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STOCKSBRIDGE'S GRAND OLD MAN



Mr. Joseph Sheldon C.C. - J. P. Engineer

Like Samuel Fox, Sheldon was 'Derbyshire' born, at Hathersage in 1845; he died at Stocksbridge on 28th August, 1935. Joseph Sheldon was the sixth son in a family of eight boys and one girl. His father and two brothers were millstone makers at Millstone Edge Quarries near the 'Surprise View'.

Hathersage in the 1850-60's

Hathersage in the 1850-60's was a pleasant, interesting village. The local trades, in addition to millstone making and gritstone quarrying, were chiefly wire-drawing and making hackle pins. At that time there were two 'schools' in the village, the Dame School and the Upper School where Mr Cresswell was the master.

There were two main wire mills at Hathersage, Joseph Cocker & Son and Robert Cook & Son's whose steel wire was taken to be 'ground' at Padley Mill, Grindleford. The process was cleaning the wire rods and changing it from a black to a bright condition. Joseph Sheldon worked and 'ground' or 'scoured' wire there as a young boy. (A young Samuel Fox was also an apprentice at Joseph Cookers')

The scouring material was crushed burnt sandstone, mixed with old oil. This oil mixture was placed on a pad of coarse flannel and rubbed to and fro on a length of about 3 feet, and then the wire was wrapped, some was oiled on two pegs in front of the worker until the whole length was finished. The wages were 3/- a week for a boy of 9 or 10 years and the working hours were from dawn till dusk.

Hard Times

Winter was dreaded by millstone makers and Joseph's father and two brothers were often unemployed for two or three months due to heavy frost on the rock face. One way of driving the 'wolf from the door' was by clearing snow from the roads or walking three or four miles towards Ringinglow to break, at threepence, a barrow load of stones, in payment of the rates, a task which even Joseph Sheldon and an older brother participated.

To make ends meet in these hard times, bilberries were gathered by mother and her children all day on Bamford Edge, Stanage and Moscar Moors, and afterwards were taken to Sheffield and sold at the 'big houses' at eight pence a quart. These were indeed 'hard times' unheard of today and Joseph's mother would send him and the other children to Longshaw Lodge with a large basin, to beg for dripping, when the so called 'Sporting Duke of Rutland' was at home for the grouse shooting season, not infrequently the household meal of the day was potato and turnip pie with an oatmeal crust.

Farm Service Life

A little before his thirteenth birthday in 1858, Joseph Sheldon left home 'for good' and entered farm service with a Mr. John Walker of Leadmill, Hathersage, on the right hand side opposite the Plough Inn.

Walker was a good master and became a true friend and Joseph's three years at Leadmill laid the foundation of his active, healthy life. He learned how to milk and mow and thresh, etc. but his principal work was carting coal from Stubble and Dronfield and delivering wood, for pit props to the mines.

At sixteen years of age and earning £8 per year plus full board and lodging, he thought 'it was time to have a change'. Hiring fairs were then held at a number of the larger towns, and in May 1861, Joseph and others set off to walk to Hope fair. There he was hired by farmer Tommy Crawshaw of Park Farm, Deepcar for £9 a year.

Sheldon went to Park farm few days after the engagement and the following week Whit-Monday arrived. Joseph could hear the bands in 'Fox Bottom' and believed it was a holiday but Crawshaw didn't and he ordered Joseph to work in the garden. Young Sheldon was upset about this and told Tommy he was having the day off anyway. Crawshaw forbade this and in his anger Joseph gave farmer Crawshaw a month's notice, but the latter reminded Joseph that he had paid the usual 'fastening penny' and that he was bound to him for twelve months.

Before the month end young Sheldon went to Morehall Farm to see a Joseph Crossland whom he knew.



Crossland was the brother-in-law to the Mr. John Walker of Leadmill, Hathersage. He had three farms, Broomhead, Wood Farm and at Morehall. Joseph left Crawshaw and went to Morehall, he went without a penny in his pocket, for Crawshaw always refused to pay the wages that were due to him.

At Morehall Farm they gave him a flask of home brewed beer, a big tea-cake and some back bacon, and then they directed him to clear a field of twitch grass behind Broomhead Hall.

He lived at Morehall where there was also a horseman and a cowman, and the food was more often, 'never ending' bread and dripping and home-brewed beer.

In this happy time at Morehall, one of Joseph's duties was to deliver milk daily to Sheffield, including the then Union Workhouse near Corporation Street.

