

Meetings

Meetings are usually held in the main hall of New Mills Town Hall, starting at 7:45pm. You may obtain easy access from the entrance on Aldersgate.

Friday January 8	Judith Wilshaw	Samuel Oldknow: Marple's Famous Son
Friday February 12	Eric Wood	The South-West Peak: A History
Friday March 12	Ruth Gordon	Grabbing The Headlines: A Look At Derbyshire's Publishing Industry
Friday April 9	Kevin Whitaker	History of Woodford and A.V.Roe
Friday May 14	Mel Smith	The Architectural History of Strines Hall and Its Renovation

Committee 2009-2010

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Building the Big Ditch; A magic lantern slide show on the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal.

Glen Atkinson.

September 11th 2009

Glen Atkinson began his talk with some facts and figures: the Manchester Ship Canal was constructed in order to by-pass the port of Liverpool. Manchester traders considered that import costs of raw cotton and other commodities into Liverpool docks were far too high. A canal large enough to accommodate ocean-going vessels which could tie up in the city of Manchester itself was to be their audacious answer. Work began in 1888 and the first ships sailed into Pomona Dock in Manchester in 1894. The canal was 36 miles long, had five flights of locks and nine swing bridges. It took six years to complete, which averages six miles a year. The estimated cost was 6½ million pounds; it eventually cost 14 million. The human cost was similarly exorbitant: 120 deaths; 1,600 serious injuries.

A large number of glass-fronted slides were taken at the time. Miraculously, they have survived in almost perfect condition and our speaker was able to project them. They open a window on that late Victorian world of civil engineering construction. It is clear that the Ship Canal company was bent on using state of the art excavating and building equipment. We were shown the latest large-scale dredgers, mechanical shovels, cement mixers, etc. - all driven by steam power. Great use was made of rapidly-laid, temporary railways to move heavy materials quickly to the task in hand.

On the other hand, when it came to the welfare and safety of workers, the pictures showed just how primitive and dangerous working conditions still remained. Navvies pushed heavy, wooden wheelbarrows across chasms balancing on wobbly planks. Scaffolding was rudimentary and often improvised; no wonder the accident rate was so high.

Glen Atkinson's talk was delivered with verve spiced with gallows humour. He frequently made acute observations and pointed out details in the illustrations that the casual viewer might miss. But it was the slides themselves, with their evocative recreation of a world that has passed from living memory, that remain uppermost in the mind.

Ron Weston

**New Mills Festival Lecture:
The Mills of New Mills, 1391 - 2000
Derek Brumhead**

21st September 2009

To begin at the beginning, or as close to the beginning as the evidence allows: the earliest mention of a mill here is in 1391, the "New Mylne", a water-powered corn mill on the river Sett, held by the Duchy of Lancaster. Its very name implies an even earlier mill on that site. It stood on the site of the present Woodside Garage, just upstream of New Mills Bridge, which spans the river at the bottom of High Street and Hyde Bank Road.

Thus, Derek began a considerable task: to give his large audience some account of the twenty-eight or so known mills in New Mills.

Having introduced his theme with our medieval mill, Derek moved swiftly to the eighteenth century and the development of the early cotton mills in the Torrs. Skilfully, he analysed the sites of the principal mills, using a combination of maps and photos old and new, and illustrated their development through the decades of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

He then turned his attention to the next generation of mills built in mid-Victorian times along the canal at Newtown. These were powered by steam from the beginning, making use of the canal and later the railway as means of transport.

Derek spoke with some feeling about Torr Vale mill, the last of our mills to stay in production, eventually closing in 2000. There are unique features to this mill — English Heritage supports its preservation. But what a sad ending to that proud record! Now it stands derelict, decaying, its future uncertain; one fears the worst.



Derek is to be congratulated on another excellent presentation, delivered without the aid of notes, as befits a master of his subject. As the festival comes round each year, the people of New Mills have come to expect a talk from Derek as one of its highlights. Long may this happy tradition continue!

