RAMSBOTTOM HERITAGE SOCIETY

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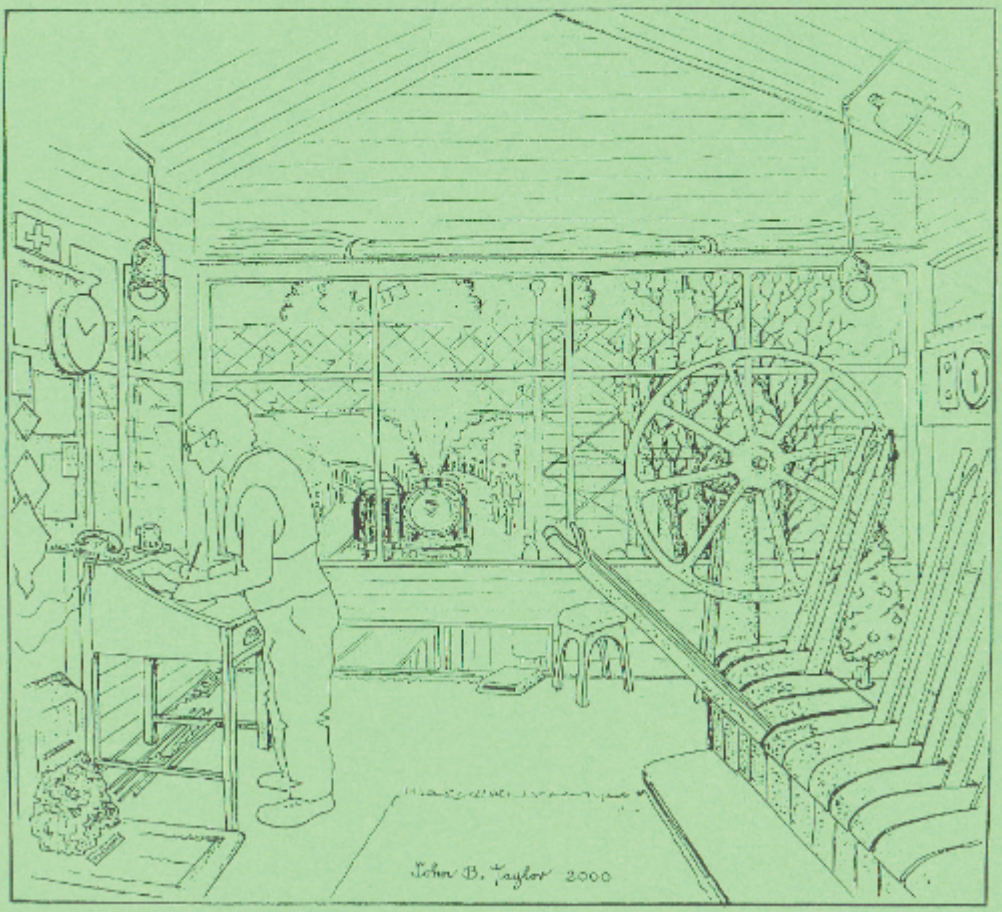

NEWS MAGAZINE

RAMSBOTTOM HERITAGE SOCIETY

THE HERITAGE CENTRE

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Telephone: RAMSBOTTOM (01706) 821603

The objects of the Society shall be:-

a) To advance education of the public, by creating an awareness of and interest in the study of the history and heritage of Ramsbottom (as defined by the boundaries of the pre-1974 Ramsbottom Urban District Council).

b) To locate relevant documents, records and artefacts. To retain, catalogue and/or copy them where possible, and to operate as an information centre.

c) To seek to protect the heritage of Ramsbottom.

2000 PROGRAMME

16th March	*Photographic Competition* judged by Mrs Clare Altham
19thApril	*Pace Egging in Lancashire* - Mr Alan Seymour
17th May	AGM; + Mr Ray Mercer, *The Hey House Renovation*
21st June	Dr Mary C Higham, *Medieval Parks in the North West*

All indoor meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month in the Civic Hall, Market Place, Ramsbottom, at 7.30pm.

Entry by donation, please.

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FRONT COVER - Ramsbottom Station Signal Box, 2nd January 2000. Drawn by John Taylor of Stacksteads

RAMSBOTTOM MISCELLANEA

Millennium Festival, 17th - 24th June 2000 - integrated with Ramsbottom Sports Week, this spectacular once-in-a-lifetime festival will feature a cherished vehicle show, an outdoor stage with full professional lighting and sound to present a Silver band, a local rock group, children from eight schools performing historical re-enactments and musical items whilst the Youth Theatre and School of Dance will stage excerpts from recent productions. The host will be BBC presenter Martin HENFIELD. There will be an all day bar and refreshments in the Civic Hall, displays, face painting, a town crier, Bippo our local clown. In the evening, a Young Clubbers event will be staged in the Civic Hall, whilst live jazz will feature in the Grant Arms. There will be a special open evening at the Heritage Centre on Wednesday 21st June, with eminent medieval archaeologist Dr Mary HIGHAM as guest speaker.

The Society has been awarded a Lottery Grant of £4,324.00 towards the costs. Eight months of quiet, hard work have already taken place. For those taking part, helping behind the scenes, or visiting our town, the Festival will be an enormously exciting event, likely to become part of the lore of the town - it will raise the Society's profile, get us new members and draw many more visitors into the Heritage Centre. Please pitch in as this needs to be a truly communal effort! A meeting will be arranged soon, at which the full programme will be unveiled. Your comments - and help - will be vital.

Celebrations on Holcombe Hill - it is interesting how often Holcombe Hill figures in our town's celebration of key national events. Good Friday is the obvious one, but there have been two in recent months which have brought this fact home to me. Like hundreds of other local people, our family headed up the Hill on Wednesday 11th August 1999, to observe the 2 minutes 20 seconds of 90% solar eclipse starting at 11-1 lam, the first since that of 1927 to be visible from here. Lots of children, usually with filters to look through, or pin hole cards to see the sun's reflection. The sky was completely clear, but the only sensation of darkness was an eerie murk, like one of those deliberately underdeveloped portions of a 1960s film clearly taken in strong sunlight (hence the shadows) but supposed to be a night scene. 'I'm cold!' shivered Eleanor. 'Changed my life! ' said one woman sarcastically, as we made our way down.

