

# Skelmersdale Heritage Society

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



## The news from... January 2023

I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year, unfortunately I'll have to start us off with some slightly sad news. Carol Fenlon, our Secretary and one of the founding members of the new Skelmersdale Heritage back in 2018 has decided to step down from the Committee. I've said this before and I'll say it again, Carol has been absolutely instrumental in the growth of the Society over the last few years. A fierce proponent for coverage of the New Town, an excellent writer, an expert organiser and the only reason these newsletters aren't littered with spelling and grammatical errors. Carol has very much earned a rest from the Committee but I wanted to publicly thank her for all her help and support over the last four years.

Our first monthly meeting of 2023 will on Monday February 6th and our speaker will be Peter Gateley. Peter actually lived at High Crow Orchard Farm in the 1970s and 80s and drawing on his background as an ecologist and his time at Skelmersdale Development Corporation he'll be giving us an in depth look at the natural wonders we can all enjoy in Tawd Valley Park. I hope as many of you as possible will be able to join us as we look to start 2023 with a bang! Cheers!

**Mark**

### NEXT MEETING:

Monday February 6th  
7PM  
Upholland Labour Club

### PHOTOS/VIDEOS

Do you have old family photos or videos featuring the town? We'd love to have a look and get copies so drop us a line.

### WANT TO WRITE FOR US?

Whether it's your memories, local history or something else entirely, if it's Skem related we'd love you to get involved. Just drop us an email and we'll consider it for our next newsletter.

## The news from... January 1991

Lytham's Tory Councillor Bill Thompson was making friends in the town by suggesting that Skelmersdale had far too many school places and the only logical solution was to close some schools down.

His comments went down about as well as you'd expect. Labour County Councillor Chris Cheetham slammed the comments saying 'It seems very strange that when Conservatives talk about West Lancashire review the only solution they can offer is the closure of schools in Skelmersdale... The Tory prejudice is a disgrace and they should reconsider their attitude at once.'

Questions were asked about how the Government was assessing these so called 'empty desks.' A report published by the Education Committee had stated there were sixteen surplus spaces at Fairlie School, Birch Green. However, teacher-governor Jennifer Harker was unimpressed, stating the guidelines were wrong and the only way they could fit more pupils in was if they 'start having classrooms in the corridor'.

## Unsocial Media

*Before there was Facebook, the only place for Skemmers to publicly complain was  
The Ormskirk Addvertiser!*

IF a certain person residing at Skelmersdale does not apologise through the columns of the *Ormskirk Advertiser* for untrue statements about myself, **ISAAC** **SOCKETT**, and my son James, within seven days, legal proceedings will be taken against him and against any other person referring to the same after this date.

Signed, **ISAAC** **SOCKETT**,  
40, Field street.

Date March 4th, 1926.

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# The Bad Doctor

By Joan Neville

On September 1st 1919 an esteemed new Doctor arrived in Skelmersdale. Not just a doctor, but also a knight of the realm! Doctor Sir Thomas Munroe came to Skelmersdale as a locum to the already established surgery of the Irish Doctor Vincent O'Reilly. Basing himself on High Street he was only in the town a short time but was said to be idolised by the town's residents. As an injured veteran of World War One he led a procession of discharged soldiers and sailors before departing the town for a new position in Blackpool on the 27th of September. It was probably quite sad for the town that such a respectable, admirable man's association with Skelmersdale was so brief but the thing is, he wasn't actually a war hero, or a knight, a doctor and his name wasn't Thomas Munroe!

## An Amazing Career.

### "Sir Thomas Munroe's" Life History.

During a long career as a habitual criminal with crimes including forgery, perjury, fraud, theft and bigamy 'Thomas Munroe' was known 'Richard Thomas Cubbin', 'John Bibby', 'Hubert Part' and 'Frederick Charles Ackland' amongst others. His true name however was John Cubbin. He was born at Cowling Cottage, Charnock Richard in April 1867, the first of five children of William and Martha Cubbin, later press reports would state that they were a respectable family . William worked at Ellerbeck Colliery and John would follow his father into the mine as a haulage hand before an accident resulted in him losing the lower part of his leg. Following this he worked as a time keeper for the colliery as well as attending night classes until 1895 when he mysteriously disappeared.

He reappears in the records on October 5th 1898 when he married 31 year-old Margaret Ellen Hankey of Borwick who had formerly worked as a lady's maid to Mrs Charles Jackson of Barton Hall. They made a home in Poulton Le Fylde and in 1900 Margaret gave birth to their only child, Christine Ann Constance Cubbin. However by 1901 Margaret and baby Christine were lodging with a cousin in Chorley. So where had John gone? Prison.

