

# *The Bowdon Sheaf*

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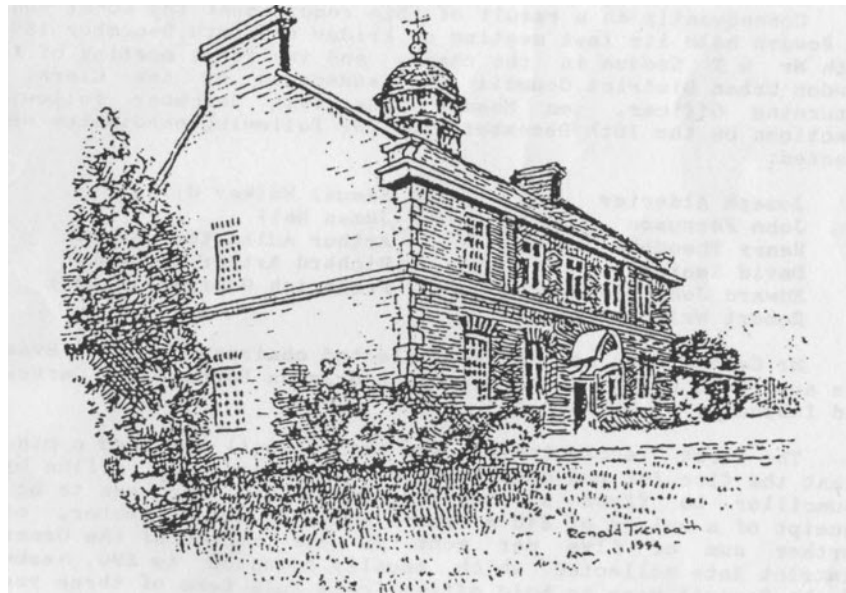
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Bowdon Hall as it probably appeared  
in the 18th Century

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## **Bowdon Urban District Council**

The Local Government Act of 1894 required that any place with a population in excess of 300 at the time of the previous census (1891) should form a Parish Council. This requirement could lead to official embarrassment especially in areas adjacent to the Manchester Ship Canal where men working on its construction, and living in temporary accommodation near to it, were registered as local residents. At Netherpool a fairly large population was registered at the census but it had dispersed by 1894 leaving only one householder to form a Council.

This situation did not occur in Bowdon which was already a Local Board and an Urban Sanitary Authority, with powers delegated from the Cheshire County Council, but when the Local Government Act became law on the 5th March 1894, it was required that as from the appointed day, Urban Sanitary Authorities should be called Urban District Councils and their districts known as Urban Districts and the chairmen of such districts, by virtue of their office, were to become Justices of the Peace in the counties in which their districts were situated.

Consequently as a result of this requirement the Local Board in Bowdon held its last meeting on Friday the 28th December 1894, with Mr H T Gaddum in the chair, and the first meeting of the Bowdon Urban District Council was summonsed by the Clerk, as Returning Officer, on Monday the 31st December following elections on the 15th December when the following candidates were elected:

Joseph Alderle	Samual Walkey Gillett
John Ferguson	James Hall
Henry Theodore Gaddum	Arthur Adlington Howarth
David Senior	Richard Arthur Warburton
Edward John Sidebottom	Frederick George Whittall
Robert Wright Trenbath	

Mr Gaddum was unanimously elected chairman and H W Evason was appointed Clerk of the Council and James Pownall the Surveyor and Inspector of Nuisances.

The first resolution of the new council included a clause "that the fine for non-acceptance or resignation of office by a Councillor be fixed at One Guinea". The Clerk was to be in receipt of a salary of £40 a year and, as the Collector, of a further sum of five per cent of the amount of the General District Rate collected, which usually amounted to £90, members of the Council were to hold office for a full term of three years and the whole of the members had to retire tri-ennially.

The Council were responsible for sewerage and sewage Disposal highways and street lighting; and responsibility for local roads, public seats, allotments and playing fields were later included in its responsibilities; and in 1925 Bowdon joined with Hale to provide a joint fire brigade and ambulance service with a station in Cecil Road, Hale.

