

The Bowdon Sheaf

A BOWDON HISTORY SOCIETY PUBLICATION

No. 42 October 2003

80p (1.3€)

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A Horse-Drawn Omnibus

ISSN-0265-816X

Industry in Agricultural Bowdon **by Marjorie Cox**

We are accustomed to think of Bowdon as for many centuries a purely agricultural community, which, in the nineteenth century, was rapidly transformed into a residential suburb. The first systematic development was initiated when in 1840-1 the Assheton Smiths of Ashley Hall sold all their Bowdon lands, some of which lay along Sandy Lane, known from the early 1850s as Stamford Road. Like them, the Earls of Stamford owned agricultural land on both sides of the whole length of Sandy Lane, and it is on one of their leasehold properties, right at the bottom of the south side of the lane, close to the present crossroads, that there was industrial activity from the late eighteenth century.

Bowdon Tenement [holding] No.11 in the Earl's voluminous records, then a cottage and about one Cheshire acre (2.1 statute acres) and a new 'inclosure' in Bowdon was leased in 1718 to Deborah Hobson, widow, and in 1757 to Anne Topp, whose name was used for it into the next century. In 1775, a new lease was made to Robert Seddon, 'chapman' (itinerant dealer), for three lives, his own (aged 60) and those of his two sons, Robert (23) and Joseph(21). Seddon may already have been Anne Topps' undertenant. Robert Seddon was already established in the locality by 1759, when he witnessed the will of Ralph Pimlott, but he held no land then. In 1767, however, he leased from the Earl the next tenement, No.12, but this does not concern us here as the Seddons were only intermittent tenants and it was not the industrial site.

The 1775 lease described No.11 as a cottage and tenement, plus two fields, [the field behind the house] alias Butty Croft and the orchard alias Well Croft, the latter across a lane running from Sandy Lane and curving round the base of the hill, but not on the line of the present Langham Road. More valuable detail is found in the Valuation Books, a series recording periodic valuations based on surveys, together with 'Observations'. In 1775 the Observations listed 'House 2 Bays [the section between two crucks] rough cast wall and thatch one work shop one dye house and one shippen for his Cows all in good repair'. More interesting and suggesting expansion, are the Observations in 1782: 'One Bay for a Warping mill, one small bay for a Dye House and one small Bay for a Comb shop all with Brick walls covered with Thatch in repair now building'.

Here are listed three stages in the production of yarn for the worsted industry. The woolcomb, with its iron teeth, was used for combing the wool smoothly, specifically for worsted manufacture, and wool combing, a skilled operation, remained a handicraft industry to the mid-nineteenth century. It was an unhealthy job, as a charcoal stove had to be kept burning to warm the teeth and the wool. The combed wool would be spun in the household or locally. A warping mill was not a building, but an ingenious piece of wooden machinery (see illustration) for organising the spun yarn ready for use as the warp of a worsted loom. It would fit into an outbuilding and was operated by one man or, later, by water power. The presence of these work shops on Robert Seddon's land is contemporary with the flourishing of the textile, especially worsted, industry, both factory and domestic, in and around Altrincham in the 1790s and early 1800s. A commercial Survey of 1793 (copy kindly lent by Mr C. Hill), which included Altrincham, refers to the town's 'principal manufactory' as 'worsted yarn and worsted and hair shags', 'shag' meaning coarse cloth. John Aikin, writing about Manchester's environs in 1795, recorded of Altrincham that 'the spinning of combed wool prevailed formerly throughout this district, the wool being delivered out at Manchester by those who employed Jersey-combers there to the people when they came to market and the worsted yarn being sold to the small-ware manufacturers.' (Small-wares were small textile articles e.g. tape and braid.) It looks as if the Seddons were trying to compete with Manchester by doing their own woolcombing as well as producing the worsted yarn and preparing it for the loom. Did they also put out their prepared yarn for local weavers? A detailed reminiscence of Moss Farm Bowdon records Jersey-weaving there.

