

# *The Bowdon Sheaf*

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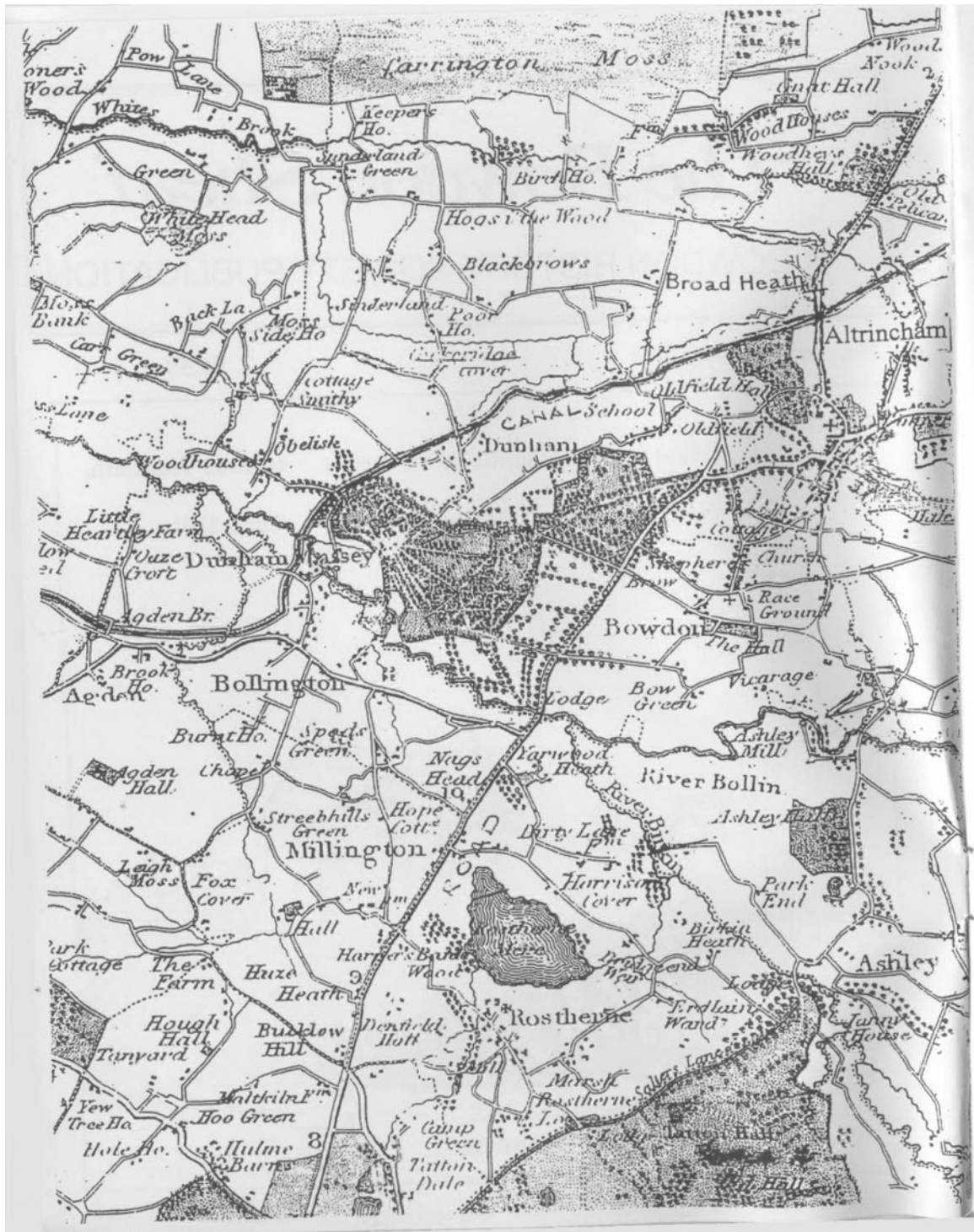
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## **Local Transport in the 18th Century**

### **by Ronald Trenbath**

The success of an enterprise depends to a very great degree on accessibility and communications, and there is little doubt that the accomplishments of the 2nd Earl of Warrington and his daughter Mary, Countess of Stamford, in transforming a near destitute estate and local area from probable bankruptcy to a successful venture during the 18th Century would have proved impossible except for the improvements in transport at the time.