My neighbour on Bolton Street had probably been up there in 1927, but when on Christmas Day we spoke about the forthcoming communal bonfire planned for New Year's Eve, his memories were of'a hell of a procession' up Lumb Carr Road, on the occasion of the coronation of George VI (193 7). It had been a lovely evening, and a band accompanied - there were rover scouts (playing bugles and drums), guides and cubs, and most of the local schoolchildren. The mayor and various councillors officiated at the proceedings, and a bonfire was lit just in front of the Tower, followed by a fireworks display. 'Andy HURST, Teddy TOWERS,' my informant mused, 'we were at that age when we quietly got back in the gloom and had some bottles of beer when we shouldn't have!' I have a feeling that rather more than a few bottles of beer got drunk the following Friday night. My brother and I this time were the only family members to set out on that gloomy, drizzle-soaked last evening of the 1900s to attend the so-called Millennium Bonfire. The powerful illuminating lights around Emmanuel Church struggled to make any impression against that all-pervading low cloud. More cars in Holcombe Village than I had ever seen, stretching way down Lumb Carr Road. Chapel Lane snarled up. A refreshments van and a great pile of cardboard boxes by the Shoulder of Mutton car park, soggy and disintegrating - had contained hundreds of wax candle-torches. A great throng on Cross Lane, all very good humoured - most going up, but many struggling against the human tide to come down. Pinpoints of candle light and beams from every size of torch moved up the hillside track, churned into yellowy brown liquid mud by the rain and thousands of feet. Mud spattered trousers, everyone in anoraks, many under every type of umbrella, and lots of toddlers cocooned in polythene as their parents struggled with buggies. Discarded cans and bottles at every few paces. Snatches of mobile phone conversation. As many people pushing past each other as on the busiest Saturday morning on Bridge Street. An ocean of people standing on the banks near the Tower, faces glinting in the drizzle and its huge lights, though only its great plinth visible, the rest lost in cloud. Impossible to get within 30 yards of the massive bonfire stack, which had been visible all day from the town centre. Easily two thousand up there, when it was lit soon after 9:00pm. Orange tongues licking intermittently up out of the smoke, reflecting in the gloom. Red diddy-men hats with 2000 digits in white.

Just two hours of the 1900s left - we slurried back down, against the still oncoming crowds, the fire was lost in the cloud, and the first firework went off, as intense as a quarry being dynamited. The air and ground quivered. Wire fence by the path, flashes, it tat tats and booms of further explosions, lighting up parts of the hillside -1 could believe we were back at the other end of the century, near Ypres.

Society Collection - this is now housed at Bury Archives, but we still welcome donations of documentary/photographic items (not artefact, please - they belong in the Museum), provided they relate to the pre-1974 Ramsbottom UDC area, viz Ramsbottom, Holcombe, Holcombe Brook, Edenfield, Turn, Shuttleworth and Summerseat. A donor release form must be completed and signed, and countersigned by a Centre keyholder. Barbara Park has kindly offered to run this system, a role performed tirelessly by Brenda Decent until last year. Thanks, Brenda and Barbara.

Subscriptions - an extraordinary general meeting of the Society in November 1999 determined that rates should rise as of the new membership year beginning 1st April 2000. This modest increase means that the following rates now apply:

Individual Membership costs £7.00 (£4.00 OAPs, Students and the Unwaged)

Family/Group Membership costs £11.00 (£6.00 concessionary)

Andrew Todd

A CHILD'S EYE VIEW OF BYE ROAD AND SHUTTLEWORTH IN THE 1930s

I read with interest Bill ROBERTS' piece in Ramsbottom Reminiscences 2 (1996). I too lived on Bye Road, Shuttleworth, spending the first decade of my life - 1928 to 1938 - at No 19. I was the only child of Charlie and Annie LIPTROTT, though Dad's widowed sister Lucy (LAMB), lived further down at No 38. She had eight children, but Dad was 46 when I was born, she was even older, so there was a big age gap between my cousins and myself and some had already 'flown the nest'.

I well remember the families who lived in our row - LLOYD, JONES, LEACH, McCORMICK, us and DRIVER. The site is now grassed over, as if our demolished houses never existed. They were already condemned when we lived there. In common with most of Bye Road they were completely basic - two up, two down. We had gas lighting downstairs, made do with candles upstairs, our lavatories were outside and of the non-flushing kind. We were plagued with 'black-jacks', enormous and revolting with their shiny, shell-like backs. The houses in our row shared a small back yard with the next door neighbours, and this led out into a bigger yard (we called it the 'big back') shared with houses fronting onto Whalley Road. Bye Road houses were on varying levels, mostly above the road, but ours were below road level, with a long step running the length of the row. We used to sit on this step, chattering and playing with such toys as we had. We were always there on Christmas morning, after Father Christmas had been, comparing notes and showing off.

The Depression hit us all as the '30s wore on. The mill at the bottom of the road, where many local people had been employed, had by then closed down and was gradually falling into disrepair. When I was little, Dad worked at the Fletcher Bank Quarry. At tea time I used to wait for him at the top of Bye Road and he would carry me home on his shoulders, but in 1935 he was 'laid off. He then spent his time either with the growing number of men who stood aimlessly at the street comer, or else playing dominoes and crib in the Club down Spring Street.

Some outsiders saw us as a rough and ready lot. Perhaps we were, but privation can bring out the best in people living in a close-knit community like ours. Our mothers were determinedly house-proud, so our stone flagged floors were constantly scrubbed, our doorsteps donkey-stoned, our windows polished until they gleamed, and the children were well cared for and happy there. Bye Road was a wonderful playground for children, with all its nooks and crannies, alleyways, big backs and little backs. The houses were nearly all terraced, with front doors opening onto the pavement, and it was a joy on a winter's night to play 'knock the door and run away', disappearing into the darkness before

the unfortunate householder had risen from his chair. The landing was ideal for a quick escape because there were steps at either end.

