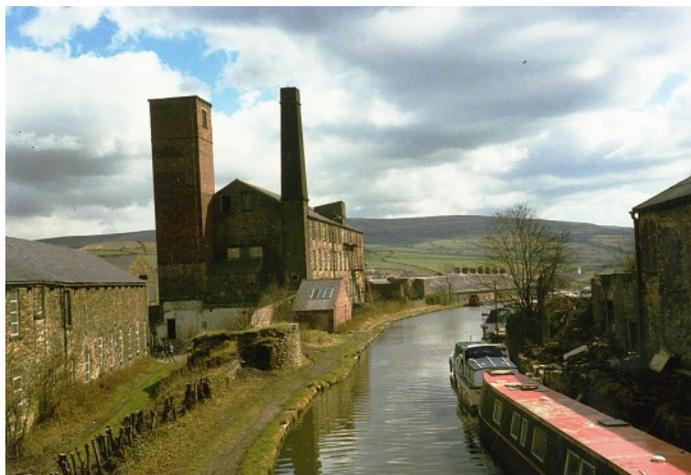


New Mills Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

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From the Editor.

Sitting in the audience at a meeting one can always sense how well the speaker has performed by the general reaction at the end. According to my judgement, we rated all our speakers in the current programme pretty highly. We are fortunate in having the services of Derek Brumhead, who books the speakers for our talks. Derek knows many of the speakers personally and, of course, some are members of our Society or of other local societies.

If you are one of our satisfied customers, do continue to give us your support in 2017: please attend the meetings and buy any new publications.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, I wish you a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

Ron Weston

Committee 2016-2017

| | |
|----------------------|--|
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Compstall and Co-operation

Judith Wilshaw, 2nd September 2016

The small settlement of Compstall lies at a bridging point of the River Etherow, just above its confluence with the River Goyt. As Judith Wilshaw pointed out in her clear and polished presentation, Compstall did not exist before the late eighteenth century when Thomas Andrew, a bleacher and dyer from Harpurhey, set up his new printworks on the bank of the Etherow. The riverside location offered a ready supply of soft water as well as a source of water power, while the coal mines in nearby Ludworth became important to Compstall with the advent of steam power there. Several generations of the Andrews family developed the industrial premises, together with the township accommodating its workforce. As the nineteenth century wore on, the family fortunes expanded. A spinning mill and a weaving mill were added to the industrial complex, together with the installation of steam power and a gas plant. Some of these buildings may still be seen today, as well as the extensive reservoirs incorporated into the Compstall Country Park and the impressive weir on the Etherow.

George Andrew, son of the founder Thomas, bought Werneth Hall and later built a new house Compstall Hall. His son, George Andrew the second, also known as “Juddy”, lived at Ernocroft Hall, now demolished. This gives us some indication of the prosperity to be derived from the textile finishing trades in their heyday. The family adopted a paternalistic attitude to its extensive and growing workforce during the early decades of the nineteenth century, building houses, shops, schools and churches and creating what was at the time regarded as comfortable living conditions, and generous social amenities.

Perhaps the most surprising and far-reaching result of this paternalism on the part of the Andrew dynasty was the promotion of a co-operative society for Compstall. The first shop opened in Compstall in 1851, only six years after the advent of the Rochdale Pioneers. It was unusual for an employer to embrace the principle of co-operative retailing: normally it was promoted by an association of working men. The venture prospered and new branches appeared in neighbouring towns in the ensuing decades: in Marple in 1874, Romiley 1877, Hawk Green 1882, and later in the twentieth century at Marple Bridge, High Lane, Mellor, Rose Hill, Cherry Tree and at the Ridgeway Centre, now an Asda, which only ceased to be a Co-op in 2014.

Having endured all the vicissitudes of the cotton textile industry, culminating in its final demise in the post-war period, Compstall has re-invented itself as a charming and much sought-after place of residence adjacent to its attractive country park. But, as Judith demonstrated through her collection of maps and photos, the township's industrial past is still apparent in the landscape and remains part of its distinctive cultural identity to this day.

