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Rastrick Local History Group Newsletter

Unearthing the Legacy, Celebrating the Spirit of Rastrick

WELCOME NOTE

Dear Members and History Lovers,

Members and Friends, as Autumn settles over Rastrick and the first leaves begin to turn, there's a quieter rhythm to the village that suits our work perfectly. The softer light, the cooler days, and the familiar landmarks framed by changing colours remind us how each season adds its own layer to the story of our community.

Our volunteers continue to do a sterling job with the cataloguing of the Margaret Usher material, and their dedication is making a real difference. Piece by piece, the collection is becoming clearer, better organised, and more accessible — a long-term benefit for anyone interested in Rastrick's past.

We also have some very welcome news. Thanks to the support of Calderdale Libraries Local Studies and their IT Department, a new programme has now been installed on the computer at Rastrick Library. This will make life noticeably easier for the cataloguing team, helping streamline the process and allowing volunteers to focus more on the historical content rather than the technical hurdles.

As we move further into the Autumn months, we look forward to sharing more discoveries, more insights, and more of the stories that continue to shape our understanding of Rastrick's heritage.

The Rastrick Local History Group

*FEATURED 'STORIES FROM THE PAST' IN THIS
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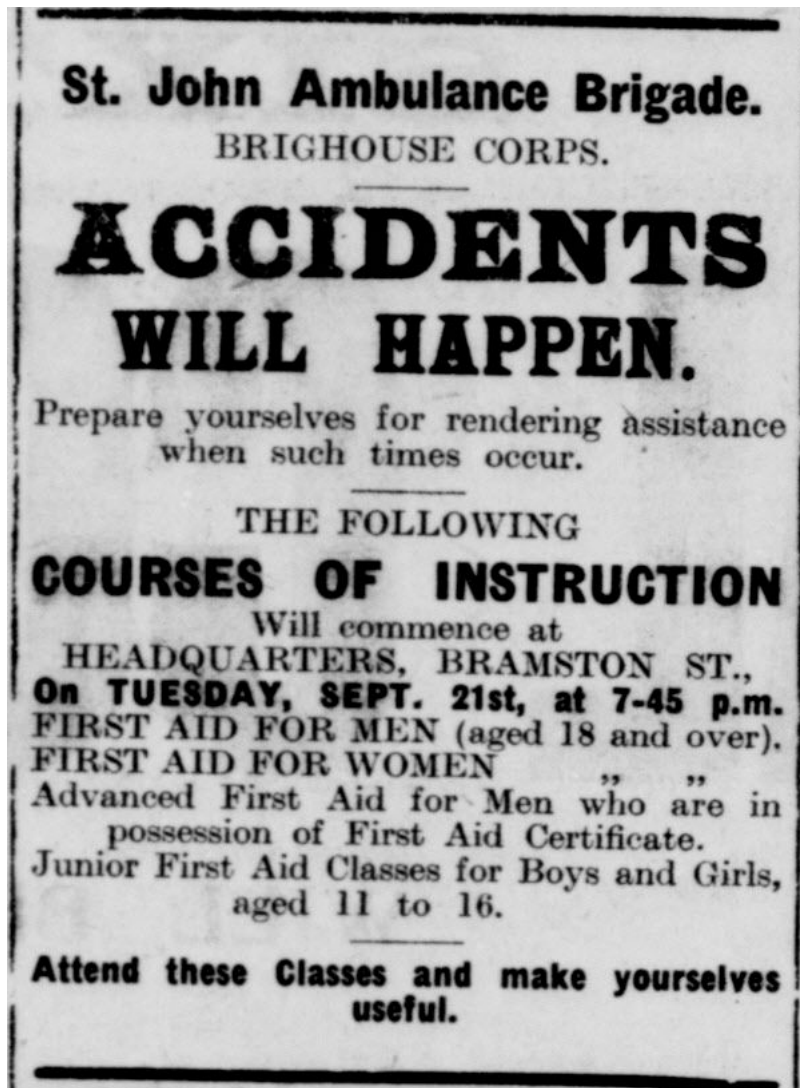
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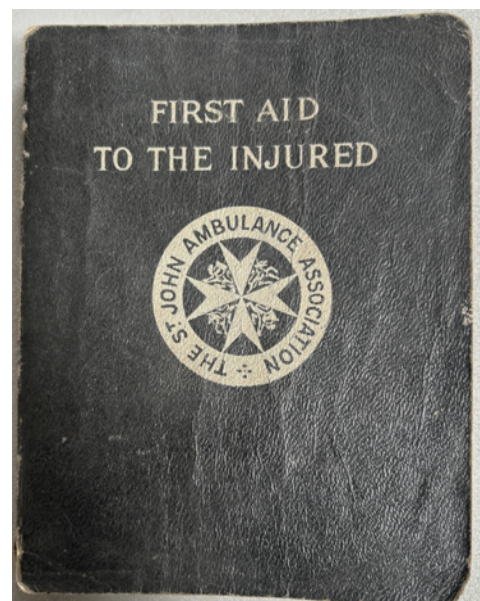
100 YEARS AGO

St. John Ambulance Brigade - Andrew Eccles



The St John Ambulance Brigade headquarters at Bramston Street was, a century ago, one of the quiet cornerstones of public safety in Rastrick and Brighouse. In an age when mills, foundries, quarries and tramways produced a steady stream of accidents, ordinary men and women stepped forward to learn the skills that could save a neighbour's life. The classes advertised in the Brighouse Free Press in September 1926 were typical of the time: practical, disciplined, and imbedded in the belief that civic responsibility belonged to everyone.

