

LETTERS ACROSS TIME



Scott Bradley & Steve Fairclough

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by

Scott Bradley & Steve Fairclough

Streets Apart is led by The Old Courts and The Streets Apart Cultural Consortium



Streets Apart

Wigan
Council



HM Government



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Northern
Heart Films

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Royal Court Theatre, Wigan. *Wigan & Leigh Archive*

Thank you for picking up a copy of our book. I'm delighted to have been involved in this unique project celebrating the heritage and hidden stories of Wigan's King Street. It's a special town and I'm proud to call Wigan my home.

All of the letters have been written by Wigan residents, each of them writing a letter across time from their memories of King Street. It's been a fascinating and emotive journey for all involved. These letters will live on in this book you now hold, and we hope you enjoy reading.

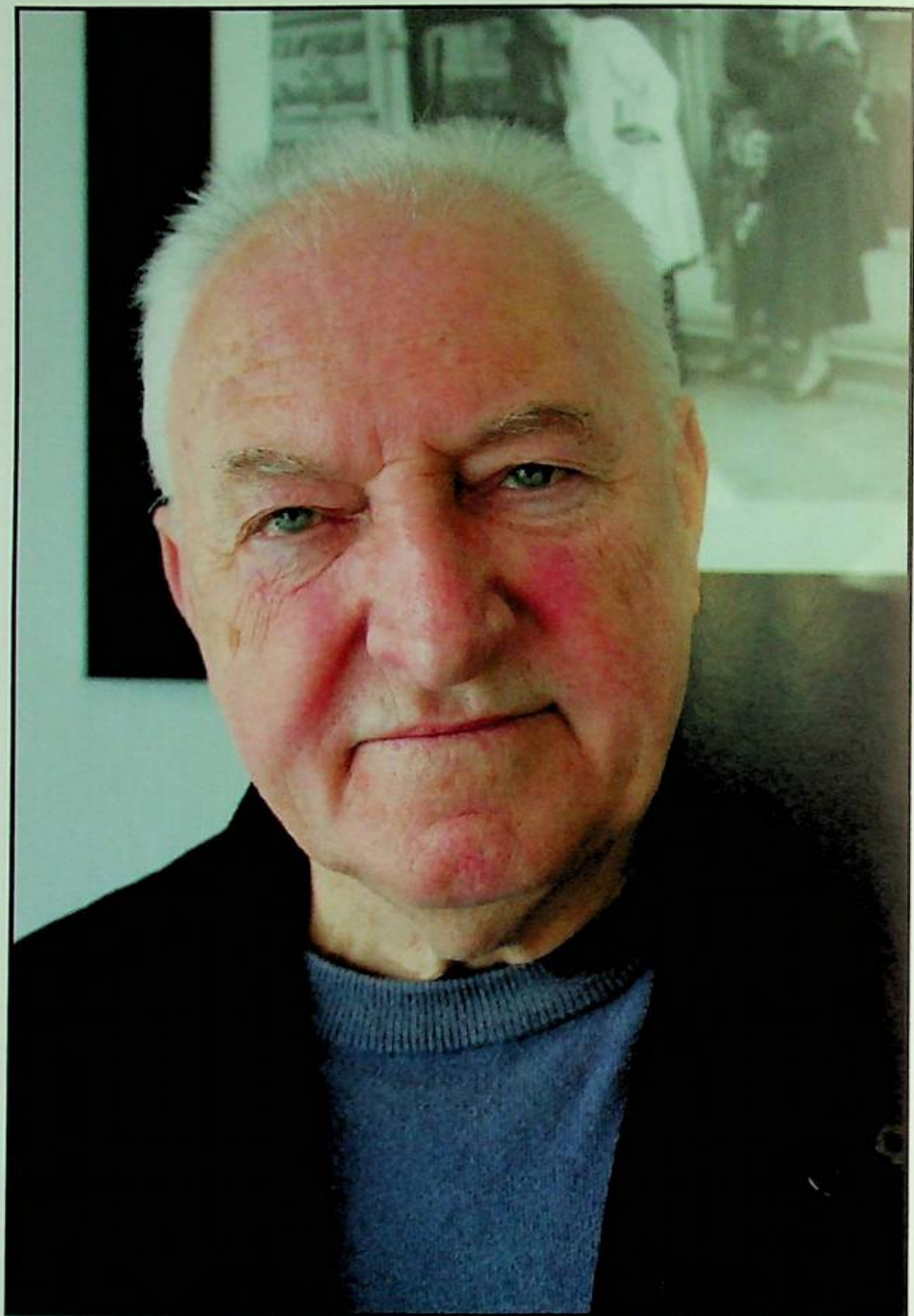
Scott Bradley



Dear Hippodrome

Do you remember me? Lilian Finch,
standing on your famous stage which
had had more famous people than me on
it. In front of those dazzling footlights
I stood and sang my song entitled
"The Pipes of Pan" from the "Gardoliers". Up in
the 'Gods' as they were then called, was
my boyfriend Ken, cheering me on.
Oh how I loved singing that song, it
brought my colturate voice, and never
expecting to come in second out of five
contestants in the contest. I was seventeen
then. now I am 93

What a lovely memory I have
carried all these years and still am
Lilian Goulding "NEE FINCH"



MEMORIES OF KING STREET

APART FROM GOING TO THE PICTURES, MY EARLY MEMORIES ARE OF PLAYING SNOOKER IN THE BASEMENT OF THE COUNTY PLAYHOUSE.

IT WAS A TYPICAL SNOOKER HALL WITH THE MAJORITY OF LIGHT COMING FROM THE FITTINGS HANGING OVER EACH TABLE.

BECAUSE SNOOKER WAS VERY POPULAR, IT WASN'T ALWAYS POSSIBLE TO GET ON A TABLE STRAIGHT AWAY. THE SYSTEM WAS THAT YOU WOULD GIVE YOUR INITIALS TO THE MAN IN THE OFFICE AND THEN WAIT FOR HIM TO SHOUT THEM OUT.

