

TWO ACCOUNTS OF - THE HORBURY WEEKEND 18-19TH JUNE, 1994

Sentimental journeys are often disappointing. Things are never what once they were, or what one imagines them to be. The first visit of the SBGAS to Horbury Bridge was an exception. The scene is vastly changed, of course, from what it was during Sabine's ministry, but many of the old landmarks he mentions in his Early Reminiscences are still there. It needs little imagination to go back in time to visualize the village as once it was.

Horbury Bridge was the scene of one of Sabine's greatest pastoral achievements. He found it a tough, lawless, hard-drinking, gambling parish, but the Yorkshire colliers, barges and workers in the woollen mills were soon attracted by the force of his personality and his obvious concern for their welfare. He helped to bridge the gulf between the unchurched masses and institutional religion.

On the Saturday morning we spent an enjoyable time visiting the Horbury Street Fayre and admiring the various stalls and sideshows. We were then invited to the house of Keith and Sylvia Lister for a delightful lunch.

The weekend proper began with a business meeting in Horbury Bridge parish hall under the presidency of Dr. Merriol Almond, the great grand-daughter of Sabine Baring-Gould, who had come over from America for the occasion. This was the hall which Sabine had built in 1865, in which to hold his services and meetings, when the original cottage was no longer adequate for his growing congregation. The election of officers proceeded apace, and the meeting expressed its debt to Mr. Patrick Hutton who had been the Society's secretary since its inception.

Mr. Keith Lister then spoke about the Taylor family and their descendants, many of whom were present, who had provided Sabine with his bride.

We were then conducted round St. John's church, which was built largely as a result of Sabine's successful ministry in the parish. Here we saw the rood screen, erected in memory of his services to Horbury Brig, and the processional cross carried in front of the school children as they marched up Quarry Hill, singing for the first time Sabine's most famous hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers".

On returning to the parish hall, we were shown a video recording taken three years previously, of the school children re-enacting the original procession at Quarry Hill. The commentator was the well-known Christian personality, Roy Castle.

In the afternoon, the more energetic members of the party followed the mile-long procession route to the parish church of Horbury, the scene of John Sharp's distinguished ministry. En route they saw the quarry from which the stone was cut to build the parish hall, and Poppleton's mill, where both Grace and her father worked.

On arriving at St. Peter's beautiful and spacious church, it gave us both joy and sadness to stand on the very spot where Sabine and Grace had pledged their troth to each other, on 28th May, 1868 - joy because theirs was one of the great love-stories of their age, sadness because Grace died at the early age of 66, after suffering for many years with rheumatoid arthritis.

On Sunday morning, 19th June, we attended a sung Eucharist at St. John's church, where we sang "Onward Christian Soldiers". The preacher was the Rev. Osmond Aisbitt, the vicar of the parish church.

There followed a walking tour of Horbury Bridge to see the cottage, now the local post office, where Sabine held his first meetings, the River Calder and the Calder Navigation Canal, and the house once occupied by Richard Poppleton, the owner of Poppleton's Mill. After lunch at one of the local inns, we went our separate ways.

This annual gathering gave us the opportunity of meeting together, making new friends and greeting old ones, united in our attempt to preserve the memory of one of the greatest churchmen of his day, and perhaps the most versatile and voluminous writer of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We were especially delighted to meet the charming Mrs. Image Briggs, Sabine's grand-daughter and the Rev. David Shacklock, the founder of the SBGAS and Editor of the Newsletter. We all owed a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Keith Lister for his superb arrangements for the weekend.

Harold Kirk-Smith

This year we had a most interesting trip to Horbury, Yorkshire. Patrick Hutton very kindly drove Merriol Almond and myself up for the weekend - for us it was a most relaxed journey - a long drag for Patrick over motorways with much traffic. Merriol and I were very kindly given accommodation and welcomed with great warmth by Keith and Sylvia Lister. We met their daughter Janine who very expertly taxied us around our extensive and varied programme of events.

