

PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Heritage Service

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Seeds of Change in Wigan

£1

WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICES
discover
YOUR HERITAGE

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

museum
of **WiganLife**

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FRONT COVER

Giant dragonflies could once be found in Wigan. To find out more visit the 'Seeds of Change' exhibition. You can read a review of the exhibition on page 27.

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Letter from the Editorial Team

It's summer once again, although with all the rain, you could be forgiven for not noticing.

In this issue we invite (see page three) all would be local history writers to enter our fantastic competition. Not only are there great prizes, but the winners will be published in **PAST FORWARD**.

Our new 'Arts and Heritage Events and Exhibitions Guide July-December' is now available. It's packed with interesting and fun things to do at all arts and heritage venues in the borough. A few of our summer family activities are highlighted on page 20 and nearly all of them free. Grandparents bring along your grandchildren. If you want more information about any event or activity, please telephone 01942 828128.

You'll notice that 'Probing Pictures' where we ask readers to help identify photographs in our collection has grown somewhat in this edition. We know that you appreciate these historic images and we very much need your help to solve the mystery that surrounds them. Please get in touch if you have information.

Also in this issue the Friends of Wigan Arts and Heritage Service (see page 20) are appealing for new members. This is an excellent organisation and we greatly value the support they give to the Service. Typically, members run events and activities, undertake research and suggest ideas for projects. If you are enthusiastic about our local heritage, why not join? There are some great benefits too!

Finally, please do have a lovely summer.

Information for Contributors

If you would like to submit an article for **PAST FORWARD**, please note that:

- Publication is at discretion of Editorial Team
- The Editorial Team may edit your submission
- Submissions will remain on file until published
- Submissions may be held on file for publication in a future edition
- Published and rejected submissions will be disposed of, unless you request for them to be returned

- Articles must be received by the copy date if inclusion in the next issue is desired

Submission Guidelines

- Electronic submissions are preferred, although handwritten ones will be accepted
- We prefer articles to have a maximum length of 1,000 words
- Include photographs or images where possible – these can be returned if requested
- Include your name and address – we will not pass on your details to anyone unless you have given us permission to do so

We aim to acknowledge receipt of all submissions.

CONTACT DETAILS: pastforward@wlct.org or The Editor at **PAST FORWARD**, Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

ARTS AND HERITAGE SERVICE NEW RECRUIT



We welcome new member of staff Ruth Darling, who joins us as a part time Exhibition and Display Officer, working alongside Lisa Keys (currently on maternity leave).

Ruth says "After studying archaeology at Glasgow and Sheffield Universities, a career in heritage seemed the obvious choice. I've always loved exploring the past. I started my career cataloguing archaeology in Wakefield and moved on to running the temporary exhibition programme at Norton Priory Museum. I'm looking forward to putting this experience to good use bringing the borough's history to life through our collections and archives.

If you have great ideas for exhibitions, Ruth would be very pleased to hear from you.

PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

Past Forward Subscription
Subscription is £5 for three issues. Payment by cheque (payable to Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust), postal order or credit/debit card (telephone 01942 828128).

Please state which issue you wish your membership to begin

I am a registered blind person and would like the CD version

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Please tick here if you would like to receive information regarding Wigan Leisure & Culture activities and events. We do not pass your details to other organisations.

Return to: The Museum of Wigan Life, Past Forward Subscription, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU



WRITE 1000 WORDS WIN £100!

Do you have a passion for local history? Is there a local history topic that you would love to see featured in **PAST FORWARD**? Then why not take part in Wigan Borough Environment and Heritage Network's Local History Writing Competition?

Prizes

First Prize - £100 Second Prize - £75 Third Prize - £50

Criteria

- Articles must be a maximum of 1000 words.
- Articles must focus on a local history topic within the geographical boundaries of Wigan Borough.
- By entering the competition you agree to your work being published in Past Forward. The winning article will be published in **PAST FORWARD** Issue 59. Other submissions may also be published in Issue 59 or held on file for publication in a future edition. If selected for publication the **PAST FORWARD** Editorial Team may edit your submission.

How to enter

- Articles must be received by e-mail or post by Friday 14 October 2011.
- Electronic submissions are preferred although handwritten ones will be accepted.
- You must state clearly that your article is an entry into the Local History Writing Competition.
- You must include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address (if applicable). We will not pass your details on to anyone.
- It will not be possible for articles to be returned.
- You are welcome to include photographs or images however they cannot be returned.

Submit to

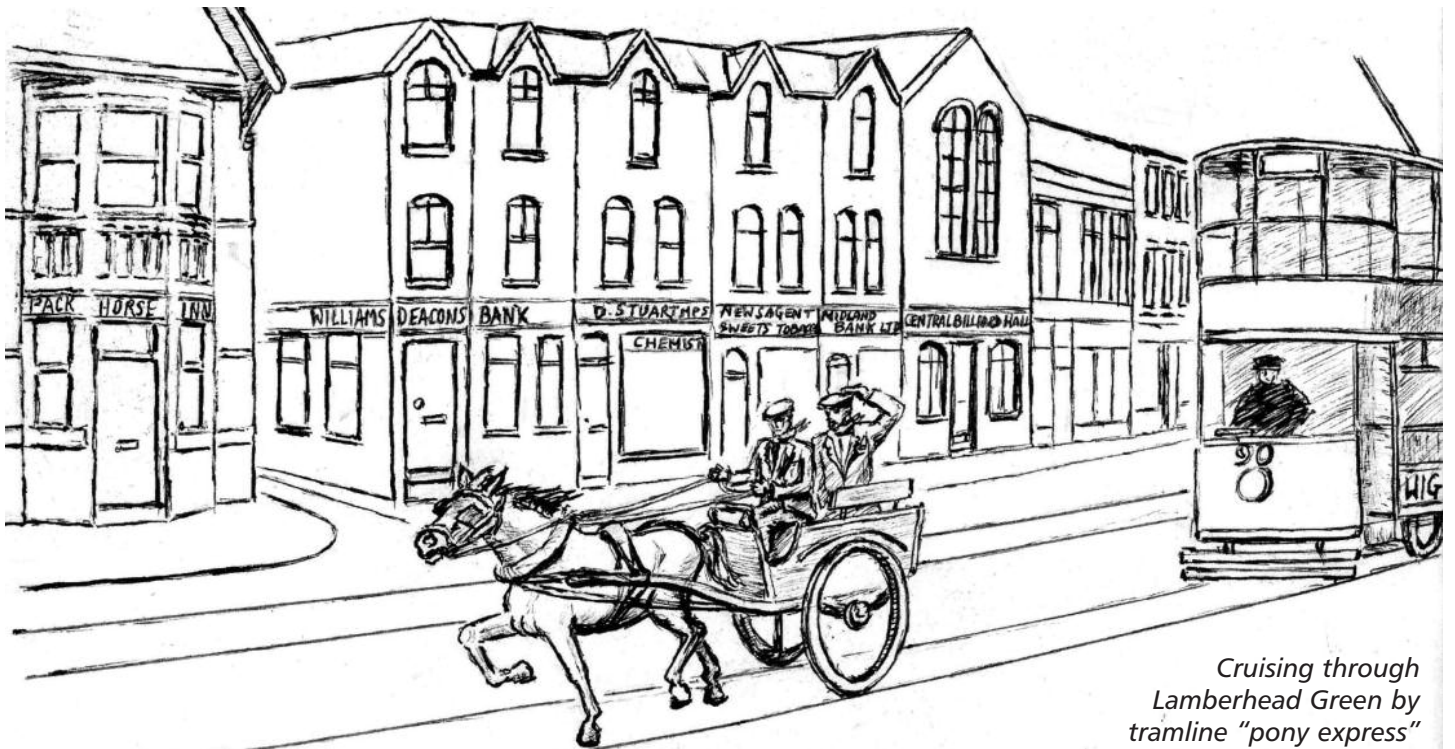
pastforward@wlct.org **OR** Local History Writing Competition, Past Forward, Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU

Copy Deadline for Issue 59

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday 28 October 2011.

Granddad's Pal

By Tony Berry



Cruising through Lamberhead Green by tramline "pony express"

During the latter part of his life my grandfather, Robert Berry, formed a friendship with James Speakman. They were living two doors apart in Mill Lane, Upholland, in the 1940's and both died in that decade in their seventies. James was quite a character and was known to all and sundry as Weezer; the actual origin and spelling of the nickname being lost in the mists of time. About 1850, their grandfathers were farmers in the Carr Lane area of Holland Moor, an agricultural region that the authorities thought fit to eradicate completely when they sanctioned the building of Skelmersdale New Town.

In his younger days, Weezer was employed as a labourer down the pit. The fact that he wasn't a fully-fledged miner could be explained by an accident that he experienced as a lad. Whilst in the grip of a fever, probably due to pneumonia, he fell out of bed and broke his leg. The fractured bone was apparently badly set by the doctor with the result that for the rest of his life he walked with a limp. He was married in 1891 but his wife died five years later, leaving him with a daughter, Jane. His latter years were spent with Jane and her husband and family.

In the 1920's, Weezer was employed as the driver of a pony and trap by Herbert Marsh, an agricultural

contractor of Hall Green, Upholland. It was then that he came into close contact with my father, William Henry Berry, who from 1927, was the driver of one of Mr. Marsh's traction engines, hauling a threshing-machine and straw-baler to farms within a large radius of Hall Green. Weezer provided the transport for some of the local workers who accompanied the machines to distant farms, and Granddad was sometimes one of these workers.

Some of the journeys that Weezer undertook were not without incident. On one occasion, at the end of a day's work at Bill Bennett's farm in Smethurst Lane, Lamberhead Green, Weezer was accompanied by my father on

the trip back to Upholland. As they pulled away from the farm the pony began to play up and Weezer had difficulty in controlling it. When they turned left on reaching Ormskirk Road, the wheels of the trap dropped into the tramlines and it became, in effect, part of the Wigan tramway system! With one masterstroke, Weezer solved his problems by giving the pony its head and they speeded along the tramlines through Lamberhead Green and Orrell to the terminus at Abbey Lakes. No doubt Weezer was able to regain control over the pony when they encountered the stiff climb up Upholland Brow.

On another occasion there was an occurrence when the pony and trap were again on the way home, this time from a farm in Billinge. The regulars of the Crawford Inn in Crawford Village were suddenly surprised when Auntie Nellie, who sometimes also accompanied my father as a helper, dashed in and exclaimed, "Come quick; our Billie and Weezer have gone into t'ditch wi' t'pony and trap!" The willing rescuers discovered that Weezer was trapped by the metal rail that was fitted across the front of the trap. "I'm dee-ing!" he declared. However, the vehicle was soon set back onto the road and was able to complete the remaining mile or two back to Bert Marsh's yard at Hall Green. Apparently the three passengers and the pony weren't badly harmed, but then people were definitely physically

tougher in those days. No doubt Weezer would have taken advantage of the nearness of the pub to down a quick pint to revive his spirits!

In the days before the NHS was established many people were rather deficient in the number of teeth they had, and Weezer was no exception. He used to tell the tale of a farmhouse meal he once had during the working day. The feast consisted of a piece of beef and the usual trimmings. Apparently the beef was so tough that Weezer had great difficulty in chewing it. In fact, instead of it being gradually consumed he swore that it grew bigger in his mouth! The dental battle with the offending meat so occupied him that he had very little opportunity to tackle the vegetables on his plate. After the meal he followed his pleasantly full companions outside, still struggling. "I chucked t'piece of beef to t'farmyard dog" recalled Weezer "and it nearly choked on it. It had tears in its eyes as big as saucers!" After several tellings, the tears became "as big as that barn door theer" when he realised the entertainment value of his tale. In direct contrast to the above experience, Weezer was pleased to compliment the farmer on the tenderness of the meat in another farmhouse meal. After the meal the farmer confided that the meat had come from a colt which had been put down after breaking a leg!

There was a certain farmer who literally held on to his money as long as possible when the time came for the farm helpers to be

paid. According to Weezer, when he was parting with his cash he sighed so deeply that it seemed to come from the bottom of his boots! Grandad and Weezer seemed to share a certain empathy. One day, they were standing in the street with my father when a man walked by. "Wasn't that Whatsisname from Wheredoyoucallit?" enquired Grandad. "Aye, that's him." confirmed Weezer. "I thowt it were" said Granddad "only I weren't quite sure." leaving my father no wiser as to the identity of the man or his place of residence. If Weezer became enthralled when listening to one of Grandad's many tales, he would use the expression "Good lawkshuss days, Robert!"

