

An aerial black and white photograph of a mill town. A tall, slender chimney stands on the right side. A winding road or path runs diagonally from the top left towards the center. The town is built on a hillside, with numerous houses and industrial buildings. The surrounding landscape is hilly and appears to be a mix of fields and wooded areas.

NEW MILLS LOCAL HISTORY  
SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 41 AUTUMN 2008

This Issue:  
\*Birch Vale House  
\*A Childhood View of  
New Mills In The 1930's  
\*John Pearson: An Appreciation

## Meetings - Autumn 2008

All meetings are held in the main hall of New Mills Town Hall, starting at 7:45pm. You may obtain easy access from the entrance on Aldersgate.

Friday September 5	Dr. John Smith	The Creation of Glossop Borough
Friday October 10	Ian Moss	Railways South of Manchester
Friday November 14	Ann Hearle	Mellor - Three Hills and Two Valleys
Friday December 5	Ian Edgar MBE and Don Baines	The Restoration and Future of Bugsworth Canal Basin

*Please note that the meetings in September and December are on the first Friday of the month. This is because the main hall in the Town Hall is not available on our usual second Friday.*

### Committee 2008-2009 (elected at the A.G.M.)

Chairperson	Gaynor Andrew (743117)	
Vice-chairperson	Barbara Matthews (743935)	
Hon. Secretary	John Humphreys (743581)	
Hon. Treasurer	Joan Powell (742814)	
Hon. Archivist	Roger Bryant (744227)	
Hon. Editor	Ron Weston (744838)	
Ordinary members	Catherine Bolton	Olive Bowyer
	Derek Brumhead	Barry Dent
	Barbara Done	Pat Evans

**[www.newmillshistory.org.uk](http://www.newmillshistory.org.uk)**

**January 11, 2008**

**The Mersey and Irwell Navigation - Mike Redfern**

This, our first meeting in our new location at the Town Hall, will be remembered for the superb collection of slides, which we were shown, of early photos of the rivers Mersey and Irwell, most of which dated to the nineteenth century. With the aid of these slides, Mike Redfern took us on a journey, beginning at the Albert Bridge, spanning the Irwell in central Manchester, and ending at Liverpool.

It is often thought that Manchester became a port with the building of the Manchester Ship Canal, which opened in 1894; but the canal only replaced an earlier navigation system, that of the river Mersey and its tributary the Irwell. Manchester and Salford stood on opposing banks of the Irwell at the effective head of navigation on that river, it was frequently necessary to dredge the river (Mike showed us slides of the early dredgers in use) and keep open the cut-offs across some of the more sinuous meanders.

Some of the most evocative photos were those showing the sailing boats, known as Mersey flats, which brought raw cotton and other bulky materials upstream into Manchester, returning to Liverpool with merchandise for export. To see these tied up at Quay Street, near where the Granada TV studios now stand, or riding at anchor in the pool below Albert Bridge, was a romantic sight reminding us vividly of the world we have lost

Now, of course, the Ship Canal, which carried ocean-going vessels into Manchester and brought the demise of the Irwell navigation, has itself become obsolete and an object of historical enquiry.

In answer to a question from the audience, Mike Redfern informed us that it was still possible to walk from the centre of Manchester along the banks of the Irwell. There would be much to see in the way of industrial archaeology, no doubt; but we should be unlikely to gain the same quality of experience as that evoked by Mike Redfern's fine illustrated talk.

*Ron Weston*

**February 8, 2008**

**Vera Brittain's Buxton - Jennie Ainsworth**

In our pantheon of local celebrities, Vera Brittain is amongst the most notable. She is a national figure - one of the few female writers to record authentic feelings and experiences of middle class women during the First World War. Her enduring work is the autobiographical "Testament of Youth", published in 1933; but she was a prolific writer - a novelist, journalist and pamphleteer and, above all, a letter writer.

