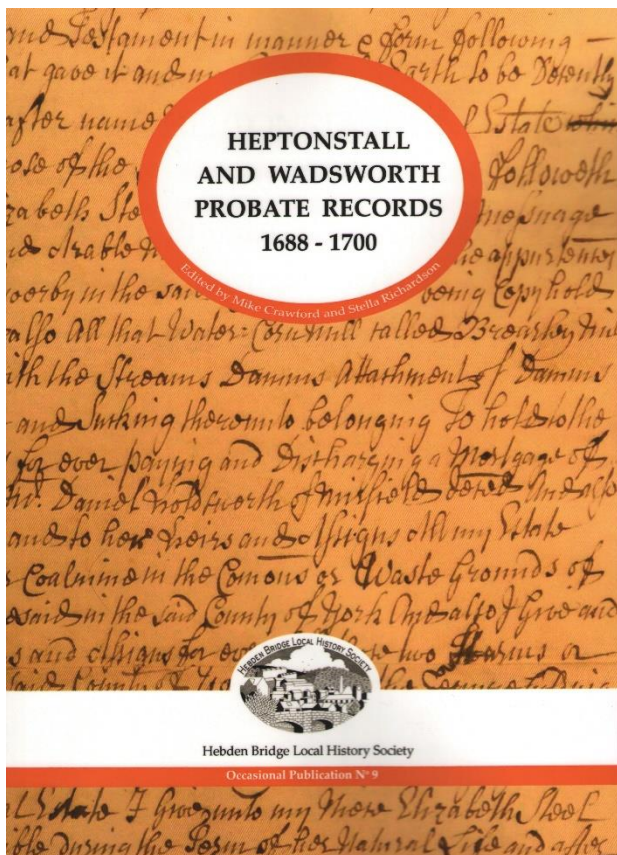


HEBDON BRIDGE LOCAL HISTORY  
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER  
[www.hebdonbridgehistory.org.uk](http://www.hebdonbridgehistory.org.uk)

## Autumn 2020



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Local History Society  
The Birchcliffe Centre  
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The society has sections for those with a particular interest in local prehistory, family history and folklore.

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**Subscriptions due – see back cover**

**Welcome** to the Autumn Newsletter. Here you'll find details of the society activities for 2020 -2021. The next newsletter will be in Spring 2021.

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## Special arrangements for 2020

*We have reluctantly concluded that it will not be possible to hold physical meetings until at least the New Year. Our AGM and lecture season this year will therefore be offered via Zoom webinar until the situation changes sufficiently to make physical lectures feasible.*

*Even if lecture meetings were allowed under changing Government guidance, many people, including speakers, are likely to feel uncomfortable at attending such events until there is a vaccine.*

*We have put together a varied programme of talks for our autumn and winter season and are committed to bringing the fascinating research work of these speakers to you as best as we can during these strange times.*

*Zoom can be used on any computer, tablet or smartphone and you do not require video as you will not be seen. If you have any queries about joining the webinars please contact Rachel at [membership@hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk](mailto:membership@hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk). We apologise to any members who do not have the requisite technology, but this is the only safe way we can continue to hold meetings at the moment.*

*Once you have renewed your membership you will receive an invitation by email to each lecture a few days before it is scheduled. You will then need to register with your name and membership number so that you can be sent the link to the webinar. This link will be unique to you and cannot be shared with other people. The link will also include full instructions on how to join the webinar. Please make sure that we have your email address when you renew your membership, so that you can receive Zoom invitations. We will also inform members via email and our Facebook page of any changes to the programme as obviously we cannot predict how things will develop between September and March.*

## **Archive 2020 - 2021**

We regret that our Archive at Birchcliffe remains closed for the foreseeable future as we cannot guarantee a safe Covid-19 environment.

## **Enquiries and Research**

The enquiry service via our website remains open and we will try and answer any queries or supply copies of documents within copyright regulations.

# **New Publication**

## **Heptonstall and Wadsworth Probate Records 1688 – 1700**

Edited by Mike Crawford and Stella Richardson. Published 2020. Hebden Bridge Local History Society Occasional Publication No.9. Paperback. 195 pages. ISBN: 978-0-9933920-4-7. £9.99. Available from our website or via the Bookcase in Hebden Bridge.

### **About the Book**

This collection of wills and inventories is a companion volume to publications of probate documents for the Upper Calder Valley townships of Sowerby and Soyland; and of Erringden, Langfield and Stansfield.

The documents offer vivid insights into life and death among the people of Heptonstall and Wadsworth at the end of the seventeenth century. Many were involved in the dual economy of the domestic textile trade and farming. Intriguing insights into family relationships are revealed through bequests, property transfers and the choice of executors. The documents show the desire of the testators and the efforts of the probate courts to ensure that the estate was administered as intended.

