An old wall, Rock House and a forgotten Methodist Church in Basford

Remembering the Nottingham Canal Explosion of 1818

Women and Clipstone Camp

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Editor: John Parker, 124 Churchill Drive, Ruddington, Nottingham NG11 6DG, tel: 0777 908 2085, chairman@nlha.org.uk.
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A bi-annual magazine of news, views and articles concerning Nottinghamshire local history and conservation
Welcome to our Spring 2019 edition of The Nottinghamshire Historian which contains a mix of articles ranging in time from the medieval to the very recent past, and geographically from the centre of Nottingham to Kantara in Egypt.

Rosemary Buckley looks at an old wall in Basford and questions what it was part of and what its connections were; Kevin Powell reports on the commemoration of a local, long forgotten, “Dreadfull Catastrophe” of 1818; Pauline Marples revisits WWI Clipstone camp and examines the challenges and opportunities it offered to local women; Robert Illett queries whether the events of July 1914 might have unfolded differently following an incident at Welbeck; Valentine Yarnspinner offers an alternative view on WWI military discipline with its inherent moral and bureaucratic failings; finally Shlomo and Josh Dowen report on a conservation and heritage project at Spa Ponds, Mansfield, undertaken by the Forest Town Conservation Group, the community and local archaeologists.

The next edition of The Nottinghamshire Historian due in Autumn 2019 will be edited by Sarah Seaton who has agreed to take on the role again and who is looking forward to working with local history groups and individuals in promoting and developing local history through the pages of our magazine. Articles, contributions, suggestions and ideas should be sent to Sarah at editor@nlha.org.uk.

I am also pleased to report that we have established a relationship with local poet Di Slaney and one of her poems appears on page 14. She has been published in various magazines including Magma, The Rialto, The Interpreter’s House and Brittle Star, and twice shortlisted for the Bridport Prize. Her debut pamphlet “Dad’s Slide-show” was published by Stonewood Press in 2015 and her first full-length collection of poetry, “Reward for Winter”, published by Valley Press in March 2016, was Highly Commended in that year’s Forward Prizes.

John Parker, Chairman, NLHA

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Nottinghamshire Local History Association invites you to its Spring Meeting

Saturday 23rd March 2019 10am - 4pm at the Village Hall, Ravenshead

Burning Issues

A Political Hot Topic: Fireplaces in Late Mediaeval Architecture– James Wright

200 Years of the Mansfield and Pinxton Railway - Denis Hill

Flooding from the River Trent in Nottingham – Gary Watson

Fee: £8.00 for members of NLHA; £9.00 for non-members
Please contact David Anderson, 35 Sycamore Road, East Leake, Loughborough LE12 6PP or telephone 01509 820067 to secure your place or for more information. Attendance is possible without booking, although it is helpful to the Association to know how many are coming.

Editorial
An old wall, Rock House and a forgotten Methodist Church in Basford

E. Rosemary Buckley

An old Basford wall

At the south-east end of Bagnall Road in Basford, opposite the row of shops, is an old wall. It continues around the corner onto Mill Lane and into Stockhill Lane. The Bagnall Road portion of the wall is made of old stone and contains three gothic doorways, which are bricked up, and four gothic windows, two of them trefoils. The wall is topped with crenellated stone. I became interested in the history of the wall as it is situated close to where I live and the little I could find out about it on the internet was a photograph of one of the doors with the caption ‘Basford Cell, Mill St (sic) – possibly a medieval nunnery connected with Lenton Priory’.

A Link with Lenton Priory...?

A cell is a small religious house dependent on a monastery or convent. Lenton Priory in Nottingham was a Cluniac monastic house (a reformed Benedictine order founded in the French town of Cluny in 910), founded by William Peverel in the early 12th century. The exact date of foundation is unknown but is thought to have been between 1102–8. The priory was granted a large endowment of property in Nottinghamshire by its founder. It was home mostly to French monks until the late 14th century when the priory was freed from the control of its foreign mother-house. The priory was dissolved in the 1500s as part of King Henry VIII’s Dissolution of the Monasteries.

The area formerly occupied by Lenton Priory was bought by William Stretton in 1802 and he built a large house called The Priory (subsequently known as the Bishops House) on the site. It was bought by the Sisters of Nazareth in 1880 and renamed Nazareth House. The Sisters of Nazareth sold the property in the early years of the twenty-first century, and the Lenton site was redeveloped for housing though Bishop’s House still stands.

Information about the possible Basford cell and its link to Lenton Priory proved hard to come by but references were found on Wikipedia to ‘Nottingham Basford Cell - Cluniac monks cell dependent on Lenton? Founded before c1200, dissolved after 1300’. Further information was found: pastscape.org.uk describes Basford as being a dependency of Lenton and Priory: ‘A Cluniac cell of Lenton is recorded at Basford in the reign of Henry 1.’ Henry 1 reigned from 1100–1130 so that would fit with the Lenton Priory date.

Basford, a handwritten booklet by W Bond and presented to Nottingham Library in 1969, mentions that ‘Philip son of Safrid and later his son Robert de Basford gave much land to the monks’. Old and New Basford Then and Now by Robert Mellors confirms that ‘When Lenton Priory was founded, Philip the son of Safrid, before-named and Maud his wife, gave to the monks, and in honour of the High and Undivided Trinity twenty four acres of land in Basford, and other property and his son Robert de Basford, gave four bordates (60 acres) more, and much other land’. It therefore seems that there was

Gothic Doorway - Bagnall Road
Indeed considerable land in Basford given to Lenton Priory and it would not be surprising if the land was used to build ecclesiastical buildings such as a nunnery.

...or Catesby Priory, Northamptonshire?

There is an interesting and possibly significant link between Basford and another priory - Catesby Priory in Northamptonshire. Mellors states that 'Robert de Basford......gave the church that he had built...with its lands and tenements to the priores and nuns of Catesby in Northamptonshire of which Priory he was the principal founder.' Is it possible that this gift of lands in Basford to the priores of Catesby is the origin of the idea that the wall on Bagnall Road is a part of an ancient nunnery?

Rock House

The wall encloses a roughly rectangular area of land where, up to 1982 when it was demolished, a large house called Rock House (also known previously as Stockhill House and Bolton Hall) was situated. The date it was built is unknown but Robert Hall was the owner of Rock House in the late 18th century and Rev Robert Wood purchased the house for £250 in 1832. It was bought in 1850 by Rev Thomas Bolton as a manse. He carried out a great deal of work on the house, including an extension built in 1868. Bolton died in 1868 and the house was renamed Bolton Hall in his honour by his wife. An auction advertisement in 1871 referred to “fine rock cellars” in the ‘newly built’ Bolton Hall. However the house was not newly built but had been extensively (and expensively) refurbished by Rev Bolton in the 1860s. Evidence of already existing rock cellars is an interesting addition to our knowledge of this site. Charles Cox a local business man moved there in 1873 until his death in 1910. The house was bought and used by Basford Guardians 1922–1930 and then by Basford Rural District Council from 1930 until 1974. Documents from the Nottingham Archives from the 1920s and 1930s indicate that the two acre estate included six glass houses, tennis and croquet lawns, vineries, cucumber houses, ornamental grounds, garage, stables, game larder, piggeries and fowl houses ‘with exceptional runs’ and five cottages. A 1931 plan of the site shows the layout of the site in detail including the site of the old demolished chapel. A 1922 contract mentions ‘a right of way to Bagnall Road through door at boundary of estate for purposes of fuel’.

The site now houses a children’s nursery. An interesting crest can be seen over the front door of the 1938 building — three upstanding bears — which according to civicheraldry.co.uk were from the arms of the Basford family, adopted in the seal of the Basford Rural District Council and subsequently incorporated into Broxtowe Borough Council arms.

