

# *The Bowdon Sheaf*

A BOWDON HISTORY SOCIETY PUBLICATION

No 41 February 2003

80p (1.3 €)

## Contents:

Canon Maurice Ridgway BA, FSA.

'Old Sir George' Booth & the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury by Marjorie Cox.

Thoughts on some Bowdon Field-Names by Marjorie Cox.

The Origins of the Mothers' Union in Bowdon by Maurice Ridgway.



ISSN-0265-816X

## **Canon Maurice Ridgway BA FSA**

Members of Bowdon History Society will be saddened by the death of Canon Maurice Ridgway on the 20th December at the age of 84. As a founder member of the Society he was temporary chairman until the first meeting when he handed over the office to Marjorie Cox.

Born into a clerical family in Stockport, where his father was vicar, he later attended King's School, Chester, when his father was appointed vicar of Tarvin. From here he went to St David's College, Lampeter, to train for Holy Orders which he completed at Cambridge, to be ordained at Chester Cathedral in 1941.

As an historian and antiquary Maurice had a great interest in silver and he became a noted authority on Chester silver, resulting in the opening of the Ridgway Gallery at the Grosvenor Museum and his portrait being put on permanent display. He was also an authority on Mediaeval rood screens and was awarded the prestigious Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries for his work in this field.

The Ridgway family had long associations with Bowdon, his grandfather having attended Rose Hill High School as a small boy. On his appointment as vicar of Bowdon in 1962, Maurice realized the importance of local history in the life of a community with a rich heritage, and in 1979 he set about forming a history society with local enthusiasts.

Fearful that academic influences could defeat the objects of the Society, he was insistent that articles in The Bowdon Sheaf and talks at the Society meetings should be on a popular level. As a member of the Committee he enlivened the meetings with his great sense of humour, and he inspired all who attended with his dedication to the work of the Society, as he did in all matters in which he was involved, sometimes taking stands on issues in the face of popular opinion if he considered that the occasions demanded it.

Early in his career, Maurice was made responsible by the Church for the welfare of vagrants, and he often retold his experiences, which would have made an interesting book if he had recorded them, including instruction on the method of making leather shoe laces from old boots and other details of their way of life.

Maurice's many articles on local subjects, which have appeared regularly in The Bowdon Sheaf, helped to attract the large readership that has grown during the last 25 years. He was widely respected by parishioners, including those from other denominations and religions.

**'Old Sir George' Booth and the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury**  
**by Marjorie Cox**

Sir George Booth of Dunham Massey (1566-1652) figures in histories of Cheshire as a pattern of the Cheshire gentry: 'free, grave, godly, brave Booth, the flower of Cheshire'. He was a pillar of the county community, which consisted of numerous inter-related gentry, with no dominant member of the nobility. Although his lands were less extensive than those of some other gentry, Booth's lengthy headship of the Commission of the Peace and his status as a survivor from the reign of Elizabeth I, a reign which became legendary under the early Stuarts, gained him great respect and influence.

Sir George appears in a somewhat different context in the Advice sent by William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle to the future Charles II shortly before the Restoration, while both were still in exile. The lengthy letter lists ways for the future king to maintain the monarchy. The extract concerning Sir George Booth appears in *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* by Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, by whose kind permission it is reproduced here.

Newcastle (1592-1676), a man of wide interests, had been Governor of Charles, Prince of Wales from 1638, when his charge was eight, to 1641 and remained a respected friend. His advice was based partly on deductions which he drew from his memories of the smooth running of government under James I. As the authors comment, 'there is a good deal of romantic nostalgia in this account of the relationship that linked King James I, the Earl of Shrewsbury and Sir George Booth'. None the less, there is much of interest in Newcastle's description of the old ways, whereby the network of a hierarchical society effortlessly supported royal authority. Arguing for Charles's need to 'keepe upp your Nobility and Gentry' and to maintain order and ceremony, Newcastle recalled the following incident:-

