



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Christmas is here again, doesn't time fly. Since the last edition of The Bugle, society members have been involved with several projects. The first being a small excavation of the remaining uncovered area of Royton Hall. This dig was the culmination of considerable hard work and organisation by our archaeology team - the Royton Lives through the Ages 2 group (see report below).

Early in November we took part in the Local History and Family History Exhibition at Gallery Oldham. Our table of exhibits was enhanced by a model of Royton as it was in 1861 made by Doug Heslop. This model first appeared at an event at St. Paul's Church and received such praise that it later went on display in Royton Library. We were fortunate in being able to borrow the model, with Doug's permission, for display on our stand. It proved to be the focus of much discussion and trips down memory lane for many of the visitors who saw it. The model is now back on display in Royton Library and if you haven't seen it I would urge you to do so. Several local history societies and Genealogical societies were represented at the exhibition and these, along with film shows and talks, made for a fascinating and informative day.

November 27th was Lancashire Day and along with many other towns throughout the county we celebrated the day. The morning celebrations began inside Royton library with Doug Ashmore reading a declaration which was responded to by Councillor Williamson. Then everyone moved outside where the Town Crier, Mr Michael Woolley, rang his bell and read the Proclamation from the library steps. This he repeated from the mounting steps in the shopping precinct. In the evening we held a 'Taste of Lancashire' night at Downey House with approximately 80 guests attending. Entertainment was provided by Stewart Needham who sang Lancashire Folk Songs. At 9:00pm Doug Ashmore adopted the role of Town Crier and read the Proclamation once again after which we all raised our glasses to toast the Queen, the Duke of Lancaster. This is the recommended time for all Societies and celebrants to do this. A potato pie supper and more Lancashire songs rounded off the evening nicely. It were a reet gradely do!

My thanks go to all members who helped organise and run the above events.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman



The Chairman and committee of Royton Local History Society would like to wish everyone

A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY, HEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.



Royton Lives Through the Ages 2

RLTA 2 has made the front page of the Greater Manchester Archaeological Federation Journal! In October we conducted a small excavation in the area of the old 'Royton Hall Yard', to the north of the area dug in 2007, to see if there were any remains of early walls. Two years ago we uncovered a length of wall tentatively dated to the oldest parts of the hall. It ran north-south away from the rear porch area towards the bank behind the Middleton Road shops. Unfortunately we ran out of time in 2007 and hoped to pursue the enigma at a later date.

From the 5th to 9th October this year, with the help of Tameside Archaeological Society, MADASH and other volunteers, we undertook a small dig in this area with great success (after a rainy and disappointing start). We found a stretch of stone drain running alongside a wall foundation indicating what Adam Thompson, the supervising archaeologist, said was the mark of 'a massive building'. We are assuming that this would be the foundations of the barn depicted in the 1793 engraving of Royton Hall. Adam thought these foundations dated from the 16th century. If it is not the barn then we certainly have a building as old as the oldest parts of the hall. Alas we could not dig any further into the bank for health and safety reasons ie. the Victorian walls and back yards of the shops on Middleton Road lie on top of it! Hopefully a development restriction order will now be placed on these shops to ensure further archaeological investigations will precede any new building work. During the week we also uncovered two layers of garden walls and paths belonging to the Hall.

We were hoping to conduct this small dig in conjunction with the Parks Department who, after we had finished, were to grade and turf the site in preparation for the 'footprinting'. While we had the services of our usual digger crew, the grading and re-turfing was put out to tender by the Parks Dept., so this work still has to be done. The outlining of the hall and landscaping of the site hopefully will be finished next year. Until then we can reflect on our small dig and examine the finds, which included clay pipes, animal bones, pottery, clog irons, various bits of rusted iron and a 1923 shilling. Both Norman Redhead (the County Archaeologist) and Fr Timothy Radcliffe O.P. (our patron) sent their congratulations.

Michael Higgins, Chairman RLTA 2

Interesting Roytonians

This feature follows on from our previous 'Famous Roytonians' feature. If you have a tale to tell about an 'interesting' Roytonian please let me have it to include in a future issue of The Bugle - Jess Wild.

Frances Pickford

by Michael Higgins

Frances Pickford, born at Royton Hall in 1778, was the third daughter of Joseph Pickford. She apparently lived a sheltered life until recently 'discovered' in the journal entries of Anne Lister, mistress of Shibden Hall, Halifax. More recently I discovered her in the pages of the Oldham Chronicle of the 1860s and Anna Philpott of Arden on Severn has left a record of her life in Bath, and of her family relations in Yorkshire.

Frances had many sisters and brothers from Joseph's second wife, Elizabeth Sunderland, along with an older half-brother, William, by Joseph Pickford's first wife, Katherine Percival. Joseph had been a widower for only six months when he married Elizabeth and thus had been fortunate to have married two heiresses in a very short time. Elizabeth was sole heiress to her father's fortune and may have furnished Frances with the wealth to live an independent life. Frances was 18 when her mother passed away in 1796, having borne Mr Pickford eight children.

