

# Skelmersdale Heritage Society



## Quarterly Newsletter

Hello again to our members. Well here comes autumn, with cosy evenings for you to put your feet up, have a cup of tea and enjoy reading the Newsletter (I hope).

Firstly an apology about the last newsletter which stated that July's guest speaker would be Brian Topping with 'Tales of a Customs Officer. I'm afraid I got the dates mixed up and it should have been Les French's talk about Frank Hornby of model train and Meccano fame. I think those of you who attended enjoyed Les's talk anyway; it was so interesting, and wasn't it good of him to let us handle some of his rare and valuable models? Marianne Howell's repeat presentation on the life of local highwayman George Lyon was also well received. Thank you to those of you who braved the winds of Storm Floris to attend our Annual General Meeting in August. The post AGM poetry readings by Carol Fenlon and the Skelmersdale Writers Group were well appreciated and were an interesting change to our usual History themed nights.

As you can see, Brian Topping's talk about his experiences as a Customs Officer will happen on 1<sup>st</sup> September, and having read about some of his background it looks as though this will be a very entertaining evening for us.

A date for your diary - Our October meeting will not be on the first Monday of the month as usual; unavoidable circumstances mean we will be having it on 13<sup>th</sup> October instead.

## AUTUMN MEETINGS

All at The Wardens Club, Blaguegate Lane, Lathom WN8 8TX

**Monday 1<sup>st</sup> September, 7pm**

Guest Speaker Brian Topping, 'Tales of a Customs Officer'

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October, 7pm**

Guest Speaker Megan Roberts, 'Transported'

**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> November**

Lancashire Night with entertainment by 'Trouble at 'Mill' followed by hot-pot supper, (free to Members and £5 to non-members)

After this there will be no further meetings until February 2026

## **Our Mining Past Display**

On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2025 there will be a display of our photographs, maps, and artifacts related to Skelmersdale's mining history. This will be at the High Street Methodist Church from 12pm to 4pm. Refreshments will be available.

## By the way....

Accessibility: We want all our members to have full access to our meetings, and to be comfortable while they are there. If there is anything we need to do for you to make this happen, please have a word with one of the committee, identifiable by their blue and white name badges. We know that sound quality is not always as good as it should be, but we are hoping to rectify that soon with the purchase of a new and better microphone.

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*Skelmersdale in the autumn. The large building in the centre is the 'Old Toby', formerly Skelmersdale Hall Farm. We are certainly not short of trees in Skem.*

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## We need your input!

Contributions for future editions of the Newsletter will be most welcome. We would love you to be involved. Skelmersdale Heritage Society would not exist without your stories, photos, memories, artifacts and interviews. If you have something you would like to see in the Newsletter, please send your idea to the Skelmersdale Heritage Email address, with the subject 'FAO Shirley'. Our address is [skelmersdaleheritage@gmail.com](mailto:skelmersdaleheritage@gmail.com)

## What we've been doing.

As usual we have been quietly working away at our usual activities to do with preparing display materials, answering queries, sourcing artifacts, running Facebook, booking guest speakers, research and preparation for the Newsletter, continued research and writing for our WW1 project, keeping tabs on the finances and so on. Not much really! The past three months have actually not been quite as busy as usual as far as meetings go - just a few, as follows.

**'The Miner's Peg'** summer display was held on 21<sup>st</sup> June and was very well received. The theme of the display was Coal Mining, as much of Skelmersdale is built over a huge network of old mine workings, and many original 'Skemmers' will have had coal miners among their ancestors. We have arranged to do a repeat of this display in October in the High Street Methodist Church. This time we will try to include information about the female colliery workers of Skelmersdale; it seems there were quite a few, not working down the mines, but at the pit heads screening coal.

**Miners' Memorial:** In June we met with Cllr. Devine on the grassed area opposite the War Memorial at the bottom of Sandy Lane. This plot had been earmarked as a potential place for a 'Veterans' Memorial Garden, and would seem to be a good place to also have our long-awaited Mining Memorial. Talks and plans are ongoing, but we will keep you informed as things develop. The next stage will be to consider what type of memorial would be best (and achievable), and perhaps come up with a shortlist of ideas.

In June we also met with the Community Liaison Officer of West Lancs CVS Funding. The meeting was about accessing Crowdfunding to put towards the Mining Memorial. We will not put in an application until we are further on with the necessary formalities.