Men were trained for the heavy work of rescue, stretcher-bearing and dealing with industrial injuries, while women were encouraged to master bandaging, burns treatment, shock management and the domestic emergencies that filled everyday life. Yet the syllabus itself was identical, drawn from the national St John Ambulance manual *First Aid to the Injured*, and taught with a seriousness that reflected the hazards of a working town.



Trainees learned Schafer's method of artificial respiration, the standard technique of the day, used for drowning, smoke inhalation and electrical shock. They practised the neat, precise

1. SCHAEFER (PRONE PRESSURE) METHOD

- 1) Lay the victim on his belly, one arm extended directly forward, the other arm bent at the elbow and with the face turned sideward and resting on the hand or forearm as shown in fig. 1A.
- 2) Kneel astride the victim, so that his thighs are between your knees and with your fingers and thumbs positioned as in Fig. 1A.
- 3) With the arms held straight, swing forward slowly so that the weight of your body is gradually brought to bear upon the lower ribs of the victim to force the air out of the victim's lungs as in Fig. 1B.
- 4) Now immediately swing backward removing all pressure from the victim's body as in fig. 1C and thereby allowing the lungs to fill with air.



THUMB ALONG FINGERS
LITTLE FINGER ALONG LOWEST RIB
MOUTH AND NOSE OPEN
ONE ARM STRETCHED
FIG. 1A

WEIGHT OF THE BODY ON HEEL OF THE HAND
ELBOWS STRAIGHT
THIGHS AND ARMS PERPENDICULAR TO THE GROUND
FIG. 1B

bandaging that newspapers often praised in women's divisions, and the splinting and lifting drills that prepared men for the cramped stairwells and machinery floors of local mills.

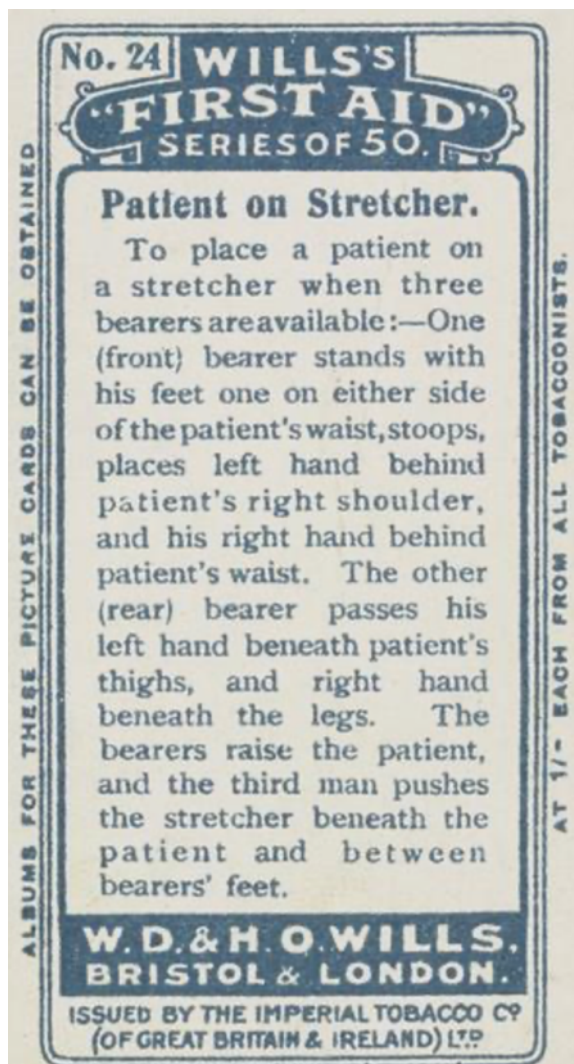
Shock was poorly understood but widely feared. In 1926, it was treated with rest, warmth and careful handling.

Burns and scalds were common, especially in textile work and domestic kitchens. Instruction emphasised cooling, protection and the avoidance of tearing away clothing stuck to the skin. Even children aged eleven to sixteen were invited to junior classes, where they learned simplified versions of the adult syllabus and were encouraged to see first aid as part of good citizenship.

The training was not only practical but almost military in tone. Stretcher drill involved commands, coordinated lifting and the disciplined teamwork that St John Ambulance valued highly. In towns such as Brighouse and Rastrick, where ambulances were not always immediately available, these volunteers often arrived first, stabilised casualties and carried them home until they could be transferred to hospital. Their work filled the gap between accident and proper medical care and their presence at public events such as football or rugby matches, parades and galas became a reassuring part of local life.



