

HARDCORE NEEPSEND



SHEFFIELD PATROL GROUP

Walking along Neepsend Lane from the Farfield Inn to Mowbray Street on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon makes me think of ‘Heart of Darkness’ and ‘Journey to the End of the Night’. It’s an experience of the sublime. There’s something about the scale of the industrial and post-industrial landscape, something about the unnatural width of the road that makes the journey of less than a mile deeply uncomfortable, but it also represents the epitome of Sheffield, the essence of the city, replete with beauty and fascination, as well as desolation and dread.

Neepsend Lane is a death haunted place. 52 of the 213 bodies recovered after the Sheffield flood of 1864 were found in Neepsend. This catastrophe explains the later development of the area for industrial use rather than residential settlement.



After placing the hamlets of Neepsend and Farfield along the banks of the river at the foot of the hill on which Shiercliffe (later Shirecliffe) Hall stands and mentioning that the word is written 'Neepesend' in 1365 and 'Neepsende' (as in 'Neepsende greene') in 1637, the solipsistic fantasist Sidney Oldall Addy waxes lyrical on the derivation of the place name in the sometimes entertaining compendium of fairy tales that he produced under the title 'The Hall of Waltheof or The Early Condition and Settlement of Hallamshire' in 1893:

The English word "gnipe" meaning a peak, or hill, Old Norse gnipa, or nipr is not applicable to this place, which is flat land lying by the banks of the river Don. The Middle English neep, which occurs in neap-tide, low tide, comes nearer, and it may be connected, but the Don is not a tidal river. There seems to be no way of explaining the word unless we take Nepe (1365) or Neep (1637) either as a personal, or a mythological, name. In the belief of our ancestors, the woods, fields, and rivers were peopled with spirits, just as they are now in the belief of savage nations. In the Edda we read of "Neps dóttir," i.e., the daughter of Nepr, who was the son of Odin. The nickname Neffa (Neb) occurs in a Wicking song. "Nippen" and "Number Nip" are names of goblins. Henderson mentions "the Nick or Nippen." In the words Neeps-end and Wards-end, the termination "end" means land, mark, district. Neepsend, therefore, may be the piece of land which was believed to be haunted by a local genius or spirit, probably a river sprite, and possibly the name of this sprite may be connected with Neptune, who was god of the fresh, as well as of the salt, waters. Hunter has preserved the following local rime:

The shelving, slimy river Dun / Each year a daughter or a son.

There can be no doubt that these lines point back to a time when human sacrifices were offered to the god or goddess of the river. In mediaeval times there was a chapel of "Our Lady" on the bridge which crosses the Don between Waingate and the Wicker, and which still retains the name of Lady's Bridge. There is a similar chapel on the bridge at Rotherham. The worship of "Our Lady" on the bridge is merely the substitution of a Christian saint for a pagan god or goddess of the river. Is it too much to say that Nepr, Nip, or Nippen was the being who was once here worshipped as the river god, and to whom, in the words of the old local saw, "a daughter or a son" was offered "each year"?

Of course, it's too much to say, but that's not going to stop old Sidney from saying it. He's the kind of self-regarding prick who fails to recognise or acknowledge that the root 'gnipe', or 'gnipa', might relate to the hill upon which Shirecliffe Hall stood, and that the suffix 'end' might indicate a location in relation to the hill because to do so would shut him up.

GENTLEMEN

WAX



In 1822, Joseph Hunter records Neepsend as "...a hamlet in the township of Brightside Bierlow, and parish of Sheffield, 1 mile NW. of Sheffield." 'Bierlow' is the name used to describe an old administrative area, forming the basic unit of local government, and is derived from the Norse term 'byjar-log', meaning 'the law of the village'.

The Kelham Island and Neepsend Action Plan produced by Sheffield City Council is a work of civically endorsed, EU funded fiction almost as fanciful as the wishful thinking of Sidney Oldall Addy. It describes Kelham Neepsend as a place unmistakably of Sheffield, a place that brings together both its proud history and forward-looking business, living and leisure. It looks forward to a prospective Golden Age commencing in 2018 from the vantage point of ten years earlier. It places Neepsend Lane in the Core Neepsend area, where it forms part of the border with what it terms Kelham Riverside.

