

LOCAL STUDIES IN THE LANCASHIRE LIBRARY: Collections in Rossendale District

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“Lancashire Library” is the post-1974 name for the service more familiarly known as Lancashire County Library. The local government changes of 1974 altered more than the name of the service; they transformed a library system serving largely rural and suburban areas into one which included the City of Lancaster, four former county boroughs and several other urban library authorities with important local studies collections. At the same time the geographical area covered by the county library service was reduced, and now excludes Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Furness, but includes the Bowland area which was formerly in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

The pattern of local studies provision in the county is based on the fourteen administrative districts of which the present Lancashire is comprised. In each of these districts there is one main local studies collection, from which the local studies service of the district is co-ordinated, although there may well be more than one sizeable collection in the district; Rossendale, the area which is the subject of the present article, has useful collections at Bacup and Haslingden as well as the main library at Rawtenstall. Each District Library ensures that as full a collection as possible is assembled and maintained containing material relating to the area within the district boundary; in addition to books and pamphlets, material such as photographs, ephemera, sound recordings, video and film is to be found in many local libraries. A free leaflet entitled “Local History” is available which gives the library addresses at which collections are housed.

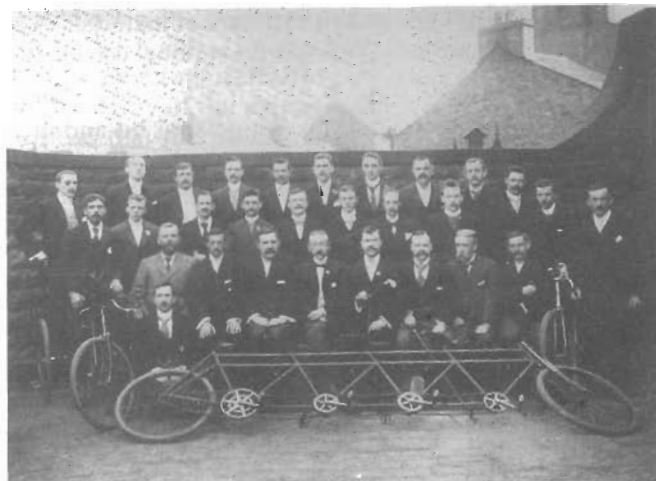
There is also an excellent collection of printed books and pamphlets at the County Headquarters Library at 143, Corporation Street, Preston. The geographical coverage of this collection is the area of the County Palatine of Lancaster, and it is therefore particularly useful to students studying a region rather than a town or village. Researchers are welcome at the Headquarters Local Studies Library, but for administrative reasons a prior appointment is essential.

In the county as a whole, an increasing amount of material is now available for home reading. In addition to the many loan collections of local titles now to be found in District Libraries, the Headquarters Library has a large collection available through the local libraries; this collection includes many items rarely available for home reading, such as volumes of the Victoria County History, and transactions of the county historical societies. Both loan and reference collections are being increasingly used by teachers and schoolchildren as school syllabuses demand more work to be done using source materials. A free leaflet, “Local Studies collections; a guide for new users”, gives helpful advice to students using county collections for the first time, and a much fuller guide to the collections of Lancashire County Libraries, Record Office and Museums is available entitled *Local Studies in Lancashire*, price £2.50 plus £1.50 postage and packing. The leaflets and full guide can be obtained from many local libraries within the county, or by post from the Local

Studies Library, Lancashire Library, 143, Corporation Street, Preston PR1 2TB (Tel. (0772) 264021).

Rossendale District

Rossendale is the name of one of the smallest administrative districts within the county of Lancashire created in 1974, and incorporates the former municipal boroughs of Bacup, Haslingden and Rawtenstall together with Edenfield, Stubbins and the former Whitworth Urban District. A large part of the area was from ancient times known as the Forest of Rossendale, and is an area of moorland sharply entrenched with streams and rivers. Sitting amongst Pennine fells rising to 1,500 feet above sea level, Rossendale has developed an independent, individual character which may now be increasingly diluted as a result of easier access by way of the improved road links to the Greater Manchester conurbation to the south.



Rossendale Bicycle and Tricycle Club in 1899.

