

PAST FORWARD

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W I G A N
LEISURE & CULTURE
T R U S T



The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

AS seems to be the case of late, there's good news and bad news. Sadly, the Heritage Service has recently lost two very good friends and supporters, Ted Cheetham and Donald Anderson (see p4).

I had the privilege of getting to know Donald in the 1980's, and well remember his amazing knowledge on anything to do with mining. I recall one instance when I showed him a photograph of miners working underground, which I naturally assumed to be local, but he pointed out straight away that it definitely was not, and almost certainly Staffordshire - all on the evidence of the shape of the toe of the miner's footware!

On a happier note, the main events during the past few months have been the two new exhibitions in the History Shop. *Wigan on the Map* was given a rousing launch in March, when the History Shop was jam-packed, and since then there has been a steady number of visitors to view this unique achievement (see p5). Claire has organised a series of events and activities based on the Parish Map, and these have proved a great success (see opposite for more details).

This was followed by *You Are My Sunshine*, curated by Philip - a splendid exhibition celebrating 70 years of Wigan Athletic, and 25 in the top flight. The timing was immaculate, coinciding as it did with Latics at last reaching Division 1, after so many recent near misses. Again, there has been an excellent public response, with many first-time visitors to the History Shop.

I think you will agree that there is another fine mix of articles in this edition of *Past Forward* - further instalments of Fred Holcroft's evocative account of the Boer War, as seen through the diaries of local men and Harold Smith's recollections of his Ashton-in-Makerfield childhood, contributions from regular writers, including Irene Roberts, whose delightful style of writing has been much appreciated by readers, as well as articles by first-time writers.

Looking ahead, I am often conscious of how many words have been written but never made available for the benefit of others. A good example of this was when I recently met Wiganer Mark Gaskell. Mark has compiled a wealth of material relating to the history of aviation around Wigan, but what to do with it? The answer, of course - serialising in *Past Forward*, which will begin with the next issue. It will be a fascinating story.

I know there are lots more potential articles out there, some of which may not even have been written yet, but the information is all there, in someone's head. Don't hesitate to contact me - it is articles such as these, on a whole range of subjects, which has helped to make *Past Forward* such a success.

I hope all readers have a wonderful summer.

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Events

WELCOME to the new Events and Activities page of *Past Forward*. We've had a busy few months with organised visits from groups, and events at The History Shop and around the borough. Read on for an update on what's been happening and we hope you will join us at our future events (listed below). If you would like further information about events and activities, or about our Education and Outreach service, please contact Claire Hawkins, Heritage Officer (Community Outreach & Education) on 01942 828124 or email c.hawkins@wlct.org We will also be taking part in the NW Archives Festival and Family Learning Weekend in September – for details of all our future events see “*What's On*” published by WLCT and available throughout the borough.

GMR Bus

There were some familiar voices on BBC Greater Manchester Radio in May, as the GMR Bus visited the History Shop for a day of Family History-themed broadcasting. Chris Watts (Local and Family History Officer) gave a star interview with BBC presenter Diane Oxberry and other staff members were live on air throughout the day. Barbara Davies (a Friend of Wigan Heritage Service) also gave an interview and all that publicity has paid off with an increase in new family historians visiting the search room at The History Shop. The GMR Bus was extremely popular and gave people the chance to access the internet and look for family history websites. For more information on the GMR Bus and it's future locations check this website - http://www.bbc.co.uk/manchester/get_involved/gmr_bus/

Family Fun

The History Shop now runs activities for children aged 12 and under every Wednesday afternoon in the school holidays. Activities are free and the finished product can usually be taken home. We ran our first ever activity session over Easter and children made brightly coloured collages based on the Parish Maps in the *Wigan on the Map* exhibition. Several children also made and decorated their own globe complete with continents – varying from planet Earth to Mars!

During Whit half-term break we were joined by the St. Francis Brownies who each made their own version of a parish map. If you know any children or their carers/ parents please tell them about our free holiday activities. Details are below. We will also be at the Leigh Carnival on Saturday 26 July with free activities for children and information on our services.

COPY DEADLINE

Please note that the copy deadline for issue no 35 of *Past Forward* is 3 October.

Cover: Afternoon tea at Atherton, early 1900's. One of the many superb photographs in Tony Ashcroft's forthcoming book on Atherton and Tyldesley. (see p16).

and Activities

Free Family Fun at the History Shop Summer 2003:

Wednesday 23 July 2-4pm and Wednesday 30 July 2-4pm

Giant Footballer Collage. Find out all about the Latics in our fantastic exhibition and help make an enormous Latics player. Later in the holidays you can then bring your family and friends to visit your art work.



Making Globes and Map Collages during the Easter Holidays



St. Francis Brownies making mini-maps during Whit half-term holiday and (below) some of the maps they made.



Wednesday 6 August 2-4pm and Wednesday 13 August 2-4pm

Animal Magic. There are lots of animals hiding in the Parish Maps at the History Shop. Come and make a crocodile, a cat or a butterfly greetings card. Or choose your own animal to create.

Wednesday 20 August 2-4pm and Wednesday 27 August 2-4pm

Summer Special. Make your own mobiles and windmills for the garden or back yard. You can also visit our exhibitions and learn more about where you live.

Wigan on the Map

"Parish of the Month", the Community Outreach and Education programme for the *Wigan on the Map* exhibition, got off to a flying start in Atherton Library during May. Lots of people came to the Local History Day there to find out about the exhibition and the work of the Heritage Service while St. George's School enjoyed a "Mystery, Objects and Ancestors" morning at the library (thanks to Joyce and Marlene for all their help). Tony Ashcroft (Local History Officer) led one of his ever popular Cemetery Walks in Atherton.

Future events include a stall at the Leigh Carnival in July and more Local History Days at branch libraries. See "*What's On*" for events in your area.

Events confirmed at time of going to press are:

Friday 25 July 10am

Leigh Town Centre Heritage Walk Discover Historic Leigh with Local History Officer Tony Ashcroft. Meet at Leigh Library at 10am, £1 charge. To book a place contact Tony on 01942 404559

Saturday 26 July

Leigh Carnival Visit the Heritage Service Stall at the Carnival for family activities and information on our exhibitions, family and local history services.

Sunday 27 July 2pm

Leigh Cemetery Walk Fascinating tour of Leigh Cemetery and facts about famous Leigh residents. Meet at Cemetery Gates. £1 charge, contact Local History Officer Tony Ashcroft to book a place.

Thursday 18 September

Local History Day at Ince Library Talk to a Heritage Officer about your local history, family trees and find out more.

Friday 19 September

Local History Day at Hindley Library With information on family trees, exhibitions and local history.

Friday 3 October

Local History Day at Ashton Library Come and find out more about your local history, the Parish Map, and how to trace your family history.

Edmund (Ted) Cheetham 1926 -2003

IT came as a great shock to hear of the sudden death of Ted Cheetham on Good Friday, aged almost 77, particularly as I had been with him on the previous Tuesday evening. Ted had been a regular visitor to the History Shop and a most valuable and regular contributor to the family history records, especially through his research of graveyard and war memorial inscriptions.

I first met Ted about two years ago, and we immediately teamed up to publish the Memorial Inscriptions for St. Marie's at Standish and St. Luke's at Orrell, Ted doing the leg work and me doing the typing and publishing. I quickly realised he had an enormous amount of drive and enthusiasm for this work and I only regretted not meeting him earlier so I could have spent more time working with him.

Ted was born in 1926 in Pop Shop Yard, now the site of the Aldi Supermarket in Newtown, and attended St. Mark's school. His first job was as a winder at Eckersley's Mill before joining the army at 17 to fight in the Second World War. Attached to the 53rd Division Royal Welsh Lancashire Fusiliers, he saw active service at Arnhem, Nijmegen and Dusseldorf, initially in the infantry but later on as a jeep chauffeur for a Colonel. Since then he has been a very active member of the Battalion's Veterans' Association, right up to his death.

Ted was demobbed from the army at the age of 22 and met his wife, Martha, shortly afterwards at the Abbey Lakes Dance Hall in Upholland. They were subsequently married at St. Andrew's, Springfield and went to live with Martha's mother.

Ted's jobs in civilian life



were many and varied, always trying to better himself and striving to provide for his family, which eventually increased to six sons. His first job was as a bus conductor, but quickly changed to become a collier for more pay and better prospects. He studied at night school and worked his way up to become Safety Officer at Giants Hall Colliery. Shortly afterwards he bought his first house in Crooke village for £350, although he had to sell his motorbike and sidecar to do so. He lived there for four years before moving to Inward Drive, Shevington where he has lived for the past 40 years.

His next job was at the glue works in Appley Bridge, where again he worked his way up, this time to foreman. He worked there for four years before deciding, along with eldest son Anthony, to set up a family coal business, with an old Bedford lorry bought for £200 and a contract with the NCB. Later on as the business grew, they were able to buy an established coal company, including another lorry, and Anthony is still running the business today.

Unfortunately, at the age of 57 Ted developed cancer of the throat but, with the aid of surgery and medication, he managed to fight through it. His health continued to be a problem, though, and he suffered a number of heart attacks

Donald Anderson

SADLY, Donald Anderson, a very good friend of the Heritage Service over many years, died on 3 June, aged 90. He had been quite ill since a stroke five years ago and had had to spend most of his time since then in a home.

Mine manager, surveyor, local mine-owner and prominent mining historian, Donald was a much loved gentleman, a very friendly and generous man. One of the 'old school' of hands-on mining managers he was highly skilled at all aspects of the trade. He had worked in South African Gold mines and Indian coal mines before settling down to operating his own mines around Wigan.

Donald opened Dalton Lees Coal and Fireclay drift mine near Parbold in 1942, then Quaker House Colliery, near Leyland Green, in 1947 as the industry was nationalised. Quaker House Colliery had possibly been the longest lived private mine in the country when it closed in 1992, a tribute to Donald's



expertise in searching out coal reserves through historical research.

Donald's magnificent research and publications on the Wigan area coal mines, along with national mining studies have never been matched for their thoroughness of research and depth of personal knowledge, and will be a lasting legacy of profound importance for future generations. His works on local estate history such as Haigh are virtually the final word.

A full obituary for Donald by Archives Officer Alan Davies will appear in the next issue of *Past Forward*.

before having a triple heart bypass operation at the age of 63. Throughout any periods of illness, though, his leadership, personality and charisma still provided the drive for the rest of his family.

Ted enjoyed many hobbies, including keeping horses, goats, pigs, geese, chickens and budgies! He has collected antiquarian books, Hornby trains and virtually anything historical. He enjoyed playing the organ and before his throat cancer had been a singer. He was a very generous man, always wanting to give things, particularly to children and the less fortunate. On the other hand he wouldn't hesitate to write to the Prime Minister if he

thought something needed saying!

Ted's funeral took place on 28 April at Wigan Crematorium, which was packed to capacity and included a small contingent from the History Shop. The coffin was draped in the Union Jack, a standard bearer raised and lowered the colours of the 53rd Royal Welsh Lancashire Fusiliers during the service, and a bugler played the last post. His son, Anthony, gave a very moving tribute to a clearly much loved family man.

He leaves behind a widow, six sons, 15 grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and many friends. All will sadly miss him.

Gerry Rigby

Opening of *Wigan on the Map*

THE exhibition was officially opened by the Mayor of Wigan and the Leader of Wigan Council on 16 April. The event was attended by over 200 people, most of whom had stitched their way into history with their contributions to the 28 maps!

Several heartfelt speeches were made, praising the work of the organisers and stitchers, by the Mayor, Lord Smith (Leader of the Council), Alastair Gillies (Heritage Services Manager) and Penny Cook (President of Wigan Soroptimists). Marion Andrews and Teresa Mather were presented with beautiful bouquets in recognition of all their hard work as the prime movers and shakers in getting the project off the ground. Special thanks were also given to Tony Staunton-Unsworth, the Artistic Director, whose creative skills turned the individual works of art into the holistic work of art you can now see in the History Shop.

The AV presentation was unveiled, and projected onto a large screen, so that the vast audience could see it. Both the AV and the exhibition were warmly received, and everyone was delighted that the promise to display the Parish Map in its entirety in one venue had at last been fulfilled.

We have to say that we were overwhelmed, and greatly encouraged by the response and reaction of our guests (and our many visitors since the opening). The after-glow will certainly carry us forward to do our best with the many events and activities we have planned to bring the Parish Map alive, and take local history to our communities.

Claire Hawkins, our Community Outreach and Education Officer (see p3) who is masterminding these events, intends to keep you updated, with regular features in the local press and *Past Forward*, so keep a look-out.

Yvonne Webb
Collections Development
Manager



Visitors enjoy looking at some of the 28 parish maps on display.



Some of the special guests at the official opening of 'Wigan on the Map'. From left to right: Dr Penny cook (President, Soroptimists, Wigan Branch), Marian Andrews, Stephanie Moriniere (Ambassadress from Angers), The Mayor of Wigan, Alastair Gillies, The Mayoress, The Leader of the Council, Teresa Mather.

Letters from the Front

Local men in the Boer War 1899-1902

Food and water

Mostly, the letters describe what was closest to the soldiers' hearts – food. Corporal Tripp of the South Lancashire Regiment wrote to his mother at Rathbone Street, Earlestown:

“Bully beef, biscuits, and tea is our diet. We break the biscuits in pieces and mince the bully beef and boil it together. We get together in twos and threes and cook for ourselves, our fireplace being the anthills.”

Private Ince from Hindley, Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, wrote fondly:

“When I come home I shall think bread and butter a luxury.”

Corporal Griffin ate the same diet:

“I could eat this food all right if I was in the Minorca Hotel where I could have as many pints as I liked.”

There was one way to supplement this awful food. Private Fred Nicholl, 7th Dragoon Guards, wrote to his mother in Higher Ince:

“We get plenty of fowl which we pinch from farm houses and kaffirs.”

Water was the big problem. Private Thomas Brimelow, Coldstream Guards again:

“We have to get our water from the river; when we are away [from the river] you have to go without. At Graspan we could not get water and those that had a drop in their water bottles could get 10s. for a drink.”

Corporal Griffin, although in the cavalry, wrote:

“The other day I walked about a mile looking for water to drink.”

Just what had to be endured was explicitly stated by Private Ince to his father in Hindley:

“...And no water in our water bottle. When we stopped there was a pit with water in it – well we called it water but you would not if you had seen it. It was so white it looked like soapsuds, and there was a dead horse in it too. It tasted good all the same.”

(Episode three)

by

Fred Holcroft

Sergeant J. McDonald of the Lancashire Fusiliers tried to inject some humour into a letter to his cousin John Fairhurst of the George & Dragon, Bold Street, St. Helens:

“.....We had no grub since dinner time the day before except a cup of dirty water. They called it tea. Well I suppose it must have been but I would like to see your Meg put it in front of you, that's all. They served us out with a pound of bread and a piece of bacon....one spud (bad) and some old shoe leather, it must have been nothing else for we could neither cut it, chop it or chew it.”

Sickness and disease

More likely than being killed or wounded in action was the possibility of sickness. Private Rimmington, Loyal North Lancashires, wrote to his uncle in Lower Ince:

“Half our regiment are down with fever and we have only three officers.”

Worcestershire Regiment wrote to a relative in Goose Green:

“You will no doubt be aware of the dreadful amount of sickness among the troops out here, especially dysentery and enteric fever. At Bloemfontein the mortality averaged 16 a day. Isn't it sad when one comes to think of the hundreds aye thousands of young fellows who came out strong and healthy and hopeful even as I did only to find a lonely grave thousands of miles from friend and home.”

The climate did not help. Corporal Pearson, Lancashire Fusiliers, believed that:

“This war could not have broken out at a worse time, this is the rainy season....not ordinary rain but as if somebody was throwing buckets of water.”

Sergeant A. Crawshaw, 6th Dragoon Guards, wrote to his father in Ashton-in-Makerfield:

“.....A terrible storm broke. I never saw anything like it in my life. It started at 6.00 in the evening and lasted until 3.30 next morning. The lightening was a continued mass of fire, the thunder was deafening, and the rain well you'd

Official Casualty Returns 1899-1902

	Officers	Other Ranks
Accidental deaths	27	771
Deaths from disease	339	12,911
Died in captivity	5	97
Invalids sent home & died	8	500
Killed in action or died of wounds	701	7,091
Invalided home sick or wounded	3,108	71,814

Private Bate, from 50 Victoria Street, Leigh, in the Manchester Regiment, wrote:

“.....Every morning it is a common sight to see 100 men visiting the doctor.”

It was heartbreaking when, after surviving the shot and shell of countless battles, local men appeared in the casualty lists, having died from disease, such as Private G. Boardman Coldstream Guards, of Tyldesley and Trooper Tom Rogers, 10th Hussars, of 42 Selwyn Street, Leigh.

Private John Hurst of the

think you had fallen in the river.”

Typical of the uncomfortable conditions this weather caused was what happened to Gunner Edge:

“.....Not long before I was in the land of slumber. No cover over us but the sky and when I woke up I found I was in a pool of water for it had been raining all night...I did not know I was wet through till I woke up.”

Private Carney, Coldstream Guards, also from Ashton-in-Makerfield, wrote:



"We have to sleep on the ground at night with one blanket and it was very cold at night and burning hot during the day."

Corporal Ben Tripp again:

"We struck camp again at 3 a.m. and were off by 6 a.m. in torrents of rain.... 12 miles in 12 hours up to our knees in mud. Next day was the reverse....dry, dusty and extremely hot."

Deep sense of duty

As their units reached Elandslaagte, the Wigan soldiers were suddenly struck homesick when they saw it was a small coal-mining town. Lance Corporal Will Wood reflected:

"The scene might be Wigan. The only difference is that the colliers are black when they go down the pit as well as when they come up, for niggers work there."

Sergeant Hartley had an amusing tale to tell:

"Our regiment formed the advance guard, and when the Elandslaagte collieries came in sight our fellows gave a shout I can tell you. I thought we were back in Wigan again. How the buzz of conversation turned to pit work. I heard one chap should: 'I wish we were going down Poolstock Lane to Owd Nat's now Bill!' and our sergeant Major who is also a Wigan man had to smile."*

Each soldier's attitude to the war came across clearly. Most had a deep sense of duty and patriotism. Private Banks, Border Regiment believed:

"I am only doing my duty as a soldier should and if I get shot I shall die as a soldier should, fighting for his country and his Queen."

Private Gething, Royal Lancaster, from Wesley Street, Tyldesley, held similar thoughts:

"They [the Boers] have thrown down the gauntlet to our country. We have accepted the challenge and now it is their lives or ours."

An alternative point of view was put forward by Corporal Frank Porter of the Lancashire Fusiliers, who had been awarded the D.S.M., in a letter to a friend in his home town of Horwich:

"You mentioned something about the Horwich Volunteers coming out here. If they have not gone

when you receive this and you know any of them personally, ask them to think twice before they take such a serious step, for they are leaving home comforts, friends, relatives, and parents. For what! You might answer to fight for your country (Rubbish). This is what you leave for. To work all the hours you are ordered, day and night, without food for hours, often days, marching under a blazing sun without water. You have a vigilant enemy who is trying his best to kill you, besides a thousand and one different things e.g. lying in your trenches all night, the rain running in torrents from your garments and no cover but the vault of heaven. These are a few things a soldier and volunteer must put up with and for what! What is his reward if he is lucky enough to come out alive! A medal in exchange for perhaps one of his limbs in addition to disease which can cripple the constitution? Such are solemn facts, but I could fill a book."

Beseiged

The eyes of Britain were on the three besieged towns far away in South Africa, and trapped inside among the thousands of defenders – soldiers, civilians and natives – were scores of local men. Exactly how many will never be known, but letters from some were printed in the local papers – Private Joseph Grey of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment from Keble Street, Ince, Reginald Clarke, a department store manager who had only emigrated in January 1899, James Ashton who had been out there since 1879, and David Barton of the Cape Mounted Police were all in Kimberley, while Lance Corporal Edgar Greenbough, King's Royal Rifles, from Poolstock, Private J. Bentham, 5th Lancers of Grove Lane, Standish, and Edward Leary, another experienced veteran who had been in the Jameson Raid, were all in Ladysmith. Unfortunately, research has not turned up any locals in Mafeking with Baden Powell.

As the three sieges dragged on (Mafeking lasted 218 days, Kimberley 123 and Ladysmith 118, conditions for those besieged rapidly deteriorated. From Kimberley Private Grey wrote to his mother:

"It seems a long time to be fighting the Boers on an empty stomach"

Constable Barton wrote to his father in Swinley:

"We have to live mostly on horseflesh and mealie meal."

On outpost duty when war broke out, his three-man patrol had narrowly evaded capture and reached Kimberley in only what they stood up in, losing all their kit.

With only 500 regulars and 1500 Cape Mounted Police, the bulk of the 10,000 defenders were civilians. Including non-combatants and natives, there were 30,000 inside the town.

Reginald Clarke gave further details of the diet:

"All were treated exactly alike, blacks, white, military, and civilians, and the food daily dealt out to each holder of a ticket consisted of: horseflesh (inclusive of bone) 4 oz; brown sour bread 10 oz; coffee 1/2 oz; tea 1/4 oz; sugar 2 oz. This kind of thing went on from week to week from month to month until that grim monster hunger stared out of every face, and when a meal-time came round every man would watch his neighbour to see whether by any chance a bit might be left on his plate."

Deciding that attack was the best form of defence, the garrison made several sorties at the surrounding Boers, in which William Ashton took part:

"Not three miles out we lost 23 men. Colonel Scott-Turner was shot with an explosive bullet which blew the top of his head off....about two miles out of town we lost 29 men killed....and at another battle a mile out we did not lose many. We took about 30 Boer prisoners after charging with the bayonet. They don't like cold steel. We have lost 50 or 60 men in our four month siege, so I think we have got off very well."

Reluctant to attack frontally in case of heavy casualties the Boers concentrated on shelling the town. Constable Barton again:

"Many lives were lost in town and the women and children had to take refuge in the debris heaps and diamond mines."

Ashton adds:

"The Boers would start shelling at three o'clock in the morning until half past eleven at night. All the people who could go (women and children) went down the diamond mines some 1200 feet, some 1500 feet at all levels. Others went in holes, anywhere they thought would be safe."

* Worsley Mesnes Colliery owned by Nathaniel Eckersley.

