



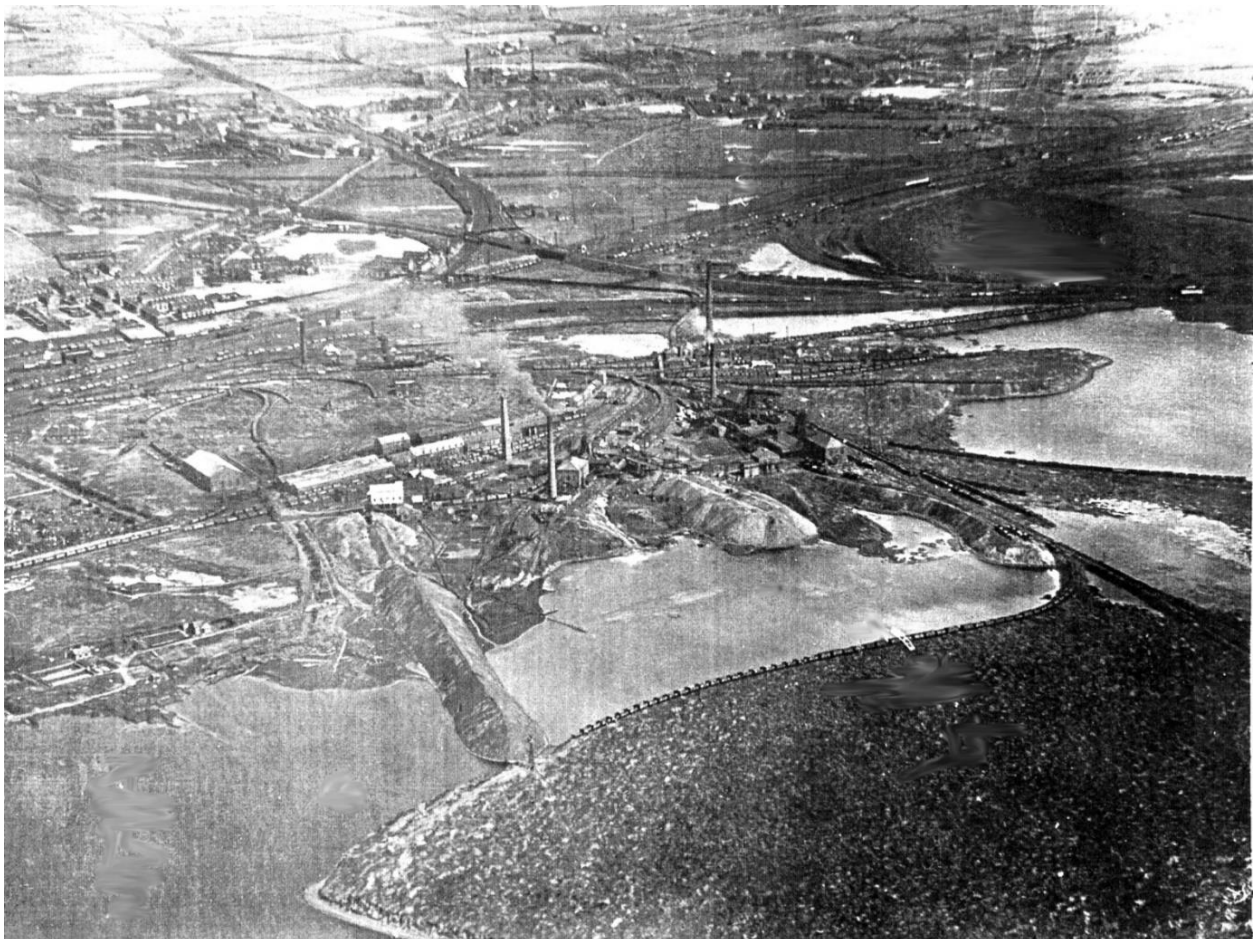
Lancashire,  
Manchester &  
N Merseyside

## History of the Wigan Flashes

By Dr Mark Champion and Patricia Rigg

### Introduction – what is a flash?

The Wigan Flashes, as we know them, are a result of the mining subsidence which happened around the year 1902. The history of the development of the Wigan Flashes needs to look at the industrial activity on the site and how this has changed the landscape. The coming of the canals, the railways and the development of industrial scale mining in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have all helped to produce the landscape that we see now. The nature of “Long Wall Mining” lead to rapid collapse of the abandoned collieries. Indeed, the word “flashes” refers to the formation of the lakes by flash flooding after the subsidence. There is little difference in the outlines of the water bodies since 1908 maps of Wigan Flashes.



