

# THE DUKE'S OTHER VILLAGE

## *The Roe Green Story*

**Bert Tyldesley**

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## Early Days

It has been suggested that Roe Green (or Roegrine) was the major settlement in Worsley as far back as the late twelfth century, when one Elias acquired the district from the Manor of Barton.[1] However, it is not until the late sixteenth century that the village appears in the local records by name.

In 1585 the Manchester Parish Register contained the following entry:

*“January 15, William Haughton of Rowe Greene” (part of the waste land in the Manor of Worsley) “died at Holdens” (the attorney’s) “at the Bridgefoot, being come as a deponent between Mr. Brereton and Mr. Sherington.”*

This referred to the long running action between Sir Richard Brereton of Worsley Hall and Gilbert Sherington of Wardley Hall over the relative boundaries of their domains, particularly in relation to the Lordship of Swinton Moor, Roe Green, Linnyslaw Moss and Walkden Moor. This dispute was to meander on during the 1580s and 90s, occasioning much violence as tenants were evicted; Sherington was charged with murder and twice incarcerated in the Fleet Prison. In 1589 the mediation of the Earl of Derby was invoked, without success; for it was not until 1598 that Francis Sherington (the brother of Gilbert, who had died in the preceding year) finally agreed to a settlement. And by this settlement Roe Green came under the jurisdiction of Sir Richard Brereton, then living in what is now known as Worsley Old Hall.[2] The hamlet would remain under the control of Sir Richard and his successors for another three hundred years.

An ancient map, produced at the time of the dispute, appears in the 1908 History of Wardley Hall and has since been reproduced in greater detail. It shows a recognisable Roe Green situated almost half way between Wardley and Worsley Halls, some two miles apart. The twenty or so farms and cottages shown on the map are roughly in a square bounded by the Hollowcloughe (Old Clough) Brook, which runs on a line with Old Clough Lane alongside the golf course, underneath the East Lancashire Road and beneath Meadowgate, to its confluence with the Kempnough Brook near Beesley. This forms the western boundary of the village on the map. The southern boundary is formed by Kempnough Brook, with the cottages and farms roughly in line with the present old houses on the edge of Beesley Green. The eastern boundary follows the course of the Hawkes Siche Brook from the Wardley area past Mulgrave Road, then beneath the road at the end of Fairyfall to its confluence with the Kempnough Brook (in the woods by the M62 motorway, two hundred yards to the south of Greenleach Lane). This eastern side of the village, where the Transport Depot is now situated, appears to have been the most populated area.

It was in the fields towards the southern end of this boundary that the village smithy stood all those years ago. The northern boundary followed a line from roughly where Old Clough Lane crosses the East Lancashire Road to its meeting with the Hawkes Siche Brook beyond the present Wardley Hall Estate. The land within these boundaries was Roogrine - the area of waste land in dispute - and was crossed by tracks now identifiable as Old Clough Lane and Greenleach Lane.

## **Kempnough Hall**

The one building still remaining which is identifiable on the map of 1590 is Kempnough Hall in the south-west corner of the village. This listed, half-timbered building is certainly the oldest in Roe Green Conservation Area, parts of it dating back to the thirteenth century. It is recorded that Richard, Lord of Worsley, who died in 1299, gave the Kempnough estate to Roger, his brother, whose family occupied it for another hundred years or so. Late in the fourteenth century a Richard Parr married Helen, the daughter and heiress of a subsequent Richard Worsley, and on his death obtained the estate. The Parrs were in occupation until 1578, when Ann, the daughter and sole heiress of John Parr, married Nicholas Starkie of Barnton, who assumed the ownership. The Starkies undoubtedly lived at the Hall throughout the rest of the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth.[2]

After that its history is less certain. There are reports of it being a public house, a farm and a house of ill fame.[3] In the early days of the nineteenth century it was tenanted by Joseph Mather, an innkeeper/farmer, and later in the same century it was divided into the three separate residences we know today. Around 1870, one of these residences served as a dispensary for the labouring population, towards the support of which the Earl of Ellesmere contributed "handsomely" and "annually". [4] In spite of all these changes it would seem that Kempnough Hall and Estate was still owned, if not occupied, by the Starkie family in 1874, when it was purchased by the Bridgewater Estates from Le Gendre Nicholas Starkie and reunited with the ancient Lordship of Worsley. Starkie Street, built in the early twentieth century in the centre of the village, is a reminder of this long association.

One last melancholy reflection on Kempnough Hall. In 1937 the main part of the Hall, facing what is now Crossfield Drive, was occupied by Mr Sam Derbyshire and his family. Mr Derbyshire, the Chief Industrial Coal Salesman for the Lancashire Associated Collieries in Manchester, was a well-respected character in the district, having connections with both the Worsley Church and Cricket Club as well as with local charities. In addition, he was a man who delighted in rural pursuits, keeping ducks in the brook behind the Hall and spending much time in the surrounding gardens and woods.

At 6:35am on 4th May 1937, shots were heard by a neighbour living across the brook, and shortly afterwards Mr Derbyshire staggered out of the side door of the Hall. The sister-in-law of Mr Derbyshire, who had lived with the family for several years, called for help from Mrs Millington, who lived in a cottage in the other wing of the Hall, and together they discovered the shot bodies of Mr and Mrs Derbyshire and that of the younger son, Tim, who was in another bedroom with his throat cut. A note left by Mr Derbyshire described himself as a failure, and said he was taking his wife and little Tim on the long journey to keep him company. Roger, the elder boy, who was away at boarding school, was left in the care of the brave sister-in-law. Murder and suicide was the verdict.

## **The Green**

As for 'The Green' itself, the present pride and joy of the village, it would seem that apart from agricultural pursuits on its periphery and the common grazing of cattle, it was used in the main for sporting activities. As far back as 1694 there is a record of one James Madock being paid 3s4d for "repairing the shutting butts at the Roe Green".[3] A century or so later we hear of fights between trained birds, dogs and men taking place, these being described as the common amusements on the Green "which filled the leisure time of Sundays as well as other days". This description[5] was allied to a commentary on the brutal instincts, coarse manners and uncouth speech prevailing among the inhabitants of Roe Green at the time.

Nearer to the present day, in 1895 an "Inquiry into Roe Green and Beesley Green" was held in the Co-operative Hall, above what is now Harrison Salmon Associates, by representatives of the newly formed Worsley Urban District Council, which at that time had no official jurisdiction over the Green. Facing the four brave members of the infant Council were representatives of the Roe Green Vigilance Committee, prominent amongst whom were John and Joseph Tyldesley, J Richard Fildes, Thomas Yorke, Major Lyon and Elias Mather.

Among the many matters raised was the question of shooting galleries on the Green. John Tyldesley complained of "one gentleman coming here who has set up his caravans and drawn a large number of people - and from other districts - and the tendency has been immoral and encouraged gaming. We want it to be stopped in its entirety," demanded Mr Tyldesley.[6]

And stopped it was within a short span of time. Indeed that meeting held in the Co-op Hall almost a hundred years ago laid the foundations of the Roe Green we know today. The conclusions of the Council's representatives are recorded in a typescript now held in Salford City Archives. Among other things, they decided that:

*“There is no doubt that Roe Green and Beesley Green are common lands and we would suggest the signboards be affixed to that effect.”*

*“...the road across the centre of Roe Green beginning at Green Leach Lane and running towards Daub Hole (OldClough Lane) be reserved for foot passengers only and that a sign board be placed at the end of the road directing vehicles to use the paved road on the South side of the Green”, and*

*“There was also an unanimous opinion that arrangements should be made for placing the Greens under control and management of the Council.”*

Soon afterwards this last recommendation was acted upon, and an agreement was reached in 1898 between the Bridgewater Estates and the Council whereby jurisdiction passed to the latter, on the understanding that the Green was maintained as a public recreation ground and the roads surrounding were kept in good order. According to details extracted by Elsie Mullineux at the closing of the old Bridgewater Estate Offices in Worsley, Roe Green was handed over by the Bridgewater Trustees to Worsley Urban District Council for the use of the public on 25th January 1899. At the same time, the 3rd Earl of Ellesmere gave £350 for the making of roads and drainage. The occupancy was terminable by six months' notice “lest the Green should be improperly used in any respect”. This arrangement would certainly have met with the approval of the Vigilance Committee, who were unanimous in the view that the land should be kept “open as a ‘Green’ and not in any sense as a ‘Park’.

So it was that the piece of manorial waste disputed by the Lords of the district three hundred years before passed into the hands of the people of the village through their elected representatives on the Local Authority. Soon trees would be planted around the edges of both Roe Green and Beesley Green, ensuring no further incursions into the treasured ‘common land’. Here was Roe Green and here was how it would remain.

## **The Beesley Connection**

Back to the beginnings. It would seem that between the late sixteenth century and the middle of the eighteenth century the village changed little in size or aspect apart from the moving of the tracks across the Green, although even these in later years were to revert nearer to the 1590 map positions.[7] A few more dwellings had been erected, including Beesley Hall - now divided into three cottages at the south-west corner of the Bowling Green - in which, it has been said,[3] the first teaching took place around 1727. In those days, Beesley - so called after Thomas Beesley, a farmer who occupied the site in the late sixteenth century - was an integral part of Roe Green, only achieving its own individuality after the cutting of the Manchester-Wigan railway in the 1860s.

## **The Village Pound**

In this area, too, alongside Greenleach Lane and opposite Beesley Hall, the Village Pound (the Pinfold) was situated. Here were held all the stray animals of the district and a historian wrote of it as “one of those dismal looking prisons for stray brutes” .[3 ]

The truth was a little less dramatic and rather more mercenary. Speaking at the Inquiry of 1895, Elias Mather said, ”Since I was born and up to very recent years we always kept the key of the ‘Pinfold’ and it was for any stray cattle found and brought there - there was 4d per head to pay for the key to fetch them out, and for any provision made for the cattle inside they had to pay so much per day.”

Although Mr Mather couldn’t remember how long ago this was, Thomas Yorke recalled that as recently as ten years earlier sheep belonging to Mr Fildes of Swinton Park had been kept in the enclosure. He did not remember Mr Mather having the key, but said that Tom Yates of Kempnough had held it more recently. Subsequently the key had been lost, and a stick had been driven through the chain to fasten the gate. Mr Fildes remembered twenty beasts belonging to the Gardners being put in and also stated that the key was taken by Mr Yates (the representative of the Bridgewater Trustees) from Mr Mather senior because he was making a large amount of money. Obviously it was a very profitable business, of which the Trustees wanted their share, but by 1895 it had disappeared.[6]

## **The First School**

If teaching did take place in Beesley Hall in 1727, it was only a temporary precursor to the real thing. Eleven years earlier, in 1716, Thomas Collier, a local worthy who had occupied most of the Worsley Township’s offices in turn, and had represented the district as churchwarden at Eccles (the then Parish Church) left “property yielding a yearly rent of £5 to endow a school for the education of twenty poor boys.” Whatever happened in the meantime, it was not until 1727 that the first Duke of Bridgewater donated a plot of land on Roe Green for a school and a house and garden. Eighteen boys are recorded as attending school the same year, but it may be that they were being taught at Beesley Hall. For according to a slip of paper in the Frank Mullineux documents - from which much of this information is obtained - it was not until 1732 that the inhabitants of the Township of Worsley agreed to the erection of a school and house “upon a parsoll of land on the Roe Green within Worsley”[7] The enterprise would be financed by charitable donations from well disposed persons, it being agreed that if these fell short, the remainder would be made up out of the poor lay of the same town.

Thus the first day school in Worsley was established. It was built on the given land immediately behind the present day bowling pavilion on Beesley Green, the two cottages which comprised the school and house backing on to what is now the cricket field. Outwardly, these buildings have presented pretty much the same face to the world for over two hundred and fifty years, although an extension was built on to the southern end of the two cottages in 1990.

The first District Poor House had operated in the Mesne Lea area of Edge Fold between 1730 and 1750, and by 1752 a new, three-storey one was built attached to the school. The third storey was designed for hand-loom weaving. This building served as a poor house for seventeen years, the last entries in the accounts being in 1769,[8] though it would be another ten years before the third District Poor House opened in the Hazelhurst area of Moorside.

The Poor House had been closed for a very good reason. Around that time the Vicar of Eccles, together with John Gilbert (the Duke of Bridgewater's agent) and two other gentlemen, had undertaken to subscribe annually for seven years sums amounting to £4.2s for a schoolmaster and schoolmistress to teach poor children to knit and sew, to read and to learn the principles of religion, on condition that the inhabitants of the township would give up the Poor House on Roe Green to accommodate them. Evidently this was agreed to, for in September 1770 a Mrs Scholes was appointed to instruct fifteen poor girls, herself living in the original school house, which had been retained for that purpose. By 1785 the numbers had increased to 32 girls.[9] A new Infants' School was built next door in 1892 and by the turn of the century the original school buildings, together with the workhouse, had become private residences. In 1968, when the children were moved to the new St Mark's School over the hill in Aviary Road, Worsley, more than 200 years of secular education in Roe Green came to an end. The Worsley Urban District Council then took over the more recent structure as a Community Centre: the kitchen and administrative areas are in the former infants' school, whilst the Centre's main room occupies what was St Mark's Church Hall, opened in 1928. The Roe Green Poor House, the first school and schoolhouse, all now listed buildings, remain as very desirable residences on the perimeter of the cricket field.

## **The First Sunday School**

Just five years after Robert Raikes had pioneered the idea in Gloucester, a Sunday school was opened at Beesley in 1785. At first it was conducted in the old workhouse, then in the old (1892) infants' school and later in this building and the 1928 church hall. This Sunday school, serving the Church of England cause, was to continue in unbroken service for almost two hundred years, although, as will be seen later, it was not without opposition.

Starting with twenty-four scholars, its declared aim was the instruction of children in writing, reading and the Church catechism. What the children in

those early days were taught in the religious sense, however, is a matter for conjecture, since many of the people teaching in the day and Sunday schools of the district seem to have been members of the Swedenborgian Society. Certainly it is on record that some teachers from the Roe Green day school assisted at the Worsley Sunday school, where all the people were stated to be members of the Society.[3] And, as one of the tenets of the Swedenborgian faith is that Christ is not the second person of the Trinity, but is the one God, it is difficult to reconcile this view with the aim of teaching the Church catechism. (The catechism contains a specific statement of belief in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, three persons of the Trinity.) Yet it would seem this continued in some degree until around 1850. when the Worsley Sunday School was closed and the Swedenborgian Society built the New Jerusalem Church in Moorside Road, Moorside;[3] (the building was demolished a quarter of a century ago). Years later, the Earl of Ellesmere's archivist, Strachan Holme, writing about the district, could speak of "those remarkable days when a Swedenborgian Sunday School was supported by collections made in a Church of England place of worship. "[10] And echoes of this strange situation persisted in Roe Green into the 1930s, when at least one person from St Mark's, Worsley - a member of the church choir and a teacher at Beesley Sunday school - held these views to some extent and passed them on to members of the younger generation.

From the twenty-four scholars in 1785, the school progressed to teaching up to a hundred by the early 1830s. This was the high-water mark of the Sunday school at Beesley, and by 1844 there were only 41 children attending.[9] But that is another story, soon to be told.

## **Into the 19th Century**

As the eighteenth century came to its close, the thirty or so cottages, crofts and farms in and around the village were supplemented by more brick and slate dwellings on the perimeter of the Green, built by the third Duke of Bridgewater (the Canal Duke) to house the workers in his various enterprises. The canal - the first commercial canal - begun in the year 1769 was created principally for transporting coal from the various pits belonging to the Duke, mainly to Manchester. Of these pits, quite a few were in the Roe Green area. Close by the village, as remembered by a Mr Salt during the 1895 Inquiry[6], was "Old Roe Green Pit", immediately behind the school and workhouse on what is now the cricket field, and at various points on the periphery were the Crumback Colliery towards Edgefold, Wardley Colliery and the Air Pit in the fields towards Moorside. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, this once rural settlement found itself in the vanguard of the new industrial age, with workers engaged in the enterprises of the Duke as well as in the traditional pursuits of hand-loom weaving and agriculture.

But it was still a rough and uncouth place, and was to remain so for some time to come. 'A Guide to Worsley', published in 1870, describes the village thus: "When the Duke of Bridgewater died in 1803, and for many years afterwards, Worsley was, so to speak, a

god-forgotten place, its inhabitants were much addicted to drink and rude sports, their morals being deplorably low. The whole district was in a state of religious and educational destitution; there was no one to see to the spiritual wants of the people, and teaching was all but nullity itself"[4]

Nor were most people's material circumstances any better. During the war with France (1793-1815) the increase of wealth had been enormous, principally because exports to the new colonies acquired from Spain, Holland and France had almost doubled. At the same time, the discoveries of Watt and Arkwright had revolutionized the cotton industry, vastly increasing its size and activity. It would seem that all this should have been to the benefit of the working population, but the truth was somewhat different.[11]

Parallel with the vast accumulation of capital arising from these events was an increase in population. In a fifteen year period at the beginning of the nineteenth century the population rose by 30% from 10 millions to 13 millions; an increase which depressed the rate of wages in relation to the rising national wealth. Thus, the chief beneficiaries of this upsurge in activity were the manufacturers and landowners - for all these factors combined had forced agriculture into a feverish and unhealthy pursuit of prosperity. The result was the rapid enclosure of the age-old commons, the doubling of the price of land and improvements in agriculture which changed the face of the countryside. And in the midst of it all, wheat had risen to famine prices, much to the distress of the common people.[11]

If this were not enough, one of the earliest results of the introduction of machinery was the ruin of a number of small trades carried on in the home, and of the families who relied on them for support. The historian J R Green said, with reference to the Luddite disturbances of this time, that unemployment, low wages and the high price of wheat resulted in "the terrible pauperization of the labouring classes. The amount of the poor-rate rose by fifty per cent; and with the increase of poverty followed its inevitable result, the increase of crime." [11]

Roe Green and Worsley, centres of hand-loom weaving and situated in the eye of the rapid industrialization, could not escape the forces sweeping through the country. As Elsie Mullineux records in her 'Pauper and Poorhouse', "The working classes had never known such difficult times and they blamed their troubles on the new textile machines and factories. By 1805 the unrest was such that special constables had to be enlisted to maintain order." In March of

1805 small staves or truncheons belonging to the Township of Worsley were delivered to twelve persons as special constables.[8]

## **The Coming of the Methodists**

It was into this climate of moral and material degradation that Methodism was introduced to the Worsley district in 1784. At the instigation of John Burgess of Worsley Mill a noted Methodist preacher, Matthew Mayer, was invited to conduct a service in the room of a private house close to where the present Chapel in Barton Road now stands. This Chapel, built in 1801, seventeen years after that first house meeting, remains open and active to the present day. By 1799, around the time Methodism separated from the Established Church, such services were being held not only in Worsley but also at Edge Fold, Roe Green and Walkden Moor.

Whilst this mainstream Methodism of John Wesley became established in Worsley and Walkden, for some reason it did not take root in Roe Green, which was to go along another and less familiar route. This was to be the path of 'Independent Methodism', always a relatively small denomination and formed around the time of the foundation of mainstream Methodism by a group of dissident members of the Church of England in Oldham, together with a number of what were known as Quaker-Methodists from Warrington, and other Methodist Societies in various parts of the country. By 1805 all these dispersed groups had allied themselves with the Oldham body, but it was not until much later in the century that the name 'Independent Methodist received official approval.

What differentiates Independent Methodism from mainstream Methodism and most other non-conformist bodies? Alfred Foreman, a leading Independent Methodist historian, underlines their similarity to the Quakers (apart from forms of worship and the resolute pacifism of the latter) and summarises the beliefs of Independent Methodists as follows: all men and women are equal before God, and so the phrase 'the priesthood of all believers' applies in practice as well as in theory. Independent Methodists do not recognise a professional Ministry with claims to special authority or priestly distinctions. Instead, they rely upon an unprofessional, in the sense of unpaid, Ministry. (Financial support is given to men and women in the Evangelistic and Missionary fields, but at all times such people have remained members of the laity. Times change, however: in 1993 the Independent Methodists at Roe Green were seriously discussing the possibility of engaging a paid Minister.) Mr Foreman asserts that both the Independent Methodists and the Quakers have jealously guarded the principles followed by the early Church, and appear to be the only denominations which have stood out for a complete return to the original teachings of Christ.[12] Whether this is so or not, the

religious and social implications of their beliefs must have sounded pretty revolutionary to many at the dawn of the nineteenth century.

## **Independent Methodism at Roe Green: Early Days**

In 1808, Humphrey Harper, a member of the Manchester Independent Methodist Church, walked the seven miles or so from his home to the obscure and neglected settlement of Roe Green to spread the Good News.

Such was the press of people gathered in Tyldesley Fold (the children's playground/Lyon Grove area, but then the centre of the village) that he was raised upon a nearby stone, so that the crowd could see and hear him better.[5] And from this stone, now in a place of honour in front of the present Chapel, was preached the first Gospel Sermon on Roe Green. A later historian echoes the oft-told tale that he preached from the text "Behold the Walls of Jericho fell", at which utterance the stone wobbled and the preacher was cast to the ground. Whether this was true or not, the same historian records that from that day on these 'Gospel Methodists' prospered.

If they did, it was only in a relative sense, for the forces of lawlessness and barbarity still prevailed in the village. All the same, Humphrey Harper - now with companions - persisted, coming not once but twice a week to sow the seed at their open-air meetings. And it was at one such meeting that the rain began to fall and the crowd was invited into the cottage of Joseph Okell to continue the service.

Not that even this afforded the small, devout band of worshippers protection from the attention of the local roughs. On one occasion, it is recorded, a slate was placed over the chimney of the cottage, thus smoking out the worshippers; whilst during another Bible Class they were imprisoned within the cottage, the malefactors having boarded up the door. Thomas Cooke, who was at this particular meeting, recalled that 'Owd Matty Okell', Joseph's wife, went through a bedroom window, on to a sloping roof and down into the yard, to let them out. As William Brimelow commented, "Offensive and threatening language were freely indulged in; and the meaner sort threw stones at the preachers. It was thought good fun to annoy and even injure men for no other reason than that they were good men and engaged in doing good to their fellowmen. "[5]

## **Okell's Cottage**

Okell's cottage still stands, immediately past the flats on the road from the Chapel to Lyon Grove and Wardley Hall Lane and adjoining at right angles the one cottage fronting that road. Adjoining Okell's on the other side is another cottage of the same period (now much enlarged) and all three are Grade II listed buildings. Until the 1960s the outward appearance of Okell's

cottage was pretty much as it was two hundred years before, when the Canal Duke built a score or so of such dwellings around the Green for his workers.

In the 1920s and 30s it was occupied by Mr and Mrs Pollitt and their lodger, Captain Howard, who was in charge of the Earl of Ellesmere's stud at the Worsley Old Hall farm. Mrs Pollitt, an extremely large lady, was washer-woman to several of the gentry in the 'big' houses down Greenleach Lane towards Worsley Station; whilst Jim, her long-suffering husband, was of diminutive proportions belying his status as a blacksmith for the Bridgewater Trustees. Both were familiar figures as they carried large baskets of washing on their heads down the Green to their clients in Greenleach Lane.

There came the day when Jim, in the parlance of the times, went into a decline and took to his bed. The village being what it was then - with everybody knowing everybody else's affairs - the ups and downs of Jim's progress were well charted during the Green-side gossip of the day. Nevertheless, there must have been a failure of communication on the morning Mrs Pollitt presented herself

at the Post Office with Jim's pension book.

"And how's Jim today?" asked Herbert Yates, the long-serving postmaster.

"I'm sorry to say," replied Mrs Pollitt, pushing the pension book across the counter, "he's passed away."

"Oh...," responded Mr Yates, a little taken aback. "I am sorry...but...er...in that case I'm afraid I can't pay the pension."

"Ay, I dunna see why not," came back Mrs Pollitt, completely unabashed. "He's scarcely cowed yet."

But no doubt by that time old Polly Peers, who lived in the adjoining cottage at right angles to Mrs Pollitt's and performed the necessary functions of birth and death for the village at large, had comfortably and flatteringly composed poor old Jim into his last sleep. Old Polly with her little bag was a familiar figure sixty or seventy years ago, emerging from that cottage up the hill; so was Tom, her husband, with his bowls of the finest potted meat for miles around.

Late in the 1980s I was approached in a Salford café by a lady whose face and voice were familiar, but whose name eluded me. She obviously knew me, for without pause for breath or any preliminaries she blurted out, almost as an accusation, "You're Bert Tyldesley...Haven't they made a mess of Roe Green? Honestly, haven't they?" I grunted, desperately searching for a name, while at the same time wondering who 'they' were and to which particular 'mess' she referred. The answer was soon to follow. "Them flats they've built on Brook House. It's a disgrace. Completely spoiled the village, hasn't it?" At this, I remembered - she was the lady whose family had transformed and extended

the humble eighteenth century cottage next to Okell's into a very desirable residence, installing behind the new and bright facade - if rumour were correct - all kinds of un-Roe Greenish exotica like Spanish Bars and heaven knows what else.

Thinking of these things, and the implicit sacrilege of it all, I suggested to the lady that they hadn't done too badly out of their little bit of Roe Green either. But the irony of my remark escaped her. "We did very well," she rattled on... and what emerged confirmed the transformation of the long-condemned 3s6d per week Trustees' cottage into the £100,000 plus piece of real estate we know today.

## **Brook House**

Brook House, of which she spoke, was the large residence situated across the present entrance to the flats from Okell's cottage. It was the 'Big House' of the village, dating from the mid-eighteenth century, surrounded by woods and orchards, with a lake in the grounds. Demolished in 1978 to make way for the present flats, its early history is uncertain.

