The Bowdon Sheaf

A BOWDON HISTORY SOCIETY PUBLICATION

No. 11 March, 1988 40p

Contents

Richard Wroe

This year marks the Tercentenary of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 at which time Richard Wroe was Vicar of Bowdon.

RICHARD WROE, VICAR OF BOWDON 1681 – 1690

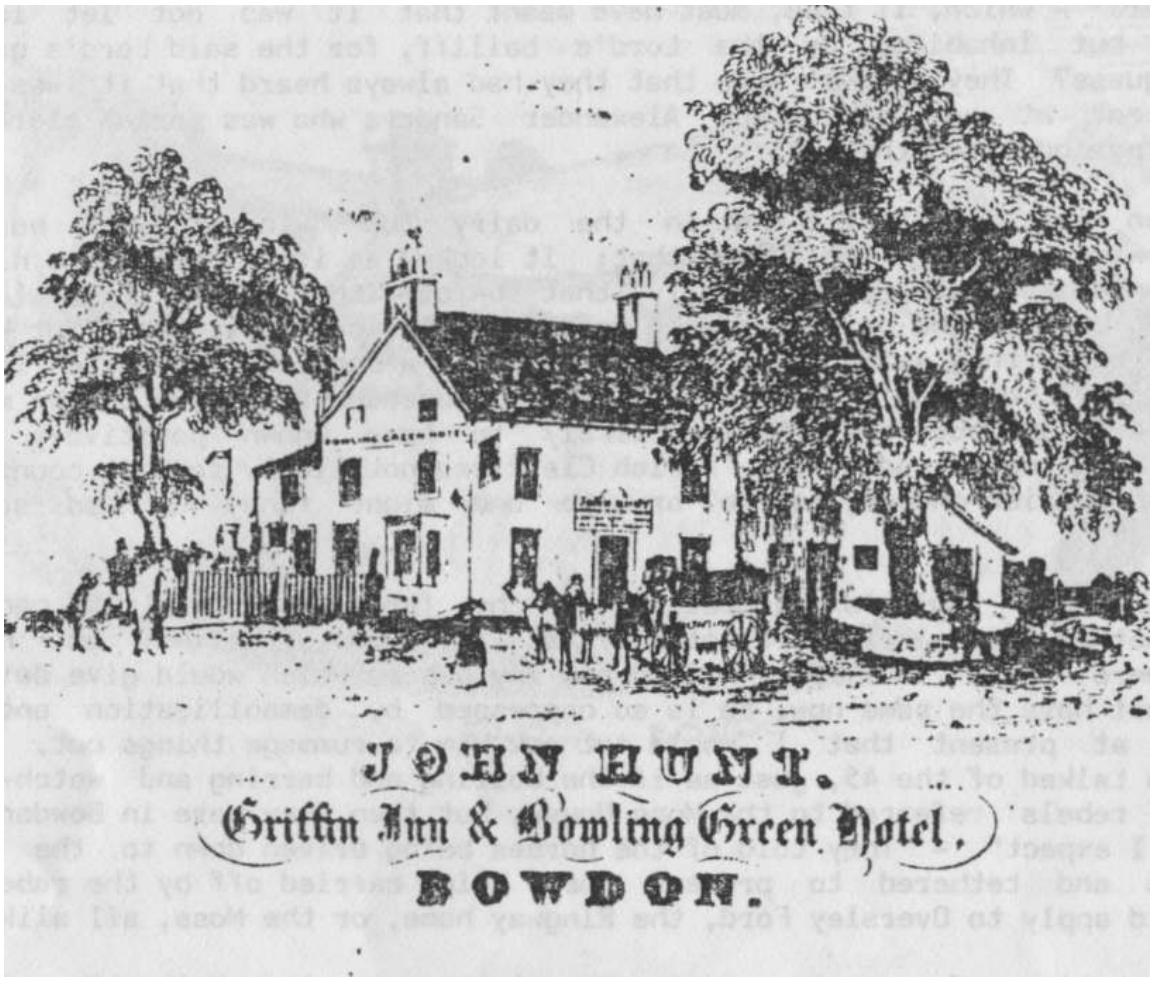
The list of the Vicars of Bowdon, found in two places in the parish church, contains the name of Richard Wroe, and we have been fortunate in recent months in obtaining a copy of a portrait of this most distinguished gentleman. A few notes upon him may help to bring to life what at present must be a mere name upon a wooden board.

