

The Bowdon Sheaf

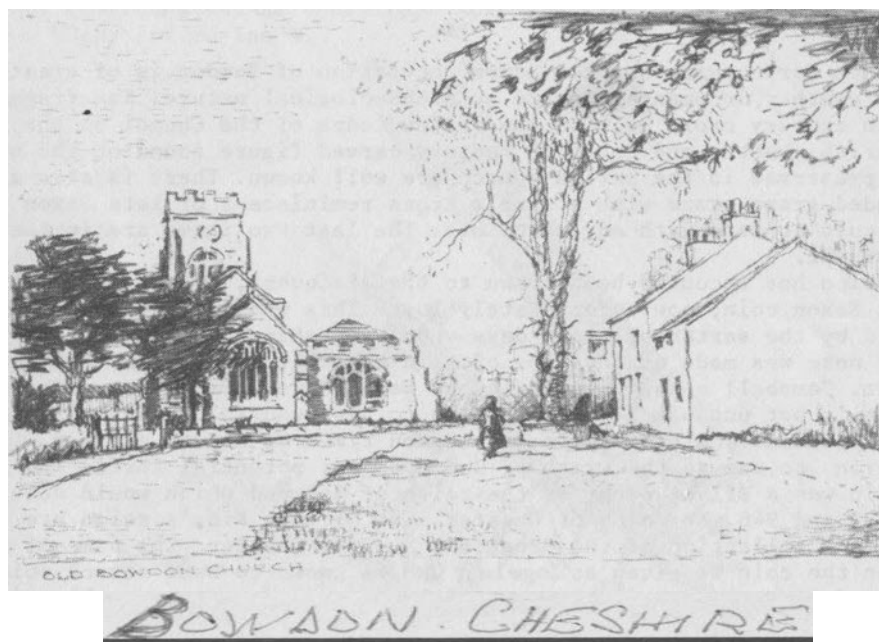
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Contents:

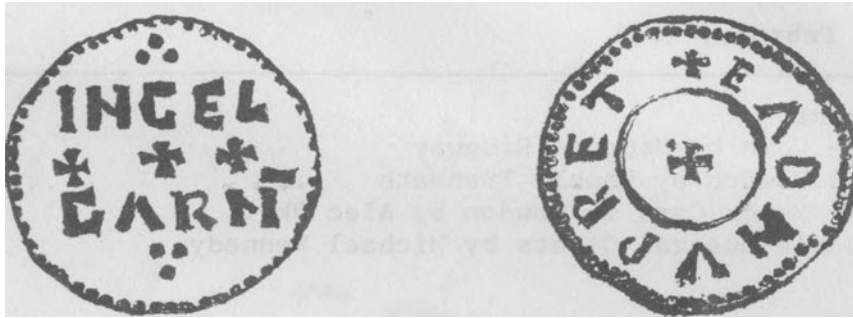
- Saxon Coin by Maurice Ridgway
Rural Bowdon by Ronald Trenbath
Early Motor Cars in Bowdon by Alec Okell
Bowdon's Musical Giants by Michael Kennedy



This drawing is based on several surveys, photographs and sketches made prior to 1858 and shows the east end of the parish church, the Griffin, the old tree and open grass area as it would appear before the church was rebuilt in 1860.

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.

SAXON COIN
by **Maurice Ridgway**



Any evidence forthcoming for the Saxon occupation of Bowdon is of great interest, whether documentary or of an archaeological nature. The fragment of the 8th century cross kept on the window ledge of the Chapel of the Cross in the parish church, and the 10th century carved figure found on the site and also preserved in the parish church are well known. There is also a round-headed grave stone with a simple cross reminiscent of late Saxon work, but difficult to date with any certainty. The last two items are in the north transept.