The Chester Road between Chester and the North was the only satisfactory artery between Altrincham and Bowdon and the rest of the county, and the adoption of the turnpike system rendered it eminently suitable for the purpose, providing a satisfactory and maintained road surface and allowing for hostelries, livery stables, staging posts and farriers along the way for the convenience of travellers, and at Smithy Green, at the junction of Bow Green Lane and the Chester Road, a blacksmith provided all the facilities needed by equestrians travelling along it.

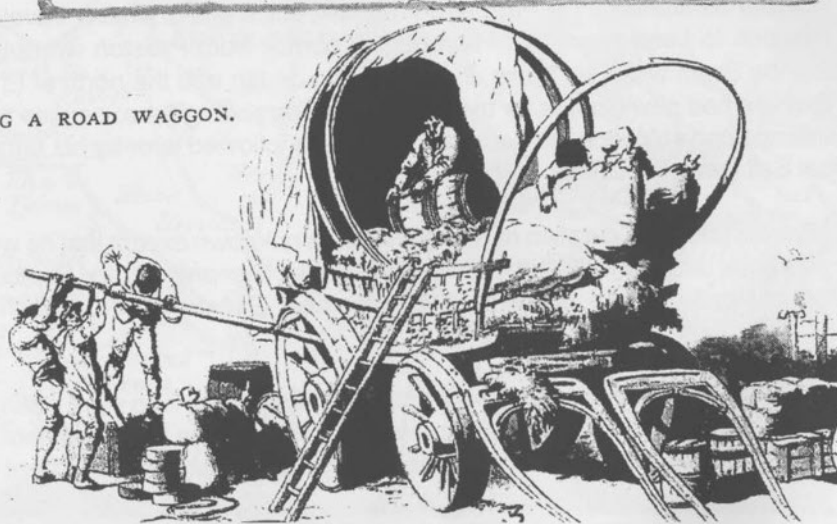
Improvements in the design of vehicles made travel more comfortable and post-chaises, coaches and traps passed regularly through the district, and carriers with covered wagons provided delivery and passenger services and goods could be ordered and delivered from merchants in Chester and other towns. Stage wagons between London and Manchester passed through Bowdon every Monday, Wednesday and Friday to Manchester, and returned the following day, and those from Birmingham came every Monday and returned every Saturday, and those from Shrewsbury came and returned every Friday, providing communication between this area and the rest of the country.

On the 16th January 1771 Richard Trenbath, at the age of twelve, travelled from Bowdon to London with Mr Heywood, a carrier from Preston who plied between the Swan with Two Nicks, in Lad Lane, London and the north of England. Richard had new clothes for the journey, eleven shilling for expenses and nine shillings and sixpence for the wagon, and was followed later by his father, the local Salt Revenue Officer, on horseback.

The purpose and duration of Richard's visit is unknown except that he was visiting his great uncle, and that he returned to Cheshire later and married Frances, daughter of Randal Clarke, of Lower Withington near Goostrey, at Northwich in 1789.

Direct For  
 M<sup>rs</sup> John Meahins  
 In North Gate street  
 Chester  
 Feb 9 1758 Paid for pigg  
 Hills  
 1763 Dr to Mr Lough £ 6  
 Feb 5 for One Ton of Coals 10 6  
 April 29. Paid for Ditto -  
 m

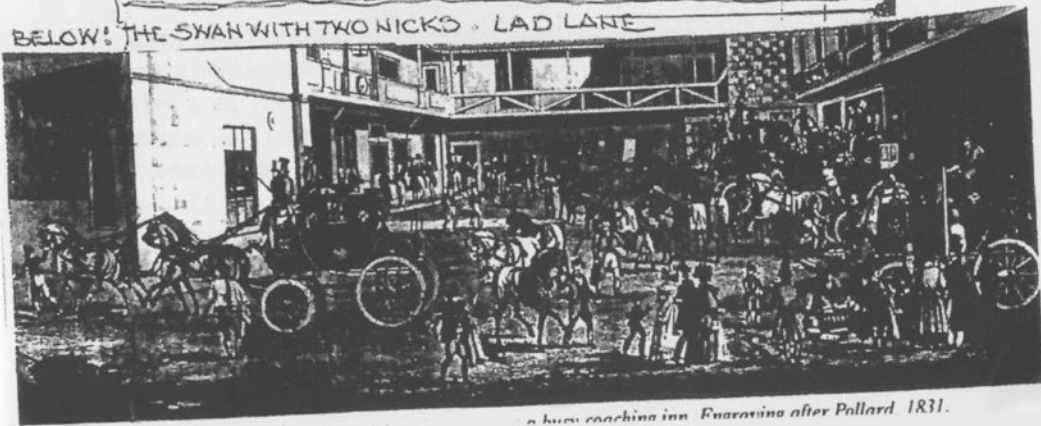
LOADING A ROAD WAGGON.



