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Contents:

Fair in Bowdon, 1863, by an unknown Artist, recently discovered by Douglas Rendell. The Bowdon History Society would be pleased to receive any information from readers concerning this picture.

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FIELDS, TENANTS & ROADS
by Peter Kemp

The names and locations of Castle Hill and Watch Hill are recognised today, but in the 17th century there was , besides Hall Hill 'on the Downs', a Mill Hill. The names Millfield and Mill Hill seem according to the 1651 document's description, to have abutted upon Castle Hill, and Hill Field survived by name and location north of Castle Hill in 1838, so it is likely that Bowdon's mill was situated the re. A mill at Bowdon is mentioned in Domesday Book 1086, existing until at least the thirteenth century (Dore, 'History of Hale, Cheshire') and it is possible that it was situated as a wooden structure on an earth dam on the little stream in the present woods above Castle Hill which must have had a much greater flow of water when it drained the White Leaches (leach = wet and marshy land) and Bowdon Moss before they were taken into farming by proper land drainage and improvement. It seems reasonable that a mill of that time would be there, sufficiently near the castle and any settlement, rather than on the Bollin, a defensive feature and liable to flood in winter. Clearly the mill itself had disappeared long before the 17th century when it is possible that Bowdon farmers used the new water-mill at Dunham Hall built in 1616 by Sir George Booth, but not so long before since the names Mill Hill and Millfield were still in common usage.

The document confirms that, although there were some enclosed fields up on the Downs, it was there that the Common land shared between Bowdon, Altrincham and Dunham Massey townships along their common boundary was situated, and Bowdon Common, with perhaps the inclusion of Yeald (Heald) Common, was the major part of that area. The Common must have been very extensive since, some ten years earlier, Prince Rupert encamped there with his army in May 1641 on his way to Chester, and, on 20 March 1641/5 Colonel Brereton made a rendezvous "on Knottesford Heath & Bowdon Downes: And thether the Scotts havlnge marched, Joyned wth them beinge in number fyve thousand or thereabouts." Up on the Downs also was some common meadowland allotted as 'doles', hence Davles Dole now Devisdale. That surname, variously spelt Devis, Devies , Davis, Davles and Devias, belongs to a 17th century Bowdon family farming as husbandmen in a small way. Bowdon Common was, along with Bowdon Moss, the source of fuel for everyone, rich and poor, including the vicar, and the document sets out rights of Turbary, that is the right to cut peat and turves either on the common land there or on Bowdon Moss. No doubt Turf Lane, now S t . Margaret's Road, owed its name to the turf -cutting there on Bowdon Common. Several field names seem to stem from tenants' or owners' names for example, Ashleyes, Sanders Bank (the Sanders family were 17c yeoman farmers at Moss Farm), Turbett's Eye, Hardye Field (Two Hardys were early 17c chartered landholders , a later Hardy was a Bowdon butcher) and Toppinges.

The field called Sir Ralphes Croft retains a name which must have been conferred upon it when (Sir) Ralph Houghe was vicar in 1583. The field called New Bridge Meadow suggests that a bridge over the Bollin was in existence from before 1654, possibly a new bridge in place of the ford rather than a replacement bridge. Field names like Hemp Croft, Ryecroft and Peasecroft give an indication of their crops, and the types of field together with the use of common land suggest a mixed farming economy contemporary Inventories, such as that of Edmond Sympson of May 1640, list wheat, barley, oats, rye and French wheat as well as cattle, both for dairy and rearing purposes. The wetlands were considerable, not only from the names of the Moss and the White Leaches , but also from names like Russy Croft (where rushes grew) , the Eye lands along the Bollin, and the Marsh, part of Heald Moss, (where Altrincham Boys Grammar School is). The will of Robert Tipping (who was Steward to Lord Delamer and apparently lived at Bowdon Hall) of 1662 lists in its Inventory 'a fouleing peece' and 'a Birdlng peece which possibly were used for shooting wildfowl in those wetlands.

There is evidence also that Bowdon produce of those days not only found its way to Altrincham Market but also as far away as Manchester the Manchester Court Leet records note that on "26 Apri l 1682, Humphrey Burges, a butcher of Bodon was fined 5/- for selling 'severall peices of Beefe unwholsome' ". Inventories of the period often mention spinning wheels together with linen yarn and hemp tow , and all of which may have been employed for home consumption only. Ingham in his "History of Altrincham and Bowdon" notes from parish records" 1617, Several websters or weavers in Bowdon". So it is possible that agricultural activity in Bowdon at that time was augmented by home spinning and weaving, not only of locally-produced wool, but also in the production of worsted on an out-work basis or traders who supplied the wool or materials to the Bowdon people at Altrincham and Manchester markets.