Aerial photo of Pearsons and Knowles Flash after mining subsidence.

All heritage photos with permission of Wigan & Leigh Archives, Wigan Council.

## **Pre-industrial land use**

The land prior to the impact of the coal mining industry was mainly agricultural, with many areas of peaty mossland occurring. These were part of the Ince Moss complex, stretching over much of the area between Bryn and Hindley. It is likely that the area is similar to that still found near Astley Green, with a mixture of fields with grazing livestock and some barley grown. This included small copses, marshes and wet areas. In this landscape there were a number of farmhouses, halls and buildings, which have been lost over time. These included Westwood House and Hawkley Hall (see below).

In times past, a roman road ran to Wigan across the mossland landscape to the east of the site. This is now Amberswood common.

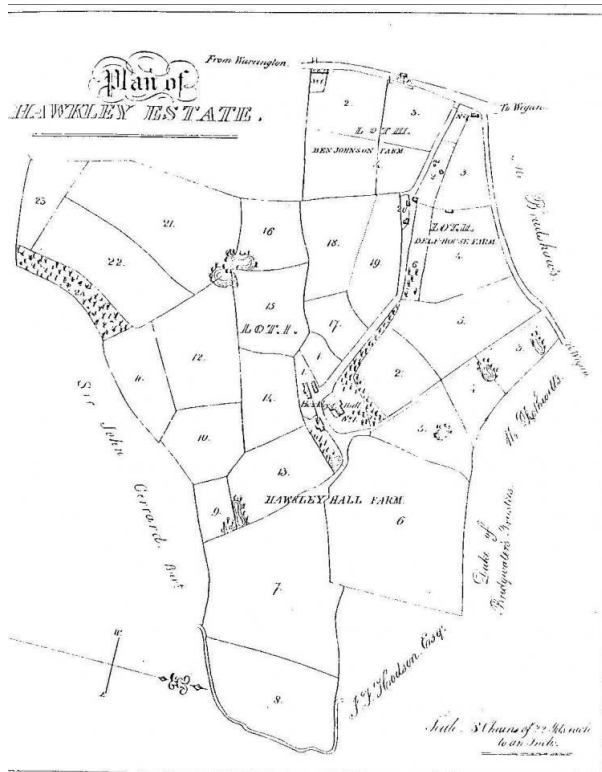
In 1491 there was a dispute on Ince Moss between Thomas Gerard, Lord of Bryn and Sir Thomas Gerard, Lord of Ince. The former tried to impound seventeen cattle, several oxen and a horse in a “most riotous manner” and tried to expel his kinsman from land on the Ince Moss.

## **Hawkley Hall**

Hawkley Hall was an Elizabethan mansion situated on the Hawkley Hall Estate. Before the Norman conquest it formed part of the Manor of Pemberton, belonging to the Manor of Newton. The Hawkley's, the original owners, came to England with William the Conqueror. The Hall bore the Hawkley Arms, a gold cross upon a blue shield.

In 1374 Hawkley Hall passed into the Molyneux family of Rainhill, where Roger married Elizabeth, who was the heiress to the Luce family of Hawkley. It remained in the Molyneux family until 1805 and then passed to the Reverend Hockenhull of Lymm in Cheshire, who assumed the Molyneux name.





3 1840 sale plan of Hawkley Hall estate.

In 1840 Hawkley Hall was auctioned off by the Reverend's son at the Royal Hotel in Wigan. The sale particulars listed the estate as the "Mansion House called Hawkley Hall with several compact Farm Cottages, the Coal and Canal Mines and Stone Quarries in a total of 212 acres". The buyer was the Squire Bankes of nearby Winstanley Hall, who subsequently leased the hall as a farmhouse.

