

SADDLEWORTH MUSEUM

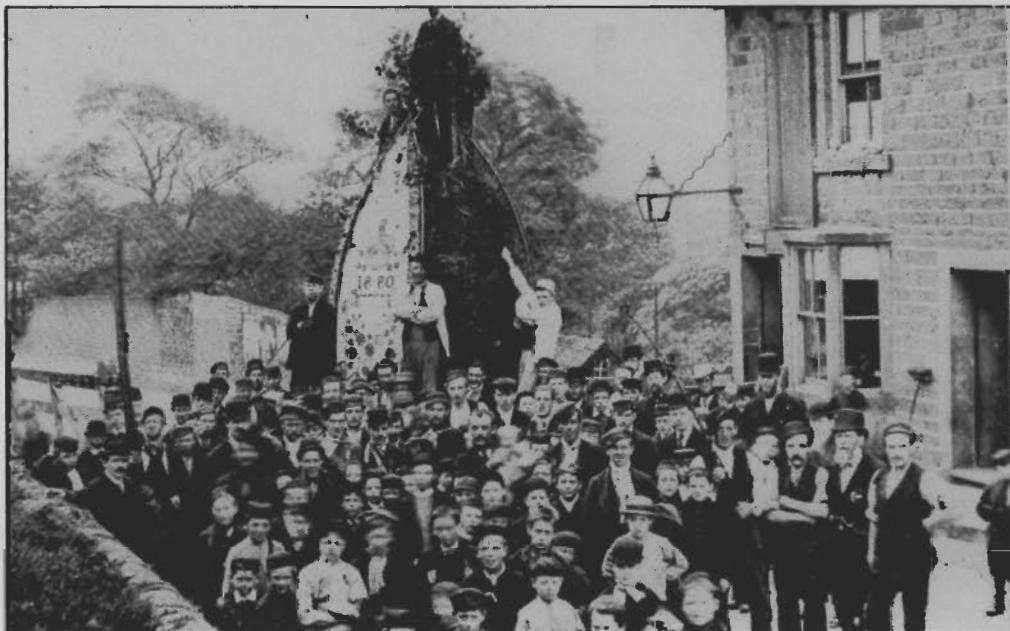
Robert McMillan

Saddleworth Museum is one of the region's older independent museums. Established in 1960 and opened to the public in 1962 it is a registered charitable trust and has a high level of local initiative, sponsorship, support and active involvement behind it. Many of the original trustees and founder committee members are still associated with the Museum. Despite this, the last ten years have seen changes in the size, role and status of the museum and in its relationship with a developing local community and with the local Metropolitan Borough authority in particular. These have almost wholly transformed its character from the original concept. More and more, the museum's operation has become a series of balancing acts between independence and reliance for certain aspects of support on outside sources. In this way its situation reflects that of the museum world in general at the moment. What can be said is that this balancing act has been performed not only with skill in keeping the museum abreast of current developments but with consideration for the interests of all the various parties involved.

and displayed. It was felt that a museum would act as a focal point for bringing together not only exhibits but also inspiring others interested in the study of local history, before social changes altered the traditional character of Saddleworth life. The trustees of 1962 included Hervey Rhodes M.P., later Lord Rhodes of Saddleworth and Col. G.B. Howcroft, a writer on Saddleworth history.

The museum was opened in 1962 by the Earl of Scarborough at Uppermill, the largest of Saddleworth's villages. It occupied a stone building that had previously formed part of the Victoria Mill, a cotton mill built in 1861 and subsequently operated with the neighbouring High Street Mill. When the rest of these mills were demolished in the early 1960s, their land was turned into the car park and gardens now adjacent to the museum and canal. The original name is commemorated by the ground floor of the former mill part of the museum now being the Victoria Mill textile gallery.

