

# LIVING HISTORY

## *April – May 2022 Newsletter*

At the last meeting we had a lively discussion on innovations that have improved our lives since our childhood. Mike Bowser was our chair for the meeting and did a very good job of ensuring that everyone had their say.

At our next meeting we will be remembering how we travelled. This could mean long, long walks to school, bikes, cars, trains and trams. This could be a personal view of getting around as a child, using buses or the family's first car, or a description of early cars and other vehicles. Do you remember coach trips to the coast?

If you would like to become a member of the Living History group and share memories of a time gone by the please contact Diane Woolven (See contacts page)

I look forward to another dynamic meeting in April.

*Diane Woolven*

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## *June – July 2021 Newsletter*

### **SPORT**

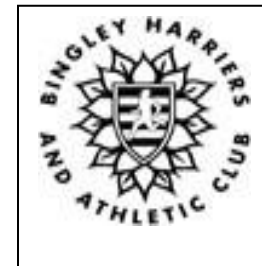
My first memory of taking part in sport was in 1962. I was standing in front of a high jump pit with a PE teacher and a large group of girls. It was my first athletics lesson. We had been shown how to raise the bar and told to keep jumping while she set another group off doing the long jump. I was looking forward to my turn. My sister and I had spent some of our spare time making jumps in the garden. Using canes balanced on bricks or anything else we could find we constructed a series of jumps. This was our version of Horse of the Year Show. Like most young girls we liked horses and we would ride our pretend mounts over the obstacles. So, when my turn came to tackle the school high jump I just mounted my imaginary steed and jumped over the bar. The bar was raised inch by inch (no cm in those days) until there was just me left. I had cleared 3ft 6 inch. The teacher finally returned and asked who had jumped the highest. Many fingers pointed in my direction. 'What style do you use?' she asked. Style? What did she mean? 'Show me' she said. I hurdled over the bar. 'Oh it's your own style,' she said in a patronising voice. This was the beginning of my love of athletics. Later I was shown how to jump using the scissors followed by the straddle and the western roll.

When I was 13, we moved to Bradford and I attended Salts Grammar School. It was the summer term and the Latin house was short of a third leg in the 4X100yd relay for sports day. Can you run asked the house captain? I don't know I replied but I'll give it a go. I can't remember whether we won or not, but I loved running round the grass track.

My parents bought me a pair of red running spikes and some athletic shorts. The spikes were to stop the wearer slipping on the grass (most tracks were grass back in the sixties) but were lethal if you accidentally stepped on someone. I can't believe now that I actually wore the shorts. They were baggy black knickers with a green stripe down the side. Green was my house colour. I thought I looked cool at the time.

The following years I entered every possible event. High jump, long jump, hurdles and middle distance running were my favourite. However, I could not throw. One sports day the team captain asked if I could stand in for the javelin as our competitor had gone home sick. They mistakenly believed that if I could run and jump, I could also throw. How wrong could they be? I tried to explain but to no avail and a javelin was pushed into my hands. I honestly did my best but the javelin came down just a few yards away. It was very embarrassing but at least I got a few points for our house team.

From then on I couldn't wait for summer terms and the opportunity to run and jump. In my final year I was doing the high jump and one by one the other competitors fell by the wayside. Even though there was only me left the teachers kept raising the bar. You might as well see how high you can go. Suddenly there was an announcement over the tannoy. Diane Harris is about to attempt the school high jump record. The whole school were spectating from the banking at the side of the field. Their eyes fell on me. All talking stopped. I jumped scissor style as I found this the most comfortable. The bar wobbled but stayed in place. As I walked out of the sand pit everyone cheered but then it was announced that to be official the vertical height from the centre of the bar had to be measured. I waited tentatively. I got a thumbs up. It was official. I can't remember the height but I know it was just under 5ft



My teacher encouraged me to join Bingley Harriers and I went and joined in their training and competitions. I didn't go as often as I would have liked as we lived on Manor Lane in Shipley so it meant a walk and bus ride to get there. These days children get taken everywhere in cars.

One year I was told that the regional championships were being held. I remember making my own way there on the bus. It was a small venue with a cinder track. I soon realised I hadn't much competition and didn't require much effort to win. However, I was told later that it was a time trial and I was actually racing against the clock. Fortunately, this didn't apply to the high jump as they just kept raising the bar. This meant that I qualified for a place in the Yorkshire sports. This was a different league altogether. By now most competitors were doing the western roll and I was still doing the antiquated scissors. However, I did manage to come 7th.

I enjoyed all sport at school but unfortunately my teacher training college didn't have a track so I joined the college Netball team. I would continue to play this game for the next 40 years and continue to play the walking version today.