Like many of his generation Weezer couldn't read and write. Grandad once made out a stamped, addressed envelope for him, probably in his best copper-plate writing, giving him the title 'Mr James Weezer Speakman Esquire'. This was, and still is, the kind of joke that one good friend would play upon another.

I don't actually recall meeting Weezer myself. Since I was only four years old when he died in 1943, aged 77 years. My brother Bill, who is five years older, remembers him as a man of perhaps average height and build who wore a cloth cap at a rakish angle, as would befit one of the old-time characters.

Your Archives

We are very pleased to announce that the Wigan Archives Service has achieved a 3* award in The National Archives assessment scheme (from a possible 4*). We are very proud of this award and would like to thank all of the staff, volunteers and researchers who have helped us raise standards and improve the service to this level.



The Earl of Crawford at work in his study at Haigh Hall.

the wage books, farm accounts and plans, many interesting or unusual documents are listed, including Lord Crawford's Masonic certificates, the Haigh Workmen's Christmas beef lists and a letter from the Potato Marketing Board on a new marketing scheme.

The new list is fully searchable and can be found on the Archive Collections pages of the Archives website.

Downstairs at the Town Hall in the Archive strongrooms, we are well underway with important decorating work in some of our storage areas. Please bear with us if there are small delays in the retrieval of some collections during this period, and look out for the Town Hall Tours during the Heritage Open Days if you would like a look behind the scenes when we're finished.

Recent Acquisitions

New listings continue as usual thanks to the work of Archive staff and volunteers. Collections accepted or listed in the last few months include:

- Church of the Nazarene, Atherton (Wigan and Leigh), Register of Marriages, 1996 (Acc. 2011/13)
- Gerard of Ashton-in-Makerfield Estate, Mining and Legal Records, 19th century (Acc. 2011/15)
- Leigh and District Nursing Association, Minutes 1962-2002 (Acc. 2011/19)
- John Taylor Photographic Collection, images of buildings, sporting teams, societies and families, aerial images and street scenes of Leigh and district, 1900-2000 (Acc. 2011/18)
- John Hosker Collection, Pretoria Pit Disaster (Acc. 2011/21)

- Orrell and Lamberhead Green Methodist Circuit, Meeting minutes, Manses Trust, 1958-1976 (Acc. 2011/28)
- Photographs of Leigh Holiday Camps; St Joseph's Church and School (Acc. 2011/60)

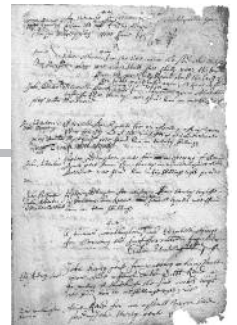
Details of the collections listed above are available from the Archives Service, as is further information on other recent acquisitions.

Collections Corner: Court Records

In archives across the country, court records are some of the best and most fully preserved types of records. Courts have always needed to gather evidence, document decisions and maintain a record of their judgments. For contemporaries, the creation of the written record reinforced the verdict and supported the legitimacy of the court as presiding bodies. For historians, the surviving records can be used to support research in a variety of areas.

Wigan has a particularly rich historical record of crime and punishment. Before the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, Wigan was effectively governed by the manorial court leet (records from 1626) an administrative and judicial function deriving from the privileges held from the crown. Wigan's size, importance and autonomy as a borough allowed the operation of further courts with local jurisdiction including the court of common pleas records (from 1616) and the court of quarter sessions (from 1733).

These courts dealt with judicial cases of assault, trespass, slander, nuisance, trade disputes, debt and petty larceny, as well administrative matters as diverse as alehousekeeper licensing, trade petitions, accounts of fairs and the recording of the admission of burgesses. These are records of great importance for family historians tracing ancestors as well as those interested in imagining Wallgate on market day 300 years ago. The accumulated details of daily life allow us to form a detailed picture of a society and give an insight into the daily lives of people of all walks of life. We see common labourers as "aliens" seeking the right to remain in the town, members of the growing pewterers' guild negotiating trade rights; we perhaps sympathise with the rector of Wigan's attempts to curtail drunken behaviour in the town, and wonder what became of a young couple, Thomas Worthington and Elizabeth Ashurst, found guilty in early 1656 by the presiding John Anderton, of "Comitting the sin of Fornicacion together". One can only wonder.



Wigan Court Leet, 1656, Thomas Worthington and Elizabeth Ashurst

William (1868-1937) Henry Lax

By Tony
Ashcroft

The Dan Leno of Methodism

William Henry Lax was better known in later life as 'Lax of Poplar'. He was born in the Chorlton district of Manchester in 1868 to Samuel Henry and Jane (nee Tatley). In 1871 the family were living at Wigan Road, Hindley. His father, who was a naturalized British subject from Hamburg, was listed as an unemployed iron-moulder. Ten years later on the 1881 census his occupation was given as an assurance agent. Also by then his first wife had died (in 1877) and he had remarried to Mary Ann Lowe (in 1878). His son William was employed as an apprentice printer.

In the late 1860s Samuel and Jane attended a mission in Wigan conducted by a Peter Mackenzie. They both were converted, and Jane promised that their unborn child (who turned out to be William) would be dedicated to God. Unfortunately Jane did not live to see him preach or become a Methodist minister and missionary.

Prior to joining the Methodist ministry, William was an apprentice printer in Hindley. He also had a stutter which he managed to overcome after attending a meeting in a small Salvation hall. He then managed to preach his first sermon in a local Primitive Methodist chapel. By 1892 he entered Didsbury College, and five years later the well known preacher Hugh Price Hughes asked him to be his colleague in London. On 2 August 1899 he married Minnie Boswell. Hugh Price Hughes and Charles Ensor Walters acted as officiating ministers.

When he went to the mission in West London he was a junior minister on the staff but eventually became senior London missionary.

He ministered for 25 years at Poplar and in recognition of his work he was elected Mayor of Poplar in 1918. Although never a councillor, he had been co-opted on to the council as an Alderman twelve years earlier. Poplar, a local government district of London was founded in 1855 and became a metropolitan borough in 1900. However by 1965 it was abolished and became part of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

During his time at Poplar, William had the privilege of meeting George V on three separate occasions. One was when the then Duke of York opened the Poplar Mission Hall (the King George Social Centre). He also talked with the King when he met the monarch at Buckingham Palace. Besides royalty, William met the music hall artist Dan Leno who is reputed to have challenged him to appear with him at Drury Lane as 'Leno and Lax'.

He also appeared in a film for the Religious Films Society. This society was the brainchild of J Arthur Rank a staunch Methodist himself. Rank collaborated with William on a film called 'Mastership' which cost £2700 and opened in 1934. If any reader watched the early Sunday evening programme 'Songs of Praise' a little while ago featuring J Arthur Rank, then they will have seen the snippet featuring William himself.

Should any reader have additional information about this Hindley lad who became a famous missionary I would be pleased to hear from them.

Editor's note: The book 'Lax of Poplar by himself' published by the Epworth Press in 1927 can be consulted in the Museum of Wigan Life.



Who lived in my house

By Yvonne Eckersley

Until recently, I had not considered who had lived in my first house before I bought it in 1970. I knew their surname and what they looked like, courtesy of photographs found in the house. I knew the man died in tragic circumstances and was told he may be related in some way to Annie Kenney, the working class northern suffragette. There it lay for over forty years.

Then a friend discovered an inquest report and an obituary of Reginald (Reg) Kenney in the Leigh Journal. The report named my father-in-law as principal witness. Using the obituary as my starting point I began my research.

Family Background

Utilising census and Google searches I established that Reg Kenney was born in Saddleworth in 1873. He was the oldest of 12 children born to Ann Wood and Horatio Nelson Kenney. One sibling was the said Annie Kenney, suffragette. The 1891 census records he was born in Saddleworth and was a "piecer of cotton". During the 1901 census he was still in Saddleworth, now a commercial traveller (books). He worked for a Manchester publisher until his retirement. He married Lizzie Proctor in 1902. The 1911 census shows them living in Lytham where their five children were born. Lizzie died in 1923. He married Margaret E Williams at Kingsleigh Methodist Church, Leigh in 1940 aged 67. The

Registers of Electors held in Leigh Library show he moved into his bride's home, where he remained until his death in April 1957. Margaret died in 1970.

Politics

According to the notes to The Kenney Papers held at the University of East Anglia, archived correspondence shows he had a formative influence on his siblings' politics and interest in social welfare. Four of his siblings Annie, Jane, Jessie and Caroline were active in political reform. His politics lay on the left. Ramsay Macdonald, Phillip Snowden and Victor Grayson, were personal friends.

In 1935 he stood (unsuccessfully) as an Independent Social Credit

Parliamentary candidate for the Bradford North constituency. What I find intriguing, given his political background, is not so much that he stood against a Labour candidate but he stood against one of the few, newly enfranchised, female candidates in that election. One cannot help but wonder what his feminist sisters thought.

Literary Societies

Guided by the obituary, I read the Leigh Literary Society records housed at Wigan Archives, discovering he was an active member and its President in 1944-5. His main sphere of interest lay in the Literature and Arts Section of the Society. His presentations for the Society reflected his deep love of northern literary culture.

In 1911 he joined the Lancashire Author's Association (LAA). This Association was formed in 1909 and included men like Allen Clarke (also known as Teddy Ashton and Ben Adhem) writer and proprietor of Teddy Ashton's Northern Weekly and many other prominent Lancashire writers.

As the name suggests the LAA's focus was Lancashire, with strong emphasis on the experiences and character of its workers, writers, literature, poetry, prose, and dialect. His obituary in their magazine, *The Record*, suggests he had a gregarious personality. He often gave "entertainment evenings" where his performances of Lancashire writers' (Edwin Waugh, Ben Brierley, Sam Laycock and Aamon Wrigley) dialect-speaking characters evoked "tears and laughter". This keen interest in Lancashire's culture was continued here in Leigh where attendance at his presentation of 'A Lancashire Night in Song and Story' was excellent.

Outdoor Interests

Like many of his contemporaries in the LAA, he enjoyed the outdoor life. As well as enjoying

companionship with like minds, his forays into the countryside led him to write the guides to Lancashire, the Lake District and North Wales mentioned in his obituary. I found many of his friends were interconnected. For instance Tom Hughes of Wigan's Pemberton Cycling Club (and later of Wigan Wheelers) with Allen Clarke and Robert Blatchford of the Social Democratic Federation and the Clarion Cycling Club. Also, whilst living on the Fylde coast (Clarke's "Windmill Land") there were shared friends in the Blackpool Rambling Club. Whilst on rambles, *The Record* reports he would recite poetry or prose "just as the passing mood caught him....reaching his listeners with such startling force and intensity of feeling".

Pennington Hall

Undeniably, without Reg Kenney's successful campaign in 1949 to save Pennington Hall from demolition, a generation of Leigh people would have none of the fond memories of Pennington Hall or its Museum they now enjoy.

Beginning on the 11 January 1949, Leigh Borough Minute Books and the Leigh Journal record the proposal to demolish the hall, people's protests against this and its temporary salvation. Council minutes record how Pennington Hall was in such a poor state of repair the council instructed the town surveyor to inspect it and give his recommendations. He recommended demolition and a new purpose-built hall erected in its place, with its entrance in Pennington Avenue. Consequently, councillors resolved to demolish the hall.

Reg Kenney's campaign began with the publication in *The Journal* of a discursive tour of the hall's interior, describing the grandeur of its features and included an account of its history. He stressed its importance as a centre for Leigh's cultural heritage and as one of the town's oldest buildings.

He called for Leigh people to inform the council of their objection to the proposed demolition, giving clear guidelines on how they could do this. He began a postcard campaign. People were urged to send a postcard to the council stating their objections. The fate of the hall touched a nerve, postcards were sent and letters in support of keeping the hall were published in the press. The hall was granted a reprieve, some work was done to prevent further decay and the hall was saved until its final demolition in 1963.

Unfortunately this article has to end on a tragic note. When questioned at the inquest into Mr Kenney's death, Mr Norman Eckersley told how he had found his friend with his head on a burning fire in the front room of the house. The inquest found this was the cause of his death.

Sources:

Wigan Archives

Leigh Library - Local History Section

Accrington Library - LAA Archive

University of East Anglia -

The Kenney Papers



*Reginald Kenney
at his home in
St Helens Road, Leigh*

The Tragic Story of Arthur Ward

by Bill Melling

Although most of the documents in the Archives are `originals`, a small proportion are copies of material brought in by people who wish to retain their originals but are happy for its content to be on the public record. The story that follows is based on just such a collection of letters and newspaper cuttings that were copied some years ago.

