

Member's Talk by Keith Williscroft to Colton history Society 17th September 2015.

Talk inspired by finding the headline 'Colton Man Heavily Fined For Lead Stealing' a case involving James Degg and well known Colton resident Albert *****

October 1934 – William Degg & Son's, Wheelwrights, Market Street Rugeley, established 1883.

Personal connection –

My Grandfather Ben Williscroft worked for Jim Degg, becoming partner with his son Frank and taking the business over following Franks death until his retirement (1955). My Father Maurice and his brother George worked with them during the 1930s until establishing their own business at The Forge Colton (1946)

Interest in the above case inspired me to research earlier Colton history using newspaper archives :-

Life in and around Colton 1815-1867

Gloucester Journal – 11th September 1815

"On Thursday last an extraordinary accident happened at Colton, Staffordshire.

A young post boy was conveying post bags from Rugeley to Uttoxeter on horseback, and when he reached the bridge at Colton his horse took fright and jumped over the battlement into the shallow water. The horse was killed upon the spot but the man escaped unhurt!

Alarmed, however with unreasonable fears of punishment he made off with great precipitation, leaving the letterbags behind him! Luckily several persons saw the transaction and the post bags were conveyed back again in safety to the Post Office in Rugeley."

Rev'd C Landor

In the early 1800s the rector of Colton was Rev'd C Landor. One of the first articles found was this interesting letter:

Extract from a letter, Sir Charles Wolseley to Rev'd C Landor, 13th December 1828:

"My Dear Landor.

I assure you that few circumstances not of a very peculiarly distressing nature have afflicted me more than seeing your name ostentatiously put forth in our country papers as a leader of a set of uninformed rustics that it would seem that you have found in your parish of Colton 176 coadjutors in your work of Christian Charity!

I know your village of Colton well, and without disparagement to the inhabitants I must be allowed to say, and you know it as well as myself, that there exists not on the face of God's earth a more undisciplined, unprincipled, and idle bipeds than are the mass of your coadjutors..."

A previous letter to the Editor of the Staffordshire Advertiser from Rev'd C Landor – November 11th 1828:

"To the Right Honourable the Lord's Spiritual and Temporal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland In Parliament Assembled,

We the undersigned inhabitants of the Parish of Colton, hearing all benevolence towards our Roman Catholic fellow subjects, feel convinced, that to concede to them more political influence would be highly prejudicial to the general interests of the community..."

This related to 'The Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829' which permitted members of the Roman Catholic Church to sit in the parliament at Westminster, which previously they were unable to do since the Reformation.

In 1857 Bellamour Hall was sold.

Staffordshire Advertiser, 4th July 1857:

The Mansion of Bellamour Hall with 140 acres of parkland was sold at Auction to T B Horsfall Esq., MP for Liverpool for the sum of £21,100 pounds

The Pew System – a case brought by Mr Horsfall;

Reported by the Manchester Courier, 24th December 1859:

"Horsfall v Wooley and Holland

This was a suit brought by Mr T B Horsfall MP against the churchwardens of Colton, Staffordshire for having unlawfully disturbing him in the possession of a pew in the Parish Church.

The case was dismissed by Dr Lushington, stating "a greater calamity could hardly happen to a parish than for the principal inhabitant to be at enmity", he sincerely hoped that some means would be found of avoiding further litigation."

The clergyman in question was Rev'd A. Seaton and the relationship between Mr Horsfall and the church didn't improve.

3rd December 1859:

"The Reading Room, erected by Mr Horsfall was opened. It was reported that the unhappy circumstances in the parish had prevented the presence of the Esteemed Rector of the Parish."

Festivities at Colton

Derby Mercury - 11th January 1860:

"On the last day of the old year the female part of the inhabitants of this village were bountifully supplied with tea, plum cake etc at the expense of T B Horsfall Esq MP in the new Reading Room. After tea, Mrs Horsfall generously distributed gifts, consisting of blankets, flannels, shawls, shirts, stockings, pieces of prints, books etc. A large quantity of surplus cake was also given to the women to take home to their families. Mr, Mrs and Miss Horsfall and the remainder of the family with other friends, partook of tea with the happy party, who departed with hearts full of gratitude to the liberal donors."

The Scottish Banner – 21st January 1860

We have heard of many preachers awaking their sleeping members in the church and of many eccentricities of clergymen; but we confess never to have heard of a minister who ordered a short hand writer to be turned out of church.

It appears that the Rev A. Seaton of Colton, a village in Staffordshire adjacent to Rugeley – notorious as being the scene of the Palmer tragedy, and the member for Liverpool Mr Horsfall have had a dispute concerning certain religious matters.

The dissention reached a climax on Sunday week.

The Rev'd Mr Seaton proceeded to lecture not on the enormity of sin but of a sinner, purely on public grounds.

The member for Liverpool deemed it advisable to have a phonographer there to 'report progress'.

The man of God shortly perceiving him, uttered language the purport of which was "Away with him".

The churchwarden to whom the order was entrusted to eject him, or make him minus his pencil, found it not so easy a matter, for the reporter declined to depart. Rev Seaton declaring phonography an immorality thought it best to

dismiss the congregation, whiningly saying that he was extremely sorry to do so.

The Rev'd Seaton had other problems to deal with:

Worcester Journal – 12th January 1861:

Rev A Seaton, rector of Colton, Staffordshire has been fined £5 for striking Dr Harland in a quarrel respecting the treatment of his daughter by Dr Harland's wife.

Elsewhere in the Parish other serious misdemeanours are going on

Staffordshire Advertiser - 8th January 1831:

Demanding Money With Menaces

Samuel Radford (41) was charged with feloniously demanding money with menaces and threatening to set fire to the premises of John Yates a farmer at Colton and a church warden of that parish. The Jury found him guilty without hesitation and the court sentenced him to 7 years transportation.

A Shocking Murder

Liverpool Daily Post – 10th June 1867:

A young man named Edward William Sanderson has been found in the canal at Colton near Rugeley. A valuable gold watch and chain and a gold scarf pin were missing from the body. A large number of rough characters such as drivers and others have been attracted to Rugeley by the great horse fair which has been held during the week. Police strongly favour the presumption that the young man was attacked by one of these men, robbed and thrown into the water.

Back to life at Bellamour...

Laying the Foundation Stone of new schools at Colton

Staffordshire Advertiser – 2nd August 1862

The erection and maintenance of a free reading room last year for the inhabitants of Colton by Thomas B Horsfall Esq MP Of Bellamour Hall has been followed by a still more munificent offer by that gentleman to erect at his own expense new schools for the education of the youth of the Parish.

The site for the new schools, which is dry and healthy, adjoins the road and is nearly opposite the parish church.

They will be built from the designs of by W M Culshaw, architect of Liverpool.

The building will be of brick with stone quoins, with open oak porch and open roofs and turret clock and bell – the estimated cost being £700. Sadly, two weeks later saw the funeral of Mrs Horsfall.

Finally a report of the **marriage of the Rev'd E Harland and Miss Horsfall**

The quiet villages of Colwich and Colton were aroused from the lethargy usually attendant on country life by the celebration of the marriage of Miss Horsfall, eldest daughter of T B Horsfall MP of Bellamour Hall with the Rev'd Edward Harland, the respected vicar of Colwich.

The Lord Bishop of the Diocese performed the marriage ceremony.

At the end of the day's ceremonies the bride and groom left Bellamour Hall in a carriage and pair amid hearty cheers and a shower of old shoes!