



Special Edition

The History of the Failsworth Pole and Ben Brierley Statue

Published to celebrate the official opening of
the refurbished Failsworth Pole Gardens and
the unveiling of the Ben Brierley Statue

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Written by Councillor Jim McMahon
& John Crompton, Chairman,
Failsworth Historical Society

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The history of the Failsworth Pole

Pre. 1793:

The date of 1793 is the particular significant dating on record of an official erecting of a pole at the junction of Pole Lane and Oldham Road. But it was shown that a pole of some sort had stood there from 'time immemorial'. It was stated that it was possibly a Maypole that had been standing here long before the 'Political Pole' was envisaged.

In 1746 the Constable for Pole Lane End, Joseph Schofield was appointed and then in the year 1760 a Mr Edward Moores occupied Pole Lane House.

Cyrus Armitage, who was born in Failsworth in 1781, is reported to have said in 1793 that "In exuberant loyalty" the High Party set up the new pole, there was already an old one standing that had stood from a 'time immemorial'.



First Failsworth Pole

1793:

This first 'Political Pole' was referred to as the New Pole, and was erected on Tuesday January 1st 1793 by the Church and King Party, which was better known as the High Party. It was said to have been erected to demonstrate "the loyalty of the Failsworth township, and to overawe the Jacobins, and hatred of Tom Paine and all his works",

in a clear demonstration of Failsworth split personality Wrigley Head was once called 'City of Boston' after Tom Paines birthplace, which is why we have Boston Close today.

This first Pole was from an Oak tree that stood near the place, and was cased in painted boards. The inscription, in gold lettering spelt out 'This our Loyal Standard of Failsworth was erected on 1st January, 1793, to the King, Church and present glorious Constitution', and was topped by a weathercock.

In the year 1830, to commemorate the Coronation of William IV, the pole was lowered in order for it to be painted. It was then raised to its original standing, and to complete these celebrations an ox was roasted to celebrate in honour of the great event. This pole remained in prominence in the centre of Failsworth for 56 years, until, on the 7th of October 1849 due to decay, it was blown down in a gale force wind.

Second Failsworth Pole

1840:

It was some 10 months before Failsworth was to have its **second pole**. This was erected on Thursday 24th August 1850. It was constructed from a ship's mainmast that measured 78 feet high and 20 inches in diameter. The pole weathered many years and withstood some great floods in the year 1872, which caused great destruction throughout the district.



After remaining in standing for a period of 49 years when in 1889, again through decay it had to be replaced.

One of the Failsworth band of poets, Elijah Ridings who was born on the 27th November 1802 in a cottage in 'The Hollow' in the Failsworth township on Old Road. He mentions the second Pole in his book 'The Village Muse', published in 1844 and his poem he entitled 'Cock Robin' he had written and he writes: - "I saw him once at Failsworth Fair Beside the Royal Standard there".

He remembered the first Pole, and went on to explain "The old Standard has been taken down, and a new one erected at the direction, if not the expense of Henry Walmsley Esq.". This reference being made as this person was one of great wealth and reputation in Failsworth at this time.

Third Failsworth Pole

1889:

It was on Thursday 24th of August 1889 that the **third pole** was erected, but it was to be a further two months, on the 22nd of October before it was inaugurated. It was acquired by public subscription and cost £100.13shillings and 2 pence funding this pole.

The Pole Committee, upon the advice of the timber merchants, George Evans and Sons of Newton Heath purchased the pole using Thomas Allen and William Dunkerly of Liverpool.

As this pole had measurement dimensions of 92 feet length and 19½" by 20" at the base, it was brought by road using 5 trucks from the London and North Western Railways from Liverpool to Manchester and then to Failsworth by the lorries of Mr Evan's company.

The pole tapered to a measurement of only 8 inches at its top. Upon its erection it was sunk to a depth of 11feet 6 inches into the ground and with 8 feet of ironwork measured a total of 88 feet 6 inches above ground. Its total weight with all its fittings was almost 4 tons. This was to include the weathercock of 2 feet 9 inches tall and measured 2 feet from its beak to tail, and was made from solid copper, and heavily gilded.

The cost of which amounted to £2.5 shillings. It was stated that it might well have been able to claim the distinction of being the 'Cock of the North'.

Fittingly, for this purpose, it was on the 26th of October that Ben Brierley was invited to make an inaugural speech in celebration of the erecting of this third pole two months previously.