The time was Christmas 1899 and life was sweet for 35 year old, ex soldier Arthur Ward, the landlord of the Waterloo Inn in Lyon Street, off Wallgate, Wigan. He was happily married to Annie and had a two year old daughter, May, the apple of his eye and two much loved teenage step daughters who looked on him as their father. He was a popular `man about town`, a keen supporter of Wigan Cricket club and probably, though it is not possible to confirm it, a volunteer in the Lancashire Hussars. The Hussars were the local unit of the County Yeomanry, the nineteenth century equivalent of the present day territorial army.

Meanwhile, 6000 miles away in South Africa the Boer War was at its height and the British army had just suffered a series of three crushing defeats in what became known as "black week". British thinking and tactics had changed little since the Crimean War, 45 years previously, and were no match for the well armed, highly mobile Boers who were fighting on their own ground, the wide open spaces of the African veldt. Back in London, following these disasters, there was some fast thinking and one of the conclusions was that what was needed was mounted infantry. On 13 December 1899 the War Office decided to call for volunteers from

the County Yeomanry and on Christmas Eve a Royal Warrant was issued setting up the Imperial Yeomanry. This called for men aged between 20 and 35 who were good riders and marksmen and who were to provide their own horses, clothing and saddles and accoutrements. They were to dress in "Norfolk jackets of woollen material and of neutral colour, breeches and gaiters, lace boots and felt hats". Arthur volunteered immediately and became Sergeant Ward, number 8991 in the 32nd Lancashire Hussars, 2nd Battalion of the Imperial Yeomanry. He was whisked away to a camp at Southport leaving Annie to run the Waterloo Inn, a prospect which she obviously did not relish since in his first letter home he wrote "I hope my dear wife that you will look at me going away the same as I do. I think that it is my duty to my country & to our Queen". He goes on to describe in loving terms how much he is missing her and the children but rather spoils the otherwise affectionate letter by closing "You must bear up darling, all will be right soon, you might send me a few shillings by return post and send me a shirt and two pairs of socks".

On the 1 February 1900 the Lancashire Hussars sailed from Southampton on the troopship Lake Erie bound for Cape Town where they arrived on the 25 February. Arthur`s next two letters described a very pleasant voyage with good weather, excellent food and concerts or sporting contests most evenings. The only downside to the voyage was that a large number of horses died although Arthur boasted that he only lost one of the thirty under his charge. He goes on to recount how, on departure from England, they were showered with gifts from well-wishers including a box from Oldfield`s Brewery (the owners of the Waterloo Inn) containing three bottles of brandy, three of port, three sherry, three champagne, a box of cigars, 2lb of tobacco, a pipe and a cigar holder. A delighted Arthur commented "If this is going to war let it go on for ever"!

Along with the Imperial Yeomanry, reinforcements had been pouring into South Africa from all parts of the Empire and at last the British were getting the upper hand. This led to a change of tactics by the Boers who now avoided direct confrontation and instead resorted to guerrilla warfare. They used groups of highly mobile troops, known as commandos, who mounted surprise attacks on British outposts and lines of communication and then disappeared into the 150,000 square miles of wilderness that constituted the South African Veldt.

For the next three months, Arthur and the 30 men of his section, were part of a flying column whose job it was to hunt down and destroy these Boer commandos. They rode many hundreds of miles, often with little food or shelter, and got very frustrated at their lack of success in getting to grips with the enemy, apart from a few minor skirmishes with small groups of stragglers. Nevertheless, Arthur found his return to soldiering very exciting and this comes over very clearly in the 12 letters he wrote to family and friends during this period. In one of his letters to Annie he wrote "I would not have missed the sights I have seen for £1000, I can't tell you what it is like to hear the cannon roar and see troops moving like clockwork and bugles sounding, drums beating and men galloping up and down the valleys. It is worth half a man's life to see and hear it". Despite his enthusiasm for the job in hand he missed his family very much and told Annie "It is an old saying and a true one that you only need to part from anyone to find out if you care for them. The only thing I am short of is to see your dear face and the children again".

On the 25 May he wrote to "My Dear Wife & Daughters" telling them that they had finally caught up with the enemy and expected to engage them in the near future. He closed his letter "I hope my dear that I shall be spared to join you all again for I am longing to see your dear faces but if I am taken it is God's will and my time must have come but I shall be all right. I must close for it is getting late and my candle will soon be out so my Darlings my best and fondest love to you all, kisses for my pet and all, Your affectionate husband and father, Arthur "

A week later, late in the afternoon of Friday 1 June 1900, Annie received a telegram "Regret to report 8991 Sergeant AD Ward 32nd company Imperial Yeomanry killed at Kheis 28th May". Poor Annie's grief must have been compounded by the fact that it took at least five weeks for a letter to come from South Africa so that most of Arthur's letters would have arrived in the weeks following the fatal telegram. Matters would not have been helped by a letter in the local paper, from a fellow Lancashire Hussar, describing the battle in which her husband

was killed. The Hussars had chased a group of Boers back to their laager (a defensive encampment) which was being shelled by the British artillery. In their enthusiasm they galloped too far and as well as coming under heavy fire from the Boers they were being shelled by their own guns "It was horrible to think about, but only too true. On one side Boers firing and above them our own guns. Men were falling all round killed and wounded. One Sergeant from Wigan named Ward was shot through the stomach and came out at the back, he died".

In a letter of condolence to Annie his commanding officer wrote "We one and all mourn the loss and sad death of so gallant a friend. I buried him myself and although there is only a rough cross over his grave at present I have made arrangements that a proper stone be placed there as soon as peace is declared".

Now widowed for the second time in her life Annie continued to manage the Waterloo Inn and she was still the landlady during the First World War. As well as Arthur's own letters the collection also contains copies of letters between May, his daughter, and her soldier sweetheart in France, but that as they say is another story.



Statue commemorating Wigan men who fell in the Boer War, Mesnes Park, Wigan

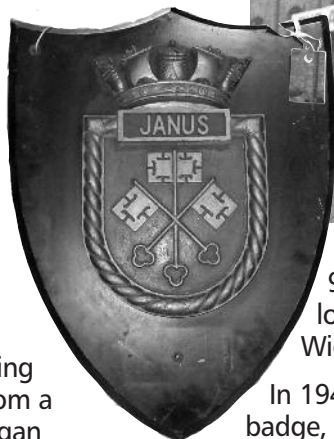
HMS Janus Ship's Badge

HMS Janus was a destroyer ship adopted by the people of Wigan during The Second World War. In November 1939 the War Office had set up the War Savings Campaign. War Savings were not only limited to the purchase of certificates and bonds, but also used local collections to raise money for aeroplanes, tanks and any items which were urgently needed for the war effort. National Savings campaigns like 'Salute the Soldier,' 'Spitfire Week', 'Wings Week' and 'Warship Week' were set up, with local areas organising their own related fundraising events.

In November 1941 Wigan held its own 'Warship Week', the aim being to raise £700,000 to adopt HMS Janus. The opening ceremony of Warship Week took place from a stage erected near the Market Hall on Wigan Market Square and was witnessed by a large crowd of townspeople. The stage was adorned with national emblems. Among those present were the Earl of Crawford, the patron of Warship Week and the Mayor. The Earl of Crawford said "savings throughout the country were splendid but they were not enough... It was our duty to see that everything that could be saved should be saved." Captain Elgood attended to represent the Officers and Crew of HMS Janus. He is reported as saying "people who invested money in Warship Weeks were investing in the best security in the world, and Wigan, in common with other Lancashire towns, had done wonderfully in that direction." During Warship Week itself £561,767 was raised. The ship was adopted by the town and its exploits regularly reported in the local papers.


In August 1942 a ceremony was held at which this replica of HMS Janus' ship's badge, was presented to the Mayor of Wigan. The replica badge is made from wood and in the centre is a gold gilt emblem. The emblem consists of three crossed keys surrounded by a rope-like border. The word 'JANUS' is above the keys and above this is a crown-shape made out of the sails and bows of several ships. The ceremony was held in the Council Chamber at Wigan Town Hall. Officers of HMS Janus attended the ceremony as well as local individuals who had been, and continued to be, involved in the savings effort. Captain Elgood presented the ship's badge to the Mayor on behalf of the Officers and Crew of HMS Janus. In return the Mayor presented a metal plaque to Captain Elgood to be placed on the ship.


HMS Janus played an important role in World War II, participating in the Battle of Calabria in July 1940 and the Battle of Cape Matapan in March 1941. She was also involved in convoy duties and operations in Norwegian waters, Alexandria, Malta, Piraeus and Crete. In January 1944 she was hit by torpedo during an air attack off



Anzio and sank with heavy loss of life. There were 94 survivors but tragically 158 of ship's company lost their lives. A memorial service was held at Wigan Parish Church.

In 1942, when the Mayor was presented with the ship's badge, he said that "it would be given an honoured place in the town and amongst their treasures." He went on to say that it would be appreciated fully, not only by the present generation of Wiganers, but also by future generations, who would value its historical associations. Accordingly the HMS Janus Plaque is on display at the Museum of Wigan Life.

Museum Shop




Museum of Wigan Life

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For further information contact
The Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan

01942 828128

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Something New

The Museum of Wigan Life regularly receives donations of objects from local people. To showcase some of these new acquisitions there is a small display in the local and family history study area at the museum, which is refreshed throughout the year.

If you'd like to find out more about the objects recently donated to the museum collection then come along to our Something New talk on Tuesday 6 September at 2.30pm. The talk will be held at the Museum of Wigan Life, the talk is free and there is no need to book. For more information, call Jenny Broadbent, Collections Officer on 01942 827594.

If you have an object you would like to donate to the museum collection then please contact Yvonne Webb, Collections Manager on 01942 828123.

Items recently accepted into the museum:

- C11.002 – Mizpah brooch in box, given to Ann Corrigan by Thomas Birkett
- C11.003 - Mug, Royal Albert Edward Infirmary centenary Cup, 1873-1973
- C11.004 - MBE certificate presented to Miss Elizabeth Hodson 10 June 1948
- C11.005 - spade, Bulldog Tools, initialled 'BH'
- C11.006 - Mug, Old English Night, Leigh Borough Council, 13 April 1972



NEW EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF WIGAN LIFE

What a Picture!

**16 SEPTEMBER 2011
UNTIL JANUARY 2012**

Love photography?

Want to improve your skills?

Then come along to our new exhibition by Wigan Photographic Society. The exhibition will feature the work of very talented Society members. Each author will also present a small piece about themselves and what photography means to them.

To accompany the exhibition, the Society have organised a series of free drop-in 'camera clinics' to help you improve your skills, or just to have a good time. These include 'Photoshop – basic editing' (15 October), 'Choosing the right camera for Christmas' (19 November), 'Taking Better pictures of your family' (26 November). There is also a half term event for children aged 4-11 'What a picture – say cheese!' who will be able to dress up in Victorian costume, have their picture taken then mount it and take it home (25 & 27 October £2.50). There is something going on virtually every Saturday throughout the exhibition. You can find full details in our new Events and Exhibition Guide (July-December) or telephone 01942 828128.

The exhibition will also feature our online historic photographic archive 'Wigan Images' <http://wiganimages.wlct.org/>. The site currently has 5,000 images from around the borough, and there are plans to add more.

They say that a picture is worth a thousand words, so come and find out for yourself!

SUNDAYS

By Les Thornley

AT 32 KENDAL STREET

I am old now, and haven't lived in Wigan or thereabouts for sixty years. But I was born in Wigan at 230 Gidlow Lane in 1925. We moved as a family to live with my grandparents in 1929 at 32 Kendal Street. 32 Kendal Street was the caretaker's house next to the Independent Methodist Chapel and Sunday School which occupied part of one side of the street. My grandparents were religious, making it inevitable that their influence spread over me and Sundays became more disciplined and organised than my daily school days. Grandad was a retired shot firer (specialist miner) and Grandma an ex cotton mill worker, who started work at 12. Dad was a postman and Mum an ex shorthand typist.

The house of smooth Victorian brick was dark in the lightest places with an aspidistra-laden parlour complete with damp, uncut moquette furniture. Next to the parlour was the dining come living room with its enormous, hissing, black-leaded fireplace serviced by grandmother every Friday morning. The kitchen come bathroom was off the dining room. We all washed and bathed in there with its large rectangular Belfast sink and Ascot gas water heater for the times when the hissing black monster in the living room was unlit. In the far corner of the kitchen was a large cupboard which housed a full size bath. This amazingly folded up into the cupboard to stand on its end. No, you didn't bathe vertically; it pulled down until it stood on the floor on its four feet. I don't remember using it. My bath was in a galvanised tub in front of the living room fire.