One of the more curious features of the era was the widespread use of cigarette cards to teach first aid. These small, illustrated cards, tucked into packets of Wills's cigarettes, showed how to

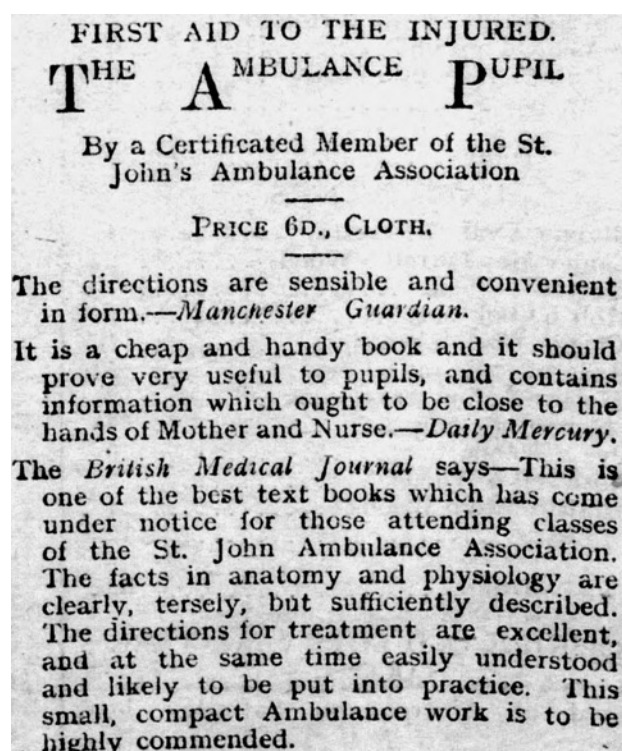


It was inexpensive, widely available, and regarded by medical journals as one of the best guides for anyone attending first-aid classes. In towns like Brighouse and Rastrick, where accidents were common and professional medical help could be delayed, owning the manual meant having life-saving knowledge literally at hand, a pocket companion to the lessons taught at the Bramston Street HQ.

treat burns, lift casualties, apply bandages and perform artificial respiration. They were colourful, memorable and widely collected, and they helped spread basic first-aid knowledge far beyond formal training rooms.

Yet there was a deep irony in their existence: while the cards earnestly instructed the public on how to save lives, the cigarettes they promoted were quietly killing millions through lung disease, heart failure and cancer. It was a strange collision of public education and commercial harm, a reminder that early twentieth-century health messaging was often tangled in contradictions.

The importance of proper instruction was reinforced by the popularity of the official St John Ambulance training manual, *First Aid to the Injured*. Advertisements of the time urged pupils, mothers and nurses to buy a copy, praising its clear diagrams, sensible directions and practical advice.

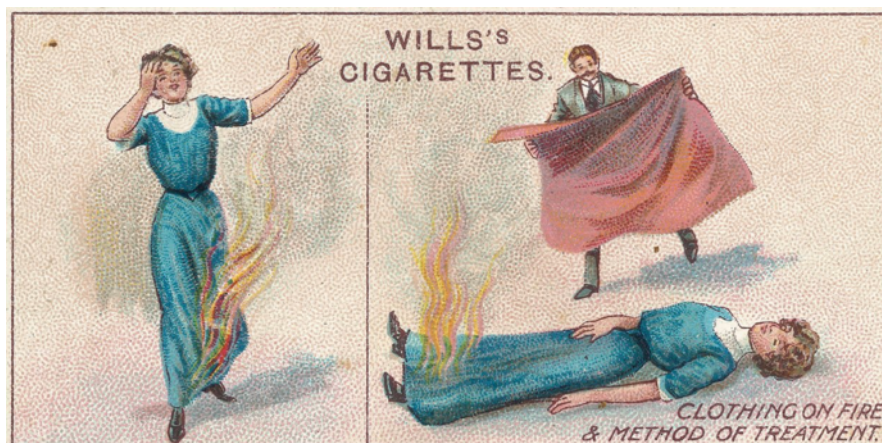


BRIGHOUSE AMBULANCE WORK.
 —The annual meeting of the Brighouse Corps of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, was held in the Ambulance Hall, Rastrick, last night. Coun. E. E. Webster, who was re-elected president, presided, and amongst others present were Ald. and Mrs. H. T. Clay, of Rastrick, and Mr. A. Robertshaw (district secretary). The Chairman spoke of the 24th year's work of the Brighouse Corps as highly satisfactory, and appealed for more public support than was at present the case. The financial statement showed receipts amounting to £316 5s. 2d., and with payments, a balance was left of £1 4s. 8d. Ald. and Mrs. Clay presented the certificates and medallions. Four representatives on the Finance Committee were elected as follow: Messrs. H. L. Thornton, A. Robertshaw, T. H. Whiteley, and J. Vickerman.