MY NAME IS WILLIAM BUT I ALWAYS THOUGHT OF THAT AS MY SUNDAY NAME SO I USED BILL AS MY EVERYDAY NAME. THIS MAKES MY INITIALS B.F, AND WHEN I ONCE DISTURBED THE SNOOKER BALLS ON ANOTHER TABLE IN PLAY, I HEARD SOMEONE SAY THAT I LOOKED LIKE A B. F. AS I DASHED TO GET TO OUR TABLE.

MANY YEARS LATER, MY SON AND I WOULD TAKE MY MOTHER TO PLAY BINGO AT THE COURT CINEMA. IN THAT RESPECT, YOU COULD SAY THAT KING STREET HAS KEPT OUR FAMILY ENTERTAINED FOR YEARS.

W. Fairclough



I Dear Shops of King Street,

II miss you all.

Every Saturday in the early 1940's my Dad would take me to the Court Cinema. Our first stop was the "toffee shop" which ran around the curved junction of King Street and Rodney Street. It had two windows and a door in the middle. It was filled with jars of sweets, toffees and nuts. The posh boxes of chocolates were behind glass under the counters.

We would buy our usual quarter pound of shelled hazelnut weighed into a white paper cone bag. I can hear the clatter of things being poured on to the scales.

The Court Cinema, of course, had its own large sweet shop fronting on to King Street but it was a penny or two dearer and that made a difference!

I loved looking into the shop windows on King Street. Just up from the Court Cinema were Grimes's two shop fronts either side of Grimes arcade. My favourite was the one which had all the musical instruments on display. Shiny brass trumpets, kettle drums, cymbalsit was magic! I could gaze through that window for ages. Entry was through a door kept locked and opened for "serious customers" by an attendant.

Past Grimes Arcade was Helen Rowe's. A shop selling "ladies' foundation garments" and things not normally seen by a young lad and we did stare through that window! Further along was Miami Modes which was a "ladies'" dress shop.

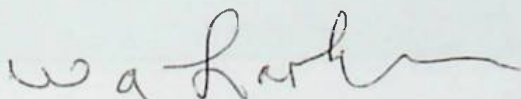
The thing I remember about the shops are the windows, proudly displaying what was on offer, not ugly metal shutters. They were like works of art, all neat and clean, like pictures in a magazine. Splashes of colour along the sides of the street.

