



The Bugle



Royton Local History Society's Newsletter

Welcome to the 2014/15 season of RLHS. I hope you have enjoyed the summer break whether you travelled to distant parts or stayed here in Royton. As usual the work of the Society doesn't stop just because we don't have any meetings and Jess, our secretary, has been booking speakers for our enlightenment and entertainment. Our treasurer, Pat, has been sorting out our accounts prior to annual checks by our auditor and a full financial report will be ready for your examination at our AGM in a few weeks time.

Shortly after our June 2014 meeting we took part in a WWI exhibition, organised by Oldham Council at the Gallery in Oldham and I would like to thank the members who set up and manned our stall on that occasion.

On the subject of WWI you may remember that I had been liaising with our local councillors, in particular Cllr Larkin, in an attempt to have the commemorative flagstone dedicated to John Hogan VC (which will be provided by Central Government) installed adjacent to the war memorial in Royton Park. I'm delighted to say that this will now take place. The flagstone will be installed and dedicated on 29th October 2014. This date being 100 years to the day that John Hogan carried out the act of bravery which led to him being awarded the Victoria Cross. * Please see below

In addition to this, due to the ever increasing numbers of people attending the Remembrance Service in November, the hardstanding area around the War Memorial will be extended to allow them to stand on solid ground rather than grass. I hope you agree this will be a big improvement.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman



*Hear more about the life of Roytonian John Hogan VC next year at our meeting on June 8th 2015 when Glynn Hogan is coming to talk to us about his very brave relative.

Jess Wild, Secretary



Interesting Roytonians

Joseph Pickford (Sir Joseph Radcliffe bt.) 1744- 1819

Joseph Pickford has not fared well in local history due to two factors. Firstly he married the only daughter of Thomas Percival, a well-regarded man of letters whose family had lived at Royton Hall for a century. Secondly he offended the radical politics of 19th century historians. He is known better outside Royton as Sir Joseph Radcliffe of Milnsbridge. His descendant, Timothy Radcliffe OP, is patron of the society's 'Royton Lives Through the Ages' project.

Joseph was born at Lower Alt Hill Farm, Ashton Under Lyne, in 1744, to Joseph Pickford and Ann Radcliffe. The Pickfords had lived at Alt Hill since Jonathan Pickford of Macclesfield had married Alice Lees of Alt Hill in 1699. Consequently the farm became better known as Pickford Hall, but the family were not too afflicted with gentry snobbery because while Joseph, as heir, was educated and bred to live the life of a gentleman, his younger brother William was apprenticed to a trade. The Pickfords however tended to marry well and Joseph's mother was a Radcliffe, the daughter of the owner of the Milnsbridge and Marsden Estates in Yorkshire.

In 1763 nineteen year old Joseph indeed married well; he wed Katherine Percival of Royton Hall. Her father died in that year and Katherine died in 1765, bearing one son, William Percival Pickford, who died before his father. Joseph, as Lord of the manor of Royton, hastily married wealthy heiress Elizabeth Sunderland the same year. She bore him many children and an heir, who would also die before his father. Elizabeth died in 1796. His third wife was Elizabeth Creswick, who long outlived him.

continued

Of his many children his daughter Frances Pickford, whose mother was Elizabeth Sunderland, is now the best known due to her mention in the diaries of Ann Lister. (See the Bugle Dec. 2009). It is tempting to detect a change of proprietorial attitude in Joseph's squireship via comments in the estate book of the 1760s. Before his death Thomas Percival had written against a defaulting rent payer, "I have forgiven him his rent, him being poor." After Thomas Percival's death a different hand comments on one tenant's rent: "His land is worth more than he says it is, let him pay up or quit." But perhaps this would be recklessly adding to the Pickford myth.

Joseph became squire of Royton at a time of a great growth in population, the cottage textile trade and political unrest. He became a magistrate and held the first petty sessions here in 1788 and had much work to do as a Justice of the Peace. At the outbreak of the French Revolution and war with France he became leader of the Oldham area loyalist 'Church and King Club'. This club opposed the new political clubs springing up to support some of the aims of the French Revolution, the most vociferous of which was the Jacobin Club of Royton led by Thomas Taylor. These Jacobins, or 'Friends to Parliamentary Reform' as they styled themselves, unwisely advertised a mass meeting in Royton for April 1794, at the height of the Jacobin Terror in Paris. The meeting, partly held in the Light Horseman pub in lower Rochdale Lane and the surrounding field, was broken up by a huge crowd of patriotic army recruits, a body of cavalry mustered by Pickford and Easter Monday footballers and ruffians, largely from Oldham, goaded on by the vicar of Royton - Richard Bury. The ruffian element were led by Joseph Harrop of Barrowshaw in Oldham, a tenant of Pickford. The pub was wrecked and two recruits were stabbed in the process. However several Jacobins, some carrying knives and pistols, were arrested by the mob and taken to Royton Hall to be examined by Pickford. The affair became known as the Royton Races. It has also been termed 'Royton's Peterloo'.

Consequently the radical, and later Liberal historians of Royton have painted a dim picture of Pickford as a heartless Tory magistrate standing idly by in his Hall while hundreds of Jacobins were being chased over the fields of Royton by 'tyrants'. He became the object of a phrase used at bedtimes to frighten Royton Children: "Ill take the before Pickford!"

