



Saddleworth White Rose Society

In the County of York

Newsletter No 26 Spring 2005

An Evening with "Yorkshire Folk & Friends" By Pam Preston

The Players' Theatre in Delph was the venue for an evening of music and laughter on December 11th last year.

We advertised the event as "Yorkshire Folk & Friends" and it was a huge success, raising almost £1000 for the Saddleworth Parish Council Chairman's Charity.

Organised and hosted in his unique manner by Gilbert Symes, the audience were entertained by a variety of local talent celebrating the pride we have in our Yorkshire heritage.

The show opened with the Delph Brass Band on stage and included Gilbert on vocals, ably assisted by members of the audience. Saddleworth's own World Whistling Champion, Dave Morris from Dobcross, followed the band. His previous performance had been in front of an audience of 2000 in America, but he could not have received a warmer welcome in the U.S.A. than he did in Delph. Other musicians taking part were the soprano Katherine Broderick from Delph, who is currently a student of music at the Guild Hall in London, guitar vocalist John Parsons (what a talented lot we are in Delph) whose evocative performance of Yorkshire themed songs was one of the many highlights, and John Leonard assisted by his nine year old son, Kieron, on banjo, who almost brought the house down.

Glamour was added to the event by the dancing troupe "Nix's Gang" and Christine Dearden performing in her own inimitable style with assistance of her sidekick, Duncan Rhodes.

Delph Band brought the evening to a close in fine style with some traditional Christmas Carols and finally, led by Gilbert, with a wonderful rendition of "Pratty Flowers".

The whole evening was rounded off with roast beef butties supplied by Buckley's of Uppermill and a few well earned drinks in the bar.

This event must be one of the high points of my year of office as Chairman of Saddleworth Parish Council, I cannot thank the performers enough for giving up their time to take part and make the evening a great success. Many thanks also to the theatre and the bar staff, to Ian Shepherd for his technical help and both John Lees and St Thomas's Church for help with equipment.

What can I say about Gilbert? – without his enthusiasm, effort and constant good humour none of it would have been possible, he was the star of the show, but really, I would have expected nothing less from a "Delpher".

Urban and Rural Conflict

The Saddleworth area was removed from West Riding control and put into Oldham Metropolitan Borough (OMB) in the local government changes of 1974. A large majority of residents did not want this and there has been some resentment ever since. This has been exacerbated by the fact of OMBC being a poor performing Council with extremely high rates. There is in fact some evidence of overt hostility to Saddleworth by some of OMB councillors and recent events i.e. closing of an important and busy Branch Library to save £20K.; removal of gritting services to our rural roads, have fanned the flames.

With recent Govt. proposals for "Sustainable Communities" / "Enhanced" Parish Councils and the like, some of the 1974 issues and the topic of Urban/Rural clash have become more to the fore.

In Saddleworth, various groups i.e. Residents Associations, Saddleworth Civic Trust and Saddleworth White Rose Society have been considering options. On February 1st, I chaired a meeting in the Civic Hall attended by over 250 people where an open forum allowed problems and possible solutions to be aired. Cllr Ken Hume, Cllr Mike Buckley, Mr Alan Roughley and myself outlined the current situation and possibilities for the future. The meeting coincided with the National Conference, attended by Tony Blair and Nick Raynsford, the Local Government Minister, on the future of Local/Regional government, Sustainable Communities and Social Cohesion. The "Chronicle" gave excellent coverage of the event. Since then an Action Group has developed our next steps, and the Civic Trust, Residents Groups and SWRS are involved. (Dobcross Residents met with Chief Executive Andrew Kilburn and Council Leader David Jones to put forward concerns about the level of services and future Council plans.)

The next few years may see significant changes in the way Local Government is organized and run. If for example the concept of Enhanced Parish Councils is carried through there could be big opportunities AND big responsibilities as budgets are devolved down from OMBC (or some other Authority!!). We could have control of some of our local Services e.g. Libraries, Gritting, Planning?? The future will see change and the few years after the Election could be very interesting.

David Makin. Chairman,
Saddleworth Civic Trust

Delph Donkey Walk

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the closure to passenger traffic of the Delph Donkey. The last passenger train ran on Saturday 30th April 1955.

It is proposed that White Rose Society members, together with enthusiasts and others, should walk all or part of the course of the now dismantled railway from Oldham to Delph. Rather than walk along the streets from Clegg Street, it has been decided to start from Southlink (off Glodwick Road, Oldham), at 10.00am, which is one end of the present day linear footpath.



Signalman W Hobson hands the staff for the Delph branch line to driver T P Evans at Moorgate Halt, around 1950

I spent several weekends surveying the route, an obstruction at Springhead can be bypassed by travelling along Station Street.

At Grotton the footpath continues past the old station where one of the platforms is still present. The path climbs the embankment then splits, but both parts eventually reach Under Lane from where a path up the fields Leads to Lydgate Church (path 215).

From Stockport Road a path alongside the old Lydgate School (path 219) leads down to Beechfield which on the day of my visit was closed due to a building reconstruction. A diversion to the right and then left along Beechfield leads back onto the same path, which continues down to Clough Lane. From Clough Lane path 220A leads to Mossley Road, from where I walked down High Grove Road to Church Road which then leads into Shaw Hall Bank Road.

