THE

HISTORY OF WIGAN.

CHAPTER I.

Aborigines of Britain—Romans, Roman Roads, and Roman Remains—Coccio: Why the Saxons chose Wigan as a site for their Town—Foundation of Saxon Wigan—Origin of the name "Wigan"—Traditional origin of the name "Winwick"—Arthur, his Historians and alleged Battles—Local Religious War in the 7th Century—The Danes: Their Battles and Devastations—Local Deluge and Famine in the 10th Century.

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A TOWN without age, or of mushroom growth, can have no history, whereas even a village that lays claim to antiquity is as interesting as the last living veteran who has only been a common private in the ranks of a distinguished corps. Wigan has not only existed during nearly two thousand years, but has very frequently figured specially in the national annals. She took her part in instituting and maturing the British Constitution; stubbornly defended the monarchy during the dark times of headstrong and unbridled revolutions; shared the misfortunes of defeat, and reaped the rewards of constancy. Ruthless rebels dismantled her; special honours were bestowed on her at the command of royalty. In the eyes of old bigoted Protestants, she, having sheltered Roman Catholic heretics in almost every house, seemed as venomous as a nest of hornets; and when Papists had their day of power she humanely protected hunted Protestants, and was often zealous in the wrong. Many of her long list of Parliamentary representatives were distinguished legislators, soldiers, and civilians. Some of her Mayors have been connected with royalty by marriage ties, and many were citizens distinguished for their honest accumulations of great fortunes as well as for pious philanthropy. Many of her sons displayed a bounteous Christian charity, the benefits of which will continue to be reaped to the latest generations. But there are many blots in the pages of her interesting history, which, like antique manuscripts with artistic illuminations, should be preserved and not destroyed, because of having, here and there, a disfigured or musty page. Before, however, proceeding with the work in hand, that of writing a chronological history of this "ancient and loyal Borough," a few words will not be out of place as to the earliest known inhabitants of the locality, and a brief mention of its condition before the Roman invasion.

There are two great branches of the Celtic race, the Gaelic, and Cymric or Welsh, and to the former belonged the Albiones, who were the aborigines of Britain. They inhabited the whole of the island when it was invaded by a Belgian colony of Britanni, who were also Celts, but of the Cymric or Welsh branch. They defeated the Albiones and drove them to the north of the island, where they afterwards assumed the name of Caledonians or Picts, and are to this day represented by the Gaels or Highlanders of Scotland, whilst the ancient Britanni are represented by the Welsh. At the same period Ireland was inhabited by the Hiberni, who were overpowered by the Scots in the same manner as the Albiones were by the Britanni. The Scots—meaning wanderers—were a race of invaders hailing from Spain. They conquered Ireland and proceeded to found a colony in Argyleshire, Scotland, for their chief characteristic then, as now, was restlessness tempered with caution. They are to this day found in every inhabited part of the globe, where their restless, migratory nature only gives place to steady caution, when success is achieved or reasonably hoped for. They became very friendly with the Albiones or Picts and were thus faithful allies against the Saxons. It is true that no foreign foe has ever invaded the land of our constitutional monarchy, or "crowned republic." Many a national eye has been furtively glanced at the favoured Isle, set like a gem in the ocean, but serious contemplation has always shown the madness of all schemes of conquest. Once, indeed, the Dutch fleet (June 10th, 1667,) sailed up the Thames as far as Tilbury Fort, destroyed Sheerness and some ships, but no troops were landed. Britain has not always thus been exempt from invasion. Previous to its becoming a monarchical institution race after race invaded it, colonised it, and was expelled from it by some new invader. The Britanni drove northward the aborigines, and the Romans subdued the Britanni; the Picts and Scots invaded and appropriated the possessions left by the Romans until they were driven back by the usurping Saxons, who in their time were harassed and temporarily subdued by the Danes; then came the last and greatest invasion, with its vast wars of civilisation and advancement. At the first Roman invasion the Britanni inhabited the province of the *Brigantes*, in which Wigan was afterwards built. These were days of barter, when estates and wealth, according to modern ideas, were little valued. The very habits, character, and conduct of the people may be gathered from their current prices. A horse was worth half a dozen cows, whilst a trained hawk was worth a couple of good horses, and a sword worth a couple of hawks. No better description can be given of these rude forefathers than that of the Latin author, Dion Cassius. He says:—