Hawkley Hall as it stood was built at some time in the Elizabethan era. There is no mention of an earlier Hall on the Estate. It was considerably rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Molyneux family who effaced plaque on the front of the hall bore the letter "M" and the date 1609.

The two-story building originally consisted of a central portion and a project wing to the left and at a later date a wing to the right. At an even later date two buildings were adjoined to create a hall at the rear. The rebuilding of this hall gave it a 17<sup>th</sup> century appearance, obscuring many of its original features. It was described as an "ordinary stone building with few architectural points about it".

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hawkley Hall suffered the same fate as many in the area. An attempt to sell it for use as a private nursing home failed. The property became damaged by nearby, open cast coal mining. Then the vandals moved in and the hall was subsequently demolished in 1968. This was an unfortunate end for a building that once had boasted to accommodate Oliver Cromwell and his officers, whilst they were fighting in the Civil War.





## **The Civil War**

At the outbreak of the civil war, geographical location and class structure were the main factors determining whether a locality was for the King or for Parliament. Generally speaking, the South and the East of England was for Parliament and the North and West for the King. Aristocratic landowners, their tenants and those who did business with them were Royalists. The independent lesser gentry and merchants were for Parliament.

Wigan was only a few miles from Lathom House, owned by Lord Derby and garrisoned by his troops. The town was strategically placed on the main North-South route and was fought over several times. Oliver Cromwell passed through Hawkley Hall once in 1648. His troops engaged in a running battle with the Duke of Hamilton's Royalists. It was during the siege (prior to this encounter) that it is said that Oliver Cromwell stationed his mortars and guns in the ditch which now forms the Mesnes Brook flowing out of Scotmans Flash. The Royalist Cause in Lancashire sustained its final defeat at the Battle of Wigan Lane in 1651. More information <https://greatacre.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/civil-war-in-wigan>

## **Will-o-the-Wisp**

The will-o-the-wisp is a flame-like occurrence caused by escaping gases from wetlands. In olden days, it was personified as a sprite who carried a fleeting "wisp" of light. Foolish travellers were said to try to follow the light and were then led astray into the marsh.

Hawkley Hall was mentioned by William Bankes of Wigan in 1788 [transcribed with modern English]

*"Some years since, near this town was a well that did not appear to be a spring, but rather rainwater. At first sight there was nothing about it that seemed extraordinary, but upon emptying it there presently broke out a sulphurous vapour which made water bubble up as if boiled.*

*When a candle was put to it, it presently took fire and burned like brandy. The flame in a calm season would continue sometimes a whole day, by the heat of which they could boil eggs, meat etc. The water was cold, and the bubbling did not increase the heat but was kept in motion by the constant halitus of the vapours breaking out the same water taken out of the well would not burn nor the mud on which he halitus had been, this shows it was not so much the water that took fire, as some bituminous or sulphurous fumes that broke out there.*

*This burning well is lost supposed to be owing to the coal works about Hawkley. Experiments may be made in many places in Wigan, and it is said by miners that are these places are generally found where there is what they call a fault which may be perceived by little bubbles of water on the top of the ground, ditches or other places which will immediately take fire on applying a lighted candle. It has been found to be nothing more than the fiery damp. If*

*collected into a bladder, by putting a lighted candle to it, it will make an explosion like a cannon. From such emulations it is said to be the Will-o-the-wisp."*

Although written in 1788, when geological knowledge was relatively in its infancy, this account shows that Wigan Miners suspected a link with geological faults and gas. The phenomenon is caused by methane, a light combustible gas, which is produced by the decay of organic materials including vegetation laid down 250 million years ago. The process is still continuing in still ponds where there is a build-up of decaying vegetation. Methane occurs naturally with coal where it is generally vented into the air and never noticed, but occasionally it can cause effects.

In 1933 the maid at St. Paul's vicarage, Pemberton, was startled by an explosion that was followed by gaseous flames shooting through the crevices between the floorboards. The Colliery Manager, Mr Cook from nearby Pemberton Colliery, was called along with Gas Department officials and Firemen. They eventually tried to make a small tunnel in the garden to divert the gas but this was unsuccessful and the gas continued to ignite for nine hours, eventually the gas blow was exhausted and there have been no further problems.

