

Local History Cafe



SJMF Heritage, Appleby Magna

Royal connections ...

Marina Sketchley muses on her feelings on the passing of the Queen

Last year we had a spectacular tribute to the late Queen Elizabeth II on the occasion of her funeral. Elizabeth II reigned for 70 years, the longest period in history. She was well loved and respected as an unchanging symbol in an age of modernity. Her funeral was televised around the world and people everywhere were glued to their screens all day. The whole ceremony was absolutely stunning,

Elizabeth II [1926-2022] became queen aged 25, following the death of her father George VI [1895-1952]. He became king on the abdication of his brother, Edward VIII ('Bertie') who had abdicated after 325 days' reign to marry an American divorcee.



King Charles II

The superb display of pageantry and ceremony at Elizabeth's funeral was breathtaking. Hundreds of thousands of people, beyond all expectations, packed the funeral routes in Scotland and England – a testament to their devotion. Young and old alike chose to queue throughout the night, in the cold and damp, just to get a glimpse of the Vigil. The emotion borne by Charles and the royal family, in public over so many days, was almost unendurable.

Our monarchy plays no part in governing our country, but they embody everything we stand for as a nation. Our royal family for centuries has survived wars, fires, plagues and, more recently, scandals and divorces, yet they remain our national inspiration and anchor.

Charles III, our new king, has an unenviable name. Charles I [1600-1649] believed he ruled by The Divine Right of Kings, accountable only to God, and he frequently clashed with his Parliament. Charles I was eventually executed.

Charles II [1630-1685] 'The Merry Monarch' fled to France in 1651, returning in 1660 to rule under sanction of taking no part in the laws of the land – which still maintains today. So ends our brief period of Republicanism.

Charles III, our new King, is 73 years old, well past retirement age, yet he faces an onerous public duty not necessarily of his choosing. However, at his Proclamation, when he vowed to serve us all, and of all faiths, he showed himself to be dutiful, deeply sensitive and caring. We are indeed fortunate.



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The next History Cafe meeting will be at 10.00 am on January 17th

Thin Ice?

Duncan Saunders recalls Ice Breakers

The greatest threat of disruption to canal traffic was ice. A spell of severe cold weather could soon bring the canal to a halt if the ice was not kept broken, so most canal companies kept a number of specially built **ice breakers** to be brought into use in a freeze-up. Massively built, heavily plated with a long raking bow designed to ride up on the ice before smashing down through it, these important emergency vehicles were kept working for as long as possible to keep the traffic moving.



An ice breaker similar to the ones witnessed by Duncan Saunders

Duncan recalls that as a youngster growing up in Snarestone, the canal (cut) was an important place to go and play, both in summer and winter. Duncan tell us that “ We would look forward to the canal freezing over because then the icebreaker would come along. I remember it as a normal wooden hulled narrow boat but with a steel reinforced bow which would ride up onto the ice and break it with the down pressure. This boat had a motor whereas we still saw horse drawn boats being towed up and down the canal.”

The boat Duncan witnessed would have had a round bottom (most canal boats had flat bottoms), and a special reinforced, sharply pointed bow to cut through the canals that regularly iced up in winter.

The boat would have been rocked by the men in it, causing a shock wave from the bow that rippled through the ice. If the ice was too thick to break, the boat would be pulled out and across the ice by horses. However, if the ice was thicker than 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 cm), all canal boats would cease working until it thawed.

Singing Together...

Marina looks at a musical standard

Auld Lang Syne (meaning ‘Old long since’) is a song about remembering old friendships and the ties which connect people throughout their lives, and it probably originates from Masonic Lodge rituals. Robbie Burns was initiated as a Freemason in 1781 and wrote his version of Auld Lang Syne in 1788. The origin of crossing arms and linking hands while singing Auld Lang Syne was called ‘The Chain of Union’ by the Masonic brethren, but was also performed when singing other songs about parting. The Japanese had an adapted version of the song in 1881.

Alexander Graham Bell was born in Edinburgh in 1847 and lived in America. When he invented the world’s first practical telephone system he used Auld Lang Syne to demonstrate it.

Scottish emigrants associated Auld Lang Syne with Hogmanay, which is a refrain, sung on New Year’s Eve. (The word is a corruption of ‘hoc in anno’ (Latin), meaning ‘in this year’.)

