



# The Bugle



## Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Although it seems a while ago that we held our Annual General Meeting, there has not been an edition of The Bugle since that time so here's a brief report about what went on. As you know, the main purpose of the AGM is to elect a committee which will guide the Society through the next 12 months. This was done and the following committee members were re-elected :- Chairman – Geoff Oliver, Vice Chairman – Doug Ashmore, Secretary – Jess Wild, Treasurer – Beryl Lever, Ordinary Members – Marjorie Ashmore, Michael Higgins and Avis Morris. If you need to raise an issue or ask anything related to the Society these are the people to ask.

At the meeting the secretary expressed concern about the survival of this newsletter as material for publication was not coming in. It was being left to Michael Higgins, Geoff Oliver and herself to supply all the articles and she would like others to contribute as well. So if any of you have something of interest you would like to share with the society please contact Jess Wild.

Earlier in the year local history societies within the Borough of Oldham set up the '7 Townships History Forum' to share ideas, resources and give help to one another if needed. The secretary and I have been the RLHS representatives at the meetings held at Oldham Local Interest centre. However, one meeting was held at the Civic Centre with the Leader of the Council where groups could express their concerns about what was happening within their townships. At this meeting it was suggested that groups put forward sites where 'Blue Plaques' could be sited in the future. If you have any suggestions for suitable sites please let me know.

The only other matter of any significance that was raised at the AGM was the 800th Anniversary of Royton, and the 10th anniversary of our society, both of which occur next year. Members expressed the desire to hold some form of celebration. Again, if you have any suggestions for a celebration then please approach a committee member with your ideas and thoughts.

As I write this, work is been carried out to improve the landscaping of the Royton Hall site. Although some work had been carried out previously this was found to be unsatisfactory. Paths marking out the layout of the walls of the Hall proved to be too narrow and the material used unsuitable for purpose. After discussion with the Parks Dept. they are now carrying out further work, making the paths wider and using a harder wearing gravel. If you would like more information about the site please contact Michael Higgins, Chairman of the RLTA group.

Yet again another Christmas is almost upon us so on behalf of all committee members I would like to extend best wishes for a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all.

**Geoff Oliver, Chairman**



### Roman Manchester

On 20th September 2011 I attended a talk on 'Roman Manchester' given by Norman Redhead, county archaeologist, at the Museum of Science and Industry, which stands on the edge of the civilian settlement to the north of the Roman fort site.

Norman gave a brief history of the Roman occupation of Britain and northern England, illustrated by local and national maps. The first major invasion, about AD 70, conquered the north with the subjection of the local inhabitants, a loose confederation of tribes known as Brigantes. A fort was established here under General Agricola at the confluence of the rivers Medlock and Irwell but there may have been an earlier fort built by advanced troops. The fort was then occupied by a mixed garrison of auxiliary mounted infantry drawn from modern day Switzerland, Austria and Portugal. The fort lay across the road between the great legionary fortress at Chester and the other legionary fortress at York. This road also connected to the smaller fort at Castleshaw, 16 miles away and there was also another smaller fort at Wigan.

For about 200 years Manchester, or Mamucium as it was known, functioned as a small but cosmopolitan garrison town with civilian homes and workplaces. There were temples, one dedicated to Mithras - a god popular with the Roman army, a hotel, iron workings, tanneries, granaries, a graveyard and also a bathhouse. Around the middle of the 3rd century AD the fort seems to have gone out of use and little is known about the site afterwards apart from references to refortifying the site in Anglo-Saxon times. Despite subsequent archaeological evidence of later Anglo-Saxon buildings it seems the site ceased to be utilised after this. By then the main Roman military concern was Hadrian's Wall so perhaps the garrison was

not needed and the area was turned over to cattle farming and other provisioning for the wall-based troops. The civilian population also relocated.

Norman pointed out that the later medieval village was built where the Cathedral and Chethams School of Music are today, on higher ground at the confluence of the Irk and Irwell, and the site of the former garrison remained rural. Over time, and with a change of language, the name Mamucium became Mamecastr and then Manchester.

It was fascinating to hear that the first known artefact, an altar, was found in the 17th century, when the area was known as the Castle Field, and that subsequent finds, including pottery and carved figures were recovered through quarrying and when laying foundations for Victorian buildings. Alas railways, roads and terraced houses soon obliterated the site before any proper archaeological work could be done and, until the 1970s, all that remained of the site was a few feet of the fort wall under the railway arches. Subsequent digs, conducted by the newly formed University of Manchester Archaeological Unit, and further ones conducted within the last few years by other groups, revealed a great deal more information about the layout of the fort and its 'vicus' or civilian town.

Fortunately modern planning laws require any developers to fund archaeological surveys before re-building and, as older properties are demolished, the empty sites can be excavated. Since the 1970s the site has been enhanced by Manchester City Council funding the erection of a replica of the north gate and defensive ditches. A few years ago an altar dedicated to the goddesses Hananefitis and Ollototae was unearthed and is now on display in Manchester Museum, with a copy of the altar also on display at the Museum of Science and Industry.

**Michael Higgins**



## Christmas 1861

### Star in the North

From the Oldham Chronicle 14th December 1861

*"About a quarter past eight last Sunday Night, many of the inhabitants of Royton were startled by the appearance of a brilliant meteor in the atmosphere. It lighted the village up for about three seconds, and rushed away in a westerly direction, and went out in a short distance of the earth. It was of a bluish colour, and left a trail behind it."*

From the Oldham Standard 14th December 1861

*"On Sunday Evening, the 8th instant, about a quarter past eight, a shooting-star of extraordinary brilliance and magnitude made its appearance in the neighbourhood, and has since been the subject of much conversation. The sky was rather cloudy at the time named, when suddenly a prodigious light became visible in the direction of the North Star. It came rushing through towards the earth, inclining a little westward and reached the ground in a field belonging to Mr Radford, Heigate Farm. A portion of this ground is nearly adjoining Tandle Hills, and it was observed by persons in that neighbourhood to pass between them and the hills beyond, completely illuminating the valley around."*

N.B. The night star over Highgate Farm (as we now spell it 150 years later) seemed like a portent, but it did not spoil the villagers' Christmas, despite the depression caused by the Cotton Famine.

The various schools and reading rooms had their festive gatherings with evergreens, paper chains, rosettes, flags, maps, oranges, spices, singers, musicians, dancers and (except for the Methodists and Temperance rooms) beer. Some did run out of provisions and money but tried to cater as best they could.

The Independent Schools' gathering utilised the services of their own composer for the singing of class hymns, tutor William Barber of Dogford House.

Tradition was adhered to in the provision of 24 free blankets to the poor by Lady Radcliffe, through her steward John Whittaker of Dryclough House.

The village Waits (carollers) also turned out as described in the Oldham Chronicle on 28 December 1861:-

*"On Christmas Morn – just after the clock struck twelve, parties of vocalists turned out, and sang the usual Christmas hymns in front of the residences of the principal inhabitants. The Literary Institution Brass Band also turned out, and played Several Christmas pieces in excellent style. The morning was remarkably fine and continued so all day."*

**Michael Higgins**



**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.**



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