



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Our Annual General Meeting was held on 24th September. Only just enough members attended to form a quorum, ie. enough to make it a valid meeting without having to re-arrange it. At the meeting our new committee was elected. I was re-elected as your Chairman, Doug Ashmore as Vice Chairman, and Jess Wild as Secretary. Our Treasurer, Beryl Lever, was retiring from the position and no-one came forward to fill the post so Jess was elected as a temporary treasurer until the position could be filled. Later Pat Abram volunteered to do the job. Marjorie Ashmore, Michael Higgins and Brian Lloyd filled the remaining committee posts.

At our first meeting of this season I showed a small section of the video about the History of Royton. In the course of making this I did some filming at the Albion Club just prior to it's closure in 2011. One of the historic artefacts in the club was the first telephone box in Royton. This box was installed in the original club premises on King St. but, before that building was demolished to make way for the present shopping precinct, the phone box was carefully removed and stored. When the new premises were built, the phone box was reinstalled in it along with an etched glass panel, also from the original building.

Earlier this year I took part in one of the Oldham Community Radio Summer Strolls. This took place in Royton town centre and I, along with Frances Stott, guided the walk pointing out the main historic sites whilst making live broadcasts over the air. At the end of the walk a fellow stroller mentioned that she had heard of the phone box and was interested to see it. As we weren't far from the former Albion Club building I accompanied the lady there to show it to her. The new owners of the club were very helpful and allowed us in but to my great shock the phone box had gone. The new owner explained that the box had gone before he took over the premises and had no idea where it might be.

During our AGM I mentioned this and shortly afterwards Colin Wood contacted me with the phone number of someone who might know what had happened to the box. When I rang the number the person I spoke to had been part of the group responsible for the removal of assets from the club at it's closure and many of the items, including the box, had been taken by an antique dealer in Oldham.

I paid a visit to the dealer, who was most helpful. He clearly remembered removing the box and having it on his premises for about a week before another dealer from Bolton took it away. This dealer then sold the box and exported it to somewhere in Italy - it is not known where. At this point I reluctantly had to give up my little quest.

It is really sad that such an important historic artefact is now missing and I'm just glad that it, and it's story, have been recorded on video and photographic records for future generations.

Finally, may I wish you a very merry Christmas and I look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

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.



The Last Ten Years.

As I sat amongst the membership at our tenth anniversary meeting in September 2012 I looked around to see if anyone else, apart from myself, had been present on that first night ten years ago. It would be so easy at this point to start naming people or past members who have passed through our doors and our lives, but knowing myself as I do I shall resist. I don't want to feel members, and in particular committee members, hands around my throat for missing out somebody's name!

However, I would like to write about the success of our Society over the last ten years. I will lightly dwell on 'the dig' or more correctly 'the excavation of the remains of Royton Hall' and in doing so mention all the people who took an active part in this thrilling project. Also we must not forget the community of Royton, and beyond, who took part by simply visiting the site to look at what had been achieved by all the volunteers. Everything was recorded for posterity by The Manchester University Archaeological Unit and anyone else who had a camera! It was a truly magnificent event, which the people of Royton should feel very proud of, and one which I shall never forget.

In remembering that event it would be easy to forget some of the other good things that have come about and, in no particular order, I have to mention our very own publication 'The Bugle'. When it was launched it was to keep our members informed of current events and was to include articles written by our members. Whilst we have had some excellent articles, I am sorry to say that they have mainly been submitted by Committee members. I know our hardworking Secretary would love something from you, the membership.

A few years ago our society joined 'The Friends of Real Lancashire' (FORL). This organisation promotes all things Lancashire and, as a consequence of this, for a few years we have had a Town Crier on the steps of Royton Library reading the Queen's Proclamation on 27th November, which is Lancashire Day. Some years we followed this by holding a 'Lanky Nite' with traditional Lancashire Fare.

A more recent addition to the Society is our wonderful web-site that tells the world what we are about here in Royton. A couple of months ago I was involved in giving a lady in America some information about the botanist John Mellor. In return I received a colour photograph of a picture of Mellor at the age of 81. Isn't technology wonderful?

Our Chairman has also made some excellent DVDs about the dig, about St. Paul's Church and another, which is currently being made, about the 'History of Royton'. What next I wonder?

And finally, I have to mention the excellent speakers, on a wide variety of subjects, that we have had at our meetings over the last ten years long may it continue!!

Douglas Ashmore, Vice Chairman



Attempted blowing up of Royton Town Hall

On Wed 26th November 1884 it would appear someone tried to blow up our Town Hall. It is reported that around 6pm a tremendous explosion was heard causing thousands of people to rush to the Town Hall to see what had happened. There they found that a considerable number of windows had been broken, the doors had been wrenched off and clouds of smoke were billowing from the building. A pair of folding doors leading from the cellar to the yard were completely blown off their hinges and flung several feet into the Town Hall yard. An iron shutter belonging to the market was bent. Both the clerk and his assistant were knocked down but sustained no serious injuries. It would appear that an explosive had been placed between the cellar window and the footpath and fired by means of a fuse.

