

Henry Marles and the Roman Lamp he found in the Gorge at Roundhay Park.

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My paternal great grandfather, Henry Marles was a man of stark contrasts; his private and public lives couldn't have been more different, but what a character he was!

Henry spent his early working years as a currier, preparing animal hides for tanning. I imagine one would not have to be too fussy about the stench of rotting flesh to do such a job day in and day out. However, escape was at hand. At the age of 23 Henry met and married Lydia Harriot Best, 12 years his senior, who ran a Dame School in Morice Town, Stoke Damerel, Devon. Almost overnight, it seemed, Henry had become an experienced and gifted teacher, and they appear to have run the venture between them with some success.

They had a servant girl, Elizabeth Sweet, who was almost twenty years younger than Henry and whom he managed to get pregnant twice whilst his wife Lydia was still living. Only ten weeks after Lydia died in 1862 Henry married Elizabeth in Exeter Register Office. They travelled almost straight away to Leeds with their two toddlers and established a home and teaching establishment in the grimy north. Again Henry was able to employ a servant, this time a North Country lass, Susan Gibson, from Pocklington, York.

In 1869, at the relatively young age of 40, Elizabeth succumbed to phthisis (tuberculosis) leaving Henry with three children under 10 to care for. All was not despair for Henry, however. Susan, the servant was already pregnant with their first, and sadly short lived child. When Henry and Susan married in Leeds Register Office in the following year he told the Registrar that he was a 50 year old bachelor and that his young bride was 23 years. In fact he was 60; Susan was barely 17 and she was, as we have seen, his third bride.

So, when I read in the 1871 census that he claimed to be, "Author, Teacher of Mathematics, Minister without Church and

L.R.C.P." I thought, "Yes, pull the other one, it's got bells on. You've got form for fibbing." However, I did notice that he gave everyone in the household's correct age, including the 43 year age difference between himself and his wife, Susan.

By 1881 Henry had moved his family from densely inhabited Kirkstall to affluent, almost rural Shadwell. In March of that year he claimed that, whilst walking through the Gorge at Roundhay, he had discovered a Roman lamp which had been exposed from the stream bank after a heavy downpour. He even wrote and published an epic poem about the discovery. On the title page he announced that he was 'H. Marles, L.R.C.R, Principal of the Collegiate School, Shadwell, near Leeds, Author of many volumes of poetry, a compendious English Grammar text book, composer of an alternative National Anthem, Lecturer on Philosophy, Science, Poetry, Music, Etc' (No mention of 'hide scraper', you'll notice.)

I was very sceptical about all this but I did find in Leeds Reference Library the only extant copy of Henry's major compilation of poetical works, 'Wild Flowers from the Wayside of Life' and more than a decade later my Devon cousins, David and Freda Broan, discovered an institute called the College of Preceptors, which had been granted royal status by Queen Victoria and of which great grandfather Henry had been a life member, his membership is recorded in the college's archives. He was, indeed, entitled to the letters L.R.C.P. Furthermore, the College is still in existence.

I have discovered too, that Henry had been invited in 1865 to write the Biography of Rev. Jabez Tunnicliffe, the founder of the Band of Hope and that Henry was the founding Minister of Carr Crofts Zion Baptist Church at Armley. My Devon cousins have discovered and ordered, from the British Library, a copy of Henry's text book, 'A Compendious English Grammar.' So it does exist, he wasn't just boasting.

And the Roman lamp? Whilst searching the Internet recently I accidentally found an official history of Roundhay, published by the West Yorkshire Archaeological Advisory Service, which included in the first couple of paragraphs,



Peter Maries at Leeds Museum's Discovery Centre with the Roman lamp believed to be the one Henry Maries found in the Gorge at Roundhay Park. See the front cover for a closer view of the lamp.

'Another palstave [a Bronze Age axe] was discovered at the upper end of Roundhay Gorge in 1883 close to where a Roman lamp had previously been found in 1881.' The location of the find is described as "Addyman Bridge", which today is only a few paces from the Ring Road.

I also discovered that Roundhay antiquarian John Holmes (see more about him in Neville Hurworth's essay, number 5 in this edition) confirmed Henry's find. Holmes wrote in his notes to the second edition of James Warden's 'Historical Notes of Ilkley, Rombald's Moor, Baildon Common and Other Matters of the British and Roman Periods', published in 1881:

In March of 1881, as Mr. Marles, of the Academy, Shadwell, was stepping across the stream of the "Gorge" at Roundhay Park, he saw something unusual close to the stream, which appeared to have been washed out of the bank. On examination it proved to be a rare finely formed Roman lamp of an advanced type, such as is common among the Etruscan tombs of central Italy.

It seems likely the lamp became part of John Holmes' collection of antiquities which was bought by the Corporation for the Leeds Museum, and from all the overwhelming circumstantial evidence, I believe it to be the only unattributed Roman lamp in Leeds Museum's Discovery Centre, near the Leeds Armouries. It's such a pity the original attribution has been lost or was never recorded.

Imagine my thoughts, however, as I held the actual lamp which I am convinced is the one Henry had retrieved from the beck 130 years earlier and which had lain beneath Roundhay soil since the second century AD, more than a millennium before William the Conqueror had granted Henry de Lacy the right to hunt in the King's park known as the Rund Hei, (Roundhay). I can only speculate, as Henry had done in his poem, as to who had lost it all those centuries before and in what circumstances.

To give a flavour of Henry's appreciation of the joys of the Gorge on that day of discovery, I end with a small extract from his poem, 'Lines on finding a Lamp in the Gorge at Roundhay Park.'

Where Nature spreads her loveliness I tread,
Flowers kiss my feet and leaves are overhead,
Birds fill with music all the yielding air,
This seems a Paradise without a care.
On either hand the hills abruptly rise,
Where tinkling rills delight my glancing eyes,
Which mingling with the stream that wends its way
Down deep gorge, where fitful sunbeams play,
Lull the full heart to gentleness and peace,
And softly whisper "Let thy sorrows cease!"

Acknowledgement

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