



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Hopefully now the worst of the winter is behind us and we can look forward to the spring and early summer and going out and about. Perhaps one of the activities you might like to be involved with is helping to create the "Royton Local List".

This is a project initiated by government to create a list of buildings or sites of archaeological and/or historical importance. When completed the nominated sites may not be included in the English Heritage register of "Listed Buildings" but as local councils have to consult the list before any possible development can take place it may make them think twice before taking action.

Oldham Council has taken this on board and Local Heritage Officer, Karen Heverin has been tasked with seeing it through. She has been placed in a difficult position because no money is available to create the list so she has been visiting local history societies in the borough and asking for their help. When I mentioned this at our meeting last November most members voted to be involved. Well the time for action is now upon us.

We now have guidelines describing the criteria for inclusion along with forms to fill in. A list of suggested sites has been compiled already and I welcome any additions you may like to put forward.

When you have carried out your research and filled in the forms, please return them to me or Jess Wild and I will convert the information into the electronic format required by the Council. If you prefer to create your own electronic versions then please let me know and I'll make sure you receive the relevant files. Digital photographs would be a great help but if you prefer to enter prints these can be converted to digital files.

The deadline for all submissions to be returned to the Council is the end of August. This gives them time to assess the nominations prior to submission to the government by the end of the year.

Please bear in mind that the buildings/sites should not be council owned. A list of these sites has already been created.

Of the 538 sites already on the English Heritage list for the Oldham Borough only 5 are in Royton. Let's see if we can increase that number, even if only by a little.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman

Royton Lives Through The Ages - Project 2

This sub-group of Royton Local History Society still continues to meet regularly and they held their AGM on 6th February 2009. Michael Higgins was elected to continue as Chairman, Margaret Heap as Treasurer and Jess Wild as Secretary.

In his report Michael pointed out that since the last AGM all the 'loose ends' regarding the 2007 'Royton Hall Dig' had been tidied up:- the final 'Dig' report had been received from the University, the finds had been analysed, the school packs had been assembled and distributed and the school's literary contest had taken place. In February 2008, a successful 'Post Dig' evening was held to thank all those who helped with the dig. Plans are now underway to 'footprint' the site of the Hall. (See separate report later in this edition)

During April the launch of the second 'Town Trails' booklet took place and the following month saw the 'Royton Hall Digs' being declared joint winners of the "Marsh Award for Community Archaeology Projects". Pearl Malcolmson and Frances Stott went to London to collect the award and a cheque for £500 to boost our funds.

Because of the excavations carried out at Royton Hall, representatives of 'RLTA 2' were invited to attend a meeting held at Manchester Museum in November 2008. At the meeting it was pointed out that in recent years there has been an upsurge in archaeological activity and the growth of archaeology societies within the area. Because of this interest the two archaeology units (UMAU and GMAU) are applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund for money to hold community digs on 'council owned land' in the Greater Manchester area. To do this they will need the help of the local archaeology societies and they hope to re-form the Greater Manchester Archaeology Federation which would help in boosting co-operation and in sharing facts on finds and general archaeology in the area. RLTA 2 members were all in favour of this and formally requested that they become the 'archaeology arm' of Royton Local History Society and thus be able to apply to become part of the Greater Manchester Archaeology Federation. Their request was granted by the RLHS committee on 27th January 2009.

Jess Wild

Quarrelsome Neighbours at Royton Hall

At the time of the 1861 Census Royton Hall had been divided up into several 'houses'. The East Wing, with the farm buildings, was used by Ann Travis and her brothers Robert and William, who farmed for their father John, who lived in Crompton. Samuel Cooper, described as a proprietor of houses, and a great benefactor to the Wesleyan Church and day school, lived in the 'principal part' (the south front) with his wife, Lydia. He also had the Wesleyan Day School teacher lodging with him. Elsewhere in the Hall and the hall yard lived eight other families. One of these, the Brierleys, housed eight lodgers to help pay their rent! But did these households, totalling 47 people, get on? How can we know, having only the old stones and bricks of the recent archaeological excavations to remind us of the days when every room had its own story to tell.