But attention has recently been drawn to the discovery, a good many years ago, of a Saxon coin, now unfortunately lost. This was discovered in Bowdon churchyard by the sexton of those days when excavating a grave space. Only a limited note was made of the type of coin and this information has been sent to Dr. Campbell a known authority on Saxon coins. His first comment is that it is not unusual for Saxon coins to be found in churchyards of old standing, presumably a projection into Saxon times of a much earlier superstition to ensure the wrath of God upon any potential thief. The Bowdon coin was a silver penny of the reign of Eadmund which would date it between 939 and 946. No coins of Chester mint of this King's reign are in the very fine collection at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester. The name of the moneyer on the coin is given as Ingelgar who is known to have struck coins at York, and in so far as any moneyer might be called common at this time he is known from a number

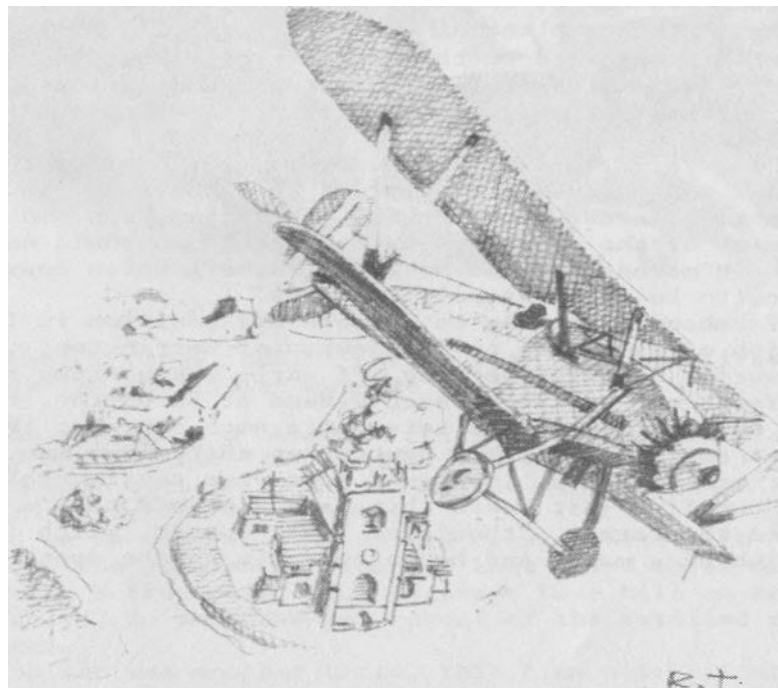
of coins. In view of the recent excavations carried out at York on the Viking settlement it is of great interest to know that Ingelgar struck for the Hiberno-Norse Kings of York in the first half of the 10th century. He also struck for the last Viking King Eric Bloodaxe at York, who was finally expelled and killed by Eadred (954). For the English Kings Ingelgar is known to have struck coins for Eadmund, Eadred and Eadwig. Dr. Campbell has supplied a sketch of what the appearance of the reverse side would resemble which gives the name of the moneyer. The obverse of coins struck in the time of Eadmund is also given.

RURAL BOWDON: 2
by Ronald Trenbath

With the cessation of hostilities in 1918 Harry Aspy returned from France to his home - Miss Aspy's Cottage in Bow Green - where his uncle Jim still continued to ply his trade as local slaughterer, or knackers man, sitting on the stile to the Seven Meadows waiting for custom, while Harry's mother, Ann, scoured the lanes and woods with a wheelbarrow, wearing a bright red shawl over her head, collecting fallen branches for winter fuel. Harry soon discovered that the standards of gardening at the big houses, such as the one where he was under-gardener, had deteriorated sadly due to the effects of high taxation to pay for the war.

Money was no longer so readily available for plants, heating of greenhouses or the employment of as many gardeners as previously, and outdoor staff often had to undertake indoor duties in addition to gardening. In this respect one man, who worked at a large house in Bowdon as a gardener, recalls being called upon to serve at table when his employers gave a dinner party. Many local boys, like Harry, served in the forces, some never returned, some were wounded and others were taken prisoner. One of the latter recalled being interrogated by a German officer who had previously lived in Bowdon when he worked for a German firm in Broadheath prior to the war.

During their absence the labour of local men was replaced by that of women land workers and also prisoners of war from the camp in Sinderland Green, many of whom undertook valuable drainage work and were responsible for paving some of the badly rutted lanes.



