In this issue:
One Summer
Hornsea Mere
Roman Signal Stations on the Yorkshire Coast
The Curious Legend of Tom Bell and his Cave at Hardcastle Crags, Near Halifax
Jervaulx Abbey

This wooden chainsaw sculpture of a monk is by Andris Bergs. It was commissioned by the owners of Jervaulx Abbey to welcome visitors to the Abbey.

Jervaulx was a Cistercian Abbey and the medieval monks wore habits, generally in a greyish-white, and sometimes brown and were referred to as the “White Monks.”

The sculptured monk is wearing a habit with the hood covering the head with a scapula. A scapula was a garment consisting of a long wide piece of woollen cloth worn over the shoulders with an opening for the head.

Some monks would also wear a cross on a chain around their necks.

Photo by Brian Wade
Welcome to the autumn issue of The Yorkshire Journal. Before we highlight the articles in this issue we would like to inform our readers that all our copies of Yorkshire Journal published by Smith Settle from 1993 to 2003 and then by Dalesman, up to winter issue 2004, have all been passed on to The Saltaire Bookshop, 1 Myrtle Place, Shipley, West Yorkshire BD18 4NB where they can be purchased. We no longer hold copies of these Journals.

David Reynolds starts us off with the Yorkshire Television drama series ‘One Summer’ by Willy Russell. It was about two tear-away Liverpool youths who run away to Wales to escape the gangs of Liverpool. David explains why Willy Russell disowned the Yorkshire TV’s production of ‘One Summer’, and tells us about the cast and the locations, the main being Kidder’s House filmed in the village of Beckwithshaw near Harrogate.

Then Alison Hartley visits Hornsea Mere which is the largest natural freshwater lake in Yorkshire. It attracts many species of birds throughout the year. Today Hornsea Mere is a popular tourist attraction offering visitors rowing, sailing, boat trips, fishing, painting and bird-watching.

Next Jeremy Clark takes us along the north-east Yorkshire coast when the Romans protected it from Anglo-Saxon pirates who sailed across the North Sea to raid and plunder. The Romans built signal stations but they only lasted for about twenty years before they were overrun and burnt to the ground. David explains how some of them came to a valiant end. Today some of the sites of the Roman signal stations can be visited.

For our last feature Jean Griffiths explores the curious legend of Tom Bell and his Cave at Hardcastle Crags, near Halifax. According to legend Tom Bell was a robber and a poacher who lived in a cave that now takes his name. Jean outlines the full story of the legend and the controversy that still surrounds a skull that was supposed to have been found in the cave.

But there is much more to these articles, please read and enjoy them. We welcome your comments.

Andrew Simpson
One Summer

By David Reynolds

One Summer is a five-part television drama series set in 1983, about two tear-away Liverpool youths who run away to the hills and valleys of Wales to escape the gangs and turmoil of Liverpool and try to recapture a happy moment in Billy’s life, a camping trip to North Wales.

It was produced by Yorkshire Television for Channel 4 in four parts and was premiered on 7th August 1983. One Summer was written in 1980 by the award winning playwright Willy Russell. However, this highly controversial production lead to Willy Russell having his name removed from the credits. This left Yorkshire Television to publicise One Summer, mysteriously as ‘by the author of Educating Rita.’

The series was met with critical acclaim at the time of its original broadcast for its emotional drama, gritty realism and wry humour.

The Storyline

For the teenagers, Billy and Icky, things are getting a little too close for comfort. Like brushes with the police, the spectre of unemployment and the attentions of rival gangs. Billy and his weaker partner Icky are in their last term at school, although neither has put in an appearance for several months. They preferred to steal cigarettes from the corner shop, to mug drunks, and to just kill time.

Yet Billy, kicking a tin amongst the wastelands, cherished a vision of the country, based on a school camping holiday in Wales. He tells his friend “It’s great, and when the fire’s going and they’re cooking sausages and soup and that, it’s a knockout. When we had to leave I was crying you know. It’s the only time I ever cried in my life.”

However they do not find the calm idyllic life they expect in Wales. They have people like Kidder to contend with, a strange man, a loner who could very well change their lives.

In the final episode soft Icky killed himself in a stolen car. The brave Billy is arrested by vicious Liverpool detectives and taken home to be re-brutalised, and their protector Kidder was exposed as a defrocked schoolmaster who was once imprisoned because of a homosexual affair with an 18-year-old pupil. It is not the happiest conclusion imaginable.
So why did Willy Russell have his name removed from the credits?

Willy Russell disowned Yorkshire TV’s production of One Summer for a number of reasons. Apparently he saw the two boys as younger and the play itself as harder. The finished product bore little resemblance to his original concept, so he asked Yorkshire TV to remove his name from everything to do with the series.

