

YORKSHIRE POST

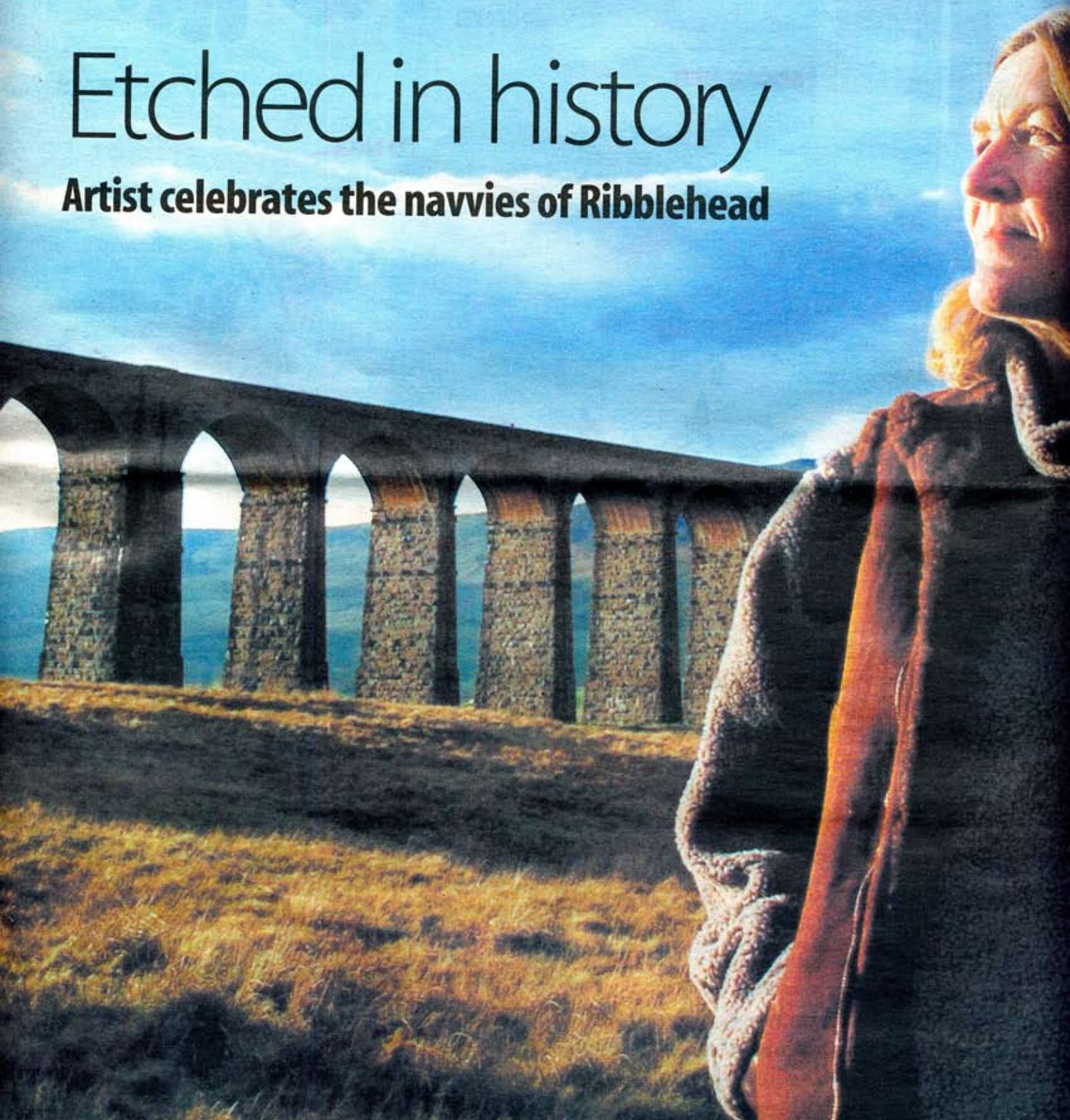
# Magazine

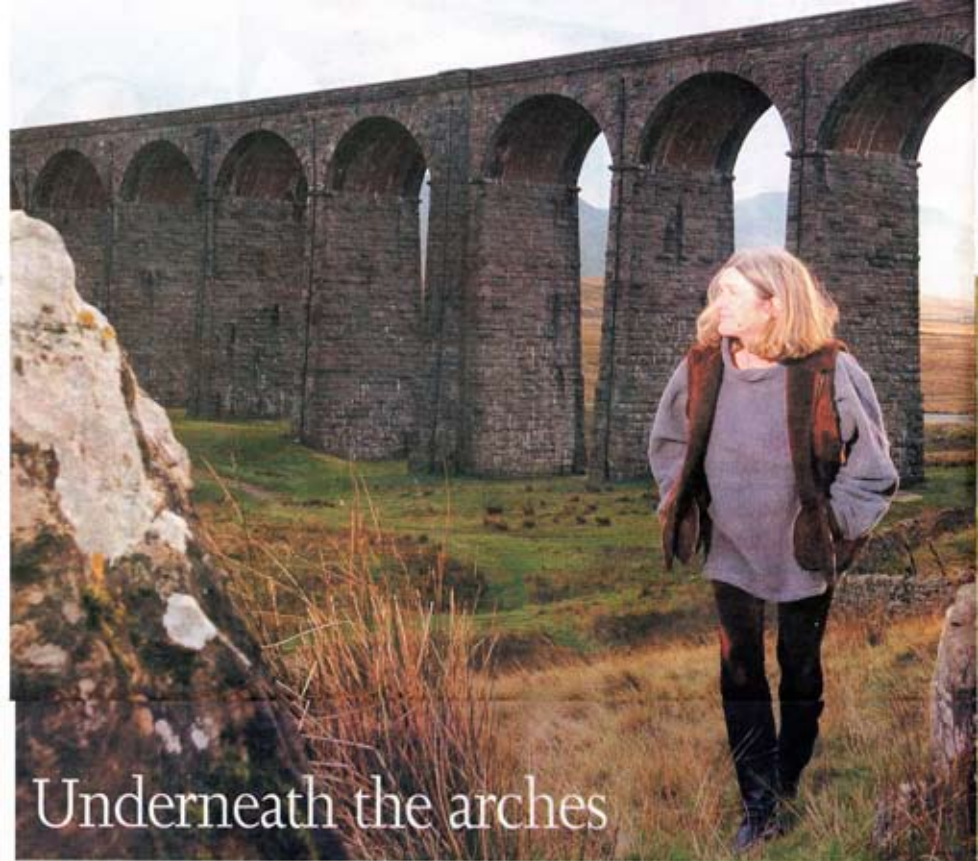
SATURDAY NOVEMBER 18 2006

Seven-day TV and radio guide starts

## Etched in history

**Artist celebrates the navvies of Ribbleshead**





## Underneath the arches

The Ribbleshead viaduct stands as a memorial to the anonymous men who built it. Now an artist is rediscovering their story. Michael Hickling reports

**The hearts of even the stoutest navvies must have missed a beat when they first arrived to confront the huge blank bulk of Blea Moor and the fierce winds that blow around it.**

Building a railway here, mostly with hand tools, was a challenge that was to prove fatal for many of them.

Transience defined these numberless workmen of the Victorian age, permanence typified their achievements. It's a statement which is nowhere more evident than in this dramatic corner of the Yorkshire dales.

The navvies who wielded the picks and shovels disappeared when the job was done, along with the

desperate shanties which they called home. Their monument, the Ribbleshead viaduct, a tribute to their skills and endeavour, has since endured the full-on assaults of many winters and the more insidious damage done by its neglect by British Rail.

For the past six years Ribbleshead has been the home patch of Philippa Troutman, who has now rescued the forgotten workers from history through her art. A motif she has devised looks at first glance like fragments of strands of barbed wire but is far more poignant. It uses two faltering marks on a marriage certificate she discovered that were made by John Perkins, a labourer,

and Jane Bird, a widow, when they were wed here in the late summer of 1872. "The woman who signed it - her little cross falling away - didn't know to put it on the line," says Philippa.

The only other personal facts about the couple to be gleaned from the certificate is that they were both "full age" and were living in one of the shabby settlements known as Jerichs. It's all they left behind.

"I struggled to get close to the people who were here, there are no pictures of them," says Philippa.

"They built and vanished."

