

'e-Owls'



Part of Manchester & Lancashire
Family History Society (MLFHS)

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MAY 2020

MLFHS - Oldham Branch Newsletter

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Branch News :

Following April's Annual Meeting of the MLFHS Oldham Branch

Branch Officers for 2020 -2021 :

Committee Member : Chairman : Linda Richardson

Committee Member : Treasurer : Gill Melton

Committee Member : Secretary : position vacant

Committee Member : Newsletter & Webmistress:
Sheila Goodyear

Committee Member : Dorothy Clegg

Committee Member : Joan Harrison



St. Dunstan and the Devil.
19th May, St. Dunstan & the Devil
from: *The Everyday Table Book*, 1826

Oldham Branch Meetings : Coronavirus Pandemic

Please note ... with great regret but in-line with the updated Statement, issued by the M&LFHS Trustees, and on the home page of the Society website, to which I drew your attention in an earlier email, all M&LFHS Meetings, Branch Meetings and public activities are to be suspended indefinitely.

The newsletter will be sent out as usual.

There will be further updates on the Society website Home Page and on the Branch pages.

The next issue of the Society Journal will go out to members as usual. It relies heavily on

Branch reports and what the Society has been doing at events and fairs etc. However, this sort of news won't be there for quite a long time! To fill the pages with interesting articles, it's hoped that more people will write up family stories and contribute them to the journal. Please refer to the page, '*Notes for Contributors*', in the Journal, for information on how to send articles, etc. The Society Facebook page [HERE](#) and the Twitter page [HERE](#) will be updated frequently.

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### **Chairman's remarks :**

I hope you are all keeping well. Fingers crossed we will soon be out of lockdown and be able to get on with our normal lives again. The current situation can't last much longer, surely. Apart from still doing some family history research, I had a go at something called baking the other day (something I don't normally do). I had a go at jam tarts and an egg custard. Needless to say the birds had a wonderful feast!

There is obviously not much to report this month so I wish you all well. Take care and stay safe.

Stay safe, and we will do our best to keep you informed through the Oldham Branch website and this newsletter.

Linda Richardson

Chairman, Oldham Branch

email me at [chairman-oldham@mlfhs.org.uk](mailto:chairman-oldham@mlfhs.org.uk)

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Editor's remarks.

It's a month since I wrote my last 'Editor's Remarks' and although in many ways the situation has deteriorated, in other ways, for some of us, a new 'normality' is evolving. My own close family and friends are, thankfully, keeping safe and well and I really hope that the same applies for all of our readers. However, I know that a close member of the Branch has lost her own mother to this disease and we offer her our most heartfelt sympathies.

My own 'new normality' is taking some getting used to! Instead of meetings and constant backwards and forwards to Manchester and Oldham, and the company of like-minded friends, I'm re-discovering my 'green fingers' in the greenhouse, and making shopping lists for my son instead of wandering along supermarket aisles and picking up whatever caught my eye for our own next meals! It's a case of 'swings and roundabouts', and being grateful still to be safe and well.

I've been a little self-indulgent in this issue (a lot, really!) and written up my uncle Len's WW2 story, in the Mixed Bag. He was captured in 1944 and spent the rest of the war in a German P.O.W. Camp.

In the block of 'Some Useful Sites' links, you'll find a new entry for my absolute favourite website, the 'Internet Archive', with almost 25,000,000 freely downloadable, free of copyright books. The Facebook link (in the e-Postbag) for the '1572 Manchester Court Leet' record of 'swine on the streets...' is to '*The Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester, from the year 1552 to the year 1686, and from the year 1731 to the year 1846.*' It makes fascinating reading!

I'm now going to confess to pinching an idea from the latest Anglo-Scots newsletter (Thank you to their editor!). They have included a crossword so, not being that good at crosswords, I've compiled a quiz for our own newsletter (in the Mixed Bag) ... I hope you enjoy it! Answers next month.

I have not listed any talks, for obvious reasons, but I've left the society/group names there, with a website url where available, so that you can keep a check on what might be happening with them. Hopefully, we can all find ways of pursuing our interests without risking our well-being and that of the NHS and carers.

PLEASE help us keep the journal and newsletters alive ... put on your 'thinking caps' and send us your photos, stories and pictures.

Keep safe and keep well.

Although I am always more than happy to receive articles, pictures etc., for the newsletter, copyright is always a tricky issue so do please make sure that you have the right to use any text or illustrations that you send! It is also helpful if you include mention of your source material.

You will retain copyright of any contributions that you send unless you decide to waive that right, at the time of sending.

Editor reserves the right to edit any contributions before publication.

email me at : Oldham_newsletter@mlfhs.org.uk

Oldham & District, Bolton & Scottish Branches

Please visit the Branch Websites for information and any updates :

Oldham & District [HERE](#)

Anglo-Scottish [HERE](#)

Bolton [HERE](#)

MLFHS updates

The MLFHS Family History Help Desk ... CANCELLED until further notice

Beginners Talks ... CANCELLED until further notice

MLFHS Online Bookshop: CLOSED until further notice

with CDs, Downloads, Maps, Registers, Local Interest Books, More General Publications, Miscellaneous Items with MLFHS Logo etc., and Offers.

MLFHS Branch e-Newsletters

Each of the MLFHS branches publishes a monthly e-newsletter which provides useful news items. The e-newsletters are free and available to both members and non-members of MLFHS. To sign-up, simply click the appropriate link below and complete the short form on the branch e-newsletter page, where you will also find copies of past issues.

