

BRADWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER No.26 April 2023

Up-coming events

For this month's talk we welcome back Marcus Newton and Julie Charlesworth who some of us joined for a 'two cathedral' walk around Sheffield about a year ago. Of their coming talk Marcus has written: The talk covers the history of women's suffrage in Sheffield. The journey from having no vote to being able to vote and attain equality in pay. We cover the Chartists, the Pankhursts, the Buffer Girls of the the First World War, the impact on local government following the right to vote, the Women of Steel, post-World War Two equality of pay to the present day.

This will be at 8 pm in the Methodist Hall on Tuesday 18th April (the 3rd Tuesday in the month!).

Recent additions to our Website

Andy Smith has been able to separate the audio and visual parts of the recordings we made in about 2008 of four people with strong Bradwell connections. The audio parts can now be heard on the home page at bradwellhistoricalsociety.org.uk under 'Interviews with Bradwell Residents'. The four in the recordings are Betty Bancroft, Barbara Bradbury, Len Green and Dora Wilson. Dora's is quite remarkable because much of it is presented in verse. Betty's also includes her reading of two of her poems.

Life on the Hills in the early 1930s

The following piece was written by Charles Bland and his godson David Bancroft gave the BHS permission to reproduce it here. Identifying this Charles Bland requires a little bit of care because there were two 20th century-born Bradwell men with that name. One was Charles Robert Bland who was living in Wortley Court when he died in 2003. His obituary can be found in the *Bradwell News* June 2003 and picture of him on p113 of *After Seth*. The Charlie Bland whose memories are reproduced here was born in Bradwell on 21st June 1926 and died in Sheffield on 1st

April 2020. His description of where he spent his early years strongly suggests that the house was Edge View, one of several of that name, but this one is on Bessie Lane where Peter and Alison Austin now live. In the 1940s Charlie worked on farms and he was later a 'Bevan Boy' working in pits such as Grassmoor.

Early memories by Charles Bland

I was born in the mid-twenties in a large village in North West Derbyshire, a three-bedroomed house which was situated (apart from a row of paving-slabs) right up to the road, which was known affectionately as Bessie Lane.



Edge View (centre foreground) c 1920

The house was uniquely situated on the boundary between limestone behind the house and gritstone at the front. At the rear, the rock had been blasted to make room for building, and parts of the drill holes could still be seen. The rocks were always running with water, and when the frost came in winter, they were a picture of ice and icicles for several weeks.

Across the road, there were several fields, and then the Gritstone Edge that rose to approximately 1,000 feet. This was very picturesque, but on sultry days it could be very depressing. The limestone land rose gently behind the house, and was carved into by fairly deep gorges, which had probably been caves which had collapsed in the distant past.

Running east to west for several miles were lead veins, which commenced where the limestone and gritstone met. In the past lead and fluor-spar were mined from the veins, the spa being left in Rakes. Most of this has been removed, to help in the production of Steel. There were also many Pit Shafts on the Rakes, and with care several topping stones could be removed and objects dropped down the shafts, as we listened for the splash when they hit the bottom. Some shafts collapsed, leaving inverted hollows in the ground.

There were no streams running on the limestone, as the rain water sank through the rock, and re-appeared lower down. There were few trees or hedges, and most of the field boundaries were walls built from limestone quarried locally.

The gritstone side was totally different. The rainwater collected on the surface, and ran down the hillside in small streams, cutting in the rocks.

Flooding was always a problem. The limestone caused water to run out of the caves and fissures, and flood the main street. But also the rain on the gritstone swelled the streams, causing the main stream to flood. Over the river were several buildings and two bridges, and when the floods came all of the water could not get under the archways, so it ran round the buildings cutting them from the 'land'.

Again, in the summer, water was always a problem. The small reservoirs would become very low, and the water supply had to be turned off for half the week, so that people higher up in the village could get a limited supply.

The streams on the gritstone had to be piped into wells, so that buckets could be used to collect the water. This was not very hygienic, as cattle had plodded through the water, and the odd sheep had died in the streams. Still we did not seem to take any harm, and the water was always boiled. On the limestone side, there was just one spring, and the water was ice cold and sparkling pure, probably as pure as today's bottled water. It was hard work carrying buckets of water to the top of the village, but at least they never got flooded!!

In the 'Dale' there was a large quarry and one of our pastimes was to go and stand on the opposite side of the valley, and wait for blasting time. At exactly four pm the siren would sound, and after a short period, the limestone could be seen falling away from the face, followed shortly after by the large 'bang' of the explosion.

Our home was originally been a four roomed cottage, then someone built a kitchen and a bedroom on one end. There were six large windows and a large heavy front door facing the road. The door would have withstood a siege, being at least 3 ft thick and having several locks and bolts on it.

The house walls were at least 3 ft thick, built of limestone, and the roof was made of gritstone slabs, the lower ones being at least 3 ft long and very heavy.

The floors downstairs were gritstone flags and very uneven. Except in the kitchen, they were covered with pegged rugs made from spare material, suites and blankets etc. The colours were made into a pattern of sorts., but the shapes did not very often match.

The back wall had wooden panelling on it, and on occasions rats could be heard running behind it.

The front door opened into the living room, and the stairs were straight up from the door. In winter the living room was very draughty, and occasionally the 'clothes horse' was covered with blankets and used to keep out the cold. At the other side of

the front door was the Parlour. This was the largest and probably would have been the warmest room, except that the fireplace was broken, so we could not have any fires. There was a large mirror on one wall, and hand-painted pictures on the other. The end wall had cupboards fitted with glass doors, and contained the best crockery and 'treasures' of the home. There was also a circular gate-legged table which was rarely used, and a Welsh Dresser under the window.

There was no gas or electricity in the house, the only illumination came from a paraffin lamp which stood at the centre of the kitchen table. Each morning it had to be filled with paraffin and the wicks had to be trimmed or else they would smoke and dirty the glass.

There were no lights on the stairs or the bedrooms so going to bed in the winter in the dark was quite an ordeal. One did not hang around. I never remember having pyjamas, perhaps night-shirts. Washing and cleaning teeth was never considered, and you went to the toilet somewhere downstairs before you came to bed.

There was only one cold water tap in the house, which was used for all the water supply. In winter as the water came through the outside wall it often used to freeze up, so a lamp had to be kept light under the sink to keep it thawed out. The sink was a large gritstone block with a shallow hollow in it, completely unsuitable for holding water, we always had an enamel bowl in it. My father used to sharpen his carving knives and other tools on its edge.

There was a cooking range in the living room which was the only fire in the house, so everything had to be cooked and burnt on it. There was an oven at one side of the fire, and a boiler at the other, but it leaked and could only be used to keep sticks warm to light the fire in the morning.

There was a large coalhouse near the backdoor, and as coal was cheaper in the summer, my parents used to purchase several tons and store it away to last them through the winter. The toilet was at the bottom end of the garden, not a place to visit on wet and wintry nights. Oh for chamber pots!

Outside the front door was a large limestone slab, which was rather uneven, and when it rained the water collected on it. It also stretched out onto the road, and when the road was resurfaced my parents insisted that the slabs also be covered with road surfacing material. There were no kerb stones on either side of the road, and no drains to take the rainwater away. Across the road was a grass verge with two large trees growing at either end.