The district did not lack excitement during the war years and several people claimed that they heard very strange noises in the sky one very misty day to be confronted, when the mist cleared, by a German Zeppelin circling Bowdon Hill, apparently having lost its bearings through confusion over the position of the Parish Church and St. Margaret's Church. The trauma of this event was heightened by the fact that most of the people had never previously seen aircraft

This state of affairs was not to last long, however, as Sir Alan Cobham, within the next decade, brought his flying circus to a field near Castle Hill where he gave aeronautical displays and provided "flips for five bob" (25p). Local enthusiasm for flying soon followed through the encouragement of early pioneers such as Harry Killick, John F. Leeming and Lord Egerton of Tatton. The gradual replacement of horse-drawn vehicles by motor cars, after the war, provided opportunities for some ex-servicemen to become chauffeurs and a new category of employee, the chauffeur-gardener, emerged, but the pre-war standards in the larger gardens had disappeared, never to return, and the gradual decline continued with the slump in the inter-war years.

The motorbike also became very popular at this time, and at least two enterprising men set up business selling ex-army stock to the young men of the district, to the great consternation of the local constable, who resorted to hiding in hedges, jumping out at passing motorcyclists, and examining both their machines and their credentials for riding them. Two youths from Bow Green bought a very large machine from a dealer near the Nag's Head (now The Nag), and not being familiar with the mechanism pushed it all the way home, but on the way they were overtaken by the policeman who examined it and threatened to take action as he considered it to be unsafe and not to conform to the requirements of the law. The youths' father, hearing the ensuing argument from his nearby cottage, came out and ordered them to push the machine back again to its place of purchase.

Ownership of motorbikes also led to the mobility of labour and men, no longer tied to their immediate localities, often found it advantageous to accept employment further away from home, often leading them into leaving the district altogether.

Advertisements in the Farmer and Stockbreeder offered jobs with "all found plus £1 per week for a 54 hour week" provided that the successful applicants were "single, competent, clean, hardworking, Christian, non-smokers and total abstainers", and many of the more adventurous young men could not resist such enticements, although members of the National Farmers Union considered these Arcadian conditions to be unnecessarily generous!

One of the local farmhands, wanting to improve his position in life, decided to apply for the job of ploughman to Mr. Newton of Carrington, the grandfather of Canon Maurice Ridgway. Setting off early one morning to walk there he stopped for refreshment at the Saracen's Head at Warburton, to arrive ultimately at his destination in the late afternoon somewhat the worse for drink. There he was confronted by Mr. Newton, an abstemious man, who asked "What is there to recommend you, I haven't seen your testimonials." "No", retorted the man "but I've just heard thine and I'm told thou's a right old B". "Well," replied the farmer, "thou's at least honest, which is the highest quality I could wish of a man", and he engaged him on the spot.

(to be continued)

EARLY MOTOR CARS IN BOWDON by Alec Okell

Alec Okell, being possessed not only of a photographic memory, but also of a remarkable collection of actual photographs, has made a study of the pioneers of the horseless carriage in Bowdon at the turn of the century. His father Samuel, of 'Overley', Langham Road, was one of those pioneers and Alec writes:

Early in 1896 my father went to the Paris Exhibition and saw, ordered and brought to England a 'HURTU' Horseless Carriage.

It was powered with a 31 hp Benz single-cylinder air-cooled engine made by a company called 'Des Autos et Cycles Hurtu' in Albert on the Somme. My father told me it was probably the first car to be owned in Cheshire. It was a two-seater with tiller steering, wire-wheels with solid rubber tyres.



Samuel Okell's first 'HURTU' car in 1896 with his first wife Mary Ellen or 'Mellie' at the tiller outside 'Overley'.

He also told me that he had owned it for several months before the abolition on 14th November 1896 of the 'Red Flag' regulations which required a man with such an object on display to precede a horseless carriage and give warning of approach.

My father told me he used to have fairly regular bets with Mr. Willy Evans, who owned the stables on Vicarage Lane and a horse-drawn cab, as to whether the Hurtu would climb Vicarage Lane hill on to Langham Road, Regrettably I do not have any record of the detailed results of these challenges.

