

Peeps into the Past

TODAY Barnard Castle is known as a market town, but if we turn back the clock to the 19th century we would find that it was one of the most industrialised towns in County Durham, with most of the different trades located on the Bank. These consisted mostly of weavers, tanners, shoe-makers, clock-makers and others.

One trade that goes back to the early 18th century is the making and retailing of sporting and military guns which is still in existence today if only in the retailing of sporting guns.

Reader **GORDON FRENCH** from Addison Road, Toronto, Bishop Auckland, outlines the history of the gun-making Rowntree family who were active in Barnard Castle from 1810 to 1879.

ONE of the best-known families of gun-makers in the town were James Rowntree and his son William. James was born at Catterick in 1792, the son of a gardener, being the oldest of four brothers and a sister.

In 1810-12, out of his apprenticeship as a gun-maker, he opened a shop in the market place, Barnard Castle, situated just below the Turks Head public house.

His clientele were mostly the gentry and travellers who stopped off at Barnard Castle, en route to Carlisle and Scotland.

Other people who would have patronised him would have been the local farmers and also the officers of the Durham and North Yorkshire Militia, who were barracks at Barnard Castle.

Business must have been very competitive at this time because there were three other gun-makers trading in Barnard Castle. All would have been producing flintlock fowling pieces, flintlock sporting and military rifles and pistols.

On May 7, 1816, James married Mary Muncaster of Barnard Castle. In 1817 a son, William, was born. Their daughter Mary was born in 1820 and on November 3 that year the children were baptised.

The Percussion Cap

The patent of the percussion cap revolutionised the ignition of all weapons, both sporting and military, and is credited to Joseph Egg, a London gun-maker, but in my own mind I am convinced the credit must be attributed to Joshua Shaw and James Rowntree, although I have never come across any evidence to support this.

I have examined guns by Rowntree, which were made to fire steel top hat caps - the first type of percussion caps used.

In the book *Engines of War*, published in 1841 by a Mr Wilkinson, he stated that Mr Egg purchased the patent from James Rowntree, who in turn

used the idea of the percussion cap which he obtained from a workman of his who had previously been employed by Joshua Shaw.

The statement of the workman I believe to be false. My research has shown that the earliest known person employed by Rowntree was one Thomas Dalkin, apprentice gun-maker of Barnard Castle.

Business expanded into Penrith as well. Guns were now being signed Barnard Castle and Penrith. I have examined guns in percussion, pinfire and early centre fire with this address engraved along the top rib of the barrels.

James traded in Penrith until he retired in 1856, and lived at Brunswick Square, Penrith. Meanwhile, the shops at both Barnard Castle and Penrith were run by William and his family.

In 1854 something happened to suggest that William was going out of business. This he put a stop to by placing this advert in the *Teesdale Mercury* of June 7, 1854:

William Rowntree Gun Manufacture Denys he is going out of business and will continue to sell his new Double Guns with good twisted barrels, steel locks, good workmanship, well finished and warranted at the low price of £3-3s-0d.

By 1858 the business at Penrith had moved to Front Street, run by Margaret Rowntree, William's elder daughter. William Rowntree died on March 9, 1869, aged 52.

William's wife and two daughters carried on the business at Barnard Castle as gun-makers, which would have been an arduous occupation.

The following are the cost of certain items sold by them in 1870 - Four cans of gunpowder 12s (60p); bag of shot 8s (40p); bag of 14 bore wads 3s (15p); box of percussion caps 4s (20p).

End of an era

After William's death James returned to Barnard Castle with his third wife and his 12-year-old daughter. His health was fading and on October 23, 1874 he died. He is buried alongside William in Barnard Castle churchyard. A headstone was erected for each of them.

Meanwhile, William's wife Elizabeth carried on the business until December 1879, when she sold it to Robert Simpson a gunsmith and ironmonger.

The two Rowntrees were top provincial gun-makers who produced some first-class guns over the 69 years they were in business. They invented different patents for the improvement of weapons, which I am convinced they sold to other gun-makers for royalties.

And James Rowntree, I still believe, was the first gun-maker to build weapons using the percussion cap.

Letters

Cricket club appeal

LETTERS are welcome on any subject but should be brief and to the point, not exceeding 250 words. Please ensure they reach us at 24, Market Place, Barnard Castle. DL12 8NB by first post Monday.