So, how was my Sunday? There was at 10.30am on Sunday morning a children's service in the

church usually conducted by the preacher of the day. All preachers on the Independent Methodist Circuits were lay preachers; some were local but a few came from outside the area. My grandfather was also Sunday School Superintendent and as such, he entertained lay preachers to lunch and tea when required. On these Sundays a fire was lit in the front room causing the wilting aspidistra to perk up and the dampness to escape from the uncut moquette.

The chapel was a square building with a front entrance into a wide, shallow vestibule which housed the hymn books and other bits and bobs. Entrance to the body of the church was by a door at each end of the vestibule. Once inside there were blocks of pews down each side and a large central block. Facing the central block was the pulpit behind which was a splendid pipe organ. The choir was seated on each side of the pulpit and next to the organ. In the early days the air for the organ was supplied by a large bellows activated by a couple of lads from the congregation but by the 1930s this was replaced by, I think, a compressor. At the far end of the church and on each side were two small rooms where brides and grooms signed the necessary papers and sometimes small classes were held. It was a pleasant place. The pews were a pleasant reddish brown colour and it was light and airy

The morning services were eminently forgettable and sometimes chaotic depending upon whether or not the preacher had any idea how to deal with children. I should think the service lasted for about 45 minutes and then for me it was back next door for lunch. On Sundays we were not allowed to play with toys and also sweets and ice cream were strictly forbidden. Reading a book or the 'Sunday Companion' was the only entertainment permitted.

The afternoon was religion again, that is Sunday School. The church hall where it was held was next

to the church and separated from it by an open passage. Its layout was much the same as the chapel except it was more spartan. The front had a raised platform and there were the rooms and a kitchen at the back. Segregation was absolute. The boys sat at the back on the right hand side, the girls in the centre, the small children at the front. I sat with the older boys like Ronnie Grice and Bert Southworth, and one or two others whose names I forget. They were about five years older than I was. Bert was killed in France in the Second World War and Ronnie was a Japanese POW. I don't know what happened to him. Two of the girls were Kathleen Watersgill, a tall, slim attractive young lady and another one called Shaw. These young ladies were much admired by the lads and the subject of much discussion and imaginative speculation. The format was simple. We sang a couple of hymns, listened to announcements from the secretary (my Dad) and then we retired to one of the back rooms for a lecture usually by one of the senior members of the church.

The Sunday School room was the equivalent of the church hall. Drama productions were held there on the stage at the front. My Mum took a leading role in 'The Bishop's Candlesticks'. There were whist drives, beetle drives, Lancashire hot pot suppers (my favourite) and various children's performances. Dancing was strictly not allowed and, being Methodist, no alcoholic drink was permitted. But nonetheless, it was an active, well supported church community.

After Sunday School we sometimes had a short walk before the evening service which started at 6pm. If the preacher was from out of town he had tea with us, having previously spent some time in our front room sauna to prepare his sermon.

The evening service saw my third religious injection of the day. But for me it was quite interesting and even enjoyable. For a start, I was allowed to stand in the vestibule and give out the hymn books as well as being allowed to sit in 'our' pew along with my Dad and Mum when she was not singing in the choir.

One of the highlights in the early 1930s was to see a farmer from Beech Hill (I think his name was Gill or Darren) arrive at the church in horse and trap leaving his horse tethered to a gas lamp

for the duration of the service. Another interesting occurrence which happened usually in the midst of the sermon, from one Obadiah Rigby who sat on the left hand side, would declare to the rest of the congregation in a very loud voice, "Praise the Lord". Once a month communion was held which involved a small cube of bread and a thimble full of blackcurrant wine. I was allowed to help in the preparation of the bread; Grandma would cut slices from a loaf then I would cut the slices into small cubes which were placed on a silver platter. After the communion service was over I collected up the small glasses and, if there were any untouched glasses left over, I drank them! I ate all the bread cubes too! Grandparents did not approve.

So I ended my Sunday; in many ways stricter and longer than a school day. But I never resented it; for me it was a way of life which I accepted and a happy one. In the spring of 1935 we left my grandparent's house and the church going to live out of town and so losing touch with the church. But the strong non-conformist teaching and principles have always stayed with me.



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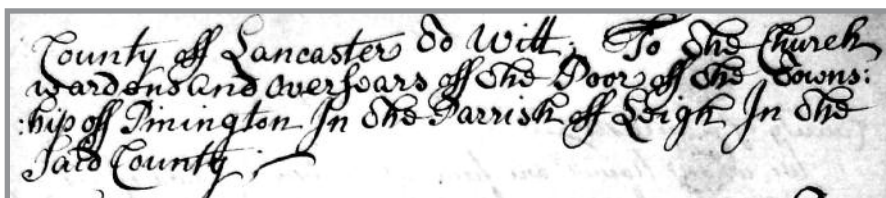
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Why

Keep Records

By Bob Evans



Most of the historical records in the archives were not kept to provide present day readers with accounts of social history but for immediate practical reasons. Parish administration from the seventeenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly in respect of the provision of poor relief, could not have been possible without the production and secure storage of written documents. The 1601 Elizabethan Poor Law Act required an Overseer of the Poor to levy a rate to provide help to those in the township community who were unable to support themselves. The more fortunate ratepayers, perhaps reluctantly, accepted responsibility for the provision of relief to poorer members of their own community but quite naturally objected if outsiders came in and requested help. After 1666 the Settlement Laws required people to have 'settlement rights' in a township to be eligible for support. In most cases proof was necessary that their male ancestors had lived in that township. Additional qualifications included serving an apprenticeship, possessing land valued over £10 per year or providing evidence of continuous employment for a period of more than one year in a township. Following marriage a woman received the settlement rights of her husband.

Township records, such as those for Pennington on which this account is based, were written and safeguarded to provide the evidence of settlement in a township. From the late seventeenth until the mid eighteenth centuries, Settlement Certificates were provided for people who wished to move to other townships as guarantees that the township from which they came would receive them back in the event of their falling into poverty. Pennington overseers saved both originals brought by people wishing to come into Pennington, and hand-written copies of others given to Pennington people moving elsewhere. An example of the former, the heading of which is shown above, was made out in 1737 by the overseer of the township of "Tildsley with Shakerley" for the family of John Hindley who "were desirous ffor their more Convenient and

Better way of Living to Reside and Dwell ffor Some Time in the Said township of Pinnington." Most of the certificates were issued for men, accompanied by their wives and children, and only occasionally for single women. In 1695 Jane Gorce of "Haddock" wished to be allowed "to live with her mother in Pinnington" as her husband had "gone to be a soldier." Without the protection they offered obtaining help could be difficult. In 1700 Henry Moss had brought his family from Flixton carrying a certificate stating they wished "to Inhabit and dwell within yr said Towne of Leigh." When, 29 years later, they must have been in need of relief and wished to return, the Flixton overseer wrote "Tho' I had once a Copy of the Certificate relating to the family....I have it not now and have forgot how it was". He then appears to promise a new one if Pennington agreed to allow the family to stay.

By the latter eighteenth century population mobility had increased to such an extent that, perhaps it was impractical to insist on newcomers providing this elaborate formal legal proof and in 1795 Parliament decided that they were no longer required until relief was requested. Also, in many cases where settlement was not in doubt, the overseer of the claimant's legal settlement township agreed to pay a small regular allowance allowing the recipient to remain rather than insisting on physical removal.

Removal orders and hence liability for relief provision could be challenged. If settlement was uncertain or disputed the Justices held examinations, hearings at which they considered evidence given by those seeking relief and the overseers of the townships involved. The Pennington records include examples of both removal orders and examinations. The latter make fascinating reading, summarising the life history of people and families together with the circumstances which they became paupers. Brief extracts illustrate how the Pennington overseers were called upon to justify relief entitlement on the basis of the settlement criteria listed earlier.

Male descent was the main qualification with married women receiving their husbands' settlement rights. This is why, in 1772, Mary Hunter requested help to return to her original family home in Leicestershire. She had married Thomas, her second husband, when he was a soldier in Dublin before returning to Pennington which was his settlement. While she visited friends in Leicestershire, her husband "she verily believes joined his regiment now lying in Ireland.....and she is destitute of any means of providing for herself".

Claimants sometimes referred to more than one generation of male parents. And settlement entitlement was made even stronger if supported with documentary evidence of property ownership. Such appears to be the case in 1856 when Pennington sought to justify a removal order for James Kitchen. Detailed evidence was given that both his father and grandfather owned and paid rates for property valued over £10 in Balderstone near Blackburn. The final sentence reads "we shall avail ourselves of all or some of the above mentioned grounds of removal and particulars of settlement in support of the said removal".

Reference was made to existing documentation when in 1842 Runcorn sent an order for the return of Samuel Basnett. Pennington's responsibility for Samuel was proved by the enclosure of a copy of a removal order, dated 13 June 1811, for Samuel's mother, Martha Basnett a widow, and her four children, one of whom must have been Samuel. Also included was a letter from William Rigby, the 1811 Runcorn overseer, confirming that he had taken the family to Pennington and then brought them back after Pennington agreed to provide an allowance This was proof that Pennington had accepted responsibility for Martha's children presumably on the basis of Martha' husband's settlement being in Pennington.

Apprenticeship Indentures could provide proof. In 1811 James Garton was in need of relief in Pennington. His father, Joseph, gave evidence that Great Bolton should take responsibility as his son had been bound apprentice there as a clogger. In 1843 when Samuel Parry was asking for relief in Pennington the overseer, Samuel Irlam, argued that Frodsham

should be responsible as he understood that Samuel's father had completed an apprenticeship there. Unfortunately the Pennington overseer had to admit "Since I examined the said Indenture I have accidentally lost the same."

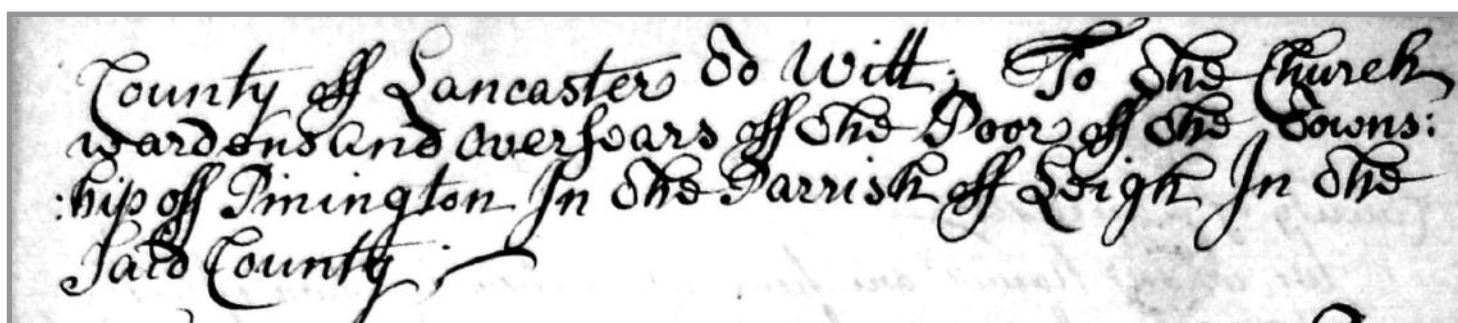
In 1794 the Wigan overseer used evidence from the examination of Thomas Sisson, married with six children, to argue that though he originally came from Westmorland Thomas had been engaged for periods of employment greater than twelve months in Pennington and therefore that township was liable for the cost of his relief. As Thomas was "in deep Consumption and is now rendered unable to follow his employment" he threatened unless Pennington agreed to recompense Wigan "I shall be under the necessity of refusing relief to such families as we resident with you"

In 1849 overseer's records should have been sufficient to provide justification for Manchester ordering the removal of the two illegitimate daughters of Ellen Battersby, deceased. They would have been able to confirm that Mary, the elder daughter, was Pennington's responsibility "by being born illegitimate in the workhouse in Pennington,...Ellen Battersby being an inmate of the Workhouse." Additionally, Pennington had acknowledged responsibility for the family by "giving Ellen regular relief while residing in Manchester."

We must be grateful first to the many parish officers originally responsible for these records then to the succeeding local government councillors who recognized the importance of their preservation before they were placed into the care of our local archives. In the near future it may be that the human stories they so often tell can become much more accessible by the professional digitisation of at least some of the documents.

