

## **"The Mystery Pillar"**

The last edition of Ranmoor Notes asked whether readers could identify the "mystery pillar" which stands beside the culvert that runs into Redmires reservoir. Originally this was one of four similar pillars constructed on a straight line between Ladybower and Rivelin which in fact were temporary sighting towers built to aid construction of the Rivelin Tunnel between 1903 and 1909.

At the turn of the 20th century Sheffield needed more water and, following the construction of the new Derwent and Howden reservoirs, Sheffield laid claim to a share of the resulting water flow. But in order to bring the water to the city Sheffield needed a tunnel to link the new aqueduct in the Derwent Valley to the reservoirs in the Rivelin valley. Water finally started to flow in 1913 delivering a daily volume of about 2.5 million gallons to the new Rivelin reservoirs.

It was a remarkable feat of engineering and ran between its entrance near Ladybower reservoir and Rivelin with a fall of only 6 feet 6 inches over its entire length. To ensure it maintained a straight line an observatory was placed near the highest point. From here engineers could line up the tunnel along a series of four sighting pillars. The observatory (demolished in the 1960s) was located near Stanage Edge and the first sighting pillar somewhere above Blackbrook Wood overlooking the Rivelin valley. The second was placed in fields west of Lodge Lane, the third, and the only one of the four remaining, stands here at the culvert near Redmires reservoir. The fourth was at the Ladybower end of the tunnel.

At its deepest point the tunnel is over 750 feet below the surface and sinking shafts would have greatly increased the cost of the project. However with the availability of electricity to power the train used to transport men and materials this was avoided. The tunnel was eventually built for about £135,000 (approximately £16.5m at today's prices). Its length at 4 miles 612 yards makes it one of the longest tunnels in the UK. It is semi circular in design being 6 feet wide and 6 feet 6 inches high with a flat base and arched roof lined with brick and concrete.

The first engineer in charge was one Joel Lean, who had been involved in the building of the Totley railway tunnel. One of his first acts was to order a 30 inch telescope and theodolite, presumably to enable him to sight the pillars from the observatory. Sadly, Lean died of pneumonia only a year into the project. His tunnel is still operational and the third pillar stands as a reminder of the remarkable work of the men who toiled below ground to bring water to Sheffield.

## **Memories of 1940s and 1950s Ranmoor**

One of our members now living outside Sheffield contacted us recently and delighted us with recollections of the time

when she and her family lived in Ranmoor. She still occasionally visits and recounts fond memories of the Ranmoor area. Some of these may spark a chord with other members of the Society.

Living not far from Snaithing Farm and she clearly remembers the pond below the farm close to Belgrave Road where she fished for tadpoles back the 1940's. This pond remained a magnet for generations of local children until the current modern houses were built here. In those days Belgrave Road was quiet with very little traffic and therefore safe enough for her and her brother to enjoy riding their bicycles. On the opposite side was Snaithing Brook (now Ranmoor Hall) where the mounted police horses were stabled. There were occasions when she could see the police horses being re-shod by the visiting blacksmith. She also remembers Mr Lockwood who lived further along Belgrave Road, a keen gardener, who opened his garden to the public each year.

In those days Snaithing Farm was still a working farm and her memories of haymaking there are still vivid. The Front Field was used to grow grass for the animals and at harvest time the cut hay was a great temptation for children to play in when they tossed it around and made dens. Hay was cut in the traditional way using a well sharpened scythe. The hay was tossed and raked together when dry with sturdy wooden hay rakes.



Kate (82) and Nora Creswick (80) still using scythes in 1965. The Creswicks who farmed Snaithing Farm used to come and cut the acre of grassland at their home and would then take the hay back to the farm by horse and cart. After adding it to the hay from his other fields Frank Creswick would expertly build it into haystacks in the farmyard.

Other Ranmoor residents may remember John Twigg (1874-1954). His family farmed Hagg Farm on Stephen Hill where the allotments are now. As a close friend of the Creswicks he regularly helped out at Snaithing Farm at harvest time. On these visits Mr Twigg preferred to sleep in the hayloft above the stables, maintaining that he enjoyed the warmth and the sweet smell of the hay and the company of the horses, Captain, Polly, Gip and Violet.

Snaithing Farm with Frank Creswick's haystacks as remembered



Both photos courtesy of Stuart & Anne Barratt

Inevitably her wartime memories are still strong. The family kept two pigs for fattening which they fed on scraps and peelings, obtained from the canteen at her father's steelworks. Of course the pigs were eventually slaughtered and one was shared with their neighbour. Her mother, not being a countrywoman, found dealing with the meat difficult at first, but soon became proficient.