### **History of Coal Mining at Wigan Flashes**

Small-scale mining had been happening, within the Wigan Borough, for about two hundred years before the Industrial Revolution. The brightly burning coal from the "cannel coal seam" was probably used for lighting as well as heating. It was the large mines that sprung up in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century that had the biggest impact on the landscape we see today.

### **Pearson & Knowles Company**

Thomas Pearson, a Liverpool millwright and engineer, had followed his father's business in Liverpool in the firm of Thomas Pearson & Co; Engineers & Boilermakers. His first venture in coalmining appeared to have been at Barley Brook on the outskirts of Wigan, near Hindley. By the early 1840's he had started working in the Ince area when he sank Springs Pit and where he also built coke ovens.

At about the same time he took over the colliery previously worked by H&E Hilton, known as Ince Hall Colliery. This was later known as both Crow Orchard Colliery or Pearson's & Knowles Arley Colliery. Thomas Knowles had been appointed as overlooker of the collieries in 1848 and became a partner in 1853. The company then became known as Pearson & Knowles Co.

### **Railways and Locomotives**

By 1834 the Northern Union Railway Line (later known as the West Coast Main Line) had been developed by way of an independent track running parallel to the main lines. This gave access to the Spring Branch Junction. Another line was built across Amberswood Common to link into the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway system. (The map is from 1896 clearly showing the railways and the flashes had not formed at this point)

The Pearson & Knowles Co. owned its own locomotives, pulling coal trains to Preston and beyond. There is a record that they purchased a Planet Class 2-2-0 in March 1841, from the Liverpool and Manchester Railway Co. This was built in 1831 by Fenton, Murray & Co. This locomotive had been no. 19 VULCAN on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway.

On 7<sup>th</sup> September 1841 Mr Pearson's locomotive ASA collided with a stagecoach on a level crossing at Euxton, near Chorley. Apparently the engine was running tender first and hauling a train of seven empty wagons from Preston to Spring colliery. In the official report on the accident ASA was described as being a six wheeled engine, (so not the one from Liverpool and Manchester Railway Co.). ASA was stated to be limited to 15mph. The weights given were locomotive 13 tons, tender half full, 5 tons and empty wagons 43 to 44 cwt each.

There was another accident to one of Pearson's trains on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1844. As the train proceeded up Coppull Bank with empty Wagons from Preston, it was run into from behind by a train belong to Richard Hollinshead Blundell, pulled by the locomotive ACE OF TRUMPS. The brakesman on one of the trains was fatally injured, and taken back to his home at Golborne on the Pearson's engine.

In addition to his colliery interests, Thomas Pearson had continued in business at the Liver Foundry in Parliament Street in Liverpool. It was here he started building locomotives. LIVER was completed in 1844 and worked the coal trains from his collieries. Before being put into traffic it was tested on the 1 to 100 incline between Wigan and Boards Head. It had a boiler pressure of 70 psi, and hauled a train successfully of 31 wagons of 6 ton each.

It was on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1844 LIVER was given a further trial, when it left for Preston with 40 empty wagons weighing 240 tons. It climbed Boars Head incline with ease and when arriving at Coppull 11 more wagons were attached, giving the total weigh of 306 tonnes. It stopped and started on the incline beyond Coppull with ease. LIVER was stated to have coupled wheels 4'7" in diameter, 14 s 2020" cylinders and 60 psi working pressure. It weighed 14 tons, 16 cwt with water.



No. 1 Pearson and Knowles, Ince Colliery

On Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1845 the locomotive men employed in working the trains from Springs Colliery, were given a supper at the Victoria Hotel at Wigan. During the evening it was stated that the LIVER had been very successful, and with Mr WM. Smith the driver in charge) had taken a train of 40 wagons, weight 260 tons, up Boars Head Incline. It was also said that locomotive DAVID, which had just had thorough repairs and alterations, would likely to realise the expectations that had formed on the trials that Monday. (There appears to be no further information on DAVID).

The next we hear of LIVER is at Preston in 1846. On 17<sup>th</sup> August a train of 32 coal wagons was run into by a train from Fleetwood. On 17<sup>th</sup> October 1850 LIVER was involved in another accident, near Boar's Head, when working from Preston to Spring Branch.

