

# LEYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(Founded 1968)

Registered Charity No. 1024919

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Tel: 01772 337258

## HONORARY TREASURER

Mr. E. Almond

## AIMS

To promote an interest in history generally and that of the Leyland area in particular

## MEETINGS

Held on the first Monday of each month (September to July inclusive)

at 7.30 pm

in

The Shield Room, Banqueting Suite, Civic Centre,  
West Paddock, Leyland

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

Vice Presidents: £12.00 per annum

Members: £12.00 per annum

School Members: £ 1.00 per annum

Casual Visitors: £3.00 per meeting

**A MEMBER OF THE LANCASHIRE LOCAL HISTORY FEDERATION**

**THE HISTORIC SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE**

and

**THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY**

## The Roundhouse on the Moss

Joan Langford

In 1984 English Heritage, British Listed Buildings, described the Grade II listed Roundhouse as a 'round single-cell one storey cottage with conical thatched roof; said to have been a tollhouse to the causeway across mossland between Leyland and Longton. Date unknown, but probably circa 18th century.

'Rendered outer casing with a round headed board door on the east side; a round headed window with latticed head on the north-east side; a wooden extension covering the present entrance in the north side. Brick partition on the diameter, with a central chimney stack. An octagonal outer frame of bog oak, clad with diagonal boarding, daubed. Was damaged by a storm during the survey.'



**Farington Roundhouse c1904**

Sod Hall Meanygate was one of the earliest crossings of the Moss and linked Longmeanygate in the south to the early enclosure roads and Longton in the north. The octagonal, thatched, timber-and-daub Roundhouse stood on this track at the boundary of Leyland and Longton Mosses, and was either the first or last house in Leyland - depending on which way you were travelling.

The 1838 tithe maps and schedules for Leyland and Longton show about 17 acres of the moss belonging to the '*Heirs of John Green*', which included Sod Hall, the Roundhouse and Heath House. Sod Hall was occupied by a James Dobson; at the Roundhouse (clearly drawn as a hexagonal building) was a John Bamber; and at Heath House was a Peter Blackwell. All

three farms included an 'uncultivated' field – which was common then, in order to avoid over-working the soil.

What were the origins of the Roundhouse? For some time it has been thought that, with the gate across the track at the boundary, the Roundhouse might have originally been a toll house. This theory is backed up by an entry in the 1861 census which reads "Moss Toll Bar". Living there at that time were 39 years old Richard Taylor (who was farming 8 acres of the moss), his wife and two young daughters. The Taylors were still in the Roundhouse in 1871, together with a third daughter.

Unfortunately, there are only two census returns where the Roundhouse is identified – that in 1861 and then, in 1911 when the occupants were Thomas Wherton age 36, his wife Mary and their 4 years old son Thomas. Somewhat strangely Thomas did not list himself as a farmer, simply as 'labourer in Iron Foundry' – presumably Leyland Motors. None of the other census returns named the farms or the roads on the moss, but simply record almost all of the numerous farms and small holdings as 'Leyland Moss'.

As yet it has not been possible to find any actual written evidence of the collection of tolls there.

The Roundhouse was inhabited until the 1980s but sadly, in June 1983, during a severe thunderstorm the house was struck by lightning which damaged the back of the property forcing its owner, 73 years old, bachelor Wilf Halliwell to move out. Wilf's move to sheltered accommodation was only intended to be a temporary one, but autumn gales, sightseers and vandals completely destroyed the little house. Therefore it is not possible to speak to anyone who lived there, but I have talked with neighbours who have lived on the Moss for several generations, and who knew Wilf well.

#### **Andrew Halliwell**

Although Andrew Halliwell was born in Penrith in 1874, by the time he was 16 years old he was living in Preston and was a butcher. He married in 1894 and lived for many years with his wife Margaret and family at Oxford Street Preston, and seems to have been a butcher for the whole of his working life. Wilf was Andrew and Margaret's youngest son.

