

## THE WHIT WALKS (1890 - 1968)

### 1890

On Friday, August 8th 1890, Miss Mary Mead, headteacher of St. Patrick's Girls' School, wrote the following entry in the school log book:

"There will be no meeting of the school this afternoon (Friday) on account of a great Catholic Demonstration in Wigan tomorrow."

The demonstration which Miss Mead referred to was the first combined walk of the Catholic parishes of Wigan which took place on Saturday, August 9th, 1890. So began a tradition which lasted for seventy-nine years.

### *The First Whit Walk, 1893*

In 1893, the date of the walk was changed to Whit Monday and so it fell to St. Patrick's to lead out on the first Whit Monday walk, May 22nd, 1893.

There would be another fifty - five processions. The last took place on Whit Monday, 3rd June, 1968. The official programme refers to it as the "sixty-ninth annual procession" but in fact it was the fifty- ninth. The reason for the discrepancy is that while the gap between 1939 and 1950 has been taken into account, two earlier gaps (1915 - 1919 and 1921 - 1923) have not been.



St Patricks passing the Convent sometime before 1914 (exact date unknown).

That first walk and the two following walks were held in August, not on Whit Monday. St Joseph's had the honour of leading out the first ever walk. They were followed in turn by St. John's and St. Mary's. St. Patrick's first turn at leading the procession came in 1893.

There was also no walk in 1926 because of the General Strike, and none in 1933.

However, back to that first Whit Monday walk. There are alas, no pictorial records of that day but perhaps the above photograph gives some idea. Fashions tended to change more slowly then so perhaps the scene was not too different.

## *To the First World War.*

The procession was fully reported in the local press of the time. They describe it as "a spectacularly colourful event". It certainly sounds so.

The St. Patrick's contingent was led by Canon Sommer. Accompanying the leading banner of St. Patrick, were St. Patrick's own Drum and Fife band and the Aspull Temperance Band. The young ladies attending the banner ribbons wore long silk dresses in the appropriate colours:- pale green on the St. Patrick banner, pale blue on Our Lady's banner and red on the banner of the Sacred Heart.

One young banner carrier was 26 years old Mr. J. Dillon who would still be walking in 1939.

### **1897**

Exactly a century ago, in 1897, in the year of their Golden Jubilee, St. Patrick's led the procession again. One lady of the parish unlikely to walk in this procession would be Mrs. Mary Penman of John Street. She was ten months pregnant at the time and a few weeks later on the 8th of August she would give birth to a daughter, also named Mary. This Mary Penman is now Mary Griffiths, the oldest living parishioner of St. Patrick's at the splendid age of one hundred.

The processions continued in unbroken succession for a quarter of a century. In 1908, the first photographs began to appear in the local papers. The leading parish usually figured in the one photograph featured and so St. Patrick's did not appear until 1910. The photograph is unfortunately too poor in quality to reproduce here. It shows Our Lady's banner turning into King Street from Wallgate.

On Whit Monday, June 1st, a few weeks before the outbreak of the First World War, St. Pat's led out in the 25th Silver Jubilee walk. For some reason, the Wigan Observer departed from its usual custom of showing a picture of the leading parish and so no picture of St. Patrick's exists unless that on the previous page was taken at this time. With the outbreak of the war, the walks were cancelled and did not resume until 1920.

### **1920**

The procession did take place in 1920, but a severe trade depression put paid to complete renewal and the next year's walk was cancelled as were the walks for 1922 and 1923.



WHIT MONDAY PROCESSION.  
ST. PATRICK'S

St. Patrick's passing the same spot in the 1920's.

The photo on the previous page may have been of the 1920 walk. It can be seen how the fashions have changed in the ladies watching. Instead of wide-brimmed hats and long dresses, they now wear short skirts and the small cloche hat typical of the nineteen-twenties.

## 1924

In 1924, the walks resumed and barring 1926, continued uninterrupted to the start of the Second World War.



Fr. Tom Carney in Hardybutts on a Whit Monday in the 1920's (Note the hat and short skirt of the young lady in the background).

It was in 1925 that the mistake in numbering the walks crept in. "The Observer" states that the walk is the 36th though its own records show that it was the 28th.

The walk was cancelled in 1926 because of the General Strike.

## The 1930's

The error in numbering continued from 1925 onwards and was well established by 1937 as the programme for that year's walk shows. It says that it is the forty-eighth

procession. Since no walks took place in ten years of the forty-eight which had elapsed since the walks began, it was actually the thirty-eighth.

