

PAST FORWARD

ISSUE No. 28

SUMMER 2001



The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

WELCOME to the summer edition of *Past Forward* which, as usual, contains a splendid mix of articles by contributors old (or not so young!) and new. 'Old faithfuls' such as Ernie Taberner, Harold Smith, James Fairhurst, Fred Holcroft and Neil Cain are again represented, along with a goodly number of first-time contributors, many of whom have been stimulated to put pen to paper as a result of reading *Past Forward* – something which in all probability they would never otherwise have done. Therein lies one of the many glories of *Past Forward*.

As always, a number of themes have taken shape – this issue sees an excellent analytical article on a particularly emotive aspect of World War I by Fred Holcroft, while Ernie Taberner and 'newcomer' Harold Seddon recall their war years, the latter giving us a splendid insight into his distinguished service with the Grenadier Guards.

The response to James Fairhurst's article in the last issue on Dr. Mary Tomlinson shows that it really is 'a small world' – throughout which *Past Forward* is now widely read. It is gratifying to learn of how so very many people have been put in touch with each other – and again it's all down to *Past Forward*.

Do keep the letters and articles coming in – I obviously can't print everything I receive, but I'll certainly do my best. As always, thanks again for all your interest and support.

The Heritage Service has an Archivist once again – after an unavoidable delay, I am delighted to announce that Alan Davies has recently joined us (see p3). I am particularly pleased to welcome Alan at this time, as the Archives Service – and indeed the History Shop where there is also one unfilled post – has been increasingly busy of late, which has put an additional burden on the Heritage Service staff. They have all responded magnificently, and I am extremely grateful to them. The letters and comments which we receive clearly show that their efforts, and the public service which they provide, are very much appreciated.

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:
Editor, 'Past Forward',
Wigan Heritage Service, Market Suite,
The Galleries, Wigan WN1 1PX

COPY DEADLINE

Please note that the copy deadline for issue no 29 of *Past Forward* is 5 October.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

THIS edition of *Past Forward* carries a special thank you to a good friend to us, Mr. Ted Cheetham. Ted has been a tireless worker in the field of local history and genealogy, not by researching his own history but by making the secrets of local churches and records available to all. He has also been very generous to us at the History Shop over the years, making sure that we always get a copy of his latest

work for our study area.

Often in association with co-worker and typist (!) Mrs. Margaret Davies, Ted has produced many useful titles over the years. Concentrating mainly on areas just outside our borough to the north and west, these titles prove particularly valuable, as they are on areas not previously covered. Here is only a flavour of what Ted has done for us over the years:

- St. Michaels's Croston** – Burial Plan
- Croston Hall R.C.** – Baptisms 1812-1828; Confirmation 1825
- Holy Cross R.C. Croston** – Baptisms 1858-1883; 1964-1984
- Courage Remembered** – Military Memorials of the 1914-18 and 1939-45 Wars
- St. Gregory's Weldbank** – Burial Plan and Memorial Inscriptions
- St. James the Great Heskin with Wrightington** – Burial Plan and Memorial Inscriptions Burials 1857-1933
- St. Joseph's Wrightington** – Baptisms 1839-1992
- St. Peter & Paul Mawdesley** – Baptisms 1856-1993; Marriages 1862-1998; Burials 1856-1885; 1903-1934; 1961-1998. Burial & Cremation receipt books 1981-1998; Monumental Inscriptions; Parish Roll 1846-1866; Living Rosary 1874; Confirmations 1845.
- St. John's Pemberton** – Cemetery Plans
- Roll of Honour for the 53rd Welsh Division on CD**
- Information relating to the Normandy Cemeteries**
- A number of Ordnance Survey maps from the original Lancashire Series 1894-1939**

Quite a list I'm sure you will agree. The latest gem Ted has passed on to us is his work on the parish church at Coppull – plans for the old and new graveyards, full listings of the plots and Monumental Inscriptions. This is now available for study at the History Shop. So once again a heartfelt thank you to you, Ted, for all your hard work – long may it continue.

We can never receive too much help, and despite all Ted's good work there remains much to be done. We are always in need of volunteers or researchers to undertake specific projects. If you feel you may be interested in such work contact Philip Butler at the History Shop or see the section on the Friends (p19).

MYSTERY PARCEL!

Back in May, the Heritage Service received an anonymous gift of photographs. Although we are grateful, we would like to know who sent them, and the names of the people depicted. There are 17 photographs (1 in an oval frame) mainly of family groups. The most interesting are a class of young children at Castle Hill School c.1910, a man in what could be a railway uniform and a group of young girls having a domestic science lesson c.1910. Some of the photographs were taken in Southport and Colwyn Bay (holiday shots?), others in Leigh and Westhoughton studios.

Without information, the usefulness of the pictures is diminished. So would the sender please get in touch with Yvonne Webb, Collections Development Manager (01942 828123).

Cover: This delightful photograph of the Pendlebury's "staff rave-up," c.1950's, has been kindly loaned by Colin Bean (see p21 for details of Colin's story, available from the History Shop). Colin describes the event as "one of the occasions in Wigan Society – almost on a par with the Mayoral Reception! And no, it's not a fancy dress do – people actually dressed like this to go dancing. I shouldn't think there were many rock 'n' roll numbers on the dance card!" Colin's father is standing, first right, while his stepmother is second right, seated.

THERE have been a few changes both in Wigan and Leigh.

Firstly at Wigan David Tetlow has left the History Shop to take up a full time post at the Greater Manchester Police Museum. Those of you who knew Dave will note that he had always kept an interest in the Police Museum, initially as a volunteer and latterly balancing a part time job there with his job share role in the History Shop. I'm sure you will join with us in wishing Dave all the best for the future and thanking him for his work and service in the History Shop.

His departure has left us with one small problem though. He was working on an exhibition dealing

STAFF CHANGES

with the locally recruited 5th Battalion of the Manchesters, 'The Collier Battalion'. Other staff will now be taking this forward but they need your help. If you served with this battalion or know someone who did, and have any stories to tell or can lend us any material, particularly photographs from the 1940's, then the exhibition team would like to talk to you. See the full appeal under History Shop News (p18).

* * *

A new face you may see at the History Shop will be Alex Hodge, who is

working with us as a volunteer, building up useful work experience before embarking on a post-graduate course. Ideally, Alex has his sights set on a career in archive administration, and will be working in our local and family history study area for a month before moving across to Leigh and working with the archive collection.

* * *

Finally, on the subject of our Archive Service, we would like to welcome to the staff Alan Davies our new Heritage Officer (Archives). Alan joins us after many years in

charge of the collections at the Lancashire Mining Museum, not an inappropriate background I'm sure you will agree. He is a local man, living in Tyldesley and knows the area well, and is very keen to get to grips with his new collection. This appointment will herald a return of the popular *Past Forward* slot 'News from the Archives' – but not just yet, we'll let him settle in a little first!

Remember, if you want to make an appointment at the Archives, the searchroom is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but don't forget to book your documents in advance. Alan can be contacted on 01942 404430 at Leigh Town Hall.

HIRE OF MEETING ROOM

The History Shop has a Meeting Room, with a capacity for 36. This is available for hire by local groups and societies at a very reasonable cost:

SOCIETY RATE

£7.80

PER MORNING/ AFTERNOON SESSION

£11.50

PER EVENING SESSION

COMMERCIAL RATE

£18.50

PER MORNING/AFTERNOON/EVENING SESSION

If you are interested, contact Philip Butler

Tel (01942) 828128

The North West Catholic History Society

has great pleasure in announcing the publication of the

Address for the

Dedication of the Hopkins Memorial Plaque,
St. Joseph's Leigh,
9 June 2001

by John McDermott.

The plaque, which reads 'Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ priest and poet – served this church October-December 1879', was dedicated and blessed by the parish priest, Fr. Hughes, on 9 June 2001.

The lecture by John McDermott, which is now published, presents a picture of Hopkins's life and work in Leigh in 1879.

John McDermott lectures in English at the University of Birmingham and is the author and editor of a number of works on Hopkins.

Copies of the lecture are available from me at the address below for £1.50p (post-free).

Mr. B.T. Farrimond
Hon. Treasurer
North West Catholic History Society
11 Tower Hill, Ormskirk
Lancs L39 2EE

Reluctant Soldiers

Wigan's Conscript Tribunals: 1916-1918

by Fred Holcroft

AS THE Great War opened in 1914 there was an overwhelming response to Kitchener's call for volunteers – in the first few months 3000 men from Wigan alone – and although during 1915 numbers coming forward slackened, by December 1915 an amazing 2,466,719 men had signed up.

Originally it had been assumed that Great Britain's contribution to the allied war effort would be naval, industrial and financial and with the Royal Navy keeping open the sea lanes, Britain's pre-war economy and population would remain intact. It was also forecast that the war would only be of short duration.

Alas this was not to be. Modern warfare demanded a prolonged and sustained effort in both munitions and manpower. As voluntary recruitment stagnated the demand for men remained insatiable and compulsory universal military service – conscription – began.

As early as July 1915 the National Registration Act had called for the registration of every resident in Great Britain between the ages of 15 and 65, asking for address, age, marital status, dependants, occupation and degree of skill/qualifications. Men were placed in numbered and lettered groups giving their liability to be called up should compulsory military service be necessary. In one last effort to avoid compulsion Lord Derby attempted to organise a voluntary system where the younger single men would be liable before the older married men. Using the Register all men between the ages of 18 and 41 were asked to "attest" their willingness to serve some

time in the future if they were needed. Results were disappointing and by Christmas 1915 conscription was inevitable.

By January 1916 the Military Service Act had passed into law. All men between the ages of 18 and 41 were liable but a clause in the act allowed exemption to be obtained on the following grounds:

- It is expedient in the national interest that he should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work.
- Arrangements must be made for persons dependent on him.
- Health.
- Conscientious objection to undertaking combatant service.

An important sub-clause added:

Any exemption may be absolute, conditional or temporary and in the case of an application on conscientious grounds may take the form of an exemption from combatant duties only, or be conditional on the applicant engaging in work of national importance.

Further sources of dispute were the grounds on which a conscientious objection could be made. At first, only cases inspired by membership of a religious body were recognised and no political rights to object were allowed. The job of examining requests for

exemption was set at three levels. Firstly, applications were made to local tribunals. The Wigan Tribunal met in the Town Hall every Friday at 6 p.m. Appeals were allowed to a District Tribunal (Wigan's cases were heard in Liverpool) which had discretion to allow further appeals to a Central Tribunal in London.

Local Tribunal members were appointed by the Town Council, whose elected members dominated membership, although there was a genuine effort to reflect local society and to include working class representatives. In Wigan the so-called "Military Representative" was a civilian. In 1916 the Wigan Local Tribunal consisted of:

Cllr. A.E. Boucher
Solicitor
Cllr. J.I. Cartwright
Postal Officer
Ald. A.S. Hilton
Estate Agent
Ald. J.T. Grimshaw
Master Baker
Mr. T. Holland
Tailor
Ald. J.N. Cheetham
Colliery Checkweighman
Ald. T. Ashton
Fishmonger
Cllr. J.T. Arkwright
Tailor
Mr. T.M. Ainscough J.P.
Managing Director
Mr. W. Johnson J.P.
Builder
Mr. R. Prestt
Trade Union Official

The chief gulf between the mainly middle-class Tribunal members and the overwhelmingly working-class applicants was one of age. None of the Tribunal were under 41 – the maximum military age – while very few conscripts

were over 21 – the minimum age to vote.

During the first four months of its existence from March to June 1916, the Wigan Tribunal dealt with 800 cases, then the flood turned to a steady stream. How did the Wigan Tribunal perform?

In the years since 1916 the Tribunals have been given a bad press - they have been accused of bias, prejudice, incompetence and impatience, often acting outside both the letter and the spirit of the law and denying a fair hearing to those with legitimate claims. In the final analysis the local Tribunals must be judged by their behaviour when in session.

Unfortunately all Tribunal minute books were ordered to be destroyed in 1921 and few have survived. The only method now of assessing the local Wigan Tribunal's work is by examining the reports of its proceedings in the local newspapers. Unfortunately here too, reporting restrictions, including closed sessions when spectators were excluded from the public gallery at the request of the applicant, and the omission of some names from the press reports, of necessity curtail the amount of information handed down to us, but an examination of a random selection of individual cases provides a true flavour of the proceedings. The evidence is there to see in print.

Nationwide, only 6% of appeals for exemption heard by local Tribunals were based on conscientious objections to military service and this seems to have been the case in Wigan. There were some very interesting cases in all types of appeal:



A coal dealer applied on behalf of his 19-year old son, employed by the father as a coal bagger. The son was the only support of the father in the business and there were six children in the family. The father said he was under the doctor and if the son was taken he would have to give up the carting side of the business.

Verdict: The man should remain in his group.

A young man wearing an armlet claimed exemption stating that all his three brothers had gone and one had been killed.

Verdict: Exemption for twelve months.

A 19-year old shop manager claimed exemption stating all his three brothers were in the army.

Verdict: Exemption for six months.

The managing director of a local firm of cotton spinners applied for exemption for his 24-year old wages clerk on the grounds that he was more useful nationally where he was. The Tribunal granted conditional exemption to the secretary and the manager. A Tribunal member (referring to the secretary) remarked, "You are depriving the army of a very good vocalist" (Laughter)

Verdict: The wages clerk was granted one month's exemption until the end of the financial year.

A grocer's assistant claimed he was the only son at home to support his sick mother and his brother was a P.O.W. in Germany. Questioned, he told he had three sisters at home all working.

Verdict: The man should remain in his group.

A director of a brewery asked exemption for his head brewer who came under the heading of works chemist.

Verdict: Conditional exemption providing the man remained in his present employment.

A plumber and electrician aged 22 years asked for exemption stating that his father had suffered two strokes and his mother was a cripple. His employer pointed out the firm had to fulfil a contract at the Workhouse and the Girls' High School.

Verdict: Three month's exemption.

A grocery shop manager claimed he was the only support at home as an only son. His father had been a cripple for 24 years and the mother who had worked to bring him up was now too old to work.

Verdict: A case of hardship; postponement for 2 months.

A pub landlady asked for exemption on behalf of her 27-years old son, the pub manager. She claimed her husband had died and left her with six children to bring up. She had bronchitis and recently been confined to bed. "You need a man about the place."

Verdict: The man should remain in his group.

A 34-year old solicitor's clerk said he was the sole support of his widowed mother aged 77 years; that he was the only clerk in the firm, one of the partners was on active service.

Verdict: Exemption for six months.

Similarly a Wigan accountant stated that his articled clerk had already enlisted, only his office boy was left. If he was conscripted the office would be closed and all the other accountants were "packed out with work". He added that now excess profits were being taxed, his work was a source of income to the country.

Verdict: Postponed for two months.

A young man stating his occupation as "a journalist" claimed exemption for domestic reasons. Asked, "Are you on the staff of a newspaper?" he replied, "No". Asked, "How do you

get your living?" he replied, "By writing stories and articles" and the Military Representative commented, "Look what stories you would get in the army." After replying to a question about his weekly earnings a Tribunal member commented that he would earn twice as much fighting and the Town Clerk informed the meeting that his mother would qualify for help from the Mayor's Relief Fund.

Verdict: Exemption for six weeks.

John Coop of Lord Street, Hindley appealed for total exemption from combatant and non-combatant military service having a conscientious objection to both. He stated that he had always been taught by his parents and he held the conviction today that all wars were extremely wicked and that the slaying and maiming of one's fellow creatures in trying to settle national disputes was not the best and wisest way. Giving his occupation as

branch manager of a co-operative shop, he also claimed on domestic grounds because his parents were in ill-health.

Asked how he would settle international disputes he replied, "By arbitration." Asked if the Germans came would he request them to sit down while an arbitration agreement was drawn up he replied, "Where there's a will there's a way." Asked, "How would you settle it if Germany would not agree to arbitration?" he replied, "It's never been put to the test." The Military Representative then remarked that at an earlier Tribunal the applicant had stated that if he saw a wounded soldier bleeding to death he would not help him. "Correct", added Coop, "Why should I assist a wounded soldier to go back fighting, something I wouldn't do myself." In reply to a further question he stated that he would rather be murdered himself than murder another man.

Continued on page 6

SECOND HAND BOOK FAIR

SUNDAY 12th AUGUST

HAIGH HALL
Haigh Country Park
Near Wigan

10 am – 4.30 pm
30 stalls and thousands of books.
These Fairs now in their 2nd year
Admission Charge & Concessions.

North West Book Fairs:
01744 883780

Reluctant Soldiers

Wigan's Conscript Tribunals: 1916-1918

Continued from page 5

Verdict: The man should remain in his group.

Harold Smith of 61 Hodges Street also appealed on conscientious grounds stating that his views as a Christian were wholly contrary to any form of war. At a previous Tribunal he had admitted at the outset of the war he would have gone to the front with a friend had it not been for his mother. "You didn't have a conscientious objection then did you?" he was told, to which he replied, "At the outbreak of the war I had those views but like everyone else I thought surely this war is not like other wars, it is a Christian war; but on looking closer I found it is not, it is no different to other wars."

Verdict: The appeal was dismissed.

Fred C. Critchley, aged 33, a tea warehouseman, asked for exemption on the grounds of serious domestic hardship and a conscientious objection, stating that his services were indispensable to his invalid father's business due to his specialist knowledge and experience of buying and blending tea. Questioned further he replied, "I have a conscientious objection to war. I refuse to take life." Questioned how long he had held these beliefs he replied, "As long as I have been old enough to think for myself." Questioned as to whether he belonged to a religious sect he replied, "None in particular", (although Rev. Binks of Queen's Hall Methodists spoke for him before the Tribunal).

Verdict: Certified for

non-combatant duties.

Eli Ernest Trotter, aged 25, the secretary of the Wigan branch of the Weavers, Winders and Cotton Reelers trade union, claimed exemption because of a conscientious objection to any form of military service in a long statement: "War is wrong from all standpoints. I will not be part of a military machine. I am not refusing to serve out of mere devilment. I have thought seriously about it." Questioned about his political beliefs he stated he had been a member of the Socialist Party and was now active in the I.L.P. Mr. Ackerley remarked, "We all disapprove of war. But we can't help it. We are at war." To which Trotter concluded: "It is impossible for a body of men to judge another man's conscience."

Verdict: Given non-combatant service.