One historian states that around the year 1873 it was frequented by the navvies working on the new railway -the Bolton branch line, in fact, which was being joined to the existing Manchester-Wigan line at Beesley Bridge - being used by them, not to speak of any locals, as a public house.[3] Whilst this suggestion received short shrift from some of the more responsible residents in the 1930s - as it certainly did in William Brimelow's 1908 'Centenary Memorials'[5] - it gains some credence from the recollections of Robert Grant, the son of the last occupant of Brook House, who lived there for many years until its demolition. Robert recalls his father saying that the land on which Brook House was built was given to a haulage contractor working on the Duke's Canal in settlement for work done. On this land 'Brook Tavern' (later Brook House) was built. Others have suggested that the tavern was actually the smaller house at the north-easterly tip of the Brook House land, buried in the 1960s beneath the new Wardley Hall estate. Whatever the truth, there seems little doubt that an hostelry existed in this area.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and until 1921, Brook House was occupied by the Earl of Ellesmere's archivist, Strachan Holme. He was a man of many talents - among other things, he was co-author of the 1908 'History of Wardley Hall' and librettist for the 1914 Historical Pageant, held in the Worsley New Hall grounds - and is remembered to this day by at least one older resident as an impressive-looking, bearded gentleman, striding around the village with a pistol hanging in a holster by his side.

During his tenure of Brook House an elevated plantation was built on the Green immediately in front of the main entrance (about half way along the

hedge in front of the present-day flats) presumably to obscure rows of terraced houses which had proliferated down the line of the railway on the other side of the village during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In the early 1920s this plantation was a wonderland for the children of the village, where they could play hide and seek, cowboys and Indians and the many games of childhood. Unfortunately - at least for the children - it did not last long; all too soon the sturdy villagers, angry at this arbitrary incursion into their treasured 'Green', had it removed. (But not, on reflection, until the departure of the Earl and Strachan Holme from the district.)

## **The Independent Methodists Press On**

In spite of the harassment already described, the Independent Methodists persisted. By 1816 services were being held not only in Okell's cottage on the Green, but in that of Mary Richardson, who occupied the reclaimed school house cottage on Beesley at a rental of £2 per annum.[8] And not least, in the cottage of Samuel Clarke at the junction of Lumber Lane and Greenleach Lane.

Samuel Clarke was a hand-loom weaver who had moved from the Daub Hole area of the village - where the East Lancashire Road now crosses Old Clough Lane - to Sisley Cottage in Lumber Lane some time in the late 1700s. There he lived for the first two decades of the nineteenth century, being identified with the Cause (along with Joseph Okell, John Howarth, John Jackson, John Broadbent and Mary Richardson) as late as 1816, when services were regularly held in his Lumber Lane cottage. On Samuel's death, his son Richard and Richard's wife Mary occupied the cottage. They lived there for the next thirty years or so, Richard dying in 1846 and Mary in 1857. During this time they produced a family of five sons

During the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, the Bridgewater Trustees, owners of most of the land at Roe Green, were determined to preserve the village in primitive simplicity and forbade the building of more cottages on and around the Green. With the village thus frozen in its eighteenth century delineation despite the burgeoning population, young people desiring to establish homes of their own were driven off the Green to places like Sindsley or Walkden, where they could not only obtain a house but also work in the mills now established in those areas. It was not surprising, then, that the daughter Church at Sindsley so soon outgrew the parent.

## **The First Chapel**

Despite the serious impediment to growth, the good people of Roe Green did not lose heart. Even before Mr Clarke's death, with greater numbers imposing an ever-increasing strain on the limited facilities of the Preaching Room, it had

become apparent that alternative accommodation was required. With his passing, anxiety was added to necessity; for now only Mrs Clarke stood between them and the owners of the property. When she was gone, the Church could well be without a place to meet. So, in 1852, conscious of their dependence on the goodwill of others, James Clarke, the then President of the Church, echoed the thoughts and feelings of all the fellowship when he said: "The Lord has kept open a place of worship for us till He seems to have given us strength to put ourselves on a different footing, to erect a Chapel that shall be legally an inheritance to the Church for ever." [5]

In 1855, amid general rejoicing and thanksgiving, the first Roe Green Chapel was opened at the south-easterly tip of the Green. It had been a struggle; there had been years of hard work and self-denial which had tested to the full the earnestness and fidelity of the people. Strangely enough the chief obstacle to the building of the Chapel had not been the question of money, for poor as most of the members were, they had been prepared to work and sacrifice for its achievement.

No, the chief obstacle had been securing a plot of land on which to put the building. The owners of suitable sites were unwilling to sell for any purpose, and even more unwilling to sell for a dissenting Chapel. As James Clarke said, "We have been up to the present time, and still are, only occupants at will under those who are attached to the Established Church, the Trustees of the Duke of Bridgewater; but in this respect... we have been highly favoured by the non-interference of those who while they have had power over us have little sympathy with our views." [5] But this toleration did not extend to making land available, something they could readily have done as they were by far the largest landowners in the district; indeed, their successors still are.

Eventually a plot of land, the site of the present Church, was obtained from one Edmund Leigh, who granted the Church a long-term lease on condition that a barn standing there was removed and re-erected, free of charge, some yards to the south. Until a few years ago, this re-erected barn stood on the perimeter of the Church property, where the bungalow behind the two cottages facing 'Sparrow Park' now stands, in what was 'Lizzie Roberts' farmyard. In the words of William Brimelow, the writer of the 'Centenary Memorials', "Great earnestness and a spirit of economy were displayed in this work.

The old barn was razed to the ground, and the new barn was built in a very short time. This task was willingly undertaken and accomplished by the voluntary labour chiefly of our own people. Everybody, men and women, old and young, had a mind to work. Some pulled down, others dug foundations or dressed bricks, and those able to do so built the barn." [5]

It was now nearly fifty years since that first sermon had been preached in Tyldesley Fold, and thirty-five since Richard Clarke had found the Cause a

resting place in his home. Perhaps the happiest person on that September day in 1855, when the new Chapel was opened, was Mary Clarke, Richard's wife, who had played such a major role in the conversion of her husband and the firm establishment of Independent Methodism in the village. To mark the occasion she presented a Bible which was in the pulpits of the first Chapel and its successor well into the twentieth century. This was to be the last recorded act of Mary, for she survived the opening of the Chapel she and her husband had dreamed of for so long by not much more than a year. With her passing in 1857 the age of that particular branch of the Clarke family was over.

## **A Victorian Idyll**

But if the age of the Clarkes was over, it was not the end of the Independent Methodists at Roe Green. Firm foundations had been laid and the Clarkes left behind them not only a well-established Cause with a building of its own, but a band of dedicated and devout workers. It mattered not that the veto on domestic building resulted in a static, or even declining, village population. Within two years of Mrs Clarke's passing a Sunday School had been erected immediately behind the Chapel. And not long after this, the elders of the Chapel had nodded in the direction of the new age just around the corner by approving the installation of an organ.

As with so many advances in the name of progress, this was not an entirely happy occasion, for there must have been some regret at the departure of the string band which the organ replaced. It might be fitting, then, as we leave the Independent Methodists of Roe Green for the moment, to take an affectionate backward glance at the Church in those pre-organ days in the middle of the last century. It is recorded of one Samuel Twist, an Astley schoolmaster and peripatetic fiddler, that: "At sermons time Sam was loaned to neighbouring chapels to strengthen their choir, polish up the singing and indirectly augment the collection (for good singing and better preaching brought out the gold and silver in the boxes).

In this capacity, one early summer Sunday, Sam went to Roe Green Chapel, a few miles away. It was sermon-tide and everybody was wrapped in sweet content. Old and young donned their best attire; from afar friends and relatives came to see old faces and familiar landmarks; busy housewives baked good and wholesome things; the countryside was green and gay; the only topic was the singing and the sermon; the one aim to make the collection bigger than the year before.

On this Victorian Sunday, long since dead, Sam led the choir in Roe Green Chapel, and when the singing had died down, the preacher took his turn. He was a stranger and a little apprehensive, for he might wound local prejudices. He took for his subject the reward of the righteous and painted for his hearers in wonderful detail the heavenly Jerusalem. He was carried away in his own

description and pausing rhetorically he invited them to leave behind the cares of this transient life, to lay aside the unfinished task and accompany him to the celestial city. At the very moment of invitation one greybeard stood up in the body of worshippers and said in a loud voice, 'Th'morn.' He then turned slowly to the right and slowly to the left, gathered a few approving 'Ayes' from other greybeards, unconcernedly arranged his coat-tails and sat down. Sam and all the rest plainly understood the remark. But it troubled the preacher. When the service was over and he was disrobing in the vestry, he took occasion to question quietly one of the sidesmen and ask what was the meaning of the interruption. The sidesman at once interpreted, 'Oh,' he said, 'as everybody is so happy at Roe Green, when it's sermons, he wouldn't come with you to heaven today. But if you would wait, lie would go with you on Monday morning.' "[16]

And if that conjures up a picture of far-off sunlit days of simple faith, so too does the remembrance of Edie Hodgkinson, who when she died at the age of 92 in 1987 was the oldest living Roe Greener. She remembered from the days of her childhood a regular preacher who invariably concluded his sermon in a lather of ecstasy, almost falling out of the pulpit in his excitement, as he assured the congregation that "In heaven there'll be rivers of broth and mountains of currant dumplings." And that was yet another fifty years after the opening of that first Chapel. Oh, happy far-off days, when doubts were few and Faith contained the certainty of a Heaven beyond the skies!

## **The Village at Work, 1840-1870**

Whether there were rivers of broth and mountains of currant dumplings in the Roe Green of the mid-nineteenth century is another matter. Certainly between the years 1840 and 1870 there was a village of around eighty houses, from Shaving Lane (Walkden Road) in the west to Worsley Road in the east, but mostly around the Green, with a population ranging from around 550 in the earlier part of the period to something less than 500 in the latter part. The restriction on house-building is referred to in a Church Report of

obviously rankled with the) Elders:"

Several of our young members have married, and this rather makes against our Church, as they generally have to leave the neighbourhood, as our cottages are allowed to be built in our locality on the Bridgewater Estate. "[5]

Of the working population during this thirty year period, the vast majority were either weavers or colliers -around 75% in the 1840s and 60% in the 1870s, and almost equally divided between the two occupations.[17] In the 1840s there was still a high proportion of hand-loom weavers, with an admixture of 'power loom operatives', probably employed in Richard Clarke's mill at Sindsley. But by 1871 only one person is described as a hand-loom

weaver. This was George Parr, who lived and worked in the cottage opposite the Post Office -one of only two in the village still displaying its eighteenth century exterior, and occupied in 1993 by Mr and Mrs Walter Heaton. Olive, Mrs Heaton, is a direct descendant of the Parrs, whose family have occupied the cottage/s for at least a hundred and fifty years.

The colliers would be employed in the various small but growing pits owned by the Bridgewater Estates, who continued as owners well into the 1900s. The Estates would also employ the various categories of workers making up the remainder of the working population: joiners, stonemasons and bricklayers, blacksmiths, coke-burners, wheel-wrights and woodcutters, not forgetting the odd sailmaker and boat builder employed on the Canal at Worsley. And by 1871 the new age was beginning to show its influence with the appearance of an engine driver and a railway porter.

Non-manual occupations, however, were conspicuous by their absence. In 1841, the only two in this category were Richard Clarke, cotton manufacturer, and the Reverend Wolstenholme, described as a Minister of the Gospel, who lived in Lumber Lane - probably in the house opposite 'Littlewood' occupied in 1993 by Judge James Booth and family.

(The Reverend Joseph Wolstenholme was a dissenting minister who married Richard Clarke's daughter Elizabeth. During the early part of his working life he operated in Scotland as an Independent Minister and later on as a member of the Protestant Methodist sect in the north of England. He died at Worsley in 1845. His - and Elizabeth Clarke's - daughter, Elizabeth C Wolstenholme Elmy (1834-1918) was a noted campaigner for the equal rights of men and women.)

As late as 1871, only two persons can be clearly identified as having non-manual occupations: Elizabeth Needham, infants' school teacher and Matthew Mullineaux, colliery under-inspector. The Clarkes still lived in the Sisley Cottage/Littlewood complex, Richard, the forty-one-year-old son of the great Richard, occupying one section with his wife Rachel and daughters Emma Ruth and Mary Alice. The other section was occupied by Richard's thirty-four-year-old brother James, along with his wife, Martha; two sons, Richard and Charles; two daughters, Emily and Edith, and two servants. Whilst Richard (senior) was described as "Formerly Cotton Manufacturer," no occupation was shown against the name of James. In Slater's Directory for 1871, both Richard and James were listed under 'Nobility, Gentry and Clergy'. A story of rags to riches in two generations.

To service the community of 450 to 500 souls, Abraham Pollitt and his wife Martha, living in the area of the present Post Office, were described as grocery and provision merchants, whilst along the road in Lumber Lane were Ashton Morton, provision dealer and boat builder, and John Parr, grocer and druggist.

There may have been others, for the 'Occupation' column of the Census Returns sometimes lists only "occupation not stated or "householder". But there is no doubt that during the period 1840-1870 Roe Green was a mainly working class village and overwhelmingly collier! weaver dominated.

## **A Very Special Village**

Whilst in the material, work-a-day sense Roe Green was little different from hundreds of villages and hamlets scattered throughout the land at this particular moment in history, in the spiritual and moral sense it had developed rather differently from many of its contemporaries, including those in the immediate vicinity. And it was certainly different from the rough and uncouth community of fifty years before. No doubt some of this change was due to the onward march of progress, common to all, with its altered attitudes and enhanced social consciousness. But what marked Roe Green out from the rest was probably the influence of its particular brand of rigid and militant Methodism on a comparatively isolated community. Had the wider socio-cultural environment been more sympathetic to their beliefs, perhaps the Roe Green Methodists would have been less tenacious. At any rate, the ingredients were there to make Roe Green a rather special village.

Undoubtedly the chief factor in this was the enthusiasm with which the Independent Methodists embraced the cause of Total Abstinence. And, whilst this cause today is on the margins of our concerns, supported only in principle by a minority who are viewed with a tolerant if amused eye, in the first half of the last century its espousal was considered revolutionary. For then it was flying in the face of the accepted beliefs of the time.

When the men of Preston started their campaign for the 'pledge' in the early 1820s - a campaign which had spread throughout Lancashire and into Roe Green by the end of the decade - the general belief was that ale and strong drink were absolutely essential to good health and to man's power of endurance for daily toil. The general consensus was that "no man engaged in laborious occupations could possibly recuperate his wasted strength without the aid of intoxicants. "[5] And despite timed tests, during which men had abstained from strong drink and were still able to declare themselves in perfect health and even fitter for work, the view still prevailed.

But not at Roe Green. Such a cause was much in tune with the militant evangelism of its adopted faith. Anything that worked against the prevailing sin and depravity, while at the same time improving the quality of life for most people, would be close to the hearts of those early pioneers, and they threw themselves into the movement with zeal. For the Church at Roe Green, Temperance became as much an Article of Faith as the Trinity or the Resurrection.

Of course, Roe Green was not unique in this respect. The fight against the abiding curse of the working man in the nineteenth century had many protagonists, not least in the mainstream Methodist movement. Where the Church at Roe Green did have an advantage, however, was in its near-monopoly of religious / social opinion in what was still an isolated, off-the-beaten-track community. When one considers that out of a total population of 550 in the late 1830s something like 350 were attending its Church and Sunday School, the creation of an ambience which excluded strong drink and all its manifestations comes as no surprise. In the words of William Brimelow, "it is largely due to the strong sentiment thus built up that Roe Green is a district free from a public-house, and will probably now continue to be so to the end of time." If this is no longer strictly true - although it was when he wrote it - the record of Roe Green over the past 160 years proves him to be more right than wrong. More than eighty years after William Brimelow's words were written, and despite the efforts of at least one brewery and other interested parties, to this very day Roe Green is known as the 'Teetotal Village'. It is not so called for nothing.

A note from Elsie Mullineux, following the clearance of the old Bridgewater Estate Offices at Worsley, gives substance to this view. She records, "In 1877 Fereday Smith - second in command of the Bridgewater Trustees - permitted Beer, Wines & Spirits Licences to be granted by magistrates on the Trustees' Estates provided that they were West of the boundary with Little Hulton and not within a hundred yards of Roe Green."

## **The Co-op Comes to Roe Green**

But the Church was not the whole village. By 1858 a small group of these colliers, weavers and stonemasons - some, but not all, nurtured in the discipline of the Independent Methodist Chapel - had achieved sufficient self-confidence to embark upon a scheme for their mutual and material benefit. In revolt against their virtual slavery to the shopkeepers - or 'th'badgers' as grocers were known in those days - and influenced by the success of the Rochdale Pioneers who had blazed the way fourteen years earlier, this small band of working men decided to set up their own 'Co-op'. Inspired by Thomas Farnworth (and there's a fine old Roe Green name), who was already a member of the Swinton Society, and Thomas Richardson, who had preached long, and loud in the cause of something better than the existing conditions, sufficient numbers were soon attracted to make the dream a reality. And once the question of raising sufficient capital was solved, by the simple expedient of an instalment system of a shilling or so a week, a start was determined on.[18]

The first Co-op on Roe Green was in two rooms of a cottage occupied by Mr William Lyon - whose name appeared first on the list of subscribers - situated in the still existing lane behind Okell's. The cottage itself was demolished in

the 1960s to make way for the bungalow now standing at the entrance to Wardley Hall Lane, opposite Lyon Grove. In addition to these two rooms, the Society had the loan of an adjacent loom shop from Mrs Sarah Tyldesley for the storage of bulky articles. And for a total rent of 6d per week she also allowed fitches of bacon, already salted in the loom shop, to hang drying in her house. Alas, such were the pressures of the times, it was not long before the rent was raised to 9d per week.

Despite this set-back, the cottage shop in Tyldesley Fold flourished. For legal reasons it was called William Lyon &

Co until 1871, when it was registered under the Societies Acts and formally became the Roe Green Co-operative Society Ltd, but it was always run on co-operative principles. The balance sheet for the half year ending November 1864 afforded a striking illustration of the difference between private trading and Co-operative methods of business:

“On the half year’s trade the Statement of Accounts shows a profit of £133.5 .9d, after allowing 5 per cent interest to the shareholders on their capital. The total capital was £163 10s, showing a profit of 160 per cent per annum on the capital employed; this would be very nice picking for the private trader or a shareholder in one of the old, but now defunct, Union Shops; but a distinct hardship to the consumer, coming as it must out of high prices on the necessaries of life. With Co-operation things are entirely different, justice and equality of treatment being meted out to capitalist and consumer alike. Capital got its 5 per cent profit, its full market value, and the consumer had the 160 per cent per annum returned to him as dividend, as discount on the amount of trade done, thus securing equity of return in proportion to the service rendered. It is no wonder that under the old state of things the ‘badgers’ had all the ‘brass’ and their poor customers all the work. If the worker had the moral force and wit to put only half his dividend into industries he would soon be fully enfranchised and his own employer. “[18]

One thing is certain, they don’t write company reports like that in the 1990s. (And the profit was nearer 180 per cent, an error which is surely attributable to the printer and not to the great Joe Tyldesley.)

For five years, until 1863, the Co-op opened only for three hours each evening, the committee men giving their services free, with those who served in the shop being paid 4d per night. Behind the scenes the committee men manhandled and divided ten-hundredweight bags of sugar, fourteen-hundredweight puncheons of syrup -for the working man’s ‘traycle butties’

- and firkins of butter. As the duty on tea at this time was two shillings and twopence halfpenny per lb. - as much as they were paying for the tea itself half a century later - this commodity was made up into two-ounce packets; an

operation requiring a delicacy of touch beyond the hopes and aspirations of some of the horny-handed committee

To survivors from the first quarter of the present century the names of the founding members of the Society, recorded as their capital contributions dropped into a basin at the inaugural meeting in 1858, will sound like a roll call of the Great and Good of the Roe

Green Establishment:

*Thomas Richardson (President)*

*William Tyldesley (Secretary)*

*William Lyon (Treasurer)*

*James Howell*

*Thomas Mullineaux*

*John Chapman*

*John Fogg*

*Tom Sumner*

*George Sumner*

*Sarah Tyldesley*

*Thomas Farnworth*

*Thomas Yorke*

*John Moreton*

*John Salt and others.*

Many of these families would figure prominently in the records of the Independent Methodist Church at this time and for another hundred years, whilst some were connected with the Parish Church of St Mark's, Worsley, which had been erected in 1846.

From this latter section came the first full-time shopman in the person of Mr John Chapman, who was appointed in May 1863, at a salary of twelve shillings per week. He was still serving the Society, as manager, when it celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1908, and for a good few years afterwards. There are those in the village today who well remember him seated on his chair at the entrance to the 'Store', surveying with an eagle eye all incoming and outgoing customers. Shop security is no late twentieth century invention.

Another long-serving official, this time from the Methodist side of the fence, was Mr John Howell, who occupied the honorary position of secretary from 1871 until at least 1908.

The same meeting which elected Mr Howell as secretary also resolved to purchase land for a shop and three cottages. Not without some doubts; for although the first thirteen years of the Society had been a story of steady progress and success, there were still

only 84 houses - including two shops -from Worsley Road in the east to Walkden Road in the west. So, to assuage the fears of some of the members, it was resolved to build a shop in the form of a cottage, which could be readily converted for domestic use in the event of failure. As it happened, the conversion which took place some fifteen years afterwards was due to success, not failure.

The cottage, still standing at the Lyon Grove end of the terrace of four at the entrance to Wardley Hall Lane and opposite the site of the first Co-op, opened for business in 1871. Eleven years later the Society decided to enter the bread-baking business, and a small bakehouse, costing less than £50, was erected in the yard at the rear of the cottage. But these were the last throes of the Co-op in that part of the village. Within three years, in 1885, the main sections of the enterprise moved lock, stock and puncheons to more splendid, purpose-built premises on the other side of the Green, leaving the cottage as a 'clog shop' or, to the post-clog generation, a boot and shoe repairer's (and, let it be said, supplier's). Even this remained for only another three years before it, too, moved to headquarters down the hill and across the Green.

The cottage, complete with private bakehouse, then became the home of Samuel Higginbottom, a carter and well known character in the district, although the Co-op retained its rent books for the other three houses in the terrace, which were for many years occupied by John Chapman (manager), John Howell (secretary) and Thomas Richardson junior - described as a moulder, but the son of the first president of the Society and himself a future president.

## **A Liberal Dynasty**

In an age when nature contrived, "that every boy and every gal.." was "either a little Liberal, or else a little Conservative" it comes as no surprise to learn that Thomas Richardson senior - already referred to as preaching loud and long in the cause of something better than the existing conditions - was, in the political sense, a 'Liberal'. Not that this was anything unusual in the Roe Green of the mid to late 1800s and even of the early twentieth century. By and large, the overwhelmingly Non-conformist Roe Green tended to be Liberal, whereas the village over the hill, Worsley, within the ambience of the Established Church

and 'The Hall', tended to be Conservative. If an old-wife's tale of fifty years ago is to be believed - and on this occasion I think it is - the rivalry between the two factions (and villages) engendered scenes of mayhem not unlike those witnessed at the average modern-day football match; certainly they did not exclude 'tarring and feathering'.

But the Richardsons are rather special in that they have supported and worked for the Liberal cause since those far-off days in the middle of the last century. And still do. While others across the years have hived off either to the Left or to the Right - as is the case with my own family and many others from Roe Green - the Richardsons have remained true to the faith of their fathers.

Thomas Richardson junior was no mean follower in his father's footsteps, both in the Co-operative Movement and in his doughty championing of the common man's rights. I well remember over fifty years ago my own father recounting the story of a long-forgotten protest march, led by Tom junior ('Old Tom', as he was known by this time) to Salford Docks; and anybody who was around in the 1920s or 30s will not need reminding of his performances at the many political meetings then held in the old Independent Methodist Schoolroom. With his chair next to the stage and his arm on the platform, a hand cupped to one ear, he would admonish in the loudest of voices any politician, of whatever party, who was foolish enough to insult the intelligence of his audience. And, from memory, there must have been many.

In the days of our childhood in the 1920s, old Tom was THE character of the village, surpassing even the Pollitts of Okell's cottage fame. His civic pride - and love of his village - was evidenced in his voluntary and self-imposed task of clearing up the litter with his home-made trident and barrow. Any lads around from that era will still happily recall the vast store of golf balls filling the large bottom drawer of the dresser in the front room of his cottage. These he had retrieved from long hours sitting on the banking up Wardley Hall Road (now Lane) overlooking the ninth hole of the Ellesmere Golf Course, and he sold them to us supplicants at 1d a time.

Less happily recalled will be Tom's figure seated on the form which used to stand at the edge of the Green opposite the present entrance to the flats. He missed nothing from this vantage point and any boys emerging through gaps in the hedges after a foraging expedition in the Brook House orchards knew the 'strap' would be forthcoming when a report of their transgressions was passed on to their fathers.

In that fourth Co-op cottage in the terrace adjacent to Lyon Grove, old Tom produced a family including three boys. One of these, Ben - who was to become a mill manager as well as a worker in the Independent Methodist Church and Sunday School - was a councillor on the old Worsley Urban District Council for many years. Whether as a Liberal, or as a wolf in sheep's

clothing, an 'Independent', is a subject of conjecture, although there is no doubt where his heart lay. Certainly his daughter, Mabel Jackson - still happily with us in Peel Grove and still fighting the Liberal corner - is in no doubt. And as recently as 1986 her daughter and Ben's grand-daughter, Pauline Ogden, won the Worsley/Boothstown ward seat (including Roe Green) as a Liberal, albeit under the then Alliance banner.

Another of old Tom's sons, Will, became a director of J Gerrard & Sons Ltd of Swinton, who built the recently demolished Swinton Rugby ground and the old Roe Green Independent Methodist Sunday School, as well as hundreds of major buildings all over the country. Will had four sons. Two of these also became directors of Gerrard's: Jack - still with us in Crossfield Drive, and in his time a fast bowler with the Worsley Club of near-County standard; and Wilf, a not-so-fast bowler with the Roe Green Club and prior to his death a chairman of the Worsley Civic Trust. Another brother, Geoffrey, who died comparatively young, was a friend of Robert Donat, the actor, during their time at Manchester University. The fourth brother (though not in that order), Alan, was a research scientist at the Shirley Institute. In his early days he worked hard for the Hugh Oldham Lads Club in one of the poorer parts of Manchester, taking many a Roe Green football team to play them, and he, too, maintained the traditions of the family by becoming a Liberal councillor.