*Diane Woolven*

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*April – May 2021 Newsletter*

## **HOLIDAYS ON MY AUNT'S FARM**

I spent quite a bit of time at my Aunt Laura's farm. I was probably about 7 when I first went there. I spent a summer week there for several years in a row during the summer holidays. I never questioned the reason why I went there, and I always spent the week alone. My brother Brian didn't accompany me. I suspect the week coincided with Brian's scout camp and it gave mum and dad a respite from the incessant demands of parenthood. Whatever the reason though, I have fond memories of most of that time.

Aunt Laura was posh by our standards. I never knew exactly what our relationship with her was as a family, but she was certainly unlike any of my other aunts. I think she was nearer my grandparents' age and she lived with her grown up son Roy who ran the farm. She moved very slowly around the house and was always immaculately dressed and disgustingly perfumed. I tried never to get too close to her and on the occasions I had to hug her or kiss her goodnight I always tried to hold my breath. She was a very kind lady with a heavily powdered face and loose rubbery skin which wobbled as she spoke. The most noticeable thing about her was her goitre. I am uncertain whether it was the first time I met her as an infant, or later when I was about five or six that I noticed it. At first it terrified me. It made her look like some kind of monster to my young eyes. Indeed, I can recall staring at her, transfixed by this disfigurement that, to my young eyes gave her the appearance of a giant frog. It took a bit of getting used to but her incessant kindness and generosity quickly reassured me so that I stopped noticing it after a very short while. The things I remember most were the teas.

Aunt Laura had one of the local women come in to help her with cooking and cleaning. I don't remember much about her, except that because of her, things just seemed to happen. At teatime we would go into the dining room and sit at an enormous table. where tea had just seemingly

appeared. On the first occasion I was placed upon a velvet seated dining chair so that the level of my eyes was only a couple of inches above the tabletop. The table setting before me was something I had never experienced before. Cakes of every sort were arranged at several levels on a sparkling glass and silver stand. There was an amazing array of crockery and cutlery in front of me and I was rendered speechless. I didn't know what to do or say. My mum was with me on that first occasion and she must have taken charge. A cushion was found for me and my view of the glistening feast became clearer. I was invited to help myself as the grown-ups were poured tea into little fancy cups, but of course I couldn't reach anything. Mum helped out and put something like a buttered crumpet in front of me which I dutifully ate as I knew I had to before I could expect cake.

Once mum had gone home and left me there, a new, less posh, teatime protocol was introduced, whereby I was allowed to lean forward, part standing on my chair, and help myself to whatever I wanted. At Aunt Laura's suggestion I never told mum about that.

The first time I was put to bed in the old farmhouse is a vivid memory to me. There was a bowl of cold water on a washstand in my bedroom and a chamber pot under the bed. I don't think I had ever used a chamber pot in my life until that point. I knew they existed and I remember the uncomfortable feeling of urinating into it while I was in the bedroom. It just seemed wrong, dirty somehow! The washstand was not a problem, and I quickly got used to it. There was a bathroom off the landing with a giant bath in it and pipes everywhere. I must have used it at some point but that memory has gone. All I know is that the bathroom contained only a bath and a washstand. There were no indoor toilets, a fact which I still find odd, for such a classy house, to this day.

Getting into the old feather bed for the first time, was quite an experience for me. I was used to my bed at home which had a mattress that I slept on. Climbing on to the feather bed in the old farmhouse was a completely different experience. As I lay down, I sank into the mattress so that I was lying inches below the top of the mattress. It was weird, but wonderful and possibly the most comfortable bed I ever slept on either before or since, even to this day. This was a mattress you slept in not on!

The house was enormous and there were spare rooms all over the place. There was a huge, spacious "Box Room" as she called it, which was probably twice the size of the floor area of our whole house. It had obviously been well used in the past, judging by the fancy plasterwork around the doors, windows and walls. In one corner there was a collection of white sheeted furniture, while in another corner there was, unsurprisingly perhaps, a stack of boxes. There were crates and containers of all sorts and sizes there, piled high almost to the ceiling.

Opposite the door was a huge window with wooden shutters which had to be opened by some sort of winding handle, while in the bay of the window was a raised floor that created a sort of stage. Apparently, the shuttered window area had previously been designed to serve as a shop counter. It had opened onto the main road into the village of Mereworth and the villagers and passers-by would go there to buy groceries and of course eggs and poultry which were produced on the farm before the war. I believe that Aunt Laura's husband had been killed in the war, though she seemed very old to me and I suppose it could have been the first war. During my stays this box room became my indoor domain, my playroom. I was allowed to have my toys in there including a scooter and later my roller skates. The wooden floorboards seemed to amplify any noise I made, but nobody seemed to care. The only thing missing was a playmate. Each time I went there I became an only child for a week.