The inventories not only describe household goods and personal possessions, but also trade tools and farming implements. They also demonstrate the sizeable sums of money loaned and borrowed, and the role of widows in the economic system.

The volume contains a description of the probate process, extensive indexes of persons, places, belongings and a thorough local glossary of usage for this period.

# Local History AGM 2020

## Items for the agenda

Any items/proposals for discussion at the AGM and any nominations for officers or committee members should reach the secretary by 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020. Contact details are:

Hon Secretary, Hebden Bridge Local History Society,  
Birchcliffe Centre, Hebden Bridge, HX7 8DG  
Email: [secretary@hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk](mailto:secretary@hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk)

## Nominations for the Committee

If you wish to nominate someone for the committee and they are willing to stand, then please complete and send the following information:

I wish to nominate \_\_\_\_\_

For the position of:

President/Secretary/Treasurer/Librarian/committee member in the Hebden Bridge Local History Society or the Hebden Bridge Literary and Scientific Society (delete as required)

Proposer \_\_\_\_\_

Membership number \_\_\_\_\_

Seconder \_\_\_\_\_

Membership number \_\_\_\_\_

You can copy this page if you prefer

## AGM Reports

This year has presented the world with an unprecedented situation and the Society, like many others, has given a lot of thought to the various ways we can remain active in the forthcoming season. Perhaps luckily, the pandemic came at the end of our 2019/2020 season and we only had to postpone one lecture.

Otherwise, we had a very successful season and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the committee for their hard work over the year.

In February our past President and good friend Frank Woolrych died after a protracted illness and he will be sadly missed. He did so much for the Society and for the inception of heritage archives in Hebden Bridge. He was President of the Society from 1999 until 2012 and during this time he saw the move of our Archive to the Birchcliffe Centre. He instigated a close bond for us with Pennine Heritage and under their umbrella founded, together with Ann Kilbey, the Pennine Horizons Digital Archive, which now has 50,000 local photos in its records. But he will mainly be remembered by many of us for his charm and charisma, always a good word and warm welcome to everyone he met. We thank you Frank for all your hard work and your memory will be with us for many years to come.

Another long-time member, Mike Denning, also died this year. We were so grateful to him for the bond between ourselves and the Methodist Church where we hold our fortnightly meetings from Autumn to Spring. Mike had a love of technology and was instrumental in setting up the projector and sound system in the



Church, so enabling our meetings to be held in there. He was a keen historian but also regularly serenaded us on the organ before our meetings. We will miss him.

In October last year, together with the South Pennine History Group and Pennine Heritage we held a study day - South Pennine Houses: their History and their People. The morning session focused on the variety of documentary resources available to researchers, followed in the afternoon by two case studies, which examined how the buildings themselves have a story to tell which can be combined with documents to provide an overall picture. It was very well attended and we thank the many speakers who took part to make it such a successful day.

The Society now works very closely with Pennine Heritage. Our Archive is housed in their building, the Birchcliffe Centre, and we now have a member of our committee as a Trustee of the charity. Pennine Heritage are in the process of applying for Lottery Funding not only to secure the fabric of the building but also to conserve the future of the charity by building on their original aims and establishing Birchcliffe as a significant Heritage Centre for the Upper Calder Valley. With this in mind, the History Society are currently in discussions to forge a stronger link by amalgamating the various archives held by Pennine Heritage and ourselves. We thank our archivist, Nigel Smith, for all his hard work in these arrangements.

## Archive

### **Donations to the collection**

As usual the Society has received several donations of items for the Archive during the year and the Society is deeply grateful to all the donors. These include the following:

- A collection of local bill heads donated by Barbara Attack
- Six magic lantern slides of architects' plans for Birchcliffe Baptist chapel donated by Ruth Hutchinson
- The Triangle Mill Sisters exhibition donated by Ruth Beazley

### **Collection maintenance**

- Work has continued on transferring the catalogue to an Endnote bibliographic database which now holds over 6300 records. There are only 3 sections of the catalogue now waiting to be transferred, though one of those, Local History Collections, is very large with several sub-collections.
- The Society is very grateful to all those who regularly help with the cataloguing and recataloguing, in particular Anne Mealia, John Crampton, Sarah Keates and Hilary Fellows.

### **Volunteer Librarians**

The Society would like to thank David Cant, Sarah Keates and Diana Monahan for their time and effort in manning the library on opening days.

