

TAMESIDE LOCAL STUDIES LIBRARY

Alice Lock

The Metropolitan Borough of Tameside was created in 1974 by the amalgamation of nine existing authorities — Ashton-under-Lyne, Audenshaw, Denton, Droylsden, Dukinfield, Hyde, Longdendale, Mossley and Stalybridge. The present borough crosses the old county boundaries of Lancashire and Cheshire but all the towns share a common background in that they were products of the Industrial Revolution and, in particular, the cotton industry. While coal mining, hatting and engineering were also present, cotton dominated the life of the nine towns. The transformation of living and working conditions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries helped create the stormy atmosphere in the area in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s.

The towns are served by a centralised local history collection which was set up in 1976 in Stalybridge Library. The local history collections of the constituent libraries of Tameside M.B.C. were amalgamated and formed the basis of the collection which has grown substantially since then. Initially the stock reflected the collecting policies of the previous authorities — towns like Ashton, Stalybridge and Hyde had quite substantial collections including considerable non-book materials such as maps, photographs, microfilms, archival material and ephemera. Other towns, like Droylsden and Mossley, which had previously been part of a county authority, had very small local history collections. By amalgamating the stock all towns benefitted from the opportunity to build up general material relating to more than one area and from the existence of specialised staff dealing only with

local history work. Since the Local Studies Library was set up the book-stock alone has grown by half as much again and now consists of over 8,000 volumes, while for other forms of material — maps, microfilms and photographs — stock has more than doubled. The standard histories of each town, including Samuel Hill's *Bygone Stalybridge* and W.M. Bowman's *England in Ashton-under-Lyne*, are included in the small collection of books for loan.

One of the major advantages of a centralised local history collection in a borough like Tameside is the opportunity to provide an archives service within the library itself. Although the administrative changes of the past mean that archive material relating to the Tameside area is held in the Archives Department of Manchester Central Reference Library, the Lancashire Record Office, Preston, and the Cheshire Record Office, Chester, a large amount of material has been retained in the borough. The basis of the collection is the material created by the local authorities which preceded Tameside and while these are primarily of interest to officers of the local authority there are a number of documents of interest to researchers generally. Indeed this kind of material has formed the basis of much traditional local history research. Possibly the most useful are the records kept by the local authorities in relation to public health. The Medical Officer of Health reports give a vivid picture of living conditions in the towns as well as a wealth of statistical information. For Ashton we hold a good run of these for the period 1874 to 1905, but the sequence is incomplete after that until 1945; Denton has a run from 1912-72;



Foundry Workers at Park Bridge c. 1900.

Dukinfield 1901-68; Hyde an incomplete run from 1880-1971; and Stalybridge 1880-99 and 1929-72. Living conditions in towns like Ashton and Stalybridge were among the worst in the country even in the twentieth century — infant mortality rates in particular were extremely high.

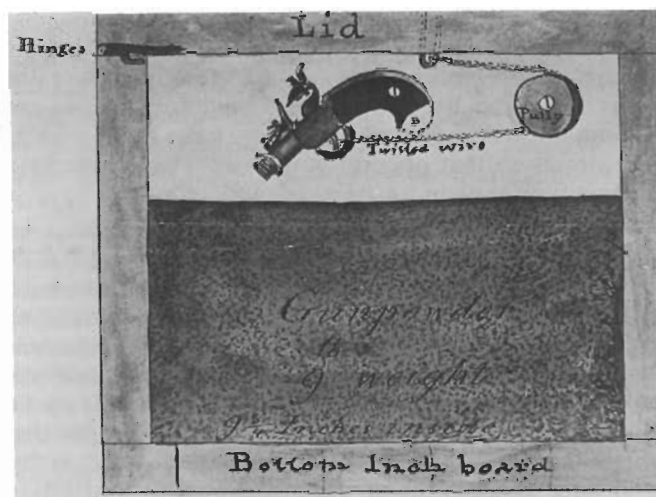
The local authority records include, of course, other basic source material about the area in the form of rate books and other records relating to land, buildings and their ownership. As well as minutes, correspondence and accounts rather more unusual items occasionally survive among these collections, for example we are lucky to have a log book kept by volunteer constables who patrolled the town of Stalybridge during the bitter industrial dispute of December 1830 - January 1831. The entries in this book indicate that this force was not the most efficient; a typical night's entry was for 18 December 1830:

