

# SPORT AND RECREATION

by J. LEECH

## Rugby League

WIGAN has for many generations been noted for its wide variety of sporting clubs. Chief amongst them is the Wigan Rugby League Club which was formed as a Rugby Union Club in 1879, although the game has been played in the town for 77 years. The present ground, Central Park, which is within a few minutes' walk of the three railway stations and main bus termini, was opened in September, 1902, and will now accommodate nearly 45,000 spectators. The club had previously played for one season at Springfield Park and for fourteen seasons at Prescott Street, where in December, 1888, Wigan was beaten by a touring Maori team. E. Bullough, one of Wigan's forwards, gained Rugby Union international honours, the only Wiganer to be so capped until Roy Leyland, centre threequarter, was selected for England more than 40 years later.

When playing at Springfield Park, Wigan for the first time took over £1,000 in gate receipts in a season. In season 1948-49 nearly £5,000 was taken at one match, that against Huddersfield.

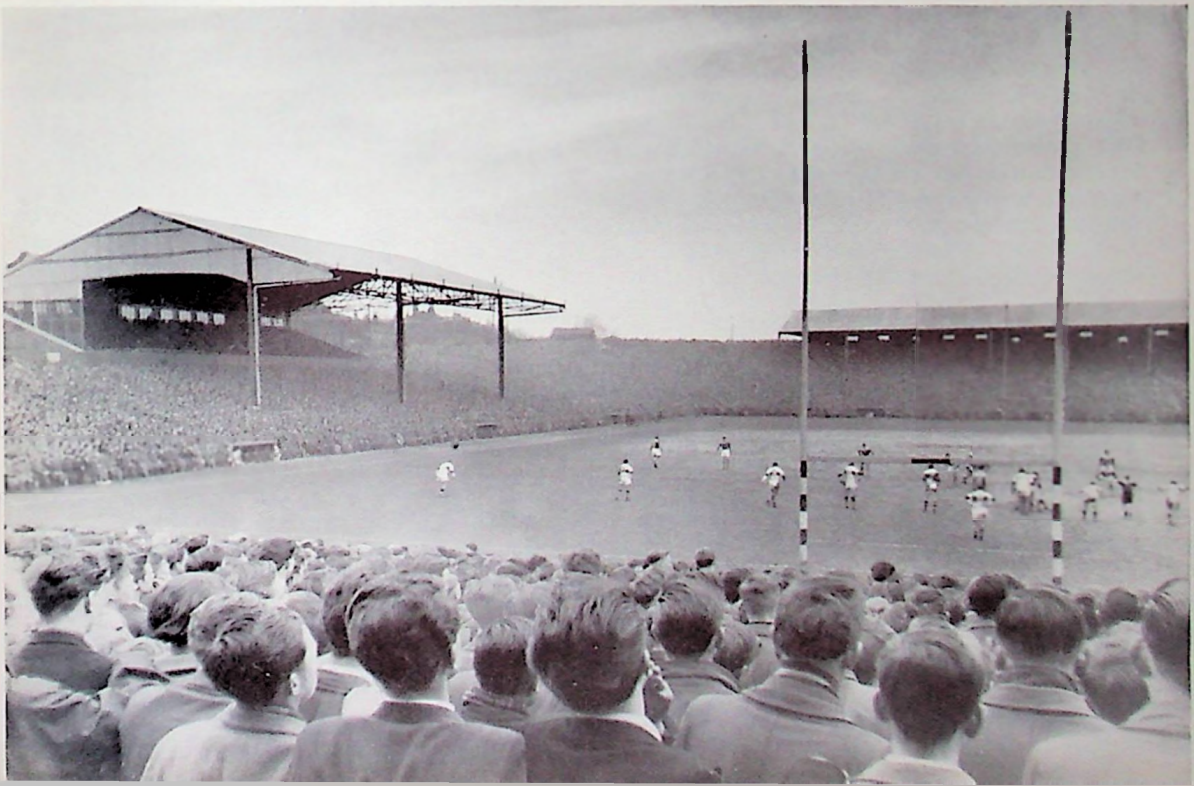
Since the club joined the professional ranks in 1895, scores of their players, including many local

