

The Bowdon Sheaf

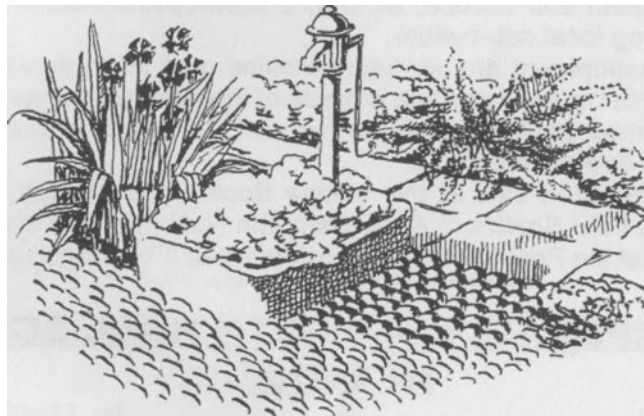
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Pump, Bow Green, recently restored.

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The Millennium

This issue of the Bowdon Sheaf will be the last one to be published in the Twentieth Century, as well as being the last one to be published in the Second Millennium, and it also marks the Twentieth Anniversary of the founding of the Bowdon History Society in 1979. To celebrate these events the Society has published an illustrated book covering the development of Bowdon and Dunham Massey from AD 1000 to AD 2000, entitled "Images of England - Bowdon & Dunham Massey".

The more wealthy residents of large conurbations have always tended to congregate in the most salubrious areas, to produce affluent suburbs, but Bowdon is different as it developed as an independent, self governing dormitory town, following the sale of land by Thomas Assheton-Smith for residential development, taking the romantic name Rose Hill.

The move was not welcomed by other land-owners who steadfastly refused to release land for building south of the River Mersey, to keep it free from the Cottontots, as they derisively named the industrialists from the north. Disagreement however between the 7th Earl of Stamford and the Parish caused him to live on his other estates, and he realized that the construction of the railway, between Altrincham and the industrial area, known as Cottonopolis, would raise the value of his land for use in high class residential development.

This development was undertaken mainly between the middle and end of the Nineteenth Century in accordance with a well conceived master plan, centred on the new St. Margaret's Church, and encouraged Cottontots, from all parts of Britain and Europe, to form a cosmopolitan community and to develop a strong local sub-culture.

This development and its future decline, and later revival by technocrats, is traced in the book and use is made of the numerous pictures, taken by early local pioneer photographers, to recreate the image of the area during every stage of development.

The book is on sale at the Village Book Shop, Ashley Road, Hale; Waterstones & W H Smith's in Altrincham; the National Trust Shop, Dunham Massey Hall & at the Post Offices in Stamford Road & Vicarage Lane, Bowdon.

A GLIMPSE OF CULCHETH HALL SCHOOL IN 1908¹ by Stephen Matthews

Culcheth Hall School in Altrincham has a long history, being one of the few in the area to have survived from the nineteenth century. It was founded by the two Miss Lang sisters, became a company in the 1920s after the death of one and the retirement of the other, and it is as a charity and a company limited by guarantee that it operates to this day.

The extract comes from one of two notebooks² kept by a Surveyor of Income Tax in the years before the first World War and it will be helpful to explain how the system then operated as that will show how the details came to be preserved.

The Surveyor was the predecessor of the present day Inspector and his responsibility was to check Returns and advise the local Commissioners about the assessments to be made. A Return of Income had to be made, as now but it was not the custom to produce accounts in support, nor was there any obligation to keep records; the Surveyor called for evidence either at random or if he was suspicious, and if he was not satisfied any dispute could well end up before the General Commissioners.

The Langs must have submitted their return in the usual way without accounts, for if they had been supplied at the start they would have been filed with the return and destroyed within a few years. For a reason which we cannot now establish, the Surveyor asked for more information. With a speed that characterises all the exchanges recorded in this and the other notebook, it was supplied within a week. We do not know what he received but it must have been less than a full set of accounts for he copied the main figures into his notebook before recording that he was satisfied that the Lang's Return was correct. The result was that the details were preserved, for the Surveyor's notebook had a greater permanence than Returns and correspondence, in departmental practice they were not to be destroyed until 30 years after the last entry. Even so, they should have been destroyed in the 1940s and their survival is quite remarkable,

The school seems to have been profitable, for the two sisters returned an average income of £834. Whilst that had to provide for the two of them it compares favourably with an assessment on £400 for a surgeon in the Downs (determined by the Commissioners on appeal), £345 and £250 for two dentists and £520 on a Surgeon, all in Hale.

