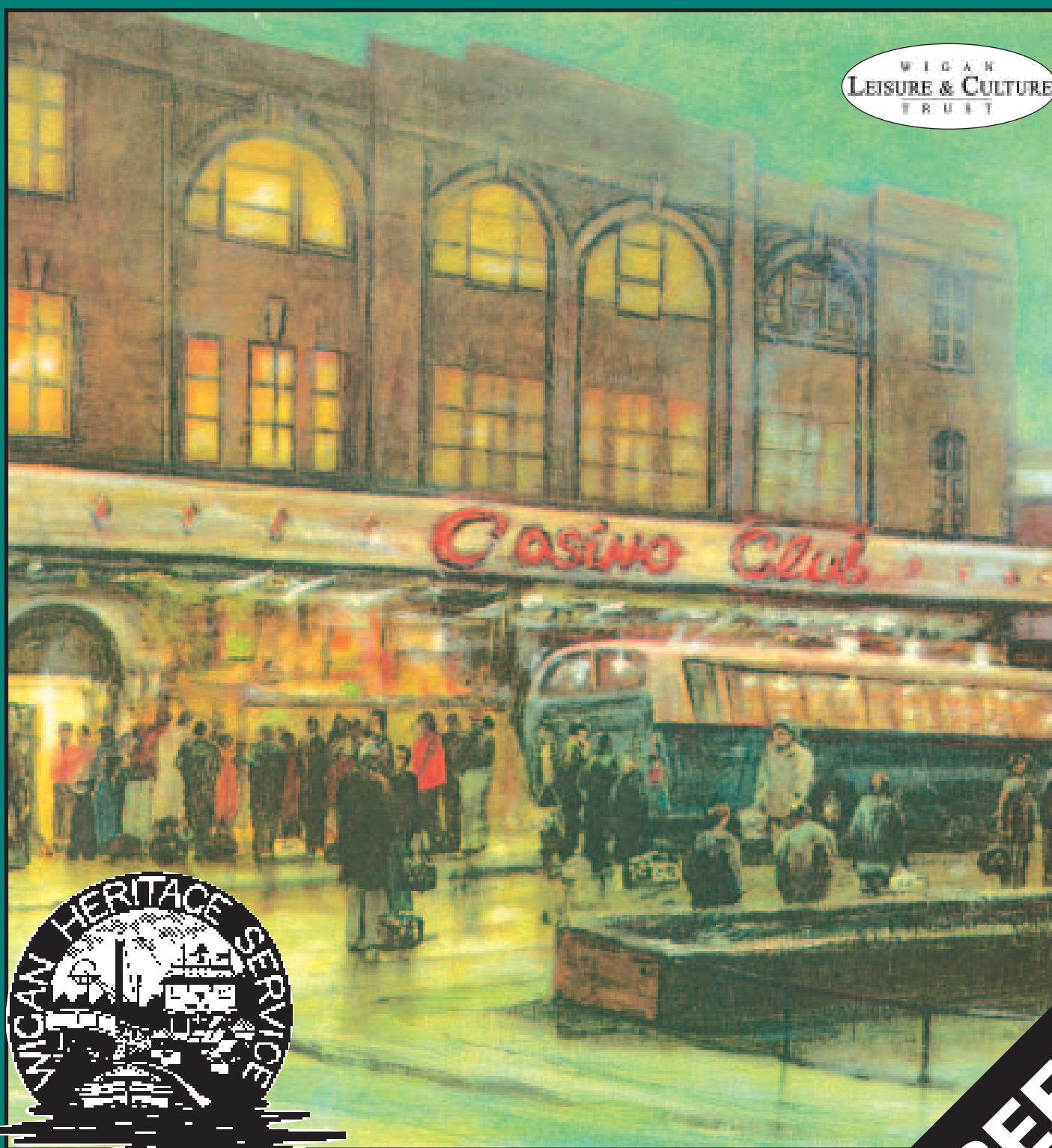


PAST FORWARD

Issue No. 37

July – November 2004



WIGAN
LEISURE & CULTURE
TRUST

Produced by Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

This edition of *Past Forward* reflects the many exciting things which are going on in the Heritage Service at the moment. There is an excellent exhibition programme for the rest of the year, for example, as you will see – and our new exhibition leaflet will be out very soon. You can also read about the increasing range of ventures in which our Friends have been engaged.

I would draw your attention to the questionnaire which appears in this issue – designed as a pull-out insert, as I know many of you treasure your copies of *Past Forward*, and don't wish to start tearing out pages. The purpose of this questionnaire is two-fold. Firstly, we would like to find out more about what you think about the magazine – although it has been a huge success and many of you write to tell me how much you enjoy it, I am sure there is still room for improvement. So here's your opportunity to have your say.

Secondly, we are asking questions about the Heritage Service itself, which we would like all users – and that includes those of you who have never actually visited our outlets but may have been in touch by email, letter or phone – to complete this. As an incentive to fill in the questionnaire, we will enter you in our prize draw. Apart from the information you send us being useful in itself, it will also be of great help to us as we move towards Charter Mark accreditation.

As you will see, this issue has a very definite emphasis on the War years – very fitting, in view of the recent 'D' Day commemorations. Which brings me to a very special 'D' Day baby – Barbara Miller was born on that very day, and 60 years later she has just taken her leave of us. We will miss her greatly.

I hope you enjoy this bumper issue of *Past Forward*, and that you all have a wonderful summer – when it eventually arrives!

COPY DEADLINE

Please note that the copy deadline for issue no 38 of *Past Forward* is 1 October 2004.

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:
Editor, 'Past Forward',
Wigan Heritage Service, Observer Buildings,
Wood Street, Wigan WN3 4ET
Email: a.gillies@wlct.org

Retirement at the History Shop

BARBARA MILLER, Heritage Assistant, retired on 6 June. It was a memorable day for her. Not only was it the beginning of a new and exciting stage in her life, but also her 60th birthday (I am sure she will not mind that revelation!) and of course, she was a 'D' Day baby!

Many of you will have met her on the reception desk at the History Shop, and been impressed by her knowledgeable, friendly and efficient



manner. If she could not answer your query herself, she always knew someone who could.

Barbara joined the then Wigan Museum Service at Wigan Pier in 1985 and, I am glad to say, remained with us through our transformation into Wigan Heritage Service and the development of the History Shop. In the past, she not only undertook a variety of clerical duties for us, but also spent many hours working on the museum collections, helping to make them more accessible.

On her last day at work, we all had a good laugh reminiscing about old times. It made us realise what a valuable colleague we were losing. However, her plans for the future (after a period enjoying her new found leisure time!) include voluntary work, hopefully at the History Shop. So, we wish her a happy retirement, and look forward to welcoming her back!

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

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

Opening hours: Mon 10.00 -7.00; Tues - Fri 10.00-5.00; Sat 10.00-1.00

Archives

Town Hall Leigh WN7 2DY. Tel: 404430 (general enquiries). Fax: 404425

Opening hours: Tues-Thur 10.00 - 4.30 (by appointment)

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

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Stephanie Tsang – 828128

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Len Hudson – Senior Technician & Photographer – 404432

Terry Meehan – Museum Technician

Cover: From one of local artist David Barrow's splendid paintings of Wigan Casino (see opposite). From October, David will have his own website - www.davidbarrowpaintings.com

Events and Activities

For details of all our future events see the *What's On* booklet published by Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust and available throughout the borough, or check our web site www.wlct.org. For further information about events and activities contact the History Shop on 01942 828128. For Education and Outreach service please contact: Claire Hawkins, Heritage Officer (Community Outreach & Education) on 01942 828124 or email c_hawk@wlct.org.

Northern Soul

Don't miss our forthcoming exhibition *Wigan Casino – The Heart of Soul* which opens in October. It will tell the tale of the impressive Empress Ballroom on Station Road from its opening in 1915 through the war years and the bands of the 1950's and 1960's. The sprung maplewood dance-floor was home to generations of young dancers.

The exhibition features wonderful paintings by local artist David Barrow (see cover) plus stories and memorabilia from soul fans who were there at Wigan's famous Allnighters between 1973 and 1981. Why not come and add your memories about the Casino Club, or the building's previous incarnation as the *Emp*, to our memory book.

Photo Identification Session 25 August

If you have old photographs at home, why not show them to our photographic expert, Len Hudson and ask his advice. Len can tell you how to date and look after your family photographs. Drop in to the History Shop (Library Street, Wigan) on Wednesday 25 August anytime between 2 and 4pm.

Photographic Fun

Come and visit the Victorian photographer's studio in our new exhibition *The Family Album*, where you can dress up like a Victorian and pose for a family portrait. Please bring your own camera.

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E-mail: enquiries@heritage-estatesuk.com
Contact: Richard Weston

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

Wigan on the Map – on now at the History Shop

A highly colourful and creative 'map' (28 giant panels featuring embroidered, painted and knitted images) made by community groups from all over Wigan Borough to celebrate the new Millennium. The images reflect the best loved aspects of each area, whether it is the local church, pub, legends or community organisation.

Talks and tours available by advanced booking for groups and societies (tel: 01942 828128).



Free Family Fun at the History Shop

After a very successful first year of Family Fun activities, attended by nearly 400 participants over the year, the History Shop is continuing to run these sessions, which will be even bigger and better! Family activities run on most Wednesdays during school holidays. Sessions are free and the finished product can usually be taken home.

The activities have become so popular that it is now advisable to book a place in advance. Families are still welcome to turn up on the day, but we cannot guarantee everyone a place without prior booking. Activities start at 2pm and 3pm and last about an hour. All children **must** be accompanied by an adult.

Wednesdays 28 July, 4 August, 11 August, 18 August
Sessions at 2pm and 3pm

Phototastic

Linked to our exhibition *The Family Album*, arts and crafts sessions for families with children aged 5-12 years.

Continued on page 4

Events and Activities

Continued from page 3

Free Family Fun at the History Shop

Wednesday 27 October

Sessions at 2pm and 3pm

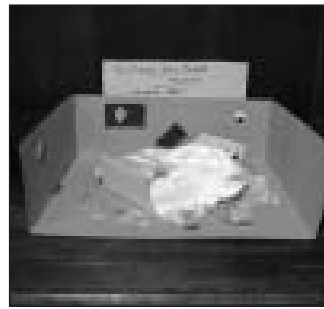
Wigan Casino - with artist Gaye Chorlton

Make your very own miniature northern soul dancer!

To book your place call 01942 828128. Admission FREE

For details of the sessions see our leaflets or website www.wlct.org. **All children must be accompanied by an adult.**

Over Whit half term holiday, families made their own miniature museums, which are on display as part of the *Far Flung Places* exhibition at the History Shop until 17 July (see right).



Exhibitions at the History Shop

We are currently planning our exhibition programme for 2005 and through to August 2006; we will let you know about it as soon as it is finalised. Meanwhile our current season goes on.

New exhibition leaflet

Look out for our new exhibition leaflet, which is due out in July. It has the handy 'how to find us' map, our telephone numbers and email and web addresses. This will take us to the end of 2004.

Far Flung Places

This exhibition, on until 17 July, showcases some of the objects from foreign climes in the museum and archive collections on the theme of travel. Most of them were brought back by local people who lived and worked in the foreign territories of the British Empire. There are Egyptian items from the Sir John Scott Collection, African tribal items from the Kerfoot and Mrs Hopkins Collections and seashells from the South Seas collected by an 18th century adventurer from the Bankes family. You can also look at a selection of mini-museums made by local children, and make your own postcards, which we will display.

The Family Album 2 August – 25 September

A feast of photography! For those of you who are passionate about photography, do not miss it! This is a series of three exhibitions, which showcases our own collection and highlights the talent we have within the borough. We open with a look at family photographs from Victorian times to the present. All those milestones in our daily lives will be there, such as the christening, first class in school, summer holidays and the wedding. You will also be able to see the development of the family photograph from the posed studio portrait (when

photography was expensive) to the more relaxed photos with which we are familiar today, as technology and price have made it easier for us to own our own cameras. We then move on to the annual exhibition of Wigan Photographic Society, and end with the annual exhibition of Atherton Photographic Society. You will also be able to see Victorian camera equipment, pose for your own photographs and bring photographs in for identification. More details of this from our Community Outreach and Education Officer, Claire Hawkins (tel: 01942 828124).

Wigan Casino: The Heart of Northern Soul

11 October – 19 February 2005

Our final exhibition of the year. This exhibition explores and celebrates the history of a local dance hall credited by many as the birthplace of Northern Soul. Built in 1915 the building firstly named the Empress Ballroom (known in Wigan as the *Emp*) became world famous in its later incarnation as Wigan Casino. From 1973 to the early 1980's the scene was massive, with soul fans travelling across the country for the regular "Allnighters". Dancers from the Casino appeared on *Top of the Pops*, American musicians jetted in especially to perform and the venue won the accolade "best disco in the world" from the American music magazine *Billboard*. Eventually demolished in 1982, Wigan Casino is now the subject of books, paintings, a touring play, regular articles in the press and television documentaries. Soul DJs and their network of fans continue to "keep the faith" with many events, fanzines and radio programmes. Many local people have memories of the "Allnighters", the atmosphere, the unique style of dancing, the record traders, and the rare 1960's soul records re-discovered for a new audience.

Yvonne Webb
Collections Development Manager

A Family Business in Wigan

WILLIAM Lonsdale went into business as a grocer at 52 School Lane, Wigan, c. 1913. In the early 1920's he went into partnership with a Mr. Goodier as egg and cheese merchants; they would travel around farms in

the Preston, Chipping, Ribchester and Longridge areas, buying eggs and cheese, and bringing them back to their premises in Crompton Street, Wigan for resale in the local shops and markets in Wigan, Warrington,

Widnes, St. Helens and even as far away as Southport. On the death of Goodier, Lonsdale took over the business and ran it as "Lonsdale & Sons" with his three sons, Edward, John and Joseph.

During World War II the firm was stopped from collecting eggs from the local farms due to petrol rationing, but continued in business by purchasing eggs from Northern & Southern Ireland. After the war Lonsdales went back to farm collections. They also sold turkeys and chickens at Christmas; in the early days, these came in crates from Ireland, still feathered, so that they had to be plucked and cleaned before sale. In 1953 the firm moved into new premises in Silver

Street, Wigan.

The Egg Marketing Board came into being in 1957, from which time all eggs had to be checked and stamped with the little lion brand at Silver Street before sale to local shops. The business ceased trading in 1969.

John Lonsdale, who has provided me with this information, has deposited his family archive of photographs (some of which are reproduced here) with Wigan Heritage Service for safe keeping; it is a valued collection, illustrating as it does a local business within the borough. John still lives in his hometown of Wigan.

Len Hudson
Senior Technician
Wigan Heritage Service



The Lonsdale family, School Lane



Crompton Street premises



Some early Lonsdale & Sons vehicles



Goodier egg collecting

MEMORIES

by
Tom Unsworth (1899-1981)

I MUST start from leaving St. George's school, when I was nearly 13 years old. My father took me to an iron works but they could not start my apprenticeship till I was 14 years old. I got a temporary job in property repairs at 5s. per week. At that time my aunt was housekeeper to the Rev. Canon Lloyd at St. Michael's, (if ever there was such a thing as saints on this earth, he was one).

Prestatyn

Although I was a St. George's boy, I had to go to St. Michael's Sunday school every Sunday morning and afternoon. As I could not go away for a holiday I joined the Church Lad's Brigade. On my second annual camp at Prestatyn the war started and the Post Office messengers began to call with call-up papers for several officers and men, among them the two sons

of the Rev. James of Haigh, a camper with us. I must say here that he eventually lost four sons and I believe one daughter in the war. What a blow for a grand fellow to bear.

A Wigan Family

Three generations of the Unsworth family traded as butchers in Coopers Row in the Wiend, before Thomas Unsworth, our Granddad, moved to 52 Greenough Street, turning down the opportunity to go into partnership with Mark Williams, another well-known name in butchering circles. The family remained there until the shop was demolished.

Thomas had three sons, Richard, Thomas (our father) and Robert, but a fortnight after his daughter Elizabeth (Lily) was born in 1903, his wife died suddenly. Thomas wooed his sister-in-law, but at that time church law would not permit a man to marry his deceased wife's sister. Things were left as they were and he later married a strict nonconformist lady who brought up the three boys. An amusing story was told of Thomas's new horse which, on the Sunday afternoon outing, insisted on calling at every public house in Wigan Lane, pulling the trap from one side of the road to the other, in spite of Thomas's efforts to keep them on the straight and narrow!

Here are, in his own words, the experiences of Tom, the middle son and our father, of life in the army.

**Jean Bates (nee Unsworth)
Gordon Unsworth**

Drill Hall

When we came home the Drill Hall in Powell Street was alive with men reporting for duty. It made us laugh seeing the men

half dressed as soldiers. I was thrilled when a party of us was asked to do a bit of duty at the railway station. They put us at each end of the platforms, and from 7.00pm till 9.00pm for the next week or two we had to keep a watch on the points and lines, to make sure that nobody tampered with them as the troop trains came rushing south. I was a train spotter then and it gave me chance to get the names and numbers of the engines as they went by.

One Monday in February 1918 I called at the recruiting office and joined up. This is where I jump out of the frying pan into the fire, as I hope to tell you later. The chap said, "Be here for 9.00am sharp to-morrow".

A nice man!

There were about 10 of us, and we were taken to a school in Bolton where there were a lot of chaps walking about with white coats on. I found out they were doctors and we were told to strip off everything, so there we were in our birthday suits. I was embarrassed at first but as you walked about you thought nothing of it.

At about 4.00pm a sergeant took 12 of us out and we got on a tram to Wellington Barracks at Bury. There was a very smart sergeant with a smashing big moustache. He was a nice chap and asked us if we had had any tea. When we said no he took us to a dining room which was as clean as a new pin. When we had finished, he asked us if we had had enough.

Then we thought a bomb had dropped. He bawled at us to get our coats off and we had to get



Thomas Unsworth's butchers shop at 52 Greenough Street

pails of water and scrub the tables again. As if that was not enough, he kicked a bucket over and made us mop it up. He was a nice man! He then took us to an office and we were paid the King's shilling for joining up and a shilling for the day's pay. On the Saturday morning he took us to Bury Station and got our tickets for London. Those who had not far to travel were told, they could go home, but to be at Manchester station for midnight on Sunday.

6d. a day!

After various tests to see if we knew anything about engines, I finished up at a place called Grove Park, a big place with massive gates. While there they put me on a lathe in the work shop and I had to make a nut and bolt and put the threads on. Anybody who had worked on a lathe could do that. I was proud of the one I made. I had to take it to a young officer. Then he gave me a little tapered connecting rod, and asked me how I would set the headstock to give me that taper. I told him and he said, "That is a fine idea. I haven't heard that one before". He asked me how old I was and if I was A1. He said he would send me on instruction for six weeks to show me the army way.

I found out later that there was a row going on in Parliament about sending soldiers overseas before they were 19. As I was 18, this is why I had to go to school. If I had passed I still couldn't go to France, and they would have to pay me proficiency pay in England. That would have been 2s. 2d. a day. On instruction my pay was 1s. a day but I had to allot half of it to my mother. You will not believe me when I tell you my pay was 6d. a day, 3s. 6d. a week!

We had church parade on Sundays when we had to clean up. Just before we marched off he would tell all the R.C.s to fall in

behind the parade and the Methodists fall out. I was always a Methodist because we marched off in another direction to the Y.M.C.A. where we had tea and a sing song!

Then I was sent to Mottingham, a little village about a mile from Grove Park. There we did our drill and gas drill. We would be playing football in a field and, just as we were going to kick the ball, a smoke bomb would land at our feet. We had to stop to put on our gas masks and kick the ball with our gas masks on.

Armistice

I was 19 on 7 November 1918, four days before armistice. We thought something was in the air because the officers and sergeants started taking the magnetos off all the lorries and cars so that you couldn't start up a vehicle. Then they told us about the armistice. Everybody went mad. The bus used to turn back near Grove Park, but one of our drivers got in the driver's seat and we all climbed on. We finished up on the tram lines in Beresford Square, Woolwich with no petrol, so we left it there. The work people were coming out of Woolwich Arsenal and you

couldn't stir for people dancing and singing; and there were some drunks.

Straight away after, they passed me out and sent me to Salisbury Plain. I was happy because I was on 2s.2d.a day. It was the overseas depot for the Army Service Corps (motor transport). It was then that I had my first leave; I had been in the army about 10 months. I had four and a half days draft leave, was half a day late getting back and was fined two days pay and two days Royal Warrant, six days pay altogether.

France

We were told that we were going to France. They marched us to the station, but when we got to Dover, it was too rough for us to sail, so we marched up to Dover Castle - a good job too because the dinner was doped, and we all had diarrhoea at the same time. What a sight to see!

Looking out to sea from the castle a battleship was on the skyline. Big waves kept holding it up, and we could see the outline of the propeller, then the whole ship would disappear before rising up again. However, the order came that we had to sail, and we were marched to a very old

paddle steamer. It was so rough that we had to go below deck. We were so packed that it was like being in an oven. The order came that everybody had to go on deck, because there was a floating mine, and the crew on the bridge were firing at it to try and explode it. Then the firing had to stop because the mine was getting too near the boat. It was very exciting, because one minute it would be on top of a wave, and when it went down it would come up somewhere else.

Eventually we arrived at Calais and were taken to a depot. Not being like the infantry, we were not regimented. I, with three others, was sent to Dunkirk to the 48th Division. They had been out since 1915 and were the finest set of chaps you could wish to meet. We were on the canal bank in half round huts, and we had all made ourselves bunks with wood and canvas.

The blacksmith was a big Irish man. I couldn't weigh him up, for during the day he would do anything for me, but when he came in at night, always last, he made for my bed and tipped it up! The electrician, who was in our

Continued on page 8



The Unsworth family on the occasion of Richard Unsworth's wedding

WEER ARE T' GOOIN'?

by Ernest Ford

'WEER are t' gooin'?' said Sam crossing the road to meet his boozing companion Ted. 'I reckon uz I'm gooin to t' same watterin hole uz thee' replied Ted. 'Tha knows our landlord is nor in a good mood ut present.'