By 1786, Robert Seddon I, chapman, had died and his son Robert Seddon II, woolcomber, succeeded to the tenancy. (It is unclear which of the two was the 'shag-maker' of that name, who acted as executor of an Altrincham tenant in 1774.) By 1787, Robert Seddon, woolcomber, was a churchwarden of Bowdon Parish Church, and in 1793 he figures in the Survey mentioned above, as a worsted manufacturer. His will, proved in 1806, shows that he lived on his premises and his estate was valued at probate at 'under £1500', a significant sum. He left his leasehold property, household goods and furniture to his wife, Margaret, for life and then to their son, another Robert, while a son, John and a daughter, Ann Clark had monetary bequests. One of his executors was his brother, Joseph, 'of Manchester, merchant'. It seems most probable, and significant, that he was the Joseph Seddon in Bancks's Directory of Manchester, 1800, who was a partner in a fustian and small-ware firm there.

The valuation in 1807, at the renewal of the lease to Robert Seddon III, woolcomber, and his mother shows what seems a flourishing set-up: 'House parlour and kitchen and a small Bay for a Comb shop all join together Walls part brick and part Timber Noged with dobe Covered with thatch in repair a small Bay for a dye house Walls Brick covered with Slate in repair Barn and Stable 2 Bays Walls Brick covered with Thatch in repair'. There is no mention of the warping mill. Apart from cursory valuations in 1785 and 1786, without detail, there is no information between 1782 and 1806, and it is impossible to say how long the warping mill continued in use.

Robert Seddon III appears in Pigot and Deans Manchester and Salford Directory of 1821-2 as 'worsted manufacturer', but not in that of Pigot and Son of 1836. This may reflect the decline of the worsted and textile industry in Altrincham in the first half of the century, described in *Altrincham: a history*, ed Don Bayliss (p.36). As a result, Seddon may have been diversifying; in 1831 he acquired the lease of tenement No.12 and at the time of the Tithe Map (1838) he held the fields, houses and cottages of both Nos 11 and 12 and a large Assheton Smith field (soon to be sold) further up Sandy Lane. By 1843, however, there are clear signs of decline at No.11. The valuation was depressing: 'House outbuildings Workshops and Garden held by Seddon. House 2 Bays Timber and Plaster and thatched out of repair House and kitchen Brick Slated in repair Two cottages Brick and thatched out of repair One cottage slated in repair'. Seddon's lease of 1813 was surrendered and renewed to Hannah Hampson, widow, of Dukinfield, mortgagee. Could she be the Hannah Hampson, sister of Thomas Hulme of Bowdon, woolcomber, whom he mentioned in his will, proved in 1802?