From the very start the programme had been fraught with misunderstandings and lack of co-operation. Willy Russell hated the way the series had been directed. It is not what he intended and was in profound disagreement over the way it was cast. Russell could give a whole list of disagreements but the casting was the thorniest problem. The producer and director reneged on a promise not to cast the play while he was out of the country. They ignored actors that he recommended and selected others without his knowledge or consent. The consequence is that the boys are played by two 18 and 19 year olds, Russell had nothing against them personally, but using two youngsters who are much older than 15 years he intended resulted in a great deal of sympathy, which was vital to the point of the series, has been lost. Russell says that “Parts of it are brutal and even pornographic as a result.” Russell also says that not once was he invited to discuss the script with director Gordon Flemyng, who made it clear that (Russell’s) direct involvement in the shooting was not wanted.

“I didn’t like the way the storyline was sacrificed to a lot of pretty shots of the Welsh countryside. I wrote the best film sequence I’ve ever written and they cut it and substituted a traffic jam. I wrote about a derelict cottage which they turned into a £150,000 bijou Hampstead residence and they did the same thing with a caravan. These details add up. But the whole tone isn’t what I intended and I asked some time ago to have my name removed.”

The series features many non-actors and previous unknowns (including Dave Morrissey and Spencer Leigh in the main parts). Russell says, “On previous plays I’ve written where unknowns or non-actors have been cast loads of kids have been seen. On ‘Our Day Out’ for the BBC we saw 300 and selected 20. Here, they only looked at about 40.” Yorkshire TV disputers this and says that they saw as many as 200 young people to find the leading rolls.

A spokesman for Yorkshire TV explained that they were proud of the series and think they have done justice to his work. “Obviously we are saddened that he took his name off it. His script has been changed very slightly and only when scenes were impractical and wouldn’t have worked on TV.”

There must nevertheless be some sympathy for Willy Russell, who refused to allow his name to be attached to the finished Yorkshire TV production.

The Cast

David Morrissey played Billy Rizley

David Morrissey was born in 1963 in Liverpool. He attended the local Everyman Youth Theatre, and went on to train at RADA. ‘One Summer’ was David Morrissey’s screen debut. David was 17 when cast in the role of Billy, and celebrated his 18th birthday during filming.

Following completion of RADA studies, he was with the Royal Shakespeare Company, then the National Theatre. Since that time he has carved a very successful career and can be seen in Captain Corelli’s Mandolin, Our Mutual Friend, State of Play (written by Paul Abbott), and Blackpool. He also appears in Basic Instinct 2 and The Reaping.
Spencer Leigh played Icky Higson

A native of Liverpool, Spencer Leigh also attended the Everyman Youth Theatre and later studied full time at a Liverpool Drama college. He was 20 when One Summer was broadcast.

Spencer Leigh has appeared in a number of films including several directed by Derek Jarman including Caravaggio, The Last of England, Aria and The Garden. He moved to the United States in the early 1990s and today produces TV commercials.

Ian Hart played Rabbit

Ian was born 8 October 1964 in Liverpool. Also gaining his early acting experience at the Everyman Youth theatre and One Summer was his debut screen appearance. Since then Ian Hart has had significant critical success in feature films. Willy Russell put forward Ian’s name for one of the lead roles in ‘One Summer’. His suggestion was rejected by the director who claimed that ‘Ian had a speech impediment and would never make a lead actor.’ How wrong he was!

Those familiar with Ian’s work will know that he has since become one of the country’s leading actors with outstanding roles in Blind Flight and Ken Loach’s, award winning, ‘Land and Freedom’, although most youngsters will know him as Professor Quirrell in Harry Potter.

James Hazeldine played Kidder

James was born 4th April 1947 and died on 17th Dec 2002, aged 55. He was rehearsing for his role as Sigmund Freud in a new stage play, The Talking Cure, at the time.

Best known for playing Bayleaf in the firefighting drama London's Burning, a role he played continuously for seven years from the series inception in 1988 through to 1995. His other TV appearances included the popular sci-fi series The Omega Factor, and Chocky. James Hazeldine was also an accomplished and successful stage actor. He started his career in the theatre at the Victoria Theatre, Salford as a student A.S.M. then on to various repertory theatres in the North of England, eventually being cast in the Edward Bond season at the Royal Court Theatre in London. A bench is dedicated to his memory outside the National Theatre on the South Bank.