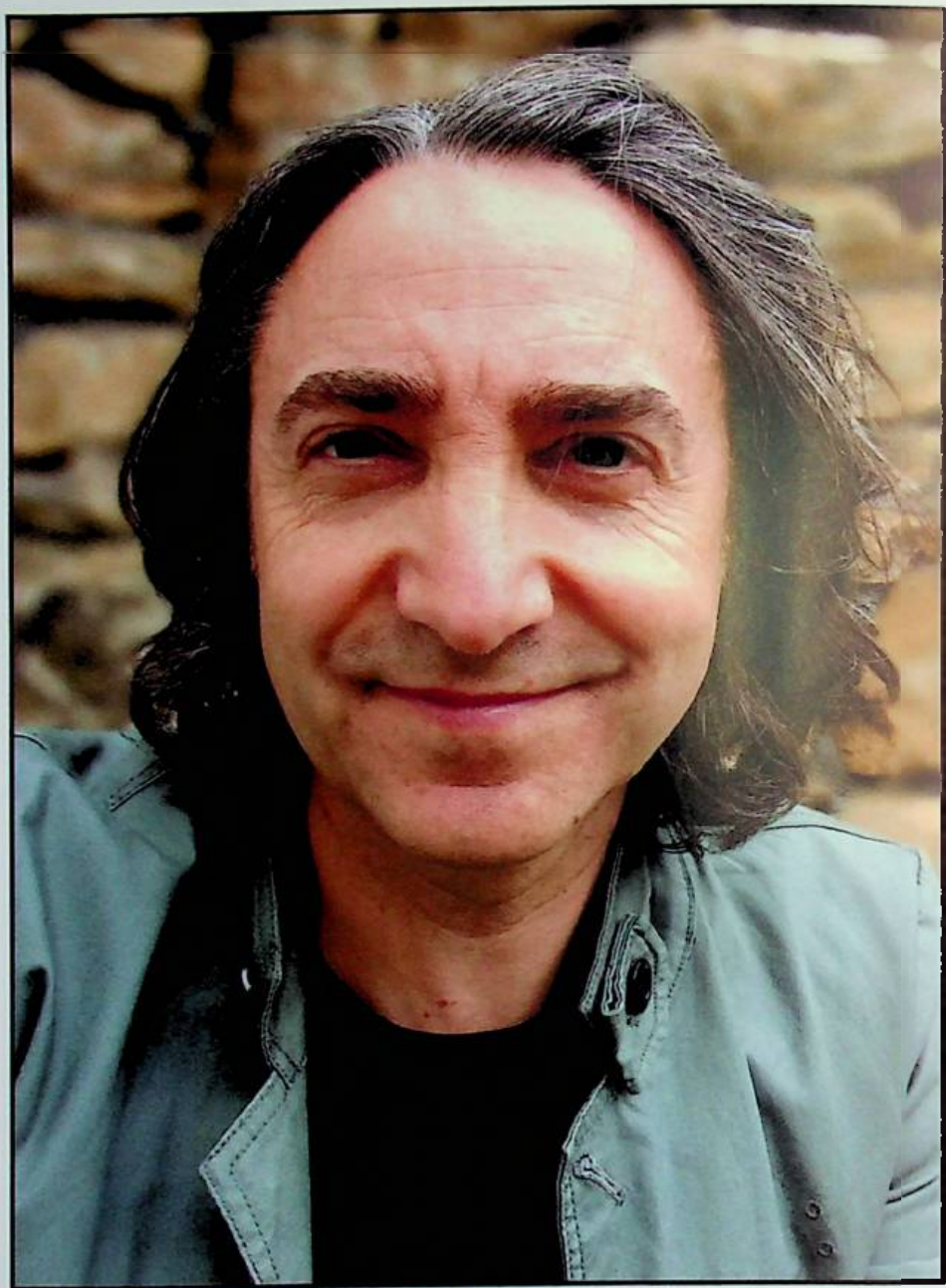
Across the road was Wintersgill's selling good quality women's coats and suits and nearby that P A Kinley's selling everything the well dressed gent needed. If you wanted something for "best" then those were the shops to go to if you could afford it. I remember venturing in to Kinleys as a young man to buy "good" Double Two shirts. It's hard to think now that you could buy such fine clothes in King Street.

Past the County Cinema was Corletts Electrical shop. There you could get electrical items repaired or buy the latest thing, a washing machine! There were wireless sets, irons and lighting,

It was a great place King Street. It had everything,

Bill Larkin





Dear Royal Court Theatre,

I remember you from being a young boy. I'd look at your beautiful doors and windows from the back seat of the car as we dropped my Grandma off for a night of chatter and Bingo.

My Grandma always had a smile on her face and was always a lively and active lady. She had many good nights within your doors, banter, laughs, cups of tea and it never mattered if she won or lost... Sometimes she did have a bingo win, and she would share that little secret with me and my Dad as we took her back home.

