

# PAST FORWARD

Issue No. 39

March – July 2005



WIGAN  
LEISURE & CULTURE  
TRUST



*Produced by Wigan Heritage Service*

**FREE**

## From the Editor

FIRSTLY, welcome to issue 39 of *Past Forward*. That's an amazing number of magazines, over, incredibly, 13 years - where has the time gone? I think it's safe to say that *Past Forward* continues to go from strength to strength - the results of the recent questionnaire (see p19) certainly confirm that. We also received some very useful and positive feedback regarding the Heritage Service in general. All in all, an extremely valuable exercise, and many thanks to all those readers who took the time and trouble to complete the questionnaire. Congratulations also to the lucky winners in our prize draw.

I am sure that you will find that there is something for everyone in this issue, including a number of articles relating to World War II, particularly appropriate this year, as we commemorate the 60th anniversary of VE-Day and VJ-Day. There are also articles looking at Wigan many years ago, one from regular writer Fred Holcroft on *'The Plague in Wigan'* and another from a new contributor to *Past Forward*, R. Evans on the *'Poor Law in Atherton'*.

I will always try my best, space permitting, to publish as many of the articles I receive as possible in *Past Forward*, so if you've often fancied putting pen to paper but never actually got round to it, now's your chance! The writings of many regular contributors - including, for example, Irene Roberts, whose charming and unique style of writing is so enjoyed by many readers - would have been lost for ever if it hadn't been for *Past Forward*.

### **COPY DEADLINE**

**Please note that the copy deadline for issue no 40 of *Past Forward* is 1 June 2005.**

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



## Welcome to DIANNE TESKEY

WE would like to welcome a new member of staff to the Heritage team, Dianne Teskey. Dianne took up the role of Heritage Officer (Community Outreach and Education) - a bit of a mouthful we know - in January 2005. She is thrilled to be with us and is keen to make lots of contacts out in the community very soon.

As the job title suggests, Dianne's role is to take Heritage out into your communities as well as infusing everything we do with learning. A tough task, so we would clearly be delighted to have your help and support. If you do have any ideas of how we

can get involved in your community or indeed how you can help us, then why not give her a call. She is based at the History Shop, tel: 01942 828124.

Dianne comes to us after four years working at Wigan Pier, helping to deliver their award winning education programme. We are confident that this area of heritage provision is now in very capable hands. Look out for a new series of holiday activities, talks and walks from our service over the coming months.

Finally we are reliably informed that 'cowgirl Dianne' is one mean line dancer. However, we are happy to report that she has promised not to wear her Stetson to the office! We will also be keen to get her assurance that line dancing workshops will **not** be filling the galleries of the History Shop!

Welcome Dianne, we wish you every success.

## Wigan Heritage Service

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

### The History Shop

Library Street Wigan WN1 1NU.

Tel: 828128 (general enquiries), 828020 (local history desk - research enquiries and bookings). Fax: 827645. Email: [leisureheritage@wlct.org](mailto:leisureheritage@wlct.org)

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

### 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

### Staff

Alastair Gillies - Heritage Services Manager (and Editor of *Past Forward*) - Tel: 488468 Fax: 488479. Email: [a.gillies@wlct.org](mailto:a.gillies@wlct.org)

Philip Butler - Visitor Services Manager - 827594 - [p.butler@wlct.org](mailto:p.butler@wlct.org)

Yvonne Webb - Collections Development Manager - 828123 - [y.webb@wlct.org](mailto:y.webb@wlct.org)

### Heritage Officers

Tony Ashcroft - Local History, Leigh - 404559

Alan Davies - Archives - 404431 - [a.davies@wlct.org](mailto:a.davies@wlct.org)

Mike Haddon - Industrial History - 828121

Dianne Teskey - Community Outreach & Education - 828124

Christine Watts - Local & Family History - 827404

### Heritage Assistants

Elizabeth Fairclough - 828128 Hilary Fairclough - 828128

Stephanie Tsang - 828128

### Technical

Len Hudson - Senior Technician & Photographer - 404432

Terry Meehan - Museum Technician

# Exhibitions & Activities

## New Leaflet!

Watch out for our new Exhibitions and Events, March - December 2005 leaflet. It has details of forthcoming exhibitions, and children's and adult activities at the History Shop. As usual, it has all our contact details, opening hours and a map showing the location of the History Shop.

## Wigan Casino: The Heart of Soul

This exhibition, which closed on Saturday 26 February, has been one of our most successful in recent times, attracting visitors from all over the country, including Newcastle, Coventry and Nottingham! The most popular exhibit was undoubtedly the archival video footage of dancing at the Casino and scenes from around Wigan during the Casino era. Visitors were encouraged to write down their thoughts about the Casino (or the Empress Ballroom) and what it meant to them. We ended up with a book full! Typical of the remarks - "it wasn't a building - it was a temple you had to go to", "my husband and I would come from Liverpool after he had finished DJ'ing in a club at 2am", "the Casino lives on in our hearts and minds and we will 'Keep the Faith' until the day we die". Strong stuff indeed! These contributions to the history of the Casino will join other archival material in our local history collections and will be available to all with an interest in the Casino and the popular culture of the 1970's and 80's.

## Exhibitions at the History Shop

### The Wickham Gallery

#### Wigan on the Map

The Wigan Borough Parish Map, 28 textile panels which weave together the many tales of local life, past and present.

Free talks and tours available for groups and societies. **Advanced booking essential.**



## The Taylor Gallery

### Routes to Your Roots 19 March - 20 August 2005

A travelling exhibition from the National Coal Mining Museum for England, supplemented by local material.

Do you want to find out about your ancestors who worked in the coal mining industry, and how they lived their lives in the heart of the coal mining community? Then this is the exhibition for you. Using photographs, artefacts

and documents from our collections, we explain the sources available, and how to use them. Younger visitors can use our special storyboards to learn how to become family and local history detectives, and play the 'Back to Your Roots' game. To complement the exhibition, we will be presenting two lunchtime lectures on the history of coal mining in our area. See Events & Activities for details.

## A Feast of Photography!

### Wigan Photographic Society Annual Show 27 August - 10 September

### Atherton Photographic Society Annual Show 14 September - 1 October

Once again these two talented local photographic societies will be presenting their best work for you to enjoy. If you visited the Wigan show last year, and voted for your favourite picture, come along and find out which was the most popular. The Atherton show, with its experimentation in the field of digital photography, is a must for those of you with a technological bent.

### The Changing Face of Wigan 15 October 2005 - 11 February 2006.

Can you remember what Wigan looked like 20 years ago? The town centre is currently undergoing redevelopment to build a grand new shopping centre. We have taken this opportunity to explore how and why Wigan has changed over the years, and is still changing. Through old maps, documents, photographs and works of

art from our collections, we present the changing face of Wigan from the early 19th century to the present day.

## Coming Soon!

### The Secret Life of Textiles 6 March - 27 May 2006

This exhibition takes a look at the fabulous wealth of design and textile history hidden away in pattern book collections throughout the North West. Produced with Lottery funding, it features our own collections alongside those of Bolton Museum & Art Gallery, Macclesfield Museum, Liverpool John Moores University and Quarry Bank Mill, and will help you decode the secrets they hold. A catalogue of the collections will be on sale in our shop. Don't know what a pattern book is? Come along and find out!

## Events & Activities

Bookings 01942 828128

### Family Fun

Arts and crafts activities for families with children aged 4-12 years. Sessions start at 2pm and 3pm, and last for 1 hour. All children **must** be accompanied by an adult. **Booking essential.** For details, see our web site ([www.wlct.org](http://www.wlct.org)) and leaflets nearer the time.

### Easter

Wednesday 23 March & Wednesday 30 March 2005

### Summer Half Term

Wednesday 1 June 2005

### Summer Holidays

Each Wednesday throughout the summer holidays.

### Family Learning Week

Wednesday 12 October 2005

### Christmas Holidays

Come and find out more about our Victorian ancestors, and the way they used to celebrate Christmas.

### Adult Learners Week

21 to 27 May 2005

Lunchtime lectures at the History Shop by our Archivist Alan Davies - 1pm - 2pm Admission £1 - bring your own lunch, free tea and coffee. **Booking essential.**

Monday 23 May 2005

A Photographic History of the Lancashire Coalfield

Friday 27 May 2005

Women and Children in the Mines

# Plague in Wigan

by

Fred Holcroft

THE Great Plague, which in 1665 wiped out one third of London's population, is very well known, but plague was not just restricted to London, nor indeed to that year only. Plague was prevalent throughout England from medieval times until the end of the 17th century. Even a small town like Wigan was not exempt.

Plague comes in several forms. Bubonic was the most common. A few days after infection the victim developed fever, tiredness but difficulty in sleeping, high temperatures, giddiness, restlessness and finally delirium. Within six days the lymph glands swelled and became inflamed and painful, while bleeding under the skin caused purple blotches; the 'ring a ring a roses' death occurred within seven days, killing a half to three quarters of those affected. Amazingly it was possible to survive.

Pneumonic plague inflamed the victim's lungs with frothy blood, causing difficulty breathing, coughing up blood and sneezing, the 'atishoo, atishoo' could come quickly, followed by death in nine cases out of ten. Septicaemia plague directly attacked the blood stream, moving swiftly to the brain and normally causing death within three days at most.

Wigan Archives hold two sets of documents, which tell how the local officials and ordinary townspeople responded to the outbreak of plague. One is the journal of Bishop Bridgeman who, as Rector of Wigan Parish Church in the years before the outbreak of Civil War in 1642, played a prominent role in the local government. The second is the records of the Court Leet, held in Wigan throughout the 17th century, where citizens were prosecuted for infringements of local by-laws and where any claims for compensation could be lodged.

In August 1625 Bishop Bridgeman wrote:

*"I sent James Pilkington, Mayor and gave him directions and orders to be observed now in this dangerous time of the plague, namely that the townsman should watch daily and let none lodge in the town that would not voluntary take his oath that he came not from any infected place within a fortnight and that himself (to his knowledge) was free from the infection: that they should provide an out room out of the town from such to lodge in as coming from London and going further had no place to live in, and another room for such as may chance to be infected; and some ale houses at the upper end of Wigan Lane to deliver passengers' victuals for their money when they came from London. And because when they watched in other parts of the town, strangers and wandering beggars came over the field up to my house and hung about my gates more than before. I also charged them to provide a watchman daily for Hallgate, to stand at the lower level of my causey (2) that they might not be unprovided of monies in time of need. I caused two taxes to be laid generally through the parish by the overseer of the poor, where of one was to be reserved in the hands of Edmund Winstanley church warden in the town, the other in the hands of Richard Worthington of Pemberton the Church warden of the parish, and I charged them not to disburse any penny of these two lays but only upon such as might chance to be infected, and such others as concerned by plague. Likewise I advised them to choose out some to be searchers of the bodies of men dying and to agree for their wages weekly, and to tell me what men were fit to be allowed to keep ale houses that I might suppress the rest, and I caused the signs of the inns to be taken down for a while*

*to prevent the abode of travellers in our town."*

This entry shows the nature of prevailing attitudes towards the plague: its initiation period was known, its symptoms all too well known, it was deadly, came swiftly without warning from who knows where, those suffering were charitably cared for while the Rector had draconian powers with which to enforce measures to deal with it.

One month later in September 1625 another journal entry appears:

*"I gave another order to the church wardens of Wigan that none should be buried in Wigan church during the time of the plague, for the infection is now in Mary Bibby's houses and two of her children are dead of it and a third now has the sores running on him, yet her sister and two of her children are escaped out and wander the country one Grimshaw (who is to marry her) has also gone out of that house and is lodged in Haigh, so it is now uncertain what places in the Parish are free from infection."*

So despite all the Rector's efforts and the programme that was in place to prevent or contain outbreak, he had been foiled by human nature and the desire to survive!

Five years later, in November 1630, the Rector had to use another weapon in his armoury of measures to be taken against the plague:

*"It hath pleased God to visit diverse places in this country of Lancashire so dangerously with the plague of pestilence as I have of times seriously considered with myself whether it more better for the common good to hold my fair at Wigan this Ascension Day now following or to forbid it. Some of you lately represented to me the*

*necessity of the people who are at this time to buy and sell cattle and by a disappointment of this fair may be much prejudiced. But on the other side when I consider that the safety of their persons is much to be preferred before any commodity in their estates, and that the extraordinary confluence of men from all parts to such a fair may bring some infection to the town, I thought it fitter to forbid their meeting than endanger the inhabitants and do choose to lose my present profit than to bring that place into peril of utter undoing and therefore I have resolved to cause proclamation on to be made in divers market towns of this country that there shall be no fair held."*

The Rector's fairs were a valuable source of income for him so that this move was a genuine sacrifice.

The next reference to plague occurs during the aftermath of the Civil War. By 1648 six years of warfare, bad harvests and food shortages had left local population weak and prone to disease. Once again plague broke out and the 1649 victims' names are listed in the church registers. There had been an epidemic in 1648 but the records have been lost.

March 1649

*Elizabeth daughter of Richard Rycroft de Wallgate  
Anne Penkieman widow de Millgate  
Richard Rycroft de Gidloe lane  
Alise wiffe of Edward Preston de Hallgate  
Elizibeth wiffe of Thomas Starkey de Hallgate*

April 1649

*Thomas Starkey att de cabin  
Elizabeth bast(ard) daughter of Anne Brockells at de cabin  
James ffinch de Wallgate  
John Aspinall de Millgate  
Elizebeth daughter of John de Millgate  
Elizebeth daughter of Edward Prescott de Hallgate  
Elizebeth Banks att de cabin  
Ann wiffe of Richard Crochley de Millgate  
Humphrey son of Robert Crochley de cabin  
Grace daughter of Robert Whittle de cabin*

*John son of Edward Orrell de cabin  
Elizabeth wiffe of Thomas Brockell de cabin  
Robert Whittle de cabin  
Elizebeth Trelfall de cabin  
Jane daughter of Thomas Whally de Wallgate  
Thomas Brochell de cabin  
Ellen daughter of Edward Lee de Wallgate  
Robert son of James ffinch de cabin  
Gerrard ffinch de cabin  
Ellen Gregson de cabin  
Edward Lee de Hallgate  
Mary daughter of Jeffrey Crochley de Hallgate  
Jane wiffe of James ffinch de cabin  
Mary daughter of James ffinch de cabin  
Anne daughter of Thomas Pilkington de cabin  
Ellice son of Hugh Mather de Wallgate  
Jane wiffe of Robert Whittle de cabin  
Elizibeth daughter of Thomas Scott of Pemberton  
William Barron the younger  
Roger Orrell de cabin*

May 1649

*Ellen wiffe of William Barron de cabin (senior)  
A poor woman in Hugh Bullocks new house  
William ————— de cabin senier  
————— Crochley de cabin  
————— daughter of Robert Shaw de cabin  
A poor wench in Hugh Bullocks new house  
Robert Pennington de Millgate  
Katherine wiffe of Robert Pennington de cabin  
Ralph son of Lawrence Anderton of Hallgate  
Robert Townlee of Hallgate  
Peter son of Humphrey Gregson de cabin*

Burials in June 1649

*John son of Robert Mollinex de cabin  
Thomas son of Robert Townlee de cabin  
Anne Orrell of Gidloe Lane  
John son of Robert Townlee de cabin  
Gilbert son of Ralph Leigh of Wallgate  
Robert son of Ralph Leigh of Wallgate*

Burials in July 1649

*Margret daughter of Robert Lee in Standishgate*

*Ellen wiffe of Robert Lee in Standishgate  
John son of Oliver Leigh de cabin  
Mary wiffe of Oliver Leigh de cabin  
Grace wiffe of Ralph—————  
Oliver Leigh de cabin  
Anne daughter of Robert Lee de cabin  
Elizabeth daughter of Oliver Leigh de cabin*

The usual methods of containing the plague were in place and once again human nature influenced events. In 1649 the Court Leet was petitioned by John Catterall a local Wigan cooper:

*"That your petitioner lately before the sickness called the plague or pestilence fell amongst us took a cottage and garden in Gidlow Lane for which your petitioner paid £7 consideration, intending to have come to lived at it at May last, was disappointed in the making of cabins for sick persons of the same cottage so that your petitioner was constrained to pay rent for another place during that time, and since the sick persons or some of them pulled down some of his walls and doors about it and burned them to his great loss and hindrance".*

Wooden 'plague houses' for those infected already existed just outside town (the present Woodhouse Lane is named after them) but the size of the outbreak must have led to requisitioning of more buildings chosen for their isolation. The generous officials gave Catterall 15s.8d.(78p today!).

Again in 1649 James Finch, one of the town administration servants, asked for financial compensation from the Court Leet:

*"Your petitioner in these late distressed and distracted times of the great visitation of the sickness that was amongst us called the plague and pestilence, was constrained to attend Mr Mayor and do what service he could in that behalf. Having a wife and a number of small children sent them into the country upon great cost and charges until such time as the town by God's providence was set clean. Notwithstanding it was reported your petitioner had allowance, which was not true.*

*Continued on page 6*

# Plague in Wigan

Continued from page 5

*Please commiserate his great charge and losses he hath sustained for want of his wife's industry so long confined from him".*

There are three aspects here: his missing wages, his extra expenses and his wife's lost income, probably from handloom weaving. Nevertheless the town officials declined to pay, coldly advising Catterall to apply to the Mayor himself (Ambrose Jolley) who presumably would have to reimburse Catterall out of his own pocket! Some chance!

It might have been expected that the doctor who attended the sick would have been treated rather better. Later in 1649 William Getenby (*"Physician and servant to your town in these late and distressed times of sickness amongst you"*) also petitioned the Court Leet:

*"At the mention and request of the last mayor Mr Jolley and some others of his brethren and burgess did undertake with his best endeavours to visit the sick persons and to minister to them as occasion should serve, and was to have for his pains and industry until such times as the town was set free and at liberty, 30s. [£1.50] a week, in which time the said William received in part payment £13 and served 24 weeks. The premises considered, the said William in regard that he was constrained to send his wife and children to Standish to dwell and inhabit being at charge of two houses and losing his practices in other places."*

So, Gatenby was entitled to £36 but had only been paid £13, and was therefore owed £23. Generous as ever the Court Leet paid him £7 *"out of such monies as shall come into the hands of any for the use of*

*the lately restrained poor"*. Even the Doctor had difficulty getting paid!

Some indication of the paranoia which filled people's minds during these times is shown by several other court records. In October 1652, although there was no plague in Wigan:

*"Information of Thomas Scott of Wigan, shoe maker taken upon oath that on the 16th day of this instant October he met Henry Reynolds of Wigan in Windle at a place called Fox Bank and on enquiring of him his travel or occasions of whether his travel then lay the said Henry Reynolds him answered he was then going to Whiston to help the poor infected people there visited with the plague or infectious sickness."*

Another entry in 1652 records a guilty plea:

*"Confessed. James Molyneux, school master for going into suspected places and dangerous for the sickness contrary to Mr Mayor's commands."*

There is no record if he was punished but John Hudson was not so lucky:

*"John Hudson confessed by himself for sending his servant towards infected places where the plague was known to be and not making the officers of this town acquainted with his journey and for hawking about in the country with pans, contrary to the statute."*

Hudson was sentenced to two hours' incarceration in the Moot Hall, or longer if he refused to publicly acknowledge his guilt. In addition he was fined 20s. (£1) mitigated to 2s.6d.

Conditions were so difficult that in 1648 public meetings were banned and the fortnightly Court Leet not held between 4 February 1649 and 1 September 1649. A petition was sent to Parliament signed by the town's officials and endorsed by four church ministers:

*"The hand of God is stretched upon the country, chastising it with the three-corded scourge of sword, pestilence and famine all at once afflicting it .... In this county*

*hath the plague of pestilence been raging these last three years and upward. There is a very great scarcity and dearth of all provisions especially all sorts of grain which is sixfold the price of that it of late hath been. All trade is utterly decayed. It would not meet any good heart to see the numerous swarms of begging poor and the many families that pine away at home not having face to beg. Very many now craving alms at other men's doors were used to giving alms at their own doors.*

*To see paleness nay death appear in the cheeks of the poor and often to hear of some found dead in their houses or highways for want of bread. In the town of Wigan with the neighbouring parts are full two thousand poor who for three months and upwards have been restrained. No relief to be had for them in the ordinary course of law. The collections in our congregations (their own supply hitherto) being generally very slack and slender, those wanting ability to help who have hearts to pity them.*

*There are no bonds to keep in the infected hunger-starved poor whose breaking out jeopardises all the neighbourhood. Some of them already being at the point to perish through famine have fetched in and eaten carrion and other unwholesome food to the destroying of themselves and increasing of the infection.*

*And the more to provoke pity and mercy it may be considered that this fatal contagion had its rise evidently from the wounded soldiers of our army left there for air.*

<i>Of Wigan.....</i>	<i>Ministers.....</i>
<i>Ambrose Jolley</i>	<i>James Hyett</i>
<i>James Bradshaw</i>	<i>John Tyldesley</i>
<i>John Standish</i>	<i>Isaac Ambrose</i>
<i>Ralph Markland</i>	<i>Richard Hollingworth</i>

Has a more pathetic plea for help ever been written? The Civil Wars had exacerbated already existing problems to reduce Wigan to the depths it was not to experience again until the 1930's. Slowly the town recovered and, by the time of the Restoration in 1660, it was on the verge of an economic change, which was to transform Wigan forever.

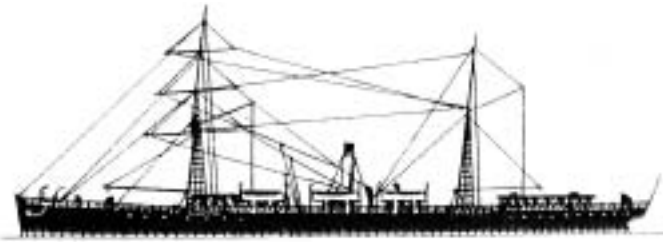
# Lost at Sea

ON 11 January 1889, a cablegram was received by the owners of the British screw steamer 'Priam' from Corunna, via Barcelona, informing them that the vessel had been wrecked on one of the Sisargas Islands, lying midway between Corunna and Cape Finistere. Evidently during heavy storms the 'Priam' had been forced onto rocks before being broken in two. It finally sank in 40ft of water at low tide.

'Priam' was the sister ship of 'Diomed'. It was built by Scott and Co. of Greenock in 1870, the year it entered into service. Its gross tonnage was 2,039, whilst its dimensions were recorded as 313.6ft x 32.8ft x 27.9ft. Greenock Foundry Co. was responsible for the steamer's engine. For 18 years 'Priam' had traded between Liverpool and China.