By 1847, Pearson's was selling the locomotives to the London and North Western Railway (LNWR). One was said to be well adapted for luggage or heavy trains, the other for passenger work. Two years later, 25 April 1849, Pearson held a sale of surplus plant which included a four coupled, six-wheel locomotive, described as having 4'7" driving wheels and 14"x 20" cylinders. Pearson & Knowles Co. trains continued to run on the main lines for another ten years or so.

The LNWR working timetable for January 1857 records that the firm's engines were still working between Spring and Branch Junction and Preston.

## Mining for coal



The first shafts at Ince Moss were sunk in 1863, the mineral royalty being more than 700 acres in extent. The principal lessors were Mr WM Walmseley, Mr Richard Walmesely, Lord Gerard and the Duke of Bridgewater's Trustees.

The colliery was capable of raising 1 million tons per annum. There were eventually six shafts sunk, no. 6 the last on being completed in 1891. No 4 shaft was 710 yards deep and had 16 seams, dipping away to the east at a gradient of 1 in 9.

Coal could be taken away on the railway with a complicated set of sidings on the West Coast Main Line or by barge on the Leigh Branch of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

In 1874 the company became known as Pearson's & Knowles Coal & Iron Co. Ltd having taken over Warrington Wire Iron Co and the Dallam Forge Co. The Springs Colliery on Amberswood closed in 1872, although the workshop on this site remained until 1905, when the facilities moved to Ince Moss.

## Managing water

Within the mine most of the water feeders occurred in seams above the Ince 7ft, which had a water lodge for all the other seams, the water being pumped up No 1 shaft. On the lower side of the shaft two water levels were driven and the water given off in all the shafts above this seam was collected and turned into these levels. No water of any consequence occurred below the Ince 7ft. The lodge room had a capacity of 1.5 million gallons. On the higher side of the levels a staple pit, 7ft diameter and 22ft across measure drift to the water levels. The suction pipes of the

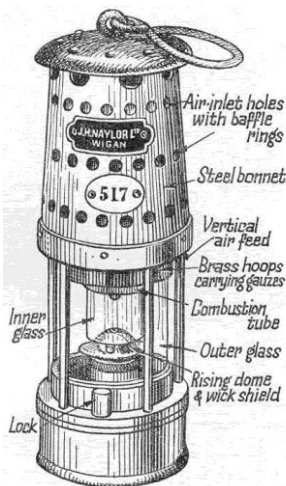


pump were fixed in the staple pit. Messrs Routledge and Ommaney of Manchester made the original pumping engines in 1886.

The steam cylinders were 31 in diameter x 2 ft stroke working tow 11 in double acting piston pumps. New pumps of the same size and type were installed later by Pearson & Knowles Co. They were constructed at the Ballam Forge Works, Warrington. The inlet valves were of the ordinary butterfly type, but Cornish double beat valves were employed for their delivery. An air vessel was fitted above each of the delivery valves. The engine worked at 24 revolutions per minute and delivered 30 gallons per revolution. The quantity pumped in a day of 12 hours was 518,400 gallons.

These pumping engines were supplied with steam by 7 pipes from underground boilers. The delivery pipes were 12 in diameter and were carried up No.1 Shaft to a lodge at the surface. There was also a pair of subsidiary double acting pumps with 7 in pistons x 2 ft stroke. These were worked by a pair of 14 in cylinder hauling engines, which were provided with back piston rods especially for the purpose. They were attached by cottars, so that they could be disconnected when required. The engines and pumps were made by Coupe and Co. of Worsley Mesnes Ironworks. When used for pumping only these engines made 38 revolutions per minute, but if used for hauling, or hauling and pumping combined, they made about 30 revolutions per minute.

