

JOHN Fairclough JP was the eldest son of William Fairclough of Leigh. Born at Stone House on 19 July 1854, he was baptised at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church by Father Middlehurst just two days later.

His education took place at Leigh Grammar School during the period of Ralph Passe's headship. After leaving school he became a partner in the firm of Fairclough Brothers, builders merchants, which had been established by his grandfather John Fairclough some 70 years earlier.

On 21 October 1879 he married Maggie Unsworth (daughter of William Unsworth, Bond Street, Leigh). The marriage was solemnized at St. Joseph's by Rev. Father Fanning.

The ceremony was then followed by High Mass before the couple departed for their honeymoon on the Isle of Wight. Although nothing extraordinary occurred at the wedding at which Father Fanning was assisted by Fathers Kavanagh, Wright and Hopkins, the event inspired Gerard Manley Hopkins to pen his poem 'At the Wedding March':

At the Wedding March

*God with honour hang your head,
Groom, and grace you, bride, your bed
With lisson scions, sweet scions,
Out of hallowed bodies bred.*

*Each be other's comfort kind:
Deep, deeper than divined,
Divine charity, dear charity,
Fast you ever, fast bind.*

*Then let the march tread our ears:
I to him turn with tears
Who to wedlock, his wonder wedlock,
Deals triumphant and immortal years.*

First Mayor of Leigh

In May 1888 John Fairclough became first associated with Leigh Local Board when he was elected in place of Thomas Norbury. He represented Pennington Ward until 1984 when the Leigh Urban District Council was formed. He continued a member for the Central Ward until 1989 when the Borough was incorporated. After this he was elected member for Lilford Ward until 9 November 1899 when he was unanimously appointed the first Mayor of the Borough.

The first Mayor's Sunday occurred on 12 November 1899 when John Fairclough attended a service at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church. The procession started from Leigh Technical School at 10.30 am. It was headed by St. Joseph's Brass Band, following on came about 40 members of the

JOHN FAIRCLOUGH (1854-1923)



John Fairclough

police force under Superintendent Higginbotham. The Fire Brigade was next in the procession in their new uniforms, under the command of Superintendent Stainton. Behind them came all the Corporation officials. They walked to the church by way of Railway Road, Bradshawgate, Queen Street and Chapel Street.

On 14 August 1900 Alderman Greenough CC, Deputy Mayor, presented Mr. Fairclough with a badge and medallion (from an anonymous donor) which formed the nucleus of a mayoral chain. The badge consisted of "a large gold medallion bearing the borough coat of arms and enamelled pictures of Leigh Parish Church, Market Place and Technical School. In the upper part is the Mayor's monogram 'JF' surmounted by a gold crown. A mace and sword jut out from the main portion of the medallion and at the foot are the words 'Incorporated 1899'. Medallion encircled by blue ribbon. The makers being the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths Co, 112 Regent Street, London."

Freeman of the Borough

For his commitment to a long public service career in which he served on most of all the important committees Alderman Fairclough was conferred a Freeman of the

Borough in January 1919. For many years he had been organist at St. Joseph's Church, a Grand Knight of the Knights of Columba, the first President of Leigh Catholic Club and a member of the Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. By 1903 Alderman Fairclough had become one of the first Borough Magistrates and in 1912 was elected to the County Bench. In the following year during the Royal Tour of Lancashire he had the honour of being presented to the King and Queen.

John Fairclough finally died at his home (55 Church Street, Leigh) in July 1923 after a heart attack.

T.A.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

HOPKINS had been born at Stratford, Essex, on 28 July 1844 to Anglican parents. He eventually converted to Roman Catholicism during his undergraduate days at Balliol College, Oxford, when the second wave of conversions to Roman Catholicism, inspired by John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement, took hold. He was eventually received into the Catholic Church by Cardinal Newman himself on 21 October 1866. By May 1868 he had entered the Society of Jesus. Although up to this date he had been a prolific poet, Hopkins ceremoniously burned his poems to renounce his career as a poet and it was not until December 1875 that he began writing poetry again with 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', to commemorate the loss of life of 99 crew and 113 passengers (including five Franciscan nuns) in a storm.

Following his ordination in September 1877, Hopkins became somewhat a peripatetic priest, eventually moving to St. Joseph's at Bedford for three months between October and December 1879, before transferring to St. Xavier's at Liverpool. His final move was to Dublin where he was appointed Fellow in Classics at the Royal University of Ireland and Professor at University College, St. Stephen's Green. He contracted typhoid fever and died on 8 June 1889. Although virtually unknown poetically in his lifetime it was through his correspondence with Robert Bridges and Bridges' edited version of Hopkins' poems, which first appeared in January 1919, that the public became aware of this unique poetic voice.