On the theme of Mining, we recently met with Stewart Lindsell of the Ecumenical Centre who is keen to extend the small mining display in their entrance. A great deal of interest has been shown in this, so we plan to do more research and produce display materials for them on a range of coal mining topics.

We have not made any school visits during the summer, but have provided Cobbs Brow Primary with information packs to support their work on Skelmersdale in World War 2.

John Thompson has again been busy with his modelling skills (making models I mean – nothing to do with catwalks!), his latest excellent creation being of the old corn mill that stood just near the Tawd down Mill Lane.

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Did anyone visit the Green Fayre in July? I would have loved to have gone but was away on holiday that week. It looks like it was a well-attended and very enjoyable event. Nice to see our Viking origins celebrated.

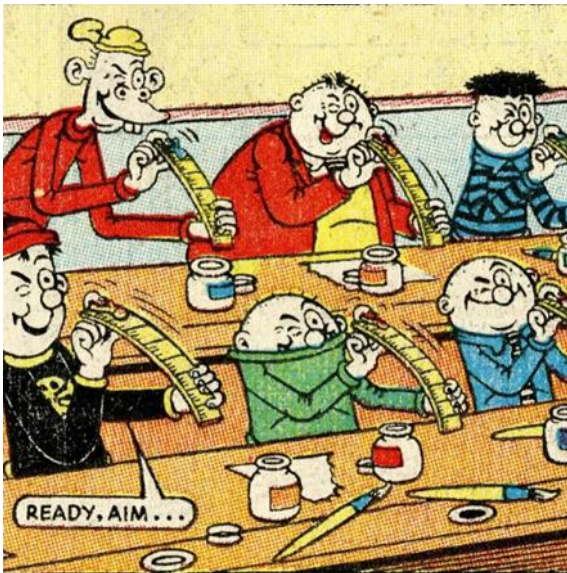


I'm sure they are very nice people really!

*Thank you to the West Lancs Borough Council Ranger Service for allowing us to use their picture.*

## Long ago, not far away.

**Naughty Boys** – sorry, I mean children with challenging behaviour.






A few weeks ago Crow Orchard School, formerly the 'Endowed', kindly gave Julie permission to scan and copy their collection of old documents – a very interesting addition to our archives. One of these items was the 'Punishment Book', listing thirty years worth of misdemeanours from the 1920s to the 50s.

I couldn't help but chuckle when I read some of the entries. I hope you find them amusing too.

As some of the pupils are still alive, to save their blushes I have not included full names – but you know who you are...just saying!

Just for the record, my sympathy is with W.G.

<b>PUNISHMENT BOOK</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Offence</b>		<b>Amount of Punishment</b>
<b>Date</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> February 1928	E.D.	13	Striking match and placing it up a boy's trousers to burn his leg		2 strokes on either hand
13 <sup>th</sup> September 1932	T.B.	13	Passing note containing bad language in class		1 stroke each hand
14 <sup>th</sup> June 1934	R.R. & J.T.	13 & 12	These two boys visited G'port Baths for instr. In charge of Miss Pearce. When Miss Pearce went to the Girls' Bath the boys absented themselves without leave and went for a walk.		3 strokes on seat
9 <sup>th</sup> Nov 1934	L.M.	12	Putting soap in inkwells		1 stroke each hand
20 <sup>th</sup> June 1935	R.W.	11	Putting caterpillars down backs of small boys		1 stroke each hand
Nov 1935	W.G.	8	Playing and wasting time when he should have been doing arithmetic		? strokes on seat
19 <sup>th</sup> March 1936	E.P.	13	Throwing ink		1 stroke each hand
27.4.53	E.P.	10 <sup>3/12</sup>	Playing 'trains' with school furniture whilst setting up for meals		1 stroke each hand
7.5.53	D.T.	9 <sup>8/12</sup>	Sliding on hall floor after many warnings		1 stroke on hand
14.5.53	N.F.	8 <sup>6/12</sup>	Bringing tar into school and playing with it under desk		1 stroke on hand
19.3.54	R.H.	10 <sup>7/12</sup>	Uncouth behaviour in accusing another boy of having lice in his head		1 stroke on hand
8.9.58	L.B. & E.P	12	Singing in class while teacher engaged with Police Officer		Cane on hand, 1 stroke
9.9.58	E.P. & H.G.	14, 12	Putting hand in mouth and flicking spittle over each other		1 stroke each hand



