

# PAST FORWARD

Issue No. 35

November 2003 – March 2004



WIGAN  
LEISURE & CULTURE  
TRUST



*Produced by Wigan Heritage Service*

**FREE**

## From the Editor

Welcome to a re-vamped *Past Forward*. There is information about the Heritage Service and a new Family History Section, for example; and we've changed some of the typefaces and sizes, which hopefully will be easier to read. There's also a new design for the cover, which this time features the presentation of prizes following a competition which ran as part of our highly successful exhibition, *You Are My Sunshine*.

Talking of competitions, a highlight of this issue is the centrespread, which contains Gerald Rickards' latest drawing, this time covering the entire borough. But it is a drawing with a difference, in the form of a quiz, which will hopefully give many readers, both near and far, plenty to think about, over the Christmas period. There are excellent prizes as well, but most important, all proceeds will go to that most deserving of causes, Wigan & Leigh Hospice. The centrespread is in the form of an insert, so that you won't even have to tear out a page from the magazine proper to enter.

This issue sees the end of two splendid four part series, by Fred Holcroft and Harold Smith. I know that many readers who have sent in articles for the magazine will be disappointed to find that these have not been included in this issue. I'm afraid that here, *Past Forward* has been a victim of its own success. But don't let that put you off sending in your contributions - I'll do my best to find room in the future.

As ever, my thanks to so many people for your support for *Past Forward*, in many different ways. It is so encouraging for us all in the Heritage Service to read of how much the magazine means to you, how you look forward to each issue - no, we cannot possibly produce any more than three issues a year! - and how it has brought together so many lost friends - the last issue, for example, reunited two army men who had not seen each other for nearly half a century! It only remains for me to take this opportunity to wish all readers a very Happy Christmas and prosperous New Year. And don't forget the History Shop for that special Christmas present with a difference (see opposite).

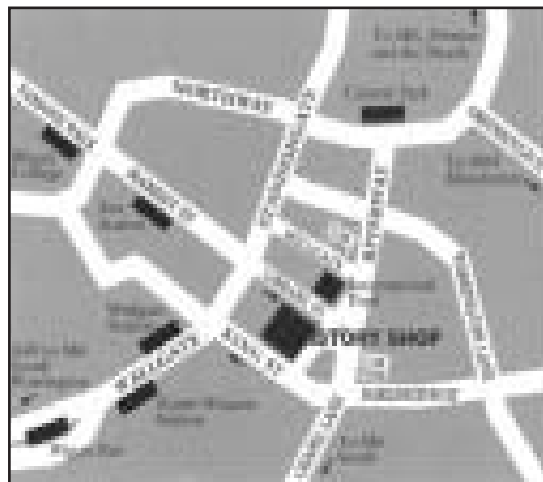
All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:  
Editor, 'Past Forward',  
Wigan Heritage Service, Market Suite, The Galleries, Wigan WN1 1PX  
Email: a.gillies@wlct.org

# Wigan Heritage Service

The Heritage Service has three main outlets - the History Shop, Archives and Leigh Local History. Please note that all telephone numbers have a 01942 code. If no individual Email address is listed, please use [leisureheritage@wlct.org](mailto:leisureheritage@wlct.org)

## The History Shop

Library Street Wigan  
WN1 1NU  
Tel: 828128 (general enquiries)  
828020 (local history desk  
- research enquiries and  
bookings)  
Fax: 827645  
Email: [leisureheritage@wlct.org](mailto:leisureheritage@wlct.org)  
Opening hours: Mon 10.00 -  
7.00; Tues - Fri 10.00-5.00; Sat  
10.00-1.00



### Staff based in the History Shop are:

**Philip Butler** - Visitor Services Manager - 827594 - [p.butler@wlct.org](mailto:p.butler@wlct.org)  
**Yvonne Webb** - Collections Development Manager - 828123 - [y.webb@wlct.org](mailto:y.webb@wlct.org)  
**Mike Haddon** - Heritage Officer (Industrial History) - 828121  
**Claire Hawkins** - Heritage Officer (Community Outreach & Education) - 828124 - [c\\_hawkins@wlct.org](mailto:c_hawkins@wlct.org)  
**Christine Watts** - Heritage Officer (Local & Family History) - 827580  
**Hilary Fairclough** - Heritage Assistant - 828128  
**Barbara Miller** - Heritage Assistant - 828128  
**Stephanie Tsang** - Heritage Assistant - 828128

## Archives

Town Hall Leigh WN7 2DY  
Tel: 404430 (general enquiries)  
Fax: 404425  
Opening hours: Tues-Thur 10.00 - 4.30 (by appointment)

### Staff based in Archives are:

**Alan Davies** - Heritage Officer (Archives) - 404431 - [a.davies@wlct.org](mailto:a.davies@wlct.org)  
**Amanda Bradshaw** - Heritage Assistant - 404430  
**Len Hudson** - Senior Technician & Photographer - 404432

## Leigh Local History

Turnpike Centre Leigh Library Civic Square Leigh WN7 1EB  
Tel: 404559  
Fax: 404567  
Opening hours: Mon, Thur, Fri 9.30-7.00, Tues 10.00-7.00; Wed 9.30-5.00;  
Sat. 10.00-3.30

### Staff based in Leigh Local History are:

**Tony Ashcroft** - Heritage Officer (Local History) - 404559

## Also

Market Suite The Galleries Wigan WN1 1PX  
Tel: 734732  
Fax: 704727

**Alastair Gillies** -  
Heritage Services Manager  
(and Editor of *Past Forward*) -  
734732 - [a.gillies@wlct.org](mailto:a.gillies@wlct.org)

Wigan Pier  
**Terry Meehan** -  
Museum Technician

## COPY DEADLINE

Please note that the copy deadline for issue no 36 of *Past Forward* is **30 January 2004.**

Cover: Wigan Athletic players Ian Breckin (back left) and Paul Mitchell (front left) present prizes to two of the winners in our *You Are My Sunshine* competitions, Lindsay Ravenhall and Jeff Wilson. (Courtesy of Wigan Evening Post)

# WE'VE GOT CHRISTMAS ALL WRAPPED UP!

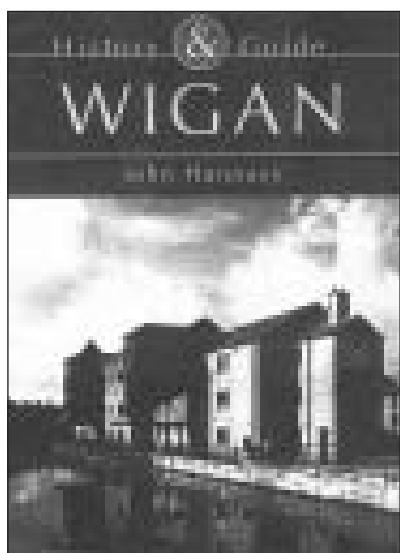
CAN'T think what to buy your loved ones and friends this Christmas? Then pay a visit to the History Shop where you'll be positively inspired by our range of gifts for all ages. As regular customers will know, we stock a varied range of toys, gifts, coal figures, jewellery, local history publications and cards. We have loyal Christmas shoppers who come back year after year as they always find that 'something different' here.

To help set the scene and get you in the festive mood, we have a beautiful selection of hand-crafted decorations



John Hannavy - *Wigan : history and guide* Tempus £14.99. Available from the History Shop (add £1 for postage). Please make your cheques payable to Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust. Also available from local bookshops.

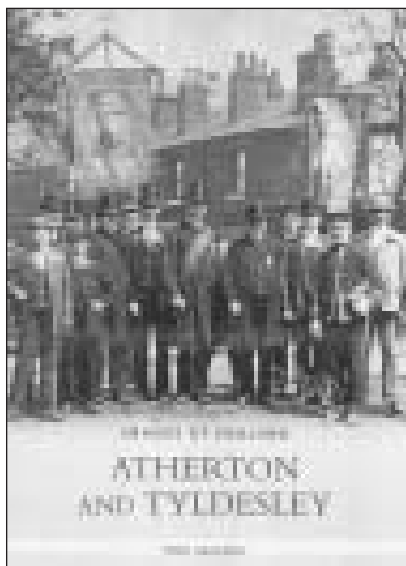
An update of Professor Hannavy's earlier book "Historic Wigan" issued 13 years ago, this is a timely publication. There is a wealth of black and white and coloured photos, many of modern day Wigan. Included are two walking tours of the town centre which takes in the major buildings and the tourist sites. Wigan's long history from its early obscure beginnings to the 20th century is covered in an attractive package. A must for Christmas.



which will make any Christmas tree sparkle. A welcome addition to our choice of Christmas cards this year is a series depicting local views by local artists. Scenes include old Central Park, Plantation Gates, Market Place, Mesnes Park and Top Lock. A great way to send special season's greetings from Wigan.

Two new titles in our local history range are Tony Ashcroft's '*Atherton and Tyldesley*' and John Hannavy's '*Wigan*', both of which we expect to be popular present choices this year.

Broadening our horizons a little



we are also stockists of 'Shared Earth' products, gifts from all over the world produced, bought and marketed using fair trade ethics.

'Hidden Treasures' is a range of hand-crafted pewter, 24 carat gold plated, enamelled and jewelled collectables. These ornate enamel boxes come in various designs with a 'hidden treasure' of a matching pendant on 24 carat gold plated chain hidden inside them. These highly decorative and distinctive boxes have been voted 'Gift of the Year' and can be used as a special jewellery box or secret hiding place.

If that's not enough to entice you, as an extra bit of festive fun and goodwill, if you buy any gift over £5 we will gift-wrap it for you - FREE!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

## HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

This important annual event takes place on 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the most notorious of all the Nazi death camps. The national theme for remembrance this year is Rwanda, on the 10th anniversary of the genocide there.

As before, Wigan will be holding a number of commemorative events:

27 January

### Ceremonies of Commemoration

Mesnes Park Wigan 11.00 am  
Firs Park Leigh 2.30 pm

Both ceremonies will be held beside the commemorative tree which was planted in remembrance in 2001. Everyone is welcome to attend these short ceremonies, as we remember, not just those who died in the Holocaust, but all those who have died as a result of genocide.

### Exhibitions

The History Shop, 24 January - 14 February (see p5)

The Turnpike Centre, Leigh Library, 12 January - 13 February.

### Lessons from History

With Stephen Lythgoe, Wigan Library Service's Reader-in-Residence  
Dates and venues to be announced - please look out for details.

### An Evening of Commemoration and Celebration

Hawley High School, Carr Lane, Wigan.

For the first time, there will be a local commemoration on the evening of Holocaust Memorial Day, in which pupils of Hawley High School (who will also be participating in the services of commemoration earlier in the day) and invited guests will take part. Further details available soon. Everyone is most welcome to attend.

**All readers of *Past Forward* where possible are cordially invited to attend the above commemorations.**

# Events and Activities

It's been a lively summer for Wigan Heritage Service, with colourful collages, animal antics and our very own stall at Leigh Carnival. 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\\_hawk@wlct.org](mailto:c_hawk@wlct.org). For details of all our future events see the "What's On" booklet published by WLCT and available throughout the borough.

## Out and about

It was a grand day out at the Leigh Carnival in July, with Heritage Officers Tony and Claire manning the Heritage Service Stall. We were in good company with the Gin Pit Residents next-



*Claire and Tony with the Heritage Service stall at Leigh Carnival.*

door dressed as Pit Brow lasses. The stall was very successful, promoting the Parish Maps exhibition 'Wigan on the Map' and our services. We had a great response from families participating in our craft activities (not least because they were fun and free!). Thanks go to Leigh Carnival, and good luck for next year.

Recent Local History Days at the branch libraries included Ince, Hindley and Ashton (thanks to the library staff for all their help).

## Family Fun

The History Shop runs activities for families with children aged 12 and under in the school holidays. Activities are free and the finished product can usually be taken home (all children must be accompanied by an adult). Over the summer holidays our activities have become increasingly popular and included the creation of two enormous (and brightly coloured!) Latics



players in collage (see below). Families also created some crafty animal cards and made some very impressive windmills and mobiles for the garden. It's great to see so many young visitors enjoying the History Shop and we look forward to future visits.

## Free Family Fun at the History Shop Winter 2003

**Monday 22 December 2-4pm**

**Christmas crafts: Calendars**

**Create a calendar** using collage, to help you welcome in a Happy New Year!

(All children must be accompanied by an adult).

## Schools

'Wigan on the Map' is an ideal exhibition to visit with your class and has links to the National Curriculum for history and citizenship at K52 and 3. We will soon be making available a Teacher's Pack to enable you to get the most out of your visit, including follow-up activities. To request a free pack or to book a visit, contact the Community Outreach & Education Officer on 01942 828124 or email [heritage@wlct.org](mailto:heritage@wlct.org)

We can also offer taster sessions for small groups of 'A' level and college students in the Archives at Leigh. For further information telephone 01942 828124. ➡

"... acquire your own piece of history ..."

**Heritage Estates UK**



*The perfect gift for any occasion  
for anyone with an interest  
in Wigan*

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Fax: 00 44 1942 770205

E-mail: [enquiries@heritage-estatesuk.com](mailto:enquiries@heritage-estatesuk.com)

Contact: Richard Weston

Heritage Estates UK, Caroline Street, Wigan, Lancashire, England, WN3 4EL

## Wigan on the Map

We are now pleased to offer talks and tours of this fabulous exhibition of Parish Maps (upon request), kindly given by the key coordinators of the original project. This is available to groups and societies who wish to bring members to the History Shop for a visit (tel: 01942 828128 to book).



Heritage Service staff Barbara Miller and Philip Butler admire the 'Wigan on the Map' exhibition.

## And the winners are

We ran two competitions at our recent Wigan Athletic exhibition "You are my Sunshine" (one for junior fans and a quiz for die hard Latics followers). Latics players Paul Mitchell and Ian Breckin kindly paid us a visit to present the prizes.

Winners of the Football Crazy Quiz were:

Mr. J Wilson

Mr. A Miller

Mr. R Prescott

The only three entrants to get all the questions right!

Winners of the junior Spot the Ball competition were:

Mark Wagstaff & Lindsey Ravenhall.

(See front cover).

### TEMPORARY EXHIBITION PROGRAMME 2004

Titles of some exhibitions may be subject to change.

**19 November – 16 January: *Paintings of Wigan & Beyond***

Gerald Rickards paintings.

**24 January – 14 February: *The Last Goodbye: Rescue of Children from Nazi Europe***

Travelling exhibition.

**1 March – 24 April: *Phantoms of Delight***

Children's illustrated books from the Dootson Collection.

**12 May – 17 July: *Far Flung Places***

An exhibition of some of the seldom seen items from the collection which either come from or feature foreign climes. The exhibition coincides with Museums & Galleries Month.

**2 August – 25 September: *The Family Album***

A celebration of our photographic collections, which will incorporate the two photographic society exhibitions.

**11 October – January 2005: *Northern Soul***

A look at Wigan Casino and its forerunner the Empress Ballroom, and their place in the contemporary culture of the time.

## HISTORY SHOP NEWS

### Exhibitions at the History Shop

IT HAS been a busy time for exhibitions since the publication of issue 34 of *Past Forward*. There have been three, and for those of you who missed them, you missed a treat!

In August and September we had two annual photographic exhibitions - first it was **Wigan Photographic Society**, then it was the turn of **Atherton Photographic Society**. Both were well attended, and many visitors remarked on the very different styles of the two clubs, especially the digital section of Atherton. The Wigan club, as usual, asked visitors to vote for their favourite picture. I know the result, and what a fantastic picture it is. However, if you want to know if it was the one you voted for, you will have to come to next year's exhibition.

In October we had a wonderful exhibition from the Commonwealth Games Legacy Team Manchester 2002. This had been on tour throughout Greater Manchester, and Wigan was its final venue. The exhibition featured many of the unusual gifts presented to the host-city by some of the countries which competed. These ranged from samples of fine rum from Barbados to a beautifully carved rhinoceros from Malawi. We also had the baton which David Beckham and Kirsty Howard presented to the Queen at the opening ceremony, and an audio-visual presentation showing some of the most memorable sporting moments of the Games. It brought back happy memories for many of our visitors (and myself!).

Our current exhibition is **Paintings of Wigan and Beyond**, by local artist **Gerald Rickards**. This is Gerald's third exhibition at the History Shop, and showcases the many wonderful local buildings drawn and painted in his instantly recognisable style.

The focus of the exhibition is work depicting familiar and well-loved landmarks from around the borough, especially those which have recently featured in *Past Forward*. In this series, Gerald has produced work depicting Aspull, Orrell, Standish, Haigh, Ince and Leigh. The works are complex, and can consist of up to 40 individual buildings. Gerald says of this work, "it is very time consuming looking at all the different places and then selecting which to include. In the space available I aim for balance, trying to include buildings and landmarks with links with the location, past or present." In addition, there will be scenes from Angers, Wigan's twin town, and the designs for the new stained glass windows recently installed at St Mary's, Ince.

Gerald was born and bred in Wigan, His postgraduate studies at the Edinburgh College of Art and a travelling scholarship to study mural painting in Europe helped him develop his unique style of painting. Retired from teaching he is now a professional artist. He has exhibited in Warrington, Cambridge, Norwich, Salisbury, Preston and London.

Gerald also hopes to use the exhibition to raise money for Wigan & Leigh Hospice with proceeds from a competition (see centrespread for details).

We will shortly be publishing our new exhibition leaflet, for 2004. The New Year will start off with **The Last Goodbye** which tells the moving story of the escape of 10,000 refugee children from Nazi occupied Europe during World War II to Britain. The exhibition aims to highlight the issues of racism, prejudice and indifference, and will be part of our programme to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day.

**Yvonne Webb**  
Collections Development  
Manager

# HISTORY SHOP NEWS

## Donations to the Taylor Gallery

ONCE again our visitors and Friends have been extremely generous to us with their time and effort. A full list of new donations is given below.

Gerry Rigby, Alan Maloney and members of UpHolland Family History Society continue their wonderful work indexing the 1901 census and have several other large projects ongoing at the moment. These include the indexing of the Parish Registers of St. Anne's Church, Shevington (the first part of which has been received and is listed below) as well as supplementing the work of our much missed late friend, Ted Cheetham, by noting the memorial inscriptions of St. John's Pemberton. Ted had earlier completed St. John's churchyard plan of the graveyard. This project, however, could take quite a while to complete.

One other important recent donation has been Ken Taylor's long awaited Sexton's Day registers of All Saints Church (see *Past Forward* 33 p4). These 12 surviving registers cover roughly the period 1765-1795 and are notes to burials. There is an index of those buried, and an additional list of those mentioned as being already buried.

### NOW IN STOCK AT THE TAYLOR GALLERY

#### Donations

- 254 JONES, Anthea *A Thousand Years of the English Parish*  
304.6021 GILES, K *Missing! from the 1881 British Census. British and non-British Crewmen arriving in Sydney, vol.1 Jan-March 1881*  
920 WAL YOUNG, Celia *A Story of Heroism [Ronald A Walker DFC]*  
929.2 JAMES, W H *The Search for Lady Constantia*  
936.2736 WIGAN Archaeological Society 1. *Standish Corn Mill excavation report* 2. *Arley Mills: investigation report*  
942.736 SMITH, S *Two Halls of Tyldesley*  
942.736 SPEAKMAN, Robert *Winstanley Hall: architecture and social life*  
G.P. RIGBY *Shevington St. Anne's Marriage Index 1887-1900*  
W.A.MALONEY (et al) *1901 Census name indexes -*  
1. *Standish, Shevington*  
2. *Aspull, Blackrod, Haigh*  
3. *Upholland, Billinge*  
4. *Pemberton, Orrell*  
5. *St George's*  
6. *St George's & St Catherine*

#### Transcripts

- Catholic Registers of St John's Wigan 1786-1802  
Lancashire Parish Register Society Vol. 131 - Eccles  
Lancashire Parish Register Society Vol. 155 - Registers of Leigh

#### Genealogy Books

- GUILD OF ONE NAME STUDIES *Register of one name studies 2002* (18th edition)  
PALGRAVE-MOORE, Patrick *How to record your family tree* (6th edition)  
SAVIN, Alan *DNA for family historians*

#### General Books

- 133 HOUGH, P *Supernatural Lancashire*  
133.4 POOLE, R *Lancashire Witches - histories and stories*  
338.7622334 SIMM, Geoff *The Leghs and Haydock Colliery*  
385.54 TOWNLEY, CHA & PEDEN, JA *Industrial Railways of St Helens, Widnes and Warrington, Part 2*  
388.322 TAYLOR, P J *Trolleybus to the Punch Bowl*  
629.25 BALDWIN, Nick *Proprietary Engines for vehicles*  
914.2736 MILLER, G *Historic Houses in Lancashire: The Douglas Valley 1300-1770*  
920 FAIR FAIRHURST, J *Who'd a thowt it*  
929.42 ROWLANDS, J *The Surnames of Wales*  
942.736 BOYDELL, Tom *Diary of Old Leigh Vol.1*  
*Diary of Old Leigh Vol. 2*  
942.736 WIGAN OBSERVER *Wigan: Fifty Golden Years*  
942.736 WRIGHT, J J *Story of Chowbent Chapel 1721-1921*  
942.757 PRESLAND, Mary *St Helens: a pictorial history*  
942.7612 YOUNG, David *One Man's Pitch*

#### Military Matters

- 016.3 WHITE, Arthur S *Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army*  
355.1 *Distinguished Service Order 6 Sept 1886 - 31 Dec 1915*  
355.1 *Distinguished Service Order 1 Jan 1916 - 12 June 1923*  
355.1 FEVYER, W H *Distinguished Service Cross 1901-38*  
355.1 McDERMOTT, Phil *For Conspicuous Gallantry: the register of the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal 1885-1992*  
355.1 NALSON, David *Victorian soldier*  
355.1342 BROWN, George A *For Distinguished Conduct in the Field . . . 1939-1992*  
355.1342 SWINNERTON, Iain *Identifying your World War I soldier from badges and photos*  
356.1 BULL, Stephen *The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment 1855-1970*  
929.341 SPENCER, William *Public Record Office Readers' Guide: Army service records of the First World War*  
940 JAMES, E A *British regiments 1914-18*  
940.4 *Battle honours awarded for the Great War*  
940.42 MICHELIN *Bygone Pilgrimage: The Somme Vol.1 1916-1917*  
940.42 MICHELIN *Bygone Pilgrimage: The Somme Vol.2 1918*  
940.46 WADHAM, W F A *Fourth Battalion The King's Own (Royal Lancaster Regiment) and the Great War*  
940.465 PEET, G *Index to names from 26 war memorials in churches and other locations in West Lancashire*  
940.481 ARTHUR, Max *Forgotten voices of The Great War*  
940.5425 STUBBS, Les & Pam *Unsung Heroes of the RAF: the Far East Prisoners of War 1941-45*

#### Fiche Donations

- 1851 census class list  
1891 census name index - West Lancs  
Upholland Marriage Index 1813-37  
British Isles Genealogical Register 1997 Lancashire Section

#### CD ROM

- 1841 Census for Lancashire

# HISTORY SHOP NEWS

## Friends of Wigan Heritage Service

**THIS autumn at the History Shop has seen the launch of a new combined Friends and Heritage Service initiative, the Family History Workshops. There have been six workshops in all, each offering assistance to the novice or becalmed researcher. At each one we have had a number of Friends on hand to help out and we would like to offer our thanks to the group for making the workshops such a success.**



*Friends explain just what can be found on the internet.*

At each workshop an experienced genealogist offered one-to-one attention to the public. This enabled many would-be researchers to make a start on their own family history or restart work that had come to a dead end.

