



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Welcome to the 2011/12 season of the Royton Local History Society. If you have been on holiday I hope you had a good time and even though we have had not any meetings for the past two months the Society has still been active.

Firstly, I must start on a very sad note. Those of you who attended our June meeting may recall that we gave thanks to one of our members - Margaret Carter on that evening. Previously she had asked if she could retire from making the refreshments after our meetings and, as a small token of our appreciation for her long and valued contribution to the Society, we presented Margaret with a bouquet of flowers. Just two weeks later Margaret was taken ill and admitted to the Royal Oldham Hospital where she underwent surgery and two weeks after that Margaret tragically died from complications. Her funeral service took place at St. Paul's Church, attended by several RLHS members, followed by cremation at Middleton.

Margaret was born in Royton, lived her life here and her knowledge of Royton's history had no bounds. She was a founder member of Royton Local History Society and treasurer from it's early days until just two years ago. She was also our tea lady, providing the much needed refreshments after each of our meetings. Margaret was one of those people who had the ability to spot when something needed doing and instead of talking about it just got on with it. Her sharp wit and sense of humour will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing her. She will be a great loss to her family and her many friends, not only here at Royton Local History Society but also at St. Paul's Church, and to Royton as a whole.

Also at the June meeting I announced that I had been contacted by Gerald Brierley, a presenter on Oldham Community Radio, to say that they were planning a 'Summer Stroll' in Royton and were inviting RLHS members to take part. He also asked me if I would provide live 'expert' commentary at various locations along the route. The stroll took place on June 16th and two RLHS members accompanied me along with about twenty regular listeners to the community radio. Fortunately on the day the weather was kind and, although not particularly warm, it stayed dry. A bonus indeed looking back at the 'summer' we have just had!

The route followed the 'Oldham Edge Trail' which appears in our second 'ROYTON HERITAGE TRAILS' booklet published a few years ago. The halfway point of the walk was at the top of the Edge, near to the White House pub, where we stopped for a picnic before carrying on down to Higginshaw Lane. I was interviewed at various points along the route and these were broadcast live. The walk ended at the starting point which was at the Edge Lane playing field at the corner of Broadway and Oldham Road. I took the opportunity to use the broadcast to promote Royton and Royton Local History Society and an edited version of the stroll was rebroadcast on several occasions throughout July.

Hopefully you have picked up your copy of our programme of talks for the 2011/12 season, which shows the extremely interesting and varied selection on offer. Society secretary Jess Wild has once again worked very hard to arrange the speakers, some of whom are our own society members. If any of you feel you would like to give a talk to the society in the future, please see Jess and she will arrange a date with you.

I look forward to seeing you all at our meetings in the coming months and if there is anything you need to know about the Society please don't be afraid to ask. Any committee member will be pleased to help in any way they can.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman.



Sorry there was no edition of 'The Bugle' in June but this was due to a lack of material to put in it. 'The Bugle' is a newsletter for all RLHS members, but it appears that only one or two members can be bothered to contribute articles. I am extremely grateful to those who have contributed but I am sure there are many more of you who still have a tale to tell about Royton and it's people. So come on, put pen to paper and let me have those stories otherwise 'The Bugle' may cease to exist.

Jess Wild, Secretary

Interesting Roytonians

James (Jimmy) Coleman 1885-1970

James Coleman was the leader of the Royton Morris Dancers for over sixty years. Born into an Irish immigrant family in Hollinwood, he attended school in the Lees/Mossley area before settling in Royton in the early 1890s. Morris dancing has an exotic history and originally consisted of male dancers accompanying the rushcarts to the church at wakes time. By the 1890s it had become a struggling street dance tradition carried out by a few teams of men in selected mill towns.

In about 1891 Jimmy and his elder brother Michael (Mick) Coleman, a noted clog dancer, raised a team in Royton, practising at the Hope and Anchor Inn. Mick left and went to live in Failsworth where he later trained up a team of boys and featured in a folk dance book. James Cheetham carried on in Royton as 'conductor', with the help of concertina player Lees Kershaw, their headquarters being at the Unicorn and Duke of Wellington pubs, until he also moved on and went to live in Oldham where he trained a rival team. This left the young Jimmy Coleman to become 'conductor' of the Royton team sometime after 1906. This team composed of other Irish catholic families, the largest of which was the MacDermotts. However, tensions arose between the two families over 'tradition' and 'innovation' and the MacDermotts briefly formed their own team at the Commercial Inn on Middleton Road, while Coleman's team met at the Church Inn, on the opposite side of the road. Jimmy Coleman considered the MacDermott's team (named the 'reds' after the colour of their knee breeches) to be no more than buskers, whilst his team (the 'blues') carried on the traditional style of morris dancing. Eventually they re-united under Coleman just before the First World War.

Morris Dancers in those days danced at the Wakes holidays (the second week in August in Royton) and at neighbouring town's Wakes holidays and other Saturday venues during the summer. Often the dancers would dance all the way to Manchester dressed in breeches, ribbons and clogs, all the while twirling cotton rope 'slings' to the beat of drums and the strains of a concertina band. They would return via tram to count up and distribute money collected during the day. At Wakes time they would dance all the way to Blackpool, sleeping in haystacks and, after collecting a fortune on the Pier, would enjoy a train journey back. It was either that or more haystacks and sore feet before they arrived home!

The Great War, along with the growth of motor traffic on the roads, almost destroyed morris dancing with many of the dancers being killed or gassed in the trenches. Coleman briefly trained a boys' team at the Dog and Partridge pub but this disbanded in the early 1920s.

It was not until the late twenties when local road sweeper Fred Day contacted Maude Karpeles, an English Folk Dance Society pianist, that the team was revived with the help of E.F.D.S. money. However this money was soon drunk away, much to the frustration of the English Folk Dance Society, who then had to raise fresh cash. Karpeles made Coleman a household name in Folk circles and mentioned him and his dance in her 'Lancashire Morris Dance' book, but he continued to exasperate the Society. In 1935 the Royton Morris Dancers won an 'All England Folk Dancing Championship' at the Royal Albert Hall with new concertina player Ellis Marshall and what Jimmy Coleman called "the dance routine" became one of the celebrated Morris Dances of England. Coleman's dancers however, were criticised for being too fond of beer, low speech, slovenly dress and habits.

Coleman revived the team again after the Second World War with the reluctant help of Royton UDC (which warned of the potential financial consequences), and Jimmy's son Norman raised a boys' team in the 1950s and 60s. After Jimmy's death Norman helped to raise another team which lasted until 1983.

James Coleman was remembered as an irascible man who once broke a collecting box over the nose of a critical spectator. He fell out with the folk dance crowd and famously locked 'folkies' out of his practices at Byron Street School. However Coleman, for a long-time a cop packer at the Roy Mill, in his own inimitable way helped to put Royton on the folk dancing map.

Main Sources: Coleman, MacDermott, Cheetham family memories, former dancers, Ellis Marshall, Census records, newspaper obituaries, Royton UDC school records,

Michael Higgins



Visit the R.L.H.S. websites at www.roytonlocalhistorysociety.co.uk or www.rlhs.co.uk

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