



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

I know it's a bit late but "Happy New Year" and I hope you all had a good Christmas.

As you all know due to the bad weather conditions, for safety reasons and the travel problems for our speaker, it was decided to cancel the January meeting. This meant that our secretary, Jess Wild, had the considerable task of contacting all members to let everyone know of the cancellation, and I would like to thank Jess for doing this. The speaker, Ken Darwen, was to have spoken about Towneley Hall, Burnley but don't worry you will not miss this talk as we have rebooked Ken for the 11th October 2010.

Our web site is still going strong. It has now been up and running for a little over 2 years and in that time it has received over 3,000 hits. I have included a contact email address on the site and from time to time I receive emails from people who have visited it. Many of these messages are from people making enquiries about Royton and it's history. Quite often I have to pass these on to Michael Higgins or Frances Stott to answer them, and I would like to thank Michael and Frances for their time and expertise in replying to these queries.

Better still some of our correspondents actually send information to me. This can be in the form of just a few written lines but some go as far as sending a historic photograph or two. Recently, after a couple of introductory messages, I received a CD full of scanned documents written in the early 1980s by an elderly lady who was born in Royton. These were her memoirs and they have made fascinating reading. One of the documents refers to the Town Hall clock and it says that the clock was donated by Dr. Kershaw and that his name and that of his wife can be found engraved on the bell. I propose to investigate this and I will let you know how I get on.

I have to thank Robert Green from the Bolton area for scanning these hand written documents, compiling the CD and sending it to me.

Those of you who attended our February meeting will have enjoyed the talk about Hadrian's Wall given by Doug Ashmore and his beautiful assistant, Marjorie. Doug and Marjorie had decided that they would donate their fee for the talk to a charity event called 'The Long Way Home' sponsoring some Army instructors and junior soldiers who are running the distance from Afghanistan to the United Kingdom, some 5800km. The money raised is to help support injured soldiers returning from the conflict and their families. I would like to thank all of you who decided to make a personal donation to add to Doug and Marg's donation for this cause and which helped swell the fund to £70:70p. Doug will make the donation in the name of our Society.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman

Royton Lives Through the Ages 2

The 'Royton Lives Through the Ages' committee held their AGM on 10 February 2010 and all the current officers were re-elected for another year - Michael Higgins as Chairman, Margaret Heap as Treasurer and Jess Wild as Secretary.

2010 should be a busy year for this group as they will hopefully see the footprint of Royton Hall being completed. Bad weather and other circumstances prevented the Parks Dept. from starting the project last year but we have been assured that it will get under way in the Spring. The first job is to level the site and turf it. The turf will then be allowed to settle and 'knit together' for a few months before the shallow paths outlining the Hall are cut out and filled with crushed stone and surfaced with limestone hoggin. At the present time enough money has been raised to complete this much of the footprint but the group has submitted a bid for a further grant to enable the rest of the original plan to be carried out. This would include an information board and an observation point overlooking the site with wheelchair access via a path lined with trees. Everyone is awaiting the outcome of this bid and keeping their fingers crossed that we will be successful.

Jess Wild, Secretary RLTA 2

THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

The following extracts are taken from a book called the 'History of the Village School, Royton' written in 1922 by Jonathan Beswick. This small hard-backed book was printed by T. Varley & Co., Ltd. of 28/30 Sandy Lane, Royton and was "dedicated to the coming generations".

In this book Jonathan Beswick writes "I have been connected with the School as a scholar, Teacher, Organist and Superintendent from 1862 up to the present day. This History, therefore, will give all the information possible. I am conscious of the fact that much is omitted that we should like to know this may come to the light of day in the future. I may be criticised for having made no reference to many outstanding individual members of the School but the success of the School has been due to the action of the Spirit of God on the hearts of men and women in lowly as well as lofty positions."

*His preface begins "In writing a History of the Royton Village School I am under the necessity of admitting the small amount of written notes or books belonging to the School. The Treasurer's book goes no further back than the year 1827. The Minute Book of the Secretary dates from 1836. Previous to 1827, my data is obtained from the Title Deeds..... Much of this history has been obtained from interviews with old scholars, a few of whom are still alive. I have also derived much information from "Notes on Old Royton", a book in the Royton Free Library, which was written, I believe, by Mr. Thomas Kay, under the *nom de plume* of "Alpha". I find his name in the Scholars' Register for the year 1836. He would, therefore, get to know much about the early History of the School, and I accept his evidence as good and reliable."*

"The Village School - What thoughts arise in the imagination of various people at the mention of these words
To the older people who, when the Village School is the subject of conversation, revert to the days of their childhood. They tell you of scenes that have changed and recall the time when the only way to the School was through Sand Hole. How often, like the children in Longfellow's "Village Blacksmith", they 'watched the sparks' at the smithy which stood near the entrance to the School yard. How the Schoolmaster could reach his home, 17 St. Paul's Street, without going round by Sand Hole and that the cellars of the houses 15 and 17 St. Paul's Street, were rented from 1827 to 1833 by the School authorities, who paid £3 a year as rent. That, before the use of tea, ale was used as a beverage at School parties. An item from the Treasurer's book bears out this statement: "Oct. 26th 1829 - Paid James Holt for brewing beer, 2s."

