

ALTRINCHAM LIBRARY LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION

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Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council, created in 1974, comprises the former boroughs of Altrincham (including Timperley), Sale and Stretford, the urban districts of Urmston, Hale and Bowdon and the four parishes of Carrington, Dunham Massey, Partington and Warburton. The existing local history collections of these areas were divided amongst the four main libraries Altrincham, Sale, Stretford and Urmston, leaving a basic stock at the smaller libraries, pertaining to their particular areas. The collections are now administered by Trafford Leisure Services and whilst much of the collecting policy remains on an individual basis, many other features such as publications and services are managed jointly, by monthly meetings involving the four local history librarians. The following description provides an account of the material held at Altrincham Library.

The origins of Altrincham Public Library lie in the formation of an Altrincham and Bowdon Literary Society in 1847 which established a library and reading room in a now demolished building on Victoria Street. In 1848 the Society became affiliated to the Lancashire and Cheshire Union of Mechanics' and Literary Institutes, and so began, according to a visitors' guide to the library published in the 1930s "the beneficial results of good reading".¹ The venture was so successful that in 1853 a new building was erected on land given by the 7th Earl of

Stamford. This was extended at various times and in 1892 Altrincham adopted the Public Libraries Act at which time a large extension was built which included a museum. Local documents, photographs and artefacts were actively collected from this date and formed what was quaintly called The Ancient Altrincham Permanent Collection. The museum itself was of a general nature and not confined to local history. Unfortunately the museum was closed shortly before the Second World War after which a new museum was proposed but never appeared. In recent years the items of a general nature were either sold or given to other museums but all the local items were retained leaving a collection of artefacts in the present local history collection. This is now housed in the new library opened in 1979, forming part of the new precinct centre in Altrincham.

Although not mentioned in Domesday Book, Altrincham probably dates back to Saxon times, and the town's history is closely linked with that of Dunham Massey and the Massey family. In 1290 Hamon de Massey granted a Borough Charter to Altrincham creating the Court Leet and this Charter survives to provide the earliest written record of the town. Apart from a few land deeds the library unfortunately holds little material prior to the end of the eighteenth century.



Stamford New Road, Altrincham, c. 1900.



Crickmore's Shop, George Street, Altrincham, 1866.

Local government items in the collection include records of the town's meetings from 1795-1859 which give interesting insights into the life of the town, for instance, to celebrate Wellington's victory in 1813 over the French during the Peninsular Wars it was decided that:

A subscription be opened for a bon-fire and fireworks on the evening of Monday next, in the Bowling Green field; and that Mr. Race, Mr. Collier, Mr. Reddish and Mr. Barrat be requested to undertake the management of them with the assistance of the constables, and that the bon-fire be lighted at 5 o'clock in the evening and be extinguished at 10 o'clock, and that the fireworks begin at 7 o'clock.²

Other early records include poorhouse accounts from 1799-1809 and 1819-35, poor relief assessments from 1810-12 and 1819-25, and paupers' accounts from 1819-23 and 1829-33. These records offer much information on poverty and the history of social welfare in the district during the early nineteenth century of which no real study has yet been made.

A Local Board of Health was created in 1851 and the library holds the Minutes of the Board's meetings from 1851-70. In 1894 Altrincham was designated an urban district, and the library holds overseers minutes from 1895 and Council Minutes from 1898. The next administrative landmark in the history of Altrincham was the granting of the Charter of Incorporation in 1937 about which much material exists. This includes the *Petition for Incorporation* made by the Altrincham Urban District Council in 1935, the *Official Programme of Charter Day Celebrations*, a variety of press cuttings and a film of the

celebrations on 31 July 1937. From this date the administrative history of Altrincham can be gleaned from Borough Council records such as the annual *Abstract of Accounts 1948-72*, the *Surveyors' Highway Report Books 1936-69*, *Housing Report Books 1938-60* and the monthly volumes of *Council Minutes*. In 1963 some Altrincham records were deposited in the Cheshire Record Office by the Borough Council. These principally include 87 volumes of rate books, spanning the years 1827-1931. A full list of the material deposited is available at the library.