At that time an Assessment was based upon the average of three years' profits, hence the total and division shown in the notebook. Having made that calculation the Surveyor recorded the deductions that had been made in arriving at the profit. As the sisters lived on the premises a deduction had to be made from the overhead expenses to allow for personal occupation, Then, as it often is now, this was an arbitrary figure, 1/3 of the total, which probably bore little relation to fact but was simply an approximation accepted by both sides. Other deductions were predictable; rent of the playing field, printing, postage and the hire of a hall for Speech Day. Miss Kendrick³ tells me that in the 1930s the school used the Bowdon Assembly Rooms and it was quite possible that the then newly built and fashionable Rooms were also used in 1908. The school paid teachers' salaries, despite the placing of the apostrophe the "salaries" is clearly plural, and deducted the cost of one maid's wages. The grammar suggests that there was another maid who had nothing to do with the school but it may be that in practice several shared the school and domestic duties. Finally there was the cost of school housekeeping though it must have been difficult to keep school and private costs separate. One puzzle is the deduction for 2/3 of the rent, for according to Miss Kendrick, the Langs owned the building. They may have paid a chief rent which would be a proportionately heavier charge than now, or the deduction may have been the notional annual value under Schedule A, which readers may remember in another form, the rateable value.

The Surveyor's notes give us a tantalising glimpse of the finances of the school in 1908 and its place in the economy of Bowdon. Whilst wishing that he had recorded rather more we must be grateful for what we have, for this notebook should have been thrown away in the early 1940s. Strictly we should have nothing at all.

1 The material is reproduced with the kind permission of the School Governors as well as the Inland Revenue. The views expressed are those of the author and not the Inland Revenue.

2 The Surveyor kept a summary of his enquiries in a series of numbered note-books. Compared with modern records they are very slender, measuring 7" x 4 3/4" with 44 folios, six index pages and a spare folio at the back.

3 M Kendrick: Schools in Victorian Bowdon. (1998).

PARISH, WARD, } OR PLACE }		Bowdon				27	
No. of Assess- ment (if any)	Name	Address, Trade, &c	Year Subsided	Annual Value or Rents	Date of Enquiry	Notes of Inspection or Enquiry	Result of Enquiry
180	Misses Long	School	1908		1909	for part as to return Return City	
					1906	889	
					1907	522	
					1908	789	
						<u>2200</u>	
						834	
						Expenses conducted in arriving at above are 1/2 rent & rate, gas, electric light & water, rent of playing field, printing, postage, fuel & heat for heat day, heat in Salaris & one pack's wages, school house keeping	

GEORGE ARTHUR PICKARD of Race Hill, Chester Road.
by his grandson - Tom Pickard.

George Arthur Pickard was born in 1850, the eldest son of George Pickard of Mansfield, who from humble origins had made a great success of a wholesale grocery business, to become Mayor of Mansfield, an Alderman of Nottinghamshire County Council, and the owner of a fine property on the edge of Mansfield, Crow Hill House. The family were Quakers, and Arthur was educated at Ackworth School near Pontefract, and then for a year at Bootham School, York. During his last year at Ackworth, in 1865, his mother, daughter of a family of farmers in County Durham, died, and at the end of 1866 Arthur came home and began work in the family business in Mansfield. There he remained for thirty years, together with two of his younger brothers. The third brother, Edgar, was a keen engineer and technician, and in 1888, at the age of twenty-five, he set himself up in partnership with a Mr. J.E.Thornton to produce photographic apparatus. The firm, called The Thornton-Pickard Manufacturing Company Ltd., moved in 1892 from its original premises in Manchester to a purpose-built factory in Atlantic Street, Broadheath, the frontage of which still stands (opposite B & Q: now occupied by Broadprint Ltd.), although the business closed down in 1939. Sadly, Edgar died after a short illness in March, 1897, and it was Arthur, the eldest son, who decided to move from Mansfield to Altrincham to take Edgar's place at Thornton-Pickard.

