



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

In September RLHS held two important meetings. The first was an Extraordinary General Meeting and the second was the Annual General Meeting. The EGM was specially convened for members to agree to a new constitution, prepared using a standard constitution for societies/clubs but amended slightly by the committee to suit our requirements. The new document was presented to members for their consideration and approval. This was accepted by those members attending the meeting.

The AGM followed the normal format and after the Secretary, Treasurer and I had presented our reports the election of committee members took place. The result was as follows:-
 Chairman – Geoff Oliver, Vice Chairman – Doug Ashmore, Secretary – Jess Wild, Treasurer – Beryl Lever.
 Ordinary Members – Marjory Ashmore, Michael Higgins and Avis Morris.
 Any of those named above will be happy to help members with any Society related issues.

For those who attended our November meeting you may recall that I asked that if anyone had any information about any of the following:- 'Royton Sword' (held at Royton and Crompton Golf Club), 'Sir Robert Wood' or 'Royton Mutual Technical School'. If you have then I would be most interested to hear from you. Any information at all would be gratefully received.

On November 19th we celebrated Lancashire Day (a little early) with a 'Lankie Neet' at Downey House. From the comments made after the event a good time was had by all. Our thanks go to Jess Wild for all her time and effort spent in organizing this event.

Finally I hope you have a great Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman.



Interesting Roytonians

John Kershaw

Dr John Kershaw was a great benefactor to the people of Royton. He was born in Lees around 1840 but moved to Royton in his early life. He was a General Practitioner and later became Medical Officer of Health for the district. It is said that he visited his patients on horseback in the manner of a country gentleman. He was well liked by Roytonians who affectionately referred to him as Dr John. He married Harriet Holden with whom he had eight children, only 3 of which survived to adulthood, and they lived in Park House (now the main Post Office on Rochdale Road). After Harriet's death on the 20th January 1904 Dr John married Sarah Hill, the daughter of Reverend Reginald Hill who was Vicar of St. Paul's Church for 39 years. This was an unhappy marriage and Sarah left shortly after the wedding and never returned to him. After this he would have nothing to do with religion.

Dr John retired to St. Annes on Sea in 1881 aged 40 and, as this date coincides with his donation and installation of the Town Hall Clock, presumably this was a parting gift to Roytonians. It was well received by the townfolk, many of whom pawned their existing clocks as they no longer needed them. A poem was written by an anonymous scribe about the gift of the clock which you can read at the end of this article.

Shortly before his death he lost a leg and was forced to use a crutch. When he died on 14th February 1909 at the age of 68 his Will revealed that no allowance was made for his 3 remaining children as these "had already been well provided for". Nothing was to go to his second wife and, after settlement of expenses and some small bequests, his property and remaining fortune was to be put in trust "to found, establish and maintain a General Hospital in the Township of Royton". It was to be built on land in his Sunfield Estate and administered by Charity Commissioners. None of these commissioners were to be Clerics or Socialists. His wish was realised in 1929, twenty years after his death, when construction of his hospital began. It opened in 1931.

In 1948 the hospital was absorbed into the NHS causing controversy because this contravened the requirements of the Will. In 1977 Dr Kershaw's Cottage Hospital became famous for being the place where research by Consultant Gynaecologist, Mr Patrick Steptoe and Dr Robert Edwards into In Vitro Fertilization was carried out. It was here where Mr Steptoe successfully implanted a fertilised egg into Mrs Lesley Brown and in April 1978 Louise Brown, the world's first test tube baby, was born in the maternity unit of Oldham and District General Hospital.

Today Dr Kershaw's Hospital still plays a major role for the people of Royton, because in September 1989 it opened as a Hospice. Now no longer part of the NHS, the hospital has come full circle by reverting back to charitable status. It is administered once again by Charity Commissioners and relies on voluntary contributions for its survival. If he were alive today Dr John would be immensely proud of what he started all those years ago. In fact he may be well aware of the success of his establishment as it has been reported that a ghostly figure of a man using a crutch has been seen walking the corridors.

Although Dr John died in St Annes on Sea he was cremated in Manchester and his ashes were interred in the family vault in Royton Cemetery. The inscription on the Obelisk describes the full details of his family's history as the birth and death dates of his children reveal that his life was not without tragedy. His second son Thomas Holden died on 9th September 1878 aged 6 and his first daughter Clara Emily died 4 months later aged 3. His eldest son Charles William died on 3rd September 1880 aged 9, and his third son George Edward aged 4 died the following day. His fifth child, a daughter, Adeline Gertrude died on 31st October 1894 aged 11.

His Will states that after the interment of his ashes the vault was to be sealed and not used again for further burials.

In eighteen hundred and eighty one,
A clock was given by Doctor John;
Not by him singly, for on the bell -
It had his name and his wife's as well.
The clock was given combined we'll say,
by John and Harriet, in our lay.

