



RAMSBOTTOM —...— HERITAGE SOCIETY

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John D. Taylor 2001

NEWS MAGAZINE

RAMSBOTTOM HERITAGE SOCIETY
THE HERITAGE CENTRE
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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.
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2001 PROGRAMME

18 th April	Birthday Meeting - Dr Mike Cresswell, <i>Lace Bonnets and Urine Pits</i>
16 th May	AGM and Members Night
20 th June	Ken Inman, <i>Poor Law Migration into Lancashire, 1835-37 Part 2</i> (illustrated)
18 th July	Circular Walk led by John B Taylor, <i>The Porritts and Helmshore</i> - meet at the <i>White Horse Hotel</i> , Helmshore at 6-30pm
15 th Aug	Peter Watson, to be arranged
19 th Sept	Dick Amende, <i>Waterways Restoration and Sustainability</i> (illustrated)
17 th Oct	Margaret Curry, <i>Cumbria - Up the Sides and down the Middle</i> (illustrated)
15 th Nov	Members' Evening
12 th Dec	Stella Slater, <i>Ramsbottom and Me (No Enoch)</i>

**Please note that all indoor meetings are held
on the third Wednesday of the month in the Civic Hall, Market Place,
Ramsbottom, at 7.30 for 7.45pm**

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FRONT COVER- the Ramsbottom Industrial Provident Society's Central Building, Bolton Street, April 2001. Drawn by John B Taylor of Stacksteads

RAMSBOTTOM MISCELLANEA

The 2001 Census - by the time you read this, the 10-yearly headcount, which celebrates its 200th anniversary this year, will be underway, assuming that the current Foot and Mouth epidemic has not led to a postponement. Those of us who have taken advantage of the 100 year rule to look at the census returns of the 19th Century (on microfilm at Bury Library) will have a sense that a moment in our families' history, a snapshot of who was at our home on census night - their ages, occupations, birthplaces, how they travel to work, and much else - will be recorded for all time, to be made available, if current legislation remains in place, for the fascination of our grand and greatgrandchildren on the first working day of January 2102. You could, of course, photocopy your return as an heirloom, before handing it in!

The Ramsbottom Friendly Burial Society - older Ramsbottom residents may remember it as the 'Carr Club' or 'Dead List', but it is not well documented. Dues were collected at the *Rose and Crown* on Carr Street, and guaranteed a benefit payment to members in the event of a family death. I am hoping to research this club, and similar ones in the area, notably the Bank Lane Burial Society, and would be interested to hear from anyone with even the smallest jot of information about the operations of such organisations.

Andrew Todd

A RAMSBOTTOM COUPLE'S VISIT TO LONDON AND BELGIUM, 1921

Exactly 80 years ago, in May/June 1921, Britain was in the midst of a lengthy miners' strike, one result of which was that the decennial census, due to be held in spring had to be postponed until 19th June. Ramsbottom couple Richard and Doris HOLDEN (nee HALL) had a fortnight's holiday in London, and got back a fortnight before census night. Doris was greatly impressed by the experience, but especially by their brief cross-Channel visit to the Belgian battlefields around Ypres. Just 30

months after the Armistice, this area where so many British soldiers had fought in three major battles, was clearly still recognisably a war zone. Other references indicate how immediate was the First World War in recent memory. Doris HOLDEN wrote to an aunt, Pollie HOLDEN, in Canada, shortly after her return, and her letter, reproduced here almost in full, has survived in the family for 80 years.

There are a several words and phrases which will be unfamiliar to modern readers. 'Everything wick you could think of, Doris writes of London Zoo, employing a northern dialect word for 'alive ' which will be unknown to most people under

Richard and Doris were the parents of member Doris HIBBERT, of 17, Carr Bank Avenue, Ramsbottom, who explains the background:-

At the time (1921) my parents lived with my Dad's family before moving into 10, Crow Lane. Mother worked in John HEATON'S (Coal Merchants) office in Market Place. Father was Chief Goods Clerk at Ramsbottom Station. She was writing to her aunt in Canada, and after her cousin Jack, the aunt's son [mentioned in the letter] died some years ago, his family found the letter and sent it to me.

I am grateful to Doris HIBBERT for sharing with us this intriguing glimpse into 1921 - Editor.

112, Bolton Rd W
Ramsbottom
June 21/21

My Dear Auntie Pollie,

I am most uncomfortably aware of the fact I have not written to you since before Christmas (except the P.C. from London,) and it is no use my trying to excuse myself. (I just felt I could not possibly write when Auntie Fanny was so ill, and afterwards, I didn't know how to begin.....).

We went to London on our Summer Holiday for a fortnight in May - we took them rather earlier than usual, you see, we were both slack, so it was convenient.

It has been the real holiday of my life! Better, actually than my honeymoon!, and I don't think we wasted one little moment. This is a brief summary of how we spent our time:-

May 21st Saturday Arrived at London. Found our digs, had tea and then went to visit Cousin Will TAYLOR and family, then bed.

22nd Sunday am Went to Kew Gardens. Beautiful place.

pm Tube to Richmond. Sailed up Thames to Hampton Court. Went through Palace and grounds, tea, then to Bushey Park then bus home (tired).

23rd Monday Bus to Tower of London (closed couldn't get in but saw it from outside) then to Billings' gate market; (horrible place, dirty and fishy. All sorts of foreigners down there. I thought I was going to be kidnapped.) Then to Monument, then to the

Bank of England, saw Royal Exchange and Mansion House. Then lunch. Caught tube at Bank to St John's Wood and spent the afternoon at Lords Cricket ground, watching the Australians play Middlesex. After the match we walked to Baker Street and went into Madame Tussaud's waxworks show, and had tea in there. Spent all the evening inside. Very interesting, then home.

