

New Mills Local History Society

NEWSLETTER 40



Spring 2008

Meetings - Spring 2008

NOTE! Permanent change of venue:- meetings from now on will be held in the main hall at New Mills Town Hall on the second Friday of the month,

Friday January 11	Mike Redfern	The Mersey and Irwell Navigation
Friday February 8	Jennie Ainsworth	Vera Britain's Buxton
Friday March 14	Greg Fox	Railways of New Mills and District
Friday April 11	David George	Early Motoring around Manchester
Friday May 9	Derek Brumhead	A.G.M. followed by New Mills - Then and Now

From the Editor

The Society will hold all future meetings, beginning on January 11, 2008, in the main hall at New Mills Town Hall. So, it's "Goodbye Sett Valley House". Lamented or unlamented, it's been our home for a good many years and the scene of many happy memories. Let's hope we can do as well in our new venue.

Committee 2007-2008 (elected at the A.G.M.)

Chairperson	Gaynor Andrew
Vice-chairperson	Barbara Matthews
Hon. Secretary	John Humphreys
Hon. Treasurer	Joan Powell
Hon. Archivist	Roger Bryant
Hon. Editor	Ron Weston
Ordinary members	Olive Bowyer, Derek Brumhead, Barry Dent Barbara Done, Pat Evans, Richard Wood

Charles Roe of Macclesfield: an eighteenth century industrialist

September 14th 2007 - Dorothy Smith

The men who made the Industrial Revolution, inventors, entrepreneurs and industrialists, came from all walks of life and all classes of society, in 1728 and one of eight children, Charles Roe was the son of an Anglican clergyman. Rev, Thomas Roe served in Macclesfield before becoming vicar of Castleton, a wealthy living supported by local tithes raised from lead-mining. However, Charles saw little of the family fortune, for when his father died (Charles was only eight at the time) the eldest son William inherited most of it. Charles was apprenticed to a button manufacturer, had the good sense to marry the boss's daughter and combined with his father-in-law to expand the business.

The fashion for silk-coated buttons encouraged them to open a silk mill in Macclesfield.. This new industry had spread in to Cheshire as a result of John Lombe's silk throwing machinery at his mill in Derby being made generally available.

It was the desire to capture the market for military buttons that aroused Roe's interest in copper and brass. This enterprise led him to mining ventures in the Lake District Alderley Edge and, eventually, to Anglesey,

By 1750, Roe had become a general merchant with fingers in many pies,, including coal-mining and the smelting and rolling of copper from the Ecton mine.

Like many industrialists. Roe took an interest in improving communications, though the proposed Stoke-Macclesfield canal link to the Mersey never came to fruition. Undaunted, Roe a copper smelter at Liverpool, which, from his perspective, no longer necessitated a canal as he could bring in ore from Anglesey by sea. From the 1780s onwards, copper production became central to Roe's activities. He had long outgrown the button industry. He became the major supplier of copper to the naval shipyards when the state of the art vessels of the Royal Navy were being sheathed with copper.

When Charles Roe died in 1781, his firm of Roe and Co. was firmly established as the chief supplier of copper to the military. During the Napoleonic wars which shortly followed, these were lucrative contracts indeed.

Charles Roe, a shrewd and practical man of business, was one of the principal founders of industrial Macclesfield,, transforming it from a market town to one of the earliest industrial centres. But Dorothy Smith, in both her talk to us and thoroughly researched book on Charles Roe, clearly demonstrates that here was a man whose contribution to this early phase off British industry was immense. It is thanks to her that he may now receive wider recognition that his achievements deserve.

Ron Weston

A History of Sheffield Manor Lodge: Past and Present October 12th 2007 - David Templeman

David Templeman came to speak to us as a representative of The Friends of Sheffield Manor Lodge. He explained that the organisation was attempting to disseminate information about a monument that deserved to be better known, one with a long and illustrious history, whose national importance has yet to be properly acknowledged.