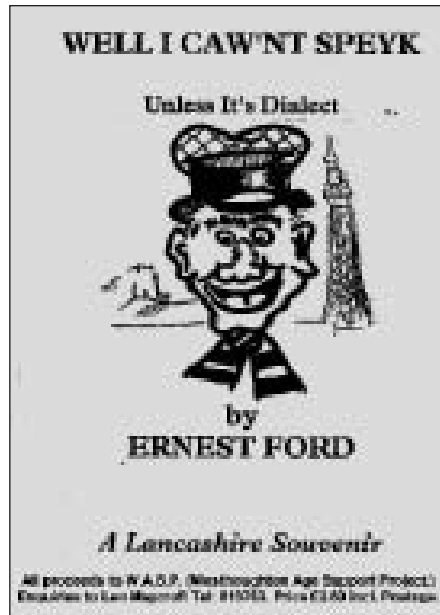
'Oh aye? Un heaw dust mek that eawt?'

'It wer last neet' went on Ted. 'He's nor happy wi t' law ut awe'l. Oh noww, nor happy ut awe'l.' The ears of his friend pricked up because he also had reason to be unhappy with the law.

'Tha sees,' said Ted. 'Bobby Simpson wer on duty last neet un this chap cum racing like a bat eawt uv hell un wer beawnt rush past him.'

'Did he poo him up?' said Sam. 'He did un awe'l' his mate remarked, 'un wen t' bobby asked wor he wer dooin runnin like the clappers he sed ' I'm racing this mon fer a pint.' Bobby looked back and saw the landlord running excitably.

'I caw'nt see owt wrung wi that'



Ernest Ford's new book. Enquiries to Len Maycroft (01942 818763)

said Sam. 'Anyroad, wen t' landlord raced up to t' bobby he said 'wor has't let yon mon go fer?'

'Oh,' said bobby Simpson. 'He sed uz he wer racin thee fer a pint.'

'He wer,' said the landlord. 'Tha sees, he's not paid fer that pint!'

'Tha knows its a funny thing fert play abeawt wi is t' law' Ted gave a huge puff at his pipe. 'Its funny in moower ways than one,' came the reply. 'Theres awe'l soarts of ins un eawts. Jargon, I think uz they caw it. Aye .. legal jargon!.'

'Owd mon,' said Sam. 'Tha must o' geet up early this mornin. Legal jargon eh? Tha's not bin eytin college puddin or owt. Tha't sharper than t' knife uz tha cuts thi bacca with. Un wot legal jargon cums to t' top o' thi yed neaw?'

'Well,' Ted gave a bigger sweel upon his pipe before answering. He looked along the lane to the church who's clock began to chime. 'If,' said Ted, un I only meeun *if* I took a hommer un smashed yon clocks face, would I be arrested fer killing time?'

Sam thought for a while before

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MEMORIES

Continued from page 7

hut, said he would cure him. We had electric lights in our huts and think they were connected to the tram wires. The electrician did something to the switch, put banks of earth under the floor boards, and then put some water on the floor. When Paddy was getting into bed he had to switch the light out. He swore at the water on the floor, but as soon as he touched the switch it sent him flying. There was no sleep at night. There were 14 of us in the hut and it took us all to hold him down.

Tins of cigs

As the young troops who had signed on for three years kept arriving at Dunkirk they marched past

our place, and our Sergeant Major didn't half make fun of them. He was a little fat fellow with several rows of medal ribbons, but he was one of the lads. You wouldn't know he was a warrant officer. I was playing football one evening in January or February 1919, and as we sat down to rest, two soldiers were there, one of whom came from Wigan. He said they had no money or cigs. We always had cigs and tobacco because our driver carted the stuff from the ship to the canteen, and cigs in tins of 50 kept falling off the lorry, so we were well supplied with them. I gave them a tin each; they would have given me a gold pig if they had one.

(Before I leave off that story, I was at a Masonic dinner in 1944 when a man came up to me and asked if I knew him. It turned out to be that Wigan soldier to whom I had given the cigs. His name

was Bert Robinson and he lived in Rose Avenue, Beech Hill. His wife and mine became firm friends. He was a librarian at the Carnegie Library in Pemberton.)

When the 48th division was sent home to be demobbed, I was on my own. Eventually I was sent to the light division at Munchen Gladbeck in Germany. When we arrived in Germany, we received an extra 1s. a day victory pay and 1s. occupation pay, giving me 4s.2d. a day. I was a millionaire, and as the Mark kept falling the rate of exchange gave us more money still. As it was only armistice and not proper peace till about 12 months later, we could travel on the street cars and railway for nothing.

At this point the narrative ends because of the strain on our father's eyesight. We

know that he travelled across Germany by train to be present as part of a peace keeping force when Danzig became a free city. The train was met by Paderewski, the famous pianist and Prime Minister of Poland, and a band playing 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary', mistaking it for the British national anthem! He spoke of the hatred shown by the Germans as they passed through.

He came home to unemployment and the necessity to use his initiative to earn a living. His father lent him £25 to buy a lorry and he started carrying meat from Liverpool market for the butchers of Wigan. As this only occupied one day a week, he would scrub his lorry so that he could then load it with coal and carry on his business as a coal dealer. He carried coal on his back to enable both his children to attend university, and his reward was his pride in their academic achievements.

thinking of an answer. 'Are t' serious Ted. Tha could'nt reych it in t' fust place.'

'Well, wot dust think?' In an instant Sam found an answer. 'If I wer t' judge I'd let thee awf!' Ted was amazed that his friend had formed an answer in such a short time. 'Un wot would bi thi reason fer lettin me awf?'

'Because t' clock struck fust! Sam replied.

'They would'nt catch me annyroad, Ted said. 'I yerd t' verger se uz they'd be away fer some time.' He raised his cap and wiped away the sweat.

'Weer hev they gone to?' Sam wanted to know. 'The vatican' came the reply.

'Oh aye. Not bad eh, not bad ut awe'l. Did they say if they'd be in t' lounge or in t' bar?'

'He's a queer un is yon mon. Does t' know uz he's naer spokken to his wife fer nine months'.

'Aye un I think uz I know why' Sam helped the conversation. 'Its because he's fret'nt of interuptin her! He owt o' done like I did wen I geet wed. I laid t' law deawn straight away. Tha should start thi wedded life same road uz th meeuns fert carry on. Put thi foot deawn wi a firm hond.'

'Un wot did *tha* do uz is wuth thi pattin thisel on t' back?'

'Me,' went on Sam 'I geet up early on t' fust mor n un took her up a tray wi a plate o bacon and eggs, toast, marmalade and a pot o' tae.'

'I thowt tha wer beawnt teych her some soart o' lesson.'

'I did' said Sam. 'Tha's not leet mi finish mi tale yo gow yed! I wer beawnt tell thi uz her wer fain gloppent un tha should o' seen her eyes.'

'Oh aye,' said his inquisitive friend. 'I'd rayther o' seen um on t' neet afore.'

Sam went on with his tale of how a gradely mon would set out to tame a wife. 'Her stretched eawt on seein wor I'd fotched her un sed by gow that looks reet wonderful. Oh aye, its reet .. reet wonderful. I sed I know that owd lass ... un thats heaw I wantt thi fert do *my* brekfust every mornin!'

'My honeymoon wer summat of a puzzle. Tha sees I wanted fert pleeus her.'

'Un so tha should' Sam replied. 'Heaw does't meeun tha wanted fert do?'

'I towd her after t' honeymoon uz I felt like a new mon un does t'

know wor her sed?'

'Noww,' Sam looked curious.

'Her gi me a funny look un said, *so do I!*'

'Howd mon I think uz I'd tek that as a bit o' an insult.'

'Insult is purrin it a bit on t' mild side. It took mi sum time fert ger oer it I con tell thi,' Ted replied. 'Does t' know ... tha t' fust mon uz I've ever towd that to.'

'I con believe thi' Sam comforted him. 'I'd be ashamed un all. Why, its a slorr on thi manhood I con tell thi. Thi secrets safe wi me ... ut least until I get wom.' Sam decided to change the tone of the conversation because he could tell that this confession was making Ted uncomfortable. 'Is it reet uz tha wer in t' R.A.F?' They both turned to move up the lane leading to their favourite watering hole, that being The Red Lion.

'Aye its reet awl reet. They cawd uz t' brylcreme boys bur they would'nt hev if they hed seen me fust. Tha sees, I wer heawf bawd wen I wer cawd up.'

'It ud be wi worryin abeawt thi caw up,' Sam suggested. 'I worried abeawt mine bur I did'nt o' needed to. Tha sees, I did'n pass, wi me feet.'

'Tha would'nt o' passed beawt um,' his pal wanted to make light of the conversation. 'I know wot tha meeuns . *Flat!* Tha would'nt be t' fust un uz failed wi that.'

'I wanted fert go tha knows,' Sam protested. 'There's noan o' uz cowards in our family. Well, noan uz I know uv.'

'It's different in our family .. I think. I have an uncle who fowt like fury in t' last war.'

'Tha did, un he did?' Sam asked.

'Aye, I con honestly say that,' Teds voice lowered. 'But he still had t' go!'

'Wer there owt interestin happened while tha wer in t' R.A.F.? There must o' bin sommat.' Ted thought hard before replying.

'Fust time uz we wer tan up in an aeroplane we wer cawd being instructed heaw fert use a parachute.'

'Owd mon,' Sams ears pricked up and he took a different shade of colour because in fact he wasand always had been scared of flying. 'Heaw did it go fer thi?'

'Not ut awe'l good ut awe'l' Ted continued his tale. 'Wen we'd bin in t' air abeawt heawf an heawr t' instructor towd meto go to t' big box ut back ut plane un fotch a parachute fer each o' me mates.'

'Wot wer wrung then? Had yo gone beawt um or sommat?'

'Noww,' said Ted. 'I did as I wer towd bur I wernt happy ut awe'l so I fotched t' instructor to t' back ut plane fert show him wor I'd discovered.'

'Neaw this does seawnd interesting if tha does'nt mind mi seyin so. Wot did t' do wen tha fotched yon mon fert hev a look ut a box wi nowt but parachutes in it?'

'He wer glad uz I'd took t' trouble because wen I lifted t' box wot does t' think wer written underneath it?'

'Heaw do I know,' protested Sam. 'Wot wer written underneath it?'

'OPENS ON IMPACT, Ted waited to see the impact on his friends face before giving a loud guffaw.

'I owt o' known uz tha wer cookin up sommat daft,' Sam blushed 'Neaw thee listen ter this un I'm tryin fert get thi conversation back on an even keel. Tha knows that verger uz we mentioned earlier on.'

'Aye,' said Ted. 'Wer it me uz mentioned him or thee?'

'Onnyroad, he wer tellin me uz his dad deed in 1948. I know uz theres nowt pleasant in that but tha sees, he knew uz he wer beawnt dee!'

'Heaw did he know that ? Did a fortune teller tell him or sommat?'

'Fortune teller did'nt tell him,' Sam said. 'It wer t' judge!'

'Judge? Had he bin a nowty lad then? asked Ted.

'Tha's guessed it in one,' Sam puffed like mad upon his pipe. 'He confessed to 2 murders on his death bed' Then he recovered.'

'Neaw thats wor I caw bad luck. Con t' smell yonder hay in t' feelt. If theres one thing uz I like its smell o' knew cut grass.'

'I like smell o' weshin un new baked bread.'

'Has t' geet a sensitive nose fer smells?' Ted asked.

'Aye un I'll tell thi uz I wished uz I had'nt, replied Sam.

'Heaw does t' meeun,' Ted wanted to know. 'It's one ut pleasent senses uz we've bin gifted wi. I dont know weer we'd be beawt sense o' smell.'

'A seet happier,' said Sam. 'Ut leeust in heawr heawse because it smells lowsey. Its because of our Mary's husband who's cum fert live wi uz. He reads a lot tha sees un he's seen in this book uz best road fert keep flys eawt ut kitchen is fert but a bucket of manure in t' lounge.'

'Thats rayther strange' said Ted but con t' not oppen t' windows?'

'Tha wot?' replied his friend, 'un let awe'l mi pigeons eawt !!'

WILLIAM THOMAS MILLER (1880-1963)

Pit Deputies Leader and Nonconformist

BORN on 21 July 1880 in Loch Street, Lamberhead Green, Orrell near Wigan, was the first child of Simon William Miller, a second generation coalminer, and Juliet Lever, a powerloom weaver and coalminers' daughter. The troubled industrial conditions of the 1881 Lancashire miners strike led the family to move, first to Rainford, and shortly afterwards to the mining village of Platt Bridge, where Miller lived for 40 years until he was appointed a full time trade union official. His mother died aged 30 in 1885, when Miller was five years old. His father remarried, to Martha Taylor, and they had a further seven children – making a family of eleven.

Miller was educated at St Peter's, Low Green, Church of England School (later St Nathaniel's), Platt Bridge up to his 12th birthday, when he commenced work underground as a pony driver at Bamfurlong Colliery No2 pit of Cross, Tetley and Company, working a 12 hour-day, 6 day-week. Two years later, he joined his father, by now a Deputy, at Wigan Junction Colliery, and worked there until the age of 16, when he went as a miner to the No3 pit of Cross, Tetley and Company.

Church of Christ

On 6 November 1901, he married Annie Phelps, the daughter of a miner who had migrated to Platt Bridge from the declining Forest of Dean coalfield, at Rodney Street 'Christian Meeting House', Wigan. The following year he moved to Mains No2 pit with the same firm, filling coal from the machine face of the Trencherbone Mine.

Simon Miller had been a stalwart of the Churches of Christ in Wigan, a nonconformist movement to restore 'Primitive' New Testament Christianity. The Church had come to Wigan in 1841, at the initiative of Thomas Coop, a local manufacturer, and in 1858 the Rodney Street 'Christian Meeting House' had opened in the centre of town.

Policemen of the mines

From an early age, Miller was an active member and trustee of the Bamfurlong Branch of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, 'being attracted to the movement first of all by the personality of Mr Harry Twist JP'. Like several other Lancashire mining leaders Samuel Woods [see *Past Forward* 32, p8 Ed.] and John Allen



W T Miller OBE, 1880-1963

Parkinson, Miller shared Twist's nonconformist background.

In 1903, Miller became Assistant Fireman at Wigan 4th Mine, which commenced his lifelong vocation, and led him to study for a Shotfirers Certificate at Wigan Mining College. At this stage, the role of the modern Pit Deputy was just emerging from a number of supervisory positions, variously described as Firemen, Examiners and Deputies. The legislative history of the position was bound up from the outset with mining safety, a concern with which pervaded virtually all Miller's public utterances. The 1887 Mines Act required the appointment of 'competent persons' to make mine inspections, though the standard of competency was left for the manager to decide. The 1911 Coal Mines Act further required a Certificate of Competency, and hearing and eye tests every five years. Workplace inspections were increased from once to twice a shift. Finally it was stipulated that the Deputy devoted his time in full to these statutory duties, except when involved in firing shots or measurement of the work done. Thus Deputies became, to use Miller's 1927 phrase, safety 'policemen of the mines'. They gained full statutory status for the first time, laying the basis for a growing sense of identity in the union organisation. Of equal importance to Miller's later life, the Act also provided for union representatives and others to attend and question witnesses at inquests after a death in the mine.

This was a time when the employment situation in the Lancashire coalfield was difficult, so in 1906 he

emigrated to Cape Breton, Canada with a party of about 16 'Christian Brethren' to work as a collier for the Nova Scotia Coal and Steel Company at Queens Pit, Sydney Mines. His wife, however, would not follow for fear of the transatlantic crossing and the family remained in Wigan. Miller returned in 1908, and resumed his position as a Pit Deputy at Cross Tetleys Ltd, and his part in the Lancashire Deputies organisation.

General Secretary

In March 1914, Miller became President and Chairman of Executive of Lancashire and Cheshire Colliery Deputies; a position which he held, until August 1922, when he was appointed full time General Secretary of the Lancashire, Cheshire and North Wales Colliery Deputies and Shotfirers Association. The union helped him buy a larger and more central end-terrace house at 30 Ellesmere Road, Pemberton, Wigan, with the union office in one front room, which helped to accommodate his growing family (eight children with two to follow).

The change of address also entailed a move of chapel to Albert Street, Newtown, another miners' stronghold, where Miller became a Chapel Officer, Sunday School Superintendent and Lay Preacher. The family remained here until the war, when a dispute caused his departure to the more liberal atmosphere of the town centre Rodney Street 'mother church' – where he attended for the last score years of his life.

The Independent Pit Deputies' union organisation faced a dual struggle for recognition against both the employers and the Miners' Federation. In Lancashire and Cheshire, although demarcation agreements had been reached between the MFGB and other unions by 1918, sharp divisions arose over the Miners' Federation attempt to dictate terms to other unions over the post war re-employment of workers.

These relations worsened during the 1926 coal strike, when working 'safety men', from the Pit Deputies' and other unions, were a constant bone of contention. Although the Miners' Federation generally allowed these categories of men to work and even draw coal, where this was necessary to keep the mine open and safe, there were constant disputes over whether

FARMING NOTES IN THE WARTIME YEARS

BLACKOUT was the order of the day – cow sheds, dairy and boiler house all had to be blacked-out. The stables you could get away with using a storm lamp, as the glass had been blacked with some stain. Also the outside pigsties, but not where the breeding sows were kept, in case heat was needed for the piglets or when a sow was farrowing. The large farm cellar was used for an air raid shelter.

Three land mines were dropped on local farms. One farm was destroyed, but the farm's shire horse was found grazing in a field, even though its stable was no more.

The farming community used to have a yearly get-together at the threshing machine. Two workers from each neighbouring farm would come to help out, then that farmer would send two workers from his farm to help them when the threshing machine moved on to the other farms. Now, the grain is mostly worked in the field by the combine harvester.

In the wartime, school children could have two weeks picking

potatoes; they had a little card that had to be marked when they had worked. They particularly loved 10.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. which was 'baggin' time, when they got a hot drink and a bun; then it was back to work.

The farmer himself could kill two pigs a year for his family, but had to forfeit his family's bacon coupons out of their weekly ration book. The Royal Lancashire Agricultural Society had prize schemes, to encourage increased production of food in a time of urgent need. One of the local farmers was awarded First Prize in the classes for Best Green Crop and Most Productive Medium or Small Farm, 1945.

German and Italian prisoners of war came to work and live-in on some farms; one or two liked the families so much that they stayed on and married the farmers' daughters.

All in all we had a happy life.

**Jean Guest (nee Patrick)
Arrowsmith Farm Leigh**

The Farmer's Year Round

*When winter days are short and drear
And work seems never ending.
Cherish the thought that spring is near
And brighter days are pending.*

*When spring does come the flowers
appear
Sweet gems of perfect beauty,
Lightening the round of daily tasks
So often termed our duty.*

*When land is tilled and seeds are
sown,
Our faith in God is rested,
For He alone supplies the life
With which our hopes are vested.*

*Then summer with long sunny days
Those tender plants do nourish
With promise of good harvesting
Man's hope again doth flourish.*

*Then autumn with its shortening days,
No time or thought for leisure;
There's plenteous crops to gather in,
Reward in bounteous measure.*

*And so the yearly round goes on
Years slip by even faster;
The land remains and we must serve:
Dame Nature is our master.*

**John Patrick (1896-1966)
Garrett Hall Farm Tyldesley**

Deputies had overstepped this mark and were undermining the effectiveness of the strike. In addition, whenever the militant wing of the Miner's Federation wished to escalate the action, the issue of withdrawing all safetymen came to the fore. Since many of these workers were not MFGB members, and the Pit Deputies' union refused to join or accept the authority of the MFGB-dominated local safety committees, a growing distrust of the Deputies' independent organisation was inevitable.

President

In 1926, Miller was elected President of the General Federation of Firemen, Examiners and Deputies Associations of Great Britain. The General Strike found the Deputies confused and divided, some working, some striking, with no say in the conduct of the dispute. Miller was clearly uneasy with the action, if not outright opposed. He was a socialist, but, philosophically, an industrial moderate; committed from an early stage to the view that trade union organisation would increase 'by joint reasoning, and fair consideration of all parties concerned' and 'not by the application of brute force'.

At the 1927 Nottingham Federation

conference, in his Presidential address, Miller bemoaned the intrusion of 'party politics' into the Miners' Federation and hoped for a restoration of 'unity' within it. At the summer conference of June 1927, he went even further, advocating mediation and machinery 'for investigating all labour troubles, compulsory arbitration and settlements if need be, with strikes and lockouts made illegal'. In a pacifist vein, he coupled industrial disputes with warfare as destructive social evils.

The 1929 Sheffield Federation conference saw unemployment emerging as a key issue, and Miller spoke powerfully on the 'destitution' it was causing, and against 'charity' as an alternative to decently paid jobs, while reasoning boldly that coal mining would 'not again be able to absorb the whole of the workers connected with the industry'. A shorter working week, raised school leaving age and earlier retirement could help alleviate this problem.

During the 1930's, Miller represented the Federation at numerous mining disasters and enquiries into causes of explosions. In 1938, he represented the union on three important mining committees: the Holland Committee of Enquiry into the Qualification of Colliery officials, the Holidays with Pay Committee, and the

Royal Commission on Safety in the Coal Mines – which set the standards for the post-war nationalised industry.

Miller was elected National Secretary of the Federation of Colliery Deputies' Associations of Great Britain in 1939, and awarded the OBE in 1941 for his work on the Royal Commission (which eventually produced the 1954 Mines and Quarries Act). 1942 saw his union rejoin the TUC. He resigned as National Secretary in 1943, to become the Chief Investigation Officer for the North Western Region of the Ministry of Fuel and Power, based in Didsbury. He retired in 1947 and moved to a small terraced house at 71 Scot Lane, Newtown, Wigan.

The two great movements of Miller's life were the Pit Deputies' Union and the Churches of Christ. He was, however, a strong Labour man all his life, and was reputedly nominated for the Labour candidate of Ince, Wigan in 1942, when JA Parkinson, the sitting MP, died. He declined the prospect, apparently because he felt his Temperance convictions would prohibit him from effectively campaigning in the town's Working Mens' Clubs. He died in Wigan Infirmary on 23 October 1963, aged 83, after nearly 55 years involvement with coal mining – the year the Churches of Christ again held its Annual General Meeting in Wigan.

