The Ranmoor Society

January 2016

Happy New Year!

We hope you have had an enjoyable Christmas and that you are now looking forward to a bright, prosperous and happy 2016. Hoping that you still wish to support the Ranmoor Society during the coming year, we have attached a subscription form for 2016 to this newsletter. As agreed at our last Annual General Meeting, subscriptions have been slightly increased but this is the first time in five years that we have had to do this. Charges for speakers and room hire have been increasing, albeit gradually, year on year.

We have now arranged the programme for the next year and we hope that it contains plenty of interest with something for everyone. For example, in our February meeting Peter Machan will reflect on the Great Sheffield Flood of 1864 and in March Valerie Bayliss of the Victorian Society will tell us the story of Sheffield's Old Town Hall which has been allowed to decay for 20 years. We have included background articles on both those items in this newsletter.

We are mindful that, at the same time as inviting external speakers to our meetings, we should include as many local-neighbourhood items as possible and we are always interested in obtaining feedback from members on this. In June we hope to display parts of the Ranmoor archive to remind everyone what we have collected over the years and how it can be made more accessible. It would be very useful to get your comments on this in advance. Any special interests we should cover?

The ***Annual General Meeting on 19th January*** *will be one occasion to talk about this whilst enjoying a glass of wine and taking an opportunity to chat with other members.*

The Great Sheffield Flood in 1864

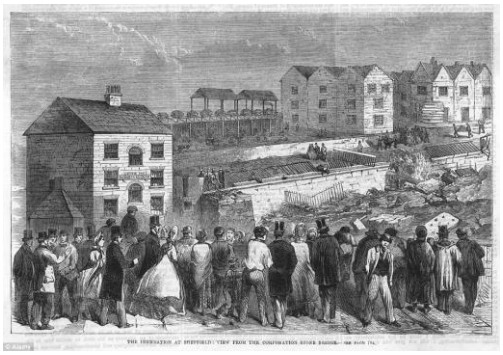
On Friday the 11th March 1864 a large section of the Dale Dyke Dam collapsed, unleashing 650 million gallons of water to thunder down the valley and on to the unsuspecting population. Two hundred and seventy people who lived in Sheffield or the hamlets in the valley below the dam perished as the huge wave roared down the Loxley valley and into Sheffield, wreaking death and destruction over a trail more than eight miles. It was one of the biggest man-made disasters in British history.

Construction of the Dale Dyke reservoir by the Sheffield Waterworks Company took place between 1859 and 1864, and this was the largest of four reservoirs it had planned above Bradfield – about 8 miles to the north-west of Sheffield. The city was then firmly in the grip of the Industrial Revolution attracting increasing numbers of people who wished to take advantage of the employment prospects in the giant, pioneering steel works. This led to a growing, even desperate, need of a continuous, and greatly improved, water supply to the town.

Despite the dam's newness, a workman on his way home at about 5 p.m. on that fateful day noticed a slight crack running across the embankment. The weather had been stormy for most of the day, and spray was being whipped over the top of the dam.

The Sheffield Waterworks' chief engineer, John Gunson, was sent for. He and a contractor colleague promptly took a pony and trap to carry them through the abysmal weather and eventually arrived at the Dale Dyke reservoir at around 10 p.m. Their initial inspection concluded that the damage was most probably a surface crack brought about either by frost damage, or slight settlement within the new embankment. However to be on the safe side they sought ways of lowering the water level in the reservoir pending a more extensive investigation. Having already tried opening the drain valves, they then decided to use gunpowder to blow a hole in the side of the sluice way in order to lower the water level more quickly. However they were thwarted by the heavy rain and persistent spray thrown up by the increasing winds which prevented the gunpowder from igniting.

At about 11.30 that night the dam gave way, unleashing a torrent that swept through Bradfield, Dam Flask, Storrs Bridge, Loxley, Malin Bridge, Hillsborough, Owlerton and on to Kelham Island, Lady's Bridge and Rotherham. No less than 270 people were drowned, 415 dwelling houses were destroyed (over 4000 more were damaged), as were 170 workshops/factories and other buildings, and 4478 cottage/market gardens. Fifteen stone bridges were also lost and hundreds of farm animals.



This picture recalls the days after the disaster when the area became a magnet for tourists eager to see the devastating effects. Observers reported that the Loxley Valley became like a fairground the following week, with people selling hot chestnuts by the road side and extra trains put on to bring people to the area.

In due course the Water Company took responsibility and paid out £373,000 in compensation for the damage. In total it formed one of the largest insurance claims of the Victorian period.

As to the causes of the Dale Dyke collapse, the experts could not agree but concluded that even with the cracks the collapse of the whole dam had been unforeseeable.