Another prominent Liberal councillor connected with Roe Green, though not with the Richardsons, was the late Jack Stell. Though not strictly a Roe Greener, he lived in and around the village for much of his life, serving this part of the Worsley area on the Council for many years until reorganization in 1974. On 31st May 1970, in his capacity as Chairman of the Council (Mayor), Jack brought the whole panoply of Civic might to the Chapel on the Green, which, according to a contemporary report "was full, even to the galleries, for the first time in many years".

An erstwhile treasurer of the Roe Green Independent Methodists, a long-time leader of the small but active Roe Green branch of the Toc H, a member of the Roe Green Cricket Club, Jack worked long and hard for the residents of the village, and particularly the old folk.

## **Into the New Age**

The moving of the 'Stores' down the hill and across the Green, away from the long-established centre of village life, was an indication of the changes taking place during the last forty years or so of the nineteenth century. In 1861, at a spot close to the old Worsley Station, the first sod of the Eccles/Wigan railway line was cut by the second Earl of Ellesmere, supported by the directors of the North Western Railway Company, numerous mayors and local gentry, and the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry Band.

This was the culmination of a twelve-year-long struggle against the principal landowners, the Bridgewater Trustees, who feared a railway line would threaten their canal, and the various coaching companies and turnpike trusts serving the routes to Manchester and elsewhere. By 1864 the line, which cut a swathe through the southern perimeter of the Green on its way to Ellenbrook and all stations to Wigan, was completed. Eleven years later a junction was created at Roe Green bridge to take a branch line to Walkden Low Level station (between Parr Fold Park and the Ellesmere Hotel) and thence to the now long-gone Great Moor Street terminus in Bolton.

One immediate result of the cutting of the railway line was the divorcement of the Beesley area from Roe Green proper, so that future generations would talk of Beesley Green and Roe Green as being two distinct entities. More importantly, however, Roe Green was no longer isolated from the outside world. Now, a brisk quarter of an hour's walk to Worsley Station made the surrounding towns and villages suddenly accessible. Manchester and Bolton were there for a morning's shopping and even distant Southport and Blackpool could be encompassed within the day.

A related and equally important effect was the ending of the irksome veto on house-building. By 1871 the Co-operative Society had built their shop and cottages, and later the ire of the Vigilance Committee was directed at the Bridgewater Trustees for selling plots of allegedly common land along the line of the railway for the erection of twenty-two cottages. (To the Trustees' perpetual profit, by way of ground rents, the Committee did not fail to add.) Certainly by 1870 Roe Green was once more on the move. Its days of stagnation and even decline were over.

The village had come a long way since the old, uncouth days at the beginning of the century. True, it was still a poor, working class village, providing in the main artisans and labourers for the various activities of the Bridgewater Estates from nearby Worsley; but it had developed an ambience of independence and self-sufficiency peculiar to itself. In no small measure this was due, as previously suggested, to its adoption of a peculiar brand of Methodism, its obsessive espousal of Total Abstinence and its love affair with Co-operation. Indeed, as regards the last, it is on record that, man for man, Roe Green was the most overwhelmingly Co-operative place for miles around.

This is how a stranger, the anonymous writer of 'A Guide to Worsley', saw Roe Green around 1870: "Roe Green is an open common, of about 20 to 30 acres in extent, and is surrounded by the comfortable dwellings of artisans and colliers employed on the Worsley estates, and for neatness and amplitude of furnishing, the cottage homes of the Roe Green colliers will bear comparison with those of any of their class in any part of the world. We are happy to write it, they are a thrifty, sober lot of men. At the east end of the Green stands a very handsome Independent Methodist Chapel. "[4]

A century later, a leading Independent Methodist preacher, David Hill -himself a Roe Greener - preached a memorable sermon, the theme of which was "one's point of view depends upon one's point of viewing". The demi-paradise depicted above could well reflect the truth of this statement; for behind the curtains of those neat colliers' homes lay untold stories of anguish and poverty. Certainly the colliers who made their way up the lane to Wardley (or Sandhole) Colliery or down the road to Roe Green (or Sanderson) Colliery - the shaft of which was situated in what was until very recently the NCB wharf at the end of Alfred Avenue - were not walking to any paradise. Since the 1830s, when both these collieries started, there had been many troubles in the pits. "Wages were low, conditions bad from many points of view, tonnage rates were low, men complained that they filled tubs with coal and were never paid for them, and there was no check against the masters who sold the coal at the pit bank. [3]

By 1872 the colliers in the area made a real attempt to organize themselves and in 1873 the miners of the Worsley district held a demonstration and meeting at which the following resolution, among others, was passed:

*"That as at present, the question of the new provision of weighing at the pit-mouth is in dispute, this meeting determines that the legal standard weight of 112lb. to the cwt. and 20 such cwts. to the ton, be enforced without exception throughout this district."*

Arbitration was recommended *"as the best form of settling such disputes"*. [3]

However these demands were received by the owners - principally the Bridgewater Trustees - they were certainly not revolutionary in the militant sense of the word. Like so many alleged 'revolutionaries' before and after them, all they were asking for was a modicum of justice and the right to a reasonable standard of living.

Nor were the men and women who made their way to Richard Clarke's mill in Sindsley Hollow or, later, to the mills of Walkden in any better state. Conditions were particularly harsh in the 1860s, when the American Civil War, spanning four years of that decade, cut off the supplies of raw cotton and rendered idle practically every mill in the country. The first Walkden mill (later Faulkner's in Bolton Road) opened in 1861, just as the 'Cotton Famine' was starting. Indeed, during this period the 2nd Earl of Ellesmere instituted a series of public works, including the laying down of sewers and drains in Broadoak Park, Worsley and Ellesmere Park, Eccles, to relieve the poverty.[19] So, despite outward appearances, life was real and life was earnest for most Roe Greeners in those mid-nineteenth century years. Even if there was traycle on their butties, there wasn't a great deal of jam.

## **A Rash of House Building**

Once the old restrictions were abandoned, the landowners no doubt encouraged development and there was a rash of house-building by the end of the 1870s. Along the line of the railway at the eastern extremity of the village, Fairyfall Cottages appeared in 1878, followed by Salt's Houses, opposite the Post Office, in the same year. Five years later, across the entrance to Toad Lane (now Summerfield Road) from Salt's Houses, came a terrace whose name, 'Chapel View', indicates that Sparrow Park, immediately in front, is of later vintage - probably from the very end of the nineteenth century. During the next few years further terraces were built, until the line alongside the railway was completed in 1900 by the erection of the 'Stores' houses westwards from Forrester Street. In 1904 the Co-op also built six cottages in Starkie Street and in 1907 three in Forrester Street. Thus, the pattern of the Roe Green we know today was set a hundred years ago and would not materially alter until the next burst of building activity some fifty years later. In the 1870s it was still a village nestling round its Green.

With new streets came new names. The village already had its Old Clough (How Clough), Lumber and Greenleach (Greenlish) Lanes. Now came Starkie Street, after the Starkies of Kempnough Hall, and Forrester Street, named after one Richard Forrester, with Mulgrave Road (after Lord Mulgrave, who plays a part in the Richard Forrester story) following some years later.

### **Richard Forrester (*Owd Dicky Thrigg*)**

In the Census Return for 1871 Richard Forrester was described as a farm bailiff, but at the 1895 Inquiry into Roe Green and Beesley Green he was accused of being a servant of the Bridgewater Trustees and implicated, along with Mr W Yates, in the diversion of 'Old Nanny Lane'. At the Inquiry, in response to the question as to who made the roads across Roe Green, one of the Tyldesleys is quoted as saying: "It w[oul]d be a puzzle to tell but the new road when the Nanny Lane was diverted was made by the B[ridge]water Trustees for their convenience".[6]

Whatever he was, and whatever his involvement in this foul deed, there is no doubt that Richard Forrester was a well-known character in the village and known to all as 'Owd Dicky Thrigg'. In view of what has already been said, it is curious that the village has always thought that the track or road leading from Harrison Salmon Associates (the old Stores) to Wardley Hall Lane was affectionately known as Nanny Lane because of the goats Richard Forrester led to pasturing, together with his beasts, on the Green.

When Dicky's son, William Samuel Forrester, died, his will, dated 15th December 1888, bequeathed to the Vicar and Churchwardens of St Mark's

£100 free from legacy duty, upon trust for investment in public funds, and directed that they should apply the proceeds therefrom in keeping in order and repair the grave of his father and the monument erected to his memory in the churchyard. Any surplus was to go to the relief of the poor. This request was refused by the Vicar of Worsley, Lord Mulgrave, but his successor, the Rev F K Hodgkinson, assented to the suggestion of the Charity Commissioners that the bequest should be paid to the official trustee of the charitable funds. The money was invested in Consols, which in 1933 produced about £2.15s.0d per annum for distribution to the poor. Since then the bequest seems to have disappeared without trace - despite the earnest endeavours of at least one old-age pensioner to discover its whereabouts - although it can safely be said that nothing at all was spent on the grave and monument. So all that remains in memory of 'Owd Dicky Thrigg' is that one small street and, possibly, a diverted Nanny Lane.

## **A New Chapel And A New Co-op**

The burst of house-building, and consequent increase in population, in the 1870s and 1880s encouraged not only the Independent Methodists to build larger premises, but also the Co-op. The Independent Methodist Sunday School, built in 1859, was extended by the addition of two classrooms in 1875 and for a good many years to come, Roe Green must have looked like a perpetual building site, with the terraces of houses following each other in steady progression, and the two major landmarks of the village, the new Chapel and the new Co-op. appearing within a year of each other during 1884/5.

Naturally, the erection and subsequent opening of these two landmarks aroused great excitement in the village. A report of the laying of the foundation stones of the new Chapel on 31st May 1884 speaks of: "a procession of teachers and scholars through the village, all of whom appeared at their best, (accompanied by) the enlivening strains of the Roe Green Temperance Band". And "After devotional exercises Mr. James Mullineaux, President of the Church, presented mallet and trowel to Alderman Bailey, who performed the usual ceremony." In expressing gratification at being asked to discharge this duty, Alderman Bailey said there was a ring of true Protestantism in the worship of the Roe Green Independent Methodists: "Not only had they unpaid ministers, but everything was of a purely voluntary character, thereby imitating the poor fishermen of Galilee, who cast their nets away and followed their Lord and Master. "[5] Needless to say, after the ceremony - as was the custom of the time and for many years afterwards -there was a tea party and a public meeting.

Within six months the Chapel was completed and on 5th December 1884 the first service was held, the preacher being William Brimelow, the President of

the Independent Methodist Connexion and the author of the 'Centenary Memorials' extensively quoted in this volume. Among those present and speaking at the subsequent tea party and meeting were Samuel Jackson, Matthew Mullineaux, Thomas Cooke and James Hardman, all of whom, with their descendants, were to figure prominently in the affairs of the Church (either at Roe Green or Moorside) and of the village, for many years to come.

### **Three Victorian Worthies**

#### *Matthew Mullineaux, The Vicar of Roe Green*

Matthew Mullineaux seems to have been a giant of a man. Born in 1821, he worked in the pit from the age of seven until approaching fifty, after which it appears he spent the rest of his working life as a colliery inspector. When toiling underground, he was once pinioned by a huge stone during a roof-fall and was close to death. "But," according to William Brimelow, "he was not afraid, nor conscious of the agony he was suffering. In the dense blackness of the mine his soul was ecstatic, as the lines came to his mind 'The opening heavens around me shine, With beams of sacred bliss'."

During his forty-three years as an unpaid minister at Roe Green Independent Methodist Church, from 1848 to 1891, he recounted this story, and the details of his rescue, with great effect on many occasions, bringing tears to the eyes of his congregation as he told of the "wonderful, providential, preserving and sustaining power of God".[5] He was an indefatigable preacher, walking as many as thirty miles on a Sunday to preach four sermons in different places. Little wonder he was affectionately known and revered as 'The Vicar of Roe Green'. After much suffering he passed away on Christmas Day 1891, still a minister of the Church and still a servant of the village he so much loved and which he had served so well.

#### *Thomas Cooke*

Thomas Cooke, the son of Abraham and Ann Cooke, was born in Roe Green in 1818, and by the time he was nine years old was working at one of the six hand-loom in their house. In 1836, at the age of eighteen, he gave himself to Christ and threw himself into the work of God at Lumber Lane. Around 1840, he and his family were part of the migration of Roe Greeners to Sindsley in the wake of the power looms. There he joined the Church inspired by Richard Clarke, and it was as a representative of this Church, which he served with distinction for many years, that he returned in 1884 to speak at the opening of the new Roe Green Church.

## *Samuel Jackson*

Samuel Jackson was born in Walkden in 1808, the year the Independent Methodists came to Roe Green. The youngest of fifteen children, he was orphaned early in life and subsequently, as a coal miner, resided with Mr W Fildes at Roe Green. When he was about twenty-four years of age he became active with the Independent Methodists in Lumber Lane. At the time of his death in 1896 he had been a Sunday School teacher for over fifty years and a leader in all aspects of work for the Church, particularly that of raising money for the various building projects.

The family has maintained an unbroken connection with the Church and village until the present day. Samuel's son, also Samuel, was a prominent member of the Liberal/Non-conformist tradition, serving for many years as a Councillor and also as Chairman of the Council. His son, James, was an official of the Church and Sunday School for many years, and his daughter, Mrs Annie Cresswell of Greenleach Lane, after years of service is still a Church member, though no longer able to attend.

## **And The New Co-op Is Opened**

The opening of the new Co-operative premises on 7th November 1885 occasioned no less excitement than did the opening of the new Chapel some eleven months previously. A report in the 'History of Roe Green Co-operative Society' speaks of "a procession [marching] round the Green to the new premises, when the architect, Mr. Fred Smith, presented a key to the President [of the Society], Mr. Robert Tirnperley, who then unlocked the door. "After this, "an inspection of the premises was made by the company present, which afterwards met in the Assembly-room" (the upper room above what is now Harrison Salmon Associates), "when the President took the chair, and congratulatory speeches were made by Mr. James Howell, senior, Mr. William Fildes, and Mr. Sumner, who were amongst the founders of the Society twenty-seven years previously" and for whom this was the third opening ceremony. Speeches were also delivered by Mr John Tyldesley and Mr Joseph Tyldesley. An adjournment was then made to the Independent Methodist Sunday School for tea, after which Lord Mulgrave (the Vicar of Worsley) and officials of the CWS addressed the inevitable public meeting.[18]

## **At the End of the Century**

Around these two, still familiar landmarks there was a village of about a hundred and fifty dwellings and a thousand inhabitants. There were still some thirty miners making their way up the hill to the 'new', large Sandhole Colliery (half a mile on the other side of the lane from Wardley Hall) which for a quarter of a century had glowered across the fields at Lyon Street and

Tyldesley Fold. But there were now almost as many clerical workers in the village as miners, and certainly more assorted tradesmen like joiners, bricklayers, plumbers and mechanics. There were still four working farmers and a 'cattle dealer' - he lived in a cottage (since demolished) adjacent to that long occupied by Tom Veal, and the home of his family for all of this century. The village could boast a policeman of its own, the 'Police Station' being the single cottage just west of the Chapel. And, although this is not stated in the records, a good many of the women of the village were making their way in clogs and shawls to the burgeoning cotton mills of the surrounding district.

It was at the centre of this growing village that the local Vigilance Committee bearded representatives of the newly formed Worsley Urban District Council at the meeting held four days before Christmas in 1895 and mentioned earlier in this book. Although we know that at the time of this meeting the Council had no jurisdiction over the actual Green, it would seem they had power to levy rates on the inhabitants. Indeed, one member of the Committee, Major Lyon, was very bitter over the difference in treatment of ratepayers. "We think it is not fair," he complained, "- and [we think] that one citizen should be treated equally with another no matter what his position is". And lest it be thought that Mr Lyon (for 'Mr' it was, 'Major' being his forename; he was the owner of Lyon Street) was arguing for the dead equality of the modern Poll Tax, it must be pointed out that what he was actually complaining about was the preferential treatment in the matter of rates given to certain people in the higher echelons of society. Apparently they did these things differently in those days. Or, at least, they did the same thing in a different way.

The meeting in 1895 revealed at its best the fierce independence of the old Roe Greener, not to speak of his jealous regard for the jewel in the crown of the village, the Green itself. John Tyldesley complained of the large slices of the Green which had been taken from time to time, remembering it when it was almost twice the size. His insistence that Beesley was not separate from Roe Green evoked memories of the time some years previously, after the railway line had divorced the two sections, when the Bridgewater Trustees had enclosed Beesley with fences. These fences were taken down by the inhabitants - not as a depredation, insisted one member of the Committee, "but as a protest in claiming their rights". In their place the Trustees placed stumps and boulders at the entrance, and these remained well into this century.

Depredation appears to have been the 'in' word in the late nineteenth century. Not only was the Committee denying its own depredations, it was accusing all and sundry of the same offence, particularly with regard to the removal of turf and clay. John Tyldesley complained both of the Lord of the Manor being involved and of the villagers themselves, "for... we ourselves have been a little predatory in that respect - We have taken a spade and barrow and taken the turf off wh[ich] has made [the surface of the Green] very uneven." It used to

be said “there was nothing better than Roe Green clay,” another committee man asserted, accusing the Trustees of taking cart-loads of it when they worked Sanderson’s Pit. Others had taken loads of clay up Wardley Lane, he assumed for the preparation of the ‘Red Cat’ bowling green at the top of Moorside Road, Swinton.

## **The Tyldesleys**

John Lunn’s 1966 ‘History of the Tyldesleys of Lancashire’ is sub-titled ‘the rise and fall of a great patrician family’, and thereby hang many tales. Suffice it to say that during the family’s finest years, between 1331 and 1566, when Wardley Hall was its greatest house, the family produced a sergeant-at-law to Henry IV and an attorney general for the County Palatine of Lancaster. Unfortunately, by this time the end of the Tyldesleys at Wardley was nigh. Thurstan, the last of the Tyldesleys to occupy the Hall and deeply in debt, was involved in some sharp practice over the alleged sale of the estate to the Gilbert Sherington who figures on the first page of the Roe Green story. Hauled before the Star Chamber, Thurstan was committed to the Fleet Prison, and the validity of a prior settlement he had made was referred to trial at common law. There the deed was found to be forged, and what followed is suggested in this still extant report: “1576. Note that at the hearing of the case between Charington (sic) and Tyldesley the Lord Keeper (Sir Nicholas Bacon) spake these words ‘Tyldesley I have sytten in this Court thies 17 yeres and yet never soe fowle a mater came before me’ “. [2] Thus were the Tyldesleys of Wardley Hall disposed of, and virtually the last mention of the family name in the history of that place refers to a Richard Tyldesley (along with a Richard Holland) being paid, in 1613, the sum of £1 for “keepinge of watter out of ye pitt and for fyndeinge of worke”. [2]

At last the Tyldesleys had found their true level. But they were a resilient lot, undeterred by adversity, and by the end of the nineteenth century they were as thick on the ground, at least at Roe Green, as daisies in the average suburban garden. My father used to tell the story, ad nauseam, of an acquaintance of his from Walkden who came to visit him. As this gentleman approached the bridge from the Lumber Lane direction he accosted what he deemed to be a native and asked him where he could find George Tyldesley. “Which of the b.g.rs?” the native responded, “There’s five of ‘em.” And not only were they thick on the ground, they were also very active and not a little vocal in the affairs of the village.

We know that William, Joseph and Sarah were active in the Co-operative Movement, and that John and Joseph were supporters of the Vigilance Committee and deeply concerned about the preservation of the Green. Added to this, yet another John was soon to embark on his unpaid vocation as a minister of the Independent Methodist Church which would extend into the

sixties of the next century, and other Tyldesleys in the course of time would take a prominent part in the affairs of the Church and village. But for all this, and without depreciating the efforts of all these worthy Tyldesleys, the best was just about to come.

Fittingly, it was during 1895, the year the Vigilance Committee bearded the Council, that an event occurred which would take the name of Roe Green to every corner of the world. At least, to every corner of the cricket playing world; for it was in this year that John Tommy Tyldesley made his debut for Lancashire, to be followed some sixteen years later by his equally illustrious brother, Ernest. Both were born on Roe Green and both were baptized in the little Chapel on the Green.

John Tommy, or JT as he was universally known, was born in a small terraced house, long since gone, between Tom Veal's cottage and the 'Stores' terrace verging on Lyon Grove. By 1888 the family had moved to the shop on the corner of Starkie Street now occupied by hairdressers Nigel and Sue; here Joseph, the father, was described as a coal dealer and grocer. And here, in 1889, the youngest of five brothers, Ernest, was born.

All the brothers (the others were Jess, Frank and Austin) and, it is said, the three sisters, Ada, Edna and Ethel, were considerable cricketers and sportsmen (and women). Much of their early cricket was played, with orange boxes as wickets, in what is now Starkie Street. And later, as an old resident recounted many years ago, John Tommy and Jack Sharp - a Lancashire colleague who himself scored over 20,000 runs and 38 centuries for the county - could be seen hour after hour with bat and ball on the Green in front of the shop. The same resident also recalled carrying JT's cricketing bag to Patricroft Station - presumably the first stage of the journey to a match at Aigburth - for which service he received 6d from the great man.

Roe Green was alive with cricket in those late-Victorian and Edwardian days, for there were more than the Tyldesley brothers (and sisters) who could turn a pretty hand at the game. Wilf Jackson, who played for the Worsley 1st Eleven for over thirty years and subsequently became the club's president, used to recall an eternal game of cricket played on the Green between the 'Up-Greeners' and the 'Down-Greeners'. "At holiday times," he recounted, "seven matches would be played every day - and always one before breakfast." Since the Tyldesley clan were amongst the 'Down-Greeners' and he himself was a member of the 'Up-Greeners' team, Wilf would recall these long-gone games with some feeling.

To a later generation, evidence of all this activity was a large area of grey clay marring the lush pastures at the eastern end of the Green between Starkie Street and the Chapel; this was affectionately known as 'The Dirt Pitch' and used for schoolboy and pre-club cricket until the Second World War. Alas, in

the present age, when youngsters receive tuition and play in teams at the Roe Green Club across the bridge at Beesley or at the Worsley Club behind the Cock Hotel, the 'Dirt Pitch' lies buried beneath a sea of grass.

Of these games, Walter Tyldesley - a nephew of JT and Ernest and a fine medium-pace bowler for the Roe Green Club during the thirties - recalls a story passed down in the legends of the family. Apparently, during one of the evening encounters between the two old rivals, the 'Down-Greeners' were a man short. "What about your Ethel?" asked one member of the team. "Oh, she's gone to bed," replied one of the Tyldesley brothers. Nevertheless, she was brought out and, it is said, made up the team playing in her nightie. She was very knowledgeable about cricket and no mean bowler and wicket-keeper.

The other brothers were no slouches. Jess, the eldest - a footballer of professional standard, and as a cricketer considered by at least one old resident many years ago to be "the best of the lot" - acquired a great reputation with Barrow in the North Lancashire League. Frank, the father of Walter, sandwiched a period at Worsley between first and last spells at Roe Green. Playing for Worsley against Sale in 1919, Frank scored 143; an individual total on that ground which was not to be surpassed for many years. (But another Roe Greener, Jack Richardson - who has already been mentioned - scored 155 not out for the Worsley Club in a second wicket partnership of 221 with L C Clarkson at Didsbury in 1935.)

Austin Tyldesley played for a time for Farnworth Social Circle before returning to his home club. One story about Frank and Austin: in the early 1930s the present writer, as a boy, was standing next to Frank in the urinal on the Roe Green Cricket Ground, then situated immediately behind the first pavilion (this was replaced a year or two later). As we attended to our business a towering hit flew over the pavilion roof and deposited itself in the small of Frank's back, at the same time depositing Frank on the ground. Hearing the cry of pain, a crowd soon gathered, including the offending batsman - Austin. One of those present turned to Austin and said, "Thar wants to be more careful. The's nearly kilt thi brother."

By the time JT was old enough to hold a bat, Roe Green Cricket Club had been founded. This, according to the Club's historian,[21] occurred around 1880, when the club occupied a field immediately behind JT's birthplace (now the Blandford Avenue/Wesley Drive complex of houses and bungalows). A few years later the pavilion was blown half way towards the site of the present ground 'over the bridge' at Beesley during a gale, and this incident is said to have provided the impetus for the move. There the club has remained for the last century, apart from a brief spell during the First World War, when the Beesley ground was put under potatoes and the cricketers returned to their original home on what by that time was known as 'Neild's Field'. Village residents over seventy can remember a square cordoned off around what is

now the intersection of Blandford and Crawford Avenues. The field belonged to the farm occupied by David Neild, who lived in the now much enlarged and modernized residence of one of the village's later celebrities, Fred Eyre.

It was for the Roe Green Cricket Club, on these grounds, that the Tyldesley brothers played their first competitive cricket. It may well be that both JT and Ernest, on their progress to the cricket fields of the world, passed a brief moment at the older and more up-market Worsley Club at the top of Lumber Lane (successive presidents from 1846 to 1923 the various Earls of Ellesmere, for whom there was a special box on the ground). But Roe Green is right to claim them for its own. Their mighty talents were nurtured in Starkie Street, on the 'Dirt Pitch' of blessed memory, and through 'Neild's Field' and the field at Beesley, before the wider world took them from the village.

