

The Bowdon Sheaf

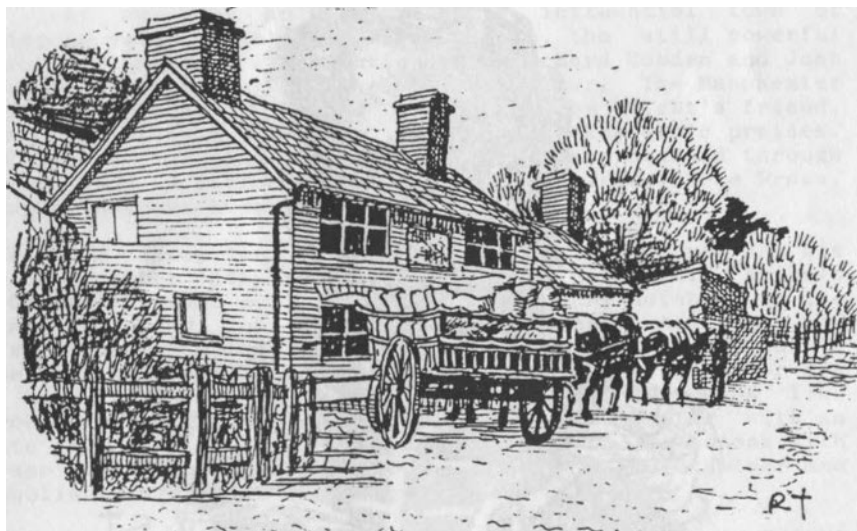
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The Greyhound, Ashley

A popular meeting place for farmers and dealers at the turn of this century.

A Hungarian Refugee
Louis Kossuth in Manchester and Bowdon
by Marjorie Cox

In his autobiography, *Closed Chapters*, Judge Sir Gerald Hurst, whose family lived at Brookleigh (Booth Road) Bowdon just before the First War, mentioned a letter from Richard Cobden thanking his grandfather for a subscription to relief funds for the victims of Austrian despotism. He comments "The north of England was then deeply interested in foreign politics and in continental champions of the principle of nationality". It was the time of the revolutions of 1848 in Europe. One such champion was Louis Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian revolution against Habsburg rule. This article sketches Kossuth's connection with Manchester - even with Bowdon - when he was a political refugee. The original Hungarian revolution of spring, 1848, was fairly described as 'the lawful revolution': its achievement was to secure for Hungary parliamentary government, civil rights and the abolition of serfdom. However, its leaders, Kossuth and the proud, historically dominant Magyars, antagonised the numerous other nationalities of Hungary - Croats, Serbs, Romanians, Slovaks - who had their own aspirations. The Habsburgs were able to exploit these divisions in order to re-impose their rule from Vienna. A fierce war, an ethnic conflict, went on for over a year, costing 50,000 lives on each side. Kossuth and his supporters fought heroically and desperately, though becoming increasingly extremist.



*A Hungarian refugee who visited Bowdon
during his period of exile in this country.*

Finally, military intervention by the autocratic Tsar of Russia ensured a Habsburg victory, which was followed by savage reprisals. Kossuth himself fled in August 1849, into what is now Bulgaria but was then part of the Ottoman Empire; though saved from extradition, he was interned for two years, half the time in Anatolia.

Meanwhile he and his cause had won the sympathy and admiration of the liberal-minded in Britain and the USA. A leader in the Manchester Examiner and Times in 1856 recalled the feelings of 1849, 'Every mind was preoccupied with it. Every despatch was awaited with intense emotion. Every Austrian defeat was welcomed with universal joy'. When, released at last from internment, Kossuth landed in England late in October, 1851, these feelings reached a climax. Over a hundred books and several thousand articles were published, mostly in the early 1850s. All over Britain towns begged for visits from him, and in the next two months he made innumerable speeches pleading Hungary's cause and denouncing Austria and Russia. In December he left for the USA, but in July, 1852, returned to England, where he lived until 1860.

Kossuth had a charismatic personality; he was handsome and idealistic and had great powers of oratory. Furthermore, when imprisoned in Budapest in the late 1830s, he had taught himself English from the Bible and Shakespeare. He was thus able, despite his foreign accent, to captivate Anglo-Saxon audiences with his eloquence.

