





# Choir's oldest member having a tough time of it

Members may have heard that the Choir oldest **singing** member, **John Smith**, is in hospital in Halifax after collapsing at his Honley home.

Jack, as he is also known, is as committed a Choir member as there is and rarely misses a performance or a rehearsal. He was there at the last 'tenors rehearsal on Zoom.

His son, Andy, tells VotV that Jack has now been moved to a Rehabilitation Ward where speech therapists and physio's are working to help him regain strength. (He's still a little weak on the right hand side but the hospital staff have high hopes that normal function should return.) They also want to assess what support he will need to return home.

Jack, (seen here celebrating his 88<sup>th</sup> birthday) lives alone and is fiercely independent, so readers will gather he's not best pleased by events.

He's also very sociable so the Covid 'No-Visitor' rules are getting him down a bit.



"He was most heartened to receive get-well messages from the Choir. " says Andy.

## Send Jack a message

The hospital has a system whereby well-wishers can write a note on their website which they then print out and deliver to patients on their wards.

Do send him a few words. He'll be made up. To send Jack a message use this link and note that John (DoB 5/8/32) is now in **Ward 7D** at Calderdale Royal.

Click on this link to access the hospital website.

<https://www.cht.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/letter-to-a-loved-one/>



# Once more with Felling

'This is a memorable week for Felling Male Voice Choir as we are 100 years old.' writes **Kevin Lillie**.



This is clearly '**fake news**' as can be seen from the photograph. You can tell hardly any of them are 100. A few aren't even pensioners by the look of it. And the chap at the front is only a boy.



## Correction:

It turns out that it's the Choir, not necessarily their members, which have reached 100. So, well done to - Northumberland's finest - **Felling Male Voice Choir**!



Kevin - the choir's publicist - tells *VotV*, their signature tune remains the Geordie 'National Anthem', '**The Blaydon Races**' still popular at Felling concerts. Their name of '**Felling Male Voice Choir**' he says, was confirmed on the **15th October 1920** when the Orpheus Male Voice Choir, formed the previous year at Holly Hill Wesleyan Methodist Church, changed its name.

The men should have been marking 100 years and the start of their Centenary Year with celebratory events. Unfortunately, all their many plans, like ours, have been put on hold because of the Covid-19 restrictions.

Felling Male Voice Choir had planned to perform their wide variety of popular songs from classical, musicals, pop, sacred and traditional male voice favourites at the choir's **Centenary Concert** at **The Sage, Gateshead** but the virus has put a hold on this and other events.

But Felling - like CVMVC - will be back!



They certainly have a distinguished history.



Out of all their many successes, perhaps their greatest achievement was on Saturday, 23rd June 1951 when they won **The Festival of Britain Music Competition** at the **Royal Festival Hall** in London. The choir's then musical director, **Tom Mearis**, was presented with the Silver Rose Bowl by Her Royal Highness, the **Princess Elizabeth**.

After the event, the Geordie National Anthem rang out from the choir in celebration within the hall. Hundreds turned out the next day in the pouring rain to welcome the choir home to Felling Square. The Rose Bowl still has pride of place in **Gateshead Civic Centre**.

Part of that history is the links between the two choirs.

CV men have performed on the same platform as Felling Male Voice Choir on several occasions.

Indeed, its links with the North East stretch back to before the Second World War - if not even earlier.

It was in 1939, when they entered the fondly remembered **North of England Musical Tournament** against a number of prominent local choirs including **Felling**. On the day **Colne Valley** triumphed over Felling by five clear points.

The Felling conductor, **Tom Mearis**, paid tribute to Colne Valley in a letter saying, "*We know the best choir won and we all enjoyed being associated with the Colne Valley choir again.*"



60 years on from that event, the two choirs met in **collaboration** rather than competition. Together they took the stage in **Low Fell** on Sat 25th Sep 1999 - just before the Millennium. (Many thanks to **David Hirst** for this info.)

Then there was a return visit when the Felling choir came to us.

That concert took place at the Church of the Latter Day Saints, in **Birchenclyffe**, on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2001.