Richard set for London  
 the 16 Jan; 1771. By Wm Heywood  
 Preston Carrier who  
 came at the Swan with  
 two Beck in Lad -  
 the Lane in London  
 26

2 port stockings	1 10
fore body for a waistcoat	4 6
V making	
shirt	2 8
making	6
Shoes mending	7
Ginger Bread	2
the Wagon	9 6
Spent	6
Richard for expenses	11 1
Taken Pocket	
	£ 1 11 7

BELOW: THE SWAN WITH TWO NICKS - LAD LANE



a busy coaching inn Engraving after Pollard. 1831.

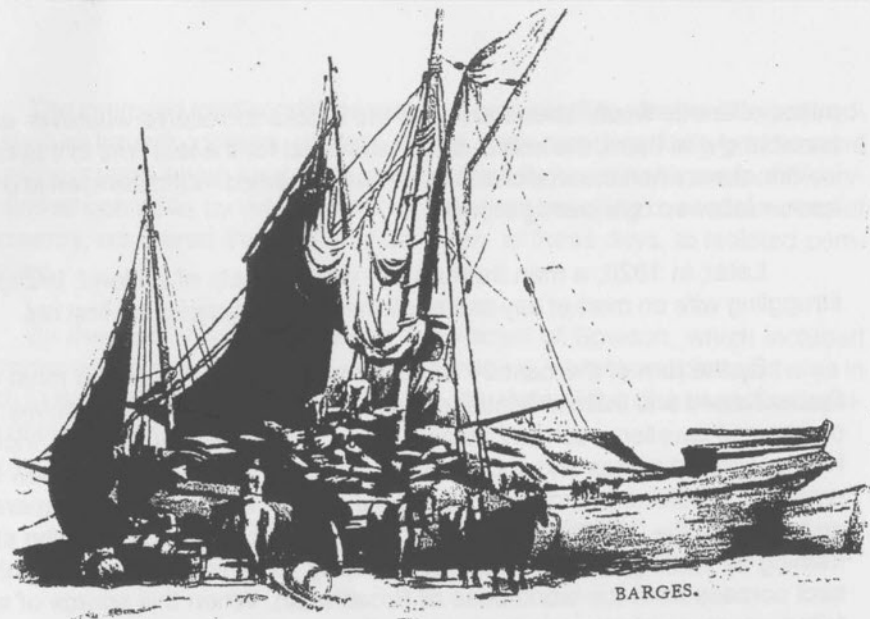
The road did however attract vagrants and malefactors who were often in league with ostlers and innkeepers who provided information on the movement of rich cargoes and wealthy travellers to highway men and robbers. The extent of robbery and violence locally due to the prosperity and expanding development of the district was such that travellers from Knutsford to Altrincham gained permission to travel through Tatton, and approach it from Ashley and Hale, to avoid Bowdon, and it is recorded that William Trenbath always travelled armed with his pistol, powder and shot.

The most infamous highway robbers locally at this time were the Romper Lowes Gang, the merchant-cum-highwayman Higgins of Knutsford and Thomas Brennan known as Timperley Tom who murdered Jacob Pitt of Hale on 30th December 1790, for which he was hanged and his body exhibited on a tree at Bucklow Hill, since which time people have reported seeing his ghost at the Pelican Inn.

The extension of the Bridgewater Canal, at this time through Dunham Massey to Runcorn and eventually the Midlands, provided scope for local commercial expansion and a wharf was constructed near to Dunham Hall for the export of local produce and import of supplies such as coal. It also provided for passenger transport with comfortably fitted out packet barges with facilities to provide food on long distance journeys. The barges passed Altrincham to Lymm, Warrington, Preston Brook and Runcorn at 10 o'clock in the morning, returning at 4 o'clock in the evening every day except Sunday, and on Saturday when boats sailed at 8 o'clock in the morning and returned at 12 o'clock.