Ron Weston.

The Festival Lecture, 19th September 2016 The Millennium Walkway and Other Bridges of New Mills Derek Brumhead.

To accompany this year's Festival Lecture, Derek produced a book entitled "The Bridges of New Mills", which consists of eighty-six photos, most of which have been taken by Derek himself, illustrating no less than thirty-one bridges in New Mills. Why our town should be so well-endowed is a question that Derek addressed in his lively and engaging talk. Firstly, this settlement, growing up alongside two rivers, the Goyt and its tributary the Sett, is very ancient. Brett's Map of Derbyshire, published in 1767, showed our earliest bridge, now known as New Mills Bridge, adjacent to the fourteenth century corn mill, together with further bridges at Thornsett, Watford, Hague Bar and Goytside. It was the part played by New Mills in the earliest phase of the Industrial Revolution in cotton textiles that created the need for more road bridges over rivers and canals. Then came the Railway Age with tunnels, bridges and viaducts to carry the rails and yet more road bridges to span them.

The Torrs, an attractive location for cotton mills in the days of water-power, also proved a formidable obstacle to communications. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of our most impressive bridges are associated with the Torrs, including the monumental Church Road Bridge, opened in 1835, to carry the turnpike from Newtown to Hayfield and the Union Road Bridge, constructed fifty years later to connect Newtown with central New Mills.

In more recent times, our penchant for bridge-building has not abated; witness the construction of the Millward Bridge over the River Sett in 1984 to commemorate the centenary of the opening of the Union Road Bridge and to honour the memory of Dr. Millward, a popular G.P. in the town who pioneered a campaign to open up the Torrs for public use in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

But, surely, the most audacious engineering achievement in the Torrs in modern times is the Millennium Walkway, opened in December 1999, part of which is cantilevered out from the retaining wall of the railway below New Mills Central station. This has been described in the most recent edition of Pevsner's "Architecture of Derbyshire" as "A stroke of Genius", while The Guardian, with perhaps forgivable journalistic hyperbole, suggested that the Walkway had provided a route through "The last inaccessible place in England."

As an Industrial Archaeologist, Derek in his talk did not neglect the topic of the bridges we have lost, notably the road and railway bridges that disappeared when the Settle Valley Trail was constructed in the mid-1970s along the former railway route to Hayfield. Derek used the Society's collection of photos of these former bridges to good effect at this stage in his talk, comparing them with his own photos of the sites taken as they appear today.

As Derek was keen to point out, his account of the bridges of New Mills was not comprehensive: there are many more bridges, ancient and modern, tucked away in our landscape that he had no time to mention. Perhaps you know one and could send our archivist a photo.

Detailed research and excellent presentation combined with a friendly exposition have long been the hallmark of Derek's talks. This occasion was no exception, as the convivial atmosphere aroused by a well-satisfied audience bore witness.

Ron Weston.

Elizabeth Gaskell

Janet Allan, 14th October 2016

Elizabeth Gaskell was born in Chelsea in 1810. Following the death of her mother, Elizabeth was brought up in Knutsford by a loving aunt. Thus began her lifelong association with the North-west, the setting of her plots and the inspiration of her characters. She married William Gaskell, the Minister at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel in Manchester, in 1832. They led a comfortable middle class life, but in the midst of the misery and destitution suffered by the working class inhabitants. The Unitarians were much concerned at the appalling working conditions in Manchester, conducted detailed surveys and were well-informed. Elizabeth drew upon these grim realities to write her first novel, "Mary Barton", published in 1848. Although a work of fiction, her novel did much to inform her middle class readership regarding the plight of the textile workers.

The Gaskells moved to Plymouth Grove in 1850, which was to remain the family home until 1913. Janet Allan is responsible for rescuing and restoring the house as a lasting memorial to the author she loves. Janet came to us last year and spoke to us about the Gaskell home and her excellent talk prompted us to invite her back to talk about the author herself.

