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All that remains of St Mary’s Priory is the lowered nave of the church and one of the original two west towers

Photo by Jeremy Clark
Editorial

Looking back over our last five years we like to think that we have not only brought pleasure to our readers through the articles and features that have appeared, but that we have also been able to give encouragement to a number of new writers. We hope that this will continue and see more writers with their work in print. To some of the hundreds of amateur photographers who get out and about with a camera at the weekends, capturing the beauty and the splendour of Yorkshire, we are looking for some striking photos of Yorkshire in all its moods to suit our front cover and for the journal itself; we leave this thought with the camera enthusiasts.

We have not had the opportunity until now to thank those readers of The Yorkshire Journal who kindly sent us messages of encouragement and told us that the Yorkshire Journal is one of those publications which is read and re-read, kept on the computer, copied and sent to relatives, friends and neighbours but never deleted! We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who have helped our writers during their research work in order to substantiate their articles.

For our new readers who would like to see what has gone before, it is easy to download back issues of the journal from our website. Each issue contains fascinating stories about the people and the places that make Yorkshire unique.

In this issue Marcus Grant reveals another Crop Circle in Yorkshire. This time the mysterious crop circle phenomenon returned to its old stamping ground around Barnsley, South Yorkshire which, seems to be a favourite place to locate crop circles. Marcus also takes a look back at the best of the mysterious crop circles.

Next, Stephen Riley takes a special look at the Dent Railway Station, which is situated in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and is the highest mainline station in England. It is on the historic Settle-Carlisle line and has now been restored to its former glory. He also uncovers the fascinating history of the station.

Alison Hartley returns to Hornsea Mere on the East Yorkshire coast to reveal a very fishy story of two young anglers who caught a big fish, this one did not get away. Also why two Abbeys had a trial by combat for the right to fish the Mere.

Ilkley Moor can be a mysterious place at times, Susan’s account ranges from prehistoric times to well-known characters of the moor, plus the major fire of 2006, conservation, grouse shooting and even alien encounters on the moor!

In contrast to Rombalds Moor, Thorne Moors is a lowland raised mire, a much rarer habitat. Daniel explains the formation of Thorne Moors after the last ice age, and chronicles their near destruction at the hands of man in recent times.

For our last article Julian Giles explains the story of the Devil’s Stone which is an unusual crudely carved stone inside St Michael and All Angels’ Church at Copgrove, North Yorkshire.

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

Since my last article on Crop Circles in Yorkshire ‘The Mysterious Crop Circles Phenomenon Visits Yorkshire Again’ published in this journal (TYJ Spring 2012) the Crop Circles makers have only visited Yorkshire on one other occasion and that was in 2012. This time the mysterious crop circle phenomenon returned to its old stamping ground around Barnsley, South Yorkshire, which seems to be a favourite place to locate them. Apparently a crop circle was discovered in a wheat field on 21st August 2012 by John S. Males on the Barnsley Road, between Dodworth and Penistone. However, it is most unfortunate that there are no aerial photos of this crop circle and that the overall design is not recorded.

Fortunately John did take a number of ground-level photos to record his discovery of the crop circle. Below are four of them.

In my article on ‘The Mysterious Crop Circles Phenomenon, Appear At Last in Yorkshire’, published in the Journal (TYJ Summer 2010), I highlight several Yorkshire crop circles. In actual fact it was not until 1999 that the first crop circles were reported in Yorkshire and we are still wondering why it took them so long to get here! To remind us what our mysterious crop circles friends could achieve when they visited Yorkshire I have included some photos of their best work.
These crop circles may not be as spectacular, or as complex in design or size, as the ones in the south of England; nevertheless they serve to illustrate what can be achieved when they visit Yorkshire.

Left: One of the best crop circles to be discovered was at Dodworth near Barnsley, it appeared on 30th July 2000 and 15 days later a second, smaller circle appeared next to it. These two circles were in a wheat field that was ready for harvesting. The first one to emerge, which was the larger of the two, was a circle which had a series of intersecting triangular shaped curves outside it, and a second ring enclosing the whole formation. The second smaller circle contained a grid of lines, leaving rows of squares of standing crops.

Right: Another interesting sighting of a crop circle was also made near Dodworth on 27th June 2002; it was of a large pentagonal design, a five point star inside a large circle. The circle appeared in a field next to a church and graveyard, and created quite a stir amongst the local community.

Left: At Darfield, also near Barnsley, South Yorkshire, a large ‘galaxy’ type circle was reported on 19th July 2002, consisting of one large ring, made up of approximately twenty six circles. The circle enclosed two concentric rings, plus an unusual extended antennae type feature of two circles connected by a line.

Right: At Howden, near the Ouse Bridge, a crop circle appeared on 11th July 2003. It had six smaller circles radiating from the main centre circle, which had six curved spokes inside the main circle.

Left: The crop circle that appeared at Sandal Castle near Wakefield, West Yorkshire, on the 25th June 2003 had three rings around it.
Right: A complex design of a crop circle appeared at the Devil’s Arrows near Boroughbridge, North Yorkshire, on the 3rd August 2003. The circle is a complex ‘spirograph’ design consisting of overlapping circular paths.

The story of ‘The Devil’s Arrows’ has been published in the journal (TYJ 4 Winter 2013).

Right: Detailed diagram of the same circle at Devil’s Arrows

Left: At the Thornborough Henge near Ripon another complex crop circle was discovered on 22nd June 2003. The circle is a complex mandala design consisting of numerous petals and segments in a circular design.

Right: This crop circle appeared in a wheat field below Roulston Scar, Sutton Bank near Thirsk on the 5th of July 2010. The design is of laid spirals and circles in linear formation several hundred feet long. The circles looked quite spectacular and added to the wonderful view from the top of Sutton Bank. There is an Iron Age hill fort at the top of Roulston Scar, with Bronze Age round barrows and earthworks in the surrounding area. The story of this area ‘Along the Hambleton Drove Road North Yorkshire’ has been published in the journal (TYJ 3 Autumn 2010).

Right: A diagram of the crop circle illustrating laid spirals and circles in linear formation by Andreas Müller

Whether you are convinced that crop circles are caused by some extraterrestrial force or believe it is all the work of humans, you have got to admit that some of the designs are amazing. Let us hope they continue to materialise and fascinate us for a long time to come.

If you decide to go out looking for crop circles this summer please remember to take your camera with you! Photographic evidence is a very important factor. It is also important to ask permission to enter the field.
Crop circle in a wheat field, at the bottom centre of the photo, below Roulston Scar, Sutton Bank near Thirsk, North Yorkshire

Photo by Helen Fowler
The Highest Railway Station located in the Yorkshire Dales National Park

By Stephen Riley

Dent Railway Station is the highest mainline station in England. Although it is situated within the boundaries of the Yorkshire Dales National Park it is not actually in Yorkshire. The area of the Yorkshire Dales National Park lies within the county boundary of North Yorkshire and extends into Cumbria.

The border between Yorkshire and Cumbria runs across the railway line which goes through the Blea Moor Tunnel. The Dent Railway Station is about 5 kilometres north of the Yorkshire border. The station itself has an altitude of 1,150 feet (350 metres) above sea level on the historic Settle-Carlisle Line, with services to Leeds and Carlisle and is positioned almost half way between Leeds and Carlisle.

The Dent Railway Station was first opened for public use on 6th August 1877. It was originally closed in May 1970 and reopened in 1986 following a campaign to maintain regular stopping services along the line. By this time the station building had been sold off.

The actual village of Dent is situated approximately 4 miles (6.4 kilometres) by road to the west and is 400 feet (120 metres) lower than the station it ostensibly serves.

Today Dent consists of the old station building, original passenger waiting room, a new shelter, stationmaster’s house, remains of a former cattle dock and the so called workers’ barracks, now more accurately referred to as ‘Snow Huts’.

When the station closed in 1970 it was rented out to Barden School in Burnley (now Barden High School) as an outdoor pursuits centre, providing accommodation for up to 16 pupils whilst they carried out various courses from potholing and caving, to geology and map reading.
In the peak of its use, over 90 trains a day would pass through Dent station, though over time the east coast and west coast mainlines became more favourable and quicker routes to Scotland.