Core Neepsend is described as predominantly industrial, containing a diverse mix of businesses, including scrap-yards, recording studios, software developers and a climbing centre. Although the area has valuable river frontage, there is limited interaction between riverside buildings and the river itself, and although historically significant streetscapes remain largely intact and constitute one of the city's most complete 19th century industrial areas still in active use, Neepsend "has seen little activity of any real quality in recent years."

There are a number of buildings of character in Core Neepsend that are important to Sheffield's heritage, and some listed and unlisted buildings of character are identified on a diagram in the plan without naming them. Problems exist in terms of safety, anti-social behaviour and criminal activity associated with prostitution and drug abuse. There are also traffic and parking problems, a lack of open spaces, poor pedestrian and vehicle connection to the city centre and a perceived neglect of the public realm.

The plan recognises the value of the historically overlooked frontage of the smaller Victorian steelworks along Neepsend Lane and by 2018, we are promised the streets of Kelham Neepsend will be well lit, attractively paved with gold and well managed by City Centre Management and Ambassadors and that all the area's historic building stock will be restored and put to new uses.



It's easy for corporately funded halfwits to come up with visions of a golden future but harder to change harsh reality. Unsurprisingly, the Kelham Island and Neepsend Action Plan has not proceeded as planned. A public private initiative that proposed to create a new bridge in the area came to nothing and the ongoing issue of street prostitution was highlighted in an article published in the Sheffield Star in August 2014 under the headline '240 prostitutes and 75 kerb crawlers'.

The article claims success for a police initiative to tackle Sheffield's red-light district by targeting kerb-crawlers whilst appealing to the public to help reduce the problem even further. It reports an interaction between a police officer and a suspicious character he pulls over:

The middle-aged man steps out and is put in the back of the police car for questioning. "I was looking for a friend," he says nervously. "Who is a prostitute by any chance?" After a slight pause, he replies: "She was. I think she's died now." The man goes on to tell the officers he was searching for a 'tall blonde', on behalf of a family who have supposedly asked him to find her.

"So why have you taken it on yourself to enquire for them?" "I felt an obligation towards it. I've got a daughter the same age. I just parked up a couple of times and I thought, 'If she's not here I'll report back'. I haven't seen her." "Well I don't believe you sir. And I'm half in a mind to arrest you at the moment for kerb crawling."

The article also claims that the initiative is as much about supporting women as it is prosecuting the kerb-crawlers, although this support consists of 'the girls' being taken to court on report and summons, cautioned, and issued with an engagement and support order, which seems to provide little in the way of meaningful support to the 'woman in a tracksuit' briefly mentioned in the piece, who is in an abusive relationship, and whose partner will beat her up if she returns home without money. It ends on a downbeat quote from the officer in charge of the operation:

It's the way we do it and the way I choose to do it. I can't speak for other forces... I hope I'm doing some good somewhere. But if you ask the girls, they would probably rather have the 75 punters back.



The stretch of Neepsend Lane approaching Mowbray Street is notable for spontaneously produced street graffiti, rather than the social enterprise informed model of pseudo-murals and insipid colourful designs that characterise other parts of the city. It's pleasing to note images which one feels have been produced by women, rather than the alienated teenage would be Alpha Males who usually resort to this form of expression.

However, Neepsend graffiti remains largely counter-revolutionary. The sentiment expressed by the beautiful young women next door depicted by aspiring beautiful young women next door is "I want to be a fashion designer and go out clubbing," rather than NE TRAVAILLEZ JAMAIS. Elsewhere, we find predictable private appropriations of commercially appropriated space and post-Expressionist depictions of urban dread, which reflect the nature of the environment they are made in. Crude depictions of fierce, gnashing geezers can be taken as a comment on the predatory and misogynistic nature of the loathsome punters that drift through the area at night time, desperately searching for an outlet for the hatred and fury that inhabits their mind consuming loins.



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