On this fateful voyage the vessel was carrying a valuable cargo of a general nature (which was plundered before salvage operations took place), as well as five first class passengers and a crew of 42. Unfortunately, whilst the majority of the crew survived, five died. Out of the five passengers, four died, including Mr and Mrs Darbyshire of Wigan and their female servant Miss Elizabeth Smith, also of Wigan.

John Darbyshire was well known in both the Leigh and Wigan areas. He had married the eldest sister of John Fairclough, a member of Leigh



**PRIAM**

Local Board who was later to become Leigh's first mayor. He had lived in Wigan and, when a student, attended the Mining School there, during which time he was closely associated with C.M.Percy, the writer of such volumes as 'Mining in the Victorian Era', and 'A History of the Wigan Mining and Technical School'.

Although the couple had many friends in the area, they were actually living at the time in Bradford, where Darbyshire had taken up his duties as manager of the Bradford and Shelf Tramways. Prior to this he had been employed by the Manchester, Bury and Rochdale Tramway Company as a locomotive fireman, a similar position to one he had held earlier in Coventry.

The couple, together with their servant, were en route to the Straits

Settlements, where Darbyshire was due to take up his position as manager of the Penang Steam Railways, for which he had been engaged by Kerr, Stuart and Co. of London, the well known tramway contractors. The work was expected to take two years, for which Darbyshire had been offered a salary of £700 p.a.

The couple had four children, three of whom were attending the Sheffield Roman Catholic School, whilst the fourth, a boy, was at Catterick.

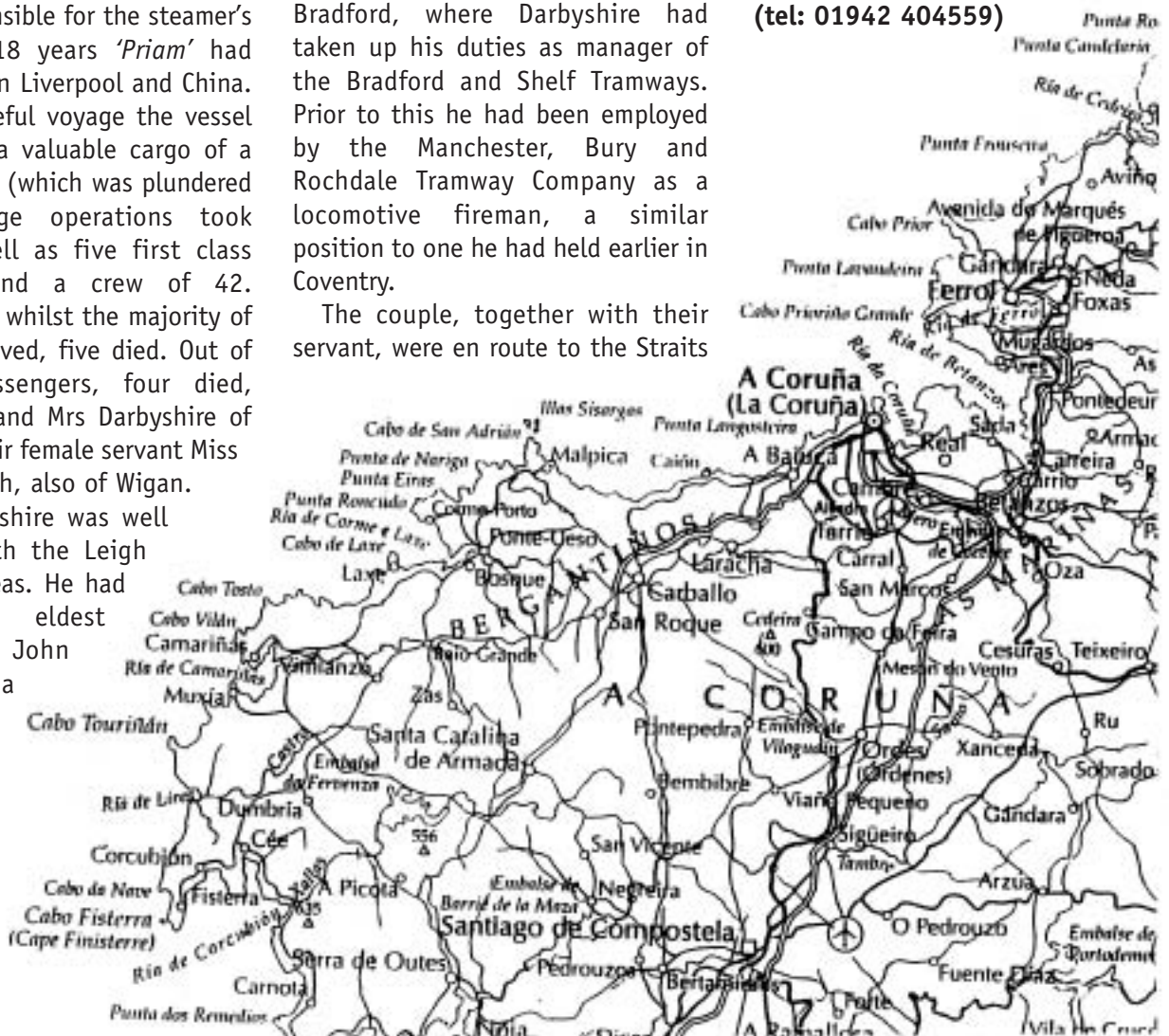
Should anyone want further details then please contact me.

**Tony Ashcroft**

**Local History Officer**

**Leigh Library**

**(tel: 01942 404559)**



# Come To Healthy Wigan, Spa Town Extraordinaire!

## Ancient tradition

Many readers will be well aware of Wigan's age old reputation as a 'watering hole' and it will come as no surprise to find in the Archives that 500 years ago inebriated souls were to be found wandering about the town centre creating havoc! The many and varied activities associated with this great tradition are, of course, still being carried on at full pace, especially at weekends.

It will come as a great surprise to most of you that over 230 years ago Wigan was famous as being a watering hole of a different kind, namely that of a health spa! No, this isn't an April Fool and I am not talking about some local character selling Ochrey sludge as a mud pack; I am, in fact, referring to Harrowgate Spa, the well of which now lies filled in close to or beneath the Magistrates Court. The spa was named as such to obviously compare itself with the famous Yorkshire example.

## Spa, a definition

To help readers to try and visualise this unfamiliar Wigan of the 1770's, the dictionary describes the term Spa as: "A health resort, especially one where there are one or more mineral springs whose waters possess therapeutic properties".

Spa is related to the Belgian town which possesses a famous mineral spring.

The other more ancient term, also used locally for therapeutic springs bearing iron salts, was a Chalybeate Spring.

You may remember the recent article in *Past Forward* (no 37, p29) on 'The Burning Wells of Wigan', where we found that Wigan has a number of natural springs due to water under pressure passing along faults in the coal measures or through porous rocks. Often these springs are contaminated with complex minerals and gas mixtures and definitely not in any sense healthy. Depending on the route the water has taken below ground mineral salts can end up in solution, certain of which are needed in trace amounts for bodily functions. Centuries ago, people really were

convinced of the healing powers of the mineral salts in spring water; those benefits were without doubt mainly psychological!

## Business is thriving in 1770

In 1889 Dr Prosser White of Wigan suggested in an article (*The Old Wells and Springs of Wigan*) that the



spring was known of and in use well before 1770, although he was relying on stories handed down through generations. The first reliable mention of the Wigan spring is in 1770 when the famous Dr. William Borlase, historian and mineralogist of Cornwall, prophesied "a fortunate and fashionable future for the Wells" in general nationally, and mentions Harrowgate Spa Wigan.

An advertising leaflet, dated 31 July 1786, for Wigan's Spa, intended for distribution via a Mr Harop, printer of Manchester, was discovered in an old bookshop in 1934 (present whereabouts of the document unknown). The contents were as follows:

## WIGAN SPAW

*Many persons afflicted with scrofulous and scorbutic disorders having received much benefit by drinking the Sulphur-Water at Wigan, lately discovered, and others having been thereby completely cured...it is therefore thought proper to inform the Publick in general of the salutary Effects of this Water, that they who are troubled with such disorders may know where to find Relief.*

*As bathing in the same water is found extremely beneficial in some Cases, a cold or a warm Bath with suitable Accomodations may be had every day at a reasonable Expence in a neat Building erected for that Purpose.*

## Wigan Spaw or New Harrogate in 1788

In 'England Described' by William Bancks (1788), publisher of Wigan, the following account is found:

*WIGAN SPAW or new HARROWGATE, is a strong sulphureous water, lately discovered in boring for coal in a field near the Scholes Bridge; it is said to greatly resemble the water of Harrowgate (Harrogate) in Yorkshire, only that it does not contain so much saline matter as that does: it contains a considerable quantity of a very fine sulphur, and has been found useful in most complaints for which sulphur waters have been recommended: it has been made use of in a variety of complaints, and frequently with good effect: amongst others, the following, may be particularly mentioned, sore eyes, particularly those that have been of long standing; old sore legs, and other old sores; scald heads, the scurvy, itch, and many other eruptions, or cutaneous complaints, scrofulous sores &c. In all these disorders, patients have frequently been known to obtain a perfect cure by the use of this water.*

*There is now a very elegant building erected for the use of those who resort to this spring, with conveniences for drinking the water, and for using it either as a hot or cold bath.*

What a vision this conjures up of cross-eyed scurvy-ridden scalded-head Wiganers limping along to the spa busily scratching themselves.

The coal seam in question was the well known Wigan 4ft, which can be seen on the six inch Geological Survey plan 93NE of 1930, outcropping virtually spot on where





First edition 6" to 1 mile (enlarged), surveyed in 1845-6 showing (top left) Harrowgate Draw Well and other springs to the east near present day Darlington Street.

the well was sunk. Another unidentified seam outcropping about 100 metres to the west would also have been intersected at greater depth.

The earliest trade directory in the Archives (1796) gives the proprietor of the 'Bathing House' as a Mrs Hodgson, widow.

**Britton's Beauties of England and Wales 1807**

The opportunity arose in 1807 for Wigan's Spa to be highlighted in this collation of beauties and wonders in England by John Britton (volume IX); the description is virtually word for word as per Bancks's account.

**Whitehouse's History of Wigan 1829, "numerous springs"**

This fascinating manuscript held in the Archives was never published. It was illustrated by the author's own watercolours and gives us for example one of the earliest views of the old Moot Hall in the town centre.

Whitehouse states;

*The springs in the neighbourhood of Wigan are numerous, and a few years ago a medicinal spring was discovered near Scholes Bridge, the water of which was strongly impregnated with sulphur, and which, very much from it's resemblance to the celebrated Yorkshire Spa, obtained the name of new Harrogate. The quantity of Saline matter contained in this water was not so considerable as in the Harrogate waters, but it was used with good effect in cutaneous and scorbutic (scurvy) disorders, and patients frequently obtained perfect cure from the use of it. For the accommodation of visitors a*

*handsome building was erected, with conveniences for drinking the water, and bathing if required, but now the waters, having got mixed with those of the neighbouring coal pits, have nearly lost their medicinal virtues, and are little used.*

**In decline then rediscovered**

By the time of the First Edition 6 inch Ordnance Survey map of Wigan, surveyed in 1847-8 and published in 1849 the site is still shown as Harrowgate with Draw Well alongside (see above).

In 1852 during repairs to a house close to the spa site a second well was found. We do not hear again of the well until 4 October 1889, when it was exposed by the pulling down of two cottages which had been built over the site. When the ground floor of one of these cottages was removed, a circular brick chamber was revealed 12 feet in diameter, with walls 5 feet in height. An arch bricked roof covered in the well, and partly formed the floor of the chamber. Under the arch and across the wall was placed a massive plum tree beam, probably for the attachment of draw gear. The well was 12 feet deep, and contained 5½ feet of water. A rough wooden seating encircled the chamber.

Wigan librarian A.J.Hawkes, when writing 'Ancient and Loyal' (a series of historical sketches of the Wigan Borough) in 1930, included a pen and ink sketch (see illustration) of the cottages mentioned above. The sketch comes from Dr Prosser White's study mentioned earlier. The artist is unknown and appears to be initialled HB alongside the date of 1899. The view shows an old lady in the foreground and possibly an idealised

image (due to the area being a mass of terraced housing at the time) of the old Harrowgate Fields behind the cottages. Other Spa House remains were still visible as part of another property in 1935 when once more Hawkes mentions it in his 'Outline History of Wigan'.

It was to be 1 January 1954 before the well was mentioned again in print, this time by Chris Aspin in the Lancashire Evening Post. He had a vision of what may have been when he wrote;

*"What would have become of Wigan had it remained a spa is open to conjecture. Would it one wonders have become a town in which retired army officers of the rank of colonel and above spent their last years, or would it have become a conference town with an annual festival of chamber music?"*

**In conclusion**

No doubt some of the hundreds of wells used in Wigan over the centuries provided good clean drinking water and some even contained mineral salts.

Over the centuries many wondrous claims, as with Harrowgate Spa, have been made for the healing powers of spring and mineral water. Many thousands of Wiganers must have paid hard-earned cash to dip their feet, rub their heads and eyes and drunk many a gallon convincing themselves it was for the best.

The World Wide Fund For Nature recently published the results of their research into spring water and found that it is no healthier to drink than tap water and that the salts contained have virtually no beneficial effects. On the other hand, you can understand some poor soul from Scholes in 1820 giving it a go when their normal water supply was probably polluted and harbouring all sorts of nasties!

Alan Davies  
Heritage Officer (Archives)

**Appendix**

**Some other well known Wigan wells**

- Silverwell, a few hundred yards east of Harrowgate Spa
- Boys Well, Scholes
- Millgate Well
- Tea Well, Darlington Street East
- Wallgate Well
- Pump Yard, Queen Street Well
- Sugar Well, Swinley Lane
- Bellingham House Well, Wigan Lane
- Mesnes Well, near Parsons Walk
- Lyon Well, Poolstock
- Barley Brook Well

# Ephemera from the Archives

## Pit Brow Women Go Global!

I have always suspected that in its heyday the Wigan borough was without doubt the world centre for coal mining activity - from actually mining vast amounts of coal to the study of mining operations, from the production of mining equipment to being the home of the finest mining legal and engineering brains in King Street, and finally as the centre of the premier mining college in the world in Library Street.

That Wigan's former influence can still be in the minds of historians on the other side of the world is some measure of its reputation. You may not be aware that Japan had quite an extensive coal industry at one time, now virtually defunct. Over the past year Japanese PhD student Inui Yukiko, who is attached to Cambridge University, has been studying the reasoning behind the production of photographic images related to women working at collieries. She has been the author of various studies into mining communities in Japan.

Inui has made very thorough use of our archives, especially the extensive photograph and postcard collection, and has kept Len Hudson extremely busy making sure no image was overlooked. An interim publication has arisen, although you will be disappointed to hear that it is typeset in Japanese script, and is unlikely to be available in local bookshops!

Her study discusses the use of images of working women focusing on the Wigan area. These included carte-de-visite type images produced by Millard's studio (formerly on the site of the Victoria Hall) mainly for the pleasure of gentlemen, lantern slides and

postcards published by Atherton Collieries in 1905, and the broader market of the mass produced postcards published by Will Smith's Wigan Lane business from c.1904 onwards. She also has analysed the types of messages to be found on the reverse of the cards.

Inui considers that, although the representations of Wigan's women coal workers in postcards show traces of certain long standing photographic conventions which were established well before the advent of the postcard, the use of women workers as an icon for a particular historical industrial community was definitely an innovation.

## FOI Trolley Dash Unlikely

Since the arrival of Freedom of Information, the much vaunted breakthrough in public access to many government and local authority files, a number of email enquirers to the Archives have presumed that they can now order huge amounts of documents which must be produced within a specified time and that all our records can now be viewed, even those which were formerly restricted or had private embargos on them.

In reality virtually nothing has changed at the Archives. Most of our records have always been made available, and we do not hold Wigan Council records post 1974. For example, we hold certain private deposits of records which had private embargos placed on them back in the 1970's and will not be accessible until 2010. Some general restrictions have always had to be made due to staffing levels or the fragile condition of the records and also the physical limitations of our strongrooms, being two

floors below the public searchroom.

Restrictions and exemptions which will still apply (although even then usually accessible by relatives of those to whom the documents relate) in relation to requests for information from our records will be:

- information accessible by other means, the census, electoral rolls, internet family history resources and publications
- documents which may have National Security implications
- sensitive personal files such as Hospital and Court records, and post mortem and inquest records. Also certain personal school records, individual assessments or punishment records, for example of past pupils still probably alive. Personal data which comes under the Data Protection Act will still in most cases be exempt from access
- a request for a record for reasons plainly suspected to be malicious or to bring harm or embarrassment to

the extant family of the person the record relates to.

- the phone number of the Argos shop in Wigan!

Requests for information must be in writing (letter/email/fax) and include the enquirer's name and address and a description of the information required. The request does not have to mention Freedom of Information.

If costs are involved we will notify the enquirer of those and await payment before carrying out the research, which will be completed within no more than 20 days (the Archives is single staffed and allowance must be made for staff absence due to sickness or leave). Standard requests to the Archives by general researchers working on local history or family history will still be subject to our local clause, whereby we can only carry out research for up to 30 minutes, after which we will then refer the enquirer to a local agent, who will carry out the research for a fee.

**Alan Davies**  
Heritage Officer (Archives)

## Bickershaw Church Centenary Open Weekend

**Friday 20 May**

**PARKSIDE MALE VOICE CHOIR**

will perform a concert commencing at 7.30pm in the Church. Tickets from Jack (tel: 01942 513056) or Jackie (tel: 01942 708484).

**Saturday 21 May**

**OPEN DAY** 10am - 4pm with displays of local history covering the past 100 years, including afternoon games and activities, refreshments and the crowning of the school's May Queen.

**Sunday 22 May**

**OPEN DAY** from 10am with displays of local history covering the past 100 years, ending with a Centenary Service at 3pm. Refreshments will be available throughout the day.

# RAF Strikes, Calcutta 1946

WORLD WAR II was over, and thousands of troops abroad, after years of enduring tropical conditions, were looking forward to returning home to wives, families and girlfriends. However, the Government's arrangements for this were painfully slow and impinged particularly on RAF personnel who were deliberately targeted for slower release than the Army and Navy.

The undercurrent of irritation and resentment gradually built up until it found an outlet in strikes which broke out at RAF stations in the Middle East, India and beyond in January 1946. In most cases, the grievances concerned tardy demobilisation and repatriation, and caused deep embarrassment to the Government, to say nothing about the top brass whose thinking was limited to "strikes? No such thing in HM Forces - it's mutiny!" The RAF top man in the South East Asian command was a New Zealander and hard liner, Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, whose basic philosophy for delivering with mutineers was to "bring in the Army and shoot 'em!"

What particularly incensed us at the Dum Dum Airport was the Government's stock reply that there was a shortage of shipping. At the same time, we were receiving newspapers from home which were full of headline news about large liners such as *Queen Mary* being used to ship G I Brides back to the USA - yet the Air Ministry persisted in telling us that they couldn't bring us back because of a shortage of shipping! They even had the nerve to add that the water outside Bombay Harbour was not deep enough for large liners, so that men would have to be conveyed out to them by tender. Needless to say, we said we did not mind in the slightest being tendered out!

This was the context within which I became a mutineer at Calcutta's Dum Dum airport. During the strike there, a Parliamentary delegation arrived, which included Major Woodrow Wyatt MP, who fought valiantly on our behalf in Parliament. Another member was a young fresh-faced officer (apparently straight from training college) who made a pathetic appearance at the microphone to supplement pleas for calling of the

strike. The lowest ebb of his speech came when, in an extremely plummy voice, he said, "I mean, dash it all, chaps, you don't kick a man when he is down, do you?" - to which we all roared "Yes!" Exit one most discomfited officer.

I recorded the momentous days of the strike at Dum Dum Airport in my diary as follows ('Groupy' refers to Group Captain Slee, our Station Commander, and 'Taffy' to our Welsh strike leader, who had a wealth of experience of strikes in Civvy Street):

25 January 8pm. *Strike meeting in hanger, 'Groupy' also present - tries to answer grievances re demob etc, but frankly admits sympathy with our cause. Would strike himself if he was an airman! Manipur (original strikers) resume work today. We have quite a good spokesman ('Taffy'). Resolution to strike carried amidst enthusiastic roars! Starts from midnight tonight. Expectations to strike: cooks, medics, and ration wagon drivers. Strikes occurring in other parts of India - also Ceylon and Middle East - and all are in Transport Command.*

26 January. *On strike! Meeting called for 12pm. Grievances put to Major Wyatt. He attempts to answer them, but has to admit to several of our points. Groupy and Air Commodore also present. Air Commodore reads out two signals just received from 'high-ups' which more or less are the consequences of 'mutiny'. This does not improve matters! Now comes split in our own ranks. I line up with minority in favour of giving Government seven day deadline, during which time we resume work; failing reply, we resume strike. Majority, however, favour continuing strike 'till reasonable reply received from Air Ministry.*

27 January 12pm. *Another meeting. Written vote taken on issue, 'deadline' or 'strike'. 3pm, result of voting: for 'strike' 368, for 'deadline' 344. Therefore, 'Taffy' (admitting to changing his mind to 'deadline' voting) is still with the strikers, but appeals to minority to fall in with majority decision. This change of mind due to committee meeting at 9am with 'Groupy' and Air Commodore. He sees three foolscap sheets, prepared and sent off by Major Wyatt - and received in 'Blighy' early this morning. Convinces himself that Wyatt was with us after all, and admits that the*

*statement despatched by Wyatt "shook him"! Meanwhile, signals from Air Ministry show that 'Groupy' is in it up to his neck and will have to take disciplinary action if strike is not broken!!*

28 January 10am. *Further meeting, 'Taffy' will no longer lead strikes on such a small minority. 'Groupy' opens meeting by appeal for return to work, having received more signals from Air Ministry stating disciplinary action will have to be taken etc. Then leaves us to talk it over. Eventually majority favours deadline of 14 days. 'Groupy' recalled, and thanks us in heartfelt manner!! Work resumes from 6pm.*

A key undertaking was given by 'Groupy' that there was to be no victimisation as a result of the strike. However, the Warrant Officer in charge of my section decided to ban our days off, except for a certain Corporal who (for some reason I forget) did not join the strike. This was clearly against the undertaking given by the Station Commander, so Corporal McIlroy and myself bearded the Warrant Officer in his den to make sure that was his intention. He openly admitted it and said, angrily thumping his desk, "furthermore, I am the C O of this section so you can go and moan to whoever you like".