Colne Valley Male Voice Choir would like to extend a warm welcome to their friends the Felling Male Voice Choir. We hope you have a very enjoyable stay down here in Huddersfield!			
INTERVAL			
<b>Felling</b> Joshua Humble Give Me That Old Time Religion Si hei lwl mab What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor	arr. Young arr. Bartholomew arr. Simmons trad. Welsh arr. Parker/Shaw	<b>Colne Valley</b> The Lord is My Light The Lily of the Valley Rhythm of Life	Arbiter arr. Arnold arr. Edmund Walters Coleman arr. Barnes
<b>Soloist</b> Items to be announced		<b>Soloist</b> Items to be announced	
<b>Felling</b> Shto mi e milo The Listeners Adam Buckham Cullercoats Bay Blaydon Races (solo: Norman Grainger)	Macedonian folksong Armstrong Gibbs trad. arr. Tomlinson trad. arr. Tomlinson trad.	<b>Colne Valley</b> The Ghosts' High Noon Bring Him Home Funiculi, Funicula	Gilbert & Sullivan arr. Ward Schönberg arr. Cunningham arr. Noble
<b>Joint Choirs</b> Heilig, Heilig Gwahoddad	Schubert John Tudor Davies	<b>Joint Choirs</b> Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves 'Speed Your Journey' Battle Hymn of the Republic	Verdi Steffe arr. Wilhousky

You never know; maybe, when this virus fades into history, we can arrange another exchange?



## Another sad deferment

For several years, Colne Valley Male Voice Choir has contributed a performance to enrich a very moving local event. This is a secular service to commemorate the lives of those who have been patients in **the Huddersfield Royal Infirmary's Intensive Care Unit**.

*'Much though we try.' said ICU consultant, **Tim Jackson**, 'Some of the patients who come into our care are just too ill to survive.*

*We hold this remembrance service for relatives and friends who, in the last few weeks and months, haven't made it.*

*We come together to remember their lives and in the hope that it will help us better to cope with our grief and sadness about those who are no longer with us.'*



The service was in CVMVC members' diaries for October 2020. In all likelihood, the Unit will, this past year, have seen more sad deaths as Coronavirus has struck; more relatives grieving over lost patients. Hence more need perhaps.

But it came as no surprise when the organisers confirmed that the service could not go ahead.

With the pandemic, it's just too great a risk. Colne Valley has told the ICU's, Caroline Winkley that we will be at their disposal as soon as we are all clear to resume.



# Eddie Bowman resurfaces

An interesting picture has surfaced on a South Crosland Social media site, which will appeal especially to our older readers.



It shows **Edward Bowman** outside his shop in **Netherton**.

People across the area have fond memories of the Bowmans' hardware shop, which he ran in partnership with his wife **Stella** for many years. They say that you could get practically anything you needed in the hardware line and lots of things you didn't even know you needed until you walked in. He's been dubbed, 'a legend in hardware when B&Q was a pipe dream'. The shop is still there but it's now the 'Debra Charity Shop' in the centre of the village.

Of course to friends and members of Colne Valley Male Voice Choir, he was better known and much-loved as a Choir singer and as the 'informal' conductor of post-concert singalongs.

Eddie sadly died in July 2003 having been a member for 22 years. Stella, though, still supports CVMVC and tells VotV she keeps up with developments. Tenor, **Les Stones**, does her a copy of the 'Printable Version' of 'Voice of the Valley' and keeps in regular touch.

People also remember that Edward was also no mean performer in his own right. Here we see him with a younger-looking **Stuart Baxter**, performing 'Gendarmes' in improvised costumes at an ad-hoc event, possibly on a 1994 Choir tour to Germany.