Dent also had a signal box which had about twenty levers to control eight signals and was manned by three regular signalmen. It also had a siding platform with a crane on the station side used for loading cattle and coal. These facilities were withdrawn from the service in 1964, but the siding remained in use for engineering works for some years. The signal box closed on 28th January 1981, but lasted until September 1984 before demolition.

Left: View looking north at Dent station taken in the late 1970s before the signal box which can be seen in the foreground on the left was demolished. In the far distance is the station with its siding, and the on the right is a signal.

On the eastern side of the station above the signal, can be seen the old snow fences created from old railway sleepers, which were erected to try and keep snow off the tracks.

Left: Dent station before removal of the signal box and its renovation. In the distance is the snow hut next to the signal box. When this photo was taken in 1983 the down siding had been removed.

Right: A closer view of the station looking north from Dent’s signal box, taken in the late 1970s. The siding can be clearly seen on the left with the signal on the right. The Stationmaster's House is on the far left.

Right: This photo was taken on 29 June 1983, by which date the signals had been removed as well as the down siding. The painted white panel on the bridge is now the only relic of the signals. The southbound Flying Scotsman passes through Dent Station with the Cumbrian Mountain Pullman.

Photo by David Christie
The Dent station building is of a standard design similar to other stations on the Settle-Carlisle line, it has a single-storey structure made of golden freestone walls and blue slate roofs decorated with crested ridge tiles. The building has a pair of gables facing the platform with bargeboards, which are ornamental boards fastened to the projecting gables of a roof to give them strength, and tall chimneys. One added feature of the station that is not seen on other station buildings on the Settle-Carlisle line is the extra roofs that are found over each of the large front windows to add extra protection from the elements. The station also fits into the small category, reflecting the expected traffic demands it would have to cope with.

The distinctive features of the Dent station building that immediately catch the eye are the gables, dormers, porches, windows and tall chimneys.

Left: Dent Railway Station in the 1920s in all its splendour including the extra roofs that are over each of the large front windows to add extra protection from the elements.

The Stationmaster’s House can been in the far right distance and the stationmaster himself is standing at the entrance gate to the station.

Right: Diagram of Dent Railway Station, illustrating the pair of gables facing the platform with bargeboards.
The Stationmaster’s House at Dent Railway Station is situated on the Lea Yeat side of the railway line in Dent Dale. The road that goes over the railway bridge is the famous ‘coal road’ from Lea Yeat to Garsdale which has an altitude of 1750 feet (533 metres) and in winter conditions it can be very dangerous.

Dent stationmaster’s house is similar in style to the station building. However it is a simple rectangular two-storey detached property with slate roofs, overhanging eaves and bargeboards. It is also unusual for its time in that the simple rectangular sash windows were fitted with double windows on account of its exposed location, to help protect it from the harsh winds. To make the double glazing the two pieces of glass were placed 6 inches apart.

The stationmasters’ houses were not only built to counteract the lack of accommodation at more isolated stations, but also to secure the loyalty of the stationmaster and maintain an unbroken corporate presence.

In the Yorkshire Dales National Park conservation project along the Carlisle Railway the Dent stationmaster’s house is at present undergoing renovation. Also the access road to the station is poorly defined and in a state of general neglect, so in accordance with the conservation project this access road is next in the conservation project to be refurbished.

Dent station has two passenger waiting shelters on opposite platforms. A small modern shelter was built for passengers on the northbound station side platform, which was needed because the station building has been privately owned since the 1970s. The original restored stone built passenger waiting shelter is on the southbound platform.

Behind the passenger waiting shelter of the southbound platform, situated on the hillside, is a line of old wooden dilapidated snow fences still in place that were created from old railway sleepers. They were erected in a desperate bid to try and keep the winter snow from drifting and accumulating in the long deep cutting in which Dent station stands and also onto the line. Unfortunately these were not always successful and in the winters of 1947 and 1963 Dent Station became heavily snowbound with snow blockages on the line.
Left: Dent Station heavily covered in snow during the winter of 1947

Right: Snow-clearing workers uncovering the Dent railway line in 1947

Above: Dent station when it was rented out to the Barden School in Burnley as an outdoor pursuits centre in the 1970s. This photo was taken from the bridge before the removal of the signal box, signals and the down siding. The snow huts can be seen next to the signal box. The 40003 freight train is heading south through Dent station. On the left bank can be seen the dilapidated snow fencing made from old railway sleepers. The Dent head viaduct can just be seen in the far distance above, and to the right of, the signal box on the hillside

The insert is a closer view of the Dent head viaduct from the station
Access to the southbound platform is by way of foot, using an unmanned level crossing to be used with care, which is situated at the south end of the station. At this crossing point there is a permanent speed restriction of 30 mph for non-stop trains which is enforced for this reason.

Left: This view was taken from the bridge, it shows the small shelter to the bottom right, the original restored stone built waiting room to the left with enthusiast railway photographers snapping away at the incoming steam train just before it reaches the foot railway level crossing.

At the end of the 1970s the Barden School in Burnley stopped renting the station as an outdoor pursuits centre and the station building was sold in 1985 to Neil Ambrose. Over the next 20 years Neil began restoring the station building retaining wherever possible its original features. In 2006 Robin Hughes purchased the station and, with the help of local craftsmen and experts, completed the restoration work and refurbished the station to its former glory. He turned the inside of the station building into holiday accommodation for guests who want to explore the landscapes of Dent and the surrounding Dales.

Above: Dent Station now restored to its former glory. It is separated from the actual station by a traditional timber fence and is available for hire as holiday accommodation. Photo by Stuart Scrivener.
One feature that was not included in the 2006 restoration was the extra small roofs over each of the large front windows to add extra protection from the elements. Also the station building is separated from the actual station by a traditional timber fence. Access to the Railway Station building is now by prior arrangement only.

*Right: One of the large front windows of the station with its original station clock on the left and a preserved gas lamp on the right. This room was originally the ticket office, as can be seen from the writing on the windowpanes, and there was a ticket window in the booking hall.*

More recently the so called workers’ barracks built in sandstone, more accurately referred to as “Snow Huts”, have been fully restored and are probably unique in Britain. They were built in 1885 specifically to provide shelter, sleeping accommodation and tool storage for the snow-clearing crews who could spend many days on site in the course of a bad winter, repairing the line and digging trains out of the snow. They are now available for hire as holiday accommodation.

*Above: The Snow Huts before renovation*

*Left: The restored and converted Snow Huts*

*Right: This old porters’ trolley is outside a former station waiting room on the northbound platform of Dent Station. The station building is now separated from the actual station by a traditional timber fence, but this old porters’ trolley can still be seen on the other side of the fence.*

Photo by Jim Stewart
Left: Dent Railway Station building as it was in July 1966 when the line maintained regular stopping services. Notice that the extra roofs over each of the large front windows are still in place, which add extra protection from the elements.

Right: The Station building as it is now restored to its former glory.

Left: Dent Railway Station building viewed from the side and rear as it was in July 1966. In the far distance on the right can be seen the signal box and the snow huts.

Right: The same view as above of the restored station building; in the far distance the signal box has long since gone, but the restored snow hut can be seen on the right.
The Big Fish that did not get away at Hornsea Mere, and the Battle for the Mere

By Alison Hartley

On a warm sunny day in August 2010 two local Hornsea lads decided to go fishing at Hornsea Mere. The story of Hornsea Mere has been published in this journal (TYJ Autumn 2014). In fact the two lads fish at the Mere on a regular basis. The types of species that can be caught in the shallow Mere include Perch, Roach, Tench and Pike.

As the small yachts harness the power of a light breeze, the two lads, angler Dominic John Cook, assisted by his young cousin Macauley Cook, fished on the bank using a rod and line.

Right: Dominic and Macauley proudly holding the pike that weighs nearly 20 lbs

After not getting a bite for some time Dominic’s luck changed, by hooking a large pike which had taken the mackerel bait. However, the shallow water conditions meant that the fish had to be carefully played to avoid the weed beds. After several good tussles, with much bending of the rod, the two lads finally landed the fish safely in their net.

To Dominic and Macauley’s astonishment the pike weighed nearly 20 lbs. After being photographed and ritually kissed, the pike was carefully released back into the water, hopefully none the worse for its ordeal.

Left: Dominic carefully releasing the pike back into the water watched by Macauley, who is holding the rod that caught the fish

Notice how shallow the lake is, they appear to be only standing in a few inches of water

This is one fishy story that Dominic and Macauley will remember for a long time to come. They will take great delight in showing off the photo of themselves holding the pike taken on Sunday 1st August 2010, the day they caught the fish.