Little is known of the children's life at the hall, save for a very fanciful fright tale, set in Royton Hall in 1790 but first published in a book of Rochdale folklore in 1923. Oddly, Frances was not included in the story and presumably was either not then living at the hall or was not at home that day. The very detailed story involves her brothers, sisters, two guests, a severed hand and a 17th century curse.

In 1795 Joseph Pickford inherited the Marsden and Milnsbridge estates and the surname of his maternal uncle, William Radcliffe. The family, save Mary and possibly her brother Joseph, left Royton Hall. Anna Philpott speculates that Frances may have helped run her father's new household, or served as 'housemaid/companion' to a paternal uncle. Her father was created a baronet in 1813 in recognition of his exertions and depredations as a magistrate during the Luddite disturbances. Sir Joseph Radcliffe, bart. died in 1819 in Bristol (but was buried at Royton) and it seems the family had some prior Somerset connections; a John Pickford owned a house in Sion Hill, Bath, before this date. Frances's nephew Joseph (son of deceased brother Joseph) who was born at Royton Hall in 1799, adopted the Radcliffe surname to become the second baronet, retaining the family's Yorkshire connections.

The Listers became friends and in-laws of the family, bringing Frances into contact with Anne Lister of Shibden Hall. It is claimed that the 'Pic' in the diaries of Anne Lister is Frances Pickford. These partly encrypted diaries escaped burning by a horrified descendent and have recently been decoded by Helena Whitbread. They have become celebrated Sapphic reading. Inside the journals 'Pic', who was also known as 'Frank', once dressed as a soldier, was very knowledgeable on the Satires of Juvenal and described as being 'too masculine' by Anne Lister. She confessed to liaisons with women and flirted with Miss Lister, who was some 12 years her junior. Miss Lister herself was known as 'Gentleman Jack' to the citizens of Halifax, 'marrying' a wealthy heiress named Anne Walker, operating her own coal mine, travelling to France and Russia, and becoming a rather snobbish and ambitious 'gentleman farmer'.

By the 1830s Frances was living comfortably in Bath, at a 'large spread-eagled house' called 'Tylehurst' in Sion Hill with 4 servants. One of these, her housekeeper Eleanor Mason, was from Yorkshire. Frances owned much property, acted as a money-lender and building speculator in Bath and Bristol, and became a prominent subscriber to charities. She lived in the company of her servants and faithful parlour maid, Elizabeth Filer, some 33 years her junior.

However, at the age of 83, she seems to have had a yearning to see the place of her birth, Royton, and it is in the pages of the Oldham Chronicle and Oldham Standard that we find her in July 1861. She made the long journey from 'Somersetshire' to Royton Hall as the guest of Samuel Cooper, who is described as living in 'the principal residence of the hall'. Mr Cooper was related to the mill-owning Coopers of Downey House. The hall is described as having been 'made into separate dwelling houses some time back'. She arrived on Wednesday 10 July and departed on the next day, visiting the family vaults at St Paul's Church. When she first lived at the hall, Royton had been a small village spread along the lane diverging around the hall park. Now, although the back of the hall was still used as a farm, much of the park had been built on and the hall had been partly surrounded by shops, cotton mills and reservoirs. More significant for us is the mention that she was given a photograph of Royton Hall as a keepsake. This is intriguing as we are bound to ask if this photograph is the undated professional card-backed photo in Royton Library's collection, depicting a family posing outside the south front of the hall. This photo is the centre-page of F. Stott's book 'History of Royton Hall'. Mr Cooper's son, Hugh and his family also lived at the hall before moving to Hollybank House on Church Street. Thanks to Frances's visit, we can ask whether it is the Cooper family who are depicted in this photograph.

The Chronicle prophesied that Frances Pickford had come to see the hall 'possibly for the last time'. She died in Bath the following December. Sadly, old Mr Cooper, who was aged 79, at her visit, passed away shortly after. Whatever her thoughts about the family vault at St Paul's, Frances was buried at St Swithin's Churchyard, in Bath, leaving her estate to her surviving sister Mary (who was to die the next year), Hannah's niece, the widow of her attorney, and her faithful housekeeper, Elizabeth Filer. She had asked that she be buried 'without ostentation and with as little expense as may be consistent with my station in life.'

Her Christian name was retained within the Pickford family; her sister Mary named her daughter Frances; her elder brother Charles named his son Francis, with the masculine spelling. He married Sophia Bancroft Lister and his aunt Hannah named one of her daughters Elizabeth Lister. Whatever the family links, Ann Lister's Journal entries may have given Frances a posthumous attention that she could never have imagined.

Sources: Helena Whitbread: I know my Own Heart; The Journals of Anne Lister, 1995; A Philpott: A Potted History of Frances Pickford 1995 (unpublished ms), Oldham Chronicle, Oldham Standard 13 July 1861

Postscript: The BBC is to dramatise Anne Lister's life in Spring of 2010.

The Formation of Royton Local Board 1863

In September 1863 Thomas Seville, of Elm House, churchwarden of St Paul's, advertised a special vestry meeting of Royton ratepayers. The two-year old American Civil War had so restricted the supply of raw cotton to the local mills that almost half the town's working population was without full time work. Something needed to be done to boost the local economy and provide for the unemployed.