Born in 1893, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist, Vera Brittain spent her early childhood in Macclesfield. Her association with Buxton began in 1904 when her family went to live there, and ended in 1915 when they moved away. But these were her formative years. Critical of the bourgeois life in Buxton of which she was part, she soon adopted socialist views. The deaths of her dear friend Roland Leighton and her brother Edward in the war, together with her experiences abroad as a V.A.D. nurse, where she saw at first hand the suffering of the wounded soldiers, served to harden her resolve to fight for a more equitable and just society, which she sought to do through her writing.

Jennie Ainsworth began her talk by painting a brief but vivid picture of this brilliant and determined woman; but her main purpose was to show us the Buxton that Vera Brittain knew. This she accomplished by showing us a wonderful slide collection of photos of Buxton as it appeared prior to 1914. Here were the palatial hotels, the gardens and pleasant walks, the elegant shops and public buildings of a town created for the leisured classes of Edwardian times - those who chose to live there, like the Brittains as well as those who came by rail to visit

This was a well-organised and informative talk delivered by one with an expert knowledge of her subject. Jennie is a Buxton town guide who brought the streets of Buxton to our doorsteps here in New Mills!

*Ron Weston*

**March 14, 2008**

### **The Woodhead Route - Jim Todd**

**J**im Todd of Marple Transport Society kindly stepped in, at short notice, for Greg Fox who, unfortunately, was ill.

The Sheffield, Ashton-under-Lyne and Manchester Railway was opened in 1845. It reached an altitude of over 900 feet at the summit where the longest tunnel in the country, the Woodhead tunnel, just over three miles in length was built. Reports of the sordid conditions under which the navvies lived and worked became a public scandal. In 1954 the line was electrified (1500 Volt, DC), the first trunk route to be electrified, a new double tunnel was built and the old tunnels (a second had been opened in 1852) developed to carry electric power cables through the hills instead of over the top.

Jim's railway interest lies chiefly in Scottish railways but he has an enviable collection of slides from all over the country, many of them locomotives, especially "Black Fives"! He showed quite a few of these in his presentation which also covered in detail the route from Manchester, including the Longdendale valley, famous structures like the Dinting viaduct and a number of stations. The talk reminded us of the importance that this route played in the transport development of our region. It is hoped that the suggested plans to use

the other tunnels for electric cables will not take place as sometime in the future this route could again become a major transport link again.

*Derek Brumhead*

**April 11, 2008**

### **Early Motoring around Manchester - David George**

**D**avid is an old friend of the Society. He has visited us on numerous occasions and each time spoke on a theme of transport or industrial archaeology. His wide variety of subjects is impressive.

Manchester engineering to most people signifies machine tools, textile machinery, steam engines and locomotives, but Manchester also played an important part in the rise of the motor industry in the period up to World War II.

The most famous Manchester firm was Rolls Royce. In 1884 Henry Royce and partner started a firm in Hulme manufacturing electrically-driven cranes, but in 1903 decided to try their hands in automobile engineering. The first car was a 2 cylinder 10 HP. The activities attracted the interest of the Hon. C.S.Rolls, and following a celebrated meeting in the Midland Hotel a partnership was established in 1908. A one model policy was pursued with careful assembly, very high standards and a beautiful finish. In 1907 the first "Silver Ghost" was produced, but many of the bodies were built by Cockshoots a Manchester coach-building firm. Rolls Royce moved to Derby in 1914.

The methods of chassis assembly and fitting were not very advanced at this time and no great capital investment was required. The output of cars in any firm except Fords was strictly limited before about 1930 because of customers' preference for wooden coach-built bodies. However, 1908 was the year of the Ford Model "T" produced by revolutionary methods, with conveyor belts and moving assembly lines, and assembled from 1911 at Trafford Park. 30,000 vehicles were produced in 1911-31, cost price £135. Ford relocated to Dagenham in the late 1930's.

The other important Manchester firm was Crossleys who began production in 1906, including a 22 hp 4 cylinder chain-driven job. The firm moved to Gorton Lane in Openshaw in 1910. Here a new range included the well-known 12 HP and 15 HP "bull nose" models, with pointed radiators and wire wheels, and a programme of saloon cars designed for the middle price range. The firm also manufactured diesel-engined motor buses, apparently more than anyone else, such as the "The Mancunian" from 1933, many of which survived until well after the war.

