NEWSLETTER

March 2024

Local History Cafe

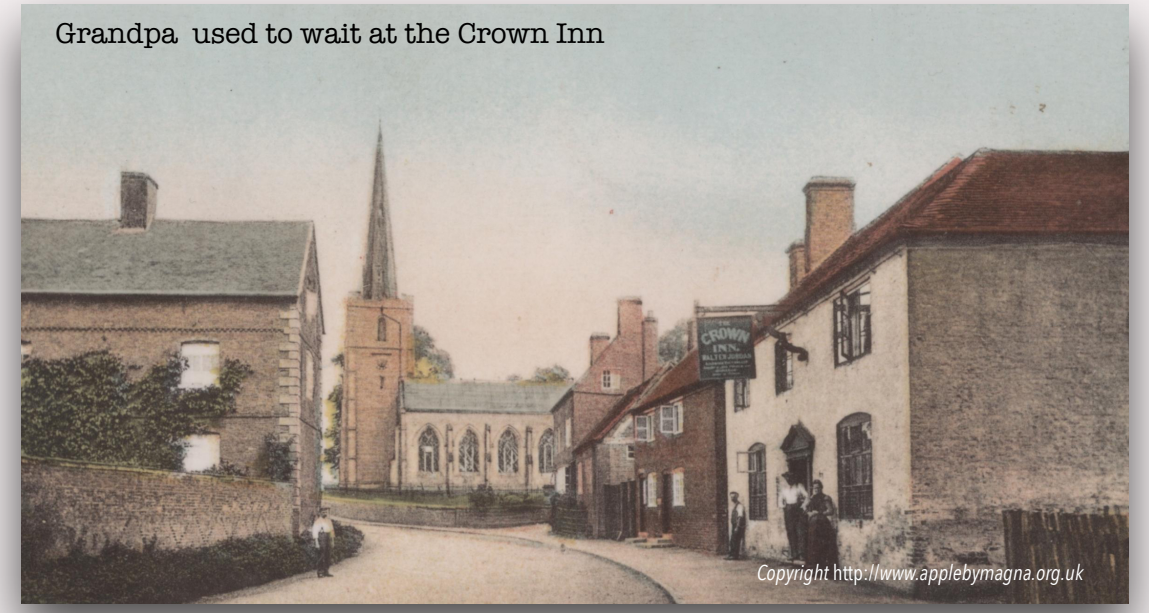
Anne Silins recalls village life ...

Appleby Magna in the 1940's, as seen through the eyes of a little girl.

Anne's final village character is Miss Mabel Knight. A School Teacher, and our wonderful leader for the village Brownies and Girl Guides.

"As I look back on those years in the village I often am amazed at the patience and knowledge that Miss Mabel Knight had for young girls in our village. She would have spent her days patiently teaching us, and we could be a noisy bunch. Twice each week day evening Miss. Knight held Brownie and Girl Guide groups in the Church School (across from the church). We learned crafts, camping skills, Morse code, how to use signal flags, and how to tie knots correctly. Sometimes as a special treat we sang and danced to old tunes played on Miss Knight's gramophone.

The Brownies, ages 7 yrs. to 10 yrs. learned in small groups called sixes: each six was named after either fairies or woodland creatures. A six is led by a Sixer and has a Second who acts as deputy. I walked along Church Street to attend the Brownies from our the shop in Church Street.



Grandpa used to wait at the Crown Inn

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Later we moved to Lower Rectory Farm in Snarestone Lane, at that time I graduated to the Girl Guide troop. Girl Guides, for girls ages 10 yrs. to 14 yrs. My friends and I now felt quite grown up. Life at the farm was quite different from life in the centre of Appleby, I was a little lonely, but my Grandfather would start up his car after 'tea time' and drive me to our Girl Guide meetings.

