
Tom Merrall's 'History of Hellifield' (1949)

In several of the local history articles written for the Hellifield Herald by me and Ken Leak you will often find us making reference to Tom Merrall's "History Of Hellifield". This was almost certainly the first detailed history of the village published before Ken's excellent two volumes came along in more recent years.

Tom avoids any detailed mention of railway history in his book, possibly as this has been covered in numerous railway publications over the years but instead gives us a view of Hellifield from prehistoric times and early Bronze age days through medieval times and up to the time of writing. A tour through the village in the years 1831 and 1895 are featured and both make most interesting reading. A list of householders in 1895 is also included

and I was able to find my great-grandfather, Robert Parker, living at 33 Midland Terrace in that year on the list.

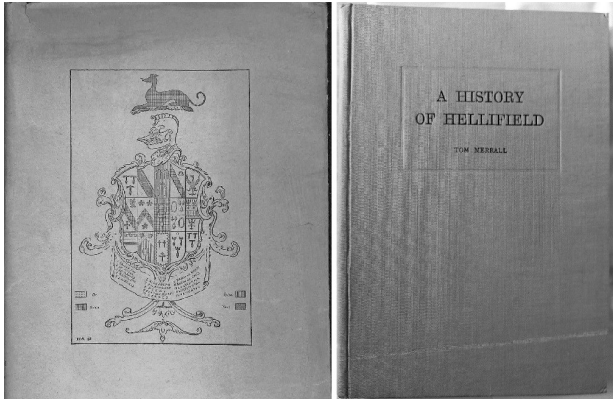
Tom was born in Bingley in 1873 then lived with his family in Gordon Street, Sutton in Craven. He was the eldest of six children, two girls and four boys. He first came to Hellifield in 1895 aged 22 years and eventually settled in Bacon Terrace, this is the row of five small cottages with the cobbled frontage located on Gisburn road. Many years later I was brought up in No.2 on that same row! The view of the cottages on the next page is from a locally sold postcard and dates from around 1950. Tom

married Martha Rowe from Sutton in Craven in 1897. For many years Tom worked in the village post office and grocers on the main road, which brought him into contact with many of the village's inhabitants, where he enjoyed hearing the many tales of old Hellifield that were passed on to him by the older residents of the village during his working day. The photograph opposite shows the front of the post office visible between Craven Terrace

and the Temperance Hotel, to the right of the hotel is the long-demolished butchers shop of Mr. Robert Rummey and just on the edge of the picture can be seen the

end of a row of cottages, known as the fold, jutting out into the roadway.

When the manuscript for Tom's book was finally completed, it was deposited for safe keeping in the village church of St. Aidan's, until publication became possible several years later in 1949. Many photographs for the book were taken by local amateur photographer Mr. Jack Holmes, with drawings provided by Mr. R.T. Clough and Mr. A. E Bownass of Haw Grove and later of





Mart Farm. Typing of the manuscript was done by local man Mr. J. Fairbrother and help with the printing was provided by Mr. L. Pitchford, the final printing of the book being done by J.W. Lambert printers of Settle. The book was produced in hardback form with a paper dust jacket and included a fold out sketch map of the area based on the ordnance survey map of 1852, which was attached inside the book's rear cover. Any monies raised from the

sale of the book were generously donated to the village church. I am not sure of the exact number of copies printed but a list of 243 subscribers is included at the end of the book. Tom and his wife Martha left Hellifield in 1928 moving back to Sutton in Craven, where Tom wrote two more books: "A History of Sutton" and "Craven through the ages" but neither of these books went on to be published. Tom's wife Martha passed away in 1940 and Tom





passed on in 1951. Up until a few years ago, copies of a "History Of Hellifield" could still be found at book fairs and online and also at antiquarian booksellers but of late the book seems to have become harder to track down. Copies of the book were often selling for upwards of £100 and sometimes higher in more recent times, quite a surprising cost for a local interest title - it just goes to show that the popularity of Tom's book still endures to the present day.

The photograph at the start of this article shows the book with its original paper dust jacket. To the left is a portrait from the book's front piece of Mr. and Mrs. Merrill when they lived in Hellifield.

John Percy.