

Memories of Tollerton in late 1890s

The Tollerton Village History Group recently acquired a letter written in 1951 by George Harpham who was involved in the refurbishment of Tollerton Hall in the late 1890s and work at St Peter's Church in Tollerton. The letter was written to a Tollerton resident and reveals some interesting experiences relating to his time spent working in Tollerton.

George Ernest Harpham, born 1873, was a Nottingham born person and lived at Ruddington for a number of years. In the 1891 Census he is listed as a 'Lace Manufacturers Apprentice' but clearly this was not a trade he pursued for long as in the 1901 Census he was listed as a 'bricklayer's labourer'. He, his wife and children emigrated to Canada in 1908 and it is from Canada that he sent this letter in 1951. George was nearly 78 years of age when he wrote this letter.

Here are a couple of the most interesting excerpts from that letter, starting with a tale from the depths of the Church.

"I don't know whether there was a Vicar there or not, I never saw one. I know I put new spouts round the Church, and one day when I and a journeyman plumber had finished our dinners we went in to the church to see what kind of a church it was. As we was walking through the church my friend tripped on an iron ring in the floor. He had a look at it and pulled the square stone up. Under the stone was some steps which we went down and found it was a vault. It was dark so my workmate sent me to his tool bag for a tallow candle for us to see. There were 4 coffins. One was very large that was black studded with brass headed nails. There was one coffin stood straight up and we found one on the floor with all the wood of the coffin on the floor; it was just like brown powder. We could see where the handles had fell. I got my hand and tried to get the powder off the top of the coffin and found a brass plate. My friend looked with the candle to see if he could see a name. We could see it was a lead coffin. He says to me, come on, let's go, so we went out and out of the church and he says to me that coffin has been there for 105 years. He says it was a woman who was buried in that small coffin and said the name on the plate was Mrs Barry Barry." [1]

Later in the letter George recalls details of some of the work done at Tollerton Hall in the late 1890s and the various tradespeople on site, prior to the Hubbersty family moving in. This same piece also gives us insights in to features of the grounds at the Hall.

Now I had better say a few words about Tollerton Hall as I found it, although I don't know one yard of the village. I used to go from Tollerton Hall to Pilkington glass shop or warehouse as many as 3 times a day for 3 crates of glass. When I first got to Tollerton Hall it was empty. We had started to work at the Hall; there was all the trades people in Nottingham working on the Hall. My uncle, William Beecroft at Ruddington got the plumbing and glazing job. Hardstaffs the bricklayers was there, Thos. Danks was there putting an oil engine up to run a dynamo for light for the Hall and stables. We worked there 7 months. Mr Barnett, [2] the gardener, lived at the lodge on Tollerton Road looked after the Hall before we finished we got to know that Colonel Hubbersty had bought the Hall and the estate. I had a cousin or my mother's cousin who worked on the Hall as a joiner and carpenter. His name was William Hardy (married Miss Thurston of Tollerton and lived at Cotgrave). The Hall had to be repaired with baths and everything was put in the Hall new. I often saw Colonel Hubbersty and his daughter when they came to the Hall to the fox hound meet. They were fox hound hunters. They used to have something to drink but don't know what it was. Colonel Hubbersty was a very tall man with grey hair, to look at him you would think he had been in the Army. [3]

Me and my mate used to go in to Tollerton Hall Park after we had finished our dinner and pick up bushels of green walnuts and take them home for Green Walnut Pickles. They was black and they didn't half stain your fingers when you got the shell off. We got a lot of Filbert nuts out of the garden against the lodge. [4] They are a nut with 2 leaves on like a Barcelona nut; and squirrels there was dozens of them. It was the first place I ever saw peacocks flying around. There was a lot in the stable yard and what a long tail they have, and they do look fine when they spread the tail."

Footnotes

[1] On first reading one might think that this was the coffin of Mrs Barry Barry, wife of Pendock Barry since she was buried here. However, it was in the late 1890s that they 'found' this coffin and she died in 1811 so perhaps the journeyman plumber miscalculated the number of years that coffin had been in the vault. Alternatively, it was another member of the Barry Family.

[2] William Barnett was born 1844 in Warwickshire. His wife was Catherine Barnett born 1849 and they had two children - George born 1876 and Winifred born 1880. Winifred was born in Tollerton but her brother, George, was born in Warwickshire. This suggests that the

Barnett family moved to Tollerton sometime between 1876 and 1880. William Barnett and his wife were still in Tollerton in 1901 and William was listed as a gardener throughout these years. By 1911 William was in Cotgrave listed as a 'jobbing gardener'.

[3] Colonel Hubbersty was indeed an Army man and was known post-1894 as Albert Cantrell-Hubbersty, his mother's maiden name being Cantrell. The following notice in the London Gazette confirms this name and also his military connections prior to coming to Tollerton from Felley Abbey, near Underwood, Notts.

Whitehall, February 3, 1894

'The Queen has been pleased to grant unto Albert Cantrell Hubbersty, of Felley Abbey, in the union of Basford, in the county of Nottingham, Esquire, late Major and Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel, 3rd Battalion, Derbyshire Regiment, Lieutenant - Colonel Commanding and Honorary Colonel (1892), 1st Battalion, Nottinghamshire (Robin Hood) Rifle Volunteers, in the Commission of the Peace for the counties of Derby and Nottingham, Her Royal licence and authority that he and his issue may take and henceforth use the surname of Cantrell in addition to and before that of Hubbersty, and that he and they may bear the arms of Cantrell quarterly with their own family arms; such arms being first exemplified according to the laws of arms, and recorded in the College of Arms, otherwise the said Royal licence and permission to be void and of none effect: And to command that the said Royal concession and declaration be recorded in Her Majesty's said College of Arms.'

[4] Filbert nuts are also known as cobnuts or hazelnuts.

I am sure you will agree, there are some fascinating snippets of information about Tollerton in this letter. A unique item that members of the history group were delighted to receive. Hopefully over time we might find or be given other letters which help us to build up a picture of Tollerton in the past.