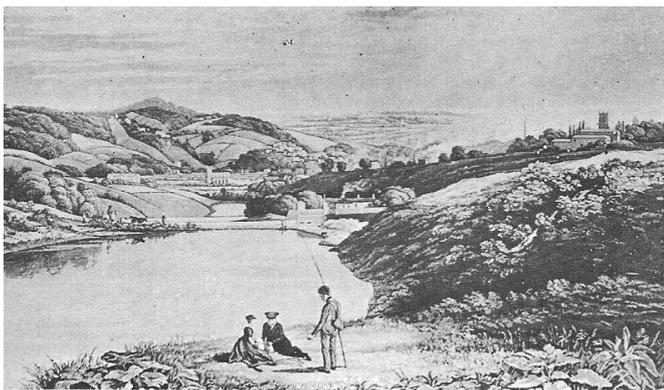


Crookesmoor - Relaxing, Racing & Reservoirs

At the turn of the 19th century places such as Crookes Moor, Ranmoor and Pitsmoor were still open land not yet submerged by Sheffield's expanding urban sprawl. The term "moor" would probably have referred merely to an open space, frequently including common land, and certainly land unenclosed by fences or walls. It could even have been part-wooded and grassy rather than treeless and heather-clad as we assume moors to be nowadays.

Crookes, the village at its western end and responsible for giving "Crookes Moor" its name boasts an ancient pedigree and is mentioned in documents dating back to 1447. It appears to have been a farming community judging from its pattern of small medieval fields which survived until the time the land was enclosed in the early nineteenth century. The road names Truswell and Headland commemorate this ancient open-field system today. Crookes Moor was a wedge of high land sloping down towards the River Don including the prominences of Tapton Hill, Broom Hill, Mount Pispah, Steel Bank, Uppertorpe and Western Bank. Lydgate Lane, itself over 1,000 years old, was originally the course of a Roman road from Templeborough to Brough.



This picture, painted in 1826, gives us an idea of what Crookes Moor looked like almost two hundred years ago; an area of open country where Sheffield citizens could relax in fresh air, away from the oppressive soot and grime of the town.

By contrast the western part of Crookes Moor (which we now know as Broomhill) was much flatter and became well known to Sheffielders in the eighteenth century for horseracing. The first races are thought to have taken place around 1711 and were run here over the next seventy years. They were only discontinued when the land became enclosed around 1790. Various sources agree that the races were initiated by the Sheffield Town Trustees, perhaps to divert the public's

attention away from blood-thirsty pastimes such as bear baiting, cock-fighting and dog fights. Certainly racing was a popular sport in other parts of the country at this time. A poem by James Wills written in 1827 recalls:

*"A noble racecourse formed of hill and dale,
Grandstand and starting-post fenced around with rail..."*

The course was probably rudimentary with a roughly levelled track just wide enough for a few horses. The length of the course was about one and a third miles with four-mile races starting at the highest point of the course (the gardens of what is now Lawson Road) and finishing at the winning post close to the site of the former Hallam Towers Hotel between Fulwood and Manchester Roads. Race goers watched from a wooden grandstand that had, according to R. E. Leader's 1905 account, been funded by the subscriptions of some of the town's wealthier citizens. It was finally demolished in 1790 after the land had been enclosed.

Ranmoor Society Meeting 19th April
Horse Racing in Sheffield in the 18th Century
Stephen Johnson will include this with other venues

Incidentally Broomhill, having never been an old-established village like Crookes, only developed as a commercial and residential centre in the next century.

By the time of our 1826 drawing the deep cleft at the heart of Crookes Moor had become partially submerged under water with the area taking on a more practical function. In the foreground of the picture is the Old Great Dam with its Dam House beyond. This was the first of a staircase of reservoirs constructed along and down the valley from 1785 onwards. These capitalised on the uncontaminated topography, a layer of impervious ganister below the sandstone and an altitude of some 600 feet above the town that would ensure to water could be conveyed by gravity to the working dam at Portobello and thence to the town centre.