It was at Plymouth Grove that Elizabeth wrote her great and enduring novels. "Ruth", regarded at the time as a shocker because its heroine was a "fallen woman", was published in 1853. Her finest novel, "Cranford", was based on Knutsford, her childhood home. Originally, it was a series of stories written for Dickens' journal "Household Words". "North and South" was a return to the theme of textile mills and working conditions, but also featured Elizabeth's preoccupation with the restricted lives of women in a male-dominated society.

Elizabeth led a full life: she was an indefatigable traveller, both at home and abroad, had a wide circle of friends, many of them famous, whom she entertained enthusiastically and with whom she corresponded constantly. She had a busy family life bringing up her three daughters. There was sadness: her only son died in childhood and she lost her great friend Charlotte Bronte, who died in 1855. Charlotte's father asked Elizabeth to write his daughter's biography, which she did, writing a powerful and controversial critique.

Her later works were "Sylvia's Lovers", set in Whitby at the time of the Napoleonic wars. In 1865, with her final novel, "Wives and Daughters" set in Knutsford, almost complete, Elizabeth died suddenly at the house she had purchased in Hampshire on her own initiative, with a view to retiring there with her husband.

Janet began her talk by quoting the character appraisal of Elizabeth by Lord David Cecil, the celebrated academic and literary critic. Cecil describes her as "A dove unintellectual, recognising man as her sex's rightful and benevolent master"! One wonders if he had ever read any of her books. The character of Elizabeth that Janet so clearly and vividly presented to us is surely the one we should accept.

Ron Weston.

The Derwent Dams

Keith Blood, 11th November 2016

Keith Blood's light-hearted and entertaining presentation was also a clear and informative account of the construction of the Derwent and Howden Dams, together with a vivid portrait of the lives of their builders.

The Derwent and Howden dams, erected to create reservoirs for the water supply of Leicester, Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield, took some fifteen years to build, from 1901 to 1916. Of crucial importance was the choice of site and the decision to construct stone rather than earth dams. The Chief Engineer, Edward Sandeman, was responsible for re-siting the Derwent dam a quarter of a mile upstream, thus eliminating the need for a further dam and reservoir above the Derwent Reservoir. Sheffield had experienced a catastrophic flood earlier in the century when an earthen dam had been breached after heavy rain and lessons had been learned. Gritstone was taken from the Bolehill quarries to the west of Padley Gorge. A branch line from Grindleford brought the stone to Bamford and thence to the dam site. Sheffield was supplied by the construction of a tunnel linking the Derwent valley with that of the Rivelin with its reservoir and holding dam.

The engineering project did not run entirely according to plan. The Howden Dam, especially, ran into problems. A very deep trench had to be constructed in order to find a firm foundation on which to construct the dam.

The building of the two dams brought in hundreds of itinerant workers from all corners of Britain, as well as giving employment to many local people. During the nineteenth century, the arrival of hordes of barbarous navvies was enough to strike terror into a local community. Fortunately, this was not the case with the construction of the Derwent dams as the new settlement of Birchinlee was well away from other centres of population.

Keith Blood has a fine collection of early photos of Birchinlee or "Tintown" as it came to be known. The main street was laid out across a hillside, flanked on either side by prefabricated houses for the workers and their families. Keith showed us illustrations of interiors and exteriors of these "prefabs", which looked comfortable enough until he pointed out that the families had to live cheek by jowl with lodgers with the inevitable overcrowding. Nevertheless, Birchinlee had the rudiments of civilised life, with a school, hospital and church a community hall and pub, together with several shops. There was a football team, a brass band and two huge policemen to keep law and order.

There was what might be described as a cavalier attitude to safety on the construction sites.

Keith's photos gave us a clear understanding of the hazards as well as the arduous nature of the work undertaken by the labourers. Although injuries were common, there were no fatalities, which is unusual on such a major development as this.

With the completion of the Howden Dam, Tintown was demolished. Plantation woodland covers the site today and it is difficult to see any surface traces of what had once been a thriving and bustling community.