[Anglo-Scottish](#) [Bolton](#) [Oldham](#)

Meetings and Talks at other Societies &/or Venues

Please note ... the relevant society/group websites or organisers are still being included, here, as they can be checked for further information or on-line resource material and activities.

All public activities are, of course, CANCELLED until further notice.

Oldham Historical Research Group: ...

Website [HERE](#)

Library Events & Gallery talks at Gallery Oldham

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**Saddleworth Historical Society & Saddleworth Civic Trust**

At the Saddleworth Museum, High Street, Uppermill.

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Family History Society of Cheshire : Tameside Group meeting.

See their website [HERE](#)

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**Tameside History Club :**

Website and programme [HERE](#)

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Tameside Local Studies and Archives - Regular Sessions and Events

Website and programme [HERE](#)

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**Moorside & District Historical Society**

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Regional Heritage Centre :

Website [HERE](#)

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**'A Mixed Bag'**

A big thank you to the Editor of the latest Anglo-Scots newsletter for this idea ... it included a crossword with local interest clues. Not being very good at crosswords I've compiled a quiz for us ... I hope you enjoy it! Answers next month.

- 1    What do the following abbreviations stand for?  
TNA .....    IWM .....    CWGC .....    WSPU .....    ILP .....    RFC .....
- 2    Whose Diaries survive that document the daily happenings in Oldham in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries?
- 3    The Butterworth father and son, who were published writers and local historians in the early 19th century ... what were they called?
- 4    By what originally derisory term were Members of the WSPU known, after 1906?
- 5    Who was Oldham's first Lady Mayor in 1910?
- 6    Failsworth, Chadderton and Oldham twinned with European towns in the 2nd half of the 20th Century. Can you name them?  
Failsworth .... L        Chadderton .... G        Oldham .... K
- 7    What was the day, date, month and year of the Peterloo Massacre?
- 8    What was the name of the Oldham man who died of his injuries after Peterloo, and whose subsequent inquest became of national importance & interest?
- 9    For what event did 'Egbert' visit Oldham in 1918?
- 10   The 'cotton famine' in Lancashire was the result of which war?

- 11 In which year did Oldham receive the Royal Charter of Incorporation in which Oldham became a Municipal Borough?  
1832 ..... 1838 ..... 1841 ..... 1845 ..... 1849
- 12 In which year did Oldham gain the right to return two Members of Parliament to Westminster?  
1796 ..... 1811 ..... 1832 ..... 1839
- 13 Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote a poem, in 1819, which wasn't published until 1832 as the content was considered too inflammatory. What was it called?
- 14 In which country did the Oldham Comrades spend 1918?
- 15 Which hatmaker's name is associated with two bequests, each of £20,000, to endow both a Bluecoat School in Oldham and a Blind Asylum in Manchester?
- 16 What do Nile, Lily, Briar, Marlborough, Windsor and Durban all have in common?
- 17 Which local newspaper began publication in Oldham in 1854?
- 18 On which hamlet was Ben Brierley's 'Daisy Nook' (in his writings) based?
- 19 In which town was Ben Brierley born?
- 20 Can you name the four 'Meres' of Saddleworth?
- 21 Can you unscramble these historic local placenames ?

**REDHEESGO** ..... 2 words

**AATGHEG**

**ETLMRAMIWHAE LA** ..... 3 words

**ENERCSAREG**

**OFLSDCIETK**

**ELOAOTRW**

**OEBNIKLOMN**

**WHSEAHSPSEE**

**LEGUEERNBTR** ..... 2 words

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May 19th is, traditonally, St. Dunstan's Day and we can read about his life in '*Lives and Legends of the English Bishops and Kings, Mediaeval Monks, and other Later Saints*' by Mrs. Arthur Bell, pub. 1904, pages 155-161

It has been given to few even of the greatest statesmen to exercise a more remarkable influence over contemporary history than did St. Dunstan of Canterbury, or to have been subjected alike during their lifetime and since their death to a greater variety of criticism. The first of a series of political statesmen, whose aim was to promote the power of the Church as well as of the State, and where the interests of the two were in opposition to turn the scale in favour of the former, the personality of St. Dunstan stands out with a distinctness rare indeed in the troubled times in which he lived, when one ruler succeeded another with bewildering rapidity, and internal dissensions were aggravated by constant incursions of the Danes.

The son of a wealthy Anglo-Saxon noble named Heorstan, St. Dunstan was born near Glastonbury in 924, soon after the accession to the throne of Athelstan, the grandson of Alfred the Great. He was educated, it is said, by some monks who dwelt in the then almost deserted Abbey of Glastonbury, and was the most promising of all their pupils. Indeed, he worked with such earnest ardour that he was taken ill with brain fever, and one night in his delirium he left his bed, climbed a long ladder left

by some workmen against the church, and was discovered on the roof by his attendants.

Fortunately, he climbed down again uninjured, and when he came to himself he declared that he had been pursued by dogs, and had fled to the church, where he knew he would be safe. In later tradition the dogs of the young monk's fevered imagination became converted into devils, and his escape was spoken of as a miracle due to direct intervention from heaven.

