

Ethel Bufton – her life and times in a Baslow newsagency

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Introduction

Ethel Bufton (1912 – 1994) was the proprietor of a newspaper shop at 3 Church Terrace, Baslow, which had a reputation for its individuality and elements of eccentricity. In the past there have been several very short articles about Ethel Bufton which included intriguing stories about her. (See Tempest 2000.) Lockdown seemed a good time for me to research her family history, using online resources, to see what more was to be discovered about this well-known local character. Later I was able to interview Baslow residents and others who knew her well and they provided more information. Recently I have spoken to John Elswood and Christine Groves who let me see papers and other materials which were saved from the clearance of Ethel's house.

This article is intended to establish more facts about Ethel's life history and to recognise her unique place in Baslow. It also shows how Ethel's story is entangled in the history of Baslow; with her links to the early days of the Cavendish family in the 1500s at Chatsworth, the long-lost houses from the 1800s in Baslow churchyard, the navvies building the Derwent Aqueduct in 1910 and 1920s, the Baslow Hydropathic Hotel in the 1930s and the construction of Lancaster bomber parts in rural Derbyshire in the 1940s.



Church Terrace 2021

Ethel's news agency

When I came to live in 1 Church Terrace in 1978 Ethel was already a "celebrity" Baslow resident known to many in the village and to those who passed by on the main road, Church Lane. She ran the newsagent shop in 3 Church Terrace, opposite the War Memorial in Baslow Church yard. (See

note 1.) The interior of the shop provided customers with a most unusual sight. She was a little old lady by this time who stood above piles of newspapers to serve customers from a selection of today's and older editions of newspapers on the counter. One customer from Stoney Middleton had his leg pulled when was told by a local wag to get his Green 'Un from the very tall lady in Baslow.

She had a good quality woollen cardigan, latterly with holes in the sleeves. Her hair was tied in a bun and she had a hot water bottle tied around her waist under her apron. She was also lacking most of her teeth. In the past she had top quality brown shoes which were well polished but later worn slippers. One villager who shopped for Ethel reported that she was sent to Swallows in Chesterfield, the local high class ladies outfitter, for undergarments.

WH Smith, the newspaper wholesaler, used to send a van occasionally to do some clearing but she was reluctant to part with old copies because she felt that she might have lost some money under the piles. Removal was only allowed if each page had been thoroughly checked. And in fact, this rumour proved to be true as cash and uncashed cheques in both old and new currency were found when the shop was finally cleared of old papers. Some old money was found hidden at the back of her oven in the kitchen.



ELR Sales details for 1 Church Terrace Church Street Baslow 1978. Ethel's shop front can be seen with advertising boards at 3 Church Terrace

As I lived in 1 Church Terrace, of course we had an early morning alarm call as the wholesale van arrived with the daily deliveries.

Ethel greeted customers warmly calling people "Lovie" and was known to be very kind to children, giving them comics on their visits. Ethel did not send out bills to the customers she knew well and it may be the case that several local farmers who had a regular order of farming journals might not have always paid for them. Often, she trusted customers to pay cash and take their own change from a tin, particularly after decimalisation. In her later years those, who did delivery rounds for her,

report being sent out inadvertently with out-of-date papers so some of them took to “putting up the papers” themselves.

There were also rumours of a grand piano and roll of Persian carpet lost under the pile and newspapers dating from the Boer War. I have been able to confirm that there was indeed an upright piano as well as a sofa and leather arm chair, which were partially hidden by piles of old papers and the Persian carpet is recorded in her will. The sofa was on the door side of the shop so that customers would have been comfortably accommodated for the exchange of village gossip, which was Ethel’s life blood. The local old farmers enjoyed a good chinwag with her and it was also handy for some school children and others waiting for the bus.

Ethel’s paper piles were the home to several cats and the lack of litter tray and occasional birth may have explained the unique smell which greeted customers.



Ethel Bufton, Baslow newsagent 1912 – 1994. Photograph taken in 1973 and kindly supplied by David Dalrymple Smith.

David Thorp went into the shop often as he helped his grandfather on the milk round and had a regular comic order but she made sure that young lads like him behaved themselves while on her premises. Also, he remembers that Ethel closed the shop on the day that decimalisation came into effect in 1971. She was hoping that it would only last for the one day and everything would be back

to £SD the next day. It is interesting that a decimalisation conversion chart is shown displayed on the wall behind her in the above photograph taken in 1973.