men, have gained international honours and many have taken part in tours of Australia. The England team which beat France in December, 1949, had no fewer than six Wigan players. Eight players were selected to take part in the 1950 tour in Australia—M. Ryan, J. Cunliffe, E. J. Ashcroft, J. Hilton, T. Bradshaw, K. Gee, G. W. Ratcliffe and J. Egan (vice-captain). The first professional New Zealand Rugby team to visit this country, Baskerville's side of 1907, drew what was then the record crowd of 30,000. Wigan won a memorable match by 12 pts. to 8. It was the first defeat of that team.

During the past fifty years the Wigan Club has been one of the most successful sides in the Rugby League. The Lancashire Challenge Cup has been won thirteen times, including six seasons in succession, the Rugby League Challenge Cup four times, including the first Wembley final in 1929, the Rugby League Championship eight times, in addition to a wartime success, and the Lancashire League Championship fifteen times.

Jim Sullivan, who joined Wigan from Cardiff in 1921 and played full back until 1946, kicked about 3,000 goals, his best being 200 in season 1933-34, and he scored nearly 100 tries from the

Rugby League Football at Central Park





Association Football at Springfield Park

full back position. He took part in three tours of Australia and played in a record number of test matches and international matches.

The club obtained players from various parts of Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Two of the directors made a visit to South Africa in order to secure players. Just before the last war there was a proposal to send the Wigan team on a tour of Australia, but it did not materialise.

Liverpool Stanley Rugby League Club began as Wigan Highfield, a club with its ground two miles from the centre of Wigan. Much success was gained and many of the players became internationals. In 1933 the club was transferred to London and played by floodlight, but in the following season it returned North and played at Liverpool. Now it is known as Liverpool City and plays at Knotty Ash.

#### Rugby Union

The Wigan O.B. Rugby Union Football Club, formed in 1913, has its own ground at Prospect Park, Standish, three miles from the town of Wigan. It has three playing pitches and five teams play every Saturday throughout the season. One of their players, Gordon Rimmer, after joining Waterloo, gained international honours in 1949. The club has a considerable sum in hand

for the purpose of erecting a new and handsome pavilion.

Orrell Rugby Union Club, formed in 1927, is also in a flourishing condition and has five "fifteens" every Saturday in the Season. A new ground, now having three playing pitches, was opened in time for the 1950-51 season and the club now has an excellent pavilion. There are other Rugby Union Clubs in the town.

#### Association Football

Five attempts to establish Association football on a firm footing in Wigan have been made during the last fifty-odd years. The first was in 1897 when Wigan County was formed. Matches were played at Springfield Park which was at that time a spacious and well-equipped sports arena with a half-mile trotting track and a cement cycling track. The club met with some measure of success, especially in cup ties. In the first round of the F.A. Cup Competition Wigan County, who competed in the Lancashire League, made a brilliant attempt to beat Manchester City at Ardwick. A mistake by the County goalkeeper a few minutes from the end enabled Manchester City to win by the only goal of the match. After three seasons, during which considerable money was lost, Wigan County was disbanded. During the three seasons from 1901-2 Wigan United played at Springfield Park, sharing the ground

with Wigan Rugby Club during their first season. They had even less success than Wigan County. The next attempt was made by Wigan Town. They also spent three seasons at Springfield Park, but did not make much progress.

The best attempt to introduce first-class Soccer into Wigan was made by Wigan Boro'. The club was formed in 1921, with Mr. H. S. Bamlett, a former English League referee, as manager. At one period of season 1922-23, it seemed as if the Boro' might finish on top of the Third Division and be promoted to the Second Division, but that distinction went to Nelson.