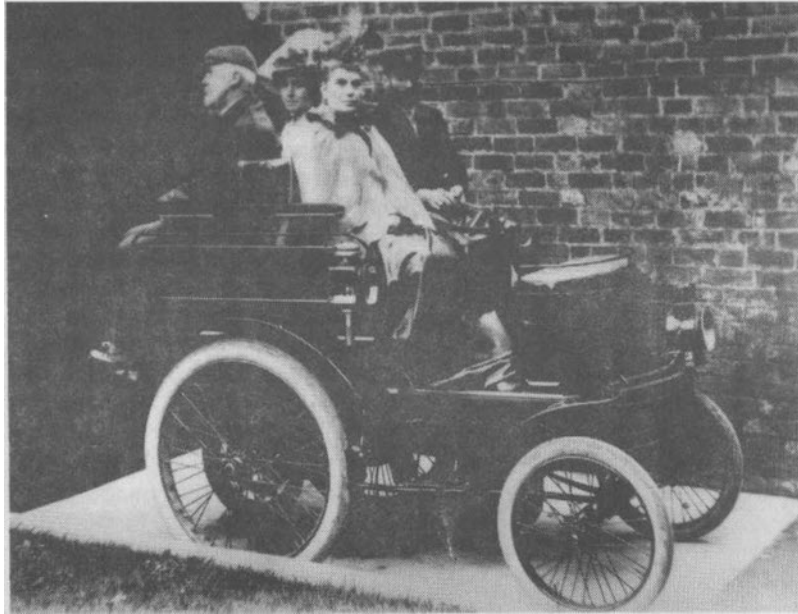
Father's second car was another Hurtu, this time a four-seater with back seat passengers facing rearwards; and built under licence in Britain by Belsize. I think it was powered by an Aster 5 hp water-cooled engine which may have been twin or single cylinder. Records indicate that this car must have been bought by my father in 1900 or 1901 Samuel Okell's first 'HURTU' car in 1896 with his first wife Mary Ellen or 'Mellie' at the tiller outside 'Overley'.

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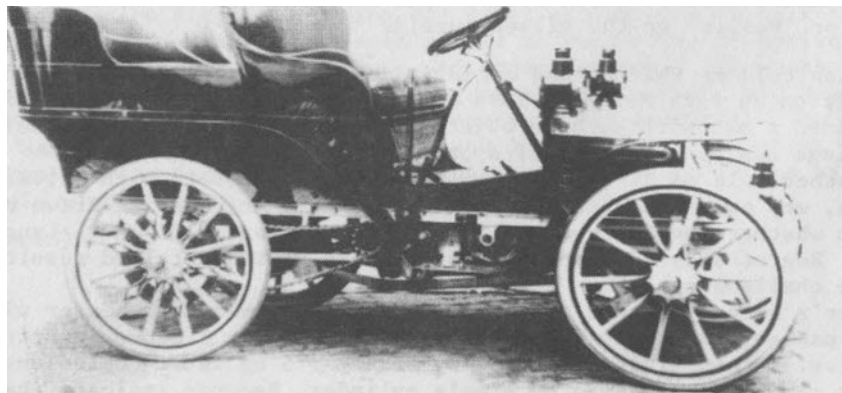
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His third car was a 9 hp James & Browne four-seater, driver and passengers all facing forward. It was introduced in 1902 and had two cylinders with transverse crankshaft and flywheel between the cylinders, and a clutch and four-speed gearbox. It was without windscreen or hood and still had wooden wheels with solid rubber tyres, but had wheel, instead of tiller steering.



Samuel Okell's second 'HURTU', circa 1900-02. On the tiller at the front, Alec Okell's half-brother Percy. Beside him Mrs. Coleby. At the rear (foreground) Mr. Coleby, behind him Miss Amy Coleby who was engaged to Percy.

His fourth car (to which he changed the registration number M 16 on 6th March 1908) was a 30 hp Belsize with a six cylinder engine. Probably its most important innovation was the introduction of pneumatic tyres. It was much more like a modern motor car in that it had a 4-5 seater body and a windscreen and hood.



Samuel's third car. The 9 hp James & Browne.

