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A Plea for The Preservation of Bowdon Church

under the name of T. Fowler & Sons, St. Ann's Square, Manchester 1856.

I have heard that it is in contemplation among certain persons to take down Bowdon Church, and to erect a new building upon its site.

I write in the hope of staying the hand of the destroyer. When I confess that I am not an owner of land in the neighbourhood, and am not even an inhabitant of the parish, I dare say many will think that I have little right to interfere.

But though neither a landowner nor a parishioner, I have, in common with all, an interest in the preservation of beautiful objects, and in addition together with thousands of persons who, though no longer resident in the neighbourhood, still look back with affection to Bowdon as the home of their ancestors, have a right to demand that the Church should be preserved, fraught as it is to us with so many and varied associations.

Now, in the first place, Bowdon Church is not an ugly object. Far from being so, it has always had the reputation of being a very beautiful one. It is not in the way. Of course if a new street were contemplated it would be absurd in this utilitarian age to ask that a mere Church should be an impediment to the improvement; but fortunately the old footpaths have not yet grown too old for modern use.

The building is in want of repair, and very probably it will cost as much to effect the repairs in a proper manner as to erect a new Church. The good people who attended the meeting the other day, viewing the thing in much the same light they would have regarded the purchase of a new or old lamp, very possibly thought, with Aladdin's wife, that the new article would be better worth the money.

O money, money! must we sacrifice everything at your shrine!

Is there not, also, another motive lurking at the bottom of this scheme of destruction? I fear that the magnates of Bowdon are dissatisfied with their plain, unadorned Church, and have come to the conclusion that it is not a building in unison with their brick and stuccoed villas.

This is true enough, but it is the brick and stuccoed villas that are at fault, not the Church. It remains in its severe simplicity the redeeming point in the landscape - a standing protection against the bad taste and pretence which surround it - and I do not see the wisdom of pulling it down, so as to secure uniformity in ugliness.

For, after all, this boasted architecture of Bowdon is ugly. To many, indeed, all these fine mansions - with lofty porches and diminutive gardens - are an eyesore, and they look back with regret to the time when Bowdon was the quiet spot it used to be, when no huge railway poured its human stream upon it, and when from the churchyard scarcely a house could be seen, to mar the beauty of nature.

Now such persons are not landowners, and the latter doubtless view the matter differently, and I am not going to be so foolish as to complain that the Manchester people have had the wisdom to run away from the smoke of their city, though their invasion may not have had a tendency to refine the country.

But I do think that a greater degree of taste might have been exercised in their architecture - that the buildings might have been less huddled together - at all events, we have a right to say, hold - when civilisation puts its sacrilegious hand upon our beautiful Church.

Let the tradesmen of Manchester build how and where they like, so that they leave our Church and churchyard untouched.

Heaven knows we have little enough of antiquity left. Do let us preserve the few farmhouses and old Churches which prove we are not entirely of yesterday.

I do not know whether the antiquity of Bowdon Church is not the great argument with some people for pulling it down. It is one of the signs of this utilitarian age to speak and think coolly and contemptuously of antiquity.

People never seem to consider that when our ancestors raised these buildings, which in their Gothic strength, in spite of storm and tempest, rebellion and Puritanism, have descended to us, they did so with the intention that they should endure.

But we seem to think that we have a complete ownership over the works of former days and may either preserve or destroy as suits our caprice. The idea never strikes us that possibly we have no right wantonly to destroy the works of others, that a duty may, perhaps, rest upon us religiously to guard them.

The creed of modern times is a belief in self and the present, which places all former ages under a cloud, and attaches everything excellent and rational to the nineteenth century only.

We can understand that it would be a folly, and even a crime, to alter the reading of Shakespeare, to destroy a play, to add a scene, or toy with the things made by such a mind, but we should laugh at the idea of crime in connection with the demolition, or mutilation of an old Church, or a picturesque farmhouse. Yet the fraud seems much the same in the one case as the other.

No one can be more anxious than I that the Church should be properly repaired but I do hope that the repairs will not be carried out in the spirit which we see sometimes.

