

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A LITERARY GIANT

In 1900 where Peter Street, Goddard Lane, Brosscroft and Padfield Main Road converge, you would see a long row of terraced cottages flanked by fields. You would hear the sound of machines from nearby Waterside Mill reminding you that this was an age of industry with Hadfield and Padfield playing a central part in manufacturing. Behind you would be the path leading down to the reservoirs, designed by Frederick Bateman, and completed some 20 years previously.

Today, if you look down the hill towards Bankbottom and the New Lamp pub, you will see modern houses on your left. This was once a large area of open land and what remains is known as Roughfields. The area was mostly used for grazing with some allotments, hen cotes and a pigeon loft kept by locals when 'growing your own' was commonplace.

In the early to mid 20th century, Bankbottom was home to Irish Catholics. Many Irishmen, known as 'July Barbers', arrived every June to help with haymaking. Some remained in the area after marrying local girls but they were often treated with disdain by other people, and living on Bankbottom came with a stigma.



Mr Joe Swift displaying crops harvested in 1925 in Roughfields



A horse procession through Brosscroft

This didn't deter ambitious Bankbottom residents. The 2009 Booker Prize winner, Hilary Mantel CBE, spent the early part of her life in Bankbottom and Brosscroft. In her 2003 memoir, 'Giving up the Ghost', Mantel recalled a fascination with a rusty iron ring protruding from the wall between numbers 56 and 58 Bankbottom, the homes of her grandparents and aunt.

Her grandfather said it was used to 'tie the monkey to' which may not have such been an odd thing to say, as it was quite common to keep a pet monkey. Unfortunately, the ring is no longer there. However, you can still see her old home; number 20 Brosscroft, with the worn stone steps she walked on as a child.

Images courtesy of Harry Buxton, Sue M Hickinson and Michael H Brown.

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