'Tall Hat' Service

On hearing that Samuel Fox, at Townend House, Deepcar, wanted a youth to work about the house, he applied and after being interviewed by Mrs Fox, obtained the job at £11 per year, his keep, one suit of clothes and one tall hat and a pair of white gloves to be worn when riding besides the coachman as he drove the carriage and pair and Mr and Mrs. Fox to the Stocksbridge Ebenezer Chapel Congregational on Sundays.

He took up the position in December 1861 having walked over from his home in Hathersage. Mr Fox seemed to be impressed by this action and came to greet him and welcome him into the household.

Joseph's first job in the day, before 7.00 a.m. was to fetch the letter bag from Deepcar Post Office, run by Mr. Thomas Turton, and Mr Fox would usually be at the kitchen door, waiting for him to come up the field with the letter bag.

The letters at the Works were dealt with later in the afternoon and were then taken to Deepcar Post Office for dispatch to Sheffield; they were taken by a one-armed man named Tom. This letter bag was often delayed at the works and Joseph occasionally had to run after Tom at Bitholmes Bottoms.

At Townend House he was allowed to ride on William Henry Fox's pony and also took the Fox's horses to be shod by Tommy Nichols, at the Wharfedale Side smithy.

Throughout his stay, Mrs. Fox gave Joseph lessons in reading and writing; she taught at the Ebenezer Sunday School and on Sunday nights gave scripture lessons to the house staff, in the kitchen.

Joseph was eager to learn and joined the Bible Class in March 1864 lead by the Rev. Henry Robertshaw and passed the London exam for teachers in 1873. In his desire for self-improvement, he enrolled in the Mutual Improvement Society, a branch of the 'Yorkshire Mechanics' Institute', passing Lower & Higher exams and eventually becoming its secretary.

Apprenticeship and Afterwards

After two years in household at Townend House, he stated that he wished to learn a trade. Mrs. Fox said she had thought of making him valet to her son, but eventually Mr. and Mrs. Fox agreed and his first job would be that of a 'catcher' in the Hot Sheet rolling mill. After a few days however he was transferred, first to the Millwrights and then became a bound apprentice in engineering in Steam Engines & Heavy Machinery until he was twenty two years of age.

Before his apprenticeship ended, he married Mary Marsden, and he asked for a rise upon his wages of twelve shillings, plus

overtime, at bare-time rates. Mr. Fox said "How much has thou" and Sheldon replied, "Twelve shillings", then Mr. Fox said, "I had only nine shillings when I was apprenticed in my last year", but he ordered Sheldon to tell the cashier to pay him fourteen shillings, then he fixed this rate for all apprentices in their last year.

Joseph Sheldon progressed rapidly and, a natural born engineer, he became head of the light engineering department, and then following the death of Thomas Herbert, became chief engineer of the whole works. He developed several methods to save the manhandling of hot billets and rails and new method of cutting cold-rolled strip steel and annealing for the crinoline trade. As Chief Engineer he guided Fox's works through its rapid development in the last decades of the 19th century.

In 1907, after serving forty five years, he retired upon his pension, royalties from his inventions and always having a desire to see other countries, in March 1907 he went to Palestine and Egypt and a year later took a trip round the world.

Most of his retirement was spent in public service; he was a member of the West Riding County Council, the Stocksbridge U.D.C. and Wortley Board of Guardians, an original member of the Old Age Pension Committee, Bolsterstone and Bradfield Education Trusts, and of the Sheffield Royal Institute for the Blind.

He was deacon at the Congregational Church Stocksbridge for sixty seven years, also Superintendent and a teacher at Sunday School. It was in September 1937 that the installation of electric lights, as a memorial to the late Joseph Sheldon J.P., C.C., was undertaken in his beloved church.

It is apparent that Samuel Fox had many ardent workers, none more than the trusted Joseph Sheldon, who showed some of his passion for Samuel Fox and his workers, in print when he wrote his 1922 booklet - 'The Founders and Builders of Stocksbridge Works', paying tribute to the ordinary 'Tom, Dick and Harry', who so often went unrecorded when writing about the 'Successful Man'.

The Joseph Sheldon Trust

Joseph Sheldon passed away in 1935 and is buried in Bolsterstone churchyard. In his last will he bequeathed part of his estate to give ongoing grants to local charities. Initially this included the building of a Reading & Rest Room in Stocksbridge for older men for rest and recreation. This was opened by Mrs Sheldon in June 1938.

In 1974 the Trust House was sold by the then trustees and a new Joseph Sheldon Trust was registered and set up with the proceeds from the sale and the balance of the original trust, monies being invested in Charity Investment funds.

Local charities are granted donations by the trustee board and the Stocksbridge & District History Society gratefully acknowledges the generous donation given for the ongoing work at the Valley Heritage Centre.