A permit is required to fish in the Mere, the current fees for a day permit are £7 to fish from a boat, with £3 per additional person in the boat, and £3 to fish from the bank.

Although the pike caught by the lads is a good sized one, it is neither the biggest nor the heaviest to be caught in Hornsea Mere. Going back to about 1912 a Mr. F. Shroeder, a successful pike angler who lived at Clifton, York, caught two pike at Hornsea Mere. The smaller weighed 24½ lbs and the larger 26½ lbs. He had them mounted by a firm of taxidermists in Stonegate, York. The cases in which the pikes were displayed had typical curved glass. In 1914 they were put up for sale and bought by a local dealer. However, he could not sell them, it appears that no one was interested in them. They will probably still be somewhere in York.
Battle for the Mere

From the earliest times Hornsea Mere has been noted for the abundance of its fish. During the Middle Ages there were several disputes between the Abbots from St. Mary’s Abbey, York, and Meaux Abbey, near Beverley, over the right to take fish from the Mere. In about 1260 the Abbots agreed to settle the issue by trial, which is trial by combat, although they did not take part personally, but hired champions to represent themselves. After a long day’s battle the victory went against the local contender, giving St. Mary’s Abbey, York the right to fish the Mere.

Right: Trial by combat c. 1230, from the Rochester Bestiary manuscript

In the Middle Ages fish were of great importance in the medieval diet, in religious customs meat could not be eaten during Lent, Advent, and after Pentecost, as well as on holy days and the eves of Christian celebrations.

Left: A 14th century illustration of fishing from a boat using a net.

When the monasteries were dissolved the Mere was seized by the Crown. In 1595 it was bought by Marmaduke Constable of Wassand, and has remained part of the Wassand estate ever since. For centuries the Mere was the private preserve of its owners, although, in the early 19th century, people were allowed to fish, so long as they made a donation to the poor.

In 1885 the Mere was opened up to the public by the short-lived Hornsea Mere and Hotels Company. Rowing boats could be hired and fishing permits could be purchased. In addition, for a fee, sailing boats could use the Mere and could also be stored on the bank.

Today Hornsea Mere is a popular tourist attraction still offering visitors rowing, sailing, boat trips, fishing, painting and bird-watching. It is also the home of Hornsea Sailing Club. Some visitors just come to sit in the café and take in the splendid views.
Ikley Moor is the most famous moor in Yorkshire, which forms part of a larger expanse of high moorlands known as Rombalds Moor. It lies between Keighley and directly above the town of Ilkley in West Yorkshire. It is renowned for its song ‘On Ilkley Moor Baht At’ which has been accepted as Yorkshire’s ‘National Anthem’. Also for the legendary Cow and Calf Rocks, the Giant Rombald, prehistoric stone circles, cairns and a profusion of carved rocks, also known as cup and ring marked rocks. The most famous single carving is the Swastika Stone on the Woodhouse Crag at the northern edge of the moor. Now enclosed on three sides with iron railings it is carved on a flat slab, but it is now badly worn. The Swastika Stone probably dates from the Later Bronze Age or Iron Age. In front of the carving is a 20th century replica which is often mistaken for the original. These stories have been published in this journal (TYJ Autumn 2010 and Spring 2013)

Right: The Swastika Stone is on the right, the 20th century replica is on the left

Left: Identification of Cup and Ring marks on a rock, Ilkley Moor

Ikley Moor is also associated with two well-known characters, the Donkey Man known as “Donkey Jackson” and the famous eccentric Hermit ‘Job Senior’.

The Lord of the Manor, Charles Marmaduke Middleton, sold Ilkley Moor to the Local Ilkley Authority in 1893 for £13,500. The moor was bought for a “public pleasure ground”. At the time there was an ugly rumour going round that the moor was to be enclosed, perhaps to suffer development in a town which was then rapidly expanding because of the railway. The moor was saved from redevelopment by the forward thinking Ilkley council for all to enjoy. When local government maps were redrawn in 1974 the moor was inherited by the City of Bradford from Ilkley Urban District Council and they are now responsible for the maintenance and preservation of the moor.

Coming to Ilkley Moor by train

In the 19th century the Cow and Calf Rocks situated at the edge of Ilkley Moor became a well-known landmark and a popular picnic spot for residents of Bradford and Leeds, who could travel by train to Ilkley, and then hike up the hill to the moor. The Ilkley railway station was opened as a terminus in August 1865 by the Otley and Ilkley Joint Railway (Midland and North Eastern railways). The extension of the line to Skipton via Addingham, Bolton Abbey and Embsay opened in 1888 making Ilkley station a junction. However, this extension was closed by Dr Beeching’s reshaping of Britain’s Railways in 1966, reducing Ilkley to a terminus once more.
Before Dr Beeching’s reshaping of the railways British Railways (BR) produced a poster promoting rail travel to Ilkley as the ‘gateway to the Yorkshire Dales’. The poster on the left depicts the Cow and Calf rocks on Ilkley Moor. The view from here is spectacular but this poster really does not do real justice to the panorama from Burley in Wharfedale and beyond seen through the gap between the Cow and Calf rocks. In the poster some ramblers can be seen walking up the path that leads onto the moors and some sheep are seen grazing on the grassy incline. Sunbathers can be seen enjoying the beauty spot, with a couple of figures on top of the rocks and then Ilkley in the valley below, with the waters of the Lido distantly twinkling. The poster was released in 1960 but the artist is unknown.

The story of The Classic Vintage Yorkshire Railway Posters has been published in this journal *(TYJ Summer 2011)*

### The origin of the song ‘On Ilkley Moor Baht At’

According to one tradition, the song was written in 1886 when members of a Halifax Wesleyan (Methodist) Church had their annual summer picnic beneath the Cow and Calf rocks, on Ilkley Moor. During the picnic two lovers left the party for a time to go happily courting. The girl’s Christian names were Mary Jane. On their return to the party, the famous song originated with the words of the first verse, “Wheear ‘as ta been sin’ Ay saw thee?” The second verse started with the words, “Tha’s been a courtin’ Mary Jane”, commented another. Further lines in common rhythm were contributed until the choir burst naturally into a tune. Somebody from the choir penned the words, and fitted them to a tune previously used for the Christmas carol, While Shepherds Watched.

The song *Ilkley Moor Baht ‘At* has put the moor on the tourist trail and is an aspect in the moor’s popularity. It is also considered as the best-known British song around the world!

### The Donkey Man

The Donkey Man was a native of Ilkley and was known as ‘Donkey’ Jackson. He was born in a low thatched cottage on the east side of Brook Street. In adulthood life he became a woolcomber. However he gave up this trade and entered the transport business. He initially bought a mule and a four wheeled carriage, which he hired for about 8 or 9 pennies an hour. This was at a time when Ilkley was establishing itself as a spa town. Later he purchased William Rigg’s donkey business, which he maintained for 38 years. Visitors came to Ilkley to immerse themselves in one of the ice-cold baths at White Wells half way up the moor. ‘Donkey’ Jackson was an enterprising character who owned about twelve donkeys. He hired them out for 4 pennies to visitors to ride up the steep slopes to White Wells, for those who were unable, or unwilling to make the journey on foot.

*Right: Donkey Jackson at his stand in 1902 with two of his donkeys*

In the early 1860s, before the railways arrived he was a familiar figure and well known by many visitors who came to Ilkley by coach and wagonette from Leeds and Bradford.
He often went to outlying farms so that people could visit Ilkley without having to walk the long journey, like a donkey taxi service. ‘Donkey’ Jackson also had sets of colourful trappings for his donkeys which he used when attending weddings or christenings.

As ‘Donkey’ Jackson grew old he gradually parted with his donkeys until he had only one left, beside which he would sit for hours waiting for a customer. He died in about 1914 and his old thatched cottage was demolished a few years later. It was one of the last thatched cottages in Ilkley.

However, a flight of stone steps that originally led up to the front door of his old cottage can still be seen on Bridge Lane, opposite Glovers Garage. They are set in a long stone wall behind which are allotments.

