

# *The Bowdon Sheaf*

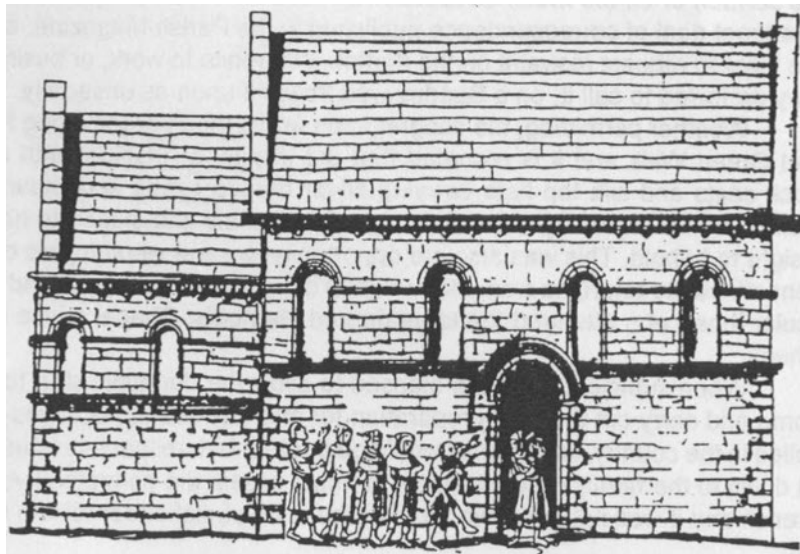
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*Probable appearance of north elevation of  
Bowdon Church in the 12th Century*

## Victorian Sundays in Bowdon

When three local senior citizens met recently the conversation turned to childhood memories of Bowdon prior to the last war, and then led to recalling events recounted to them by their grandparents sixty years prior to that period, with the result that a graphic description of life in late nineteenth century Bowdon was produced and in particular Victorian Sundays of that period.

The Sabbath was strictly observed at that time and followed a very set pattern. Everyone donned their Sunday best and prepared for church. The servants went to Saint John's, headed by the butler in those houses where one was employed, or otherwise by the most senior member of the staff, although it was not unknown for the master or mistress of the household to follow them in a horse drawn carriage and then to proceed to the Parish Church, to join their families for morning service, when he or she was satisfied that the staff were all safely at St. John's.

Families without transport walked to church, mother and father side by side with the children walking in pairs in front, the smallest pair in the lead and taller ones at the back.

After morning service the adult members of the congregation would gather at the Stamford Arms to await the Vicar who would join them in a glass of madeira or sherry. Conversation would be of a social nature or centred on the sermon or on the much discussed form of service, which was the subject of a great deal of correspondence published in the Parish Magazine, causing the vicar to request restraint on the matter. Reference to work, or business as they preferred to call it, on a Sunday was frowned upon as unseemly. Weather permitting, the congregation would then parade along the Firs and Green Walk and it is recorded that the display of fashion, with men in frock coats and silk top hats carrying silver topped canes accompanied by their wives in elegant tight-waisted dresses and coats and elaborate hats was a sight to behold. This was also the opportunity to meet worshippers of other denominations returning from their various churches and chapels, and in particular those who attended the large domed Methodist Chapel (since demolished).

When sufficient time had elapsed to allow the domestic staff to return home and carry out the final preparation for mid-day dinner, as it was always called in the country, each family would go back to their respective houses and sit down to the family meal at which, in many cases, the conversation was in French and it was not unknown for children to be punished for talking in English.

After dinner the younger children attended Sunday School while the more adult ones undertook good works and the parents rested or read books.

Meanwhile the servants washed up and prepared tea prior to evening service. Following this guests were often invited back for supper and an evening discussion, poetry reading or music while the younger children were put to bed and the older ones read improving books.

The evening often ended with the father of the family winding-up the hall clock and checking it against his hunter and then retiring after satisfying himself that the house was secure against intruders.

### **Chester News Sheet**

In the Cheshire Record Office copies of the 18th Century News Sheets are preserved and at times placed on exhibition. These publications, which were printed in Chester, Liverpool and Manchester, were the forerunners of newspapers in Cheshire, and were based upon similar publications produced in Europe following the invention of printing presses.

Printing had been very slow to become established in England and Wales due, in the first instance, to Caxton holding the monopoly on printing which limited its use mainly to Westminster.

To counter this German printers set up presses in other parts of England until the Worshipful Company of Stationers introduced restrictions upon printing in the provinces which were upheld by Star Chamber, with the result that news sheets had to be printed in English in the Netherlands and shipped to this country.

