



Newsletter stories, articles, snippets and curios from the past

Childhood Memories of Spital by Mrs E Richards

One of our members, Mrs Richards, has sent in some memories of her husband Bill, now aged 77, who was brought up in the terraces on Spital Lane. These are some extracts...

"Infant-School was held during the week in the St Leonard's Mission, while older children went to Hipper Street....

One day Bill had been picking up sticky buds from horse chestnut trees. He had got some of the sticky substance on his face and the teacher, Miss Knighton told him to use his handkerchief. Not having one, Bill said it was in his coat pocket, so he was allowed to go to the cloak room.

There he did his best to clean his face with the lining of his little round cap, but there was no mirror. When Bill presented himself back in class his face was still dirty. The truth came out and Bill received two strokes of a knitting needle on the palm of his hand.



In 1892 the Saltergate Methodists conducted open air services in the Lordsmill Street area. There were then lodging houses in this area occupied by otherwise homeless people.

The Saltergate congregation largely consisted of business people, however they did have an evangelical concern for the less fortunate. Trundling a harmonium around the streets on a trolley and singing hymns, they offered friendship and took an interest in any who responded.

This outreach work led to services being held in the old British School, Hollis Lane, and eventually to the building of the Wesley Hall Chapel, also on Hollis Lane, which was opened for worship in September 1898.

This chapel served the large population then living in the terraced houses of the area. In 1920 there was a membership of a 100 and nearly 300 Sunday School scholars. The chapel was closed after 73 years, but the influence of those who served and

taught there is still an influence for good in the lives of many people...

Children sometimes got into mischief. Bill tells how he and one of his brothers decided to steal a swede from a neighbour's garden.

The first one they pulled up was too small - so they put it back in the ground. So was the second and the third and so on all along the row. The result was that they put them all back, thinking that they would continue to grow.

The neighbour told their parents who took appropriate action!"

The Chesterfield Rat catcher - By Sandra Struggles

From about 1890-1900 Jack Straw, alias "Skinner" lived in Parkin's Yard (Parker's Yard) near the Odeon picture house. He was the rat king of Chesterfield and wore a rat skin waistcoat and other vermin apparel such as a rat skin cap and gloves!

Skinner's vocation was rat catching - he would do this by cutting the feet of women's old woollen stockings and running a wire snickle around the open top. These were then put over the bolt holes while his ferrets got to work. Once caught, he sold the rats to owners of terriers for training purposes or for lucrative rat killing matches.

At weekends he would proceed to public houses with a brick attached to a yard of string in one pocket and live rats in the other! Skinner would put down his brick and attach the loose end of the string to a rat's hind leg. Then he would back himself against time to worry rats with his teeth - his reward being pints.

This sport was not solely conducted at Chesterfield. At about the same time or slightly earlier a rat catcher going by the name of "Jagger" operated at South Normanton, while "Pot" Baguley worked the Staveley patch.

Several other worthies operated at Ilkeston and Cotmanhay. As a form of entertainment ratting seems have died out locally.

These are, alas, degenerate days.

The New Insert

I have recently taken charge of a near complete set of the Society's original newsletters - and from time to time will reprint old articles and stories in the new Inserts

This is the first of those Inserts.

Peter Maycock



RAILWAYS

The Zig Zag Railway by L Garlic

A private railway constructed by Joseph Butler of Killamarsh in 1788, it is one mile and three quarters long. An appendage to the Lings Colliery on the north east of North Wingfield, it runs east by a crooked course, part of it is considerably elevated, its object is to bring down coke burnt at the Lings Coke Hearths to Wingerworth Forge. It commences at a crane by the side of the road in the small village of Ankerbold and terminates at the coal pit and coke hearths at Lings, half a mile south west of Temple Normanton. (taken from John Farey's "View of Derbyshire", Vol. 3, published in 1817).

The same volume states that the rails cast at the Forge at Wingerworth were four feet long and weighed 32 lbs. each. They were laid 20 inches apart and nailed to wooden cross bearers, and the vehicles were large boxes made to hold one ton of coke. On reaching Ankerbold these boxes were lifted by the crane on to road wheels and conveyed to Wingerworth Furnaces and to the wharf on the Chesterfield Canal for loading into barges and taken to the Forge at Killamarsh.

The old Ankerbold to Lings railway is roughly one and three quarter miles long and runs a crooked course (hence its name, the Zig Zag railway). The Ankerbold end was near the old Wharf, now demolished, at Clay Cross Railway Station. It went up the incline, past the now demolished Brick Works, towards Alma, along level ground to what was once known as Coupes Sidings, across the B 6058 road between Alma refuse tip and the site of Alma Colliery, over the track on which runs the British Railways branch to Holmewood Colliery, and up what is known as the Old Pit road to the site of Old Lings pit and the old coke hearths.