Skeletons found on Rock House site

In 1988 Ian Horry wrote an article in the Basford Bystander about Rock House. The following is an extract from his article: ‘When outbuildings were demolished in 1937, a mystery surfaced! Fourteen human remains were unearthed from the sandstone. The Coroner who attended
said that they were all female and possibly of mediaeval origin. In the 1950s more remains were discovered, this time of both sexes; and one grave contained the skeleton of a woman with an infant in her arms. It was accepted by the members of Basford RDC that the house had formerly been an ecclesiastical house for women, though church records do not mention such a house.

“The house, however, did have ecclesiastical connections - for instance, the Rev Bolton and prior to him, the Rev Robert Wood. Indeed, the whole style of the house had religious connotations, from the gargoyles and spires on the roof, to the carved window surrounds. The most persuasive evidence is in the system of cells carved out of the sandstone under the house and grounds. One winding vaulted tunnel had small anti-chambers hollowed out of its side walls at every turn of its length. On the rear wall of these ‘cells’ a stone bed/seat had been carved out during the digging of the chambers. Being much worn in the middle, they are said to be the “penance stones”, where nuns were confined for self-examination. If one compares the layout of these cells with the under crofts of known ecclesiastical houses in Nottingham, then there are striking similarities’. Interestingly, there is a precedent for a religious cell built into rock in Nottingham. In the book Sanctity and Scandal reference is made to a dependent cell of Lenton Priory within a cave near Nottingham Castle known as Mary Le Roche (St Mary of the Rocks). An illustration of the cell states that it is a ‘Borough of caves hew’d out of the Rocks’.

Scott Lomax (Nottingham City Archaeologist) on nottinghamarchaeology.sclomax.co.uk states that ‘several human skeletons were found in the 1930s and 1950s and it was speculated that the dead had been child labourers at a nearby mill and had died during their work, buried without ceremony to prevent scandal. People had gone onto the site and drawn a blank. My research, however, proved that the site had been a Methodist chapel with burial ground from the late 17th century through to the 19th century. It is amazing how, the 1930s, the burial ground had been in use in living memory but had been entirely forgotten about. An article relating to his research was published in the Nottingham Historian in the Spring/Summer 2014 issue.’ In this article Lomax, suggests that the Bagnall Road archways were formerly entrance ways to Rock House garden and one of them was access to a storage cave under Rock House (personal correspondence, 2017).

A forgotten Methodist Church on the Rock House site

Near to Rock House was a Methodist church which appears on the 1881 map and is labelled New Connexion.

The church was built by Robert Hall (1754–1827), a textile and bleaching works owner, of nearby Basford Hall for his workers in 1793. It was officially opened by John Wesley. In 1797 it became a chapel for Kilhamites (a reference to an influential Methodist cleric Alexander Kilham) and became New Connexion (a breakaway branch of the Wesleyan church) in 1840. A Sunday School9 was established in 1800.

The church had a burial ground. A 1947 souvenir booklet for the 50th anniversary of David Lane Methodist Church (which superseded the old chapel) mentions, in regard to the chapel: ‘A piece of land was enclosed as a graveyard and in 1876 there is a still a stone standing which bears the date of 1809. According to The London Gazette of February 3rd 1857, an order of Queen Victoria decreed that the burial ground of Old Basford New Connexion Chapel be closed ‘with the exception of now existing vaults and brick graves’.

The Chapel was demolished in the 1920s10. I have not been able to find any photographs or any other pictures of this chapel. Lomax8 believes that the skeletons were from the burial ground belonging to the Methodist chapel however it is difficult to see how this is possible. The Chapel and Rock House with its large gardens were situated very close to each other, about 50 feet at the nearest point and it is difficult to see how ‘an enclosed piece of land’ for burials could be situated in this area. The 1937 skeletons were found when demolishing outbuildings of Rock House. Why would bodies legally be buried so close to/under Rock House or its outbuildings? There is no indication on any map of this period of an ‘enclosed piece of land’ near the Chapel.

Enquiries were made to the Nottingham Coroner’s Office for further information about the fourteen female skeletons but unfortunately records are no longer kept from the 1930s and it was not possible to find any records from the 1950s without more information about specific dates etc. I have been unable to contact Ian Horry to ask about his source of information for the articles from 1988 and 1990.

Back to the Wall...

Although there is good evidence that considerable land in Basford was given to Lenton Priory and indeed, to Catesby Priory, there is still no evidence to link it specifically to the old wall with its gothic doorways and windows on Bagnall Road.

The wall is thought to be 18th or 19th century but containing older parts with gothic doorways and windows. On the Mill St side of the wall, there is a large vertical crack which must be a cause for concern. According to the Nottingham Council website, the wall is not listed, neither is it in a Conservation area. This may mean the wall is vulnerable to demolition should it collapse or need stabilization. The owner of the wall has been informed and asked to carry out repairs. The City Council Archaeologist has said that the wall could be a candidate for local listing—a local list of heritage assets, good news for an interesting landmark in Basford!

It is unfortunate that the original source for the information from Ian Horry from the 1988 and 1990 articles cannot be found. A photograph taken by the Newsagent on Bagnall Road in 2015 shows brickwork being replaced in the far left doorway and, interestingly, shows the remains of an old blue wooden door before it was bricked over again. There appears to be debris behind the door. Who knows what other secrets this and the other doorways would reveal if the site behind the wall was excavated? Questions remain:

- Lomax says that the doorways in the wall led into the gardens. However a old photograph of Rock House from Bagnall Road/Mill St shows that the house is situated very close to the wall and the garden did not extend into this area. There is also a significant height difference between the road and the land behind the wall and it is
difficult to see what the purpose of the four stone windows would be.

• It has been speculated by Lomax that the one of the doorways was put in to access storage caves under Rock House. But why would a doorway be incorporated into a wall accessed from a public road if it only led to a storage cave under a private house?

• In 1937, skeletons were found while excavating the site of the old Methodist chapel land for an office block which stands on the site today. In the 1950s skeletons were found when carrying out work associated with an extension of the same building. Both Rock House and the Methodist chapel were on the site in the late 1790s around 50 feet apart. It is hard to see where a piece of ground enclosed for burials would be situated on the Rock House site as the buildings were so close together and the great majority of the land was either landscaped with gardens or used for greenhouses and outbuildings. Perhaps the theory that the skeletons were medieval and the caves were used for religious purposes needs to be reconsidered?

I would be grateful for any further information about the excavations in 1930s and 1950s, Rock House, the old Methodist chapel and especially the old wall on Bagnall Road housing the three mysterious doorways.

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November 11th 2018 saw the culmination of four years of anniversaries, all with one thing in common, they all commemorated the events of one hundred years ago. These anniversaries occurred because of a conflict that started on the 4th August 1914; World War One would be described as the ‘war to end all wars’ and so it is only right that the nation remembered and commemorated these events and celebrated those men and women who gave their lives in this terrible conflict.

But, during the past four years there had been other anniversaries, all important in their own right and their place in history. One of those anniversaries was the destruction of the Nottingham Canal Company’s Warehouse which occurred two hundred years ago on Monday 28th September 1818.

To mark the 200th anniversary of the event, Nottingham Civic Society held a ceremony to unveil a plaque at the side of the Nottingham Canal.

The ceremony took place at 3.00 pm on the 28th September 2018, the time at which the explosion occurred, this was preceded by a talk at the Nottinghamshire Archives and hosted by Inspire (Nottinghamshire County Council)

The unveiling of the plaque was carried out by Councillor Graham Chapman, Deputy Leader of Nottingham City Council, in attendance were members of Nottingham Civic Society and members of the public.
In 1818, the event was referred to as the 'Dreadful Catastrophe' by the Nottingham Review newspaper. To many Nottingham residents it was virtually an unknown event that had only had only been recorded in a few publications in the 1800's.