The record crowd for the ground was established in season 1928-29 when Wigan Boro' met Sheffield Wednesday at Springfield Park in the third round of the F.A. Cup Competition. The attendance was 30,443. Sheffield won by 3 goals to 1. In the following season the Boro' won the Manchester Senior Cup, defeating Manchester City in the final. The club resigned from the Third Division early in season 1931-32 following financial difficulties.

Despite these failures there were still enthusiasts in the town who were determined to make a further effort. In the summer of 1932 Wigan Athletic was formed and the club played in the Cheshire County League, an application for admission to the Third Division having been turned down. In the second season the Athletic won the championship by six clear points. The club had a remarkable run of successes in the F.A. Cup competition in season 1934-35. After winning four qualifying rounds, they beat Carlisle United by 6-1 at Carlisle, Torquay United by 3-2 at Wigan before a crowd of 20,000, and then lost at Springfield Park to Millwall in the third round by 4-1, when over 25,000 spectators were present. In season 1935-36 the Athletic won the Cheshire County League Championship, the Cheshire League Challenge Cup and the Lancashire Junior Cup. The Athletic joined the Lancashire Combination in season 1947-48 and won the championship by two points over Nelson. They have won it three times since and had success in the F.A. Cup competition. In season 1953-54 the Athletic had the distinction of reaching the third round of the competition. They surprised Newcastle United by drawing 2-2 at St. James's Park, but were beaten by 3-2 at Wigan. In the following season they entered the first round and lost by 3-2 at Burnley.

Hundreds of Wigan youths are able to play in organised football matches every week in the season. The Wigan and District Sunday School League has 50 clubs in three leagues, from the 14-16 or 16-18 age groups to senior teams. The number of players registered is about 1,220 of whom 460 are seniors. About 26 matches are played each Saturday but it is not always possible to provide neutral referees for all junior matches. In addition to the league championships there are two shields and a cup competed for, and representative games are played with similar organisations in other towns. Many players from the leagues have gone into first-class football.

### **Junior Rugby League**

The Wigan and District Junior Rugby League receives much financial help from the Wigan Rugby League Club as does the Old Schoolboys' league which is a link with the schoolboys' league and has six teams. The intermediates play in the West Lanes League and the open age teams in the Wigan and St. Helens joint league. There are various knock-out competitions for cups. Schoolboy rugby is very popular in the town. One match between Wigan St. Patrick's and St. Bede's, Widnes, drew a crowd of 16,000 at Wigan. A very large number of players who learned their football in Wigan junior leagues have gained international honours. Some clubs experience difficulty with regard to grounds, but one has been bought for junior football through the British Playing Fields Association.

### **Cricket**

In 1948 the Wigan Cricket Club, which runs two elevens and a junior team, celebrated its centenary and its fifty years on the present ground at Bull Hey. Many well-known townsmen have played for the club. An All-England eleven opposed twenty-two of Wigan and District on the Mesnes Ground in June, 1867. It was a three days' match and the England eleven won by 71 and 181 to 88 and 66. A year later another All-England eleven, composed of J. Smith, W. Osercroft, A. Shaw, T. Hayward, J. Rowbottom, George Tarrant, George Parr, G. Pinder, G. Anderson, R. C. Tinley and J. C. Shaw, visited Wigan and again won easily. T. Wall, W. Wall, and J. Lowe, three of the Wigan members, played for Lancashire and later R. L. Rennick, captain of Wigan, played for



Cricket at Bull Hey

Cheshire. For many years the club had a professional. One of the best was Ralph Tyler, a very stylish batsman, who in season 1913, scored 1,017 runs, an exceptional achievement in club cricket. Another Wigan professional, Bill Hawtin, scored well over 1,000 runs in 1935, and in 1939 he scored three centuries.

