

The Record Society
of
Lancashire and Cheshire



Official Newsletter

No. 3 2022

Welcome from the RSLC

Thank you for reading the *Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Newsletter*, and for your interest in our Society. The RSLC – established in 1878 – is a registered charity which aims to promote understanding of, and public interest in, the history of Lancashire and Cheshire – including Manchester, Liverpool, Chester and Preston – through the publication of editions of historical records and other activities.

If you are a member of the Society, we are very grateful for your support. If not, you can find out more about the RSLC, including details about how to join (and receive our annual volumes in return for your £20 subscription), at <http://rslc.org.uk/>. Alternatively, you can write to Diana Dunn at East Manley Hall, Manley Lane, Manley, Frodsham, WA6 9JE or d.dunn@chester.ac.uk

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The RSLC in 2021

Despite the continuing challenges raised by the pandemic, this has been a heartening year for the Society. In January, we launched our new Facebook page which shares stories from our published volumes and updates about our activities (see below). In April, Dr Paul Booth delivered a very well-received public lecture (via Zoom) on 'The Oldest Lancashire Ghost Story' (see <http://rslc.org.uk/blog/> for a summary of the occasion and a translation of the story, which dates to 1373). We were also able to hold our first in-person event for 18 months in September: a belated celebration of *The First Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum 1797–1809*.

We are always keen to welcome new members, and so please do pass on news about the Society to anyone you think may be interested in our activities and publications.

Annual General Meeting 2022

The society's AGM will be taking place on **Wednesday 13 April**, starting at **1.45pm**. It will be followed at **2.00pm** by the **Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture**, which will this year be given by Dr Alan Crosby on 'Lancashire's Second Oldest Ghost Story'. This story dates from the reign of Henry VIII, and so links well to the upcoming RSLC volume, *Loyalty and Levy* (see pp. 3-4), as well as to Dr Booth's 2021 lecture.

Alan Crosby is one of Britain's leading local historians, and since 2001 has been editor of *The Local Historian*. He has published extensively on many aspects of the history of North West England, and his 1991 Record Society volume, *Benjamin Shaw's Family Records*, has become a standard text in the field of nineteenth-century working class autobiography.

We intend that our AGM and lecture will be held in person this year, and also livestreamed via Zoom for those who would like to join us online. Owing to the evolving COVID situation, we are not yet able to confirm the venue, other than that it will be in Liverpool. Please check our website (<http://rslc.org.uk/>) or Facebook page (see below) for details of the venue in advance of the AGM and lecture.

ALL ARE WELCOME! To register for the AGM and lecture, please contact Diana Dunn (see postal and email address on page 1) in advance of the meeting, providing your email address and confirming whether you would like to attend in person or online.

RSLC on Facebook

Our Facebook page has now been live for twelve months, and can be accessed via the following link (whether or not you have a Facebook account): <https://www.facebook.com/Record-Society-of-Lancashire-and-Cheshire-103846055012201>

We publicise all our activities and publications here, and share interesting stories buried within our 150+ published volumes. Many of our past editions are available, free to users, on the society's website: <http://rslc.org.uk/publications/> – and so those interested can follow up our social media posts at their leisure.

In 2021, we posted a series of stories from our publications about experiences of historical pandemics across the region – from the Black Death to the Spanish Flu. Other entries have included posts about the environment and nature, about the Christmas season in the journal of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, and the marriage of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn (in anticipation of our forthcoming volume 158: *Loyalty and Levy: West Derby Hundred in Lancashire seen in the Succession Act Roll of 1534 and the Lay Subsidy Returns*).

We would be grateful for any feedback on our Facebook page, or suggestions for developing it further. If you follow the page, please feel free to share posts with your Facebook friends!



THOMAS STEEL tells us about the research behind his forthcoming RSLC edition [Loyalty and Levy: West Derby Hundred in Lancashire seen in the Succession Act Roll of 1534 and the Lay Subsidy Returns](#), and discloses how this has shaped his views on one of the most notorious rulers in our history.

What first drew you to this set of records?

I found the wonderful Succession Act Oath Roll quite by accident, when looking for material on West Derby township, and I quickly spotted that I was on to something of importance. Every adult male in the kingdom was required to acknowledge the legitimacy of the king's marriage to Anne Boleyn and its offspring (as established by the Succession Act of March 1534), by swearing an oath before one of the king's representatives. The Roll for the western half of the hundred of West Derby looks to be the only one to survive.