The value of this training was also reflected in the annual meetings of the local corps. In 1926, the Brighouse Corps gathered in the Ambulance Hall at Rastrick to review its twenty-fourth year of work. The president, Coun. E. E. Webster, described the year as highly satisfactory and appealed for greater public support. Certificates and medallions were presented, finances were scrutinised, and committee members elected. It was a reminder that behind every

stretcher-bearer and bandage was an organised, disciplined volunteer body keeping the service running. These meetings show how deeply embedded St. John Ambulance was in local civic life, supported by councillors, aldermen, doctors and ordinary townspeople who recognised its importance.

Despite the irony of cigarette cards and the modesty of the manual's price, the training at



Bramston Street HQ was sincere, practical and profoundly valuable. It represented a community taking responsibility for its own safety at a time when professional medical help was

limited and accidents were an everyday reality. The men and women who attended those classes carried their knowledge into mills, homes, streets and workplaces, and their quiet readiness to help formed an important part of Rastrick's social fabric. A century later, their work still deserves recognition: ordinary people, equipped with simple skills, making an extraordinary difference.

STORIES FROM THE PAST

The Thompson & Walton Feast Crane – Paul Thompson



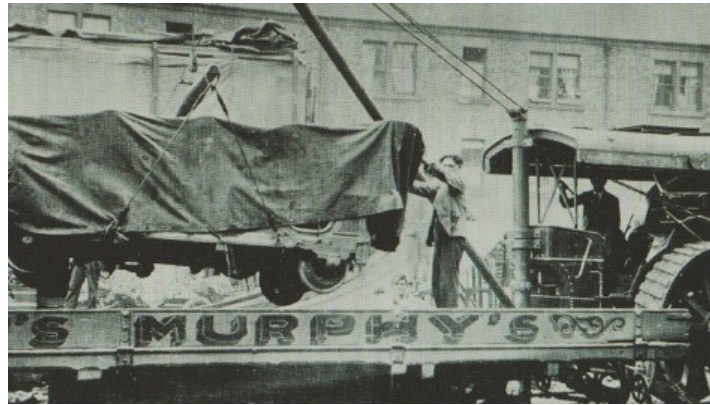
Recently I visited the Yorkshire Traction Engine Rally at Scampston Hall near Malton and came across a traction engine fitted with a crane made by my grandfather, Joe Thompson, and his company Thompson and Walton, in 1910. The traction engine was made by Fowlers of Leeds and is known as a showman's engine. It would have been used to haul fairground equipment around the country, and the crane mounted at the rear of the engine lifted heavy parts of the



fairground rides to assist in assembling them on site. What struck me most was that this crane, made by my grandfather in his early years as an engineer, is still fitted to the engine and demonstrated all over the country, proudly displaying the brass nameplate "THE FEAST CRANE, THOMPSON & WALTON ENGINEERS, BRIGHOUSE."

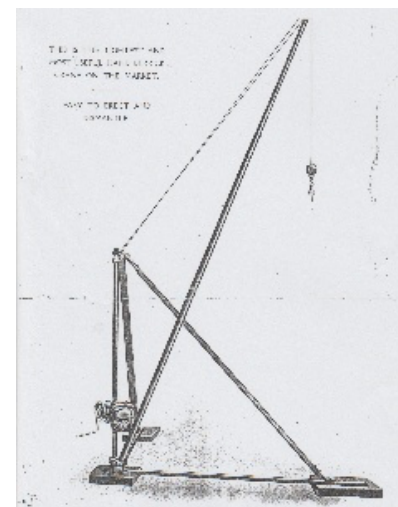
My grandfather came from a family who owned a stone quarry in Southowram and had seen how the wooden cranes used at that time would rot after years exposed to the weather. He decided to produce a crane made from iron, which was used extensively in the stone industries in this area and in other applications requiring the lifting of heavy objects. He must have

approached Fowlers and sold them his crane, which was then modified to fit onto the traction engine. John Fowler of Leeds was a world-famous manufacturer of steam traction engines, agricultural machinery and ploughing equipment, founded by engineer and inventor John Fowler in 1863. The company was based in Hunslet, Leeds, where the Costco Warehouse now stands. It employed up to four hundred men and exported machinery in those early years of steam-powered equipment to Germany, Brazil and America, and later went on to make Churchill tanks in the Second World War. Under various owners, it continued to make tractors and rail locomotives until the company ceased trading in 1974.



Joe Thompson lived in Rastrick for most of his life at Holly House, 32, Thornhill Road, at the bottom of Closes Road, an area now known as Thornes Park. There were a group of houses there along with a barn. I was born at number 34, Thornhill Road, next to Dixon's shop and opposite a cobbler's owned by Mr Hirst. There was also a hairdresser, sweet shop and a fish and chip shop. In those days, all shopping was very much on a local basis. We had Simms grocery shop on Thornhill Road and further along the road towards Scotty Bank were the Co-op stores.

