

New housing debate 1930s style

By Andrew Stubbs

As early as 1921 the Congleton Chronicle was posing the question: 'Why the delay in erecting new houses in Congleton?' The question was a fair one, especially as the housing shortage in

the town at the time was acute. The housing committee came in for much criticism.

However, it wasn't until 1930 that a subsidised National Housing Act provided for the necessary slum clearances by the local authority and a five-year plan was drafted for the task.

In October 1932, the Town Clerk of Congleton began a correspondence with the Ministry of Health concerning the declaration of a clearance area and a proposed area for rebuilding in New Street, Congleton.

Following the Housing Act of 1933, the local authority was required to draw up another slum clearance programme. Though the number of houses to be cleared was only a fraction of what was needed, there was some real progress.

HOUSING ACT, 1936.

Borough of Congleton.

WHEREAS the Council of the Borough of Congleton have submitted to the Minister of Health for confirmation the undermentioned Clearance Orders made by them under the Housing Act, 1936, and dated the Twentieth day of September, 1937, ordering the demolition of the buildings described in the Schedule to the orders and their vacation within the period specified therein:

CLEARANCE ORDERS

Borough of Congleton (Dane Side)
Clearance Order, 1937.

Borough of Congleton (Astbury Marsh
No. 1) Clearance Order, 1937.

AND WHEREAS the Minister of Health has determined to hold an Inquiry into the subject matter of the said Orders;

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that B. W. Fitch-Jones, Esquire, F.R.I.B.A., will attend for the purpose of holding the Inquiry at the Town Hall, Congleton, on Tuesday, the fourteenth day of December, 1937, at a quarter past 10 o'clock in the forenoon and will then and there be prepared to receive the evidence of any person interested in the matter of the said Inquiry.

(Signed) L. INFIELD,
Assistant Secretary.

Ministry of Health,
26th November, 1937.

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Gibraltar Rocks, located at the bottom of Park Lane, was demolished in 1937

Continued on page 2

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Continued from page 1

Generally, the entire process of re-housing was time-consuming. Understandably, many Congleton residents were genuinely attached to their places of residence, despite their shortcomings.

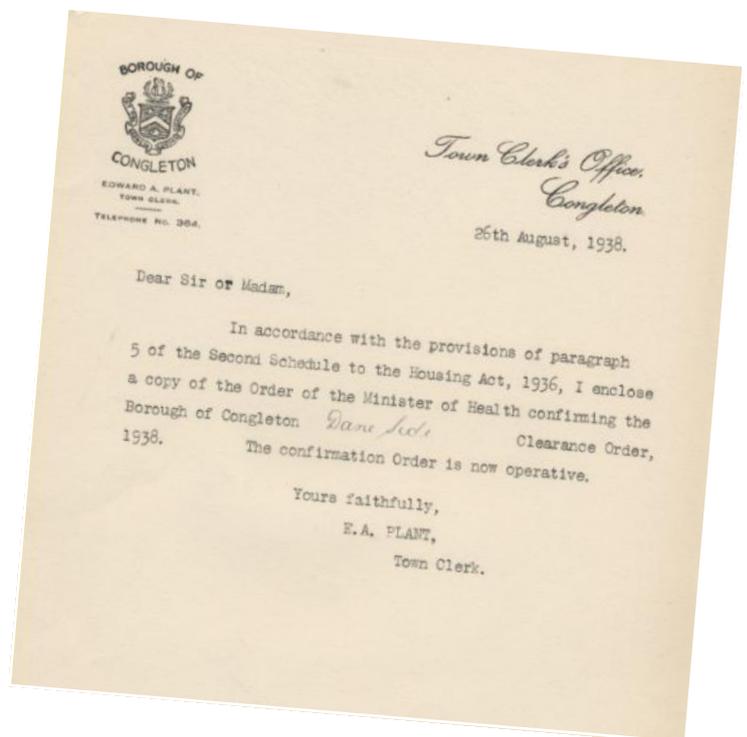
Congleton had many small houses dating from the late eighteenth century onwards, when the town had become industrialised. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that by the 1930s many of these houses should have been damp or insanitary, or characterised by other serious defects. Accordingly, the Medical Officer of Health at the time, Mr Davidson, recommended the demolition of 32 houses in the Cole Hill - Canal Street area. These properties were condemned for their "disrepair and sanitary defects, and owing to the fact that they (could not) be rendered fit at a reasonable expense".