So what was the story behind this terrible event, well first we need to look at why and how the Nottingham canal system came into being in the years preceding September 1818.

The idea for the Nottingham Canal had started in 1790, when a group of local colliery owners and businessmen sought to build a canal to bring coal down from the Nottinghamshire and South Derbyshire coalfields to supply the surrounding towns in the area.

It was planned that this would extend from the River Trent into Nottingham and thence up to Langley Mill, a distance of nearly fifteen miles. Work began in June 1792. The first stretch of canal from the Trent to the town wharves was completed in 1793 and the whole stretch of canal was finished by 1796, after that the warehouses, wharves and bridges had been completed. The official opening took place in 1802.

The main engineer for this major project was William Jessop, a renowned canal engineer. However, due to ill-health and other projects the works were completed by local engineer James Green. The main cargo carried on the canal was coal, along with iron, stone and lime. But there were more unusual cargoes and dangerous ones were sometimes carried down the River Trent and even along the narrow canals.

So it was that, in September 1818, a canal boat owned by Richard Barrow was hired to carry a general cargo consisting of a large number of flag stones, cotton, wool, molasses and soap. In addition, the canal boat carried 21 barrels of gunpowder. It was planned that the gunpowder would subsequently be carried to the mines in Derbyshire. The boat's captain was Hezekiah Riley and it had a crew of two men; Benjamin Wheatley (28), a boatman from Stoke Bardolph, and Joseph Musson (32), formerly of Edingley, but at that time he and his wife were living in Meadows Platts (an area of Nottingham that would later become Victoria Park).

On the morning of Monday 28 September, a warm, late summer's day, Captain Riley manoeuvred and docked his boat in the wharf that ran under the Nottingham Canal Company's warehouse. Sometime after noon he and his crew proceeded to unload the cargo and the 21 barrels of gunpowder, each of which weighed some 100lbs (45 Kgs). They were assisted by the Company's labourers, George Hayes (25), of Trowell, and Job Barnes (36).

One of the barrels rolled by Riley started to leak powder, as the barrel seal had come loose. Three to four pounds of powder came out, leaving a trail running along the wharf towards the warehouse. Realising that his barrel had leaked, Riley made every effort to scoop up the powder off the ground. Believing that he had cleared most of it up, and returned it to the barrel, he and his crew carried on unloading the powder and transferring it into the warehouse on the south side of the building. However, some of the powder remained mixed in the dirt on the ground.

Just after three in the afternoon Joseph Musson thought that he would have some 'fun', a 'flush' as it was described in the Nottingham Review. Going to a neighbouring boat, he enquired of the crew if they had a fire and if he could have a hot coal. Carrying the 'coal' between two sticks for most of the way between the boat and

**Nottingham Review Broadsheet (Derby issue). Courtesy of Nottingham Local Studies Library**
the warehouse he eventually dropped it. Picking it up, he then carried it, tossing it between his hands until he reached the loose gunpowder that Riley had been unable to pick up. Dropped again, the hot coal ignited the powder and this, in turn, connected with the trail of gunpowder and then the barrels.

As the barrels exploded, Musson (with nine others) was killed instantly. The explosion shattered and mutilated their bodies and many were only recognizable by their clothes. Musson’s body, in pieces, was blown across the canal into the fields beyond, in the area then known as the Meadows. These pieces eventually fell on the other side of the Tinker’s Leen. Benjamin Wheatley, George Hayes and Job Barnes were found dead in Riley’s boat, their bodies horribly disfigured. Riley, however, survived the explosion and was able to give a first-hand testimony at the coroner’s inquest.

The youngest killed was 11 year old John Howell, who was fishing on the side of the canal. He was the son of one of the Company’s bookkeepers and they lived in a small house on the Company’s Wharf. His body was so badly mutilated that he could be identified only by the remains of his clothes.

Of the others killed in the explosion, John Seales (30), and William Norman (60) were killed instantly. William Stevenson (23) did show signs of life, and he was taken, with all others showing signs of life, to the General Hospital. He died, however, in the early evening. All three men had been working about fifty yards from the explosion, moving a cart. A quotation often used is ‘being in the wrong place at the wrong time’. This was certainly the case for Thomas Baker (42), who was standing near his wagon in the yard when the building fell and crushed him and his shaft-horse to death.

Also in the wrong place at the wrong time was 15 year old William Parker, who was described as ‘the son of a poor man living at Carlton’. He had come to Nottingham that Monday morning hoping to be hired and to offer his services to work on Riley’s boat. He was standing only a few yards from the explosion when it occurred, the force lifting his body and carrying him across the canal and into a hedgerow, where his twisted body was found terribly mutilated.

In what had been a moment of ‘foolishness’, nine men and a boy had lost their lives.

Thankfully the death toll was relatively low; many others were very lucky and had very narrow escapes.

Such was the force of the explosion that it was heard at Ratcliffe, Bingham, Loughborough, Alfreton, Loscoe, Newark and Castle Donnington.

Following the catastrophe the bodies of the unfortunate victims were taken to The Navigation Inn, where the coroner’s inquest was held. Captain Riley and other survivors gave evidence and a gentleman who had been crossing the Meadows at the time of the explosion described how ‘[h]e saw the whole building lifted up in the air, and then suddenly divide into innumerable fragments; the bricks, beams and bales flying to all points of the compass’.

A large number of properties in the vicinity of the explosion were damaged, mainly in the form of broken windows and roof damage. For those in the town, the sound was deafening and everything shook. Windows shattered and cracked, further away the windows rattled and items on shelves crashed to the floor. For the people themselves, some thought it was an earthquake and some even thought an arsenal had blown up.

As the great plume of smoke and dust rose into the air, men and women grabbed their children and loved ones and fled away from the scene.

Those who ventured down to the canal area were greeted with a scene of utter devastation, to some who saw it, it compared to a battlefield.

One person described how where the gunpowder had stood in the warehouse, ‘the earth appeared to have been pushed downwards.’

Once that the dust had settled claims for compensation came thick and fast. The estimated cost of the damage was about £30,000, which included 4000 quarters of corn, some paper, and cheese in the warehouse. Although the Nottingham Canal Company’s Warehouse was insured the insurers refused to pay, leading the canal company to sue Joseph Musson’s employers, the Nottingham Boat Company. The Warehouse Company won £1,000 yet the boat company could not afford to pay, and a settlement of £500 was agreed. As for those killed and injured, the townsfolk of Nottingham raised a public subscription and, within a few days, money was provided for the relief of the families of the unfortunate sufferers.

The fact that the warehouse stood virtually on its own on the Company’s Wharf limited the damage and also the loss of life. In 1818 this area was on the periphery of the town. Expansion would come in the next two decades with the extension of Carrington Street across the Nottingham Canal in 1829 and the coming of the railways and the first Midland Station in 1839. However, such was the importance of the explosion that, in Wild and Smith’s map of Nottingham, published in 1820, the area was specially noted.

Following the demolition of the warehouse, which had stood for only a few years, there is no evidence that it was rebuilt. However, the sections of the canal were reconstructed and this can be seen when comparing maps of the areas before and after the event.

The area where the warehouse had been on the Company’s Wharf was previously an open site and was
used on the 1st November 1813, when Nottingham's first balloon ascent took place. This event was covered by the Nottingham Review in 1813 and was referred to in their article relating to the explosion, so their readers could understand where the explosion occurred.

Between 1831 and 1878 very little had changed in the sense of new buildings, it would be in the 1890's that demolition and rebuilding would take place in the area being fronted by Canal Street and Carrington Street.

Stavely and Wood map of 1831 shows new buildings had been built and the canal area partially reconstructed after the explosion.