The next case was John Richard Trotter, the brother of the previous applicant. He claimed exemption mainly because he was too small - only 4 ft. 10 ins. His brother now reappeared as a witness and spoke on behalf of the applicant. The Town Clerk asked if he could read a letter he had received from the applicant: "I beg to withdraw my application for exemption. I have no desire to be part of that lot in the Non Combatant Corps. If I have to go I will go as a right man or not at all."

Eli Trotter left the room shouting "He's only little, he'll be no use", at which a Tribunal member called out: "One thing about him, he may be little but he's a man."

Albert Stoker, 22, of 3 Gidlow Avenue, applied for total exemption from combatant and non-combatant service on the grounds that his services were more important at home than in the army and

also on conscientious grounds. He worked for his father who was also interviewed. Young Stoker said he absolutely refused to take part in war under any circumstances because he believed that war was caused by the capitalist classes, and while the common people were fighting the capitalists were reaping the benefits. The father, when asked his profession, replied that he was a manufacturing draper with six shops and that his son worked for him. A Tribunal member called out, "Oh you are a capitalist then!" (Laughter).

There then followed an interesting exchange between the elder Stoker and the Tribunal chairman, ending with the Tribunal member asking: "How many girls do you employ?" Stoker replied, "Between 30 and 40, I am a capitalist". "I think you ought to go into the trenches", suggested the Tribunal member. Stoker replied, "I have been telling people all my life about capitalism", to which the Tribunal member declared, "I'm sorry you belong to this terrible crowd."

Verdict: That the applicant remain in his group.

Certainly the degree of consideration for applicants on compassionate grounds is there to see. The treatment of those who appealed on grounds of conscience was severe, especially to those who did not use religious arguments, but only just over a third of all applicants were placed in combatant groups and almost half of all applicants gained exemptions or postponements.

The period 1916-1918 was the first occasion that conscription had been imposed on Great Britain. Unlike other countries it gave generous exemptions for a wide variety of reasons. While the Tribunal decisions were far from perfect, the proceedings gave valuable experience, so that the Tribunals of 1939-45 (although the enemy was much more clearly definable) carried out their work much more smoothly.

A reading of the local Tribunals' deliberations shows our fellow-townsmen deliberating deep moral problems, at short notice, at a time of grave crisis. They did their best. Could better have been done?

A random selection of cases from the first two months' work of the Wigan Local Tribunal shows the type of decisions they made:

Decisions reached by Local Wigan Tribunal (March-April 1916)	Total applications for exemption	Conscientious objectors only
Remain in group (exemption refused)	36	4
Placed in non-combatant group	4	4
Exemption granted on condition of remaining in present job	16	0
Postponement of Conscription for:		
one month	10	0
two months	5	0
three months	6	0
six months	11	0
twelve months	2	0
Remanded to another local Tribunal	3	0
Adjourned for more information	7	1
TOTAL	100	9

Here are some further memoirs of Molly Hodge (deceased) and a dialect poem written by her daughter.

Wash Day in Gordon Street, Wigan, 1930's

WASH days were very important ones in households in those days, being a day of very hard work, so unlike our press-button and heated driers of the present period. My grandad used to get up at six o'clock in the morning to light the boiler fire in the wash-house for my mother to start the washing at seven. Her only equipment was two 'Dolly Tubs', 'Dolly Legs' (which were three legs with a handle made of wood) which were dished about in the soapy water, a rubbing board, a large mangle (wringer), a stiff and soft scrubbing brush and blue-mottled soap that was so strong that when you used it on the clothes and rubbed it up and down on the 'skiffle board' it took the skin off your fingers. Later on my mother got the use of a 'Poss' (I think it was spelled like that) which was more efficient. I liked to do the job of swishing the

'Dolly Legs' about but didn't care much for the rinsing in 'Dolly Blue' (to make whites whiter than white) – the starching or the mangling was really donkey work, turning that big handle.

Next came the pegging out and on a fine drying day it was a pleasure to see the washing blowing in the wind but on a wet day the drying part was a nightmare, since Monday had to be a laundry day no matter how bad the weather; therefore there could be wet clothes all over the house – hanging on a rack on the ceiling to a maiden round the one fire which meant coming home from school for dinner (lunch time) was quite an ordeal in the long winter months. As soon as the first garments were dry the ironing began, with two flat irons constantly in use. Gas irons followed which stank – both caused callused, difficult-to-heal palms.

Church Walking Day

Arrange't on th'anger white organdie frocks
Black paten' shoes 'n' cotton ankle socks
New vests 'n' knickers laid on't top o't drawer
Fresh posies side bi side in t'cardboard box
We'd ger a cat lick down in't scullery sink
Bi thar excited, couldn't sleep a wink
Wi'd ger up, crack er dawn, to comb our 'air
Tek up mi mam 'n' dad er nice 'ot drink
Wi'd prance in t'front o' t'mirror, feelin' proud
Imagin'in' such wavin' from t'big crowd
Who'd line awlt streets as wi'd bi goin' past
Wi't music from t'brass band still boomin' loud
Awlt lasses well attendin' Sunday School
Would ger er place on t'banner, as er rule
But them us missed er lot would ave t'join ranks
'N' march along at th'end 'n' feel er fool
Wi thowt o' nothing else from t'start o' May
But June procession, even when owt play
Mi sister sometimes cum out wi't remark
"Oh din't we awl use't love church walkin' day"

Elene Humphreys
Mold Flintshire

WATCH THIS SPACE

ReCreate has been working with local residents on the Hag Fold estate recently towards a reminiscence project focusing on life in Hag Fold and Atherton. The project has four main themes: Homelife, School/Work, Entertainment and Hopes for the Future.

Sessions were organised with Hag Fold Youth Club, Devonshire Place and Atherton House Sheltered Housing schemes and Age Concern to work creatively with both younger and older people. Activities have included sharing stories, mask making, drawing portraits, designing questionnaires, and producing profiles and panels of artwork based on their own experiences.

ReCreate will be celebrating this work soon on the Hag Fold estate, to give residents the opportunity to see this collection and meet the people involved.

ReCreate also hopes to expand the project further to involve schools on the estate. So watch this space to find out what happens next. You never know – it could involve YOU!

If you live on the Hag Fold estate and would like to see how you could become involved in this project, or would simply like to know more about the ReCreate project please phone Andrea on 01942 404841.

ReCreate aims to provide new opportunities for people on the Hag Fold estate to become involved in arts, sports, environmental and library activities that contribute to the regeneration of the estate. The ReCreate project is supported by SRB5 Atherton Building Communities, Wigan Council's Leisure and Cultural Services Dept. and Northwest Arts Board's Initiative Fund.

Happy and contented . . .

UNLIKE many *Past Forward* readers "weaned on *Pride and Prejudice*, *Treasure Island*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* or on *Villette*", I was thoroughly satisfied trawling through a *Beano* Comic Annual, a *Rupert Bear* Book and a spon-new copy of Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*.

Though none of our family were addicted readers we were still happy and contented. Our mid 1940's newsagent delivered our daily paper, our *Womans Companion*, *Red Star* and *Red Letter* magazines, plus the *Weekend* (entertainment and local gossip), containing other newspaper. We also took *Boxing News* and the *Children's Newspaper*, which deserve mention as these newspapers "for the young" are no longer available today.

Our Atherton home (123 Mealhouse Lane), like most wartime homes contained a yellowing old family Bible, a few 'Doctoring' remedies books, a *Daily Express* (1937) *Coronation Book* with thick golden coloured covers, *Songs That Will Live Forever* (Odhams Press), some second hand piano-music-sheets and a *Weldons Theatrical Costumiers Catalogue* from which, by ordering outfits, one could instantly become a Pierott, a Knight of the Realm, a Soubrette, a Gypsy fortune-teller, a 'Moth', a Queen of Hearts or even a House that Jack Built! With Father Christmas's regalia donned, one could look festively delightful . . . quite worthy of winning any North Lancashire Carnival even before Christmas.

Readers will hopefully understand by now my mentioning my much admired (late) in-laws, Lucas and Sarah Mason, who spent years raising their family in County Police Street, Ince (later moving to Holt Street, near to Ince Bar itself).

Lucas was born in 1900, in Amar Street, and was a miner in Bickershaw Colliery. He won many book prizes for his attendance at school and Sunday School, including Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* in 1914 and a copy of the *Strand* magazine for Sunday School attendance in 1921. This was a cracking book, with articles by actress Lily Brayton, the escapologist Houdini, and Arthur Conan Doyle, War Correspondent at Cambrai, who was later to write the Sherlock Holmes stories.

It was also around 1921 that this pigeon flying, Ince bred miner married his lifetime millgirl partner (from Careless Lane, Ince), Sarah (Sally) Gibson, whose grandfather was from Dromore in Northern Ireland. Together they spent an admirable lifetime!

Kenneth Lucas
Hindley

'Another Fine Mess You've Got Me Into Stanley'

by Neil Cain

REGULAR readers of *Past Forward* may recall that in 'Let's talk Wiggin' (issue 22) I made mention of my great good fortune in having two uncles, both well into their 90's, who are capable of almost total recall when it comes to events around the time of the First World War.

A few weeks ago, during a conversation with one of them – Stan Morris – he told me how the article on Mary Hodgkinson in issue 26 had triggered memories of his early life as he was born near, and attended social functions at the New Jerusalem church. Would I be interested in hearing his recollections? Needless to say, at the first opportunity – which coincided with Stan's 94th birthday – I headed down to Bournemouth, where he now lives, to chat to him.

Stan was born in Spring Street, off Darlington Street, on 12 April 1907, to John and Ellen Morris (nee Ormerod). He was their third and only surviving child. They had



A youthful Stanley Morris with his Ormerod grandparents in Spring Street, Wigan.

married at St. Thomas's, Wigan on 4 July 1904 and, at the time of their marriage, John was a carter living at 137 Gidlow Lane. Ellen's family had moved to Wigan from Stacksteads, and young Stan was to be close to his grandparents as he grew up; especially so as sadness soon entered his life, in common with many in those tough days.

Stan's father worked for Wigan Council at their Sovereign Road Works near the old gasworks. He looked after horses and it was

possibly this that led to him contracting erysipelas – or St. Anthony's fire, an inflammatory disease leading to shivering fits and glandular swelling. The Council put sand down in the street to deaden the sound of passing traffic in an effort to ease John Morris's suffering but, as Stan recalls, the kids collected it for sandcastles. Sadly John died on 11 June 1913, aged 31, at 91 Spring Street, leaving Stan – only six – the man of the house.

One of Stan's abiding memories of his father is being taken to Central Park to watch Wigan RLFC play. This was in the legendary era of Leytham, Jenkins, Todd and Miller. Being only small Stan was held aloft on his father's shoulders.

Another vivid memory is that of watching coal pickers on the local tips during the bitter miners' strike of 1912. Even at that tender age he could sense the tension between the miners and the authorities.

Unexploded bomb

The death of her husband meant Ellen had to take on war work the following year, doing 12-hour shifts alternating between night and day. Stan retains memories of living through the Great War, most notably seeing soldiers around the town and, of course, the Zeppelin raid which occurred on his 11th birthday. Nearby Harper Street fell victim to the bombing which demolished three houses and killed Mr. and Mrs. Tomlinson, but in addition Stan tells me that a

sweet shop in Darlington Street, opposite Seddons the bakers, had an unexploded bomb outside and had to be roped off. During the bombing, which occurred about midnight, Stan and his mother, who had roused him from his bed, stood in Darlington Street until things calmed down.

Despite the hardships of war he told me he never went hungry. His Ormerod grandparents, who lived a few doors down in Spring Street, would give him bread pudding as he returned home from school. He also has a vivid memory of their neighbour, Mrs. Milligan, saying "Com 'ere, yer little ****, I'll teach thee. Purrin' yer 'ands in t' pockets" – and she sewed up the pockets on his trousers!

Living in Spring Street meant that Stan attended the local Warrington Lane council school near the old railway bridge, over the 'Smoothing Iron' pub. His schoolmates included Maurice Webster and his brother, members of the well known family of coach firm operators, George Wilkinson, whom he thinks was a nephew of Inspector Pey (Wigan's famous Chief Constable), and also Jackie Downes, Tommy Richardson, Eric Poulson, Anna Keegan and May Speakman. Could any of these still be alive?

The schoolmasters at this period were led by Mr. Middlehurst, and latterly by Mr. Fillingham. As boys paraded in front of Mr. Middlehurst on their last day in the school, he would hit them around the head saying, "That'll teach you to tell right



John Morris, Stanley's father with a Wigan Council horse.

from wrong”, then he would give them each a book from the school library with the exhortation to “Keep your reading up.”

Being the man of the house in those days meant that, in spite of still being in school, Stan had to go to work after finishing at 4 pm. His first job was at Phillips the chemist on the corner of Wallgate, near the Clarence Hotel and L & Y Station. For two and a half-hours work each evening he received 5s. per week (25p). Stan used to take the discarded spectacle lenses to school to play with; however, Mr. Middlehurst, imagining them to have been taken from Phillips’ improperly, marched Stan down to Wallgate whereupon his name was cleared.

Dogsbody

His next job was that of dogsbody in the house of Alfred Hewlett of Wigan Coal and Iron Company (remembered now by Hewlett Street). The house, in Basin Lane, Haigh, provided a real jump in salary to 10s. weekly, for which shoe cleaning, carpet beating and running errands for cook were required. At this rather grand house Stan remembers the daughter who had horses – it was a window into another world.

After leaving Hewletts, Stan went to work at the well known outfitters, Ellors, at the top of Makinson Arcade, where he cleaned windows, swept floors and brought boxes down from the storeroom for manager Mr. Fowles and the staff – George Davis from Crosby, a Mr. Fairclough and a lady assistant. From his time at Ellors comes a wonderful story indicative of Stan’s playful nature and the era itself. Every Saturday Stan would take a packed lunch to work, and on one occasion it was a meat pie. A mouse had been discovered in the

storeroom and a piece of said pie was used to bait the trap. The mouse was duly caught, but what to do with it? “Your pie caught it, you get shot of it” was the helpful response.

Now it so happened that Manager Fowles had his midday meal sent in from a restaurant – possibly Wynards – from across the Market Place. The dead mouse was therefore placed between the now empty plates for the return journey to the restaurant. A young lass on kitchen duties found the mouse at washing up time and screamed blue murder! Stanley’s head was now on the block instead of the mouse’s. He recalls Mr. Fowles saying, “I’ve got to be seen to act”, but he did provide a good reference for the departing pest controller!

About this time Ellen Morris decided to move to a larger house in Spring Grove, on the other side of Darlington Street. This allowed her to take in lodgers, especially visiting acts playing at Wigan Hippodrome in King Street. Every weekend Stan would go to the L & Y or North Western stations to intercept the touring companies arriving for the following week’s entertainment. The ticket collectors would tip him off as to likely arrival times and then he would tout for lodgers and carry their bags to Spring Grove.

Turning point

1920 was to prove to be a turning point in Stan’s life as that year saw his mother marry again, at St. Catherine’s Church; this time to a Liverpoolian, Thomas Archdeacon. He also got his first full-time job, at Gibson & Young’s, at the age of 13. The company’s yard was in Hallgate and it was here that he started emptying crates of crockery. He also learned to drive the three Ford vans around the yard, and eventually the owner – Mr. Stent – said that if he could get a licence he could

drive the commercial traveller to his calls when he sold glasses to local pubs. As this salesman took a drink at every port of call, he needed a driver! I asked Stan about the procedure for obtaining a licence in those days (by now 1923) and he told me you just went to the police station, filled in a form, paid 5s. and that was that – no test, or anything. So at 15 years of age Stan was on the road, a position which lasted about another two years. He laughs at the memories of those days, one of which involved them stopping off in Horwich so that the commercial traveller could use the toilets (small wonder!) He went into the ladies by mistake, only to reappear as if the hounds of hell were after him – pursued by a number of irate ladies.

Got the sack

After about five years with the firm, Stan got the sack after refusing to drive to Widnes in the dark after an already full day. He explained

to Mr. Stent that by the time they reached Widnes it would be opening time and that publicans didn’t want salesmen calling, but it was to no avail and so another chapter was about to start. His stepfather was a signalman on the old Great Central Railway and it was he who now got him a job at the sheds between Darlington Street and Warrington Lane. This was to be a happy time for Stan, but we leave him here for the time being, at 18 years of age.

Footnote:

Last year Stan returned to Wigan to inter the ashes of his beloved wife Jenny in Ince Cemetery after 67 years of marriage, and whilst in town visited the site of Ellors – now a mobile phone shop – and the Gibson & Young stall on the indoor market. Here he made the acquaintance of the present owner – 80 years after starting work for the company. What changes he has seen!

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In his penultimate article on the life of Ellen Weeton, Alan Roby emphasises the vital importance to Miss Weeton of her religious faith. He also provides much background information about the religious turbulence - locally and nationally - of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Ed.

ELLEN WEETON

(1776-1849)

GOVERNESS

'In Heavenly Love Abiding'

ELLEN Weeton's faith, from childhood, was a vital part of her life. Throughout her writings references to the Almighty abound. There is ample evidence of her faith, which although at times fluctuates from doubt in the Trinitarian God to absolute belief in Christian truth, is continuous for the duration of her letters to correspondents. In addition, her faith is espoused in her 'religious diary' under the title *Occasional Reflections for the year 1818* and also in a fragment entitled *The History of the Life of N. Stock, 1824*.

Her *Retrospect*, written in 1824, is an autobiographical account of her life from birth to the year 1809. That account informs us that very soon after the family's arrival in Upholland from Lancaster, in May 1784, they quickly became immersed, both spiritually and socially in the life of the Established church of St. Thomas The Martyr. Miss Weeton informs us that her mother "has many a time entertained little tea-parties" in the garden of their Church Street cottage home, consisting only of clergymen and their wives.

Repelled

Principled and a disciplinarian throughout her life, Miss Weeton was, not surprisingly, repelled by what she saw in adulthood as non-Christian attitudes, both in the Established church and in her Protestant friends of whom she was "much pained at their want of charity". She was particularly critical of the "frequent

profligacy of the [Protestant] clergy, [which] first shook my faith to the foundations. . ." Instinctively averse to 'pomp and ceremony', she condemned both the Established and Catholic churches. That response was emphasised after a visit, for the first time, to see high mass performed at the consecration of the stone for the new chapel* on 27 January 1818:

"What I witnessed this day, filled me with the utmost astonishment that so many millions of people, possessing as much natural sense and discernment as myself, could be so led by such boyish pageantry, or imagine for a moment that Christ, whose 'Kingdom was not of this world,' whose life was utterly devoid of grandeur or finery, should be pleased with that now, which he censured whilst he was among us in his human nature."