One fascinating story emerged from the first workshop we held. One of our Friends was helping a lady from the Orrell area on her family. After her session had finished this lady stayed to do some more research. She was followed by another researcher, who proceeded to tell our Friend the family that he wanted to pursue; lo and behold it was the same name at the same address at the same time as the lady before him!! It turned out that the two researchers on the workshop were distantly related, sharing a relative that to one was grandfather and the other a great-grandfather. But neither knew the other, and they had come along to the workshop completely independently. Needless to say they then went on to spend the rest of the session deep in conversation, and searched together.

### Family history workshops get off the ground

Due to the success of these workshops, we are planning some more for 2004. Provisional dates are:

**Wednesday 14 January 10.30-12.30**  
**Monday 26 January 2.00-4.00**  
**Thursday 12 February 2.00-4.00**  
**Friday 27 February 10.30-12.30**  
**Tuesday 16 March 2.00-4.00**  
**Saturday 27 March 10.30-12.30**

As with the previous sessions, these will take the form of individual consultations, and are to be aimed predominantly at beginners. 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

Friends are helping the Heritage Service in more and more areas. Family history is still the largest single area with the Workshops; however, two exciting local history projects are now under way, with the indexing of the *Wigan Observer* from c.1950 to 1990, and the listing of the celebrated Dootson collection of books.

This second project brings in to play our collections held over in Leigh, and gives volunteers the chance to work in the Turnpike Centre with our Local History Officer Tony Ashcroft. For those interested in a fascinating collection of old books, keen to do voluntary work on the Leigh

side of our borough, or simply those looking for a project not directly related to family history, this could be for you.



*Friend Eric Davies 'holds court'.*

Contact Tony Ashcroft in Leigh (01942 404559) or Max Finney, the Chair of the Friends, through the History Shop. For the Newspaper indexing project contact Philip or Chris (01942 828128).

\*\*\*\*\*

For those interested, the next meeting of the Friends has been provisionally set for 12 February 2004 at 1pm at the History Shop. (please ring to confirm).

\*\*\*\*\*

**I would like to wish every reader a happy Christmas and a prosperous and fulfilling New Year. Remember the Friends do hold regular meetings and are expanding the number of projects on the go all the time. This all needs good will and volunteers. If you are interested in your local heritage and can spare some time then why not get involved? We'd love to see you.**

### FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

Name .....

Address .....

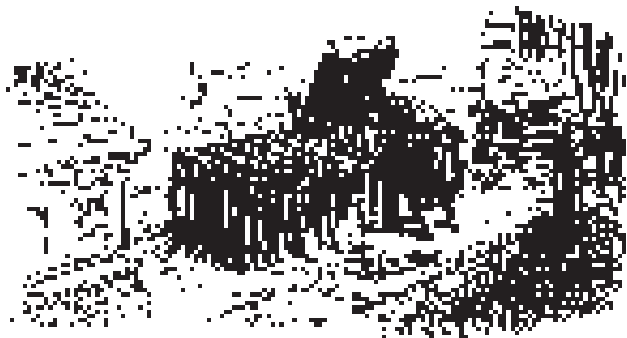
Interests .....

**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.

# Family History



## The Family History Project

History Channel has recently launched 'The Family History Project'. The aims of the project are to make history relevant to everyone by encouraging people to research into their own families. Their target is not only absolute beginners but also experienced researchers.

The Family History Project would be interested to hear from persons who would be willing to share their family stories, be they about emigration, their jobs of their experiences and achievements, famous or infamous.

Information on the project may be found on the project's website at [www.thefamilyhistoryproject.co.uk](http://www.thefamilyhistoryproject.co.uk). Entry is open to all over 18 years of age and there are categories for both the novice and experienced researcher. You may enter via the above website, by telephone (0845 671 6005) or by writing to The Family History Project, The History Channel, Grant Way, Isleworth, Middlesex TW7 5QD.

## 1861 Census Index

An apology is offered to all of those who have written or phoned to order their copy of the 'Wigan Census', only to

be told this is not, as yet, ready. Unfortunately, we have had a couple of technical problems with the reproduction of the disc. These have been successfully resolved, and it is now envisaged that we will be able to fulfill all orders from 1 December 2003.

Also, in *Past Forward 34* we gave the impression that the disc contained the whole census for Wigan, instead of being a surname index to the census. This monumental task has been undertaken and completed by our "Friends of Wigan Heritage Service", and principally Mrs Barbara Davies.

The details to be found on this excellent disc are:- surname, Christian names of all persons listed at that address (actual address is not listed), their ages and a reference to the relevant folio. There is no street index.

A very useful feature is a section on boat-dwellers. It is possible by using the "find" function to go through the enumerations very quickly, to find your particular family.

All areas of the present day Wigan Borough are included, as are a few which are not part of the borough e.g. Westhoughton, Heaton, Halliwell, Haydock, Winwick, Billinge Chapel End, Up Holland, Newton and Kenyon.

This excellent disc opens

in Excel and is priced at only £7.

If you have ordered previously under the impression that the disc is the 1861 Census of Wigan and not an index, it would be appreciated if you could reconfirm your order and contact us by phone (01942 828128), email ([heritage@wlct.org](mailto:heritage@wlct.org)) or post (The History Shop, Library Street Wigan WN1 1NU). Apologies once again for any confusion and inconvenience.

## Useful Internet web sites

[www.freebmd.rootsweb.com](http://www.freebmd.rootsweb.com)  
[www.freereg.rootsweb.com](http://www.freereg.rootsweb.com)  
[www.lancashirebmd.org.uk](http://www.lancashirebmd.org.uk)  
[www.Cheshirebmd.org.uk](http://www.Cheshirebmd.org.uk)

All of the above sites aim to provide free access to records of birth, marriage and death. Most have volunteer contributors and thus are in various stages of completion. Therefore, as yet, most do not have comprehensive coverage of the records. Nevertheless, they are of enormous help to researchers at home and abroad. Full G.R.O. reference, for ordering the certificates, are given and in *Cheshirebmd's* case are linked to the register office concerned and provide a ready made-out application form for you to send off.

## [www.1837online.com](http://www.1837online.com)

This new pay by view site provides access to all of the birth, marriage and death indexes for England and Wales from 1837-2001. The indexes are in 2 formats:-

from 1837-1983 all records are scanned pages of the indexes found at the Family Records Centre and those held in microform by libraries.

from 1984-2001 all information is in database format. These are searchable.

There are four pricing plans:-

up to 50 units (i.e. pages) for £5. These must be used

up within 45 days from purchase.

300 units for £25 to be viewed over 120 days.

800 units for £60 to be viewed over 365 days.

2400 units for £120 to be viewed over 365 days.

The site is particularly useful for overseas researchers. A great site to use.

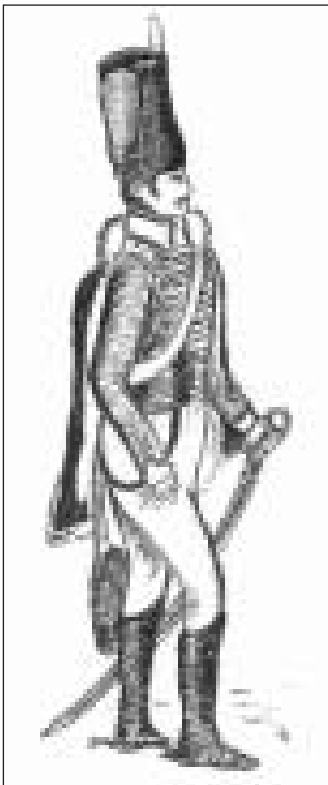
## Volunteer family history researchers at the History Shop

Every year the History Shop receives around 800 enquiries from all over the world. The great majority are enquiries concerning family history research. Because of this ever-growing number of enquiries staff have had to restrict the amount of time devoted to each enquiry to 30 minutes. We formerly also offered a fee paid research service. This has had to be withdrawn, again due to the growing pressure on staff time.

This demand, however, does not go away, and the Heritage Service is rethinking how we may help enquirers without on the one hand overloading staff, and on the other hand charging large fees. One possible solution is to gather together a group of experienced volunteers who would be willing, on request, to follow up those requests requiring longer than the present 30 minute allocation.

Therefore, if you would like to help all those researchers, whom we currently only partially help, please contact Christine Watts or Philip Butler on 01942 828020. Volunteers are asked for a small commitment in terms of time e.g. a couple of hours a week. We anticipate that this may not mean helping out every week, since there are often peaks and troughs in demand over the year.





# The Dragoon who served under Wellington

Dear Mr. Gillies,

Whilst rounding off my interest in Family History in Wigan, I have been in touch with members of Wigan Family and Local History Society, in particular with Mrs. Carol Littler. She encouraged me to update my article of 2001 (which you published in *Past Forward* no. 29 under the title "The HITCHEN name in Wigan") which I am now enclosing for possible publication.

**Dr. Pam Baxby (nee Hitchen)**

*Left: 'Trooper 7th (Queen's Own) Light Dragoons Hussars, 1808'. (after a plate in 'Wellington's Light Cavalry' by B. Fosten Osprey, 1982).*

## THANK YOU

Dear Editor,

I am writing to thank you very much for printing my letter on the back page of *Past Forward* no. 34. Within a week I had a telephone call from a John Taylor in Chorley giving me some information on William Baron, so I would like to thank you and Mr. Taylor for your help. I am still hoping somebody will come forward with the information on the missing second marriage of William Baron to Mary Heaps.

**Sylvia Arden-Browne**  
**14 Southfields Close**  
**Donnington Chichester**  
**West Sussex PO19 8SD**

## Alfred Crook

Dear Mr. Gillies,

I am looking for any information on relatives of Alfred Crook and his descendants.

Alfred's parents were William Crook (miner) and Margaret Beesley; William and Margaret married at Wigan Register Office in 1882. In 1891 they were living in Dicconson Lane, Westhoughton, but by 1897 they had moved back to Wigan, living at Turners Yard, 2 Caroline Street. Margaret died that year.

In the book *Working in Wigan Mills*, there is a photo taken at Rylands Mill of my grandfather John Thomas Beesley and his brother Alfred (Grandfather was born before the marriage in 1881). The caption says that shortly after it was taken Alfred left Rylands to become under - Manager at Eckersleys in Swan Meadow Mill.

Can anyone help me to discover more about Alfred and any other Crook children?

**Margaret Hegan**  
**67 Chester Road**  
**Stevenage**  
**Herts SG1 4JY**  
**Tel: 01438 233687**

THERE are two soldiers with the name John Hitchen listed in military records:

A corporal in the 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars from 1803, fought in the Battle of Waterloo and was in receipt of the Waterloo medal. The Muster Rolls of British cavalry record him as "wounded" but no details are given. The Roll of Chelsea Pensioners who attended the unveiling ceremony of the Wellington Memorial in Manchester in 1856 also lists John as having the Military General Service Medal with one clasp, that for Sahagun and Benevente. (Extracts and illustration kindly sent by D.L. Milner, [www.battleofwaterloomen.co.uk](http://www.battleofwaterloomen.co.uk). These were part of the rearguard action to support the withdrawal of Sir John Moore's forces to Corunna (*Wellington in the Peninsular War* by J. Weller. Longmans, 1967 and *Wellington at Waterloo* also by J. Weller. Ward, 1973).

Another John Hitchen, a Sergeant in the 1st Battalion, 2nd Footguards (Coldstream Guards) is

recorded as born in Pemberton. He was a wheelwright (5' 7" tall). John enlisted in 1794 and was discharged in 1814, aged 37 years, having served for "18 years and 330 days worn out through long service in Egypt, Holland, Hanover, Portugal and Spain" (Public Record Office, Kew WO 97/178). The 2nd Footguards had arrived in Portugal by May 1809 and fought throughout the Peninsular War.

### Wigan Census

Peter Hitchen of Millgate in 1811, married at Deane in 1806 and had 12 children. He was a weaver and later a carter, who in 1819 and 1820 applied for funds to get to and from Liverpool with his goods (Halliwell Overseers' Accounts). Peter and his family lived in central Wigan, including Wallgate, where Peter died in 1851 (All Saints' Parish Registers). So he cannot be the same Peter as my 3x great grandfather (born in Pemberton around 1784/88) who died in Dukinfield, Cheshire in 1854.

It is likely, however, that Peter of Millgate was the son of James Hitchen, weaver of Wallgate, shown in the family tree in my earlier article. John, brother of this Peter could not have been the Dragoon because John died (aged 15 years) in 1801 (All Saints' burials). These details were sent by Kath Arkright, 3x great granddaughter of Peter of Millgate, who also sent the PRO record about John.

### Coal Mining and Military Service

The association of Hitchens with the Orrell coalfield was confirmed by several other readers including:

Mrs. Lily Hitchen, born in Wigan and now living in Devon. Lily's husband Clifford (1911-1994) joined the Grenadier Guards, aged 17 years and fought with them until 1946. Clifford's family lived in Wigan "for many years, mostly in Pemberton and the men were engaged in coal-mining". Lily's father-in-law William, was a blacksmith

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# Childhood Revisited

AT the time, there was no alternative to the two and a half mile walk to school, though in inclement weather, parental compassion, plus the slackness of the purse strings just might have run to the circuitous alternative of the 4d return train fare to the next station at Bryn, plus a 1d Wigan Corporation bus ride to within 200 yards of the school.

The journey on foot to and from school, especially in the lighter months, could be, and often was, an adventure. What fun it was walking down Almond's Brew! The childish thrill of picking up a large stone to

## (Part four)

by  
**J. Harold Smith**

pitch down the disused shaft of the derelict Almonds colliery, listening for yonks, to hear the final, echoing splash and boy-ing; dislodging the fruit from the wild damson tree that grew over the bridge of the stream (Millington Brook, I seem to remember) that ran under the Bottom of Almond's Brew, throwing them away because they were far too bitter to eat. There might also have been time for a quick game of hide-and-seek in the dangerously rotting dereliction of the buildings on Davy Lowe's deserted farm premises.

How sad to realise now that for many years I must have crossed that scene

transversely on Them Six or the M6, depending on how far north of Watford one hails, dozens of times. With the thought of the many years of dereliction of Davy Lowe's farm in mind, one gets a brief glimpse into the foresight and the workings of the minds of our town and country planning buffs.

I suppose the initial impression of arriving at our new school for the first time, was the vastness, though seeing it 30 or 40 years later, it seemed to have shrunk. Not only did we have a large playground there was a huge expanse of grassed playing field, the northern boundary of which butted on to the

playing field of the Grammar School, a small brook running along the demarcation path.

## Order to 'Fall In'

At five minutes to nine, a rather impatiently sounding electric bell rang, signalling the order to 'fall in' - no running allowed. At nine o'clock the same bell, in no better mood, rang again and the whole of the boy's school filed orderly into the school hall for assembly, a completely new innovation for us North Ashtoners, as we were designated. As he would on every morning during my sojourn at Ashton Boys Central School, the headmaster Mr. J.A. Farrand took up his stance on the stage to deliver his daily homily,



## The Dragoon who served under Wellington

*Continued from page 9*

at Pemberton Colliery and another of his sons, also called William, was employed at the colliery too.

John Hitchen (born 1923, Marsh Green, Wigan) and his granddaughter Deborah, traced their ancestry back over three generations of blacksmiths in Pemberton to James Hitchen (engineer) born in Pemberton in 1809 (1851 census). Deborah writes that John was "one of the few soldiers to return from Arnhem" in World War II. Since contacting me on reading my

article in *Past Forward*, sadly, John died on 27 April 2003. He is buried at St. John's, Pemberton. Daniel (born in 1884 John's father and Daniel's twin brother Elias, both fought in the Horse Artillery in World War I.

Mrs. E. Berry of Billinge wrote that her father John Hitchen (born in 1897) was a mining engineer and her grandfather Daniel (born in 1876) was "captain of the pit rescue team at local collieries". It is of particular interest that Peter Hitchen, owner of Birchley Colliery in 1903 (see earlier article), was her father's great uncle. Mrs. Berry has traced her ancestry to Reuben Hitchen, her 3x great grandfather (born in 1797).

Most recently, detailed research by Kath Arkwright shows that:

(1) Clifford and Deborah share the same



*Fitters with a colliery locomotive, Pemberton Colliery 1924. Deborah's great grandfather, Daniel (blacksmith) is 5th from the left, front row.*

*(Photograph reproduced by kind permission of John Hannavy).*

ancestry via William and Daniel (see photo) who were brothers (1901 census, Newtown) and their father John Hitchen, also a blacksmith.

(2) Reuben is the son of Peter Hitchen, carpenter, of Winstanley who married Alice Barton at Standish in 1781 (Parish Registers). This confirms what

another Family History enthusiast found and takes Mrs. Berry's ancestry back one more generation.

With thanks to all of them for information and to Mrs. Carole Littler of Wigan Family and Local History Society for encouraging me to write the articles in *Past Forward*.

which would be followed by a hymn, led by Mr. A. Jones at the piano. A regular inclusion was, "Awake my soul and with the sun, they daily stage of duty run", with emphasis on the second line of, "Shake off dull sloth and joyful rise, to pay thy morning sacrifice".

Assembly over, all new starts were shepherded into delegated classrooms and there introduced to the new (to us) idea of making out time tables and learning which classroom to occupy for the particular subject in question.

It took some little time to get used to the idea of seeing masters wearing their black gowns, minus the mortar boards of course, as did the idea of moving around from classroom to classroom when the subject dictated. This did, however, provide the opportunity for us to weigh up each master's temperament e.g. Mr. D.M. Jones's no nonsense, book throwing propensity or Mr. Davis's woodpecker impersonation whilst driving home his point with the aid of the blunt end of a pencil tapping on the pupil's skull.

## Vociferous tirade

Caning was in evidence as before, but again, I think it was generally accepted. The fact that the teaching staff was all male had the effect of increasing the pain barrier of the punishment, of course. Being sent to the Head's office was the cardinal sin and an experience never to be forgotten. There was something surprisingly incongruous about entering Mr. Farrand's lair, which was not directly connected with the usual array of books, the huge desk etc., it was the vociferous tirade emanating from so small a person, no taller than many of his pupils. But make no mistake, a session with *Little Alf* was an experience that would remain in the miscreant's memory forever.

With the benefit of hindsight, however, I do

feel that Mr. F. might have had in him, a masochistic gene. He seemed to work on the premise that if the masters were not providing him with enough *cane fodder*, he would go and look for it. This meant leaving his den to do a full reconnaissance of the classrooms, all of which were approachable, via a flagged walkway bordering the lawned quadrangle between the boys' and girls' school.

The outward opening door of each classroom was half glazed by six, perhaps nine, panels, the lowest line of each providing an excellent, almost concealed viewpoint for Mr. Farrand ... as long as he stood on tiptoe. Like a pike in a well stocked pool, he would search the class for one or more potential quarry. The attack plan successfully formulated, his opening of the door had the effect of class and master ducking for cover. Pointing to his chosen victims he would command, "Come out you, and you" simultaneously clearing a space on the large form room table with one sweep of his forearm, commanding each *victim* to lie with his trunk on the cleared space, with feet still on the floor. With his victim suitably anchored, there began an embarrassing fiddling with the top of the trousers, not with the intention of removal as first thought, but to allow hitching until he, Mr. F., was happy with the tightness in the area of operation, a precarious step in the dark, in consequence of poorer lads whose mothers had, for the umpteenth time, risked yet another patch on the fraying parent material.

With the old adage of sparing the rod in mind, Mr. Farrand, in his time, must have left a limitless legacy of unspoilt children in evidence.

## Three year sojourn

About half way through my three year sojourn at

Ashton Central School, I was earmarked for what was referred to as First Year Technical, as opposed to First Year Commercial, a legacy I suppose of my leaning towards science and technical drawing, with English as a strong third. Or it might have been my leanings towards our popular science master, Mr. Winstanley (Billy Wink) – always very pleasant, with a penchant for bringing pure science down to schoolboy level. On that score, I remember his dissertation on the subject of coal gas, particularly interesting to us Garswood lads whose village would depend on gas for many years to come, prior to the introduction of electricity. We were all well aware that gas was fed through underground pipes from a place in Princess Road, Ashton, not surprisingly called the Gasworks where, one could have a bag filled with coke for about 8d (three and a half pence). We were all familiar also with the fairly common sight of the man who used to push that coffin-like box on wheels containing the pennies and shillings collected from every gas meter in the village. But how, Mr. Winstanley addressed the class, enigmatically fondling none other but an old, white clay pipe...(no, there was not thick twist to follow) is it made?

But what's this he is now packing into the pipe's bowl? Coal dust!! Well, I suppose some of us had heard of poor old men smoking tea leaves, but coal dust! Fixing the pipe to a laboratory retort, he held a lighted Bunsen burner under the pipe's bowl and left us all to await his next trick. We were all invited to watch the coal dust glowing red, at which point Mr. W. Held a lighted taper to the mouthpiece of the pipe and, hey presto, a spectacular, blue centred tongue of flame appeared, though not quite so spectacular as the batswing burner that illuminated our back kitchen.