Richard Wroe was born at Radcliffe in 1641 and went to Bury Grammar School, going on to Jesus College, Cambridge in 1658, during the Commonwealth, though he himself was a loyal member of the then banned Church of England, he emerged with a BA becoming a Fellow of Jesus in the same year of the Book of Common Prayer, 1662. Dr. Pearson, who was later to become Bishop of Chester, was then Master of Jesus College and the two became great friends. Wroe also met at this time Lord Delamere and partly because (to quote) ... "he was possessed of a commanding presence and a melodious voice" and had become a preacher of some merit, a Royal Mandate was obtained from Charles II and he was presented to the vacant fellowship in the College at Manchester (much later to become the Cathedral Church of Manchester). During the Commonwealth it had become very much what one would call today an "ecumenical centre for non-conformists," to the exclusion of course of the C of E, and although some claimed at the time that his appointment and the action of the King was an interference with the rights of the College, the Visitor of the day (none other than Dr. Pearson, who had now become Bishop of Chester), was able to settle the difficulties and Wroe was installed in March 1674-5. Wroe had become Chaplain to Bishop Pearson and he was collated to a stall in Chester Cathedral in March 1677-8. On April 24, 1681 on the resignation of Francis Mosley, the Bishop made him Vicar of Bowdon, where he remained for about 9 years. At Manchester and Bowdon, by his great zeal and influence, backed by his Bishop who had written the famous standard work on the Christian Creeds ... (the author has a First Edition) he upheld the Church of England at a time when it was holy assailed by Presbyterians who attacked the creed and discipline of the Church, and by the Roman Catholics who we are told attacked her orders and authority.

(To be continued)

James II 1685-88. whose despotism precipitated the "Glorious Revolution." 1638.

JOHN HUNT of THE GRIFFIN



The bill-head reproduced above shows the Griffin Inn as it would have appeared circa 1850. It is interesting to note that the main part of the building has changed very little in the intervening years and that the small bay window on the gable-end still exists.

The tree with the stone seat round its base, similar to the one in Dunham Town today, was the venue for bull-baiting until it was stopped by the Vicar of the time, the Reverend J Law, about 1820.

In the 1861 Census John Hunt, the landlord, was recorded as being 46 years of age, born in Birmingham and married to Eliza and having one son. They employed a housekeeper, barmaid and waitress which would make it a smaller establishment than the Stamford Arms, next door, where the landlady, Mary Howard, aged 34, from Stockport, employed a barmaid, waitress, cook, kitchen maid, gardener, "hostler", and a boots.

EARLY DAYS AT MOSS FARM (continued)
by Alice Walker

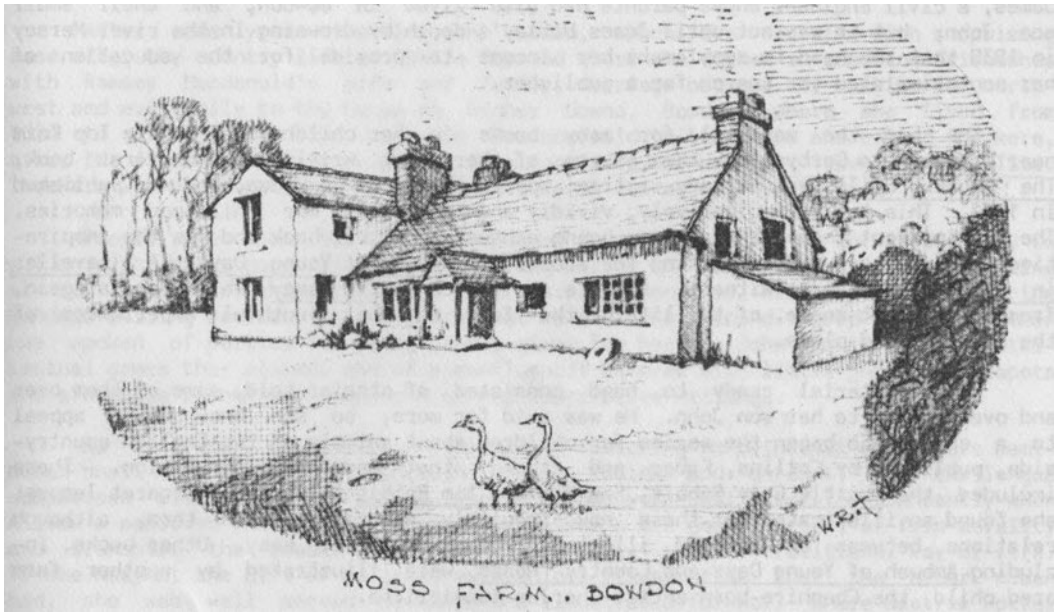
In her letter to Josephine Greenwood in 1944 Alice Walker described events which had occurred earlier in the history of Moss Farm as follows:- "Somebody once told of one of our folks "that long ago it was known as the "Manor Farm" - which, if true, must have meant that it was not let in lease to tenants, but inhabited by the Lord's bailiff, for the said Lord's gain - or so I should guess? They said at home that they had always heard that it was called "Sanders Green" at one time, and Alexander Sanders who was parish clerk in "16 something period lived there."

