Castleton and Its Old Inhabitants by Kay Harrison.

“……. there are also memories in the Churchyard on many Headstones, and nameless mounds, which also have their story.” (Shawcross, 1903)

Introduction.

Our beautiful village has a rich history of lead mining, rope making, old inns and alehouses, show caverns, Blue John Stone, Garland Ceremony and an old ruined castle from which it takes its name. The rugged Winnats Pass and surrounding hills almost enclose the village; with its picturesque old buildings, streets, streams and quiet corners we are reminded that the past is never very far away. But what about Castleton’s people; those who lived, came, worked and died here, in centuries gone by? This forthcoming history is about their stories.

The “nameless mounds” in the churchyard, which lie silently forgotten, with the gravestones gradually crumbling away or disappearing under the creeping ivy, have hidden a wealth of secrets and stories about Castleton’s history from us.

As you walk through our churchyard, perhaps spare a thought for the mother you can’t see, as she buries her child whose life has been taken by the wheel of a cart, a father standing by his children’s grave as he buries his eighth child, and a young widow burying the father of her two little boys after he was crushed to death. We can imagine the terrible grief of the Castleton Barmaster after his son shot himself dead, and his daughter was found dead within the same week. In some of these “nameless mounds” lies a young servant whose despair caused her to take her own life, an old guide who hanged himself inside Peak Cavern, a lead miner who cut his own throat, and a father who owed just a little money and couldn’t pay. These and many more old inhabitants, with peaceful and happier lives, can be remembered in this history.

Left; Robert How seen here in 1858 - he became Barmaster of Castleton. Image reproduced courtesy of CHS. Please see footnote *
A thirsty population lived here and frequented our many inns, alehouses and taverns; all the innkeepers and landlords were required to keep “orderly houses” and their names were recorded in the Victuallers Recognizances and gazetteers of the day. Some of these taverns no longer exist; others remain as well-frequented today as in years gone by.

Lead miners, rope makers, cotton factory workers and farmers made their living here, sometimes in great poverty where hands were plentiful and the wages low. Many worked in occupations that enabled day to day life to go on here, such as servants, bakers, muffin makers, and tailors, dress and bonnet makers. Other trades of daily life included blacksmiths, grooms and coachmen reflecting the transport of days gone by.

Above; Ye Olde Nag’s Head circa 1895. Image reproduced courtesy of CHS.

Above; group of servants with ladies, gentlemen and children seen here in Castleton School yard, circa 1900. Image reproduced courtesy of CHS.

Left; coach and horses outside the Cheshire Cheese Inn, with groom and coachman circa 1900. Image reproduced courtesy of John & Karen McKeever, and Ken Slack.
Early schooling left a lot to be desired, when ignorant children were thought to grow up seeking the comforts of the alehouses.

Many efforts were made to improve education here, especially of the poor, by several kind benefactors and charities. We had several schools here, with many masters and mistresses; not all seemed fit to teach and memories of schooldays were not always happy ones.

At the centre of village life was the church; Castleton’s history included many much-loved vicars; also one who ended up in court twice for assault, another who cried when he left Castleton; another was frequently drunk when he conducted services. St. Edmund’s Church has seen innumerable baptisms, weddings and funerals over the centuries; our parish registers often provide a window into the past where we can glimpse life as it was then.

Our pretty village belies the echoes of poverty, domestic violence, illegitimacy, and assaults on children. How did the village deal with these darker areas of life? Drunkenness and violence often went hand in hand, sometimes perpetrated by so-called “gentlemen” of Castleton. Behaviour such as this often went on “behind closed doors” for many years.
Many poor people lived here; indeed our baptism and burial registers often recorded a person as a “pauper” and in the census records too.

Castleton did have poorhouses where the impoverished could live; but it was often regarded as the greatest shame to have to go there. One pauper hanged himself in there in the eighteenth century.

Many crimes were committed here both by Castleton’s own inhabitants and those who came to the village. The Lead Merchant’s shop was burgled in 1843; all three lads were transported for this crime. Another young man escaped the death sentence when he stole two cows from a nearby field. The story of Allan and Clara, murdered in the Winnats Pass by lead miners in the eighteenth century, is a gruesome tale; the murders of Joyce Bock and her little son, Peter Hugo, in 1945, is perhaps one of the most horrific and saddest stories in Castleton’s history.
The Ancient Garland Ceremony was, and still is, a day of great celebration and festivity in the village. Many old inhabitants took part in the ceremony and many came simply to watch. It has, however, changed and adapted over the years. Who organised it in days gone by, who danced in it, who took the main parts and what costumes did they wear?