For thirty-two of the thirty-six years up to 1934, one or both of the Tyldesley brothers, JT and Ernest, appeared in the top twenty of the first-class averages, and for fifteen of these years in the top ten. JT was actually top of the averages in 1910, while Ernest finished second in 1928 and 1932. Perhaps Ernest's most remarkable achievement was in 1934 when, at the age of 45, he scored 2,487 runs at an average of 58 runs per innings, including a 239 and seven other centuries. That year he finished fifth in the averages, behind three Australians - Don Bradman, Bill Ponsford and Stan McCabe - and one Englishman, Wally Hammond (and there's a roll call of the cricketing great!).

In all, Ernest scored over 40,000 runs in first-class cricket at an average of over 45 runs per innings. With a hundred and two 100s to his credit he is - even today, fifty-seven years after he played his last first-class innings - one of only twenty-three players to score a century of centuries. JT, playing in a slightly earlier era when wickets weren't so good, scored over 39,000 runs, at an average of over 40 runs per innings, with 86 centuries.

Despite being described as a 'run machine', Ernest only appeared in fourteen Tests. That his average in these Tests was over 52 per innings speaks volumes for the quality of English batsmanship during the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, only Jack Hobbs and Wally Hammond of that era finished with higher Tests averages. JT played in thirty-one Tests, finishing with an average of 31 per innings. And if this average seems markedly inferior to his younger brother's, it must be remembered it was achieved at a time when conditions were less favourable to the batsman. After all, it was John Tommy who was described by a leading cricket writer as "perhaps the most skilful, the most audaciously inventive batsman of his time" and "perhaps the best batsman of all time on a bad wicket".[22]

But the statistics and the fame and the glory were not the whole story. Both JT and Ernest, widely acclaimed as they were, remained modest, self-effacing, kindly men throughout their lives, never far from their Starkie Street roots. If

one can except JT's predilection for tripping the light fantastic on the floor of local ballrooms, and Ernest's dexterity with the table tennis bat in the upper room

of the old Sunday School, there were none of the high jinks so often associated with their latter-day counterparts. Until his all too early death, at the age of 57, in 1930, JT lived within walking distance of the village of his birth at Monton, where his daughter Kathleen still lives. Ernest lived throughout his playing career in Roe Green, for many years at 'Woodend' on the corner of Greenleach Lane and Alfred Avenue. In his later years he moved first to Southport and then to Rhos-on-Sea, where he died at the age of 73 in 1962

Not that JT and Ernest were without their 'groupies'. 'A Memoir of May Hilton Timpson' - a Worsley girl from the early days of the century, later married to a Harley Street doctor - contains the following charming passage written by her husband:

"During our childhood May and I were unconsciously being drawn together by a common admiration for J.T. Tyldesley. I worshipped 'J.T. 'from afar. To May he was a familiar figure, known as 'John Tommy'. Her father often took her to watch J.T. and Ernest Tyldesley playing on Roe Green. Before 1914, J.T. Tyldesley was Lancashire's greatest batsman; after 1919, Ernest Tyldesley became so; he had played for his home club, Roe Green, and for Worsley, before joining the Lancashire 2nd XI. Both brothers were men of the highest integrity, great in character as in cricket. It is significant that May so early came in contact with men of such high ideals. They left a lasting impression upon her. In its higher sense, May was one who throughout her life 'always played cricket'. "[23]

Well, that tells us something about May and a lot about JT and Ernest. It also tells us that being a 'groupie' was a much more decorous pastime in those far-off days.

Of JT, the same Neville Cardus who penned the eulogies quoted above[22], wrote: "The man is by nature as discreet and modest as few geniuses ever are, and that modesty and discretion, as one tried to show, came out even in his most flashing play. Once, in the days when cricketers were asked by a London newspaper to write reports," (days, incidentally, when there were Gentlemen and Players, the former being identified by their initials and the title 'Mr' and the latter merely by their surnames) "Tyldesley was the historian of the Lancashire XI. And he wrote his accounts very much in this style: 'Yesterday we had the good luck to get Worcestershire out cheaply, thanks to some good bowling by Mr. Brearley and Dean. When we went in the wicket was faster, and Mr. McLaren and Mr. Spooner, batting finely, gave us a good start. Sharp did well too, and Mr. Poidevin had the misfortune to play on after a promising beginning. I also managed to get a few.'

And turning to the scores you would read:

<i>A.C.McLaren b Wilson</i> _____	41
<i>R.H.Spooner c Arnold b Wilson</i> _____	31
<i>Tyldesley not out</i> _____	200
<i>L.O.S.Poidevin b Arnold</i> _____	16
<i>Sharp b Burrows</i> _____	20
<i>Extras</i> _____	10
<i>Total(for 4 wickets)</i> _____	318

*“The real Tyldesley peeped out in his cricket writings - and he never played innings that was untrue to his nature”[22]*

A person less charitably disposed than Neville Cardus, and less under JT’s cricketing spell, might - apart from observing that JT had learned his lessons well under Mr Baldwin at Worsley School - have noted that he was a true Roe Greener in so far as he knew on which side his bread was buttered.

On June 25th, 1904, “in the presence of a great concourse of people”,[5] the ceremony of laying foundation stones for the new Independent Methodist Sunday School took place. Ten stones were laid, amongst which was one bearing the name of J T Tyldesley, an old scholar and teacher. The author of the ‘Centenary Memorials’ noted that Mr Tyldesley was engaged at the Oval that day, so his place was taken by his wife. As it happens, JT was in the process of scoring 121 against Surrey that weekend, so no doubt his absence was forgiven. His name remained in a prominent position at the entrance to the Sunday School until its demolition in 1976 to make way for the Egerton Flats.

In 1906 JT received a benefit from the County totalling £3,111.18s.3d; an amount which was to remain a record until the £14,000 handed to Cyril Washbrook over forty years later in 1948. JT invested the money - or part of it - in the erection of ten houses. These were built by his brother Frank, who had a builder’s yard in Starkie Street (the house of Mr and Mrs Collier and the adjoining bungalow now stand on the site) and was responsible for the erection of some of the best-built houses in the Roe Green area.

Two of these houses were on the north side of Lumber Lane and the remainder adjacent in the newly-created Hardy Grove. (This was so called after one Charles Hardy, who married into the Ellesmere family and lived at Wardley Hall for a time.)[24] The first of the two on Lumber Lane housed the Tyldesley family on its removal from the shop in the village, and was named ‘Aigburth’ to commemorate Ernest’s County debut on that ground in 1909. And ‘Aigburth’ it remains to this day. By a nice coincidence, the house stands

immediately opposite 'Littlewood', another of Roe Green's historic landmarks.

Ernest survived his brother JT by more than thirty years and there are at least three or four around the village today who can remember him as a kindly, humorous Sunday School teacher in the late 1920s and early 1930s. At this period Ernest was twice second in the English averages and recording a quartet of double centuries amid many single ones. The same few people can also remember him slogging away (something he never did at the crease) during the dark winter nights to get them in shape for the presentation of a play - 'The Black Schoolmaster' - which was to be the pièce de resistance at the much looked forward to Christmas Tea Party and Concert.

Ernest was an unsparing worker for the Independent Methodist Church and Sunday School, being chairman of the annual two-day bazaar, to which he attracted top-class entertainers like Norman Evans (of 'Over the Garden Wall' fame) and a leading magician of the day, Graham Adams. He was also responsible for the appearance on the Sunday School stage, before packed audiences, of Neville Cardus, the famous Manchester Guardian cricket and music correspondent, and George Duckworth, the legendary Lancashire wicket keeper.

Before his retirement from first-class cricket in 1936, Ernest had captained Lancashire in all but name for several seasons. Denied the official title by the archaic amateur tradition, he returned to Roe Green to captain the village club for the next few seasons. And if he

scored no double centuries during this period, he was remembered by one youthful member of the team during his incumbency for one thing. Gazing at his rags-and-tatters mob before leading them down the pavilion steps one Saturday, he said, "If you can't play like a cricket team, you can at least look like one." Thereafter, Roe Green teams turned out in washed and

creased flannels, looking - if not playing - like a team worthy of their captain.

Later, Ernest became the first former professional to serve on the County Committee, was one of the first ex-pros to be elected a life member of the MCC and, fittingly, when Cyril Washbrook became Lancashire's first professional captain in 1954, Ernest was his Match Committee chairman. Ernest lived and played and died, loved and admired and respected by all who came in contact with him. As G A Hodcroft said in his book, 'My Own Red Roses', "It was all so long ago, but the enchantment lingers yet." [25]

## **The Tyldesley Tradition**

JT was a partner in the leading Manchester firm of sports outfitters, Tyldesley and Holbrook of Deansgate. There is still a sports shop in the same premises

and, despite at least two changes of title since the last war, the name 'Tyldesley' has been retained.

JT was also one of the first owners of a motor car on Roe Green. Douglas Derbyshire, an old Roe-Greener now resident in Walkden, recalls having his first ride in a motor car, along with some pals, in this vehicle around 1914. It was a brown car, Douglas recalls, though he can't quite remember the make - probably a Bean or a Clyno. They went round the Green and Douglas's chief recollection of what must have been a great event in these lads' lives was JT's constant admonishment "not to kick the panels".

Ernest had a winter job travelling for the Cryselco Light Bulb Company. It is said - and who can doubt it? - that one of his first orders was for the Blackpool Illuminations. He too was an early possessor of a motor car and one of his first models was a Morris with indicators, high up on each side of the windscreen, in the form of present-day traffic lights. It was in this car that, as a young boy, I travelled to my first ever County match. Driving through the main gate of Old Trafford to the respectful salute of the gate-man is still a happy memory.

Not so happy was the fact that Lancashire lost the toss and their opponents, Nottinghamshire, occupied the crease all day, thus depriving me of seeing Ernest in batting action. But youth is fickle, and I did acquire another hero that day in the person of W W Whysall, a leading Nottinghamshire batsman of the time, who amassed a large score before my eyes. Thereafter I followed his career with interest, until a year or two later I read of his death from blood poisoning brought on by a protruding nail in a dance floor on which he was performing.

And one other... Since the great days of the Tyldesleys, no Roe Greener achieved County status - although one or two have knocked at the door - until the late 1980s, when Andrew Hayhurst made the Lancashire First Eleven.

In his young days, Andy lived with his family in Alfred Avenue, not many yards from Ernest's long-time home, and was a regular attender at the Independent Methodist Sunday School, where his mother was a teacher. At this time he played a lot of fun cricket

with the lads on the Green. It was also during this period that he wrote an essay for the annual Arts and Crafts Exhibition of the Manchester Circuit of Independent Methodist Churches (of which I was a judge), ostensibly about a holiday the family had taken. But what took the judge's eye was the amount of cricket the dad and lad had played during their progress round the country; so much so that I wondered whether poor Mrs Hayhurst had spent the entire holiday chasing cricket balls round the fields of England. This apart, the essay won first prize on merit.

Nurtured by his father, Bill Hayhurst, headmaster of Mesne Lea School, and by Geoff Ogden - 'Mr Cricket himself' - Andy, after going through the Carnegie College of Physical Education at Leeds, progressed via the Worsley club to the Lancashire seconds and thence to the County team proper. Unfortunately Lancashire tended to use him as an all-rounder, and this combined with the abundance of young talent emerging in the county during the late 1980s meant that his position was never very secure. Nor did he really justify himself and consequently at the end of the 1988/89 season he was released and snapped up by Somerset, where in 1993 he is a capped player and an established opening bat.

And so tradition is handed down. It is impossible to talk of cricket in the area without reference to Geoff Ogden, Andy Hayhurst's mentor, just as it is impossible to talk of politics without mentioning Geoff's wife Pauline and her forebears. But Pauline's grand-father on her father's side was Wilf Jackson, already noted as a contemporary of the Tyldesleys and no mean sportsman himself, and it is fitting that she and Geoff now live in Wilf's former cottage on the edge of the Green.

For Geoff occupies and has occupied so many positions in the cricketing world that to list them all would require a volume in itself. Suffice it to say that after many years as a playing member at Worsley, including several spells as captain, he is currently Chairman of Cricket at the Lancashire County Cricket Club and manager of the Lancashire under-sixteens.

Many of the bright and coming stars of the present Lancashire side have passed through Geoff's hands. It is no surprise to him that Michael Atherton appeared in the England side so early in his career, for he was predicting great things for this lad eight or nine years ago. Nor should we forget another Michael who briefly passed before Geoff's eyes ten years or so ago before he escaped the clutches of Geoff and, indeed, Lancashire. This is Michael Vaughan, who was born in Worsley and lived with his parents, Graham and Deirdre, in Lumber Lane until their departure for Yorkshire when Michael was eight. This year, 1993, Michael will be captaining the England under-eighteen side as well as appearing for one or other of the Yorkshire sides, who changed their rules just in time to accommodate lads from across the border. Geoff predicts a great future for Michael, speaking of him in the same breath as Hutton. Mind you, Michael has a fine pedigree. His great-grandmother was a sister of JT and Ernest Tyldesley and his maternal grandmother was Mildred Greenhalgh, County hockey player - both of them Roe Greeners to the core.

## **The Twentieth Century**

By the turn of the century Roe Green was twice the size it had been only thirty years earlier in terms of housing and population. Since the coming of the

railway there had been more white-collar workers who took the train to Manchester, and the village was already changing.

But the railway did not just reach out to Manchester, Wigan and beyond, it also came into Worsley, bringing with it visitors from the newly industrialized settlements in the surrounding area. Individuals came, perhaps to see green fields and woodlands for the first time in their lives. Parties came from the Sunday Schools of Salford, Eccles and similar places, with most of the children certainly enjoying a new experience. Many of these schools came year after year, making the trip to Roe Green their annual outing, and one at least was still coming after the Second World War.

Some of the Sunday Schools coming to Roe Green had 'Tea Parties' in the Independent Methodist Sunday School, whilst others supplemented the children's 'bummies' with tea brewed in the large cellar kitchen of that school. As the visitors came, various establishments sprouted to cater for them and individual sightseers in particular took advantage of these.

One such establishment was at No.26 Roe Green, the home of Mrs Powell, who advertised in the Independent Methodist Monthly Record (the organ of the Manchester Circuit of Independent Methodist Churches) in June 1904. The house stands at the entrance to Mulgrave Road, and has been occupied by the same family for over a century.

In Roe Green all things harmonize. Eric's Auntie Rachel, a Powell by birth, was the wife of Henry Tyldesley, a one-time fast bowler for the Roe Green Cricket Club and a sometime President of the Independent Methodist Church. Eric recalls his aunt escorting parties from Worsley Station to Roe Green, and particularly to No.26, where they would be treated, among other delights, to a plethora of boiled eggs. But never on Sunday.

Serving the Established Church's Sunday Schools, though not only these, was Neild's Farm, now the home of Fred Eyre and family. Mona, the youngest of the Neild family - still living in Walkden and still a regular attender at the bridge/whist sessions held in the Beesley Community Centre - recalls the 'Scholars' Days' held on the sliver of a field (usually reserved for goats) which is now covered by the Wesley Drive old people's complex. Long tables would be set up in the field for the scholars and drinks would be served from the adjacent farm, including the delicious buttermilk for which Neilds were rightly famous. Games would be played in the field and a good time had by all.

Neild's Farm also provided a bed and breakfast service long before this became a common feature of the English roadside. Mona recalls the occasion when a young couple took advantage of this facility, enjoying - apart from the gargantuan breakfast - the undisturbed use of the large double bed in the guest room. Only later, probably after the bill was paid, was it discovered that the

couple were not, in the jargon of the time, 'properly wed'. Thereafter Mrs Neild could not view that large and undoubtedly comfortable double bed without a feeling of horror. It would seem the sinned against had become the sinner. Oh, those were the days!

## **Half-Time At The Methodists**

Although a changing village, Roe Green was still very much influenced by the Independent Methodist Chapel. Indeed, the first decade of the new century was to witness the high point of the Chapel's fortunes, and record membership in both Church and Sunday School. With their Centenary coming up, they were now roughly at the half-way stage of their career to date.

Already the Sunday School had felt the benefit of the post-railway building boom, and by 1895, with two hundred and seventy-three scholars, had overtaken those early glorious years in Lumber Lane. Within another decade there would be around three hundred scholars and forty teachers, figures which would remain at this level for some years to come. Little wonder that the old school, erected in 1859 and already the subject of several enlargements, was becoming too small again. And so, as recorded in the 'Centenary Memorials', "with characteristic courage a new, commodious and up-to-date Sunday School...was decided upon". No sooner said than done; within a year or two the foundation stones had been laid and on 26th November 1904 the new Sunday School was opened.

For over seventy years, this magnificent building, erected within five months by J Gerrard & Sons of Swinton, a firm not unconnected with Roe Green, at a cost of £261 9.15s.6d, served the Church, Sunday School and village. Among the many activities of the Church and Sunday School were the Band of Hope (a temperance society which organised many meetings and concerts), a Ladies' Hockey Club and a Literary Society which during the 1920s and 1930s attracted large audiences to its celebrity lectures. The building was also the venue for political gatherings at a time when public meetings were the main means of communication at election times. In addition, and particularly in its later years, it was the home of the Roe Green Players, a highly successful dramatic society which put on shows regularly during the 1940s and 1950s; the headquarters and changing rooms of the Roe Green Football Club in the same period; and the home of the Roe Green Over-Sixties Club during its great years in the 1960s.

When the school was demolished in 1976, the cause was not so much the emergence of the Community Centre at Beesley as the relentless onslaught of dry rot and escalating fuel bills, following the increase in the cost of oil during the early seventies.

Meanwhile, the Church was not far behind the Sunday School in its advancement. A membership of 49 in 1895 - a considerably lower figure than that of forty or fifty years previously - had risen to 62 by 1900, and after a series of Revivalist Meetings in 1902 another 40 or so were added to the register, resulting in an average membership of over 100 during the next decade.

It was at this time - 1900 to be exact - that Arthur Yorke and John Tyldesley became ministers (unpaid) attached to the Church, to be joined a year or two later by Wilfred and Arthur Howell. Thus, by the end of the decade, the Independent Methodists at Roe Green had reached the zenith of their fortunes, with 100 or so adult Church members, 300 Sunday School scholars and four ministers recognised by the Manchester Circuit of Churches. In 1907, one year before the centenary of that first open-air sermon from the Stone, William Farnworth assumed the Presidency of the Church (the highest position in an Independent Methodist Church); an office he was not to relinquish until his death thirty-six years later in 1943. John Tyldesley was to remain a minister even longer, having been on the Preachers' Plan for sixty-one years when he died, aged 86, in 1961.

## **The Co-op Is Fifty Years Old**

Coinciding with the Centenary of the Independent Methodists in 1908 was the Golden Jubilee of the village Co-op. From the thirty or so pioneers of fifty years before, there was now a membership of 176, representing around 800 men, women and children if families are taken into account. The capital was £7,005. Small in terms of today's inflationary figures, and relatively small in relation to neighbouring Societies such as Walkden or Eccles; but, as the historian of the Society points out, large enough to show Roe Green as the most overwhelmingly Co-operative place of them all.[18]

In 1900 the Co-op started a savings bank for its members' children in one of the upstairs rooms above the shop; by 1908 this had 260 depositors with £1,018 standing to their credit. It was still in existence in 1936, as one old resident, who bought his first motorbike with the £20 thus saved, well remembers.

As with the Independent Methodists, the first decade of the twentieth century was probably the high-water mark of the Co-op's success story. Within two decades of this glorious Golden Jubilee - souvenirs of which, in the form of suitably decorated cups and plates, can still be found in some Roe Green homes - Roe Green Co-op was near to its demise. An indication of the declining interest can be found in a story told to the old Roe Greener, Douglas Derbyshire, by Sam McKelvey, OBE, a Roe Greener himself and a member of the Co-op Committee.

Apparently, to counter the poor attendances at Annual General Meetings and the paucity of nominations for the committee, the existing management thought up the brilliant idea of sending out individual notices of the AGM, together with an implicit promise to double committee attendance fees for any who offered themselves and were elected to serve. The ploy was brilliantly successful, in that the room above Harrison Salmon Associates was filled to overflowing on the night of the meeting; but support quickly waned when the fair-weather friends, interested only in riches beyond the dreams of avarice, discovered that the doubling of the attendance fee predicated an increase from all of 6d to 1s per meeting. Even in those hard-pressed times, it seems, this munificence was not sufficient to revitalise the slumbering Co-op.

But that was in the future. In the meantime, the Co-op was at the pinnacle of its success and serving the community well, particularly the poorer families of the village. Twenty years later, according to my mother, the two-and-sixpence in the pound 'divi' was clothing my two sisters and myself. Yes, the Co-op had its place, in its time, and we should not forget.

## **The Great War**

By the outbreak of the First World War there were around two hundred houses and over a thousand inhabitants in the village. Of the males, 41% were now tradesmen of various descriptions and 30% white collar workers, whilst only 15% were employed in the pits. Mill work was still the main occupation of those women who were wage earners, although by this time some were shop assistants and even office workers. 'Service' in the larger houses down Greenleach Lane towards the station also accounted for a number of women workers.

As with every other community in the country, the First World War had a great impact on the village. From the Independent Methodist Church alone, where the records are still extant, no fewer than 56 young men went to serve their country; nine were not to return. And, whilst these would represent the bulk going from the village, there were many more from the Church of England and unattached. So far as can be judged from existing records, Herbert Lyon was the first lad from the village to be killed, on 25th September 1915, and the last was his cousin, Wilfred Lyon, on 4th November 1918 - just one week before the war ended.

Herbert Lyon - the first to be killed and my uncle - might be taken as an example of that generation who marched away to the abyss in Flanders. From all accounts he was bright, intelligent and conscientious, as can be seen from samples of prizes he won in his early days. Starting work as an order boy with the Roe Green Co-op. he seems to have worked hard and read widely to equip himself, if not for bigger things, at least to become a responsible citizen of the world in which he lived. But he was destined not to live long in that world;

within ten years of receiving those schoolboy prizes it was all over for him and he was lying, along with thousands of others, in a cemetery near Loos in France.

Although only twenty-one when he died, he left behind a library of books -all neatly inscribed with his name -ranging from accountancy to philosophy, politics to religion; all suggestive of a lively and enquiring mind. One can only wonder what he, and the millions like him, would have made of the world they were destined never to see. The library of books still remains, long since handed down to me, and has played its part in shaping the minds of at least three generations since Herbert's untimely death nearly eighty years ago. Thus life goes on, and an unknown uncle, dead before any of us were born, may have had a greater influence than he ever dreamed possible.

Another casualty of the war, this time from the Church of England section of the Green, was Arthur Blackshaw, who was killed 'somewhere in France' on 27th July 1918. A policeman in civilian life, Arthur was thirty-one years of age when he was killed, and left behind a widow and a two-year-old son. Harry, the son who was never to know his father, still lives in Roe Green, during the past few years in Fairyfall cottages. One of the select band with over fifty years of service, he has been a well-known character in the village throughout his life, particularly in sporting circles. Apart from representing Worsley St Mark's, he was a regular member of various Roe Green football teams, for a brief time a powerful forward with the old Walkden Rugby League Club, a sometime member and official of the Ellesmere Social Club and in his later years an enthusiastic, albeit inaccurate, member of the Roe Green Bowling Club.

Harry's mother, Annie, lived all of her eighty-seven years within a hundred years of her birthplace in the family cottage still occupied by her younger brother Tom (Veal) - at the time of writing aged eighty-eight and the oldest living male Roe Greener. Annie - variously known as Veal, Blackshaw and, from 1928 until her death in 1977, Welsby - was a lady of great courage and not a little talent. Foremost among her various talents, so far as I was concerned, was her ability to make the most delicious cream horns and cream crisps in Christendom.

Sixty-five and more years ago a tray of these delicacies would be passed on Friday afternoons over the back fence dividing Nos.20 and 18 Lyon Street (Grove) - the respective homes of the Blackshaws and the Tyldesleys - much to the delight of we kids at No.18. Thirty years later the same ritual was still being performed in somewhat different circumstances. In the years after the Second World War, Annie -now Mrs Welsby - would go to the Friday night whist drive held at the Walkden Conservative Club (having gone to several others elsewhere in the district earlier in the week).

On these Friday nights she would return by the 10.00pm bus from Walkden, which was always the chocolate-coloured Bolton Corporation bus and always, it seemed, carried as conductress a lady known to one and all as Mary, a well-liked and familiar figure for many years. On crossing Beesley Bridge the bus would come to rest outside the first two houses (replaced in the late 1980s by a rather splendid detached dwelling), some fifty yards from the nearest official stop. Mrs Welsby and Mary would disappear into the second of these houses, regardless of the waiting passengers, for Mary to emerge a little later with a basket full of the much-loved cream cakes. One wonders how many other people, across the years, were beneficiaries of Annie's generosity and talent.

If whist was a passion with Annie, flower growing was a religion - as it was with most of her family. During the 1960s a flower show was held annually in the Independent Methodist Sunday School. Although of comparatively short duration - it became a victim of its own success - it was, for a few years, an extremely popular event in the village's life, attracting large numbers of entries and visitors. Chief among the entrants, year after year, was Annie Welsby - then in her seventies - who regularly won the lion's share of the prizes and the 'Best in Show' award. Another honour came Annie's way, though in less happy circumstances, when she represented all the war widows in the area at the unveiling of the Cenotaph at the entrance to Parr Fold park, Walkden.

Although so many of the young men played their part in the war, not a few as volunteers, the Independent Methodists of Roe Green were opposed to it in principle. As early as 1916 there was a minute in the Church records to the effect that a letter should be sent to the Prime Minister "expressing a wish that negotiations might be opened with a view to bringing a speedy peace". It is not recorded what the Prime Minister replied, if he replied; but nearly three more years of unrelieved bloodshed, during which eight scholars from the Sunday School and others from the village died, were to ensue before peace was at last declared.