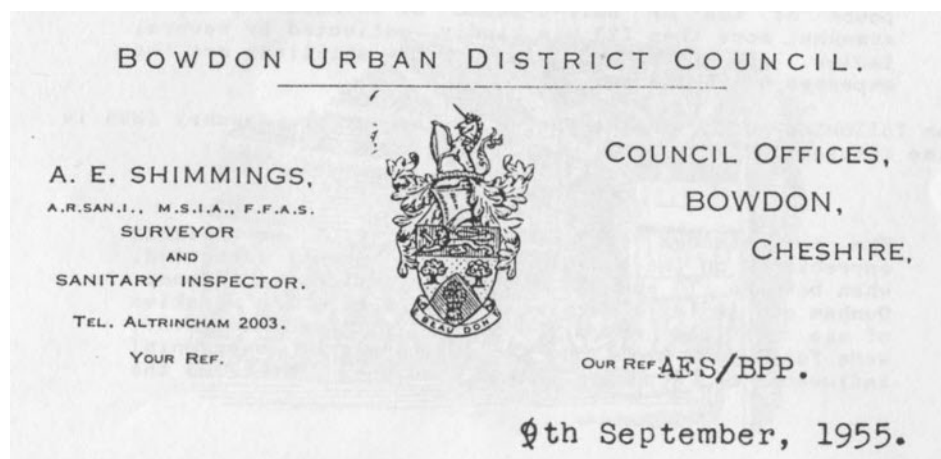
The Councillors were respected local residents, interested in the welfare of the community having served other local interests such as the church, chapels or charities. Obituaries to these men, when they died, give some idea of the sort of people they were. For many years during its existence members of Bowdon Urban District Council sat independently of party politics although they were often leading figures in either of the two parties in private life.

H T Gaddum, a keen supporter of the Liberal Party, married in Aberfoyle in 1899 and set up house in Hale but later moved to the Priory in Bowdon where he lived with his wife, family and several servants. He was a local benefactor and a very benign magistrate who often paid the fines he had imposed if he thought the accused too poor to pay them. A A Howarth not only supported the Liberal Party but later held ministerial office for which he received a baronetcy. He was not well known locally as being a benign magistrate.

The two families were united when Dorothy Gaddum and Geoffrey Howarth (later Sir Geoffrey) were married by the Bishop of Chester, at Bowdon Parish Church, in 1926.

R W Trenbath, in contrast, was a keen supporter of the Conservative Party being Honorary Secretary of the Conservative Council of Exchange Ward in Manchester and also member of the Cheshire Branch. He was president of Bowdon Bowling Club, Trustee for the building of St. Johns Church and first warden to be appointed and served on the Committee of Newtown Night School in Altrincham. His obituary noted that he had "keen interest in the welfare of Bowdon" which he defended with "strenuous and faithful advocacy".

Early boundary changes led to the removal of at least one ward into a neighbouring district council when, during the course of ten years, it was removed from Bowdon, to Dunham, then to Bucklow, and finally to Altrincham, to the consternation of rate payers as the latter charged higher rates than Bowdon.



## **CARE OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED IN THE LATE 19th CENTURY**

Studies of life in 19th Century Bowdon have all too often been focused on the privileged, incoming, nouveaux riches who dominated local services, rather than on the indigenous residents whose lives must have compared very unfavourably with their wealthy neighbours.

The Church organized functions to brighten the lives of these unfortunate parishioners as the following reports, from the Bowdon Parish Magazine for December 1894, illustrate.

### **DINNER FOR THE AGED**

As New Year's Eve fell on Sunday, we had to anticipate the close of '93 by twenty-four hours, and have the annual dinner on Saturday. By half-past two the tables were well-filled, and over 60 guests sat down to enjoy one of Mrs Long's deservedly renowned repasts. Every seat was occupied, and every square inch of standing room was covered by waitresses, so that the scene was an animated one. After the discussion of roast beef and goose, plum pudding and mince pies, the proceedings took the form of a musical entertainment, interspersed with words of wisdom from the Rev. G Birtwell, the Rev. R K Preston, and the Rev. M W Hervey, with a running commentary by the Ven. Archdeacon Gore, who presided, completing, we believe, the majority of Old People's dinners. The musical part of the programme included part songs by some of Mr Thomas' glee club, songs by Miss Simpson, Miss Birtwell, Miss Maude Broadbent, the Rev. A G Child, Dr. Simpson, and Mr Megson, who delighted their audience with strains both grave and gay, sublime and ridiculous. Before leaving the room, Lady Stamford's bounty gave each guest the opportunity of making the important choice between a pound of tea or half-a-pound of tobacco. A sum of somewhat more than £23 was kindly collected by several ladies, and this has within a few shillings met the expenses of the dinner.

The following notice in the Parish Magazine for January 1896 is also interesting:

### **OLD FOLKS' DINNER**

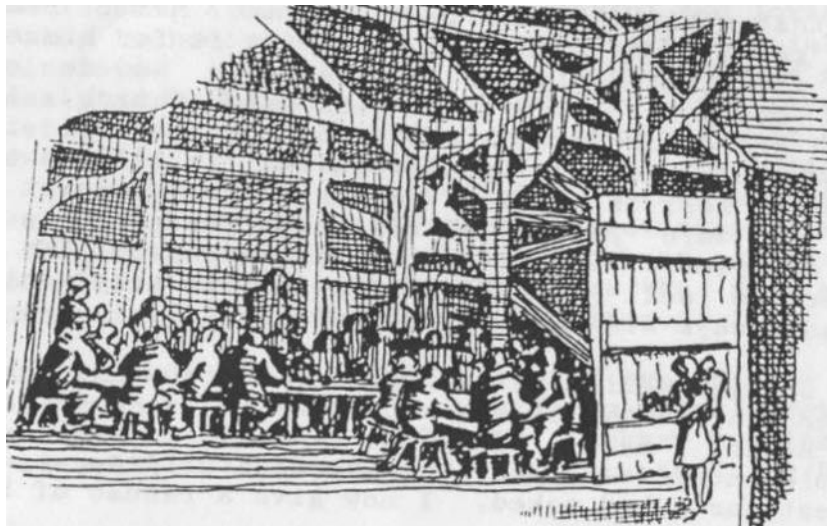
The conveniences of the enlarged room were highly appreciated on the occasion of this annual gathering, when between 70 and 80 old people sat down to dinner. Dunham and Ashley each sent a contingent. The wrinkles of age that had not all come of mirth and laughter, were for awhile smoothed and softened by the genial influences of good fellowship and good fare; and the grandsire, who proverbially "sits in alabaster" (because, poor fellow, he has a certain stiffness about the knees), forgot his aching joints and became a boy once more.

Then followed speeches and music, and witty things were (of course) said and pretty things were sung and played, and the old folks nodded and smiled because they were pleased, and one of them sang - a new song. Then a vote of thanks all round, "God Save the Queen", tea, tobacco, "and so home", according to the well worn formula of friend Pepys.

It would be interesting to know the location of the "enlarged room" referred to. On a more regular basis a Lads' Club was formed which provided instruction on woodcarving, a well patronised gymnasium and a sparsely attended reading room. A Girls' Friendly Society provided cookery lessons, consisting of demonstrations and practical classes, while a Penny Bank encouraged thrift. A Men's Club was organized in Bowdon Vale and many local maiden ladies gave their services as District Visitors.

In December 1896 Mr and Mrs Hampson, of the Gorse, offered two prizes of 15 cwt of coal each, to be completed for in draughts and domino tournaments at the Men's Club, but in the following January the Committee of the Lads' Club had to exert much energy to "take things in hand" and gain "a marked increase in the attendance of the lads, and a decided improvement in their general conduct".

One can recall, many years ago, hearing elderly residents, who were alive at the turn of the century, say that, not surprisingly, these provisions were considered paternalistic and patronising by the rural population, who were inclined to hold their wealthier neighbours in contempt, giving rise to the oft.- quoted remark by workers and tenants on the Stamford Estate that "Our Lord would n'ere dine with a cotton lord".



**Windyridge, Church Brow, Bowdon**  
**by Maurice Ridgway**

To many 'Windyridge' is known as Bowdon Vicarage but it has had an interesting story to tell, for there have been five Vicarages in less than 150 years and Windyridge has been the last. This is not wholly true for one of them was a pro-Vicarage and never belonged to the Church.

The 'Priory' in Bowdon Vale was the first but Archdeacon Pollock moved to the large house in Park Road built about the time of the rebuilding of the Church. When I became Vicar of Bowdon the house had been divided in a quite dreadful manner and when Canon Low came back from the forces he was accommodated in what remained of the house - a flat with a study separated from it. We came to Bowdon and accepted the living as long as I did not have the Vicarage. In the six months no house could be found. The problem was solved by having to purchase my own house! No. 6 Portland Road. The Church Commission refused to acknowledge it "as it was stuccoed" - though it was an admirable house and we had many happy years there. However the Diocesan Authorities kept pestering me "when are you going to supply a Vicarage ? When I find a house suitable" was my reply.

Eventually when boarding school fees had to be met they coincided with "The Beeches" in Heald Road coming on the market which had been owned by the Hensman family, and the Church Council were very willing to help in the purchase of it had every advantage for the Parish - for we were able to help a number of families who were finding it difficult to find "a roof" - and the house was so designed that a division was possible. Even "Paddy" took up residence in the coachman's room. It kept him out of prison and was a very good watchman. Here we had a wonderful family home for the children - and many will remember the very lovely times we had with parishioners in the oak panelled billiards room.

A few years before I was due to retire we had a letter telling us that "the Authorities" would no longer accept it as a Vicarage when my retirement took place. It came as a shock. But almost at the same time I was told by Mr Noel Dethier that he had heard that a house (lived in by Mr and Mrs T Pearce, since 1939) was going to be sold. He had built it for himself and his wife after the first World War - and as they had no children he had always hoped to leave it to his Parish Church. It was next to the west end of the Church and he had designed it in terms of what he thought a Vicarage would require. In 1939 however he had been forced to sell as he required considerable amount of capital to ensure the safe passage of his invention, (he was one of the inventors of Nylon). The house then passed to Mr Tom Pearce who now agreed to sell it to the Parish, if they wanted it. Mr Dethier had always wished this to happen.

