



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

On the 15th March, members of RLHS enjoyed a private tour of Clegg Hall given by its owner Jason. Unfortunately Marge and myself were unable to attend but about thirty-five members made the short trip over to Milnrow for the tour. The owner is in the process of refurbishing the Hall which was derelict and without a roof when he bought it.

Clegg Hall is believed to be of a similar age to parts of Royton Hall and members got a feeling of how Royton Hall may have looked in its heyday. Clegg Hall was once occupied by the gentry but, when land in front of the Hall was sold off and the canal built within yards of the front entrance, it was no longer seen as a desirable property and suffered a similar fate to that of Royton Hall. Luckily it was saved from demolition and now looks set to become grand once again.

I believe that there is still a lot of work to be done to return it to its former glory but it is slowly getting there. Everyone admired Jason's endeavour and determination to complete the project but he does have an ultimate goal and that is to live there one day. We wish him well.

All those members who went on this tour thoroughly enjoyed it and hope to go and see it again when it is finally finished.

When the History Society started in September 2002 Margaret Carter volunteered her services as Treasurer and I gratefully accepted. There was however, no mention of Margaret becoming the 'brew lady' but she undertook that job as well; coming early to set out the cups and saucers and shopping for the tea, coffee and biscuits as well as the bottle of wine given in the free draw each month. She is now ready to retire from this post and will stand down at the end of the Society's year. I know you will all join me in thanking her for her services and for helping to guide the Society in its early years.

We are breaking with tradition in September in so much as we will not be holding our AGM on a meeting night, but will be holding it on 1st October 2008 at 7pm in Downey House. The room to be used will be announced at the first meeting of our new year on 8th September 2008 when, as usual, membership fees are due. Of course only fully paid members will be able to 'vote' at the AGM.

Following on from my piece in the March Bugle about Ben Brierley, I have come closer to home in this edition with an article about John Mellor of Royton which I hope you will enjoy. As you may have guessed I am very interested in Royton's self-made men who were working class heroes of their time.

On that note Marge and I wish you a very pleasant summer and look forward to seeing you all again in September.

Doug Ashmore, Chairman



Memories

Marjorie Ashmore's 'oven bottom muffin' memories in the March edition of The Bugle brought this response from Megan Kershaw :-

I remember a small bakers in the same location in Royton as that mentioned by Marjorie. I wonder if it is the same one? She said she used to get oven bottom muffins from there. I remember it for its wonderful meat pies!

In the mid to late 1940s there was a bakers shop set in the middle of a terraced row of houses on Rochdale Road, about 7 - 8 doors away from Radcliffe Street, on the opposite side of the road to the Radcliffe Pub (now the Marston Tavern). The shop and bakery was owned and run by a Mrs Wainwright and was just known as 'Wainwrights' to local people. It consisted of a small grocery business with a bakery in the back room.

On Saturdays, towards mid-day, I would call at the shop with my father to collect our regular order of meat pies for the family dinner. A lady served in the front shop and sometimes she would tell us to "go through to the back", usually because the batch of pies were not quite ready or maybe because the piping hot pies were easier to deal with 'in situ'. The heat from the large oven and the smell of baking food became quite overwhelming as we went down the passage and into the bakery room.

It was always a hive of industry in here - Mrs Wainwright, working at a large table, making batches of different types of pie. The pastry for each individual pie was fitted into a loose bottomed tin, then came the fillings, and lastly the lids were expertly placed on top. Loaves and muffins, at different stages of baking, were all around. The actual baking was done by a tall man in a long apron and wielding a baker's shovel. I think his name was Frank. The oven was tall and wide with doors which, when opened, revealed shelves or 'drawers'.

Sometimes one or two other customers were also waiting - chatting and joking - it was all very homely. When the pies were ready they were wrapped and placed in bags or baskets. At this point each customer produced a container for gravy, which was the necessary accompaniment to the pies. The shopping complete we marched home carrying our mouthwatering dinner.

Where the 'Country Stile Deli' is now, on the corner of Radcliffe St. and Rochdale Rd., there used to be a butcher's shop.

As far as I can remember it was owned by a family called Chadwick in the 1940s. Also, in the same terraced row, nearer to the bakery, there was a gents hairdresser. It was said that he also permed ladies hair as his afternoon trade, as this fitted in with the men who were mostly at work then. I don't know if perming lotion had been invented then, but the perms at this time used curlers attached to a wire and then electricity! Am I right about this or is it just my childhood imagination?

Anybody out there who had "an electric perm"? Let me know about it or any other memories you may have.