## Popularity soared

One day, Mr. Winstanley's popularity soared 100% when he turned up at school on a brand new James, 250cc, two stroke motorcycle which, on mounting to make his homeward journey, home to (would you believe?) Winstanley, was the centre of admiration and an impromptu science lesson on the kerbside.

The spectacle, though probably dominated by the newness, was in complete contrast to woodwork master Mr. (Sammy) Atherton's ageing Sunbeam. Nevertheless, it is my guess that the origin and loving care of Mr. A. combined to outlast Mr. Winstanley's new James by quite a few years. Woodwork master Mr. Atherton was, understandably in view of the nature of his potential disaster scene, a much stricter disciplinarian, and it was quite some time before he allowed us to embark on any project of our own choice. At the time, I used to take *Hobbies Magazine* in which there had been an article on how to make a model speedboat, the length of which was about two feet, and so, after some discussion, I was allowed to embark on this rather ambitious scheme. After a couple of weeks working on my dream I was not unaware that its resemblance was straying from that portrayed in *Hobbies Magazine*. I was also a little worried about the little chinks of daylight poking through some joints which did not auger well for successful floating. I was not alone in my opinions, but it was Mr. Atherton who finally put me out of my misery by compounding it...."Is it going to float, Smith, what about this hole here? "D'ye think it's going to be strong enough?" At the same time he answered his own question by raising my handiwork about shoulder level, then bringing it down with a crash on

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# Childhood Revisited

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the bench...It broke. No, Mr Atherton, it wouldn't have been strong enough.

## Teapot stand

But there was a happy sequel. Mr. A. allowed me to try wood turning on the ancient treddle lathe that nobody ever seemed to be interested in. I turned a quite presentable teapot stand around the edge of which I did some fancy gouging. Just as I was about to forget the occasion, I was informed that my teapot stand had been accepted as a craft item at the Royal Lancashire Show, then in Blackburn. My mother used that reminder of "Sammy" for many years.

Time now was rapidly approaching my 14th birthday, and though I felt happy about leaving school, signs of the alternative were daily cancelling out any such euphoria. These times were certainly grim reminders that the age we knew as childhood had abruptly come to an end and that soon, though nobody could say just when, adulthood would be upon us with a vengeance with all the unsavoury portraits of life in the early '30's. The term 'job' was having the same significance as the one eyed man in the land of the blind.

One particular detail of these days of nothingness was the common use of the term, "So and so's playin' him". Hardly grammatically correct but to the person concerned, there was a devastatingly degree of correctness about the ungrammatical statement, about which he and thousands of others could do nothing but just try to survive the conditions prevailing.

Here and there around the village were the well

trodden venues where little groups of men congregated just to chat from morning till evening, no doubt with unwritten agendas, none of which would include the remotest attempt at tackling the reason for why they were in such a plight. As the groups broke up for the day, there was ample evidence of their presence, clog marks in the footpath, the gobs of those with pulmonary disorders plus the empty Woodbine packets, usually the paper (2d) variety. In that connection I did hear on more than one occasion in those days, that it was imperative to get a Woodbine "going" fust thing in the morning, "just fert loosen t' chest".

Knowing what we know today of the dangers of cigarette smoking, I find it difficult to believe that I can look back on the time when the cigarette, and the way it was smoked, was a sort of status symbol, totally free of any suggestion that it might be harmful. Smokers were everywhere. Even in films, the smoking of a cigarette was an art form, often emulated by youngsters just to create the impression of maturity. Sweet manufacturers got in on the act via those little white, icing sugar sticks with a blob of red dye at the end, representing a lighted cigarette. There were also the liquorice imitations of smoking pipes with red hundreds and thousands confections in the bowl.

It is not surprising, then, that when a lad reached the age of say, 12 or 14, he thought of smoking as a symbol of manhood. The beginnings, or the experiments in pursuit of the 'new' pleasure were legion, principally in clandestine conditions, well away from adults and certainly away from parents. For me, the bug bit comparatively late, coinciding with the vacuum days after leaving school at 14 years of age. My first experience of smoking was in the company of three or four playmates in the wash house of a large manor house where one of the lads

lived. The 'cigarettes' were home made, to a recipe suggested by one of the lads. They were simply strips of brown paper, rolled as tightly as one could get them. The light was real of course, and when the smouldering paper caught on, it was possible to apply one's own choreography of how a cigarette should be smoked, even though the smoke, sucked into the mouth proved chokingly foul... but it was a beginning.

## Sheer aplomb

Stage two, which was still in the period where the money to buy cigarettes was out of the question, was the occasional encounter with mates who were veterans at the game, having been smoking since the age of 11 or so. Watching the sheer aplomb with which they smoked away nearly the full length of the 'cig', one would ask, "Save us thi stump", which usually meant a butt of about half an inch long. The fact that it had quarter of an inch of the lad's saliva in evidence didn't seem to matter, the smoke was the thing.

Stage three was a brief entry into euphoria of the highest order when for some remote reason, a few pennies had appeared in one's pocket. For just two of them, it was possible to find a Woodbine slot machine which could be activated to regurgitate five Woodbines plus one match, in the familiar flat, open paper pack. (In hindsight, could it be that the inclusion of one match assumed the client to be a chain smoker?)

It was on the back of one of those idyllic "trips" that I was showing off my new found smoking skills to the errand lad at our local cop, himself a veteran at 14 plus. He of course was not particularly impressed and did in fact point out, "Ah, but tha 're not doin' t' swallow" at the same time, demonstrating with his own fag exactly what he meant. Taking a long

'draw' on his cigarette, cheeks withdrawn at full extent, through his half open lips he allowed me the briefest glimpse of the ball of bluish green smoke before "doin' t' swallow" or, as I know it now, inhaling the smoke. But that was not the end of it, just as I thought that the ball of smoke had disappeared forever, this clever lad somehow had trained it to reappear through his nose....what magic!

## Like a fool

"Ney thee try it" he suggested. And like a fool, I did. The 'draw' was just as I had been doing since Lady Nicotine first beckoned - no problem. The disappearing ball of smoke act, however, was something totally and alarmingly different, immediately on the first intake of breath. It was just a though I had been hit in the chest with a sledge hammer - from the inside. My head spun and my legs wobbled uncontrollably, the whole experience being totally incongruous with the distant sound of guffawing from my new found preceptor.

But that was the beginning of a habit that stayed with me for nearly seven years, my last smoke of any description being on 20 September 1937....why do I always remember the date? With the awful experience described, I have never yet come across any explanation of why, whether it be smoking or any other addiction, does such a distasteful experience lead one to the addiction of the source?

There seemed to be something about smoking in that era which just like leaving school seemed to symbolise the closing of the door on childhood, irrespective of any possibility of a look into the adulthood to follow. Just what did follow we can only assess now as successful or otherwise after revisiting that (if not **the**) most important theatre of our lives.

# Village life in Abram 1902-1911

Treasured among the photographs, old postcards and other memorabilia left to me by my mother is a thick volume labelled "Abram Parish Magazines 1902-11". I recall seeing this in my grandmother's bookcase when I was a child, and at that time, not surprisingly, it held no appeal. Nor does it sound as if it would be riveting reading now. However, open its pages and read: you will hear, loud and clear, voices, laughter and sadness from the past, and see in your mind's eye a vivid portrait of people and events – indeed a whole way of life – now lost to us.

Why are the images evoked by the magazines so vivid, and how did they come to be bound together between dark-blue boards with gold lettering on the spine – and why only 1902-1911? The answer to these questions is the same: because of the man who wrote many of the words – the Revd Thomas Brownbill Twemlow, vicar of Abram, 1902-1911. It was he who resurrected the magazine 'from its long sleep ... since January 1878'. Through his skilled and often very entertaining writing, his commanding presence and his courage to tackle controversial subjects he inspired a devoted following among his parishioners. Among them was my grandfather, Sam Marsden who, for the rest of his life, strove to follow Twemlow's example.

Twemlow had come to Abram after serving as a chaplain in South Africa during the Boer War. The public school-educated son of a Cheshire accountant might have felt like a fish out of water in a mining village, and might have restricted himself to the usual parochial duties. But this was not the way of Thomas Twemlow. In his first two magazines, in July and August 1902, we see him planning clubs for 'our young men', describing the village entertainments staged to raise funds for a much-needed new church, and beginning his crusade to reduce child mortality. He campaigns too for better schooling and sanitation; for a playground for children in Abram and elsewhere; for shorter hours for miners and others; and for much else that would improve the lot of his parishioners:

## November 1902.

*Infant mortality. At last England has aroused herself on the question of Education. ... But what is the use of education if there are no children to educate? It appears to us that it is high time for England to make laws, not only for the purpose of better educating our children, but for the purpose of better rearing of our children ... Take our own Parish, and turn to the Registers ... and for the past 60 years the rate of infant deaths has been growing ... for the last 4 months, out of 24 funerals 13 are those of babies...*

## August 1910

*...we consider the present system of elementary Education ... to be as rotten and as wasteful a system as can well be imagined ... if the Government compel all our children to be pushed through one scholastic mincing machine, turning out a mush pulp-jelly of nothingness, thereby emptying our markets of skilled labour, and filling them with casual labourers ... then we say with all the strength we possess, THEN GOVERNMENT ought to find them work, and keep them from starving ...'*

## September 1910

*'We have known cases where stokers towards the close of a 23-hour shift have been caught sleeping ... and have been sacked: to us it seems strange that ... the law said nothing to the employers for permitting such heathenish and iniquitous spells of labour ... as well as stokers we have engine-winders: the duty of these men is to wind up and lower colliers from and into*

*the coal mines. ... many of these winders have at times to do a shift of 23 hours and the justification is that probably for the greater proportion of the 23 hours shift the winder will not have to move a single lever ... but what if the winder had to pull over his lever just once to bring up a fireman, and through mortal weariness ... in a hot, stuffy, oil-smelling engine-room he had been dozing: the gong goes, half dazed he moves his levers, forgetting for the moment the position of the cages – and then! ... Our point is ... that the life of one man being pulled up at 1 am is as valuable as the life of any one of those being wound up by cage-falls at 2 or 3 in the afternoon ... In how many pits we wonder are the men lowered in a morning ... by a winder who is just completing his 12th or 13th hour of winding? It is our business ... to claim that no man employed on such awfully responsible work should be employed for more than an 8 hour shift ...'*

## May 1905

*'The flowers are with us again, the birds are*



Sam Marsden  
(1884-1946)

*singing... and Nature calls the children out to play ... and the children answer the call and out they go to play – but where? Why, on the roads and in the streets. Some years back the chief danger ... lay around the stinking sewer grids, but now to this another peril is added, the horseless traffic. In the days gone by the children knew the horse, and the horse knew the children,*

*and there was a mutual respect and sympathy, but now ... what has been lost in sympathy has been alas replaced by speed and the gong of the tram and the hoot of the motor, spelling out danger to the children ... Today Abram badly needs a playing-field; let the children have it ...'*

In a lighter vein Twemlow also records, in words reminiscent of Jerome K Jerome's 'Three Men in a Boat', the fun that was had on trips and other entertainments:

## June 1907

*To Tourists. - As the weather for walks and bicycle rides will (we still hope) soon be with us, we desire to warn our readers that the maps of this locality, especially those setting forth the mileage from Abram to Liverpool, must be received with great caution. We have quite recently received some letters from persons (evidently) well qualified to speak on this. The writers desire to remain unknown for the present, and sign themselves simply Aching Arthur, Suffering Sam, Jaded John, Tiling Tom, and one other which we regret we are unable to decipher. They state that the distance shown in the maps between Abram and Liverpool as being 18 miles, is outrageous, scandalous, absurd, cruel (this is J. J.'s word). They vary somewhat in their estimate of distance. A.A. says it's well over 40, for "I am able to maintain cracking jokes and whistling for 25 miles, and for the last 15 miles of this journey I was dumb." S.S. says "I have been to school, and know how many yards make a mile, and I know the size of a yard (we've got one at home), and being accustomed to the use of figures I estimate the distance to be 45 miles." T.T. says "I counted the mile-stones up to 50, and then I forgot whether I was counting milestones or telegraph poles, it was proper mauling." J.J. writes, "The dis-*

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## Village life in Abram 1902-1911

Continued from page 13

tance is without doubt 82 miles, for we walked 5 hours at the rate of 15 miles an hour; it is not true that my condition called forth expressions of profound sympathy from all the passers-by, possibly my anxiety for the pitiable state of my four companions made me look a trifle careworn. I may add as proof of the great distance, that in spite of two pairs of home knitted socks, I have counted seven blisters on one foot - the other foot has not yet been properly surveyed.

The comradeship characteristic of miners and of close-knit communities such as Abram is evident in many places in the magazines, but perhaps most clearly when Twemlow uses the pages to record the departure of members of his congregation for a better life overseas:

### May 1907

*God-Speed.* These words are sounding too frequently in our ears. Once again we have said Farewell to some more of our fellows. Peter Grimshaw (Capt. 1st XI), William Blakeley (Capt. 2nd XI), John Lowe (Member of Church Committee), and George his brother, sailed by the "Baltic" from Liverpool for New York, on Wednesday, April 24th. We have seen many "goings out" from us, but it was no ordinary going abroad in this case, and most of us knew it and felt it; ... we felt that we were losing men, fellows who never claimed to be perfect, who would be the last to think that their light has shone before men, and yet we who remain behind are conscious that they were fellows who have left an example - a good example

Our "send off" to our lads commenced as was fitting and proper, on Sunday (21st), when together with their friends they came to

the Holy Communion. At the evening service the four acted as sidesmen and collected; the Vicar took as his text Psalm 121, v. 5, 7, 8, and the hymns chosen were "Stand up, stand up," "Soldiers of Christ arise," "Fight the good fight," "Jesus Lover of my soul." On Tuesday afternoon Mr. Close most kindly took a group photo of the four and the Vicar [see right], and at night the Club gathered together in strong force, for a cup of coffee and a smoke, and to give a Bible to those going away. Each of the four made a stirring, straight, simple little speech, and the gist of their words was that they would try to uphold the name of our club and our Parish in other lands. At the close of the evening we sang - holding each others' hands crossed, with never a break - "Auld lang syne, " "God save the

King," then "Lighten our darkness," and "The Grace."

At 8-0 a.m. the next morning we met at Platt Bridge, bound for Liverpool. The large number of the previous evening was only slightly diminished by those who were unable to get away from their work. From this hour until 2 p.m. all was a kaleidoscopic rush. At 2-15 the mighty "Baltic" slowly came alongside the stage; and from this time until 4-10 p.m., when the last hawser was cast off, we kept up a smiling face, with many a joke and jest, which all knew to be painfully hollow. And now the siren has sounded for the last time, and the ship so vast, so huge that we cannot realize her enormous size, began to move out slowly into the river, and then with the dignity of a great giant, demanding respect from all around, she slowly got about with her head to sea; and for a tiny moment she seemed to stay, as if unwilling to part us - and then

slowly - so slowly, she moved forward - out towards the open sea - on to that land, and to that future where our lads were going.

The sun which had shone so bright and warm, as if to help to keep our spirits up, now withdrew behind the clouds; and the wind which had dropped, as if to help us to speak to those on board, once again sprang up cold



May 1907. Clockwise from top left: Peter Grimshaw, Vicar Twemlow, The Blakeley Brothers and Jack Lowe.

and raw - nor would we have had it otherwise; the crowd had gone, and those two who had gone to the north pier "to see the last of them" had no longer need to keep up a hypocritical cheerfulness - nor wish to. And as they watched that mighty ship now only a blur on the horizon fast fading from their sight, the sun shone out for a moment as if to say God's Peace, Good-bye.

One inevitably wonders what happened to such men in their new lives so far away from Abram. For a small insight, I am grateful to my grandfather for preserving a postcard sent to him by another of the four, Peter Grimshaw, and I reproduce his words here:

### 9 June 1907

Dear Old Sam

You must excuse me not writing before this as I wanted to tell you something special, but I have had to write at finish with nothing

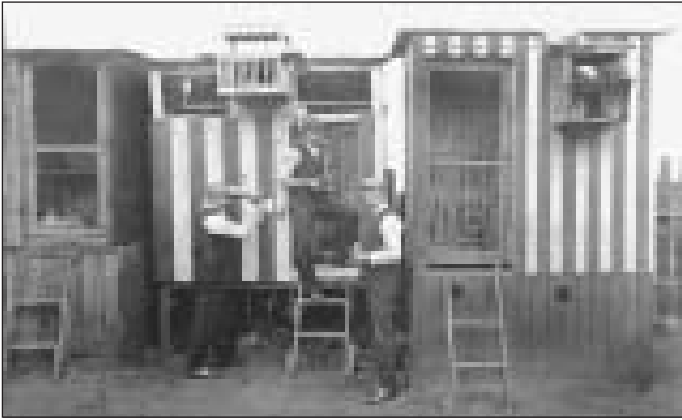
fresh to tell you. Dear Sam, how are you going on with your debating class now that Joe Chamberlain has left you. If you keep it on you must let me know whether it is right or wrong to write letters on a Sunday for it is Sunday now and it is lovely here. We never go anywhere on a Sunday now, only on a night when we travel to Jamestown to Church, but it isn't like the old Abram Church for it's nearly empty on a Sunday but he is a champion preacher. It brought back memories of our last Sunday: Quit you like men, Fight the Good Fight. I couldn't sing it Sam, my thoughts went back to England to my old pals and I wondered what they were doing, but a fellow can't think here Sam, the place is too fast for thinking and Celeron is reckoned to be the giddiest place in all NY state. But Sam old chap we will try our best to keep out of danger and not bring into disgrace the name of APC [Abram Parish Church] and I think how you used to try to make me a better chap and now that I have gone away I want to tell you Sam that I think you are the best fellow in the world and I am proud to call you a friend of mine. From your old pal P.

Fortunately the magazines also shed light on the lives of some of the men in their new countries:

### March 1909

'Alberta, Canada, is where Jack Lowe is, and from where he writes an interesting letter, wishing to be remembered to all his old friends; in his letter he says, "the weather is pretty cold here. It was 50 degrees below zero for a week. I got my ears and fingers frozen several times. The work is altogether different here than it was in England, much easier. If you sweat you sit down until you are cool. We only work eight hours, and we go to our work dressed up. They have wash houses at the mines, they are like the public baths. We come home clean and leave our working clothes at the pit. ... We walk into the mines. They go under the Rocky Mountains' Twemlow also used the





September 15 1906. Abram Pigeon Fanciers. Left to right: Fred Livesey, Dick Longton and Billy Longton

magazine to mourn the tragic losses in frequent pit disasters:

#### May 1903

*Moss Hall Colliery. Living as we do in a Colliery district, we are but too well acquainted with the feelings aroused by the cry - 'A Sad Accident!' Sad indeed was the terrible cage disaster which occurred at the above Colliery a few weeks ago, whereby both the manager and under-manager lost their lives ... and dull would be the heart that stood unmoved in the presence of such a calamity...*

He shared in the shock and grief of Abram's own mining tragedy, the explosion at the Maypole, about which he wrote, on black-edged pages:

*August 18th 1908, 5-7 p.m., No.1 Pit at the Maypole fired. 75 men perished. 3 men rescued. 7 bodies have been recovered. Weeks will have to go by before there can be any hope of recovering other bodies.*

*The Manager - When disaster overtakes an army, when a ship is wrecked on the rocks, ... there is in each case one man on whom the eyes of the world are fixed; in the one case it is the General, in the other it is the Captain, or to use an ordinary phrase - it is the man at the helm on whom the gaze of the world is focused. When an awful catastrophe wrecks a coal mine, the world fixes its eyes on the widows and orphans (and most justly so), and on those who are thrown out of*

*work, and on the colliery owners, but the world sometimes seems (we hope that we are sadly mistaken) to forget that here again there is the one man - the manage - who if he be human must suffer as no one else can suffer, for they are his men - his own men, who have been wrenched, in a moment of time out of his life. The manager or the man at the helm of the Maypole Colliery is Mr. Arthur Rushton. On the afternoon of the explosion Mr. Rushton was returning home from his holidays with his wife and family; when some 40 yards from his own house, which adjoins the colliery, the explosion took place. Had the explosion been arranged as a hellish salute for the manager's home-coming it would have been impossible to have timed it with nicer accuracy. Jumping from the wagonette, throwing away his straw hat, seizing the cap of a passer-by, the manager rushed to his colliery. To attempt to tell all that Mr. Rushton did, how he laboured, how he suffered, would be little short of insulting. The explosion took place on Tuesday afternoon, sometime on Friday Mr. Rushton was persuaded to go home and lie down - but even then not to sleep. But in addition to this, in the list of the killed the name of Levi Rushton may be found - any relation of the manager? Yes, his uncle. And so upon his terrible suffering as a manager for his men and their families, he carries the additional burden of family sorrow. When after a day of thinking about others, when after many and many a*

*patient answer, when fagged out in body and brain, when the time comes that the pit can be left in its grim silence - then the manager is free to go home, and fasten the door, and be alone with his own private sorrow. To Mr. Rushton we tender our sincerest sympathy in the hour of his great anguish.*

In sharing in the griefs and joys of his parishioners, Thomas Twemlow gained the lasting affection and respect of many. It was my grandfather who bade farewell to Twemlow in the very last magazine in the volume, so it is his words that I quote here:

#### November 1911

*...we should like to speak for a short time of our late Vicar and we are sure that our new Vicar [the Revd W Wentworth Scott] will forgive us if in penning these lines we refer to him not as Mr Twemlow, which to many of us sounds so unfamiliar, nor as our late Vicar, but as ... 'the Vicar'. On the evening of the 28th September, a very large number of our people assembled at the schools to bid goodbye to the Vicar and Mrs Twemlow upon their leaving Abram. The proceedings of the evening were very simple. A little refreshment, a grip of the hand, a few parting words of farewell, and he had gone; he who for the past nine years had been our true friend and counsellor ... As most of our people know, the Vicar has expressed a strong desire that there should not be any collection*

*made ... and in explaining the gathering it was pointed out to him that no one had failed in their duty with respect to the carrying out of his wish. Not one single penny ... had been asked for. All who had given had come forward voluntarily, and had tendered their portion as a mark of their sincere regard for him and his teaching ... May we in conclusion add our simple tribute to the memory of one who did his very best for Abram. Perhaps we may best do this by quoting the words of one of the young men he loved so dearly... 'I should have been a wrong un but for him'. We know of more than one fellow who could say this. We quote again, this time the words of an older member: 'The good work of the Vicar in Abram though quite evident now, will not be shown so much in the present time as in the generations that will follow'...*

There surely cannot now be anyone who recalls Thomas Twemlow, but the Church that stands in Abram now owes much to him, and there may be Abramers who remember their parents or grandparents speaking of him. I would like to think too that the kindness, decency, wisdom and common sense of Abram people today derive to some degree from the teaching of the vicar who campaigned on behalf of their forebears nearly 100 years ago.