## My treat – what'll you 'ave?

In February 1917 Skelmersdale police officers were involved in a little known undercover operation, but what villany was afoot? Was this to collar vicious criminals, or to break a serious organised crime ring? On the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> two police officers disguised themselves as miners (flat caps and blackened faces maybe?), and entered the Victoria Hotel at the bottom of Sandy Lane. While sipping their drinks and keeping a wary eye open it was not long before they spotted the suspected criminal activity – the horrendous crime of a man buying a round - or 'treating' his mates! I know, I couldn't believe it either.

It seems that during the years of World War 1 there were worries that the amount of alcohol being consumed was hampering the war effort in both industry and the services. Men on leave would not be at their best if they had been 'treated' too generously. As a consequence parliament, under the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA), brought in a 'Liquor Control Order' which meant that buying a drink for someone other than yourself would be against the law. This situation lasted through the war years, so hard luck if you were a bit short of cash after your shift down the pit.

The policemen in disguise observed the barmaids ignoring this law and serving five men with rounds of drinks for friends, but due to their age and inexperience they were let off fairly lightly. The officers also gained evidence of illegal betting being carried out on the premises. One miner had complained that he had only been drinking a 'lemon dash' (nowadays we would call it a shandy), and this raised a smile in the courtroom.

The upshot of this was that all concerned were given fines totalling £45. An expensive round indeed!

AN EXPENSIVE "ROUND."  
BREACHES OF THE LIQUOR CONTROL  
ORDER AT SKELMERSDALE.  
POLICE DISGUISED AS COLLIERS.  
Richard Molyneux, licensee of the  
Victoria Hotel, Skelmersdale, was sum-  
moned, in five instances, for permitting  
treating, Maggie Powell, barmaid (in four  
instances), and Elizabeth Hulme, daughter  
of the licensee, with supplying the drink ;  
Daniel Lawrence (in four instances) with  
treating ; and James Thompson, Thomas  
Swift, Joseph Robinson, John Lyon, and  
Henry Alty with being treated. James  
Thompson was also summoned for betting  
on licensed premises.



*Ormskirk Advertiser , 8<sup>th</sup> March 1917*

## Upholland Railway Station – where exactly is it?

Many years ago, I was having a pint in the Owl Inn in UpHolland one afternoon, when a stranger came in and asked for directions to UpHolland station.

After we had explained, drawn him a sketch map, and sent him on his way, the landlady asked 'Why on earth is UpHolland station so far from the village?'

Owd Bert, who always sat in the corner and rarely spoke, looked up from his copy of the Daily Mirror and said: 'Appen they wanted it near t'railway line'.

He then resumed his study of the racing page without another word.



'The Owl' on Parliament Street, Upholland. Still there but no longer a public house.



*The station is on Pimbo Lane*

Thanks to Roy Hunt of Wigan World for this anecdote, and to Joan Neville for discovering it.



## The Orme Mill

Situated in Taylor Street, opened 1906 first named the **Merdale Mill** then it changed to **The Orme Mill** in 1914 and was modernised in 1946 by the **Co-op society** but closed in 1958 and became **F.E. Callow Ltd** and later the **T.P.T.**

Thank you to Geoff Boden for these photographs and information.

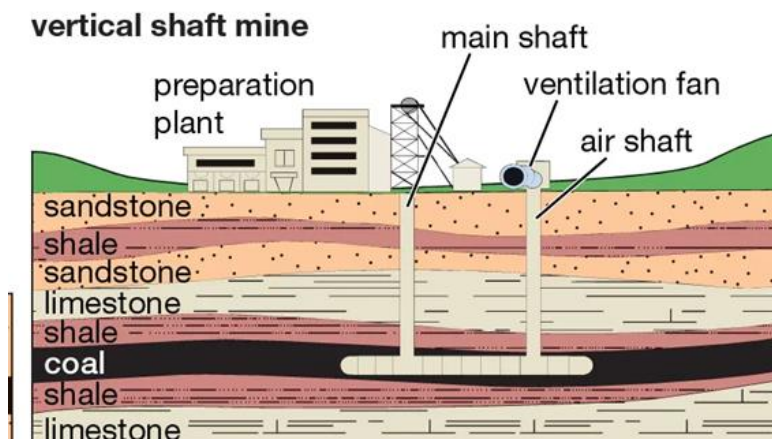
# Upholland – We built this city on rock and coal (Part 1)