A. M. ✠ P. C.

# 48th Annual Procession

Of the Catholic Parishes in the County Borough of Wigan,  
**Whit-Monday, May 17th, 1937.**  
MARSHAL IN CHIEF—Counc. D. ROURKE.  
COURTIER—P. KEENAN, H. O'HARA.

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## St. Patrick's.

Holy Mass at 8.30 a.m. Procession to be formed immediately afterwards to be on the Market Square at 10 a.m.  
Position on Square—Market Hall Side, with head of Procession facing Messrs. Bell & Son, Florists.

### ORDER OF PROCESSION

Chief Constable Pay and Mounted Police.  
Processional Cross, Papal Flag, Altar Boys.  
Wigan Public Brass Band and Standish Subscription Brass Band.  
**STATUE OF ST. PATRICK.** Senior Girls.  
**BANNER OF ST. PATRICK.** Senior Girls.  
Marshals—J. Yates, C. Joyce, T. Hegarty.  
Rev. Fr. Murray, R.D., and Invited Clergy.  
Guild of St. Aloysius and Senior Boys.  
South Pemberton Brass Band. May Queen and attendants.  
**BANNER OF OUR LADY.** Children of Mary.  
Marshals—J. Garaghty, W. Crews, J. Faithurst, J. McLoughlin.  
Rev. Fr. Coghlan and Invited Clergy.  
**STATUE OF OUR LADY.** Children of Mary.  
Lower Ince Temperance Prize Band.  
**BANNER OF THE SACRED HEART.** Junior Boys.  
Marshals—A. Judge, T. Pidgeon, T. King, W. Charnock.  
Rev. Fr. O'Brien and Invited Clergy. Third Order of St. Francis.  
**BANNER OF HOLY FAMILY.** Junior Girls.  
Marshals—J. Bennett, J. Doherty, W. Tickle, P. Nolan.  
Skelmersdale Temperance Brass Band.  
**C.Y.M.S. BANNER OF ST. PATRICK.**  
Marshals—J. Harrington, J. F. McLoughlin.  
Rev. Fr. Bergin and Invited Clergy. Statue of Sacred Heart.  
Officers, and Members of C.Y.M.S. and Men of the Parish.  
Benediction immediately after the Procession.

When the Schools are assembled a bugle call will summon to the centre of the Square a band from each mission. The Hymn tune "Faith of our Fathers" will be played once by the bands in the centre, after which the bands and the concourse of people will take up the Hymn. Mr. Gleeson will conduct. All are asked to join in the singing. At the conclusion of the Hymn and "National Anthem" a bugle call will dismiss the centre bands to their respective positions.

### The order of procession of St. Patrick's on Whit Monday, 1937.

On the 29th May, the last procession before the Second World War was held. Still walking with St. Patrick's at the age of 73, was Mr. J. Dillon.

