



# The Bugle



## Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

At the risk of boring you all I'd like to formally thank all the members who helped out at the Town Hall during the Heritage Open Days. It was a wonderful event and much appreciated by the council staff and the members of the public who visited the event. Our local councillors were so impressed by the work done by RLHS members that they made a donation to society funds. This was unrequested and quite unexpected but most welcome all the same.

As a result of our efforts the councillors have asked if we will assist them in the planning for the 100 years anniversary memorial events of the First World War taking place in 2014. I'm not sure what our involvement will be but already we are making progress in trying to ensure that the memorial flagstone for John Hogan VC, Royton's only Victoria Cross holder, will actually be installed in Royton and not Oldham. The flagstones are a Government initiative to commemorate all 400 Victoria Cross awardees from WWI.

We are also helping to find out if any Royton service people have fallen in conflicts since World War II and, if there are, having their names added to the memorial in Royton Park. The British Legion and the Oldham Ex Servicemen's Liaison Organisation are involved in this as well.

On a lighter note, Royton Town Hall is now one of a couple of buildings in the Oldham Borough that features on Google. Photographers have been taking images inside the town hall with special cameras and now you can take a virtual tour of the inside of the building. To do this you open Google Maps, find Royton and zoom in to the town hall. Click your mouse on the town hall label and a menu window pops up. Select 'See Inside' and some photos appear. Click on one and off you go. You can tour the inside of the board room, reception area, staircase and even inside the clock tower. The clock tower tour even includes the rat!

**Geoff Oliver, Chairman**



*Jean Taylor, our friendly 'meeter and greeter' on the door, asked if she could share her favourite Christmas poem with you via The Bugle. This poem is by Cecil Day Lewis CBE, who was Poet Laureate from 1968 until his death in 1972.*

### The Christmas Tree

Put out the lights now!  
 Look at the Tree, the rough tree dazzled  
 In oriole plumes of flame,  
 Tinselled with twinkling frost fire, tasselled  
 With stars and moons - the same  
 That yesterday hid in the spinney and had no fame  
 Till we put out the lights now.  
 Hard are the nights now:

The fields at moonrise turn  
 to agate,  
 Shadows are cold as jet;  
 In dyke and furrow, in copse and faggot  
 The frost's tooth is set;  
 And stars are the sparks whirled out by the north wind's fret  
 On the flinty nights now.

So feast your eyes now  
 On mimic star and moon-cold bauble;  
 Worlds may wither unseen,  
 But the Christmas Tree is a tree of fable,  
 A phoenix in evergreen,  
 And the world cannot change or chill what its mysteries mean  
 To your hearts and eyes now.

The vision dies now  
 Candle by candle: the tree that embraced it  
 Returns to its own kind,  
 To be earthed again and weather as best it  
 May the frost and the wind.  
 Children, it too had its hour - you will not mind  
 If it lives or dies now.



***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.**

## St Thomas and Charity - Royton and the New Year 1863/4

The Christmas and New Year of 1863-4 was the third of the American Civil War and the subsequent restriction of imported American Cotton. The Cotton Famine put a quarter of the population totally out of work and a majority of the workforce on short time. In Christmas week there were 662 persons receiving outdoor poor relief and a fortnight later there were 852 persons, with 818 hands working 5-6 days (not quite full time), 342 working 4 days and 553 working 2-3 days. 1,798 persons were totally unemployed. Clogs were being distributed to the needy. Accordingly the seasonal celebrations were a pale shadow of the Christmases celebrated before the war. Then the town was replete with mill parties, annual school and church dinners and other merriments, the highlight of festivities being the patrolling of the streets at midnight by carollers.

The newspaper reports of 1863 report few of these:-

In the spirit of the times there were many farewell parties as well-known families and personalities prepared to emigrate. One such, held by friends at an unspecified venue, was for Elizabeth Barlow of Edge Lane, to bid farewell to the woman whose husband had already emigrated to Australia 8 years before. Eight years was nothing in those days it seems and she was preparing to join him. Such loyalty. Such desperation. However there was a different side to marital sentimentality presented in Royton Magistrates' Court on Park Road (now called Rochdale Road). There, a mercifully un-named woman requested that the magistrates put the equivalent of a restraining order on her husband who drank, spent all his money and for a while beat her, but not recently because 'he daren't now!'. There was much laughter in the court at this and the magistrates explained that the woman could only ask for him to be summonsed for a specific offence. She left the court grumbling audibly.

The lowest ebb of courtroom life was enacted just before Christmas when Martha Kay, described in the Oldham Standard as a 'volute, vulgar looking woman', charged two shopkeepers, Shepherd and Tattersall, with assaulting her at Mr Holt's public house (The Station Inn) which then stood diagonally opposite the Railway Inn. That the newspaper headed the story *A Rattling Tongue* sets the tone for events. It seems the two men had been quarrelling with her husband when she came in and she joined battle by calling one of the men an 'ecute' (make of this word what you will). Shepherd and Tattersall then pushed her out the door and threw her on the ground. Both men struck her. The Bench agreed that a legal assault had occurred and bound the men over for sureties but advised that the assault had been provoked by her intemperate language. Mrs Kay was advised to 'stay at home instead of going to public houses to bawl and create disturbances'.