In 1901 he was a guest of HM Prison, Preston after being found guilty of pretending to be a doctor, making false declarations on medical certificates and larceny. Prison didn't exactly straighten him out, on his release in 1902 while still married to Margaret he took a second wife, Alice Ford under the name of Herbert Part, a deceased doctor whose identity he had stolen. When in 1905 he was arrested for bigamy, he claimed that he thought Margaret was dead. The judge was unimpressed, John was found guilty of bigamy and indecent assault and jailed for five years.



Upon his release he moved around the country working as a doctor and then in 1917 he obtained employment on the Canadian Pacific Ocean Service as a ship's surgeon where he met Gertrude Satchell who he quickly married in Montreal! He then joined the SS Akab on a voyage to the West Coast of Africa. This job didn't last long as he was soon dismissed for being inefficient!

Following his misadventures on the high seas he was arrested in Essex on his return to England following an assault on a child. He was sentenced to fifteen months in prison which included the unexpired term of his previous sentence for bigamy plus 12 months hard labour for the assault on the child and a further five years for his bigamous marriage to Satchell.

On his release from prison he changed his name again to Thomas Munroe. Moving to the North West he was for a short time employed by Dr Rees of Wigan before being discharged for his drunken habits. He then took positions in Preston with Dr. Denham, followed by Dr. Dunnerdale in Blackpool to whom he returned following his short stay in Skelmersdale.

His final position as a doctor was in Bury where he conducted the post mortem of a man who had died by a shooting suicide. It may be worth reiterating that he had absolutely no medical qualifications!

On February 26th 1920 he was arrested at the YMCA lodging house in Islington, Liverpool after a warrant for his arrest was issued in Blackpool for making false certificates and forgery.

The trial at Liverpool assizes was held in St. George's Hall where he was charged under one of his many names, Richard Thompson Cubbin. Described as a surgeon he pleaded guilty to all charges and the judge, who described Cubbin's record as 'a terrible one' sentenced him to five years in Parkhurst Prison.

1733-02	Richard Thompson Cubbin, aliases John Cubbin, Hubert Part and Frederick Charles Ackland d i o u 630, Parkhurst	1867 Chorley	5	5	fr	bn (tg gr, thin top)	bl	wound scar rt. side of chin; scar first and second rt. fingers; dot base l. thumb	Forgery and giving false death certificate — Liverpool Assizes (Blackpool)	5 yrs ps (conc.) 12-4-20	11-4-25	4-1-24 London Ex-Surgeon	For photo, etc., see Case No. 106, Vol. IV., Police Gazette, Supplement A
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**Naughty naughty.**

Cubbin would die in Liverpool on the 13th of November 1933, after a lifetime of lying and manipulating it's unclear if he ever went straight after getting out of prison. He remained married to a clearly very forgiving Margaret who he left a not insubstantial amount of £434, 13 shillings and 9 pence in his will. Today this would be worth over £24,000!

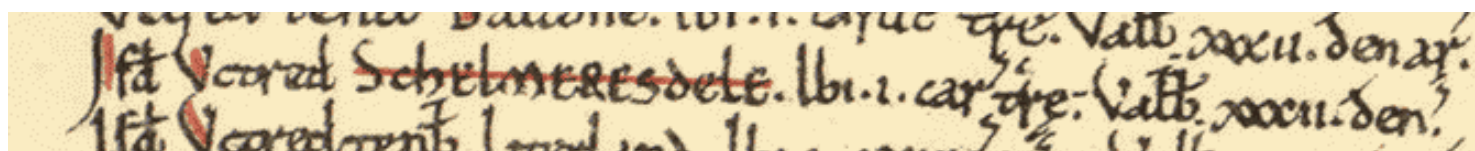
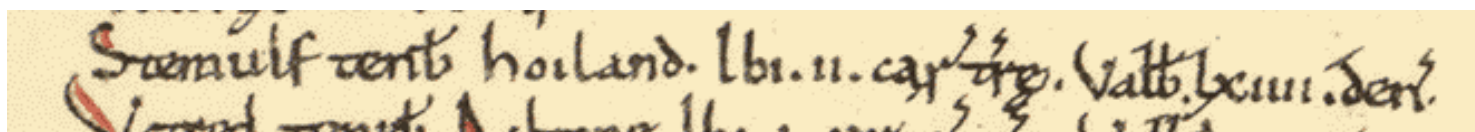
# O'er t' Bruck

## By Shirley Carr

**Older residents of Skelmersdale will no doubt be familiar with the term 'o'er t' bruck'. It means 'over the brook', the 'brook' being the River Tawd. To a Skemmer, 'He's from o'er t' bruck' referred to someone from Up Holland, whose boundary with Skelmersdale was the Tawd. I wonder, did the residents of Up Holland and Diggmoor refer to Skemmers in this way too?**

Although they were different communities, Skelmersdale and Up Holland had a lot in common: the farms, the peat mosses, coalmining, schooling and of course family networks. Although there may have been some friendly rivalry between the two towns, I believe the ties were strong, and when it was decided to link the two towns into one in the early days of the New Town planning, this partnership became official.