As it was one of his last big speeches he took special pleasure in being permitted to take part in what was an 'all parties celebration of Conservative or Radical in politics, or in religion Churchmen or Dissenters joining together for such an occasion.



He stated that, "In the same year that the Eiffel Tower had been erected in Paris, that Failsworth should have got something in its place which, if not quite so stupendous in structure, is perhaps more suitable for the position it has to occupy". Whilst continuing to remark "I am pleased to see the preservation of old customs, landmarks, ancient footpaths and old village greens".

There followed much more in reflection and highlights of the progress of Failsworth and the prosperity of its people. Contrasting his memories of the time that he had assisted in raising the pole after the vane and points had been regilded in honour of the Coronation of William IV. Remembering the feeble voices of the assembled crowd that joined in singing 'God Save the King'. Comparing the contrast of to-day will be the voices that will join in singing 'God Save the Queen' for since 1830 Failsworth has fixed upon itself the stamp of progress.

The erection of this beautiful emblem of concord is significant of the prosperity that you now enjoy". In concluding his commemoration he stated "I now declare, in Masonic parlance, that this pole is duly and truly erected, and in the name of the committee and by permission of the Local Board I dedicate it to the people of Failsworth".

A sawn section of this pole is at present still preserved in the Robert Sidlow Library, together with the gilded weathercock and Royal Cipher G.R. (George Rex) from the 4th Pole.

1901:

On the 9th day of August 1901 to celebrate the Coronation of Edward VII the Sunday Schools held a United Sing at the Pole. This had been re-painted, decorated and garlanded for such an important occasion.

Once again the roasting of a whole ox was done in honour of such an event. By priming the cock at the top of the pole with an electric current, and a special gadget, it was kept 'crowing' all the day.

Failsworth folk tell you that the cock will crow whenever he smells roast beef, and he also crows and flaps his wings when he sees the sun rise to herald the dawn.

Fourth Failsworth Pole

1924:

On Friday August the 24th 1924, 35 years on, the **fourth pole** was erected. It was made, from an imported Redwood tree from Louisiana, in the United States of America at a cost of £300. The new Failsworth Pole stood 82 feet high stood in place for 26 years before being blown down on Easter Sunday in 1950.



Fifth, and current Failsworth Pole

1950:

Following the loss of the Pole, an attempt to purchase a pole from Canada proved abortive, and still efforts continued to be made to secure a replacement. In November 1952 there were no particular designs for a new pole and so the Failsworth Urban District Council offered a prize of £5.00 for the best original drawing. There were no less than 39 respondents to this request and the winner was a Mr John Sutcliffe of Yorkshire Street, Oldham. Estimates were sought for this design and they were reported to have been between £1,020 and £1,670. There was no action taken on these quotes, and so the site remained without a pole for 8 years. Despite much pressure from the many residents pressing for a new pole to be erected immediately after the destruction, it wasn't to be so until the 15th of May 1958 before Failsworth saw any progress made.

1958:

The day of May 15th 1958 was the day of the inauguration of Failsworth's **fifth pole** replacement. Bands played and crowds gathered to watch Councillor Ronald Ord pull back the curtains to unveil the new Failsworth Pole. Many thought "that this new monument was nothing more than a rather odd-looking clock tower, with an even odder looking pole stuck on the top". This was to be the Clock Tower that exists to this day Wednesday 14th June 2006. The tower was built on the famous site of all the previous Poles, at the junction of Oldham Road and Pole Lane and Main Street.



This modern tower, to serve the place of original poles, is of a steel pole, resembling in appearance, at its top, those of all previous wooden poles mentioned here before. But is mounted on a tapering 33 foot 6 inch high brown brick built column. With clock faces to all four sides, and being repeaters of an electrically operated master clock inside the tower, Mounted on the top of the pole is the gilt-painted copper 'Cock o' the North' weather vane perched some 54 feet above ground level. At night neat vertical fluorescent lights light the Tower and adjoining gardens.

The District Engineer and Surveyor, Mr E.D. Turner, C.Eng. F.I.Mun.E., A.R.I.C.S., designed the clock tower and gardens. at the express wish of the Council giving a more permanent structure, and up-to-date significance than the previous former traditional wooden poles whilst incorporating the Pole replica.

Renovation



The renovated Pole Gardens we see today was funded through the Government's Housing Market Renewal programme, a scheme to regenerate inner-city and urban areas, and grant funding from the European Union which totalled around £400,000.

