



WITHINGTON WORTHIES

Kenneth Whittaker

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BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

It is sixty years exactly since I started taking an interest in Withington's history. It was the result of leaving school and becoming a member of staff at the Withington Branch Library in 1949.

The two publications I have produced on Withington, the short 'A history of Withington' (1957; enlarged edition 1969), and 'The Withington that was' (2007), are not strong on biographical information, though Robert Donat and Samuel Langford feature in them. This booklet has therefore been written.

The people covered are no longer alive, though members of their families may well be. This booklet is, of course, very selective. Some of those included were born in Withington, some died in Withington, some came to work and/or live in the place. Information on local worthies is harder to find than that on local events and buildings. I should be interested to learn more about locals, and not just those featured in these pages.

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STREETS NAMED AFTER PEOPLE

The once Lords of the Manor of Withington, the Egerton's of Tatton, have two streets named after them, Egerton Crescent and Tatton Grove. Also in the centre of Withington is Davenport Avenue, named after a gentleman who resided on the corner of the Avenue. Rippingham Road is named after a local builder, whilst Copson Street, originally Cooper Street, was named after the owner of land in the vicinity.

Less central are Langford Road and Paulhan Road. Langford Road, off Burton Road, is named after a local family featured later. Paulhan Road, between Parrs Wood Road and Kingsway, takes its name from a French airman dealt with under 'Plaque People'.

What is now Wellington Road has an interesting story. John Baird, writing in the 1896 St. Paul's Bazaar Handbook, stated that its original name was Raspere Lane after a Frenchman who resided there. This would seem to have been corrupted to Raspberry Lane before long. The Ordnance Survey map of 1848 gives a further twist to the story. It names it Rassbeaur's Lane. As late as 1923 the Ordnance Survey had a Rassbeaur's Bridge near where Victoria Road met Wellington Road. Did Rassbeaur build a bridge over the Leigh(or Ley) Brook?

Two more streets may well be named after local people Clowes Street and Burton Road. Clowes Street (now Candleford Road) may come from a Thomas Clowes. The 1869 Lancashire Directory gives him as living at Hampden House. Burton Road (previously Lane) is likely to have been named after the Burton family. In the

mid-Eighteenth Century a deed refers to Thomas Burton having a cottage with a blacksmith's shop, orchard and croft. (Probably the shop taken over by Friday's before they moved to Wilmslow Road).

There is a more recent street name to be noted. About 1960, probably when the Council were still changing street names so they did not duplicate each other, Rosemary Close off Harcombe Road was renamed Verity Close. Miss E. Verity, a teacher at Withington High School for Girls, was awarded an MBE for her educational work. Her Sixth Form pupils put her name forward to the Housing Committee as a possible street name. The Committee agreed.

As well as streets named after people Withington also has one named after a dog. Brigadier Close, off Burton Road, is named after a greyhound. The dog won a big race for the owner of the nearby pub, the Waterloo, now demolished.

LORDS OF THE MANOR

The Manor of Withington covered a wide area, Didsbury, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Burnage, Rusholme, Moss Side, and Levenshulme, together with a detached part, Denton and Haughton. As the Lords of the Manor seldom lived locally they are mostly just here noted. It is not known when the Manor came into existence, but it was named in 1224.

It then belonged to the Hathersage family whose home was in that area of Derbyshire. It passed into the hands of the Longworth family, another Derbyshire family, about a century later, and they held it until 1593, when, for financial reasons they were forced to give it up. The purchasers sold it to the Mosley family in 1597. The previous year the Mosley's had purchased the Manor of Manchester. It remained in the hands of the Mosley's and then, through descent the Bland family, until the 1750's. The Lord of the Manor from then on came from the Egerton family. The Egerton's of Tatton in Cheshire having bought it. Today, although all their South Manchester lands have been sold, the Lordship of the Manor belongs to the Executors of the last Baron Egerton.

SIR NICHOLAS MOSLEY

One Lord of the Manor deserves special treatment for not only did he live for some years in the area, it was he who had built a new manor house, the still standing Hough End Hall.



Illustrations: top: Arms of Sir Nicholas Mosley.
bottom: Monument to Sir Nicholas and his family in St. James' church, Didsbury.

Sir Nicholas Mosley was part of a family living at Moseley near Wolverhampton. He was the one who changed the spelling of the name to Mosley.

Nicholas and his brother (Anthony of Ancoats) went to London. There Nicholas made his fortune. He was a merchant who became Lord Mayor of London in 1599, and was knighted in the following year. He had built Hough End Hall in 1596-7, and came to live there on his retirement in 1602. He lived there until his death in 1612.