We took him at his word and went straight back across the airstrip to the Squadron Leader and reported what had happened. We had hardly got back to the section when the Warrant Officer stomped in, face black as thunder, and said, "Much against my will, I've had to restore the days off." I could see he was awfully mad about our victory and thought "that's goodbye to any future promotion prospects for me!". Later, he sent for Corporal McIlroy and me to give us a dressing down about going over his head - when all we had done was to follow his own advice to "moan to whoever you like"!

The strikes did have a noticeable effect on demobilisation and demobs and repats schedules quickly increased in tempo. There were, however, still anxious waits in Bombay where we scanned the horizon day after day for signs of shipping.

I was eventually demobbed on 7 June and married five days later. Close thing!

C Miller  
Wigan

# Family History



## Additions to The Taylor Gallery

### Donations

ACKERS, Peter *Christian Brethren, Union Brother*  
RIGBY, G *St. Thomas, Up Holland. Index to marriages 1600 – June 1837 (now complete to 2004)*  
SWIFT, E.A. (Transcriber) *Bishop Bridgeman's ledger 1616-1642*  
1901 CENSUS INDEX to  
Bispham Lathom Burscough Skelmersdale RG13 3545/46  
St John the Divine, Pemberton. *Index to marriages 1835-1926*

SURNAME INDEXES (CD ROM) to:  
Tyldesley Cemetery Oct 1878 – Jan 1953  
Atherton Cemetery Feb 1857 – 1899  
St George's Tyldesley Oct 1825 – June 1938

SURNAME INDEX (CD ROM) to:  
Wigan Lower Ince Cemetery Sept 1856 – July 1865

### Genealogy

Family and Local History Handbook 8th edition

### General

RICHARDS, Eric *Britannia's Children* 304.80941  
WINDER, R *Bloody Foreigners: the story of immigration to Britain* 325.41  
MUNBY, Lionel *How much is that worth?* 339.47  
*Schools in Wartime* 371.009044  
CONDER, Tony *Canal narrowboats and barges* 386.226  
MUNBY, Lionel M *Dates and times: a handbook for local historians* 529.3  
*Make do and mend* 640.41  
PATTEN, Marguerite *The wartime kitchen* 641.5  
JONES, Gillian *Lancashire professional photographers 1840 – 1940* 770.254 276  
MORRIS, Graham *Wigan Rugby League Football Club* 796.3331  
BILTON, David *The Home Front in the Great War* 940.3  
ARTHUR, M *Forgotten voices of the 2nd World War* 940.5481  
VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORIES *History of the County of Oxford vol XIV* 942.57

## CD Roms

1841 and 1851 Census of Lancashire

## Project News

Our Friends and other local researchers have been once more beavering away on our behalf and this month have produced some excellent CD-ROMS.

Keith Openshaw has, for some time, been indexing Cemetery records for Atherton and Tyldesley. Thanks to him you will now be able to search Tyldesley cemetery for 1878-1953 and Atherton 1857-1899. As a bonus, Keith has also indexed St. George's, Tyldesley burials 1825-1938. His work is continuing for Atherton cemetery 1900-1960. Paper copies of all these indexes will soon be available at Leigh.

Received also this month from Freda Chorlton is the first part of the indexes to Wigan Lower Ince Cemetery. This covers Sept 1856 – July 1865.

## Web-sites

### [www.lan-opc.org.uk](http://www.lan-opc.org.uk)

This interesting site aims to provide information on towns and parishes in Lancashire. Keith Openshaw (mentioned above concerning burials at Atherton and Tyldesley) has been heavily involved with providing memorial inscriptions and burials for St. Stephens' Church, Astley. These are now available online at the above web-address. Burials 1754-1926 are covered with graveyard plan and photographs of interesting memorials.

Other parts of the borough are also listed, notably Atherton, which has Atherton mining deaths, information on the various pits, photographs of pits and churches. Under Wigan you will find names of persons who put their names to the 1641 Protestation of loyalty oath and also a Window Tax Assesment for 1768. Some excellent pictures also. A site to watch for future development.

### [www.irishorigins.com](http://www.irishorigins.com)

Like *Englishorigins*, this is a pay per view site, but this time allowing access to Irish records such as Griffiths valuation 1847-1864, a "a substitute census" and Griffiths survey maps and plans. In addition there is also an Irish Wills Index of 100,000 names covering the years 1484-1858, Dublin City census 1851, a militia attestations index 1872-1915 and Irish passenger lists for 1890 to US destinations from Irish Ports. At £3.75 for 72 hours access, monthly access for £7.95 and annual membership for £22.50, this will hardly break the bank.

### [www.britishgenealogy.com](http://www.britishgenealogy.com)

The site's introduction says that it is dedicated to assisting people with their British family history research and in particular to provide this for free. For the beginner there is an explanation of sources available and lists resources by county. Unfortunately the site is not fully operational and no information has been inputted specifically for Lancashire as yet. However, as an example of what is free, is a Gloucestershire 1841 Census place index which seems really to me to be a thinly veiled advertisement for Archive CD Books who happen to sponsor the site. However, they have a Forum section which you may find useful.

Ô

### Correction

Apologies for not crediting the excellent *wiganworld* website to its creator, Brian Elsey, in the last issue.

Dear Mr. Gillies,

I commend you on the latest issue of *Past Forward*. Your magazine is eagerly awaited in this neck of the woods, and perused with great anticipation in the hope of finding mention of places and people that may have been associated with my maternal family. I must, therefore, express appreciation to Neil Cain for his article "Barm Cakes in the Pantry" (issue 36 p31) as he mentions many of the places I have found relevant to my grandfather's childhood in Aspull, and suitably enthused me once more to try and establish further successes, this time with my grandmother's side of the family.

My grandfather, John William Hilton, was born at Top Lock in 1868; Withington Lane and Haigh Hall, Bickershaw Church and Upholland also feature in the Hilton family records that I have gathered, and so it was quite a thrill to see these places featured, and helped add a little more to the picture of where my forebears resided. Way

## Hilton/Pugh Genealogy

back in 2001 (issue 27), I submitted an article to your magazine regarding the Hilton Family, entitled "From Aspull to Australia"; this article brought forth contact with descendants of my family who filled in lots of gaps and detail to the Hilton/Greenhalgh/Hindley connections.

My maternal grandmother was SARAH ANN PUGH, daughter of Thomas and Jane (nee Hughes). Sarah Ann was born in Pontesbury but the family came to reside in Poolstock after 1881 and are shown on the 1891 census as residing in Byrom Street, Poolstock – Sarah Ann was working as a servant at the *Commercial Inn*

139 Cale Lane. She married John William HILTON in 1897 at St. Thomas' and St. James' Church in Poolstock. She resided for some years in Bolney Street, where the family grew to five children, the eldest girls Annie and Olive, attending St. Johns Church, New Springs. The family came to Australia in 1912. Sarah kept in touch with her younger brother James, but sadly no letters have survived. I have, however, salvaged several photos from the family album and enclose two of these.

Photo one is of my maternal grandmother's youngest brother, Jim Pugh, his wife Elizabeth

(nee Taylor) whom he married in Wigan in 1904 and their children - possibly William Stanley b. 1905, Thomas James b. 1908, May b. 1910, John b. 1912 and Elizabeth b. 1917.

Photo two is a mystery engine – the name on the side of the Engine could be "SHAH" and I take it to be in Wigan somewhere. I hope the photographs may trigger the memory of someone out there and also bring me in contact with further family descendants

I extend again my congratulations on your excellent publication and eagerly await the arrival of the next issue.

**Elsbeth Bradbury**  
31 Dalwood Close  
Eleebana NSW 2282  
AUSTRALIA



## Mary Ann Whittle

Dear Sir

I would be grateful if you could possibly print the request below in your newspaper. I am researching my family history, and most of my family came from the Wigan area, but I now live in Crewe. Your readers are out there with the information that I need! The men in my family were miners; I am proud of that, and therefore want to make sure that future generations do not forget their roots.

CAN YOU HELP ME? I am looking for anyone who knew Mary Ann Whittle nee Humphries. She was born in 1871, and was living with her parents, George and

Jane, at 1 Colliers Yard, off Ince Green Lane, Ince-in-Makerfield, in 1881; she had several brothers and sisters. In 1897 she married Robert Whittle, and they had a son Robert, born in 1901 (he was my grandad, and married Bertha Critchley). I would like to know where any of these people are buried, or any information or photographs that could help me with my search. Please contact me if you can help, thank you.

**Jean Bennett**  
(nee Telford)

**20 Davenham Crescent**  
**Crewe CW2 7RZ**  
**e-mail: [Jeangeniexaol.com](mailto:Jeangeniexaol.com)**

## S.O.S

Mr Ronald Whittle, who formerly lived in Hindley and went to Argyle Street Secondary Modern School, would like to contact old school friends, in particular Robert Fairhurst, who last he heard, was living in Farnworth, Bolton. Ronald left school in the Summer of 1956 and lived at Hawthorn Avenue, Hindley Green and Borsdane Avenue.

If you know of an address for Robert Fairhurst or would like to contact Ronald his address is 8 Gardenfields Close, Irthlingborough, Northants, NN9 5XZ Tel: 07949 664939.

*Continued on page 14*

## Family History



*Continued from page 13*

### Lowes of Wigan

Dear Christine,

I thought you would be interested to hear about a success story from the article about James Lowe which appeared in issue 37 of *Past Forward*.

Two weeks ago I received a letter from a lady in Wigan who had photographs of one of my

grandmother's sisters – she very kindly took copies and posted them to me. We hope to meet up sometime next week. I am now the proud owner of two photographs of James Lowe's daughters – Alice and Ellen.

Without all of your help I would not have achieved such success. Thank you once again.

**Susan Williams**

*Since I received this letter from Susan she has informed me that another contact has been made which has yielded more photos but of James Lowe's sister.*

**CW**

### Robert Taylor, from Wigan to Sydney

Dear Christine,

You may be able to give me some advice re Robert Taylor born 11 September 1791 in Wigan. His parents are George Taylor and Mary Marsden.

Robert married Margaret Hough 30 Jan 1814 in Wigan and they had a daughter Ann born 7 February 1815. Robert had a brother George Taylor born 22 March 1789. George married Hannah Topping 17 July 1814 and they had a son John born 1 January 1816 in Wigan.

I have found the above information from the IGI and it fits with information I have here in Sydney Australia.

Robert Taylor was convicted in the Lancashire Assizes on 20 March 1819 and transported for 7 years; he arrived in Sydney on 27 January 1820. He had a daughter Ann Taylor who married a John Higham; they had six children in Sydney, the first one being born in 1840.

Robert Taylor made a lot of money in Sydney and was a very big landowner; however, he left his estate to his nephew John Taylor, formerly from Wigan. Robert died in 1850 aged 58, before formal registration of deaths, so the parish register does not give any family information.

So the above IGI information sort of fits the picture.

**Lynette Henery**  
**gggggranddaughter of Robert**  
**Sydney Australia**

*Can any Past Forward readers assist Lynette?*  
**CW**

## Readers Photographs

### Editor's Note

This fascinating selection of photographs has been kindly donated by Harry Walls of Orrell. Hopefully some readers may be able to add to the information given. Harry's recollections of his Canal Life can be found on page 24.



*Joe and Emmie - otherwise unidentified.*



*Taken on Crankwood Road, Abram by William Walls. He has written on the back: "My pal Len Appleton who played football with me for Abram Parish Church and later went to play first for Blackpool, then on to Exeter and later Southport".*



*Above and far left: Abram St Johns Concert Party, 14 June 1916. Performers identified on the back of the photographs as (standing) Edward Gorton, Wilson, Hesketh, R. Cunliffe, Wilson, (seated) Sharrock, L. Birchall, Peter Gorton (the old Lady), David Parry and Lily.*



*Taken in front of Timberlake's Motorcycle Showroom, Wigan, 1930's. Rider unidentified.*

# ANNE BROADHURST

ANNE was born at the turn of the century in Tonge Moor Road. Her father, Mr. William Broadhurst, was also to make his mark locally during his 91 years. He became President of Leigh Literary Society, and later represented the Culcheth Ward on Golborne Urban District Council.

The family soon moved to Culcheth and Anne won a place at Leigh Girls' Grammar School. Her musical talent quickly became obvious, and upon leaving she attended Manchester's Northern College of Music. There her contralto voice was trained to perfection, and she was soon performing at concerts all over Lancashire.

However, her really big break came when she successfully auditioned for the BBC's 2ZY Radio Station in the 1920's. Despite radio being in its infancy, she was soon a family favourite

who enjoyed national celebrity. Regular broadcasts were to follow from Manchester and Cork, Ireland. International recognition came in 1932 when she visited Leipzig, Germany, to combine performing with studying under Elena Gerhardt. Hailed by the Germans as the 'Perfect Singer of Lieder', she returned the following year and was one of the few foreign artists to stay when the Nazis took control.

On her return to Leigh she gave 'Voice Production and Singing Lessons' from her home at 4 Clovelly Avenue, Leigh. The lessons were a huge success and, interestingly enough, her newspaper advertisements highlight the scarcity of private telephone numbers at the time - her number was simply 450.

At this time she was still performing and earned rave reviews from the national press

for her 1934 concert at London's Grotrian Hall. But by the end of the 1930's her popularity was beginning to wane. In April 1935, she married William Hector Prescott, third son of Mr & Mrs David Prescott of Walmsley Road, Leigh, and set up home in Bolton with her new husband.

Journalism attracted her briefly, and her knowledge was put to good use, as she wrote reviews for both the *Bolton Evening News* and *The Guardian*. Her love of music endured and, in 1950, she was elected Chairman of Bolton Musical Artists' Association.

Gradually, however, she faded from public view, and eventually died peacefully at her home on 29 December 1993, aged 93. She had no children, but was survived by her sister, Adelaide, who lived in Culcheth.

**Tony Ashcroft**  
Local History Officer (Leigh)

---

**THIS is a true football story dating back to a few years before the 1914-1918 war.**

The match was played in the Church League between St. Catharines of Wigan and St. David's Haigh, at St. Catharines. Unfortunately the wagonette due to convey the St. David's team did not arrive at the *Balcarres Arms* as arranged. However, three players, who had walked from Red Rock where they lived, did arrive, as did the Vicar of St. David's, at that time the much respected Rev. James. The Vicar called the three together (unfortunately one name is lost in the mist of time but the other two forwards were

## HARD TO BELIEVE

Sam McCartney and Albert Huxley. "What can we do?" he asked, "shall we cancel?"

Without hesitation the answer was "no sir, we'll play them!" The three discussed tactics and decided to play two forwards and 1 defender (no goalkeeper). The few spectators grew to a crowd of over 100 as news of this unusual game spread. Tactics were to dribble until surrounded by opponents then pass to each other or drop exhausted.

At change round they were certainly ready for the usual slice of lemon,

although they got extra rations being only a three man team! The match ended after 90 minutes - no stoppage time in those days. The reporter from the *Bolton Evening News* went off to write his piece. (The article was kept as a souvenir for many years but unfortunately cannot be found).

The unbelievable final score was St. Catharines 1 St David's 13. On returning to Haigh the three had to explain how St. Catharines had managed to score! It was a long clearance by the St. Catharine's full back from his own half and St.

David's one defender chased after the ball as it crossed the goal line.

In true sporting style, hands were shaken and the league lived up to its motto engraved on the medals, "*Honour Before All Else*". Just as important as the result in those days. There was an evening fixture the same day at Haigh. The three heroes were rested, although they did actually turn up to play. Two matches in one day and a full-time job!

This is a true story told to myself by Mr Joe Huxley whose father was Albert Huxley, one of the heroes of the day.

**J Burns**  
Aspull Wigan

# Halcyon Days with the Clarion

WHEN Bill asked me if I would talk to you, I wasn't quite sure what I was going to say; but then I thought about why not talking about something I had really enjoyed doing, bringing to mind my own cycling days.

No doubt many of you will have cycled at the same time, whether it be around Atherton, cycling to work or maybe with a cycling club, as I did eventually. My first bike was shared with my brother Jack. It was a very small cycle, as we weren't very old. It was second-hand and cost 3s.6d. We decided it needed a new coat of paint, so we painted it silver and called it the 'Silver Streak'. It looked a silver mess but the hours of happiness it gave us meant it was worth every penny. We damaged more spokes and buckled the wheels trying to do trick cycling, until my mother finally refused to pay any more money for repairs. This was the end of the 'Silver Streak', and no doubt the little bike was glad to see the back of us, even when it was carted away on the rag and bone cart.

In my early teens I decided another bike of my own would save on time going to and from work, and I had grand ideas of riding to many places of interest. Having put the idea to my dad, he decided after considerable thought that, since I had only £1 to my name, he would look at a bike at Radcliffe's Cycle Shop, and then decide whether I could have one. He would pay for it and I would have to forget my weekly spending money of 1s. It took several weeks before a decision was made - my dad never

Dear Sir

Reading through some of my old scribblings, I wondered if you would be interested in printing the enclosed notes, for they are 60 years old. The names of the people I have mentioned are no longer with us, but had they been they would have been pleased to see their names in print and remembered.

I thoroughly enjoy reading *Past Forward* which brings back such happy memories to me. Thank you for such a good production.

**Nancy Strand Boardman  
Blackpool**

did anything unless he had thought everything through. The new model was a 'Raleigh Gazelle', a sit up bike. It weighed a ton and cost £3.7s.6d. The day I called for my bike, if someone had given me the Bank of England I couldn't have been happier! However, the months ahead with no spending money were very hard; there was no way my dad would change our agreement. It was a hard lesson, but one I remember to this day.

Perhaps you remember that ladies and gents' cycles had a case covering the chain; this bike was no exception, and I became quite adept at removing it and putting the chain back on, until I finally discarded it through frustration. I also soon learned to remove tyres and inner tubes when necessary.

## Leigh Clarion cycling club

Whilst the War was on my brother and his friend met some older cyclists who informed them that the old Leigh Clarion Cycling Club was being revived and would they be interested in joining. Jack immediately commandeered the 'Gazelle' bike, so that I, of course, was left with no transport at all - until he thought of borrowing my brother's 'racer', which he did, until

he could buy or build one himself. But before I could join I had to go on a trial run with Jack and his friend Roy.

Trial night was Thursday night, and what a night it was. Try to visualise the scene; they are on lightweight bikes, and I was on the very heavy 'Gazelle'. We left Atherton, heading for Warburton Bridge. It couldn't have been a rougher night, and cycling down Holcroft Lane

was sheer hard work. The wind was head on, but I battled on, determined to show them that I wasn't just a girl. Of course they made light work of it but informed me I had to lead. Have you ever done this? I was in a state of collapse by the time we arrived. You have to keep up with everybody if you join the club, or you will be left behind. I believed all they said, but then realised they were teasing me, and replied I wasn't going to be the next collapsed member of any club.

## Filthy from head to toe

However, nothing ventured nothing gained, and I joined the other club members at the Leigh obelisk on the Market Place. I have never seen a more motley crowd in my life. There were about 40 in all, ranging from 10 to 72 years. You can imagine the various models of all descriptions, nothing like the models today. The outfits we wore had to be seen to be believed - remember, there had been a war. I was very smart with white linen tennis shorts and a white lightweight jacket. Can you imagine white on a wet drizzly day? Since many of the bikes didn't



possess mudguards, we usually arrived home filthy from head to toe. A few had souwesters or caps.

My first club ride was to Parkgate on the Wirral, with tea at Frodsham. After that I decided this was going to be fun, so I joined the Leigh Clarion Cycling club. The subscription per year was 6s.6d., which carried coverage for accident and entitled a person to use the facilities and reduced rates at the Clarion club or teahouses. So many applied to join, and I became a committee member - not that I knew anything about committees, but I soon learned. The club was flourishing, so we contacted the *Journal* (the local paper) with our forthcoming events, and a short write up for the sports page. Every week I submitted an entry and, because it was classed as sport, there was no charge. I was quite pleased about that.

Each year there was an Easter meet; the venue was changed every year. This was the highlight of the year. It was an occasion when we met friends from far and wide. After the business meeting, there was a huge social event; special road races (time trials) and visiting places of interest were also included. Everything we needed for the weekend was carried in the saddle and paper bags, including whatever food we could take. Remember everything was still on ration. There were no crease resistant clothes, so it was difficult to unpack and find anything that wasn't creased, but we were there to enjoy ourselves. We usually slept in a school hall with a pillowcase to sleep on, and a grey blanket. Males in one section and girls in the other. There were times when there was difficulty in finding the correct section, but the person in charge sorted them out in no certain manner! Breakfasts were made in the school kitchen; sometimes we used the British Restaurant if open. There were never enough pans or utensils, but somehow we managed. It could be quite hilarious, when one boy who was rather spoiled demanded that he had the egg he had brought, and he had even put his name on it! Each day I said to him, with tongue in

cheek, "yes, that is your egg, I've specially fried it".

### **'Sit up and beg'**

In every club there are characters, and we were no exception. Our oldest member was Mr Jim Cooke, affectionately called Pa Cooke. He never said anything without a twinkle in his eye, and the tales he told! Then there was Fred who was blind, and rode a tandem with his friend Ernie. He didn't suffer fools gladly. Two teenage boys, who were deaf and dumb, were always up to some prank or other. Mr Leonard was a widower with three teenage children who were also club members. He was the sage of the group, and loved by everyone. Joe - what can I say about him? One look and it was grins all around! He rode a very heavy 'sit up and beg' bike - his pride and joy - but he didn't care a lot and made us smile on many a dismal day.

We had to organise an A and B section after our first invitation run, in the *Journal*. It would have been impractical and dangerous to be on the roads in such a large contingent. The A section were the most experienced in distance riding and the B section were able to cycle at a more leisurely speed. Each section would meet at the end of the day for tea; this was important. The rule of the club was to ride to the slowest rider, but, of course, there were always the teenage boys who wanted to do their own thing, which would have caused havoc. This wasn't allowed for the reasons I have stated and there had to be a certain amount of discipline from all aspects.

Mostly we took packed lunches, but there were also club tea houses which could supply a certain amount of food if it was ordered in advance, which I used to do. It was very basic - if it was a farm we were lucky enough to have an egg, a little bacon, sausage and sometimes beans, and it always tasted so good after being in the fresh air. Did you know most cyclists drink lots of tea? The saying was "A good short hair cut and a mug of hot tea will turn you into a cyclist." I wonder!

Should there be a problem with anyone's bike the whole club would

stop until it was rectified. Nobody was left alone. The blind boy I mentioned and his friend were returning home when the cross bar snapped. Fortunately neither of them was hurt, they returned (by bus) to meet us for tea and the club organised the bike to be transported home. There was no panic, just relief that they were ok.