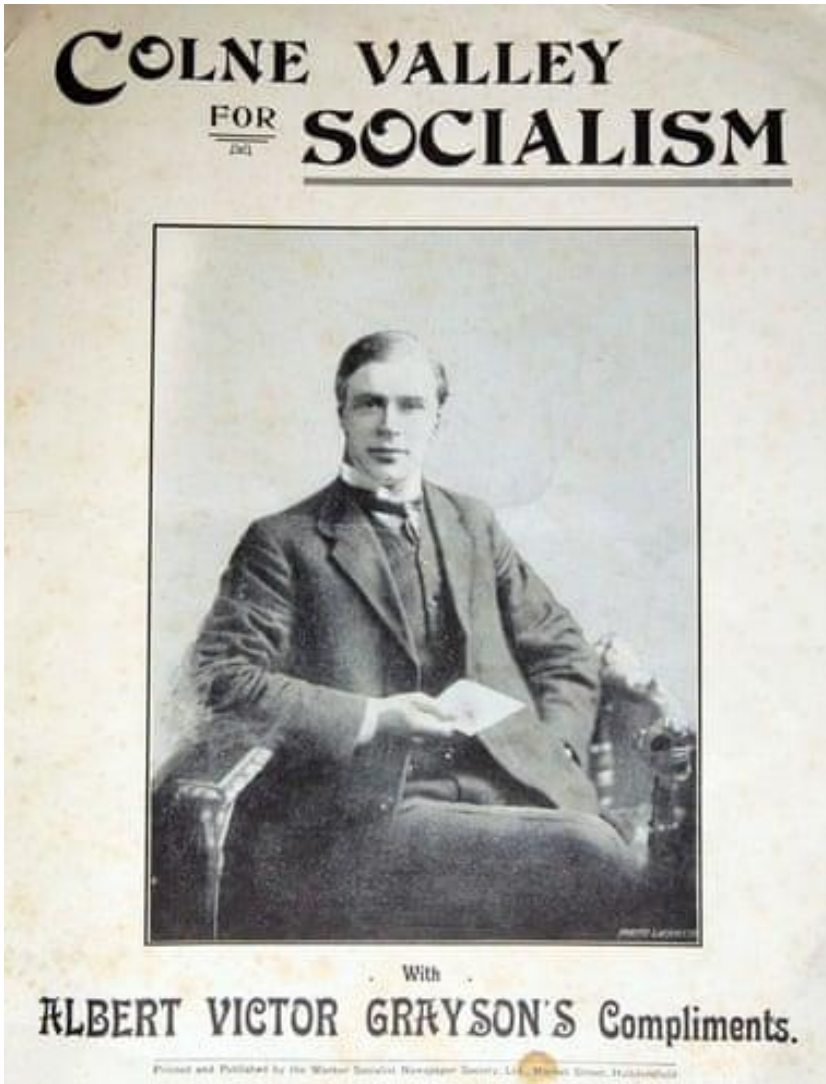


# Slaithwaite: home of revolutionary politics?

You wouldn't have reckoned Slaithwaite, in the early 1900's - the years just before Colne Valley Male Voice Choir was formed - as a hot bed of radical politics but it was.

In fact a bit of Britain's political history was made back in 1907, when the voters of the Colne Valley (all men, naturally) elected a socialist to Parliament, creating shockwaves through the House of Commons.

The man was Victor Grayson and his story is full of strange features.



It was a bright sunny day on July 18<sup>th</sup> 1907 when Colne Valley voters flocked in their droves to the polling booths in a parliamentary by-election: one that was to shake the nation.

Not even his die-hard supporters predicted the political bombshell ignited by their hero, Victor Grayson. He styled himself an 'Independent Socialist'; and he had been adopted by the **Colne Valley Labour League**.

The League was the first Labour constituency party in the country.

It seems they were swept away by Grayson's powers of oratory and his outstanding charisma, even though the national Labour Party refused to endorse his candidature.

A by-election was called when the constituency's sitting Liberal MP, Sir James Kitson, was granted a peerage. It was a fierce and passionate campaign for all three parties.

Socialists poured into the Colne Valley from all quarters and Grayson's meetings were packed. He was supported by visiting speakers, including suffragettes led by the **Pankhursts** and many clergymen among whom were two local men of the cloth; Rev F R Swan and the Rev W B Graham of Thongsbridge.

On polling day itself Grayson toured the constituency in a car. All along the route he was swamped by enthusiastic supporters and from some of the polling booths he was carried shoulder high.

There was no doubt that he had won the hearts and minds of thousands but the big question was whether this would be translated into victory at the polls.



The answer was provided the following day when the count took place at **Slaithwaite Town Hall**.

When it came, thousands of people gathered outside the building (close to today's Slaithwaite Leisure Centre) could scarcely believe it.

