

PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Heritage Service

Issue No. 59

December - March 2012

Writing Competition Winners Revealed

£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

Mesnes Park in the Snow
by Lisa Naylor of Wigan
Photographic Society.

Letter from the Editorial Team

With Christmas fast approaching, why not attend one of our Christmas events to get you in the festive spirit?

Leave the shopping centre crowds behind and bring your children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews to our Christmas Super Saturday event. The event will take place at the Museum of Wigan Life on Saturday 17 December from 11am-2.30pm. There will be art and craft activities, christmas carols, objects to handle and something special thrown in.

The Arts and Heritage Team have been busy planning our exhibitions and events for January – June 2012. Look out for a copy of the new exhibitions and events guide or call the museum on 01942 828128 to have a copy posted to your door.

Finally, if you like the front cover photograph then make sure you come along to our *What a Picture...What a Photograph!* Exhibition. In the exhibition you will find many more stunning photographs by members of Wigan Photographic Society. The exhibition is on at the Museum of Wigan Life until 21 February 2012.

On behalf of everyone at Wigan Arts and Heritage Service we would like to wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous and Happy New Year.



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.

Writing Competition Results

There were lots of excellent entries into the **PAST FORWARD** Local History Writing Competition and it was very hard to choose a winner. We would like to thank the Wigan Borough Environment and Heritage Network who came up with the idea to run the competition and kindly provided the prizes. The prize winners were as follows:

First Prize (£100)

Thomas McGrath South Bank - The History of a House

Second Prize (£75)

Richard Jackson Wigan's Lost Jewish Heritage

Third Prize (£50)

Susan Rigby Lowton Blacksmiths

You can read the prize winning articles on pages four to eight. The judging panel consisted of representatives of the Past Forward Editorial Team and the Wigan Borough Environment and Heritage Network. We hope you enjoy reading the prize winning entries as much as we did.



Prize winners Susan Rigby, Richard Jackson and Thomas McGrath with Network Chairman John O'Neill.

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to enter the competition. All entries have been kept on file and may be published in future editions. Finally, we hope to run the competition again in 2012, so watch this space!

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

Name

Address



Postcode

Telephone No.

Email

Signed

Date

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

Heritage Service Christmas Opening Hours

	Museum of Wigan Life	Leigh Local History	Archives	Trencherfield Mill
Sat 24 Dec	11am – 3pm	Closed	Closed	Closed
Sun 25 Dec	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Mon 26 Dec	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Tues 27 Dec	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Wed 28 Dec	Closed	9am – 5pm	Via Leigh Local Hist	Closed
Thurs 29 Dec	10am – 5pm	9am – 5pm	Via Leigh Local Hist	Closed
Fri 30 Dec	10am – 5pm	Closed	Closed	Closed
Sat 31 Dec	11am – 3pm	Closed	Closed	Closed
Sun 1 Jan	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Mon 2 Jan	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed

Copy Deadline for Issue 60

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday 24 February 2012.

South Bank - The history of a House

By Thomas McGrath

Nestled next to rows of terraced houses is South Bank, a large Victorian villa built in Atherton, 121 years ago, as impressive now as when it was first built. The history of the house has many chapters, and each family that lived there made their mark. More over the history of South Bank reflects the history of Atherton itself.

The Peacock Family

Around the mid-1880s construction began on South Bank, which at the time was land at the top of Lee Street. It was completed by late 1890.

The house is characteristic of that late Victorian era, fortunately one of the few that is still exist intact today. The house features; a cellar, two living rooms, a dining room, kitchen, larder, five bedrooms and in typical Victorian fashion, a bathroom with separate WC (thought to be more sanitary).

All the rooms are richly decorated with high ceilings, cornicing, dado rails and panelled doors.

The first family to live in the house from 1890-1894 was the Peacock family, originally from Renfrewshire in Scotland. The Head of the family, John Peacock was a mill manager; he lived in South Bank with his wife Mary, their children Mary Jane, Harry, Jemima, John, Agnes and Archibald. The family also employed a domestic maid, Mary O'Neill from Cheshire.

The Peacock family were quite prosperous, and this would have been reflected in the decor and furnishings of the house. Despite this, their eldest daughter Mary

Jane, who was only 15 in 1891, was in employment as a teacher and her younger sister followed her into this profession. This highlights the first social change that South Bank witnessed over the years, as women at the turn of the century were becoming more independent, strong willed and joining the workforce.

