

Villages Project - Local History One

It's been another successful year for our 'Village Projects' where members have formed small groups to visit and research local villages, reporting their findings back to the larger group. The groups also give us info on parking and bus routes, and where to have refreshments.

Colin and Barbara Robertson investigated **Brandesburton**, with its medieval market cross probably dating back to the 14th century. One of the many buildings they looked at was St Mary's Church, parts of which date to the 12th century. There are some rarities here: two rare brasses, remnants of a 'leper squint', where those who were unable to enter the church could see the services, and an extraordinary list of every incumbent of the church since 1320.



St Mary's, Brandesburton and the medieval market cross





Black Swan, and today's entrance to Brandesburton Hall

I enjoyed the history of the 350-year-old Black Swan, one of two pubs still open in the village, which was the recording centre for the Royal swans on the nearby Leven Canal.

We saw a rather shocking photo of the six 'Brandesburton Pygmies', brought to Brandesburton Hall by Colonel Harrison in 1905. He brought these people of the Mbuti tribe from what was then the Belgian Congo to Britain to live in the grounds of the Hall and they became well known around the village, hunting small game, making arrowheads at the blacksmith's, learning English and even singing with the church choir. He built a glasshouse in the Hall's grounds to emulate their equatorial conditions. But most of their time here was spent being put on show as curiosities.

Chris Strawhorn's group of five researched **Tickton**, which had Anglian roots, first recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 as 'Tishetone'. Belonging to the Archbishop of York, it was one of the region's 'Water Towns', much of the area being just above sea level and subject to extensive flooding. This probably explains why its population remained low until drainage works of the 18th century across Holderness. Tickton's importance is due to its being the only bridging point of the river before North Frodingham, the original village being by the river, now known as Hull Bridge, with the current Tickton village only expanding from the 1800s. The group gave us background and photos of many buildings in the village and were invited by one resident into his garage to view an old fire engine.



Tickton's two churches: St Paul's and the Methodist (once Wesleyan) Chapel

Hull Bridge's main claim to fame is its being featured in the trial of Charles 1 in 1642. Royalist troops broke into houses and plundered them, this being the first recorded hostilities in the English Civil War.

Stephenson's Bone-crushing mills were at Hull Bridge, and his family paid for charitable works, such as the Almshouses in the village.



There's a poignant memorial on the modern footbridge to eighteen members of a Halifax Bomber crew who crashed here in fog, and another record of tragedy in the village is the village pump (left), paid for by public subscription, after an outbreak of typhoid in the village in 1895.

The third group, Lyn, Pam and Jenny, investigated **Huggate**, probably derived from Haugr gata, 'road to the mounds', referring no doubt to the many prehistoric burial mounds nearby.

They made sure we knew all about the wonderful Rachel's Walnut Café, full of style and character, and home-made everything.



This is the highest village on the Wolds, and has the second deepest well in England, at 339 feet deep. There are wonderful views, and the village stands at the junction of three major public rights of way: The Wolds Way, Minster Way and the Chalkland Way, and is also on the cross-country cycling route, the Way of the Roses. Good luck getting to Huggate on a bus though.



Left: site of the well

There's plenty of open access land around, and some beautiful benches and outdoor artwork. Pam read us a poem by John Clark inscribed on one of the benches nearby. There's a pond in the village, full of goldfish discarded some time ago and now the dominant species. There's a church, St Mary's, with a wildlife churchyard, and a pub too, the

Wolds Inn (below).



I loved the story of how this was the first place David Hockney got drunk, after stooking corn in the local fields as a youngster.

We were treated to some lovely photos of the village and surrounding area, which made us yearn for summer days again.

Many thanks to all those who contributed to the Villages Project, which we hope to run again next year.

The 'Brandesburton Pygmies'

As always with our local history talks, there are topics so fascinating you want to go away and find out more, and this was the case for me with the 'Pygmies'. It transpired that Colonel Harrison was a voracious hunter who, taunted by a friend that his trophy heads weren't up to much, decided to up his game and bring back live people instead of dead animals. It had been known since Stanley's expedition in 1890 that small-statured forest dwellers lived in remote areas of central Africa and these were targeted by Harrison. How voluntary their exodus was, no-one really knows. First, they were given medical treatment in Egypt (the older woman, Amuriape, had 'an arrow wound, was emaciated, had a curved spine and a feeble pulse') then brought to England for two years where they were paraded around the country as curiosities, in music halls, stately homes and even Buckingham Palace.

Newspaper reports reveal the ignorance and colonial superiority complex common at the time. Some described the visitors as Darwin's 'missing link', others were surprised that they were neither cannibals nor tearing at raw meat, yet others were amazed by their dignity and their ability to speak English, or marvelled at how they nonchalantly strolled around London tossing coins at Cockney lads. One, Mongonga, was 3'10' tall, but the women apparently refused to allow themselves to be measured.

Not everyone was pleased with their arrival. Some at the Foreign Office were unhappy with James Harrison's defence of the notorious King Leopold of Belgium's atrocities in the Congo. Roger Casement called Harrison an "addlepated dwarf impresario".

It's thought that a million people saw the group, including many in the East Riding. At an event in Londesborough Hall, live rabbits were emptied from a bag so the audience could be impressed by the group's hunting prowess. They all survived, though it was reported that one of the women had a stillborn child here. In 1907 Harrison returned the group to their homelands, where they disappeared from history, although Harrison did find one in 1910, still wearing his 'fustian breeches'.

This story seems so topical now as we are reassessing our colonial history all over the land, confronting many uncomfortable truths about our legacy.