### **Miners lamps**



The miners' safety lamp was invented by Thomas Heaton an employee of Pearson & Knowles Co. who worked at Ince Moss Pit. Unfortunately, the light the early lamps gave off was poor, and some miners, who were paid by piecework, objected to using them. Different manufacturers made their own improvements and the Naylor Lamp (also made in Wigan) that had the advantage the oil could not spill, even if the lamp was tipped over. A further advantage was that the wick could be seen at a glance preventing it running out of wick. It could burn for fourteen hours without readjustment and was fitted with a new method of magnetic locking. It had a lighting effect of 1:1 candlepower which was much more powerful than early lamps. Diagram credit [www.mining-memorabilia.co.uk](http://www.mining-memorabilia.co.uk)

### **The Ince Moss Pit Disaster**

A particularly serious incident took place at the Pearson & Knowles Co. Moss Pits, with an explosion on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 1871. The accident occurred in the Wigan 9ft seam, a mine that was known to be 'fiery' and hazardous. There were around one hundred and fifty men in the pit at the time, of which sixty-eight were working the 9ft seam. An explosion was heard at the surface, followed by a thick column of smoke emerging from the upcast shaft. Although the cage for carrying the men was destroyed and the headgear damaged, a hoppet (a large iron bucket used

to carry spoil) was intact in the shaft. This was used to bring up the miners who were not working the 9ft seam, and who were uninjured.

A rescue party consisting of trade union officials and colliery managers descended the shaft. When they reached the seam there were dead and injured colliers lying everywhere. Roof supports had collapsed and coal tubs were damaged. The injured were brought up in the hoppet with the rescuers using a hammer to signal to the winch man above.

There was a second smaller explosion, which threw the rescuers several metres down the workings. They were fortunately uninjured and managed to escape up the shaft. The sides had by now caught fire. A decision was made that no more men could be saved and shaft should be capped to prevent air getting to the fire in the workings.

After several days an assumption was made that the fire was out and the workmen began to remove the clay from the shaft. Later a party was ready to go down to check the mine. Proprietor Thomas Knowles was looking into the shaft when there was a third explosion. The engineers at the top of the shaft were blown 12 metres into the railway. John Knowles, the son of the mine owner, received a broken leg. The hoppet was thrown up into the headgear. Four of the workers were fatally injured with one falling down the shaft. The sound of this blast was heard miles away and a sheet of flame was visible from Wigan town centre where it was seen well above the top of the headgear. Messengers running to the doctors were delayed by women and children asking for news, as they ran through Ince. A large number of people ran to the colliery. The decision was taken to flood the mine using water from the nearby canal.

There was a fourth explosion which damaged windows in a village four miles away. Three police on watch at the pit ran for their lives with debris falling all around them. Crowds ran to the pit at dawn, where a cloud of smoke obscured their view. The Wigan horse drawn fire engine arrived, but the hoses were not long enough to reach the headgear, which had collapsed in the last explosion, covering the opening of the shaft. Damage to the pit caused smoke to rise from the downcast shaft and the crowd ran, afraid of another explosion. Pumps were brought from other mines and it took a week to extinguish the fire.

It took about eight weeks to pump out all the water. The bodies of the miners were identified by their possessions. Elizabeth Shuttleworth had the harrowing experience of identifying her husband, who was killed in the second explosion, by a shoe and a piece of shirt. Eighteen of the dead were not recovered and that area of the mine remain closed.

A pithead service of remembrance was held on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1874 by the Reverend Thomas Fergie of Christ Church. It is said that far more came to see the fires at the pit than came to the service to remember the dead.

## **Latter life of the pit**

Developments at Ince Moss Colliery continued into the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when alternative rail sidings were constructed on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Pemberton Loop Line. Pearson & Knowles Co. built a railway northwards, alongside Pearson's Flash to the Westwood Park sidings. The connection to the Loop line was constructed in 1887. In 1892 a further connection to the Lancashire Union Railway between Wigan and Liverpool was added. The mine was now large enough to require up to seven six wheeled tank engines to move the coal on the internal rail system, before it joined the National Rail Network.

In the period between 1872 and 1901 an Ironworks was in operation adjacent to the main line and Ince Colliery. This venture was apparently unsuccessful and closed in 1901, while Pearson & Knowles continued to expand their interests into other mining ventures.

Productivity in the pit started to go down from 1918 onwards, only three locomotives were needed. In 1930 the Iron and Steel interests were amalgamated as part of the Wigan Coal Corporation.