Sheffield's medieval castle fell into the hands of the Talbots, the Earls of Shrewsbury, in the early fifteenth century, when the current Earl married Maud de Furnival, the local heiress. In the sixteenth century, largely through their revenues from mining on their lands in West Yorkshire and Derbyshire, the Talbots became very wealthy. The cold, draughty castle was abandoned and, around 1516, Sheffield Manor Lodge was built as a stately country house in the middle of the old deer park, a comfortable and elegant abode for a wealthy magnate pursuing the arts of peace. The site itself is ancient archaeological excavations have revealed several other layers of occupation, though none as extensive or splendid as this surviving one.

One of the most imposing architectural features of the 1516 building was the gallery, one of the first of its kind, a place for entertainment on a grand scale. Long galleries became a feature of many sixteenth century grand houses.

In the Elizabethan period the Earl of Shrewsbury was entrusted by the Queen with the custody of Mary Queen of Scots. Her "prison" had to be fit for a queen and Sheffield Manor Lodge with some alterations was ideal for this purpose. Additions were made, largely at the Earl's expense, including a hunting tower from which Mary could watch the progress of the chase (she had in her younger days been an accomplished horsewoman). Mary and her ladies, together with the

Countess, the redoubtable Bess of Hardwick, spent a great deal of time at the tower.

It is this period in the history of Sheffield Manor Lodge that David Templeman feels has been unduly neglected. The house receives little attention from the many scholars who have written about Mary Queen of Scots and yet it was the scene of several important and dramatic events.

Since that time and especially after the Civil Wars when the Talbots lost a great deal of money by backing the King, the house has had a chequered career and has suffered much neglect. It is now the intention of the Friends to rectify this and with the help of heritage funds give the house a new purpose and restore it to something approaching its former glory.

Ron Weston

A Walk through Styal Country Park November 9th 2007, John Hill-Wilson

Styal Mill is one of the most popular National Trust properties in our area; but how many visitors bother to explore the extensive estate that surrounds it? John Hill-Wilson, who as a volunteer has long been associated with the mill and its estate, gave us a slideshow tour of this attractive property which was both instructive and entertaining.

The Gregg family has been associated with the mill from its beginnings in the late eighteenth century and the final family resident there, Alec Gregg, gave the property to the National Trust in September 1939. The estate grounds consist principally of woodlands traversed by the river Bollin and its tributary the river Dean. The rivers supplied the water power to the mill and our speaker showed how the great wheel, restored to its former glory in recent years, drove the cotton spinning machinery in the early years before the installation of steam engines.

Apart from the mill itself, we were shown several other early buildings on our tour, including the apprentice house, the manager's house and the Gregg residence, all with their tales to tell. The ancient village of Styal retains much of its early character with a number of attractive houses and shops of different periods. Then there are the rivers and mill pond, captured on camera in every season. Some idea of the variety of events that take place in and around the mill was also

conveyed. These usually involved much dressing up in period costumes and the parading of a plethora of vehicles of yesteryear.

But surely the most captivating scenes were of the great woods themselves and their rich variety of wildlife. The most recent runway of Manchester Airport runs perilously close to the Styal Country Park; they are separated only by a wire fence. This is where our two worlds meet; some would say collide: the contemporary one filled with the excitement and bustle of travel; the other the ageless, peaceful but threatened realm of nature.

Ron Weston

Church Furnishings and Fittings December 14th 2007, Ian and Christine Hamilton

Christine Hamilton, with the aid of her husband and his attractive photos of church interiors, gave us a clear and authoritative historical account of some of the principal furnishings to be found in churches of every period, namely, altars, sedilia and piscinae, rood screens, pulpits and fonts.

As stone tables used in ritual sacrifice, altars have been employed since classical times and were inherited by the early Christians, who adapted them for use in Holy Communion (a ceremony itself not unconnected with sacrifice). After the Reformation most stone altars in parish churches were broken up (Christine showed us rare survivals) and were replaced by wooden tables. The Puritans put the table lengthways down the chancel. In many churches rails were put round the altar to fend off browsing livestock! Now altar rails feature in Holy Communion itself. The nineteenth century brought the return of the stone altar under the influence of evangelical theological ideas emanating from the Universities.