I was told that when Wilf's father, Andrew, bought the Roundhouse (c.1930s) the toll gate was still 'in situ' and until then the previous owners HAD continued to collect tolls. Andrew 'apparently' continued to collect some tolls for a short while, although neighbour John could not remember the actual rates - but they are likely to have been similar to those on other toll roads. Andrew told him that the monies collected were supposed to be used for the maintenance of the road (Sod Hall Meanygate was more than a mile long) but the local farmers who used it in the 20th century did not think they should have to pay, and very little money was collected then. Andrew did not know by what authority the tolls had been collected and did not want to be bothered with all the hassle, especially as he was a busy man tending his land and also still working as a butcher at Sayers in Preston. So he removed the gate and 'travellers' have since been able to pass freely.

So, although no written evidence has been found, there is oral confirmation that the Roundhouse was a little toll house. I think this is also backed up by the style of the building itself.

Typical agricultural workers' cottages on the moss would, like the Roundhouse, have been small two roomed dwellings but, if they had windows at all, the frames would have been simple and 'square', and the front door frame would similarly have been square at the top.

The Roundhouse's two main windows were placed in positions which enabled views, in each direction, along the roadway to see oncoming travellers. Also, the windows and door all had round headed frames – making it a more 'superior' cottage.

Over the years many people have asked the meaning of 'Meanygate'. One definition I have found is that it was originally 'Mainway Gates' which contracted over the years to 'Meany' gate. An obvious meaning then is that people having to pay tolls thought the toll gate keepers were 'mean'. Surely though, if there were gates, then that implies that there was some form of control/toll to pass these gates? However, 'gate' is an old English word of Norse origin for 'Street'. Were Meanygates 'Main Streets'? I still have not found the definitive answer to the original question.

### Toll Houses

When the English Heritage team were examining the Roundhouse in the 1980s (before the storm) they considered it to have been built in the 18th century.

In the late 18th century many toll roads were established, with the intention of raising money to improve the condition of the country's roads, and which had toll houses erected beside the gates. The houses were, for economic reasons, usually small and built by local men using local materials. There was no standard pattern, but the most characteristic feature was the number of windows which allowed the toll collector to view traffic approaching from different directions. Many toll houses had half-hexagon fronts and a few were round or fully hexagonal – like ours.

Early turnpikes were generally local and small-scale. In some areas 'specialist toll-farmers' made a fixed payment to the local Toll Trust for the 'base' and then organised the day to day collection of money, often leaving themselves with a profit on their operations over the course of a year. By the Victorian period toll gates were perceived as an impediment to trade and the Local Government Act 1888 gave the responsibility for maintaining roads to County/Borough Councils. This resulted in many toll houses being sold to private owners.

This all ties in with our Roundhouse being one such toll house. Were the early occupants 'specialist toll-farmers'? Did the Roundhouse go into private ownership at the end of the 19th century? Unfortunately we will probably never know.