## Publications

Two of our publications are now out of print: *Century of Change* and *Enclosing the Moors*. The Society has reprinted *City in the Hills* twice this year in short print runs of 50, both being very popular. Two other books have also been published: *The Railway in the Upper Calder Valley: Hebden Bridge and the railway in the nineteenth century* by David N. Taylor; and *Heptonstall and Wadsworth Probate Records 1688-1700* edited by Mike Crawford and Stella Richardson.

## Exhibitions

Over the last eight years we have covered many topics in the Town Hall exhibitions - from prehistoric Widdop to World War to the Hippies saving Hebden Bridge. Our current project, for Spring 2021, is perhaps the most demanding - Who built Hebden Bridge? The focus is on the architects, developers and workmen who built the town. We would really welcome any details / images of buildings in the town if members are able to help.

Pictures of datestones and note of location very much appreciated. Contact Diana Monahan.

## Social Media

Our Facebook page is proving increasingly popular and we have 794 followers with individual posts regularly reaching 600 people and some over a thousand.

## Probate Group

A small group is now in its tenth year of transcribing the probate documents for the Upper Calder Valley. The transcription and indexing of all the Stansfield documents for the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries has been completed and work is now focused on the final checking and indexing of the eighteenth century. The group has also transcribed the documents for the townships of Heptonstall and Wadsworth for the period 1688 to 1700, and these have now been published. Work is proceeding on preparing the last townships for that period, Midgley and Warley, for publication.

## Latin Group

This group has met for 15 weeks this year to learn more about historical documents written in Latin and how to transcribe and translate them. Local documents are used as examples. The group has recently embarked on translating some of the early Heptonstall Court Rolls from the 1620s. This is part of a wider project financed by the Society to translate and publish the extant rolls from 1570 using a professional translator.

## South Pennine History Group

The Society is a member of the South Pennine History Group, together with Saddleworth and Marsden History Groups. The group continues to meet a couple of times a year in order to exchange news and discuss matters of common interest. The group is in the process of establishing a fund to encourage research and other activities in the history of the South Pennines. This is derived from the profits of *History in the South Pennines*.

## Family History Group

The family history sessions continue to be well attended and sometimes very busy. We have helped people trace ancestors who came from as far afield as Ireland and Germany as well as more local ancestors from Hebden Bridge and Todmorden; and our visitors have been searching for ancestors from the 16<sup>th</sup> century right up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Visitors have used a wide variety of resources to help understand their family history including minutes of evacuees, deeds, wills, electoral registers and church registers. We have helped researchers find out more about travelling musicians, criminals and master builders in their families. A number of visitors have been interested in the history of their home and this is an area of growing interest. We have also been looking into the possibility of a transcription project, working on diaries we have in our own collection. Look out for more information about this in the future.

## Folklore Group

It's not been a great year for traditional folklore, any more than it has been for community affairs generally. Our Pace-Egg players couldn't perform on Good Friday. Although our Dreaming Valleys event at Birchcliffe Chapel just scraped in before the lockdown, the Centre for Folklore, Myth and Magic in Todmorden had to cancel their weekend on The Dark Side of the Fae in May. Possibly the most observed bit of folklore this year has involved things like crossing the fingers, and the Internet has replaced gossip.

But otherwise, in ways we might not expect, it's been a busy year for folklorists. Our Section report in the newsletter explores these new cultural areas in a little more detail, as many

of us may not have recognised the folkloric character of some of 2020's news. Change is what defines living rather than moribund tradition, and how we emerge from this trying year will be a measure of how alive our culture is.

## Prehistory Section

The year began well with a talk in Leeds by Tom Booth of the Crick Institute where the genetics of the British Neolithic were outlined. The sophistication of the study of ancient DNA has reached a point where it is possible to pronounce with defensible certainty that the hunter-gatherer (Mesolithic) population of these islands was out-competed and replaced with little mixing by Neolithic people from what had become mainland Europe. Some three thousand years later Bronze Age settlers arrived in a largely depopulated land, the Neolithic people having succumbed to a series of poor harvests brought about by climate change and a plague to which they had little or no immunity. Makes you think...

Last October Rupert Till, University of Huddersfield, presented a resume at Pictureville in Bradford of the recently-concluded European Music Archaeology Project. There is a host of material online which you are urged to consult. Fascinating and illuminating, injecting humanity into what can be a dry catalogue of features, finds and interpretations.

We crossed the Pennines for the Barrowford Prehistory Day where several speakers discussed ongoing work much nearer to Calderdale than activities in East Yorkshire, which are our typical comparator. The take-away point is that finds over the last hundred years from (say) Widdop and Thursden may well have ended up in museums in Skipton, Rochdale and

Huddersfield. Modern county databases too make an artificial distinction on the basis of a boundary that did not exist five thousand years ago. This makes for complications when trying to reconstruct the activities of pastoralists with winter bases in the Burnley basin who moved their stock up onto the summer grazing of the South Pennines, or earlier hunters whose traditional movements crossed the whole area.

