

## **Growing up in Drighlington – Memories of Peter Clapham, born 1924**

### Moorhead and Royal Oak

Gildersome was a large village in the West Riding of Yorkshire (about 5,000 inhabitants) up to about 1930 when it was incorporated into the town of Morley and subsequently, I think into Leeds city. Its near neighbour Drighlington was incorporated into Bradford.

Moorhead was a hamlet, part of Gildersome and separated by green belt but housing development in the 1940s eliminated the green belt.

The main employer at Moorhead was Moorhead Mills, a woollen mill making top class worsted and woollen cloth. They made navy blue serge cloth and had contracts with Royal Navy and exported worsted and military uniform cloths world-wide. The mill owners were most upset when Gildersome became part of Morley because Morley Mills were 100% manufacturing shoddy and second rate reclaimed wool materials. They feared that a Morley address would damage their reputation.

Moorhead Mills was owned by Henry Booth & Co and closed about ten years ago. The buildings were demolished last year and the site is now being redeveloped for housing.

The name Gildersome was said to be of Flemish origin and there was a settlement of Guilders who were hand weavers hence "Guelders Home". \*(see later note).

The mill was unlike the usual in layout. Instead of having four, five or six storeys the entire spinning and weaving operations were on one ground floor. Steam was raised by four Lancashire boilers, coal fired and powered by a large single cylinder engine (with standby) driving shafts for belt drives to all the looms etc. The steam also was used to generate electricity for the works.

The Booth family were enlightened employers and treated employees fairly and well. In the 1920s and 30s they closed down for the holidays and paid a bonus to everybody, depending on profits as a percentage of annual wages, this being the same percentage as their dividend to shareholders (usually 10%). This meant that everybody could afford to go away for a holiday. The Company had built a few houses adjacent to the works for key employees and bought up any cottages that came up for sale. The cottage at Royal Oak where my Grandmother lived was owned by Henry Booth & Sons.

Why was Royal Oak called by that name? I used to wonder if it could have been the site of an inn sometime in the past, but this seems unlikely.

The track to Royal Oak was an unmade track wide enough for a farm cart and ran from the B6126 road (Farnley to Morley) for about 300 yards. The track ended at Royal Oak Farm and only footpaths went on from there. The farm complex consisted of a small farmhouse with garden, three other houses and a dairy in a block. The farmer was called Harold Cocker. I cannot say whether he owned the farm.

One house next to the farm was occupied by two ladies (I think sisters) named Hepworth and one of them was named either Sarah Anne or Martha Anne. They left the house in the 1930s or early 1940s and some people called Lambert moved in. As a child I spoke to them but cannot remember going into their house.

Another small house was occupied by Ida and Maud Watson.

At the end of the block, overlooking fields with a long view was Grandfather and Grandmother's cottage. This was a two-storey cottage, probably the oldest of the four, built in stone probably

dating back to the early 1700s. It had a long stone mullioned window in the front wall and the same upstairs. These windows were typical of a weaver's cottage. The front door was to the left side of the window. In front of the window was a herb bed, about 9ft x 3ft with comfrey, wormwood and parsley growing, the two former for medicinal use.

Entering the front door, immediately inside were the steps going upstairs with a door at the bottom. To the left was the outside wall and immediately right along the front wall was a large hand-operated mangle with heavy gear wheels and wooden rollers. This was covered by a cloth cover. Passing in front of this took you into the one living room. This was square with a stone flagged floor. On the front wall under the window was a long narrow table, in the centre of the room was a square dining table with a plush cover (except for when in use for meals). There were four polished elm chairs to this table.

On the right hand wall (standing with back to window) was a cast iron range with a coal fire. One side of the fire had an oven and the other side a "side pan", heating water. To the right of the fireplace in the chimney breast was a sink with a cold water tap. Hot water had to be taken from the fireplace by a lading can. (When my father lived there as a child there was no mains water in the house and water had to be pumped from the pump outside).