Arthur had married in 1881 Jane Carr Wright, daughter of Isaac Wright of Bolton and his wife Christiana, younger sister of John Dodgson Carr of Carlisle, founder of the biscuit firm. Arthur and Janie had one son, Arthur Gray, my father, born in 1882 (Mayor of Altrincham, 1928). On moving across the Pennines to Cheshire, they lived first in Hale, at a house in Hale Road called "Skeffington". But in 1905, after old George Pickard's death, they moved to "Race Hill", a large house a short distance out of Altrincham along the Chester Road, and there they remained until the end of the Great War, moving finally, via a short stay at Bowdon Hydro, to the Ashley end of South Downs Road, Hale, where Arthur died in September, 1919.

Unfortunately Arthur and Mr.Thornton did not get on - indeed Edgar had already found Thornton a difficult partner - and Thornton left the firm in 1898. Arthur suffered much from ill-health, and spent two long spells in South Africa during the 1880s in search of a cure, but to little avail. He was away from work for three months in 1900, again in 1903, when Gray had to leave Manchester University without taking his degree in order to come home to look after Thornton-Pickards and for six months in 1909 he suffered from pneumonia. Nevertheless under Arthur's management Thornton-Pickard flourished, to become one of the best known British makers of shutters, as well as of the splendid mahogany and brass stand cameras which today's collectors prize. They manufactured the Hythe Gun Camera for training aircrew in aerial combat during the war, also the Type 'A' Camera, the first official Royal Flying Corps camera designed for oblique aerial photography. The type 'A' was designed in collaboration with Colonel Trenchard (later Lord) and Lieutenant Moore-Brabazon (later Lord Brabazon of Tara) and after the first meeting in London between Moore-Brabazon and R. Hesketh (T-P's company secretary who lived in Westgate, Hale) a prototype was produced and rushed to France within eight days.

Arthur's great love was fly-fishing for trout. He and Gray - and I myself, briefly - fished the Birkin, but it was the Derbyshire Wye that drew Arthur, year after year, to the Peacock Hotel at Rowsley for weeks at a time. Also he fished the Axe in East Devon every spring until 1917, staying a month at Seaton. His fishing diaries are a wonderful record of immense numbers of trout caught, and in addition contain notes of public events - the death of the King (Edward VII) in 1910, the loss of "Titanic" in 1912, as well of course as the outbreak of war in 1914. Travel between Bowdon and Seaton was inevitably by train, until in 1912 Arthur acquired a Wolseley motor car, which was still on the road as late as 1927. In 1912 from Bowdon to Seaton by car was an eighteen hour journey, split over two days, and it was a matter for congratulation that there was no puncture. But the stately progress enabled Arthur to enjoy the scenery, and he writes enthusiastically about the state of the blossom on the fruit trees en route - such observations an unlikely adjunct to driving down M6 and M5! The car, which I remember vividly, had a gravity feed from the rear petrol tank to the carburettor, and when the car went up a steep hill the driver had to reach down with his left hand below the dashboard to operate a manual fuel pump, keeping his right hand meanwhile on the steering-wheel and hoping nothing was coming in the opposite direction!

Everyone who knew him, with few exceptions, always spoke of Arthur as an exceptionally kind and gentle character, including many of his employees; at his funeral, his coffin was accompanied on foot by a large deputation from the work force all the way from South Downs Road to the cemetery at Timperley. Unfortunately, although he wrote an excellent account of his father's life and work in Mansfield, he left little about himself. His poor health prevented him from indulging in public activity, in the manner of his father or of his son, although probably he was of a more retiring disposition than they, and preferred a more private life. Since he died just before my own second birthday, I have no recollection of him. But occasional glimpses can be had of life at Race Hill in his time, and there seems to have been plenty of entertainment and fun among the younger set, witness the following extract from a letter written many years after the event to my father by one of his many female first cousins:

"During 1910 and 1911 we lived in Altrincham and I was often at Race Hill where Uncle Arthur and Aunt Janie were always so kind and welcoming. Gray and I went skating, riding and dancing together. He was the perfect escort! I also remember a few dancing enthusiasts prancing up and down Race Hill drawing-room to the tune of "It's a Bear, It's a Bear, It's a Bear" and "Alexander's Ragtime Band". Do you remember, Gray? And how you sat at the piano and sang "The Sea hath its Pearls" while we sat around and recovered our breath."