Sources and acknowledgements

The account is based on the Pennington records from Tr Pe/C/4/1 and C/5/1-3 contained in Box labelled C2-C4 Thanks are due to the archivist and staff of the Wigan Archives Department in Leigh Town Hall for making the records available



County of Lancaster do with To the Church
Warden and Overseers of the Poor of the Town of
Pennington in the Parish of Leigh in the
Said County

Walk the canal in Leigh

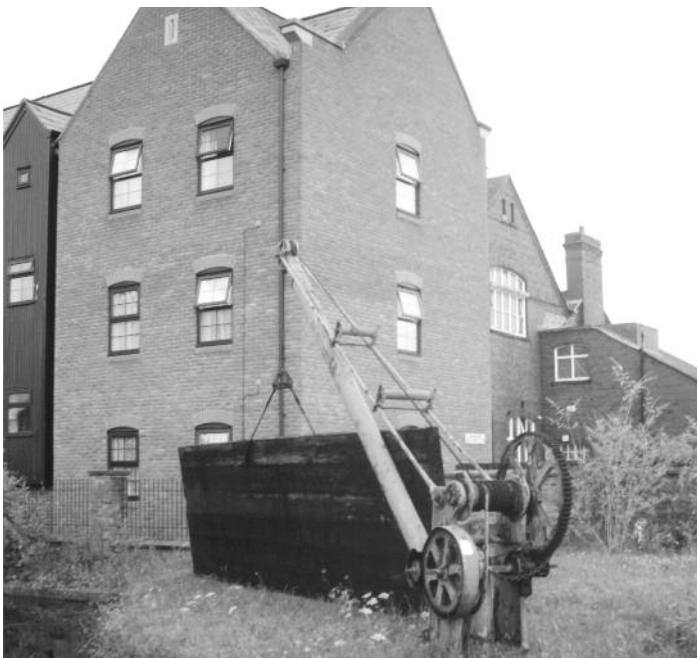
By Hannah Turner

Summer is the perfect time to explore your local area. Why not try this local history walk along the Leigh branch of the Leeds to Liverpool canal. The walk begins near Leigh Bridge and runs right through to Pennington Flash.

The Bridgewater Canal

This spot marks the point where the Bridgewater Canal meets the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. Opened in 1820, the Leigh branch connected both canals for the first time allowing both cargo and passengers to travel by boat from Liverpool to Manchester or vice versa. As part of the agreement for building the Leigh branch, the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company had to provide £5000 for wharfs and basins at Liverpool for the Duke of Bridgewater's use.

The crane on the bank is shown holding wooden boards, these are called stop planks and they are designed to shut off the canal in the event of a leak or repair work.



Leigh Bridge

Originally built in 1819, locals at the time complained that the new Leigh Bridge was too steep, but the House of Commons ruled in favour of the canal company. Widened later, the old bridge is still visible underneath the new one.



Quayside

The Mansley Rope & Twine Company once occupied this site. Since 1825, the company made tow-ropes for boats on the canal. The rope works had been at various sites including Gas Street and Cook Street, and later moved to the side of the canal. They didn't just produce tow ropes but doormats and floor matting as well.



Waterside Inn

Once a canal warehouse, the Waterside Inn is now a public house and restaurant. The warehouse would have stored cargo such as bales of cotton.



Welch Hill Street

The “Welch Hill Wakes” were once held around this area. Organised by the landlord of the Oddfellows public house, John Meakin, festivities included dancing and running for a cheese along the side of the canal.



Water View Park

Once home to Etherstone Mill, this site is now dominated by private housing. Owned by the Lilford Weaving Company, the mill was used as a prisoner of war camp during the First World War. Throughout its time as a camp, 12 men in total tried to escape, 11 were captured and

one, Friedrich Schmidt, was shot on the roof. After Schmidt's attempted escape, the prisoners' quarters were searched and an underground passage discovered.



Atherleigh Way

Built in the mid 1980s, the Atherleigh Way passes over the canal. The bypass follows the same route as the Bolton to Kenyon junction. Built in 1831, the Kenyon and Leigh Junction Railway paid the canal company £500 to build a bridge here as well as an additional £15 per day if navigation was interrupted during its construction.

Pennington Flash

Pennington Flash is a country park and a premier bird watching site. Flashes, including Pennington, are believed to be the result of coal mining, and the subsequent effects of subsidence and extensive flooding. Maps before the 1900s show little evidence of Pennington Flash; they merely show that the area is liable to floods. From 1902 onwards the Flash really began to make its mark. A railway line and two farms were swallowed up by the engulfing waters.



Bibliography

Leigh Chronicle 1856 and June 1858.

1861 census return, Pennington.

Pubs of Leigh: Revisited by Cyril Ward.

A Lancashire Triangle Part One by D J Sweeney.

The German Prisoner of War Camp at Leigh

1914-1919 by Leslie Smith.

SUMMER WITH THE HERITAGE SERVICE

Bored and looking for something to do this summer? Then spend time with the Heritage Service, you won't be disappointed! Grandparents bring your grandchildren.

Junk Modelling

2, 9, 16, 23 August 1.00pm-2.30pm
Museum of Wigan Life



Can you build a bridge from kitchen rolls? Can you create a piece of art from sweet wrappers? If you care about the environment, join us at the museum and take on a different junk model challenge each week. Suitable for children aged 4-11 years.

Astley Explorers

4, 11, 18, 25 August 10.00am-2.00pm
Astley Green Colliery Museum, Higher Green Lane, Astley, Tyldesley.

Discover how the borough's environment has changed over time. Make a fossil rubbing, solve the riddle of the colliery and stalk the wildlife in the 'jungle'. You can make something to take home too. Bring a picnic. Suitable for children aged 4-11 years.
Cost: £5 per child and £3 per adult.

Design Your Own T Shirt

5, 12, 19, 26 August 10.30am-12.00pm
Wigan Archives Service, Leigh Town Hall

Are you a budding fashion designer? Get some inspiration at Leigh Town Hall, print your own T shirt and wear it all summer long! Suitable for children aged 4-11 years.
Cost: £2.50 per child

August Bank Holiday Fun Day

29 August 11.00am-3.00pm
Museum of Wigan Life
Please contact us for more information

Information and bookings please contact
01942 828128

Find out more about all our activities and events in our new brochure 'Arts & Heritage Events & Exhibitions Guide July – December 2011 out now!

Friends of Wigan Arts and Heritage Services

This newly reconstituted group is looking for additional members to help support and actively work jointly with Arts and Heritage Service staff to help fund, develop and run events and projects. If you are enthusiastic about the history of your local community and would like to become involved with aspects of research, why not come along to find out what we are doing? You can make new friends, be part of an enthusiastic team, learn something new, have a laugh and know that you will be contributing to the history of your community for future generations.

If you decide to become a Friend you will also receive certain benefits such as free entry to evening talks, free training and development, free copies of our Heritage magazine Past Forward, VIP views of exhibitions and sites and a 10 per cent discount from the shop. What better incentives for you to join us?

Future plans in the pipeline include helping with the Heritage Open Days in September and being involved with a Lancashire Day event in November.

If you would like to join the Friends group please call the Museum Reception on 01942 828128 or email heritage@wlct.org.



Life after ... Who Do You Think You Are?

Our final tip on researching your family history

Here at the Museum we see a steady stream of folks who are stuck on a particular line, sometimes for a good few years. Sensible researchers decide to follow another line and often stumble upon a connection with the person they are stuck with. Not everyone is that lucky. There are a few strategies to employ in this situation, particularly if the brick wall is a longstanding one.

First of all it is useful to go over carefully the ground already covered and to check the information gathered. If there is, for instance, only a baptism record and no birth certificate has been sought for the person and they were born within civil registration dates (that is from 1837 onwards) it would be an idea to buy that certificate. Where a marriage has not been found online on the national indexes, then check with the local district register office. General Register Office's indexes are well known for their omissions and mistakes. Even trawl through marriage indexes produced for record offices such as the Museum.

Try name variations. Even simple names can be misheard or copied. At times of real desperation I have been known to apply to a district register office with just a year or two and a name and this has produced results. If it is census entries you struggle with and cannot seem to find a particular family which ought to be in a particular area at a set time, perhaps because children were born in the area at that time according to a later census. Then buy that birth certificate. This will at least give an address and then try locally produced census indexes such as the ones here at the Museum. Again these are often far more accurate than online indexes.

One avenue of family history research much neglected but which can provide rich rewards, is to look at other types of record such as wills, marriage bonds (for those married by licence prior to 1823), and affiliation orders (for illegitimate children especially in the 1700s and early 1800s). Obviously not everyone left a will but it is surprising how many people did. They are often a rich vein linking to relatives and connections previously unknown. This applies often to licences too. Sadly, not all of these documents have survived and those that have are usually in county record offices.

Family history research over the last ten years has been revolutionised by the internet and the massive upload of digitised records. Search engines are refining constantly. It is therefore always useful to re-try a website regularly to see if other records have been added and more importantly, incorrectly transcribed entries corrected. If all else fails try that other branch of the family, pursue brothers and sisters. Better yet ask someone else, more experienced perhaps, to look at what you have found, to see if they can dismantle the brick wall.

Recent additions to the reference stock at the Museum of Wigan Life

Catholic Family History Society: Lancashire Registers volume 1: Wrightington Hall 1795- 1889 and Standish Hall 1742-1889. CD ROM.

Lancashire Parish Register Society Volume 173: St Luke's Lowton

Recusant History volume 30 No.3 May 2011

Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire transactions volume 159.

Crockford's Clerical Directory 1989/90 and 1959/60. 283.025

Pendlebury, Harold. Before mobiles and nightsticks: reflections of a Wigan detective. 363.20942736

Skelmersdale Library. George Lyon Highwayman? 364.1552

Wigan Grammar School 1597-1947 373.42736

Roby, John. Lancashire myths and legends volume 1. (First published 1829) New edition. 398.2094276

Thomson, Susan. Manchester's Victorian art scene and its unrecognised artists. 709.42733

Hayes, Dean. Lancashire County Cricket Club: an A-Z. 796.358094276

Brannigan, Norma. The Pennington family of Hindley. 942.736

Walker, Henrietta Walker 1833-1900. 942.736

Hayes, Cliff. Greetings from olde Liverpool: a history in picture postcards. 942.753



Wigan Pit Brow lasses.

A VERY EXCITING DAY

By Patricia Rigg

This piece was written by a member of the Pemberton Pens group during a creative writing workshop run by the Heritage Service. It is inspired by the story of Margaret Park who was Mayoress of Wigan from 1882 to 1887. In 1887 she led a group of pit brow lasses to London to protest about plans to ban them from working on the surface of coal mines. The protest was successful and pit brow lasses continued to work at Wigan's coal mines.

Oh dear! I don't know why I ever agreed to join the pit brow lasses on their trip to London. I think it was the charisma of our Mayoress at the time, Mrs Margaret Park. Mrs Park came to our meetings and tried to understand our problems. We told her we were unhappy because the miners' unions wanted to ban women surface workers, to protect the wages of the male members at our pit. We all know it is a very dirty, thankless job but it's the only means we have to help our family's finances. Some of the girls also have to keep food on their table for a family when the husband has died or sustained injuries in the pits.

Well never mind, we have just had a very long journey down to London in May. The train was packed and some of the girls were quite at a loss as they had never left Wigan before, myself included, what opportunities we now get in 1887. We had taken enough food to keep us going during the day and Mrs Park did her best to keep our minds occupied, explaining to us what we could expect

when we got off the train, and why it was a good idea to go to meet our Home Secretary and be able to put our case. We were also joined by some well known members of the women's suffrage movement who came to support our case.

We have all tried our best to wear something presentable as we don't really have a need for fancy clothes working at the pit, but I was pleased to see everyone had made an effort, even if some clothing had been borrowed from family and friends.

Well here we are. We have arrived! The station is a very busy place, there are people moving about with purpose, running for trains or greeting family or friends, it's completely different to our little Wigan Station. They say that there is even an underground train called the Metropolitan that is opening this year. We are getting swept along with the crowd towards the exit and we are all trying to keep together and not get separated, it would be terrible to be on my own not knowing where anything is or how to get to the Houses of Parliament to join the rest of the girls, but the suffragettes are a help as they have done this sort of thing before.

I feel completely out of my depth, outside the station there are cabs and omnibuses and coaches zipping about in all directions, the noise of all the hooves on the cobbles was horrendous. The girls, all 23 of us are trying to put a brave face on it, but we are all, not surprisingly, very nervous.