New memories from Anne Silins

Pages 1 and 2

Fred Steward and Sally Lowe get all inky

Jane Harris reviews David Rooney's book "About Time"

Page 5

The next History Cafe meeting will be at 10.00 am on March 19th

Continued from Page 1

I am sure while my Grandpa waited for me, he enjoyed a pint and conversation at the Queen Adelaide Inn or the Crown Inn.

In the Summer of 1950 Miss. Knight arranged for some of us to travel to Barmouth in North Wales for a week of camping in a farmer's field. Here we would put to use some of the newly aquired camping and field craft knowledge she had taught us. We all squeezed into her car and early one sunny morning we were off to Wales. Our camp site looked down towards the famous Barmouth railway bridge, all 900 yards of it. This bridge crossed the estuary of the river Mawddach.

Our first chore was to set up our bell tents, I well remember that they were smelly having been used some years earlier during war manoeuvres and most likely put away wet. Our second chore of that first day was to dig a trench which acted as our toilet facilities. We cooked our meals on an open fire, all taking turns to cook or to clean up afterwards. One of the high-lights of that week was our day long trek along the famous Precipice Walk, such views, so beautiful. Miss. Knight, never missed an opportunity to teach, and so we heard that this walk originally was a path used by sheep and shepherds in the 12th. century. Over the last century it was widened for use as a public footpath.

Miss. Knight, always mindful of our education, made sure we knew the history of everywhere we visited. She was a gentle educator and always had time to explain and point out places of interest to us.

I think we all learned a great deal of common sense and practical knowledge from her during those weekly gatherings at Girl Guides, I know I did.

In harness ...

Terry Davies looks into the skilled work of the harness maker ...

The ancient craft of draught harness and horse collar making dates back some one thousand years and still continues today much as it has always done. HCA Friend Terry Davies still carries on the skills and techniques required for this traditional craft.

The use of horses as a 'working tool' is dependent upon the application of fit-for-purpose harness and here the skills of the harness and horse collar maker play a vital role.

Collar making, using Rye straw and leather was, up until the early twentieth century, a separate craft practiced by a sub-division of harness makers who were trained specifically for the purpose and who were inextricably linked in the production of draught horse harness.

The skills of the collar maker lie in the ability to produce superbly crafted collars of great artistic and utilitarian merit, to fit the diverse range of size and conformation of horses on which they are used. Collars that fail to comply with the needs of the horse have the potential to seriously injure or curb the animal's ability to perform its tasks efficiently. The old adage of 'one horse one collar is an appropriate one that still governs the making of collars to the present day.

In current times, the role of the horse as a 'working tool' has been superseded by technological advances and many of the affiliated crafts associated with their use have fallen into serious decline. The remaining collar and harness makers in the UK can now be counted on the fingers of one hand.

There has been, however, over the past two decades a strong revival in the use of horses. This is driven by aficionados who remain attached to the horse and the long history surrounding it.

Carriage driving and the eco-friendly interest in the working horse has brought about this revival and so collar making as a traditional craft continues to be practiced with demand coming from both the home and European markets. It is hoped that this can be maintained and the long established traditional skills of the craft can be preserved.

Shopping around the village trades

Walter Ellis recalls local shops in Appleby

In Church Street, where Allan had his renowned Lenny Betteridge butchers shop, a bustling newsagent owned by Mr. and Mrs. Smith offered more than just newspapers. Meanwhile, just around the corner on Mawby's Lane, Rock House still served as a butchers shop, operated by Les Starbuck with the assistance of Bill Taylor. Following Les' unfortunate illness, the shop underwent a name change to Starbuck and Taylor.

Top Street around 1910

During those bygone days, it was common for households to raise their own pigs, very often fed only on the scraps from the family meals and Bill would visit homes to slaughter them. After allowing the meat to hang overnight, he would carefully cut it into various cuts, including joints and chops, while also preserving some as bacon and ham.

At the top of Black Horse Hill, on the corner with Mawby's Lane, Edgar Wilemen diligently managed the local Post Office, while Mrs. Johnson ran a charming small shop nearby.

