



## Ryedale Folk Museum: In the Beginning

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**R**yedale Folk Museum officially opened in 1964, but its antecedents lie over thirty years earlier. The founding figures are credited as Bertram ‘Bert’ Frank, Wilfred Crosland and Raymond Hayes, but others played their part too, notably Wilfred’s sisters, Helen and Hannah (known as Minnie), and Bert’s wife Evelyn.

In 1935 Wilfred Crosland and his sisters were living at Elphfield in Hutton-le-Hole. To display his collection of artefacts found on the Moors and raise funds for the Village Hall, they opened one room of their home for two weeks. Wilfred had collected for much of his life and dreamed of his collection forming a local museum. The outbreak of World War 2 put paid to this, but during the late 1940’s Crosland and Bert Frank, then living at Lastingham, met to discuss the possibility of a permanent collection. No progress was made, however, and in 1961 Wilfred Crosland died.

Bert also spent much of his life collecting on the Moors, and from 1960 housed his collection first in a garden shed and then in four small buildings, with the support of enthusiastic volunteers including Raymond Hayes, a local archaeologist.

Efforts to find space for the fledgling museum to expand were fruitless, and Bert felt the venture was doomed to fail: “...only a miracle could save it...”. But

that miracle occurred when in July 1962 Bert was invited to meet Wilfred’s sisters, Helen and Minnie. His diary records: “I felt that I was going to have an extraordinary experience ... They had heard that the infant museum which I had started at Lastingham ... was in danger of collapsing due to lack of space. They went on to say that ... if I was willing to leave Lastingham and come to live at Hutton-le-Hole, I could take over the remnants of their brother’s collection”. The Crosland sisters said they would leave the house and its grounds to Bert in their will to turn into a museum.

Fortunately, Evelyn Frank agreed to the move, and in November 1962 Bert and Evelyn cleared and whitewashed the first room of the new museum, where Wilfred had kept his own collection. The one room soon expanded to three, by August 1963 a board bearing the legend ‘Ryedale Folk Museum’ was attached to the outside wall, and the doors opened for the first time to the public after a small ceremony.

Bert’s diary for 5th August 1963 reads: “Museum ... was visited by a number of people who paid one shilling to see the exhibits ... We were surprised to find how many local people were interested enough to come and see the collection for themselves; some of them bringing household objects, craftsman’s tools, and other

implements”. 1964 saw Bert clearing out the barn for additional space; this area is now the entrance to the present museum, the striking arch being added in 1994.

Minnie and Helen Crosland did not long survive the museum’s opening, dying in 1963 and 1964. Bert and Evelyn continued to live at Elphfield and the museum officially opened on 28th March 1964, with the Look North TV crew visiting in April. The work of collecting continued, and in 1965 the first vernacular building was offered to the museum. ‘Stang End’ was “an old thatched cottage of cruck construction...”. It was dismantled and reconstructed in the grounds of the museum. A unique acquisition was the glass furnace from Rosedale, discovered by Raymond Hayes and brought to the museum after much hard labour and ingenious ideas for its removal from boggy ground. Constructed in 1570, it had remained in use until about 1600.

In 1970 Harome Manor House, built around 1570 and home to the Lords of the Manor and the

Manor Courts, was offered to the museum. During its dismantling, a silver spoon of 1510 was found in the thatch, then considered the oldest spoon of its type in the country. The British Museum now has it in its collection, but it made a welcome return to the museum in 2017 as part of an exhibition. In 2012 the museum was further augmented by the extraordinary Harrison Collection of antiques and curiosities from 500 years of British history, collected by brothers Edward and Richard Harrison over five decades.

Bert Frank died in 1996, having seen the dreams of Wilfred Crosland and himself become a reality. The museum is now a major tourist attraction in the North York Moors, recording and commemorating a way of life now gone or fast disappearing.

Raymond Hayes and Bert Frank were awarded MBEs in 1986 in recognition of their services to the archaeology of the North York Moors and to the foundation of Ryedale Folk Museum respectively.



## Find out more

Ryedale Folk Museum, Hutton-le-Hole, Kirkbymoorside, YO62 6UA,  
<https://www.ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk/>

Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group,  
<http://www.yvbsg.org.uk/>



*Old shops, with Tudor Manor House from Harome in the background, Ryedale Folk Museum, Hutton-le-Hole*