



Church Street, Eccles in 1930s.

ECCLES LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Rev. Ian H. Wallace

Eccles is an industrial town situated some five miles to the west of Manchester. Salford lies to the immediate east while the Ship Canal provides a southern boundary dividing it from Trafford. It derives its name from the Celtic word - ecclesia - for church. The town was made up of four hamlets - Eccles, Barton-upon-Irwell, Monton, and Winton - which became part of the borough when it was created in 1892.

Older residents still talk about Eccles as being the village but although originally a hamlet Eccles grew into a town in the nineteenth century. It was in the second part of the century in particular that the pace of economic and social change quickened. The community's rural character disappeared as buildings filled up the once open fields around the centre of the village. Handloom weavers' cottages - cotton and silk weaving had developed as an important feature of the local economy - gave place to rows of Victorian working-class dwellings, which were to characterise the town up until recent times. This did not mean that all the housing in the town was poorly designed and built cheaply, as a study of

the aristocratic district of Ellesmere Park will confirm.

Writing in 1914 in his informative book, *Old Eccles*, Thomas Swindells tried to capture those changes which had taken place within living memory by taking his readers on an imaginary ramble round Eccles in 1848. Starting from the small railway station readers were taken past the Vicarage and its grounds until a hundred yards from the corner of Church Street they found themselves in open country.

A private road leads to Monks Hall which stands alone with an orchard in front. A few yards further on and the lane divides and the right-hand lane leads us through fields to Monton and the Green. This quiet hamlet standing remote from the larger village is noteworthy for its quaint Dissenters Chapel and school. The return journey was made by the comparatively new road known as Gilda Brook Road, three or four houses are passed until we arrive near the railway station, where several streets of houses have been erected.

In more recent times the redevelopment of large parts of the town centre, the construction of multi-storey flats, notably the Kembal House flats, have again changed the appearance of the town. Transport innovations which have played such an important part in the area's history since the building of the Bridgewater Canal continue to leave their mark on the landscape and the community. In the 1960s the building of the M602 Motorway has had the effect of cutting the town into two separate areas.

Although for the purposes of local government and administration Eccles has been absorbed into Salford, the town still retains a community life and a strong sense of its identity. Such feelings help to explain why the town decided to establish its own local history society.

The Eccles and District History Society held its inaugural meeting in the Central Library on 1st February 1956. It was an appropriate venue as the librarians of this Carnegie supported library, built during the Edwardian period, had done much to preserve material dealing with Eccles' history. The Society's first chairman was Alderman G. K. Edwards, who later

became Mayor of the borough in 1965-6. Its founding was an indication of the keen interest in local history at that time. From its inception it was decided that the Society should be concerned not only with Eccles but also the neighbouring areas of Swinton, Pendlebury, Worsley and Clifton.

Support for the Society has fluctuated over the years but there has always been a small group of enthusiastic members who have carried out the necessary administrative and organisational tasks that any society needs to keep operating. In 1963 individual members numbered 31 which had increased to 54 by 1965. By 1970 membership exceeded 100, made up of 77 individual members plus 29 institutional ones, a figure which was broadly maintained during the 1980s. Last year the Society had 65 individual and 16 institutional members.

As in other local history societies the Society aimed to encourage a deeper interest in the district's history through a programme of lectures, excursions and publications. Members regularly visit local places of interest and in spite of the loss of important buildings the locality is still rich in such places. Of the early buildings still to be seen by visitors four are of particular interest and are well known to the Society.

One of the oldest buildings in the district is Monks Hall which probably goes back to the late fourteenth century when it was a cell or grange belonging to Whalley Abbey. Rebuilding occurred in the sixteenth century resulting in a wood and plaster building with a wing of brick added. The building served a number of purposes over the centuries including use as a doctor's surgery. In the 1860s building work close to the Hall had the unexpected consequence of uncovering a large cache of some 6,000 silver coins. In 1960 the Hall was turned into a museum and visitors to the Hall today may find it difficult to imagine that the building once stood in open fields.