For the opening of Bull Hey in 1898, A. N. Hornby brought a strong Lancashire side to oppose fifteen of Wigan. The county eleven included C. R. Hartley, Barlow, Paul, Johnny Tyldesley, Baker, Hallam and Watson. A. N. Hornby made 75 and Tyldesley 78 not out.

The West Lancashire Cricket League has been in existence a great many years and now has six divisions with more than 1,000 registered players. The league has produced many fine players, including a splendid all-rounder, Danny Taylor, who often topped both batting and bowling averages. Norley Hall won the Salter Cup in 1953 and 1954 and were unbeaten in league matches in both seasons.

#### Swimming and Water Polo

Another Wigan organisation known throughout the country for many years also had a great

measure of success—the Wigan Swimming Club. Established in 1896, the water polo team very soon became proficient. Within a dozen seasons the first team was composed almost entirely of internationals. In 1902, after beating London Polytechnic in the semi-final of the English championship, Wigan won the shield by beating Leicester, at Leicester. The club also won the English championship in 1909 and 1910, in which years the English Squadron Championship was also won. Wigan secured the Lancashire Cup every season between 1904 and 1913 except in 1908. The Liverpool and District League Championship was won on innumerable occasions, as also was the Grant Squadron Championship. Another outstanding success was the winning of the Captain Webb memorial trophy for the most points in national swimming and water polo, individually and collectively.

Outstanding players in those days were C. S. Smith, who was the first choice as goalkeeper for England season after season—he played water polo for half a century—Tom Saunders, Jim Peacock, G. W. Nevinson, F. V. Swift, who was an international at 17. Ike Bentham, Eric Forsyth, J. Hodgson, F. Kearsley and J. Critchley.

There were many other players, some with county honours, who could not get a place in the first team. Three Wigan swimmers appeared in the Olympic Games of 1908, viz., C. S. Smith, goalkeeper, who captained the British water polo team, G. W. Nevinson, who was also in the team, and T. S. Battersby. The last-named finished second to H. Taylor in the 1,500 metres race and went on to beat the world record for a mile. He also held two other world records, the 440 yards and the 300 yards. In 1912 Smith and Battersby, along with I. Bentham, another member of the Wigan Swimming Club, took part in the Olympic Games.

Every encouragement is offered to school children to learn the art of swimming. The average weekly attendance for swimming instruction at the Corporation baths is over 2,000, and 152 boys and girls obtained awards in life-saving in 1953-54. Wigan children on attaining the age of 14 who gain the bronze medallion of the Life Saving Society are granted free passes to the baths for a year.

The average weekly attendance at the Wigan Corporation Baths is 10,000.

There is a ladies' squadron team in Wigan and for eight consecutive seasons Wigan ladies won the Liverpool and District Life Saving Competition. During the winter months the large plunge bath is converted into a public hall and is extensively used for dances, whist drives and other social functions.

### Curling

It is not known when the Scottish game of curling was introduced to Wigan; it was probably late in the 18th or early in the 19th century. The Wigan and Haigh Curling Club, which is still flourishing, was formed in 1861 and was admitted to the Royal Caledonian Club four years later. At first, matches were played on the "flashes," large tracts of water on land near the canal and on various ponds in Wigan and district, but about forty years ago the Wigan and Haigh Curling Club began to play their matches at the Manchester Ice Palace. They have had many successes. The Meggatt Cup was won outright and, with the late Mr. James Black as skip, the I'Anson Cup was won both at the Manchester Ice Palace and on a pond at Blackburn. Another trophy won was the Little-

McLellan Cup which reposes in Wigan. A quarter of a century ago the late Alderman James Walkden, who was a Mayor of Wigan, and a member of the club, went to Canada to play in a series of matches in many of the Provinces; he won a number of medals there.