Letters from the Front

Local men in the Boer War 1899-1902

Continued from page 7

Reginald Clarke also participated in several skirmishes. In one there was an incident over a white flag:

"During the attack the Boers hoisted the white flag at one end of the redoubt, and immediately the order was given by the British officers to cease firing. Directly this was done the Boers commenced blazing away at our troops from the other end of the redoubt. A number of British soldiers raised their rifles to reply to this treachery when Lieutenant-Colonel Scott-Turner drew his revolver and said – 'the first man who raises his rifle again I will shoot him dead.' Needless to say rifles were dropped. Fortunately there were no losses from the Boer abuse of the white flag on this occasion."

In a masterly understatement, Clarke described his feelings at the continuous Boer barrage in the later stages:

"One gun at three miles range kept dropping a pretty constant supply of 100lb shells into the town. In one single day 500 shells came into the town. On one occasion a shell burst so close it knocked me down with its violence and blackened both my eyes. Once I and some friends had just left a coolie gingerbread shop when a shell landed plump in the centre of it and blew it up like a pack of cards. This kind of sport is all right when viewed from the grand stand at Earl's Court or the Crystal Palace – interesting and exciting without a doubt but it tells on your nerves."

The arrival of the relief column brought a surprise to Clarke:

"A man (from the relief column) came up behind me and put his hands over my eyes and said – 'guess who' – it was a strange feeling for I knew at once I had found a friend and looking quickly round I saw a young fellow called McLoughlin with whom I went to Wigan Grammar School."

Ladysmith had an even tougher time. Throughout the siege Edward Leary kept a diary in the form of a letter to his friend Tom, in which he begins by describing how he had turned down a

job in the Cape Town plain-clothes police – at 10s. a day! – and gone to Natal in search of action. Between 1887 and 1895 he had served in locally raised units and this experience got him the job of orderly to General Brocklehurst, accompanying him on active service and being in charge of the grooms and drivers attached to the general staff.

"Of course I jumped at the offer, the only thing that troubled me was that I was remaining a civilian and would not be entitled to a medal if I got through. I mentioned this to the general and he said he would do his best to obviate that."

It was in this capacity that Leary found himself shut up in Ladysmith. On 27 November 1899 he wrote:

"That is nearly a month ago. God knows how many thousand shells have been fired into the town. We are absolutely surrounded. Ladysmith is in a kind of natural punch bowl surrounded by a circle of small foothills and further out by a circle of high ones. Our troops are entrenched in the foothills and the Boers have the higher ones commanding the town, and it is simply a matter of providence that there is a building left standing or a person living in the place, as they have big guns all round and the amount of shells sent into the town is enough to have destroyed a town like London, let alone a Godforsaken place like this."

The bombardment intensified. On 1 December 1899 he wrote:

"The Boers seem to have got more guns in position and let us have more shells than usual. Two 40 lb shells have entered the town hall which is being used as a hospital and finished off a lot of poor chaps who were already wounded....supplies will not last too long, at least we have a good supply for the men but the forage for the horses and mules will not last very much longer."

Hopes rose in early December as the relief column got closer:

"The other night a nigger managed to get through the Boer lines and brought a lot of letters....I believe the long talked of Relief Column will arrive any day now....we are still hanging on almost hourly for the Relief Column."

Black Week was a terrible shock to the defenders. On Christmas Day 1899 he wrote:

"I must write a little today. I have hardly had the heart to write since I wrote last the news that has filtered through being so bad, but we are still living in hopes and today of all days I should not be lugubrious."

A month later, on 1 February 1900, he was recovering from the shock of

Spion Kop:

"Ten days ago guns were blazing away within 12 miles of us and we were led to believe that in a day or two we were to be relieved, but we are not relieved and it is beginning to appear that we are never going to be. Since then we have heard no guns, neither has any news been published by the authorities as to how we are fixed. We have a tremendous percentage of sick and nothing to give the poor devils to pull them round."

As the food situation worsened he added:

"...We are on half-rations now, viz 8 oz. biscuits 12 oz. meat....out of about 4000 cavalry horses we can only manage to feed 300, the remainder are let run to grass during the day, under a strong guard. Poor brutes. It makes me awfully sorry to see the state they are in."

There had originally been 408 horses in Private Bentham's cavalry regiment, but all but 20 had been killed for food. (At Kimberley only horses killed in action were eaten). When they ran out of tea and sugar they roasted the Indian corn and ground it to make coffee, and when all their tobacco had gone they used tea leaves, coffee grains, weeds – "anything that would raise a smoke."

As a result Leary, like thousands more in the beleaguered town, grew weak and sick. On 22 February 1900 he wrote:

"I am still alive but speechless. I have been having another go in at dysentery, and I am trying to get my strength back....if we could only get on to some decent food again I would soon be alright."

Two days later he added:

"I find myself too shaky to write much. I have completely broken down during the last ten days and am in the hands of a doctor. They have managed to keep a few things together in the mess in case of emergency and they feed me on porridge at breakfast, sago at mid-day, and a basin of soup at night. I am debarred from solids."

Four days later, on 28 February 1900, and only just in time if Leary's condition was common in the town, the siege was broken. Lord Roberts' victory at Paardeberg caused the Boers to lift the siege and retreat into the Orange Free State. It was another 11 weeks before Mafeking was relieved, but this was a third glorious episode in British military history, which hid much of the incompetence in the way the war was being conducted.

In the next issue, Fred assesses the victory, won only at a price.

GEORGE ORWELL'S 'The Road to Wigan Pier'

ERIC Arthur Blair was born at Motihari, Bengal on 25 June 1903, the only son of Richard Walmesley Blair, an English civil servant, and his wife, Ida Mabel. On leaving Eton, where he was a Kings Scholar in 1921, instead of university, he joined the Burma Imperial Police.

Returning to Europe five years later, he set out to learn the facts about poverty as a dishwasher and tramp in England and France. He described his experiences in his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, published in 1933. He worked next as a schoolmaster and bookseller's assistant, during which period he wrote three novels, the best being *Burmese Days*, a bitter analysis of the condition of the Burmese natives in the early 1920's.

The breakthrough into national recognition came with the publication of *The Road to Wigan Pier* in 1937. The idea for the book came from Victor Gollancz who advanced £500 to Orwell to report on the condition of the unemployed in north-west England. Orwell stayed in Manchester 6-10 February 1936, where he was given the address of Wigan's Jerry Kennan, a union activist; he arrived in Wigan on 11 February.

Decent lodgings

He was found decent lodgings at 25s. a week in Warrington Lane and quickly discovered that in Wigan, wooden clogs were worn, women placed shawls over their shoulders and miners were

conspicuous by the blue scar on their faces. On 12 February he wrote in his diary, "Terribly cold, long walk along the canal towards some distant slag heaps...some which are like Stromboli. All the flashes are covered with ice like raw umber." Another entry stated, "In the early morning, the mill girls, clumping down the cobbled streets in clogs, make a furiously formidable sound like an army hurrying into battle. I suppose this is the typical sound of Lancashire."

Wishing to see the seamier side of Wigan, he left his clean lodgings and went to live above a tripe shop in Darlington Street, only to find the conditions there depressing. On 21 February he wrote, "The squalor of this place is beginning to get on my nerves....there is an unemptied chamber pot under the table at breakfast this morning".

The late Sidney Smith, who owned the bookshop in Mesnes Street, was quite definite that the shop was not exclusively a tripe shop but sold other things. He recalled his meeting with George Orwell; "It was a Wednesday afternoon, and at the time I was working in my paper shop in the Old Arcade. This was our half-day and I was

standing with two friends at the corner of Sovereign Road. Coming towards us, we saw this tall, gangly man wearing Oxford bags who had a tousled appearance and carried a clip-board. He began asking questions such as, 'Where do you work? How much do you earn? How long is your working week?' He had a beautifully modulated voice, completely at odds with his scruffy appearance, and when he began to write down our answers to his list of questions, we thought he was a government snooper, trying to catch people out on the Means Test. It was

only when the book was published that we realised he had been making an honest attempt to find out what conditions were like. Of course, the name Blair or George Orwell would have meant nothing to us at that time."

Bryn Hall Colliery

Orwell was taken underground at Bryn Hall Colliery, Bamfurlong, commonly known as Crippens, the coal owner's name. He had thought that the mine roadways would be like those of the underground railways. The roads were 4 ft. high

Continued on page 10

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**GEORGE ORWELL'S
'The Road
to Wigan
Pier'**

Continued from page 9

and the coal face only 3 ft. On the way back to the surface he was exhausted, collapsed and had to be helped by Jerry Kennan and his friends. Eventually, after having had to stop every 50 yards, they reached the surface, leaving Orwell full of admiration of the miners' agility to move so quickly in such confined spaces. When he bathed later he was amazed at the amount of dirt on his body and the difficulty in getting it off, noting that few miners had baths in their houses, only a bathtub in front of the fire.

Orwell drew from Wigan not only haunting

images of poverty but also of the goodness and decency of working-class people, but could never understand why the men were ashamed of being unemployed. He found people could even joke about their poverty. Mr. Smith recalled for me two of the current jokes: "A man was refused relief by the Board of Guardians because he had been seen late at night selling firewood. He protested that he was doing a midnight flit and the firewood was his sticks of furniture." He also told me that people used to say they were awakened in the morning by the sound of birds – coughing!

'Death Stoppage'

Orwell's research at Wigan Library showed that one miner in 900 was killed and six injured, and that nearly 8,000 had been killed in the Wigan pits

between 1927 and 1934. He wrote, "More men are killed in the mines every year than the whole of the casualties sustained by the Gallipoli Expeditionary Force in World War I."

The comparison showed clearly there was a kind of war going on with only one side suffering casualties. Not only that but there were what Orwell called "...the walking wounded, men whose lungs were damaged by dust and eyes by the poor lighting underground."

He quoted a notation on a miner's pay slip which showed the deduction of a shilling whenever a fellow miner was killed, the money going to the dead man's widow. This happened so frequently that the company used a rubber stamp marked 'Death Stoppage'. The casualties were not only the miners but also their families, some of whom lived in poverty on the banks of the canal. There he found a caravan colony which reminded him of some of the worst slums in Burma. "But", he wrote, "nothing there could ever be as bad, for in the East there isn't the penetrating cold to contend with and the sun is a disinfectant."

How representative of Wigan was *The Road to Wigan Pier*? Jim Hammond, the miners' agent for Wigan at the time, said that the description of the miners working underground was the best he had ever read. Regarding conditions, Jack Winstanley, Editor of the *Wigan Observer* in the 1970's, believed the descriptions to be one-sided and unfair, and that Orwell went looking for the dirt and found it. If he

did, it was because the dirt was there.

The Town Clerk of Wigan, William Henry Tyrer, Wigan born and devoted to the town, raised no objection, saying it brought Wigan to the notice of the nation. But in 1919, Mary Elizabeth Connelly, a future member of Wigan Council, had given evidence to a Royal Commission appointed by the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, about the appalling conditions in Wigan. In 1931, there had been a riot in Wigan led by Paul Farrell, protesting about the Means Test and the dirt and poverty. There had been little change in the depression years.

Industrial ugliness

Orwell would have argued that he was telling it like it was. Leaving Wigan, he gave a lyrical description of two crows he saw "...on a bare patch beside the railway line – courting and copulating." He was saying that the sterile gloom of industrial ugliness could be redeemed by nature if even the ugliest of birds could procreate in an urban wasteland. He wrote, "I knew nothing of working-class conditions. I had read the unemployment figures but had no notion of what they implied. Above all, I did not know that respectable poverty is always the worst. The frightful plight of a decent working man thrown on the streets after a life of steady work, his agonised struggles against economic laws which he does not understand, the disintegration of families, the corroding sense of shame – all this was outside my experience."

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Wigan Heritage Service - Discovery of Regionally Important Textile Archive

THOSE of you interested in the local textile industries will remember an article in *Past Forward* 31 announcing a Heritage Lottery Fund award of £86,000 to Wigan Heritage Service and our partners to survey and catalogue the textile pattern books in our collections. As well as the catalogue, we aim to produce an exhibition and a book in 2005, based on the knowledge we gain. The total cost of the project is £96,000. The shortfall of £10,000 has been made up by North West Museum Service and contributions from all the partners.

We are the first of the partners (Bolton Museum & Art Gallery, Macclesfield Museum, Quarry Bank Mill, John Moores University and Manchester Central Library) to have detailed analysis undertaken on our collection. The work is being carried out by Dr Philip Sykas, Research Associate in the Department of Textiles and Fashion at Manchester Metropolitan University, and an expert on historic textiles. We still await his full report, but so far the information he has recovered is astounding. The Charles Hilton & Son Archive has proven to be extremely

**The Charles Hilton & Son
Archive and the Silk
Industry of the
North West**
—
**North West England
Pattern Book Survey**

important and will undoubtedly shed new light on the Lancashire silk industry; it could even enable the dating of dress fabrics that were previously undated. This has the potential to enable museums to date garments in their collections.

Briefly, Charles Hilton & Son was a silk weaving firm, with works in Manchester and Leigh, producing dress silks. We have 48 pattern books with nearly 6500 silk patterns woven between 1854 and 1894, hundreds of point papers (charts used by operatives to set up the Jacquard looms) and various order books containing the names of customers, winders, weavers and warpers. A highly detailed picture of the company's production in the late 19th century is emerging.

All of this information will add to the knowledge of the

social and economic conditions in the industry and of its workers, the technical aspects of production and allow us to follow design innovations and progressions. The archive is rare in that it is so complete. Dr Sykas was delighted to make his discoveries. He tells us, "This information challenges some of our preconceptions about design in the silk industry. Until now, that history has been told mainly from the view of the top end of the market. But Lancashire produced dress silks for the middle classes, those silks that have a lower survival rate in museum collections. This collection is a resource of great depth and quality that will allow the public to see the design choices of ordinary people."

Dr Sykas has now moved on to work on the collections of our partners. Who knows what other exciting discoveries await him?

We intend to publish an in-depth article on the collection in a future edition of *Past Forward*, when we have access to Dr Sykas's full report.

**Yvonne Webb
Collections Development
Manager**

PRETORIA PIT DISASTER

PRETORIA was Lancashire's worst mining disaster. It occurred on 21 December 1910. An explosion at 7.50 a.m. wedged the cage in the shaft. At 9 a.m. the cage was released and rescue operations commenced. The explosion, 900 feet below the surface in Yard Mine, and the resultant

fierce fire, killed 344 miners. 436 men working in other parts of the mine were saved. The miners came from the Chequerbent, Atherton and Westhoughton area.

A relief fund was opened by the Mayor of Bolton and contributed to by the King and Queen. A commemorative tissue

was issued, listing the names of the dead and featuring drawings of the pit edged in pink flowers. One of the tissues was inherited by a Mr. Calderbank from his grandmother. Mr. Calderbank can find no family link with the pit disaster and would therefore like to pass on

the tissue to a relative of any miner who died that day.

If you would like this piece of mining memorabilia, Mr. Calderbank would be pleased to hear from you. You may contact him at 154 Wigan Road, Euxton, Chorley PR7 6JW (tel. 01257 269397).

The (long) road to Wigan Pier

I WAS born in Litherland, a northern district of Liverpool between Aintree and Seaforth. After leaving school I joined the Merchant Navy, shipping out of Liverpool. In 1959 I was the youngest certificated seaman registered in Liverpool. I married my wife Louise in 1963, and after a short while in a shore job, I joined the Trinity Lighthouse Service (the lighthouse authority for England, Wales and the Channel Islands) in July 1966. Following an initial training period of one year, which involved visiting various lighthouses to gain experience in the different types of equipment used, I was promoted to Assistant Keeper. I then worked at the following lighthouses, initially for two months on station followed by one month on leave until 1974, when the duty period was reduced to one month on and one month off:

Flatholm Island, Bristol Channel; Bull Point, N. Devon; Lundy Island North Light, Bristol Channel; Lynmouth Foreland, N. Devon; Strumble Head, S. Wales; Portland Breakwater, Portland Naval Base, Dorset; Sark, Channel Islands; Alderney, Channel Islands; Hartland Point, N. Devon; Coquet Island, Northumberland; South Stack, Holyhead, Anglesey.

Bardsey Island, off Lleyn peninsula; St. Bee's, Cumbria; Longstone, Farne Islands; Inner Dowsing, 15 miles off Lincolnshire Coast; Lundy Island South Light, Bristol Channel; Needles, Isle of Wight; West Coast Control Centre, Holyhead, Anglesey (11 stations); St. Anne's Head, S. Wales;

Flamborough Head, Yorkshire; Lizard Point, Cornwall; Nash Point, S. Wales; North Foreland, Kent (Britain's last manned lighthouse).

Pretty basic

Many of the lighthouses at my time of joining the Service were still operated by oil, not only in the main navigation light, but also the living quarters, and many stations did not have the basic facilities of running water, toilet, bathroom or heating, so life was, to say the least, pretty basic. Explosives for use as

fog signals were also still in use.

There are three types of lighthouse.... **tower rocks**, the type that is usually conjured up as a mental picture whenever lighthouses are mentioned; these are the tall towers that stand out at sea on submerged rocks.... **island stations**, which, until 1926, were operated by keepers and their families. The introduction of an automatic gas light allowed the more remote and barren islands to be de-manned.... **shore based** such as those at the popular holiday destinations of

Flamborough, Portland and Lizard where the keeper was resident with his family in tied accommodation. One such station, Hartland Point in North Devon, was where I and my family lived for four years, but when the children reached school age we thought it prudent to leave the rather splendid isolation for a more 'normal' lifestyle.

A pleasant town

So, in 1973, I was transferred to an off-shore station again, and after looking at various part of the country to live, my wife and I chose, for several reasons, to settle in Wigan - it seemed a pleasant town, fairly central for travel, and not too far from family connections, it had good roads and rail links for travel to east, west and south coast, and most importantly, at that time private housing was reasonably priced. Thirty years later, we are still here! Both my daughters attended St. Michael's Junior School, Gidlow Middle, and Deanery High. My wife worked for two well know credit companies in Wigan before joining Wigan Metro's Social Services Home Care Dept. in 1983, where she completed 20 years service before her recent retirement.

In January 1980, whilst stationed at South Stack Lighthouse in Holyhead, I was involved in the rescue of an injured man who had fallen from the cliffs near the lighthouse, and spent an hour in the sea with him before rescue by the Air Sea Rescue helicopter and Coastguard Cliff Rescue



North Foreland Lighthouse, Broadstairs, Kent. The last manned lighthouse in Britain. Left to right: Brian Clayton, Assistant Keeper; Gordon Medlicott, Principal Keeper; Peter Robson Assistant Keeper.

THE CART HORSE (c.1938)

I WATCHED a snippet of a TV programme the other day showing a shire horse being shod at the village smithy in the olden days. It took me back to the time in my youth when I was first introduced to the shire horse by my grandfather, a coal dealer.

We were fortunate in that where they lived there was plenty of space to house the cart and a large stable for the horse. I first became interested during school holidays when I would go with my grandfather to the coal yard in Chapel Lane for 30 bags of coal. Well I remember Chapel Lane – this was where Billy Davies lived with his mother and we often used to see him rubbing stoning the steps to the front door. Chapel Lane was also where the sweet shop was where I was allowed to spend my penny.

The railway wagons were in their respective sidings, all loaded with the different kinds of coal, nuts, Welch, lumps etc. My grandfather would drive the cart alongside the wagon and drop the door to get inside whilst I held the bag to be filled. When the cart was loaded we would go off to various parts of the town to deliver the coal. In the winter time, when the roads were covered with ice, the horse had to have studs fitted to its shoes to dig into the ice. Crossing the junction of Station Road and Chapel Lane was very treacherous because it was on a slope. More than once the horse lost its footing and the cart would take charge.

The horse knew that at certain customers it would be fed an apple or a crust. One customer took 30 bags at a time, delivered down a chute under a grid in the gateway. I was in the cellar shovelling the coal away from the chute. When we had finished I was as black as the ace of spades; but there was always a cold drink waiting.

Another of my special jobs was supplying fishermen with blood worms from the midden next to the stable! At one time the horse was troubled with segs on its legs which my grandfather treated with a bucket full of cow dung, plastering the affected area by hand. At least it did the trick!

In the summer time I had the job of taking the horse to pasture down Coppull Lane to Bottling Wood, I also collected. One time I was riding her bare back, when I gave her rather a hefty slap on the back and she broke into a gallop (took boggerts as they say), nearly throwing me off in the process.

I mustn't forget the glamorous part – when it was Carnival time, grandfather plaited the horse's mane and tail and decorated her with ribbons and rosettes while the wagon became the base for a tableau all decked out with crepe paper in glorious colours.

**R. D. Heavside
Standish Wigan**

PLEA FROM THE EDITOR

I greatly value all contributions to *Past Forward*, and if you don't have access to a computer or word processor, please don't let that put you off sending me your article - preferably typed, but again, if you can only manage handwritten, that's fine.

However, if you can possibly submit your contributions to me electronically ie by Email (a.gillies@wlct.org), or on CD ROM or floppy disc together with hard copy printouts, so much the better. And it would help the production team and myself even more if articles were double line spaced with one inch (25mm) margins each side, and a word count included.

Many thanks.

Ed.

team, for which I was awarded the Royal Humane Society Bronze Medal, presented to me by the Mayor of Wigan at the Old Town Hall in February 1981.

Promotion to Principal Keeper came in 1988, when I became the keeper-in charge of the Longstone Lighthouse at the Farne Islands, the home of Grace Darling (that well known heroine of folklore history), and then went on in that capacity, serving in several more stations until the end of my service. Appointment in 1994 as Officer-in-Charge of the West Coast Lighthouse Control Centre at Holyhead, (with responsibility for the lights from the Solway Firth to the Bristol Channel), should have been my final move within the Service before retirement, but alas, technology was developing

so fast that events almost certainly overtook us, and the Control Centre operations were transferred to the main Trinity House Marine Depot at Harwich; with the option of redundancy or returning to the lighthouses, I chose to stay employed and was re-stationed at what was to become the country's last manned lighthouse, at North Foreland, Broadstairs, Kent.

32 years service

With 32 years service, I was one of the senior Principal Keepers of the Service; in fact I was number three in the seniority list, but as only two Principals were required for the closing ceremony at the last manned station, I was somewhat unceremoniously

removed from post, and left the service on redundancy terms just a couple of weeks before the final demanning. However, I was asked if, along with another colleague, I would represent the Lighthouse Keepers at the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall in the company of the Deputy Master of Trinity House, Rear Admiral Rowe, (now Sir Patrick Rowe), the one and only time that Trinity House has ever been represented at this event....and with great pride I was delighted to do so, at what was to prove to be a most memorable and moving occasion.