There is among some people an innate desire to alter what is beautiful: - it is a pity that this desire leaves unscathed what is ugly. If All Saints' Church is burned down you find it restored, brick by brick, with scrupulous accuracy, but how often if the object be beautiful are innovations and wanton additions introduced which destroy its character altogether.

I trust that every reparation in Bowdon Church will be in unison with the old building; let us have no patch-work monstrosity. Alter the architecture, and you spoil it. You may make it more beautiful, perhaps, in an architectural point of view, but we shall be losers nevertheless.

What is beauty? Your St. Margaret's is an exquisite building, and reflects great credit upon the architect, and upon the persons who prompted him to his noble work. It is a building worthy of the high purpose for which it was intended.

It will be an object of admiration when this generation has passed away and is crumbling in dust, and our children will point to it to show that good taste had not in the 19th Century entirely died away in Cheshire, whatever might be the case in the neighbouring counties.

But beautiful as St. Margaret's is, and though the eye wanders with pleasure over the fluted columns, the painted windows, and the vaulted roof, there is one thing wanting - age. It is modern.

There is no association connected with it. No fond imagination can fill the aisle with the creatures of the past - the beings to whom we ourselves owe our being - no grey-headed grandsire in his yeoman pride, ever stood in this pew, no stately dame ever leant on that alter rail, or gazed through yonder pane. All is present and new - the past an empty blank.

Now Bowdon Church is a different place altogether. It may not be carved so richly, or formed so artistically, but it has that venerable beauty which no artist, save time, can give.

For more than eight hundred years has it looked down upon that fair valley of Cheshire. The ownership of neighbouring lands has changed hands. The Masseys, the Fittons, the Booths are gone, yet still the old Church, which they endowed and prayed in, and which they, at least, regarded as the embodiment of everything that was beautiful and holy, rears its walls to heaven.

Can imagination do nothing here? There is scarcely a farmer or yeoman for twenty miles round who has not some family tradition connected with Bowdon Church.

Even the stranger cannot fail to be impressed, as he gazes upon a building so old and reverend, and to many there is not an arch, or a window, which does not call up solemn and tender memories.

Why should we destroy this treasure house of beautiful association? Let it not be taken down. On the contrary, let it be restored to its old glory by a workman capable of feeling worthily the holiness and importance of his task; let the modern pews give place to the old benches; take down the unseemly gallery; remove from the walls the tawdry paint and whitewash. Then indeed, gentlemen of Bowdon, you will have done your duty, and will be worthy of much honour.

If the Church be insufficient to accommodate the congregation, why not erect an additional Church? If you choose, let both Churches be under the same vicar. Surely some proper and convenient site might easily be procured.

There erect a second St. Margaret's, there build a church which will be worthy of being trodden by the feet of our suburban magnates; leave Bowdon Church, in its plain and holy simplicity, for the poor gentlemen, yeomen and farmers, who look upon it with a respect, perhaps romantic and foolish, but which has grown with their years and increased with their stature, where hearts would be well-nigh broken if it were taken down or so altered and adorned as to lose its present character.

Ages ago, in that venerable building, their ancestors were carried to the font, worshipped, were married, and now rest from their labours beneath its aisle, or in the churchyard outside.

And when they themselves pass from life they had hoped, and hope still, to lie beside their fathers, beneath the shadow of that hoary pile which has been their spiritual home in life.

It has never crossed their fancy that the old tower could possibly be taken down, or that those bells would be silenced to which they have listened with emotion ever since childhood, whose chimes may be pleasant music, and nothing more, to the strangers who have migrated to the district and built themselves fine mansions, but speak a very different language - a language full of meaning - to those whose sires held the land upon which these fine mansions stand.

I trust that those in whose hands the fate of Bowdon Church rests will think well before they act.

I do not appeal to men who would gladly, if they had the power, pull down Westminster Abbey, and replace our Manchester Cathedral by some light and airy structure, better suited to this light and airy age.

I commit the cause of Bowdon Church to those who do not think it mere romance to handle with gentleness and reverence the works of the dead. If they exert themselves Bowdon Church may be saved, and I am satisfied that the day will come when they will feel proud that they have preserved this glorious relic of the past from falling a victim to modern Vandalism.

