



# Whitworth Historical Society

Founded 1973

(Registered Charity: 517660)

## November 2020 NEWSLETTER

No.8

### News

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on Saturday, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020, Whitworth Museum will once more have to close its doors to the public. The new restrictions mean that all entertainment venues, which include museums, must remain closed from Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November until at least Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020. Realistically this means that we will probably not re-open again for the remainder of this year. We will, however, continue to review the situation and respond in line with whatever Covid restrictions are in force at that time. It seems unlikely that we will be in a position to safely restore our monthly talks programme much before March 2021.

Around the middle of October 2020, we circulated the 2019/20 Annual Report to each Society member along a voting slip. We are pleased to say that 74 out of the 103 voting slips issued were returned, representing 71.8% of the membership. The votes were counted on Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2020 by two scrutineers and we are delighted to say that all resolutions proposed by the committee were unanimously approved. Effectively the officers and committee members will therefore remain in post for a further 12 months. We thank you, the members, for this vote of confidence in the management.

### Other News

This year, again because of Covid restrictions, the customary Remembrance Sunday parade, service and wreath laying ceremony will not be taking place at Whitworth's Memorial Park on 8th November. This is a decision taken by Rossendale BC and will apply to all districts throughout the Borough. However, it is permissible for organisations (and individuals) to privately place poppy wreaths at the memorial providing all restrictions in force at the time, social distancing etc., are complied with. On or around the 8<sup>th</sup> November, the Society will, on behalf of its membership, privately place its wreath on the memorial to respect the memory of Whitworth's fallen soldiers, sailors and airmen of the two World Wars.

## Features

### Church Music

Today we almost take it for granted that a church, of whatever denomination, will have an organ. In some of the older and grander churches this will be a traditional pipe organ; in smaller and more modern buildings



The magnificent four-manual pipe organ at Hallfold – dated 1868

there is generally a compact electronic organ suitably 'voiced' for church and religious music. The semi-portable harmonium, now few and between, was adopted by many country churches and was sometimes referred to as the 'pump organ'. It incorporated a series of small reeds which, when air was passed over, produced a vibration corresponding to a musical note. The player generated a steady flow of air by alternately pressing a pair of pedals which in turn operated the bellows.

At Hallfold Congregational Church in Hall Street, Whitworth, their small 'orchestra', an ensemble of musicians playing stringed instruments, was replaced by a harmonium in 1862. This was, in turn, replaced by a four-manual pipe organ in 1868. This magnificent instrument dominated the whole of the west wall of the church.

Lacking electric power in the church building at that time, the tedious job of manually 'pumping' the bellows was given to the junior members of the choir and it was not until March 1924 that electricity, initially to replace the gas lighting, was finally brought into the building. Electrically powered bellows were fitted to the

organ shortly afterwards.

Of course, an organ is of little use without music and where there is music, in the context of a church, there is often choral singing. The first references to a choir at Hallfold are made in 1833 but there may have been a singing group of some sort much earlier. What seems to have developed in many parts of the country, and also in Whitworth, is the writing of local musical compositions to accompany well known hymn lyrics. Whitworth Museum is fortunate in having a number of these hand-written manuscripts from several of the local non-conformist churches. Some of these short pieces have been given very local titles such as 'Healey Hall', 'Millgate', 'Burnedge Villas', 'Mount Pleasant', 'Fern Isle Wood', 'Stoneyroyd' and 'Hallfold'. Other titles take us on a journey outside the locality, 'Southport', 'Ripon', 'Barrow', 'St Bees', 'Sawley', 'Blackburn' and 'Chester'. More still have direct religious links, 'Elijah', 'Gethsemane', 'Bethlehem', 'Messiah' and 'Earthly Temple'. Not all of these pieces can be attributed to specific local composers but two composers that do stand out perhaps more than others are Joseph Whitworth and Clement Hill. Between them, these two Whitworth composers penned several dozen of these compositions.



At Hallfold, the musical achievements of the choir had, for many years, been something of which the church could be rightly proud. In November 1947 they took part in and won the Sir James Duckworth Challenge Cup



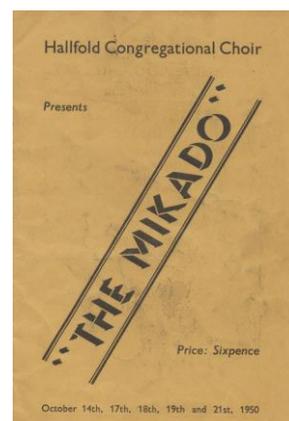
Performance of the 'Mikado' on the stage at Hallfold in October 1950

at the Blackpool Musical Festival. (Sir James was well known locally for his chain of grocery stores). Spurred on by their success at Blackpool, the choir decided they had the strength of numbers, musical competence and enthusiasm to stage one of the comic operettas by the partnership of Gilbert & Sullivan. These two men, of very different temperaments, had been brought together in 1875 by the then manager of the Royalty Theatre in London's Soho, Richard D'Oyle Carte and over the next 25 years were to produce 14 of their, unique in style, operettas.