Another winter game was ' Bobbie, Bobbie, show your light'. One child would run off to hide, carrying a concealed jar containing a lit candle. We would all shout out: 'Bobbie, Bobbie, show your light' and he, or she, would wave the jar in the air before concealing it again and making off while we searched. Torches overtook candles eventually - they must have been a great deal safer!

All the children joined hands for the big 'round' games in the street. We sang, as we circled, such ditties as: 'the wind, the wind, the wind blows high; it blows Freda LIPTROTT (or whoever) across the sky.' The round games always took place by the light of Hilda PRESTON's chip shop. Unfortunately, our house was close to the chippy. At 8.00pm prompt my mother would appear at her door shouting for me to go home to bed, and she started the other mothers off. There was always the threat that Boney or the Bogey Man would get us if we didn't obey. I know that Boney was BONAPARTE, but who on earth was the Bogey Man? Whoever he was he terrified us.

One night when we were out playing we saw the Aurora Borealis and watched, mesmerised, as the glorious colours flickered about the sky.

According to season we played whip and top, hoops, rounders and marbles with real glass alleys - always with our eyes on the prized 'blood alley'. We played 'tig' (known in other parts of the country as 'tag' or 'he'). Skipping seemed to go on through winter and summer to a variety of chants. A topical one in the mid-193 Os was 'Who's that walking down the street? Mrs SIMPSON's cheesy feet!.'

We always played in the road because there wasn't much traffic, particularly now that the mill was closed, apart from a few delivery vehicles, BROOKs' ice cream van, which toiled up from Ramsbottom in the summer, and occasionally the red open- topped roadster, driven down from Turn by 'Little Gilbert' which fascinated the boys.

Sometimes, during the summer holidays, I went with Enid LEACH up to SEDGE WICK's farm, where her father worked. There we collected eggs, helped (?) with haymaking and, if we were lucky, were given a lift on the horse drawn milk float. Usually though, we spent our time in the brook up The Croft. I paddled there for hours with Enid, Doreen JONES, Teddy WHITTLES, Donald BARKER, Albert ROTHWELL and others. We had picnics on the slopes above, roly-polying down when the mood took us. The sun always shone, of course, Blackpool could only have been second best.

We were forbidden by our parents to go too far up The Croft on our own, for fear of John Willy (I think he was a tramp who lived on the moors) and also for fear of the lodges. Older lads used to jump in for a swim on hot summer days, and there had been several fatalities. Unwanted animals were also thrown in to drown. We went up, but the lodges were indeed, and probably still are, frightening - glassy, dark and deep. Another forbidden place was the bank at the top of Richard Street. I only climbed it once and found to my horror that I was looking a long, long way down into a quarry pit with slimy green water at the

bottom. I wished I hadn't disobeyed instructions because I suffered from secret nightmares afterwards.

Bye Road contained a surprising number of shops - starting with the Co-op on one comer and the Post Office on the other (before it moved up Whalley Road). There was the chip shop (the centre of our small universe), CASSLEY's potato pie shop, and several shops which seemed - to a child's eye - to sell nothing but toffees. And although we had a Co-op, the DRIVERS next door to us also had a little grocery shop in their front room.

One of my all-abiding memories is of the clogs, clattering on the setts. They started early in the morning, in pitch darkness during winter months, as the women (and it was usually women who worked at those looms still operating) left for the Ramsbottom mills. One pair of clogs to begin with, followed by another, and another, until the noise built up to a crescendo, slowly subsiding until all was silent. At schooltime it started again, with my clogs part of the general clatter. And when we came home from our labours so did the clogs. The clogger (another shop in Bye Road) must have done a roaring trade.

I remember too a visit from the Britannia Coconut Clog Dancers of Bacup, prancing up and down with their coloured flowing ribbons and blackened faces - fearsome yet tremendously exciting. All visiting entertainers performed in the road outside our house because we faced Richard Street as well as the chip shop. The Salvation Army often appeared on Sunday nights, and brass (or was it silver?) bands came up from Ramsbottom on New Year's Day.

Facing Richard Street had its drawbacks. Those outside privvies had to be periodically emptied, and that's where the night soil cart (or 'muck cart' to use the local term) came into its own. On one infamous occasion, before my time, it was proceeding steadily up Richard Street, heavily laden, when the back fell off!

Returning to the subject of entertainment - we children had our own musical custom, pace-egging. Pace-egging goes back to pagan times, but the words of our song probably go no further than the 19th Century. I've sent a copy to Heritage Society (complete with my attempt at the tune) and it is now in the Collection. For our performance we too blackened our faces and begged or borrowed our fathers' old shirts. We sang our way from door to door, including the big house (I think it was called Spring Bank) in Whalley Road - where they actually had maids to answer the door - hoping for small monetary contributions, and we were rarely disappointed. Ha'pennies meant a lot to us in those days. And to the givers.

I received no pocket money from my parents, so I went into business. When the women came home from work, tired and hungry, I used to run up and down the road crying: 'Can I get your chips?' I had two or three regular customers and it proved quite lucrative because the wage was either a ha'penny or penny, or a chip butty made with shop-bought bread. This was a great treat for a child whose mother insisted on making her own bread. It seems incredible now to recall that I turned my nose up at delicious home baked bread but, as the saying goes, 'familiarity breeds contempt'.

When I was four years old my grandfather, Herbert LIPTROTT, died in Jericho Hospital, Bury, at the age of 84. His open coffin was laid out in our front room table and people came to

'pay their last respects'. I had never met him, but we had a large photograph of him dominating our front room wall, and as his coffin lay there I surreptitiously crept in to gaze at his face, in death, stroking his beard quite fearlessly. Funerals were many in those days - some families were decimated by tuberculosis - and even if you were Chapel (as we were) you were always christened and buried by the Church. My father and his nephews, all 'six-footers', were invariably called upon to be pall bearers, and Dad kept a bowler hat and black tie especially for this purpose. So they headed our funeral procession, carrying granddad's coffin on their shoulders, up Bye Road and Whalley Road to St John's Church and, after the service, over the road to the graveyard. He was buried in an unmarked grave - we couldn't afford a gravestone - but although 66 years have passed, I could find it now. That was the first time I'd ever set foot in a graveyard but I felt quite at home because I'd been told that a lot of people I had known were there too. I became a regular, if solitary, visitor, thoroughly enjoying the sight and smell of the flowers. Flowers were a luxury to us.