Jane West played Jo

Jane West was born in Greywell, a small village in Hampshire in 1959. She appeared in a number of British TV dramas before relocating to California in 1986 with her six-year-old daughter. Jane is the author of ‘The Lonesome Pine’ a successful children’s picture book, and is currently working on other writing projects including a pilot for a TV sitcom.
Above: Billy and Icky after jumping off the train  

The Supporting Cast include Sheila Fay as Mrs Rizley, Gil Brailey as Maureen Rizley, Robert Keegan as Mr Wally, Susie Johns as Irene, John Cording as George, Sean McKee as Louie, Ken Sharrock as Liverpool Cop, John Shackley as Kid 1. It was directed by Gordon Flemyng, produced by Keith Richardson and the music was composed by Alan Parker.

It must have been hard on David Morrissey and Spencer Leigh, cast as Billy and Icky, who were expected to look 15, when they were evidently three or four years older. Their maturity of stance and style tended to work against the story. Also Jo who played by Jane West aged 22 as Billy’s girlfriend was also much too old for the part.

Their circumstances in the story were that Billy had no father, a mother obsessed with bingo and a lazy sister, and Icky was one of 10 in a slum family. These were set down as if in an area about urban deprivation that was not integrated into the story.

The Locations

The five-part series was shot in Wales, Liverpool, and at a cottage near Harrogate between Easter and October 1983. Kidder’s House was filmed in the village of Beckwithshaw near Harrogate, North Yorkshire. The exterior of the house has been renovated, but is basically still the same after 20 years. The interior has been substantially modernised.

Left: ‘Kidder’s House’ before filming ‘One Summer’
Left: Another view of ‘Kidder’s House’ before filming ‘One Summer’ note that the porch was added for the film

Right: ‘Kidder’s House’ as it is now

Left: The brook behind ‘Kidder’s House’ where Icky skimmed the plates

Right: The caravan in a field behind ‘Kidder’s House’

Left: One Summer is available on DVD. Produced by Network DVD Catalogue Number: 7952371
Special features on the DVD include interviews with David Morrissey, Spencer Leigh, Ian Hart and producer Keith Richardson.

The program has lived on vividly in many people’s memories. A website has been setup in an attempt to make some information available to those who still remember the program, which includes the controversy surrounding its original broadcast which has contributed to its relative obscurity. It also includes images, press clippings, episode guide, interviews and a forum.

The website is dedicated to the memory of James Hazeldine, who died 17th Dec 2002 aged 55.
Hornsea Mere in East Yorkshire is located west of the sea side town of Hornsea. It is the largest natural freshwater lake in Yorkshire and was formed at the end of the Ice Age. The Mere covers an area of 467 acres, that is about 2 miles (3km) long and three-quarter of a mile (1.2km) at its widest point and is not much more than 8 feet (2.5m) at its deepest point. It was featured on the BBC television programme Seven Natural Wonders as one of the wonders of Yorkshire.

It is a Special Protection Area due to its shallowness that results in a diverse range of swamp and fen plants. Also being close to the North Sea coast it attracts many species of birds throughout the year and is of international importance for a migratory population of gadwalls, a common freshwater duck with grey and brown feathers. Over the course of the year, as many as 250 different species of birds may be seen. If an injured bird is found it is the job of the recovery service to bring it to the shore for the attention of the RSPCA.
Today Hornsea Mere is a popular tourist attraction offering visitors rowing, sailing, boat trips, fishing, painting and bird-watching. Hornsea Mere is also the home of Hornsea Sailing Club. Some visitors just come to sit in the café and take in the splendid views.

However, a permit is required for anglers who come to fish for pike, carp, bream and perch.

For those who hire a rowing boat or a sailing craft they are supplied with buoyancy gear. In the event of someone getting into difficulty, like capsizing or breaking some equipment and cannot get back, it is the recovery services that go out and tow them in.

Sailing on the Mere is available seven days a week from 9am from the beginning of April to the end of October, and Wednesday evenings from early May to late August, with on-water recovery during these times.

Although the Mere is self-managed in most respects, the service team do routine maintenance to remove fallen trees and other floating debris.

The café was built in 1880 to cope with the demands of the tourists being brought in droves to Hornsea by the railway. The line was officially opened on 28 March 1864, closure of the line came as a direct result of the Beeching Report. The last passenger train ran on 19th October 1964.
Hornsea Mere is open to the public daily from 9.00am to 5.30pm. There is a car park situated near the lake.
Above: Hornsea Mere, inset the Mere looking towards Hornsea town, the Church tower can be seen in the far distance
ROMAN SIGNAL STATIONS ON THE YORKSHIRE COAST

THEY ARE UNIQUE AND WITHOUT PARALLEL IN BRITAIN

By Jeremy Clark

Today the north-east Yorkshire coast is one of the finest in Britain, with its steep cliffs, broad bays and lengthy beaches. Along its unspoilt coastline are remains of signal stations built by the Romans during their later occupations. They were built at various locations from Huntcliff, near Saltburn-by-the Sea, down the coast to Filey. They are a reminder of the days when no holidaymakers came to the area, but unwelcome visitors arrived from across the North Sea. These Yorkshire Roman signal stations are important sites, they are unique and without parallel in Britain.

