

Henry Lock (1806-1895)

His whole life spent in Littlehampton, Henry Lock had a limited education, but is known as a prominent school teacher and a lay preacher in the Methodist Church, even though he worked first as a boot maker. He is principally remembered today for a discourse on Littlehampton in the nineteenth century, which he gave in 1882 and repeated subsequently, and which is one of the earliest to set down the town's history.

Details of his life are sketchy, and much of what we know was discovered in the 1970s by HJF Thompson, himself a major contributor to knowledge of Littlehampton's history, working with descendants of the man. In the early 1800s nearly everyone living in the small community was connected with either the sea or farming. Lock's father was a mariner and was drowned in an accident when the boy was only twelve years' old, leaving his mother destitute.

Thompson says that Lock became a lay preacher in 1828 and married in 1832. The 1837 birth certificate of his first child, however, gives his profession as now being that of teacher. There was no state education at the time, and if people learned to read and write it would be at very small schools where they paid a small amount weekly, or, if they were lucky, at a school supported by charity. Lock initially ran one of these schools in Beachtown.

A reasonably wealthy widow, Mrs Welch, had established a school in Church Street, which she had built for that purpose (the building is still standing and now houses the Quakers'). At some time in the 1840s Henry Lock was appointed schoolmaster there and also lived on the premises. He continued to work as a lay preacher, visiting Methodist congregations in West Sussex. He was also a strong supporter of the Temperance movement.

The 1870 Education Act created a requirement for all children to be taught to read and write. In the following years this led to the creation of much larger establishments and the consolidation of the various religious and charitable strands which had developed independently. Mrs Welch's 'penny a week' school was closed but Lock continued to live in the premises. Thompson thinks that they may have been used by the Temperance movement. In 1875 Lock became pastor at the Bosham Congregational Chapel, which was a part-time post not requiring him to move from Littlehampton.

By 1882 Lock would have been in his mid-seventies. 'He wore a long white beard and spectacles, and with his thick white hair was a fine-looking old man' (Robinson 1933). He was persuaded to speak to the Total Abstinence Society about his life in Littlehampton. Thompson wrote: 'the Discourse remains one of the most valuable records ... of life in the town during some of its most formative years'.

Lock's narrative describes the various houses in the centre of the town and their inhabitants. It is difficult sometimes to follow the exact geography but it is an important picture of people's lives and livings. He goes on to talk about the development of Beach Town and the holiday lodgings business, as well as the evolution of the schools and the churches as the town grew from a few hundred inhabitants at the start of the century to 5,954 at the end.

Lock's original manuscript is still in existence (in the museum's collection). However it has proved difficult to decipher. Thompson suggests that after its first outing Lock was asked to repeat it many times to different audiences and the content probably was modified over time. Thompson worked on the manuscript and published a corrected version in his 1983 *The Littlehampton Story: the early nineteenth century*.

Henry Lock died in 1895 and is buried in Littlehampton cemetery. His funeral was attended by many people, reflecting his prominence in the local non-conformist congregations and also the Temperance movement. Thompson wrote: 'He was a remarkable man, who, in spite of what can have been only a modest education, managed to rise some way above his relatively humble beginnings'.

Works cited above:

Thompson, H J F (1983) *The Littlehampton Story No 5: The Early Nineteenth Century (part one)* Littlehampton Printers.

Robinson, E (1933) *Older Littlehampton* in Robinson, E & Heward J S *Reminiscences of Littlehampton*, Natural Science and Archaeological Society Littlehampton.