The Hermit of Rombalds Moor

Over the years Yorkshire has had its fair share of eccentrics, one of the most famous being Job Senior (c. 1785-1857) the hermit of Rombalds Moor. He is remarkable for a man who sunk so low in life to have had an inn named after him, his life story printed and his dishevelled figure done in ‘oils’. There are a number of versions to his story but the most likely one is that Job was born around 1780, at Beckfoot, Middleton, on the north bank of the River Wharfe about a mile from Ilkley. He was the illegitimate son of Ann Senior, whose surname he took. His father is unknown and there is no entry of Job ever being baptised in parish records. It would seem that he was an uncared for child and was often left to fend for himself. This led to him having a dirty and unkempt appearance which stayed with him all his life. Apparently he was never a very energetic person, much preferring an easy life to a working one. Although at times he was known to work as a farm labourer among the farmers around Ilkley to earn his keep. It is believed that he was noted for his drystone walling skills. Occasionally Job worked as a woolcomber and at one of Ilkley’s coaching inns.

Despite a drink problem, he proved to be a remarkable singer and was engaged by several town theatres. At the age of 60 he became acquainted with Mary Barrett, a widow, who was in her eighties. Mary had inherited a smallholding from her late husband, on the edge of Rombalds Moor near Burley Woodhead. Rumour had it that Job had only become friendly with Mary Barrett because he had seen it as a way of claiming her cottage and land when she died. They soon got married in Otley Church and it was not long before Job squandered her money, not caring for her too well. She soon died as he had expected she would.

After Job’s wife died, he thought that the estate would come his way, but he was wrong, for his wife’s first husband’s relatives had other ideas. They managed to acquire the land following her death but Job hung on to the cottage, where it is said that he grew potatoes in the small garden. Job returned one evening to find that the cottage had been ransacked and that anything of slight value, including a small amount of money which he had hidden away, had been stolen. Although Mary’s relatives were strongly suspected nothing could be proved.
Downhearted, but not defeated, Job salvaged what he could from the cottage and set about building a shelter from the stones and he thatched it with twigs and heather from the moor. Apparently it was so small that he had to enter on his hands and knees.

It is from around this time that his reputation as a hermit began to grow. His appearance began to become even more unkempt. His coat being a mass of patches of various colours as were his trousers, which were held in a position by means of a Hempen belt. His legs and feet were bandaged with straw; the pair of clogs he wore was also stuffed with the same material. Upon his head he wore a very ragged old hat in which he carried an old tobacco pipe.

He also had a mass of hair and a beard and, since he never bathed, his general condition can be imagined.

A pair of crooked sticks aided him in his progress around the countryside, and no doubt as a result of his way of life he knew the tortures of rheumatism.

Such an outfit would have been little protection against the elements on the moor. Even in summer it can be quite a bleak place at times, but when the winter winds blow and the icy rain and snow fall, death from exposure can become a very real risk. Somehow he survived in his shelter for many years and became the object of attention of curious visitors who had heard rumours of a strange old man living on the moors. For a few pennies, he would sing, tell fortunes and forecast the weather for these sightseers. However his shelter was again destroyed, this time by some boys who set it alight.

Later in life Job suffered from rheumatism and leaned heavily on his two sticks. He would tour the moor-edge farms and local villages, still very unkempt, singing for a few coppers and hopefully getting a meal and a bed in a barn for the night. On one occasion during 1857, when singing at Silsden, it is said that some young men drugged his ale in what they would call a lark (having a laugh), but Job was taken ill. He managed to struggle back as far as the Wheatsheaf Inn at Ilkley where the landlord notified the parish authorities of his condition. It was found that Job had cholera and he was taken to the Carton Workhouse, as he belonged to Burley, near Ilkley. But he died within a few days. Job was buried in the churchyard at Burley-in-Wharfedale, aged 77.

The former Carton Workhouse site is now occupied by a converted barn which is not the original workhouse building.

There is an old local pub at Burley Woodhead that has been named ‘The Hermit’ most likely a tribute to Job Senior, the hermit of Rombalds Moor. Pubs were rarely named by accident but were inspired by religion, royalty, heroes and local legends. In the days of a largely illiterate population, pictorial signs were an essential way of advertising the inn. Although it is not believed that Job drank at this public house during his lifetime but, because he lived very close by on the moor, his eccentric legend inspired the name of the pub.

Originally there was an old sign over the entrance to the Hermit Inn which carried a picture of the eccentric Job Senior. However, over the years the pub has updated their signs to make Job or a Hermit look more respectable and attractive.

Left: The picture of the eccentric Job Senior which was the sign over the entrance to the Hermit Inn at Woodhead. Not very impressive for its customers
Left: The sign on the wall of the Hermit Inn, in this old black and white photo, is more in keeping with Job Senior’s appearance.

It appears to depict him without his two sticks but heavily clothed.

Right: The sign over the door to the Hermit Inn is the current one.

Job Senior is seen holding a stick in his right hand, he is better dressed but with patches on his trousers.
Left: The Pillar sign in the car park is remarkable because it has lost any reality to the eccentric Job Senior. It portrays a hermit in a cave. In this sign the Hermit Inn has moved away from the legendary figure of the moors to an imaginary one.

This hermit in a cave is cooking food in a metal pot over an open fire. He is sitting on a small wooden casket looking very clean and well kept. Although he has long black hair and a beard he looks very content with his life. A far cry from poor Job Senior’s situation.

However, the sign reads ‘The Hermit’ and that is how most people would imagine a hermit to look.

These days it is rare to take time to consider the sign outside the pub in the rush to get inside, but few pubs were named by accident. Almost every name has a story behind it and, together, they illustrate the social history of England. With names enduring for centuries it is possible that the sign above the door is as old as the pleasure of drinking itself.

Returning to the Moor - The Aftermath of a moor fire

In July 2006 a major fire on the moor left between a quarter and half of it destroyed. Much of the area burned was covered with heather, bushes and moorland grasses, plus their associated insect life. Ironically, the much-despised bracken on the moor actually helped halt the flames.

Right: The smouldering fire put out on the moor

Nine years on the moor seems to have recovered well, the landscape quickly began to regenerate itself, with new plants taking root. In the hot spots where the worst damage has taken place, the countryside department re-seeded the land with new plants.

Reptiles such as lizards were unlikely to have escaped the fire, but rabbits and many other mammals were able to get out of harm’s way. Now the animals have returned to graze once more on the moor.

At the time of the fire Countryside officers found the nests of moorland birds that had been destroyed. However it was quite late in the nesting season, so it could have been much worse.

English Heritage also carried out an inspection to see if the fire had uncovered any previously undiscovered archaeological sites. Now once more walkers, climbers and sightseers have returned to explore the moor.

New Prehistoric Rock Art Discovered on the Moor

A number of previously unrecorded prehistoric rock cut markings known as ‘cup-and-ring’ have been discovered at the northern edge of Rombalds Moor on Burley Moor. A cup is a circular hollow carved out of the rock by a sharp stone, flint tools or antler. Generally they are between two and ten centimetres in diameter and up to three centimetres deep.

The carvings were found as a result of uncovering a previously undiscovered cairn circle, close to the Twelve Apostles stone circle. In assessing and exploring this newly found circle, it was noticed that a small opening in the near horizon highlighted a rise in the landscape almost a mile away. By carefully rolling back the vegetation at the edge of this particular rock, cups-and-rings and carved lines seemed to be covering most of its surface.
This is the latest prehistoric carved rock to be discovered on the moors. It has a complicated design consisting of at least three cup-and-rings, two partial cup-and-rings, twenty eight cups and several carved lines along with some cup-markings which are linked to others. The most notable of the carved lines is the longest, running from a single cup-mark at the southernmost rounded end of the stone, almost straight and parallel with a natural ridge or dip along the rock, until it meets the largest of the cup-and-rings on the level part of the rock.

Most of the design is carved on the upper face of the stone, but a small part of the rock dips into the ground on its eastern side and a small group of cups and a single carved line, in a very good state of preservation, are carved right at the edge of the stone.

This prehistoric carved rock has been nicknamed the Fraggle Rock after noticing that when you look at the stone from one end, the two main cup-and-rings are like two large eyes carved above a large natural downturn ‘mouth’ feature, similar to some of the creatures’ faces on the Muppets.

It is unclear what the original meaning of these carvings was and many theories have been put forward to try to explain them. There are around 300 identified carved rocks on the moor and others are still being found, like the recently discovered group on Burley Moor. Most of them probably date to the Neolithic or the Bronze Age.