Building expansion in the area was not affected and in the years to come, the coming of the railways in 1839 brought a new prosperity to the area and Nottingham.

Following the explosion, The Nottingham Review published a full account of the catastrophe on the 2nd October 1818, this was later followed by the publication of a 'Broadsheet' about the event. (Both are available to view at Nottingham Local Studies Library.)

This 'Dreadful Catastrophe', as it was described in the Nottingham Review certainly brought the events of that day to life, a week after the explosion happened.

This retelling of the story covering the full horrors of the day and the terrible loss of life, must have sent a cold shiver down the spine and many must have said a silent prayer, thanking God that they were not there.

Thankfully, had the area been more populated, the loss of life would have been far greater. But to local folk, this was still an area where you could walk and see the spring crocuses as the meadows stretched out towards the River Trent.

A call for 'Retribution', well there does not appear to have been any. Unlike today when anyone and everyone would be 'screaming for blood and compensation' and 'Health and Safety' would be shouted from every roof top. This was a tragic accident that occurred because someone thought they would have 'a bit of fun'.

In the years to come, there is very no evidence to show that the explosion was ever remembered or commemorated. It appears that once the event had slipped from living memory, it was forgotten. It would be 'The Nottingham Date Book (1884)' that would remind people of the event and subsequent authors would refer to this book when writing and retelling the story.

And so, two hundred years after the dust had settled on these events in 1818, the Nottingham Civic Society commemorated the 'Dreadful Catastrophe' at the Nottingham Canal Company's Warehouse.

Acknowledgements

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Women and Clipstone Camp

Pauline Marples

Just a few miles from the town of Mansfield, and near to the mining village of Forest Town, one of the largest military training camps of the First World War was built in 1915. This was Clipstone Camp. Upwards of 30,000 soldiers could be stationed there at any one time, and there was a continual turnover of regiments. It was also to Clipstone that many soldiers were demobbed at the end of the war, and, consequently, it was not until 1921 that the camp finally closed.

Throughout this time, from 1915 to 1921, women from all walks of life contributed to the wellbeing of the soldiers. Many of the soldiers were nothing more than young lads, thrown into the supposed thrill of fighting for their country, embarking on new adventures with a uniform to wear. It was possibly the first time that most had left their homes, families and the places where they lived.

It would be easy to concentrate on the lives of soldiers, as far more was written about them in newspapers and documents. However, I have taken the opportunity to enlarge on the little-known role that women played in relation to Clipstone Camp.

Women afar

For Soldiers, finding themselves in such an isolated place would not have been easy, and communicating with home would have been important. Communication in those days was by letter or postcard and was often to and from the women who were closest to the soldiers’ hearts - mothers, wives and girlfriends.

John Challinor, for example, wrote regularly to his wife, addressing her as ‘my own sweet darling’, or ‘my darling heart’, and signing off as ‘your husband John’. His letters are very endearing. One has an amusing PS, in which he thanks her for the clothes that she has sent and adds that he is wearing them after a bath!

Female visitors

Housewives in Forest Town were known to rent out rooms, so that soldiers’ relatives could visit. This earned the housewives extra income, as well as providing a valuable service. Comments in postcards show that these relatives often formed very different opinions of Clipstone. Peg wrote to her friend that ‘it is a dirty ugly village, all coal miners and mines’. As she was staying in a better-class house I suspect that she was an officer’s wife. Nelly, however, staying in a miner’s cottage, wrote that the place was like Blackpool!

Some women brought their children with them. Richard Henry Sheppard was stationed at Clipstone Camp for a time. During his stay his wife Hilda and their two daughters, Olive and Hilda Junior, came to live at a shop in Forest Town, the girls attending Forest Town School for a month. We were able to discover this because of the survival of a postcard sent from Forest Town by Hilda.

Romance

As may be expected, there were many romances, some ending in tragedy and others in happiness.

Happy tales include that of Barnsley lad Frank Briggs, who survived the war. We know from a female descendant that he married his sweetheart, Ethel, and that they spent many happy years together.

Another Barnsley lad, Bill (William Joseph Platt), met another Ethel - Ethel Slack - when he was stationed at Clipstone Camp. They married in May 1918, in Mansfield, and their grandson still has some of their personal effects.

Henry Coulter was at Clipstone Camp for around four months, from November 1915 onwards. He and Lucy Townend sent letters to each other nearly every day. Most of Henry’s letters start ‘My Darling Little Girl’ and end ‘With my fondest love & kisses, Yours for eternity, Henry’. He often referred to her as his future wife. This, however, was not to be. Henry was killed just a few weeks after leaving Clipstone Camp for France. Although she later married, Lucy saved over 100 of Henry’s letters. A few years ago they were discovered in an attic of the house where Lucy had once lived. They have now been transcribed and published in a book by John Rumsby.

Lady helpers in Mansfield

Early on in 1915, when it was known that Clipstone Camp was being built, and that thousands of soldiers would soon be in the Mansfield area, committees of men and women were established to look after the welfare of the soldiers and the protection of women and girls.

Local ladies were quick to get involved, providing refreshment facilities at their churches or in the YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association). Soldiers from the camp regularly came into Mansfield and would visit churches of various denominations for services, refreshment or social activities. One of the largest venues was the YMCA, in Church Lane, at which a visitors’ book was kept. Visitor comments published in the local newspaper in July 1915 include excerpts such as ‘[a] delightful place, and pleased to find such a splendid work being done for our soldiers by the good ladies of Mansfield’. Another entry told of a mother who had come...
to Clipstone and from there to Mansfield to see the place where her soldier son was staying. They had had tea at the YMCA, where they were waited upon by ‘the band of warm hearted Mansfield ladies, who freely give up so much of their time to minister to the comfort and welfare of the boys in khaki...’ The newspaper thought that ‘the commendation was well earned for the local ladies willingly sacrifice their leisure in order to give the troops a good time. Take last Sunday, for instance, ladies were in the hall cutting bread and butter, mashing tea and serving men from 3 o’clock until after 8 o’clock, thus giving up their Sabbath rest and worship’. How much this book might reveal if found today!

Some lady helpers kept autograph books. A poem about the Mansfield YMCA ladies was written in Lily Chadwick’s autograph book by a ‘Pte, G H Ward, MGC’ on 25 November 1917. Also naming only Lily but also Nora, Mrs Harvey, Edith, Nellie Redfern and several others, one evocative verse stated that:

There’s Mrs Chadwick we call Mother
We are sure she will not mind
Because to us she is like those, That we have left behind.

Those few words reveal what many of the soldiers would have been feeling. We can similarly assume that the ladies who served the soldiers were hoping that someone, somewhere, was doing the same for their own sons, husbands and brothers who were away somewhere training or fighting.

**Lady helpers at Clipstone Camp**

This good work was also occurring at Clipstone Camp, which had three large YMCA huts offering facilities for the soldiers. The camp also had huts of various religious denominations, providing food, games, postal items and social activities such as concerts, mainly of a musical nature. Women were evidently performers too, as newspaper reports of the concerts and other entertainments are full of women’s names and the songs they sang. These include ladies from some of the more established families in the Mansfield area, such as the Misses Houton, Royce and Linney.

Ladies helped, however, in many ways, often less glamorous. Depicted on one surviving postcard, for example, is a woman advising the soldiers on the best way of filling their palliases with straw!

Women also staffed the huts provided by the YMCA and the Masons for use by relatives visiting hospital patients. Miss Travis was the Lady Superintendent in charge and, according to one newspaper, was well-endued with those qualities of cheerfulness, sympathy, enthusiasm and good management essential for the position.