In my time, Gilbert, that great Earle of Shrewsbury whoe was a wise man, had a gentle soule, a Loyall, - at a St Georges feaste, I have knowne Sir Georg booth a Cheshire knight And of six, or seaven thousand pound, a yeare, weare my Lord of Shrewsburys blew Coate on St Georges Day, - as also Sir Vinsent Corbett, whose brother had 10,000 a year, & after the death of His brother, hee had 4 or 5000 a yeare, & hee wore my Lords blew Coate ... butt the nexte day they satt both at my Lords table nexte to him, & nothing butt good Coosen Corbett & good Coosen booth, & they were very wise in itt, for thus they did oblige my Lord, to bee their servant all the yeare After, with his power to serve them, both in Courte and Westminster Hall, [location of the central courts of justice] and to bee their solister [solicitor]\* - agen my Lord had no business in the Country, but they did itt for him, - & then the King had an Easey busines, for whatsoever busines his Majestie had in any County in England, or in all England, itt was but speaking to Shewsbury, or Darby, & such great men, itt was Done with Ease & subilety ... & what doth itt coste your Majestie, a blew Riban, a privey Counsellor shipp, or such offices as your Majestie cannot bestow better, then uppon such great men ... then all their kinderred, freinds, dependances, servants tenantes, are well pleased, & your Majestie safe.

This description of 'clientage' and the chain of influence and obligation is vivid and compelling, but the origin of the connection between Sir George and the Earl, who died in 1616, is as yet unclear. The term 'cousin' may not be as significant as it appears to us; its use then was looser, covering more distant kinship, and even just as a term of friendship or familiarity.

However, there is no doubt as to why Newcastle mentions Gilbert Talbot, 7th Earl of Shrewsbury twice, as a pattern of the old nobility. Newcastle's father, Sir Charles Cavendish of Welbeck was the youngest son of Sir William Cavendish of Chatsworth (later 1st Earl of Devonshire) and 'Bess of Hardwick'. After Sir William's death, 'Bess' married twice more, and her fourth husband was George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. She was thus the grandmother of Newcastle and the step-mother (and Subsequently mother-in-law) of Gilbert Talbot. As young men, Newcastle's father and Gilbert Talbot travelled together on the continent and remained life-long friends, and it was from Gilbert Talbot that Charles Cavendish acquired Bolsover, a mediaeval keep, and began his own building. Newcastle himself made splendid additions - a Gallery and Reception rooms, where he entertained Charles I and Henrietta Maria in 1634 with a masque by Ben Jonson called 'Love's Welcome to Bolsover' and, as those of you who have visited Bolsover will recall, the Riding School, built to satisfy his passion for horses. He was the author of two books on horsemanship, one of which has illustrations showing horses being schooled in front of his various houses, including Bolsover.

It is therefore no wonder that Gilbert Talbot bulked large in Newcastle's youthful memories, and there is no reason to doubt his account relating to Sir George Booth, even if its significance is puzzling.

\* in the general sense of 'one who solicits'

Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes: *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (1994)  
Mark Girouard: *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House* (1983)

### **Thoughts on some Bowdon Field Names** **by Marjorie Cox**

There is a danger that the Tithe Map of 1838 can be seen as the tablets of stone on which the names of fields from time immemorial were graven. It is true that some names have a long continuous history: some were recorded in the 16th century and one as early as the 13th, but some names disappear and others drop out of formal use. The Parliamentary Commissioners in 1654 noted names of fields in the vicarial glebe not recorded elsewhere. One is 'Sir Ralphe's Croft abutting south upon the river Bollen'; possibly the 'Sir' was not a knightly title, but the clerical title of a former Vicar. Another was a close called 'The Huggle'; although this does not seem to be found elsewhere, and certainly not on the Tithe Map, it remained in local memory as late as 1882. In that year a correspondent wrote to The Cheshire Sheaf, fearing that the name would be lost to memory and re-appear as 'Smithville, Rose Lodge, Grass Lea or some other fashionable but meaningless and inappropriate name'.