Situated in the town centre, Hall's Building is a splendid example of a Tudor yeoman's house built from local materials by local workmen. The building is two storeys high and the upper floor is open to the roof. At the east end is a service room which may have been used as a shop as it has a shuttered window. The walls are timber framed in large square panels infilled with wattle and daub, some of the panels having been renewed in brick. The windows have been generally altered save for a frieze window on the north wall of the parlour which has wooden mullions. The building might have been easily lost in the redevelopment



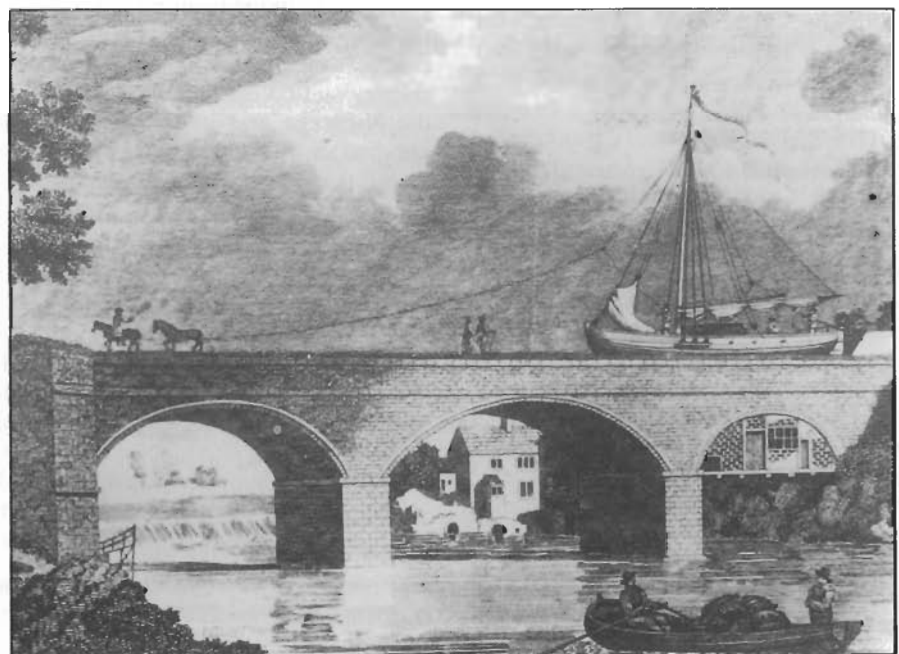
Hall's Building

clearances of the 1960s but fortunately its historic importance was recognised, pressure was brought to bear by conservationists, and it was saved.