Hough End Hall is near the junction of Mauldeth Road West with Nell Lane. It later became a farm house, and, a hundred years ago, was known as Peacock Farm, because those particular birds graced its yard. Hough End Hall replaced the old manor house, Hough Hall. The site of the original manor house was where Eddisbury Avenue's council houses now stand. An appropriate plaque is attached to one of the houses.

In Didsbury Parish Church there is the tomb of Sir Nicholas. It takes the form of an elaborate alabaster monument.

OLD FAMILIES

NORRIS FAMILY

The oldest South Manchester area family that Ivor Million in his 'History of Didsbury' could trace was the Norris family (Richard and Jordan le Norreis 1196). It is believed that this family gave its name to Heaton Norris. Million adds that by the end of the Seventeenth Century the family were spreading out, and had reached Withington. Certainly one of the earliest local directories (Pigot's Manchester directory for 1836) includes a Samuel Norris. His occupation is given as farmer. He also had the job of acting as the constable for the township of Withington.

At the end of the Nineteenth Century James Harold Norris was the rate collector for the Withington Urban District Council. It was he who founded the firm of estate agents, Norris and Son. It was through these agents that my mother and father bought our Mardale Avenue house in 1938. Their local office was in West Didsbury.

CHORLTON FAMILY

An old family with many local branches is the Chorlton family. As long ago as 1647 a Richard Chorlton was farming at Little Heath Farm (the farm pond is now the duck pond in Fog Lane Park). By 1836 Pigot's Manchester directory was able to list five local Chorlton's: three farmers, a gardener, and a beer retailer. In the wider South Manchester area the Chorlton's occupied no

less than thirteen farms by 1862. One of them was the Old Hall Farm on the site of the original manor house.

Some years ago I talked to Robert Chorlton, who was at the time trying to unearth the roots of his big family tree.

LANGFORD FAMILY

The other family name which appeared, like the Chorlton's, five times in the 1836 Manchester directory was that of Langford. Of the five Langford's there listed three were farmers, one a joiner and builder, and one a shopkeeper. The two families incidentally intermarried.

The Langford's were to become best known as market gardeners. This family business was sited off Burton Road, where Langford Road now stands. Jonathan Langford is listed as the market gardener in the 1886/7 Manchester Suburban Directory. The entry states that he 'has always on hand a good selection of well grown herbaceous plants, bulbs, roses, evergreen and deciduous shrubs, forest trees.'

The best known member of this part of the Langford family was musician as well as market gardener. The son of Jonathan, Samuel Langford became music critic of the 'Manchester Guardian'. He also played the organ at the Withington Wesleyan chapel, and married an opera singer. He was a character. C.A. Lejeune wrote of him 'His Lancashire accent was as rich as a fine fruity Eccles cake'. Sir Nevil Cardus, a later 'Guardian' music critic, paid him this tribute: 'He was the greatest man I have ever known'. Sammy Langford died in 1927 at his Withington home.

PRIDAY FAMILY

The well known blacksmith family, the Priday's are first listed in a 1869 directory. They are there named as wheelwrights. After having their smithy on Burton Road until 1881, they then removed to Wilmslow Road, next to St. Paul's church and the original St. Paul's school. Subsequently they were for a number of years coachbuilders as well. When the forge itself closed in 1977, the remaining blacksmith, Jack Priday, went to work with the police horses at Hough End. A new development, which is on the site of the smithy, incorporates some of their old premises.

At one time, Billy, the coach painter, lived in the house on the front, together with his father. John, the blacksmith, lived with his family in what became the derelict cottage in the yard. Later in the Twentieth Century there were three Priday brothers in the business. One was then killed at an accident at the forge, whilst Sam died about a year later in 1962 aged fifty-nine. Just Jack was left.

MANSION PEOPLE

THE HENDERSON'S, THE SCHILL'S AND WITHINGTON HALL

Unlike the old families just outlined, the people in Withington's 'big houses' (I call them mansions in my previous books) only came to the place in Victorian times. This was the time when houses of all kinds replaced Withington's fields. The people in the mansions were different too in that they tended to leave Withington as soon as it began to be a less fashionable place.

Incidentally, the population of the area, grew not just because of the additional properties, but because the big houses also accommodated servants. It is believed that the increase in the local Irish population at this time was mainly because of the need for extra servants.

Withington Hall was one of the biggest of the mansions. It stood near the junction of Wilmslow Road with Cotton Lane. A hall of residence for nurses at the nearby Christie Hospital is on its site. The hall of residence is appropriately named Withington Hall. The two families most mentioned in connection with Withington Hall are the Henderson's and the Schills.

