

# Wigan Fair. The Three Ages.

By,  
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Every October and May something magical happened in Wigan - Wigan Fair and all the exhilaration that abounded during its stay; although it was said it always rained when the Fair came to town, and there seemed more than a grain of truth that theory. However, I thought it would be interesting to look back at 3 different ages.

The first age, children overcome with joy; the excitement this traveling jamboree caused is difficult to overstate, children and adults alike looked forward to its coming for weeks. As you neared the Market Square , long before you saw the bright lights , and there were thousands of naked light bulbs shining in the night you could hear the latest gramophone records playing at top volume , this sound started a funny tingling feeling in your tummy before you'd even clapped eyes on this extravaganza of light, a wonderland. To children something akin to paradise. 'The Big Wheel 'in its usual commanding position near the Ribble and LUT Bus Station, to a child it appeared taller than Blackpool Tower; before holidays abroad it would be the nearest thing to flying most would experience!

A time before computer games and mobile phones when a kaleidoscope seemed the ultimate in visual toys and Magic Robots really did seem magic, until some spoilsport, usually an uncle after a Sunday afternoon snifter, gave the damning observation "it's worked by magnets " killing the illusion at a stroke. The magic of the fair however was not so easy to dispel, the bright lights the smell of diesel and the hum of the generators powering the Aladdin's cave of colour and adventure. I remember as a toddler sitting on a roundabout perched on the top deck of a bus or a fire engine clanging the bell , waving to my Mam on every revolution and the blind panic when I failed to spot her or a familiar face , the absolute relief on the next revolution seeing her waving furiously realising that I'd missed her last time round.

The second age, as you reached your teenage years the yearning to go to 'Wigan Fair' didn't abate, now at last you could go on 'the big rides' The Waltzer, where the lads who worked on the fair would show off for the girls winking backwards as the ride was going off at different tangents collecting the fares as they went, if they took a fancy to a girl they would give them a free ride; I don't think Mr Silcock would have been happy with the concession- if he'd known! I know it sounds particularly mean but we local lads used to hope they would lose their balance, alas they never did, I imagine they could ride a surf board with ease – show-offs, to be fair it was envy because they seemed to be able to walk on water.

The Caterpillar was a favourite with courting couples, a canopy would cover the carriages intermittently, during the darkness a quick kiss and cuddle, it seemed quite daring in those more innocent times, when open displays of affection would have been frowned on, and a kiss in public tantamount to an hanging offence! An example of how prudish times were The County Cinema had a few double seats on the back row for those 'keeping company', some old folk thought it was like Sodom and Gomorrah. Goodness knows what they'd think of today's King Street.

The Dodgems known to all as Bumping Cars, the fair lads on this ride showing off again, jumping on the bumper leaning into the car taking control, completely ignoring the notices all around the ride 'NO BUMPING' always girls cars of course. the 'fair lads' on this ride as adroit as those on the waltzer. The local lads again longing for a tumble were to be disappointed.



The stalls, Shooting Ranges with tin ducks going round at speed, shoot three in a row to win a prize off the top shelf, not an easy task, I think Roy Rodgers would have struggled to go home with Giant Teddy. Black Pea Saloons, I remember 2 names Holland's and Butterworths, you could sit inside the tent to enjoy the fare, I must admit I never tasted this particular delight, after an uncle told me the open vats were open to tampering, that he knew one lad who threw a 'Dolly Blue' in, this was by no means the worst of the foreign bodies rumoured to find a home in the boiling

cauldrons. Mams assertion that they didn't wash the cups properly another factor in my reluctance. True or not it was enough to make me decide that a Toffee Apple was a safer bet!

The third age, the best of all! When you take your own children and relive your own childhood through their excited eyes. It is truly a magic that never goes away. When I took my children to 'The Wigan Fair' at its new home off Greenough Street, the magic came flooding back as I relive the memories of yore. They on the roundabout clanging the bell, me the one waving like mad in case they couldn't spot me.

Every year it was my duty to win a goldfish, this not as easy as it sounds for a non dart thrower. The feat was to stick a dart in three separate playing cards displayed at the back of the stall, if you speared one and it fell out it didn't count equally so if two darts found their way into the same card, void game. One particular visit I had so many attempts it cost more than a fresh salmon! On another occasion I 'won' one, unfortunately it had shuffled off its mortal coil before we even reached home. Back to the fair with the lifeless body swinging in the plastic bag hanging on the choke of my old Austin Cambridge, quite disconcerting really as the corpse seemed to come to life with the motion of the car, so much so I wonder if I'd been premature in declaring Ralph's demise (the children named it thus before the unfortunate creature took leave of its new family) Panic, maybe it was only asleep, when the car stopped and the water stilled, my original diagnosis was proved correct. To my surprise the stall-holder was quite sympathetic and gave me a replacement

without a fuss, and to boot gave a little tub of fish food for my trouble. Happy to report Ralph 2 lived to a ripe old age.



All three ages enjoyed the 'Pot Fair ' run in conjunction with main event, this took place away from the main show-ground on the other side of The Market Hall. It was almost like a show, the patter of the auctioneers fascinating on lookers , they all seemed to have cockney accents with an ability to throw dinner plates in the air as good as any juggler , then balance 6 plates along his arm as he invited bids , I watched spellbound and would try to imitate him when I got home to my Mams amusement, until I broke 2 plates ! The spiel exciting would be buyers into a possibly an unintended purchase, going home with a 21or18 piece tea set, earlier in the evening

they hadn't realised they needed. Many of these impromptu buys would finish up as weddings presents, as would the eiderdowns and blankets bought in an equal moment of madness, we're all suckers for what appears to be a bargain!

It seems another age since going to Wigan Fair was such a big thing; Mams and Dads struggling home with the aforementioned crockery, bedding and even roles of oilcloth (for younger readers, an inexpensive type of cushion floor). Children tired out after being allowed to stay up past their normal bedtime; on a high with a windmill bought as bribe to leave the bright lights behind. I'm aware we have so much more today, but wouldn't it be wonderful if today's children and adults for that matter could experience just a little of that magic, from what seems a bye gone age. I know, rose coloured spectacles again, but there's no harm in remembering happy times!