Another important Manchester firm, Belsize of Clayton, also introduced American methods of production, and from 1900 to 1925 produced quite a

number of cars and commercial vehicles, including a Belsize Junior 7 HP costing £185 and the Belsize Senior 15/20 HP costing £495. They also supplied the early motor fire appliances to the Manchester and Salford Brigades. Peak car production was 60-70 vehicles a week, which was quite an achievement. However, typical of the industry in Manchester, the firm could not meet the kind of capital expenditure required for the new methods of production and closed down in the 1930's.

There were also several other smaller producers such as Horsfall and Bickham, manufacturer of the Horbick car in 1905, a 10/12 HP model costing £300 and a 15/20 HP at £500. It actually received an order for 2000 taxi cabs but lacked facilities and capital and ceased production in 1909. David also usefully placed the industry in the wider context of national production such as the introduction by Morris in Coventry of pressed steel bodies supplied from outside. A series of slides of old vehicles accompanied the talk.

*Derek Brumhead*

**May 9, 2008**

### **New Mills—Then and Now - Derek Brumhead**

Anyone visiting New Mills for the first time would form the immediate impression that this was a town whose principal streets and buildings dated from the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Those of us who have lived here long enough to know the place well are perhaps more aware of how much New Mills has changed over the years and, along with the rest of the country's built environment, continues to change. That everywhere looks increasingly like everywhere else these days is a familiar criticism, particularly of high streets up and down the country.

So, thank goodness for people like Derek, who over the past decades has had the foresight to photograph the changes as they occur, or more to the point, before they occurred. He gave us a feast of photos of New Mills, slides taken over the last quarter of a century, which he compared with slides of much earlier photos drawn from our archive. He began with the main streets, showing us the turnpike gates, the horse-drawn carts and then the crowded terraces swept away in the era between the wars or during post-war clearance schemes. Then came the town's public buildings: Town Hall, library and the churches. These buildings have suffered the least changes. The former textile mills, on the other hand, have fared badly, suffering a great deal of neglect and much change of function, not all of which is particularly appropriate. The Torrs, once the industrial heart of New Mills, has been preserved; but Derek's photos brought home to us just how much has been lost forever.

Derek ended his pictorial survey with illustrations of the changing scenes along the town's railways. Here, surely, are the most sweeping changes to have occurred over the last four decades in New Mills, with the former Hayfield line now the Sett Valley Trail

We owe Derek a debt of gratitude, not merely for this talk, but also for contributing so comprehensively to the pictorial record of our town's past

*Ron Weston*

## **Summer Outing 2008 Arkwright's Mill, Cromford**

On Saturday 31 May, inspired by a winter lecture, twenty members set off by coach for a day of discovery at Cromford Mill and village. We arrived at 10.00 am and took our usual fortifying coffee break before meeting our guide Peter Sell. Peter is a retired Managing Director formerly of Viyella which owned a number of mills in the Cromford area. Peter led us to the top floor of the 1791 mill where we settled down to hear about the development of the site and the various stages of the cotton spinning process. Peter's presentation was excellent; he clearly knew about every aspect of manufacture and presented it simply and clearly. In August 1771 Richard Arkwright began building in Cromford. He created the world's first successful water powered cotton spinning mill; a vital step towards full scale factory production. The mills at Cromford with their powered machinery, large workforce, and factory village became models for others throughout Britain and abroad. For the Victorians who learnt so much from his example, Arkwright earned the accolade 'Father of the factory system'. For a man born the thirteenth child in a poor working class family, apprenticed to a barber beginning as a 'lather boy' Richard Arkwright's story as he went on to become the leading industrial tycoon of his day is astonishing.

Peter then took us off for a walk around the village of Cromford. We explored all the nooks and crannies including rows of early workers houses in North Street and, the village jail which was definitely not a 'des.res.'

After a break for lunch we found that we had quite a lot of time on our hands so thanks to Derek we quickly hatched a cunning plan. We hopped on to the coach and drove a mile or so to the High Peak Junction where the High Peak Railway and Cromford Canal come close together for the trans-shipment of goods. Here Derek gave us an ad hoc tour of the various features. There followed a leisurely stroll back along the canal to Cromford entertained by nesting Dab Chicks with time for tea and a cake before boarding the coach for the journey home. There seemed to be a feeling that this had been one of our most enjoyable outings.