The earlier significance of hill farming was diminished by the growing importance of the domestic loomshops in the eighteenth century and the onset of the industrial revolution. The numerous rivers in the valleys together with the damp climate produced ideal conditions for woollen and cotton spinning, and it was no accident that Rossendale became known as the “Golden Valley”. The footwear industry also brought increased prosperity; both the textile and footwear industries have, however, been in decline since World War II, but the footwear trade is now in an expansionist phase. Many of the old textile mills have been demolished or converted into industrial units as new, lighter industries and services have been attracted to the area.

The Museum of the Lancashire Textile Industry at Higher Mill in Helmshore is an important centre for the study of local textile history, and may become even more popular when the railway line from Bury is re-opened. Perhaps the most unusual feature of the area is the Rawtenstall

ski-slope, the longest artificial ski-slope in England, boasting panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

Rawtenstall Collection

The main local studies collection for Rossendale is housed at Rawtenstall Library, although there are also good collections at Haslingden and Bacup. The Rawtenstall collection includes a greater variety of background information on Lancashire and the north-west than do the other two collections, with particular emphasis on adjacent areas. Thomas Newbigging's *History of the Forest of Rossendale* (2nd ed., 1893) and G.H. Tupling's *Economic History of the Forest of Rossendale* (1927) — Dr. Tupling lived in Haslingden — provide useful introductions to the history of the area as a whole. A surprising number of histories have been written about Rossendale towns and villages (some unpublished) including such titles as *Once upon hard times: life in the village of Higher Cloughfold* (1981) and *Reminiscences of Rawtenstall in 1884* (unpublished typescript, 1967). Studies on special topics abound, ranging from church history (*Methodism in Rossendale*, by William Jessop, 1880) through transport (*Road development through the Rossendale Valley*, by Ben Riley, typescript, 1969) to social conditions (*The Haslingden Poor Law Union 1848-1930*, by Rhodes Boyson, typescript, 1949); Sir Rhodes Boyson, M.P., was born in Haslingden.



Bank Street, Rawtenstall, c. 1919.

Much has been written on the development of industry in the area, and some examples of local activity can be found in *Mr. Pilling's short cut to China ... and other stories of Rossendale enterprise*, by Chris Aspin (1983); the wealth created by the new industries is reflected in the chapter "The fall of Troy", which describes how a Bacup cotton manufacturer discovered silver in Nevada, and a mine was opened there with "thousands of pounds of Rossendale savings", resulting in a "contagious mining fever. People are rushing here and there almost delirious to obtain shares in the Troy Silver Mining Company".

Other aspects of industrial history are represented by several unpublished dissertations, including *The development of industry in Rossendale, 1750-1965*, by P. Goldsworthy (1965) and *The decline of the textile industry in the Rossendale Valley and its impact*, by K.J. Holden (1982). Works donated by local historians include John Davies' *Coal mining in Rossendale*, (1982) and Malcolm Starkie's *Mineral water manufacturers in Rossendale*, (1987) — the latter refers to over 100 such manufacturers; mineral water was evidently a popular commodity on the wet, windswept moors of Rossendale!

Remote as it may have been, Rossendale has attracted its share of visitors and produced a number of local celebrities. John Wesley was one of the visitors and reported in his Journal on 7 May 1747:

We left the mountains (around Todmorden) and came down to the fruitful valley of Rossendale. Here I preached to a large congregation of wild men; but it pleased God to hold them in chains.

Among the celebrities with local connections are Don Whillans, the mountaineer, and David Lewis, the athlete. The library holds information on these and other prominent local people. Also widely known is the Rossendale Male Voice Choir, winner of many national and international singing competitions. Musical tradition in Rossendale is very strong, and extends back in time at least as far as the mid-eighteenth century, when a group of local musicians and composers known as the "Larks of Dean" travelled between each other's homes to play music and to sing principally, but not exclusively, religious songs. They built a small chapel in Lumb where they could sing in public, but after about eight years transferred to a larger building at Goodshaw Chapel. A fine collection of the scores which they used and wrote has been placed on permanent loan to the Lancashire Record Office, a photocopied set being available, along with other information, at Rawtenstall Library.

A local diarist, Moses Heap, refers to the Larks of Dean, who were his companions:

"Why, we used to go ower th' hills i' o' sorts o' weather, and think nought o' practisin till one o'clock i' t' mornin', aye till two and three o'clock sometimes. A young man, after a day's work, walked five miles at least, and over two sets of hills (from Dean to Haslingden Grane) to a practice. Midnight passed in practising; later, as the hour of 2.0 a.m. approached, he ventured to say he thought he should be getting home, as he "had to be up middlin' soon on i' t' mornin'," (as if it were not already mornin'). An enthusiastic old man who also had several ranges of hills to cross over on his way home too, reprovingly said — "Do'st yer what aw'm bown to say, young chap; if tha'rt allus i' such a hurry as that tha'll never mak a musician as long as tha lives!"