Family History



Donation? Competition?

One interesting, recently donated, article was passed to me by Bob Dobson of Landy Publishing, Staining. This is a single sheet of questions and answers requested by Harold Jevons, Town Clerk of Wigan in 1920, of the Lamp Superintendent.

Bob thought we ought to ask readers how many gas and electric lights there were at that date. The actual number of ordinary gas lamps in the then County Borough of Wigan is given as 1,568 and 151 as incandescent. At this time there were only eight electric arc lights. **More interesting than these figures is the number of lamplighters employed and the salary of the Lamp Superintendent of the Borough.**

If anyone thinks they know the answer to my questions, please contact me by postcard or a sealed envelope with the answers written on the back and your name and address and telephone number. The person with the correct answer can choose from any Alan Godfrey map of the area or a tin of Uncle Joe's.

Donations and Projects

Once again our Friends from near and far have been

hard at work indexing sources.

We have two more name indexes for the 1901 census, this time for Abram and Hindley (RG13 3560 and 3561) as well as a completed set for Wigan town. These, as you may be able to guess, are, as usual, courtesy of Gerry Rigby and Alan Maloney.

There is also another index from Frank Mitchell in Arizona (not Canada as I wrongly stated in *Past Forward* 36), this time for Lowton (RG13 3588).

I have received a first substantial instalment of indexing from John Wogan and Brian Fairhurst, of birth, death and marriage notices and of Coroner's inquests from the *Wigan Observer*. These detailed indexes, dating from January 1853, make interesting reading. The first incident noted from the very first issue on 1 January 1853, is the death of William Winstanley, a slater from Ince, who sadly fell from his ladder. There are two sequences to the index, by date and by surname.

One unusual donation has been "Aspull's Liberator" by Hugh Heyes of Salisbury, Massachusetts. The B24 Liberator bomber crashed in fields adjoining Hall Lane, Aspull in August 1943. The book documents the incident and is accompanied by some excellent pictures. Other

USAF crash sites in the area are also noted, notably Billinge (1956). (See Hugh's articles in *Past Forwards* 27 and 33).

Wiganers at War 1914-18

Local researchers have long been aware of a set of cuttings books concerning reports of servicemen's awards or deaths during the Second World War. During the last two years these volumes, because of their dilapidated state, have been photocopied, indexed and rebound.

We have, however, no similar volumes for the 1914-18 war. I am, therefore, seeking out volunteers who would be interested in assisting staff in creating a set of "Wiganers at War" for World War One. This would entail indexing pages of the *Wigan Examiner* and *Wigan Observer* from microfilm.

Those interested should contact Christine Watts on 01942 828128.

S.O.S.

Mr Don Ray Melling of 435 West 24th, Burley, Idaho 83318 USA (email Ruth@ATCnet.net) is trying to contact a lady he met in the History Shop back in February. He unfortunately lost her name and address and is anxious that she contact the History Shop or himself at the above address for the purpose of exchanging information.

Local Heritage Initiative

The Local Heritage Initiative, set up in 1999 by Nationwide Building Society, and intended to last for 10 years, has been distributing grants of between £3000 and £5000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to groups for local history projects such as collecting old photos. Projects must, however, involve the whole community. For further information call 0870 9000 401 or www.lhi.org.uk



Book Review

Jean Cole and John Titford: *Tracing your Family Tree: the comprehensive guide to discovering your family history*. 4th edition, Countryside Books, £11.95

Written by two experienced and renowned researchers, this excellent book, now in its fourth edition, continues to explain and encourage. For the experienced and beginner alike.

Available from the History Shop.

Stuart A Raymond: *Family History on the Web: an internet directory for England and Wales*. 3rd edition, 2004-5 edition. FFHS, £5.95

Web site addresses are notorious for the speed with which they seem to change. This handy sized booklet is revised annually and contains addresses under a huge number of headings from occupations, including the Armed Services, to the counties of England and Wales, the types of records, rare books, societies and research facilities, surnames, message boards . . . the list is endless.

Available from the History Shop.

Websites

www.thegenealogist.co.uk

Research into the census has been lately greatly assisted by the publication of CD-ROMS for the individual counties by British Archive Data Ltd and Stepping Stones. Access to our ancestors' details, however, remains, without good indexes, to be a bit of a trail. British Archive Data Ltd in association with Genealogy Supplies Ltd have attempted to remedy this situation by inviting individual researchers to index their own areas and publishing this data on CD-ROM and, lately, on their website at www.thegenealogist.co.uk. Obviously the website is more up to date than CD-ROM and more counties are available in this way also. Lancashire has partial indexes for the census years 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1891. A subscription costs £5 for 90 days or £14.95 for a full year. Volunteer contributors have the incentive of a free copy of the completed index as well as a few more perks.

www.bmdindex.co.uk

Another new pay per view site, once again from British Archive Data in association with Genealogy Supplies Ltd. They claim to offer more accurate searching of the Birth, marriage and death indexes for England and Wales. They offer complete birth records from 1950, some from prior to 1865 and complete BMD coverage from 1984. The index is fully searchable by first name and surname with the cost of subscription being £5 for 90 days or £14.95 for a year. 95 million records have been added to date with more being added daily.

www.documentsonline.pro.gov.uk

This site allows access to The National Archives' collection of digitised public records. There is a free search initially with a charge of £3.50 to download a digital image.

Examples of types of record are war diaries of France and Belgium for the Guards Brigades and other regiments 1915-18, treatment of British prisoners of war 1915/16, famous wills, and more importantly, the latest data set to be included,

the World War I medal rolls. Details are being added in batches by surname. Surnames beginning with A to L available now. This will eventually, in essence, form an almost complete roll call of all who fought.

www.englishorigins.net

Produced in association with The Society of Genealogists, the site offers access to English genealogy records, in the main, in the care of the Society. Data sets offered include the whole of Boyd's Marriage Index 1538-1840, Bank of England will extracts index 1717-1845, marriage licence allegations index 1694-1850, Boyd's London Burials 1538-1872, London apprenticeship abstracts 1442-1850, and Archdeaconry Court of London Wills Index 1700-1807.

The Apprenticeship records are particularly valuable since, although they cover London apprentices, these may have come from anywhere in the British Isles or overseas, and details include name, parish, occupation of the apprentice's father and in some instances, the mother.

An initial free search is offered but access to the individual record is by subscription of £6 for 300 credits 7 days continuous access.

www.irishorigins.com

Similar pricing as above but this time access is to Griffith's valuation 1847-1864, the "census substitute" for Ireland. This apparently is the only source of the full version complete with revisions and amendments. It is hoped to have the Irish Wills Index 1484-1858, and the William Smith O'Brien Petition (1848-9) online in the near future.

www.scotsorigins.com

Different to the English and Irish Origins sites, in that, since Scotland already has a wonderful pay per view site at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk (featured in *Past Forward* 36), most of the more widely used sources are listed there. Scots Origins therefore offers a free sighting service for documents 1700-1990. However there are charges for searches at £8 for Statutory Registers and £9 for Old Parish Registers.

John Mallinson Stamper, Wigan 1910

In *Past Forward* 36, John Burgess of Waterford pondered why his great aunt, Alice Jane Burgess, should possess two beautifully decorated horns. I cannot directly answer that question, since sometimes we acquire possessions by indirect means. However, I can pass on a little detail on the painter himself, J M Stamper.

John Mallinson Stamper was born in Hesketh-in-the-Forest, Penrith, Cumberland in early 1888, the son of John Stamper and Sarah Ann Mallinson. The couple's three older boys, William, John and Joseph were all born in Cumberland. John Snr was a railway labourer. By 1901 we find the family living in Moss

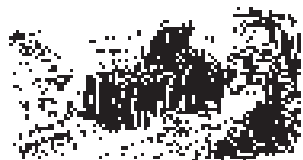
Lane, Hindley with John Stamper a railway signalman, young John, now aged 13 and the addition of two more boys, Philip and Isaac, both born in Ashton-in-Makerfield, and a daughter Sarah aged one year born in Hindley.

By 1905 the family were living at 54 Barnsley Street, with John Snr still a railway signalman. The family were still living at this address when John Mallinson Stamper married Caroline Causey on 8 November 1913 at St Michael's Church, Wigan. John's occupation at this time is given as painter. Indeed, he worked for Fred Pagett's firm of painters, decorators and plumbers.

Sadly, John and Caroline lost two daughters in their childhood

and in her distress, Caroline forbade John to paint in his leisure time. This he complied with until Caroline died. During his lifetime, John painted Billy Boston and Wigan's Royal Albert Edward Infirmary, as well as many pairs of horns, with delicate flowers and birds. Can the butcher's shops be the connection with Miss Burgess's horns? Did John obtain the horns from McAvoy's? This seems very likely. Whether John was commissioned to do these lovely paintings is not known.

The Stamper brothers lived in and around Hodges Street for many years and John Mallinson Stamper died at Sherwood House, Platt Bridge in December 1982.



Continued from page 13

ONLY one photograph of my great grandfather James Lowe survives in the family album. There are gaps where others have been – one, for example, is labelled ‘The Family Lowe’. The only clue I had concerning my great grandfather was that he lived and worked in Wigan, his surname was Lowe and according to the ‘family story’ he had something to do with lead mines. Little realising that Lowe was such a popular name in Wigan and with not one birth or marriage certificate surviving, I started the search for my Wigan family in the hope that maybe someone somewhere still had some Lowe family photographs.

Through my grandmother’s marriage certificate I discovered my great grandfather’s Christian name, James, and that he was a tin plate worker and iron master. My James Lowe

JAMES LOWE

was born in Water Street, Chorley on 22 February, 1856 the first son, after three daughters, to Joseph and Ellen Lowe. When James was five years old the family moved to Wigan and several public houses became home over the years - *The Fox and Goose*, 6 Hallgate, *The Pineapple*, 27 Gt George Street, and *the White Bull*, Prescott Street - before the family finally settled on Wallgate.

In his early teens James was an apprentice tin plate worker by day, while evenings were spent helping in the public house or with the local brass band. A notable musician, James played with the St Thomas Band and the Pemberton Old Band, The Blue Jackets. He was also a member of the Wigan Volunteers.

By the time he married Ellen Hart on 9 February 1878, he had already started his own tin plate works and founded the Douglas Sheet Metal Works, Pottery Bridge, Wallgate. Members of his family worked with him - younger brother Joseph Lowe and nephews James Harrison and Joseph

Hampson.

In 1911 James Lowe was made Vice-President of the Bellingham Bowling Club – a club with which he had been associated for quite a few years. In 1912 he was made President, with Thomas McKnight as his Vice-President. Although James Lowe’s business address remained on Wallgate his private address was 38 Ellesmere Road, Pemberton. Also at this address was Mary Sharrock and her daughters Margaret, who helped with James’ business, and Janet, who married Patrick James Sherry in 1922; a son born in July 1923 at 186 Wallgate was called James Lowe Sherry.

James Lowe died at his home on 8 October 1930, aged 73 years. Four of his six daughters survived; Sarah Catherine was at 83 Wallgate till the 1930’s, under her married name Goulding. Ellen married Harry Cunliffe and they had a grocers and confectioners in Barnsley Street till 1929 when Harry was killed in a car accident. Ann married James Pilkington in Bolton in 1905 and in the early 1920’s the family moved to Blackpool. Alice Lowe, my grandmother, married Leonard Pearson from Cheshire in December 1910; they too lived in Blackpool.

After finding all James Lowe’s brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces and cousins, a few descendants are still living in Wigan today; but at the end of this story, sad to say, there is still only one photograph of James Lowe in existence – the one I started with.

Susan Williams
28 Moreton Drive
Staining Village
Nr Blackpool FY3 ODR

Sergeant Thomas Atkinson

Dear Sir.

I enjoy receiving each issue of *Past Forward* and read it from cover to cover.

During our most recent trip to Wigan, my wife and I had the pleasure to visit the History Shop and to do some research on my Atkinson family. One of the items found was the obituary for my great grandfather, Thomas Atkinson who died on 14 May 1909. The heading on the obituary is “DEATH OF AN EX-POLICE OFFICER” and states that “Mr. Atkinson was an ex-sergeant of the Wigan Borough Police Force, and he retired on superannuation as far back as 1880, when he met with a somewhat serious accident whilst engaged at the big conflagration at Messrs Eckersley’s mill.”



Thomas Atkinson

I am in hope that maybe one of your readers would be able to provide me with some background on the conflagration at Messrs Eckersley’s mill or some information on the Thomas Atkinson family.

Attached is a photo of my great grandfather Atkinson.

William Atkinson
Portland Michigan
U.S.A. email:
watkinson@power-net.net

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If you are interested, contact Philip Butler

Tel (01942) 828128

A PIT BROW GIRL'S STORY

THE following was given to me by Jenny Leyland (nee Hooton) who is now well into her 80's, and living in Ashton-in-Makerfield. She started work on the pit brow of Long Lane Colliery, better known as 'Crowpit' in 1934 at the age of 14. Had she started there two years earlier she would have found my grandfather, another James Fairhurst (known as Owd Jem Swagger) in charge of the women.

Jenny said they started at 7a.m., had half an hour for breakfast and finished at 3:30. If it had been a bad day and there had been stoppages, they might have to work overtime, usually an hour. When she began work, two of the women, Mary Anne and Charlotte Davies, were in charge, with a man in overall control. The coal, in 10 cwt tubs, came up the pit, went over the check weigh machine to have its weight registered and then on to a tipper called a 'kecker'. The tipper would deposit the coal on belts underneath.

Only Mary Anne and Charlotte had authority to stop the belts. The work was heavy but the knack was soon learned. Sometimes there would be lumps of coal with a band of dirt running through, and a chipper would be used to separate the coal from the dirt; or a very large lump of coal would come down the belts, which would have to be stopped until it was broken up. If the belts were stopped too long it might stop the winding coal, so it was essential they were kept going.

Compo Men

At the time, working alongside the women, were men who had been injured underground and were known as 'COMPO' men i.e. in receipt of compensation. *"We were sometimes grateful for a short stop so that we could have a rest"*, said Jenny. If there was a particularly bad tub of coal, they would have to climb on the belt and spade the discard off. One of the sisters, Mary Anne, would station herself at the bottom end of the belt where the coal went into the wagon. If any dirt had been let through, she would stop the belts and give everyone a mouthful. Occasionally the belts broke and a fitter would have to mend them, giving the girls another short rest.

There were few accidents in Jenny's time. *"I only remember one accident, and that was a compensation man had two fingers taken off. If there was an accident underground and the pit*



was stopped," she said *"we were always found something else to do, for there was always plenty of cleaning up."*

The Cabin

"The cabin was an old engine house heated by steam pipes with no stove then. A canteen was built but it was after I left. The tea in our cans was kept heated on the hot water pipes and was often stewed. The girls would take it in turns to have their break, for the pit never stopped winding. When the canteen was built it had a stove and a rest room with easy chairs and a toilet. Before that, to answer a call of nature, we had to improvise and use a quiet spot out of the way with a plank and a bucket. We had nowhere to wash our hands afterwards."

Their complexions would be guarded by make-up - Snowfire cream was put on first and the make-up on top of it. *"The dust would stick to it and come off when we washed ourselves. We put the make-up on just as we would if we were going out at night. Sometimes our hands hardened and cracks formed in the skin which would be painful in winter. Our hands never seemed clean, no matter how hard we scrubbed them, for the coal dust became ingrained."*

The Cattle Market

Entertainment was going to the pictures and dancing. On Saturdays and Sundays, the girls paraded along Lodge Lane and Gerard Street in Ashton, parades referred to as 'the cattle market'. *"The idea was to find a*

partner and raise a family. Some of the girls were really nice," reported Jenny, *"and were Sunday school teachers. We were never ashamed of our work because we were as smart as anybody when we were out. Even when we went to work we had clean clothes and we washed our hair every night. We would put brown paper under our shawls to keep the dust out but it got everywhere. As time went by, a spray was played on the dust which improved conditions a little. There were never any baths at the pit. I had to finish when I married in 1938, and even if a woman had to bring children up having lost her partner, she would not be re-employed. I remember one girl who had a son by a married man who was allowed to stay on. Her mother brought up the lad and the woman married someone else later."*

The custom then was that when a couple became serious about each other, marriage would be anticipated and the first child would soon follow the ceremony. There was no shame in it for that was the way of things. Occasionally a girl would be let down as aforesaid and there would be shame attached to illegitimate births, the issue being known as 'chance child'. But there were never what is known as 'one night stands', for the consequences would be too serious for the women."

A Happy Little Pit

"The Crowpit was a happy little pit. The manager, Tom Jameson, was very friendly and I could talk to him just like I'm talking to you. Our reading matter would be 'Woman's Weekly', 'Red Star Weekly' and 'Red Letter'. A new shawl would be greeted with gasps of admiration and the owner would hold pride of place until the next one came along, for women competed with each other as to who had the nicest shawl". Asked about Mary Anne and Charlotte, Jenny said she didn't think they had ever been courting but both were sociable enough. As far as she could remember, wages were about 2s. 6d. per day, 15s. a week. When they stopped overtime they were allowed to keep the money, which was usually spent on clothes. At the age of 18 they were paid the top rate of wages.

N.B. Charlotte Davies was given the BEM on 1 January 1950, at the age of 63, for 50 years service to the coal industry.

**James Fairhurst
Ashton-in-Makerfield**

GOING TO WAR

When war broke out my Aunt said to me, "What are you going to do about it?" So I put my name down for the RAF. I've always had a liking for planes - even from being a toddler, when I would 'fly' models down a piece of cotton in the kitchen, I wanted to fly a fighter plane, although I knew in myself I didn't have the education. If navigation had been left to me I would have ended in Germany!

But I carried on with my job, preparing sheet rubber for civilian gas masks; and being just 20 years old when war started, I was itching to join. I was ordered to go to Hope Street school in Wigan for my medical examination, which I passed; although I had had pneumonia as a child, still they gave me grade A1.

At the end of March my calling up papers arrived. I was to report to RAF Padgate near

Warrington on 1 April 1940. My aunt, although she really didn't want me to go to war, got a small suitcase big enough to hold my everyday clothes, and with that and travel warrant, I set off to catch the train to Warrington. Leaving home was the most upsetting time I have ever had.

Sir 081

A number of young men were getting off the train at Bank Quay,

from where I followed instructions given with my call up papers, as to how to get to RAF Padgate. I have forgotten the route I took all those years ago, but I do remember a wireless shop and the song "It's a lovely day tomorrow, tomorrow is a lovely day" coming through the open doorway.

Then I was met with a loud-voiced Sergeant barking, "Come along lads, smarten yourselves up". Reporting at the front office we were allocated a billet and a bed. This, my first bed in the RAF, must have been taken out of the torture chamber in the tower of London; it was called a Macdonald, a heavy steel bed that concertinaed in on itself to half size - good for making room in a barrack room but torture to sleep on. Anyway, on the first day we were sworn in and given a service number - mine was 991081, so whenever my name was shouted, my answer was to snap out "SIR 081". On the second day we were kitted up with uniform and webbing and the kit bags to stow your gear in. The uniform was rough wool to sensitive civilian skin, but I later found that the RAF uniform was less rough than the other services.

Morecambe

On the third day it was inoculations. The medical men certainly hadn't a clue on handling us sensitive civilians, I have sharper nails in my garage than those syringe needles. But although my arms ached like the devil I - unlike many others - never went off my feet. The rest of the week, it was how to assemble into ranks and

making friends. Then about 2000 of us boarded a train for some mysterious venue, which turned out to be Morecambe, where we were to do three weeks foot and rifle drill to the Guards standard.

Marching up and down the front at Morecambe could be very tiring but the newness was still with us. We were members of an elite force in our minds and the ability to march correctly was bred in most of us, but not all. The odd men out gave us something to be thankful for - these men were as wooden as the stock of the rifle we carried, swinging their arm to the wrong leg, i.e. right leg and right arm forward at the same time. They got the brunt of the sergeant's wrath.

We were sleeping in guest houses in the West End Road. The food was meagre, and being growing lads we were always hungry. Our pay was only 2s. per day, paid every two weeks. Of course some went on food but also on cigarettes - nearly everyone smoked, and you could get five Woodbine cigarettes for 2d.

Hampstead Heath

After a few weeks I was sent aboard another mystery train, and I ended up in Stanmore, Middlesex, to train to fly a balloon! What a let down, though I was later to learn that these balloons were as dangerous as flying in bad weather. We spent three months in Stanmore, then moved out in May, heading for north London. I was posted to 906 squadron, stationed at Highgate; we had our

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headquarters in a former girls school, (they had moved farther away from London). After getting allocated a balloon flight we were separated to the various sites - mine was on Hampstead Heath, at the bottom end of the garden of Sir Robert Whiley Cowan, former president of Shell Mex petrol company. We lived in his fruit store house, with no balloon, one rifle with five rounds of ammunition, and strict orders not to fire any rounds.

Life was pretty good - we even got quite a few girls coming round - but then the blitz started on London. At first during the day, then the Germans turned to night bombing, and for quite some time we suffered unremitting bombardment. Then we got a balloon and I moved to another site, higher up on Hampstead Heath. We had to screw pickets into the ground, to hold the ropes that secured the balloon when inflated; but balloons in high winds have been known to lift the 5 ton winch they are attached to clear off the ground - they could be a monster when in a gale. Life on the hill was risky - we had a balloon holed by an anti-aircraft shell, with bombs falling all around; I ended with a splinter of steel in my mouth which took my front teeth away. The next day I was posted to Weybridge in Surrey, where I stayed until the beginning of 1942.

Weybridge was the home of Armstrong Vickers who at that time made the Wellington bomber. The track that ran in front of their works was the pits for Brooklands car racing circuit, and there was a take off and landing place for aircraft in the centre of the race track. On the Byfleet side of this aerodrome Hawkers were making the Hurricane fighter. The balloon barrage was sent there

after German Stukas had badly damaged both aircraft works, killing a lot of workers - the balloons didn't stop bombers sending down bombs, but their wires kept the planes high enough to make hitting their target harder.