> "They never cultivate the land, but live on prey, hunting, and the fruits of trees; for they never touch fish, of which they have such prodigious plenty. They live in tents, naked, and without shoes; have their wives in common, and maintain all their children. The people share the government amongst them, and they practise robbery without restraint. They fight in chariots, having small, fleet horses; they have also infantry, who can run very swiftly, and while they stand are very firm. Their arms are a shield and a short spear, on the lower part of which is a bell of brass to terrify the enemy by its sound when shaken. They likewise wear daggers. They are accustomed to brave hunger, cold, and all kinds of toil; for they will continue several days up to their chins in water, and bear hunger many days. In the woods they live on bark and roots of trees. They prepare a certain kind of food for all occasions, a piece of which, of the size of a bean, prevents their feeling hunger or thirst."

Thus at the beginning of the Christian era, when the "Good News" was first proclaimed on the plains of Palestine, our country was under the dominion of heathen mythology. When Christianity, having bid defiance to heathendom, was waging war in the civilised countries of the East, the few inhabitants of our almost unknown island were bowing their knees to idols. Long after the Roman Conquest Lancashire was inhabited by Druid Britons, who, clinging ardently to the most superstitious doctrines and traditions, believed in the transmigration of souls. Their priests were their despotic rulers, in whom they most piously confided. Their rites were of the most savage nature, for they believed that gods, like men, demand vengeance on the transgressor. Prisoners of war or criminals, and, when neither of these could be got, innocent persons were bound by them, placed in large cages of wickerwork, and burned as sacrifices to their gods. They were not sufficiently civilised to build towns for their social comfort, nor were they able to cultivate the fertile land. Their time was entirely devoted to indolence, hunting, fighting, and worshipping. There were vast forests, moors, and marshes, throughout the country, in which they spent their barbarous lives in hawking, or hunting the numerous bears, wolves, wild boars, and beavers. Their manner of living was little superior to that of the animals they hunted, and the best of their shelters, answering the purpose of houses, were not unlike the huts of the modern gipsies. They knew nothing of agriculture until taught the practice by the Romans, who over-ran nearly the whole country about the beginning of the Christian era. The Romans had discovered the wealth of the land, and being intent on possessing and using it they, according to the great precept of the conquering Cæsar, made roads which, though expensive in construction, were considered the most practicable method of subduing a strange country, especially when rudely inhabited, as Britain then was. At the time of their invasion there were only twenty-eight British cities, which they connected by excellent roads. One of these twenty-eight cities was Winwick, then called, Cair-Guintguic, from which to Wigan traces of Watling street, or the old Roman road, marked by columns or milestones, have been discovered. In no document does the name of Wigan appear at this time, but, strange to say, when it does come into use long afterwards, another name of a very important town—Coccio, which answers in all respects to Wigan, and which some eminent antiquarians give good reasons for believing to have been Wigan—dies out. Coccio was long supposed to be Blackrod, which undoubtedly was on one of the Roman roads, but it was only a supposition, and the antiquarian researches of Mr. Sibson, and Mr. Thicknesse, M.P. for Wigan from 1847 to 1854, seem to prove beyond doubt that it was not Blackrod, but Wigan. Mr. W. Thompson Watkin, an eminent antiquarian, has given good reasons for holding a like belief. The main Roman road passing through Wigan was that from Chester and Warrington to the north. It passed on the east of Goose Green, by Robin Lane End, to the ford on the Douglas, near where Adam's Bridge now stands, and was really the only street in the town, being what is now called Wallgate, Market Place, and Standishgate; and then, instead of proceeding on the route of the modern Wigan Lane, turned westward through the Mesnes, along Beggar's Walk between Gidlow Lane and the Railway, and thence to Standish. The other Roman road from Manchester passed through Hindley, Amberswood Common, Hardybutts and Scholes, and crossed the river at the ford where Millgate begins, and where the Rector's water-mills stood. Near the latter ford was built the first Wigan bridge in the time of Edward III. The very existence of these roads in Wigan proves that it must have been a walled town even at this early period, for every Roman *iter* terminated at a walled station. Although both Standish and Blackrod have been considered by some to have been Roman stations, their claims can be established neither by relics nor records, whereas Wigan has clearly been proved to have been one, and an important one too. From the very circumstance of its having been a Roman station, the likelihood is that neither Blackrod nor Standish—both about three miles from Wigan—were stations, although they were undoubtedly on the Roman highway. The excellent papers on this subject given in the twentieth and twenty-eighth volumes of the "Archæological Journal" should be read by all who wish to follow more fully the researches on this subject. Wigan was the most important local town on the great Roman way, for surely the very existence of these Roman roads—now discovered—proves that it must have been an important station. The remains of these roads, coming severally from Preston, Manchester, and Warrington, and meeting in Wigan, are still to be seen. Mr. Sibson says, "The great roads seem to have been about twelve yards in breadth and a yard in thickness. They were first formed with earth, about half a yard in thickness; the earth was generally covered with a stratum of large pieces of stone, a quarter of a yard in thickness, and the stones were then covered with a layer of gravel, about a quarter of a yard in thickness. When stones were scarce, and particulary when the ground was marshy, the road was formed wholly of earth and gravel." The town Winwick was the residence of Oswald, King of Northumbria, who was killed there whilst fighting against the Mercians in 642. Traces of the great Roman road from Winwick are still to be seen beyond Wigan, at Standish, on the one side, and near Ince on the other, and at Blackrod. The Blackrod portion was part of the direct road from Manchester and Ribchester, which joined the Wigan one. Afterwards another road was made from Manchester to Wigan, traces of which have also been recently discovered at the making of the new branch (Midland) railway. All Roman settlements would naturally be on the highway, and Wigan is proved to have been one of them; for surely antiquarian relics are more to be relied upon as historical guides than the mythical language, records or traditions of romancist authors, who wrote more to please the imagination than with a desire to relate facts. The archæological remains of Wigan relate a history uncoloured by fancy. It was certainly on the Roman highway, for portions of the highway exist and assert the fact. There was found treasure trove in the town in 1837, which clearly gives it a Roman connection. In clearing away some old stonework to make room for modern improvements, the workmen came upon a large collection of much defaced, but still clearly recognisable Roman coins of the reign of Probus, Victorinus, Gallienus, and Tetricus. Two Roman urns and many charred human bones were found near the present site of the Wigan Gas Works. Cremation was an honour bestowed only on the bodies of the great—a custom borrowed from the Romans and practised by the natives from the second to the fifth century. At the restoration of the Parish Church there was discovered a stone, now built into the splay of the tower window of that church, which is believed by antiquarians to be the remains of a Roman altar. (An old Roman altar, dedicated to Fortune by a centurion of a Roman legion, was discovered in Manchester in 1612). These discoveries themselves prove that Wigan must have been a Roman settlement, as it was the custom of the Romans to have at all their stations or settled colonies, and at them only, both a cemetery and a temple.