He lost no time in visiting the influential town of Manchester in early November, 1851. There, the still powerful Anti-Corn Law League organisation and Richard Cobden and John Bright were his supporters. The Radical paper, The Manchester Examiner and Times, published and managed by Bright's friend, Alexander Ireland from 1846 to 1889, sang Kossuth's praises. Outside its office in Market Street, as he processed through Manchester, hung a banner proclaiming 'Free Trade, Free Press, Free People, Welcome Kossuth'.

Kossuth's reception in Manchester was rapturous, and his meeting on November 11th in the Free Trade Hall (said to hold 9/10,000) was crowded out. There were so many notables on the platform, including John Bright, Sir Elkanah Armitage and Alexander Ireland, with others of the Examiner and Times, that a cry came from the hall 'Keep room for Kossuth'. He spoke for one and a half hours, winning his audience with phrases like 'commerce is the locomotive of principles', and ending with an appeal to the people of Manchester and England to 'speak with manly resolution to the despots of the world'. The Examiner and Times published a special supplement on the event.

After Kossuth's return from the US, Cobden and Bright continued to support him, especially against Palmerston's accusations that he had had dealings with an explosives manufacturer. They were both, however, reluctant to advocate any use of force by England in his cause. Nevertheless, during the 1850s Kossuth paid Manchester several visits, which aroused much enthusiasm, though not on the scale of 1851. The Examiner and Times reported three meetings in November 1856 in the Free Trade Hall.

At the first, his entrance was greeted by a Hungarian march on the organ, and he then spoke for two hours to an audience of 6,000 on the Italian movement for independence from Austria, a cause he linked to that of Hungary. The speech was published by John Heywood of Deansgate. In January, 1857, he made a return visit to address the Working Men of Manchester in the Free Trade Hall. In May 1859 he addressed a packed Free Trade Hall at a meeting to agitate for England's neutrality in the war against Austria and Italy.

Alexander Ireland, one of Bowdon's 'eminent Victorians', was living in Stamford Road certainly in 1855 and probably earlier in the fifties. He was a staunch supporter of Kossuth: his press printed a booklet, *Kossuth in Exile*, by John Hilson of Jedburgh in June 1856 - 'Published in Manchester, price 2d. by A Ireland & Co. Printers by Steam Power, Pall Mall'. The obituary of Ireland in *Manchester Faces and Places* states that Kossuth was his guest on his second visit to Manchester in 1854. This may have been in Bowdon, but certainly when Kossuth gave his talk to the Working Men on Saturday, January 24th, 1857, he was invited to Bowdon by Ireland. On January 20th, Ireland wrote to his close associate, George Wilson, chairman of the former Anti-Corn Law League inviting him to dinner:-

'Kossuth has promised to dine with me at Bowdon on Saturday next at 2 o'clock. Will you give me the pleasure of your company. The hour is made early as he comes in by the 7 p.m. train to lecture'.

A little later, in March 1857, Ireland accompanied Kossuth when he gave a lecture in Crewe and then to stay with John Mills and his wife at Nantwich. Ireland and Mills were old friends from the Radical forties in Manchester, and Mills, a leading banker, chose in 1864 to settle in Bowdon to be near Ireland and his lively circle. Already, in 1849, Mills had written to his wife of the 'painful intensity' of his sympathy with Kossuth and his losing cause. In 1857, his wife recorded his reaction to Kossuth's oratory: 'I never saw Mr Mills more completely carried away'.

At Kossuth's last Free Trade Hall meeting in May 1859, before his departure in 1860 to live in Turin and support the Risorgimento more actively, the chairman was George Wilson and Alexander Ireland was again on the platform. After Kossuth's emotional plea for English neutrality in the Italian struggle- 'Let Austria be forsaken by England and she will be forsaken by God', 'the whole meeting' (according to his memoirs) 'rises to its feet', 'waving hats, handkerchiefs and cheering'. Ireland was also interested in the Italian cause, and in November 1855 entertained to dinner at his house in Stamford Road the famous Italian exile, Count Aurelio Saffi, one of the Triumvirs with Mazzini of the revolutionary Roman Republic of 1849. (Saffi had originally come to see Ireland with a note of introduction from Carlyle.) At the dinner party, we learn from Absalom Watkin's journal, John Bright and Saffi discussed the Italian situation. Kossuth never returned to Hungary in his lifetime, though many other exiles did, but both he and Ireland lived to see the independence and unification of Italy: coincidentally, they both died in the same year, 1894.

