

This is the story of an unassuming, talented man who produced a manuscript - a magical manuscript - which wasted away at the back of a wardrobe for over half a century.

Henry Josiah Atty's Wonderful Book

THE story started near Wigan, then moved to nearby Warrington. Henry Josiah Atty was born on 17 November, 1874 in Crow Lane, Newton-le-Willows, the eldest son of George (a printer's compositor) and Elizabeth (nee Malbrow). George Atty had several brothers, one of whom was Richard Hughes Atty, inventor of Atty's Mint Balls - precursor of the world famous Wigan manufactured Uncle Joe's Mint Balls.

Henry had a younger brother, Lawrence, but after their mother died, George married Alice and they had a son, Colin. There is a mystery here as the first time Colin knew of his half-brothers was when Henry turned up at their father's funeral. Colin's son, Michael, who still lives in Wigan, provided this information and has a painting by Henry Atty of Wigan Parish Church and Cenotaph.

We wonder whether Henry did not get on with his step-mother, for the next we hear he is in Warrington, penniless. Befriended by Jack Leech (Pop), he worked opposite him as a compositor at the printing works of the Co-op Wholesale Society (CWS), in Barbauld Street, Warrington. Eventually, however, Henry started his own business at 28 White Street, Warrington, trading as a 'General and Commercial Printer and Stationer'. He produced business cards, posters and scrolls for special occasions, always exquisitely designed with beautiful lettering.

On 7 November 1900 Henry married Margaret Eccleston (Maggie) at St. Paul's Church, Marston, near Northwich, and by 1908 Henry and Margaret were living at 64 Legh Street, Warrington, where they remained for the rest of their lives.

The Booth family, their next-door neighbours for over 40 years, remember them as a kindly couple. They describe Henry as a quietly spoken gentleman, who wore a long overcoat, scarf and trilby in winter and, on spring and summer weekends, would go out, often on his bicycle, with sketchpad and pencils in a roll. Of an evening he would pull out his easel from a corner of the living room in order to paint, sometimes by gaslight. The couple were so poor that he often used cardboard boxes as a canvas.

by Jen Darling



Henry Josiah Atty in the 1940's.

Painting was Henry Atty's relaxation. As far as we know he never sold his work but gave his pictures away as presents and local paintings as wedding presents.

Henry also used to paint and inscribe individual Christmas cards for his friends. One of the ancient Barley Mow pub in Warrington has come to light, which bears the words:

*A healthy and bappy
Christmas and New Year
Friends
For these this prayer of
thankfulness I raise,
For Friends whose presence
cheers the passing days;
Whose kindness helps me on
my Pilgrim way;
Whose courage strengthens,
more than words can say.
I cannot pay this debt in
gold or gem,*



Cover and jacket of Edwardian Rambles and Preface page showing the author's skilful artistry and calligraphy.

*So make me ever worthy
Lord, of them!*

*From M. & H. Atty, 64 Legh
Street, Warrington*

In his later years Henry was known affectionately as 'Old Atty'. He died at home on 12 April 1961, at the ripe old age of 86.

I first heard about Henry Atty when a friend told me about this wonderful book with copper-plate handwriting and water colours of local scenes, owned by a neighbour. **Edwardian Rambles** had lain at the back of Jeanette Morgan's wardrobe since the 1950's. Henry Atty had given the manuscript to her grand-father, Jack Leech, as a present and, as a little girl,

Jeanette can remember getting it out to look at the pictures.

You too can enjoy this craftsman's superb work with paintbrush and pencil, his knowledgeable asides about the historical and literary connections of the area, his visual and written descriptions of the flora and fauna, churches, public houses, and so much more along the way.

Each page is designed, individually illustrated and handwritten by Henry Atty, who would almost certainly be astonished and, we hope delighted, to see his work available now for all to enjoy.

• *Edwardian Rambles is available from all bookshops at £14.95. Otherwise contact Jen Darling of Alfresco Books at 7 Pineways, Appleton, Warrington, WA4 5EJ (Tel/Fax 01925 267503).*