

# DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF OLDHAM AND ITS PEOPLE

## Oldham Local Studies Library and Archives Service

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Oldham Local Studies Library collects and preserves for public use material relating to Oldham Metropolitan Borough, which includes the districts of Failsworth, Crompton, Royton, Chadderton, Lees and Saddleworth. The collections held in the library include books, pamphlets, photographs, maps and newspapers along with Oldham's archives. Small local history collections are also available at some of Oldham's community libraries including Crompton, Failsworth, Royton, Chadderton, Uppermill and Lees.

The history of Oldham since the industrial revolution is one of dramatic change, from obscure Pennine village to cotton spinning capital of the world in the space of two generations. Oldham's industrial history includes hatting, coal mining, textile machinery manufacture and cotton spinning. Oldham's recent history has seen the development of new industries to replace cotton, and the integration of new cultural traditions and religions.

### Growth of Collection

Local material appears to have been collected by Oldham Free Library since its inception in 1885. The collection was housed in one of the library offices known as the "Oldham Room" with restricted access. Early acquisitions included the manuscripts of James Butterworth and his son Edwin (1812-1848) – Lancashire historian and Oldham correspondent to Manchester and Leeds newspapers. This collection of almost 200 closely-written notebooks and related papers included manuscripts of the earlier local diarist William Rowbottom (1756-1830).<sup>1</sup>

Other important collections were acquired over the years, including those of Joseph Whitehead, former assistant



