

Findings of the Ryecroft Hall Investigation

Saturday 6th September 2008.

The aim of this piece is to organise into a structured format, a coherent summary of the wealth of information that Mandy produced at Saturday's investigation at Ryecroft Hall. Mandy said she felt the evening was very odd for her because the information she was receiving was very fragmented, and some of the visual symbols being given to her by spirit were somewhat bizarre. Throughout the evening I was consistently amazed at the leads that Mandy was getting, and so I wanted to share my



research I had done prior to the investigation, so as to illustrate Mandy's accuracy.

To structure the information I shall bullet point the information Mandy said she was feeling or receiving, and then I shall explain the historical fact; adding flesh to the bones so to speak; I'll try and take it bit by bit.

- It's passed, and passed, and passed and then it stops.
- Wealthy family, very rich.
- Buckles of shoes.
- Double barrel names.
- James is following us.
- Something's not finished – he started something and he never saw it finished, he died first.
- Horses in the grounds.

The land on which Ryecroft Hall now stands was once property of the Seventh Earl of Stamford and Warrington; but he sold it to James Smith Buckley, on February 1st 1849. The Buckley's were a wealthy cotton manufacturing family with mills at Ryecroft near Saint Peters. James Smith Buckley began constructing Ryecroft Hall, the grandeur of the home reflecting the elite status of his family, but he sadly passed away on July 20th 1851, leaving the hall incomplete. As well as the house itself there were outbuildings that contained stables and coaches. The hall was exchanged between Buckley hands four times in just a 64 year period, before eventually being sold to an unrelated buyer, who we will discuss further later.

- Cane and Abel
- Two sets of Two

- There's a William, not sure where he fits in, before the sets of two, either one or both
- Two James', two Abels
- 1870 something, a death not a birth,
- Charity it's a giving home
- Church – there are three churches, this ones in the middle, but it has an odd name, it's not like a normal St. Georges etc, it's different
- Donations – either they built it or paid for it to be built
- West Bromwich Albion – the baggies
- “It's the church” – unusual trip to the ladies!

James Smith Buckley, who bought the land, was brother of Abel Buckley though this particular Abel did not live at Ryecroft, he lived at Alderdale Lodge, Edge Lane Droylsden. When James Smith Buckley died he left the unfinished property to his son, the second James Smith Buckley. James (junior) did not wish to keep the property so he sold it to this brother, William Smith Buckley. William lived in the family home until his death on May 1st 1877, though his mother remained in the now grade two listed property until 1885.

At this stage the Hall's possession passed to William Smith Buckley's cousin, Abel Buckley, son of Abel Buckley senior, and he was the first of two Abel's to actually own the property.

The Victorian period saw a large upheaval and increasing questioning in the world of religion, with numerous Christian denominations building new churches. Abel Buckley was a Congregationalist by faith and gave vast monetary contributions to the construction of the Albion Chapel.

Together he and his brother Nathaniel owned cotton mills on Oxford Road and also Pennington Mills in Leigh. In the world of business Abel had his fingers in many pies: he held majority shares in the Hayfield Printing Company; interests in Plas Kynasta Collieries at Ruabon in Denbighshire; he was director of the Palace Hotel in Buxton; a founder of the Greenfield Mill Company; and a director the Manchester and Liverpool bank.

Abel was a prominent local political figure, being Mayor of Ashton twice; and he was also something of an art enthusiast. He owned a Turner, “A Trout Stream”, a Gainsborough and a Reynolds. An oil painting of Galtee Castle, the Southern Ireland estate Abel had inherited from his Uncle, hung in the dining room in Ryecroft Hall.

Abel Buckley married Hannah Summers, daughter of John Summers a Stalybridge Ironmaster; and together they had two children. Abel lived in Ryecroft Hall for 22 years until his death in 1908. The Hall then passed to his sons Harold, and the second, Abel Summers Buckley.

- 1913
- Austin Powers
- Hopkins, Hopkiss or Hodgekiss
- Greek Alphabet
- Metal work, cutting machinery, cutting metal, inventor, pioneer, colliery, there's a manual, engineers or engineering.
- Charitable and giving home.

On February 14th 1913 the Buckley family's possession of Ryecroft Hall stopped when Abel and Harold Summers Buckley sold the Hall to Austin Hopkinson.

