

BYGONES

This week's Bygones contributor is Neil Collingwood who was born in Junction Road, Leek.

He has a BSc (Hons) in Applied Biology and is keen on studying both birds and dragonflies.

He became interested in local history during a six-month contract as a museum attendant in Newcastle Borough Museum after finishing his degree.

He did not even have a GCSE in history but when he was shown some old photos his life changed overnight.

He offered to catalogue the museum's photographic archive and ended up staying for seven or eight years, working as a voluntary archivist as well as working full-time elsewhere.

He also attended a local history evening class for five years.

He has now published twelve local history books most for two international publishers and consisting largely of photographs but his real passion is in research and producing books that "bust" myths and reveal previously unknown facts about the area of Leek and its surroundings. He is also available for slide talks.



A rarely seen view of the Ball Haye Hall Stable Yard and its fleet of the Hall's horse-drawn vehicles.

A Hall family holiday photo showing a bathing machine advertising Pear's Soap "for the complexion".



The two John Halls of John Hall's house

AS Catherine Walton said on October 25, John Hall, of Brough Nicholson & Hall, never owned Ball Haye Hall and his family lived there for only forty-eight of its 175-year history.

This may be a surprise to those who have always called the house "John Hall's" but what may also surprise people is that there were actually two John Halls, father and son, living there.

The story of Ball Haye continues this week with a brief look at these men.

John Hall senior was born at Crowgutter Farm, Ipstones in 1840 where he lived with his father Thomas Alexander, mother Anna and one servant.

The substantial farmhouse still stands today, and has no fewer than eight bedrooms.

John was still there in 1851 but ten years later his father had died and the family had moved to Stockwell Street, Leek where John was employed as a silk warehouseman.

In 1865 John married Sarah Marie Howe who had been born at Bulogne sur Mer near Calais.

They had a Civil Marriage in Leek, possibly because Sarah was Roman Catholic whereas John was a leading Wesleyan Methodist, a trustee of West Street Wesleyan Sunday School and a keen fund-raiser for Wesleyan Methodist missionary work.

By 1871 John and Sarah lived at 39 Queen Street, the house occupied today by Sigley's Undertakers.

John was now a silk manufacturer and had three children, including two-year-old John Howe Hall, and two servants.

As soon as there was any possibility of

confusion between the two Johns, John Junior began to be called "Howe" by the family and once employed in the family business became "Mr Howe" to employees, and people outside the family circle.

In legal documents though he always had to be recorded as John H Hall.

In 1881 John and Sarah Hall were living somewhere at Ball Haye Green with their three children Kate, later a keen photographer, Agnes and Bernard.

Their three older children were all away at boarding schools, Howe and his brother George at The Leys School, Cambridge, a prestigious boarding school for boys from Methodist families.

By 1891 John Hall had rented Ball Haye Hall from the Broughs and was living there with his eight children and four servants.

Howe and George had returned home and were both apprenticed to their father who was described as a manufacturer of sewing silks, braids, etc.

At this time Brough Nicholson & Hall employed 630 workers in Leek mills.

What is not widely known is that after leaving school Howe had been sent by John on a trip to New Zealand, lasting around two years.

The purpose of this was to reinforce his Methodism and Howe would stay with Methodist ministers on his travels, even meeting up with one of his old teachers from The Leys.

He kept a detailed diary of the trip which hopefully may be transcribed one day.

In 1901 the two John Halls were still at Ball Haye Hall; John Senior (61) a silk

manufacturer and Howe (32) a silk business manager; perhaps John had taken a step back and allowed Howe to fill his shoes.

By 1911 Howe's mother had died and John may have been out of the country as he could not be located in the census.

Forty-two year old Howe was still single and he and three of his siblings were at home, cared for by six female live-in servants.

It was quite a surprise to everyone – except the couple themselves presumably – when Howe Hall married in 1927, aged fifty-eight.

He married Irene Brooks, daughter of a master baker, at Woburn Square, London, close to Irene's home.