On the back wall were hanging about three picture frames. One contained a certificate of my Grandfathers confirming that he had been in a church bell-ringing event at four churches in the area including Leeds Parish Church. A frame of 3 family photographs and another with photographs of 4 generations, my Great Grandfather Elijah, Grandfather Harry, my Uncle Willie and my cousin Harry (Willie's son) the baby. In front of this wall was a polished harmonium. I don't think I ever heard it played but I know that Grandfather did sometimes. I think that this instrument must have been inherited and came from some Methodist Chapel via my great Grandfather.

On the fourth wall was a door to the coal cellar steps, a polished mahogany chest and a mahogany long-case grandfather clock.

The living room walls and upstairs walls were lime-washed every year and the woodwork was all painted and grained.

Upstairs were two bedrooms and both had stone floors. These were flagstones placed in rebates between the joists, I have never seen this system before or since. I assume that the cottage had originally been a weaver's cottage with a handloom upstairs. It may have been older than we thought and been used by the original Guelders.

The toilet consisted of an outside dry privy. This had three doors for the different houses each with their own wooden seat with a communal central midden with a raised floor for shovelling out by the night-soil man. Kitchen fire ashes were thrown in through this door.

There was a small square garden plot, which contained currant bushes, black, red and white.

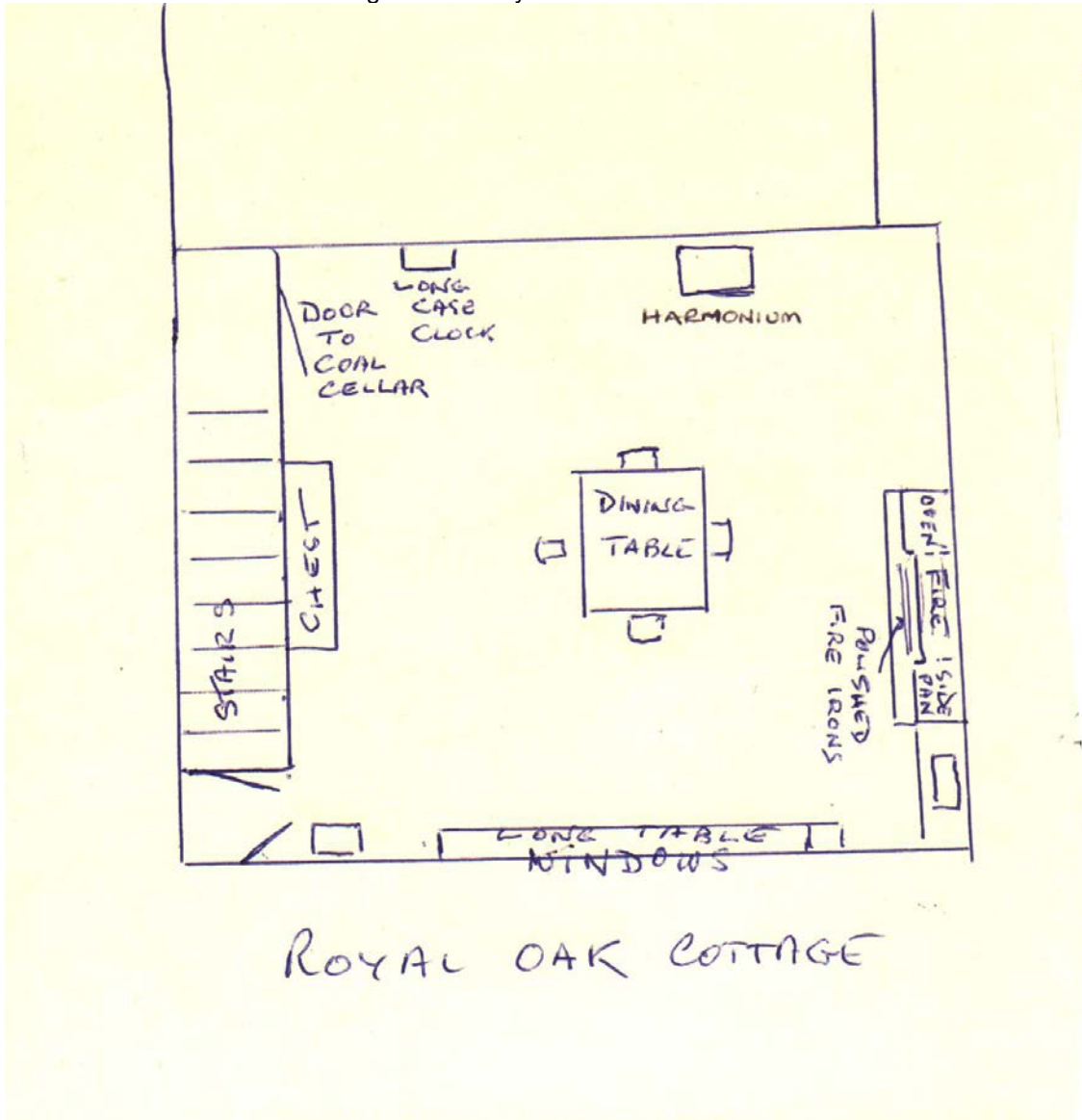
The only time we (Father, Mother and I) ate at Royal Oak was on Christmas Day each year. We lived in a cottage at the Mill gates and on Christmas Day we opened our presents then had lunch, roast cockerel and Christmas Pudding, then walked through the Mill yard to Royal Oak. As a young child I was always anxious about the last hundred yards to the farm because of the geese which always came flapping and hissing at us. They were better than guard dogs.

