

Obituary of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Fishwick (1835-1914) *(Rochdale Observer, 26th September 1914)*

Transcription note:

This obituary was dictated from a poor photocopy held in the local history files [G3 FIS] at Rochdale Local Studies Library. It had not been possible to make another usable photocopy because of its grey background. The dictation, taken on an Olympus DS-150 Digital Voice Recorder, was converted to text using IBM ViaVoice Pro. The transcript has been checked against the sound recording and is thought to be fairly accurate but where there were unclear words or passages some guesses have been made (although not so as risk destroying the sense); some dates are marked with [?], and in extreme cases of textual uncertainty gaps are indicated by "[... unclear ...]". Thanks are due to the Library staff, firstly for finding the photocopy, and then for allowing me the use of a quiet room in which to dictate the text.

(David J. Murray, August 2000).

Death of Lieutenant-Colonel Fishwick

- A many-sided career**
- A story of over 40 years of public service**

It is with deep regret that we record today the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Fishwick, J.P., F.S.A., which took place at his residence The Heights, Rochdale at half past two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. To most people it was not known that he was ill, and the news of the end came as a painful shock.

Mr Fishwick's last public appearance was at a meeting of the Rochdale Distress Committee on 7th September. He was then very feeble. A series of severe illnesses during the last ten or a dozen years had seriously diminished his reserves of physical strength. Returning home from the Distress Committee meeting he became poorly, and a day or two later had to take to his bed. A sharp attack of dysentery greatly weakened him, and he gradually sank. He would have been 80 years of age had he lived until next March.

Memoir

Colonel Fishwick touched public life at many points, educationist, municipal administrator, author, painstaking antiquary, geologist, art connoisseur, and unwearied collector of pictures for his town - these were among his main interests. To many of us the wonder was that a man whose material resources were not sufficient to relieve him from the anxiety of business as a necessary avocation should have been, not merely willing, but able to devote so much time to the public service. That he did so is striking evidence that in him Rochdale possessed once more a type of the finest public spirit.

Colonel Fishwick was a native of Rochdale where he was born on March 9th, 1835 and was therefore in his 80th year. His father was Mr Henry Halliwell Fishwick of Brownhill. The family were at one time extensive colliery owners in this district, but

the flooding of the mines had a disastrous effect on their commercial fortunes. The family name of Fishwick is taken from the township of Fishwick in the parish of Preston and for several generations Fishwicks were among the leading people of North Lancashire. For a great many years they were settled at Goosnargh, and from 1640 onward for nearly two centuries the ancestral home was at Bulsnape Hall in the Goosnargh district.

From his youth Colonel Fishwick took an interest in public affairs. When only 18 years old he was secretary of the Rochdale Young Men's Christian Association and he was only 25 years of age when he joined the Volunteer Force, then by no means popular. Indeed, he was one of the first to associate himself with the movement, and to endeavour to popularise it. With him in this task with Captain James Fenton and Ensign Philippi, who afterwards became the Colonel Commandant of the Rochdale Battalion. It was on 24th February, 1860 that of Mr Fishwick joined the corps. That was on its enrolment. He was appointed Lieutenant, and, together with Captain Fenton and Ensign Philippi, he attended the Queen's levée to volunteer officers on 6th March 1860[?]. Subsequently he became major and commanding officer. This post he resigned in 1869[?].

The next year he was gazetted Major of what was then known as the 56th Lancashire (Salford) Rifle Volunteers and a little later he took the command of the regiment, been gazetted Lieutenant-Colonel at the end of October 1871. For some time he was attached to the 8th Kings Foot Regiment which was then quartered at Salford, and he ultimately obtained a field officer's certificate. Under his direction the corps increased from 300 to 800 strong. He resigned his appointment at Salford in 1879, but retained the rank and title of Lieutenant-Colonel.

As education was long his chief public interest so it was the problem that attracted him early in life. As far back as January 1862 he took an active part in the founding of the Rochdale Lyceum with the object of "the diffusion of knowledge among all classes." He became the secretary of the movement, the late Mr G T Kemp accepting the presidency.