To finally end my association with the lighthouse service, I and my ex-colleagues were invited to a farewell dinner held at the company's head office on Tower Hill, London, one

of the major classical buildings of the city, in the presence of the Master of Trinity House, HRH Prince Phillip, with whom my wife and I were seated during the meal. At the end of the evening each of the keepers present was presented with a medallion to mark the end of an occupation that has been part of our maritime heritage.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the service, and had a lot of job satisfaction from knowing that I **did** make a difference....it was a unique way of life that I'm more than pleased to have been associated with.

**Gordon Medlicott
6 Yewdale Crescent
Wigan WN1 2HP**

Since his retirement, Gordon has been a volunteer at Wigan Pier for over four years. Ed.

Communication via sign language

SINCE 2003 is the year of the Disabled, I thought that any reader with hearing difficulties may be pleased to learn that they should not be discouraged from visiting the Archives in Leigh as we have the ability to communicate with them via sign language.

Have you ever really enjoyed learning a new skill but secretly doubted that you would ever be called upon to use it? When I finished my introduction to sign language course a short time ago, I never thought in a million years that my job in Archives would be the place where my newfound skills would be put to the test. I recently helped a gentleman and his wife track down some burial records and an article from a local paper from the 1930's, which doesn't sound so unusual until you consider that they were both profoundly deaf, the gentleman partially sighted, his wife almost totally blind and neither of them able to speak.

It was immediately clear that it was going to be no ordinary conversation. To begin, I simply had to provide the gentleman with a pencil and paper so he could write down what he was looking for, but it became apparent, because his initial enquiry was quite complex and he wasn't really sure which parish he needed, that idea was going to be very tedious. So, I took the plunge and signed to him that I knew sign language and could communicate with him that way.

Needless to say, he was very happy with this arrangement, although it instantly put me at a disadvantage as I tried to read his super efficient signing, translate it and think of how I would reply. He was very patient with me, and whenever I didn't know a word, I simply fingerspelled it to him!

Eventually, after much signing, a few more notes and some mimes that Marcel Marceau would have been proud of, I was

able to point them in the right direction. It was also a learning experience for me to see how the gentleman communicated via deaf-blind sign language to his wife – a form of communication which is much more tactile than ordinary sign language.

To say the gentleman was grateful is somewhat of an understatement. I cannot even begin to imagine the problems that he and his wife must come across every time they have to speak to someone other than each other. I was so pleased that the course I had taken on a whim had proven to be so useful – even though it only helped two people it had already been worthwhile. It's also nice to know that should the situation arise again I am confident that I will be able to deal with it – and am more than happy to pass some basic signs onto whoever might like to learn them. You never know when you might need to use them.....

Amanda Bradshaw
Heritage Assistant, Archives

From Up Holland Grammar School to Winstanley College

THIS is the title of the latest book on Up Holland by Dr. Allan Miller. It tells the story of the old Grammar School from the 17th century to the modern day Winstanley College. Allan was a pupil at the school in the 1950's and, after university, he went back to teach there in the 1960's. He is thus well qualified to recount the fascinating history of this respected institution.

During the 1640's Adam Martindale was attracted to teaching in Up Holland because of its 'prettie church towre'. However, he stayed in the village 'not much above a quarter of a yeare' on account of the 'many great inconveniences' and 'constant alarmes' associated with the Civil War. After the trauma of the wars, villages from both sides of the conflict determined that Up Holland should have a grammar school and donated the necessary resources for the building in School Lane. The Rules of Up Holland Grammar School were dated 4 April 1661, which was probably the date of its official opening.

For the next 100 years, Up Holland Grammar School experienced fluctuating fortunes and dissatisfaction with a curriculum dominated by the Classic. At



The first Up Holland Grammar School (1661), in School Lane.

the end of the 18th century Rev. John Braithwaite and his son-in-law, Rev. John Bird, converted the failing grammar school into the much more fashionable 'Up Holland Academy'. It became an exclusive boarding school catering for the sons of the new middle class by offering them a 'new' curriculum designed to prepare them for the age of the Industrial Revolution.

When this experiment ended in 1812, the school went into decline. In fact it became virtually an elementary school where a certificated master taught pupils basic reading, writing and arithmetic on the lower floor, with a handful of

grammar school pupils with a separate teacher in the upper school.

In 1875 the lower school moved to new premises in Church Street. Meanwhile, the enlightened Rev. William Berridge effected the move of the upper school to new premises in Ox House Road, the site of the present High School. Despite threats of closure, the school's fortunes were improved by the remarkable headmaster, Rev. Charles Cox. Eventually, the Ox House site proved to be totally inadequate and in 1953, under headmaster Alfred Maggs, the Grammar School was re-located in purpose-built buildings on

Winstanley Road. (The book has been written to mark the 50th anniversary of this move).

Under Mr. Maggs and his successor, Mr. Ellis, the Grammar School continued to grow in size and to raise its academic reputation. In 1977 it became a sixth form college known as Winstanley College, to avoid confusion with Up Holland College, the Roman Catholic seminary in College Road. Under Principals Lavelle and Watson, Winstanley College has been consistently ranked among the top colleges in the country.

Old pupils and anybody interested in the full story will want to buy a copy of this book, published in hardback, with 38 photographs, by the European Library in a limited edition of 500 copies and all personally signed. It is available directly from the author, Dr. Allan Miller, 8 Holgate Drive, Orrell, Wigan WN5 8SL (tel: 01695 625370 or E-mail AllanMiller@wfc1.freeserve.co.uk) @ £9.95 post free (Dr. Miller is donating his share of any profits to local churches and other good causes). It can also be obtained from the History Shop (please add £1.05 for p&p if applicable).

'In Their Own Write'

Rachel Prescott (d.1824)

RACHEL was the only surviving daughter of John Prescott, a bookseller and printer who ran a business in Old Millgate, Manchester. By the end of the 18th century, after a lengthy residence in Manchester he moved to Bedford, Leigh, where he died in April 1811, aged 79. Rachel also died here in December 1824. She was the writer of a small book of verse entitled 'Poems'. This volume was published in 1799 by Messrs. Richardson of Cornhill, London at a cost of 2s. 6d. and was dedicated to Mr. George Nicholson, editor and publisher of the 'Literary Miscellany'. In total it contained 29 poems. Obviously, she was reasonably well educated and literate, probably because of her father's occupation - one of her poems is a response to her reading of Mary Wolstonecroft's major work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, first published in 1792, which is now regarded as one of the earliest feminist classics. Entitled *Stanzas to the late Mrs. Godwin, on reading her 'Rights of Woman'*, this is an example of her literary output.

*Esteem'd defender of the British fair!
with firm contempt of prejudices born;
ordain'd of Reason to make us thy care,
and rescue female faculties from scorn.*

*Matur'd by science, thy rhetoric pen
has amply trac'd our Rights, and sought
redress,
in bold defiance of scholastic men,
who would enslave the powers thy sex
possess.*

*Man's claim admitted, why ignobly seek
to chain in ignorance our source of
thought?
illiberal! deeming mind as body weak,
and spurning science when by woman
taught?*

*Unaw'd by Fopp'ry's superficial sneer,
for ever jealous of superior sense,
't is conscious error makes them justly fear
the reprehension due to insolence.*

Further biographies of women writers associated with the area

*Shall rude quaint maxims of a gothic age
erect their standard o'er the scythe of time?
Shall prejudice disdain the female page,
which teems with truth and sympathy
divine?*

*Thy potent eloquence can fully prove
the force of language not to man confin'd;
nor mental powers constrain'd alone to
move,
within the orbit of his narrow mind.*

*If nature's Author, with the same design,
gave us reflection, reason, memory, sense;
why each dear privilege to man resign?
A proud fallacious scheme, without
defence!*

*Is he permitted scientific skill,
while woman, doom'd to puerile employ,
resistless quits, t'avoid the satirist's quill,
refinements nature form'd her to enjoy?*

*While letters are consign'd to man alone,
they swell his dignity to dronish ease,
and rights disputed, which we long have
known,
have scarcely left him any rights to seize.*

*Thine is the merit, be the laurels thine,
wherewith our gratitude shall bind thy
brow;*

*the female sex in common thanks shall join,
in heart-felt tribute all thy worth to show.*

In her will both her cousin, Richard Pickering Higginson, and his mother Rachel were named as beneficiaries. In the Leigh trade directories for 1818 he is listed as being in trade as wholesale and retail grocer and draper of Market Place. By 1821, his address was given as Market Street. He died in November 1838 at 'The Walmsleys', a house that he had built. Later occupants of his residence included William Charles Jones of Jones Bros. & Co. (1850's), Thomas Kirkpatrick (1881) and, in the 1940's, Henry Speakman.

Rachel Prescott's poetry must have achieved some kind of recognition as she is listed in Charles William Sutton's book *A List of Lancashire Authors*, published in 1876.

Mary Thomason (1863-1937)

Mary Thomason was born in Westleigh on 3 March 1863, the daughter of Thurston and Alice

Continued on page 16



'The Walmsleys', the home of Richard Pickering Higginson, cousin and beneficiary of Rachel Prescott.

'In Their Own Write'

Further biographies of women writers associated with the area

Continued from page 15

Pemberton. Her early life was spent in Westleigh which she loved intensely. She married Mr. Joseph Thomason, a postman, who later became Assistant School Attendance Officer in Leigh. He died in 1895. For 34 years Mrs. Thomason was a school teacher and taught at Westleigh Wesleyan Elementary Schools, having started her teaching career at the early age of 13. She was also later at the Leigh British School, while as a supply teacher she taught at most schools in Leigh at one time or another.

Mr. Thomason was the son of John, a printer, who was the first shorthand teacher in Leigh. They had three children, a son and daughter who died in infancy, while the surviving daughter taught at Westleigh Methodist School. Mrs. Thomason took a deep interest in the educational and religious life of the town. At one time she was a representative on the Lancashire and Cheshire Institutes, an honour she greatly appreciated, being the first woman from Leigh to enjoy that distinction. She was a member of the Leigh Literary Society and served for many years on the Educational Board of the Leigh Friendly Co-operative Society, where she rendered excellent service. She was also a devoted member and an active worker at Westleigh Wesleyan Church.

Mary Thomason died on 16 March 1937, aged 64 years, at her residence, Pemberton Cottage, Beech Crescent, Leigh. As a native of Westleigh she was well grounded in local tradition and could tell many good dialect stories happening within her own lifetime. Her daughter Alice M. Prescott (nee Thomason), besides



Mary Thomason

being a teacher at Westleigh Wesleyan School, also wrote poetry. Although none of it was published, some of her manuscripts are held in Leigh Local History Library.

Few people had a greater love for Leigh than Mrs. Thomason. She sang its praises in her poems, and would never tolerate disparaging criticism of the town.

*I have heard some of beauty speak
And say Leigh is without
That they don't know what beauty is
I have not any doubt.*

*Whatever other people
May think of old Leigh,
'Tis the dearest spot
in the world to me.*

Leigh and the Spinning Jenny is a poem typical of the style penned by Mary Thomason.

*Of good old Leigh my song shall be,
A town of wide renown,
Long for inventive skill and work
Its people have been known.
When Arkwright but a barber was
And travelled up and down,
The world's first spinning jenny he
Saw in our good old town.*

*Tyldesley, Bradshaw and Shuttleworth,
Worthies bygone of Leigh,
If here you could but come again
A greater town you'd see.
Thousands of spinning jennies now
Immense in size there be,
All sprung from the small jenny that
Invented was in Leigh.*

*Then sing of Leigh, long may it be
Far famed for skill and work,*

*Long may its jennies spin good yarn
For looms that will not shirk.
Its shirtings, silks and calicoes
In markets o'er the earth,
Maintain the fame of good old Leigh,
Where jenny had its birth.*

In 1931 a lyric entitled 'Give a Little Squeeze' was accepted for publication by James Reed & Co. London, provided she could supply a musical setting. She also wrote about other local features, including Pennington Hall, Lilford Park, the Beech Walk and the opening of Leigh Town Hall.

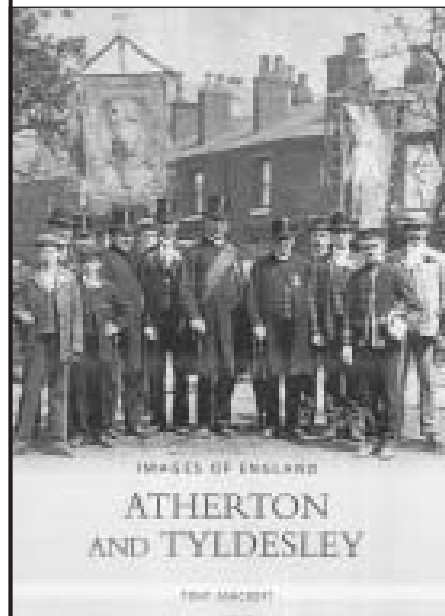
Her publications include:
New Poems for little bricks – A.H. Stockwell, [1924] 20p.
Warp and Weft: cuts from a Lancashire Loom – Leigh Chronicle & Printing Co., [1938] 183p.
Baa Baronet and Maggie – a fast piece: two stones – Leigh Chronicle & Printing Co., [1959] 185p.
The Poetry of Mary Thomason – A.M. Prescott [195-] 306p.

The last three books were illustrated by Roger Hampson.

Tony Ashcroft
Local History Officer, Leigh Library

Forthcoming Publication

A new book by Tony Ashcroft on Atherton and Tyldesley is due to be published by Tempus at the end of August. It will have the same format as those on Leigh, Hindley and Abram, Ashton and Golborne, Standish and Shevington and the Wigan Coalfield.



Wigan Casino

Memories of the "Heart of Soul"

READERS under the age of 35 could be forgiven for thinking that Wigan's only pre-Verve contributions to popular culture were George Formby and clog-dancing. In fact, Wigan in the 1970's was at the forefront of a massive soul revival, making its **Casino Club** not just nationally but internationally famous.

The 3-storey building on Station Road was constructed by the Atherton Brothers around the time of World War I and bore, on its façade, the name 'Empress Hall'. Known locally as 'the Emp', it served at various times as a theatre, a billiard hall and, under the ownership of Eddie Farrimond, a venue at which one could jive to the best dance bands. A second dance hall, later christened 'Mr M's' (the Casino's 'oldies' room) but known initially as the Palais de Danse, was subsequently added. In the 1960's the building was bought by a brewery and renamed the Casino Club. By the time it came into the ownership of businessman Gerry Marshall in the early 1970's, the Casino was in a dilapidated state. Nevertheless, with its large Maplewood dance-floor surrounded by a balcony and topped with a dome-shaped ceiling, it was considered a perfect venue for the weekly soul music 'all-nighters' that commenced in September 1973.

Based on the Motown 4/4 beat, "Northern Soul" originated in the American cities of Detroit, Chicago and New York, and was so called to distinguish it from the Sly Stone/James Brown/funk-oriented sounds dominating the London soul scene at the time. In the early years of Gerry Marshall's ownership the Casino played host to such people as The Tams, Major Lance, Edwin Starr, Arthur Conley, Jimmy Ruffin and Chairmen of the Board. These acts, however, were just the tip of an iceberg of black recording artists who, during the 1960's, had sought to emulate the Motown sound. Although more contemporary records were later added to the play-lists, it was mainly the sound of these forgotten recordings, mostly commercial failures at the time of their original release, that filled the Casino during the famous all-nighters of the 1970's.



The 'Soulies'

With the Casino now long gone, it is hard for those who weren't a part of it to appreciate just how big the northern soul scene – and the profile of Wigan Casino in particular – actually was in its heyday. Despite strong competition from the likes of the Mecca Club in Blackpool, the Casino regularly pulled in thousands of adherents from all over the UK. The 'soulies' would arrive in Wigan by car, coach, train or on foot; many clutching sports bags decorated with badges obtained either on previous visits to the Casino or at other favoured venues. These bags typically contained a change of clothes and assorted toiletries – dancing all night is a sweaty business! Popular outfits were singlets, enormous flares and footwear that best facilitated moves such as side-stepping, spins, backdrops and stomping (Clark's Polyvelts were popular for a time).

Except on anniversary nights, admission was by payment in cash (to Mrs. Woods) prior to being ushered up the stairs by the doormen to avoid blocking the entrance ("Straight up the stairs please!"). On opening the double doors to the main room, one was immediately assailed by three things: the heat – "like opening the doors onto

a blast furnace" – a unique aromatic cocktail of sweat, talcum powder, cigarette smoke and deodorant, and, of course, the music. Many patrons were almost religious in their fervour for the forgotten soul classics that resurfaced during the Casino years – records such as *I Got to Find Me Someone* by the Velvets, *The Duck* by Willie Hutch and *Born a Loser* by Don Ray. A particular feature of the Casino that some may remember was the record bar where dealers could buy and sell, and swap lists of 'wants' and 'offers'.

'Mr M's', the oldies room, opened an hour later than the main room, at 3 a.m. From February 1976, however, an oldies all-nighter on the first Friday of each month complemented the weekly Saturday all-nighters at which both 'oldies' and 'newies' were played. (I should perhaps explain that the term 'oldie' here refers not to the year of original recording or release but to the fact that the song was already familiar to the dancers. It was thus distinguished from a 'newie' which, although possibly recorded as long ago as 1965, had yet to be 'broken' i.e. introduced to the audience by the DJs). The oldies all-nighters again proved

Continued on page 18

ST. NATHANIEL'S, PLATT BRIDGE

St. Nathaniel's Parish Church, Platt Bridge, was consecrated for worship on 10 June 1905, but its centenary is marked in October 2003 as it was in the autumn of 1903 that the church foundation stone was set in place by J. Eckersley J.P.

Since that time the mission of the church to the parish has developed to meet local need, with the establishment of a mission church (now demolished, along with the original vicarage) in Victoria Road. One of the most famous occupants of the vicarage was Revd Arthur (later Canon) Dean, vicar from 1923 until his sudden death on Walking Day in 1956. The vicarage is now situated in Ridyard Street, although the present vicar of St. Nathaniel's lives in Abram vicarage with his wife, the vicar of Abram and Bickershaw.

In the 1980's, pastoral reorganisation in the area saw the parish boundaries extended to take in the village of Bamfurlong, formerly part of the parish of Abram. This move led to the Bamfurlong mission church – known as "The Church of the Good Shepherd" – becoming part of Platt Bridge, which was not necessarily a popular move with those most affected by the changes! The two parts of the



parish have grown in their relationship with one another, and it is hoped that greater co-operation will be possible.

A number of activities have been planned during the Centenary celebration year, including a special Walking Day route through

Bamfurlong to St. Nathaniel's in June, a Flower Festival 23-24 August, and a centenary Festival service on 26 October.

For further details contact the Vicar, Revd Kevin Crinks, on 01942 866269.

'Wigan Casino Memories of the "Heart of Soul"

Continued from page 17

phenomenally popular.

In 1978 Wigan Casino was voted "Best Disco in the World" by Billboard Magazine, ahead even of New York's ultra-trendy Studio 54! At its peak, the club is said to have had in excess of 100,000 members!

The 'Soulies'

The Casino's eventual demise has been attributed to various factors. Certainly, its passing was not mourned by some sections of the local community. The regular invasions of their town, and the media interest that followed (a still-controversial

Granada Television documentary about the Casino was broadcast in 1977), were resented by many Wiganers. Station Road became virtually impassable at opening and closing times. Much time and energy was expended by the police in trying to keep the traffic moving, control the crowds and deal with problems surrounding the consumption of illegal drugs. (The strongest beverage that could be obtained inside the Casino was cola, but some relied on more potent substances to sustain them through their nocturnal dancing and record dealing.)

Finally, by 1981, it seemed that Wigan Metro had decided to deal with "the Casino problem" once and for all by terminating the lease (the Council owned the land, though not the club itself) and demolishing the building to make way for a proposed civic centre. The very last all-nighter was held on 6/7 December of that year. The site is now a car park for

council employees.

The loss of Wigan Casino left a massive void in the Northern Soul scene that has never been properly filled. The 'faith' is still kept at a series of lower profile venues, but none has come close to rivalling the popularity or longevity of the Casino. Despite the controversy and internal wrangling over musical direction that dogged its later years, Wigan Casino – the "Heart of Soul" – remains a treasured memory for those who were fortunate enough to attend.

Recommended reading

Soul Survivors – The Wigan Casino Story, Russ Winstanley & David Nowell (Robson Books Ltd. ISBN 1861051263).

Nightshift – Growing Up in and Around Wigan Casino, Pete McKenna (S.T. Publishing, ISBN 1898927405).

Casino, Dave Shaw (Bee Cool Publishing Ltd. ISBN 0953662624).

Recommended Listening

Various Northern Soul compilations are available on CD, many featuring tracks that are

now otherwise unobtainable. The following are singled out for the simple reason that the packaging includes some great pictures of Wigan Casino in its heyday:

After Hours: Northern Soul Masters (Warner)

More Northern Soul Memories (Sanctuary)

Northern Soul Floorshakers (Music Club)

30th Anniversary Weekender

Original Casino DJ Russ Winstanley has organised an anniversary weekend at **51st State on 23-24 August, 2003**. Every DJ who played on the first and last nights at the Casino has been booked to appear, and the event will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 2.

Keep the faith.

Anthony Pilgrim

The History Shop will be mounting an exhibition featuring Wigan Casino in 2004. If you have any memories of the Casino or the Empress Ballroom, please contact Claire Hawkins on 01942 828124 or Email c.hawkins@wlct.org
Ed

HISTORY SHOP NEWS

Friends of Wigan Heritage Service

THE latest meeting of the Friends was held at Leigh Library, where those who attended were treated to a behind the scenes tour of the collections by Local History Officer Tony Ashcroft. Thanks are extended to Tony for this -those present certainly felt his enthusiasm for his work rubbing off! Indeed their own interests were so fired that a project to work on the collection is being looked at by our Chairman Max Finney and Tony (see below under projects).

The next meeting is to be held mid-week as a change to its usual Saturday slot. We are hoping this will prove a more popular time. As usual, all Friends and anyone else who is interested are invited to come along. Please let me know here at the History Shop in advance though, so that I can cater for the correct number.

We are always looking for more people to get involved, either with helping to organise the Friends themselves or with the project work. If anything that you read on these pages appeals to you then please do get in touch. (01942 828128).

Friends Roundup

Work has been progressing on the indexing of the 1841 census and the end is in sight. Co-ordinated by the hard working Barbara Davies for the Friends, the project will hopefully generate another CD available to our readers.

