

**Earby Through 60 Years**  
An Outstanding Kelbrook Worthy  
Mr. Eli Cowgill's School days  
(By John Hartley) 22/4/1938

In the last article a brief reference was made to my friend, Eli Cowgill, of Kelbrook. Two days after its publication he passed away suddenly, following a seizure, and being unconscious he was unable to read it. He had actually anticipated it, for a few days previously he remarked to his wife, "I think Johnnie will put something in' t' Craven Herald about him and me being at t' Sough together."

For many years he had been one of the outstanding characters in his native village, especially of those who had been associated with the Smallpage era. He had a lively recollection of those days, and delighted to recount interesting incidents of his earlier years. He received his education spasmodically, part of it at a private elementary school at the old Baptist Chapel at Earby, the school being run by Joseph Heaton, whose father had been the Baptist minister for a few years.

The "master" was rather slack in enforcing discipline, and also in his own personal habits. On a hot summer afternoon he would sometimes send one of the boys with a can to the White Lion Inn for a pint of beer to slake his thirst; and one pint was not always sufficient. When he was overcome with the indulgence he would send the scholars home for the rest of the day. "Joss" Heaton could not be said to have inspired much reverence by his personal influence upon his pupils.

"Eli" (as he was familiarly called), went for another spell to the National School at Salterforth, and later (when it was opened) to the National School at Kelbrook, of which Mr. Joseph Bentley was the master. He was the brother of Mr. John Bentley, of the Earby Grammar School. With the schoolmaster who followed, Mr. Bulcock, Eli became very friendly, and was much indebted to him. He also maintained friendly relations with succeeding masters, Mr. J. W. Brown, Mr. Horbury and Mr. Clegg, and was held in high regard by them.

But music was the chief hobby and delight of Eli's life and good music, well performed, held his soul in glorious rapture. He was himself no mean exponent of the musical art, and he was a keen and accomplished musician. The first time I saw him was at a public singing competition at the Victoria Institute, Earby, more than 50 years ago. The title of his song was "Come into the garden, Maud," and he gave a good account of himself in competing against many noted singers from East Lancashire towns.

### **Kelbrook Band**

In his early manhood he was one of the leading members in the Kelbrook Brass Band, being one of the cornet players. The Kelbrook Band flourished for some years and they appeared at a memorable contest held at Salterforth on May 9th, 1868. The other bands were Earby, Barnoldswick Model and Barnoldswick Ribblesdale. Earby carried off the

first prize, but Kelbrook's conductor, John Wilkinson, won the prize offered for the best cornet soloist.

Although he had been brought up at the United Methodist Chapel, and had been in the choir from early boyhood as an alto and tenor singer, he went to the village church when they were without an organist and helped them through a difficult period. In his later years, after his return to Kelbrook, he frequently officiated as organist at the chapel services.

When he retired from business at Colne as a coloured goods manufacturer at the Viaduct Shed, he went for a prolonged holiday to Canada and the United States, with Brantford as his headquarters. On the termination of his holiday he married Miss Maretta Crabtree, a member of an old Kelbrook family, who had lived at Nelson for many years. Her father had been one of the leading figures at the Salem Independent Methodist Chapel, and one of the compilers of the Connexional Hymn and Tune Book. Her association with the Bethel Chapel at Kelbrook had been most happy and serviceable, and for several years she was the teacher of the Young Ladies Bible Class.

Mr. and Mrs. Cowgill went to live at Morecambe for about five years, where they were associated with the Sandilands Methodist Church. Towards the end of the War years they returned to Yellow Hall, Kelbrook, and more recently they had resided in Colne Road. Some years ago, Mr. Cowgill acquired considerable cottage property in Earby, but apart from the management of his property, he had no business ties, and he had enjoyed a very happy retirement. He was a nice, kindly disposed, dapper little gentleman, and up to a few weeks ago he could be seen almost every day taking his constitutional stroll on the Colne Road to Hague Houses and back.

Without a doubt "Eli" was one of the most worthy characters Kelbrook has produced, and his passing is very much regretted in the village.

### **A Sheep Story**

By the way, I have been reminded that Tom Proctor, with his family, went to live at Cockit Farm, next to Blear-side, but a little nearer Kelbrook, abutting on the Earby to Lothersdale highway.