Moses Heap (1824-1913)

Moses Heap was a cotton mill worker and his diary, covering the period 1824 to 1913, offers numerous insights into nineteenth-century life. He describes home life in Rossendale in the mid nineteenth-century:

The houses at this time had little furniture in them. The money earned went in provisions, and these were very scanty. Many a time our family of father, mother and three or four children had to join in at the porridge dish, with treacle and water instead of milk. In summer we gathered nettles, and sourdocks for mother to cook with a little oatmeal ready for eating. On Saturday night towards seven o'clock when all work was finished and the bobbin wheel taken away, the house would be cleaned up. The floor was washed with a long mop, then it was covered with sand, afterwards scrubbed over with a large stone at the end of a long pole. Carpets were unknown. It was indeed a time of great humiliation. A master really thought he was doing a great favour by finding one a few days' work.

At the opposite end of the social spectrum the diary of the industrialist, David Whitehead, covering the period from 1790 to 1860, is available in the collection. Other materials for industrial history include account books and ledgers for Loveclough Printworks, 1831-1925, along with copies of apprentices' indentures, 1831-44. There are also apprenticeship indentures for poor children in the Chapelry of Newchurch, 1759-74.

Early administrative history is represented by a selection of material for the Chapelry of Newchurch including poor relief assessments for 1751 and 1757-8, and nineteenth-century Poor Law material for Cowpe Lenches, Newhallhey and Hall Carr and Higher Booths. Accounts are also held, some in microform, of the Greave of Rossendale, 1691-1829. Council minutes for the Borough of Rawtenstall and, from 1974, the new Borough of Rossendale, are available from 1891 to date, and there are annual reports of local medical officers from 1896-1972. The minutes of the Bury and District Joint Water Board, 1901-20 and 1922-5 are also held.

The most significant local newspaper is the *Rossendale Free Press*; first issued 10 March 1883, the library file, on microfilm, begins in May of that year. A newscuttings file is maintained, and a number of local periodicals are available.

Interest in family history continues unabated, and a guide to the genealogical material in the collection, *Tracing your ancestors in Rossendale* can be purchased for 25p (plus 30p postage). Items held include census enumerators' returns, parish registers (printed and microform, and including some Methodist registers), electoral registers and trade directories. A particularly interesting source is a collection of manuscript notebooks of the Haslingden antiquarian Henry Stephenson, born in 1842, which record historical facts about the locality and its families, including family trees and coats of arms.

Other materials include maps and plans, films, sound recordings and an excellent collection of photographs. Limitation of space precludes further description here, but inquirers who would like to investigate further will be welcome visitors.

Bacup Collection

Bacup town centre, in which the library stands, has been developed as a conservation area. Few readers may be aware that on the conservation area's fringe is situated Elgin Street, currently recorded in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the shortest street in the world (length 17 feet).



St. James' Street, Bacup c. 1910.

Plainly the *Guinness Book of Records* will have to be added to the local studies collection!

Bacup Library is on the ground floor of the Mechanics' Institute in St. James' Square, which is the oldest library building in Rossendale. Built in 1846, it is on the site of Rossendale's oldest nonconformist place of worship, erected in 1692 for the double purpose of a school-house and a religious meeting-house. Seven minute books and sundry other documents, reports and notebooks relating to the Mechanics' Institute are available, covering the period from April 1839 until the end of the nineteenth century. During 1983 the library was extensively modernised, with the result that the local studies collection of nearly 2,000 items is now more readily accessible than was formerly the case.

There is, however, no longer the space to hold the originals of the local newspapers, so that the *Bacup Times* (written from a Liberal angle), which ran for just over 100 years from 8 April 1865, is now available on microfilm only, the originals reposing with the Bacup Natural History Society round the corner in Yorkshire Street. The Bacup Natural History Society also holds the originals of the Conservative-slanted *Bacup and Rossendale News*, which began publication in 1863, became the *Rossendale Divisional Gazette* in 1891, and ceased early in the twentieth century; a microfilm is available in Bacup Library. Also on microfilm are the complete files of the *Bacup and District Advertiser*, (26 issues, 1967-72) and the *Bacup Echo* (155 issues, 1972-7). There is a newscuttings file maintained in the collection.