*John Humphreys.*

## **New Mills Photographic Archive Project: Progress to date**

Three years ago the Heritage Lottery Fund agreed to grant over £46,000 spread over four years for this joint project with the the Local History Society and Heritage Centre. Several people have asked me to outline the details of the project and how it is progressing.

The project involves the digitisation of the local history society's collection of photographs to enable it to be more readily accessible to the public. Digital copies of all the images in the photographic collection of New Mills Local History Society have been created (so far over 8000) and mounted in a database. Days have been spent over the last three years by our archivist preparing the collection for scanning in a series of batches Each image is accompanied by a detailed description, which will form a large searchable database. Two of our members have also been very busy adding data and keywords to each scanned image and a process on which they have so far spent over 260 hours each. We are anxious to find other members (working in pairs if preferred) who would get involved in this work so that it can be completed before next year. If anyone thinks that they might be able to help please contact me. In-Service Training will be provided !

All this will provide a level of access for the public never previously possible, who will be able to browse the collection and view the descriptive data and order prints. This access will be provided by public access modules which will be placed in New Mills Heritage Centre and New Mills Library. Searching for images will be done by using keyword lists.

The data base may also be later available on the internet allowing remote searching and access to low resolution images. A further development will be the provision of an electronic ordering service of high resolution images, and a server will do this. Most providers we have consulted have recommended this internet facility since the object is all about making the images available. They can only be viewed in low resolution. This online version will also provide useful feedback from the public, being worldwide.

Scanning and the provider of software and hardware has been provided by the House of Images of Blackburn who have been supplying software and digitisation services with photographic collections since 1995. Among others, they have worked for Derbyshire County Council, Manchester Central Library (Local Studies Unit), Tameside Libraries, and Cheshire County Council.

The project will help to conserve the photographic collection, some images being unique, which otherwise suffer from searching, handling, copying, and changing environmental conditions.

*Continued on page 15*

## Birch Vale House

**B**irch Vale House was once a fine and unique house. The Bennetts, who came from Charlesworth, (their graves are in the chapel above Charlesworth on the road to the Grouse) started the Print Works, originally at the Garrison, and they lived in a small house between the Garrison and the Birch Vale/Thornsett road. They then built Birch Vale Print Works in about 1841 (date on the first chimney, the second chimney was dated 1851), in what was then Spinnerbottom, but they changed the name to Birch Vale. The print works flourished, printing mainly, but not entirely, calico (cotton) until the American Civil War (1861- 1865) when for a few years cotton was no longer available. However Great-grandfather Bennett (John b.1816 ) had a good reputation for business so he had no difficulty in borrowing money from the bank (unlike Great-grandfather Hadfield (John b.1806 ) of Cowbrook, Glossop who could not borrow, but was lent money to start up after the Civil war was over, from a friend, only on the condition, as well as a high rate of interest, that he restart when and only when the friend told him to!)

Great-grandfather Bennett borrowed money, as did many other cotton manufacturers in Lancashire and South Yorkshire, to keep his work force from starving, and keep them busy, (for instance paving the Pennine Way at Mankinholes.) Great-grandfather Bennett set up a soup kitchen, so that no-one in Birch Vale suffered malnutrition, in return (without wages!) the work force built Birch Vale House.

Birch Vale House was a beautiful house, with plenty of free labour the stone was smoothed. The woodwork - the parquet floor in the big drawing room and the stairs and banisters, had no metal nails, they were all held by wooden dove tails, and the enormous sash window halfway up the stairs, which must have been, on the bottom half about 4ft.x 6ft. was so perfectly balanced that one could open it with one's little finger. The drawing room, a very large room, the size of two large rooms, had a partition 'hidden' in the ceiling between the two rooms so that it could be converted to two rooms if desired. The green baize door leading from the hall to the kitchen passage was balanced perfectly so that anyone carrying a tray could open it with an elbow, either way and then have the door swing to gently after them. The cornices in the drawing room were decorated in gold leaf, and it was a very large room with a very elaborate cornice. There was central heating, radiators in the main rooms, but under floor heating, pipes below a metal grid in the billiard room where one could stand to play billiards. On the ground floor there was the dining room, with a hatch to the kitchen, and the very large drawing room, there was also a billiard room and a large kitchen. The way in from the garden to the billiard room had a wash basin and lavatory off it and for the maids there was an outside lavatory