We children (me and my cousins) found it rather boring and used to ask Granny to light the lamp. This was a very good paraffin (kerosene) lamp. She would not light it until it was quite dark. The price of paraffin was high and thrifty country people saved money by waiting (cf. Robbie Burns "Glominshote" for the interval between dusk and lamplighting).

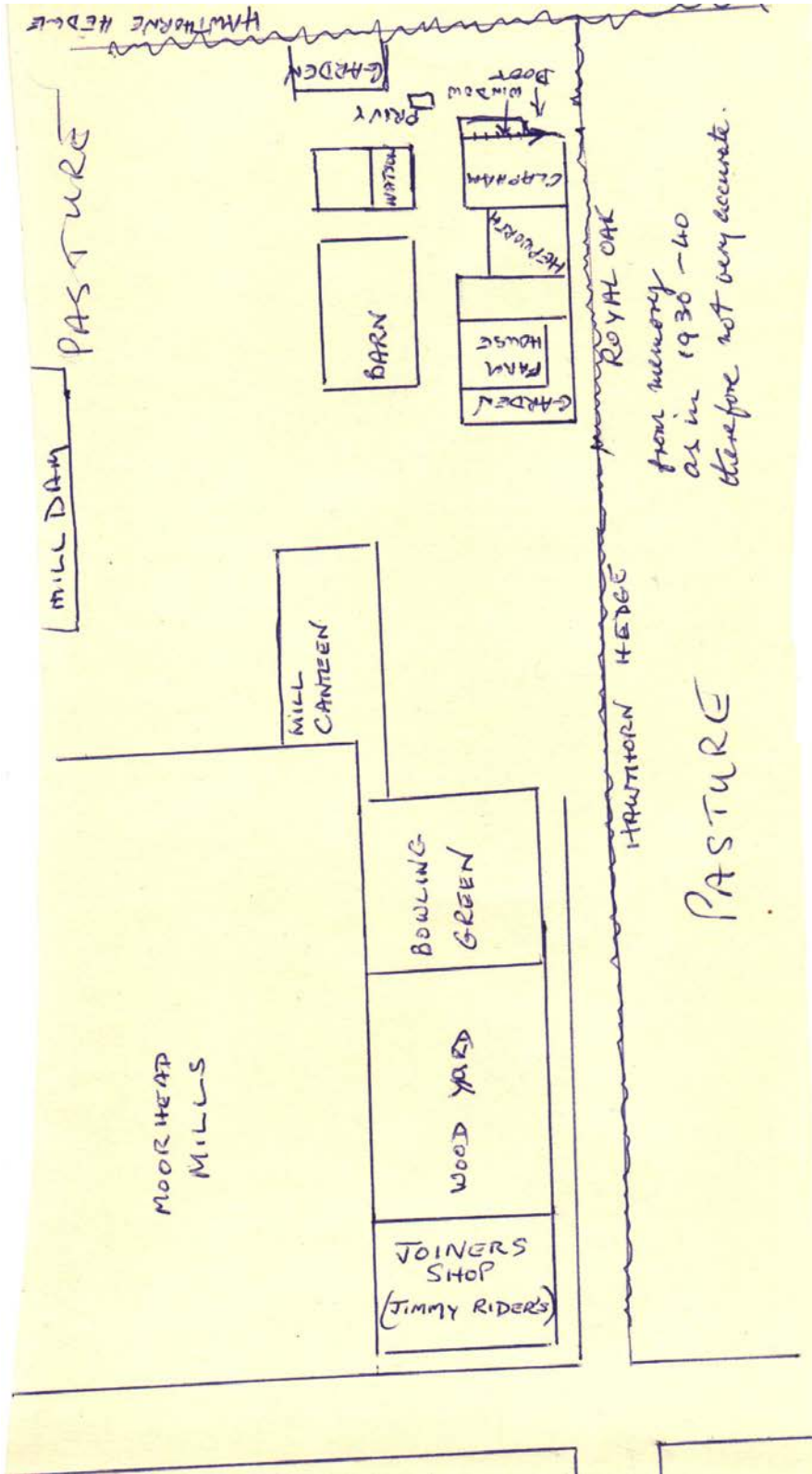
Granny was offered by the landlord to have electricity and/or gas installed in the house but with an increase in rent. She said, "I've lived here for 60 years without either. My Mother managed without them and I'm not going to pay any more rent".

