
The Bugle

Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Although we have not met between December 2014 and March 2015 the Society has continued operating in the background. I had a long and fruitful conversation with Cllr. Stephen Bashforth where he outlined future plans for our town and how he would like our input before work begins.

Construction of the new leisure centre is now well under way and is due to open in September 2015. The old baths will then be demolished to make way for a car park for the new centre. We have already made representation to our councillors to try to preserve the carved stonework above the entrance to the old baths and somehow display/incorporate it into the new building. Cllr. Bashforth is fully supportive and would like to hear suggestions on how this should be done. If you have any thoughts on this matter please let me know and I will log all suggestions and present them to Cllr. Bashforth at a meeting to be arranged sometime soon. If you would like to be present at the meeting and put forward your suggestion personally I can arrange that too.

Secondly, due to changes to be made to the Youth services in the Oldham Borough, a large room on the top floor of the Town Hall will soon become available and could become a Royton Museum. Once again Cllr. Bashforth is asking for our help in planning, and although there are already some exhibits in storage he would like donations of artefacts, either on loan or as gifts to the town, that can be put on display. We would also be involved in creating information boards for the displayed items. If you would like to be involved in any aspect of this project please let me know.

Finally I hope you enjoy the talks we have lined up for the remainder of this season until our summer break at the end of June.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman

Peterloo Bicentenary 2019

In January I attended a meeting of the Peterloo bicentenary committee, on behalf of the Society, at Manchester Central Library. Many events, history walks, memorials and related activities are planned, not just for Manchester but for the surrounding radical towns such as Royton. These could involve Royton Library or the planned Royton Museum. All ideas are welcome.

Michael Higgins

Interesting Roytonians

Thomas Percival the Antiquarian 1719-1762

Thomas Percival was a magistrate in scarcely less troubled times than those of his son-in law Joseph Pickford, later Sir Joseph Radcliffe. (Bugle Sept. 2014) But while Pickford was reckoned a 'Tory' by contemporaries, Percival was definitely a 'Whig' He was also a keen squire. He enlarged Royton Hall in the 1750s and did much to create a cottage weavers' village by the hall and park.

Thomas was born to parents William and Dorothy on 1 September 1719. In 1738 he married Martha Gregge of Chamber Hall, Oldham. After the re-building of the hall a stone tablet depicting the joined family crests was erected in the park wall. This is the plaque which was stolen in 1989

(Bugle Dec. 2014). As magistrate in 1745/6, he took statements from local informants after a Jacobite patrol under a 'Colonel' Gordon occupied the Oldham area as flank guard for Bonny Prince Charlie's army. These make fascinating reading. The rebels demanded local 'taxes' and affirmations of loyalty to the exiled King James Stuart. They also hunted out militia men and their arms.. They sought lodgings in inn at Oldham and were led to suspect houses by local Jacobites. But few men actually joined his army and the locals hid their horses and cattle. One militia man refused to give up his arms and told the Jacobite horsemen 'God save King George and damn the Prince and his lousy army'. Only one collaborator was sent for trial. It is not known where Thomas Percival was, however, when the Jacobites stopped at Dryclough cottage in Royton itself. In 1748 he wrote two treatises against the Jacobite-leaning High Church Clergy of Manchester, and Jacobites in general.

In 1758 Thomas became embroiled in a weavers' dispute on behalf of his tenants, describing them as 'a numerous half-starved, half-clothed poor weavers opposed by a few rich traders.' There were riots in Manchester and elsewhere and occasionally he had to call out the military. He wrote a pamphlet on this too, entitled 'A letter to a friend occasioned by the late dispute betwixt the check-makers of Manchester and their weavers; and the check-makers ill-usage of the author'. Thus began his career as a man of letters. He also pursued antiquarian interests, travelling about the area searching out Roman roads and signal stations, surveying Castle Hill in Rochdale and Buckon Castle at Mossley, and discovering the route of the Roman road from Manchester, through Failsworth. In 1751 he read a paper to the Royal Society entitled 'Observations on the Roman Colonies and Stations in Cheshire and Lancashire.' His plans were used by later local historians such as Aikin and James Butterworth, the latter in his 1817 history of Oldham. Thomas Percival was elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 1756 and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1760.

Fortunately one of his estate books survives from the 1750s and 60s showing rents owed for both gardens, land and buildings. The latter were expanding each year, many built by John Wallwork of Royley. New cottages were built in the new 'Chapel Lane' and High Street and some local historians have speculated that the new streets named Sandhole and Gravel (the latter re-named St Paul's Street), were originally the pits dug for building material for the enlarged hall. Thomas also donated land in 1754 for the new chapel too (St Paul's). He seems to have been a kindly man, generous to his tenants and workers, and to his own liberated 'negro', named in his honour Juba Thomas Royton. Juba's son in turn was christened Thomas Percival Royton.

Thomas and Martha's only daughter, Katherine, was born 'at three o' clock in the afternoon on 15 March 1739* and baptised the same day'. She wed Joseph Pickford of Alt Hill in 1763, bore William Percival Pickford and died in 1765. Her son died before his father and the manor eventually reverted to Sir Joseph's grandson. A descendent of the Percival family unsuccessfully challenged the Radcliffe family's right to inherit from Katherine as they were not heirs of her body.

Thomas's death at the height of renown in 1762 left a vacuum. As an archaeologist, and a fitting model for RLHS's own Royton Lives Through the Ages project to excavate the ruins of Royton Hall, he was a fitting role model. But however we remember him he was certainly an all-round personality, the like of which we would be unlikely to find in Royton today.

*Main Sources: Dictionary of National Biography, Radcliffe Papers, Rental book of Royton Hall, Parish baptismal records. * The baptismal record for Katherine has a '40' added to 1739.*

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