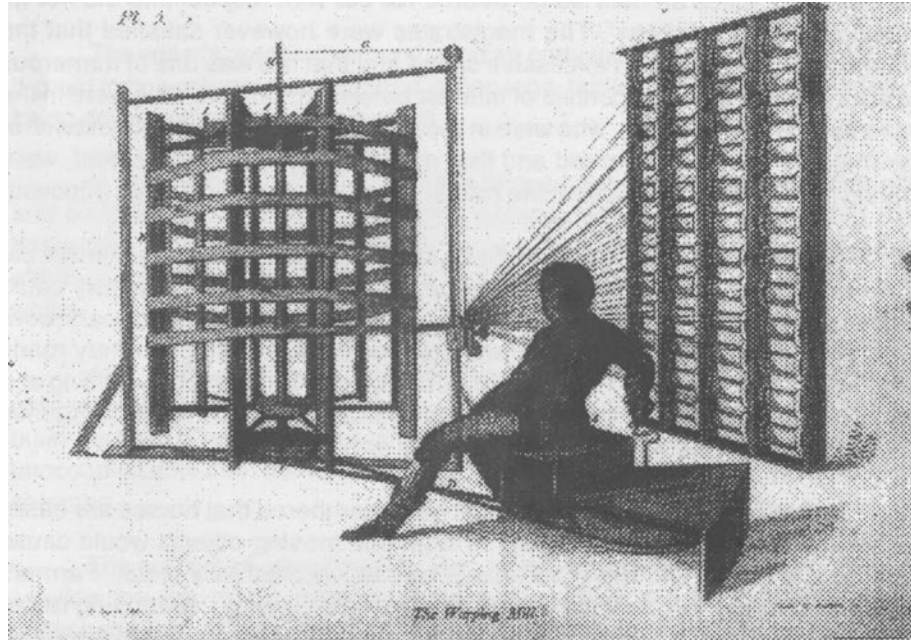
1846 marked another downward turn for the Seddon enterprise. The house and bam were in repair, but there was only one cottage 'in middling repair', and the Workshop was reported 'taken down'. The lease was returned in September, 1846 and the new lessee of both Nos. 11 and 12 was Frederick Grundy, solicitor of Manchester, possibly with Bowdon connections. By 1847-8, Grundy is listed in Balshaw's directory as living at 'Holly Bank, Sandy Lane', which appears to be a house on Butty Croft, presumably built by himself; it was later called Hollywood (see O.S. map 6" to 1 mile, 1953). Meanwhile, in 1847-8, Robert Seddon was living at Oak Hill, Sandy Lane, a newly built semi-detached house at the top of the south side and appears there, now named Stamford Road, in the census of 1851, still as a worsted manufacturer, aged 65, with his wife and two daughters. He is still at Oak Hill in 1854-5, but in 1858-9 the only Seddon in Stamford Road is Miss Seddon.

The leasing records, particularly the Valuation Books, may reveal other examples of early industry on the land of the Earl of Stamford, though this is unlikely to apply to Bowdon, where the name Seddon seems to be the only one connected with manufacture in the Manchester and district directories. This study of Tenement No.11 traces the rise and fall of the industrial enterprise of three generations of one tenant family.

Chief Sources

1. The relevant leases in the series EGR 14/2/5 and the valuations in the series EGR 14/7 in the Dunham Massey Archive deposited by The National Trust in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.
2. The Survey of the Earl of Stamford's Manor of Bowdon, 1793, with accompanying map in the Dunham Massey Archive.
3. The Bowdon Tithe Map (1838) and Apportionment (1839).

My warm thanks are due to Mr John Hodgson and the staff of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester (Deansgate) for much help. I am grateful, too, to Mr John Messner, Curator (Industry), Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, to the Local Studies Unit and Technical Library, Manchester Central Library and to Mrs Dorothy Shelston.



From R. Guest, A Compendious History of the Cotton-Manufacture (1823)

The Horseless Carriage in Bowdon by Ronald Trenbath

The Macclesfield Courier on the 20th September 1902 reported that on the previous Monday, at Altrincham, Samuel Blinkhorn, a Manchester gentleman, was summoned for furious motoring on the Knutsford Road, Dunham Massey, on the 16th August that year.

Mr L. Caldecott, prosecuting on behalf of the police, told the court that, following complaints, Sergeant Hunt and two other officers of the Cheshire Constabulary had, with the aid of a watch and powerful field glasses, witnessed the accused over a quarter of a measured mile in 50 seconds, which he calculated to be a speed of 18 miles an hour. The summons was for driving to the common danger of passengers.

The defendant stated that he kept his motor car for pleasure and never exceeded 12 miles an hour as he treated his car with respect and did not go 'ripping and tearing away'. The magistrates were however satisfied that the defendant was riding at an excessive speed and that this was one of numerous cases in which there was conflict of interest between motorists, who were in the minority, and horse drivers, who were in the majority, and that the convenience of the majority must be observed and that motorists, by their great speed, were driving horses and carriages off the roads. A fine of £5 and costs was imposed.

