

Saddleworth Historical Society

Chairman's Report to the Annual General Meeting Thursday 3rd December 2008

Mike Buckley

The Annual General Meeting provides an opportunity for us to review the activities of the Society over the last twelve months. 2008 has been a busy one for us and seen the work of the Society flourish and grow.

As always, success has been the result of hard work and dedication by the committee and members of the Society. My thanks are due to all members of the committee for their support during the year. Alan Schofield, Neil Barrow and Dorothy Latimer have stepped in and chaired meetings and lectures from time to time in my absence, and I am sincerely indebted to them for doing this, often at short notice. I am delighted that Mike Fox, emancipated by early retirement, has re joined the committee.

Roger Ivens, our Bulletin editor has done an excellent job during the year, producing a very high quality product, both in terms of editorial content and presentation. We have also recovered much of the lag in publication dates that had built up last year in the absence of a full time editor. The work on the newsletter by Stanley Broadbent and Jack Hindle must also be acknowledged. This is an important but thankless job and I would like to record our appreciation to Stanley and Jack Hindle for the meticulous and entertaining way in which this has been done over many years.

The lecture programme this year has been as varied and interesting as ever. Once again my thanks to Keith Taylor and Dorothy Latimer for putting this together and liaising with speakers. At the AGM last year Cllr Alma McInnes, Past Chairman of Saddleworth Parish Council presented the Society with a copy of "Saddleworth - Hub of the Wheel". This book is an account of the foundation of the town of Saddleworth, South Australia by an emigrant from Saddleworth, England in the 1830s and had been a gift from the author Elinor Bellman. I gave a short talk on James Master, its founder, drawing on the research done many years ago by Bernard Barnes and published in the 1983 Festival publication "Saddleworth, the Australian Connection". This was illustrated by a number of views of Saddleworth Australia that I took on a visit a few years ago, also other photographs presented with the book.

The Bernard Barnes memorial lecture in January was given by an old friend of the Society, Norman Redhead, County Archaeologist for Greater Manchester. Norman gave a masterly review of archaeological work across Greater Manchester illustrating his group's work over 38 sites across the County, ranging from iron age settlements to Victorian industrial remains. Alan Rose's talk on Methodism in Delph 1779-2000 followed in February. This was another very interesting and well researched lecture. The importance of Delph in the growth of the local Methodist movement was illustrated, starting with Wesley's cold reception by the established church on his visit in 1780, to the foundation of the first Methodist church in

Millgate a short period afterwards and the increasingly larger chapels of 1800 and 1895; also the pivotal role played during the nineteenth century by the Mallalieu family, local mill owners. The national importance to the movement of one of the local ministers Rev Jabez Bunting was also revealed.

Alan Petford's, interest and research into the life and work of local architect and antiquarian George Shaw is well known and Alan has revealed the importance of this somewhat neglected local figure in the past in his lectures to the Society. In March Alan gave a fascinating account of George Shaw's life and travels as revealed by his diaries, now in the Local Interest Centre, Oldham, and presently being transcribed by a group of volunteers under the guidance of Alan, Neil Barrow and Roger Ivens. Shaw's accounts of his business travels around the country, particularly in Scotland give a vivid insight into life in the 1830s and the young Shaw's fascination with Scott, antiquities, architecture and the growing gothic revival movement.

Popular local author and lecturer Freda Millett enlightened and entertained us in April with a beautifully illustrated talk on the history of Lees, our small and sometimes ignored neighbouring township. Freda illustrated the growth of Lees from a small agricultural hamlet in the middle ages, through a short lived period during the eighteenth century as a spa, to an industrial cotton town in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Old photographs illustrated the wealth of eighteenth and early nineteenth century building lost in recent times and the modern municipal neglect of Lees's heritage. The loss of the historic market place was particularly poignant.

In June I gave a talk on Saddleworth's highways and byways, concentrating on routes locals and travellers would have used before the advent of the turnpike roads at the end of the eighteenth century. Through routes, now partially forgotten, that would have been used by travellers crossing the Pennines north and south and east and west were the main focus of the talk. I repeated the lecture in October to a national meeting of the Milestone Society held here in Saddleworth in memory of society member, and local turnpike road historian and enthusiast, Chris Marcus.

The 2008-9 programme got off to an excellent start in September with an illustrated lecture by Glen Atkinson on the building of the Manchester Ship Canal. A superb set of Victorian magic lantern slides taken at the time of the canal's construction was accompanied by an informative narrative, reflecting the speaker's extensive research on the origins and history of the canal. Talks in October on the Sixty years of Nursing in the National Health Service by Dr Christine Hallett, and on Agriculture and Farming in Ancient Egypt by Victor Blunden, have maintained the high standard set by this year's lecturers. Dr Hallett's lecture gave an erudite account of change and evolution in the NHS and was followed by a lively questions and answer session. Victor Blunden, a popular local lecturer, and recognised authority on ancient Egypt, showed how evidence from ancient monuments has enabled a picture to be built up of an agrarian Egyptian society in the time of the Pharaohs.