**Nursing staff**

There was a large military hospital on the edge of the camp, staffed by members of both the Royal Army Medical Corp and the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VADs), qualified nurses, and possibly other women too. Occasional names have been gleaned from various records, including the London Gazette, documents at the National Archives, and Red Cross Records. A search of the Red Cross records, transcribed, indexed and available online, has revealed 90 VADs serving in different capacities at Clipstone Camp Military Hospital.

As an example, Gill Saunders was a staff nurse at the hospital, and her records in the National Archives disclose much about her. She also kept an autograph book, containing contributions from patients and staff, and some wonderful sketches, that is now with a family member.

Nurses at Clipstone Camp who in 1919 received awards for valuable nursing service can also be discovered in newspapers and the London Gazette and Edinburgh Gazette. They include Matron Miss Cecilia Alice A. Stevens QAIMNS, Acting Sister Miss Amy Gore Nicholls QAIMNS and also the VAD Nurse Mrs Bertha Chain Edwards.

**Women in uniform**

By 1918 women in uniform were to be seen at the camp. They belonged to the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs) and the NAACB (Navy And Army Canteen Board). However, and despite two postcard depictions, to date virtually no documentation has been found about the NAACB women at Clipstone. The only evidence found so far is a single advert in the Nottingham Evening Post calling for female charge hands, waitresses, cooks and kitchen maids for the Army Canteens.

Information on Clipstone’s WAACs is also sparse. However, one former soldier recalled the Clipstone Camp WAACs in his memories, referring to them as clerk, cooks, waitresses in the officers’ mess, and cleaners. They must have had some time off work, however, as at least two married soldiers. An entry in the Edwinstowe Parish Registers records the weddings of Marion Anne Cockcroft and Eva Winifred Lock, both described as WAACs at Clipstone, who on 12 December 1918 married soldiers from the camp.

**Women misbehaving**

Theft from the camp was a temptation for some women. Working at the camp opened up numerous opportunities, as was discovered when Ellen Dean was found to have bacon, rabbits and army boots hidden under the piles of washing on her dray.

Conversely, there were also women who were a little too helpful. Mary Hunt who ‘had been living in a certain way’ was fined for being drunk in the town with a soldier. Elizabeth Welton, a common prostitute referred to as a dangerous woman,
was similarly discovered in the huts at the camp. A one-month prison sentence did not deter her, for six months later she was appearing before the courts again. Eliza Marshall, however, claimed to be very apologetic when, for similar crimes, she made her 67th appearance in court!

Similar instances can be found throughout the war years. While ever there was the camp and soldiers there was temptation. Thus, in January 1919 Dorothy Gilbert appeared at the Mansfield Petty Sessions, having being seen by a sergeant of the military police in the camp just after midnight, in the company of two soldiers. On being handed over to the civil police she had replied that ‘I was just seeing the boys home’.

**Remembering women**

Although hundreds of women who were associated with Clipstone Camp the only known memorial is to VAD Nurse Ada Elizabeth Young, who died at the camp hospital from pneumonia, aged 33, on 15 July 1918.

She is buried in St Alban’s Churchyard, Forest Town, and has a Commonwealth War Grave headstone. There is also a brass memorial plaque inside the church, placed there by her colleagues in the Army Nursing Service.

**Conclusion**

Clipstone Camp opened up a challenge and many opportunities for women that would not have existed had not thousands of soldiers been stationed in the Mansfield area. We can see how important, collectively, they were to the men’s lives as a whole. As individuals, however, they seem to have received comparatively little formal recognition and memorialisation in Clipstone and its surrounds, in life and in death.

**References**

John H. Rumsby, “Yours For Eternity” a Romance of the Great War (Huddersfield Local history Society, 2014)

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**Coal**

The widows wrote for coal that cold, wet winter of ’53, when smog stoppered cities, the Empress sank, waves sucked the east clean and Perry Como kept stars from getting in their eyes. In their distress, biros surged across cheap lined pages, curling and looping like seagulls crying in the storms, school-drilled copperplate working thin black seams glittered with tears. Sweetness restocked shelves in February, but nothing filled the displaced hearth, stoked the flue, kept their kettles boiling. The widows chopped up chairs; tables and beds lost their legs, wardrobes spilled lying wedding lace onto rugs. Old wood spluttered in the grate like dead husbands promising to return, vowing homes for life, pledging never-ending coal to warm a miner’s wife.
TEN GUNS A BLASTING: THE ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND AT WELBECK

Robert Ilett

Introduction

The turn of the year 1913 and the first six months of 1914 were significant for the number of celebrations in the Worksop area. These events were topped by a visit of H.M. King George and Queen Mary in June 1914, as guests of the Duke and Duchess of Portland at Welbeck.

Welbeck Abbey was in fact a frequent venue for hosting foreign heads of state and dignitaries. King Carlos of Portugal had been a guest in 1904, and the King and Queen of Spain followed in 1907. In 1911 Prince Henry of Prussia, the brother of the Kaiser, headed a tour of German motor clubs. An invitation to lunch at Welbeck was issued and the Duke of Portland, also a motoring enthusiast, met the Germans at Daybrook. They were led by the Duke up what is now the A614, with the turn off at Ollerton bringing the party to Sparken Hill (Worksop), where the Welbeck Estate was entered through The Lion Gates.

Amongst the visitors of 1912 was the heir to the Austro-Hungarian thrones, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the 48-year-old nephew of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor and King, the 82-year-old Franz Joseph, and his wife the Duchess of Hohenberg. The couple had met in 1894 when Sophie was the Countess Sophie Chotek. Despite the title the Choteks were by no means well off and Sophie had held a position as a lady-in-waiting at the time she and Franz Ferdinand met and developed an affection for each other which turned into the deepest love. Protocol in the Empire prevented a Habsburg marriage other than to a member of a European royal house, so it was only with great difficulty that their marriage was allowed in 1899 on a morganatic basis meaning that Sophie could not hold any rank and her children could not have succession rights. The powers in the Austrian court then treated Sophie with the utmost contempt and callousness to the point of cruelty but she remained calm and dignified in support of her husband. They had three children which, unusually for the time, they brought up themselves in a warm family atmosphere.

One of the Archduke’s many interests was horticulture and it was a visit to London to attend what was to become the Chelsea Flower Show which saw a private visit to London as a precursor to the Welbeck visit. The Austrian Ambassador, Count Alfred von Mensdorff, arranged for a luncheon meeting at Buckingham Palace with the King and Queen which all parties enjoyed and Queen Mary was able to amend her own preconceptions about the couple. The Archduke always remained loyal to the Empire and would not have used the visit for political purposes although on accession he planned to federalise the Empire and bring under control the aggressive Magyars in Hungary.

It was a pleasure for the Archduke and Duchess to be treated with such respect and kindness as a couple - a situation which was very different to that prevailing in Vienna and this was exactly the type of reaction they were to receive at Welbeck their next point of call on the visit.

The royal visitors

The royal party arrived at Worksop station at 6.02 pm on Saturday 22 November. Having travelled in a private saloon car on a train leaving Kings’ Cross at 3.25 pm, the party stepped down onto a specially laid
crimson carpet leading into the entrance hall on platform No.1, in a station designed and constructed in the same fashion as the lodges on the Welbeck Estate. Progressing through the booking foyer, laid out from top to bottom with a seasonal display created by the gardening department at Welbeck, the royal couple and their entourage were greeted in person by the Duke. They and their entourage then entered a long procession of cars passing through Worksop, travelling along Carlton Road, Bridge Street and Sparken Hill at a slow pace to enable the people on the thronged streets to get a good view of the Archduke. The procession then entered Welbeck Abbey via The Lion Gates.