Many of Ian's photos are of parish churches in Kent and he had several fine examples of early sedilia and piscinae found in that county. Sedilia are an arrangement of (usually) three seats set into the south walls of pre-Reformation churches for the use of the priest, deacon and sub-deacon; while a piscina is a stone basin set in the wall nearby for washing the vessels used in the Mass,

In medieval times, it was thought necessary to separate the chancel from the nave with a rood screen ("rood" being an old word for the cross). The building of such artefacts gave further opportunity to embellish the church and many examples are of great artistic merit.

Sometimes, a rood loft, a sort of gallery, was built over the top. Many rood screens were destroyed at the time of the Reformation; but it is sometimes possible to find the staircase which once led to the rood loft.

Pre-Reformation pulpits are rare - it was the Mass rather than the sermon that preoccupied priests of the Catholic Church, it is all the more remarkable that an early fourteenth century pulpit can be found in Mellor church. In Protestant churches of most denominations, pulpits became increasingly prominent, culminating in the great "three-decker" pulpits still to be seen in many churches today. Pulpits, like rood screens, provided an opportunity to beautify a church.

Fonts are one of the earliest furnishings in the Christian church. They are usually found at the back of the church, it being the custom to baptise a child near the open west door so that evil spirits might freely depart. We were shown a variety of examples of fonts drawn from different periods, including the early font in Mellor church with its enigmatic figures carved in low relief Was it a seventh century font as it has been claimed, or does it date from Norman times?

This talk evinced a great deal of interest from our audience, which prompted several quite searching questions. Christine mentioned the existence of a second talk on this subject - Meetings Secretary, please note.

Ron Weston

**Dorothy Bentley Smith -
A Georgian Gent & Co. The Life and Times of Charles Roe.
pp. 655, Landmark Publishing 2005, ISBN 1 54306 175 9,
£25.**

In the mid-eighteenth century Charles Roe (1715-81), an industrialist in a pre-industrial age, set the town of Macclesfield on the road to industrialisation by building its first silk spinning mill and one which used the principles of the Thomas Lombe machinery whose patents had expired in 1832. The mill was completed in 1748-49 and water power was obtained from a brook which was a tributary of the river Bollin. The site, between Mill Street and Park Green is marked today by a plaque. We are entering the realm of proto-industrialisation here for Roe's introduction of factory silk was built on the home manufacture of silk buttons, going back to the sixteenth century, and the throwing of silk in the houses of the work people and in throwing houses where a number of throwsters worked under supervision.

Having succeeded in establishing this enterprise Roe quite soon diversified into another which was also to prove an industry vital to the burgeoning industrial economy - copper mining and smelting. In 1756 he purchased Coniston mine, but having no smelter, sold the ore on probably to the nearest and most accessible smelter, in Warrington.

However this one source was insufficient for a viable copper production in Macclesfield and it appears that Roe began to extract copper ore from the Alderley Edge mines at the same time as the Coniston mines. This lasted about ten years 1758-68. Roe established a copper smelt works in Macclesfield where a windmill was erected about 1772 for crushing ore (there is still a Windmill Street near the site) The symbol for windmill is shown on Burdett's map of Cheshire 1771. About the same time a brass works was erected adjacent to the windmill. These works were on the common pasture and mark the first of many subsequent invasions of the commons by industry. Other copper works were established by Roe at Havannah and Bosley near Congleton, and at Liverpool. The Coniston production began to prove unproductive and in 1763 he took out a 21 year lease on the Parys Mountain copper mine on Anglesey, which became a very profitable concern. Roe also mined coal near Wrexham.

