

The Bowdon Sheaf

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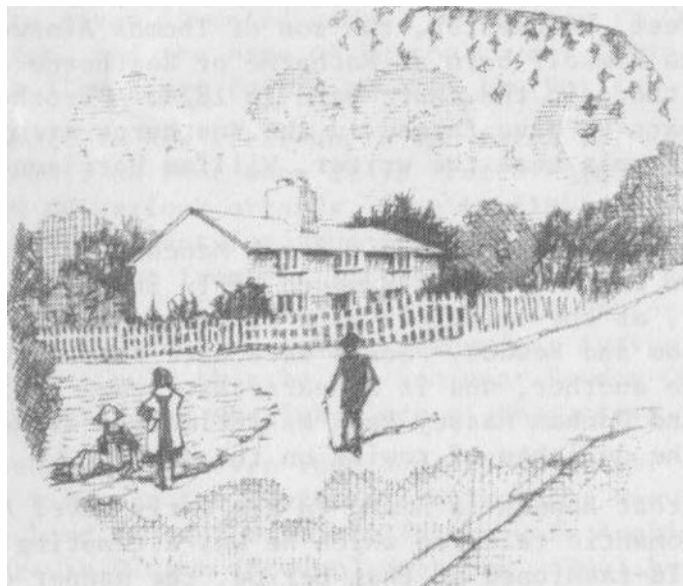
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Contents:

W Harrison Ainsworth, A Victorian Novelist's portrayal of Bowdon by Myra Kendrick.

Early Days of the Women's Movement in Bowdon by Dorothy Shelston.

Rural Bowdon by Ronald Trenbath



These cottages were probably called after Shepherd's Lane, the previous name of Park Road, but local romantics at one time insisted that they were named after Shepherd, the London Highwayman, although it is doubtful if he ever came so far north. Harrison Ainsworth wrote about his exploits in one of his London novels.

W. HARRISON AINSWORTH
A VICTORIAN NOVELIST'S PORTRAYAL OF BOWDON
by Myra Kendrick.

Bowdon has, rather unexpectedly, played a part in two novels by a writer who was once a best-seller. William Harrison Ainsworth (1805-1882) enjoyed great popularity as an historical novelist, of a rather sensational nature, from the 1830s until well into the present century. *Old St Pauls* about the great plague and fire of London of the 1660s, *The Tower of London* having as a central figure the famous Tower prisoner Lady Jane Grey, ancestress of the Greys of Dunham Massey, and *Windsor Castle* with its use of the Heme the Hunter legend, among others long kept their vogue. Of special interest to readers in north-west England are *The Lancashire Witches*, focussed on Pendle Hill in north Lancashire and the villages at its foot, and *Guy Fawkes* with its Manchester references: the old Seven Stars Inn near the Collegiate Church, Ordsall Hall, the home of the Catholic Radcliffe family, friends of Fawkes' Chat Moss, across the treacherous surface of which Fawkes and his companions escaped from their pursuers, and the dignified figure of Humphrey Chetham, founder of Chetham's Hospital. Coming nearer home, Ainsworth describes how he himself looked down on the bogland of Chat Moss from the heights of Dunham and later in the novel despatches some of his characters on a pilgrimage to Holywell via Knutsford and Chester.

For the Ainsworths were a north-west family. William Harrison was born in King Street, Manchester, the son of Thomas Ainsworth, a Manchester solicitor who was himself born at Rostherne or Rosthorne in Cheshire in 1778 and buried there in the churchyard in 1824. A brother of Thomas Ainsworth's appears to have farmed in the Rostherne area and it is evident from two of his novels that the writer, William Harrison, visited his relations frequently. This would mean that from his north Manchester boyhood home in the Cheetham area, to which his family moved early in his life, he would often make the journey, at the leisurely pace of horse and foot transport, through Altrincham and Bowdon. People were used then to walking many miles from one place to another, and it appears that young William knew his way to Bowdon hill and Dunham Massey Park as intimately as he did Rostherne churchyard and the delights of rowing on the mere.