Already certain Friends have been turning their attention to what the next project might be. We still need some areas of the 1891 census indexing, and although the whole of Lancashire is now available on CD in the History Shop, this is only indexed by place name. As we are getting to see just how good our new 1861 and 1841 indexes are on CD, we might like to see it in the same format as them. In fact, in the future it would be good to have all our indexes done in this way. Plenty to work at there then.

Of course, indexing is not the only way Friends can help with genealogy, and genealogy is not the only subject with which Friends can help the Heritage Service.

Heritage Projects

Genealogy

Wigan Heritage Service is piloting a scheme of Family History Workshops for beginners to the subject. For this the voluntary assistance of the Friends is vital. A small group will be trained in the use of all the resources in the research

area of the History Shop so that they will be able to conduct one to one workshops with the public. The idea is that these are organised in advance and the public will attend by appointment (see right for details).

Local History

Other areas of our work, particularly local history, also generate a lot of interest with the public both as researchers and as potential volunteers. Projects on newspapers, maps and photographs have already been looked at, and a project on the local history collection at Leigh is also under investigation.

This would entail working with our Local History Officer in Leigh, Tony Ashcroft, who is based at the Turnpike Centre (Leigh Library). The collections there are wide ranging and the project could involve all areas from newspapers and maps to books and pamphlets, to electoral rolls and council minutes!

The project is likely to be co-ordinated by Friends representative and Chairman Max Finney. If you are interested and if you would like to do something to help the development of local history in Leigh, then please contact Max through the History Shop or go direct to Tony Ashcroft in Leigh Library on 01942 404559.

Appeal for ideas for projects

The range of projects tackled and the subjects is partly down to you, our Friends and volunteers.

Without you the work would not progress and without your interest in it

you would not enjoy doing it. It has to remain relevant and engaging to produce quality results, so if there is some other area you feel should be tackled, then let me know. If you can spare the time you may find yourself co-ordinating a project in the future, so do get in touch.

Family History Workshops

The Friends of Wigan Heritage Service, in conjunction with the staff at the History Shop, are planning a series of family history workshops over the autumn. These sessions will probably take the form of individual consultations and are to be aimed predominantly at beginners to the subject.

The sessions must be booked in advance at the History Shop and will carry a nominal charge of £1.50 to cover any reproduction costs, with the remainder going directly into future Friends projects.

DATES FOR THE WORKSHOPS:

Wednesday 10 September, 10.30-12.30

Monday 29th September, 2.00-4.30

Tuesday 14 October, 2.00-4.30

Friday 31 October, 10.30-12.30

Thursday 13 November, 2.00-4.30

Saturday 29 November, 10.30-12.30

Obviously this is something of a new departure for us. However, if there is strong interest in the workshops then we may repeat the exercise in the New Year.

For further information or to book call the History Shop on 01942 828020.

Philip Butler
Visitor Services Manager
tel: 01942 828128

FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

Name

Address

.....

Interests

.....

Please enclose £5 subscription for one year's membership. Cheque/P.O. payable to Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust. 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, starting with the current issue unless you request otherwise.

N.B. If you do not wish to cut this coupon out, a cheque along with your details on plain paper is fine.

HISTORY SHOP NEWS

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE

All summer at the History Shop visitors are invited to join us in the celebrations that surrounded last seasons outstanding performance by Wigan Athletic.



The exhibition *'You Are My Sunshine'* traces the development of the professional game in the town, a story going back some 120 years. It is revealed in the exhibition, for instance, that Wigan had no less than five teams between 1883 and 1932, and the last one of these, Wigan Borough, actually had League status. Then, 70 years ago, Wigan Athletic was formed and the rest, as they say, is history.

And what a history it has been - years in the relative obscurity of

'non-league' football in the Cheshire, Lancashire and then the Northern Premier Leagues, with only the occasional FA Cup adventure to excite the town. Finally, as recently as 1978 the Latics gained admission to the Football League, and this season climbed into Division One for the first time.

The story, from the 19th century through to this last glorious season, is told with text, objects and pictures in the Taylor Gallery of the History Shop. Items

from our own collection are joined by items lent by the club, JJB the main sponsor, the fans and the National Football Museum in Preston.

We have a collection of shirts showing the development of the strip over the last 25 years, but did you know that until the Second World War Wigan's colours were



Is your community group trying to reach a wider audience, looking for an exhibition venue?

WE want to encourage community groups to use the History Shop as an exhibition venue. If you are a local historical society, craft group or other group with a story to tell and the commitment to carry it through, then we want to hear from you. We can offer advice, practical help and, if relevant, objects from our collections to supplement your display. Both the Wigan and Atherton Photographic Societies use the History Shop for their annual exhibitions, you could too. If you are interested, please contact me at the History Shop for an informal chat, I will be delighted to hear from you!

Yvonne Webb
Collections Development
Manager
tel: 01942 828123

NEWSPAPER INDEXING

Wigan Observer Newspaper indexing 1950-1990..... Sign up now!

All you need is an interest in recent local history, a familiarity with our local area and a few hours to spare each week (or more!) indexing the papers.

I would like to help the Friends of Wigan Heritage Service with their index of the Wigan Observer.

Name.....

Address

.....

.....

Tel

Preferred day to attend the History Shop am/pm

HISTORY SHOP NEWS

red and white shirts with black shorts?

There is a model of the new JJB stadium, produced by the company during the planning stages of the project at Robin Park, and the



original Football Association log-book from the 1931-32 season, showing the demise of the fated Wigan Borough Association Football Club who resigned after only 12 matches of that season on 26 October 1931.

And of course we have plenty of photographs and programmes to tell the story and evoke memories of the past.



There is a visitors book where we are inviting you, not only to tell us what you think of the exhibition, but also to send any messages of support and congratulations to the club. At the end of the exhibition, which closes on 16 August 2003, we will be sending all of the comments through to the club, so come down and let them know what you think.

There are also two free competitions to test your judgement and knowledge. One, a 'spot the ball', is for our younger visitors whilst the 'Football Crazy Quiz' is guaranteed to test even the most informed of Latics fans. You will have to be quick though, as the closing date for both is 31 July 2003, but it is worth it as great prizes are up for grabs.

Exhibitions and Events

WE now have a new leaflet out, *Exhibitions & Events 2003*, which details all our activities and exhibitions until the end of the year (you can't miss it, it has a picture of a Wigan Athletic player on the front). It includes our telephone numbers, opening hours and a handy 'how to find us' map. It is available at all libraries and, of course, the History Shop.

Our current exhibition in the Taylor Gallery is *You Are My Sunshine – A History of Professional Association Football in Wigan* (until 16 August). As you can imagine, this has been a great success (see Philip's article opposite). Wigan Athletic could not have timed their promotion to Division 1 better, 70 years as a club and 25 of those in the league - what a celebration! Latics fans have been flocking to express their joyous feelings in our visitor's book. Typical comments include "Wonderful memories – here's to Div 1", "Here's to the Premier League, sit up

everyone and take notice!!" and "Simply the best day of my life and my mum's, grandad and grandma's". I think we get the message, and we will ensure that it is passed on to the club, even though we are sure that they already know what great fans they have.

Here is a quick rundown of the rest of the years' exhibitions (see our new leaflet for full details)

23 August – 6 September
Wigan Photographic Society
Annual Exhibition

13 – 27 September
Atherton Photographic
Society Annual Exhibition

13 – 31 October
Legacy of the Commonwealth
Games

19 November – January 2004
Paintings of Wigan and
Beyond by Gerald Rickards

TWO NEW HERITAGE SERVICE CD'S!

Two new CD's are now available from the History Shop, at only £7 each.

The first includes the superb audio-visual programme which accompanies the *Wigan on the Map* exhibition, along with an extract from the *Mapping the Millennium* programme and images from all 28 maps which have not been used until now. This compilation is also available as a video, again at £7.

Genealogists will be keen to buy their own copy of the 1861 census for the Wigan area on CD, to use at home.

Available from the History Shop, or by post (please add £1 for p&p).



INCE

Here, Gerald Rickards returns to his project of producing a line drawing of all the townships in the Borough. Ince is the fifth area to be covered. Gerald writes: *"I made the decision to do the Ince drawing, influenced by a recent commission to produce a stained glass window for St Mary's Church. Seeing that the window is being done in a similar style it seemed an obvious decision to make. Incidentally, this is the third stained glass window I have done, the previous two being a Guild Window at Preston and the large window in the Queen's Hall, Wigan."*

Gerald had another good reason for choosing Ince, as his wife Mildred lived at Westwood Lodge before they were married. This also seemed an appropriate location to include the customary 'mog', even although the cat never actually visited the building.

Gerald is well aware of the constraints of time and space. *"With every project in the series I become more aware that there is just not enough space to include every interesting item I discover. It is very time-consuming looking at all the different places and then selecting which to include. In the space available I aim for a balance, trying to include buildings and landmarks with links with the location, past or present. I also aim to adapt the items to my style of drawing and try to link the whole composition together - an interesting exercise and a test in decision making."*

Gerald has now completed paintings based on his Aspull, Orrell and Leigh drawings, and these should be included in his exhibition in the History Shop in November (see p21).

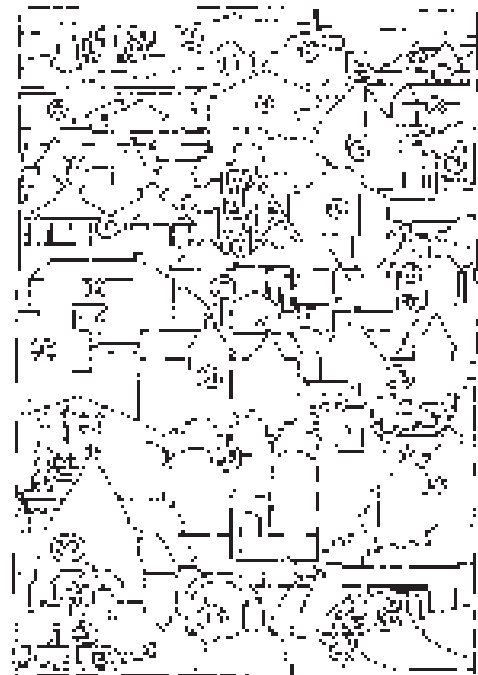
1. Westwood Power Station and cooling towers. Created a considerable amount of interest when they were demolished in August 1989.
2. Three of the many pylons in the region.
3. Distant view of the Pennines with Rivington Pike in the centre.
4. Centenary Primitive Methodist Church building in Delegarte Street.
5. East end view of St Mary's Church. Consecrated in 1887, it was the work of the highly regarded architects Paley and

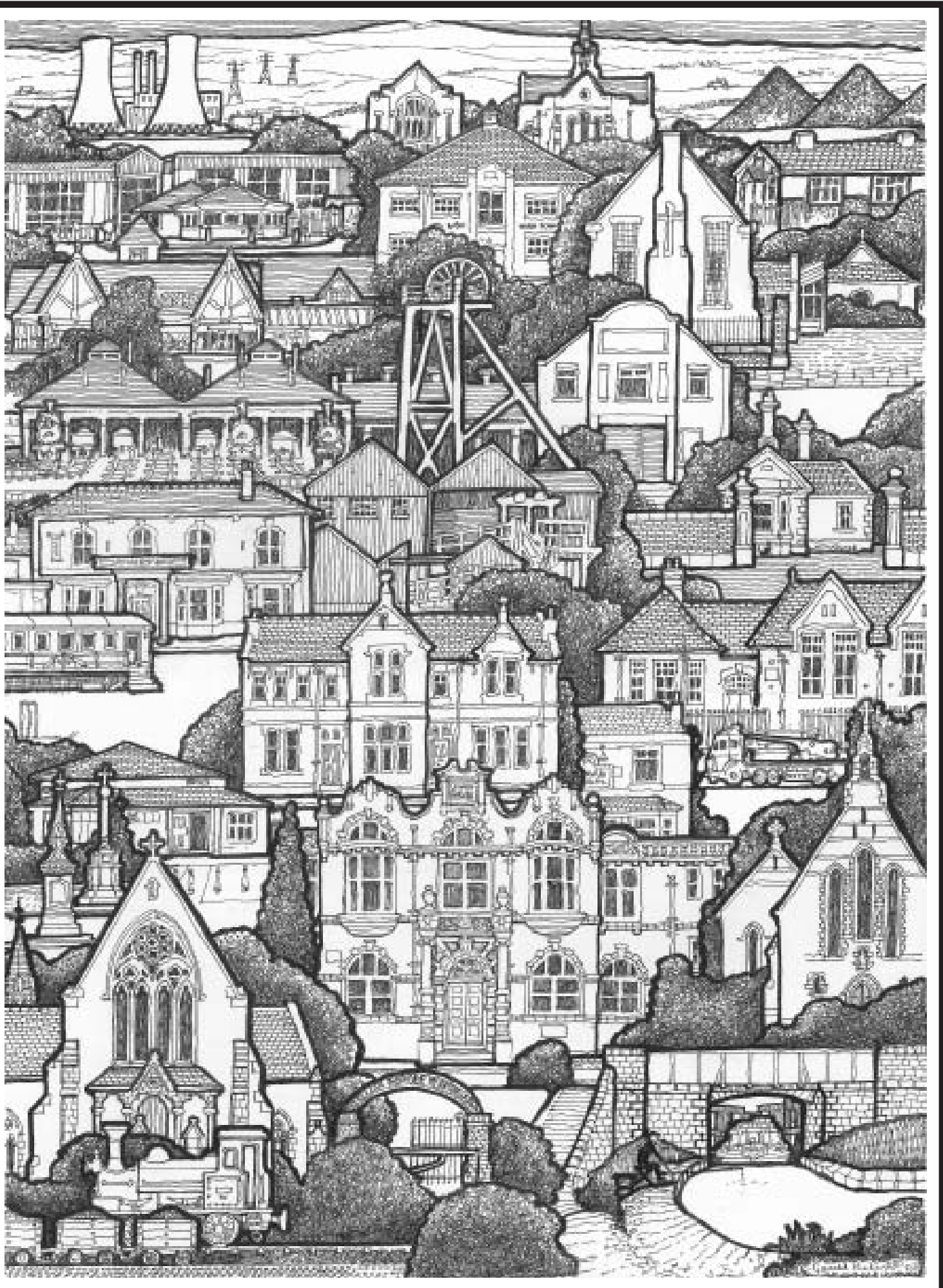
Austin. Demolished due to mining subsidence in 1978.

6. Pit waste heaps; sometimes described as the 'Ince Alps'.
7. Water areas or 'flashes'.
8. Hitchen Foods' processing factory which has been considerably extended over the years.
9. Rose Bridge High School.
10. The band practice room.
11. Morrisons supermarket. Opened in 1979, on the former site of the railway goods yard.
12. Former school, converted into the new St Mary's Church in 1978. Part of the original school wall and gateposts can still be seen but the railings have gone.
13. The Church Hall which was later added to the church building in 1995.
14. Springs Branch Loco Sheds.
15. Regal Cinema in Bryn Street. When it was opened in 1938 there were seats for more than 700. Since 1959 it has been used for other purposes but the areas on the wall, where information on the films used to be displayed, can still be identified.
16. 'Walmesley Arms'.
17. Ince Moss Coal Pit, Number Four. Pit head gear in background; materials tub hoist in front of sheds.
18. Westwood Lodge as it used to be before recent renovation. Today there is little to see of the hall, which was once such an imposing building.
19. Artist's cat.
20. One of two railway carriages, standing on concrete blocks, which were once used as pavilion and refreshment area at Spring View Cricket Club.
21. Police station at Spring View, often referred to as Lower Ince Police Station.
22. 'Anderton Arms', with the large sign indicating the link with Rosebridge Amateur Rugby League Football Club.
23. St. Mary's Church of England Primary School in Derby Street, which was previously a secondary school, built in 1906.
24. A unique piece of mining equipment, at the start of a long journey from the Joy Mining Machinery works in Seaman Way.
25. Library opened in 1985 as part of the Smithy Green Shopping Centre. Built on

land where nine cottages once surrounded a small green, in an area still generally known at Ince Bar.

26. Ince Moss pit disaster memorial, in memory of many who lost their lives there in 1871.
27. The First World War Memorial, not far from the pit memorial, in Ince Cemetery.
28. Sometimes described as the Town Hall but 'Council Offices' is clearly inscribed on the large central plaque, and amongst the decorative features above the entrance is A.D. 1903.
29. St. William's Roman Catholic Church.
30. Christ Church, which is often referred to as Ince Parish Church.
31. One of the locomotives at Ince Moss came from Stephenson and Company Ltd.
32. Locally built colliery tubs.
33. Gateway to the William Foster Playing Field.
34. Britannia Bridge, where Warrington Road crosses the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.
35. The not uncommon sight of a fisherman sitting on a stool on the canal towpath.
36. Short Boat with the Britannia Bridge lock gates in the background.





IN THE dream I am a child again, running over the back-field to the ‘pens’ where the men keep hens and pigeons. I run in slow-motion – I don’t mean to – that’s just how it is in the dream – that, and the strange silence. I can see my dad chatting with a pal by the pigeon-cotes, and he waves to me, the fragrant aroma of his pipe-tobacco mingling with the scent of privet and rosebay willow-herb, filling the air with familiar, comforting smells of childhood. High above, an aeroplane, inaudible in the odd silence, leaves a trail of white vapour in a perfect summer sky.

I feel safe here, in the past, and I hold on to the dream, not wanting to wake up, because I know that, whilst I dream, my mam will still be at home in the kitchen, standing on the pegged rug in her faded cross-over pinny, humming to herself as she makes potato pies – a family one in the big brown dish and two tiny ones in little white, illicit ‘British Rail’ cups – a regular Saturday-teatime treat for my friend Christine and me. She likes a ‘flutter’ on the horses, does mam – sixpence each way on “Newsboy” – and I hurry with her down the back-entry to a house where bets are laid out on the table, and where the bookie’s wife and unmarried daughter are always ready for a gossip.

‘A bird in th’and’

There is a plaster Alsatian dog on a crocheted runner on top of a huge radiogram which, come Sunday dinnertime, will broadcast ‘Two-way Family Favourites’ . . . “And now a request from B.F.P.O. 17” . . . followed by ‘The Billy Cotton Bandshow’. Over the

THE DREAM

fireplace is a mirror etched with a picture of a crinolined lady in a garden. I can see that room yet, and I can hear the clock ticking and the fire crackling. Mam was the Mrs. Malaprop of Ince – always getting her words wrong and mixing proverbs with a kind of reckless abandon: “A bird in th’and”, she would state dramatically, “gathers no moss!” – and then she would laugh with us, good-naturedly, at her own mistakes. Those precious moments have gone down in history in our family – lovely reminders of that patient, gentle soul whose whole world lay in the vicinity of the damp little terraced house that was her home.

A bus-ride into Wigan, with a look round Woolworths and a cup of tea in Gornor’s Café, was a treat, and half a day at Southport was her holiday. We went from Ince Station, our feet echoing over the covered elevated walkway of wooden planks, and I tried not to look at the ground so far below. My dad bought our tickets from the little ticket-office, and there was a tiny waiting-room whose coal-fire lay unlit on our summer outings. Oh! The thrill as the train chugged into the station, filling the air with the heady smell of steam on a sunny June morning – it was enough to make you dizzy!

We sat in long narrow carriages with pictures above the seats and leather straps to let the windows up or down, and I can still feel the tingle of excitement as the guard blew his whistle and the train gathered speed.

My dad always recited the stations between Wigan and Southport: Gathurst, Appley Bridge, Parbold . . . and somewhere along the way there was a bone-works which stunk to high heaven, and the thud-thud of carriage windows being shut was like machine gun fire!

‘Mary’s Café’

Arriving in Southport, we always went to ‘Mary’s Café’ for our dinner; the building that was ‘Mary’s’ is still there, just down a side street – no longer a café, and seen today through misty eyes and memories, but in the dream we can still go inside. A ride on the miniature railway and a turn on the ‘caterpillar’, and all too soon it was time to go home.

As we walked from Ince Station the evening sun slanted on terraced rows, throwing into shadow the corner-shop with its huge potato-scales and its tiny toffee-scales. On the shelves, bundles of firewood and packets of Omo with 4d off jostled for space with ‘Twink’ home-perms and bottles of ‘Drene’ shampoo. Cards hung haphazardly on the walls, each holding a dozen combs or babies’ dummies or the little bottles of patent medicines in which our mams had such faith. Strings of paper bags hung on nails by the “penny tray” – little white three-cornered ones for sweets and square brown ones for fruit and vegetables; everything else went straight into the customer’s own shopping-basket, or a threepenny

brown paper carrier bag with string handles – there were no plastic carriers in our little world.

Today there is a fish-and-chip shop in Ince Green Lane; in my childhood it was the Co-op – in the dream it still is. Everyone called it ‘t’cworp’ or ‘t’stores’ then, and there were chairs to sit on; the lady assistants wore little caps with “C.W.S.” on, and served you personally, reckoning up your bill at the speed of light on long slips of paper, licking pencils which they kept behind their ears, and our mams collected little yellow ‘checks’ which they stuck onto a card for their ‘Divi’.

Sticky yellow flypaper

Just further down the lane was ‘Little Amy’s’ off-licence, which was in a time warp even then! Ancient, faded showcards portrayed young ladies of a bygone era enjoying Bulmer’s cider – the only decoration to grace Amy’s, apart from the sticky yellow flypaper hanging by the one dim electric light-bulb. Packets of crisps were kept in a blue tin with a Union Jack painted on each side, and we bought ‘Spangles’ and ‘Penny Arrows’, ‘Black-Jacks’ and ‘Sherbet Fountains’; does anyone remember . . . not boxes, but bars of milk-tray chocolate – six different flavours all in one bar? We pretended to smoke our ‘sweet cigarettes’, which in these so-called enlightened days have to be called ‘candy sticks’ in case they encourage children to smoke, and yet I must have eaten enough to sink a battleship, and never once had the urge to try the real thing.

As I emerge from Amy’s dim little shop into the



'Their Name Liveth For Evermore'

WHILST recently working in Skopje, the capital city of Macedonia, or to give it its official title, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, my host mentioned there was a local British war cemetery and she would be happy to take me there as it was only in the suburbs of the city.

The morning prior to my return home was a beautiful day, with the mist just clearing to reveal clear blue skies and the sun, which lit a small stone-walled area containing 123 war graves of soldiers and one nurse from World War I.

