



# Antiques roadshow

**DALES DELIGHT:** As the Yorkshire Archaeological Society marks its 150th anniversary, **Michael Hickling** reports on a hidden gem which deserves wider enjoyment. Main pictures by **Mark Bickerdike**.

**W**HEN Sylvia Thomas booked a Dales weekend away with her husband, she did not anticipate that their trip would eventually lead to a happy anniversary.

The couple had booked accommodation at The Folly, a quirky 17th-century Grade I listed building which in recent years has been given a new lease of life in the centre of Settle in the Dales.

The property now doubles up as a self-catering holiday let on one side and as a museum on the other. Writer Alan Bennett, who lives locally, is the president of the trust which rescued The Folly and is now campaigning to raise the money needed to secure its future.

Sylvia's holiday revealed the place was oozing charm – uneven stone-flagged floors, inglenook fireplace, oak staircase and panelling, quoins and cornerstones – and it set her thinking.

This, she reckoned, could provide an atmospheric setting and a brilliant showcase for aspects of the historical collections to which she had devoted most of her working life, and material the public rarely sees.

These are treasures accumulated over the centuries by the most passionate collectors of Yorkshire's heritage and since then donated to a unique institution, the Yorkshire Archaeological Society.

Sylvia, the YAS archivist at its headquarters in Leeds for 21 years, was its president by the time she came for her short holiday at The Folly. As such, she was thinking about how the society might make a mark in the wider world when it reached a significant milestone.

The YAS's 150th anniversary was then some 18 months away. How could they make a bit of a splash? Taking the show (or part of it) on the road could open the eyes of a new audience to the riches that the society has been tucking away in vaults, drawers and cabinets for the past century

and a half. The show opened this month and proves to be a perfect match. It's also a meeting of minds. Both organisations have a similar ethos, relying on voluntary efforts.

The YAS is a mainstream archive with no regional equivalent in the country and it possesses, among other things, the biggest collection of books on Yorkshire outside the British Library. It's a testament to the serious historical work that can be achieved without any help from public funds.

The same principle applies to the project which rescued Settle's Folly from a chequered history as variously a fish and chip shop, a furniture shop, tea rooms, surgery and restored it to the architectural glory days of its original design as a home for a Settle lawyer.

They did receive a lump of Lottery cash to get them going, but now rely on local enthusiasm, especially that of the vigorous Anne Read who took on the job of curator of the Museum of North Craven Life in an honorary capacity.

"We have put this on because we want more people to know we exist and what a lot a treasures we've got," says Sylvia. It's also part of a recruiting drive for more YAS members of which there are presently 650, although they do have sections of special interest which attract many more. For example there are 900 involved in the YAS family history section.

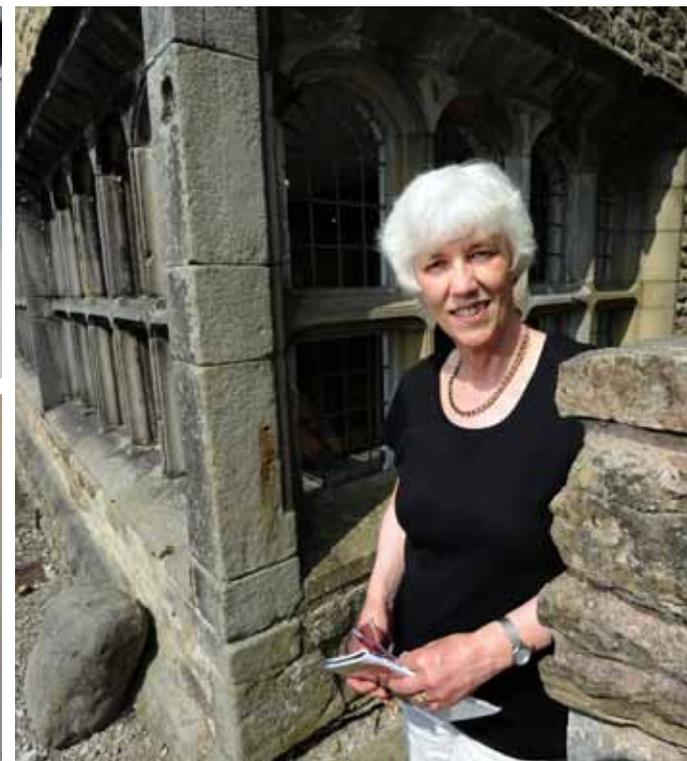
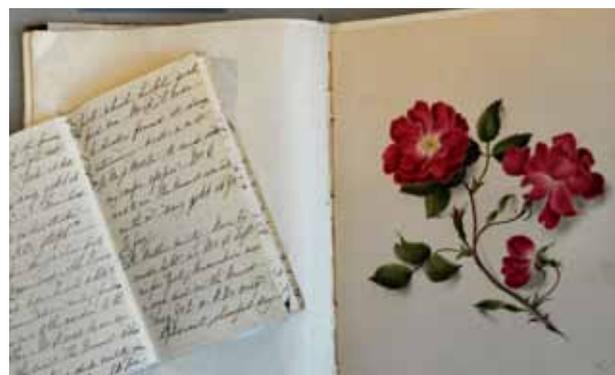
If someone wanted to explore a family tree, what material would they discover that might help them inside the YAS premises at Claremont adjacent to Leeds University?

"A lot can be found that they don't know exists if they simply Google," says Sylvia, explaining they house the original documents of Yorkshire gentry families and estate accounts, manorial rolls, medieval charters, accounts, maps and letters from the 12th-century, court reports, parish registers and much more.

"People also need someone to help and interpret, it's an unlocking of a key to another world."



