

The Three Horseshoes and the Oddfellows Hall

(Based on a letter originally sent to the Scottow Parish Council)

Date of original 7th July 2012

The Scottow Parish Council,

For the attention of Roger Canon Esq., Parish Clerk, Dated 7th July 2012.

Dear Mr Chairman and Members of the Scottow Parish Council,

Re: The Scottow Three Horseshoes and The Oddfellows Hall recently acquired by Starlings Transport & Storage Ltd.

I respectfully draw your attention to a flyer- styled communication dated 21st June 2012 issued by Starlings Transport & Storage Ltd., which begins: "Dear Neighbour" and is signed by Mr Matt Starling, concerning the future of the Three Horseshoes Inn and the Oddfellows Hall which stands at the rear of the property.

I completely understand the need for change to meet today's present circumstances. It is worth noting since the present building was erected in 1760, the Three Horseshoes Inn seems never to have solely depended on its income as an inn and has variously co- functioned as a farm, provided coaching facilities and more recently in the fifties, a carrier and transport business hiring refrigerated lorries to Westwick Frozen Foods.

The Three Horseshoes Inn has, during its long history played host to many celebrities, including the then famous singer **Gracie Fields** and the famed world war two fighter pilot **Douglas Bader** to name but two of many.

To the rear, brick built in 1860, stands the ***Oddfellows Hall (Manchester Unity)***, Durrant Chapter, referred to locally as the ***Clubroom***. It measured 100 feet by 27 feet, with its then characteristic lantern styled roof skylight (sadly now gone) and its arched windows at each end, creating a pleasingly symmetrical building both simple and functional. Inside the Hall, at the north end was the stage and at the opposite end was a balcony with a bar beneath. Heating was provided by two cast iron pot belly stoves, although there was a further fireplace on the stage in the east wall.

Financed by the Durrant family of Scottow Hall, the building's original purpose was primarily to provide a venue for the men of the village (some one hundred and seventy of them at the time) to pay their weekly insurance subscriptions (the N.H.I was not introduced until 86 years later) and served as a place of social assembly for the whole village. No other such facility existed at that time.

Such 'sub' paying rituals involved a certain amount of beer drinking and so were generally located in close proximity to a pub. So the site chosen to the rear of the existing inn, the Scottow Horseshoes was ideal. It stood at what was then a T-junction on the Norwich to North Walsham road at the heart of an area called The Fairstead, so called after the tradition of holding a cattle fair there every Easter Tuesday. In many contemporary maps of the area the name Scottow does not appear but is simply shown as the Fairstead Inn.

Those villages and towns not as fortunate as Scottow in having their own hall usually met at a local inn. So profitable did this prove to be that a number of public houses actually renamed their establishments "The Oddfellows".

The **Oddfellows Hall**, through its long history (built in 1860 one year after the Scottow Parochial School) also provided an ideal community centre for the running of both public and private events, such as wedding receptions, parties, social and dances, whist drives, concerts; and the Women's Institute met there regularly. There was a mobile cinema every Sunday evening and plays staged by the local drama group. During the war it doubled as an overspill dormitory for RAF personnel stationed at the 'camp', RAF Coltishall.

It hosted the highly all important morale boosting 'Welcome Home Dances' held immediately after World War Two. So its service to the people of Scottow through war and peace, thick and thin, has been immense.

However as plans are now underway to change its use, it is of public interest, as well as from a historic perspective to learn when the **Oddfellows Hall** actually lost its original function and status and became merged with the freehold of the Three Horseshoes Inn. Was there no caveat protecting the Hall's original purpose?

Much has now changed in the village of Scottow. This initiative being proposed by Starlings Transport & Storage should be welcomed given the current financial climate. However, due diligence must be given as it should also be a time of respect and remembrance for the memories, lives and legacies we have inherited from our forebears and the past inhabitants of Scottow.

The result of decisions made now will affect the fragile link between the past and present. It is important to consider the future from the widest possible perspective. To an observer it would appear the affairs of Scottow have become fragmented with no overall plan, nor a central representative body of authority coordinating the best possible outcomes for both the social and economic well-being of the area. If this is the case then Scottow deserves better.

Since 1939 the village of Scottow has received many insensitive battering's from outsiders and unsympathetic officials and this appears not to have changed.