The memorial garden seemed such a peaceful area, especially as we had just left the hustle and bustle of the city. The cemetery itself, with a small whitewashed church to the left and a smallholding on the other, was maintained to an immaculate standard, the grass recently cut, and even though it was November some of the rose bushes between the graves still bore their scented flowers. Remembrance Sunday was only the previous weekend and four wreaths lay below the plaque "Their Name

Liveth For Evermore", and a single poppy was placed on one of the graves.

As I walked along the rows of graves I noticed the words "Lancashire Fusiliers"; I could not believe it, all this way from my home in Appley Bridge in Lancashire, only to find memorials of soldiers from the same county. Then for a moment the reality of what I was looking at dawned on me, these poor young lads who probably lived not far from my own home, had left their homes and travelled across Europe, I guess mostly on foot, only to die in what was then a remote part of the Balkans.

Then, on the last row of graves, a memorial unusually gave both the name and address: M2/226053 Private W. Seddon, 102 St Helens Road, Leigh, Lancashire, Nr Manchester, England. I could not believe my eyes, this address was just seven miles or so from home. What



made this all the more poignant was that he died 3 November 1918, just days before the end of the war.

We can only imagine the grief of their poor families. Their mothers, fathers brothers and sisters, wondering where on earth their loved ones had been laid to rest.

The following day, as I am waiting for my flight, thoughts of those poor lost soldiers are still in my mind. Let's not forget them.

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brilliant sunshine, my mind begins to wake from the dream, but I fight it – I want to stay, just for a while, in my childhood, where old ladies sit out on chairs in the sun, watching 't'childer' at play – little girls jumping into skipping-ropes "All in together girls, very fine weather girls"..... or whipping tops along the pavement with whips made out of 'banding' – a kind of tubular string which my Aunt Mary brought home from the Empress Mill. I walk, a child again, through a vanished world of rag-bone men and gas-lamps, of factory-hooters and outside toilets, of jagged pieces of glass stuck into cement on the tops of walls to deter thieves, and of running to the shop for a 'gas-shilling' when the gas was 'begging'.

I know that, if I stay asleep, I can still go on the Labour-Club trip and I will be given 10 shillings in a

brown envelope to spend at Southport or Blackpool; and, twice a year, I can visit Silcock's Fair on the spare land, with its toffee-apples and candy-floss, where the older girls, sporting beehive hairdos and stiletto heels, eye up the fair-lads who stand fearlessly on the waltzer, spinning the screaming girls dizzily round to the strains of 'Cathy's Clown' or Bryan Hyland's haunting 'Sealed with a Kiss'. The fair came twice a year – once in the spring and once in the tingling autumn dusk, when we entered a magic world of glitter and flashing lights, and it is only when we wake from the dream that we see it as a few square yards of tattered gaiety set between back-yards and factory walls.

Donkey stones

I always know when the dream is ending; I am

running, again in slow-motion, down Ince Green Lane, over flagstones whose every crack and crevice is as familiar as my own hands. Little terraced homes, long demolished, still stand, and friendly neighbours, kneeling with buckets and donkey-stones, slowly smile and nod as I pass by in the eerie silence. Our terraced row stood back from the road, invisible until you reached it, and strangely, in the dream, I never do reach it – never get to see again the little row of six houses where I grew up, but I know it is there, waiting for me, just out of sight.

I wake, slowly and reluctantly at first, and then I remember that this is a very special day; the past is a dream and I must let it go – the present is real and it's here, and I have a wedding to go to! Mam and Dad didn't live to see the day; they never got to meet our

Beccy, my lovely daughter-in-law, but they would have loved her as I do. I see their faces, smiling through the mists of time, but today they must stay behind in the dream, as I walk down the path of a lovely old London church, 200 miles and a million years away from my childhood home, to witness their grandson's wedding. Their little girl is today the bridegroom's mother, and I am conscious, as I enter the cool, dim interior of the church, that I must walk slowly with dignity, as befits my role.

But the child in me is running – running through the clear air of a sparkling sunlit morning long ago, running for the sheer joy of living, as only a child knows how, across the back-field and down the dear, familiar road that will take me home.

Irene Roberts
Abram
Nr Wigan

Victoria's Secret

by NEIL CAIN

AS FAR back as I can remember history has fascinated me. As a youth I had clearly defined images of what constituted history; Lancashire's past instantly appeared in my mind's eye as a tableau where a Roman soldier marched across the land now occupied by the Wiend – his Coccium – and ghostly monks drifted through the ruins of Burscough Priory. Vikings pulled their ships up on the shore and moved inland to settle at Goosnargh with its wonderfully guttural Scandinavian name, and Cavaliers and Roundheads fought across the Bloody Mountains of the Douglas Valley.

Victorian history? Well to me the two words just didn't go together. Heavens above! Grandad Cain was born in Victorian times and it seemed too recent to warrant the term 'history'. Schoolboy days drifted by to the accompaniment of droning masters while we

daydreamed, our thoughts a million miles away from boring acts – Reform Act, Factory Act, Ten Hours Act and so on. The Victorians had more acts than the Apostles, or so it seemed!

Years went by, and I was sitting in the History Shop in Wigan peering at census figures which contained lists of occupations as extinct now as those of the muffin man or orange seller.

Dark violet world

'Cotton spinner', 'underlooker', 'pony driver', 'fettler', 'shingler' and 'thrutter' My eyes read on. Returns for the canal bank at Ince threw up the following entry for one inhabitant.... *"Lives in a shed"*. The contrast with the present hit me, and suddenly the Victorian era was history, real history. Forget the list of acts, this was life as it was lived. The fact that these were the lives of old people I knew as a child now made it doubly interesting. Of course there is always the danger of falling for the Pears Soap

images of the past. How wonderful it would be if we could conjure up visions of our ancestors in a Wigan where rosy cheeked mill girls chattered their way down Wallgate in a golden dawn, or well scrubbed little boys bowled hoops in the Market Place. Perhaps a trip in a time machine could show us such sights, but it would also show us an x-rated Wigan; a dark violent world. This is where I would like you to come with me, to uncover some of Queen Victoria's secrets.

A few publications will give us ample information. Let us delve into the report prepared for The Children's Employment Commission of 1842.

A lad by the name of John Charnock, a waggoner at Kirkless Pit near New Springs, was asked his age. His answer – *"I do not know."* [They estimated he was ten]. *"Have you any clothes besides those you have on?"* – *"No"*. There is then a comment, *"His clothes were a tissue of rags; the wonder was how they hung on the child."*

Henry Gibson, a drawer at one of the Haigh pits, was asked if he saw lads beaten?

"Yes, there is another lad called Andrew....he is about eight years old.... [he] is half clammed and many times he comes without dinner or anything to eat, and we give him ours."

Should we ever need proof that another's suffering can elicit compassion, despite one's own adversity, surely this is it.

Employment disputes

Where life was this harsh it is no wonder that any additional burden tipped the scales towards violence. Protest and riot were never far from the streets throughout the 19th century in Wigan, usually associated with employment disputes. Resistance by the authorities was equally determined. Prior to Queen Victoria's time a disturbance led to two cannon being taken from Haigh Hall and set up outside Trencherfield Mill.

During a miners' strike in November 1853 a particularly violent riot took place. A mob assembled outside the Royal Hotel, (what many of us still think of as Woolworth's corner at the top of Standishgate), and stalls, lamps and windows were smashed. The hotel was set alight and premises were looted. The police were driven off with missiles before the military was called from Preston. Relative calm prevailed for the following day, but then a gang attacked the sawmills at New Springs, intent on spilling the blood of Welsh 'blacklegs' billeted



Library Street, Wigan, c.1900.

there. Shots rang out, and woundings, and a possible fatality, occurred among the mob. Soldiers were stationed in Scholes and a cavalry troop arrived from Manchester.

The unrest of 1853 had followed violence in 1841 when John Coulton, employed at the Arley and Aberdeen pits, was shot through the head. Further shootings occurred around the Haigh area at that time and Lord Balcarres's manager, William Peace, received a death threat. The following year



The writer (with Mum) at 'Parbold Bottle', built to commemorate the 1832 Reform Act.

Chartists succeeded in closing collieries and mills, throwing 3,000 people out of work.

Violence was obviously not limited to industrial unrest. One instance of this is quoted in John Hannavy's excellent book *Historic Wigan* where the fear of assault is quite clear. A letter from Canon Fergie to the authorities has to be a masterpiece of understatement. He writes of his willingness to teach young men at the Mechanics Institution, "but neither Mrs. Fergie nor myself think it would be very comfortable for me to be knocked down, robbed or garrotted". He alludes to a robbery at Pemberton and

then writes, "and sometime since we heard of a garrotting in the neighbourhood of Warrington Lane."

Many readers will remember Bawkhouse Pit, or 'Button Pit' at Red Rock. Fewer may know how it got its popular name. This was due to the murder of James Barton there in 1863. A search was made upon his apparent disappearance and blood was found. When the boilers were riddled his remains, including a button, were found. After prolonged investigations a man was charged and sentence to death at Liverpool Assizes three years later.

Clog fighting

James Fairhurst's interesting book *Policing Wigan* throws up the fact that during the 1870's a number of deaths were caused by clog fighting – or 'purrin'. The situation became so bad that the Home Secretary was informed, and the churches in Scholes exhorted to influence their flocks against the practice. Mr.

Fairhurst makes the point that this was a traditional method of working class duelling in Lancashire, which only really died out with the gradual acceptance of football!

Perhaps no other event exceeded the Cotton Famine of the 1860's for bringing hardship to the town. The disrupted supply lines caused by the American Civil War produced untold misery. I can do no better than point readers in the direction of Fred Holcroft's *A Terrible Nightmare* (a Wigan Heritage Service publication). The full scale of the suffering in Wigan may be judged from contemporary reports: –

"Not one of the eleven was earning anything except the father who was working for 1s 3d [about 6p] a day."

Other cases are almost too painful to contemplate. Witness the following:

"The woman, fever stricken, sat on an orange box....and to prevent the fire going out, she was pulling her seat to pieces for fuel bit by bit."

In the same house....
"The wife was very near her confinement and had not tasted food for two or three days."

Such misery, multiplied across so many families in one town, is almost beyond our ken. Let me lighten the mood a little, though, and conclude these snapshots of the other side of 19th century Wigan with the more bizarre aspects of violence and 'shameful doings'. Whilst football appears to have helped reduce certain violent tendencies within the town, sometimes the cure would seem to be worse than the illness, or almost. After reading Allan Miller's recent articles on the early years of Wigan Rugby League Club in issues 32 and 33 of *Past Forward*, I was inspired to trawl through my club memorabilia and found this description of a match played at Dicconson Street in an article headed "Tough Days of Early Rugby".

"On one occasion when Wigan supporters were playing Pagefield

supporters there, a maul in goal became so boisterous that the police had to make a baton charge to sort out the combatants – and this was only a friendly match!"

According to the article, hacking and punching were perfectly allowable under early rules!

'Halfpenny Day'

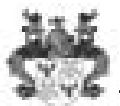
Mike Clark's book *The Leeds and Liverpool Canal* contains this marvellous indication that the female of the species could be just as deadly as the male. He does not say whether this happened in Wigan, and if so whether it was in Victorian times, but it is so good that I hope it was. The Canal Company exercised their right to claim a toll from anyone using the towpath on one day in the year – known as Halfpenny Day. Their employee approached two ladies for their payment, only to find himself under attack from umbrellas. The ladies had decided he was a beggar and waded in with gusto!

What Queen Vic would have made of it all we can only guess. Had she opened the Wigan Examiner for 30 November 1878 she would have read that it was common practice among the youths and young men of Billinge to run naked, and that complaints from ladies and ministers of religion had been received.

Can't you hear her now? "We are not amused."

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THE MEMOIRS OF JOHN VINCENT GORNER

MY FIRST eight or nine years were spent in Long Lane, or rather, Lung Lone. Nearly everybody there worked at Garswood Collieries, but they were always called Smethurst's Pits, because for many years Arthur Smethurst was the manager there, and the big thrill of the year, the Saturday excursion to Blackpool, was always spoken of as Smethurst's Trip. Lung Lone buzzed with excitement the evening before. Everybody seemed to be going to somebody else's house to make arrangements for the following morning.

The train was taken from Bryn, of course. There were several trains; I was always for the earliest one. The big bridge over the Ribble at Preston was a never-failing thrill, then miles before we got to Blackpool we were all hanging out of the left-hand window for the first sight of the Big Wheel and the Tower.

I fancy that my first trip was when I was five, and I can well remember my first sight of the sea. I ran away from mother and father to cross the prom and get to the rails. It WAS safe to cross roads in those days, with only an occasional phaeton trotting along. This immense sheet of water made me think at once that the famous Nicol Lane 'flash' which was just behind our house was a mere drop. The Tower building was a fairyland: admission 6d. for grown-ups (I think it was 6s. when I was in Blackpool last year). The aquarium seemed like a big fairy cavern to me, and was as big a thrill as the menagerie. It was a most wonderful 6 penn'orth, with a concert in the Roof garden thrown in during the afternoon. I probably did Smethurst's Trip 10 or a dozen times. On one of the earliest I took the one hour's steamer trip from the North

These memoirs are transcribed verbatim from a letter dated 16 October 1969, from John Vincent Gorner to his eldest son Patrick.

Dear Sir,

The enclosed memoir was written by my father, John Vincent Gorner (24 June 1891 – 14 May 1976). He was born and raised in Ashton-in-Makerfield, and although he lived and worked in London since the 1930's, he loved Ashton and visited it frequently.

It was coincidental that the article in Issue No. 31 covered the 5th Manchester Regiment, since my father served in the 3rd Manchester Regiment during World War I. I have been trying to piece together a record of his service from old letters and postcards; censorship, of course, did not allow much detail to be sent back to the home front, so the record is limited. If any of your readers have knowledge of the 3rd Regiment, I would very much like to hear from them.

For a while during World War II, I myself lived in Ashton, so I know it and Wigan well. Whenever I have visited the U.K. after my emigration to the U.S.A. in 1956, I always managed a few days in Ashton. It was during my last visit that I was delighted to find *Past Forward*; it is excellent, and I eagerly anticipate each issue.

Denis J. Gorner
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U.S.A.

Pier; we saw a shoal of dolphins quite near the boat and I felt distinctly nervous of their attacking it.

Owd 'Wiggin'

Dear owd 'Wiggin' gave me a lot of thrills; mother took me several times a year, and we always went straight from the station to the Market Hall. It looked enormous to me, and the big name, carved deep and in enormous letters on the stone rectangle set in the brickwork, and the huge figures, 1877, also carved themselves on my memory. Just inside the hall was a biscuit stall with a great variety on view. Mother

always made her first buy there. There is still a biscuit stall in the same spot and I always wonder if the woman running it is the daughter, or rather grand-daughter, of the woman who handed over biscuits to me in the middle 1890's.

The Wigan Coal & Iron Co. had blast furnaces in Ince, spoken of as Ince Top Place. On inky black nights, suddenly the sky, Wigan way, would be brilliantly lighted because a furnace was being refuelled. The dazzle would last only a few seconds as the fuel was being tipped in, but in another few seconds would be another dazzle. We kids always halted our play for

those dazzles, somebody would say 'Top Place' and on we played. It is one of my most vivid memories; the fact that it was a dazzle in the dark helped it to be, of course.

An old chap, very tall and lean, used to come hobbling along Long Lane, and looked as if he had one heel shot away. That could very well have been, because he was said to have been in the famous Charge of the Light Brigade. None of us ever dared ask him if that were true, but the grown-ups said that it was so, and we kids gazed on him with the greatest awe. He didn't appear often; may have been visiting friends in the vicinity.

Little Sammie's chip cart was a regular Saturday lunch-time arrival. He would come along 'Nicco Lone' like a Cunard Liner steaming up the Mersey, and he did a roaring trade. Mother always had a couple of basins ready and all I had to do was trot out to the cart. Little Sammie was really a VERY little Sammie. I had to stand on tiptoe to see him.

Another regular at almost the same hour as Sammie was the Cassinelli ice cream cart. Then it was a case of going out with teacups and getting each cup filled with a ha'porth. Whenever I am in Wigan these days, I see a Cassinelli ice cream cart doing good business outside the Market Hall. I don't doubt that the proprietor is the grandson of the chap who served me with many a ha'porth. On one memorable Saturday, the cart arrived to introduce us to the ice cream sandwich. It was our first sight of wafer biscuits, and of course they caused quite a sensation, and seemed a marvellous invention, even to the men who were always waiting the arrival of Cassinelli.

Garswood Park

For Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in June 1897, we had a great day in Lord Gerard's Park, as it was called, rather than Garswood Park. At six years old I was young enough to be popeyed with excitement. Buns and lashings of tea figured largely in the celebrations. Mr. Leach sent up several hot-air balloons during the day, and it was always very hard for him to maintain elbow-room to get the thing ready. There was a great craning of necks to watch the balloon as it slowly rose skywards. When one caught fire in mid-air excitement simply bubbled over.

But besides the Jubilee occasion, we had an annual half-day in the park and it was always a most happy occasion. I can see old Mr. Boardman arriving in his trap, with one of the huge cans milkmen used to come around with; but this time it was full of tea. We kids sat in big circles and the teachers came around dishing out the tea and buns. Bakers in those days were much more generous with currants than they are nowadays!

The Gerards figured very largely in Ashton life. Lady Mary Gerard gave a huge Christmas tree to St. Oswald's. The tree always arrived at the boys' school a couple of days or so before THE day, which was on breaking-up day. There was a breathless excitement as the men manoeuvred the tree in through the school doorway; lessons just ceased to be.

Lady Mary always came to give out some of the prizes, coming in her open carriage with the coachman looking very posh. We had all been shown how to make our curtsey on receiving our prize, and to say "Thank you, my lady". My memory of her is of a very delightful person, and she was immensely popular in the Ashton district. Garswood Hall looked like a fine building from the palisades near Hunt's Farm on Liverpool Road. I grieved to see it being taken down many years ago, and later to

see the lovely park being carved up by the Watson estate.

The Prince of Wales

The Prince of Wales came to Garswood Hall in 1897 or 1898. The schools had a day's holiday; in front of our infants' school there was a little grandstand erected. We were still living in Long Lane then and father took me down to school. Of course we had to go by the path that comes out onto Wigan Road at Dr. Hunter's or, as it was then, Dr. Latham's, and I vividly remember coming out onto Wigan Road, for there was a long line of policemen standing on the sidewalk on either side of the road and at intervals of about 20 yards. The Prince was arriving at Bryn station and driving down Wigan Road in a landau. Of course from the school stand I had a popeye view when he actually arrived at the park gates.

Several years later we school kids were taken on to the park to see the arrival of General Buller, who was also a friend of Lord Gerard. Naturally I knew a lot about him from my Boer War reading. A few years back, when I was with a bunch of Poly students in Winchester Cathedral, I was interested to come across Buller's tomb there.

The Boer War had a special interest for us in Ash'n because Lord Gerard had a troop of hussars which the younger fry of the town called, very unflatteringly, Lord Gerard's cabbage-cutters. All the same we used to troop to watch them practising horse-riding in a big field right behind the British Schools. Of course we knew practically every one of them as they were all locals. The day they marched off to Bryn station to entrain for Liverpool or Southampton was one of stupendous excitement. After that there was the undiminishing excitement of learning who locally had got a letter from them and what its news was.

Crystal clear

By then my family had moved from Long Lane to Stonecroft Terrace and our house was overlooking the brook, which in those days was crystal clear. It is not many years back that Stone's collieries began pumping water into it and making it a horror of grey, clingy mud. Stonecroft was called Steam Engine, or rather Steeum Injun, because there was still the ruin of an old mill with some of the machinery rusting away; the old building was a favourite playground.

One of my pals, Teddy Clark, had a brother in the cabbage-cutters and he seemed to write home fairly often so that Teddy showed me all his letters. Quite a number of the troops were killed or died of fever. One chap, George Plunkett, got a packet of shrapnel in the leg, and the shrapnel found its way to the window of a photographer whose shop was at the bottom of Bryn Street, and so the said George became a very famous man among us kids. Years later he became the landlord of a pub overlooking Ashton Heath, and whenever I saw him on my walks in that direction, he was nearly always across the road from the pub chatting.

George Heath, who had been out there, came home safely but was soon afterwards killed in a strange accident at the Old Boston pit. They were unrolling a new steel cable from a big wooden drum; it broke loose when nearly fully unrolled and coiled up again like lightning, killing poor George on the spot. His home was exactly across the road from St. Oswald's Boys' School and Mr. Leach let us go out to watch the funeral procession leave his home. There was a big contingent of his old fellow-troopers, but THE thrill was to see his horse with his riding boots fastened into the stirrups. I am sure that all the other boys were as breathless with awe as I myself was; the horse seemed to sense the solemnity of the occasion, for it stood perfectly still while the coffin was brought out of the house and fastened onto the gun carriage.

The horseman with muffled drums was awe-inspiring too; the military band played what seemed to me the most marvellous and solemn music I had ever heard. Doubtless it was Chopin's famous *Marche Funebre*, which of course still thrills me whenever I hear it.

Weeks of thrills

Harry Greenwood's auction mart provided many weeks of thrills around 1900 and 1901. The war songs I heard there fix it as during the Boer War, and they included, of course, the outstanding favourite of that war's songs, 'Goodbye Dolly Grey'. The proprietor came from Warrington and he himself did most of the auctioneering. The mart was of wooden partitions with the canvas top like the shows in travelling fairs. From the front of the platform there ran out three plank runways about five feet above ground level, along which the assistants could go to show the article being offered, or to take the sold article to the buyer. The mart remained for weeks, behind where the Queen's cinema is now, and it was my nightly mecca. The big wall clock here in the kitchen was bought from Harry Greenwood and it is still a marvel; night after night it strikes to the split second with Big Ben when the 10 o'clock news is coming on.

During my Steeum Injun days Ashton Town played in the Lancashire Alliance, and I was a keen supporter; nearly all the players were locals, which made it almost a family affair. Admission was 1d. but we sometimes managed to sneak on for nowt, up the steep slope from the brook. Bryn Central was the other local team and there was great rivalry between the two; the two derby days each season had the district in a ferment of excitement and there was always a squashy crowd. Bryn had a forward named Joe Scholfield, who had a terrific shot and I had a near heart-attack every time he had the ball anywhere near the Ash'n goal. He is still alive; must be around 90, and has been living in Billinge for a good many years.

Pre-School Memories

ONE of my earliest memories goes back to when I was four or five year of age. I lived in a mid-terraced house in George Street, Hindley.