A stern, but useless opposition was made by the ancient Britons of Lancashire against the invasion and settlement of the Romans, who showed the natives no mercy when they defeated them, but cruelly bound them in the wicker-work cages prepared by themselves for immolating the Romans in. Soon the Roman empire was assailed on the continent, and began to decline. The time for the Roman evacuation was at hand, but great progress had been made in civilising the primitive natives. About 418 A.D. the Roman troops finally left Britain, and the Picts and Scots immediately cast their covetous eyes on England, which they at once invaded with large depredating armies. Ruin, devastation, and desolation marked their progress. Gildas, the first British historian, who was born at Dumbarton, in Scotland, about 500 A.D., represents the Britons as thus bewailing their condition:—"The barbarians drive us to the sea, the sea drives us back to the barbarians. Thus, of two kinds of death, one or other must be our choice, either to be swallowed up by the waves, or butchered by the sword." Thus there was little peace in store for them. The fertility and wealth of the land had become known through the merchants, who had been induced by the Romans to carry on trade between the island and the continent. A new, but at first peaceful invasion, at the request of Vortigern, was made by the inhabitants of the Rhine—Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, the latter of whom divided the districts acquired afterwards by them into hundreds. These invaders were really the same in religion, language, manners, and customs. Vortigern had invited them, as mercenaries, to assist him against the continual harassing and vexatious invasions of the Picts and Scots from Scotland and Ireland. He treated them as good and worthy allies; but, seeing that the country had great natural wealth, and was pleasing in their eyes, they, by their craftiness, undermined his power, and soon became masters of the situation. The natives fought hard against their ever-growing power, and after a twenty years' war, provoked by the repeated attempts of the Britons to drive them out of the country, hope seemed to die out of the natives altogether, and the victorious Anglo-Saxons spread themselves all over the land, building rude towns, clearing forests, and cultivating the fields. They took possession of Lancashire, and circumvented the natives by their peaceful craft. They naturally explored the country, first along the existing Roman roads, on which, at convenient places, they settled and built hamlets. A body of these colonists settled on the Roman remains at Wigan, for, according to their experienced views, it was specially adapted for the site of a town. It was their custom, under such circumstances, to chose as a place of habitation a hill surrounded by valleys or low land, conveniently near a water supply, so that from this hill in the hollow they could not only obtain the elemental necessaries of life, but be able on all sides to observe the approach of friend or foe. The old Roman camp on the Douglas, or Dhu-glas of the ancient Britons, on the mound-like hill on which the Parish Church of Wigan now stands, was thus the very place of their ideal choice. There they determined to settle, and first of all rudely fortified their little social colony, according to their wont, by digging trenches and throwing up earthwalls.