In the fourth century AD, Anglo-Saxon pirates sailed across the North Sea repeatedly raiding the coast. The Angles came from what is now the border of Germany and Denmark and the Saxons from what is now Northern Germany. These Germanic raiders arrived here in their long ships, running them onto the beaches. They had time to pillage the undefended coastline and they could also move further inland knowing that there were no Roman troops in the area. After loading their ships with plunder, which included corn and sheep as well as valuables and older children, they set fire to the houses before returning home across the North Sea. The Picts who inhabited much of Scotland may have come south by sea in about AD 376 and like the Anglo-Saxon pirates found it easy to attack the east coast.

The sporadic raiding of the coast underlined a weakness in the Roman defences. A system was needed to give an adequate warning of any impending raids. So in the late fourth century, possibly in the reign of Magnus Maximus (AD 383-8) who had been an army commander in Britain, a line of fortified signal stations was established along the high headland on the North Sea coast at Huntcliff, Goldsborough, Ravenscare, Scarborough and Filey.

The signal stations were presumably all built at the same time. Roman coins and pottery found during excavations prove they dated from the second half of the fourth century, after about AD 380, late in the Roman occupation. Accidentally lost coins from the monies sent to the signal stations as pay, forms the principal evidence for dating the signal stations. Other Roman signal stations may have existed which have either been washed away or still await discovery. In Roman times, the coastline was probably several miles to the east of where it is today.

The Yorkshire signal stations are amongst the latest fortifications erected in Roman Britain and that is why they are so interesting. They are located in prominent positions commanding extensive views out to the North Sea and up and down the coast.

These Roman signal stations were built not to defend the coast, although they were manned by garrisons, but to give the alarm, being ideally placed for signalling. It is also possible that the local people who lived in remote areas could have also used them as a refuge. The method of signalling is not known, but the Romans could have used torches, beacons or even mirrors.
It is likely that these signal stations were able to alert both naval patrols at sea and troops inland. Malton was the nearest inland fort where in the late fourth century, a unit was transferred from Brough on Humber. This was a mobile cavalry force prepared for action. Signalling inland would have required intermediate post between Malton and the sea, but no examples are yet known. When raiders were seen approaching, a beacon or fires were lit and smoke signals gave the alarm. Other signal stations passed on the message. The signal stations remained in commission until at least AD 396, but the Roman forces that backed them up were finally withdrawn by 410 and the undefended coast was once again open to attack by raiders.

GOLDSBOROUGH ROMAN SIGNAL STATION

The Roman signal stations were built to a fairly standard plan. The best Yorkshire example was excavated in 1918 at Goldsborough, about half a mile (800 m) from the sea at Kettleness. The site survives only as a mound in a field and overlooks Runswick Bay on the east side of a minor road to Kettleness. At the site there is an information plaque with details of the Roman Signal Station. During the 1918 excavation over 300 Roman coins were found.

An outer defensive wall protected the station, with a parapet of about fourteen feet nine inches (4.5m) strengthened with rounded towers at the corners. The single gateway in the south wall led into an unpaved courtyard, which surrounded the central signal tower. This was a square structure up to a height of fifty feet (15 m). On the floor, large stone blocks were found. Timbers set vertically in the sockets of these blocks had presumably supported an upper storey. The total height of the tower was about one hundred feet (30 m), with two or three storeys. A deep well in the courtyard provided a good supply of fresh water. A large outer ditch with sweeping curves at the corners encircled the signal station.

The Roman road commonly known as Wade’s Causeway served the North. It ran between Cawthorn and Lease Rigg forts and probably onto Goldsborough, with a branch off to Whitby where there may have been a fort. Another Roman road probably ran from Malton to the coast at Filey with a branch road to Scarborough. Wade’s Causeway on Wheeldale Moor is one of the very few Roman roads in the country which is exposed to view and is well worth seeing; through the stretch uncovered is the foundation of the road and not its surface.
The Roman signal station at Huntcliff has now been completely destroyed by erosion. In 1911 more than half of the site had been eroded away when it was discovered and the remaining part was then excavated. The remains of the signal station consisted of a ‘V’ section ditch 10m wide and 3.5m deep which enclosed a sub-rectangular area perhaps 50m square. Within the enclosing ditch was a defensive wall about 3.25m high with bastions at the corners. Little of the interior survived, but there were traces of walling and a well 14 feet deep and 6 feet wide which contained the remains of 14 people, including women and children. In the lower levels of the well a leather sandal, two wooden bowls, a part of an oak wheel and a piece of cloth had been preserved in a waterlogged condition. Other finds from the site included fragments of Roman pottery and a number of bronze coins the earliest dating from A.D. 337 showing Constantius and the latest dating to A.D. 395-408. The finds from the site are now in the Whitby Museum. Today the location of the site is marked by a plaque, (unfortunately very mutilated) which can be seen east of Saltburn on the Cleveland Way.