She lives close by the shabby sites of these former



**Left: Artist Philippa Troutman who has an exhibition of her work of etchings, screenprints and drypoints, depicting aspects of people's lives who lived in the shanties of Ribbleshead in the 1870s.**

**Above: Salt Lake Cottages.**

**Below: Philippa looking out from her studio in her cottage.**

**Right: Philippa working on an etching.**

Pictures: Bruce Rollinson.



neighbours, in a cottages on a short row built at a right angle to the Ribbleshead railway track. She came to live here six years ago with her daughter and partner, and was fascinated by the place's history. Bringing it back into focus was hampered by the fact that there's only one known picture of a shanty, in the background of a photograph of the partly-completed viaduct at Ribbleshead (then known as Batty Moss).

Philippa has lived in Yorkshire for 25 years, partly in Leeds, did an MA in printmaking at Bradford University and juggled jobs as a social worker and artist. Her work dealing with the casualties of inner city

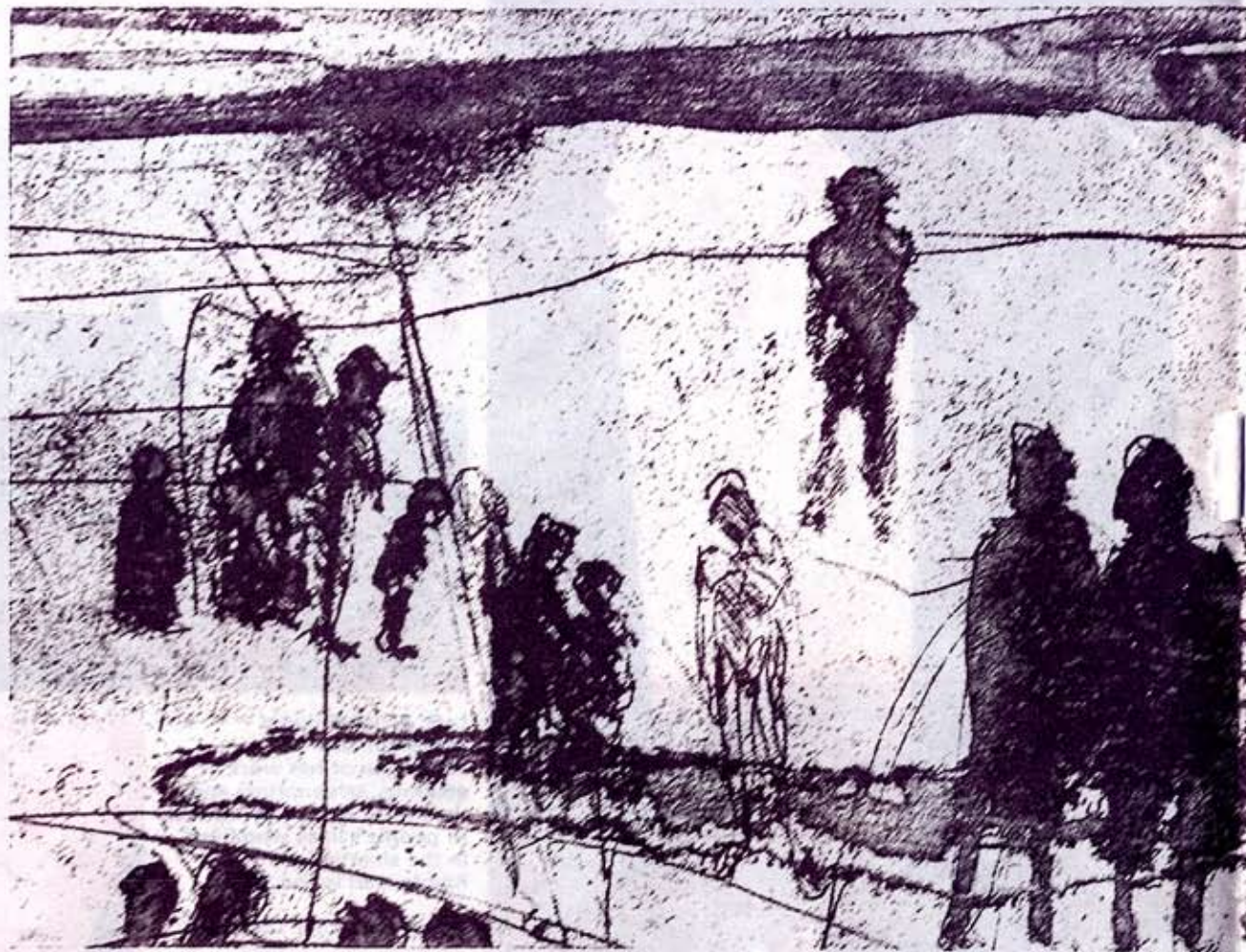
life was left behind when she turned to art full time, and the view from her sitting room could not be further removed from urban stress. It overlooks a sharply sloping moorland garden with the magnificent profile of Penyghent at the end of the valley. How did she find such a singular place to live?

