

Second thoughts

As the years passed, the decision to pull down the pinfold continued to trouble some parishioners. It was thought that, with the loss of this site, a part of village history would be forgotten. As it was, the area had become dilapidated and a dumping-ground for the County Council's winter salt. In 1987, the late Joyce Copeland, who was a member of the Parish Council at the time, raised the idea of commemorating the pinfold. Shepherd Homes, who were building the Appleton Court development, decided to carry out the project as a way of putting something back into the community. The company provided the materials and tiled the area that the pinfold had once covered. In 1990, students of York College of Technology designed and erected a plinth to hold two plaques. One was the rescued Coronation plaque - and the other, donated by the Bishopthorpe branch of the Yorkshire Countrywomen's Association, commemorated the pinfold and the restored area.

And now, in 2007, an idea has been fulfilled as part of the Bishopthorpe Crossroads Scheme. A new structure, based on the old pinfold, has been completed with thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund. So take a seat within its walls, take in the history of Bishopthorpe - and remember, among many other things - the pinfold, pinders and pigs!

Linda Haywood



The Pinfold 2007. Photograph by Simon Melton.

Sources

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“Cometh the Pynder”

A History of the Bishopthorpe Pinfold



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A History of the Bishopthorpe Pinfold



This is the only photograph of the old pinfold known to exist. The view was taken in Main Street about 1927 looking towards the junction of Copmanthorpe Lane and Sim Balk Lane. The circular brick pinfold has a backdrop of beech trees and a sign post to the left. It has a wooden gate with a notice pasted on it.

Yf thy horse breake his tedure... than cometh the pynder & taketh hym & putteth hym in the pynfolde ¹

To take an animal that had strayed and lock it into a purpose-built pinfold or pound, was not meant to be an act of kindness to the owner. On the contrary, straying animals were a nuisance to the community; they trampled and consumed growing crops causing considerable damage. All beasts were the responsibility of their owners and impounded animals were released only on payment of a pain [a fine] to the Lord of the Manor who maintained the pinfold.

In the township of Bishopthorpe, the Archbishop of York was Lord of the Manor. His steward held a Court Leet where the jurors presented minor offences and also appointed the pinder from among the local householders. It was his job to secure the offending animals within the pinfold until the fines had been paid at the next court sitting.

Pinfolds were an essential adjunct to mediaeval open fields when grazing was confined to the common land or fields that lay fallow.

This situation changed drastically in the 18th century when land in many townships was enclosed through private Acts of Parliament; mainly for the benefit of the larger land owners and tenants. Grazing land for poorer villagers became scarce and it can only be imagined what hardship this caused.

The pinfold in Bishopthorpe was once a familiar sight. It was situated at the junction of Copmanthorpe Lane and Sim Balk Lane and consisted of a circular brick wall measuring about 1.5m high and 6m in diameter. The entrance faced south-east and was closed with a wooden gate, the key of which was kept by the pinder. The pinfold was probably similar to those that survive in Acaster Malbis and on the Tadcaster Road, near to the Racecourse. It is thought that the Acaster pinfold dates from the eighteenth century. Bricks of the same period were found while digging the foundations for the 'new' Bishopthorpe pinfold in March 2007. It is possible, therefore, that the old pinfold was built around

1757 when the Bishopthorpe Enclosure Act was introduced. This meant that the local landscape changed: the former 'open' fields and common land were now surrounded with hedges and grazing animals were strictly 'out of bounds'.

Of pigs and piggeries

However, keeping animals from the crops was only part of the problem. Gardens in the 'town street', or Main Street as it is now known, were not enclosed until 1828. During a time when almost every villager kept pigs in a piggery at the rear of his home, a neighbour's roaming animal could have caused havoc. In 1811 the rules of Bishopthorpe Manor demanded, "That every person suffering their Pig or Pigs to go or run in the Townstreet shall pay for each offence: 3s 6d [17½p]". A few months earlier, the pinder was kept busy when five local labourers were each fined 2s 6d [12½p] and another two, 3s 6d [17½p] each, for allowing the town street to become a playground for their pigs. This was when a labourer's weekly wages were just a few shillings more than these sums.

A new lease of life

The pinfold eventually became obsolete as a temporary pound for straying animals. In 1901, the Parish Council agreed to take over responsibility for the structure from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners at a nominal charge of 1 shilling per annum. However, the question of what was to be done with the pinfold ran for the next sixty years. Initially local joiner Walter Johnson installed wooden seating inside the brick wall, the intention being to use it as a place for weary villagers to rest.

When the West Yorkshire Road Car Co. ran a service from York to the village, the pinfold became a bus stop. The junction at Sim Balk Lane and Main Street used to be much narrower with the Almshouses positioned at the corner. The pinfold was considered to be an obstruction to modern traffic and in 1933 was damaged by a bus. Eventually, the front part of the wall was removed. New benches were fixed inside but the remaining semi-circular shape made it, in the words of one former resident, "... a draughty, but recognisable Bus Stop". The Parish Council tried for years to erect a bus shelter within the pinfold (i.e. with a roof), but the ideas put forward were either too costly or did not meet with the approval of the West Riding County Council.

The junction at Sim Balk Lane and Copmanthorpe Lane was once thought of as a pretty area with a group of "... lovely old beeches, which were later cut down in their prime". Apparently, contractors laying the new sewerage scheme in 1949 were responsible for this "wanton" destruction.

This was remedied a few years later when the Bishopthorpe Gardening Association planted six trees in the field behind the pinfold, as part of the village Coronation celebrations in June 1953. A plaque commemorating the event was fixed to the pinfold wall and duly unveiled with a union flag by Lt.-Col. Tyndale of The Laurels.

A white elephant?

The pinfold saw some difficult times: In the rebellious nineteen-sixties, rockers with motor bikes gathered there leaving much litter to be disposed of; while the equally rebellious milk dealer, Cloughtons, stored unsightly crates of empty bottles on the site. A further indignity befell the pinfold when a teacher from the school used it as a car park. All such incidents left the Parish Clerk with a surfeit of correspondence to deal with.

Eventually, through the lack of funds and, possibly the lack of will, the semi-circular remains of the pinfold were demolished. The Parish Council of 1966 could not make up its mind whether it had a white elephant or a structure of historical importance. The pinfold had fallen into such a state of disrepair that, at first, it was decided to obtain three estimates in order to knock it down - and rebuild it! The estimates were put to one side while the Parish Clerk wrote to the Ministry of Works to ask if the pinfold could be scheduled as an Ancient Monument. If not, he asked whether the department would make a grant towards its upkeep. The Ministry's silence was deafening.

The Parish Council dithered for two years and, finally, following a discussion at the AGM of 1968, agreed that the pinfold was a "... source of danger and an eyesore". The high cost of remedial work was considered prohibitive and a deal was struck with Mr. Leslie Simpson, son of well-known local builder W. J. Simpson, to demolish the structure for £20.

¹ John Fitzherbert, *A newe tracte or treatyse moost profitable for all husbnde men*, 1523.