When his education was completed, St. Dunstan spent part of his time at his father's castle, and part at Court, where he early became a favourite, on account of his beautiful face, his charming manners, and his great love of music. He used, it is said, to carry his harp with him wherever he went, and was always ready to cheer those he met by the way with a song, sometimes of his own composition, but more often some well-known ballad. As he grew older his popularity aroused the jealousy of Athelstan's courtiers, who persuaded the King to banish him, and though he was recalled after that ruler's death by King Edmund, a plot was laid against him which nearly cost him his life. He was set upon by some young nobles as he was riding in the King's train, thrown from his horse, trampled in the mud, and left for dead upon the ground. After a long illness he recovered; but he was a changed man, caring no more for the vainglory of the world, and resolved henceforth to dedicate his life to God. Acting on the advice of his uncle, St. Alphege, then Bishop of Winchester, Dunstan took the vow of celibacy, and having been ordained priest, he was sent to Glastonbury to aid in the services of the church. There he built for himself a small cell, in which he could not even stand upright, spending many hours in devotion, but also devoting much of his time to working in metal, for, like St. Eloy, he was a skilful craftsman. It is related that one night, when the holy man was working at his forge, the devil appeared to him in the form of a beautiful woman; but he recognised the enemy at once, and seized the apparition by the nose with his red-hot tongs, causing the evil one to resume his true shape and withdraw.

Some time after this remarkable occurrence King Edmund was hunting in the forest near the cell of the recluse, and, having outstript his courtiers, was led in the ardour of the chase, to the very brink of a precipice, down which the stag and hounds had fallen. The terrified King, believing his end had come, cried aloud to God for help, declaring that if he were saved he would recall St. Dunstan to Court. As the promise left the trembling lips of the King, his horse paused as if spell-bound, and, back again in his palace, Edmund lost no time in carrying out his good resolution. He rode himself to the cell of St. Dunstan, and when the exile declared he had no wish to return to the world, his visitor compromised matters by making him Abbot of Glastonbury.

In this position, which admirably suited his saintly but energetic character, St. Dunstan soon won the devoted love of his monks, and his monastery became famous for the beautiful works of art in metal, including the bells of Abingdon, now, alas! destroyed, and the fine illuminated manuscripts produced in it under the superintendence of the new Abbot. In the Bodleian Library at Oxford are preserved several manuscripts copied by St. Dunstan and his monks, including one with an illuminated frontispiece, which is undoubtedly from his own hand, representing a monk, probably meant for the Abbot himself, kneeling at the feet of the Saviour; whilst in another is a drawing of a child's head, inscribed 'Wulfric cild,' supposed to be a portrait by St. Dunstan of his only brother, who remained with him as a lay helper at Glastonbury until his death in early manhood.

A beautiful tradition relates that the work of St. Dunstan and his monks was sometimes cheered by the songs of angels, and on one occasion, when the Abbot had hung his harp upon the wall, an angel played on it the anthem beginning 'Gaudent in Coelis' (they rejoice in

Heaven), much to the delight and edification of all who heard it. According to another version of the same legend, it was when St. Dunstan was instructing a class of young maidens how to embroider a stole he had designed for a lady of high degree named Ethelfreda, that the harp upon the wall gave its impromptu rendering of the well-known hymn of praise. It is added further that Ethelfreda bestowed upon the Abbot all her wealth, enabling him to restore the Abbey of Glastonbury and widely extend the sphere of its influence, so that it became renowned throughout the land as a great centre of education.

A touching story gives a vivid picture of the individual interest taken by St. Dunstan in his pupils. During a brief absence at Bath, he had dreamt that he saw the soul of a little boy under his care being carried to heaven, and on his return he eagerly questioned a messenger who met him near the gates of the abbey. The monk declared that all was well, and St. Dunstan, still anxious, repeated after him, 'All well with all?' to which came the reply: 'Yes, except that one little pupil is dead.' 'So I feared,' cried the Abbot. 'May his happy spirit rest in peace!'

On the assassination of King Edmund by the robber Leofa in 946, and the accession of his brother Edred, St. Dunstan felt it his duty to return to Court; and though he still ruled the abbey at Glastonbury, he gradually became the chief counsellor of the new King, accompanying him on all his journeys. It was indeed mainly due to his wise influence that Edred was able to assume the proud title of the Caesar of the whole of Britain.

After the untimely death of the King in 955, however, all was changed. The new King, Edwy, was a man of a very different type, who, against the advice of his Witan, had married Ethelgiva, a relation within the forbidden degrees, and St. Dunstan, who had tried to prevent the union, fell into disgrace. The story goes that a quarrel broke out between the young monarch and his thanes at the coronation feast, and that Edwy left the table in high dudgeon, to join his bride in her mother's apartments. St. Dunstan was deputed to compel the King to return to the banquet, and has been accused of acting with unnecessary roughness. In any case, his offence, whatever it was, was never forgiven. He was exiled from England, and took refuge in the great Benedictine Monastery of Blandinium, near Ghent, where, however, he remained for one year only. King Edwy was solemnly separated from his wife in 958 by Archbishop Odo. The people of Northumbria and Mercia revolted against him, and proclaimed King in his stead his brother Edgar, one of whose first acts was to recall St. Dunstan. During the eighteen years' reign of the new ruler, who on the death of Edwy in 959 became King of all England, the Abbot was without doubt the leader both in Church and State. He was appointed in rapid succession to the Sees of Worcester, London, and Canterbury, going to Rome to receive the pallium as Primate of all England from the hands of Pope John XII.

On his return home the new Archbishop devoted himself with eager zeal to the founding of monasteries, into which he introduced the rigid Benedictine rule, with which he had become acquainted during his residence in Flanders, and to inaugurating the wise policy of conciliating the Danes, aiming at welding them and the Anglo-Saxons into one nation instead of encouraging perpetual feuds between them. Moreover, the saintly Archbishop exercised a most salutary influence over the private life of King Edgar, whom he never hesitated to reprove, although his own position depended entirely on the royal favour. After the tragic episode in connection with St. Edith of Wilton, St. Dunstan is said to have refused to take the hand of Edgar, drawing back with the words, 'I cannot be a friend to the enemy of Christ,' and the King instead of resenting this plain speaking, humbly entreated the Archbishop to forgive him, declaring that he would submit to any penance he chose to inflict. St. Dunstan took him at his word, and forbade him to wear his crown for seven years; a punishment which was submitted to without a murmur.