SIR - Barnard Castle Cricket Club wants to attract more young players and so ensure the future of the club and the game.

With this in mind, it will once again be holding Wednesday evening practice sessions run by our own members, who, last year, obtained coaching qualifications with the sole aim of helping youngsters.

These practice sessions get underway at 6.30pm on Wednesday, May 2 and last for an hour and a half. Ten are envisaged on successive Wednesdays, but more may be held in the school holidays if there is a demand.

The cricket club has a long history of encouraging youth, with many of its senior members like the secretary, Coun Newton Wood, being given their chance to play, as boys, by the late Fred Wilkinson, when he was head of

St Mary's C of E junior school and captain of the 2nd XI.

Today, the club's youngest player is 15-year-old Martin Donald of Bowes, who plays alongside his father for the town 2nd XI.

Few villages in Teesdale now have a cricket XI and it is unlikely we will ever again see teams from Bowes, Romalldkirk, Mickleton, Stainton, Startforth, Cotherstone, Whorlton and Winston playing on a regular basis.

It becomes even more important, therefore, for Barnard Castle Cricket Club to offer village youngsters a chance to play, as well as children living in the town. They and their parents can rest assured they will be warmly received and looked after. The club has been fortunate to have been helped and encouraged to provide junior

cricket, by both Teesdale District Council and the County Durham Cricket Development Board, whose representatives have spent many hours with officials during the winter months, explaining what needed to be done.

As well as practice sessions, the club will hopefully be fielding two teams to play in the Darlington and Dales Junior Cricket League - hopefully, because the Foot and Mouth disease outbreak could yet scupper all cricket in this area.

While the club can provide some equipment for juniors, it is not aware with bats, pads and gloves. In order to purchase new equipment, especially for juniors, it proposes to charge youngsters £1 per session.

JOHN ASHWORTH
Vere Road,
Barnard Castle.

The sound of silence

SIR - As I stand in my garden, is that a cow, sheep or lamb I hear, no, my ears deceive me, everything has gone.

At this time of year you can usually hear them calling to each other, from farm to farm, now just silence. My eyes are sore from the emptiness of the fields. I take a deep breath to collect my thoughts and the smoke from the fires burning around me chokes me.

I try and plan a route to travel from my home, which way can I go, so I don't have to go past a farm that has the vehicles of destruction outside them, there no longer is a way. The tears roll down my face, every one I shed is for them most in our hearts and thoughts, the farmers, of our beloved Teesdale and beyond.

LINDA FAULKNER
Middleton Road, Faulkland.

Late Letters

DUE to our early Easter deadlines some Letters reached us too late for inclusion this week. We shall try to include them next week.

The advertising deadline for this page is 12 midday on Friday.

Views in brief...views in brief...

SIR - I would like to thank, through your column, all those residents of Cockfield who contributed to the gifts presented to me at the AGM of the Cockfield Community Association to mark my retirement from the Association after 11 years. I would also like to thank the many friends who gave personal gifts.

The role of a Community Centre has changed dramatically over the past years, moving on from one of providing entertainment, to one catering for Education, information and facilities for the young and old not available at other establishments.

The committee has been proud of its achievements in starting a monthly newspaper, computer courses, fax and photocopying facilities, help in compiling CVs and internet access to find work, not forgetting the much needed daily luncheon club. I hope that the new committee will continue these and expand. It is important that everyone is aware that the Community Centre belongs to the people and the committee need to know your requirements in order to succeed.

I wish the new committee every success in the future, but would like to give a special thanks to Mary Duggan who has helped so much with the dinners and many other ways over the years. I would not have been able to keep going for as long without her help.

SUSAN BARNES
Christian Aid Co-ordinator,
Woodside,
Barnard Castle.

SIR - As ever, what excellent timing by the District Council!

When the Government acts to get people back into the countryside, the cost of the principal car park is increased.

Not only will this encourage local people to by-pass Safeway's (another Council debacle), but also discourage much wanted visitors.

MRS C. A. WHITE
Newgate,
Barnard Castle.

Mercury Comment

WITH the spread of Foot and Mouth to Upper Teesdale and emotions running high, misinformation and accusations about illegal sheep movements are rife.