It was also in 1916, after the passing of the Conscription Act, that a controversy arose over the status of the unpaid ministers of the Independent Methodist churches. After some correspondence it was agreed by the War Office that the term "regular minister of any religious denomination" in the Military Services Act (Par.4, Schedule 1) includes the ministers of the Independent Methodist Churches, "and they are, therefore, excepted from the operation of the Act". Despite this, local tribunals continued to refuse exemption, until an agreement was reached with the War Office that a test case should be arranged. Accordingly, Arthur Howell, a Roe Greener who had been made a minister at the Roe Green Church in 1907 and was now attached to Moorside, was summoned before the county magistrates at Strangeways on 4th June 1917. After statements by the secretary of the Independent Methodist

Connexion and Arthur Howell, the magistrates stopped the trial, the chairman saying that “the bench had come to the conclusion that Howell was a regular minister of a religious denomination coming within the exception provided by the Military Service Act.” The result of the decision was that all Independent Methodist Ministers of military age who applied were thereafter exempted.

Another feature of the 1916-17 period was the accommodation of a number of refugees from war-torn Belgium. A Register of Aliens handed to me by the late Agnes Yorke of ‘Brooklyn’, on the corner of Lumber Lane and Hardy Grove, reveals that twenty Belgians were billeted there and in adjacent houses during these years. Not without some lasting effect, for Agnes often recounted the story of how one of these foreign gentlemen (billeted at my present home in Hardy Grove) took off with the lady of the house. Where they went, and what happened to them, remains a mystery.

Despite the horrors, life had to go on... Shortly after the outbreak of war a committee of ladies was formed to “make garments to relieve distress”. This was based at the Independent Methodist Sunday School, the organizers being Mrs Perry and Miss Skemp. It continued throughout the war, along with the more regular manifestations of Church and Sunday School activity, like Christmas parties (of which records still exist), the Young Worshippers’ League and the Young People’s Evening Service.

The Young People’s Evening Service, which at its peak attracted up to sixty young people into the Social Room of the Methodist Sunday School, was the brainchild of Mr and Mrs Appleton, a couple who had come to live in Broadoak Road in the early days of the century, immediately attaching themselves to the Methodist cause at Roe Green with great enthusiasm. Mr Appleton, a Manchester businessman, is well remembered making his way down Greenleach Lane towards Worsley Station resplendent in frock coat and shiny top hat; whilst the tiny figure of his wife, Eliza, bent on good works, was familiar around the village until her death in 1959 at the age of eighty-eight. And even at that great age she was still the Overseas Mission Secretary, faithfully going round from door to door - usually, it seemed, in the depth of winter - collecting donations for those beloved missionaries (or their successors) she had told us so much about in her Young People’s Evening Services. By a nice coincidence, the house in Broadoak Road she occupied for around sixty years, ‘Roseneath’ on the corner of Beatrice Road, is now the residence (when at home) of David Robinson and his family. David (a minister attached to the Roe Green Church) and his wife, Jenny, are full-time Missioners in Thailand.

The Young People’s Evening Service survived the passing of Mr Appleton in the early 1930s and was taken over by Ernest Chapman, only to become a casualty of the Second World War. The Young Worshippers’ League outlived Mrs Appleton by ten years and more, ceasing to exist in the early 1970s when

the Sunday School moved from afternoon to morning. Remembered with affection by those still around who were members, both institutions were at their peak during the First World War, as were a Young Ladies Class of 100 plus led by Miss Skemp and Mrs Appleton, and a Young Men's Class of similar proportions presided over by Mr Appleton.

So far as the Independent Methodists of Roe Green were concerned the Great War officially ended on Saturday, 21st February 1920 - sixteen months after the Armistice - when the last of the returning soldiers were welcomed home at the final social gathering held for this purpose. In the words of the programme, the occasion provided "another opportunity of expressing gratitude to Almighty God, not only because victory has been given to our cause but also because peace has been established". And so it had; but how fragile that peace proved to be! James Jackson - the father of Annie Cresswell of Greenleach Lane, herself a loyal servant of the Independent Methodist Church - was the principal speaker at that Welcome Home gathering; he was still an active official of the Church when the next war broke out less than twenty years later.

## **The 1920s**

And so into the 1920s and a world with homes fit for heroes. The first evidence of such homes on Roe Green was the group of twenty council houses built in 1923 in what is known as Mulgrave Road, supplementing the four private houses of a slightly earlier vintage already there. With the exception of the old people's bungalows put up in Wesley Drive some fifty years later, these were to be

the only council houses ever built in Roe Green. Of the original tenants, Ethel Erdington still occupies (in 1993) the same house she and her parents came to seventy years ago.

Apart from these, and fourteen houses which appeared on the north side of Lumber Lane in 1924, there was little further building during the first part of the 1920s. This was still a village nestling round the Green, with fields extending behind the Chapel; in front of and behind Lyon Grove; and in a large arc from the south, around Worsley Vicarage, northwards and eastwards along the lines of Walkden Road and Old Clough Lane to the newly-built Birch Road area of Walkden. Although still a relatively isolated and self-contained community of around 250 houses, Roe Green was, nevertheless, changing its nature with the changing times. The seventeen colliers still living in the village now represented only around 10% of the working population. The remainder was almost equally divided between tradesmen and clerical and professional workers, with a small balance engaged in various service industries. In addition to the four farmers and one policeman from decades before, there were now four schoolteachers, two music teachers, a mill director, a mill manager, a woollen manufacturer and an architect - not to

speak of one professional cricketer (but, of course, until recently there had been two of these).

## **Sport On The Green**

In the early 1920s, a set of drunken goal-posts at the Tyldesley Fold end of the Green, just in front of the present children's playground, signified that football had been played there in the years before the Great War. Although no written records of an organized club survive, one obviously existed, as can be seen from a photograph of the team attached to the Independent Methodists. This was taken in front of the first Methodist Sunday School, which was demolished in 1904, and presumably this team played on the Green itself in the days when the goal-posts were in better repair. So matches played on the old cricket field in front of Lyon Street/Grove, as remembered over the years by older residents, must have been prior to 1904 and probably in the nineteenth century.

Certainly there was no lack of footballing talent in Roe Green at that time. Jesse Tyldesley, the eldest of the cricketing family, was on Bury's books in 1903, at the time they beat Derby County in the FA Cup Final by the still record score of 6-0. A little later, Arthur Tyldesley, from another branch of the same clan, was with Manchester United before ill health took him to Wales; later he played hockey for Wales and Minor Counties cricket for Denbighshire, whilst his brother Albert - killed in an accident at work whilst still a young man - was playing semi-professional in the Lancashire Combination. Frank Davies - pictured in the Methodist team, although himself a member of the Church of England and later prominent in the affairs of the village - also played semi-professional in the Manchester League. And Wilf Jackson, mentioned previously for his cricketing prowess, was much sought after as a goal keeper by the professional clubs, including Manchester United.

Judging by the abounding talent, football must have played a prominent part in village life during the decade or so before the First World War. But it took the village some time to recover from those years of slaughter, and it was not until 1929 that Roe Green could once again boast of an organized football club. In the meantime, another sport was to occupy the village green.

It was in the mid-1920s that a Ladies' Hockey Club was formed in the village. This was started by the Independent Methodist Church for the girls of the Sunday School, and initially facilities were provided by the Church. At this time the club played on the Green, but after a year or two it spread its wings, became an open club and moved to the cricket field, where it continued to play until the late 1930s. Its captain and star player for many years was Mildred Howell (Greenhalgh), who was to represent the County at this sport. (The same Mildred Greenhalgh was to be an organist at the Independent Methodist Church for over fifty years during the period from the 1920s to the 1970s, as

well as figuring prominently in the musical life of the surrounding district.) Another prominent member of this team was Edith Smith (Ashurst), who still lives in Fairyfall Cottages.

Later a men's hockey team was to occupy the hockey pitch on the cricket field, although this was run by 'outsiders' and was in no way a Roe Green venture. And by the time the Ladies' Hockey Club left the Green a new Football Club was in the wings, waiting to take over.

## **The Great Roe Green Train Disaster**

During these mid 1920s Roe Green also experienced its great train disaster. And whilst there are still a few around who well remember the fruits of this disaster, there are not many who can recall its precise circumstances. According to a contemporary newspaper report, it occurred on 11th February 1926, when several wagons and a brakevan broke loose from an engine at Little Hulton junction, thence proceeding at a fair and gathering lick down the gradient through Walkden Low Level into the vicinity of Roe Green. Here, in accordance with the emergency plan hastily put into operation, they were diverted on to the up line and into the small siding adjacent to the north side of Beesley Bridge. They smacked into the bridge with a resounding thud, breaking up in the process and depositing their contents far and wide, before bursting into flames. The contents of one wagon being boxes of Daddies Sauce, and of the other, crates of Wellington boots, it is no surprise that sales of the more popular HP Sauce diminished in the local shops for some time to come, and that Wellingtons became an item of fashion amongst not a few Roe Greeners for a season or two. The bridge itself received a mighty hammering and bore the scars of the encounter for many years. In fact, it was never really safe until its renovation in the 1980s.

## **The General Strike And Its Aftermath**

1926 was the year of the General Strike and the subsequent nine-month-long miners' stoppage. Whilst this did not have as great an impact on the village as it would have had twenty or thirty years earlier, there being far fewer mine workers, it did have an effect on some families, including my own. The recollection of digging for coal on the giant Sandhole slag-heap across the fields and golf course from Lyon Street is still vivid. And the strict injunction not to partake of the free soup being dispensed at Worsley School to the children of the miners needs no joggng of the memory. That was how it was.

How my mother contrived to feed and clothe a husband and three children without strike pay, dole or social security of any kind beggars belief. True, washing was taken in, and papers taken out for Mrs Bradshaw, who then operated a newspaper delivery business from her house next to what is now

Nigel and Sue's. And a 3s6d voucher out of the Daily Herald was expendable at the Co-op. (But not Roe Green Co-op. To benefit from this one had to walk to the nearest branch of Walkden Co-op. at Edge Fold.) Looking back, all this scarcely amounted to a row of beans, and hardly explains why we never went hungry or ill-clothed.

As that summer progressed toward winter, my father, through the good offices of relatives or friends, secured a job in Manchester with J Gerrard & Sons, the builders of Swinton - a firm which, through the Richardsons and several other people in the village, had strong Roe Green connections. Although the only time I saw him at work in Manchester he was half way up a ladder carrying a hod of bricks, I nevertheless felt I could at last hold my head up with my more affluent pals 'down the Green', whose fathers also worked in Town'. I was very proud of this and of the fact that he was helping to build the massive Midland Bank in Spring Gardens, and I could never understand why, all of a sudden, one Monday morning, instead of setting off for Worsley Station he resumed the all too familiar walk up Wardley Lane to the pit.

A direct result of the miners' strike was the first purpose-built newsagent's shop in the village, and consequently a material change in my own family's fortunes. Because my mother had, out of necessity, taken on the role of paperwoman during the Strike, the round was offered to her when Mrs Bradshaw, the owner, decided to retire in 1927. On hearing of this, a rich uncle, ever mindful of a business opportunity, offered to finance the creation of a newsagent's shop. This was to be in the house on the corner of Starkie Street then occupied by Sam McKelvey - who moved a few doors down the row - and sixty years later it is still the village newsagent's. (In 1993 the present owners, Mr and Mrs Postles, had it refurbished on the outside to make it a very attractive-looking establishment, a credit to both them and the village.)

There had been previous newsagents' shops - Haslam's, in the cottage near the Chapel now occupied by Mrs Peter Smethurst, and 'Polly Mull's' next to the old wool shop - but these were 'front room' shops and not purpose-built. Other 'house' or 'front room' shops in the 1920s and 1930s were Mrs Farnworth's, a second-hand furniture shop in the cottage next to the Chapel (adjoining Powell's eating establishment of twenty years before), and a sweets and cigarette shop in the cottage opposite the Post Office, now the home of Olive and Walter Heaton and then occupied by Olive's mother.

## **Further Expansion**

By 1928 Roe Green was once more beginning to expand outwards. The fields which ran in a more or less unbroken line from the south side of Lumber Lane, across Greenleach Lane and over the hill towards the vicarage, the Church and Worsley School, were now being covered with houses. Within a decade so many of our fields of yesterday through which we had walked, played and

even 'hay-maked' would be similarly covered. 'Semis' and - if you were one or two steps up the ladder - 'detached's', were proliferating rapidly.

In some quarters this expansion had apparently long been foreseen, for the opening of the extension to the Church of England Sunday School on Beesley Green (as it was now known) was imminent. The Sunday School, the oldest in the village, dating back to 1785, had latterly been housed in the comparatively small Infants' School built in 1892. But now, in those optimistic twenties, the need was felt for something bigger and for a place where the Church of England flock on Roe Green could meet socially.

An intimation of this had been given as early as 1921, when a report in the Worsley Parish Magazine for August of that year stated: "Roe Green Sunday School Anniversary was held on July 10th. A special service was held in the school and a sermon preached by the Rev.G.Knowlson in the afternoon. There was a good congregation, though not so crowded as in former years. A collection on behalf of the Roe Green Sunday School Fund amounted to over £5."

Seven years later, on 1st December 1928, the building, which is now the main room of the Community Centre, was declared open for use by Mr W W Jackson (Wilf Jackson of cricket and football fame). The secretary of the school was Harold Chapman; he and his brother Basil, sons of the long-serving manager of the Co-op, John Chapman, were stalwarts of the Church of England connection on the Green. The treasurer was Arthur Arden, a well-known playing member of the Roe Green Cricket Club. A bazaar on the same day was opened by Mrs Strachan Holme, the widow of Lord Ellesmere's archivist and a long-time occupant of Brook House on the other side of the Green.

## **A Little Football Talk**

On Wednesday afternoon, 6th March 1929, one of the two Higson brothers of the building firm of W Higson & Sons of Swinton was completing the roof of No.29 Greenleach Lane, which was part of the new development in that area. As I was delivering the Evening News to the newly built, but already occupied, No.28 opposite, this gentleman shouted, "Bolton's won 2-1!" A check in the reference books reveals that on that day Bolton Wanderers had indeed beaten Blackburn Rovers in a replayed sixth round FA Cup tie at Bolton. After winning this replay, the Wanderers then disposed of Huddersfield Town in the semi-final and Portsmouth in the final, to win the Cup for the third time in six years. (How times have changed!)

Just a word about that 1929 Cup Final. This was long before television, and indeed only in the early days of the radio, or 'wireless', as it was then called. If you were the fortunate possessor of such a wonderful machine in those days -

which very few on Roe Green were - the fact could not be disguised; a necessary adjunct was a tall mast at the bottom of the garden carrying an aerial to the house and thence to the receiver.

Having identified such a mast at the house of Sam McElvey, a few doors away from our newsagent's shop, I obtained, by one means or another, an invitation to go and listen to the broadcast of the Final. Now this was long before the present-day sophisticated running commentaries, and even before the Radio Times used to print a squared plan of the pitch, from which one plotted the to and fro of the game from the rather pedantic and deliberate instructions given by the commentator. In 1929 what one heard was a summary of the game played thus far every ten minutes, with Palm Court music and talks on gardening or even embroidery filling the intervals. It was hardly the ideal way to follow the fortunes of your favourite team, and only towards the end, with the Wanderers in a 2-0 lead and well in control, could the niceties of pruning rose trees be fully absorbed and appreciated.

1929 also saw the resumption of organized football on the Green after a lapse of fifteen years or more. At the instigation of Frank Wallwork, who lived next door to the present butcher's shop, a team comprising virtually all Roe Greeners was entered in the Eccles League. In its first game on the Green, against St Anne's, Clifton, it won 7-1, but the bright promise faded and by the end of the season it was struggling. From memory, Roe Greeners in that team included Albert Lombard (goal), Walter Tyldesley (full back), Norman Howell (centre half and captain), John Wallwork and John Rushton (half backs) and Roger Wallwork and Billy Rothwell (forwards).

This was not good enough for some members of the committee, who favoured the recruitment of 'foreigners' to strengthen the side. A split developed, resulting in the mass importation of foreigners and the departure of that section of the committee who believed that football on Roe Green should be for Roe Greeners. The result was an extremely talented side containing one or two ex-semi-professionals and a goalkeeper (Arthur Potter) destined for Bury, with one Roe Greener, Norman Howell, still centre half and Captain. During its comparatively brief existence it was a power in the Eccles League, attracting large crowds on to the Green and winning its share of trophies.

Meanwhile, another team had started, containing a younger generation of Roe Greeners, including, over the years, Bert Yates, Harry Blackshaw, Eric Powell, Geoff Sharples, Fred and Herbert Tesseyman, George Rushton and, later, Kenneth Berry, Alan and John Richardson and many others.

## **A Touch Of Politics**

It was also in the spring of 1929 that the second Labour Government "came quietly into office, as a natural election swing-over in two-party govern-men

t".[26] Not so quietly, if memory serves correctly, in Roe Green, whose traditional Liberal sympathies were now being threatened on the one side by the ancient enemy, the Conservatives, and on the other by the upstart Labourites. But more quietly, probably, than in the days of the other two-party system, when every little Worsley child was a Conservative and every little Roe Greener a Liberal and, if the words of an old resident many years ago can be believed, tarring and feathering was not an unusual manifestation of elections in the district.

In those pre-television days, when public meetings were the chief means of communication and electioneering, the Independent Methodist schoolroom was their natural home. This was particularly so for the Liberal cause, as many members of the leading families of that persuasion, like the Richardsons and Yorkes, were also adherents of the Chapel. But it was not so necessarily - or not always - for the Labour cause, and certainly not at this election. For one firebrand representative of the Labour party, the Reverend J Wilcockson from Farnworth, was denied the platform in the school and was provided with a chair by my father, from which, with his back to the newspaper shop, he addressed a large crowd in Starkie Street.

But Labour was to have the last laugh on that occasion, its candidate, Guy Rowson, being elected MP for the Farnworth constituency in which Roe Green was situated. He was defeated by Jimmy Stones, a Conservative, in 1931, but regained the seat in 1935. Mr Rowson died in November 1937 and in the election early the following year George Tomlinson, who was to become one of the most popular Ministers of Education this country had known, was returned as his successor. For fifty-five years since that time, the constituency containing Roe Green has remained Labour, with the much-loved George being followed by Ernest Thornton, John Roper and Terry Lewis. (In the interests of historical accuracy, however, it must be said that for a brief moment during the 1980s the constituency, now called 'Worsley', was represented by an SDP member, when the sitting Labour MP, John Roper, followed the Gang of Four into that short-lived party.)

In the high summer of 1929 children from Roe Green, on their way over the hill to Worsley School after dinner, were amazed to see the vast bulk of the R100 airship appear from somewhere in the Barton Moss area and fly low over their heads in the direction of Bolton. Travelling slowly, its vast silver envelope glistening in the sunlight, it was an unforgettable sight, made more impressive for some when the Manchester Evening News informed us that amongst the passengers was the Prime Minister of England, Ramsay MacDonald, on his way to Glasgow.

This was the high summer of both the R100 and Ramsay MacDonald and his Labour Government. Within two years, the R100 had been dismantled in the wake of the R101 disaster in France, and the Labour Government had been

dismantled to make way for a National one of all parties in the wake of the Wall Street Crash and the subsequent depression. The really hungry years were now with us; the years of the means test, the hunger marches and the distressed areas.

## **Into The 1930s And The Great Depression**

Whilst Roe Green was not the epicentre of distress, it did not remain untouched. To be unemployed in those days was to experience real and absolute hardship; with no redundancy payments, minimal 'dole' -reduced even further during the course of the recession - and the hated means test taking into account every last penny coming into or circulating within the home. In Roe Green this real and absolute poverty was epitomized by the walls of our newsagent's shop, where the 'Jobs' pages of the Manchester Evening News and Evening Chronicle were pinned up for free examination by those who could not afford even a penny for a newspaper.

Many people lost jobs and careers in the early thirties, never to regain them. Tom Hulse, after a lifetime in cotton, turned the front room of his house into a shop (now the butcher's) and sold ironmongery. Albert Lombard - the old Roe Green goalkeeper who lived in Lyon Street - replaced his Manchester office job with a wireless accumulator (battery) re-charging service, collecting and delivering in an old motor-bike and sidecar. Reg Jackson, also in cotton, became a temporary postman - a temporary position which continued for many years until the end of his working days. The 'Postman's Cottage' - a listed building - at the corner of Blandford Avenue is named after him.

But Reg was never the Roe Green postman. During the twenties and thirties this position was shared between Harold Nunn and an Irishman popularly known as Paddy. Both were well known characters and both knew every house, and every occupant of every house, in the village. (Harold in particular was well known for his ability, by whistling, to evoke a response from a feathered resident of the Brook House woods.) During their long reign there was never any question of mail going astray or being misdelivered in Roe Green.

And then there was Joe Qakes, a professional violinist who fell on hard times through a combination of the slump and the coming of the 'talkies'. To eke out a living he went from door to door cleaning drains, and later cutting hair, supplementing his income by playing his fiddle in such pubs in the vicinity as would have him, notably the Brown Cow at Winton. But even poverty did not prevent Joe giving his services freely to various amateur orchestras in the district. Yet another victim of the coming of talking pictures and the demise of the live theatre was George Mottershead, who played the violin in the orchestra at the Crown Theatre, Eccles, before its cinema and bingo days. After occupying what is now Nigel and Sue's hairdressing establishment for a

short time - his daughter, Winnie Jones, still lives in Starkie Street - George gave violin lessons at his new home in Mulgrave Road.

(Another violinist from the Roe Green area was Betty Robey, who lived with her family in Hardy Grove during the 1930s and 1940s. But she was not the victim of the depression or anything else, becoming a distinguished orchestral player both in England and Australia.)

The onset of the depression in 1930 also saw the demise of the Roe Green Co-operative Society as a separate entity. Maybe the fervour of the early years had disappeared, not helped perhaps by the change in the nature of the village, although some would say a major contributory factor was the timidity of the Committee in turning its back on the possibilities of expansion. Certainly they had considered opening a shop in Worsley village before the larger Eccles Society established itself there. As it was, Roe Green amalgamated with the Walkden Society, becoming its No.12 Branch, and so remaining until closure in the early 1960s. An almost direct result of the amalgamation was the loss of the shoe shop and repairer's in Forrester Street, which made way for two sets of semi-detached houses in 1935, and the butcher's shop on the other side of the street, which reverted to a private dwelling.

In 1934 the Independent Methodists celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the new (and present) Chapel. Appropriate festivities took place and a glance at the programme reveals many of the family names which loomed large in the affairs of the Church and village - at least, the Methodist section - during the first part of the twentieth century:

Tyldesleys, Yorkes, Howells, Richardsons and, under the heading 'President's Remarks', the Farnworths. For the President was William Farnworth (Bill to all and sundry), who in 1934 had already served 28 years in that capacity and was to continue for almost another decade.

Another name of interest on the programme was that of the Rev Isaac Renshaw, Vicar of St Mark's, Worsley, who after the high-minded and high church twelve-year reign of the Reverend Thorne, had brought a breath of fresh air to the parish on his arrival in 1930. An ecumenical before church unity was widely talked about, Isaac Renshaw became a much-loved vicar during his seventeen years at Worsley, and a very visible presence, not only within the confines of the Church of St Mark's, but throughout the district, including Roe Green.

Perhaps my own comment at the time of the centenary celebrations in 1984 sums it up: "The programme speaks volumes, not only for the talent and versatility the Church could call on fifty years ago, but also for the constitution of the audience. The writer, then a school boy, endured it all, along with his mates, for that very last item - 'An Hour with the Minstrels.' An HOUR with the Minstrels after all that.

## **The Village In 1934**

By 1934, with the extensive building in the Lumber Lane/Greenleach Lane! Kempnough area, plus four new dwellings on the edge of the Green by the railway bridge, there were over 500 dwellings and over 2,000 inhabitants in the greater Roe Green area. Inevitably, the nature of the village had continued to change, particularly with the appearance of so many semi-detached houses on the outskirts, to which not a few of the 'old Roe Greeners' were drifting.

Only three colliers could now be identified as living in Roe Green, whilst over 50% of the male population acknowledging an occupation in the records of the time could be identified as professional or clerical. The vast bulk of the remainder were tradesmen of various descriptions ranging from joiners, bricklayers and electricians to hatters, boat repairers and printers.

There were now four grocers' shops, two newsagents (one in Lumber Lane), one greengrocer's, one drapery shop (in the Co-op), one butcher's (Co-op), one ironmonger's (in the present butcher's shop) and one sweets and tobacconist's (in the front room of Olive Heaton's house opposite the Post Office and run by Olive's mother). The Post Office was where it is today, in the grocer's shop on the corner of Mulgrave Road.

The village still had one permanent policeman, the kindly Bobby Middleton having replaced the fearsome Bobby Walker in the Police Station at No.2 Alfred Street (now Avenue). (Not that Bobby Walker was really any less kindly than Bobby Middleton; we were just that bit older, with less of a tendency to raid the orchards around Brook House.) Later, for a brief while, the Police Station was in the old Co-op butchery at the corner of Forrester Street until mobile patrols took away this comforting feature of village life.

As well as numerous company directors, mainly in the large houses down Greenleach Lane, the village now had six school teachers, two architects, a bank manager, three professional violinists, a professional cricketer, a music teacher, a dentist, and a chimney sweep and two window cleaners as well, not to speak of a wireless instructor. It was certainly becoming a very representative community.

But greater changes were in the offing. Already an hourly bus service - the precursor of the No.12 - was bringing Manchester and, more importantly, the 'pictures' at Walkden nearer. (Twopence to Walkden from Roe Green, a penny from the Beesley end of Lumber Lane. And quite a few walked to Lumber Lane for this magnificent saving!) And now, in 1934, the first sods were being dug for the 'New Road' - the East Lancashire Road.

## **The New Road**

Legend, if not fact, has it that this road - a good example of the Keynesian economic theory of spending one's way out of a slump - was destined to cut through the heart of the village (as a railway was seventy years before and as yet another road is at the time of writing.) In the event, wiser councils prevailed and by the time Sir Lindsay Parkinson and his merry men made their first inroads into the surrounding fields the plan was to skirt the Green by bisecting the lovely Wardley Hall Road between Sandhole Colliery and the village and the equally rural and unspoiled Old Clough Lane - a favourite haunt of gypsies at the time -at a point adjacent to Fido's Farm in the area known as Daub Hole.