On his return the Wigan team went to Switzerland, where they played various clubs and reached the final of a competition. The late Mr. James Black won a medal three years in succession at Manchester Ice Palace so that it became his own property; it is a very large silver medal. In 1930 when England beat Scotland in an international match at Manchester, the Wigan rink scored the highest number of points and each member—David Murray (skip), T. T. Brown (sub-skip), Dr. J. B. Macallan and W. Stevenson—received a gold medal.

An amusing story is related of the early curling days on the "flash." Arriving a man short, the skip invited a bystander, a local collier, to play and although he had never previously taken part in a curling match he played very well. He shared in the refreshments, which included a good supply of Scotch whisky. On the following day he was there again and when asked if he would like another game he replied, "Aye, but I've not been paid for yesterday."

### Hockey

Founded in 1906, Wigan Hockey Club was for many years one of the best clubs in South-West Lancashire. The club has played on various grounds but chiefly on the Poolstock Cricket Ground, Wigan. It was not until 1925 that fixtures with leading clubs in Lancashire and Cheshire were secured and for many years Wigan figured successfully in the Bridlington Easter Tournaments.

Many Wigan players were selected for Lancashire or took part in county trial matches. They included J. W. Butterworth, left-half for Lancashire for many years between the two wars, W. Cryer, W. Southern, W. E. Hesketh, W. Laidlaw, K. Williams, W. Seddon, P. Kinsey and E. de Mere, who played for Yorkshire. Several county second team matches were played on Wigan's ground.

The club has had many fine secretaries—W. Leyland, J. F. S. Halliwell, and F. Henderson.

Two players with long service were W. Winstanley, a brilliant full-back, and H. Prestt, an excellent centre-forward, who was elected to the Lancashire County Committee. Both these players were well over 40 when they ceased active participation in the game. Harold Dowling, now an alderman of the Wigan Council, and a former Mayor of the borough, was the club's goalkeeper from 1924 to 1942, and for eight consecutive seasons did not miss a match. He was still playing for the second eleven in season 1954-55.

The club ceased to function in 1942 owing to a lack of players, but it was revived in 1950.

### Golf

Golfers are well catered for in Wigan and district. There are seven courses within seven miles of Wigan with an aggregate membership of about 1,500. Haydock Park, one of the oldest golf clubs in Lancashire, Hindley Hall and Dean Wood each have 18 holes, and Wigan, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Gathurst and Westhoughton are 9-hole courses. Team championship matches are played every year and attract large numbers of spectators. Several local members have played for the county.

### Rowing

Established in 1872, the Wigan Rowing Club still provides healthy exercise for the young men of the town who care to take advantage of it. For some time a stretch of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal from Poolstock to Dover Lock, Abram, was used by the club, but in 1894 a clubhouse was built close to the canal at Haigh, where the members are able to row for eleven miles through beautiful country and without the necessity of opening a lock. The Club is fully equipped with pleasure and racing craft, the membership is about 70, and the club is in a thriving condition. Members have often competed with success at regattas at Lancaster, York, Chester and Agcroft and the club itself has promoted regattas. Amongst the crack oarsmen of the past were Mr. J. H. Harrison, who was blinded in the first World War but continued to take a great interest in the club, Messrs. W. and J. Bolton, Percy Wild, H. D. Sawbridge, and W. Fletcher.

### Angling

Angling is one of the principal recreations of a large number of Wiganers. The Northern Anglers Association has a membership of nearly 17,000 and the three Centres in Wigan and district—Wigan, Orrell and Ashton-in-Makerfield—have about 5,000 members. They include professional men, miners, mill workers, artisans of all types, police officers and a number of women. The Northern Anglers' Association has fishing rights over a large portion of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal from Halsall, near Liverpool, to Leeds, and in many rivers, beside the local flashes. In the Northern Anglers annual match six and a half miles of the canal are occupied by well over a thousand anglers. The canal is kept well stocked with fish, and various cups are competed for annually, including the Foster Memorial Cup which was given in memory of Councillor George Foster, who for 23 years was secretary of the Northern Anglers' Association.