On the death of King Edgar - leaving two young sons, St. Edward the Martyr, and his step-brother Ethelred - St. Dunstan eagerly espoused the cause of the former, and it is related that, at a Council held at Winchester to decide on the succession, St. Dunstan's pleading for the rights of the elder brother was endorsed by a voice from a crucifix hanging on the wall. Edward was duly crowned at Winchester by the Primate, and it is claimed that at the first Council held

at Calne after the ceremony, yet another miracle was performed on behalf of St. Dunstan, for when certain of his enemies spoke against some reforms advocated by him, the floor of the room gave way. All who had opposed the holy man were killed, but he and his friends were saved by clinging to a beam.

After the assassination of King Edward, St. Dunstan, though he loathed the crime which had led to the accession of Ethelred, loyally supported the new ruler; but his political influence now gradually waned, and he spent most of his time at Canterbury, labouring zealously for the cause of the Church, and receiving, it is said, many special tokens of the Divine favour. On one occasion he had a vision - such as that so often represented in connection with St. Catherine of Alexandria - of his mother being betrothed to the Redeemer in the presence of a choir of angels, one of whom taught the Archbishop the hymn of praise they were singing, which he repeated to his monks the next day,

but which, unfortunately, no one wrote down, so that it was lost to posterity.

St. Dunstan died at Canterbury in 988, at the comparatively early age of sixty-four. He was taken suddenly ill on May 19, just after he had received the Holy Communion, as he was reciting Psalm cxi., and expired the same evening. He was buried in his own cathedral, and until his fame was eclipsed by that of the murdered St. Thomas a Becket, his shrine was the goal of hundreds of pilgrims and the scene of many supposed miracles.

Beloved and revered by many who look upon him as a wise statesman, a disinterested reformer of monastic life, and a purifier of the Church, but hated and condemned by others as an upholder of the claims of the Papacy and an advocate of the celibacy of the clergy, the name of the Archbishop is preserved in the dedications of a very large number of churches, including the well-known St. Dunstan in the East and St. Dunstan in the West in London, with one at Mayfield in Sussex. The last is supposed to occupy the site of a wooden chapel which was dedicated by its titular Saint himself, who, according to a quaint legend, observing that it did not exactly turn to the sunrise at the equinox as it should have done, gave it a little push with his shoulder, and turned it from its original position to the true line of the east. Less than twenty years after the death of St. Dunstan, who was accounted a Saint in popular imagination long before he was canonized, King Canute ordered a special service to be held in his honour on May 19, a very significant proof of the high esteem of the Danes for the man who had done so much to promote peace between them and the English, and an eleventh-century Mass, with a prayer to the Saint written by St. Anselm, is still preserved.

The name of St. Dunstan appears on many Anglo-Saxon coins issued by him, the greater number of which were cast in Guildford Castle, where he resided for some time. Actual representations of the Primate, who is supposed to be the special protector of English jewellers and blacksmiths, are comparatively rare, but in addition to the quaint drawing from his own hand already referred to, the Bodleian Library, Oxford, owns a window in which the Archbishop is seen seizing the devil by the nose; and in the British Museum are various Saxon manuscripts containing his effigy, with a dove whispering in his ear or hovering above him, in token of the inspiration he constantly received from on high. Now and then St. Dunstan appears in old iconographies playing on a harp, listening to the voice from the crucifix, or surrounded by angels who are singing the 'Gaudent in Coelis.' On a rood-screen at Great Plumstead, he is introduced between Saints Giles and Benedict, and in some nearly - defaced mural paintings in churches at Broughton in Buckinghamshire, Highworth in Wiltshire, Latton in Essex, and Watford in Hertfordshire, what is supposed to be his figure can still be made out.

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**Still on the subject of St. Dunstan's Day** and, according to '*The Every-Day Book and Table Book ...*' of 1826, by William Hone :

"There is an engraved portrait of St. Dunstan thus detaining the devil in bondage, with these lines, or lines to that effect, beneath;  
they are quoted from memory :-

*St. Dunstan, as the story goes,  
Once pull'd the devil by the nose  
With red-hot tongs, which made him roar,  
That he was heard three miles or more.*



On Lord Mayor's day, in 1687, the pageants of Sir John Shorter, Knt. as Lord Mayor were very splendid. He was of the company of goldsmiths, who, at their own expense, provided one of the pageants representing this miracle of St Dunstan. It must have been of amazing size, for it was a "Hieroglyphic of the Company, consisting of a spacious laboratory or workhouse, containing several conveniences and distinct apartments, for the different operators and artificers, with forges, anvils, hammers, and all instruments proper for the mystery of the goldsmiths. In the middle of the frontispiece, on a rich golden chair of state, sat St. Dunstan, the ancient patron and tutelary guardian of the company. He was attired, to express his prelatical dignity and canonization, in a robe of fine lawn, with a cope over it of shining cloth of gold reaching to the ground. He wore a golden mitre beset with precious stones, and bore in his left hand a golden crosier, and in his right a pair of goldsmith's tongs. Behind him were Orpheus and Amphion playing on melodious instruments; standing more forward were the cham of Tartary, and the grand sultan, who, being "conquered by the christian harmony, seemed to sue for reconciliation." At the steps of the prelatical throne were a goldsmith's forge and furnace, with fire, crucibles, and gold, and a workman blowing the bellows. On each side was a large press of gold and silver plate. Towards the front were shops of artificers and jewellers all at work, with anvils, hammers, and instruments for enamelling, beating out gold and silver plate; on a step below St. Dunstan, sat an assay-master, with his trial-balance and implements. There were two apartments for the processes of disgrossing, flatting, and drawing gold and silver wire, and the fining, melting, smelting, refining, and separating of gold and silver, both by fire and water. Another apartment contained a forge, with miners in canvass breeches, red waistcoats and red caps, bearing spades, pickaxes, twibbles, and crows for sinking shafts and making adits. The lord mayor, having approached and viewed the curiosity of the pageant, was addressed in :

