

Back in Time - 37 - The Bradshaw Legacy

By John Rabbitt

Perhaps one of the most well known names in Victorian times was that of “Bradshaw”. George Bradshaw (1800 - 1853), was born at Windsor Bridge in Pendleton, Salford. Windsor Bridge is now the location of Salford Crescent Station; in Victorian times there



was no station at Windsor Bridge. Thanks to Michael Portillo's television series "Great British Railway Journeys" I'm sure you are familiar with Bradshaw's Railway Guides. Bradshaw's Railway Timetables and later, the Bradshaw's Railway Guides were the Victorian railway equivalent of Google; if you wanted to know the time of a train or details about a town you consulted your Bradshaw's Guide. Bradshaw's publishing company was based in Manchester. George Bradshaw died relatively young (53) of cholera in 1853 while visiting friends in Oslo. George did however lay the foundations of one of the most successful publications in the Victorian era.

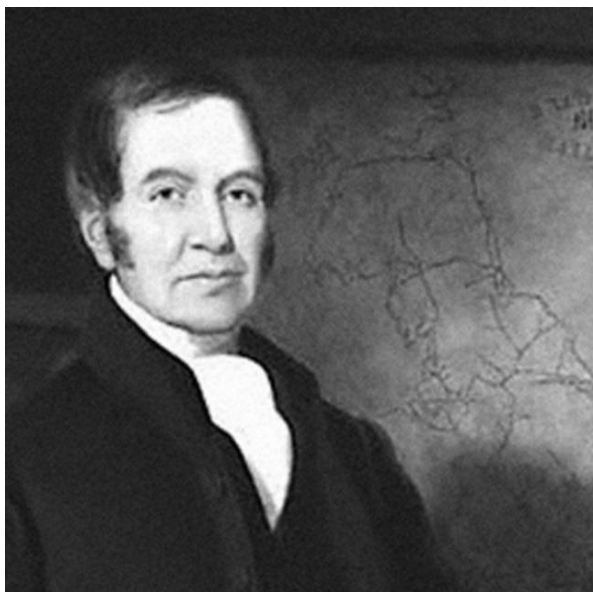
The Bradshaw business was very much a family affair and George's eldest son, Christopher took over the business. We now come to the Ellesmere Park connection.

Christopher Bradshaw lived in two houses in Ellesmere Park, at East Dene in Westminster Road (shown in the photograph below) and at The Nook, one of the four houses in Victoria Avenue.



Christopher Bradshaw worked for his father's firm at the Bradshaw's Railway Guide and General Printing and Stationery Works in Albert Square in Manchester. He was a Director of Henry Blacklock and Co. who published the Bradshaw's Railway Guide. He was an avid collector of books on the theatre and the arts as well as Napoleon. He collected furniture, his collection from the workshops of master craftsmen was reputed to be the finest in Lancashire.

Christopher Bradshaw was a well-known Manchester figure, somewhat flamboyantly dressed and keenly interested in literature and the theatre, he became a J.P. on 24th April 1903. The Bradshaw family were very well connected. Through his father Christopher had met the likes



of Gladstone, Disraeli, Victor Hugo and many of the most famous Victorian actors and actresses of the time. One in particular was his great friend, Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905) who was the most famous actor of the Victorian period. Irving was the very first actor to be knighted in 1895. Whenever Irving appeared in Manchester Christopher Bradshaw dined with him. For 30 years Bradshaw was a constant guest at Irving's London productions, especially at the Lyceum. It is not appropriate to list all Irving's achievements here but that fact that his ashes were interred in Westminster Abbey says how much he was celebrated as one of the finest actors in the Victorian era.



So why is Sir Henry Irving important to Eccles and Ellesmere Park?

The first President of the Eccles Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society was none other than Sir Henry Irving. To have such an important actor as the President of a small Lancashire town's amateur dramatic society is astonishing. This must have come about through Christopher Bradshaw, one of his best friends. It is highly likely that Christopher Bradshaw was a leading figure when

EADOS was established in the early 1900s and he knew just the person to ask to be the President of the new Eccles amateur dramatic and operatic society. When Irving died in 1905 Christopher Bradshaw donated 500 of his books on the theatre to the John Rylands Library in Manchester in memory of his friend Henry Irving.

There is no doubt that Christopher Bradshaw was one of the most important and influential residents of the Victorian Ellesmere Park.

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