Other signs of entering a bygone era were that the shop was lit by gas and Ethel kept her kitchen warm with a coal fire. David Cartledge recalls in his memoirs that electricity generated in the Mill on Calver Road was wired via the Church and Mrs Chapman's shop (Ethel's mother) to the Red House on School Lane. It seems that 3 Church Terrace acted as an electricity pole rather than benefitting itself from the supply in the old days. Ethel had no bank account for much of her life and she was fortunate in later years to have confidence in Colin Groves, a local bank manager, who kept her affairs in order.

Ethel became more and more dependent on villagers like Violet Ligo, her neighbour at 4 Church terrace who lit her kitchen fire, provided hot drinks and bacon rolls and many other acts of kindness. Other villagers provided meals and shopping with payment on an ad hoc basis. One of these people reports that she had to buy only the best cod cheeks for the cats, an expensive decision.

As Ethel became more frail, she was the victim of a distraction burglary when a thief crept from the back kitchen up the stairs, broke open her wardrobe and stole her mother's jewellery and wedding ring while she was serving the accomplice. Not long after this Ethel had a spell in hospital and decided to move to Gernon Manor in Bakewell where she died in 1994. In her will Ethel gave a large legacy to St Anne's Church, Baslow which supplemented previous donations. It was Colin Groves who managed this legacy with the Church Wardens, which they used to erect a wooden and etched glass screen in the south side of the Chancel and Vestry. This particularly reflected her mother's close links to the church where Edith is remembered for singing in the choir and wearing wonderful hats.

Ethel was buried with her mother Edith Chapman in Baslow new graveyard and the gravestone inscription retells of their devotion.



The Vestry screen in St Anne's Church Baslow, erected with a legacy from Ethel Bufton

Ethel's family history

Ethel was born to Bryan Bufton and Edith Dorothy Shipstone, who were married in 1911.

Ethel's father - Bryan Bufton 1882-1954

Bryan was from the Ludlow area and he was an engine driver in a factory by the time he was 19, according to the 1891 census. This occupation was to tend the stationary engines which were increasingly used as a source of power in factories and it proved to be a good choice of training. During his lifetime, as larger and larger civil engineering projects were undertaken across the country there was a regular supply of jobs needing his skills. In 1901 he was an engine driver for a contractor building a waterworks in the Ludlow area and by the 1911 census he was a crane driver occupied with building public water works in the Manchester area. This may have been the extensive building project by Manchester Corporation Waterworks to bring water from the Lake District to Manchester.

It is interesting to speculate how Edith met Bryan. One possibility that he is that he worked as a navvy on the Derwent reservoirs or the Derwent Aqueduct which was being built in the early 1910s and opened in 1912. Its route passed through Baslow. This was around the time that he may have met and married Edith Shipstone in Baslow. Ethel was born in Middlesbrough in 1912 as Bryan presumably followed another employment opportunities. (Note 2)

The marriage was unhappy and did not last long, as Edith described in a newspaper announcement about her divorce in 1922. In fact Bryan went to Merthyr Tydfil with a new partner where he had a son in 1915 and then to Aston, Birmingham, where he fathered girl in 1917. He married the mother of the children, Nellie Watton, in 1927, after his divorce from Edith and they had another girl in 1928.

The evidence is that Ethel did indeed have legitimate parents, dispelling rumours that she was illegitimate, and that also she had one half-brother and two half-sisters.

Ethel's mother – Edith Dorothy Chapman (nee Shipstone, 1st marriage Bufton) 1889-1971

Edith was a Baslow girl born in 1889 to John William Shipstone from Sheffield and Sarah White from the long established farming families of the Whites and the Marsdens, who were favoured by the Cavendish family, and farmed in the local area from the 1500s.

The maternal family tree has been compiled by other researchers (see notes below). Ethel's great grandmother was Anne Sheldon (born 1833) who was a direct descendent of Elizabeth Marsden (born 1776) who in turn was directly related to Edmund Marsden (born 1611). It is believed by some that he was a retainer of Sir William Cavendish, son of Bess of Hardwick, and several generations of the family farmed at Parkgate and Oxclose within in the Cavendish lands close to Chatsworth.

Ethel's grandmother, Sarah White (born 1857), is descended from a long line of Whites who farmed in Bubnell and can trace their ancestry in the village back to the 1500s. In the 1881 census Ethel's mother Edith, was living with her aunt Ann White at Bubnell Hall Farm working as a domestic servant.

This indicates that Ethel had prestigious ancestors on the female side of the family. The more recent male ancestors also have interesting ancestors with connections to local history.

