

LOCAL PERSONALITIES (119)

66 YEARS OF COLLECTING HAS GIVEN MR. SIMPSON QUITE A SELECTION OF ANTIQUES

(BY JOHN DAWSON)

If every month for 66 years, a sheet is torn from the calendar, and each one of the 792 sheets is replaced by, and article, an old article, an antique, or possibly two or three, imagine the size of the collection which would be built up. Mr. John Hainsworth Simpson has done this, not strictly to the pattern, but the treasures have been increased, until at the present day, at 89, he has quite a remarkable selection of things from days gone by.

Apart from owning the antiques, Mr. Simpson knows the background details behind them all, some of which date back as far as the year 3998 B.C. His interest extends further than just his own collection, and he likes to learn about anything that is connected with ancient people's, customs and habits.

A member of an old Idle family, Mr. Simpson who now lives at Faltice Cottage, Croft Street, still has the family pedigree, dating back to 1622, which shows that 60 years after that date, John Simpson was the village constable. Mr. Simpson was born in 1873 in a house down Ley Fleaks Road, which he instantly told me meant a field which had been taken from the moorland, and surrounded by a fence to keep in cattle.

It was only four years after his birth, that Mr. Simpson's father was killed whilst working at Blakehill Quarry, which was opposite the present site of the International Harvesters Co. Ltd., on a Good Friday. There was no National Assistance in those days, said Mr. Simpson, so his mother had to bring up four young children on next to nothing. "Dripping and bread was a luxury meal for us in them days," said Mr. Simpson with a smile.

Food was not the only thing Mrs. Simpson had to provide for. When the children started school, all the books had to be bought and at first this was very expensive indeed, although after the first stock had been paid for it was possible to pass them on to the next in line.

FIRST JOB

The end of school came rather earlier than it does nowadays, and Mr. Simpson was only 10 when he went into his first job, part-time at Castle Mills, a spinning and weaving mill in Idle. The half time was increased to full time at the age of 13. This was not really what he wanted for the rest of his life, and so when he was 16 he left the noisy, stuffy, mill for a more varied life, and became an apprentice to E. W. Walker, a painter and decorator at Thackley. He started with a wage of four shillings a week and at the end of his training, lasting five years, he was earning the top wage of 12 shillings.

In 1896, Mr. Simpson married Miss Mary Jane Lane of Titus Street, Saitaire, at Idle Parish Church, and the couple settled down in Idle.

Two years after he was married, Mr. Simpson thought he would secure himself and his wife by taking out a life insurance policy. He had, however to be examined by three doctors, and after a thorough check he was turned

down as being unsuitable for the insurance. "That," he said, "was 54 years ago, and look at me, I am still alive and kicking."

He certainly is alive and kicking and, when I called on him he was just finishing washing up his pots after a meal. He also washes his own clothes, does his housework, shopping keeps his sizeable garden tidy, and even finds time to watch the local cricket match on a Saturday afternoon, read library books which he has borrowed regularly from the Bradford Central Library for 40 years and read a paper every day.

PAINTS HOUSE

Possibly one of the most remarkable of his tasks is the recent completion of the painting of the outside of his house, in smart up-to-date colours. The paints these days are much simpler to use than when he first started, he was glad to say. In the early 20th century, paint was bought in powder form and had to be transformed into applicable paint by mixing oil vigorously into it with heavy stones, liquefying it.

Although painting and decorating was his life in his younger days, soon after he was married he developed a great interest in anything and everything that was old. Names from the Middle Ages also fascinated him, and occasionally the knowledge has come in very useful. When he moved into his present home, in Croft Street, the previous owner of the house told him that the garden would grow nothing but charlocks, which Mr. Simpson presumed were weeds. Mr. Simpson then checked on the name of his house, Faltice, which he had been told originated from a man's name. Somebody must have been wrong for when he returned he had the right answer. Faltice was an old Norwegian name, Fauldal, and it meant a piece of arable land. This convinced him that if the word meant arable land originally, it must be fit for gardening and it was.

