

THE WARESIDE TREACLE MINES

Mrs Yvonne Lee of Bakers End writes in response to the article by Mr Birne in the Spring 1996 issue -

As a fellow historian, I read with interest in the Spring issue of the Waresider "An historical investigation by Basil Birne" entitled "When Ware Fed the World", referring to the famous Wareside treacle mines. Although I am too young to remember the mines, I do remember with affection my Grandfather, who would sit me on his knee when I was a child and tell me stories of his happy years spent toiling in the very same mines.

As a lad, my Grandfather would set off bright and early with pick axe over his shoulder, singing happily (if a little out of tune): "High ho, High ho, To the treacle mines I go. I dig the stuff till I'm out of puff, High ho, High ho." For many years he worked deep underground in those sticky mines, and would often bring home the fruits of his labours which he had carefully concealed in his lunch box. Of course, this was strictly forbidden but times were hard and Grandfather had a large family to feed.

In his article, Basil Birne recalls the summer of 1928 when seventeen face workers were cut off from the access shafts for two weeks by a massive treacle flow. My Grandad was one of the poor unfortunates to be trapped and had to survive on raw, untreated treacle. He was so stuck-up when he finally ate his way out that he never really recovered.

Sometimes, when money was short, he would sell smuggled treacle to Mrs^{widdy} Waddy, who, as every true Waresider knows, used to sell delicious treacle toffee from her home in Red Lion Yard. Although it was supposed to be top secret, there was a thriving bootleg trade, which very senior Waresiders might well remember. Some made a pretty packet out of this racket, but others were discovered and the treacle was recovered.

When Grandad came home very sticky, he found the only way to remove his clothes was to soak for half an hour in a warm bath, which made the treacle float to the top of the water, to be removed and re-cycled as wallpaper paste or for sticking new soles on worn-out boots.

When, in 1923, shares in the mines were offered as a way of generating extra money, Grandad bought a dozen at sixpence a share, a fair sum in those days. We still have them somewhere, tucked away, gathering dust in an old tin box, now completely worthless.

Thank you, Basil Birne, for bringing to our attention that false teeth, given to miners who had rotted their own as a direct result of eating too much treacle, are now extremely valuable collectors items. Luckily we kept Grandad's false teeth as an affectionate reminder of him and now intend to take them for valuation when the Antiques Roadshow comes to town.

I hope you have enjoyed my recollections and perhaps have your own stories and personal memories you would like to share of Wareside's unique and historic past.