Two of our favourite calling places were Ma Ormies (Mrs Ormeshers) at Clayton Green and the tearoom at Broom Edge, where there was a piano. We had wonderful singsongs after tea before we returned home, many a time singing along the way. For our annual dinner and presentation of trophies, we booked the *Greyhound Hotel* in Leigh. Social events, dances and potato pie suppers were held at the Buck Street Hall, Leigh and the Leigh Unitarian Church Hall. We always made sure we left everything tidy, otherwise we wouldn't be allowed to book again.

### **Chained to the 'wringers'**

By now I had bought a new bike frame, a 'Tour de France' with its many gears, but I never used these. I preferred to use a fixed gear, I felt more in control. Now this really was my ultimate in a bicycle, when it was specially built for me. I remember the pride I felt on my first day out with the club. Unfortunately a week or two later my mother decided, as it was a very snowy morning, there would be no cycling for my brother and I, so she chained and padlocked it to the 'wringers'. Since we couldn't find the key to unlock it, we had to play the wowing game, until my dad got so fed up with all the hassle that he persuaded my mother to unlock the bikes and let us go. She never did it again for we hid the padlock!

The miles we covered, the fresh air and fun, the friends we made - and have kept to the present day - are wonderful. I kept my 'Tour de France' bike for 41 years and then sold it to a young boy interested in cycling. My three children had ridden at the same time in their lives, but were never interested enough to take it up as a hobby. They can't possibly know what they've missed!

# FRIENDS NEWS

## Family History Workshops

IT IS beginning to turn into a regular *Past Forward* feature just to let you all know how the last series of Family History Workshops went and to tell you about the dates for the next. So here we go again.....

The last of the current series of Family History Workshops, kindly run for us by the dedicated Friends of Wigan Heritage Service, is scheduled for Wednesday 6 April 2005, with the normal two start times of 1.30pm and 3.00pm.

There were some changes made to the original format for this the fourth series of Workshops. The main one of these is that participants now have to book and pay in advance, so making a firm commitment; in return they receive the handout notes also in advance, so that more can be gained from the session.

Once again we are claiming that it has been a great success. The sessions so far have all been booked up - indeed, at the time of going to press, three sessions have been held and there are three still to go. The next session is full, the penultimate session has two slots remaining out of six and the final session still has four.

The best measure, however, is to let you speak. From our feedback sheets we find that a remarkable 100% so far have had their expectations of the session met, with comments such as 'excellent', 'yes but there is so much information I'll definitely be back', 'very much so', 'yes, very clear'.

Other comments on the sheets are just as encouraging, 'cost was reasonable and length and format excellent', 'not long enough!' 'very informative', 'very helpful', 'I had longer than anticipated and enjoyed the session', 'the session was exactly what a beginner needs', 'the time was just right, everything was well explained', 'I appreciated the info relating to my family'.

Perhaps the best measure, though, is the question on the sheet 'Would you be happy to recommend our service to others?' Over 93% of you said you would, one was undecided!

This is, of course, fantastic reward for our hard working Friends, who do not always receive the thanks they are due, and great news for all the people who have benefited so much from taking part. However, one final thought - when asked where the participants

had heard about the workshops, 57% said they read it in *Past Forward*. Despite the statistic above, only 14% said that the workshops had been recommended by a friend or relative. So until you do start spreading the word, you will have to put up with more articles like this in the pages of *Past Forward*!

It is very important, however, to get in print the next series of workshops. Allowing a couple of months lay off for the Friends to recover, we hope to begin the workshops again in June this year and to try running some over the summer. As this traditionally is a slightly quieter period, with the counter-attraction of holidays, the sessions will be every three weeks.

**22 June 2005, History Shop  
1.30 & 3.00 pm**

**13 July 2005, History Shop  
1.30 & 3.00 pm**

**3 August 2005, History Shop  
1.30 & 3.00 pm**

**24 August 2005, History Shop  
1.30 & 3.00 pm**

**14 September 2005, History Shop  
1.30 & 3.00 pm**

The arrangements will be the same as for this series, with booking essential, the fee of £2.50 payable in advance and the Family History pack distributed before the session. The very best features of the sessions of course remain - one-to-one tuition from an experienced genealogist, tour of the History Shop study area, free use of the machines and facilities with advice and guidance as to the next steps. The general approach is for the beginner, but more advanced workshops can be arranged. Similarly, if the Wednesday afternoon slot does not suit your circumstances other times can be arranged.

Please ring the History Shop with your requirements or to book on 01942 828128.

## FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

Name .....

Address .....

Interests .....

**Please enclose £5 subscription for one year's membership.** Cheque/P.O. payable to Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust. Please return to the History Shop, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

Remember your subscription entitles you to a priority mailing of *Past Forward* three times a year, starting with the current issue unless you request otherwise.

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

# HISTORY SHOP NEWS

## Past Forward Survey

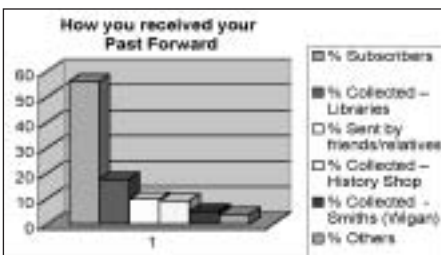
In the last issue we reported our initial findings from the *Past Forward* survey that was conducted in 2004. In this issue we are happy to bring you the full story. Right from the outset, when the surveys were distributed in issue 37, we knew we were going to be in for a high response. The forms kept on flowing back to us, so much so that we had to extend the original October 2004 cut off date as they just kept coming. In the end over 150 replies came in from existing customers, mailing list regulars and first time readers alike. This is a tremendous sample and more than enough to build an accurate picture of where we are now with the magazine and what you might like to see in the future. We would like to say a great big thank you to everyone who replied; without your support we could not have made *Past Forward* the huge success it undoubtedly is, and without your opinions we would not be able to make it even better.

## Survey Report

**Total returns** **168**



## About the magazine



Those who subscribed were then asked if they thought the magazine subscription offered value for money. Some got a little carried away at this question as, although only 94 people responded positively to being

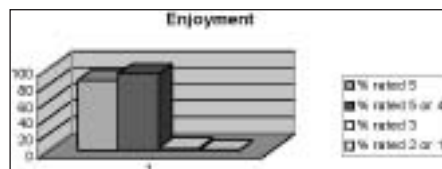
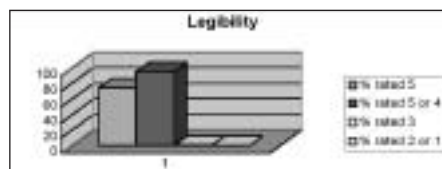
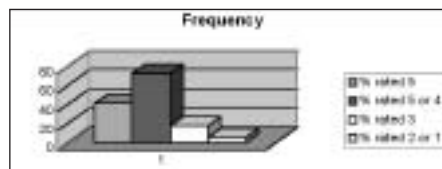
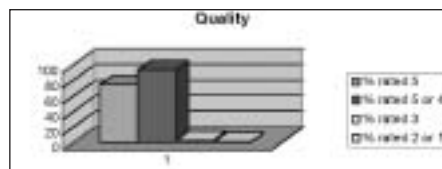
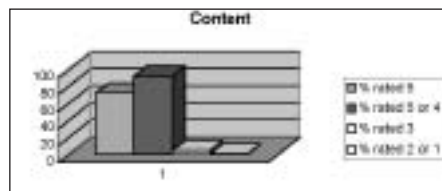
subscribers, 103 declared it value for money!

### Value for money

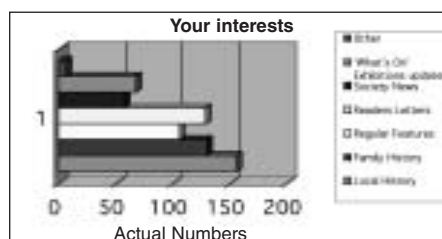
% Subscribers – positive	98.9
% Subscribers – negative	1.06

As they say there's always one!

**All respondents were then asked to rate the magazine on content, quality, frequency, legibility and enjoyment.** The results are absolutely outstanding (rated on a 1-5 scoring basis with 1 being poor and 5 excellent).



**The respondents were asked what interested them most in the magazine;** they were invited to tick all boxes that applied. The % figures are the proportion out of the total sample for each category.

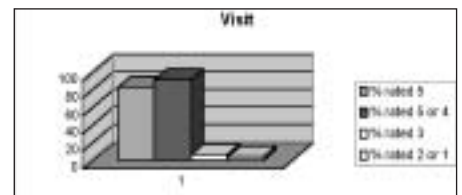
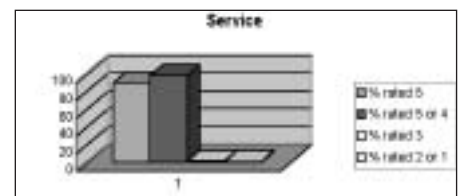


The 'other' nominations of interest were

- Industry
- Competitions
- New publications
- Old maps
- Old photos

**We asked if you knew that the magazine was produced by Wigan Heritage Service;** a reassuring 92% of you said you were. We asked if you had ever used the Heritage Service in any respect, in person, by post, email or telephone; 82.75% of you said you had. A sizeable percentage, 58.9, said they had visited the History Shop.

**On a subsequent satisfaction rating question regarding that visit**



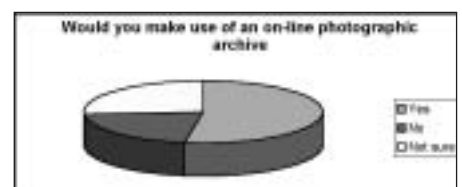
**We asked if you found the Heritage Service staff friendly / helpful / knowledgeable;** only 0.75% had anything negative to say, with the other 99% of respondents being very positive indeed.

For the record 79.8% of the total did express their views.

On the question of the service being easy to access,

- 71.4% expressed their views
- 95.8% were satisfied or much better
- 4.2% were of the opinion that certain elements were hard to access.

**We asked about our photographs**



Continued on page 20

# HISTORY SHOP NEWS

## General Comments

Finally your comments were invited on any aspect of the magazine or the service. The response was excellent. Here are just some of the many comments, complements and occasional criticisms you voiced.

So once again a big thank you for your time and trouble completing the questionnaire. Thank you also for your kind words and positive comments; without your opinion we cannot move forward to improve our magazine.

## Prize Draw

The questionnaire also gave details of the Heritage prize draw. Everyone who completed the questionnaire for us and supplied their contact details was eligible to enter. The first three names out of the hat were:

**Mrs Norma Peach from Prescot**  
**Mr S Taylor from Abram**  
**Mrs Elsie Edwards from Grantham, Lincolnshire**

Well done to each of you. You will be receiving one of the three prizes specified – a framed photo of your choice, a copy of *Wigan – a Historical Souvenir* or a set of Fred Holcroft's local history booklets.

## User Survey

We have also been consulting on the Heritage Service overall and in particular our main venue, the History Shop. Some details from this were released last time, but it does no harm to go over them again. The questionnaire covers all Heritage Service venues and these figures are combined (over 75% of respondents visited the History Shop).

- 74% of visits were for research purposes;
- of these 91% visited for family history, 16% for local history
- the most used resources among this group were the microfilms at 75% and the microfiche at 30%
- 77% of this group rated their visit as excellent
- 68% rated the staff excellent

- 96% of all respondents rated the venue, the facilities and the staff either good or excellent and a similar figure rated their satisfaction with the visit as good or above
- demographics show that 88% are in the over 40 age brackets while 51% are over 60
- 67% of visitors from within WN postcodes, with 91% from the wider North West region

These results are extremely encouraging, but they do indicate that so far we have only reached the research visitors. It is far more difficult to consult with exhibition viewers and general browsers through this sort of passive survey. However, we have visitor books and comment books in the various venues, and visitor comments from specific shows, such as 'Wigan Casino', are likely to be valuable feedback sources.

One of the best small museums of its kind. Archive space rather small although I haven't visited this year. Good shop. The 'Past Forward' magazine is unique, a winner for any Heritage Service.

I look forward to receiving each copy of 'Past Forward'. Who knows what gems will be found amongst its pages. Carry on with the good work.

IT IS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS TO HAPPEN IN WIGAN, AS WE OLDER ONES LOVE TO TALK OF THINGS OF THE PAST, BUT IT IS GREAT TO BE REMINDED OF THE THINGS WE HAVE FORGOTTEN.

ONLY ONE CRITICISM - IT DOES NOT COME OFTEN ENOUGH.

I CAN ONLY REITERATE WHAT MANY READERS HAVE SAID "THE HERITAGE SERVICE IS GREAT" WE READ THE PAST FORWARD MANY TIMES, EVERY PAGE IS FULL OF INTERESTING STORIES WHICH BRINGS BACK MANY HAPPY MEMORIES.

# HISTORY SHOP NEWS

A SUPER PUBLICATION  
ALWAYS WELCOME IN THIS HOUSE.  
MANY THANKS!

Congratulations on producing such a first class magazine. Being born and bred in here and now living in Cornwall, I find Past Forward an eagerly looked forward to publication. The content is outstanding and is a wonderful means of recording people's memories. Living so far away I am unable to visit the History Shop and Archives and so any information & pictures on line would be marvellous. Fortunately I am able to buy Uncle Joe's here in Cornwall. Many thanks for all your excellent work. It is greatly appreciated.

I love this magazine and after I have read it through on numerous occasions, I send it to my cousin in the U.K. She originated from Upholland but brought her own family up at Billinge Higher End. So it's great that sometimes there is a mention of these places. Thank you to all concerned.

Magazine & advice by post are excellent

I FORWARDED THE MAGAZINE TO FRIENDS IN NEW ZEALAND WHO ALSO PASS IT ON, THE FEEDBACK & COMPLIMENTS YOU RECEIVE IS QUITE EXTRAORDINARY. KEEP GOING AS YOU ARE.

I look forward to receiving each copy of 'Past Forward'. Who knows what gems will be found amongst its pages. Carry on with the good work.

I live too far away to be able to make use of the History Shop etc. so particularly value the Magazine itself. Through it I am now in regular contact with an old workmate of almost sixty years ago & through her receiving news of yet another. As we are now all in our eighties, that is quite an achievement, I feel. My annual price to you is well worth it!

# Haigh & Wigan

I have been forced to accept that at the moment I cannot find the time to obtain the necessary information to produce another drawing for a further township in the ongoing series that has been appearing in *Past Forward*. However, I trust the Haigh and

Wigan design taken from a series of colour prints will fill the gap. All the items in the design have links with the Crawford family and their ancestors, with particular relevance to the links between Haigh Hall and Wigan.

## 25 DOORWAYS

The 25 Doorways quiz in the previous issue of *Past Forward* created a considerable amount of interest and I believe several people were seen around town looking and in a few cases taking photographs of doors. Proceeds from the project, linked with a fund raising coffee morning, which seems to have become an annual event, raised over £950 for Wigan and Leigh Hospice. Prints have now been presented to two prize winners - Mrs Kathy Bird of Buckinghamshire but formerly from Wigan and Mrs Brenda Lythgoe of Elmers Green.

I hope readers from around the region will be pleased to know that next year my intention is to produce a design which features skylines taken from every part of the borough. I will be most annoyed if I fail to manage this, even though I am well aware that for various reasons to make definite promises is dangerous.

In the answers to the quiz, I have included a few details of the history of some of the buildings, but much more information could no doubt be added.

I also found the answers received to Question 26 ('suggest another doorway') very interesting and hope the time might come when some could be incorporated into a painting.

1. Tote, near GPO in Wallgate, once Barclay's Bank.
2. Cafe, in Mesnes Park Terrace.
3. Platt and Fishwick in King Street, on the site of the Wigan Dispensary; it was originally Wigan Savings Bank.
4. Doorway in Buckingham Row, alongside a house, occupied by Walmsley's Insurance, at the foot of Dicconson Street.
5. Tower Building, opposite NW Railway Station, with strong links with the Freemasons.
6. Drumcroon Education Art Centre since 1980; previously a doctor's surgery.
7. Parish Church side door.
8. Looking into the café area at the Queen's Hall; a 1985 replacement alongside the main entrance.
9. Bradford and Bingley Building Society, on the site of the first Moot Hall.
10. John Dean, International Bride, 5 Powell Street.
11. Franco's Restaurant, with Westwood Estate Office still inscribed above the doorway.
12. Mab's Cross School, previously the Girl's High School.
13. Town Hall, originally the Mining and Technical College.
14. Gerrard Winstanley House, former Magistrate's Court - where the two local M.P's have offices.
15. Post Office, Wallgate.
16. Main door to 18th century town house in Millgate - remembered by many as part of Pennington's furniture store.
17. Claremont Dental Practice, Mesnes Street.
18. Thomas Cook Travel Agents, Market Place.
19. Rodney Street entrance to the library building designed by Sir Alfred Waterhouse - now the History Shop.
20. Walmsley's Insurance Office, Dicconson Street; on the opposite side of the road to the firm's main office.
21. Hallgate entrance to 'Crofters', with colourful tiles surrounding the doorway.
22. CCArt (Present Trend), prints and picture framers, Hallgate entrance.
23. Little Theatre; the only doorway in the quiz beyond the dual carriageway.
24. 'Bricked up' doorway beneath the old Wigan Grammar School / Mesnes High School tower - now part of the Thomas Linacre Centre.
25. Number Fifteen, King Street West - now an eating place, built as Wigan Reform Club.

The patterns at the edge of the design (top, left and right) are based on the tombs and figures in the Bradshaigh/Balcarres Crawford Chapel (sometimes known as The Lady Chapel) in Wigan Parish Church.

The two marble monuments are the work of Florentine artists. The one on the left is in memory of Earl Alexander and his wife; the other is a memorial to Maria Margaret France, wife of Earl James.

The tracery superimposed on the design is from the window behind the chapel altar, where Lady Jane Evelyn Lindsay designed a stained glass window in memory of her father Earl Alexander William.

**Other items, reading as far as possible in lines from left to right and from the top to foot of design include . . . .**

the Parish Church and gateway,

Dairy Cottage and Gothic Cottages in Sennicar Lane at Haigh

Home Farm and outbuildings

Haigh Hall, built 1830's, to the designs of the 24th Earl of Crawford

'Haighlands', a fine stone house, built on the site of a tannery for Sir Colin Lindsay, but he said it was too low and too small

Lathom House, the original estate office

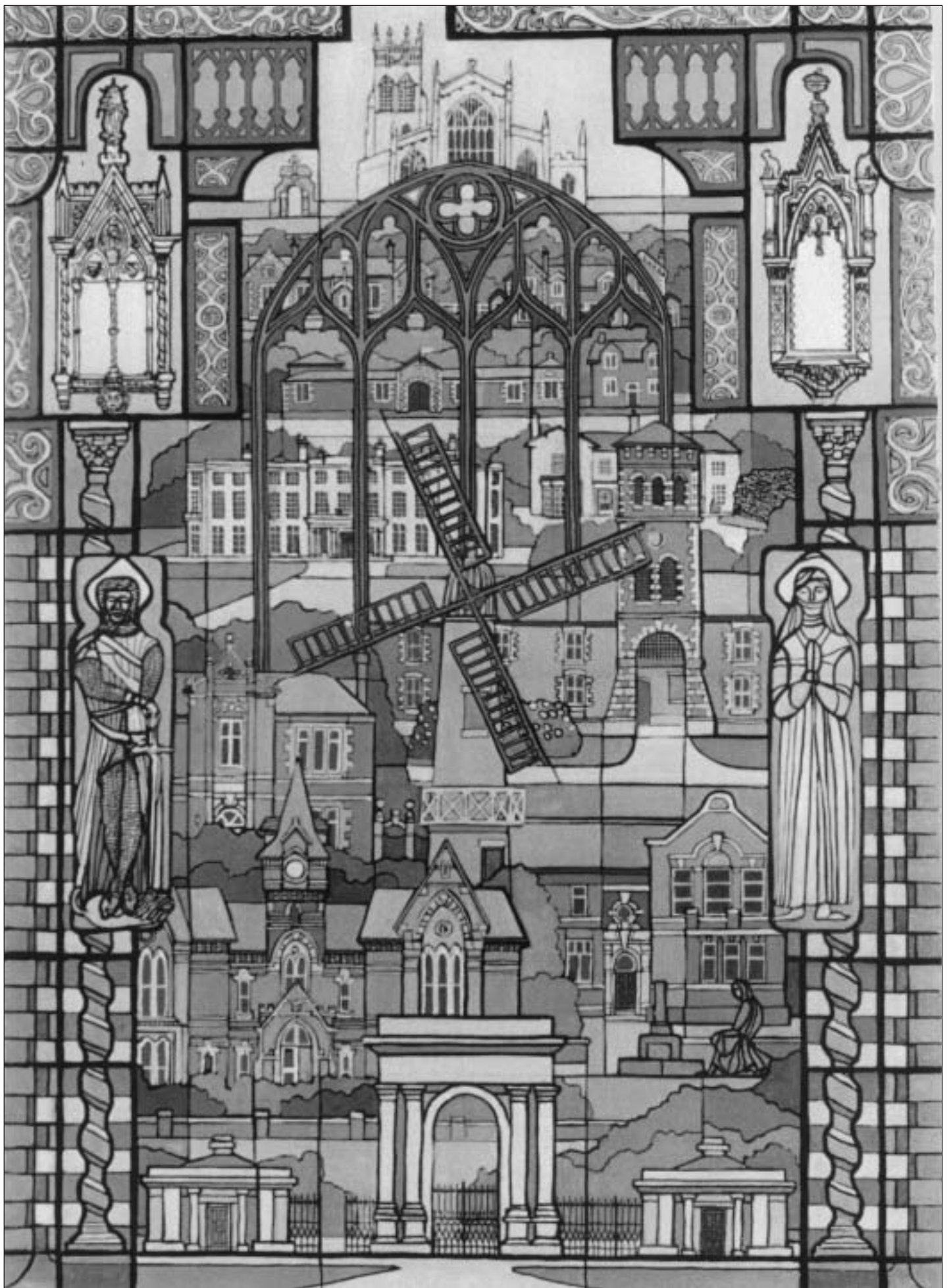
Mab's Cross Primary School, known to an earlier generation as Wigan Girl's High School

Mab's Cross, just outside the school wall. Linked with the story of Lady Mabel's penance and barefooted walk, and adapted by Sir Walter Scott for his novel *'The Betrothed'*

the windmill, built to pump water to the brewery near St. David's Church

the Royal Albert Edward Infirmary, opened by Prince Albert, stayed at Haigh Hall during his visit.

Plantation Gates, Wigan Lane.



# Life on a Lancashire Canal during World War II

**I WAS born near Dover lock on the Leigh branch of the Leeds Liverpool Canal and was living there with my grandmother when the War started.**

A neighbour of ours was Mr W Wells, owner of T & W Wells, canal carriers. He had a son Billy who was a school friend of mine and we spent most of our spare time on the canal. We only missed trips when we were at school or later when we started work. The long summer holidays were really wonderful times and we must have run miles up and down the towpath. In those days there were lots of hand operated swing bridges and we loved jumping off an on the barges to operate these.