By Shirley Carr

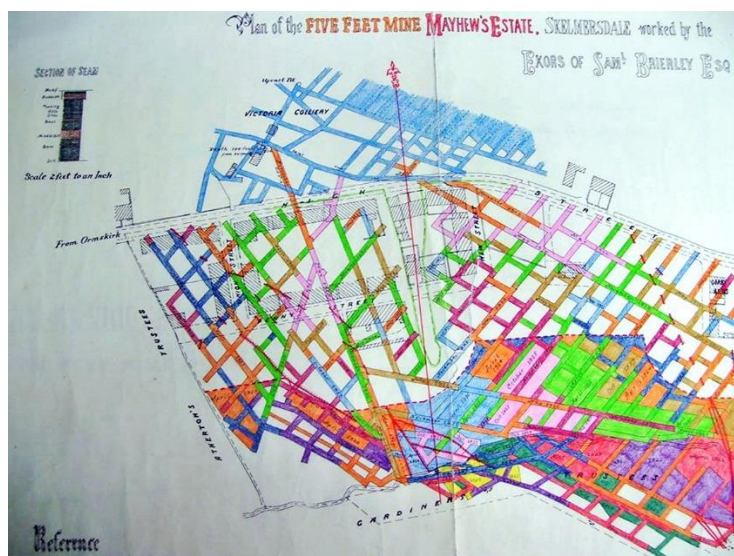
*(With apologies to 'Starship' and the Muppets)*

Yes, I know it's not a city, but allow me some poetic licence!

Before going to Upholland let's start down in Skelmersdale, which is on the eastern edge of the West Lancashire Plain. Much of the land here is covered by a deep layer of 'till', which is loosely formed, left-over material from the Ice Age. Beneath this lie the layers of coal that made for the mining industry and consequent growth of Skelmersdale in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Upholland is also built over these rich seams of coal, which have been extensively mined, resulting in a grid like network of mine workings, still there beneath the town.



Simple diagrams of coal mines such as the one above do not give an indication of the layers of coal seams, or the immense geometrical grid pattern of mine workings running outwards from the main access roadway. These are shown on the colliery rescue maps, some of which can be seen at our mining display at the High Street Methodist Church on 4<sup>th</sup> October this year.



*This map shows a small section of the mine workings beneath Old Skelmersdale*

Upholland's coal seams, known as the 'Gannister Beds', were brought up by the Great Upholland Fault, where huge slices of the ground were pushed or lifted by immense pressure from below. This coal was discovered many years ago, with local 17<sup>th</sup> Century registers naming the occupation 'Coaler' among their lists. This was in the very early days of coal mining when the coal seams could be reached through horizontal workings or shallow bell pits. As the worth of the coal was recognised, and deeper pits were dug the coal mines became an important source of employment in the town. It has not been possible to put an exact figure to the number of men working in Upholland's collieries over the years, especially as they had several different titles for their occupations, such as coal miner, hewer, engine winder, lampman, banksman, dataller and many others mentioned in the Census returns.

A 'snapshot' of the numbers is given in the 1911 Census where thirty-four pages of names of 'coal miners' are given on the 'Ancestry' website. There were thirty-six pages in the 1921 census, and just one page for the 1939 registration. Throughout these years though, agriculture was still the main source of employment, with hundreds of pages of Census returns listing 'Agricultural' or 'Farm Labourer'.

The following is a list of Upholland and Orrell coal mines compiled from various reports by the Inspectors of Mines. It may not be complete as one or two collieries are missing, unless the names have changed over time.

### **Upholland and Orrell**

- Albert, Upholland
- Crawford Day Eye, Upholland (*a 'Day Eye' is a surface entrance to a small mine (drift or adit)*)
- Ditton Brook, Upholland
- Harts Lane Fireclay, Upholland - abandoned August 1945
- Holland Nos 6 and 9, Upholland
- King Edward, Upholland
- Lafford Lane, Upholland
- Lawn's Delf, Upholland
- New Gate, Upholland
- Orrell Hall, Orrell
- Orrell Post, Orrell
- Springfield, Orrell
- Tower Hill, Upholland
- Upholland, Upholland – listed as not working in 1880
- Windmill Dalton, Upholland

As well as coal mining, Upholland has a history of weaving, nail making and shoe making, and because of the town's geological makeup, many were employed in getting stone. We tend to think of open quarries as being the source for building stone, but in addition to its quarries, often known as 'delfs' or 'delphs', Upholland and its surroundings has several underground 'stone mines', giving the opportunity for dangerous and suffocating work, with the risk of developing the lung disease Silicosis.