Until 1937 Timperley was a separate township from Altrincham, only becoming part of the suburban commuter belt in the interwar years. Records do not exist prior to 1770 and by that time Timperley affairs were controlled by the Town Meeting. Such records as do exist for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are not original but are in the form of selected entries copied out by Charles E. Newton, a local historian who died in 1937. Newton's notes form part of the *Frank Bell Collection* at Cheshire Record Office (Ref. DDX 131/22 and 23). The Select Vestry for Timperley was set up in 1835 and the library holds its proceedings from 1835-67. These are followed by *Minutes and Resolutions of the Ratepayers of the Township of Timperley 1868-94*. Timperley Parish Council was created in 1894 and the library holds the minutes of its meetings from 1894-1936 after which date records of Timperley can be found in the minutes of Altrincham Borough Council. An interesting study has been made of these records in the form of a thesis for the Extra-Mural Certificate in Local History by Hazel Pryor and entitled *The Development of Local Government in Timperley 1770-c.1914*.

A LIST
OF THE
Merchants, Manufacturers, and Tradesmen,
IN THE
TOWNS AND VILLAGES
TWELVE MILES ROUND MANCHESTER.

ALTRINCHAM,

Ashton-upon-Mersey, Bollington, Bowdon, Broadheath, Carrington, Chorlton, Cross-street, Davyhulme, Dunham, Flixton, Lyms, Partington, Stretford, Timperley and Urmston.

* All the places except Altrincham are distinguished by *Italics*.

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| <p>Adhead John, boot and shoemaker, Lower-town</p> <p>Adehead James, shoemaker, Lower-town</p> <p>Aimson James, wheelwright, Cross-street</p> <p>Amit Thomas, cotton manuf. Flixton</p> <p>Ashcroft Joshua, grocer & spirit merchant, Market-st</p> <p>Ashley William, worsted manuf. & shopkeeper, Market-st</p> <p>Ashley John, grocer and flour dealer, Lyms</p> <p>Ashley Sarah, victualler, Bleeding Wolf, Ashley-heath</p> <p>Atherton John, hobbie-turner, Lower-town</p> <p>Austin Ann, shopkeeper, Lower-town</p> <p>Bagshaw Thomas, gentleman</p> <p>Barrett John, grocer, brandy merchant and maltster, Market-place</p> <p>Barlow James, cotton manuf. Flixton</p> <p>Barrow John, grocer, Lower-town</p> <p>Barton Thomas, vict. Pelican, Timperley</p> <p>Baskerville Joseph, miller, Market-place</p> <p>Battison Richard, gentleman, Lyms</p> <p>Beaumont George, linen & woollen draper, Market-place</p> <p>Beech Thos. tinplate-worker, Lower-town</p> <p>Bell Thomas, hair-dresser, Market-place</p> <p>Beut John, manuf. Flixton</p> <p>Bibby Richard, confectioner, Market-place</p> <p>Birk Thomas, tailor, Market-place</p> <p>Blackburn Peter, tinplate-worker, Lower-town</p> <p>Blense John, bricklayer, Flixton</p> <p>Blease Robert, shopkeeper, Lower-town</p> <p>Bloxley Mrs. Elizabeth, Chorlton</p> <p>Boardman Theophilus, cabinet-maker, Market-place</p> <p>Boardman Frederick, victualler, Bowling-green, Market-place</p> <p>Boardman Robert, vict. Bay Malton, Market-place</p> <p>Booth Alice, vict. Red Lion, Green-lane, Flixton</p> <p>Bradbury Thomas, vict. Axe and Cleaver, Lower-town</p> <p>Bradbury Thomas, hat manuf. Well-st</p> <p>Brasculute Thomas, Market-st</p> | <p>Brierley Jos. tallow-chandler, Lower-town</p> <p>Broadhead Richard, surgeon, Market-place</p> <p>Brown John, bricklayer, Bollington</p> <p>Brown Jonathan, vict. Horse and Jockey, Chorlton</p> <p>Brownhill James, joiner, Lower-town</p> <p>Brownhill Timothy, joiner, Lower-town</p> <p>Bruckshaw Samuel, grocer and flour dealer, Market-place</p> <p>Broadrett John, shopkeeper, Lower-town</p> <p>Burgess Israel, vict. Orange-tree, Lower-town</p> <p>Burgess William, Carrington</p> <p>Bury William, butcher, Higher-town</p> <p>Bury M. & Daughters, seminary for ladies, Sale Old-hall</p> <p>Bythell William, shopkeeper, overseer and collector of taxes, Chorlton, and Bridge Inn, Salford</p> <p>Calderbank Thomas, gardener and seedman, Lower-town</p> <p>Cassiter Wm. corn and flour dealer, Lyms</p> <p>Chorlton John, vict. Hare and Hounds, Timperley</p> <p>Clare Thomas, blacksmith, Flixton</p> <p>Clark Rd. worsted manuf. Bowden-downs</p> <p>Clark Thomas, blacksmith, Higher-town</p> <p>Clark James, shopkeeper, Ashton-upon-Mersey</p> <p>Callier John, vict. Dog & Partridge, Flixton</p> <p>Cook Job, tailor, Flixton</p> <p>Cook Jas. shopkeeper, Ashton-upon-Mersey</p> <p>Cookson George, shopkeeper, Stretford</p> <p>Crompton Wm.-esq. schoolmaster, Carrington</p> <p>Crompton William, shopkeeper, Carrington</p> <p>Daniel John, wheelwright, Stretford</p> <p>Darbishire Ann, vict. Malt Shovel, Lower-town</p> <p>Darbishire Thomas, sen. gentleman, Lyms</p> <p>Darbishire George, grocer and flour dealer, Stretford</p> <p>Davenport Job, land steward to the Earl of Stamford, Dunham-park</p> <p>Davenport James, shopkeeper, Broad-heath</p> <p>Davenport John, vict. Wharf Shoaf, Sandycroft-head</p> |
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Extract from Pigot & Dean's New Directory of Manchester and Salford, 1821-2.