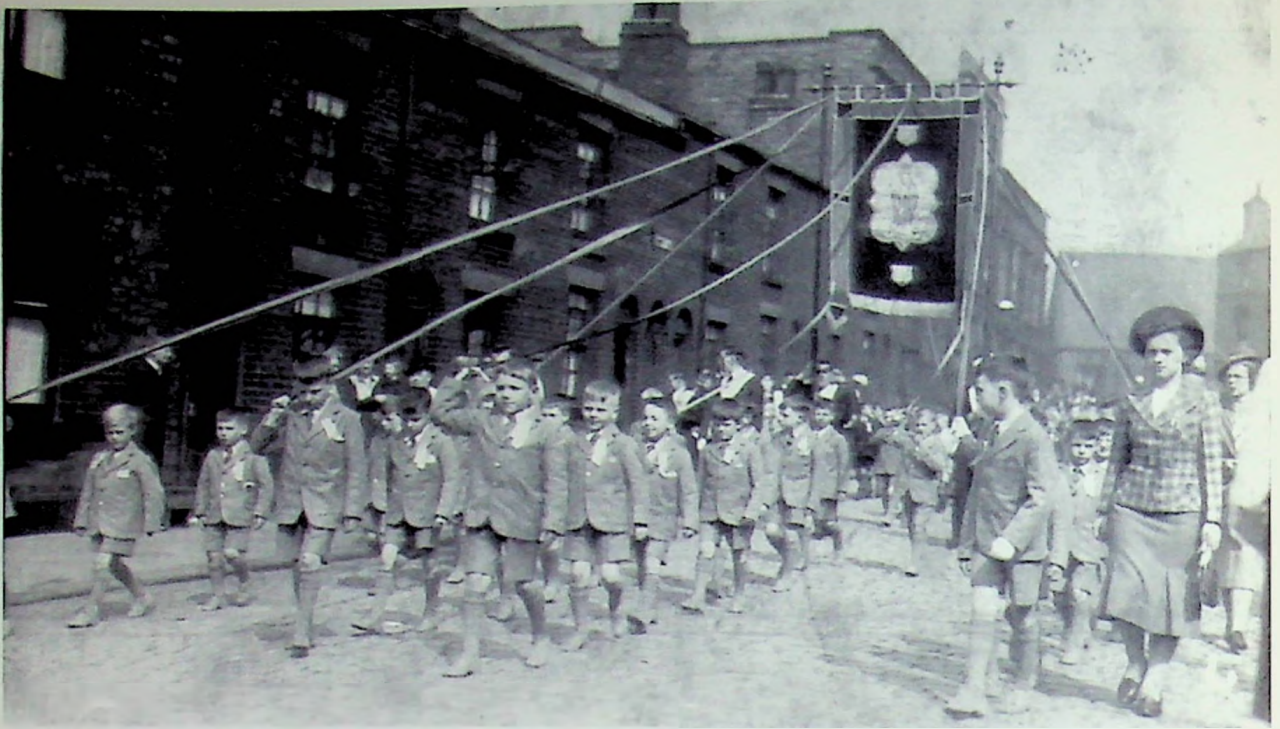
Another error seems to have crept in here, for the procession was entitled, "The Golden Jubilee" procession. Since it was only the 49th year and only the 42nd procession, it was wrong on both counts. It was perhaps lucky that the mistake occurred or the Golden Jubilee of the walks might never have been celebrated. The guns were about to speak once more and there would be no more walks for a long time to come.



1937: Father Murray leads St. Patrick's back up Scholes in the last procession they headed before the Second World War. On the far right of the row of dignitaries is Mr. E. Gleeson who conducted the singing.



1938: A group of children with the small Sacred Heart statue on St. Patrick Street outside the Junior Boys' School (Old Church Building).



1939: Miss Mary Brown leads her boys down Rupert Street only thirteen weeks before the outbreak of the Second World War.

### *The 1945 Walk*

On Whit Monday, May 22nd, 1945, only days after the end of the Second World War, St. Patrick's held a procession of their own around the heart of the parish and finishing at St. Catherine's Recreation ground where a field treat was held.

It seems the walk was held to raise funds for the decoration of the church for the approaching centenary. The centrepiece of the procession was the May Queen and her attendants who had carried out the crowning ceremony only the week before.



Margaret Molloy, the first May Queen after the War, leads the 1945 walk up Hardybutts towards Birkett Bank, one week after the crowning ceremony.



St. Patrick's statue passes triumphantly under Darlington Street bridge as the walks resume in 1950.