*Houghton's Delf Quarry / Grimshaw Delf – photo by Joan Neville*

Upholland is built on higher ground than Skelmersdale, on the ridge between Ashurst Beacon and Billinge Hill. The British Geological Survey (BGS) shows that the bedrock of the area is made up of several different varieties of Carboniferous sedimentary rocks – sandstone, siltstone and mudstone, laid down approximately 319 million years ago, and each with their own unique qualities. The list includes 'Milnrow Sandstone' in the southern part of Upholland, 'Great Arc Sandstone' between Pimbo and Tontine and Holcombe Brook Grit Sandstone in the Grimshaw Road area, and an unusual 'dragon's eye' rock formation which has been discovered in one of the old stone mines. Many more examples can be found on the BGS interactive map.

I remember visiting one of Upholland's quarries, 'Hard Rock Quarry' on Wide Cross Road, in 1970. This is where 'Old Lawrence Rock' was quarried, though I am fairly sure our guide at the time told us it was an outcrop of 'Old Red Sandstone' continuing from strata in Yorkshire. An interesting feature was an area of the quarry wall that was clearly twisted and folded due to immense heat and pressure. The quarry is no longer operating.

There is still a working quarry in Upholland, the Ravenhead Brickworks near Chequer Lane. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its layers of sandstones, silts and shales, which give evidence of climate change in the Carboniferous Period. There are plans to restore it in the future.

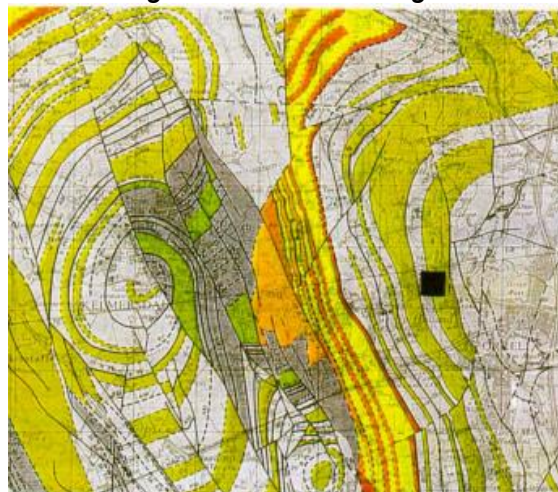


*Aerial view of the Ravenhead Brickworks*

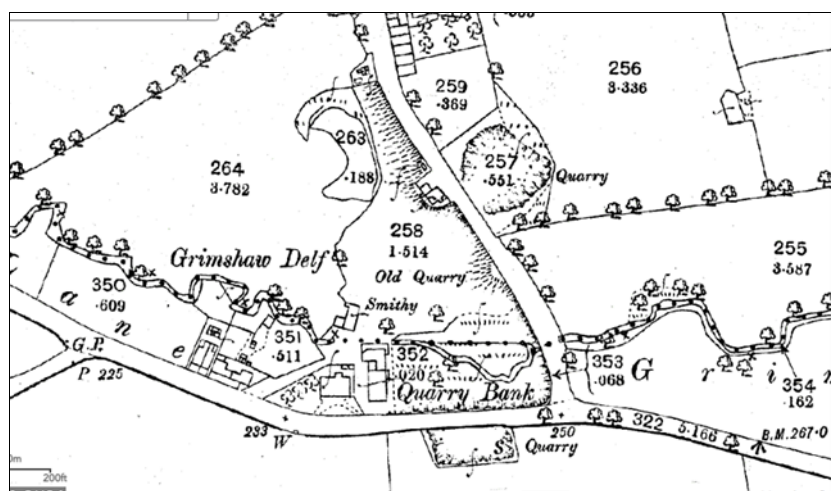


Fossils such as this were discovered by the London Geological Society in 1950. Their visit to the quarries of Upholland caused them great excitement when they realised the significance of their finds. The quarry where this was found is still a Site of Special Scientific Interest, (SSSI).