"I had friends living in the row who we used to visit and we were looking for the right place to settle. It is very isolated and such a sharp contrast with how it would have been in the days of the navvies. It's amazing, they were here in force and then they were gone." The nearest shops now, and her daughter's

school, are at Ingleton seven miles away, 15 minutes by car. The closest church is St Leonard's at Chapel-le-Dale whose parishioners numbered about 200 in 1869.

Rather more than that were to arrive following a decision taken in 1865 by the directors of the Midland Railway to bring the railway here, constructing it across some of the most inhospitable territory in the country, linking the 72 miles between Settle and Carlisle by means of 14 tunnels and over 20 viaducts. It meant that by 1871 St Leonard's had nearly 1,000 railway builders added to its flock.

The navvies were housed – with their women and



Some of the pictures by artist Philippa Troutman from her exhibition *Shanties of Ribbleshead*, at The Folly Victoria Street, Settle, from November 19 to December 20.

children, pets and livestock – in over 150 huts around Batty Green, the biggest settlement. The titles of some individual encampments – Sebastopol, Inkerman – echoed the Crimean War which had ended 20 years previously and was perhaps the British navvies' finest hour. The railway they had built in the Crimea to supply the troops at the front line is said to have won the war and observers contrasted the effectiveness and organisation of this civilian army with the inflexibility, bungling and ineptitude of the real one wearing uniforms.

One of the Ribbleshead shanty camps, where the huts had porches, was called Belgravia which suggests black humour played a part in its naming. Calling another Jerusalem may have been a nod to the evangelical-temperance people who sought to turn the hard-living navvies onto the ways of godliness and abstinence. Another called Tunnel Huts seems no more than a frank admission of the bleakness of the dwellings.

A visiting medical officer confirmed that picture. He was appalled at the state of the overcrowded huts clustered on this exposed, boggy ground with no drainage apart from open trenches infested with rats. In addition there was pollution from a brickworks at Sebastopol pouring out soot and smoke.

In 1871 smallpox broke out in Sebastopol and at John Perkins and Jane Bird's settlement, Jericho. A temporary fever hospital was set up to deal with what became sporadic outbreaks of the disease.

The creation of what was to become, in the modern age, one of the most photographed sites in Britain might be considered interesting to the public at large. But newspapers seem to have ignored it, with the honourable exception of *The Lancaster Guardian* which sent a regular correspondent to this back of beyond to report what was happening.

"I searched the files of *The Lancaster Guardian* from the 1870s and I got hold of the population census and records of births, marriages and deaths from County Hall at Northallerton," says Philippa. "I also want to acknowledge local writers like Bill Mitchell, who have spent years researching this. For me, it's partly about



The marriage certificate of John Perkins and Jane Bird of 1872, and left, a detail of their signature "marks" which Philippa Troutman uses as a motif for her new exhibition.

the landscape, partly the people, partly about the work."

This is a place to keep your eyes open and be aware of the visual drama as the weather changes, often with astonishing rapidity. Walking up to stand beside the viaduct for the photographs on these pages, the sky was mostly overcast and the structure appeared frowning and forbidding. Suddenly the clouds parted and the 24 arches, illuminated by a low golden light from the west, took on the airiness of a slightly unreal stage set.

The trains which come over them no longer do justice to the arches' grandeur. Today's multiple diesel units look like rather pathetic and garish toys. But had it not been for the Friends of the Settle Carlisle line, there

would have been none at all. In 1981, British Rail had plans to close the line to passengers, due to the cost of repairing and waterproofing the viaduct which had been allowed to fall into a poor condition. BR diverted trains away from the route to undermine the case for retaining it. Public outrage was followed by a steep rise in passenger numbers and in 1989 the Government decided to keep the line open.