When they had thus fortified themselves against the attacks of marauders they immediately proceeded to erect a place of worship, for a church and fortifications were the foremost and greatest necessities of Saxon town building. They built on the present site of the Parish Church, and, doubtless, on the remains of the Roman temple, if not indeed on the site of the old Druid oak, a rude, but sacred building of wattlework, plastered with clay. Such was the first fortified or fighting town of that Saxon colony.

Having built their town, the likelihood is they would at once give it a name, and, although it is presumed that to them it was known to be the old Roman Coccio, they certainly did not give it that name, but, according to their custom, one compounded from their own language. There is always some definite reason for giving a special name to any place, but the names of many old towns, like their inhabitants and customs, have undergone such great changes that their origin cannot be traced. Many are so corrupted as to have no resemblance to the original, whilst many have been replaced by entirely new ones. The etymology and philology of the name "Wigan" are wrapt in much obscurity, indeed no authenticated reason can be given for its origin. Some plausible and many absurd reasons have been suggested, but the most probable hitherto advanced, and the most generally accepted as genuine, is that it is derived from the Saxon word "wig," meaning a fight, and that Wigan is simply the Saxon plural of that word. The local antiquarian discoveries and known history have suggested and favoured this hypothetical derivation, for sufficient human and horses' bones and implements of war have been found on its site to prove it to be the veritable graveyard of armies. If Arthur ever fought at Wigan, it must have been about the time that the Saxon colony settled there, but the untrustworthy historian, Nennius, only says, in reference to Arthur's battles :—"The second, third, fourth, and fifth happened at another river, called the Duggles, in the region named Linius." It is doubtful whether Arthur even existed, much more so is it doubtful whether he ever fought at Wigan. The Danes did fight there, and the "barrows" of bones found are most likely the remains of Dano-Saxon engagements. In all probabilty the Saxons named the town, and had good reasons for giving it its special name. I am disposed to think the termination *en* or *an* does not signify the plural of *Wig*. I think a much more plausible derivation than this is one which I have seen in an obsolete dictionary (Bailey's), where the original name is said to have been Pibiggin, derived from the Latin *Pi*, and changed by the Saxons to *Wi* and *biggin*, a building, and thus the name of the town meant really the sacred edifice itself, the habitations being merely attachments. It is no unusual thing for a town to receive the name of its church. Eccles simply means the church, while Ecclefeghan means the church on the hill, and Pibiggin is reasonably supposed to be derived from the Saxon and Latin words, and originally applied to the house of worship.*