Between two rows of terraced houses there was a patch of land on which Joe Lyons' clog making and shoe repair business stood. It consisted of a wooden hut approximately 12' x 20', painted leaf green with Georgian windows to its north facing side. The door on the south side had a small display window to the pavement side with the only advertising poster, of two small kittens who sat with their heads peering out from two highly polished black boots, advertising a well known brand of black shoe polish.

This hut, 'Joe's workplace', had a charm all of its own, and as a youngster, I was allowed, and indeed welcomed, to spend many countless hours with Joe, long before I started school. I would be fascinated watching him repair clogs and shoes, and hammer in bright brass nails which he held in his lips.

The hut had three work benches, each covered in clogs, shoes, large sheets of leather and the odd newspaper about a foot deep. The work benches themselves were rarely seen!

Pot bellied stone

Joe himself lived in Argyle Street, just a street or two from George Street. I was so keen to be in his company that sometimes I would be at 'his hut' before him. The first indication Joe was on his way was the appearance of Judy, his black spaniel, around the corner three or four minutes before Joe. Both

Judy and I would be sat at the step when he arrived a few minutes later.

When he opened up the place, it had a smell all of its own; halfway down, he had a pot bellied stove which heated the hut within minutes. As he came in he would remove his coat, put on a white apron, sit on his stool, remove his silver pocket watch from his waistcoat and wind it up fully before placing it before him, hung from a one inch nail. Surprisingly the hut did have electricity. There was a single light bulb hanging just a few inches over Joe's head which could be switched on and off from a six inch string pull switch. I particularly enjoyed sitting on a stool – no mean feat for a five year old, as this stool stood six or seven inches taller than I did!

Directly opposite Joe's hut was a corner shop to which we referred as Annie's. On occasions Joe would arrange for Annie the shopkeeper to heat up for him a meat and potato pie for dinner, which she did in the back room, in the oven of the old black grate which most terraced houses had at that time. On these occasions he would send me across the road, having first made sure there was no danger – not that there was a lot of traffic in George Street in 1950! The hot pie would be placed onto a strip of cardboard and put into a paper bag. Then I would stand at the kerb until Joe spotted me, and wave me across when it was safe to do so.

"Where's my pie?"

On one of these occasions I remember entering his hut and, as he was preoccupied

nailing new irons onto clogs, I placed the said pie onto the stool. Joe then asked me to pass him a small hammer, which I did, then seated myself onto the stool, forgetting where I had placed the pie just a few seconds earlier! I knew immediately what I had done, but was not prepared to mention it. Once Joe had nailed the irons to the clogs, he was ready for his pie. "Where's my pie?" he asked, as he moved newspapers shoes and large sheets of leather looking for it, "I can smell it"; and he spent the next three or four minutes looking for it.

At the first opportunity, when he had his turned his back, I quickly jumped from the stool and shot down the backs and in through our back door, past my mam doing the washing up at the sink, and hid myself on the stairs for what seemed an eternity. Then I heard footsteps coming from the cobbled backs and stopping at our back door. "Where is he?"

inquired Joe. My mother replied, "He has just shot past me like a scalded cat. Why, what has he done?" "Nothing" said Joe, "other than convert my pie into a pancake". "Come on", he shouted into the house, "its o.k.", and peering out from the curtain at the bottom of the stairs I could see he was smiling. Holding hands we walked back to his hut where we spent the rest of the day, and the incident was never mentioned again.

Today I find it difficult to remember what I had for my dinner only an hour before, but I have no trouble in looking back more than half a century to those days I spent with Joe in his green wooden hut with the pot bellied stove and a dog called Judy, the distinctive smell of leather and the sound of laughter coming from a small boy, only punctuated by the comings and goings of the odd customer. I can see Joe's smiling face as if it was only yesterday.

**John Westwell
Leigh**

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

£8.25

PER MORNING/AFTERNOON SESSION

£12.35

PER EVENING SESSION

COMMERCIAL RATE

£20.00

PER MORNING/AFTERNOON/EVENING SESSION

If you are interested, contact Philip Butler

Tel (01942) 828128

Ashton-in-Makerfield Probus Club

Members of the Club are retired business/professional people, who meet at the Angel Hotel, Ashton-in-Makerfield on the first Wednesday of every month at 11.00 a.m. New members are always welcome, and can receive details from the Honorary Secretary, Alan Bradshaw (01942 726493)

6 August

The George Formby Story

Jack Pendlebury

3 September

D Day

Fred Holcroft

1 October

"Shiver Me Timbers"

Ted Machin

5 November

The Reivers Way

David Cookson

3 December

Christmas Readings and Lunch

James Fairhurst

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, Barbara Rhodes (01942 222769)

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 Mrs. M. Hodge Tel: (01942 884893)

12 August

Haigh Hall

Carol Banks

9 September

Joseph Evans and the Boothstown Botanists

John Aldred

14 October

Meet Mr Edward Bear (preceded by AGM)

Jennie Todhunter

11 November

The Police Museum

Duncan Broady

9 December

The Language and Laughter of Lancashire (followed by Christmas buffet)

Brian Clarke

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. All newcomers are welcome. Further details from Derek Briscoe (01942 747366) or Jim Scotson (01942 719291).

SOCIETY NEWS

To all Secretaries

Would Secretaries please note the copy deadline on p2, and ensure that you send in all details of your meetings up to Easter 2004 for inclusion in the next issue. Thanks.

Hindley History Society

Our AGM will be held on Monday 8 September at Hindley Library, Market Street, Hindley, at 7.00 pm. New members are always welcome. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs Joan Topping (01942 257361) or the Treasurer, Norma Brannagan (01942 258668).

Leigh & District Family History Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month at 7.30 p.m. in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. O. Hughes (01942 741594).

19 August

Getting Started

16 September

Sin Sex and Scandal - Old Newspapers

Roy Stock

21 October

The 19th Century Family in the Community

Iris Johnson

18 November

Local Men on the Somme

Fred Holcroft

16 December

Poets and Poisoners

Lizzie Jones

Leigh Literary Society

Meetings are held in the Derby Room in the Turnpike Centre, Leigh, on alternate Monday evenings at 7.30 p.m. Annual subscriptions £13; visitors £1.50 per meeting. For further details contact Tony Ashcroft, Local History Officer, Leigh Library (01942 404559)

6 October

Cotton Wool Country

Margaret Curry

20 October

The York Story

Neville Holt

3 November

Market Day

Agatha Brown

17 November

Francis Trollope

Liz Williams

1 December

Sea Bird Summer & Birds of the Pennine Forest

Gordon Yates

15 December

The Last Lighthouse Keeper

Gordon Medlicott

Leigh Probus Club

Members of the Club, which is non-sectarian, are generally retired professional/businessmen. The Club meets at the Leigh Masonic Hall on alternate Thursday afternoons between

October and April. New members are welcome – anyone wishing to join should contact H. Wilkinson (01942 671943).

Shevington Memories Group

This small, informal group meets each Friday at 2.30 p.m. in Shevington Methodist Church (New Lounge), to share memories about old times. Anyone is welcome – just turn up! Contact Maurice Hilton (01942 223107) for further details.

Standish Probus Club

The Club was only established in 2001 but already has 70 members. Members are retired business and professional people. Meetings, which are open to both men and women, are held at 'The Owls', Rectory Lane, Standish on the second Tuesday of every month at 10.30 a.m. New members welcome. Further details from the Secretary, Bryan Shepherd (01257 424994)

Tyldesley & District Historical Society

Meetings are held on the third Thursday 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 email rydings@cablenet.co.uk. You can also visit our website 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.

Wigan Civic Trust

The Trust stimulates public interest in the Wigan area; promotes high standards of planning and architecture; and aims to secure the preservation, conservation, development and improvement of the historic parts of town and country. The Trust meets at Drumcroon Education Arts Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan, on the second Monday of the month at 7.30 p.m. For further details contact the Secretary, A.J. Grimshaw, 6 Bridgeman Terrace, Wigan (01942 245777). New members always welcome.

Wigan Family & Local History Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month (except in July and August) in the Springfield Hotel, Springfield Road, Wigan, at 7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m. The meetings alternate between members' evenings and external speakers on history related topics. Annual Membership fees are £6 for individuals, £7 for families and £10 for overseas membership. A meeting fee is charged at £1 per member and £1.50 per non-member. For further information contact John Wogan, 678 Warrington Road, Goose Green, Wigan WN3 6XN, Email Johnwogan@blueyonder.co.uk

Childhood Revisited

(Part three)

by
J. Harold Smith

THE new class, Standard Four, was on the upper floor of the school, commanding a bird's eye view of the south transept of Holy Trinity Church and one leg of the graveyard, separated from the school's playground by a low stone wall. Looking back at the scene now, I am reminded of the figure of Thomas Gray seated in that churchyard in Stoke Poges, scribbling the lines of his famous elegy, in particular the one, 'Into his narrow cell for ever laid'.

Once sitting down at those long, form style desks, however, the view was blocked out, replaced by the rows and rows of forms with the familiar grooves to accommodate pens or pencils, holed here and there to house ceramic inkwells. In front there would be the teacher's table and a blackboard and easel, perhaps a duster hanging on one of the pegs supporting the blackboard and, of course, the ever present teacher. All in all, not a very inspiring atmosphere to bring out the best in the would-be academic.

The ecclesiastical connection with the Church was never far from the mind, even during lessons. It was a fairly regular occasion when, absorbed in some subject or other, a muffled "bong" would invade the atmosphere. A mental note would circulate throughout the classroom.... *Funeral!!* The first muffled peal would set in motion a combined sort of metronomic anticipation at every 15 seconds or so, throughout the class.

To those of us familiar with the scene, a mental picture would flash before us

of the horse (usually four) drawn hearse and following entourage, either coached or on foot, slowly making their way up Rectory Road, totally oblivious to the fact that their every stride was being monitored and relayed semaphorically to the rector, bell ringer, choirmaster (if present) and any other official by the super efficient Tommy Bold, sexton *par excellence* whose services never failed.

Cranking up

It was a time when the motor car was still in the embryo of total acceptance but not as yet being reliable enough to oust the well tried and revered services of the horse. I suppose it would evoke irreverent pictures of silk hatted, frock coated, cravatted drivers, cranking up a hearse whose engine had just 'conked' or with his head under the opened bonnet in search of the reason. Even self-starters were looked upon with a mechanical scorn and not yet even fitted to all vehicles.

Little did I realise on listening to those muffled peals that, just over 10 years later, I would be the operator, in my official capacity of church bell ringer and organ blower at the annual stipend of £4, paid in eight increments of 10s. (50p). Previous to that, until my voice broke I was in the choir – no stipend but the recipient of 3d., after attending New Year Watch-night Service. We were told that this was a legacy connected with a local miner, James Lowe who, some years

previously had emigrated to Australia on medical advice. There was, of course, the added joy of receiving three rosy apples following the Harvest Festival.

Singing was something I used to like, but with hindsight, I could never understand its inclusion as a lesson in the school curriculum, especially as there was no such thing as a singing lesson involved. Certainly there was a fairly extensive repertoire which was monotonously repeated, including many which I would categorise under, "*Oh no, not that again*", such as *Where the bee sucks, there suck I*, the 'round' song, *Go to Joan Glover and tell her I love her*, a song which painfully reminded me of my pet hate – a girl in my class. I suppose in view of the fairly recent cessation of World War I, such chart toppers as *Rule Britannia* (parodied by those at the back of the class as, "Rule Britannia, two tanners make a bob, three make 18 pence and four – two bob") and *Ye Mariners of England*. Come early November, *O, Valiant Hearts* would be quite appropriate, as would the appearance of Flanders Poppies and preparations for the '*Eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month*'. But singing lessons....never.

Oozed attention

During my sojourn in Standard Four, there arrived a new teacher, Mr. Leonard Waterhouse, in Standard Seven next door, a class I was

not likely to join as I had been earmarked for a new school recently built in Ashton-in-Makerfield. Mr. Waterhouse was the only male teacher at the school and very popular he became – he was of immaculate appearance, possibly of recent army officer rank, and simply oozed attention.

Though destined never to be in his class, I had a few extra curricular sessions with Mr. Waterhouse who had that enviable facility of putting people at ease and getting down to a level from which the pupil could make strides. It was, however, from pupils in his class that I learned more about his skills. One of the lads showed me a crude, though quite efficient electric motor which Mr. Waterhouse had taught him to make. Another lad had made a pin hole camera, using a cardboard box on front of which a Beechams Pill box had been fixed and the base pricked with a pin – what else? At the rear of the box was a slot in which a photographic slide could be accommodated. Via this, and I suspect other Waterhouse cameras, there were a number of monochrome pictures of the graveyard (from Standard Seven) in evidence.

But Mr. Waterhouse's thinking went well beyond the bounds of the classroom and, with the benefit of hindsight, I think he would have liked to have imbued every child in the school with the same facility. One occasion he organised a Saturday train trip from Garswood to Liverpool – for some, probably the first time on a train and certainly for others, the furthest they had ever ventured from home.



Sheer exuberance

It was not just a train trip, however, but the itinerary – again Mr. W’s brainchild – that made the experience so interesting and enjoyable. The sheer exuberance of climbing the endless white steps up to the museum and Walker Art Gallery and, after a conducted tour by, yes Mr. W., just to sit on those steps and watch Liverpool go by. The view in those days was, to kids of our age, something majestically panoramic, rather like a Roman amphitheatre with traffic, now filled with the edifices of the entrances to Queensway, the Mersey Tunnel. For the very first time in the lives of most of us, we would have seen a coloured person or watched barefoot children playing in the streets.

But then it was ‘fall in’, and off we would follow our pied piper down to the docks where, for the very first time in our lives, we would actually set eyes on an ocean-

going liner of which there might have been half a dozen or so then, the heyday of Liverpool as a passenger terminal. Having just about got over the sheer explosion of incredibility, our minds were about to be set on fire as we watched Mr. W. arrange with some official the actual boarding of one of these floating monsters for the purpose of a tour throughout as much of the ship that time would allow. The last ship I remember in this connection was the three funnelled, HMS Samaria, but don’t ask me the line.

Rescued

Then it was back up to Lime Street and the train home to Garswood with the feeling of wanting to do it again ere long. Sadly for me, I was to leave the immediate contact with Mr. Waterhouse, but I never lost spiritual touch with him. In his later years his name often hit local news and

then, his lasting glory, the conversion of his private garden to a passenger carrying model railway. Long may his memory live.

One day a new lad appeared in our class who was introduced as Bill L..... His general appearance and clothing (trousers well below the knee) suggested that he was not of local stock. When he spoke, which was not very often, it was in a strange accent. He was of melancholy mien, a description that seemed to tally with the rumour that got around about his being rescued from a cruel home in a place we had never heard of, called Shropshire.

As far as everyone knew, Bill settled down and became what we thought was a normal class of pupil, just like we were. But one day, he went AWOL, leaving no trace of his whereabouts or where he might have gone. He was absent for about a week before turning up again. He returned to school just as

though he had never been away, but still remained his usual taciturn, lugubrious self. Feeling sorry for the lad, I stepped up my contact with him, though I have to confess that curiosity, rather than sympathy was the motive, seeing his escapade as an enviable adventure and something I wanted to know more about.

Though his mien remained unchanged, I was able to gather a sort of piecemeal story from him, how he had slept in a Dutch barn, the thought of which sent shivers down my spine, having in mind all the little rodent visitors that might have shared his bed. His diet was almost confined to turnips, eaten fresh (washed or not, he didn’t say) from the field.

When asked where he actually grew up, he replied, “Muckleton, near Wem”, which I took to be some kind of joke or perhaps a Salopian

Continued on page 34



The Pension Service comes to the Libraries

Are you aged over 60 years? Do you have a benefit related query and would like specialist advice? You may be entitled to claim one of many benefits but are unaware; by asking our staff they will be able to identify potential income, which may be available to you and help you make that claim.

If so, the Pension Service has joined up with the Libraries and other partners to ensure we are in convenient locations throughout the borough to offer help to pensioners, their families and those who are planning ahead for their retirement.

Help is available for: -

- Completion of Minimum Income guarantee forms
- Completion of Retirement Pension forms
- Verifying Saving Documents, Birth/Marriage Certificates (no need to post off these items, handed back immediately!)
- Winter Fuel queries
- Signpost to other Pensioner Services

You can make an appointment at any venue convenient to you or simply drop in. **To arrange an appointment please ring 01942 758000 and ask for the Pension Service.**

Mon	Ashton Library Wigan Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield 10.00am-12.00 noon	Orrell Library Orrell Road, Orrell Post Orrell 2.00pm-4.00pm
	Age Concern Wigan 68 Market Street, Wigan 10.00am-12.00 noon	Hindley Library Market Street, Hindley 2.00pm-4.00pm
Tue	Standish Library Cross Street, Standish 10.00am-12.00 noon	Signpost Advisory Service, TCEC Building, Upper George St Tyldesley 1.00pm-3.30pm
	Atherton Library York Street, Atherton 10.00am-12.00 noon	Aspull Library Oakfield Crescent, Aspull 2.00pm-4.00pm
Wed		
Thur	Marsh Green Library Harrow Road, Marsh Green 10.00am-12.00 noon	Golborne Library Tanners Lane, Golborne 1.30pm-3.30pm
	Higher Folds Community Centre Stirling Close, Leigh 10.00am-12.00 noon	Abram Library Vicarage Road, Abram 2.00pm-4.00pm
Fri	Wigan & Leigh Pensioners Link 27 Charles Street, Leigh 10.00am-12.00 noon	Ince Library Smithy Green, Ince 2.00pm-4.00pm
	Shevington Library Gathurst Lane, Shevington 10.00am-12.00 noon	

Childhood Revisited

Continued from page 33

non sequitur rather like when we used to be asked, perhaps cheekily, "Where you gooin?" and we would reply, "Warrington fer two eggs". But sure enough, Bill was telling the truth, a fact I proved many years later when my job took me into many remote corners of the UK, including Muckleton and Wem, no more than an hour's run from here by car.

Had Bill's flight been made today, it would most certainly have been the subject of a local, if not national radio broadcast. At the time, relevant details were just plain facts to be digested as and how the recipient received them. As for radio, (no such word then, it was wireless – it was the Yanks who started calling it radio) reception of such a luxury was still quite a number of years away.

Crystal set

It could be said that there was a sort of awakening to the development. Presence of a crystal set here and there was heard of and in fact my father acquired one. None of the rest of the household of ten, however, ever heard as much as a screech from it, mainly due to the fact that father was non, nay, anti-technical.

The parents of one of my friends had the latest 'set', complete with one of those curly type loud speakers proudly sitting on the sideboard. Also sitting on the sideboard was a little wooden casket accommodating three woven wire rings from which two connection pins protruded. They were the means of changing wave lengths....all highly technical!

It was some years before our house aspired to such dizzy heights, an occasion which to this day, whenever I have reason to press my remote control button, thus saving me the energy sapping trek all the way across the hearth rug, I think of all the things that were needed to give me, roughly, the same level of technical satisfaction and entertainment.

I see the set, a Marconiphone, four valve (wow!) effort being delivered and deposited on our kitchen table, followed by the speaker, a rather posh, circular, polished walnut affair, about two feet diameter, later to be hung on the wall above the set. But what's this they're lugging in now? A wooden cabinet about 4' high x 5' wide by 2' deep. Placed in position, the set then placed on top and the speaker somehow secured on the wall, a couple of feet or so above, thinks....the big moment has arrived. But no, the men are still bringing in a strange looking rectangular section, glass containers, containing flat plates and a liquid just deep enough to cover them.

"Every fortnit er so"

Opening a long shallow lid near the top of the cabinet, one of the men proceeded to place these glass articles on a shelf made for their installation, at the same time announcing, "These is wot yu caw th' eye tenshun batteries an' every ney un agen, yull 'ave t' avum charged." Reaching again into the box containing the, as yet unfamiliar objects, he produced two more glass objects of larger capacity, fixed to which there was a carrying handle. "These is t' low tension batteries – yull 'ave t' ave um charged every fortnit er so". And so he went on, at the same time coupling up the batteries to wherever they had to be connected.

Right?...no not yet. Then off the men went.

On the following day, they turned up again to complete the wiring which started at the set, through two holes (one for aerial, one for earth) which they had drilled in our back kitchen window by brace and bit. The earth wire was attached to a metal rod, driven into the ground. The aerial wire? Well that was almost as exciting to follow as the first broadcast to come into our house. This went through the window frame, then vertically to a white, ceramic insulator fixed to the wall, just below the guttering, thence fed out from its reel, along our backyard, through the gate, across the backs and into our allotment. Here a hole, big enough to accommodate the burial of a large dog or small pig was dug. Lowered into that was a large beam onto which was attached a sort of flag pole about 20' high, near the top of which was another ceramic insulator through which the aerial was fed. Once the mast was raised and secured, the aerial pulled reasonably taut, and it was all hands back to the house for the moment of magic.

For me, that really was a magic moment, a moment which even now I cannot describe. To hear music and voices relayed via the ether into **our house**, was absolutely unbelievable. The twiddling of the knobs became a family habit in the early days but eventually programme choice seemed to sort itself out fairly amicably.

Large family

If there was one area of listening common to all members of our large family, it would have to be music, a legacy I suppose from our pre-wireless days when music was very much in evidence in our house, four pianists (one doubling on ukulele, though not simultaneously) and five

male singers, father a fine solo baritone and church choirmaster to boot. There was, however, the intrusion of some of the popular music of the era, though how, in the absence of radio in those days, such 'rubbish' (father's words, not mine) infiltrated it was not clear.

The resultant picture was one of a sort of music no-man's land on which was being fought a battle of the tastes of the ages with father, general of the light classics and religious, down to my level of the vo-do-di-oh-do syndrome, as yet, not even given a uniform. I can, however, see father's point much clearer now than I could then, especially when remembering such discordant ingredients as, for instance, *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth*, and *Oh Shinanikida, he play a guitar, outside a bazaar, bazaar, bazaar* (I can assure the reader that this number really was quite popular, I am not making it up) and many other numbers with equally crazy titles.

Were I to have been asked at the time, to quote just one example of justification for possession of a wireless set, I would have said that it was the guarantee of regular timing of my homecoming from school. There was something magical about sitting down to do my homework, or other scholastic imposition, in time to hear the voice of Jack Payne introducing his afternoon broadcast of the BBC Dance Orchestra, together with the background sound of his signature tune, *Say it with Music* (I still love to hear it on Desmond Carrington's Sunday mid-day Radio 2 programme). The sound of some of the old tunes of the early '30's still haunt me.