Ron Weston

Farmhouses and Cottages of East Cheshire

R.W. Brunskill

9th October 2009

Professor Brunskill, one of the foremost authorities on Vernacular Architecture, kindly consented to come to talk to us at short notice, after the sad death of our scheduled speaker, Fred Broadhurst.

Our speaker began by distinguishing the "vernacular zone" from the "polite zone", explaining that great and large houses in the past were buildings which went beyond the utilitarian dwelling. Instead they were designed to be considered pleasant to look upon – that is, as aesthetic works of architecture. On the other hand, the houses in the "vernacular zone" were the manor houses and yeoman's farmhouses of the medieval period, though in recent centuries the zone has encroached upon more humble abodes – the cottages of labourers and artisans, as these became more substantial and long-lived. In addition, regional variations in building styles and materials are major themes in vernacular architecture.

Professor Brunskill showed us a series of slides of buildings in East Cheshire, beginning with some very early examples of stone and timber-framed houses, explaining that several stone buildings concealed their timber-frame origins. Early examples were Chorley Hall (Alderley Edge) and Baguley Hall. The evolution of house design from the single storey – single roomed "hall" with its central hearth, typical of the fourteenth century, to the multi-storey complex of chambers, parlours and butteries with their attendant chimneys and staircases was also illustrated with slides: Handforth Hall and Staley Hall were used as local examples.

The final section of the talk concentrated on the small houses, country cottages and town terraces dating from the seventeenth century onwards, which occupy the attention of students of vernacular architecture to an increasing extent. A feature of this type of building is the use of new building materials, notably brick, tile and slate. With the coming of the railways, building materials ceased to be exclusively regional, while certain architectural styles came to dominate built landscapes associated with the industrial age throughout the country.

At the present time where, increasingly, everywhere looks the same, it is well to appreciate the work of scholars such as Professor Brunskill, who remind us of the need to preserve and value these few precious survivals of the world we have lost.

Ron Weston

Abel Buckley Wimpenny - A nineteenth century Hayfield mill manager, political activist and social reformer

John Crummett

November 13, 2009

In many ways, Abel Buckley Wimpenny, the subject of John Crummett's excellent talk, epitomised all that was best in the Victorian liberal patrician. John's perception of this fact has led him to make an in-depth biography of someone whom others may have dismissed as merely "a big fish in a little pool".

Wimpenny moved to Hayfield as a young man in the early 1860s to become manager of Wood mill print works, owned by his wealthy relatives, the Buckleys. There he remained, living at Oak Villa in Swallow House Lane, until his death in 1905. He proved an excellent manager, dealing successfully with several problems that defeated some of his local rivals. He was also an accomplished craftsman in the highly-specialised fields of dyeing and printing and kept abreast of the rapidly-changing developments in the industry in response to the huge expansion in demand during the late nineteenth century.

Wimpenny's undoubted personal qualities had been fashioned and reinforced by his early influences. John emphasised this from the outset, describing Wimpenny's upbringing in a loving and well-regulated household of a middle-class family in Old Road Duckinfield. Standing nearby was a Unitarian chapel and a Moravian church with its own community. Thus, his own family life in Hayfield was exemplary, even by the high standards of his time. Wimpenny kept detailed, well-annotated accounts of all his domestic expenditure; these are revealing documents which enable the historian to present a vivid picture of a Victorian household.

Wimpenny was a Liberal in politics, a close supporter of Gladstone and active in the promotion of reforms to local government in Hayfield and district. It was his interest in education that brought sparkle and prominence to Wimpenny's career in local politics. The 1870 Education Act brought in the first serious attempt to provide state education for the masses independent of religious denominations. The Act was sure to generate conflict between liberal reformers and churchmen up and down the land — not least in Hayfield. Wimpenny was determined to see a Board School established in Hayfield; the Reverend Ricketts, vicar of Hayfield, was bitterly opposed and equally determined to maintain religious education in the village. The long-running disagreements between the two adversaries provide much dramatic and sensational copy for the local press. The rearguard action of Ricketts and his supporters (which, incidentally, included the Wesleys) delayed the implementation of the 1870 Act until 1888, when the new Board school was eventually opened.

