



NEWSletter

Number 56

All you need is love ...

Edwardian Valentines were not all that different ...

Valentine's Day in Edwardian England, celebrated on February 14, was a charming and significant occasion that encapsulated the era's evolving social customs and romantic expressions. The Edwardian period, spanning from 1901 to 1910, was marked by a blend of traditional courtship practices and the emergence of new, more liberal attitudes toward love and relationships. This transformation was particularly evident in how Valentine's Day was celebrated, reflecting both the romantic ideals of the time and the burgeoning influence of commercialism.

One of the most defining features of Valentine's Day during the Edwardian era was the exchange of intricately designed cards. The rise of the printing industry allowed for the mass production of elaborate Valentine's cards that were both beautiful and accessible. These cards often featured elaborate illustrations, lace embellishments, and sentimental verses. Many individuals took great pride in creating their own cards, employing creativity and artistry to craft unique messages for their loved ones. The sentimentality of the era was captured in the verses, which ranged from sweet and playful to deeply romantic, often using floral imagery and metaphors to express affection.

Floral gifts were another key component of Valentine's Day celebrations. Roses, symbolising love and passion, were the most popular choice, but other flowers such as violets, sweet peas, and forget-me-nots also conveyed various sentiments. Men often

presented bouquets to their sweethearts as a token of their affection, while women reciprocated with their own small floral arrangements.

Social gatherings and parties were also common on Valentine's Day, providing an opportunity for friends and couples to come together in celebration. Young women would often host tea parties, where they showcased their culinary skills by preparing homemade treats such as cakes, biscuits, and confections. These gatherings were not only a chance to indulge in sweet treats but also a venue for the playful exchange of cards and gifts. Games and activities, such as valentine lotteries, added an element of amusement, allowing participants to draw names and engage in lighthearted matchmaking.

The commercialisation of Valentine's Day began to take root during the Edwardian period, with shops offering a variety of cards and gifts to cater to the growing demand. This shift marked the beginning of Valentine's Day as a retail phenomenon, influencing future celebrations. The emergence of department stores and the availability of ready-made cards made it easier for individuals to participate in the festivities, regardless of their artistic abilities.

Overall, Valentine's Day in Edwardian England was a delightful celebration of love, creativity, and social interaction. It reflected the era's changing attitudes toward romance and laid the groundwork for the modern celebration of Valentine's Day. The customs established during this time emphasized the importance of expressing affection, fostering connections, and reveling in the joy of love, making it a cherished occasion that continues to resonate today.



Ghost Signs in Leicestershire ...

Sonia Liff reports on a recent History Café talk.

In November the Local History Café enjoyed an interesting talk from Colin Hyde of Leicester University. Ghost Signs are what remains of adverts for products or companies (often no longer sold or in business), painted on brick buildings up to the 1960s.

We have all seen them, and probably thought they would still be there the next time we passed. Unfortunately, they are fading rapidly – to say nothing of those that have been painted over or have had framed signs placed over the top.



Others were purely local businesses. We particularly liked one for Gins and Guttridge, Funeral Directors on Abbey Lane. Among their services they offered 'Qualified Embalmers' – we wondered how many unqualified ones there were out there! We also discussed whether such signs should be repainted to retain them, allowed to fade away, or whether there was some middle way.

Café members recalled signs that they had seen and remembered details of some of the businesses.

I remembered a photo we had in the museum's digital collection showing one on the side of an Appleby pub, captured when someone snapped a football club outing.

Luckily Colin and others have been paying more attention, photographing those that remain and have been returning year after year to see whether they are still there and how they are faring. Sometimes they get a pleasant surprise when a boarded sign is removed to show a well-preserved earlier sign underneath. Sometimes as one sign fades, another one underneath becomes more visible.

These photographs are available online where you can while away many a happy hour. They can be found at:

<https://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p15407coll4> .

Colin told us about his favourites and how he found out more about the companies via trade directories. Some were part of national campaigns such as from the major breweries.



Matthews and Thornley – the Village Delivery Van.

Anne Sillins recalls a different way of shopping

This is the story of the family that each week day loaded their van and travelled from village to village through country lanes in the area surrounding Ashby de la Zouch. The bulk of their items for sale were things that the housewives in the region would require for their daily chores around their homes. With “Matthews and Thornley” making their circular route through villages and hamlets a housewife could make a purchase close to home. Women who were some distance from the shops of Ashby, Burton, Coalville or Market Bosworth relied on “Matthews and Thornley” to save their day.

Their van carried items of importance especially to the daily life of village housewives. Most women in the 1930's to the late 1950's didn't have a car and most didn't even drive a car. Most women also didn't have a bicycle to just hop on and go to a shop. Many women who were farmer's wives, did in fact drive the tractor, but they weren't about to jump on the tractor for a quick trip to the shops. Hopping on a bicycle wasn't an option because most women had children or baby and they couldn't be left alone.

This is where first, Alf Bentham, saw a need and Mr. Bentham set up his business to fill this need. Alf Bentham started this business before the Second World War and he was helped by Bill Matthews.