Then without any warning I was posted to No 1 School of Technical Training at RAF Halton, Bucks as an apprentice fitter. But when we marched down that first morning with mounting excitement, we saw..... biplanes with flying wires, a type of plane which went out in the late 20's or early 30's! Still at least engineering was the same. And over 16 weeks we had a quick course on it and at the end I passed out as a Leading Aircraftsman.

Spitfires

I was next posted to Benson. Coming through the gates I got a quick sight of..... Spitfires! Here at last was the flying side of the RAF that I wanted so much, although it was second best to be able to look after the planes. Benson was a photo recognisance unit with a personnel of 3000 women and 1000 men! The aircraft were two squadrons of Spitfires and two of Mosquitoes. I was posted, at first to 541 Squadron, doing pre checks and post checks, on Spitfire airframes, before moving to 8541 section, to inspect aircraft that have done the required hours flying - 40 minor inspection, 80, 120 and so on, getting progressively in sections up to a major.

I worked on our planes until 'D' day, when the amount of photo recognisance came almost to an end. Then I was on the move. The train ended in West Kirby, where we got kitted out for tropical gear, and again the round of never ending injections -

only these really did get to you; they were the counters to yellow fever, black water fever, malaria etc.

'The Rock'

After the train journey from Wigan to Greenock, I boarded SS 'Orduna', a very slow tramp steamer previously sunk in the First World War and re-floated from the sea bed. We steamed down the Clyde to join a convoy, heading south. We were unsure where we were going, until one day, one man shouted that he recognised the shoreline as Takoradi, in West Africa. The 'Orduna' left the convoy there and, hugging the coast, turned north. I still didn't have a clue where I was going, until early one morning, was staggered to see towering over me, a massive pillar of light - Gibraltar. I was to go to 520 Squadron who were situated at the North Front

airfield between the Rock of Gibraltar and Spain. They were operating Halifax four engined bombers, and flying out into the Atlantic to forecast the weather for the 'D' day landings and beyond. We had a good canteen NAAFI and, to beat the lot, a beach only 200 yards away. As there were only men on the 'Rock', nude bathing was the order of the day.

I was at Gibraltar when the German surrender was taken and the first nuclear bombs fell on Japan; and when peace was declared, when the lights went on all over Europe and the Far East. Life could begin again. I sailed home on the 'Highland Princess', reported to Sealand camp, was held there for a week or two, then sent to Cardington to be demobilised, having served my country for six years and 23 days.

George Victor Wadeson
(Sir 081) Wigan

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A TRY SCORING MACHINE!

TO which of the many great players who have graced the cherry and white shirt of Wigan does this title refer? Billy Boston, Ellery Hanley, Mick Sullivan, Trevor Lake - sadly no! None of them compare in the tries per appearance stakes to the player pictured here, Lewis Bradley. Who knows just what he would have achieved in the Wigan colours had World War I not claimed him.

Lewis was born in 1889, the youngest of four brothers and two sisters born to John George and Ann Bradley, in Ruardean in the Forest of Dean - an unlikely setting for a rugby star, one would think at first glance. However, the major industry in the area was coal mining - hard and labour intensive, and not a million miles from the coalfields of South Wales, or the North West for that matter. Like many of that era the only way forward was through sport and, in particular, rugby union. He, like his father, was a Gloucestershire man and, as he grew up in the West country, it naturally followed that rugby would call him - after all, it was the major sport for that part of the world.

Welsh or English?

Bradley quickly developed a reputation as a wingman who was well able to sniff out a gap in the opposition's defence. Given his strength from working in the coal mining industry, he was to become a strong and fearsome tackler. Coupled with this was his obvious rugby brain. It all meant that his reputation began to spread outside of Gloucestershire.

Players of his ability and undoubted talents would have been expected to gravitate to the Gloucester club or perhaps Bristol. Bradley, however, moved even further afield, across the Welsh Marches, to Pontypool. It was a strange decision on his part, as it isolated him from any chance of



Lewis Bradley, 1889-1918

representative honours. Playing in Wales, no matter how well, was going to cut no ice in England. Also, as an Englishman he would gain no Welsh representative recognition. There seems to have been some confusion as to who he could actually play for. People felt that he was either Welsh or English, depending on who you talked to! This confusion arose from the fact that, whilst his father was English born and bred, his mother was Welsh, having been born in Llangarren in Monmouthshire - indeed, perhaps that was why he moved. Whatever, he certainly had an immediate effect on the Pontypool club, becoming their top try scorer in the 1910-11 season with 22 tries.

Down to the valleys

By now, he was beginning to attract attention from further afield, from the professional ranks in the North of England, and in particular the giant Wigan club, who were always in the market for Welsh talent. They were interested in a wingman simply because the three quarter line at the club, glorious though it had been, was coming to the end of its life. Leytham and Miller on the flanks were finishers par excellence while Lance Todd*

and Bert Jenkins of New Zealand and Wales respectively had achieved all the game had to offer. They could not go on playing forever, however, and the club scouts were beginning to report on a new Welsh star playing in the valleys.

And so the Central Park directors moved with great stealth down to the valleys. One must not underestimate the dangers in such actions - it was, after all, not uncommon for professional scouts, directors etc. if discovered, to be beaten up and run out of town by the locals, fearing they were about to poach yet more talent from their clubs. Nevertheless, the Wigan directors returned from their secret mission to the valleys on 1 December 1911 with the signature of the 21 year old Pontypool wing wizard on a professional contract.

Hard act to follow

To say that Bradley had a hard act to follow at Wigan was an understatement. "Gentleman" Jim Leytham was a legend even whilst still playing, and was revered by the supporters. Joe Miller was a local lad who hailed from the Pemberton area of Wigan and was blessed with blistering speed. Both made scoring tries look easy. Bradley, however, was not fazed in any way by this, but rather set about his task with relish.

Buzzing

He did not have long to wait to make his professional debut. His new club wasted no time in announcing that the Welsh wing wizard was to make his debut the following day. It was Saturday 2 December, just a day after signing, when Bradley made his way through a packed house at Central Park to play against Wakefield Trinity. The whole town was buzzing with anticipation at the new Welsh player. Neither they, nor the Wigan club, for that matter, were aware that he was actually English!

Bradley's performance that day conquered the Wigan crowd. In his History of Wigan RFC, Robinson wrote: *"the critics of the time were united in saying that rarely had a wing threequarter shown such promise on his first appearance with a Northern Union club, and the spectators simply rose at "Louie"*.

In the 1911-12 season, his first as a professional, he quickly established himself in the team, playing on either wing. On New Years Day 1912, just a month after signing as a professional, he crossed the whitewash five times against Barrow! That put him in the same bracket as Miller and Leytham who had both accomplished the same feat.

That same season he helped Wigan to second place in the league with a record of 27 wins, 6 losses and one draw. In those days the Championship was played off between the top four clubs. Huddersfield had secured first spot, and so played Hunslet in the play off semi-final, whilst Wigan met Hull Kingston Rovers in the other. Huddersfield and Wigan met in the Final, played at Thrum Hall, the home of Halifax. Bradley was up against the great Aussie wingman, Albert Rosenfeld. Whilst their personal battle ended up even - they both scored a try - it was Huddersfield, however, who took the spoils 13-5, in front of 15,000 supporters.

42 tries in a season

The following year he helped the club win the Lancashire Cup, defeating the holders Rochdale Hornets in the final 21-5. Bradley crossed for two tries in that game. His crowning glory must have been in his last season at the club, 1913-14. On 7 March 1914 Rochdale were the visitors to Central Park. Bradley was on top of his game and topped everything he had done, equalling the feat of legend Jimmy Leytham by scoring six tries. It was a record which would stand until a number of players were to cross for seven tries in a match; and in the 1990's Martin Offiah and then Shaun Edwards were to score ten tries in a match. Nor were his try scoring feats just a flash in the pan - in that

last full season he crossed for 42 tries. In the three or more seasons Bradley was at Central Park, he scored three or more tries in a match no fewer than 11 times. On one occasion he was presented with an overcoat by a local tailor in Wigan as a reward for scoring a hat-trick.

As the 1913-14 season drew to a close and Europe tumbled faster and faster into war, Bradley's career was drawing to a close. His record at Wigan, however, is astonishing to say the least. Between 1911 and 1914 he made 106 appearances, and incredibly scored 117 tries, more than one a game - a strike rate not bettered by any other player at the club. The closest are the great Billy Boston with 478 tries from 485 appearances and Trevor Lake with 132 tries from 140 appearances. Of his contemporaries, Leytham scored 258 times from 280 appearances and Joe Miller 151 from 206.

World War I

Had the War not interrupted his career, who knows just what scoring achievements he would have ended up with. Sadly it was not to be the case, for he found himself in the Royal Field Artillery, as a driver, when the War began in earnest.

Bradley went through the war until 18 June 1918 when, during the battle of Scherpenberg, it seems that he was hit by enemy fire. The extent of his injuries can be easily verified from his obituary in the *Dean Forest Mercury* of 26 July 1918, which included the following letter sent to his father, landlord of the *Roebuck Inn* in Ruardean Woodside :

"Dear Mr Bradley.

Your son, Driver L. Bradley, 118613 R.F.A. , was admitted here late on the 18th. and died at 10.30 a.m. to-day, the 20th. He had very severe multiple wounds of back, head (which had fractured his skull), and both thighs. He was quite sensible until last night, and since then has been only semi-conscious. The poor boy had been badly infected with gas gangrene, and it rapidly spread and eventually caused his death. He left

no messages, as yesterday he did not realise he was dying. He will be buried by our own chaplain in the military cemetery near here, where so many of our fine men are lying. I hope it is a little comfort to you to know he was in a British hospital, where all that could possibly be done for him.

With deepest sympathy.

(Miss) E. O. Schofield, Sister in Charge.

Bradley died on 20 June 1918, just five months before the end of the war. It would appear that, as he never married, it was his married sister who actually wrote to the Wigan club to inform them of his death. The secretary sent the following reply to her :

Dear Madam,

As promised I have informed my committee last night of the death of your brother Lew, and they instructed me to convey to the family their sincere regret of the loss which you have sustained. Lew was a great favourite in Wigan, and will be greatly missed by a very large number of people, who were quite delighted with his play as a footballer, and a very popular player where ever he went. Would you kindly inform his mother and father of our deep sympathy with them in their sad loss. This terrible war is causing great havoc in families and one never knows whose turn it is next to lose one of their loved ones.

Geo. Taylor (secretary Wigan Football Club)

Lewis Bradley was laid to rest in Vignacourt British Military Cemetery (grave ref: 1V.A.1). Situated in that cemetery is a statue of a French soldier which was erected after the war by the villagers. At its base there is a plaque which when translated reads:-

"Brothers in Arms of the British Army, fallen on the field of honour, sleep in peace, we are watching over you."

It is quite fitting that Bradley should be there when you consider the many thousands who watched over him during his try scoring exploits on the rugby fields of either code!

Tom Mather

* An article on Lance Todd will appear in the next *Past Forward* Ed.

Memories of LUT

THE two enclosed pictures recently came to light and I thought they might be useful for *Past Forward*. Both pictures are of Lancashire United Transport events and readers might be able to identify some of the people shown.

LUT had a "Thirty Club" for employees who had achieved 30 years service. The top picture was taken at the first celebration dinner of the Club on 24 November 1937. I was told that the venue was the Rope and Anchor Hotel, Leigh, now demolished. The original was credited to C.E. Willis Ltd., Bolton. Those identified are on the second row from the front. They are (from right to left):

Mr. Hampson, Rolling Stock Superintendent; Mr. Williams, Overhead Engineer; Mr. E. Smith, Accountant; Mr. Wilson, Rolling Stock Engineer; Mr. E.H. Edwardes, General Manager; Mr. J.R. Holt, Secretary; ? ; Mr. Farrimond, Traffic Manager; Mr. Deveney, Claims Manager.

Mr. Edwardes enjoyed perhaps the most illustrious career within the company. Born in 1874, he was appointed Power Station Engineer to the associated South Lancashire Tramways Company in 1901. He was appointed General Manager of LUT in December 1910, Managing Director in 1932 and Chairman in 1947. He retired in 1955 at the age of 80 and died later that year just short of his 81st birthday, having achieved a remarkable 44 years of management within a total service of 54 years. Mr. Holt, Secretary for 35 years, gave 53 years service. Even longer service was given by Chief Inspector T.B. Boothroyd, who commenced as a points boy in 1903 and retired after 60 years at the age of 73 in 1963. On the picture Mr. Boothroyd is behind and to the left of Mr. Holt.

The bottom picture shows the "Official Agents' Annual Outing," probably in 1936 or 1937. Most

of these people will be newsagents from within the LUT territory who were being rewarded for their generation of business in selling excursion and express tickets throughout the year. The location is the Howe Bridge workshops, now razed to the ground, together with the depot across the road. The two buses on the left are from a batch of four Dennis Arrows with Roe bodies of 1934 and the bus on the right is a Leyland Tiger T57 with Metropolitan-Cammell body of 1936, one of a batch of ten. Notice the stencil plates in the

destination boxes. Electric lighting behind opalescent white glass illuminated the display at night. Most single deck bodies were by Roe, so these Leylands formed a minority batch. I often travelled to Eccles Grammar School at Monton on these buses as they were returning empty from Trafford Park to Swinton depot after early morning workmen's duties during the late 1940's and early 1950's.

Rev Eric Ogden
40 Burnedg Lane
Grasscroft Oldham
Lancs OL4 4EA



FRIENDS NEWS

Friends Family History Workshops

ON 30 June this year the third series of Family History Workshops came to an end in the History Shop. It is time, I think, to step back and take stock of just what the Friends have achieved with these workshops and just how popular they have proven to be.

The concept is very simple. Firstly, the demand is caused by so many people who wish to find out more about their family history. This demand is then met by experts or, so as not to embarrass them, very talented amateurs (and one professional, but that's another story), from the ranks of the Friends. The reason this approach is needed is very simple also. The Heritage Service, which runs the History Shop and the genealogy study centre there, has not got the time to put on such an event manned by its own staff. So with a little support from us the Friends have stepped in, and the rest, as they say, is history.



Friend Gerald Marsden shows workshop participant and now regular researcher Sue Hesketh some inside tricks

It works because of its personal touch. After booking in and paying their small fee, each of the participants is assigned an individual 'expert' for a one to one session that lasts a minimum of an hour and sometimes much longer. During that time, there is plenty of scope for the Friend to explain all of the delights that await in the research area of the History shop, and then get their hands dirty with a bit of digging. All participants are advised to bring as much information as they can with them as the pace can be hectic. By checking the more popular indexes and records our resident experts have managed to kick start the research of over 70 people so far. Judging by the feedback sheets we have been getting

from participants they are very happy with the service. Here is what just a few have said to us:

**'Very informative'
'staff friendly and helpful'
'cost worth every penny and more'
'length (of session) not a problem, stayed overtime'
'very friendly very useful'
'wonderful value for money'**

Unfortunately, at the beginning of our sessions we were a little over optimistic as to the numbers we felt we could handle and a few sessions were very busy indeed. We learnt from that, cut down the number of people and increased the time from 30 minutes to an hour for each consultation. We have not as yet advertised this any wider than the pages of *Past Forward* and the History Shop itself, and this has now started to slow down. Indeed, at the last session, due to cancellations and a no-show, three of our dedicated volunteers had a wasted journey as their services were not required. So just a plea from me, **if you do book a session, do try to keep it, and if you can't, do try to let us know in plenty of time.**

Yes, we are planning more of these sessions for the future, still under the banner of Family History Workshops and still delivered by our excellent Friends. The new season will start again in September, with once again sessions being booked every fortnight on a

Wednesday afternoon. If this time does not suit anyone then special arrangements can be made. Due to the increases in administrative charges and the inclusion in the pack of our 'Genealogical Sources', the price will be rising a little, but it will still represent exceptional value.

If you are interested in tracing your family history and need a helping hand to get started please ring the History Shop on 01942 828128 to book a place for the autumn.

Cultural Partnership Convention

On 20 June at the Robin Park Arena in Wigan, volunteers from a variety of organisations throughout the borough, including our own representative David Lythgoe, met at the Cultural Partnership Convention. This short report from our man on the inside illustrates all the good work that is going on, the importance placed upon it by our local administrators and the high profile of the Friends.

The Convention at its most simple is an opportunity for people from all voluntary organisations to come together and exchange information and ideas in an organised and structured event. Being the Cultural Partnership Convention, the emphasis is always on considering the cultural and sporting needs of the local communities. David writes:

The main topics for discussion

Continued on page 24

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Around Wigan Quiz

ANSWERS TO THE AROUND WIGAN QUIZ

1. Entrance to the stable block at Haigh, built for Sir William Bradshaw.
2. Westwood Power Station; demolished 1989.
3. Haigh windmill, erected to pump water to Sumner's Brewery, Haigh.
4. Rivington Pike.
5. Television mast on Winter Hill.
6. M6 high level crossing at Gathurst, between junctions 26 and 27.
7. Hindley Hall, now Hindley Golf Club.
8. The Prince and Princess of Wales opened the Royal Albert Infirmary in 1873 and stayed at Haigh Hall.
9. Mab's Cross.
10. Entrance to the Galleries Shopping Centre in Market Place, Wigan.
11. Thomas Linacre Care Centre (previously Wigan Grammar School and then Mesnes High School).
12. Cenotaph, telephone kiosk and Liverpool Cathedral; all designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott.
13. War memorial near Finger Post, Aspull.
14. Ince St Mary's Church, demolished due to the effect of mining subsidence.
15. The well at Standish, damaged by an American army vehicle in 1943.
16. Aspull Church Primary School, opened by Sir Robin Leigh Pemberton.
17. Orrell Post, near the Stag Hotel.
18. Large tree near the Stag Hotel, demolished by a gale in 1920.
19. Pennington Flash.
20. Boats from Leigh and Lowton Sailing Club.
21. St James's Vicarage at Poolstock, which became Wigan Hospice.
22. Hindley Green House, one of the homes of George Formby.
23. George Formby appeared in more than 20 films, including: *Keep Fit*, *Spare a Copper*, *George in Civvy Street*, *Get Cracking*, *No Limit*.
24. Hindley Town Hall.
25. Wigan and Leigh Hospice at Kildare Street, Hindley.
26. Carnegie Library in Pemberton.
27. Lord Gerard opened the Carnegie Library at Ashton in 1906.
28. Howe Bridge Sports Centre.
29. The writer, James Hilton was born at 26 Wilkinson Street, Leigh.
30. Probably the best known film made from his novels is *'Goodbye Mr Chips'*.
31. Morris dancers beside the Abram sign.
32. St. Luke's Church, Lowton.
33. Leigh Town Hall.
34. The obelisk near St Mary's Church and the Turnpike, Leigh.
35. The Turnpike Centre, Leigh.
36. The Maypole Colliery disaster, 1908.
37. Fountain in Market Square, Tyldesley.
38. Dam House, Astley.
39. Pit head, Astley Green Colliery Museum.

HERE are the answers to Gerald Rickards' quiz, which featured in no. 35. Comments received suggest it was a great success, and with help from a well supported coffee morning (which continued well into the afternoon!) at the Rickards' house, over £1100 was raised for Hospice funds. A similar fund raising event is now being considered for the future.

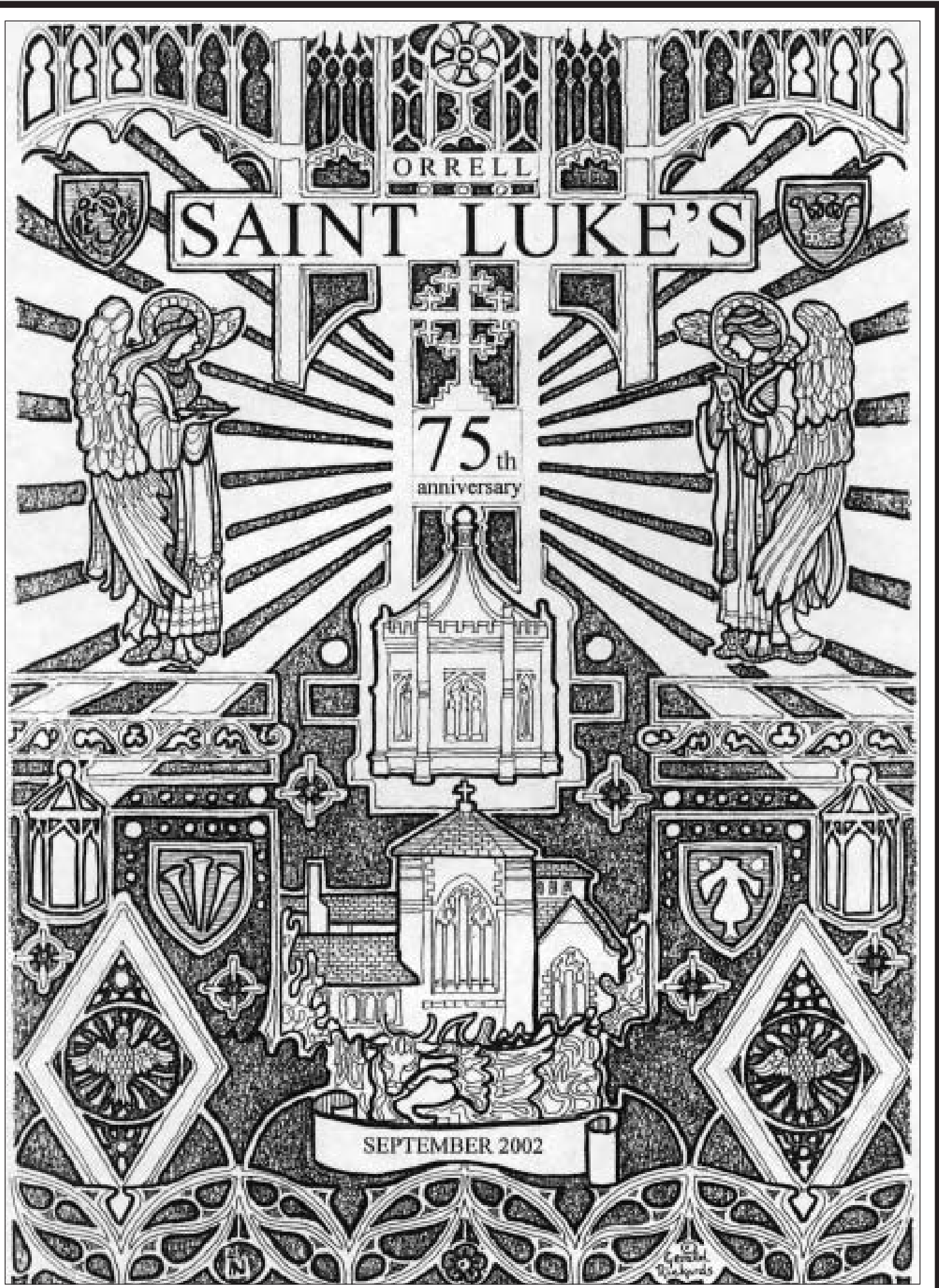
Perhaps the most amusing story related to the quiz was of someone who had worked out almost all the answers, realising, after handing the form in at the Hospice, the correct answer to no. 25!