Celebrating Auld Lang Syne and Hogmanay became synonymous and are now enthusiastically practised by many ex-pats around the world.



After the Scout movement sang it at their World War I Scout Jamboree it became world famous.

American students sing it today when parting at their Graduation Ceremonies. Versions have been written in several languages.

So the next time you sing Auld Lang Syne after a night’s partying – and stumbling over the words – at least you know how it all started!

Victorian Scavengers ...

Taken from the "Back in the Day Blog"

Despite being the age of progress, living in Victorian England meant a life of grime for the poorest people. It took the whole era to recognise that looking after the public's health was an investment, not a waste of money. One of the biggest problems was the disposal of human and animal waste.



This is something we barely think about nowadays, with our flushing toilets and fortnightly bin collections. We can find a public toilet almost anywhere – in a shopping centre, in a restaurant, in a library, and we can chuck away our rubbish in one of the numerous bins on the (fairly) clean pavements. We have morgues in hospitals and funeral homes with refrigerators in which dead bodies are stored before burial. We bury our dead a good six feet underground and we also cremate bodies and then bury the ashes.

At this moment in time, in Britain, we live in the cleanest environment ever. The two main sources of street waste we must deal with are rubbish and dog faeces. However unpleasant, this is nothing compared to the sheer amount of dirt and filth the Victorians had to contend with on a daily basis.

The main cities, and London in particular, were incredibly grim. They were constantly smoky from the factories belching out noxious fumes all day and everything was covered in a layer of soot. Edinburgh was known as "Auld Reekie" for a good reason. As this was before the age of the motorcar, horses were used to pull carts, black hansom cabs and private carriages everywhere. This meant that the roads were quickly covered in manure. There weren't any wheelie bins or even dustbins and so rubbish was piled up outside houses, left to be explored by rats, cats, dogs and human scavengers.



Burying the dead in London was also a problem. Cremation didn't take place in Victorian times and so London churchyards became full very quickly. Bodies in coffins were piled on top of each other or packed side by side with no earth in between to absorb liquid and smells. The stink of rotting bodies on a hot summers day was appalling.

The toilets at the time were little more than huts in which there would be a bench with a hole in it to sit upon. Waste matter would drop onto piles of loose soil in the ground below. These "earth closets" would be at the back of a row of houses and were shared between several families. At night, the dirty soil would be replaced with fresh soil by night workers employed by the council.



Human scavengers would take animal faeces from the streets to sell to tanneries, as human and animal faeces were used in the treatment of leather, something dating back to Tudor times. They would also scavenge through rubbish on the streets and sell animal carcasses to glue making factories and horse manure to farmers.

So every day, people going about their daily business had germs, toxic gases, soot, faeces, urine, poisons and general muck to contend with.

In 1848, the Public Health Act was passed, and the General Board of Health was established. This Board revolutionised the disposal of waste and started to clean up the streets.

Ring in the New Year ...

Sonia Liff researches problems with the school bell from the Trustees Minutes

The support of the bell within the cupola seems to have been a longstanding problem with its ultimate fate affected by the Trustees' limited funds and apparent inability to keep up with the maintenance needs of the building. The decisions (and lack of decisions) would benefit from a more thorough investigation but the following extracts from the Trustee minutes give an outline of the decisions. The bell was originally connected to the (historic) clock mechanism. It is not clear when they were disconnected or when the original clock stopped working. The bell predates the school building and it is not clear where it came from before that time.

There is a Trustee minute from July 1815:

Specifications of the work undertaken to be done by Mr Potter of Litchfield for repairing the cupola etc of Appleby School. To complete the whole in a good manner will cost the sum of £400. The whole to be completed on or before 12th of September next. To take out the old beams which now support the cupola – put in new truss beams – take off the roof over the school put in new beams and binding joints and make good the other parts with what is good of the old timber – lay the gutters with new deal and cover the roof to receive the lead with the best of the old boards so far as they will cover it and make it out with new deal boards – the lead to be reduced to a proper thickness that is to 7 pounds to the roof superficial and laid on with proper turned beams and plashings – put up four[?] stalks of wall pipes of cast iron 4 inches diameter with proper steads[?] to take the water from the roof – repair the chimney tops – put up the ceiling joists and partitions and plaister them – put in new door jaumbs and repair and hang the doors – make good the ceiling and floor over the school – take out the glass that is in the school windows and the rooms over and reglaze them - paint the iron bars and colour the walls, white wash the ceiling and put up the staircase to the cupola – to make good the lead sashings round the wings, point the walls where they are wanting and make a fireplace in the Writing School and carry up a flew from it to the top of the walls – to make a new bell frame and hang the bell.