I'm sure that the farm and probably the other houses did have electricity installed in the early 1930s.

This is how I remember the living room at Royal Oak:



This is the position of Royal Oak compared to the Mill:



### Hepworths

Regarding the Hepworths, my grandmother's maiden name was Sarah Hepworth and she lived in Drighlington before she married Harry Sheffield Clapham.

There was a boy called Kenneth Hepworth in my class at Gildersome Church School, 1928-1935. He was related I think, to the Hepworth sisters at Royal Oak, and he is now dead.

The school caretaker at Gildersome Church School at that time was called John Hepworth who had a daughter called Mary and lived in Finkle Lane, Gildersome.

### Co-op Dividend

Cockersdale village was about a mile from Royal Oak down New Lane, a very steep unmade road and the was a branch of the Co-op. All customers of the Co-op were members and had a dividend number. As a child, one of the first things I was taught to remember was our divi number – 1011JC – we got dividend credited on every purchase and normally only bought from there.

My cousin Stanley Denning, who lived at Royal Oak as a child tells us that he had to fetch paraffin in a gallon can from Granny's oil lamp. He was not allowed to buy this at the Joiner's shop at the end of the lane three hundred yards from home but had to buy it at the Co-op a mile away at the same price to get the divi.

Granny was always very poor and only had her pension but when she died she had her Co-op bank book containing several hundred pounds, equivalent to about £30,000 on present day value. This represented all the Co-op divi for her whole married life and she had never made withdrawal in more than 60 years.

### Grandma Clapham and Superstitions

As a child I found it hard to believe in many of the superstitions which Granny firmly believed in, things like touching wood, throwing salt over the left shoulder when spilt etc. I was particularly sorry for Cousin Stanley when he lived at Royal Oak. He was sent to school every day until 1 June wearing winter underwear and a heavy overcoat and scarf because of the saying "Cast ne'er a clowt till May be out". There is some doubt as to whether May applied to the blossom on the May Tree (Hawthorn) or the entire month of May, but Granny insisted on the latter.

All stockings and socks were home knitted and Granny and Auntie Maud always knitted theirs with purple feet whatever colour showed. I used to laugh at this as a stupid superstition. Granny said that purple feet cured sweaty smelly feet. Later I became a chemist and I wonder now whether this was because wool dyed with early aniline dyes were antiseptic and cured infection and probably athlete's foot. It could be so, Gentian Violet and triple blue dyes were long used as antiseptics for impetigo and other skin infections. Perhaps our forebears had discovered this effect by observation.