Skelmersdale and Up Holland have a shared heritage, yet the two places retain their own identity. Up Holland has a long and fascinating history; so does Skelmersdale; both are mentioned in the Domesday Book, so who would think of changing their original names?



### Domesday entries for Upholland and Skelmersdale

Well... as it happens, with the coming of the New Town it was mooted that there should be one new name for the two connected townships. Up Holland's representatives on the 'Joint Committee of Skelmersdale and Up Holland' seemed to be pushing for this. Here are some of the names, with comments, that were put forward by the public when they read of this notion in the press as published in the Skelmersdale Reporter in January 1965:

**LANDALE:** 'It would seem that both Skelmersdale and Up Holland wish to keep their township's identity. Let them in districts of the New Town choose a completely new name for the whole town.'

**TAWD VALE:** 'The name that could satisfy both Skelmersdale and Up Holland is already in use – for the new telephone exchange – Tawd Vale. It is also more or less in the heart of the New Town – 'Interested Observer' – Ormskirk.'

**HOLLAND-DALE:** 'How about naming it Holland-Dale (Denis Marsden, age 14)'

**SKELMERSDALE:** The reader asked 'Why? It has been known as Skelmersdale all the way through. Up Holland will be that part of Up Holland which is not in the New Town area. Skelmersdale is swallowed up completely. The parts of Up Holland in the New town can retain their name as districts within the town, as other towns and cities have – Dignum, Hall Green, Tawd Bridge, Holland Moor – Keep it Skelmersdale'.

**BEACONDALE:** The reader pointed out that 'Skelmersdale Development Corporation had said the New Town should be centred around the view of Ashurst Beacon from most points within the housing development.'

**DALESIDE:** 'A new name? Try to keep a rural sound'.

There was, as you would expect, a divergence of opinion about the idea of changing Skelmersdale's name. At a meeting in January Councillor Hugh Edden called for fellow members of the council to 'unite and fight against those impatient people in Up Holland who want to change the name of Skelmersdale New Town,' while Councillor Shufflebotham commented on 'the impatience of our friends over the water concerning the name of the New Town'. Councillor Edden, chairing the meeting, also reminded those attending that Skelmersdale Council were 'the pioneers for the introduction of a New Town twelve years ago when no other name was thought of, to help the people of Liverpool in their hour of need.' He went on to say that 'the name of Skelmersdale was now known throughout the length and breadth of the land and that he was not going to be party to re-christening it.' (*Skelmersdale Reporter 21st January 1965*)

'A further meeting was held on 27th January 1965, the details of which were not released until March of that year; a decision had still not been made. Concerns were raised by Councillor Claxton about the amount of press publicity the subject was receiving, and Councillor A. Davies told the meeting that he thought the time for changing the name was premature. On the other hand Councillors Hammond and Lomax wanted to move things along, involving the public by sponsoring a competition.

## UP HOLLAND COUNCIL SUGGESTS NEW TOWN SHOULD BE NAMED HOLLANDALE

***This would indicate a merger and not a take-over,***

*inquiry told*

She turns out rosettes galore to cope with the rush



Mr George Watson, general Manager of Skelmersdale Development Corporation advised that the question of renaming the town should be left until the two Urban Districts of Skelmersdale and Upholland were amalgamated. Amalgamation had been discussed between the two authorities, but in the end it was for the County Council to decide whether this would go ahead.

The meeting had ended with a vote that the matter be 'held in abeyance to a more opportune time.' (*Skelmersdale Reporter 11th March 1965*)



**George Watson**

Well a 'more opportune time' was 1968, when the Urban District Council of 'Skelmersdale and Holland' was created. I seem to remember that letters posted to addresses in the district were to have the envelopes addressed with 'Skelmersdale with Holland', or 'Skelmersdale with Up Holland'. This did not last very long though because in 1974 this merged council was subsumed into the new, non-metropolitan 'District of West Lancashire' under the Heath government's 1972 Local Government Act.