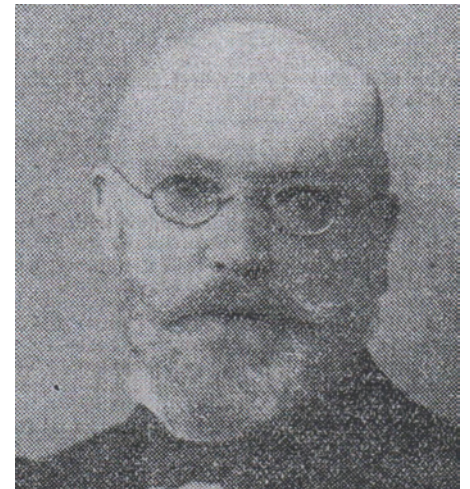
In 1892 scandal hit South Bank as Mary O'Neill, the Peacock's unmarried maid, gave birth to a son. It is not known who the father was, but uncommonly for the time, the Peacock's did not dismiss Mary, but kept her in employment, even when they left South Bank in 1894 and moved to The Hollies, off Bolton Old Road.

It is unknown why the Peacock's left South Bank and by 1901 they left Atherton and moved to Derby. Mary O'Neill married William Seddon in 1895 and they set up their own home in Atherton, along with the baby.

The Blair Family

In 1895 Claude Herbert Blair, his wife Annie Maria and their eight children; Annie Marie, William, Claude, Ada, Florence, Herman, Harold and Dorothea moved into South Bank from Poynton, Cheshire.

Claude was another mill manager, however he was a keen athlete in his youth and was also well travelled speaking French and German fluently. In 1907 he was elected as a county Magistrate, and previously he held a commission in one of Manchester's Territorial Battalions. He was involved in Atherton society during his time at South Bank as a member of the Atherton Higher Education Society and Vice President of the Liberal Club.



Claude Herbert Blair, from the Leigh 1907

During the Blair family's time South Bank saw its second social change. By the time of the 1901 census the landscape around SouthBank had altered dramatically. Between 1896-1899 rows of terraced houses were built next to and facing South Bank, creating Hamilton Street, but spoiling the Blair's views of the farms and fields of Millers Lane. Further construction of the Dan Lane Mills took place at the back of South Bank in the same period. It was during this time that Atherton was at an industrial boom, and the population rose from over 12,000 in 1881 to over 16,000 by 1901.

Under the Blair family, South Bank was a busy home, in 1901 all eight children are still at home, and a daughter-in-law and granddaughter are new family members.

As their children got older and married, the remaining Blair's moved to Sanderson House, also in Atherton. Later they moved to Southport where Annie Maria died in 1924 and Claude in 1925.

FIRST PRIZE

The Brooks Family

Around 1920 another family take over South Bank, Harold Brooks, his wife Martha and their three grown up daughters Ellen, Louie and Edith. Little is known about the Brooks' time at South Bank, although some outbuildings built in the garden still exist today.

Ellen married in 1921 at the Chowbent Chapel, Louie married in 1929 at Manchester Cathedral and Edith married in 1937 at St John's in Atherton. After their daughters were married Harold and Martha moved on.

The Gallagher Family

In 1938 South Bank took on a completely new role as two Irish doctors, John Daniel Gallagher and his wife Mary Kate bought South Bank. They moved in with their five children, having previously lived and worked at West Bank House in Hindsford. The ground floor of South Bank now became the Gallagher's work space and upstairs was their living quarters. The dining room now became a waiting room, with chairs lining the walls. The two living rooms became consultation rooms and the kitchen remained as it was.

This enters South Bank into another social change that was occurring at this time. After the war the upkeep of larger and older houses became more difficult, many were demolished and others set to different purposes. South Bank was not the only medical house in Atherton; Alder House was used as a clinic for many years and Dam House in Astley was turned into a sanitary hospital.



Dr John Daniel Gallagher, photograph taken from his obituary in 1967

The Gallagher family remained in residence at South Bank until 1967 when John Gallagher died, his wife having passed away the year before.

The Daley Family

Around 1968-69, James Daley, his wife Constance and their five children moved into South Bank. The final changes were made to South Bank by the Daley's. A garage was built on the side of the house and the garden was developed and now a pair of semi-detached houses stand there.

