

Living History.

NEWSLETTER December 2009.

Bus shelters

The Living History Group wrote to the Parish Council having heard that the Council were thinking of knocking down two of the bus shelters in the parish. The Group were concerned that if one of those that they were considering was the shelter at Cockgate they should reconsider as it is an asset to the village and is used. We have received the following reassuring reply: *'...Just to let you know, at the Parish Council meeting yesterday the councillors agreed that the Cock gate shelter should absolutely be kept, and will be maintained on an annual basis by the parish council, with whom it is insured...'*



Common Blue sow Thistle - update

The blue sow thistle which we reported in an article with the June 2009 *Newsletter* has been seen elsewhere in the parish. Jan Fletcher has seen it growing at the entrance to Leys lane and has germinated some of the seed; a patch has been seen growing in the back garden of Pear Tree Cottage, Green Lane, Yarpole and another on the verge of the B4362 opposite the mill at Mortimer's Cross.

Map of sale of Croft Estate 1923

Due to the generosity of Audrey Brookes for loaning us the map and Martin Baines for producing a tidied-up, scanned copy of the map we are now able to offer printed copies of this beautiful map for £14.00 or on disc for £2.00. If you would like a copy of one of these maps please contact Ron Shaw on 01568 780770. They will be on display at the official opening of the Community building project on January 16th 2010.

Articles

The following articles accompany this edition of the *Newsletter*:

The Croft Dendroglyph by Ian Mortimer

Shoe Found in the Chimney of the Manor House by Tony Mears

Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2009 are now seriously overdue and subscriptions for 2010 will be due in January. They can be paid to Audrey Bott either by leaving them at the shop addressed to her or sending them to Audrey at Horizons, Green Lane, Yarpole (tel:01568780489) Cheques should be made out to "Living History" for £6.50. **If you have not yet paid your 2009 subscriptions please do so as soon as possible. If we do not receive sufficient subscriptions we will not be able to continue producing and distributing our articles and newsletters.**

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Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held in the Committee room of the Village Hall on **Wednesday 6th January 2010 at 7.30pm.**

The 'Croft Dendroglyph':

It was in the early summer of 2007 that Ron Hill, who had just recently arrived in the area, was out walking in the Croft Woods when he observed this - the 'Croft Dendroglyph'.

The word 'observed' is used advisedly because Ron, whilst out walking, does *observe*, amongst other things, the variations and blemishes on the bark of trees so that if he had not spotted it that particular morning, he would have seen it on a subsequent walk. He has seen very many initials and 'hearts' carved into the bark of trees but nothing quite like this nor anything between this and simple initials.

The figure is 400mm high and 300mm wide (about (16" by 12") - six feet from the ground - etched into the bark of a living beech tree. Next to it are the initials "G C" and the date "1933" but these are rather crude and by a different hand and may not be related. The etching is on the north side of a mature beech tree {with a girth of 2.43m. (8ft)}, close to a well trodden path, - one of a group of beech trees high on the north slope of the Fishpool Valley - possibly planted as part of the landscape development of the Valley at the end of the 18th century.



There is no doubt but that the artist was proficient in the techniques of 'bark engraving' - most importantly the artist's knife did not penetrate the full thickness of the bark which would have allowed the possible entry of infection and infestation and provoked over growth of the bark (as part of the healing process) and thereby obliterate the image.

Believing that this must surely be a recognised art-form, we were very surprised not to find any other example in the vicinity; indeed we could not find one person, amongst the older residents who either walked or rode through the woods or had worked there with the Forestry Commission, who knew of this engraving or anything like it anywhere else in the woods.

To find out more we approached the main 'tree authorities' in the country, including an eminent tree anatomist at Kew Gardens, but although they all expressed interest and proffered some possible leads, none had had any experience of this phenomenon.

However, Kath Owen, Senior Verifier for the Woodland Trust did enlist the help of the 96 verifiers throughout the country to keep a look out for any other examples, but, two years on no other similar work has been discovered.

The 'Croft Dendroglyph' would, therefore, appear to be a 'one-off', by a well practised hand, - a visitor from overseas?

We understand that carving on the bark of living trees was an art form in North America - practised by the Cherokee Indians and 'Basque sheep-herders' in Northern Nevada. Link that to the fact that during the Second World War there was a transit camp for American troops at Berrington Hall and we have one further line of enquiry to follow-up but a search of the woods at Berrington Hall with Ron Hill failed to find any other example of bark carving

However, by contacting the Department of Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, we were introduced to Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, the foremost expert in Basque bark carving, who confirmed that he would not have been surprised to have found our Croft Dendroglyph himself in the mountains of Nevada or California. Joxe goes on to say that Basque sheep-herders were drafted into the army during WW2, therefore one of them could easily have authored it.

This photograph is an example of a bark carving by a Basque sheep-herder and illustrates the resemblance to the Croft Dendroglyph.

Jeff Oliver of the Department of Archaeology, Aberdeen University, who has made a special study of 'bark carving' in the UK, admits that he has not seen (or heard of) anything similar to the Croft Dendroglyph in the UK but confirms that it reminds him more of Joxe's carvings



On the evidence that we now have, it is probable that the Croft Dendroglyph was carved by an American soldier, billeted at Berrington Hall during the Second World War, who had been, in civilian life, a Basque sheep-herder in Northern Nevada.

More information: www.knowledgecenter.unr.edu/sheepherders/arborglyphs.html
Compiled by Ian Mortimer (2009)

Shoe Found in the Chimney of the Manor House

During the recent renovations of the Manor House, a shoe was found within a niche of the chimney of the large fireplace.

The Northampton Shoe Museum believes the shoe to date from 1839 to 1850 and is a Patten. A Patten is an overshoe used outdoors to protect the normal footwear in order to keep the feet dry and prolong the life of the normal shoe.



Hidden shoes have been found mainly in southern England from Derbyshire southwards. Isolated examples though, have come from northern USA and Canada. A very early shoe was found in Tewksbury Abbey, it was dated as being 15th century. There has been one recorded as late as 1935. The hiding places are various, in the roof, over door lintels, in walls, chimney breasts and ovens.

The practice of concealing shoes in buildings is probably the most common superstitious practice of the post medieval period. Almost all hidden shoes found are well worn. The shoe retains the shape of the foot because of this many people thought that the shoe contained the spirit of the wearer. Therefore one can see why the custom grew around shoes.



It should be mentioned that the Romans were known to have hidden Neolithic axes in the roof to ward off lightning, as nearly a fifth of shoes found are in roofs could it be a variation of this trait, the original reason lost in time.