The Yorkshire Archaeological Society hosted a study day where Steve Sherlock discussed the Neolithic in the Tees Valley, like ours an area that saw continued reuse such that suitable settlement sites now have a jumble of finds and features from contrasting periods spanning two or three thousand years. Prehistory isn't simple.

In Wigan, Don Henson - University of Liverpool - spoke generally about the use of flint in prehistory. More specifically, in relation to finds in east Yorkshire, he had found that utilitarian, everyday tools were made from the local, outcropping flint whereas artefacts with more social/ritual uses were made from more unusual flint derived from the glacial till. This indicates a more sophisticated appreciation of the available resources than had previously been thought.

Then it all went a bit quiet for obvious reasons. My latest newsletter piece makes reference to activities and resources online, many of which are highly recommended. We await a disastrous drought to lay bare the reservoir shores for further exploration and, more importantly, the publication of the Environment Agency's completed LIDAR survey of the whole country, promised for late summer. This will be a significant help in locating and understanding how the Calderdale upland was used in prehistory.

# Lecture Programme 2020 – 2021

Lectures will be by Zoom webinar  
until further notice. See page 2.

**23 September 2020**

**WOMEN OF PROPERTY?**

**David Cant**

**The role of women locally  
at the end of the 17th Century**

What part did women play  
in the changing society and  
expanding economy of the  
Upper Calder Valley?

By analysing original  
documents we can get a new  
look at life over three  
hundred years ago.... And  
your ancestors may have  
been involved!



David Cant is an active local historian with a particular interest  
in using original documents and in studying old buildings.

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**14 October 2020**

**THE LOW MOOR MUNITIONS  
EXPLOSION OF 1916**

**Mary Twentyman  
Geoff Twentyman  
Barbara Reardon**

They said it was an accident waiting to happen.....

This presentation, prepared for the hundredth anniversary commemoration, attempts to reconstruct what really happened. Then you can make up your own mind.

Mary and Geoff Twentyman have run Low Moor Local History Group for 25 years and are regular speakers on local history topics. Mary and Barbara have been researching the Low Moor area of Bradford together for 12 years and the results of their efforts can be found on the website [www.sblha.com](http://www.sblha.com)



**28 October 2020**

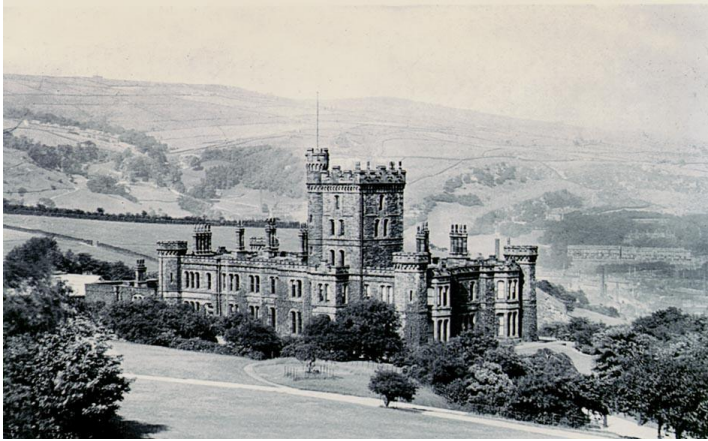
**LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY AGM**

Our AGM will be a virtual meeting using Zoom. More details are on page 2 and the notice and reports are on pages 6 – 13.

**11 November 2020**

**THE ALAN PETFORD MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**THE FIELDENS AND THEIR LEGACY IN TODMORDEN     Anne Mealia**



There's hardly any aspect of life in nineteenth-century Todmorden that the Fielden family didn't influence: work, religion, education and even sport. They commissioned a number of very striking buildings by architect John Gibson. The Fieldens' influence is still felt in the town today. This talk explores the colourful characters that built up the Fielden enterprise from small-scale weaving, through radical politics and an unhappy marriage to untold wealth and success.

Anne Mealia is a professional genealogist and historical researcher who runs her own research business, Evergreen Ancestry. She carries out research for individuals, academics, and TV companies as well as teaching family history. She leads historical walks round Todmorden and the surrounding area and is on the Committee of Hebden Bridge Local History Society. Her own research interests include the Fieldens and the Dobroyd area of Todmorden.

**25 November 2020**

**LAURA ANNIE WILSON:  
SUFFRAGETTE, BUILDER, ENGINEER**

**Anne Kirker**



Laura Annie Wilson was no ordinary woman. During her lifetime she was trade unionist, suffragette, industrialist and engineer, MBE, house builder and President of the Women's Engineering Society: often at the same time! Hers was truly an extraordinary life.