From Greenfield Station along Ladcastle Road with a view over the present railway line, to the right fork which leads down and over the level crossing at Moorgate Halt and onto Den Lane which we follow to the linear path just beyond Woburn Abbey.

The section of linear path (course of the old Delph Branch) from Wall Hill Road to to the boundary of the building site at Delph goods yard has recently been re-laid with hardcore and a new stairway constructed at the Delph end down to Deph New Road.

My total time for the 7 or 8 miles, at a fairly fast pace, was 2hrs 6mins. A realistic time with frequent stops to reminisce would probably be 3 to 3.5 hours.

A Donkey will greet walkers at Delph at approximately 1.30pm, plus a contingent from the always popular Delph Band. It is advisable to wear good walking shoes.

Sponsorship/donations in aid of the Chairman's Charity, Saddleworth Parish Council. For sponsorship forms
Ring 01457 878 768
G Bayley SWRS Chairman

SADDLEWORTH NEEDS OUT

An urban orientated authority must pose a constant threat to the future of Saddleworth as a rural area. Over the years we have had many hair brained schemes foisted upon us, the latest ones being, closing our libraries, not salting our roads and most damaging to our environment, the falsely claimed "green" wind turbines on our moorland, at around 400 tonnes each, in reality mini power stations. Add to this one of the highest Council Tax rates in the country and blanket development across the district with the wrong type of housing for local needs and the change of use of our industrial sites to housing, without regard for local employment.

All this must surely raise the question - is it in our best interest to be in a Metropolitan Borough, which seems hell-bent on developing Saddleworth to generate revenue to finance urban schemes, or would we be better out of it, before our environment and heritage are completely destroyed?

If for example there is a conflict of interest between Saddleworth and the urban part of the borough, with it's much more densely populated area and greater number of councillors, who is likely to get preferential treatment under the present administration?

Why is Saddleworth in a Metropolitan Borough anyway? Was the intention to urbanise the district? A Metropolitan Borough has so little if anything, in common with our district. In the current situation, with the governments weakening of planning laws to permit wind farm developments in the green belt and higher density housing, Saddleworth could very well eventually be completely lost to urban development and become indistinguishable from the built up sub-urban fringe of Greater Manchester.

Is this where we want to be? Are our green fields, meadows and gardens seen as places that haven't been built on, yet!? One must surely come to the conclusion that we should be in a rural authority made up of areas similar to our own, with a similar background, history and requirements and therefore, understanding?

A South Pennines Borough for example, following the route of the Pennines, between the Metropolitan Boroughs, both to the east and west stretching from Saddleworth in the south to Wadsworth, north of Todmorden, in the north and similar in structure to the already functioning and viable, High Peak Borough which stretches from Buxton in the south, to Glossop, would be a preferable administrative unit.

If we respect our district we need to think seriously about where we are heading under the present regime. We must consider whatever choices and alternatives we have. And what options are likely to materialise as the national government ponders the chaos created in 1974 with the drastic and unpopular local government reorganisation.

"Oldham" Metropolitan Borough, a misleading title

The OMBC is an administrative authority, formed to administer seven separate towns and districts. It is not a town council, even though it actually refers to itself as Oldham Council rather than the OMB Council and refers to the Mayor as "Mayor of Oldham". This office was abolished in 1974 along with Oldham Council. Even the URBED report states "One of the great strengths of the borough is it's many and varied towns, each with its own town centre". The OMB mayor is equally the mayor of all seven parts of the OMB, so, it is devious and very inconsiderate to refer to him or her as mayor of the one town, even if this is seen as unavoidable in view of the current misnomer, used in the title of the borough. To use the term Oldham when referring to the OMB is most misleading. It is like referring to the British Isles as the European Isles or referring to the whole of Britain as England. Oldham is a town within the OMB, just like the other six towns and districts. OMB is simply an administrative area, not one town but the council appears to see the whole of the OMB as Oldham and the other six towns or districts as Greater Oldham, why else in 1974 did they prefix the title Metropolitan Borough with the name of that town and why did they choose a coat of arms for the whole borough which is almost identical to the Oldham coat of arms, when in fact the other six areas are separate communities each with their own history, culture, heritage and most importantly, identity.

At the western end of the borough, just beyond the Saddleworth boundary is a cluster of townships, one of which is Oldham, whose boundaries are clearly marked. Saddleworth is no more a part of that town than it was a part of Wakefield during the WRCC administration.

If local democracy has any meaning, sooner or later the authorities will have to recognise the legitimate grievances of the people of Saddleworth and look again at the administrative boundaries.

Statistics for the OMB administrative area

Saddleworth 18,485 acres (53%)

Oldham 6,392 acres (18%)

Chadderton 3,014 acres (9%)

Crompton 2,865 acres (8%)

Royton 2,148 acres (6%)

Failsworth 1,679 acres (5%)

and Lees 288 acres (1%)

Saddleworth Referendum 1974 voting results:

Kirklees	5963	69%
----------	------	-----

Tameside	1837	21%
----------	------	-----

OMB	890	10%
-----	-----	-----