There is even less local government material relating to Hale and Bowdon in the collection as the majority of records were deposited by the local Council in the Cheshire Record Office in 1974. A calendar of the Hale material is available in the Altrincham Collection (ref. LUH/1-4). The library holds a small amount of material pertaining to the Bowdon Urban District Council including *Council Minutes 1965-74, Treasurer's Accounts 1906-44* and general accounts for the years 1910-17 and 1940-59. There is however a useful booklet produced by the Bowdon U.D.C. on its jubilee entitled *Fifty Years of Local Government 1894-1944*.

Religion played a large part in the history of Altrincham and some of this can be gleaned from the collection of church manuals and parish magazines dating from the 1870s for various churches and chapels in the area. A particularly useful example is the manual produced annually by the Bowdon Downs Congregational Church. The library holds copies for the years 1865 and 1878-87. These manuals not only provide details of the activities of the church and its various missions but also list its registered members and is of particular interest to those tracing their family trees because they indicate, where appropriate, the town to which members moved. Other such records include the parish magazine of St. Margaret's Church, Dunham Massey from 1896-1904 and 1925-33, of St. George's Church from 1910-37 and 1968 to date and Hale Road Baptist Chapel from 1924-38 and 1942-47. The collection also includes the *Altrincham Methodist Circuit Steward's Account Books 1907-13* and *1924-38* and a *Sunday School Record Book* for Partington Congregational Church giving lists of pupils and

attendances from 1868-91. Amongst a small collection of sermons preached by local ministers is one given by John Berry of Altrincham in 1840 exhorting his flock: "Not only to abstain from drunkenness, but also to abstain from fleshly lusts".³ It is not recorded how his message was received.

Good use is made of the parish registers held on microfilm for St. Mary's Church, Bowdon from 1628-1841 for baptisms and burials and 1628-1844 for marriages. For St. Werberg's, Warburton all registers begin in 1611 with baptisms to 1859, marriages to 1836 and burials to 1863. The International Genealogical Index for Cheshire is soon to be put into stock which will be of great use to the genealogist.