She then went on to record that in the dairy the "windows were built up, because of window tax I do know that; it looked as if it had been a nice room to live in, once. We know, traditionally, that before the Walker time (I can't say how long before) the dairy had been used for religious services. "Not Wesley's time - before then" they said. I surmise that it was a conventicle, maybe Independent or Baptist, but don't think Quaker meeting, because there was Quaker meeting-places elsewhere, and our forefathers so likely to have known positively enough, if Quakers were concerned. The Parish Clerk was not likely to have countenanced meetings out of parish church, was he? or else one might fancy he had something to do with it!"

Regarding her family's occupation of the farm Alice wrote "I cannot say definitely whether the Walkers were actually at the Moss in 1745, but have an idea they were there in 1750. Alfred had any papers which would give dates, and though Wyn must have the same now, he is so oppressed by demobilisation and other difficulties at present that I would not ask him to rummage things out. The old people always talked of the 45, just as if the bolting and barring and watch-keeping against the rebels referred to the Moss House, but then they were in Bowdon parish in any case, I expect". - "They told of the horses being driven down to the Bollin-side dingles and tethered to prevent them being carried off by the rebel army; and this would apply to Oversley Ford, the Ringway home, or the Moss, all alike."

An interesting reference is made in the letter to the Walkers' neighbours at Moss Cottages when Alice recounts that "There was a good patch of green stretching in front of it, and in my childhood there was still a good wedge bordering the lane up to the cottage hedge, and our "Devisacre" footpath gate. "Deborah's Acre" is the real name of those fields or one of them I believe - but don't know who "Deborah" was. The old wheelwright at the first cottage annexed the green corner for his wood-pile and saw-pit. I could tell you how by cunning removal of his "neighbour's landmark" in defiance of Ash Wednesday curse, he also lengthened his garden considerably, but his descendants might not want his moral weakness to be talked of!"

A charming reference was made to the Gaskells when she stated that - "I think it was after Grandmother Walker's death, when my father and aunts were carrying on, feeling themselves orphans though grown-up, because she was so beloved, that Mrs Gaskell came to lodge at the Moss, with her girls Florence and Julia, and their nurse. It was a happy time. When I asked Aunt W. what Mrs Gaskell was like, she said enthusiastically, "More like an angel than anything else - an angel in the house".She must have been as beautiful in disposition as looks; and she must have loved the quaint house-place, for she came again after they had "walled in" the sitting room and made the lobbies, and she cried in distress - "Oh, you've spoiled it - you've spoiled it completely." They were sorry for her disappointment, but I think they went on being glad of the warmer room. Mrs Gaskell was very happy and busy in the old parlour where the roses were tapping on the window,



and the wood fire which she loved crackling in the high grate' under the 18th century high narrow mantlepiece (which I remember myself with regret). Sherestedon the sofa as she wrote, and they were convinced that it was "Ruth" which she wrote, as it came out after that and they fancied that something of the Moss showed on it, but I never read the sad story carefully and don't know to what they referred. I do know that Mrs Gaskell talked with Aunt B. about Charlotte Bronte and "Jane Eyre",which was exciting everybody then,and she told of her visit to Haworth and exclaimed with deep feeling: "Oh, Miss Betsey, if you could see that dreadful place and know the life there, you would be so sorry for poor, poor Charlotte!" My aunts liked Mr Gaskell very much, and Aunt Betsey, who went to see them at their Manchester house, enjoyed herself greatly and said he was the most kindly and courteous host imaginable. I heard so much about them and always associated the bedroom with the window looking towards the wood and hill road with Mrs Gaskell, as if she had left some of her thoughts behind in it."

