



# The Bugle



## Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

This year, 2014, is the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War and I'm sure there will be many commemorative events throughout the year both locally and nationally.

Towards the end of 2013 I was approached by society members, Ian and Pat Etchells, who had heard about a government initiative to produce a carved flagstone for every Victoria Cross holder from WWI. The flagstones are to be installed in the birth place of the awardee. Ian and Pat were concerned that the flagstone for Royton's VC holder, John Hogan, may be installed in Oldham rather than Royton, especially as the commemorative plaque to him is installed in Oldham not Royton.

I have looked into the matter and as a result of my research I have approached Royton Councillor Tony Larkin and put it to him that John Hogan's flagstone should be installed in Royton. I believe that Cllr Larkin is in full agreement that this should happen. The flagstones are due to be installed in August so there is still time and scope for this to go wrong but I will monitor the situation.

Also some background research has been carried out into the life of John Hogan VC by Frances Stott and Christine Shelmerdine. The result of their endeavour is published on a special page dedicated to him on our web site at [www.rlhs.co.uk/john\\_hogan.htm](http://www.rlhs.co.uk/john_hogan.htm)

John Hogan's Victoria Cross is on display in one of the silver collection cabinets in Oldham Civic Centre.

On a similar subject, Phil Hynes has now produced a web site showing all the names on the War Memorial in Royton Park and is also carrying out background research into these names, publishing the results on his web site [www.roytonrollofhonour.com](http://www.roytonrollofhonour.com). There is a link to this site from our web site too. There is also a facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/royton.memorial> and a twitter feed @Royton\_Memorial

Phil would also be grateful for information about any of the names including photos if possible. This is still a work in progress but he hopes to complete his task by the end of the year. If you have any information please contact him on [roytonrollofhonour@gmail.com](mailto:roytonrollofhonour@gmail.com).

Further to this Maggie Hurley of Age UK in Oldham is researching servicemen who passed away in the years following the wars as a result of their injuries. She too would be grateful for any information that might help this cause. Contact her on [maggie.hurley@ageukoldham.org.uk](mailto:maggie.hurley@ageukoldham.org.uk)

Finally, but still on this tack, research is currently being carried out by Alan Noble, of Oldham Ex-Serviceman's Liaison Association, into Royton servicemen who may have fallen in conflicts after WW2 with a view to having their names added to the War Memorial in the park. Once again he would be grateful for any information on this topic.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman



## Interesting Roytonians

### 'Old Tom' (Thomas Davis) 1815 - 1882

Thomas Davies was born in Royton the year of Waterloo (1815) and grew up in highly suspicious times. His father had come to Royton as an apprentice cottage handloom weaver from Northenden during the long Napoleonic War. Government scrutiny of suspect revolutionary activity was severe and trade unions were limited by law. At times they were illegal. In this atmosphere young Thomas, a 'tall, active lad', was put to work at the age of eight as an apprentice little piecer at Royton Hall Mill (Hall Street). During his six weeks training he received no wages and thereafter 1 shilling sixpence per week (1s 6d). His hours of work were 6:00am to 8:00pm with no breakfast and only forty minutes for the noontime meal. When he became a big piecer he earned 5s 6d. As he was 'an observing youth' he became a spinner in charge of a pair of mules at age 15. He swore that 'when he became a man he would do something to alleviate the workers to get a fair day's wage for a fair day's work'. He became a member of a secret 'Jack Strike Club' which had a branch in Royton.

He found work in Oldham and became a committee member in the Cotton Spinners Union and the local Jack Strike Club. Such was the secrecy involved that members had to undergo a masonic style ritual with blindfold, solemn oaths sworn on the Bible, ritual 'Kentish Fire' (clapping and stamping of feet while the candidate was blindfold), and after his unveiling, warnings to keep the rules or else! The candidate was shown a candlelit skeleton while the members recited verses such as: 'But alas! The spirit's fled and life is gone; If ever you prove deceitful you are done.' Membership cost 1s 6d.

On 3 April 1834 two constables broke in during a debate on how to handle 'knobstick' workers who had been brought in during a strike at Bankside Mill in Oldham. The members pushed one against a wall and threw the other downstairs. The members fled with the Bible and membership book. They burnt both in a hat ruffing workshop next door. But the next day Davies heard some of the men had been arrested and the committee asked him to go to Royton to tell anyone he saw that all the Oldham spinners were out on strike and they should all come to Oldham where the arrested men were to be tried by magistrates in the Angel Inn. The enlarged crowd of strikers then rescued the prisoners as they were being escorted to Hollinwood and stormed Bankside Mill, driving out the 'Knobsticks' and trashing the mill-owners house. One of the rioters was shot and killed.

But it was probably the 16 week strike at Acre Mills in Derker at the new year of 1836-37, which broke the back of the Cotton Spinners Union, that turned his mind to serious negotiation and reconciliation with employers. He formed a new open union with official representatives who liaised with employers. In this way the original dispute involving employers assigning more machines to one spinner in an attempt to cut wages and improve output was shown to be false economy and the employers relented. He acquired the affectionate by-name of 'Old Tom' and soon got elected to the organising committee for the 10 Hours Bill then in the charge of Oldham MP John Fielden. In this capacity he was a formidable fund raiser and pace setter, at one point acquiring almost single handed a loan from Charles Hindley, the trusting MP for Ashton Under Lyne.

During endless union work Old Tom got a job as night watchman and when his health failed, took charge of the central newsroom at the Industrial Co-operative Society. When he had to give up this work he declared, 'I have become poor in trying to improve the condition of the cotton spinner.' But he never failed to be hopeful and thoroughly approved of the new Limited liability mills then being built in Royton and Oldham, where anyone was free to buy shares and 'labour and capital could work together'. His parting shot at employers was to remember that 'when it is well with thee, remember me'.

*Main Source:* Oldham Chronicle October 28, 1882 – a small, easily missed, memoir by a 'W.M.', hidden among unrelated news items.

**Michael Higgins**



One of our members, Pat Etchells, has been scouring very early copies of the **Manchester Guardian** and **Manchester Times** and has found some interesting 'snippets' about Royton in them. When we have space I will include some of these. The first two are printed below and show just how varied the topics were to hit the headlines in those days!

**Jess Wild, Secretary**

### **PAT'S SNIPPETS**

#### **March 3rd 1827**

On Tuesday evening week, Mr. George Holden, of Holden Fold near Royton, went from Manchester to Oldham by coach, and on his arrival he was joined by Mr. William Travis, a neighbour and they proceeded together towards their own homes. When about three hundred yards from Holden Fold, they were attacked by six men, who demanded their money. Mr. Travis struggled with the villains and escaped; his friend also made the same attempt, but, unfortunately, proved unsuccessful, and was robbed of one hundred and four sovereigns, one £20 bank of England note, three £10 ditto, four £10 Bank Post Bills, one £5 Bank of England note, and two £5 Country Notes. Amounting in all to £209

#### **Jan 3rd 1829**

A few days ago at Royton a singular contest took place between a hen and a mouse. The mouse sprung from its hole, when a hen, which was near immediately rushed at it with the ferocity of a cat, and began to peck it with its bill. The mouse not much liking to be henpecked struggled to get free, and squeaked for assistance. When some persons who were standing by drove away the hen liberated the mouse. The hen, however, again flew at her prey and billed it to death, and afterwards devoured it.

