



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

As we now come to the end of the current season I would like to take this opportunity to thank all committee members for their support and hard work. In particular our secretary, Jess Wild, whose tireless efforts provide us with interesting and varied talks. She also carries out other background work that most of us never see. Thanks also to Pat Abram, our new treasurer, who has skilfully picked up the reins from last year's retiring treasurer and continued to look after our finances.

More thanks go to the members of our archaeology group 'Royton Lives through the Ages', who wound up their activities earlier this year and transferred the responsibility of the maintenance of the Royton Hall site to the main society. It is entirely due to their efforts that the Royton Hall excavations were such a great success and the follow up landscaping of the site now looks so good.

In April our local councillors invited RLHS to take part in the St. George's Day celebrations on Sunday 21st April in the town centre. We were asked to put on a display of old photographs of Royton so, on the Friday before the event, some members transferred our display boards from the library cellar to the red room (the former board room) in the town hall and helped set up the exhibition.

We were also asked to do various other tasks including tours of the Town Hall clock tower. The clock has recently been repaired and put back into operation but unfortunately has fallen behind time of late, partly due to the change to British Summer Time and partly due to the slightly incorrect regulation. Phil Ellis and I decided to see if we could remedy the situation before the tours to stem the tide of complaints. To cut the story short we found out how to set the time and adjust the regulation so that we could put it right. Therefore, on the day and since, the clock has been keeping good time! To fully regulate the clock automatically an extra device has still to be fitted to complete it's overall repair and refurbishment.

On the day Phil Ellis, Stephen Darlington and I conducted the clock tower tours, which were fully booked up and we now have names on a waiting list for the next time we do it!

So once again more thanks are required to all those members who helped with putting on this event. It was more than a great success both for us and the council. Over 250 people visited the Town Hall and the success of the event completely shocked the town hall staff who were overwhelmed with the numbers who turned up. I need to also thank Zubair Seedat in the Town Hall for his work in organising the whole event and to Linda for printing and laminating the old photos we supplied for the display.

After this meeting we close once again for the summer months. However, although we have no meetings, the work of the society will continue. I look forward to seeing you all in September but in the meantime have a great summer.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman



Martha Hayes, the Royton, (or Ashton) Giantess.

The Oldham Standard of February 1870 claimed Royton possessed "the oldest hall, the smallest man, and the largest woman to be found perhaps in any of the northern counties" adding that "they are certain to be ranked among the curiosities of nature and art to say nothing of 'the Seven', which are dispersed in various parts of the township."

In the article entitled: 'A Giantess for a wife and what became of it' which details a domestic affray ending at Royton Magistrate's court, we glimpse a hitherto unknown local sideshow lady named Martha Hayes (or Heyes). According to the census records she was born in Ashton Under Lyne parish in about 1820 and married her husband David in the early 1840s before coming to live in Royton after the birth of their first daughter. He is listed as a 'pedlar' born in Blackburn, and one presumes they came to Royton to seek work. Whatever their former employment they soon set up business as 'black pea sellers', becoming sufficiently established to invest in a travelling tent and to set up stall at neighbouring fairs and local Wakes celebrations.

Today's papers would probably be more circumspect in saying that Mrs Heyes (as the Oldham Standard spells her name) ate a lot of her own and others' wares at these events and eventually grew wide in girth. The Standard reporter declared baldly that Martha 'continued to prosper and fatten' as the family business grew. Being a creature of fairs and side shows she rubbed shoulders with all sorts of showmen and after years of sampling her own and other food-offerings served at these events her waist began to expand. She eventually realised there was a more lucrative income to be gained by using this attribute rather than selling peas and was persuaded by a persistent showman to join his 'circus' as the 'Ashton Giantess'. She would probably already be known in Royton by that name anyway as she was not one of the Seven, but was an 'off-comer' or 'in-comed-un'. The Standard reporter unkindly says she succumbed to the 'Madam Rachel System', having her weight, breadth etc. specified and 'thirty years knocked off her natural life'. (She was 41 on the 1861 census and would have been 50 at the time of the newspaper article)

All was well for a few years as she became a popular attraction at Tommy Field in Oldham and in all the nearby towns at Wakes time. That is until: 'A short while ago, when the season was over, she returned to her husband at Royton and was re-acquainted with her old pea customers' On Sunday 23rd January 1870, a number of youths were passing her house "and saw the good lady sat near the door, when one of them said, "Hallo, we can see her for nowt neaw ", all of them being favourable to a free gaze, they availed of themselves to pass remarks, which had the effect of rousing the ire of the loving husband who soon entered combat with them, which resulted in him losing several teeth and being severely kicked."

The affair ended in Royton Magistrates court with Mr Heyes charging the three youths, George Dewhurst, Alfred Halliwell and Albert Gartside, all of Royton, with assault. There were many witnesses for the defendants however and only George Dewhurst was found guilty and ordered to provide sureties to keep the peace. The chairman of the bench, Mr Mayson, ended the proceedings by saying: "Just because a man happened to have a wife who was extra stout, he was not to submit to insults."

So ends the tale of Martha Hayes. The census spells her surname with a strange looking 'a' which could have been corrected from an 'e' so I have used this spelling in the title. In 1861 she was living in Seville's Yard, just off Rochdale Lane or Bottom Sandy Lane, with her husband David, aged 39, and daughters Maria 17, Mary 15 and Ellen aged 12. All three girls worked in the local mills as cotton piecers. The two youngest were born in Royton so the family had been living here since at least 1846.

Sources: Census Records. Oldham Standard, 5 February 1870.

Michael Higgins



Next Season

Tonight is our last meeting before we finish for the summer break and I am sure we are all looking forward to those long, lazy days basking in the summer sun (eh! what's that?). However, I hate to interrupt your dreams but I just want to remind you that our new season starts on Monday 9th September 2013 at 7:30 pm with a talk to commemorate the 500th anniversary, to the very date, of the Battle of Flodden Field. Every manor or community in the North sent contingents to the Earl of Surrey's army and a company of archers from Middleton, led by Sir Richard Assheton, played a pivotal role in crushing the Scottish invasion. Sir Richard was knighted for his heroics and the archers are commemorated by the famous Flodden Window in Middleton parish church.

I hope I have arranged some interesting talks to suit all tastes for next season. These include '**The Staff of Life**' which includes the history of Warburtons bakery, with the speaker promising to bring samples (don't have any tea that night!!). Also a talk entitled '**Down Forget-Me-Not Lane**' which is about the lives of ordinary people on the home front during 1938 - 1945, and '**I Never Left School**' - the very funny reminiscences of a retired headmaster.

If you would like to become a member of the society the cost is just £10, which gives you free entry to all ten meetings and free refreshments afterwards. Just come along to the first meeting held at Downey House, Church Street, Royton, on Monday 9th September to join. Existing members can renew their membership tonight or at the first meeting in September.

Enjoy the summer, don't get too sunburnt (?) and I hope to see you all again in September.

Jess Wild



Visit the R.L.H.S. websites at www.roytonlocalhistorysociety.co.uk or www.rlhs.co.uk
Royton Local History Society is a member of the 'Friends of Real Lancashire' - No. 544SF