The family also kept hens and preserved any surplus eggs using isinglass. They did their shopping at Nether Green and Ranmoor which offered a good selection of shops including Broughton's for groceries and Pollards, who sold tea and coffee. Inevitably during wartime there were often queues but although the City of Sheffield suffered terrible devastation the family home in Ranmoor suffered no damage.

## Robert Marnock & Ranmoor

In the 1870s the development of Ranmoor was accelerating as wealthy industrialists began recognising the value of cleaner air and pleasant surroundings away from grimy Sheffield. They built their fine mansions mainly along the Fulwood Road axis but they were less keen on having the original countryside or farmland right on the doorstep. They preferred to set their residences within attractive "pleasure gardens" that echoed the landscaped parks of the aristocracy. They also yearned for specimen trees and plants, with water features, statues and obelisks carefully arranged among them. Perhaps even a lodge at the main entrance.

Most of Sheffield's industrialists in the 1870s knew immediately that Robert Marnock was the man to approach. His services were secured in quick succession by Edward Firth at *Tapton Edge* (now "The Laurels" care home), Frederick Mappin at *Thornbury* (now the private hospital), William Howson at *Tapton Park* and his business partner James Harrison at *Tapton Grange* (now apartments and houses on Tapton Park Road) and William Brittain at *Storth Oaks* (now Phoenix House refuge).

Although Marnock by this time must have been approaching retirement he had an auspicious career in landscape gardening behind him. He had become a renowned exponent of the "Gardenesque" style, as it was called, where trees and shrubs were planted in such a way as they could be treated individually and viewed with awe by owner and visitor alike. This idea had been fuelled by the introduction of exotic plants brought back from far-flung parts of the world by Victorian plant collectors.

Robert Marnock had been born in 1800, the son of an Aberdeenshire crofter. As the third of nine children he probably needed to move away from home and by age 25 he had become the head gardener at Bretton Hall near Wakefield (the grounds of which are now incorporated into the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. At this time Bretton Hall was owned by Colonel Thomas and Diana Beaumont, the illegitimate daughter of Sir Thomas Wentworth who had died in 1792. Diana gardened her 30 acres obsessively and it was here that Marnock helped her create garden features such as arbors, statuary and trellis work and generally honed his landscape gardening skills.

Diana Beaumont died in 1831 and soon after Marnock was encouraged by J. C. Loudon, the Scottish botanist and landscape designer, to move from Bretton to improve himself and this was how came to Sheffield. In the early nineteenth century, before the establishment of public parks many English provincial towns started to see subscription botanic gardens as a way of providing a recreational resource for the upcoming middle classes. In June 1833 Sheffield's Master Cutler called a public meeting to air concerns about the lack of public facilities for healthy recreation and self-education in Sheffield. The upshot was a decision to create a botanical garden. £7,500 was raised through shares and 18 acres of south facing farmland was purchased from the Wilson family, the snuff makers.

The following year Sheffield Botanical and Horticultural Society advertised a competition for laying out the grounds. The submitted plans were judged by experienced gardeners and not only did Marnock enter and win but he was then made responsible for carrying out the design. By 1836 he was appointed its first curator at a salary of £100 per annum.

He laid out the gardens in the then highly fashionable "Gardenesque" style characterised by trees, shrubs and plants each positioned to create a striking display. Its hallmark is scattered plantings, open grass areas, long structured views, and 'natural' landscapes with flowing contours using mounds as viewpoints. The Botanical Gardens were acknowledged to be the best of their kind in Great Britain, The iconic glass pavilions probably resulted from the collaboration between the giants of landscaping at the time, Marnock, Paxton and Loudon.

When Sheffield Botanical Gardens suffered financial difficulties soon after opening in July 1836 Marnock moved to London. He first worked as a nurseryman in Hackney and then applied successfully to design the Royal Botanic Society's garden, at the Inner Circle of Regent's Park. He became the garden's curator from 1839 to 1863, and began enjoying recognition as one of the leading landscape gardeners of the day earning public and private commissions across the country and abroad.

He left this post in 1863 but continued to practice his profession as a landscape gardener until 1879. It was during this time that he returned to Sheffield for the commissions referred to above including one for Sheffield Corporation who employed him to transform the grounds of Weston Hall for use as a public park. In September 1875, both were officially opened as Weston Park and Museum. Robert Marnock is also known to have laid out the Anglican section of the Sheffield General Cemetery added to its Nonconformist part in 1848.

## Committee 2020

|            |                 |               |
|------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Chairman   | Mike Killingley | 263 0454      |
| Secretary  | Gerald Eveleigh | 230 1992      |
| Treasurer  | Nick Morris     | 07515 889 394 |
| Archive    | Peter Warr      | 230 9174      |
| Planning   | David Barber    | 230 4717      |
| Membership | Peter Marrison  | 230 3238      |
| General    | Wendy Woodhouse | 449 5777      |
|            | Helen Sweet     |               |