#### A SPEECH BY ST. DUNSTAN

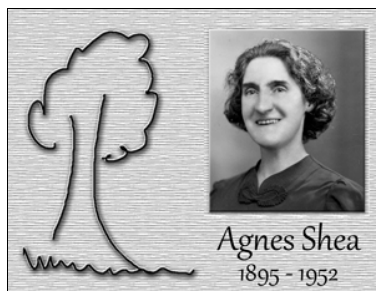
Waked with this musick from my silent urn,  
Your patron Dunstan comes t' attend your turn  
Amphion and old Orpheus playing by,

To keep our forge in tuneful harmony.  
 These pontifical ornaments I wear,  
 Are types of rule and order all the year.  
 In these white robes none can a fault descry  
 Since all have liberty as well as I :  
 Nor need you fear the shipwreck of your cause,  
 Your loss of charter or the penal laws,  
 Indulgence granted by your bounteous prince,  
 Makes for that loss too great a recompence.  
 This charm the Lernaean Hydra will reclaim;  
 Your patron shall the tameless rabble tame.  
 Of the proud Cham I scorn to be afraid;  
 I'll take the angry Sultan by the beard.  
 Nay, should the Devil intrude amongst your foes [*Enter Devil*]  
*Devil.* What then?  
*St. Dunstan.* Snap, thus, I have him by the nose!

The most prominent feature in the devil's face being held by St. Dunstan's tongs, after the prelate had duly spurned the submission of the Cham of Tartary and the Grand Sultan, a silversmith with three other workmen proceeding to the great anvil, commenced working a plate of massy metal, singing and keeping time upon the anvil.

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Remembering 8th May, 1945, 75 years since V.E. Day (Victory in Europe)



This narrative started life as a short, 12 minute audio-visual presentation, 'The Tree', which I began back in February 2006. It was a year in which my daughter was seriously ill and I spent a lot of my time going through old photos and letters, reflecting on family and what it means. (I've included thumbnails of a few of the slides that went into the presentation.)

That was my first foray into family history research and, I imagine, like everyone else, I started looking at the census returns.

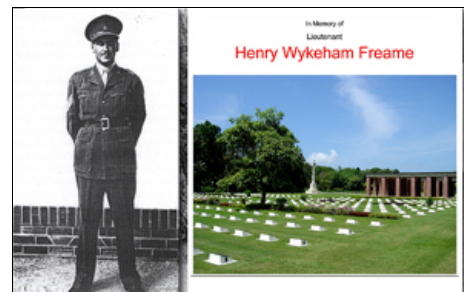
I knew that my mother (Ivy) was illegitimate. Born in 1915, to Agnes Shea, an unmarried catholic mother, with no family support, I marvelled that my grandmother hadn't given her up for adoption. In 1921, Agnes married war veteran Robert Acton, with whom she had 2 sons, Robert (Bob, born in 1921) and Leonard (the subject of the story, born in December 1922). Robert Acton had been badly shell shocked and, in 1923, had become so ill that he was admitted to Winwick Hospital. He would not leave again until his death, almost 50 years later, in 1970.

I discovered Agnes on the 1891 census, in Ashton-under-Lyne, with her own parents, brothers and sisters, of whom I knew nothing. From these I was then able to identify her aunts, uncles and cousins and then, from other records, I was able to take the family back to Templemore, in County Tipperary, and my 2x Gt- grandparents, Thomas and Bridget Shea.

A picture was developing of a poor family who left Ireland after the years of famine to become cotton workers and labourers, living in 2-up, 2-down dwellings, near Portland Basin, on the canal, in Ashton-under-Lyne.

Coming back to the present ... I had spent the five WW1 centenary years researching, reading and writing about the war, for uploading to the Oldham Historical Group's WW1 Project website pages, so I'm only just beginning to think about WW2 anniversaries.

May 8th is, of course, the 75th anniversary of V.E. Day which means so much to families, including my own, whose loved ones had been fighting in Europe. Thinking about V.E. day in 1945, I remembered that the war was still raging in the Pacific and would continue to do so until the August. As Britain celebrated on that actual day, a 23 year old cousin of my father-in-law's was killed by a bomb thrown under his hospital bed in Malaya.



But this story is all about this man, my uncle Len, who had been taken prisoner, in September 1944, after the battle of Arnhem. Len's story had always fascinated me ... the young man, like his brother, and others of his generation, who were sons of a generation that had given their own lives in the First World War. In February 1943, after 12 months in the territorial army, he was called up and sent to a training camp in Shropshire. In extracts from the surviving letters, that he sent home, we can read :

Dear mother,

Please send me some tabs ... and chocolate ... and cake...