Mary Sayers  
Buxton Derbyshire  
Email:  
hca00mms@shef.ac.uk



11 February 1907. Abram Colliers. Front extreme right: Jack Lowe.

THE ORIGINAL band, which was formed in 1942 from the cadets of 316 Squadron of the Air Training Corps, Leigh, consisted of 5 saxes, 2 trumpets and 3 rhythms. The manager was Squadron Leader Charles Grundy who was in charge of the young band. Their leader was Vince Hayes and the secretary Ken Williams.

The band members were all cadets:

**Saxes**

Alto/Clt Vince Hayes  
 Alto/Clt Bill Dickinson  
 Tenor Bert Smith  
 Tenor Joe Coward  
 Baritone Ken Williams

**Brass**

Trumpet Bill Clarkson  
 Trumpet Eric Gregory

**Rhythm**

Piano Birkett Hodson  
 Drums Frank Smith  
 Bass Tom Jackson

Soon after its formation, the band played in many local venues, including Leigh Church Institute, St. Joseph's Hall, the Co-op Hall and at various R.A.F., U.S.A. and naval camps in both the Leigh and Warrington areas, as well as in the

# The Falcons Dance Band

Drill Hall at Atherton and Walkden Town Hall.

In order to achieve wider recognition, the Falcons entered numerous *Melody Maker* and *Musical Express* Dance Band contests. In 1945 they were rewarded with their first winning position in the Northern Counties section, the contest taking place at Levenshulme Palais. A year later in 1946, Alwyn Ainsworth, an enthusiastic young big band arranger from Bolton, took over the band and produced special arrangements for them. As a result, they started to obtain bookings from a

wider area including Altrincham, Bolton, Oldham and various other locations in the north of England.

Alyn added two more trumpets which made a big difference to the sound of the band and new personnel appeared on other instruments. The additional trumpets were Albert Ramsden on lead and Dennis Martin, who also provided vocals. The lead alto changed when Maurice Alcock joined the band, Harold Hill came in on piano and Ken Bowers took over drums. A little later, due to illness and the sudden death of Harold Hill, Frank Gregory came in on piano. Other fine musicians played a big part before the personnel settled, including Derek Healey (trumpet), the son of Johnny Healey, the band leader at Bolton Palais, Wilf Hardman (tenor sax), Fred Lightbrown, Sam Pollitt and Max Holgate (saxes), and occasionally in the very early days Jimmy Mee on trombone and Jim Speakman on guitar.

Apart from the odd session the make up of the band was always five saxes, four trumpets, bass piano and drums, with vocals by the band members. The arrangements that Alyn produced were based on this combination. ➡

## 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**



October 1947. The Falcons Dance Band in the Regal Zonophone Recording Studios, London where they were recording the numbers "I've Got You Under My Skin" and "Opus One" for their latest record. In the photograph are: Alyn Ainsworth (second left standing); Alto Clarinets: Maurice Alcock and Samuel Pollitt; Tenor Clarinets: Joseph Coward and Herbert Smith; Baritone Clarinet: Kenneth Williams; Trumpets: Albert Ramsden, William Clarkson, Eric Gregory; Piano: Frank Gregory; Bass: Thomas Jackson; Drums: Kenneth Bowers.



## Contests

August 1945, Northern Counties Championship, Levenshulme Palais, Manchester. 1st Prize.

June 1946, East Lancashire Championship, Majestic Ballroom, Accrington. 1st Prize.

March 1947, Manchester and District Championship, Coronation Ballroom, Belle Vue, 1st Prize.

September 1947, North Britain Western Region Championship, Empress Ballroom, Blackpool.

October 1947, All Britain Final Championship, Coronation Ballroom, Belle Vue, Big Band section winners, runner up to the overall contest winners - Etch and his Quads.

April 1948, Central Lancashire Championship, Carlton Ballroom, Rochdale.

March 1949, North Lancashire Championship, Preston. 1st Prize.

September 1949, North of England Championship, Winter Gardens, Blackpool. 1st Prize.

October 1949, National Championship, Winter Gardens, Blackpool.

Following their success at the all Britain contest in October 1947, the Falcons were rewarded with a recording session in London with Regal Zonophone Records, and were also given a radio broadcast at the BBC in Manchester. Alyn Ainsworth's arrangements of *I've Got You Under My Skin*, *Opus One* and *Sympathy* were the contest numbers and the same arrangements were recorded.

Alyn eventually left the band to form one of his own in London. By 1951 he had begun to arrange for the newly formed BBC Northern Variety Orchestra, and after Vilem Tausky moved to the Northern Symphony Orchestra, Alyn was offered the job of resident conductor with the NVO. A year later Ainsworth and the NVO provided the musical setting for the BBC's long running show from the City Variety Theatre, Leeds, *The Good Old Days*. He became a highly respected musical director and arranger for records, television and the West End stage. He worked with and accompanied such illustrious personalities as Geraldo, Syd Lawrence, Frankie Vaughan, David Whitfield, Marty Wilde, Neil Sedaka, Barry Manilow and Shirley Bassey.

He was also a leading conductor and arranger for various West End shows, including *Hello Dolly*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Sweet Charity*. He died in 1990.

The Falcons continued without Alyn for a little while, but in 1952/3 the band ceased to exist, as several of the musicians left to join other bands in the Bolton and Leigh areas.

My thanks to Tom Jackson, a former member of the group, for the relevant information. Should anyone have any fond memories of hearing the band or have any photos or even an old 78 rpm, I would love to hear from them.

Tony Ashcroft  
Local History Officer



Certificate awarded to Tom Jackson, bass player with the Falcons when they won first prize in the East Lancashire Championship in 1946 at Accrington.

**Mr Tom Bennett died last Christmas (see a tribute to him in Past Forward 33 p3). This delightful letter from California was received recently. Ed.**

To the staff of the History Shop.

I am writing to inquire if there is a way to remember our wonderful friend Mr. Tom Bennett, by helping the History Shop to acquire some item it needs? We met Mr. Bennett in the 1990's, through his cousin in Sydney. She arranged that we would get together with him at the History Shop. I will never forget meeting this gracious man. During the time we were in Wigan, he devoted much time to helping me trace my father's family. (Dad was born in Wigan in 1911).

During that visit, and subsequent ones, we enjoyed Tom's company. One favourite memory is of taking Tom to lunch at the Travel Inn in Orrell, because we had spotted the display of photos from days past at 'Uncle Joe's Mint Balls'. It was a joy to watch him remembering his old friends, and telling us about his many years of service at Uncle Joe's.

I am not the only person who has happy memories of spending time in Tom's company, and who has benefited by his research efforts. Perhaps we could join together to help the History Shop make an acquisition it needs? If so, please let me know of any way the friends of Mr. Tom Bennett could do something for the History Shop that was such an important part of his life. I saw for myself, on several occasions, the respect and affection shown to him by the staff and patrons. He was a very special person, and I hope that by pooling our resources, we can do something worthy of the memory of this kind, intelligent, and generous man.

Mary Ann Ashcroft

**If anyone who remembers Tom Bennett would like to contribute towards a memorial to him in the way that Mary Ann suggests, please contact Philip Butler in the History Shop. Ed.**

# WIGAN PIER

## PROMOTING NEW INITIATIVES



As we head to the end of 2003, staff at the Wigan Pier Experience are gearing up for a busy time as a number of initiatives on which they have been working over the last 18 months come to fruition. The main aim of all of our initiatives is to make the site more accessible and attractive to both local people and our national and international visitors. Here is a taster of what's happening:

- Thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund we are happy to announce the start of the project to restore our world famous steam Engine. The Trencherfield Mill Engine Restoration Project will culminate in this wonderful engine running again with new vigour from autumn 2004. There will also be a complete change to the way that the Engine is displayed to visitors, through the use of theatre lighting, audio-visual presentations and improved displays.
- After a year of piloting tailor-made group and family events packages linked to site activities and celebrations, we are pleased to announce that we are extending what's on offer from Christmas and beyond. These packages include drama performance, art activities, trails around the Museums, Music Hall sing-alongs, participation in our Victorian Schoolroom, as well as providing refreshments and a visit to Santa (for some!).

- We have recently been awarded Charter Mark accreditation, whereby we had to demonstrate how we react to customer demands and suggestions, how we serve our local communities and how we can make Wigan Pier more accessible and offer value for money.
- Carole Tyldesley, Pier Manager, was part of a recent delegation to Romania from Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust, the Epiphany Trust and the Hilton Foundation; the exchange trip to Romania was undertaken to see how the Romanians deal with heritage promotion, and to deliver a series of seminars on tourism issues to them. The trip covered a number of sights and the team has brought back a number of ideas from their Romanian counterparts.
- The Wigan Pier Theatre Company is putting together a series of projects designed to open the site up to people interested in exploring history and culture through theatre. The Theatre Company are also looking to broaden the horizons of their work and find avenues of working with the community. Their first project will be the development on site of a community theatre company; membership will be open to anyone over the age of 16. The community theatre group will perform their first show in March 2004; this will relate to

issues and cultural references linked to the borough. Other plans are to set up Youth Theatre groups around the region, to deliver community productions in community venues and to also undertake some peer education work.

### Special Offer

For January 2004 we are offering school classes the chance to participate in one of our award-winning educational workshops for the bargain price of just **£10.00**, a saving of **£40.00**. This offer is open to all schools who make a booking to visit either museum during January 2004.

We also offer **Free Teacher Preview Days** where our experienced members of staff will answer any questions you may have about our facilities and what to expect during your visit to us. Please contact our Education Bookings Department on **01942 702495** for workshop and booking information. Remember places are strictly limited, **so book early to avoid disappointment.**

**Hopefully this has given you a flavour of what is on offer at Wigan Pier, and you will be able to go and sample some of it (tel 01942 323666 for full information). To encourage you to pay us a visit, here is a money saving voucher you can't refuse.**

EXPERIENCE Christmas at WIGAN PIER

save up to **£10** with this voucher

**£2 OFF ADULT SITE TICKET £1 OFF CONCESSION SITE TICKET**

Valid from 2nd December 2003 to 11th January 2004. Valid for up to 5 people. Not valid for food and drink. © Wigan Pier Experience

# RANDOM THOUGHTS ON ATHERTON

by Albert Rigby

THERE is very little I can recall of the first three years of my life in Atherton, but the house in Wardour Street was undoubtedly a very happy home, with my mother Ethel and my father Albert striving to make ends meet in the difficult years in the early 1920's. Miners' wages were very low, particularly if one worked at the coalface as a hewer, and there was little scope for married women with young children to supplement the family income. My sister Winnie was born in 1916 and I arrived in June 1921.

Dad was born and bred in Atherton and had a sister Jane (Butler) and three brothers Fred, who emigrated to Canada, Richard and William. Their parents were well known in the town – for

many years they were publicans at the 'Woolsack', which I loved to visit when I was a small child. Just before opening time I would sit in the public bar with a set of dominoes and a tiny glass of beer – it was a warm, friendly pub with high-backed benches and open fires, wooden seats and stone floor. The memory lingers on.

## Depression period

These were the days leading up to the depression period in the late 1920's which, admittedly, affected many industries, but I believe that cotton suffered far greater than most, with the Japanese becoming fierce competitors after acquiring all the expertise and skills from

Lancashire technicians. The position was simply that the cotton industry was financed by many shareholders, some on a large scale, but there was a preponderance of modest to small investors who had little or no knowledge of the share market or the underlying financial state of the country and in particular the changes taking place in the world cotton trade. In other words, they were living from day to day, oblivious to the worsening situation; fundamentally they retained a strong faith in their cotton industry and forlornly believing that the short term problem would be overcome. And so, people who retained shares which formed a good part of their savings suddenly found them to be worth-

less or worth only a fraction of their original value. My grandfather, Richard Rigby, was one of these. As a respected publican he had a good living, not prosperous but got along nicely. He invested most of his capital in cotton and it was apparent from the documents I saw after he died that his shareholdings had been quite substantial, but then suffered the same fate as so many others in the Lancashire towns.

## Loved to look back

Atherton Baptist Church is remembered as having a very active congregation; my mother, Ethel Furber, attended regularly with the rest of her family, and I treasure the Bible which was given when she was a member of the Young People's Union. It is signed by G. Bullough, Richard Morris, Thomas Davis and S. Yates – perhaps the names will mean such a lot to some of your older readers. At that time she was living at 62 Stanley Street. Later on my first cousin, Tom Part, was, I believe, a respected member of the same church before he retired to Southport. One of his brothers, Kenneth, was a good footballer who played for Wigan and Manchester United. As for my father, he loved to look back on his achievements in the boxing ring. As a flyweight he was boxing at the same time as the great world champion, Jimmy Wilde, but

*Continued on page 20*



*Atherton Baptist Church.*

## RANDOM THOUGHTS ON ATHERTON

*Continued from page 19*

dad had no pretensions of reaching Wilde's class. They met briefly in a gymnasium in Wigan when my father was training for a fight – this could have been at the time he won the Northern Counties Flyweight Championship fighting under the name of Young O'Hara. It was to his regret, and that of many of his followers, when he bowed to the insistence of my mother, supported by his parents, that he should abandon the ring when they got married. Gone were the days of fighting in fair-ground booths, often against men who were heavier opponents, or the Wigan Football Ground where he won his title and where he defeated the London Champion. No trophies remain, except for a cup given to him for the Northern Counties title – it has pride of place among our silverware.

As a small boy I loved to sit on my father's knee, listening to his exploits in the boxing ring, no doubt to my mother's disapproval. I suppose I was a captive but willing audience, but he liked to recall the Wardour Street days when, on returning home from the pits, he would see me sitting on the cobbles in my 'frock' with legs wrapped round the lamp-post – I shrank visibly. Incidentally, I also have a Bible presented to my father for regular attendance and good conduct in 1906 at the Howe Bridge Congregational Church Sunday School.

## Attractive Daughter

I remember so well the competition organised by the *Daily Dispatch* for a Cotton Queen. Girls from all over Lancashire sent in their photos which were published for several weeks, before the final choice was made. My Aunt Jane and Uncle Charlie Butler had several attractive daughters, Millie, Marie, Connie, Joan and Marjorie. Marie was chosen as one of the finalists, an event which caused a great deal of excitement in the family. Cynics have habitually criticised beauty competitions, and maybe some of the comments have been justified, but I do believe the Cotton Queen Competition came at the right time, as it provided light relief when there was a great deal of bewilderment in the industrial north. Moreover, it was not just a parade of beautiful girls but instead was intended to show all concerned that within the cotton mills there was genuine beauty and attractiveness.

It was not unusual for Lancashire families to uproot their homes in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first 30 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because of the work shortages in industrial towns or the attraction of living in holiday resorts such as Southport, Blackpool, Morecambe, Colwyn Bay and Llandudno. Consequently, there were tradespeople, hoteliers and boarding-house landladies there who would welcome you with broad Lancashire accents, and many of them began to play increasing roles in the running of the community. Some were successful in their ventures, but I know how difficult it was for several

to eke out a living during a short summer season. For family reasons my parents decided to move to Colwyn Bay in the mid-1920's, and our return visits to Atherton were mostly at Christmastime when we stayed with a mill manager, Jim Lomas and his wife Hilda at Westleigh. Through them we eventually became friends with Richard and Harry Tyldesley, who spent holidays with us when they were not playing cricket for league clubs.

After the War, my work took me south to Guildford, High Wycombe and London, and for 50 years my wife and I have enjoyed living in Princes Risborough (the town of the Black Prince) where we have just celebrated our Diamond Wedding. I am pleased to say that our daughter Ann, who lives nearby in Aston Clinton, visits Wigan and Atherton

fairly often, mostly for family history reasons, but she genuinely loves both towns and especially where I was born so many years ago.

*Footnote: Following his service in the Royal Navy Patrol Service, Albert rejoined the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and had an interesting career covering many aspects of MAFF work, including some parliamentary involvement and visits to the EEC in Brussels and Luxembourg. He and his wife Patricia are Associates of the Royal Photographic Society; Albert is President of the Chilterns Association of Camera Clubs and for 18 years was photographer for Hearing Dogs for Deaf People. He is the author of two books on mine-sweeping and life on small ships in World War II.*

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# AROUND WIGAN

## A DECORATIVE DRAWING AND QUIZ

by

**GERALD RICKARDS**

### THE DRAWING

Gerald Rickards' drawing in this issue of *Past Forward* features buildings and landmarks from different parts of the borough. The idea for this has been influenced by the preparation for a group of murals at Wigan and Leigh Hospice where the artist and others aim to incorporate into the design items from as many parts of the district as possible.

### THE QUIZ

The drawing is presented in the form of a quiz. Hopefully it will give enjoyment to all over the Christmas period and at the same time raise some money to help the Hospice.

### ENTRY FORMS

These can be sent either by submitting the question page (or photocopy) as printed in this issue of *Past Forward*, or handwritten on a plain piece of paper with question numbers alongside. All entries must be accompanied by a donation of at least £1 (stamps will be accepted).

## Hospice's Community Chapel Murals

**Exciting news! Wigan & Leigh Hospice has been successful in securing funding from Arts Council North West. The original idea for the creation of four murals came from Gerald Rickards, who felt quite passionate about 'doing something special' for the Hospice. Gerald has also agreed to be the lead artist.**

**The murals will feature many of the familiar buildings and landmarks throughout the area served by the Hospice. Central to the project will be the involvement of both the Hospice and the wider community. A series of workshops will be held to include school children, Hospice patients, staff, volunteers and carers in the production of ideas for the mural. Three local emerging artists will lead the various workshops.**

**An exhibition is planned at Drumcrown in Wigan and the Turnpike Gallery in Leigh in March 2004 and a grand opening ceremony will be held at the Hospice in April.**

Question sheets are also available from various centres, including the **History Shop**, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU, **Wigan & Leigh Hospice**, Kildare Street, Hindley WN2 3HZ, **Hospice Shops, local libraries, CCArt Picture Framers and Gallery**, Hallgate, Wigan, or from the artist himself.

All forms must be returned, with a donation, to one of the above venues before 31 January 2004.

### THE PRIZES

Two prizes are offered from the artist's selection of signed prints in frames. One prize is offered for the highest number of correct answers, AND (to encourage everyone to enter) another prize for the most apt and original answer to question 40 – with this prize awarded irrespective of answers given or ignored from all the other questions.

Prizewinners will be sent a list of all the signed prints available. These include:

- local subjects eg public buildings, churches, streets, Formby houses, parkland and canalside
- the Central Park triptych (three views of the stands as seen from the Spion Kop)
- decorative compositions developed from designs printed in *Past Forward: Aspull, Haigh, Ince, Leigh, Orrell, Standish* etc.
- subjects further afield, including limited editions of Thomas Hardy properties and places linked with his writing, English Cathedrals and Cathedral Close buildings, National Trust properties, canalside views, Oxbridge Colleges.

**Prizewinners can choose either any framed print or two card mounted unframed prints from the above.**

### EXHIBITION IN THE HISTORY SHOP

Several of the above prints, some of the paintings they were taken from and many more will be on display during the artist's

*'Paintings of Wigan and Beyond'*

exhibition in the History Shop  
(Taylor Gallery) –

19 November 2003 to 16 January 2004.

1. Who was the original owner of the stable block?.....
2. What was the name of the Power Station demolished in 1989?.....
3. Where is the windmill and why was it erected? .....
- .....
4. What is the name of the Pennines landmark?.....
5. Why has Winter Hill become so well known? .....
- .....
6. Between which junctions of the M6 is the high level crossing?.....
7. What is the name of the Hall and what is it now used for?.....
- .....
8. Name the two members of the royal family who passed through these gates in 1873 and what was the reason for their visit? ....
- .....
9. What is the name of the ancient stone?.....
10. What is this tower part of?.....
11. What was the new name given to this building in 2002?.....
12. What is the link between the cenotaph, telephone kiosk and Liverpool Cathedral?.....
- .....
13. In which part of the borough is this war memorial?.....
14. What is the name of the church and why was it demolished? .....
- .....
15. Where is the well (near cross and stocks) and how was it damaged in 1943? .....
- .....
16. What is the name of the school?.....
17. What is the name of the structure standing near the Stag Hotel? .....
18. How was this large tree demolished in 1920? .....
19. What is the name of the water area with nearby golf course?.....
20. Which sailing club uses the water area?.....
21. Name the former vicarage and the reason for the extensions to it?.....
- .....
22. Who was the entertainer who once lived in Hindley Green House?.....
23. Name one of the films he appeared in? .....
24. What is the name of the building?.....
25. What is the name of this building opened by the Duchess of Norfolk? .....
26. Where is the recently renovated building?.....
27. Where is the building and who opened it in 1906?.....
28. What is the name of the Sports Centre?.....
29. Who was the author born at 26 Wilkinson Street? .....
30. Name a film made from one of his novels?.....
31. What is the place name on the sign and who are the people alongside?.....
- .....
32. What is the name of the church?.....
33. What is the name of the public building? .....
34. What is the name given to the tapered pillar?.....
35. What is the name of this building? .....
36. What disaster occurred near this colliery building? .....
37. In which square does this structure stand? .....
38. What is the name of the house beside the water? .....
39. Where is this pit head wheel? .....
- 40. What do you think the fisherman is saying to the man on the canal boat? .....**

.....(no more than 10 words)

NAME .....

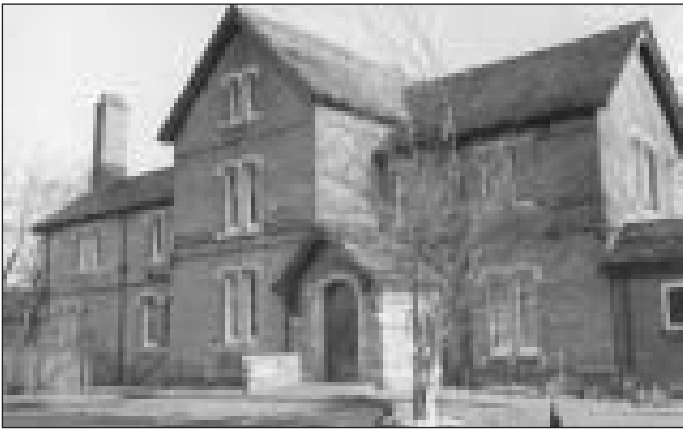
ADDRESS .....