Mum and I faithfully attended Bank Lane Baptist Chapel twice every Sunday. I've still got two of the books I received for good attendance - Alice in Wonderland and The House in the Little Green Wood, both signed by Elders of the Chapel, Gilbert HOLT and Tom FIELDING. A book I did not keep was Down the Snow Stairs by Alice B CORCORAN, with its drawings of nasty little hobgoblins lurking on the stairs and waiting to catch me if I fell and do me to death if I'd been naughty. And we complain about the horrors fed to our children and grandchildren now!

We had some wonderful times at Chapel. I particularly remember the New Year concerts. We laboriously rehearsed for months beforehand. Mum made the costumes and there was much coming and going for fittings. The great day arrived, and after a high tea of ham and pickles we were up on the stage at last, behind the footlights, with the smell of the grease paint and the roar of the crowds. Well, perhaps I'm exaggerating about the crowds. But we were clapped and cheered heartily, and inspired to go on a tour of other chapels. We performed at Park, and Patmos, and I'm sure they enjoyed our musical gems such as: 'River Stay Away from my Door' and our recitations - for example my solo about Baby Jesus: 'He had 10 tiny fingers and 10 tiny toes.'

The Whit Walks were also a highlight of our year. We marched through the streets of Shuttleworth behind the band, queen and princesses, resplendent in our new frocks, waving importantly to our public. Afterwards we repaired to the field near our Chapel for games and refreshments.

The starting age at Peel Brow School was four years old, and we went first of all into Miss ELSBY's nursery class. We all loved the 'Jungle Him' and rocking horse. We had our own band but, much to my annoyance, although I yearned to play the tambourine, I was never promoted beyond the triangle. When we reached our fifth birthday we each had a party, complete with table fireworks. Then we moved up to Miss FOSTER'S class and real work commenced.

When I first started school we had a cinder playground. Can you imagine - cinders for children to play on! I was forever going home with bloodied knees and I've still got the

scars. Later, the playground was concreted over, and this was great for 'sparking' our clogs.

I was an only child and thoroughly molly-coddled by my mother. In winter I was probably the most-dressed child in school with my woollen vest, combinations, liberty bodice, jumper, gymslip and woollen stockings. Not only did I feel positively indecent, stripping down to my vest and knickers, but it took me ages to get there!

Despite all Mum's efforts I suffered bouts of illness, and late in 19371 went down with the dreaded diphtheria. There was an epidemic throughout Lancashire but somehow, until then, it had missed Shuttleworth. I was rushed into the Florence Nightingale Isolation Hospital, Bury, in an ambulance with two other children from further afield, as it was so rife. Bye Road people blamed the tap water which, so I was told later, came out a 'funny brown colour', and long afterwards they collected their drinking water from Sally Well, a spring at the bottom of the road. Why 'Sally' I wonder?

My stay in hospital lasted five weeks. There was a suspicion that I might also have caught scarlet fever, so 1 ended up doubly isolated, in a tiny bedroom all alone. This was well before the NHS so I don't know whether my parents had to contribute towards the cost of my treatment and, if so, where the money came from. They could seldom afford the bus fare to visit the hospital, but even when they did they were only allowed to view me through a plate glass window. But the worst part for me was the food. Unless relatives paid extra for food we existed on a basic and monotonous diet. Every day, for five weeks, we had stodgy porridge for breakfast, stew and rice pudding for dinner, bread and jam for tea. All served on battered tin plates.

Tragically, whilst I was incarcerated, one of my friends, Jean LLOYD, died of meningitis. I will always remember her version of the popular song 'Go to sleep my little piccaninny', which went: 'Go to sleep my little pinky ticket.'

When I returned to school, still feeling frail, there was a big diphtheria immunisation campaign in progress. We all had to be immunised. My protests that I had only just had the wretched disease fell on deaf ears. My arm was grabbed and in went the needle. I was justifiably indignant.

If my memory served me correctly, my father's dole money was 26s 0d a week -10s 0d per adult and 6s 0d per child. Mum's sisters used to send her their old clothes which she duly cut up and re-made for me. I longed to have a brand new dress 'off the peg'. She struggled to improve our lot by taking in washing and sewing, but she was anaemic and her health deteriorated. She was a southerner, having been brought up in Southampton (she and Dad first met when he was stationed there during the First World War) and her relatives started to plead with Dad to let us move down there to live. He was not enamoured of the South. We had all heard about the Edenfield family who won the pools, went off to the New Forest for a holiday and returned in double quick time complaining that it was 'nowt but grass and trees'. As Dad spent most of his army life on Salisbury Plain and Southampton Common he tended to agree with them. However, in 1938 he gave up the struggle and we moved to the bustling sea port where a job had already been found for him on the Docks. It seemed to me to be a noisy, unfriendly place. The streets were swarming with foreigners.

I couldn't even understand the locals and they certainly couldn't understand me. A far cry from Shuttle worth, where everyone knew everyone else. I'll never forget my happy, and in some ways quite unique childhood, and my roots will remain in Bye Road.

Freda Molyneux (nee Liptrott)

MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS: SOME IDEAS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

This is in the nature of a request - a request for you to venture out more with your camera and take more photographs. Despite having used a camera since I was knee high to a tripod, I have a great many regrets for all those missed opportunities I let slip through my grasp. There are photographs and photographs, and a good deal of mine (and my father's) early attempts, although technically proficient are now almost meaningless to me.