Editorial Note

Many readers will consider that the observations expressed in this plea, on the bad taste and pretensions of developers in Bowdon, at that time, could be applied to current developments today.

Your Dutiful Son: A Sketch of William Grey **by Stephen Matthews**

The Grey family contained many interesting and colourful members, and not the least of them was the Rev. William Grey (1819—1872), the father of the ninth Earl of Stamford. His life was a mixture of the exciting and routine for his career took him from England to Bermuda and to Newfoundland where his son was born, and back again to the relative obscurity of clerical England. His life is set out in a brief biography in the catalogue of the Dunham collection in the John Rylands library, from which these biographical details are taken and where more intimate glimpses of him can be found in a number of letters which he wrote either to his own or his wife's family. Those to his father were always signed as from 'your dutiful son', which is what he wanted to be.

William was born in 1819, the second son of the Rev. Harry Grey, who was then Vicar of Knutsford in Cheshire. His strong evangelical convictions did not suit some of his congregation and after he had withdrawn for a prolonged absence, opposition to his return lead to his final resignation in 1824. He later lived around Bristol and from 1847 in Torquay. After taking his degree at Oxford, William was ordained in 1843 and after two spells as a curate in Wiltshire, he was appointed chaplain to the Bishop of Newfoundland. After a brief visit to the diocese, he married Harriet, daughter of the Rev. Francis Henry White, who was related to the Gilbert White of Selbourne. They had one child, the future ninth Earl, born in Newfoundland in 1850 where William had become Principal of St. John's Theological College, now the Newfoundland Memorial University. His stay was shorter than it should perhaps have been but Harriet could not cope with the climate and they were forced to return to England. To judge by his letters he was probably not too unhappy to return, though disappointed not to have done his duty as he would have wished.

In this short piece I will pass over his adventures in England, but he continued to write long letters to his father when he was abroad. Unlike many Victorian gentlemen, William was a fair artist, having the ability not only to describe a landscape in words but to draw the picture as well. Some of his letters contain little pictures, illustrating landscape and buildings in Newfoundland, which is what we will consider in this article.¹ They are not finished works but simply uncoloured ink sketches either in the body of the letter or on a blank page at the end. William inserted them because 'I know that you are fond of illustrated letters, so I have given on the other side a view of the present church & schoolroom, with the blacksmith's house, stable and forge as seen from our bedroom window. You see we have some noble hills, although what is shown in the sketch is nor so high by 300 feet or so of others close by'. On the last page of the letter was the sketch, figure 1 below, inscribed 'Portugal Church from the Parsonage'². At the end he included a picture of his Allington Rectory from the south east (figure 2).

The fisheries caught his eye and he not only wrote a description of the fishermen's stages, but in the middle of the text inserted two little sketches (9 cm across) to make clear what he meant.

These stages are made of the wood of the country - they are built as piles driven into the bank, so that the stages 'head' is always well beyond low water mark. At a distance they look like large bathing machines when seen in front. At the stage head one or two ladders made of nailing long sticks across the supporting posts, where the fishermen get up and down from their boats.



Fig. 1 Portugal Cove.

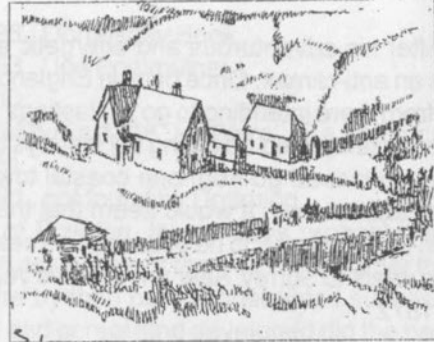


Fig. 2 Allington Rectory.



Figure 3, fishermens' stage (left) and flake (right).

Domestic life and scenery came together in one long letter, unfortunately too lengthy to quote when the couple were getting their house ready and visiting the neighbours, showing off baby. William was at times irked by what must be the bane of every junior clergyman's life, the heavy hand of a rather overbearing bishop: 'I fear now that we shall not get to Portugal Cove until the beginning of next summer - for I see that it is not the Bishop's wish, & it is scarcely my [lot] to leave this before the Bishop's return' (18 Dec. 1850). In the event, Harriet's health suffered - or was that the excuse? - and the family returned to England and a series of curacies in the south of England.

