
The Bugle

Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Chairman's Message

Due to last minute technical difficulties the chairman's message was not able to be retrieved in time to print. If the editor may be allowed to stand in I would just say that we have had a fine and varied programme of speakers in the last season, beginning with *The Great War and Chadderton's involvement* by Michael Lawson and Mark Johnson of Chadderton Local History Society, and including amongst others , *James Butterworth of Oldham, Postmaster, Historian and Reformer* (by Dr Robert Poole ahead of his forthcoming book), *Banking in a Gentler Age* by Alan Hayhurst, and *The Olympics then and now* given by Dorothy Shirley Emerson, who won a silver medal at the 1960 games in Rome. Our own member Doug Ashmore told us of his own search for his birth mother in *Looking for Clara*, a mixture of family search and archival research. On the latter note it is always good to hear a talk from our own members from time to time. However, the downside is that I too have been roped in to speak during next year's season. All the above of course is due to our secretary, Jess. So, in lieu of Geoff, and begging his forgiveness, we wish you all a pleasant summer break and hope to see you at our first meeting of the new Season on 14 September.

MH for Geoff Oliver, Chairman

Precinct Archaeological Dig.

The ongoing development of the old Royton Assembly Hall site has given scope for a small archaeological dig. The developers were obliged to undertake a survey if they needed to dig beyond a certain depth and consequently AOD Archaeology were commissioned to check the Hall Street end of the site where deep excavations for the car parking area were required. This was in the area bordering High Street, where 18th century weavers cottages and the old Shoulder of Mutton Inn were situated. This would also have been an excellent opportunity to check for any traces of the old Royton Hall park walls. Despite contacting AOD for any information and access to a dig report, I have not yet received a reply. We will keep you informed.

The Dog and Partridge

The Dog and Partridge Public House on Middleton Road has been put up for auction and reputedly sold by its owners, the brewers JW Lees. It is rumoured that it was sold with a covenant preventing any buyer from opening the premises as a pub. If this is true it means the end of an era for Royton, as the building has been licensed since 1808 when the first landlady was Ann Lees (no known relation to the brewer). In fact when Ann Lees kept the pub the original John Lees had not even set up his brewery in Middleton Junction (1828). The brewery did not buy the pub until 1931. In that time the building, originally on a stretch of road known as Haggate Lane, had for a while come under the sphere of the cotton spinning and weaving Holden family who farmed the area and ran Shiloh Mill at Holden Fold, and Lane End Mills almost next door to the pub. Between 1818 and 1841 the landlords were Thomas, James, John and Alice Holden. The Dog has always been a small pub at the end of Holden Fold Lane and in its heyday in the 1890s could not put up travellers or provide food for more than twenty people. Within living memory it was a temporary training quarters of the post-war revived Royton Morris Dancers in 1926. They were mostly young boys and the landlady, Annie Bardsley made them practise their clog steps in an upstairs room in stockings feet to minimise the noise for the drinkers below. Heaven knows what she did about the concertina music.

Until a few years ago three cottages, stood along side the pub. These were pulled down to create a grassed beer garden. In the last few years the pub has had difficulties keeping a base clientèle but if the story of the covenant is true it means it can never be a pub again.

Royton Wakes

As Summer is upon us this month and the Society is having its warm weather break until September, it may be apt to remember the old Royton Holiday, the Wakes. I don't mean the amalgamated mid twentieth century Oldham Wakes which has faded out completely, and which was held in June. I don't mean the old Oldham Wakes which for centuries was held at the end of August either, but the good old Royton holiday held approximately in the 1st week of August.

It is hard to determine when Royton Wakes actually began to be celebrated. The word Wakes comes from the Saturday vigil before any Sunday observance of the saint the church is dedicated to. But often it was a convenient summer date suggested by other church custom. Wakes became famous for the ceremonial clean-out and replacement of old church floor rushes with a new crop piled high in fancily decorated carts.

Before the original St Paul's was built (1754) and for long after, Roytonians, along with the inhabitants of Chadderton did celebrate Oldham Wakes, then held at the end of August, and based on the Feast of the Assumption, which is 15 August. In 1752 eleven days were taken out of the year to facilitate the new Gregorian calendar and Oldhamers promptly put them back in again to celebrate the old day after 26 September. By 1800 it had become a riotous affair of rush cart parades, public parties, fairs, rural games and communal dances. Rushcart parties gathered at Oldham parish Church from all over the area and in that year a frightful affray occurred between the rushcart party from Haggate, probably from the Colliers Arms, with the Chadderton party outside a pub called the Red Lion, which used to stand on Burnley Lane near Mill Brow. The Haggate party chased the Chadderton party into the pub and demolished the doors and windows of the pub in their frenzy. Six of the rioters ended up in Lancaster Gaol.

Oldham Wakes became a huge magnet for summer visitors as Oldham grew from a large village into a large cotton spinning town, until the growth of the railways facilitated trips to the seaside. Rushcart parades and riots, often involving Morris dancers, continued to make headlines up to the 1860s but by then all the growing villages round Oldham had begun to celebrate Wakes of their own. The oldest was possibly Shaw, which reputedly had had its own chapel of ease since the 16th century and celebrated its Wakes after the first Saturday after Old Lammass Day (1 August plus 11 days). By the 1860s Royton had a long-established Wakes of its own too, beginning approximately in the 1st week in August. As at Oldham, the holiday, at first one or two days, but later a full Week, involved rush cart parades and local fairs and public house entertainments, the latter featuring George Taylor the village fiddler. In those times there were two main rushcart parties, one from 'Owd Tatt's, beerhouse on Fir Lane, and one from the newly built Duke of Edinburgh public house on Market Street. These rushcart parades lasted until the 1880s. Field sports were held in Royton Hall Park too with the centre of village shows and other displays at old Marketplace, Crofthead.

Strangely enough Mill owners liked the Wakes too- as it was the only time the mills were completely shut and was a good time to clean out the boilers. But when a feeler went out from Oldham to amalgamate all the different Wakes into Oldham's again every mill in Royton voted not to change. Royton Wakes really took off with inauguration of Royton Athletic Games at Paddock cricket ground in 1870. By 1900 twenty thousand visitors were flocking into Royton annually to see the races and field sports, despite the growing popularity of wakes savings clubs at the various public houses which enabled folk to escape the factory grime and take a holiday at Blackpool. Morris dancers were observed in the 1870s but by the 1890s the Royton Morris Dancers really came into their own when the Coleman brothers celebrated team was formed at the Hope and Anchor Inn, practising in the old Philharmonic Hall behind. For a while they had become two teams, the Colemans and the MacDermotts, before uniting again before the Great War and they too had begun to travel to dance in Blackpool. In 1935 they danced at the Albert Hall in London under auspices of the English Folk Dance society. But by that time the Rushcarts were dead and Royton had become a ghost town at Wakes while its inhabitants trod the sands of the seaside en masse. By then no one wanted to stay at home.

Today the Wakes is but a memory, as even when the date was later changed to June in the hope of lighter evenings and better weather, the school system and fragmented industry could no longer cope with universal town holidays. Today the thought of a whole community celebrating a week off work at home or conversely the whole town going to the seaside during the same week seems absurd. Royton and the world are now a different place.

Michael Higgins

Royton Local History Society on the Internet at www.rlhs.co.uk
A member of The British Association for Local History
A member of the Friends of Real Lancashire