Highly intelligent, Miss Weeton questioned many of the then current practices of both the Established and Roman Catholic

*This may have been St. Mary's R.C. Church, Standishgate, Wigan.

churches. She mocked the fashionable beliefs of Theism and later Deism. And Atheism was anathema to her as was Antinomianism and Socinianism. She had some sympathy with the Society of Friends (Quakers) but seems never to have reached a conclusive opinion of the newly dissenting Methodists. Perhaps this was because for many years after the death of John Wesley, in 1791, Methodism was in a state of turmoil.

Grow in grace

She had come to believe that she was not a Christian. The discovery that she needn't strive for personal perfection through slavish devotion to duty but instead could simply grow in grace through faith, is clearly illustrated by her following comment: ". . . I should have gone on heedlessly to my last hour, imagining myself to be a very dutiful child of God, all the time trusting in my own works." And so "turning disgusted from the pompous folly of our Churches and Clergy, and knowing nothing of the Dissenters [probably Methodists], the apparent simplicity of the Quakers had strong attractions for me. For years I went on thus unsettled, never being fortunate enough to become acquainted with one religious Protestant family or individual, yet seeking them wherever I went."

In her constant seeking a method of worship that best reflected her religious instincts she once attended the churches of three different denominations in one day: "the Church [of England] in the morning, the Presbyterian Chapel in the afternoon, and the Methodist meeting at night."

For a time, whilst a resident in Liverpool (August 1808–December 1809), she had been influenced by Deists, whose belief was in a God, detached from the world. This rationalistic thought denied the divinity of

Christ and the supernatural authority of the scriptures. Struggling to believe in Christ's divinity, she pleaded in prayer:

"that Jesus Christ should be Thy Son, is what my faith has not yet had strength to believe. If he were, indeed God, thine only son, help me to believe, and that soon; delay not the time, that these pages which have now recorded my doubts may shortly record my comfort."

Imperceptibly, yet resolutely, a change was taking place in Miss Weeton's thinking about Christianity; not so much in the truth of Christianity but how best to interpret and express that truth. Ironically it was to be the "frequent profligacy" of the clergy of the Established church, to which she belonged, which became the catalyst for change.

'Independency

How she finally came to 'Independency' is not clear. But a clue is provided by a conversation on a stagecoach journey from Liverpool to Wigan in 1813. The passengers in the coach had been gently arguing about religion most of the way. Miss Weeton had been much impressed by "a fat man, who acknowledged himself a Calvinist; his religion appeared to be in his heart. I took sides with the Calvinist." A year later she was married to a Calvinist by the name of Aaron Stock, who was a member of St. Paul's Independent Chapel, Standishgate, Wigan. And she was to ultimately find comfort in the, 'Old Dissent' of 'Independency' – but not alongside her husband.

When forced by 'Deed of Separation' from both her husband and child, Mary, she went back to live in Upholland. It was whilst there in October 1822 that she heard that a "congregation at Farr(sic) Moor Chapel, are about to form a regulated body for the first time

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CHRISTIANITY IN 'THE AGE OF REASON'

THE 18th century was the 'Age of Reason' and the church was undergoing a challenge to its beliefs. There was widespread paralysis in religion throughout England in the early years of the century.

The courts of the first two Georges were immoral; the Established church was affected by jobbery and corruption, exacerbated by absenteeism, 'plurality of livings' and nepotism. Much of its teaching and preaching was overly cautious. Moderation was exalted and any kind of 'enthusiasm' was condemned. This was partly because of a general weariness following the sustained religious controversies of the 16th and 17th centuries.

The masses were ignorant and brutal; drunkenness, robbery, murder and infidelity were rampant. The private character of leading politicians was, on the whole, bad. The majority of the clergy had been described as "the most lifeless in Europe" and were content to remain without zeal. The better clergy were deeply pessimistic about the future of the Established church and the Christian religion.

Deistic and Trinitarian controversies raged throughout the 18th century, not only in England but also in France, resulting in the fearful Reign of Terror in 1793-4. Just a few years earlier the faith of many intellectual people had been shaken when in 1776 (the year of Ellen Weeton's birth), Gibbon's *'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire'* was published. Gibbon accounted for the spread of Christianity largely as an agent of that Empire. Thomas Paine followed with his *'Rights of Man'* in 1791-2; the articulate artisan, so fashioned by Wesley, was well prepared to read this inspiring work or have it read to him. Sadly he followed this with *'The Age of Reason'*, written as a prisoner in France during the Reign of Terror, based on the Theism of Robespierre and highly offensive to Christianity and to his own reputation.

The 'Old Dissent' too – Presbyterians, Independents (Congregationalists) and Baptists – were also in a state of gloom and depression. The other churches were in no better condition. The Roman Catholic minority was slowly declining, clinging on in places where it was well represented – Lancashire especially – to the old faith, but experiencing no real growth till Irish immigration began in the 1790's. The overall picture was truly bleak.

Various pamphlets, some published anonymously, attempted to trace the decay of the dissenting interest to every imaginable source. The generally accepted conclusion was that the serious numerical decline was accompanied by a spiritual decline. Much of this could partly be attributed to various Acts of Parliament in the 17th century: the act of Uniformity (1662), the Five Mile Act (1665), the Conventicle Act (1664, 1670) and the Toleration Act (1689).

Schisms abounded. Many dissenting churches drifted into Arianism, then Socinianism then Unitarianism, as well as losing members to the Established church. Dr. Joseph Priestley, ordained in the Presbyterian ministry when he came to Warrington Academy in 1761, became a leading Unitarian in Britain and America.

In truth the church was not dead, but merely slumbering. It would soon awaken with renewed vigour through the work of John and Charles Wesley; though it would be a mistake to trace all mid-18th century revival back solely to the Wesley brothers.

Among other prominent activists for change were George Whitefield and Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. For a time John Wesley and George Whitefield combined their great energies until irreconcilable differences over doctrine occurred. Arminian John Wesley expounded Martin Luther's idea of 'justification by God through faith', whereas Calvinist George Whitefield expounded John Calvin's precept of God's sovereignty – which accepts that everything that happens is due to the will of God. Luther put great stress on what Christ did for the human heart in bringing men and women in to peace and harmony with God. Calvin was very different. He believed the church needed re-forming. God's sovereignty and man's total corruption being fundamental to belief. In practice this was largely



A print by Hogarth, published in 1736, entitled 'A Sleepy Congregation in a Country Churchyard'. It depicts the Established Church's tendency to dispose the congregation to somnolency through the deliberate avoidance of 'any kind of enthusiasm'.

interpreted that God has pre-destined some people to be saved and some to be damned. Predestination at its worst created a barrier to evangelism. What would be the point if God had already decided things beforehand?

Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, who was greatly influenced by Whitefield, was one of the most colourful figures to emerge in the 18th century, and spent large sums of money in evangelising the dark parts of the country. She gathered around her men of rank and intelligence, in addition to applying her own wealth and funds raised to train and support clergy, who were considered as her chaplains. Her followers were known as Lady Huntingdon's Connexion.

Unfortunately for Wesley, before his death in 1791, Whitefield founded the community known as the 'Calvinist' Methodists, which upheld the same Calvinistic teachings as the 'Old Dissent' of Independency. Wesleyan Methodism, as it officially became known from 1739, was part of the 'New Dissent'. After Wesley's death in 1791 various offshoots arose which very gradually coalesced.

J. A. Roby.

ELLEN WEETON
(1776-1849)
GOVERNESS

**'In Heavenly Love
Abiding'**

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since Mr. Holgate came amongst them." Far Moor (Orrell, near Wigan) is about one mile distant from Upholland.

In due course Miss Weeton became a Sunday School teacher at Salem Congregational Church, Far Moor. Unfortunately things did not run smoothly for her at Salem, believing as she did that Rev. Steill (Minister of St. Paul's Independent Chapel, Standishgate, Wigan) had been "calumniating me in bitterest manner" to Mr. Holgate. This resulted in Miss Weeton being asked to answer alleged charges against her character. The fact that she had become 'legally'

separated from her husband and daughter through no fault of her own was irrelevant, and being 'only a woman' was not in her favour.

To be fair to Holgate, he appears to have been scrupulously fair and non-judgmental towards Miss Weeton and talked to her at length in private, prior to a meeting in her presence, with church members, in his parlour on Sunday, 20 October 1822:

"Imagine what I felt like going in, and seeing ten or twelve illiterate, coarse-looking, poor men and women, before whom I had voluntarily brought myself, and who appeared to receive me as a poor criminal, come only that they might pronounce sentence; for I found that I had previously been tried and condemned, not in a Christian kind of way, but like the Inquisition in Spain, where the criminals were never confronted with their accusers, nor told what they were accused

of. . .

Mr. Holgate spoke of the very favourable character he had heard of me by all the neighbouring people, but there were one or two present whose minds could not be easy to receive me, and he asked me if I could be content to be elected by a majority only, and not unanimously. I asked what these had to say. Not one person spoke. I rose, and bid them all goodnight.

"Heavenly friend"

My Heavenly friend was with me, and I left them without any feelings of resentment. . . On the 21st (Monday night) Mr. Roby came to form them into a Church. Of course, I did not go."

It is an indication of Miss Weeton's strength of character that that incident did not shake her faith but she did consider going back to the Church [of England] and also, alternatively,

to the Methodist Chapel at Lamberhead Green (Pemberton, near Wigan). In the end she defied the 'Deed of Separation', banning her from within two-and-a-half miles of Wigan centre, to attend Hope Congregational Chapel, Mesnes Lane, Wigan (seceded from St. Paul's Independent Chapel, Standishgate).

It was at Hope Chapel that Miss Weeton became acquainted with Rev. William Marshall, who had married the daughter of a Mr. Marsden of Wigan. Both Rev. and Mrs. Marshall became close friends of Miss Weeton, as also was Mr. Marsden.

In August 1824 Miss Weeton removed from Upholland to live in Prescott, to be within acceptable distance to Parr Hall, near St. Helens, where her daughter Mary was boarding. She was also within



INDEPENDENT DISSENT AND

THE persecutions of the 17th century had driven nonconformity out of the towns into the rural districts. It is probable that Wigan nonconformists had an interest in the existence of the Presbyterian chapels at Tunley, Mossy Lea, Wrightington (1691), Abram Hall (1691-2), Park Lane, Ashton-in-Makerfield (1697-8) and Hindley (1700). And for many years these chapels would have been attended by hearers from both town and country.

Wigan's first purpose-built nonconformist chapel was Trinity Presbyterian Chapel, erected 1769 in Chapel Lane; the next nonconformist chapel to be built was the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, erected 1775 in the Buck-i'-th'-Vine Yard, Wallgate, and opened by John Wesley in 1776.

Wigan's nonconformists of the Independent or Congregational persuasion had been meeting fairly regularly in a large room at the Sign of the Bear's Paw, Wallgate, and preachers travelled there from places like Horwich, Rainford and St. Helens. About the year 1780, several dissenting ministers attempted to establish an Independent or Congregational chapel in the town without success. However, news of the town's 'wicked' and 'destitute' status had reached the ear of Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. Soon afterwards a chapel was built by her in the town and operated under the *Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion*. Rev. John Johnson, one of the first six

students ordained in that Connexion, came to Wigan as its minister in 1783.

Under his able ministry the congregation considerably increased, leading to the need for greater accommodation. In 1785 a new chapel was erected in Standishgate and named 'St. Paul's Chapel'. It was opened by Rev. Johnson himself, in keeping with the wishes of Lady Huntingdon, whose name was attached to the deeds.

Among his first converts was a man who was destined to be not only an eminent minister but instrumental in founding the Congregational Union. His name was William Roby. Roby was born at Haigh, near Wigan on 23 March 1766, and was educated at Wigan Grammar School. After later 'conversion' he attended the Countess of Huntingdon's seminary for theological study at Trevecca, in South Wales. He returned to Wigan to become assistant preacher to Johnson. Their joint

labours did not continue for long. Johnson had noted that young William Roby had talents that could be more profitably employed in 'separate stations'. In due course Johnson left Wigan leaving Roby in sole charge.

As expected Roby proved a popular minister and was seven years at Wigan before he began to notice a change in the attitude of the congregation. At the same time Roby himself, along with other discerning and pious persons in the



'St. Paul's Chapel', Standishgate, opened by Rev. John Johnson in 1785 on behalf of Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon.

reasonable distance to friends in Liverpool.

Even though she had become a member of Prescott Independent Church, it is clear she was not altogether satisfied with her situation at Prescott. It is equally clear that her less pertinacious enemies at Wigan were indicating a desire to change the state of affairs which was so obviously injurious to her daughter Mary's moral and physical well being. Pressure was slowly being brought to bear. The iniquitous residential ban was duly lifted and following a meeting held on Thursday evening, 22 July 1827, her friend and adviser Rev. William Marshall penned: 'Mrs. Stock [Miss Weeton], who had been admitted a Member of the Independent Church in Prescott, requested to be allowed to fill a place in our Church, having become resident in Wigan. No objections being offered, her name was ordered to be enrolled.'



Rev. William Marshall, friend and confidante of Ellen Weeton.

Two years later the mother's heart must have further rejoiced. On 7 June 1829: 'Mary Stock was this evening received into the Church by the general consent of the members present.' Four years later on 2 July 1833, the young initiate advanced into full church membership alongside her mother.

My opinion differs somewhat from Edward Hall, editor of *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess*, who believed "religion was not an innate principle" in Miss Weeton, whom he believed to be a "freethinker, following her own inclinations in regard to denominational religion." My own view is that religion was very much an innate principle in her. She was, I believe, conditioned by the age in which she lived and influenced by the events of her time. Highly intelligent, she was aware of the many conflicting religious ideas and methods of worship, and struggled in its complexity to find the truth.

Like many of us today, she had doubts, which arise when one system of knowledge is allowed to tyrannise over another. But honest doubt does not mean the abandonment of faith, merely wanting to get to the heart of the matter.

Perhaps Tennyson best

clarifies it in two verses from his philosophical poem *In Memoriam*:

**Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.**

**He fought his doubts, and gathered strength;
He would not make his judgement blind;
He faced the spectres of the mind,
And laid them: thus he came at length**

To find a stronger faith his own . . .

● *The last of Alan Roby's articles on Ellen Weeton will appear in the next issue of Past Forward (no. 29). This excellent series began as long ago as autumn 1998, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of her death. Ed.*

SECESSION IN WIGAN 1775-1825

congregation, became increasingly dissatisfied with the order and forms of worship, as planned and dictated by the Countess of Huntingdon. After much thought and prayer it was decided to abandon a strictly liturgical form of worship and to seek ministers of the Congregational order. The proposed changes had the hearty approval of Roby because of his increasing belief in the concept of the 'gathered church', which became identified with the Congregational form of Independency.

Towards the end of 1795 Roby left Wigan to take up a position at Cannon Street Independent Chapel, Manchester.

This was the time when the uses of liturgies, vestments, rituals and even musical aids were much in dispute. And people attending church services were very observant in detecting any supposed error of doctrine in preachers' words, or any departure from 'faith'. Such was the atmosphere in the Wigan of Miss Weeton's time.

Miss Weeton herself was particularly censorious of ardent Calvinist, Rev. Alexander Steill, minister of St. Paul's Independent Chapel, Standishgate from 1809 to 1832. She wrote of him as being "a very worldly-minded kind of man, haughty and overbearing, and of a most bitter temper." The fact that she had

matrimonial troubles and Steill was a friend of her husband would not, of course, predispose a charitable opinion towards him. Despite the fact that Steill was clearly a man of "superior attainments in theology", others too had similar opinions to Miss Weeton.

It was partly due to Steill's extreme Calvinistic views that a number from St. Paul's congregation seceded to Hope Congregational Chapel, Mesnes Lane, and also to the Baptist Chapel, Lord Street.

Mr. Edmund Alston, one of the first members of Hope Congregational Chapel and a deacon and trustee, recorded of St. Paul's Independent Chapel in the summer of 1810, when Rev. Alexander Steill was minister:

'Uneasiness among the congregation broke out in various forms . . . Many of the people left the place and assembled for worship in rooms, and some went to the Baptist Chapel, a place of worship that had been erected some years previously in consequence of a separation that had taken place from St. Paul's immediately after Mr. Roby left Wigan. The then minister of the Baptist interest was considered a very pious and sincere man, and had in other places been the instrument of doing more good in the cause of religion than some who possessed greater talents as preachers. It may be proper to remark here that the separatists from St. Paul's Chapel were characters of various degrees of

religious sentiment, some of the Antinomian cast, others nearly allied to those views; yet there were many whose principles might be considered moderate and scriptural.'

This was opened in 1818 and its first minister was Rev. John Ralph. After his death in 1822 his successor was to become Miss Weeton's close friend and confidante, Rev. William Marshall, whose ministry at Hope was to last for 39 years. Before coming to Wigan Rev. Marshall had been pastor of Macclesfield Congregational Church from 1818 to 1822.

Miss Weeton wrote:

"I went to Wigan last Sunday (4 May 1823) to Hope Chapel where Mr. Ralph preached; since his death Mr. Marshall from Macclesfield has succeeded to the Chapel. I was there by half past 9 and visited the school. I was most gratifyingly received (for I have not been at the place since I ceased to reside in Wigan [April 1822] until the 4th inst.) Mr. Marshall and several others told me that when I left the school diminished lamentably and continued to do so until lately. It now revives again. My old pupils are all gone, except 2 or 3 who are now become teachers. They received me most affectionately. I think I shall go often when the weather permits, taking my dinner in my pocket, as I did last Sunday, and eating it in the school, or at Mr. Marsden's, father-in-law to the Minister."

J. A. Roby.

A TOWN CLERK'S STORY

IN 1920, Mr. Tyrer, Wigan's Town Clerk, was appointed to a similar position with the Metropolitan Borough of Hackney. Wigan Corporation begged him to reconsider and remain with them, for the town was passing through a difficult time and there were many anticipated projects for the future. As Mr. Tyrer declined to approach the Hackney Corporation to release him, Wigan Corporation sent a deputation to plead with that body, with the result that Mr. Tyrer remained as Wigan's Town Clerk.

William Henry Tyrer was born in Whelley in 1876 and was educated at Wigan Grammar School, and later at the Wigan and District Mining and Technical College in Library Street. He began his legal career as an office boy with Messrs. Peace and Ellis, a well-known firm of solicitors in King Street. In 1902 he was appointed common Law Assistant in the Town Clerk's office in Salford, and served his articles with Mr. L.C. Evans, the Town Clerk, being admitted as a solicitor in 1910. His appointment in that city coincided with a great period of municipal activity, which included the change over from horse-drawn to electric trams.