### Cycling

Cycling has always been a popular pastime with all classes in the Wigan district. A section of the Cyclists' Touring Club was formed in Wigan in 1928. "A" Section is for members who ride from 90 to 120 miles in a day and "B" section for those who cover 60 to 90 miles. Thirty or forty members take part in a run, but to avoid impeding faster traffic riders split up into smaller groups of eight and ten. Touring holidays by members have been made as far north as the Isle of Skye and as far south as Devon and Cornwall, and members have toured many parts of the Continent. A map library covering almost all parts of the British Isles is available for members.

The Wigan Wheelers Cycling and Athletic Club was founded in 1919 and many records have been broken by members, including Liverpool to Edinburgh tandem by Tom Hughes and John Ibbison in 1925; London to Liverpool tandem by James Shepherd and Tom Hughes; Liverpool to Edinburgh tricycle by Tom Hughes; Edinburgh to York tandem tricycle by Tom Hughes and Eric Robinson; Land's End to John o' Groats tricycle by Tom Hughes; Albert Hughes and Tom Hughes also established a record for a tandem tricycle from Liverpool to Edinburgh, and Tom Hughes secured fourth

place in the Polytechnic 24-hours tandem-paced race at Herne Hill, London, in 1929, covering 448 miles, 1,000 yards. Many club trophies are competed for annually. There are other cycling clubs in the town.

One of the best known road cyclists for many years was the late Tom Hughes, who cycled in most European countries. Mr. S. A. Hall, of Wigan, a well-known writer on cycling, was in January, 1949, awarded the Sir Alfred Bird memorial medal and plaque for services rendered to the Cyclists' Touring Club.

There were also many successful track cyclists in the past. Benny Jones, of Ashton-in-Makerfield, a township adjoining Wigan, competed in the Olympic Games and won the 5,000 metres race. Jones in one season won no fewer than 25 first prizes and 18 seconds.

Amongst his many successes were the Muratti Cup, the Palmer Cup and the Half-mile Championship of Ireland. Other prominent riders included Tommy Sharratt, Bill Rowe and Tom Rimmer.

Many local cyclists have been prominent in recent years. Arthur Turner, of Bryn, did a remarkable performance in a National 24-hour time trial and Alan Danson has had numerous successes both in this country and abroad. Alan Grisdale and Fred Richardson, of the Wigan Wheelers, have won many awards in open time trials. The Premier Wheelers also have strong road and track racing men. All clubs have social activities and runs every Sunday.

### **Athletics**

Although track running is not practised by Wiganers to the same extent that it was in the early part of the century, probably due to the many forms of recreation that are now available, the town has produced many brilliant runners; Tom Eatock, who played for Bolton Wanderers, won the Powderhall Sprint; Fred Bullen in 1896 won the Blackley Sprint, one of the most famous races in the North of England, known locally as the Booth Hall Plate; and several years later his younger brother, Jim, also won the race. One of the best mile runners was Matt Snowden, who more than half-a-century ago won a grand race at Fallowfield. A young runner coming to the front is Beverley Bolton, a 15-year-old Wigan Grammar School boy who has had

numerous successes in junior cross-country championships.

### **Wrestling**

The old Lancashire wrestling has been followed by all-in wrestling which has a big following. Two of the best exponents in the Wigan district for many years were Billy Riley and Jack Pye. The former had a tour of South Africa during which he took part in many fierce contests. Among the great wrestlers from Wigan in the past were Joe Acton, Bob Berry, Billy Charnock, Jim Stockley, and Joe and Jack Carroll.

### **Bowls**

The popularity of bowls increases every year. There are two private clubs in the town, Wigan Bowling Green Ltd., with two greens and two billiard tables, and the Wigan Subscription Bowling Green Ltd., which has one green and one billiard table. Both have a large membership. Several political clubs and many hotels also have bowling greens. The Springfield Hotel has two greens, claimed to be equal to any in the country.