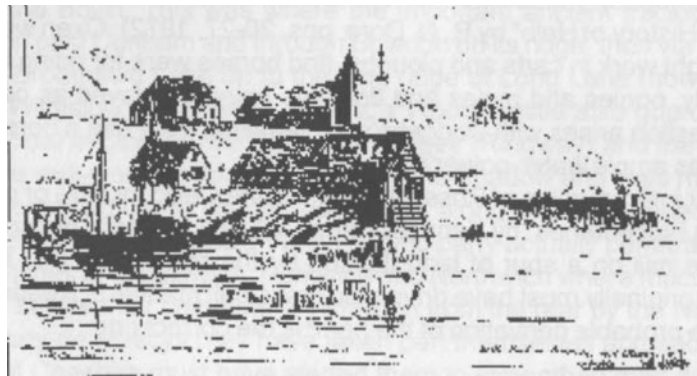


Figure 4, 'Battle Harbour, Parsonage and Church, Labrador. Church consecrated July 5th 1857.. "and on the same day the Bishop gave confirmation to five Esquimaux the first fruits of their efforts."

After his adventurous and energetic early years, William's life could be seen as an anti-climax. Once back in England, he lived for a time in Paignton but moved from there intending to go to Hastings. It is interesting to note that even in 1855 he contemplated travelling to Hastings by the steamer rather than by train, but if he did indeed go from one coastal town to another that might well have been the easiest way. It would seem that the curacy in Hastings was not to be his, for in December 1855 he obtained one near Bournemouth, whence he moved after five years to Surrey. After another five years he returned to Exeter, where he died in 1872.

1 The illustration and the extracts from the letters are reproduced by courtesy of the National Trust and the John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

2 Rylands reference EGR4/6/1/4/33.

Further Thoughts and Evidence on the de Mascy Castles and Mills by Peter Kemp

Ross Mill, Hale

Due to a misreading, in the publication of the original article, the alternative the alternative spelling of Ross appeared as Passe instead of Rasse in the "Bowdon Sheaf No. 21 of October, 2001 and in the subsequent article in No. 45 of October 2005. We apologise for this error. [corrected in this version].

The name Ross or Rasse has been given a possible interpretation by some as a 'flat area' and by Prof. J. McN. Dodgson in his authoritative work "The Place names of Cheshire" as 'horse'. But it seems very doubtful that such a prized animal would have been used instead of, say, an ox in the mundane task of milling as early as 1291, the date of the first-known record of the mill when the then Hamo de Mascy granted it free from toll with lands in Hale to Jurdan de Davenport. ("History of Hale" by R. N. Dore, pps. 20-27, 1972). Oxen were then used for draught work in carts and ploughs, and horses were for riding in battle and travel only, ponies and mules and donkeys being employed as pack animals. The question arises with Dodgson's explanation "Why use a horse when the location has ample water-power?"

Another interpretation of Ross derives from the Celtic for a hill or promontory ("English Placenames" by Kenneth Cameron) which exactly describes the location of the mill on a spur of land flanked by the river Bollin and the little stream which originally must have driven the first small mill there. Readers may agree that this probable derivation of the name is the correct one.

Notes on the other Barony mills

The following list drawn from Dodgson's "Placenames of Cheshire" Part II reveals the earliest mention of the Barony mills:-

Bowdon Mill	earliest mention	1086, Domesday Book
Dunham Mill	" "	1353 'lee Poolmulne'
Ashley Mill	" "	1210
Bollington Mill	" "	1354 but in 1318 'Le Were'. (? a weir for a mill)
Castle Mill.	" "	1481
Ross Mill	" "	1291, not found by Dodgson

With the possible exception of Bowdon, these dates probably refer to mills sufficiently developed to use the actual flow of the river Bollin rather than its tributaries. Weirs and mill-races were by then being constructed successfully. Only as population slowly increased and cereal land developed did the need for more mills arise which is also a possible explanation of the dates given above.

