

The Nelson

In the 1950s and 60s the landlord of the Nelson was Godfrey Long, also known as Goff, never John, his first name. Fairly tall, with dark hair, a piercing gaze, strong features and a biggish nose, he resembled a latter-day Heathcliff or a wild Highlander like his Scottish maternal ancestors. In the 2nd World war he had been in the RAF where he no doubt witnessed traumatic events which might explain his gruff, eccentric manner. Godfrey had a soft spot for us children. He was usually willing to hand over to us the 3d deposit money on lemonade bottles we collected even when the lemonade hadn't come from his pub. Sometimes he even gave us sweets.

It's a mystery how Godfrey and his similarly taciturn father managed to make a living from the pub. Godfrey's father had been in South Africa in his youth either working in the goldmines or fighting in the Boer War. He was rumoured to have brought back gold from there. They also had a smallholding which may have helped. There is a story, possibly apocryphal, that Godfrey's grandfather, Old Charlie Long, once had a go at bullfighting. According to the tale it happened one Sunday afternoon after he had perhaps imbibed rather too much beer with his Sunday dinner. He decided to take on the bull which was kept in the back field and waved a coat at it. Unfortunately for Charlie the bull won the ensuing struggle.

The Nelson was primitive, even by 1950s standards. The front door opened onto a narrow bare stone floored corridor which was so dark it was hard to see where it led, which was to a door into the living quarters at the back. The only lighting was through two small glass panels in the top of both six panelled pine doors to the sides of the corridor.

On the left was the 'Best' room. This was rarely entered by anyone; the use of it was actively discouraged by Godfrey. If some hapless customer tried to play the out of tune piano he tended to suggest they might like to leave. On the right was the Public bar. The walls were a pale khaki, probably mostly coloured by years of tobacco smoke deposits. In the winter they might gleam slightly with light reflected by drops of condensation running down the walls. Although there was a fireplace, for most of the year the only form of heating was from the pipes and cigarettes of the hardy bunch of regulars.

Directly opposite the pub was the Non-denominational Saltergate Hill Mission Room whose congregation mostly comprised teetotal ageing ladies who had 'taken the

Pledge' in their youth and therefore viewed the pub as a den of iniquity. We local children were sent to the Mission Room Sunday school to be 'civilised' by learning long pieces of religious verse and singing Sankey's Sacred Songs; it also gave our mothers a chance to cook the Sunday dinner. A few errant husbands might meanwhile slip into the Nelson for a quick pint.

The pub regulars all wore hairy, sometimes well worn and patched jackets that smelled of damp wool, cows, hay and diesel oil. Under these the older ones wore collarless thick coarse cotton twill shirts, originally white, with a narrow dark thread making stripes half an inch or so apart; the younger ones would have worn more modern brushed cotton shirts with attached collars. All sported itchy woollen trousers with button flies, often held up by lengths of sisal baler band and heavy boots. At least one sometimes also wore canvas puttees left over from the 1st World War.

The customers mostly sat around the walls on black bentwood chairs and benches, listlessly shuffling a few dominoes or cards on round tables. The single bare electric lightbulb cast a light so dim it's hard to imagine anyone being able to see to play cards or read a newspaper. Whatever conversation had been going on would cease if a stranger happened to come in. A row of expectant faces would turn in unison and gaze at the newcomer. Usually Godfrey would be sitting behind the bar, leaning forward, his head in his hands. If his Dad was in charge he had to sit on a beer barrel to see over the bar. Sometimes Godfrey, in convivial mood perhaps, would join the row of customers. He often wouldn't rush to get up and serve a customer if he was enjoying a half or talking to someone.

On one occasion he was sitting in the row when a new customer came in. Godfrey evidently didn't like the look of him so he just sat there silently in the row for a while. The man asked if the landlord was about.

"Oh!" said Godfrey, "I think he's gone up the road for a bit."

The regulars all lived within a mile or two and many would walk there. In those days, with much less traffic on the roads, the pub was easily accessible on foot along the tarmac footpath, which was intended to be used by people attending the Mission room. Now sadly, overgrown, it ran all the way along Skipton Road from the Travellers Rest pub to Rowden Lane End. There was also a regular daily bus service to Blubberhouses that passed the pub and the Penny Pot service passed the Travellers

Rest. The few who drove pulled in along the side of the pub or down the track to the farm gate.

The regulars were attracted by the fact that Godfrey's beer was good and he kept it well. Looking after beer in wooden barrels was quite a skilled job especially since Godfrey sometimes left the barrels outside or in the hay barn. They were probably escaping noisy overcrowded farmhouses, needing to relax and enjoy a bit of company after a day's dirty labour, often on their own.

Only a few of those regulars were still around when, thirty years later, long after he had sold the pub, Godfrey died. Not many were left to go to his funeral, where sadly the vicar referred to him throughout by the wrong name.

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