There are ladies in wonderful clothes walking about the streets and the shops are amazing, I have never seen such shops. They sell everything from food, clothing, household goods and wonderful luxuries, things that we girls in Wigan can only dream about.

We are now walking towards the House of Commons and it is quite pleasant, not quite as busy and noisy. We decide at this point that we ought to have our food, so we find a quiet place on the Embankment and share our food in the dim sunshine.

Mrs Park then tells us to gather all our things and to follow her. I am feeling very nervous

I hope the Home Secretary and his sort of people don't ask me any questions, I think I'd die on the spot or get so tongue tied nothing but rubbish will come out of my mouth. My mouth is dry, my chest feels as if it was full of butterflies, but we came here for a purpose and we have to see it through!

The Home Secretary came to talk to us and hear some of our views; I kept at the back of the girls



Margaret Park, Mayoress of Wigan 1882-1887

and tried to hide, but he did try to talk to everyone and he had a knack of putting me at ease. We handed in our list of problems and I was glad when it was all over.

Our appearance in London caused quite a sensation apparently, twenty three pit brow lasses and our Hero Mrs Park coming to London to fight our case was reported widely in the London papers.

Well thank goodness it's all over; I am tired, over-excited and wishing I was back home. We get back to the station and wait for the next train. It is very crowded and we have to share seats or wait until someone gets up to leave the train. I manage to get a corner seat eventually and snuggle down for the return journey. I'm afraid I fell fast asleep! We girls are used to working long hours but this trip was so different, everything to us was new and exciting and not a little frightening. Back in Wigan we are all glad to be back in a place we know and understand. It has been a very interesting day; I have seen things I never thought I would, and met people I would never normally come into contact with.

Let's just hope the trip was all worth the effort and the people in London can fight our case for us so we can keep our jobs and help to feed our families.



MEMORIES OF A WIGAN LAD

BY ALAN PARKINSON

Billy Mitchell (1874-1958) lived in Pagefield Street off Gidlow Lane, and my mother did his family's washing. Billy was a famous footballer. He played 48 times for Wales, 303 games for Manchester United, and 367 for Manchester City. Billy was the first superstar of football. At 45 years of age, he was the oldest international footballer when he played for Wales. He was the oldest to play in an FA Cup game when he played for Manchester United v Newcastle, aged 49. When he lived in Wigan, every week my Dad and I would carry a large basket with the family's clean laundry, and pick up their dirty washing. My Dad would be given 10 Woodbines, and I was given sweets. All Billy's International Caps were hung around the walls in his front room. He gave me a biscuit tin with hundreds of marbles in it, a four-wheeled truck, and a six foot 'Joe Davis' snooker table. His

son, Jack, lived on in the house until his death a few years ago. I couldn't say if Jack ever played football, but he was a staunch Latics supporter.

As a young boy, I had graduated from picture comics to story comics. The four main ones at the time were Rover, Hotspur, Wizard, and Adventure. These comics started my interest in aeroplanes. The two stories I liked best were 'I flew with Bradock' a Lancaster pilot, and 'The Phantom Flyer' a spitfire pilot. In Woodhouse Lane where we lived, there was great excitement one day. A 60 foot Queen Mary (a low lorry used to transport planes) came to the army camp opposite our house. It was carrying a Bristol Beaufighter. It had to stay overnight, but was too wide to go through the camp gates. An armed guard was put on it, but I still managed to climb

up, slide open a little cockpit window, and sit in the pilot's seat. I was pressing the machine-gun buttons, it's a good job they didn't work!

Considering I left school at 14 years of age (All Saints, now Deanery High School) I have had quite an eventful life. In 1949, aged 18, I joined The Royal Air Force. After training as a flight mechanic, I was posted to Wig Bay, Stranraer in Scotland. It was the largest Flyboat Station in the world, with over 100 planes. These were very large aircraft (Sunderland Flying Boat), having upstairs and downstairs, a kitchen, six bunks, and a toilet. In July 1950 I was the only member of our squadron to be chosen to fly down for the Farnborough Air Show. We flew down to Calshot, Southampton on the Friday, did Farnborough Saturday, and flew back on the Sunday. Imagine my delight when we flew over Wigan, Preston, Blackpool, Barrow, and then back to Wig Bay!

Also in 1950, my friend and I had a weekend in London for the Rugby League Cup Final, Warrington v Widnes. On the Sunday we went to the Old Bailey, only to find it was closed. After hammering on the door, the caretaker allowed us in (for half-a-crown) and gave us a tour from the dock to the cells! Whilst in the Air Force, I made good friends with Robert Wilson of Dumfries. We both married had families, and welcomed each other for holidays. In fact, Bob and his wife Mamie spent their honeymoon in Wigan. Friends of theirs, Robert and Mary, worked for the Laird of Dumfries and Galloway, who was equerry to Prince Charles. Robert and Mary lived in a bungalow at the gates of the Estate, and my wife and I had tea there several times. Most of the people employed on the Estate lived in Dalswinton, a private village with its own houses, school, church, post office and pub. On the Estate is a lake upon which the first steam-boat to be built had trials. Dumfries is very close to Lockerbie, which, in 1988 was the scene of the disaster where terrorists blew an American airliner out of the sky, killing 270 people in total. In a quiet corner of Lockerbie's cemetery is a Garden of Remembrance, which is tended by the locals who have adopted those victims buried there, 3000 miles away from their families.


Our youngest son, Ian, was also in the RAF. In 1985 he was courting a girl who was a

hairdresser in the theatre world. She did Michael Crawford's hair when he appeared in 'The Phantom of the Opera'. Michael kindly sent tickets for me and my wife, and we celebrated our thirty-third wedding anniversary with a weekend in London. Our seats were about six rows from the stage, and sitting in front of us were Prince Edward and Andrew Lloyd Webber. We received a special programme which was signed by most members of the cast, including Michael Crawford. In 2005 our son married a Canadian girl, Carolyn, and we flew to Vancouver for their wedding in Victoria. They were married in the English Garden, and the photographs were taken in the garden of the Governor-General of Canada, and the Government Building in Victoria. It was a long way from my roots in Woodhouse Lane!

Well, I am getting on in life now, in fact I remember the Dead Sea when it was only ill! But after I have had another couple of operations, I hope to fly again over Wigan. I have already booked my place on a Microlite Aircraft.

Events & Exhibitions

museum of WiganLife



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Museum of Wigan Life

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For further information contact
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BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Christine Ross

Discovering Coccium: The Archaeology of Roman Wigan

Text by Ian Miller and Bill Aldridge
Published by Oxford Archaeology Ltd

"A wonderful read for anyone with an interest in Roman Wigan."

Whether the Roman Settlement of Coccium was Wigan or not has been debated for centuries. But with the important remains being exposed at the archaeological excavations on Millgate it has been shown beyond reasonable doubt that Wigan was a Roman settlement of considerable importance and almost certainly the site of Coccium.

This booklet has been eagerly awaited as it is Volume 3 in a new series called 'Greater Manchester Revealed.' It presents new and exciting findings from the archaeological excavations as well as a fresh insight into the development of the town from the medieval period onwards. You are taken through the topography of Wigan and the surrounding area, showing how Wigan lay midway between settlements, for travellers using the North / South routes.

A chapter is devoted to the early history of Wigan showing the discovery of the artefacts from

polished stone axes to flint flakes. The people who made these tools would have been nomadic 'hunter gatherers' with Wigan being an ideal territory as it would have been a largely forested area.

The evidence for a Roman occupation of Wigan is examined and illustrated with gold and silver coins found over a period of time. Also the construction of Roman roads and the routes they would have taken is explored.

There is a very detailed and full description of the excavations along with photographs of the sites and finds which is a must for anyone who has seen the mock hypocaust outside the Grand Arcade. I never knew Roman baths could be so varied from elaborate baths at fortresses to smaller ones in auxiliary forts.

I found the format of the chapters easy to read and follow, as well as being fully illustrated with photographs, maps and computer generated reconstructions.

The book is a must for anyone who has an interest in Roman history. If you watch 'Time Team'



on TV you will be familiar with lots of the areas the book covers. It is a must for 'ex-pats' and would make a wonderful Christmas stocking filler.

Discovering Coccium Only £5

Copies of Discovering Coccium can be purchased from the Museum of Wigan Life Shop for £5. Alternatively you can order a copy by calling 01942 828128 (postage & packing charges apply). A copy of Discovering Coccium is also available for reference in the local and family history section of the Museum of Wigan Life (shelfmark 936.273604).

Seeds of Change

EXHIBITION REVIEW

By Fiona Callandine



'The Seeds of Change' Exhibition at the Museum of Wigan Life brings together local history, heritage and the natural environment. The exhibition examines a handful of prominent themes, such as local history, the industrial revolution, the environment, Green awareness, and the importance of regeneration within the Wigan Borough.

The exhibition tracks the history of Wigan's natural environment to show how the land and environment led to the development of the coal mining industry in the Borough. It continues on through the decline of the industrial revolution and onto the present regeneration projects.

What is so poignant about this exhibition is that it highlights the work of local community groups. The success of their ventures to improve their local environment is evident, such as the Stubshaw Cross Resident Group who used their 'People Power' to improve where they live and develop the Stubshaw Cross Heritage Garden. The education and local outreach projects that stemmed from this exhibition have been instrumental in raising awareness in schoolchildren of the importance of looking after the local environment and finding ways to thoroughly enjoy being outside.

The audio-visual film used in the exhibition and presented by Phil Clarke, promotes the Greenheart Project. Many of the sites that lie at the heart of Greenheart were once the mining and industrial areas that have been transformed into recreational green spaces for all to enjoy. Phil rides a bicycle through areas such as Amberswood and Pennington Flash. He provides a taster of the activities on offer along the Greenheart Regional Park. From watching the video it is fascinating to discover the astonishing differences of landscape and environment the Borough contains, such as marshlands, wetlands, and woodland, as well as the miles of bridleway to explore. It is good to note here that the video is keen to point out that these areas are accessible for all, including, walkers, cyclists, horse riders, pushchairs and disabled people.

The display of wildlife and animals that call the green spaces of Wigan their home is delightful as it is doubtful that most visitors have the opportunity to see these creatures so close in their natural habitat.

'Seeds of Change' has fun interactive features and activities for children and adults alike such as plant fossil rubbing, eco

explorer games, and recycling awareness activities. If you are looking for a fun and interesting way to occupy the kids or grandkids in the upcoming school holidays then this exhibition could well be the place. It has enough detail and depth to be interesting for adults and enough activities, games and displays for the children to immerse themselves in.

Overall the exhibition is interesting, enlightening and fun. It successfully highlights the fascinating past of our environment. It plants a 'seed of change' in the minds of visitors of how we can protect, use, and most of all, enjoy our local environment. The exhibition not only engages visitors with the areas' past and present, but most importantly with how we can improve its future.

Editor's note: Seeds of Change is on display at the Museum of Wigan Life throughout the school summer holidays until 30 August 2011. Opening hours are Mon, Tues and Fri 10-5, Thurs 10-8, Sat 11-3 and Wed/Sun closed. The museum will also be open on 29 August (Bank Holiday Monday) from 11-3.

For more information about Greenheart visit www.visitgreenheart.com

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In the community:

Reminiscence Workshops and Talks
Lotion, Potions and the Poulitice (talk, reminiscence and quiz)
Schooldays (interactive workshop with reminiscence)
History Mystery Chest (workshop and game)
Make Do, Milk Bars and Mini Skirts (reminiscence workshop)
The Fairer Sex (Interactive talk)
The way we used to live (interactive workshop with reminiscence)
Meet the Ancestors – Family History (talk with handouts)
Local heroes (interactive talk with resources)
Creative Writing Classes also facilitated

At the Museum of Wigan Life:

Washday Blues
Ten Week Local History Course
Creative Writing Classes also facilitated

New sessions coming soon:

Through the Window – The Life of William Wickham
Thomas Taylor – Man of Means

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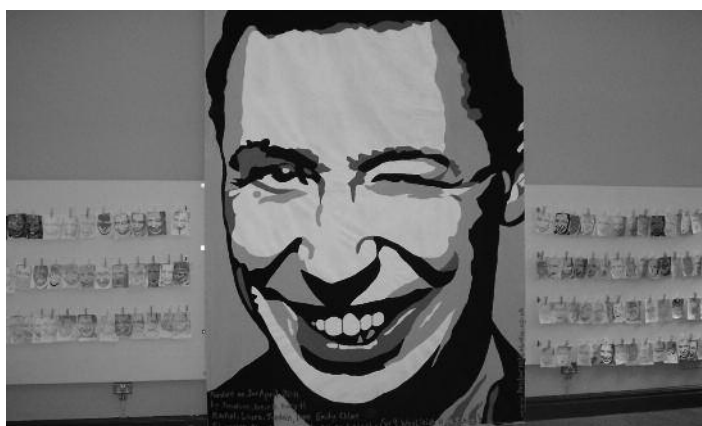
museum
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Celebrating Wigan's Favourite Son

The Formby Project

By John Bullivant



The completed mural at the Museum © Ken Barrett

The George Formby Society (GFS) held their Spring meeting at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool on 5 and 6 March 2011. The event celebrated the life and achievements of the ever popular George Formby Jnr – who died 50 years ago.