At the age of 36, in 1911, Mr Tyrer was appointed Town Clerk of Wigan. He was chosen from 45 applicants. Apart from statutory duties, Mr. Tyrer worked hard during the first World War to relieve the families of the servicemen in the town, and was honorary secretary to many of the funds instituted by the War Mayors, including (to name only a few) the National Relief Fund, the local War Fund, the Air Raid Fund, etc. For these and other war services he was awarded the O.B.E. from the King and the Medaille du Roi Albert from the Belgian King for his work for the Belgian War Refugee Fund. Mr. Tyrer was also



*William Tyrer
(1876-1947)*

the honorary secretary of the Maypole Disaster Fund which was inaugurated in 1908 to assist dependants and relatives of the 75 men and boys who lost their lives in the disaster. After the war Mr. Tyrer acted as Secretary of the Wigan division of the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association, and he was also the representative of the numerous local regimental Funds.

In 1919, Mr. Tyrer performed a particularly notable feat of municipal business on Wigan's behalf. Manchester City Corporation promoted a Parliamentary Bill which sought to repeal the of the Wigan Corporation and other authorities to take water from Thirlmere and to substitute rights which, in Mr. Tyrer's view, meant having to pay, year by year, to the Manchester Corporation a larger sum for the Thirlmere water. On Mr. Tyrer's advice, Wigan opposed the Manchester Bill, with the result that Wigan's right was preserved.

During the depression years following the 1926 strike, the Lord Mayor of London set up a Distress Fund to assist the deprived areas, and it was argued that Wigan was

not eligible to be included. Mr. Tyrer prevailed on the Earl of Derby and Lord Crawford to intervene on Wigan's behalf. The outcome was Wigan's inclusion in the scope of the Fund, the town benefiting to the extent of £66,000. As a reward for his work in administering the Fund locally and for other services – chiefly to his native Lancashire – Mr. Tyrer was awarded the C.B.E. in 1937.

In 1933, Mr. Tyrer was made a Freeman of the Borough of Wigan. The ceremony took place in the Town Hall during the Mayoralty of Councillor Walter Atherton, and resolutions were passed which placed on record Wigan's high appreciation of its Chief Clerk. In 1936, Mr. Tyrer celebrated his Silver Jubilee as Town Clerk, and in 1938 the honorary degree of LL.M. was conferred on him at Liverpool University.

Not the least interesting feature of Mr. Tyrer's career was the number of men who trained under him who subsequently became Town Clerks – of Paddington, Croydon, Derby, Oldham, Swindon, Durham, Clitheroe, Macclesfield and Lytham St. Annes, proving beyond doubt that he had the faculty of passing on his knowledge to others, a gift not given to all men.

Mr. Tyrer was associated with Wigan Parish Church and he was a member of the Parochial Church Council. His wife Ellen, who was a Justice of the Peace for the County, pre-deceased him in December 1937. Mr. Tyrer died of a heart attack on 27 March 1947 at the age of 71; he left one son, also a solicitor. When the news of his death was known flags were flown at half-mast on the Town Hall, Wigan Parish Church and other buildings. It was said of him at the funeral that loyalty was the keynote of his personality and his loyalty to his native town was outstanding. He loved Wigan as few men loved the town and his official life was devoted to its betterment. He was buried in St. David's Church at Haigh.

James Fairhurst

Perpetuum Mobile

HOW often we hear older people remark that time goes faster than it used to. On that very subject not long ago an article appeared in *The Daily Mail* which went to great lengths to prove that this was scientific fact. I have to confess, however, that somewhere in the middle of the second sentence, I lost the gist. I suspect I am not alone in the feeling that throughout eight decades and a bit, the passage of time does seem to have accelerated. Something seems to have decreed that everything should be done at an ever-increasing speed, evoking such thoughts as uttered by Benjamin Franklin in the 18th century. *Time is Money*. There may of course be substance in the thought that this apparent impetuosity might be borne of man's primitive existence on our planet, when the quality of his agility was related to whether he was the eater or the eaten.

The word *impetuosity* may not fit exactly but those of us who may be carrying our bats throughout a very long innings will no doubt sympathise with the choice when remembering the time we received the first few balls, when the light, the line and the ease of dealing with them was comparatively far more leisurely and possibly instinctive.

So at what stage in our own lives did the old impostor impetuosity introduce himself to us? Perhaps it was as far back in life as the toddler stage when one day it was realised that our rate of progress was far faster than that of some days previous; that being so, tomorrow we would try to improve our performance. Or was it more likely to have been a few more years hence when the ability to run became attended by an urge to run faster – the first building block of impetuosity or perhaps

simply the desire to show off. Perhaps these were the early days of a development of matching, or even beating, the speeds of fellow beings of a similar age bracket.

Smelly jerseyed kid

That bracket in my life would be about the mid 1920's when I had just about become inured with life at infant school, today euphemistically referred to as educational integration. Then, it was a heaven sent opportunity for parents to get the little *****'s fer under t'feet. But that old impostor was there in the schoolyard even then. It was terribly important to have acquired a decent level of agility if one were to avoid the embarrassment of being last in the line in a game of "Sheep, sheep come home" and taken to the wolf's lair by some smelly jerseyed kid you couldn't stand the sight of. Or in the scramble to avoid such embarrassment, you collected a bloody ankle or

shin via someone's clog iron.

There were, of course, such events as the Sunday School Field Treat where one could partake in the 100 yard dashes, whereby acquiring first hand knowledge of just how fast one could run in comparison with kids of similar age. The result might end in family euphoria for the following year should one walk off with the laurel wreath or it could end up in the most unpalatable and damnable knowledge that proved beyond doubt that the snotty nosed kid from next door to the entry could give you a three yard start.

Three motor cars

Our village, population about 300 at the time, could sport only about three motor cars and even passing vehicles were few and far between, each one probably known to every villager. There would be the open lorry type such as the Co-op delivery wagon (a Karrier if I remember correctly) and a smaller version of the same description. Mick Finnegan's Ford Model "T" of the same description was an ever present vehicle, always driven by a female (about the same national incidence of female driver as smoking in those days) of the Finnegan family. There was no bus service until about 1927 when Websters of Wigan began one starting in Ashton to serve such places as Bryn, Downall Green, Sims Lane End, Garswood, Pewfall and Haydock, the terminus being The Huntsman Hotel. There were just two buses daily. After a few years the service was taken over by Lancashire United who were still running

it when I left the area at the end of 1938.

As will be gathered from that picture, our village could never have been mistaken for Brooklands or Monte Carlo, the pace of life remaining fairly static for years. There were, however, certain occasions that turned heads, young and old, like when the sound of the throaty exhaust of Dr. Hugh Mather's open topped Sunbeam heralded his approach and all play was stopped on the croft for the witnessing of the passage of his huge, fabric bodied open tourer.

In a similarly arresting way, there was the occasional visit to Mick Finnegan's grocery store of a steam driven open wagon delivering bagged flour from Paul Brothers Ltd., Birkenhead. I suspect that "it" may have been one of a fleet of what might be termed today as state of the art steam road wagons, the make of which I cannot be sure but the name Sentinel rises to the surface. The appearance, both in design and eye-catching livery, vied with anything of the petrol driven wagons and was a real head-turner. Once parked outside Mick Finnegan's store there was always a small knot of young kids such as myself sitting on an inner kerb a few feet away from the Leviathan, just gazing and in glorious anticipation of the sight of the driver if he found it necessary to stoke the fire.

Guffawing chorus

To the initiated the highly polished, chromium plated wheel hubcaps were of

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Perpetuum Mobile

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special interest. The uninitiated usually got a bit of a shock – literally. The path leading to the shock was in the same genre as the *CAUTION – WET PAINT* syndrome. After pulling a few faces at his reflection the “victim” could not resist the urge to touch the gleaming mirror. The result was a guffawing chorus on seeing the victim’s hand withdrawn at lightning speed as though the hubcap were red hot which, of course, it was not. Mentioning this phenomenon to our science master a few years later, he explained that it was probably an accumulation of static electricity caused by the continual vibration of the vehicle during transportation and that the shock would have been in the region of 100 to 125 volts.

But road vehicles never seemed to be discussed in conversations about speed. I suppose it was natural that living almost on the lines of the system that ran from Liverpool to Wigan and branching to all stations north west, trains and especially locomotives dominated juvenile chat most of the time. In recent times I have learned that the era of my subject was the era of many railway amalgamations which explains the appearance of hitherto unknown locomotive types, many of which were far more exciting to look at than the predominance of the monotonous black puffers.

It appears that the original line was LNWR and was then taken over by LMS. To feast

one’s eyes on the new looking maroon livery of the LMS locomotives was novel in the extreme and one lad announced, though from where he gleaned his information remains a mystery, that LMS engines were much faster than our old black things. New names like Mogul, Midland Compound and Claughton began to roll off our tongues and such pseudo technical terms like 0-8-0, 4-6-0, 0-6-0 and so on, together with such eye opening phrases as superheaters, 4F and 5P class – all guaranteed “pullers” should one find himself wandering off into the Girls’ school playground!

But there were genuine interests in the things that went on in the line’s general activity - the longer goods trains, for example, would pass through, displaying a most colourful ribbon of painted wagons advertising the names and sometimes the nature of the business of the owner(s). Fairly late each evening a long train of about 50 large vans sped northwards in the direction of Wigan. It was said that the entire load was bananas being delivered from Liverpool Docks to Carlisle and that there was some connection with the production of whisky – well that’s what was said, anybody got any other ideas?

As may be imagined from the foregoing, the fastest moving object I had seen to date was probably on the railway, until one day, via my friendship with the son of a local grocer, I was invited to an evening trip to watch Dirt Track at Liverpool Stanley Stadium, a new sport introduced from Australia of which I had only vaguely heard. I had, of course, seen motorcycles being ridden on the roads, but never with such furious handling as on the

Dirt Track, which was necessary in manoeuvring the machine and rider within the confines of the oval track.

Thrilling spectacle

The bikes of the day seemed to comprise a predominance of modified Douglas’s and Scotts, both of which had their engines set low in the frame, making the low centre of gravity ideal for Dirt Track racing. To watch the thrilling spectacle (if one didn’t mind the odd shower of cinders) of four powerful, noisy machines created the impression that their speed was about 80 or 90 mph when in fact it was in the 30 to 40 bracket. Riders had such quaint names as Max Grosskreutz, Sprouts Elder and “Bluey” Wilkinson.

The experience, plus a few repetitions, was enough to further my juvenile interest in motorbikes. At the age of about 14 I rode my first machine, an *Ivory Calthorpe 500*. The distance was but a few hundred yards but sufficient for the bug to bite, even though there wasn’t the slightest chance of my ever entering the motorcycle fraternity. The owner of the bike was a member of a happy band of bikers who used to meet on Sunday mornings outside Winwick Church for no other purpose than to warm up their engines, then “give it the gun” all the way down what the band called “Winwick Straight”, the magic figure being 60 mph or faster, in the direction of Newton-le-Willows.

The I.O.M. T.T.

In 1935 I was taken to see the Isle of Man Senior T.T. race via one of those cheap 10/6d (52.1/2p) return overnight trips from Liverpool, or

Fleetwood if more convenient. Getting there was the physical equivalent of an SAS route march. Train to Liverpool, the walk from Lime Street, past the Tunnel entrance (opened only two years before hand), down Dale Street and eventually to tag on to the end of a seemingly endless crocodile intent on dispersing itself in every conceivable nick and cranny on the decks and other accommodation of The Isle of Man Steam Packet’s nostalgically named ferries like *Mona’s Isle*, *King Orry*, *Mona’s Queen* or *Tynwald*. The fact that membership of this motley gathering was to be the pattern for the following two hours or so before the official sailing at midnight, seemed not to matter one iota, the mood and the common interest in the crusade obliterated all normal connections with time.

Once enlisted in that single minded multitude, one must be prepared for at least 48 hours of existence rather like that endured by penguins on an ice floe – there is no escape. At something like 3.30am the ferries disgorge their human cargoes on the quayside in Douglas and almost to a man (or woman) there is a mass pilgrimage moving in the direction of the centre of Douglas, mainly to seek out Strand Street where bleary eyed restaurant staff who have reluctantly opted for money rather than bed are there, apparently for the purpose of enriching the honey being gathered by their superiors. Breakfast menus often flout the very basic meanings of Trades Description – but who cares, in such an atmosphere, at four o’clock in the morning?

There are still six hours or so to go before the starter’s flag signals the clutch start of the first rider off at the



grandstands in Glencruchery Road. Until that time, the scenes in and around Douglas would resemble, from the air, a giant ants' nest of predominantly male species wandering aimlessly, sometimes halting to admire some unusual specimen of motorcycle parked in the most open spaces with apparently no thought given to the possibility of stealing (but then, how would they get it off the island?).

Eventually the town of Douglas returns to its normal visitor density, as those intent on reaching their favourite vantage points around the T.T. course have done so, either on foot or having taken advantage of the dozens of coaches offering to take spectators completely round the course or to drop them off at any chosen spot. Weather permitting, and that means both at sea level and on the mountain roads, time drags on to the appointed starting time when a sort of hush descends throughout the island. This is temporarily broken on the appearance of the Official Car or motorcycle indicating the fact that the roads are then closed to the public and opened for the T.T. event of the day.

Excitement reaches a crescendo as a further silence descends as spectators strain their ears in the hope of hearing the starting maroon which, on a good day, can be heard throughout most of the areas of the course. This is followed by the whines of the first machine off the blocks, and then another and another until the whole field of riders is released in the highly skilful though dangerous pursuit of travelling over 237 miles in less than 21/2 hours – in one piece.

The spectacle of seeing a lone rider astride a two wheeled machine in excess of 120 mph (or in these days

very much faster) has a similar effect, especially on the initial experience, to a sort of inoculation which re-sets the onlooker's previous perception of speed. By the time the whole field has passed one's vantage point seven times, the prescribed number of laps of the event, there appears some inurement with the picture even bordering on indifference but by then, a decision to return next year has already been made.

In spite of all the discomforts a visit to the I.O.M. T.T. Races had imposed, the speed bug had bitten and bitten quite hard. Within a fairly short period, glancing through a copy of my father's *Daily Dispatch* (now defunct this last 50 years or so), I read an announcement of the date of The Daily Dispatch Trophy or some such title, a motor cycle sand racing event on Ainsdale Beach near Southport.

Inveiglement

After a few sessions of unadulterated inveiglement with one of my, as yet, uninitiated pals, we came to a reasonably acceptable agreement to cycle to Ainsdale, even though at the time, it might have been in Outer Mongolia. Encouraged by the fact that some sympathetic adult had decreed that our general direction would be through Billinge and beyond, hitherto the extent of our knowledge of any place West of that village.

On the Saturday morning, armed with a few jam butties and a whole bottle of Tizer purchased at the then prohibitive imposition of three whole pence, we set out on our attack on the west. Thankfully, we negotiated such places as Billinge (we'd tackled Billinge Lump on

numerous occasions), Rainford and a place called Bickerstaff and a few more districts of Outer Mongolia until we started to see signs to the, as yet unvisited, seaside town of Southport. More by good luck than expert navigation we followed the directions of a signpost leading TO AINSDALE where, again with auspices of good fortune, we arrived at the appointed venue in good time for the commencement of racing. There standing out on the sands was a huge frame with small rectangular cells, rather like the ones we now see at the airport Departure and Arrivals lobbies. There was much feverish activity around the base and to each end of this structure and dotted here and there were small, temporary enclosures, which were the pits for the various entrants. Eventually the racing started and from the programme I noticed that a few of the riders had participated in the very same Senior Event I had seen on my recent T.T. visit. I have to say that the thrill factor fell far short of the T.T. standard but enjoyable all the same.

Some time later and via the same source of information, I learned about a similar event at the same venue but on this occasion it was car racing. There was no difficulty in tempting my pal to repeat the torture and so once again we cycled roughly by the same route to Ainsdale beach. Probably by dint of familiarity with landmarks, we arrived long before racing began, in fact we actually got involved in a fetch and carry sort of way at the end of which, we could hardly contain the thrill at being offered the job of lap scoring.

“Also-rans”

The initial euphoria, however, soon evaporated as

the official explained that it was as simple as pushing up a handle every time “our” car went past on completion of a lap. This at once clarified the presence of the huge screen containing flap-down numbers. Each lap scorer was given the racing number of the driver he was to watch. The shoving up of the handle activated a mechanism which caused the flapping down of a number on the screen, indicating the number of the lap one's driver was engaged on. As may be expected for ones so low down in the pecking order, we drew the potential “Also-rans” and for some unknown reason, I still remember the name of my runner as Arbuthnot Lane.

I did rather fancy doing the lap scoring, not for the driver but one of two huge open type, white Mercedes sports cars with four of the fattest of flexible exhaust pipes protruding from each side of the bonnet. Both cars, I learned later, were driven by sons of the famous author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The importance of official lap scorer did wane somewhat after several laps but at least some of the enthusiasm was restored at the end of the racing when each lap scorer was visited by an official who doled out the then appreciated stipend of one whole shilling (5p).

Here again, what was it that attracted hundreds of spectators to that event? Correct, the thrill of the obsession with speed.

M1 opens

Turning now from the role of the spectator, let us consider ourselves as individuals in control of a vehicle of any description capable of fairly high speed. If, say, we are of the lower

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HISTORY SHOP NEWS

Exhibitions – Wickham Gallery



WIGAN 2000 continues to be the focal point for our ground floor gallery. This colourful exhibition looking at Wigan today, and how it contrasts to days gone by, has proved quite a draw. Unfortunately this has not always been for the right reasons. Our visitors' book has been unanimous in its praise but we have had a number of more sinister visits. Petty theft has been in the minds of some with our youth case displaying current music and fashion trends in a 'What's In What's Out' approach being particularly targeted. The case was broken into and clothes stolen from the dummies in full view of our CCTV cameras and passing visitors. We are sadly accustomed to a small degree of pilfering from our shop area but not from the displays and we will not stand for it. We have already reviewed all our security and procedures and call upon you our visitors to remain vigilant and let us know at once if you see anything suspicious.

Wigan 2000 is scheduled to run until the end of 2001, so there is plenty of time to take a walk around the displays and see how your town looks today and what direction it may be taking for the future.