This gift, the clock, is the best we've seen,
The best Royton gift that there has been.
There have been gifts, but none so high,
They served a part, this, all passers by.
It looks from sides one, two, three, four,
On sturdy youth and frail fourscore;

All sides alike except the East,
And that is deficient in the face:
That is, it's smaller than the rest,
This owing to the building's crest.
This fault, a little oversight,
Not compared to it's utility.

Its loud grave tone I like to hear,
Where'er I am, be it far or near,
When I hear it strike I often say
"Doctor John tells the time of day."

'Tis said the pawn shop has got more
Of clocks than ever it did before.
Be it so, or not, I cannot tell,
'Tis not the fault of the clock or bell.

Be John's faults many, old or new,
He deserves not the praise of the few;
The public at large will all give vent,
With thanks to him for the money spent.
Upon the clock; 'tis a monument.

Let all the town give praise to John,
And for this gift call him "good man,"
And for a memorial it shall be,
When the donor lies in the Cemetery

Sources:- A History of Dr Kershaw's Cottage Hospital by G.M Hargeaves

Geoff Oliver

Ralph Taylor of Thorp

(from Notes on Old Royton by 'Alpha')

Following on from my article on Ann(e) Buckley, the Royton lady who provided Thomas Kay ('Alpha') with much of his information for his newspaper articles, readers of the Bugle may be interested in an excerpt from his 'Notes on Old Royton'. This is a part-excerpt from the Oldham Chronicle of 23rd November 1878.

"As much as is being said of Oldham, its people etc., of byegone days, you will perhaps, of your usual liberality, find a corner for the same specialities of Royton. Few villages in Royton have seen greater changes in its inhabitants, manufacturers, geographical surface etc. The hamlet of Thorpe, situate in the north west of the township, between the village of Tandle Hill, is perhaps the oldest portion, for I have heard one of my ancestors affirm (and I am one of the original seven) that she could remember the time when there was not a house between Thorp and the village church. Old Ralph Taylor was of the ancient family of the Taylors of Thorp, ancestors of the Taylors of Lees, and consequently of our future Tory candidate, who I am afraid, in his coming electioneering campaign, will be able to verify the truth of the old saying that even a prophet is not appreciated in his own country.

Old Ralph, it is asserted, established a cotton mill at Thorp Clough as early as the year 1764.*This mill has, from the beginning of the present century, been occupied as cottages, but the old water conduit can still be traced to Pingling Pit, Thorp, where the water reservoir was situated. Many anecdotes are related to Ralph Taylor – "Yeoman" on his gravestone in Royton Churchyard. One is, that having for some time served the office of overseer [of the poor], and being conscious that a part of his duties required that he should take a book before a magistrate for signature before he commenced to collect a new rate, Old Ralph attended on the functionary for that purpose, and having presented his books, the following colloquy took place:-

"I suppose Mr Taylor, these books are correct."

Mr Taylor: "Yes, for anything I know they are: If they were when I received them, they are now for I have never altered them."

The truth was, Ralph had received money when it was tendered, and paid when it was required and had kept no record of either.

Ralph, as was the fashion with great folks of those days, wore his hair very long behind in the form of a pigtail, and among his employees was a lad named John. This lad lived with his 'gronny' and was in fact, a 'gronny' lad: and on one occasion when a bull-bait was to take place at Royton, Ralph refused to allow John to go and see it. This brought John's 'gronny' to remonstrate with old Ralph who in spite of her entreaties, still refused to allow John a few hours absence. The old woman being determined that John must go and seeing that Ralph was determined he must not, seized him by his pigtail and called to the lad, 'Now John; run, John'. John took to his heels and when Ralph was completely exhausted his 'gronny' followed and they were both shortly enjoying themselves at the bull-bait

ALPHA

(*The site of the mill is part way up the lane from Stove to Thorp on the right hand site. It resembled a jumble of cottages built against one another. A few piled stones are all that remain from the original building and a blue plaque records an unproven claim that it was the first cotton mill in Lancashire. Two large houses have been built over the old mill water run. From this story one wonders what Mr Taylors' mill accounts were like!)

[Some of Alpha's articles have been preserved as typescript copies in Royton Library.]

Michael Higgins



Royton Lives Through the Ages 2

The Royton Hall footprint is now well under way and should be finished before the end of the year. On 23rd November each primary school involved in the excavations sent along 8 children to help plant trees on the site. Earlier in the month schoolchildren had also helped to plant 5,000 purple crocus bulbs around the footprint. These were donated by the Oldham Metro Rotary Club to help raise awareness of its polio eradication project. Ridding the world of polio has been a target of worldwide Rotary clubs since 1985 and the purple crocus represents the dye which is dabbed on to a child's finger to show he/she has been immunised against the deadly polio virus. These crocuses, along with the additional trees, should provide a spectacular display next Spring.

Jess Wild, Secretary RLTA 2



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.



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