'What goes around comes around' as the saying goes. It is true that some communities such as Dignum, Birch Green and Tanhouse, despite lying 'o'er t' bruck' are now classed as being part of Skelmersdale, but both Skelmersdale and the greater part of Up Holland (or do you say 'Upholland?') have retained their ancient names and their unique character.

The bond is still there though; you have only to attend one of the Skelmersdale Heritage Society monthly meetings, held at Up Holland Labour Club to see that we are all friends together!



# The Vicar and the Potters Daughter

## By Mark Boardman

**Scouring the old newspapers for references to our town can sometimes bring up surprising discoveries. In the pages of previous editions of this newsletter we've covered riots, murders, explosions and all manner of mayhem.**

So this story may seem a bit more sedate but back in 1902 it wouldn't have seemed so to the small town of less than 6,000 people, in fact it was major news.

It concerns a Church Minister, a young woman and a baby.

The young woman in question was Myra Jones, aged 24, daughter of Edward Jones, a local pottery worker and his wife, May (or Mary) Ann. The Jones's had originally hailed from Rowley Regis in Staffordshire but had come to Skelmersdale sometime in the 1890s and by 1903 were residing at 34 Marchbank Road.



The back of the terraces on Marchbank Road

The Church Minister was the Reverend John William Davies, a pastor at the Congregational Church on Witham Road. Born in 1856 in Staffordshire, he grew up in Denbighshire, Wales.



**Congregational Church**

In February 1876 having followed his father Jacob into the brickmaking trade he married eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Davies and their only son John Wright was born on Christmas Day later that year.

According to Davies's later recollection he joined the Congregational Church in the late 1880s, coming to Skelmersdale in 1895 along with Elizabeth, John Wright and an adopted daughter, Dyllis. Dyllis had been born Dyllis Hudson in Rugeley, the daughter of a woman from Liverpool who already had a number of children with her husband, George. However Dyllis, was not George's daughter but the result of an extramarital affair. Perhaps unable to cope or under orders from her husband, Elizabeth had Dyllis given up for adoption and John and Elizabeth had taken her into their care via the Boarding out Committee, a precursor to the fostering system.

The Congregational Church movement (Calvinist Churches that operated independent of any central body such as The Church Of England) had arrived in the district in the late 1870s. Originally meeting in a cottage belonging to Thomas Turner, they would only be there a short time before moving into a couple of houses on 'Rigby's Row' (presumably Rigby Street) in September of 1877. When the Church outgrew this Mission Hall, they moved again, this time onto Witham Road where an iron building was erected before being later replaced in the late 1890s by the stone building at the cost of £2000.

Davies was certainly a man of standing in the town. In addition to his duties as a pastor, he was also a guardian of the poor (sitting on a board appointed to provide care and relief for the poor of the parish). A member of the Skelmersdale School Board, he had also occupied the positions of President, Vice President and Secretary of the Free Church Council.

In January 1900 Myra Jones went to work as a servant at the Davies household but was dismissed when it was discovered she was pregnant. On July 14th 1900 she gave birth to her first child, the father of which was local miner Jonathan Roberts. However, in the 1901 census there is no sign of the child; Myra is listed as living with her Aunt and Uncle at 99 Sheratt Street and working as a 'monthly nurse'. This was the term used for someone who looked after a mother and baby in the period following a birth. Intriguingly back at 34 Marchbank Road there is an eight-month old named Edward listed as the son of Edward and Mary. It's possible that they had taken on the baby as their own, the dates would certainly suggest this.



Myra's replacement as servant was her sister Sarah (known by her middle name Matilda) but in May 1901 while his wife was away in Wales Davies deemed Sara incompetent at her household tasks and sent for Myra via his daughter Dyllis. In the later court case Myra would say that Davies told her that with his wife away he was 'tired of being alone' and needed help getting Dyllis ready for school in his wife's absence. Myra agreed to stay at the house for a week after Davies told her he would inform his wife of the arrangement via letter. The following night, Sunday May 18th, Davies woke up Myra, telling her he was 'unable to rest while his wife was away' and it was then the child was conceived.

A few months later on November 23rd, Myra's father Edward visited Reverend Davies at his home to confront him with the revelation that Myra was pregnant and alleging that the minister was the father. Reverend Davies was furious in his reaction, denying the charge and telling his wife that 'she has got herself in trouble, undoubtedly, somewhere, and considers this the easiest way out of the difficulty.' His wife, understandably shocked, fainted.

Davies, confronted the allegations head on, instructing his solicitors to send a letter to Myra's father asking that Myra either take action at once via a paternity case in the courts or withdraw her allegation. At a public meeting he informed his congregation of the allegations and asked that they suspend judgment until the full facts had been established in a court of law.