alternatively 'The Town of Titipu'). This operetta, one of the most popular, had been originally performed in 1885 and was the ninth in the G&S series. Under the musical direction of Ernest Penney and producer Ronald Nuttall, the 'Mikado' was performed to packed houses on the stage at Hallfold on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> October 1950. Annual performances of G&S, usually the more popular of the operettas, continued into the 1960's until Hallfold Choir finally handed over production and musical direction to the newly formed Hallfold G&S Society.

For one of their first performances, Hallfold took the decision to stage 'The Mikado' (or

Throughout the 1950's and into the 60's, Hallfold Church Choir, in addition to their weekly renditions of religious music at Sunday worship, organised concerts in the schoolroom and, each year, performed Handel's 1741 oratorio the 'Messiah' in the church. On many occasions were the choir able to 'raise the roof' with one of the most famous pieces of Baroque choral music, the Hallelujah chorus. Organist Arnold Papworth, using the full weight of the organ's 16 foot pipes, gave depth and majesty to the rendition. The Messiah is a challenging work at any level and it stands to the eternal credit of those involved that they had the confidence and ability to tackle it.



The church choir at Hallfold, due to falling numbers, sang its final hymns in 2016 after at least 183 years of making musical history.

## Mrs Newby's Letters

There are numerous stories and tales surrounding the Taylor family, who were better known as the Whitworth Doctors, recorded in the pages of William Robertson's 1897 publication "Rochdale & The Vale of Whitworth". What has to be remembered however, is that Robertson wrote his book almost 20 years after the last

[Whitworth Historical Society, The Heritage Museum, North Street, Whitworth, Rossendale, Lancs. OL12 8RE](#)

member of the Taylor family had passed away, and, as is often the case, some of these tales had, with age, gained a little more 'flavour' in the telling. When writing his account of the Doctors, Robertson relied heavily on the work of William Howitt (1792 – 1879) who was a prolific English writer; one of his best known works being *'The Rural Life of England'* which he published in 2 volumes in 1838. In his book, Howitt, historian and Quaker, carries out a type of survey of the English countryside in which he sought to record the traditions and customs which, in the midst of industrialisation, were rapidly changing and, in some cases, disappearing altogether. In Volume 1, Chapter III, which is entitled *'Nooks of the World – A Visit to The Whitworth Doctors'*, he includes an account of his visit to Whitworth made in 1819. Howitt makes the following observation about the Doctors, *"They are indeed the most remarkable men of the class that ever perhaps appeared in England, and have accordingly become proportionably celebrated. For originality and eccentricity of character, there are few of those many varieties of singular personages with which the lower walks of English life have abounded, which may be compared with them"*. By the time of the visit, John Taylor, the original and arguably the most celebrated of the Whitworth Doctors, had already been dead some 17 years and it was to his son, James, on whom Howitt had to rely to recount some of the more colourful stories of his father's early career. Entertaining though many of these are, many are a little fanciful and will not stand up to too much scrutiny.



William Howitt 1792 -1879

So far as we are aware, there are very few written accounts of day-to-day life in Whitworth in the early 19th century, particularly the lives of those patients treated by the Doctors. Some of the best accounts we have are contained in a series of letters written by Mrs Margaret Newby, the wife of the Rev George Newby, Master of Witton-le-Wear Grammar School, and curate of the local parish church of St Philip & St James. Rev Newby had been educated at St. Bees' College, Cumberland and, in 1806, took up residency in Witton, a small village on the north bank of the River Wear about 5 miles from Bishop Auckland in County Durham.



Mail Coach of the 19th century

In 1805 he married Margaret Crawford and the couple was blessed with four children, three sons and a daughter. The pair seems to have enjoyed a comfortable living having, in addition to the school and the church, also farming interests in the locality. Sometime in 1823 Margaret was troubled with breast cancer and, despite it being some 120 miles distant, it was to Whitworth and the famous Doctors that she turned for treatment. In the first of her letters, dated 26<sup>th</sup> November 1823, Margaret describes her journey from Witton in some detail.