It all began in early 1939 when 'some men from the ministry' lost their way north of Norwich, emerged from a wood into a large field of potatoes and declared it an excellent site for an airfield. Hence the birth of RAF Coltishall – eventually to occupy some 650 acres of prime agricultural land, out of a total of 2020 acres that was then Scottow. This does not of course take into account the number of homes lost, the complete eradication of Bately Green and the very sad destruction of the very picturesque Scottow Moors (opposite Scottow Hall and the church) - a favourite Sunday walk and picnic area for the villagers of Scottow.

Neither does it take into account the fatalities, war damage and the resultant losses of community, village facilities and landmarks, all of which can be directly attributable to the presence of RAF Coltishall. Throughout the war the village and its inhabitants were under constant threat and actual attack from the German Luftwaffe.

A Norfolk village, having few natural features of landscape such as hills and mountain, relies heavily for its formal sense of identity on buildings, flora, mostly in the form of trees, water features such as ponds, streams, rivers and becks; roads, lanes, lokes and byways. To deprive a village or a hamlet of any of its established landmarks is to deny its people a sense of identity and brings a feeling of loss to the whole community. This phenomenon was further witnessed in a wider context in the wanton destruction of Westwick Arch, (built around 1780) in 1981, a well-known and much loved local landmark.

In the years after the war further losses have occurred - the closing of roads, loss of development and community. A great post war tragedy was the destruction of the historically important Scottow vicarage / rectory. (On a map of 1884/5, it is referred to as a vicarage).

This building was the second house of Scottow after Scottow Hall and had associations with the Nelson family. It was also the home of a great soldier who served in both the Boer and first World

Wars and who was twice mentioned in dispatches. At the end of its existence it was the home of a WW2 hero, who on having escaped from two German POW camps finally ended up in the most notorious camp of them all - Colditz!. And the vicarage's fate? Being located so near to the newly extended runway rendered it undesirable as a residence, so it was first turned into a battery chicken and pig farm -then demolished!

Despite all this, most people of Scottow, certainly during my childhood and later, showed a pride for the sacrifices made by the village towards the war effort, even though this has never been properly recognised, either then or now. The policy of the Air Ministry at that time was the naming of war time airbases after the nearest railway station, which actually was Buxton, afraid it would become confused with Buxton in Yorkshire, they opted for Coltishall, thus stealing the credit from Scottow and so it has remained.

What you may question is my right to participate or interfere in this current debate? Well I was born at 41, The Fairstead in 1943, attended Scottow school, christened at All Saints church and attended and sang in the church choir, was a member of the Scottow Wolf Cub Pack and rode for the Scottow cycle speedway team (although the less said about that the better) and regardless of having lived away from the village since 1961, with the exception of one year, have always retained strong links with the village though my Norfolk family. In fact I am in the process of compiling a record of memories of life in Scottow over the last hundred years or so.

My great- great- grandparents, William and Hannah Gibbons ran the 'Horseshoes' from 1888 - 1904 after which they moved to Rookery Farm - a further casualty of RAF Coltishall. Their son Alfred Gibbons was the Scottow wheelwright and carpenter. Both my grandmother and mother worked at the 'pub and my grandfather worked on the farm. These family connections with the pub and clubroom were very much increased through the war work of both my mother and grandmother, especially concerning the clubroom. Among my ancestors lying at rest in Scottow cemetery, is my own father, having died at the age of 36 in 1955 from war injuries he received in the Middle East

Recently I attended my mother's 90th birthday party. Present were her two sisters- my aunts, both in their eighties; all were born at 53, The Fairstead, on the Horseshoes corner, now demolished. Their cottage had been bombed during the war as indeed was the Horseshoes.

Please forgive this personal interjection but I do so in order to proffer my own qualifications, if only on the grounds of sentiment alone. You can never change where you were born and although my qualities as a ' Norfolkian' may be in doubt, my qualifications as a 'Fairstedian' are not!

My purpose in writing this letter with its brief potted history is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand all things change and are finally forgotten, on the other, a place is substantiated by its history, Its strength of presence and worth is dependent upon that history. Therefore, it is to place on record and give voice to those who, for whatever reason are no longer able to speak. To those that tilled and toiled, sowed and harvested, lived and died - I salute you!

My thanks to the members of the parish council for their indulgence in reading this letter and my apologies for my lack of skills as a writer.

Yours sincerely,

Keith ap Owen