Following on from this, events were held in Wigan, the birthplace of George Formby Jnr, between Thursday 31 March and Tuesday 5 April, in conjunction with the Museum of Wigan Life and Wigan Council.

On Thursday 31 March, an exhibition was opened in the museum. The exhibition consisted of various artefacts, many on loan from the George Formby Society. These included a George Formby Toby Jug, some 1930s and 1940s sheet music, photographs, a few vinyl records and a Ukulele Banjo Dallas B model. The museum had produced a brief time line of George Formby Snr and Jnr and there was a large canvas on the wall with an iconic image of George Formby. The image was produced by artist Ken Barrett, and was to be painted on Saturday 2 April. Ken works in a variety of media, on projects that encourage conversation and participation. More information can be found at www.kenbarrettstudio.co.uk/the-formby-project/.

Also on Thursday 31 March, the George Formby Society President Gerry Mawdesley, gave a multi media talk with a ukulele at the Museum of Wigan Life. Unfortunately I couldn't obtain a ticket for this event, as it was sold out. However I was told about 30 people attended and it was very successful.

On Friday 1 April, a day symposium was held at the Queens Hall, Market Street, Wigan. The day was chaired by Dr C P Lee along with Ken Barrett. The day included discussions such as one entitled 'Frank Randle V's Formby- Wigan's Favourite Sons?' and screenings of Formby documentaries and films. Ken Barrett presented an Orwellian analysis of some of Formby's saucy songs and Dr David James, a Senior Lecturer in Film and Media Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University examined how Formby's films were using propaganda to help the war effort. The symposium was a great opportunity to talk to the others delegates and speakers in an informal setting. The day provoked many interesting discussions and as a new GFS member I learnt a lot, especially about placing Formby into a historical context, and seeing what he achieved.

Later in evening at Club Nirvana three of Formby's songs were mixed into house style by Ken Barrett, with a backdrop of Formby's action sequences. It made interesting listening, and can be viewed on www.youtube.com. Whilst they may upsets purists, the mixes were well done and the club night may lead to further projects somewhere else.

On 2 April, at the museum, nine GFS club members turned up playing the banjo and ukulele and were well received. The large canvas mural was painted by local school children as a giant monochrome paint-by-numbers. The mural stayed until the end of the Formby exhibition. It was then transferred to the Grand Arcade Shopping Centre, where it was hung from the balcony, behind the George Formby



Sue Smart and John Bullivant at the Symposium © John Bullivant

statue, until the end of April. The mural was used as a backdrop to the stage area, at June's Formby Society meeting at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool.

On Tuesday 5 April at 1pm, a talk was given at the museum on a medal George was given by Canada's Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans. The medal was purchased by the museum in the early 1970s for £30 from Preston's Auction House, Bolton. The medal is on permanent display at the museum. Six people attended this talk, most were from the GFS, and found the talk interesting.

Whilst this was an enjoyable few days, I found it tiring travelling from Preston to Wigan daily. However I have made some good contacts with Ken, Dr C P Lee and also within the Museum of Wigan Life, and will hopefully use their resources in the future. Speaking to Ken Barrett after the event he says "I have picked up some ambivalence to George in the North and particularly in Wigan". Two of our speakers at the symposium alluded to this. "It seems to be about him playing to the stereotype of the gormless northerner, something most comics didn't do...But this art project was as much about generating conversations about him as celebrating him and the muted Wigan reaction is part of that conversation."

It was great to see people of all ages participating, and perhaps some of these people will become members of the GFS. Events like this don't happen overnight, and the Museum of Wigan Life usually plans events two years in advance. Ken only approached them in April 2010 and it is marvellous that they were enthusiastic and put on a good series of events.

I wish to thank Ken Barrett, Tony Hannan, A J Hilton, David James, C P Lee, The National Lottery, the Museum of Wigan Life and Wigan Leisure and Culture, who had faith in the events and made them a success. I hope events such as this can be done again in the future.



Nine members of the GFS at the Museum

© John Bullivant

George Formby Society Information

The George Formby Society meets four times a year at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool. The next meeting is on 17 and 18 September 2011. It is the 50th anniversary of the formation of the George Formby Society and is guaranteed to be a terrific event. Charges for non-members are £5 for a day or £8 for both days

You can join the George Formby Society for £15 per year (£25 overseas). If you are interested in joining, contact Andrew Gatherer, 52 Windrush Drive, Hinckley, Leics LE10 0NY, telephone 01455 890214 or email andy@ajgatherer.freeserve.co.uk. Membership benefits include receipt of the society's quarterly magazine called 'Vellum' after the skin on a Banjo Ukulele, which Formby made famous. For further information visit www.georgeformby.co.uk

Events

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Friday 9th & Saturday 10th
September 2011
Leigh Civic Square, Leigh

As part of the National Heritage Open Days celebrations join us for a FREE weekend of 70's themed events and activities around Leigh Civic Square.

For full details of the Heritage Open Weekend events in both Leigh & Wigan, please contact:
01942 828128
www.wlct.org/heritage

Hello, I'm Hal!
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www.wlct.org/hal



WLCT turnpike GALLERY discOver YOUR HERITAGE heritage open days

Aspull and Haigh Historical Society

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month at Our Lady's RC Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull at 7.30pm. All are welcome, contact Barbara Rhodes for further details on 01942 222769.

Atherton Heritage Society

Meetings held on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm in St Richard's Community Centre, Mayfield Street, Atherton. Members £1.00, non members £1.50. Contact Margaret Hodge for further information on 01942 884893.

Atherton Heritage Association

We are a non profit organisation dedicated to preserving our Atherton heritage. We are located in Atherton Town Hall, 91 Ashfield Road. The Heritage Room is open Tuesday 10.00-12.00 noon. Contact us on 650 688 6540 or meo@rjoster.com. Further information www.ci.atherton.us/heritage.html

Billinge History Society

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month at Billinge Chapel End Labour Club at 7.30pm. For further details visit www.billinge-history.com

Hindley & District History Society

Meetings are held on the second Monday in the month at Hindley Museum in Hindley Library from 7.00pm to 9.00pm. Please note there is no meeting in July and August. Admission is £1.00 for members and £1.50 for non-members. Everyone is welcome.

The museum is open to the public at least once a week and entry is free. Contact the library staff for times and dates or telephone our Secretary Mrs Joan Topping 01942 257361 or Mrs Norma Brannagh 01942 258668.

Leigh & District Family History Society

Monthly meetings held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month, except June and July.

16 August **Getting Started**

20 September **Armchair Irish Family History – Marie McQuade**

18 October **Help Evening and Members Talks**

15 November **Gun Powder Plot Ancestors – Ray Catesby**

A weekly Help Desk is run by members of the Society each Monday from 1.30pm-3.30pm in the Local History Section of Leigh Library.

For more information contact Mrs M Harrop (Chairman) 01942 743428, Mrs G McClellan (Secretary) 01942 729559 or email: leighfhs@blueyonder.co.uk

Local History Federation Lancashire

The Federation holds several meetings each year, with a varied and interesting programme. For details visit www.lancashirehistory.org or call 01204 707885.

Skelmersdale & Upholland Family History Society

Meetings held at 7.30pm on the fourth Tuesday each month at Hall Green Community Centre, Upholland. There are no meetings in July or August. For more information contact Sue Hesketh (Secretary) 01942 212940 or Suehesketh@blueyonder.co.uk or visit www.liverpool-genealogy.org.uk/SkemGrp/Skem

Wigan Civic Trust

If you have an interest in the standard of planning and architecture, and the conservation of buildings and structures in our historic town, come along and meet us. Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.30pm. The venue is Drumcroon, 2 Parsons Walk, Wigan. Contact Mr A Grimshaw on 01942 245777 for further information.

Wigan Family History Society

Meetings are held at the Bowling Green, 108 Wigan Lane, Wigan on the third Monday of each month (7.30 for 8.00pm). No meetings are held in July and August. Please note we do have a small charge for each meeting of £2.00 for both members and visitors. The society can be contacted in wiganfhs@email.com and for further information see www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory

19 September **Children in the Mines – Alan Davies**

17 October **The Philadelphia Experiment – Brian Halliwell**

21 November **The Yorkshire Coiners – Cliff Stockton**

Wigan Archaeological Society

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm, at the Upper Morris Street Working Men's Club in Wigan, for lectures and discussions on topics of historical or archaeological interest. Admission is £2 for members and £3 for guests. For more information call Tom Glover on 01695 624372 or Bill Aldridge on 01257 402342. You can also visit the website www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk

MY BEST 'ORGAN-ISED' BRIDE

by Austin Lyons



It was just another 2.30pm wedding on a Saturday afternoon; at least I thought it was, until things started to go wrong. The verger, an old friend of mine, seemed to be getting rather agitated, so I asked what his trouble was. "The organist hasn't turned up yet and the bride's due any minute. She's going to blow her top!" he replied. In that moment the bridal car drew up at the church gates. The verger hurried down, and opening the car door informed the bride that Frank, the organist, hadn't arrived. "I'm not going down that church without the organ" said the bride in a very resolute tone of voice. No one spoke for a few minutes. Finally the verger asked the car driver to take the bridal party, including the two waiting bridesmaids, to his house at the end of the street. His wife would give them the comfort of the sitting room until Frank was located. Meanwhile he would get his car out and search for the organist.

This wasn't going to be an easy or quick trip, as Frank lived some four miles away in Golborne. The verger must have been familiar with the area as he located Frank's house without much difficulty, his wife answered his loud knocking. "Is Frank in?" he asked. "I'm afraid not" she said "He's taken the baby out in the pram." "Have you any idea where he might have gone?" the verger asked with obvious irritation. "Well, he usually goes along the East Lancs Road" replied the wife. The verger, shocked with her reply, rushed back to his car and drove off through the streets and then the town centre and onto the roundabout on the East Lancs road. "Now which way did Frank go?" he asked himself "Leigh and Manchester on the left or Ashton and Liverpool on the right". The verger decided on the latter, his luck was in and after driving for a short distance saw Frank pushing his pram.

Screeching to a halt, he dropped the car window and called out "Frank haven't you forgotten that you should be playing at a wedding at 2.30 and it's now getting on for 3." Somewhat alarmed, Frank quickly turned the pram around and set off on the long walk home. He would then have to get his car out and make a dash for the church. Meanwhile, the verger now found himself trapped and unable to make a U turn, was required to drive on to the next roundabout to

make his exit and follow the signs to Wigan. Arriving back at the church, well ahead of Frank, he quickly gave the news to the vicar and waiting wedding guests that Frank had been located and was on his way there. He then hurried to his home to give the good news to the anxious bride and the rest of the party.

Frank eventually made it to the church. The verger immediately signalled to the waiting wedding car which brought the bride and her father to the church a second time, although well over an hour late. As I took my usual arrival shots, I thought the bride looked rather strained and nervous. Following the party into the church, I was confronted with a spate of loud music. Frank seemed to be pushing each chord of The Bridal March into every part of the church. The bride was certainly getting what she had earlier demanded. I took my usual interior shots and at the end of the ceremony, moved with the bridal party into the vestry for the signing of the registers.

As my flash illuminated this familiar scene, I thought the bride still looked rather solemn and non-smiling. "She'll be more relaxed when we get outside" I thought, but I was wrong. Whilst all her relatives and friends were laughing and joking, her expression still remained pleasant, but no smiles. I then decided, as it were 'to consign all my customary silly jokes to my camera bag' and instead spent quite some time fussing over the bride's slightly blowing veil and giving the same attention to the bridesmaids' dresses.

This activity eventually resulted in calming the hilarity of the wedding guests and enabled me to produce pleasant pictures of everybody. Rather than laughing ones contrasting with the bride's more quiet mood. In the end I completed a beautiful album for the bride and groom, who were highly delighted with my efforts. In all, I had supplied over thirty photographs in black and white, colour had yet to wait several more years before it appeared on the scene.