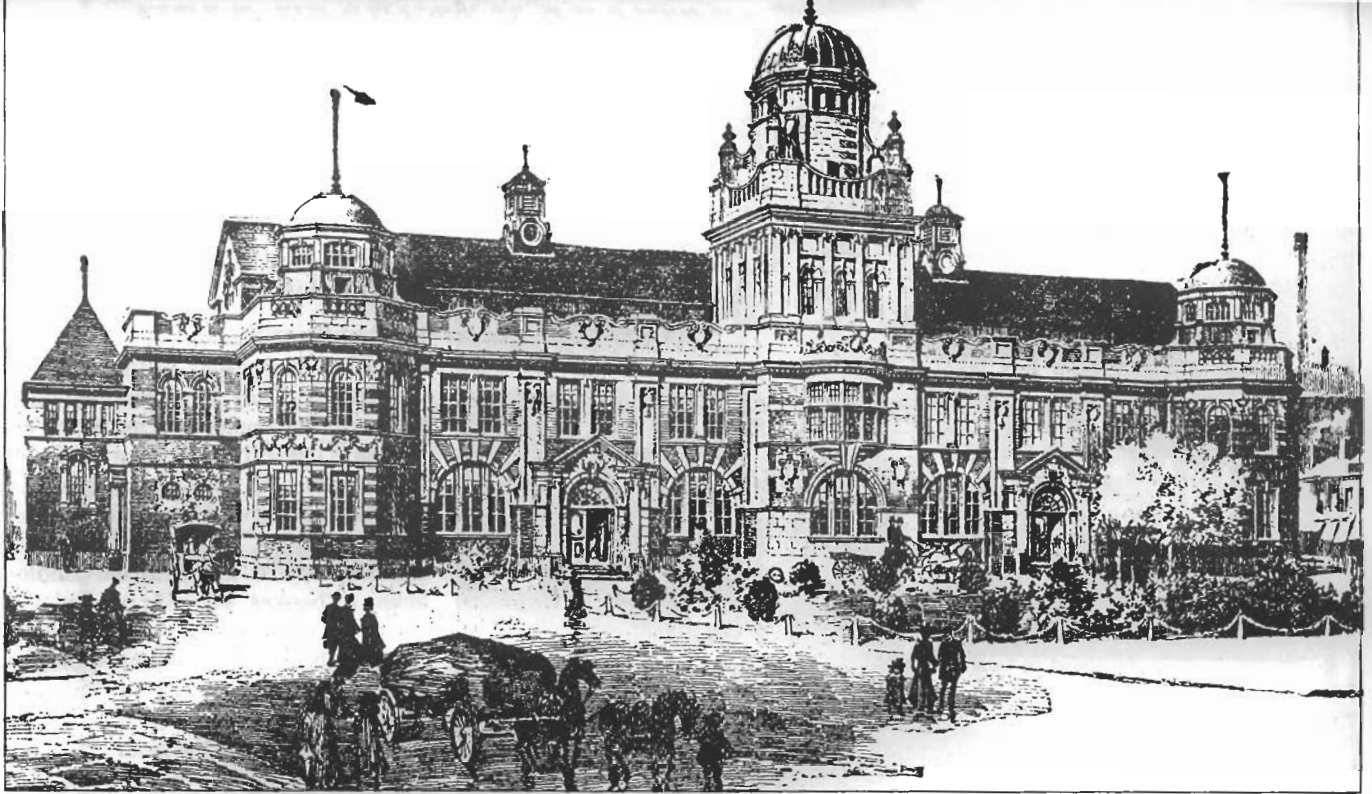
To outsiders Eccles is famous for its cakes and the town still possesses buildings associated with these 'toothsome morsels'. The earliest authenticated reference to Eccles cakes dates back to the late eighteenth century when James Birch, a corn miller and baker, started making them at a shop opposite the parish church. In 1810 he removed to larger premises across the street where he died in 1833. The business passed to his nephew John Birch, who in turn was succeeded by his grandson. Meanwhile a rival establishment was started up by William Bradburn, who had learnt cake making from James Birch. He commenced business as a 'grocer and cake maker' in Birch's old shop. He