Camden thinks, from the diminutive appearance of the houses, although, I think they would not seem to be insignificant in the eyes of the native builders, that the name is a corruption of Weebiggin, or Little Buildings. The word biggin is a good, old, and not yet obsolete, provincial one. It is a most unlikely thing that the founders should mock their own handiwork with a name not untainted with ridicule. There are those who say that the name is derived from *wye*, a place of safety, and *gan*, to go to; giving at the same time plausible reasons for their suggestions or beliefs. That the whole name is but the plural of its first part is really the only derivation that receives serious consideration, and is generally believed to be the real one; but, with all due deference to those who hold that belief, I think it is not so. The town is of Saxon origin, was the site of a Saxon castle, fortifications, and church; and so the name, in all likelihood, would be a Saxon one, and doubtless the origin of the first part of the word is correctly given, as *wig*, a fight; but it is scarcely justifiable to say that *an* or *en* forms the plural. It seems strange, if this hypothesis be true, that Wigan should be the only one of all Saxon towns whose complete name is simply the plural of its part. The site of the future town was chosen by the colonists, because it was on the Roman road, because the remains of a town were already there, and, what they chiefly wished, because it was a hill in a hollow, fit to be fortified according to their notions. The Saxon experience was that all fortified places were fighting places, and, consequently, they expected Wigan to be a fighting town, and named it accordingly. In reading old books and manuscripts for this work I have found the name of the town spelt in a dozen different ways, all of which cannot be right, and, although "Wigan" may seem to this generation, from the custom of hearing it, the most euphonious, still it may not be nearest the original. All the spellings which I have seen begin with *Wig*, or *Wyg*, and undoubtedly the derivation is, so far, *Wyg*, a fight. One of the usual terminations which the Saxon name of a town bore was *ham*, and the Saxons, like too many of the modern English, were guilty of dropping their aspirates, and in the rubbing down process common to all growing languages this termination would be pronounced without the *h*, and the *am* again corrupted to *an*. I have found the town casually named in letters written during the Commonwealth "Wigham," and I believe "Wigan," by the corruptions of civilisation, to be a mere refinement of "Wigham," which means the fighting place, hamlet, town, or borough. It is really the same as Wigton, or Wigtown. In the drama of *Palantoke* occurs the dialogue:—

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* The following description of the ancient arms of Wigan was recently lodged by Mr. Alderman Byrom in the Wigan Free Library, and published in the local newspapers:—"A church between two tall trees. On the reverse a crowned head (supposed to be Edward I.) In base a lion couchant between two acretts, anammalated (?). Dated 7 Henry VI., 1428." Mr. Rylands, F.S.A., of Warrington, gave excellent reasons for believing that Mr. Byrom was altogether mistaken. Each tree referred to, it is believed, is like the *ash*, the common provincial name for which is *Wiggin*, and, had antiquarians been reconciled to the description, and received it as genuine, in all likelihood a new derivation for the name of the town would have sprung up. People would have asked, "Was the name *Wigan* not originally applied to the church beside the Wiggin trees?"—D. S.

Harold. Wer machte zum Statthalter dich in Wigan?
Swend. Du sandest mich nach Wigan und nach Schönen!
Harold. Who made thee chief in Wigan?
Swend. 'Twas thou didst send me forth to Wigan and to Schönen.

The origin given of names of places is not only sometimes very peculiar, but far-fetched and questionable; that of Winwick, with which the early history of Wigan is so closely connected, may be cited as an example. There, earnest labourers had just finished digging the foundation of their Parish Church, and retired for the night from their weary day's toil, when the inhabitants were startled by the unhappy squeaking of a pig. Heads appeared at every hole in the wall that answered for a window; still the pig screamed "We-ee-wick! We-ee-wick! We-ee-wick!" and then carried away a stone destined to form part of the church's foundation, and, laying it on the spot where King Oswald had fallen, again and again returned, squeaking "We-ee-wick," and bore back one stone more. The inhabitants were fully persuaded it was a Divine interposition, and, acting in accordance with their convictions, built their church where the pig carried the stones, and moreover from that day named their hamlet "We-ee-wick," which was afterwards refined, or corrupted, into "Winwick." The representation of a pig with a bell round its neck is, however, by no means a piece of ecclesiastical architecture confined to Winwick. A similar representation is generally found beside sculptures and paintings of St. Anthony, the patron of the lower animals and of bells and bell-towers. According to the traditional rhyming summary of Winwick history, both past and prospective, the parish is not one favourable to the fostering of virtue.

The Church at little Winwick,
  It stands upon a sod;
And when a maid is married there,
  The steeple gives a nod.

Alas! how many ages
  Their rapid flight have flown,
Since on the high and lofty spire
  There's moved a single stone.