As a local museum it was fairly large. The contents were intended to display some of the main aspects of local and natural history including natural surroundings, homes



Rushcart at Toll-bar house, Uppermill, 1880

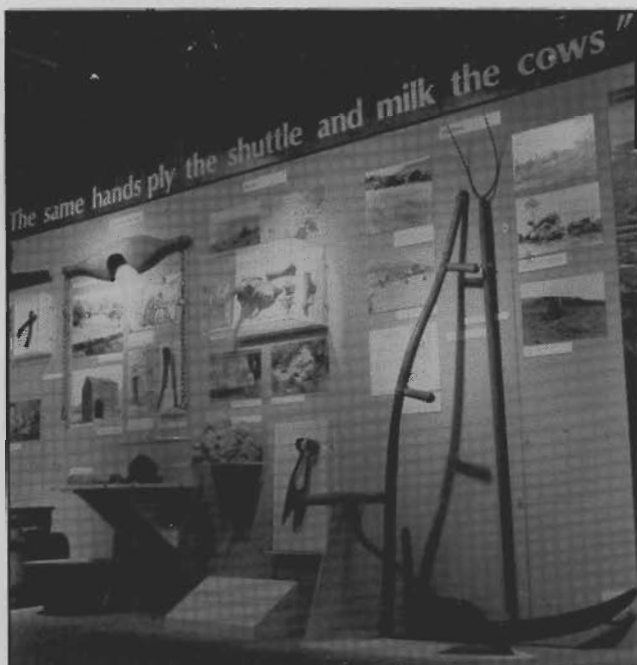
Saddleworth Museum's origins go back to the period of local history museums before words like 'heritage', 'community' and 'interpretation' came into fashion. Its founder was Roger Tanner, a local businessman, and then a member of Saddleworth U.D.C., who still retains a highly active role in the Museum's affairs. The inspiration lay in the local folk museums found in many continental countries, in this case Norway. Saddleworth is a remote and unique group of hills and valleys, a Pennine parish for centuries forming a part of the West Riding of Yorkshire but with its main economic and social links with the adjacent areas of Lancashire, Oldham in particular. In the 1960s it was still in Yorkshire but there were already proposals for union with a Lancashire local government area. It was felt by those who founded the museum that Saddleworth's historical legacy deserved a showcase where aspects of local life could be preserved

and domestic life, work, leisure, banking and ecclesiastical and administrative history. Help was also given at one stage by the Tolson Memorial Museum in Huddersfield, especially with the archaeological displays, and surplus display cases were obtained from the Werneth Park Study Centre in Oldham. Saddleworth links with Huddersfield in fact went back to before the war, when the Tolson Memorial Museum provided a home for Saddleworth material and also displayed the glass collections of Francis Buckley of Tunstead, the Saddleworth antiquarian and archaeologist. In common with other museums at the foundation stage, an appeal was put out for archaeological collections. In the period approaching the 1974 reorganisation of local government boundaries, collections of objects held by the West Riding County Council were placed in the Museum on permanent loan in order to make sure that they stayed in the area. Apart from the

important flint collections, material collected at this time included relics of Saddleworth's early nineteenth-century huntsman John Andrew; historic commemorative pottery of the district; some fine pieces of local furniture; relics of the Bill's o' Jack's murders of 1832 and objects connected with the bakestone and textile industries. Despite its importance locally, farming has never been well represented in the collections.

The museum was for a long time open only at weekends. The formation of the Saddleworth Historical Society in 1966 began a period of co-operation during which the Society provided regular volunteers to staff the museum and to care for its exhibits. For a period too, thanks to the assistance of Roger Tanner, the museum was opened on Wednesday afternoons each week, this being the local market day. Numbers of visitors were often small and the financial operations amounted to little more than the sale of a few postcards or books. The museum was nevertheless fulfilling its aim for Saddleworth people by acting as a focus for interest in the past of the locality, and for Saddleworth Historical Society, which in 1971 started to publish a quarterly bulletin. To this have been added walks, maps and books such as *Saddleworth Surveyed* and *Saddleworth Buildings*. The Saddleworth Festival of the Arts has collaborated on the publication of a number of these works.

In 1978, the museum authorities took the bold step of sponsoring an MSC Scheme to double the size of the museum with a wing at right angles to the existing one, and a triangular art gallery facing the canal. There was hardly any money available at the time, but the project was carried out and opened in 1979 by the Duchess of Gloucester. There followed a period of fund-raising which is remembered with nostalgia and pride as the Museum's finest hour by those who took part in it. The art gallery in particular, left with its fashionably stark breeze block walls, varying levels and canal-side vista has proved an exciting room for artists to display their work. It became the base for the Saddleworth Group of Artists for a number of years up to the mid 1980s, and has exhibited work by leading artists as well as giving opportunities for those less well known.



