
Frozen Stiff and Loving It! – Snowy Memories of Hellifield Flashes

A walk across the 'Back Fields' between Hellifield and Long Preston Bridge will take in the area now known locally as 'The Flashes'. The first pond you pass is known as Dunbars and it lies beneath a hilltop which is overlooked by Midland Terrace. Close by in the next field lies another pond.

Historically they were both one large pond in a large field, which was edged by a

marshy surround. The old name for this area was Marl Pit Pasture. A reference to the days when the land was dug out to retrieve Marl – a mixture of lime and clay, with added sand – which was used for building purposes and as a form of fertiliser. The area was drained significantly in the 19th Century.

Further afield and now a subject of controversy due to ongoing development is Gallaber Pond. Now known as 'The Flash' or Hellifield Flash. (Flash – Yorkshire Dialect word, for a pond in a field.)

Back in the 1960's we seemed to live in Duffel Coats and Wellington Boots whenever the snow started falling. Very often straight after school and under a leaden sky, we would drag our sledges (very often homemade) across what we all called the 'Back Fields' and head for Dunbars, which was the first of three ponds that froze over and provided hours of fun. Overlooked by Midland



From the 1970s: the edge of Gallaber Flash prior to the construction of the house and Waterside Lane
(The Road to Nowhere!)



Straight down the hill and across the ice on Dunbars!

Ken Leak and brother David. 1968

Terrace and the Railway Station, Dunbars had the added bonus of being located beneath a steep hill which was ideal for sledging down. Once speed had been gained and the icy pond had been reached, we were rewarded with a clear run across the ice. The pond next door to Dunbars lay beneath the railway banking and was not surrounded by any sort of hill. That particular pond was ideal for makeshift Ice Hockey matches using branches and sticks and any suitable flat stone to bash across the ice.

Gallaber Pond (Hellifield Flash) seemed much more of a trek for little legs to reach. Again there were no hills surrounding it, so sledging was restricted to Dunbars which was closer to home. When snow was thick on the ground it could attract up to 30 people – adults as well as children – who all



Back up the hill alongside Dunbars. Interesting photo as it shows the Midland Railway Pumphouse still in situ. 1968.

seemed to be making the most of the wintry conditions. I well remember the feelings of agony, when absolutely wet through and frozen to bits, we finally returned home to thaw out in front of the fire. Circulation returning to icy fingers and toes was not something you forgot. Our clothing, which was predominantly woollen, was excellent at retaining the wet and the cold. Duffel coats, socks, and pullovers were hung up to dry. Wellington boots were stuffed with newspaper. We may have

suffered, but as long as the snow lasted we would repeat the process day after day. Gluttons for frozen punishment but enjoying it while it lasted. Finally the thaw would come. Things became a bit too damp and slushy for sledging, and the ice made rather unnerving noises as huge cracks spread out from our tentative footsteps across the thawing pond.

It would soon be over for perhaps another year. But the memories of exhilarating rides down the hill side and across the pond, plus the after effects of icy fingers and toes will always remain with me.

Article by Ken Leak, December 2019

All photographs courtesy of Neil Redfern



Sledgers on top of the hill above Dunbars Pond. Ken Leak third from left and Neil Redfern who supplied the photos fifth from left. 1968