*'We have, through our geological hammers, seen through the mists of the ages...'*



The Geological map of Upholland above shows the many fault lines, and the variety of sandstones, known as 'flagstone', for which Upholland is famous. The area is also dotted with 'cloughs', the steep sided gorges cut by ice age glacial meltwater. In places the surface layer of soil holds 'Sherdley Hill Sand', blown in from the coast over millions of years.



Part of the 1890 Ordnance Survey map shows a typical Upholland landscape, which was dotted with many quarries old and new. Quarrying has been carried out in the area since Tudor times.

As with the coal mines, it is not possible here to say how many Upholland men have worked in the quarries and stone mines; there were so many different names for jobs linked to the industry: quarryman, delver, stonemason, stone breaker, labourer at the stone delf, stone delf (earthenware) delph man, rock getter and sett maker to name a few.

Work in the quarries and mines was obviously a dangerous occupation. The 'UK Coal Mines Accidents and Deaths Index' lists accidents in quarries as well as coal mines. Those local to Upholland are too numerous to mention, many involving falls from great height into the quarry, or being hit by falling rock or shards of flying stone. Broken bones were a common occurrence, as was loss of life. A terrible accident in 1928 involved a young man, Robert White, who was horribly crushed when a six-ton block fell onto him; he died instantly of course. A driver, John Mc Lachlan standing nearby was struck by the stone and died later of his injuries. This happened at Stoney Brow, where heavy rainfall in the night had caused the block to break away. Another death occurred in 1900 at Appley Bridge quarry, when a steel rope holding a two-ton stone, broke and dropped its load onto John Yates, age twenty-two, working below.

Over time several quarry bottoms filled with water. In later years these became well-known places for fishing or swimming. Upholland's flooded quarries have claimed the lives of several people, among them Margaret Richardson, a thirty-nine year old woman who was found drowned in a disused Quarry in 1932. She had been released from care in an asylum for a trial period. When she had been missing for two weeks divers searched the quarry near her home and retrieved her body from a depth of 60 feet. Sarah Ellen Kenyon, aged fifty-seven also drowned herself in Blackledge Quarry while 'of unsound mind', but saddest of all was the death of a three year old boy, John Richard Williams, who was purposely drowned by his mother. She had separated from her husband and presumably in despair had intended to kill herself as well, but after she had removed her son's clogs and cap (a red Tam o' Shanter), and thrown him in the water, she lacked the nerve to carry out her plan. She was condemned to death at Liverpool assizes, but was shown mercy and her sentence was commuted to imprisonment.

On a lighter note the Wigan Observer & District Advertiser in 1886, reported that two Upholland miners were walking to work one morning when they heard cries of distress coming from a nearby quarry. They went to investigate and found a man, John Birchall, at the bottom, injured and unable to climb out. Strangely he was in possession of fourteen pigeons, some alive and some dead. The men helped him out, with his pigeons, but he was later to be charged with the theft of the birds. He had stolen them the night before from a Mr Tyrer, while under the influence of drink. Mr Tyrer decided not to press charges and Birchall paid for his misdemeanour with a fine of 10 shillings plus costs, which was lucky for him as pigeon thieves at the time often received stiff jail sentences.



In Part 2 (Winter Edition), we will take a look at the awesome subterranean world beneath Upholland that has resulted from delving for stone.

## PUZZLE PAGE



Can you identify the leaves? All these trees can be found in the Skelmersdale area.

*Image borrowed from Ribble Rivers Trust. Answers in the next Newsletter*

Answers to the Summer Newsletter 'What's Missing?' pictures:

Picture	Missing Item
The Beehive Public House	Telephone Box
Elson Road	Sign over park gate
Cooper's Egg Packing Station	Lorry at the side of the building
Skelmersdale Arms	Chimney
Tommy Morris's garage in Sandy Lane	Mobil petrol sign
Skelmersdale Town Hall	Woman and girl by the railings

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Our website has a wealth of information and a photograph gallery, open to anyone who is interested if you want to let others know about our Society. Copies of all our Newsletters and Skemcasts are also available on the site to members only – but you already know that if you are reading this!

<https://www.skelmersdaleheritage.org.uk>

Our Facebook page also gives up-to-date information about our events, and is a treasury of Skelmersdale memories and photographs.