

Ian Harrison

"North Muskham, a place I sincerely love and cherish"



Ian and Gill Harrison

Early Memories

My earliest recollection of North Muskham goes back to the late 1960s; sitting on the grassed river bank, south of the clapper gate near the Ferry Public House with my girlfriend at the time and her pet Alsatian.

At that time, the area from the footpath to the river bank, from the Ferry downstream, was fully open and clear. The occasional car would be parked in front of the Ferry.

I was born in 1953 in Rochdale, Lancashire, in the next street to where Gracie Fields was born. After moving to Chesterfield and then to Sutton In Ashfield, we settled in Little Carlton in 1964, with my Father getting the post of Assistant Area Manager for British Rail. He remained in that position for 15 years and part of his role was, unfortunately, to attend to the not infrequent number of deaths on the railway along his stretch of the

East Coast Main Line from Grantham to Retford. This included several deaths at the Church Lane Crossing at South Muskham. He was often one of the first, if not the first, to attend such events; I still think about the psychological trauma to him and many that this may have caused albeit and hopefully for a short but I remember him telling me of many occasions where train drivers who, after experiencing such tragedies, often had to take early retirement or leave the job, as they could not face driving another train.

A lighter memory of my Dad's job was that he had to pay unannounced visits to the many signal boxes along this stretch in the evenings. Occasionally he would find the crossing keepers asleep or entertaining female guests! (never both together I recall!!)

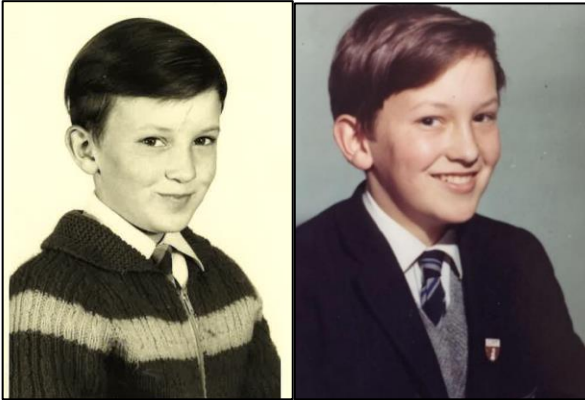
Having been initially schooled at the new and revolutionary Ashfield Comp, when I came to Newark, I attended Hercules Clay, before going on to College.

My journey back from school would usually be energised by a mini Hovis from the bakers at the end of Barnbygate. My interests as a youth were many and varied. Sport was king but I also had a strange interest in archaeology, which came to an abrupt halt when I was asked to leave the school's Roman archaeological venture on the A46 at Margidunum - Bingham roundabout. I had been discovered in the girl's tent (I was framed actually), at the week-long camp based at Toothill School playing fields, Bingham. My school friend soon followed the next day, having inadvertently put a pick through a Roman Centurion's skull!!

Teenage Years

Anyway, back to North Muskham. The limitations and lack of females at Little Carlton soon initiated the urge to grow and expand my activity area. So, instead of spending hours in a den with the Simpson brothers, under the old caravan that was the cricket pavilion at Little Carlton, I ventured out into the wider world, meeting and playing with youths from South Muskham, including the Eason, Watson, Lowe and, later, Ellison Family members. I also started to attend the youth club at North Muskham on Blacksmith's lane. The club later moved to the Woolhouse Hall where we had the technological brilliance of a Dansette record player, to

which we would take our Tamla Motown 45s, most of which had the middle bit missing as they came off pub juke boxes.



Ian aged 7 and 12

My new and growing circle of friends at North Muskham included Roger Milnes, Robert and Dick Baker from Bathley and Robert Shearer and Robert Guy from Main Street, North Muskham. Philip Moore (son of Colonel “Dinty” Moore) whose family ran the village shop on the corner of Ferry Lane and Main Street, next door to where I currently live, was also a great friend. I also “hung out” with David Duddles from Crab Lane whose father worked at Bennett’s Farm and Diane Kent (Mackleys Lane) and Lindsey Talbot (Main Street), whose father owned Talbots garage and breakdown business. Eric Talbot had an excellent understanding of short waved radio technology along with a reputation for occasionally arriving at accidents before the Police. He also, at least on one occasion, it is said, misunderstood the road signage on the access roads to the A1 resulting in all the other cars going the wrong way!

Whilst my sporting activity was mainly playing cricket, rugby and football at School and cricket for South Muskham and Little Carlton (for 35 years), we would play football and occasionally cricket, on Bob Beard’s land off Main Street, bordering on Macklays Lane. The North Muskham cricket ground was originally on Bourne’s land over the Bathley Lane level crossing on the left but that had been ploughed up when the land owner wasn’t included on the team sheet!