Bowdon Mill in the 1086 Domesday Book had the lowest unit value used by the Norman assessors of 16d. (one fifteenth of £1) in a poor township wasted 16 years before and still not recovered under the de Mascy overlords. Bowdon was assessed for only 1 hide of arable land, maybe some 60-100 acres.

The de Mascy castles of Dunham and Ullerswood

It has now been confirmed that the second Toot-hill did exist in Hale where suggested to complete the defensive line of fortification along the river Bollin between the two castles (see "Bowdon Sheaf" No.45, October 2005). Even as late as the 1838 Tithe Award and Map for Hale, two fields, No. 369 Toot Hill and No. 371 Higher Toot Hill indicate the location of the defensive look-out point, still open farm-land at that time. ("The Placenames of Cheshire Part. II by J. McN. Dodgson, p. 26).

The major castle of Dunham on Watch Hill was most probably built by the first Hamo de Mascy soon after his arrival in his new domain in 1070, but when the minor castle of Ullerswood was built is not yet known. It could have been erected later to protect the vulnerable corner (or nook) of de Mascy territory at the far end of Hale (now Hale Barns) where Oversley (Wulfric's clearing) Ford crossed the Bollin. This was where the important ancient trackway ran from Warburton past Dunham and through Bowdon on its ridge, then via Peel Causeway and Broomfield Lane on to the long ridge of Long Lane (now Hale Road) towards Wilmslow. Ullerswood (Wulfric's Wood) castle also guarded the deer and wild boar enclosure of Ringhaie or Ringey (Ringway) and the good arable land of the well-wooded ridge bounded by the Shadow and Hale mosses to the north. Ullerswood castle was probably built, along with the connecting toot-hill posts about 1150 when a bold Welsh raiding party actually penetrated as far as the salt wiches of Middlewich, Nantwich and Northwich where much destruction occurred before their complete annihilation from the rear by the Normans. The ever-military de Mascys may have taken part themselves and such deep penetration of Cheshire must have alerted them to strengthen their defences only some nine miles further on from Northwich.

Both castles are recorded in the Chronicle of 1173 when the barons under the Earl of Chester rebelled against Henry II, but It does not say whether they were attacked or destroyed at that time. Both castles would have been in clear view from the south, if not from the north as well, since the whole length of the Bollin, running as it did through de Mascy lands on both sides, from the Warburton boundary to Ullerswood would have been cleared of trees to bow-shot range some 2-300 yards across the river. The de Mascys were known at one time to have had five knights in their retinue - perhaps Ullerswood castle had one of those knights in command of the men-at-arms and bowmen manning that important outpost.

It would seem that the de Mascys felt confident that their other barony boundaries were safely guarded by trusted Norman friends and relations. William FitzNigel, Constable of Chester and Baron of Halton, as senior baron of Cheshire, had been granted tenancy of 30 or so manors by the Earl of Chester including Sale and Ashton-on-Mersey and half the manor of Warburton (the other half went to FitzNigel's seneschal Odard de Dutton); Hamo de Mascy's young nephew Hamo de Carenton held Carrington and Partington. Thus the northern county boundary along the river Mersey with what was to become Lancashire was secured by those Norman compatriots of the de Mascys as well as by the formidable (in those days) barrier of the wide Mersey marshlands.

Housing in Bowdon in 1863 by Stephen Matthews

From the middle of the nineteenth century Surveyors of Taxes (the predecessors of the modern Inspectors) were required to provide statistical reports for the Commissioners in Somerset House, about the tax yield and assessable values of their districts. Their district reports were amalgamated to provide national statistics and the original returns were not preserved, so that it is generally impossible to arrive at the underlying material. It is therefore only rarely that we can recover the details for individual localities.

By chance a bundle of about 250 Inland Revenue circulars has been preserved in an archive which belonged to a Mr Henzell. who ended his career as the Surveyor for Stockport and an additional part of north Cheshire, in effect, Bucklow Hundred. They run, with a few gaps, from 1839 until 1866, not long before he retired shortly after 1870. He glued the circulars and instructions that he received into a minute book and whilst this makes interesting reading for the student of administration, more valuably, he often wrote a copy of his report on either the back of the circular itself or on additional sheets which he glued in beside it. These reports provide useful, though limited, economic data for Stockport and the surrounding countryside in those years.