Several other traders also flourished in the village during this era. On Top Street, a few doors down from Mrs. Johnson's shop, Mr. Black skillfully repaired shoes at his dedicated shop. Synonyms for shoemaker include cordwainers and cobblers, although there are distinctions. Cordwainers are highly skilled English shoemakers who fashion sturdy and fashionable footwear from raw leather goods.

In Duck Lake, villagers would venture to Gordon Parker's farm to savor fresh milk. Along Stony Lane, three houses adorned a bank, each accessible via steps. The first of these houses belonged to Pinkie Wilkins, known for his work as a bookie's runner. Lastly, the last house was home to Mr. Snead, a barber whose hand clippers made for a less-than-pleasant experience. After enduring a couple of visits, many locals opted for the barbers in Measham, which boasted three skilled barbers at the time.

Early Springtime ...

The strange world of English Traditions

Ancient English springtime rituals were deeply rooted in the celebration of nature's renewal and the arrival of warmer weather. One common ritual was May Day, which marked the beginning of summer. People would gather early in the morning to collect flowers and greenery, creating intricate garlands and wreaths. These beautiful floral decorations were then hung on doorways, fences, and even on poles as a symbol of fertility and good fortune.

Another significant tradition was the practice of "spring cleaning." Homes were thoroughly cleaned and swept to remove the stagnant energy of winter and welcome the fresh energy of spring. This ritual was believed to bring good luck and prosperity to the household.

Additionally, bonfires were an integral part of ancient English springtime rituals. These fires were lit to symbolize the purging of darkness and the triumph of light. People would gather around the bonfires, singing and dancing, while leaping over the flames as a form of purification and protection against evil spirits.

The ancient English also had a custom known as "well dressing." This involved decorating wells and springs with intricate floral designs made from petals, leaves, and other natural materials. It was believed that this act would ensure the purity and healing properties of the water throughout the year.

These ancient English springtime rituals were not only a celebration of the changing seasons but also a way for people to connect with nature, express gratitude, and bring blessings into their lives. They served as a reminder of the cyclical nature of life and the eternal beauty of the natural world.

Well, well well ...

Fred Steward and Sally Lowe clean their inky fingers ...

Fred Steward wrote to our Museum Manager Sally Lowe noting that his researches on the history of the writing school led him to 'rediscover' that there are 3 lead inkwells in the museum collection which were probably used during its 18th century heyday. The inkwells were found in 2003 in an archaeological survey of the school grounds using a metal detector. Susie McGraw's thesis (2010) dates them to 1600 -1800.

Sally then went on to discover more ...

We've got loads of inkwells in the museum. Loads of em. School kids used to carefully dip their pen in the hole, scratch out their writing, then blot. Tongues out in concentration, probably!

When schoolchildren visit the museum today, pen nibs invariably get squashed, broken, twisted; paper is torn, and everyone agrees that pens today are much easier to use. It's almost a relief to get back to the modern classroom and write up what you learnt on your trip to the museum in your usual biro.

These three inkwells are very different to most, though. Whereas all of our other inkwells are ceramic, these are made of lead. They've been dated to somewhere between 1600-1800, and were more than likely used in the school. Precious items indeed! Lead corrodes easily in damp conditions, or if the air is somehow polluted. Storing lead next to certain types of wood leads to a chemical reaction, which is why well-preserved tobacco pipes are pretty hard to come by. It is unusual to have three such old lead inkwells in good condition.

Lead inkwells have been used for centuries. There is evidence of the Romans using lead, as well as other materials. Until the 18th century, silver was popular, and a visiting dignitary could expect a gift of a silver inkwell. Ornate inkwells were a symbol of status and wealth. The American Civil War saw the advent of portable inkwells, which remained popular until the Great War, when the first plastic ink cartridges made an appearance. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Write this down ...

The spread of writing seems to be down to shop keepers ...