displayed the sign 'Never Removed' in reply to Birch's announcement 'Removed from Across the Way'. Bradburn's premises were built in 1835. The cakes appear to have quickly found a market outside of Eccles and they were sold widely at local fairs.

The cakes also were very much a part of the infamous Eccles Wakes. Held each September this was the highpoint of the local leisure calendar, an event which saw the continuation of many rural customs long after they had died out in other parts of urban Lancashire. But the demand for the cakes was by no means confined to Lancashire folk and there are records of them being exported as early as 1818. By 1880 it was stated that a staggering three million cakes a year were being sold. Today, they continue to be made and they are still supplied to countries all over the world.



Barton Aqueduct

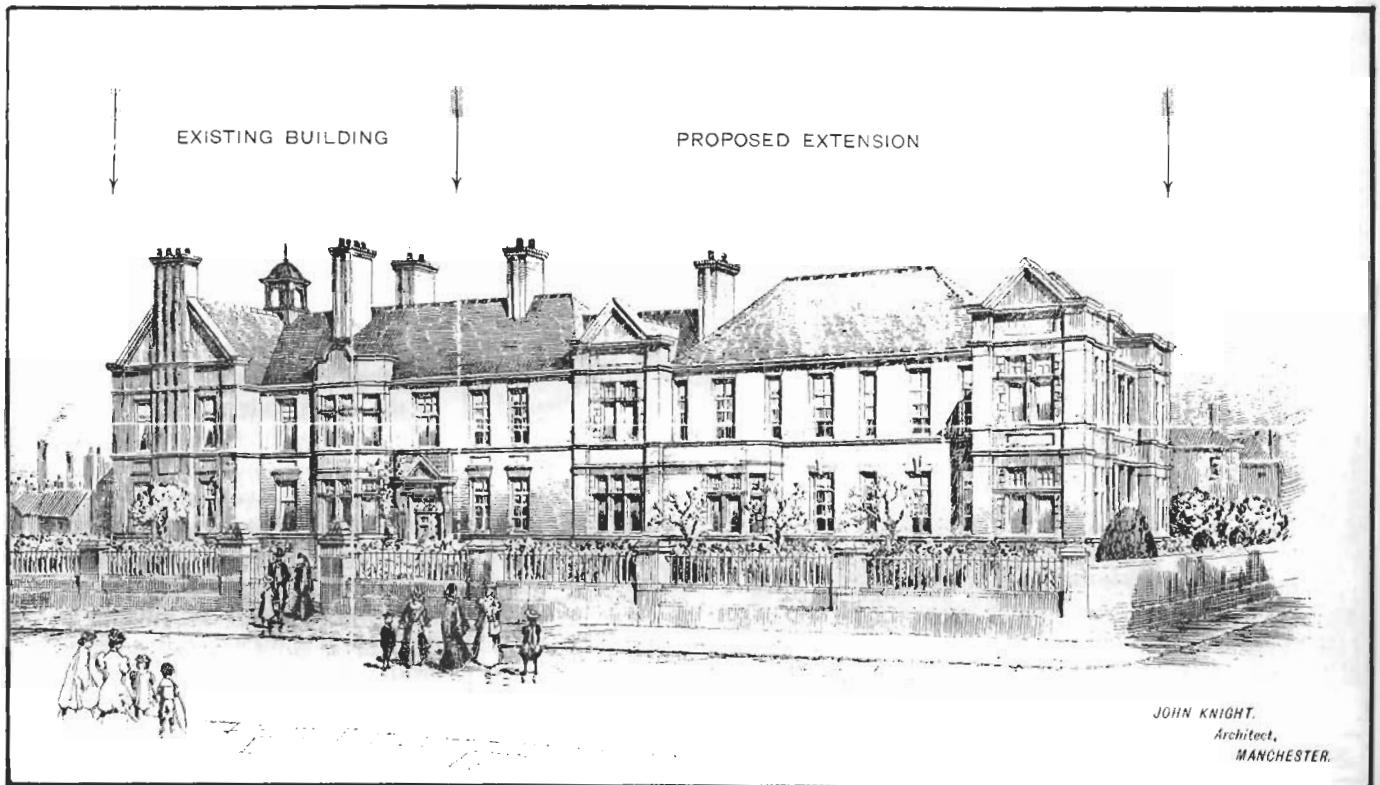


The proposed Eccles Carnegie Library, 1906. (Architects: Potts, Son and Hennings).

Mention should also be made of the parish church of St. Mary's which dates back to early medieval times. At that time it was owned by the Abbot and monks of Whalley, but after the Dissolution of the Abbey in 1539 its living became vested in the Crown. One of the early vicars, Rev. John Jones, held the office for 47 years and was succeeded in 1657 by his son Edmund Jones, who held the living when the Act of Uniformity was passed. Jones was one of the 2,000 clergy who

refused to conform and in August, 1662 he was ejected from the living. In spite of difficulties he remained true to the small band of local parishioners who left the church with him until his death in 1674. The Unitarian Church at Monton Green still stands as a witness to his labours and those of his successors, who kept the Presbyterian and Unitarian tradition alive in the town over many years. Of all the vicars who have served at St. Mary's, Canon James Pelham Pitcairn

was the most outstanding. He was vicar from 1861 to 1892 and was responsible for carrying out a thorough rebuilding in the form and spirit of the pre-reformation builders. The work included the reconstruction of the east end of the church and the restoration of St. Catherine's Chapel. Such changes did not pass unopposed and the proposal to have a new redos led to part of the congregation breaking away from St. Mary's and building a new church St.



The proposed extension to Eccles and Patricroft Hospital (Architect: John Knight).

JOHN KNIGHT.
Architect,
MANCHESTER.



GOD SAVE THE KING.

FORMAL OPENING

BY

HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR OF ECCLES

(W. SCOTT FORBES, Esq., J.P.)



PROGRAMME.

- Dramatic Picture - - - - Cardinal Wolsey
- Comic - - - - - Tontolini Sneezes
- Dramatic - - - - - A Woman's Martyrdom
- Comic - - - - - Wife's Ma Comes Back
- Dramatic - - - - - Foiled by a Fire



NOTICES.

Ladies are respectfully requested to remove their hats.
 Continuous Performances will be given each evening (Sunday
 excepted), commencing to-morrow, at 7 o'clock.
 Matinee on Saturday Afternoons, commencing at 2-30 o'clock.



Programme for opening of Eccles Picture Theatre, June, 1912.