Also of interest to the family historian is the collection of local Cheshire directories — from 1821 onwards. These run at fairly regular intervals up to 1942 which was the last directory to include Altrincham's private residents. The library also holds electoral rolls for Altrincham from 1929 to date, for Timperley from 1936 to date and for Hale and Bowdon from 1974 to date. It should perhaps be noted that the other essential for the family historian, the collection of enumerators returns for the censuses of 1841-81 for the Altrincham area, are kept at Sale Library, not Altrincham.

Other types of record also contribute to building up a social history of Altrincham. One of the earliest institutions which still exists is the Altrincham General Hospital. Founded in 1853 as Lloyd's Fever Hospital, the library holds annual reports from 1858-1947 and also a general history *The Story of Altrincham General 1870-1970* by James L. Pugh. A very clear picture of the health of Altrincham is seen in the *Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into the Town of Altrincham* by Robert Rawlinson dated 1851. This inquiry, done under the powers of the Public Health Act of 1848 was extremely damning for instance:

... the tenant of one cottage absolutely closed the window-shutter of the ground-floor room, thus depriving it of light and ventilation, that he might pile a dunghill higher up his cottage wall: the result was, that the liquid manure exuded from this dunghill, found its way through the crevices of the shutter and window, and flowed into the house.

and reporting on the state of the Bridgewater Canal:

*that there was but one opinion about it, namely that it was a monster nuisance.*⁴

The Inquiry did result in a great many improvements being made in the town, most importantly that a new and efficient system of drainage and sewerage was begun. Other records which complement these are the *Chief Medical Officer of Health Reports* from 1895-1960.



Timperley Railway Station.

Another important aspect of social history is education. Unfortunately the collection contains little primary source material such as school minute books, the exception being the *Manager's Minutes 1903-30* for Seamons Moss School. However a lot of information can be obtained from the good collection of school magazines, in particular for the Altrincham Grammar School for Boys from 1913-36 and 1979 to date, and annals of the Girls Grammar School from 1910-33.

Altrincham never became heavily industrialized, but towards the end of the nineteenth century the Broadheath area became a small centre for light industry, in particular engineering. One of the most internationally famous firms was that of Linotype and Machinery Ltd., manufacturers of printing machinery and the library holds various records of its history, including its house magazine *L and M News* from 1949-65, manuals for various types of presses and typefaces and an interesting book published by the firm, *Works and Industry of Linotype and Machinery Ltd., Broadheath* which in addition to being a history of the firm also describes the houses built in Broadheath for the company's employees.⁵

Another firm in Broadheath which won international fame was the Thornton-Pickard Manufacturing Company which made cameras and other photographic equipment. The library holds a number of catalogues of their equipment dating from the 1890s and various illustrated advertisements which clearly show the history of nineteenth century photographic technology.

The growth of Altrincham as a commuter belt for Manchester is directly answerable to the transport network which grew up from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The Manchester South Junction and Altrincham Railway was opened in 1849 and there are various pamphlets and books marking its history, in particular the Act of Parliament of 1845 which initiated the railway and more recently a definitive history by F. Dixon, *The Manchester South Junction and Altrincham Railway*. The next form of transport to reach Altrincham was the tramway in 1907 and the library holds agreements between the various bodies of Altrincham Urban District Council, Manchester Corporation and the Bucklow Rural District Council which made the tramway possible.



Altrincham and Sale Public Window Cleaning Company.

One of the most telling items in any local history collection regarding the social history of an area is the personal testimony of local residents. There are no very large deposits of family documents but recently the library has acquired two large scrapbooks relating to the Robinson family of Bowdon which provide a marvellous insight into the lifestyle of that particular family.



Linotype Works, Broadheath, opened 1897.

including letters of both a personal and business nature, bills for all types of household commodities and dealings of shareholdings. It is this type of material which is of paramount importance to the social historian but so frequently gets discarded as a result of removal to another area or death. Records of this type would always make a very welcome addition to the collection.