The Society has hosted two events this year for other Local History Societies. In May, Alan Petford and I both spoke at a well attended weekend workshop on Saddleworth organised by the Yorkshire Archaeological Society in their offices in Leeds. This was followed the next day by a visit by members of the Society to Saddleworth and a guided walk round the Denshaw area. The weather was kind to us that day and the visitors left with a very positive impression of this westerly

outpost of the White Rose County. Also in May we were pleased to welcome over 40 members of Marple Historical Society. A short introductory lecture was followed by guided tours of Uppermill, Diggle, Delph and Castleshaw roman fort. We hope to reciprocate this visit at a future date.

Following the first Local History Forum, hosted and organised by the Society last year, we participated in a similar event this year hosted by the Hebden Bridge Local History Society. The theme was Historic Pennine Landscapes. Alan Petford was heavily involved in the organisation of the workshop and I spoke on early Settlement in Saddleworth. It is hoped that these meetings, which bring together local history groups from across the South Pennines, will become regular events in the calendar.

In June we embarked on a new initiative, an Historic Records Assessment Day. This was an idea we had picked up from the Marsden Local History Society. Members of the public were invited to bring into the museum old photographs and documents for expert interpretation. With the owners' permission, we then scanned these to obtain copies for our archive. Freda Millett also ran a session of recording oral history. The event was a great success and many new photographs of old Saddleworth turned up as well as some interesting deeds. We hope to continue this idea in the future as a road show taking in each village and area of Saddleworth in turn.

This year Alan Schofield organised an extended and ambitious programme of summer walks. Various members of the Committee led walks around Springhead, Friezland, Diggle, and Linfitts and society member Jack Schofield launched a new Scouthead Trail by a guided walk around the area. The programme concluded in August with a twelve mile walk around the Friarmere boundary. The walks were well attended and much appreciated by all those taking part. Our thanks go to Alan for an excellent job well done.

The summer trip this year was to the City of York. Once again our thanks go to the two organisers, Alan Schofield and Alan Petford, for an interesting and enjoyable day visiting this historic City and having an opportunity to see aspects of York's history that could easily be missed by the casual visitor. From medieval stained glass to the cathedral library the visit was interesting, stimulating and full of variety.

Once again during September Jim Carr conducted a number of well attended and popular tours of the Castleshaw Roman Forts as part of the Heritage Open Days organised by English Heritage and The Civic Trust.

The Society also participated in the Local History Day held last month in Gallery Oldham. Sales of our flagship publication "Mapping Saddleworth" have continued this year at a steady rate and to date stand at around the 850 mark. Its print and production costs are now almost covered and we are now in the healthy situation of having enough stock (around 1100 books) to meet demand for many years to come. Work continues on Volume 2 which we hope to publish in Autumn next year. Copies of historic manuscript maps of Saddleworth are being assembled from record offices across the country as well as from our own collections. The 1770 Farrer Manor Map will feature heavily, this time at full scale and in colour, and a new version of the 1822 township map is being prepared based on a new more detailed copy discovered since its last publication in 1983. Work is also underway on a companion volume to the popular Saddleworth Villages book published in 2003. This volume, to be called "Saddleworth Hillsides and Hamlets", brings together

the text of the local interest trails together with a new set of coloured illustrations by artist Geoff Toms. It is planned for launch at the Saddleworth Festival in 2011.

Our programme of conservation of archive material continues. During the last twelve months The Delph Independents' Chapel Registers and George Shaw notebooks have been expertly repaired and restored.

In addition to the ongoing historical research into Saddleworth families carried out by our family history members I would also like to mention important work underway on Medieval Saddleworth led by Victor Khadem. Thanks to the Internet and the growing number of digitised indexes Victor and I have discovered much new material on medieval and early modern Saddleworth which has enormously expanded our understanding of this hitherto relatively undocumented period. A calendar of early Saddleworth references and documents is at present in preparation and I hope that we can present some of this in the near future in the form of a lecture.

This year 22 new members have joined the Society and membership has grown to just over 500 members; among these are 32 overseas members.

It is always sad to record the deaths of members. This year we lost Norman Wisenden, Heights; Bob Durkee, USA; George Taylor, a past keen member of our archaeology group; Joyce Walsh, Denshaw; David Schofield, Newcastle; Mrs. Christine Sykes, Grasscroft; Mrs. M.E. Patriaca, Grasscroft and Chris Marcus, Shaw. I have already mentioned the debt we owe Chris Marcus for raising the profile of our Turnpike road heritage. We extend our condolences to their families.

Finally, I would like to thank all who have contributed to this year's success. I look forward very much to 2009, the publication of Mapping Saddleworth Volume 2, our programme of activities and lectures and particularly our planned Family History weekend in July.

Mike Buckley
3rd December 2008