Anne Kirker's interest in Laura Annie Wilson began in 2018, when the Calderdale Industrial Museum was asked to collaborate on an exhibition of her life to celebrate the centenary of women obtaining the vote and the foundation of the Woman's Engineering Society.

Anne has been studying aspects of local and family history for 25 years. She works as a guide for Calderdale Heritage Walks and volunteers for Calderdale Industrial Museum.

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9 December 2020

COMMON PROBLEMS

Angus Winchester

**The history of common land  
in northern England**

Northern England contains the largest expanses of common land in the country, but this is only a fragment of the extent of the communally used land which existed before the wave of moorland enclosures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



Commons were an integral part of the rural economy, providing not only essential grazing for livestock but

also fuel for the hearth, building materials and other resources. This lecture explores how past societies tried to achieve sustainable management of these shared resources on which they depended for their livelihood.

Angus Winchester is Emeritus Professor of History at Lancaster University. He has longstanding research interests in the history of upland landscapes and of common land in particular. His publications include *The Harvest of the Hills: rural life in northern England and the Scottish Borders, 1400-1700* (Edinburgh University Press, 2000). He is currently working on a book on the history of common land in Britain.

13 January 2021

**JOURNEYS BETWEEN THE WORLDS**

**John Billingsley**

The centralised system of mediaeval parishes meant a soul still had a long journey to take before it passed out of this world, to the nearest consecrated ground. Certain routes – corpseways – became established. They can be seen as ancestral trails for our communities, and are thick with folklore and custom – and can often still be traced today, many centuries after their origin. John looks at the characteristics of corpseways, and walks us through three that were oriented on Heptonstall.



John Billingsley is convenor of the Society's Folklore Section, author/editor of several books on folk tales, folk-magic and ritual protection marks, and editor of *Northern Earth* magazine.

27 January 2021

**THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL HOUSING  
IN HEPTONSTALL**

**Mary Ellen**

2019 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of British social housing, a revolution in house-building that remains as testament to a democratic drive to enable working-class people (especially those ‘Heroes’ returning from WWI) to live in healthy, affordable, family-friendly communities. Heptonstall has one such planned estate, whose history offers up some fascinating insights into modern housing and its inhabitants.



Dr Mary Ellen calls herself a cultural historian. She was Head of English at a Norfolk school before moving to Heptonstall. She has lived in the area for five years now and has immersed herself in its local history and landscape. She was a founding member of the Heptonstall Historical & Heritage Society and played Colonel Robert Bradshaw in last year’s production of ‘The Battle of Heptonstall’.

10 February 2021

## WHO BUILT HEBDEN BRIDGE?

Michael Peel

This talk is designed to complement an exhibition planned by the Local History Society on the subject of "Who Built Hebden Bridge?" It will concentrate on the area known as "The Croft" between Commercial Street, New Road and Bridge Gate, which was an open field until the 1860s. It eventually encompassed many of the town's most important and iconic buildings



including the Co-op Hall, Hope Chapel, the library, mills, pubs, clubs, a bank, a surgery, a wood yard, nurses home, police station, lodging houses, numerous shops and a reservoir!

Michael Peel has lived in the Calder Valley all his life, firstly at Blackshaw Head, Edge Hey Green and more recently in Sowerby Bridge. He was a senior reporter for the Hebden Bridge Times, the Todmorden News and the Halifax Courier for 40 years. He has had a life-long interest in local history and has been actively involved with Hebden Bridge Little Theatre since he was a teenager.

24 February 2021

**JOHN F BATEMAN**

**Britain's foremost reservoir engineer and local lad. The making of Hebden's earth embankment reservoirs.**

**Michael O'Grady**



John F Bateman, born 1810, from the Moravian settlement in Lower Wyke, Halifax, revolutionized Britain's reservoir infrastructure and the science of data around geography and rainfall, as well as establishing procedures for structural design and control of flow between and from linked reservoirs. Responsible for more than twice the reservoir projects than those of his nearest rivals, Batemen started in Manchester then established offices in London in order to consult world-wide.

The three Upper Calder Valley projects (Widdop, Walshaw Dean and Gorple) were all designed by Bateman. He enjoyed



the common touch with contractors, engineers, landowners, industrialists and Parliamentary regulators alike, never losing sight of the needs of the people, while rising to pre-eminence in his field and in public life. There's a lot to tell about the water that comes out of Calderdale's taps.

Dr Michael O'Grady is a Senior Lecturer and Course Leader in Web and Digital Media in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Huddersfield. He is currently mixing his interest in local history, a past career in civil engineering and the day-job (digital visualisation) to investigate the processes and details of building the six reservoirs at Widdop, Walshaw Dean and Gorple valleys.