So it is that Bowdon is named in his early novel *Rookwood* (1834), a deliberately romantic tale, in which he was attempting to write in a manner already old-fashioned at that period, the manner of Mrs. Radcliffe, familiar to the modern reader through Jane Austen's delightful parody in *Northanger Abbey*. He wanted to substitute for Mrs. Radcliffe's Italian marquises, castles and bandits an English squire, country manor and highwayman. *Rookwood*, then, is evidently a Cheshire manor house hence, too, Dick Turpin and his mare Black Bess figure in the story and a *re*, in a ballad quoted at length, the heroes of an escapade on the outskirts of Bowdon. Dick himself tells the story in rhymed verse of his waylaying and robbing a horseman on a road not far from Dunham. The road was a hollow, a sunken ravine, overshadowed completely by wood like a screen. The victim recognised Turpin, who knew he must trust to the legendary

speed of his mare to establish an alibi and escape hanging. So he applied the spur, fled "over brake, brook and meadow" and in five minutes at the most he was playing bowls at an inn at Hough Green. In a footnote Ainsworth identifies the site of the robbery as a "woody hollow", once the old road from Altrincham to Knutsford — descending the hill that brings you to the bridge crossing the little river Bollin". The road has been re-aligned since Ainsworth's days, but the site is still traceable, not far from the roundabout linking the A56 and M56. Here Ainsworth is clearly using a well-known local tradition. He writes, too, of his own visit to the spot in the year his novel was published, describing it as, in April 1834, "a perfect nest of primroses and wild flowers". The ravine near the Bollin bridge with its steep banks overhung with trees he characterises as "just the place for an adventure" such as the kind of hold-up Turpin performed.

A later novel of Harrison Ainsworth's, *Mervyn Clitheroe*, published in 1858, sets the whole action of a wildly romantic tale of a stolen will, disputed inheritance, midnight vigil in a churchyard and a simulated ghost in a wide setting, ranging from somewhere just north of Manchester, (Kersal Cell?) through the city, with references to Chetham's Hospital" school and the old Grammar School in Long Millgate, south through Bowdon and Rostherne, as far as Delamere. Strangely, many characters are given Lancashire and Cheshire place names, such as the hero's Clitheroe, his great-uncle the Rostherne farmer's John Mobberley, and Malpas Sale, the major villain of the piece. Towns and villages, while perfectly recognisable by description, are given invented names. Manchester is Cottonborough, Rostherne is Marston, and the name of Dunton covers Bowdon, including Dunham Massey Park. The river Bollin becomes the Rollin. The hero, heir to his great-uncle who farms in Marston, rows on the local mere, crosses it on foot when it is frozen hard, and ranges between Marston and Dunton on various errands. Once he fights a duel on the outskirts of Dunton Park, not far from the site of the Turpin episode in Rookwood "about a bowshot from the little stone bridge crossing the river Rollin". His antagonist is his rival cousin who is trying to wrench his inheritance from him by slander.

Slightly wounded, Mervyn spends the night at the Stamford Arms. Could this be the inn near Bowdon Church? The Nag's Head is another recognisable meeting-place of characters. Dunton (Dunham) Park, even then accessible to the public, is mentioned several times in the course of the action. Mervyn, as a lad, used to run there hand-in-hand with his future wife Apphia, whose mother had taken, a cottage in Dunton (Bowdon) near the school her daughter was attending. The day after the duel Mervyn wanders through the park, nursing his grazed arm, and revels in its magnificent woods, its herd of fallow deer, rabbits "and a few songsters of the grove" (unspecified). A pleasing picture of Bowdon's hill and old church is given early in the story. The view from Marston (Rostherne) Vicarage, near the church on a high bank, is being described. "The fairest object in this part of the prospect was Dunton Church, which stood on a gentle hill about a mile north of the mere. It was an old pile with a square tower like that of Marston. On the right of Dunton the view was terminated by the dark and distant range of the Lancashire hills".

I again, on the icy day when Mervyn crosses Rostherne Mere on foot, he rides on to Bowdon. "Having mounted the gentle acclivity on which Dunton Church was situated, halted near its reverend walls. Hence, in Spring, the view was exquisite". Then, apparently, the whole countryside seemed snow-covered from abundant orchards of damson blossom and the hedgerow sloe. On this winter day, Mervyn's ear is suddenly enchanted by a distant peal of bells which he knows comes from Marston Church, beyond the mere. This challenge is answered by the "ringers of Dunton", disturbing jackdaws from the church tower. So clearly does a novelist of the last century bring before us sights and sounds that are recognisable today, even though the flowers of those days are less abundant now.