During the fine summer days, I was able to go out on the farm. The men who worked there were very kind as they kept a watchful eye on me, finding little things for me to do, collecting eggs from the chickens and turkeys, filling up the feed troughs and generally helping out. There was a little dog too, whose name has left me now but I spent a lot of time with him, taking him for walks around the cobnut orchards and throwing a ball for him to fetch. I am not sure what breed he was but thinking back, in my mind, he was similar to the old "His Master's Voice" dog Nipper. There were pigs too. They were kept in brick-built pigsties next to the orchard. A job I remember well was collecting a bucket of scraps from the kitchen and taking them down to the pigsties and feeding them to the pigs. I was quite scared of them as my uncle Roy had warned me that, if I fell down in front of them, they would probably eat me.

Roy was Aunt Laura's son. It became apparent at some point that nobody except his mother liked him. I overheard conversations between the farm hands which clearly indicated that they despised him. He certainly had a sadistic streak in him. He took pleasure in catching birds in a trap and on more than one occasion, showing me how to break their necks. He also had a gun with which he would shoot birds and rabbits. Most of the time I tried, quite successfully, to avoid him. I don't think he had much time for me either and I certainly had no desire to be with him. I was always so much happier helping out the men who worked for him.

I have sometimes wondered what became of them. Roy could, I suppose, still be around, but I think it unlikely. He was probably in his 20s or even 30s in those days, which would make him at least 15 or 16 years older than I, so he would be at least 86 today, perhaps much older. I am sure my parents would have lost touch with him after Aunt Laura died, and to this day I have no idea exactly how we were related, if indeed we were.

*Chris Woolven*

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*February – March 2021 Newsletter*

## GETTING INTO TROUBLE

At first my thoughts were that my memories of getting into trouble when young would be pretty run of the mill stuff – playing cricket in the street and scoring a six by hitting the ball through a neighbour's window and something I'm sure I mentioned before – persuading my friend Tony to swap his fort with cowboys and Indians for my 'de-luxe' twin baby pram.

But suddenly into my mind popped the words 'Ration Books' – here was my story to be told.

A minor mishap with Ration Books occurred when I was sent to the local corner shop for our sugar allowance. Whilst waiting in turn I realised that customers were getting what seemed like large quantities of soap (the red and green blocks) for few coupons – this I was sure was a much better deal – and so, yes, proudly returned home with a large bag of soap but no sugar – we were very clean but sugarless for a while.

On my next 'adventure' with Ration Books.... I should begin by explaining that both my Mum and I had bright ginger/red hair with tempers to match. So on one of the seemed to be frequent clashes of temper I was sent upstairs to the bedroom, there to wait in isolated boredom because there was of course no television, radio, telephone and so on in bedrooms back then (I'm talking 1950s). On this particular day Mum must have been really annoyed because she would not even let me take one of my beloved books upstairs with me, CRUEL.

So there I was utterly bored when I noticed our Ration Books on Mum's dressing table next to her dainty manicure set, holding a nail file, tweezers and scissors.

Are you keeping up with me or are you a step ahead?

Yes – I sat and proceeded to cut up one of the Ration Books – fortunately Mum came upstairs before I got to any more.

I'm sure you can all well imagine Mum's anger but also her worry about how we would manage without the lost Ration Book. I think I hid quietly in the cupboard under the stairs until Dad came home from work. When he did he was to be faced with an irate wife, who wanted to know what he was going to do about his daughter as she presented him with a brown paper bag full of cut up coupons.

My Dad (who I'm sure was as worried as Mum), was a very patient man with a calming influence and he managed to assure Mum that the problem would be solved the next day.

So it was decided the next day Mum, Dad (did he have to miss a valuable day's work) and I would walk up to the Council Offices to ask for a replacement book. Because the Ration Book I had cut up was fairly new and Mum could remember which coupons had been used, she was hopeful she could explain this and a new book would be issued.

But, no such luck, the three of us were led into a small room containing a table, chairs, sheets of paper and pots of glue!

Yes, we were told to try to glue the Ration Book coupons back together on the sheets of paper provided. They were not about to trust what Mum had told them.

I cannot remember how long we were kept at the task (I don't think I would have been much help – I was probably about 8 or 9 at the time) but eventually someone in authority came in to inspect what had been achieved and finally said they would accept Mum's word as to how many coupons had been used and a precious new Ration Book was issued.

I never saw our Ration Books laying around again. Mum stopped sending me upstairs, instead, making me sit on the back door step where she could keep an eye on me!

Was this the first NAUGHTY STEP I ask myself?

*Carol Pearson*



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## *December 2020 – January 2021 Newsletter*

### **MY FATHERS OCCUPATION**

My first recollection of my father's working life would be about 1930. My first impression was that he was away from home for long periods each day when he was working. He was not working full time as this was just after the great depression of the late twenties. I found out later that he had tried almost anything to get some money into the household, even trying to sell vacuum cleaners 'on the knocker', in other words, door to door.