Grayson had won with 3,648 votes, 153 more than the Liberal, Philip Bright, and 421 more than the Tory, Granville Wheler.



After the announcement most of the crowd sang the Red Flag.

His supporters dragged the campaign car through the streets of Slaithwaite for a mass meeting outside the **Dartmouth Arms**.

So, at the young age of just 25, Grayson entered Parliament.

As news of his success spread, it caused widespread alarm with some top politicians and newspapers predicting that the result was the start of a political revolution. Stock markets were hit and experts forecast a downturn in the economy.

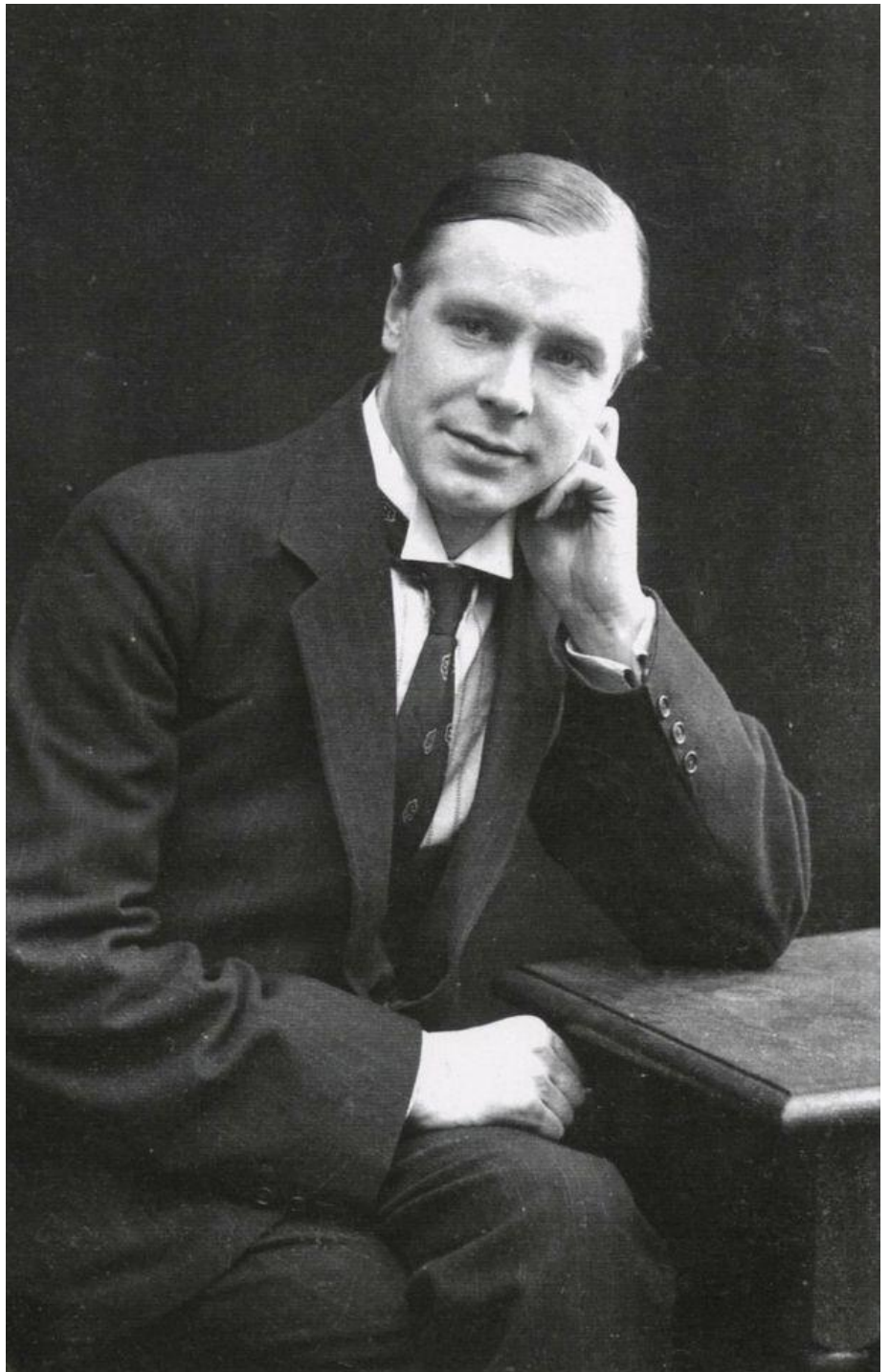
A procession of supporters joins Victor Grayson marching to open the **Scapegoat Hill Socialist Club** in 1908.