EARLY DAYS OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN BOWDON **by Dorothy Shelston**

In nineteenth century Britain the most widely held view concerning the relationship between men and women was that their roles were complementary and that they should occupy separate spheres. Men belonged in the world of work, business and politics, women belonged in the home. This way of thinking affected many aspects of women's lives. Married women could not own property in their own right, their rights in relation to their children were limited, women could not vote and were excluded from many occupations. The Women's Movement, which came into being in an organised way in the mid 1850s, set out to change this situation. Its aims included securing certain basic rights for women, such as the right to vote, and lessening their dependence on men by giving them greater opportunities for education and employment. The early campaigners placed a high priority on improving girls' education. One of their early successes was the inclusion of girls' schools in the investigations of the Royal Commission on secondary education set up in 1864. Anne Jemima Clough gave evidence to that Commission and she outlined a scheme for improving women's education by providing courses of lectures to be given by university lecturers, for women teachers and their senior pupils. This scheme was put into effect in 1867 and led to the formation of the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women. The Council consisted of representatives of a number of northern towns, many of them schoolmistresses, and three leading educationalists. The first course of lectures was given in Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Sheffield by James Stuart of Trinity College Cambridge. One might have expected Manchester to be part of such a scheme but in 1868 Bowdon also joined. The Report of the third meeting of the Council records that: "Mrs Chambers appeared on behalf of the Ladies Education Society in Bowdon to ask for admission to the Council". This was agreed unanimously and courses of lectures organised by the North of England Council were held in Bowdon in 1868 and 1869. The first course consisted of nine lectures on the History of Ancient Greece, given by W. B. Kennedy of Pembroke College, Cambridge in the Autumn of 1868. Sixty five students attended and of them twelve submitted papers to the lecturer for comment.

This seems a large number for a community the size of Bowdon, especially as the parallel course in Manchester only attracted seventy five students. This may reflect the social composition of the area and also the large number of schools within it. Mrs. Chambers, the Bowdon representative to the North of England Council, was herself a teacher at Highbury House which was then a girls' school. The second lecture course was held in the Spring of 1869 and consisted of eight lectures on the History of Science, given by T.S. Aldis of Trinity College, Cambridge. It proved less popular and only forty students enrolled, although this was the same as the Manchester enrolment. Mrs. Chambers represented Bowdon at the fourth meeting of the Council in June 1869, but no further lectures were held here and Bowdon was not represented at any later meetings. It seems possible that the Bowdon Ladies Education Association became part of the Manchester Association for Promoting the Education of Women. Mrs. Chambers was a committee member of the Manchester Association in 1871 and the membership lists include the names of a number of Bowdon people.

A Bowdon resident who played an important part in the work of the Manchester Association was Emily Hall of Higher Downs. She became secretary of the association in 1875 and her arrival coincided with a far more vigorous phase in its work. One of its main objectives was to gain admission to Owens College for women. Two Acts of 1870 and 1871 had given the college the power to admit women but they seemed very reluctant to use it. In 1875 a formal request was made to the Council of Owens College by the Association but was rejected. The Association then called a public meeting to consider the possibility of the University of Cambridge providing Extension Classes in Manchester specifically for women. The Principal of Owens College objected to the scheme and maintained that his college was very anxious to provide for women but: "In any such arrangements care should be taken for a due separation of sexes in the lecture room. Therefore the authorities of Owens College would be compelled to have a double set of classes, and various arrangements in respect of benches and chairs".

This meeting provoked a lively correspondence in the Manchester press and Emily Hall, in a letter which she sent to both the Manchester Guardian and the Manchester Examiner explained the predicament of women in Manchester who wanted higher education. "The college, as an institution, does nothing for us, nor, we are told is it likely to do; and yet, when offered help by Cambridge we are met with the objection that there can be no necessity of seeking from strangers that higher education which Owens College, with a professional staff, confessedly inferior to none in the kingdom, is so well fitted to supply: of the fitness there can be no two opinions; yet as regards women it is a case of "water, water everywhere - but not a drop to drink" and because men in Manchester have exceptional educational advantages, to conclude that women need no extraneous help would surely be somewhat illogical". The outcome was not the admission of women to Owens College but the cooperation of the senate of the college in organising courses of lectures which led, in 1877, to the foundation of the Manchester and Salford College for Women. This college was taken over by Owens College in 1883 as a separate Department for Women.

