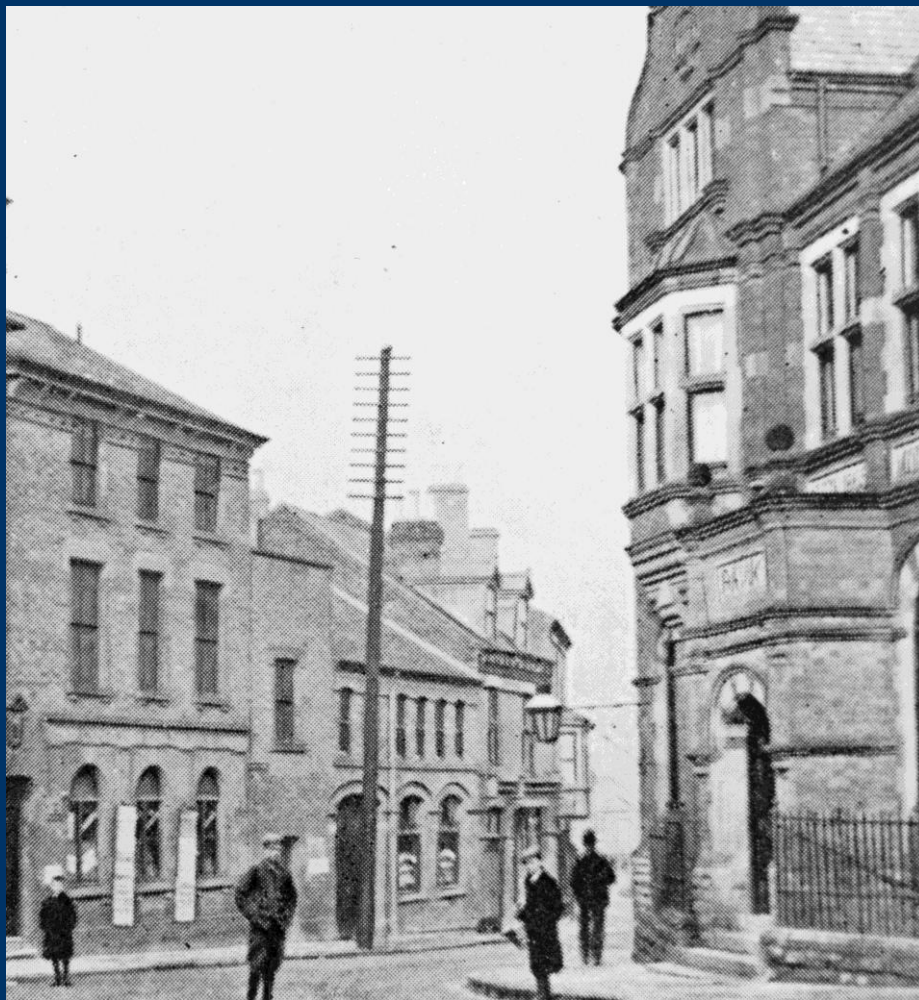


RIPLEY & DISTRICT
HERITAGE TRUST
DERBYSHIRE

Newsletter



Number **Thirty-Two** **November 2025**

www.rdht.org.uk

The Black Boy Papers

The owners of the Black Boy pub in Heage were tidying out the loft and came across a bag of papers. They kept the ones to do with the pub, but there were lots of others, so they donated them to us.

The more recent ones are to do with the sale of some land opposite the pub on which one, or possibly two, bungalows were built. It is the earlier ones that are most interesting, though.

The piece of land can be identified on the tithe map of 1836 as number 706, as shown below.



It appears to have belonged, with lots of other land to Cornelius Launder, in 1775 High Sherriff of Nottingham. In his will of 1804 he left all his properties to his two spinster cousins, Frances and Ursula. Frances died soon after, but Ursula married, but not before she had gone to court to assert ownership of the lands in her own name, not her husband's.

The land then passed through several hands. At one time there was a cobbler's shop on it owned by Tom Starsmore, and then by Mr H. Holtham, the family of whom now have the kitchen business in Pickard Lane nearby, a shown below.



The papers have probably got more to tell us, and we'll keep working on them.

BIT Update

MP Linsey Farnsworth has written to Aquarius, the owners of the Butterley site (on House of Commons notepaper) requesting a meeting. A reply has not yet been received.

Three posts from the St Pancras Station under-croft are to be put on display at the West Shed, Swanwick Junction. There was a meeting to discuss the creation of a "Terminus Garden" there which Brendan Stafford attended.

The group are continuing to try to pressure the various parties to move forward on the conservation of the Blast Furnace wall, but it is an uphill struggle.

A Butterley 'clocking in' machine has been donated to BIT.

Pots and Pix Exhibition

At the end of November, this exhibition features not just pottery but also pictures from the collection of Hugh Potter, the archivist of the Friends of Cromford Canal. Details are on the poster below.