Ratcliffe discharged. Geo. Hall has returned twice in a very disorderly manner after being discharged ... Two prisoners, Geo. Hall and Jn. Williams, hammering at half past twelve o'clock for being drunk and disorderly. Three sent (out) to Cock Brook, met the Watchman of Ashton, all right, returned, found the guard with the two prisoners and both fast asleep on the flore (sic), (snoreing) (sic) ... One o'clock 24 picket guards round Cockbrook ... returned by Bridge Street to Messrs Cheetham's Mill and found two of the extra watchmen drunk ...¹

This period of unrest was associated with several violent attacks on local millowners — the most famous being the murder of Thomas Ashton of Hyde in January 1831. Among the family papers of the Heginbottoms who were among the earliest millowners in Ashton is a diagram of an "infernal machine" sent to William Heginbottom during a dispute with his workpeople in 1830. This consisted of a box half full of gunpowder, a pistol was fixed inside, designed to go off and explode the gunpowder when the lid was opened. The box was so shaken up that it did not explode when William Heginbottom's wife opened it. Although a reward of £500 was offered for anybody who arrested the sender of the box the culprit was never found.² Other material among the Heginbottom family records includes early accounts (relating to their flax and cotton businesses as well as household accounts), land records and plans.

The library also holds a collection of documents relating to the Clarke family of Hyde. The Clarks were descendants of the Hyde family and farmed Hyde Hall Farm. Captain Clarke took on many of the duties of the major landowner and was active in local government as well as being a magistrate. His son John kept a detailed diary of farm life from 1842 to 1845. Most of this is concerned with the work of the farm and the Clarke's leisure activities but the industrial disputes of 1842 are commented on as large bands of striking cotton operatives were moving around the Hyde area. The Clarks provided soup and bread for some of them. The Clarke family papers also include correspondence dating from 1837 to 1844.³

The largest family collection held at Stalybridge is that relating to the Lees family of Park Bridge. The Lees set up an iron works at Park Bridge in 1784. They produced machinery for local mills and as the business expanded they built cottages for their workers as well as a village institute and church. The industrial hamlet of Park Bridge was completely dominated by the Lees family and the ironworks. The business closed in 1964 and its records do not seem to have survived, but a vivid picture of the Lees'



"Infernal machine" sent to William Heginbottom, 1830.

family life survives in their correspondence and household accounts. The letters are all addressed to Samuel Lees between 1856 and 1897 and show Samuel's control over a large family network mainly through finance. Long after his sisters married and moved away from Park Bridge Samuel continued to control their incomes. Legal documents and material relating to Park Bridge church and school also survive in this collection.⁴

Most family documents surviving in local history collections are, of course, the records of the more prosperous local families while papers relating to people lower down the social scale are less likely to be preserved. The Tameside Local Studies Library had made an effort to collect material relating to more ordinary people and among items of this type held here are the diaries of James Knight, a Stalybridge schoolmaster, dating from the mid-1850s to 1862. Knight worked at a private school and later set up his own school, but his diaries rarely refer to his working life. Instead he records his leisure activities which seemed to centre on long country walks and local pubs. Occasionally he would adopt short-lived new interests — for instance in March 1860 he devoted considerable time to building a pigeon cote; his interest soon waned however when the first pigeon flew away never to return!⁵

We are lucky that other local people wrote autobiographies, many of which have been published. A list of local autobiographies and diaries is available for consultation at the library. Among the lesser known autobiographies are those written by William Aitken, the Ashton Chartist, which appeared in the *Ashton News* and the beginnings of an autobiography by Lewis Watson, an Ashton trade unionist and Labour party worker who died in 1944.⁶ Lewis Watson was a friend of Hannah Mitchell and of Rev. R.W. Cummings, the Communist vicar of Hurst. Unfortunately his autobiography is unfinished and deals mainly with his life in Lincolnshire before moving to Ashton in 1895, but he gives a great deal of information about the early days of the Ashton Independent Labour Party Branch.

In an attempt to fill some of the gaps in the records relating to the more ordinary inhabitants of the area the library has started a small oral history collection. We have about forty tapes of interviews with some of the older inhabitants of Tameside recalling their childhoods and early working lives in the area. Many of these people worked in the cotton industry, but we do have recordings of local people whose occupations ranged from slaughterman to clogmaker. Of particular interest are the

memories of one gentleman who lived in Hugh Mason's Oxford Community in the West End of Ashton. He gave details of the control the Masons exercised over the workforce who lived in cottages built for them in the Community. At one time there were gates at the ends of the streets so that operatives who were not home by a certain time at night were locked out.