Imagine, for instance, you are going away on holiday - when is the first time you will use your camera ? More often than not it will remain tucked away in its case until you are firmly ensconced on a beach somewhere feeding endless ice creams to your ever hungry offspring. I have many a shot of myself in exactly this situation. Yes they are quite good photographs, but now, four decades after they were taken, what exactly are they photographs of ? A young boy, obviously me, sat in the sand with his back to a brick wall. They could have been taken anywhere, in a builders yard within a mile of my own home, for all I know. How much nicer it would have been if a recognisable building had been carefully "posed' in the background . Possibly the lifeboat house or perhaps a theatre with placards of weekly events strategically placed ? Anything really that will pinpoint the exact location for future reference. And why wait until you are on the beach? How well I remember my own childhood holidays in the 1950 s . One of our favourite destinations was Rhyl on the north Wales coast. Even our family, all avid photographers, committed the cardinal sin of not using our cameras until we were settled into our new surroundings. How I wish we'd taken shots of our journey there and back. Setting off from home with my father struggling under the weight of our suitcases. Arriving at Ramsbottom Station where my 70 year old grandmother, still working full time as a cleaner, would stand under the large clock alongside the platform indicator boards, waiting to wave us all off. What a memorable picture that would have made, taken from inside of the train with ourselves looking out - not just a family portrait but a record of the station and its staff as it was many years ago. Then we set off, passing through all those stations with the strange sounding names which were magic to me as a child. Besses o'th' Barn and Mickle Trafford were always a couple of my favourites. Then came the refreshment trolleys, rattling up the platform towards our carriage and our purchases being handed to us through the sliding top windows. Cartons of orange juice with tiny windows to force your straws through, if you didn't bend them in six places first in the attempt. I often wonder what would have happened if the train had set off while we were still paying our dues, or, worse still, waiting for our change. But what a wonderful memory a photograph of that scene would have made. My recollections are fading now of all those stations displays with huge glass cases containing giant model ocean liners, of the posters and milk chum laden trolleys adorning the platform. All gone-never to be seen again. And those large red machines with the giant

'hour- hand' that you could turn to the letter of your choice, and by swinging on a long lever, stamp out your name on a thin strip of metal, all for only one penny.

Eventually, when we arrived at our destination, and stepped out onto Rhyl platform, the engine driver would give us all a cheery wave-another picture opportunity missed. Spilling outside into the warm sunshine, practically guaranteed in those days, we'd be met by the screams of the gulls overhead and the cries of the local barrow boys, 'Carry your cases, sir?' For the princely sum of sixpence my father was relieved of our luggage until we reached our holiday home on the sea front. What a wonderful picture that would have made, and another piece of history we don't think of at the time. These sort of photos mean much more in later life than young So-and-so posed on front of a deck chair somewhere in Southend.

A few shots of street scenes or of the locals going about their daily business would not go amiss-reminders in future years of the shop fronts and the transport and dress of the time. It all adds to the atmosphere of your holiday.

So too with snaps taken at home for your family album. I have photographs of myself in my school uniform in our back garden which now seem almost mundane, but the ones taken of me in the house doing my homework are something else. Sprawled on the carpet with a bowl of "cherry-lips" (one of my favourite sweets, I'm told, from decades ago). Newspapers thrown on a nearby chair, all the paraphernalia of the '50s lying around the room, and no TV! Only our faithful valve radio in the comer standing next to a large first aid cabinet my father made before I was born. I still have both of these, and what's more the radio still works! I've lost count of the times I've poured over this particular photograph until a hand lens straining to read a date or a headline on the newspapers to give me a clue as to when it was taken. How much more meaningful if it had been on the back of the print in the first place .

I can remember a few of the photographs actually being taken. Electronic flash was still in the future and we had to make do with the old magnesium filled bulbs slotted into a six inch aluminium reflector - another item I still own. As children, the brilliant flash followed by the crackle and hiss of the bulb cooling down amused us no end. Flash shots, though, were few and far between, largely due to the expense of the bulbs. They used to have blue spots of chemical inside them, and if this ever turned pink it meant that air had leaked inside and the bulb was not to be used. I'm reminded one time of my delight at eventually finding one of these 'pink' bulbs and then attempting to find out the reason. The loud explosion as I tried the shutter and the cascade of glass which powdered the entire room gave me my answer. Luckily no- one was hurt, but how much easier it is in this age of compact electronic cameras to reproduce what we had to struggle to achieve then. Even the film in those days was limited to bright daylight. Nowadays, however, there is no excuse. High speed film, colours easily obtainable and at a cheaper price than black and white, and wonders of wonders - the video. Not only a moving picture but stunning sound too. And if you don't like your first attempts you simply record over them and try again. There is absolutely no reason any more for not going out and making a record of everything in sight. Not even the weather should dampen your sprits. We've all had the

experience, huddled together under a shop awning or doorway shivering in a torrential summer downpour and cursing the moment we ever set foot in the place. The last thing we'd think of is to record it on film, but I'm certain, in our later years, just such an image would bring a smile to the face of even the hardiest of souls.

Joe Crompton

MEMORIES OF RAMSBOTTOM STATION SIGNALBOX AND CROSSING

Few railway level crossings have been the subject of a parliamentary question, addressed to a minister in the House of Commons, but ours has that enviable distinction. The crossing and its box are now significant railway heritage features, even figuring on the town's Market Place history plaque! The crossing celebrated its 150th anniversary in September 1996. The present brick built Ramsbottom Station Signalbox, at least the third to have occupied this site, celebrated its 60th anniversary in 1999. Constructed by the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, probably in 1938-9, it replaced the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway's stone box, which had been in commission since 1875. The LMS box was unused between 1980 (when the final weekly coal train to and from Rawtenstall ceased running) and 1991, when the line from Ramsbottom to Rawtenstall was reopened as part of the East Lancashire Railway. The present 40 lever frame (also of 1939 vintage) was taken from Bum Naze box, near Fleetwood, and installed at Ramsbottom in 1988.

With a lifelong interest in railways, I inevitably became a working member on the ELR once I started seeing its trains from our window chuffing along the valley bottom. By 1995,1 had passed out as a class one signalman, which meant that I could be rostered for turns in charge of Ramsbottom Station Signalbox.

There have been signalmen at Ramsbottom since 1846, when the original East Lancashire Railway opened. The wheel-operated level crossing, very rare now on the Railtrack system, is one of the present line's most interesting operational features. All the gates, points and signals operated from this box are interlocked, so that it is mechanically impossible for a signalman to pull levers which could permit a dangerous train movement. To take a simple example, signals protecting the approach to the crossing cannot be cleared for a train until (1) the gates are shut to the road, and (2) the four brown locking levers are pulled, ensuring that neither road nor pedestrian gates can be opened. These levers (numbers one to four) are just visible beyond the black cast iron wheel which works the gates - see front cover.