Austin Hopkinson was something of an engineering entrepreneur and had invented himself a pioneering new coal cutting machine. Hopkinson first came to Audenshaw in 1908 when he established factory to manufacture his new invention. Soon demand for his creation outweighed the production levels his present facilities could supply; so he expanded his production space and the Delta Engineering Works was founded.

Hopkinson ran Delta on the basis of a profit sharing scheme the likes of which had rarely if ever been seen before. The scheme was introduced in 1921. After all general business expenditures had been accounted for then the net profit was to be distributed between employer and employees. On the first £1000, nine tenths to the employer, one tenth to the employees. On the second £1000, eight tenths to the employer, two tenths to the employees; and so it went on. The scheme ran until 1926. Hopkinson later ruled that the whole capital of the firm came under the jurisdiction of the employees, whilst he retained sole power over the day to day running of the business. He paid his workers handsomely, openly telling the House of Commons that he regarded the work his engineers did as highly as any naval military officer. He paid his workers the equivalent of a naval officers wage £4, 14s, 6d. Hopkinson along with the rest of his family were not bound or restricted by social class. Austin Hopkinson organised regular cricket matches between his employees at Delta Engineering and members of his own family, despite their being public school elites.

- World War One
- It's a hospital; it's not a long period; it's not twenty years; it's not this much (hands expressively far apart) it's only this much (hands expressively close together)
- Nurses, lots of nurses everywhere
- French connection possibly a nurse
- Used for something that it's not, like a secondment, a temporary use
- Mortuary table, dead bodies, blood being swept away, there are 50 bodies here
- Angry lady shouting get out – it's not for us to see

Austin Hopkinson bought Ryecroft Hall to have for his home, but being a military man himself, he equipped and maintained the house as a temporary voluntary hospital throughout the duration of the First World War, 1914 – 1918. The hall would have been full of nurses, doctors and other voluntary medical professionals. But there are no records kept listing all those that worked there, therefore it is very difficult to trace the French nursing connection.

Down in the cellar is what Mandy felt was a mortuary room, with original brick built table. A number of the team doubted the authenticity of the table due to its overly large size; it's too big, practically, to perform autopsy etc on; and also the lack of drains underneath to dispose of the blood. There is little evidence to confirm in concrete that that was a mortuary, however my academic estimate would be that it was. I would argue that the mortuary would not be as fully functioning as one in a hospital would have been, therefore it would not have been essential to have an accessible table on which to perform post mortem examinations, it would merely be for the laying out of the recently deceased until the time of their removal, therefore the bigger the better.

And with regards to the angry lady shouting “get out”, I have two perspectives on why she may be so angry and what she is guarding. One I shall discuss here and one I shall argue later in this piece.

Mandy felt the presence of this lady whilst she was picking up the feelings of the First World War mortuary. I feel it's possible the lady has a presence in that context as a nurse of some sort. World War One was total warfare; the events at the battle front were directly experienced by the civilian population at home, giving rise to the term home front. This was warfare unlike anything seen before, and this new warfare demanded mobilisation of human and material resources of entire societies on an unprecedented scale. This put huge pressure on the home front. At the outbreak of war morale wasn't really a problem, even those who opposed the outbreak of war rallied enthusiastically to the national cause. But this wasn't support for war in general; it was support for a particular type of war, a short sharp war with rapid victories. But the war wasn't short, and the victories weren't quick. It was brutal and tough on everyone, both on the continental front line and also the home front. Propaganda became a key instrument of war on the home front. Propaganda was conducted by the press, government and patriotic organisations. British press became subject to mass censorship. Information considered to be damaging to home morale, would not be published, for instance important battle losses were often completely unmentioned and to the flip side of that small victories were massively overstated. Casualty lists were, of course, sensitive information and therefore increasingly tight regulations were imposed. Naming the missing or wounded was forbidden and cumulative totals were not allowed to be published. With this in mind, for someone to be in that cellar, in that mortuary and seeing first hand how many men had died due to the injuries they had sustained at the hands of the Germans would have been absolutely forbidden. If that kind of information had found its way into the public domain, the civilian outcry would have been huge, which is why I believe she was a nurse and she didn't want us there. Maybe

she would have got in trouble if anyone had got in and seen them? Maybe it was her job to watch over the corpses and keep people out?

- It's passed, and passed, and passed and then it stops.
- I want my photograph taken with that tree, it's the first tree.
- There's lines of people; and they're having their picture taken, like school photographs.
- Angry Lady shouting get out, it's not for us to see.