A small postscript, connected with Bowdon, points up the mutual admiration between Kossuth and Manchester Liberals. Inglewood, the house in St Margaret's Road which Ireland built for himself in 1869-70, was the home from 1888 of the Hopkinson family. They were distinguished Manchester Liberals, described by Katharine Chorley in Manchester Made Them. John Hopkinson, her grandfather, had heard Kossuth in the Free Trade Hall. In their home, she writes, 'hung a portrait of Kossuth'. Below it was printed this tribute to England: 'Ah, now I am free, I feel I am free, I am free when I touch your shores'.

My warm thanks are due to the staff of the Manchester Central Library, and I am grateful to the City of Manchester Leisure Services Committee for permission to quote Ireland's letter in the Wilson Papers.

Early Threshing Machines in Bowdon by Ronald Trenbath

The following report in the Manchester Courier on Saturday, the 7th August, 1847, was noted by Marjorie Cox, while researching a different subject.

Barley Oats

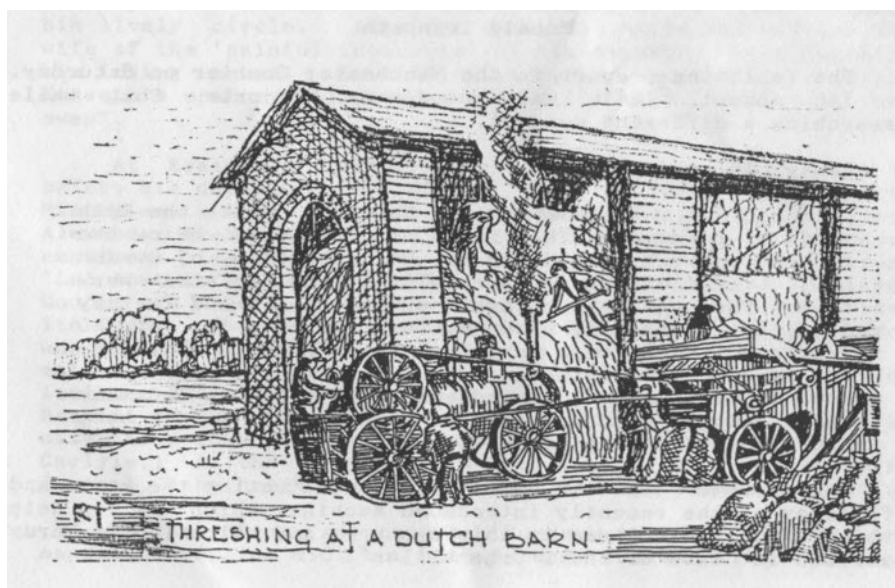
"A field of oats was cut on Saturday week, the 24th ult., at Bowdon. The field is situated below the church, and is farmed by Mr Wm. Warburton of Bowdon Hall. The field was most excellent, and the straw very fine. The oats were thrashed out on Monday and Tuesday last, by a thrashing machine; on the evening of the latter day they were taken to Ashley Mill, and will be in the market as oatmeal today. Some of the straw was sold in the market on Wednesday and again on Thursday last, being the first straw of this year's growth that had appeared in the market".

One assumes that the report was demonstrating the speed and efficiency of the recently introduced machine, which was to help revolutionise agriculture in this country, and which Thomas Hardy described in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles".

Prior to this time the practice had been to cart the corn from the fields into barns provided with tall wooden entrance doors to permit access to highly laden carts, with low doorways on the opposite walls to facilitate the exit of empty carts. Paved areas between the doors were used as "thresholds", or threshing floors, and the sheaves were stacked on either side of them. Splayed piers were built on either side of the doors, which were often provided with roofs to form porches so that the wind could be channelled through the thresholds to blow away chaff and dust during threshing.

Gertrude Jekyll wrote that:- "the flail was one of the oldest of the farmer's implements. It is formed of two rods about 3 ft 6 ins long the handle being the slighter and the swinger the thicker and heavier. There may be many yet living (1925) who can remember the pleasing sight and sound of threshing; the man's dexterity, for there were labourers who would undertake to knock all the grain out of a single head of corn stood up on end at the first blow, and the pleasant sound, the "whish" when the flail first struck the loose corn, and the thump when, after a few strokes, the heavy swinger felt the floor".

