

# *The Bowdon Sheaf*

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The Great Barn. Moss Farm.  
Sketch of the Interior of the barn illustrating an imaginary party

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## **ROSE HILL SCHOOL** **by Myra Kendrick**

Rose Hill in Bowdon was roughly the area now covered by South Road, East Downs Road and West Road, a site much favoured for small day and boarding schools as Bowdon developed after the opening, in 1848/9, of the Manchester to Altrincham and Bowdon railway. This had attracted a steady flow of Manchester business men to move to Bowdon and look about for schools to educate their sons and daughters.

About 1874 Alfred James Pearce opened Rose Hill School, the second of that name. A graduate of London University, he had come north to be headmaster of the British School in Oxford Road, Altrincham, since demolished. He was the author of a popular mathematics book and his reputation was such that he was invited by Bowdon parents to found a boys' school to fill a need felt. Not all wanted to send their young sons away to boarding school if a sound education could be acquired near home.

Among Mr Pearce's pupils are named sons of such local families as Calderbank, Ormson, Ridgway and Syers. Canon M.H. Ridgway's father won an attendance prize there at Christmas 1892. Mr Pearce's own son was a pupil in his father's school until the age of fourteen, when he was sent to complete his education in Germany. Similarly, sons of German customers of Manchester business men came to be educated in English at Rose Hill School. Some boys must have finished their schooling there, although in the 1890s two pupils are known to have gone on to Manchester Grammar School.

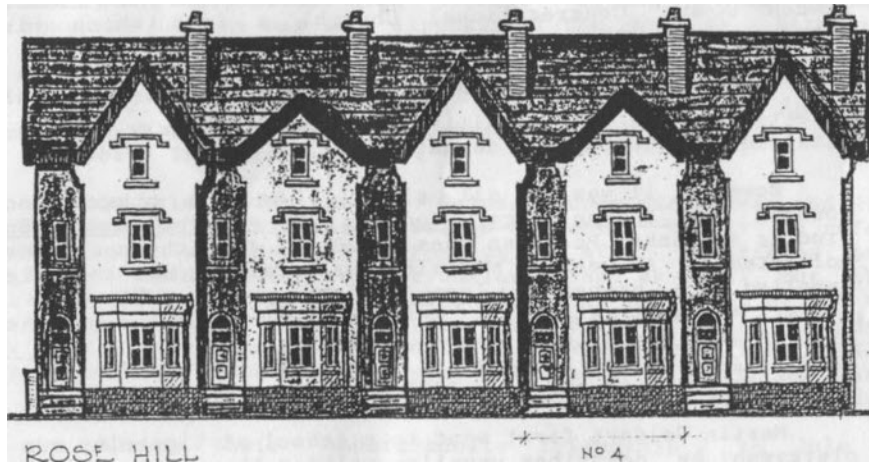
A Cheshire directory of 1874 contains an advertisement for Mr Pearce's Rose Hill School. It gives the course of instruction as including English "in all its branches", Mathematics, French, German, Latin, Physical Science, Drawing and Drill. The inclusion of Physical Science is interesting, reflecting new educational developments: it was not in the curriculum of the earlier Rose Hill School. The Principal was stated to be "assisted by French and German masters and well qualified teachers". He made an explicit point of "having a large schoolroom and playground detached from the residence".

A. J. Pearce's schoolroom, which he had bought in 1874 for £1000, had originally been built for the Methodist Chapel on Rosehill. This was being replaced by the Dome Chapel on Enville Road, itself to be demolished after about a hundred years' existence. For some time before the purchase Pearce had been renting the room for use on weekdays, the Methodists still using it on weeknights and Sundays. This building can still be glimpsed off South Road, close to the residential part of the school apparently built by Pearce. It is now converted into flats, after a short career as a laundry. The playing fields were on land opposite the schoolroom and the Pearce family lived in the small house round the corner in West Road known as Daisy Bank, which may originally have housed the caretaker of the former Methodist chapel and schoolroom. The windows of some adjacent houses have a significantly church-like appearance.

A. J. Pearce, known to his pupils as "Daddy Pearce" was reputed to be a strict disciplinarian. He catered for boarders as well as day pupils, and his daughters in turn helped him on the domestic side. The youngest, Miss Jessie, continued to keep house for his successor who took over when Mr Pearce retired about 1905. The school survived his retirement by one year only; of the two headmasters Pearce was by far the better businessman.

