

Teesdale U3A – Monthly Meeting – June 2019

The speaker at the June meeting was Maria Glott whose topic was 'The Saltaire Experience'.

Maria had been involved in 'Saltaire' for over 40 years and had researched many of the individuals who had worked and lived there. Personal details of these people had been summarised on bookmarks which she distributed.

Titus Salt was born in 1803 in Morley, the son of a successful businessman and who went into the clothing industry in Bradford, initially as a wool stapler. He ran his father's factory for 20 years and quickly established himself as an entrepreneur e.g. as one of the first to buy cheap alpaca wool and weave it into cloth. He even made an alpaca present for Queen Victoria. He employed many people from the workhouses. Factory working conditions at the time were extremely poor. Infectious diseases such as cholera were common and life expectancy for factory workers was not much more than 20 years. Titus then bought a greenfield site outside Bradford in Shipley, near the River Aire, and in 1853 opened a new factory which became one of the biggest in the world. He also built an adjoining village, comprising houses for the workers and their families, bathhouses, churches, a school, an institute, and shops. In order to create a clean and healthy environment, he introduced a variety of recycling processes e.g. producing clean water, making cosmetics from effluent, using urine for the tanning industry, building smoke free chimneys etc. This community working and living environment was ahead of its time and visitors from throughout the world came to Saltaire. The factory-made considerable profit and in addition the workers spent their earnings on rent and in the shops. However, there is no doubt that the living environment was controlling with lots of rules and regulations. Titus was a strict Methodist and demanded regular church attendance from his workers with no drinking or gambling.

Titus became one of the richest men in the world. He was Lord Mayor of Bradford, a liberal MP for a short period and held many other public positions. He was knighted in 1869. He was however extremely secretive and there is very little evidence remaining by way of commercial transactions. In fact, he called in lots of written material, some of which he paid for, and burned them. It is interesting to note that his accountant retired on a considerable pension together with a gagging order.

Maria was closely involved in the successful submission for World Heritage Status, one of 24 in the UK. So, we were left wondering who was the real Titus Salt. Was he a ruthless capitalist or a benevolent philanthropist and environmentalist or a mixture of all three?

This was a fascinating presentation, full of historical details, with at times a theatrical delivery and full of very amusing anecdotes. The vote of thanks was given by Tim Meacham.

The next meeting will be held on 25th July when Nicholas Talbot will be speaking on 'Attempting Everest the Harder Way'.

For more information about U3A contact Ian Reid tel: 01833 631304.

Ian Reid