As with so many other aspects of the ELR's operation, these levers have a history. To allow us easy passage up and down the box, the normal position for a lever is 'in the frame' - i.e. pushed back away from the signalman. They are only 'out of the frame' when permitting a train to pass. Thus a signal is pulled 'off (i.e. cleared for a train) when its lever is pulled forward by the signalman. Similarly, levers three and four, the brown levers which work the two small, pavement wicket gates, are out of the frame when these gates are locked shut to pedestrians, as on the cover illustration. But levers one and two, which lock the four big road gates, work oppositely - they are 'out of the frame' when the gates are locked to the railway, and road traffic can pass. With an up and a down train passing over Bridge Street

only every hour, and usually only at weekends, the delays occasioned by the gates are tolerated by most road users with equanimity, and only occasionally, perhaps after a special events weekend, does the railway receive complaints. Some road drivers, however, indulge in hair- raising races to jump the gates as these swing through their 90° turn against the road, and at least once this has resulted in damage to everything concerned, most recently only weeks ago, when a stolen van made contact. Such drivers (and our most heartstopping experiences seem to be with the drivers of taxis!) are actually the latest representatives of a long tradition of gate jumpers at Ramsbottom. The crossing has long been a source of vexation to road travellers, but as the following evidence should show, any modem difficulties are miniscule compared to those of the past.

Road traffic at the dawn of the railway age was exceptionally light by modem standards, and since the railway had the legal right of way, it adopted the practice of closing its gates to the railway only if road users appeared. So, the normal position of the gates was closed to the road - and this is why the normal position of those brown locking levers, one and two, is 'in the frame' - i.e. locking the gates to the road.

The East Lancashire Railway operated the crossing from the line's opening in 1846 until its amalgamation into the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway (1859). It is clear that the company kept the gates closed to the road for long periods of time. The problem was that early in the line's history (probably after the 'Extension' line to Accrington was opened in 1848) sidings were laid out north of the station. There was also a water tank beyond the crossing, with the combined result of much engine and shunting movement back and to over Bridge Street. Two employees appear to have discharged what we would now consider the signalman's function, judging from the 1851 census returns -17 year old Robert HOPKINSON, who lived at Factory Bottom, was enumerated as 'Rail Porter, Signalman', whilst 30 year old 'Railway Pointsman' James SUTCLIFFE lived on Ramsbottom Lane. There was probably no signal cabin, and the gates would almost certainly be operated manually, like the farm or turnpike gates that they resembled. Whoever tended them would need to steel himself against the complaints and abuse from delayed road users. It seems from newspaper reports as late as 1891 that there were no locking levers for the wickets, and walkers chanced to dart across between train movements, despite the warnings of the gatekeeper.

Early on, the railway company responded to complaints by constructing a public footbridge over the line to the north of the crossing, round the west and north walls of the box. At least the delays to foot traffic occasioned by shunting would now be obviated, opined the Bury Times of 8th Oct 1859 under a heading 'Ramsbottom Public Safety'.

This bridge, and a subsequent reconstruction, were in evidence for around 130 years, the stone steps only being removed shortly after Ramsbottom Station was reopened in 1987. There are few clear photographs of this footbridge, primarily because it was itself a favourite perch for photographers. The western rise of steps occupied the tight, now cobbled space between the signalbox and No 5, Bridge Street (Figure 1).

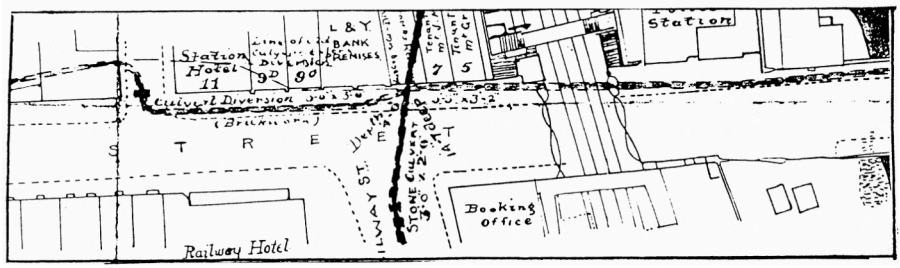

Figure 1: Portion of an Urban District Council survey of Bridge Street, Ramsbottom, May 1917, showing the crossing and 1859 footbridge to the north (Bury Archives)

In its final form, stone steps led up to piers which supported the iron lattice overbridge section. A couple of gaslights offered unassuming illumination. Ramsbottom Station was a 'continuous box', manned in three eight hour shifts, and it might have been expected that late night drunks would regularly pester the signalman as they passed the two sides of the box. In fact the close proximity of the Police Station reduced this aggravation! The locking room (ground floor) windows of the 1939 box were bricked up, presumably, because they adjoined these public steps.

The original 1859 footbridge was evidently somewhat crudely designed, and proved itself as hazardous as the foot crossing it was intended to augment. The Bury Times of 26th November 1859 contained a report of the death from concussion of Bank Lane sizer James MORRIS, who had fallen down its steps around 1 l-00pm the previous Saturday. A coroner's inquest, held at the Railway Hotel on the Wednesday after the death, was told how Thomas LORD, also of Bank Lane, had heard MORRIS fall down 20 steps, and helped carry him to the toll house, on the east side of the crossing where the entrance to the Wharf picnic area is now situated. Doctors WOODCOCK and FORSHAW attended. Nancy GRIME, who lived at the tollhouse, stated that since the bridge had been erected, just two months before, a man, woman and several children had fallen. Susan MORRIS, widow of the deceased, told the inquest that her husband had been a sizer at ASHTONs', earned 24 shillings a week, and had left home for Ramsbottom at 6-15pm that evening with three shillings; since there was 2s 7½d on his person when he fell at 1l-00pm, and he did not smell of drink, it was clear that drunkenness had not caused the accident. The jury, finding that MORRIS had suffered accidental death, was critical of bridge's design, suggesting that it should be removed to the south side of the crossing, be provided with two landings, have a reduced rise and broader treads and be covered from the weather. Landings were certainly incorporated into the later reconstruction (Figure 2) but its location and exposed state were unaltered.