Interior of museum, Man and Landscape gallery



Bakestone trimmer

Early in 1982, the museum won a major award from the Gulbenkian Foundation for the re-housing and development of its archives. To this was attached an MSC CEP scheme which for the first time brought in a full-time staff consisting of professional, secretarial, building and manual workers. The museum began to open throughout the week. Since then further MSC Schemes have resulted in additional work being done. In 1985, thanks to grants from the Carnegie UK Trust and the English Tourist Board, the 'Man and the Landscape' gallery, first talked about in 1978, was opened. In 1984, Oldham MBC within which Saddleworth has been since 1974, generously funded a post of curator. In 1987 the museum and Oldham MBC came to an agreement whereby the Council opened a Tourist Information Centre in the museum, with a seconded full-time officer to manage it.

Saddleworth Museum now has around 26,000 visitors a year. Something like one-tenth of these are educational and social service parties which are admitted free of charge as a matter of museum policy, though a donation is encouraged. This, and the services of the curator in promoting the educational work in particular, are regarded in part as a quid pro quo for the funding of the curator's post. The main source of visitors is the Oldham area, followed by Tameside and then by Rochdale, Manchester, Kirklees and places at a like distance. School parties have come specifically to the museum from as far away as St. Helens in one direction and Barnsley in the other. The policy of free admissions is applied to all parties without discrimination. Other visitors pay 50p for adults and 20p for children and OAPs. There are also a large number of people who come into the Tourist Information Centre/Shop for information about Saddleworth and places further afield. The encouragement of visitors of whatever kind in the TIC/shop generates some income from members of the public who do not wish to visit the galleries themselves. Sales in the shop are an extremely important part of the museum's income, and the amount spent per visitor is fairly high in comparison with major attractions elsewhere.

The museum is not, therefore, simply a place for visitors to go round though this idea still sticks. As a museum service it also contains an archive which is the principal Saddleworth archive, being larger and more varied than the holdings of Saddleworth material in the Oldham archive collections. This archive consists of two separate collections, the museum's own acquisitions and the collections of the Saddleworth Historical Society. Both have been calendared and indexed by a volunteer archivist. Both collections contain useful libraries of books and



Whitsun procession, Uppermill, c.1910

pamphlets on local genealogy, the histories of schools, churches, chapels, mills and industries, and numerous works by local artists, musicians and authors. An important example is the collection of prose, poetry and historical works by Ammon Wrigley. There are wills, deeds, titles to and sale details of land and property, such as that — over six days in 1791 — of the Manor of Saddleworth, which was bought by thirty-one men who thereafter called themselves 'The Proprietors of Saddleworth', and a copy of the Saddleworth Enclosures Act of 1810.

The textile world is represented in numerous books on practice, patterns of material, the ledgers, commercial correspondence, wages and account books of local firms, while the Bernard Barnes Collection gives details and plans of 175 mills in the district. Local government proceedings are evidenced in such documents as authorisation to construct reservoirs, to light the streets with gas and to extend the boundaries of the district, the authority operating at different times under its various names — Saddleworth Guardians, Saddleworth Urban District Council, Saddleworth Parish Council. There are Bills to make the Huddersfield Canal, to build various railways, the Standedge railway and canal tunnels, as well as material relating to turnpike road and other developments in transport and communications.

A very important source of information and pictures is the E.L. Edwards Collection; this consists of eight large volumes relating to Saddleworth, 2,900 letters on researches and further supplementary material. Two similar collections are those of Julian Hunt and F.C. Battye, the latter having particular reference to the Saddleworth Woollen Weavers' Association.

Local festivals and customs, religious, social and cultural, are well documented, as also are local celebrations of national events such as coronations and jubilees, with relevant posters and programmes. Local society and club minute books are preserved — Literary and Philosophical, Botanical, Cricket etc., with those of Mechanics' Institutes, and a wide range of documents and newspaper articles on events in Saddleworth, with bound volumes of local newspapers.

There is a collection of maps and land plans, historical and contemporary, and a wide range of photographs of local people, places and buildings, the last of these illustrating the changes in the district's architecture over the years. A large number of pamphlets, bulletins and books published by the Saddleworth Historical Society provides another valuable source of historical information, plans and pictures, while the Howcroft Collection contains a variety of documents and notebooks, many having special reference to local architect and historian George Shaw.

On microfilm and in book form are the parish records of many of the Saddleworth churches. Military records are held, relating to wars from the Crimea onwards, especially local participation in both world wars. In other documents are recorded the archaeology, industrial, economic, social and domestic history of the district, records of emigration from Saddleworth to America and Australia, and a collection of over 70 letters sent from Massachusetts by a local emigrant between 1845 and 1875. There is also a sound archive created by the two successive MSC scheme sound recordists in 1984-6, with tapes on many aspects of local life and work.