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**10 March 2021**

**LLOYD GEORGE, SPANISH FLU, AND THE 1918 GENERAL ELECTION IN THE CALDER VALLEY** **Alan Fowler**

In September 1918, Lloyd George fell ill in Manchester Town Hall, and spent a week in the Lord Mayor's Parlour. Despite his illness he managed to intervene in the major industrial dispute in the cotton industry. He returned to London for further recovery, to plot the end of the war and a general election. The latter posed a particular problem given the nature of his coalition.

The 1918 General Election saw the Labour Party leave the government and fight independently, while only a minority of Liberal candidates had Lloyd George's support, unlike a majority of Conservative candidates. The election in the Calder Valley was unusual in that when the Liberal candidate, Higham, got Lloyd George's support, much to the surprise of



24 March 2021

SYLVIA PLATH IN YORKSHIRE

Heather Clark



We often hear about Ted Hughes' links to Mytholmroyd and the Calder Valley, but Sylvia Plath also had local West Yorkshire links. These local places had an impact on her and feature memorably in her poetry.

Heather Clark is Professor of Contemporary Poetry at the University of Huddersfield and author of *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* (Knopf, 2020); *Her Kind: The Boston Years of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Adrienne Rich and Maxine Kumin* (Knopf, under contract); *The Grief of Influence: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (Oxford University Press, 2011); and *The Ulster Renaissance: Poetry in Belfast, 1962-1972* (Oxford University Press, 2006). She lives in America.

## **Prehistory Section**

Unsurprisingly there is very little to report since the last newsletter. Our ground-breaking fieldwork has ground to a halt for the duration, and conferences and talks have either been cancelled or held online.

Online is interesting: the Council for British Archaeology has had to suspend its Facebook presence following a number of quite strange political posts and internal wrangling. Major museums, the Neolithic Studies Group and the Prehistoric Society amongst others have put out a wealth of free material that is well worth an extended browse. The Prehistory guys have interviews, podcasts and videos as good as anything you get on TV.

Research into ancient DNA continues to produce results necessitating serious reappraisal of previous assumptions. The Bronze Age settlers who repopulated these islands at the end of the Neolithic apparently entered a landscape where there was little human activity. It seems that the existing Neolithic population fell into a steep decline following poor harvests brought about by climate change and a virulent plague to which these island-dwellers had no immunity.

*Dave Shepherd*

## **Folklore Section**

### **A chronicle of a plague year**

It's not been a great year for traditional folklore, any more than it has been for community affairs generally. Our Pace-Egg players couldn't perform on Good Friday, and likewise on Easter Saturday the Britannia Coconut Dancers of Bacup, just

over the border. Although our Dreaming Valleys event just scraped in before the lockdown, the Centre for Folklore, Myth and Magic in Todmorden had to cancel their conference on The Dark Side of the Fae in May. Possibly the most observed bit of folklore this year has involved things like crossing the fingers. Perhaps some of us have buffed up the horseshoes and holed stones suspended by our doors. If not, give it a try...

Cultural patterns are a key ingredient of folklore. The pandemic and lockdown will certainly have generated new folklore-related speech and behaviour, for instance how we greet and leave people, or the patterns of social movement. Will wearing a mask in public become a social feature here as it has been in East Asia for some time? In the Iveragh Peninsula in Ireland there has been increased attendance at holy wells dedicated to an early mediaeval saint credited with keeping a historic plague away from the area – people remember these things when they become relevant.

The way we tell stories has changed, too: not in pubs and meetings so much as through social media. Social media transmission has led to an upsurge of folk panics and rumours; conspiracy theories abound, as well as questionable health advice ranging from excessive Vitamin C intake to possible vaccines being laced with a mystery ingredient of social control funded by Bill Gates. Some say it's best to avoid vaccines altogether. Was COV-19 manufactured in a Chinese lab? Will a variant of bleach taken orally help prevent infection? Will 5G make compliant zombies of us all? Is it best to burn down 5G towers now? The magazine *Fortean Times* has been keeping a chronicle of such Corona weirdness across the world since the mass lockdowns started, and it makes for eyebrow-raising

reading, truly news from The Far Side. The internet has replaced gossip – the folklorist’s beloved ‘oral transmission’ sounds more like a buzzword for pandemic panic in 2020.