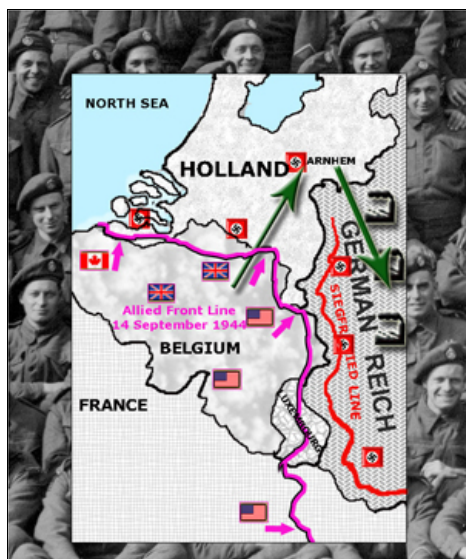
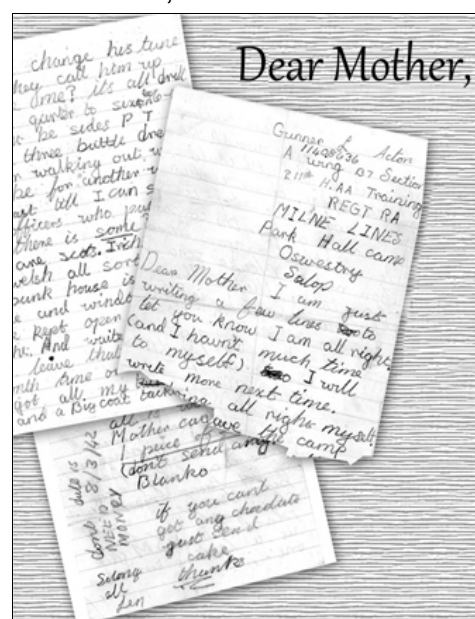
I got 3 battle dresses..., one for walking out ... all my tackle and a big coat ... I can't leave the camp until I can march properly ... Tell Robert that it's no fun ... He will change his tune when they call him up, believe me.

Robert ... see the sgt. major parading them in the square bawling his head off saying, "Look straight ahead!" ... and ... "don't watch him as he's no oil painting!"

We must not lean on lamposts, against walls or on shop windows ... or the MPs will pick us up and put us in the Barracks room. The corporal says, "They are bloody sods!"

Tomorrow I'm going to get a rifle ... a short Lee-enfield 303, a real one with live bullets ... we're going to Scotland on active service soon ... I'll be on a heavy ant-aircraft gun ...

18 months later, by August 1944, even though bombs continued to fall, lives and home were lost, and buildings burned, after the successful invasion of Normandy, hope was coming over the horizon.



Operation Market Garden was conceived as a joint venture between the British, the Americans and the Polish, and would involve 35,000 servicemen. If successful, it would allow the allied forces to sweep through France and Holland, avoiding the defensive Siegfried Line, and into lowland Germany, allowing them to attack the industrial centres and cut off vital supplies and armaments. On September 17th, 1944, over 10,000 airborne troops dropped into Holland, 150 kms. behind the enemy lines, in gliders and by parachute. Their task was to capture and secure the bridge over the River Rhine at Arnhem. Len was in the King's Own Scottish Borderers and in the first wave of gliders to land. What happened next is history, well known, documented, written about, filmed and the subject of numerous websites.

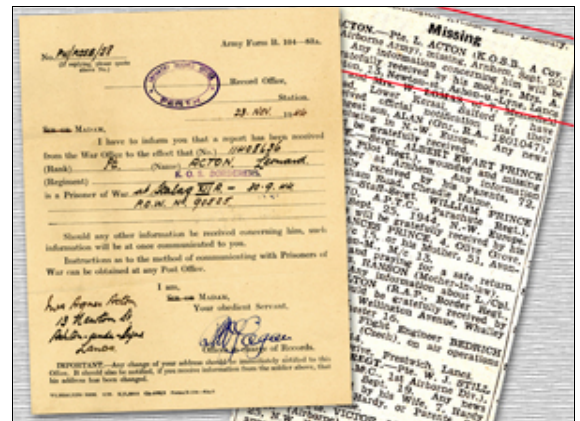
Critically, and unknown to the Allied Command, two German panzer units were re-fitting just a few miles away and ready for action. Allied supply lines failed, and reinforcements weren't able

to reach the area. Just over week later, the operation was considered a failure. Less than a quarter of the British airborne force were evacuated, about 15,00 men died and almost 7,000 were taken prisoner. Of the Scottish Borderers, 7th Galloway Battalion, we know that from the 17th to 26th of September, 765 men took off in 56 Horsa gliders and, of these, 112 men died, 76 were evacuated, and 577 reported missing.

So, for his mother, sister and brother, the agonising wait began, knowing how many had died but hoping against hope that Len was still alive, and desperate for news. It was the end of November before it arrived and it was January before they actually received a letter from Len himself. Len HAD survived and, by the end of September, was in Stalag XII A at Limburg, in Germany.

From there he was allowed to send a card to his mother informing her that he had been captured.

Stalag XII A was a mainly transit camp and from here the prisoners were soon moved to other stalags. Len's spirits were fairly high at this time (presumably because he was still alive and uninjured!) and he used red-cross cards to jot down random thoughts. In extracts from these cards, we can read ...



6th October ... there is a raid on and a dogfight is in progress. Raids are as frequent as hours in a day. Every town I saw on the way here had been flattened. The Germans have taken a beating that will take years to get over. I wonder if I will ever see Ashton-under-lyne again.

8th October ... I think of my last leave when Robert was home. It never entered my head that a few weeks later I would be a prisoner of war.

A very cold day. I am very hungry. I have just finished my piece of black bread. It must be as bad for you at home.