The Ravenscar signal station was the first to be discovered in 1774 during the construction of Raven Hall. A number of Roman finds were made including a sandstone slab bearing an inscription, ‘IVSTINIANVS P P VINDICIANVS MASBIER TVRRM CASTRVM FECIT A SO’ translated ‘Justinianus the First Centurion and Vindicianus the Magistrate, built this tower and fortification from its foundations.’ This commemoration stone represents actual evidence for the small Roman fortification with a tower constructed by Centurion Justinianus at Ravenscar. It is also believed to be the latest inscription from Roman Britain and is now on display in the Whitby Museum.

The site is now under the Raven Hall Hotel and there is nothing visible on the ground.

Right: Stone slab with the inscription from Ravenscar
The remains of the Scarborough Roman signal station are located on the headland of Castle Hill. It was excavated in the 1920s and consisted of a square tower with an enclosing outer ditch that had rounded corners. The inner wall had small bastions which enclosed a small courtyard of 33 metres containing a double-stepped plinth which formed the base for a central tower 15 metre square at the foundations. Seven bases for wooden posts supporting floor beams were also discovered. The foundations suggested that a single tower, built of wood on stone foundations stood nearly 30 metres high. The signal station was guarded by a gatehouse that controlled the entrance into the courtyard. During the excavation several Roman coin were found indicating by the dates that the signal station was built in about AD 370 and occupied almost continuously until the early fifth century when it was overrun and destroyed. The remains of the excavation are now laid out for the public to view and the ditch which surrounds the courtyard can be clearly seen, although cliff erosion has removed the eastern side of the wall and ditch. The site was later occupied by a series of medieval chapels and no Roman masonry is now exposed. The outline of the signal station is marked out in concrete.

Above: The Roman signal station on Scarborough’s headland, with Filey Brigg in the distance. It is now overlaid by medieval stonework.

Left: Excavate plane of the Scarborough Roman signal station

Left: A Reconstruction drawing of the Scarborough Roman signal station, the fire of another Roman signal station can be seen in the distance. By Ivan Lapper, courtesy English Heritage Photo Library

Above: A view from the site of the Roman signal station, Scarborough, looking north along the coastline and over the hills to the site of the Ravenscar signal station. Standing on top of a 30 metres high signal tower would give a lookout a more elevated view. A blazing beacon fire on the horizon would be visible in both directions. The Romans in fact would have tested the range from each signal station in order for them to be in full operation.
FILEY ROMAN SIGNAL STATION

The Roman signal station at Filey has been badly affected by erosion and it is certain that Carr Naze, where it once stood was considerably bigger in Roman times than it is now. The signal station was investigated after a cliff fall in 1857 and small-scale archaeological excavations took place in 1923. As a result of the increasing threat of erosion further archaeological work was carried out in 1993-94 and although about two-thirds of the site has disappeared over the cliffs, it is clear that the plan of the Filey signal station is very similar to that of the others in the group. It measured about 50m across and at the centre stood foundations of a tower 14m square. In 1857 five large stone blocks were recovered which may have supported the first floor of the tower. The blocks have sockets in the top for holding upright timber posts and one block has a hunting scene carved on it. These stone blocks can now be seen in the nearby Crescent Gardens in a bedded area between shrubbery and flower.

Far left: Five large stone blocks recovered in 1857 which may have supported the first floor of the tower. Left: A hunting scene carved on one of the blocks. They can be seen in the Crescent Gardens set amongst flowers

Left: Plan of the Roman signal station at Filey

Right: Reconstruction of the late Roman signal station at Filey.
Drawing by Simon Chew and Peter Marshall, York Archaeological Trust

The tower was surrounded by a small walled courtyard which was entered through a gate on the west side. Beyond the gate there was a defensive ditch which presumably ran across the headland, but did not enclose the whole site. Since the Roman structures have been totally demolished, it is difficult to know what they originally looked like, but it is possible that the tower rose to a height of 30m.