John covered a great deal more in his biographical account of Wimpenny: his love of art and music and the delight he took in his frequent visits to Manchester, then one of the most progressive, cultivated and civilised cities in Europe.

John's audience left with a fully-rounded picture of Abel Buckley Wimpenny, this remarkable man. Many of us also left with John's book, newly on sale and eagerly purchased.

Ron Weston

The Portico and Its People

Emma Marigliano

Friday December 4th 2009

As the world's earliest manufacturing city, Manchester has left us a complex and varied inheritance. Perhaps we have been too ready to dwell upon the evil aspects of the Industrial Revolution: the "dark satanic mills" with their attendant slums and wretched inhabitants. Today we are all too aware of their legacy: sub-standard housing, poverty, crime and an alienated under-class are still with us in our inner cities.

Emma Marigliano's talk reminded us that there is another side to Manchester. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the city's industrial and commercial prosperity fostered academic learning and cultural activity of every kind. Some of the greatest men of the age, and not a few of our most gifted women, were Mancunians. From the earliest times, city life had always been equated with civilisation and nineteenth century Manchester, for all its industrial squalor, was no exception.

In 1806, the Portico Library was built in the centre of the emerging industrial city. Its founders, honorary officers and early members were academic and professional people. Medical men associated with the Infirmary were particularly prominent and brought with them an expertise and interest in science, both pure and applied. Members of the Portico Library were also, for the most part, supporters of the celebrated Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, whose lecturers addressed the great political, social, economic, religious and scientific questions of the day.

It is impracticable in this short review to mention all the celebrities who during the last two hundred years have been numbered amongst the membership of the Portico Library, or who served as officers or committee members. Needless to say, the list is long and illustrious. Nevertheless, and at the risk of appearing invidious, let me select a few of the giants of the early days: Samuel Gregg, the mill-owner, John Dalton, founder of atomic theory, Robert Peel and his famous son, Sir Robert, Rev. William Gaskell (whose wife, the famous novelist, was denied membership, with the rest of her sex), Richard Cobden, the anti-Corn Law politician and James Watson a literary figure who produced the Library's first catalogue.

What is the relevance of the Portico Library today? It remains a treasure house of "polite literature", the early nineteenth century collection of volumes deemed necessary for the edification of the great and the good. Today's members still enjoy a library whose walls are lined with books and rooms not occupied by machines. In past decades the Portico has suffered from neglect and lack of support; but recently there has been a resurgence in its fortunes. One disadvantage of a library located in central Manchester is that its books tend to disintegrate in the sooty atmosphere. Although many of the older volumes have been restored, many more require conservation.

The Portico Library is a monument to Manchester's great traditions of culture and learning; long may it remain!

Ron Weston

Abel Buckley Wimpenny - A Review by Rosemary Taylor

When I was writing "Pioneers of Calico Printing", I breathed a sigh of relief when I came to Wood Print Works. The man in charge rejoiced in the name of ABEL BUCKLEY WIMPENNY. What a change from the multiple Georges, James's, Henrys and Thomas's who controlled the other print works. Surely, I thought, there couldn't be two men with a name like that, but I was wrong..

In his detailed study of ABW, Dr. John Crummett has shown that not only were there two ABWs, father and son, but there was an Abel Buckley as well. He and his brother Nathaniel Buckley owned Wood works and installed ABW junior as Manager. Dr Crummett has pursued the family tree in sufficient detail to show that ABW was not Abel Buckley's nephew, as stated in his obituary, but a more distant relation.

Dr Crummett put flesh on the bones in his talk describing not only his work but his many leisure interests. He gave us a picture of a hard-working, technically accomplished man with wide interests who was involved in most aspects of Hayfield life, particularly the Parish Council. Trying to read between the lines of ABW's comments about servants and his arguments with the Vicar, it seems that he was not a man who suffered fools gladly. It would be interesting to know what his employees thought of him. We do know that he was called "the Mestur"

The book is well produced. There are 100 clearly printed, glossy 61/tin. By 91/2in.pages with maps and family trees and excellent colour photographs of some of ABW's designs. At £5 it is a bargain.

Abel Buckley Wimpenny is the gentleman in the bowler hat at the back.



