

POSTCARDS, PEOPLE, PLACES AND PUBLIC ART

The March meeting was not the one advertised. Brian Elliott commented that he was a substitute – after being contacted by the Programme Secretary, Les Walker. Last time Brian came he brought a visual aid and he thought he had better keep up the tradition. He produced what he called a miniature version of public art – an underrated aspect of local and family history not often mentioned or talked about. It was a miner's lamp with a miner on top. Inside the flame area was an old miner cramped down at the coal face with a shovel, stripped to the waist showing the muscles of his back, his clogs and so on. Brian said there is a modern version of a miner standing on top of a miner's lamp, again stripped to the waist but he had got a helmet on and was wearing a self rescuer and battery for his cap lamp etc. It is sited outside a supermarket in Hucknall, Nottinghamshire and stands 20 -30 feet high. It is a fantastic piece of art. The most well known public work of art in this area is at Meadowhall and was commissioned in the 80s. The composition is called "The Teemers", a celebration of crucible steel making in Sheffield. One chap teeming the red hot metal is gripping a wet cloth or towel in his teeth because of the intense heat. There should also have been a boy but political correctness deemed it wrong to depict child labour.

Brian moved on to show slides of old picture postcards and said they could be used to make family history more interesting. The first was of the Clarence Hotel in 1912, the official offices of Barnsley Football Club. The National Telephone No. 320 could be seen. Obviously not many people had telephones in those days! Another slide was of a Barnsley Cup tie at Oakwell probably later than 1912. It showed spectators in a variety of hats and caps, there was a chauffeur and one or two ladies. It was social history. Wombwell High Street in 1905 showed the Town Hall, a pawn broker's shop, Hansom cabs, a boy selling newspapers etc. There was fantastic detail and information not normally available. Photographers encouraged people to be on photographs. It made the scene more interesting and people on it would buy the postcard.

Brian reminded members not to forget the oral aspect. One lady he met aged 102 remembered the old school song she sang 95 years earlier. Brian bought a school photograph from a box of postcards on sale in Leeds of Hemingfield (near Wombwell) infants. A local newspaper agreed to print it. A lady recognised herself and could name everyone in the class of 1924. A friend she had not met for 75 years also responded and Brian had a photograph of their reunion. It meant so much for these ladies to meet again and that is what it is all about, brought together by a photograph.

After the war, memorials were erected, paid for by public subscription. Postcards were produced when they were unveiled and dedicated. 15,000-20,000 people attended these events. They are well documented in newspapers of the time.

Brian showed a slide of Arthur Wharton's gravestone. He was a world record sprinter born in Accra in 1885. He died in Edlington (Doncaster) in 1930. The legend on the gravestone stated he was an athlete who ran like an express train with full steam and that he was also a footballer. Corner shops used to be important. They were little extensions of houses. There was no indication that one was a shop apart from the Brooke Bond Tea

sign on the wall. Brian also showed the Co-op and could still remember his 'divvy' number. The most famous shop in Doncaster was Parkinson's in High Street. Started in 1817, Doncaster Butterscotch was world famous. It was hand made and hand wrapped. Brian said we need to raise our eyes to see interesting detail on old buildings.

People came together at street parties to celebrate Royal Weddings and Jubilees. 'Long Live the King' and overprinted 'Long Live the Queen' could still be seen painted on the brickwork of a terraced house on one postcard. People came together on Hospital Sundays to raise money. Brian covered many different aspects of people, places and public art and concluded by saying postcards gave important local and family history.

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