Oral history recordings are also among the techniques we plan to use in a project to record the experiences of immigrants to the area in more recent times. Like most other local history libraries we have little material relating to the influx of people into the area from different ethnic backgrounds and to remedy this we plan a special project to record interviews and collect documents from members of the local Asian communities. It is hoped that this will not only make the collection more relevant to this and later generations of these communities but fill an obvious gap in the stock. The contribution to the life of local towns made by Asian immigrants is one of the major changes of recent times and should be recorded.

Another source of material for information about working people in Tameside's past is that of trade union records. The library houses the records of many local unions, particularly cotton unions. Many of these were deposited via the retrieval schemes operated by Audrey Linkman and her colleagues a few years ago. Unfortunately few of these collections contain much pre-1900 material. Some of the larger collections are those relating to the S.E. Lancashire and Cheshire Weavers' and Winders' Association, Hyde and District Loom Overlookers, Ashton and District Teachers' Association and the Ashton and District Trades Council (c.1920 - c.1959).⁷

To complement the trade union records the library holds a collection of business records. Unfortunately these do not include many cotton mills partly because the majority of local mills had gone out of business before the Local Studies Library came into existence. One extensive collection relates to the woollen business of Hugh Kershaw & Co., of Mossley who ceased trading in 1977. This includes correspondence, accounts, wages, order and stocktaking books etc. from the 1880s to 1970s. The records of Stayley Mill, Millbrook, dating from the 1890s, have also survived, as has a rather miscellaneous collection of records relating to the Fletcher family of Ashton. The Fletchers were large property owners in the town as well as cotton manufacturers. Some of the rent ledgers in this collection date from the 1860s. Other interesting business records include those of the Ashton-under-Lyne Savings Bank, established 1829; these include records of individual accounts held at the bank which contain information about occupations, as well as the names and addresses of account holders. These records date from 1844. The local hatting industry is represented by papers relating to the Lancashire Felt Company of Denton. These include directors' minutes from 1866-1949. Another large collection is for Greenups of Droylsden, printers. Accounts date back to the 1860s and the material includes ephemera relating to Droylsden printed by the firm over the years (including a newspaper called the *Droylsden Express* which was printed for one year from April 1870).⁸

The records of some of the co-operative societies active in the Tameside area have also been preserved. These include minutes for Mossley 1859-1958, Higher Hurst 1864-1953, Waterloo 1866-1947, Ashton 1870-1943, Droylsden 1872-1958, Stalybridge 1875-1927, Hurst Brook 1890-1929 and Hyde 1913-44.⁹

Any researcher interested in the industrial development of the towns of Tameside might also find it useful to consult the records relating to transport in the area. We hold the minutes of the Ashton, Huddersfield and Peak Forest Canal Companies on microfilm and there are some early railway plans among the records of the Stamford Estate. Two other large collections are records of the Manchester and Salterbrook Turnpike Trust dating from the 1790s and various collections for local tramways including the Stalybridge, Hyde, Mossley and Dukinfield Tramways Board, and Hyde and Ashton Corporation tramways.¹⁰

There is an extensive collection of records relating to education and though many of these are concerned with the administrative aspects of school some more interesting material is also represented — school log books, attendance records, correspondence etc. For some Ashton and Stalybridge schools these records date from the 1860s, but those for most schools are later. The log book of Park Bridge Church of England School gives the usual range of information thought worthy of remark by the headmaster — including a record of the clearing out of the ashpits, the visits of gypsies demanding money for good luck and lighting of fires in the school — there are even some references to educational matters!¹¹

As provisions for educating adults also existed in many Tameside towns, we are lucky enough to have some Mechanics' Institutes' records. Those of the Ashton and Stalybridge Mechanics' Institutes along with Dukinfield Village Library were studied by Mabel Tylecote in *The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire before 1851*.¹² Ashton minutes survive from 1825-82 in an incomplete sequence; there is also a large collection of correspondence. For Stalybridge the records date from 1864-1933 (mainly minutes and annual reports). For Hyde only the minutes from 1872-90 have survived although annual reports and correspondence also exist.¹³

While many Victorian working men and a small number of women were actively involved in the Mechanics' Institutes there was a wide range of other leisure activities for members of the working-class and lower middle-class. In Victorian times of course these often had a role in 'improving' one's character and status. Because they were voluntary societies run by the participants they generated a great deal of records in the form of minutes, accounts and correspondence, but because these records often remained in private hands many have now been lost. Among the societies active in the Tameside area many records have survived; these include some of those of Stalybridge Harmonic Society, Ashton Gentlemen's Glee Club, Hyde Students' Association and Hyde Pleasant Sunday Afternoons Brotherhood.¹⁴ After the turn of the century many of these societies died out and leisure activities came to be dominated by commercial enterprises like cinemas and theatre. Where records survive these tend to be in the form of accounts, but we hold much less material for this kind of leisure organisation.