Thomas Brown, founder of the *Bacup Times*, was in business as a printer and publisher for several years before 1865, and one of his earlier pamphlets, published in 1852, bears the curious title of *The Paroxysm of Barnabas and Paul, respectfully inscribed to contending Wesleyans*, by Jacob Grimshaw. This is one of 47 pamphlets or leaflets at least a century old, many of them of religious significance, but also including such delights as *Rules to be observed by the members of the Hen-peck'd Club, held at the house of Mr. Sawney Submit*, and a dialogue in dialect written by Dick o'th'owd Schoomeasters.

Other items include an autograph of Edwin Waugh, the record of payments made by the Bacup Relief Fund in 1862-3 during the Cotton Famine, and the programme of the concert given by Dame Nellie Melba in Bacup's Court Theatre on 6 February 1911. The scrapbook of the Bacup Male Voice Choir contains a programme for the first

concert of the 1932-3 season, when the guest artiste at the pianoforte was a certain Kathleen Ferrier — who had not then taken up singing.

Another rarity is the *Rossendale Watchman*, a local newspaper which began in April 1876 as *The Busy Body and Rossendale Critic*; it was deemed diplomatic to amend its title after only five issues, but it still ceased to exist before the year had ended.

The somewhat unwieldy official *Borough of Bacup Photographic Record* is an album which contains 45 leaves of pictures of various areas of the town from the 1880s to the 1930s. In addition to this album, the library also has a considerable file of illustrations, of which many are photographs.

There are few theses or dissertations at Bacup Library, but one outstanding item is the B.A. thesis of the late Austin Digby, written thirty years ago under the title of *Agricultural land-utilization in Rossendale in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*.

Local trade directories form part of the collection, produced by a variety of publishers from 1824/5 onwards, and a particularly useful item is the 1914 pocket edition of *The Cotton spinners' and manufacturers' directory for Lancashire and the adjoining manufacturing districts ... containing the approximate number of spindles and looms, and the pay days, telegraphic addresses and telephone numbers of the principal firms*. An obituary index to Mayors of Bacup and other prominent Rossendale folk who died between 1923 and 1971 (plus quite a few outside those dates) has been compiled. The obituary index also includes the entries from the Bacup Wesleyan Methodist Society Members' Obituary Book, which began at the end

of 1882 and continues until 1962 (432 entries in all). The Members' Obituary Book is not a library item, but can be consulted on application to the Rossendale Circuit Superintendent Minister. This biographical material is of interest to genealogists, who will also find local census enumerators' returns and the registers for Mount Pleasant Methodist and Ebenezer Baptist Churches available for consultation (both of these church registers go back to at least the 1780s).

Easily the most regular inquiries at Bacup concern the Britannia Coconut Dancers, who entertain the local public every Easter Saturday. As well as pictures and a transcript of their Secretary's book, the library has, by courtesy of the North West Sound Archive, a copy tape of their Easter 1973 performance. Other inquiries have ranged from information on the Bacup Orchestral Society (many of whose concert programmes are held) to material on the Maden Holt family and their residence at Stubbylee Hall. A frequent request is for "The history of Bacup"; a twentieth-century version has yet to be written — but there is plenty of scope for the researcher among the material on football and brass bands, local dramatic societies, swimming ... and a close study of Bacup Library's local studies collection will reveal much more.

Haslingden Collection

Haslingden Library, like so many other libraries in this country, owes much to that most famous of all library benefactors, Andrew Carnegie, although the local "Free Library" advocates of 1857, notably John Binns, must share the credit. It was Carnegie's gift of £2,500 which enabled Haslingden Corporation to purchase the old Haslingden Institute building, originally built in 1860, and



Mitchell's Chip Potato Saloon on Lower Deardengate, Haslingden, 1902.

to convert it into a free library which was opened initially with the provision of a newspaper and periodicals room in 1905, followed a year later by a collection of books. The local studies collection really came into being when a local politician and ex-mayor, Major David Halstead, donated his collection of several hundred books, pamphlets, diaries, scrap-books and letters to the library during the First World War. Halstead was an enthusiastic antiquarian and an avid collector, and his donation formed the nucleus of the library collection.