.....

.....

Telephone Number (optional) .....

# Wigan & Leigh Hospice old and – new from Poolstock to Hindley



*old . . . and new*



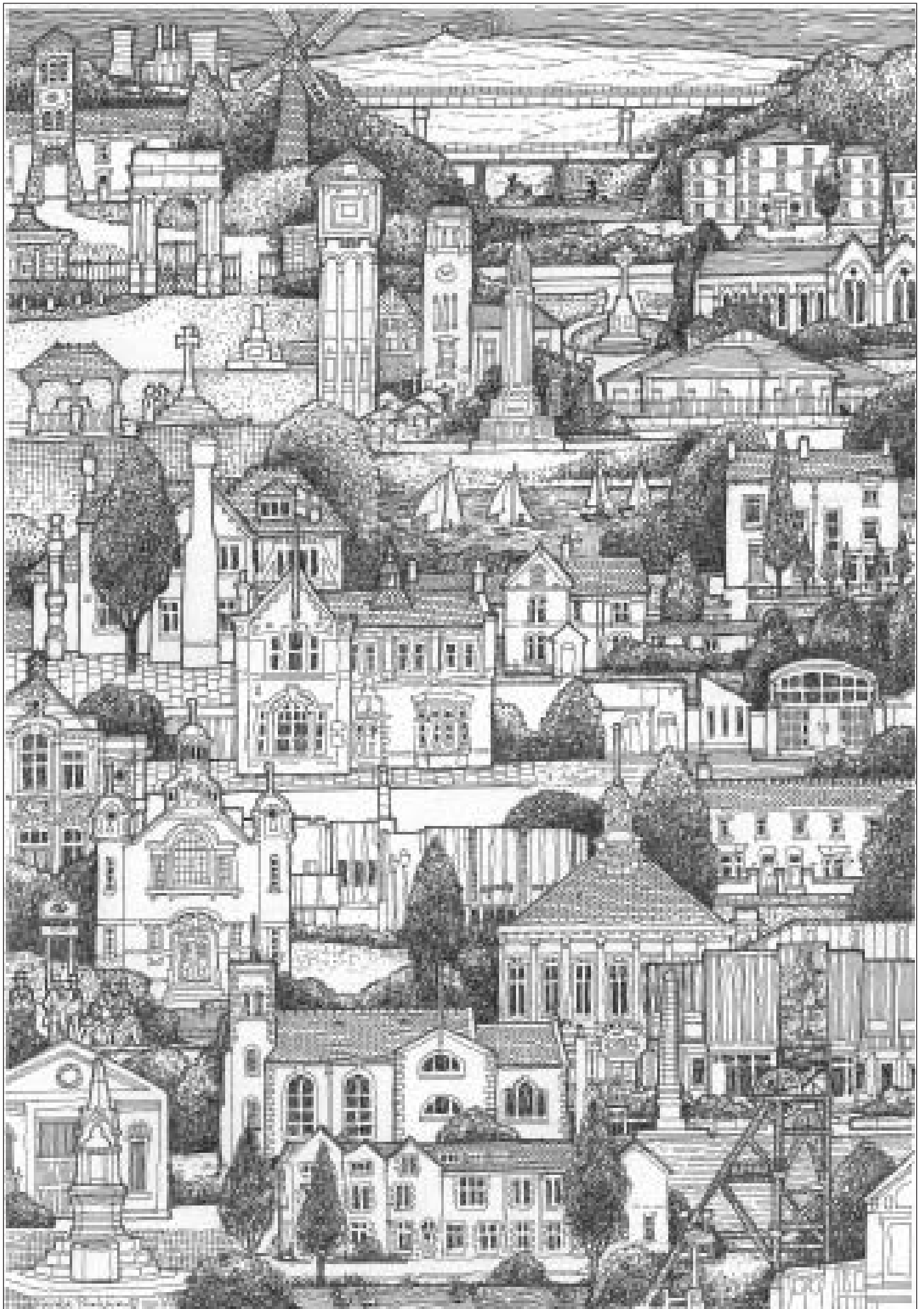
## Within its resource constraints, Wigan & Leigh Hospice:-

- provides specialist palliative care services, on as broad and varied a basis as possible and at the highest quality achievable, thereby aiming to enhance the quality of life of individuals living with a life-threatening illness
- offers needs-assessed support and advice to carers, both during the illness of the patient and in bereavement
- aims to complement and support other palliative care providers, not taking over from them, but seeking to collaborate with them to promote a seamless service for people with specialist palliative care needs
- is committed to delivering needs – assessed, research and evidence-based palliative care education, both in-house and through outreach educational programmes

The following services are available:

- *specialist nursing team working in the community*
- *in-patient beds*
- *day hospice*
- *physiotherapy*
- *occupational therapy*
- *complementary therapies*
- *counselling services*
- *bereavement support services*
- *Spiritual care*
- *education services across the Borough*

*Wigan & Leigh Hospice  
Kildare Street Hindley  
WN2 3HZ  
Tel: 01942 525566*





# Letters from the Front

## Local men in the Boer War 1899-1902

### Victory – at a price

ROBERTS now did what Buller should have done back in December 1899. He concentrated on the left, sweeping round behind the Boers and threatening their homelands. General Cronje's army was captured and the Boers retreated. By the end of February 1900 both Kimberley and Ladysmith had been relieved. On 13 March 1900 the Orange Free State was knocked out of the war when its capital Bloemfontein was captured. Two months later on 17 May 1900 Mafeking was relieved, on 31 May 1900 Johannesburg was captured, then on 5 June 1900 Pretoria, the capital of the Transvaal, was at last occupied.

These were tremendous victories, but won at a price and paid for by local men as much as anyone. One of the first to fall, on 23 February 1900, was Private P. Higgins, who had survived the hell of Spion Kop which he described in his last letter to some friends in Hindley:

*"no one knows what a battlefield is except those who have seen one. The sight is fearful and the crying and moaning of the wounded is something never to be forgotten....hoping that I shall see home and friends once more."*

A death which shocked Wigan was that of Sergeant Albert Ward of the Lancashire Hussars, killed in a skirmish at Klein, Cape Colony on 28 May 1900. He had been landlord of the Waterloo Inn, Lyon Street, Wallgate since ending his days in the regular army, was well-known in local cricket and rugby circles, and as a reservist had been recalled to the Colours. Encountering a force of Boers, his mounted column had captured their wagon-laager together with 80 women and children and over 3000 cattle, and went on to attack the Boer escort. An un-named trooper of the Lancashire Hussars wrote in the *Wigan Examiner*:

*"We were on the right and trying to flank them. I wouldn't have thought our men would have been so cool under fire. There were only bits of bushes, just enough to hide your head in. Then our men began to fall as we were only a few yards from the Boers who did not waste a shot. The first to fall was our Sergeant Ward (Wigan) who was shot through the bowels and the leg. The next was a St. Helens lad Jack Fairclough. The shot went*

### (Episode four)

by

**Fred Holcroft**

*through his side. He was dead when picked up. Then there was Clarke from Ashton – he was shot through the lungs. Captain Jones was shot through the ankle!...Captain Tindle and Lieutenant Matthews have since died."*

### Baptism of fire

For most it had been their baptism of fire. Trooper F.W. Lawrence, son of Mr. J.W. Lawrence, the owner of Ince Brewery, was in the same fight. Young Lawrence was no stranger to war, and when the present conflict broke out he offered to raise a company of 100 men mounted and equipped at his own expense; but the government declined, so he went out with the Lancashire Hussars. Writing to his father:

*"We along with the Gloucester Mounted Infantry and Nesbitt's Horse lined the banks of the river and opened fire on the trenches opposite. After a sharp exchange of shots the Lancashires were ordered to cross the drift which we did in fine style being covered by the fire of the Gloucesters and Nesbitt's. Immediately we gained the opposite side – the river is about 500 yards wide here – the Boers retreated towards Kleis followed by the whole force. At Kleis they had a laager and they took up a position some distance away behind long broken Kopjies. The order of attack was: Lancashires on the right, Gloucesters centre, and Nesbitt's left. The Lancashires coming more directly on the Boer position had the hottest place in the fight. We got behind a ridge and the Boers were behind another 200 yards away, and anyone who showed his head was either hit or heard a bullet uncomfortably near him. The game would have been interesting had it not been for our artillery which sent screaming, yelling, bursting shells among friend and foe alike. With a few exceptions it was our first experience under fire and that would have been enough without our own fire as well; in fact it would have shaken the nerves of many old seasoned campaigners. The officers were at a loss to know what to do,*

*but there was only one thing and that was to sit tight and wait events. Retreat would have been murder and to advance equally as bad.*

Trooper Roberts of St. Helens was in the same regiment and on his return gave an interview to the local paper:

*Sergeant Ward was leading our troop and he was shot in three places, on the face, the leg, and the fingers. He rolled off his horse and my horse being shot I was also dismounted. I helped the sergeant to cover and then ran across to let someone know he was hit. Just as I was getting back and was just asking Sergeant Ward where my horse was when a Martini-Henry bullet hit Ward in the back and came out of his chest and entered my left leg just above the knee. We both fell and lay there for six hours and although Sergeant Ward was in great agony there was not much I could do for him. As we lay there one of our own shells burst near us and scattered dirt all over us, and a short time afterwards one of the shrapnel shells from our own battery rolled about a yard from us but fortunately did not burst. I expected it to explode any minute and I could not take my eyes off it, quite excepting to be blown to pieces. Luckily it did not burst. After the fight I was put across a horse for we had no ambulance wagon after crossing the river, and I was taken to camp bleeding like a stuck pig. There were several attempts to extract the bullet but it could not be found. I was in a critical state and was given up for dead three times. However I kept cheerful and managed to pull through. I was taken 100 miles to hospital in an old Boer wagon and owing to the lack of springs and the big stones on the road the journey was torture. On 27 June my leg suddenly went worse, the bullet was still unfindable and the doctors said that to save my life they would have to take my leg off. I agreed to that and my leg was taken off on Sunday 1 July."*

### Gallant husband

Trooper Frank Stout of the 12th Lancers, son of the landlord of the *Star and Garter* pub, Tyldesley, suffered a similar amputation. Sadly, Lieutenant B. Stapleton Bretherton, his troop

*Continued on page 22*

# Letters from the Front

Local men in the Boer  
War 1899-1902

Continued from page 21

commander, wrote to Ward's wife and family:

*"Dear Mrs. Ward, it is with the greatest sorrow that I have to write and break the sad news to you of the death of your most gallant husband who was killed in action on May 28th in front of his troops facing the enemy. From the moment he became sergeant to my troop I always told Captain Jones that 'when it comes to fighting Ward is the man. He is as brave as a lion,' and this has proved more than correct. From the moment the fight began your husband showed the utmost coolness and was conspicuous through the whole fight for his bravery. We one and all mourn the loss and sad death of so gallant a friend. I buried him myself and although there is only a rough cross over his grave at present, I have made arrangements that a proper stone shall be placed there as soon as peace is declared. Accept again my sincere condolences in your sad loss."*

Several letters from Sergeant Ward had already been published in the local Wigan press, and poignantly, two were printed after his death had already been announced:

*"We are having a jolly time of galloping about the country. Tell J.H. he does not know what he has missed. I would not have missed the sights I have seen for a thousand pounds. I can't tell you what it is like to see the cannon roar and to see the troops moving like clockwork. Bugles are sounding, drums rattling and men galloping up and down the valleys. It is worth half a man's life to see it. If it was not for the poor fellows getting shot I could stick it all my life. What sport it is to see a head peep from behind a boulder then to hear a shot."*

*"The only thing I am short of is to see your face and the children. I was so pleased to get a letter from the girls. We are off in the morning to do the final job on our side. When it is over we shall be on our way home. I don't think it will be a very big job for they have all the*

*fight knocked out of them. I hope my dear that I shall be spared to join you all again for I am longing to see your dear faces, but if I am taken it is God's will and my time have come, but I shall be all right. Don't be uneasy about me for I am in the best of health and in good spirits. I must close now for it is late and my candle will soon be out."*

Two further deaths stunned the locality, both members of the active service company attached to the Manchester Regiment. Lance Corporal Frank Munro was engaged in mopping up operations near the Mozambique border, when on 26 August 1900 his company made a flank attack and he was hit in the head and died instantly. A month previously, on 30 July 1900, the Manchesters' camp had been caught in a bush fire and five of the eight large storage tents were completely destroyed. Private Kennedy Ball was trying to rescue some of the contents when he tripped over a tent peg, fell into the flames and was so badly burned that he died of his injuries a fortnight later.

A memorial service for Lance Corporal Munro was held at St. Mary's R.C. Church in Standishgate, while another one was held for Private Ball at the Parish Church, Standish. There were many more. Wigan and district had paid its full share in the price of victory.

Everyone thought that the war was now over. Lord Roberts returned to Britain, leaving Kitchener to deal with the scattered Boer commandos who were not seen as much of a threat by the British Army, the British government, and the British public. All three were to be sadly mistaken.

## The Phoney War

Although both their republics were occupied and their armies dispersed the Boers would not give in. Many Boer leaders – Botha, de Wet, de la Rey, Smuts, Viljoen – decided to fight on to the bitter end, earning the soubriquet 'bitter enders' (those Boers who surrendered were known as 'hands uppers'). Divided into small mobile groups – often only one commando strong – the Boers attacked railways, bridges, convoys, and camps, especially at night, believing that if they could make the war drag on, causing constant attrition, then the anti-war party in Britain would force their government to make a peace more favourable to the Boers than had once seemed likely.

The Boers were far better suited to this type of warfare – hit and run – using their mounted mobility. They were helped by poor British intelligence of their movements, while they in turn had an excellent spy system. Half the Boer strength – 25,000 men – refused

to give in. To make matters worse the Boer farmers who had not joined the Great Trek but remained in Cape Colony now chose to take part in this type of fighting. These 'Cape rebels' were an added threat. Trooper James White from Pemberton, in the Lancashire Hussars, had the job of chasing them:

*"there had been a dust with the rebels today. A lot of them has been killed and hundreds taken prisoner. They have however taken some of the Cheshire Yeomanry prisoner and gone off with them."*

Trooper Hanman, aged only 16, of the Army Service Corps wrote to his aunt, the landlady of the *Lion Inn*, Hindley describing how his convoy was ambushed and he was almost captured.

*".....I only escaped by a miracle. It happened while we were crossing a drift (a river ford) and no sooner were we well in and half way up the other side than thousands of Boers ran in amongst our wagons and shot all our drivers so we could not get away.....we were fired on but I was not touched and escaped. We lost seven wagons, 15 black men, five of our own men and 70 mules, besides seven guns of artillery. I shall never forget that night as long as I live."*

Another Wigan soldier, Trooper William Browne of the South African Light Horse, was not so lucky. He enlisted during Black Week and fought non-stop for 12 months, seeing the relief of all three towns and chasing 'bitter enders'. On 27 July 1900 his patrol was a few miles from Vlaaglaage when it was ambushed, and his excitable horse reared and galloped off as he tried to remount:

*"at this time Corporal Dudgeon, in spite of sharp Boer firing, rode up to me.....and asked me to try to mount behind him. His horse was a good height and twice I tried but failed the second time nearly pulling the Corporal from the saddle. I thanked the brave man and told him to save himself. During the whole time the Boers kept up an incessant fire. Next moment our Colonel rode up to me. The only other sign of our men I could see was a grey horse racing across the velt with two men on its back.....he rode up to me and in a quiet tone said 'try and run alongside me and hold my stirrup-leather'. I ran some little distance and completely exhausted I prayed the Colonel to leave me and save himself but he would not. After a slight pause he said – 'now have another try. I won't go too fast'. I did not run far.....I begged him to go which he did seeing I could advance no further."*



## Hero's welcome

Browne lay still on the ground and the Boers only discovered that he was alive when they tried to remove the two bandoliers of ammunition which had weighed him down. The mobile Boer columns had no room for prisoners and after being detained at Vrede he was released on 23 August 1900. After further active service he returned home in time for Christmas 1900 to a hero's welcome in his father's new home town – Southport.

South Africa was suited for this type of guerrilla warfare – huge distances, high steep hills, few railways, poor roads, sparse water supplies. Unable to catch the Boers, Kitchener divided the country into segments where each side was an obstacle – a fortified railway line, a line of black houses, a mountain range, the sea, the border. The British cavalry took each segment in turn and searched for the Boers trapped inside. To prevent the Boers from being supplied by their families, the farms of known guerrillas were burned down and their occupants brought in from the scattered farms and 'concentrated' in camps. Private Lewtas was involved in these proceedings:

*"The war would have been over long ago if they had burned all the farmhouses we came across and they are only just finding it out now. Yesterday we captured 20 Boer wagons loaded with corn and other stuffs. In two of the wagons there were four Boer women and fourteen children. Their husbands were fighting against us and they told some of our men that their farmhouses were burned down and they had to travel the Veldt. We only left them with three weeks stock so that can find their husbands again."*

Opinion in Britain was bitterly divided over the use of concentration camps. Pro-Boer visitors were allowed to see them but were regarded as meddling busybodies by those who were looking after the Boer families. A nurse from Leigh wrote:

*"We have two of these beauties, pro-Boer women from England, at our camp for a fortnight or more inspecting our camp and looking for complaints, and they are not at all satisfied because they cannot find enough. We don't feel gracious towards them and the old Boers laugh and make fun of them."*

She went on to quote one official visitor who had complained:

*"I am not at all satisfied. I have been in 38 tents this morning and have not had one single complaint. There must be something wrong. They are afraid that if they complain the nursing sisters will punish them."*

The nurse who omitted to give her name, went on to describe camp life and how the inmates were well looked after but refused to work. She had been prompted to write on hearing that Emily Hobhouse (the leading critic) had given a lecture in Westthoughton.

But there were successes, and Boer casualties mounted. Trooper H. Stephens of the South African Constabulary wrote to his mother, Mrs. Gratrix, at 29 Scholes, Wigan:

*"Nowadays we have to root Boers out of caves and kloofs, rocks and beds of dry rivers where they hide in twos and threes. We had the honour last week to capture Commander Hall a traitor who at one time belonged to the Imperial Light Horse. It appears that he and six others thought we had passed through a nek after camping there overnight but we turned back and caught him searching for ammunition and cartridges. I suppose he will get shot because he is wanted for murder."*

## More successful

By the end of 1901 there were 250,000 British and Empire soldiers in South Africa, of which 70,000 were in the mobile cavalry columns actually chasing the Boers, while 180,000 guarded the blockhouses, railways, depots, and towns; about 12,000 Boers had been caught or killed. Gradually the British forces grew more successful at this type of warfare, usually because they adopted Boer methods of fighting – small but elite forces, fast marches, surprise attacks, improved intelligence using natives or friendly Boers who had joined the British and were known as 'joiners'. The Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians were particularly good at this. The British even gave up carrying swords and lances, relying entirely on rifles and pistols.

The last few Boers surrendered, not entirely due to these tactics but because their families, who had been released from the concentration camps, pleaded with their husbands, fathers and sons that it was hopeless to continue. The terms of the peace treaty of 1902 were generous to the Boers:

*All Boers still fighting to surrender immediately.*

*No Boers who surrendered to be imprisoned.*

*No Boers to be prosecuted for legitimate acts of war.*

*The two Boer republics to join with the two British colonies to make one new country – the Union of South Africa.*

*Afrikaans (the Boer language) to have equality with English.*

*Boers be allowed hunting and sporting rifles under licence.*

*Military government to be replaced by a civilian government as soon as*

*possible.*

*£3,000,000 compensation for all the destroyed farms.*

*No extra taxes in South Africa to pay for the war.*

*When the new country became independent there was to be an inquiry into giving the native population the vote.*

## A new country is born

So the war ended and a new country was born. But although Boer and Briton were given equality, the Bantu natives were not, and this sowed the seeds of discord which were to throw up their shoots many years later.

The new enlarged South Africa was a huge success, and the more thoughtful Boers rallied to make it work. Twelve years later many, including the best soldiers, had risen to high government posts, and when the Great War broke out they acted swiftly and decisively to put down uprisings by the pro-German extremists who had been their former wartime comrades. The Boer War was the first occasion that the armed forces of the British Empire had rallied to the defence of one part of it. In 1902 Empire Day was instituted, where there were public displays of loyalty to the Empire, recognition of its achievements and appreciation of what it stood for. Between 1914-18 and 1939-45, the Empire's forces again rallied to help the Mother Country, but the stresses and strains of these conflicts only contributed towards the Empire's breakup.

All this was not known to the ordinary soldiers who make up the British Army. All they knew and wrote home about were their own experiences. The story ends with Private Lewtas once more;

*"I have gone through some hardships these last five months. I will tell you all when I come to the dear home, when a traction engine will not drag me away again. I have earned my medal which is a five-pointed star with the Queen's head in the centre, made of gold, silver and bronze, with red, white, blue and khaki ribbon. It will be hung up in the house to look at forever in remembrance of the Boer War."*

But the after-effects of the war were not over. In November 1915 his Hindley neighbours were shocked when William Lewtas took his own life. He had returned home to his job as a guard on the L. & N.W. Railway, but his health had been affected by his campaigning. Over the years his asthma had got worse, and 15 years later the 37 year old William Lewtas could endure the pain no longer and cut his own throat with a razor. War does not end with peace treaties.

# Donald Anderson

8 June 1912 - 3 June 2003

**DONALD Anderson was born at Highfield, Wigan, the first of four children born to James and Isabella. His grandfather William Alexander was a Scottish mining official and also a shaft sinking and tunnelling contractor.**

Donald's mother was a Webster whose family were great sportsmen, two in particular being players for Wigan Highfield in the newly formed breakaway Rugby League.

Donald lived with his sisters and brother near to the park wall surrounding Winstanley Hall. A great friend of his in those early days was Andrew Fraser, a highland Scot who was in service at the Hall. He was very lucky to be allowed to travel to London with Andrew and the other staff on a couple of occasions, to open up the Bankes's (of Winstanley Hall) family house in Eton Square. These early brushes with beautiful and historic buildings, fine furniture and parkland must have sparked his interests of later years.