It was eventually fitted with an 'Auster' screen for wind protection of the rear seat passengers who previously had had to comfort themselves with such devices as a large, oval copper tank beneath their feet covered with carpeting and filled with boiling water, plus many rugs, heavy coats, caps and goggles.

One of the intriguing features of the big Belsize was its lubrication system, described to me in detail fairly recently by my cousin Hubert Frith who emigrated to New Zealand in 1927.

He has told me that from the front seat one could see little chains under a glass cover, hanging from a spindle and dipping into a trough of oil, then wiping drops of oil they collected into the mouths of half a dozen pipes that led to the main engine bearings.

While I was in Singapore in 1953 I heard a radio talk by the Motoring Correspondent of the Straits Times talking about a visit to London during which he had met a veteran motorist who had driven for 50 years, and claiming thereby a record.

I thought that our family could challenge that since my half-brother Arthur Percival Okell, born 1865, died 1959 aged 94, must have driven for 63 years; while his brother Ernest Gordon Okell, born 1868, died 1956 aged 88, must have driven for at least 58 years.

My father's fifth car was a light 'Fafnir' of German origin which he bought second-hand after Bates, our chauffeur, was called up during the 1914-18 war.

My mother was taught to drive it by Charlie Alexander, the Hale garage and taxi owner, but she never mastered the art of reversing. My own driving experience, at an early age, was acquired by driving the Fafnir backwards out of the garage at home and then handing over the controls to mother. In the next issue of The Sheaf Alec Okell will record some of the adventures of other motoring pioneers in Bowdon, including some remarkable ones by members of the Gaddum Family. (to be continued)



BOWDON'S MUSICAL GIANTS: ADOLPH BRODSKY Part 2
by Michael Kennedy.

One of the first acts Brodsky had performed on arrival in Manchester was to form a string quartet. Its inaugural concert was on 24th February 1896 and it played Haydn, Schumann and Beethoven. The proceeds of the concerts went to the college Sustentation Fund to help needy students and over the 23 years of the quartet's existence over £2,000 was contributed. Critics generally considered Brodsky was at his best in chamber music. His cellist colleague, Carl Fuchs, called Brodsky's playing of the Cavatina in Beethoven's op. 130 "soul-searching", and Neville Cardus thought him the best player he had known in the late Beethoven quartets. "Manchester", he wrote, "will always remember the way Dr. Brodsky would lead his quartet, how he would lie back and give himself up to a noble phrase; how, in a slow movement, you could see his very soul turning upon itself, retiring to the music's peaceful sanctuary".

There was something of the peasant about him, and it is therefore no surprise to learn that he was a much better player of Haydn than of Mozart. He was superb in the Bach concertos. Archie Camden, who often visited him in Bowdon, has left a touching picture of Brodsky's tender devotion to his wife Anna while she was paralysed and bedridden after 1921. He asked her "What would you like me to play?" and she replied "Bach please, Adolph". He was always generous in inviting students and colleagues to his home, often making music with them or just telling them about the musicians and composers he had known. It is touching for the English to know that he reserved his greatest love for Elgar's concerto, playing it "almost daily as other people say their prayers". He would often ask his assistant principal (and eventual successor) R.J. Forbes, another Bowdon resident, to walk over in the evening to play the piano reduction of the orchestral score.

As Principal of the College he was a firm disciplinarian but kindly behind his irascibility. He had a violent temper which was usually aroused by laziness or carelessness. If he thought someone was trying to do their best, then he was helpful, if not the door would be flung open and out would come music stand, music, violin, bow and finally pupil. Once he threw the metronome as well and smashed it to bits. He was known to have torn the score of a concerto in half in his rage and once, when asked by a student how a certain form of technique could be improved, he replied curtly "Practise it".

When he was annoyed he would bite through the stem of his pipe. On his 60th birthday in 1911 the students bought him 60 pipes! Let Archie Camden, who was both student and employee at the College under Brodsky, sum him up: "His as a true spirit of music. It was noble without the trappings of nobility; compassionate without the slur of sentimentality; stylish without extravagant showmanship". Not a bad epitaph.

