



Stow Parish Archive

Newsletter

March 2009

This winter may have turned out to be a bit worse than expected but it can hardly compare with the snowstorm of 1875-76

Snowstorm on the Waverley Line

In the last month of 1874 snow set in and was falling almost daily for the first week. During the following week there was a fall of 8 inches and a few days later more snow brought this measurement to nearly 20 inches. Between these heavy falls the temperature did increase and the snow did melt some but in fact a correct measurement for the month gauged that there had in fact been 34 inches in total.

By the turn of the year the weather had retained its grip by another 6 inches. Then, on New Years day a storm that culminated in a hurricane caused so much devastation that it to become a memorable date in all Scotland's meteorological records. A furious gale arose in the south and the snow drifted into immense mounds. All over the country a vicious storm was raging and many who were caught in the open sadly perished.

In the parish of Stow all the roads and the railways were blocked. At Falahill a goods train was stuck in 14 feet of snow and a further 4 trains were stuck nearby. A train with men was sent from Hawick to try and clear the line but after getting through at Falahill they could make no effort to clear the way onto Tynehead.

Many passengers were stuck and a further attempt was made to rescue them. It became apparent to all that the character of the drifting was extraordinary. It seemed that though all doors and windows were closed the snow still came sifting through and many passengers held up their umbrellas to keep dry. Matters then began to take a serious turn for the worse and one last effort was made to clear the line back to Galashiels. A band of surfacemen assisted by the constable of Heriot, named Stewart, and a few of the passengers walked with spade and shovel and heroically tried to clear a way forward. However as fast as they shovelled, the snow appeared to drift back.

Eventually, the Hawick train and the Carlisle express had a passage made for them by a pilot engine going on before them. The trains were then all backed into Heriot station. Passengers rushed from the train and besieged the little village shop and several women and children who were blue with the cold were carried to the station masters house and the house of the constable. A few managed to find lodgings but other freezing and shivering passengers had to return to the carriages to take shelter, First Class was now opened to all. Some women were carried through the snow to the Old Fala Inn while others went to the hut at Fala sidings. About 30 people who were near unconscious from exposure were taken by cart to Falahill Farm where Mr. Dunn provided food and warm drinks. At about 11 o'clock a train arrived from Galashiels with provisions, including whisky and brandy. Dr. McDougall was directed to relieve the worst cases but for all it was a very long and weary night. The following day a large body of labourers were sent to dig out the trains and this was achieved by late afternoon with a train to Edinburgh reaching there by 8 o'clock that evening. In all there were over 300 stranded passengers.

“Who do you think you are?”

Here is an exciting chance for families in Stow and Fountainhall to go down in the history books! Together with Stow and Fountainhall Primary Schools, the Stow Parish Archive Group would like to invite ALL families and individuals interested in investigating their family trees or some aspect of local history to come along to **Stow Primary School on Thursday 23rd April 7pm**. We would like to invite as many people as possible to contribute to a display and exhibition planned for the autumn looking at Stow and Fountainhall through the decades. This might include current residents' family trees (you don't have to be Borders born and bred), stories connected to a particular photographs, investigations of a local building or event - anything that builds a picture of the past through the eyes of people living here.

Local studies advisors and archivists from both Midlothian and Scottish Borders local authority areas are coming along to show what records are available. They can offer advice on how to get started as well as helping the experienced researcher. There will be a chance to look at original records as well as a **“hands-on” session** with various on-line resources. We are keen for families to be involved and for the young researcher there will be some **story-telling** from days gone by and a chance to look at great great grandmas old toys and school books!

We are also hopeful that some people who have had connections with Stow in the past might come along and join in – there'll be some great stories to hear! Make a note in your diary and come along. We shall look forward to seeing you!

(If anyone is willing to lend a hand “behind the scenes” on the night, please give Wendy a call 730560).