In the mid to late 60’s I recall I used to spend much time along the river frontage with a “gang” of friends between the Ferry and Macklays Lane, and we would buy penny chews and gob stoppers at the shop by the Ferry Pub which was owned by the ‘two small sisters’. That building later mysteriously burnt down, but fortunately no occupants were injured. With Diane Kent and Lindsey Talbot, we spent many summer evenings in Diane’s rowing boat rowing across the river to Holme Marsh.

The River Trent and Muskham Lakes

The river and water were often a big part of our activities at North Muskham and, around 1968, we used to swim/paddle in the gravel pit that was eventually to become the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Lake, on Dickinson Way. The Lake owner, Walter Bower, invented the famous “Newark Needle” fishing float.

However, Walter had also designed and built a prototype floating metal landing stage (with plastic buoyancy tanks). This was situated on the lake near to the current main entrance to Dickinson Way Estate. Throughout the summer, many of us would spend our weekends and days in the summer holidays swimming around and under the landing stage or, at worst, clinging onto the undercarriage of the landing stage and occasionally making lunges into the deep open water as non-swimmers. It was during one such day that the BBC Look North programme came to film the new landing stage. Robert Shearer got a ‘little carried away’ and seized the opportunity to achieve world-wide recognition by duly charging along the landing stage and diving into the deep lake. Once in, he remembered that he couldn’t swim!! Fortunately, the BBC camera man could and he subsequently stopped filming and rescued Robert from a filmed ‘early departure’ from his time on earth.

When the weather behaved and it became hot, we would often toddle off to the Tubular Bridge (the one that carries the east coast main line over the Trent and into Newark) and swim or paddle across the shallows to the island there. I always remember that stomach upsets occasionally followed, not least as we would then often



go fishing at Winthorpe Rack near to the sewage works outfall!

Fishing was often on the agenda and in winter we would go 'piking' on the fleet pond at the back of Bennett's farm and whilst actual size is often confused by the passing years, we regularly would pull (and return) Pike of 15lb and more from that shallow pond with crystal clear water.

Early Work

As I matured, (at least in years) I worked in the Summer holidays at Warwick and Richardson's Brewery on Northgate, Newark, consuming the obligatory two pints for breakfast in the beer cellars before either working on the pop bottling plant or later on assisting with deliveries around the east midlands. It was here that I established my liking for C₂H₆O that would stay with me till this day.

My other holiday jobs whilst at College included working as a postman in Newark (memories of which still amaze me but cannot be printed here!), filling sand and cement bags at Hills at Cromwell and one particular job of note: on the ticket gate at "The Greatest Show On Earth" at the showground, organised by the renowned Joe Weston Webb. This show became infamous as he had a chap fighting with a crocodile underwater (the crocodile had its jaw wired!) and he shot another chap out of a cannon who missed the net!

Wedlock

After an engagement party at the Crown, I married my wife Gill on the hottest day of the year in 1976, at Kelham Church and held the reception at Kelham Hall. This was the first such "double" there in over a hundred years. Gill was the daughter to Roger and Eve Paling from Trentside Farm on Blacksmiths lane at Kelham and it was her father and brothers that would escort their cows across Kelham Bridge twice a day for milking! Difficult to imagine now, given the amount of traffic the bridge now takes.

We had two daughters; Claire and Katie, who both subsequently went to Muskham school, where I would be a governor many years later.

The Village Pubs

As is the norm for many youths, pubs and other dens of night-time iniquity became the norm and at the end of each Saturday and Sunday cricket game came the habitual and essential de-brief at the Lord Nelson and, later, the Crown. Occasionally, but rarely, we met at the Muskham Ferry.

As under-age visitors, in 1969/70 we did visit the snug at the Ferry which was to the far left of the bar where the fireplace currently is. In the snug there was a bar billiards table and a juke box and we would consume Vimto! Exciting times! Outside of the Ferry at this time was a lovely little lamb who resided in a dog kennel next to the front door. The village children would daily stroke the little lamb but not after Xmas day, as he had departed...or at least gone into the kitchen to rest with the Brussel sprouts and stuffing!