24th Tuesday Bus from Chiswick to Shepherds Bush, Oxford Street, Oxford Circus, Regent Street, Piccadilly Circus, Lower Regent Street, Trafalgar Square, to Whitehall (all such wonderful streets to me.) Saw the change of the Guards at Whitehall and the soldiers rehearsing the Trooping of the Colours for the King's Birthday, June 4*. Saw War Office, and Scotland Yard, and the Cenotaph, flowers and wreaths all around. Made us a bit sad, but proud. Then lunch and afterwards to Westminster Abbey. Stayed to Empire Day Service, then went through the Royal Chapels and saw all the old historical things there. Then to the Houses of Parliament, (Big Ben etc) we could not get inside. They were closed to the public owing to the Sinn Fein raids etc, so we crossed Westminster Bridge and walked along the embankment (where the loafers sleep, until the policemen move them on.) Then over another bridge back again, and walked along that side of the embankment until we came to Cleopatra's Needle and the Belgian War Memorial. Then went into the Strand, had tea, and being very tired we caught a bus home. I call that a full day.

25th Wednesday Tube to South Kensington Natural History Museum. Spent all morning there, (and only saw the basement!!) Lunch there and then went through the 2 Science Museums (where all the patents are, the first engine, bicycle, motor car, etc, etc, all kinds of ships, working models of all the engines.) Then into the Victoria and Albert Museum, until teatime. Tea at Brompton Road, then home.

26th Thursday Bus to Marble Arch, walked along Park Lane to Hyde Park Comer then sat opposite Rotten Row, (we forgot to take our horses.) Saw all the 'Nobs' out riding, then went and sat by the Serpentine and just as we got there the guns in the Park fired a salute in honour of the Queen's Birthday. (We said it was in honour of our visit of course.) I think the guns must have upset the elements a little because it began to rain a little in the afternoon, but not on us, oh no! We went from Hyde Park to the Strand Theatre, 'The Safety Match', (matinee) and had a jolly good time there - then tea, strolled along Pall Mall, caught a bus and went home. (You notice that we kept good hours.)

27th Friday Bus to Regents Park walked through the 'Broad Walk' (squirrels and rabbits and things all running about the grass) then to the Zoological Gardens. Talk about Belle Vue! Belle Vue nothing! Everything wick you could think of. Lunch there, then spent the afternoon at the Olympia. (That is a kind of Exhibition. It was all about King Neptune and all the sea soldiers, right from the times of the Ancient Britons up to the Royal Marines of today.) There were exhibitions of Bridge building and demolition, horsemanship, (even horse dancing the Lancers and waltzing) there were the same horses that drew the Unknown Warrior to his grave in the Abbey. Good old Mons horses, with the Mons Star on their harnesses, bless them! Then tugs of war, a hurdling competition, and how the

A.S.C. took the ammunition up the line, I just wished our Teddie could have been there.¹ Then we caught a bus to Shepherds Bush and walked through Hammersmith home to Chiswick. (We stayed at Chiswick High Road, quite near Will TAYLOR's.)

28th Saturday Bus from Hammersmith right to the Crystal Palace, and spent the whole of the day there. (Could have spent two if we had had the time.) There was a wax exhibition there. Guns, aeroplanes, ships, even the gun at which Jack CORNWELL² was killed. There was a fair outside in the grounds and a Japanese village. Inside (the Crystal Palace, not the Japanese village) there were waxworks, fountains, Palm courts, an enormous organ, (I think they had a recital because we went) also the Life Guards band, which played selections, a statue gallery and models of villages in the battlefields. Then home, with a fixed determination to spend Sunday quiet. (On the way home, looked in a shop and saw a coat. Walked home with a parcel.) You should see it more of a cape than a coat, serloppy sleeves, and will button right up to the chin with lots of covered buttons, or will open back into revels it was called a Paris model, and I was fear't of wearing it in Ramsbottom, but Dick reassured me it looked jolly nice. It kind of clips my ankles. That's all by the way we were talking of holidays not coats.

29th Sunday Walked to Ravenscourt Park, bought 2 tuppenny chains and sat down to hear band, quite restful and enjoyable. Home to lunch, then had a walk round old Chiswick and saw places where the Germans had done a lot of damage with bombs. Home to tea, rested, and went to bed soon, because:-

30th Monday Up with the larks, caught a tube at 7.30 to Victoria Station, train to Dover 9 o'clock, then boat from Dover to Ostend, Belgium, arrived there at 3pm (lunch on board). Then by train to Bruges, arrived 4pm. Madame met us on the station (you have heard of Madame of course? Yes, I thought so.) She was just delighted to see us and took us in the car to her home. Tea there, and then to a Belgian cinema until bedtime.

31st Tuesday Madame insisted on motoring us over the battlefields. We had honestly only intended calling on her and giving her everybody's best regards from Ramsbottom, but once she got us there, there was no escape! We assured her that we must return to London on the following day, (Wednesday) so she evidently intended to make good use of the time we had at our disposal. So we motored from 9 in the morning to 7pm all day long, through such shamefully devastated country. You would have cried. I did. We had lunch at Ypres and tea at Ostend then back to Bruges. Of course, there is a great deal of reconstruction going along now but it will take ages to make Belgium look like a country again. It's just a wilderness. We had supper early as soon as we got home, then Dick and I went into Bruges and bought some postcards to send home. Then home to bed. You know Madame has the loveliest home I have ever seen. I don't mean nicer or cleaner than anything, but just richer. She has every little detail of the very best. The kind we should say - print, and she, satin or silk, and she stands on one side whilst the maid opens the

door. Now wouldn't it be difficult for someone like that to have to make do with what we've got to offer?