During 1954 the number of people playing bowls, tennis and putting in the local parks was much smaller than usual; this was due to the abnormally wet summer. In Mesnes Park the figures were; bowls, 21,129; tennis, 9,344; putting, 25,194; Alexandra Park—bowls, 11,506; tennis, 3,930; putting, 3,519; Great Acre—bowls, 14,987; tennis, 1,014; Haigh Estate—miniature golf, 3,720. The bowling figures include several thousand old age pensioners.

### **Other Sporting Activities**

The oldest lawn tennis club in the town is the Bellingham Tennis Club, established over 80 years ago. The situation is ideal; close to the centre of the town and with a magnificent view of Haigh Hall and Plantations. Some of the outstanding players of the past were Mr. O. Platt, Mr. A. Melling and Mr. W. Alexander. The Wigan Field Club was formed many years ago to promote the love of the countryside, and there is a strong Y.H.A. in the town.

Wigan has two greyhound tracks—Poolstock and Woodhouse. The Wigan Auto Club, with a membership of about 100, hold grass track meetings, and the Hindley Motor Cycle and Light Car Club hold weekly runs, social events and trials.

One of the finest sports grounds for many miles around Wigan is Christopher Park, given for use of the students of the Wigan Mining and Technical College by the late Mr. G. A. Christopher, a very generous Wigan benefactor. The 27 acres of enclosed land contains Rugby and Association football pitches, a hockey field used also for cricket, and two hard tennis courts. There is a handsome pavilion where if needed eight teams can change simultaneously.

The Wigan College is not only a seat of learning to which students come from many parts of the world, it has a number of cultural and athletic organisations—football, cricket, tennis, badminton, table tennis, dramatic society, rambling club, photographic society, debating society, music society, a mountain climbing section and a biological and natural history society formed in 1954.

The number of youth organisations in the town is 150, with a membership of approximately 5,000, including Scout Troops, Girl Guides, Boys' Brigades, Church Lads' Brigade, pre-service units and clubs from churches. Amongst the activities are drama, debates, handicrafts, football, cricket, table tennis, boxing, swimming and rounders. There are also leaders' conferences, drama festivals, an annual summer camp, foreign exchange visits, athletic sports and youth displays.

Table tennis has become increasingly popular. The Wigan Table Tennis League has three divisions with nearly forty teams. The Wigan and District Badminton League has two divisions, and there are several dart leagues in the district.

Homing pigeon fanciers in the Wigan Amalgamation number over 200. These homing pigeon fanciers take very great care of their birds which compete in races from the Continent and places in the South of England. The price of homing pigeons ranges from £3 to £20. Large sums are paid out in prize and pool money, especially for cross-channel races.

The Wigan Bridge Club, with over 100 members and its own premises, runs winter and summer contract bridge leagues and occasionally arranges duplicate matches with other clubs.

Billiards and snooker continue to be popular, especially snooker, and there are various leagues in the town and district.

The Wigan district has produced a large number of good boxers, the outstanding one being Peter Kane, of Golborne, who became world flyweight champion and later European bantam-weight champion.

#### Indoor Entertainment

Wiganers are well provided for in the way of indoor entertainment. In the borough alone there are twelve cinemas and a music hall—the Hippodrome—with an aggregate seating capacity of over 16,500. One of the cinemas, the Ritz, seats 2,600. Several of the cinemas now have Sunday evening performances. Queen's Hall (the Wigan Methodist Mission) has seating accommodation for 2,000. It is used for orchestral and other concerts and has been crowded for concerts by the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Glasgow Orpheus Choir, and the Hallé Orchestra.

Formed in 1953 to present "Merrie England," the Wigan and District (Coronation) Operatic Society has been continued. In 1954 "Oklahoma" was given, and in 1955 "Annie Get Your Gun."