According to tradition, and some beliefs deduced from modern discoveries, King Arthur was the renowned hero of several sanguinary battles fought on the banks of the Douglas. It is a serious matter to disagree with historians, especially on a question of such romantic interest, for it must be pleasant for all inhabitants of Wigan to believe that their town has such a worthy poetical connection. There is really no sufficiently authenticated reason for believing that either the noble Arthur, or any of his gallant knights, ever bathed their pilgrim feet in the limpid Douglas, or bared their swords on its grassy banks. All accounts of this Welsh favourite are of a romantic nature, and were neither written by "special correspondents" nor eye-witnesses, but are taken from mythical sources. No contemporary historian wrote of him, unless indeed, Gildas be Nennius. His history when recorded was a tradition, and almost every country has a similar mythical hero, just as all our most common tales and legends have their equivalents in other lands. Henricus and Ranulphus, after Nennius, are the two first chroniclers who record his glories, and the former lived about 300 years after his time, and the latter 800 years. Their information was culled from the interesting traditions of the Welsh bards, who from age to age had clothed their chronicles in more gorgeous garbs. The legends of the Morte d'Arthur of Sir Thomas Malory, of the 15th century, are as much to be relied upon, as historical facts, as their chronicles. Of course, whether Arthur ever lived, acted, and died, as he is recorded to have done, or not, his name will never die. Henricus and Ranulphus have written one sentence each, and in those two sentences lie Wigan's claims to an Arthurian connection. They are :—"In this year, which was the tenth year of Cerdicus, King of the West Saxons, arose among the Britons, in the eighteenth year of his age, the noble Arthur, who had twelve victories against the Saxons—the first on the river Gleny, then four on the river Douglas, which is in the region of Inees. That river is now called in English the Douglas (Duggles), and runs from the city of Wigan, being ten miles from the river Mersey, in the county of Lancaster."—(MSS., Harl, 2261.) The former of these two sentences was written by Henricus 300 years after the time of Arthur, and the writer of the latter, Ranulphus, of Chester, died in 1369. Where is the Gleny, the Douglas, or the region of the Inees? Nobody knows. The Douglas of Wigan is not the only Douglas. Many have written of King Arthur, but none have been able to say where the Gleny and the Douglas are; and even writers of the twelfth century confess they are unable to find out by searching whether this Douglas is in Lothian, Lancashire, or Cornwall. The Arthurian claims of Wigan are, therefore, feeble and can scarcely be considered reliable.

Arthur was a veritable Samson, according to the unauthenticated traditions handed down concerning him, and seemingly nothing, either in verse or prose, can be said of him which is either too good or too great. In the times of Vortigern, who invited the Saxons to this country, he, according to his admiring chroniclers, not only distinguished himself in single combat, but frequently also against dreadful odds. Now he felled this knight to the ground with one dread swoop of his battle-axe; now clove that hero in two. His name was the terror and pride of the land. He issued from his fortified castle to meet distinguished knights who had travelled far to openly defy him in his own domains, simply to have their prowess tried against his. He wandered abroad in search of adventure, did battle against knights who were rumoured to have carried off some maiden fair, or led his invincible armies against national foes. He lived in times when war was the business of all men and the admiration of all women. Then, Might was Right, and even the most civilised nations were but barbarians. When there were no national foes to fight, it seemed to men there was no object to live for, and, as if to keep themselves in good practice, families, clans, towns, and counties warred one against the other, for the mere pleasure of fighting. Even the priests themselves attended the battle-field, armed with clubs, to beat out men's brains with, for it was sinful for such orthodox men to shed men's blood by the sword. Then, every man of power was a tyrant, whose serfs were proud to fall prostrate at his feet and own him for their lord. Robber-chiefs were local kings, who ruled with a rod of iron, and carried on war on their own account. The natives of Britain warred against each other, until, weakened by their internecine conflicts, their invited allies, the Saxons, quietly took possession of the land. In Wigan, as elsewhere in the county, great struggles were made by the enfeebled nations for supremacy, but the Saxons foiled their efforts, and, thus subdued, their hopes decayed until the renowned Arthur, according to tradition, roused their downcast spirits from a lethargy of despair. In all his battles Arthur is said to have carried on his shield the image of the Virgin in which he idolatrously placed implicit confidence. Many of the Britons had already become the willing slaves of the Saxons, working in their fields without the town, and living in their houses within it, for those who cultivated the fields by day returned to the town for safety by night. These slaves of Wigan, and the natives of the surrounding neighbourhood, are represented as being roused to arms at the command of the great Arthur, about 520 A.D. His brother-in-law, Uriens, the Lancashire hero, one of the knights of his round table, figures conspicuously in the mythical history. After his wife had failed to assassinate him in a fit of jealousy, he fell by the hand of another assassin, and received honourable burial, whilst his glorious brother-in-law, not even receiving the common rites of burial, and without even having had his brave deeds recorded by chroniclers of his day, came to a mythical end. Contemporaries forgot him, but future historians have written about him so elaborately as to leave nothing untold, except the truth. Those who wish to believe the traditionary romance should read Nennius, Henricus, Ranulphus, and Sir Thomas Malory.