June 1st Wednesday 9-30am train from Bruges to Ostend (but before we got to the station we called in the cathedral a most gorgeous place.) 10-30am boat to Dover arrived 3pm then a train to Victoria Station, London. Arrived at diggings at 8-30pm, so went to the pictures, until bedtime. (Weren't those three busy days?)

2nd Thursday Bus to Selfridges store in Oxford Street then shop gazed all morning Oh I did like that part. Lunched in Shaftesbury Avenue, then spent all the afternoon in the National Gallery, where the most wonderful pictures are hung. Tea in the Strand, then bus to Hammersmith Broadway, and walked home.

3rd Friday Spent all Friday morning having a last moon about Chiswick and Hammersmith, picking up little mementoes etc, had lunch near Kensington, then it began to pour with rain. I think it was so despondent to think that we should be leaving on the following day. So we bought an ice-cream brick, (first time I had seen any) pink and yellow, brown and white, brought it home and spent the afternoon reading and packing up.

In the evening went to the Chiswick Empire (George ROBEY was there) and laughed enough to strain our faces.

June 4th Saturday Goodbye to London. Arrived at Ramsbottom at 9-00pm. Rather slow travelling, but everybody pleased to see us, and we pleased to be back.

It is the 24th today and I commenced this letter on the 21st, and still it feels incomplete. But suppose I post it right now and then write again soon. I will write, honest injuns. Give my fond love to Jack and Uncle Johnnie.

Your affectionate niece,

Doris

PS This is my tenth week off work owing to the Coal Strike, I think I must have retired. Dick has had another advance in salary.

References

1. Mons - Mons was the first major battle on the Western Front in 1914, and the Mons Star its medal; A.S.C. - Army Service Corps
2. Jack CORNWELL - teenage sailor and Great War hero who inspired the poem 'The Boy stood on the Burning Deck'

MEMORIES OF THE RAMSBOTTOM CENTRAL CO-OP

George ASHWORTH, who died at Grange-over-Sands on T' January 1994, had lived in Ramsbottom for most of his life, living finally at 430, Bolton Road West. His recollections of our town in the earlier years of the last century appeared in this magazine in the Spring 1999 edition (no 18). Eventually the secretary of the Ramsbottom Industrial and Provident Society, and author of its centenary

historical outline, Working Men of Ramsbottom Founders of our Society (November 1958), he describes here his earliest experiences of the Society's office, where he began work in 1916 at the age of 14, retiring in 1967. This specialised information about food and diet 80 years ago is of particular interest.

An ever diminishing band of people in Ramsbottom will remember the Co-op as an operational organisation in the town. There were nine branch shops scattered about the town and its outlying hamlets (Rostron Road, Nuttall Lane, Hazelhurst, Holcombe, Holcombe Brook, Bank Land, Peel Bridge, Bridge Street and Stubbins) but its main, Central building occupied nos 45-55 Bolton Street. The top storey of the taller portion was for many years the location of a popular theatre, the first floor was occupied by the offices where I assume George Ashworth worked for so many years, and the ground floor (currently Mogul Dynasty Tandoori Restaurant and New-To- You) was, I believe, the retail area. The warehouse was in the basement, accessible from Back Bolton Street - Editor.

In April 1916 I commenced to work for the **local** Co-operative Society in the Office. I soon became quite versatile collecting rents weekly, keeping records in the Central Grocery Warehouse, also working in the small wooden hut, the office, in the coal yard sidings in Stubbins [Lane] when the regular man was absent for one reason or another, or no one at all would do the job. Several other firms had similar places alongside, Wrigleys, Heatons etc. In those days we all had horse drawn lorries or box carts. The lorries had one or two horses, a man with two horses could deal with 50 hundredweight bags of coal, anywhere in the district. These bags of coal had to be filled direct from the large rail wagons of various quality and price. This is where the odd men from the 'Model' came into use, they used a spade to fill each bag from the wagon whilst the driver held the bag on the scales on the lorry. During my time I paid these men 2d (old money) for each 20 bags they filled. It was important that the weight was correct, quite often inspectors would check each bag and also at times the weight of the load, also the accuracy of the scales themselves. I very soon became aware that it was not wise to pay these men at noon for the work done that morning, apart from a 'sub', otherwise they would probably not turn up in the afternoon.

In addition to dealing with the cash, our Co-op customers had to be given a check (for dividend purposes). It was a very 'messy' job on a cold wet day and the men had to bring in the cash after each load, except that for the last load the cash had to be taken to the general office (there was no tick).

With orders of 10 hundredweight [half an imperial ton] or more a ticket was given so that the cash then had to be paid later at the shop of office. In addition, the box cart was used to deliver a ton or more.

It was a very important job to keep all the necessary records concerning the coal business. When I had completed my job in the coal cabin I had to continue my work in the General Office. There was no extra pay. It could be for a few days or weeks. However, I was learning an important job which became useful to me in later years.

From time to time the customer would dispute as to the actual number of bags delivered, one or two short. So I would go back with the coal man and settle the matter, one way or the other.

I mentioned earlier how important it was to always keep in mind that the Police Inspector could stop the lorry at any time. In later years, as the Secretary of the Society, I was summoned to attend Court in order to account for the misdemeanours of the men employed in our Coal Department.