The 1651 document mentions eight under-tenants of glebelands and property Brereton (this is John possibly, who signed the Protestation Roll 1612, made contribution to the Free and Voluntary Gift 1661, paid Hearth Tax 1661 and 1671, died 1683; may have been George died 1632), Drinckwater (this is John possibly, who marked the Protestation Roll 1612, paid Hearth Tax 1661 and 1671, died 1685; a Peter was Commonwealth clerk around 1659; and there was also a Robert), Eaton (this was John yeoman who figures in many wills from 1637 to 1650, and possibly had a wife Sibill and a family who figure until at least 1696), Goulding (or Goulden) (of Bow green yeoman had a son John who paid Hearth Tax 1661 and 1671, but Richard yeoman is more likely, who appeared in a 1631 will, made contribution to the Free and Voluntary Gift 1661, paid Hearth Tax 1661, died 1668, leaving wife Jane and family), Widow Peirson (several Peirsons, this could be Elizabeth who contributed to the Free and Voluntary Gift 1661, and paid Hearth Tax 1661 and 1671), Widow Rowlands, Widow Sanders (possibly Dorothy and one of the Sanders of Moss Farm , yeomen), and Wirrall (or Worrall) (William signed the Protestation Roll 1612 and paid Hearth Tax 1661). Other names mentioned are Hardie (Hardys mentioned before), Hollinworth, Leather (this is John yeoman and butcher, in 1637 and 1618 wills, who signed the Protestation Roll 1612, contributed to the Free and Voluntary Gift 1661, paid Hearth Tax 1661 died 1668), Widow Rowlyson (possibly Ellen who paid Hearth Tax 1661), Sympson (not Edmond yeoman died 1611, could be Richard, who marked the Protestation Roll 1642), and a Mr Tipping (this is Robert, gentleman, Steward to Lord Delamer, of Bowdon Hall, died 1662). Only three thoroughfares are mentioned in the document Bow(e) Lane,Vicars Lane (modern Vicarage Lane) and Streete Lane (the Street was Watling Street now the A56 trunk road).

The houses and cottages mentioned all seem to have been of timber frame construction. The Vicar of Bowdon lived in a thatched house of three bays (that is, three timber framed sections), possibly situated on the Vicars Lane mentioned (where the present-day house called The Priory stands) , with a garden, barn and yard, and a stable. Widow Sanders had a messuage or tenement (Moss Farm) of three bays (to be seen today much altered in the lower part of the building), with a barn, stable, orchard, garden and yard, and farmland totalling some 75 acres, (if the document can be read to include all the entries following that for the house down to the concluding statement of the right to turbary in Bowdon Moss). William Wirrall's house had two bays, and he also had a barn and stable, a garden and a barn yard.

The two yeomen Eaton and Leather had houses with kitchens (a new refinement in 17th century houses of this size) , and all the of these people mentioned had cottages of two bays, or , exceptionally three bays. The other yeoman , Richard Goulding , had an oven house attached to his cottage, so he may have been a baker as well. Finally, there are two further field names on which the 1654 document throws no light. The one is Muncks acre or Mounckes Acre which corresponds with Monksacre (No . 287 1838) 2 acres in extent, situated south Bow Lane, east of Bowgreen Farm and west of The Priory, whose name must hark back to the days when the church lands belonged to Birkenhead Priory before being taken over by the Bishop of Chester at the Reformation. The other, which is not included in the 1654 document, the 1838 Tithe Award or Dodgson, is the field at Newbridge Hollow by the Bollin called John O'Jerusalem's Patch, which seems to have its name derived from the Knights of St . John of Jerusalem who did have one or two fields in Bowdon in mediaeval times. (to be continued)

THE WARTIME HISTORY OF DUNHAM HOUSE
by John Chartres

Our Society has of course always taken an interest in the houses within 'Our Manor' in which famous people have dwelt. So far most of the houses in which the Society has taken an interest have been those in which very worthy people such as authors, composers of music, conductors of music, eminent doctors and Indeed some politicians, have dwelt. Some such houses have Indeed had plaques placed upon them. All of them one feels, have had one thing in common. The dwellers in these houses have contributed to the joy and the well-being of those who still live in Bowdon.

At the turn of this year some members of the Society, especially Peter Kemp and Ronald Trenbath took note that there was a house within our 'Manor' in which some very famous people had dwelt, such as Odette Churchill, George Cross; Violette Szabo, George Cross; to mention but two SOE (Special Operations Executive) agents who lived in Dunham House, Charcoal Road, while doing there parachute training Just down the road at Ringway and Tatton Park. Altogether nearly 5,000 ‘special agents' dwelt, at least for a few nights, in Dunham House before the war was finally won.

