



## Number 76

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### Annual General Meeting 2021

The Council wishes to notify all members of the forthcoming AGM. It will take place virtually at 14:00 on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March, immediately prior to Dr Liz Stewart’s lecture.

Click (or type in) this link in your browser to join: <http://bit.ly/3tamwcd>

### Editorial

Lately, I have found myself wondering whether future histories of this pandemic will ever be able to capture the monotony of lockdown life. Though I am not the first (and nor will I be the last) to make observations of this sort, the social transformation in which we find ourselves will – alongside the political, economic, and medical happenings of the last year – require significant study. Let’s hope that authors in future volumes of *Transactions* will be up to the task.

Sustaining the newsletter in a time without much relevant news has been a challenge, and I am grateful to our contributors for their help. Their reviews and commentaries have both sustained this publication and shown that it is still possible to be productive even under these trying circumstances.

– James Evans

### What a way to spend a Sunday...

For many of us during lockdown, at times one day may have come to seem much like another, but William E. A. Axon, whose paper ‘Sunday in Lancashire and Cheshire’ was read to the Society on 13 January 1881 [HSLC, *Transactions*, vol 33 (1880-1881)], set out to explore how the observation of the Sabbath day in Lancashire and Cheshire had changed from ‘before the period of the Puritans’ to more recent times.

Most of Axon’s introductory remarks are quite general; on the subject of merry-making he refers to the fairs at Weeton (near Kirkham), Turton and Samlesbury where, he points out, ‘merry’ is the local name for the wild cherry growing near the Ribble. The last bear-baiting at Turton Fair occurred in 1790. Rush-bearing in church buildings took place at a time when ‘cushions and hot water pipes were alike unknown’. He lists only three locations where the tradition is maintained; today, in non-Covid times, the list of places where rush-bearing is still maintained, or has been re-invented, would almost certainly be longer.

Axon spends some time discussing the Chester Mysteries as well as other plays performed in



the city – on the Sunday after Michaelmas in 1564 the story of Aeneas and Dido was performed on the Roodee with ‘much spectacular display’. It is not clear if all the events mentioned by Axton actually took place on a Sunday but an agreement surviving from the mayoralty of Sir Lawrence Smith (mayor in 1558, 1563, 1570) concerns the supply of, amongst other things, painted giants, a unicorn, a dragon and 16 ‘naked boys’!

In 1512 an earlier Mayor ordered that all children over six years of age should be ‘set to school or virtuous labour on weekdays, and on Sundays and holidays attend their parish churches. In the afternoon, though all the boys should practise shooting with bows and arrows...for pins and points only, and that their parents furnish them with bows and arrows, pins and points for the purpose, according to the statute lately made for the maintenance of shooting in long bows and artillery, being the ancient defence of the kingdom’. It seems to have made no difference that 10 July 1570 was a Sunday when a search was made at night in Lancashire and Cheshire and ‘other parts of the kingdom’ for ‘vagrants, beggars, gamesters, rogues, or gypsies’. Axon tells us that the search lasted until 4pm on the following day and ‘resulted in the apprehension of 13,000 masterless men’.

Anyone who wants to follow Axon’s account of changing and conflicting attitudes towards leisure activities permitted to take place on Sundays should seek out his paper but it is worth saying that he quotes in full James I’s 1617 Declaration of Sports which he fears has been misrepresented in the past. Axon seems to relish the opportunity to describe more than one drunken Puritan but in contrast presents John Bruen of Bruen Stapleford as ‘a nearer approach to the typical Puritan’. On one occasion Bruen invited preachers to the Tarvin Wakes ‘so as the pipers and fiddlers and bearwards, and players and gamesters, had no time left for their varieties’. But, there were also those, who believed the Sabbath should be observed on the seventh rather than the first day of the week - he cites the case of John Traske’s wife who was imprisoned for 15 years for working ‘on the Lord’s Day’.

Moving forward to the late eighteenth century, Axon seems to welcome the rise of Sunday Schools as places where children could be taught more than religious ‘dogma’. He is particularly critical of a poem on Sunday Schools written by Abraham Watmough and published in Rochdale in 1821. Amongst other things Watmough asserted that the teaching of writing was a violation of the Sabbath and described a proposal to teach arithmetic as a ‘profanation’. Axon’s comment that this ‘perverse sentiment is only now disappearing in some sections of the community’ suggests that he saw the education of children as an excellent way to use the Sabbath day.

It is interesting to see how Axon’s own interests and, to an extent his life, are reflected in both the style and content of his paper. Born in 1861, he started his working life at Manchester Reference Library at the age of 15 and, a founding member of the Library Association, he stayed with Manchester Libraries until 1874 when he joined the literary staff of the Manchester Guardian. When he died in 1913 the newspaper’s obituarist noted that his interests were ‘extremely varied’, a view echoed in *The Times*. Acknowledged as an antiquary and a bibliographer, his interest in the histories of Lancashire and Cheshire extended to the dialect, folklore and customs of the two counties. His paper is based on accumulated knowledge and extensive reading rather than any examination of original documents. But Axon was also an activist - not only was he prominent in the temperance movement, an advocate of vegetarianism and a leading member of the Anti-Tobacco League but as secretary of the Manchester and Salford Sunday Society he had also campaigned successfully for the Sunday opening of Manchester’s libraries at a time when this was the only day off for many workers. He concludes: ‘The opening of the public libraries of Manchester and Wigan on the first day of the week, are evidences that in the present day it is felt that the ‘Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath’, and that there is no harm, but great good, in calling in the aid of art and knowledge as handmaids of true and practical religion’.