The scheme was designed by Richard Vink, OMBC Landscape Architect and Project Managed by Sue Eachus, OMBC Highways Dept.

The design was developed with local groups Failsworth Pole Residents Association and the Failsworth Historical Society.

The extensive works included cleaning the Pole tower, repairing the clock mechanism and replacing the clock face, adding lighting to pole. Redesigning the gardens with raised beds, trees and shrubs, and of course the installation of the Ben Brierley Statue.



CCTV will be installed at the gardens in the coming months to complete the scheme.

A brief insight into the life of Ben Brierley

It is agreed by most that Failsworth's most famous son was Ben Brierley, the 19th century writer of humorous verse and prose carried out in the South-east Lancashire dialect of the day as spoken in the area.



Ben was self-taught and he rose from bobbin winder, handloom weaver and silk warper to author, journalist, and politician. Ben was born first surviving child of James and Esther Brierley at the "Rocks", Failsworth on 26th June 1825. The unnumbered and unnamed weaver's cottage where he first saw the light of day still stands not many yards from Failsworth's

famous Pole. Since then the dwelling has had an extra floor added to bring it in line with the road when it was raised to go over the Rochdale Canal, and is now numbered 466 Oldham Road (now Prima Pizza shop).

He was baptised. at All Saints in Newton Heath, on 2nd August 1825 by the Reverend Gaskell, whose name is remembered in the Gaskell Street of Newton Heath.

Ben's Father, James Brierley was born in Middleton Parish and was a handloom weaver and ex-soldier, having fought at Waterloo in 1815. He also attended the Peterloo massacre in Manchester on August 16th 1819, being a member of Sam Bamford's Middleton contingent of weavers.

Esther Brierley, (nee Whitehead), was Ben's mother and was possibly from the Failsworth area. She was born c.1796 and died in her canal-side home in Hollinwood in the Autumn of 1854.

James and Esther were married at Manchester Cathedral on 25th November 1816, as were Ben and his wife in 1855. It does not mean to say that they were moving in high society, but rather the opposite, as in Ben's case ten other couples were married at the same time, all answering yes or no at the appropriate moment. At James's wedding he signed the register with an "X".



When Ben was about three years old the family removed to Canal Street, Hollinwood, where Ben was employed by his father as a bobbin winder at a spinning wheel. As soon as his legs were long enough he was placed in front of a hand loom to earn his living. Through all this time, very young as he was, he craved to read and write, and as mentioned, though he was mainly self-taught he attended old dames night classes where they sat by her fire and learned what little th'owd dame had to teach. He also attended a class run by the Primitive Methodists at Bourne Street, Hollinwood. From here and there he educated himself, and indeed as he put it "My education finished at an age when present-day children are just starting theirs".

Plying the handloom and working at a Hollinwood Mill which he describes as being so gloomy that his candle made the darkness just visible, he carried on reading all he could in his spare time. He once remembered reading a scrap of paper by the light shed by the fire at home, and as the room got darker, and the fire got lower he leaned further and further forward to catch the last glimpses of light, but sat up rather suddenly when his hair caught fire.

Times were very hard for all the handloom weavers at this time - having to wait for weeks for the putter—out to give them weft to weave at home, and even longer for payment when the cut of cloth was "takken whom". (Taken home to the man who supplied the weft ready spun or still as "cotton wool").

The wages of the handloom weaver were poor at the best of times, and they were fined for any faults — a sixpence fine for a hole for example. Ben's friend Sim Schofield, born Holebottom, Failsworth, 25th August 1852, describes in his book "Short Stories about Failsworth Folk" of 1905 how a weaver got two holes in his piece of cloth, and was going to be charged sixpence a hole, but the angry weaver ripped the two holes into one.

After Ben left his loom which was handed down to him by his father as an "heirloom", he took a job as a silk warper at a mill in York Street, Manchester. Warping involves lining up the thousands and thousands of silk threads parallel to each other to be fed into the rear of a (by this time) power loom ready for the weft to be thrown across carried on a bobbin in a shuttle.

It was at this mill that he met Esther Booth (Firth is sometimes mentioned). She came from Bowlee Heights above Middleton. However, she married as Esther Booth at Manchester Cathedral on April 29th 1855. Her father was Reuben Booth (joiner) of 10 Briddon Street off Frances Street Strangeways, Manchester, and she signed the register with the familiar X.

After Annie's death Ben was advised to snap out of his depression and get back into public life again. This he did by standing as a Liberal candidate for St Michael's ward, Collyhurst. He was elected for two successive terms in office and so spent six years as a Manchester City Councillor.