In the town council

The "Father of the Council," Colonel Fishwick's connection with the Rochdale Corporation extended over the long period of 43 years. He first entered the town council in 1871, being returned as one of the Conservative representatives for the undivided ward of Castleton. With the exception of three weeks in 1872 (he was defeated on November 1st, but re-elected on the 21st of the same month) his membership continued right up to the time of his death.

On the election of the late Mr W T Shawcross as an alderman, after the "general election" of 1872 contiguous on the extension of the borough, Colonel Fishwick stood for the vacancy in Wardleworth East ward. His Liberal opponent was the late

Alderman Joseph Rushworth, with whom he was afterwards associated on the council, and still more closely in the educational establishment of the town. The contest for the vacant seat in Wardleworth East was a close one, and Mr Fishwick only won by the narrow majority of seven votes. Once in the council he was not long in proving himself a valuable acquisition., so much so that he was never again opposed by a Liberal. In fact he sat for 18 years without having his seat attacked from any quarter. Then the Socialists appeared in the field, but made no impression against him.

On April 25th, 1900, Alderman Tatham, who had sat as a Liberal, died and at a special meeting of the Council on May 17th Councillor Fishwick was elected to the vacant aldermanic seat. There was a sharp controversy among militant radicals at this action of the Liberal majority in giving an aldermanic seat to a Conservative, and Mr Fishwick's selection was not unanimous. But the great majority of the Liberals in the Council and outside felt that the promotion had been earned. While labelling himself a Conservative Mr Fishwick was never a party man in municipal affairs, and was far more often to be found acting with the progressives than with those with whom he was allied in Imperial politics. Indeed, all through his long career on the Council he was a consistent progressive, and in the 1906 election he is said to have voted Liberal.

The inner work

In the work of the Council no member had a more active share. He served on five committees - Waterworks, General Purposes, Public Libraries and Art Gallery, Education, and Distress - and on no fewer than eight sub-committees, some of them of the utmost responsibility and importance. Many years ago he was a member of the Buildings, Baths, Parks and Cemetery Committee, and for some time acted as its chairman. At the time of his death he was chairman of the Public Libraries, Art Gallery, and Museum Committee, and the Education Committee, and until a short time ago presided over the Distress Committee.

His membership of the Free Library Committee lasted from the formation of the committee in 1874 and his chairmanship of it from the death of Alderman James Booth in 1881. The addition of the Art Gallery and Museum in 1903 made the functions of the department vastly more onerous, and in promoting the success of these two additions to Rochdale's possession Colonel Fishwick was enthusiastic and untiring. To him primarily the periodical exhibitions of some of the best of pictures have been due, and he was also the chief moving spirit in getting together the memorable collection of portraits of Rochdale worthies, which formed so conspicuous a feature at the celebration of the Jubilee of the incorporation of the Borough in 1906. It was Mr Fishwick, too, who approached Mr Carnegie and secured from him a grant of £2,800 to cover the cost of erecting the commodious new branch library at Castleton.

The Colonel's long and devoted services to education are dealt with later in this memoir,. There is still another department in which for many years he was, next to the

chairman (Alderman W T Peake [?]), the most conspicuous figure - the Waterworks Department - from which he retired a few years ago. For long he was one of the "inner circle" of that body. Again, he served on what for many years was the most onerous sub-committee of the General Purposes Committee - the Parliamentary Sub-committee. This work greatly interested him; as he once said it familiarised him with all the intricacies of procedure on parliamentary bills, and it brought him into contact with a great many men of exceptional character and attainment.