Other than street names there is little to remind us today of the copper works in Macclesfield. However, collectors of industrial tokens (privately issued to counteract the shortage of copper coin at the end of the eighteenth century) will know of the many variations of the Macclesfield penny and half penny. One variety was inscribed Payable at Macclesfield, Liverpool and Congleton and had a likeness of Charles Roe taken from his monument in Christ Church. Five detailed and informative pages are devoted by the author to tokens.

Thirty years ago in France a Macclesfield resident on holiday came face to face with one of those metal plaques which adorn the sides of buildings. This one was advertising a product called 'Macclesfield'. It was copper sulphate for spraying on vines as a preventative of mildew. Is it still produced and has anyone seen such a sign?

In 1774 Charles Roe's brother, James, was vicar of St Michael's church and his acting curate was David Simpson. Simpson flirted with Methodism and as a result the bishop refused to institute him as curate. Charles Roe, along with his brother was evangelical and held Simpson in regard. He obtained an Act of Parliament for the erection of Christ Church, a church without a parish. It was built in seven

months and completed in 1775-6. Roe's monument in the church is a tablet in relief and includes Genius holding a cog-wheel, a copper works and the original silk mill. Up to several years ago the monument was accompanied by a portrait of Charles Roe by Joseph Wright, before it was realised that it was far too valuable to leave in an open church.

The author says she makes no apology for the amount of information in this book, and indeed it is difficult to imagine that any fact, facet, statistic, personality or date has been omitted. For instance there are nine pages on the Jacobite invasion of 1745. The result is a book consisting of 559 pages of dense main text which, if the author had focused on her subject could probably have been reduced by at least 20%. There is an epilogue (9 pages), some fine photographs (32) two appendices (18), notes and references (52) and an index (6), resulting in a huge book of 655 pages weighing in at 1.35 kgs (31bs). There is unfortunately no separate bibliography although sources are listed in the notes, which take the form of being arranged by groups of pages. Thus, there is no superscript in the main text. One advantage of this is that when references are repeated in the notes they are given in full.

My chief criticism is the index, quite inadequate for a book of this scope and importance. Entries consist only of lists of page numbers and some are very long, eg 'Brass' 69 entries, 'coal' 63, 'London' 123, and similar lengthy lists for Cheshire, Derbyshire, Liverpool, Manchester, and of course for Charles Roe, and Roe and Co. Many entries do not merit an entry at all, e.g. Under 'Warrington' the entry is 'Thomas Legh.,MP for Newton near Warrington', under 'Buxton' the entry is 'Flash...close by the route from Leek to Buxton'. The established convention is either to highlight in bold the most important entries, or to provide a breakdown of the entries by using sub-headings also in bold. Drawing up indexes is notoriously time consuming and tedious. I hope the author was not given the task, I suspect it was. Either way, it is the publisher (don't they employ sub-editors these days ?) who should take the blame; also for not pruning the text.

Charles Roe seems to have taken up a good part of the author's family life for at least ten years. Her dedicated research into the 'sheer volume of documentation which has passed before my eyes' includes not only Charles Roe and his family tree but often very useful and new background material - but, as I have said, at the expense of a loss of

focus. Nothing about the historic and contemporary backgrounds, places, industries and their processes, and personalities seems to have escaped her attention. As a result, we have a huge source book for this most fascinating period.

Derek Brumhead

Fifty-Three Years Ago in January by Edith Egerton

It is a privilege to reprint one of the many reminiscences of Mrs. Egerton that appeared in the parish church magazine; they certainly deserve a wider audience. This account is obviously appropriate for New Year, though, of course, it should now be re-titled to "Fifty-Nine Years Ago in January". Incidentally, if any of you are thinking of putting your memories and anecdotes down on paper, the Heritage Centre will be sure to want them for a forthcoming publication, which will be a collection of writings, both fact and fiction about New Mills and its people. Then, of course, there's always the Newsletter.....

Fifty Three Years ago in January Edith Egerton.