If there are ghosts at Race Hill, then it seems to me they ought to be very jolly.

Although my home was in South Downs Road, Hale until I got married in 1946, and my father often pointed out Race Hill to me, I never stepped inside it or even walked round the outside. There are as far as I know no photographs of the house or garden as it was early this century. Plenty of photographs of Arthur survive, but perhaps the most typical is the one of him, taken almost certainly by J.E.Thornton, when on the point of netting a trout on the Wye.

Arthur took his responsibilities as a business man very seriously, and actually committed to paper his thoughts on "Business Ethics". Amid a good deal that is optimistic, he nevertheless reached a very proper conclusion, what he called the "Golden Rule"-when contemplating a course of action, ask yourself "Would I like anyone to do this to me?" Not a bad rule for living.

THE ALTRINCHAM & DISTRICT WAR HOSPITAL SUPPLY DEPOT
by Douglas Rendell.

On 1st June 1917 the Altrincham Guardian reported that the depot "has more work before it than it can accomplish without the wholehearted support of every individual worker. An urgent appeal has come in from an Italian hospital which is directly in the fighting area and which is most terribly in need of immediate supplies. This appeal which ought to be answered by return, will be obliged, owing to pressure of work, to wait at least two weeks before it can adequately be attended to. The regrettable delay would not be necessary if the depot had been able to accumulate stocks upon which it could draw on an occasion of this kind. Will all workers see if they cannot give just a little more time to the depot so that the wounded may not have to wait an instant more than is absolutely necessary for the supplies they are badly in need of. The urgent needs for next week's work are thin red blankets (singles) for the operating theatre, bandage cloth and hospital gauze."

Within the next two weeks 13 bales containing 4,551 articles were sent to the Italian hospital.

On 8th June 1917 the Guardian reported that the depot "is working this week for St. John's Hospital, Etables, under the command of Colonel Charles Trimble RAMC. This hospital is a very large one and the order for it is correspondingly heavy and will be quite impossible to accomplish unless all workers make up their minds to give every spare minute they can to the depot. As Etables is on the coast of France an enormous proportion of our wounded pass through St. John's Hospital on the way home. Thus the hospital is in constant need of fresh supplies of dressings and clothes to replace those which are taken away by the men who are fit to continue their journey to England. It is a great pleasure to the Altrincham Depot and its guilds to be privileged to help this magnificent hospital which has the reputation of being the finest institution of its kind in France." There was a further appeal for grey calico (thick and thin), gauze, old blankets towels and linen, white natural or pink wool for blanket stitching.

In one week in June, 45 bales were dispatched containing 14,486 articles. On 22nd June 1917 it was reported that the depot had been running for just over 18 months. The organiser, Lady Haworth, was at West Hill.

On 29th June 1917 it was noted that "The authorities are delighted to be able to announce that an evening of great enjoyment lies in front of all workers and friends. Mr. Hilaire Belloc, the celebrated lecturer, has kindly consented to lecture on the war for the benefit of depot funds. This lecture will be illustrated by a unique kinema film of the recent fighting which has been given to Mr. Belloc by the French War Office. The entertainment will take place on 12th July. At the conclusion of Mr. Belloc's lecture a film will be shown of the depot at work. This film should be particularly interesting to all depot workers and their friends as it will give a comprehensive idea of the many activities which are undertaken at West Hill and Kirk Lee."

The 'entertainment' took place at the Altrincham Picture Theatre (on the site of Station House). The depot film was made by Ronald Gow (Bowdon Sheaf No 22 October 1993) and his friend James Horley (later to become a well-known local coal merchant) with a small 35mm hand-turned camera. Because of a shortage of film the camera handle was turned slowly, resulting in the speeding up of the action when projected.

Recollecting the event at the cinema 60 years later, Ronald Gow wrote 'I was standing beside the large Hilaire Belloc. He had just joined in singing the National Anthems - with special emphasis for the Marseillaise - in a deep bass voice. That night they were showing the first official French war film, but ours came on first. "Ha, what's this? A little local effort, I suppose..." But he grunted approval and I felt I had rubbed shoulders with the mighty.'

The reel of film was presented to the local council and came to light in Altrincham Library in the late 1970s.

The views and material published in the Bowdon Sheaf do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor! or of the Bowdon History Society.

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