Our Lost Hostelries

In the last issue we focused on three local pubs that are still in business today. But do you know about three other "locals" that, although the buildings remain, have not served beer for many a year?

If we had lived in Sandygate **"The Ball Inn",** sometimes referred to as the "Blue Ball" at the top of Pitchford Lane in an early nineteenth century terrace, might have been an attractive option. The census records tell us that Charlotte Wright was the innkeeper in 1841 when a 57 year-old widow, and that she was still here 20 years on. By 1871 Joseph Sampson had become the landlord whilst apparently at the same time working as a grinder. By 1881 Anne Sampson had taken over, but the pub closed shortly afterwards. Between 1917 to c.1970 it operated as a small grocer's shop, and nowadays it is a private house.

Had we been around in the early 19th century we could also have called in for a pint at **"The Blacksmiths Arms"** in Goole Green (now the Old Fulwood Road) and possibly even been served by the blacksmith himself, Farewell Harrison. We know that he had bought a barn and built a house adjoining the smithy and by 1828 he described himself as a "victualler, blacksmith and farrier at the Blacksmiths Arms, Goule Green". He also farmed 17 acres of land nearby. When he died the pub was taken over by another blacksmith, George Hodson who had married Harrison's daughter. From 1863 the property came into the possession of Henry Isaac Dixon, the owner of Stumperlowe Hall. By the 1880's the Temperance Movement had gained strength, and in 1888 the vicar of Fulwood, the Rev J. H. Hewlett, possibly concerned with local drunkenness, approached Mr Dixon and persuaded him to surrender the licence and to open a Coffee House in its place. Farewell Harrison's home has been a private house since 1936.

The sign in this photo of 1910 advertises *"The Blacksmith's Arms, Fulwood Coffee House and Inn with good beds, stabling, cricket ground, bowling green, savings bank and cyclist touring club headquarters"***.** What more would you want …. apart from a pint of beer!

Until the early part of the 20th century the **"Grouse and Trout Inn",** facing the middle Redmires reservoir, was a popular destination for Sheffield people to visit on Bank Holidays. In those days the nearest they could get to it by public transport was by using the tram terminus at Nether Green, so from there they had to walk up the hill to the pub.

Its heyday as a thriving hostelry began in the 1830s when the reservoirs were being constructed, largely by Irish navvies. The latter allegedly knew it as the "Eyes & Ears", a reflection of the alarming damage they used to inflict on each other during drunken fights. During the First World War it became a popular haunt for soldiers stationed at Redmires Camp. By then the Inn had lost its licence but apparently still served coffee and sandwiches.

Why was the licence not renewed? Apparently the then owner, William Wilson of Beauchief Hall, was anxious that the new motor bus service between Broomhill and Lodgemoor would allow hoards of visitors from Sheffield to tramp across his moors and ruin his grouse shoots!

The Grouse and Trout was eventually demolished circa 1950, but its stone inn sign with the image of a grouse and three trout can still be seen today on the left hand side of the road leading to Stanage Pole.

Sheffield's Old Town Hall

Sheffield's Old Town Hall has played an important part in the city's history: there were election riots on its doorstep in 1832; it was the centre of public relief after the Great Flood in 1864; and it was the setting for the collapse of charges against 95 miners arising out of the conflict at Orgreave.

Sheffield's earlier town hall had opened in 1700 close to the parish church (now the cathedral). But that was incapable of extension and in 1807 it was replaced by what we now know as the Old Town Hall, designed by Charles Watson. This housed not only the Town Trustees but also the Petty and Quarter Sessions, hence it is also known as the Old Courthouse. The building was extended in 1833 and then in 1866, acquiring the central clock tower over a new main entrance reoriented to Waingate. At the same time, the building's courtrooms were linked by underground passages to the neighbouring Police Offices.

The first Town Council, elected in 1843, took over the lease of the Town Trustees' hall in 1866. In spite of extension in 1896-7 the building was still too small, and it was replaced by the current Sheffield Town Hall. The Old Town Hall building became the Sheffield Crown Court and Sheffield High Court. In turn these courts moved to new premises in the 1990s since when the building has been empty. Over the last 20 years the current owners – a London company – have allowed it to fall into a state of serious decay.

However it is Grade 2 listed, which means it is regarded as of special significance architecturally and/or historically. In 2007 the national Victorian Society named it as one of the top ten most at-risk buildings in the country. How and why it has been left to decay, and what might be done about it, is an interesting story which Valerie Bayliss of Sheffield's Victorian Society will recount at our March meeting.

Ranmoor Society Committee 2016

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