Three prizes were awarded, to Peter Baxter of Wigan, Phillip Green of Shevington and Wendy Grehan of Leigh. Congratulations.

The artists continue to work on the Hospice's Community Chapel Murals, but are searching for familiar landmarks and buildings, especially in the Leigh, Tyldesley and Astley areas. If anyone has any suggestions, please write to Gerald Rickards, c/o Wigan & Leigh Hospice, Kildare Street, Hindley WN2 3HZ or email: volunteers@wiganandleighospice.org.uk. An Open Day to launch the murals has been organised for 11 November 2004.

Unfortunately, due to personal circumstances, Gerald has not been able to complete the latest in his series of local drawings in time for this issue. But as always, he has come up with a solution – a drawing which he did alongside a larger painting for the 75th anniversary of St Luke's, Orrell in 2002. Gerald hopes to resume his popular series in the next issue.





FRIENDS NEWS

Continued from page 21



covered problems with transport to meetings, events and activities, facilities in parks and open spaces, and provisions for young people.

Specifically for the Friends of Wigan Heritage Service, the vast range of information held in the History Shop was reported, together with the progress being made through projects and events like the Family History Workshops.

Max Finney, another of our Friends but this time talking on behalf of the Over 50's Forum in Wigan, gave an account of the Legacy project, the Community History of the Wigan Townships. This is now underway and Max was appealing for contributions. "The legacy of the past being accumulated will become today's legacy for the future." He stated that items from local townships' past such as photographs, postcards, posters and memorabilia would be welcomed.

Heritage Service Voluntary Work and Projects

The last issue of *Past Forward* (no 36 p.24) contained a detailed report on the projects currently underway. It is very encouraging to think how much excellent work is being done that otherwise the Heritage Service would simply not be able to tackle. It is equally gratifying to note that all this work is vital in its own way and researchers and casual observers for generations to come will benefit from it. Thank you to everyone who has spared their precious time to help over the last two years and thanks in advance for the next two.

This report did make an appeal for more people to get involved in our projects. I am delighted to report that at our last Friends meeting on 5 May we were able to welcome new members Freda Chorlton and Brian Worthington. Freda has quickly busied herself with work on our census indexing projects, while Brian was keen to volunteer on the

Dootson indexing project at Leigh. However, we still need your help. In particular, people are required to help the newspaper indexing project go more smoothly in Wigan, and to gain some momentum with the 'Dootson' indexing project in Leigh. For the newspapers, we need someone to tackle the input of the transcribed data onto cards to form the index (manual typewriter), while in Leigh we need at least two more people to work with Max on compiling the basic list (pencil and paper). Please contact me, Philip Butler, at the History Shop if you think you can help.

Recent additions during the next few months are:

1841 Census Index by the Friends of Wigan Heritage Service. This index with Christian names and ages included, allowing family groups to be built, is almost ready. It is now available for use at the Study area in the History Shop, and we are hoping to have it fully available to purchase on CD by the autumn. The price is likely to be the same, initially, as for 1861 (just £7). But be quick, once the initial sales of this disc have been dealt with, we will be putting the price up, probably to around the £10 mark. Given the feedback we have had so far on the 1861 disk this would still constitute one of the bargains of the year!

More 1901 census index areas are being added to our paper collections in the search room each week, it seems.

The culprits? A particularly prolific pair from Upholland, Gerry Rigby and Alan Maloney. The 1901 Census for the areas of Hindley and Ince, about to be completed, are good examples of the pair being able to apply modern technology to old records and produce useful resources as a result. Just Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley to go now! Gerry who, working with a small team has produced and refined many finding aids for us over the past few years, is also currently working with some existing Census indexes from 1891, capturing them in an electronic form so that they can be searched on the computer and incorporated in a much wider database of census returns.

Recently in the study area we made available microfilm records of ceremonies at **Shevington St. Anne's: Baptisms 1873-1926, Marriages 1887-1928, Burials 1889-1914.** But more recently still, Gerry, with the assistance of his team, has **provided us with an** index to all ceremonies at Shevington St. Anne's between these dates. Keep up the excellent work, Gerry.

Neither the 1891 nor the 1901 projects are going to be finished, though, without the areas of Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley being tackled. Special thanks at the moment go to Bob Newton for his sterling work on the area for 1891, but he is working alone and it is slow going. We would be very happy to hear from anyone with the talent for indexing and an interest in that side of our borough.



There it is! Friend Simon Martin has another success

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 1st Wednesday of every month at 11.00 a.m. New members welcome, details from Alan Bradshaw (01942 726493)

Aspull & Haigh Historical Society

We meet in Our Lady's R.C. Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull on the 2nd Thursday in the month at 7.30 p.m. Details from Barbara Rhodes (01942 222769)

Atherton Heritage Society

Meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. at St. Richards Jubilee Hall, Atherton. Details from Margaret Hodge (01942 884893)

10 August

The World of Dickens B Schreider

14 September

The Curiosities of Lancashire P Robinson

12 October

Walkden - Out of Step (preceded by AGM)
Glen Atkinson

9 November

Samuel Coulthurst John Aldred

14 December

The Brownings in Italy (plus Christmas buffet) Lizzie Jones

Atherton Probus Club

This is a non-political and non-sectarian Club for retired professional/businessmen, who meet in St Richard Parish Centre, Mayfield Street, on alternate Thursday afternoons at 1.30 p.m., from 30 September until May 2005. New members welcome. Details from Ron Collier (0161 790 1819).

Billinge Local History Society

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

Golborne & Lowton Local History Society

Meetings are held at Golborne Library on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7.00 p.m. Non-members are welcome. Details from Derek Briscoe (01942 747366) or Jim Scotson (01942 206820).

Hindley History Society

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

6 September

AGM

11 October

Mining James Bathey

The Museum has also been open three times per month – two Friday mornings and one Saturday. Future dates are: 6, 20, 21 August; 10, 24, 25 September; 8, 22, 23 October; 12, 26, 27 November; 3, 18, 19 December.

Leigh & District Family History Society

Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of

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 Christmas 2004 for inclusion in the next issue. Thanks.

every month at 7.30 p.m. in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. Details from Olive Hughes (01942 741594).

Leigh Literary Society

Meetings are held in the Derby Room at the Turnpike Centre, on alternate Monday evenings at 7.30 p.m. Details from Tony Ashcroft, Local History Officer, Leigh Library (01942 404559)

4 October

Stick Around Brian White

18 October

Literary Lakeland Margaret Curry

1 November

Farming Experiences Ian Addison

15 November

The Life & Times of a Butler Donald Lodge

29 November

On the Home Front Len Hudson

13 December

Everything in the Garden's Lovely
Agatha Brown

Leigh Local History Society

Meetings are held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library, on the last Wednesday of the month. Details from Norma Ackers (01942 865488)

29 September

The History of Catholic Lancashire

Tony Hilton

27 October

The Gattys: a notable Lancashire dyeing family

Roy Bannister-Parker

24 November

Roman and Turnpike Roads in SW

Lancashire Mike Atty

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. Anyone wishing to join should contact H. Wilkinson (01942 671943).

Shevington Memories Group

This small, informal group meets each Friday at 2.30 p.m. in Shevington Methodist Church (New Lounge), to share memories about old times. Anyone is welcome. Details from Maurice Hilton (01942 223107).

Skelmersdale & Upholland Family History Society

Meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of each month, except December, July and

August, at 7.30 p.m., in the Hall Green Community Centre, Upholland. Beginners and more experienced family historians welcome. Details from Simon Martin (01942 702594).

28 September

Family History Course – *Manorial Records*
Simon Martin

26 October

Probate Inventories Showing Everyday Life in the Past Diane Winterbottom

23 November

Family History Course – *Parish Registers*
Simon Martin

Standish Probus Club

Members are retired business and professional people. Meetings, which are open to both men and women, are held at 'The Owls', Rectory Lane, Standish on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at 10.30 a.m. New members welcome. Details from Bryan Shepherd (01257 424994)

Tyldesley & District Historical Society

Meetings are held on the 3rd Thursday of every month from September to May at the Tyldesley Pensioners club on Milk Street at 7.30 p.m. Refreshments available. Contact Tony Rydings (01942 514271) or rydings@blueyonder.co.uk. Visit our website at www.tyldesleyhistoricalsociety.co.uk.

Tyldesley Probus Club

Members of the Club meet at Tyldesley Methodist Church, Eliot Street, on alternate Thursday mornings at 10.30 a.m., from 7 October until May 2005. The Club is for retired business/professional men and is non-political and non-sectarian. New members welcome. Details from Cedric Evans (0161 790 5166).

Wigan Archaeological Society

The Society meets at the BP Centre (Scout HQ) in Greenhough Street on the 1st Wednesday of the month at 7.30 p.m.

Wigan Civic Trust

The Trust meets at Drumcroon Education Arts Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan, on the 2nd Monday of the month at 7.30 p.m. Details from A.J. Grimshaw, 6 Bridgeman Terrace, Wigan (01942 245777). New members always welcome.

13 September

Lancashire Surnames Fred Holcroft

11 October

Bounds of Upholland Dr Audrey Coney

13 December

The Liverpool Blitz Video

Wigan Family & Local History Society

Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month (except in July and August) in the Springfield Hotel, Springfield Road, Wigan, at 7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m. The meetings alternate between members' evenings and external speakers. Further information from John Wogan, 678 Warrington Road, Goose Green, Wigan WN3 6XN or email Johnwogan@blueyonder.co.uk. You can also visit our website at www.ffhs.org.uk/members/wigan.htm.

Mary Lee, the last woman to work underground at Atherton Collieries

Ellen Smith's fascinating reminiscences for 'Carbon', the magazine of Atherton Collieries in 1921

UP to now the writers of reminiscences for *Carbon* have usually started by giving the dates on which they began working for the firm; it is difficult for me to say when I was first employed here, as I have lived at Gibfield all my life, and have never worked a day for any firm but this one.

Col. Fletcher

My father Thomas Blakeley first worked for Colonel Ralph Fletcher at Darcy Lever, and in 1827 after Colonel Fletcher came to Atherton my father came to live at Gibfield. I believe his first job in Atherton was to repair some of the old water wheels in various parts of the village. There was one at Cox's Farm [*south of Atherton Central Station*], one at Molefield [*Howe Bridge*], and several others [*between Howe Bridge and Wigan Road*]. I have often heard my father speak of his early days here. When he first came there were no buildings of any kind at Gibfield and just one old ladder pit. There were a number of these old ladder pits in different parts of the village, several down the Tyldesley Old Road, and one or two at the top of the Leigh Road, opposite the cemetery.

Old Gin Pit

There was also an old gin pit [*a horse wound winding wheel arrange-*

Foreword

FLETCHER Burrows and Company operated Atherton Collieries from 1874 until the formation of Manchester Collieries in 1929. The Fletchers had far earlier associations with coalmining in Atherton, right back to at least 1768 when a lease was taken out by them to allow mining operations.

The company had always had a uniquely caring approach to their mining community, its moral and spiritual well-being, general welfare and leisure facilities. In 1919 they began to publish a magazine called '*Carbon*', probably the first of its kind in the industry. The impetus was probably due to the influence of Clement Fletcher, who had a fascination with the history of the industry in Atherton and had a real soft spot for the mining community. The magazine included a range of articles, from debating societies to travel, from mining history to updates on local colliery activities.

A series of reminiscences from older employees were published in '*Carbon*' in the early 1920's. These show that some had worked for the company for over 60 years! Their clear memories of Atherton in the middle of the 19th century and the even earlier memories of those around them who could recall the 1820's are very important. They add meat to the superbly clear and detailed 1st edition OS maps of Atherton in 1849, a semi rural world of small scale industry, open fields, dirt roads and newly arrived railways.

This particular reminiscence is one of the more fascinating examples and tells us of the old and probably late 18th century waterwheel winding collieries dotted around the area. The watercourses for these can still be seen. The lady also recalls early ladder pits and the precarious arrival of steam winding and mentions the last woman to work underground.

Anyone interested in reading other '*Carbon*' magazines can find them in the Studies section of Leigh Library.

Alan Davies
Heritage Officer (Archives)

ment] up 'Far Atherton' [*east of Schofield Lane*] which, of course, was not worked within my memory, but which my father often talked about. When the old engine house was built in 1829 [*alongside Stephenson's 1828 Bolton to Leigh Railway*] most of the work was done by a man named Alexander Hayes and my father. I still have the date stone marked 1829 R.F. which

my father took when the building was pulled down at the time the Arley Pit was being sunk [*in 1872*]. At that time a wooden engine house was put up temporarily, after which the present building was erected.

In his early days my father was engine winder as well as stoker; he used to start the cage coming up, then run down the steps to the engine house,

stoke up the boilers, and get back in time to stop the engine when the cage reached the top. As well as looking after his engine and boilers he did most of the tub repairing and joinering, but later on as the work increased, the stoking and winding were done by others, and he gave all his time to joinering etc.

Born in 1846

When the old engine house was built - it stood just about where the present mess room is - a small cottage was put up quite near it in which my father and mother lived. I was born there in 1846.

Our kitchen door was right opposite the boilers, and I remember several occasions when the boilers ran dry we had to get up in the middle of the night and go out in case they should blow up. There was a patch of ground outside the front door on which coal used to be heaped, and when there was a lot down we could not use the front door at all and could only get in and out the back way. The offices were under the same roof as our cottage, but they were very different from the present ones. There were just two small rooms - one upstairs and one downstairs - and later on a second room was built upstairs over our kitchen.

In her lifetime my mother was the office

caretaker, and I remember helping her to dust the rooms when I was a very small child. She died when I was nearly 13 years old, and since that time I have looked after the offices without a break of any kind - that is for over 62 years. At one time one of the cashiers - John King - lived with us and I always remember the cash box he used to take up to his bedroom. There were no safes in the offices as there are now, and all the money that could not be taken to the bank was put in this cash box each night.

Fields everywhere

When first I remember, Gibfield was a very different place from what it is now. There was the engine house, a stable, the wagon shop, joiners shop, and an old saw pit, and the rest was green fields. There were, of course, a few farms round about, but apart from these there were practically no buildings of any kind. There were a few old houses in Bag Lane, with beautiful gardens and big orchards, but looking

towards Atherton - Chowbent as it was then - it was quite open. Wigan Road was little more than a lane and, except for a few shops and cottages in Market Street, there were fields everywhere. I often used to go to see my mother's people who lived at Tyldesley Fold, near New Brook, and it was quite a country walk. There was, of course, no Lancashire and Yorkshire railway line and I used to go across the fields the whole way. So far as I remember the only two buildings I passed were Spa Farm and Hag Fold. In those days men thought nothing of walking three or four miles to their work and as they spent from 10 to 12 hours down the pit, they had very long days.

Mary Lee

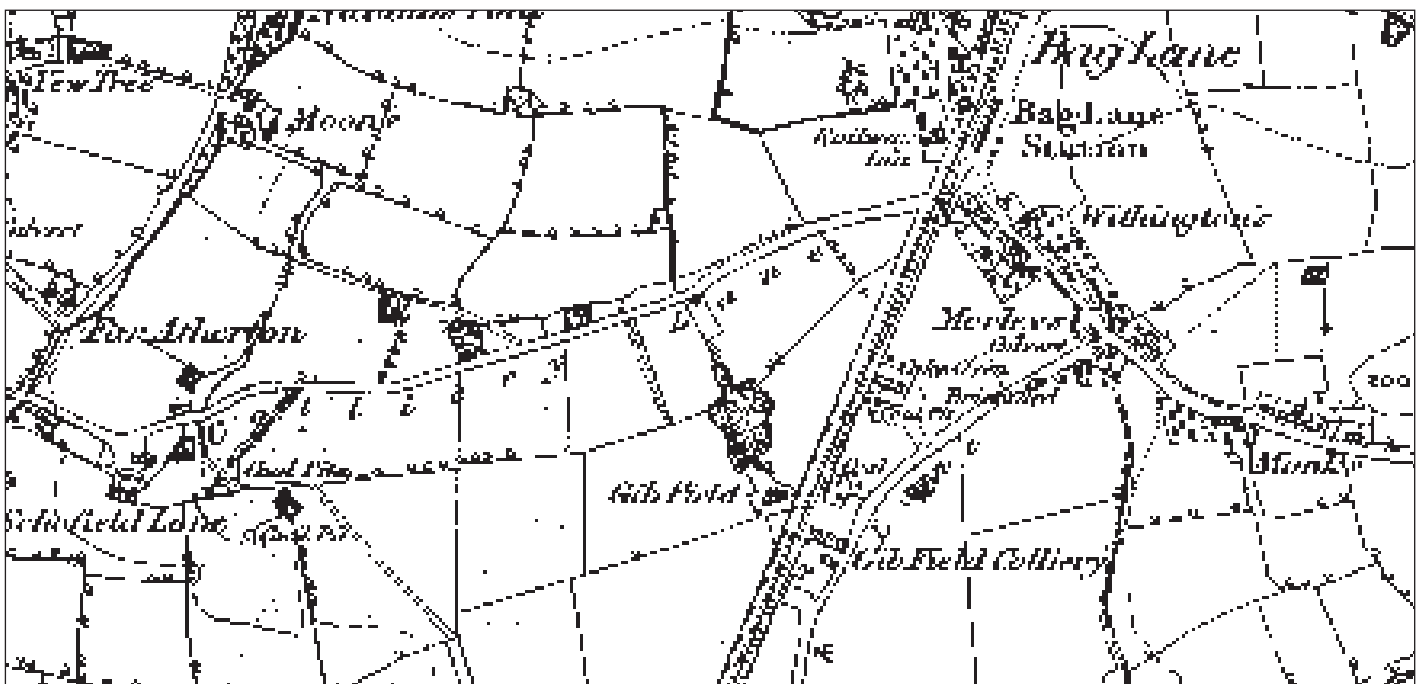
I can just remember one woman working down the pit - Mary Lee - who worked as a drawer [pushing full and empty tubs around below ground] for her father. She was a very big woman, and did not seem to find the job too heavy. I believe

she was the last woman to work down the pit in Atherton [women's days underground ended by law in 1842, although many still were to be found at collieries for years afterwards].

Coal winding was a very slow process compared to today's activity. In the old days, if a specially important order had to be got out, the men were told of it at the beginning of the day, and the firm provided them with bread and cheese and beer when they came up if the order was completed. Up till quite recently Whitsuntide was a great holiday in Atherton and, as the pits were closed down for a week, all the ponies were brought up for a holiday. The boys who looked after them used to take a great deal of trouble to make the ponies look as nice as possible when they came up, and a big crowd used to gather at the pit head to see them. The boys used to parade them round Bag Lane and Leigh Road to a field in Howe Bridge, where they remained until the pits began work again.

'Captain'

I could tell many amusing and interesting stories of Gibfield and Chowbent in the old days, but one story my father used to tell always remains in my memory. An old horse named 'Captain' which formerly belonged to Major John Langshaw [a cousin of the Fletchers who joined the company in 1840], was used for all sorts of odd jobs about the pit head. He was a great favourite with everyone. One day he got out of his stable - which was quite near the pit shaft - and whilst rubbing himself against the doors at the top of the shaft he managed to get them open and fell down. Mercifully it was in the days of the old ladder pit so he stopped at the first stage. He was hauled up with much difficulty, none the worse for his adventure, except for the loss of one of his shoes - which my father kept. This shoe still hangs above my kitchen mantlepiece, along with a number of other relics of bygone days.



1849 6" O.S. Map

South Pemberton Brass Band

My father was one of 13 children (nine of whom survived to become adults). The family lived for a time in a terraced house in Enfield Street, Pemberton - can one imagine accommodating nine children, two parents and a grandfather in what must have been a two-bedroom property?! He developed three particular interests which distinguished him from his peer group.

Firstly, as a teenager he studied steam engines at Wigan Mining and Technical College and became a colliery winding engineman; secondly, at the age of 22 he became a qualified rugby league referee (I have a photograph of him at the age of 10 as part of the Pemberton Colliery School rugby league team of 1910/11 which had won the local championship and been awarded watches and chains; for some reason, however, he chose not to pursue a playing career). Thirdly, he learned to play the piano and the cornet. This latter skill led him, in his late 20's, to establish the South Pemberton Brass Band of which he was bandmaster. It is about this band that I would particularly welcome any information your readers might be able to provide. I should emphasise that this was not the Pemberton Old Band but may, in fact, have replaced it.

What I know is that the band was officially set up in 1932. I have its draft constitution from a firm of local solicitors, a couple of photographs and the Treasurer's account book for the period 1931-43. The latter gives a glimpse of the engagements from the detailed income and expenditure statements. For example, there are entries showing that the following sums were collected from the crowds watching Wigan Athletic in the autumn of 1933:

20 Sept	
Wigan Athletic	7s. 0p.
14 Oct	
Wigan Athletic v Lytham	9s. 10p.
25 Nov	
Wigan Athletic	6s. 1½p.

These may have been generous voluntary contributions at a time when there was unemployment on



South Pemberton Brass Band at Wigan Hippodrome

top of the poverty in the area (or perhaps it suggests low attendances?). The band's surplus for that year appears to have been just over £2.