Ethel's maternal grandfather was John William Shipstone (Shipstan, Shipston). His father, Henry, was a little meister in the Sheffield cutlery trade. One memory of Ethel and her mother, described by Zoe Rains in Anne Tempest's book, relates to this heritage. They would walk along Bubnell Lane enjoying a pear peeled using a fruit knife made by Ethel's great grandfather Henry Shipstone.

John did not follow his father Henry into the cutlery trade but is recorded as an agricultural worker in Baslow at his marriage to Sarah White in 1887. By 1901 John was the Baslow auxiliary postman and the family lived in Church End conveniently near the Post Office. The family residential address in the 1901 census is interesting. At that time there was a complex of houses in the yard of the Prince of Wales Hotel where four families lived, next to the churchyard. These properties can be seen on the 1882 OS map to the east of the graveyard. In fact, traces of them can be seen in the Prince of Wales car park and the church graveyard today. (See David Dalrymple Smith's article about the Prince of Wales for further details).



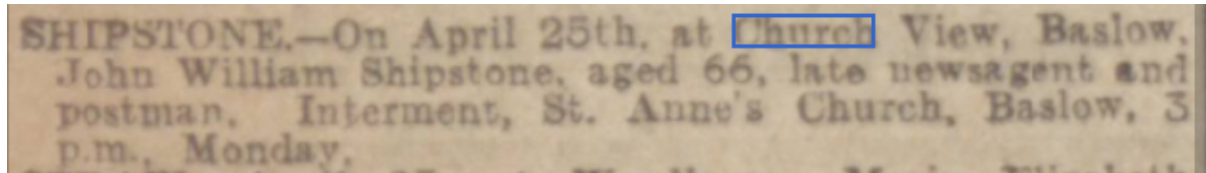
Map of the Bridge End area of Baslow 1883. Courtesy of <https://maps.nls.uk/>



Photograph found amongst Ethel's possessions when the news agency was cleared. It shows a terrace of houses built in the Prince of Wales Inn yard. One remains to this day attached to the main building. With thanks to Christine Groves.

By 1911 census, the Shipstone family of John, Sarah and the children Edith and William were living in 3 Church Terrace. At around this time the family started the newsagent business with a record of John Shipstone as a shopkeeper in the 1912 Kelly's directory and while working as an auxiliary postman.

When he died of influenza in 1924, his death notice in the Derbyshire Times states that he had been a postman for 30 years which suggests that not long after the 1891 census he taken up this role.



John William Shipstone, death notice Sheffield Daily Telegraph 26 April 1924 British Newspaper Archive. The family sometimes referred to Church Terrace as Church View.

The above death notice is evidence that it was John Shipstone, Edith's father and Ethel's grandfather who started the news agency in Church Terrace. Further evidence for the start of the business by 1912 is provided by Ethel herself who "would point out a hook by the door where she was tethered while a toddler to prevent her walking off." (Anne Tempest). Ethel's mother had returned to Baslow to live with her parents soon after her birth in 1912.

The photograph from the Marples Collection below is interesting because it shows the appearance of the Terrace around this time. (Note 3)



Part of a postcard of Church Street Baslow from the Marples Collection. Date before 1911?. The door on the extreme right is to 3 Church Terrace.

Several reports relate that “Ethel’s mother was well spoken and came from a good family” and “had a good singing voice and played the piano. Ethel used to go with her to entertain guests at the Baslow Hydro.” Ethel also served at the table of local Baslow dignitaries indicating that she knew how to deport herself in good company.



Ethel, dates unknown, in her younger years. With thanks for the use of these photographs to John Elswood, the W H Smith rep, who befriended Ethel and helped empty her house.

David Thorp remembers that Ethel also had a good singing voice and was a Church choir member. “Ethel was treated like a little princess and her clothes were of the best quality and purchased from Kendal Milne in Manchester”. (Anne Tempest). Ethel attended Baslow School and, in the yard, other girls marvelled at Ethel’s silk knickers. We were told on arrival at Church Terrace by Violet Ligo that there were cupboards of wonderfully bright coloured shoes upstairs and clothes. Vintage clothing, including an expensive fur coat, with Kendal Milne labels was indeed found upstairs when the building was cleared as well as some beautiful bedroom furniture. A lovely doll’s house and a short green feather Christmas tree with trimmings also came to light.

David Thorp remembers hearing that Edith took Ethel for holidays in Brighton in the best hotels and “lived it up.” A receipt from the Grand Hotel Llandudno dated 1939, found in the house clearance, confirmed this legend.

