

Why Shaw & Crompton takes some beating...

Before people were able to read and understand maps and when very few parishioners ever left their home parish, just about every town and village in Britain carried out the annual ceremony of beating the bounds.

This ancient ritual involved groups of people, and bands sometimes too, walking the boundary of every parish. These boundaries were marked by stones (many of which still exist today) and in some cases, young men were lifted upside down and their heads knocked against the stones, in others, the stones were beaten with staffs (probably safer).

By and large the tradition has been lost but one of the last parishes to continue the

ceremony, albeit only every seven years now, is that of Shaw and Crompton. The next year in which this takes place should be 2014. Usually, the group sets off from the Jubilee Inn on Milnrow Road for the 12 to 13-mile walk. This is a little simpler today than it used to be.

There were two interesting features about the parish boundary, as you can see in these old photographs. Firstly, at the King's Arms, Grains Bar (the 'bar' refers to this having been a toll gate at one time) three parishes meet – Oldham,

Saddleworth and Shaw and Crompton. The pub crosses the line. Until not too long ago there wasn't a suitable back door to allow the 'bounders' to pass through the pub and mark the boundary so ladders were constructed over the pub, following the line, and the participants climbed over the building.

Then there was Besom Hill reservoir, constructed by Thomas Mellodew to provide water to his mills and the homes he built for his workers at Moorside. Again, the boundary line passed through the water and so, for many years volunteers swam across the reservoir and even, through a tunnel. Thankfully, the reservoir was drained and no one need get wet today.



Pictures:

1. This is July, 1965, and the 'bounders' queue up on the pub roof to come down.
2. Besom Hill reservoir, just above Sholver, is the setting for this picture taken in July, 1958. This gentleman is preparing to swim across the water to mark the boundary.
3. The chairman of Crompton Council on the roof of the King's Arms, Grains Bar, in October, 1972. It all looks a little precarious, doesn't it?
4. Finally, in July, 1965, swimmers mark the parish line by swimming across the reservoir and through the tunnel.