One particular request, made on the 16th November 1863, was for a report, township by township, of the number of houses chargeable to Income Tax.

(implicitly under Schedule A), split into four value bands up to £20, with the numbers and values of houses in each band. To remind those with shorter memories, Schedule A created a notional value for the occupation of property which was then added to and assessed upon the occupier. Mr Henzell replied on the 16th December and inserted a copy of his schedule in the minute book after the circular. His report covers sixty townships in all, in alphabetical order but for this note I have extracted the figures for Bowdon and its next door neighbours, Altrincham and Hale. The reason for the enquiry was probably Parliamentary reform, which was a major concern in the 1860s, and which led to the issue of a number of reports almost certainly based upon figures produced by the Revenue. Having examined them, I cannot see any which adopted this particular breakdown of values and it is most likely that the detailed figures provided were re-grouped as the various reports were prepared. A similar request was made in 1865, but on that occasion Mr Henzell did not keep a copy of his reply.

Mr Henzell has thus given us an idea of the pattern of housing in Bowdon and the surrounding area in the abstract. We know how many houses there were in each of these value bands, but that does not enable us to understand what sort of houses they were. For that we can turn to the Rating valuation lists, for the Schedule A assessments and the Poor Rates used the same values, which were fixed by Union Assessment Boards. We also have a scattering of appeals against the proposed valuations. The figures for Bowdon, with Altrincham and Hale for comparison, are set out in the table below:

	Under £5		£5-£10		£10-£15		£15-£20		TOTALS	
PLACE	No:	Value	No:	Value	No:	Value	No:	Value	No:	Value
Bowdon	4	16	66	447	15	189	8	132	93	784
	4.3	2	70.9	57	16.1	24.7	8.6	16.8		8.4
Altrincham	90	340	680	4860	154	1774	79	1316	1003	8290
	8.9	4.1	67.7	58.6	15.3	21.3	7.8	15.8		8.2
Hale	5	18	60	405	29	353	17	285	111	1061
	4.5	1.6	54	38.1	26.1	33.2	15.3	26.8		9.1

What I have done is set out in the top line for each place the number of properties in the particular value band and in the lower line the percentage that represents out of the total, both for number and value. Thus, $4 \times 100/93=4.3\%$. Those four houses represented 4.3% of the total number but only 2% of the total.

value (16 x 100/784). By comparison. Altrincham had double the percentage of the poorest houses but they represented 4.1% of the total value. Hale had much the same profile as Bowdon but had more property at the better end of this market.

What sort of properties were these? The Altrincham Valuation lists and appeals against valuations give us a fair indication, for the lists served as the basis for both the Poor Rate and Schedule A. From an appeal meeting in 1863 we learn that in Bowdon, Samuel Pimlott succeeded in obtaining a reduction in his premises in Langham Road, as 'Gardener, Fruiterer and Shopkeeper' from the proposed £13 down to £10. Towards the bottom of Stamford Road, Mrs Whitehead had lesser success, but still managed to have the value of her house at Sunnybank reduced from £20 to £19 10s 6d. The valuation lists themselves give us more comparisons: in Altrincham, for example, cottages in Victoria Street ranged from £3 16s 0d to £5 12s 0d. A railway porter occupied a cottage in Stamford Road (Altrincham) worth £5 12s 0d whilst Susan Goulden's house in Ashley Road was worth £12 16s 0d.

More prestigious houses existed: a solicitors clerk, Mark Pearson's, house in Stamford Road was worth £24 whilst John Mort, actuary to the Savings Bank, lived in one worth £38 8s 0d. From these it is likely that the threshold for 'gentlemen's property' lay around the £20 level, which was why that figure was picked by the Parliamentary enquiry. What we can see from the figures is the growth of housing for the artisans and tradesmen next down the social order.

There are many other comparisons that the reader can draw from the figures, I have made only the most basic.

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