These recent excavations indicate that the Filey signal station was one of the latest fortifications to be built in England and was still functioning at the very end of the Roman period in Britain. Roman coins discovered amongst a thick layer of refuse in the courtyard around the tower left by the garrison, provided evidence for this. Six coins are of particular interest, because they belong to one of the latest types to reach Roman Britain which date A.D. 395-402, although occupation is unlikely to have continued much beyond the early fifth century. Another important discovery is of a bronze spur that may indicate a mounted capability, perhaps for coastal patrols. This new evidence gives a clearer picture of how they operated.
The final stand of the Roman signal stations

These signal stations had a short life of only about twenty years or so after which they were overrun and burnt to the ground. Some of them came to an end dramatically, although the evidence of the final stand is vivid. At both Huntcliff and Goldsborough, skeletons were found under the ruins of the structures. In excavations at Huntcliff fourteen skeletons of men, women and children were found dumped in the well. Better evidence for violence came from Goldsborough. In the ruins of the tower a skeleton of a short thick-set man with serious head wounds had fallen face-down across the smouldering fire of an open hearth, probably after being stabbed in the back. His left hand twisted behind his back with his right hand touching the wall. The skeleton of a taller man lay face down near the feet of the first; beneath him lay the skeleton of a large and powerful dog, its head against the man’s throat and its paws across his shoulders. This was thought to represent a dog defending the tower against an intruder, so even the dog too had defended to the last.

VISIT THE SCARBOROUGH ROMAN SIGNAL STATION

The remains of the Roman signal station at Scarborough are open to the public which is on the prominent headland between the north and south bays in the ground of Scarborough Castle. The signal station is outlined with concrete D-shaped corner towers. Only the ditch which surrounds the courtyard can be clearly seen, cliff erosion has removed the eastern side of the wall and ditch. The site was later occupied by a series of medieval chapels which makes it difficult to separate Roman remains from the medieval remains, but no Roman masonry is now exposed.

The signal station garrison probably consisted of a small band of local militia whose duties were to warn local people and the Roman army inland of the approach of sea-borne raiders

Scarborough Castle and grounds are managed by English Heritage which has made the site a tourist attraction with exhibitions of artefacts from the site and viewing platforms. The 18th century Master Gunner’s House is now a museum, its centrepiece is a Bronze Age sword discovered in 1984.

Below are two Roman coins similar to these found at the Roman signal stations which helped to date them.

Left: Magnus Maximus 383-388

Right: Theodosius 379-395

Above: Aerial view of the Scarborough Roman signal station
The Curious Legend of Tom Bell and his Cave at Hardcastle Crags, Near Halifax

By Jean Griffiths

Calderdale in West Yorkshire has had its fair share of historical outlaws, the most famous of these is ‘The Notorious Cragg Vale Coiners Who Became Murderers’, this story has been published in the journal (TYJ 3 Autumn 2010). In fact it is very doubtful that an outlaw named Tom Bell ever existed, and the cave in Hardcastle Crags which has been named after him, probably only came about after the story was first related in the 19th century. Tom Bell’s story has been considerably developed and exaggerated since it was first published in a collection of poems by a local poet William Broadbent, published posthumously in 1840. The poem is titled ‘A Rural Walk on a Summers Day in the Groves of Hebden (in Company with Mary and Martha)’. Broadbent claims that he is relating a popular local story, which may be true, but in fact he has invented it himself. Also, from his description of the cave it is obvious that Broadbent had visited the site in person. A few years later in 1844, a more fanciful poem of the story was published by William Dearden, but he does not actually mention Tom Bell by name, only a Robber’s Cave. Also Dearden further exaggerated the story and included three new characters in his poem which is titled ‘The Poor-Law Martyr’.

In 1919 these two poems, written in the 1840s, were accepted as a legend by Dan Thomas Wilcock the editor of a series of little booklets ‘Stories from Hardcastle Crags and Heptonstall’. The Tom Bell legend was published in the first one. Wilcock attributed the story to Broadbent and Dearden adding that it was “an imaginary outlaw”. There were some, however, who believed that Tom Bell really existed!

A popular version of the legend of Tom Bell

Tom Bell was a robber and a poacher caring neither for life, laws or limbs. He lived alone among the wild rocks and trees in a cave that now bears his name in Hardcastle Crags, the popular beauty spot near Hebden Bridge. At night he would leave his cave to plunder nearby local farms and villages and lay up in his cave during the day eating and sleeping. The results of his ill-gotten loot produced large quantities of valuables and food which he stored in his den. He is said to have worn a clanking iron mail suit, and boots with the heels at the front and toes at the back to mislead anyone who tried to follow his footsteps. Tom Bell’s cave had an entrance in Hebden Wood, Hardcastle Crags, and according to local belief could be walked through which led to Hell Hole Rocks or Choppy Knife Rock near Mytholm Church in the Colden Valley. These provided Tom with secret access to a wide area. It is also said that along the way, at the right time, you could hear the coal fires of Heptonstall being poked.