Mayoralty and freedom of the borough

It must be said to the credit of the majority of the Rochdale Town Council that if Colonel Fishwick, by work and service, had earned honours, his colleagues were not slow to give them to him. In 1903, after over 30 years in the Council, he was invited to succeed Alderman Samuel Turner as mayor of the borough. It was an honour that he keenly appreciated, but at first, for private reasons, he felt bound to decline. The Council, however, pressed their suit and backed it up by a resolution which had the unanimous support of the 43 other members. In deference to this flattering expression of confidence and goodwill, Mr Fishwick waived his personal objections and accepted the office, consenting at the end of his first year of office to undertake the duties for the second term. His mayoralty was a success, and witnessed one or two notable events. The chief was the opening of Alderman Turner's coronation gift of Falinge Park. In this connection Colonel Fishwick narrowly escaped the honour of welcoming royalty for the first time to Rochdale. An effort was made to induce the present King then, of course, Prince of Wales, to come to the new park, but his Royal Highness was about to make a foreign tour, and was thus unable to visit the town.

An even greater honour than the mayoralty awaited him at the celebration of the town's municipal jubilee in 1906, when in company with Sir Clement Royds, Alderman S. Turner, and the late Mr James Ogden, he received the honorary freedom of the borough.

It was, however, not the only honour done to him during the jubilee celebrations. After the opening of the portrait exhibition at the Art Gallery he was the recipient of his own portrait in oils subscribed for by many admirers and painted by his old friend Mr Tom Mostyn, the honorary art adviser to the corporation. The portrait, generally praised as a good likeness, Mr Fishwick afterwards presented to the town to be hung on the art gallery walls.

In still another way his name will always be associated with Rochdale municipal jubilee. It was largely on his suggestion that the volume of Jubilee records of the town was compiled. This he edited, and he was also responsible for the long general introduction to the work, dealing with the rise and progress of the town before its incorporation.

It may be added that of those in the town council when he first became a member in

1871 only three survive - Mr J S Littlewood, Mr Charles Whittaker, and Mr WJ Petrie. All of them have served as mayors of the borough, and Mr Fishwick and Mr Petrie were at the Town Head school together.

The school board days

Much as other public work appealed to him it was the cause of education and of the children that was always nearest to Colonel Fishwick's heart. It was his proud distinction to have served on a public education authority longer than any other man in the country. He was a member of the Rochdale School Board from its formation in November 1870 until its abolition in 1903 - he became chairman of the Board on the death of Mr William Shaw J.P. in 1897 - and since then he had been a member and chairman of its successor, the Education Committee. So that his public education service extended over nearly 44 years.

At the first triennial election of a School Board for Rochdale he stood as a church candidate and was sixth on the poll with 3640 votes. After the first battle the triennial elections passed without contest for 15 years. Then in 1885 Colonel Fishwick headed the polls with a great vote of 10,942. Ever after that his was the first name on the list. In 1894 the contest was an exceptionally fierce one, as many in the town will remember. Colonel Fishwick then stood for the first time as an independent churchman. As on the Council, so on the School Board his attitude had been that of a progressive and he had always fought as an educationist rather than as a churchman. Hence he had offended some of his church friends but the 1894 poll again showed unmistakably that he had the people with him. He polled the enormous number of 12,802 votes. Still further had he advanced in popular favour when the 1900 contest came; then the jurisdiction of the Board had been extended to Castleton and the membership increased from 11 to 13. This time Colonel Fishwick eclipsed all his previous polls, the number of votes he then received being 14,760, and this although the Church party had officially instructed their adherents to vote solidly for the church candidates, thus leaving Mr Fishwick out in the cold.

That was the last contest. The Education Act of 1902 abolished the school boards. On the new Education Committee being chosen, Colonel Fishwick was unanimously elected as chairman, and he has retained the post ever since with the support and goodwill of all sections.

His policy in education

Independence was one of the chief characteristics of Colonel Fishwick, and nowhere was it more strongly displayed than in his policy as an educationist. Here he knew no party, acting with the Liberals in this department of public life, not because they were Liberals but because their attitude was one which in his view made for educational betterment. He believed in good school buildings where the children could be

surrounded by everything to make school life attractive. He was not afraid of spending, and he did not look for an immediate return for the money. He was content to wait.