I had never heard of the Roll and have never met anyone who admits to knowledge of it, either. There seems to be nothing like it. There it has sat, hidden in a big box of miscellaneous and unrelated items. It is correctly catalogued (and indeed mentioned by one American scholar), but no excitement about its significance seems to have reached Lancashire!

The chance, simultaneously, to release some Henrician Lancashire tax returns into the light of day, seemed too intriguing to miss

What was the biggest challenge you faced when preparing this edition?

My enforced stay at Henry VIII's court has consumed an inordinate amount of my time and energy. Entering the well-trodden pathways of Tudor history, whether treating Henry's supremacy demand or his taxation policy, I quickly realised the limits of my education and had to put in train a huge programme of careful research if I was to place these documents in a proper context. I can only hope that I can open readers' eyes as wide as mine have become.

What is the most unexpected or exciting material that you've uncovered in these records?

Big surprises have awaited me at every stage in this research. I had no idea how much the common people resented the rise of Anne Boleyn and simply believed Henry's marriage to Katherine of Aragon to have been valid. I marvelled at the almost totalitarian efficiency of the oath-swearing operation across the kingdom. I groaned at the realisation of so much art and beauty being swept away along with the fake and the merely superstitious, at the Dissolution. I had not previously grasped the economic wreckage which Henry brought to the kingdom.

How would you hope your volume will be of use to historians of the future?

I have had constantly in mind the aim of producing an edition which is accurate and balanced enough to be a valuable resource for the academic community and clear enough to excite genealogists and local historians, but above all to open new layers of insight to readers of all kinds who, like myself, have not been sufficiently educated in these vital themes.

After working on this edition for a number of years, what is your view now of Henry VIII?

Asked for my view of Henry VIII, I am very hesitant about offering any addition to the great heap of opinion which has piled up in recent years. I have read most of it during this work. I come away shocked by Henry's lust for war (and especially for victory whatever the cost), but with a strengthened idea of his genuine religious seeking. But he ranks very low on the list of royals I would like to meet!

Loyalty and Levy, RSLC volume 158, will be published in the spring. To purchase this volume for the non-members' price of £35 (+ £4 p&p), please send a cheque for £39 – payable to 'Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire' – to Dr Fiona Pogson, Department of History and Politics, Liverpool Hope University, Hope Park, Liverpool, L16 9JD. Alternatively, you can contact Dr Pogson by email (pogsonf@hope.ac.uk) for details of how to pay by bank transfer. New members joining during the first half of 2022 will receive this volume in return for their £20 subscription.



SAM RILEY graduated from University College, Oxford in 2021 having completed his undergraduate dissertation, entitled 'Voluntary associations in Liverpool from 1743–1809: from conviviality to culture?' under the supervision of Dr Perry Gauci. He now works in the London wine trade. He introduces us to the fascinating records of the mid eighteenth-century Liverpool Ugly Club.

My undergraduate dissertation was based on a comparative analysis of the Liverpool Athenaeum and the Ugly Club, utilising Brazendale and Towsey's 2020 edition of the *First Minute Book of the Liverpool Athenaeum* (RSLC 157) and my own transcriptions of the Ugly Club's records. Even more so than I anticipated, the latter is a hugely rich source, and detailed examination revealed a very strong seam of irony and humour that has almost totally been ignored. It speaks, of course, to Liverpool in the mid eighteenth century, but also raises broader questions of middling identity, association, and the popular political patriotism of the 1740s. The manuscript is badly damaged, and unclearly ordered, but it is roughly composed of four elements: (i) a register of attendance, (ii) a founding charter of the Club, (iii) a list of members (with attendant 'deformities'), and (iv) occasional but significant discursive minute keeping.

The Ugly Club and the Liverpool Athenaeum may initially appear diametrically opposed in nature and function. The former lasted a mere thirteen years, from 1743–57. Its constitution specified that its 56 members had to have 'something odd, remarkable, droll or out of the way in [their] Phiz[...]or in [their] complexion', and that 'ale shall be the common drink of this society'. Conversely, the Athenaeum, founded in 1797, flourishes to this day. Its prime purpose was to facilitate information access, and as such was centred on a library and newsroom, and quickly established itself as an aspirational marker of status, expanding to accommodate five hundred of Liverpool's leading citizens as proprietors.