In December 1922 the Ryecroft Hall ceased to be a family home when Austin Hopkinson donated the property and its grounds, which is thought to be three acres and possibly had sixteen cottages as well, to the people of Audenshaw.

In 1931 there was a grand ceremony, opening the hall and its grounds to the public for the first time. 5000 people turned out to see Lord Derby, Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire and Councillor W. Hardman, Chairman of Audenshaw District Council. Councillor Austin Hopkinson was also in attendance as he had personally escorted Lord Derby all the way from Manchester. Lord Derby and Councillor Hardman came to the Park Road entrance; and Lord Derby opened the gate with a golden key. He also planted an elm tree which had been presented by Councillor G. Barnett, Chairman of the Estates Committee. The proceedings were accompanied by a chorus of 600 children from four local schools singing Land of Hope and Glory.

From the opening of the hall as council offices there is little information known about the hall's uses, and any of its live-in workers. Which brings us back to the question of the angry lady in the cellar. A number of the team picked up on the notice on the cellar door saying "Silent – Control Room". It was assumed that on that basis the lady must have been a worker in the control room and was protecting private and sensitive information, and thus wanted us out. This is a perfectly logical assumption to make. But in the absence of a date for this lady I'm reluctant to make this connection only because I know certainly on the upper floors there are rooms, for instance the library, that have signs on their doors, but they did not always serve that purpose.

- Darren – came up with a Frank or Francis, as a caretaker, in the Gent's toilets on the upper most staircases.

This particular point I wish I could be more certain on. In my research I came upon a testament by a lady called Kate Kerry, this was a fairly recently published book, late 1990's early 2000's. This lady's grandparents were caretakers at Ryecroft Hall, and my sources would indicate that their names were William and Sarah Bradshaw. However Kate's parents were married at Ryecroft Hall in the 1950's, whilst her grandparents were still caretakers. Her parents were Constance (Connie) Bradshaw and Frank Graham

Newton. This could be clutching at straws, but it's the best possible fit I can find in the absence of any further details.

Also in the upper floors Mandy said she could sense a little girl, a Jessica perhaps, but there are few records surviving relating to the female side of the family, so it would be particularly difficult to trace that lead; and to my knowledge there are no records of staff or servants who worked there, so without a full name to look back through census records, it would be difficult to find if she was a staff member possibly.

- Harry Norton Schofield.

To close the evening we held a séance in the Ballroom. Mandy could sense there was a presence in the room, and asked if any of the Buckley gentlemen or Austin Hopkinson, basically spirits she had felt previously in the evening, could come forward. Now on the exterior of the building is a blue heritage plaque baring the name Harry Norton Schofield VC. A number of team members had seen this name and so this name was introduced to the séance, in the hope that it may induce some reaction. As soon as the name was mentioned Mandy began to deteriorate, her breathing became very heavy, almost gasping, she began to hunch over, her grip on mine and Darren's hands became tighter, and to some of us around the circle her face appeared to change. After a few moments Mandy had to ask the spirit to step back and she had to leave the circle, and the room altogether. She said she felt it had been the spirit of Harry and that he was angry that he had been forgotten. I've done a little digging to see if I can get a better picture of who he was. He was born in Manchester on 29th January 1865. He was the son of a local Chemist. He was educated at the Royal Military Academy and passed out in 1884. He had a fruitful military career, earning himself the prestigious honour of Victoria Cross on 15th December 1899. He retired from active service in 1905, though he featured in the First World War in a communications officer capacity. He married in June 1917 to Dorothy Vere and together they had a daughter and two sons. He died in Connaught Gardens, South west London on 10th October 1931, his funeral took place at the Chapel Royal at Saint James' Palace and he is buried in Putney Vale Cemetery. His gravestone reads: "After he had served his own generation, by the will of God he fell asleep".

There is no doubt that he was a courageous man, and that's recognised by Tameside Council's decision to put up a commemorative plaque in his honour. However there is no traceable connection that I have found as yet, connecting Harry Norton Schofield to Ryecroft Hall. Even on the Tameside Government website where all the heritage monuments are listed, there is no specification as to the reason why that particular plaque is placed on the Ryecroft Hall, other than simply to commemorate the life of a local man.

Well there you have it, I've tried to clarify as much as I could remember, if anyone wishes to discuss any of this further don't hesitate to get in touch I'm always up for a historical natter!