Readers wanting to become familiar with the history of Haslingden would be well advised to start by reading *Haslingden, 1800-1900*, by Chris Aspin (1962), in conjunction with the excellent collections of pictures to be found in *Haslingden* (1979) and *Helmshore* (1977), both edited by Chris Aspin and Derek Pilkington. Another valuable work is *Haslingden: a topographical history*, by Thomas Woodcock, published by the Chetham Society in 1952. Thomas Woodcock was a local solicitor and his book contains much useful information on land ownership and several detailed maps.

The Irish patriot, Michael Davitt, founder of the Irish Land League, will long be remembered in Haslingden, where he spent his formative years. He worked for a time in a cotton mill in Baxenden, where he lost his right arm in an accident. Subsequently, he was educated at a local Wesleyan school and worked in a printing firm in Haslingden. After joining the Fenian movement in 1865 he served seven years in an English jail for arms smuggling, and when released he had two spells as a Member of Parliament. Davitt's great contribution was his constant fight against oppression and his sensitivity to the needs of less fortunate members of society. In appreciation of his support for the Irish people and his links with the town, two memorials have been erected in different parts of Haslingden. The library has many books and photographs covering his life, and John Dunleavy's *Michael Davitt and Haslingden*, published by Haslingden Local History Society in 1979, is an authoritative account of Davitt's connection with the town.

Local musical and dramatic groups have always been strong in the town, many events and activities being promoted by the Haslingden Arts Club. The library holds the Club's collection of membership registers, posters, gramophone records, press cuttings, programmes and autographs, and a small booklet has been written by Lisbeth Hildred entitled *The story of Haslingden Arts Club, 1944-1974*. In addition to the Arts Club material, the library has several recordings of the Haslingden Choir, the Rossendale Male Voice Choir, and the well-known Haslingden-born composer, Alan Rawsthorne.

For the family historian Haslingden Library has a variety of useful source material. Items include the Haslingden census enumerators' returns for 1841-81, all with street indexes and with a head-of-household index for the 1851 returns. There are some microfilmed and printed church registers and a transcript of the memorial inscriptions in St. James' Parish Church graveyard. Trade directories are held for various dates between 1811 and 1969, as are Burgess Rolls for the period 1891-1915 and electoral registers from 1948 onwards.

The extensive holdings of local newspapers are well used, the *Haslingden Observer* and the *Haslingden Guardian* being the most significant. A cuttings file, begun in 1930 by a local reporter and bequeathed to the library, is available, supplemented by library indexes to illustrations and obituaries.

For an earlier period, the library holds Poor Law accounts for Rossendale for the years 1799-1801. The minutes of the Haslingden Union cover the period 1907-1930. Borough of Haslingden Council minutes from 1896/7-1974 (slightly incomplete) and yearbooks from 1892-1974 are held, as well as the annual reports of the Haslingden Medical Officer from 1898-1972.

Over the years the collection of illustrations has grown steadily with the help of donations from local people, and slide lectures are a popular library event. Exhibitions of photographs from the collection are held from time to time and are much enjoyed by local residents, many of whom have lived all their lives in the area. It is perhaps through these old illustrations that Haslingden people as a whole, not only local historians, are best able to share in the interest to be found in the local studies collection.



H. Clarke, Boot Repairer and Boot Maker, on Deardengate, Haslingden.

Conclusion

Although the towns of Bacup, Haslingden and Rawtenstall are small, the wealth of information contained in their local studies collections reflects the diversity of their histories and the care with which local people have preserved their heritage. John Wesley was unimpressed with one aspect of Rossendale when, in the eighteenth century, he rode into Haslingden from Padiham and complained that the roads "were sufficient to lame any horses, and shake any carriage in pieces", and that he would never attempt to travel them again until they were improved (Journal, 22 April 1788). It is hoped that the present condition of the roads is no impediment to those who would be interested in visiting Rossendale to consult these three local studies collections!

Visitors are welcome at all libraries, but it is necessary to book a microfilm reader in advance if microfilm is to be consulted. Library hours vary between libraries; it is advisable to check opening hours before visiting. Addresses of the Rossendale libraries are:

Rawtenstall Library: Haslingden Road, Rawtenstall, Rossendale, BB4 6QJ. (Tel. Rossendale 227911.)

Bacup Library: St. James' Square, Bacup, OL13 9AH. (Tel. Bacup 873324.)

Haslingden Library: Higher Deardengate, Haslingden, Rossendale, BB4 5QJ. (Tel. Rossendale 215690.)