To me the month of January holds a very special memory. It comes around with great regularity and reminds me of a clay. The very one when I first set foot on English soil, now fifty three years ago.

It was a letter to my father from his former employer, for whom he worked when he was a P.O.W. in England, that triggered it off. Soon after he returned to us, they first wrote to ask how he found his family and was settling down. Wanted to know how he was coping in the aftermath of the war. They even send very much appreciated food parcel now and then. Dad always wrote a thank you letter and in turn wanted to know how they coped on the farm.

Then one day the news came, the boss had taken ill and they couldn't find any labour. Dad couldn't get his head around that. At one part of the universe there was plenty of work but no labour, at our part plenty that were willing to do, but no work could be found. With that he thought he had the perfect answer, I could fill the gap. After all I could milk cows and handle horses, knew the difference between a pig and a hen. The only difficulty he foresaw was the language, but assured himself, as I had an idea of the English, I would pick it up as I go along. His former employer was delighted with that. An application for a

work permit had to be made by them. I don't think any of us know there and then just how slow bureaucratic wheels do wind. 53 years ago it wasn't just a case of put a few bits and pieces in a bag and sling yourself on a plane. A large form with umpteen questions had to be filled in by me. It was in English. With the help of a dictionary and a quiet prayer I tried. Must have been successful, as there was a request for examination by two doctors, one German one English, to make sure I was clean in body and mind. Meanwhile a letter to Dad arrived telling him that the Boss has got better again. With that we thought he had no need for help.

But here we learned a lesson, once the English started something they saw it through to the very finish. After months of waiting a permit arrived allowing me to work on that farm for 12 months. That was followed by another one giving the itinerary of the journey, and telling me to keep it safe at all times as it was my only identification, plus the fact that I had to present myself a few days later at 2pm prompt at Tempelhof Airport. It was the time during the airlift. There was an iron curtain around that city, the only means of in or out only by air. Three nations had committed themselves to feed the residents of that city by air. It was the most talked about one, even long before the 1939-45 war and ever since, Berlin. Therefore it was a very busy place, a coming and going of aeroplanes. The only building, a Nissen hut standing ; side of debris. These planes brought everything from milk, to rice, to meat, to flour, to vegetables, to coal. They came, landed, were unloaded and within minutes set off again. Taking with them often the ill and infirm, once a few orphans too. In that Nissen hut too was a hustle and bustle, and with it a noise too, and a constant coming and going of people. I tried to find someone that could make sense of my letter and me. Suddenly there was absolute silence. An American airman stood on a table stamped his feet to get attention, then with a voice equal to a foghorn shouted, "Anyone here understand me, anyone speak English?" Thinking maybe I would belong to his group, after all I had an English letter I lifted my hand. In seconds another airman grabbed my letter and case and another with a firm grip on my arm steered me along, the runway dodging planes, tractors with trailers or anything else that had wheels, till we came to a small plane. Children were lifted into it and so was I. Everybody was in a hurry. That plane did not have seats, only wooden boards along side hanging on chains and had leather belts. No time was lost, the children fastened with those belts, the engines were roaring all the time. Once