## Mining career begins

At 14 years of age, Donald was offered an apprenticeship in the surveying office at Pemberton Colliery where his father was an official. He studied hard, at the then world renowned Wigan Mining College, obtaining his Colliery Surveyor's Certificate in 1933. Three years later, he obtained his Colliery Manager's First Class Certificate of Competency, one of only a handful of people ever to have held both these statutory government certificates.

Times were difficult in the UK mining industry with little prospect of advancement, so Donald left home for the goldfields of Tanganyika. In 1937 he went to India as Assistant Manager for the Turner Morrison's Sripur Colliery in Bengal. A few months after arriving he was appointed as colliery manager. He was actually under the age laid down by law and some years later was told that he could claim to be the youngest colliery manager in the British Empire!

## World War II

At the outbreak of the War he attempted to return home to join the forces, but because of his reserved occupation, was forbidden to do so. Nevertheless, he did join the Chota Nagpur Light Horse Regiment of the

Auxiliary Forces of India. They were mainly used at that time for internal security duties.

Sometime in late 1943, in secrecy, Donald (or Andy as he was nicknamed in India), was told to expect an important visitor to the mines. He did not realise how important that person would be until the Viceroy of India's Bodyguard arrived, to be followed by the Viceroy, Lord Wavell and his ADC Group Captain Townsend, together with Lady Wavell and their



*Donald Anderson receives the Wigan Civic Trust Special Award, 1988.*

daughter. Lord Wavell, ever a hands-on Viceroy, had come to see at first hand the difficulties in producing coal for the war effort.

## His own coal mine

Towards the end of the war Donald became ill, and was invalided home. On his return to Highfield, after convalescing he began prospecting for coal at Dalton with his friend Bill Gorton, to fulfil his ambition to own his own coal mine. Together they invested their savings, and helped by his father James, developed a successful business, the Dalton Coal & Fireclay Co Ltd.

A two pronged disaster struck shortly afterwards; in 1947 the Government nationalised the coal industry, and in early 1948 they were flooded out by water from ancient unrecorded workings. The determination, tenacity and grit which was a feature of Donald's character enabled them to start again at what became known as the "Top Pit". It was during this time in Dalton and Parbold he met his future wife.

He began prospecting in an area of coal near the place of his birth, and by 1950 their Quaker House Colliery Co. Ltd. had developed a mine at Garswood. The Quaker House Colliery, together with Leyland Green Drift Mine, was to become one of the largest private mines in the UK, and certainly the largest in Lancashire prior to the re-privatisation of the coal industry in the early 1990's.

Having been advised by the most eminent persons in the Lancashire mining industry that it was "commercial suicide" and that "there was no more than five years coal in any of the proposed reserves", it is perhaps an indication of his qualities as both a mining surveyor and an engineer that his enterprise outlasted all the major collieries in the North West; its last tonne of coal was wound in 1991

## A devoted family man

Donald was the proud father of three children, to whom he devoted energy, direction and love, giving them so many opportunities, passing on his knowledge, experience and wisdom, and instilling in them a respect for family, books, history and his country. They all enjoyed many days with him and their mother visiting historic sites, little suspecting that they were being educated at the same time!

## Historical duty

He genuinely considered it a duty to faithfully record the history of the mining industry and pass on to others his vast knowledge, particularly of the Lancashire coalfield. In 1964 the first of a three-volume work on the history of the Blundell's Colliery business, where his family had worked and where he first embarked on a career in the mining industry, was published. Many other books were to follow. (A full list of Donald's published works will appear in the next issue of *Past Forward*.)

Always a staunch supporter of the town of Wigan, Donald was a founder member and Vice President of Wigan Civic Trust, and in 1988 he was proud to receive their Special Award. He was also a member of the Chetham Society, the Newcomen Society, the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire and the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, as well as Vice-President of the



I was saddened to hear of the death recently of Evelyn Finch, following a stroke. Evelyn, together with her husband Norman, was one of the stalwarts of both the Leigh Family History and Leigh Local History Societies. Evelyn's main contribution to the Leigh Local History Society was her enthusiasm for ensuring that a local history publication programme produced regular booklets relating to the local area. She was also a very keen and active genealogical researcher.

Evelyn was born in Liverpool, the only daughter of Alfred Horne, a master mariner of Ireland, and Winnifred Moore of Wanstead. She attended Ranworth Square School, Norris Green and St Margaret's, Anfield before entering St Edmund's College for Girls, Liverpool. She worked in an accountant's office in Liverpool until she was 18, when she left to work in London for a short while. On returning she worked in Woolworth's as head cashier.

In 1944 she met Norman over a fence on the allotments and they were married in October 1945. Their marriage was blessed with two daughters, two sons David and Geoffrey, and eight grandchildren.

While bringing up her own family she still found time and energy over

## Evelyn Finch (1924-2003)



a period of many years to foster around 80 children who were all in need of her love and attention. In 1968 she qualified as a children's nursery nurse and worked in several nurseries in the Liverpool area. The family moved to Lowton early in 1975, when Evelyn took up post at Hope Carr nursery in Leigh.

She was a strong and determined woman with a sense of standing for what was right. She was a great believer in having a go at anything,

be it painting, bricklaying or building motorhomes - the list is endless; she was an original DIYer in every sense, always sure that challenging the mind was the way to overcoming physical pain. In recent years she expanded her artistic talent in painting with both oils and watercolours.

When she and Norman retired in 1981 they both embarked on a new interest, researching their family history; this culminated in a book *The Finch Family* which they published themselves in 1992. She was elected chairman of Leigh Family History Society and later Leigh Local History Society, and held both posts up to her death. She was also a member of the Antique Society, Chairman of the Anglo-Irish Society until 2002 and a member of the Lancashire Local History Federation.

Despite all her health problems she has still managed to lead a very active life in the societies, lecturing regularly and continuing to fulfil her role as a dedicated mother and grandmother. She will be sadly missed by many, for her untiring work in promoting both local history and genealogy in the Leigh area.

Tony Ashcroft  
Local History Officer

NW Branch of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Minerals Division.

### A true gentleman

My first encounter with Donald was in 1974. I had written to him saying how much I enjoyed his Orrell Coalfield book, not really expecting a reply, yet receiving a detailed letter back and an invite to Quaker House Colliery!

I soon realised that there was something very special about Donald, hard to define, as though here was a rare type of man with a distinct aura about him. People, their lives and family backgrounds fascinated him, no matter who they were. Even though he was a businessman he still made time for me which I never forgot. After then I had a friend for life.

Donald did not often outwardly demonstrate his naturally religious nature, but in his thoughts and in his acts of caring, compassion and generosity to others less fortunate than himself, he practised the tenets of his Christian upbringing. As a young man in 1968, whilst working in India, his son John, also a mining engineer, witnessed at first hand

the respect and fondness with which he was remembered by his former Indian colliery staff and his old Pathan bearer, still alive and in service at his old bungalow. John was also privileged to work with him at Quaker House Colliery, and see again the respect and friendship of the miners and officials, some of whom had been with him from the early days at Dalton.

### A cruel blow

Following a disabling stroke, Donald was determined to battle on, being superbly nursed for the last six years of his life at Douglas Bank Nursing Home, only a stones throw away from his first mine.

It is said that only the forgotten are truly dead. I am sure that Donald Anderson will not be forgotten.

Alan Davies  
Heritage Officer (Archives)

### Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to John Anderson (who may I add is very much in the same mould as his father) for Donald's background.

## STAN SMITH (1935 - 2003)

Tyldesley and District Historical Society began its 31st season without its long-standing Chairman and Treasurer, Stan Smith, who died on 27 July. Stan, a well-known local historian who has written several books and recently published his study of *The Halls of Tyldesley*, had held office in the Society for 10 years. Born in 1935, Stan attended Leigh Grammar School. After National Service he entered the banking profession, and later worked for a variety of textile firms. In retirement he dedicated himself to local history research, and was working on a history of coalmining in Tyldesley at the time of his death. He had a great knowledge of and affection for the railways, and was a well-known speaker at many local societies. He leaves a wife, two sons, and two grandchildren. He will be sadly missed.

# 'Good stuff comes out of Wigan'!

ON 23 AUGUST 1898 at no. 6 Bird Street, Ince-in-Makerfield, my grandmother, Eunice Bowman, formerly Pearson, nee Crook was born. She was the second of 12 children of Thomas and Sarah Crook, nee Hosler. Thomas and Sarah Crook had 12 children, seven boys and five girls, one of which died in infancy.

Although times were hard her family and generations before had earned a living in

Wigan from coal mining, weaving or in the cotton mills. But at the turn of the 20th century the big cotton mills of Lancashire were in decline, work and jobs were drying up and it meant that her father and other members of the family had to take drastic



Right: Eunice Bowman (nee Crook) left, with her sister Harriet (born 1920).



One of Tyneside's oldest women enjoys a celebration – and a civic visit

## Here's to your 105th, say proud family

EUNICE Bowman celebrated her 105th birthday amid three generations of her family.

One of the oldest women in Tyneside, Eunice was the second oldest of 12. She had seven brothers and four sisters. At the last count, she has 23 grandchildren and great-grandchildren besides.

She enjoyed a cake and a man from the Mayor of Gateshead, Councillor Lynn, looking in because of flowers, in honor of her birthday.

Eunice's 105th birthday was celebrated at the Grand Hotel, Newcastle, at the Grand Hotel, Newcastle, on August 23. She was born on August 23, 1898, in Ince-in-Makerfield, Lancashire, and she moved to Newcastle in 1920. She has lived in the North since then.

By [Name]

[Address]

Eunice Bowman still lives in Ince-in-Makerfield, where she grew up.

"She was a woman that she didn't want any son or brother on her birthday, so I won't be her 105th when we first had a big party."

The immediate family had tea and a birthday cake. The garden-folia, which is North-Eastern, and she received a message of congratulation from the Queen.

There is a tradition in Ince-in-Makerfield of the age of seven because work in the cotton mills of Lancashire was done up.

The man today moved up

from Wigan to find work in Tyneside, mostly in mines at Heworth Colliery.

Eunice said: "I first went to the Low Board school at Felling, and then we moved to the High Board. It's the same as the High Board."

"When we came up from I didn't want to go down the quarry. I've never been on a quarry."

"I had seven brothers and four sisters and they're all dead apart from Harriet, who is 82 and living with me."

Eunice married Robert Pearson at the age of 25. In 1920, she moved from Ince-in-Makerfield to Newcastle when he was 35, leaving her with four children to look after. She married again in 1921, to Frank Bowman, and had two more children.



**HELE AND HELIANTY** - Eunice Bowman is celebrating her 105th birthday with her large family vicariously over

The story of Eunice Bowman's remarkable life as it appeared in her local newspaper in August 2003. (Courtesy of the Newcastle Evening Chronicle).

action.

So around 1905, Eunice's father came to the North East to suss out the area. He gave it the thumbs up and his wife Sarah, the children, including Eunice, uncles, aunts, cousins and nephews all headed north. It was part of a big evacuation of families from the Wigan area looking for work on Tyneside.

### "Lankie Row"

Eunice recalls that it was probably the first time she had ever been on a train. They arrived in Felling, near Gateshead and had to live in someone else's house, sleeping on the floor. One of their next houses was in Quarry Row, Felling. That house was in the shape of a coffin! Then they came to Nursery Lane, Windy Nook, Felling. Nursery Lane got the nickname "Lankie Row" because of all the Lancashire people who were living there.

On one occasion she remembers someone getting the cane. So the next day she went into the classroom early and hid the teacher's cane behind the blackboard. I wonder if the teacher ever found that cane!

Eunice can remember always being asked to read poetry.



*The 'Three Sisters', taken in June 2003. Harriet (left), Eunice and Annie (seated).*

Could it have been that the teacher and the class wanted to hear her Lankie twang?

When Eunice left school she worked with her gran in Lomas's fish and chip shop. She had to stand on a box and serve over the counter. Her father made her pack the job in when she got a big bone in her nail. Years later she worked in another fish and chip shop owned by her sister's daughter Joan and her husband Ronnie.

Playtimes for Eunice did not exist as she was always looking after kids or doing odd jobs for people. She also looked after her mother when her father Thomas died in 1953.

### No holidays

During World War I Eunice worked seven days a week, with no holidays, on 12-hour shifts at Vickers-Armstrong munition works. She had to walk all the way from Felling to Scotswood in Newcastle, even during the blackouts. She started as a messenger and then went on to piece work, putting all the gunpowder in the fuses. She remembers how one night she was not able to go to work because she was ill. The next day she found out that the place where she had worked had blown up!

Eunice had been courting Robert Pearson during the war, and on Christmas Day 1919 they married at Christ Church, Felling. Bob Pearson was a tall man, while my gran is quite short, so they must have looked quite a pair going down the street - little and large!

Eunice can still remember helping her mother do the washing with a poss-tub in the yard and using the big wringers. Eunice says "you had to get into a rhythm. If I was passing down my mother would poss up. It took a whole day to wash and iron. You put the iron on the side of the fire. I was kept off school every week to look after kids, and help with the washing and ironing. You would hang your washing outside and then the coal carts came round and you'd have to go out and pull all your clothes in. But sometimes

the coalman would just go straight through the washing and leave it with big black marks".

Sadly Bob Pearson contracted tuberculosis and died on 20 April 1928, leaving Eunice with four children, Norman, Thomas, Doris and Constance.

### Tough time

Eunice got 10s. for herself, 5s. for Norman and 3s. each for Tommy, Doris and Connie. Altogether, therefore, she got 24s. to feed, clothe and bring up her family. There were no more



*Eunice with her most recent great granddaughter, Aimee Flynn (born 2003).*

State hand-outs. It was a tough time for her, but she was always looking for bits of jobs to do to keep the coppers coming in. As she says, "I saw more mealtimes than meals".

Eunice was always willing to help - even laying people out when they died. Eunice gave a little laugh, as she recalled laying out a man called 'Lankie Bob' - "There was a big tall fella, we called him 'Lankie Bob', who lived on his own. His daughter went upstairs with his tea and found that he had died in his sleep, curled up with his knees under his chin. The woman I worked with sat on his knees to try and straighten him out, and the body promptly sat

*Continued on page 28*

# *I remember when . . .*

MANY *Past Forward* readers will have visited Blenheim Palace, near Oxford, which was built as a present by Queen Anne, to the First Duke of Marlborough as a 'thank you' for his victory at Blenheim. In due course it became the birthplace of who many believe was the greatest Prime Minister of all time, Sir Winston Churchill.

Few readers, however, will know that it was a Wigan lad who was instrumental in 'persuading' the father of the present Duke to permit visitors to the Palace, and not just to the gardens as hitherto!

A small coach operator, Arthur Elliott, with only one 27 seater Bedford coach, had approached me to suggest that as he was "no good at writing letters, perhaps I would do him a favour by

composing one for him". And so it was that I wrote to the Duke of Marlborough to advise him that a Mothers Union group from a church in Coventry would like to visit Blenheim Palace, fully expecting to be told that only the grounds were open, as they then were.

Imagine our joint surprise when the Estate Manager of Blenheim replied, "His Grace the Duke would be pleased to welcome you as his guests, and no doubt in due course you will advise us of the date and time you suggest, for his agreement".

As word got around the Mothers Union, more and more wanted to take part in 'the event of a lifetime', as never previously had any Coventrians or indeed any other non-family members been inside the

Palace.

On the big day, I found myself ringing the bell of Blenheim Palace; and instead of a butler as I expected the door was opened by none other than the Duke of Marlborough himself! On seeing the size of our party (the Duke had not seen my later letter informing him that our numbers had grown considerably), he called to his wife "Sarah dear, it is the party from Coventry we were expecting, but there are rather more than we thought. There are 60 of them. Perhaps if you called 'Sonny', then we each could take 20 and meet up here afterwards."

'Sonny' (who still lives on the estate, as the present Duke), then appeared with a tear in his trousers – a very jovial character, quite

lighthearted, who made everything into a joke.

After the tour, trestle tables loaded with cake stands full of delicious cakes and urns of scalding hot tea appeared as if from nowhere and we travellers thoroughly enjoyed being 'the guests' of nobility!

The Duke engaged me in conversation, and asked if I had ever been to Chatsworth House? I was able to tell him that I had, many times, and that the Duchess of Devonshire was the prime motivator, in opening the Hall to the public. We discussed the possibilities of doing likewise at Blenheim and I encouraged him to do so.

Before long, visitors were being welcomed to Sir Winston's birthplace, and I like to think that I – a slum kid born at Wigan Pier – had a part in it!

© Ernie Taberner

## **'Good stuff comes out of Wigan'!**

*Continued from page 27*

up, giving us the fright of our lives."

At the beginning of World War II Eunice's sons, Norman, aged 19 and Tommy, aged 17, were called up into the Army. Because of their ages they were separated, one going to Dunkirk and the other to Africa. They both - surprisingly - returned safely from the war and went back to their work in the shipyards.

Eunice married for a second time on 13 December 1941 – this

time her neighbour, Frank Bowman. They had two children, Sheila, who died in infancy and Ann (my mother) who was born in 1945. Sadly, Frank died in 1950, leaving Eunice on her own once again.

Ann married George Berry in 1964 and I was born later that year. Eunice by now was a grandmother 13 times over, with four more grandchildren still to come.

Eunice returned to working in the fish and chip shop, and I can remember when I was young going for two papers (two lots of fish and chips), and four packets of chips at Ronnie's fish and chip shop. I used to go every Thursday night and get served by my gran – and boy did we enjoy them!

My mother, my brothers and sisters and I used to go for our tea to my gran's every Saturday at 4 o'clock. If anyone was late

we would get a right ear-bashing. She was still making our tea when she was in her '90's!

### **Happy days**

Eunice has for the most part enjoyed good health, with a good sense of humour. Money and sometimes food were scarce, but of the past Eunice says "they were happy days".

At Eunice's 100th Birthday Party she received many presents and cards. She made a speech thanking everyone and said, "I wonder what I'll get when I'm 200 years old". On 23 August 2003 Eunice reached the grand old age of 105. She is still living in her bungalow by herself and is still quite independent.

Good stuff in little bundles must have come out of Wigan!

J. M. Berry  
Gateshead Tyne & Wear



# Tyldesley Railway Station

TYLDESLEY used to have a railway station until Dr. Beeching came along and chopped it. It was an old Victorian edifice illuminated by gas lamps, and with enamelled advertisements for Stevens Ink and Mazawatti Tea, and one of those machines that you put a penny in and got a bar of Nestles milk chocolate – for a pre-decimal penny!

We thought it was a cut above other stations in the area because not only did it have three platforms but it was also a junction. The main line came from Manchester and went on to Leigh, Golborne and Newton-le-Willows, and there was a branch line to Bolton Great Moor Street.

A shuttle service operated on these lines, long before British Airways thought about it. This used a little shunting engine with two carriages that served the destinations alternatively. As there were no turning round facilities for the engine at the final destination, the engine pulled the carriages outwards and had to push them on the way back. The end carriage that now became the leading carriage had a window at the end, behind which the driver sat to see where they were going whilst the fireman drove the engine at the other end. A length of

wire went from the driver, over the carriage tops and into the engine cab. This was the engine room telegraph – 1 for go, 2 for stop, 3 for slow down.

When the train was leaving Tyldesley, one of the porters would call out the destination. One of them lived in Common Lane, and as the people who lived there were not very conversant with BBC pronunciation it must have been a bit confusing for strangers when he shouted ... 'Yeau bridge, Chowbent, Chequerbent, Dobbie and Bowton'.

One of the features for which the station was noted was as the starting place for pigeon races – as Tyldesley stands on the first rise in the ground from the Cheshire plain it was ideally placed. The rise was known as a bank thus Tyldesley Banks. Tyldesley people being what they were pronounced banks as bonks, and somehow bonks became bongos. So that's the theory of how Tyldesley got the name of Bongos.

On certain Fridays in the summer months incoming trains would unload baskets of pigeons, until they were stacked up 10 deep and the length of the platform. At 10.55 on Saturday morning the stationmaster emerged from his office and checked the time with

his big railwayman's Waltham double-lever watch. At 11 o'clock he blew his whistle and the porters flung themselves at the baskets and opened them up. Huge flocks of pigeons emerged to circle round, whilst they got their bearings to go back to their various lofts, and you could hear shotguns going off over Gin Pits. Pigeon pie for Sunday dinner!

The porters then shifted the baskets to the back of the platform, and where they had been was a half inch thick layer of pigeon muck which they loaded on to a handcart and sold to the men on the allotments – it was good rich pungent stuff, as a result of which Tyldesley had the reputation of growing some of the finest rhubarb in the northern counties!

Word of this eventually

got to headquarters at Manchester Victoria, and a letter came from them pointing out that this material was the property of London Midland and Scotland Railways and so the practice must cease forthwith. So the lads had a meeting with the union bloke and a reply was sent agreeing that the material was indeed the property of London Midland and Scotland Railways and offering to deliver the next consignment directly to their headquarters at Manchester Victoria. Well, they never heard any more of that and Tyldesley continued to grow splendid rhubarb!

**J.G. Smith (age 4 score and 4 years)**

**Astley Nr. Manchester  
Tel: 01942 882513**

**Email:**

***jgsmith86@aol.co.uk***



*Tyldesley Station*

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# THE CLARKE BROTHERS OF LEIGH

THE Clarke brothers lived at 1 Barker Street, Leigh. The street is still there, as is the house, off Firs Lane, opposite where the Firs Maternity home stood. Mother and father were Emma and John Clarke, John being a joiner by trade.

## Harry

The second eldest son, Harry, was my wife's grandfather. He joined the Army as a regular in 1907, lying about his age, saying he was 19½ when in fact he had just turned 18. He enlisted in Bury into the 1st Battalion Lancs. Fusiliers, and was sent out to India where he trained as a signaller. At the outbreak of war the 1st Battalion were brought home, spent some time in Nuneaton before being sent out on the infamous Gallipoli adventure. Harry took part in the famous Lancashire landing – 6 VC's before breakfast – surviving only to have his right arm and shoulder shot off by a Turkish sniper in May 1915, one month after landing.

## Robert

The next son was Robert (Bob), who again had joined as a regular in 1904 into the 2nd Battalion Border Regiment. When war broke out his unit was sent to France as part of the BEF, the 'Old Contemptibles'! After fighting in Belgium and Northern France, Bob suffered a severe shell wound in his back at Festubert on 16 May 1915 – his 30th birthday – and he was invalided out of the Army. He was to die in the street in 1927 when shrapnel which had been left in his body moved. The

Dear Sir,

Both my wife and I hail from Leigh and have recently moved down here. We are very interested in family history and receive your excellent publication via my wife's cousin who lives in Atherton.

