

# Ramsbottom Heritage Society: Blue Plaques and Lost Street Names

There are many old streets and lanes around Ramsbottom whose names have been lost to memory. And there are several buildings whose original uses are equally forgotten.

A prime example is the Apprentice House, built around 1802 to house the pauper children brought up by the cartload from city workhouses. They had to serve 'apprenticeships' in the Ashton family's long-demolished Ramsbottom Mill, at the end of *Crow Lane*.

By the 1830s the mill could rely on local labour, and the Apprentice House was converted into cottages.

With ties to their original families long gone, most of these involuntary migrants settled around the only home they had ever known – the 1851 Ramsbottom Census records London birthplaces, the poorest parishes, for 11 people aged in their 40s, 50s and 60s. All were living within 5 minutes walk of the Apprentice House.

By 1900 they had all died, and with them all recollection of their grim life stories. Yet now, scores of Ramsbottom people must descend from them.



1 The Apprentice House, Crow Lane

Those child workers were forgotten, and the history of these three houses became a mystery. One local estate agent even put one on the market as 'a highly desirable period cottage, circa late 1600s'.

A few years ago, research in local sources finally brought this fascinating building back into collective memory. We found the 'Apprentice House' recorded in the town's early 19<sup>th</sup> Century rate books. There was also one in Nuttall village.

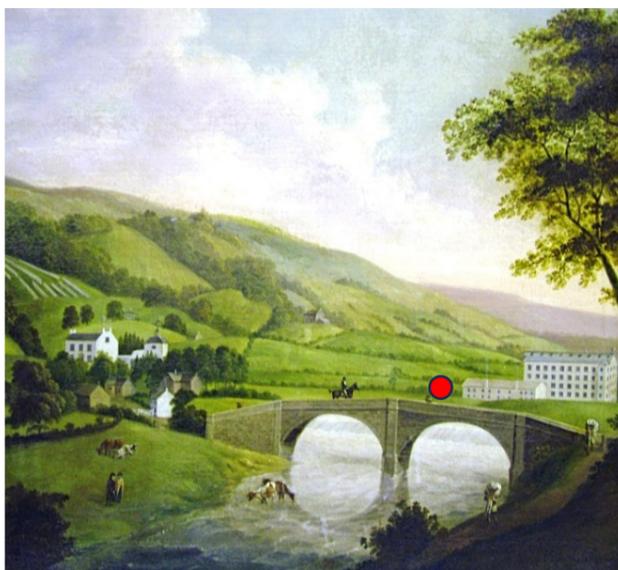
The discovery of a painting dated c1806 and stored inconspicuously at Bury Museum clinched the location of this Apprentice House.

The painting (below left) clearly shows the house immediately in front of Ramsbottom Mill. It is marked ●.

The memory of those unfortunate pauper children who lived here was finally acknowledged for the town when we erected a plaque in 2022.

One man read this plaque in amazement, as soon as it was going up. A woman saw our *Dungeon Row* street sign, then this plaque, and said:

'I've lived in Ramsbottom all my life. How come I never knew about these buildings?'



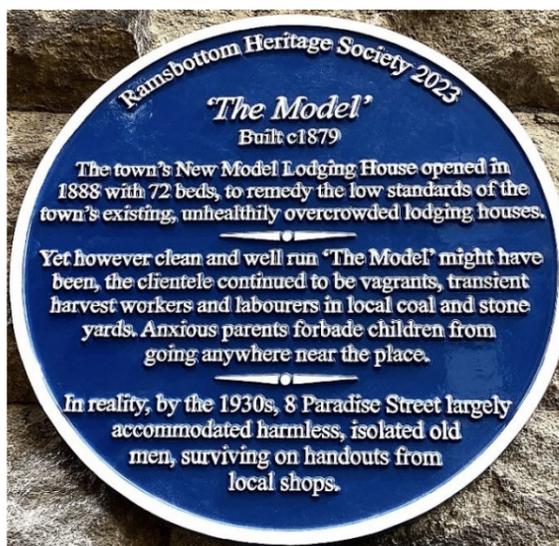
2 The Old Ground Inn, Square St



Trade directory entries have ensured that the *Old Ground Inn* stayed in popular memory, despite closing in 1912. The *Bury Guardian* reported how the magistrates had refused to renew its licence, on the grounds that there were six other public houses within 100 yards!