When costly schools have been built in recent years the old cry against extravagance has been heard, and in spite of Colonel Fishwick's never failing advocacy and his great prestige feeling has continued to grow that Rochdale's education rate is becoming too great a burden. His answer to all this was that the government and progress was continually placing new responsibilities on the shoulders of local authorities and that they could not be discharged without a corresponding increase of expenditure. He was a strong advocate of an increased grant from Imperial sources, and several times joined deputations to the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer to press that view. To the teachers in a scarcely less degree than the children he was always a friend. He was the first mayor of the borough to give them special recognition in his social programme, and in many other ways he did much to improve their status and to raise their work to its proper level in public estimation. They in turn gave him their fullest confidence. They entertained him during his mayoralty, and after he had stepped down from the civic chair they further showed their regard by a public presentation, in April 1906, of an illuminated address in book form testifying to his distinguished service to the cause of education. The book was a remarkably beautiful piece of workmanship, and inside, on pieces of vellum, the text of the address was followed by the names of the 416 past and present teachers in the Rochdale district.

Though he was always fair in the administration of the Education Act of 1902 he was one of its most vigorous and uncompromising opponents during the passage through Parliament. He deeply regretted the disappearance of the school boards. When the Bill of 1902 was considered at a town's meeting in the Rochdale Town Hall he moved a resolution condemning the measure and he was one of the chief speakers at a vast open-air demonstration against it on the Town Hall Square in the autumn of 1902.

Mr Fishwick was a leading member of the Association of Education Committees of England and Wales of which he was vice-president from its formation. He was elected President of the Association in June 1909, and though confined to his home by illness, he prepared a presidential address which was read for him by his friend and colleague Alderman J R Heape J.P..

In November 1910, Fishwick completed 40 years' continuous service as a member of the Rochdale educational body, and on 11th February, 1911 he was publicly presented with a congratulatory address and a service of silver plate. The presentation was made by Lord Sheffield (?) (better-known as Mr Lyulph [?]) [Sentence missing?]

Author and antiquary

His reputation outside the Rochdale District was as an educationist and still more as a local historian and an accomplished antiquary. The history and the associations of

Lancashire were a great attraction to him and he had written largely about them. When he published the Rochdale Corporation Jubilee records it was stated that that was the 25th volume that he had either written or edited. Several others have appeared since, one of them the important work in two large octavo volumes, "Memorials of old Lancashire," of which he was general editor as well as the contributor of several chapters.

His "History of the Parish of Rochdale," an exhaustive work running to 600 quarto pages was his most important literary production. He was the author of "A Popular History of Lancashire" one of the volumes in the "Popular County Histories" series as well as "A Genealogical Memoir of the Family of Fielden" (privately printed) and of "The Lancashire Library" which is the acknowledged standard work on the bibliography of the county. He also edited "The Works of Tim Bobbin," which he prefaced with a full account of their author.

He had made frequent contributions to the transactions of the area's learned societies. To the publications of the Chetham Society he contributed such works as the histories of Preston, Kirkham, Garstang, Poulton-le-Fylde, Bispham, St. Michael's on Wyre, and Lytham. His last considerable work for the Chetham Society was the editing of "The Rochdale Manor Survey of 1826." [1820?] published about a year ago; and at a time of his death he was editing for the society the [..... unclear] Tracts, the curious collection of which the Rochdale library contains the only full collection. For the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire of which he had been president since 1895 he edited [church surveys of 1630 (?)], and the "Pleadings and Depositions in the Dutchy Court of Lancaster" in the time of Henry VII and Henry VIII. He was the editor of the Registers of the Parish Church of Rochdale, which was published in two volumes and the [---- unclear] of the Lancashire Parish Register Society of which he was President.

Colonel Fishwick was also a member a number of learned societies. He was President of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, to which post he was elected in 1897. He was on the Council of the Chetham Society and of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, of both of which he had been President, and an honorary member of [several French organisations? - very unclear]. Since 1876 he had been a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

Locally he has long been a member of the Rochdale Literary and Scientific Society which by his death loses its most distinguished member. He had twice been President of the society, was a vice-president at the time of his death, and had been one of the larger contributors to its transactions. He had also been President of the Rochdale Education Guild from its formation in 1905.