Saddleworth Museum's constitution is still based on trustees and a committee. There has, however, always been a strong and active body of supporters of various kinds who, prior to 1982, were entirely responsible for the staffing, administration, fund-raising, cataloguing and display work. Inevitably, the existence of staff since 1982 has meant that the role of the volunteers has changed although they are still very much required. If anything, owing to the need for stewards for the summer exhibitions since 1985, they are needed more than ever. Many volunteers now belong to the Friends, a relatively new umbrella organisation which brings together all those who are interested in the museum. Many have now assumed specific roles, for fund-raising; the organisation of museum



A Dobcross loom ready to leave Dobcross factory

and social events; the running of certain galleries such as the transport and textile galleries; and building maintenance.

Since the 1970s, the museum's galleries have altered in keeping with the move away from the traditional local museum. The expansion of 1978-9 enabled a new plan to be prepared, corresponding roughly in approach to that of organisations such as Pennine Heritage in its treatment of the region's environmental history. The first gallery, opened in 1985 with grant aid from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, the English Tourist Board and the North West Museum and Art Gallery Service, is devoted to the theme of 'Man and the Landscape' in Saddleworth. The first panels and displays tell the visitor where Saddleworth is and what it is and refer briefly to its still controversial position as a borderland between Lancashire and Yorkshire. The gallery illustrates the physical character of Saddleworth and shows some of the ways in which man has adapted to this environment, and in turn altered it. The displays cover farming, quarrying and the use of stone for buildings, walls and other features, coal mining, the manufacture and use of bakestones, peat-cutting, poaching and rush-gathering on the moors. There is also a small section on wildlife.

The second part of the gallery contains a chronological outline of Saddleworth's prehistory and history, beginning with a display showing a small part of the very important local Mesolithic flint finds on the moors. This includes a layout of a flint 'floor', with anvil, hammerstone, coves, waste and finished implements as left by a prehistoric hunting party. The Roman Castleshaw site is represented by a new model of the Agricola fort occupied c.AD 79-c.90. Later periods of history are briefly surveyed in the space available. There is a replica of the gold Viking period ring found in the Chew Valley near Greenfield and historic items of later local history. Also represented is the diversity of Saddleworth's cultural life. One display celebrates the achievements of Ammon Wrigley (1861-1946), Saddleworth's greatest writer and populariser. The revival of the old rush-bearing is shown with a Saddleworth morris man and examples of the 'sheets' made each year for the front of the rushcart. Music, for which Saddleworth's brass bands are famous, was once more diversified than it is at present, with teams of handbell ringers, change ringers and reed bands being active. A different strand is represented by the Saddleworth Festival of the Arts, held every four years. Amongst the displays is a section devoted to the Bill's o' Jack's murders of 1832, now a part of local popular lore. The Bible belonging to the inn at the time of the murders, and reputedly spattered with the blood of the victims, is a recent gift to the museum. Also shown are one of the murder weapons and other mementoes, including commemorative cups and saucers in two qualities — earthenware for the less affluent, china for the better off!

The visitor passes by the three Victorian rooms, a parlour, bedroom and laundry, which give the museum volunteers a chance to put on show some of the large number of Victorian objects in the collections. There is also a small display on clog-making, once an important local trade as it was elsewhere in the region. The overall scheme of the museum is resumed at the weaver's cottage of about 1810, with its re-furnished interior and working handloom. Graphic displays in a section still to be properly completed carry the story of Saddleworth's woollen industry through the late eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries. Items on show include an Arkwright-style cotton carding engine of about 1820-30 and a pair of heads from a set of fulling stocks. Downstairs in the re-styled Victoria Mill, the visitor passes machinery typical of that used in the mill up to, and even after World War II. The equipment includes a card and condenser, Asa Lees' woollen mule of 1909 and a Dobcross loom made at the once renowned loom works nearby.

The transport gallery still looks largely as it did when it was built with a popular and changing display of bicycles, motor cycles and vehicles. These include a boneshaker, penny farthing, 'sociable' tricycle and two Bradbury motorbikes made in Oldham, one of them with a wicker sidecar. The eventual aim is to re-display the gallery on the subject of transport and communication in Saddleworth through the ages.