There is a good story told of Jack Proctor and a speculation he had with some sheep. He bought about a dozen, and he kept them upon his father's land. As the first winter drew to its close the sheep began to droop and fade away, although the cause could not be ascertained. When Jack returned home at night from his work as a weaver down in Earby there was often a tale of woe for him. To avoid the repetition of the melancholy tale, his brother, "Jim Sam," hit upon a novel expedient. He possessed a melodeon, and one night, after another sheep had succumbed to the dread disease, he posted himself with his instrument on the top of the wall by the roadside, and when his brother appeared round the bend of the road he greeted him with the strains of the "Dead March in Saul."

"Jim Sam" is now one of the best-known farmers in Earby and, with his son, Stanley, occupies "Wadd Fowd" (Waddington Fold), one of the finest Elizabethan farmhouses in the neighbourhood.

## **The Village Institute**

Near by is the Liberal Club, erected on the site of the old village institute, which was designated the Victoria Institute, but popularly called "T' Stution." It was mainly due to the efforts of Mrs. C. Bracewell that the Institute was erected, to provide a place of recreation for young men, free from the temptations of intoxicating liquors.

It is about 60 years since the Institute was opened by Sir Henry Mitchell, of Bradford. It was a rare rallying ground for the villagers for all kinds of social events, and the large assembly room was the most popular rendezvous that Earby has ever known. The room seated three to four hundred people, according to circumstances, and the entry was by means of a staircase (none too wide) from the central hall below. Popular lectures and concerts were promoted by the Institute committee, and the annual concert was usually a noted event. On these occasions famous singers from East Lancashire and the West Riding often appeared, and the advent of a popular "comic" like G. W. Nicholson, of Leeds, was hailed with delight. Friends of the Bracewell family often assisted, and a lady artiste who once appeared in Scottish costume to sing Scottish ballads created quite a sensation.

For many years Mr. Peter Pickup, of Burnley, was a very popular accompanist for these concerts. While welcoming artistic visitors from neighbouring towns, ample encouragement was afforded local talent, and many a promising young musician got a good start in their career by the opportunities thus afforded. The village Temperance Society and Band of Hope provided various kinds of entertainment fare, especially for younger folks, and "magic lantern" shows, featuring "Christie's Old Organ" and "Buy your own cherries," were immensely popular.

The children's annual treats were all too rare occasions of merriment for the village youngsters, and the social gatherings which followed were gladly availed of by those who loved to have their fling in the waltz, the schottische and the polka, in addition to well-organised games.

## **Legerdemaine**

One of the main attractions of the Institute, however, was the facilities which were offered to travelling troupes of variety artistes, conjurors, phrenologists, mesmerists, and all types of musicians. For a few coppers the lads of the village could have a rare night out, and when they were elated with any performance their enthusiasm knew no bounds. They had a great time if any of the more forward youths could be drawn on to the platform to be "operated" upon by the mesmerists, or have their "bumps" felt.

One of the last parties who appeared in the Institute was Barney Parsons with his entertaining family of Lancashire lasses from Burnley. The following summer he took them to Morecombe, and his entertainments on the sands and in the field at the Bare end of the promenade were the initiation of the Happy Mount Pleasure Park.

When the "at home" mode of social enjoyment and entertainment became popular the Institute committee led the way in the promotion of these events, and for several years they were the outstanding social gatherings of the winter season.

About 1895 the Institute was taken over by a Buildings Company, and the premises were enlarged and a better entrance to the assembly room provided by the inclusion of an adjoining dwelling-house, improved facilities for games were also provided, and the conversation room became a noted forum for the discussion of current topics.

Amongst those who were prominently associated with the formation and the subsequent working of the Institute may be mentioned Richard Demaine, H.C Smith, Joseph Windle, Hartley Windle, W. Wilkinson, C. W. Bailey, Dr. Hunter, Dr. Falconer, Sam Dugdale, Ed. Riddihough, W. Little and John Boocock.

One of the last persons to occupy the position of president was John R. Hartley, always known as Jack Hartley. Always interested in the Institute if not always in a position to share in the management, he remained one of its most loyal supporters to the end of his life, which was most untimely cut short in 1908. He was at his work as a tapper at A. J. Birley's Victoria Shed on a Tuesday afternoon in September 1908 when he was taken seriously ill and was rushed off to the Victoria Hospital in Burnley. An immediate operation was necessary, but he failed to recover and passed away early on the following day.