The more recent problems with the bell are first noted as a result of discussions around the primary school returning to the building in the 1950s. It appears that the County Council were concerned that the building be put into a state of reasonable repair before they entered into any arrangement whereby they assumed responsibility for paying for a proportion of repairs. In March 1950 there is a minute saying:

It was agreed that the question of the repair of the school clock and bell should be left over pending the negotiations with the County Council.

There a lot of references in the Trustees' minutes around this time about the historic importance of the clock, the importance of protecting it and the desirability of it being reinstated. At the same

time there were discussions about substituting an electric mechanism to drive the clock face. It is not obvious from the minutes how and why this latter approach was chosen.



In November 1952 the Trustees' minutes note:

Proposed by Rev A R Meakin, seconded by Mr Orton, it was decided that Mr Rowbotham be asked to take steps to make the bell safe by taking it down and placing it in the clock tower. In August The Rev Meakin and Mr Gorham offered to attend to oversee this.

The next reference is in November 1987:

It was also agreed that when the opportunity arose, the bell presently situate on the roof of the school would be moved to the top room.

In November 1993:

The old school bell will be re-sited if the governors and Trustees so wish as previously discussed. And later in the same meeting: This will cost in the region of £250.



It appears that the bell was taken down at some point in the mid-1990's using an external crane. The school were allowed to watch its removal.

Summing up ...

Memories of sums at school ...

My schoolbooks were neat and subsequently so were my work ledgers. However, I hated maths so much I still remember Wednesday morning was 'double maths.' The only redeeming feature was we exchanged re-action to the previous night's episode of Quatermass and the Pit.

Sarah Golding

I loved doing Maths or Sums as they were called in Primary School in the early 50s. Later I had to use pen and ink and loved underlining totals twice ... did tend to get ink on my ruler but I turned it over all was well.

Juliet Prior

I wasn't too bad at maths and I took maths up to university level but, even as a Chartered Engineer, I used very little of it in my working life, the statistics were useful, and the trigonometry was useful when I started making stained glass windows as a hobby.

John Buxton

When I did "sums" as they were called in the 1950's the teacher used beads and occasionally dolly mixtures.

Mary Hartwell

OMG this just sent shivers down my spine...seriously! I was literally filled with dread when the teacher would say "Get the Beta books out ". I was absolutely terrified!

Deb Cozier

Sliding around ...

Sharon Davies reminds us of childhood ice slides

I remember sliding on ice and had great fun until the caretaker arrived. We would be out again at break trying to create a new one.

I also remember my Dad made my brother and I a wooden sledge which we spent all day pulling up and sliding down a lengthy farm track near our house in 1963. We complained it wasn't going fast enough so he tacked some metal ribbon under the runners and we literally flew down ! We started a craze with our friends asking their Dads to do the same. We fell off a few times but came to no harm. We just laughed, got back up, thought about our mistakes and learned to control our sledges better.



Also remember the foil tops of our little milk bottles being pushed up by the frost. The bottles were lined up next to the big heating pipes that ran along the cloak room defrosting. We drank our milk at break time with white paper straws that went soggy, sometimes the birds had pecked a hole in the top ready for us. The children's toilets which were in the yard were also frozen so we had the privilege of using the teachers toilet.

Our classroom was lovely to go back to after break as we had a real fire grate in the corner with a lovely lit fire. It did have safety bars around it with a little gate, no lock.

In our September edition there was an article about the ancient art of thatching. This stirred a memory from History Cafe member, Duncan Saunders ...

"Thatching showed the true versatility of a countryman. One such man was Herbert Garton and when he lived at Jordan's Farm on Top street I remember him renewing the thatch. He used straw which was most likely provided by Len Abbott of Bowleys Lane. He had smaller and older agricultural machinery and still produced stooks rather than bales."



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