Joe had been an apprentice at Alfred Robinson engineers in Brighouse in the late 1890s and decided to set up his own company in 1903. He started as an engineer's millwright, working on equipment in the many mills in this area, and saw the need for cranes made from iron. He produced a range of cranes with his partner John Willie Walton, with different models sold and transported from his works by rail, the accepted mode of transport at that time.



The original owner of the traction engine was John Murphy, a Tyneside-based travelling showman. He purchased the engine in 1920 and named it "Renown" after a Royal Navy battle cruiser from the 1914 - 1918 war. It was fitted with a Thompson and Walton crane to assist in building up his scenic ride. Newspaper reports from the 1970s and 1980s confirm that this same engine, Renown, continued to be a familiar sight at steam rallies and public events, often appearing alongside its sister engine "Repulse," the pair being named after famous warships. Renown was well known among enthusiasts, and photographs from the period show it drawing crowds, gleaming under the care of preservationists, and still equipped with the crane my grandfather made decades earlier.

The engine continued to be used up to the Second World War, when it was used predominantly for forestry work. By this time, the traction engine was in poor condition. It went through the hands of several preservation owners until it was purchased by the Howard Brothers in 1979. After restoration, it was exhibited at many steam fairs. Newspaper accounts describe Renown attending rallies where children enjoyed miniature railways, enthusiasts polished engines to a shine, and the atmosphere reflected the long-standing public fascination with steam heritage. Renown even helped raise funds for the British Heart Foundation when displayed outside Long Eaton Co-op in Nottinghamshire, accompanied by a Gavioli steam organ, showing how these engines continued to play a role in community life.



Renown was badly damaged by a fire at the Howard Brothers' workshop in September 2003. It was totally refurbished once again, and in January 2005 the work was completed. The engine emerged displaying the sign "John Murphy's Proud Peacocks" and "Plain but Powerful," ready to enter the

next phase in its eighty-five-year life. Today, the showman's engine can be seen around the country alongside its fairground ride, Galloping Gallopers, which is a steam-operated carousel.

Finding this engine at Scampston Hall, still carrying the crane made by my



grandfather, created an unexpected and meaningful link between his early engineering work and a traction engine that has travelled the country for more than a century. It is remarkable that a crane designed in Brighouse for the stone industry became part of a showman's engine that has entertained crowds, survived hard labour, been rescued by enthusiasts, raised charity funds, and continues to be displayed with pride.

The Rastrick Automotive Industry – John Shepperd

Who would have thought some early cars were built in Rastrick?

It is not a well known fact.

At the turn of the twentieth century, most transport was by boat or train for long distances and horse and cart for shorter journeys. In Rastrick, it is generally thought, the first motor car owner was William Smith, owner of Badger Hill Mills, who lived in his designer-built mansion at Lands House, New Hey Road. His personal staff grew to include a chauffeur - exciting times! No wonder, then, that a technically minded young person would be interested in pursuing this modern development. One such person was "Freddy" Bond of Rastrick.

Born in Rastrick on the 7th May 1890, Frederick William Bond was the second of three children of a local doctor, Frederick Fielding Bond, originally from Accrington, and his wife, Mary Emma Bond (née Dixon) from Sowerby. Frederick William was christened at St Matthews, Rastrick in June 1890.

The census of 1891 shows the family living at Rastrick Common but by 1899 they were at "Thorncliffe", 36 Thornhill Road. Dr Bond was medical adviser to the Rastrick Local Board then later to the Brighouse Borough Council. He was also a founder member of the Rastrick St. John Ambulance Brigade.

Frederick William received his technical education at Huddersfield Technical College and served his apprenticeship with Messrs. T. Lister and Company, brass founders, Brighouse, and with Karrier Motors, Ltd., a commercial vehicle firm based in Huddersfield. When he graduated from the technical college, he immediately entered the engineering world with Karrier Motors.

In 1914 Frederick William joined H.M. Forces and saw service abroad in the mechanical transport division of the Royal Army Service Corps (R.A.S.C.). He served in Egypt with the Middle East Force and took charge of motor vehicle and motorboat repairs. He was gazetted lieutenant in the Territorial Force of the Royal Engineers in 1917 and was subsequently appointed instructor at Stokes Bay, Gosport. In 1919, he returned to Karrier Motors as manager of the Claims Department and Investigation Engineer. In 1921 he commenced in business on his own account under the title of F. W. Bond and Co., building Bond cars.

In June 1921, Bond was described on the census return as a motor engineer working on his own account from his parents' home at 36 Thornhill Road. Also residing there were his wife, Annie Theresa Helena (née Hird, born in Wyke in May 1892), and their daughter Sheila H. Bond, born in Rastrick in September 1920. A second daughter, Elizabeth, was to be born in November 1921.

From 1922-28 Frederick William Bond assembled cars from British and American components. In 1927 he also introduced a light sporting model. By 1926 he had resigned from his day job and employed Freddie Dixon's friend Eric Greenhough as his full-time mechanic. He received financial backing from George Arthur Topham of Croft House, Rastrick, who owned, along with his brother John, of Spout Mills. He engaged a family friend, Capt. Malcolm Campbell, as sole distributor and had made the strategic decision to build sports cars. F. W. Bond of Crowtrees was formally launched in May 1926, after Bond had built his first two cars.