Being known within the Society as having a special interest in the armed Forces of this nation I was given the Job of investigating the history of Dunham House during World War Two. What an enjoyable and fascinating Job it has been! I had two immediate bonus points. The first was that Colonel Maurice Buckmaster OBE, Legion d ' Honneur, Head of ‘ F' (French) Section of SOE , was someone to whom I could write personally. Another old friend was the Deputy Colonel Commandant of the Parachute Regiment, Lieutenant General Sir Michael Gray, with whom I had ‘ soldiered' in a sort of way in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s when British soldiers and British newspaper reporters were still persona grata in those parts.

In fact Maurice Buckmaster couldn't tell me all that much because his job had kept him in London (or other less hospitable places) throughout most of the war. Nevertheless he gave me the home address of Odette, now of course Mrs Odette Hallowes. Odette wrote back saying that her memories of her billet in Cheshire were rather vague but that she did remember breaking her nose and spraining her ankle dropping through the mock-up training fuselage of a Whitley bomber, probably at Dunham House. Like many other SOE agents Odette was taken into enemy territory by alternative means to parachuting, the best of these being 'delivery' in short-landing and take-off Lysander aeroplanes. Fortuitously 1990 has been the 50th anniversary year of the formation of the Parachute Regiment and also of the forming of No. 1 Parachute Training School at Ringway - originally code-named 'The Central Landing School' in order at least to retard information reaching the enemy that we were training parachute troops at that stage of history.

At a splendid and enormous party held In one of the ‘ South Sid e' hangars at Ringway on 17 March actually marking ‘the 49th' of the first ever British parachute operation which severed the Tragino aqueduct in Southern Italy the first clues emerged, pointing me towards people who could tell me more about what happened in Dunham House, Charcoal Road Bowdon between late 1940 and late 1945.

These clues first put me in contact with Mr Peter Lee, Historian to the not- widely-advertised Special Forces Club in London, thence to Mr Ray Wooler of Annapolis County, Nova Scotia, the former Chief Instructor in parachuting of SOE agents at Dunham House. They went on via Colonel David Mallam O B E , Secretary of the Parachute Regimental Association to Mr Royston Rudd of Hull , another Instructor, and eventually to Mr John Battersby of Knutsford who is working on somewhat parallel lines with the objective of a full history of all the 'safe houses' used by ‘unconventional forces' in Cheshire during World War Two . John Battersby recently generously supplied me with a copy of an official history of the role played by those who dwelt in Dunham House between 1941 and 1945.

So far as the early history of the house itself is concerned the information was available 'within the family' as it were, from Miss Joan Gaddum, whose step-grandfather, Mr Walter Joynson, built it in 1899. He did not live long to enjoy the really lovely house he created for himself and for his wife, Dorothy.

Walter Joynson, a Justice of the Peace and a much respected member of the community of Bowdon, died suddenly while on holiday in Corfu on 19 November 1904. His widow, Dorothy, died only ten months later.

In telling the whole story of Dunham House one is left with a 35-year gap between the death of Dorothy Joynson and the probable requisitioning of the house for war purposes circa 1940. One hopes that the publication of this article in The Bowdon Sheaf may bring forth some further information about who lived in it, and one hopes, enjoyed it, during this period.

What is now fairly clear is that Dunham House, along with many other substantial dwellings in Cheshire, was selected by one of those mysterious but quite omnipotent gentlemen empowered to ' requisition' or 'commandeer' property for the ‘War Effort' circa 1940. According to Professor M R D Foot, formerly of Manchester University, the house was designated as 'No. 33 Special Training School' . In his widely respected book on the history of the SOE he refers to it as 'an Altrincham merchant's house' . An official record of the SOE designates it as ‘ No. 51 Special Training School' but this small deviation could have come about at a time when many changes of nomenclature were being made in a hurry.

There is evidence that at least one other house in the Knutsford/Wilmslow area was also requisitioned for a similar purpose. During the course of the war, segregation, by nationality, sometimes by sex, of secret agents undergoing their parachute training became desirable, sometimes perhaps, essential.

The establishment of Dunham House as a Special Training School dated from February 1941 by which time the parachute training system at Ringway had been well established. The first, and indeed ONLY Commandant of the STS at Dunham House, was Major C J Edwards of the Northumberland Fusiliers , who had achieved earlier fame in the 1920s as the composer of the song 'All By Yourself In The Moonlight'. Major Edwards remained the Commandant until the final disbandment of the School in August 1945.

At this stage the only aircraft available for the training of parachutists of any sort was the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley , one of the first monoplane bombers to go into RAF service in the 1930s rapid expansion period and an aeroplane which was not really up to front-line operational standards even by 1940-41. The Air Ministry at this time, and in particular Bomber Command , was reluctant to release any aircraft for what it saw as a secondary role' . At this time ‘ parachuting ' seemed something of a Joke to certain senior officers of the Royal Air Force , never mind what the Germans were doing.