A few facts on the Leigh branch and the canal which joins it at Leigh, the Bridgewater, will put my reminiscences in perspective. The Bridgewater, as most people know, was one of the first canals to be built in this country. It was built on the order of Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, to transport coal from his mines at Worsley to Manchester, a distance of ten and a half miles and all on one level. The Act of Parliament was passed in 1759 and the Duke's engineer was a self-taught millwright, James Brindley.

## **Barges sailed underground**

Two points are worth noting about the Bridgewater. The first is that the barges sailed underground into the coalmines to load; this tunnel can still be seen today. The second is Brindley's aqueduct over the river Irwell; this was the first of its kind in the country. The Irwell at this point is now the Manchester Ship Canal

**by Harry Walls**

and Brindley's stone aqueduct is long gone. In its place is the Barton swing aqueduct or 'Barton tank' as the boatmen named it. This was designed by Sir E Leader Williams and was opened about 1893.

Since its early days the Bridgewater has been extended to Leigh to the west and to Runcorn on the Southern side of the Irwell.

The Leeds and Liverpool Leigh Branch leaves the main canal at Wigan, down two locks at Poolstock and, until 1950, one lock at Dover. A long time ago there was an extra lower lock at Dover Bridge and one more at Plank Lane, near Leigh. During the period I remember there was only the one lock after Poolstock. Sometimes we loaded at Garswood Colliery tip, which was just above Dover Lock, but usually it was at one of the many coal tips between Dover and Leigh.

During this time it was, as during the Duke of Bridgewater's time, coal to Manchester. Later, however, it was coal to the great industrial estate known as Trafford Park. The coal from the Wigan and Leigh coalfields was vital to the war effort - so vital, in fact, that canal boatmen were exempt from military service, as of course were coal miners.

I remember going with the coal to Barton and Trafford power stations, Stretford Gas Works and Kellogg's Cornmill.

The T & W Wells fleet of barges and their pattern of work was as follows.

First there were steam barges each carrying a cargo of 40 tons of coal; these were '*Thomas*', '*James*' and '*Progress*'. All three were of similar construction, all wood with

similar vertical water tube boilers; however, they all had different engines. '*James*' was, I believe, the best, both in power and condition. It had a vertical twin cylinder double expansion engine with an 8" stroke. '*Thomas*' came next in the condition and power rating; she had a Vee four-cylinder double expansion engine with a 6" stroke. '*Progress*' was nowhere near as powerful as the other two and was used mainly as a reserve and for canal loads. She had a horizontal twin cylinder double expansion engine with a 6" stroke.

## **'Statter Boats'**

The rest of the fleet consisted of 27 dumb barges of slightly different types, but all were of wooden construction. There were five known as 'Statter Boats'; these were 62ft long and had a beam of 14ft 3ins, with a stern and high cabin roof similar to a narrow boat. Because of the size the steersman had a longer than normal tiller and stood on the cabin roof. The five 'Statters' were used originally on the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal.

Four more were known as 'Rochdale Canal' boats; these had a rounded stern and flush decks. There were also nine other barges similar to the Rochdale boats, and two smaller ones named '*Science*' and '*Victory*', referred to as Wells type boats.

Mr Wells had seven more 40 ton boats, which he always called 'Muck Boats'. These were used for carrying the manure from the Manchester Corporation stables. At times these were used to supplement the coal fleet. Whoever named them 'Muck



Boats' must have had a wry sense of humour, as they were all named after family members!

During the war years the pattern of working was as follows. The steamer 'James' would leave one of the Wigan coal loading points fully loaded and towing five loaded barges as early as possible on a Monday morning. At the same time 'Thomas' would leave Manchester towing five empty barges. They would get to the loading tip and load as many as possible that day. On Tuesday morning 'Thomas' would be on its way to Manchester, and so it went on until Saturday evening.

On arrival at the delivery point the steamer was always unloaded at once; the large number of barges available meant that the steamer didn't have to wait for them to be unloaded. The loading was very quick as a railway wagon was upended or tipped into the barge at specially designed 'Wagon Tipplers', as they were known. When travelling loaded,

the barges were towed on a long rope about 50ft long, but when empty they were 'tight up' - this meant they were secured one behind the other by two crossed ropes and the barges were only a few inches apart.

### Allowed to steer and help

We youngsters were allowed to steer and help on the steamer with boiler and engine repairs etc. The knowledge thus gained stood me in good stead when I joined British Waterways in 1956. By then there were just a few steam tugs and steam driven dredgers around; all load carrying was done by motor barges, with just one horse drawn barge carrying corn from Burscough to Wigan.

The men who worked for Mr Wells were nearly all related to each other by blood or marriage. Names I remember were Martland, Abram, Watkinson and Dewhurst. Even the two boat builders he employed were

brothers, Harry and Eddie Leyland. I don't think a finer pair of craftsman lived. They were everything in the boatyard - blacksmith, carpenter, painter etc. They were wonderful to watch and made everything seem so easy.

Finally I would like to mention a few other barge owners seen in the Leigh branch. These were mainly horse or mule drawn but with the odd motor barge. Firms included:

Dean Waddington – Horses  
Crooke and Thompson – Horses and Mules  
Richard Williams – Motor and Mules  
Chris Iddon – Motor  
L&L Canal Transport Company – Motor  
B.I – Motor

Those days are now long gone, but when I think of the amount of coal moved and time taken, I wonder if we have advanced all that much, if at all?

## PARISH VIDEO STANDISH

presents

### The History of Coalmining in the Borough of Wigan

Titles include

#### Nothing Too Serious?

(The last working year and closure  
of Bickershaw Colliery)

#### Blue Scars, Black Diamonds

(A History of Mines and Miners  
in the Wigan area)  
(in two parts)

Also available

#### The Standish Chronicles

Part 1, Part 2

(A General History of Standish)

For more details: 01257 422108

## Food for thought

*On strechin' up t'supermarket shelf*

*Ah couldn't reach down't package by misself*

*Then summat took mi t'one side o't shop*

*'n think o't comfort found in't corner shop*

*Thi 'ad a word of cheer, a friendly grin*

*Thi' made yer feel o't ome when dropping in*

*Then once thi'd help yer purchase this and that*

*Thi'd stan' at counter, eager fer a chat*

*Thi'd know awlt names of grown-ups, childer too*

*(shopkeepers) they knew how't look after you*

*Thi allus seem't fo't t'ave an oppen door*

*Is progress loosin' thin's like local store?*

Elene Humphreys  
Treuddyn Mold

# Norman Dewhurst M.C. A Lancastrian

HAVING sent the issue of *Past Forward* in which was featured the story of Jonathan Dewhurst – The Lancashire Tragedian to a friend in Brussels, I was most surprised to receive back from him a book entitled ‘Norman Dewhurst M.C.’, written and published in Brussels in 1968 by H.J. Edmonds.

It is the incredible story of a fellow Lancastrian. I found it to be a little gem, and I just had to find out more about him i.e. which town in Lancashire was he born, (there is little indication of this in the book), does he have any living relatives, and where did he die.

## The Army

Norman Dewhurst enlisted on 10 September 1906 as a private in the Kings (Liverpool Regiment) No. 9622. 1908 saw him serving in different parts of India, including the Northwest Frontier on the border with Afghanistan. In December 1914, as a 2nd Lieutenant, he sailed from Bombay for England, with the Royal Munster Fusiliers. Arriving back in England, his Battalion was merged into the 29th Division, which was the last division in the British Army composed entirely of regular troops.

On 16 March 1915 the Royal Munster Fusiliers sailed for Egypt, and the Dardanelles (Gallipoli); 16 April they were transferred to the S.S. “River Clyde”, which was to carry them to the landing point at Gallipoli. Again, he gives a graphic account of the

Dear Sir,

Please find enclosed a short story which is the consequence of sending to my friend in Brussels issue No. 29 of *Past Forward* in which was featured an article on ‘Jonathan Dewhurst – the Lancashire Tragedian’. He in return sent to me a novel entitled ‘Norman Dewhurst M.C.’, written and published in Brussels in 1968 by J.J. Edmonds. The following is a result of my research and includes extracts from the book, which for me is an incredible story of another Lancastrian sharing the name of Dewhurst.

I sincerely hope that you will find the story interesting, Norman Dewhurst was born in Southport, which after all is not so far from Wigan.

John A. Christy  
Hindley Green  
Wigan



*Norman Dewhurst as a 2nd Lt. Royal Munster Fusiliers in 1914 and as a F/Officer in the R.A.F. in 1946*

landings, and the slaughter in which the Royal Munster Fusiliers lost 11 Officers and 553 men, killed on the first day at “V” Beach; he himself was badly wounded. It was here that the Dublin Fusiliers were almost literally wiped out, while being towed towards the Beach in small boats, and it was also here that the Lancashire Fusiliers won six V.C.’s before breakfast.

After recovering from his wounds he was transferred to the Intelligence Department, Cairo, working as a Cipher Officer, and was introduced to another 2nd Lt., a Lt.



Lawrence later to become Lawrence of Arabia. From the contents of the telegrams that he was decoding, he quickly realised that he was now a member of a cloak and dagger unit. On 8 February 1916 he left on his last mission for the Department, being transferred to the Eastern Mediterranean Special Intelligence Bureau at Salonika. His work involved taking allied agents behind enemy lines, and bringing them out again with valuable information – highly dangerous work, but he was also able to live the high life too as an Officer,

socialising at every opportunity when not on operations. 1917-1918 saw service in Greece, and Palestine. He arrived home just before Christmas 1918, and dropped in on the family; they had not seen him since January 1915. He says in the book “What a wonderful surprise I gave them. We opened up the hamper that I had brought, in which I had included everything, a turkey, puddings and all the trimmings, and we had a wonderful Christmas – the best for many years”.

In the New Years Honours List for 1919, he was awarded the Military Cross by King George V, for distinguished military service in the field. In April he was promoted to the rank of T/Captain and transferred to the British Political Mission to the Baltic States of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. The situation in the Baltic States at that time made the mission both dangerous to life and limb, but of high political importance to the Allies.

The task of the British Political Mission was to try to bring some political stability and order to the region, following the Russian Revolution. By early 1920 things had started to quieten down so he was able to return to England in February 1921, and temporarily rejoined his Regiment, the Royal Munster Fusiliers. After a few months of peace time soldiering he decided to resign his commission after 15 years, and came out with a gratuity of £200. Nobody told him that had he stayed in for a few more months he would have been entitled to a gratuity of £1,000!

## The Business Man

After a few interviews for various jobs he decided that England was not to his liking – life was drab and rationing was still in existence. So he finally resolved to return to Riga, the Latvian capital, and open a garage there.

He got the agency to represent Crossley Motors, and was also appointed R.A.C... correspondent for the Baltic and Russia. The garage was soon opened for business, but his really big idea was to obtain the concession for the installation of a network of petrol pumps throughout the country; however, after negotiations lasting two years he saw the concession go to a Dane.

Meanwhile he was painting the town red, free from all official restraints; as he says "I was having a royal time". But the time soon came when he found as many others have done, that business and pleasure don't mix, so he decided to sell out to another Englishman, made an excellent deal and decided to try his luck in Canada.?? (America)

So with his bank account in pretty good order he arrived in New York in 1923. He found a job as a special policeman for the Brooklyn Manhattan Transport (subway train system). He held the job for a year or so, then bought himself a secondhand Dodge motorcar and headed for Florida, where he stayed until 1925, returning to New York in 1926 where he went to work for a large British Insurance Company. He held this job for two years and when the 1929 stock market crash came, he was able to take advantage of the situation by buying up two or three quality cars very cheaply to start a car hire company. As time went by, and life for him became more settled, he became Secretary of the local branch of the British and Canadians Drum and

Fife band, most of whose members were of Lancashire origin and worked at the Coates' Mills at Pawtucket.

Such was the situation in 1936, when the phone rang and he was asked to meet a gentleman in a room of a local hotel, where he was asked to join up again with his old organisation as a freelance operative and go into Germany and Italy. He had many years in Intelligence and had carried out a number of operations during the war and just after – but now he would be on his own and for a long time, in what would be dangerous territory. He had been recruited once again into MI5, and because he had become well known in the local, and business community, in order to avoid suspicion he had to resort to a little deception to return to the U.K. He did so on the pretence of having been left a legacy by an uncle, leaving New York on the 'Brittanic', arriving in London on 7 June 1936.

## The Secret Agent (Italy and Germany)

On his arrival in London he reported to the boss of his department, after 14 years away from the organisation, and was given his assignment. He was to go to Italy on a double mission. First he had to go to Milan and make contact with an Italian who had at one time been a big hotel proprietor, but had fallen foul of Mussolini and his fascists, and now living in a hovel; he was to propose to him that in return for the safe installation of his wife and eight year old daughter in England, he would help the British with information. The offer was accepted. Dewhurst recalls in 1942, "I dropped by chance into a small restaurant in Chelsea for a snack – and was delighted to recognise the owner, his wife and daughter were also there. It gave me quite a kick to see this happy ending".

The second part of his mission was to go to Genoa and find out what progress had been made on the construction of a 35000 ton battleship e.g. how many decks were completed and if the guns were mounted. He was asked to note rail traffic and movements of naval and military personnel between Genoa and the big naval base at Spezia. At the end of the two weeks he returned to London and made his report.

His next assignment was Germany; he was scheduled to go there for 18 months, so every morning for the next few weeks he made his way to a special office where he received a course of training in lock-picking, inks, codes, wireless telegraphy, and the photographing of documents. This was followed by an intense study of the German Army, with special reference to its different sections and to other distinguishing markings. He worked hard not only to become a good spy, but also to dodge the Gestapo.

On his entry into Germany he wasted no time in cultivating friends whom he thought might be useful to him, even acting as an interpreter to an American doctor with whom he had made friends. He went all over the place with the doctor who was there to tour hospitals in the area and in this way he picked up a lot of useful information. The friends whom he made unwittingly helped him to gather information on secret airfields, and troop concentrations, without attracting the attention of the Abwehr or the Gestapo.

At last in December 1937 he left Germany, and the dangerous climate that was being generated by the Nazis and returned to England to give his final report. He was informed that his next job would be to go to Riga, after six months leave. He writes: "I began to tingle with anticipation at the prospect of returning to Latvia – for I

had always felt like a godfather to that small state." But first it was back to the States. He sailed from Le Havre and reached New York via Nova Scotia, then on to Rhode Island to pick up where he had left off 18 months before.

As time slowly past, he attempted to curb his impatience to be on the move again and resolutely devoted himself to the activities of the 'Veterans Association' Drum and Fife band, until at the end of May 1938 he sailed again for Europe on the S.S. Manhatten, landing in France, where he met his contact from whom he received detailed instructions of his mission. He then made his way overland by train to Riga.

## Riga and Helsinki

While in America he had managed to obtain the agencies of companies who simply thought that he was going to Riga on business. With funds now readily available to him he found that it was not very difficult to go into a business partnership with a Scotsman whom he knew well, for he had been there during his time with the British Mission. Many of his old friends were still leading members of the Latvian government or high government officials, so it was easy to get into the heart of things; he even recruited the chief of police in Riga, and with plenty of money at his disposal, he was also able to recruit quite a number of British residents in Riga. So successful was he in his activities, and his socialising with the friends he had made, that his chief in MI5 received reports from other agents in different branches of intelligence, who considered him to be a Germanophile. This really proved just how successful he was.

In June 1940, Soviet troops moved into the Baltic states and arrived in

*Continued on page 28*

# Norman Dewhurst M.C. A Lancastrian

*Continued from page 27*

Riga. All foreigners were ordered to leave immediately, and Norman witnessed the unhappy spectacle of his Latvian friends being loaded on to trucks and taken away to Russia. But he stayed on in Riga, learning all he could of both the Russians who were on the spot and the German agents still operating there – the pact between Germany and Russia was an uneasy one. It was not long before the Russian Intelligence Service wanted to know why he was still there when all the other foreigners had already left. He showed them his American passport and told them that he was still in business for these American companies. He was interviewed several times, and finally asked to work for them in America; he realised that if he did not appear to play ball with them, then it was Siberia for him, so he moved to Helsinki and immediately forgot the offer. His arrival in Finland from the Soviet zone caused him to be viewed with suspicion, but he was able to prove that he was representing some American firms, and had stayed behind to settle some business matters; Helsinki was now his business centre. However, when Finland entered the war he decided that he had to get out before he was arrested. He went to the American Embassy and told the Vice Consul there that he was a British agent and that he wanted to get out; he was eventually put on plane to neutral Stockholm. At last in March 1942 he was on a plane bound for the U.K., landing at the R.A.F. airfield at Leuchars, Scotland.

He returned to London but, as the American Embassy could not find him a job he decided that the time had come for him to turn in his American citizenship and, on 15 June, he handed in his American passport. He then applied for his British passport to be reinstated to him, which was duly granted on 19 August 1942.

## The R.A.F.

He now began to look seriously for work; he was not short of cash and had done well out of the wartime regulation which now, as a British citizen, he was obliged to accept – all money now on account in the U.S. had to be converted. The exchange rate was in his favour, so he was on to a good thing. But a job was still necessary and as the R.A.F. were accepting men up to the age of 55 years, he went to the recruiting office in November 1942.

After a few months he was sent to 222 Squadron at Hornchurch as an equipment assistant. Some weeks later he was asked to attend an interview with his old boss from his days in the Intelligence Service, who asked him to take on the job of looking after groups of Free French Officers who were being trained to parachute into occupied territory; he accepted the offer and a few days later he joined his new posting as an acting unpaid Sergeant on 28 December 1943. Two months later he was transferred yet again to the R.A.F. Intelligence unit, at Orwell Grange, the final rendezvous point for the completely trained men about to be parachuted into enemy held territory.

He began to wonder when the axe would fall, he had visions of losing his three stripes and returning to the stores as an A.C.1. Shortly afterwards, his commission as a P/Officer came through, giving him a special fillip to know that he had made the grade for a second time. Then on 22

August 1944, he was appointed to the rank of F/Officer for 'special duty' to an Intelligence unit, with which he renewed his acquaintance with lock-picking, document photography and codes. He was given a partner, a linguist fluent in German and Polish, as they were earmarked to be working in the eastern part of Germany.

In October he received orders to proceed to the headquarters of the organisation in Brussels situated in a villa on the Avenue de Tervuren; 72 hours later he was almost killed when a German 'doodle bug', intended for Antwerp cut out and fell on the villa next door killing a dozen men.

As the war moved forward so did the Intelligence Unit. When the end finally came, the Unit came under the Control Commission for Germany; Norman was enrolled for Counter-Intelligence duties. The Unit stayed in Bad Salzuflen until 1947 allowing him to do quite a lot of travelling all over Germany, maintaining communications with other Units in the different zones. However, on 18 September 1947 he left Germany for some leave in the U.K., and on October 3 he was informed that his duties in the R.A.F. had ceased as at 27 September, and he was accordingly requested to relinquish his commission. Although he went up to London to see if the decision could be reversed, nothing could be done. He was out.

And with a meagre three months paid leave. He was now 60 years old, with neither pension nor large capital resources; he made a final attempt to get a better deal and in the end he received a payment of £150 as a final settlement. As he says in the book "I had served my time and the wages had been paid. I collected my clothing coupons – took a hard look at rationed London, and went to Victoria Air Terminal. I purchased a ticket to Brussels, and,

today over 20 years after, I still have the return half!"

**This is the end of the story of Norman Dewhurst as far as the book is concerned, I have no doubt that the character of the man enabled him to lead a comfortable and happy life, and put behind him the shameful way that his country had treated him after 60 years of loyal service. I will continue to look for answers to the following questions:**

**Does he still have any living relatives in the Southport or Liverpool areas? I would like to hear from them; perhaps they could add something more to the story of this resourceful man.**

**Where in Brussels did he live. Did he marry and have a family, when did he die, and where is he buried?**

### Gazetted Details for Flight Lieutenant Norman Dewhurst MC (71858)

**Date and Place of Birth:** 29 September 1887, Ormskirk, Southport, Lancs.

#### Previous Service

Sergeant service number 9622 in the K L Regiment 25 Apr 1906 to 4 Dec 1914

Lieutenant in the R M Fusiliers 5 Dec 1914 to 24 Jan 1915

Lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps August 1915 to 22 June 1921

#### Promotions

Enlisted into Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve 9 Nov 1942

Discharged to Commission 13 Aug 1944

Granted a Class CC Commission as Flying Officer in The Administrative and Special Duties Branch of the Reserve of Air Force Officers 14 Aug 1944

Flight Lieutenant (CC) 5 June 1945

Relinquished Commission in Class CC (on cessation of duty) 27 Sept 1947

#### Honours and Awards

Military Cross 12 Feb 1919

# Charles Bell of Wigan

THE recent joint interest of local authorities and wildlife conservation bodies in industrial wastelands and wetlands is very gratifying, for such places are now known to be of especial ecological value in densely populated lowlands. There were already many collieries in the Wigan region in the latter part of the 18th century, and flashes and floodwaters associated with mining have been of interest for many years - perhaps, in the first place, to wildfowlers, then to anglers and then to naturalists. The last were few in number until the popularisation of countryside interests, especially bird watching, in the last 30 years or so.

My own interests in natural history stem from childhood and have never waned. I was born in Leigh, among collieries and cotton mills but also where snipe nested in the few rough fields, skylarks sang all day above the meadows, kestrels and swifts nested on the mills and bats occupied the church tower. Both my parents had been born in Wigan, in 1894, and it is not surprising that my outdoor interests were concerned mainly with the colliery zone along the canal from Astley Green to Worsley Mesnes.

For a time during the War my journeys took me through Wigan, where I changed buses in the Market Square. One day

in 1944 I came across Chas Bell, Seedsman and Taxidermist in Market Street. What a find! I saw him only a few times before I left the district and wish that I had made more notes of what he told me. The few notes that I have are tantalisingly brief.

Mr Bell had preserved and mounted quite a number of interesting or unusual birds. Many came from the flashes but not all had been shot - some were victims of gales or telegraph wires. Among his specimens were water rail, little auk, a species of petrel and such like. His knowledge was wide and he was already aware of the status of the rarer species which were in need of special protection. There were local records of bitterns over the years and the last he had heard of had been shot locally late in 1943. Mr Bell refused to deal with the specimen and strongly criticised the man for having shot the bird.