The "Nelson", under the fine stewardship of Minnie and Jean Pratt, was my favourite watering hole in the 70s and 3 or 4 weekly outings there would take place. The indoor sports played there at that time were darts and table skittles and later pool. The Crown was also visited and it was from here I would obtain the records from the juke box and where Gill and I had our engagement party in 1975 and my 40th in 1993. There were many post cricket match de-briefs where that brilliantly witty, warm and much-missed character Ian Connolly would, with George Sproston, act as judges (with a bar towel on their heads when passing verdicts) pronounce judgement for dropped catches and other cricketing misdemeanours of the day. Those tremendous and memorable evenings also included local cricketers standing on a bar stool outside the Crown in the middle of the road, attempting to consume a yard of ale.

One memorable evening involved Ian Connolly bowling vol au vents in the pub car park, again as a sentence passed down by the court Judge Sproston.

It was in the early 70s at The Crown where Ron Newbold of Main Street (the old Police House) would enter the pub lounge on his bike blowing his hunting horn and the occasional wife would appear to deposit a pre-plated dinner on the head of a well-known, non-returning husband from Crab Lane!



Fireworks

Firework displays have always been eventful in Nth Muskham and it was at the Crown sometime in the 90s when Ian Connolly and I were charged with organising the fireworks display by the landlord Bud, (Alan Snell, a man of immense humour, wit and charm). Again, much missed. Suffice to say, whilst the display started impressively, it was over very soon in a crescendo of noise and screams as a firework entered the garage and set off the remaining stock!

A similar near catastrophe took place a few years later at the Ferry Public House when a large crowd had gathered on the front patio to witness rockets falling from their launchings and travelling at rocket speed 12 inches above their heads and smacking against the pub restaurant wall! Fortunately, I don't think there have been any more public displays in the village since then.

Fancy Dress was always a much-awaited spectacle at the New Year's Parties at the Crown and, at such times, it was the norm to meet a chap dressed as a Pea or indeed Bo Beep on Main Street at 2 am in the morning.

At the Ferry, I recall colourful landlords and landladies including Frank Neath, Jerry at the Ferry and Anne and Mario, followed more recently by Howard and Liz. I am pleased that the Ferry under the excellent management of Keith and Sarah continues to play its essential part in the village providing a place of community and friendship for all ages. Long may it continue, (not least as I now live within ordering distance of the bar!).

At the Crown (now Crown Cottage), the earliest landlord/lady I remember was Barbara Rennison, previously of the Fox at Kelham, followed by Nobby Scaith, John and Anne Ready, Jane Parker, Glyn and Rachel, Bud and Babs Snell, Jan and Steve, Rob and Sandar Neil and the Claughton family, (not necessarily in that exact order!)

For some unknown reason, Police officers always frequented the Crown in the 80s and 90s and memories to the fore include Sgt Ron Dawes (from South Muskham Police House) who always entered the pub with a smart officious looking attaché case. Unfortunately, the expectation of us customers that we

would see official case papers when opened was usually quickly killed off on opening to reveal only his cigarettes and packed lunch. Also, as a memorable duo, Ron and Malc Davidson could be seen at Christmas time carrying out festive renditions on the piano.

Gainful employment

Having worked as a trainee sales rep at Hoveringham Gravels, (where I notably secured a sand and gravel contract for a very small project.. The Humber Bridge.. at the wrong price!!) I started with Newark and Sherwood District Council in 1974 as a clerical assistant in the Planning Department and am still 'earning my bread' in local government t 45 years later (ok, they pay me!!)

During my time with NSDC at Kelham Hall where I occupied 16 different offices in my time, I rose to the heady heights of Strategic Manager for Risk and Resilience and under my wing, amongst other services, I had responsibility for emergency planning. In the floods of 2000 and 2007 I managed the 'response' to significant flooding throughout the district including Nth Muskham and surrounding villages. In 2000 I recall the river up to the doorstep of the Ferry but fortunately that flood only effected one property on Crab Lane. Properties on Macklays lane were also affected with a blocked outfall drain at the time. In my earlier days at the Council I was responsible for water safety and headed the response to the two tragic incidents at Cromwell weir when the young territorial soldiers went over the weir following a storm and power failure. This was followed some months later by a family in a river cruiser. As a result of these two incidents the District Council lobbied the Govt and British Waterways to put booms at the heads of all weirs on navigable river stretches in the UK. The boom you see there now was as a result of those incidents and the lobbying of NSDC.

In addition to "working" for NSDC I also carried out consultancy work around the country about the occupational consequences and dangers of asbestos. This specialism was born, not least, because Kelham Hall was riddled with asbestos lagging put on to the heating pipes by the brothers of the Sacred Mission, who occupied Kelham Hall until 1973.



