NEWS

Harrogate Heritage

Looking back: musical memories and our lovely old market hall

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For almost twenty years from 1995, the eminent local historian Malcolm Neesam contributed a series of remarkable articles to the Advertiser, initially under the headline 'Bygone Harrogate' and later using the title 'Our Heritage'. In association with Harrogate Civic Society, we are proud to republish a selection from the series. The views expressed were those of the late Mr Neesam at the time of writing and do not necessarily reflect the current view of the Advertiser or Harrogate Civic Society.

It was about the same time as I acquired my first watch, aged 13 that I really began to appreciate music.

At that time, the basement of the old Harrogate Market contained a music shop known as the Robell Music Box, which had a huge selection of modern long-play gramophone records, whose covers were arranged by manufacturer.

The covers, or sleeves, were empty to prevent theft and to protect the easily-damaged 12 inch, black vinyl gramophone records from being scratched.

I remember Pye Golden Guinea, Decca Ace of Clubs, RCA Victor, and at the top price end, Deutsche Grammophon, Decca, EMI His Master's Voice, and Phillips.

These records usually played at 33 and one-third revolutions per minute, retailing at about 39 shillings each, whereas the smaller 45 revolutions per minute records were much cheaper.

The 45rpm record stand was the best place to examine the latest pop singles, which could be heard in a curious booth containing speakers.

This practice was commonplace at the time and could also be found on the first floor of WH Smith's store in Parliament Street.

To the best of my knowledge, Harrogate never had listening booths as sophisticated as those at Valence's shop on the Leeds Headrow, which provided completely sound proofed glass booths, complete with chairs, where it was possible to spend an entire afternoon listening to record after record!

The Robell Music Box also sold sheet music, usually decorated with garish photographs of the latest pop star.

Near to Robells stood the stall of Green the antique dealer, several ladies outfitters, a leather goods shop, and, in the far corner, the Cravenette Cafe.

Readers may be able to fill in any significant omissions from my survey of the market's basement.

But I must mention the important and imposing figure of Mr Dale, the market superintendent, who could sometimes be seen in his smart black uniform and peaked cap, patrolling the market to ensure all was as it should be.

He occupied the Market Hall flat on the first floor, where the offices of the British Red Cross Society were also located.

The market building was ringed with shops on three of its sides, with the southern side having a delivery bay and storage facility, much the same as the present arrangements.

My earliest memory of the Station Square market shops were of a furniture store called Russells and Gilpins bakers shop. Round the corner in Cambridge Street I recall Tetleys tobacconists, who advertised their presence with a pavement stand full of walking sticks and a life size model Red Indian, complete with painted feather head-dress.

The other side of the steep steps to the inner market was a wonderful grocery shop run by John Farrah of Harrogate, which at the time had a cheese section rivalled only by Standings, round the corner in James Street.

Next door to Farrahs, on the corner of Market Square, was mens outfitter Alexandre, from whom, at the age of 12, I had my first suit, chosen and paid for by my parents, for my sister's wedding.

In Market Place I recall Harman's fish stall, which used to hang an enormous spiked puffer fish over its entrance, and Blamey's flower shop. Here too could be found the County Wallpaper Store, and Burras Peake the tailor.

> *Harrogate never had listening booths as sophisticated as those at Valence's on Leeds Headrow*


OurHeritage

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With Malcolm Neesam

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But it was the interior of the old Harrogate Market that attracted me as a schoolboy.

But why, readers may ask, did such a thriving facility as the old Harrogate Market disappear? In my opinion, there was no single reason behind the loss of the market, but several contributing factors.

It was possibly the arrival of an offer to the council from a developer, which arrived shortly after the financial crisis of the conference centre fiasco had ensured that many council owned buildings were neglected.

Monies which should have gone towards the routine maintenance of these buildings went instead into the conference centre debt.

The consequence of this ensured that when public buildings deteriorated due to natural ageing, full restoration work was not always possible.

When the cost of fully repairing the Market Hall was known, it was then calculated that the rentals would have to be increased considerably if such costs were to be recovered.

This had serious implications for the tenants. If my memory is correct, most of the men and women who worked in the market were cheerful and hardworking souls.

They and their businesses deserved better than the shabby treatment the council gave them when they caved in to the developer's blandishments.

This article was first published on September 6, 2012

A note from Harrogate Civic Society: It is now almost four years since Malcolm's death. He left behind an astonishing body of work that we at the Harrogate Civic Society are determined should be preserved and enhanced for the benefit of future historians and, indeed, for the benefit of anyone who cares about Harrogate.

Not long before his passing, we discussed with Malcolm and the *Advertiser* republishing at least some of his articles.