Note. We acknowledge, the main source of information contained in this article is from Joseph Sheldon's unpublished 'Reminiscences 1845 -1927', stored in our archive.

WW2 in the Little Don Valley

Part 3

A Compilation by Barry Needle

Victory Club Dances.

At the Victory Club Dances during the war, there were plenty of dancing partners, soldiers from the barrage balloon outfits and the anti-aircraft units around the reservoirs, and men from the tank practice range at Upper Midhope. A black company based in Wortley came to the dances too, and people who had never seen black people before didn't know how to react to them at first. It was not long before they were accepted as part of the wartime scene. Apparently they asked for the Soughley Bridge to be straightened out for their vehicles as quite often they could be seen hurtling along in their American jeeps. The function of these overseas servicemen was to take over work already begun by the RAF. This was to transport large numbers of bombs to and from dumps which were sited on country roads in remote areas of the parish. The RAF had mainly lifted the bombs by hand, whilst the Americans used ladders with roller rungs to speed up the process. The area around Upper Midhope and Langsett soon became known as, Non PC, the 'Little Congo'.

Bolsterstone

Ray Hulatt remembers a parachute mine exploding across at White Lee on the far side of the Ewden reservoirs. It shook the house, blew the curtains out across the table, rattled the crockery and swung the oil lamp. It was also apparently responsible for breaking some glasses in the Castle Inn. He recalls the bombers coming up to turn round over the moors before heading back to Sheffield, one being caught for a while in a searchlight, and he could see the swastika on the plane and the outline of some of the crew.

War time dances were held in the village school on a Saturday night, with music provided by Jimmy Shaw's band. The postmistress of Bolsterstone Mrs Gertie Helliwell played the piano for the band. For the interval refreshments, one old shilling bought two potted meat sandwiches, a bun and a cup of tea. Strangely the dance always seemed to fill up after 10pm when the Castle Inn closed.

Air Raid Protection (ARP).

The Air-Raid Protection Act came into being on the 1st January 1938, and placed the responsibility for air-raid protection upon local authorities.

Sheffield Archives contains a Planning Application for air raid shelters 1939 to 1940 submitted by Stocksbridge Urban District Council.

An existing air raid shelter was mentioned in a recent property description for 2 Linden Crescent.

Under the Green Spaces in Stocksbridge Audit for St. Johns Church Deepcar, it mentions a possible old air raid shelter in a grassy area to the rear of the Church which I vaguely remember.

Alf Bonner's family had a shelter in the fields across from Wilson Road Deepcar. Alf remembers spending a lot of time making it more comfortable.

Barbara Williams spent her first 17 years on Unsliven Road. Home was in a beautiful wooded valley on the edge of 'Toy Town' with freedom to play by the river just across the road, and in an old air raid shelter with its tricky secret entrance.

Inside we found diagrams of Doodle Bugs'.

The Miners Welfare Hall was set up as ARP Post No1 from 1939 to 1945. Air Raid Wardens were on duty every night, and boys with bikes were recruited as messengers. The kitchen was reinforced as a shelter.

Barrage Balloons rode over the area to protect the steelworks.

Catenary defences were constructed to cover Langsett, Midhope, Underbank, Morehall and Broomhead Reservoirs (as was the Bradfield Reservoirs) after Guy Gibson's Dam Buster raid, to prevent the Germans from getting their own back. (Gibson stayed at Broomhead Hall with the Rimmington Family during the training for the raid over the Derwent Valley.) Underbank also had empty oil drums on chains across the water. The lattice towers sat on concrete plinths which can still be found. Wires strung between the towers had chains and girders hanging down. I can still remember seeing the catenary towers around Langsett Reservoir from the bus, which took me to school in the mid 1950's.

'Air Raid Precautions around the Bradfield Reservoirs' records they were dismantled by three men (two Irish men and a tipper driver) working for T.W. Ward scrap merchants. Each tower weighed about 25 tons and sat on a ball bearing about 3" in diameter supported in place by the wire ropes weighing about 5 tons. Weights were then hung from the wires at intervals across the water. The tipper driver remembers delivering most of the steel to Sammy Fox's, the nearest steelworks. They also dismantled the Derwent and Bradfield Reservoirs taking about a year from 1954 to 1955.

Bombs falling in the area.

Upper Midhope was bombed twice around 1941, probably accidentally. One stick fell near Midhope Reservoir and a second in the North America area. An UXB was found near the shooting cabin in Sugden Clough. In Stocksbridge Town Council History, 'it is believed that there were 6 bombs dropped in the valley'.