As a small boy I recall their performing in Mesnes Park, Wigan, and I know that they also played at church walking days and field treats. Again the accounts show the following amongst other entries for 1934:

3 June	
St Johns Pemberton	
Field Treat	£7-0-0
1 July	
St Lukes Orrell Field	
Treat and Sermons	£10-11-4
8 July	
St Matthews Highfield	
Field Treat and Sermons	£9-0-0

The Band also entered local Band contests at Standish, Atherton, Skelmersdale and, on at least one occasion. In 1934, the prestigious contests held at Belle Vue, Manchester; unfortunately. However, I have no record of their performances.

Should any of your readers be interested in seeing these papers I would be willing to arrange for them to view them, perhaps on one of my occasional visits to the town.

Meanwhile I would welcome any information on the Band and its predecessors. Moreover, I would particularly like to establish the

date and venue when a Brass Band (a predecessor or some other band) played at a field day at Upholland in 1928, 1929 or 1930, because it was at this event, I was told, that my parents met. I have studied in vain the parish magazines for St Thomas the Martyr at the Archives Office in Leigh. Can anyone help please with details of the bands playing for the Upholland Field Days in those years?

Roy Ainscough
 6 Delville Avenue
 Keyworth
 Nottingham NG12 5JA
 Tel 0115-9373419
 email:
roy@rainscough.freeserve.co.uk

Date	Description	Amount
1931	Income	1 1 1
1931	Balance forward	1 1 1
1931	Wigan Athletic	7 6
1931	Lytham	9 10
1931	Wigan Athletic	6 1 1/2
1931	Contribution	5 0
1931	Contribution	5 0
1931	Wigan Athletic	7 6
1931	Lytham	9 10
1931	Wigan Athletic	6 1 1/2
1931	Contribution	5 0
1931	Contribution	5 0
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1931	Wigan Athletic	6 1 1/2
1931	Contribution	5 0
1931	Contribution	5 0
1931	Wigan Athletic	7 6
1931	Lytham	9 10
1931	Wigan Athletic	6 1 1/2
1931	Contribution	5 0
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1931	Wigan Athletic	7 6
1931	Lytham	9 10
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The Burning Wells of Wigan

That gas is associated with coal deposits is not a relatively new area of knowledge. In 300 BC both Plato and Aristotle mention *burning stone* and *spiritus* (gas). In any area like Wigan Borough where the upper strata is mainly coal measures, methane and other gases associated in smaller percentages have always found their way to the surface.

Methane is a light, combustible, gaseous hydrocarbon, (CH₄), produced artificially by the dry distillation of many organic substances, such as the decaying vegetation of coal measures forests over 250 million years ago, and occurring today as a natural product of decomposition in stagnant pools, whence its name. Methane occurs naturally with coal, bonded to the internal surface of the pores within the structure along with other gases. Often these gases would be vented into the general body of the air and never noticed. The amount of methane associated with coal can vary from almost zero cubic metres per tonne to as much as 25 cubic metres.

Today the study of methane seepage is a highly specialised area probed into worldwide by scientists and the level of knowledge is staggering. We know now, for instance, that the flames associated with burning phenomenon can be ignited by traces of hydrogen phosphide sometimes found near decaying organic matter.

Sir Thomas Shirley 1667

Our first account comes in 1667 from Sir Thomas Shirley in his paper to the Royal Society. He states:

"About a mile from Wigan in Lancashire is a spring, the water of which is supposed to burn like oil. It is true that when we came to the spring, and applied a lighted candle to the surface of the water, there was suddenly a large flame produced, which burned vigorously.....The people of this town did confidently affirm that the Water of this Spring did burn like Oyle.

Upon making a dam, and hindering the recourse of freshwater to the burning place of the water, I caused that which was already there to be drained away, and then applying the burning candle to the

surface of the dry earth at the same point, where the water burned before; the fumes took fire and burned very bright and vigorous. I then caused a bucket full of water to be poured on the fire, by which it was presently quenched.....the fumes here mentioned were inflammable air or hydrogen gas, of which the rapid ascent through the water gave it the appearance of boiling"

The Burning Well of 1676

Roger North describes the existence of seepages of gas in the borough, probably in the Wigan area. This particular example is almost certainly *The Burning Well*, actually shown as such on the 1849 OS map alongside Dog Pool brook, opposite the site of Hindley and Abram Grammar School, now Park High Teachers Centre.

During a journey homewards from Lancaster, North states:

"The greatest wonder his Lordship [Francis North, Baron Guildford] saw was what they call the Burning Well. The manner of it is this. First in some place where they know the sulphurous vapour perspires (often in a ditch) they dig up a turf, and clap it down in its place again and then they are ready for projection.

When the show company are come, a man takes up the turf, and after a little puffing of a brown paper match gives fire and instantly the hole is filled with a blue spirituous flame like brandy.

It seemed to waste and I believe would not have burnt in that manner long; but while it was burning they put water in the hole, and the flame continued upon the water as if it had been spirits. And some people said they used to boil eggs there.

That which seem'd most strange was that the vapour should come through the water and burn, and no bubbling of the water appear. It seems to infer that the vapour permeates the body of the water, as water through sands. But, I question, if the body were not fluid, but rigid, as glass, whether the vapour would so easily pass it; for the perpetual action of the fluid parts facilitates the passage. And it is some demonstration how easily the effluvia of a magnet may permeate glass, metals, and every palpable substance we are acquainted with, as we continually observe of them."

In Baines' Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster of 1825 he mentions the Hindley Burning Well and states:

"The springs in the neighbourhood of Wigan are numerous.....There is at Hindley a phenomenon of great rarity called The Burning Well. On applying a lighted candle to the surface of the water, there is suddenly a large flame produced, which burns vigorously; the water will not, however, burn detached from the well, for on taking up a dishful, and holding a lighted candle to it, the

Continued on page 30



Geological fault lying below the Burning Well Hindley opposite Park High Teachers Centre. 1849 6" O.S. Map

The Burning Wells of Wigan

Continued from page 29

flame goes out. The water in the well boils and rises up, like water in a pot upon the fire, though on immersing the hand in the liquid no warmth is communicated, but a strong breath of wind bears upon the hand while wile over the place whence the flame issues.....the cone of the flame ascends a foot and a half from the earth, with a basis of about 14 inches in diameter. An egg may be boiled in a small vessel above it."

Faulted ground venting gas

Looking at the geological survey plans we find that the Hindley Burning well lay right on top of a major fault. Here the strata has been dislocated by nearly 700 metres making an ideal conduit to allow gas under pressure to force its way to the surface. The relatively porous broken ground of the fault taps gas from many seams and probably still does today, so teachers should be careful where you throw matches when next at Park High on a training course!

Dr John Clayton

The Revd John Clayton (1657-1725) was the son of Richard Clayton of Preston. He is known to have been intrigued by the gas emissions in the Wigan area and collected samples. Although Dr Clayton's communications in relation to gas in the Wigan area were only published after his death by the Royal Society he is known to have sent his findings to the famous Robert Boyle in 1684 when aged 27.

The part of his letter to Boyle published as "*An Experiment concerning the Spirit of Coals.....*" in 1739 by the Royal Society contains the following interesting sections;

"Having seen a ditch within two miles from Wigan in Lancashire, wherein the water would seemingly burn like Brandy, the flame of which is so fierce, that several strangers have boiled eggs over it, the people thereabouts indeed affirm, that about 30 years ago it would have boiled a piece of beef; and that whereas much

rain formerly made it burn much fiercer, now after rain it would scarce burn at all.....I hired a person to make a dam in the ditch.....about the depth of half a yard. We found a shelly coal, and the candle being then put down in the hole, the air caught fire, and continued burning.

I observed that there had formerly been coal pits in the same close of ground; and I then got some coal from one of the pits nearest thereunto, which I distilled in a retort in an open fire. At first there came over only phlegm, afterwards a black oil, and then likewise a spirit arose, which I could noways condense. I observed that the spirit which issued out caught fire at the flame of the candle and continued burning with violence as it issued out, in a stream, which I blew out, and lighted again, alternatively, for several times.

I fixed a bladder, squeezed and void of air, to the pipe of the receiver..... the spirit blew up the bladder. I kept this spirit in the bladders a considerable time, and endeavoured several ways to condense it, but in vain. And when I had a mind to divert strangers or friends, I have frequently taken one of these bladders, and pricking a hole therein with a pin, and compressing gently the bladder near the flame of the candle till it once took fire, it would then continue flaming till all the spirit was compressed out of the bladder."

It is interesting to note that Clayton recognised the varying emissions of gas coincided with periods of varying air pressure, more gas being emitted during low pressure rainy spells. Ex miners today will remember low pressure spells danger as gas is released from the strata more readily.

The Derby Lane Well, Hindley

James Stirling, active in the Royal Society in the 1740's, describes another well at the end of Derby Lane, Hindley, to the north west of the present Town Hall. He said that the water boiled and rose up like water in a pot upon the fire, though his hand put into it felt no warmth. The flame rises in a cone-like form, with a circular base about the circumference of a man's hat at the brim.

A description of the Derby Lane well in 1835 states;

"The gas ascends out of a small

hole through a heap of clay, near a little rill, and takes fire on the application of the flame of a candle, the carbonated [carburetted] hydrogen, a black oily liquid, boiling up and bubbling continually at the bottom, while the flame ascends about half a yard high."

By the time John Leyland was compiling his *Memorials of Hindley* in 1873 both sites were not active either as wells or as visitor attractions any more. A glance at the geological survey shows that the Derby Lane well lay virtually on top of a major fault, gas revealing itself at that particular place by bubbling up through the water, but probably coming to the surface in many other places along the fault outcrop.

The Hawkey Well and Will O'th Wisp

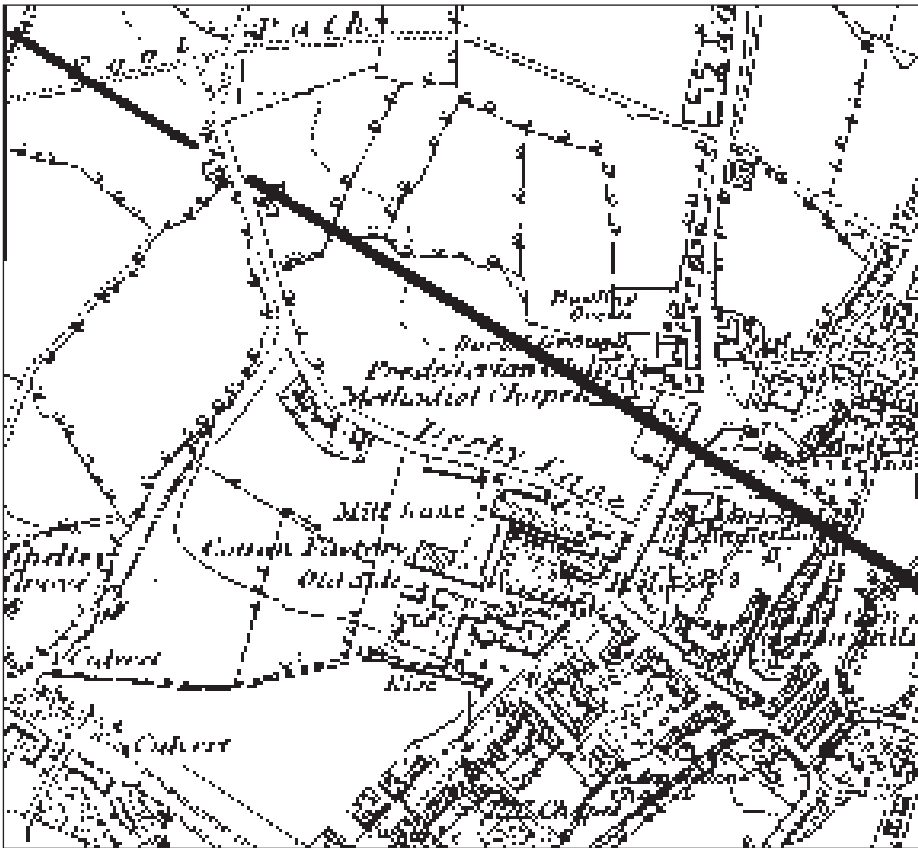
The exact location of this site has been lost. The occurrence is mentioned in *England Described*, published by William Bancks of Wigan in 1788;

"Some years since, near this town was a well which did not appear to be a spring, but rather rain water; at first sight there was nothing about it that seemed extraordinary, but upon emptying it there presently broke out a sulphurous vapour which made the water bubble up as if it boiled.

When a candle was put to it, it presently took fire, and burned like brandy; the flame, in a clam season would continue sometimes a whole day, by the heat whereof they could boil eggs, meat, etc though the water was cold. By this bubbling the water did not increase, but was only kept in motion by the constant halitus of the vapours breaking out.

The same water, taken out of the well would not burn, nor the mud upon which the the halitus had beaten; and this shews that it was not so much the water that took fire as some bituminous or sulphureous fumes that broke out there.

This burning well (as it was called) is lost, supposed to be owing to the coal works about the Hawkey demesne, (near where it was). Experiments may be made in many places in Wigan and the neighbourhood similar to it, and it is said by the miners, these places are generally found, where is what they call a fault, which may be perceived by little bubbles of water on the top



1849 6" O.S. Map of Hindley showing the geological fault passing below the site of the Derby Lane Well.

of the ground, ditches, or other places, and which will immediately take fire on applying a lighted candle thereto; or (as it has been found to be nothing more than the fiery damp) if collected into a bladder, by putting a lighted candle to it, will make an explosion like a cannon: from such exhalations, it is said, proceed, the Will with a Whisp, or Jack with a Lanthorn, or, as they are commonly, (though vulgarly) called in Lancashire, a going fire."

Although written in 1788 when geological knowledge was still relatively in its infancy this account shows that the Wigan miners themselves suspected a link with geological faults. Working below ground they would be used to blowers of gas (the fiery damp as they called it) being associated with faults or faulty ground.

This early use of the terms Will with a Whisp (or Will O'th Wisp) and Jack with a Lanthorn (Jack O'th Lantern) is interesting as viewed by those walking through the borough's fields in the 18th century. The imbibing of copious amounts of locally brewed ale no doubt heightened the experience! The earlier the description of burning phenomenon the more colourful the conclusions. In many places Will O'th

Wisps were associated with spirits of the dead who could not enter either heaven or hell, wandering the earth leading foolish travellers astray.

Divine retribution?

Methane seepages around the Hawkley area dramatically came to light once more in January 1933. The maid at Goose Green St Pauls vicarage, which dated back to around 1700, was startled by an explosion in the drawing room and alarmed by blue gaseous flames shooting through crevices between the floorboards. A valuable collection of china was smashed to pieces.

The colliery manager at Pemberton Colliery, T. Cook was called, along with gas department officials and firemen. They removed floorboards and probed amongst the brick foundations, even making a small tunnel from the area out into the garden to divert the gas. This was to no avail, as the gas continued to ignite for nine hours after the initial explosion. Eventually the gas blower was exhausted and no further problems occurred.

Blazing Borough Boundaries

Most of our area's boundaries go unnoticed, many following field

shapes, others small brooks. Harry Forshaw and Phil Gregory of Westhoughton, on hearing of my researches, informed me that the boundary between Atherton and Westhoughton at Hall Lee Brook, alongside Schofield Lane was for many years known as The Burning Brook. About 50 years ago the area was regarded as a visitor attraction.

A match thrown onto the surface of the brook would ignite methane gas bubbling up, to be extinguished by throwing a large brick or stone into the brook. A glance at the geological survey shows the area to be intersected by faults and outcrops of the King and Cannel seams. In 1975 a farmer near Rogers Farm Sewage Works, Westhoughton described how after ploughing his field he could ignite furrows in certain areas.

In Conclusion

In the Wigan Borough we have progressed a long way from the days of Will O'Th Wisp and Jack O'Th Lantern superstitions. We have passed through 600 years of coal extraction and can free our minds from worries that the area is one huge high pressure gasometer, and that probably it is now just a slightly smaller gasometer!

Regional names for the phenomenon:

Hertfordshire and East Anglia:

The Hobby Lantern

Lancashire:

Will O'th Wisp, Jack O'th Lantern, Peg-a-Lantern

Cornwall and Somerset:

Joan the Wad

East Anglia:

The Lantern Man

Shropshire:

Will the Smith

Worcestershire:

Pinket

The West Country:

Jacky Lantern, Jack a Lantern

Wales:

Pwca and the Ellylldan

Norfolk:

Will o the Wikes

Warwickshire Gloucestershire:

Hobbedy's Lantern

North Yorkshire, Northumberland:

Jenny with the Lantern

Other names:

Corpse candles - related to graveyards and funeral processions.

Igis Fatuus - Latin for 'foolish fire'.

Alan Davies

Heritage Officer (Archives)

My Memory of World War II

By Beth Slevin (nee Rigby)

I WAS training to be a nurse at Manchester Royal Infirmary on 3 September 1939 when, as I walked down the long corridors at 11.15am, I heard over the radio those memorable words of Neville Chamberlain, “we are now at war with Germany”.

For a while after the announcement of war, nothing much happened, and the war seemed remote. It came close to home when we heard Hitler's boast that Manchester could expect to bury its dead on Christmas Day. Sure enough we got the promised raid, though mainly in the town centre and it was in another raid later that our nurse's home got a direct hit with an incendiary bomb. As we were all in the shelter in the foundations none of us were hurt, even though we had to walk bare foot through the broken glass to a safer place.

My ambition had been to go to Rhodesia with a friend, as soon as we had finished our training, but as the war started we had to think again and decided to join the army together instead. It did not work out quite like that as the Matron, one Miss Duff-Grant, who was unbelievably strict, stopped Olive leaving at the last minute. She said she had to make up the time she had been off sick in the last four years. So I went on my own to Colchester in June 1942, to join the QAIMNS.R. (The Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserved).

Albert Hall

After a few months I was sent to Hatfield House which had been turned into an emergency hospital. One day I, with about five other nurses, was told to get myself ready to go out wearing my ward uniform, to take a clean cap with me. We had no idea where we were going but were dropped eventually by a door, and went in. We had to wait in the queue, put our caps on, and not to talk. All of a sudden we were pushed through another door to find ourselves in an enormous circular building and, as bands played, we

walked down some steps and across the centre – all out of step of course – and escorted to seats reserved for us. There we watched as other personnel and troops marched across in time to the military music. It turned out we were in the Albert Hall for the November 11 Annual Memorial Service for the war dead. We were taken back as quickly as we had come, in order to disperse the hundreds of soldiers who had all been under one roof. No wonder the whole exercise had been planned and executed without any one of us knowing where we were going. Hitler would have had a field day if he had known!

Men's Trousers

In Hatfield we were being assembled to form the 31st General Hospital, and in January 1943 we boarded ship to go overseas. As officers we travelled with a trunk - a real luxury - and a camp bed, plus three blankets. As they were for the British Army they were coarse and not very warm. The Canadian blankets were much softer and the American ones I believe were sheer luxury, but I never even saw one of those.

Our destination turned out to be Algiers in North Africa, where we were again re-grouped into small numbers, to go to existing hospitals. We were compared very unfavourably with the nurses who had arrived before us. They had been torpedoed, even

though they had been in a clearly marked hospital ship. They all had to be rescued from the water, and lost all their possessions; unlike us, though, we were told that they had all been laughing and joking, and had been kitted out in men's khaki uniforms. Incidentally, while I was in Algiers I was able to call for a few minutes to see a friend who had been in this group, and I remember getting quite a cultural shock to see her on duty in men's trousers with the zip at the front! Girls' trousers in those days always fastened at the side, and were anyway only worn for sport, certainly not for nursing in. How times have changed!

At first, with our grey frocks, we wore white aprons, white collars and shoulder capes. However, as we had to wash our own clothes and had very few facilities, one by one these little extras were discarded, until only the white caps were left floating behind our heads, looking deflated and sad. Eventually we were also given khaki uniforms, because, I suppose it was easier to supply the whole army with the same colour, but we never got the trousers, only the skirts.

Spam!

We always seemed to be short of soap, even when we were able to buy a ration of gin and whisky! I never found out why. The thing I missed

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Nurses at Hatfield House, 1942 (Beth is centre, front row)

most was fresh milk. I hated the powdered milk we always got. The highlight where food was concerned was spam. We loved it! I often wonder now whether it really was the same as the spam you can buy today.

I pitied the poor patients. They were mainly front line casualties wounded in the fighting as the battle raged inland. They were first attended to at casualty clearing stations and then sent on to us. They were mainly gun-shot wounds, and we dressed them with the new magic powder that had just been discovered, penicillin.

No Love Lost

Part of the hospital was fenced off as a prisoner of war compound for wounded Germans. The senior sister over them was very strict, and they use to stay that she was too good for the British Army – they admired discipline! We also had German orderlies working in the hospital. Prisoners could choose whether they would work for us ‘on parole’, a promise not to try and escape, or go to a prisoner of war camp. Many chose to work for us, though when our hospital left North Africa, they would not work for the Italians who were left in charge, and so went cheerfully to prison. There was no love lost between the Italians and the Germans. The Italians were furious that the Germans, our enemy, were allowed to work on the wards, while they had to do the more menial tasks. The Germans on their part could not forgive the Italians for changing sides so easily when they were needed most. But on the whole, compared with the violence at today’s football matches, everyone got along very well.

The Army went to great lengths to see that the mail was delivered to the troops, even if it had to follow them round from place to place. Our regimental sergeant major was therefore not very amused one day, when a spitfire came low over the hospital and dropped a small tin box with a ‘handkerchief’ parachute. In it was a letter addressed to me. Unfortunately it landed in the POW compound just as the colonel was doing his round. You can imagine the telling off I got!

Harrowing

The 100th General Hospital was about 10 miles inland from us and it was there that my friend Olive began

her overseas stint. As there were no phones it was difficult to make arrangements to meet, even if we could manage to get transport, so I only went to see her once. On the visit I realized how lucky we were, for conditions there were light years away from ours. I would call them harrowing.