The fourth vehicle produced by Bond was a four-seat tourer for a local councillor, Mr. Eric Naylor, and the fifth, a huge seven-seater Pullman Saloon built for Topham after his mother had refused to travel in the all-weather tourer.

Bond was close to Sir Malcolm Campbell (right), the British racing motorist and motoring journalist who gained the world speed record on land and on water at various times. The two families often spent time together. As Bond developed his business, Campbell became an advisor and customer, commissioning the construction of three cars with a new sports chassis. Similar in design to that of a Frazer Nash Super Sports, Bond Number 5 was the first of this kind, and was tested as a bare chassis by Sir Malcolm Campbell at Brooklands in 1927. Light Car and Cycle Car magazine wrote a review on this Anzani



engined-car and were impressed, describing it as *“built very low, and a true speed car from stem to stern”*. Bond’s passion and skill in engineering, they said, *“was showing great potential.”*

Number 6 was the first vehicle to be fitted with a Meadows 4ED engine and was sold first to Mr G B Palmer, who competed the car in two events before selling it to Reg Bolton, a music hall comedian in 1928. Bolton’s son, Peter, in a 1977 article in Yorkshire Life, recounted the time spent with the car. His father had brought the car home and said *“You wanted a Bugatti. Well, I’ve bought you one – from Yorkshire – a Brighthouse Bugatti!”* Peter had many fond memories of the car and records and photos of Number 6 are retained in the history file. Sadly however, the car itself has not survived.

Bond Number 7, the second car with a Meadows 4ED engine was tested in 1928 at Brooklands and was to become the final iteration of the Bond marque, as financial pressure brought the endeavour to an untimely end. Commissioned by Campbell to compete at the Brooklands Easter Meeting and painted in Campbell Blue, 007 was tested but did not compete, and subsequently sold from Campbell’s Mayfair showroom in Spring 1928 for £600 and registered YW 6887. For some years thereafter, it disappeared from the records.

In the late 1950’s no.7 re-emerged from obscurity in the hands of Mr P. L. Alvin of Leeds. It had



The cement track at Brooklands where Sir Malcolm Campbell tested Bond Number 5

been fitted with an ignominious body and was in much need of TLC. In the 1960’s a new owner,

Mr Sawyer, set about restoring the car and assembling the now extensive and growing history file, which is stocked with letters, photographs and magazine articles both from the period and modern day. In 2018/19 the car was subject to a full nut and bolt rebuild, and is now finished in striking black cellulose paint. Advertised as *“A composed drive, 007 eats up the miles and is a smooth and powerful – as much now as it was in period. Offered on the open market for the first time in decades, this car is an opportunity to own a genuine piece of automotive heritage, and to participate in the on-going story of talent and endurance that was started by F. W Bond. Low slung and sleek, the chrome on the black is sharp. Uncluttered, neatly engineered lines express elegance, power, and the passion of a man who desired to leave his mark on the evolution of the motor car.”*

Sold to the current owner in 2021, the car has been used and reviewed extensively, featuring in car magazine Octane in April 2023, and taking a trophy at the prestigious Salon Privé Concours at Blenheim Palace in September 2022.



1928 Bond Minicars Black Manual, Right Hand Drive

Altogether Bond and Co. built a total of 7 true Bond cars, and 3 specials. Of these, just two remain to this day: The Nanette Special, which resides in a private collection in the UK, and Bond number seven.

Unfortunately, the lack of orders resulted in Topham withdrawing his financial backing and the garage closing shortly thereafter. In 1928, F.W. Bond accepted an appointment as engineer surveyor to the Motor Union Insurance Company, Ltd., a position he retained for the rest of his life. The 1928 electoral roll still places F W Bond in Rastrick but by the next year's register he had moved to Balby, Doncaster.

From Balby, Doncaster, the family moved to Harrogate. On the 1939 Register, Frederick and Annie, with their two student daughters and two of Frederick's in-laws, were living at 1, Westminster Drive, Harrogate. Frederick William Bond's death on 6th January 1943 was registered in the Knaresborough district. He is buried at Pannal.

The Local Osier Trade – But What Was It ? - Andrew Eccles

If you walk through Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve today, past the still water of the lagoon and the whispering reeds, it is hard to imagine that this peaceful corner once hid an industry woven into the very fabric of the Calder Valley. Nothing in the landscape hints at what stood here before, no ruins, no tools, no trace of the labour that shaped generations of local families.



Yet on the 1854 map, a small, easily overlooked label reveals the secret, osier beds.

Before the nature reserve, this area was a dumping ground for fly ash, a by-product of the former Elland

Power Station from 1959 but in Victorian times, this marshy ground produced the supple willow rods that fed a thriving trade, supplying the great woven baskets known as skips or sometimes skeps, that were once as common in the textile mills of Rastrick as the clatter of machinery itself.