Quite apart from his unlikely and short-lived election victory, Grayson's life was alive with mysteries and strange goings-on.

He was supposedly born into a poor, working-class family in Liverpool but it turns out that maybe he was, in fact, the illegitimate son of an aristocrat who had been handed over to the Grayson family, possibly for money. Certainly his only surviving daughter, Elaine, insisted in a 1985 interview that he was indeed an aristocrat's son but she declined to name his real family's identity.

As a young man after a short spell in engineering, Grayson turned to studying at Owen's Theological College, Manchester, although most of his time was taken up preaching socialism. He made two impressive speeches in Huddersfield that led to him being adopted as parliamentary candidate by the Colne Valley Labour League. He was dubbed 'Britain's greatest orator'.



Bolstered by his by-election success Grayson entered the Commons in high spirits but was then brought down to earth by parliamentary procedures. His persistent cries for help to be given to the unemployed got him into trouble and he was suspended from the house. His reign as an MP was short - the Liberals won back the seat in 1910, with a disillusioned Grayson bottom of the poll.

It seems his downfall was partly due to his dependency on drink and a love of the good life. He had married a beautiful actress called Ruth Nightingale in 1912 but she and his second daughter died in childbirth. There is some evidence that Grayson may have been bisexual. His fondness for alcohol deepened as he suffered stress and fatigue and he quite quickly faded from the political scene. Although he served in the army during the First World War, he was discharged because of physical wounds and mental problems. Grayson then fell into a parlous financial state, barely making a living from public speaking and journalism.



## But stranger things were still to happen...

An odd chap by the name of **Maundy Gregory** was asked to spy on Grayson. By the then head of the Special Branch, Sir Basil Thompson, who apparently suspected him of working as an agent for the new Communist Government in Russia or for the IRA.

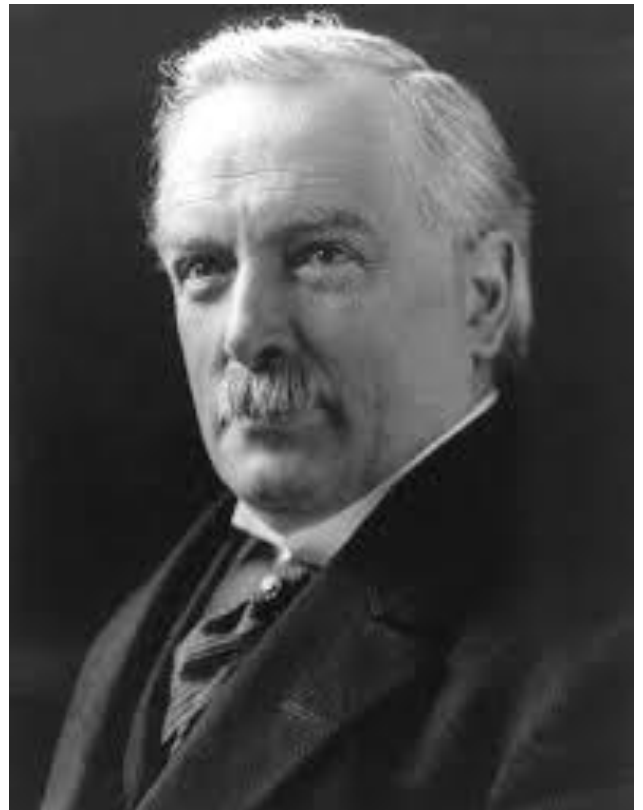
Grayson discovering that Gregory was spying on him set out to get the low -down on Gregory and, with the help of some important friends, found out that Gregory was an agent selling political honours on behalf Prime Minister, David Lloyd George.