APPEAL FOR INFORMATION

As we stated in the last issue we have delayed the exhibition 'The Collier Battalion', about the 5th Manchesters, until the end of the year.

We have a good deal of information prepared, but we would like to hear from you if you or any relatives served with the Manchesters during the Second World War. The reformed 5th Battalion went out with the British Expeditionary Force in 1941 and were later among the troops evacuated from Dunkirk. It seems that they then remained in this country on coastal patrol duties for the rest of the War. Please, if you have any further details or served yourself, get in touch with our exhibition team at the History Shop (Philip Butler or Dawn Wadsworth).

Our thanks already go out in advance to Roy Blythe for his help in the development of this exhibition.



HISTORY SHOP NEWS

Exhibitions – Friends of Wigan Heritage Service

Taylor Gallery

CURRENTLY we are running two exhibitions in tandem here.

Firstly we have a slightly abridged version of the exhibition on shopping in the Borough *Open All Hours*. This had been showing earlier in the year and had a brief write up in the last issue. In short the exhibition follows the development of food retailing in the area and the differing patterns of shopping that have existed over the years. As usual the exhibition is generously illustrated with photographs (one appears opposite) and objects from our own collections.

Alongside this we are also showing the *Mesnes Park* exhibition. Again mentioned in the last issue, this exhibition was put together in conjunction with the Friends of Mesnes Park group and marked the centenary of the Park last summer. Now that the display is with us at the History Shop we have been able to liven it up with items from our collection. One such item is a framed copy of the Park's bye-laws, a list running to 48 points, dated 1923. On it are included such gems as:

- *A person shall not fly any pigeon or pigeons in the Park*
- *A person shall not play any musical instrument or sing in any part of the Park*
- *A person shall not in any part of the Park beat, shake, sweep, brush or cleanse any carpet, druggot, rug or mat, or any other fabric retaining dust or dirt.*

And of course the obligatory

- *A person shall not at any time, in any part of the Park, walk or run over, or stand, sit or lie upon any part of any flowerbeds...*

The penalty for the infringement of any of these bye-laws was a £5 fine.

In July we will be having a show connected to the annual Wigan Arts Festival as in previous years and then in August and September the ever popular photographic exhibitions from Wigan and Atherton Photographic Societies.

AS YOU may know our Friends is now well established, and the numbers joining continue to grow. Remember as a member you are entitled to a priority mailing of *Past Forward* at each publication and other Friends' mailings designed to keep you informed about what's going on. It can also be a way to get involved in your local heritage and meet like-minded people, get help with local or family history questions and take part in organised projects. Subscription is only £5 per year, just fill in the slip below.

In *Past Forward 27* we highlighted the establishment of our regular meetings and invited any local residents to come along. We have since had two such quarterly meetings in March and June; here are the main points from these meetings:

- Chair of the group was nominated – Max Finney of Ince
- Topics and activities for work groups have been identified – indexing work on maps and census
- Sub-groups for our different areas based on subject or geographical locations discussed, local history, genealogy and archive groups suggested but not yet set up
- A voice for the group on the Council's Community Forum.

You are all welcome to attend future meetings, registered Friend or not. The next two will be 15 September and 8 December, both on Saturday at 1pm at the History Shop.

* * *

After our call for correspondents in *Past Forward 27*, we have received two interesting offers; Mrs Glenda Caroli-Woodcock of Belgium told us:

"In the last Past Forward no. 27 I saw your ideas about people living further afield and I think they are excellent, especially for those living abroad. I would like to set up a contact group for people living in Belgium, Holland or Luxembourg. I would love to hear from anyone living over here from Wigan."

Glenda's details are: 155A Rue de St.Germaine, 4861 Soiron, Belgium. E-mail Raymond.Caroli@belgacom.net

Vincent Baines of Ontario, Canada also thinks it's a great idea and would like to hear from anyone in the Eastern States and Eastern Provinces in Canada. His E-mail address is Vinjess@look.Ca.

- Our ideas were:
1. Correspondents. If you are an ex-Wiganer living far away you can still contribute. Write to us about your memories or your attempts to find out more about your family history from overseas. We could introduce a regular Correspondent slot into the Friends section.
 2. Overseas branches of the group. If anyone in say Australia or North America would like to set up a contact group in their country, let me know.

And don't forget to include your Email address, soon it will be the only way to keep in touch and we can have virtual Friends all over the world!

FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

Name

Address

.....

Interests

.....

Please enclose £5 subscription for 2001. Cheque/P.O. payable to Wigan Council. Please return to the History Shop, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

Remember your subscription entitles you to a priority mailing of *Past Forward* three times a year.

HISTORY SHOP NEWS

RECENT ADDITIONS TO STOCK AT THE HISTORY SHOP

282.42	SHORNEY, D Protestant nonconformity and Roman Catholicism: a guide to Resources in PRO	796.334 0942736	HAYES, Dean P. Wigan Athletic – the league years
282.42736	MURPHY, Brian St. Cuthbert's Church, Pemberton 1871-2000	823 TAP	TAPLIN, Alan Rondo
305.4	THOMPSON, D.K.G. British women in the 19th century	929.10285	PEACOCK, Caroline Genealogy: the good web guide
338.76633	FAULKNER, N.O. Allied Breweries: a long life	929.3	GIBSON, Jeremy Quarter Sessions Records
392.5	CHAPMAN, C. Marriage laws, rites, records and customs: was your ancestor really married?	929.2704	SHOTTER, D. Roman coins from North-West England, 2nd supplement
473	MARTIN, C.T. The record interpreter	942.736	(Boothstown Local History Society) Boothstown
625.24	COATES, Noel G. Lancashire and Yorkshire Wagons, Vol. 1	942.736	SMITH, Malcolm David About Haigh and Aspull
711.7094273	G M P T A Investing in excellence: G M Local Transport Plan 2001/2- 2005/6	942.736	WINSTANLEY, Joe Growing up in Wigan 1930-1950
		942.7612	CHEETHAM-HOUGHTON, Robert Burscough Boatmen - their marriages and their boats
		MAPS	
		912.42736	(Godfrey edition) Pemberton 1907

Perpetuum Mobile

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age bracket, driving in the early stages of legality, it is almost certain that at some stage the urge to "See what the car (or motorbike) will do" will enter the scene. In my own experience this factor could not have been illustrated more vividly than in the early days of the opening of the M1 Motorway.

For a few years before its opening by Ernest Marples in 1961 my business involved quite a number of southbound trips from my then home in the south Birmingham area. This, before the M1 was built, meant finding the least trafficked routes one could find to reach the main artery

of the Midlands and Southern Counties, the A5. As anyone (especially Uncle Ernie) who traversed that part of the country at the time will aver, journeys were becoming more and more wearisome by the day, contributed to by a number of factors such as the mandatory 20 mph speed limit for heavy vehicles and the national, yearly growing number of vehicles.

From the day Ernest Marples cut the historic ribbon, the M1 Motorway became a Silverstone, open to all users. For such people as myself it was, in the first instance, a sort of blood pressure valve when, on reaching its beginning at Watford Gap after 40 odd miles of traffic hazards, it was as though one had driven through dark clouds and was then descending on an endless, comparatively deserted runway. One could sense the feeling that every motorist was, in old Wigan terms, "Purrrin t' clog deyn".

In that sense, I was no exception and for the first time in my driving career I saw my speedometer climb over the 85-mph mark. But I was by no means leaving other vehicles standing – quite the opposite in fact.

It was in that period that my boss rang to say that he would like to accompany me to Vauxhall Motors Ltd. at Luton and that he would pick me up at an arranged venue. He didn't inform me that only a few weeks previously he had taken delivery of a brand new Ford Corsair. It was in that connection that I sensed the real interest was a spin on the M1, a thought which transpired to be very near the mark. Once he had the feel of the new surface, he gritted his teeth and coaxed the Corsair up to 104 mph, the fastest by far that I had ever driven in a motor car.

And so continued the high speed version of dodgems for a year or two until reports of resultant

accidents and not a few incidents of what today would be referred to as road rage reached the ears of those above. I did hear it repeated on a number of occasions that police had "clocked" a couple of A.C. Cobras travelling at 205 mph in the wee small hours of the morning! Though perfectly legitimate, and the reason given was the fact that the vehicles concerned were under test in anticipation of the forthcoming Le Mans 24 Hour Race, it was the cause of Barbara Castle's outcry of *That's enough lads – 70 mph from now on.*

But we all know what difference that made to a man's obsession with speed. What, one may ask, will be the ultimate goal (if such a thing exists) of this apparently uncontrollable urge?

See next century's thrilling installment!

*J. Harold Smith
Sutton Coldfield*

I remember when

There were no road numbers or signposts on the roads in England, Scotland or Wales, they had all been removed to conform with a Government order.

This was designed to be unhelpful to enemy agents who could be parachuted from enemy planes during darkness and use road signs and numbers to help them locate their whereabouts, and if necessary even light flares to guide their pilots to their targets.

William Joyce, an Englishman "turncoat" who had been recruited by Nazi Germany to broadcast to England under the pseudonym of "Lord Haw Haw" (so named to ridicule his statements as humorous by our counter intelligence people), frequently told his listeners here which targets had been hit and in some cases which would be next! Barrage balloon sites were a particular target because, situated as they were around important sites, they prevented enemy aircraft from dive-bombing those targets.

Since our own broadcasters, for obvious reasons, never reported these it would be quite a discussion point the next day to hear "Lord Haw Haw" tell us what was happening and although some of it was true, much of it was false, designed specifically to lower our morale, ready for the day when Germany invaded us.

Without road signs and numbers, the main objectives for drivers were roadside transport cafes, usually open day and night. Every long-distance driver knew of The Brownhills on the Stafford to Cannock Road or Tubby's Caff at Willoughby near Daventry. Whilst at Jack's in St. Albans one could always get inner London directions

Dear Alastair,

As it is approaching the 61st Anniversary of our forces wholesale evacuation of Dunkirk, itself almost a miracle of organisation, I thought I would place on record my memories of that period and how civilian drivers overcame personal difficulties to maintain support for our forces at home and abroad.

With petrol rationing for private motorists at six gallons per month, many chose to lay up their cars "for the duration", which in 1940 was not expected to last for more than six months, so a reminder now could well appeal to even those older motorists, especially as to how we dealt with the problems of no signposts or road numbers!

**Ernie Taberner
62 Westwood Road
Earlsdon
Coventry CV5 6GE**

and at Mrs. Smiths at Talke Corner there were always Mancunian lorry drivers who would give you detailed instructions for Stockport or Manchester.

If you asked anyone for directions at any of these "watering holes", you would get an impromptu map of the area, often on a disused cigarette packet from one of the ash trays, at a price of a mug of tea (2d. in old money).

Country pubs, which often doubled as transport caffs, would be the source of detailed information on Bury, Bolton, Rochdale and Oldham as well as a snack of pie and peas and, with a bit of luck, another lorry driver flogging rabbits snared on the moors at 18d. a pair (under 10p) – in wartime, a useful supplement to the rations.

But significantly, even in the pubs, it was always "the cuppa" which was the attraction – only occasionally would a driver have a pint of beer during opening hours, although even then some pubs would display a "No Beer" sign outside, as even supplies of that sometimes ran low.

The usual laws relating to hours worked and time sheets were suspended for

the duration, and I personally have done a Manchester Old Trafford from Coventry and return, followed immediately by a Coventry to Bristol and return, all in the same day of 24 hours!

Significantly, most drivers were middle-aged or

above (some had sons serving abroad in the services) – in my own case I was a rejected volunteer for all three services on health grounds, but was proud to serve by helping the pilots and air crews to remain airborne. I also had a personal motivation, as a young cousin with whom I was brought up on't' cut bank at Wigan Pier was called up at 18, sent to France after only six weeks training and "killed in enemy action" within a few weeks.

I like to think my wartime endeavours to keep the planes in the air helped to repair some of the damage caused by his early demise as well as that of his young comrades. Many returned from France via Dunkirk who otherwise would not have done.

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Memories of Days in the Park

I HAVE many memories of days in the park. Mesnes Park runs through my life like a thread of gold.

My first memory is being pushed in a Tansad (c. 1924/5 - "nearly new") by one or more of my elder siblings (being the youngest of five) with another neighbour's child pushed in beside me; so I think I knew the way to the park before I could even walk! My next and most memorable recollection is about the time I was eight or nine years old and going to the park with the gang in the long summer holidays.

Going through the lovely iron gates was equal to going to Buckingham Palace to us and we passed the keeper's house with plenty of shush - he was regarded with such reverence and awe. If he came to the door when we were passing we didn't know if he was the Mayor, the Chief Constable or the Pope himself, the question being whether to curtsy, salute or genuflect. We usually shuffled past in case he spoke to us and we would be stopped from going in.

One-upmanship!

Once inside I can still feel the thrill of those beautiful floral displays and those green pristine lawns. They were a sight to behold, even with the blue enamel "Please Keep off the Grass" signs (as if!) We

Dear Sir

It has been suggested to me by a member of the Friends of Mesnes Park that you might find my article of interest to readers of 'Past Forward'.

I do hope this is of use to you; it would give me great pleasure to think I have contributed to your wonderful magazine, which give hours of pleasure to myself, and the many folks I pass it on to.

Edith Topping (Mrs)

didn't want to look away from all that magical colour at our feet, which is understandable when you consider we had only a backyard with not a blade of grass or a flower in sight. I say this with a little one-upmanship because some of the gang did not even aspire to a backyard. They only had "a yard". This meant seven or eight or more to "a yard" with a row of lavatories with corresponding numbers on the door; each one was religiously locked after use and the key returned to the house for the next patron! The locking of the lav door was instilled into them from childhood as if guarding the Bank of England; having said that, I do not think there was one of them with a front door to their house that would lock ("We've nowt to lock up," they would say).

Passing the flowerbeds our next port of call would be Owd Powell, to jump up and touch his toe for luck. The number of times I have done that I should have had all the luck in the world - maybe I had and didn't know it.

Our next adventure was the steps. Up the steps to the soldier at the top - last one stinks! And then looking back down the

steps and seeing the banking either side of the rhoddies - pink and lilac and reds.

Jam butties

Next it was time for the picnic. Oh the joy! Out would come the jam butties and bottles of tap water; food and drink for the Gods - I can taste them yet!

Next were the games on the field, just past the café (I didn't aspire to going in there until I was 18 or so). Rounders, jackets and jumpers off for the stumps. Much arguing as to the team. "I'm not having her" or "I'm not having him" - until a truce was signed and play began. We would run our little hearts out for the team until we were ready to drop.

The next natural step was the water fountain with the iron cup on a chain. You pressed a knob and water came out of the lion's mouth - nectar, pure nectar, I kid you not.

I was to remember this many years later when I was very ill with Legionnaire's disease. I kept asking for a drink of water from the iron cup on a chain. My dear husband put this down to delirium, but I knew it was real enough. I

have had many fancy drinks since then in posh hotels, but none can compare with a drink of water from the iron cup on a chain. (Incidentally, when I recall truthfully, the chain was never quite long enough and we always ended up spilling it down our fronts, but this only added to fun and laughter - happy days!)

Fear of God

Then it was onwards and upwards to the swings, seesaws and roundabouts - three and four on a swing and jumping off the roundabout when it was going fast. It took only one shout - "The keeper's coming!" - to put the fear of God in us, and we would all revert to being the little angels we never were. After that, it would be roly-poly down the hill.

Next was a run around the bandstand for no reason at all, just for the joy of it. No bands played except on a Sunday, but we didn't mind.

Now we come to the most important point - coppering-up. Whoever had managed to cadge a penny out of their mother or elder sibling went to the ice cream cart and chose the one, Jack Lewis or Cassennelis - decisions, decisions! It was a cart, never a van, and it had shafts, but I never saw a horse moving it in, or out, of the park. Penny cornets with raspberry - never enough to go round, so it was "you give her a lick", "I'll give him a lick" and so it went on. Sometimes with



MEMORIES OF THE CENTRAL SCHOOL ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD

THE article, 'I Won't Dance – Don't Ask Me', by J. Harold Smith in issue No. 27 of *Past Forward*, in which he mentions the teacher Mr. Heaton who worked in the above school, has acted as a catalyst as I have been meaning to write about the above school, and one teacher in particular, for quite some while.

For 38 years, from 1928 till his retirement in 1966, my father, Percival Clifford Ralls, was a teacher at this school, rising in the ranks from assistant teacher to be Head of the English Department and Deputy Head.

Before I deal with the school I think a little background information on my father will help to set the picture and show how things changed in the school over the years he worked there. He was born in the small market town of Cowbridge, in South Wales, about 15 miles from Cardiff, and after

attending the Grammar School in Pontypridd took a Degree in English at the University of Wales in Cardiff. After qualifying as a teacher he had to apply for over 200 teaching posts before obtaining a post as assistant master at Ashton Central School, there being a chronic shortage of vacancies in schools all over the country.

Tremendous shock

It must have been a tremendous shock to his system, and to that of my mother, whom he married in 1930, to move from the enclosed environment of a

small, country town, where their families were well known, to a Lancashire mining town. In Ashton they lived first in Vicarage Road and then in Osborne Road.

I was born in August 1934 in Cowbridge and moved when I was six weeks old with my mother to live in Osborne Road. Just before the War started we all moved to 16 Queens Avenue, a new development behind Armoury Bank on Wigan Road. My father lived there until his death at the early age of 66 in 1971 and my mother moved to live with my family in Cambridgeshire.

When my father started at Ashton Central School, the Headmaster was a Mr. John A. Farrand M.A., and there were seven other teachers on the staff. The first picture shows these teachers; my father is on the left of the back row, Mr. Farrand is in the middle of the front row. The only other name I know

is that of Arthur Jones, on the right of the back row, who was a member of staff for many years, specialising I believe in later years in the education of those with Special Needs. He ultimately became the Headmaster of Horwich Senior Council Boys' School.

My earliest recollections of my father's work are connected with the many walks we had in the countryside around Ashton – areas which are now full of housing estates. During these walks he would regale me with accounts of his work which I must admit I found fascinating and no doubt helped me to make my choice of career in the same profession.

Wanted revenge

As the son of a local teacher, I experienced a lot of trouble from the local lads

Continued on page 24

reluctance, but no one was left out.

On to the tennis courts where the toffs played – well, it was 3d on the tennis and 2d on the putting (the price of their dinner for some kids!). Watching is not half as good as playing so that did not usually last long. On to the bowling – all the old men (we thought anyone over 16 was old), and woe betide us if we made a noise whilst play was in progress. But we liked it when we could clap at a good shot. We didn't know any difference; we just clapped when everyone else did.

