
Old tales from the Black Horse Hotel

The Black Horse Hotel stands in the centre of Hellifield, and is surrounded by some of the oldest buildings in the village. An old Coaching Inn that has been restructured within and without over its long life. The building and its many customers have witnessed many changes in Hellifield over the years and we are fortunate that the Black Horse has survived closures where many Village Pubs have not.



The Black Horse circa 1919

Across the road from the Black Horse is Hellifield House (Social Club). This was the home of the Hardacre family for many generations. The Hardacres were influential landowners and gentry, and a family whose descendants had resided in the village and surrounding area for over 500 years. Next to Hellifield House, Rook Cottage and the subsequent cottages on Bacon Row, led to an area where Weaving Sheds once stood, in a time when the cotton industry provided employment for many locals. The old Smithy which stands next to the Black Horse will still be remembered as a working Blacksmiths.

The last Blacksmith who worked in the Smithy throughout the 1960's and early 70's was Tommy Garnett. The Smithy was the domain of local farmers, and the Auction Mart also kept Tommy busy. However, even prior to the Auction Mart being built, the Smithy was an integral part of a very small village. In the early 18th Century and prior to the Institute being built, the land at the rear of the Black Horse was open and consisted of a grassed extension to the Village Green. Roughly where the main car park stands, a lane led from the road and connected with Gisburn Road on one side, and the Back Lane

on the other. A little further on, near land where the Institute was to be built stood the Pinfold. Pinfold is known to be a Saxon term meaning 'pound' – and is where loose cattle, sheep and other livestock were held prior to being collected – at a cost – or being subsequently disposed of if payment could not be made.

This was in a time where many of the surrounding fields were not enclosed as now, and there was still common land for grazing. This created a somewhat transient population of livestock who were often not where they should have been. The Pinfold would have been a secure stone enclosure where these roamers were rounded up and stored. Many villages would have a Pinfold and there is no evidence now – except on old maps –



Hellifield in 1831 showing the site of the Pinfold. (From the History of Hellifield by Tom Merral)

of the one that stood in Hellifield. The Black Horse was a key changeover for horses in the days when the only traffic through the village belonged to local tradesman and farmers. The main transport prior to the railways was the arrival of the coach and horses, and the restaurant area of the Black Horse was the stabling area for such traffic. Within the Black Horse itself the building was used for local meetings. Attended by landowners and the gentry ie: the Hamertons of Hellifield Peel or the Hardacres of Hellifield House, these meetings were often the scene of much debate over land usage, rents, and the subsistence of the mainly poor inhabitants of Hellifield.

One such meeting in 1832 was attended by James Hamerton of Hellifield Peel and Thomas Spencer of High Ground Farm who was a Cattle Dealer, but also held the post of Village Constable. At this meeting James Hamerton accused Spencer of using £50 of public money for his own use. The accusation formed part of a document which was in the possession of William Wilkinson of Hellifield Green. Thomas Spencer denied these charges and the case dragged on for 18 months. Spencer was finally able to take possession of the document and decided to take libel action against James Hamerton.

Unfortunately for Spencer, things did not go his way and the case was heard at the York Assizes in 1835, resulting in Spencer being found guilty of the charges made against him by James Hamerton two years earlier, and Spencer subsequently being ordered to pay all of the £50 back. The licensee of the Black Horse at that period was Mary Kayley.

The Kayleys were a family who were

connected with the Black Horse for many years, and it was the Kayley family who were in residence during the railway construction years. At that time the village found itself in a tumultuous situation, with large numbers of Railway Navvies having to be accommodated in huts and encampments around the village. These men brought with them their families and were often living in cramped unsanitary huts. The area of the Playing Fields on Station Road had several of these huts located together, but they could also be found along the newly constructed railway embankments such as the one that carried the line over the main Railway Bridge above Hellifield Beck. The men were notorious for their drinking and lawlessness, poaching and casual violence. Obviously the Black Horse (licensed for the sale of wines and spirits) would have been an attraction, and there were numerous instances of trouble where alcohol was involved – especially when payday occurred.

One such incident in 1879 when the railway from Chatburn was being constructed is particularly notable. Two railway labourers – Eli Hurst and John Cox got into an argument over money at the Black Horse. The subsequent fight spilled out into the road and John Cox drew a knife and stabbed Hurst causing serious wounds. Cox quickly left the scene and made his escape out of the village. By now a ‘posse’ had organised themselves. Consisting of other Navvies and some local men, they found Cox hiding in trees on Thornview Road and he was chased up the Airton Road. He made it to the railway bridge at the top of Airton Road and leapt from the top of the parapet onto the rails below. Whether he was trying to end it all, or trying to escape is unknown, as he was wounded in the



Advertising leaflet from around 1920

drop and was soon captured and arrested. It is reported that Eli Hurst survived the stabbing and recovered from his wounds.

These are just two different tales that originate from within the walls of the Black Horse. There will be countless other undocumented stories of life in Hellifield that are long forgotten. Stories of people who lived in times of change, and with the ever present Black Horse Hotel serving as a permanent backdrop to their comings and goings.

Ken Leak