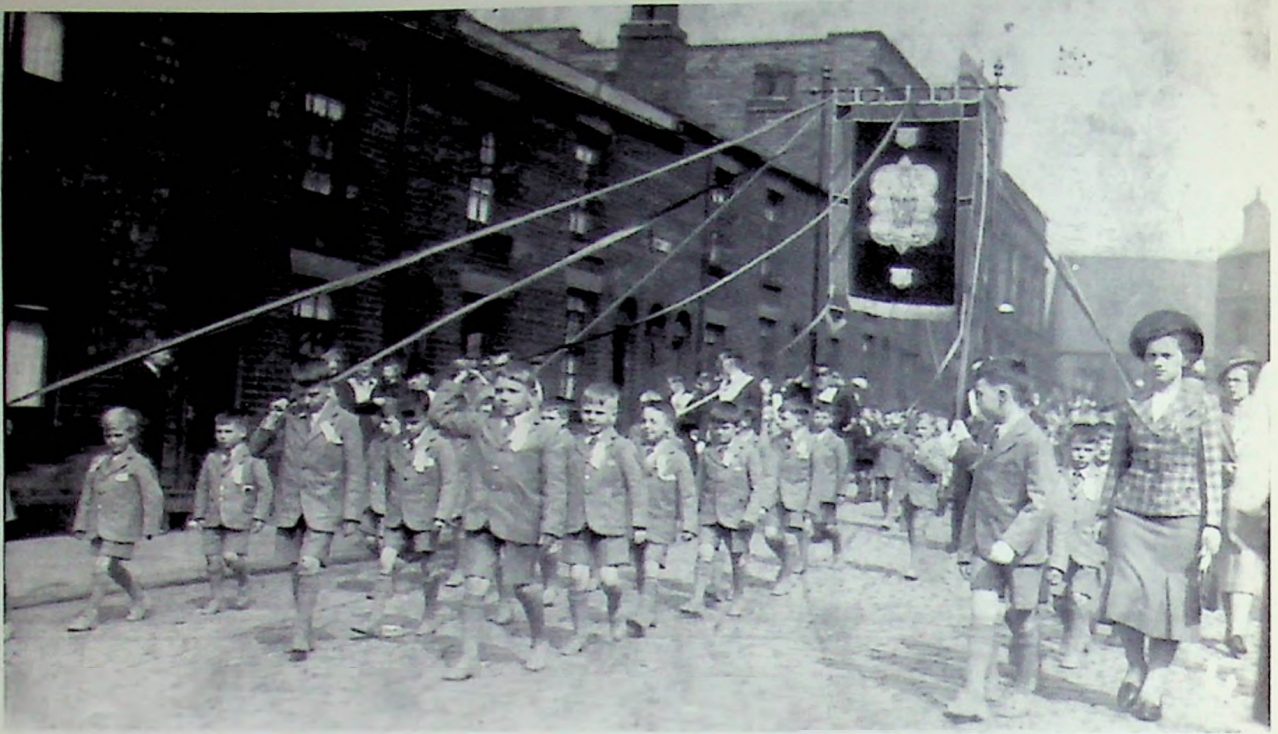
### *1950, The Walks Resume*

In 1950, St. Patrick's announced their intention of staging a Whit Monday procession and with the exception of Sacred Heart, the other parishes decided to join them and

the combined walks were resumed. Sacred Heart rejoined in 1956 and the walks continued in the traditional fashion up to 1968, when the last was to take place.



Gentlemen of the C.Y.M.S. stride along Darlington Street East in the 1950's.



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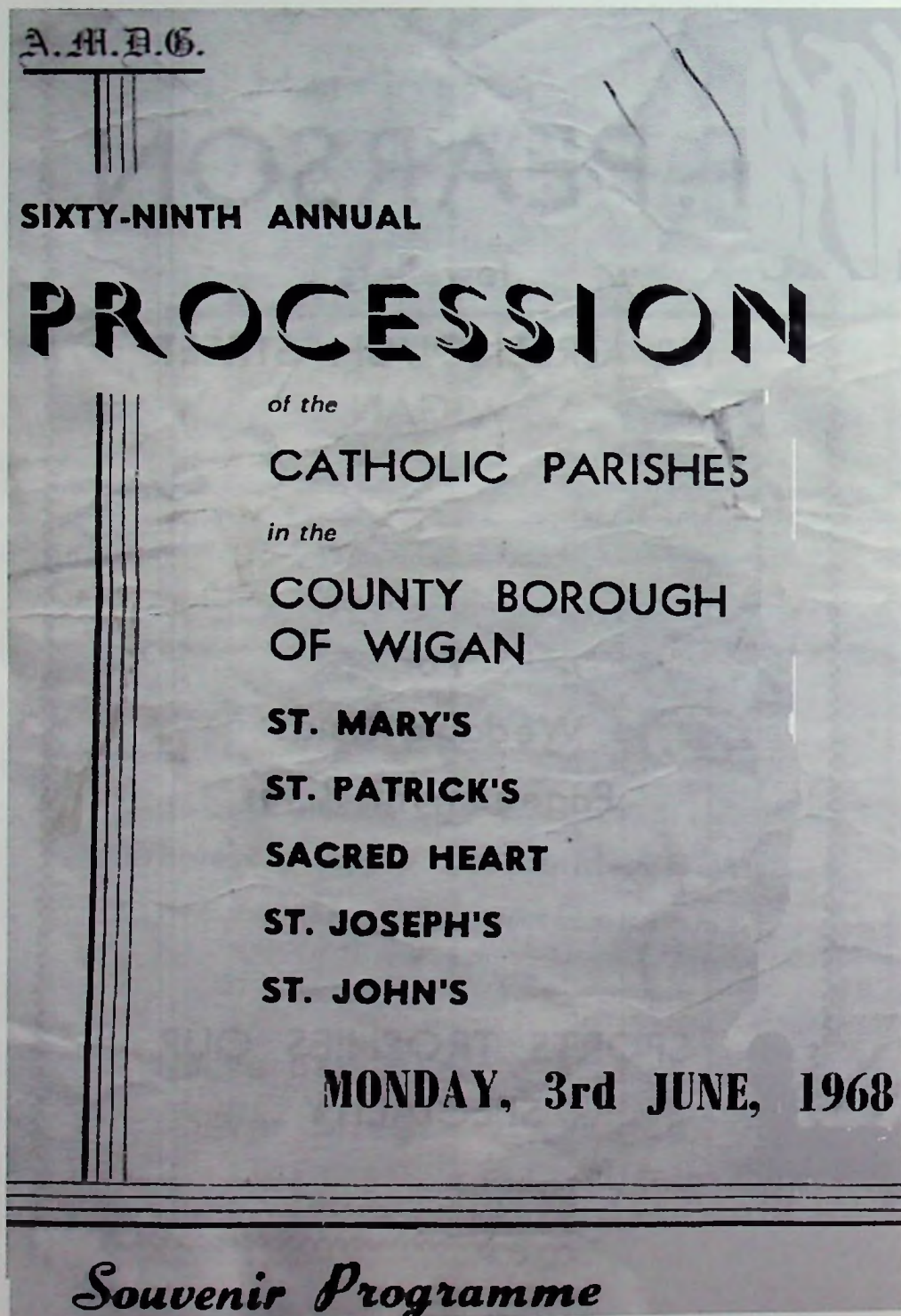
Gentlemen of the C.Y.M.S. stride along Darlington Street East in the 1950's.