Another feature of Victorian life was, of course, the church and chapel. We hold very little material relating to the parish churches (though we do have pre-1837 parish registers on microfilm) as these documents are deposited in the diocesan record offices either at Manchester or Chester. We do, however, hold material for some of the nonconformist chapels. Among the more important collections are those for Wakefield Road Baptist Church, Stalybridge (1815-1948), Cross Leech Street Baptist Church, Stalybridge (1842-1958), Ashton-under-Lyne,

Stalybridge and Hyde Auxiliary of the Baptist Foreign Missionary Association (1898-1960), Rycroft Congregational Chapel (1849-1930s), Abney Chapel, Mossley (1880s-1920s), Ashton Christian Israelite Church (Wroeites) (1830s-1900), Ashton Spiritualist Church (1896-1913), East Cheshire Unitarian Union (1859-1970s) and Dukinfield Old Chapel (1840s-1930s).¹⁵ The records of the Wakefield Road Baptist Chapel are particularly interesting as a new minister in 1823 decided to reorganise the records of the Chapel. He provided a huge book in which to record the minutes of meetings, but because previous records were in such a state of disarray he used the first section of the book to write up the history of the Church before his arrival. The stormy first years of this chapel's life are recorded in great detail — including the rather unclerical activities of one of its first preachers:

*Evil reports soon spread themselves abroad among individuals, of unbecoming liberties taken by the minister with his female pupils ... Suspicions began to increase and continued to spread discontent among individual friends until his sudden disappearance and that of a young female, whom he seduced, confirmed the awful fact.*¹⁶

As well as the collections of original documents, other source material is held on microfilm. Among the most heavily used items on microfilm are, of course, the census returns. Our collection of these includes all the towns now in Tameside for every census from 1841 to 1881. These are in demand by family historians, but have also been used for in-depth studies of particular areas — for example Hurst in Ashton and Haughton in Denton. Copies of these based on material gleaned from the census returns are available for consultation in the library.¹⁷ Also on


microfilm are copies of local newspapers — these include *Ashton Chronicle* 1848-9, *Ashton Herald* 1887-1937, *Ashton News* 1868-74, *Ashton Reporter* 1855-date, *Ashton Standard* 1860-83, *Cotton Factory Times* 1885-1937, *Denton Reporter* 1964-77, *Denton Post* 1965-70, *Hyde Reporter* 1895-1934, *Manchester Guardian* 1821-61, *North Cheshire Herald* 1851-date, *The Reporter* (a composite paper made up from all the local editions of the Reporter) 1978-date, *Stalybridge Reporter* 1874-date. There is an index to the *North Cheshire Herald* c.1895-1972. It is advisable to ring in advance to book time on the microfilm readers as they are in constant use. The Local Studies Library also has a Regma LR6 Reader-Printer which allows copies to be taken from material on microfilm.

Another popular area of stock is the illustrations collection which consists of about 10,000 photographic prints and over 2,000 contact prints, as well as slides, engravings and paintings. These pictures provide a vivid glimpse into the lives of our ancestors in this area. The engravings and paintings date from the late eighteenth century and the photographs from the 1860s. A selection of photographs for the towns of Ashton, Denton, Droylsden, Dukinfield, Hyde, Mossley and Stalybridge have been featured in our publications.¹⁸ Slide packs and exhibitions featuring some of this illustrative material have also been compiled by library staff and are available for loan to schools and other groups. Library staff have also compiled a bibliography for the history of the Tameside area which can be consulted at the Library (and main district libraries throughout the borough). *A Guide to the Archives* is also available in all main libraries in Tameside.



Sarah Ann Hunt and Mrs. Emma Williams at Whitelands Twist Mill, Ashton 1915.

ARTIFICIAL

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Advertisement from Worrall's Directory 1882.

It is hoped that future publications will feature more original research by local historians in the area and the first books to include work of this kind are *Looking Back At Denton* and *Looking Back At Hyde*. Both are collections of articles written by both professional and amateur historians on various aspects of the history of each town.¹⁹ Similar publications for Stalybridge and Ashton are planned.

This brief description can only highlight a few of the collections held at the Local Studies Library; there is a wealth of material much of which has never been the subject of detailed study and staff at the library are anxious to see more use made of these items so that a fuller picture of the area's past can emerge. We are also keen to collect material relating to the history of Tameside including all kinds of documents and photographs which can be copied if owners do not wish to part with the originals. Work done by researchers such as projects and these is also always a welcome addition to the stock.