In 1934 there were plans to clear at least 80 houses scattered throughout the town, involving 330 people. Though many objections were lodged, notices of intention to make the clearances were nonetheless posted in June 1935. The reasons cited were many and made for depressing reading, including:

- Allegations of defective drains.
- Inadequate sanitation.
- No washing accommodation.
- Roofs and chimneys in bad condition.
- Defective pointing and plastering.
- Dampness.
- Ill-ventilation.
- Cockroaches.



Paradise Row cottages. When they were demolished the Dane Bridge Mill was extended



This letter from the Town Clerk's Officer and the Borough of Congleton Clearance Orders on the cover are from the museum archives.

There were further clearances in hand from 1936 to 1937, with re-housing eventually being provided in 1938 on the town's Bromley Farm Estate, where a 4-bedroomed house could be rented at 9s. a week, a 3-bedroomed house at 7s. 5d and a 2-bedroomed house at 5s. 5d.

Throughout 1938, there were further clearances of older houses in several parts of Congleton. There was considerable opposition from Stonehouse Green and Wagg Street and a ministry enquiry was held on 13th September, but it merely confirmed the local authority view on the case for clearance.

In total, some 38 houses and 133 people were noted for clearance in 1938. Eventually, 140 houses were pulled down and about 600 Congleton people re-housed during the 1930s.

These figures are not necessarily comprehensive, but plainly indicate the marked change in the town during this period. The visual impact of the clearances was lessened, however, by the scattered locations.

Sources:

Notes compiled by Chris Bradley
Research by John S Rowe (Tutor Mr J Kennedy)
Records of the Congleton Borough Council in the care of the Congleton Historical Society
Thank you to Moira Lawrence and Tom Matthews for their assistance

Farewell Bunty – Hello Ada

By Ian Doughty

Mrs Bunty Strickland, alias Education Officer Karen Stratford, has literally moved on to pastures new as a full time education officer with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. Karen joined the museum team in November 2009 and quickly established herself by leading on the delivery of Congleton's contribution to the Royal Society's 350 years celebratory Local Heroes project.



Bill Pegley, Linda Ward and Karen Stratford

This project not only raised the profile of 'local hero' John Whitehurst, but also that of the museum, as the school based projects devised and delivered by Karen were identified as a model of good practice by the Royal Society's final report on the effectiveness of their celebrations.

It is as Bunty Strickland, Mow Cop's evacuee organising officer, that Karen will be remembered by the hundreds of primary school children from Cheshire and North Staffordshire who have participated in the museum-led evacuee experience. During her four years at the museum, Karen and her team, Linda and Bill, have developed this in to a very effective and much sought-after activity.

It was therefore with great sadness and grateful thanks that we said farewell to Karen at the end of July.

However, in September, Bunty will be succeeded by Ada Salt, the alter ego of Jean Westbrook, our new evacuee organiser and education officer.



Jean Westbrook

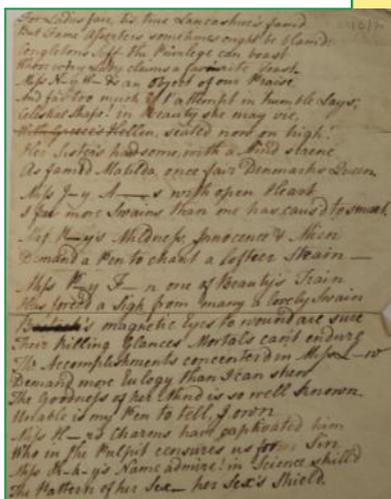
We were signposted to Jean, a highly experienced primary school teacher, by our partner primary school, Woodcock's Well, where it was felt her particular expertise in the humanities and creative arts would prove an asset to the museum.

Jean's experience as a creative therapist, adult trainer, author, foster carer, residential care worker, care officer and community organiser will enable her to develop the museum's educational and outreach services in to new and exciting areas. Since she was responsible for the creation of the biggest cardigan in the world, which involved the participation of knitters from all over the country, we await with trepidation the mammoth projects Jean might propose - the 'biggest bear in the world perhaps?'