On Monday 24<sup>th</sup> November 1823, she takes the mail coach, which commences

its journey south at Durham, and which stops at Witton, some 12 miles away, to change horses and to pick up passengers. From Witton the coach first travels east to join the Great North Road at Burtree Gate before going south to Ripon. Mrs Newby and her travelling companion, Margaret Watson, were the only inside passengers on this 50 mile stretch of the journey, the other passengers occupying the seats on top of the coach along with the driver and the guard, the latter being responsible for sounding the post horn to warn the toll road gatekeepers of the approach of the coach. The coach arrived at the Wheatsheaf Inn, located on the outskirts of Ripon, late in the afternoon and it was here that Mrs Newby and her companion were to spend the night. Mrs Newby describes the Inn and its accommodation in the following terms, *"..... a rather shabby house, every place was dirty. We had tea and went to bed in a room where nutshells and the cores of apples formed no inconsiderable part of its carpet. However, I slept for I was tired but Margaret never closed her eyes. We were called up at half past four and at five set off with four male passengers all in ruff great coats."* From Ripon the coach travelled to Leeds, at distance of about 30 miles. The road, which passed through Harrogate, is described as heavy and the hills long and frequent with the horses straining the whole way. Breakfast was taken at Leeds but the passengers were, as a courtesy, only allowed 12 minutes for their refreshment and to change coaches since the Manchester coach, which was to take them on the next leg of their journey, was due to depart almost as soon as they arrived. Leaving Leeds, the coach began heading in a south westerly direction towards Halifax and on to Rochdale. Mrs Newby comments that the roads on this part of the journey are *"extremely bad and they drive over them at a rate that shakes every limb"* passing over Blackstone Edge which was *"..... the wildest and most desolate ride I've ever had anywhere"*.

The coach arrived in Rochdale at 5.00pm whereupon the pair transferred to a chaise [a small two wheeled, one horse, carriage with only basic weather protection] which would take them the last few miles to Whitworth. Daylight was almost gone when they arrived at the Red Lion Inn in Whitworth Square.

Mrs Newby, "..... I was not prepared to expect much from the place [the Red Lion] and have therefore found things rather better than I looked for. We have a sitting room and a bedroom to ourselves for which we pay eleven shillings a week, fire and attendance not included. We also have the privilege of using the general sitting parlour when we are disposed for society."



The old Grammar School at Witton-le-Wear

The next day Mrs Newby was to see both the doctors Taylor who agreed that whilst her complaint could be successfully treated, it could not with safety, be neglected any longer. Treatment was to begin immediately. Margaret soon began to realise that this painful treatment would take much longer than she had originally anticipated. A fellow patient, a Mrs Bertram, who had travelled from Lincolnshire to be treated for a similar complaint, had, by the time Mrs Newby arrived, already been in Whitworth for two years.

Mrs Newby was to remain at Whitworth for seven months suffering the application of 'keen', an active caustic applied, in the form of a poultice, directly onto the surface of the skin where the tumour was at its most pronounced. By February of 1824 the tumour was greatly reduced in size and Dr Taylor pronounced that he was pleased with the progress his patient was making. The painful 'keen' poultice continued to be applied at regular intervals however.

It seems that in Manchester at that time there were a great many cases of smallpox and this caused Mrs Newby some concern and she questioned the effectiveness of Edward Jenner's vaccine which had been introduced in 1796, some 28 years earlier. (Jenner's vaccine had replaced variolation, which was a means of building up antibodies by injecting the recipient with fluid usually taken from a pustule of an infected patient).

Gradual improvement was to continue and on Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1824 Margaret has difficulty in disguising her excitement when writing what is to be her final letter from Whitworth. For her return journey, her husband, Rev George Newby, is to travel down from Witton-le-Wear in the family's own horse and trap rather than having his wife suffer the discomfort of the mail coach. Her mood is slightly tempered by the forthcoming funeral of a young boy which was taking place at the nearby Whitworth Chapelry. Enoch Bamford, aged 8 of Bridge Mills, had been killed in a factory accident at Facit.

Following her return home, Margaret Newby was to live a further 21 years and is buried, along with husband, in the churchyard at Barningham, a small village some 20 miles from Witton and the birthplace of her husband. Just how the Newby's gained knowledge of the Whitworth Doctors is difficult to discover but perhaps the most likely source is through the church. Lord Bishop of Durham, Dr Thomas Thurlow, had been treated for a cancerous tumour in the bowel by John Taylor of Whitworth some 30 years earlier.

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## From the Collection



A tricycle race at the Rawstron Street track in 1900



Cycling both on and off road appears to be gaining in popularity these days but competitive cycling on the track was taking place in Whitworth more than 120 years ago. Several of the districts in the Rossendale Valley had their own cycle clubs but in the Township we had the 'Whitworth Wheelers Cycle Club', whose 'home' base was the cycle track at the Rawstron Street playing field, a venue now used by the Whitworth Valley football team.