I noticed many things taking place in the large warehouse and in the shops. Very few items were pre-packed. Almost everything had to be weighed up and packed in the shop (there was no spare time at all). Flour was very difficult to deal with, it was always done on a Monday morning, the Central had to pack up the needs of several other shops, it was done in a separate room so that the 'Flour dust' did not pervade the shop itself. Sugar, dried fruit, rice, coffee, tea, etc. Items such as biscuits had to be weighed out from the tins as required. Butter, margarine, cheese, etc. was wrapped up when purchased. Hams and bacon had to have special care in the Warehouse, being hung up within a wire protected cage to keep the vermin away. The warehouse and all the shops had their own special cats to keep check on the vermin. Vinegar came in large casks. Syrup and Treacle came in drums of about five hundredweight each. Customers had to bring their own container in which these items were placed. In these days almost everything in the shop has been prepacked (or overpacked). So I might continue telling you of the difficulties of packing many things in poor quality bags etc. A short time before I arrived on the scene in 1916 the Co-op were using Metal Checks to give customers the equal value of the amount spent in order to pay the quarterly dividend due. They system had just been changed with the use of Cash Registers issuing a paper check showing the amount spent. These checks had to be totalled and dividend paid accordingly each quarter. At the beginning, the adding up of these checks in front of the customer was almost a nightmare but, like anything else, practice makes perfection and, after a few years, the figures just jumped into line for me. Several times each week I had to go down into the warehouse in the basement in order to make out the list and prices on the charge sheet for each shop, it was mostly of fruits and vegetables in season, plus items such as bacon or boiled ham. These hams were boiled each week at our own bakery. The fruits in season came on the early am train from Manchester. (I had some wooden boards round my desk to protect me from the cold winds etc.) When the electric cables were brought into the Warehouse, say 1917/18 a very large refrigerator was installed in the Warehouse for storing bacon, hams, etc.

Having to do so much of my work in the grocery warehouse I was able to learn a great deal about how many different foodstuffs were dealt with. For instance, there was a room immediately above the heating boiler in the basement, this was the banana room. The crates of fruit came to us unripe (green) and were hung in bunches in this room. As they became ripe they were sent out to the shops for sale. Most of the apples came from Canada in large wooden barrels, the Manager showed me that the very best ones were always at the top, and these were sold

separately at the best prices. The ones from the middle part, being less in selling value, although quite good, were sold a little cheaper, whilst those from the lowest part were the cheapest. Green grapes came in wooden barrels, packed in cork shavings. These would keep well if kept in a dry place. Certain fruits were only available at various seasons of the year. We never had tomatoes at Christmas time, only apples and oranges were available then. It was all on account. There was no refrigeration on any of the boats, or on land also, in many instances.

It was interesting to know how cheese was dealt with. There was what was called a wooden 'stillage' with slatted shelves in order to let the air get through. There was a big trade in cheese and thirty to forty of one kind would come from the same dairy (English of course). Wooden kegs of butter (approximately one hundredweight) would come from Holland by boat, always from the same dairy.

As the years went by more and larger refrigerators were installed in the warehouse. It was at Christmas time that any kind of perishable foodstuff could only be in the shops for about ten days in advance. This applied particularly to chickens, turkeys, rabbits and other game birds. They had to be ordered in advance (NOTE: no frozen ones at the present time).

When I was young I remember that a tin of salmon was always a special treat for tea on a Sunday. I do not remember any other items being in cans at that time. Certainly NOT the great variety of fruits and meats of these days.

George Ashworth (1990)

Editor's comment - when I moved to Ramsbottom in February 1977, the Central building was a ghost of its old self, only a small portion of the ground floor still being used as a retail food outlet, run by two female assistants. The upstairs had long been abandoned, perhaps in the 1960s. Barbara Park wrote about the Society's 1954 Stocktake in our Winter 1994-5 issue (no 10), which, against all the odds, survived the sale and clearout of the Bolton Street premises in 1987.

In that year, a small group of locals organised a 'Ramsbottom Trust', the objective of which was to preserve important town buildings, and to establish a heritage centre. I was invited to join as the requisite local historian! We first considered the stable block at Barwood Lee, below Kay Lodge, and then the old Co-op building of which George Ashworth writes. We were shown round on 1st July 1987 by an estate agent from Wright, Dickenson and Catlow whose main concern was to avoid stepping in the masses of pigeon droppings that were festooned about the upper storeys. The offices in which George Ashworth had so carefully followed the procedures described above looked like Hitler's Wehrmacht had just taken it by storm - all the paperwork with which George must have been so familiar was scattered over the floor. I had literally seconds as we toured through to see the mountain of records so utterly discarded. Pigeons flew around the theatre, plastic sheeting draped over the red velvet circles of seats to protect them from the aerial bombardment. We were offered the place at £45,000, but the council surveyor came up with a figure of £366,000 for refurbishment, not least on account of the dry rot.

I rang the eventual buyer to ask if we could have the piles of 'rubbish' - he thought I wanted the radiators for scrap, and asked me to make an offer! When I clarified my request, he said we could have the lot. Before anyone told the builders, however, a skip was in Back Bolton Street, a chute filling with old wood, plaster and the paperwork I had seen on 1st July. I was able to extricate, with some difficulty, a large, strung bundle of documents which, once dusted, turned out to be the stocktake of 1954. The only other important survival from this appalling treatment of the Co-op's archive was a mid-20th Century membership list which I had surreptitiously 'rescued' whilst the estate agent was sidestepping the guano. Both these items are now in the Heritage Society's collection at Bury Archives. It would be gratifying to think that so large an organisation as the Co-op would today be rather less cavalier with its archive material.

The Ramsbottom Trust finally switched its attention to the old Model Lodging House, no 8, Paradise Street, described in some detail in our last issue. Nothing came of that either, and it was left to our society to bring a heritage centre to the town on 26th May 1990.