He had progressed to the wild heights of labouring at Steel Peach and Tozer's mills at Templeborough. This was a long way from home as we lived in with my grandmother on the south side of Sheffield. He would be up at around 4 in the morning on his working days, this was soon to become full time. He then had to travel by tramcar into Sheffield and then change to go on to work on the Rotherham service. I know from personal experience that the Rotherham service took 50 minutes to do eight miles.

Now onto the work that he did. He was a 'tyre bowler' moving railway tyres from one working operation position to another. Railway tyres are of course simply steel rings varying from carriage and goods wagon wheels to those very large ones that went on to be the driving wheels of engines. The tyres were subsequently heated to a high temperature in order to be shrunk onto the cast iron part of the wheel. While he was at work, he was the one and only qualified first aid man. There was no other facility there at the time. It seems that Health & Safety was a long time coming to SP & T and yes he was frequently involved after serious accidents.

We moved to live in Rotherham in 1935 for obvious reasons. We were very happy in the little house which we rented. However, only some three months after moving my father considered himself very fortunate to get employed on the Sheffield Ambulance Service. This was a position which he had been trying to get for several years so he had to start travelling the opposite way to get to work on a three-shift system.



Naturally it was not long before we moved back to Sheffield where everything seemed to be well until grandmother died in January 1939. At that time, we were living in a flat upstairs and grandmother on the ground floor of the house which we had moved from in 1935. This was grandmother's property and had to be sold. My parents decided to move to South Africa to be with mother's sister and family. Father had been promised employment as a masseur, the house had been cleared and sold and we were due to sail for South Africa on September 7th and father had worked his leaving notice when we were informed on Monday 4th September that there was no chance of getting to South Africa until the war had ended.

Father was welcomed back into the Ambulance Service (he loved every minute of his work) until the German air raid on Sheffield in December 1940. He was on duty that week and left us in an Anderson shelter about 8pm to get to work by any means.

It was two days before we found out that he had been killed by a direct hit on the ambulance. The Ambulance Service provided a fleet of ambulances for dad's funeral. The epitaph on his grave reads "He died as he lived, helping others".

*Eric Wood*

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#### *October – November 2020 Newsletter*

### **LIVING HISTORY**

Although the Living History Group is not currently meeting, I do have some vacancies if anyone would like to join. The purpose of Living History is to capture and preserve memories so they don't get lost. A topic is given to write about and at our meetings we take it in turns to read them out. Long forgotten memories from childhood and early adulthood come tumbling back and I have often gone home and re-written my own piece to include something I had forgotten.

Some topics this year have been: The 2nd World War through your own eyes or someone else's; Your Dad's occupation; Memories of going to the Dentist; Shops and what do you remember?

So far we have produced two booklets of shared memories with a third in the planning. If it's something you would be interested in please don't hesitate to call me or email me for more information.

*Jess Parkinson*

### **EARLY MEMORIES OF THE DENTIST**

I was fortunate as a child to have good teeth so I had to have little dental treatment beyond the occasional inspection and filling, carried out by the West Riding County Council's dental service as it moved round from school to school. They would either bring their equipment with them and set up an empty classroom or arrive in a large lorry with the surgery installed in the back.

I have only two clear memories. One is the smell – which might be an imagined memory – for I am assured by various sources that the mixture of nitrous oxide and oxygen used as an anaesthetic for extractions and more substantial fillings was in fact odourless beyond a faint sweet smell. I'd be interested to see if other people remember an odour.

The other certainly wasn't imagined. This was the dentist's drill. Looking back, it reminds me of a large praying mantis lurking ready to strike, crouching there behind the dentist's chair, all belts and pulleys and wheels, worked by a treadle under the chair operated by his foot. It produced a high-pitched whine and was utterly terrifying.

The 'gas' as we called it was delivered through a rubber mask held over your nose and mouth by the nurse, which certainly did have a smell – a stale rubbery mixture of cold sweat and other people's mouths. Makes me shudder even now. I don't think it put you out completely but lifted you up so you could peer down – hopefully painlessly – at what was happening to you. Most peculiar!

I don't think I attended a dental surgery in Doncaster until I was an adult but I do remember my mother telling me that when I was a child before the war that there were two sorts of dental practices. One was similar to those we have today, where you went for treatment generally, and the other where you just went to have teeth extracted who my mother always referred to as 'pullers', some of whom had alarming reputations.

This, of course, was the time when it was common to have all your teeth out whilst still very young. I remember people not much older than me having all their teeth out as a twenty first birthday present, all of which had to be paid for in cash at the time.