I have many fond memories of my Grandma's stories of her youthful adventures in and around Wigan, particularly the wartime era of the 40's. If she were here today, she would grumble at the changes to Wigan and King Street, even though she was a progressive thinker about the future.

I can still picture her in coat, red cardigan and bag, walking through the doors giving us a wave, with that infectious smile. Dementia was my Grandma's demise and at the same time I saw you, The Royal Court begin to fade, crack, leak, break down and eventually be boarded up. All your history and memories locked up inside a shell.

My Grandma will never be forgotten, and maybe if we share your stories we won't forget you?

Steve X



Grimes Arcade, Wigan. *Wigan & Leigh Archive*



Baptist Church, Wigan. *Wigan & Leigh Archive*

Dear King Street.

I remember in my teens the early 1960's when I was counting going to the Court Cinema. sitting on the back row on the double seats. Our treat was to buy sweets from the toffee shop next door.

In the early 1970's my father thought he would "educate" me and take me to the King of Clubs. What an experience as I had never been in a nightclub before. I just remember it being very dark & smokey.

Later in the mid 1970's I worked lunchtime as a waitress in the Turkey. It was ideal for me as the hours were 10am - 2pm and I could take my children to school & pick them up. I wore a red dress white apron & a white mop cap. But the best part was you could choose what you wanted for lunch & the chef would cook it.

Great memories

mayone . 76

MY MEMORIES OF KING STREET

King Street was a varied and vibrant street in the 1950s and 1960s.

On turning into King Street from the town centre on the junction of Wallgate and King Street was the Berni Inn Steakhouse. It was very popular as it was reasonably priced and lots of working class people had become more affluent and were able to treat themselves to a meal out.

About 50 yards down King Street, on the right, there were gents outfitters. In the window there were smart shirts, ties and even cravats. This was obviously to serve the many solicitors who had their offices in King Street. All day long men in smart suits carrying briefcases or folders under their arms could be seen going and froing to offices or to the Court at the back of the Parish Church.

Approximately 100 yards on the left was a lady's clothing shop. They sold the more bespoke kind of clothes for ladies and even sold fox furs and hats.

In King Street there were 3 cinemas. The County Playhouse, the Court Cinema and the Palace Cinema. The Court cinema had 3 levels – the stalls, the circle and the upper circle. The cinemas, in the late 50s and early 60s, were very popular. There would be queues of people standing outside waiting for the earlier film to finish and the next viewing to start. There was a sweet shop at the Court Cinema and to the left of this, big doors that opened up to a flight of steps down to the Court Ballroom. This was a very popular venue and on Saturday night people would spend the evening dancing the waltz, quickstep etc. to a regular live dance band. There was an interval when tea was served. There was a balcony on one end of the dance floor and if you were lucky you could have your refreshment there. People used to rush to get a space. No alcohol was served but anyone wanting anything stronger went to the Shakespeare Public House just across the road.

The very popular theatre, the Hippodrome was down at the bottom of King Street on the right. Varied acts were performed each week – the circus even came there, variety shows and pantomimes. It was a real favourite and many people went every week.

The Trustees Savings Bank was on King Street. Ordinary people saved with this bank. A passbook was supplied and this was used to record savings and withdrawals – no cheque books in those days for ordinary people. It stayed open until 6.00 pm on Thursday night. The doors were then locked but anyone inside would be dealt with and sometime it would take an hour until it was your turn.

A music shop was on the corner of an arcade which led to Library Street. All kinds of instruments could be bought there, including a Grand Piano!

The very first Tesco to open in Wigan was opened on King Street.

The first Wimpy Bar was opened in King Street. This later became the Beer Kellar.

Right at the bottom of King Street opposite the Palace cinema was the Town Hall and the Central Police Station with its grand entrance and big blue lamp.

Joan Gratton



King Street, Wigan. *Wigan & Leigh Archive*

Dear 'Legal' King Street

I remember you... where I worked as a young solicitor in the 1980's. There were so many firms on King Street, I'm trying to remember them all. There were a dozen or so at that time.

Some solicitors' offices came and went but most were there for many years. Their names were grand and gave a nod to their founders - Frank Platt & Fohwick, Arthur Smith & Brodie Griffiths, Gibson Russell & Adler being a few fine examples.