Granny was very angry about smoking and nobody was allowed to smoke in the house and she would say "If God had intended you to smoke he would have made you a chimney".

### Family Bible

There was a large bible with a brass hasp and lock at Royal Oak. I think that this had belonged to my great Grandfather Elijah Clapham but Granny did not use it because it was a "Methodist Bible". It came to us at "Thornfield" but was left in our shed, became wet and mildewed and was thrown out. It contained a section for writing in family births, deaths and weddings but only had a few entries. I remembered that one entry I recognised was the wedding of Elijah Clapham and

Matilda Chippingdale (that spelling) but my daughter has got a copy of the marriage certificate and Matilda's surname is spelt Chippendale like that of the famous furniture maker and designer, Thomas Chippendale. As an amateur wood worker I should like to think that I might have inherited some skills from such a famous man!

### Holidays

I have no recollection of any of my grandparents ever having a holiday away from home. I was only four years old when Grandfather Rufus Thornton died. They could have afforded to pay for a holiday but he would not have wanted to be away from home and leave his racing pigeons behind.

Harry and Sarah Clapham would not have spent money on a holiday.

My parents and I went on holiday to Scarborough every year for the third week in August, Gildersome Feast week. My Mother would say "We're going to the spa". Some years later I realised that most seaside resorts were Spas and people went to take the waters as well as to go bathing in the sea.

When I was about 5 or 6 we went to a boarding house in Scarborough and stayed in apartments. We bought our own food and had the use of a cupboard in the dining room for ourselves. The landlady cooked and served all our meals for us. How she managed to do this with 3 or 4 families also having different food I don't know. Later on we stayed on "full board". This cost seven shillings and sixpence per person a day in the 1930 whilst apartments cost about 4 shillings.

As a small child I was carried to the farm over the road to see the pigs. The farmer was called Wharton and he and his wife had relatives in the USA. I remember them borrowing our daily newspaper regularly to follow the pound/dollar exchange rate because they often wanted to change dollars at the most favourable rate.

In about 1928 the Whartons, who were past middle age, sold up the farm and bought a boarding house in Blackpool. We used to have a few days holiday there at Easter or Whitsun if the weather was fine. I remember one visit to Blackpool in October or November to see the "Illuminations". This was an attempt by Blackpool Corporation to extend the holiday season with a massive display on animated lights along the Promenade. I was about 8 years old and had had a birthday party just before going. On arriving in Blackpool I had a high temperature and next day this was Chicken Pox. I had a very miserable two days before arriving home and then everybody who had been to my party went down with it. That was the last birthday party I had for some time.

### Family gatherings

In the 1920s and 30s there were strong ties between parents and married children, sisters, brothers and cousins etc but strangely enough the elder parents rarely visited their married children, never to stay the night and very rarely did they visit for meals. I remember my Mother saying (regretfully) that her father only visited our home once, in a morning. He had walked from Drighlington, about 2-3 miles and insisted on walking home for lunch. This was because of the general poverty and families were reluctant to impose on their relatives.

Grandfather Clapham called in more frequently – a few times a year.

I remember going to Granddad Rufus's house and having lunch there once, at Makin Street. This was when he played his joke on the children when he was serving the jam roly-poly pudding, saying "Who wants middle and who wants end". All asked for middle and he cut the pudding in two saying "There's no middle, only ends". He later took me to see his pigeon loft. I remember

small sacks of dried peas, one variety was called maple peas. He died when I was 4. He insisted on being on being buried in a pitch pine coffin. Being Colliery Blacksmith he went down the pit in the "cage" first trip every morning to prove to the colliers that it was safe. He worked at the Duke William Pit at Westgate Hill. He said that most wood rotted in the mine including oak but pitch pine survived, hence the choice for his coffin. He also had insisted on a horse-drawn hearse and coaches. Rufus died in his mid 60s from Bronchitis – this could well have been emphysema from working underground.