My most painful, but in a way most hilarious, visit to a dentist occurred when I was in the army doing my National Service in Egypt. It was the Christmas of my first year so it would be 1954. A couple of weeks before Christmas I lost a large filling in a back tooth and it got worse and began to hurt, so much so that on the morning of Christmas Eve I went on sick parade and made my way to the medical unit. I thought it was deserted but eventually a corporal in the Medical Corps turned up and let me in. He told me that the duty dentist would be in shortly, and two hours later he turned up. He was a young guy, doing his national service like the rest of us, and I don't know when he had had his last drink, but he reeked of whiskey and was obviously still drunk. Whilst he identified the tooth, I could see his hands were shaking and I feared the worst. I shrieked in pain as he prodded the offending molar, and he then called the corporal medic in to give me an injection. I feared the worst. By this time, he was mumbling incoherently and just wanted to get the extraction over. He didn't give the anaesthetic long enough to work and grabbed the tooth with his pliers or whatever they use, and as he pulled down, I shot up and knocked him over. The pain was excruciating! He was sitting on the floor with his back against the wall as the medic dashed back in the room to see what all the noise was about.

Assessing the situation quickly he retrieved the dentist's tools from the floor and without more ado finished the extraction himself - which he certainly shouldn't have done, but my word was I grateful! As I was rinsing my mouth, he brought me a carton of painkillers, telling me to avoid alcohol, and off I trotted. As I was getting royally drunk that night in the Corporals' Mess I bumped into the medic. He grinned and I bought him a pint!!

*Colin Brown*

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*August – September 2020 Newsletter*

## **A SPOOKY/GHOSTLY ENCOUNTER**

Growing up I had heard stories of spooky and unnatural events but I had never experienced anything myself. That is until at the age of 21, in 1974 when I married and moved into the council house my husband already had. It was a modern council house on the Cantley 6 estate very close to the water towers.

John had complained several times of strange feelings he had in the house and told me one story that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. He said he was asleep in bed when he became aware of a person in the room. He sat up and saw an oldish looking man with a long beard walk into his wardrobe. He told me he leapt out of bed and threw open the door with the intention of confronting whoever was there. All he saw were his clothes hanging there. It disturbed him but he just went back to bed and thought no more about it.

When I moved in the first week of September 1974, after our honeymoon in Skegness, I didn't give it another thought. That is, until I also started to experience strange feelings. A draught on the back of my neck, a feeling that someone was around, strange but nothing to scare me too much.

We had a little dog at the time, Chip who slept in her basket in the outhouse, a small room about 3 metres by 3 metres. She slept in there quite

happily every night until one night she started barking and wouldn't stop. I got up and went down stairs to tell her off, thinking someone had walked by and woken her up but I was a little shocked to see how distressed she was. She was in the back of her basket going mad at something I couldn't see. It un-nerved me but after a while she settled down and I went back to bed.

Some months later John was building a continental headboard in our bedroom. It was a big bedroom and made sense to make it in there. We didn't have a carpet at the time so there was nothing to damage. As a result he had all his tools there too.

The house was built in the 60's so had old fashioned wooden drawers and cupboards in the kitchen. The drawers were on wooden runners and the doors had little metal catches that pinged when you opened and shut them.

I was laid awake trying to get to sleep one night when I heard in the kitchen drawers and cupboards opening and shutting. I lay for a while until I had to say something, "John can you hear that?", "Yes" he said and told me later that he was trying to ignore it. We got up and John took his mallet from the floor and went downstairs with me behind him. He shouted, "I'm coming down" and we carefully stepped into the kitchen. There was nothing there and nothing had been moved. I went into Chip and she just looked at me as if to say, "What are you doing up"? We were unnerved and went back to bed discussing how strange it had been.

The next event really terrified me. It was getting on for nine in the evening and John used to do a lot of spare time painting jobs after he'd finished work, so went straight from one job to the other. I was getting dinner ready for him coming in. The house had warm air central heating with ducts throughout the house with a square mesh outlet, about a foot square in each room. The one in the kitchen was by the door and I used to put my concertina clotheshorse in front of it to dry or air the clothes. The ducts were Chip's favourite place to lay and that night she was under the clotheshorse in the kitchen where I was.

I was at the sink when Chip started barking. She was at the clotheshorse going mad at something that wasn't there. The hairs on the back of her neck were stood on end and she looked like she wanted to kill something. I tried in vain to calm her and was so spooked and scared myself that I ran to the front door with the intention of going a few doors down to my sister-in-law's. But as I got to the door John was there and looking at me perplexed. When we got back into the kitchen Chip had calmed down and with John home I calmed down too.

We left the house in 1976 when we purchased our first home. No other scary things happened after the clotheshorse incident but it was always in the back of my mind.

I've heard many stories from people since about things they have experienced but fortunately I have never had any other unexplainable things happen to me, thank goodness.

That is until a couple of weeks ago on the 19th of January. We had gone away with friends and stayed at the Black Horse Inn at Kirby Fleetham. I am a very poor sleeper and a couple of years ago moved into a single bed so I didn't constantly disturb my husband. The only way the Inn could accommodate us was in a very nice family room. It had a large main room with a double bed and an adjoining room with two single beds. Because I'm used to sleeping in a single I took the twin room.