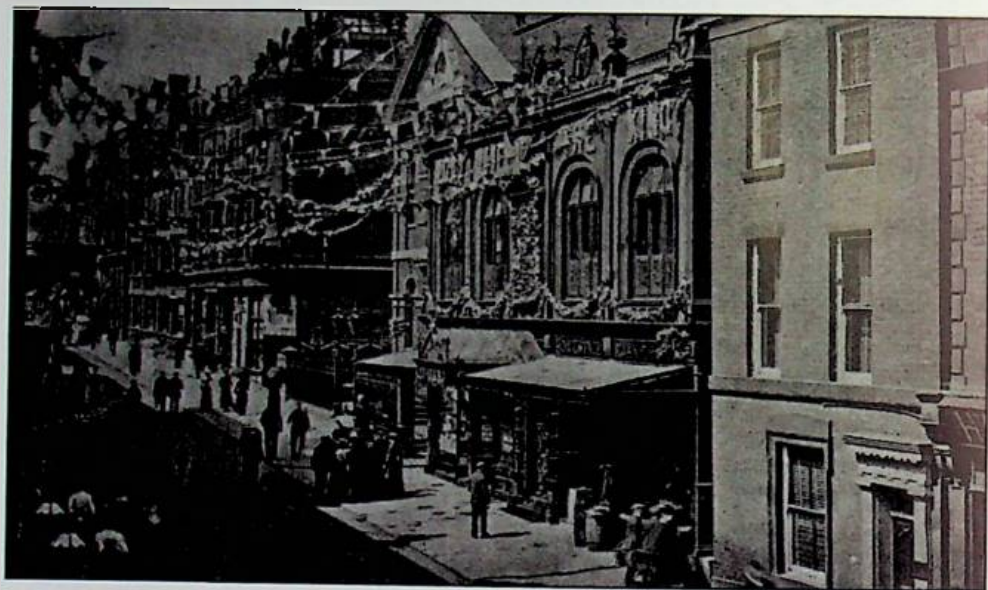
The view from my office window was of the street. I could see fellow solicitors 'suited and booted' going about their business. I could wave to a solicitor friend in her office across the street.

Wigan Magistrates Court was imposing with its wood panelled court rooms. It stood facing Brocol House. Now there's just a car park.

It was a bustling, thriving legal community and mostly we knew each other. Never did I imagine it would go, but it has. Just one firm left now.

With fond memories

Jamel Larkin
x



King Street, Wigan. *Wigan & Leigh Archive*

Hello no 32

How are you, and how does the inside look now? Probably not like it did as a 1960s solicitors' office, when Liz and I used to visit our dad there at work on a Saturday morning. Hey, that was an experience.

The place was dark, wooden and mysterious then: full of steep stairs and dim corridors, with people appearing through doorways and tapping on glass partitions (you'd almost imagine Bob Cratchit hard at work on the other side). There was a proper strong room too - in those days important files were kept in dusty cardboard folders bound up by thin ribbons.

Mind you, Dad was always keen to move with the times and try out the latest recording technology for dictating his letters, so I'm sure he would have been happy to computerise, if that had been an option. Anyway, 32 King Street developed in me a curious but life-long love of office stationery and of reading small print on A4 sheets. Goodscap it was then, of course.

If you don't mind me saying so, you're not looking your best at the moment. Dad would be disappointed - he tried to keep the building neat and clean. He even had it sand-blasted, which started a short-lived craze at the time.

What next for the old street, I wonder?

Yours affectionately

Pete Coulson



Orrell,
Wigan
March '23.

My dear King St,

Where to begin? So many memories of times spent on and around you, and how they affected my early life!

I remember as a small boy in the 1940's on a snowy afternoon, queuing outside the old Hippodrome theatre to see my very first pantomime "Red Riding Hood." 70 years later, my involvement and love of panto is as strong as ever it was. The Hippodrome is sadly long gone, burned down years ago. That site is now a car park! But I still recall the thrill of seeing that beautiful safety curtain rise and applauding the many great stars who appeared there. I remember seeing a pair of young comedians, near the bottom of the bill, called Maccabee and Wise! Wonder what became of them!! I saw my first live musical Wigan Amateur Operatic Society's production of "Annie Get Your Gun" which inspired me to join them and led to a lifelong passion for Am. Dram. The theatre was replaced by Wigan's first supermarket, Hannon's, and I was employed there for a while in the early 1960's.

Then there was the Bowt Cinema, formerly the Royal Bowt Theatre, where my grandfather saw his favourite "The Merry Widow". I spent many a Saturday afternoon there after it became a cinema. I remember after the first show (it was twice nightly) the ushers would spray disinfectant in the aisle as the audience left. Thank you for a lifetime of memories. May you retrieve your former glory.
Your B. Collin.