**Conservation of the Moor**

More than 250,000 walkers and sightseers are drawn to the moor each year, causing wear and tear to the landscape, with new footpaths formed as old ones erode. Litter from picnics is polluting the terrain and roadside verges are churned up by motorists unable to find space in the overflowing car parks.

The Countryside Service is attempting to find new funds, and a pilot scheme to merge three of the government’s rural agencies under the name Natural England has been agreed. Plans are now underway to upgrade the most popular paths, finding a way to clamp down on dogs that are allowed to terrify sheep and chase birds off nests. Also to provide interpretation boards at archaeological sites such as the Twelve Apostles standing stones and the famous Swastika Stone. Perhaps a visitor’s centre could also be accommodated.
Grouse Shooting comes to the Moor

The Bradford Council who are responsible for the maintenance and preservation of the moor granted a lease to Bingley Moor Partnership in 2008 to hold shoots, in a deal which sees the Partnership provide a gamekeeper and work with the Council on the management of the moor.

The move came following the fire of 2006 which badly damaged large areas of the moor. The Council has since secured a Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England, which brought more funding to help manage the moor.

Bradford Council let the grouse shooting rights on a ten-year agreement which continues until 2018. Under the agreement there can be up to eight shooting days a year on a small part of the moor, the council gets up to £12,000 if all those days go ahead, £7,500 if there are two shoots and even if no shoots happen the Council still gets a payment of £5,000.

Despite passionate pleas from the Anti-blood-sport campaigners, Bingley Moor Partnership that organises shooting parties will continue until it comes to an end in 2018.

In future visitors to the moor are likely to see Anti-blood-sport campaigners peacefully protesting and handing out leaflets. They are determined to continue campaigning until the shooting stops!

Alien Encounter on the Moor?

We cannot leave the moor without including the Alien encounter, or we could be next! It happened in the early morning of December 1, 1987 at about 7.10am, on Ilkley Moor. Philip Spencer, a former policeman, claims that he was taken aboard an unidentified flying craft, and after his release managed to snap a picture of one of the alien beings.

Spencer, not the officer’s real name, had moved his wife and child to the Yorkshire area to be closer to her family. He was walking across the moor on this December morning heading for his father-in-law’s house in East Morton. He took his camera with him hoping to get some photographs of the strange light tricks of the moor.

He was searching for some photo angles, when suddenly he caught sight of a strange looking being in the slopes ahead of him. He aimed and snapped a picture of the creature which seemed to be gesturing for him to stay away. Then he ran towards the strange being, but the creature disappeared behind an outcrop. He arrived just in time to get a glimpse of a flying craft with a domed top rising up from the moor and disappearing into the sky. At the top of the dome was a whitish square. He was not able to get a photograph of the object.
When he saw nothing else of the being or its craft, he began to walk to the nearest village. He was rather shaken and when he finally arrived in the village it was 10 am by the church clock. The walk would normally have taken about 30 minutes. Almost two hours were missing from his life. Another strange happening was that on the moor his compass pointed south instead of north.

Apparently, he had been abducted to the spacecraft and had been examined on a table.

Spencer had the film developed and printed in Keighley. Now he saw a picture of the creature and knew that he had not been hallucinating. It looked to be about 4 foot tall, and had a blue-green tint to its skin.

He contacted UFO researcher Peter Hough who began a thorough investigation. It was confirmed by wildlife experts that the image shown on the film was not of a known animal. A reconstruction of the original site did establish the alien’s height at or near 4 and one half feet. The photograph was sent to Kodak laboratories for analysis. The result showed that the creature formed part of the original photo, and was not superimposed. Without confirming what the creature was, Dr. Bruce Maccabee, former optical physicist with the US Navy, also looked at the film. He was unimpressed by the grainy detail which also prevented him from confirming what the creature was.

Spencer later underwent hypnosis. The session revealed that he was abducted and medically examined on the craft by the aliens. He describe the creature as quite small with big pointed ears and dark big eyes with a small mouth, and without a nose. His hands were enormous with three big fingers like sausages and long arms and had V-shaped feet, like two big toes.

Spencer convinced the experts that he saw the little green man of Ilkley Moor.

The Men in Black

One evening Spencer had a visit from two middle aged men. They were dressed in black suits and showed Spencer their Ministry of Defence identification badges. One of the alleged agents told him that they had come to discuss his encounter the month before on Ilkley Moor.

The two men were very well versed on the case, and asked him a number of questions about what had happened. He told them about the photograph he had taken but had given it to a friend. Almost immediately the two men seemed to lose interest in questioning Spencer any further.

They left almost as quickly as they had arrived. It seems that the two men in black did not realize there had been a photo taken. When they found out that the image of the alien was not immediately accessible to them, they had no more business with the eyewitness.

It has been suggested that although they functioned as normal human beings, they were, in fact, aliens assuming the role of humans!

Now that it has been included, we can all sleep safely in our beds.
As can be seen in these photos many rock carvings are not so easy to locate on the moor. The boulders and rocks that have cups, rings and grooves cut into them are situated in areas overgrown with heather, bracken and wild grasses. Many places are also waterlogged with peat bogs. These rock carvings are thought to date from either the late Neolithic or the Bronze Age but it is unclear what the original meaning of these carvings was.
The rise and fall of Thorne Moors

By Daniel Theyer

“Any fool can appreciate mountain scenery, but it takes a man of discernment to appreciate the fens”.

To the non-resident Yorkshire is composed solely of high, bleak moorlands – Heathcliff country – gritty working towns – Leeds, Bradford, Hull, Sheffield, pretty Dales villages and the splendid coastal resorts of Scarborough, Whitby and Filey. A fair few Yorkshire folk are of the same opinion too – but they are all wrong.

Step forward the nineteen hundred square miles of “Yorkshire Fens”, a vast area encompassing the area surrounding the rivers feeding the Humber, stretching into North Lincolnshire on the south, Doncaster in the west, along the Derwent into the Vale of York in the north and including Holderness in the east. Also known as the “Humber Wetlands”, the “Humberhead Levels”, even the “Humber Fen” all of it is below 10 metres above sea level. As recently as the Middle Ages the whole area was a mosaic of slow-flowing winding rivers, lakes and marshes, punctuated by a few islands of slightly higher land, where the villages were concentrated. Today the area is rich farmland, crisscrossed by a geometric pattern of ruler straight drains and ditches with the rivers securely constrained by embankments.

What remains of the old fen? Precious little, but it is indeed precious. Hornsea Mere is the only substantial lake but a birds-eye view reveals two large uncultivated areas devoid of human habitation and roads. Thorne and Hatfield Moors, at around 2,000 hectares each representing the despoiled remains of the two largest lowland raised peat bogs in England.

The story of their rise and fall starts eighteen thousand years ago in the last ice age, when a glacier blocked the Humber Gap, the dip between the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Wolds through which the Humber now flows. This flooded a huge area, forming Lake Humber. Over the next five to seven thousand years rivers and material in the receding ice sheet filled the lake with sediment, up to a depth of thirty feet. By 11000 BC the Humber gap was breached and the huge flat lake bed was revealed. The predecessors of the Derwent, Ouse, Trent, Aire, Went, Don and Idle Rivers meandered across this bleak and treeless tundra. Subsequently the obstruction in the Humber gap was completely cleared. Sea levels were much lower then, about 20 metres below present levels, a land bridge existed between England and the continent, and would continue to do so for another five thousand years. The rivers cut deep channels through the soft sediment, leaving large areas of dry land which quickly became afforested in the warming climate. Birch was the first coloniser, spreading quickly from sheltered refugia, where they had survived the ice-age. Birch was supplemented by Willow and Pine. By 8900 to 8250 BC Oak, Elm and Hazel colonised from the south, and Pines in the drier areas. From 8250 to 5300 BC Alder increased in the wetter areas while Lime became established in the freer draining soils.
Sea levels continued to rise due to a combination of melting ice and the “bounce-back” effect causing the land to rise in Eastern England. By 5000 BC they were 10 metres below present levels and by 3,500 BC only 5 metres. This slowed the flow of the rivers and allowed them to silt up, with increasingly regular floods, especially in the wetter periods. Alder and willow swamps – carrs – now formed extensively along the watercourses, trapping rich silts in the floods and further impeding run off of water to the rivers. This marked the end of total dominance of the lowland forest as conditions became less suitable. Early farmers also played a part in clearances.