The incline was worked as what was called "a self acting plane". A rope passed round a wheel at the top, one end of the rope was attached to the loaded vehicles at the top of the incline and the other to the empty vehicles at the bottom. The weight of the loaded vehicles pulled up the empty ones, and a bypass was provided half way for the passage of the boxes.

This railway was later taken over and reconstructed by the North Midland Railway in the middle of the 19th century. A stationary steam engine was fixed at the top of the incline, empty wagons being drawn up and the loaded ones lowered down, thus providing a useful supply line to the North Midland Railway. Permission was recently obtained from N.C.B. to search for the site of the Lings coke hearths and from the British Railway to follow the line of the old Ankerbold to Lings railway. There are certainly remains of early industry, but they are covered with briars and brambles, further visits will have to be made before it is certain that they are the remains of the coke hearths.

Evidence was found, however, of the railway, covered in moss, grass and weeds and a number of stones roughly two feet square and a foot thick were found. The imprint of an iron chair and two holes are clearly shown on photographs taken by my companion, Charles Smith.

These stone setts were used instead of wooden sleepers. They depended on their weight and were embedded in the ground to prevent the spread of the track.

During our investigations several more of these stones were found to have been used in building a retaining wall of a dam. A stone building erected over the old shaft of Lings pit and until recently used by the National Coal Board as a pumping house had many of these stone setts built into its walls. These stones had been split in half and the holes in them were plainly visible on the walls of the building.

No attempt has yet been made to trace the line of the Woodthorpe to Wingerworth railways, but John Farey tells us that it ran on level ground from near Woodthorpe Hall to Wingerworth Furnaces, the rails being the same kind as those used on the Ankerbold to Lings Railway. This railway was used to transport iron ore dug out of the bell pits at Woodthorpe. In the earlier days horses and carts had been used, but after the laying of this railway Joseph Butler reported that an ass could now do the work of two horses.

An early mention of iron rails appears to have been made in 1767. These were cast in the iron works at Coalbrookdale and laid down as an experiment, but with what success is not known. John Holland in his book "Collieries and the Coal Trade" 1841 tells us that a Mr. Curr claimed "the making and use of iron railroads in 1776 as one of his inventions for the working of the Duke of Norfolk's collieries at Sheffield", but these were edge-rails, and the wheels of the small vehicles were flat.

Douglas Dixon in his book "The King's Sailing Master" on page 195, states that on passing from Chesterfield on the main Derby road to Wingerworth, between Birdholme Bridge and Broad Oaks Furnace "you have just travelled across the track of the first of all railway lines to be laid on the surface of English (or possibly any) soil. It was the first ever built on the surface and used to carry by gravity, the tub-trucks full of coal from Clay pit on the west of the road, to Wingerworth iron stone pits on the east. It was built in 1788".

John Farey in Vol III of "The General View of Derbyshire" page 288 states "I have heard that the earliest use of flanch rails above ground was on the south of Wingerworth Furnace leading to the iron stone pits, by Mr. Joseph Butler in the year 1788."

In his book "The Evolution of Railways" Charles E. Lee gives it as his opinion that the name "waggon" originated to distinguish the vehicles with flanged wheels from "wagons" which had cast iron wheels with flat treads only.

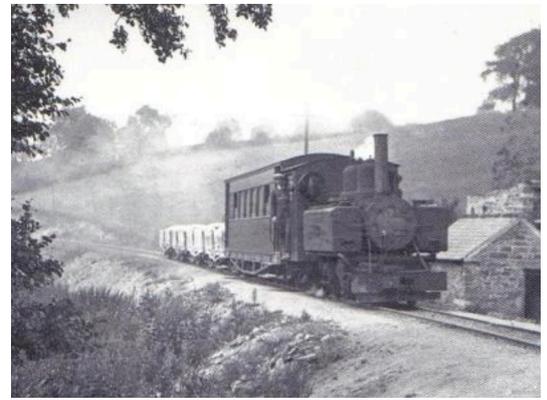
I am sorry these two books are out of print and not more readily available but Farey was reporting in 1811 to 1817 and Dixon quoting in 1948. I am strongly inclined to accept Farey's account and to believe that Dixon was a little over zealous in collecting material for his book.