Again it was a 1200 bedded affair, made up of Nissan huts and tents, but there the nurses slept in small tents holding two or three. In the hospital compound the latrines were called ‘Indian tents’. They comprised a square hessian tent with a flap for a door. The room inside was divided into two by a hessian screen, behind which was a so called ‘wooden coffin’ with four holes in it. As most of the summer they had gippy tummies, there was a permanent queue on one side of the hessian screen, waiting for the privilege to sit on one of the holes on the other side. To make matters worse the ration of ‘army form blank’ (toilet paper to you) was only five pieces per person per day! The toilets in the nurse’s compound were only a little better. The walls of these were made of beaten out petrol cans with the same dividing wall of hessian and a wooden coffin seat. However, here there was extra hessian draped between each hole to give more privacy.

Now to this picture add the heat, the dreadful smell and the swarms of flies, with their attendant maggots! It has to be endured to be believed, no words of mine are adequate. No wonder everyone there had almost permanent tummy trouble, for those flies were everywhere. They got on the food and in your mouth. In the orthopaedic ward the flies got under the patients plasters and were so bad that the maggots had to be swept up off the floor everyday! Mind you these maggots did no harm; in fact they seemed to clean up the wounds. The trouble was the terrible sensation the patients felt as they crawled round inside the plaster.

Italian Coast

In October 1943 I was moved with one nurse to Bari in Southern Italy, to the 98th General Hospital. The nurses’ home was a brand new building, but unfortunately there were bed bugs already under the plaster on the wall, brought in on the workmen’s clothing. We thought they were fleabites until told otherwise.

The hospital was comparatively good, and as the 97th hospital was far back from the front line by the time I got there, the patients were very varied. Some were just ill with things like malaria and hepatitis; others needed operations such as appendectomy. Here we nursed a few Yugoslavians; they looked an unhappy lot, as well they might. We also nursed some Ghurkhas who sat stoically upright with straight backs and crossed legs, never uttering a sound. I could believe they are very, very brave.

The maids were Italians and we could not speak the language; all I could say was “lavari tutti presto” which I hope means “wash everything quickly”. This seemed to have the desired effect, as they got on with whatever they could see needed to be done.

We saw little of the war. It is hard to realize how little of the war news we heard during all our time overseas, as no one had a radio, so we did not really know what was going on.

In Africa we had had no time off, but things were different now, and we all had regular holidays. A week I think it was, every four months. We went to YWCA hostels, set up for the purpose, in nine places. I had a lovely week in Sorrento, visiting Capri, and another one later on Ischia; my last holiday was in Rome, so wasn’t I the lucky one?

Home Again

I volunteered to go to India in June 1945, and so was sent home for some leave. When I arrived in Wigan, a man called Jim Slevin, my sister-in-law’s brother, who I had never seen before, met me at the station. My parents had asked him to meet me, as he was the only person they knew who had a car tucked away in the garage. It was love at first sight for both of us, and before my leave was up he had asked me to marry him, and I had said ‘yes’. I had a lovely two weeks at home with the family, and then I had to go back on duty.

Well, of course, I never did get to India. First it was VE day on 8 May, and then VJ day on 14 August. I asked to be released from the army and came home to marry Jim on 26 November 1945. I did have to go back to Headington for a few weeks after the honeymoon, but came home for good after that.

**Beth Selvin
Standish Wigan**

Wiganers at Rorke's Drift

by Fred Holcroft

I RECENTLY made the trip of a lifetime. Well, I had to wait a lifetime before I got the chance to make the trip. Fifty years after first hearing the name 'Spion Kop'¹ I was able to visit the site of that Boer War battle as part of my trip to South Africa, to watch the Cricket World Cup. I was also able to see the battlefields of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift, fought some 21 years earlier than Spion Kop.

The first thing that strikes you on a visit to these early battlefields is how small they were. Isandlwana is about the size of the Robin Park and Asda retail complex in area, the top of Spion Kop would fit into two cricket fields, while Rorke's drift is only slightly larger than two tennis courts.

The dramatic events of all three battles can be easily reconstructed on the spot. Spion Kop (1900) and Isandlwana (1879) remain largely unchanged while, Rorke's Drift (1879), despite much recent building around the site, it is so

small that the salient features can still be followed and there are excellent supportive exhibitions (plus souvenir shop!).

Given the number of Lancashire regiments present at Spion Kop – Lancashire Fusiliers, Royal Lancaster Regiment, South Lancashire Regiment – there was always the possibility of finding local men in the thick of the action, and so it proved. Over 120 local men were serving in these regiments,² while eight local men were killed and lie buried with their comrades in the mass grave which marks the line of their trench:

Richard Barlow, Private 4999, Lancashire Fusiliers, 38 Aldred Street, Tyldesley, age 24

Wilfred Brogan, Private Royal Lancaster Regiment, 3 South View, Bryn, age unknown

¹ See Fred's book, *'The Devils Hill'*, available from the History Shop. Ed.

² Listed in *'The Devil's Hill'*.

Dennis Delaney, Private 4435, Lancashire Fusiliers, 18 Anderton Street, Wigan, age 24

Michael Green, Private 4449, Lancashire Fusiliers, 41 Victoria Street, Wigan, age 26

James Greenall (enlisted as John Lunn), Corporal 3125, Lancashire Fusiliers, 80 Plank Lane, Leigh, age 28

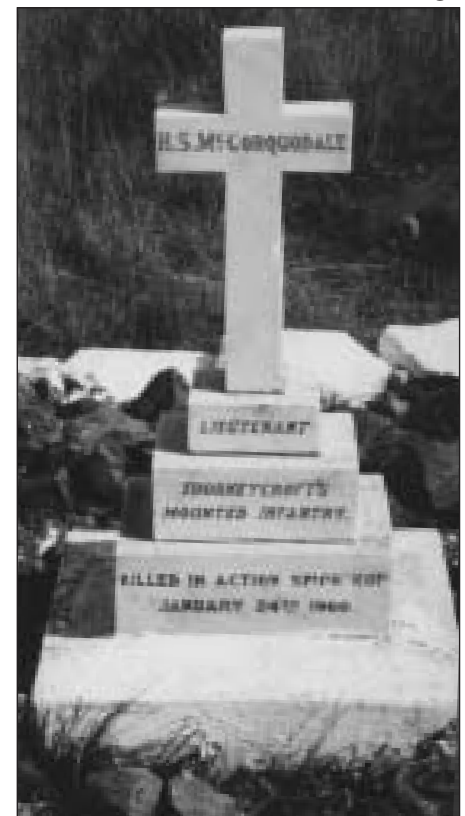
John Heyes, Private 2967 Lancashire Fusiliers, 15 Church Lane, Wingates, Westhoughton, age 28

Stewart McCorquodale, 2nd Lieutenant in Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, Newton-Le-Willows, age 25

Isaac Pratt, Private 2912, Lancashire Fusiliers, 48 Bolton Street, Chorley, age 29 (born in Wigan)

Young McCorquodale's family (who owned the well-known printing and binding firm) erected

British dead in the trenches at Spion Kop



FROM SPRING BANK TO WINSTANLEY

A Story of our Time

1938 to 1948

THE Year is 1938. A family lived on Spring Bank in Pemberton, the forthcoming war not in the thoughts of the two boys in the family. A giant machine is laying tarmac on the road in Larch Avenue. Two families with lawns set together had made for themselves a homemade bowling green. The Bradys and the Berrys lived side by side. Sitting on a fence we children sing songs of the day, 'Horsey, horsey keep your tail up' was one I remember well.

'Little sir Echo' became popular. There is a May Queen but 'Flash Gordon' was on at the Carlton cinema.

In the early spring of 1939 this family left Larch Avenue and settled in Winstanley. Why we went only my mother could have told me (but never did) so No.72 (now 92) Pemberton Road became our home. Baxter Pit Lane has hedgerows, which a little boy could not see over. The sapling over the

wood wall opposite the front door of No 72 is now a tree of quite a size (I write this in 2004).

In Pemberton Road we have families with children like the new arrivals – the Hitchens, Waterworths, Banisters and Fowles. The newcomers made friends easily. Later when bikes were ready for speedway Norman Hook was mentioned. Looking from Baxter Pit Lane towards Windy Arbour there was nothing but meadows.

Drifts ten feet deep

One abiding memory of the war years was going on a winter's day in December to attend a wedding in Upholland in December 1940. The first flakes of snow began to fall as all the family listened to Uncle Tom and my father's sister Alice being married. And did it snow, for almost a week. In places it was said the drifts were over ten foot deep. Before we could

Continued on page 36

a personal monument, which is still there today.

With regard to the involvement of local men, Rorke's Drift was more of a surprise. Here 139 men from B company 2nd/24th Warwickshires held off 4,000 Zulus for almost 12 hours, winning 11 Victoria crosses; they have been immortalized in the film 'Zulu', which brought it to the attention of a wider public, but which also unfortunately perpetuated a number of misconceptions about the incident. The most important of these was where the film stressed the Welshness of the regiment involved - 24th Regiment of Foot, 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment. True, there were a small number in the ranks who had enlisted from Brecon, Pembroke and Glamorgan, but they were in a tiny minority - of these in B Company whose birthplaces are known, 47 were English (including 9 from Lancashire), 13 were Irish and only 5 were Welsh.

This confusion probably arises because the Army reforms of 1881 reformed the 2nd/24th Foot as the South Wales Borders with its depot at Brecon and an entitlement to all

the history and traditions of the battalion since its formation.

An examination of the list of defenders reveals that two local men fought at Rorke's Drift.

Private William Neville

Born in Wigan, a coal miner by trade, Neville had enlisted in the army two years earlier in February 1877, aged 19 years. Only 5' 5" tall, with fresh complexion, hazel eyes and brown hair, he had served in Gibraltar and India before being posted to South Africa. In 1880 he married Sarah Elizabeth Graham and, on being discharged from the Army in 1883, resumed his work in the mines, living in Ince. In 1885 he was convicted of assault and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment with hard labour. The qualities needed for a soldier in those days were not always suitable for peace time!

Private John Smith

Born In Wigan, a labourer by trade, he had enlisted in the army three years earlier on Christmas Eve 1876, aged 25 years. He was slightly taller than his fellow townsman, at 5' 7", fresh complexion, blue eyes and brown

hair. He was wounded at Rorke's Drift, and probably never fully recovered; he was discharged from the army in 1882 and spent his later years in Bury.

So next time you watch 'Zulu' remember that two of those redcoats behind the barricades are Wiganers! And any of you who are researching locally may turn up more details of their lives.



FROM SPRING BANK TO WINSTANLEY

Continued from page 35

go home we needed the snow to melt. Then we walked home, all the family together via School lane, Abbey Lakes, the Stag Hotel, Orrell, Enfield Street and past the Venture Lodge where snow was piled over the boards on both sides of the road.

I must speak about Peggy and Wally Rhodes who became our next-door neighbours. My mother and Peggy took to one another and became firm friends, along with Wally, a master of making anything with wood. Wally made us many things including a bagatelle and a B17 model flying fortress.

As a schoolboy I remember running around next-door and asking had they any lemonade, and being told they had nothing like that. As schoolboys will, I saw something that looked like lemonade and drank from, it. It turned out to be white spirit! I know better today.

My mother and Peg went potato picking for a day at Wadsworth farm near to where we lived. A line from a song comes back to me, 'The women in the uplands digging prairies speak a language that the strangers do not know'. They came home with bad backs and finger nails that took weeks to repair.

Dearden brothers

While Monty and Churchill were finding ways of defeating Germans, we boys were fighting our own wars. There was no rest

from the Dearden Brothers. Whenever we strayed on their land they appeared as if by magic. "Cut them off, Jimmy", one brother would shout to another, and seeing that Jimmy seemed about 90 to us boys, he has no chance. We hid behind our garage or sometimes in it. Tom Johnson chased us from out of Winstanley Park where we were playing football, using two trees as goalposts at one end and our coats as the other. I remember we escaped over the wall but had to leave our clothes behind to make the escape, and our parents had to enter into negotiations to recover them.

Every midday Baxter Pit would give the time by blowing what could have been some sort of whistle. My belief is that 'bobby' Lydon was our local policeman. His address was somewhere up the Straw Yard (now renamed Spring Pool). My father and Uncle Ernest (his brother) were special constables; Wally Rhodes was A.R.P Warden (the air raid shelter was to the right of our front gate). What had wÆ to fear from Hitler!!

Our teacher, Miss May Barton, would play the piano and have us join in when a signal was given. 'The Minstrel Boy' was a favourite. One winter's afternoon Miss Barton set us the task of writing down from the blackboard these words:

"Lost yesterday between sunrise and sunset two golden hours, each set with 60 diamond minutes, no reward if offered as they are gone forever". This was written by Horace Mann, an American who lived from 1796 until 1859.

On 5 February 1944 our vicar died, and I as a choirboy said goodbye. Today young people do not mix as we did; boys and girls went out together in a crowd. His successor

appointed by the bishop was a young man who was born locally, Rev. Bert Bullough. A Boy's Brigade was formed and we had football between local church sides.

My father and Wally had a succession of cars in the war. I remember a side valve Singer and a Riley with a canvas top. The cars hardly ever moved from out of the garages. We boys and girls would open the garage door and sit in the car. I remember one night when my father was on night turn and my mother was out somewhere, a gang of us sitting in the car steering as if we were going somewhere, when the handbrake was taken off and the car started to move, ending halfway out of the garage, caught against the slope of the drive. Naturally we all fled. I can't remember the punishment.

Back in the 1940's, because anti-freeze was hard to obtain, car radiators, in the winter had to be drained of water. My father was called on day or night. Winter played havoc as frost and snow always came at the wrong time. My mother and I would push the car many a morning early to the top of Well Brow to get it started.

My Grannie Berry had three sons; one was Uncle Frank, now aged 20 who was called up for the forces, and the time for embarkation had arrived. To keep Grannie company, I spent my summer holiday in Upholland. I slept at the top of the house in the smallest room.

Red shale tip

On 8 May 1945, told the nation war was over in Europe. We had won. A bonfire was gathered together on what we knew as the 'red shale tip'. Everyone had a happy time

and asked what peace could offer.

Life in the parish began again. Cricket returned in 1945/46 with games in the West Lancashire league. Football between churches was played on a playing field that had grown food for victory. Teams of note in 1946-8 were Bickershaw Colliery, Leigh Wesley Guild and, of course, Norley Hall, loved and hated in equal measure. When we lads played against other church teams we used to train by gathering at our back kitchen, and running from there to St. Aidans church at Billinge and back as fast as possible.

Speedway was a new interest. We 'lads' had our own version called cycle speedway. To make it fair when starting, our method was to toss a small stone in the air, and when it landed, off we would set four times around a set course, anti-clockwise. Another game involved riding along Baxter Pit Lane, past the pit, up the red shale tip and down the other steep side to end in the ferns in the bottom.

We could ride the bogey from Dearden's shop downhill all the way, passing the only house on the slope, no 158, past the hedges and down to Pony Dick without doing ourselves any real harm.

In the old school (built 1894) barn dances and film shows (supplied by the vicar) were to be seen. George Formby on film was smiled at and every now and then laughed at.

I learned to dance the modern way, down at the school hall. It would come in useful as girls came into view. I remember dancing the waltz in the middle of the road with Bessie Bannister. I wonder who's kissing her now!

John Berry
Winstanley Wigan

IT WAS 11 November 1937, Armistice Day. Betty and I had been blowing bubbles from a clay pipe that Uncle Stanley Dickinson had given us. He had a tobacco shop at the corner of Commercial Yard, leading off the Market Place. We hadn't been to school that day because we both had sore throats. Of course we never thought about the germs we were sharing, when we decided to get out the bubble game! We were delighted at the iridescent colours that made tiny rainbows in each dripping sphere.

There was a loud knock at the door. I went to answer it. A plump faced man stood at the door. He asked where my mother was. I told him that she was at the Townswomens' Guild, which she attended every Wednesday afternoon.

"Well, little girl, do you know that you have diphtheria? It's very infectious! We shall have to take you for a nice little ride, lovey, wrapped in this nice red blanket. I'll go and find your mother and I'll be back. You can get your things ready!"

Ambulance

With that he climbed into the waiting ambulance and disappeared. I turned to Betty and said, "what does he mean by a little ride? Where to?" "I expect he means to Whelley Hospital," she said. "It's an isolation hospital. Lots of people in my class have got diphtheria and they have all gone to Whelley."

I was not pleased at this prospect. "I don't think mother will let me go", I ventured hopefully. "She might have to!" Betty said. "I don't think we have any choice in the matter. It's the law - so that other people don't get it!"

Soon mother's key was heard in the lock and she came into the house, followed by the man in the white coat, carrying the red

The Sanny

blanket over his arm.

"We have to get your case packed", Mother said. "I'll just go and get your clean pyjamas and the things you'll need." You probably won't be in very long. You'll soon be home again." She was always very positive in outlook. "It will be alright" was her favorite expression.

When Father arrived home he promised to visit very often, and goodbyes were said. Wrapped in the enormous red blanket I was carried to the waiting ambulance. I was very put out at being carried when I could perfectly well have walked.

Hospital Routine

By teatime I was settled in one of the long rows of white beds and was pleased to find that there were two of my old friends from school whom I knew. Sister Doddin was a quick bird-like nurse who ran her ward in an efficient manner. Her heels clicked as she walked along.

Parents were allowed to visit only on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. They had to stand outside the windows and shout to the children inside. The weather was cold and damp, it being November. The beds had been pushed up to the high windows. Some of the more fortunate parents were allowed to stand on the verandah. Conversation was somewhat limited. "Have you had your heggs?" belted Mr. Smith to his daughter. "Yes, Dad!" came the reply, "we had them for tea". Breakfast consisted of curled up sandwiches which had been made the night before from sliced bread and syrup.

The hospital routine was strictly defined. The children had to lie flat for the

first week. In the second week - to their great delight - they were allowed to sit up and finally, after three weeks, they were able to get out of bed and walk around in dressing gowns. The ones who did not own a gown were given striped towelling robes, which made them look like children from the Bible.

Home for Christmas

I had fondly imagined that I would be home in time for Betty's birthday, on 25 November, but this just did not happen. I was there for six very long weeks. It was my first spell of homesickness and I longed for the night time to come so that I could have what I called one of my imaginings. This was when the lights were dimmed and I could dream about being at home. It was the week before Christmas before there was any chance of being discharged.

Father was determined that I should be home for Christmas Day. He asked our family doctor, Dr. Mac Allen, to bring pressure to bear for me to be discharged. This was agreed, on the condition that I was not allowed to contact any other children for another two weeks. My brother and sister were allowed to peep round the door!

I felt sorry for the other children, but very pleased for myself when I was told that I would be going home. On the Friday before Christmas I was told by Sister to get ready. Mother arrived and said, "Are you ready? It's time to go!" Outside, waiting in the car, was Uncle Stanley. I jumped in before anyone had time to change their minds! Like most people at

that time we didn't have a car of our own and Father never learned to drive.

A Special Day

As we drove into Swinley Lane I began to feel very excited. The homecoming was ecstatic! One of the neighbours, Mrs. Winter, had brought a most beautiful doll with long red hair as a present for me. As my hair was nearly the same shade I fell in love with her and had her for many years.

The bed had been brought downstairs, into the front room, and I had strict instructions not to go into the rest of the house until further notice! I had to rest a lot and visitors were only allowed to talk from the door. Betty and Roy were soon there to have a peep at me. My teacher, Miss Wilcock, had sent me a leather purse and there were lots of cards from friends. I shall never forget that first meal at home, of grilled plaice and thin brown bread and butter. I really appreciated this after the hospital food.

Christmas Day came very quickly after that, and what a day it was! The joy of finding presents in a pillow case at the bottom of the bed and sharing these with the others. There was always a selection box, and we were allowed to sample one bar before breakfast! Later in the day we heard the Salvation Army band playing carols in the street, and after dinner we played with our new game, Monopoly (at that time it cost 7s. 6d!). Then at three o'clock we were all ready to listen to the King's speech. The day flew by, in the warmth and love of my own family.

So you can see why the Christmas of 1937 was such a special one for me and one that I shall always remember.

**Margaret Hurst
Parbold Nr Wigton**

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRIST CHURCH, PENNINGTON 150 YEARS AGO

ON Christmas Eve in 1839 a Scot by the name of James Irvine became the incumbent of St Mary the Virgin (Leigh Parish Church). He had been approached by the local Whig patron, Lord Lilford, to fill the vacant position left by the previous clergyman, Jonathan Topping, who had been found in the rectory after having shot himself. His appointment had been against the entreaties of the local Evangelical curate Alfred Hewlett. Over a period of time Irvine's approach brought about strong differences in opinion amongst churchgoers. He acted according to his conscience and his interpretation of the rights and duties of the Church of England, which led to his refusing to baptise, confirm, marry or bury irregular churchgoers or those sympathetic to non-conformist teachings.

Many felt that his approach was too autocratic. They attempted to restrict his powers by signing a petition, which was presented, to Parliament in 1852. The *Leigh Chronicle* of April 1852 published the following: *"The deprivation of the Rights of the Parishioners by the Clergymen of the neighbourhood has been for some time estranging the people from the Church of their fathers. Many have hoped for a change, some have joined other denominations, others have travelled a considerable distance to hear the gospel preached. Many have become careless and apathetic to all religious duties. The population has been growing and in ordinary circumstances a new church would have been desirable and necessary."* A meeting was called, attended by mainly working men.

Mr James Pownall of Pennington Hall, silk manufacturer, occupied the chair. Other members of the Committee were: Mr J S Turner

Green, Mr William C Jones (Treasurer), Rev A Hewlett, vicar of Astley, Mr Richard Marsh, Mr Richard Guest, Mr Charles Widdows and Mr Henry Jones (Secretary). Mr J S Turner Green, Barrister, of Hall Houses, moved the resolution, which was carried: *"That it is desirable, expedient, and necessary that a new Church be built in the immediate neighbourhood of Leigh"*. This resolution was passed and 1000 guineas were subscribed at the meeting.

