

The Ryedale Folk Museum and the Harrison Collection, Hutton-le-Hole, North Yorkshire

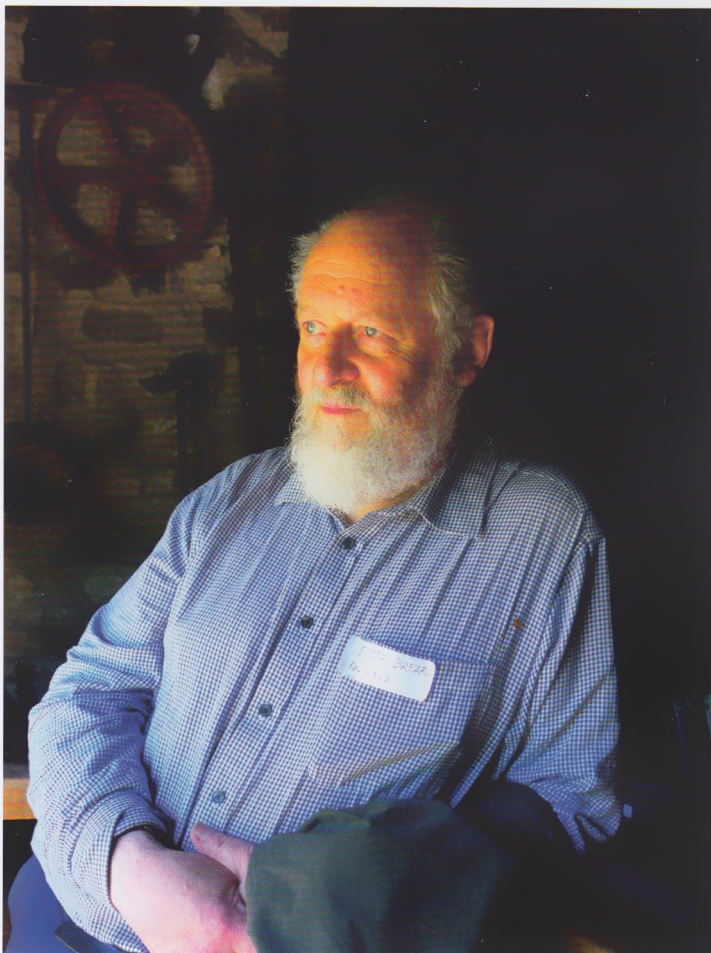
Saturday 15 June 2013

This event had been anticipated by the Society for several years, ever since two of our members, Daphne and Mike Todd, told us about the amazing collection of some 10,000 objects of domestic life collected over the past 50 years by Edward and Richard Harrison, two brothers from a farming family from Pickering, who had most generously offered it to the Folk Museum, which was then at the start of a process of raising funds to provide appropriate galleries, library and research centre to house and support the collection. The first phase of this project has now been completed; some of the highlights of the collection are now displayed in a high-quality exhibition space beside the purpose-built library and archive. We were most fortunate that Edward Harrison was able to be with us on the day to introduce the collection and it was decided to invite members from the Society for Folk Life Studies and the Antique Metalware Society to join us for the day.

Peter Brears, a council member of the Society and a former trustee of the Ryedale Folk Museum, and Dr Bernard 'Bill' Cotton, our President Emeritus, both kindly agreed to speak at this event.

Tony Clark, Chairman of the Trustees of the Ryedale Folk Museum, began the day by welcoming us to the museum; Peter Brears, who talked about the culture of the North York Moors, followed him. Peter introduced Ryedale, one of Yorkshire's most fertile regions, based on the Vale of Pickering, known for its cattle, pigs and sheep, barley, oats and root crops, and dairy products; food was sent from here to the industrial towns of West Yorkshire and to the coastal ports such as Whitby. Peter also outlined the history of the museum, founded as a private museum by R. Wilfrid Crosland in the 1930s, a lecturer who realised how quickly the local culture was changing. On the death of Mr Crosland and his sister in the early 1960s, the collection passed to his friend Mr Bert Franks who opened the museum to the public and involved many local volunteers in collecting both objects and buildings; in 1995 the museum won the Museum of the Year award. Peter's vivid and memorable lecture included something for

everyone, from house types and interiors to folklife traditions, via furniture and metalwork and certain North Yorkshire historic personalities. For example he described the traditional wedding procession from the bride's home to the church and then on to the couple's new home; the two-wheeled ox wain laden with household and personal items which was part of the procession was a reminder of very similar traditions we had seen illustrated in both Brittany and Romania. In Ryedale the wain's contents would include a press containing locally grown and produced woollen or linen (Helmsley linen) items. He



A portrait of Peter Brears at rest during the Ryedale Visit.
(Jeremy Bate)

spoke about the Carter family of Kirby Moorside, blacksmiths, until the arrival of the railway in the 1840s, when better transport meant businesses had an opportunity to expand and the three Carter brothers each opened separate foundries, one specialising in ranges; and about several generations of the Tomlinson family, woodworkers and wheelwrights, and of their surviving account book from 1884–1924, their furniture including lodging boxes at 15 shillings each, croquet balls and boxes for baking gingerbread. He described a surviving Tomlinson dresser as light in construction with 2" square corner-pieces, glued rather than pegged joints, and racks with bars across so the plates would lean forward, protecting the front of the plates from the smoke from the fire. Many of us purchased a copy of Peter's book *Ryedale Recipes*, which includes an illustrated catalogue of the museum's collection of kitchen objects, amongst which are a livery cupboard and a hanging safe, the latter having arrived at the museum described as a fox box.

Our afternoon was spent looking at the new display of objects from the Harrison Collection: Edward Harrison introduced the collection, explaining how it came to be and the way in which it is now displayed. He and his brother Richard had been very influenced by the publication of Edward Pinto's book on treen in 1968; although their collection of objects of social history is not limited to wooden objects, they have followed the way in which Pinto divided his collection into sections such as 'preparing food and eating', 'writing' and 'fire making and lighting'. Edward stayed with us, answering questions and pointing out favourite objects and significant details, as did David Stockdale, curator of the Harrison Collection. It is hard to choose just one item to mention from the collection but for me perhaps the most dramatic is the lead heart casket dated 1562 and inscribed 'Here lies the harte of John Peck'. This is one of only two known of this period and is believed to belong to the custom of embalming and returning the heart home for burial when someone died abroad and the body could not be returned home.

The Society's thanks are due to Tony Clark, David Stockdale and the staff at the museum, Edward Harrison, Peter Brears and Bill Cotton, and to Daphne and Mike Todd for their marvellous arrangements.

Polly Legg and David Bryant