Charles Paton Henderson, who lived at the Hall in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, played a part in the development of St. Paul's church. How wealthy he was was revealed when he died in 1887. He left £404,000. The value of money today would make him a multi-millionaire.

The Schill's lived at the Hall later. Paul Schill

lived from 1869 to 1954, and was at the Hall between 1904 and 1924. He founded the Ardwick Lads Club in 1889, and then supported it. One of his daughters died only in 2006 (aged 101) She was Eleanor Schill. She became one of England's first female doctors, and gained an MBE. She was born at the Hall in 1904.

GUSTAV BEHRENS AND HOLLY ROYDE

One of the roads filled with the big houses was Palatine Road. Indeed, round about 1900, it was considered to be the wealthiest road in Britain. There were a fair number of Jewish residents who lived on the road, Gustav Behrens was one of them.

He was the eldest son of Sir Jacob Behrens of Bradford in Yorkshire. Born in 1846, Gustav came to live at Holly Royde in 1894, and lived there to his death at the age of ninety in 1936. Holly Royde was not far from the Withington end of Palatine Road, and remains though in an altered state.

Behrens was keen on music, and became a friend of Sir Charles Halle. Both Halle and the composer Grieg were entertained at his home. After Gustav's death his family presented Holly Royde to the University of Manchester. They used it for their Extra-mural work. However, after many years, they sold it. In 1997 the site was developed as flats, though with the original building retained.

PIONEER AND PUPILS

W.H.HERFORD

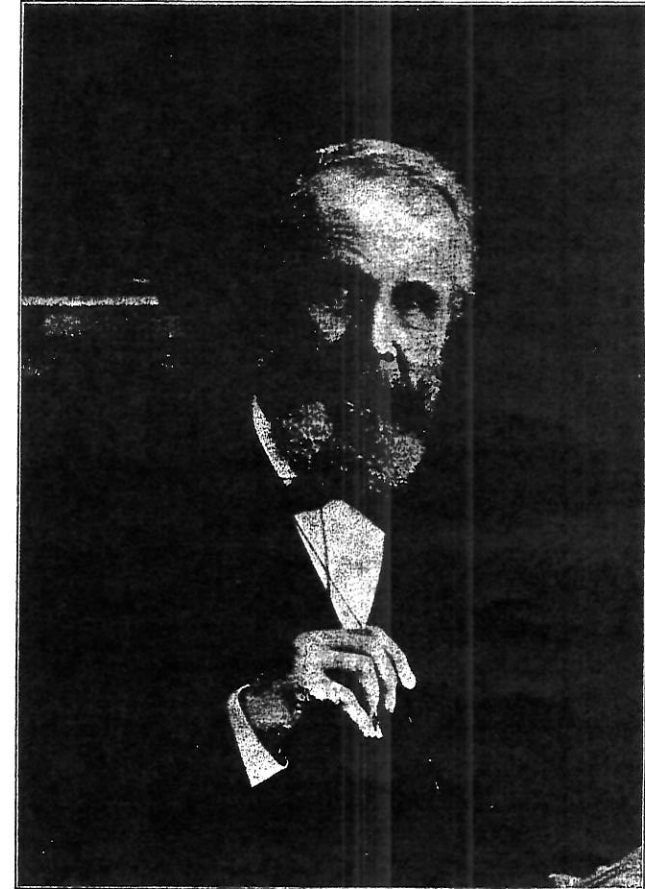
From Mid-Victorian times Withington not only grew rapidly, it attracted well off people to its big houses. The parents of the children in these houses looked for an outstanding school to which they could send their children. W.H.Herford supplied one.

The school was the Lady Barn House school, a day school of a private nature, and essentially a primary school. Two pupils who became well known are dealt with here after Herford himself.

W.H.Herford was born in 1820, came to Manchester, and founded his school in 1873. Originally it was sited in a house on Wilmslow Road, near the border of Withington and Fallowfield. After a few years the school moved to 17 Mauldeth Road by the corner of Amherst Street. The school was therefore never really in Ladybarn.

The Lady Barn House school was considered to express Pestalozzian educational ideas in the 1870's better than any other in England. Herford was a Germanophile, and so his school was therefore well supported by the local German community. At one time in its early period forty-two out of its one hundred and eleven pupils had German names. Herford lived to about 1904, but in 1884 gave the running of the school over to his daughter Caroline.

By the 1930's, as the character of the area did



W. H. HERFORD

IN HIS LAST YEAR AT LADY BARN HOUSE

change, so did the fortunes of the school. Numbers dropped, and financial problems loomed. It was announced therefore that from the end of 1935 that the University of Manchester would make itself responsible for the School's future. But it did not survive the war years. However, the school building still stands.