Up to this time Royton had been regulated by a loose partnership of a gas lighting inspectorate and a board of highway surveyors, elected by the ratepayers of the town through the vestry board of the Parish Church. Richard Hill, the vicar of St Paul's, chaired the vestry and lighting meetings. He was also chairman of the cotton famine relief committee. The latter was busy raising money from official government funds and from locally raised donations. Sir Joseph Radcliffe, Lord of the manor, was a frequent donor of money and clothing through his local agent at Dryclough House. But there were criticisms that the unemployed were underpaid and put to work on private property (Sir Joseph's own estate for one). It was said that some employed people (especially railway navvies) were falsely claiming relief.

The special vestry meeting held that September at St Paul's Church was chaired by the vicar, but Thomas Seville, member of the board of surveyors led the debate. He repeated what had been proposed at the last highway surveyors' meeting, that Royton would benefit by applying to the Home Office for status as a local government board under the Local Government Act of 1858. The new authority would be able to raise loans against the rates and provide proper public works and unemployment relief. Money borrowed from the government would then be paid back in instalments over 30 years. Currently, none of the local public bodies were allowed to borrow money.

A debate followed, with some members showing unease. Reverend Hill said that if they agreed to adopt the Act it could be put in place within 21 days. Mr Seville explained that the Act could be tried for two years. If it was found wanting they could then abandon it and return to the present way of regulating the town. Some ratepayers were concerned about who would be liable for any debts but Mr J Ashworth proposed a motion that they adopt the Act. Seconded by Mr Stott, the motion 'that the Ratepayers of Royton, in vestry assembled, duly adopt the Public Works Act, and request the churchwardens and overseers of the township of Royton to take the necessary steps by communicating with one of her Majesty's secretaries of state in order that the same become law' was duly carried. A committee was formed to see the resolution carried out. It comprised Vicar Hill, Thomas Seville, J Ashworth, Robert Whittaker, J Stott and Thomas Butterworth.

In the meantime wet weather, delays in the building of the new railway line, and even earthquake tremors felt in Royton, added to the overall gloom. In October there were 1531 persons in full time work, 84 on four or five days a week, 174 on three days and 877 totally unemployed. The wages lost equalled £599, 15 shillings.

On Friday, October 16th the government Gazette officially published the news that Royton had adopted the Local Government Act and another Vestry meeting was called in Royton for Monday 19 October at noon for the purpose of electing a local government board. Dr Kershaw suggested electing 15 'commissioners' or board members and the motion was carried. The number had to be divisible by three to allow a third of the board to retire and face re-election every year. A motion to delay electing any members for 3 months was defeated. This meant that as the electoral year was to run from March 25 (Lady Day, the old New Year's Day) there would have to be a new round of elections then. The question of whether to divide the town into wards, and thus divide representation, was left undecided. The new board was then variously nominated and elected by the ratepayers. Its members were:

Mr Thomas Butterworth – coal proprietor
James Buckley, Bull Cote, farmer
John Smethurst, Heyside, coal proprietor
James Ashworth, Union, gentleman
Edward Gartside, Park Road, Innkeeper
James Stott, Longsight, farmer
Robert Whitaker, cotton manufacturer
John Buckley, Park Lane House, cotton spinner

Thomas Seville, Elm House, cotton manufacturer
William Ormerod, Royley House, farmer and butcher
John Robson, Haggate, butcher
John Holden, Highlands, cotton manufacturer
Jonathan Kay, Highlands, gentleman
John Ashworth, Longsight, coal proprietor
Simeon Holden, Heyside, cotton spinner

The first board meeting was held on 2 November in the club room of the Bull's Head Inn, Sandy Lane. Mr Whitaker surrendered the powers of the surveyors and Vicar Hill surrendered the powers of the lighting inspectorate. Mr James Ashworth was then elected chairman of the new board until March, along with temporary officials. Mr John Mellor, of Fleet Street (Middleton Road), was chosen as temporary clerk, nuisance inspector and collector of the highway rates at £82 per annum. James Wild was appointed temporary surveyor of the highways at £50 per annum. John Ashworth of Longsight was appointed temporary treasurer.

A week later an 'improvements and finance' and a 'lighting committee' were formed. It was decided that meetings would be held monthly and that the town bellman would ring the news round the town that all existing highway rates must be paid by the 30th of the month in order that a new rate could be set. The first task of these committees was to meet with a Mr Brown of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company in the newly named Railway Inn (formerly the Park Inn) to ask him to rectify damage caused by the new line at Turf Lane bridge and Higginshaw bridge, and to erect two new lamps by the line in Shaw Road. Wet weather had delayed operations and as yet no trains were running into the new station at High Barn Street. The railway, after all, would be foremost in helping Royton to prosper once the cotton trade resumed.

Michael Higgins

Sources: Oldham Standard 26 Sept., 17 Oct. 1863; Oldham Chronicle 10, 24, 31 Oct., 7, 14 Nov. 1863

Visit the R.L.H.S. websites at www.roytonlocalhistorysociety.co.uk or www.rlhs.co.uk
Royton Local History Society is a member of the 'Friends of Real Lancashire' - No. 544SF