Andrew's in Chadwick Road, where they installed the curate of St. Mary's, H. J. B. Armstrong, to the new living. Armstrong worked very hard for his church and to raise money for the Day and Sunday schools which were considered to be the finest in the district when they were completed in 1892.

Public houses remain one of the most important institutions in the history of the district. They have fulfilled many roles over the centuries. One of the best known is the Jolly Carter Inn at Winton. This inn became notorious as a result of a brutal murder which occurred there in the last century. A benefit club held its meetings at the inn with the landlord acting as banker. The sum in hand often amounted to sixty or seventy pounds. This fact became known to two brothers who visited the district hawking, and who formed plans to secure the cash. The inn was occupied by the landlord, Blears, his wife, a young servant woman and a boy. The two villains called at the Inn and succeeded in doping the landlord by means of a drug dropped into his ale. Asking the servant girl to show them to their bedroom, one of them attempted to kiss her and in the struggle that followed, drew a razor across her throat. The boy who was in bed but not asleep fled out of the house and hid in a ditch in the fields at the back of the inn. The murderer and his brother hurriedly left the house, passing a few yards where the terrified lad lay. The lad returned to the house only to find the girl dead, the mistress badly hurt and the landlord unconscious. A few days later the brothers were arrested near Kirby Lonsdale, and were taken to Lancaster, where they were tried and executed. The event made the Jolly Carter notorious for many years afterwards.

The district was very much altered by the industrial revolution. In particular it was crossed by some of the most important transport developments which transformed the economic potential of south Lancashire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The earliest of these was the Bridgewater Canal and visitors to the town today cannot fail to be impressed by the Barton Swing Bridge and the canal bridge, late-Victorian engineering achievements which matched (and replaced) the equally spectacular and innovative Barton Aqueduct, designed by James Brindley. Not surprisingly, given the proximity and importance of the canals, members have taken trips on both the Bridgewater and the Ship Canal.

Eccles was also on the route of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, and for many years its railway station was

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Appeal for Eccles and Patricroft Hospital, 1922.

considered to be one of the expanding towns' most important public buildings. The station was a timber construction described as being 'perched like Noah's Ark on stilts upon the Ararat of a railway station'. Passengers approached it by way of a step ladder. In this century the district has continued to be involved at an early stage in new transport developments with Barton Airport laying claim to being one of the first civil aerodromes in the country.

An outstanding figure in the industrial growth of the area was James Nasmyth, who saw the stretch of green flat land by the side of the Bridgewater Canal and decided that it was ideal for his purpose. He proceeded to move his works from Manchester to this site, and by so doing transformed Patricroft from a rural village into an industrial area. Nasmyth is chiefly remembered as the inventor of the steam hammer though this was only one of his many engineering inventions. He was a pioneer in precision engineering using machines where ever possible to reduce the possibility of human error. His achievements were such that his life was recalled by a number of writers, one of the first being the biography written by that equally famous Victorian Samuel Smiles.

The Society has always encouraged the publication of research into the district's

history and over the years an imposing list of publications has developed. Much original and important work has been done by members. Amongst these has been Frank Mullineux's study *The Bridgewater Canal* which has been reprinted a number of times since it first appeared in 1959. G. Atkinson has focused on the Worsley terminus of the canal in his study, *The Canal Duke's Collieries Worsley 1760-1900* (1982). C. Elsie Mullineux's books, *Pauper and Poorhouse: A Study of the Administration of the Poor Laws in a Lancashire Parish* (1966) and *Mast and Pannage: A History*

of Swinton to 1765 (1964) have thrown much light on the area's social history.

Old photographs provide a most informative source about the more recent past and like other towns a selection of those dealing with Eccles has been published: Peter Bowes and Madeline Patry, *Eccles. A Collection of Old Photographs*. More recently the needs of local and family historians have been met by the publication of *The Register of the Parish of Eccles*, transcribed by Hilda Watson assisted by Betty Dawson and Edith Mellor. The Society published the standard history of the town, *Eccles and the growth of a Lancashire Town* by F. R. Johnston, and also two smaller works by the same author, *Eccles and Swinton. The Past Speaks for Itself*, and *Eccles from Hamlet to Borough*.