So , the embryo Parachute Regiment and Special Operations Executive had to do their best with the Whitleys. One of the snags with the Whitley as a parachute-training aeroplane was that its back door was too small for a parachutist to step out from. A modification was therefore made at Ringway providing an 'exit hole' towards the end of the fuselage. This hole, through which trainee parachutists would drop, was surrounded by a sort of rim, making the whole arrangement look like a coal-miner's bath without a bottom to it.

The Whitley, although only capable of about 190 mph maximum speed, also had a rather high stalling speed, which meant that it would not really slow down enough to enable parachutists to depart from it in comfort. It was also, according to a recent publication by the Parachute Regiment during its 50th anniversary, ‘cold, cramped and badly ventilated'.

One of the features of Dunham House and of the satellite ‘ STS's' was a carved-up Whitley Fuselage including 'The Hole' . A number of agents got this form of dropping sequence wrong, thereby, like Odette , damaging their frontal features and other parts of their bodies. The Instructors called it 'Ringing the Bell' .

Happily the aircraft used for most operational drops by SOE agents into Europe and other parts of the world were of more modern design, from which the parachutist, be he a secret agent, or a fighting soldier could Just step out of a door, with static line attached.

An official history of SOE activities at Ringway produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and shown me by John Battersby makes the point that rather special living conditions were required for SOE agents during their parachute training, in that the work they were destined to do ‘Had a natural tendency to induce a high state of nervous tension'. Those special living conditions, it seems, were provided at Dunham House.

Another special aspect was that the SOE ‘parachute students' were of many nationalities. This official report goes on to say: ‘ The Only solution to these problems was to have a ground training establishment where special care could be given to the preparatory training of men and women who in many cases had come straight from a sedentary life before joining the organisation, and where individual attention could be given in order to deal with the differing temperaments and languages of the students. It appeared that only in this way could the necessary high confidence and morale be obtained.

A fairly standard course of training for secret agents needing to learn the art of parachuting was followed throughout the war. After about a week's ground training at ‘STS's' like Dunham House students would probably carry out five actual 'descents' from Whitleys. This requirement was reduced to four at a later stage of the war. These training ‘descents' would involve a take-off from Ringway Huddled in the back of a Whitley and an arrival at Tatton Park on the dropping zone area which lay to the left of the road which the present-day visitor takes while driving through the Park from the Rostherne Entrance Southwards towards Knutsford.

From October 1942 onwards special training was introduced into the technique of parachuting into water, both for paratroops and for ‘secret Agents. It was important for all to understand the technique even though, as every parachutist now knows, dropping into water is in some ways the easiest and most comfortable option of all, providing someone is around to pick you up. Rostherne Mere was used for the first formal training of parachuting into water. Undoubtedly, however, a great many trainee parachute soldiers and probably some secret agents from Dunham House inadvertently descended into Tatton and Melchett Meres if the wind was gusting a bit and the 'drivers' at the front end of an elderly Whitley hadn’t got everything right.

Ray Wooler records that Rostherne was an ideal lake for these early experiments because it was reasonably well hidden from 'the public gaze' and security was all-important at this time. One of the reasons for training agents to parachute drop into lakes was that it was thought that some important targets in Germany and other parts of Occupied Europe could be reached via lakes which might not have been too closely guarded.

Ray in fact, nearly got into serious trouble when the experimental ‘water-dropping’ harness which he was testing came unwrapped from his body about 150 feet up. He recalls that the surface of Rostherne Mere felt VERY hard on that occasion .

An officer in the Canadian Army at the outbreak of World War Two Ray Wooler came to Dunham House via a rather circuitous route, being at one stage a volunteer ski-trooper attached to the Finnish Army during their disastrous ‘little war’ against the Soviets in 1910. He remembers that at the time that Dunham House was established, SOE billets tended to be nicknamed ‘Stately 'Omes of England’ . Ray has said in letters to me that Dunham House was 'a perfect building' for its very special purpose. Apart from anything else the Whitley aircraft fuselages with their dropping holes and sand-pits underneath, could be concealed behind high walls again ‘ away from the public gaze'.

When ready for their ‘live' drops the trainee agents were driven to Ringway dressed as far as possible to look like regular paratroops. Ray Wooler commented in a letter: ‘ This worked well if we could persuade the female agents not to run around too much after they had descend ed at Tatton Park .' Other famous names at Dunham House recalled by Ray Wooler include Wing Commander Yeo Thomas, (The White Rabbit') , Peter Churchill, and General Slkorski. Although life at Dunham House was of course essentially very serious for all concerned, there were moments of light relief , some of them perhaps deliberately contrived to reduce tension.