

Freddie Carter poet laureate of Yorkshire dialect

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Only the same chap who contributed to the Examiner for 60 years and wrote the Owd Joss column for 40 years.

Relative Robert Carter, who was himself a local correspondent for the Examiner for 30 years, told me all about this remarkable man.

"He was my grandfather's cousin and, as a published author, was something of a family legend," he says.

Freddie Carter was born in Kirkburton in 1893. He went to King James Grammar School in Almondbury and was a director of the family shovel making business. He died in Harrogate in 1980. Robert supplied me with the obituary he wrote for him that was used in the Huddersfield District Chronicle.

F A Carter served with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment during the First World War. In 1916, he published a collection of poetry and prose, under the title 'Parapet Poems', which included a poem written by his brother, John, who was the first man from Kirkburton to be killed in the war.

He became a prolific writer of plays and verse and in the 1930s wrote a dozen dialect plays as well as four in standard English.

“These became so popular that the Huddersfield Thespians, of which he was a founder member, could not cope with the demand, and he formed his own theatre company, The Yorkshire Comedy Players. They toured much of northern England and also broadcast many of the plays from the BBC studios in Leeds and Manchester,” says Robert.

“During the 1930s he started writing a dialect column of homely wisdom in the Yorkshire Weekly Post and, when that paper closed in 1936, he changed his pen name from Owd Jabe to Owd Joss and started a weekly column, on the same lines, in the old Huddersfield Weekly Examiner, which he continued until failing eyesight caused him to retire in 1975.”

He retired from the family business in 1945 to concentrate on writing and was also an authority on Jacobean and Restoration drama and adapted several English and French classics for broadcasting. He lived on the East Coast and in the Dales before moving to Harrogate 10 years before his death.

It is amazing that so few people remember him as Owd Joss. Pat Bricklebank (nee Wilkinson) does, because she worked at the Examiner in the 1950's and 60s.

That, of course, is the way of newspapers. It used to be said that today's news was tomorrow's fish and chip paper. Sadly, Owd Joss will only last as long as people's memories.

But F A Carter's published poetry and plays will, of course, last for as long as literature. For one thing, there will be copies of them lodged in the British Museum.

As Yorkshire Life magazine said about him after his death: “He could well have claimed to be the poet laureate of Yorkshire dialect – except that he was far too modest about his own achievements.”

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