St. Mary's had the honour of leading out on that last Whit Monday walk. If only one more had taken place. St. Patrick's would have led the last walk.

But it was not to be. Difficulties with traffic problems and mounting costs put paid to a great tradition. There have been no more walks since 1968 and it seems unlikely that any more will be held.

Let us not say however, that the Whit Walks have disappeared forever. It may yet fall to some future generation to revive them in some form. More unlikely events have occurred. If this should ever happen and if tradition is adhered to, it would be St. Patrick's who would lead that future procession.



The cover of the programme for the 1968 procession, the last to date.

# St. Patrick's

Leave assembly point at 9-10 a.m. to be on the Market square at 10 a.m. via Marsden Street corner. Position on square: Hope Street side with head of Procession facing New Market Street.

*Chief Marshal* : Mr. J. B. McDERMOTT.

## ORDER OF PROCESSION

Papal Flag Processional Cross Altar Servers  
Rev. Fr. Lappin, P.P., and invited clergy.

Hindley Subscription Band MacSwiney Pipe Band

**Statue of St. Patrick** (Junior Girls)

**Banner of St. Patrick** (Junior Girls)

*Marshals* : Messrs. W. Connolly, E. Hunter, T. Gannon.  
St. John Fisher Boys May Queen and Attendants

Coppull Subscription Band

**Banner of Our Lady** (Juniors)

*Marshals* :

Messrs. T. Winstanley, R. Lythgoe, F. Charnock, B. Ashcroft.  
Guardian Angel Group (Infants)

Rev. Fr. B. Wyche and invited clergy  
Children of Mary

*Infant Jesus Group* (Infants)

St. Mary's Girls' Pipe Band

**Banner of Holy Family** (Infants)

*Marshals* : Messrs. J. Brown, T. Dunn, G. Green, W. Lenegan.  
Rev. Fr. R. Coughlan and Invited Clergy

**Statue of Sacred Heart** (Infants)

Third Order of St. Francis U.C.M. Ladies of the Parish  
Drum and Fife Band

**C.Y.M.S. Banner of St. Patrick** (Juniors)

*Marshals* : Messrs. J. Patmore, F. Connelly, B. Nieland.  
Officers and Members of the C.Y.M.S.

Gentlemen of the Parish

St. Patrick's Order of procession for the last Whit Monday Walk.

Those of us old enough to have participated in or witnessed these great occasions will never forget the kaleidoscope of colour that brightened our lives on Whit Monday or the stirring in our blood, as to the skirl of the pipes and the thump of the brass bands, we turned the corner of Greenough Street and Scholes and banners borne high, stepped out on our own turf.

So then, for all those who miss those days and despair of ever experiencing their like again, here is the next best thing. Have a good, unashamed wallow in nostalgia as you look at the succeeding pages. If you haven't managed to spot yourself already, you may well be lucky enough to do so now!