The final phase of the reservoir scheme came with the construction of the Ladybower reservoir and dam between the wars. Keith has promised to visit us again to tell us about it. We'll look forward to that.

Ron Weston.

The Rocks of the Peak District and their Economic Endowment, Past, Present and Future Pete Webb, 9th December 2016

Most of the topics in our local history programme are concerned with the recent past, but Pete Webb's talk dealt with the Peak District at its most ancient, the origins of the rocks themselves. Geology to the uninitiated can be abstruse and loaded with jargon, a subject which attempts to explain unfamiliar processes at work on an unimaginably lengthy time-scale. Pete has the gift of shedding the light of understanding on these dark obscurities. Aided by simple maps and diagrams and some brilliant photos, Pete conveyed this immense subject with perfect clarity.

Pete began by explaining that during the Carboniferous Period (359 - 299 million years ago) the land we now know as Britain stood near the Equator on the edge of a land-mass that geologists call Laurentia. In the Early Carboniferous the limestone of the White Peak was created under a warm tropical sea. Its sea bed was formed by particles of countless generations of dead algae, shellfish and corals. It was a relatively quiet period in the sedimentary history of the Peak District, only occasionally interrupted by volcanic activity. A profound change came in the mid-Carboniferous with the formation of immense deltas brought down to the edge of the tropical sea by rivers eroding the mountain chain located in the north-east. Coarse gritstones, sandstones and shales - the Millstone Grit Series - formed the rocks that we know as the Dark Peak. The late Carboniferous was dominated by the tropical swamps that developed on the deltas. Equatorial forests decayed and were

compressed by overlying deposits of sediments, only to be re-colonised and squashed down again, and so on in a continuous cycle. This buried vegetation became the coal seams of today.

At the end of the Carboniferous period continental plates collided as Laurentia drifted northwards and the rocks of the Peak District were crumpled into a dome. Millions of years of erosion have removed the Coal Measures and gritstones at the centre of the dome to reveal the limestone below.

Little remains of the sediments that accumulated after the Carboniferous - they have all been eroded away - except for a few pockets of sands and gravels, known as the Brassington Formation, laid down in comparatively recent times in the Miocene period.

Although the rocks of the Peak District are largely confined to a single geological period, the Carboniferous, they nevertheless constitute a considerable and varied economic resource.

Limestone and sandstone have been quarried extensively over the centuries for building, road-stone, millstones, dry-stone walling and chemical products. The sands of the Brassington Formation have a high melting point and have been put to good use in the manufacture of refractory bricks, as at Friden. Lead, and to a lesser extent copper, have been mined since Roman times at least, and formed the backbone of the economy of the Peak District for centuries. Other minerals, such as chalcopyrite, Ashford Marble, barytes, fluorspar and, of course, Blue John have all figured in the local economy and continue to do so. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, agricultural lime became an important resource in the improvement of upland pastures. Lime burning using local coal met that need in our locality.

Pete's splendid presentation left his audience well-satisfied. This was evidenced in the several questions put to him and the end of the evening. Inevitably, no geologist can give a talk these days without being asked about fracking, Pete's talk was no exception. Obviously, this contentious issue could not be dealt with in a few minutes, but Pete gave an excellent talk on this subject to the Natural History Society recently.

Ron Weston.

John Crummett

A recent Society publication, “1885: The General Election in Derbyshire’s High Peak” by John Crummett, our Vice-Chairperson, has been reviewed in the journal “The Local Historian” July 2016. This is reprinted below.

Other books by John on aspects of the history of Hayfield, which are available at meetings and at the Heritage Centre, are as follows:

“Abel Buckley Wimpenny: The Life and Times of a Nineteenth Century Hayfield Mill Manager. Political Activist and Social Reformer 1844-1905”,

“The Reverend Ricketts Raymond Ricketts: Vicar of Hayfield 1877 - 1906”

“Mothering Sunday 30th March 1851: A Window into Church-going in northern Derbyshire”.