– Dr Christine Verguson



## The Society library

The Society's library is mentioned in every yearly report and donations of items to the Society started almost as soon as it was founded in 1848. Some of the items are now quite rare and have the original covers such as the Rev. David Thom's book *Liverpool churches and chapels: their destruction, removal or alteration* (1854), which originally cost 2/6d. However, there were also donations which had no local

the Victorian passion for geology such as the Rev. Adam Sedgwick's *A synopsis of the classification of the British Paleozoic rocks* (1855). The Society also acquired bound volumes of old newspapers including the *Chester Chronicle* (nos 1035 to 1066) from April to November 1795. For some reason this is bound with the *Manchester Gazette & Weekly Advertiser* (nos 8 to 91) from January to August 1796. The last issue of that publication cost sixpence (3 ½ pence, taxed by Mr Pitt 2 ½ pence). The spine has 'volume two' written on it in ink so presumably there was also a volume one which is now missing.

To add to this the Society corresponded with most of the other historical and antiquarian societies in Britain and Ireland and also in the United States, and acquired exchange volumes and also monographs such as Richard Hodgson's *A history of Northumberland* (1858) or Edward Bellasis's *Westmoreland Church Notes* (1888).

After a lot of deliberation Council has decided to sell most of the materials without a local context, or give them a new home where they will be more appreciated than lying in the archive repository at Liverpool Central Library.

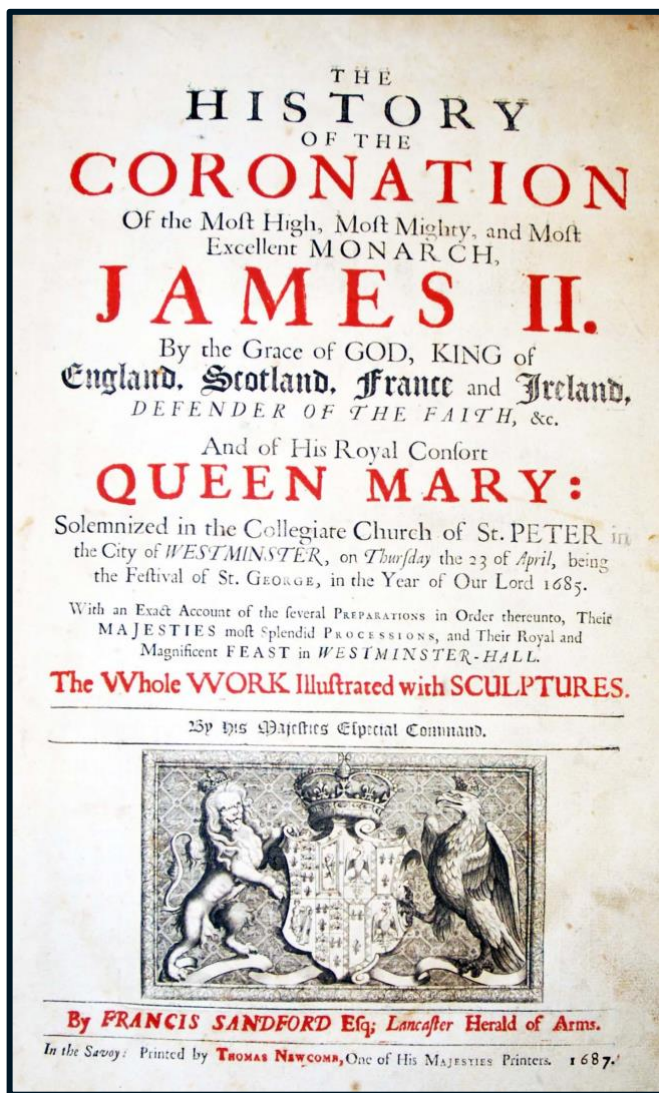
– Roger Hull

## Forthcoming events

As part of the Society's adaptation to the pandemic, speaker events, beginning with that of Dr Liz Stewart (immediately after the AGM), will be held online via Zoom. Speakers have yet to be confirmed, but talks are scheduled for the 17<sup>th</sup> March, 24<sup>th</sup> April, and the 12<sup>th</sup> May (which will be the Mike Stammers Memorial Lecture).

The link for the AGM and subsequent lecture is available on the first page of this newsletter. Members will be notified about future events via email, the Society's website, and the Society's Facebook page (the Facebook page is available via this link: <https://bit.ly/39uQCzt>).

Events will also be recorded to view on YouTube. These will also be publicised via email and in future newsletters.



connection at all including items such as volume one of the comedies of Terence (*Les comedies de Terence avec la traduction et les remarques de Madame Acier*) published in Amsterdam in 1724 or a magnificently bound *History of the Coronation of James II* by Francis Sandford, published in 1687. Liverpool Central Library suffered from bomb damage in 1941 so there may have been yet more items which were destroyed. There were also volumes reflecting