What a time this was for the village! A fleet of some thirty or so dirt-carrying lorries, working on a payment-by-load basis, crossed and re-crossed the village at breakneck speeds from morning till night, causing not a little anguish and not a few accidents. More dramatic, though considerably slower, was the occasional movement of the giant pile-driver as it went from point to point along the length of the construction around the village. It moved along two comparatively short, pre-constructed lengths of railway track, one of which it stood on. The other it retrieved from its rear by its own self-contained crane, placing it at its front to link up with the stretch on which it was standing. It can be seen that the progress of this huge piece of machinery would be extremely slow! Moving in this fashion, length of rail by length of rail, a journey of a hundred yards or so could take hours, and some - say from Old Clough Lane to Walkden Road - a day or more.

All this brought great excitement, particularly to schoolboys and teenagers, who delighted in the facilities left behind for their own special enjoyment when the workmen departed each evening. Particularly fascinating was the length of narrow-gauge railway running down the hill alongside the emerging roadway from the heights of Wardley to the depths of Daub Hole. Using the small four-wheeled bogies left conveniently to hand, and armed only with a piece of wood to jam between chassis and wheel as a brake, the lads of the village passed many a long summer evening hurtling down the length of track, regardless of danger to life and limb. (And regardless of the long trek back up to the top.)

Another delight at this time was 'tightrope walking' across the girders of the skeleton of the bridge destined to carry Wardley Hall Road across the new road, and the mineral line from Sandhole Colliery to Sanderson sidings and the Bridgewater Canal. But that was a feat which sorted the men from the boys.

The opening of the East Lancashire Road by King George V in 1934 heralded a new age for the village. For so long secluded from the world at large, it was now a convenient staging post alongside a showpiece of a road linking the two

largest cities in Lancashire. Even if it was still ‘Sleepy Hollow’ to the townies and sophisticates of Walkden and around, its potential did not go unnoticed by the speculators and developers, particularly in view of the steady growth of private motoring. Within a year or two either way of the opening of the road, a garage appeared on the corner of Old Clough Lane, the fields surrounding Mulgrave Road were converted into what we now know as Glen Avenue, much of the grazing land in front of Lyon Street (Grove) disappeared under the Blandford

Avenue/Crawford Avenue estate and both sides of Old Clough Lane beyond the new road were subjected to a strip development of houses.

## **Not a Pub?**

And worse was to come, for a community still calling itself ‘the Teetotal Village’. On one awful day in late 1936 a hoarding went up on a sliver of land between the new road and the recently built Blandford Avenue estate bearing the legend “Corn brook Breweries. Site for proposed new Hotel”.

Whilst the elders of the village reluctantly accepted the inevitability of progress in many things, this was too much. On 14th January 1937 a public meeting was held in the Independent Methodist Sunday School to oppose the granting of a licence for the proposed hotel. Although only thirteen persons were present on that occasion, it was the start of a successful campaign in which Chapel and Church fought with equal vigour, defeating the application at the Licensing Sessions on more than one occasion. Prominent in the fight on the Chapel side were Bill Farnworth, James Jackson and Councillor Ben Richardson, and on the Church side Frank Davies, James Welsby and the Reverend Isaac Renshaw. Guy Rowson, MP, also lent his name and support to the campaign.

It is interesting to note what the applicants wanted. Mr Jalland, speaking for the proposed Cornbrook Hotel, Worsley, said there would be an assembly and dance hall and a bowling green as well as five guest rooms. In addition there would be a tea room and dining room, which would not be licensed. Quite a place for what the applicant himself described as “a quiet little village in the backwater” although he did add, “changed by the making of the East Lancashire Road.”

And here was the rock on which the application foundered and continued to founder. However much the applicant insisted that all these delights were for the 540 houses and 2,160 population living within a half-mile radius of the proposed site, the suspicion - brought out many times during the hearings - was that what they really had in mind, as inadvertently stated by them, was “a house of call for those who travelled along what was one of the most important

highroads of the country". What they really wanted, in the jargon of the times, was a road house; and this they did not get, either at that time or later.

Fittingly, in the eyes of many of the old Roe Greeners, the site - which remained a field attached to Roe Green Farm for another thirty years or so - eventually became host to the nest of old people's bungalows known as Wesley Drive. Never let it be said, in view of this, that the old Worsley Urban District Council was lacking in either a sense of what was just and proper or a sense of humour.

Amongst the 81% polled by the brewers as being in favour of the proposed hotel, and the 80% stated by Bill Farnworth, Chairman of the Roe Green License Opposition Committee, as having been polled against - you see, polls were even less reliable in those days than they are today - there must have been some on either side a little disappointed that the prospect of a bowling green had receded. (The dancers had less cause for complaint. Since the erection of the new Church of England Hall at Beesley a decade before, there had been regular dances in the village, and even whist drives, both of which activities were severely frowned upon across the Green at the Independent Methodists. And to this day there has never been a whist drive at the Independent Methodists, though dances - always called socials, and usually of the 'country' variety - have taken place from time to time.)

## **And Now - A Bowling Green!**

But the would-be bowlers were not to wait long. Towards the end of 1937 leaflets were distributed throughout the district announcing the fact that turf for a bowling green had been laid down on land near St Mark's School, Beesley Green, and informing all

interested of a public meeting to be held on Friday, 7th January 1938. The land, owned to this day by the Church, was adjacent to the school and the fifteen-year-old St Mark's Tennis Club, and had long been a wilderness of grass and willow-herb.

In fact, the land had been given to St Mark's School by Lord Ellesmere during the mid-1920s for the erection of an Institute, but in view of unforeseen difficulties this was eventually built on its present site between the old Infants' School and the old Workhouse. For many years the land was a wilderness, undeveloped owing to lack of funds, until help came through the most unlikely circumstance. A shaft between the old school house and the cricket pavilion, a relic of the long-disused Roe Green Pit, collapsed. Manchester Collieries, the predecessor of British Coal in the area, asked if they could use all the spare material on this piece of derelict land to fill up the shaft. Thus, the school managers were relieved of the cost of clearing the site. Furthermore, the

Collieries fenced the plot, leaving an enclosed piece of land in perpetuity to St Mark's.

Even then the land remained undeveloped for a considerable time, the school managers having neither the money to develop it nor much idea of what to do with it. Eventually a bazaar was held, raising between £120 and £130, and by this time a bowling green had become the favourite suggestion for the use of the land. Although there was still not nearly enough money to finance the project - by the time the green was laid around £200 had been raised and a further £200 was needed - the school managers, Wilf Jackson and Harold and Basil Chapman, had decided to go along in faith. By making such a facility available, "They believed they had done a piece of good Christian work in providing healthy outdoor recreation in admirable surroundings, and they hoped the people of the district would appreciate it. "[27] And although the bowling green belonged to St Mark's School, Roe Green, connected with St Mark's Church, Worsley, it would be open to everyone in the district irrespective of sect or denomination.

Twenty to thirty people, including several ladies, attended that inaugural meeting on 7th January 1938, a provisional committee was formed and by 30th April the green was open for play. Ernest Tyldesley - in whites, since he was playing on the adjacent cricket ground, where he had been Captain following his retirement from the County in 1936 - unlocked the gates and declared the bowling green open. Thereafter there was bowling throughout the afternoon followed by a tea in the school and a whist drive at night. Thus the St Mark's, Roe Green, Bowling Club came into existence. Its first president was Lord Brackley. Early officials were Wilf Jackson (chairman), Bill Holmes (secretary) and Frank Davies (treasurer). The three school managers whose initiative created the green were ex-officio members of the committee, Wilf Jackson being chairman for the first three years and Harold and Basil Chapman active workers.

Twenty-one years later, on 13th June 1959, Basil Chapman - one of six original members still with the club -spoke at the opening of the new pavilion by Mr W H Ainley, the president. The pavilion, like the green twenty-one years earlier, had been the work of members and friends; not least Mr J Higginbottom, who had undertaken the original laying of the turf and had had to wait a considerable time for his money, it being paid in small instalments as and when it accrued in the coffers of the club. A report of the event went on, "The Club is in a very healthy condition in every way and is governed by officers and a committee with the fullest consideration for the members and their enjoyment, providing a Green in a setting difficult to find an equal..."

Thirty years on these words were echoed by the long-serving chairman, Maurice Prill, when on 30th April 1988 - exactly fifty years from the day of the green's opening - he proposed a toast to the Roe Green Bowling and Social

Club. (Following the physical departure of St Mark's from Beesley in the late 1960s, the name of the club was changed in 1970.)

The club is now extremely active and a well known amenity with a full quota of 120 playing members and 50 or so social members. Of the long-serving triumvirate at the head of affairs at the time of the Golden Jubilee celebrations, Councillor Les Marriott (secretary) and Jack Williams (treasurer) were still in office in 1993, although Maurice Prill (chairman) had been replaced by Brian Smith during the previous year. Maurice remains an active member and is still capable of winning the odd cup or three. These officials are supported by a hard-working committee and a very energetic ladies' committee. Apart from regular play throughout the week, scarcely a Sunday goes by between April and October without a cup competition or some other event taking place on the fifty-year-old green.

During recent years the current (1993) president of the club, Edith Schofield - the latest in the long line from Lord Brackley - was preceded at intervals by three other ladies in the persons of Gertrude Bentley, Hilda Seddon and Edith Armitage. This is fitting, not only because they have been fine successors to those 'several' ladies of fifty years ago (ladies now represent 50% of the playing membership), but because the Roe Green Ladies' Bowling Team won the Eccles Ladies' Bowling League in the thirteen successive years between 1977 and 1989 and produced at least four County players. With the century-old Cricket Club and the seventy-year-old Tennis Club, the fifty-year-old Bowling Club makes up a trio of venerable but hale and hearty sporting institutions on the Green.

## **Amateur Dramatics**

As the 1930s progressed, Roe Greeners could watch full-length dramas in contrast to the concerts, operettas and sketches of previous years, as amateur dramatics became a feature of village life. Both St Mark's at Beesley and the Methodists on the Green had dramatic societies, each playing during the winter months to appreciative, though largely different audiences.

It had been no easy matter for the younger folk at the Methodists, heirs as they were to a much more puritanical tradition than their friends across the bridge, to establish a mainstream dramatic society. Care had to be taken over the choice of plays and even the titles; and the contents had to be analysed carefully so that anything which might be deemed objectionable could be erased or amended. And this, in a Sunday School for which there were separate entrances for boys and girls and in which the sexes were still rigorously segregated, embraced a multitude of proscriptions. (All this is not to say the St Mark's dramatic society had a licence to do what they liked. But there was a difference...)

For example, nothing purporting to be alcoholic liquor could be seen to be drunk during the course of a play, regardless of the requirements of the plot. A cup of tea was the most acceptable of alternatives, although a glass of lemonade, providing it was clearly identified as such, would be allowed if the plot required the use of a glass. Smoking (at a time when smoking was not the anti-social habit it is considered today) was also frowned upon. Bert Yates, postmaster at Roe Green until the late 1960s, and a well known producer of plays in the district at large, used to tell of the occasion when a particular play chosen by the Roe Green Methodist dramatic society required, as part of the plot, one of the characters to smoke a cigarette.

As no deletion or amendment could be made, and as preparations for the production were well advanced before the enormity of the situation was appreciated, there was no way out except to place the dilemma before the Elders of the Church assembled at their quarterly Church Meeting. This was done and - in the words of Bert - "All was going well after a sympathetic hearing, and it seemed approval was about to be given, when old Tom Yorke intervened. 'And we'er will they spit?' thundered old Tom, silencing the chairman and holding up the proceedings for several minutes." There was no answer to that. In the event, permission was granted, although it is not recorded whether cuspidors distributed about the stage were part of the deal.

Yet it would be the Methodists who took amateur dramatics into the next decade and beyond. After the Second World War the Roe Green Players, based at the Independent Methodist Sunday School and under the enthusiastic direction of the same Bert Yates, presented plays once or twice a season for a dozen years and more. By this time, the players were drawn from all quarters; indeed, two of the leading performers throughout the period, Fred Neild and Frank Parker, were prominent members of the Worsley St Mark's Church choir. Impelled by the infectious enthusiasm of Bert Yates, the Roe Green Players presented a wide variety of plays, ranging from 'Arsenic and Old Lace' through courtroom dramas like 'Witness for the Prosecution' to the deeply religious 'The Vigil', and always to high critical acclaim and enthusiastic audiences.

Inevitably, with the advent of television and other factors, there was a decline in amateur dramatics from the 1960s onwards, but even in the 1980s there were two successful productions in the Independent Methodist Church -there being no school now available. One was a revival of 'The Vigil' under the banner of the Worsley Neighbourhood Christian Council (comprising local Church of England, Catholic and Methodist Churches) and in 1985 a very successful religious fantasy, 'The Clouds of Heaven', was staged, the conception of Dennis Wallwork, a long-serving Minister of the Roe Green Independent Methodists.

## **The Literary Society**

Another lively feature of village life during the 1920s and 1930s was the Literary Society. Again based at the Independent Methodist Sunday School, the monthly lectures attracted a regular audience of sixty drawn from all sections of the community, and when such celebrities as Neville Cardus or George Duckworth appeared, thanks to Ernest Tyldesley, more than two hundred would pack into the main hall of the school. In the pre-television days of the 1920s and 1930s, before overseas travel was the commonplace event it is today, those magic lantern lectures on such exotic places as 'Petra, the Red Rose City' and 'In the High Himalaya', by people who had actually been there, were occasions of wonder for both old and young.

## **...And An Interval At The Cinema**

As the 1930s advanced, such societies came more and more under threat from what had become the great communicator of the times, the cinema. With talkies now well established, a once or even twice weekly visit became part of most people's routine, and with such regular features as the 'Fitzpatrick Travelogues' and the 'March of Time' series, the world was becoming smaller and more accessible to the ordinary man in the street.

Walkden, in those days, had two cinemas: the Palace, which opened in 1912 in an old tram shed - now the site of the splendid new Worsley Court office block - and the Criterion (The Crit) in Bolton Road, of early 1920s vintage and standing roughly where the Unit 4 cinema is now situated.

In the late 1920s, when silent films were still the main meat of the cinema, the Palace had an orchestra led from the piano by one Thomas Dando. This gentleman's Monday morning task was to deliver (on his bicycle) the window bills advertising the week's films to various shops in the district, including our own newsagent's in the village. For displaying these we received free entry to all shows, and we were more than grateful, particularly since the older and somewhat decrepit Palace appeared to have access to all the superior Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, United Artists and Twentieth Century Fox films. The newer Crit, on the other hand, purveyed an eternal diet of the brasher and more down-market Warner Brothers and Universal offerings, together with large platefuls of the awful British films of the time. Yes, the dear old Palace had the edge with its 'penny rushes' on Saturday afternoons filled with Hoot Gibson, Buck Jones, Tom Maynard and all the Old West, not to mention the added diversions of flicking orange peel and wielding pea-shooters during the interval. (And who could forget the seemingly interminable 'Phantom of the West' and its long awaited and much discussed dénouement?)

When the Broadway Cinema at Eccles was opened in the mid-1930s, Dando - as he had become known professionally - was the first organist there, supplementing a twenty-plus stage orchestra led by a musician named Mercado. In later years both Dando and Mercado became established names in the musical and broadcasting world, the one as a cinema organist and the other as the leader of the orchestra at a large new hotel near Marble Arch in London. With the opening of the Broadway, Eccles - long a favourite venue with the older element for its Saturday night market - became a regular haunt for Roe Greeners. young and old alike.

Even before the opening of the Palace in 1912, films had been shown in the Co-operative Hall at Walkden. The

story is told of old Mrs Powell, who ran the tea-shop at 26 Roe Green in the early days of the century, being taken there to see her first film, one featuring the world's sweetheart, Mary Pickford. After the show her daughter asked if she had enjoyed it, to which the old lady responded, with a look of disapproval on her face, "Is she a Wogden lass?"

### **...And Back To The Literary Society**

Despite the counter-attraction of the cinema (and the radio), not to speak of the changed climate of the world at large, a brave attempt was made to continue the Literary Society after the Second World War. It limped along for a year or two, but when attendances had dwindled to nine or ten the committee of three decided to call it a day. I was one of them - the other two being James Jackson and Ernest Grundy - and I remember escorting a wonderful Viennese refugee actress by the name of Gerda Redlitch to the bus stop near the Post Office on a cold and wet night in March 1949. She was one of the last lecturers to appear at the Society. Forty years later, in 1989, the same Gerda Redlitch, still happily alive and well, was recounting the same fascinating story of her life she had told all those years before at Roe Green. And the memory lingers on...

### **More Thoughts On Temperance**

Although the face of the village was changing, temperance was still high on the agenda during the 1930s. Band of Hope concerts were held in the Independent Methodist School, at which stern and sometimes horrifying warnings against the evils of drink interspersed the songs and jokes and the piano. (This was also the venue for the Co-op concerts, at which an added attraction was a paper bag of eatables, always including an apple. for every junior present.)

But the chief vehicle for temperance, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, was the Independent Order of Rechabites, that non-sectarian, nationwide friendly society for total abstainers. The branch at Roe Green, again based at

the Methodist School, was particularly strong; and not least among the junior section. There were two reasons for this, neither of which was particularly related to the cause of temperance.

In the first place, a free film show was presented on the last Friday of each month by Cohn Richardson - a dedicated Independent Methodist and temperance worker as well as being a keen playing member of the Roe Green Cricket Club - to a packed room of youths and maidens, all of whom had signified, with whatever degree of sincerity, their belief in total abstinence. And in the second place, a free half-day trip to Southport, including tea at the Chapel Street Methodist Sunday School, was provided by the branch each June.

A place on the trip was open to all junior members with a satisfactory attendance record, so there was sufficient inducement in both summer and winter to ensure a large and lively body of young abstainers. The Rechabite Trip was a village institution, with scores of mothers lining the railway embankment to watch the excursion train chug its way up from Worsley Station on its way to distant Southport. For many of the village children, it was an event not to be missed; for this was probably the only occasion during the year when they would see the sea. A week by the sea was not within the means of everybody even in the 1930s, and certainly not in the early part of the decade.

## **On the Edge of War**

As the decade progressed, and increasingly after 1934 when Hitler and his Nazis usurped power in Germany, the preoccupations of people at large were less with home affairs and more with what was happening just across the water and the increasing threat of war. By 1936 the prologue to this was already being played out; first, in March, by the German reoccupation of the Rhineland and secondly, in July, by the military insurrection in Spain against a democratically elected government which was supported with men and 'planes from Hitler's Germany. The obliteration of a town called Guernica by German bombers in 1937 - to be commemorated in a haunting painting by Picasso - was particularly shocking. The implications of this, and of the Spanish Civil War as a whole, were underlined by returning members of the International Brigade, who had been fighting on the legitimate government side, at a meeting in a local works canteen at which I was present. And so, bit by bit, year after year, through Austria and then Czechoslovakia, the prologue was played out until the inevitable culmination in the first act proper in 1939.

Even so, the second half of the 1930s was not an unhappy time, particularly for that post-First War generation now coming to manhood and womanhood. Although wages were low - 12s6d per week (60p) was around the norm as starters for a grammar school lad at sixteen or seventeen, and £3 per week for

an adult - the cost of living, especially for pleasures, was comparatively low and, even more important, steady. (So steady were prices that they could be printed with confidence on packaged goods. Sevenpence halfpenny (3p) for a bottle of HP sauce seemed as immutable as the rising sun; while 11½d (4½p) for a packet of twenty cigarettes is more memorable than the price of the same yesterday.)

If not the golden age of before the First World War, which was in any case largely confined to the upper and middle classes, those last two or three years before 1939 were ones of pleasurable excitement for young working men not long out of school. Pleasures within the pockets of most of them were readily available; horizons were broadening, and even a visit to the theatre in Manchester was not considered out of the way. In short, the wider world was at last within the reach of the ordinary working man.

A visit to the local cinema cost 6d downstairs and 9d or a shilling in the posh seats upstairs. Even the Broadway at Eccles, with the added attraction of Mercado and his orchestra and Dando on the organ, cost no more than 1s6d. A visit to the Palace Theatre in Manchester, to see Ambrose, Harry Roy, Roy Fox and their orchestras, plus six or seven first-class acts, cost no more than 6d at the back of the gallery and 9d at the front. But to this had to be added the 7d bus fare and 2d for a programme.

When playing commitments with one or other of the Roe Green teams of the time allowed, a trip to watch a First Division match at United, City or Bolton would cost a shilling (5p) standing up and 2s6d (12p) sitting down. Programmes would cost around twopence (1 p) and the bus or tram fare (if you didn't go on your bike) amounted to another 2 or 3p. So a first-class football match, plus a programme and a meat pie, would cost in the region of 10 or 15p - two or three shillings. (Though it should be said that at this period United were as often in the Second Division as the first, and on one famous occasion - as supporters of Millwall might still remember -practically in the Third.)

By 1936 gangs of Roe Green youths were taking themselves off to Cunningham's Holiday Camp at Douglas in the Isle of Man for their annual week's holiday. The total cost for this would be around five old pounds. Board and lodgings were £2.2.0d including all the entertainment, which featured a resident dance orchestra, adjudged by all the lads who patronized Cunningham's as the best in the world, despite the fact that it wintered in some obscure hall in Whalley Range, Manchester. Add to this 11s6d for the rail and boat fare and approximately £2.5.0d, ample spending money for the week, and you were well within the £5. And by the spring of 1939 a few nineteen and twenty year olds were contemplating the previously unthinkable, a cruise to a foreign country; to the Norwegian Fiords, in fact. In those days a boat sailed from Hull on a regular cruise to Norway for £9 - a sum the lads considered within their means after a bit of scrimping and saving. But it was not to be.

## **The Second World War**

On 26th April 1939 the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, announced in the House the immediate conscription of all young men of twenty and twenty-one. By June the first of these conscripts, including one or two of those who had been contemplating the Norwegian cruise, were in uniform. The next and first cruise taken by many of these lads would be under very different circumstances, and not to Norway. A long, long way from the wide-eyed magic lantern shows of just a few years before.

Within a year one of these twenty year olds - Leonard McKelvey, the son of Sam McKelvey, OBE - was cruising across the English Channel in a small boat, an evacuee from Dunkirk. (Sadly, Leonard - one of that first June intake - returned to France in 1944, only to be killed just before the end of the War.) And within a couple of years or so most of the others were spread across the face of the earth, from Iceland to Egypt and beyond.

The Second World War was less devastating than the first from the point of view of the number of lives lost: apart from Leonard, only Roy Leybourne of the young pre-war Roe Greeners can be identified as having been killed, although at least one other, Frank Gaskell, died in the Far East. But its impact on the village was probably greater.

Not only was the Green itself laid waste to make way for air raid shelters, but the incomers from the rash of building in the mid and late thirties were supplemented during the war by refugees from bombed areas like Salford and even as far afield as London; a reminder that war was not now just fought on foreign fields. And although Roe Green was to escape a direct hit - the nearest being a landmine at Wardley and a doodle-bug at Worsley - the presence of these late 1930s incomers and evacuees was to change the face of the village. So much so that a returning soldier spoke of the war years being 'lost years', in that on his return the village seemed to be populated by strangers. Certainly names like Armitage, Dawes, Gill and Green - unknown or scarcely known before the war - loomed large in the affairs of the Chapel and village during the war and immediate post-war years.

Prominent among this band of active incomers was Edith Armitage - an ex-president of the Roe Green Bowling Club - who during the war organized and ran a very successful girls' club for both locals and evacuees. Helped by other local ladies like Annie Campbell and Annie Cresswell, Edith kept the club going throughout those dark days, to the great benefit of both the girls and the community. And fifty years on, members of the club, now middle-aged ladies themselves, still visit Edith in her Glen Avenue home or correspond with her from further afield.

## **The Post-War World**

As the new families were moving in, old stalwarts were dying and the traditional families diminishing. Bill Farnworth, who had presided over the affairs of the Chapel since the early days of the century, passed away in 1942, to be followed shortly afterwards by those two great characters, Tom and George Arthur Yorke. Within a decade or so the original Church and Chapel families who had played such a great part in creating the moral and physical climate of the village - the Chapmans, Farnworths, Howells, Richardsons, Yorkes and Mullineuxs - had all but disappeared. By 1993 even the many-branched Tyldesley family, which in the early days of the century could boast five Georges in the village, could not claim one member living round the Green.

And just as the families were changing, so the nature of the village continued to change. By the mid to late 1940s over 60% of the male working population could be classed as white collar, managerial or professional. Included in these were seventeen managers (one managing a cinema and another a colliery), six accountants, eight school teachers, two architects, sixteen commercial travellers, a dentist, an estate agent and a golf professional (but, alas, no longer a professional cricketer). And just as a matter of interest, playing at the top of Mulgrave Road in the 1940s was a young boy whose face would become familiar to millions both in this country and abroad. This was the young John Nettles, who thirty or so years later would metamorphose into television's Bergerac. His family had moved into number 39 Mulgrave Road in 1938 and it was there John lived the early part of his life. At Christmas 1990 he was playing in the pantomime at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, not very far from his roots. So there is yet another case of a local lad making good.

Of the remaining male working population, 35% were engaged in engineering, joinery, painting and similar occupations; whilst the traditional trades of the village were represented by six cotton workers and a miner. And ere long Sandhole Colliery would disappear and with it the village's long association with the mining industry. Roe Green was now well and truly poised for its new role in life.