One last trip on the Ashover Light Railway - by Geoff Marsden

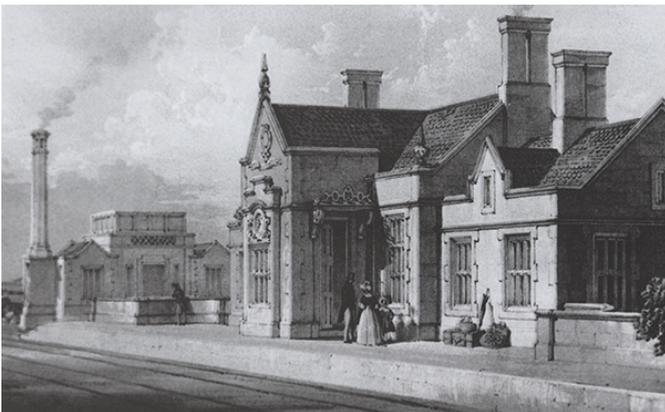
You either love them or you hate them, the steam engines of Britain's railway past. But the subject of Mr Bob Grattan's talk, the history of The Ashover Light Railway showed exactly how lines of this type are able to capture the imagination 40 years after it closed.

A real 'Heath Robinson' affair, this privately owned narrow gauge line was opened in 1925, using ex - War Department engines built originally in the USA for use behind the Western Front. General Jackson, owner of the Clay Cross Works, bought four of these engines for a mere £1000, painted them in a crimson livery and named them after his children, Hummy, Guy, Joan and Peggy.

Although the railway was mainly built to carry limestone quarried for use as ballast on main line railways it provided some halcyon days out for the Clay Cross fraternity. Coach loads were carried to Ashover where a brass band played and they could enjoy a snack in the specially built Rainbow Cafe. Mr Grattan described this building as a hexagon with the roof painted in the colours of the rainbow, one section a different colour - alas, there are only seven colours in the rainbow! After the Second World War goods traffic declined on the ALR, although it did not so much stop working by edict, rather, like the old soldier, just faded away. The victim of competition from the roads, one wonders whether with a few more people like Mr Grattan the railway might have been kept alive in more than books and lectures.



Chesterfield Railway Station



The first Station was the North Midland Railway building, designed by Francis Thompson "Railway Thompson", architect to the Company 1835 - 41, which was opened on 30th June 1840.

The Canopy over the platform was added c. 1860.

This building was some hundred yards south of the present station, and the water tower (tank) was still in existence in 1970.

This station was demolished c. 1875 when the second station was built. The Derbyshire Times of 5th February 1870 gives details of:

"Proposed new Station at Chesterfield - the site proposed is a little north of the present station, the building is to be set back to allow a platform 25 feet wide. The building will be of the gothic style of architecture, constructed of red pressed brick with white brick pilasters

and cornices of Ransome stone on the approach side.

The cornices on the platform side will be of coloured brick and encaustic tiles, the arches of the windows and doors will be of coloured brick. The building will consist of three wings, the centre being the booking hall two storeys high, the wings being each one storey, the booking hall being open to the roof.

The south wing to contain the waiting rooms and the north wing the station masters' office, parcels and telegraph office and the porters room. The upside to have waiting rooms. The platforms to have an ornamental trim roof and an underground passage will be provided under the line for access to the up platform. The plans are by Mr. W.G. Tees, architect to the North Midland Railway and the work is to be carried out by A. Neil of Bradford."

This station was modernised in 1968 and nothing remains of this station except the ornamental iron pillars holding up the platform canopies and the underground passage between the platform.

The stone building in Corporation Street facing Felkin Street is similar in style to the 1840 station and may have been constructed from the material of the demolished station in 1870 or built in 1840 as an office but this is not clear.

"Modem Chesterfield" by Pendleton and Jacques, published 1903 gives this description of the station when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert arrived there in 1843:

"The old station, which was of course, the old building, subsequently re-erected at the bottom of Corporation Street, and used now as an engineer's office, was most tastefully decorated "

Contributed by Les Garlic

Looking Back by Walter R. Allen

Some time ago our Chairman, Miss Anne Hodson, gave a talk to a group of people and afterwards was approached by a gentleman, Mr. Walter Allen who had written down the story of his life. He presented a copy of this book to Miss Hodson for use by the Society and it is my intention to include part of it in the next few Newsletters. Mr. Allen's permission has been given, and in the front of the book says "I dedicate this book to my wife, Joan, and my family for half a century of happy memories."

"LOOKING BACK" - Walter R. Allen

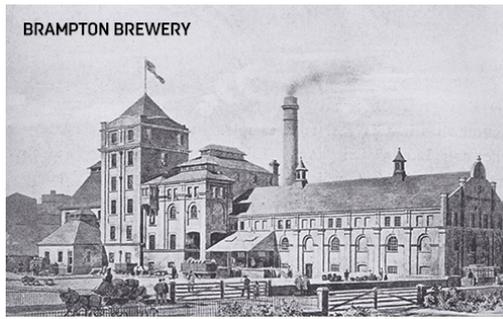
I, Walter Reginald Allen, was born on the 6th July 1911 at 16 Hirst Gate, Mexborough, Yorkshire. When I was only a year and eleven months old, my father met with a fatal accident at Cadeby Colliery, which is near Mexborough. When he was killed my mother was left with seven children. The eldest three had started work and the next two were soon to start, so that financially we were not desperate.