Palace Cinema, Wigan. *Wigan & Leigh Archive*

Bill Johnson

Starting at the top of King St. On the left hand side King of Clubs and opposite a mans shop, hats scarves gloves jackets etc: then on the same side County Play House. The other side was a Baptist church next to the Court cinema. The left hand side of the Court (in the same building) was a sweet shop. A bit further down was a cheap restaurant U.C.P. then around the left hand corner was another baptist church in Rodney St.

On the site of the dole was a cinema can't remember its name only its nickname "THE SCRATCH" which is self explanatory. At the back of the Dole was the HIPPODROME theatre I remember going in as a child and we were late and had to push past other people to get to our seats and the only thing I remember was someone singing "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth". Going up King St. was the TURNKEY RESTAURANT and further up was a pub called THE SHAKESPEARE. I remember going in the Court to see a double bill "THE GREAT CARUSO and THE STUDENT PRINCE with Mario Lanza, and going across the road to have a drink in the pub. Lots of changes to the street but nothing stays the same forever sometimes for the better and some for the worse. I have lots more memories of Wigan AH!

Bill Johnson (Standish)



Wigan Hippodrome, Wigan. *Wigan & Leigh Archive*

DEAR KING STREET,

WOW, WE GO BACK A LONG WAY. I THINK I WAS 17 WHEN I FIRST EXPERIENCED KING STREET AT NIGHT. I REMEMBER BEING QUITE DAUNTED BY THE CROWDS AND THE NOISE. BIG GANGS OF DRUNKEN LADS ON EVERY CORNER AND POURING OUT OF THE MANY DRINKING ESTABLISHMENTS

OVER THE YEARS I GOT BRAVER AND BEGAN TO TAKE THE CROWDS WITH A PINCH OF SALT AS I ENJOYED A FEW TOBES ON MY WAY TO THE FAMOUS PEMPS.

THERE WAS ONE BAR ON KING STREET THAT BECAME A FAVOURITE OF MINE + MY SISTERS. I CAN'T REMEMBER THE NAME (THEY CHANGED QUITE OFTEN). BUT IT WAS A KARAOKE BAR AND BEING KEEN SWAGGERS ESPECIALLY AFTER SEVERAL DRINKS WE WOULD ALWAYS STOP THERE BEFORE HEADING OVER THE ROAD TO PEMPS.

KING STREET WAS QUITE INFAMOUS FOR BEING A TAD ROWDY BUT AS LONG AS YOU SWAGGED THE UNSAVOURY CHARACTERS IT WAS A LOT O FUN!!

Kathy



County Playhouse, *Wigan*.



Royal Court Theatre, *Wigan*.

The heart of King Street is...

The heart of King Street is fading.
Because those who really remember it as a place of culture and
commerce are now growing old.
King Street is a wet feral dog,
a dying office plant,
brown and depressed.
On King Street, I see
potential.
I hear shouting, bad language and police sirens.
I smell weed, stale piss and kebab meat.
I feel like it's time to go home, there's nothing here for me.
I taste freshly made pizza.
I remember saying to myself the last time I was here,
I was never coming out here again.
I hate King Street, because it's everything that's wrong with
night-time entertainment.
I love King Street because of it's history and it's place in Wigan
once upon a time.

Scott

The heart of King Street is full of
lost memories and old shoes
Because people lost their souls down
dark and hidden alleyways.
King Street is draped with furry,
blossoming pigments of exhaustion.
On King Street I see pavement floors.
I hear ringing in my ears.
I smell donner meat and cheap perfume.
I feel hazy.
I taste tequila.
I remember absolutely nothing.

Nat

The heart of King Street is buried,
Under clouds of vape and cheap pints
Because while it slept,
The people took it for dead.
King Street is a slimy slug trail,
By the back door in the morning.
King Street is a succulent,
Even if you starve it of water and light,
It will keep breathing for as long as it can.
It feeds on itself.
King Street is blue.
It's homesick for a different timeline.
I hate king Street because I didn't get to
Experience it in its prime.
I love king Street because it is slowly,
Starting to claim its roots back.
King Street is an activist.

Romana

The heart of King Street is weekend,
Because everyone is out for a good time.
King Street is a gorilla,
King Street is a vine,
King Street is orange,
King Street is mischief,
On King Street I see lights of fast-food vendors.
On King Street I hear a symphony of voices.
On King Street I smell the night before.
On King Street I feel the energy of the people.
On King Street I taste the fast food.
On King Street I remember running to the station.
I hate King Street because of the ghouls on a Saturday night.
I love King Street because it's Wigan.