## **More Football Talk**

By 1946 the remains of the large bonfire which had been lit in the centre of the Green to celebrate the ending of the war had been cleared away and a football pitch marked out on the site for marginally less sanguinary hostilities. And with the erection of goal-posts, all was set for a resumption of league football on the Green at the start of the 1946 / 47 season. Prominent in that early post-war team were Eric Powell, captain for many years, Harry Blackshaw, Kenneth Berry, Clarence Shovelton, Tom Robbins, Ralph Russell, Bob

Nightingale and incomers like Jimmy Hunt and Walter and Rod Heaton. These were soon to be joined by the four Darlington brothers, including Harry and Frank who came to live in the village. Amongst the backroom boys during the first four or five years after the war were the Tesseyman brothers, Herbert and Fred, Vincent Skipper - a long-serving secretary - Herbert Powell, Li Roberts, George Seddon, Reg Temperley, Gordon Heyes and Bert Tyldesley.

It was at Christmas 1946 that a little bit of football history was made on Roe Green. At the time a small group of German prisoners of war were still encamped on the Ellesmere Golf Course just across the East Lancashire Road, and the Football Club, comprising in the main returnees from the Forces, invited them to a game of football and some refreshment to celebrate the festive season. Not, it must be said, with the whole-hearted approval of some of the older residents in the village.

Nevertheless, the game duly took place and resulted in a 7-1 victory for the villagers. Nothing remarkable in this, considering the limited resources of the opposition, except for the fact that the German goalkeeper -who would have picked seven goals out of the net had there been nets - was none other than Bert Trautmann, later a towering figure with Manchester City, who was to achieve lasting fame by playing in an FA Cup Final with a broken neck. Whatever the football historians may say, this was his first game of organized football as a goalkeeper in England. Forty years later a writer who had spoken slightly in 'Lancashire Life' of Roe Green and its football team's 20-1 defeat by a bunch of German POWs, was put right in no uncertain terms by the still living veterans of that encounter.

During the same season, in March 1947, Roe Green was drawn at home in the Marshall Stevens Cup against the then giants of local football, Walkden Yard. There was intense local rivalry and the match was awaited with the

keenest anticipation. Unfortunately, owing to the worst winter in living memory, the match was postponed for three Saturdays, from the first to the last in March, owing to the frozen state of the Green. When eventually it was played, on a still snow-covered pitch, Roe Green triumphed by a single breakaway goal from Jimmy Hunt after withstanding almost continuous pressure from 'The Yard' throughout the game. After their unexpected defeat, 'The Yard' vigorously protested about the state of the ground, much to the delight of the Roe Green team and its many supporters who regularly thronged the touchlines.

The surprise is that, snow or no snow, there had not been more protests about the state of the pitch. At its best it was rough; at its worst, and particularly in the top right hand corner in the angle of the children's playground and the Brook House flats, it was terrible. On dry days it was springy marsh; on wet days it was a paddy field. This was to the undoubted advantage of the home

side; for over the years a generation of Roe Green right-wingers, ranging from Jack Fletcher in the early thirties through Herbert Tesseyman to little Eric Seddon in the late fifties, had acquired the know-how and technique to negotiate their way through this morass. So bad was it that the Club itself spent one summer draining this particular section with field tiles supplied by the local Council.

Nor were the facilities provided for the teams and referees any better. For most of the period the changing room was a wooden hut then situated between the Chapel and the old Sunday School, used by the Methodists as a store-room for scenery and junk of all kinds. Washing facilities were a bucket of cold water and clothes were deposited on any old forms or piles of junk lying around. I once interviewed the international referee, Neil Midgeley, who spoke with humour and affection of his apprenticeship on the grounds of the district, and particularly of Roe Green. "It was no wonder," he said, "that referees wore all black, because whatever you wore that's how you would finish up after a match on the Green. And that's how you would go home."

By 1955 those lads who had sailed to distant parts in 1939 and the following years were getting, if not decrepit, a little long in the tooth and the Club passed into the hands of yet another generation. Among them were Billy Wallwork, John Richardson - soon to appear in the colours of Manchester City, if only for the reserves - Eric Roberts, Jesse Walsh and Bernard Newnes. And it was this generation which was to face the greatest crisis Roe Green football - and by extension, Roe Green itself - had had to endure throughout its history.

From time immemorial the Roe Green Football Club had, at the commencement of each season, and merely out of courtesy, applied to the Worsley Urban District Council for permission to play organized football on the Green. This was done merely as a gesture of goodwill, tacitly acknowledging, with tongue in cheek, the Council's ultimate suzerainty over this hallowed stretch of turf. It was not considered of any consequence and never interfered with the routine entry into the League, but was just something which had to be done to keep everybody happy and the records straight. The fact that the Council, some six years before, had allocated the pitch to Burton's Football Club had long been forgotten. On that occasion a single letter from the secretary, Vince Skipper, had awakened the Council to its responsibilities.

But this time it was different. In response to the customary letter of application, the Council offered the Club the use of the pitch on alternate Saturdays only, thereby debarring the second team from fulfilling its fixtures in one of the lower divisions of the Eccles League. These alternate Saturdays had been offered to a team calling itself Worsley Rangers, but based, of all places, in Walkden, which had itself been entered in the Farnworth League. And as this Club had friends in high places amongst the Walkden councillors there was to be no repetition of the Burton's episode. The Council stood firm,

invoking its long standing powers of control and management of Roe Green as a public recreation ground which derived from the agreement with the Bridgewater Estates made in 1898.

The affair smouldered on throughout August, September and October with the Walkden team diplomatically fulfilling away fixtures and the Council, through its solicitor, threatening the direst of consequences. When it became obvious that Saturday, 5th November 1955, would be the critical day, with the unavoidable convergence of four teams on the one pitch, the Club committee, by this time supplemented by members of an older generation, saw no option but to call a public meeting and enlist the support of the village at large. And so, on 24th October 1955, a packed meeting in the social room of the old Independent Methodist Sunday School resolved to fight the matter to the death.

A committee was elected, comprising Herbert Powell, Wilf Richardson, Johnny Wallwork, Vincent Skipper and Walter and Bert Tyldesley (a representative enough selection of old Roe Green names, it must be said). This committee met four days later at nine o'clock in the evening in the Powell residence on the corner of Mulgrave Road - the old café, and now Eric Powell's home - to discuss first, what should be done regarding the home match to be played on that Saturday, November 5th and secondly, the draft of a letter by Wilfred Richardson in reply to that received from Messrs Berry & Berry, solicitors to Worsley Urban District Council.

The minutes of that meeting still exist and show that with regard to the match itself, Walter Tyldesley proposed that to overcome the difficulty anticipated as a result of the double booking of the ground, Roe Green should get the first use of it by starting play as soon as possible. And in the event of their opponents not arriving early enough to enable this to be done, a scratch team should play Roe Green to keep the Green occupied until the official match started. With this proposal passed, it was agreed that the scratch team, which we hoped would comprise veterans of the previous Roe Green teams, should take the field at 1.30pm, while every effort was made for the official match to start at 2.00pm, or sooner if possible.

In the event, the day proceeded pretty much as the committee had planned, with Roe Green's opponents, Cross Celtic, inserting themselves on the field of play in place of the veterans around 2.00pm. Half an hour each way, with no half time, was played, whereupon the now renamed Walkden Youth Club team (Worsley Rangers) and their opponents, St Richard's of Atherton, took the field for a similar period. Much to the chagrin of the home supporters, Roe Green lost 2-0, whereas the Walkden Youth team won 3-2, an outcome which did not improve the temper of the local crowd.

The crowd was much larger than usual for a second team match, and was supplemented by two policemen, the Assistant Town Clerk of Worsley, the Parks and Baths Superintendent and numerous councillors and 'interested' onlookers. After the games, all these assembled in the centre of the pitch. Voices, if not fists, were raised; and the proceedings were much enlivened by the constant brandishing of Charlie Newton's umbrella; a resident of Mulgrave Road, Charlie was a keen supporter of the Club who usually employed this implement in the service of Roe Green for the flailing of biased referees or dirty opponents. Eventually the 'foreigners' slunk away, with the Parks Superintendent being heard to say, "I'll be glad when there's a bl...y gasometer built on here." But no gasometer was built or ever will be built on Roe Green, and within a fortnight or so a ground had been 'discovered' in the Little Hulton area for the Walkden team.

All ended amicably... An interchange of letters in November closed the matter and illustrated the fact that the anger of the Roe Greeners had not been aimed at the lads from Walkden, but at what they believed to be a bureaucratic incursion into their traditional rights.

Ironically, organized football on the Green survived for only another year or two. Soon the horrors and hazards of the pitch became too much for even the hardy Roe Greeners and a dispirited nucleus moved elsewhere.

But if this was the end of football on the Green itself, it was not the end of the game at Roe Green - not quite! For a year or two in the 1960s William Bertenshaw of Blandford Avenue ran a successful youth team on a pitch in the field bordering on Hawthorn Drive (the area is now partially under the motorway). Among the several promising young footballers in this team were David Bertenshaw (now prominent in Roe Green Independent Methodist circles) and Rodney Kerfoot, whose mother still lives in Fairyfall Cottages. Unfortunately this team never advanced beyond the youth stage, with some of the players, including David Bertenshaw, moving on into higher amateur league circles. A happy memory of this team is a Youth Cup Final it won at Boundary Park, Oldham, particularly notable for a dazzling display on the left wing by young Rodney Kerfoot.

## **And More On Cricket**

Meanwhile, over at the Cricket Club, changes came with the resumption after the war. After sixty years of 'friendly' matches, 1947 marked a change in direction and a plunge into the unknown waters of more competitive cricket in the newly-formed North Western League. During the six years' membership of this League no pots were won except for a third team trophy, the only newsworthy event being the concession of ten wickets (all bowled) to a young fast bowler, then playing for Denton West, by the name of Brian Statham.

*A roll call (incomplete) of local cricketing 'greats' during the past eighty years:*

*PRESIDENTS: J T Tyldesley, Captain T Nuttall, W Richardson, E Tyldesley, J Baxendale, W Tyldesley, C Richardson, J Stell, F Wilkinson, H Darlington, G Hardman*

*LIFE MEMBERS: Harold Yates, Jack Baxendale, Wilf Jackson, Ernest Tyldesley, F Wilkinson, Mrs F Wilkinson*

*CHAIRMEN: H Tyldesley, A Wilkinson, C H Greenhalgh, N Howell, C Richardson, Walter Tyldesley, J Stell, D Johnson*

*CAPTAINS: Frank Tyldesley, E Johnson, Ernest Tyldesley, H Price, B Snowden, H Darlington, N Darlington, F Darlington, G Hope, J Boardman, R Jones, N Stanyard, E M Prill*

*SECRETARIES: A Wilkinson, W D Halliwell, C Richardson, H Duncan, F Wilkinson, R Green, L Bell*

*TREASURERS: N Howell, F Wilkinson, S Perry, H Urmston, D Heywood, H Darlington, J Hughes, B Piper, E M Prill*

In 1953 the Club joined the Bolton & District Cricket Association (Lancashire's oldest Cricket League), with whom they were to remain until 1988, when they joined the Lancashire & Cheshire League. After thirty years of non-success in the Association they blossomed magnificently in the 1980s, winning the Championship and the Gledhill Cup in 1980 and 1985 and the Cross (knock-out) Cup in 1982. Through the good offices and assistance of the chairman, Derek Johnson, the Club was also able to buy the ground and build a new pavilion. But the two main events during the post-war years were untypical of any club bearing the name Roe Green.

In 1968, in the face of mounting costs, the Club decided to apply for a bar licence. Not without some heart-searching, it must be said, in view of the still staunch teetotalism, in theory if not in practice, prevalent in the village just across the bridge. But much to the relief of the members, the expected deluge of wrath did not materialize. Maybe the temperance advocates had become more temperate; or maybe, because the Club was across the bridge and railway in the now separated Beesley Green area, it no longer counted. All the same, at least one member of the Club still looks with a wary eye for any small cloud which might appear in the bright blue sky above the Green.

Four years after this earth-shattering event, in 1972, the Club embarked on another venture equally untypical of Roe Green and its near hundred years of village cricket. In this year the Club which had provided the world with two of its greatest professional cricketers decided to have a professional within its own playing ranks. But it was eight years before this was to show any results

by way of trophies; and the replacement of a groundsman by a professional cricketer resulted in a deterioration of the playing surface which has persisted to this day.

Any brief summary of post-war cricket at Roe Green would be incomplete without a mention of the late Frank Wilkinson. A playing member from before the war, Frank lived for the Roe Green Club (and the Association) for over a quarter of a century afterwards, being variously Club captain, chairman, secretary and latterly president. Frank was a cricket purist and nobody was more pleased than he when it was decided to build the new pavilion as far away from the car park (and road) as possible, thereby lessening the chances of its becoming a 'boozing club' rather than a 'Cricket Club'. Not a surprising attitude for a pre-war member of the Club which, on 30th January 1936, had passed the following resolution:

*“Resolved that we, the committee of the Roe Green Cricket Club, are of the opinion that further licensed premises are unnecessary in the neighbourhood, as the present facilities fully cater for the requirements of the residents. Our Cricket ground is situate mid-way between the Cock Hotel and proposed premises at the end of Old Clough Lane and we are of the opinion that the erection of further premises would not be in the best interest of sport and a menace to the youth of the district. A copy of the resolution be forwarded to the Roe Green License Opposition Committee.”* (21 and Cricket Club minutes)

## **150 Years Of Independent Methodism**

In October 1958 the Independent Methodists celebrated the 150th Anniversary of that first sermon on the stone in Tyldesley Fold and 150 years of continuous witness in the village. Spread over nearly a week, the celebrations included services, the traditional tea party and concert, a film show, a new production by the Roe Green players of the beautiful morality play 'Noah Gives Thanks' and various talks and exhibitions. Prominent amongst the older generation taking part were John Tyldesley (a minister, unpaid, for over sixty years); Joe Morris (ex-Roe Green cricketer and raconteur, who was still talking when Bert Yates, the compère of the opening concert, had to draw the proceedings to a belated but abrupt conclusion); Ward Mullineux (ex-organist and village piano teacher) and Marjorie Tyldesley (well known local singer).

The first service of the celebrations, a truly memorable one, was led by the Church's own youth team of Vivien Brown (later Hill), David Hill, Christine Gill and Beryl Green (later Hay), in the presence of the chairman of the Worsley Urban District Council, Councillor Bill Edge, a well known local-character. Also prominent among the young Church members at the time were John Elton and David Bertenshaw, both of whom still live in the village and are still active in the affairs of the Church.

Amongst ladies taking part were Mrs George Arthur Yorke, the first lady president of the Church, now well into her nineties and living in Bolton; Mrs Elsie Brown, the first lady minister of the Church, still active at the age of 88 and a well known and well loved visitor throughout the village; and Sheila Welsby, a tireless worker for the Sunday School until her untimely death in 1970.

The final event of the five days of celebration was a service in the Church, conducted by the Reverend Eric Geddes, followed by a Forum in a packed Sunday School, at which the Reverend Geddes shared the platform with a bright young man from the Manchester Circuit of Independent Methodist Churches, Jack Cantrell. As a contemporary writer recorded, "Whatever the verdict of posterity, in 1958 the Reverend Eric Geddes was something of a national figure in his capacity as the Independent Television Parson.

In this role he had, on the nights he gave the Epilogue, a congregation of millions and a potential influence beyond the wildest dreams of the great preachers of the past. For all that, he was a hard working parson in a poor parish of Manchester, with trenchant views -as Roe Green discovered - on such matters as Church Unity. This was the first occasion television had directly impinged on Church life at Roe Green; and this was also the first occasion, so far as can be judged, that the question of a unified Christian Church had been posed as a matter of practical policy in the pulpit of the Church at Roe Green. The development of both will be a matter for the social historian fifty years hence. "[28]

Certainly, since that night in Roe Green thirty-five years ago, when twelve-inch black and white sets were the norm, television has developed into a major feature in our lives and is on the brink, with the advent of satellite and cable TV, of becoming an all-pervading monster. Even thirty years ago the advent of ITV had so threatened the staid old BBC that within a matter of a year or two it was they, and not the new and thrusting Independent channel, who had pushed forward the frontiers of experimentation (and some would say, decency) with such programmes as 'That Was the Week' and its successors.

As for the Church unity the Reverend Geddes so passionately espoused in the pulpit at Roe Green thirty years ago, the most one can say is that the jury is still out. But there has been some coming together, and not least in our own area, through the auspices of the Worsley Neighbourhood Christian Council. Joint services have taken place in various churches - Church of England, Catholic, Methodist, Independent Methodist, Emmaeus -throughout the district for several years, as well as combined ventures in other fields.

Roe Green, under the inspiration of Denis Wallwork, a long-time Minister at the Independent Methodist Church, has been an active member of this organization. And it was in the little Chapel on the Green on Sunday, 18th

January 1987, that the unthinkable took place - certainly for many of the older Independent Methodists - when the much-loved Roman Catholic Bishop of Salford, Patrick Kelly, came down from that old home of the Tyldesleys, Wardley Hall, to preach the sermon to a packed congregation. What the old Independent Methodist pioneers of a hundred years and more ago would have thought, and said, defies contemplation. What is more, the hitherto irreconcilable have been further reconciled by the several joyous visits, under the auspices of the Worsley Civic Trust and its Roe Green branch, to Wardley Hall.

## **Among The Old Folk**

The late 1950s also saw the foundation of the Roe Green Over Sixties Club. Sponsored by the small but active Roe Green branch of the Toc H, in which the late Jack Stell and the still active Frank Green were prominent, it first met in the small hut belonging to that organization situated on a plot of spare land half way up what is now Summerfield Road. When this land went for building in the early sixties, the Club moved to the social room at the Independent Methodists, then to the new and larger Toc H premises on the left hand side of Starkie Street (a site occupied for many years by Frank Tyldesley's builder's yard and now by the house and bungalow owned by Mr and Mrs Collier). The final move to the newly opened Community Centre on Beesley Green was made around 1970.

At its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, the Club was an extremely successful and worthwhile adjunct to village life, regularly attracting sixty or seventy old folk to its weekly meetings and various efforts and outings. Its demise in the 1980s was symptomatic of the changing world. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s the age of sixty was adjudged to be the harbinger of decline and senility, by the 1980s it was nothing more than a marker for new fields of activity such as bowls and dancing. Thus the 'Over Sixties Club' progressively became an 'Over Seventies' or 'Over Eighties Club'.

Ladies like Alma Wood and Edith Hodgkinson, who were officers of the club at its commencement when in their sixties, were still occupying official positions when in their eighties, as was Ethel Howell, the last leader. Edith Hodgkinson died in 1987 at 92, the then oldest Roe Greener, and Alma Wood a year or so later at 94, the oldest resident (as she had lived in the village for only 67 years she was still not considered to be a Roe Greener!) As a matter of interest, in the early and mid-1980s there were five ninety-year-olds in the village - Alma Wood, Edith Hodgkinson, Emily Roberts (Tyldesley), Ida Harrison and Ethel Sutherland.

Just a word for the health and food fanatics of today, not to speak of the doctors. Alma Wood was smoking at least twenty cigarettes a day into her 94th year and had been doing so since she was seventeen. Not long before her

death, in my presence, she went to the door with a newly-lit cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth. It was the itinerant fish man from Fleetwood. As she opened the door, Alma was greeted with, "Now come on, Alma, if you keep that up you'll never grow up to be a big girl." As for 'Old Hoddy', Edie Hodgkinson, so much salt did she take that any plate of food she had, until she started to demolish it -which she could still do with gusto at ninety - looked like the slopes of St Moritz. Old Alma and 'Hoddy' were survivors of a tough generation which had spent half a lifetime on its knees scrubbing other people's floors. All they needed to set them right for the day was a dose of Senokots in the morning.

## **Into The Present Day**

The era of the late 1950s and early 1960s was the watershed between the old and new Roe Green. With the closing of Sandhole Colliery on 11th April 1963, allied to the steady erosion of the cotton industry, the last tenuous links with the old way of life had been broken. The days when Roe Green had to be considered as the awkward, plebeian cousin of its more aristocratic neighbour over the hill were coming to an end.

Fittingly, for Roe Green, the first indication of this final transformation was marked by yet another protest and yet another committee. It all started with a notice affixed to a gatepost at the entrance to Wardley Hall Road, close by the site of the Preaching Stone and the first and second Co-op shops. The notice briefly announced the proposed closure of the road.

Even then, in the early sixties, this road was still a lovely country lane, stretching in unbroken line between hedges, fields and woods, past Wardley Hall to the distant Manchester Road. In springtime it was a dream, with the high hedges full of sweet-smelling blossom. And in living memory, the gates at either end betokened its status as a private carriageway - though a public right of way - whilst a shooting hut in the field beyond the bridge over the East Lancashire Road reminded one of the sporting activities which took place there well into the 1920s.

Whilst the main objection of the villagers was the apparent impending destruction of a much-loved amenity, the matter was fought through the Enquiry on the grounds of the closure of a public right of way. Not that this argument had any chance of success, for there were much bigger things afoot, as soon became clear. And in any event, an alternative route for the right of way had been planned, by way of an entry from Lyon Street (Grove), across the East Lancashire Road and thence by a circuitous track to Wardley Hall and beyond. Indeed, it can be confirmed that this alternative right of way still exists and can actually be negotiated-providing one is equipped with a machete and the constitution of an ox!

The real reason for closing Wardley Hall Road was dextrously avoided during the Public Enquiry into that small matter, but soon became apparent when petitions began to circulate against the projected slicing of Worsley Wood by a motorway. What was planned, and inevitably what was to be built, was a new road linking the already existing M63 Worsley-Stretford motorway with the M62 to Rochdale, Oldham, Leeds and ultimately Hull. On its course from the Court House at Worsley it would envelop the Crossfield between the old Worsley School and the Church, leaving the 130-year-old school (demolished in 1968) isolated. The road then swallowed up a sizeable slice of the woods and old Hurst Lodge on Greenleach Lane, situated at the point where the motorway crosses that road. Eventually, after skirting the southern and eastern edges of the village, it spewed out a series of over-passes, under-passes and slip roads around the East Lancashire Road and Wardley area.

It was sacrilege, but it was to be, no matter how big and how vociferous were the public meetings in opposition. The Lancashire County Council were the managing agents for the project and the statement of their representative at the Public Enquiry is well remembered: *“You may laugh at this, but when this road is completed the value of your property will rise enormously.”* And those packing the meeting duly obliged him by shaking the rafters with their laughter; many of them are still laughing all the way to the bank at the fulfilment of his prophecy.

## **Gains And Losses**

This, then, was the legacy of the sixties. We now had a village like a piece of apple pie, enclosed between the East Lancashire Road and the M62, with its apex at Wardley. In this apex, close by the early centre of the village, were built in the late sixties the eighty or so houses comprising what is now known as Wardley Hall Lane. Its near neighbour, Lyon Street, was embellished by the erection of modern houses to its south and west and upgraded to the status of ‘Grove’, whilst a year or two later the old people’s bungalows were erected on the remaining sliver of open land in that area - the site of the proposed public house of all those years ago. Thus, by the early 1970s, the old cricket field of a century ago was completely covered by houses.

Other changes were also taking place about this time. With the opening of the new St Mark’s Infants’ and Junior School just over the hill in Aviary Road in 1968, 240 years of secular teaching at Roe Green came to an end. The Infants’ School on Beesley Green was closed and, as a consequence, almost 200 years of continuous religious teaching on behalf of the Church of England also came to an end with the closure of the Sunday School. The complex of buildings was taken over in 1970 by the Worsley Urban District Council for use as a Community Centre, and so it has remained up to the present. The old school and church hall were sold for around £4,000 and the adjacent cottages - the

original school and workhouse - for £3,000. Of the remaining church land, the tennis courts were later sold to the Tennis Club and the bowling green leased to the Bowling Club for 21 years from 24th June 1971, an arrangement renewed on the expiry of the lease in

1992.

Another casualty of the mid-sixties was the Co-op. As related, it had become the No.12 Branch of the larger Walkden society. It now ceased to exist under either name, as would its big brother up the road in a few years' time.

The closing of the Co-op was symptomatic of the changing nature of the village and of the changing nature of the world itself. Private cars, television and supermarkets were now influencing the social environment almost as much as the transformation from hand to steam weaving had done a century and a half before. We were now in the age of pop music and Carnaby Street, when the attendance of the faithful at Church was carefully tailored to accommodate the weekly episodes of the 'Forsyte Saga' on television. Moreover, with the vast growth of private motoring during the late 1950s and 1960s, the propinquity of the East Lancashire Road and the nearby motorways, providing a quick getaway to any part of the kingdom, made the village a very desirable base for the new, get-up-and-go generation.

In keeping with the new age, the quasi-manor of Brook House, which had dominated the eastern side of the Green from within its orchards and woods since the eighteenth century, had made way by 1978 for the several blocks of (forty-two) semi-luxury flats now occupying the site. At the same time many of the eighteenth century Trustees' cottages skirting the Green, mainly round the elbow of the old village centre in Tyldesley Fold, were acquired by 'outsiders' and modernized, extended and beautified into very desirable residences now worth a small fortune. Such of the older inhabitants who had survived into this new age in their long condemned and often despised cottages were no doubt happy with the turn of events which enabled them to exchange one of these for a terraced house across the Green plus a bank balance. But not as big a bank balance as might be thought; for even these nineteenth century terraced houses were acquiring a value far beyond their designated status in society.

## **Independent Methodists In The New Age**

Not that all this activity and growth in population was doing anything for the religious life of the village. Even the demise of the Church of England Sunday School, the Independent Methodists' predecessor and long-time competitor for the affections of the young, did little for the cause. In line with the national trend, the still active Sunday School now numbered its pupils in fifties and sixties, rather than the hundreds of previous generations.

As for the Church itself, a contemporary observer, after surveying the scattered congregation of mainly old ladies one Sunday morning, predicted its demise within another ten years. That it survived into the 1990s -and not only survived but even rediscovered some of its old passion and evangelizing zeal - is a story in itself.

Large, or even medium-sized trees grow from small seeds. At the time of the 150th Anniversary in 1958, the same observer wrote, "The religious revival, which many forlornly anticipated during or immediately after the Second World War, came to some extent in the 1950s." And it came, perhaps not unexpectedly if one had been taking note of what was happening outside these islands, with the Western Wind from across the Atlantic. It came in the person of one man, Billy Graham.