Local tradition has it that the building had also been a 'Catholic Club'. And the 'Lloyd George Census' (the national property valuation survey of 1910-15) confirms that an Irish nationalist club was at this address in 1913.





Known as 'The Model' or 'the Doss House', no 8, *Paradise St* is a three-storeyed brick building, with pitch stone frontage, boasting lines of three windows on its first and second floors. It has an extension at the rear which provided it with rather more internal accommodation than the proportions of its frontage might suggest. To those older residents who recall 'The Model' from their childhood, it remains a forbidding memory. Perhaps like modern fears about child molesters, there was a mythology, the dangers of which were largely in parental imaginations. Some believed that men slept hanging on a line of rope.

Locals alive in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century recall The Model as the resort of 'tramps, layabouts, odds and sods'; the place was 'rough and ready, avoided like the plague'; it was 'a sort of doss house for tramps, down and outs, and old men who had no proper home.'

One girl who delivered milk for a local farmer would go to *Paradise St* with her sister for safety, but only as far as The Model, since further on was the 'rougher end where we were not allowed to go'. Tramps from as far afield as Rochdale and Rawtenstall would be there: 'we always got away quick if we saw any of the men coming', but she admits that nobody had any trouble. There was no local hostility to such transients, and they would often be given whatever could be spared.

One Ramsbottom man, born in 1902, recalled many of the long-term residents, all with colourful by-names: 'I can well remember the days when people were recognised by rather unusual names which connected them closely with their own family, viz *Long Toms, Jack o'Molley's, Tom o'Jerry's, Robin o'Bob's, Owd Baa Lamb, Charlie w'it Crutch*. Others were *Treacle Whiskers, Tommy Slap, Sally Slap* (they had a toffee stall on the weekly market), *John o'th'Greenhill, Bob Worknomore* (a very well-known person in the town for many years).

He had no fixed job, made his living doing errands and odd jobs. *Owd Sing Smo* (choirmaster at Holcombe Church at one time), *Shilling Mangle, Cissy Sixpence, John Willie fro't Turn* (he used to walk through Ramsbottom to Tottington for some currant cake, usually saying 'Awn nod so numb, am I?' (He was well-known for knocking the Bobby's hat off.) *Tommy Cross* was a well-known character in later days. He was the bag carrier for the Ramsbottom Cricket Team. He also acted as the night watchman when outdoor jobs were being carried out, sheltering in a special wooden hut with a roaring coal/coke fire, very attractive to passers-by. He was forever cadging cigarettes. Another character was known as *Cheadle Bobby*. His job was to go round in the dark nights lighting the gas street lights, then turning them off in the morning.

They were well behaved people (they did not have enough money to get drunk!) I do not know how much they paid for their accommodation, or just what kind of sleeping accommodation they had. Most of them earned a living by working in the coal yard at *Stubbins Lane* filling coal bags. I would say that most of them lived on scraps bought from local shops, ham and bacon bits, cheese, meat, bread etc. Whenever we had any leftovers - eatables of any sort - it was taken over to them, and they were always very grateful. Some of them would move to other parts of the country (usually in the summer months) visiting smaller places on the way.

Now and then buskers would come through the town and spend a night there [at The Model], sometimes going on the *Market Place* to perform their acts such as lassoing and other acts with whips.