"I'm not a railway buff, although I love trains," says Philippa. "There's quite a gradient as they come past us, and they have to work hard coming up the hill. It's a tremendous sight when it's a steam train excursion."

The row of cottages was built for workmen on the line – possibly by the navvies who built the viaduct, since there's a suggestion of the monumental about them. The walls look two feet thick. "Since we are next to the railway it feels we are connected to the world, although that might be more symbolic than actual," says Philippa. "We take the train to Carlisle for a day out, or we might go to visit friends in Leeds. I'm not really a shopper, although I do miss the cinema."

She concedes it's not an easy environment. They have been putting alder, willow and ash in the garden but nothing grows well apart from hawthorn in this spot where the wind can literally take your breath away.

That is made up for by having Wharfedale and Ingleborough for neighbours and what Philippa calls the "banks of weather" that are ever-changing around them. "This is my immediate landscape, the topography, history, people. It feels a good place to start – where I am. The historical element is fascinating but I'm an artist and everything is done with a view to creating images."

She breaks off to point at Pen-y-Ghent. "See the light? See what's happening?" In the gathering dusk a ray of sun turned the subdued brown tones into a bright technicolour strip across the top third of the mountain. Thirty seconds later it was gone.

■ Philippa Troutman's *Shanties of Ribbleshead* exhibition of prints and drawings with text is at The Folly, Victoria Street, Settle, from tomorrow November 19 to December 20.



# Working on the viaduct

**WR Mitchell**

The Farrers of Ingleborough Estate benefited from the sale of a strip of land for the viaduct and also through hut rents and the material removed for brick-making. The saga began in 1869, when a four-wheeled caravan hauled by traction engine arrived at the edge of Batty Moss. It accommodated the first batch of railway engineers.

Old folk said the viaduct was "built on wool". It was a good story, until some of us discovered that shafts for the piers were driven down to bedrock above which was set a generous layer of concrete. Perhaps the wool aspect related to the money a cash-strapped Midland Railway Company, during inflationary times, borrowed from the Bradford woolmen.

The railway site is patterned by tramways, connecting the emergent viaduct with Littledale, from whence came most of the limestone used in its construction. Contractors' locomotives conveyed blocks of limestone to the sorting and dressing yards. Coal was train-borne to Blea Moor, where vertical steam engines operated at the head of the shafts. On Saturday afternoons, wagons were cleaned and made available to shoppers frequenting the amenities of Batty Green, the principal railway settlement.

Grassed-over humps are the site of the two lofty chimneys at the brickworks. Nearby is a heap of rejected bricks. At the peak of production, the brickworks provided from 18,000 to 20,000 bricks a

day for viaduct and tunnel. A mixture of local shale and clay proved unsuccessful and those exposed to weathering were eventually replaced by imported bricks. (The wife of Mr Nixon, the brickworks manager, "ran away" with one of the nawies. The police lost all trace of the couple at Skipton).

A typical shanty hut was divided into three parts – one for the family to whom it was allocated, a room for the lodgers and a central area where all might meet and eat. Mr Tiplady, nominee of the Bradford City Mission, presided over a mission hut where, on Saturday night, a Penny Reading – a sort of concert – was organised. Elsewhere, excise men snooped on navvies drinking themselves into a stupor in unlicensed huts, and crowds gathered on Sunday mornings at the prospect of a quarrel, resolved through bare-fisted fighting.

Near pier No 13 is the monument raised to the memory of the Victorian masons who built the viaduct and those who in recent times restored the structure. The dexterity of the scaffolders was impressive. After attending to the viaduct, they decked the environs of their portable home with items made of scaffolding and, inside, an extra bed being required, they made one from scaffolding and a spare plank.

WR Mitchell is the author of *The Lost Shanties of Ribbleshead*, Castleberg, £7. To order a copy from the Yorkshire Post Bookshop, call free on 0800 0153232 or order on line at [www.yorkshirepostbookshop.co.uk](http://www.yorkshirepostbookshop.co.uk). P&P is £1.95.