

A Trip Down Memory Lane

Report of an occurrence at the D&DFHS Monthly Meeting 28 January 2009

Mabel at the Seaside - Representatives from the National Coal Mining Museum.

We had a great turnout for our January FHS meeting where a packed house roared with laughter at the antics of Mabel and Malcolm. A little different from our usual speakers, these two representatives of the National Coal Mining Museum took us on a trip down memory lane. Mabel Lockwood was a housewife living in the shadow of Caphouse colliery, near Wakefield, in 1949. As if by magic she appeared among us, wearing her 1949 outfit, and told us about the time her family had gone to the seaside. She had brought her husband, Walter, with her, but her children Harold and Elsie had been left at home. That did not matter because some “volunteers” (and I use that term loosely!) from the audience tried their hand at amateur dramatics and took the place of the children.

Caphouse colliery was a working mine until 1985 and in 1949, most of the families of the men who worked there lived in two up, two down, terraced houses. The ground floor consisted of a kitchen and a parlour, and two bedrooms upstairs. Most of the men in the audience empathised with Harold, chastised by his mother for being a “muck magnet” as he looked forward to getting his first pair of long trousers when he would start work at the age of 15. They cringed at the reminder of the goose grease vests they wore and the Christmas capon that lasted seven days before the bones were boiled for soup.

A visit to the seaside was usually a community affair. The Welfare Club day trip was the highlight of the year. Everyone piled on to a charabang (a coach) with spam sandwiches, spare pants and drinks (a crate of brown ale for the men and a crate of dandelion and burdock pop for the children) and went off to Morecombe. Our budding actors and actresses were kitted out with suitable clothing. Harold was the lucky one. He was given a bucket and spade, then a label was fastened around his neck. This had his name written on, plus the time and place that the coach was leaving – just in case he got lost!.

We laughed as we recalled swimming costumes that hung down to the knees as soon as they got wet and the rubber swimming hats covered in rubber flowers. I have never heard of “how to make your own liquorish drink” before, but my husband confirmed that he knew the recipe well. All it took was a jar of water with some well-chewed liquorice root dropped inside and then give it a good shake. Leave it a few days and it was ready to drink. Remember, there was still rationing in 1949 and people were inventive. We re-lived roller-skating on the pier, paddling in the sea and listening to the band.

More “volunteers” were found to help with the grand finale. This was the story of the lion and Albert (a monologue written by Marriot Edgar in 1932). It began

There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool
That's noted for fresh air and fun
And Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom
Went there with young Albert, their son ...

A brilliant monologue, well acted by all involved. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening - even those who took part! We are hoping to book Mabel and Malcolm to come and talk to us again next year.

Karen Walker
Editor
The Doncaster Ancestor