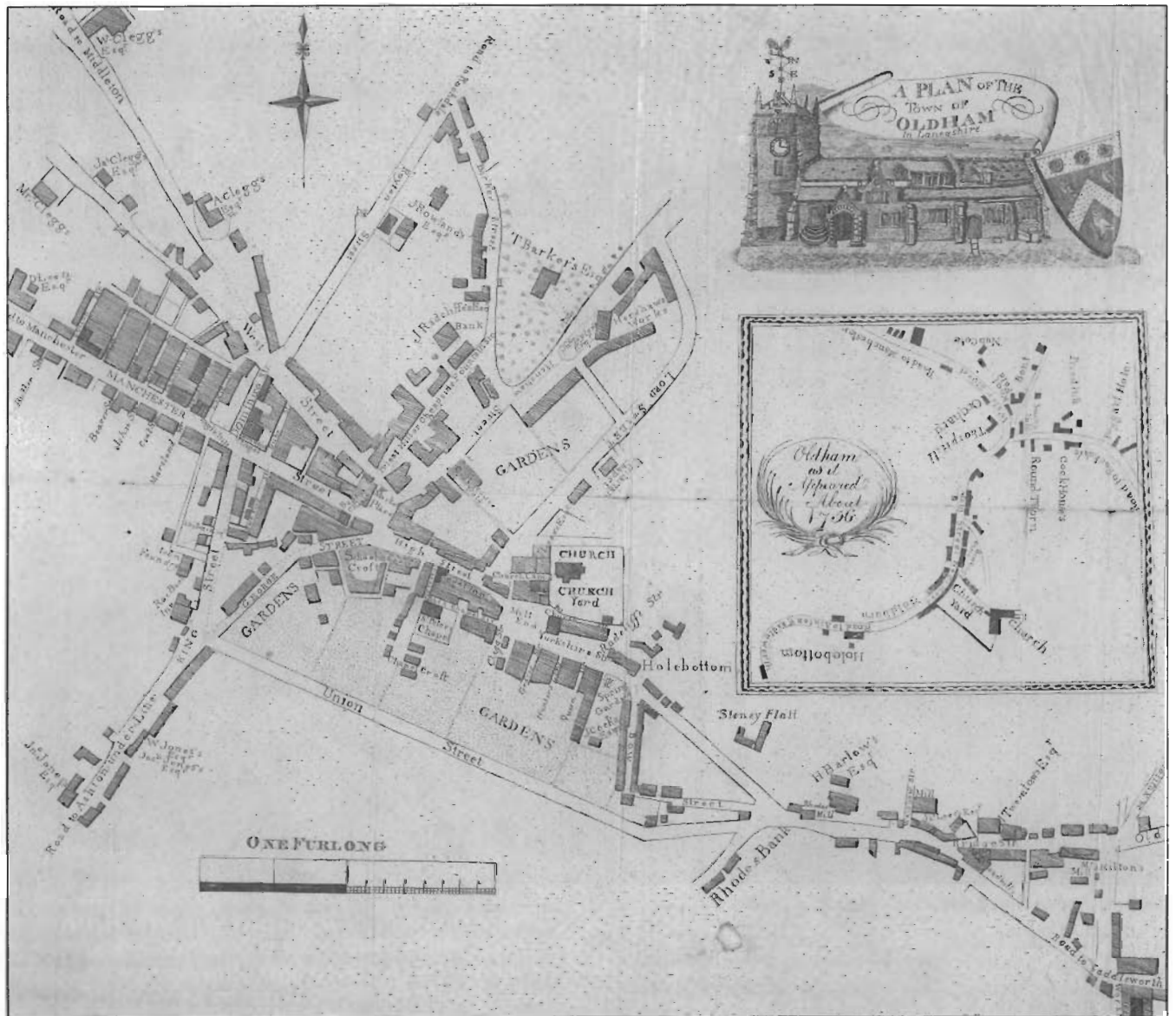
*Telegram deliverer, Waterhead.*

overseer of Oldham (d.1902), and the Higson Manuscripts, donated in 1931. Many other records of local families, businesses and organisations also came into the Library. However, until 1976, all were treated as an integral part of library stock, being split up and classified according to library practice.

In the 1960s the Local History Collection was moved to Werneth Park Study Centre where a reference library, art gallery and a natural history museum were also housed. In 1972 the collection formed the Local Studies Library of the innovative Local Interest Centre. Situated on Greaves Street in the former Friends Meeting House, it was also a museum and a small art gallery. The first professional Local Studies Librarian was employed at this time. In the re-organisation of local government in 1974, Oldham Metropolitan Borough was formed by the merging of the seven former local authorities of



*Oldham Local Studies Library.*



*A Plan of the Town of Oldham, 1817.*

Failsforth, Chadderton, Crompton, Royton, Saddleworth, Lees and Oldham. This brought in a huge influx of council archives. In 1982 the Local Studies Library moved to its present home.

### The Collection

The Local Studies Library holds approximately 16,000 books and pamphlets covering all aspects of Oldham's history including the cotton industry, transport, leisure, dialect works and health. The "Pamphlet Collection" consists of ephemeral material, for example prospectuses, souvenir histories and periodical articles. The book collections include voters lists and trade directories. Voters lists are held for Oldham town from 1849 through to the present day, but the collections are incomplete for many of the outlying districts of the Borough. Trade directories vary in content over the years but a great deal of useful information can be gleaned from them, including information on the commerce, industry and occupancy of the area. The library also holds long runs of the transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, Chetham Society, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Lancashire Parish Register Society and Saddleworth Historical Society.

The Local Studies Library map collection numbers over 2,000 items. Many of these have been copied and are available on open access in the Library. Early maps of Oldham town centre include Butterworth's map of Oldham for 1817, which has an inset showing Oldham as it appeared around 1756, and Baines' 1824 map of Oldham. Dunn's map of Oldham for 1829 also has an accompanying schedule detailing owners, occupiers, field names and their areas. The tithe award maps for the area were surveyed between 1840 and 1848 and cover Oldham, Crompton, Royton, Chadderton and Failsforth. For most of these we have accompanying schedules giving details of ownership, tenure and use of each plot of land. For Saddleworth we hold the Enclosure map and award for 1840.

The library has a comprehensive collection of Ordnance Survey maps which bring to life the changing economic landscape of Oldham. The first six-inch edition for 1844-48 highlights the early industrial features of the town whilst the large scale ten-foot edition for 1889-91 reveals the town centre in intricate detail. The most comprehensive collection of maps is that for the scale of 25 inches to the mile. We hold Oldham town centre from 1879 to the present day at this scale and from 1890 onwards for the outlying districts.



*Oldham Police Force and Fire Brigade, c.1900.*

The Local Studies Library also houses Oldham's Photographic Archive. This important collection of visual images of Oldham's past ranges from great public events to everyday street scenes. It helps to document the way life was lived in Oldham and the changes in the area over the last 150 years. A collection of 20,000 photographs is available in the library for browsing and we are continually adding to this collection. A selection of exhibitions drawn from the Photographic Archive are available as Community Loans from Oldham Museum. A copying service is available for most material in the Photographic Archive and framed prints are sold in the Library.