I must have dozed off shortly after 3.30 a.m. The last time I had looked at the clock was 3.27 a.m. I was asleep facing the wall when I felt someone lean on the bed behind me. Thinking it was my husband I was turning over about to ask what was wrong when a male voice said "Heather". I whipped around only to see, nothing. It unnerved me so much that I turned on the light and it stayed on until I got up. In the cold light of day I was 90% sure it must have been a dream but at the time it shook me to my roots.

*Jess Parkinson*



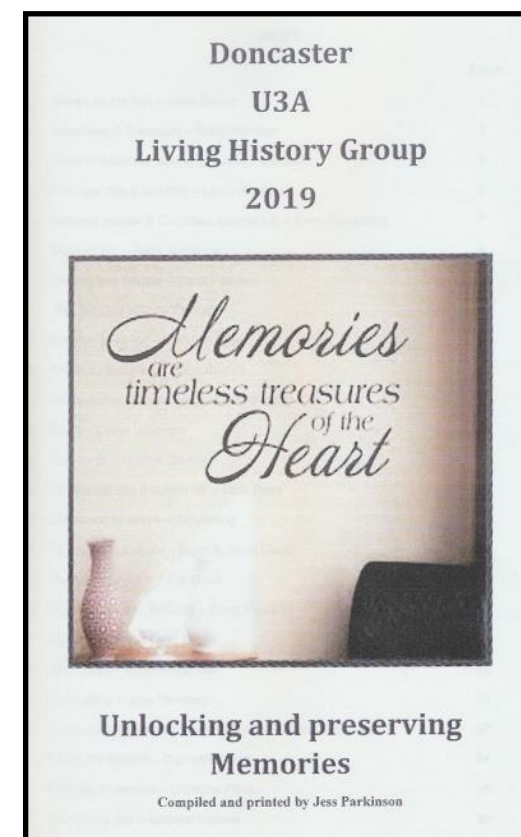
## LIVES WELL LIVED.

It is with pleasure that the Living History group announce the completion of their second booklet. The way we live today has changed so much, since the nineteen thirties, and this change gained pace in the fifties, so that those under sixty have no comprehension of how we lived, worked and played in previous times.

Those who have read the first booklet know what to expect from the endeavours of this group, who, together recalled their individual memories of how they lived in days past. They then wrote down those precious memories, sometimes just for their families, or such as myself, for our descendants and social historians.

Our first booklet was very popular and we will have our latest booklet for sale at the next general meeting. The booklets have all been written, designed, and compiled by the members of this group, all with no previous experience of publishing. But most of the credit for accomplishing this booklet, must go to our very hard working leader, Jess Parkinson, as well as those who contributed their memories. We meet on the first Wednesday of every month at ten thirty, in the Prego Cafe on Hallgate. New members will be made very welcome.

Betty Alexander



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## THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN OF THE NORTH



When I was a child at school in nineteen forty something or other, our class was shown a film about the City of York. The commentator said that York was known as the "Jewel in the Crown of the North". That phrase surprised me. Surprised me because my grandmother lived in York and I had until then always thought York was an ordinary place compared to where we lived in Doncaster.

Seventy five years later the memory of that film returned to me when our group leader suggested that we, in the Living History group, spend a day at the York Castle museum, and all agreed. So on a nice bright autumn morning our group met at the Doncaster market car park and boarded the bus that had been booked for us, and which then rapidly drove us to York where we alighted a short time later at the entrance to the York Castle Museum. This was wonderful. No parking worries, no distance to walk for those of us who are not so good on our feet, which meant that we were nice and fresh and able to enjoy the experience of the museum. We had four hours to spend at the museum before the bus would be back to pick us up for our return to Doncaster. One would think that a couple of hours would suffice, and for most museums it would, but York Castle Museum covers a large area. As the name implies, it was originally a castle built by the Normans. If York was known as the "Jewel in the Crown of the North", the castle is the "Jewel in the Crown of York" sitting, as it does, on a hill in the centre of the city.

From being a castle, it then became a prison, eventually maturing in nineteen thirty eight into becoming a social history museum. The latter change in the use of the castle was led by the efforts of a Dr. Kirk, a keen social historian and an amateur archaeologist, who was responsible for many archaeology finds in and around York in the first half of the twentieth century. Of interest to the U3A Philosophy group is the fact that Dr. Kirk was

also an honorary member of the York Philosophical Society. By all accounts, a very busy man.

Lunch and a natter was welcome when we reached half way round this large museum. There was hot food as well as snacks, not a large selection, but adequate. It was interesting to listen to the U3A group's impressions of the artefacts we had seen. Many mentions of memories recalled from childhood, by seeing household objects on display; remarks such as, "I remember my grandmother using that". There was a particularly good display of the fashions of the sixties. Some of us are old enough and brave enough to say that we recalled using, or wearing, some of the objects that were there.