1885: THE GENERAL ELECTION IN DERBYSHIRE’S HIGH PEAK

by John Crummett

This monograph is a welcome addition to the relatively small number of case studies focusing on general election contests at the parliamentary constituency level. As such, they complement works by electoral historians who seek to construct an overarching narrative for the election as a whole. This is especially important where, as in the case of the High Peak constituency in 1885, the outcome was unexpected. As Crummett explains, it was generally anticipated that the Liberal candidate, John Frederick Cheetham, would comfortably hold the seat. He had been one of the MPs for the previous two-member constituency of Derbyshire North and Liberalism was the dominant political force throughout the county. In the event, however, his opponent the Conservative, Captain William Sidebottom, won by the very small margin of nine votes.

Drawing almost exclusively on reports from five local newspapers, the Liberal-supporting Ashton Reporter, High Peak Advertiser and Buxton Advertiser and Conservative-supporting Glossop Dale Chronicle and Buxton Herald, Crummett describes many of the key features of the election.

These include the fact that this was first contest in which rural working class males could vote, having been enfranchised in 1884, and that most constituencies were now single member. He provides background information on the political and socio-economic character of the constituency; mini-biographies of the candidates and their views on the issues of the day; insights into the campaign and approaches to electioneering; and what happened on polling day. He also gives some reasons for the result, of which complacency on the part of the Liberals seems to have been an important factor along with the decision to locate their headquarters in Buxton rather than Glossop. In such a socially-mixed and geographically extensive constituency as High Peak,

territorial politics inevitably played its part. The account ends with helpful summaries of the future careers of Sidebottom and Cheetham.

Overall, Crummett's coverage of the 1885 High Peak election makes an interesting read. However, this reviewer has a few quibbles. First, the numbering of the sections should have begun with the one headed 'Background', as opposed to the 'Preface' and descriptions of Punch cartoons, which are preliminaries. Second, rather than a combination of endnotes and the embedding of newspaper references in the main body of the text, a more consistent approach to referencing would have been welcome. Last, it should have been made clear that Cheetham won the Stalybridge constituency at a by-election in early 1905, having failed to do so at the previous general election of 1900 (p. 19). These, however, are minor matters and should not deter anyone with an interest in local electoral history from acquiring a copy of this fascinating monograph.

ROGER OTTEWILL

The Local Historian

Volume 46 No 4, October 2016 has been placed in New Mills Library.

Professor Tom Williamson: 'Capability Brown and local history'.

Andrew Watkins: 'Humphrey Ryddell and the Swan at Coleshill: a sixteenth-century smalltown innkeeper and his inn'.

Claire Cross: 'Recreating Calvin's Geneva in sixteenth-century Ashby de la Zouch'.

Marie-France Weiner and John Russell Silver: 'John Pierpont Morgan and the Wall Hall Estate (military hospital near Watford, Hertfordshire) during two World Wars'.

Gillian Cookson: 'The Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society: past, present and future'.

Mike Derbyshire: 'The organisation and records of the Palatine of Lancaster, and their use for local historians'.

Sally Sokoloff: 'Researching "The Fallen" in local histories of the Great War'.

Reviews.

The grass roots of English local history, local societies in England before the Industrial Revolution; English inland trade 1430-1540 - Southampton and its region; Shropshire taxes in the reign of Henry VI11; A history of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds; The cult of St Edmund in medieval East Anglia; The Inoculation Book 1774-1783.

Recent publications in local history.

New Mills Local History Society - Meetings - Spring 2017

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

Please note that the April meeting is the first Friday in the month.

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| Friday Jan. 13 | The Story of the Peak Forest and Macclesfield Canals | Judith Wilshaw |
| Friday Feb. 10 | Manchester Docks to Salford Quays | Derek Brumhead |
| Friday Mar. 10 | Avro Manchester: The Legend behind the Lancaster | Dr. Rob Kirby |
| Friday Apr. 7 | Restaging the 1829 Rainhill Trials for BBC 4s Timewatch | John Glitheroe |
| Friday May 12 | A.G.M. <i>followed by</i> The Lost Pubs of New Mills | Mike Daniels |