I have already discovered extra material on the old Co-op Central building, and would appreciate any additional documentary or reminiscence evidence of its operations - Editor.

LIFTING THE LID ON THE TRAMSHED: RAMSBOTTOM'S BUSES

Remember the title 'The Happiest Days of Our Lives'? A film wasn't it? Well, when were our happiest days? When we were young usually ... younger at least! I don't have to stop and think when were mine. It was during those idyllic months when I was conducting (another of those defunct occupations that went the same way as sagger maker's bottom knockers) on any of the 13 buses of the Ramsbottom Urban District Council's Transport Department - Rammy Buzzes in the vernacular. That was in the mid-1960s. Life has been more or less downhill since.

It was during university vacations and it was Paradise ... in motion. We ran over variations of a basic route - from Bury, through Ramsbottom, Stubbins, Edenfield to Rawtenstall. Most journeys terminated at Edenfield, some having arrived via Stubbins, others via Shuttleworth. Some turned at Stubbins.

We offered an intimate little service. I soon became familiar with the quirks of the buses (mostly elderly), the passengers and crews (also mostly elderly or so it seemed to me). But they were a cheerful lot, who turned almost everything into a laugh. There was a certain camaraderie and bonhomie that welded us into a highly tuned team - at the cutting edge on the transport revolution.

Eddie was particularly quick-witted. His repartee was legendary and any significant gathering of crews with Eddie would soon be in stitches. He operated with Evelyn, a Cockney, who had moved north during the war and stayed. Evelyn was all right... but she talked . . . and talked . . . and talked. As she moved down the bus it was 'Tickets, please..Fenk you, lav... Bury, Lav?... Roit, lav... Lavelly die (as in spry)

... Fenk you very much, lav, ta'. Then louder, more formally, more firmly: 'Hey you all got your tickets now please? Next stop, lav? Roit lav?... Bye, bye, now, lav, fenk you. Hold toit now, please — Her lips were never still.

At the terminals she could talk a driver to despair (some preferred to stay in the cab). But Eddie took it all in good part... although he did once say, with a smile: 'Sometimes I look in the cab mirror and it's like watching a goldfish in a bowl!'

Generally speaking the same conductor worked with the same driver (apart from some special occasions) until one or other fancied a change. Most crews were twosomes who had operated over years ... like Harold and Florrie, man and wife. Florrie was something of a local personality. They were all in their way. But *she* had been on Wilfred Pickles 'Have a Go' on the wireless.

They had been on the buses since the relief of Mafeking and had some rare tales to tell... of the '30s, the War, and the blackout... Harold explained how they had once had a lady passenger who Florrie knew had recently been in hospital. She stood up to alight, picked up her shopping bag, then, aghast, and went white and trembling.

'Oh dear!' she gasped. 'I've lost my liver!'

'Oh Goodness!' said Florrie. 'Whatever shall we do? Had we better call for an ambulance?'

It was, of course, lunch that had gone astray. With such tales did days disappear without consciousness of passing of time. Since I was there basically to replace people on holiday or off sick, I worked with most drivers at one time or another. Thus Dick regaled me with his adventures driving steam lorries on the East Lancs Road in the '20s and '30s; Derek with the joys of budgie breeding which consumed his spare time. Tom 'Pom' was our philosopher-in-residence and turned many a fine symbolic phrase on the meaning of life. Well into his fifties, suffering intermittently from lumbago, sciatica and various other debilitating complaints, he was, nevertheless, an extremely cheerful chap and time passed swiftly in his presence.

They were excellent drivers, steady as the Bank. They coddled their conductors, who had to move about a shifting workplace, often with no free hands to hold on. There was Jack... He had learned that during frost it was advisable to pump brakes ...then couldn't lay off the habit... got in a permanent sort of frost, perhaps, Jack did. Instead of braking normally and with increasing pressure until coming to a smooth halt, he would brake with long rhythmic pumpings. His clog would crash down for the first pump causing the conductor to hurtle down the bus... to thud into the front bulkhead. He might just manage to turn around before the pedal was released which would send him scurrying back down the aisle, streaming money bag and machine, and if lucky, on exiting from the platform, grab the pole ... there being nothing so namby pamby as doors on most Ramsbottom buses.

I was on a shift with one of the three Georges when I approached the only passenger on the top deck for his fare, a waterworks' man in uniform. His face was blue-purple; his eyes staring!

'Are you alright?' I asked, concerned No answer.

I hared down the stairs fearfully and slid back the driver's window.

'George! George! There's a chap upstairs having a heart attack! He's blue and purple!' 'Has he paid?' George asked calmly.

'What?' I asked, uncertain if I had heard aright.

'Has he paid?'

'No.'

'Well, go and get the money off him then.'

I wasn't quite sure what to make of this advice, but returned to find the man a perfectly normal colour.

'Bury, please,' he said and gave me his bus tokens.

'Thank you,' said I as I gave him his ticket... and that was that.

Neither of us mentioned his indisposition and he alighted quite normally in Bury. Not easily panicked Ramsbottom bus drivers weren't!

I was with another George on his first day alone after passing his PSV (Public Service Vehicle driving licence). He drove through the shift well enough, if a shade nervously, until we took out the Holcombe bus. This operated just once a week... on a Saturday night. It was something of an event for the Holcombe villagers, but George and I turned it into a real spectacle. Number 13 was the number for that job - a pre-war single-decker of uncertain temperament and one requiring extra driving skills. Turning round in the narrow road through Holcombe was difficult . . . not helped by the inevitable Saturday night overflow from the *Shoulder of Mutton* car park. Between us, I blowing my whistle and thumping increasingly hysterically on the back of the bus and George tangling his feet in the pedals, we managed to reverse number 13 quite substantially into a house. Number 13, which had a through-chassis, was considerably put out, as was the management down at the tramshed!