The plant became part of Wigan Coal Corporation, at this point the plant had modernised. There were two electrically driven 125 H.P. three stage turbine pumps: one in the Ince 7ft seam and the other in the Bottom Yard Mine. The former delivered 320,000 gallons a day from a depth of 148 yards whilst the latter delivered 240,000 gallons per day from a depth of 113 yards. There were standby pumps for these. A compressed air piston driven pump delivered water to the lodge in the Bottom Yard Mine, whilst two compressed air pumps in the Ince 4ft workings and five similar ones in the Ince 7ft workings delivered to the Ince 7ft lodge. Three compressed air driven pumps in the Furnace Mine delivered approximately 12,000 gallons per day to the Ince 7ft Lodge. Hardly any water was made in the seams below, but water made in the shafts was wound in tanks from the Arley Mine. The total quantity pumped amounted to 560,000 gallons.

The Westwood sidings on the Pemberton Loop line closed at the end of 1944 and the coal was sent out by the West Coast Main Line, now run by the London Midland and Scottish (LMS). The Ince Colliery became the property of the National Coal Board on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1947. Ince Moss closed in November 1962.



Fishing on Scotsman's Flash

### **Other collieries that effected the Wigan Flashes**

There were other collieries that had an effect on the development of the Wigan Flashes. These include the Bamfurlong Colliery and the Bryn Hall Collieries and the bed of a mineral line to Park Lane Colliery still exists and is part of the footpath network between Bryn Marsh and Ochre Flash. Obviously these mines have interesting histories but it is beyond the scope of this publication.

#### Hawkley Hall Collieries

The Hawkley Hall colliery was open from 1837 to 1853. Most of the coal was taken away by barges using the Leigh branch of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, using a pier head at Bryn Moss. The mineral rights were leased by Thomas Jenkinson and James Richard Grimshaw from the Molyneux family for a forty-year period; Meyrick Bankes renewed these mineral rights when they purchased the estate in 1840.

The Pemberton Colliery worked the coal reserves after the pits closure in 1857.

#### The Worsley Mesnes Colliery and Ironworks

The Worsley Mesnes Colliery was opened in 1856 and was owned by Barton and Gilroy; this pit was believed to be on a small scale. The first major development was in 1873 when Nathaniel Eckersley sank two pits.

In 1883 the pits were being worked by the Worsley Mesnes Colliery Company with Eckersley the major partner. Following his death in 1886 the Ironworks was up for sale being purchased by the Melling family and the colliery was then acquired by Tomlinson, Rogers and Simpson who formed the Worsley Mesnes Colliery Company Ltd. These partners also owned pits at Winstanley and in South Wales.

The Ironworks and colliery were linked by a private railway to the Lancashire and Yorkshire line at Upholland. Improvements to the railway system converting it to standard gauge, and linking it to the Winstanley Colliery railway system, meant that coal could be taken to the Lancashire Union Pemberton Branch and to the canal.

With the Worsley Mesnes and Winstanley Collieries being operated by nominally separate companies the single track railway line had several collisions, there was a fatal accident on the night of 20th January 1912 when a train of wagons from each colliery ran into each other. After this Winstanley locomotives didn't run beyond Goose Green.

The first locomotive to operate at Worsley Mesnes Colliery was called 'Jane' and interestingly according to ex employees, this saddle tank was the last engine in use at the colliery. Other locomotives at this time were named 'Dragon' and 'Tomlinson'. In 1915 two new engines were on site these were called 'Worsley' and 'Mesnes'

The Worsley Mesnes colliery was abandoned on the 21st September 1929 but the Ironworks continued in business as a general engineering company until after the Second World War.

The works finally closing in the 1970's to be developed as a housing estate.

#### Bryn Moss and Park Lane Collieries

In about 1850 a pit was opened to the south of the Leigh Branch of the Leeds and Liverpool canal and directly to the west of the pier head that later served Park Lane Colliery. It was operated by William Garstang before being owned by William Entwistle. The Blackrod and Brynn Colliery Company Ltd was formed in 1874 but went bankrupt shortly afterwards. The colliery changed hands several times before being dismantled by 1888

The first colliery at Park Lane, called The High Brooks Colliery, was opened in the 1850's and was owned by Mercer and Evans. The company went on to open the Park Lane Colliery in 1858. The two pits were closely linked and were amalgamated in 1869. A railway was constructed from the pits covering the mile and a half to the Leigh Branch of the Leeds and Liverpool canal where evidence of the pier and the track bed can still be seen. Another railway line linked to The North Union Line, three and a half miles south of Wigan. Other railway links were built to the Lancashire Union Railway where sidings were constructed and eventually connected to the main line. Unusually it appears that the colliery company bought its locomotives second-hand from mainline railway companies and operated the line using a tender engine and an ex-passenger engine called 'Hecla' and 'Caliban'. It is thought that this colliery closed around 1900.