C.A.LEJEUNE(Mrs. E.Roffe Thompson).

Caroline Alice Lejeune, the writer and pioneer film critic, was born in 1897. She attended the school from the age of three until she went to Withington Girls School. Caroline Herford was running the school then. At Withington Girls school there was to be a Lejeune House.

C.A.Lejeune died in 1973. Her work included the autobiographical 'Thank you for having me' which includes information on Withington.

IAN HAY(real name John Hay Beith).

Born in 1876 this well known writer lived in Rusholme, but travelled to the Lady Barn House school. He wrote in his spare time under his pseudonym, by profession he was a soldier, ending up as a Major-General. He died in 1952.

He wrote novels like 'Pip' and plays like 'Tilly of Bloomsbury.' An illustration in 'Looking back at Withington and Didsbury'(Sussex and Helm) shows that the Withington Literary and Social Society were doing this play in the 1930's.

It is in Rusholme that Ian Hay is remembered. There is a Council Blue plaque (under his real name) on Wilmslow Road. The plaque is on flats which are opposite Platt Fields. The information on the plaque includes the words:'Born at Platt Abbey on this site'.

PLAQUE PEOPLE

There are only three people plaques in the Withington area, two of these are Council Blue plaques. However, there is also a Blue plaque in Rusholme for the person just mentioned, Ian Hay.

FRANK KINGDON-WARD

This Council plaque was put up on the site of his birthplace in Heaton Road. The site is occupied now by the Family Housing Association's 'Sycamore Close' home. The wording is: 'Frank Kingdon-Ward, plant explorer and botanist, 1885-1958.'

Kingdon-Ward is considered to be the last of the great plant hunters. In 1911 he set off on his first expedition to China. He explored China and the Himalayas between the wars, discovering new animals as well as plants. Awarded an OBE in 1952, His death was at Wimbledon six years later.

LOUIS PAULHAN

Just across Parrs Wood Road from Fog Lane Park is Paulhan Road. On numbers 25-27 is the blue plaque. It reads: Louis Paulhan 1883-1963. Pioneer French aviator landed a Farman biplane in a field on this site, making the first London to Manchester flight 28 April 1910.' Paulhan as a result won a £10,000 prize offered by the 'Daily Mail'.

He landed early morning, but a large crowd greeted him. Amongst it was local lad, John Alcock, who went on to complete the first non-stop aircraft

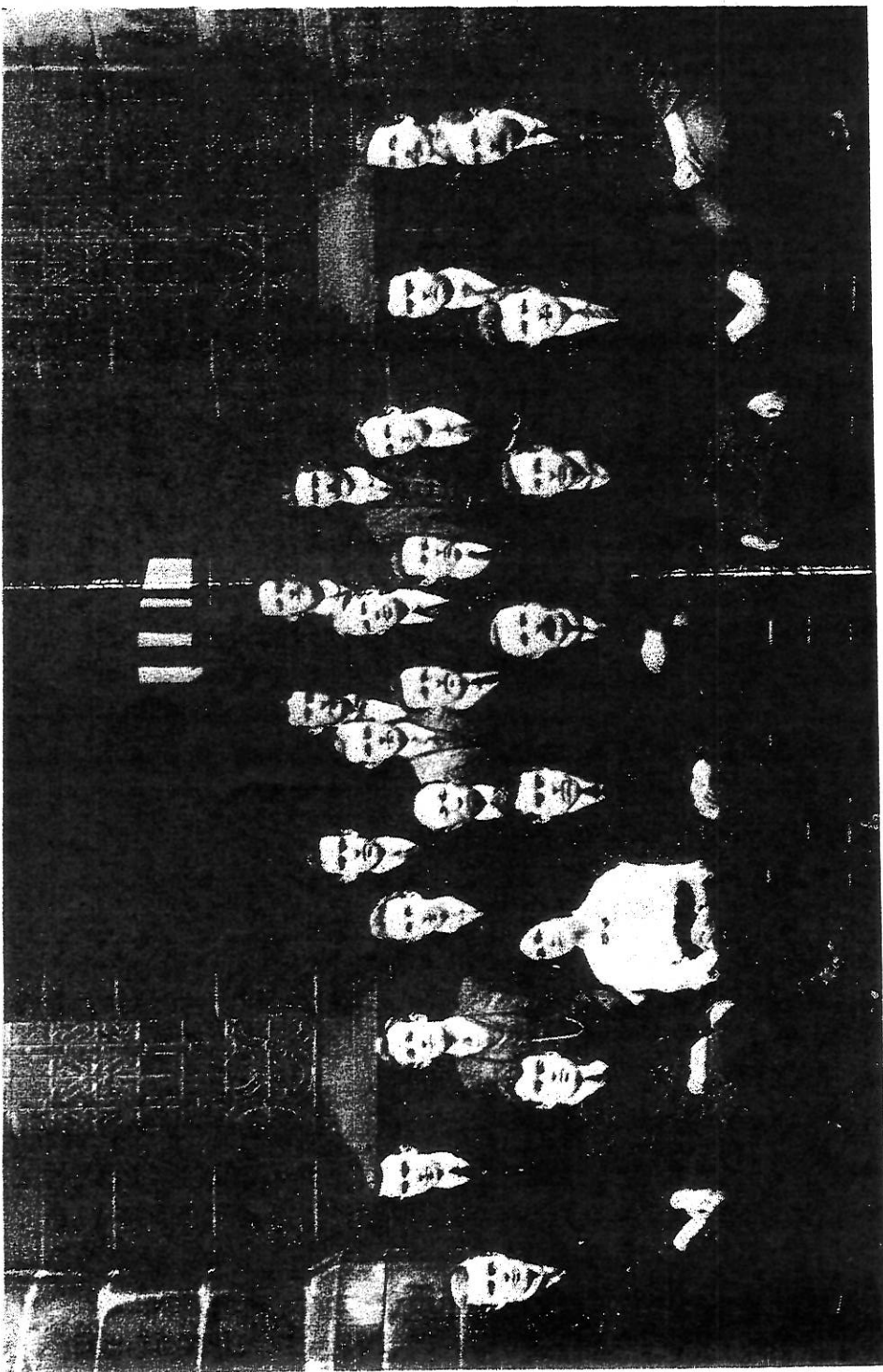
crossing of the Atlantic. As Captain Sir John William Alcock he has his own plaque on 6 Kingswood Road, Fallowfield, because of his 1919 feat.