Another name in the 1654 Survey is 'the two seller feilds', which became in the Tithe Map 'Cellar Field', giving rise to speculation about its meaning. It would seem, from the history of the carving of the Vicar's glebe out of the total land originally given to the Priory of Birkenhead, that this name probably goes back to the period between 1150 and 1284, when the Priory was the sole owner. A comparable field-name near Chester is given in J McN Dodgson The Place-Names of Cheshire, Part V, Section li, pp 130 and 74. This is 'the two Sellars Meadowes' (1662), 'Cellerers Medowe' (1539-47 and 1579), both meaning land for the use of the cellarer of Chester Abbey, the monastic officer in charge of the cellar and provisions. Presumably the 'seller feilds' in Bowdon were for the use of the 'cellarer' of Birkenhead Priory, until they were transferred by the Bishop to the Vicar.

### **The Origins of the Mothers' Union in Bowdon** **by Maurice Ridgway**

Apart from the photographs of my baby days (of which as in so many homes there are a great many!), one of the earliest is of myself taken in about 1920 sandwiched between a Mrs Currie and a Mrs Scarlett, and surrounded by many dozen 'Mothers' on the steps of Portwood Vicarage, Stockport, where my father was the Vicar of St Paul's. The Church and Vicarage have since disappeared. The Church and its surrounding graveyard (where my grandparents are buried) now desecrated and used as a children's playground, and the Vicarage built over by a housing estate. But the group was started by my mother during the First World War as 'The Women's Help Society' or the WHS. It contained many widows including Mrs Currie, whose married life lasted three days, and her husband's body is among the unknown.

So I kept good company and it was an official link with Parish life, and as I celebrate my 60 years as a priest this year, I feel I could speak with some sort of authority! So let me say something about 'Bowdon Mothers'.

The Reverend William Pollock, later Archdeacon of Macclesfield, became Vicar of Bowdon in 1856. He succeeded the Reverend William Galfridus Mann who was the last to occupy the Old Vicarage (The Priory) for he was an exceedingly active gentleman, and almost immediately set about drawing up plans for a new Vicarage and a new Church. The work was begun in 1858, a Vicarage suitable for a Bishop and a Church like a Cathedral.

Hand in hand with this activity went a great sense of caring and mission for the expanding community. Bowdon Vale as a community came into existence about this time, and the Hill was also providing vast residences for the Manchester merchants. The Reverend Mann cared also for the vast number of servants and others who made their livelihood by serving them. The Vale became known as Soapy Town from the lines of washing which decorated the tiny gardens. The Vicar also in keeping with the times set up a Penny Bank and House Meetings throughout the Parish, which embraced Altrincham, Hale, Ashley and Dunham, and it is in this period that we have to find the roots of what was to evolve as the Mothers' Union.

I do not think it is an idle boast to say that what Mary Sumner had in mind when she drew together for the first time the mothers of her husband's parish to the Vicarage in 1876, had already taken place in Bowdon certainly in 1873, three years before. Unfortunately details are hard to come by, for we have only what is called Bowdon Parochial Magazine to go by, and this appeared in 1873. It was launched by Bishop Alford who came to live in Bowdon from China! His presence in the Parish added to the five other curates. Bowdon Parish had, in 1841, a population of 549 and 115 houses. In 2002 we have a population of 6000 and about 2000 houses. Times have changed, Clergy strength has increased in inverse proportion!

We find therefore a year before Mary Sumner called together her mothers at the Vicarage, Bowdon having an already old-established Mothers' Meeting held at Peel Causeway (as well as a Penny Bank) under a Miss Sharpe, meeting on Mondays in the afternoon between 2.30 pm and 3.15 pm. The Bowdon Vale Meeting met in a house in Priory Street which had been purchased (and later extended) to serve as a Church Community Centre. This was the embryo of St Luke's Church which was to come later in 1880, and the Bowdon Vale Club later still.

By 1886 the mothers were meeting in St Luke's Church (which also housed a billiards table until the Bowdon Club was erected when it was moved to it). As far as I can gather, it continued to be used until 1941 when for a while the British Restaurant took over, and Mrs Low enrolling members of the Mothers' Union, was appealing for an alternative meeting place.