Monogenesis, the theory that writing originated in a single civilisation, persisted for a long time. According to academics, all writing originated in Mesopotamia's ancient Sumer and spread around the world as a result of cultural diffusion. This argument holds that traders or merchants traveling between geographical locations passed on the idea of representing language by written signs.

The pen 'n' ink ....

Andrew Moore looks into the development of the ball point

The Biro pen, also known as the ballpoint pen, has a fascinating history. It was invented by Hungarian-Argentinian brothers, László and György Bíró, in the late 1930s.

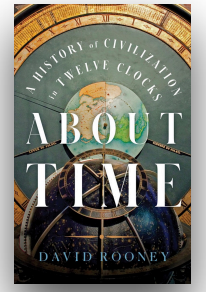
The Bíró brothers were frustrated with the fountain pens of their time, which were messy and prone to smudging. They devised a revolutionary design that used a tiny ball bearing at the tip to distribute ink smoothly and evenly.

This innovative mechanism prevented leaks and provided a consistent flow of ink. In 1943, the Bíró brothers patented their invention and started mass-producing ballpoint pens. The Biro pen quickly gained popularity worldwide, becoming an essential writing tool for people of all ages.

Today, it remains an iconic and indispensable instrument in our daily lives, however I remember the way mine used to leak in my school blazer pocket on hot summer days!

About time...

Jane Harris reviews David Rooney's book detailing the measurement of time



The author takes us on a fascinating journey through space and time. He describes the earliest methods of measuring time such as sundials, water and sand clocks, often built into the fabric of civic buildings like the sundial in Rome's forum in 263BC. They enabled rulers to regulate their citizens' lives and were not always welcome. From the earliest times the movement of the stars and planets have been studied, and were believed to affect the earth in the same way as the moon affects the seas. Astronomers in medieval Europe provided clocks to meet the needs of astrologers, to enable them to write their charts which were highly sought after and still are today.

The author describes the development of clocks and how they changed societies. One example saved many lives and enabled Europeans to better explore the world on the high seas. They were able to navigate using the stars and sun when travelling North or South. But the inability to navigate East or West led to many shipwrecks and the starvation of crews. In 1714 a competition was launched to solve the longitude problem. By the 1750s John Harrison produced a chronometer that would work on the rolling deck of a ship and at a wide range of temperatures. Eventually this became a trusted timepiece allowing the further expansion of the British empire in safety.

Among the many instances of clocks that affect ordinary citizens are the timing of calls to prayer, keeping the railways running safely, and for the sounding of factory hooters at the start of the working day. The standardisation of time based on the Greenwich meridian was controversial and viewed in many countries as an example of Britain's imperial ambitions. Official clocks were targeted by anarchists in the nineteenth century, including attempts to blow up the Greenwich and Edinburgh observatories.

When rules limiting the working hours in factories were introduced, there were always those who tried to cheat the system. Some factory owners would find ways to slow down their clocks so the working day would be longer than the workers realised.

The first clock used for market transactions was in 1611 at the Amsterdam stock exchange. The need for accuracy as market dealing speeded up has led to the use of time stamping clocks that can allow up to a million computer trades to take place in a second.

The chapter on the manufacturing of clocks, especially the work of John Bennet was particularly interesting. In 1865 he built an extraordinary facade to his shopfront with numerous horological displays which attracted hundreds of people. However John Bennet was scathing about our education system, blaming its failings for the increased competition from Switzerland. In 1859 he addressed the newly formed British Horological Institute on the state of our schools. To quote from the book: *In Switzerland, he exclaimed, every child of every class, girls and boys, in the most remote mountain districts as well as the major cities, was given the best education.* He went on to describe that not only were they taught mathematics, languages, science and mechanics they were also taught music, design drawing and art.

David Rooney explores the use of clocks in every aspect of life in a ride through the centuries and around the world. From sundials to satellites he highlights the advances we have made in timekeeping but also the inherent dangers when their control falls into the wrong hands.

A riveting read.

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LOCAL HISTORY CAFE EXTENDED