POTS & PIX EXHIBITION

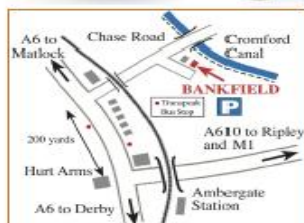
29th & 30th November 2025 - 11am to 5pm

STONEWARE POTTERY

*Ideal Xmas presents
by Liz Tatam*



HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS SLIDE SHOW CROMFORD CANAL



Bankfield, Chase Road, Ambergate, Belper DE56 2HA
01773 852009 liztatampotter@gmail.com
Other times by appointment

A Pig-Sty Library

In the magazine "Country Life" of 26th July 1902, there appeared an article about a reading room established in Hartshay a few years previously.



W. P. Penn.

THE READING-ROOM AND ITS PRESIDENT.

Copyright

The "President" may well have been Alfred Lambert, a 68- year old labourer at Butterley, who is the only man named in the article.

The article, by William Arthur Penrhyn Penn, a jobbing journalist, is rather patronising in tone, but nevertheless shows some admiration for the men who established the library.

The background is the growth of reading rooms in the second half of the nineteenth century. Various Education Acts had created a more literate population, but in most towns and villages the only places to congregate were the pubs or the churches. Many philanthropists and landowners saw the Reading Room as a less harmful alternative to the alehouse, and donated land and money to establish small libraries.

In Ripley there were many attempts to establish such an institution; the Derbyshire Advertiser of May 1866 reported that there had been six different libraries opened and then closed in the previous 20 years or so.

The one that lasted was the Co-operative Reading Rooms, established in 1880, with 20 newspapers and free public entry. A lending library was added a couple of years later, starting with 875 volumes. By 1910, the library had grown to 5,000 volumes and over 2,000 borrowers. It acted as the town's library until replaced by the County Library in the 1950s.

Most villages had at some time their own reading room. Penn describes how one was established in Hartshay, which he describes as "a somewhat squalid settlement of a few score cottages on the banks of the Cromford and Derby (sic) Canal".

The men of the hamlet, mostly colliers or workers at Butterley Ironworks, would meet in the evening on one of the bridges over the canal to talk and listen to the newspaper read aloud. When it rained, they went under the bridge, on the towpath. Eventually one of them suggested converting a pigsty he owned alongside the canal.



W. P. Penn.

THE LIBRARY CORNER.

Copyright

At first it was just that: a cleaned-out pigsty with a few rough wooden benches in it. A low door and no windows, so that candles had to be used day and night. They paid 6d to join and 2d subscription, which provided the candles and a weekly newspaper.

Later, in 1894, it was extended into the next pigsty along, a proper door, a skylight and a stove fitted and shelves added for the growing library of books which were loaned out.

Penn rather pointedly remarks that the men needed to smoke their pipes, to mask the smell from the pigsty next door, which was still in use for its original purpose.

He lists some of the books they gathered or were given, and describes making a second visit in 1902 when the stock had increased to a “goodly library”, though the roof leaked and the 12ft by 6ft shed was rather damp.

He portrays the men as proud and independent, permitting “neither parson, squire, nor any zealous and superior person to adopt them as protégés. It is their own club, and they reject all patronage and direction.”

Driven Up the Pole

In December 1888, just after Christmas, a Mr Marcus E Baker, who had a shop on High Street, appeared before the Local Government Board with a request. He wanted them to have removed a telephone post which the National Telephone Company had erected in front of his premises.



Judging by contemporary photographs like the one above of High Street, the post was not removed, but joined by many more. They had been first erected in October, when the newspapers reported that “there are to be five wires” and that “some of the poles are of gigantic height”. This later photograph confirms this, the pole shown well overtopping the buildings.

They were the next stage of a revolution which had begun in the late 1840s when telegraph wires were laid along the railways, including that from Derby to Chesterfield. By 1870, the telegraph had been joined by the telegram and was being run by the Post Office. For the first time, as the Derby Courier proclaimed, “an answer may be obtained to any question instantaneously.”



An early telephone exchange

The telephone wires were connected to an exchange, first in Rowland’s shop and Post Office on the corner of Church Street and Moseley Street, and later, as more devices were installed, in an exchange at 20 Moseley Street. The first numbers were the big players in the town: the Co-op (Ripley 2) and Butterley (Ripley 6). The equipment was expensive: the equivalent of over £350!

We are used to thinking of the internet as a revolution, but the telephone could be seen as an even greater change, especially as it was introduced in an era before motor cars, when, railways apart, transport was on horseback or on foot.

In March 1889, three months later, the Local Board agreed to ask the Telephone Company to move the offending pole further down the street, arguing that it was “a great nuisance”. There is no record of it ever being moved.

Art Ripley

Ripley library has launched 'Art Ripley' in which they are inviting the local community to join them in creating paintings showing Ripley's past, present and future. The project will run until January 2026 and then, in February, all finished pieces will be displayed within the library for people to see.

'Art Ripley' is open to everyone regardless of age, background or painting ability and will be completely free with all materials provided.

They are aiming to host a few introductory sessions with local artist, Kelly Herrick, who will help those who perhaps are a little unsure where to start and we will be providing lots of inspiration with local books and pictures. They are also having drop-in sessions some Saturdays (the next is the 29th November from 11-12am) for people to work on their pieces.

For more information, contact the Library on ripley.library@derbyshire.gov.uk or 01629 532982.