Myra however, refused to withdraw the allegations even under threat of legal proceedings and on the 12th of March 1902 they took out a court summons for a paternity case against Davies.

There was also the case of the anonymous letter that was delivered to Mr and Mrs Richard Davies (no relation to the accused) with whom Myra had previously lodged. Signed by 'an old friend' it alleged that there were three witnesses that could prove that Myra's 'misconduct' had not taken place with the Reverend John Davies but with Richard Davies!

The suspicion was that the anonymous writer was none other than Reverend John Davies seeking to divert attention away from himself! During the paternity hearing local fireman Peter Roscoe would add fuel to this particular fire when he claimed that Davies had visited him and asked him to back up the letter by saying he was one of the witnesses and had seen Myra with Richard Davies (no relation) in the closet behind the chapel. When Roscoe refused, the Reverend was alleged to have said 'Well they are going to swear falsely against me. You say I am innocent. I do not see why you cannot swear falsely for me'.

It was during the same visit that the Reverend had warned Roscoe that Richard Davies was going to take proceedings against him for slander for spreading this rumour. The cool-headed Roscoe replied that Richard couldn't because Roscoe had not slandered him.

Roscoe admitted that he thought the minister was innocent of the charges but he would not lie under oath for him. He did concede however that he had said that he knew two men, who could give enough evidence to clear Reverend Davies due to them seeing Myra go along Liverpool Road and onto the station platform with a man named Glover. How this would prove anything is anyone's guess but it certainly seemed elements of the community were trying to cast doubt on Myra's credibility.

While Roscoe was still (just about) backing Reverend Davies, Roscoe's wife Elizabeth was not so sure, stating in court that she had believed the minister to be innocent before he'd tried to induce her and her husband to commit perjury.

Innocent or not the good Reverend seemed intent on stirring up trouble.

The paternity hearing began on April 4th 1902 at Ormskirk in front of a large crowd of onlookers, taking place over three days it was the talk of the newspapers with in depth articles appearing in The Liverpool Echo, The Liverpool Mercury, The Preston Herald, The Manchester Courier and more (though, strangely considering the public interest, The Ormskirk Advertiser gave it only the briefest of reports).

So what do we conclude from all this? Do we believe Myra, a working-class girl who, aged 24 already had an illegitimate child or the pillar of the community, the man of God, the Reverend John William Davies.

It's fair to say that some of Reverend Davies's actions were less than Christian as he attempted to influence his congregation to commit perjury. There's also the matter of the letter. The court concluded that this was a forgery designed to look like Reverend Davies had written it in order to weaken his case but, for me at least, this seems a bit complicated a plot to have been carried out by Myra and her father.

Nevertheless, the court concluded that Reverend John Davies was NOT the father of Myra's baby and the case was dismissed.

Reverend Davies would remain in Skelmersdale for another five years, resigning from his post in January 1907 to take up a post in Brecon, South Wales. Following the death of his wife Elizabeth in August 1924 he would remarry in 1926. The bride in question was a widow named Kate Louisa Webb. There was a considerable age gap, Kate was 38 while Reverend Davies was 70! The marriage was short lived though as Davies would die in 1930 while living in Surrey. In his will he left all his possessions to his young wife.

As for Myra, she would continue to live in Skelmersdale. In 1906 she married miner James Bolton (who as it turns out is my great Uncle). They would have three children together before her death in 1945.

But what about Myra's first two children? Here it gets harder to say. The 1911 census lists the aforementioned Edward Jones aged 11 and a new child, Esther, aged 9 living with Myra's parents at 24 Marchbank Road. I suspect that these are Myra's children, informally adopted by their grandparents. In 1921 they were living at 15 Liverpool Road with Matilda who of course, was their sister, or potentially, their Aunt.

There is one final, small twist to the tale. While researching for this article I came across the great nephew of John William Davies, he told me that family legend had it that there was some disapproval of the reverend, philandering was hinted at. At the time he had had no idea about the court case, a case of mud, rightly or wrongly, sticking, even over a hundred years later.

# Images of Stormy Corner Skelmersdale's lost hamlet



**The old railways crossing, Lathom Brickworks in the distance**



**Stormy Carnival, Berry Street, 1902. The area of the buildings is now Crow Orchard School's playing Field.**



**Looking up Berry Street towards the Seven Stars Pub**



**A closer look at the Seven Stars**



**Summer Street**



Edward Drapers shop



**The junction of Berry Street and Summer Street**



**The Beehive Pub**