There is no definite account as to how the money was raised to pay for the building of the School. John Kay was a scholar at the Village School in 1836 and he says "The Village School was built by public subscription". We must assume that this was the method adopted until we get evidence to the contrary.

A description of the School in 1856 shows that it was a building one story high, the length of three windows - six feet wide by five feet high divided into three parts by mullions and transomes, with wooden shutters on the outside. It was during this year that a porch was added, and a stone over the doorway gives the date of erection of the School and the date of the porch extension - 1785 / 1856.

There was a chimney stack at each end of the building, showing that open fireplaces were used, but it is open to question whether they were built with the School or added afterwards. In addition to these open fireplaces a stove was placed in the middle of the room. This indicates that the building was not sufficiently heated, so that about this time a new method of heating was inaugurated by running a sheet iron pipe, 11 inches diameter, the whole length of the School. The smoke travelled along this pipe, and it was thought that heat might be obtained in this way. It was not a success, however, and the pipe was then placed under the floor, but as worse results followed it was discarded entirely.

Gas was used for the lighting of the School at this time (1856), having been introduced two years previously. Before that time candles were used, and scholars were encouraged to bring their own. There are persons living today who can testify to having brought their own light. Water was not laid on until 1878, and at the period of which we are writing, scholars who desired to quench their thirst obtained it at the houses near by. Cans of water were placed at the doors of the houses on hot sultry days, and the rush at "all out" can be well imagined.

The largest addition to the School was made in 1886 to celebrate the Centenary. Two objects were in view at that time; one was to make the building useful as a Day School, and the other to make it more convenient for Sunday purposes. In order to carry out the first, the Government had to make the final settlement in the laying out of the plans. The school was not planned to suit the Trustees and the Sunday School Committee, otherwise the interior might have been different. It is a Government planned school. To raise money for the Centenary extensions the old plan of public subscriptions was resorted to, and the following circular was printed and distributed to every house in Royton :-

Centenary Celebrations, Village School, Royton.

The above School will complete its Centenary in the year 1885. The Trustees and Committee believe that as the School is getting too small, and is in consequence of its age becoming very expensive to keep in repair, it will be a very suitable time to remodel and enlarge it. In order to carry out their desire, they intend holding a Bazaar to celebrate the above event. As the building was erected by public subscription, we feel confident that in again appealing to the public they will feel it a privilege to respond to our earnest appeal to the best of their ability. There being many, no doubt, living who owe much of their education to the institution, we now believe the time has come when they can do something to show their appreciation for the old place.

This circular was followed up by a personal visit to collect subscriptions."

I trust you have enjoyed reading the above and I hope to print more extracts from this book in future editions of The Bugle.

Jess Wild, Secretary

Royton Rant

Mid Lent Sunday (the 4th Sunday in Lent) was once a much loved 'holiday' in Royton. It was even said to have rivalled the Wakes held every August for the number of visitors brought into the town. Nowadays we call it 'Mothering Sunday', a harkening back to the days when apprentices were given a day off to visit their mothers and mother villages, bearing flowers and simnel cakes, a pastry and currant concoction, then popular at Easter. In Royton the day was officially known as 'Mid Lent' or 'Simnel Sunday' but unofficially as 'the Rant' due to the boisterous antics of some of the younger inhabitants. While pubs, other venues, and surprisingly, shops were open to the adults, the youths of the town were wont to show off their belligerence by threatening each other with 'thin canes' and shouting 'close you!' (an order to stand to attention), or fighting the hated 'Shaw Gawbies' on Parapet Hill (rising ground bordering the present golf course off Linkside Avenue and Park Lane). The gangs from Shaw came to 'steal the rant' whilst the Royton lads fought to cut down 'th'owd Ash', a Shaw landmark blown down in a storm in 1887.

The more peaceable townfolk took in visitors, stocked up on pies and penny muffins, and wandered round the streets with their visitors in groups, catching up on old news. But pride of place was inevitably given to the simnel cakes themselves, the products of much care, and competitions, some so big that they filled an entire display window. The practice was said to have been brought to Royton by a farmer and carrier (waggon driver) from Bury, then famous for its simnels in the late 18th century. This man, 'Old Franklin' was also a baker and soon his simnels had spawned imitators. Thus the Royton simnel came into being: 'a flat cake of two layers of pastry with anything from half to three-quarters of an inch of currants between. There was a slightly raised edge and very often a frilling of coloured paper. The top of the cake was covered with white icing sugar.' It was also popular to cut or 'paint' a topical design into the icing. A favourite theme was the famous Nipthistle story, the tale of a pea seller who tied his donkey, 'Nipthistle', to a public house railing style of gate, only to find that the mischievous locals had un-tethered his donkey while he was drinking, placed it inside the gate, then re-attached it leaving donkey and cart tied but on both sides of the barrier. The donkey was not much liked as its braying was said to have foretold the death of many of Royton weaver.

Alas, the Rant eventually fell afoul of modern attitudes to boisterousness and an influx of drunks from Oldham and other places. At one time the holiday was extended into Monday by some Fustian cutters and other trades. A newspaper report of 1889 described the Rant as a 'successful gathering of country folk', but a newspaper report of 1901 reported that the holiday was dying out 'thanks to the growing intelligence of the people'

Michael Higgins

Sources: annual newspaper reports 1860-1936 (especially Oldham Chronicle 21 march 1936)

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