Newspapers are an essential source of information on the town for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The main Oldham papers held are the *Oldham Chronicle* (Liberal) which was first published in 1854 and is still running today, and the *Oldham Standard* (Conservative) which was published from 1859 to 1947. Several other short-lived titles including the *Oldham Express* and the *Oldham Daily Advertiser* are also held. Uppermill Library holds the *Saddleworth and Mossley Reporter* for 1876-1970. Due to problems of storage and deterioration in the quality of the originals all our major titles are now held on microfilm. We also have a newspaper cuttings collection which includes obituaries. This has been kept intermittently since 1885 and takes the form of bound volumes in date order with a subject index. Prior to the newspapers in Oldham, everyday events were recorded by Edwin Butterworth (covering the years 1829-1843) in his "diary of events" and by William Rowbottom in his diaries covering the period 1789-1830.

These are now available on microfilm in the Local Studies Library.

Copies of many of the surviving Church of England and nonconformist registers for the Oldham area are kept on microfilm, or as printed editions. They include St Mary's (Oldham Parish Church) and St Chad's (Saddleworth Parish Church). A handout detailing these is available. The International Genealogical Index to parish registers is held on microfiche for Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire and Derbyshire.

The most heavily used of the microfilm collections are the Census returns. These are held for the whole of the area now covered by Oldham Metropolitan Borough for the years 1841-1891. Street indexes are available for all of these returns. Local Studies Library volunteers have been working on indexes for the past three years and have so far completed surname indexes to the 1871 and 1891 returns as well as the street index for the 1891 census. A copier for microfilm and fiche is available in the Local Studies Library and staff are able to make copies when copyright allows.

### **Recent Changes**

The past twelve months have seen improvements in the Local Studies Library and the introduction of new collections. The Oldham Walton Archive was officially opened in the Local Studies Library by Lady Walton during Oldham's second Festival to celebrate the work of the Oldham-born composer, Sir William Walton (1902-1983). The archive consists of musical scores, books,

pamphlets, photographs, newspaper cuttings, cassettes and compact discs on William Walton and his works. A unique feature of this collection is the availability of scores together with music which can be listened to in the library.

Another new collection, launched in 1994, was the World History Collection which includes information on the Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, Ukrainian, Polish and Irish communities in the town. To place this material in a wider context the collection also includes material on the history and culture of these communities along with records of their experiences of living in Britain. The collection consists of books, pamphlets, posters, photographs, videos and maps along with small collections of books in Urdu and Bangla.

The staff in the Local Studies Library and Oldham Museum are at the moment working on a project to organise and index the Museum's Oral History Collection. This collection records the living memories of all kinds of Oldhamers, many of whom would otherwise be "hidden from history". It is planned that in 1995 everyone will be able to listen to first-hand accounts of Oldham life in our Oral History Listening Station. Several oral history projects are underway in Oldham at the present time to record the memories of the Asian and the Afro-Caribbean communities in the town and it is hoped these will be made available as soon as possible in the Library.

The Local Studies Library produces a series of information sheets which includes "Tracing your family history at Oldham Local Studies Library", holdings of parish and non conformist registers, newspapers and memorial inscriptions.

The move of the Oldham Tourist Information Service out of the library provided the opportunity to create an easy seating area where users can relax and browse through a wide range of books on the history of Oldham, magazines on local and family history and current Oldham newspapers. There is a small exhibition area which is used for displays with an Oldham theme. Suggestions of suitable displays are welcomed. We now also have "Local History", "Family History" and "Archives" news boards for information on Oldham and beyond. Events can be advertised here.

The Local Studies Library sells a wide range of books on the history of Oldham and distributes Arts and Heritage Publications for Oldham Leisure Services.<sup>2</sup> The most recent title, *Oldham and its People* tells the history of Oldham between 1920 and 1970 in the words and photographs of the people themselves. Photographic histories in our "Looking Back" series cover Chadderton, Crompton and Royton.<sup>3</sup>

### Archives

Since the establishment of Oldham's Archives Service – the first Archives Officer was appointed in 1991 – much essential background work has been undertaken in establishing proper facilities for the preservation and use of this vitally important evidence for the district's history. New storage facilities have been provided, a thorough review of holdings has been undertaken, and priorities have been set for making the significant unlisted collections more accessible. Lists and indexes to the collection are available in the Local Studies Library, together with staff help and guidance when required. A new summary guide to the listed archives collections will help make access to their diverse range very much easier. There is a growing reference collection of specialist subject guides to records, and information about other repositories in the region and

nationally. Usefully for those intending to visit, there are sets of information leaflets for the British Library and the Public Record Office, including the *PRO Current Guide* on microfiche.