Keith Lister is a retired policeman with a keen interest in the history of the area which included the romantic story of Grace Taylor and the man she chose to marry, the local preacher/minister of Horbury Bridge (the parish of St. John), the then thirty year old Sabine, with his good looks and his dynamic preaching. All of this interesting history inspired Keith to become a very active member of the SBGAS and offer his services to lay on the trip. He co-opted his wife, Sylvia, and she nobly played a valuable part in looking after our wellbeing and otherwise supporting Keith in this great consuming interest of his since his retirement.

He organised an interesting tour laid on with great flair for detail, giving us the most minute details of the area, including the factory life, and Poppletons, the factory where Grace was working at the time. He even collected together a number of the Taylor branch of the family and members of Poppletons to meet us as the contingent from down West - he is in the process of writing a book on the life of Grace at Horbury and Horbury Bridge.

Merriol and I felt that this introduction to the members of the Taylor family and for us to "feel" the area where she had been born, meant a very great deal to both of us. This was the whole crux of the weekend, to meet Grace's family line. We both felt that now we could claim to be part-Yorkshire in our heritage! We had been accepted with great warmth and kindness as it all became very alive to us when we met in the old school. We listened to Keith's clear and lucid descriptions of the life at Horbury at that time. We were then shown the film of the hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers". It was tremendous to see the very streets

which we had by then begun to recognise, with the children all suitably dressed up in the clothes of the period marching up the hill from St. John's church to St. Peter's at the top of the hill in the town of Horbury.

Later on that day Keith marched us up the hill to have tea at St. Peter's church. We were given the stops that the children were given where they used to have lemonade or something similar to keep their spirits from flagging; a long steady climb for those with short legs, although they were marching to that rousing hymn so well-known to all of us. The headmasters present and past were there also to greet us.

Alice Valentine Hinchliffe (nee Taylor) who was brought up by Grace's sister Emma, brought a beautiful book of old photos. It was fascinating to be able to see the faces of Grace's father and her sisters and brothers, and some of her step-family: (Her mother died when she was young and her father married again). We met some of this second family ... it was thrilling to be so welcomed. We also met some of the family linked into the history of Popletons - the factory where she worked.

Merriol and I feel that it is time the story of Grace is told in all the majesty of the remembering of the saga of her life. Like so many Victorian ladies of her period she had always played the supporting role to her brilliant husband. We have to remember the incredible support and loyalty she gave to this very difficult man, a veritable "will-o'-the-wisp", never there at times of very real domestic crises, who made huge demands upon her, particularly when it is remembered that the forms of life he expected of her were all roles she had had to learn, even to the extent of having to give up her lovely Yorkshire dialect.

He greatly appreciated her, but I wonder if he really thought of the loneliness and the huge trials of the many pregnancies she had often to endure without his support.

She was a very great lady; hers was a tremendous role as great as his had been. She represented the amazing strength and tenacious ability to persevere when life became incredibly tough in those hardened Victorian days ... 15 pregnancies with so much pain and so much heartache ... and never the opportunity to nurse any of her babies herself, or to really get to know any of them. The decree of the time for the lady of the manor was to hand her babies over to nursemaids to bring up. She told my mother that she wished she had had the chance that her daughters had of nursing their own children ... to be allowed to hold them and love them.

My heart ached for that tiny little soul who was torn away from her beloved Yorkshire; she was often homesick for the Yorkshire moors (according to my mother Cicely who looked after her at the end of her life in Devon). I am sure she longed to hear the beautiful lilt of the Yorkshire dialect of her home town. This dialect she was forced to change into the social form needed for that time - the pure snobbishness of it!

She was a very great lady. As a representative of over 150 of her descendants, we remember you with warmth and love and gratitude for your great Yorkshire strength and warmth of your personality.

Neither Merriol nor I will ever forget that momentous experience, to have been able to pay our tribute to Grace and her home town, and to meet so many kindly Yorkshire people. Finally, we stood at the altar rails of St. Peter's church at Horbury, the spot where they were married.

Image Briggs

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