As these publications contained mainly foreign news they were of interest to only a very limited section of the community whose social or business interests had strong connections with Europe.

Illegal presses were often set up here, and proprietors were fined for printing unlawful publications, as the authorities were concerned that they might incite opposition. Cromwell, when he assumed powers of dictatorship, exerted great restrictions on printing to be continued after the Restoration until, with only a brief period of freedom, the end of the 16th century. There were a few limited exceptions to the ban however such as the Oxford and Cambridge University presses, which held privileged positions with the authorities.

Following the end of censorship printers were free to publish, and in 1695 the Stamford Mercury was introduced as a regular news sheet to be followed by similar publications produced in Worcester, Shrewsbury and Liverpool, but they were not always a viable proposition as readership was limited due to widespread illiteracy.

Production was expensive not only because of the initial cost of printing, but there was an application of a 50% tax, with the result that many printers only printed news sheets when there was a shortage of work.

In 1712 Edward Ince set up a press in Chester, and realizing a great potential for printed matter in Wales began printing in Welsh, as well as in English, and a similar press in Shrewsbury developed a flourishing trade in Welsh publications.

In 1721 William Cook started printing the Chester Weekly Tatler having been previously fined £10 for printing without permission, and in 1730 Roger Adams produced a weekly journal in Chester and Manchester which developed a wide following throughout Cheshire.

Little is known about Adams' origin but it is known that he married the daughter of a Chester chemist and had a large family, who joined his printing business, although they often had long periods of disagreement. He was however eventually made a freeman of the City. One of his sons walked from Chester to London at the age of 87 and eventually died in Chester in his nineties.

These news sheets now have an artistic appeal due to their rustic simplicity, and are often used for decoration. Many of the early sheets had interesting advertisements for the sale of property, and timber from woodlands. News Sheets developed into newspapers and later diversified into national and local newspapers when education became more universal, and wider literacy followed.

Political factions produced news sheets, and papers were edited to favour their own particular policies and often contained cartoons depicting public figures (such as the Prince Regent) in unfavourable poses. Victorian morality and prudery however brought improvements to the standard of journalism for a long period of time, although the practice of manipulating public opinion gradually returned.

The tax on papers continued however, and in the 19th century Heywood, the Manchester newsagent, went to prison rather than collect the tax payable on the newspapers he sold. Queen Victoria refused to visit the city after he became mayor until she "forgave" Mancunians when they erected the monument to Prince Albert in front of the town hall. The fight for the right to print and publish in the early period was hard won, and it is distressing that current abuse of the right is now leading readers to wish for freedom from the press rather than the freedom of the press.

## Scouting at Dunham Park

Scouting started in the local area in 1908-9, when Dr Vernon Stocks and his brother, Arnold, formed the first Hale Troop and at the same time, Mr T. Plant, having read about the proposal in a Scouting Magazine, by popular request, formed the 1st Broadheath Troop. Further troops were formed, including the 1st. Bowdon, known as 'the Earl of Stamford's Own Troop'. In 1922, the first mass gathering of Scouts, the Prince of Wales Rally, took place in the grounds of the Crystal Palace. Cubs and Scouts from 1st. Bowdon took part and joined the march past and salute to the Prince and the Chief Scout, Lord Baden Powell.

During the 1920's, the 1st. Bowdon, together with 6th Altrincham, spent many weekend camps in Dunham Home Park. The south side of the drive was allocated as the summer Camp Site with a good number of bell tents set up on a permanent basis, this being a special gift from the Earl to his 1st Bowdon Troop, the 'Earl's Own Troop'. From 1922, the north side of the drive was used by the S.E. Lane's. Scouts and Rovers for Woodcraft activities and Wood Badge Training Courses, a peppercorn rent being charged for its use. Each year such courses and Rover Meets were held on five weekends with attendances of over 400 each time. The administration for such gatherings was taken over by 1st. Hale Troop.

Twenty one years after the founding of the Scouting movement, in 1929, a celebration was organised in the form of the first World Jamboree, which took place at Birkenhead; the venue being the largest public park in England, Arrowe Park; again a contingent of local Scouts attended, including members of 1st. Bowdon. Fifteen thousand Scouts attended from this country and a similar number from the Dominions and foreign countries. Altogether forty two countries were represented.