I've included this newspaper extract found by Michael Higgins in the 'Memories' section of this newsletter but I'm fairly certain we don't have any members who will actually remember this!

"AN INTERESTING GATHERING AT ROYTON HALL"
extract from the Oldham Chronicle, January 27, 1894

"Royton Hall was on Monday night the scene of a pretty function, the occasion being a grand social party promoted by the members of the flower section in connecton with the bazaar recently held at St Paul's School, Royton. Upwards of 150 ladies and gentlemen and several friends of the church attended. There were also present the Revs. E.T.Wigg, Jones Bateman and J.H.Hopkins, and several of the church officials. The Rev. D. M'Intosh, who resides at Royton Hall, besides entertaining the company, and making them welcome, extended his generosity in several ways, and to him was attributed the success of the gathering. Mr James Schofield (Guardian) and Mr Thomas Lees and others assisted in making the guests as comfortable as possible. The old drawing room was occupied for dancing and refreshments were provided in the room opposite the old theatre stage, and the room formerly used by the actors and actresses for dressing purposes was on the occasion made into a smoke room. During the evening interesting songs were rendered by Mr James Schofield, Mr R.Leach, and Mr. Kenworthy. Mr John Dronsfield, of Oldham, amused the audience with humorous sketches. The hall was placed at the disposal of the party through the kindness of Mr Mallinson, the agent for the lord of the manor."

It would be interesting to find out more about the performers and guests at the hall that evening. The bass singer, Mr James Schofield often sang alongside a tenor with piano accompanist so the other two gentlemen would presumably fill those two roles. Incidentally, the Oldham Standard printed the same piece word for word. Obviously someone from the flower section party wrote it and sent it in to both papers.

Michael Higgins

It is also interesting to see that Royton Hall once had a 'theatre stage' and 'dressing room for the actors and actresses'. I wonder if any other public performances took place there? One for the 'Research working group' to look into perhaps?



Royton Lives Through the Ages

No doubt you will have heard by now that our RLTA excavation project at Royton Hall was a joint winner of The Marsh Award for Community Archaeology. Here's a 'behind the scenes' look at the presentation in London on 2nd May 2008.

The Marsh Award The Untold Story

It was with some trepidation that we set out for London on Thursday 1st May 2008 to represent RLHS and the RLTA Project with a presentation at 'The Who Do You Think You Are' and 'Discover Archaeology Live' Exhibition at Olympia. True to our northern roots we had bagged bargain seats on Virgin rail and fortified by a picnic lunch we arrived safely at Euston station. It was easy to find the hotel after a short journey on the tube. There was a slight hiccup with our booking but it was quickly resolved to our satisfaction and we were able to settle in before a leisurely coffee then dinner.

An early night meant that we were up bright and early on Friday 2nd May and, quelling our nerves, we polished off a hearty breakfast before walking to the stadium. Once there we wished that we were on first but, being done alphabetically, Royton was unfortunately last on the bill. A mini theatre had been set up by the CBA complete with stage, podium and hi-tech aids for presentation. We had sent our power point presentation in advance and were relieved to find we would have no technical difficulties. Not so for another finalist - Mellor - whose multi-media presentation had not been tested and failed on the sound.

The doors of Olympia opened at 10.00am and sporting our importantly labelled 'Expert/Speaker' badges we avoided the long queues and went straight in the 'Celebs' entrance. This meant we had a short time to browse round the other exhibits but 11 o'clock came all too soon and we were on! The Badsey map project was fascinating, Mellor's Iron Age Fort interesting and the North Scotland Cairns intriguing but then it was our turn. We were told by our 'groupies' Brian and Ann (RLHS members who were in London for the weekend and went along to the presentation) that we did a fine job and had everyone listening intently to our natural style of delivery that fitted perfectly to the visuals and clearly showed how much community involvement there had been in unearthing worthwhile archaeology.

There was a tense moment before it was announced that all four finalists were joint winners, although Brian Marsh publicly announced that the Royton dig was his favourite. Julian Richards, from TV's 'Meet the Ancestors', also gave lavish praise to Royton and seemed particularly impressed by the post-dig potato pie supper which we laid on free for all the volunteers! So it was congratulations all round and homeward bound on the Mega Bus at £1 (yes £1) each, where we reflected on how everyone involved in the RLTA Project had worked so hard to earn a well deserved award of £500 and national recognition.

Pearl Malcolmson and Frances Stott.