Although flat the former lake bed contained some slight undulations, and the hollows became increasingly waterlogged as the climate entered a wet phase around 3100 BC. The nutrient levels were very low away from the watercourses, and the waterlogged hollows favoured the growth of a few specially adapted plants, dominated by sphagnum moss. Sphagnum efficiently absorbs vast quantities of water and creates an air-free blanket over the ground, inhibiting decay. Dead sphagnum remains do not decay in these conditions, the living moss grows over them, forming a layer of peat. Within 500 years up to a metre of peat had accumulated and many of the small peat bogs had joined up to form larger areas, the largest of which we now call Thorne Moors.

So quick was the development of peat that the dead trees in the waterlogged forest were quickly overgrown when they fell and embalmed in the peat. Today they remain in perfect condition, apart from staining from the peat. There are no primeval forests left standing in Britain, and these preserved trees are among the few relics of the primeval forests of West Europe. That is by no means all that was preserved in the peat, as well a bog body and a trackway are a myriad of pollen grains and insect remains perfectly preserved and accurately dated by their location in the peat. Pollen grains are very distinctive and under the microscope an expert can distinguish which trees and plants were prevalent nearby. Similarly the exoskeletons of beetles provide a unique record over the last five thousand years.

The coming of the Romans had little impact on Thorne Moors, but possibly a more significant one on the rest of the levels, by the construction of canals like those in the East Anglian fens. Such canals also act as drainage channels. It is not certain that these canals were Roman, and in any case they silted up again afterwards.

In Norman England Selby Abbey had extensive holdings in the Humberhead Levels, including Snaith, Rawcliffe and Whitgift. They began drainage of their holdings by digging extensive drains, such as the Bishop’s Drain in Selby and their activities were particularly well documented by the Inclesmoor map of 1405, showing a drain encircling Inclesmoor (i.e. Thorne Moor). Roads were built, villages founded and peat extracted for fuel, resulting in the Moorland Allotments, still a landscape feature today, consisting of strip like fields between the Ouse and Thorne Moors.
The Normans designated two hundred and seventy square miles of the southern Humberhead levels, including Thorne Moors, as a royal hunting forest, Hatfield Chase. This had little effect on the existing population, even when Forest Law was established, prohibiting the killing of deer, otters, boar, swans etc it was not rigidly enforced. The area was primarily pastoral, largely flooded in winter, but providing excellent grazing in the summer and autumn. Sporadic attempts at drainage were attempted, but were largely unsuccessful; in flat country piecemeal drainage is almost impossible, anyway fish and game from the wetlands were an important part of the local economy.

Official hunts were rare events, the last one documented took place in 1690, when Prince Henry, son of James I was guest of honour. Five hundred deer were driven into Thorne Mere (a large shallow lake, up to a mile across, its location now cause of much speculation), where scores of hunters in boats attacked them with spears and clubs.

Left: Pair of serving spoons with handles turned from Thorne Moors bog oak by local craftsman

In 1626 Charles I, needing funds for his war with Spain, signed a contract with Cornelius Vermuyden, a Dutch drainage engineer, to drain sixty thousand acres of the Chase. Vermuyden and his backers were to receive a third of the land, as was the king, with the remaining third allotted to the commoners.

Vermuyden realised that the flow of the three rivers in the area was impeded by high tides in the Trent and Ouse and proposed to divert the Don, Idle and Thorne rivers. There was much local opposition to the plan, particularly when large numbers of Dutchmen were shipped in to carry out the work. Vermuyden tried to ease the situation by also employing the more vocal locals at well above the going rate, but attacks on the foreign workmen continued, and drainage works constructed were sabotaged. Even so the work was completed by 1629 and Vermuyden collected his rewards and, very sensibly as it transpired, returned to Holland. It very rapidly became apparent that the River Don had been diverted into an inadequate channel, resulting in repeated floods in Fishlake, Sykehouse and Snaith.

The remedy, which involved cutting a new deep channel from the Don directly into the Ouse, creating the “Dutch river, was very expensive, and was borne by the public purse. This was largely successful, but failed to appease many of the commoners, who were unhappy with the redistribution of their land and violence continued while an appeal was made to Parliament. The King’s council for the North found that the distribution was indeed unjust, and ordered the Dutch owners to relinquish some of the land claimed, including Thorne and Hatfield Moors.

Some of the commoners were still unsatisfied and there was further trouble during the Civil War in 1642, but it eventually became clear that there were benefits to be gained from drainage and work continued on the wetter areas, with steam pumps eventually being utilised to drain previously intractable parts of the Chase. By the mid 19th century Thorne and Hatfield Moors were the only significant areas left untouched. Not just the Chase was drained, but practically the whole of the low-lying “Yorkshire Fens”.

Thorne Moors was subject to small scale peat cutting for fuel, but this had virtually no impact on the raised mire. Right up to the 19th century they remained almost unspoiled. After almost five thousand years the amount of peat deposited was up to eight metres. The bog was dome shaped, with the centre significantly raised above the surrounding land. In winter the increased rainfall and reduced transpiration meant that enough extra water was retained to raise the centre of the dome up to 2 metres above summer levels.
Few people ventured out into the bog, and they had to wear large flat fen boards to avoid sinking into the mire. The moors supported a large population of wildlife, including many waterbirds, and also an astonishing diversity of invertebrates. Thorne Moors lies on the boundary between northern and southern populations and therefore had strong representations of both, it also supported species now only found in North-east Europe and consequently became a favourite haunt of nineteenth century naturalists.

Like the Moorland Allotments previously mentioned Thorne commoners were granted the right to extract peat in a long strip from the town boundary towards the moors. The parallel strips were known as cables and were bounded by dykes. Peat was extracted for fuel right down to the clay below, which was then cultivated. Excavation continued at varying rates, until they eventually reached the Thorne Waste Drain, which was dug in 1815, initially to transport excavated peat.

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This led to flooding at times of high tides it was realised that this could be beneficial, as the silt deposited was very fertile and produced good crops the following season. This discovery led to the systematic introduction of a process called flood warping. In 1821 the Swinefleet Warping Drain was dug from the Ouse through the Moorland Allotments to the east of Thorne Moors. At high tides water flowed out of the warping drain into compartments bounded by embankments, where it deposited a few millimetres of silt. The water flowed back into the warping drain and then the Ouse as the tide ebbed. Over the winter enough silt accumulated to produce good crops and in following years the process was repeated on other compartments until they were all the same level, at which point the whole process was restarted until eventually the land was raised sufficiently to avoid flooding.

Durham’s Warping drain was dug in 1856 from the River Don. This was an ambitious scheme by Makin Durham, a civil engineer, to warp the land to the east of the moors, and then to warp the moors themselves to convert them into good arable land. Since 1630 Thorne Moors had been administrated by elected overseers, and Durham persuaded them to form the Thorne Moors Improvement Company. Realising that the raised dome of the moors was higher that water levels in the Don even at the highest spring tides he planned to use another method of warping known as cart warping. This involved the loading of dry silt on to carts or boats and transporting it to the area to be warped. This process was very labour intensive and the economics questionable so it is not surprising that this part of the plan was never actioned. Problems of silting in the River Don by 1870 further hampered the operation, but not before much former wetland near the river had been raised by a metre and converted to “farmland of the highest quality”.

Right: Loading dried peat blocks, taken from an old postcard, probably about 1930
The operation must have been profitable as Makin Durham bought Thorne Hall, a splendid mansion in the centre of Thorne. Makin's grandson, Frederick was the last of the Durham family to live in the Hall, passing away in 1913. In the early 1920s Thorne Hall became a private school for girls aged eleven to eighteen years. In 1930, the girls were transferred to the newly opened Grammar School nearby.

On 24th November 1966 the Hall was designated Grade II listed. Thorne Hall's most recent occupants were Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council who took it over 1974. The building was extended and adapted for use by various council departments including social services, housing and maintenance. The council vacated the Hall around 2006 in a bid to save money due to budget cuts and the building has been left to decay. In 2015 it was sold at auction for a knock-down sum of £150,000 to a local builder who “plans to convert it into quality flats”.

Makin Durham was not always so astute, in 1862 he built a large paraffin mill to produce paraffin wax, an important ingredient in the production of grease, lamp oil, and, most importantly, candles. Similar ventures had been unsuccessfully tried in Ireland and the Hebrides and peat paraffin was generally regarded in Britain as uncommercial at the time. Sadly this proved the case for Durham’s venture too, and the mill was derelict by the early 1870s, though the building stood until demolition in the 1930s.