across the back yard. On the first floor there were five bedrooms, and two bathrooms and lavatories. In the attic there were many smaller bedrooms. The gardens must have been spectacular. There was, altogether, 26 acres, most of it woodlands with some fields. More formally all along the long drive there was a narrow strip of lawn on both sides, and then a double row of rhododendrons. There was also the "rhododendron path" used as a short cut to the main road and the railway station, with again a double row of rhododendrons on either side of it. On one side of this was a large orchard and on the other side a large kitchen garden. Above this, i.e. further up the hill towards the house, there was a grass tennis court. In front of the house was an area, with a holly hedge on the lower side, to prevent the horses veering down the hill, where a carriage could turn. There were lawns, and rose bushes, in front of and just to the side of the house. Grandfather Bennett (Thomas b.1838) had a large, heated, greenhouse built, where he grew luscious grapes and even bananas! Originally there were two fountains in the garden, both powered by gravity with water from further up the hill.

My grandmother (Zipporah Bennett nee Hadfield b. 1849 ) did not believe in waste and so although the house could be linked to the main sewage system, it was cut off from it and all the sewage from the house went into a cess pool in the kitchen garden, and from there it was pumped up for manure. There were also, originally, seven water supplies. One, the town supply which my grandmother did not use. Secondly, the main supply which came from an old colliery further up the hill. Thirdly, the "well" in the yard, invariably used for drinking water. Fourthly, a further supply which originally went to a well by the main road which filled a trough for horses to drink at, however this was stolen by some one further up the hill who wanted it for his hens, as he had tapped it for seven years before my Grandmother got round to doing anything about it, we lost this supply. Fifth, the water for the fountain outside the drawing room window, which still worked in the 1920's. Sixth, the supply to another fountain, Granny Bennett ( and the gardener) tried to run this supply to the kitchen garden one dry summer and lost it on the way. Seventh, and lastly, an arrangement by which, in case of drought, the rainwater from the roof could be channelled into a large cistern in the attic. I can just remember living there, in 1918, when one fountain played and we had four gardeners. I can remember much more clearly trying to explain the pipes for the various water supplies and the sewage system to the tenants, and have clear memories later on, when the house was empty, trying to keep up appearances, trying with Mother, (Mary Bennett nee Humphreys b. 1881) to persuade a very angry and hungry owl, who had fallen down the chimney, to go out of the window. In the end we had to go to an acquaintance who was an angler, to borrow his long handled nets to dislodge the owl from the picture rail. And the long hours spent trying

to keep the garden tidy, mowing lawns - nothing but hand mowers in those days - carrying cans of weed killer to keep the long drive clear of weeds, brushing leaves in the autumn, and frantically digging up young trees, knowing if they were missed for a few years they would be too big for us to tackle, and, of course, on the good side, eating as many apples, pears, plums and soft fruit as possible. When we no longer had a gardener, either there or at Heathfield it was very hard work, just mowing the lawns at both houses took 11 hours a week, pushing flat out! But in its heyday it must have been a most beautiful house and garden.