To be concluded in the next issue in which Harold moves on to a new school.



Definitely Miss Beatrice Simm

Dear Sir,

With reference to the photograph again published in *Past Forward* 33, p35 of St. Michael's Sunday School teachers, elders, and Women's Bible Class members. The photograph was probably taken on the occasion of St. Michael's Annual Field Day (preceding Walking Day), at Bull Hey field, Parsons Walk.

In reply to your request, the tall lady in

white on the Vicar's left is definitely Miss Beatrice Simm. Regarding the gentleman on the back row, far right in the picture, I would say that is Mr. Smith, who was a Sunday School Superintendent.

I can also identify the following members of the group:

Front Row: starting 4th from left – Grace Martindale, Bill Sharrock, Amelia Bradshaw, Winifred Barnes, and I

think Joan Barlow (all Sunday School teachers).

2nd row: (seated) far right Miss P. Greene.

3rd row: Starting 2nd from left, Jane Jolley, Mr. A. Harris (Headmaster), Annie Frost (Sunday School Superintendent), the Vicar Rev. A. Whitehead, Beatrice Simm, far right Maud Meadows.

Far Back: Harry Bickerstaffe, Harry Benning, Mr. Hampson (Churchwarden), and far right Mr. Smith.

I must say how much I enjoy reading *Past Forward*, and congratulate you on an excellent magazine.

**M. Ellison
Swinley, Wigan**

All proud Wiganers

Dear Sir,

I am writing on behalf of my dad Sydney Draper, and enclosing a photograph he has asked me to send to you.

He was born 6 April 1908 in Walthew Lane, Platt Bridge, and when still a baby moved to Bickershaw Lane, Abram. He married Nellie (Ellen) Meadows at Zion Methodist Church, Platt Bridge on 4

July 1936 and lived in Bank Street, Platt Bridge until 1944 when we moved back to the old family home at 5 Bickershaw Lane, Abram. By then my sister Eileen and myself had joined the family.

Unfortunately mum died on 6 January this year, aged 92 years 11 months. If she had lived till July they would have celebrated 67 years of marriage.

My sister and I both went to Abram School and I spent one year (1950) at Ashton-in-

Makerfield Grammar School before we moved to Blackpool in 1951.

Dad worked at Maypole Colliery and his uncle Albert Draper was killed in the Maypole explosion. Dad now lives with me in Poulton-le-Fylde but we are all proud Wiganers and my sister and I have season tickets for Wigan Warriors.

A friend passed your magazine to me, hence the letter and photograph plus a bit of family history.

**Sylvia Houldsworth
Poulton le Fylde**



Standard 7 Abram St. John's C of E School c.1919-20

Front row: Fred Burrows, Sydney Draper, Harold Parkinson, Tommy Fairclough, Stan Briscoe, Jimmy Smith, Wilf Jameson

2nd row: ? Partington, ? Briscoe, Frank Lomas, Billy Harter, Billy Whitehead.

3rd row: Teacher Mr. Ewart Charnock, Jack Crompton, Vinnie Hornby, Leslie Peet, Billy Wilcox, Albert Burrows, John Cunliffe, John Houghton, Headmaster Mr. Joe Falcon.

Back row: Dick Molyneux, George Cottam, Leslie Jeffries, John Holland, Len Morgan, Billy Patterson, Tommy Grimshaw, Peter Smith.

IT'S THE HAT!

Dear Mr. Gillies,

I refer to the picture of St. Michael's Sunday School teachers in *Past Forward* 33, p35. I agree with the identifications made by Miss Norah Hall, and confirm the lady near to the Vicar was Miss Beatrice Simm and not the Vicar's wife.

I even remember the hat she was wearing!

**Maria Seddon
Wigan**

MEMORIES OF OLD WIGAN – FROM 'DOWN UNDER'

Dear Editor,

I wish to thank you very much for printing the photo of a group of members of St. Michael's Church, Swinley Road with the Vicar, Rev. Whitehead, (who officiated at my wedding in 1939) and churchwardens, Sunday school teachers, etc in *Past Forward* No. 32 and 33, which I have just received from my sister, Mrs. G. Guest of Marsh Green. I originally sent the photo to her and she in turn sent it to you.

I emigrated to Australia 21 years ago, but do like to keep in touch with my home town of Wigan, so enjoy each issue of your great magazine. Also, I have so many relatives here, and ex-Wigan friends who also enjoy reading it, so I pass it around.

With regard to the photograph the Vicar's wife was sick that day, and did not go with us; the person in white next to him was Miss Simm. I was Phyllis Ashworth then, and am in front of the Vicar, my friend next to me in white, with a hat on, was Olive Abbott, whose mother had a fruit shop for many years next to the Millstone Hotel on Wigan Lane. Grace Martindale was our friend also, and I would like to know if she is still with us. We were all Sunday school teachers for many years. I lived in Beech Hill then, and had to walk there and back to St. Michael's three times every Sunday – 8 a.m. Communion, Sunday school in the afternoon, and Church in the evening. I don't know of any one who would do that today!

Also, I have read with great interest Harold Smith's articles, 'Childhood Revisited'. He must be similar in age to me – 88 years old. I also could write a book of my childhood. I remember well the coal strike, when we had to queue up at St. Stephen's School in Whelley for bread and jam, pea (so called) soup, and potato hash (as it was called) – all terrible stuff to eat. Later on, a lorry would come and stop on the road, and we queued up there, with basins. I also went on the pit slags in Worsley Mesnes, where I lived after I married, to pick bits of coal and slack, and wheeled bags of it, along with my baby, to Newtown for my grandmother who was very sick in bed at the time. I went every day, to keep her fire burning, and to feed her, etc. Coal was rationed at that time, as was everything else. Hard times.

I lost my first husband in Caen, France in the Invasion, aged only 27. I remarried four years later – he was also in the Middle East fighting for three years. Now I have lost him, with cancer! The men were forced to go in the services those days; now we are having all the young ones demonstrating, 'no war' as they think they will have to go.

Also, I enjoyed the article by Helen Prescott about Ramsdale's Ice Cream Shop, which I do remember, as I worked with their daughter Kathleen when I was 16 to 18, and used to spend my week-ends at their house.

Happy memories and thanks a lot for giving all these to me. Good luck and best wishes to *Past Forward*.

**Phyllis Rawcliffe
109 Blaxland Drive
North Dandenong
Vic. 3175 Australia**



THANK YOU VERY MUCH

Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for the pleasure and enjoyment I get from your excellent newsletter, which is sent to me by my brother George Nicholas of Platt Bridge. I was particularly pleased to receive issue no. 31 with the line drawing of Standish showing the schools I attended and Ashfield House which

was Civil Defence H.Q. when I lived in Standish.

Past Forward No. 25 with 'Childhood Reminiscences' by Jane Fairhurst was particularly interesting as she taught me in Standard 6 as Miss Marshall. On turning the page I was delighted to see the heading Charles Sawbridge Ltd. over a letter written by his granddaughter (who is a friend of many years) and gave me the greatest pleasure.

I wish you continued success.

Muriel Meitz
(nee Nicholas)
359 Bent Crescent
Richmond Hill
Ontario
L4C 1C4 Canada

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

Dear Editor,

One of the highlights of the Municipal Year in Wigan was an annual football match between male members of staff from the Town Hall (Borough Treasurer's and Education Departments) and the Municipal Buildings (Town Clerk's, Borough Engineer's and Health Departments).

As one would expect, the occasion created great enthusiasm and rivalry, and a good following of supporting staff came along to cheer (and jeer) their favoured team from the touchline. Although the games were taken very seriously, they were generally fought in good spirit. There were many amusing incidents and occasionally a few injuries (mainly minor ones). After the match the teams and followers retired to a local pub for drinks and a hot pot supper, and the 'Corporation Cup' was

presented (usually by the Town Clerk or other Chief Officer) to the Captain of the winning team.

The following day, several of the participating players suffered aches and pains, stiffness and bruising, especially those (like myself) who did play football regularly and for whom this was a 'one-off' game.

The enclosed photograph shows the soccer team which represented the Municipal Buildings in 1953/4, with staff from three departments – Health (H), Town Clerk's (TC) and Borough Engineer's (BE). Does any reader recognise the four unidentified members from the Borough Engineer's Office? If so, please contact me at home or via the Editor of *Past Forward*.

Roy Ashurst
62 Greenford Close
Orrell Wigan
WN5 8RH

1953/4 TOWN HALL v MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS ANNUAL FOOTBALL MATCH

played at Lord & Sharman (Ross Works) Pemberton



Standing: Coach (BE) Bob Brown (BE) Les Boardman (Capt. TC) Goalie (BE) Alan Gore (H) Bert Stockley (H) Tony Kay (TC) Linesman with skull & crossbones flag (BE)

Front row: Roy Ashurst (H) Gordon Rigby (H) ? (BE) Brian Leigh (H)

FROM AN OLD WIGAN BOROUGH SUPPORTER

Dear Alastair,

As always I very much enjoyed receiving and passing on the latest issue of *Past Forward*.

In your editorial you mention Wigan Athletic at Springfield Park. As you already know, I was an old Wigan Borough supporter, and even remember the incident when Frank Barson was sent off for jumping on an opponent and subsequently never played football professionally.

I can remember the Latics team of 1938:

Preedy
Moran Dennis (Capt.)
Humpish Wilson Robb
Welsby Welsh Smith Harris and Hughes

An interesting fact of those days was that because there were so many unemployed who couldn't afford the shilling entry fee (5p), they would hang around outside until about ten minutes or so after half-time when the gates would be opened and they would be allowed free entry!

Ernie Taberner
62 Westwood Road
Coventry
West Midlands CV5 6GE



PHOTOS OF GREAT PERSONAL INTEREST

THE WATSONS, AN OLD AND RESPECTED FAMILY

Dear Editor,

Please find enclosed a cheque for the subscription to Friends of Wigan Heritage Service.

Sadly, my husband, John G. Watson, died last June, but I know he would be pleased for me to continue contributing towards *Past Forward*. John looked forward to receiving the newsletters – the magazine took him back to the old days of Ashton-in-Makerfield with which he was familiar and back further into history.

The Watson's were an old respected family in Ashton. John Watson senior was a master builder (as was his father in Newton-le-Willows) who was later joined by one of his two sons, Ernest. My husband was born in Ashton, and went to St. Thomas's Church School before going to a boarding school in Arnside. He served in the Royal Engineers during the whole of the War, going through France, Holland, Germany etc. On demobilisation he returned to his roots – gaining an Honours Degree in Architecture at Liverpool University and then a

Dear Editor,

Browsing through the spring issue of *Past Forward*, the larger photograph of the WAAFs outside Winstanley Hall caught my eye. In particular the WAAF seated 6th from the right on the 2nd row from the front. I was sure that this was my mum, then Pat Taylor but, as she had died in 1963, (I was 13 years old) I couldn't quite believe it was her. On checking with dad he confirmed that she had been billeted at Winstanley, so to make doubly sure I got out the photos that I have. Not only do I have the same picture you published in your magazine but also one taken in February 1946 of 'C' Watch, Blackbrook, which has the names of the personnel written on the back.

The articles which accompanied the photos were of great personal interest to me, especially the letter from Carol Jones when she relays

memories from her mum Betty Bell. I have an autograph book that belonged to mum with signatures dated 5/10/44 from 'B' Watch and others. Betty's name isn't among them but I wonder if Bell is her married name. However, someone with the surname Bridgewater has written a short verse. I can't decide if the initial is M or H. If it is M then perhaps this is Betty's friend with whom she warmed mince pies on a shovel one Christmas Day.

Mum originated from Pinner in Middlesex. She and dad met when he, a delivery driver, called into De Roma's café in Station Road, Wigan, for a drink. Mum was there with two other WAAFs and they all got chatting. Dad offered to give them a lift back to Winstanley Hall. They married in February 1947.

**Dee Phillpotts
Orrell Wigan**



Taken outside RAF Station, Blackbrook, St. Helens, February 1946

1st row (seated left to right): Eric Craven, Mary Bradley, Jean Grant, Ralph Stevens, F/Sgt. Dudley, S/O Reid, Sqdn/Ldr. Fraser, Flt/Off. Wentzell, Pat Taylor, Isobel Hamilton, Emmy Robinson. **2nd row:** "Jock" Read, Ron Coates, Tommy Perkins, Pat Scott, Doris Cochram, Lilian Thompson, Doris Foley, Kay Smith, Alison Dick, Dot Edgar, Edna Drake. **3rd row:** Albert Sherrington, Doreen Blackwell, May Lenehan, Betty Harrison, Lucy Sherlock, Sylvia Selby, Kath Smith, Joyce Orton, Sylvia Wild. **Back row:** Frank Hyde, Sid Fernley, Janie Smith, Joan Akroyd, "Gerry" Chambers, Peggy Wilson.

Master's Degree in Civic Design.

Some of John Watson's (senior) work included building housing estates and schools in and around Ashton, the National Westminster Bank, Pit Head Baths etc. He bought and

demolished Lord Gerard's Hall in the Park, using some of the Hall to build his own house in Liverpool Road.

I am trying to piece together a picture of the Watson family over the years gone by. Some are buried in St.

Thomas's churchyard and some in the Newton-le-Willows churchyard. If there are any of your readers who recognise the name of Watson's, (Builders) and have any light to shed on the family, I would be so grateful to hear

from them.

In closing I must congratulate you all in the Heritage Service for producing such an excellent magazine.

**Audrey Watson
56 Hawthorne Road
Kings Norton
Birmingham B30 1EG**



THE 'EIGHT MITES' OF LEIGH

Dear Editor

I wonder if any of your readers could provide me with further details regarding these two old photographs of Plank Lane, Leigh?

The first picture shows the 'Eight

Mites', who were clog dancers and singers, and also part of a concert group formed in Leigh during World War I by Edward Bromilow and Sam McMaster, both miners from Plank Lane.

They performed locally, sometimes in cinemas during the interval between the first and second film. Their ages ranged from 8 to 14 years. Their costumes were skirts/shorts in red and white stripes, red blouses trimmed with white, and cream hats with red

trimmings.

I know the names of six of the eight - from left to right:

Annie Sumner, Florrie Stout (?), Lizzie Smith, Edna Bromilow, Alice Nicholson, Ida Simm.

Does anyone know the names of the two 'mites' on the right?

The other photograph is of a Plank Lane rugby team. Can anyone date it and identify any of the players?

Mrs V Lirakis
74 Lordstyle Lane
Bromley Cross
Bolton BL7 9JY

MYSTERY OF WIGAN'S PAST

Dear Mr. Gillies,

A couple of years ago I was browsing and chatting in a local antique dealer's warehouse, and as it sometimes does, our conversation turned to Wigan and its history. The friendly dealer said, "come into the yard and have a look at some items out there". To my amazement, leaning against the wall were two large stone slabs; it seems they were found on a dump some years earlier, purchased, and had lain there ever since.

One of the slabs was pretty obviously the old Wigan emblem of the Moot Hall, but what wasn't obvious to me was where on earth was its original situation? Could it possibly have been part of the structure of the old Town Hall itself? Intriguing!

The other slab is even more of a mystery to me. I have spent some time at the History Shop, checking anything heraldic, and reread Jessica Lofthouse's *Lancashire's Old Families*, but to no avail, and so in desperation, what else but to turn to readers of *Past Forward*. I am sure someone out there will supply the answers.

Needless to say I asked for permission to return with a camera and enclose the results.

Don Rayner
8 Edale Drive
Standish
Wigan WN6 0LN



The 'eight mites'



Plank Lane, Leigh, rugby team





William Challenor

Dear Editor,

The article by James Fairhurst (*Past Forward* 33 p35) seems to be referring to work carried out by my father William Challenor who was a Senior H.M. Inspector of Mines (coal mines, salt mines and quarries). He

conducted controlled trials using water infusion to cut down the dust when cutting the coal face. Trials were carried out at Golborne, Cronton, Lea Green, Clock Face, Bold, Wood, Sutton Manor, Ravenhead and Llay Main Collieries. The findings and conclusions were published and Wigan Library was given a copy along with many of his text books relating to the history of mining on his death in May 1969.

Margaret G. Tonge
Springfield Wigan

In the last issue of *Past Forward*, Frank Winnard recalled a summer evening German bombing raid in 1940, when some incendiary bombs were dropped on or near Billinge Hospital. He wondered if any reader could add some more information.

Mark Gaskell has contacted me with details from the Lancashire Control Centre Incident Record Books. These show that a report was made at 2.30 am on 5 September 1940, of ten high explosive bombs. One failed to explode, and the records state that its recovery

was abandoned 3 months later.

Mark has carried out extensive research into local aviation history, including various crashes (apologies for omitting an acknowledgement to you in the Sabre Jet crash article in the last issue, Mark), the Wigan Presentation Spitfire and the amazing story of its main pilot. I am delighted that he has agreed for the history he has compiled to be serialised in *Past Forward*, starting with the next issue. It will make fascinating reading.

Ed.

LABOUR HALL CINEMA ANECDOTES

Dear Editor,

I am a subscriber to *Past Forward*, and I was very surprised to see an article in the Summer 2002 issue No. 31, p24; it was headed *Open Door for the 'Penny Rush'*. The article was written by Tom Heaton, a nephew of Fred Heaton who was a projectionist at the Labour Hall Cinema in Scholes. He mentions Rueben Williams, his wife and their daughters.

I became involved with the Williams family in 1951; by this time Rueben had passed away and Margaret his wife was running the Labour Hall with her daughters Betty in the cash box and Joy in the office selling ice-cream. Rueben and Margaret had a large family consisting of seven daughters and one son, Edith (Ada), Anne, Edna, Peggy, Mary, Betty, Joy and George. Ada, Anne and Edna had been in Canada from some years.

As I said earlier, when I became involved, Betty was doing the cash and doing the books ordering films etc; in the cash box area was a DC generator that

supplied power for the carbon arc projection machines. When they were ready to start the first movie someone would shout to Betty to start the 'geny'. I started going out with Betty and did some minor repairs to the rewind equipment, which lasted until the Labour Hall - 'The Show' as it was called by the family - closed. I guess that I did some portion of my courting at the Labour Hall. After the 'second house' ended, I would walk with Betty and her mother - I called her 'Ma' - back to their house in Vine Street, Whelley.

Tom Heaton describes his uncle as a fit man. Freddie did have to be very agile in swinging around the end of one machine to start the next machine and reel on cue; however, on one of his quick swings around the machine he missed his footing and ended up sat in the fire bucket. Tom also mentions Tommy Allen and his biking; my wife Betty (sorry, I forgot to mention that we got married in 1954) went for a tandem ride with Tommy to Southport,

and was in sore shape when they got back

Please find enclosed a copy of the final poster that announced the closing of the cinema; this is a reduction of the posters that Freddie would have stuck up on various bill boards and telephone posts around Scholes. I wonder whatever happened to 'White Eagle'.

I never experienced the 'empty jam jar admission', but I had heard about it when I was a youngster. After the Labour Hall closed Margaret Williams sold their home in Vine Street, and bought a small haberdashery and ladies wear shop practically across the road from the Labour Hall, between the hardware shop (Joe Howards) and the paper shop (Allan Woods). Joy was running the shop but unfortunately business was not very good and it eventually closed, as did many more small places in Scholes.

We come back to Wigan each spring for a vacation and whenever we are driving through Scholes we look at the spot where the shop was and marvel as to

how all those businesses and houses fitted in that small space. The only thing still standing on that side of the road is the 'Earl of Balcarres' pub. Thank you Mr.

Heaton and *Past Forward* for the happy memories.

Ken and Betty
Roocroft
1454 Major Oaks Road
Pickering Ontario
L1X 2N5 Canada





'THERE'S NOWT LIKE A BLAST FROM THE PAST...'

Dear Editor,

There's nowt like a blast from the past to warm the old cockles. And so it's warmest thanks to Rev. Roger Taylor for his remarkably detailed reminiscences on the life and time of Wigan Grammar School's form 5C – for the most part, the 'awkward squad', as I recall. School reports of 'easily satisfied' and 'could do better' summed up fairly the attitudes there prevalent.

At that time I was living in Scholefield Lane – not the most affluent part of town – just across the road from Johnny Lynch. I must say that reference to him in the article

was a little patronising, and took no account of the dire economic climate of the '30's. Jobs were really hard to come by, and as the oldest child in a large family, Johnny simply had to take what was on offer in order to bring a wage home. But then, there was ever an air of snobbery by the 'haves' over the 'have nots'!

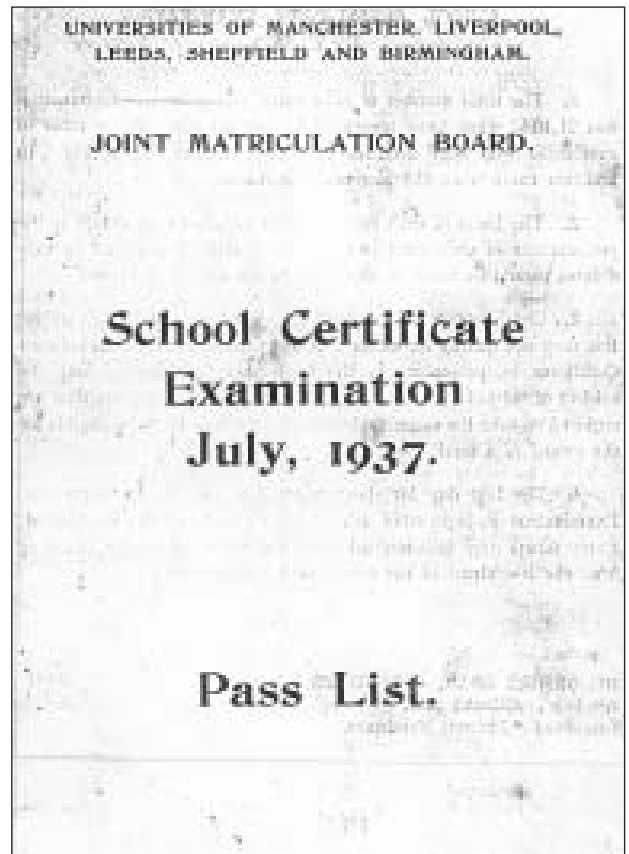
Nonetheless, I am indebted to Roger for an erudite pen-picture, which will doubtless have been fascinating to the alumni of W.G.S.