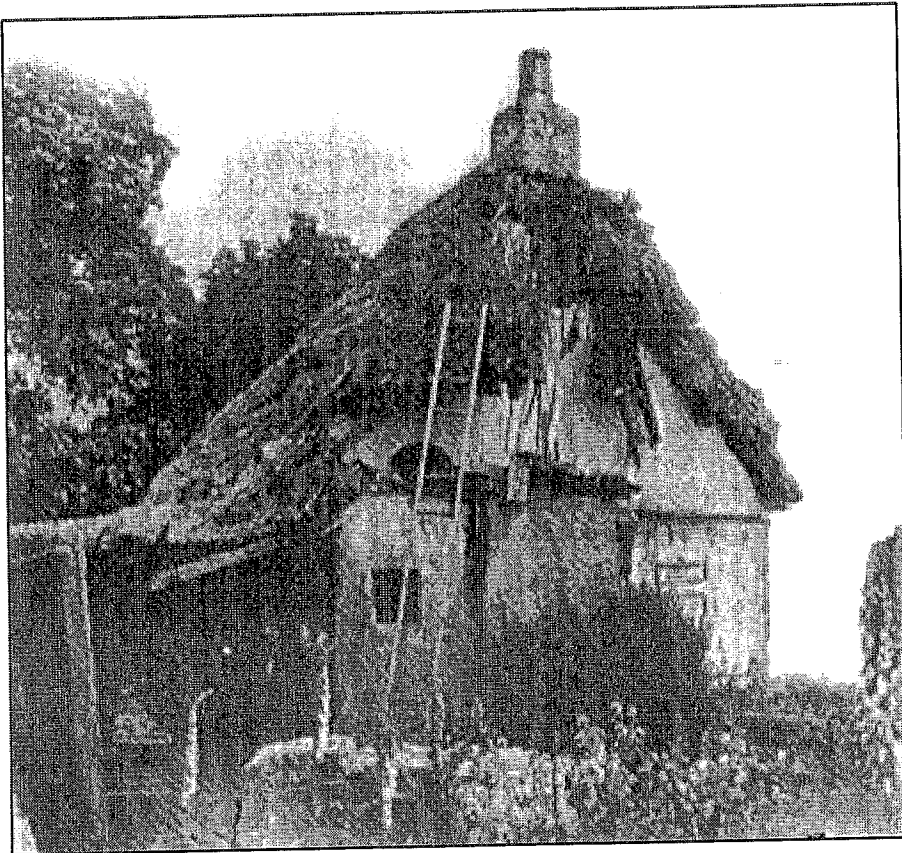
### The Roundhouse

What was the Roundhouse like? Its frame was eight large bog-oak trees extracted from the moss erected and placed to form a point in the centre at the roof top, and for this reason the house was actually hexagonal not round. The walls, constructed with wattle-and-daub which, at some stage was also covered with boarding. Inside it was a snug, but very basic, little two-roomed home, some 20 feet in diameter, and had an earthen floor covered with flags. ! One man I have spoken to told me that when, as a child he visited Wilf, *'Inside it felt like being in a threepenny bit'*.

In early years a peat fire would have burned in the hearth all day, every day, providing warmth and on which the cooking would have been done, but in his time Wilf had a range which kept him warm and on which he did his cooking. In the early days there had been a well beside the road, but that has long since fallen into disuse. Despite the fact that mains water and electricity were never connected to the Roundhouse it seems it was always a family home – at one time a couple with six children are reported as having lived there. Goodness knows how they all managed to squeeze themselves in!

Wilf's move to sheltered accommodation was only intended to be a temporary one, but the

extensive damage to his house made it impossible for him to return, and S.R.B.C. subsequently removed the remains of the old Roundhouse. Neighbours and good friends on Sod Hall Lane, who knew Wilf well, wanted to purchase the remains of the Roundhouse and rebuild it – not for anyone to live in but to keep it as the popular local landmark it had been for about 200 years. (By that time Wilf was well settled, and happy in sheltered accommodation in New Longton). A family called Clarke purchased the land but unfortunately, the Council for some reason best known to themselves, refused them permission to rebuild.