On the 11th of October, Len was transferred to Stalag IVB in Muhlberg, Saxony. The horrific journey would take a week, spent in a crowded box car with a lump of cheese and a piece of bread to last for the whole journey. He would only be there a couple of weeks before he was transferred yet again, this time further south, to Stalag IVF at Hartmannsdorf, near Chemnitz. Here he would wait out the rest of the war. Food was scarce, a daily piece of black bread and a bowl of watery soup and, to make matters even worse, red cross parcels were becoming much more infrequent.



Letters home had to be formulaic and reveal little. Because Len moved twice, and communications in Germany were becoming more chaotic, many letter sent to Len were returned home, as undelivered. In one of his own letters, Len refers to being on a working party on the railways and, in another, to a spell in hospital with diphtheria.

More telling, and reflecting his growing desperation, is a card on which he'd again written random thoughts :

Tomorrow, 26th February 1945 I will have done 3 years in the army. The future is very black forus all. I am hungry; I have almost stopped thinking the war will end. I pray to God it will end next month. If it doesn't, it will just about finish me off...



Liberation came with General Paton and the Americans on the 17th of April. By the 28th of April, Len was home ... only 10 days later and it was V.E. day and Ashton erupted in celebration but Len's head was too full of dark memories, fallen comrades and the privations of the Stalags, to take any part and, again, took to writing down his thoughts : *Germany has been beaten to her knees and devastated another page of British history and the strength of the British was second to none.*

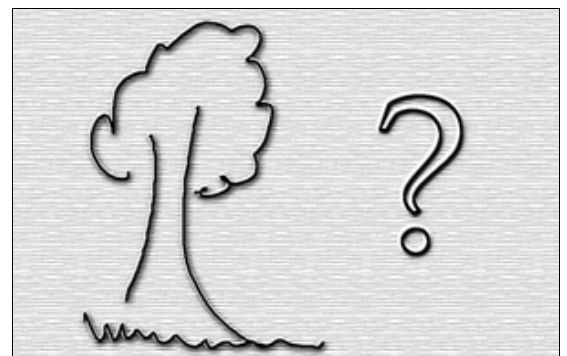
Midnight ... Today Ashton is celebrating the end of the war ... there are flags out everywhere, fireworks are still going off.

We are grateful. May God give eternal rest to all the allied fallen and to all German dead. May their souls rest in peace.



But, happily, life slowly returned to normal for Len, for his sister, his mother, and me. Bob also came home safely. Living next door, Len had been a constant and loving presence in my childhood. Piecing together his story had been an absorbing task, and I began to feel that I had come to know and understand him so much more.