You will see that I am in my 81st year (when written) and the farthest back I can remember is getting a good slap on my backside about 79 years ago for trying to fill the toilet bowl with stones. My mother's sister Sally lived at Chesterfield and when the house next door to her became empty she persuaded Mum to leave Mexborough and come to live in Chesterfield next door to her. I can well remember us flitting by horse and dray from Mexborough to Chesterfield - all that way for the poor old horse. I even remember the drayman's name was Mr. Taylor and when he had unloaded the dray and had tea and sandwiches, he set off back for Mexborough.

Mother decided that Chesterfield offered better employment prospects for a growing family, especially a chance to avoid pit work for her sons. Well there we were at 15 Chester Street, Brampton, Chesterfield. Elsie, the eldest had gone to train to be a nurse. Ted had gone into the Army. This was the summer of 1915 and of course the Great War was on. Albert got work at Brampton Brewery. Florrie started work at Robinsons (a surgical dressing factory). Arthur got a job shoe repairing at Yeomans. Doris and I started school at Brampton Board School.

Brampton Brewery was almost across the road from where we lived in Chester Street and I can remember a notice outside, which stated that during Zeppelin raids, the public were allowed to shelter in their cellars. You could see the Brampton men looking hopefully into the skies.

Twice we had Field Cards from the Army



that Ted had been wounded and was in hospital. Mum and I went to a Military Hospital in Liverpool to see Ted. The first wounds he got was shrapnel wounds to his chest, received when he was eighteen, going over the top as it was called. My Aunt Sally's eldest boy was invalided out of the Army with shellshock. He had been in the Somme offensive, that terrible loss of England's youth - 100,000 young men slaughtered by stupid so-called top brass. There's an appropriate saying "Lions led by donkeys." A few weeks after he came home he cut his throat one night. I heard the commotion and went in next door and saw him with a towel wrapped round his neck. He survived this but he lived on with a miserable few shillings a week pension.

The war eventually ended and on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month 1918 everybody went wild, all the girls came out of Robinsons mills around Chester Street. There was singing and dancing in the streets. Everyone was hugging and kissing. I was only seven but I was lifted up and danced with. I thought they had all gone mad.

15 Chester Street was a two bedroomed terrace house with an attic, but it had a crude earth closet or toilet, which we shared with the next door neighbour. When the pan in the toilet needed emptying the Corporation muckcart backed into the yard and the men made a pile with the ashes in the middle of the yard. They made a recess in the middle, then emptied the pans into it, shovelled ashes over it and finally the gooey mess was heaved into the cart. It was a case of all doors and windows shut whilst this went on.

Mother, Florrie and Doris had one bedroom, Albert Arthur and I had the other. After the war Florrie was soon to marry. She married Walter C. Wilson. He had been a prisoner of war for the last ten months of the war and because his name was Wilson, the same as the American President, he suffered many a kick and blow from the German guards. They converted the downstairs front room into a bedroom. The Council were building new estates at Boythorpe and St. Augustines and fortunately they were able soon to get a new house at Boythorpe. This left us free again to resume our musical Sunday evenings in the front room. My two elder brothers brought girl friends and male

friends on Sunday evenings so we had singing, piano and violin recitals. I used to love listening and hoped my mother wouldn't notice me and send me off to bed too early.

We made our own entertainment and it was very enjoyable. We had no wireless or television. Wireless was soon to come though. The first wireless sets were homemade and curious things they were too. We soon had wireless component shops where we purchased parts, condensers, resistors, coils etc., One of the first wireless sets in Chesterfield was owned by some people living in Goldwell Hill. They would put the horn speaker in the open window and people came to stand in the street to hear it. It was such a novelty. People would say "Listen to that music, it is coming on waves without using wires." In the 1920's wireless really became the rage. You still couldn't get factory made sets. People bought weekly wireless magazines and shops sprang up selling all the parts one required to build your own set. They were funny looking contraptions. Albert made one with large glass valves, wet accumulator batteries, a high tension battery and a grid bias battery. They had just earphones at the start and then they progressed to a large horn speaker.

Friday night was bath night at Chester Street. The big tin bath was brought inside in front of the fire. It usually hung on a nail outside in the yard. After tea it was on with the copper kettle on the fire and fill the side boiler taking care not to knock any soot into it, otherwise you came out of the bath with black smears on you. Fill up the bath with all available hot water, then add sufficient cold water. Doris claimed first dip, me second and possibly mother next. Albert and Arthur would use the swimming baths in summertime and in winter, the baths in South Street.



To be continued in the next Newsletter.

Do you have a story?

We are always looking for new stories and articles for our Newsletter - why not write one yourself?

If you would like to write something - have a word with Peter or Janet.