Grandfather Bennett and all his brothers and sisters were born in the house near the Garrison Mill, and my father (Philip b.1875 ) and his generation were born at Heathfield so I was the only person actually born at Birch Vale House. We were still living there at the end of the first world war. I remember leaning out of a bedroom window waving a Union Jack on Armistice Day. The works buzzer went and everyone traipsed out for a day's holiday and I suppose there must in reality have been rejoicing and a happy holiday atmosphere. In my memory it was like a funeral procession. I was told later that Uncle Arnold (Bennett b.1877) was missing, and though by then he was presumed dead Granny Bennett sent one of the gardeners down to the post office to see if there was any news, which presumably explains my impressions of the day. Nowadays much is written about sustainability and conservation and the need to recycle. The most ardent 'Green' would be profligate compared to my grandmother Zipporah Bennett. At Birch Vale House nothing was wasted. There was, of course less to waste in those days. There were no tins to dispose of, milk was delivered to the back door twice a day straight after milking, the farmer brought it round and ladled it from the pail into jugs at the back door. Vinegar was sold not in bottles, but by bulk to the shop and anyone wanting it would take their own bottle to be filled, and there was much less wrapping than today. Anything that could not be reused was burnt on the kitchen fire, where the heat was used for cooking and water heating. The ashes went to the ash pit. This was only emptied twice a year, so nothing but ashes was ever put in the ash pit. The ashes, from the houses in the village and from the works were dumped into the valley from the Birch Vale/ Thornsett road. Eventually, when the dump was large enough, and had reached road level, tennis courts were built on it, and very good hard courts they were, this was in the early 1930's.

Vegetable scraps went into the "hen pan" and were boiled up to feed the hens. Bones from the roasts etc. were put into the stock pot. This was boiled up every day for an hour, the stock was used for soups, gravy etc, and when the pan was full of bones Granny would examine them carefully and remove any bones that were soft to the touch. These then went to the potting shed where

the gardener would put them in a large grinding machine and grind them up for bone meal to fertilize the kitchen garden. Anything else that could be was composted would, of course, go on the compost heap, and in due course be spread on the kitchen garden. Soapy water, from the wash, was used, as required, against aphids. The sewage from the house went to the kitchen garden and was pumped up as fertiliser.

So, nothing was wasted. We were largely self sufficient. Admirable? But it can create problems. Farm produce came from the farm on the hillside next to Birch Vale House towards Hayfield. Mutton from the sheep on the hill, in those days it was more usual to eat boiled mutton, with onion sauce, than roast lamb, which is, of course, much pleasanter. Similarly roast chicken was a real treat, compared to the more usual boiled fowl. Rabbits were frequently shot,



and, of course, eaten. Fruit and vegetables came from the garden. But this is the Goitre Valley in Derbyshire, an area notorious for Derbyshire neck or Goitre. Great Aunt Hester ( Hadfield b.1855 ) had the typical swollen neck with a black velvet ribbon worn round it, and one of the maids, Madge, also had an enlarged neck, as had many women in the village. By the time I was three years old my

neck was showing unmistakable signs of the goitre swelling. Fortunately, for me, the cause of goitre, a lack of iodine, had just been discovered. My neck was painted with iodine, inside, and rubbed with iodine ointment, outside, and iodised salt was obtained. I was given so much iodine that it is a wonder I did not suffer from an overdose of iodine! The swelling disappeared, but I was lucky not to suffer from disfiguring goitre. There is a moral. Too much conservation, too much concentration on food from a comparatively small area certainly reduces the need for transport and saves energy, but it can be dangerous if, as was the case in Birch Vale, there is a natural deficiency, or if, as would be much more likely today the soil is contaminated with something poisonous. Birch Vale House was pulled down and the stone used to build modern bungalows on the hill opposite the Sycamore pub. The gates to the drive that used to lead up to the house are still there, opposite the Sycamore. The land where the house stood is now an abattoir.

*Written by Barbara Preston (nee Bennett 1915-2004) Granddaughter of Thomas Bennett. Communicated by her daughter, Mary Simmonds, Sept.2007*