His grave is in Bowdon churchyard; the inscription gives his life-span as from 1837 to 1908. He had however been an active member of the Downs Congregational Chapel where, his grand-daughter understood, he was a lay preacher. Non-Conformists were indeed responsible for the founding of a number of Bowdon's Victorian Schools.

Much of this material was supplied by A. J. Pearce's grand-daughter, the late Miss Ada Pearce.



## GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS' BOWDON FRIEND

By Marjorie Cox

In the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins' early diaries, which he kept when he was an undergraduate at Balliol College, Oxford, the following entry appears in 1865 "4 Rose Hill Bowden Manchester E. M. Geldart". Edmund Martin Geldart was a fellow undergraduate at Balliol, and the two became friends, close in their student days, more remote in later life. Both were born in the same year, 1844, and both died fairly young, Geldart at 41 and Hopkins at 44. Their lives were lived in a period of strong religious divisions and of a deep crisis of faith.

Martin Geldart was the son of Thomas Geldart, originally from Norfolk, who came to the area in 1856 when he became Secretary of the Manchester City Mission. After a brief stay in Altrincham, he lived until the 1870s (when he moved to The Firs) at 4 Rose Hill. The house can be identified as the last but one at the east end of the Gothic style terrace on East Downs Road. In his autobiography Martin Geldart records an incident which shows us the developing but as yet unorganised suburb, to which gas lighting came only in 1865. He came home from boarding school because of his elder brother's fatal illness, arriving at Manchester by train at 1 a.m., then taking a cab to Bowdon. He could not identify his parents' new house and the cabman set him down in a fog. Wandering round, he was eventually helped by a policeman, or rather "the private watchman who did duty in those benighted parts for that functionary". Thomas Geldart, though a Baptist, attended the flourishing Bowdon Downs Congregational Church, a fact which his son attributed to mild social snobbery. His wife, Hannah, wrote popular religious books for children. Their children had a strict evangelical upbringing, and Martin describes vividly the effects of this on a sensitive child, particularly the obsession with sin and the fear of damnation.

However, it was not all gloom. He and other schoolboys founded The Entomological Society of Altrincham and Bowdon, finding in Dunham Park an ideal habitat for the specimens they collected. A weekly magazine was started, and they cleverly enrolled as a member a local printer, who published it: in Geldart's semi-satirical autobiography it appears as The Hebdomadial Bughunter, more soberly it was The Weekly Entomologist, price 2d, and all complaints to be addressed to him at 4 Rose Hill: it ran from 1862-3.

Martin Geldart first went to a school at Timperley run by a clergyman; he describes usually walking there, though sometimes going by train, but apparently boarded (?weekly) at Woodlands Park. Later, after a brief interlude with the same master at Oxford, he was sent to Manchester Grammar School. During his time there the school's academic standing was revolutionised by a new headmaster and Geldart was the first pupil to win an open scholarship to Balliol. This made possible a career very different from the one he had visualised, aged 12, on the eve of moving to Manchester. In a letter to his father he had done a humorous drawing of "My future prospects", showing himself seated among bales labelled "The very best cotton", "finest cotton" etc.

Geldart and Hopkins came up to Balliol to read Greats in the same year, 1863, and had rooms on the same staircase. Hopkins at first found Geidart's appearance unprepossessing, but the initial impression soon wore off and Geldart became one of the circle of his best friends. They enjoyed walks together in the beautiful Oxford countryside which permeates Hopkins poems, fireside talks, luncheon and dinner parties. In his Journal on May 8th 1866, Hopkins, after noting the weather as he often did, recorded "Walk with Geldart and Nash. Curious notions of those sort of people about conceit." an enigmatic remark. Thomas Nash, also from Bowdon, was one of two close school friends of Geidart's at Balliol: all three were labelled "Manchester men", regardless of origins.