A floating chapel at Broadheath catered for the spiritual needs of the canal folk. Members of local families regularly travelled on the canal well into the 19th Century. Improvements in transport together with the economic expansion of the Dunham Massey Estate towards the end of the 18th Century brought increased prosperity to the market town of Altrincham. The building of warehouses and workshops along the Bridgewater Canal at Broadheath catered for new local industries such as Worsted yarn manufacture and a limited amount of cotton spinning and also local agriculture found a ready market for its produce in the towns of the Industrial North.

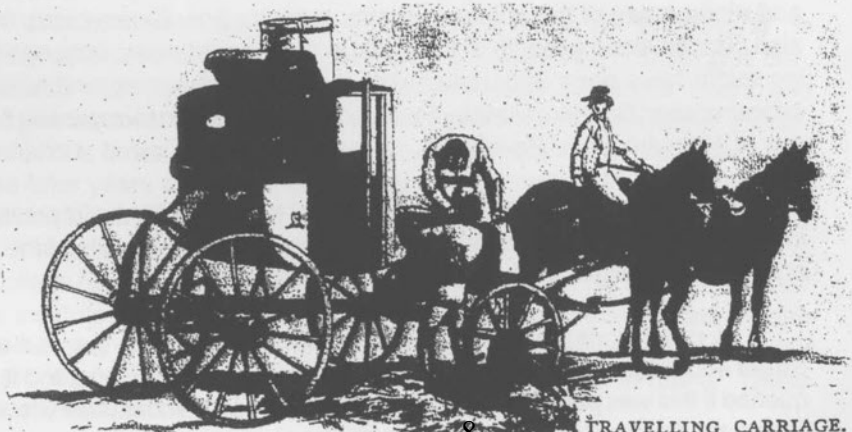
With ever-increasing passenger traffic passing through the town many hostelries opened which were reported to have provided a very high standard of accommodation and cuisine, and De Quincey recorded how, as a very small boy, he had stayed in a hotel overlooking Altrincham marketplace and that, in spite of his tender age, he had been excited by the scene of vibrant activity and thriving trade.



BARGES.



PACK-HORSES.



TRAVELLING CARRIAGE.

From Aquatints by J. B. Py

As well as providing a venue for the butter market, pig market, cattle market, and for itinerant traders to display and sell their wares, the market place was also the social centre where the Town Crier would broadcast local, regional and sometimes national news, and those found guilty, by the magistrates, of minor offences would spend a day in the stocks to receive whatever anyone cared to shy at them, the scolds bridal was used for the last time in this country in Altrincham when the wretched woman was wheeled round the town in a wheel barrow followed by a jeering crowd.

Later, in 1820, a man from Ashley with the help of a friend, brought his struggling wife on market day and auctioned her, accepting the first bid.

By the turn of the century wealthy merchants had replaced most of the timber-framed and thatched cottages with elegant brick-built town houses; silver smiths and jewellers such as Eustace Parker, opened shops; lawyers, including Harris, opened offices and doctors established surgeries. The Renshaw family practised medicine from their house in the Market Place for many generations and well into the 20th century, accepting fee-paying articulated pupils who started training by making pills and studying anatomy, for which the doctor would dissect corpses from the workhouse at Broadheath. When this source of supply failed grave snatchers stole bodies from Bowdon churchyard.

In spite of the high level of crime in the district, it was recorded in the British Directory of Trade, Commerce and Manufacture, at the end of the 18th Century, as an area to be "much esteemed and resorted to on account of its cleanliness and pleasant situation" and the number of gentlemen who had villas and country houses in the parish was noted. It also recorded that there were five non-conformist chapels in the parish, but only one Anglican Church prior to the building of St. George's Church as a Chapel of Ease, which might indicate a degree of independence necessary in a successful society to be found locally at that time.

In order to present a pleasing appearance to the district trees were planted along the side of the Chester Road from the Bollin River to the centre of Altrincham and along many of the adjoining roads, such as Bow Green Lane, trees were also planted along a length of the canal in Dunham Massey, although the planting might have been undertaken with a view to enhancing and enlarging the appearance of Dunham Massey Park and Hall rather than to improving the amenities of Altrincham and Bowdon.

A traveller in the 18th Century could not have failed to be impressed by his initial views on entering the district from either direction, in spite of the toll gates and possible danger of attack.

A prestigious and elegant estate office was built at the end of Market Street and villas sited along Bowdon Road and Normans Place, and it might be queried if this was part of a never-completed plan for a linear urban development linking the Parish Church to the town centre.