It is said that if the church had been built in the neighbourhood of Bradshawgate, as was at first contemplated, a district would not have been assigned on account of its nearness to the Parish Church. However, in May 1852, land was purchased "between Fairfield and Gandy's Row" in Pennington, and steps were taken for securing a district for the new church. It was felt on the whole that owing to the rapidly expanding population of Bradshaw Leach and Landside, this would be the best position for it to be sited.

In October of 1853 the trustees of the benefice appointed Rev William Seaton of Birmingham as first incumbent.

The Foundation Stone

The foundation stone for Christchurch was laid by Lord Lilford, on 19 May 1853. Unfortunately for the majority of people the day was not observed as a public holiday. However, those who did witness the event were treated to a display of finery, as there was a parade of officials involved with the project, who walked to the church grounds from the old town hall, led by the Warrington Borough Band.

The stone was laid beneath a buttress, and under this in a cavity

is a bottle containing a piece of parchment, a copy of the *Leigh Chronicle*, a florin, shilling and a sixpence. The parchment was headed, with the words 'Gloria in Excelsis Deo'.

After the ceremony and speeches, Lord Lilford with a large party of clergymen retired to Pennington Hall, the residence of James Pownall for 'an elegant cold collation' where the usual toasts were drunk. Those lower down the social scale, such as the masons and county constabulary, were treated to a substantial entertainment provided by Mr Hampson of the *George and Dragon*, whilst the working men's committee and others had an excellent dinner at the *Eagle and Child*.

Funding

After an initial meeting in 1852 a sum of £1000 had been subscribed with a further £1000 being collected by Alfred Hewlett personally. From the neighbourhood of Pennington a working men's committee had been formed. By organising the working classes, over 1500 subscriptions of 5s. had been obtained amongst their own class.

The remaining shortfall was duly met, helped by the enticement of a lithographed drawing of the church to anyone donating a pound.

Consecration

The consecration was performed on Monday 12 June 1854 by Right Rev James Prince Lee, Lord Bishop of Manchester. Amongst those present were the Venerable Archdeacon Rushton, Rev Hugh Stowell (hon. Canon), Christ Church Salford; E Girdlestone, vicar of Deane; A Hewlett, Astley;

and the Bishop's chaplain. Non-clergymen included Rev Hon Lord Lilford (brother to the Bishop elect of Sodor and Man); James Pownall; Alfred Silvester; John Green of Newton; Richard Guest of Etherstone Hall; Robert Guest Esq; W R Marsh and others. During the ceremony the infant son of Rev William Seaton, named Ernest Prince-Pennington, was christened by the Bishop of Manchester.

After the ceremony, the Bishop of Manchester, together with Lord Lilford and about 70 clerical and lay friends, partook of a luncheon at Pennington Hall.

In the same year that the consecration took place the major national event was the beginning of the Crimean War, whilst at a local level Leigh Cricket Club was formed.

Architectural Features

Architect: E H Shellard of Manchester
 Builder: Mark Froggatt of Manchester
 Masons: Ellis and Hinchcliffe
 Material: Yorkshire Stone
 Style: Perpendicular Gothic

The building, which consists of a nave and two side aisles, has a chancel at the east end, a tower at the west end, and a porch on the south side. The west gallery entered from the porch was originally erected for children's accommodation.

Measuring approx. 71ft in length and 50ft in width, the chancel is 30ft long by 20ft wide. Initial estimates suggested that the structure would be able to hold 816 persons of which 450 were to be appropriated and 366 free.

The tower, which is about 80ft high, and has four pinnacles, is large enough to hold eight bells. The pinnacles were blown down after a violent storm on New Year's Day of 1855. Two of these actually passed through the church roof. Repairs were soon carried out and all four replaced and made more secure.

Tony Ashcroft
 Local History Officer

WEDDING/MARRIAGE CUSTOMS AND FOLKLORE

This is the subject for a new talk I am preparing.

If any reader has knowledge of relevant unusual customs (local or national) I would like to hear from them. I would also be interested in looking at old wedding photographs.

Tony Ashcroft
 (Local History Officer)
 Leigh Library Tel 01942 404559



Dear Alastair

Thank you for publishing my letter regarding Donald Anderson and his mines in the latest edition of *Past Forward*. Imagine my surprise when you also published a letter from Frank Goodwill who actually started serving his time just as I was finishing mine. What a coincidence, because I think we were, in fact, the only two apprentices to be trained there!

I only overlapped with Frank for a couple of months

Back in touch

because, in late 1960, I left to join the Merchant Navy and, sadly, I never kept in touch. I would love to renew contact with him, to catch up with old times and folks, and to find out what he actually did after leaving Dalton. Could you sort out something so that we can get in touch?

Arthur Penny

Three Days Later

Dear Alastair

Got a lovely reply from Frank to my email, and we are meeting up for a drink very soon. Thank you for putting us in touch again after so many years. All the best to you all at *Past Forward*.

Arthur Penny

Memories of Donald Anderson

I read with interest the article in a recent *Past Forward* which included a photograph of the late Donald Anderson.

While Donald was operating the Dalton Lees Coal and Fireclay drift mine near Billinge in the early 1950's a coal cutter was in use working the mid-mountain seam. The seam had a fireclay floor which was reasonably soft and 'mealy' (i.e broke up easily). The machine being used was a 40 HP Anderson Boyes 12 inch with a standard 4 foot 6 inches cutting jib and chain, taking an eight and a half inch 'kerf' (a slot cut into the coal). This was the only machine they could utilise due to the low seam height.

I found the machine was underpowered but also suffered from a voltage drop. If any reasonable speed was attempted, the machine would stall and the jib and chain would get clogged up with damp soft fireclay. The only reasonable suggestion I could make on behalf of Anderson Boyes (who I worked for as an engineer) to remedy the situation was to change the cutting jib and chain and remedy the voltage drop, all of which as far as I know was adopted.

It was quite a while after I

had left Anderson Boyes that I started work back at Bickershaw Colliery, Leigh in charge of the fitters at No.3 pit. One Sunday morning a gentleman came to my home along with his wife who I now realise was Donald and Mrs Anderson to ask me if I would consider overhauling a second hand Anderson Boyes 15 inch coal cutting machine he had recently acquired.

With the assistance of another fitter called Brian, and providing Donald would purchase any replacement spares or parts required along with transport to and from the mine, it was agreed. The machine, including motor, was completely stripped down, with the necessary parts replaced, much to Donald Anderson's delight. He rewarded us with the handsome sum of £45 each.

This may not seem a lot of money by today's standards, but the £45 I received bought my first second-hand car, a 1936 Wolseley Wasp in which I eventually took my driving test in at Bolton, passing first time - and all thanks to Donald Anderson.

Ken Pearce
 Harrogate
 N Yorks HG2 0BS

PLEA FROM THE EDITOR

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

Best by far are electronic contributions, ie by Email (a.gillies@wlct.org), or on CD ROM or floppy disc together with hard copy printouts. And it would help the production team and myself even more if articles were double line spaced with one inch (25mm) margins and a word count included. Many thanks.

Ed.



£4 per year

Dear Mr. Gillies

J. Harold Smith's letter about organ blowing struck a sympathetic chord, but when I saw his salary of £4 per year I was green with envy! I, too, did a bit of blowing in my teenage years at the Church of Christ, Rodney Street, Wigan, and subsequently served as organist for a good many years. I was rewarded with the princely sum of NOTHING!

With regard to the postscript, the lovely, poignant, melody of Easthope Martin's 'Evensong' was also one of my favourite voluntaries, which I played on many occasions. I cannot, however, offer any further information about the composer, except that I always understood that he was a church minister.

**Clifford Miller
Wigan**

IT WAS 1952 when we moved into a new semi in Billinge. There was about 60 houses so 60 new families. Little did the locals know that we were a sign of things to come, as farmers gleefully sold land to builders.

It felt like a Brigadoon situation at that time. Seven or eight family names, for example, kept recurring in the church records over 300 years. The local doctors were all from one family - fathers, brothers and sons. People for years worked locally on farms or in the pits. Seven surrounding towns had never encroached, until then.

The dialect was unique

PARKSIDE CHOIR



Parkside Colliery Male Voice Choir, St. Georges Chapel, Windsor Castle, 1976

Dear Editor

I would like to comment on the article by Alfred Hughes on the Ashton Male Voice Choir (*Past Forward* no 36.) My father Tudor Jones was its first conductor.

It was known originally as the Ashton Victory Male Voice Choir. When my father retired as conductor, Mr Handel Jones was invited to be its conductor. When Parkside Colliery choir began later, Mr Handel Jones was invited to be its conductor; this led to

the dissolution of Ashton Choir, with most of its members going to Parkside Choir.

I was born in Bolton Road, Ashton in Makerfield. I left school at the age of 14, and worked 31 years in the pits. I was a member of Ashton Male Voice Choir, and also a soloist. For many years I also performed in clubs as a ballad singer, I was also a member of St. Helens Operatic Society, and afterwards of Earlstown Operatic Society.

This photograph of Parkside Choir shows Mr Handel Jones in a white coat on the front row; I am fourth from the right on the back row.

On Saturday 24 April 1976, we were at the Albert Hall for the 'Burma Star Reunion' and on the following Sunday on the steps of St Georges Chapel, Windsor Castle, where we sang at morning service.

**Trevor Jones
Ashton in Makerfield**

BRIGADOON SITUATION

and unadulterated 'Old Lancashire'. There were wonderful words, far more descriptive than the equivalent in English, like frichened, fawe, nesh, sken, thrutch, mavis, shelpy, baggin, and cutch - all were exclusive to Billinge, and made us feel that this was a foreign language.

It was easy to see what the locals did for relaxation. There was the Labour Club at the bottom of the hill and the Conservative Club at the top and half way up was the British Legion. There were also the *Brown Cow*, the

Labour in Vain, the *George and Dragon*, the *Oddfellows Arms*, the *Forresters Arms*, and the *Eagle and Child* otherwise known as the '*Bird and Babby*'. As you can guess, no one went thirsty in Billinge!

At that time, there was a united village feeling. Everyone was proud to touch cap to the squire of Billinge. She was sometimes referred to as Joyce Banks, never as Mrs Banks. She indeed was the squire, not her husband.

Never did the centuries overlap as they did in the village in the 50's. Gone is

Old Annie and her wonderful dialect. Gone is Wild Jackie, the man who, when bitten by a dog, grabbed it, bit it back, and then threw it over the hedge back into its garden. Where is the man who threw his hated mother-in-law's dog out into the hen pen? Who remembers Jonny Rimmer, the aspiring Olympic contender? And did you know that the giant trees on Main Street were planted to celebrate the relief of Mafeking in the Boer War?

Gone is the common heritage of the old Billinge folk.

**Elsie Wilson
Radyr Cardiff**



Years rolled away

Dear Mr Gillies

Years rolled away when I turned to Issue 36, p41; the photograph of Miss Anderson recalled a vivid memory of my early days at St. Thomas's Clayton St School, when she took me on her knee to console my crying because I couldn't get my sums right. The year would be c.1937

My wife Kate (nee Jackson) was in the same class as me, having started school at the same time; we can recall many incidents from those times, i.e. miss Simm who seemed to us to be seven feet tall, Miss Bolton who used to warm our free bottles of milk at the classroom fire and instruct us to get our blankets to lay on the floor for 'quiet time'. Each of our blankets had an individual logo - mine was a pocket watch while my wife's was Humpty Dumpty. Happy days when children knew exactly where they stood.

One outing which we recall was when we were taken to welcome the King and Queen on their visit to Wigan on 20 May 1938; we were placed under the old market verandah (it was the fruit market at weekends) facing out towards Market Street. There was a newspaper photograph taken of all the class waving our flags; I recall my Dad lifting me up to look at it in Leaches newsagents window on the town centre side of Wallgate bridge (I have made exhaustive searches for a copy of the photograph but so far without success - can any one out there please help to locate one?)

In 1940 we moved to St Thomas's, Caroline Street, and remember the air raid and gas mask practices. We would be marched down to the air raid

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the article submitted by Frank Cunliffe about the village of Garswood in issue 36 - and particularly the item about St Andrews Sunday School football team, looked after by Billy Ralphson.

I too was a member of that very successful junior team which played in the St Helens Sunday School league. Our changing room was in the Sunday School, then we had a 10 minute walk along Garswood Road to the

recreation ground where we played all our home matches.

After the match we would walk back to the Sunday School to get dressed but with no luxury of a hot bath - all 22 players and the referee would share one hand basin and one toilet before going home!

I enclose a photograph of the 1942/43 team with the league cup and the junior cup.

Joe Littler
Haydock St Helens



Garswood St. Andrews, 1942-43

Back Row: Joe Littler, Jim Cunliffe, Ron Birkett, Bob Kay, Frank Cunliffe, Jack Hodson, Jack Melling and Ken Nuttall

Front Row: Billy Raplhson, Jack Cunliffe, George Barton, Ken Kay, Bob Cunliffe, Les Cunliffe and Billy Woods

shelters in a very orderly manner until an imaginary "all clear" was sounded and we were returned to the classroom. Teachers whom we can recall were: Headmaster Mr Jackson, Mrs Tickle, Mrs Hodson, Miss Winstanley, Mrs Long and our favourite, the gentle ginger haired Mrs Telford (nee Martindale).

My wife and I have recently celebrated our Golden wedding anniversary 68 years after starting school together at Clayton Street.

We look forward to receiving our regular copy of your excellent *Past Forward* magazine, and wish you every success for the future.

Ralph Hilton
Southport

Does anyone know Cpl. Andrew Farrimond?

Dear Sir,

I'm doing historical researches about some events of World War II which happened in the Maritime Alps area (NorthWest Italy). I know that a fellow citizen was involved in one of these events. On 7 August 1944 Corporal Radio Operator Andrew E. Farrimond, an agent of "Special Operations Executive" (SOE) was parachuted with three other agents

onto the enemy area and landed a few miles from my town, Cuneo. Together with Italian partisans he fought bravely against Nazis and Fascists, sending useful information by radio to the allies. I met some ancient partisans of my town who still remember him with affection. That's why I'm looking for Mr. Andrew Farrimond.

Sergio Costagli
email: s.costagli@libero.it



Some of the best

Dear Sir,

As always thank you for my article in the last issue of *Past Forward*. One subject that I can't recall ever being mentioned is the local interest of wrestling*; Wigan has produced some of the best.

Riley's used to have a gym for local lads to learn the skills there were the Belshaws and many more. When we were growing up as lads in Higher

Ince, one of the lads was Harry Jones; he was always proud to tell us about his granddad who won the World Title at Springfield Park many years ago. He fought someone by the name of Yoko Tani sounds Japanese, but whether it was or not I am not quite sure. Harry's granddad used the name Burgie Ben in the ring. They lived in Bird Street, Higher Ince; as a special treat Harry used to take us into the front room of the house, where the belt his granddad had won was on display for all to see. I often wonder what became of the belt - perhaps one of your readers can provide some information is it still in the family, as I think he won it out right?

A E Smith
Winstanley Wigan
**See issue 16, p3 Ed.*

Other side of Billinge Hill

Dear Sir,

Re 'Teenage War Years in Orrell', by Frank Winnard (Issue no. 33 p41), he recalled an incident of an unexploded bomb landing in a field near to 'The Burgie'.

As you will see from my address I must confess to being an interloper from the other side of Billinge Hill, but it was his use of the word 'Burgie' that caught my attention. Here in the saintly borough the word 'Burgie' is used to describe the several areas covered by the waste sand beds used at the Pilkington glass works to polish the plate glass before the introduction of float glass, in the early 60's. I had always thought the term 'Burgies' was unique to this part of the world, so I would be most interested to know what the Orrell 'Burgies' contained.

I should add I do have some Wigan credentials, as from the late 40's to the early 60's I worked for the St Helens food wholesalers G. W. Collins (no relation), and delivered goods to most of the corner shops around Wigan. They have all gone now, I suppose. I also recall delivering to Roy Café and Gorners in the Market area, the Trencherfield Restaurant close by the Mill, the village shop at Crooke, and Jack Hilton's mother at Pemberton. She was so proud of a photo of Jack being presented to the King at Wembley.

Then, as now, Rugby League was always a good topic of conversation, but I must admit you certainly have a winner with *Past Forward*.

Henry Collins
St Helens Lancs

The Furey Brothers

Dear Sir

Re the photograph sent in by Edmund Waddelove, believed to be at St. Joseph's RC school, Leigh, which appeared in the last *Past Forward* p43, it is possible that members of my family, FUREY, may be included, as follows: centre row (3rd from right) Tommy or Paddy Furey, (right) Martin Furey. I feel there is a strong resemblance to some of the adults on the enclosed photos.

Here are the names of those who attended this school c. 1900:

Patrick (Paddy) b. 1890:
 Annie b. 1892: James b. 1894:
 Roger b. 1896: Martin b. 1898:
 Elizabeth b. 1900: Edward b. 1902:
 Margaret b. 1904: John b. 1906:
 Michael b. 1907 (my father).

Thank you for a wonderful magazine.

Mrs M Aldred
Southport



St. Joseph's Leigh c.1920
Seated middle row, Jimmy Furey? (next to priest?)



'Flanagan's Band'
Back row: 2nd left Paddy Furey? 4th left Martin Furey?
Front row: 1st left Thomas Furey?



Ten Loonies
Back row: 2nd left Arthur Jones? 4th left Paddy or Thomas Furey?
5th left Martin Furey?



The Petty

TODAY we call it the lavatory, the toilet and the loo. When I was a lad it was known as the Petty. A solid brick built building with a flagged roof that stood at the end of the yard; it was a chilly traipse on a winter's day with the wind gusting under the gap in the door and whistling round your bare legs.

Unlike the modern toilet which has a pedestal, the Petty had a board that ran from wall to wall with a hole in the middle over which you sat. Some of these had two holes in the board and were known as companion privies which caused my father to comment that you could get some very interesting conversations.

It was a place where the ordinary working man could get away from the wife and kids for a quiet period of contemplation and the sides of the board were handy for putting things on like your pipe and tobacco tin.

It also had an educational value in the form of a *Daily Herald* cut into six inch squares, threaded on a string and hung onto the wall in front of you. It was a substitute for a toilet roll and provided information on subjects like stock market prices and church commissioners' reports.

It was simple in its design and operation. The excrement when released dropped into a pit six foot deep and was cleared away by waste water from the kitchen sink, known not as the sink but the slopstone.

The water travelled along a drain under the yard and emptied into an oddly shaped container at the bottom of the pit. This was shaped in such a way that when it was full it

tipped and the water gushed out sloshed the effluent away into the main sewer.

The problem came when something went wrong with it. It was no use sending for the plumber, you had to dig down six feet to put it right and this was done by an Irishman. He turned up in the morning and great clods of clay would fly out of the hole until about midday when there would be a knock on the back door and he would be standing there to ask if you could let him have a couple of bob advance for his dinner. So you gave him the money and he set off to the nearest pub and that's the last you saw of him until the next morning.

The modern toilet is a convenience, the Petty was an experience and I would be interested to know if anyone has any theories as to how the name Petty came about.

JG Smith

Astley Nr. Manchester

email:

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BUS IN THE WATER

Dear Sir,

In a letter published in *Past Forward* 36, Rev Eric Ogden enquired about an incident of a bus in the water.

I am told this took place at Nook colliery baths, which were separate from the pit. The bus route was down Prince's Avenue and Astley Street in Tyldesley along Manchester Road and up North Lane.

An old street map shows a mine south of Gin Pit village which seems to be correct for North Lane. It also shows one near Gin Pit village presumably Gin Pit itself.

St Georges pit is not on the map but is reached from Meanley Road. The three pits, St Georges, Gin Pit and Nook were in a straight line.

B Greenhalgh

Tyldesley Manchester

Good old days of Wigan (in my younger days)

I FIRST started school at St Cuthbert's, Ellesmere Road, Pemberton, when the Headmistress was Mrs. Horrocks, Music Teacher, Mrs. Riley and one of the others was Mrs. Hurst. When Mrs. Horrocks left to go to St. Thomas More as the Library Teacher, Mr. Brendan Murphy took over as Headmaster at St. Cuthbert's.

I then left St. Cuthbert's to go to St. Thomas More. I was one of the first pupils to go right through the school. On opening day there were three trees planted - "Chelsea, Tower, and Lambert". The Headmistress was Sister Rose; other teachers were Sister Julie, Sister Frances and Miss Clough who came from St. Mary's.

When I left school I worked at Coop's sewing place near Santas' (Uncle Joe's Mintballs) and The Grand Hotel, then I

left to be a bus conductress under Mr. James McNight. One day when Gene Pitney was on at The Ritz in Station Road I left the bus at 4 p.m. with a load of people on, including school children, to go and watch him and stayed right through till the end!

I'm a staunch Wigan Rugby League supporter and I was really upset when they closed Central Park (55 years I had watched them). I remember one particular match between Wigan and Leeds in the Challenge Cup, when the referee was Len Ganley and it was throwing it down with rain; I ran on the pitch and hit him with my umbrella because of a wrong decision!

I remember three cotton mills near one another, Trencherfield, Eckersley Mill and Taylors. Down the road

from them was the Bus Depot for the Corporation, and on the opposite side to Wigan Pier was the Ribble Depot. Down the road was Seven Stars Bridge, which was a lovely walk down to Frog Lane and Springfield Park, formerly the home of Wigan Athletic. There used to be a

greyhound track at Poolstock and, where I was born, Worsley Hall Boys Club, which had a few local Rugby League players: Tommy Dickens, Johnny Stopford, Martin Dickens, Bernard McMahon, Johnny Speed and Bill Bretherton, to name but a few.

Winifred Kelly (nee Tocker)
Blackpool

Published by Wigan Heritage Service, Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust, Market Suite, The Galleries, Wigan WN1 1PX

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Who? Where?

There was an excellent response to the photographs in the last issue, and all four have now been positively identified, as follows:

top left: Westleigh Secondary Modern school, 1940's
bottom left: J V Almonds Brewery, Standish, c.1935
top right: the old Sutcliffe & Speakmans brass shop, in the old Leigh Brewery building, recently demolished
bottom right: Central Promenade, Douglas, Isle of Man, early 20th century (so not a local picture after all, but presumably taken by a local person while on holiday).

Thanks to all of you who responded. If you can identify any of this issue's photographs, please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942 404432).

