

## PEOPLE OF THE STREET

### **JOHN HODSON KEARSLEY (1785-1842)**

Hodson Kearsley belonged to a family long established at Wigan and the surrounding area of south Lancashire: they were part of the town's commercial and municipal elite by the end of the eighteenth century.

His father, Edward Kearsley, who was possibly the son of James Kearsley of Hulton, near Leigh, became a partner in the Wigan cotton and linen manufacturing business of his brother-in-law John Hodson of Ellerbeck, M.P. for Wigan, 1802-20. It is not clear whether he was also involved in the Manchester cotton manufacturing enterprise of James, Josiah (his brother), John and Edward Kearsley.

In 1811 Hodson Kearsley married the heiress Mary Anne Bevan, daughter of the late George Bevan of Liverpool, who owned property in Wigan, Preston, Liverpool, Ireland and the West Indies, and soon afterwards came into her only sister's inheritance of property in Wigan, Hindley, Chorley, Adlington and Preston.

The Bevan family had an interest along with Henry Robinson and others in the Wigan Brewery founded by Thomas Higson in the 1780's.

Hodson Kearsley's father died in 1816, not long after his great uncle Josiah of Manchester. By his father's will, Kearsley received an equal share with his seven siblings in a trust fund of almost £52,000, and by his great-uncle's a legacy of £1,000.

With the use of his inherited wealth Hodson Kearsley gained a share in the Wigan Brewery was able to finance the acquisition of additional properties and businesses to the already considerable portfolio of the Wigan Brewery Company

During this period, he was involved in the running of the brewery with Henry Robinson, resolving previous partnership agreements and by 1831 they became joint sole partners in the brewery.

In the details of the joint partnership agreement, it was agreed that on the death of one of the partners personal representatives of the deceased would agree to sell the moiety/share of the company.

Henry Robinson died intestate in August, 1833, leaving two children only, George, his heir-at-law, and Ann, the wife of Thomas Morris. Soon after Henry Robinson's death, George was found a lunatic and Mr. and Mrs. Morris were appointed joint committee of his estate.

The Morris family agreed to sell Henry's share and the arrangement was completed, comprising of 345 properties, varying from copyhold, freehold and leasehold, a substantial portfolio.

In 1837, the legitimacy of the sale was unsuccessfully contested by the Morris family, although Thomas Morris continued to be involved in the successful running of Hodson Kearsley's wholly owned company.

Hodson Kearsley's wife, Mary Anne, died in 1837 at their family home, Higher Hall, Westleigh.

John Hodson died on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1842, aged 57 years. He was buried on 10<sup>th</sup> October in the family vault at St. Mary the Virgin, Deane, Bolton. The funeral was very private only attended by Sir Robert Holt Leigh and Henry Gaskell, Wigan solicitor.

## Auctions

The disposal of his considerable properties and land through his will was conducted by various auctions:-

2nd November 1842 - William Lomax Auctioneer, at Higher Hall, Westleigh, Sale of Farming Stock, including cattle, horses, machinery, 17cwt of cheese and 400,000 bricks, etc.

28th November 1842- William Lomax Auctioneer, at Higher Hall, Sale of furniture, silver plate, wines, library and various carriages.

June 1843 – Clarendon Rooms, South John Street, Liverpool. 20 lots including land and properties in Liverpool.

June 1843 – Royal Hotel, Wigan, 8 lots of land, building and farms in Hindley and Westleigh, including the family mansion, Higher Hall, Westleigh.

14<sup>th</sup> January 1843 – Sun Inn, Ulverston, Sale of 10 lots – Freehold Estates in Cartmel, Holker area.

July 1843 – 3 day auction at the Royal Hotel, Wigan, by Messrs Lomax & Sons, including **Wigan Brewery, Brewers Arms, Minorca Hotel and the land at Pillytough**. Day 1- 21 lots, Day 2- 19 lots, and Day 3 – 21 lots.

## Public Life

He was active in the public life of the town, serving three terms as Mayor of Wigan in 1813, 1819 and 1825, in addition he was M.P. for Wigan 1831 and 1835.

In October 1819, in response to the Peterloo Massacre a committee of Wigan factory owners and local gentry proposed to raise a troop of volunteer horsemen to safeguard the interests of the town. The new unit was called the Wigan Light Horse Cavalry and Kearsley, who was serving as Mayor for the second time was chosen to become Captain in command. He held the position for 23 years up until his death.

In the 1830 General Election, triggered by the death of King George IV, Kearsley ran for Wigan but was defeated into third place by his cousin and second in command of the Wigan cavalry troop, James Alexander Hodson. In second place was James Lindsay of Haigh Hall, 24th Earl of Crawford and 7th Earl of Balcarres.

The following year the ailing James Hodson vacated his seat as MP for Wigan. He nominated his cousin John Hodson Kearsley as his successor, and on 1st March 1831 Kearsley duly won the by-election 48 votes to four in front of a large hostile crowd. However, his views on opposing the Great Reform Bill were well known, and on leaving the hustings he was attacked and hit in the face with a stone thrown by a woman protestor.

Kearsley was also unpopular with his fellow M.P.s, one describing him as that '*vulgar little brewer and an immoderate fool*'. No paintings are readily available of him but biographic detail from the '*The History of Parliament*' describes him thus:

*'He had such a comfortable notion of his own senatorial qualifications, and this notion was so vividly imprinted on his little round pug-looking face, that it was impossible to look on him and not be pleased ... Never was man on better terms with himself ... A most expressive look of self-complacency always irradiated his globularly-formed, country-complexioned countenance, while his small bright eyes were ever peering triumphantly over his little cocked-up nose. Then there was his ample harvest of black, bushy hair, with a pair of excellent whiskers to match, not forgetting his well-developed cheeks. He is a little thick-set man, with an inclination to corpulency ...'*

Kearsley stood for Wigan at the general election of 1832, the first after the Great Reform Act, but finished bottom of the poll behind three Liberals. He regained the seat in 1835 but lost it in 1837. He was defeated by two votes in a poll of 520 at a by-election in March 1839, and unsuccessfully petitioned. He decided against standing again in 1841.