This week Middleton has been subjected to the same sad, pitiful sight of animals being slaughtered that has become commonplace at Cockfield, Evenwood, Toft Hill and Butterknowle over the past weeks. There is a particularly poignant reader's letter on this page from Linda Faulkner at Woodland, summing up most of our feelings at this wretched time.

There is a fine line between public interest and personal intrusion when it comes to publishing news. It's easy to make mistakes. But it didn't help when national radio stated that police had moved a local family from their farm after receiving death threats, and when we asked the police, this was not the case.

On a positive note, one idea at Thursday's task group meeting was for the establishment of safe areas for public access, through the controlled and monitored movement away of valuable and potentially vulnerable stock.

Positive action is a way forward for us all and enables farmers, businesses and the tourism industry to work together to pull us through these difficult times.

Council is doing the best it can

SIR - One of the biggest criticisms I get of Teesdale District Council is: "What do I get for my council tax?"

Then I get an answer: "My bins emptied." And I add: "And the streets swept among other things." I am then told: "But not often enough."

When you get the Best Value Performance Plan, this shows you what the council does, but it also gives a breakdown of the distribution of the council tax you pay, or who gets what.

You will find that Durham County Council gets about 79%, Teesdale about 17% and the Police Authority 8%.

This is based on a Band A property, so you have to decide which one is giving you value

(best value for your money), but first find out who is responsible for what service.

Personally, I find Evenwood and District get more done than when I first came on the council, but we could do better.

If anyone complains to me about a problem, I do my best to solve it. So, if you have anything you want redressing, please do not hesitate to call me.

Teesdale District Council does not get anything like the amount of money larger authorities gets, but I will do my best to see that Evenwood, Ramshaw and Evenwood get their fair share.

COUN ARNOLD SMYTH
Shirley Close,
Evenwood.

Our disappearing local names

SIR - Mr Geoff Woods asks about meanings of local words.

Cala comes from California mine in Teesdale, a rich lead mine named after the rich silver mines in California being worked about the same time, but soon shortened to Cala mine and Cala Dams nearby.

I have long thought that many of our place names, and to a certain extent, surnames, partly originate from the way local people pronounce their words, being prone to take short cuts for the ease of saying.

On surnames we have Tallen for Tallentire, Tuer, Teward, Hewitt, Heward, Hetherton, Hetherington, Warton, Walton and Warmeth for Wearmouth.

For place names we have Stonylog for Stonyhill. Yudep for Hudeshope, more correctly, Hudeshope, Ruekup, Rookhope, Bautherstel for Balderdale, Auxeit for Aukside.

This latter one spoken by myself and a few near locals to this day, who are fast dwindling, and with them a number of

words my father used that I do not, if ever, hear now.

Sett is probably the common version of the sides we have. Some sets still stand in their own right; Selsel, Cornet, Appersel, Conset.

Sett is described as a large upland pasture which many of our outlying places formerly were. Sett, Shield, Sheil, Sealing and Scale, for which we have Scale Bank Newbiggin, another is The Bell Sheil (the pretty sheiling) at Middle Sett (sett), now only known as The Bell.

Middle Side or Middle Sett is well-known that this area was plundered by the Scots, fragmenting away the occupants, burning down their houses, stealing their cattle and eating up all the herbage with their own horses.

The large number of horses being pastured there were sold south before the Scots could get among them.

C. WATSON
Aukside,
Middleton-in-Teesdale.

What's in a name: Geoff Wood

At Lynesack they have a Women's Meeting Point whose members enjoy these articles in the *Mercury*. Like the United Reformed Church, last week, they have a number of "sons" among them, Dowson, Pattinson, Richardson, Robson, and Watson.

Dow- and Daw- are both pet forms of David which is Hebrew in origin and thought

to mean "beloved, or friend" Patten- is from Paton, a diminutive of Patrick which we looked at last week. Richard also has the element *ric* for ruler, and the *-ard* means brave.

Rob- is short for Robert, originally *rod* - bert with the meanings "fame, bright" While Wat- was a pet form of Walter which in Old German meant "ruling people". Dalkin (and Dawkins or Daykin) are also formed from David.

More from Lynesack next week.

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