

Blacon History Newsletter



March 2021

Welcome to the Blacon History newsletter, the Newsletter goes out either digitally or in printed format to a large number of Blacon residents. Our main aim is to research and distribute local historical information to our membership and the wider Blacon & Chester community. Additionally to work with the local community and schools to enable residents old and young to discover their local history and provide a sense of belonging. To work with other institutions to enhance and provide a local learning resource for those who are able and unable to access new technology.

Please contact us at blaconhistory@gmail.com

Or take a look at our website <http://www.blaconhistorygroup.org/>

For more information If you are unable to access technology then contact either

Dave Cartwright on 07854 681886 or Alan Smith on 07932556062

Not Ghosts, just a bit strange! By Norman Stainthorp

One story that I have heard more than once from different sources is about the early days of Blacon Cemetery, before the Crematorium was build, when the ground simply sloped down to the canal.

The heavy clay soil that makes up Blacon is not an ideal site for a Cemetery, with the result that before proper drainage was installed, several coffrins, after heavy rain, were found floating in the canal!

Another story I heard from a reliable source at the Cemetery was of a family who paid for an extra deep grave so that further family members could be added later. The day came when a second interment was required, and the grave was opened up, only to encounter the earlier coffin, just below the surface. Presumably, the ground water in heavy Blacon clay had nowhere else to go but upwards, through the lightweight back fill above.

These were, as I say, early days for this Cemetery and I am sure that any problems with groundwater drainage have long been sorted out!

Charlie and the Milk Float A very Blacon story by Gerry Lucas

Between 1969-1971 I had the pleasure of working on Charlie Beck's milk round. Charlie operated from Broadclyst Farm at the top of Mayfield Road. Normally the round started at 5AM but being an early bird I arose at 3.50AM (4 days per week), got dressed in my dads ex-army (hair) shirts and shot down stairs to make a brew. I always listened to the 4AM World Service news. The bulletin was always preceded by the Glorious "Henry Purcell's" Lilliburlero - that stirring tune now ingrained on my memory. I'm sure I disturbed mum and dad with my sonorous accompaniment to this piece of music but they never complained. I now know that it was dads REME Regimental marching song and so I guessed it brought back memories



I would leave my house in Saughall Road and hotfoot up to Charlies for 4.30AM. I would then take out 2 crates of milk (I would find half a crate a difficult task these days) and start the milk round along Mayfield Road. At 5AM exactly, Charlie would turn out of the farm with 2 other lads aboard clinging to the milk float roof to reconnoitre with me. Then the round began in earnest. Charlie, in his trademark grey warehouse coat and sitting in the cosily warm cab of the Bedford milk float with the sliding window slightly ajar would dispense a milk code "3-1-2-a gold top-1-orange and 6 eggs" and so on from his meticulously written order book in a broad Lancastrian accent. Each lad knew his houses and would gather the order from the crates. In those days I could carry 4 bottles in each hand and 2 under the left arm. At the end of the first round of drops we would crowd into the cab to get warmed up as Charlie drove off to the next tranche of streets. Usually, the next drop after Mayfield, included Jonathan's Way and the dreaded Blacon Station. The latter had an order of two pints per day and the youngest (and therefore most dispensable) of the lads was detailed for the delivery. This normally was awarded to Andrew (from Durham Road). If Andrew did not turn in I was assigned to be the daily sacrifice.

It was a scary delivery. From the Parade side of the bridge a long incline descended to the up-line platform. Each side of the incline was shrouded by tall brambles in which dangerous beasts resided and would occasionally rustle but never roar. On reaching the platform the air was eerily still, pitch and always dangerously silent. Turning right you made to the bridge so as to cross the line. One always stopped, listened and squinted, in case the ghost train from John Summers Shotton works (now owned by BSC but still called JS) loaded with thousands of tons of galvanised sheets and steel coils, destined for the car industry, would mow you down at its idling speed of 20 MPH. Assuming you survived this and negotiated the rails in darkness you would make up the downline platform to the first door of the station to deposit the milk order. Always, you would glance around making sure that a homicidal maniac was not about to pounce. And then...horror struck.. There was a note in the empties... half a dozen eggs please! Oh no! It all had to be done again. Back to the float and repeat. But I survived. I'm not sure what happened to Andrew he did not turn up one day.

Then the round continued. Hatton Road, Stamford Road etc etc. It seemed to be very cold in those days with lots of frost and snow during the winter. I never seemed to fall over though. One of the oddest things I noticed was that the air was still until it dawn and then then the breeze stirred.

At about 8AM when the final drop was accomplished we piled onto the float and standing on the rails that kept the crates in place, and hanging onto the roof, Charlie would drive off at 40mph whilst we surveyed the stars, Halleys Comet and braved the icy facial blast.

On reaching somewhere near your house you would bang on the roof and Charlie would slow to just about leg breaking speed, rather than life changing injury velocity, and you would jump off. The lads left on the float would knock twice on the roof and Charlie would speed off. God knows what H&S would make of this now. But nobody ever died or was injured. I really don't know what happened to Andrew.

It was thirsty work and mysteriously somebody would occasionally, and accidentally, put their thumb through the milk top rendering it undeliverable. We were then allowed to drink it. Charlie never complained as long as it was not the expensive Gold Top (Jersey) milk. Even the Orange juice was sometimes damaged.

Charlie Beck was an excellent employer and a thoroughly nice man. I remember in 1970 he lent me £14 so that I could buy a bespoke "made to measure" suit jacket with ticket pocket and 10 inch single back vent from Burtons. He then invented work for me to do so that I could pay him back.. washing the vans etc.

Charlie hailed from near Lancaster, hence his strong accent, and I believe he died as recently as 2016 at the age of 89.

In the 60's and 70's Charlie and his (2) milk floats were an integral part of the Blacon scene. Generally unseen but probably heard by Blacon residents he would knock every Friday night for payment.

RIP Charlie.. you were a large part of my teenage years and your job granted me loads of pocket money.

Looking back the milk round was the best job I have ever had and I would do it again tomorrow... could!

I wonder what happened to Andrew?