The house party consisted of several of the great and the good, including the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the Duke and Duchess of Roxburgh, Earl Roberts, Earl Curzon, Lord Hugh Cecil and the former Prime Minister and future Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour. In the Archduke’s entourage were Alfred von Mendorff, the ambassador, the Countess Clary, Baron von Rumerskirch and Count Rudolf von Stanton Ponthos. Other guests included Lord and Lady Lovat. Lady Lovat was the 21-year-old former Laura List and had married Lovat in 1910 giving birth to an heir the following year. Lady Lovat was a recognised beauty of her day with a warm and attractive personality making her a perfect guest at a weekend house party. It is noticeable that she and her husband were also invited to take part in the celebrations at Welbeck for the visit of the King and Queen in the following June.

On Sunday, the Sabbath, the Catholic majority of the foreign dignitaries, including the Archduke and Duchess Sophie who were both very devout, and their entourages attended the Roman Catholic church on Worksop’s Park Street, within which for many years the banners of the various royal houses were kept stored for display during regal visits. Monday was a quiet day, marked by an unannounced visit to Bolsover Castle, followed by lunch at Hardwick Hall as guests of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. In the evening the guests were entertained at Welbeck by the orchestra of the exotic Frenchman of Italian descent Frederick Cassaro, a regular for social entertaining at Welbeck Abbey.

The shoot

It was on Tuesday that serious business took place in the form of a ten-gun shoot on Clowne Hills (a spot relatively close to the Abbey). The sport was excellent. The shoot took place in perfect conditions, with the birds noted to be numerous and stronger than usual, while the Archduke lived up to his reputation for marksmanship although he needed to adjust his technique as he was not used to shooting high flying birds. Some of the ladies from the house party joined the guns for lunch, others playing golf on the estate’s nine-hole course.

After a morning frost Wednesday was a clear bright day and ten guns, including the Duke and Archduke, were again out for the shoot at Clipstone Coverts. The shoot was very successful, with a good bag of mainly, but not exclusively, pheasants. Luncheon was served in a marquee in the open, where the sportsmen were joined by several ladies from the house party.

On Thursday the shoot took place on the Gleadthorpe covers, where excellent sport was again enjoyed. The Roman Catholic ladies attended Mass at St. Mary’s Worksop and afterwards joined the other ladies and the guns for lunch at Corunna Lodge on the road leading along the southern side of the lake to Carburton. The shoots were highly successful, and on each several hundred birds, including not only pheasants but also partridges, woodcocks and wild ducks, were killed, with hares and rabbits thrown into the mix for good measure.

The logistics of organising and managing the Archduke’s visit and the associated activities had called for a great deal of skill, hard work and endeavour by all the Welbeck staff, both indoors and outdoors. The overall organisation fell to the Duke’s house steward, James Spedding, who was presented with a ‘handsome double-cased gold hunter watch, bearing the Royal monogram’ by the Archduke. The Duke himself was conferred by the Archduke with the very high honour relating to the Kingdom of Hungary the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Stephen of Hungary.

An open-car procession

The plan was for the royal guests to depart from Worksop on a special train at 9.45 am on Saturday. Accompanied by the Duke and Duchess, they drove from Welbeck in an open carriage with postillions that would allow the people of Worksop to give them a ‘hearty send-off’. The party passed safely through the town with its flag-waving crowds, and proceeded to the railway station. Could this safe passage through Worksop have created a precedent for their journey in an open car six months later?

A near-miss

There had, however, been a significant near-miss during the visit itself. As the Duke recorded,

There was rather deep snow on the ground; and after a rise of pheasants, one of the loaders fell down. This caused both barrels of a gun he was carrying to be discharged, the shot passing with a few feet of the Archduke and myself.

He finished by noting that

I have often wondered whether the Great War might not have been averted, or at least postponed, had the Archduke met his death then, and not at Sarajevo in the following year.

References


Michael Willcocks - noted Worksop Roman Catholic

Nottingham Evening Post Various dates 1912/1914

Worksop Guardian Various dates 1912/1914
Since 2014 we have been looking into the cases of the 103 Sherwood Foresters who between 1914 and 1918 were either sentenced to death or sentenced on mutiny charges by courts martial. Whilst some information is available for the eight soldiers who were executed by firing squad, very little is known about the 30 Foresters whose death sentences were commuted, and even less about the 65 alleged mutineers.

When it comes to military law enforcement, the actions of the army during World War One have often been portrayed as ‘injustices’ needing to be unveiled and corrected. Especially when criticising executions, a well-established narrative argues that these soldiers also did their bit for King and Country, but were broken by the unimaginable hell of combat stress – something that the army failed to acknowledge, choosing to execute them rather than acknowledging them as casualties.

One significant problem with this narrative is that it questions merely the ‘unjust’ conduct of the army at the time. It still accepts the underlying idea of ‘doing your bit’ for King, Queen and fatherland (and other such follies). It is however not only our contempt for armies and nation states that leads People’s Histreh to reject this moralistic approach. We also deem this approach historically inaccurate.

It is evident that the army’s actions had nothing to do with the matter of (in-)justice. As the Manual of Military Law states, the ‘object of military law is to maintain discipline among the troops’. Military law enforcement was not concerned with ‘justice’ in the sense of determining an accused’s ‘guilt’ or ‘innocence’. Instead, its concern was to ensure that soldiers continued to do as they were told. Military law was thus another tool employed by the army to keep the gears of the war machine turning. It was by no means the only such tool, but it was an important one.

Military law was usually enforced in the immediate context of the relationship between rank and file troops and their direct superiors. Officers had wide ranging powers to give out punishments such as detentions, fines and the ever-favourite Field Punishment Number One, also known as crucifixion. In addition, over 240,000 alleged infractions of military law were tried before courts martial between 1914 and 1918. Such trials were bureaucratic affairs, exemplifying the biases of Edwardian class structure. However, and especially in the implementation of capital punishment, the army was walking a tightrope between deterrence and maintaining the consent of the troops. In short, it shot just enough soldiers to make a point, but not so many as to turn fear into defiance.

When the army bureaucracy processed a death sentence considerations were made as to whether the condemned – almost always a low ranking soldier – would be more useful executed as an example to others or kept alive on active service. Where an example was deemed necessary it appears that the army first went after those too traumatised to carry on. It is no coincidence that the stories of those shot at dawn so often entail heartbreaking accounts of extreme psychological and/or physical trauma. The army had decided that these broken soldiers were of no use to King and Country other than by being murdered pour encourager les autres.

Where courts martial resulted in executions it is relatively straightforward for the modern researcher to follow the paper trail. However, things are much more complicated when looking into those death sentences that were commuted. For instance, little evidence survives from the cases of Privates Harvey and Coleman, sentenced to death in February and July 1915 respectively.

Both men had been soldiers before the war, arriving at the Western Front when it was already entrenched. Both would find themselves on trial for the so-called ‘crime’ of desertion, the charge that resulted in by far the greatest number of death sentences and executions. Desertion was defined as an aggravated form of going absent without leave, ‘aggravated’ by the supposition that the person had had no intention of returning. In many cases the evidence for the latter was rather
shaky, and much depended on the whims of the officers sitting in court.

Harvey's and Coleman's units endured dreadful conditions during the winter of 1914-15. For months on end they were sent in and out of the line, yet were never out of artillery range. They experienced low intensity, but pretty constant, fighting across no-man's-land, although it was usually the cruel elements that were their fiercest enemy.

In both cases these conditions rapidly deteriorated just prior to the trial dates. For Harvey's unit weeks of comparatively low intensity fighting were followed by a sudden spike in casualties in late January, caused by a mutual mass shootout to celebrate the Kaiser's birthday. In Coleman's case, his unit was sent from a quieter part of the line to Ypres, where many of the factors that had already made the soldiers' lives hell were suddenly amplified: more shells, more casualties, longer spells in the line and shorter breaks.