Irene was still young enough to bear Howe a son some fifteen months later but sadly the boy would not get to know his grandfather because John Hall died on March 24, 1930 at the Hotel Victoria in Monte Carlo. He was cremated and his ashes buried with Sarah in Leek Cemetery.

John Hall left a considerable fortune, £231,014 15s 10d. Probate was granted to his three sons Bernard R, George H and John H.

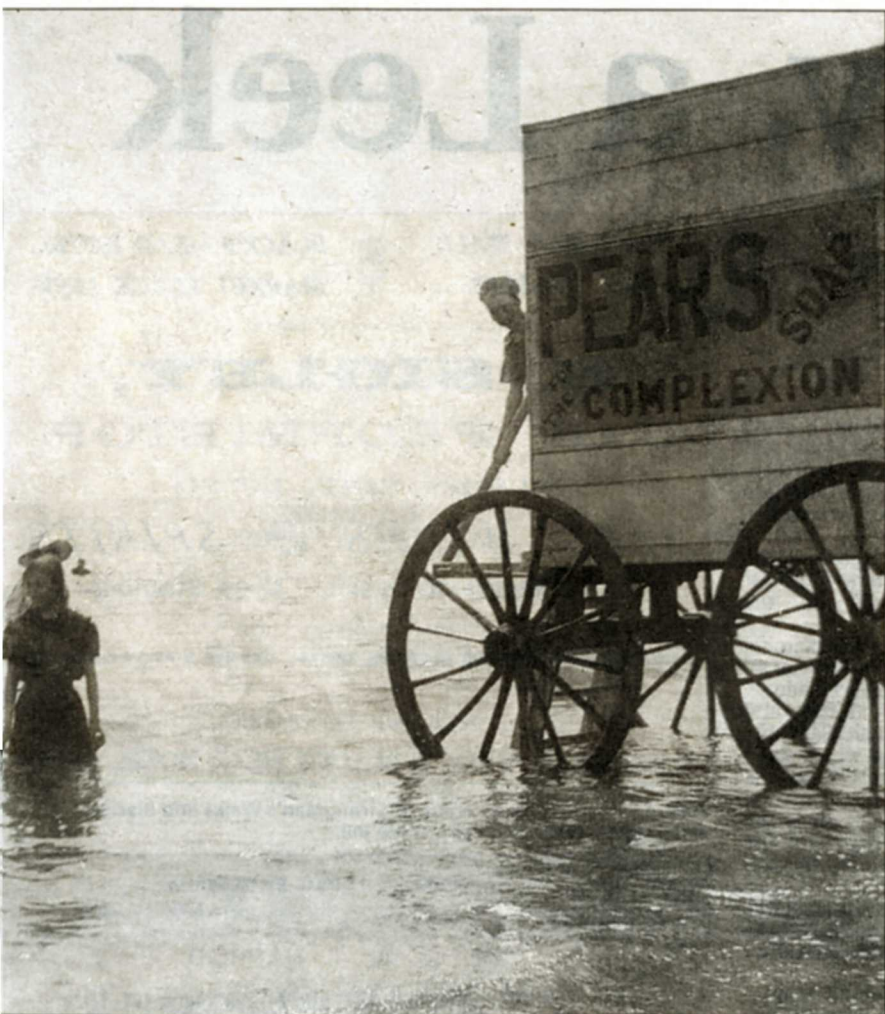
Howe Hall, like John a director of Brough Nicholson & Hall, retired in 1941. He had bought a large house in the Cheddleton area in 1926 but once retired he followed his brothers to Hampshire and rented this house out.

This mirrored Ball Haye, Woodcroft and other large gentlemen's houses.

Howe remained a director of Brough Nicholson & Hall until his death in 1952.



John Howe Hall, always known as "Howe" within the family and Mr Howe to employees and people outside the family circle.



John Hall as you probably haven't seen him before, paddling in the sea with wife Sarah Marie and son Bernard.



John Hall's funeral wends its way up Derby Street in 1930. The hearse was supplied by Henry Davenport of the Black Swan.



Lyndhurst House, Queen Street. John Hall lived here in the 1870s.



Ball Haye Hall shortly before demolition in 1972.