JOHN MELLOR - BOTANIST 1767-1848

John Mellor was born in Royton in 1767 in Thorp Lane, and started work as a bobbin winder at the tender age of seven. At the age of nine, he commenced the occupation of hand weaver and continued doing this for a few years before becoming a hand cotton spinner at the Top o't Fold Mill. Then came the introduction of power which did not suit John at all because he had to keep up with the machinery. He always maintained that 'the strap wouldn't run him', referring to the leather belts which drove the machinery.

When he was thirty years old he became a working gardener, a job that became his hobby for over fifty years. Having explored the flora of his neighbourhood, Mellor made annual excursions into Scotland and the Northern Counties. The route of his rambles would take him from Lancashire into Yorkshire, Durham, Newcastle and Scotland. It was not uncommon for Mellor to walk a thousand miles in pursuit of his favourite study, braving all the elements that nature could throw at him. On one trip into Yorkshire he visited Wentworth Hall, where he helped in correcting the names of the plants. The Earl Fitzwilliam invited him to stay and enjoy his hospitality any time he was in the area

He made six journeys into the Highlands of Scotland visiting such places as Ben Lavers, Ben Nevis, Ben Lomond, Clova and the Breadlebane Mountains. All these excursions were carried out on foot and alone, a tribute in itself to the man's fortitude and perseverance. However, on one occasion he was leaving Edinburgh, when a stranger joined him. After walking with him for a few miles another man joined them. It turned out they were Highwaymen who took ten sovereigns from him but missed a further three, which had dropped through the lining of his coat.

During these absences, which took upwards of 6 weeks, his affairs were looked after by his landlord George Booth, who also received his plant specimens by carrier and nurtured them until Mellor's return. Quite how Mellor managed to pay his bills is not clear but the Rev. C E Shaw said that in his declining years Mellor was saved from the workhouse by John Roby of Rochdale, the author of the 'Traditions of Lancashire'.

Mellor had 4 gardens which he tended. He used these for stocking the specimens from his excursions and they were the forerunner of the 'garden centre' as we know it. On Sundays these became a local meeting place for his botanist friends, who came from the surrounding areas to spend the day there. His companions included John Dewhurst, George Crozes and George Cale of Manchester the well known botanist who, with Sir Joseph Banks, went to explore Botany Bay. Sir Joseph Banks with Dr Solander also accompanied Captain Cook on his barque The Endeavour to explore the Southern Seas.

The Botanical Society was founded in 1794 at The Unicorn Inn with John Mellor as the President.

Simon Mellor (secretary), James Mellor, George Sudhurst, John Blunt, John Ogden, Henry Gartside, Thomas Halkyard, Edmund Shaw, Edmund Mills, Dan Andrew, Samuel Newton, Dan Mellor, James Geeenwood, James Hallawell, Jonathon Cheetham Lees, Benjamin Taylor, John Steilbeck, Samuel Walton, John Ogden, Robert Holden, Richard Kent, James Dearden and Simon Kent being the other members. It continued until 1824 when it was dissolved and all the books and other property of the Society were divided amongst the remaining members. Another society was formed in 1844 and was said to have a good Library.

There is no doubt that John Mellor's title 'The Father of Lancashire Botanists' was rightly deserved and although he was a modest man he was never happier than when he was imparting his knowledge to any who were interested, particularly the young people of the time. He is credited with having dictated a book 'The Flora of Royton' but this book is now lost. He made many friends, aristocrats and working class alike, including Sam Bamford the Lancashire reformer. In 1918 J W Kershaw wrote "He was also acquainted with Wilson, Hooker and John Nowell" who, as a pupil of Mellor's, distinguished himself as a botanist.

Born of poor parents, as many were in those days, one gets the feeling that Mellor was a quiet reserved person, often criticised for not putting himself forward to receive the recognition that others felt he deserved. Before Mellor's time the British Hymenophyllum consisted of a single species - the Hymenophyllum Tunbridgense. Mellor, having discovered the Hymenophyllum at Greenfield, sent it to Wilson pointing out that his specimen differed from the Tunbridgense. Wilson, who was of the same opinion, forwarded it to Sir William Hooker who, through some misunderstanding, named it Wilsonii after Wilson when it was Mellor who should have been honoured.

In his later years he was described as "a cheerful, vigorous and hale old man as could be seen" but, after just one weeks illness, he died from english cholera on October 5th 1848 at the ripe old age of 82. His burial took place in Royton Church Yard (St. Paul's) in an unmarked grave but was attended by a large crowd of mourners that included many of his friends and botanists. Some years later a memorial stone was erected in the interior of St Paul's Church.

DOUGLAS ASHMORE

Sources

Rev C E Shaw, Varley's Royton Annual, J W Kershaw and Bruce Langridge - Oldham Interest Centre.

