

Saddleworth Historical Society
Chairman's Report to the Annual General Meeting
Thursday 5th December 2007

This year has been another very active and successful year for us.

I would like to start by thanking all the members of the committee for their support and hard work during the year. We now have a very strong team and the many achievements of this year are a direct consequence. I am delighted that Roger Ivens, Archivist at Oldham Local Studies, following in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessor Julian Hunt, has now taken over the role of Bulletin Editor. It is a real boon that we now have Roger's knowledge and experience at our disposal. We said goodbye (hopefully only for the time being) to Mike Fox who has stood down from the committee due to work commitments and to David Latimer, who has served the Society almost from its inception 40 years ago. We are fortunate that although Dorothy Latimer retired as Treasurer at the last AGM she has continued as a committee member and we continue to benefit greatly from her administrative and organisational skills. The Society's finances and day to day running remain in capable hands with Neil Barrow now as Treasurer, and Alan Schofield as Secretary.

The lecture programme this year has been as successful as ever. My thanks once again go to Keith Taylor for putting together such a range of varied and interesting topics. At the AGM last year I presented a photographic tour around some of Oldham's historic buildings and it came as a surprise to many that the Town has such a wealth of buildings of real architectural interest. In January Ian McInnes followed on his earlier successful talk "The Men behind the Medals" by looking at more local men who have received awarded for bravery. Next Freda Millett gave a moving talk on the "Scattered Homes" children's orphanages in Oldham in the early twentieth century and in March Steven Moorhouse gave an illustrated talk on the "Historic Saddleworth Landscape" drawing upon his extensive experience and knowledge as a Yorkshire landscape archaeologist. Our youngest committee member, Victor Khadem, followed in April with a meticulously researched and illustrated study into the origins of the Gartside family, their rapid ascendancy from early hillside farmers in Rochdale to a medieval merchant family. On behalf of the Society I would like to congratulate Victor on his acceptance to read history at Brasenose College, Oxford. I believe his work on the Gartside's went down well at his interview.

This season the programme has continued with two more illustrated talks in October by Paul Jennings on the "History of the Public House in Yorkshire" and by our Bulletin editor Roger Ivens on Workhouses in Oldham. November was marked by visit from Doug Ashmore of the Royton Local History Society when he gave us an account of the recent excavations carried out on Royton Hall and the tremendous level of community involvement and interest there has been in the project.

Undoubtedly the high spot of the year was the launch in June of the Society's new publication "Mapping Saddleworth". As before, this was timed to coincide with the Saddleworth Festival of the Arts. The book is a superb production. In full colour, it is probably the most ambitious project yet for the Society. As with all festival publications, the target of a publication deadline resulted in many late nights for the editors as the publication day loomed ever nearer. It was truly a team effort and was only made possible by the considerable involvement of many members of the Society. I would particularly like to pay tribute though to David Harrison for the hundreds of hours of work he put in preparing the artwork for the book and for the efforts of Cliff Moorhouse and Roger Holland in scanning the original maps. The quality of the book and its appeal to a wide market has been amply demonstrated by the sales to date. Sales during the festival were buoyant and since then have exceeded the 600 figure. We are now more than half way to recovering the full print costs. A second companion volume of manuscript maps is planned for the summer of 2009.

In September the Society hosted and organised a Local History Forum. This was a weekend event aimed at Local History Societies across the South Pennines and groups across Oldham Borough and Tameside. The idea was to get to know each other better and share information on project work. Attendance was good and on the Saturday a workshop of speakers and an

exhibition of publications was well attended and enthusiastically received. A walk around Dobcross followed on the Sunday. We agreed to repeat the exercise again in the not too distant future and to set up an Internet Email group to share information and news.

Another series of summer events were the guided walks organised by Alan Schofield. These ranged from an Ammon Wrigley walk to an exploration of the roads and trackways over Stanedge. The walks were all well attended and received and I would like to thank Alan and all those who took part in the organisation of an initiative that we will definitely repeat in the future.

The summer trip this year was to Cromford and Morley in Derbyshire. Organised by Alan Schofield and Alan Petford a guided tour round Arkwright's mills was followed by a visit to the Morley church with its fine medieval windows and monuments of the Sacheveralls, Lords of the Manor. I would like to thank the two Alans for the all their efforts in organising what was a most enjoyable day.

Jim Carr has continued his links with the Universities of Manchester, Lancaster and Sheffield, added to the Society's membership the Council for British Archaeology North West. He also successfully organised Conducted Tours of the Castleshaw Roman Forts and Road during the Public Guided Walks in the summer and twice during the Heritage Open Days organised nationally by English Heritage and The Civic Trust. Numbers attending on each occasion were most encouraging.

It was that with great sadness that we heard of the death of Robina McNeill B.A., FSA, MIFA, the Greater Manchester County Archaeologist, at the age of 57, after a battle with cancer. She ensured that Manchester's industrial heritage was recognised throughout the world and was locally appreciated for her work in the 1980's on the Castleshaw Dig. We attended a Service of Thanksgiving at Manchester Cathedral in October (Robina was also the Cathedral's Archaeologist). She will be replaced as County Archaeologist by Norman Redhead, an old friend from Castleshaw days, a contributor to the Bulletin in the past and, by co-incidence the next speaker in our Syllabus.

New shelving in the archive room has now been installed and this completes are overhaul of the way in which our archive collection is housed. Our program of conservation measures continues and this year we have had a number of items professionally restored and conserved. Among these is the Saddleworth Rate Book of 1839. More conservation work is planned in the coming months. Material on local Waterworks from 1830 has been presented to the Archives and placed in the Askwith Collection.

Further items of computer hardware were purchased during the year to facilitate the production of artwork for our publication work. The Mapping Saddleworth book project benefited significantly from these also from the scanner purchased last year.

The Family History Section remains very active. Membership of the Group continues to grow and the Internet mailing list managed by Cheryl Westlotorn is always busy with queries and answers being exchanged between members The Saddleworth baptism project is now nearing completion. That is, what we now regard as the first phase. All Saddleworth baptisms prior to 1837 will be entered into a single database. This will cover the period 1750 - 1837 initially, and cover all Saddleworth Churches, whether Established or Non Conformist. We hope to publish this first phase in the very near future. Phase 2 will follow extending the coverage to the sixteenth century and including the baptisms of Saddleworth people at churches and chapels outside the area.

This year 42 new members have joined the Society and this has enabled us to maintain a membership of 480 which compares favourably with previous years. We have 30 overseas members mainly in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Italy, Germany and France.

Elsie Broadbent our membership secretary also organises distribution of the Bulletin. Approximately 400 copies of the Bulletin are forwarded each quarter to the membership which involves labelling envelopes, ordering from the printers and arranging delivery to

David & Dorothy Latimer who for a number of years have systematically organised and dispatched them in boxes to the Post Office. Elsie also corresponds with members requiring information and back copies of the Bulletin. Our thanks are due to Elsie, David and Dorothy for their valued contributions.

Unfortunately, we have to record the deaths of several of our members: Mr Frank Allsop, Greenfield; Mr J.W.Sykes, Greenfield; Mrs Amelia Hill, Lydgate; and Mr J.F. Holroyd. Stratford-upon-Avon: also in the last week Mr Mike Howarth of Greenfield. Mike has been an active supporter of the society almost since its inception. Our condolences are extended to their families.

Finally, I would like to record our thanks to Jack Hindle, who is standing down from the committee due to ill health. Jack has served the Society as newsletter editor and representative of the Museum Friends for many years. We will miss his contributions and the good humour that often lightened our meetings.

I look forward to another successful year in 2008 and wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Mike Buckley
5th December 2007