Reflecting on this most unusual wedding story, I would have to admit, as brides go, that she was definitely the best 'organ-ised' bride I'd ever photographed.

YOUR LETTERS - CAN YOU HELP

Dear Editor

I do so enjoy this magazine especially as I now live in the Isle of Mull, too far away to visit Wigan very often. Issue 56 however was to me one of the most interesting so far because of personal connections.

The article on the Pretoria Pit disaster brought back my early working years in the Town Hall at Westhoughton in the late 1960s. When I was one day clearing out a large floor to ceiling cupboard I found, on a top shelf right at the back, a very dusty and yellowing copy of a local newspaper dated 24 December 1910 describing the scenes at the pit head. This discovery caused great excitement amongst my colleagues as we all eagerly read it. I'm glad to say my boss made sure the newspaper was taken to the then Bolton Archivist for safe storage. I bought myself a copy of Andrea Finney's book for Christmas and it makes an interesting addition to my collection of local history books.

I was also interested in the article on Cutacre Clough and the proposals to create reservoirs there. I visited this area about three years ago as my great, great grandparents, who had recently arrived from Ireland, were living first of all in Wharton Chapel Fold and later in the Wash Cottages just over the boundary in Tyldesley in the 1860s. The area has changed so much, that even though we trudged through deep puddles and tangled undergrowth, I could not locate the site of Wash Cottages though I did find the site of Wharton Chapel and its graveyard. Nevertheless, as the area is still rural it was satisfying to feel I was walking along the self same dirt track towards Tyldesley that my family would have walked along all those years ago.

The article by A Morris on medieval farming in Abram was also of great interest especially the mention of Robert Bolton who lived in "Bekyrschawe" in 1501. One of my

Ranicar ancestors married Judith Bolton (b.1622) the daughter of Edward Bolton de Abram who I think is a descendant of Robert.

Finally I visited The History Shop (*Editor - now the Museum of Wigan Life*) again for the first time since the alterations when I was in Wigan for my mother in law's funeral in March and was very impressed, especially with the exhibitions. I was interested in the house with the three black cats as we used to pass it often on our way to Southport from Horwich when our children were small; they used to love looking out for it. However I didn't think to write down exactly the meaning of this, I thought I would be able to remember but sadly all I can recall is that there was a sign put in the window when mass was to be celebrated in the locality.

Well I have often thought of writing to thank you all for your wonderful publications which I look forward to very much and at long last I have got round to it. Long may it continue. I especially enjoy articles from the archives.

Kind regards

Valerie Fielding,
Isle of Mull

Dear Editor

Re the letter in issue 57 regarding the decorating of St John's Church (Powell Street, Wigan) in 1952. I recollect that the Parish Priest was Dr Campbell (Doctor of Divinity) and the Curates were Father O'Connell and Father Kielt. There was no Father Complett as stated.

I was an altar boy at St John's from 1946, age nine until I left for my National Service in 1955. I remember the lovely job done by the men from Pagett's. Unfortunately, I have been unable to see the interior recently on my visits to the town as the church is usually locked up, sign of the times I suppose!!! I will be in Wigan in June

when, hopefully I will be able to find a time when it is open.

I have many happy memories of the school, the church and especially the youth club. I now live in Folkestone in Kent, but love to come home to my roots in Wigan as often as possible.

Keep up the good work.
Frank L Pyke,
Folkestone,
Kent

Dear Editor

I was very interested to read the article in PAST FORWARD issue 57 (p 28) by A Parkinson about Burney's (handbag and small cases works) as I worked there when I left school (Gidlow Secondary) in 1936 at the age of 14.

I left school on the Friday in August and started work on Monday morning. I was asked if I could use an electric sewing machine and said 'yes'. I had only used a treadle sewing machine at school but I soon got the hang of it. I wanted to work there as my best friend and both of her sisters worked there (Joyce, Monica and Rene Kay) from Beech Hill, as I was also. The bosses were very strict, no talking and only one hour lunch break. Also, we had to ask Joe Hayes (the manager) if we could go to the toilet (I was very embarrassed at this). I remember him well and was sorry to hear about his death on the railway.

I left Burney's after I had been there about nine months as I got a new job at H Anderton's Sewing Factory in Scholes to learn dressmaking. (I was just sewing handles for handbags at Burney's). Incidentally, I didn't wear a headscarf that I can remember or special overalls, but that was in the thirties (not many of us left).

Yours truly

Mrs G Guest

Dear Editor

Recently I went to Wigan Museum to see a coal mining display, I had an ulterior motive as I once worked at Astley Green Colliery first as a face worker then later an official. It was in the 1960s, nearly 50 years ago. As well as being interesting it brought back so many memories, and whilst there I purchased a DVD about the Wigan dialect by Richard D Lewis who I confess I had never heard of. He was a Wiganer and his grandfather was a coal face worker. When I got home I put it on and it started off with three men conversing in the Wigan dialect, words were spoken that I hadn't heard in 50 years. Two of the men left and the third carried on talking in The Queen's English, he was obviously an educated man who turned out to be RD Lewis.

I was so intrigued, I borrowed two books of his from the library, one of which was 'The Road from Wigan Pier' and underneath the title 'Memoirs of a Linguist'. As a boy, he attended Ashton Grammar School and then university. Born in the 1930s he grew up speaking two languages, North Country and the Wigan miner's dialect. From an early age he started listening to foreign language broadcasts on the radio which stimulated him to learn French at school. By the time he was 25 he could speak ten languages which took him all over the world. Here are some of his achievements.

- Spent five years in Japan as tutor to The Empress and her family.
- Opened several language schools in Europe.
- An advisor to governments on issues of cultural diversity.
- Delivered seminars around the world.
- Was knighted by Finland's President in 1997.
- Author of several books and articles.
- Visited 120 countries
- Wrote speeches for Konrad Adenauer.

Not bad for a Wiganer.

Jack Taylor,
Lower Ince,
Wigan

Dear Editor

I read with interest your article sent to you from Mrs L Stewart (Issue No 57 April-July 2011). Mrs Stewart was searching for relatives of the Stanley's of Wallgate and mentioned Mrs Clarkson's corner shop. My great-grandmother was Mrs Mary Clarkson and ran the grocer's shop at 113 Wallgate. After her death in 1935, her unmarried daughter of the same name kept the shop open until her death in 1960.

I am sorry to say that I have no knowledge of the Stanley family, but thought Mrs Stewart may be interested in the above information.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Mary C Molloy (nee Clarkson)
Wigan

Dear Editor

Old railway photographs

I have written a book on Springs Branch shed and I am currently researching the next volume covering both the ex L&Y shed at Prescott Street and the ex GC shed at Lower Ince.

Very little has emerged photographically for the shed buildings and, more importantly, the men themselves.

If any reader has any photos of people who worked at Prescott Street or Lower Ince, I would be grateful if they could contact me.

Chris Coates

Email chris-coates@talktalk.net or phone 01204 690122

Editor's note: If any reader does have photographs, we would very much like to acquire copies for our Archive. You can either donate the originals or loan them to us for copying. This way they will be preserved for the future and researchers have access to them.

Mary Tomlinson Editor's Note

In the last issue (57) an article on Mary Tomlinson stated that she was born at 254 Billinge Road, Highfield. A reader, Mr Frank Baynes, has also undertaken extensive research on Mary and has a copy of her birth certificate which states she was born at 64 Loch Street, Lamberhead Green, Orrell. It is always rewarding when readers are able to add to our knowledge. This new information will be passed on to Sheila Ramsdale, the writer of the original article, whom I am sure, will be most interested to hear of it.

'OUR HERITAGE' DVD

Howe Bridge village, Chowbent Chapel in Atherton, the Marsh Gymnasium in Leigh, St Wilfrid's Church in Standish, and the Abram Morris Dancers are just some of the stories featured in 'Our Heritage', a new DVD celebrating the history of Wigan Borough.



The film tells the untold story of many of the historical buildings and traditions of the Wigan area, and highlights the efforts of grassroots groups and individual volunteers to preserve heritage in their own local area. The DVD has been produced by the Wigan Environment and Heritage Network, who are an umbrella organisation for all the local history and environmental groups in the Borough, along with Tradition Films, who specialise in heritage videos.

The DVD will be launched during Heritage Week on the 8 September 2011 at Wigan Town Hall with a special screening in the Council chamber. The DVD will be available to buy in the Museum of Wigan Life shop or online at www.traditionfilms.co.uk

PROBING PICTURES

For this edition we've selected a series of images from the Photographic Archive Collections. These images have all been accepted into the Archive collections in recent years, usually as part of larger collections, but unfortunately have no supporting information to tell us what they show.

With the exception of the image showing a group on a hillside (which we believe is in Atherton), nothing is known of the people and events recorded in these photographs. The photographs appear to range in date from the nineteenth century to the years after the Second World War (unknown school interior) judging by the type of prints and the clothing and buildings in the images. It has been suggested by volunteers at the Archives that the barber shop was in Orrell and the canteen workers from a Leigh pit, but we have no evidence to support this guesswork. The only thing left to do was to cast our net wider and see if the readers of Past Forward can help?

More local images (all identified we hope!) from the Archive Collections can be found on the Wigan Images website, at <http://wiganimages.wlct.org/>, or by visiting the Archives Service in person.

If you can identify any of the people or places shown, please get in touch with Alex Miller at the Archives on 01942 404 430.





Last edition's picture



Local and Family History Officer Hannah Turner discovered the following information about last edition's photograph. On Friday 2 October 1914 an advert appeared in the Leigh Chronicle under the heading 'OUR SOLDIERS NEED BLANKETS.'

The advert asked "will every householder... kindly send one or more?" It went on to say "it is only just that the Soldiers should have a full supply of warm covering while fighting for our benefit".

A week later the image was printed in both the Leigh Chronicle and Leigh Journal. The Journal reported "During the weekend seven hundred blankets have been collected in Tyldesley and Astley by Scoutmaster W Callister and the Boy Scouts. Mrs Lund, Miss Lund and a band of willing workers including men of the St John Ambulance Brigade had a busy time on Friday evening opening the parcels and packing the parcels ready for transport. The chairman of the Council wishes to thank all those who willingly responded to his appeal. A list of the donors will be posted on the notice board in the library".

How to Find Us



Museum of Wigan Life

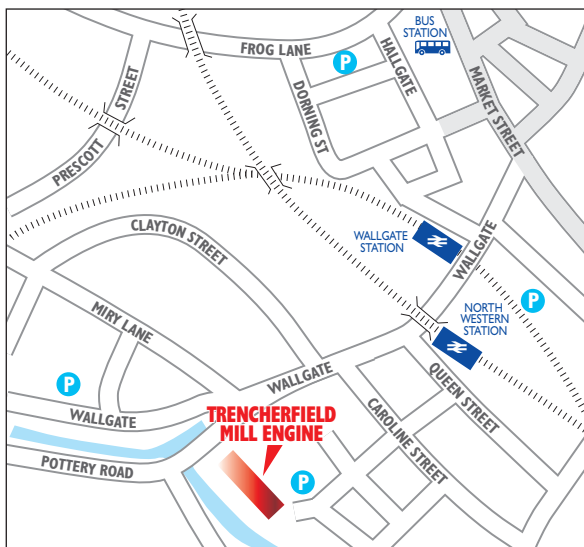
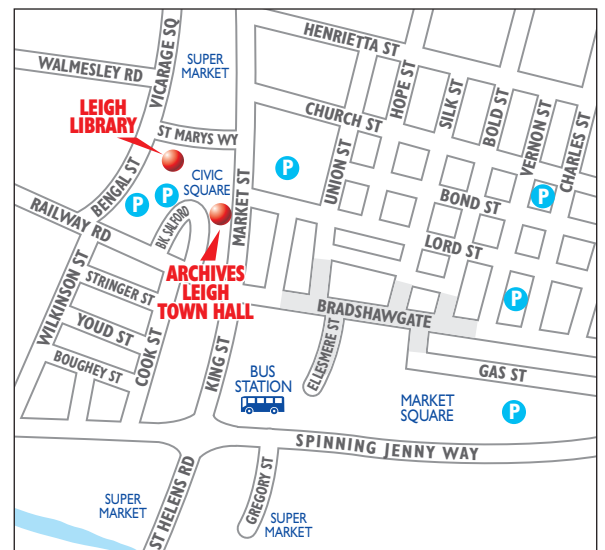
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