After that came the best

bit of all – the pond and the ducks. What little was left of the picnic (we usually managed a few crusts) was used to entice the ducks out of the water onto the bank and up to the railings where we could feed them. Then they would waddle back to the water to feed their young.

By now it would be coming up to teatime (no watches, our bellies told us so) and so to home we would reluctantly turn. Home sweet home! For some of us, others not quite so. But a lovely day in the park was had by all, with the parting shot "See you tomorrow!" Sadly for

some of the gang their tomorrows never came. God bless them every one.

Lovely days

I worked in munitions during the war at Beech Hill R.O.F. I would walk through the park when I was on afters (afternoon shift 2.00-10.00p.m.) and remember those lovely days with the gang; on Sundays with my best coat on I would go with my friend to the park café upstairs and drink coffee – so grown up and refined!

I have spent many more days in the park since I was first pushed there in my Tan-sad – there were

parading days, courting day, tennis days, bowling days and now grandma days – but I will leave others to recall those years.

Lung of Wigan it certainly was, and more besides. It filled our lungs with fresh air, our eyes with colour and beauty, our hearts with joy and happiness and our minds with cherished memories.

As I started, so I will finish. The park runs through my life like a thread of gold – old gold, pure gold. Long live the park and all who treasure her.

**Edith Topping
(nee Daly)
Aged 74**

MEMORIES OF THE
CENTRAL SCHOOL
ASHTON-IN-
MAKERFIELD

Continued from page 23

who wanted revenge for punishments, real and imagined, inflicted by my father. I attended Ashton Grammar School and do remember that some of the pupils at the other school across the playing fields got their brothers or friends to have a word with me about how my father was supposed to have punished them. Needless to say I defended him to the best of my ability and they soon stopped; whether this was due to my persuasive powers or to the fact that they got fed up I don't know. Incidentally, when I questioned my father about these punishments it was to find that the stories had been grossly exaggerated.

It might be thought that taking pupils on school holidays is a fairly recent development in education. However, my father and staff at the Central School started taking children to Grasmere

in the Lake District soon after the end of the Second World War and continued for many years. These were done during the school holidays, and were genuine holidays for children who would otherwise have not experienced any life away from the environment in which they lived. He was always pleased and gratified at the response of these pupils to seeing a way of life that they couldn't have imagined.

NO collusion

At this time, and for most of my father's time in the school, the building in Cansfield Grove was divided into two parts; that on the left was the boys' section whilst that on the right was for the girls' school, presided over, I believe, by a Miss Bradshaw. What I do remember is that there was NO collusion between the boys and the girls, and the only mingling of staff was by the respective headteachers. This all changed about five years before my father retired when the school became comprehensive. I remember him telling me about the concerns the men had about



Male staff of Central School, Ashton-in-Makerfield, 1948.

the sharing of their staff room with lady teachers. How would they take to their language and jokes; would they be offended by the perpetual fug that lingered in the room from the cigarettes and pipes? As it turned out the transition went quite smoothly and everybody got on with each other.

But to return to earlier days. The Headteacher after Mr. Farrand was, I believe, a Mr. Lester, appointed in 1947; he is shown in the middle of the front row in the photograph above, taken in 1948. Other members are:

Percival Ralls, ??

front row (l to r): ? McKenzie (Geography and Gardening), Firth Hartley (Woodwork), ? Lester (Headmaster), Arthur Jones (History), ? Heaton.

On a personal level I am reminded every day of one of these teachers, Firth Hartley, as I have in my house some examples of this craftsman's handiwork – a stool he made for my wife and myself on the occasion of our marriage in 1961 and a coffee table which he made for my parents.

Over the years the school grew in size and my father proceeded up the promotion ladder which can be seen by the change in his position on the various staff photographs I possess.

In the photograph to the left, he is seen sitting on the front row next to the Headmaster, Sidney J. Price, in his capacity of Senior Master or, as it is now called, Deputy Head. He combined this with running the English Department, and on many occasions was left in charge of the school. Sidney Price lived in Liverpool and commuted every day to Ashton by bus, not being able to drive. The only other



Staff of Central School, Ashton-in-Makerfield in the 1960's.



Life in the Grenadier Guards

THE Grenadier Guards were formed in 1656 by Charles II; since then, they have been awarded 76 Battle Honours, up to and including 1939-45. I was involved in two of these, mainly Salerno and Casino.

The highlights of my career were when I was the sergeant of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, St. James's Palace, the Tower of London and Windsor Castle; and in particular, being spoken to by Queen Mary during a foggy morning in November, at St. James's Palace. I had the honour of being on parade during the Trooping of the Colour and was also in the congregation in the Guards Chapel in the presence of the King and Queen.

When the War started on 3 September 1939 I was 18 years of age. Five weeks later I volunteered and joined the Grenadier Guards for a period of 12 years, signing on at the recruiting office at Wigan. But first I had to have a test

on the three 'Rs' which I passed. The Sergeant Major in charge then sent me to Hope Street School to face the doctor. I had to be at least 5' 10" and physically fit. I then was handed my rail ticket to London and on to Chelsea Barracks.

Bewildered

I arrived at 8 p.m. on a Monday evening. I stood beside the gates, put my suitcase down, clutched the railings, and stood bewildered, looking at the Guardsman on sentry. I was now having second thoughts, but after a while I plucked up courage and entered. I was taken to the mess room for a mug of tea and a cheese sandwich. At 10 p.m. the drummer was

standing in the centre of the Parade Ground with his bugle, playing the Last Post, and again at 10.15 lights out. The clock on top of the barracks struck every quarter of an hour. I heard every one!

The following morning we were kitted out and issued with a nameplate. I remained at Chelsea for about three months weapon training and foot drill, then on to Wellington Barracks for further training and Guard duties. Wellington Barracks was known as the Holding Battalion in preparation for joining one of three battalions. Guard duties were performed at Buckingham Palace, St James's, the Admiralty, Home Office, Foreign Office, War Office, Westminster and No. 10 Downing Street. During my time at Wellington Barracks, I rose to the rank of full sergeant.

One night, at 10 p.m., I was detailed for special duties, which meant guarding and protect Sir Winston Churchill

in his bunker. At around midnight the enemy planes were overhead, when he said to me, and I quote, "The buggers are here again sergeant, but never mind, it won't be long before its over." I also spent a few weeks training in Windsor Great Park. On two or three occasions, I noticed the two princesses riding their white ponies.

Secret war film

Next stop was Chequers for a few weeks. During my stay here, I was invited to see a secret war film, in the company of Sir Winston Churchill, Lord Mountbatten and my company commander. Later I was posted abroad, leaving Greenock, Scotland on the troopship Orion on my way to North Africa, which took 28 days. I recall sailing past Morocco during the hours of darkness. Of course

Continued on page 26

name I know, apart from those already mentioned, is that of Mr. Latham, first left on the back row.

Old guard

As time when on the school expanded and more staff were employed, although the old guard remained. In those days continuity of service was the norm and something which gave stability to a school. I remember during our walks how frequently my father would be stopped by an ex-pupil and told how he was now teaching that person's son or towards the latter end of his career this was sometimes the grandson. I was conscious of the pride

that this invoked in my father and he would happily recall that parent's or grandparent's achievements.

In 1966, due to ill health, my father was forced to retire at the age of 61. He didn't want to go but common sense prevailed. Unfortunately, he didn't enjoy a very long retirement as he died in April 1971 at the early age of 66. The photograph to the right shows the presentation made to him in February 1966 at the school. As a point of interest I still have the radio which was presented to him and as far as I know it still works.

**Stan Ralls
Royston Herts**



Percy Clifford Ralls being presented with a radio at the time of his retirement as Deputy Headmaster in 1966.

Life in the Grenadier Guards

Continued from page 25

they were neutral and one could see a whole city lit up with streetlights. It seemed quite odd, as we on the ship were in complete darkness.

We finally arrived at our destination, Philipville, the next port of call after Algiers. We were stationed there for a few weeks in readiness for the invasion of Salerno. During that period we were visited by Mr. Churchill and Montgomery, who gave us a lecture on what to expect. On the day of departure, we set sail from Bizerta, and landed on the beach at dawn. We advanced to Monte Casino, after being bombarded from the air and on the ground. At last we arrived, slowly ascending Casino under

severe sniper fire. Darkness fell and a message was sent to me that the rations had arrived at the foot of the mountain. I detailed two men to collect them, which were in steel dixies containing sausages shaped like a 'Toblerone' – we called them Sawyer Links. The weather was atrocious, so much so that the dixies were overturned, caused by the slippery surface. The rations were covered in mud, but that didn't deter our hunger; we polished off the lot!

Wounded

On 3 December, I was wounded by mortar fire. The pain was so severe that my whole body went numb. I heard a voice in the distance saying "Sergeant Seddon's had it." I lay between the rocks for almost two days, when I was spotted by the stretcher bearers. It took eight men to carry me down the mountain and I ended up in hospital at

Casino. After a few weeks I was taken to Naples and flown to Sicily, staying in hospital for two weeks before being transferred to a convalescence depot. During my stay, I was granted seven days leave to be spent in Rome – of course by this time the Italians had surrendered – where I had the privilege and honour of seeing the Pope conducting mass in St. Peter's Square.

After completing my convalescent, I rejoined my Battalion in December, and immediately I found myself in action once more, approaching Bologna. Prior to going into action, I was told by my commanding officer that I was to be promoted to Sergeant Major. That very same night I received a message that he and my other three officers had been wounded, which left me in total command. At this point I decided to take a peep over a fence, when I heard a voice saying Comrade – it was a German soldier who had been wounded. I didn't shoot – if I had, the enemy would know where we were. The following night we made our second attempt. This time I was in a small valley, and within seconds I was wounded a second time in my back. So I had to spend a second Christmas in hospital.

Lord's Prayer

Once again, I was transferred after a spell in my sick bed to the original convalescence depot, which by now had left Sicily and moved on to Perugia. I remember my first night at the depot; the lights were put out at 10 o'clock and all was silent, until one of the patients sang the Lord's Prayer from beginning to end. It was a very moving experience, especially as he had a particularly good voice.

Finally, in August 1945 we set sail from Naples and arrived at Southampton. I was granted two weeks leave and

then reported back to my unit. We were then drafted to Hawick in Scotland for more training. After a few days, I was called into the office and detailed to go as an instructor to Sandhurst College.

Passing out parade was very special with the Princess, now the Queen, on her white horse.

I served about 12 months at Sandhurst before being released at last.

**Harold Seddon
(Sergeant)**

The Old Warrior

*The clouds of war were dark
and dread,
The Nazi planes zoomed
overhead.
The future black and we were
down
And confidence was almost
gone.
"I lived in Churchill's time."*

*His clarion call awake the land
To greater things at his
command.
He praised "the few", he gave
us back
The spirit we had seemed to
lack.
"I lived in Churchill's time".*

*His jaunty stance, his big cigar,
He toured the world both near
and far
Urging us all to wage the fight,
Hitler was wrong, and we were
right.
"I fought in Churchill's time".*

*For six long years we laboured
on,
His leadership, it really shone!
Soon the tide turned – defeats
were past
And Victory was ours at last.
"I lived in Churchill's time."*

*When peace once more reigned
o'er the land
I met him once and shook his
hand.
"Well done!" he said, and then
I cried,
But still look back and say with
pride,
"I lived in Churchill's time!"*

H. L. W., Dersingham

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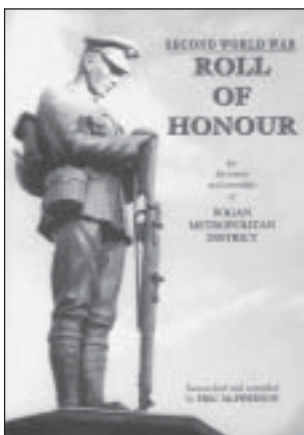
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J.H. Ollerton was a good friend of Wigan Heritage Service and Past Forward, who sadly died last year. His widow has kindly sent me the last two articles which Mr. Ollerton wrote for Past Forward. Here is the first of these. Ed.

Childhood Sounds of the 1920's and 1930's

IN the absence of alarm clocks the wake up call was planned or was prompted by chance external noises. These were the times of the professional knocker up. From times like 2 o'clock he would promenade with a 20-foot long pole and loose laths on the end. To the appointed address the fearsome rattling on the window and the called out time were a welcome assurance. Our household was not geared to this arrangement, possibly because of the cost. It was because of this that I suffered one of the great shocks of my young life when this infamous knocker up got addresses mixed up and proceeded to give our bedroom window the treatment. My nervous system still bears the scar!

Clogged feet

Nature itself or the natural world did not supply the needed helpful sounds. No cock ever crowed within half a mile of Scholes crossing. As for the dawn chorus of robin, thrush or blackbird you needed to live at least a mile away, near Mesnes Park or the Plantations of Haigh Hall. The prompting came from an entirely different source at least six days a week. From 7 o'clock in the morning we were stirred by an incessant clattering sound of hundreds of female clogged feet. These were the millgirls walking down Scholes towards the cotton mills near Wigan Pier. And

so we remembered what the teacher had said. Whilst Arkwright and his Spinning Jenny and the Industrial Revolution had produced the factories, it was the permanent damp atmosphere of Lancashire, essential for the processing of natural cotton fibres, which had produced this unnatural wake up call and the employment of hundreds of millgirls.

'Green in stature'

One surprise variation from this workday morning sound occurred occasionally in winter. Instead of the expected clatter there was an unexpected hush everywhere, punctuated from time to time by the blunt noise of something being banged against a wall. The explanation was that there had been a snowfall overnight. Clogs, especially with clogirons and snow, do not mix. As the millgirls walked in the snow they literally grew in stature as the snow stuck to their clogs. The action time came when they stated to overbalance. The solution was to bang each clog in turn and then to start again. The South has its leaves on the line whilst Wigan had pads on its clogs. This hindrance to normal movement was shortlived and only arose on new snow.

Trampled or frost-hardened snow produced a new set of hazards. The best hope then was the Corporation would bring in an army of unemployed plus

shovels and a horse and cart. In a very short time the flagged pavements were safe and clean. As for the snow it was quickly taken down Scholes and dumped in the famous River Douglas. How else could you describe a river which regularly changed colour according to the whims of the boffins at the dyeworks a couple of miles upstream. Nowhere else in the world have I seen a river change its colour so often!

And so back to the sounds of the times. Scholes had its own special sound. This was a very loud banging and clattering noise as the double-decker trams made their way up and down Scholes. One famous gentleman, John Willie Holt, who was renowned as a herbalist, had developed a sideline in dentistry. His technique was to synchronise his extractions with the approach and passing of a tramcar. No screams were ever heard in the neighbourhood!

'Tommy talkers'

Any account of the sounds of the times must include descriptions of the attempts at music making. Some lucky youngsters managed to get a mouthorgan for Christmas or a birthday. I was lucky myself and by sheer effort learned to play *The Bluebells of Scotland* perfectly. Sadly I did not learn to vamp. One instrument, if that is what it may be called, which brought music making

within the reach of all, consisted of a shiny tin pipe about four inches long with a circular gauze covered half way along the top. The trick was to insert a piece of shaped tissue under the gauze, and the instrument was ready for use. You did not blow but hummed into the pipe to produce a pleasant musical sound. The Americans called them kazoos, we knew them as tommy talkers. One single performer would pass largely unnoticed, but if, as in the annual Wigan Carnival, you assembled 30 or 40 similarly dressed performers in each band the effect was quite memorable!

There was not the slightest possibility that they would upstage the real music makers of the time in the form of the world famous colliery bands. I can still hear the sound of Bickershaw Colliery Band playing Ketelby's "In a Monastery Garden" in Mesnes Park one Sunday evening.

There is just one more reminiscence to complete this catalogue. It relates to election times when we observed what was going on and then made our own special contribution. We marched around the district singing "Vote, vote, vote for Alan Parkinson, he is sure to win the day". This was followed by a threat of what would follow if they failed to vote him in – a situation which never happened. We were never paid any money and possibly never broke any electoral laws!

J.H. Ollerton

The history of Tel-el- Amarna

EGYPTOLOGY and archaeology have always fascinated a large number of people. I don't know whether this is because of the popularity of such films as *The Mummy*, *The Mummy Returns* or the *Indiana Jones* trilogy which romanticises the exploration of ancient civilisations, offering adventure and excitement with the possibility of making a monumental find for future posterity leading to a better understanding of the past.

In the History Shop recently, I came across a few items written by John Devitt Stringfellow Pendlebury, and was then reminded of the film because he was a distinguished archaeologist and Egyptologist.

Although not a native of Wigan (he was born in London) he had strong Wigan connections, the son of Herbert Stringfellow Pendlebury F.R.C.S. and also the grandson of the founder of Pendlebury & Co. Ltd., Wigan. Educated at Winchester College and Pembroke College, Cambridge he obtained a 1st Class Classical Tripos in 1927 with a distinction in archaeology. He was also an Athletic Blue and International High Jumper (1926-27). Between 1927 and 28 he was a Cambridge

University student at the British School of Archaeology in Athens. By 1928 he had become a Member of the Archaeological Expeditions to Macedonia and was Director of Excavations at Tell-el-Amarna.

In October 1936 Mr. Pendlebury, at the request of Wigan Education Society, opened their 27th annual season of lectures at the Mining and Technical College with an illustrated talk on the history of Tell-el-Amarna and his excavational work there.

At the outbreak of World War II Pendlebury was at Knossos in Crete. During the War he served as

an officer in the Intelligence Corps and became Vice Consul of Candia, but later returned to service as a Captain in the cavalry regiment. After the invasion of Crete, he led a guerrilla band into the mountains. Eventually he was wounded and captured by the Germans who subsequently put him to death in front of a firing squad (24 May 1941).

His publications, which can be referred to in the History Shop, include:

- 1) *A Handbook to the Palace of Minos and Knossos with its dependencies* (Macmillan, 1933)
- 2) *The Archaeology of*

Crete: an Introduction (Methuen, 1939)

- 3) *Tell-el-Amarna* (Lovat Dickson and Thompson, 1935)
- 4) *The Annual of the British School of Athens* (Macmillan, 1940 – No. 38 Session 1937-38)
- 5) *The new Tell-el-Amarna Discoveries* (Extracts from London Illustrated News)
- 6) *Aegyphaca: a Catalogue of Egyptian Objects in the Aegean Area.* (C.U.P., 1930)
- 7) *John Pendlebury in Crete comprising his travelling hints ...* (C.U.P., 1948)

*Tony Ashcroft
Local History Officer*

FAMOUS EGYPTIAN EXCAVATOR VISITS WIGAN.