Emily Hall is also interesting because she seems to have been one of the few people in the area who was actively involved in both the education campaign and the campaign for the vote . In 1867 The Manchester National Suffrage Society had been founded to campaign for votes for women. One might have expected supporters of women's education also to support demands for the suffrage but this does not seem to have been the case. For example a comparison of the membership list of the Educational Association and the subscription list of the Suffrage Society for 1875 shows onlv a small degree of overlap. Of 200 members of the Educational Association only 12 were subscribers to the Suffrage Society, but one of these twelve was Emily Hall.

SOURCES:

Reports of the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women, 1867-1874. (John Rylands Library, University of Manchester).

Reports of the Manchester Association for Promoting the Education of Women 1870-1877, (Manchester Central Reference Library, Local History Library) .

Manchester Examiner 9th April, 1875, 22nd April 1875

Manchester Guardian 9th April, 1875, 20th April 1875

RURAL BOWDON: 5

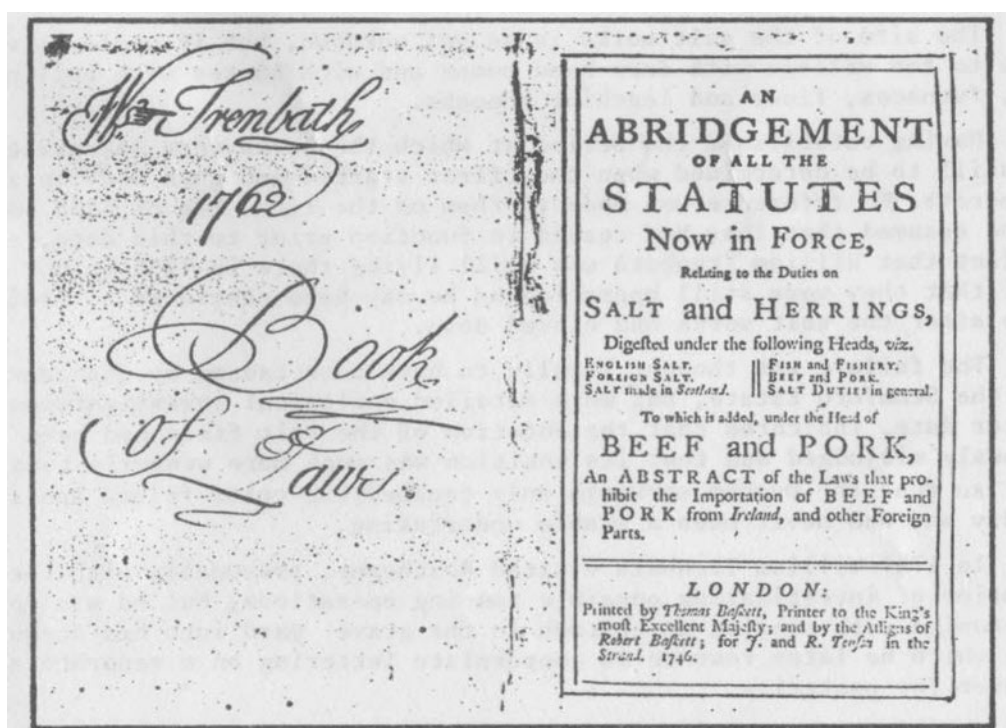
by Ronald Trenbath

Prior to the urban developments which commenced in the middle of the last century Bowdon had been a rural community, but it is not widely known that attempts were once made to "create another Northwich in the district" by the introduction of salt production. Before the last war a few of the older inhabitants of Bowdon claimed that they could remember references to salt extraction locally, and to attempts to create a salt town in Altrincham and Bowdon, but the suggestion was always completely ridiculed, because of the apparent lack of substantive evidence, in spite of references to the acts by Alfred Ingham in his history of the area in 1879.

It was known, of course, that brine was at that time being pumped at Agden, a short distance away, and continued to be pumped there into the 1950 s. but few people would accept that this could take place on the north side of the River Bollin. Recent investigations, however, have revealed an interesting project which might have seriously affected the entire area. In the 18th century prospecting to extend the central Cheshire salt fields was being undertaken by hopeful prospectors who thought that a large inland salt lake, bounded by Delamere Forest to the south, Alderley Edge to the east and Bowdon to the north , had dried out in primeval times to leave a very rich salt deposit. It was thought that the meres were formed as a result of this phenomenon , and that as Rostherne possessed unique fish life from prehistoric times, which they considered to be sea fish, it was reasoned that the bed of this mere was salt which was "being continually dissolved from broken deposits and drawn off a very dilute solution". Based on these assumptions it was argued, in the absence of more scientific forms of investigation, that the Bowdon area would be rich in salt deposits , with the result that brine pumping was started locally.