### **Family of Ten**

His name and family deserve more than a passing reference. He left a widow whose maiden name was Ellen Speak, and ten children, five boys and five girls all living at home when the father was so suddenly taken from them. He was one of the most versatile men I ever knew, having been in turn a mule spinner, railway engine cleaner, coachman, carter shop-keeper, picture framer and warp sizer.

He was always fond of active games, and as a youth he was a daring leader in all forms of jumping feats. His body seemed to be like a piece of human India rubber, and no exertion seemed to tire him. Of course, cricket made a strong appeal to him, and he threw himself into every match with all the ardour of his being. He was no bowler, but a lively fielder "out in t' country." He was a batsman of the "long-handled" type, and with him it was always a case of getting runs or getting out. He played in both eleven's in the "old club," and when a new start was made in 1886 he was made the captain of the first eleven, position he held for several years. A very fine team was put into the field in the following year, and in 1888 they had the honour of being undefeated, an achievement which was very rare in those days. The plan that he usually adopted as captain was to send "t' other side" in first, get them out as quickly as possible, and then go for the runs needed for victory. That kind of spirit has continued to characterise the Earby cricketers, and accounts in small degree for their keenness in the field to-day. When the cricket club was re-formed a football club was created along with it, and after a double season in the Lower Barnwood field, the two clubs continued a dual existence on the New Road field. In football, too, Jack Hartley was in the thick of the fray, and for a few years he was a vigorous right full-back.

## **Lover of Music**

In another sphere of life he displayed keen interest, for he was an ardent music lover. He may have lacked opportunities of musical culture, but music was as natural to him as breathing. He could handle a concertina effectively, but I never saw a man who could get as much music out of a tin whistle as he. The flute, however, was his favourite instrument, and it was a grand sight to see him and his wife surrounded by their little children while he played such airs as "Scenes that are brightest" from Maritana." He was a baritone vocalist, too, of no mean order, and for a lengthy period he was the leading male soloist in the Wesleyan choir with whom he toured the surrounding villages and the Skipton Temperance Hall. He was most effective though in humorous duets, in which he displayed the true Bohemian style.

We had a jolly concert in 1895 at Marton Institute for the Leeds Infirmary. There were about 12 of us in the concert party, and in addition to glees, songs and duets, we gave the sketch, "Uncle Crumps the Crumbier." in which "J.R.H." was Uncle Grumps, and the part of the three nephews was taken by three Hartleys --Charlie, Johnnie and Tom— (actual nephews) with Willie Crowther as the man servant. We imported "a life of our own" into the sketch, which included a song by Tom— "Two little girls in blue," accompanied by "knackers." This homely touch was evidently pleasing to the country audience, as well as the "house party" from Gledstone Hall, but Charlie was the hero of the evening by his rendering of "Let me like a soldier fall." In his earlier career as a vocalist he was a tenor and he had a "lisp" which tended to amuse the listeners. This was one of his first efforts away from home, and he was keenly anxious to do justice to himself and the occasion. As he stood with head erect and chest expanded a ripple of amused interest was seen on the faces of the audience as he declaimed : "Yeth, let me like a tholdier fall,  
Upon thum open plain,  
Thith bretht, ekthpanded for the ball,  
Shall blot out every sthain"— but when he came, entirely undismayed, to the climax of the song— "He like a tholdier fell.  
He like a tho-ol-dier fell." the whole company, including the worthy Rector (Rev.R. Thorman) and the Grand Primrose Dame from Gledstone (Mrs. Roundell) were convulsed with hearty laughter, and gave him unstinted applause.

## **Cricketer Sons**

The ten children of Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Hartley are now all married and have given a good account of themselves in various walks of life. Seven of them have rendered good service in the Wesleyan Chapel choir, and most of them have been good workers in the Sunday School. Three of the lads have figured prominently on the cricket field, Jim being the present captain of the Earby first team, and renowned as one of the most forcing batsmen in West Yorkshire. He has also played with Barnoldswick in the Ribblesdale League, and captained the team for a few years. Jack is a professional at Burton-on-Trent, and has also played with Saltaire in the Bradford League.

Only three of the ten children are now resident in Earby, the rest being scattered in various parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire, with two in the Midlands. The mother resides

with the youngest daughter in Langroyd Road, and in the company also of three grand-children is enjoying a beautiful eventide of life.

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