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Chapel
1784
1800
1894



School
1816
1873
1884

"How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts"

Preacher (Morning, 10-30; Evening, 6) Rev. W. BACKHOUSE, M.A.
OF MANCHESTER

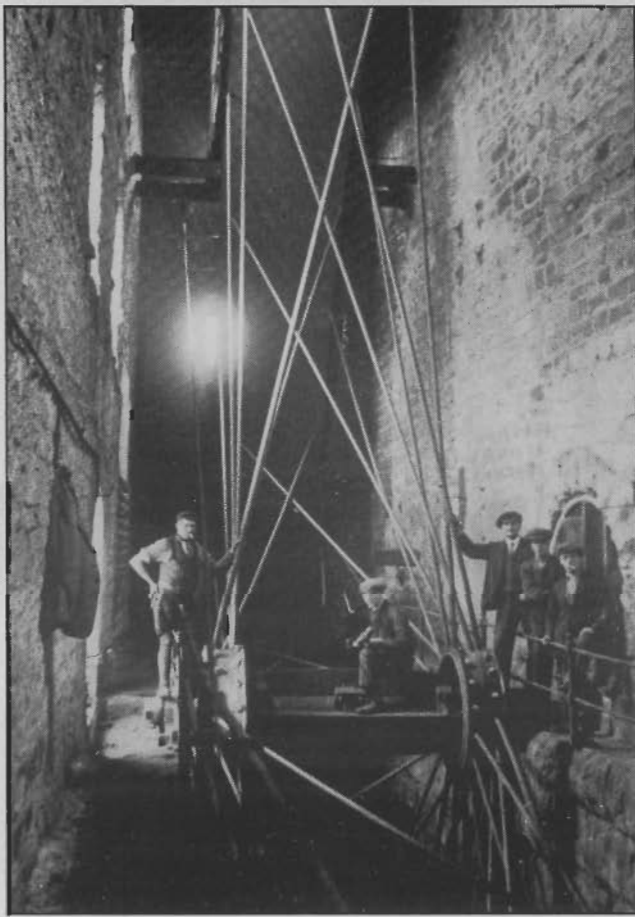
ADDRESS in the Afternoon at 2-30.

COLLECTION AT EACH SERVICE IN AID OF SCHOOL FUNDS.

Delph Wesleyan Chapel, 1911 (since demolished)

Saddleworth is significant because it is the lowest and narrowest crossing point in the south-central Pennines and generations of road, canal and railway engineers have left their mark on the landscape. The most striking features are the Standedge canal tunnel more than three miles in length, and the fine early Victorian railway viaduct sweeping across the Tame Valley at Brownhill.

In 1985, the museum undertook a major new initiative with the preparation of the first of a series of major summer exhibitions. The first of these, 'The Lad Nobody Wanted', celebrated the 90th birthday of Lord Rhodes of Saddleworth. This was followed in 1986 by a Saddleworth World War I Exhibition. In 1987 thanks to funding from the Saddleworth Festival of the Arts, the Museum was able to put on an exhibition on the



Diggle Mill waterwheel during demolition, 1924

150th anniversary of the accession of Queen Victoria. This was designed, planned and executed largely by a volunteer team, and attained a highly-acclaimed standard of presentation and content. The 1988 Roman exhibition carried out in conjunction with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit, and designed to mark the completion in 1988 of their four-year Castleshaw Project was similarly well-received.

Saddleworth Museum has therefore evolved with the times. It is not only still fulfilling the original aims, but is exceeding them. In particular, it is responding to the fact that it is now a major tourist attraction in an increasingly popular area for visitors. It has the benefits of independence which enable it to respond rapidly to new local initiatives. At the same time, being outside the commercial mainstream it has attracted valuable support and help that it would not have had otherwise. Internally, there is a constant awareness of the effects of change, particularly as it affects the relationship between policy-makers, volunteers and staff. Basic matters such as admission charges are constantly debated and each debate brings about over and over again the basic questions — What is a museum and who and what is it for? Saddleworth Museum is a highly successful microcosm of the museum in the modern world. There is no complacency, however. This is Saddleworth's museum and the desire for continued independence sees to that.

Saddleworth Museum and Art Gallery and Tourist Information Centre is situated on the A670 at Uppermill, 4 miles east of Oldham. It is open daily. For further information telephone 04577 4093.

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