Many of Malcolm's articles dealt with the history of the town, exploring the people, places and events that

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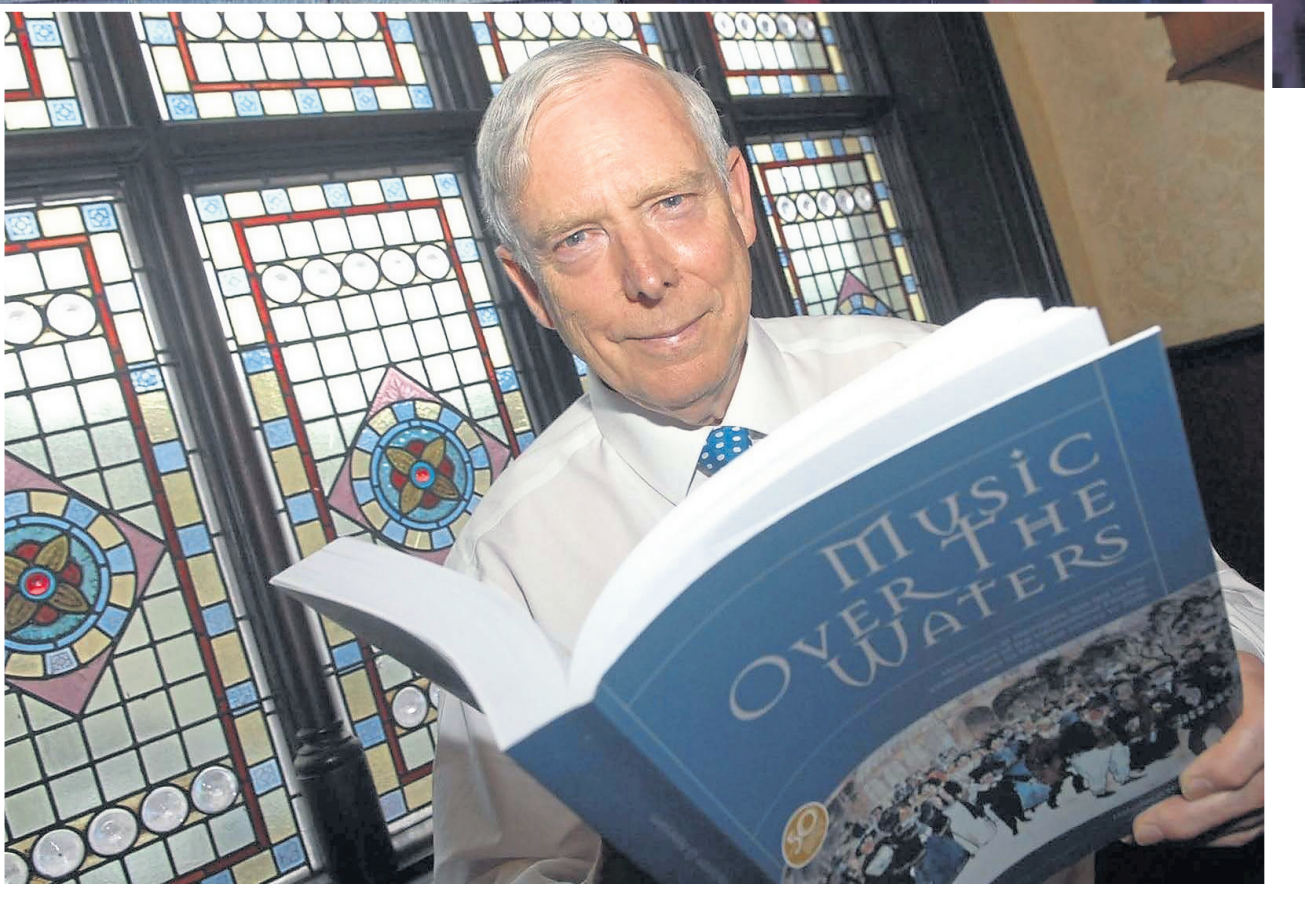

A view of the inside of the old market hall, which closed in 1991, above, and the late Malcolm Neesam, right

helped to form the Harrogate we know today. At other times Malcolm concentrated more on contemporary issues.

While acknowledging that Harrogate could not stand still, he was convinced that change should always be tested.

Last year, the first republication of Mr Neesam's articles appeared and today, the series continues.

We are grateful to Malcolm's family for their approval, to Simon Kent (closely involved with securing Malcolm's legacy) for his work researching and preparing the articles for reprint, for the advice of historian Paul Jennings and to Graham Chalmers and his team at the *Advertiser* for their support and encouragement.

> *Mr Dale, the market superintendent, could be seen in his smart black uniform and peaked cap*

We hope you will enjoy reading (or in some cases re-reading) these irreplaceable snapshots of history.

If you are able to add to our knowledge, or wish to know more about our work, contact us at: history@harrogatecivicsociety.org.