Martin Geidart's thinly-disguised autobiography, *A Son of Belial* by Nitram Tradleg (his name reversed! which appeared in 1882 is an important source used by biographers of Hopkins to evoke the Oxford of the 1860s, Hopkins, to whom he sent a copy, called it "an amusing and sad book". Geldart paints the intellectual exhilaration of Oxford, particularly of Balliol: no subject was taboo and viewpoints were many and varied. (He himself struck a contemporary as being "as clever a man as I ever met"). Above all, in the Oxford of a generation after Newman and the Tractarian Movement, religion was endlessly discussed. Divisions in the Church of England between Evangelicals and High Church Puseyites ran deep, and Newman, of course, had gone over to Rome. Geldart came up a convinced Evangelical: he had been baptised into the Church of England by the Vicar of Bowdon, Archdeacon Pollock, who favoured Evangelicals and regularly preached argumentative sermons (much to Geidart's taste) against Unitarians, Roman Catholics and Puseyites. At Oxford he first actually encountered High Churchmen, among them Hopkins, whose family was moderately High Church. In the hothouse of Oxford, however, Hopkins was soon strongly of the Puseyite, Ritualist or Anglo-Catholic wing of the church. A brief entry in his diary of 1865 shows a youthful mixture of idealism and pressing practicalities "Little book ' for sins. Necktie. Boots to see after. Slippers? Bath, Letters to Aunt Annie, Aunt Kate, Geldart. Trousers".

In his autobiography Geldart uses pseudonyms and Hopkins figures as "my ritualistic friend Gerontius Manley", a reference to Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*. After describing another friend, Geldart observes "Gerontius gushed as well, but then he meant it". Geldart was coining under the influence of the famous Benjamin Jowett (Hopkins tutor at Balliol) and his advanced biblical criticism. He recalls long discussions with Hopkins on religion, in which the crux of their differences was the relationship between the church's authority and private judgment. During their undergraduate friendship, in July 1865, Hopkins stayed with the Geldart family in Rose Hill. Writing to Robert Bridges, another Oxford friend, he remarked (as a Londoner) that Mr Geidart's office was in "what they have the face to call Piccadilly, if I remember right . They (the Geldarts) live at Bowdon eight miles off". While at Bowdon he met Martin's younger brother, Ernest, who was training as an architect under Alfred Waterhouse, soon to be the architect of Balliol's new buildings (in which Ernest was involved) and later of Manchester Town Hall. No poem was inspired by the visit to Bowdon, but in Hopkins sketchbook of that year there is a delicate drawing of minutely observed plants on a river bank, entitled "On the Bollen, Cheshire". The drawing (reproduced in *All My Eyes See*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton, p.127) is proof that Geldart had taken his friend to a favourite haunt of his on school half-holidays.

After the end of their Oxford days, in 1867, Hopkins and Geidart's lives diverged, though both retained feelings of friendship. Hopkins, while still an undergraduate, had been received into the Roman Catholic Church, and in 1868 he began his novitiate as a Jesuit. Geldart had a much more varied career.

He taught for brief periods at Manchester Grammar School and in Athens, where he became an expert on modern Greek. Later he was ordained in the Church of England at one point he was curate of All Saints', Manchester but left it to become a noted Unitarian minister until his "socialistic" views proved too much for his Croydon congregation and he resigned. His life ended tragically in April, 1885, in a mysterious disappearance from a Channel steamer, which Hopkins assumed to be suicide. In a letter of April 24th to an old Oxford friend, Hopkins lamented the death of Geldart, a "self tormentor", but found some comfort in having renewed their friendship a few weeks earlier.

Quotations from the following are by kind permission of Oxford University Press:-

The Journals and Papers of G. M. Hopkins ed. H. House and G Storey (1959)

The Letters of G. M. Hopkins to Robert Bridges ed. C. C. Abbott (1955)

Further Letters of G. M. Hopkins ed. C. C. Abbott (1938)



## FOURTEENTH CENTURY FEUDS IN BOWDON by Maurice Ridgway

A sentimental view of the pre-Reformation Church often displays a complete ignorance of the facts that go towards making the fascinating tapestry of medieval life. Take for example the latter half of the fourteenth century in the Bowdon story. For a considerable time the manor had been held by two owners. On the one hand there was the Prior of Birkenhead and on the other the Mascy family of Hale.