We look forward to Jean joining us in September – I know that she already has exciting thoughts about the future.

Poetry corner

One of our volunteers, Jamie Campbell, has just discovered the love poem pictured below in our archives. The author is unknown, but based on the style of handwriting and exaggerated sentimentality it's thought to date from the 19th century, the time of a collection of similar poems called 'The Congleton Alphabet'. It reads in part...



*For ladies fair, tis true Lancashire's fam'd,
But Fame Asserts sometimes ought be flam'd:
Congleton's self the Privilege can boast
Whose every Lady claims a favourite Toast,
Miss N—y W—d an Object of our Praise,
And far too much t'attempt in Humble Lays;
Celestial Shape! In Beauty she may vie,
With Greece's Hellen, seated now on high!*

Museum volunteer digs deep into the archives

By Sam Vinsun

My name is Sam, and I am a relatively new volunteer to Congleton Museum.

What most people don't realise is just how many objects we have crammed into this small area. I spend my time at the museum updating the collection archives, which is an endless task. However, I have found out a lot about Congleton in a short space of time!

Recently, I came across some accounts payslips from the Eaton Hall Estate, dating from the early 19th century. Until now, I must admit I didn't even know Eaton Hall existed. Being curious, I did some digging and found out some things. Here are just a few of the intriguing bits...

Gibbs Crawford Antrobus had a pet monkey named 'Jacko', who was buried in the kitchen garden. A small headstone



Eaton Hall in its former glory

was erected in his memory.

Eaton Hall was the first place in the area to have an air raid siren installed.

The lawns were cut by a large mower pulled by a Shire horse. Nothing unusual there, however, when the tennis courts were cut, the Shire horse had to wear leather boots to prevent horsey damage.

When the family went away, the staff would meet in the house for tea and biscuits. Makes you wonder what else they got up to!

One head gardener had a pet robin called Herbert.

Sadly, the main hall was demolished in 1980; however, aspects of its history are stored in the museum's archives, including a photo album containing some interior photographs.

You can find out more about Eaton Hall, as well as other notable Congleton properties, in a series of new booklets by Lyndon Murgatroyd extracted from his book 'Who lived in a House Like This?' These are now available from the museum shop.

Gala Night

Many thanks to CVS Cheshire East for inviting us to take part in their Volunteers' Gala Night at AstraZeneca on Wednesday 12th June. Over 200 volunteers and representatives of the local volunteer community attended the event, including five from the museum.

Pictured there are Bill Pegley and Dorothy Robinson (seated), Janet Stevens, Mike Whitehurst and Linda Ward (standing L-R). "We had a fantastic night," said Linda. "I felt so privileged to be asked to go. The entertainment was outstanding, the food was good and the whole atmosphere was great!"



Town oath book goes digital

By Becksy Olpin



Hi, my name is Becksy. I am a student at Sandbach High School and I have been volunteering at Congleton Museum for just under a month. With my love of history, it has been very interesting to learn in depth about local history and particularly the history of Congleton ... something which isn't taught in schools!

Whilst at the museum, I have been working with Ian (Doughty, museum chair), looking at a book of Town Oaths which date back to 1841 (see image). My project involves transcribing the original oath documents into a computer to ensure that the documents are more accessible to volunteers and visitors alike. At first it was quite difficult trying to understand both the traditional language and handwriting, but after a few pages, the words began to become familiar. It has been great to have the opportunity to handle and gain some experience of using primary sources.

My first month at the museum has been great! Excuse the cliché – but here you really do learn something every visit!

awesome Artefact

The museum building

Did you know that the building now occupied by Congleton Museum was originally the town's police station? Built in 1870, and situated behind the town hall, the building also included living

accommodation for the Chief Constable.

In 1890 the town's police force comprised a Chief Constable, two sergeants and eight constables. Congleton retained its separate police force and Chief Constable until 1947 when it was merged with the Cheshire Constabulary.

The accompanying photo shows the members of the police force c. 1940s posed just outside what is now the museum's front door!



New museum mugs now on sale

Museum volunteer, Sam Vinsun, relaxes with a cup of tea in her new Congleton Museum mug.

"The mugs are a real team effort," commented museum shop manager, Diane Ritherdon. "The illustrations were produced by museum volunteer, Jessica Coatesworth, while local businessman Tom Mellor handled the manufacturing side."