Not Quite Manchester United

Early in 1945, I remember I was in a little old ship named "City of Christiana" in the Mediterranean, when we got orders to go to Gibraltar. On arrival, we were sent to Lescoise, the port for Oporto in Portugal to load thousands of tins of sardines for London. Due to the German U-boats in the southern French ports, the ship had not been in that area, but with the Germans being beaten back it was safe to go.

When we got there, several British people who lived and worked in Oporto came on board and made us very welcome, inviting us to their homes. Our third officer had his twenty-first birthday there and they gave him a complete party, together with a cake.

To go to Oporto we caught the single-decker town trams right into the old city. I'm pleased to say that one of these old trams is still working at Crich Museum.

One day, an older resident came aboard. He had something to do with the local youth sports club and football team. He said that if we could raise a team and play the locals at football he would buy each player a bottle of port, if we managed to win or draw. This was a tempting offer, as money was always short and it would make a nice present to take back home. So we formed a team as best we could. This was not easy, as the crew were from India and did not play football, while many of the officers were older men. However, we formed a team, they kitted us out and the match got under way. Being on a ship does not give you much chance of prolonged exercise and after thirty minutes we were getting really hammered and the home side easily beat us, 5 - 0.

Everyone seemed to have enjoyed the game and two more fixtures were arranged. In the second game, though we tried our best, we were beaten 5 - 2. The final game took place just before we left and we were determined to get the port. We played our hearts out and drew 2 - 2. True to his word, the older resident came down and we all got our bottle of "Gonzales" port. I got my bottle home safely to New Mills by wrapping it in a sock. My parents did enjoy it.

Bill Barton

Mill Chimneys

Most of the mill chimneys that once punctuated the skylines of our area have now disappeared. John Hill sent in this account from The High Peak Advertiser for August 18th 1893, to remind us of those days when all our chimneys smoked and needed maintenance.

EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE AT BIRCH VALE BIG CHIMNEY. A CHAT WITH A FAMOUS STEEPLE-JACK.

Mr. John Faulkner, the well-known steeple-jack of Manchester, is now engaged repairing the tall chimney belonging to Messrs. John Bennett and Sons' Printworks, Birch Vale.

The chimney, he tells me, is 216 feet high, and was laddered in two and a half hours. On examination, the cramps, which secured the stonework, were found to be greatly the worse for wear, and it is necessary to replace them with new copper cramps; the joints of this stonecap will be pointed up, also the brickwork for 10 yards underneath will be pointed with boiled linseed oil mastic cement. This mastic cement which he uses, he finds to be better than any other cement or mortar for his class of work. It resists the sulphur and weather, and at the same time is absolutely waterproof, and when set is as hard as rock, almost unbreakable.

Mr. Faulkner tells me he does not confine himself to tall mill chimneys, but can proudly say he has operated on most of the loftiest spires in the United Kingdom. Of course, the system of laddering a chimney or spire is not the original process, in fact it has only been in operation 17 or 18 years. Before then, kite-flying was the *modus operandi*. Mr. Faulkner has the proud distinction of having been the first man to gain access to the top of a chimney by this means some forty years ago, and since then up to the present he has repaired some thousands of spires and chimneys; in fact, he can safely say he has been

on more chimneys than any other man in the world.

This is by no means his first visit to this district, for he has recently repaired chimneys for Messrs. Slack, the Kinder Printing Company, Hayfield Printing Company, Woods', Glossop, Sumner and Company, Sidebottom's, Hadfield, Platts and Company, Rhodes' and Company, Potter and Company, Dinting Church, Whitfield Church, Old Glossop Church, Woods' Baths and Hospital, Strines Printworks, etc.

At the present time he is erecting lightning conductors and repairing chimneys and spires at Royal Exchange and Owen's College, Manchester, Accrington several chimneys, Brackley Church, Northamptonshire, and has just been chosen by the directors of the Dukinfield Coal Company as the most suitable person (and deservedly too) to repair their chimney at Astley Pit, which was struck by lightning during the recent storms.