By the 1890s, increasing road and rail traffic combined to make the issue of delay and safety at the crossing a regular item in the local press. The railway itself, of course, generated a lot of road journeys - as late as the 1920s, horsedrawn hansoms run by Abraham DUCKWORTH from 75, Bolton Street (known colloquially as 'Old Ab's Cabs') queued up outside the station plying for hire; the station was a busy parcels

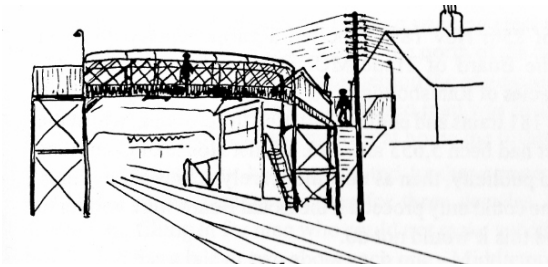

Figure 2: Rough sketch of the public footbridge at Ramsbottom Crossing, looking south towards box and station (based on a 1957photograph in The East Lancashire Express, No 1, Autumn 1987, page 14)

centre; there was a goods shed on Railway Street; and local butchers used to collect their meat from the sidings. ' It is no uncommon thing to see a good half a dozen carts, lurries and carriages wait a good 15 minutes before they can cross the line,' declared the Ramsbottom Observer of 13th June 1890, 'and notwithstanding the great care which is constantly exercised by the company's intelligent and alert officials at this junction, the number of fatal accidents has been very great. True there is a footbridge by which pedestrians may cross but the bulk of people have a rooted objection to ascend and descend two flights of steps to make a mere 20 yards headway ... if they are physically capable.' (Evidently, it was common practice to 'rush across the metals', using the wicket gates which, clearly, had no locks.) Local people, the paper opined, 'are unanimous in their desire to see Ramsbottom Station spanned by a bridge, one that will accommodate vehicular as well as pedestrian traffic,' a demand which the paper considered so reasonable 'that we cannot think it will long remain ungranted.'

By 19th September 1890, the paper was referring to 'the proposed subway beneath the level crossing' and deriding the Local Board for inactivity.

The issue surfaced the following year, the Ramsbottom Observer of 7th Aug 1891 reporting how one member, James HOLT, had raised the issue at the Board's last meeting, following a further accident. The gates and wickets were being painted, and the L&YR had displayed a board instructing pedestrians to use the footbridge. 'An injustice!' declared Mr HOLT, 'the road was there before the railway came...'. He had seen a dozen people and a lurry waiting to cross, and no train coming either way.

Chairman BARLOW explained that the position of the current Board had been compromised by the inaction of earlier members. He had met railway officials at the station and presented weekly pedestrian traffic flows. 'They quietly tabled letters sent to them by the Ramsbottom Local Board thanking them for the money they had spent - £8,000 - in alterations to the station.' The railway had asked the Board for suggestions whilst they were doing these, and the Board had simply approved the plans, which included the present footbridge. 'We looked very simple then,' a Board member chipped in. (Laughter). It was agreed that a further deputation be sent.

The alterations referred to had occurred after 1874 (see Figure 3, overleaf) when the railway facilities in the town had had a general makeover. The 1875 signalbox may have been part of this development. But any improvements had since been overtaken by the increasing volume of traffic. Representations were evidently made beyond the town, and

the Bury Times of 25th Nov 1893 reported a parliamentary question addressed to President of the Board of Trade MUNDELLA by local MP, Mr CHANNING on the inadequacies of Ramsbottom's controversial crossing.

On 30th Sept 1893,8,948 persons and 181 trains and engines had used the crossing, whilst the equivalent figures for 2th Oct had been 5,653 and 146. Whilst House of Commons questions may make for good publicity, then as now they rarely achieved anything. Ultimately, the subway scheme could only proceed if the Local Board were willing to spend ratepayers' money, and this it would not do.

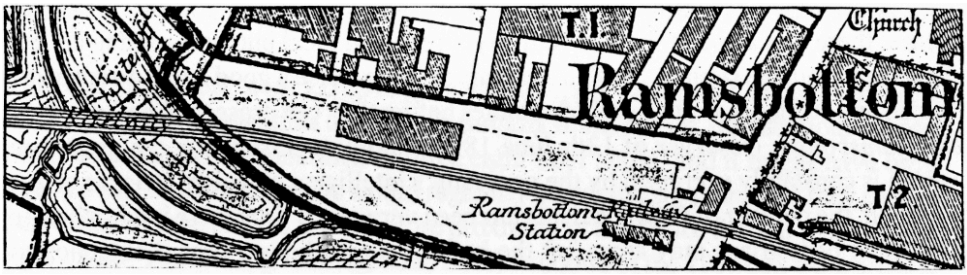

Figure 3: Ramsbottom Station from the 1874 plan of the Grant-Lawson estate (Bury Archives)

The history of Ramsbottom's railway facilities can be pursued in the ELR and L&YR Board of Directors' Minute Books at the Public Record Office, Kew.

