

Pigeon Fancying in East Cleveland



Pigeon Man sculpture, Beach Road Skinninggrove, produced by Steve Iredale.

Produced by



SKINNINGGROVE HISTORY GROUP

with thanks to



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East Cleveland Federation of Homing Societies for invaluable help.



Staithes Pigeon Club, 1951 (courtesy of East Cleveland Image Archive)

"In the 1950s all the land around was taken up with allotments and lofts so my dad converted our coalhouse into a pigeon loft!"

"I'd spend my last penny on pigeons, I would. I'd give owt for them; oh aye, it's love all right!"

"When you'd been working down a mine or at the steelworks you wanted to be outside. It was easier to afford keeping pigeons then"

Mining communities in the North East of England took a particular interest in pigeons. Residents here often had access to allotments to develop lofts and workers were pleased to be in the open air. The Up North Combine organisation was formed in 1905 and Skinninggrove & District Homing Society five years later. The society developed into the East Cleveland Federation, formed in 1926; members of the federation were in villages and towns strongly connected to ironstone mining. The industrial bond that held such communities together may have gone but pigeon fancying and racing continues to attract people of all ages, male and female.

"I want to be here when that pigeon comes home, to see it drop out of the sky when you've bred it, trained it, brought it up"



Multiple winner Bill Porritt, Staithes 1970s (courtesy of Mary Hambley)

"Keeping pigeons can bring families closer together"

"I once had a pigeon that ended up in a shop at New Marske. I told the shopkeeper I'd sent it for a packet of fags!"

"You name some of your birds because of their character but you can't give them all a name: there's too many!"

"I've got four pigeons racing today, 550 miles and twelve hours; might not see them again"



Unloading at Corneilles, 1955 (courtesy of Up North Combine)

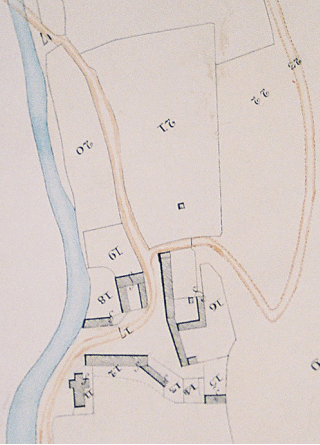


Liberation at Lille, 1961 (courtesy of Up North Combine)



Three John Winks (grandson, son and grandfather) and blue hen pigeon, Skinninggrove 1956 (courtesy of East Cleveland Image Archive)

Before faster means of communication became available, pigeons had a vital job as carriers of important messages. The incredible ability of these birds to find their way home over long distances was used for many purposes. With the arrival of the telegraph about 1840, these useful birds became redundant. Thousands of unemployed pigeons flooded the market, to be picked up cheaply by working men; the utility bird then turned into a sporting bird. However, their role as vital messengers resumed during wartime in the 20th century: homing pigeons were the most reliable way of communicating and they were instrumental in saving many lives.



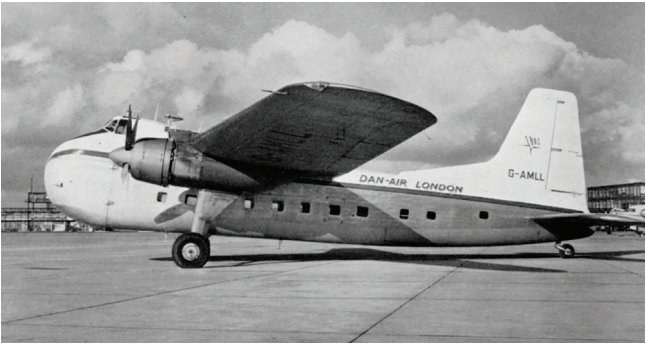
This tith map shows Skinninggrove in the 1840s.21 is named Pigeon Cote Field (courtesy of Teesside Archives)

"There's nothing more exciting than to see pigeons coming home out of the sky after you've been waiting two or three hours or days"

"For me there's nothing better than early on a summer's day and you let your birds out to fly. They go up like tiny little dots, they come sweeping down and you hear the wings come across your head, then back up and disappear off. It's a magical sight"

—A meeting was held at Skinninggrove on Saturday, Dr. J. B. Laverick, J.P., of Hinderwell, being chairman, when it was decided to form a Homing District Homing Society, with a radius of seven miles. Mr. M. Dobson has been appointed secretary. The next meeting will be held at the Miners' Institute, Skinninggrove, on October 1st, when anyone desiring to become a member may do so by applying to the secretary.

Skinninggrove & District Homing Society launched 1910 (courtesy of Cleveland Ironstone Mining Museum)



New air freighter, 1962 (courtesy of Up North Combine)



Loading baskets, 2017



Loading baskets, Skinningrove 1980s; photo: Chris Killip (courtesy of Stan Binks estate)

"I got into pigeons through my husband; now I'm treasurer!"



One man and his pigeon (photo: Ian Macdonald)



Winner's medal 1964 (courtesy of Cec Rawson)

"I owned my first pigeons at eight years old!"



Skinningrove Bonfire 2017, designed by Steve Iredale

"My brother's at the loft at half three in the morning: can't wait for sunrise!"



Liberation from Ypres July 2018: World War One centenary (courtesy of Up North Combine and The Gazette)

Old Bird Channel Federation

		Points Total
Stafford & Wilson	Skinningrove HS	92
Mr & Mrs Peirson&Purver	Brotton HS	66
A & D Wright	Skelton Green HS	43
Bowden Bros	Skelton Green HS	41
White Bros	Skinningrove HS	41
Prokopowicz & Son	Skinningrove HS	36
I. Brown	Boosbeck HS	35
R.Wilson & Ptns	Brotton HS	22
Mr & Mrs I & E.Purver	Skinningrove HS	20
Chapman Sons&Swinburne	Skelton Green HS	19
F Reilly & Son	Brotton 6 BC	19
K & M Arkless	Loftus HS	17
K Wren & M Stone	Skinningrove HS	17
D.Smith & Daughter	Boosbeck HS	16
K M Brown & Cole	Brotton 6 BC	16
D Williams	Skelton Green HS	15
Winspear &Son	Skinningrove HS	15
A Tose & Daughter	Loftus HS	14
D Winspear & Son	Skelton Green HS	14
D & J Waters	Brotton HS	14
G Peirson MBE & Sons	Skinningrove HS	13
D Ward	Staithes HS	11
D Coates	Boosbeck HS	9
Richards & Marsay	Skinningrove HS	9
C Vasey & Son	Loftus HS	7
G.Bavin & Son	Marske & New Marske HS	4
Sayers Brothers	Skinningrove HS	3
G Skidmore &gsons	Lingdale HS	2
Harris Bros & son	Loftus HS	1

East Cleveland Federation 2018 (courtesy of Bill Dowey)

"I see him going up that hill with bags of corn on his shoulders, carrying buckets of water..."

"We've taken pigeons on our coach trips then released them!"

"I've got a pigeon that's bred from birds used in wartime"



"We lose lots of pigeons to other birds, electricity wires, weather and so on"



'Lewis' 2002 winner, W Heslop Brotton Homing Society (courtesy of Bill Heslop)



Pigeons over Skinningrove (courtesy of photographer Graham Smith)



Painting, artist unknown (courtesy of Bill Heslop)



Dave Alderson in his loft (courtesy of photographer Graham Smith)



Painting by Stan Binks (courtesy of Stan Binks estate)



Surveying the skies (photo: Ian Macdonald)