It is impossible to know from the surviving evidence whether or not Harvey and Coleman had indeed intended to escape these conditions permanently. For all that we know they could simply have succumbed to drink and fallen foul of a patrol of military police (arguably the worst kind of copper there ever was). If they did try to desert, they were in all likelihood quickly arrested. The vast majority of overseas 'deserters' had no money, civilian clothes, paperwork or language skills, and did not get very far.

Both sentences were commuted, Coleman's to two years hard labour. Yet, it seems that neither did any time and Harvey's to two years hard labour. Evidence contained in many accounts of trench life suggests that sleeping while on sentry was more usually dealt with by an unceremonious kicking, followed by a spell of Field Punishment Number One. Thus, our question was not how Burton and Ball escaped a firing squad in order to be shot another day, but why their cases had been escalated to a court martial in the first place.

One explanation is that the army was fully aware that it was sending green troops to accomplish an extraordinarily difficult task, and seized the opportunity to reassert its absolute authority over the soldiers. Two death sentences within the first few days of active service would have made it abundantly clear to these fresh troops that they had to always remain disciplined, had to always do as they were told, regardless of what was being asked of them.

Passing out death sentences and executing soldiers was regarded as a necessary tool to maintain discipline. Conversely, however, any mutiny prosecution was itself a potential pressure point and a potential further exacerbation of already destabilising forces. It seems, therefore, unlikely that all mutinous behaviour led to prosecution. Thus, it is likely that the figure of 1,500 troops, including 65 of the Foresters in our sample, who were tried overseas on mutiny charges is an under-representation of the actual number of mutinous troops in the British Army.

Although legally rather vaguely defined, mutinies are at core incidents of collective indiscipline or insubordination. As such, many officers would not have wanted to advertise the fact that a unit under their command had become mutinous. Instead, they might

Overseas British forces charged with mutiny (Aug 1914-Aug 1922)

Spike in mid 1917 almost totally due to Kantara mutiny

have preferred other ways of dealing with such events, such as prosecuting on alternative charges. On other occasions officers simply made concessions, showing that this form of direct action can be seen as a continuation of the labour disputes and strikes to which many soldiers would have been well accustomed in their civilian lives.

There was a notable increase in mutiny trials from spring 1918. Yet, the war had fundamentally changed with the German Spring Offensive and most of the final mutinies were actually related to demobilisation delays after the Armistice.

The most noteworthy aspect of the mutiny prosecutions prior to 1918 is their rarity, especially for cases involving anything more than a tiny number of soldiers. Consequently, the charging of 64 Foresters in Kantara, a military base in Egypt, in June 1917, was exceptional. Indeed, this was by far the largest single mutiny prosecution to occur in the British Army before 1918. These Foresters were not a front line unit but were older soldiers and those recovering from injury or labouring and guarding installations. The war in the area revolved around British efforts to secure the vital Suez Canal by pushing eastwards across the Sinai and, eventually, beyond Jerusalem. By early 1917 they were stuck before Gaza and a few months of trench warfare ensued whilst the British prepared for another attack. During that time all troops and equipment were required to travel through Kantara base onto a railroad built through the desert, effectively the only supply line to that front. The crucial importance of Kantara was perhaps behind the decision to crack down hard when the 64 Foresters disobeyed an order. There was also the added complication that it would have been impossible to hush up such disobedience, involving so many people and in such a central location. The result was a mass trial on mutiny charges.

In the end all 64 Foresters were sentenced to two years of hard labour, although, as far as we know, they served only three weeks in an Alexandrian prison before their sentences were suspended. Afterwards, they were posted to a number of different units, and many found themselves in combat, where quite a few would be killed and others severely wounded.

Overall, it is striking that the war machines of the great powers kept going on and on and on for such a long time. Soldiers on all sides continued to charge into artillery barrages and machine gun fire, rather than turning their guns on their officers before departing for home. There are of course some very notable exceptions, including the eventual collapse of the Russian Empire, and methodological problems make it difficult to ascertain actual levels of unrest amongst rank and file troops. The British Army seems however, to have been remarkably successful in avoiding any serious breakdown of discipline, and it did so even though many foolish blunders led to one bloodbath after another.

It is thoroughly depressing, but unavoidable, to recognise the tragedy that this was in part because the vast majority of the troops consented to the war. This majority stayed disciplined and did as it was told. Consent and enthusiasm are, of course, very different things and consent was given increasingly grudgingly. It was, however, given. Consequently, and whilst there were many well documented examples of combat avoidance (‘live-and-let-live’), actual combat refusal was very rare. The examples of active disobedience found in some of the 103 Foresters’ cases are not unique, yet their comparative rarity makes it even more crucial that such stories are heard.

Military law enforcement was a bureaucratic tool used to uphold discipline, its implementation being influenced by concerns about manpower and maintaining consent. As such, the resultant appalling treatment of individuals was the consequence of the twisted, but in itself coherent, logic of those who rationalise and perpetuate the organised mass murder that is warfare.

Approaching military law enforcement in this way, rather than as immoral ‘injustices’, does not excuse the army. Instead, it demonstrates the insidious nature of both the institution and the wider political and economic system that enabled the slaughter of millions. Being part of a bureaucratic apparatus makes it so much easier for perfectly decent people to act with callous disregard towards fellow human beings, and, as demonstrated by the subsequent history of the 20th century, when taken to extremes this can have catastrophic results.

References


Further reading

This project remains years from completion. The primary research carried out is already extensive. However, daunting amounts of data still remain to be gathered and processed (let alone interpreted!), and life sometimes gets in the way of volunteer archive work.

Three lavishly-referenced pamphlets are available as free downloads from our blog (http://peopleshistreh.wordpress.com/103-foresters), and contain detailed investigations into the backgrounds and experiences of Harvey, Coleman, Ball, Burton and their comrades.
The people and the ponds: Why a nature conservation group undertook a heritage project in Mansfield

Shlomo and Josh Dowen, Forest Town Nature Conservation Group

When the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group worked with the community to purchase a local wildlife site in 2014 we were not just acquiring a popular location for dog walkers, horse riders, ramblers, cyclists and nature lovers, we were buying a heritage asset with a rich and largely unexplored history.

Introduction to Spa Ponds

The 4.6 hectares Spa Ponds site is situated off Clipstone Drive in Forest Town, Mansfield. Packman's Road, a bridleway that may have been an ancient trackway, runs through the site. Maps from the early 19th century show Packman's Road running from Leeming (‘Storth’) Lane in Mansfield Woodhouse (a suspected Roman road), along Spa Lane (a path through the Flood Dykes), over Packman’s Bridge, and then along the Spa Ponds site to Clipstone Drive, possibly continuing to Rainworth.1

‘Packers Puzzle’, situated just north of the bridge, was popular from the 1930s with the Mansfield CHA Rambling Club.2 Packman’s Puzzle might have been so named due to the area’s bogginess which made it a puzzle to navigate. According to someone who has visited Spa Ponds since the 1940s: ‘When it rained, the corner of the river on the other side to Spa Ponds which was wooded overflowed onto the path so you would need your wellies. This was called Packman’s Puzzle’.3

Spa Ponds is located at the lowest point of a valley, presumed to have been formed as part of a periglacial watercourse.4 The Local Wildlife Site currently contains a series of four ponds fed by natural underground springs arising out of the Bunter Sandstone.5

The Spa Ponds Heritage Project: Celebrating 700 years of history

2017 marked the 700th anniversary of the year medieval fish ponds would most likely have been constructed. In honour of this milestone we launched our Spa Ponds Heritage Project. The Forest Town Nature Conservation Group (FTNCG) worked alongside the wider community, supported by MB Archaeology and other experts, to produce a Heritage Management Plan that helps us understand and protect the site’s heritage value.7 As part of this HLF-funded pro-
ject we held meetings, workshops, on-site surveys, off-site expeditions, and public exhibitions. We looked through plenty of maps, drank many cups of tea, heard dozens of people’s memories of the site from the 1930s onwards, and discovered far more than we had expected about the site’s social, historic, archaeological and geological contexts.

