



Friends of Smithills Hall



**Patron: The Duke of Norfolk President: Sir William Goring Bt.
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OCCASIONAL BULLETIN No. 6

Summer 2011

Friends of Smithills Hall Executive Committee



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Introduction

Welcome to the 6th Occasional Bulletin.

Times continue to be difficult for individuals, organisations and charities alike, but the Friends finances remain on a stable footing. However it seems that the Lancashire Local History Federation

(LLHF) is questioning their future because of the poor level of support they are receiving. They are currently canvassing opinion from members of their Federation on whether they should continue. We will consider our position with regard to our membership of the LLHF.

Family Garden Party

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The Family Garden Party was held at the Hall on Sunday 31st July. Friends turned out to help erect gazebos, steward rooms and run the Friends bric-a-brac stall (which raised useful funds to help support the Hall) on a busy afternoon. My thanks go to all those who helped in whatever capacity.



The Friends Bric-a-Brac stall

The dog show was again a major attraction for owners, and dogs of all shapes and sizes. There were stalls selling a variety of craft items, and the ice cream seller seemed to be doing good business on what thankfully was a dry and warm afternoon.



Dogs and their owners on show

The first indications are that there were about 580 visitors and over 100 paid for entry to the Hall. Children were kept entertained with lots of

hands-on activities in the Dome Room and the Great Hall.

The King's England: Lancashire (continued)

Robin Scott-Smith's extract from Arthur Mee's publication of 1936 describing Bolton, is continued from Occasional Bulletin No.5.

The hall in the wood has for a neighbour another delightful black and white structure, Smithells Hall, a 15th century timbered house (now public) with a 14th century window and a rich interior with much oak. On a stone step is an impression in the shape of a foot; it has at times an odd red glow which science can explain quite well, but which has become a cause, a legend.



Even in these days there are those who believe it is the footprint of a martyr, George Marsh, the brave preacher who was examined here. Bolton Church is 19th century standing in a churchyard like a garden, as all churches should. It has two doors, covered with fine iron hinges designed as scrolls, leaves and flowers. Here lies poor Samuel Crompton in the shade of a fine and lofty tower, with the tramp of people of his town about him. Here the sound of those he wrought for echoes round his bones forevermore. We come upon a flat old stone in memory of old John Okey, who lived through the bitter years of the Civil

War. On his stone is an epitome of the misery of those days:-

“Seventeen years of civil war, many dreadful seafights, the crown or command of England changed eight times, Episcopacy laid aside 14 years, London burned by papists and more stately built again, Germany wasted 300 miles, 200,00 protestants martyred in Ireland, Bolton thrice stormed, once taken and plundered.”

Through most of this time John Okey lived alone and at last found rest in 1684. We may open the register in the church and find the names of 78 soldiers who fell fighting against Prince Rupert. It may be said that Bolton was the Geneva of Lancashire, the stern stronghold of non-conformity. Its pulpits have known many preachers of celebrity, famous for their eloquence and courage. Perhaps the oldest thing in Bolton is in the north aisle of the church, a wonderful relic found in three pieces under the tower and set up here complete at the end of the last century. It is a Saxon Cross carved with interlacing work. There is a little 17th century glass and three 15th century oak stalls with tip up seats. One of these ends of the stalls is carved with two angels with a shield and crowned with one of the biggest poppyheads we remember; and one of the seats has an angel with a shield, and one an eagle bearing to its nest a babe in swaddling clothes. On one of the walls of the church is a marble bust of John Berry who taught the boys of Bolton at Sunday school for more than half a century and died in 1911.



Bolton School has the great distinction of having amongst its possessions a handsome bookcase containing 40 chained books, some of which came from a library bequeathed to the church by the famous Humphrey Chetham, who founded the great school that bears his name in Manchester.