A century later this report might be read with incredulous amusement but consideration of the conditions which existed in the early 20th Century could produce understanding of the antipathy for motorists. Early motor cars were fitted with very basic hand brakes and quite primitive steering, country roads were winding and surfaced with soft material, so that any vehicle travelling at a speed greater than that of a horse would have difficulty in making an emergency stop, especially when rounding blind corners or bends in roads.

Added to these difficulties it must be remembered that horses are easily frightened and to be confronted by strange fast moving objects would cause them to shy or bolt and many serious accidents occurred as a result. Farmers often complained that their cows had stampeded on seeing fast moving motor cars, causing them to prematurely drop their calves, and cottagers often lost poultry who roamed freely on roads and lanes at the time, and the incident dealt with at Altrincham Magistrates Court in 1902 might be compared with a Ferrari racing car being driven at top speed today between Bowdon Church and St Margaret's Church. Trains were segregated on railway lines so why were motor cars not separated in a similar way?

In spite of the risk of loss of popularity several Bowdon residents bought cars and had their coachmen trained as chauffeurs. The difficulty in maintaining a supply of petrol caused great problems as suppliers were few and far apart, and motorists were often stranded at road sides for very long periods when they ran short of petrol which had to be brought, often from a great distance, by horse drawn conveyances, although most cars carried spare cans of petrol on their running boards.

For local driving residents had cans of petrol delivered to their homes and at Bowdon Hall an early petrol pump still exists near the garage. It would appear that the authorities gave little consideration to the high risk these practices imposed on the neighbourhood

Early motor cars produced great dust clouds as they were driven along the often unsurfaced roads to cause nuisance to pedestrians and roadside property. Drivers and passengers regularly wore specially produced dust coats, which covered the whole body, and wore goggles to protect their eyes. Their appearance, looking like beings from another planet, must have caused consternation to those unfamiliar with motor traffic.

The writer's grandfather purchased an early motor car and proclaimed that it could in no way compare with four strong legs, bridle and reins, and insisted on being driven rather than drive himself.

In the course of time blacksmiths shops undertook repairs to motor cars and installed petrol pumps to become garages serving motorists rather than horsemen, and gradually the motor car was accepted by the general public, although cases did continue of irate equestrians lashing at drivers with their whips.

After 1918 most new detached houses built locally were provided with garages and semi-detached villas were usually provided with enough space to build garages if required later, although those which were built were often left unoccupied until after the Second World War when car ownership became more common.

The authorities were however very slow in accepting the change, failing to provide the necessary road improvements, and in the early 1950's Punch published a cartoon showing two elderly civil servants remarking to each other that the horseless carriage appeared to have come to stay. All this changed after 1960 when legislation required urban developers to provide two car spaces per dwelling, motorways were constructed, and railways virtually destroyed by the Beeching Plan, a 'U' turn which produced the car based culture of today. Perhaps greater heed should have been given to the opinion of the magistrates in 1902 !

The Horse-Drawn Omnibus
by Marjorie Cox

An advertisement in the first edition of Charles Balshaw's Stranger's Guide and Complete Directory to Altrincham, Bowdon and the surrounding neighbourhood. Undated, but not later than 1848 and probably 1847.

HANNAH HOWARTH

Tenders her grateful Acknowledgments to her Friends and the Public for the liberal support she has received since she commenced running Omnibuses to and from Manchester, and begs to inform them that her Omnibus leaves the

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and Nine o'clock in the Morning and half- past
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Manchester for Knutsford
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in the afternoon passing through Stretford, Altrincham,
Bowdon and Bucklow Hill.
From Manchester to Altrincham and Bowdon
at Six, seven and half-past nine in the evening.

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HOUSE on the Downs

Entry in the Directory of Altrincham:

Hannah Howarth Coach proprietress on the Downs.

Was this a routine advertisement in the first edition of the new Directory or a response to the imminent threat of the opening of the railway between Altrincham and Manchester, which happened in 1849?

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