There was scarcely a Church or community in England not touched to some extent by this early post-war campaign of the American evangelist. And Roe Green was no exception. The observer continues, "The interest of one or two members - notably Den is Wallwork, a Minister of the Church, and Cyril Linster, the Sunday School Superintendent - in this campaign resulted in a minor upsurge of spiritual feeling in the Church." The stirring of the spirit at this time has profoundly affected the life of the Church up to the present. The spiritual life was shaken out of its routine, and if the upsurge may be described as 'minor' that is only because the Church had experienced revivals in the past - but not the recent past - whose immediate effects had been greater.

Whilst the most immediate tangible effect of this minor revolution was the de-secularization of the Church -secular plays and entertainments soon becoming virtually a thing of the past (and not with everyone's approval, it must be said) - the most profound effect was the bringing to Christ of a clutch of teenagers, one or two of whom were to have a significant influence during the next two or three decades, even to the present time. First among these teenagers was a young man David Hill, possessed of vision allied to leadership qualities and no little energy, whose family, through his great-grandfather, Thomas Baguley, could trace its Roe Green Independent Methodist pedigree back to Richard Clarke's preaching room in Lumber Lane. Within the next few years, supported throughout by his wife, Vivien (herself a member of a prominent Moorside Independent Methodist family) and despite a young family of their own, he took the Church, in the nicest possible way, by the scruff of the neck and shook it out of its lethargy.

In the 1980s, David, again with the support of Vivien, gave up a responsible and well-paid position in the business world to undertake, for a brief while, the pastorate of an adjunct of All Souls, Langham Place -the BBC Church - serving some of the poorest and most deprived people in London. Here the two of them came face to face in their daily lives with the problems of vice and drugs and homelessness most of us only read about in our newspapers.

Returning north, and based once again in his beloved Roe Green, he undertook a full-time, peripatetic Missionership with the Independent Methodists for three or four years, endeavouring to inject into that ageing and declining denomination the same new sense of life and purpose he had brought to his own Church a decade or so before. And in the 1990s he and Vivien continue their spiritual and material odyssey, this time to the Baptist Church at Altrincham, where on 20th January 1991 David was inducted as a full-time Pastor. But all is not lost; David remains a Trustee of the Church he has served for so long and both he and Vivien will be seen in the village on their frequent visits to Vivien's mother, the indefatigable Mrs Brown, and en route to see the third love of David's life, Bolton Wanderers.

One of the first things David identified as being an impediment to the continued existence, let alone growth of the Church at Roe Green, was the large and much-loved Edwardian Sunday School. He was not alone in this; one or two older members in the Adult class of those days had already discussed the matter without bringing it on to the agenda as a practical proposition. Amongst these older members was Alan Taylor, who had come to the village as a young man after the war and was to continue to serve the Church in various capacities (including a ten year period as president and a similar period as vice-president) for nearly fifty years until the present day. I was also involved, as reporter and historian of the Church's activities for many years and as treasurer during the next decade of change.

But we older members tended to see the matter in the negative sense of retrenchment - of cutting one's coat according to the cloth available, or even hanging on to the remnants. David saw it differently. Whilst recognizing that, for practical reasons, the Church had to be released from the burden of

maintaining this large but crumbling edifice, he saw even more clearly that it had to be liberated, in this car and TV age, from the ethos and attitudes epitomized in that building. A new Church Hall and a new beginning were his targets.

So the opening of the new Church Hall in 1978 was a symbolic event, even if it was not appreciated as such by many of the older Church members. To them it was rubbing salt into the wounds occasioned by the loss of their beloved Sunday School. In practical terms it was achieved by the sale of the old School - to be replaced by the Egerton Flats - supplemented by numerous and diverse efforts. The old School was sold for £11,500 and the new Church Hall cost £32,500. Despite a deficit on the transaction of £21,000, every penny had been raised and every debt settled by 1979, one year after the Hall was opened.

## **Farewell To The Old School**

On Saturday, 19th June 1976, the last ‘jamboree’ of all took place in the venerable and much-loved Sunday School. A large crowd gathered to enjoy the ‘last supper’ of all the countless tea parties and suppers held there over the preceding seventy years, followed by an evening of nostalgia, remembrance and thankfulness. People came from far and wide; old friends and new, including the ‘daddy’ of all our local historians, Frank Mullineux, whose family came from the village, together with his wife Elsie, herself a local historian of note. There was much talk, much laughter and not a few tears before the ghost of the fine old building was finally laid to rest.

Of the sixty or so families mentioned in a monologue spoken by Bert Tyldesley and accompanied by Vivien Hill, many were represented on this farewell evening and quite a few have been mentioned in these pages. Some were resident in that tight little Roe Green which began to fray at the edges fifty years ago, when two sisters, unable to sleep at night, instead of counting sheep would name every person in every house round the Green: Polly Mull (actually Mullineux), a great character in her day and erstwhile paper lady; the three inseparable Hardman sisters; and ‘Miss Skemp’ (did she have a first name?), who handed a sweet to each of the hundred or so primary scholars after Sunday School. Slightly later there were Rachel and Ernest Grundy, Herbert Greenough, trustee for thirty-five years and treasurer for twenty, and Billy Peers and Cyril Linster. Of recent vintage are David and Helen Bertenshaw, prominent in both Church and Sunday School; Andy Atwell, Church treasurer until recently; and Philip Hagerty, the long-time magazine correspondent.

## **The Opening Of The New Church Hall**

And so, on 18th February 1978, eighteen months after the closing of the old Sunday School, the new Church Hall was opened. All the doubts and heartaches, and even anger, of the previous decade were dispelled by the enthusiasm and joy of the three hundred or so people who crowded into a room designed for less than half that number. True, it was a midget compared with its large, multi-roomed predecessor, comprising as it does only one assembly room plus a kitchen and cloakrooms. But it was light and airy and considered large enough for the needs of the day, although on the opening night this seemed doubtful. All the same, it got off to a good start which must have brought joy to David Hill, whose vision and determination had made it possible.

It was fitting that the new Church Hall should be opened by John Pearson. The most self-effacing of men, John had been assistant or full secretary of the Sunday School for near enough fifty years (and was to continue as secretary

until 1989). Although an emigré in distant Walkden for many years, he had remained a Roe Greener through and through, with a deep love for its Church and Sunday School. Interested in sport in all its aspects, he was prominent in the very successful Badminton Club run at the Independent Methodists before and after the war, as well as in the pre-war Rugby League Club in Walkden, and is associated by some with a memorable hat-trick he secured long ago for Roe Green Cricket Club, of which he was both a playing member and sometime official. John, now in happy retirement with his wife Millie, although no longer able to attend, still takes a deep interest in the Church at Roe Green to which he has contributed so much.

Two more names mentioned in the report of the opening of the new Church Hall are David Bertenshaw and Geoff Ottley. David, a product of that surge of revivalism a decade or so earlier, and Geoff, who came to the Church through marriage to a Roe Green girl and life-long member, Brenda Whittingham, left their mark for generations to come, not only by redesigning the interior of the hundred-year-old Church but by transforming the dream into reality with their own hands. Geoff is the latest of a long line of craftsmen in wood, beginning with Charlie Clarke and George Arthur Yorke and continuing with the late Jack Hill, a life-long member of the Church and no mean batsman in his time for the Cricket Club. All have given their particular talents freely for the Independent Methodists, as did painters like Tom Yorke and Herbert Powell. Jack Hill's lasting memorial is the fine cross, made from timber from the old Sunday School, now in a place of honour in the new Church Hall.

## **The Church At Roe Green Today**

Within a month or so of the opening a Children's Crusade, led by two extremely professional Evangelists, occupied the new Church Hall for a week. On each night of the Crusade the hall was packed to capacity and it seemed a new age had indeed dawned. Alas, false dawns are more common than new ages, and this was to be no exception. As the nature of the Church changed, the change in the nature of the village continued.

This green oasis, with its too-ready access to virtually all the motorways of the country, attracted newcomers who found its semi-rural aspect a desirable base and jumping-off point. As we have seen, the cottages round the Green, and now the new houses beyond, were occupied by people whose roots were neither in the village nor in the Church. Within a generation such old Roe Greeners as remained saw their homely, working-class village transformed into a middle-class commuter's paradise. Un-fortunately, although some of these incomers' did, and do, show some interest in the village, very few ever went anywhere near the Church.

If in finding, or re-finding, its soul the Church has lost the village, it is not entirely the Church's fault. The social upheaval of the post-war years must

bear much of the responsibility. All the same, in re-spiritualizing itself, the Church has become more inward looking vis à vis the village and loosened the ties which bound the two together. With many of the new wave of worshippers non-Roe Greeners, many even 'inward commuters', it might be said that the Church is 'in Roe Green' rather than 'of Roe Green'. Indeed, probably as many people, if not more, now go over the hill to the Church at Worsley as attend the Chapel on the Green - something unthinkable a century, or even half a century ago.

As it is, the Church on the Green in the 1990s, if not the social centre it was years ago, is one of some spiritual substance and reasonably successful in terms of religious activity today. Few are left of the old Independent Methodist families of yesterday. And of the newly-formed Joint Leadership team, only David Bertenshaw and John Elton can claim a life-long association with the village and Church. Nevertheless, the Chapel on the Green seems set fair to celebrate its 200th Anniversary in fifteen years time.

But, at the best, it will never again be the heart of the village. If there is a heart to the village, apart from the Green itself, it is now in the secular Community Centre, located in the old Church of England Church Hall and day school, and on the adjacent cricket field, bowling green and tennis courts. Here, in this corner of Beesley, everything goes on; from the designated sports outside to badminton inside, from Arts clubs to luncheon clubs, from dancing to bridge. In the main, in the Chapel and Church Hall on the Green, only religious activity takes place.

## **An Echo From The Past**

Although during the last decade the Independent Methodists at Roe Green had allowed people who felt unable to sign 'the Pledge' into membership, the time-honoured attitude to strong drink was still very much in evidence. And no more so than in the person of Elsie Brown, still a Minister of the Church in 1993, at the age of eighty-eight.

When, in 1985, an application was made for the granting of an 'off licence' for a proposed delicatessen in the old Tyldesley-Powell grocer's shop on the corner of Starkie Street, Mrs Brown was quick off the mark with her objections. She was not on her own. Equally determined in their objections were members of the Roe Green branch of the Worsley Civic Trust, including several 'incomers'. It was decided to mount a campaign, petition the village and fight the application through the Court. A letter sent by Mrs Brown, with the approval of her fellow objectors, epitomized the feelings of not only the old Roe Greeners but now, it would seem, many of the 'incomers'. Interestingly enough, the active campaigners covered the entire spectrum of mainstream religious and political opinion, and this ability to come together in

a common cause is one characteristic of Roe Greeners which hasn't changed over the years.

In the event, the objections of the villagers, led at the court hearing by the doughty Mrs Brown, were accepted by a sympathetic bench of magistrates and the application was rejected. Shortly afterwards the shop was converted to the excellent hairdressing establishment it is today.

## **The Civic Trust**

Through the interest and endeavour of the late Harry Tyldesley, an employee of the Bridgewater Estates (and an 'incoming' Tyldesley to Roe Green, no less!), the Green was at last designated 'Common Land' in 1970. Thus the myths and legends and fears of generations were laid to rest. The Common Land of all our yesterdays was officially confirmed as such. In the meantime, the national Civic Trust and Amenity movement had come to Worsley. This was formed to keep a watchful but benevolent eye on all environmental matters and to ensure reasonable maintenance of our heritage.

The local branch covered the whole of the old Worsley Urban District Council domain, including Roe Green, and representatives from the village sat on the committee formed at the inception of the movement in Worsley. However, when Roe Green became a Conservation Area in its own right in 1978, it was decided that the village should have its own sub-branch, while remaining accountable to the parent Worsley committee. A representative from Roe Green sits on the main committee, thus maintaining liaison between the two bodies.

Prominent on the original Roe Green committee were Walter Tyldesley (chairman), Brian Ogden (secretary) and Harry Pickering. In 1993 Harry Pickering still serves on the committee, which has been led for several years by Councillor Leslie Marriott, who also serves on the Salford City Council as a representative for the Worsley/Boothstown area. He is supported by Bert Tyldesley (secretary) and half a dozen other folk, mostly long-serving and mostly ladies.

Of the committee only Norah Gorick, a member of the Baguley family from the early days of Independent Methodism, Bert Tyldesley, one of the many-pronged clan of that name and Ken Lowndes, born and bred in the village and a life-long member of the cricket club, can be considered Roe Greeners. Of the rest, some are well on the way to completing their fifty years' apprenticeship, whilst others are comparative newcomers. Such is the concern for the environment in and around the village that there are around a hundred members from the greater Roe Green area registered with the Worsley Civic Trust and Amenity Society.

The Civic Trust has joined with, and to some extent replaced, the Church as the conscience and watchdog of the village. Whilst concerning itself in the main with environmental aspects, and particularly with the encroachment of unacceptable building within the Conservation Area, it has also involved itself in other matters it has deemed to be detrimental to the ambience and moral tone of the village. With a committee of varied political views and varied religious beliefs, it operates as an ideal sounding board and more or less permanent action group for the village as a whole.

In 1974 Roe Green - along with the whole of Worsley - came under the jurisdiction of the City of Salford. 'That lot' from Walkden was replaced by 'that even greater lot' from further away, and not without some opposition and trepidation. Indeed, there were quite a few people who vowed they would never use Salford as their address and would never own up to living in that benighted city. Even now, nearly twenty years after the event, there are still some who maintain this attitude.

But in the main their fears have been unfounded. Despite the manifold problems of running a poor city in a hostile world, the authorities have served the more affluent and tree-embowered corner of their domain with sympathy and understanding. Certainly they have played their part, along with the Civic Trust and other bodies and individuals, in helping to preserve and even enhance the environment in this part of the city.

## **To Build Or Not To Build**

A hundred and fifty years ago one of the chief concerns of Roe Greeners was the veto on house building in the village; a veto which was sending the young folk away and hindering the development of institutions. A hundred and fifty years on, the wheel has turned full circle. Now, one of the chief concerns is to stop building in the village. With 160 houses within the Conservation Area, and well over 1,000 pressing into it from three sides, "Enough is enough" is the cry.

In view of Roe Green's status as a Conservation Area, any building is subject to certain restrictions. Prominent among these are the conditions that any new developments should be in keeping with their near neighbours and should be built with appropriately aged brick. Since the erection of the Brook House flats in the 1970s, three houses have been built in the Conservation Area, two of which have proved to be acceptable and are now occupied.

The first of these - 'The last house on the Green' - replaced two demolished terraced cottages adjacent to Beesley Bridge. (Annie Welsby of cream horn fame was the last occupant of one of them.) It was built in the late 1980s by the architect Chris Grey and is now occupied by Chris and his family, although in 1993 it has been up for sale for some time. This enhances, rather than

detracts from, the general appearance of the Green and it is a very desirable residence with attractive views both to the front and to the rear.

The second, again dating from the late 1980s, was built on a small field

situated between Beesley Hall and the tennis courts. Built in the style of the Hall itself, with the passage of time it will merge well into its surroundings and no doubt by the turn of the 21st century will be virtually indistinguishable from its more venerable neighbour.

### **...And The House That Shouldn't Have Been Built**

Increasingly, as time goes by, every spare parcel of land in the Roe Green area, no matter how small, has come under the eye of the speculator. Even the back gardens of terraced houses have not been exempt from bids to pop in the odd dwelling, regardless of the suitability of the site or the propinquity of its neighbour. Such attempts have been resisted both by individuals and by the Civic Trust and in virtually all such cases the applications have been turned down by the planning authorities.

One case, however, was subject to much controversy. This concerned the erection of a dwelling next door to the house known as 50 Greenleach Lane, which itself is formed by the conjoining of two eighteenth-century cottages, originally Nos.48 and 50. The land on which the new house has been built is, in effect, the garden of what was No.48, nearer to the Post Office.

Originally the developer applied to demolish the cottage at Nos.48/50 and build five houses in its stead on the entire site. This was objected to by many residents, the Civic Trust and political groups, and ultimately rejected by the City Council. The cottage was then refurbished and sold. Subsequently it was put up for sale again for £195,000. No doubt Jim Richardson, who with his sister Edna was a long-time occupant of No.48, and was the 'clogger' at Roe Green Co-op for many years, would be surprised to learn how much this humble old cottage is now worth - as would Jane Eden, who lived next door at No.50.

Finally the developer put in plans to build one detached house in the garden of No.48, supplemented by a double garage in front of the house verging on Greenleach Lane. This plan too was rejected after further objections from residents and various bodies, but the developer threatened appeal to the Department of the Environment. At this the Council, fearing the possible cost to the City of litigation, agreed that building could commence in accordance with this latest plan. And, very quickly, building did commence.

However, that was not the end. It wasn't long before a number of keen-eyed residents came to the conclusion that the house was much nearer the road than it appeared to be on the plans, and the Council was accordingly notified. After

an inspection, the developer was informed that the dwelling house was approximately 8'3" closer to Greenleach Lane than approved - and he was advised to stop building. On receipt of this advice, he submitted a fresh application, with the object of gaining retrospective planning permission for the new site of the house. Meanwhile, building continued.

But in face of continued opposition from the Roe Greeners, not to speak of several angry councillors of both parties, this fresh application was rejected. With the house now completed, the developer was determined to hold on to what he had, and yet another application was submitted, this time with the double garage, verging on Greenleach Lane, halved. Again this was rejected and a few days before the end of December 1990 the Roe Green branch of the Worsley Civic Trust was notified of an appeal by the developer to the Secretary of State, Department of the Environment. An inspection was made on behalf of that eminent person, all previous papers and objections were read, and in 1991 the appeal was upheld. However, in March 1993 the house has been 'For Sale' for well over a year and remains empty.

Vigilance, in the interests of a Conservation Area, must be unremitting. As the verdict was awaited on the fate of a very nice house in the wrong place, yet another planning application was the subject of scrutiny, this time for - yes - - a detached house with a double garage, in the garden of No.50 (conjoining No.48) Greenleach Lane. As this site was at the base of a triangle of open Conservation Area land to the east of Greenleach Lane - land which, itself, is under threat from another source, as will be seen - and as the site was considered inadequate for the nature of the proposed house, this, too, had to be resisted. We had been here before, and once again the planning application was rejected.

## **Fin de Siècle**

And what of Roe Green in the last decade of the twentieth century? It has certainly come a long way, and changed a lot in the process, since the Breretons and the Sheringtons wrestled over its rough and meagre carcass over four centuries ago; or even since the days when John Tommy Tyldesley first stepped out to bat for the County. In contrast to the twenty or so farms and cottages at the time of the Brereton / Sherington dispute in the late sixteenth century - and to the eighty-four farms, cottages and shops in the 1870s - there are now around 1,100 houses (give or take the odd one under review) in the Greater Roe Green area, with something in the region of 4,000 inhabitants. But within the Conservation Area itself, comprising the immediate surroundings of the Green, plus the fields and woods to its south and west, there are still only around 160 houses and 700 inhabitants. This is pretty much as it was at the turn of the century.

The same cannot be said for the inhabitants of the Green. Long gone is the last collier (and the last colliery) and long gone the last weaver or spinner or overlooker. Almost extinct, though not quite, are the plumbers and painters and candlestick makers of yesteryear, not forgetting those bricklayers and joiners who figured so prominently in the life and history of the village.

Few are left of the Chapmans, Clarkes, Howells, Mullineuxs, Powells, Parrs, Richardsons, Tyldesleys and Yorkes, although it must be said that the oldest person on Roe Green, Millie Howell, is a relict of one of these ancient families. Her late husband, Frank, was a grandson of James Howell Senior, a towering figure in the Independent Methodist Church in the early days of this century, and Frank's cousin James Howell Junior (the father of Norman, Mildred and Lilian) was himself a prominent figure in Independent Methodist circles, in addition to being the last secretary of Roe Green Co-op in its independent days. Millie, now in her ninety-seventh year, lives in her little bungalow, happily independent (and still busily and successfully cooking), but watched over carefully by her family. Born in Walkden, where her father was a policeman, Millie has lived most of her life in and around Roe Green.

Second in seniority, and the oldest living Roe Greener, is Nellie Jones, now eighty-nine. Nellie, like Millie, is the centre of a caring family and matriarch of a great sporting clan. Her sons, grandsons and great-grandsons have figured consistently in the post-war teams and affairs of the Roe Green Cricket Club. One grandson, Graham, played for the Luton Town first team and other professional clubs, whilst at least one great-grandson has been noticed by the Lancashire County Cricket Club. Nellie is one of only three members of the old Tyldesley families living on Roe Green.

The oldest male, and oldest male Roe Greener, is the eighty-eight-year-old Tom Veal. A bricklayer by trade, and a long-time senior servant of the old Gerrard's firm, Tom lives with his wife in the cottage built by the Canal Duke in the mid-1700s and still showing its eighteenth century brick face to the world. It has been occupied by Tom's family for the past century or so. No mean athlete in his younger days, Tom still takes a pride in his garden, for which he has been justly famous over the years.

So much for the Roe Greeners of old. Now we have sales executives by the score and computer operatives of various descriptions by the dozen, not forgetting the odd judge (retired) and countless professional people ranging from accountants, lecturers and teachers, through civil engineers to estate agents and quantity surveyors. Nor must we forget Fred Eyre, now in occupancy of an extremely up-market Roe Green Farm (shades of the Neilds of long ago), whose remarkable downhill career in professional football, from Maine Road at the top to some field at the end of nowhere at the bottom, with a score or more stopping-off points in between, was tracked so hilariously in his book, 'Kicked into Touch'. Fred emerged from this long tunnel as an

entrepreneur, author and broadcaster par excellence. As Neil Midgeley, the International football referee, said to me some time ago, "He can afford to live on Roe Green, but I can't."

And then there was Pete Smethurst, until his recent and too-early death the popular village butcher, who combined this service to the community with a remarkable career as professional Rugby League player, coach, manager and broadcaster. Happily the shop continues and his wife and children still live in the eighteenth century cottage, once the home of the Tyldesley family.

A comparison between the present list of trustees of the Independent Methodist Church with that of ninety years ago sums up the changed nature of the village, if not the country. Included in the present list are an auditor, an optician, a company secretary, two sales executives, a senior biochemist, a senior analyst/programmer and a civil servant. Ninety years ago the list included two manual workers (retired), a plumber, a railway worker, a painter, two joiners, a Corporation worker and two gentlemen described as salesmen. Yes, times have changed.

And what of the village itself? Far from the rough, uncouth place of the early nineteenth century, it was recently described by one commentator as an idyllic, up-market village. True, it still has a grocer's, a newsagent's and a butcher's; but never a chip shop and certainly never a pub.

So here is a bright and prosperous Roe Green as I write in the early 1990s, smiling in the winter sunshine, at last able to look its sister village over the hill squarely in the face. A haven of peace and quiet, wedged like a piece of pie in the apex of two major but not overtly obtrusive roads, reasonably remote - in spirit, if not in distance - from the hurly-burly all around. Hardly a place dreamed of by those pioneers of old; but, as things stand at the moment, not a bad place for all that. At least those old pioneers will be glad to know that not a few families have come to live in the village in recent years 'because it is the kind of place in which they would like to bring up their children'.

## **Yet Another Motorway?**

Nothing is forever, as they say... No sooner was the village settling down to its new role in life as a well-heeled suburb of the City of Salford than further clouds loomed on the horizon. The first was the proposed widening of the M62 which cuts through the southern and eastern sections of the village, forming the actual boundary of the Conservation Area for much of its progress through the district. This was bad enough. Even before this could be implemented, however, the local Member of Parliament, Terry Lewis, was warning us during 1990 of the possibility of yet another motorway cutting through the area. This was even worse.

Both these projects involved not only Roe Green but Worsley in general and, if the latest rumours were true, the western extremities of the area in Boothstown and Ellenbrook. Already the Worsley Civic Trust had spent a year or two concerning itself with the widening scheme and proposing alternatives. Now, out of the blue, came an even greater threat to the remaining woods and fields of this still lovely area. Which is precisely why there was a threat; for the woods and fields presented a comparatively cheap and easy route for the planners.

When it became obvious that the danger signals arose from more than conjecture or fancy, the MP called a couple of public meetings, both filled to overflowing. From these emerged a permanent and ongoing campaign - Residents Against the Motorway (RAMS) - whose remit was not only to fight the Department of Transport's proposals to build a Greater Manchester Western and Northern relief route, but also to consider and make comment on the previously proposed widening of the M62. (Nobody denies there is a problem, for it is estimated that over 100,000 vehicles a day pass over Greenleach Lane on the M62 at the south-eastern edge of the Roe Green Conservation Area, a figure which it is projected will increase by over 100% within the next decade.) The campaign, with a steering committee and several sub-committees, is in the process of fighting these battles and ready for others to come. The Worsley Civic Trust is also involving itself directly in opposing the proposed road, although individual members of the Trust are working with RAMS.

Although information regarding the choice of route for the new motorway was originally promised for Spring 1993, the decision has been postponed and at the time of going to press in July, we still do not know \*.

*[\* the road widening scheme was abandoned completely in 1994]*

If the planners are hoping that Roe Green residents will forget about it, they are in for a sad disappointment. There may be few of the old families left; the village may have changed in many respects; but the traditional spirit lives on and Roe Greeners, 'old' or 'new', will always stand up for themselves.

Whichever of two possible routes is selected, it is obvious that either will encroach upon Roe Green, even upon the Conservation Area itself. The poor old Roe Greener might well ask what he has done to deserve all this, what with the East Lancashire Road in the 1930s, the M62 in the 1960s and now the M-whatever-it-will-be in the 1990s. What, he might wonder, is destined for the year 2020, the end of the present thirty-year cycle? He is right to ask, and he is right to wonder, but of two things, if it is any consolation, he can be certain. He can be certain there will be no gasometer on the Green. And he can be certain the Green will still be there.

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