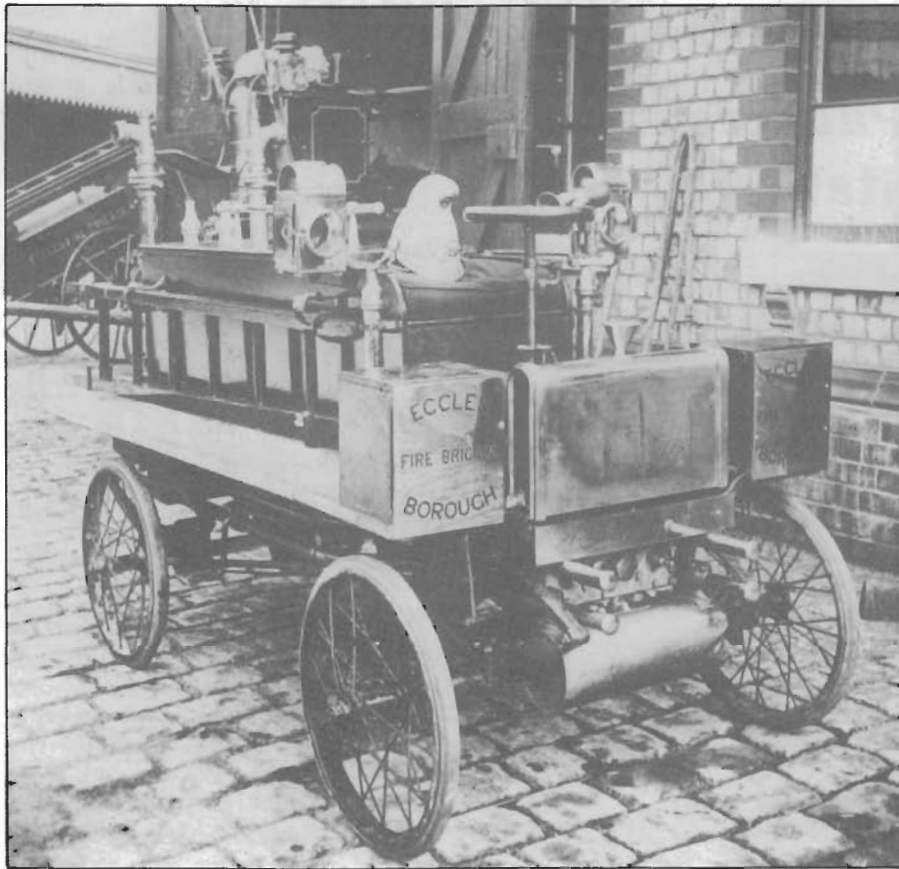
This is not to suggest that the district had not been explored previously by local historians. Some indication of this may be gleaned by looking at a few book titles from earlier years. One of the first published studies was the work of the antiquarian, John Harland whose *History of the Ancient Parish of Eccles* appeared in 1864. Other studies such as Edward Moss, *Eccles and its Wesleyan Sunday Schools 1813-1913* (1913) dealing with the history of local churches and chapels appeared before the First World War. The Bridgewater Canal and the Manchester Ship Canal have also attracted a great deal of attention. The district's industrial history has also been discussed in studies such as David Whitehead's *Gardner's of Patricroft* (1968). This was followed a few years later by the same author's study, *The History of the Protector Lamp and Lighting Co. Ltd. 1873-1973* (1973).

From 1967 printed copies of lectures given to the Society, annual or biennial (not now all in print), were issued. A Bulletin and later a Newsletter were also issued. Over 30 off-prints from lectures



- Eccles -

Eccles Cross in the 1890s.



Eccles Borough Fire Tender built by the Protector Lamp and Lighting Company, 1901.

given to the Society between 1970-1 to 1987-8 are still available and may be purchased for £7 plus 40p postage and packing from the Salford City Archivist.

The Local History Collection in Salford contains much relevant material in the form of news cuttings, brochures, pamphlets, directories and books relating to Eccles and the surrounding district. Photographs are also available, and some time ago a camera was obtained with the help of a grant from Salford City Council and 150 prints of the district and its buildings were taken with it. These are now kept with the Society's records at the Archives Centre.

The Society awards a prize annually in memory of Frank Mullineux who did so much to encourage local history projects in this area.

In this year when the town celebrates the centenary of the Charter the History Society will be arranging some special events as part of the Centenary Festival. Readers interested in finding out more about these and the general work of the Society should contact **Mr. A. N. Cross, Salford City Archivist, Archives Centre, 658-662 Liverpool Road, Irlam, Salford M30 5AD.**

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