## A childhood view of New Mills in the 1930's

**M**y first memory of New Mills was in the 1930's, I found myself surrounded by a sea of legs and feet and was desperate to escape to the safety of Mr. Hill's greengrocers shop. Somebody must have let go my hand. We lived in a nearby village so much of our shopping was done in New Mills on Fridays. For a time I thought New Mills was just the shops at the top of Union Road, the market ground, the stalls by Mr. Foy's fish shop and Mr. Dodd the butcher. I remember the stalls had huge lights above them and there were always lots of people about. We looked at the stalls; were bananas really 18 for 1/-? and then went for other fruit and vegetables to Mr. Hill. He and his assistant were very busy and sometimes Mrs. Hill would get up from her chair in the house place and help. We seemed to stand there a long time. Then we crossed the road to see Mr. Dodd (Charlie). We stood shuffling our feet in the sawdust whilst the huge figure in a blue and white striped apron covered with a white one flourished the steel and the wicked looking knife. Joints of meat were produced. Trays of offal with strange names like savoury ducks, chitterlings, trotters along with liver and kidneys lay on view. While we waited for the joint of lamb, pork or ribs to be presented we might look to our left and see a good fire burning in the living room of the house part. Did Amy help with the till or was that later?

Across the Hague Bar road from the market ground was Mr. Wharmby's shop (J.T. Wharmby), it looked newer than the other buildings. Now and then we went into the Post Office on Market Street. Mrs. Bailey ruled there. Then it was time to get on the North Western bus and go home.

After a while my grandfather took a hand in my education. He seemed to know a lot of people. Sometimes it was "Good day" and a tip of the hat. Other times it might be "Now then Joe - or Sam - or Bert" followed by an unintelligible conversation. We might go into the herbalist's shop near the Post Office. Rather dark with a pleasant smell, it was also quiet. Perhaps we would cross the road to Sharples' chemist, another quiet shop, it had carboys of coloured water on a high shelf. That shop smelled nice too. A quick look in the Penny Bazaar, like an early and yet to be seen Woolworth's. "Come on Toosie" and on to a glance in Horsfield's furniture shop. I think a grocer came soon (? Hunter's) and then a smell of baking. Would Grandpa buy me a maid-of-honour at Hobson's? "Come on Toosie" so we crossed the road by Sayer's furniture shop. No Mr. Sayer, the shop was run by his son-in-law Mr. Billy Broadhurst (Mrs. B had played hockey in the same team as my mother), then perhaps we would go to Higginbottom's ironmongers, a very dull shop, all bits of metal, garden forks, knives and unknown objects. Or we might walk along High Street passing houses with steps outside, then two or three shops and the Manchester and County Bank - "Sit down there Toosie" - and I waited for grandpa to transact

his business. If it was a fine day he could see no reason why my little legs should not carry me further, so down High Street, "That's the old Chapel". A bit further on and a lot of big stones appeared on the left, "Mi faither lived there", non-comprehension on my part. How could great-grandpa live in stones? Then nearly to underbank and the Salem bridge and grandpa pointed to the butcher's shop, "Mr. Coates used to live there". I did not know Mr. Coates. and I did not find out for many years that grandpa's mother Alice had been married to James Coates in November 1858. He died in March 1859 and Alice married my great grandfather in April 1861.

Then it was over the bridge with a quick look at the river. "Watch where you're putting your feet", "Come on Toosie" and up the steep steps to the chapel. Stop for breath and a look at the family grave. "There's your great-grandpa and your great-great-grandpa". I couldn't understand that!! "Where's great-grandma?" "I'll take you to Taxal". Now, where was that? But it was unwise to ask too many questions. I wonder if I learned to read by looking at gravestones.

Sometimes we would walk down what I knew was Union Road but grandpa called it "The New Bridge". He was born in 1863 so saw the building of the bridge. We popped into Beverley's shoe shop, "Say good morning to Mrs. Beverley, Toosie". Mr. and Mrs. Beverley were committed Methodists like grandpa. Then another chemist, was it Livesley's?, my mother knew Norah and Olga. Then a shop called Wharmby's. I have an old photograph of this shop. Further down we came to Ingham's tailors. I did not like this shop because of the dog, a noisy Pekinese behind a little wicket gate which divided the shop from the house, it always yapped but never got out. My mother knew Kathleen, Enid and Vera Ingham. Next door was Mrs. Wharmby, she had a sweet shop, a nice lady. I think she went on until the war closed her down. There was nothing of interest except for the cinema on the other side of the road, just the dentists and a shop that sold pianos. I never went to the back of Mr. Dodd's shop "because of the BEASTS". I was even more frightened of the BEASTS than of all those legs and feet. At last the bus home - and a maid of honour in a paper bag - thank you grandpa.