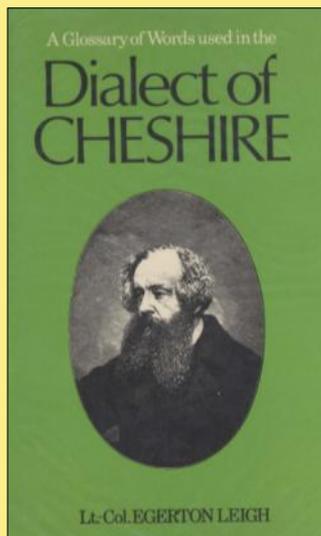
The mugs are priced at £3.50 and currently come in 2 designs – a pictorial one as shown and another which features a copy of an old map.

"Both are selling well in the shop," said Diane, "and we hope to have more designs printed in the future."

Get your Congleton Museum mug while supplies last!



Dumberdash & quifting pots!



Ken Law, one of our research library volunteers, was recently perusing the collection when he came across a volume entitled, A Glossary of Words Used in the Dialect of Cheshire. Compiled by Lt. Col. Egerton Leigh and first published in 1877 (our copy dates from 1973), the book is set out as a dictionary of local slang. Intrigued, Ken sat down to

examine the tome and afterwards remarked: "I've lived in Cheshire most of my life and I only know a couple of the words!" Some examples are noted below. How many are you familiar with?

Colly Weston is used when anything goes wrong. "It's aw along with Colly Weston." This, probably at the outset, was an allusion to some particular person or circumstance and the saying remained after the origin was forgotten. Harrison, page 172, mentions "the mandilion (a loose garment, without sleeves), worne Collie Weston-ward," i.e. awry. Colly Weston also means in the opposite direction. "He went there, but I went Colly Weston."

Crambly, adj. – Lame (whereas Cramble, v. means to hobble, and Crampled, part. means stiff in the joints or cramped).

Dumberdash – A violent pouring shower or fall of rain. Also Dunderdash, perhaps thunder pour.

Meazy, adj – Mazy, giddy. An old woman who drank about three gallons of gin a fortnight made no complaint, except of "being so oft meazy."

Quifting Pots – Half gills, a measure for drink.

The museum's research library is now open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 1200 to 1600. With a trained team of supporters to assist your search, you can find out about people, places and publications. Support and access is available at other times by prior arrangement. This service is free to Friends of the Museum. Other people have the first half hour free. If you would like some specialist research undertaken for you, please enquire for the cost.

Pleased to greet you

The museum shop has a new card spinner full of hand made greetings cards made by our volunteers, their families and friends. Some have verses, some are left blank for your own message.

Next time you need a card, please buy one from the museum shop to support our funds and our loyal card makers. You can be assured that no-one else will have sent the same card!

Cards are priced from 60p to £1.50. Not a high price for a unique handmade card.



History of religion talk

Peter Aston, museum trustee and chairman of Congleton History Society, will give a talk on Friday 13th September at the museum. He will conduct a pictorial tour of churches in Congleton, explaining their individual histories and the influences (both local and national) that affected their development.

The town has a rich and complex religious history. Initially, Astbury was the mother church but as Congleton itself grew in importance, St Peter's tried to assert its religious dominance.

Methodism became popular in the area in the mid 18th century and, of course, Primitive Methodism originated in a famous meeting at Mow Cop.

For more fascinating information, come to the talk.

If you have an interesting old bible, perhaps with a family history, please bring it to show us.

Tickets £2.00 (free for Friends of the Museum). As space is limited, booking is recommended. Please contact the museum to book.



St. Peter's Church

Honest John Bradshaw

By Geoff McKay

The most powerful man ever to be associated with Congleton was almost certainly John Bradshaw. In 1649, at the end of the English Civil War, Bradshaw was selected as president of the court to try Charles I. He did not want the job, but had no choice.

He was the son of Henry Bradshaw of Wibbersley Hall, near Stockport, and was educated at Bunbury School in Cheshire and in Middleton, Lancashire. Tradition says he also attended Kings School in Macclesfield, but there is no proof of this. He was articled to an attorney in Congleton with an office in the White Lion on the High Street, now marked by a blue plaque. He finished his studies at Grey's Inn in 1622 and was called to the Bar in 1627, aged 25. Around 1630 he returned to Congleton as a Counsellor-at-Law. He lived in Lawton Street, where Bradshaw House now

stands, marked by another blue plaque.

