

The Bowdon Sheaf

A BOWDON HISTORY SOCIETY PUBLICATION

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The Bowdon Sheaf is published by the Bowdon History Society which was founded in 1979, and is sponsored by the Cheshire Sheaf. The Society has four winter meetings and two informal summer meetings or walk-about as well as study groups for those who wish to take a more active part.

Bowdon has a long history as a rural community under the manorial lords of Dunham Massey and as the centre of a wide-spread parish much larger than its present size. Domesday Book records that Hamon de Massey held Bowdon and that there was a church and a priest there.

It has a different history, beginning in the 1840s, which links it with Manchester. The coming of the railway combined with large scale-sales of land in the area brought a great influx of energetic, wealthy and often cultivated Manchester men from the city which Gladstone called "the centre of the modern life of the country". The face of Bowdon was almost completely changed and it was transformed socially and culturally.

The Bowdon History Society exists to explore both these pasts and to collect material about them - written records, oral traditions and reminiscences, photographs and the evidence of the landscape and buildings we still see around us. Much has already been collected and we hope to pass it on in the Sheaf, in the belief that knowing its history adds to the enjoyment of living in or visiting a locality. Much, we think, remains to be discovered and we invite you, our readers, to send us any information you have which can contribute a piece, however small, of the jig-saw of Bowdon's past.

Marjorie Cox.
Chairman.

RURAL BOWDON: 1 Bow Green
by Ronald Trenbath

In former times Bow Green was a small rural settlement at the junction of Bow Green Road (at that time Bow Green Lane) and Bow Lane, consisting of four semi-detached cottages, a white thatched farm house and a larger dwelling which had previously been the residence of the Head Gamekeeper but subsequently included into the farmstead.

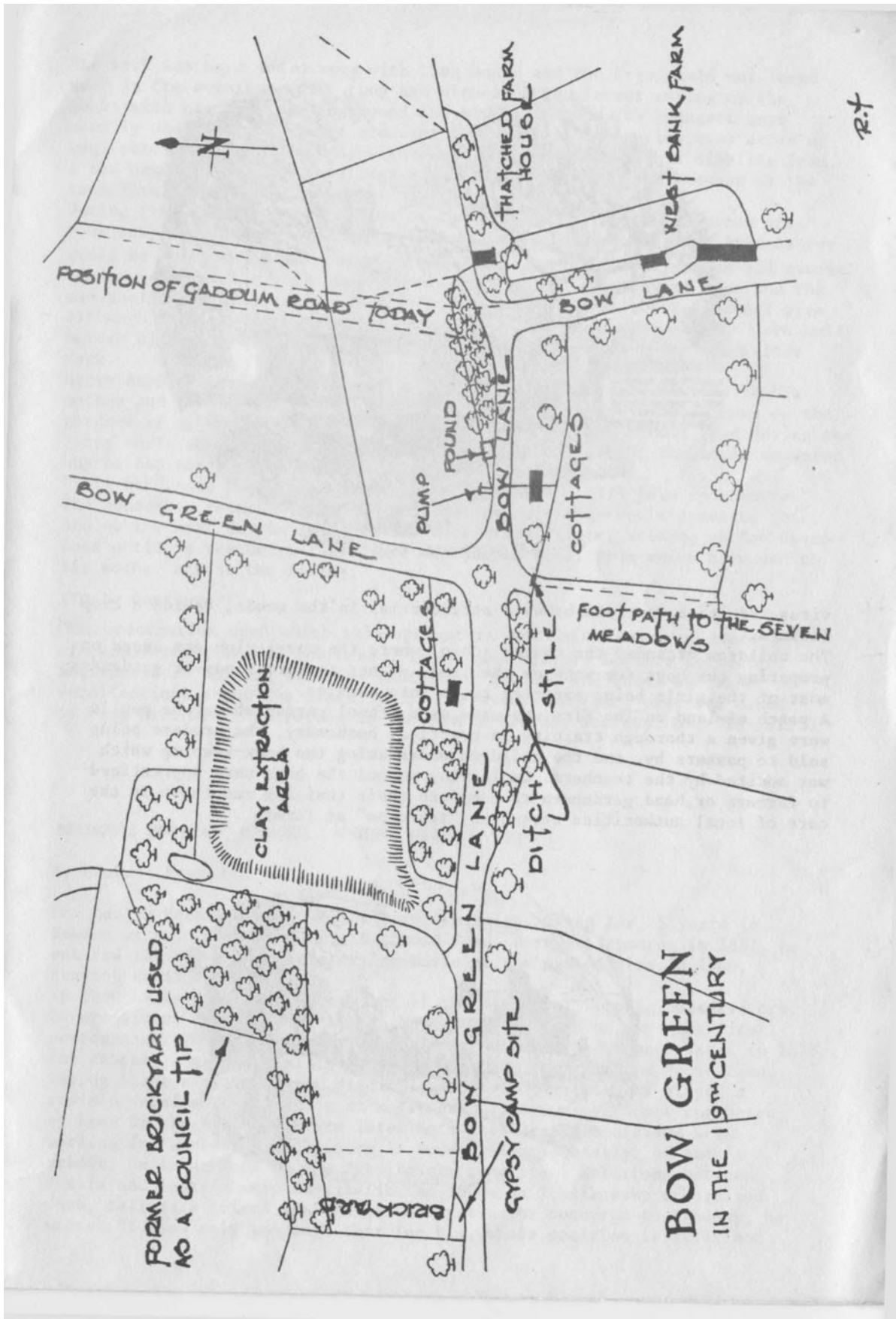
The barn to the farm consisted of a threshing floor or threshold, a barn porch, a shippin, loose box and shant for itinerant workers. The doors were of a sophisticated design to control air current needed on the threshold while threshing corn. The two roads were narrow between high hedges overhung with damson trees and provided a better route to Bowdon than the main Chester road, as the gradient was much easier. In the previous centuries salt merchants used this route but robberies and a murder made it very precarious.