I did eventually sort out the extensive Wharmby family with the help of my cousin whose grandfather married one of them.

*Elizabeth Wild*

## **An appreciation of John Pearson**

**J**ohn Pearson, who was Surveyor of New Mills Urban District Council from 1946 until 1974, died on 14 January 2008, aged 96. After working as a boy on a farm in Disley, he joined his father's local practice as a trainee surveyor. In 1930 he obtained a post in the Borough Surveyor's department in Marple, and later moved to Bury in 1937. After wartime service in the Royal Navy, in which he helped with major sanitation and drainage projects in Sierra Leone, he returned to Bury and then in 1946 joined New Mills Urban District Council. It is unlikely that the town has ever had a servant more dedicated to his work. One of the first things that John did in New Mills was to use his weekends to walk every right of way in the Urban District Council's area, and this laid the foundation for his great knowledge of the area which he was to display throughout his whole career in New Mills. His responsibilities were astonishing and wide ranging, and more or less covered all the work of the U.D.C. including highways, rights of way, car parks, domestic sanitary accommodation, the planning and erection of council houses and their maintenance, parks and playing areas, water supply and distribution and drainage, the fire station and U.D.C. depot, public conveniences, tree preservation orders, the Town Hall, the opening up of the Torrs, and much more too numerous to list. He was known for his meticulous attention to detail, however small, and he was a person of the very greatest integrity which earned the respect of all who came in contact with him. On one occasion he was presented to his embarrassment with a bottle of whisky by a supplier of goods; it stood in his room for a year, never opened ! His tact, patience and understanding in dealing with the public (and town councillors !) when difficult problems arose were legion, yet nothing would divert him from the right decision as he saw it.

One of his greatest achievements was to lay the foundation for opening up the Torrs to public access. For this, the U.D.C. required him to discover the owners, descended from 150 years ago, and he spent months of his time tracing them down. But even John had to admit defeat over some owners, who were never found but for which monies apparently are still set aside in case they turn up. The irony of all this work for the Torrs was that it was completed just in time for the High Peak Borough Council to take over from the U.D.C. for the opening ceremony. After 28 years of devoted work, this was the time for John to retire and his retirement lasted 32 years. Unfortunately, his retirement was marred by the death of his wife Margaret to whom he was married for fifty years and had nursed for a long time. He never really got over her loss and never took another holiday.

He was a founder member of New Mills Probus Club and was President for three years. He told me that when he joined he was the most junior and when he left he was the most senior. The Club met in Sett Valley House, the building of which he was in charge and was co-opted onto the management committee.

I was privileged to first meet him in 1993 when planning a centenary book of the U.D.C. (1894-1994). He invited me to his home where he brought out a historic 'archive' of papers, notes, correspondence, drawings, maps and photographs, material which I had never seen or knew of their existence. Like all his writings, and there was a great deal over the years, his script was in the most immaculate hand, which could hardly have been bettered if type set. This material he trusted to me to take away for preparing the book and in addition we had many long discussions over matters and problems for which I which needed his advice. It stimulated him to write his own book on the duties and responsibilities of his work entitled "Urban District Surveyor New Mills 1946-1974", published in 1996 by New Mills Heritage Centre, where copies are still for sale. My copy is inscribed by him - "with very best wishes and many thanks for the greatly valued help and friendship and for all your marvelous efforts in connection with the publication of this book. Also very best wishes and sincere thanks to Mrs Brumhead for kindness and courtesy I always received when phoning or calling at Gayton". I quote these words as they are in the same sincere sentiment he applied equally to all those people with whom he worked and dealt with. His name was once mentioned in a discussion I was having with a group of people and one person remarked "A gentleman". Not everyone can be described as such, but John Pearson was certainly one of them.

*Derek Brumhead*

*Continued from page 7*

The grant is also being spent on the digitisation of the Society's audio tapes and on the Heritage Centre's collection of objects, which will be used for indexing as well as being available on the public access modules. Other costs will include publicity in various forms including an official launch and the costs of setting up the systems in New Mills Heritage Centre and New Mills Library.

*Derek Brumhead*