I knew Mr Dethier well - he had moved to a house in the Firs and later after the death of his second wife - to the Convent Lodge in Grange Road. I asked him about the house as it was one of considerable interest - and he gave me a written answer to many of the questions I had asked. I now give a resume of his reply.

Windyridge was built with love to give happiness to everyone and to be a permanent 'thank-you' to God Almighty for so many blessings. That is what I feel today as I write this.

In the March of 1918 the German's offensive made the greatest attack of the 1914/18 War in their final effort to break through the British lines to reach the Channel Ports. We in the Manchester's and Lancashire Regiments suffered heavy losses during non-stop attack from March 20th to the end of April.

We were accustomed to heavy shelling but in the March/April fighting we faced several gas attacks of phosgene and mustard gas and I was one of the victims but was very fortunate to recover and rejoin my unit before the War ended.

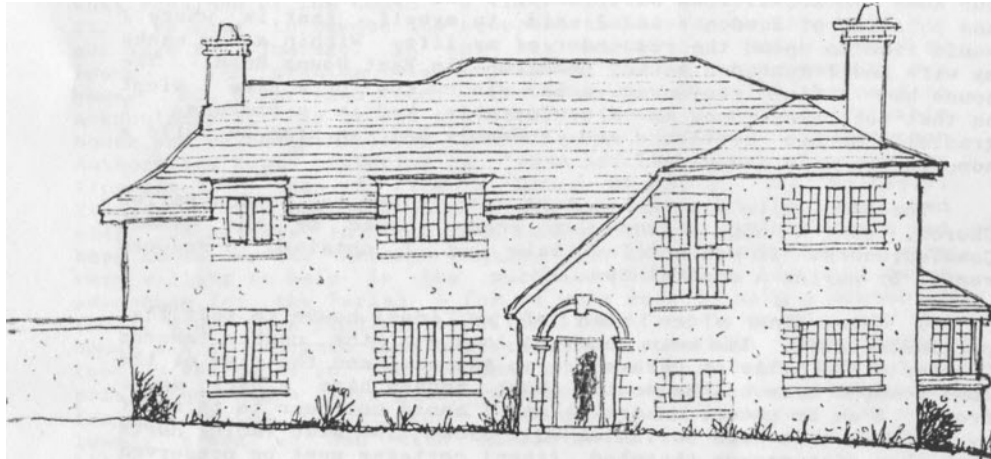
I had several weeks for convalescence and driving one day to our home in Kersal from North Wales I was struck with the beauty and position of Bowdon - and I said to myself, that is where I would like to spend the remainder of my life. Within a few weeks my wife and I rented a house 'Bemerton' in East Downs Road. The house had a flat roof over a bay window and for a time I slept on that not being used to a comfortable bed in a bedroom. I gradually became civilised and suddenly had an urge to build a home for my wife and myself.

The ideal site was near. Just west close to Bowdon Parish Church, on a high ridge of ground owned by the Church Commissioners. It was not for sale but I obtained a reduced rental by paying a capital sum.

I drew plan after plan of my ideal house to suit that particular site. The main rooms to look over the county towards Chester - the hills of Derbyshire on the east and the rise of the land towards Lymm on the west. Most houses have a back and a front. I am by nature an artist and I could not bear to think of my house on that site having an ugly back. The side facing north with the picturesque thatched (then) cottages must be preserved from any unsightliness so the plans I sketched showed an elegant front entrance, lovely stone mullioned windows of the kitchen and scullery and the same for the windows of the smaller rooms on that side of the house. In other words I made the back look like a front Every view from Windyridge was a picture of beauty and godliness. A monument to a wonderful and loving wife and a house worthy to become a Vicarage (which was his intention from the beginning). The lounge and dining rooms and the interior was designed by Liberty's of London and the fireplace of brick and stone was also designed by Liberty's. An elegant and dignified design. The lounge of Liberty's design was perfected by a combination of simplicity, beauty and strength shown by the use of oak on the walls with a great supporting beam of oak across the ceiling. The oak mantelpiece and oak shelf and by the numerous electric candle lighting around the room and the strong metal central fitting of 'candle' lighting.

I must add that it was with a feeling of trepidation when I showed my plans drawn to scale to Mr Brazier a local architect. To my relief he said "this could be built!" I knew nothing about the qualities of brick, stone, slates, timber etc. Mr Brazier did not disappoint me, Windyridge has given pleasure to many people, may it for ever be so". (The oak work was done by Mr Pennington).

This was the house Mr Noel Dethier built. He sold it in 1939 to Mr Tom Pearce whose grandfather taught my father at Rose Hill School, Bowdon between 1892 and 1894, just a century ago



WINDY RIDGE