William Casson was another well known local personality, born in Thorne in 1796 of Quaker parents, he was Thorne’s first chronicler, his book *The History and Antiquities of Thorne, with some account of the drainage of Hatfield Chase* is his most lasting memorial, remaining a standard local reference even today, over 160 years beyond its first appearance. William was also a botanist of some repute, and built up and extensive grocery and drapery businesses, but is best remembered by the plant nursery he established on the south-west fringe of Thorne Moors with his brother John. Experimental gardening activities commenced in the 1830s in the portion of a cable beyond the Thorne Waste Drain – the only cable to extend beyond the drain. Plants grown include roses, rhododendrons, fuchsias, deutzias and salvias. Having established which plants thrived they then created a commercial nursery on the other side of the Thorne Waste Drain, specialising in rhododendrons, although other shrubs were also sold – as well as peat for horticultural purposes. The business thrived, catalogues were distributed nationally, and a showground was established alongside the railway at Thorne South station. Having been partially filled with peat from Thorne Moors, it was planted early in 1874 with “Rhododendrons, Aucubias, and Skimmia Oblata”. Following William’s death in 1886 the business passed on to his nephew, who sold it in 1890. In 1896 a severe fire swept through the nursery, destroying all the stock, and the land was ploughed up and planted with potatoes.
The story does not end there though, as the rhododendrons seeded freely and thrived on the adjoining portion of the moors, where they can be seen to this day, and are now regarded as an unwelcome alien. The hybrid seedlings have largely reverted to the dominant species, *Rhododendron ponticum*, but there is still an attractive, if limited, range of shades of colour in spring.

*Left: Pale pink rhododendron on the moors*

In 1879 one A.L. Peace, Durham’s assistant in the Thorne Moors Improvement Company, also chairman of the Thorne overseers and chairman of the Thorne parish council abused his powers to transfer ownership of Thorne Moors from the commoners to the Improvement Company. The once rebellious commoners, now farmers themselves, raised no serious objections, resigned to the conversion of the moors to farming land. They were wrong, it was a different fate that lay in store.

A market was developing for peat as a bedding material for animals, particularly horses – a substitute for straw – and there were a lot of stables in this pre-motorised country. The moors were quickly leased to several companies. Initially peat cutting was very difficult in the boggy conditions, employees had to wear fen boards to dig drainage ditches. Then workers cut the top few feet of three foot wide trenches into blocks, which built into small stacks at the side of the trenches to dry in the wind and sun.

*Left: Peat stacks drying*

They could then be hauled off the moors on tramways laid on a base of clinker from nearby blast furnaces. Horses provided the power for the transport on the tramways, but everything else was done by hand. The Anglo-Dutch Griendtseveen Moss Litter Co. built a system of canals, so that the peat could be loaded into barges and pulled to the edge of the moor. The Dutch workers were no better welcomed by the locals than their predecessors in Vermuyden’s day. Most of them initially lived at Waterside, a small settlement on the River Don just outside Thorne. Largely single they were attracted at weekends by the numerous public houses in Thorne. By the end of the evening alcohol tended to quicken tempers, and some of the Dutchmen carried knives with which they were proficient. The situation was ameliorated when Moss Terrace, a row of 20 terraced houses, were built nearer the moors, just outside Moorends. The 1901 and 1911 censuses show just how many Dutch inhabitants they housed. It is still known as Dutchman’s Row to this day.

*Above: 1911 census entry for a dwelling in Moss Terrace*
By 1896, most of the surviving early companies – including Griendtsveen – had united to form the British Moss Litter Co. Ltd. The pace of extraction slowed in the early part of the twentieth century, as horses were superseded by automotive forms of transport and the market for animal bedding subsided. Manual peat extraction continued at a reduced rate throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The first mechanisation occurred in 1947, with the conversion of an Austin 7 car to run on tramways to haul peat wagons. Although underpowered (7hp), it was used for several years. In 1954 or 1955 a 31hp petrol driven locomotive was purchased, to be followed by diesel powered locomotives and horses quickly became redundant, being completely replaced by 1960.

In the 1960s a new use for peat became widespread. Not content with extracting limestone paving, digging up wild flowers, importing wild flower bulbs, dowsing plants with toxic insecticides and releasing alien species into the environment the huge army of horticultural vandals, also known as gardeners, turned their attention on peat as a cheap and sterile substitute to soil for seed germination and growing plants.

Up to this point Thorne Moors was still largely intact, the peat workings occupying a relatively small area of the moors, and natural regeneration quickly healing the scars. Even so the drainage had taken its toll on the bogs. Dried out peat is no longer immune to decay, providing nutrients to support a range of invasive plants, also, once dried out peat is very difficult to rewet. Drainage also affected the hydrological forces that enabled the mire to support a large raised dome.

In 1963, Fisons acquired all the share capital of the British Moss Litter Co., and planned to realise the horticultural potential of Thorne and Hatfield Moors. This was part of Fisons’ national pursuit of growth and intensification in the horticultural peat trade. Peat-based compost had been introduced to the British domestic market in the 1950s and quickly became popular. To compete in the growing market Fisons needed to increase the rate of peat extraction, and to accomplish this they decided to mechanise it. The first cutting machine, a German Steba, was delivered in 1963, followed in 1964 by the first Flügger Leveller – utilised to plane and clear the surface of the peat prior to cutting. The proportion of peat mechanically won was small at first, 13% in 1966, but by 1970 it had completely replaced hand cutting. Machine cutting required better drainage, so the drains cut became more frequent and much deeper. This increased extraction and drainage now began to have a real impact on the moors, and voices of concern began to be heard.

By far the loudest voice belonged to one William Bunting. Born in Barnsley in 1916, he left school at 16 and trained as an engineering fitter, before becoming a courier in the Spanish Civil war, and carrying out several undercover operations in WWII, mainly in Yugoslavia. After the war, in poor health, he settled in Thorne with his family. He was fascinated by the moors, be became a respected self-taught naturalist, authoring several papers. The moors provided an unusual source of occasional income for Bunting – he collected adders and cycled to London, where he sold them to the zoo for research purposes.
Apathy about the moors among the local population was widespread in the 1950s and 1960s. Largely this was a result of ignorance, few of them had ever set foot on the moors. During and after WWII much marginal land surrounding the moors had been cleared and cultivated for food production, and the numerous tracks and footpaths to the moors had been blocked and ploughed out. On the moors themselves Fisons were inhospitable, to say the least, to “trespassers”.

Bunting walked the old footpaths, and carried, and used, wire-cutters as well as a gun, a machete and a shooting stick concealing a sharp blade. Landowners and workers quickly learned that it was unwise to challenge him. He also badgered the authorities to enforce the footpath laws. When this was not forthcoming he spent long days in libraries, archives and court rooms, learning the arcane rules and laws of public rights of way, extending his knowledge also to other public rights. His first test of his newly acquired knowledge came in 1954, when Thorne council evicted him from his house for breeding cockroaches there. He bred cockroaches in closed containers in the house for sale to schools and universities. The health inspector found no violations, but the council evicted him anyway. The story was quickly picked up by regional and national press, even the Times referred to him as Beetle Man. Bunting applied for damages at the High Court of Justice. Judge Hallett dismissed the claim, barely trying to conceal his contempt for Bunting, calling him a “a trouble-making agitator”. Bunting took his complaints about the judge’s behaviour to the Court of Appeal and, after several days, a new trial was ordered and a humiliating rebuke issued to Hallett.

He disagreed with the conventional wisdom that the moors had effectively been destroyed by farming and peat-cutting, leading to them being regarded as under-utilised wasteland. In 1962 South Yorkshire council discussed a plan to use it as a dump for ash from power stations, and five years later they proposed filling them in with mining slag and building an airport on top. The ash plan was revived in 1969, the airport plan in 1971 and again in 1976. In 1978 it was proposed to re-open Thorne Colliery and dump colliery waste on the moors. Bunting fought each proposal tigerishly and all were defeated.