Bombs were also recorded to have fallen in the fields down Morehall Lane, by Bolsterstone residents Connie Dyson, Sally Ashton and Jean Bamaby.

The following extracts are taken from the Stocksbridge Works School records :-

4th September 1939 - School closed for one week following instructions regarding arrangements in case of war.

11th September 1939 - Letter received from the Divisional Clerk regarding sand and shelters. Under 5's excluded from attending school for the present.

April 1940 - Air Raid Practice.

September 1940 - Register kept open till 10.05 to allow children to be late due to spending the night in the shelter.

4th January 1941 - The alert sounded 3.20, All Clear 3.25.

November 1941 - Alert sounded 1.20, All Clear 2.45.

Ron Smith recorded in his diaries that on the 21st August 1940, 'Air Raid reported at Stocksbridge, Sirens 1.30 to 3.15. (extract from his two surviving diaries for 1940 and 1941.)

Arnold Belcher of Thurlstone writing in WW2 Peoples War, records 'I can remember in 1941 the bombing of Stocksbridge Works. All the family went into the cellar'.

Society News

In the memoirs of Lillian Birkhead she mentions a bomb that fell on a bungalow at the bottom of Park Drive, 'but there was no serious damage'. In total contrast, Audrey Moxon says the bungalows at the bottom of Park Drive were destroyed. The Paragon records the date as 23rd August 1941, and one of the craters as being 30ft wide x 15 ft deep.

Audrey (who lived in Hull), had been sent by her parents to a 'quiet area' (Stocksbridge). She stayed with her uncle Mr Smith who was the steward at the Victory Club, and remembers there was no siren warning but the sound of explosions and breaking glass. An incendiary bomb landed on the doorstep of Mrs Lee's house in Spring Mill Terrace without exploding. The Spring Mill received a direct hit and the last bomb landed on the hillside with the biggest explosion of all. Alice Broomhead also remembered when the Spring Mill was bombed. Next day many people went to look at the craters and damage. Windows as far away as Woolley Road were broken.

The History of Stocksbridge School records the incident as follows. At the bottom of Park Drive a second hand wooden furniture store belonging to Mr Len Moxon, received a bomb and had to be closed as a result. One bomb dropped between Spring Mill Terrace and Bessemer Terrace and fractured a gas main. Another fell in the works scrap yard and showered metal and bolts through the glass skylight of the Victory Club onto the billiard tables. A further bomb dropped in Siemens Open Hearth Melting Shop, landing in an empty mould which splintered, causing a Mr Trill to suffer from shock. The last of the stick fell on the hillside between the works and a homestead known as the Barracks, leaving a huge crater.

Sheffield Archives has an ordnance survey map of Stocksbridge, showing war damage sites in relation to compensation claims.

On the 3rd August 1942 West Riding ARP Archives record 'We have an unexploded bomb in Cemetery Road Oughtibridge. Please stay clear for now.' Later 'Another 4 high explosives reported Cemetery Road Oughtibridge.'

The four cottages of Bland Houses on the right just before the bend to Middlewood Tavern were badly damaged by bombs, thought to have been mistakenly dropped. The gate posts to the property can still be seen.

I note the August Paragon last year where we stated that we had just been successful in gaining an award from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the museum. Is that only one year ago, it seems ages, so much has happened.

The Heritage museum is settling down and we are changing our exhibition in the next few weeks to 'Wire drawing & Fox Wire'.

We had a steady stream of visitors when we opened and this has now tapered down to 3 or 4 visitors a day, which I suppose is about right for a centre like ours. We have had a number of visits from groups, the latest being the Bradfield History Society, who like everyone else, has been well impressed.

I think we will have a busy autumn period with our work with our new sponsors, Stocksbridge Regeneration Co. We are providing historical information and photographs from our archive and the one in storage at the leisure centre, for their development themes for retail shops and offices in the Fox Valley scheme.

Our thanks again go to Basil for his 'Grand Day Out' arrangements to the Mill museum at Leeds. He unfortunately couldn't go and I had to be 'Basil' for the day! - Scary, but you realise how much effort is put into these events

Well done B.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS FOR 2015

September 10th	How Cathedrals were built	Pat McLaughlin
October 8th	A History Society Presentation	
November 12th	How The Victorians Invented Christmas	Susan Deal
December 10th (Note! this is a Thursday)	Christmas Celebrations (Pre-booking essential - Members only)	
January 14th 2016	No Event - Winter Recess	
February 11th 2016	A History Society Presentation	

Meetings take place in the Christ Church Meeting Room (Under Croft) starting at 7.00pm Prompt

Why not visit our Website at - www.stocksbridgehs.co.uk

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