There are several musical organisations in the town and district. The Wigan Music Society, formed twelve years ago, has 150 members. They meet once a month for socials, piano recitals and to hear instrumental and choral music. There are also members' evenings when members contribute to the programme.

The Wigan and District Choral Society was formed in 1933 as the Wigan and District Sunday School Union Choral Society with Mr. Allen Hood as its first conductor. An average of three concert performances of oratorio and other sacred works was given each season in local churches. In later years the Society, no longer sponsored by the Sunday School Union, changed its title to the Wigan and District Choral Society. With the change in the title came a change in policy and secular works began to be included in the concerts.

The aim of the Society is to enhance the musical reputation of the town and to provide the people of Wigan with opportunities of hearing classical and modern choral works, oratorio and opera. For all performances the finest artistes in the country are engaged and, in the operatic



performances, are supported by a full professional orchestra. Appreciation of the work of the Society is reflected in the growth of the choir and audiences which make it necessary to engage the commodious Queen's Hall for all concerts.

The Wigan Orpheus Choir of mixed voices attends music festivals and gives concerts; the Ashton-in-Makerfield Choral Society has concerts in the winter when prominent vocalists and instrumentalists are engaged. There is also a Wigan Orchestral Society, a Bach Choir, and a Wigan Philharmonic Society, a Wigan Art Club and a local art group.

Dancing is extremely popular in the town which has several dance halls. The Empress, a well-equipped building, is one of the largest dance halls in the North of England. When the Wigan and District Farmers' Ball is held annually 1,600 people are present at the Empress Hall. The Court Hall is another building where many organised dances take place, and there are smaller halls.

#### Little Theatre

Although one of the youngest cultural organisations in the town the Wigan Little Theatre holds a high place. Formed in 1943 by three townsmen, it now has about 700 members and its own building. Of that number over 100 find active employment taking part in plays, building and painting scenery, designing and making costumes and in other ways. Eight major productions a year are given, each on ten successive evenings, and they are well supported. The seating accommodation is 250. Classes have been formed for the training of young members. The Chairman of the Little Theatre Committee is Mr. Fred Fairclough, who is well known as a broadcaster in drama and Children's Hour programmes. There is also a film society in the town.

Wigan also has a very flourishing Photographic Society. It has over 70 members, all keen to improve their work. Monthly com-

petitions are held for members and there is also an annual exhibition, also confined to members, which attracts many townspeople. Inter-competitions are held with other towns and there are joint outings with members of other photographic societies during which photographs are taken in addition to an occasional quiz. The members have the advantage of lectures on photography by eminent authorities and the Society has its own magazine, *The Viewfinder*.

There are several operatic and dramatic societies in the town and district, including Hindley and District Operatic and Dramatic Society, and societies connected with various churches.

Other organisations in the town include the League of Friends of Wigan and District Hospitals, Wigan Rotary Club, the Inner Wheel, the Wigan Round Table, the Fabian Society, the Wigan Soroptimist Club, the Wigan Women's Professional and Business Club, the Townswomen's Guild, the Young Women's Christian Association, with its own building which was opened in September, 1949, a local branch of the Westmorland and Cumberland Association, the Old England Society, a Deaf and Dumb Society, a Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association, with their own well-equipped club, a Society for the Blind, a Prisoners' Aid Society, and Wigan Infirmary Ladies' Linen League.

The Haigh, Aspull and Blackrod Agricultural Society holds an agricultural show every year and the Wigan and District Horticultural Society has held an annual show for a quarter of a century.

Since the Wigan Corporation purchased Haigh Hall and the extensive plantations in March, 1947, improvements have been carried out and thousands of people have visited the grounds where there is a beautifully laid out rest garden, lily pond and an 18-hole putting green. Wrightington Fish Pond with its lovely setting, Ashurst Beacon, Parbold Beacon and other country places within a few miles of Wigan are also visited by large numbers of people at the weekends in the summer months.