### Coal Mining

There were many small coal pits in the area which closed in the 1920s/30s. The wooden pit-head gear still remained for many years but have now all gone and the pits filled in or capped. Above the valley to the north of Tong village there were six or more such pits and there was a railway system where trucks of coal were taken from the pits to a collection point for the ironworks by gravity, the empty wagons being hauled back by cables pulled by stationery engines at the top. This was the Alexandra Incline. There were remains of this system visible when I was a child and walked over this area.

In a pasture field about two hundred yards from Thornfield were three or four dips in the ground. They were about twenty feet diameter and ten feet deep. There were similar depressions in Cockersdale Wood valley. They were undoubtedly mediaeval bell pits. About 1940-42 and open cast working in Cockersdale was carried out for fire-clay and when the fire-clay bed was exposed there were circles about 20 feet diameter missing from the fire-clay, these had been removed when the bell pits had been dug.

Drighlington village stands on the crossroads of the A58 (Leeds-Halifax) and A6501 (Wakefield-Bradford) roads. The church is about 100 yards on the Leeds side of the latter. In front of the Church a small road runs off called Back Lane and from there runs a path which crosses the open country to the village of Tong. A few hundred yards along this path are the signs of spoil from an old disused colliery overlooking a small wood. The wood is Doles Wood and the colliery site was the former Doleswood Colliery.

This pit was only about a mile as the crow flies from Duke William Pit where my Granddad worked and probably on the same coal seam. These shafts were not very deep and the safe length of side galleries much shorter than is now possible in deep mining, The depth of Morley Main Pit at Brunswick was 150 yards.

There are other similar pits at Cockersdale and Cud Hill, Uppermoreside, Gildersome and Bruntcliffe that I can remember. All closed between 1900-1930.

### Mena Clapham, nee Thornton

My Mother, Mena, was born in 1886 at Drighlington and was the eldest child of Rufus and Emily Thornton. She went to school in Netherton and was a bright pupil. She was asked to stay on at school to become a pupil teacher but had to leave at 12 to work and help to feed the family which by then had grown by a brother and two sisters who survived (Sarah Annie had died young of Rheumatic Fever and Tom had also died in infancy).

Mother worked as a weaver. Her father Rufus and Mena had to leave home at 5.30 am to walk to work. They had gas in the house with flame lights, incandescent mantles had not then come into use. Rufus made a hook and fitted this to the gas pipe above the upturned flame nozzle and made a can to hang on this hook above the flame. Before going to bed they brewed tea and left it in the can. When her father got up he lit the gas and heated up the tea so that they could have a drink quickly before leaving to walk to work.

## Weaving

In the weaving shed the looms were driven by belts from above and were in two rows down the shed with a centre gangway. It was very noisy and most of the weavers were deaf after a short time on the job. They soon learned to lip-read and could talk to each other in spite of the noise. They were usually paid on piece-work. This possibly explains how the expression "piece-work" started: The cloth was made in "Pieces" – each piece being about 40 yards long. The "Piece" dated back to hand-weaving days and the "piece" was the largest that could be carried by one man. When a weaver finished a piece it was removed from the loom and another warp had to be installed by the "Tuner". There were many disagreements (and fights) between the weavers when two or more looms finished at once because the ones that were waiting were not being paid (being only paid by the piece) and had to wait their turn to be re-started on a new piece. Some cloths were easier to weave than others and the girls would try to speed up or slow down to try and get the easier ones.

All pieces contained faults where weft bobbins were replaced and the yarn joined by a knot. A mender's job was to examine the cloth and remove these knots and other flaws. This was a very skilled job. Some faults could not be invisibly mended and 2 were allowed in each finished piece and these had to be marked by a piece of string tied into the selvedge.

Peter Clapham  
01 March 2000



## **Further Memories of Peter Clapham**

### **My Mother's Sayings**

Mena was broad West Yorkshire and used lots of interesting colloquial expressions, many of which seem to have died out today.

If someone tried to hurry her:

"Don't you hurry no man's cattle, you might have a donkey of your own, one day".

