



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Once again we have come to the end of another season of talks and I'd like to give my usual round of thanks to various members who have contributed to the smooth running of our Society.

First of all many thanks to our secretary, Jess Wild who has put together a varied and interesting series of talks which have kept us informed and entertained. Jess is now putting together next season's programme (please see below for an important amendment to that programme) and it is no easy task. It is an all year round job. Arranging the programme, then keeping an eye on everything just in case a speaker can't come at the last minute, and having a backup plan for those eventualities. Jess also carries out many other administrative duties and produces 'The Bugle'.

Next, thanks to our treasurer Pat Abram who looks after our finances. This too is a role that needs constant attention and Pat carries it through with great diligence. Also our thanks go to the ladies who sort out our refreshments on meeting nights. Again another essential task carried out with great and cheerful efficiency. Especially the washing up!

Finally thanks to all members who have helped out on our various activities in the community. I suspect that our involvement in events such as the Heritage Weeks and the St. Georges Day event at the Town Hall will continue along with extra events, particularly in the next 4 years as various commemorations take place for the 100 years anniversary of World War I. I would be very grateful for any support that anyone can give.

On the topic of WWI please remember that Oldham Council are looking for any memories you may have about relatives or friends, and about life in Royton and Oldham during both WWI and WWII. They are compiling a database of names and memories of those times. The information will be passed on to the Imperial War Museum who will record all these recollections on a national database for future researchers and historians to examine. These memories should not be lost. If you have any recollections of stories passed down through your family, however small, please contact Councillor Cath Ball. She is co-ordinating all this information.

I hope you have an excellent summer break and I look forward to seeing you all at the first meeting of the new season on the 8th September.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman



IMPORTANT AMENDMENT to next season's meetings

The following is an extract from RLHS AGM dated 23 September 2013

Any other business

Concern was shown about the Society making a loss each year. Although we are a non-profit making organisation we cannot sustain these losses year on year. A discussion took place on how we could address this and various suggestions were made - increase membership fees, increase visitors fees, raffles each month, guided walks with a charge etc.

It was suggested that as the January and February meetings are not well attended, due mainly to the weather, that perhaps we could have a break during this period. This would save a substantial amount of money, probably over £100, on room hire and speakers fees. This would mean we would meet from September to December and then from March to June. We could keep the membership fees at £10 but this would be for 8 meetings instead of 10. Many of those present thought this was a good idea and a vote was taken to accept this proposal Although not unanimous, the proposal was passed by a 13 votes for and 3 votes against majority. This will come into effect for the 2014/15 season.

Please note that next season we will be meeting on the second Monday of the month in September, October, November and December. There will be no meetings in January and February and they will start again on the second Monday in March and finish on the second Monday in June. Membership fees remain the same as in previous years at £10 per annum.

Jess Wild, Secretary

Interesting Roytonians

(if not for the best of reasons)

A Man with Two Wives

This curious title comes from the Oldham Chronicle of 1879 and stems from the long catalogue of drink related incidents brought before the magistrates at Royton Police Court. The year was a remarkable one for Royton in that beside the setting up of a School Board and the opening of a civic cemetery, the Local Board had also obtained a government loan of £7,500 to build a new Town Hall, market hall and stables, expected to be completed by June 1880. Also much new housing was being erected in Park Road (now Rochdale Road and Oldham Road) when the incident took place. The incident is of interest because it concerns a resident of Royton Hall Yard, the poorest part of Royton Hall and the site of the last archaeological dig undertaken by this society's 'Royton Lives Through the Ages' project in 2009.

Here is the incident as reported by the Oldham Chronicle:

'At the Royton Police Court {Park Road} on Wednesday, James Robinson of Hall Yard, Royton, was charged by police-constable Riley with being drunk and creating a disturbance in Park Road, Royton at half-past four on Tuesday afternoon. The bench inquired if prisoner had been up before. Super-intendant Tindall said he had not been up before; but that he might be brought up hereafter. The bench asked if he was married, and Mr Tindall replied that Robinson had two wives. Mr Seville, [a magistrate living at Elm House, and also on the Bench], then added that the prisoner's wife had been up to his house, and had told a most pitiful story about her husband being out of work, while at the same time he was drunk. Prisoner said the drink he had did not cost him anything. Mr Crompton [magistrate] said they did not believe it.'

The Oldham Standard made no mention of the two wives and headed their story, 'HE WANTED TO BE LOCKED UP', and relates that Robinson, a labourer, was charged with being drunk and disorderly in Park Lane. [Park Road and Park Lane do intersect - MH]. When accosted by the arresting officer Robinson said that he would be locked up, and accordingly the officer took him at his word! The Standard relates that Robinson's wife had gone to see Thomas Seville at his house, claiming that her husband was out of work, that the family was starving, and begging for assistance. The bench was unimpressed however and fined Robinson 5 shillings and costs, or seven days. It is unlikely he found the money.

In the Chronicle version Thomas Seville has the last word as the fine was laid: *"This is the way we are imposed upon by such wastrels."*

I was curious about this story so checked the 1881 census to see if James Robinson did have 'two wives' and if he was a 'wastrel'. I found that James Robinson, then aged 35, did have at least one 'flesh and blood' wife, Margaret aged 33 - was drink the other 'wife' that Mr Tindall was referring to? James was still living at Royton Hall Yard with his wife and his daughter Mary, aged ten, and son James, aged four. His occupation is given as 'cotton spinner operative' and what looks also like 'labourer'. He was born in Liverpool and his wife in Ireland. Both children were born in Royton.

Their story is sad, and perhaps trivial in the scope of Royton History, but does say something about the mix of social life in Royton Hall at the time when the cotton industry and related trades were expanding and with them immigration. The Robinson's neighbours in other parts of Royton Hall ranged from Kitty Cook, a washerwoman who's son James, then two, later became a Royton Morris Dancer with Jimmy Coleman, to John Becket, cotton mill book-keeper and salesman, who lived in better style with his wife and servant. The curate of St Paul's, William Burns, also lived at the Hall with his wife.

For me there is a further poignancy as I met John Becket's daughter and Kitty Cook's grand-daughter many years ago and heard them speak nostalgically about Royton Hall and the characters who lived there. With four archaeological digs on the Hall site behind us, Royton Local History Society members will appreciate, probably more than most, these trifling tales from the past.

Michael Higgins



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