Ethel was an active member of the Baslow Girl Guides and Baslow Girls Friendly Society and well as collecting for the National Institute for the Blind. (Newspaper reports from the 1920s – 1930s)

As the family history above shows, Edith's family were a little different to many people of that time who were living in working-class Baslow housing. The affluence, from running a successful paper shop as well as having Willie's wages from the Steel mill, may have made Edith and Ethel feel that they had moved up in the strict social order of those times and that they could treat themselves to expensive clothes and holidays. The link to the prominent farming families of White and Marsden from the past also may have given the family a special cachet.

Ethel's step father – Willie Chapman 1896-1954

Edith married her second husband, Willie Chapman, in Baslow in 1923, not long after her divorce from Bryan Bufton was complete, and Ethel was chief bridesmaid. Willie was born in Sheffield and followed his father into one of the many rolling mills in Sheffield at that time. Here, heated steel or iron bars were reduced in size or dimensions, by passing them through rollers several times. In 1911 he was a billet lad who caught steel bars from the upper roller and sent them back via the lower rollers. He joined the Royal Navy in World War 1 but was discharged in 1915 to carry out war munition work. All the census and war records available to me up to 1939 give his occupation as a roll turner or runner although Town Directories tell of a connection to the news agency.

It is reported that Willie Chapman met Edith when he was working on the upgrading of the Derwent Aqueduct in the early 1920s (Anne Tempest, David Thorp and note 4). As there was a depression in steel making at this time it is possible that Willie took to the navy life where jobs were available, and met Edith when working on the pipeline as it passed through Baslow.

Willie and Edith Chapman made their home in 3 Church Terrace with Ethel and when Edith's father, John, died in 1924 they took over the newsagent's business. Willie is named in Town Directories of 1932 and 1941 as a newsagent. It seems likely that Edith and Ethel carried out much of the shop work while Willie worked in rolling mills in Sheffield and their contribution has been unrecorded. From the age of nine Ethel did the Baslow and Chatsworth deliveries herself on a bicycle while her mother looked after the shop (West Derbyshire Times 22.2.1980). On Edith's death in 1971 Ethel ran the shop with deliveries carried out by villagers such as Jenny Henshaw and the Baldwin family.

During WW2 Ethel may have been given a break from these duties as she worked at Metrovicks Ltd who had a satellite factory in Bamford. Leonard Twigg, with Ethel and other locals, used to cycle over together from Baslow to work there. They constructed alternators which were used in Lancaster bombers engines. This is the aircraft used by the 617th squadron which took part in the bouncing bomb raids. Maybe the airmen who were practicing their skills for these raids at the Derwent Dams were in fact flying over the factory which made some of their engine parts.

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to local residents who recounted their personal experiences.

(Richard) John Elswood, Chrisine Groves, Jenny Henshaw, Chris Hurst, Roger Lloyd, Julian Newton, Richard Powell, Anne Tempest, David Thorp, John Thorp, Winston Thorp, Leonard and Judith Twigg, Jane Walker, and another anonymous lifelong Baslow resident.

David Cartledge <https://baslowhistory.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/baslow-revisited.pdf>

David Dalrymple Smith - his very useful website provided much additional information
<https://baslowhistory.co.uk/>

References

Anne Tempest *Baslow* 2000

Marsden family

<https://baslowhistory.files.wordpress.com/2021/02/marsden.pdf>

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White family

<https://baslowhistory.files.wordpress.com/2021/02/white-baslow.pdf>

<https://baslowhistory.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/bubnell-history1.pdf>

Prince of Wales

<http://places.wishful-thinking.org.uk/DBY/Baslow/PrinceofWales.html>

Notes

1 David Dalrymple-Smith has acknowledged that in some of his articles he has erroneously said that Ethel lived in 2 Church Terrace. Personal communication.

2 In the 1921 census Ethel birth place is given as Middlesex. Examination of the original records show that there has been a mis transcription. Searching in Free BMD confirms that she was born in Middlesborough.

3 Curiously there is a bill board outside 2 Church Terrace suggesting that the news agency may have been based in this cottage in the Terrace, but I can find no other evidence for this in records around this time. It is possible that the notice board was associated with the police constable who lived there in 1901 and was used to make public announcements. It is possible that the cart is a Royal Mail vehicle delivering to the chief postman Bernard Bristol who lived at 1 Church Terrace. The lack of advertising boards for newspapers at 3 Church Terrace suggests that the photograph was taken before 1911 when the family opened the news agency.

4 The Thorp family of Gorse Bank Farm, Baslow, on the route of the Derwent Valley Aqueduct told me about their father Ron, who cycled from the farm through the pipe during construction. This was indeed possible because the pipe is 6ft 3 in in diameter! The Thorp family moved to the farm in 1920 when they were displaced from their farm in the Derwent Valley as the reservoirs were filled.