As a little girl living in Snarestone Lane at Lower Rectory Farm, I can remember seeing the ‘Matthews - Thornley’ van driving in the village of Snarestone. I don't remember it coming down our farm driveway, but if my Grandma and I were walking in the lane towards Snarestone, or in Snarestone Main Street, we would stop at the van and there always seemed to be something they had on board that Grandma needed, something that filled a gap to make her life a little easier.

The reason this van was so familiar to me was that my best friend at Ashby Ivanhoe School was Pauline Thornley, the daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Jack Thornley. Mr. Bentham was an older member of Pauline's family. When I would have an overnight visit staying at Pauline's home in

Nottingham Road, Ashby, I was allowed to visit their warehouse. I looked in amazement and wonder at all the supplies lining the shelves of their warehouse.

These items waiting to be taken and placed on smaller shelves in their van I found very interesting. Alf Bentham passed away in 1942, but the

business carried on with Pauline's father, Jack Thornley, running the business. Pauline's father had been overseas during the Second World War. His service was in Burma, Ceylon and India, but he was lucky and he returned to his family and Ashby in 1946. During the war the business was run mainly from the warehouse which was on Nottingham Road. Jack Thornley and Bill Matthews got the business van back on the road again after the 2nd. World War. Sadly in 1953 Bill Matthews died. At that point Jack Thornley's sister, Sarah Plummer began to help with the van. Later Keith Matthews, son of Bill Matthews, who had just left school joined Jack Thornley and he started working on the van. Keith stayed working with the van for nine years.



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This service was a great help to a young mother who might need food items or cleaning materials. Other items needed by the housewives would be something for the kitchen such as a pot or a cup and saucer. There was always something needed at the last minute to complete or add spice to a meal. Other items could be soap or clothes pegs to help with the weekly load of laundry. At the back of the van there was also paraffin and vinegar which was poured from small barrels into a jug or a bottle the women brought for this purpose. On top of the van were logs, bath tubs and dolly pegs. They also sold pit boots, fire lighters, in fact anything that people asked for could, and would, be ordered and delivery arranged on their next trip. At this time there was still rationing and Pauline as a teenager had the job of counting tea coupons every week. A favourite job for Pauline was packing sweets, biscuits and tinned goods from the warehouse and carrying them to the shelves of the van.

Keith has many memories of being chased by geese, their long necks out stretched as they tried to bite his trouser legs. It was dogs who also gave concern when they entered a driveway to sell their wares or make a delivery. After nine years of



working with Jack Thornley, Keith bought a shop in Coalville. Keith tells us that it was an education meeting all sorts of people in their village environment, but he was happier later working in his own shop in Coalville.

In February 1971 decimalisation was introduced in Britain and this changed a lot of things for many people and businesses. This made a lot of work for small and large businesses at first, as time went on they got used to it all. Decimalisation was the conversion of a system of currency, weights and measures. Now prices, weights and measures used decimals instead of fractions. For some older generations this caused a big headache, and much heart ache. Then on April 1st. 1973 VAT, Value Added Tax, was introduced. Again this added head aches and more heart aches to people selling products and services. Jack Thornley had had enough. First decimalisation, now VAT and Jack Thornley retired from his business.



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There is a distinction between the business which Jack Thornley provided and that of a peddler or a street vendor. They cannot be compared. Jack Thornley and his van had a regular route around the villages, they were relied on, they could take orders and deliver items to your door. They followed a scheduled route and would find housewives waiting for them. The main distinction between peddlers and other types of street vendors is that peddlers have no fixed place of trade, they set up their business wherever they found a spot. Street vendors may sell at a town market place or on a street corner. Their service can be a bit hit and miss. Now this sort of small business is gone, but not forgotten. That village delivery van business selling ordinary items was a great help to housewives at that time.

Free Sunday Open Days at the Museum

Sally has arranged a spectacular series of Free Open Days for 2025

Upcoming events.

2025

APRIL
06

PROF FRED STEWARD

An investigation in to the pupils of Appleby Magna. How instrumental were they in the Industrial Revolution?

MAY
04

ANDREA ZUVICH

A look at Barbara Villiers, the enchanting mistress of Charles II

JUNE
01

MICK RAWLE

The sufragettes, as experienced by Mick's own family

JULY
06

LLYNDA BAUGH

Llynda shares the secrets of apotropaic witch's marks

AUG
03

DANIELLE BURTON

A fun talk about pirates, highwaymen, and thieves

SEP
07

SALLY LOWE - THE APPLEBY MAGNA COMMUNITY PROJECT

The story of Appleby Magna, as told to Sally by the people who live there

ALL TALKS START AT 3.30PM



The Sir John Moore Foundation Museum

101 Top Street, DE12 7AH

www.sirjohnmoore.org.uk

Tickets: £12

<https://sirjohnmoorefoundation.eventbrite.co.uk>

Free Open days are back this year at The Sir John Moore Foundation Museum. The Museum will be open from midday to 3.00pm on the first Sunday of each month April to September with brand new exhibitions in the main hall. No tickets are required for our Open days ...

These will be followed by a series of ticketed talks linking into each exhibition, starting with a talk by Prof. Fred Steward, who has discovered serial links between former pupils at the school to major events in the Industrial Revolution.

Click on there link below for tickets for all events:

<https://sirjohnmoorefoundation.eventbrite.co.uk>



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