Before he moved to Faltice, Thorp Cottage, in Albion Road was Mr. Simpson's home, and he said Thorp was an old Danish word. Sometimes it was spelt with an 'e' at the end and other times this was left off, but that it did not really matter, because like all the names of places, it was the result of many years' corruption, and therefore one letter could not make a great deal of difference. Take the word Idle for instance, the village used to be named after a gentleman, Hyde-Hill who lived in it. The population then increased and the name was reduced to Idell and from that arose the name that it has today, Idle.

ANTIQUES

Moving from Mr. Simpson's interest in words, we get a look at the things which fostered his knowledge, his antiques. From entering his front door, until going out at the back door, past the skeleton of an albatross's head, an Australian Boomerang, and a relatively modern Tanganyikan arrow, there is an olde worlde atmosphere.

Asked what his wife thought about the enormous collection, Mr. Simpson replied that she was a very understanding lady and she could adapt herself to anything if it was what her husband wanted. We can imagine what it was like for anyone keeping the things clean throughout three score years especially if they were arrayed in Mr. Simpson's previous house as they are at present!

On a shelf around the main room, there are many kinds of old and well known types of pottery, including Blue Nankin, and coloured Nankin, about 250 years old, a resplendent Chinese teapot and Spanish Majolica Plates. A number of years ago when Mr. Simpson was in Bedale, in the Yorkshire Dales, he picked up some Pewter Plate, about 200 years old, and that also is on his shelf, for him to admire.

A display cabinet is the next thing to have a look at, and this is filled with literally hundreds of articles from ancient Egypt, the Far East and South America.

To account for all the articles which are full of history and interest would fill a book, so in this story only the minimum of Mr. Simpson's collection can be related.

Among the selection is a Roman Lamp, used to light up the houses in Roman days, Egyptian Spitalas, small containers, ladies carried their make-up around it showed that the making up of the face is not a new idea. As well as the compact, the Egyptian ladies also had a palate on which they mixed their beautifier before applying it. Still in Egypt, Mr. Simpson has a number of Ushabti which were taken from a tomb of about 1400 B.C. These are small replicas of the deceased Lord's servants and were laid by the body presumably to serve the master in the next world. Also taken from a tomb were a pair of shoes, over 3000 years old, and a piece of material which could be mistaken by anyone as rough towelling made in the present day.

Lucky Charms

Lucky charms dating back well before Christ, are so well made that they could be thought to have been made recently. A long stemmed opium pipe lies on the edge of one of the shelves, and it has different fittings like the pipes of today, with replaceable bowls. This is from the Far East. Yet another country on the list is Greece, from where Mr. Simpson has a clay tear bottle with a smooth round shaped top on their eyes, the tears then ran down into a cavity round the base of the bottle. At the end of the funeral, these were then put on top of the tomb in remembrance.

On the floor in the corner of the room, is an Egyptian canopice, which was also taken from a tomb, and this immaculately moulded article with the design scratched onto it depicts Horis the people's God, and was put next to the mummy.

The most treasured possessions of Mr. Simpson, are the Jacobean doors in the house which are

250 to 300 years old, and have been made to fit the frames in all the rooms.

Apart from the shelves and display cabinets, the chairs and tables are also of antique importance, and there is an old Jacobean gate-legged table, and also chait and a dower chest from the same age of wood architecture.

An interest that has become more pronounced since his retirement when Mr. Simpson was 73, is gardening. Before moving, he could boast a flower in bloom a any time of the year. His present garden which he had to begin from scratch when he moved in, is cluttered with a large variety of flowers and shrubs, which show clearly that this man is never idle.

His Family

Mrs. Simpson died in 1945, just before the end of the war, and now Mr. Simpson is the oldest member of a family containing four generations. His only son, William, now living in Winchester, who is the father of two girls and the grandfather of another two was the youngest soldier in the first World War, to win the Military Medal, and the D.C.M.

Mr. Simpson also has two daughters both married. Mrs. F Schofield lives at Bankfoot and has one daughter, and two grand children, and Mrs. E. Hey, who lives at Toller Lane, Bradford, also has a daughter.

Upon leaving this grand old man, who is well known throughout the village of Idle, by young and old, sent me away with one thought, "I am not tired of this world, and I am seeking someone who can show me how to start afresh, if you know anyone who can tell me how to do it tell them to come and see me." And that was from a man who celebrates his 90th birthday next year.