The advantage of this method of threshing lay in the fact that the corn could be threshed as, and when, it was required and could be a useful indoor job during inclement weather, whereas the cost of moving the new machinery from farm to farm and paying the crew who worked it, plus any extra labour required, meant that it had to be used continuously for three or four- working days, regardless of the weather, if it was going to prove to be economical.



Most farmers found it impossible to use the threshing machines in the traditional barns, which resulted in the open sided Dutch barns becoming more popular and the traditional barn becoming redundant.

Early in the morning when threshing was to take place the machinery would be seen chugging along the approach road to the farm with smoke bellowing from the funnel of the traction engine, which towed the thresher, and the whistle blowing to announce its arrival, a scene which Turner would have enjoyed painting. The next task was to manoeuvre everything into position near to the corn stack which was in itself a very exhausting operation.

As soon as the farmer and the driver were satisfied that all the equipment was properly aligned the work for the day commenced with workers on the stack feeding sheaves, by pikel to a man, or woman, on the box, who would cut the string or "bant" tying the corn and throw the loosened sheaves into the thresher where the operation of separating the corn from the straw took place. The corn flowed out of an aperture into bags on one side of the box where it was weighed and then carted to the granary, the chaff was directed through another opening on the opposite side of the machine into bags in which it was transported to the hen pens, or store, and the straw came out of the back where it was hand tied into bundles, if it was to be used for thatching, or passed through a baler, if it was to be used for bedding, or sold to industry.

A long tough belt, from the traction engine, drove the machinery in the thresher and was always a great source of danger, of which the workers had to be constantly aware. The driver would walk round with an oil can spurting oil into various parts of the machinery, check the gauges and overlook the regular supply of water to the boiler to ensure that it did not burst. Super heat-producing engine coal was used to stoke the furnace which resulted in the emission of very thick black smoke which with the pollen and dust, inevitably gave all concerned, other than the regular crew, very bad colds for days afterwards. The crews always appeared to be immune from catching colds but they regularly ended up with chronic chest and lung diseases, and those who worked on the boilers were subject to chronic cervical spondelosis or the farmers disease, by which name it is still known locally, but the wages paid to these workers were very much higher than those paid to farm workers.

The pollen also caused intense skin irritation and those carrying the bales on their backs nearly always received cuts on their necks and shoulders, so it is not hard to imagine that this very dirty, dangerous and exhausting job could lead to frayed tempers, especially, when milking, feeding and bedding down of cows, had to be undertaken when Threshing had stopped for the day. The fact that the operation occurred mainly in winter when the days were short and darkness came early also made life difficult.

The rats and mice which inevitably inhabited corn stacks worked their way downwards as the work proceeded, to be found hiding en-masse in the last few layers of sheaves, at which point local boys would bring their dogs and enjoy a rat chase as a finale to the operation when often a hundred or more rats would be taken.

The traction engines were always the pride and joy of the drivers who would tend them with loving care, washing them, polishing the brass components and keeping them in pristine condition.

Mr Barlow, the last driver in the district kept and tended his engine long after it had become obsolete and it was fitting that it should have been driven past his house as a mark of respect to him at his funeral.

Before the destruction of Ashley Mill in the great Bollin flood at the turn of the century, corn was taken there for grinding and then often on to Ashley Station to be carried by train to various markets, as a result of which the adjoining "Greyhound Inn" became a meeting place for farmers where they could lunch, discuss affairs, carry out deals and execute their business generally. The late Reg Baker, who was landlord of the inn for very many years, as were his in-laws for many generations prior to that, told interesting tales of the carryings on and of the self employed men who virtually ran their business, such as haulage, cattle dealing and contracting, from the pub.

Anyone unfortunate enough to have taken part in threshing will know what a loathsome job it was, so when, on the 4th August 1960, the first combine harvester was operated at Bow Green a small group of local people gathered to hail its arrival and take photographs, and a cine film of the event, and generally celebrate the end of the threshing machine era, not entirely realizing that the new machine would bring its own problems.

Perhaps one of the greatest assets of the threshing yard, which was lost when combine harvesters came to dominate harvesting, lay in the fact that these yards were the habitats of barn owls. They lived on the rats and mice, and the disappearance of this feature from farmsteads contributed to the decline in population of this very beautiful and useful bird. It might be of interest to readers that a barn owl was heard calling in the garden while this article was being written and it is to be hoped that it will be the first of many more to come.