Many other kinds of wild life had come his way, often by way of market produce, which he was strategically well placed to get. He had bird-eating spiders and horned vipers at various times, and kept one horned viper alive for seven and a half years. Large hawk-moths always attract interest and he saw them often. He said that the poplar hawk-moth and the elephant hawk-moth had

increased in numbers in recent years. He preserved large moths by injecting formaldehyde. Of the rarer species, a striped hawk-moth had been found in the market and an oleander hawk-moth on the outskirts of Wigan a few years ago. The most recent records of the last two rare immigrants that I can find in the South Lancashire list are for 1996 and 1923 respectively.

A most interesting man. Is there a relative who can provide more information about him and his fascinating work?

**T Edmondson  
Chester**

Email: [sjedmondson@btinternet.com](mailto:sjedmondson@btinternet.com)

## 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](mailto: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.*

## BOB DOBSON

**Publisher and Book Dealer**

**LANCASHIRE**

**YORKSHIRE & CHESHIRE**

I buy, sell and search for second-hand books relating to these counties: I search for books: I issue lists. I buy quantities of other books.

---

**LIST OF MY NEW PUBLICATIONS  
ON REQUEST**

---

**BOB DOBSON**  
"Acorns"  
**3 STAINING RISE**  
**STAINING**  
**BLACKPOOL FY3 0BU**  
Tel: (01253) 895678



# Anything for the Weekend Sir?

IT came as something of a shock when I first visited my new girlfriend's home and found the kitchen table covered in little packets bearing the livery and carrying the name of a famous brand of condoms. We didn't call them condoms in those days but I recognised the packets, having seen them in the little herbalist's shop window in Mesnes Street, Wigan. Seeing the alarmed expression on my face, she waited until we were alone, and then explained that her mum was a hairdresser and the contents of the packets were nothing more exciting than items to protect her fingers from being burned by chemicals used in some hair dying process.

## Sex 'yet to be invented'

This being 1959, pre-Beatles and sex 'yet to be invented', my only thought was, "Here's an opportunity to save a bob or two" – thinking, of course, of the rising cost of getting a haircut. And so it proved. I must have saved a fortune; for the next 40 years I had regular crops for nothing. The free haircuts continued until, in her '80's and with failing eyesight, my mother-in-law clipped a lump out of my ear and I finally decided that it was time to think up a way of diplomatically suggesting that she took 'early retirement'.

Having briefly scanned the local hairdressers (whatever happened to barbers?), I decided that (a) I had no intention of sitting reading *Cosmopolitan* with a cup of tea under a hairdryer in one of these so-called unisex salons and (b) I certainly wasn't going to pay £12 for a short 'back and sides'. By now, of course, 'back and sides' was all I had left - my hairline had now receded like the tide at Southport and I was disappointed to learn that the cost of the haircut did not reduce in proportion to the area of hair to be cut. Nevertheless, it needed a trim from time to time. Fortunately, a close neighbour, who did my

wife's hair, offered to take on the task at a very reasonable rate.

The thought of paying £12 for a haircut set my mind racing back to my childhood in Scholes when I used to pay 4d. (less than 2p) at Joe Siney's barber's shop. This was situated opposite Alderman McCurdy's furniture emporium and squeezed between Sanderson's wonderful pie-shop and Th'Owd Mon's toffee shop. Nobody ever knew what Th'Owd Mon's real name was but he certainly had a wonderful line in mint balls and aniseed balls, all handmade of course, though, according to some, foot-made would have been a more correct description! Surely an apochryphal story this, but it was strongly rumoured that he used his bare, sweaty feet to roll the toffees! Could that have been the secret of that certain something in the flavour of his toffees that Uncle Joe himself could never quite achieve? No doubt Th'Owd Mon took the secret to his grave. Anyway, he was a lovely fellow and his toffees only cost a penny a bag, I seem to remember.

Kneeling up on the seat of the barber's chair and facing backwards sucking a mintball, it was easy to scan around the room at the sea of faces awaiting their turn and to read the pictures and notices on the wall. One notice always sticks in my mind - printed in a bold Victorian script it stated, "We respectfully decline to shave dirty or sore faces". I still have nightmares thinking about the barber who might have been willing to shave dirty, sore faces.

## Still unshorn

About 100 yards up the hill and on the other side of Scholes, just past the end of Platt Lane, was another barber's shop, owd Joe Carter's. I only went once to Joe's; I went at 9 o'clock in the morning and six hours later my mother came to collect me to say that my dinner was going cold. I went home still

unshorn and even missed the Saturday afternoon children's matinee at the Labour pictures. I think that Joe had a favourite pecking order and little lads came well towards the end of it. It was back to Joe Siney's in future, praying that I never had a sore face if I ever grew big enough to need to go to a barber's shop for a shave.

At nine years of age, and being a keen Wigan Rugby fan, my next move was further up the hill, past my grandmother's corner shop at the end of Coop Street and past Longshoot where, incidentally, at the top of Bolton Street, was Jack Monk's Post Office. As a young man, Jack was reputed to have been the finest and fastest ice-skater in Wigan and possibly Lancashire. According to my dad, skating on the Clarington Brook Lake (better known as t'Clarry) between Platt Lane and Rose Bridge, Jack was reputed to jump an incredible number of old mattresses and dustbins, which were there in abundance.

## Rugby chat worth every penny

Then across the road and in, or close to Whelley, I was now at Worthington's Barber's Shop. Whelley being considered rather more upmarket than Scholes, the price was now 6d., but the rugby chat was worth every penny and I didn't care if I had to sit there until nightfall. In this shop there was one chair in the middle of the room and around the walls were leather covered benches; these were always filled with customers, rugby supporters to a man.

Mr. Worthington (I never heard his first name) could have been an actor and ought to have done the rugby commentary on the radio on Saturday afternoon. "Snip, snip" went his scissors and then he would pause, turn to face one side of the room and start to address the

# The “Battle” of Wigan Lane

## Mark 2

THIS took place between the mid 1920's and the start of World War II. It was a getting together of the sexes, a parade of both groups of young men and young women; but what was special about this parade was the constant vein of laughter running through the mass of humanity going from where the Christopher Home started, then through Marylebone and the area in front of the *Cherry Gardens Inn*, a distance of several hundred yards. The road in this area is very wide - almost four lanes - but it was blocked solid with a teeming mass of humanity, mostly young; there were very few cars then on Wigan Lane, but the residents must have dreaded Sunday evenings.

It wasn't easy taking part in the parade. The Police had a policy of not letting anyone stop walking; if you did stop

you were pounced on by a plain clothed policeman who would take your name. Then there was the police car that would carve a passage down the centre of the road, with constables leaning out of the car windows hitting with leather gauntlets those who were slow to get out of the way. I was caught out stopping to turn to see where my mate Cyril Aspinall was - a policeman pinned me against the Marylebone Park railings and took my name and address.

I was scared stiff - although several people around me said nothing would come of it, I was afraid for my family if I had to go to court. It was against all moral conduct of the time, and would have been a stigma against our character. The point was that,

although in town we had dance halls, milk bars, cinemas and public houses (far too many!), the younger generation didn't have very much money, so Wigan Lane was a place to bring together couples some of whom would stay together for the rest of their lives. When you met the one you were interested in, then it was a walk through the Plantation Gates and down to a beautiful woodland, to talk and find out about each other; and with moral standards being high, girls were not afraid to venture into the dark woods - at least there was safety in numbers, as there was a constant stream going in and out of the Plantations, and usually groups linked together.

I was checked on. A

policeman came to both my home and Cyril's to tell our parents not to allow us out on Sunday nights; after a short time we started to go out again but avoided stopping - a bit like Felix, he kept on walking. Yes, I did see a girl who interested me, but I didn't interest her.

During the war years, when I was in the RAF, I heard that this parade of youth changed its route to circling the King Street, Wallgate, Library Street and Rodney Street block. We then took to our bicycles and congregated at the entrance to Rayner Park in Hindley, or went with Wigan Wheelers for a run to Chester. By then we were growing up and the future looked bright; the coming war lay lightly on our teenage minds, full of adventure.

George Victor Wadeson  
Wigan

appreciative audience, “Billy Blane come away from't scrum, handed one mon off, sidestepped another, geet ball eht to Ashcroft who passed to Noggy on't wing and oer he went in't corner.”

### Like a ballroom dancer

Turning back to the man in the chair, “snip, snip, snip” and then, after a lengthy pause with both hands poised over the customers head, continued, “Ward kicked a blinder straight off ‘touchline”. He then pivoted like a ballroom dancer doing the *pas a double* to face the other side of the room and another row of faces devouring his every word, not at all worried about dinners going cold.

Growing up and moving on to a new school, inevitably the time came to move on to another barber's, this time it was Gordon's at the bottom of

Dicconson Street. Strange that Mr. Worthington in Whelley didn't seem to have a first name and now here I was at the shop of a man with no surname. My school mates, I seem to remember, recommended Gordon's because he kept a stock of adult style magazines containing a sort of Page Three picture in each edition. I remember surreptitiously thumbing through the pages of one of these journals as the man who had just finished having his haircut rose from his seat and turned to face me - it was Paddy Gore, my history teacher at Wigan Grammar School. “G-Good afternoon, sir” I blushingy stammered, slipping the offending magazine under a copy of the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* and hoping that he hadn't noticed.

Leaving school at 16 and now a real teenager, I found myself needing to follow the latest fashion. As an apprentice earning 30s. a week, I

couldn't afford to be a real teddy boy with draped coat, velvet collar and crepe soled shoes, but I could afford to spend 1s. of my 5s. pocket money occasionally on a DA (Duck's Bottom) haircut; the only place offering this service in Wigan was the little shop up the Wiend, off Standishgate. An added bonus for the lads on the wall at this barber's shop was the famous nude calendar photograph of Marilyn Monroe.

On completion, the barber held up a mirror behind my head to show me the completed immaculate DA, guaranteed to slay the girls at the Empress Ballroom on Saturday night. I really felt grown up when, as he brushed the bits of hair off my collar he asked, “Anything for the weekend sir?” “Yes,” I replied confidently, “I'll have a jar of Brylcreem!”

Tom Heaton  
Telford Shropshire

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN 18th CENTURY ATHERTON

# THE POOR LAW

by R Evans

DURING the 18th century local administration in what was then known as the Township of Atherton was in the hands of the more substantial proper owners who each year were required to appoint from their number Churchwardens, a Highway Surveyor, a Constable and, the subject of this account, an Overseer of the Poor. Extracts from documents now the in the Archives in Leigh Town Hall, some as photocopies and others as transcripts, illustrate the range of duties and the various ways in which overseers responded to the needs of their community.

Under the terms of the Elizabethan Poor Law Act of 1601, the Overseer was required by the Justices of the Peace to make provision for the needs of the poor, the infirm, the destitute, the sick and unemployed. The cost of providing this support was to be raised from a rate paid by the local inhabitants. General accounts suggest that this post was accepted with reluctance, as the work, which would be additional to the overseer's normal occupation, was time-consuming and involved the unenviable duty to levy taxes on one's neighbours. This view certainly appears to be confirmed in the early years of the 18th century when seldom was the same person Overseer in consecutive years.

As an additional burden the Overseer could find himself in debt, having to pay out of his own money. In 1693 John Girby wrote:

*"the town oweth me £0-7s-2d"* (C2/1)

as he had paid out £5-18s-6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d and only received £4-11s-4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d from the town. Robert Kearsley's full year account sheet for 1696 records a total payment of £31-16s-8d with the addition of:

*"If I be not mistaken....I have given out this much upon all accounts you have paid me £27-12s-06d.....so that there remains from the town due to me £4-04s-02d"* (C2/1)

This temporary tenure must have become progressively more unsatisfactory. By the mid century the duty was being undertaken on a longer-term basis, particularly during the second half of the century when there were lengthy periods of service by John Baxter, Edward Green and John and James Clowes. In addition, whereas in most years until the mid-18th century two appointments were made, one for the Higher Side of the Township and one for the Lower Side, from 1750 onwards the administration was consolidated for the whole township.

During the 18th century life was uncertain. Poor sanitation and polluted water supplies contributed to the rapid spread of fatal diseases which resulted in high infant mortality, and a low life expectation. Many people suffered from physical disabilities and deformities. Harvests were uncertain with the threat of insufficient food. Work to support ones family was not assured. Overseers were called upon to address pleas for help arising from all these difficult circumstances. In the early part of the century all the assistance they gave was in the form of out-relief consisting of small sums of money, clothing, rent or raw materials for work, to allow people to continue living in their homes.

One of the earliest documents, the 1699 accounts of Thomas Strang, (C2/1) lists payments to named individuals of between 2d and 12d a week. Two shifts and a pair of clogs were bought for Thomas Glovers daughter while others had

their house rent of 8s paid Thomas attended several meetings in connection with his duties and at each one he spent 1s. The April 1765/6 accounts of John Cunliff contain typical examples of the wide variety of payments made.

pd John Poack 1 <sup>st</sup> of week	4	0
In sickness and infirmity		
pd Sarah Gilberts 3 <sup>rd</sup> of Henry youngs 3 <sup>rd</sup>	17	0
pd Holden apprentice	2	6
pd Mary Brandwood	4	8
Bo <sup>t</sup> Mary Brandwood wretches clogs	2	8
pd William Franco	4	0
pd John Bowker 5 <sup>th</sup> James Sharp 2 <sup>nd</sup>	7	6
pd Jack Charlton	6	3
pd Jonathan Boston	2	0
pd for Henry youngs Lodging 14 weeks		
all 8 <sup>th</sup> of week	5	1
Bo <sup>t</sup> Adam Hurst Clogs	0	3
Bo <sup>t</sup> James Dixons Clogs	0	9
Bo <sup>t</sup> Eason wife a gown	5	6

(C2/12) Help was given to those with physical disabilities. In 1752 'Blind Jac' received 1s per week (C2/19) while an unnamed deaf women was given 6d. Again in 1760 'Blind John' received 1s (C2/10) while at the same time 'Deaf Jane' only got 6d. In 1765 John Cunliff recorded monthly payments to "Blind Jack" initially at 1s 6d per week but then reduced to 12d per week (C2/12). He then had a child, so in September the accounts note:

*"pd Blind Jack 4s towards is Child 3s-7s-0d"*

Was he overpaid as in the following two month the accounts read?

*"pd Blind Jack more than is allowance 2s-0d"*

For the remainder of the year he received 18d per week.

The living needed help but the poorest townspeople were also unable to meet their funeral costs so the overseer paid these. Child burials are frequently recorded as in John Cunliff's 1765/6 accounts (C2/12):

pd for James Dixons Child Coffin	2	1
pd for Drink & Dues	2	11
pd Henry youngs Childs Coffin	3	3
pd for Drink & Dues	2	1



These and the March and April 1760 accounts of Edward Green give the comparative cost of adult and child coffins and makes it clear that a wake was part of the costs that were paid (C210):

<i>pd Richd Laithwaite for Wid Marsh Childs Coffin 2s-0d Dues 1s-11d</i>	<i>£0-4s-7d</i>
<i>pd Betty Seddon in her Illness 2s 4d&amp; pd margt Seddon Sick 6s-4d</i>	<i>£0-8s-8d</i>
<i>pd for her Burying fetching Byer 4d Drink 2s:4d Dues 1s-11d Coffin 6s</i>	<i>£0-10s-7d</i>
<i>pd Shoney in Sickness 19s:3d Burying him ale 2s-4d Dues 1s-11d Coffin 6s</i>	<i>£1-3s-6d</i>

### MEDICAL TREATMENT

The Overseers paid for medical treatment. Bills received from doctors include frequent references to purging and bleeding and charges for remedies such as vomiting powder, detergent gargle, worm feed and volatile drops. Doctors also attended to teeth, a charge of 2d being made in 1748 for "drawing a tooth" (C2/39). Treatment was not cheap. In 1751 James Collier paid several doctors account:

<i>"Doctor Farringtons Bill</i>	<i>£0-08s-10d</i>
	<i>(C2/40)</i>
<i>Doctor Allred</i>	<i>£1-07s-01d</i>
<i>Doctor Ranicars</i>	<i>£1-0s-08d</i>

In June 1747 John Farrington presented his bill for one family (C2/39):

<i>"Bleeding Ned Hartley</i>	<i>£0-0s-4d</i>
<i>Spirits for his head</i>	<i>£0-0s-2d</i>
<i>Bleeding his Daughter</i>	<i>£0-0s-4d</i>
<i>A bottle of Balsaic ? and Drops for wife</i>	<i>£0-0s-6d</i>

Patients could be referred to an infirmary in Manchester. In 1784 James Throp was sent for treatment for an unspecified illness (C2/45):

*"Manchester Infirmary 19 April 1784*  
*Sir*  
*By Order of the Weekly Board, now sitting, I beg Leave to Acquaint you, That James Throp recommended by you as an in Patient is discharged cured.*  
*Jas Hilton*  
*Secretary"*

### CHILDREN

Orphans were provided with foster homes subsidised by payments from the overseer as Edward Green did on 16 October 1752 (C2/40):

*"I do hereby promise to pay onto Frances Lawson for Keeping Halliwells Child ten week the Sum ten Shillings if the Child so long Live"*

Frances made his mark to signify his agreement.

Some elementary education was provided, which in 1747 was at a cost of 1d per subject per week (C2/39):

*"Schoolwages for Atherton Poor Children from 29 of September till Christmas last*

<i>Thomas Suddoth Child for reading &amp; sowing 12 weeks</i>	<i>£0-2s-0d</i>
<i>James Smith's Child for reading 12 weeks</i>	<i>£0-1s-0d</i>
<i>another Child of James Smith's for reading 6 weeks</i>	<i>£0-0s-6d</i>

A collection of School Bills records payments to provide teaching (C2/43):

*"June 24 1771. Recd from John Clowes for Teaching Widow Ratliff Two Children Twelve Months the Sum of Twelve Shilling in full to this day by me Elen Whittle"*

To ensure that in later life these children could become

self-supporting they were placed in apprenticeship to one of the local trades such as nail-making, fustian weaving or shoe making. A master had complete charge over his apprentice. The child lived and worked with him, was fed and clothed at his expense, and in return worked as an unpaid labourer as he learnt the trade. Indentures, the agreement that linked the master with his apprentice, make clear the duties and responsibilities of each (C4/1):

*"This agreement made the forth day of November 1780 between James Clowes, Overseer of Atherton, on the one part, and James Roylance of Atherton of the other part witness that the said James Roylance is to have George Bromilow for the term of five whole years..... the said James Roylance is to teach and interest the said george Bromilow in the trade or occupation of nailor and find and provide him all manner of apparal and sufficient meat, drink, washing and lodging during the whole term"*

This indenture was witnessed by James Brown and John Sale, while James Roylance, being unable to write, made his mark. Later printed forms listed the evils from which a master was instructed to shield his apprentice. When John Hallows 'a poor boy of Atherton' was apprenticed to William Prescott, a fustian weaver of Atherton, the boy was expected observe the following (C4/1):

*"his said masters he shall faithfully serve, his secrets keep, his lawful commands obey, at cards, dice or any unlawful game he shall not play, nor exercise himself therein Alehouses, Taverns, evil company he shall not frequent.*

*Fornification or adultery he shall not committ, nor matrimony contract during the said term: neither shall he consume, waste or lend the goods of his master or suffer the same to be done by others, but shall endeavour to prevent the same, and give notice thereof to his master. Neither shall he absent himself from the service of his master by day or night, during the whole term of his apprenticeship, but in all things behave himself to his master and all his family as becometh a faithful apprentice, during the said term."*

### THE WORKHOUSE

During the early years of the century the records only refer to support given as out-relief and this support in the home continued to be the main form of assistance throughout the century. Concerns that the provision relief in the home was either not always practical or represented the most efficient use of the rate-payers money resulted in the passing of an Act of Parliament in the early 1720's which gave permission for the purchase of buildings to be used as workhouses for able bodied paupers together with the right to refuse relief if they would not enter.

The earliest evidence in the Township records for a local workhouse is provided by a receipt, which shows that in 1740 John Baxter paid for repair work to a workhouse in Leigh serving both the inhabitants of Atherton and the neighbouring Pennington townships (C2/38):

*Recd. Sep<sup>r</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> 1740 from Mr. Jn. Baxter  
the sum off. seven teen shillings and four pence  
for repairs of Pennington Work house in the  
Y<sup>r</sup> 1738 and 1739 by me J. Green*

Regular payments were recorded for the care of inmates from this date onwards.

Monthly bills show the numbers admitted from Atherton fluctuating from month to month. In 1749 the highest was

*Continued on page 34*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN 18th CENTURY  
ATHERTON

THE POOR LAW

*Continued from page 33*

31 and the lowest 8. In May of that year the Overseer was asked to pay for the following (C2/39):

<i>"31 Heads at 1s-43/4d</i>	<i>£1-8s-011/4d</i>
<i>Shoes for Adams Children</i>	<i>£0-02s-08d</i>
<i>Necessaries</i>	<i>£0-04s-061/d2</i>
<i>Ale for Seddons Wifes Buring</i>	<i>£0-0s2-00d"</i>

In 1765/66 John Cunliff's accounts list the following (C2/12):

<i>"pd to the workhouse for march 12 Heads</i>	
<i>Att 2s 5d p Head</i>	<i>£1-9s-0d</i>
<i>pd for Aug to the workhouse</i>	
<i>15 heads att 2s 5d p Head</i>	<i>£1-16s -3d"</i>

Payments of 6s 3d to the workhouse Governor were recorded in April of that year.

A summary of contributions made towards repairs to the building give some indication of its appearance and what was expected of those sent there. This record makes it clear that weaving was one of the tasks expected of the inmates. This loom house appears to have been a building partly of brick and partly wattle and daub with a thatched roof and small glass windows (C2/40):

*"Repairs of the Workhouse in Leigh Paid by Pening & Atherton*  
*1745 Repairs of all sorts* £ s d  
*£14-7s-0d"*

*"1751 Rebuilding of the Loom House as follows*

<i>July 6 Shaw Allanson Carpenter</i>	<i>£1-2s-6d</i>
<i>27 Geo: Penkethman Plaisterer</i>	<i>£0-11s-6d</i>
<i>Treading Daub</i>	<i>£0-1s-0d</i>
<i>29 Rich: Whittell Bricklayer</i>	<i>£1-11s-8d</i>
<i>Thatching Serving &amp; Pricks</i>	<i>£0-11s-6d</i>
<i>Sept 1 James Johnson ten threaves of Straw</i>	<i>£0-8s-4d</i>
<i>2 Geo: Gregory for nails</i>	<i>£0-4s-5d</i>
<i>3 Rab: Berry for Laths</i>	<i>£0-6s-1d</i>
<i>Tho: Benton Glass and Work</i>	<i>£0-12s-9d</i>
<i>4 Geo:Penkethman pointing and hair</i>	<i>£0-2s-2d</i>
<i>Rob: Gwilym Esqr: for brick</i>	<i>£1-18s-6d</i>
<i>James Morris Slater</i>	<i>£0-1s-6d</i>
<i>Feb 25 Lime and Carting</i>	<i>£0-14s-0d</i>
<i>For Raff trees</i>	<i>£0-3s-6d</i>
<i>carting Brick and sand</i>	<i>£0-5s-0d</i>

*One third* £7-13s-91/2d"

Surviving coal bills show that coal fires heated it (C2/43):

*"Nov 13 1773 Rd from John Clowes for six Quarter of Coals for the Workhouse the sum of twelve Shillings be me Peter Call."*

Bills and receipts dated in the 1750s also refer to an additional rented property used for nail making (C2/40).

