



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

After our Society's Annual General Meeting, held in September 2009, I presented a revised Constitution to committee members for their consideration and deliberation. Over the past months they have been going through this and carefully adapting the document to better suit our Society's requirements and at a committee meeting held in April 2010 the final amendments were made and now a complete document is ready to present to you.

This cannot be officially implemented without your due consideration at a specially convened Extraordinary General Meeting formed for the specific reason of ratifying the document. Therefore an EGM will be held just before our AGM toward the end of September 2010. Members will be invited to attend in writing at our first meeting of the new season which begins on Monday 13th September 2010. Only paid up members can vote at both the EGM and AGM meetings. The AGM will be the usual one of electing new officers and committee members to run our Society for the next 12 months.

Another topic discussed at the committee meeting was that of refreshments at our monthly meetings. At the moment a charge of 50p is made for a cup of tea/coffee with biscuits. Your committee decided that as from September refreshments will be FREE OF CHARGE. To offset the cost of this the free raffle (to win the bottle of wine) at every meeting will be dropped. I hope that this change meets with your approval.

As this is the last edition of The Bugle for the 2009/10 season may I take this opportunity to wish you all a good summer break and I look forward to seeing you in September when will we have a new and varied selection of speakers and topics to stimulate, enlighten and inform.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman



THE TOWN HALL CLOCK

In the March edition of The Bugle I mentioned that I had received the memoirs of a lady who was born in Royton. The memoirs came to me in electronic form via the Royton Local History Society web site. At the time of writing my message for that edition I had not read the full document, but one interesting fact had emerged from the early pages and that was that the bell in the Town Hall Clock had the name of its donor cast into it.

It was already known that the clock was donated by Dr. Kershaw but nowhere was it documented that the bell carries this inscription and, after asking our expert members if this was correct, no concrete evidence was forthcoming. But, after reading my March message, Society member Hilda Greenhalgh approached me and said that as a girl she recalled hearing people say "There goes Doctor John" every time the bell tolled but she had no knowledge of the inscription. I decided it was time to check it out for myself.

I began by going into the Town Hall and asking for permission to examine the bell. I managed to get to speak to the right people who, after hearing my tale, became intrigued enough to allow me to investigate and, at an appointed time, I met up with Martin Murphy and Kim Belston. After the usual greetings we wound our way up the various staircases into the very dusty and now unused roof space and eventually into the clock tower where the ponderous ticking of the mechanism could be clearly heard, although the pendulum could not be seen as there were no lights in the room. We climbed up a ladder alongside the clock mechanism into the dial room. Looking at the building from outside this is where the four clock faces are. This is very interesting in itself as this is where the output drive from the clock is distributed to the hands of all four dials. But as yet there was no sign of the bell.

After tracing parts of the clock mechanisms I decided that the bell had to be in the space above the dial room which is inside the green dome at the top of the tower. I scaled the rickety 130 year old ladder which provides access to this space and looked inside the dome. It was impossible to see the bell due to the complex arrangement of large wooden beams that support its weight and the topmost platform where the flagpole used to be. At this point I decided that enough was enough. The area inside the dome was inches deep in guano and as I was decently attired did not wish to proceed further until I had changed into some scruffy clobber. I descended and arranged with Martin and Kim to return at the same time the following week.

One week later I arrived at the Town Hall but this time laden with cameras, lights, tripods and all sorts of paraphernalia to make certain I could adequately record what was found even if there was no inscription. Also with me was society member Phil Ellis, who like me has more than a passing interest in horology. Our sartorial elegance left much to be desired as we were both suitably attired to cope with the dust and guano. I even had a CSI suit.

Phil and I then spent the next three hours photographing, videoing and investigating all aspects of the clock. It is known as a turret clock and was made in 1881 by Gillet and Bland of Croydon, Surrey. Its mechanisms run through the whole building from the green dome at the top of the tower down to the reception office in the foyer. To find out the full details you will have to watch the video we made which will be included in the Royton History video which we are making this year.

We did eventually reach the bell which is fitted right at the front of the green dome, and yes I can confirm that there is an inscription cast into the metal. Unfortunately the bell is installed so that the inscription is facing the inner wall of the dome and is so close to it that it cannot be seen in its entirety and only half of it can be seen from one side. To see the other side we had to crawl under the bell and squeeze up the other side to read the other half. Once this was done the two halves of the inscription could be put together which reads:-

THIS BELL
WAS GIVEN TO THE PUBLIC OF ROYTON
BY JOHN AND HARRIET KERSHAW
OF HIGHLANDS ROYTON IN THE YEAR
1881

So now you know!

With grateful thanks to Martin Murphy, Kim Belston, and of course Phil Ellis.

Geoff Oliver



Interesting Roytonians

Thomas Seville 1818-1906

During his long life Thomas Seville served in all parts of local government, its justice system, church life and the social welfare of the growing town of Royton. He was born at Birchilee, Royton in 1818, into a farming and cotton spinning family. At age 25 he was sent to Blackburn to learn the 'manufacturing' or weaving part of the trade after which he went into partnership with his brother-in-law John Milne, first at the Union Mill (later to give it's name to the street) and then at Springhill Mill nearby, named after the iron works first built on the site. The business was such a success that, in the 1850s, he was able to move house from Union Street to a grand new house - Elm House, next door to Downey House - built beside a great elm tree which shaded the entrance to the then public gardens (soon to be cleared away to make Church Street).

The partnership with his brother-in-law was dissolved in the 1860s and for the next forty years he headed a family enterprise at Springhill (Thomas Seville and Sons) long after the demise of family-owned weaving and spinning firms in a mainly spinning town.

Despite disastrous fires in 1875 and 1889 (when 300 hands were thrown out of work) his firm thrived. In 1875 it comprised of two weaving sheds containing 396 calico looms, spinning rooms and outbuildings fed by the River Roy, with reservoirs 12 feet deep cut into the hill slope south of Brook Street. There were also 21 cottages and a smithy. Houses and units cover the site today.

Thomas was a dedicated liberal in politics and soon became de facto head of the party and a staunch supporter of free trade. After a long campaign to become a magistrate (supported by the Oldham Chronicle, a liberal newspaper) he joined the bench in 1869, eventually becoming the oldest JP in the area. He served on the old Board of Highway Surveyors and was a founder of the movement to elect the first proper local government body for the town - the Local Board - in 1863. He served on various Board committees, eventually becoming Chairman.

Thomas Seville was also Overseer of the Poor in Royton, then served as a member and Chairman of the board of guardians of Oldham Poor Law Union (a union of workhouses which included Royton). He was a trustee of the Poorfields Charity and during the Cotton Famine distributed food to the unemployed out of his own pocket.

During this time he was a long-serving churchwarden at St Paul's Church in Royton. Recalling the days when gardens and farmland bordered the church, he said that St Mary's Church in Oldham had once donated an old bell for the new tower at St Pauls - "the only thing Oldham ever gave them!"

Thomas lived at Elm House until he 'retired' in 1880 and went to live at Southport. The business was run by his sons but in 1893 he returned permanently to Elm House, possibly to oversee the flotation of the old family firm on the Stock Market. He died there in 1906, aged 88.

Sources: mainly Oldham Chronicle and Oldham Standard reports 1860-1906, too many to list, but see obituary O.C. 24 Feb. 1906

Michael Higgins

Visit the R.L.H.S. websites at www.roytonlocalhistorysociety.co.uk or www.rlhs.co.uk

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