One of the newest Archives Services within Greater Manchester, Oldham works closely with Greater Manchester County Record Office (GMCRO), and the other district record offices. There are also, naturally, close links with Lancashire County Record Office, and with West Yorkshire Archives Service, and with the independent archives of Saddleworth Museum and Saddleworth Historical Society. These latter repositories have more records for the eastern part of Oldham Metropolitan Borough, which incorporates parts of the former West Riding.

Almost 5,000 shelf feet of archives are now held in Oldham. The library actively seeks records which will improve our understanding of Oldham and its people's history. Oldham's archives acquisitions policy broadly encompasses the collection, permanent preservation and use of records and archives primarily relating to the area of the present Metropolitan Borough. Within this, most types of original material are collected, including official, religious, business, family and society records.

Oldham's archives are both rich and varied. As would be expected, the administrative records of Oldham County Borough and the pre-1974 urban districts are held, but there is far more. The Oldham Poor Law Union (1870–1930) is strongly represented, as are the Police Commissioners (1827–1853) and the Oldham School Board (1870–1903). The Co-operative Movement is reflected in seven local collections, giving excellent scope for comparative study. Nonconformist religion is equally well

OPEN TO ALL ENGLAND.

A GREAT

# NOSE + SHOW

WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE

## ABBEY INN, WEST STREET, OLDHAM,

ON

## OLDHAM WAKES MONDAY,

AUGUST 31<sup>st</sup>. 1885.

When handsome prizes will be awarded for the best specimens in the following Classes:

- Class 1. Reds, with the brightest tinge.
- .. 2. Deep Reds with white grounds (note but *professional* abstainers allowed to compete in this class.)
- .. 3. Purples (Novice Class)
- .. 4. Deep Purples or Fly Destructors (for old stages) with best variety of frog bloom.
- .. 5. Blues, with best litter of young ones. Size and greatest number of sprouts to be taken together.
- .. 6. Best Perforated or Indented Nose, with largest number of holes in.
- .. 7. Nose nearest imitation to a Tomato in colour and shape.
- .. 8. Pugs, with the most artistic turns.
- .. 9. Wellingtons, with the greatest hump and length.
- .. 10. Flukes or Flats, covering most ground.
- .. 11. Best Nose for taking Snuff, with gold or bronze drops appended.
- .. 12. Champion Nose in Show (Society's Silver Medal)

A SPLENDID SNUFF BOX, FOR THE BEST COLOURED CABBAN'S NOSE.

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**ENTRANCE 1/- EACH CLASS.**

Staging 6d. extra, to be returned in Refreshments. Admission to the Show, 3d. each.

### RULES.

1. All entries to be made on the night previous to the Show at the above hours. No entry received without Fee.
2. Dyeing, painting, or in any way tampering with the colour by artificial means in classes 1 to 6 will subject the owner to disqualification.
3. Competitors in class 2 will be required to produce a temperance pledge if requested by the judge.
4. In judging classes 3, 4, and 5, consideration will be given to the length of time the exhibit has been in training, but in no case will allowance be made as to the cost of producing the same.
5. Artificial Noses are strictly prohibited.
6. A competent judge will be appointed, who will be empowered to poll exhibits to detect *improper* *unsuccessful* exhibitors (if necessary) to blow the same, to ascertain their soundness. His decision shall be final. If deemed insufficient merit in any class, he shall be empowered to withhold the prizes.

Poster advertising Nose Show, Oldham Wakes, 1885.



Bonfire, Oldham Edge to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee, 1897.

placed in the archive record. Further deposits of church and chapel records are arriving, making this an increasingly diverse and interesting resource for the many smaller denominations so active in the area.

With Oldham an undisputed world leader in the cotton spinning industry, a strong representation in the records would be expected. Until very recently, this would regrettably not have been so, the cotton company records seemingly having disappeared with the mills themselves. However, the recent acquisition of a major accumulation from a group of cotton spinning companies promises to substantially redress this deficiency. Such is its size and complexity that it will be some time before it can be made publicly available. Essentially, it is saved for the future, and resources for its arrangement and listing are being urgently sought.

Where there is excellent representation of the cotton industry, though, is in trades union records. The archive contains a dozen collections broadly covering the key sectors of the industry. They include, naturally, records of the Oldham Operative Cotton Spinners, Weavers and Winders, Cop packers and broader-based trades such as engineers and woodworkers. The records of the Oldham Master Cloggers' Society add an interesting colour to them. A substantial collection for the Oldham Lyceum shows its development from a working men's mutual improvement society to a flourishing institution "ever devoted to the moral and intellectual culture of the inhabitants of Oldham". The varied papers of Dame Sarah Lees (1842-1935) and Marjorie Lees (1878-1970) well illustrate their influence in local society, politics and the suffrage movement.