During his squireship the first cotton mills driven by water and horse power were being built in Royton and the population and trade doubled. In 1795 Joseph inherited his maternal uncle's Marsden and Milnsbridge estates on the proviso that he change his name to Radcliffe. Consequently he moved to Milnsbridge House near Huddersfield, where his second wife died of fever within a year, a move lamented as signalling the demise of rural life in Royton and rule by textile magnates. Poet James Taylor, nephew of Thomas Taylor the Jacobin, wrote in his poem *On My Native Village* "How much disfigured is each rural scene/ Since Old Sir Joseph from his villa went".

In rural Milnsbridge, however, Joseph Radcliffe found that riot and rebellion had not escaped him in Yorkshire. In 1812 the Luddite conspiracy resulted in affray and bloodshed all over the north, with violent machine breaking and looting of property. Corn was expensive and the long Napoleonic War had severely hampered the cottage textile trade. In that year four mill workers shot and killed a local wool cropping employer and Radcliffe had over a hundred suspects arrested. One of the guilty party turned state's evidence and betrayed the other three but such was Joseph's zeal in tracking down accomplices that all but three of the 64 suspects who eventually went to trial in York were detained by him. It is alleged that he lobbied the government to send a reliably harsh judge to try them and the three assassins were hanged.

The Luddites were eventually subdued, partly by general military action, but Joseph allegedly strove to push his role to the government in the hope of gaining a baronetcy. His persistence paid off and he became Sir Joseph in 1813. But the strain of the effort, and subsequent death threats against him and his family, apparently took its toll and he suffered from a nervous tremor ever after. He removed to a property in Ridding Park near Harrogate, then being finished by his architect, selling Milnsbridge House to his son-in-law.

Sir Joseph continued to live the life of a wealthy country gentleman, often spending time in his house at Clifton in Bristol. He died there 1819 but was buried in the family tomb in Royton Chapel. His birth surname was commemorated long after in Pickford Street and Pickford Buildings (now the top of Middleton Road) and the prize for Royton Athletic Sports day became known as 'The Pickford Plate.'

His Radcliffe descendants remained Squires of Royton. He was succeeded as baronet by his grandson, Joseph Percival Pickford Radcliffe, the last of the family to be born at Royton Hall.

Main Sources: Bowman:England in Ashton Under Lyne, Royton Estate Books, Alpha:Notes on Old Royton, John Bull's Calderdale Chronicle.

Michael Higgins



A Lazy Man's Defence

I recently visited the newly refurbished Manchester Central Library to do some research. Whilst searching through the archives of the Manchester Evening News, using their new super duper but sluggish microfilm/computer system, looking for a particular article I saw many other articles that distracted me from my main task. Having spent the best part of a day straining my eyes staring at the screen I guess I was ready for a giggle, so when the headline of one particular item caught my eye as being a bit different, I digressed from my task and read through it.

The newspaper was dated 7th June 1881 and I double checked this because at first I thought it might have been April 1st. I reproduce the article below in the hope that you might find it as amusing as I did.

A Lazy Mans Defence

Not a thousand miles from St. Anthony, Minn - and not very many years ago a certain physician from New Hampshire, went at the work of getting up and organising 'A Lazy Man's Club', and he had good success. The club was duly constituted, its bye laws adopted, and chief of all, its larder looked after.

The chief law really and the law that formed the distinctive feature of the club was this:- Any member who should be proved guilty of having been in a hurry i.e. of having allowed anything under the sun to cause him to hasten a movement of body or mind, should be fined an amount sufficient to pay for a supper for the club.

The first man accused and brought forward for trial was the president and originator of the club himself - Dr. Hackett Eastman. The court was duly organised, the complaint read, and the witnesses summoned. It was proved, first that a boy was seen to call at Eastman's office door and deliver a message; and it was known that said messenger reported, on that occasion, a case of sickness, and begged that the doctor would make haste. Next it was proved, by several reliable witnesses, that Dr. Eastman was seen very shortly after the delivery of that message, driving through the city 'like lightning' that plainly signified that he was in a tremendous hurry. Aye, clearly enough he had wilfully violated the fundamental law of the society.

But Eastman called witnesses in his own behalf. He called two grooms, both of whom swore that the horse which he used on that occasion was a head strong hard bitted, high mettled beast, that would 'streak it off like blazes' if ye'd only let her. And Dr. Eastman claimed he had not hurried an atom. His horse had hurried but not he. In no way manner or shape had he made any haste.

"But" said the judge advocate, "you could have held the horse in, you could have prevented the beast from tearing away in such a hurry."

"Certainly, I could have done that very easily."

"And why didn't you do it?"

"Why - didn't I do it?" The doctor repeated the words in amazement. "Do it!" "Hold in my Horse? What are you thinking of? Had I done that you might well have mulcted me; but I didn't. The fact was I was too lazy to do it! I was just that lazy, torpid, supine and utterly lifeless on that occasion, that the headstrong beast might have killed me, and I wouldn't have put forth effort enough to hold her in."

The club did not get a supper at their president's expense on that occasion.

N.Y.Paper.

Manchester Evening News. 7th June 1881

p.s. If like me you are unfamiliar with the word 'mulcted', I checked, it is not a misprint it means 'fined'.

Geoff Oliver, Chairman



IMPORTANT AMENDMENT to this season's meetings

Please note that this season we will be meeting on the second Monday of the month in September, October, November and December. There will be no meetings in January and February and they will start again on the second Monday in March and finish on the second Monday in June. Membership fees remain the same as in previous years at £10 per annum.

Jess Wild, Secretary



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

Royton Local History Society is a member of the 'Friends of Real Lancashire' - No. 544SF