The workhouse was not the preferred option but rather it was the last resort and it would appear that Overseers were reluctant to send a person to workhouse if they could be persuaded to remain in their home. Edward Green's 1752 account records two payments which appear designed to limit the numbers being taken into the workhouse (C2/9):

*"pd Crompton wife to stay out of the workhouse one week 6d*

*Given Mary Crompton 6d to goe out of the workhouse"*

John Cunliff's 1765/6 accounts also appears to indicate that Giles Guest, who was in receipt of out-relief before being admitted, was then provided with the means to again be self-supporting outside (C2/12):

This April account also includes payments for "Clogging Giles Guest Clogs" and removing "Giles Guest to the workhouse" (C2/12).

Once home he continued to receive help. In February 1766 he was given equipment for spinning costing 4s-6d and in March a bed and blankets costing 17s-6d. His wife is not mentioned in later records which show that weekly payments to him continued until May 1769 (C2/12).

The able bodied who were admitted were required to work and make goods which could be sold to help defray the cost of their keep. The evidence however suggests that their treatment was not particularly harsh or oppressive. The basics requirements of food, clothing footwear and bedding were provided. A bill of September 1753 (C2/40) included 6d for tobacco and shaving while those who died received similar consideration to those outside. An undated bill shows that Peter Flitcroft's funeral expenses were paid and included the cost of "Drinke 02s-06d" as well as "Church Dues, taking, Grave making 05s-02d, Coffin 02s06d and Shroud 03s06d".

SUMMARY

There was then a sense of community responsibility for its own. The Poor Law ensured that the basic necessities, food, clothing and shelter were available. If possible support was in the form of out-relief allowing people to continue living in their own homes. Only as a last resort were people moved into the workhouse. Despite the provision made for punishment at the workhouse, the overall impression is of a system that was compassionate. More appears to have been provided than was absolutely necessary. References to the supply of tobacco, surely not a necessity, are common. The provision of education and the apprenticeships represent practical help for young persons to become self-supporting members of the community. The Overseers paid for relatively expensive medical help. In such a close knit community the impression is that pleas for assistance would be treated with understanding and sympathy. In 1785 John Clowes received the following request (2/46):

*"Ann the wife of John Schofield who is a pauper belonging to the Township of Atherton and informs me that her Husband has Deserted her whereby she is destitute of a house to live in and of Common necessaries to support her and her Child. I therefore desire you will take this matter into Consideration and relieve this poor Distressed woman and pursue such measures as the Law directs to punish and make Example of the Husband according to his Deserts."*

It was only in the 19th century, following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, that Poor Law administration with its emphasis on committal to the workhouse gained the grim reputation that is so vividly portrayed in Dickens's Oliver Twist. With out-relief no longer provided people had to be in desperate circumstances to accept admission to what then became a harsh workhouse regime.

**NB.** References to documents in Leigh Archives given with each extract. In each case full reference should begin "TR ATH"

### **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)

**6 April** *Hot and Cold* Eric Littler

**4 May** AGM

**1 June**

*Law and the Community* Tony Clark

**6 July**

*John Betjeman's Cornwall* Trevor Lucas

**3 August**

*Remembering Oscar Hammerstein II*  
James Fairhurst

### **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)

**12 May**

*The Planning of D-Day* Tony Parkinson

**9 June**

*The History of St Kilda* Stephen Halliwell

### **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)

**12 April**

*Shades of the Past* Steve Abbott

**10 May**

*Three Centuries of Autographs* P Morgan

**14 June**

*William Crumblehulme in Horwich*  
Christine Crumblehulme

**9 August**

*The Life of Beatrix Potter* Dorothy Hindle

### **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](http://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**

The Society meets in the Museum at

## **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 the end of 2005 for inclusion in the next issue. Thanks.**

Hindley Library, market Street at 7.00 pm on the second Monday of the month. Details from Joan Topping (01942 257361) or Norma Brannagan (01942 258668). The museum is open three times per month on either Friday or Saturday mornings; please ask in Hindley Library or phone as above for further details.

### **Leigh & District Family History Society**

Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month at 7.30 p.m. in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. Details from Olive Hughes (01942 741594)

**19 April** *Surnames* Peter Watson

**17 May**

*A Girl without a Name* Tony Foster

**June (TBC)**

Proposed visit to Williamson Tunnels, Liverpool

**July (TBC)**

Proposed visit to Ellesmere Port Boat Museum

**16 August** *Getting Started*

### **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 April**

*Traditional Lancashire Recipes* (plus AGM) Fred Holcroft

### **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)

**27 April** AGM and video

### **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 Malcolm Parr (01942 673685)

### **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).

### **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)

**12 April** AGM

### **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](mailto:rydings@blueyonder.co.uk). Visit our website at [www.tyldesleyhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://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.

### **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](mailto:Johnwogan@blueyonder.co.uk).

You can also visit our website at [www.ffhs.org.uk/members/wigan.htm](http://www.ffhs.org.uk/members/wigan.htm).

# Wartime in Wigan

PREPARATION for war began in Wigan in 1938, when Sergeant Rothwell of the Wigan Borough Police was appointed Air Raid Precautions Officer. Because of its proximity to Liverpool and the munitions factories at Euxton and Risley, it was expected that Wigan might well be attacked. Gas masks were issued, members of the Auxiliary Fire Service gave demonstrations of fire fighting on the Market Square, trenches were dug, air raid shelters were provided and basements strengthened.

## "Etnas and Strombolis"

Burning pit heaps, described by Joe Tinker, MP for Leigh, as ".....our Etnas and Strombolis", were visible at night and had to be dealt with. The Fire Brigade, which up to now had been a part of, and manned by, the Borough Police force, became a separate entity in 1939 and was renamed the National Fire Service. The 'black-out' began in Great Britain on 1 September 1939. In Wigan a trial of this had been carried out earlier, between the hours of midnight and 2 a.m. in the morning, with the result being pronounced satisfactory by Wigan's Chief Constable,

Thomas Pey.

However, throughout the whole of Britain, people complained of this new threat, as they saw it, to their safety, many saying it was the secret weapon that Adolf Hitler had boasted of. There were many casualties until the new circumstances were adjusted to. The first person to be killed by a street accident during the black-out was Miss Lillian Ellison of Woodhouse Lane, Wigan, who was killed on her way to work at Wigan Infirmary; she was knocked down by a motor car shortly before 7 a.m. on 7 November in Mesnes Road, Wigan and died the next day.

Infringements of the black-out regulations led to fines and the first person to be summoned for the offence was himself an air raid warden from Orrell. A fine of 4s. costs was imposed by the magistrates who earnestly entreated the public to take this matter seriously.

## Armistice Day

The period later to be labelled the 'Phoney War' now began, but Wigan had a distinct reminder of what might be in store on Saturday 11 November 1939. The air raid siren sounded and wardens took up their posts, auxiliary

fireman and decontamination squads stood by in readiness, the central control was fully manned and large numbers of people in the town centre sought safety in public shelters. A carefully prepared evacuation plan was put into operation in local mills and business houses. The warning which was heard at 11.10 a.m. gave a grim significance to what had once been Armistice Day. There was irony in the fact that an air raid warning should be heard on a day on which, in previous years, the nation had honoured its dead of the 1914 - 18 War. Some people at first thought that the siren was signalling the commencement of the two minutes silence previously held on that day. The warning sounded for a minute and a half while adjustments were being made to the siren. The official explanation made later regarding this false warning was that a representative of the makers of the rhythmic control was examining the relays and had accidentally made contact with the air raid signal warning. The 'All Clear' was given immediately afterwards.

## Excellent rehearsal

Meanwhile, however, intense activity was taking place in the defence service. The British Legionnaire in charge of poppy selling collected his steel helmet and gas mask and set off at once for his warden's post. Volunteers rushed to their posts to supplement the workers already on duty and, before the warning had died away, the town's defence machinery was ready for any eventuality. ARP wardens later stated that although the alarm was a false one which was regretted, nevertheless it had been an excellent rehearsal and showed that services were fully

prepared. Shoppers in the main street made their way to the public shelters and remained there until they were assured that the 'All Clear' had sounded. The civilian population had behaved with extraordinary calm. At the Dorning Street premises of Messrs. Coope & Co, clothing manufacturers, nearly 1,200 employees were marshalled into the firm's air raid shelters within five minutes. An official of the firm said, "the stewards and wardens took charge and there was no panic or excitement among the employees, 80% of whom are women and girls." Most banks and several large shops closed their doors and conducted their clients and customers to places of safety.

However, there was criticism levelled by the authorities about the principal reaction of a number of people - one of curiosity. Many of them rushed to the doors of their houses, gazing skywards and apparently not realising that they were exposing themselves to unnecessary danger. A visitor to the town who was passing through Worsley Mesnes at the time told the local press that before the siren was heard the streets were deserted. But as soon as the sirens sounded, crowds of people flocked into the streets and spent some time gazing into the clouds.

Chief Constable Pey and his assistant, Inspector Paul Foster, appealed to the populace to treat all warnings seriously and to carry their gas masks at all times. Nevertheless, Christmas 1939, was a prosperous one for Wigan, with shops reporting record sales.

But the price for this had to be paid later.

**James Fairhurst  
Ashton-in-Makerfield**

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

**Heritage Estates UK**



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

[www.heritage-estatesuk.com](http://www.heritage-estatesuk.com)

Tel: 00 44 1942 770202

Fax: 00 44 1942 770205

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

Contact: Richard Weston

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

IT'S a cool but sunny afternoon in early spring when I see the girl. I am strolling around Ince, where I grew up – I like to go back sometimes – when I see her skipping along in front of me. She wears a blue coat and has a ribbon in her hair, and she is following a chalked line of arrows along the wall of the old Empress Mill – “follow this line” it says – and I know it will lead her to some silly scribbled message, for haven't I done the same thing many, many times in my childhood?

The Empress was a working mill in those days, and the clatter of looms, deafening to the doffers and spinners inside, was just a hum out here in the street. The cotton, with its distinctive smell, floated in the air like fine snow, and stuck to the clothes of the mill-workers as they emerged wearily when the factory-hooter sounded the end of their working day.

### “Brylcreem Bounce”

The girl has found the cheeky chalked message and she grins before turning towards Ince Bar, and as I watch her skipping along the familiar road, I realise that something isn't right.... Everything looks as it did in my childhood – impossible, I know – and yet the everyday things – the cars and the lampposts – look strangely dated. I feel uneasy and turn to retrace my steps, but curiosity wins, and I follow the girl past shops that have canvas awnings pulled out to shade the goods in the window. I step carefully around a big black delivery bike as its owner, a grocer's lad, sporting a brown overall and the “Brylcreem Bounce”, carefully prints the price of bacon on the shop window in whitewash. My mam used to shop along here every day, (we had no fridge you see, just a meat-safe), and there were separate shops for everything – Morton's Grocers, the Cloggers, the Chemists, the Temperance-Bar and the Butchers, (which had sawdust on the floor and where, if you weren't careful, you collided clammily with enormous sides of beef which hung from the ceiling).

# THE GIRL

In the chip shop, there were none of the polystyrene trays of today. Instead, people queued up carrying basins wrapped in tea towels to hold their food. Shop windows were carefully dressed – packets of ‘Tide’ or ‘Omo’ were displayed in pyramids in front of a curtained backdrop, and 1/4lb packets of Horniman's Tea jostled for space with Viota Cake Mix in front of a row of glass jars containing sweets at 4d a quarter.

### “Whiz-Bang”

My favourite shop was the papershop, where I got my comics – *Bunty for Girls* – (remember “the four Marys”?) – the *Topper* with “Beryl the Peril”, the *Breezer* which once gave away a free “Whiz-Bang” toy, (I think every child in Ince had one!), and everyone's favourite, the *Beano*. How we crowded round the shop window on autumn nights, mesmerised by the shiny new annuals, and colouring books. We shyly whispered our requests to Father Christmas in posh Pendlebury's or Lowe's in Wigan, but our toys came via the papershop's Christmas-Club in which our mams saved up all year.

‘Playing shops’ was a popular pastime, and we pretended to weigh sweets on scales made from a piece of wood balanced on a brick. Sometimes we had a ‘chip shop’ using pieces of slate for fish; “salt and vinegar?” we asked each other in our ‘chippy-lady’ voice, busily shaking water from a bottle with a hole in the cap. I remember we once used dog biscuits for chips until our dog Vic sidled up to the ‘shop’, tail wagging, and polished off our profits in one fell swoop! How we laughed and chased him up the back-field!

I laugh out loud at the memory as I leave the shops behind and walk on towards terraced rows that my common sense tells me are no longer there, and yet I can see women mopping front doorsteps, whilst little girls, with frocks tucked into knickers, do handstands against the wall, then ‘walk’ down it into ‘the crab’ on the pavement, and I smile ruefully – try as I might,

I was never able to do that! I am suddenly aware of the girl watching from a distance and smiling, as if she knows my thoughts. She walks on and I follow, and oh! there's the coalman carrying a cwt. of coal down the back-entry. Oh, how long since I've seen him, but of course we live in a smokeless world now, don't we?.... we?? And yet there's smoke coming from chimneys – I can see it – I can smell it! And with it comes something else – oh, it's hard to define – just a ‘feeling’ perhaps – but something long, long forgotten is in the air.

### Saturday night at the “Emp”

I look for the girl. She has joined some friends and they go round in a circle, holding hands, ribboned plaits flying out as they sing “Sally go round the moon”, and little lads clatter past Bank's shop on a home-made trolley. Banks's! – what a strange shop that was – a grocery and off-licence with the odd addition of a chip-range! Girls from a nearby factory – a biscuit-works, I think – used to flock at dinner-time for a “six” (sixpennyworth) of chips, and afterwards, with their hair in rollers under a headscarf and their nylon overalls nipped in tightly at the waist, they would ‘bop’ on the pavement in the sunshine as “*The Night has a Thousand Eyes*” issued forth from someone's ‘tranny’. Sometimes we younger ones would sing along with them about “*Seven little girls sittin' in the back seat, a-huggin' and a-kissin' with Fred*”. Then back to work they went, where dreams of Saturday night at the “Emp” got them through the tedium of the afternoon.

The little girls are now skipping in and out of someone's old washing-line – “I'm a little Dutch girl dressed in blue” they chant, as I did long ago, and I wander over to the school which stands eerily silent. I walk past “wilful damage” notices to peer into empty classrooms, where computers will have succeeded the inkwells and blotting-paper of my schooldays, but no – there is a stack of “*Beacon Readers*” books on the piano and oh look! there are our percussion-

*Continued on page 38*

# THE GIRL

*Continued from page 37*

band instruments! Which did you play? I was unfailingly allocated a triangle, at which I tapped away unhappily to "*Bobby Shaftoe*" – oh, how I longed to be put with the castanets, but I was a shy, timid child and was afraid to ask. Do you remember the songs we were taught? "*Ye banks and braes*", "*I'll go no more a-rovin'*", and "*Go and tell aunt Nancy the old grey goose is dead*", which always had me in floods of tears!

## Sums in £ s d

On the blackboard, sums in pounds, shillings and pence are written in chalk, (which the teacher wasn't averse to throwing occasionally followed by the blackboard duster at anyone talking in class). The weather chart shows a mixture of suns and umbrellas, showing a changeable week, but it hasn't been, has it? What is going on? I glance round, more puzzled than afraid and see the girl standing alone in the playground. She wanders out onto the cobbled street as the afternoon sun begins to sink, and the shadows lengthen. I see her suddenly hurry across the road as a man appears, and immediately I know her fear, for he was part of my childhood, and he had some terrible malady which caused him to turn round and round on the spot every few yards, his eyes staring glitteringly and his forefinger permanently pointing. Oh, how easy it was, as a child, to think that that finger was pointing at me! Only now do I realise that the poor man probably never even saw me.

Then there was "Ciggy", who would shuffle terrifyingly into our house to cadge a cigarette – "cig, Bob; cig, Bob" he would say over and over to my dad, whilst I hid behind the couch in fear. One lady, who was rather easy-going in the soap-and-water stakes, was known locally as "Persil", due to her obvious lack of use of that commodity, and my aunty Mary was scathing in her criticism: "'Er's as black as a crow!" she would exclaim in disgust, to which my gentle mam, who always saw the best in

everyone, would say, "Ee, 'Er's awreet, Polly", (she always called my aunty Mary "Polly"). "Awreet? AWREET?!" screeched my more forthright aunty – "'Er favvers 'er's fawd off a flittin'!" Characters seemed to abound in those days, and whether troubled, ill or just none-too-fragrant, they were part and parcel of our childhood, and our lives are richer for having known them.

## Guard the 'Bommy'

The girl has reached the back-field now, and the memories wash over me – it was here where a big box from the Co-op became a train or boat for a day, or an old sheet became a tent, and where, for no particular reason except the fun of it, we mixed dirt and water into a revolting mixture called "slop-dash". Oh look! there's the sand-hole where we had the bonfire, and where the Shawcross lads made a 'den' in which they stayed all night to guard the 'Bommy' from marauding gangs. Mrs Shawcross had a wonderful, easy rapport with us children, and she once organised an enormous May-Queen procession – why do you never see them now? We sallied forth through the streets, collecting pennies – a motley array of crepe-paper elves, fairies and pantomime characters, with our queen resplendent in her mam's net curtain and a cardboard crown. Then back to a picnic-tea of butties, jelly and pop on the back-field, and I can tell you that no meal since, however posh, has ever quite matched it!

I find myself smiling, drunk on memories, and the girl smiles back. She turns into George Street and I know before I turn the corner that all will be as it was – those familiar doors at which we sang carols or played tap-latch in the winter nights, and where in the event of a death, the neighbours collected for a wreath, in the days when people cared. In the gathering dusk, the streetlights begin to come on – electric now on the main road, but here in the cobbled back-streets, gas-lamps still flicker. There are only a few more steps to St. William's Presbytery, behind whose garden wall stood the little terraced row where I grew up, and I am almost afraid to reach it. Oh! how many times has this place crept into my dreams at night! The

site now belongs to St. William's school, and is railed off, and I stand head down by the railings, afraid to look. Are they here, those little terraced homes, where the dramas of ordinary people were acted out? Where births and deaths, weddings and funerals, took place. Where neighbours gossiped and children played, and where love and laughter took centre stage before the demolition-men brought the curtain down. Trembling now, I steel myself to look, but there are only the shadows, and the shush-shush of the trees that now grow where once I played.

## She is my past and I am her future

The girl is close to me now. Slowly, she turns to me and smiles her shy smile, and for one heart-stopping moment I look into eyes that are my own, before she turns and fades into the shadows, and I realise why the railings haven't barred her way as they have mine.... in her world, they simply don't exist, for she is my past and I am her future. She is walking through another time. Any second now she will open our front door, and she will see warmth and light, and my mam's gentle face, and our Vic will wag his tail with happiness because she is home.

I stare for a few moments into the gathering dusk before I turn and walk away. I have no explanation for this strange afternoon, but my heart is thankful for it, although it appears I am to see no more, at least not yet. But I know that I will come back, and perhaps she will be waiting to show me the things I have forgotten, when the nights are lighter and the days warmer.

And will you come with us? I hope so, but now, suddenly, I want to go home. Lights are coming on in the terraced homes, illuminating cosy domestic scenes, whilst out here a chilly little wind springs up, as if it wants to blow away all that I have seen. But, the evening sky wraps itself comfortingly around me like a deep blue shawl, keeping my memories warm. And as the sky darkens, each memory becomes a star, and each star shines like a jewel in the soft Lancashire night.

Irene Roberts  
Abram Nr Wigan

# BURGY BEN

THE last two issues of *Past Forward* have contained interesting letters speculating on the word or name 'Burgy' and its meaning. Our interest is because the name Burgy Ben mentioned by some of your contributors (issue nos.37 and 38) was the name under which our grandfather wrestled in the late 19th century.

He was born in Aspull in 1867 and had a brother Benjamin and sister Helen. He went to school until he was 12 years old and told of having to pay one old penny to the school each week and of learning to write on slate boards. His handwriting even in his later years was in beautiful copperplate style. He started work at the Moor Pit Colliery in Aspull, and it was during this time that he was given the non de plume of Burgy Ben by his workmates at the pit. It would seem the name 'Burgy' had coal mining connotations at that time also.

## First wrestling match

He had his first wrestling match at the age of 15, for a wager of 10s. a side. His last match was in 1907 at 40 years of age, held at the White City Stadium, Manchester; this was the final of a competition with 63 competitors. He beat Harry Mort of Oldham to win the nine stone championship of Great Britain in Lancashire Style wrestling. He

was awarded a magnificent winner's belt of red leather, adorned with seven silver medallions, the centre one about six inches across and inlaid with mother of pearl, depicting two wrestlers and inscribed with his real name of Thomas Jones, together with his wrestling name of Burgy Ben. The belt would be on display at all the places where they would live in future years.

During his wrestling career he met and married Mary Melling, our grandmother, whose parents kept the *White Lion* public house at the top of Whelley Brow. The couple lived at and ran the *Prince Albert* in New Springs and had seven children, including twins, Aaron and Moses, who died at birth. Later the family moved to the Rose Bridge Inn in Higher Ince, which had stables and a gym where grandfather trained many young men, including his only son Harry and our father, Fredrick Ralph. The stables were employed as overnight accommodation for horses that were used for towing barges along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, which ran alongside the pub.

We were told stories of barges buying a 'nip' of rum for two old pence and being allowed to sleep alongside their horses in the stables. We were also told of children being ushered into the pub cellar when, during the Great War, German Zeppelins



*Burgy Ben with Collins who we think may have been one of Burgy's trainees.*

came over to bomb the nearby Top Place Ironworks at Kirkless, New Springs. A huge crater on the spot where St. Patrick's rugby ground now stands was left for many years after a German bomb missed its target, badly damaging some houses nearby.

## Lancashire style

When asked about wrestling it was always grandfather's contention that Lancashire Style wrestling was much more scientific than other codes such as Cornish, Greek, Cumberland and particularly 'All In'. He was always willing to demonstrate, even in his late '70's, and we recall one brash young man being unceremoniously floored and held there before being rescued by grandmother.