I was prompted to write to you as a result of Fred Holcroft's series of articles in *Past Forward* on 'Letters from the Boer War'.

My wife's family name was Clarke, and she has compiled an account of the five Clarke brothers who served in World War I. Obviously I cannot say this situation was unique in Leigh and District, but there can't have been many. Their story is very sad – not uncommon for the time, of course – but it is a story that might be worth sharing with your readers.

**Bill Belch**

**Weston-Super-Mare**

**Somerset**

**Tel: 01934 613573**

**Email: [halfarmmews@aol.com](mailto:halfarmmews@aol.com)**

coroner's comments at the time were quite scathing, as it turned out on investigation that Robert had been denied a pension for his wounds. On his death, therefore, his wife was basically destitute, so she took herself and her four children back to Yorkshire, cutting all ties with the family in Leigh.

[A very happy footnote to this sad event is that Robert's children were traced to Ripon in Yorkshire in 2000. All of them were in or approaching their 80's and had no idea they had family elsewhere. But by a chance in a million, young Alf – now 84, but eight when he left Leigh had seen an advert placed in a magazine by my wife's cousin.]

## Alf

The original Alf was another of the Clarke brothers, but unfortunately we know nothing of his military service. We do know that he worked at Irlam steelworks after the War, and very sadly took his own life in 1920. He left a very poignant note for his mother, calling her "the bravest of women", adding "no more sleep until death, why prolong the agony?" The medical report on Alf's death stated he was suffering from neurasthenia, commonly shell shock.

## James

The youngest of the brothers was James who enlisted in 1914 in Leigh into the Loyal North Lancashires. He was to die on the Somme in July 1916.

## Joe

The 5th and eldest brother was Joe, born in 1876. Joe had enlisted as a regular in the 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashires and was serving in India when the Boer War broke out.

At the time my wife started on the story of the brothers, we had no idea that Joe had served in South Africa or even in World War I. But Joe's surviving daughter gave us a photograph of him with Mary his wife which showed him in uniform wearing his medals. I took this photo into the Fusilier's Museum in Bury, and the curator immediately identified the medals as being from the Boer War – The Queen's S.A. Medal, King's S.A. medal and a very



special medal – one that he should not have been wearing with his uniform – the Kimberley Star!

Further research showed that the 1st Battalion Loyals were the only regular British Army unit actually in Kimberley during its siege by the Boers. Trapped in Kimberley with them was the famous Cecil Rhodes – by all accounts in the Regimental Diary, a very difficult man, who had constant differences of opinion with Lt. Col. Kekevich, the military commandant. The siege lasted some four months, with the townspeople and the garrison down to half a pound of horsemeat at the point it was lifted.

In gratitude for everything done by the volunteer defenders and the Loyals, the Mayor of Kimberley had the Kimberley Star medal struck privately. He had 5000 made in total, one gold for Rhodes and 4999 silver for all the others. As a private medal, not sanctioned by H.M. Government, soldiers were forbidden to wear them. The photograph (right) shows Joe and the offending article.

Many people in Leigh will remember Joe, even though he



*Left to right: 6948 Private Robert Clarke (1885-1927), Regular Soldier; 1331 Private Harry Clarke (1889-1972), Regular Soldier; 17807 Private James Clarke (1894-1916).*

died in 1951. Many more will still remember Harry, not least because of his missing arm and the job he had for 30 years as an Insurance collector with the Pearl.

P.S. I wonder if any reader has any information whatever on Alf Clarke, the brother who killed himself by drowning in 1920. We have no idea, for example, in which regiment he served.

*Right: 4512 Private Joseph Clarke (1876-1951), Regular Soldier. Fought in the Boer War, Sergeant in World War I. Pictured with his wife, Mary.*



*This photograph was kindly loaned by Mr and Mrs Cyril Walls of 10 Alexandra Crescent, Pemberton, Wigan WN5 9JP. It is of St. John's School, New Springs, taken about 1927/8. Cyril could only name himself (second row and third from right with folded arms), and his cousin Freddie Walls (front row, second from right). He would love to know if any readers can name anyone?*

## 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](mailto: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.*

### **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. Further details from the Honorary Secretary, Alan Bradshaw (01942 726493)

#### **3 December**

*Christmas Readings and Lunch*  
James Fairhurst

#### **7 January**

*Open Meeting*

#### **4 February**

*Local History* Walter Carney

#### **3 March**

*Monologues and Poems* Pete Edwards

#### **7 April**

*King Edward VII, his Life and Loves*  
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 (01942 884893)

#### **2 December**

*Lancashire Witches* (followed by Christmas buffet) Lizzie Jones, Brian Clarke

#### **13 January**

*Lancashire humour* Brian Clarke

#### **10 February**

*Badges and Tokens of Bolton* Cliff Stockton

#### **9 March**

*The Life & Times of Samuel Crompton*  
Sean Baggeley

### **Billinge Local History Society**

For further details contact Jack Boardman. (01744 892613), or visit our web site at [www.billinge-history.com](http://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. Further details from Ron Marsh, P.R. Officer (01942 726027).

### **Hindley History Society**

We meet in the Museum at Hindley Library, Market Street at 7.00 p.m. Further details from the Secretary Joan Topping (01942 257361) or the Treasurer Norma Brannagan (01942 258668).

#### **12 January**

*The Worst of the Victorian Murders*  
James Fairhurst

#### **15 March**

*Victorian Surnames* Fred Holcroft

### **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. Further details from the Secretary, Mrs. O. Hughes (01942 741594).

## **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 Summer 2004 for inclusion in the next issue. Thanks.**

#### **16 December**

*Poets and Poisoners* Lizzie Jones

### **Leigh Literary Society**

Meetings are held in the Derby Room at the Turnpike Centre, on alternate Monday evenings at 7.30 p.m. Annual subscriptions £11; visitors £1.50 per meeting. For further details from Tony Ashcroft, Local History Officer, Leigh Library (01942 404559)

#### **1 December**

*Sea Bird Summer & Birds of the Pennine Forest* Gordon Yates

#### **15 December**

*The Last Lighthouse Keeper*  
Gordon Medicott

#### **5 January**

*Canals in Camera* Roy Murphy

#### **19 January**

*The Kerry Way* David Cookson

#### **2 February**

*Travels through Peru* Andrew Calder

#### **16 February**

*Lancashire Comedians* Tony Hilton

#### **1 March**

*Gilbert & Sullivan* David Hill

#### **9 April**

*Cornwall* (also AGM) Trevor Lucas

### **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. Further details from 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.

### **Skelmersdale & Upholland Family History Society**

Meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of most months at 7.30 p.m., in the Hall Green Community Centre, Upholland. Beginners and more experienced family historians always welcome. Further details from the Secretary, Simon Martin (01942 702594).

#### **25 November**

*Liverpool in the Blitz* Simon Martin

#### **27 January**

AGM and Workshop – Starting Out

#### **24 February**

*Ralph Cartledge, Napoleonic Soldier*  
Neville King

#### **23 March**

Workshop – Births, Marriages & Deaths

#### **27 April**

*Bounds of Upholland* Dr. Audrey Coney

### **Standish Probus Club**

Members are retired business and professional people. Meetings are held at 'The Owls', Rectory Lane, Standish on the second Tuesday of every month at 10.30 a.m. Further details from the Secretary, Bryan Shepherd (01257 424994)

#### **13 January**

*Life is 3D* Roy Jackson

#### **10 February**

*Hidden Treasure* Agatha Brown

#### **9 March**

*Lady Anne Clifford* Margaret Curry

### **Tyldesley & District Historical Society**

Meetings are held on the third Thursday of every month from September to May at the Tyldesley Pensioners club on Milk Street at 7.30 p.m. Voluntary contributions are always welcome. Refreshments available. Contact the Secretary Tony Rydings (01942 514271) or [rydings@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:rydings@blueyonder.co.uk). Visit our website at [www.tyldesleyhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.tyldesleyhistoricalsociety.co.uk).

#### **18 December**

*Last Weekend of Peace, First Weekend of War, 2 & 3 September 1939* (also AGM)

(See also p25 for a tribute to Stan Smith).

### **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 meets at Drumcroon Education Arts Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan, on the second Monday of the month at 7.30 p.m. Further details from the Secretary, A.J. Grimshaw, 6 Bridgeman Terrace, Wigan (01942 245777).

### **Wigan Family & Local History Society**

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of most months 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. Further details from John Wogan, 678 Warrington Road, Goode Green, Wigan WN3 6XN. or Email [Johnwogan@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:Johnwogan@blueyonder.co.uk). Visit our website at [www.ffhs.org.uk/members/wigan.htm](http://www.ffhs.org.uk/members/wigan.htm).

#### **16 December**

*William Hutchings: Evangelical Preacher, Writer, Debater and Journalist* Max Finney (Christmas Buffet)

#### **20 January**

*Another Road to Wigan Pier* Carole Banks

#### **17 February**

*Taking a Walk along the Leeds & Liverpool Canal* Ron Rigby

#### **16 March**

*Water Corn Mills in Standish* Adrian Morris

#### **20 April**

*The Story of Wigan Railways* Philip Heyes

# The Children's Employment Commission (Mines) 1842

## A unique insight into our mining forbears.

### An ancient practice

It is known not least from illustrations in tombs and on pottery that women and young children worked in the metal mines of ancient Egypt and Greece well over 2000 years ago. In England children of poor and working class families had worked for centuries before industrialisation, helping around the house or in the fields.

The practice of putting children to work was first actually documented in England in medieval times when fathers had their children spinning thread for them to weave on the loom. Children had always performed a variety of tasks that were auxiliary to their parents but nevertheless critical to the family economy. There is no reason to doubt at all that the Wigan Borough area's earliest organised coal mines over 700 years ago utilised female and child labour.

### Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper

Before 1842, legislation was not in place to improve or safeguard the working conditions of those employed in the mines. Virtually the single driving force to eradicate the employment of women and girls in the mines was to come from a Tory MP, Anthony Ashley Cooper, who has never really received the enormous credit he deserves.

He was born in April 1801, the eldest son of the 6th Earl of Shaftesbury; at the age of 10, Anthony was given the courtesy title of Lord Ashley. Educated at Harrow and Christ College, Oxford, he was elected M.P. for Woodstock at the age of 25.

He began to take an interest in social issues after reading reports in *The Times* about the accounts given to Michael Sadler's Committee investigating child labour, and wrote to Sadler offering his help in his campaign for factory reform. On Sadler's defeat in the 1832 General Election, Lord Ashley was asked to become the new leader of the factory reform movement in the House of Commons. He accepted, and in March 1833, proposed a bill that would restrict children to a maximum 10 hour day; this bill, however, was defeated by 238 votes to 93. Although the government opposed Ashley's bill, it accepted, however, that children did need protecting and decided to put forward its own proposals.



*Anthony Ashley Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1802-1885).*

### 1833 Factory Act

The government's 1833 Factory Act was passed by Parliament on 29 August. Under the terms of the new act, it became illegal for children under nine to work in textile factories, whereas children aged between nine and 13 could not be employed for more than eight hours a day. The reformers, however, were disappointed that children over 13 were allowed to work for up to 12 hours a day. They also complained that with the employment of only four inspectors to monitor this legislation, factory owners would continue to employ very young children.

### Children's Employment Commission

In 1840 Lord Ashley helped set up the Children's Employment Commission. Its first report on mines and collieries was published in 1842. It caused a sensation when it was published. The majority of people in Britain were totally unaware that women and children as young as six years of age were being employed in mines.

### Graphic illustrations

The report was the first of its kind to include engraved illustrations, which for the already evidence-shocked Victorian reader added an unbelievable visual

dimension. Images of muscularly deformed naked young girls dragging coal carts along low tunnels were to be instrumental in speeding up the parliamentary route to a change in legislation.

The engravings were reproduced in the national newspapers, standing out at a time when pictures in newspapers were few, and images of bare breasted females even fewer! The illustrations, most of which were to be found in the Lancashire sections of evidence, also give us the first accurate glimpse into working conditions and mining 'technology' below ground. Although photography had recently arrived, the first attempts to create images in coal mines were at least 40 years into the future. The engravings appear to have been accurately sketched in a cold manner, without any form of artistic embellishment or licence. Perhaps the artists felt a sense of moral duty to record accurately the horrors before them, which they themselves were probably seeing for the first time.

### The evidence

This was gathered by the sub-commissioners below ground and amongst the mining community on the surface - in local pubs for example, a well known haunt of most colliers. Some smaller coalowners who knew that their workforce slaved in terrible conditions were very uncooperative, their mineworkers giving little useful insight into conditions.

Larger concerns such as the Duke of Bridgewater's massive mining complex were the opposite. Even though they employed over 140 women and girls, they readily supplied statistics and allowed workers to openly speak to the sub-commissioners.

There was a great deal of suspicion of the motives behind the gathering of evidence. Mineworkers felt that the revealing to an audience outside of their close-knit communities of their terrible working conditions and immoral practices would lead to job losses, colliery closures or prosecution. As mining wages were often higher than mill wages the workforce often felt it worthwhile to keep quiet, accept their lot and hope for the best.

*Continued on page 34*

# The Children's Employment Commission (Mines) 1842

*Continued from page 33*

The evidence which follows for this article only scrapes the surface of the scope of the full report and is drawn from the Wigan Borough area and the wider Lancashire coalfield.

## Twelve hour day

John Charnock was about 10 or 12 years old and worked as a waggoner (pushing and pulling pit tubs below ground) at Mr. Thickness's Kirkless Pit, near Aspull.

*What age are you?* - I do not know.

*Where do you work?* - I work at Kirkless, Mr. Thickness's.

*What time do you go in the morning?* - I go at five o'clock in the morning, and I come out between five and six at night.

*What time do you have for breakfast?* - I get my breakfast before I start in the morning, it is thick porridge; we don't stop for it.

*What time do you have dinner?* - I have praties (potatoes) for dinner and we don't stop for bagging [mining term for food]; I get praties for supper sometimes; I have enough to eat.

*Have you any clothes besides those you have on?* - No. [His clothes were a tissue of rags; the wonder was how they hung on the child.]

*How many of a family are you?* Father, mother, three sisters and myself.

*Do you all sleep in one room?* - Yes.

*In one bed?* - Yes.

*Are your sisters older than you?* - Yes. [This boy was about 12 years, or between that and 13: his appearance was wretched.]

## Amazing feats of stamina

Children were given tasks an adult of today would never accept. An astonishing piece of evidence comes from Benjamin Berry, aged 14, working at Patricroft Colliery, near Worsley;

*What is the greatest length you have known a drawer bring a waggon? [during a shift].* I have known two drawers, a lad and a lass, draw 800 yards on the level, with rails, 10 times [16,000 yards] and 360 yards up and down without rails 20 times [14,400 yards]; total 30,400 yards or 17 1/2 miles nearly.

Many rambblers today would be proud to walk 17 miles in the Lakes, but just

imagine dragging loaded and empty tubs in the mine for 10 hours for the same distance!

## A rough community!

William Harrison was the Relieving Officer for Orrell, Pemberton and Upholland and several other townships. In his evidence of 12 May 1841 he replies to the following question;

*Have you ever noticed the domestic condition of the children of colliers?* As regards their habits, some of them are very respectable, but the great body are quite the reverse, and very disorderly in conduct, and they make bad use of their money; they are usually filthy in their habits, they will wash their neck, face, and hands, when they return from work, but they scarcely ever wash their bodies, very rarely indeed.

*Have you ever observed the moral condition of the colliers?* It is not uncommon for four or five of them to sleep in one bed, and sometimes two or three beds in one room; the girls and boys sleep in the same room, and I have known cases where they have slept in the same bed. I have known them sleep together until the boys and girls were 14 or 15. They are very much demoralised in their habits; bastard children are thought nothing of, it scarcely makes any difference on a young woman's character in this district, if they get a child they think they should go to the parish with it.

Mr. Latham was the hard-pressed Chief Constable of Wigan. He had been a resident for 42 years and amazingly was asked the following question;

*In that time have you had the opportunity of noting the character and habits of the colliers in this neighbourhood?* Yes, I have; and all classes of working men in this district, excepting the lower classes of Irish, who are probably as bad, the colliers are the most turbulent and riotous; their

language is of the most blasphemous description, and the children follow their example; the name of Christ is always in their mouths; their constant oath is, 'by the heart of Christ I'll tear thy liver out.'

*Is it considered discreditable for a man to be seen drunk?* No, it is considered no disgrace to be seen drunk and disorderly; every pay night they come to the town, and they are drunk and disorderly upon these occasions; their wives usually accompany them, and leave the children to fend for themselves.

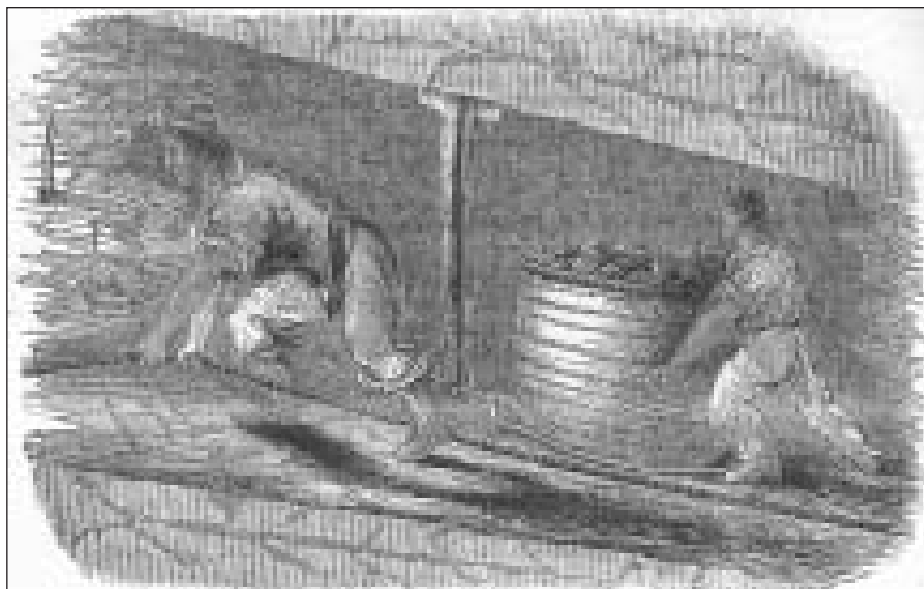
Betty Harris, aged 37 was a drawer (pushing and pulling coal tubs and baskets) in a coal mine at Little Bolton. Her description is well worth citing as her working process would be typical of women, girls and boys in the Wigan area. Her evidence is much quoted;

*"I have a belt round my waist, and a chain passing between my legs, and I go on my hands and feet. The road is very steep, and we have to hold by a rope; and where there is no rope, by anything we can catch hold of. ... I am not as strong as I was, and cannot stand the work as well as I used to. I have drawn till I have had the skin off me; belt and chain is worse when we are in the family way"*.

Patience Kershaw, aged 17 and also from Bolton, describes a sad daily working routine where the job itself was not the only cause for concern;

*"I hurry the corves [pull or drag wicker baskets full of coal] a mile and more underground and back; they weigh 3 cwt [20 cwt to a ton] ... the getters [the men at the coal face] that I work for are naked except for their caps, sometimes they beat me if I am not quick enough" [in supplying them with empty baskets].*

Betty Wardle of Outwood, near Radcliffe, recalls her time in the pits. A modern day mother will find her evidence virtually unbelievable;



*Have you ever worked in a coal pit? Ay, I have worked in a pit since I was six years old.*

*Have you any children? Yes, I have had four children; two of them were born while I worked in the pits.*

*Did you work in the pits when you were in the family way? Ay, to be sure. I had a child born in the pits and I brought it up the pit shaft in my skirt.*

*Are you quite sure you are telling me the truth? Ay, that I am; it was born the day after I were married, that makes me to know.*

### 'Purring'

A tough collier, recorded only by his surname of Cooper, but with the nickname of 'The Strapper', was working at a pit in Dukinfield. He mentions the painful practice of 'purring', also known as 'parring' or kicking with clogs, usually on each others shins, which was also very common in the Wigan area.

*Have you ever been hurt? No I never was hurt in a pit, but I have had several bones broken.*

*How did that happen, out of the pit? With fighting.*

*Do you fight naked? Yes, up and down, with clogs on.*

*How much beer do you drink on a Saturday night? Sometimes half a barrel!!*

### Earnings on the side!

Mary Glover, working at a pit near Ringley was asked:

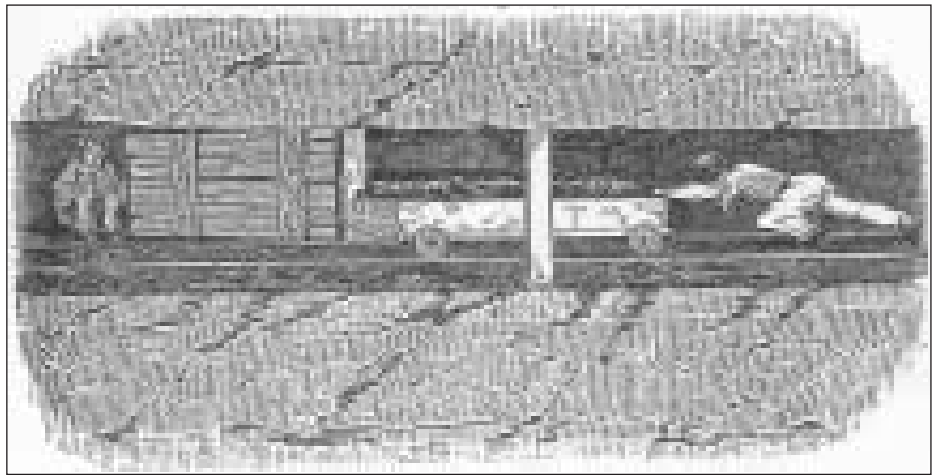
*How are you dressed when at work in the pits? I wear a shift and a pair of trousers when at work, and I always will have a good pair of trousers. I have had many a 2d given me by the boatmen on the canal side to show my breeches.*

### Coal Mines Act

The Children's Employment Commission was published in May 1842. General outrage at the revelations meant that no one could really argue against the continuation of many of the workplace practices or condone the presence in the mines of the lowest levels of moral behaviour. The Coal Mines Act, piloted by Lord Ashley, came into effect only three months after publication in August 1842. Women and girls and boys younger than 10 were prohibited from working underground.