In the sixth century, a young man of quick mercantile ability endeared himself to, and married, the rich widow of his employer, and so became possessed of all her worldly goods. For some years he continued his mercantile career, and then retired from public life, and, notwithstanding his wealth and former business habits, lived after the manner of the Hebrew Essenes. Some said he was mad; others that he was the prophet of God. In a few years the traditions of his devotees proved him to many to be Mohammed, the true prophet of God; and his gorgeous temples now number tens of thousands, whilst his followers are innumerable. About the very time his religion was springing into existence, fanatic idolaters were waging bitter war against Christianity in the vicinity of Wigan. Religion has brought about more bloodshed than all other causes of war together. The heathen have at all times proved themselves as zealous enthusiasts for the defence of their paganisms as the most devoted Christians have for their creeds. The first religious wars in Lancashire, where Christianity was concerned, took place in the middle of the seventh century. In 597 the Roman missionaries, as related in connection with the tale of the Angles, or Angels, were well received by the king and people, and the benign influences of Christianity were soon felt all over the land; but a reaction set in in the north of England when Edwin was king of Britain, from his northern borough town (Edwin's burgh or Edinburgh) to Chester. Edwin was slain at the beginning of the outbreak of fanaticism at Hatfield in 633, and the war was continued by his successor, Oswald, who, when a youthful exile, had found refuge with the missionaries of Iona, and was converted by them. One of his first regal acts was to send there for missionaries, the first of whom, in hopeless despair, returned to his monastery with the intelligence that the people of Lancashire were so stubborn and barbarous as to make the introduction of Christianity an impossibility. Such was the unflattering account taken back of the Lancashire bigoted Pagans. But the monks, holy and hopeful men, blamed the severity of their unsuccessful brother more than the ignorant stubbornness of the natives, and another attempt was made with great success. The chief monk Aidan, who next came as missionary, wandered from town to town through Chester, Wigan, and all Yorkshire and Northumbria, with the good king as his interpreter. The hospitable King Oswald, who often gave the viands on his own table to the numerous poor at his gates, devoted his life to the harassing battles of the Cross, and fell at last in the great cause on the battlefield near Maserfield, when fighting against Penda, the defender and champion of Paganism (642). About 300 years after this, the doctrines of Christianity having been generally accepted, a copy of the Anglo-Saxon bible was placed in every church, having been translated by the king's order into the native tongue. Wigan was a very extensive parish, and in its church would, no doubt, be placed the sacred book in the native tongue, which could only be read by the priests to the poor parishioners who were eager for the gospel news.

The Danes, pirates of the seas and robbers of nations, invaded England at the end of the eighth century, and for a hundred years, during many invasions, they ravaged the land, destroyed towns, laid waste fortifications, and carried off everything of any value, neither too big nor too heavy. Their visits caused a revolution. The quiet agricultural progress of the inhabitants was arrested, and life and property became so uncertain and unsafe that laws were disregarded, and perfect anarchy reigned until the time of Alfred the Great, who wrought such marvellous changes in the conduct of the people and the government that dishonesty seems literally to have been frightened out of the country. Of all towns taken and ravaged by these Danes none suffered more than Chester, which, after they left the country, was virtually a walled city without an inhabitant. One of the excellent highways of the country passed through Wigan to Chester, and thus the invaders in all likelihood despoiled Wigan, as well as other places, especially as it was a fortified town and lay on their route. So great were the depredations and destruction of these Northmen that, among many other contingent taxes, one had to be levied for the restoration of the castles and town walls destroyed by them, and such a terror had they become to the country that the inhabitants willingly paid their Dane-gold, or tax of Ethelred the Unready, to buy them off. The three most important taxes imposed in Wigan and other large towns at this time were, one for the repairs of highways and bridges (although there was no bridge at Wigan, for the Douglas was forded there then, and for centuries after), one for the maintenance of the army, and another for the repairs and restoration of towns, castles, and town walls.