Many smaller collections illustrate the range of topics available for research. Much can be gleaned from a little. Both a definitive publication and an archive exhibition were drawn from the four boxes of the Oldham Pals Archive, the Battalion adjutant's personal papers from the First World War and subsequent reunions. The life and times of Oldham and its people are represented by collections as diverse as those for the Moral Welfare Council, Oldham Brewery, a splendid set of Fire Brigade notes and news cuttings, early rail developments, and the earlier Manchester, Oldham and Company Turnpike Trust records. Most of these splendid collections have yet to benefit from detailed research and publication.

In this short survey we have only been able to cover the holdings in very general terms, but there is a wealth of material much of which has never been the subject of any detailed study. We are constantly adding to our collections and are particularly interested in material on recent history, minority communities, family records and material produced by individuals or local organisations. If you see something of interest to us please let us know or send us a copy. With items of interest, particularly photographs, that you would like to keep, we will take copies and return the originals to you.

Everyone is welcome to come and use Oldham Local Studies Library. Whether you are working on an educational project, researching a local topic, tracing your ancestors or simply curious to find out more about Oldham, we are sure to be of help. There is no charge and no membership is required, although for use of archives we do require an official form of identification showing name and address. As some of the archives are stored away from the library at least twenty-four hours notice may be required to produce them. Details of holdings can be advised by letter, or in simple cases by telephone. Experienced staff are always on hand in the library to help and advise. They are unable to carry out detailed research but a list of research agents is available. Resources are for reference only, but copying facilities are available. If you require a microfilm reader it is advisable to telephone and reserve a machine in advance of your visit. The library is open Monday and Thursday: 10am-7pm; Tuesday: 10am-2pm; and Wednesday, Friday and Saturday: 10am-5pm.

**Oldham Local Studies Library, 84 Union Street, Oldham, OL1 1DN (Tel: 0161 911 4654)** is in the former Post and Telegraph Office. Oldham Library is next door and Oldham Museum is behind on Greaves Street. Information on Community Loans from the Museum Exhibitions Officer, Peter Fox (0161 911 4647).

#### NOTES

- 1 For earlier histories of Oldham, see James Butterworth, *Historical and Descriptive Account of the Town and Parochial Chapelry of Oldham* (1817 and 1826); Edwin Butterworth, *Historical Sketches of Oldham* (1856 reprinted 1981); Giles Shaw, *Annals of Oldham and District* (1904); John Higson and Charles E. Higson, various titles; and the Higson Collection held at Oldham Local Studies Library. For the Butterworths, see Giles Shaw, "James Butterworth of Oldham" *TLCAS XXVI* (1908) 124-132, and "Edwin Butterworth: his life and labours" *TLCAS XXII* (1904) 61-72; and Michael Winstanley, "News from Oldham: Edwin Butterworth and the Manchester Press, 1829-1948" *MRHR IV*, Spring/ Summer 1990. For more recent histories of Oldham see Hartley Bateson, *History of Oldham* (2nd ed. 1974) and K. McPhillips, *Oldham the Formative Years* (1981). For the outlying districts see Elsie Ballard, *Chronicles of Crompton* (1986), Michael Lawson, *Chadderton Chapters* (1972) and Dennis Ball, *Story of Failsworth* (2nd. ed. 1987).
- 2 Titles currently available include Duncan Gurr and Julian Hunt *Cotton Mills of Oldham* (2nd ed., 1989); Freda Millett, *Going Up Town: Shopping in Oldham* (1988); *Childhood in Oldham* (rev.ed., 1989); and *Oldham and its People* (1994). Sheila Taylor, *Taste of Oldham* (1990); Alec Greenhalgh, *Hail Smiling Morn: Whit Friday Brass Band Contests 1884 to 1991* (1992); Trevor Coombs, *Rising from Reality: Art in Oldham 1820 to 1890* (1990) and James Carter, *Oldham Coliseum Theatre: The First Hundred Years* (1986).
- 3 Michael Lawson and Mark Johnson, *Looking Back at Chadderton* (1990); Julian Hunt and Frances Stott, *Looking Back at Crompton* (1988) and Frances Stott, *Looking Back at Royton* (1994).