A curious little tale we came upon at Bolton, telling of one of its chapels which was “built of rags and bones.” The Baptists were celebrating the jubilee of the chapel in Dorset Street in 1936. It seems that about a century before that a ragged orphan boy walked from Bolton to Manchester looking for work, and fell asleep on a doorstep in a slum. A widow found him there, and it happened that she had a little rag and bone business into which she took the boy, leaving it to him when she died. Now he became a man of enterprise, growing rich by using old bones to manufacture a fertiliser. He was Tommy Vickers, the orphan boy who took the name of his friend Maggie Vickers, the rag and bone woman, and he paid for this chapel. Yet it is not for its churches or chapels or schools but for its industries that Bolton stands as one of Lancashire’s great towns.

Ghost story

Published by: Friends of Smithills Hall working in Partnership with Bolton Council

Extracts below from 'A Victorian Childhood' by Annabel Hoth Jackson, are provided by Andrew Briggs.

One room was always kept, in the rather grisly way of our fathers, as the place in which any deceased member of the family was laid out. This room was called the 'dead room' until Lily Vaughan married my cousin Richard Ainsworth. She said it was barbarous and would not have it so named. It had always been used as a spare bedroom in spite of this unpleasing title, but none of us very willingly slept there, and I myself thought the whole wing of the house haunted.

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There was supposed to be the ghost of a cat in the wing and one day after a group of very rowdy cousins had been chaffing about the animal, three of us came down to breakfast next morning with long scratches on our faces which nobody could account for. We spoke with great caution on the subject after this.

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It was here that the martyr George Marsh was tortured under Queen Mary, and as they led him from being racked, he put his poor bleeding foot down on the stone pavement and said "As sure as my faith is the right one, this mark will remain." The mark is certainly still there and it does not do to tamper with it. Some foolish young men removed the stone and threw it into the shrubbery some fifty years before I first went there. The most disastrous manifestations followed and everyone was so terrified by noises and the feeling of being touched by invisible things that they very soon put it back and everything became quiet.

In memoriam

June Margaret Pilling

We were sad to hear of the death of June Pilling who has been a Life Member since 1992. She died peacefully on 16th July 2011 in Wythenshawe Hospital aged 81 years. June was formerly a Senior Nursing Tutor at Bolton Hospital.

Forthcoming Events

- **Heritage Weekend**

This will be on **Thursday 8th September, Friday 9th September and Sunday 11th September, 12pm - 4pm.** Entry is free to all. Friends will be most welcome to help out on any of these days or just come along to enjoy the day!



Some members will be wearing costumes on Sunday and there is the added bonus that Halliwell Local History Society will be exhibiting old photographs and maps of Smithills Hall and Estate, Moss Bank Park and Barrow Bridge at the event.

- There will be a **Ghost Tour** on **Friday 28th October** starting at 4pm especially for children, called the Casper Ghost Tour. This is a new enterprise for the Friends guides and early indications are that it could be popular if marketed well. Do you have any children, grandchildren, nephews,

nieces etc. who would enjoy being frightened – but only a little bit!

Other ghost tours will run on **Thursday 24 November, 26th January and 23rd February 2012 starting at 7pm** for adults. These will be free to members. Tea/coffee and biscuits will be provided during the evening.

- Period themed **Christmas decorations** will be put up by Friends throughout the Hall's public rooms on **Friday 25th November** starting at 9am. Any help you can give will be most welcome – do as much or as little as you feel able to do – the decorations will take most of the morning to put up so come along when you can!
- The **Christmas Social** will be held on **Wednesday 7th December** starting at 7pm when the ever popular Lizzie Jones will be playing the part of Mary Queen of Scots. Tickets will be £9 each for

Friends and guests and refreshments will be available. (Further details will be posted to you nearer the date).

- The **Christmas Carol Service** will be held in the Chapel on **Wednesday 14 December**, followed by mince pies and mulled wine. There will be no charge for this event. (Again more information will be sent to you nearer the event.)
- Watch out for the possible appearance of a **Rivington Choir** singing in the Great Hall in early December (more details when known). This should be very atmospheric as the Great Hall will again be dressed in its medieval decoration.

Stop Press

Watch Margaret Koppens, Friends Secretary, on BBC2 on Thursday 29th September at 6.30pm. She was filmed for **“The Reel History of Britain”** with Melvyn Bragg, talking about her father. There will be an article in the next Bulletin.