#### **The Leeds Liverpool Canal**

A major engineering project in the early eighteenth century made the River Douglas navigable to the Ribble Estuary, this act of navigation was in many ways the start of the industrial revolution. The Douglas Navigation allowed increased extraction of coal which could be exported from the Wigan Coalfield, the main market being



Liverpool. By 1765 the Duke of Bridgewater had built a canal to link his collieries with Manchester.



This was so successful that further canal schemes were planned.

In 1816 the Leeds and Liverpool Canal was opened. In December 1820 the Leigh Branch of The Leeds and Liverpool Canal was opened to link the two canals together.

The Leigh Branch of the canal was transporting coal until 1972 when the last coal barge 'Ambush' transported coal to the Westwood Power Station and is still popular with tourists today

### **Westwood Power Station**



This stood at the Northern end of the site and construction work started in 1946 and finished when the plant was commissioned in 1950.

(Photo looking to cooling towers from Wigan town centre credit Wigan World).

The plant provided power for Wigan and burnt 2000 tonnes of coal a week. The coal arriving at the power station by both train and barge. The last barge delivery was in 1972 by the barge "Ambush".



The cooling towers were 314 feet tall. The site is now in the process of being redeveloped and was cleared with the landmark towers being demolished in 1989.



The ash has been an important source of botanical habitat as it has been colonised by a range of orchids and other rare plants. There is a gentle hill just to the east of Moss Bridge. It was here that the material from the cooling towers of Westwood Power Station was also placed forming a further pair of undulating small hills. The power station had a further effect on the landscape as the pulverised fuel ash, was spread as a thick layer in the Westwood area often forming an area of undulating mounds reminiscent of coastal dunes. This area was colonised by a number of rare plants associated with this habitat and this has been well studied by ecologists.

### **Land Filling and Tipping**

Over the years the subsidence has produced a number of holes in the ground which have been used for tipping, the area which is now known as Horrock's Flash is amongst the most interesting as it has one of the longest histories. The area was part of Ince Moss, a fragment of which still remains, which was used as a Victorian rubbish dump. Later ash from the Spring View rail sheds was dumped here, along with other material from the railway, this work was carried out on the site until the late 1980s when the site became an SSSI and the processing of railway ballast finished, although it continued on the adjacent Rainfords Area until 2001. During this period a range of materials were placed here including rotten bananas from the Liverpool Docks. It is even alleged, although I believe the stories are properly mythical, that damaged aircraft from RAF Burtonwood were buried here.

Mining spoil has been placed in many areas and often pleasantly landscaped by tree planting, and the creation of hay meadows to form low hills. There was also a land fill operation for domestic waste and this is combined with the mining spoil tip to form the gentle hill just to the east of Moss Bridge, it was here that the material from the cooling towers of Westwood Power Station was also placed forming a further pair of undulating small hills.

The power station had a further effect on the landscape as the PFA, or pulverised fuel ash, was spread as a thick layer in the Westwood area often forming an area of undulating mounds reminiscent of coastal dunes. This area was colonised by a number of rare plants associated with this habitat and has been well studied by ecologists.

### **The Present and Future**

The Area was designated a Local Nature Reserve in 2001 and is now one of the most important wetland sites in the country. The subsidence flashes have developed reedbed which total 0.5% of the fresh water reedbed found in the UK. This and the nearness to centres of population have meant that the Wigan Flashes have become an important site for recreation and wildlife.

The recent management by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust in partnership with Wigan Council, has allowed many improvements to be made including the removal of over a quarter million tonnes of post-industrial spoil, to improve the habitats for a range of scarce birds and other wildlife. The old power station site is presently being developed into a modern Business Park.