Yet this implied dichotomy between uncultured, mid-century drinking club and enlightened turn of century literary association is brought under question by my research. This seeks to rehabilitate the Ugly Club as a fully functioning and complex association that shares much common ground with the Athenaeum. Significantly, the Ugly Club was never just an association, but also part parody of association: the resultant joke was so successful and entrenched that it has wrong-footed historians for over two centuries. This reassessment of the Ugly Club is an important part of the methodology for better understanding provincial middling identities, but also is a valuable end in itself.

Ultimately, both clubs were successful because they spoke to contemporary social requirements: in particular, the desire for confraternity and an escape from busy lives, and the ability to mix with well connected, influential individuals and access materially relevant information. The Ugly Club survived for thirteen years before choosing to disband, but achieved its aims nevertheless: the provision of conviviality for young men.



DR PETER COTGREAVE is a longstanding member of the Record Society's Council and its Webmaster. He was originally a scientist, working as a lecturer in Zoology at the University of Oxford, and is now Chief Executive of the Microbiology Society. He is also the author of Heroes and Villains of Chester and Beyond. He recounts how he came to be involved with the RSLC.

How did you first learn about the Record Society?

When I was a child, apart from my immediate family, I didn't know anyone with my surname. So when I was a teenager, I started trying to find out about where my family had come from, and the answer turned out to be Cheshire. In those days, the Record Society's indices were the only way of identifying local wills and other probate documents, which told me fascinating stories about my ancestors.

What made you take more interest in the Society's work?

Over the decades, as I learned more, I realised that there is a huge wealth of records out there, thousands upon thousands of documents of completely different types, created for countless different reasons and now held in various libraries and record offices. It would be impossible for a novice to understand this complex archive landscape and to know where to look for more detail without a way of appreciating what the different sorts of record were. The Record Society's publications showed me what criminal records are all about, what church records can show us, what heraldic volumes might reveal, local government, trade records, manorial documents, economic papers, personal letters and diaries and so much more. For a novice, standing confused at the gateway to history, the Record Society provided a plan of what was there, a guidebook to the landscape, a torch to shine into the dark bits, and a way of understanding what I found. In the end, I was able to write a book that tells the individual life stories of 20 Cheshire men and women over eight centuries, accessing all those old documents, and I could never have done it without that initial orientation that the Record Society gave me.

As an amateur, how did you get involved with the Society's Council?

Council represents the interests of the membership and it's always looking for people who are willing to give a bit of time to support the Society's work. I work in science, but that doesn't mean I can't offer opinions or that I don't understand some of things that are important to the Society – for example, my day job involves having an intricate knowledge of the academic publishing industry, which is currently subject to massive systemic changes, some of which have the potential to affect the Record Society. When Council was looking for some new blood, I offered to try and help, and somewhat to my surprise I was asked to join. I haven't looked back since.

What do you enjoy most about being on Council?

I love the fact that as a group, we're trying to do something that's genuinely worthwhile, and that although we come to the table with different experiences, and although everyone is doing it in their spare time, we make it happen. We're ensuring that after almost a century and a half, in a world that is completely changed from that of our founders, we carry on the Society's core business of exposing the documentary history of the two counties to the light of day. It has been a huge privilege to be taken seriously by professional historians, whose knowledge and understanding of the past and how to study it is infinitely more impressive than mine!

How do you think the Society will develop in the future?

Interest in local history has never been greater. I have no doubt there are going to be technological, and financial challenges for the Record Society, but I am completely certain that we will find a way of using documentary records to allow professional historians and amateurs alike to have the privilege of meeting some of the people from the past who have made Cheshire and Lancashire such special places.

For brief biographies of other members of the RSLC Council, please see our website:

<http://rslc.org.uk/council/> We are always looking to broaden the experience and expertise on the Society's Council, and if you would like to express an interest in this role or to hear more about what it would entail, we'd be delighted to hear from you.

*You can contact us about this, or any other matter, at the following email address:
enquiries@rslc.org.uk*