I did have regular drivers. One year it was Stan who described life in the Australian outback where he had spent some time. Another year it was Justin (let's say) who outlined life in Stangeways Gaol, where he had also spent time in the debtors' section. (The name Justin doesn't really do him any justice). He had enjoyed it.

He had 11 children and during one spell of unemployment, when Social Security was being a little niggardly, he took them all there, and planted them on the counter. 'Here,' he said, 'if you can't give me enough to look after them, you do it'.

He turned to leave.

'Come back,' cried the startled clerk. 'I'm sure we can find a little more.' (That was in the days before Mrs THATCHER, of course.)

I was 'in the shed' for a short period, when no replacement was required - cleaning the buses and pottering about. There were 'shed men' who looked after the non

mechanical side of the buses and also went out driving or conducting when crews 'ducked' early in the morning.

In the rest room of an evening old Will, the doyen of the shed men, who also acted as a night watchman, would reminisce about solid tyre days. Before the War, the shed man/watchman also doubled as ambulance man. Once, according to Will, a Ramsbottom man, whose wife was having a baby, rang for an ambulance... to get no reply. He left his father on the telephone and walked to the depot... to find the shed man/watchman/ambulance man (not Will)... fast asleep! The telephone still rang in the background.

Will went to some important road smashes all alone. Did he have any first aid training? 'No, I just stuck them in the ambulance and let the hospital sort them out.'

But how did he manage to lift the stretcher in by himself? 'Oh, there was usually somebody to give you a hand. If not you dragged it to the back and gave it a knee up. There was a knack to it.'

He sometimes took patients to a large mental hospital near Clitheroe.

'That was a bit weary. You saw all sorts there. They used to take you aside and tell you their troubles... "I've been here for thirty years," they'd say. "Will you tell our George to come and take me out." They'd give you an address. Repeat it over and over again. "You won't forget now, will you?" I'm sure half of them weren't mental at all.'

'And did you?'

'Did I what?'

'Go to the address?'

Will sucked his pipe, and blew out a cloud of smoke and smiled.' —'No.'

Lording over all was Inspector Philip Dobson. 'Dobbie' was the greatest character of all-tubby, red-faced, bucolic, like an Eighteenth Century squire. He cursed us up to scratch, but all in good humour. He didn't bear grudges and nobody bore him any. Appearance belied what he was - a very astute man. From time to time the Irwell would flood under Stubbins railway bridge which swiftly reduced our little network (not that there was much of it!) to chaos. I'll never forget Dobbie standing imperiously, but heroically, in pouring rain, in Wellington boots as floundering buses dribbled back to the depot. At one and all he fired instructions and times like a talking timetable. They all swept out again rapidly restoring the service to near normality.

Then there were the passengers. In covering the same ground so regularly we came

to know the passengers well. The Chocolate Lady always gave a bar to be shared with the driver. She was popular. The Cigar Man, on his way down to Bury of a Saturday night, would give the conductor a cigar knowing he would be on the Last Bus.

I may be a bit under the weather when I come back, so you'll look after me won't you?'

We did.

However, there was the Irishman who became frighteningly drunk of a Saturday night. He was a hard nut and frightened me, but always called me 'Sir' or 'Sorre.' On the same subject, one lad from Stubbins arrived aboard in Bury in an advanced state of nausea. The downstairs passengers edged away from him one by one as the journey progressed to huddle on the back seats and I was afraid the bus would tip up. He did eventually vomit around Dundee Lane. Dogs caused a fair amount of dislocation to the service by vomiting, too, I recall.

At Hazelhurst there was a pub called the *Cemetery Hotel* since renamed, less sombrely, as *The Fusilier*; On Tuesdays we did a Sunshine Special which picked up Senior Citizens from Shuttleworth Sunshine Club. They would surge (if that isn't too strong a word) excitedly into the lower deck. Soon the legal limit would be passed and I would order firmly, 'Upstairs only now, please.' But large ladies would bosom me aside like hydrofoils cleaving up out of the waves. They would squash inexorably inward: not upward. Then I would have to squeeze through them all, heaving money bag and machine around them, under them, over them.

One Tuesday I fought to the front of this raucous crowd to find an old lady sitting serenely like a lily just out of the eddies of a troubled pond. She was thin, especially compared to her mountainous sister Sunshiners. Her cadaverous face was the colour of flour brightened by a vivid orange lipstick done in cutie-bow style. She tendered her pennies and whispered, 'Will you put me off at the *Cemetery*, please, luv?'

The Sunshine Special was something of a professional challenge. Otherwise it was a relatively easy life, aside, that is, from the Stubbins to Ramsbottom factory bus. There were six factories in Stubbins and many workers lived in Ramsbottom barely half-a-mile away, so upward of 60 fares had to be processed in that distance. The fare was tuppence. And, in those days, pennies were pennies - heavy metal objects, none of our fancy pence. By Ramsbottom the ticket machine would be aglow; conductor on his knees, weighed down with coppers.

There were 16 duty rotas, some less jolly than others. There was the 'Three Rawtenstalls' - Bury to Rawtenstall and back three times before breakfast - which was inexplicably wearing and there was the one with 'Black Friday' in it, although I can't remember why the Friday was black. Then there was the turn of the first bus which left at fiveish and which took its toll after a week of early rising. One did feel a certain sense of achievement about it, though, superiority even ... of being up and about when others were lying a-bed. Each sunrise was different. We often had to wait

at staging points on early buses with time in hand and I remember, on the first bus turn one year, we were always, by chance, waiting opposite the Ramsbottom Town Hall as sunrise broke over Peel Tower above. It was never twice the same that week- purple, rose, grim and grey, golden ... the Tower emerged from the dawn to herald another day.