Thanks to court and newspaper reports we can glimpse some of the lives of families living at Royton Hall. Here are two families, the Irelands and the Halls, both described as living in 'Hall Yard', the part of the Hall buildings on the west and north sides adjacent to the northern farmyard. William Ireland was a blacksmith and farrier aged 42, originally from Chedsley, Lancashire, whose smithy still stands off Shepherd Street, adjacent to the Hall grounds. According to the 1861 census he lived at Royton Hall with his wife Grace, aged 42 from Yorkshire, his son aged 13, and two younger daughters aged 11 years and 8 years. They had one female friend of the family lodging with them and another male lodger. However by 1862 this friend and the lodger have moved on and two navvies named James Chapman and George Goodacre (alias 'Lincoln'), currently helping to build the new railway line from Oldham to Royton, were taken on as lodgers. A third man, named Davies also seems to have been a lodger. Their next door neighbours were 'the Halls' - George Hall aged 52, originally from Bristol and described as a house joiner, his wife Charlotte, aged 49 and born in Saddleworth, and their six children, aged from 25 years down to five years old.

In July 1862 George Hall was convicted at Royton Magistrates court of being drunk and disorderly at twenty minutes past nine in Pickford Street (the top part of Middleton Road) one Saturday night and was fined 2s 6d. Being unable to pay the fine he was sent to the Salford House of Correction for one week. The next month, on 18th August, his wife suffered a similar penalty when she was convicted of using abusive language to Grace Ireland over a long-running dispute regarding Mrs Ireland's ducks

The Oldham Standard of 30 August 1863 reported: "The parties have lived as very disagreeable neighbours, Mrs Ireland having been before the bench within a short period for similar matters." The report continued "..... she and her son were in the garden on the day in question, and the defendant came to the garden door. On seeing her she (Mrs Ireland) ordered her son to put up the ducks, as she had reason to believe she (Mrs Hall) had poisoned several fowls. On telling her son to put up the ducks she (Mrs Hall) began to use very offensive language to her. Mrs Hall denied the charge and said it was all a trumped up story....." The magistrates believed Mrs Ireland and ordered Mrs Hall to find sureties for her behaviour. Unable to find the money Mrs Hall was sent to the Salford House of Correction for seven days.

Besides her abusive neighbour, Mrs Ireland had trouble with her lodgers. A few months previous she had been woken up late on Sunday night the 4th May, by a commotion coming from the Hall Yard. At the trial Mrs Ireland said she had opened the door to find some men striking her lodgers. She said that when one of them, James Chapman, got into the house he said, "Oh I'm a dead man." He was bleeding very much. She went for Dr Ramsden who dressed the wounds. (Dr Ramsden lived at Park House, now the main Post Office on Rochdale Road). She then went to find police Constable Stewart who met her in 'Croft Street' (presumably Croft Head) at around midnight and told him that 'some of her lodgers had nearly been killed.' Constable Stewart went to apprehend the suspects. At the trial the following day the suspects John Lund, Henry Smith and James Heywood claimed the three lodgers had attacked them. However circumstantial evidence such as Lund's lost Billycock hat found in the Hall yard, blood on his left hand, blood on paper in his pocket and a broken stick, identified as Lund's and presumably used in the fight, pointed to his guilt. The victims claimed that the accused had lain in wait for them in the Hall yard and had taunted them, asking Goodacre to go for a drink. Goodacre replied that he would if he had 'anything to drink of.' Then Lund challenged Goodacre to a fight, which challenge he refused. Lund then 'punced' Davis, and threw Davis against a wall, before kicking Goodacre several times as he went to Davis's aid. Chapman claimed he had also been attacked and had been hit over the left temple with a stone.

The magistrates found the defendants guilty of 'serious aggravated assault' and sentenced Lund, Smith and Heywood to six weeks hard labour in the House of Correction. Needless to say, the accused had been seen in The Shoulder of Mutton public house at the bottom of High Street just before the incident, carrying the stick used in the attack (the report names the landlord, enabling us to locate the pub). The report does not say where the three victims had been before they arrived at the Hall Yard. In the Oldham Chronicle's version of events the victim's lodgings are described as a house in the yard, which could mean the brick cottage set to the rear of the west wing of Royton Hall shown in old photographs. (The area which, during the excavations, revealed no building foundations only empty sand).