Further extracts from this letter will be published in the next issue of the Bowdon Sheaf.

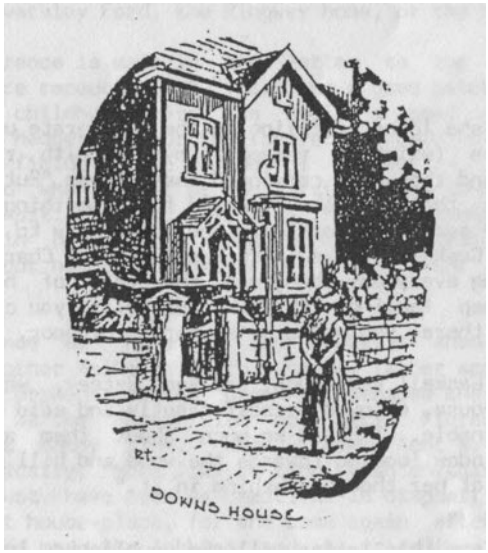
ALISON UTTLEY, A DOWNS RESIDENT
by Myra Kendrick

Alison Uttley's career as a professional writer began in Bowdon. Downs House, number 13 Higher Downs, still in Bowdon parish though postally once Dunham and now Altrincham, was where it started. She had moved there in 1924 with her husband James, a civil engineer whose parents had also lived in Bowdon, and their small son John; but it was not until James Uttley's death by drowning in the river Mersey in 1930 that the need to supplement her income to provide for the education of her son stimulated the search for a publisher.

She had the material for many books in her childhood at Castle Top Farm near Cromford in Derbyshire, the source of her best writing. Her first book, The Country Child, was already written, apparently at Downs House, and was published in 1931. This tells imaginatively, vividly and poetically her childhood memories. The reminiscent theme was far from being exhausted by this book and was the inspiration for much more of her writing for adults, as Ambush of Young Days, A Traveller in Time and others witness. As late as 1962 came Wild Honey, which speaks again, from a different angle, of the life of the farm and her youthful experiences of the deeply loved place.

Other material ready to hand consisted of stories told, some of them over and over again, to her son John. He was avid for more, so she knew their appeal to a child. So began the series for children about animals of the English country- side, published by Collins, Faber and others, that made her reputation. These included the Little Grey Rabbit, Sam Pig and Tim Rabbit tales. In Margaret Tempest she found an illustrator for these now indelibly associated with them, although relations between author and illustrator were not always easy. Other books, including Ambush of Young Days and Country Hoard, were illustrated by another farm bred child, the Cheshire-born artist Charles Tunnicliffe.

These books sold quickly and continued to sell extensively, becoming an important part of mid-century children's literary heritage.



Castle Top farm, the inspiration of so much of her writing, was Alice Taylor's (her maiden name) birthplace in 1884 and her home until adult life. "The home of my childhood," she wrote in Ambush of Young Days, "eternal, green, appears before my inward eyes." The move away from it began her secondary schooling at Lady Manners School, Bakewell, where she showed a surprisingly strong aptitude for the sciences. Then followed the move to Manchester University where she read for a Physics degree under Rutherford and became one of the university's first women physics graduates.

After some years teaching in London, which she accepted with surprising ease after the country life of Castle Top and where she formed an admiring friendship with Ramsey Macdonald's wife and family, marriage brought her back to the north- west and eventually to the house on Higher Downs, Bowdon, where she lived from 1924 to 1938, until the move to Beaconsfield to the house she called Thackers, after the stone-built farm featuring so strongly in her novel A Traveller in Time. Thackers was her home until her death in 1976 at the age of ninety-two.