The work began each spring when short twigs of willow, planted just fifteen to eighteen inches apart, sent up six to eight slender branches, often reaching eight feet in a single season. By autumn and winter, the crop was ready. Families cut the flexible branches known as withies with sharp bill-hooks, either coppicing them close to the ground or pollarding them (cutting everything back from the main trunk) at a height of three or four feet so that next year's growth would sprout again. The cut stems were tied into bundles with willow ties, sorted by size and stored. Some were used green, some were woven with the bark still on, others were stripped, sun-bleached or even boiled to deepen their colour. Before weaving, the stored withies were soaked to make them supple, and for the finest work they were split lengthways.

This was not a solitary trade. Basket making was a family affair, with every pair of hands contributing. The heavier work of planting, cutting and carting fell to the stronger members of the household, while the nimble-fingered weaving of fruit baskets and domestic wares was often done by women. Children learned early, and apprenticeships were common. J. T. Smith, writing in 1839, recalled seeing basket-makers' huts along the Thames from Fulham to Staines, simple shelters for storing willow rather than for weaving, because the craft needed warmth and dexterity.

The best osiers grew in rich alluvial soils, the kind that lay beside the Calder. Matthew Bowden,



a Brentford basket maker whose family supplied much of London in the nineteenth century, said that his most luxuriant crops grew in ground flooded at almost every high tide. Cromwell Bottom, with its marshy riverside land, was ideal. The local variety, *Salix Viminalis*, the common osier, was perfect for weaving: long, narrow leaves, smooth yellow-green twigs, and a habit of producing straight, flexible stems year after year. It had been in Britain since ancient times and thrived in wet places, its catkins providing early nectar

for bees and its branches shelter for birds.

Although the osier beds have vanished, the trade they supported once touched every mill worker in Rastrick. Anyone who spent time in a spinning shed or warehouse would remember the sight of skips stacked high with yarn or bobbins, the creak of willow when the baskets were filled and

subject to weight, and the knowledge that these simple woven baskets were part of a much larger chain of labour stretching from riverside mud to factory floor. The industry even carried its own folklore. In Chediston, Suffolk, a “willow stripping” ceremony saw a person dressed in willow bark dance under the full moon before being tossed into a pond, a reminder of how deeply woven willow was into rural life.



Today, Cromwell Bottom is a place of wildlife and quiet paths, but beneath the surface lies the memory of an older landscape, one where families worked through the seasons, where the river fed the soil, and where the humble osier helped keep the great textile mills of Rastrick running. If you pause by the lagoon and imagine rows of willow rods swaying in the breeze, you can still sense

the rhythm of that lost craft, once so ordinary that no one thought to record it, and now so forgotten that it feels almost like a secret rediscovered, however, if you look carefully, there are still the odd willow trees scattered around the riverbank area.



My grandfather was the projectionist at the Albert Cinema around 100 years ago. As an amateur photographer, he used to take home the glass slides that were used to advertise forthcoming films and local businesses, once the slides were finished with. He would then clean the glass and use them for his own photographs, however, I have a box containing thirty-eight of these slides that he never got around to wiping clean. One of the local advert slides is for a man named Harry Collins who was a basket maker at

Woodlands Place, Birds Royd. Harry’s advert announced that his speciality was mill skeps and laundry hampers. He can be seen on the advert sitting amongst an assortment of wicker items.

The osier trade at Cromwell Bottom had disappeared before 1900 and Harry would have used either imported willow or willow grown on the Somerset Levels or in the Thames Valley as they were the only places left in the country who were still growing it. His speciality trade was in decline, and he doubtless had to find work in another manufacturing industry, soon after he placed this advert.

Unruly behaviour in Rastrick - 150 years ago - Andrew Eccles

Thomas Bell of Little Woodhouse, Rastrick, born in the township in 1837. He lived until he was 56 years of age and was buried at Carr Green in 1893. Thomas lived the kind of life that was once so ordinary it rarely made the history books. A stone delver by trade, he spent his days in the hard, punishing work of the quarries at Longroyde and his evenings in the familiar world of footpaths, alehouses, and the loose gatherings of workmates that formed the social life of industrial villages.

He married Mary Ann Bradley in 1862, and though they never had children, their home at Little Woodhouse was typical of the time, yet Thomas also belonged to a culture that encouraged grown men to behave, at times, with the swagger and mischief of lads half their age. In villages like Rastrick, groups of men would gather after work, lingering at field edges or street corners, sharing drink, gossip, and bravado. It was a world with few structured pastimes and little in the way of organised recreation, and so “hanging about” became a pastime in itself. Stone-throwing, shouting, and petty harassment were common enough that the newspapers developed a vocabulary for it: “roughs,” “rowdies,” “loafers,” and “lads at their pranks.” Thomas Bell’s appearance before the Halifax West Riding Police Court in the late 1870s was nothing unusual but part of a wider pattern that magistrates saw week after week.