Ben's health began to decline, and this, coupled with the fact that most of his life's savings had vanished due to the collapse of a building society, he and Esther with his sister in law removed to "The Poplars", 17 Hall Street, (now Hillier Street), Moston. Here he died on the 18th January 1896.

Ben is buried in the Manchester General Cemetery (Harpurhey cemetery) in plot 5260NC next to his daughter. Most of the Manchester City dignitaries along with figures from the Manchester Literary Club, which he helped to establish, attended, as did representatives from various Masonic Lodges. Ben himself was a Mason, and had no less than three Masonic institutions named after him, he being a member of the Arthur Sullivan Lodge.

Esther, his wife, died on the 25th May 1914 (her 80th birthday) and is buried in the same plot as Ben.



The one true gift to Failsworth is that of Daisy Nook. Ben's first writing of any note was published as "A Day Out," or "A Summer's Ramble to Daisy Nook". He began writing this following a day's holiday given by his employers in rejoicing following the fall of Sevastapol in 1855. He asked Charles Potter, the Oldham artist to provide a vignette or small illustration for the book depicting Daisy Nook.



Potter asked him where the Nook was and Ben replied "Thou can fix it anywhere thou likes," so the artist set up his easel at the picturesque hamlet of Waterhouses by the River Medlock and depicted that, making it "the spot that has lived on daisies ever since."

Ben's wedding present from his employers was the sack, but Ben had been offered the post of a sub editor of the Oldham Times. They moved to Collyhurst, Manchester, and here on the 7th November 1856 Annie Brierley, their only child, was born. Sadly she died of TB at 12 St. Oswald's Grove, Collyhurst on the 15th June 1875, and was buried aged 18 years. Annie was their only child, so obviously there are no direct relatives of Ben's alive today.

The death of Ben's only child Annie came as a painful blow. Annie had been looking forward to becoming a bridesmaid at her cousin's wedding, and although she was not well enough to attend, her Mother let Annie wear the dress bought for the day.

Ben wrote this poem on the death of his daughter;

We thought she was our own for yet a while;
That we had earn'd her, by our love of Heav'n,
To be life's comfort, not a season's smile,
Then tears for ever. "Tis to be forgiven,"
We deemed her mortal - not an angel sent,
From out on a mission host, on mercy bent.

We were beguiled by her sweet ways of love-
The growth of her affections round two stems-
As if they were of her, and from above,
We did not note that from her heart the gems
Of her devotion were bestrewn in show'rs
Where'er she went, and gathered like spring flowers.

And her last words (coherent) - "I have lived,
And have not lived" - were full of earthly tone,
And utterance. They too, our hearts deceived;
Nor were we mindful til, when we left alone,
We heard the flutter of dove-like wing,
And a sweet strain, such as the seraphs sing.

Then knew we, she had come in mortal guise,
To teach us love, and charity, and grace;
With sun-gold in her hair, heaven in her eyes,
And all that's holy in her preaching face.
The scales had fallen, and in our vision then
Saw that an angel graced the homes of men.

Now onto the statue

In 1898, a couple of years after his death public subscription paid for the erection of a statue in Queen's Park, Rochdale Road, Harpurhey. After the official ceremony guests travelled onto the The Rocks at Failsworth to erect a plaque on Ben's birthplace.



After being vandalised the statue was taken down some 20 years ago and taken to Heaton Park for storage. During its 'safe' keeping, the boat house where it was housed, burnt to the ground around 1995. Not realising its significance the contractors, McInnis, sent the statue to the dump. A sad end to such a great monument to Ben's life and work. History hunters can see the plinth as it still remains in Queens park and faces the old gallery.



When embarking on this project to bring a new Statue to Ben's home town of Failsworth local Councillor and historian Jim McMahon wrote to Manchester City Council to ask that they donate the remaining plinth to Failsworth, but they declined saying they also intended to restore the statue.

After this it was decided to persue a new statue for Failsworth and the stunning bronze we see at Failsworth Pole is the end result.

The statue was crafted using clay by Artist Denise Dutton (shown to above).

After the clay had been crafted the figure as wrapped and cast in plaster in order to create a mold for the foundry to cast in bronze. This was then taken to the foundry where the statue really came to life.

Now Ben is back at home near The Rocks we hope the people of Failsworth become as proud of this new landmark as they are of their Failsworth Pole.