To the notes and gleanings page of the Observer Literary Supplement he often contributed and in many other connections had come to be among the most frequent [unclear] for a many years. When the "Observer" celebrated its jubilee in February 1906 he was one of those who sent kindly and much appreciated note of

congratulation. He then wrote as "one whose name appeared on its first page and very many times since."

During the last few weeks he had indexed a volume of early Lancashire deeds given to the Rochdale Museum by Sir Clement Royds.

Other interests

Among his business positions the chief was the chairmanship of directors of the Rochdale and Manor Brewery Company, which he had held for a number of years. He was also for some time director of the old Manchester, Bury and Oldham Steam Tramways Company Ltd.

A magistrate for both borough and county, having been appointed to the borough commission of the peace in 1874 and to that of the county in 1889, Colonel Fishwick was a justice of the old type. He saw to the heart of the case quickly, his questions were few and severely to the point, and his sentences were delivered with the same brevity of speech which marked him in other public activities. It fell to his lot to hear the first batch of summonses issued against passive resisters after the passing of the Education Act of 1902, and though himself in sympathy with their protests, he rigidly kept them within the confines of the threefold objection. So rigorous, indeed, were his rulings that the resisters paraded from the court to the Bright statue and then carried a resolution condemning what they regarded as the unfairness of the colonel and his colleagues. On a later occasion his sense of humour must have been immensely tickled when a minister blandly asked to be allowed to quote from the colonel's own speeches in justification of his resistance to the Act. Sorely tried as it must have been by this audacious demand, the chairman's judicial poise and gravity remained undisturbed - outwardly at any rate.

In the Rochdale Infirmary Mr Fishwick took a deep interest. He was one of the trustees of the institution, a past President, and for many years a vice-president.

He was one of the best known members of the Manchester Arts Club.

A great reader, he possessed a remarkable collection of books, many on antiquarian and archaeological subjects and on ancient Lancashire history being of unusual value.

Some characteristics

Outwardly Colonel Fishwick had a somewhat brusque manner which led people who did not know him to think, quite erroneously, that he was a hard man. Quite the contrary was the fact. He was sympathetic and kindly to a degree. In debate he could give hard knocks and he never complained if he received them in return; but a complement or a kind reference touched him instantly; and a story, especially if it was

connected which child life, never failed to stir his sympathy.

Quick and alert of mind, he abhorred unnecessary speech-making, and bores openly irritated him. An ideal chairman, he rigorously kept orators to the point, and he had the supreme virtue in the chair of knowing his own mind and sticking to it.

In debate he was a doughty antagonist. He could be as [...unclear...] and he was an adept at parrying awkward questions. Members of the Council who sought to heckle him on questions not ripe for public statement generally found him more than their match; and if he felt that the public interest would not be served by giving the information they are required to [... unclear ...]

Colonel Fishwick was a widower. His wife was the daughter of Dr W H Bullmore of Truro, surgeon to the Royal Cornwall Artillery Militia. She predeceased him many years ago. He leaves a son, who is in Canada, and three daughters - Miss Fishwick and Miss Janet Fishwick, who have resided with him at The Heights, and Mrs Wallace of Peterston-Super-Ely, near Cardiff. With them general sympathy will be felt in their great loss. Another daughter Miss Caroline Fishwick died during the South African War in which she served as a nursing sister.

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The funeral

The funeral takes place at the Rochdale cemetery at noon today (Saturday) and will be attended by the Corporation and representatives of other public bodies. The cortege leaves The Heights about 11 o'clock.

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Alderman Heape's eloquent tribute

At the meeting of the Rochdale Education Committee on Thursday morning the vice chairman Alderman J R Heape, J P, opened the proceedings with a reference to Colonel Fishwick's death.

(DJM - The copy at this point becomes very blurred, and I think it would be better to transcribe it some other time from an original newspaper or film).