A. Lyons

The Mayor (Councillor Tom Smith) welcoming Mr. J. D. S. Pendlebury, M.A., the famous archaeologist, when he arrived in Wigan on Friday last week, to lecture before the Wigan Education Society. Mr. Pendlebury, who is a member of a well-known Wigan family, is Director of the Egyptian Excavation Society's excavations at Tell-el-Amarna, and his lecture dealt with the

important work and the interesting finds there. In the group also are Mr. Leslie R. Missen (chairman of the society), Canon W. O. Hunter Rodwell (Rector of Wigan), Mr. A. J. Hawkes (Borough Librarian and a past chairman of the society), Mr. Allan Royle (Deputy Town Clerk), Mr. J. M. Ainscough, J.P., and Mr. D. Cowser (secretary of the society). A report of the lecture appears in this issue.

From the Wigan Observer, 10 October 1936.

'IT'S GOOD TO TALK'

TODAY, many adults either watch television or listen to the radio in order to be entertained or educated. Prior to these technological developments, large numbers of people were reached through a programme of public lectures. Over the years many well known (and some lesser known) personalities have visited the Wigan area to share their knowledge, interest, enthusiasm and criticisms of society with a wider audience.

For instance, in November 1869 a lady by the name of Harriet Law gave a course of three lectures at Leigh. Unlike

today, the reports then included no photographic imagery in the local newspapers, so all the readers had to go on were the reports and comments of those sent to cover the event.

The following item taken from the Leigh Chronicle of 13 November 1869 gives a sample of the type of reporting that was in use and contains a vivid description both of her physical qualities and the manner of speed delivery. I found it a refreshing read. I hope you do too.

Tony Ashcroft
Local History Officer

MRS. HARRIET LAW IN LEIGH.

A course of three lectures of a rather remarkable character has been delivered by Mrs. Harriet Law in the theatre this week and a short description of the lady and her lectures may not be uninteresting.

Mrs. Law is a lady who has seen some thirty or forty summers, possessing a well-built head, and black hair, and a fairly formed mouth, so on the whole she cannot be considered bad-looking, though perhaps she is rather too *masculine* to be considered handsome. She appears before her audience attired in a black velvet jacket and dark skirt. She wears a gold chain and a locket as big as a lady's watch.

From her manner, one would judge that she was somewhat given to scolding. The lady is in every sense a strong,—a *very strong* minded-woman. Impulsive she is, in the extreme, and in her style of lecturing, certainly pugnacious.—In commencing to address her audience she dashes at once into the subject chosen with very few introductory remarks. Cordelia's voice, according to Lear, "Was ever sweet and low—an excellent thing in a woman." Mrs. Harriet Law's voice is neither sweet nor low, but rather loud and harsh, and at times screaming, and as far as her accent goes, one would imagine that she hailed from one of the midland counties. She has certainly very little affectation, and would impress the audience that she enters into and thoroughly enjoys her infidelity. She does not mince matters by any means. She is exceedingly honest in stating what she considers *her* view of the truth. Her arguments are ingenious and novel. For example, she defined, on Wednesday night, the word infidel in this fashion.—Anyone who is opposed to the accepted faith of the age he lives in is infidel. All men who promulgate opinions in advance of their times are infidels! The first man who used an umbrella in the streets of London was an infidel! Socrates was an infidel in the age in which he lived, but his teachings are now accepted and are taught at our *very Christian* universities; therefore Socrates now-a-days is not to be considered an infidel. Of course it is easy to see the weakness of such reasoning, though perhaps it is eel-like and rather difficult to grapple with. One feels inclined to ask Mrs. Law for her own idea, her own standard of the infidel and the Christian, and also to request her to account for her assertion that a man may be infidel in the early ages and still his views may be deemed orthodox in after time. Does not Mrs. Law somewhat confound infidelity with orthodoxy? Will Mrs. Law, who is now considered an infidel, be ever considered orthodox? or will Charles Bradlaugh ever be held up as a sample of a great moral philosopher? This is really too ridiculous to dwell upon. Mrs. Law seems to have a very vague notion of *real* Christianity. She wanders

in the fog of scepticism, and often asserts that Christians have been opposed to light, life, and liberty, so that the liberty of the subject and of the press owe alike their existence to infidels who have suffered for the good of mankind. She forgets the existence of Hampden and Cromwell. To listen to her, one would be led to imagine that Paine, Voltaire, and Richard Carile were the only great pioneers of liberty, and that to them we owe our freedom of thought and action! She revels in such phrases as "Christian rack," "Christian gaol," "Christian bailiff," &c. Her greatest joy, so she asserts, is to be called infidel, and then she seems to fancy that her name will be enrolled on the scroll with Socrates, Confucius, Galileo, and Bacon! It is impossible not to be reminded when she explodes in this style of the fable of the "frog and bull." But Mrs. Law also assumes the character of a political lecturer; she gives her hearers to understand that she played the part of Joan of Arc when the Hyde Park railings were pulled down, and in glowing language she portrays the advance of the Reformer's banner. Mr. Walpole may now know that it was Mrs. Harriet Law who caused him to shed tears. Mrs. Law has played, and intends, if possible, to play a very remarkable rôle in the history of the nineteenth century. Of course, if we swallow all this nonsense, we must look upon Mrs. Law as a sort of supernatural being; but whatever may be our views of this lady, she evidently thinks not a little of herself. She is also great on "Woman's rights," a sort of Ajax, in fact, of the feminine gender. She teaches that the position of a woman, in relation to what we may call the inferior part of humanity, might be mended enormously. The fair philosopher is avowedly dissatisfied with the position of the pretensions of the tyrant, man. Her hearers have certainly a very varied entertainment. From "Love, Courtship, and Matrimony," the subject of the lecture on Tuesday, the discussion gradually changed to Free Trade and Reciprocity, the Land Question and Politics, and wound up with what they please to term the "Religious Question." These discussions, which took place at the close of her meetings, amply repay her hearers for their trouble of listening to her harangue, and no one, even the most serious, goes away without having had a hearty laugh at the expense of some unfortunate individuals who have been venturesome enough to measure swords with her. This was in every respect the case on Wednesday night last, and her victims, three in number, were an intensely ludicrous sight to behold. Who could not have sympathised with them? The evil produced by Mrs. Law's lectures always stands a fair chance of being forgotten in the amusement of the discussion which she always invites, and in leaving her lectures you are likely to depart with the idea of having had a couple of hours of splendid fun.

From the Leigh Chronicle, 13 November 1869.



‘Wigan is a grand old town, The Romans knew it well...’

THANKS to my wife’s cousin and her husband, Doris and Bill Clarkson of Shevington, we are in receipt of recent copies of *Past Forward*. As a native of the ‘Ancient and Loyal’ Borough I would like to

compliment you on your very informative publication, and to congratulate the Heritage Service on its efforts to preserve and expand the history of Wigan and District.

I was born in Wigan in

1917 at the corner of Darlington Street and Harrogate Street in the living quarters of the grocery store which my father had taken over just prior to World War I, and which eventually became widely known as “The Shop

That Value Built”. The business was sold after the death of my father in 1938, and I left Wigan in 1946 when I accepted the position of Deputy Surveyor to the Romsey Borough Council in Hampshire where I remained until we emigrated to Canada in 1949. I have many clear memories of my early life in the 1920’s and 1930’s in Wigan and District, some of them grim and depressing, others pleasant and interesting. I find it difficult, in these days of plenty, to describe to our grandchildren how things were in those early years in the coal mining and cotton milling towns of central Lancashire. Your magazine’s stories and photographs will certainly help in presenting a more realistic picture as they develop an interest in their family’s roots. This is a particularly popular subject in a country like Canada where it is far from unusual to have four grandparents with four different nationalities.

During the quarter of a century that he was operating the store, he served one term as President of the Wigan Grocers’ Association, and was elected as a Fellow of the Grocers’ Institute. It was a difficult period for businesses in the area that he served, for the slum-clearance programme created movements of people to the newly developing Council House Estates. To counter the loss of valued long-time customers he used to spend one day a week ‘on the road’, picking up the weekly order which was delivered on Thursday or Friday (better service than today!).

My memories of the first nine years of my life in the Darlington Street area are still quite clear. They include Cassinelli’s Ice Cream Shop and ‘Factory’

across the street from our store, from where their many ice cream carts were serviced for pedalling through the streets of the town, the Presbyterian and Jerusalem Schools that I attended, the Gas Works and the Brass Foundry, for some reason given the name of ‘Pepper Mill’. I also remember learning to play Rugby football at the age of eight on a field bare of grass, and enjoying the Sunday School outing by canal boat to Gathurst or Appley Bridge for the Annual Sports Day; also attending the Saturday matinee silent films, usually in those years at the Palace or the Pavilion. We did indeed live simple lives in those days.

My wife’s family, Grounds, from Standish, is an old established family of the village going back to the 18th century. Until 1996, for the previous 100 years there was always at least one member of the Grounds family involved in ringing the bells of Standish Parish Church, where we were married in June 1940. The roots of our families go deep in the soil around Wigan and District.

I am enclosing a couple of photographs of the store which is no longer there as the result of the re-developments that have taken place, and which have helped to make Wigan the attractive town that it is today. The one which includes myself and my younger brother is dated by the window display which features the recognition of the Silver Jubilee of King George and Mary’s reign. It was also my last year at Wigan Grammar School. The other would have been taken around the same time.

As our old school song said, “Oh, Wigan is a grand old Town, The Romans knew it well”. May it continue to prosper for another Millennium!

Regards to any who may remember us.

J. Vincent Baines
4-21 Rossmore Road
Grimsby Ontario
Canada L3M 3E3



‘The Shop That Value Built’ once stood at the corner of Darlington Street and Harrogate Street. Both these photographs were taken c.1935.



Aspull & Haigh Historical Society

Meetings are held in Our Lady's R.C. Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull on the second Thursday in the month at 7.30 p.m. Further details from the Secretary, Mrs. Rosalie Naylor, 3 Pennington Close, Aspull, Wigan (01942 256145).

13 September

The History of the Manchester Museum of Transport

Sidney Robinson

11 October

Greasepaint and Fun

Joan Balshaw

9 November

From Alchemy to Chemistry

Dr. David Lythgoe

13 December

Christmas Party

Atherton Heritage Society

Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. at St. Richards Jubilee Hall, Atherton. Admission £1 (members), £1.50 (non-members). Further details from the Secretary, Mrs. M. Hodge, 82 Leigh Road, Atherton M40 0PA (01942 884893).

14 August

Unwilling Soldier

Lizzie Jones

A wife follows her husband – a soldier in the English Civil War. What were her thoughts and how did she cope with this life style? Lizzie will reveal all.

9 October

Maps and Cakes

After the AGM members can study our collection of maps and enjoy a drink and old fashioned cakes.

13 November

A Profile of Elizabeth Gaskell

Liz Williams

We have read her books and been captivated by their translations to TV. Now hear about the lady herself, from a member of the Elizabeth Gaskell Society.

11 December

Wigan's Theatrical Past

Fred Barton

SOCIETY NEWS

Mr. Barton, no stranger to the Society, will have us 'rolling in the aisles' once again with his latest offering.

Billinge Local History Society

For further details contact Jack Boardman, 38 Garswood Road, Billinge, Wigan, WN5 7TH, (01744 892613), or visit our web site at www.billinge-history.com.

Golborne & Lowton Local History Society

Founded in 1984 the society now has an average monthly attendance of over 20. Meetings are held at Golborne Library on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.00 p.m. Non-members are welcome. Further details from Ron Marsh, P.R. Officer (01942 726027).

Leigh & District Family History Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. O. Hughes (01942 741594).

18 September

The Grime Family of Shuttleworth

Andrew Todd

16 October

Members Evening

20 November

Catholic Ancestry

Dr. A.J. Mitchinson

Leigh Literary Society

Meetings are held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library, on the last Wednesday of the month. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. Norma Ackers (01942 865488).

Tyldesley & District Historical Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday

of every month from September to May at the Tyldesley Pensions Club on Milk Street at 7.30 p.m. We do not charge an entrance fee although voluntary contributions are always welcome. Refreshments available. Contact the Secretary (01942 514271) or ryding@cablenet.co.uk. Visit our websight at www.amw02593.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk.

Wigan Archaeological Society

The Society meets at the BP Centre (Scout HQ) in Greenhough Street on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. Entrance is only £1.

1 August

Annual Trip

5 September

Shapur the Great

Dr. Charlesworth

3 October

Two Excavations and a Little Bit of Luck

Jack Smith

7 November

Industrial Archaeology of Greater Manchester

Robina McNeal

5 December

Manchester University Recent Finds

John Walker

Wigan Civic Trust

The Trust meets at 7.30 p.m. on the second Monday of the month at Drumcroon Arts Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan. For further information contact Anthony Grimshaw, Secretary (01942 245777). New members are always welcome.

Wigan Family & Local History Society

Meetings are held on the first (workshops), and third (speakers) Tuesday of the month at the Springfield Hotel, Springfield Road, Wigan, at 7.30 p.m. For further information contact the Secretary, Tracie Ann Brown, 16 Florence Street, Higher Ince, Wigan WN1 3JS.



**DICCONSON
STREET
NEWS
WANTED**

Dear Sir

With respect to you. Having just become a member of "Friends of Wigan Heritage", now enjoying my first copy of *Past Forward* may I say what a great magazine it is, lots of interesting items and information to be found.

I am hoping through the magazine that a question can be answered as to whether Dicconson

Street Wigan still remains today? Are there any old photographs or prints of that area that I could obtain?

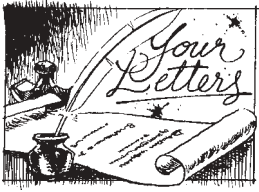
My great-grandfather Henry Miller was born 17 August 1833 at Hindley; he married Mary Elliott (born 13 July 1830 at Carlisle) at St. Lawrence's Church, Chorley, 12 September 1853. Henry is stated as a book-keeper. My great-grandparents

Henry and Mary are listed on the 1861 Census at 19 Dicconson Street Wigan; Henry was a railway agent. Three young children are also listed, ages five, three and one years old. Great-grandmother Mary and her children are later to be found on the 1871, 1881 and 1891 censuses at Chorley; Mary is stated as married each time, but no trace of great-grandfather

Henry. I have (so far) been unable to find his death, or any further trace of him!

I shall be very pleased to hear any news about Dicconson Street if possible. Thank you again for *Past Forward* – I shall look forward to the next edition.

**Angela Everitt
3 Rowan Way, off
Warren Avenue
Fakenham
Norfolk NR21 8PW**



Queen at the Annual May Day Festival (14 May, 1909)

Dear Sir

Due to being busy I have only just read Issue 26 of *Past Forward* – EXCELLENT – I felt I had to write to congratulate you on all articles – it has been one of the best issues yet.

Whilst reading the article by Irene Roberts, “Memories of an Ince Childhood”, it struck a note in the back of my mind, and yes I am going to tell you about it.

On 2 April 1998, my late mother would have been 100 years old – and thinking about her I remembered her relating to me the very exciting episode in her life, when at the age of 11 she was crowned Queen at the Annual May Day Festival in Golborne (14 May 1909). I say episode because in those days it was quite an event.

My mother, Ellen Norris, was practising to be a Morris Dancer in the forthcoming May Day Festival, and one evening on her way home she met a friend who was going to Golborne Council Offices in Worsley Street to attend the election of the Queen. The girls whose parents could

afford the expense were there, and mother’s friend asked her to go in with her. On entering the room the two girls were the last to arrive, so my mother’s friend sat down on the wooden form and my mother stood beside her. A bowler hatted official told my mother to sit down and, too afraid to say she was “only with her friend”, she did so. The gentleman removed his hat and slips of paper were put into it; the girls were told to each pick out a paper and the one with an X would denote the lucky girl to be Queen. The hat was passed down the row, starting furthest away from my mother, and yes, there was one paper left; horror of horrors it had the X on it.

My mother walked the streets of Golborne before arriving home quite late, to be asked where she had been. Of course she had to get it over with and tell what had happened. My grandmother was a widow, and there were seven children in the family, all grown up and working, except for my mother who was the youngest. Grandmother’s words were “you can’t have it”, and what followed next I am sure you can imagine. However, a few days later my mother’s brothers and sisters came up with a plan – one offered to buy the material for THE dress, another the lining material, another the shoes, another stockings and so on, until between them they would cover the cost of the whole day. Up to the actual day of the Festival my mother had not seen the “top material” of the dress, so there would be no “leaking of the colour”.

* * *

Moving forward to April 1998 – I decided to try to trace anything I could about this wonderful day in my mother’s life, and after various attempts, I spoke to Tony Ashcroft, Leigh Local History Officer; he searched old newspapers around the date I had, and lo and behold it was there in the Leigh Chronicle, 14 May 1909 – a full column all about the “Golborne May Queen Festival”, giving every detail of interest you could imagine (except the trauma of how the Queen came to be Queen!). One person’s name omitted from the write-up was the name of the ex-Queen, but I have found a black, leather bound, illustrated Holy Bible inscribed:

*Presented to the Queen
From the Ex Queen
Martha Lowe*

You can imagine the thrill I had from reading the press report and the immense pride in my late uncle’s and aunt’s support for their sister.

Sadly this was the last of the Golborne May Queen Festivals, but it certainly sounds as if it had been well supported.

My late mother’s married name was Cunliffe, and in later years she and my father, Gerald, worked for various charities in the district, one of the first ones being to raise enough money to buy football shirts for the local football team, at the time organised by Mr. Jimmy Bridge, a local farmer/milkman.

Best wishes to you and all the staff who work on *Past Forward* and those who provide Wigan with a first class Heritage Service.

Betty Brookes
10 Willowcroft Avenue
Aspull
Wigan WN2 1QJ

STILL IN THEIR ‘PIT BLACK’

Dear Alastair

With reference to Mr. Donald B. Norton’s letter (*Past Forward* 27 p28) concerning the All Blacks Rugby Team, I have often wondered if the Ince All Blacks got their name from the fact that they would be mostly miners and as such many of them would have worked on Saturday mornings, then played in the same afternoon, still in their “pit black”.

In those days, there were no pit head baths and miners would bathe in the tin bath on the fireside hearthrug at the end of their shifts. This would be impractical with their children still around (often as many as six of them of both sexes) at mid-day on Saturdays. Consequently it was a hands and face wash until after the match, when the younger children would be put to bed and the older ones would play out under the street gas lamps until called in by mother, by which time dad had bathed as usual on the hearth.