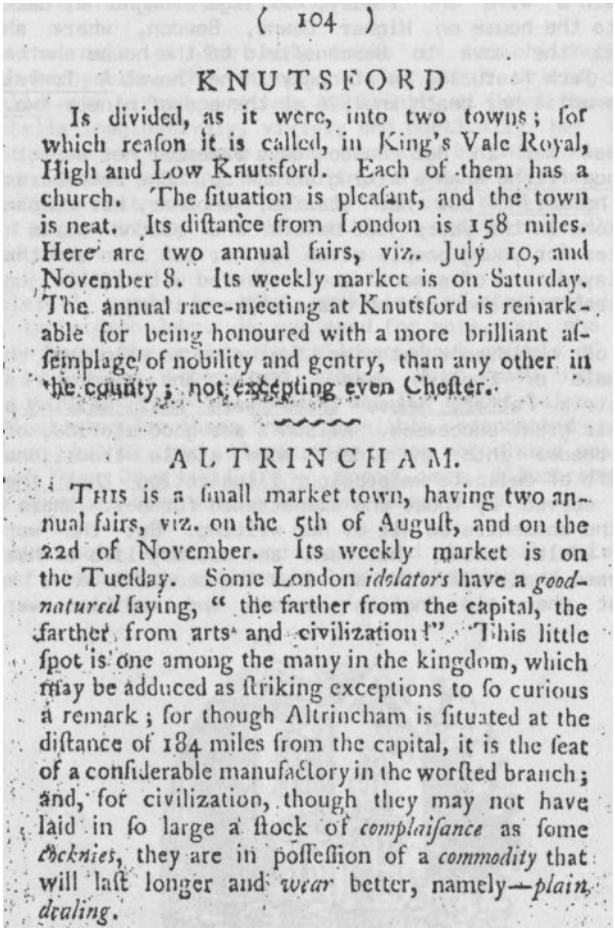
People who knew her in her Bowdon days remember her as not always easy to get on with, but a good friend when a liking struck up. One remembers her kneeling at her typewriter hammering out her stories; another, her companionship during bandage-rolling sessions in the years just before the second world war. Another has spoken of parties for young people given for her son John and the highly intellectual games they played, and of a mantle shelf covered with little jugs and teapots and ornaments recognisable in some of her descriptive writings.

As a writer of children's stories featuring as principal characters semi- human small wild animals of English woods, fields and gardens, she challenges comparison with Beatrix Potter, whose tales were still selling abundantly when Alison's achieved their great successes. Alison's are good stories, of firm morality and transport the reader into an older, more stable traditional way of life.

If she had not the gift of delicate watercolour illustration that the older woman had, she was well served by those who illustrated for her. Where Beatrix Potter is inimitable is in the concentrated wit of her writing. But the world of Alison Uttley's books for adults about the farm and country life of her childhood has magical power to release the imagination and draw the reader into a more peaceful, less mechanical past when old English customs and traditions were still living things.

NEIGHBOURING TOWNS 1791

The following extract from the History of the City and County of Chester 1791 provides impressions of Bowdon's neighbours, Altrincham and Knutsford, at that time. It is interesting to note that, by calculation, the two towns were considered to be 26 miles apart.



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KNUTSFORD

Is divided, as it were, into two towns; for which reaſon it is called, in King's Vale Royal, High and Low Knutsford. Each of them has a church. The ſituation is pleaſant, and the town is neat. Its diſtance from London is 158 miles. Here are two annual fairs, viz. July 10, and November 8. Its weekly market is on Saturday. The annual race-meeting at Knutsford is remarkable for being honoured with a more brilliant aſſemblage of nobility and gentry, than any other in the county; not excepting even Cheſter.

ALTRINCHAM.

THIS is a ſmall market town, having two annual fairs, viz. on the 5th of Auguſt, and on the 22d of November. Its weekly market is on the Tueſday. Some London *idolators* have a *good-natured* ſaying, "the farther from the capital, the farther from arts and civilization!" This little ſpot is one among the many in the kingdom, which may be adduced as ſtriking exceptions to ſo curious a remark; for though Altrincham is ſituated at the diſtance of 184 miles from the capital, it is the ſeat of a conſiderable manufactory in the worſted branch; and, for civilization, though they may not have laid in ſo large a ſtock of *complaiſance* as ſome *Cockneys*, they are in poſſeſſion of a *commodity* that will laſt longer and *wear* better, namely—*plain dealing*.