Tom had a friend in Willie the Woodsman who would sometimes visit him at night to share a stolen meal. One particular night Willie was making his way to his friend’s cave with a stolen lamb, when he was spotted by two children. They saw him going towards Tom Bell’s cave and so they decided to return the next day to explore. As Willie reached the entrance to the cave he was startled by two crows with bloody beaks still holding clumps of flesh as they flew past him. As he ventured into the cave he was met with a dreadful sight. His friend Tom lay dead, his eyeless sockets staring blankly at the dying embers of the charcoal fire. In his raised hand was his sword, the blade all black with clotted blood. Tom Bell is said to have died when his stomach exploded after gorging himself on his store of food which he had stolen. His dead body was strangely illuminated by a pale green phosphorescence of a rotting tree root. Willie quickly turned and ran for all he was worth, forgetting about the lamb. The next day the two children returned to Tom Bell’s cave and were confronted with the same sight that sent Willie the Woodsman screaming into the night. The shocked children crept away whispering “Willie’s dead”.

20 The Yorkshire Journal
In this version of the story the children had not seen Willie leaving the cave so they thought that the burst corpse was his. Broadbent who was the originator of the story ends his poem in saying ‘How long he lived, or where he died nothing more is said beside’. Therefore it is not known when this incident was supposed to have occurred, although various traditions date the legendary Tom Bell to the 9th down to 18th centuries.

**The Original Tom Bell Legend?**

However, it is possible that there may be some truth behind Tom Bell’s legend. This is because in 1779 an incident occurred involving another historical outlaw, which in fact was probably the original source of the legend. The incident happened on 8 September 1779 when a man walking by Hathershelf Scout, an escarpment near Mytholmroyd not far from Hardcastle Crags, watched his dog run into a narrow cave. Thinking that the dog was chasing a fox, he followed it into the aperture which expanded into a small cavern. Instead of finding a fox he came face to face with a ragged outlaw hiding out and defending his cave with his pistol. Eventually the outlaw was overcome by force.

This outlaw was Joseph Bailey a journeyman blacksmith and the cave was found to contain stolen goods from Rochdale Parish Church. It was also well stocked with cured meats to satisfy the needs of a long concealment. Joseph Bailey was convicted and transported for his crime. Some aspects of the Tom Bell legend differ little from Bailey’s activities. The newspaper report of his arrest infers that there were other places used by him to conceal plunder. Tom Bell’s Cave could well have been used by Bailey, or the idea transferred by popular imagination to Hardcastle Crags. Most of the escarpment at Hathershelf Scout including the cave was destroyed during the late nineteenth century by quarrying for stone. The legend relies heavily upon an historical fact and the name Bell could easily have been a corruption from Bailey. It is easy to imagine how the story could have developed into local folklore and moved to other locations in the area.

**Tom Bell’s Cave**

The location of Tom Bell’s Cave is marked on the 25 inch to the mile Ordnance Survey map of 1908, but no entrance is visible. It is situated in Hebden Wood south of Hebden Water and the Hebden Hay hostels, north-west of Hebden Bridge. The cave is not simply a hole in the hillside that can be walked into but has a large length to it with several entrances. Modern geological and potholing knowledge has shown that the cave is a passage between huge tumbled boulders covering a fissure in sandstone caused by a minor fault. It has a narrow zig-zag route into the earth for about 80 feet. Then there is a steep drop into a chamber for which climbing equipment is needed if you want to get out again! The cave has an accessible length of 140 feet with a single entrance and cannot possibly have connected through the hillside to the Colden Valley, even in antiquity.

*Right: Entrance to Tom Bell’s Cave between huge boulders covering a fissure*

During the summer of 1899 Herbert Cooper, son-in-law of Mr Thomas, the owner of the Hebden Hey estate which includes Tom Bell’s cave, claimed to have made an amazing discovery while he had been exploring the cave, presumably looking for the lost treasure of the imaginary outlaw Tom Bell. He is reported to have found a human skull at the end of a seven yard crawl, just out of reach in a crevice. Evidently Cooper was shocked by the find, because it took him another three weeks to pluck up enough courage to enter the cave again and extract the skull with a piece of wire. Cooper believed that he had found the skull of Tom Bell!

On examination, the skull was found to be complete and in good condition with seven or eight teeth; the mandible was however, missing. The discovery aroused much interest and controversy concerning the authenticity of the human skull and the size of the cave. The increase in tourist visits to the area that ensued from the find was rather advantageous to Herbert Cooper, as he and his wife ran a business providing refreshments to summer visitors to the Crags.