Bunting received little help from established conservation groups. When the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust refused to object to the 1969 ash plan. Bunting mounted a furious campaign, deluging the trust with letters and reports until they finally agreed to visit the site. Amazed at what Bunting showed them they reversed their decision not to object. The Nature Conservancy Council however were unmoved, and for years maintained there was nothing of interest on the moors. Finally, in 1970, they yielded, declaring the area an S.S.S.I.. This had no effect on Fisons, who were armed with unrestricted planning permission to extract peat on the moors.

In 1971 Fisons excavated several deep drains in the richest part of the moor. Bunting took direct action, together with a group of naturalists, local residents and students. Almost every weekend in the spring and summer of 1972 Bunting’s Beavers dammed up the drains with whatever material was to hand. Fison’s workers cleared some of them in the week, and the following weekend they were blocked up again – and some more. By the early autumn there were dozens of dams, some forty feet thick. In October, shortly after a BBC television crew filmed the Beavers at work Fisons dynamited 18 dams. The Beavers repaired them, and Fisons, showered with unfavourable publicity, let them stand, and agreed with the NCC to protect this area from drainage and digging. 11 years later the NCC bought the 113 acre area from Fisons and declared it a National Nature Reserve.
Much more could be said about Bunting’s legal battles to protect the moors and surrounding countryside, but suffice it to say that he concentrated attention on the fate of Thorne Moors as never before.

Despite the adverse publicity peat extraction continued, and, in 1987, Fisons raised the stakes. They introduced surficial peat harvesting, commonly known as milling. This is basically the repeated removal of a very thin layer of peat over a wide area. The process can only be described as industrial. First all vegetation is removed from a huge area, sq. kilometres is a more apt measure than hectares. Then a “tiller-dyker” is attached to a 300hp tracked vehicle, to cut 1.3 metre deep drains every 20 metres to ensure perfect drainage of the exposed desert-like expanse of peat. Finally the milling machines remove layer after layer of peat throughout the year, with the drains periodically deepened, until the peat is exhausted.

In 1989 Thorne & Hatfield Moors Conservation Forum was founded, acting as a focal point for organisations opposing the current rate of destruction of the moors. The Forum organised a series of surveys in 1990, providing indisputable evidence that the wildlife of the moors was already severely threatened. They raised the national profile of the moors, almost all conservation magazines carried articles about them in 1991, as did many national newspapers. The myth, propagated by Fisons, that only a small vocal minority of outsiders were concerned about the moors was further discredited in December 1991 at a meeting in Thorne attended by 500 residents, where they repeatedly expressed their frustration that Fisons were destroying “their” moors.

In 1992 the “Peat Campaign” finally brought Fison’s to the negotiating table, Thorne and Hatfield Moors were “gifted” to the nation through English Nature but it eventually became clear that the agreement allowed peat extraction to continue down to a level of half a metre courtesy of a leaseback agreement negotiated behind closed doors.

In 1997, English Nature decided to denotify 35% of Hatfield Moors and 5% of Thorne Moors as no longer being of SSSI status. This provoked furious opposition and when the Dr Derek Langslow, Chief Executive of English Nature, attended a Public Meeting at Thorne Grammar School 400 local people vented their feelings after discovering that the hydrological reports upon which EN based their assessment were funded by Fisons. Langslow resigned a few days later, and English Nature withdrew their proposal after pressure from the Environment minister. In 2000 the Thorne & Hatfield Moors SSSI was designated asSpecialProtection Area (SPA) under the European Birds Directive because of the nationally significant breeding population of Nightjars. In 2004 Thorne Moors was registered as aSpecial Area of Conservation (SAC) for Lowland Raised Mire under the European Habitats Directive.
In 1997 Fisons sold their peat business on the moors to the American horticultural company Scotts. Scotts had a reputation as very tough operators, one which proved justified, as peat extraction was ratcheted up a few more notches, particularly on Hatfield Moors, most of the economically viable peat resources on Thorne Moors having already been harvested.

The NGOs continued to maintain the pressure and in 2002 Scotts finally agreed to accept compensation of £17.3m from Defra to revoke their rights to extract peat from the two moors. There would be no more extraction on Thorne Moors but another 970,000 cubic metres could be extracted from Hatfield Moors over the following two years to allow Scotts time to resource peat for their Hatfield processing plant. No-one was able to tell me how independent monitoring of the agreed amount would take place…

In 2002 Natural England took over management of Thorne Moors, with the expressed intention of restoring it to a pristine raised mire. This was always going to be an impossible mission. What they inherited was a very degraded area more like heathland than bog, most of which had been drained and some of it still bare peat following milling. Over the past 12 years NE have poured much time, effort, money and herbicides into the moors. They have sought to raise the water table by blocking drains and by removing part of the birch woodlands which were thriving in the drier conditions. They have also waged war on the descendants of Casson’s rhododendrons. The previously bare areas are now covered by soft rush, and the area has undeniably healed somewhat. What we now have is a mosaic of different habitats. The old tramways provide an excellent network of easily walkable tracks where you can roam all day and rarely meet another soul. It continues to attract unusual birds and in summer there is vibrant insect life. Even if conditions were right it would take the best part of a thousand years for the goal of the pristine raised mire to be recreated – but they are not, and climate change, rising sea levels and increased population pressure will further make it unachievable in the future.

English Nature, hit by the economic squeeze, are trying their best to find another organisation to take over their custodian role. Perhaps benign neglect may prove the best long term option anyway – just so long as we can keep the developers at bay! Access to Thorne Moors is better than it was, however it involves quite a walk to reach the moors proper, but it is still a magical place if you appreciate big skies and peace and quiet.

Left: Large Skipper butterfly

Right: Crane in flight over Thorne Moors
Finally, if you are a gardener, please use peat-free composts. Peat extraction no longer despoils British bogs, but the Estonians now bear the brunt of our insatiable craving for peat.

Above: Nightjar

Left Cranberry

Right: Sundew

Panorama of Thorne Moors
Bog Cotton
The small village of Copgrove is situated between Ripon and Knaresborough, 6 kilometres south-west of Boroughbridge in North Yorkshire. This small, quiet village mainly consists of Copgrove Hall, St Michael and All Angels church and a few houses.

Built into the south wall of the nave, next to the chancel arch of St Michael and All Angels’ church, is the so called Devil’s Stone. This unusual crudely carved stone has been moved a few times. It was originally located either against or within the north wall of the chancel. Then it was moved during the nineteenth century restoration work of the church to the north-east corner of the chancel wall on the exterior. Recently the carved stone was moved again, this time to its present location inside the church, to prevent further damage by the weather.

Right: The Devil’s Stone in its present location built into the south wall of the nave next to the chancel arch and the light

Left: The previous location of the Devil’s Stone on the exterior of the north-east corner wall of the chancel

Unfortunately the Copgrove figure is now badly worn due to the weather which has eroded it so much that it is nearly impossible to see the carving unless it is lit from the side. It has been suggested that the crude carved figure on the stone may be related to the Sheela-na-gig type, which are exhibitionist carvings, but this seems unlikely. It appears to show a stick like figure that might be either male or female, due to the relief carving of the outline.

The proportions of the figure’s head and neck seem rather odd; while the left leg appears to have been broken away in antiquity, but if the leg was bent back and up, as if standing on one leg, then there may be traces of it below the left elbow, in which case the left lower arm might be the devil’s tail. Between the legs of the figure there is a slit, but given the style and primitive nature of the carving it is difficult to identify. The round object in the right hand could represent a bowl, but this is not readily identifiable. Next to the figure is a T shape which has been interpreted as a cross or axe and which may have been a later addition. Perhaps the biggest mystery is, why was such a carving in the church? The answer could be a quite simple one.

Another explanation for this image is that the T-shape carving could stand for Thor’s hammer and the figure may have a sword in one hand and a round shield in the other.
Right: The badly worn Devil’s Stone in its present location built into the south wall of the nave. It appears to show a stick like figure which may have a sword in one hand and a round shield in the other. The T-shape carving could stand for Thor’s hammer.

This much worn crude carving is possibly Pagan, pre-Christian in date and the stone it was carved on was incorporated into the building of the church in the 12th century. Local gods were often adopted by early Christians and this carved stone probably had some local importance for the people of the area, so to please them and not alienate their new converts it was brought into the Church to be made safe.

To perpetuate the idea that this stone is a “Devil’s Stone” the church leaflet contains a short note about it “.....known as the Devil’s Stone ..... of great antiquity probably of Romano-British origin.”
Hornsea Mere

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