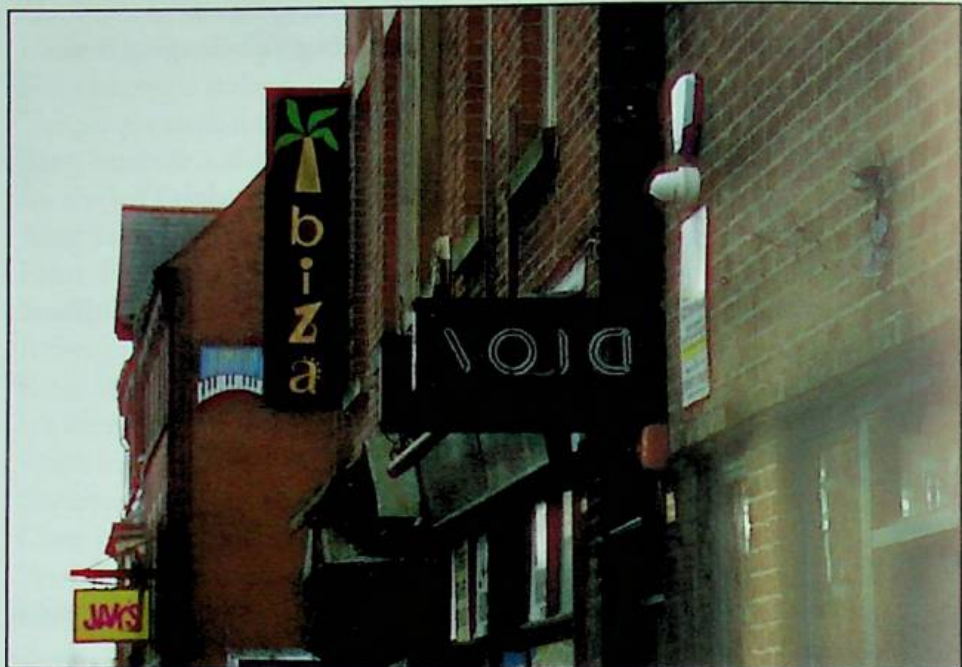
Chris

The heart of King Street is the Royal Court Theatre,
Because of it's unrivalled and defiant presence through challenging times.
King Street could be a dazzling peacock,
A blooming Peony or a flawless ruby.
But is stuck in a state of flux.
On King Street I see emptiness, I hear whispers from the past,
I smell potential, I feel a sense of longing,
I taste the produce from independent stores of days gone by
And I remember a thrilling and thriving hub of the Northwest of England.
I hate King Street because it's currently stagnant and lost.
I love King Street because of its ability to return to it's former glory,
With a little help from those who value it's past.

Holly

The heart of King Street is dead.
Because the jobs need somewhere to go
On a weekend, and Pop World just doesn't cut it.
King Street is a feral cat, with straggly whiskers and matted fur.
An Ivy bush, left to grow wild and creeping into all the dark places.
The brown colour of a dog turd left on the path.
The despair we feel when we lose something precious.
I see shops left to rot, bars running the show
and chavs fighting over "that Girl!"
I hear nothing during the day but the yells of jobcentre security and buses by.
Yet at night there's music left and right!
I smell the takeaways and the deep-fried food they sell,
It doesn't cover the pee smell from alley three.
I feel out of place. It isn't for me.
I taste cheesy chips and donner meat, the cocktails, though I'm knee deep.
I remember the indoor pool at Reef, playing pool at Morty's and wondering...
Why am I here?
I hate King Street because its just the dickhead street at weekends.
I love King Street because the beauty is still there.

Tina



Bars and clubs, King Street. *Northern Heart Films LTD*



College Avenue, King Street. *Northern Heart Films LTD*



King Street. *Northern Heart Films LTD*



Grimes Arcade and Takeaways, King Street. *Northern Heart Films LTD*

A Final Word



Steve Fairclough, County Playhouse Steps. *Northern Heart Films LTD*

Letters Across Time

It's adapted through age and era, been what we required,
For its local community and revellers from out of town.
It's done the rounds of shops, restaurants, cafés, pubs, and clubs,
Had a colourful past and some dark moments.
Dotting the I's and crossing the T's of legal proceedings, serving its time
and people.