A pump, and later a tap, in Bow Lane provided the communal water supply and was surrounded by an interesting Victorian wooden fence, while an adjoining brick-walled enclosure, with a stone coping, was used for an official pound for impounding stray cattle, prior to its conversion to a highway materials store. Both the pound and the pump disappeared when Bow Lane was realigned in 1958. The cottages were constructed from bricks made from local clay, fired on site, and the wide ditch from which the clay was excavated still exists although it is now planted with trees.

Each tenant had a large garden in which to grow fruit, vegetables and flowers and to keep poultry and sometimes pigs to augment their wages. Hops were grown for use as vegetables but never used for brewing and large, purpose-made jars were used for forcing rhubarb.

The farmers regulated production to meet the requirements of their market which, to a large degree, consisted of serving the needs of the adjoining affluent residential area with milk, eggs, vegetables, fruit and fodder for the horses, and for a while strawberry growing was very lucrative until a virus infection, carried by wild strawberries in the woods, caused a crop failure.







The children attended the church school where the curriculum was based on preparing the boys for work on the land, either as farm hands or gardeners, most of the girls being expected to go into service.

A patch of land on The Firs was used as a school garden where the pupils were given a thorough training in practical husbandry, the produce being sold to passers by, and the children undertaking the book-keeping which was audited by the teachers. On leaving school the boys were apprenticed to farmers or head gardeners to complete their training and those in the care of local authorities were also "taken on" at farms.



The work was hard and arduous with long hours and the boys could not leave work in the evenings until they had witnessed the farmer making up the books with his wife sitting round the kitchen table. The youngest boys usually undertook the least pleasant tasks and in the spring many acres of vegetables would be planted, with a man forming holes with a dibbling iron, a boy bending to place seedlings in position and the oldest member of the team firming-in with his heels.

During the winter farmers relied on the sale of cereals, hay, straw and root crops for income and when a load of hay was required a man from Ashley would be summoned to the farm where he would survey the hay stack and assess how to go about his work. A boy would be sent for a supply of beer and the man would carefully cut the hay into neat bales all of absolute equal size although they had been measured by eye. The man would always leave work well before nightfall as he did not like passing The Priory or the woods after dark.

Harry Aspby, who was born in one of the cottages where he lived with his mother and uncle, and ended his days after seventy odd years, worked in the gardens of a large house in Charcoal Road when he left school, and during the First World War a housemaid told him that the mistress of the house wondered why he had not enlisted.

"Tell her" said Harry, "if she makes up my wages I will join up tomorrow". The housemaid returned later to say that her mistress would agree to this, and so the next day he left for the Recruiting Office, walking up Bow Green Road until he reached a field gate on Langham Road, from which he waved to his mother across the fields.

(to be continued)

(The information upon which this account is written is based on memories of people who lived in Bow Green. The Bowdon History Society is most interested in hearing memories concerning Bowdon, and those who have recollections about the place, people or events in times past are asked to ring Mrs. Gray, Secretary to the Bowdon History Society, 061-928 1812.)

BOWDON'S MUSICAL GIANTS: ADOLPH BRODSKY Part 1 **by Michael Kennedy**

Dr. Adolph Brodsky, the Russian-born violinist, lived for 25 years in Bowdon at No. 3 Laurel Mount, Richmond Road. Born at Taganrog in 1851, he entered the Vienna Conservatory of Music at the age of nine in 1860, staying until 1863.

In 1880 he became senior professor of the violin at Leipzig Conservatory. International fame came to him in November 1881 when he gave the first performance of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto. This had been written in 1878 for another great violinist, Leopold Auer, who declined the dedication, saying the concerto was too difficult and too long. Brodsky played a revised version successfully at a Vienna Philharmonic concert conducted by Hans Richter. Twenty years later both these great musicians were working in Manchester and living in Bowdon! (incidentally, to Auer's credit, he later took up the Tchaikovsky concerto.) Relations between Russia and Austria were hostile in the 1880s as Tchaikovsky recognised when, telling a friend that he had dedicated the concerto to Brodsky, he wrote: "I know only too well that for him, whose position is still not established in Vienna, it would not be easy to appear before a Viennese audience with a concerto by an unknown composer and, in addition, a Russian, so I doubly prize his service to me".