the doors were closed we were off. I did ask with broken English and sign language about my belongings. It was totally ignored, but they were telling me to explain to the children? What? I don't really know the gist of it, they are going to a home in the west and now, here and now, they could eat what was offered to them. I can only describe them as goodies, things those youngsters had not seen before, chocolate, toffees, cake and bananas. I did my best to explain to them to eat, help to wipe tears and assured them that they are and would be in very safe hands, and hoped they'd believed me. Once they got the gist of it they did eat and plenty, they stuffed themselves, it had dire consequences, yet nobody minded. An hour later we were in Hamburg. Two lady's were waiting for the children, one German, one English. Like good mother hens took off with them. But what about me? One of the airmen gave me some chocolate too, then turned my nose in the direction of another Nissen Hut. That airport had had the same fate as the Berlin one total destruction and was now just as busy, planes were coming, being loaded and roared off. That hut stood aside a much larger amount of debris. Here I was met by an irate person who had been waiting for me and she had my letter and case. Then I joined a group of people that had the same destination in mind, England. A right motley crew we were. One elderly rather refined lady was going on holiday, she had been several times before the war and, as she said, she had a visiting visa, there is a big difference between ; that and a working permit, I assure you. Three brides whose fiancee's, and one time soldiers, now demobbed, were waiting for them. One young chap, a one time P.O.W. came back to marry his bosses daughter. Another chap, a bit older ones and P.O.W. too, couldn't find his family in Germany when he was released. He wrote his former employers and they in turn invited him back. The third chap with more advanced in years and fluent in English. He had done some business with a firm before the war and was now hoping to re-establish contact again. Then there was a lad, not ten years old, I would say. Rather small with a pale and bewildered face. He was joining his mother who a few months ago had married an English soldier. They would be waiting for him in London, and me, well you know what I as about. We were taken to another Nissen Hut, first given something to eat, for which we were grateful. Then divided into two part, female and male and shown to two rooms where we could sleep, also told what time to meet up the following morning.

Another feast was waiting for us, and the instruction of our next leg of the journey. From Hamburg by train to Hook. Each receive two tickets that entitled us to meals on the train and in Hook we would be met by another courier. It was a long and tedious train ride. Hook was in darkness by the time we arrived. The courier was waiting, did a head count, satisfied himself all sheep arrived safely then handed us over like baggage to a steward on the ferry. A bit like a Noahs ark we were sorted two by two into cabins then told firmly to come to the dining room, and at what time and which point we had to meet him next morning. At the arrival at Harwich a young policeman took over. Did another head count, then walked us to the immigration office. One by one we had to enter it, to be asked question by a Custom and Excise Officer, and a Doctor. My name was the last one on the PC list, he must have been used to foreigners his words came slow and precise. Wanted to know where I was going. Somewhere near Manchester! "Can you ride a bike, holding an umbrella up", he laughed. No, I shook my head. "You will learn, it always rains in Manchester."

Our train journey into London was swift. Excitement mounted, everybody who would be there to meet them. Even the little lad came to life. Except me.

That letter that had occupied me the last two days and was read by many, didn't tell me. After we said our good by to each other, I was on my own. Feeling very much like one of those poor orphans on that plane, lost. I didn't budge, well didn't know how or where to. After a long while I heard my name called over the hubbub of the station. Like an obedient child I lifted my hand up and waited. A lady in uniform ran towards me (I later learned it was someone from the WRVS) took my arm and suitcase then hurried me to a waiting car. All the time she was talking to me. I couldn't understand a word or what it was all about. Soon we were at another station, rushed to another train, I think it was a porter that met us, the two exchanged words and in no time at all I was put down in a compartment. A few minutes later the train started. After a while a porter came to me, gave me a cup of tea and a sandwich. He was obviously used to foreigners to spoke slow and precisely too, I understood, he told me to eat it and would be back to help to get off at the right station. Just then the train must have skirted Oxford, he told me to look at it, for this was the most well known City and scholars from all over the world came to study. By the time the train got to Crewe he was there again, kindly led me to the refreshment room and told the ladies to look after me until someone

THE LOCAL HISTORIAN

Issue for August 2007 (Volume 37 No 3) has been placed in New Mills Library, and includes the following.

Susan Parrot, 'A time of change: land sales in the East Riding of Yorkshire in the early twentieth century'.

Michael Barke, 'Comparing communities: two north-east coastal villages in the mid-nineteenth century'.

Alan Crosby, 'The historical geography of English and Welsh dioceses'.

Jacqueline Fillmore, 'An annotated list of internet sites for local historians', [nine pages of very useful contacts of societies, organisations, etc.]

Book Reviews include: The Church Building Commission 1818-1856: Towns and local communities in medieval and early modern England: Southport; stories and legends: The parish in late medieval England: Workhouses; the people, the places, the life behind doors.