Gregory - a peacock figure given to ostentatious displays of wealth - was said to habitually carry round "a wad of banknotes the size of a newly born baby's head". It seems he had carved a post war niche for himself illegally selling knighthoods, baronetcies and peerages on behalf of Lloyd George's government.

David Lloyd George - who incidentally might have known my father - was British Prime Minister from late in 1916 through to October 1922.

At a public meeting in Liverpool, Grayson accused Lloyd George (pictured right) of selling honours for between £10,000 and £40,000. He declared: "This sale of honours is a national scandal. It can be traced right down to 10 Downing Street and to a monocled dandy with offices in Whitehall. I know this man, and one day I will name him."

Grayson's "**monocled dandy**" remark let Gregory know that he was in danger of being exposed. At the beginning of September 1920, Grayson was beaten up in the Strand. This was probably an attempt to frighten him off. But Grayson continued threatening to name the man behind the corrupt system.



Sometime later Grayson's financial situation and lifestyle improved. He was living in a luxury apartment in London. There are those who suggest sinister forces were now trying to 'buy him off'.

## Mysterious disappearance

Shortly after the strangest thing occurred; Grayson disappeared. There were reports that he was seen with a suitcase and accompanied by two men not known to the manageress of the flats.

This was later in 1920. Speculation arose about the mysterious disappearance and there were supposed sightings in London, Maidstone and even mainland Europe.

But he was never reliably seen again and the mystery of what happened to him remains to this day. One biographer, David G Clark suggests he may possibly have survived into the 1950s under a pseudonym. Clark believes Grayson was bribed in order to keep quiet about the honours scandal and was told to forge a new identity. **We may never know.**

# Farewell Spencer Davies



Spencer Davies, who died the other day of pneumonia formed and led a number of bands in the 1960's. His eponymous '**Spencer Davies Group**' brought him fame and No1 hits.

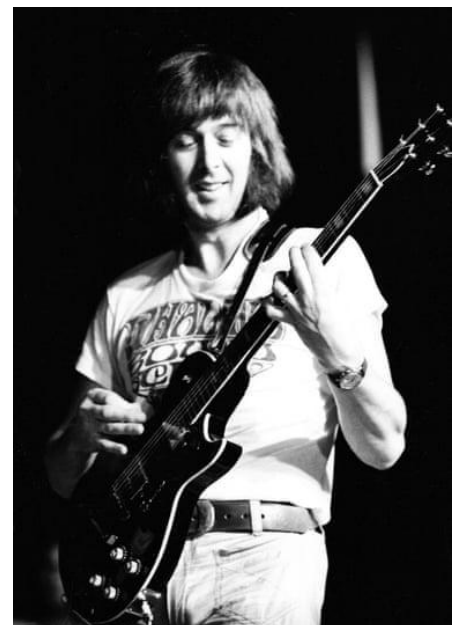
The band included the fabulous blues singer - **Stevie Winward** - who is still around. They had known each other since they were kids.



The group's best remembered song is probably '**Gimme Some Loving**' in 1965.

This film of their performance on the link below is super -

- you just have to disregard the subtitles in Finnish and let their music speak for itself



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcxYX8KPhGk>



## Spencer in his own words ....

Davies talks in this 1966 video about his '**Keep on Running**', the driving force behind his groups, the contribution of the Winward brothers to his band and what makes him probably one of Britain's best R&B musicians. There are clips of the band performing, too – very 'sixties'.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Y0FjRGvTqk>

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## Halloween is coming up

Well it made me smile ...



*"Track or trace?"*

# Autumn above Digley



There's nothing like a good walk in the country on a crisp autumn day to perk you up.

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## Send me a picture, tell me your news....

At this time of social isolation, VotV readers, whether singers or audience-members, can no longer meet each other.

But we can keep in touch.



Let the VotV Editor know if something happens to you, that might be of interest and has some - connection - however tenuous - to the Choir. Doesn't matter if you are not very confident writing, I'll help you put into publishable shape.

**Voice of the Valley Editor: John C Clark**

Ring Choir Secretary, Jenny, on 01484 645192 to join us or join our Readers' List or for other queries



And see our website to get the full story

**[colnevalleymvc.org.uk](http://colnevalleymvc.org.uk)**