In the 60s and 80s these mothers' meetings were held in numerous places: Hale Mission Room (for St Peter's, Hale had not been built), Ashley, Bowdon Vale and at Bowdon in the Old School Room in Richmond Road (now demolished). The Bowdon Mothers' Meeting met on Mondays at 2.00 pm, the same time as the meeting at Bowdon Vale. These parish mothers' meetings continued to meet until, in 1894, a Miss Maiden came from London to talk about the Mothers' Union, after which this title was used in the Parish Magazine for the first time. It was an attempt to bring together these rather disconnected mothers' groups and affiliate them to the positive ideals of a central organisation founded by Mary Sumner, and which in 1876 had been given a Royal Charter, as Queen Victoria was very keen on the movement, as were other female members of the Royal Family.

I must quote from the Parish Magazine of 1888. The mothers were meeting in the Vale in the 'Institute', as they called it, in Priory Street. They had complained of the cold (it was February). Later that year they had planned to go to Alderley Edge, but the Railway refused to take bookings subject to the weather. Not to be defeated they hired cabs and wagnettes.

Six years later came a meeting at Hale (St Peter's had just been built, but was still in Bowdon Parish) and a Mothers' Union branch was formed of the existing members. In the evening of 23rd October 1894 Miss Maiden, having visited 20 dioceses, came to Bowdon Vale and spoke to the mothers in similar vein. It would seem that this meeting helped to promote a further link with the Mothers' Union, a sort of umbrella organisation, and members continued to meet weekly on Mondays, and those willing to be linked with a wider branch also met monthly.

By 1897 (Jubilee Year) this link was further established between parish groups by a visit from Mrs Sumner herself to St Margaret's Institute on 22nd January. Miss Binyon was the Parish Secretary for the Mothers' Union, and the Mothers' Meeting met under Mrs and Miss Pigot.

By 1904 Miss Geldart was running the Vale Mothers' Meeting but, by 1910, Miss Binyon was still Parish Secretary for the Mothers' Union. The weekly meeting under Mrs Gore and Miss Geldart, and the monthly meeting of the Mothers' Union seem to have been the pattern about that time. The programmes seem to indicate that for the Mothers' Union there was a higher spiritual content, and in 1913 one of the speakers was Mrs Hewlett Johnson, first wife of the Red Dean who was then Vicar of St Margaret's, Dunham Massey.

Reports on meetings give an insight into what happened. In 1908 there were 40 present for a New Year's Party, some bringing the fruits of motherhood, and of their babies it was remarked 'their behaviour was above all praise'. They dined 'on turkey, ham pies and many other nice things', and then they had dancing and games. A one-sided competition brought to a close many exciting struggles. It seemed scarcely fair to match one of the bachelor curates reading the needle competition against his colleague, a married man; the bachelor won hands down.

Records of the First World War are missing, but in 1924 Mrs Lowry Hamilton was elected Enrolling Member, and she wrote a long description of a meeting in the Parish Magazine in 1925. Outings became popular. In 1927 they went to Liverpool (fare 3/9d), in 1928 to Buxton. In 1941 many men and women were away, including the Vicar (Canon Low). In 1947 Mrs Mulliner, wife of a former Vicar of Tilston Fearnall, lived at The Priory with the Gaddums, and Mrs Bleckley was the Secretary, followed by Mrs Wadsworth in 1952 when Mrs Cashmore was Treasurer, who later took over as Enrolling Member, followed by Mrs Ingram ... they are all known to me, for they fit into my 21 years as Vicar of Bowdon.

So, may I close with a personal memory. Just before the War, my mother spent ages organising an appeal for a caravan which was to be sent by the Mothers' Union to Africa; it was known as the 'Johnson caravan'. Many years later, I met Mrs Johnson's sister, the famous Miss Gladys Johnson who lived on The Firs. I occupied a wonderful memory- link with her when I told her how, as a teenager, I had been sick of the Johnson Caravan appeal. She laughed and shared my sympathy!!

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

This journal is copyright. No part of it may be reproduced or used without the express written consent of the Bowdon History Society.