When the search was eventually able to take place a strong smell of sulphur was noticeable leading to the conclusion that the explosion had been caused by gunpowder and it had been placed immediately below the local board offices. The next morning the site was visited by the Mayor and a large crowd of people. It is estimated that about 6lb of gunpowder must have been used and that it was probably an attempt to injure some of the officials. The school board clerk had only left the building a minute before the explosion. The can in which the gunpowder was placed was found and taken by the police. At the time of the report no arrests had been made and the Home Office was expected to send someone to investigate.

In June 1885 an attempt was made to blow up Leesfield Vicarage. Rumour had it that the attack was against the action of the Oldham School Board of which the vicar was a member. The explosion was linked to the attempted blowing up of Royton Town Hall where the school board was situated. It was assumed that the person responsible committed the crimes in revenge for some act of persecution by the school board.

Christmas in Royton 1862 - The Cotton Famine Continues

A century and a half ago Royton was going through bad times. The Federal Government's naval blockade of Confederate ports severely restricted the supply of American cotton into Liverpool, and all the textile mills throughout Lancashire were either working on short time or laying off mill hands. In December, 480 families or 1,857 persons were receiving poor relief, roughly a third of Royton's population. Christmas looked grim, despite the Lord Mayor of London's committee sending 8 pence per head for Christmas Dinner. Local committees and benefactors, such as Lady Radcliffe, struggled to meet demand for clogs, coal, clothes and food. In January 1863 the numbers had increased to 495 families and 1,938 persons.

Petty thefts seemed to be on the increase, the notable crime of the month being the sentencing of Edwin Cheetham to 4 months hard labour for stealing poultry from Mr Holden at Highlands House. He had attempted to sell these, and other birds stolen around Royton, in Rochdale and other places.

Nonetheless, a few local clubs and institutions attempted to keep up the Christmas and New Year spirit in the old fashion. Two events were noted in the Oldham Chronicle of the day, beginning with a dinner held at the Working Men's Hall, followed by recitals and singing on Christmas Eve. The same evening a dinner of potato pies and plum pudding was held at the Temperance Seminary, also followed by 'singing' and other 'innocent amusements'.

On Christmas Day, The Independent Sunday Schools also used the Temperance Seminary to hold a tea for 260 scholars and teachers, again followed by singing and reciting. Shortly after, the Baptist Sunday School held a party for 160 scholars, each receiving a 'cheering cup'. After the recitations and hymn singing the party was entertained by a 'tonic sol-fa choir'. This was followed in the week by a recital and concert held at the Village Sunday School. Among the recitations was a reading of a dialect poem called 'Short-time and No Time' written by James Mayall. It described the effect the Cotton Famine was having on a parent's ability to pay for food, clothes and a Sunday School education for his daughters. (Sunday schools then often taught reading, writing and arithmetic as well as the Bible Story). Afterward the group were entertained by the Royton Tonic Sol-fa Association choir, conducted by Mr Thomas Dunkerley.

On New Year's day, Mr Mayson, the owner of Dogford Mill, provided tea for his workforce at Bethesda Chapel. They were entertained by the Dogford Tonic Sol-fa Singing Class, conducted by their teacher, Joseph Caley. On the same evening the Cooper Brothers of Downey House and Downey Mills, the largest mill owners in Royton, and staunch Methodists, treated their workers to a tea in the Wesleyan Schoolrooms. After the meal Mr Edmund Mills, over 80 years of age and still working as a warper at the mills, led the entertainment by 'chairing' the party, singing a song and 'encouraging others to follow'. The evening was filled with 'singing and innocent amusement in which the masters joined'.

The last of the New Year festivities to be reported in the Evening Chronicle was held by Mr Whitworth (presumably Adam Whitworth of Spaw Cottage) a Poor Law guardian. He treated the teachers of St Paul's Sunday School, the Minister and churchwardens in a group totalling 60 persons to a repast including the luxuries of apples and oranges. Mr Witworth also has the last word of the New Year's news in his capacity as collector of the Poor Rate. He summonsed John Travis of Royton Hall for non payment of part of the sky high rate set for him in 1862. John leased the hall and park from the Radcliffe family and had neglected to inform the authorities that the Radcliffes had sold part of the land to the new Railway, still under construction. John's son George did his best to get the rate reduced but the magistrates were unimpressed, said it was too late to reset the rate and his father would have to pay in full. Bad news for the Traverses maybe, but for the unemployed, clearing and helping to lay out the streets by the new railway station at Highbarn, the news was hardly better. Would the new railway and cotton warehouse help Royton recover when trade revived? Or would it be a white elephant forever reminding Royton Folk of past glories when cotton was king? How long would the American Civil War last? As James Mayall wrote in his poem read out at The Village Sunday School:

'They cannot keep feightin' fur ever.'

The last line of the poem, however, stretches over the years from then to now:
'Aw wish you a Chesmus as glad as can be un a happy new year to yo' o'.

Michael Higgins

Sources: Entirely from the Oldham Chronicle Dec 27, 1862, January 3, 1863. The Chronicle had a good resident reporter in a Mr Fitton. The Oldham Standard fell down in their festive reporting this year.



