
The Bugle

Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Chairman's Message

A lot has been happening over the winter months. The old swimming Baths and Leisure Centre that was built in 1909 has been demolished. Although this was a rather sad event I'm pleased to say that the carved stonework above the main entrance was very carefully taken down and transported to Alexandra Park where it will be stored, cleaned and refurbished prior to re-erection somewhere yet to be decided. At the time of writing the Blue Plaque on the commemorative stone at the site of Royton Hall has been taken for refurbishment and a fingerpost sign directing people to the Royton Hall site is currently being made. It will be erected somewhere on the shopping precinct when the building work is complete. To clear the way for that building work the mounting steps will be moved back to their original location at Downey House. The 'Wheel of Time' that sits next to the Mounting Steps in the precinct at the moment will be taken into storage until a new location can be found for it.

Because of all the changes in the town centre our Heritage Trails Booklets will be in error. The booklets were originally written by Frances Stott and Michael Higgins. Frances and Michael are re-writing the booklets to reflect the changes. This is quite fortuitous because there are very few left of the original run of 1000 of each one so now is a good time to update them and have another print run, Funding has been secured for all the above projects from unspent monies in Royton Council's budget.

RLHS committee members Brian Lloyd and Phil Ellis expressed a desire to bring the stocks at the side of St Paul's Church back to life. As part of this project it was thought that some stone flags would be needed to cover the ground around the posts. However when the overgrowing vegetation was cleared away to see what was underneath it revealed original stone cobbles so that saved some work and costs. Just timber and ironmongery is required now plus the labour. Funding for this has been sought from the Royton Community Chest.

Finally, you may remember we attended a talk about the organ in St Paul's Church. That talk preceded a huge fund raising effort to pay for refurbishing the instrument. That money was raised and the work that has been going on for some time is nearing completion. There are to be a series of concerts and recitals to celebrate the completion and show off the organ at its very best.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman

RHLS Committee elected at the 2015 AGM

Chairman	-	Geoff Oliver
Vice Chairman	-	Michael Higgins
Secretary	-	Jess Wild
Treasurer	-	Pat Abram
Ordinary Members	-	Frances Stott, Brian Lloyd, Phil Ellis

Archaeology Note

AOC Archaeology have recently surveyed and documented the area by High Street recently being redeveloped as part of the new Lidl and precinct redevelopment. Old 18th century houses of the early village were built here against the park wall of Royton Hall. The Planning Application stipulated that an archaeology assessment had to be done for any groundwork deeper than 30cm. We will update you when we have any further information.

'Deserted is my Own Good Hall' - Lord Byron and Royton

Old legend has it that Lord Byron visited Royton and mentioned Royton Hall in one of his poems. If this is so, why? George Byron the poet certainly had a connection to the area because his ancestor, Sir John Byron, had been created the first Baron Byron of Rochdale in 1643, and he was the sixth baron. Even before this the Byrons had also been stewards, landlords and leaseholders in both Rochdale and Royton. They had sold the manor of Royton in the 17th century and since then lived mainly at Newstead Abbey in Nottinghamshire. Yet when 'the poet lord', inherited his title aged ten, few Byrons had since visited the area and the Rochdale estate was embroiled in a long-running lawsuit over manorial rights and the leasehold of coal mines.

According to Henry Fishwick, Victorian chronicler of Rochdale, the young poet briefly visited there in 1803, aged fifteen, with his sweetheart Mary Chaworth. He had travelled up from a ball at Matlock to stay overnight with his steward, Mr Ferrand, at the old manor house 'the Orchards', which stood on the present site of Rochdale Town Hall. The Rochdale writer Margaret Lahee later depicted this visit in a romantic tale, picturing dutiful couple, cheering tenants and public entertainments. If true this was a problematic teenage frolic.

Byron's letters however show that he came here with his agent, Mr Hanson, in 1811, when he was twenty-three. His criminally eccentric great uncle William Byron, the 'Wicked Lord' had instigated an interminable dispute which was preventing sale of property and collection of rents. Byron was then unknown but was only a few months away from worldwide fame with the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, a thinly disguised autobiographical Balkan adventure in which he became the hero of his own legend. The pair reputedly left Newstead at the end of September to stay at Hopwood hall where his friend, Robert Gregge Hopwood, resided. According to the journal of Mary Loveday, who was present with three Byng sister in-laws, a Starkie family sister plus others, Byron arrived not as the 'Byronic hero' of myth but as a very unsure young man with odd dietary habits. He seems either to have lollled about the house and grounds while Mr Hanson was engaged in fruitless discussion with the Dearden family, lessees of the mines, or indulged himself in the odd ride out. According to F.R. Raines, the indefatigable collector of house deeds and family histories, Byron then rode from Hopwood to Royton to visit the hall his ancestors had sold in 1622, then their main residence. Starkies once lived at Royton Hall and the Hopwood set knew the way, presumably taking the easiest route via Slattocks and Thornham Old Road, then a turnpike. Byron found the Hall occupied by the Rev, Joseph Hordern, magistrate vicar of Shaw Chapel, who used it as a school for gentlemen aristocrats as well as a gaol and magistrates' court. Fascinated by old family associations, Byron was keen to hear its history. Perhaps here he heard the old ghost tale of wronged Mistress Carey and of cursed Nicholas Byron's 'ghastly hand'.

There is no evidence that Royton hall was dilapidated at this time, though over the following years it was destined to become a run-down farm building shared by industrialist tenants and poorer lodgers. Byron is known to have added some stanzas to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* while at Hopwood and immediately after arriving home. Indeed he may have learnt of the death of his old bosom schoolfriend John Eddleston while he was at Hopwood, for he became 'reserved and silent' This was a profound shock, following on the death of his mother before his visit. Despondency begets despondent verses and he became convinced that death, madness and misfortune cursed the Byrons. But did he really add the following in Canto I after seeing Royton Hall as the legend attests?

*Deserted is my own good hall/ Its hearth is desolate;
Wild weeds are gathering on the wall,/ My dog howls at the gate.*

This could equally describe Newstead Abbey of course, parts of which were indeed a ruin. The lines refer to the exiled Childe Harold lamenting his old home, now destined to decay. Poetry takes in all experiences and even though *Child Harold's* publication made Byron a sensation in 1812, he could never keep up with his debts, or his gloom. It was not until 1824 that he was able to sell Rochdale to fund his permanent exile and death in the Greek war of independence. By then he had become the model for Heathcliff, Mr Rochester, Mr Darcy and countless other cursed literary heroes fatal to the feminine heart. But at Hopwood it seems, he set no one's heart a-flutter.

Sources: Fishwick, Raines, Byron Letters, MacDonald-A *History of Hopwood Hall*, Fallon-*Lord Byron in Profile*

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