What would come next? I had got the Family History Research bug! I knew that my mother's father had been killed during the first World War, and before her parents could be married. All I had was a little brass bucket sent from the front, and a name on a war memorial. Now, what more could I discover?



~~~~~  
Sheila Goodyear

**A small selection of April entries on the MLFHS Facebook page [HERE](#)...**

There was so much that I almost began to wish I hadn't started!!

\* Rediscover Manchester through the Local Image Collection. The Manchester Local Image Collection contains over 80,000 online images of Manchester many years ago.

[HERE](#)

\* North West Film Archive 15 April at 09:10 · A Film A Day

The Right to Roam was a hard fought battle for many and one up until recently we now took for granted. Today's short film seen from the BFI Player takes us back to those times of the campaigns to open up the fells for us all and something we can hopefully enjoy again soon.

[HERE](#)

\* The Lost Cousins newsletter is usually published 2 or 3 times a month. To go to the main LostCousins website click the logo at the top of this newsletter. If you're not already a member, do join - it's FREE

[HERE](#)

\* News from the Working Class Movement Library ... on-line talks etc.

Online talk '*The legacies of wartime strikes: interwar women trade union leaders in France and Britain*' Date: 6th May 2020 Event time: 14:00 to 15:00 Please note that we are aiming to run this talk remotely at the time specified. Keep an eye on this page for login details nearer the time. Also '*Posters from the Irish civil rights era*' - guest exhibition, spring 2020.

[my note ... previous talks are also on-line, on You-tube]

[HERE](#)

\* Use tithe records to locate the building where ancestors lived in England and Wales

[HERE](#)

\* Hollinwood canal gallery of photographs

[HERE](#)

\* GENUKI ... UK and Ireland: Occupations

[HERE](#)

\* This week in 1572 Manchester Court Leet appointed officers to drive swine (kept in the streets by many Mancunians) to forage at Collyhurst each day.

[HERE](#)

\* Free Online Access to all the UK's Parliamentary Publications

[HERE](#)

\* British Library Catalogues and Collections / Digital collections

[HERE](#)

\* City Speaks : Sweeping vision of Manchester as an urban utopia in the making, by one of Britain's greatest documentary filmmakers.

[HERE](#)

To see so much more, visit the MLFHS Facebook Page :[HERE](#). MLFHS Twitter page [HERE](#).

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email 15th April : Can you help?

Email via our Chairman, Linda Richardson:

We have had an enquiry from a lady in Australia (Rhonda Rasmussen). She is looking for her mother's side of the family who lived in Royton. She is enquiring about a James Andrew born

around 1722 in Oldham - details below:

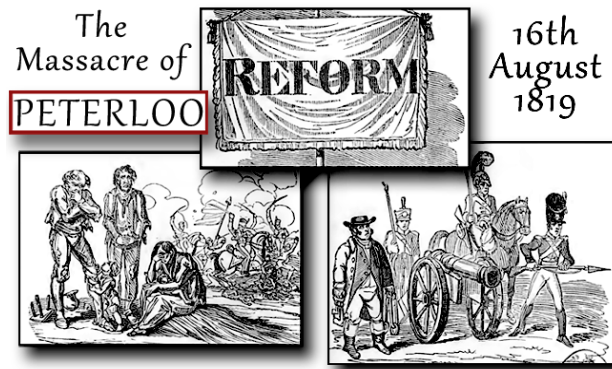
"I think James Andrew was born in 1722 in Prestwich, Oldham, Lancashire England. He married Susanna Smith and they had four children: Jane, Thomas, Hannah and Joseph. These four children were baptised at All Saints, Newton Heath, Manchester. I believe Thomas was a grain farmer at Royton and they had their own windmill to crush their grain..."

If you can help at all, please email Linda at < chairman-oldham@mlfhs.org.uk > and she will pass it on.

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## PETERLOO : the Bi-Centenary

Visit the website for **The Peterloo Project** with particular reference to Oldham, people, accounts, life at the time and more ...



at [Peterloo-Manchester](#)

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Although the long-anticipated Bi-Centenary has come and gone, there are some Peterloo websites still active with news, photos and reports.

You can make searches on websites such as :

Manchester Histories - Peterloo 1819 ... Manchester Histories have created a website which publicises all that is happening, or has happened, around the region.

Visit their website [HERE](#)

Peterloo Memorial Campaign Group ... to find out more about the memorial etc. organised by the Memorial Campaign Group, visit their website. [HERE](#)

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## Need Help!

**Oldham Local Studies and Archives - CLOSED until further notice.**

**Local Studies and Archives at 84 Union Street, Oldham, [OL1 1DN](#),**

There are regular Family History Advice Sessions every Monday and Wednesday afternoons from 2-4pm.

There's no need to book. Just turn up with all the information you have and the resident family history experts will be on hand to help.

Archives are unique, original documents created in the course of everyday activities. Oldham's date from 1597 and cover an enormous range of subjects and activities :

- Hospital records
- Poor Law Union records
- Coroners Court records

- Local Authority records including Chadderton, Crompton, Failsworth, Lees, Oldham, Royton and Saddleworth
- Schools and education records
- Records for statutory bodies like the police force
- Church and religious records
- Business records
- Solicitors and estate agents records
- Trade unions and associations records
- Co-operative Society records
- Sports, entertainment and leisure records
- Personal, family and property records
- Society and Association records
- Records of Oldham communities

There is no charge to look at archival records although you would need to bring proof of your name and address (e.g. your driving licence) to do so.

Most archives can be produced immediately, with no advance booking required. However, some archives are stored off-site, in which case at least 2 days' notice is required in order to see them.

**Other archives may be closed due to their fragile condition, or because they contain confidential information.**

There are regularly changing displays in the Local Studies Library.

[Opening hours](#) and contact details.

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Website Links

Other Society Websites

Catholic Family History Society – www.catholicfhs.co.uk
Cheshire Local History Association – www.cheshirehistory.org.uk
Chadderton Historical Society (archived website) – www.chadderton-historical-society.org.uk
Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society - <https://www.lfhhs.org.uk/home.php>
Lancashire Local History Federation – www.lancashirehistory.org
Liverpool and South West Lancashire FHS – www.lswlfhs.org.uk
Manchester Region Industrial Archaeology Society – www.mrias.co.uk
Oldham Historical Research Group – www.pixnet.co.uk/Oldham-hrg
Peterloo - Peterloo-Manchester
Ranulf Higden Society (Latin transcription) - [Ranulf Higden Soc.](http://Ranulf-Higden-Soc)
Royton Local History Society – www.rlhs.co.uk
Saddleworth Historical Society – www.saddleworth-historical-society.org.uk
Tameside Local History Forum - www.tamesidehistoryforum.org.uk
The Victorian Society - [Manchester Regional Website](http://Manchester-Regional-Website)

Some Useful Sites

GENUKI - [Lancashire](#)

Free BMD - [Search](#)

[National Library of Scotland](#) - Free to view, historic, zoomable maps of UK :

1891 - Oldham and locality [HERE](#)

Online Parish Clerk Project : Lancashire - [HERE](#)

British Association for Local History - [HERE](#)

and for their back issue journal downloads - [HERE](#)

Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, website, [HERE](#)

and for their back issue journal downloads, website, [HERE](#)

Internet Archive ... The Internet Archive offers over **24,000,000** freely downloadable books and texts.
[HERE](#)

There is also a collection of 1.3 million modern eBooks that may be borrowed by anyone with a free archive.org account.

Some Local Archives

Barnsley Museum & Discovery Centre – www.experience-barnsley.com

Birkenhead – [Local & Family History](#)

Bury – www.bury.gov.uk/archives

Chester - [Cheshire Archives & Local Studies](#) (linked from Discovery at the National Archives)

Derbyshire - [Local & Family History](#)

Leeds - [Leeds Local and Family History](#)

Liverpool Archives and Family History – <https://liverpool.gov.uk/archives>

Manchester - [Archives & Local History](#)

Oldham - [Local Studies & Archives](#)

Oldham - [Oldham Council Heritage Collections](#)

Preston – www.lancashire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives

Stockport – www.stockport.gov.uk/heritage-library-archives

Tameside Local Studies and Archives - <https://www.tameside.gov.uk/archives>

York – www.york.ac.uk/borthwick

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**Failsworth Wesleyan Church :  
Whitsuntide Walks on Oldham Road, (circa 1925)**



Courtesy Martin Goodyear

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Whitsuntide new clothes (circa 1888)



Courtesy Martin Goodyear