This was not the complete story of the Ireland family's travails however. On the 23rd June, William Ireland appeared before the magistrate's bench as a complainant against a debtor who had assaulted him. William had accosted Henry Gartside, a farmer living in Haggate Lane, in the street near his smithy and 'using a course epithet' had demanded he settle an account he still owed. Mr Gartside, described by the Oldham Standard as 'an aged man' then lost his temper, struck William Ireland, ran him into the smithy and threw a piece of iron at him. The iron was produced in court. The magistrates, noted evidence that Mr Ireland had said to him, 'pay your debts you d... d....' but nonetheless fined Mr Gartside 10 shillings plus costs.

Such is this little snippet of family life at Royton Hall in 1862. Who knows what information on other tenants lies buried in newspapers, court reports and other records hidden away in archives and private collections?

Michael Higgins

Sources: Oldham Chronicle 10 May, 5 & 19 July, 30 August 1862 ; Oldham Standard: 10 May, 5 July, 30 August 1862. R. Magee, A History of Royton Pubs.

Famous Roytonians

In this edition Doug Ashmore continues his articles about famous Roytonians with this about James Wolfenden.

JAMES WOLFENDEN, the renowned mathematician, resided in Hollinwood, but was a native of Royton being born at Higginshaw in 1754. While carrying out his trade as a hand-loom weaver he taught himself mathematics, familiarising himself with the works of Newton, Emmerson and the famous Geometers.

Probably his greatest achievement was compiling 'The Liverpool Tide Table', for which he received the sum of £5 for the first Table. He carried out this duty until his death and, what made it such a remarkable feat, was that he did it without ever seeing the sea! Although he was offered a permanent appointment in Liverpool, with a salary of £300 per annum, he turned it down because he felt that his occupation as a weaver suited him better and gave him opportunities for study.

When he was in his 80s a few members of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester, along with other individuals who were anxious to mark their achievements along with his, raised a sum of money sufficient to purchase an Annuity for his support. Unfortunately, shortly after the money was raised, Wolfenden died on March 29th, 1841 aged 87. It was decided to not only to bear the cost of his funeral but to place an inscribed stone over his grave to show the merits of such a talented individual.

Wolfenden's remains were interred in Hollinwood Church yard and his stone reads:-
"Where rest the ashes of the honoured dead, But must we not say all honour to such a man."

There is also a tablet inside Hollinwood Church, placed there as a token of appreciation by Mr William Lees who had been associated with Wolfenden both as a pupil and assistant teacher.

Doug Ashmore

Sources : Rev C E Shaw, Varley's Royton Annual, J W Kershaw, Bruce Langridge Oldham Interest Centre



Footprint of Royton Hall

During the past few weeks members of RLTA 2 have been in talks with Oldham Parks Department regarding the making of a 'footprint' of Royton Hall. We envisage that this will be an invaluable asset for local schoolchildren to help enrich their history lessons and a place of interest for the whole community especially those with an enthusiasm for local history.

The idea is to show visitors the position and size of the Hall without actually exposing any of the remains found during the recent digs and thus protecting them for future generations. The 'footprint' will also need to be semi-permanent in case anyone wishes to excavate the site again in the future.

Oldham Parks Department have drawn up the following plan:-

The site would first be levelled with a slight slope from back to front then grassed over. A tree lined footpath would be made leading from Hall Street to the back of the site culminating in a raised area, with information boards, from which the whole site could be viewed. This path would run parallel to, but to the front of, the south wing of the Hall so as not to encroach on any of the remains underground.

The actual walls, rooms and staircase of the Hall would be expressed as shallow 'paths' filled with crushed stone and surfaced with limestone chippings. These would be easily seen from the raised area, and thus the size and layout of the Hall could be readily appreciated.

The maintenance of the site would be carried out by the Parks Dept. (the mowing of the grass) but Royton Local History Society members would be expected to keep the edges of the paths trimmed and the paths free from weeds.

I'm sure you agree that the above plan sounds superb but unfortunately, as with all good things, it comes at a price. The final cost hasn't been arrived at but it will be in the thousands of pounds so it looks like we will have to hit the fund-raising trail yet again! RLTA 2 members are already researching whether any grants are available for this kind of work and will keep us posted with their results.

Jess Wild, Secretary RLHS and RLTA 2



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