This chimney is 42 yards high, and was shattered about one-third its length. It is a wonder to me that such a stroke of lightning (which displace such a quantity of brickwork) did not level the whole chimney to the ground. Had there been an efficient lightning-conductor fixed on the chimney, this catastrophe would not have occurred, lightning conductors carry away the electric fluid silently and unseen to the ground. In all his experience he has never known a single case in which an efficient lightning-conductor has ever failed to do its allotted duty.

Mr. Faulkner recommends all persons using lightning-conductors on their buildings to keep them in good repair, and tested electrically to ascertain if they are in proper working order. Going nearer Mr. Faulkner's home, he has recently been engaged on two of the loftiest spires in Lancashire, viz., St. John's Cathedral, Salford, and St. Mary's Church, Hulme, Manchester. The top part of the steeple of the former had to be entirely rebuilt, as it was 1ft. 3in. out of the perpendicular, a very risky job indeed. The lightning-conductor on the spire of the latter was seen to be disconnected at the top. Lord Egerton, who is patron of the church, instructed Mr. Faulkner to do the necessary repairs to the spire and lightning conductor.

During his career he has straightened some scores of chimneys, some of which had been out of perpendicular from 1 foot to the alarming extent of 6 feet.

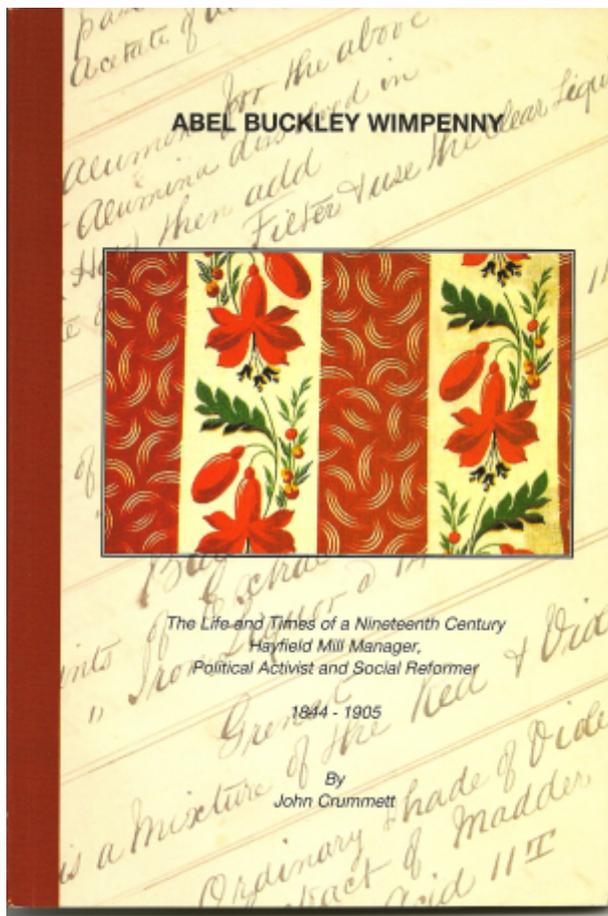
On the 10th of March, 1863, the day of the celebration of the Prince of Wales' wedding,

he baked an immense potato pie (which weighed over 60lbs.) on the cool side of the chimney belonging to the Manchester Corporation Gas works, Rochdale road. This chimney was 303 feet high, into which the heat from no less than 120 different fires was constantly ascending. During the whole of the time the chimney was thus working he contrived to remove the large stone cap of the chimney, weighing 40 tons, and 48 feet of the brickwork of the chimney.

I may mention that the Birch Vale chimney from the ground level to the summit is 216 feet high, and the foundation is 24 feet below ground level. It was built in 1851 by Clayton, of Hazel Grove, at a cost of £1,500. The bricks were made close by, -the exact spot being across the reservoir bank, and were conveyed along a temporary tramway by means of a pony and wagons, the pony-driver at the time being, Mr. Thomas Ashton, now of Beard Wood, New Mills.

The Demolition of the Chimney in 1974





Abel Buckley Wimpenny

Available from New Mills Heritage Centre and at Local History Society meetings for £5.00.