Right; Garland day at Castleton circa 1900. Image reproduced courtesy of CHS, also Robert & Mary Webster who kindly donated the original image.

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Left; Tom Hall the Garland King circa 1900.

Below; Florence and Edith Gregory, photographed near Peak Cavern, dressed ready to dance in the Garland circa 1915.

Images reproduced courtesy of CHS.
When the railway came to the Hope Valley in 1894, Castleton was changed forever. Lives were horribly lost during the railway’s construction, but it allowed visitors to flock here in their thousands to see the “Wonders” of Castleton; the village tried hard to keep up with a changing world.

Above; visitors in Castleton circa 1900. The old stable seen on the right stood where the bus station is today. Image reproduced courtesy of CHS.

There are many old Castleton families here such as the Barbers, Halls, Broadbents, Ashtons and Eyres to name but a few. Where did they live, what work did they do? What secrets and sadness did these families hold?

Left; the Barber Family at The Walk, Castleton, circa 1900.

Below; Florence Barber. She researched much of Castleton’s history.

Images reproduced courtesy of CHS.
The sombre faces of the adults here, may tell us something of the tragedy that had already befallen this family many years before .......

Left; the Heathcote family circa 1905.
Image reproduced courtesy of Mr Jack Heathcote.

.... but with the advent of the First World War, others had their own tragedies yet to come.

Right; the “Speedwell” Eyre family circa 1900. Image reproduced courtesy of CHS.
There were old and sometimes odd characters in the village, such as our “Daft” Sammy Eyre – some say he was not so daft - but where did he die, where is his grave in the churchyard and what was written on his headstone?

Left; “Daft Sammy of Castleton” (Robinson, 1866)

*Image reproduced courtesy of CHS.*

All these people, and many more, helped form Castleton’s history - they are part of it. As their names gradually wear away and disappear from the gravestones into a forgotten past, it would be easy to forget that they had ever lived; I hope this forthcoming history will allow them to be remembered.

Left; gravestone of Isaac Hall, “late guide of Peak Cavern” inscribed thereon. He died in 1895 aged 54.

Inscribed on one of our church bells is a phrase that is perhaps a poignant reminder of the brevity of life; the Rev W.H. Shawcross referred to it as “The Legend on the Seventh Bell”;

“When Of Departed Hours We Toll The Knell, Instruction Take And Spend The Future Well”.

These are wise words indeed.
I intend this history to be an ongoing project with the articles and stories added over time. As a member and trustee of the Castleton Historical Society I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed researching and writing it.

Bibliography;


The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) has provided a wealth of new research which will form a large part of this history; all names, dates and full references will be given with the stories as they appear in full on the CHS website.

Acknowledgements;

I would like to thank Castleton Historical Society and the Derbyshire Record Office for their kind permission to reproduce images, also the Reverends Ian Davis and Josephine Barnes for permission to use images and information from our Parish Records. I thank Robert and Mary Webster for permission to reproduce their two photographs, John and Karen McKeever of the Cheshire Cheese Hotel, and Ken Slack for permission to reproduce the coach and horses photograph, and Mr Jack Heathcote for his kind permission to reproduce his family photograph. All the modern images of Castleton are my own unless otherwise stated. Sometimes the original source of old images has been lost, and cannot be traced; if this is the case in any used in this history then please contact our Society, so, where appropriate, correct acknowledgement can be given.

*Image of Robert How. We, at the Castleton Historical Society, would like to thank Mr Jim Rieuwerts for correctly identifying Robert How, Barmaster of Castleton, in the above named photograph. The entire, uncropped image shows Robert How with his daughter Martha in 1858. The image held by the Society has been wrongly identified as Robert How Ashton for many years.

*I would also like to thank many people who have helped and encouraged me in the researching and writing of this history including Jean Adamson, Angela and Alan Darlington, Peter Harrison, Maria Kenyon, Maura Ward and Val Burgess; also thanks to Val for her assistance in getting this history onto our website.*

Kay Harrison May 2014.