If somebody walked with their feet turned out:

"Feet like Alice Walker, kicked every pew corner as she walked down the aisle".

If someone was mean:

"Nancy Nipkern, she'd nip a kern (currant) in tow to make it weigh".

If somebody who was not short of money was ill:

"Fat sickness s better than lean sickness".

If she did not think something was worth buying:

"I can't thoil it".

If she was busy:

"I'm as throng as Throp's wife".

If someone was stupid:

"Gormless as a peacloise"

To a husband when having a meal at someone's house:

"Get some meat Edwin" (This was at the time when little meat was eaten because of the cost and was a sarcastic warning not to take too much, rather than the opposite).

If she was going out for a meal without her husband:

"I don't take a ham sandwich to a banquet".

If she was eating something that had not been washed:

You've got to eat a peck of muck before you die".

When she was getting smaller as she grew old:

"I'm growing downwards like a cow's tail".

When accused of gossiping:

"Hark at the pot calling the kettle grimy-arse".

NB Nancy Nipkern, Alice Walker, Throp and Edwin were all mythical unknown people.

### **Cheese**

Going back seventy-five years there were no refrigerators for the working class (the higher classes had ice). Most houses had cellars but often these were used to store coal and only at the cellar head would food be stored. There is an old folk song which says "There's bread in the pantry and cheese on the shelf". In summer house-flies were difficult to keep out, though people who could afford would have a fly catcher. This was a strip of heavy paper coated with a very sticky treacle containing arsenic on each side. It was sold in a roll and when unrolled had a hook on top and a weight on the bottom.

In spite of this meats and cheese were vulnerable and would sometimes grow maggots and had to be thrown away. There was a standing instruction from Granddad Rufus to save him any cheese that had "mawks" (maggots) in. After removing the livestock he would eat the cheese with great enjoyment as the flavour was greatly enhanced.

### **Bell Ringing**

Both my grandfathers were bell ringers at Drighlington Church when the vicar was the Reverend John Trew who married my father and mother on 12 August 1912. When Auntie Kate's second son Jack was christened Reverend Trew said to Kate "Don't call him Jack, it's not a name, it's only the diminutive of John", but she insisted on Jack.

Granddad Thornton and several others always went home after ringing the bells and did not join the service. Mr Trew called them together and insisted that they attended any service after ringing. Granddad said that ringing the bells was his act of worship and he had no intention of changing. He and others never rang the bells again.

### **Father (John Clapham)**

In Gildersome was a coal mine owned by a man called Eric Towler and I think he owned other drift mines called "day-holes". When my father left school he went to work at the mine. I think he was weighman and clerk in the office. He hated the work indoors and took a job working outside as Teamer at Henry Booth's Mill.

On May Day every year he would go to work at 5 am to deck the two Shire horses for the day as was the custom. They were groomed and brushed and decked with ribbons and polished brasses.

Normally he had to start work at 5.30 am to groom the two horses before starting the carting work. His first job was to fetch enough coal from the colliery or later from the rail-head to keep the steam boilers going. Then he planned and did any other carting that was required. He always planned his work to be home for breakfast at about 8 am and had bacon and eggs every day. Later, about 1922 he was sent to Leyland to be taught to drive and maintain a Leyland Lorry which the Mill bought. He completed his haulage work by lunchtime on Friday and then greased and did any necessary work on the lorry until late on Friday night and until lunchtime on Saturday, but took time off on Friday afternoon to clean the Boss's car for which he was paid extra. This eventually became two cars and he would get a 10 shilling note as extra pay.

The Booths lived in a fine house with large grounds at Moortown, Leeds. They employed various servants and gardeners and a chauffeur. Father was called upon to act as Chauffeur when Lindley was ill or on holiday. As a child I thought it peculiar that father was always called John by the boss, but as a servant, Lindley was always called by his surname.

On his visits to Moortown he was often given things discarded by the Booths. He had the head of a hedging bill, the shaft having broken. This was held by the shaft socket and used to chop sticks for lighting the fire. My mother did this, she turned the rug back in the living room and chopped

them on the concrete floor. I had a steel shaft welded on to the tool and still use it – it is sharper than any modern ones.