LORD RUTHERFORD

This plaque, not a Council one, is where Rutherford lived whilst in Manchester. He was born in New Zealand. His Manchester years saw him as Professor of Physics at the University. He lived at 419 Wilmslow Road (the Fallowfield end of Withington). The plaque reads: 'Lord Rutherford, scientist, resided at this house. 1907-1919. Died October 1937. Interred in Westminster Abbey.' According to the Council's list of plaques it has one for Rutherford on the Oxford Road Museum Building, by the University.

Ernest Rutherford was born in 1871; in 1908 he won the Nobel prize for physics. Subsequently his work in the field of nuclear physics was outstanding. In 2007 there was a call for the Withington property with its first floor plaque to be turned into a Rutherford Museum.

The illustration of Rutherford shows him (centre of front row) with staff and research students of the Manchester University Physics Department in 1913.



PLAQUE WORTHY

ROBERT DONAT

The 'Manchester Evening News' reported in 1987 that the suburb's Civic Society had wanted to increase the number of local plaques, but only one name was then put forward. It was Robert Donat. However they failed to find out where he had lived.

Robert Donat, the actor and film star, is in fact the person I have found most remembered by local people and press. He is certainly Plaque Worthy. He was born in Withington on March 18th 1905 at 42 Albert Road (now Everett Road). Whilst still small, the family moved to St. Paul's Road, and it is believed that he attended St. Paul's school for a time. He recalled how he used to cycle round the village shops on his tricycle. He later attended both Ducie Avenue school, and the Central High School for boys.

He became an amateur actor with the Rusholme Repertory company, and was taught elocution by Prof. James Bernard of Fallowfield. Donat made his professional debut in 1921 in Birmingham, and in 1923 joined Sir Frank Benson's company.

Donat was always interested in film work. His best loved role was in 'Goodbye Mr. Chips'. He based his character on a teacher in one of his Manchester schools. Donat died just after completing the film 'The Inn of the Sixth Happiness' in 1958.

Robert Donat was an actor known for his fine presence and beautiful voice. He had health problems and died young, but managed to display well his talent.



■ OSCAR WINNER: Manchester's Robert Donat as Mr Chips

WOLSTENHOLME SISTERS

Though Robert Donat is the obvious Plaque Worthy, there must be other worthy locals. A plaque, for example, could be fixed to the Withington Pool and Fitness Centre, Burton Road (previously Withington Baths), in honour of the Wolstenholme swimming sisters. They are still remembered by Old Withingtonians.

Cecilia and Beatrice were certainly both world class swimmers. Cecilia, for instance, broke the world 200 yards breast stroke record at the Empire Games in Toronto, and also took part in the 1932 Olympic Games.