The collection of maps which now totals over 850 includes a few dating back to the early nineteenth century, the most important being the tithe maps of 1838 for Hale, Bowdon and Timperley each having their accompanying apportionments which give details of ownership, tenure and use for each plot of land. There is also a contemporary map dated c.1834 based on the tithe map for Altrincham, though it is hoped that a copy of the tithe map will be acquired in the near future. A drawn and written description of Altrincham can be seen in the extremely detailed Local Board of Health Survey of 1851-2. This comprises a book of maps at a scale of just over 1 inch to 50 feet with an accompanying survey giving owners, occupiers, plot size and land use. From the end of the nineteenth century to the present day a variety of local maps, chiefly ordnance survey, are held, many being 1:1250 or 1:2500 scales. The collection also includes some maps generated by the Planning Department giving detailed plans of housing schemes, for instance the Aimson Road scheme of 1970. Other more recent maps show socio-economic factors in the area, such as population density, land use, housing tenure and car ownership.

Various local newspapers are filed on microfilm, the longest run being for the *Altrincham Guardian* from 1895 to date. This paper did in fact start in 1864 but copies from that date to 1894 are only available at the British Library Newspaper Library, Colindale Avenue, London NW9 5HE. Other newspapers held in the collection include the *Altrincham Division Chronicle and Cheshire County News* June 1887-December 1890, the *Altrincham, Hale, Bowdon and Timperley County Express* April 1959-June 1963 and the *North Cheshire Courier* from February 1948-July 1950.

There are over 7,000 illustrations in the collection depicting various local scenes, events and people. Included in this is a large collection of glass lantern slides made by a local photographer, Harry Wilkinson, (1870-1942). He was a gifted amateur photographer, and allied with his love of photography was his great interest in local history. The photographs he took himself date from the 1880s but he also made prints of photographs borrowed from elderly residents at the time, thus the whole collection covers a long period from about 1860 to the late 1930s. On his death his widow donated the slides and also his lecture notes to the library, thus making the collection more historically significant than is usual. Some of these glass slides have been converted into modern format and provide the basis of illustrated talks given to local groups by members of the library staff.



Old Market Place, Altrincham, in 1858.

There are in addition, a number of general histories of the area most of which are also available for loan, the three basic ones being Charles Nickson's *Bygone Altrincham* published in 1935, Alfred Ingham's *History of Altrincham and Bowdon* published in 1897 and a pictorial book by Basil Morrison, *Looking Back at Altrincham* published in 1980. It can be seen from this that there has been no detailed history of Altrincham written for over 50 years, a state which desperately needs rectifying, especially as there are many errors in *Bygone Altrincham*.

Whilst this brief outline can only offer a small taste of the material in the collection it is to be hoped that a good idea of the type of material to be found can be gained. It should also perhaps be realized that such a collection largely grows up as a result of the interest and generosity of local people who wish to preserve their past, and items for the collection are always welcome.

Finally some of the facilities and services of the library should be mentioned. Photocopying facilities are available and subject to copyright law, copies can be made for a small charge. A microfilm reader is also available though due to the heavy use made of this it is advisable to book this in advance, by contacting the library below. Trafford Leisure Services also have a continuing publishing programme. To date for this area this includes a local history pack which is extremely well used, both as background reading and by schoolchildren for project work; postcards, a print and two town trails, one for Altrincham and one for Bowdon. These have proved very popular and staff are always available to take local groups on a guided walk as well as to give illustrated talks on the area. To book any of these services or for any further information please contact the Reference Librarian at the following address: Altrincham Library, 20 Stamford New Road, Altrincham, Cheshire. WA14 1EJ.

Tel. 061-928 0317. Opening hours are Mon-Tues-Thurs-Fri 10-7.30 pm, Wed 10-1 pm, Saturday 10-4 pm.

NOTES

1. W.G. Bosworth, *A Visitor's Guide to the Altrincham Central Public Library, Museum, Art Gallery and Public Hall* (Altrincham, N.D.).
2. Reports of Town Meetings held in Altrincham, 1795-1825. MS
3. John Berry, *A Short Address on the Lusts of the Flesh, or Fleshly Lusts* (Manchester, 1840).
4. Robert Rawlinson, *Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Town of Altrincham* (1851)
5. The typesetting for this magazine is produced using a Linoterm Phototypesetting Machine. This type of machine is serviced by Linotype-Paul from its service depot in Broadheath, Altrincham, this being the modern-day trading name of Linotype.