### The 'pit brow lass' emerges

Women and girls removed from the mines often bitterly resented their livelihoods being taken away from them in one foul swoop. Some women even resorted to dressing as men to continue work. Hannah Hathaway was discovered after being killed in a roof fall at a Standish pit in 1845. An enquiry found others were working at the pit.



*A young boy working as a ventilation door tender, often in total darkness, cold and draughty for up to sixteen hours a day.*

Women mineworkers had traditionally worn petticoats over trousers. Many now intent on sneaking below ground, often with the management turning a blind eye, were to be increasingly seen on the surface in more masculine caps, jackets and trousers. 70 years after the 1842 legislation this style was still in place, particularly in Wigan, giving us the memorable image of the 'pit brow lasses'.

### Work options

Other women and girls were lucky to be given agricultural or service work on the estates of the coal owners or drifted away to other industries, textiles for example, or even cockling in Morecambe Bay. By 1860 work for 30 ex pit women was being provided at Sumner's Haigh Brewery near Aspull.

20 years later it was felt the general public were still relatively ignorant of the problems facing the industry. C. Collier in his *Gatherings From The Pit Heap* of 1861 stated that: "of miners the mass of mankind knows no more than if they were Hottentots:- born, bred and buried, for the most part out of sight of the highly civilised and educated people around them".

The rest of Europe was slow in adopting female exclusion from the mines after 1842. This was only finally achieved in Belgium, for instance, by 1911. Today women and girls can still be found in mines in China, India, Cambodia and Columbia and many other remote areas worldwide.

### Tireless campaigner

As for Anthony Ashley Cooper, he continued to campaign for effective factory legislation. In 1863 he published a report revealing that children as young as four and five were still working from six in the morning to ten at night in some British factories.

He was also associated with the movement to provide free education for the poor. He was president of the

Ragged Schools Union. By 1850 the organisation had established over 100 schools for poor children. He helped both Florence Nightingale, founder of the nursing profession, and the philanthropist Dr Thomas Barnardo. Despite his reforming work, however, his opponents accused him of neglecting the labourers on his own estates.

The 7th Earl of Shaftesbury died on 1 October 1885.

### Appendix

"Boompin' Nell", a poem by A.J. Munby of 1887 (Victorian diarist, poet and barrister, 1828-1910)

*'Couldn't I work theer ageean Sir? I'd go as snug as I can;  
I'd cut my hair quite short, I would, and I'd dress mysen like a man.  
Why, I've gotten by breeches here, an my owd top coat an all,  
An I lay they suits me better, nor a Sunday bonnet and shawl;  
For my showthers is rare and broad, you see, an I never had much of a figure,  
An my hands is as hard as nails, look, an as big as a man's, or bigger;  
An' what is a woman's voice, when you shouts, but never speaks?  
An' my face 'ud be thick in coal dust, so they'd never notice my cheeks,  
An' the best of it is, I are tall, so they wouldna make much out o' me,  
If I once goes down like a man, Sir, why a man I can easy be.  
My mates 'ud know me, it's true; but they wouldna tell, not they!  
So, if you'll only let me, why I'll do it, straight away'.*

Alan Davies  
Heritage Officer (Archives)

### Acknowledgement

Thanks to Ian Winstanley of Ashton-in-Makerfield for access to his transcription of the Children's Employment Commission (Mines). Have a look at his excellent mining website [www.cmhrc.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.cmhrc.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

# SATURDAY MORNING

Saturday morning. No school! What more could a little lad want? Well, he could want not to be sent off to Allsop's, to queue for a rabbit for a start.

A measly rabbit!

This was in wartime days, everything was rationed, and folks took every opportunity to get something extra. Like a rabbit!

Well, when I say folks, I mean me, because nobody else in our family ever had to spend Saturday morning queuing for a rabbit!

And never a nice, sunny, warm Saturday morning! Always a freezing cold winter morning, when your nose was all runny, your hands lost all feeling, and your ears would have dropped off if anything just touched them.

All for a skinny rabbit!

Mind you, it was a very educational experience. For a start, you learned to recognise every single brick in Allsop's wall. Especially the bit that stuck out, so you couldn't avoid being exposed to the full fury of the elements for a good ten minutes while you got past the buttress. I only knew it was a buttress, because some boring History teacher told us castles had them to stop the walls falling down.

He never said nothing about them being put on shops so as little lads, who had never done anybody any harm, had howling hurricanes blowing up their pants legs. Right up to your waist if the pants were a bit big, having been bought to grow into.

And rain! It was just like it said in the Bible when they started building Arks. Only little lads didn't have any Arks, they just got witchert!

And for just standing there, being patient and fed up waiting for a rabbit, you could get in no end of bother.

There were always big ladies, (you would never have thought there was rationing, the size of them!), who were always going on about "Her." Her was some other lady whose identity you never knew, because she was always referred to furtively through pursed lips, and a heave of ample bosoms.

Then they would look at you, standing there all innocent, as though you were trying to listen, and you got the look. The one that turns little lads to stone, even if they don't understand what they can't help hearing.

Anyway, all the Yanks I ever met were really nice and gave you toffee and gum and nylons for your mam.

Usually, by the time you got turned to stone, you didn't really notice anyway because you were so frozen. In a way, being turned to stone with the look wasn't a bad thing. By then you were halfway along the queue, nearly past the buttress, where it got a bit warmer.

Mind you, when I was a little lad, nothing was ever gradely fair, and when you got past the buttress, there was no guttering, so all the water went down the back of your neck.

Eventually, it happened. You got nearly through the shop door. That's if they didn't suddenly decide there were no more rabbits!

I never did understand that, because the time we had been standing in the queue was plenty long enough for them to breed!

But, sometimes they said no more rabbits.

That was the worst possible thing that could happen! Then you had to walk the two miles back home, frozen, wet through, fed up and, of course, to blame!

Naturally it was your fault there were no more rabbits. You should have gone sooner, or you should have run to get there instead of walking, or you shouldn't have let people push in front of you in the queue.

But there were no people. They were all big ladies and if they pushed you, you stayed pushed.

Of course, you didn't always fail. Usually, you would get into the shop and slowly work your way round to the counter. Perhaps that's where you first learned to be terrified of big ladies.

Bessie, I think they called her! I didn't of course! I just tried to be very little so she wouldn't see me. She sat there, on a stool - well, half of her was on a stool, the other half was sort of free flowing - and she skinned the rabbit for you as you bought it. Great big hands, like shovels, got hold of these scrawny little rabbits and skinned them easier than I could take a pair of gloves off. If I'd ever had any gloves that is!

Still, once you had your rabbit, you could be on your way home. You would think that by now, you would be really looking forward to a rabbit feast.

Not me. By then I hated the rotten rabbits in a way only little lads know how to hate. Evil, venomous, hopeless!

Soon there would be the smell of the hot oven, and pastry being mixed, and eventually rabbit pie cooking. Now wouldn't you think, that when this pathetic little rabbit finally got chopped up into a pie, that it would be all lumpy?

But no! There were never any lumps in my bit. There was plenty piecrust and plenty dip, but I don't remember lumpy!

I suppose it was good - everything's good to hungry little lads who could manage it with the skin on if need be. But I never remember any lumps, and there must have been lumps.

Anyway, that was that, another Saturday morning gone. At least I would be able to go out and play for the afternoon, wouldn't I?

But that's another story!

Alan Lloyd  
Astley Nr Manchester





## Past Forward 'triggers a string of memories'

Dear Sir,

Being an avid read of *Past Forward* I always find some article or letter which triggers off a string of memories. None more so than Issue no. 34 (summer 2003)

I was born in Bryn, Ashton-in-Makerfield on 6 August 1929, and lived in Downall Green Road until 1957 when I left home to get married in 1957....exactly 46 years ago.

The photograph on the back page (bottom left) is Holy Trinity Church, Ashton....or as we kids knew it....'Downall Green Church, Rectory Road'. It was the 'mother' church of St. Peter's Church, Bryn Road, Bryn, which I attended. The minister at that time was Rector Hall. A well-known figure in the

area and one who visited our home quite often.

Re 'Childhood Revisited' by Harold J. Smith....I remember most vividly Mr. Waterhouse and his trains which to us kids was sheer magic. He lived approximately 500 yards away, and I remember spending many happy hours leaning on the fence and watching Mr. Waterhouse with his trains. I wonder if Harold J. Smith is the Harry Smith who lived a few doors away from us?

Re the short piece 'Better than Heaven' by K. Dutton from Billinge, yes, Wiggin Infirmary was somewhere better than heaven in those days. I trained as a student nurse there, 1954 to 1957, when I qualified as an S.R.N. Some of the happiest days of my life were spent there. I wonder if any of the girls in the same P.T.S. as myself remember me? My maiden name was Liptrot. Two people I vividly remember are Lilian Leverington and Lorraine Jones; Lilian lived in Scholes and Lorraine in Hindley. Who knows they may read *Past Forward* and remember....

Thank you for such an interesting magazine.

**Irene Riley  
Dunham Massey Cheshire**

## Wigan's wartime Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS)



This photograph was taken in 1940 opposite Tom Hughes's Cycle Shop in Wallgate, Wigan; the building was the Canal Co. offices. The room with sandbags round was the head Air Raid Warden's Post for Wallgate and Poolstock, covering the mills.

The fire engine was manned by the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) who were full time on shifts and slept at night in the room above the ARP Post. When Wigan fire engines from Chapel Lane Station went to relieve the Liverpool or Manchester firemen during the blitz this engine went up to Chapel Lane on standby. It was stationed at the Wigan Pier for the duration of the 1939-45

war. The warehouse on the left of the picture is now *The Way We Were* museum. The building on the right is now *The Orwell* Public House. The engine is parked where the Queen unveiled a plaque at the official opening of Wigan Pier in 1986.

The driver was George Day of Darlington Street, and for practising the engine was taken across the cobbled yard up to the edge of the Leeds and Liverpool canal.

The photograph was taken with a Kodak Baby Brownie camera (hawkeye model) given with the boys magazine *Modern World*.

**Alan Davenport  
Whitley Wigan**



Wigan Police Cricket Team, at Wigan Cricket Club in the early 1940's. Mrs. B.J. Berry of Eccleston, Chorley has kindly loaned this photograph. Her father, Jos. Leather, is standing third from right.

**From all at  
Wigan  
Heritage  
Service to all  
readers of  
*Past Forward*  
a Happy  
Christmas and  
a Prosperous  
New Year.**



## Earned respect of all in mining circles

Dear Editor,

Mrs. Tonge was quite right in assuming that the H.M.I. I worked with on dust suppression at Bold Colliery in the late 1950's was her father, Mr. William Challoner (ref. *Past Forward* 34, p39). During that short period I came to see him not as another stick for the back of officials but a person of wide experience, always willing to offer help and advice. He was never happier than when discussing mining problems and envisaging the industry's future.

I never failed to be amazed at his ability to draw a compar-

ison of a mining problem with something outside of mining. When hydraulic supports were introduced he remarked one day on their time-saving aspect. Seeing the questioning look on my face, he asked, "How many times do you have to hit a rigid support to put it in place?" Not having given the matter any thought I was unable to comment. He went on, "How many strokes of the razor do you have to make before you are clean shaven?" He pointed out that, apart from the long strokes, there were the innumerable little nicks one had to make. Similarly with rigid prop-setting. Apart from the large hammer blows there were the numerous little taps before the support was finally erected. I told that story many times afterwards to working miners and it was always received with nods of approval.

Mr. Challoner earned the respect of all in mining circles for the invaluable contribution he made to safety and health.

**James Fairhurst  
Ashton-in-Makerfield**

## FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE

Dear Editor,

I was introduced to *Past Forward* by a dear friend, liked it so much I became a subscriber.

In issue 34 (p42) there was a letter by Tom Silvester, who mentioned his sister Dorothy. I feel sure she is the little girl centre right, back row in the enclosed photograph; next to her is Irene Lavin.

The photograph was taken at a garden party held at the

Parish Church, Downall Green. The vicar at the time may have been the Rev. W.W. Williams. The girl second left front row was Joan Brownbill who sadly died shortly after.

I frequently visit Wigan for a walk about, and if I pass through Mesnes Park, for old times' sake I rub Mr. Powell's foot, and perhaps make a wish.

**E. Wilkinson  
(address supplied)**



## MADAME DORIS WOOD'S LIFE OF MUSIC

Dear Mr. Gillies,

Earlier in the year I wrote to you about a letter from A.E. Smith who was the nephew of Doris Westhead, better known perhaps to many people as Madame Doris Wood. You kindly sent my letter to Mr. Smith and we have since been in contact. We feel that Wigan folk would be interested in the highlights of Madame Doris Wood's life of music which tragically ended at the early age of 59

Doris Wood, leading lady of song in Wigan and, indeed, throughout the country, lived with her husband Bill Westhead in Coniston Park Drive, Standish, a few doors away from her married sister Mrs. Mary Fishwick with whom she had sung duets so many times.

For 43 years, from the age of 16 to her death, she was a staunch choir member of Standishgate Methodist Church and was a soloist at most special services. Her first 'Messiah' was with Wigan Choral Society. She returned as soloist with the society in several subsequent 'Messiahs' and performed the work on many occasions in various parts of the country. In lighter vein, she took part in productions by Wigan Amateur Operatic Society.

Although oratorio work was her first love, she had a vast repertoire of songs from shows. Among her wartime charity concert appearances, she sang with Bickershaw Colliery Band and at

Lancashire shows featuring Tommy Handley and Rawicz & Landauer. She was a great singer at celebrity concerts with Toni & his orchestra at Blackpool's North Pier and also at St. Annes Pier; she was accompanied by Horace Finch (Blackpool Winter Gardens organist) and Stanley Tudor (Manchester Gaumont cinema).

Perhaps the peak spots in her career, however, were attained at Bridge Methodist Church, Ratcliffe where, in 1947, she sang in 'Messiah' there with Isobel Baillie, Tom Phillips and George Allen; and in 1958 she appeared in the same work with Isobel Baillie, Hedde Nash and Owen Brannigan.

The march of time did not deter this fine artist. She retained her voice by disciplined practice. Her favourite modern show was 'The Sound of Music', the theme tune of which she often sang. At 59, her musical zest and enthusiasm were unbounded and her rich, mellow contralto voice still gave pleasure to all who listened.

I considered it a great honour and privilege to have accompanied her on several occasions at Rodney Street Church of Christ, Wigan and elsewhere.

Mr. Smith and I pay this affectionate tribute to Wigan's gifted musician who so freely gave her talent and delighted thousands of music lovers.

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

## I remember Roger Taylor

Dear Sir,

I was given a copy of *Past Forward* no. 33 and I remembered Roger Taylor c.1931 as a boy.

I wrote to Roger and he put me in touch with two boyhood friends, Leslie Seddon and Reggie Lamb - we all lived in Atherton Street in Wigan. Les, Reg and I have met and I visited Roger (in Lindsey) three weeks ago. Both Roger and I would like to contact Leslie Grundy (Platt Bridge c.1934) I was in the same class as Les and Roger and we worked together for a time.

In 1941 I joined the RAF with a Jack Taylor (ex Wigan G.S.) On the photo Roger sent to you is a J.E. Rigby - I wonder if they are the same. Jack lived at Crawford House in Appley Bridge.

I have just received *Past Forward* no. 34, and see that Roger's article has awakened even more memories.

**Geoff Yates  
Over Hulton Bolton**



## MYSTERY SOLVED

Dear Mr. Gillies,

When I wrote to you asking for readers of *Past Forward* to help with information about the two photographs of slabs found dumped in the Wigan area many years ago (issue no.34 p38) I was confident that, our readers and their contacts would come good.

Yesterday (18 September) I received a very informative let-

ter from a Mr. Chris Ward of Blackburn. It seems the coat of arms is that of our famous 'Man in the Park' Sir Francis Sharp Powell, and Mr. Ward suggests the location as the former Powell Museum, demolished to make way for the ring road.

I also wonder what happened to a smaller slab showing the Moot Hall emblem which was built into the gable end of the old porter's lodge at Wigan Infirmary (a picture of it can be seen in issue 23 p11 of *Past Forward*, as part of my story of "Wigan Infirmary in the Early Years"). I do know for a fact that it wasn't preserved by the hospital authorities at the time.

**Don Rayner  
8 Edale Drive  
Standish  
Wigan WN6 0LN**

# WRIGHTINGTON HALL

Dear Sir,

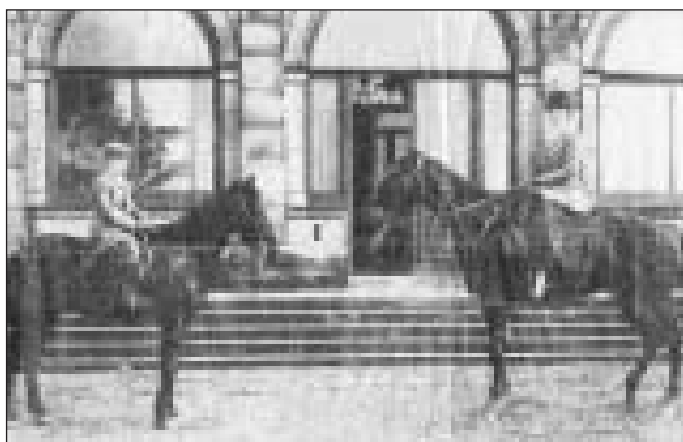
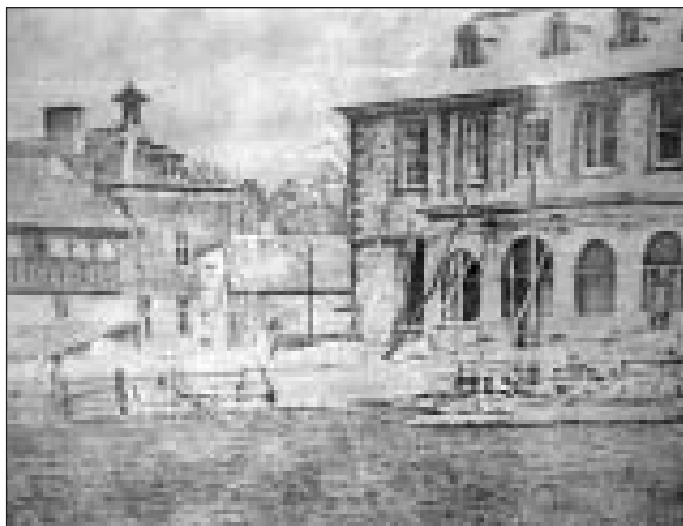
Please find enclosed two photographs of Wrightington Hall.

The picture of the Hall appears to have been taken during the restoration and re-building between 1860-62. The Old Hall is visible on the left, the Barn can be seen through the gap between the buildings and the porch appears to be in the middle of construction at the front of the New Hall. The extension has yet to be built.

The people featured in the 'Horses' picture are not known. Perhaps one of your readers will be able to identify them.

**David Roughley**

**Email: david@roughley.fsworld.co.uk**



## CAN ANYONE HELP?

Dear Sir,

I ask if the following conflict of memories can be satisfactorily resolved by your readers.

An elderly gentleman friend of mine (incidentally only located by me in Blackpool through a caption in *Past Forward!*) and I recollect that No. 1 pit, at the Maypole Colliery, had a main winding engine, at the top of the pit; halfway down the shaft, there was another electric winding engine that took a smaller cage to the Arley mine. In other words, a continuation of No. 1 shaft.

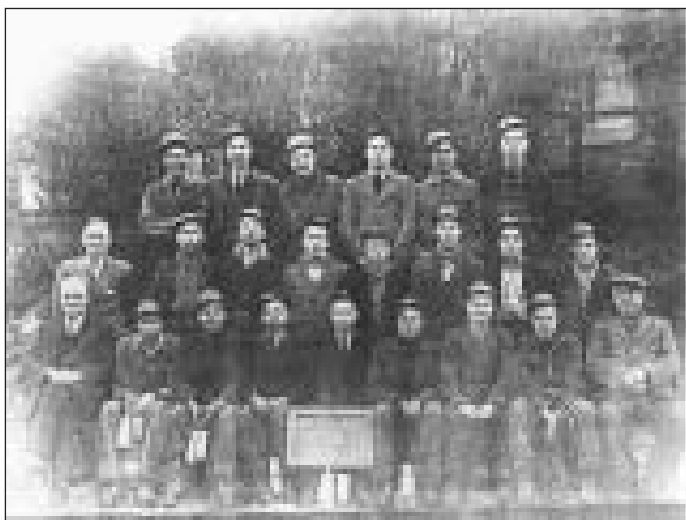
My cousin, however, who worked there from 1940 to 1949, has no recollection of this. No way can I convince him that this was in fact so. Can

anyone help?

I enclose a photograph of our N.C.B. training group, taken at Low Hall, Platt Bridge, in the spring of 1950. I am third from the left, back row. The only others I can remember are Benny Bennison, second from left, back row, (his parents were the licensees of the Bath Springs, near the Little Theatre), and John Lawless, who lived in the same locality (third left, front row).

**I should like to add that the publication of *Past Forward* is one of the best things that has happened in Wigan in modern times.**

**Albert Edward Short  
20 Geldof Drive  
Blackpool FY1 2AQ**



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

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# Who? Where?

There was a good response to last issue's Who? Where? – and particularly to the bottom right photograph. Although one or two thought it was Montrose Special School, the overwhelming verdict was for St. Cuthbert's Junior School, Thorburn Road, Norley Hall, Wigan (a number of readers identified the school by its distinctive water tower). Holy Trinity, Downall Green was a popular and firm identification for the church. Closer inspection of the posters in the top right photograph would suggest it is somewhere in Leigh. Nothing at all, however, for the house (top left).

I must apologise to Mr John Dootson, whose photograph appeared in Who? Where? in issue 33. Reference was mistakenly made to Mr Dootson's widow; however, I am delighted to confirm that reports of his death, in the words of Mark Twain, "have been greatly exaggerated". Mr Dootson is, in fact, alive and well, and living in 'glorious Devon'. As his son wittily remarked, "Is that our father which art in Devon?"

If you can identify any of this issue's photographs, please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942 40432).