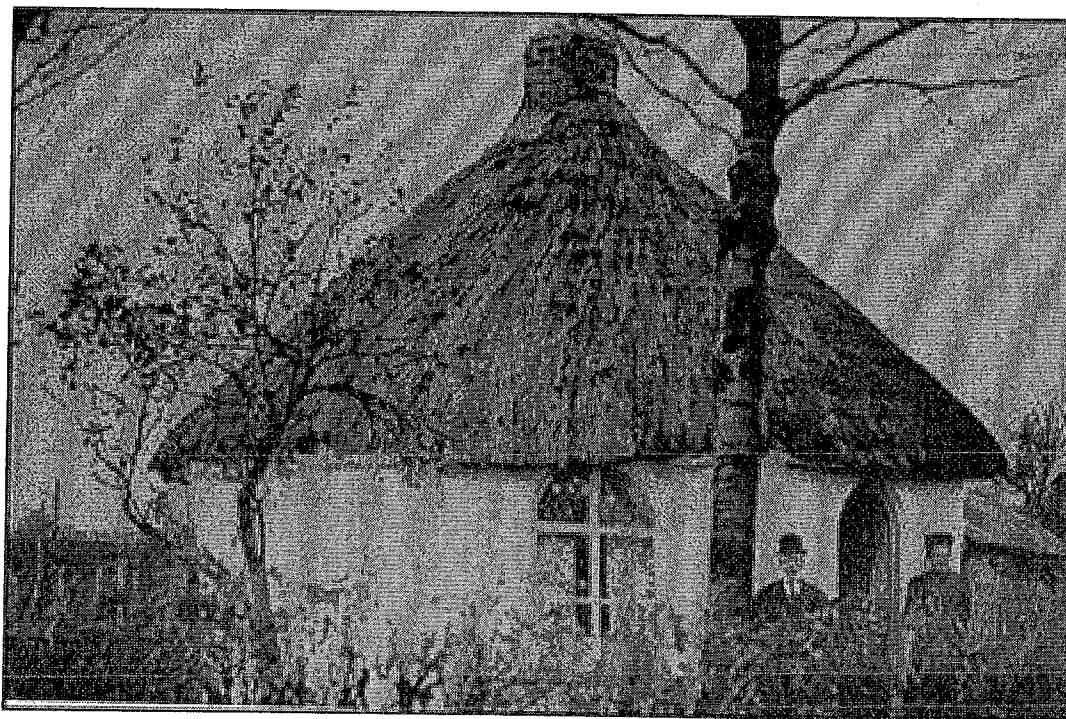


**Some of the damage at the rear of the Roundhouse after the thunderstorm in June 1983**

### Remains

All that is left today is the round space where the house once stood (now largely reclaimed by nettles and brambles), surrounded by its old hedges and overgrown shrubs. However, the remains of the shed which had been built onto the back of the house, and in which Wilf had a tank where he collected and stored rain water, etc. is still just visible through a tangle of ivy.

It was always a popular casual walk along Sod Hall Meanygate and I am told that many of the older residents of the area remembered being taken to have tea at 'Mr & Mrs Crompton's thatched round house on the moss'. Neighbour John told me that Andrew too sometimes provided cups of tea to walkers on Sunday afternoons, and that in the days when Leyland Motors was in its heyday there was a morning and evening 'rush hour' along Sod Hall Meanygate with many cyclists and pedestrians making their way to and from work at the Factory in Leyland. One of those 'rush hour' cyclists was Wilf himself, who cycled into Leyland where he worked for the Council. Other regular cyclists along Sod Hall Meanygate in the early years of the 20th century included one of the managers at BTR rubber works in



Mr & Mrs Crompton outside their roundhouse c1920

Leyland and the postman whose exposed ride from Leyland, along Long Meanygate then onto Sod Hall Meanygate, could have been quite challenging in gales, winter storms or ice, with his delivery bag over his shoulder.

#### A Narrow Escape

On the night of the storm in 1983 Wilf had been about to go to bed when he changed his mind and decided to *'have one last pipe'* which he smoked in the living room first. This proved to be a rather lucky decision because, if he had been in bed when the lightning strike hit the back of his house – which was his bedroom - the rubble would have landed on him in his bed.