Tchaikovsky's was not the only celebrated violin concerto to be composed in 1878. Brahms's was also soon in Brodsky's repertory and he was much in demand in the 1880s for these two works. Yet, puzzlingly for so established a soloist, he accepted an invitation in 1890 to become leader of the New York Symphony Orchestra, then conducted by Walter Damrosch. He remained for four years, but it was not a happy time. America was the Mecca for any European musicians at this time - Dvorak, for example, and later both Mahler and Toscanini. Brodsky's return to Europe in 1895 coincided with the appointment of Willy Hess, leader of Halle's orchestra in Manchester, s leader of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Hess was also senior violin professor at the Royal Manchester College of Music which had been co-opted in 1893 with Halle as principal.

Halle offered both posts to Brodsky, who accepted. Brodsky was living in Berlin and Halle's letter recalled that Sir Charles had heard him play the Brahms in London in 1883. It is interesting to know the terms on which Brodsky was engaged - very generous when converted into the monetary values of the day. For the college professorship he received £500 a year for 36 weeks of 15 hours' teaching per week; £150 a year for 30 concerts as Halle leader with each additional concert at £5; and £95 a year for leading the 12 concerts that Halle conducted for the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. All this could be "topped up" with private tuition fees.

Brodsky accepted on a year's trial. He arrived for the 1895-6 season and led the orchestra at Liverpool on 22nd October. Two days later Halle rehearsed the orchestra for the start of the Manchester season but that evening he had a stroke and died a few hours later on the morning of 25th October 1895. It was Brodsky's sad task to conduct Mozart's Requiem at Halle's funeral. On 31st October, the day the Manchester Halle season started, Sullivan conducted and Brodsky was soloist in Mendelssohn's concerto and Bach's in A minor. Brodsky also conducted several of the Halle concerts that season including that on 20th February 1896 when Joachim was soloist in Beethoven's concerto, a remarkable example of co-operation between two great violinists.

But the art-loving businessmen and philanthropists who ran Manchester's music realised how Brodsky would be wasted as Halle leader. They offered him the post of Principal of the Royal Manchester College of Music in succession to Halle at £300 a year on top of his salary as violin professor. He was then 44 years old, full of energy and ideas. He played a major part in helping to entice Hans Richter to Manchester as Halle conductor - though it took four years - and was one of the original guarantors of the Halle Concerts Society. Like Halle, he was on friendly terms with most of the distinguished continental musicians and could attract eminent teachers to the college staff. His first major task was to replace Halle as piano professor and he brought W.H. Dayas, a Liszt pupil, from Cologne. When Dayas died in 1903, he found another Liszt pupil, Arthur Friedheim, to replace him. Later he engaged Wilhelm Backhaus and after Backhaus it was Egon Petri.

He established the college's tradition for excellent operatic performances in the early years of his principalship Brodsky conducted Nicolai's "Merry Wives of Windsor", Gluck's "Iphigenia in Aulis" and Verdi's "Un ballo in maschera", none of them very obvious or hackneyed choices. In 1904 he made a valiant effort to obtain Elgar as professor of composition - Brodsky, like so many other European musicians had been bowled over by The Dream of Gerontius - and failed only because Elgar had committed himself to the new chair of music at Birmingham University.

Brodsky set under way a revision and stiffening of the college Diploma and brought in external examiners. Besides himself, the violin teachers included Edith Robinson and Arthur Catterall. The latter was a former College student and later became leader of the Hallé and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. By 1913, the College's 20th anniversary, there were nearly 170 students.

When the First World War began in August 1914 Brodsky was in Vienna fulfilling solo engagements. He was interned and his return to Manchester seemed unlikely before hostilities ended. But thanks to the intervention of the American Ambassador in Vienna, he was released and allowed to return to England in 1915. Brodsky saw the college through the difficult war years and after 1918 began to build a new teaching staff, for there were many retirements of the "old brigade". He called on the Halle for some of his woodwind professors, for instance Harry Mortimer for clarinet and Archie Camden for bassoon, and, as in Richter's time, so now, he persuaded the great soloists who played at the Halle to visit the college. Although he retired from concerto performances in 1921, he paid a remarkable tribute to his friend Elgar in 1927, the year of the composer's 70th birthday, by playing the Violin Concerto at a Halle concert with Elgar conducting. He was then himself 75. Exactly two years later he died from cancer and was buried in Southern Cemetery. The college's annual report for 1929 commemorated him as "a professor of such eminence, a teacher of such enthusiasm and an artist of such lofty and noble ideals".

(to be continued).

CLAY PIPES FOUND IN BOWDON

by M. J. King

Since the sixteenth century the craft of making clay smoking pipes in England has produced a wide variety of shapes and designs. Often the gentry had pipes especially manufactured for them, some incorporating their coat of arms or the sign of a society, for instance the Masonic mark 'V' and callipers. The pipes I have illustrated are some of the more interesting and mystifying in my collection. If you recognise any of these marks or you know where they originated I should be very interested to hear from you.

The last three pipes have been water damaged and thus the detail is hard to make out, but again if anyone recognises them or has any ideas I would be most grateful.