It was not known, however, for a very long time where exactly and when this took place. This mystery was to a very large degree solved in 1982 by Canon Maurice Ridgway when he was checking church records and noted a reference to "William Trenbath , Officer of Ye Salt Works at Dunham Woodhouses" in relation to the baptism of the latter's son, Benjamin, on July 18th, 1770. This entry located the position of the saltworking and the approximate period when it was operating.

William Trenbath was a Cornish mining engineer who recorded many incidents from his travels in Southern England, Wales and Ireland, together with items from family life, in his account book, but he never made any direct reference to his vocational activities, with the result that his reasons for settling in "Boden" in 1766, at the age of 39, were never explained. It should be noted that the references to living in Bowdon were not incorrect as Dunham was part of Bowdon at that time. Prior to this period William Trenbath had worked in the coal mining district of Coalbrook Dale and in the brine pumping area of Witton, near Northwich, where it would appear that he was an Officer in the Salt Industry. His Book of Laws, acquired in 1762, provides valuable information about the rigorously-enforced laws in relation to the manufacture and sale of salt in the 18th century, and to his duties , as Officer in enforcing them, including overseeing of payment of tax, confiscation, and dealing with salt merchants. The job must have been reasonably lucrative judging by the luxuries he bought, including clothes, boots , waistcoat s, wigs , regular purchases of wig "oyl", whips , tea and a china tea service.



The three main products of Cheshire - dairy farming, forestry and salt production - were interacting. The presence of brine in the earth was considered to enrich the quality of the pasture, the salt was used for reserving the beef carcasses, prior to the advent of refrigeration, and also for curing hides for leather; wood was required for the manufacture of charcoal necessary for the production of salt, and for use in the construction of timber-framed buildings to resist the effects of subsidence, a practice which continued in Cheshire long after it became outmoded in other counties.

Many of the so-called local marl pits are, in fact, former hide pits where hides were buried with brine and lime as part of the tanning process. Charcoal production was also undertaken on a large scale judging from the workings to be found in local woods, especially the big charcoal pit in Charcoal Road. These activities offered alternative forms of employment to the local labour force from agriculture, upon which they would otherwise have been forced to depend, and as working in the salt works was clean, safe and healthy no doubt many inhabitants of the area appreciated the opportunity this offered. It has always been the proud boast of Cheshire salt producers that the conditions of work have always been safe and healthy, a claim which can be substantiated by records, and that when mining was introduced to the industry women and children were barred from working below ground. Dunham Woodhouses was an interesting example of a small 18th century salt village with brick cottages for the wallers and other employees and some earlier timber ones, which were demolished prior to the war.

Larger houses of architectural quality were provided for those in charge, one of which was three stories high with clocks in entablatures on two sides, a flight of steps to the front door and elegant wrought iron railings, stone piers and brick garden walls which might indicate a degree of prosperity when they were built. The site of the salt works is as yet unknown, but it would be very close to the village with deep hand pumps and wick houses with boiling pans, furnaces, flues and leaching troughs. Having established the period at which the works were operating it has still to be determined when they first started and when they ceased to operate. No reference was made to them on the Tithe Map of 1838 so it may be assumed that they had ceased to function prior to this date, and the fact that William Trenbath was still living there in 1795 is not proof that they were still operating as he may have continued to reside there after the salt works had closed down.

The failure was thought locally to have been caused by disagreement with the Stamford Estate, but more detailed geological investigations, at a later date, indicated that the location of the salt field had been seriously misjudged and that its position was much more westerly towards Lymm, so that the Dunham workings only touched the outer fringe and soon ran dry and had never been a viable undertaking. In 1767 William Trenbath visited Rostherne, presumably with the intention of investigating possible pumping operations, but he was more preoccupied with copying an epitaph in the graveyard into his account book, which he later rewrote in copperplate lettering on a separate sheet of paper for posterity. In spite of the failure of the venture salt merchants continued to operate in Bowdon, as references in old documents indicate, although most of them were also slaughterers. The last of these, "Salty" Warburton, only recently left the district. Writing on the subject Ingham stated that "attempts to create another Northwich in that district (Bowdon) proved futile"; and "those who know the dreary aspect imported on the face of nature by the establishments of these works, leaving out the question of damage to property by subsidence, will scarcely crave for active operations in this district". Few today would disagree with this opinion.