

Stalybridge by Ray Pearce

Why Stalybridge? And where is it? It is a small town which used to be in Cheshire and is now part of Tameside, Greater Manchester. The town is 8 miles East of Manchester and the River Tame flows through the town. I lived there from when I was about 6 months old until we moved to Crosby in May 1946. Dad was the foreman of Stamford Park and we lived in the Lodge in the park. In those days it was a cotton town under the Lea of the Pennines and very wet and damp. This was helpful for the cotton industry as the cotton was less likely to break as it went at speed through the looms. The dampness, however, was bad for our health and on doctor's orders we left there in 1946. I paid a sentimental journey back there earlier this summer 2021.

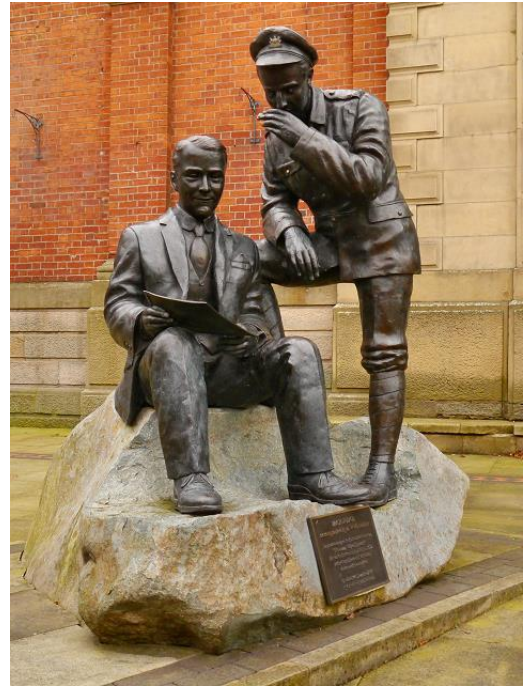
I took the 9:57 Manchester train from Birmingham New St. arriving at 11:15. Then the 11:35 Hull Trans Pennine, first stop Stalybridge at 11:45. How sad the town looks now, the waste land outside the station, where I first started train spotting, appears to be the same as it was in 1946. The town does boast the two pubs with the longest and shortest names, and in the Guinness Book of Records. I spoke to a lady outside The Old Thirteenth Cheshire Astley Volunteer Rifles



and she noticing my military bearing said that as a Veteran I could have a free drink on the house. I thanked but declined. Opposite was a pub named Q but I hastened to Melbourne Street where the used to be a branch off the Yorkshire Penny Bank, alas not there now but there is a shop there selling tripe. Said to be the only tripe shop left in the North West. We used to have tripe and onions which mother bought from the UCP. A chain of shops selling offal and standing for United Cattle Products. By the 1950s it had 146 shops cum restaurants but I cannot find any trace of them now.

There is a statue in Trinity Street to Jack Judge who was born in Oldbury in 1878 and died in West Bromwich. It was in Stalybridge on 30th January 1912 that he

wrote the song “It’s a long way to Tipperary” which became famous in World War 1. The Railway Station has a famous buffet dating back to 1885 and well worth a visit. As I said earlier we lived in Stamford Park which was given to the town by a wealthy industrialist in 1873. I went to see The Lodge, where we lived, but, sadly, it has been demolished .The population of the town is now 23,700 and reached its peak in 1901 at 27,600.



John Summers opened an iron forge in 1840 employing 1000 people and later moved to Shotton, Flintshire where the factory became part of the British Steel Corporation. John Summers daughter, Ada Jane, became the first woman town councillor and later became a JP, one of the first ladies in the country to hold such a post. The American Civil War in 1861 had a big effect on Stalybridge as cotton was not available, 7000 people were unemployed from the 39 factories in the town. I can remember in the 1940s lorries loaded with cotton bales going by with pieces of cotton all over the road. That reminds me that when we were evacuated to our grandparents in Northamptonshire, at school there I spelt lurry as that was



how I pronounced it. I could go on about the hostile reception mechanised machinery received and how the Stalybridge Brass Band is the oldest in the country but I have written enough and I bid my readers a very good afternoon.

Ray Pearce 16.12.2021.