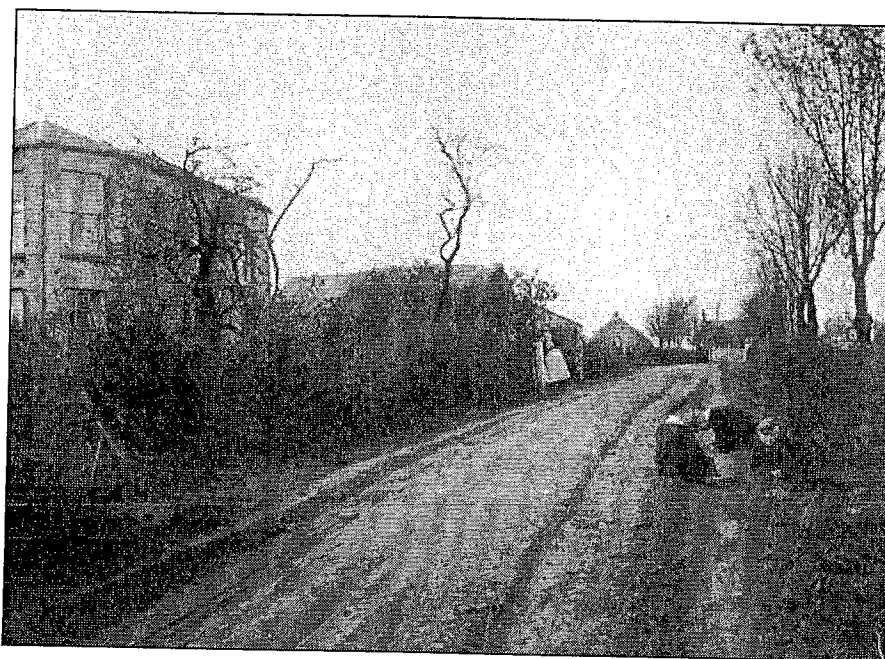
As a youngster Wilf, the youngest of Andrew's sons, was considered to be 'of a weak disposition'. However, this did not prevent him from living a long and active life in that good clean, open air out on the moss. After he retired from work with the Council he earned a bit of extra money by growing a variety of vegetables on his moss-patch, and then selling them in Preston market on Saturdays, where he had a regular spot on 'Growers Row'. Neighbours described Wilf as 'a good neighbour, but kept mainly to himself. However, he did sometimes come to us with his white enamel bucket for some fresh tap water'. Wilf was also a great Preston North End supporter and never missed a Saturday home game.

#### Sod Hall Ghost

Harry Dewhurst, who owned Heath House in the early part of the 20th century, had a horse which unfortunately suffered with colic. Late one night the horse was in considerable discomfort so Harry took it for a walk around, in the dark, to try to relieve the animal's distress. At the same time several Longton gentlemen were making their very drunken ways home from the Midge Hall public house – having taken a dangerous and illegal short-cut along the railway line. As they neared Harry the horse, which had a large white blaze on its head, suddenly reared and snorted loudly. The drunks were terrified and cried out "*It's the Sod Hall ghost*" and ran away in panic. The tale was a good one, and the story of the ghost at Sod Hall continued for many years.



family discovered that in the garden at the southern end of the house was a lead-lined wall. Enquiries revealed that in the past it had been probably used as 'butts' for shooting parties. The tithe map shows it looking like an oval pond.



**Sod Hall Meanygate c1904 looking north. Heath House on the left, the Roundhouse and Sod Hall in the distance**

The Clarke family still own the house and surrounding moss land.

Henry Clarke was very grateful for the help provided on his farm during the 1940s war years by Italian prisoners of war, and he and his wife looked after them and fed them well. One stayed in contact with the family for a number of years after he was repatriated, very grateful for the way he had been treated.

It is interesting to note on the map the large orchard on the Heath House estate. It was still an orchard in the 1940s, but the trees were later grubbed out and the land put to more profitable agricultural use. In 1893 there was also a small orchard at the end of the Roundhouse plot, but that too has now gone.

The well from which early residents living on Sod Hall Meanygate were able to draw water was just to the right of where the three young boys are playing in this photograph.

### **Sod Hall**

Unfortunately very little is actually known about the old Sod Hall. It is clearly identified by name on Yates' 1789 map of the area and, as one of the very first houses built out on the fertile peat-rich flatlands of the Moss, it seems rather appropriately named. Sod Hall had been home to numerous farmers and their families over the years but was demolished sometime in the middle of the 20th century and a bungalow was built in its place, but, I understand, this too was demolished in the 1970s.

All that now remains to show of Sod Hall's existence are the old maps, the overgrown patch of land where it had been, and the lane by which it stood – now known as Sod Hall Lane.