He toured the USA on two occasions but grandmother could not be persuaded to go with him. He said that his toughest match was against an American by the name of 'Rocky Mountain' Joe Burns for the sum of £50 a side. However, after two hours the match was declared a draw and each had their money returned. Whilst in America he also modelled clothes at several New York hotels.

On another occasion he fought and beat a famous Japanese jujitsu expert named Yokio Tani at an exhibition match held at the old Springfield Park football ground in Wigan. He was credited with being the only white man to have beaten Tani.

He trained many local and national wrestlers, including an American, Joe Rogers, who was to fight the mighty Hackenschmitt, a formidable wrestler of the time. The fight took place at the London

Palladium, but Rogers lost.

During all of this time he organised running, boxing and athletics training at Higher Ince Athletics ground. He also trained the Wigan Water Polo Team; one of his successes was to train the winner of the Powderhall Handicap Race.

## Retirement

The family moved to 81 Bird Street, Higher Ince on retirement, but after a few years of relatively quiet living our grandparents, with Polly, one of their daughters, moved to an off licence at the corner of Manchester Road and Holt Street, Higher Ince. Grandfather kept busy in his garden and by walking around Ince. Even in his later years his complexion was smooth and pink, which he put down to always adding milk to his washing water and saying his prayers every night before retiring to bed.

He died peacefully at his home on 22 November 1952, at the age of 85, and is buried in Ince cemetery.

Several months after his death a burglar was caught in the room where the belt was still on display. No one knows his motives but when cornered by our aunt Polly he escaped by diving through and smashing the bay window before running off. The Police never caught anyone. Thereafter the belt was kept in the custody of Burgy's son Harry Melling Jones, the father of our cousin Harry Jones, to whom your correspondent Henry Collins of St. Helens referred (issue 37, p42). The present whereabouts of the belt is not known.

**Tom and Donald Ralph  
Chorley Lincs**

## HIRE OF MEETING ROOM

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

### SOCIETY RATE

**£8.25**

PER MORNING/ AFTERNOON SESSION

**£12.35**

PER EVENING SESSION

### COMMERCIAL RATE

**£20.00**

PER MORNING/AFTERNOON/EVENING SESSION

*If you are interested, contact Philip Butler*

**Tel (01942) 828128**



Dear Sir,

I read with interest the letter written by Irene Roberts in issue 38, *An Apple for the Teacher*. I enclose a photograph of the old Ince Central School Higher Ince, taken in 1956, when I was five years old. I am on the bottom row, extreme left.

I attended the old school till the day it closed. I remember going to school that morning, and after assembly all the children left for the last time, and walked hand in hand (I with my best friend at the time, Susan Bird) across Ince Green Lane, through Local Board Street, into Pickup Street, down Charles Street and into the brand new school. We were the very first children to learn, play, read and write in the new Ince C. E. School. I wonder how many readers know that its original name was Ince Central Elementary school.

Irene Roberts asked if any readers remember taking 3d every week to buy a brick; I remember, but thought it was 6d. My mum used to give me 6d every week and tell me we owned half the school. I also remember Bobby Beacon and the felt pictures he used to stick on the board, the "cheesettes" that were sold at 8 for 1d; I

## Ince Central School, Higher Ince

usually bought 16 "cheesettes" and a "jammie dodger" for 1d - all this for 3d, and a bottle of milk!

Irene, I don't remember the gadget you mentioned shaped like a flying saucer, but I do remember using the milk bottle tops as flying saucers, putting the foil bottle top between two crossed fingers, then moving the fingers and off it flew across the classroom - milk bottle tops everywhere.

I must be two years older than Irene (I would love to know her maiden name - mine was Molloy). I know all the children in the 1964 photo she took of the Sports Day. I left Ince C E in 1962 and went to Rose Bridge High School. I wonder if Irene Roberts remembers any of the teachers at the new Ince C E School - Mr. Fairchild, Miss Melling, Miss Morgan, Miss Riding. If my memory is correct Miss Jones was the Headmistress. My mum used to clean for her a few mornings a week. She lived in an upstairs flat in Swinley Lane; I remember going with my mum a few times, and she would often leave me an orange on the stairs. I also remember Mrs Sandiford and Miss Ashurst.

I remember the old Ince C E School very well. I was brought up in Hook Street, just across from the old school. I climbed over the gates after school closed and played in the schoolyard. Does any reader remember Miss Foster, a tall

grey haired Lady, who lived somewhere in Ince Green Lane? I remember very well Miss Foster keeping a cane and bringing one naughty boy out to the front to cane his hand; just as the cane was coming to land he moved it, and Miss Foster hit her leg. Thank you, Irene, for bringing these memories and many more I thought I had forgotten back to the front of my memory file. My maiden name was Molloy. I suppose you could say things have gone full circle - I am now a Governor of Ince C E School.

I also noted with interest the letter written by Clifford Storey ("Wiganers at Rorke's Drift", p43). He asked if any reader knew where Brown Street was, I am pleased to tell him it is still on Manchester Road, Higher Ince, two hundred yards past Varty's Funeral Directors (walking towards Hindley past Branch Street, Brown Street is the next one).

Grayway's coaches have the coach park at the bottom of the street.

Finally I would like to refer to Fred Holcroft's letter, also on p43. I noted he mentioned a C. Molloy - it would be interesting to find out if I am related to this family. If anyone can enlighten me I would be very grateful.

A very interesting issue. Many thanks for the memories.

**Kathleen Meadwell**  
**5 Patterdale Place**  
**Higher Ince**  
**Wigan WN2 2NX**

## Irish Clubs in the Wigan area

Dear Alastair

Maybe some of your readers can help me with any information they may have about Irish League clubs in the Wigan area. The Brian Boru Irish Democratic League club at Ashton-in-Makerfield is now the only Irish club left in the Wigan district. At one time, given the size of the local Irish population, there must have been many more.

I have been able to trace the existence of the 'O'Brien-Davitt' branch of the United Irish League on Station Road, Wigan prior to World War 1. When did this club close? Do any photos of it exist?

Other areas of Wigan and other townships such as Ince may also have had Irish League clubs. These Irish clubs were the means by which the Irish population in Britain organised itself and gained respect in the wider community. We are now down to the last dozen or so in Lancashire and Yorkshire.

I will be publishing a CD-Rom on the Irish League clubs and their activities this year, so I would be grateful for any information received in whatever form so that Wigan can properly be represented.

**Chris Clegg**  
**Secretary**  
**Lancs. Federation of**  
**IDL clubs**  
**Tel: 01282 602186**  
**Email:**  
**ccleggidl2@hotmail.com**

## Old Market Hall

Dear Editor

I was remembering the old Market Hall which was demolished in the late '80's and recalled a feature of the building which seemed to have been removed prior to the demolition.

There were two bulls heads on the Hope Street side of the Hall, but I am not sure if they were on the Fruit Market part of the building. Can any of your readers recall these heads and what they signified?

**J Meadows**  
**7 Rutherford House**  
**Over Hulton**  
**Bolton BL5 1DH**



*Our Infant department, School Street, Higher Ince 1956*





## Marylebone Village

Dear Editor

I read with such interest Mrs Rowe's article about Marylebone Village in the recent edition of *Past Forward*. The picture of the Stores brought back one memory in particular, as my first ever job was as a grocery delivery boy at Marylebone Store when I left school in 1927. Apart from the huge basket on the front of the bike I can recall little of my time there, although as it was to be the first of 25 jobs, perhaps I wasn't cut out for it or it didn't pay as well as the coal!

I must admit I have a slightly different recollection of the Wigan Lane parade of suitors from Swinley to Cherry Gardens - as young lads we referred to it as 'the rabbit run'!

Indeed, my outstanding memory of Wigan Lane involved me jumping on a passing tram to escape the attentions of a

chasing policeman; quite what I was up to escapes me now, although what I do remember is that I did escape!

Subsequently, I worked at Rose Bridge pit alongside Jack Alker who, incidentally, was also mentioned elsewhere in the edition. Jack and I both trained at Billy Beech's gym and appeared as wrestlers at Ardwick Stadium in Manchester.

After time spent as a porter at Wigan Wallgate and Atlas Forge in Lower Ince, I also worked for an asbestos company on the re-roofing of Trencherfield Mill. However, many Wiganers will have heard of a man who gave me a lift to RoF Risley: Jim Sullivan. Jim ran a fleet of lorries and we were excavating for underground buildings in the late 30's. Jim, of course, was a famous member of the Wigan RL team and captained Great Britain.

Like Mrs Rowe I do so love that part of Wigan as it holds memories of many happy days. If anyone remembers the area around Seed Street, Platt Lane, Scholes, I would dearly love to hear from them.

Many thanks for the article, Mrs Rowe.

**Stan Roberts**  
9 Riverside Road  
Penwortham  
Preston PR1 9RE



*VE Day, Hayward Street, Spring View, Ince (kindly donated by Miss V. Clayton of Sping View). Those she recalls include: V. Clayton, Mellings, Lowes, Parris, Cunliffe, Hollands, McNamara.*

## Wartime Blitz on Atherton

I was very interested in the story in *Past Forward* no 38 re the landmine which fell on Cox's farm, as on the same night another landmine was dropped and exploded in the brook just behind the Station Hotel on Bolton Road which my parents managed. I was only six years old at the time but can remember being in the cellar of the hotel for shelter when it exploded, resulting in us having to move out due to the damage and having to stay with Mr & Mrs Woodward who lived on Newbrook Road, near Hulton Park Gates, and owned the garage which was situated near Atherton Town Hall.

At the time I was very annoyed with the person who dropped the mine as the night before I had been playing with my collection of glass marbles and of course they all got lost in the resulting debris.

The father of James Speakman who wrote the article was our milk supplier and was also a customer in the hotel. It certainly brought back memories and was made more interesting by the fact of being involved in it. Thanks for the trip down memory lane.

**FE Underwood**

## ATHERTON BLITZ

Dear Mr Gillies

I refer to the article by James Speakman in issue no.38 regarding the blitz over Atherton during the night of 7 May 1941. It was a lovely moonlit night which was ideal for the German Luftwaffe, due to their being able to identify their targets by moonlight by means of reflections from rivers and railway lines.

At that time my family lived in Worthing Grove, Atherton, just off Wigan Road. Our back garden went down to Harrison's Farm fields with the Baptist tennis courts and Atherton Old Cemetery beyond that. My father considered that jumping in and out of the Anderton shelter which was usually full of water was not on, so decided to make his own shelter under the dining room floor, close to the chimney breast, by cutting out a square hole in the floorboards; this we subsequently made into a trap door over which we pushed the dining room table to enable the entrance to be kept clear in case of falling debris.

On the night in question we got so fed up with going in the shelter during the raid that my father and I went to stand at the back door, looking at the red sky over Liverpool and Manchester and thinking about the poor souls that lived there. All of a sudden we saw a parachute drifting towards us. My father, who had been a prisoner of the Germans in the First World War and was now serving his country as a Sergeant in the Home Guard, immediately identified it as a German pilot or paratrooper.

He then got the axe out of the shed whilst I reached in the

drawer for my mother's carving knife. The wind was rapidly blowing the parachute over our way. My father and I stood side by side in the back doorway with our weapons at the ready. I think we realised simultaneously that it was actually a land mine at the same time because, without a word being said, we were both trying to get under the table through the trapdoor at the same time, a sight not to be forgotten!

As a footnote, Mr Speakman mentioned Rev Glen Evans in his article. Both my elder sister Vera and I were educated at the Chowbent Unitarian School until we reached 11 years of age, when we attended Hesketh Fletcher School. Incidentally my younger sister June was baptised at Chowbent Chapel and we all attended Chowbent Chapel and Sunday School. Rev Evans used to visit our homes on his bicycle and let us listen to his gold pocket watch which chimed on the quarter, half hour and hour. I remember him saying in one of his Sunday services that he felt that children were not coming to chapel because they only had clogs to wear, which made quite a noise in the chapel due to the flag floor which was made up of gravestones. He decided, therefore, that to eliminate any embarrassment, from that day forward he would only wear clogs, which he did!

From what I understand, after surviving the land mine attack his gold watch went black and the gold colour never returned.

**Ken Pearce**  
Harrogate



## Mary Tomlinson - Pit Brow Worker

telling me that he and another soldier had just returned from holiday in Crhome-Pet, 20 miles from Madras, where they had stayed at Mary's (now Mrs Roll) home.

Before long, Mary wrote to invite me with another soldier to a similar holiday. As I was due for two weeks leave, I set off with a fellow soldier, Stan Etheridge. The journey by train took two full days and a night - a lot longer than we expected - but we had to stop at many stations for food and drink. In the second day before reaching Madras, at one of the stations, the driver asked us "if we would like a ride with him in the cab". An Anglo Indian, he said that there was a good long straight railway ahead and so, partly to ease the monotony of the journey, we said yes.

With a bottle of whiskey by his side, from which he partook every so often, and a very hot coal fire, he frightened our lives out, thinking that at any minute his engine, now at full throttle as

he showed off to us, would come off the line or turn over. To our relief, an Inspector on the line forced him to stop, from which we made a swift escape.

Joe Allen, whom I mentioned above, came from Little Lane, Wigan and for some time played for Orrell R U. In 1929, as pupils of Highfield C E School and 13 - 14 years of age, with Ken Gee, the great Wigan forward, a year younger than most of us, we had great hopes of winning the *Daily Dispatch* shield. Other members of our team included Fred Fouracre from a farm near Pony Dick, Horace Lappage from the Outdoor Licence at the top end of Enfield Street, John Cadman from Tunstall Lane, Horace Williams who, at 16 years of age, played full back for Wigan Highfield, Donald Heaton from Billinge Road, a good strong fast runner, Jimmy Lowe from Ormskirk Road, a good scrum half and later on, with John Heaton, opening batsman for Wigan Cricket Club and last but

not least, on the right wing, a big strong North Counties 100 yards winner, who if he caught the ball could not be caught. Joe Allen was left wing and I played centre to him.

One Saturday at Central Park we were due to play a round in the *Daily Dispatch* shield, but five of our team failed to turn up, evidently gone to watch Wigan playing not for away in a round of the Rugby League Cup. George Millard from Spring Bank immediately washed his hands of us. But before reaching 14 years of age, we did manage to arrange two friendly games ourselves. One was with St Josephs, whom we defeated 27:0. Their Headmaster, Mr McGuire, told us at the close of the match we were the dirtiest team they had ever played against! Hopefully, he was referring to the dirt of Swan Meadow, which did not have a blade of grass, and the occasional patch of cinders thrown from the coal-fire heated homes nearby. A week or so later we played St Marks, Newtown. This match was much tighter - we won 3:0 with one try.

**Jack Houghton**

**Birkdale Southport**

## Bird Street, Jubilee of King George V

Dear Sir

Thank you once again for printing my letter in your recent issue of *Past Forward*.

I knew the Crooks from Higher Ince. I think one of the family had a butcher's shop around Earl Street; his name was Billy and he used to go round the streets with a horse drawn van before World War II. There was also a Crook family in Bird Street; my mother went to school with one of the girls at the Old Ince Central School.

I also went to Ince Central School. I started in 1933 at the age of four. On my first day I had an accident; I wasn't quite sure where the toilets were, and didn't quite make it in time, then had to go back into the class and suffer in silence till it was time to go home, when I had to explain to my mother what had happened. Happy days!

The 'Petty' was mentioned in another article. What about the rank of Petty Officer in the Navy, and a petty offence?



*Bird Street, Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary. Bird Street won first prize for best decorated street, we lived in Bird Street at the time. The houses in the photograph have all been knocked down.*

There are many definitions of the word. 'Burgee' was also mentioned. Burgee Ben the wrestler worked on the tips at Rose Bridge Colliery.

I enclose a photograph of Bird Street before the War; I think it was the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary. Liza Hunt was the main

organizer of the event; she is in the front of the photograph. She went on to become Mrs Matthews and Chairperson of Aspull Council. A local grocer, Mr Rawson, can also be seen at the front. The photograph might stir a few memories.

**A E Smith**

**Winstanley Wigan**

## Wigan still home

Dear Sir,

As an ex pat Wigan lad I thank you for such an interesting publication as *Past Forward*.

I receive this pre-owned, as they now say in the motor trade industry, after it has gone through three other hands. It arrives here in South Africa in Kwa Zulu (Natal), and is sent to me by my old friend Joe Siney, ex Bird Street, Higher Ince.

I am now over the allotted three score years and 10 and have been in Africa 40 years, but Wigan is still home. I married Veronica Maxwell from the off license on Warrington Road, Lower Ince; we met when we were 14 and had a marriage of 47 wonderful years until her sad death last year.

**Ron Winnard  
Northcliff 6  
South Africa  
Email:**

**ronwinnard@netactive.co.za**



## Mr. Harold Dowling

Dear Sir

Issue no. 38 of *Past Forward*, containing a letter and photograph of Argyle Street School, Hindley, from J Bowery of Hove, mentions her teacher from the old All Saints School, Hindley, a Mr Darling.

This was no doubt Mr Harold Dowling, who became a Conservative member of the old Wigan Borough Council. He eventually was elected Mayor and later made an Alderman of the Borough. He married a teacher colleague at All Saints school, where they taught for many years.

Sadly the Argyle Street school was demolished quite recently to make way for a new school for children with special needs.

**Austin Lyons  
Aspull Wigan**

## LANCE TODD

Dear Sir

The article on Lance Todd presented by James Fairhurst in issue 38 of *Past Forward* was most interesting.

You may not be aware that Lance Todd was also a member of Wigan Golf Club and was the winner of the Captains Prize competition at Arley Hall in 1910. His win is mentioned in *The History of Wigan Golf Club* by Jack Winstanley. He also won the Medical Cup competition in 1921, and his name is on the board which hangs in the clubhouse at Arley Hall to this day.

**Ben Hughes  
Email:  
ben.hughes10@btinternet.com**

## Stoney Lane Bridge and Navvies Lump

Dear Editor

I picked up a copy of *Past Forward* in my local library today – the first time for a couple of years that I've been there at the right time – and there were several items which caught my attention and took me back to my own childhood.

Although we never used the Workman Train I too was taken by bus for the occasional day out at Gathurst. During World War II my dad worked on the railway, getting 'quarter fare' train tickets as a perk of the job, so that we could often afford to go to Southport with another 'railway' family. I remember the train being very crowded by the time it reached Hindley Green, where we then lived, and we were allowed to travel standing up in the guard's van all the way to Southport. Just like A.E. Smith, we went to the beach cafe for a jug of tea, then on to Peter Pan's, followed by a walk beside the lake – what a day out! A far cry from Camelot and Disneyland!

When I was very small we lived in Liverpool Road at Hindley (still at that time known by the older locals as Stoney Lane). Certainly three years or so ago the bridge parapet over the brook was still standing, inscribed with "Stoney Lane Bridge". We lived in a house in a small area then known as "Navvies' Lump" – I was told this was because they were thrown up in a hurry to house the labourers working to build the railway. Those houses are gone now, and Council properties were built on the land perhaps 35/40 years ago.

Between "Navvies' Lump" and the bridge, where the Social Security office now is, was an open area known as the "Piggy Field". This was where the men and boys used to go in the light evenings to play 'Piggy'. I never understood the game because girls and women were not allowed to play, but it involved a shaped piece of wood, narrow at one end and broad at the other, placed on the ground and clouted with a stout stick (usually the washday boiler stick sneaked out from home). This entertainment

came to an end when the "Dole" was built – development taking over the green spaces even then!

I could have been no more than 18 months old when I remember being carried by my grandma, wrapped in her shawl, "deyn t' fowd" to see the Billy Bull in the bull pen at Billy Splutter's farm (actually William Eatock, who didn't like being called Billy Splutter!). The track is still there, opposite the Strangeways pub, but the farm is long gone. It was just over the "bruck bridge" on the righthand side, and I think the big barn stretched as far as the present Grange grazing fields. The hay in the barn caught fire towards the end of World War II and the barn was burnt out. The farmer did a milk round in the old horsedrawn milk float, ladling the milk directly from the churns into the housewives' jugs.

I also remember being taken to Borsdane Wood – just under the railway bridge at the Mill Lane end there were a few cottages, probably mill workers cottages in the days when the mill was there; at the end one lived an old lady who used to sell home-made dandelion and burdock pop.

My grandmother was probably born c.1880 and as a girl worked on the pit 'brew' (her mother had actually worked down the pit). Apparently the mine was unsuitable for pit ponies, so they used young women - including my great-

grandmother - to pull the tubs instead!

On a more modern note, in my late teens and early 20's I was a regular attendee at the Empress Ballroom (Wigan Emp). There was no bar – you had to be content with a cup of coffee, or drink your alcohol before you came in, or in the interval on a 'pass-out'. On Fridays there used to be a late dance with first-class visiting bands. I can't now recall the bands I heard there, except for one, the Joe Loss Band. I went to the dance with a girl called Betty Westhead and we had the temerity to knock on the bandroom door in the interval and ask if Mr Loss would sign our autograph books. Imagine our surprise when Joe Loss himself came to the door to sign and have a word with us! Imagine our further surprise when we saw the photograph in the next week's Observer of ourselves hob-nobbing with the great Joe Loss! Although in the future I danced many times to the Joe Loss Band at Hammersmith Palais in London, nothing equalled that first time I saw them at the Emp.

I spent a year or so as a student nurse at Wigan Infirmary, and I remember that the owner of the Empress, Mr Farrimond, used to let the nurses in free, and would always make room for us at the special dances, even if all the tickets were sold. He also ran the 'Palais de Dance' in Millgate, but that was rather more staid than the Empress – I heard they did Old Tyme dancing there.

**Edna Booth**

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

The views expressed in this issue are not necessarily supported by Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust. Nothing printed may be construed as policy or an official announcement unless so stated.

Neither Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust, nor the Editor, accept liability for any matter in this publication.

Contributions are welcome but no responsibility can be taken for loss or damage to contributors' material.

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

© Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust, March 2005.

# Who? Where?



The response to the Who? Where? feature in the last issue was excellent. The football match (top left) has been positively identified as taking place at Victory Park, Duke Street, Chorley, 1960's; the home team are wearing the striped shirts.

The location of the two photos on the right has been confirmed as Eckersleys Mill, Wigan, 1970's. Top right shows Frank Singleton at work in Richard Fosters, chair manufacturers, while Irving Diamond, owner of Diamond's ladies clothing manufacturers, can be seen bottom right. The other photo has not been identified, but as it came from the same source as the two from Eckersleys Mill, it is highly likely that it was taken there as well.

If you can help identify any of the photographs shown here, please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942 404432)