**YORKSHIRE TREASURES:** Sylvia Thomas, from the Yorkshire Archaeological Society which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, looks at the Fountains Abbey Stock Book in the exhibition at The Museum of North Craven Life in Settle, main picture; some of the exhibits, above and below left; and Sylvia Thomas at the Folly, below right.



You will also have access to original watercolours of the artist George Walker which are among the most appealing of the goodies the YAS holds. Walker, just as the Industrial Revolution was on the cusp of reshaping city landscapes, was commissioned by a Leeds bookseller to draw out the broader picture of lives and times. One of the families is the Bollands who made their money out of wool and with the proceeds bought land in Settle and Kettlewell. The exhibition star so far as the Bollands are concerned is Margaret Bolland, born in 1805. She was a keen letter writer and diarist who reveals a great deal about Dales home life in its pages and in her commonplace book. On January 27, 1826, when she was 21, Margaret confided to her diary that her fiancée Hugh Pudsey Dawson, had given her a pleasant surprise. "HP called at my room door to see me in my curl papers and to give me another kiss," she wrote. It's a charming moment made all the more poignant by the fact that Margaret noted it down in code, as she did all the diary entries which had a special meaning for her. There was no happy ending however. Hugh Pudsey Dawson died on a distant shore before the pair could be married and Margaret never found another man to replace him. Descendents of the Bollands lived at a rather grand property in Settle called Town Head until it was bought by a larger-than-life character, who was also a prodigious collector, called Tot Lord. The Bolland papers eventually came to another local collector, Harry Bradfer-Lawrence, about whom more later. Tot Lord, greengrocer, caver, local politician and founder of the Pig Yard Club had many other strings to his bow and was one of the most colourful and dynamic characters to come out of this part of the world. He died in 1965 but is so well remembered that a Tot Lord Trail around Settle, set up in more recent times, now flourishes in his honour. Tot lied about his age to join up and fight in the trenches of the First World War at the age of 16. Later, as an explorer of the extensive caving system beneath his home town, he was a founder member of the world's first cave rescue organisation. His underground explorations were conducted with a sharp eye for what geology and human history had deposited here and eventually his idiosyncratic collection at his home-made Pig Yard Club Museum reflected that. It included the bones of the elephant, rhinoceros and hippopotamus which had once roamed in these parts. There were also the bones

The exhibition has been put together by Kirsty McHugh from the YAS who took the view that what interests the general public about history are people's stories. She has organised the show around three significant families from the Craven area to draw out the broader picture of lives and times. One of the families is the Bollands who made their money out of wool and with the proceeds bought land in Settle and Kettlewell. The exhibition star so far as the Bollands are concerned is Margaret Bolland, born in 1805. She was a keen letter writer and diarist who reveals a great deal

**It's wonderful to bring treasures like this to a remote part of the county.**

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of an ancient Dales woman, discovered in a nearby limestone pavement.

Tot's amazing one-man show, described by some as the greatest collection in the north of England, also included documents like the original Settle Market Charter of 1249.

His great, great grandparents had arrived in Settle in 1800 but in the longer view he had records to show he came from local farming stock dating back to medieval times. It's possible that some of his ancestors were men who worked on the outlying farms owned by Fountains Abbey of which there were many in the district. Maybe that's why he acquired for his Pig Yard Club museum the original 15th-century stockbook compiled by the monks at Fountains Abbey.

Resting on a cushion, this stockbook, newly cleaned by the YAS, is one of the eye-catchers at The Folly. On one page a Cistercian scribe with immaculate handwriting records that at the Appilgarth farm three men – John Brown, George Sigeswick and Henry Elison – are in charge of eight rams and 306 ewes.

Together with 80 gimmers, the three were responsible for 406 animals belonging to Fountains Abbey.

The man who took on the Bolland papers, Harry Bradfer-Lawrence, was another extraordinary character. This Ripon antiquarian was a Norfolk man who came to Yorkshire to be the land agent for a baronet and then switched jobs to become the boss of Hammonds brewery in Bradford.



**HISTORICAL GEMS:** The 150th anniversary exhibition of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society (YAS) at The Folly, Settle. Honorary Curator Anne Read, left, and Sylvia Thomas of the YAS.

But history was his passion. He joined the council of the YAS in 1936 and accumulated an extensive library and a valuable collection which is now described as a goldmine of information on Yorkshire's past and is available online.

Is it something in the water that makes people so passionate about collecting around here? Another luminary of the YAS, the renowned field archaeologist and polymath Arthur Raistrick, also specialised in the Craven area. And then there was Marie Hartley who tirelessly collected Dales by-gones and chronicled the dying of the old Dales ways in more than 40 books.

One slightly puzzling thing about the Yorkshire Archaeological Society is that there doesn't appear to be any archaeology, or at least hardly any.

There was, it seems, a fairly recent project to dig up the lawn at their headquarters at Claremont. It revealed no more than Sylvia Thomas expected: some old clay pipes and a piece of Spode china. But that was really more of a training exercise for members.

Sylvia explains that they have considered changing their name to antiquarian, but prefer to leave things as they are, using the term archaeology in the older, broader sense meaning a systematic study of past human life. For this time team, it's not just all about digging things up.

■ **Family Stories: 150 years of discovery with the Yorkshire Archaeological Society. Museum of North Craven Life, The Folly, Settle, to November 3. [www.scbpt.org.uk/folly](http://www.scbpt.org.uk/folly). YAS: 0113 245 6362. email [yas@wyjs.org.uk](mailto:yas@wyjs.org.uk) [www.bradfer.yascollections.org.uk](http://www.bradfer.yascollections.org.uk)**