Using social media, publically-displayed posters, local magazine articles and advertisements, we asked the community to share photographs and memories of Spa Ponds, also known locally as Gara Ponds due to its proximity to Garibaldi Plantation.

The response was fantastic, and included photographs showing the reconstruction of the ponds in the mid-1980s. These photos and first-hand accounts transformed our understanding of the magnitude of reconstruction efforts necessitated by subsidence resulting from nearby mining activity.

FTNCG volunteer Ann Childs trained five fellow volunteers in the skills and sensitivities required for taking, recording and analysing oral histories. This group recorded more than 20 people’s memories of Spa Ponds, and the analysis of these interviews is captured in the Living Reflections of Spa/"Gara" Ponds oral histories report.7

At a ‘Memories of Gara Ponds’ drop-in session one participant revealed she had snowdrops in her garden that had been rescued from near Spa Ponds several decades earlier, when the Duke of Portland’s Flood Dykes were dismantled. She dug up some of these snowdrops and they have now been returned to Spa Ponds!

Another contributor shared their account of a site clean-up at Spa Ponds in the 1990s when they were the site’s Wildlife Warden. His report provides some of the earliest photos we have of the natural springs that feed the ponds and provided drinking water to visitors.10

As part of the Heritage Project we worked with MB Archaeology’s Field Archaeologist David Astbury to interpret LiDAR maps of Spa Ponds.11 We identified interesting features that we then explored through ground truthing and non-intrusive landscape surveying.12

MB Archaeology’s local historian and community archaeologist Matt Beresford delivered workshops introducing Community Archaeology and History Research Skills, including map interpretation and archaeological fieldwork. Accounts of these are available in the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan13 and accompanying archaeological report.14

FTNCG volunteer Mark Fretwell has been recording trees at Spa Ponds for several years, and as part of the Heritage Project he shared what he had discovered about the natural history of the site, including taking us to some sweet chestnut trees that were saplings during the English Civil War.15

Author and archaeologist James Wright provided hand-holding support to visit the Nottinghamshire Archives, as well as delivering an inspiring day school exploring the site’s Mediaeval context.16 And we were taught to ‘read the landscape’ by geographer and hydrology expert Stephen Walker, who is involved with Moor Pond Wood (another Nottinghamshire site with archaeological and natural historical significance).

Drawing all of this together, in addition to the Heritage Management Plan and the Oral Histories Report, we produced a 12-page Chronology to share what we learnt about the history of Spa Ponds.17

Brief history of Spa Ponds

On the hill northeast of Spa Ponds is a Scheduled Monument referred to since the 1800s as ‘the remains of Beeston Lodge’.18 It is understood the original stone structure was part of the historic Clipstone Park and Peel. It is speculated that the hill may have been the site of an earlier settlement, possibly an Iron Age hillfort.19

When Revd Edward Downman surveyed these ruins in 1911 he observed that ‘this work is apparently that of a mote castle’ and recorded finding one ditch and two ramparts. Downman stated: ‘There is a block of masonry of rubble work on the site of the inner rampart, which may have continued round as a wall of considerable thickness’. He also noted...
a possible interpretation of the site as having been a pre-Norman stronghold prior to its Medieval use associated with Clipstone Park.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1178 Henry II ordered the creation of Clipstone Park as a royal deer park to the south-west of the King's Houses at Clipstone. In 1316 Edward II expanded the Park to the south-west (encroaching on common land of Mansfield Woodhouse in the vicinity of Spa Ponds) and ordered the creation of a peel (an area enclosed by strong wooden fence and ditch) in this new area.\textsuperscript{21}

The Peel is thought to have served as a ‘bolt hole’ for Edward II as it was built in a time of political turmoil between him and his cousin Thomas, Earl of Lancaster.\textsuperscript{22} The Clipstone Peel complex included farmland, a great gate and gatehouse, houses, military equipment, a chapel, and sheds for sheep and cattle.\textsuperscript{23}

In January 1317 the men of Mansfield Woodhouse presented a petition complaining about the enclosure in the Park of ‘les Holms’ and about the loss of important common land and the loss of the right to take wood from that part of the forest.\textsuperscript{24}

The petition called for the return of land, later described as pasture in Woodhouse Wood, that amounted to at least 200 timbered acres and 100 acres of waste.\textsuperscript{25} The King refused to give back the land, but conceded that they would not be penalised if their beasts entered the ‘new assart’ because of gaps in the enclosure.

Historic documents indicate that in Autumn 1318 Edward II lodged at the Peel rather than the more luxurious King’s Houses.\textsuperscript{26} In 1328 Edward III finally agreed to the removal of ditches and hedges enclosing the area outside the Park boundary and to the restoration of the common rights over it. In return, petitioners relinquished their claim to the part of the wood recently taken into the Park proper.\textsuperscript{27}

It is unclear whether, during the 11 years of the Clipstone Peel’s existence, Spa Ponds was part of the extension enclosed by palings, the area that was hedged and ditched, or a mixture of these. It seems to us that there would have been strategic reasons to secure access to the spring and ponds for the King’s use.

Spa Ponds is within the vicinity of various sites referred to in historic documents such as ‘les Holms’, Woodhouse Wood, and ‘peel water’,\textsuperscript{28} but the documents do not conclusively explain the role of the Spa Ponds site before, during and after the Peel.

Speculation regarding medieval uses of the springs include: as fish ponds to supplement food stores during a time of famine;\textsuperscript{29} as a tributary to the River Maun and/or to irrigate nearby fields;\textsuperscript{30} and/or as a holy well.\textsuperscript{31}

Royal ownership of the area persisted until 1603 when James I granted Clipstone to Charles Blount.\textsuperscript{32} Clipstone Park and environs was subsequently bought by William Cavendish in 1630. Cavendish, a Royalist, fled to France during the English Civil War. During the War nearly all of Clipstone Park’s trees were felled for use as timber for ships and charcoal for forges. When Cavendish returned to England in 1660, upset by the damage done to Clipstone Park, he decided to restock and repair the Park.\textsuperscript{33}

George Sanderson’s Map of 1835, produced when the 4th Duke of Portland owned the land, shows the site with two ponds and sluices thought to be part of the Duke’s extensive Flood Dyke system.

The 6th Duke of Portland died in 1943, and in 1945 tenant farmer Edmund Shaw Browne bought Spa Ponds as part of the sale of the Duke’s estate. The site remained in the Shaw Browne family’s possession until it was bought by the Forest Town Nature Conservation Group in 2014. Spa Ponds has gone full circle, from communal ownership to Royal and aristocratic ownership and eventually back to the community, who are committed to enhancing the site’s biodiversity whilst honouring its heritage.
References:

2. Sanderson's Map (1835); and the Tithe Map of 1845
5. Also known as ‘Nottingham Castle Sandstone’
7. Available as Appendix B of the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan
8. Appendix D of the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan
9. Available as Appendix D of the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan
11. Appendices C and E of the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan
12. Appendix H of the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan
13. Appendix C of the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan
14. Appendices H and F of the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan
16. Appendix A of the Spa Ponds Heritage Management Plan
17. OS Map 1875–1884; and Sanderson’s Map (1835); and the Tithe Map of 1845
21. Further details are included in the works of David Crook and James Wright.
27. Crook, D (1976), op. cit., p40; and Wright, J (2016), op. cit.
Fieldwork training with Matt Beresford who oversaw the community carrying out a profile survey of Packman’s Road at Spa Ponds. June 2018

Spa Ponds Heritage Project exhibition at the Great Notts History Fair May 2017