The improved road conditions provided better facilities for the itinerant traders, such as travelling tinkers, peddlers, tailors, chair-menders, knife-grinders and rat-catchers upon whom rural communities relied for household goods and services and whose visits, by virtue of their experiences travelling over wider areas of the country, countered the insularity common in those days to isolated communities.

By the end of the 18th Century the Parish of Bowdon, which included Altrincham and Dunham Massey, was a flourishing, vibrant and pleasant area in which to live and work, in comparison with the state of the district at the beginning of the century.

**Sir William Boyd Dawkins**  
**by Chris Hill**

Sir William Boyd Dawkins, B.A., M.A., D.Sc., FRS, FSA, FGS, (1837- 1929), famous geologist, paleontologist and antiquary. Born at Buttlington vicarage, near Welshpool, Montgomeryshire, Dec. 26th., 1837, only son of Revd Richard and Mary Ann, nee Youngman; died 15th. January, 1929, aged 91. He was educated at Rossall (an Anglican public school near Fleetwood) and Jesus College, a predominately Welsh college at Oxford, 1854-60, where he gained a 2nd. class degree in Classics and a 1st. in natural sciences. He was diverted to geology by the inspiring personality of Prof. Phillips at a time when natural sciences were not popular.

Sir William Boyd Dawkins, lived for some years at "Woodhurst" in Fallowfield, but moved to Bowdon, to Richmond Lodge, No.1, Richmond Road, sometime after 1916, until his death. He earned himself the title of 'Grand Old Man', and was known throughout the world as an eminent geologist and authority on prehistoric times. He lived over sixty years in the Manchester area and during the later years of his life, carried on his scientific work at his Bowdon home. He came to Manchester when thirty one, and for thirty six years after that, acted as a science lecturer at the Manchester Museum in Peter Street, and at Owens College (which afterwards became Manchester University). "The 'popular lectures' which he instituted justified their title; they aroused great interest among the industrial masses of the city and his cogent style, his enthusiasm in his work and his gift of succinct illustration, imparted rare knowledge to many." These lectures were free and held on weekend afternoons.

An outstanding achievement was his investigation of the prehistoric age. As an undergraduate, in 1859, he discovered the oldest cave in Great Britain (Wookey Hole) near Wells, with its hyena den and evidence of human occupation, from which he reached conclusions about the human and animal species living in these islands before the dawn of civilization. These threw him into sharp controversies with the anthropologists of the time, a situation he appeared to relish with its attendant publicity in the press. In 1861, he became the first recipient of the Burdett-Coutts scholarship, founded at Oxford to promote studies in geology.

His two most widely known books are: "Cave Hunting: Researches on the Evidence of Caves respecting the Early Inhabitants of Europe" (1874), which was an attempt to gather together the growing mass of material on cave exploration, from all over Europe, into one volume; and "Early Man in Britain and his place in the Tertiary Period" (1880), which was written as a companion work to the distinguished historian, John Richard Green's "History of the English Peoples". The two men were college friends, and their intention in writing the books was that each should complement the other. He also collaborated with W. Ayshford Sandford on "British Pleistocene Mammalia", issued in parts 1866-72.

After the 1870's. he was drawn towards applied, or 'engineering' geology.

He travelled extensively and had various adventures. In Australia, he outwitted a gang of swindlers who hoped to obtain £120,000 in respect of an alleged deposit of kerosene shale in which they had interested a body of Manchester speculators. The professor was sent out as a consulting engineer, to report on the worth of the 'find'. He discovered that the whole thing was a fake, that the 'vendors' were a clique of 'desperadoes' and did not in fact own the property of which they were seeking to dispose. He declined a bribe of £8,000 which they offered him to allow the deal to be completed. He bore himself with such easy self-reliance that he safely parted company with them. He also went to Nevada during the silver boom, and had a chance of buying a mine where the ore held out great promise, for \$350, but his work at home had a firmer hold on him, and he gave no attention to 'get-rich-quick' propositions.

From 1861 to 1869 (before he started at Manchester), he became a member of the Geological Survey of Great Britain at Southampton, during which time (eight years), he was occupied with the mapping of the Wealdon and associated formations in Kent and the Thames Valley. He became interested in the rich mammalian contents of the cave-earths and gravels. For his work on Pleistocene Mammalia, Dawkins was elected in 1867, at the early age of 28, to the Fellowship of the Royal Society.