I find it interesting to recall that in 2004, some 15 years ago I was responsible for looking at how our Newark and Sherwood communities could reduce CO2 emissions and also how we could mitigate the impact of the CO2 already released. It is disappointing to see how slowly we have responded since then and I still recall a high level meeting with the EA who projected then that the river levels in 2050 will mean that, due to global warming and sea level rises, there will be no difference in height between either side of the weir, with obvious additional upstream flood risk with spring tides. I also recall attending an emergency planning exercise at Eaton Hall to find that the “scenario” was a multiple vehicle collision with a LPG tanker on the A1 with a resultant plume of explosive gas being carried over the adjacent village. On closer inspection, I found the maps to show Nth Muskham and the scenario was based on an actual incident that had occurred in the 1980s (fortunately no ignition took place and North Muskham is still here!)

My home is North Muskham

In 1984 Gill and I, with daughters Claire and Katie, moved to Trent Close from our first marital home in Newark and soon became fully entrenched in village life. I had always had an affinity with North Muskham and was thus very happy to be moving into the village where both of our girls started their schooling at the excellent Muskham Primary School. With a desire to get more involved in the village and help secure its culture and many assets I joined the Parish Council in 1998 taking over the chairmanship when David Mellors retired.

The Parish Council

The Parish Council is seen by some as a fairly toothless sloth-like being, but I think I can say with some degree of accuracy that Nth Muskham PC does deliver; I think we 'punch above our weight'. Unfortunately, we only get a good turnout from the community when controversial matters arise. Early on in my tenure of Chair, I had to lead the response of the village to try and prevent the delivery of an adult 'swinging club' at the Lord Nelson, it being supported by the brewery owners at the time. Despite protests within the village and a

televised interview with me as I strolled along the river frontage captured by regional news programmes, the owners would not divert from their path. Muskham does not give in easily and with a sustained campaign, particularly by the young mothers of the village, the proposal was dropped and instead we have now one of the best Indian / Bangladeshi restaurants in the region.

As well as the Parish Council I have participated in many community ventures within the village. A village where I have always felt at home. Although bestowed with the magnificent Trent, it is not the prettiest village with the East Coast Main Line and the increasingly busy A1, but I find its rich and significant beauty within its people, its characters and its culture.

MRCC

Possibly, the greatest achievement of the village within the past 20 years has been the fundraising and subsequent build of the MRCC in 2009. I was fortunate to be chair of the fantastically talented project team with the remarkable grant application skills of Jude and Arnout Andrews. The enjoyment and community development that the new building has encouraged and facilitated has been substantial. I am sure that it will continue to serve future Muskham generations in the years ahead.

Not commonly known, but worth noting is the fact that we placed a time capsule beneath the floor just inside the main entrance, if it survives, it may be of interest in years to come as it was intended to offer a snap shot of the village life in 2009, warts and all!(can litigation follow you beyond the grave?)

The Muskham Players

As my sporting prowess and capacity diminished, I sought more cerebral creative pursuits and joined the Muskham Players as a founder member in 1994, playing Count Dracula in the first Panto called “Babes in the Wood Meet Dracula” (not the most well-known pantomime plot). I recall that I managed to drag Ian Connolly down for the auditions, in order that there was another “actor” lined up as favourite for Dame. Fortunately for Ian, and indeed for the many audiences that saw Ian play Dame, the other unknown competitor



for Dame never showed again and allegedly went off to serve time at her Majesty's pleasure!



poor by performing a play around the village. The Pinkies inventory has grown to include George and the Dragon and the world renowned "Old Horse". We perform the Plough Play the Saturday before Plough Sunday, usually in Newark Town Centre but always finishing with some haste back at The Ferry to raise monies for good causes on the way.

In conclusion, I often wonder where I would be had I not found North Muskham. Along with Sandaig bay., (ring of bright water location), near Glenelg in the remote west of Scotland It is a place I sincerely love and cherish and I will stay here till the earth and my master or Scotland beckons.

Ian Harrison

August 2019

I went on to perform in all of the Pantos to date and for many years as Ian Connolly's side kick under the much talented and wine-assisted direction of Paul Buck! In later years I have also directed many plays, farces and thoroughly enjoyed producing murder mysteries which we performed in many different locations. Perhaps the best comment I heard from an audience member was when we performed to the local WI. During the interval at the end of Act 1, some beautifully inspiring and motivating words were heard:

"Is that it?"

I hope so!!".

My love of the performing arts extended in the early 2000s when I became a member of David Haslam's infamous "Muskham Pinkies", a group of "bicycle riding enthusiasts with a love of beer". Since 2004, we have always performed the ancient and nationally renowned "Muskham Plough Play" which was born out of an incident where plough boys in North Muskham ploughed through the church yard and, as punishment, were required to collect monies for the Church and the