At the same time, the Black Lives Matter movement demands reflection, and has a particular relevance for folk traditions. Many mumming and folk-dance teams began as a way for poorer families to generate extra income at holiday periods – to deflect the personal stigma inevitably attached to begging in a more moralistic age, disguise was employed; typically a wipe of freely available soot across the face sufficed, and also conveyed a sense of ‘otherness’ to the performance. This has come to be known as ‘blackface’ - a term that surely needs rethinking, but is informative in that in disguise traditions only the face, not the neck or hands, is darkened; whereas the minstrel shows coloured all visible skin and often accentuated the lips – a clear sign of a racial slur, as in the ‘Zulu’ participants at Lewes Bonfire or the Zwarte Piet character in Holland. Perhaps a return to smudged soot or charcoal, and partial instead of full-face smudging would preserve the tradition while being a more sensitive option than black facepaint.

All these unexpected flashpoints of 2020 will feed into community memory. Some of our responses will persist, and some will be forgotten. Traditions will surely change, and should do so, because the essence of a living tradition is its ability to alter and adapt.

*John Billingsley*

## Family History Group

### **Scandal before the courts: a story of fornication and extortion**

Did your ancestor appear before the courts in a dispute over pew rights, accused of fornication or involved in a churchyard brawl? These – and many others – are all cases which came before the ecclesiastical courts. The cases provide a fascinating insight into the lives of local people because of the wealth of detail each case provide. Not only do we learn about the case itself, we find out about witnesses, their ages and occupations, what they thought about their neighbours, their nicknames and facts about their lives we can't get from parish registers.

York Cause Papers are court cases which were heard at the Bishop's and Archbishop's courts in York. They survive from the 1300s and cover cases which occurred in the diocese of York and appeals from other dioceses within the Province of York. The Church courts declined after 1660, though a large number of cases still appeared before the York Court, but various legislation throughout the 19th century reduced the Anglican Church's authority still further and cases declined. The courts still exist but they now cover just ecclesiastical matters. Early cases are in Latin but the majority are in English and they are available to view free of charge on the Borthwick Institute's website.

I've picked an interesting local story from one of the cases concerning Henry Cockcroft and Susannah Kirshaw who came before the court in 1719-1720 accused of fornication



In Dei nomine Amen nos Johannes Audley Esq<sup>r</sup>  
Dei R<sup>o</sup> in Christo p<sup>r</sup>is et Dei S<sup>u</sup>i h<sup>u</sup>ilis s<sup>u</sup>i providentia  
D<sup>ni</sup> Edwardi Archiep<sup>i</sup> Anglia Primas et Metropolitani  
Vicarii in sp<sup>u</sup>atib<sup>us</sup> h<sup>u</sup>icis et officii p<sup>r</sup>imitivo t<sup>u</sup>ms s<sup>u</sup>ttur  
Hoc actus scripta s<sup>u</sup>o s<sup>u</sup>ls<sup>u</sup>ia o<sup>mn</sup>ia et singula infra scripta  
Vobis Henrico Forkecroft et Susanna Kishaw Cap<sup>ta</sup>  
de Hoptonstall infra potam de Hallifax Ebor<sup>ac</sup> Dioc<sup>es</sup> ad  
promotorem officij ibi D<sup>omi</sup>ni et ministrum  
Inibus et ~~quis~~ parli serm<sup>o</sup> volumus et  
mandamus v<sup>ost</sup>re p<sup>r</sup>es<sup>u</sup>mi pl<sup>u</sup>mi et fide<sup>l</sup>is r<sup>ati</sup>o a  
Is dari et fieri et ob<sup>o</sup>mn<sup>is</sup> f<sup>o</sup>ij<sup>u</sup> D<sup>omi</sup>ni et de  
qu<sup>o</sup> t<sup>u</sup>st<sup>u</sup>

*Hen. Squire*

I Jur<sup>o</sup> vobis p<sup>r</sup>es<sup>u</sup>mi Henrico Forkecroft et Susanna Kishaw  
ob<sup>o</sup>mn<sup>is</sup> et ar<sup>u</sup>nt<sup>u</sup> that you the said Henry Forkecroft and Susanna  
Kishaw not having the fear of God before your eyes did in  
the month of October November & December One thousand  
seven hundred & eighteen last past keep company together  
very familiarly & suspiciously as well upon the Day time as  
upon the night in places apt to commit the crimes of for<sup>o</sup>  
or Adultery within the Chappell of Hoptonstall aforesaid &  
other places thersabout & you the said Henry Forkecroft have  
been observed to have been alone with the said Susannah  
Kishaw in places meet for committing the crimes of for<sup>o</sup>  
or Adultery together and that you the said Henry Forkecroft  
& Susannah Kishaw within the time & places aforesaid  
have laid together in one & the same bed solus f<sup>o</sup> sola  
nudus f<sup>o</sup> nuda & have divers & sundry times (or ones all  
the last) within the time & places aforesaid the  
detestable crimes of for<sup>o</sup> or Adultery together in an unad  
v<sup>ost</sup>re p<sup>r</sup>es<sup>u</sup>mi alioquin. Xpi fide<sup>l</sup>is p<sup>r</sup>ios<sup>u</sup> exemplum  
et ob<sup>o</sup>mn<sup>is</sup> de tali et tanto long<sup>u</sup> modo et forma p<sup>r</sup>es<sup>u</sup>mi  
qu<sup>o</sup> et qu<sup>o</sup> in v<sup>ost</sup>re h<sup>u</sup>ic<sup>u</sup> lib<sup>er</sup> p<sup>r</sup>es<sup>u</sup>mi at f<sup>o</sup>ij<sup>u</sup> D<sup>omi</sup>ni et de  
qu<sup>o</sup> t<sup>u</sup>st<sup>u</sup>



