



Friday 9th February 2018

Childhood adventurers revisit tunnel

Nowadays their antics would be condemned by officialdom, but times were very different back then. On 11th February 1960, 12-year-olds Kathleen Leonard and Trudy Baxendale joined four of their school mates to walk through the disused railway tunnel under Queensbury, West Yorkshire, almost one-and-a-half miles in length. It was an exploit that left them cold, wet and frightened, until sanctuary was found in a house close to the northern entrance. The police, their parents and a newspaper reporter then arrived.

Almost 58 years later, Kathy and Trudy (now Daveney and Bradburne) have made an emotional first return to the tunnel to recount their experience. The visit was arranged for a second collection of filmed interviews - entitled 'Reflections' - which the Queensbury Tunnel Society has produced in its campaign to save the Victorian structure for future use as part of a cycle path network.

There was deep snow on the ground when the six girls left school at 3:30pm and headed to the tunnel. Trudy had planned the trip and Kathleen borrowed her father's torch, but the pair were unaware of what might lay ahead of them. "I don't think we had any idea really, how bad it could be," suggests Kathy. "My biggest memory is all the water coming down a big vent. We had to breathe in and go around it. I cried and they all took the mickey out of me because I wanted to go back all the time."

Expecting the trip to last half-an-hour, it was well after 6:00pm when they finally emerged into the deep cutting close to the site of Queensbury's former station. Darkness had fallen and the torch was no longer working. Exhausted and bedraggled, they clambered up the hillside, attracted by the lights of a house. The lady who answered the door took pity on them, offering soup and pairs of her husband's socks. She rang Trudy's father who informed the police that all six were safe; reunions then followed.

The story appeared in the following day's Halifax Courier and, after the police turned up, school was buzzing with news of their escapade. "We were called to the Headmaster's office," recalls Trudy. "He was telling us off but he had a twinkle in his eye. He said 'What were you thinking?' I remember being asked that question by my parents when I got home. I didn't know the answer then and I don't know the answer now!"

Kathy and Trudy's contribution will appear next Thursday - one of five videos to be published during the week on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as well as the Queensbury Tunnel Society's website. They will cover broad themes - Cycling, Campaign, Engineering, Memories and Politics - with a new one being released each morning.

On Monday, Mike Babbitt, Head of Network Development at Sustrans, describes how valuable disused railway structures are in developing cycle paths, because of "the magnificent legacy Victorian engineers left us. They flattened out the hills and the valleys," he asserts.

Wednesday's video features Peter Harris, a highly-respected tunnel engineering specialist, who looks at the condition of Queensbury Tunnel and how it can be repaired. "Having seen other problems of a



similar nature developing elsewhere - and seen how some contractors have approached solutions, safely and carefully - then I do know that it can be done.”

Andrew Senior, a Conservative Councillor in Queensbury ward, appears on Friday. His Motion in support of the campaign was recently backed by a full meeting of Bradford Council. “Once I found out that [the tunnel] was potentially going to be gone in June and will be lost forever, I just felt that I needed to stand up,” he states.

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, features in Tuesday’s video. She says: “Kathy and Trudy are the real stars. It was a joy to meet them and hear their story. The memories clearly came flooding back - like it was yesterday - as we walked with them up the cutting, 58 years after they were last there. It was quite emotional for all of us.

“Distant officials see Queensbury Tunnel as a relic - a historic liability to be torn from the landscape and devoid of any value. We know that it’s embedded in our social history and could be again. Future generations must have the opportunity to enjoy adventures just like Kathy and Trudy did. We cannot allow a lack of vision to deprive them of that.”

A short trailer featuring clips from the five interviews can be viewed at youtu.be/2kA_mHo0CQ8.

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To link to the trailer for the ‘Reflections’ series or embed it on your webpage:

(Link) https://youtu.be/2kA_mHo0CQ8

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/2kA_mHo0CQ8?rel=0" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" allowfullscreen></iframe>`

A collection of high-resolution photos for Media use is available from:

www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/media/imagery.shtml

More general information on the campaign is available from:

www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/

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Notes for editors

Queensbury Tunnel was built by the Great Northern Railway between 1874 and 1878 as part of the Halifax, Thornton & Keighley Railway. Work was initially expected to take two years but was delayed significantly by two of the seven construction shafts having to be abandoned due to water ingress. At least ten navvies lost their lives during the work.

The tunnel, which is 2,501 yards (2,287 metres) long, opened to freight traffic in October 1878 and passenger trains in December 1879. The line between Holmfield and Queensbury, which included the tunnel, was officially closed on 28th May 1956. Track lifting took place in 1963.

Queensbury Tunnel would be the longest in the UK to host a shared path if the proposal to reopen it for such a purpose is successful. Currently Combe Down Tunnel in Bath holds that position at 1,829 yards (1,672 metres). The longest in Europe is the 2,931-yard (2,680 metres) Uitzu Tunnel on the Plazaola Greenway in northern Spain. However plans are being developed to restore Rhondda Tunnel in South Wales for cycle path use; this has a length of 3,443 yards (3,148 metres).

The Historical Railways Estate (HRE), part of Highways England, is responsible for inspecting, maintaining and limiting the liability associated with more than 3,000 disused railway bridges, abutments, tunnels, cuttings, culverts and viaducts. HRE's remit was formerly fulfilled by BRB (Residuary) until its abolition on 30th September 2013.