He was made Freeman of Congleton and appointed Attorney General for Cheshire and



Flintshire. He was also elected Mayor of Congleton and Recorder for Newcastle-under-Lyme. In 1643 he moved to London and five years later was appointed Junior Counsel to Parliament and Chief Justice of Flintshire and created Sergeant of Law of Parliament.

Then came the trial of Charles I. Bradshaw announced the verdict and was the first to sign

the death warrant. Charles I was executed on 30th January 1649. Bradshaw became rich and was made President of the Council of State, his power second only to Cromwell's.

Bradshaw died on 31st October 1659, when he was 57. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, but in 1661, after the restoration of Charles II, the bodies of Bradshaw, Cromwell and Ireton were exhumed and taken to Tyburn and hung from the gallows. Their heads were cut off and the bodies were eventually buried under the gallows.

Although a controversial figure, Bradshaw always did what he thought was right, on occasion standing his ground against Cromwell and earning his displeasure. The final word must go to Cromwell, who said, "I have dissolved the Council of State in spite of honest John Bradshaw, the president."

Photo: The White Lion

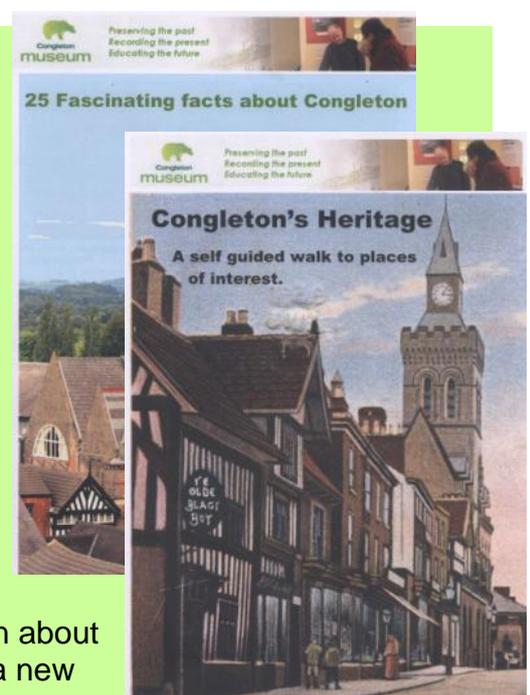
Two new booklets

Congleton's Heritage

Take a self-guided tour of local places of interest with the museum's new booklet, Congleton's Heritage. Featuring a town centre map, the tour stops at 15 landmarks including The White Lion, the Town Hall, Bradshaw House, the Congleton Bath House, St. Peter's Church, the Moody Street Cottages and the Little Street Shops – as well as the museum, of course! The booklet is on sale at the museum for £1.50.

25 Fascinating Facts About Congleton

Did you know that following a disastrous flood in 1451, which destroyed a large part of the town including the corn mill, the Corporation petitioned the King for permission to change the course of the River Dane? Find out more interesting information about the town's history with 25 Fascinating Facts About Congleton, a new booklet on sale at the museum for 60p!



Forthcoming walks

1st September 2013

Changing Places *Leader: Ian Doughty*

This walk will use images of Congleton, taken over the past 100 years, to show how the main streets to the west of the town have developed to meet the changing social and economic needs of the town and its inhabitants.



6th October 2013

At the Chalk Face *Leader: Ian Doughty*

The provision of education, or the lack of it, can have a considerable impact upon the way a community develops for generations. This walk will look at how education was provided within the town and some of the conflicts which it created between 1870 and 1936.



3rd November 2013

Shadows in the Town *Leader: Peter Aston*

Many lost features of the past are associated with notable properties in the town. Where are they and where can we find them? Using maps, this walk will seek out significant buildings subsequently hidden by modern developments.



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Opening Times

Tuesday - Friday
12.00 - 4.30pm

Saturday
10.00am - 4.30pm

Sunday
12.00 - 4.30pm

Monday - closed

*For holiday opening times
please contact the museum.*

Your newsletter team

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Walks: £5 or £3 for Friends of the Museum (includes cream tea) - meet at the museum at 2pm.