There was friction between them and the Parish Church, its Vicarage and parson stood betwixt the two. It was in July 1383 that Thomas de Mascy aided by his friend Hugh de Artunstall, carried off the Tithe corn. It may well have been an act which sprang from an earlier dispute which was settled by the Baron Hamo with a charter in 1278 which placed the Priory at Birkenhead securely in possession of the Advowson (this meant amongst other things that the Priors of the Benedictine Priory at Birkenhead had the right to the tithes and also could place Vicars at Bowdon Church).

In 1383 this Thomas certainly had no right to what he took away, but after all the Prior of Birkenhead was some forty miles away at the end of the Wirral. Doubtless the Bowdon parson finally got word to him. Perhaps this particular incident could be settled and was. But a few years later in 1397 Thomas, John and Richard, the sons of Robert de Mascy and others "assaulted" William de Preston the "holy watur clerk" of Bowdon Church. Poor William, whatever had he done to deserve this? Apparently nothing, but the fourteenth-century bovver boys from Hale wanted to take it out of somebody and the Holy Water clerk at Bowdon was as harmless as anyone they were likely to find,

Why? A year earlier Richard de Wever had died, and the Prior had appointed Richard del More to be the new Vicar of Bowdon 1396. He had hardly been instituted a month when on March 3rd the Mascies (to quote) "entered the Vicarage and held it by force until Palm Sunday, threatening the Prior and his new Vicar that they should have no profit from the church unless they admitted Richard, the son of Robert de Mascy, as Vicar.

They also browbeat the Prior's tenants and tried to make them quit their holdings." Richard was only 18 and could not hold the benefice in any case. These efforts to capture this rich vicarage for one of the family evidently did not prevail and the result may well have given rise to the local proverb preserved by Sir Peter Leycester in the seventeenth-century History of Cheshire, "Every man is not born to be Vicar of Bowdon," though Peter Leycester admitted he did not know the real origin of the phrase. It is still perhaps the most often quoted of local proverbs, as it is the most inaccurate!



## Marriage and Divorce in Early 19th Century Bowdon

The following Bowdon Wedding was reported in the Hereford Journal, of July 16th, 1806:-

"Married, On the 27th ult., at Bowdon, Mr Thomas Darbyshire, of Altrincham, maltster, to Miss Goulden, only daughter of Mr Joseph Goulden, of the same place, inn-keeper, after a courtship of a quarter of an hour.

The following are the facts attending this short-sighted union: Mr D and Miss G were two of the attendants at the celebration of the marriage of a relation of Miss G, on the 12th ult., when (amongst conversation usual at such times of mirth and festivity) Mr D said he was desirous of being married, and put the question to Miss G whether she would marry with him, or not? To which she answered in the affirmative, and that the marriage should take place at nine o'clock the following morning. All the persons present considered the matter merely as a joke, Mr D drew up an agreement between him and Miss G which they both signed in the presence of a number of witnesses. Early the next morning, Mr D waited upon his fair Desdemona, with the intention of proceeding in the performance of what had been agreed upon the night before; but she, having been seized with a cold in the night, requested Mr D not to be so urgent about it, alleging that she was so hoarse, she was afraid she should not be sufficiently audible in the performance of her part of the marriage ceremony. Mr D consented to a respite; the 27th ult. was fixed upon, and the marriage accordingly celebrated".

It is said that in earlier times marriages were based more on women's abilities and asset? than on their affections, Some say that such unions often resulted in happier families compared with the position today, with the very high rate of broken marriages, but at that time an unsuccessful union could rarely be ended by divorce but rather by murder or suicide.

A ploy did exist however whereby a husband could end an unhappy marriage by selling his wife, as part of his goods and chattels, to any bidder willing to buy her, and at the turn of the 18th Century a man from Ashley led his wife to the Altrincham cross, with a man prodding her with a stick from behind, and auctioned her, to accept a final bid of eighteen pence, but, in order to make the transaction legal, he had to purchase a halter from Sammy Rutter the Saddler in Church Street, and place it on the wretched woman.

Auctions of wives, similar to this, were not infrequent but not all of them were quite as inhuman as this one, as many decent husbands were able to release their estranged wives by arranging for a suitor, of the wife's choice, to make a favourable bid and so enable her to commence what it was hoped would be a happier life. One can only be thankful that, such degrading remedies are no longer acceptable in this country.