The second half of the tour could be a bit depressing, when going round the prison cells and exercise yard with the stocks and the scaffold on display. How lucky we are to be living in this age was a thought that went through our minds. With all its imperfections, it is still better than the past, at least in our part of the world. One thing we have now, that was an immediate blessing on our day out, was the fact that there was a lift in the museum for those who could not get around easily, as there were lots of stairs. There were also seats scattered around that one could rest on from time to time.

A look around the Museum shop was our last stop before saying goodbye to York Castle Museum.

Our hired bus collected us at the entrance and, as no one was missing, we left in timely fashion for our return to Bonny Donny. It was an interesting visit made enjoyable by visiting in the company of other U3A members, where it was possible to have the time to renew acquaintances and meet new friends.

*Betty Alexander*

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### *August – September 2017 Newsletter*

This group is all about recalling our memories and getting them into print. Individual members of the group have different reasons for doing this. Many of the group are writing their past memories as family information for future generations, such as **how** they lived, worked, ate and played. Also **where** they lived, worked and played, and with whom. Some members of the group have been doing this by themselves but, doing it in isolation, have found it to be a lonely and tedious activity and so tend to falter after a while. But, by relating one's memories in a group, it seems to awaken many memories of the past that would not be remembered without the inspiration of other people's memories.

This in turn also makes it an enjoyable activity. Instead of a lonely trawl through our past life which, let's face it, is not always full of happy clappy incidents, but a mixture of sad and glad nostalgic events. It helps too that one learns how others have also coped with similar difficulties that one may have been presented with on their journey through life.

Over the last eighteen months we have, as a group, amassed a fair amount of material some of which we now intend to put together and print as a booklet. This will be a learning curve, certainly for me. Others of our group have talents that we intend to exploit so that the only expense incurred will be for ink and paper. We then hope to assist each other in doing personal booklets for our individual family archives, or perhaps a wider readership, such as social historians.

*Betty Alexander*

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## *June – July 2017 Newsletter*

Living History is a group of between 15 and 20 people writing about our past memories and having those memories compiled into a booklet. We have already published one booklet and are well on the way to our second. We meet in Prego Café at 10.30 on the first Wednesday of each month. Past topics have been

Memories of Accidents;  
Early memories of Bad Weather;  
Early memories of Christmas;  
Early memories of TV & Radio,  
Street games I played as a child;  
Earning a few bob;  
and much more.

We have a wide age range which makes for very interesting listening. The group is led by Betty Alexander who can be contacted on 01302 888159.

*Jess Parkinson*

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## *April – May 2017 Newsletter*

### **EARLY MEMORIES OF BAD WEATHER**

I have three recollections of really bad weather. The first was when I was 10 years old in 1963. We lived just outside Honiton in Devon on a static caravan site in a large blue caravan with a large Georgian window at the front. The family woke up to a scene from a Christmas card. When mum opened all the curtains all we could see was white.

The van had a side door from the living room and a back door from the kitchen. The snow had drifted from the back and side of the van where the doors were and we were completely snowed in. We weren't the only ones. All around us were caravans half covered in snow. Our toilet was outside in a shed which stood at the back of the van. This was also under several feet of drifted snow.

I don't remember how long it took to get us out but everyone rallied and eventually everyone was freed. My brother and I couldn't wait to get out into the snow but because I had a cold, only my brother was allowed out. Sulking wasn't tolerated so I just had to sit and watch my brother and the other children having a whale of a time.

I didn't need to worry as the snow lingered for what seemed like a life time. My best friend was Lorrain and she lived in the farm with her family who owned our caravan site. We were the same age and went to school together and I had some amazing adventures on and around that farm but that's a story for another day. Lorrain had two older sisters and a brother who must have been in his teens and once I was allowed out, we all went off to the lane. The lane was the entrance for the farm and caravan site from the main road.





On one side of the lane was a narrow stream but the snow had drifted so high on that side of the road it was impossible to distinguish where the lane ended and the verge began. We spent our time throwing ourselves into the drifted snow, it was such good fun. This carried on until Lorain's brother completely disappeared. Once our panic had passed because we could hear laughter, we all crowded in to help him out. He'd gone right through the drift into the small stream below. That was the end of that game, at least for a while because it was off for a warm drink and get dried.

I have copied a picture from the internet but I remember cars being so covered that all you could see was a small patch of the roofs and in some cases buried completely. Even road signs only had the very tops peeking out. I looked on the internet to find dates and on 29 and 30 December 1962 a blizzard swept across the South West of England and Wales. Snow drifted to over 20 feet (6.1 m) deep in places, driven on by gale force easterly winds, it blocking roads and railways. The snow stranded villagers and brought down powerlines. The near-freezing temperatures meant that the snow cover lasted for over two months in some areas. Snow lay to 6 inches (0.15 m) deep. With an average temperature of  $-2.1^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $28.2^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), January 1963 remains the coldest month since January 1814 over Central England. Much of England and Wales was snow-covered throughout the month. The country started to freeze solid, with temperatures as low as  $-19.4^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-2.9^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and freezing fog was a hazard for most of the country. Even the sea froze over in some places.