Figure 1 (page 12) shows a peculiarity of the layout of Ramsbottom - that there were two footbridges, one on either side of the level crossing, within a few yards of each other. The southerly one, a hefty, timber, half-glazed affair, was on the station proper, and was used by passengers walking from the booking office at the Railway Street entrance to the up platform (Bury-bound). This bridge may have dated back to the major redevelopment of the station in the mid-1870s or later - its timber looks surprisingly new on the photograph of Friday 26th October 1900 which shows Peel Bridge toll bar and tollgate, on the afternoon that they came 'out of trust' - see copy in Ken BEETSON's Ramsbottom Volume 2 (1978). This footbridge was demolished in 1959/60. The present cast iron station footbridge was brought over from Dinting. Ramsbottom Station was not easy to work. The two platform canopies (demolished in the winter of 1970/1), the two footbridges and the curve of the line made sighting difficult, the dangers being aggravated by the heaviness of rail traffic and the frequency of shunting manoeuvres. The Accrington Observer of 7th September 1895 reported how local fireman Willie POLLARD, had been knocked off the tender of an engine whilst shunting round its train in Ramsbottom Station the previous Friday evening. It was 8-30pm, and presumably dark. Another train was due, and to save time POLLARD was changing the engine's tail lamp whilst it was in motion, climbing over the coals to reach the back of the tender. The driver, John BRIGGS, claimed at the inquest that he had warned his fireman of the two bridges. A witness, Ramsbottom labourer

Thomas PILLING, had been standing at the gate, presumably waiting for the engine to pass, and had seen the fireman walking erect on the tender so that his head was struck by the public footbridge to the north of the crossing, the lower of the two. POLLARD plunged onto the track behind the engine and was taken into the porters' room. Dr DEAN was called. The injured man was rushed to Accrington by special train, and he died of his head injuries at home the following evening.

Fred HANSON, who has contributed to these pages many times, worked as a signalman in the Manchester area for three decades. From 1947, he was a relief signalman, filling in for men who could not make a shift, has experience of scores of boxes, and has a tale or two about each one - Middleton Junction West Box haunted by the white apparitions of a signalman and his dog; Alderbottom haunted by a signalman who had got caught up in his own wires and died of overnight exposure; and Fred himself being snowed in at Bacup Junction for five days early in 1947!

Fred recalls Ramsbottom's level crossing as

> **always an obstruction to road transport. It had a footbridge for the hasty, though the majority preferred to wait and watch the steam trains passing. In the 1960s, 120-130 trains passed over the crossing every 24 hours, the box being open continuously, and had been for over 100 years, the turns being 6-00am - 2-00pm, 2-00pm - 10-00pm,10-00pm - 6-00am, Monday to Saturday; Saturday 10-00pm - 8-00am Sunday, 8-00am - 7-00pm, then 7-00pm Sunday to 6-00am Monday, and the man on this turn came back 2-10, after eight hours.**

Fred worked in both of the Ramsbottom crossing's boxes. He remembers the old L&Y pre-1939 model as 'poky, a queer little hole. Oil lamps inside before the 1930s, then gaslights, heavy L&Y levers facing the line, very limited clearance around the wheel which was parallel with the tracks, so you had to move front and back of it to get a view up and down the street.' The steps up to the box were near to the pavement, at 90° to it, and in the ginnel by the footbridge. 'They were moved to stop drunks coming up and mithering the signalman,' says Fred. 'People would ask train times and come off the platform to ask where a train was.'

But there were domestic comforts. 'A pot-bellied stove heated the box, best Yorkshire coal was the favourite, and soon got white hot, and on the top was the kettle, perpetual hot water! Engine drivers dropped off the odd cod or two. Also every signalman had a tin for cooking bacon, steak etc in a minimum of time. My favourite being a large onion cut small and fried until brown with butter then drop the cheese in , slap it on two rounds of real bread (home made). Brill! That in one hand and pull levers, ring bells, answer phone and swing wheel as necessary with other.'

Fred remembers Ramsbottom's gates as being exposed to the wind, and in consequence often being 'heavy' to swing. The trick was to keep them well oiled. Peter STEVENSON, who is still a volunteer on the ELR, recalls his BR days, when linesman Bill TATTERSALL, who lived on Stubbins Lane, was able to lever each gate in turn out of its bottom hinge, with the help of one other man and using a block of wood as a fulcrum. There was no bearing, just

a brass sphere seated in a brass cup. Fred recalls trainee signalmen at Ramsbottom who were frightened that they simply would not be able to get the gates open to the railway in time for approaching trains because of the number of people crossing.

Particularly difficult were cricket match days in the '30s and '40s, when large crowds as big as any now seen at Gigg Lane, would come out of Acre Bottom, and fill the width of Bridge Street as they walked up to the station. If the gates needed closing, the signalman had to go down onto the street waving a red flag, and leave this posted in his window. Many came by train, since the station was so close. When Leary CONSTANTINE, of the West Indies national team, was Nelson's professional, special trains worked from Nelson, and were stabled in the loops to the north of the crossing, or on the 'machine road'. On match day Saturday afternoons, COTTERILs' stand would sell hundreds of pork pies (they were baked in the shop at the top end of Dungeon Row, on Bridge Street). 'I've seen Ramsbottom Cricket Ground,' said Fred, 'when you couldn't get on. I'd go on the Cheeky Stand.' (This was the bank above the Irwell, below Bury New Road.) CONSTANTINE once scattered some of the illicit spectators here by hitting a ball over the river and amongst them!

The local signalmen had their own grandstand view - Ramsbottom South Box stood by the old Square Works, overlooking Acre Bottom, and the men had put in their own 18 inch square window, in the back of the box. The signalling inspectors assumed it was official! On match day Sundays, when the box might be manned for an engineer's possession, the rostered signalman would have nothing to do but watch the game! 'You're supposed to show initiative in the box!' said Fred.

There were some scary moments:

> **We had a few express trains daily, mostly for Manchester Stock Exchange - the 4-30pm Victoria to Colne was one. On this particular day, I was working the box at Ramsbottom on the 2pm - 10pm turn, when I got this train flying through Summerseat at 4-50pm, next stop Accrington. Set the gates for the train, and on indication of passing Nuttall Park pulled the brown levers [3 and 4] to lock the wickets. Phone ringing, grabbed it. Mytholmroyd to Ramsbottom coal train passing Bury L&Y, came off phone, to window, people still walking across, down wicket open. Half a dozen trying to get out of up wicket - locked. Express coming through the station, I released the up wicket, shouted and stopped people coming through the down wicket as the Express shot passed at 60mph. On testing locking lever it was not working. 1 got the station foreman Conkey NEAVES to tie both wicket gates up with rope to put them out of use, and sent for the signal fitter to repair fault!**

Fortunately, nothing quite like that ever happens on the preserved ELR!

Thanks to Fred HANSON for passing on so many railway memories, and to Mrs NP MARTIN for the newspaper account of her great uncle, Willie POLLARD's death in the 1895 accident.

Andrew Todd

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