One regular client had an artificial leg. He would stomp on, sit on the side seat, leg extended across on the aisle. He then fumbled for a knee switch and the lower leg sprang down like a gin trap. Best not to be too near.

Mervyn was hopelessly deformed held together by springs, but extraordinarily cheerful in an inarticulate sort of way. At Holcombe Brook the driver would leave his cab and, between him and the conductor, Mervyn would be virtually carried across the road to await the Bolton bus. It was that kind of service. Archaic, easy going, but it worked. We gave a personal service; even waited for old ladies!

The depot was known locally and affectionately as the Tram Shed. Mighty Ribble also swept majestically through part of our route. They considered themselves very much a cut above us. We were only *Municipal*.

One day a Ribble driver, on approaching our depot, called out facetiously to his passengers, 'Anyone for the Museum?' The lady there gave him such a verbal lashing it passed into Ramsbottom folklore. In the brief moments it took to arrive at the stop she listed all their faults and all our qualities. As she stepped off she concluded disdainfully, but vehemently: 'And it makes a profit.' It did too, whereas most bus services, including Ribble's local services, did not.

Alas, Number 13 is long gone to that great garage in the sky and Ramsbottom Urban District Council Transport Department is no more, swallowed in Greater Manchester's mighty maw and, over the years, as I returned on visits, people would tell me, darkly, that things were, decidedly, not what they were... for as long as they could remember how they were! But much water has now flowed under Stubbins' bridge since then.

Harry Hanson, Mas de Mourgues, Gallician, Par Vauvert, 30600, France

RAMSBOTTOM URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT'S LAST YEARS: A POSTSCRIPT

I greatly enjoyed reading Harry HANSON's foregoing account of the last years of 'Rammy Buses', and was moved to follow up some of his memories. Ramsbottom's little municipal bus service, with its distinctive maroon and cream livery, is well chronicled. An eight page commemorative booklet was produced immediately prior to its absorption on 31st October 1969 by SELNEC PTA (South East Lancashire North East Cheshire Passenger Transport Authority) as a prelude to local government reorganisation in 1974. There will be many surviving copies, including one at Bury Archives in the Heritage Society's collection.*¹

In 1903, the UDC obtained powers to build a tramway from Holcombe Brook to Edenfield, with a loop via Bridge Street and Shuttleworth, the latter conditional upon a bridge or subway being built to cross the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway. This would have produced a remarkable situation at the site of the level crossing, and the mind boggles at how this area might have looked had the powers ever been exercised! The costs of the tramway scheme resulted in eventual abandonment, and a trolley bus service was, after a referendum of all ratepayers, introduced instead in

August 1913. Barbara PALMER contributed a piece on these early buses to our Winter 1992 issue (News Magazine, no4, pp!2-16).

Harry refers to the competition with the Ribble Bus Company. Bus operation before 1986 was a curious mix of private and municipal, and highly regulated according to the powers that each local council was able to obtain through private Acts of Parliament. Ribble prevented a number of RUDC initiatives, including operation into Burnley, and a Ramsbottom, Bury, Blackpool service, run jointly with Bury Corporation. The modern 273 Stagecoach service, incidentally, the descendant of the old Ribble 236 run from Bolton to Burnley, dates back to a parliamentary compromise of 1926, when Ribble undertook not to operate between Ramsbottom and Bury, in return for an RUDC undertaking not to compete with them on the Ramsbottom-Bolton route. Ribble similarly agreed not to carry local traffic on the Edenfield-Holcombe Brook route, along which Ramsbottom operated its trolley buses. Ramsbottom people thereby faced the frustration of watching Ribble buses travelling the very road that they wished to, but being forced to wait for an RUDC service! In 1931, an agreement between Bury, Ribble and RUDC allowed Ribble to carry local passengers.

The problems encountered by Ramsbottom's buses at Stubbins bridge persisted for most of the department's existence. Built in the 1840s as a skew bridge to carry the railway over the turnpike road, the bridge's clearance of 13 feet 6 inches restricted operation to single deck buses, even though double deck buses had started to come into use in 1947. In 1948, the RUDC began campaigning for a new bridge. Through passengers wanting to go on to Bury had the inconvenience of having to change onto a waiting double-decker at the Depot on Stubbins Lane, since more seating capacity was required on the busier southern part of the route! The intensity of competition from the private motor car, and from British Railways' introduction of diesel multiple units onto the Bury-Bacup line in 1956 made the UDC's position worse. A compromise of lowering the roadway to increase clearance to 14 feet 9 inches was begun in September 1960, a mystery gas main was inevitably struck, traffic lights were installed, and double deck buses could now operate throughout the route. The fleet was reduced in size, bus mileage reduced, and savings made.²

This simple bridge alteration, though probably the cause of regular flooding into at this dip in the road, brought the department into profit, and it was a sore point in 1969 that an efficiently run operation should lose its autonomy to SELNEC. There is a file of newscuttings in Bury Library which chart the controversy. With a modern fleet of 12 buses (11 double, one single deck) and a staff of just 16 drivers, 16 conductors and two inspectors, it was the smallest municipal bus undertaking in England, Ramsbottom being the only urban district council to have its own service. Its buses ran some 425,000 miles a year. In 1968-9 it had turned in a profit of around £8,000 on a turnover of £75,000, and its fight against dissolution soon earned the attention of those national newspapers most critical of the Labour Government of the day. 'A small, happy, hardworking and efficient bunch,' opined one such report.³

One councillor who served on the Transport Committee of RUDC at the time recently told me that the Council was unanimous in its desire to retain an independent bus operation. He related how they received a visit from Transport Minister Mrs Barbara CASTLE in advance of the SELNEC merger, and had told her civil servant how strong local and Council feeling was against the policy. 'Listen, Councillor,' the official had said, placing a patronising hand on his shoulder, 'in the general scheme of things what you think doesn't matter at all.' Interestingly, the RUDC transport General Manager supported the merger - but perhaps that may have been because he knew he would have to work the new system, under new bosses.

