

Nawton and Beadlam: a grand day out in twin villages

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Village spirit has a different meaning in Nawton and Beadlam.

We're not just talking summer fetes and friendly neighbours, we're talking resilience, loyalty, a sense of identity and community.

Here's an example from history.

When the gentry and the clergy decided to take over Nawton's parish school for the Church of England from the mainly Methodist working people in the 1890s, they took on more than they bargained for.

An account from the time tells us: "On the Monday morning when it was expected that forcible possession would be taken a crowd of determined men stood guard at the old schoolroom. Some of them carried in their hands things stronger than verbal arguments."

One resident, Arthur Wilson, was even evicted from his cottage by the Earl of Feversham after resisting intimidation over the school, but the villagers won out and the school was saved.

That character is still alive and well in the twin villages today. Four years ago, the finishing touches were just being added to a redevelopment of the recreation ground and sports pavilion when fire destroyed it.

Undeterred, the residents set about the whole fundraising process again - and succeeded in replacing them.

Even the odd stories people tell give a glimpse of this characteristic vibrancy. In the 1950s, Sir Martin Beckett gave the village the recreation ground. When they held a meeting, and set up a football club and a cricket club, Libby Capsick's mother, Mabel Nixon, stood up and said, "what about something for the women?" and promptly became the founder member of the village tennis club, which is still going strong today.

Libby is the third generation of her family living in the village, and her son Philip runs a mechanical business there now. Libby was clerk to Nawton Parish Council for 34 years, and is also a member of St Hilda's Church of England church, and has played a part in bringing religious harmony to the community.

"These villages are part of the Kirkdale Ecclesiastical Parish, for which the church is Kirkdale Minster" she explained. "St Hilda's was built as a daughter church in Beadlam because people had to walk or cycle to Kirkdale, sometimes during the winter in bad weather."

At the same time, there was a strong Methodist presence in Nawton Beadlam, and the wider area, so much so that there were two chapels - the Primitive Chapel and the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel.

"As congregations dwindled over the years, both Methodist and Anglican, the people got together and decided to form an ecumenical partnership," said Libby. "We now have two churches, Kirkdale Minster and St Hilda's, and we have a mixture of services in both traditions. "It seems to work very well, having two churches helps to stop any friction, and in the millennium we built an extension to provide a room for the whole community, for Sunday school and things."

Any hostility seems to have been overcome by this new partnership. Libby added: "It's not like when I was a child, it used to be daggers drawn!" She remembers a few other things that were a bit different back then too.

"There were about eight or nine farms in Nawton and Beadlam combined, two butchers, two sweet shops, a post office, three cobblers, a blacksmiths, a joiner, a pub in Nawton and two in Beadlam," she recalls.

It was a self-contained community, but then, it's not doing badly now. There's one pub - the Rose and Crown in Nawton which has a darts and a pool team, and is run by Stephen and Andrea Wood. There's an Indian restaurant, the Spice Club, in Beadlam where the pub used to be, a fish and chip shop, a carpet shop, a mechanic - Philip, mentioned earlier - and a few building firms.

And socially, it's a whirl. There's a cricket club, a football club, a tennis club, a youth club, a billiard club, a gardening club, a walking group and a parish council for each village.

Bernard Simpson lives in Pretty Cottage - an apt name if ever there was one - which was actually the place that Arthur Wilson was turfed out of all those years ago.

Bernard's dedication to the village is on a par with that of his predecessor, having served as chairman of the village hall since 1978, chairman of the trustees of the recreation club, chairman of the village gala and a trustee of the John Stockton educational foundation, which provides grants to local people. "There's always been a little bit of rivalry between the villages, but really we do things together," said Bernard, who came to Beadlam in the late 1940s. "There used to be two cricket teams, both successful," he said.

"Now it's only a bit of a joke really - 'oh, you're from Nawton are you', nothing serious."

Chris Rymer, chair of the recreation club, knows only too well how the villages work together, having been part of the team driving the new facilities through. "It's taken us five years since the fire and it's still coming to an end," she said. "But everyone makes their own contribution. There's a chap in the village who will install the benches - that's his job, and someone else will cut the hedge; we've got four great local groundsmen and even when we had the fire and needed a temporary building to tide us over, a local builder found us one and brought it up. It is all voluntary and without all these contributions it would not have happened," she said.

Cricket is central to the life of Nawton Beadlam, with a very successful Nawton Grange Cricket Club playing in the premier division of the Scarborough Beckett League, a second team and a strong junior section, with between 30 and 40 youngsters turning up to training.

Secretary Adam Collier said: "It's a typical old village sport. Some villages are losing their teams, which is a pity because it's part of village life. Once you've finished playing you go to the pub. In the summer you finish work and play cricket, on Saturdays you go shopping and then play cricket. It's a big part of life and sometimes it's hard to fit it all in!"

In the light of their fierce defence of their original educational establishment, it seems fitting that these villages are now home to two excellent schools. Ryedale School - a secondary, was built in 1953, and in 1964 a new primary school was built - the current Nawton Community Primary School. In fact, for Barry and Bridget Gillespie, part of the attraction of moving to Beadlam 12 years ago was the excellent schools for their children, Bryony, 14, who is at Ryedale and nine-year-old Barley who is at Nawton Community Primary School.

"Both of them have been very happy at Nawton and now Bryony is really getting stuck in at Ryedale, starting her GCSEs, " said Bridget. "It was one of the main attractions that the schools were there in the village, just a 10 minute walk away."

The Gillespie's house is a very creative place. Bridget is a botanical illustrator and Barry, a teacher at Ampleforth College, makes violins in his spare time, and their workshop - an open-beamed area of the house - is a constant hive of activity.

At the centre of the two villages, in fact at the crossroads which divides them, there is a huge old tree, which was planted to celebrate the birth of the third Earl of Feversham and around it a wooden seat, dedicated to the memory of his half brother, one of Lady Marjorie Beckett's sons, David Duncombe, who died in a car accident in 1929. It is a key icon of the villages, and in fact Libby chose it to be the emblem for Nawton Parish Council when she designed it. With memories so alive I could have spent days in Nawton Beadlam, and spoken to dozens more people there. As it was, I met a handful, but I think their enthusiasm for the place they live in speaks volumes.

The last word has to go to Adam Collier: "We may not have a post office or a village shop but what we lack in those things we make up for in other areas, " he said. "It's close knit and people are very loyal. Yes, it's a grand place."