The Yorkshire Journal 21
Robertshaw of Ellen Royd, Midgley. Also there was a tale that a mummified cat had been found there, but it turned out that Cooper’s brother, a sceptic, was the source for the cat report. After Cooper’s discovery it was not long before the cave was besieged by explorers in search of the rest of Tom Bell’s skeleton, or even better, some of his booty. Their only discovery was the name J. Helliwell, who had left his or her name daubed on the cave’s interior in 1817, nothing more was ever reported as being found.

In February 1900 a public debate was held at Mythomroyd Co-operative Society on the whole controversy where the skull was produced. The previous year, in November 1899, the skull was taken to Dr Russell of Todmorden who then showed it to Professor William Boyd Dawkins of Manchester University who declared it to be prehistoric, possibly Neolithic. The debate did not seem to resolve anything, except that the skull might have been that of Tom Bell (an imaginary outlaw) and also that it could have been placed in the cave within the previous 20 to 30 years. The skull made a final appearance at a meeting of the Local History Section of the Hebden Bridge Literary and Scientific Society in about 1953, and has since been lost. However, the skull had been recorded photographically on a glass lantern slide.

In 1963 Ernest Hall, a caver and potholer of Oldham and Michael Edhouse, a naturalist and a student of entomology of Mytholmroyed, decided to make a thorough survey of Tell Bell’s cave. Mr Kenneth S. Lord, of the Hebden Bridge Times and Gazette acted as photographer. They went down 80 feet from the caves entrance and had to use an 18 feet rope ladder to drop into the deepest chamber. Ernest squeezed himself into 18-inch fissures to make a full exploration of their length and what lay beyond. The two explorers had to face cramped conditions, slithering over jutting faces of rock. They continued down more steep drops, and in places, the crevices glowed with a golden iridescence which is a living fungus. Their survey has proved that the cave did not have a long passage that went through the hillside below Heptonstall to the Colden Valley. Also no bones or prehistoric artefacts were discovered during their survey.

It would seem that Herbert Cooper had been exploring the cave over a period of some months and had previously brought to the surface a rhinoceros skull and four other small bones. These he had sold to Mr S
The reason why Professor William Boyd Dawkins identified the skull as possibly prehistoric was because natural caves – dark, damp, often inhospitable places, were a favoured burial places in prehistory. Over 70 caves and rock shelters in northern England had been used in the Neolithic and to some extent during the Bronze Age for burials and occupation. Many were excavated in the 19th century. In some of these caves individuals were represented only by skulls, and like the Tom Bell cave skull, the absence of the remaining parts of the skeletons has yet to be satisfactorily explained. Also, unlike the Tom Bell cave, almost in all these caves were found prehistoric artefacts such as stone and flint tools, pottery and the bones of the burials were radiocarbon dated.

*Left: Human Skull dating to the Late Neolithic. It was found with Neolithic pottery, excavated from the Elbolton Cave, near Grassington. It is on display at the Craven Museum and Gallery, Skipton*

One interesting point, is that the Tom Bell cave human skull does not seem to show the kind of deterioration for a skull that has been buried in a cave for more than about 3,000 years, compared with the skulls excavated from other northern England caves, which are in a very fragile condition and have a Neolithic date. Some of these skulls are on display at the Craven Museum and Gallery, Skipton. It is unfortunate that the Tom Bell skull is no longer available for expert examination and until it is found its dating will always be open to question.

**Tom Bell’s Carved Stone Head**

The original building that stood where Tom Bell’s Hostel is today was used as a café, which was a converted farmhouse, by Cooper and his wife for walkers until the estate was bought by the Scouts in 1964. Then the café became a Scout Hut hostel, until 1983 when the original café/hostel building was demolished by the Territorial Army. A stone head was rescued from the café that Cooper and his wife ran and built into the present Hostel. It is situated at the apex of the Hostel, above the door. The orientation of its replacement preserved the direction of the stone head looking towards the entrance of the cave. However, following the piercing stone heads gaze, then or now, it certainly does not look towards today’s Tom Bell’s cave!

*Above: The stone carved head built into Tom Bell’s Hostel*

This carved stone head is believed to be Tom Bell himself, keeping a watch over his yet undiscovered treasure!

**Hardcastle Crags**

The Hardcastle Crags landscape includes deep rocky ravines, tumbling streams, oak, beech and pine woods and some of the best examples of upland meadows in the country.
Bronze statues of a soldier and an archer defending the South Barbican of Helmsley Castle.

Photo by Brian Wade