Father was also given an old bicycle when I was about 6. It was a big heavy Rudge Whitworth roadster with a 24" frame. It was tied up in the lorry garage roof until I was big enough to ride it. This happened when I was about 12 and had wooden blocks fitted on the pedals to reach.

### **Pageants, Festivals and Fun**

The Eric Towler previously mentioned lived in a large house in Gildersome and was regarded as a man of means. As a choirboy at the church I went out on the morning of Christmas Day singing carols at the houses of various churchgoers. We were given money which we shared out later. We got our largest handout at the Towler House and when that family moved to a different house in Tong we took the long walk to Tong for our carol visit.

Whilst at Gildersome, in 1933, Eric Towler had the idea of organising a Pageant in Gildersome, to be held in a large field up Finkle Lane, adjoining his house and owned by him, Eric Towler himself played the part of a highwayman, Dick Turpin or Nick Nevison, I can't remember which – I think the latter because he rode in on a brown horse. There was a moated island in the centre of the field with four trees and a footbridge. I played the part of a Brigantian goatherd and had to lead my goat over the bridge on to the island. I also had to lead the borrowed goat for about 2 miles along the road to get to and from the field.

Incidentally, in about 1996 or 97, on the occasion of Bessie Whiteley's funeral I was at Dorothy Whiteley's flat in a council estate in Finkle Lane built in the same field and the houses were built around a green which contained a centre circles with 4 large trees. This must have been the remains of the island in Eric Towler's field, the moat having been filled in.

About the same year, 1933, I remember Ascension Day. As a church school we had some scripture lessons and on the morning of Ascension Day the vicar came to school to examine us on our knowledge of the scriptures. When we passed our exam we had the rest of the day as a holiday. On this day Sidney Aveyard and myself had sixpence each and we decided to walk to Morley to go to see "Treasure Island" at the Picture House. We each bought a packet of 2 Woodbine cigarettes and a match for a penny. We walked to Morley and smoked one cigarette each. We went into the balcony (best) seats at fourpence each, smoked the other cigs on the walk home and still had a penny each left. I gave up smoking when I was 14 because they put the price up.

### **The Swimming Baths**

Another memory of Gildersome School was of visiting Morley Swimming Baths. Only pupils in the top class were on the list for attendance but if any regulars were absent then younger boys could take their place on the day. I always went when the opportunity arose but of course had no costume or towel. We went to Morley on the "Little Brown Bus" or "Flying Loaf Tin", a 20 seater owned by "Barkers". On arriving at the baths we went through the turnstile and asked the attendant for "towel and drawers". The towel was a small huckaback towel like a pot drying cloth and was very inadequate. The drawers were two cotton triangles with tapes on two corners for tying, but the tapes were always missing. After the swimming we had about 5 minutes to get dry and dressed and were always very damp when we got on the bus.

### **Granny's fender**

Watching a TV Antique programme today reminded me that in my note about Royal Oak cottage I had forgotten to mention this item.

My father's sister Maud had two children, Sarah and Stanley and when her husband, Horace Denning, who was joiner at Moorhead Mill, died she and the children went to live at Royal Oak (or it might have been when Grandad died). In the 1930s and before, the female members of the

family had a strict daily routine, washing on a Monday, baking bread on a particular day etc. On Thursday morning Maud and her mother did not light a fire and they cleaned the grate. After removing the ashes they knelt side by side and black-leaded the entire cast iron grate. Black lead was a paste containing graphite which was rubbed on with a cloth and then brushed with vigour until shiny.

Round the hearth was a large fender which I think was steel but might have been partly brass. In the hearth was a stand and fire irons about 4 feet long, made of highly polished steel. On the TV programme a poker and shovel similar but not quite so good were valued at £2,000. I'm sure that the fender and set at Royal Oak would now be worth double that figure. I don't know what ever became of them.

In my previous description of the living room at Royal Oak I also forgot to mention two high back country chairs which stood on either side of the fire.

Peter Clapham  
24 March 2000