



# The Bugle



## Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

My message this quarter begins with sad news. Many of you will already know that John Crothers, a founder member of Royton Local History Society and Vice Chairman for many years, passed away on February 17th 2012 aged 84 years after a long illness. John led an interesting and active life having had a distinguished military career after which he became an architect. He was responsible for the design of many prominent buildings in the Greater Manchester area and beyond. John was also elected as a Liberal councillor on the Royton Urban District Council until it ceased to be when Royton came under the wing of Oldham MBC in 1974. He was very fond of cricket and played for the St Matthew & St. Luke Church (Chadderton) cricket team. John's funeral was held on 29th February at St. Matthew's Church, Chadderton. It was good to see that many Society members attended the service followed by interment in the churchyard. The funeral tea was held afterwards at the Half Way House, Royton.

John was a family man and was married to Cynthia for 55 years and I'm sure you will join with me in extending our sincere condolences to Cynthia and the family.

In my announcements at our meeting in February I mentioned that I had made a change to our web site. Some small changes were made to the appearance of the pages but the biggest change was the removal of the Royton Hall Dig Summary Video. When I first created the web site I made an internet version of the video to play directly on the site. However this had severe limitations, the worst of these being that it could only be viewed through the Windows Internet Explorer browser. During the winter weeks I made a new high definition version of the video and stored it on 'YouTube'. Not only is the picture quality vastly improved, the move to YouTube opens it up to a much wider audience but more importantly it can now be viewed using any Internet browser. To maintain the connection between the video and our web site I have put a link on the 'Royton Through the Ages' page. Clicking on the link takes you directly to the video. If you prefer you can go straight to YouTube and do a search on 'Royton Hall' and the video will appear on the list. Those of you who are reading the internet version of this document can click the link below which will take you straight to the video.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqtGkpwkSHI>

Another web site you might find of interest is 'Royton in Pictures'. This can be found on 'Facebook'. Membership of Facebook is not required to view the photos but if you want to add your own photos or make a comment about existing photos you have to become a member. There are literally hundreds of photos of Royton on the site. Some very recent and some very old, but all are worth seeing. When you log onto the site, click on 'Photos' and/or 'Wall' and the photos will be listed. Click on a small photo to enlarge it then scroll through them all. Look at both places (Photos and Wall) because the photos are different. Once again for those reading the internet version of this document clicking on the link below will take you directly to the site.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Royton-in-pictures/341709819188091?sk=photos>

Also it is worth keeping an eye on the site from time to time because new photos are being added on a daily basis.

**Geoff Oliver, Chairman**



### Interesting Roytonians

#### **Samuel Smethurst (b. 1853)**

I am writing this little resume of Samuel Smethurst's life with it's final years incomplete. I do so remembering John Crothers, Royton Local History Society's former vice chairman, and former Royton councillor, who sadly passed away in February 2012. Like Cllr. Smethurst, John was a long serving council member and a man of many parts, having business interests, community projects and a church life apart from his council duties. Although incomplete, it seems that now is the right time to narrate Councillor Smethurst's story as a mirror to John's.

Samuel Smethurst is remembered today as the donator of the public recreation ground at the Royton end of Broadway. He was born in Hollinwood in 1853, the second of six children. His father John was a building contractor and, after spells at Wesleyan and National schools in Hollinwood and Rochdale, he eventually entered the business with his father, becoming a foreman at James Smethurst's, Hollinwood. He later went into partnership with James's son at J. & S. Smethurst and when the firm floated as a limited company he became it's managing director. He lived at Longsight, Royton, at premises

variously referred to as '216 Oldham Road' and 'Coldhurst House'. Samuel's career coincided with the spread of the limited liability movement and the great boom in cotton mill building. His firm was responsible for the construction of over 40 mills in the Oldham area.

Described as scholarly rather than athletic, he found expression as a young man in political debate and when joining the Oldham Political Debating Society, he first gained a taste for public representation. He became a member of the Oldham Conservative Party, eventually becoming its chairman. In 1875 he married Jane Rydings, the daughter of an old Failsworth family. In 1892 he was elected to the Oldham School Board, his success here leading to an appointment to the Royton School Board where he was a strong proponent of denominational day schools.

In the 1899 Royton Urban District Council elections he was asked to stand for the Conservatives in the Dryclough Ward. He won and was re-elected unopposed for three terms, becoming chairman in 1907. As an urban district of Lancashire Royton did not officially have a mayor or a town hall, only a 'chairman' and 'council offices'. In the great divide within the party at the time, Samuel supported free trade against protectionism as the best option for the cotton industry and was forced to resign from the chairmanship of Oldham Conservative party as a result.

Described as genial and unassuming, he fulfilled many public roles almost too numerous to name. A long time Wesleyan lay-preacher, he was strongly attached to the Methodist church and school at Luzley Brook in Royton. He was a founder of the Oldham Poor Children's Aid Society and was president of, and benefactor to, the Royton Poor Children's Fund. He served as a magistrate on the Oldham bench and at Royton. He was a director of the Federated Employers' Insurance Association, director of the Oldham Excess Insurance Company and chairman of Coombes' Ltd. A busy man in a busy time.

However his lasting legacy is the land he left to be used as a perpetual playground behind old Edge Lane (Oldham Road) at the end of what is now Broadway. The dedication plaque on the low wall bordering the land reads:

ROYTON  
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EDGE LANE OPEN SPACE  
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This land is the gift  
of  
SAMUEL SMETHURST. ESQ., J.P.  
  
To Be Used as a Children's Playground  
FOR ALL TIME.

**Michael Higgins**



## THE BLANKETEERS

In March 1817 a hunger march to London was organised. It was made up of spinners and weavers from the Manchester area protesting about the great distress that the downturn in the cotton trade had caused them. The idea was for the weavers to march in small groups of ten, ensuring they were not in breach of the law, and with each carrying a blanket on his back and a petition to the Prince Regent fastened to his arm. The petitions requested that the Prince take action to remedy the terrible state of the cotton trade. These protesters became known as the 'Blanketeers' and out of the many hundreds that set off from St Peter's Field Manchester only one is said to have made it to London. After the relative failure of the Blanketeers march there was a movement to round up and arrest the radical reformers of the time.

The following is an account from Samuel Bamford of one such event that happened on the way to the Old Bailey Prison in Manchester :-

*"Passing Street Bridge and Royley, we entered the village of Royton, the streets of which were deserted and the doors shut. We soon returned to Royley, and the constables made a dash into a house in search of a man called Mellor, but he was not there. A crowd was collected near the carriage and, as I was expecting to move on, the door was suddenly opened, and a long thin barrel of a human body was thrust into the coach, head first, a couple of stilt like legs being doubled up under it. 'Lock em together,' said Mr Nadin, and it was no sooner said than done. This person had met some of the runners in a back court or alley, and threatened to beat in their brains with a walling hammer which he had in his hand*

*George Howarth, for that was the name of my new companion, was a decent labouring, married man of Royton, and was about six feet four inches in height. He said he thought it a very hard case, 'he cudno' tell wot he'd dun amiss.' Mr Nadin said he'd know 'wot he'd dun amiss' before he was much older."*

The prisoners stopped for some food at the Spread Eagle Pub in Oldham where it is reported that Mr Howarth ate most of the food, him being very hungry.

**Patricia Etehells**



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