The local press reported extensively on the UDC's campaign to remain out of the proposed merger with 10 other municipal fleets. 'Hands Off Our Buses Mr Marsh' splashers on the sides of each bus informed a later Transport Minister of the candour of local feeling!⁴ Each bus had run at a profit of £697 that year, covering more miles than in most other transport undertakings. Costs were lower than Ribble's, and of other English municipal bus departments, only Leicester's being more profitable.⁵

The debate anticipated Ramsbottom's merger into Bury MBC in April 1974, when there was a strong feeling that the town's true destiny lay with Rossendale, not Bury or Manchester. We had to wait for the return of the THATCHER Government for a dismantling of the Labour vision of urban state transport monoliths. Deregulation of bus services in 1986 promised smaller, more responsive, private operation, but in the intervening 15 years corporate giants have swallowed up most undertakings. Perhaps the Ramsbottom model was about right - 'a small municipal passenger transport undertaking, fundamentally sound, basically a happy one, with a staff held in high esteem by the public they so loyally serve,' opined the official history.⁶ Certainly Harry HANSON and most of the old UDC's passengers would concur!

Andrew Todd

References

1. *Ramsbottom Urban District Council Transport Department, 56 Years of Municipal Passenger Transport Operation 1913-1969 (1969)*
2. *RUDCTD, 56 Years of Municipal Passenger Transport Operation (1969); Bury Times, 24th Sept, 8th Oct 1960*
3. *Daily Express, 19th Sept 1969*
4. *Bury Times, 27th Sept 1969*
5. *Bury Times, 9th, 30th Nov 1968*
6. *RUDCTD, 56 Years of Municipal Passenger Transport Operation (1969)*

LOCAL RESEARCH

The Heritage Society has no staff, and cannot offer a research or query service. The following institutions could be approached:

1 Bury Archive Service - Edwin Street (off Crompton Street) Bury BL9 0AS; tel: 0161 797 5897 - preserves the historical records from the 1650s to the present day of a wide range of organisations and private individuals from all parts of the Metropolitan Borough. There are over 30 tons of documents, maps, plans and photographs, almost all of which are available for consultation in the public reading room. Holdings include the records of local authorities (eg Ramsbottom Local Board, and UDC, including many building plans) schools, churches, businesses, trade unions, sports clubs, charities, political parties and other social organisations. The Heritage Society's Collection, including photographs, is on permanent loan there.

The service is based in Edwin Street (off Crompton Street, next to Plumb's Hi-Fi shop), and entrance is via the yard at the far end of the street on the right-hand side. The reading room is open from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm every Tuesday; and at the same times on other weekdays Monday to Friday, but please make an appointment in advance by ringing archivist Kevin Mulley before visiting on these days. Group visits (minimum six persons) on evenings and weekends are available if booked in advance.

2 Bury Central Library (Reference and Information Services Department) Manchester Road, Bury, BL9 0DG; tel: 0161 253 5871 - has publications on local history, historical printed works of local interest such as trade directories, older Ordnance Survey maps for the whole of BMBC, including Ramsbottom, copies of local newspapers, thematic collections of newscuttings worth pursuing for local biographies, census returns and parish registers on microfilm.

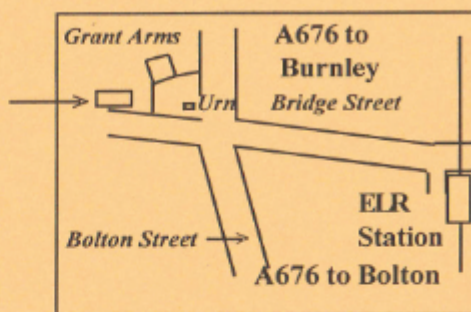
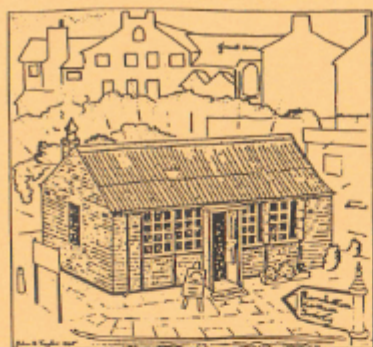
The library is open from 9.30am to 5.30pm each weekday (open until 7.30pm Wednesdays), and from 9.30am to 4.30pm on Saturdays.

3 Ramsbottom Library, Carr Street, Ramsbottom, Bury; tel: 01706 822484 - has much of the Ramsbottom local collection of the late Rev RR Carmyllie, and several filing drawers of local newscuttings and booklets, as well as Hume Elliot's history.

4 Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society; membership secretary Vicky Barlow, Bob's Ley, 6, Mowbreck Lane, Wesham, Preston, Lancs PR4 3HA; tel: 01772 687234 - membership is only £9-00 per year, and this entitles you to four magazine issues, an opportunity to publicise your research queries and findings, and 14 meetings each month with speakers at venues all over the county, including Bury and Rawtenstall.

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