Nearer home in 1929, a Scout building was opened at the Scout Camp Site which had been set up in Dunham Park by the S.E. Lancashire Scouts for their Wood Badge training courses involving potential Scout leaders from the Lancashire and Cheshire area. Lord Stamford was a keen supporter of the Scouting movement and indeed, was the area's first President. On many occasions, when he had guests at the Hall, he would request that he bring them round the camp and have afternoon tea. On more than one occasion, Baden Powell would be a special guest and it would have been of great interest to him to see the Rover one man tents pitched as part of the Wood Badge Training Course. It was after one such visit, that the local Scouts wrote to him, requesting a Woodcraft Training area for his own Altrincham Association. Again, Lord Stamford released some land for a training area at a peppercorn rent. The wood between the canal and the park was allocated for woodcraft, a field

at the edge of the River Bollin for bridge building and swimming, while canoeing and camping took place in a private area adjoining the canal. Unfortunately this happy arrangement came to an end just a year later when the canal burst its banks and flooded the camp site. It took the canal company nearly two years to repair the damage and because the rebuilding involved narrowing the canal, canoeing became impossible. Since the estate was bequeathed to the National Trust, a similar cooperation has existed between themselves and the Scouting Movement, enabling camping to continue at the Park.

*Information supplied by Arthur T Hilliker of Hale*

## **The late Dr John Wilkinson**

Dr John Wilkinson the eminent haematologist, venerated for his pioneer work, who died on the 13th August 1998, at the age of 101, will be remembered for entertaining members of Bowdon History Society at his home, Mobberley Old Hall, when he shewed them, among other items of interest, his white peacocks and black swans. The highlight of the visit however was the reconstructed 16th Century apothecary shop, which he had assembled over a period of 80 years, and which was housed in a windowless, securely constructed outbuilding with a bank vault door, to fulfil insurance requirements, as the collection was valued at over a million pounds.

The traditional dragon (a stuffed alligator) hung from the ceiling over the centrally placed bench on which brass and earthenware pestles and mortars, weighing scales, porcelain leech containers and brass pill making boards were placed. Around the walls shelves held dozens of porcelain Delft apothecary jars decorated in colourful floral patterns with the contents of each marked on them in Latin, using florid gothic lettering and many of them still containing the herbs or drugs they were made to contain. Highly polished drawers provided space for further substances.

Many members of the party were surprised when Dr Wilkinson shewed them the leech container and said that their use for drawing blood away from swellings or injuries was painless and far more pleasant than other methods of drawing blood and that the practice had been reintroduced into contemporary medicine. He then demonstrated the original method of making pills. The ingredients were mixed together to form a dough-like substance which was rolled onto a brass grating attached to a board. This was then left to harden after which the grating was removed leaving the newly formed pills, which were then coated with gold dust for the more affluent and important patients, with icing sugar for the less rich and left untreated for the poor. Dr Wilkinson then gave a very interesting talk on the history of medicine explaining that early pharmacy was based on herbal remedies developed in monastic establishments and continued by herbalists after the Reformation, but lack of knowledge led to quackery and Charles II encouraged a more serious approach to the subject.

The Worshipful Company of Apothecaries was given Royal approval and the Apothecaries Hall became the centre of medical life with the introduction of apprenticeship and examinations and candidates, who satisfied the requirements of the profession, were given porcelain plates inscribed to indicate that the owners were qualified to practice medicine. Metal plates were later substituted for porcelain ones to be forerunners of professional plates today. Physick gardens were established where herbs and plants were grown to supply the profession with ingredients for medicines, and Chelsea, the most famous of them, is still functioning.

From this period the physicians' profession developed and the practitioners assumed the title of 'doctor' to cause confusion to visitors from abroad who reserved the name for academics from the Latin 'docere' to teach. Such surgery which was performed at that period was carried out by barbers, who displayed red and white poles outside their shops to indicate that they were surgeon-barbers, but they also were encouraged to adopt more scientific approaches to their discipline and enforce high standards and regulations. They however retained the title of 'mister' to differentiate between the two branches of medicine.

Apothecary shops flourished in all the larger towns and people alive today can remember their grandparents describing visits to these shops when they were children in the 19th century. The Renshaw family practised medicine from their house in the Old Market Place in Altrincham for many generations, and when Dr Willy Renshaw, the last of the family, died after the last war, the house was altered and human bones were found buried in the garden. At the inquest, following the discovery, the Coroner decided that they came from anatomy studies carried out by the apprentices of early members of the family. Canon Ridgway, in an article, described how grave robbers were reputed to steal newly buried bodies from graves in Bowdon Church Yard and recounted an amusing story about a live man being sold to a doctor when a suitable corpse was unavailable. This account was retold in a previous issue of the Bowdon Sheaf.



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