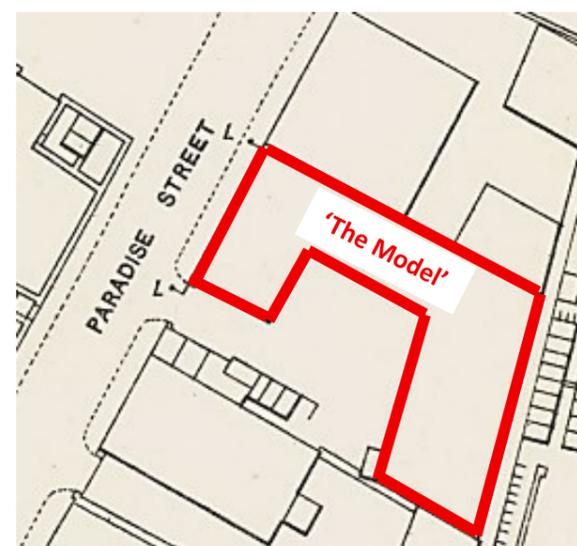
An 1892 account in the *Ramsbottom Observer* describes the kitchen or dining room as 'a large lofty hall and it is in here that the lodgers live. It is fitted with strong, useful tables having zinc tops together with forms and chairs, whilst in the centre is a large stove at which the cooking is done.'

'There were about a dozen of the inmates grouped around the fire, one of them being a woman who was discussing with evident relish a short clay pipe filled with bad tobacco. There were several labourers who had been forced to idleness through the snow, but it was by one particular group, that of a young man, his wife and two children that my attention was particularly arrested. They had an air of respectability about them which was altogether out of touch with their surroundings. The place was heated throughout by steam. Each of the lodgers had a cupboard in which to store their food.'

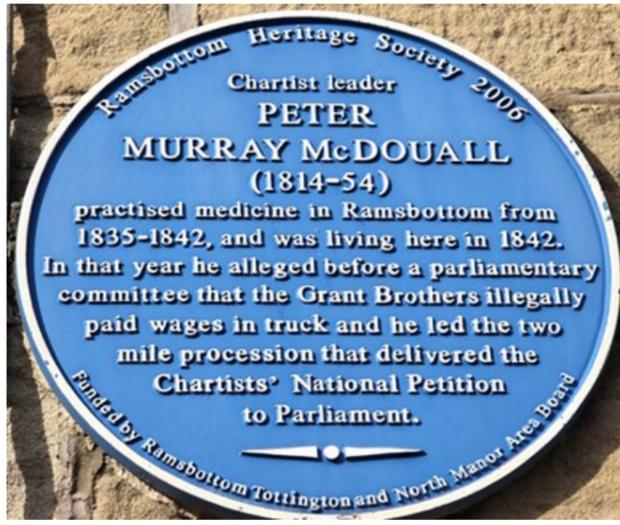
'We next passed into the washhouse, which is very well fitted up and then my conductor took me through the bedrooms, whose cleanliness and cheerful appearance struck me, to use common parlance, "all of a heap".'

'The majority of the lodgers were of a respectable type. "Of course," the owner said, "there are exceptions and many times we have a row. But we soon fetch the police and if they do not be quiet they are turned out and then locked up."'

From *Ramsbottom Heritage Society News Magazine*, No 20 Autumn 2000.



No 8, *Paradise St* – The 72 bed Model Lodging House – note outdoor privies over the wall in the yard of St Paul's School on Crow Lane (1891 OS Map, 10 feet to the mile).



4 No 18, Bolton St



Ramsbottom's most famous doctor, Peter Murray McDouall, practised medicine here during the town's most unsettled years. Moved by local distress, he became a leading figure in the largest radical mass movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Yet his seven-year spell in the town received no attention from local historical writers until the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

McDouall's advocacy of 'Physical Force Chartism' made him an embarrassment to establishment opinion rather than a source of interest, and this ultimately led to his imprisonment.

Our 2006 plaque inspired local author Nigel Jepson to write his best-selling book, *Ramsbottom's Revolutionary Doctor: The Life and Times of Peter Murray McDouall* (2021).

5 The Grant Arms, Market Place



Until its slow decline and final closure in 2017, *The Grant Arms* was the town's premier public house. One of the town centre's oldest buildings, it probably predates the laying out of the industrial complex known as The Old Ground in 1783.