The Library is in Trinity Street, Stalybridge, SK15 2BN, and is open from 9.00 a.m. to 7.30 p.m. every weekday except Thursday, (we are closed all day on Thursdays) and 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. on Saturdays. The phone number is: 061-338 3831/2708.

NOTES

1. Log book kept by special constables, 18 Dec. 1830. IC/STA/13.
2. Diagram of "Infernal Machine". Heginbottom family papers. DD8/5.
3. Clarke family papers. DD1 (John Clarke's diaries DD1/38-41.).
4. Lees family papers. DDL.
5. James Knight Diaries. DD86/1.
6. Wm. Aitken, Remembrances and struggles of a working man for bread and liberty, *Ashton News*, 18 Sept., 25 Sept., 2 Oct., 9 Oct., 23 Oct. 1869. Lewis Watson, *An autobiography* (typescript) n.d.
7. South East Lancashire and Cheshire Weavers and Winders Association, TU/6. Hyde Overlookers Association, TU/8. Ashton and District Teachers' Association, TU/17. Ashton and District Trades Council, DDTC. The records of the Hyde Overlookers are subject to the 30 year rule.
8. Hugh Kershaw and Company, DDKM. Staley Mill Company, DDSM. Fletchers' Mills, DDFM. Ashton-under-Lyne Savings Bank, DDB. Lancashire Felt Company, DD234. T.H. & W. Greenup, DDGR. The records of the Ashton Savings Bank are subject to the 100 year rule.
9. Mossley Co-operative Society, DD246. Higher Hurst Co-operative Society DD269. Waterloo Co-operative Society, DD268. Ashton-under-Lyne Co-operative Society, DD271. Droylsden Industrial Co-operative Society, DD264. Stalybridge Good Intent Industrial Co-operative Society, DD250. Hurst Brook Co-operative Society, DD270. Hyde Equitable Co-operative Society, DD250.
10. Stamford Estate records, DDS. Manchester and Saltersbrook Turnpike Trust, TTM. SHMD Tramways, DDTR/4. Hyde Corporation Tramways, DDTR/5. Ashton Corporation Tramways, DDTR/8.
11. Park Bridge School log book, E.SR/3/1.
12. M. Tylecote, *The Mechanics Insitutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire before 1851* (1957).
13. Ashton Mechanics Institute, MI/1. Stalybridge Mechanics Institute, MI/2. Hyde Mechanics Institute, MI/3. Dukinfield Village Library, DD71, PCA/DUK/9/1.
14. Stalybridge Harmonic Society, DD111, DD125, DD185. Ashton Gentlemens' Glee Club, DD62. Astley Bowling and Billiard Club, DD37. Hyde Students' Association, DD16: Hyde PSA, NPSA/1.
15. Wakefield Road Baptist Chapel, Stalybridge, NB1. Cross Leech Street Baptist Church, Stalybridge, NB2. Ashton-under-Lyne, Stalybridge and Hyde Auxiliary of the Baptist Foreign Missionary Association, NB3. Ryecroft Congregational Chapel, Ashton, NC1. Abney Chapel, Mossley, NC3. Christian Israelites, Ashton, NCI/1. Ashton Spiritualist Church, NS1. East Cheshire Unitarian Union, NU1. Dukinfield Old Chapel, NU2.
16. Wakefield Road Baptist Chapel, Minute Book, NB1/1.
17. J. Hey, *Higher Hurst. The growth and development of an industrial community in Lancashire in the 19th century* (typescript) 1979. J. Cronin, *Haughton in 1851* (typescript) 1982.
18. A. Lock, *Ashton In Old Photographs* (1981).
A. Lock, *Denton In Old Photographs* (1983).
A. Lock, *Droylsden In Old Photographs* (1982).
A. Lock, *Hyde In Old Photographs* (1981).
A. Lock, *Mossley In Old Photographs* (1983).
C. Wilkins-Jones, *Dukinfield In Old Photographs* (1980).
C. Wilkins-Jones, *Stalybridge In Old Photographs* (1979).
19. *Looking Back At Denton* edited by Alice Lock (1985), £2.00. *Looking Back At Hyde* edited by Alice Lock (1986), £2.75. Both available from Tameside Libraries or, plus postage and packaging, from Book Sales Officer, Tameside Libraries and Arts Dept., Council Offices, Wellington Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire OL6 6DL.