Henry Cockcroft and Susan Kershaw were accused of '*not haveing the fear of God before your Eyes [and] did in the months of October November & December One Thousand Seven Hundred & Eighteen last past keep company together very familiarly and suspitiously as well upon the Day time as upon the night in places apt to Com[m]itt the Crime of For[nicati]on or Adultery within the Chappletry of Heptonstall & other places thereabouts... and that you the said Henry Cockcroft and Susannah Kirshaw...have laid together in one & the same Bed.*'

The prosecution statement reports that credible witnesses have sworn that Henry and Susannah were guilty though much of the evidence was based on 'a common voice and well grounded fame'. The witnesses could all name some credible person they had heard this report from. Not perhaps the rigorous standard of evidence we expect today! Henry Cockcroft was described as a 'person of mean Character and suspected and reputed to have been Guilty of the Crime of Fornication or Adultery with diverse other women within the Parish of Hallifax.' He had previously attempted to debauch one Mercy Sutcliffe, the wife of Robert Sutcliffe of Stansfield who to avoid his attentions had been obliged to leap down some stairs sustaining an injury.

We get a detailed description of the two main accusers: Jonas Stansfield and Jonathan Stansfield were persons of good life, conversation, credit and repute and descended of the ancient family of the Stansfields of Stansfield Hall. They had been chapelwardens of Cross Stone and Heptonstall and overseers of the Poor and could not be prevailed upon to swear falsely. Jonas Stansfield, the statement tells us, had previously been entrusted by the court along with others to pull down Cross Stone Chapel and rebuild another chapel. They were the ones

who claimed to be eyewitnesses, finding Henry and Susanna together in Henry's barn on 9 November 1718.

The defence statement tells a very different story. It tells us that Henry Cockcroft was a bachelor in good circumstances, aged about 67 and having an income of over £60 and one statement even tells us his baptism date and the name of his father. Susannah Kirshaw, or Little Su as she was known, was a poor infirm widow about 40. Both lived in good repute among their neighbours and neither had been thought to be guilty of fornication or adultery previously. He had a small farm and had asked Susannah to look after his cattle while he was away only returning once a quarter. On one occasion, when they were seen by Jonas and Jonathan Stansfield, Henry was in the barn with Susannah and a young boy of nine and he was trying to prevent the rain coming in through the roof while Susanna was feeding the cattle below. The defence also claimed that Jonas and Jonathan far from being characters of good repute had threatened to make reports against others for fornication in order to extract money from them and on this occasion Henry Cockcroft had refused to give in to their threats. Jonas and Jonathan were accused of being vexatious and litigious and of trying themselves to debauch women. Indeed, Jonathan himself was said to have tried to debauch Susannah Kirshaw in Henry Cockcroft's barn. Other witnesses were accused of having a grievance against Henry.

In all 24 witnesses gave statements and most of them could vouch for the good reputations of Henry and Susannah. However, few had anything good to say about Jonas and Jonathan Stansfield. Some spoke of being frightened of them, many spoke of women intimidated by them and others of

extortion and false accusations by them. Only a handful spoke in favour of the Stansfields though they could provide no evidence against Henry and Susannah beyond what they had heard from Jonas and Jonathan.

Unfortunately what's missing from the case is the outcome so we'll never know whether Henry and Susannah were found guilty or not guilty though the case for the prosecution seems a little shaky to say the least.

With 38 statements and documents this case gives a detailed account of the dealings and disputes between local people in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Cause Papers can be a treasure trove if your ancestor is named in one of the cases as they provide details of relationships, occupations and business dealings. To have a look for other local cases or to see if your ancestors appear, you can find the York Cause Papers online at <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/causepapers/>

### **Source**

Borthwick Institute, York Cause Papers, Consistory Court, ref: CP.I.617

*Anne Mealia*

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