Stanley Greenough
(late of 5C)
Leyland Lincs

Congratulations to Rev. Roger Taylor on his article in issue 33

I knew the Hewitts and Les Gee and was in his class at Poolstock School when Mr. Wood was Headmaster. My history lessons were copies of Mr. W's, especially his Lord Nelson and Cromwell – wonderful dramatisations which have remained with me to this day.

H. Bonikowski
(formerly Sawbridge)



• Extracts from a booklet containing school certificate examination results for 1937 kindly sent in by Mr. Greenough. The list records matriculation of Rev. Taylor as well as the results for Wigan Girls High School and Wigan Notre Dame High School.

SCHOOL CERTIFICATES.		
Wigan, Wade Deacons Gr. Sch.—contd. Form F.A. Carey, Cosh, Walter Davies, Douglas T. Fowler, Stanley Gibson, Geoffrey Jones, Frederick G. Manning, Alexander F. Pugh, John Robinson, Harold A. Tomkinson, Richard Upton, Percy Whittington, Charles Gals, Lewis, Margaret J. Shaw, Joan G. Form F.B. Armstrong, Philip Beckett, John Bell, Norman Dodkin, Harry Docker, Thomas Dunbar, Bernard W. Forster, Kenneth D. Fisher, George Gandy, Norman A. Holsby, Richard Hodgins, William Jackson, Donald F. Mandy, James Ward, John R. Whelan, William L.	Wigan Girls' High Sch.—contd. Form G.A.—contd. Paul, Catherine M. Raby, Barbara Rogers, Kathleen Seddon, Lois J. Smith, Joan T. Southall, Madeline Taylor, Ellen Taylor, Joan Thomas, Constance Tibbets, Dorothea Warburton, Edith M. Walker, Alice Whitaker, Marion Yates, Myrtle Form G.B. Balfour, Mary Bellis, Kathleen Burton, Catherine J. Dalrymple, Helen J. Donahue, Mary A. Lee, Joan Robinson, Vera H. Turner, Margaret A. Walker, Dorcas Form G.C. Davies, Edith Brown, Joseph Brown, Gordon Dalton, Clifford W. Davyport, Charles Ellis, Roy Farnham, John H. T. Gaskell, Stanley Greenough, Stanley Hall, Henry Hamilton, William Hunter, Ernest Hunter, William H. Johnson, Donald H. Leyland, Frederick H. Nott, Eric Platt, Richard Rycence, Arthur G. Taylor, Norman H. Walker, Thomas W. Wolfe, Charles D. Worland, Thomas H. Worland, Walter H. Worland, Helen	Wigan Gr. Sch.—contd. Form F.—contd. Altherton, Joseph Bell, Edith D. Barry, Edgar Brown, James Brown, William Coochman, Richard Cole, Cecil H. Gray, Arthur E. Hadfield, Arthur Kelly, Joseph Kirkland, William G. Miller, Clifford Radcliffe, Frank Rigby, Arthur G. Rigby, John G. Robinson, Percy T. Smith, William G. Sturges, John Tappin, Lewis Topping, Bernard J. Form F.—contd. Adams, George H. Atkinson, Frederick E. Austin, Donald E. Carrington, Jack D. Carter, Thomas E. Galt, Eric Larkin, Alan F. Mason, Raymond Melling, John Morris, Arnold Murphy, Brandon J. Huggins, Harry Alder, Arthur Armstrong, Joe Taylor, May Walker, Thomas H. Yarwood, Bertram
Wigan Girls' High Sch. Form G.A. Collier, Olive Crossman, Myrtle Crossley, Jessie Dean, Hilda Dowell, Mary A. Eyles, Myrtle Fisher, Margaret Hutton, Ellen Gaskell, Elaine Grime, Margaret Hall, Dorothy Jones, Lilian Leonard, Ethel H.	Wigan Gr. Sch. Form F. Bates, Elizabeth Brown, Joseph Brown, Gordon Dalton, Clifford W. Davyport, Charles Ellis, Roy Farnham, John H. T. Gaskell, Stanley Greenough, Stanley Hall, Henry Hamilton, William Hunter, Ernest Hunter, William H. Johnson, Donald H. Leyland, Frederick H. Nott, Eric Platt, Richard Rycence, Arthur G. Taylor, Norman H. Walker, Thomas W. Wolfe, Charles D. Worland, Thomas H. Worland, Walter H. Worland, Helen	Wigan, Notre Dame High Sch. Form F. Bates, Elizabeth Brown, Joseph Brown, Gordon Dalton, Clifford W. Davyport, Charles Ellis, Roy Farnham, John H. T. Gaskell, Stanley Greenough, Stanley Hall, Henry Hamilton, William Hunter, Ernest Hunter, William H. Johnson, Donald H. Leyland, Frederick H. Nott, Eric Platt, Richard Rycence, Arthur G. Taylor, Norman H. Walker, Thomas W. Wolfe, Charles D. Worland, Thomas H. Worland, Walter H. Worland, Helen

SCHOOL CERTIFICATES.		
Wigan, Notre Dame High Sch.—contd. Form F.—contd. Caddell, Margaret Clemons, Hannah Hayes, Ruth L. Hayles, Joan Jackson, Mary G. Jackson, Kathleen Jones, Joan Kenna, Mary E. Kenna, Mary F. McCallister, Maria Mansfield, Marjorie Martin, Agnes H. O'Sell, Fred Piddlett, Margaret M. Roberts, Olive H. Rigby, Elizabeth Rigby, Winifred D. Rowley, Elsie Taylor, Joan Taylor, Margaret M. Ward, Nora I. Wadding, Alice Williams, May	Wigan, Friends' Sch. Form G.P. Brathwaite, John C. Dixon, John C. Gould, John C. Lindley, James Martin, Colin Shepherd, Roy W. Striffle, John K. Troughton, Alan J. Gals, Wilson, Freda Form G.P. Adams, Eric Bartlett, Joseph D. Burdell, William H. Fox, Raymond Foster, Jonathan Harrison, John G. Hayton, Geoffrey D. I. Hobbins, John H. Jones, John L. Paul, Fred Taylor, John Tarrant, Lewis H. Wallis, William Wallace, Lawrence	Wigan, Friends' Sch. Form G.P. Brathwaite, John C. Dixon, John C. Gould, John C. Lindley, James Martin, Colin Shepherd, Roy W. Striffle, John K. Troughton, Alan J. Gals, Wilson, Freda Form G.P. Adams, Eric Bartlett, Joseph D. Burdell, William H. Fox, Raymond Foster, Jonathan Harrison, John G. Hayton, Geoffrey D. I. Hobbins, John H. Jones, John L. Paul, Fred Taylor, John Tarrant, Lewis H. Wallis, William Wallace, Lawrence
Wigan, Friends' Sch. Form G.P. Brathwaite, John C. Dixon, John C. Gould, John C. Lindley, James Martin, Colin Shepherd, Roy W. Striffle, John K. Troughton, Alan J. Gals, Wilson, Freda Form G.P. Adams, Eric Bartlett, Joseph D. Burdell, William H. Fox, Raymond Foster, Jonathan Harrison, John G. Hayton, Geoffrey D. I. Hobbins, John H. Jones, John L. Paul, Fred Taylor, John Tarrant, Lewis H. Wallis, William Wallace, Lawrence	Widnes, Friends' Sch. Form G.P. Brathwaite, John C. Dixon, John C. Gould, John C. Lindley, James Martin, Colin Shepherd, Roy W. Striffle, John K. Troughton, Alan J. Gals, Wilson, Freda Form G.P. Adams, Eric Bartlett, Joseph D. Burdell, William H. Fox, Raymond Foster, Jonathan Harrison, John G. Hayton, Geoffrey D. I. Hobbins, John H. Jones, John L. Paul, Fred Taylor, John Tarrant, Lewis H. Wallis, William Wallace, Lawrence	Widnes, Friends' Sch. Form G.P. Brathwaite, John C. Dixon, John C. Gould, John C. Lindley, James Martin, Colin Shepherd, Roy W. Striffle, John K. Troughton, Alan J. Gals, Wilson, Freda Form G.P. Adams, Eric Bartlett, Joseph D. Burdell, William H. Fox, Raymond Foster, Jonathan Harrison, John G. Hayton, Geoffrey D. I. Hobbins, John H. Jones, John L. Paul, Fred Taylor, John Tarrant, Lewis H. Wallis, William Wallace, Lawrence



MINER'S FRIEND – THOMAS ASPINWALL



I THOUGHT I must put pen to paper to tell you a little more of Thomas Aspinwall, miners' agent for the Wigan District and Vice-President of Wigan Infirmary. A plaque was erected by the miners of Wigan and surrounding districts and hangs on the corridor of Wigan Infirmary, near to the MAV Department (the old South Ward).

Thomas Aspinwall was born at Bickerstaffe, near Ormskirk, in 1846. He settled in Skelmersdale at the age of 14 and commenced an association with the colliery village. He began working in the mine at an early age and from the pit rose to a high position in the mining world; and in the political world he nearly won a seat in the House of Commons.

In 1887, on the death of the late Mr. William Pickard, he became miners' agent for the important Wigan District – a position which he held with credit to himself and benefit to the men whom he represented

This letter was received in response to a 'Memory Lane' feature which appeared recently in the first issue of Wigan Council's magazine 'Borough Life'.

PLEASANT MEMORIES OF THE OLD CORN MILL

Dear Sir,

This photograph shows the old corn mill which was at the bottom end of Coppull Lane on the left hand side going down (i.e. north side). The mill was connected to a stone-built farmhouse to its right hand side (the corner of the farmhouse roof is just visible in the photograph).

In the late 1800's/early 1900's the farm and mill belonged to my great grandfather, William Leather, and subsequently passed to his eldest son, my great uncle, Dick Leather.

The mill/farm was part of a thriving community in that part of the Douglas Valley, called Bottling Wood, and included a pub called 'The Woodman'. The whole lot was demolished in the early 1930's 'for health reasons', and the Bottling Wood estate was built at the top of the hill on the Whelley side



of the Douglas, with most of the inhabitants being re-housed in their council houses.

Although all the property had been demolished, when I was a boy I well remember that the mill race was still clearly visible where it had run through the mill, driving its waterwheel and then across the field on the south side of Coppull Lane and back into the river Douglas.

My grandfather, Joshua Leather, was a younger brother of Dick and he brought up a family of 12 children (including my father Tom) in a cottage (in fact, two cottages knocked through) with its back to the Douglas on the south side of Coppull Lane, i.e. almost opposite the farm. Several of my grandfather's brothers and sisters also raised their families in Bottling

Wood, so there was a tremendous community spirit – with almost everyone related. I and my many, many cousins in the Swinley/Whelley area may never have lived in the valley, but we heard so many stories of the old days from our forebears that it became very real to us, and remains so to this day.

Thanks for stirring pleasant memories.

**Joshua Leather
Eccleshall Staffs**

up to the day of his death. As miners' agent he came into the front rank of miners' leaders and his word had great weight in the deliberations of the Lancashire Miners Federation and other mining organisations. He was practical; his experience combined with his sound commonsense made him a representative of which any mining community would have been proud.

When the Labour cause became so prominent Thomas Aspinwall entered the political arena, being adopted the Liberal

and Labour candidate for Wigan. He was a man of the people who took for his motto "Come Let us Reason Together". The Conservatives admitted that they were fighting a strong candidate, as the result of the poll proved – Sir Francis S. Powell only beat Aspinwall by a majority of 110.

He took a great interest in public affairs. He was Chairman of the Local Board, Urban Council and School Board, held the Principal Lay Offices in Wigan Parish Church and was Vice-President at

Royal Albert Edward Infirmary in Wigan.

Thomas Aspinwall died on Thursday 21 March 1901, after suffering from a painful internal disease; he was only 55. The funeral took place on the following Monday afternoon amid signs of universal mourning and respect. The interment had been delayed until late in the afternoon, so that the men from all districts whom the deceased had so ably represented could attend the graveside. More than 600 miners from all over the districts joined in the

funeral procession, which was headed by two local brass bands.

To all my colleagues, friends and visitors of Wigan Infirmary, when you go past Thomas Aspinwall's plaque on the corridor near to the MAV Department, just take a minute to read the inscription; the tablet was erected by the miners of Wigan and surrounding districts:

"In his prosperous hours he had but this pride, to be the weak man's help, the poor man's guide."

**George Davies
Ex Councillor and
Unison APF Officer**



War years as a Flight Engineer Air Gunner

Dear Editor,

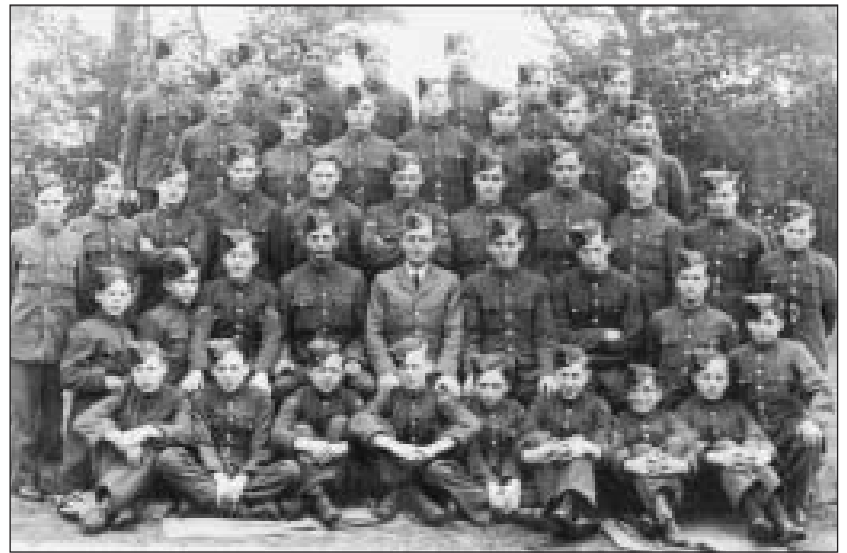
I was very interested in the article in *Past Forward* 33 by Alan Davies on Tom Bennett, whom I met some years ago as, being of similar age, he would probably have volunteered for aircrew around the same time as I did. I never asked Tom at the time whether he was in 1178 Squadron ATC.

I enclose a photograph of the squadron; Dickie Nutt of Wigan Grammar School was the C.O. I cannot remember all the names but some of your readers may recognise members of their family, and I

would be interested to know if they joined the RAF and what happened to them. On the third row, second from the left, is Johnny Berry, the fifth is Kidd, and I am the fourth from the right; the fourth from the left on the second row is Calderbank, next to the C.O.

You did not have the choice of which aircraft to fly on; in my case the fact that my last number ended in 44 meant that I was allocated to being a Flight Engineer/Air Gunner on 202 Squadron, flying Catalinas. Apart from the throttles, the Engineer controlled the engines, fuel and floats, and climbed via a small ladder to a position under the wing. On Coastal Command, as well as being Flight Engineer, you also had to be an Air/Gunner, and in the front gun position you were stood up in the open air.

The squadron operated in the South Atlantic from Gibraltar, on anti-U Boat patrols and looking for blockade runners; and later in



1178 Squadron ATC.

the North Atlantic from Loch Erne in N Ireland on anti-U Boat patrols and convoy escorts.

After Germany surrendered, we should have gone out to the Japanese war, but the powers that be decided we were not needed; in retrospect it was probably because they had the atom bomb. The Skipper and I were sent on a conversion course on Liberator bombers which had been converted to troop carriers, by removing the gun turrets and sealing the bomb bays.

The troops were seated in the bomb bays on canvas seats. I am on the far right in the enclosed photograph.

We flew from Cambridge via Tripoli, Cairo and Shaibah (Iraq) to Mauripur, being the airport for Karachi where we bought small carpets to

bring back. On the return journey we landed at Lydda (Palestine) instead of Cairo, where I used to pick up silk stockings for my sister Margaret and cigars for my father.

J.H. Dennis
17 Gidlow Avenue
Wigan WN6 7PF

SON OF THE VILLAGE POSTMAN

Dear Editor,

It was with some interest that I read the article in *Past Forward* No. 33 entitled 'Childhood Revisited' by J. Harold Smith, as I am Tom Silvester, son of the village postman. Together with my sister Dorothy, we are the only ones left, apart from our families. We both do remember our mother telling us about the incident as mentioned by Harold.

I was born in April 1923 and so am younger than Harold, with no recollection of those strike years. One incident I do remember while at the school in Garswood, however, was when the Airship R101 came over the school, and everyone ended up in the school yard looking up at it. I also recall playing piggy cricket, football and many other games on the croft, not to mention lighting small fires which I was told not to go near.

I also remember spending time climbing trees with my friend Jim McLennan in and around Monks Wood. I have a photograph of Jim and myself sitting in a tree which had been struck by lightning. I too was a friend of the son of the landlord at the Railway Hotel, Teddy (Edward) Heaton, and as well as exploring the large buildings in the pub yard and on the bowling green, we spent a night or two in his tent on a patch of ground bordering onto Victoria Road.

Tom Silvester
Ashton-in-Makerfield Nr Wigan



The writer is pictured (far right) in Shaibah (Iraq).



OWEN GRAY, APPRENTICE BAKER

Dear Sir,

I am currently researching my family history, and I am wondering if any of your readers can help.

My great great grandfather Owen

Gray was brought up in Liverpool Workhouse and eventually was apprenticed to a James Spencer to become a baker in 1861. James Spencer's address on my copy of the apprentice papers is given as 119 Scholes, Wigan. I would like to know if anyone has any

knowledge of this baker, for which I would be very grateful.

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P.S. I think *Past Forward* is a great magazine.

BETTER THAN HEAVEN

Dear Mr. Gillies

In reference to the article about the American Sabre Jet crashing in Billinge (*Past Forward* 33, p24). One of the ambulance crew who took Lt. W.B. Stockdale to Wigan Infirmary was a certain Mr. William (Billy) Maggs who hails from Ince but now lives in Billinge with his wife Edna. After reading the article Billy told me the story of how when Lt. Stockdale woke up briefly on his arrival at Wigan Infirmary he said, "Am I in heaven?", Billy's immediate response was, "now owd lad, thar somewhere better than that, thar int Wiggan Infirmary".

K. Dutton
Billinge Wigan

BORN IN LANCASHIRE – I PRESUME?

WILLIAM BARON was born I know not where, c.1860's – in Lancashire I presume. I was told by a relative that his father was a proprietor of a hotel or inn in either Blackburn or Burnley. His mother died and his father married again; the new wife did not like William around, so he was packed off to a boarding school with a name like Houghton or Hoghton Towers. N.B. There was a school in the village of Houghton but the Lancaster Record Office has no papers concerning pupils there for the middle to late 1800's. As everybody including his wife said he was a perfect gentleman one assumes the education he received must have been good. In the family there is a portrait of him aged four, showing a little boy with blonde curls sitting at a table playing with bricks. He is wearing a white dress decorated with corals.

The relative also told me that William later in life was in a partnership with another man in a jewellery/goldsmith's business, which was supposed to be in Bold Street, Liverpool (I have not been able to confirm this) in the latter part of the 19th century. One day this partner went off with

the stock in trade and William's wife. Later to hush things up he paid for their passage to the United States.

I know that William Baron had a son by his first marriage by the name of Cyril, who subsequently married a Lizzie(?), and they had a pawnbroking business in Bootle from which they were bombed out during the Second World War. My maternal grandmother Mary Thompson took me there during the War.

Mary Thompson's mother, Elizabeth Heaps, had Dining Rooms in Makinsons' Arcade, Wigan (she is listed from 1903 until 1928 in the local directories); William Baron had a business selling jewellery and clocks in the Arcade and is in the 1903 directory too. It seems very possible that William went to Heaps Dining Rooms for lunch and met Mary there. At the moment there is no trace of their marriage, and at some time around this period William changed his surname to Thompson. Later their third child needed to prove his parents' marriage and had to produce a copy of their marriage certificate; one could not be found, but

his parents insisted that "they were legally married".

On the birth certificate of their first child, Leslie, born 13 March 1904, his parents were living at 239 Stanley Road Bootle, and Mary gives her maiden name as Houghton; similarly when their second child, Laura, was born on 22 March 1906, at 51 Harrow Road, Walton. William's occupation is given as a photographer on the birth of Leslie, a freight clerk on Laura's and when their third child, Jack, was born, also at Harrow Road, on 12 November 1908, he is a book-keeper. On the birth of Jack, Mary gives her correct maiden name of Heaps.

The family moved to 19 Duke Street, New Brighton, somewhere around 1912/14, William worked for Coastlines in Liverpool as a book-keeper; in the mid 1930's he moved to Aughton, near Ormskirk. William died on 9 August 1938 in hospital in Ormskirk, but he is buried in the same grave as his son Leslie (who died in 1923) in Rake Lane cemetery, New Brighton. No age is given on the grave stone for William, but it is believed that he was much older than

generally thought. His age on the death certificate is given as 70.

I believe that William Baron had a brother who subsequently became Lt. Co. A.(?) Baron and was a Dental Surgeon in Rodney Street, Liverpool.

I have been in touch with the Goldsmith's Company but there is no record that William Baron was apprenticed with them; nor is there any record of him being in business in Bold Street. Coastlines records, now in the Greenwich Maritime Museum, have no information on staff employed in their Liverpool Office. I have not been able yet to trace William Baron on the 1901 census for Wigan. But the Directory gives an address at Standishgate where I believe a relative of

Mary's was living.

I would appreciate hearing from anybody who has any information on this family. I know that some of my grandmother's sisters married and lived in the Wigan area and it may be that some of their descendants might be able to impart more information on the life of William Baron. Mary Heaps had sisters called Nellie and Edith and brothers, Tom and Joseph, Nellie married a Mr. Alfred Simms and lived at 16 Warnford Street, Swinley in the 1920's, while Tom lived in Diconson Street, Ormskirk at the same period.

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Who? Where?

We're still not sure about the location of the bottom two photographs in last issue's Who? Where? It would appear that the farm (top left) is Birch Tree Farm, Highfield, Wigan. As for the top right photograph, there has been a huge response. All three clergymen have been positively identified as, from left: Rev Roger Mitchell of St John's, Hindley Methodist Church, Rev John Morgan Williams, the Circuit Superintendent and Mr John Dootson, Circuit Steward and lay preacher. Many respondents, including Mr Dootson's widow, who now lives in the south of England, believe that the presentation was made in the Brunswick Street schoolrooms, Hindley Green, probably in the mid 1960's. James and Hilda Bibby of Shevington have particular reason to remember Rev Mitchell, as he married them; sadly, though, he was to die young, soon afterwards, while rescuing a child from drowning.