But local loyalties prevailed when eleven barrels of flour were landed from the good ship Edinburgh from 'America' and Canada. This was presumably from Federal USA rather than the Confederacy as the goods escaped the Federal blockade. Three emigrant families, Holdsworth, Andrews and Coates, originally from Royton, sent the flour to various families in Royton and Mrs Holdsworth also sent a rocking chair 'for a female friend'. Furniture moved both ways - John Lees, about to emigrate to America, was presented with an inscribed writing desk by his fellow scholars at St Paul's Evening School. Money from various relief funds did allow some other seasonal parties to be held. The Manchester Relief Committee sent £150 pounds and the Townfields charity apportioned £10 for Royton under its township trustees, Rev Richard Hill, the vicar, and Thomas Seville of Elm House, to be distributed on St Thomas's Day (21 December), the traditional day for Christmas begging and charity. This was 'Thomasing' in a new way.

Henry Cooper JP, of Downey House, and Downey Mill, a staunch Methodist and Conservative, held a party for unemployed male operatives and 'aged' men in one or two of his mill rooms. It seems he regularly led self-improvement meetings for the unemployed in these rooms several evenings each week. On this occasion he provided cheese, bread, and, 'for those who asked for it', a pot of beer. For a teetotal Methodist in those days that was real liberalism.

John Buckley of Park Lane House and Park Lane Mill treated his male workforce to a supper at the Travellers Rest public house (now the Blue Belle) where there was singing and dancing till 4 o'clock in the morning. (Who says men can't shake a leg?) This seems very liberal indeed but sadly the mill was undoubtedly shut the next day through lack of cotton. Other parties were far more abstemious with tea parties at the Village School and St Paul's National School. The latter were entertained by St Paul's church choir. The Rechabites and Temperance Society held a proper tea party at the Temperance Seminary on Park Road (now Casa Belmondo).

However at the high end of society, the Floral and Horticultural Society entertained 60 members to a dinner of turkey, geese and rabbits at the house of Edward Gartside (possibly the Unicorn Inn). The evening had been arranged by James Ashworth, chairman of the newly formed Local Board, and he was accompanied by fellow mill owners R Whittaker and JG Holden and others. Mr Whittaker led the praises of the host and all agreed that here was living proof that Royton had proper public accommodation. The evening ended with loyal toasts and praises to the Local Board commissioners and the landlord. Those commissioners however had much else on their plate. In January they applied to the Public Works Loan Commissioners for a £6,000 loan to carry out improvements in the town. One problem was public gas lighting provided by Oldham. Another was the slow progress of the new railway line from Oldham which had only just surmounted total collapse of the Higginshaw Bridge and the construction of the new bridge and road surfacing at Shaw Road. If and when the American war ended the town would need many improvements to keep its inhabitants healthy and prosperous. The new railway station and warehousing was one. A new cemetery to replace the overfull St Paul's burial yard was another. Accordingly they wrote to Sir Joseph Radcliffe, lord of the manor, to ask him to survey and fix a price for a 4 acre plot of land at 'Park-pit Hill (land at top of modern Bleasdale Street). They also wrote to R.R. Rothwell in respect of land at the bottom of Garden Roads (now Church Street). As it turned out neither of these plots were purchased. But the new Board Room in Radcliffe Street was nearly finished.

Perhaps one of the final gatherings of the Christmas Season summed up the general mood. It was a talk given by John R Marland at the Literary Institution in Market Street entitled *The American War - Sessession and Slavery*. The audience were all emancipationists so perhaps there was one section of society which saw the struggle as moral rather than economic.

Sources: Oldham Evening Chronicle, Oldham Standard Dec-January 1863-4.

**Michael Higgins**

Note: St Thomas's Day was officially moved from 21 December by the Roman Catholic Church in 1969 after centuries of folkloric associations. Traditionalists still look to his old day for Christian charity during Advent. Begging on this day is known as 'going a-Thomasing'. Surely Royton should keep this day to remember the famine.

Currie's Corner  
Sqn Leader Jack Currie DFC  
1921-1996

In early October Marjorie and I celebrated our 9<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary by spending four days in North Yorkshire at Easingwold, a charming small market town about 10 miles north of York. On our way there we visited Fountains Abbey so I could take some photographs. It was a beautiful day, ideal for photography, with wonderful scenery in a memorable and peaceful setting.

On arrival at The George in Easingwold we were enjoying a late afternoon beverage, when I noticed in the corner of the bar several photos of WW2 Lancaster bombers and their crews. There was also a wooden plaque above a fixed seat with the inscription, "Curries Corner" inscribed upon it. This grabbed my attention immediately as, in the 1990s, I had worked on the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster Bomber called 'The City of Lincoln' which is the last remaining Lancaster still flying in this country.



One of the photos showed Pilot Officer Jack Currie, the pilot, with his Lancaster crew after a mission over Germany. He completed 30 missions during which time he earned a commission to Pilot Officer and was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. After completing his 30 missions he converted to flying the Mosquito for the duration and towards the end of the war he was promoted to Squadron Leader. On talking about his decoration he told someone "I got it for not getting shot down" when in fact he flew his badly damaged Lancaster back to base against all the odds, without aileron control, no flaps and large lumps of wings missing.

In retirement and in the last ten years of his life he frequented The George and used this corner for writing his memoirs, he laughingly reckoned it took about 800 pints to write a book. He later became a Northern TV personality and radio presenter. Not surprisingly he still has two books in print - 'Lancaster Target' and 'Mosquito Victory', and it is down to the proprietors of The George in Easingwold, Kay & Mike, that we have 'Curries Corner' and the memorial bench outside, and that we are able to share and enjoy a part of Jack Currie's life.

This is my tribute to him, the R.A.F. and the crews he flew with in the 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary year of the Battle of Britain.

Douglas Ashmore Oct 2013