Once the initial excitement of the first few days had passed the drudgery kicked in. It was so cold it's hard for me to remember now. Trying to keep a caravan warm in those temperatures was nigh on impossible. We must have gone through bottle after bottle of calor gas, which on occasions froze in the bottle. My dad worked outside as a borough surveyor and as the ground was frozen solid he couldn't work. It must have been a terrible time for them financially but as a 10 year old I didn't know that.

Everything became a chore. The two miles or so walking into Honiton and back every day for school was cold to say the least. Shopping was the same, everything had to be brought from Honiton. We only had wellies in those days and in the days before the snow was cleared or impacted it soon came over the top of said wellies. It wasn't long before I had chilblains. I cried a lot and I remember how painful and uncomfortable they were. However, my lasting memory would have to be the beauty of it all. Until the thaw came and the slush.

Jess Parkinson

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## A SUMMER STORM

One hot July evening in the summer of 1945 a group of seven or eight of us, all boys, decided to go swimming. We chose a venue other than the River Don since swimming in the filthy water of our local river had, in many cases, been physically beaten out of us by our worried parents. We chose instead what we called 'the dug-outs'. These were a series of rectangular man-made depressions along the northern banks of the Don where soil had been dug out to throw up earthworks to prevent flooding. They had gradually filled with water, had a sandy bottom, and were nowhere more than about chest deep, and made ideal open-air swimming pools. They lay about five miles distant out beyond Arksey along bumpy lanes and farm tracks, over which we rattled on our old bikes. Our ages probably ranged from ten to fourteen.



We had no use for swimming costumes or towels, since we were all accustomed to skinny-dipping and getting dressed whilst still damp concerned us not at all.

So involved were we in the cooling pleasures of our chosen dug-out that we failed to notice the skies darkening and thickening, presaging a summer storm.



A rumble of thunder, already near at hand, made us beat a hasty retreat and still dripping head for home. We had covered barely half the distance when, with the sky now as black as night, the heavens opened. We were passing a field where, just inside its wide open gate, stood an old stone built cow byre with an open front but a still intact, though rusted and flapping, corrugated metal roof. It was shelter enough, and our unofficial leader, a boy called Billy Ord urged us all into it. The floor was thick with straw and dried cow muck, but we lined up along the rear wall to shelter and watch the proceedings. It was probably because we were all so young that the ensuing storm made the terrible impression it did, and there followed the most awe-inspiring and terrifying electric thunderstorm I have ever encountered. The centre of the storm must have been directly overhead and the boom and crashing of thunder made the tin roof of the byre rattle and shake deafeningly, frightening us out of our wits. But it



was the monstrous forked-lightening, descending in great jagged leaps into the fields around us, that reduced all but one of us to screaming panic. Only Billy kept his head, telling us stories to make us laugh and leading us through all the songs we could remember how to sing. He was the tower of strength that saw us through, but even he was reduced to an amazed silence when there was the loudest crash of thunder you could ever imagine, followed by a flash so bright we were all illuminated in a steely blue glow as a huge fork of lightning struck a large tree not fifty yards away and directly in front of us. Before our astonished eyes the great tree disappeared in a huge flash of flame and was reduced to a hissing smoking stump.

I involuntarily dropped to my knees, and was not surprised on looking round to find everyone else, including Bill, similarly prostrated. The possibility of lightening striking the metal roof of our shelter sent us crazy with thoughts of escape, but the lightening still forking down only yards away penned us in. Recovering quickly Bill roused us to our feet. "Come on yer dozey buggers, gerrup", he shouted, "let's sing under t'bloody chestnut tree, cos that bugger ovva theer's not gunna do any more spreadin". And so in tremulously piping voices we sang our thin little songs into the teeth of the storm, whipped up by Bill whenever we began to flag or became tearful again.



It must have been well over an hour before the rain began to ease and the storm passed on and we were able to resume our journey home, laughing and shouting in hysterical release from the tensions of the previous couple of hours.

We splashed through so many muddy puddles as we rode home that by the time we entered the backs between New Street and Church Street we felt like the legion of the lost returning to a hero's welcome.

Alas, as you might imagine, that was far from the case. In those days our parent's way of showing relief that we had been spared was to bestow a good thrashing by way of reminding us not to do that again. The soundest thrashing was reserved for the one who deserved it least, Bill Ord, who was greeted at their back gate by his darkly scowling father, a taciturn bloke who no one had ever seen smile and who my dad called 'Black Jack'.

Poor old Bill, he was a smashing lad, and you can imagine the sadness I felt on returning home from National Service to hear that Bill had been killed whilst serving his apprenticeship when he fell from some scaffolding on a building site.

*Colin Brown*

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