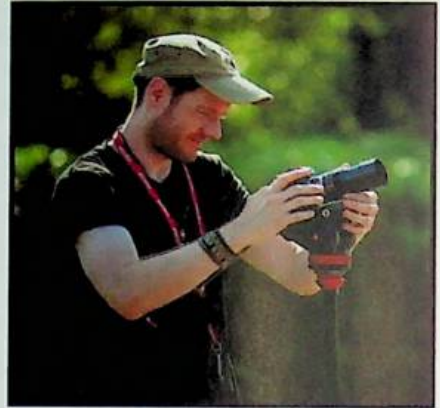
Its screened cinematic masterpieces in plush entertainment venues,
Called bingo numbers, heard singers, bands, and variety acts streets apart!
It's where memories were made, hearts broken, bonds agreed, special
words spoken,
And lifelong loves through courtships began, even when they fell asleep
on the first date...
It's seen it all and taken it in its stride.

If only its buildings, doors and rooms could speak, tell its story, pen its
letters across time,
And remind us of all the highs and lows, past glories, and recent stories.
Oh, what memories this king of streets might recall and share with us all,
I've seen it in a different light, and I think it has many more tales to tell.
This is a collection of our stories... what are yours?

Steve Fairclough

Who We Are

Scott Bradley is currently Head of Production at the award-winning Northern Heart Films, who work regularly with the BBC, The Guardian, Mirror and BFI, and is passionate about crafting work that resonates strongly with Northern communities. His interests range from nonfiction to fiction but mostly centre on human interest, environmental and animal welfare stories.



Steve Fairclough is a multi-skilled creative practitioner, a freelancer in the arts for over 25 years. He's a performer, creative writer, and facilitator who loves stories, oral history, and film. Steve is a "people person", and much of his practice lies within community arts projects, supporting, growing, and celebrating creative journeys with participants of all ages and abilities.

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Thank You

This project simply wouldn't have been possible if it wasn't for the wonderful people who contributed their time, memories and letters.

Danielle and the team at Krumbs Café

The Old Courts

Wigan Little Theatre

Wigan Library

Wigan & Leigh Archive

Anne Wooley

Marjorie and Bill Johnson

Lilian Goulding

Katie Davies

John Churnside

Bill Collins

Brian Gallagher

Paul Finch

Bill Fairclough

Louise Fazakerley

Joan Gratton

Mr Pendlebury

Mr Kennedy

Bill, Marjorie, and Janet Larkin

Pete Coulson

James Walton

Tom Gatley (Drone Pilot)

Tom Stocks (The Chubby Northerner)

Natasha Hawthornthwaite

Scott David Jackson (Poster and Book Design)

And all the participants who attended our creative writing workshop!

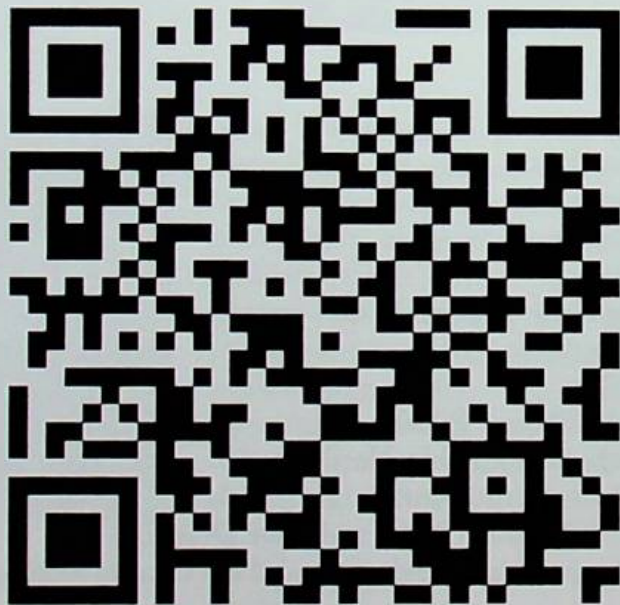
Thank you all so very very much!

Watch our film!

Enjoyed our book?

Want to hear more stories and see some of the people that
contributed to this project?

Scan the QR code below to watch our Letters Across Time short film
and listen to more hidden stories of King Street!



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Northern Heart Films

Inside this special publication is a collection
of letters across time written by local Wigan residents
in celebration of Wigan's famous King Street

A fascinating and emotional journey told by the people
of Wigan through handwritten letters and photographs



**Northern
Heart Films**