Crookes Moor continued to satisfy the town's demand for clean water until the 1830s, but with Sheffield's population now exceeding 90,000, the pressure to increase capacity now led to the construction, six miles further out, of the three Redmires reservoirs connected by conduit to a new Hadfield Service Reservoir near Crookes. The latter, built above the existing ones on Crookes Moor in 1833, was covered over in 1893 but still exists under a modern housing estate. The valley below which played host to the seven dams and reservoirs have since become colonised by the sports fields and various buildings of Sheffield University.

C. D. Leng Pioneering Journalist

One of Ranmoor's unusual houses is The Towers, close to the junction of Sandygate Road and Coldwell Lane. This imposing and romantic building dominates the skyline with its matching lodge. Built in 1896 in the Scottish Baronial style (designed by Flockton & Gibbs) its estate was bounded by a curtain wall with towers at each corner and even incorporated a model dairy and small farm. Both house and lodge are Grade II listed. The photo below shows the battlemented main tower which is five storeys high.



The Towers, built in what was then a rural location, was the home of Christopher David Leng the editor of the Sheffield Daily Telegraph who was now following closely in the footsteps of his more famous father, the head of one of the most influential families in Victorian Sheffield. William Leng had taken over the paper's proprietorship in 1864, only nine years after its foundation, after a career in local newspapers in Hull and Dundee. Together with co-proprietor Frederick Clifford they turned it into a powerful local newspaper. It fulfilled an ambition to make it "*inferior to none in England, in vigour of the management and literary ability employed upon it*" For this and perhaps for its strong conservative stance William Leng was knighted in 1887 on the recommendation of Lord Salisbury. He died in 1902.



C.D Leng

Sheffield Who's Who 1905

Born at Dundee 1861

Educated at Collegiate School Sheffield and La Villa, Ouchy, Lausanne

Editor "The Weekly Telegraph"
Sheffield Automobile Club
Founder Hallamshire Golf Club

Christopher Leng's particular ambition was to make the Weekly Telegraph into a national literary journal independent of The Sheffield Daily Telegraph and to

this end he championed the publication of fiction in instalments by well-known authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins and Emile Zola. Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* was serialised in 1890. By 1888 The Weekly Telegraph was widely read both in Britain and overseas with a weekly circulation of 230,000. By the end of the 19th century, with an evening paper now added to the portfolio, sales of Leng's Sheffield newspapers had reached, it was claimed, 1.25 million copies per week.

Leng was described in the 1901 census as a "journalist & author" but he was also interested in modern (Canadian) agricultural techniques and explored ways of improving of milk quality in his "model dairy" at the Towers. He was said to have helped save Endcliffe Hall from demolition in 1913, and in 1920 developed the Den Bank Estate near to the Towers on Manchester Road. He was also active in the Sheffield Smoke Abatement League. His manner was said to be rather aloof and distant, and in fact declined an offer to become Lord Mayor in 1914. However he played golf and was a founder in 1897 of Hallamshire Golf Club nearby. He died suddenly on New Year's Day 1921 aged 59 and will be remembered as the pioneer of a new type of journalism before newspapers were forced to face the challenge of radio and television.

The Loxley Valley

Of the four tributary streams that meet the Don within the City boundary each contributes its own quite distinctive character. The Sheaf and the Porter are more wooded and contain several popular urban parks whilst the Rivelin is more rugged and less busy. The Loxley is the most northerly, the widest, the longest and most rural and has clearly fascinated Pater Machan who gave us a spellbinding talk in February when he likened it to one of the Yorkshire Dales. His recent book "*Loxley; Wanderings in a Curious Valley*" (£8.95) describes its diverse landscapes, historical characters, buildings and traditions. If you missed the talk (or some of it!) and would like to buy the book we can put you in touch.

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