If a player got a torn shirt, his “black” body would be revealed and as many players in Ince were miners, it’s easy to reconcile the team acquiring their title of “Ince All Blacks”, locally.

In a similar vein, since the All Blacks of New Zealand were possibly emigrants from Britain on assisted passages of £10 per person (or their descendants), one wonders if the All Blacks from “Down Under” were in fact English or even Wiganers!

E. Taberner
62 Westwood Road
Earlsdon
Coventry CV5 6GE

BIRCH, DONNELLY, TYRER AND DILLON?

Dear Sir

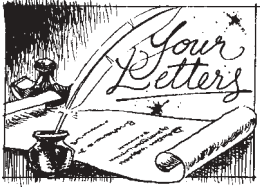
I have just read Mr. Lee’s letter, accompanying the Ince All Blacks photograph in *Past Forward* issue 26; I now live in Mozambique but am a Wiganer born and bred. The magazine is wonderful and for people like myself who are interested in the history of our home town and have moved away, it is like a piece of gold.

Since I was a small girl I have been interested in the history of Wigan and my family tree but it is only the past five years I have started researching.

A lot of my family were from that area and I would be interested to know the outcome of your findings or if any of my ancestors were on the photograph, just in case you have names; the surnames I am looking for are BIRCH, DONNELLY, TYRER and DILLON. As you can appreciate I have the names of my ancestors. I have their dates of birth, marriage, death, how many children they had and in some cases where they are buried. It would be wonderful if I could connect with a photograph of one of them. I am 33 years old and only this past Christmas did I see a photograph of my grandfather. He died five years before I was born.

Readers can contact me by E-mail or the address below which is my mother’s.

Susan Davies
c/o 18 Cromer Road
Goose Green
Wigan WN3 6RH
E-mail: jmdavies@isl.co.mz or
daviesb@hotmail.com



A HUT OR NOT A HUT?

Dear Sir

How I wish that I could answer my *Past Forward* colleague writer Mr. Harry Entwistle's poser (issue No. 27, p28), regarding dancing at Hindley's Hut, "Thut" as Mr. Entwistle called it. I have contacted a well versed senior local gentleman whom I greatly respect, but between us we cannot think of a dancing venue which formerly operated on Hindley's Stoney Lane (Liverpool Road), but **perhaps**, Mr. Entwistle, there **could** have been such a venue at one time!

The only 'huts' we have heard of in Hindley were the old Scout Hut which stood either near to the old All Saints School, or near to Hindley's present Police Station on "lower Castle Hill"!

Mind you, if one discounts the dancing, and thinks of entertainment incorporated with the town centre St. Peter's Church, there was a "Mission Hall" on the Liverpool Road, close to today's Labour Exchange

and the ochred Stoney Lane Brook Bridge! Local gentleman Mr. Jack Meadows' father ran the Mission Hall, a Church Army Hall where many children who didn't attend St. Peter's Church were welcomed to take part in Harvest Festivals, Socials and the like, to sing hymns, and to see scores of religious (and zoo animal) lantern slides.

Sometimes a large white sheet was spread-eagled onto Longton Street or Yarrow Street walls, and hundreds of slides were shown (evangelistic pictures) using an acetylene generator.

The area where the Stoney Lane Church Army Mission was situated in the 1920's was known as Navies Lump. The residents were kind and goodly people but most families were very, very poor. Some children that used the Stoney Lane Mission Hall had no Sunday suits, and sometimes not even shoes to speak of – they were "as poor as Church mice", too poor to attend the greater church building

seemingly, yet they, despite their obvious impoverishment, would have been friendly, loyal and they would have had pride!

The Strangeways Pub stands almost opposite the old Mission site, and the Workhouse was situated nearby; on the left, close to the brook stood a couple of houses, an entry like Coopers Yard once had, and flags to walk on adjoined the gas-lamped Mission Hall.

I believe a postcard picture remains of the Old Mission Hall showing a stage, a long reading desk and a decorated table, which at Harvest held offerings like cakes baked by Mr. Jack Meadows' mother and dad. The doctor, Dr. Ainscough, often sent flowers, cut freshly from his house on Atherton Road, "The Hawthorns", while the proprietor of the Powers Bakery sent an extra-special huge "Harvest Loaf" to the poor people's Church Army Mission.

I'm sure the 'Queensway Incer' will find my "attempt to answer" interesting. Many thanks!

**Kenneth Lucas
80 Park Road
Hindley
Wigan WN2 3RX**

Busy carrying missives

Dear Mr. Gillies

I wish to extend my appreciation to you for including my article on the Hilton Family in your last issue of *Past Forward*.

I must let you know that two days after receiving my copy and recovering slightly from the thrill of seeing my article in print, I received a further surprise – a letter from a descendant of the Hindley family, Henry (Harry) Hindley from Tyne and Wear. We have established that we are third cousins, both claiming great great grandparents, Joshua and Elizabeth (Rothwell) Hindley. Needless to say that British Airways and Qantas have been kept busy carrying missives and family photos to and fro. Harry is very kindly delving into more Hilton Family ties in Leigh for me at the present time, as his wife Irene seems to think that we could have common ground there within the Hilton clan.

My sincere thanks *Past Forward* and all concerned.
**Elsbeth Bradbury
31 Dalwood Close
Eleebana 2282 NSW Australia**

Info on a home wanted

Dear Sir

We are attempting to discover as much as we can about our house and wondered whether or not your readers would be able to offer any advice.

The house was built in 1907 and is the four bedroomed half of what we are led to believe was a six bedroomed house. The most striking feature is the front of the house: the front part of our large living room was a shop. We know that the shop belonged to a Miss Draper and was a 'general' shop. The store at the back used to be the bakery once upon

a time.

We have so far been unable to locate any photographs or any real detailed information about the property. We understand that the shop ceased to trade in the late 60's or early 70's.

We would be most grateful if you could help us in our search for information, photographs etc. – perhaps some of your readers may know more of the property.

**Graham Birtwell
119 Miles Lane
Shevington
Wigan WN6 8ES**

When Ince-in-Makerfield saluted the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth

Dear Sir

When your correspondent Neil Cain referred to the First Wigan Company of the Boys' Brigade in Ince-in-Makerfield [*Past Forward* 26, p29], he touched on a high period in the history of that town, albeit also a time when the crash of the Wigan Coal & Iron company signalled a new depressive low for the entire Wigan area.

Ince-in-Makerfield may have lost its iron works, and the struggle for existence was known in virtually every household; but the flourishing

of the new Boys' Brigade signalled an endeavour by the people of every local street to fight back in the face of adversity. The like-existence of further Companies in and around Wigan signalled the determination of everyday folk to display their pride and sincere common spirit.

This was never more apparent than on 12 May 1937, when Ince-in-Makerfield saluted the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Making good use of the iron works slag tip on

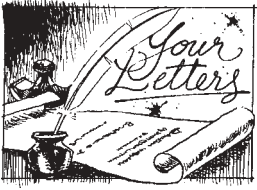
Hemfield Road, a huge beacon was prepared, consisting of removed railway sleepers in criss-cross fashion, with a side support to ensure stability. A path of ascent in step fashion had been prepared on the slag-tip side, to accommodate the local dignitaries for the ignition at 7.00p.m.

The ceremony was heralded by the First Wigan Boys' Brigade band, accompanied by local Council officers and clergy. The weather remained dry, allowing the burning fire to

emit a brilliant light, which continued well into the night.

Neighbouring beacons were also noticeable at Rivington, Ashurst Beacon and Parbold. But with its proud slag-tip, Ince could vie with the best! In those long-gone days, like the beacon fires, something suggesting the heart of an ancient people seemed to burn as though for all proud time.

**Donald B. Norton
Krithia
3 Queensway
Ince-in-Makerfield
Wigan WN2 2HL**



James Fairhurst's article on Dr. Mary Tomlinson in the last issue of *Past Forward* has aroused a considerable response from readers, particularly with regard to her final days. Here are just three of the letters which I have received. May thanks to everybody who has taken the trouble to write. Ed.

Dear Editor

The following has been passed on to me by Frank Baynes of Milton Grove, Orrell.

"Returning to India, Mary developed another interest – Indian Law – and became chairman of the local magistrates bench which consisted of five members, all of different faiths. Meanwhile, she met Reg Roll, a tanner and they married in 1941. The Missionary Society wanted Mary to come home when war broke out and India was threatened with invasion. However, she stayed on, returning to Britain after the war. Before long she and her husband went off to Tanganyika in East Africa where she worked with the Lutheran Church. After two years in Africa she returned to Britain and became the first female doctor in Gorleston, Norfolk. She was very popular and many former patients visited her after she retired. Her husband died, aged 86.

Mary celebrated her 100th birthday in 1999 and

at the time someone wrote "*Mary is known for being strong-minded and determined. It is important to remember and recognise that the attitude to women in the medical profession was not as it is today. It is to her credit that she faced these hurdles and won.*"

Even in old age she was full of fun, fond of a good political argument and strong-minded – some would say just like a Pembertonian!

Mr. Baynes concluded his letter, "This morning I received word that Dr. Mary Roll died on 27 September 2000, aged 101."

James Fairhurst

Dear Editor

I became acquainted with your magazine *Past Forward* some time ago through the Leigh branch of Pensioners' Link and must say I find it very enjoyable and interesting. I've been moved to write to congratulate you, particularly as a result of the Dr. Mary Tomlinson

story.

I am Irish and through letters to 'Ireland's Own', a weekly Irish magazine which my daughter gets for me, I have had shoals of lovely letters from home, over here and abroad; but my greatest surprise was the letter I received from an Indian missionary priest "in India". He had seen one of my letters in a copy of the magazine passed on to him, and we are still corresponding. A still greater surprise was when I read of Doctor Mary learning the Tamil language. Father Alfred Fernando is based at Tamil-Nadu, India! What a coincidence and what a small world.

Also, when I noticed the name of the writer of the article I felt I had to say how often I have read – always interesting – articles in 'Ireland's Own' by a James Fairhurst, Wigan, Lancs. Can it possibly be the same gentleman who is the interesting contributor to your *Past Forward* and my 'Ireland's Own'*

I have lived here since I

was 19 and England has been good to me. I married the loveliest Leigh lad – not a Wiganer! – but sadly lost him when he was only 53. He was a miner and a victim of lung cancer – no doubt largely due to inhalation of the lethal black coal dust. I still miss him even after 25 years.

**Annie Hindley
40 Elmridge**

Leigh WN7 1HN

**It most certainly is. Ed.*

Dear Editor

I was delighted to read the article on Dr. Mary Tomlinson, as I was a frequent guest at her home near Madras in 1944. Her hospitality extended to all ranks of the services and I was extremely privileged to enjoy the friendship of this remarkable lady. Alas, I was eventually posted to Calcutta, but before leaving she invited me to choose from her library a book which she suitably inscribed and of which I am the proud possessor to this day.

From then onwards I lost touch, but last

October Geoffrey Shryhane wrote a short article about her in the *Wigan Observer* – my first news since 1944! I contacted Geoff and he kindly supplied me with a fuller account. As a result, I can clarify one or two points in the closing paragraph of Mr. Fairhurst's article. Her husband, Mr. Reginald Roll, whom she married in 1941, was manager of a tannery at Chrompet near Madras. They returned to England on VJ Day in 1945. They settled in Norfolk but, following a request from the Missionary Society, Mary accepted a position to run the Aga Khan Clinic at the town of Mbeya in what was then Tanganyika; they stayed until the country gained full independence in 1951, when they returned to England. Mary was offered a position as a G.P. once more and carried on working in Norfolk until her 80's, when she was made an Honorary Member of the British Medical Association.

Her husband died in 1994. She then entered a Methodist home in Norwich where she died peacefully at the ripe old age of 101.

**C. Miller
28 Norbreck Crescent
Wigan WN6 7RF**

"It's a wonder he didn't drop dead from shock"

Dear Editor

As I was reading Mrs. Westhead's letter regarding pre National Health treatment in issue No. 27, her account of her father being ordered to pay nine shillings per week hospital charges rang a bell.

When my mother was taken into hospital for a period of six weeks my father was working away from home and I, a young teenager, was left to cope. This was in the early 1940's. A friendly neighbour took the trouble to inform me that if I didn't get a 'Recommend' we would be faced with a hospital bill. She advised me to

ask for one from dad's employers. Unfortunately he didn't work for a Wigan firm, so they couldn't supply a 'Recommend', whatever that was. Now I was advised to apply to our local Vicar. Although we lived in St. James' Parish, Poolstock, we were regular attenders at St. Thomas' church and Sunday School in Caroline Street. This caused new problems.

The Vicar at St. Thomas' was kind enough to explain what a 'Recommend' was. Apparently companies and institutions that made charitable contributions towards the

upkeep of Wigan Infirmary (the Royal Albert) were allowed a certain number of certificates allowing them to recommend free treatment for a limited number of people. As St. Thomas' parishioners contributed this money he was only allowed to issue them to people living in that parish. He advised me to apply to the Vicar of St. James'. On arriving at St. James' I found that 'our' Vicar from St. Thomas' had been in touch with him and, although he had very few 'Recommends' left, he very kindly supplied one for my mother. This no doubt saved us from a

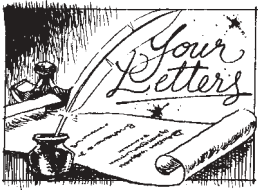
heavy bill as my mother received several blood transfusions before having a hysterectomy.

Another aspect of medical financing was illustrated when I received the doctor's bill. The Saturday morning after my mother went into hospital there was a knock at the door and Dr. Portman's chauffeur handed me a bill. I think the amount was £3 9s. 6d. I paid him from the money dad had left for housekeeping. That night, visiting mother in hospital, I told her I'd settled the bill. Ill as she was, she began to laugh, "It's a wonder he didn't drop dead from shock",

she said. How was I to know that the usual method of paying the doctor in our street was by giving the chauffeur sixpence a week on his Saturday morning rounds? "If he gets two shillings from the better off he counts himself lucky", said mum. "The chauffeur is as much a debt collector as a driver!" I wonder what today's doctors would have made of this system?

Perhaps other readers may have more knowledge or experience of 'Recommends'.

**Elsie Mack
3 Dale Street
Spring View
Wigan WN3 4UP**



THE LOVELY LADIES OF COOP'S SWIMMING CLUB

Dear Editor

You may be interested in publishing a photograph of these lovely ladies, who were all members of Coop and Co's swimming club. The picture was taken around 1936 or 1937.

I have been given the photograph by my aunt, Bessie McHugh who lives with her husband Bill in Caloundra, Queensland, Australia. Bessie Heaton, as she was then known, is the last survivor of the 13 children of Thomas and Martha Heaton who ran a well-known general carrier's business and a small corner shop at the end of Coop Street, at the top of Scholes. Bessie can't remember the names of most of the people in the photograph but she thinks the young woman on the extreme

right was a member of the Sherrington family who ran hardware and ironmongers businesses in the town.

I felt highly privileged at one time to be the only male member of the club, but then I was only about three or four years of age at the time! The club started me off on a lifelong interest in swimming and I still swim a mile in reasonable style at least once a week.

Incidentally I read a piece in a recent edition of *Past Forward* about dancehalls around Wigan. One of my swimming companions down here in Wellington is Ken Nelson, whose band regularly played at Ince Public Hall in the 1950's. He is fit and well and still teaching saxophone and clarinet and playing at mainly charity gigs

around Shropshire. Ken thinks that some of the ladies of Ince from the 50's got to know some of his band members quite well, and may recognise them in the photograph below.

Bessie and Bill met during the war when they were both in the army and stationed at Blundellsands near Liverpool. In the ATS, Bessie was one of the first women to drive heavy goods vehicles and also, she tells me, had experience of driving tanks.

As a member of the Kings Own Regiment, Bill McHugh had a very active war and was never far from the action. He was a regular soldier who was soon in active service, starting his war, to most people's surprise, by fighting against the

Vichy French in Syria. From here he moved over to North Africa and took part in the front line at the relief of Tobruk. Bill tells me, with some indignation, that he has had several verbal tussles with the local press in Australia who insist that no British soldiers took part in the relief of Tobruk and it was all done by the Aussies! After Tobruk he was flown out to the Far East where, as a member of Wingate's Chindits, he landed behind Japanese lines in the Burmese jungle.

At the end of the war Bill returned to his home in Kimberley Street, Park Road, Wigan and worked in Wigan for Fyffes Bananas and Brimelows the wholesale fruiterers. He was well-known around the wholesale

fruit market in the town. Still a member of the Army of Reserve, he was once more called up for the Korean War and was yet again right in the front line of the fight, this time against the Chinese and North Koreans. Once again he survived whilst other alongside him were less fortunate.

The couple emigrated to Australia in 1963 and lived around Melbourne, Victoria up to their retirement, when they moved north to live in Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland where my wife Dorothy and I recently visited them.

If any of the ladies in the photograph below, who will all be in their 80's, recognise themselves and are interested I am sure that Bessie would love to hear from them.

Tom Heaton
21 Sycamore Close
Wellington
Telford TF1 3NH
E-mail Tom@heatonctc.freeserve.co.uk



Left: Coop & Co's Swimming Club, c.1936-37. Bessie Heaton (now McHugh) is seated on the bottom step of the diving board on the right.

Right: Ken Nelson and Orchestra, Ince Public Hall (c.1954). Ken is second from left playing saxophone.

Only one person killed

Dear Sir

I found the article "Reminiscences of events in Atherton Township in 1941" [*Past Forward* 27, p19] very interesting, but I think that I should put the contributor right on certain points.

The farm at Atherton Central Station area was owned by the Speakman family, none of whom were killed by the parachute mine which landed on the barn, and from which only the bull and turkey cock walked away uninjured.

The only person killed that night was my uncle Arthur Shaw who was on duty as an Air Raid Warden in the area of the farm.

Keith Shaw
(previously of Bolton Road, Atherton)
Wennfield House, Wennington
Lancaster LA2 8PA

CORRECTION

Mrs. Jean Shawcross, whose letter appeared on p29 of the last issue of *Past Forward*, has pointed out that there were no Headmasters at Gidlow Girls' School - only Headmistresses.

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Who? Where?

There were lots of identifications of the top right photograph in the last issue as Dock Lane House, Liverpool Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield. No suggestions to date, however, for the other three. If you think you can help identify any of these three photographs, or of the four below, please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall, (01942 404432).