This typical incident was reported in the Brighouse and Rastrick Gazette on the 9th September 1876. A group of men had gathered in a field at a late hour, making a nuisance of themselves, and when Police Constable Cragg approached to disperse them, they responded with the usual mixture of bravado and hostility. Abusive language was followed by a volley of stones, and the constable, alone and outnumbered, did what rural officers often had to do: stand his ground, report the offenders, and hope the magistrates would impose enough of a penalty to discourage a repeat performance.

ASSAULT ON A POLICEMAN.—Thomas Bell, stone dresser, Rastrick, was charged at the Halifax West-riding Police-court, on Saturday last, with having assaulted P.C. Cragg, on the 25th ult. while in the execution of his duty. It appeared that for some time past a lot of roughs in Rastrick assemble together, annoying persons who are passing or happen to go near them. On the night in question, at a rather late hour, the band were at their pranks in a field, and P.C. Cragg went towards them to order them away; they commenced using abusive language and pelted him with stones. — The magistrates found the case proved and ordered defendant to pay £2 8s. 6d. or in default one months' imprisonment with hard labour.

The court did what courts generally did. Bell was fined £2 8s. 6d., a significant sum for a stone delver, and threatened with one month's imprisonment with hard labour if he failed to pay. Victorian justice relied heavily on fines, short sentences, and public shaming through the local

press. Magistrates could bind men over to keep the peace, and constables were encouraged to keep an eye on known troublemakers, but the deeper causes of such behaviour — poverty, boredom, alcohol, and the absence of meaningful leisure — were beyond the reach of the law.

What makes Thomas Bell's story so striking today is not its uniqueness but its familiarity. The ingredients have barely changed in 150 years: groups of bored youths and men with limited prospects, cheap drink, weak policing in certain areas, and a sense that the police are an irritation rather than an authority. Victorian newspapers complained bitterly about "roughs who will not grow up," and modern headlines often echo the same sentiment. The courts of the 19th century knew perfectly well that fines and short spells of hard labour did little to reform habitual offenders, but they had no power to address the underlying social conditions. And so the cycle repeated itself, year after year, generation after generation.

Thomas Bell's life, viewed through this lens, becomes more than a single court case. It becomes a glimpse into the everyday reality of industrial Rastrick. The hard work, the rough humour, the camaraderie, the drink, the mischief, and the occasional clash with authority. He was not a villain, nor a hero, but a man shaped by the world around him, a world where adulthood arrived late, leisure was improvised, and the line between harmless fun and public nuisance was easily crossed. His story reminds us that the past was not always prim and orderly, and that the frustrations of modern life have deep roots.

In many ways, very little has changed.

PHOTO ARCHIVES & HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Discover More at www.MyRastrick.com

Each season brings new additions to our understanding of Rastrick, and much of that ongoing work is reflected on www.MyRastrick.com. The website continues to expand as more photographs, documents, and research notes are added, offering a deeper and more detailed picture of the township's past than ever before.

For anyone interested in tracing family lines, exploring the development of local streets, or simply enjoying a look at how Rastrick has changed over time, the site provides a wealth of material at your fingertips. Recent updates include newly scanned images, improved indexing of historical references, and clearer navigation to help visitors find exactly what they're looking for.

The extensive burial records for St Matthew's Church and the former Bridge End Chapel remain among the most frequently used resources, supporting family historians from near and far. Alongside these, the growing collection contributions continues to shed light on stories that might otherwise have been lost.

With visitors from across the UK, and well beyond, the website has become an important point of connection for anyone with ties to Rastrick. If you haven't explored it recently, it's well worth a visit. You may find a familiar face, a forgotten building, or a detail that adds a new layer to your own understanding of the place we call home.

GET INVOLVED

Contribute to Rastrick's Legacy. Your voice matters in preserving the legacy of Rastrick. Do you have old photographs, fascinating anecdotes, or hidden artefacts? Share them with us and become a custodian of our community's history. Email your contributions to history.rastrick@gmail.com. Together, we can ensure our heritage continues to inspire future generations.

Alternatively, come and join our friendly group at Rastrick Library. Meetings are held every second Tuesday in the month at 5.00pm

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monthly meetings held at Rastrick Library, 5-00pm – 6-30pm

Tuesday 13th October 2026

Tuesday 10th November 2026

Tuesday 8th December 2026

CLOSING THOUGHTS – Threads That Endure

The Rastrick Local History Group

As Autumn settles over Rastrick, we're reminded how change often arrives not with fanfare, but with the gentle shift of light on familiar streets. The turning leaves, the cooler evenings, and the steady rhythm of community life all speak to the same truth: our shared history isn't only found in archives or old maps, it lives in the everyday moments we continue to shape together.

This season encourages us to pause, to notice, and to appreciate the threads that bind our neighbourhood across generations. Whether through local stories rediscovered, walks taken along well-worn paths, or conversations sparked by memories of "how things used to be," each of us plays a part in keeping Rastrick's heritage alive and meaningful.

As we move toward winter, may we carry forward that sense of continuity, the quiet confidence that our community's story is still being written, one thoughtful step at a time.