A stubborn resistance was everywhere offered to the Danes, and they showed an equal determination to conquer. They were attacked by the inhabitants of the walled towns, for the men in these—and sometimes the women, too—were trained to arms from youth. In every probability several engagements must have been fought in the neighbourhood of Wigan, some of which local wars were those which are generally ascribed to Arthur. Wigan must have been one of the most important military stations on the great Roman road, which the Danes undoubtedly traversed on their way to Chester; and can it be supposed that, contrary to all Danish characteristics, they laid waste with fire and sword all other towns and yet passed the fortifications of Wigan unmolested? The buried bones that have been exhumed from local "barrows" must be the remains of Saxon and Danish opponents, and the blood that is said by old chroniclers to have dyed the Douglas for several days during the Arthurian battles is likely to have been that of the Danes and Saxons, who fell during the engagements which took place in the ninth century.

The Danes had destroyed many of the fortifications of Lancashire, but Edward the Elder took a very great interest in restoring and repairing what they had overthrown. Several of these towns the king himself visited in 923, and the repairs of Manchester and Thilwell are specially mentioned, but as he and his father were constantly building and repairing in the neighbourhood, Wigan was doubtless one of the other towns attended to by his orders. The beneficial influences of Christianity were making marked effects on the progress and manners of the people. They had become, comparatively speaking, extensive cultivators of the soil, and, indeed, exported much grain to the continent. Cheese was also largely exported. Agriculture was the favourite pursuit of the better classes, who all had several slaves in their service. Nomadic habits had given place to those of social settlement. There were many improvements in the dwellings. The houses of Wigan were of a more solid and substantial nature. At first they were but rudely thatched, gipsy-like, huts, with holes in the walls for windows, and an opening in the roof for a chimney, whereas the gentry now lived in wooden edifices. Families, slaves, and dogs lived and fed in the same house and room. Swine's flesh was the chief food at dinner—an early meal—after which it was not unusual for all to get drunk, especially the clergyman if he happened to be present. The men were soldiers in times of war, and hunters, or cultivators of the field, in times of peace. Ladies were expert at needlework, and generally wove all the cloth and made all the clothes. The rude church was adorned with modern sculptures or pictures, not for the remotest purposes of idolatory, but simply as modest means of enlightening ignorant people, for priests only could read. Unfortunately, nothing further has been recorded concerning Wigan at this period except that it was visited in 923, like other neighbouring towns, by a storm that seemed to the inhabitants to be another Deluge. Great progress had been made in agriculture, and the people were entirely dependent on the produce of the land, which, being virgin soil, required no skilled or scientific management, but simply ploughing and casting in of the seed, to insure a manifold crop; but in this disastrous year the crops were destroyed. The destruction of these easily-gained crops meant that the inhabitants were deprived of their national food and brought to the very verge of famine. The yeomen of the town, or those who had acquired a lease of patches of ground from the lord of the manor, were impoverished and their slaves and dependents reduced to starvation. Disease and death followed the famine, and the better classes had to resort to, and wholly depend on, their hunting. This was but one of the many plagues and famines in which Wigan was destined to participate. It seemed to foretell that her whole career would be chequered, as some youthful ailments certainly retard the healthy growth, and leave their effects clinging to a long, sickly, life. Desolation and despair reigned in her streets during every national plague, and she had special visitations that brought short-lived agony, and almost certain death to many, often leaving the survivors in reckless despair, as men, who, looking upon their yawning graves without seeing any hope beyond, eagerly devour the mad, insatiable pleasures that are momentarily presented to them. Such insanity of despair as is begotten by dearth of food, and, seemingly, the inevitable certainty of death, have developed such orgies in her midst that religion has held its breath at the daring of frenzied humanity, whilst men of sober thinking have marvelled at the stupendous sacrileges committed by Christian men and women. At the end of the sixteenth century Wigan was frequently the house of lamentation and woe, and in 1648 the desolations of war were added to the ravages of famine and pestilence. Often have oriental pests laid a large percentage of her inhabitants in early graves, and, worst of all, the scarcity of work for able and willing hands has frequently visited upon her the most cruel distress. But of these and many others, with their accepted lessons of wisdom, which she has overcome and survived, mention will be made in due order.