In 1872, he came to Manchester at the request of Professor Huxley (with whom he had worked as a junior colleague on the Geological Survey at the Royal School of Mines in Jermyn Street, London), to become curator of the Manchester Museum in Peter Street, where he was to reorganize the city's Natural History collection which had fallen into desuetude and consequently was shunned by the public and by students. Two years later, in Oct. 1874, he was the first to be elected to the Chair of Geology at Owens College, a position he held until 1908, after which he acted as an advisor to the Museum which had joined the University. He proved to be an attractive and inspiring teacher, supplementing the college lectures by practical demonstrations in the field. His summer courses of field-excursions were open to others besides his ordinary students and thus attracted many amateurs who were members of local societies. Between 1875-8, he carried out further excavations at Creswell Crags near Worksop.

In 1880, he gave the Lowell Lectures in Boston. In 1882, he was elected honorary fellow of his old college, and also elected President of the Anthropological Section of the British Association. This same year, the Channel Tunnel Committee employed him, when he made a special survey of both coasts discovering the Dover coalfield (1890), as a result of his investigations. He also took part in the first boring operations. The next year he laid down the line for a tunnel under the Humber. He advised on the water supply to many places, including Hull, Dover, Eastbourne, Brighton, Worthing, Croydon, etc. "He acted as consultant to many private and Parliamentary bodies with respect to water supplied from chalk strata in the London area, and was engaged more than any other geologist of his day, as an expert witness in court cases" (Manchester Guardian, 16 Jan., 1929). Apart from Australia, he was consulted by diamond mining firms in South Africa and in Italy about the Carrara marble quarries. Later, in 1888, he became President of the Geological Section of the British Association, while in 1889, his services to Geology were recognised by the Geographical Society of London, with the Lyell Medal. In 1892 he supported efforts to obtain compensation for those who suffered the effects of subsidence due to brine pumping in the Northwich area. He was invited to join various societies in America and the Continent as an honorary member and was an Hon. Professor of Geology and Palaeontology at Victoria University, and received an Hon. Degree of D.Sc. at Manchester. Dawkins published many scientific papers.

He retired from his professorship in 1908, after 36 years work. He was a member of the Athenaeum Club in London, and his recreational hobbies were fishing and gardening. In 1918, the Geological Society of London awarded him their Prestwich medal. In 1919, the honour of Knighthood was conferred on him. Sir William married twice, on the second, occasion to Mrs. Mary Lilian Congreve, widow of Hubert Congreve, in May 1922. He had one daughter Ella (d 1969), by his first marriage which was in 1866, to Miss Frances Evans, nee Poole. She was the daughter of a clerk in the Admiralty and she died in 1921.

His mind was quite unaffected by age and he wrote many articles and essays, as well as books. On his 90th birthday, he said "One's work ought to be finished after 90 years, but I suspect I am rather a slow dog, for I still find plenty to do." In 1908, he gave a forty minute lecture on cave exploration in Derbyshire without referring to any notes. During this same year, he presented a collection of drawings and wall paintings, illustrating the dawn of art, to the Manchester City Art Gallery and this was exhibited for two months during that summer. Most of the earliest drawings were from caves in the South of France. When he was 91, he insisted on travelling to London to propose a toast at the Geological Society dinner. Valuable furniture and cloisonné enamels were also included in the gift. He bequeathed his books and many papers to Buxton where a Boyd Dawkins room was established in the Museum to house the collection. There is a catalogue of his papers in the Rylands Library Bulletin 74(1992), 3-36. His speleological papers are at Oxford University Museum. On his death he left just over £24,698. His remains were cremated at Manchester Crematorium. His wife, Lady Dawkins, must have found the Lodge too much for her to manage on her own, so she moved next door to No.4 Richmond Hill, (presumably letting the bigger house), and it was there, in her 90th. year, that the coroner (four days later), found she had had the misfortune to be 'poisoned by Coal Gas, accidentally inhaled', on 25th. April, 1954.

When Manchester celebrated the 75th. Anniversary of the granting of the Charter in March 1908, he wrote a special message for the Evening Chronicle on the back of two envelopes, in which he drew attention to the importance of the city's open spaces and parks as a relief from the grime-covered buildings, and hoped that in another hundred years, the city would be smoke free.

Although his international reputation was based largely on his researches into the story of pre-historic man, he is also remembered as a popular science lecturer, author, consulting engineer, traveller, discoverer, and speaker; so Manchester and Bowdon may well be proud to have had so distinguished a citizen and resident, if only for a short while.

#### **Refs.**

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