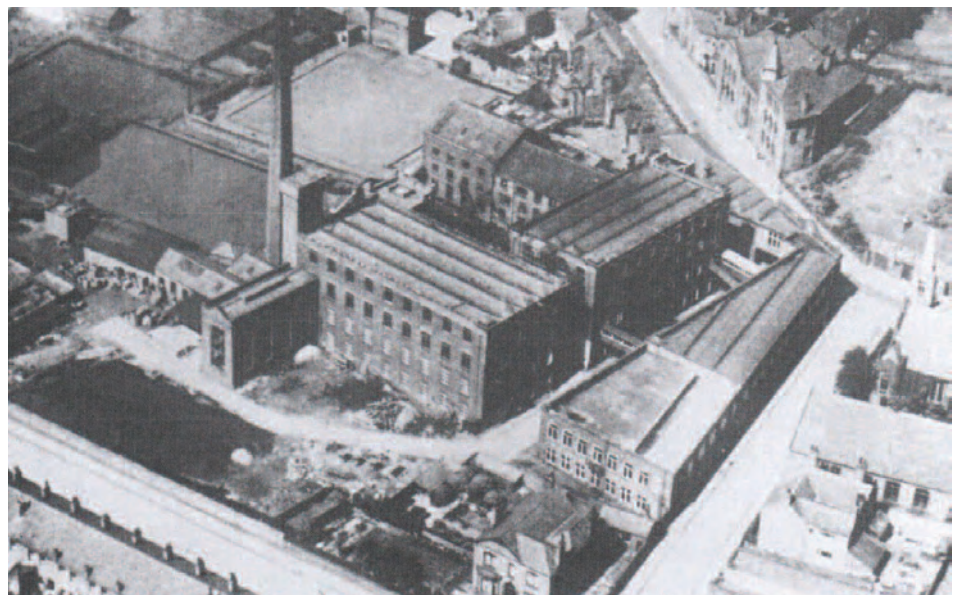
South Bank is still owned by the Daley family today. Despite over 120 years of long and colourful history, from mill managers to doctors, South Bank still retains the charm of the period in which it was built, waiting for the next chapter of its history to unfold.



South Bank in the early 1900s



South Bank today



Aerial view of South Bank

Wigan's lost Jewish Heritage

By Richard W Jackson

On Sunday 4 December 1898, Wigan's Jewish community gathered for a special meeting of remembrance. Two weeks previous, the founder of their congregation, Mr Charles Ableson, had died on 20 November. His death certificate reads: cause of death from carbonic oxide gas from a fire in a bucket, taken by him in his bedroom. Being only 35 years of age, The Jewish Chronicle noted the deep 'sense of loss' felt by Wigan's Jewish community, commending that Ableson 'had worked zealously hard for the welfare of his co-religionists'. His death even featured in the local newspapers, with The Wigan Observer carrying the ignominious headline, 'Strange Death Of A Jew'.

Although Charles Abelson had overseen the consecration of a place of worship in 1886, cementing a Jewish congregation in Wigan, the historical presence of Jews began much earlier. Records suggest that medieval Jews traded in Wigan, and are believed to have occupied an area that came to be known as The Jews' Yard. Once accessed between 70 and 72 Millgate, The Jews' Yard existed in name until the twentieth century, poignantly close to where Abelson resided and died of accidental suffocation at 58 Millgate.

Wigan's nineteenth century Jewish population formed in the 1880s - a result of increased Jewish

emigration to Britain from Eastern Europe and Russia. Until this time, only three Jews had lived in Wigan. One was Abraham Hartz: a Hebrew teacher who, in 1851, lived in the Smiths' Buildings off Wigan Lane, close to where the Tyldesley Monument stands today. By 1881, 12 Jews lived in Wigan. This figure rose to 69 in 1891, before peaking at 82 in 1901.

A neglected history, little is known about Wigan's Jewish heritage. Manchester Jewish community archives only record that a single synagogue existed in Wigan. In fact, there were two. The first opened in late 1886, located at 26 Foy Street (once immediately north of Darlington Street). On 18 March 1887, the President of the Manchester Hebrew Congregation, Mr L Cobe, presented the Wigan Congregation with a Sepher Torah (handwritten Torah scroll). The second and known synagogue opened years later at 22 Bold Street (once behind Wigan Little Theatre). Whilst 26 Foy Street was a residential home, the Bold Street property served solely as a synagogue, to cope with increasing congregation numbers. A 'Jewish Tabernacle' appears here in the 1901 census.

A cluster of successful, business-owning families formed the backbone of Wigan's Jewish community: the Kresner, Tarshish, Niman, Ableson, Franks, Sytner, and Schur families. Alfred Kresner's tailoring business, at 134 Standishgate, appeared in the Commercial Directory of British Jews, whilst Aaron Sytner



and Alfred Niman ran a successful furniture shop from 32 School Lane. Business rivalry, however, created a schism in the community.

Wigan's first Rabbi, the reader at Foy Street, was a gentleman named Myer Berkowitz. Originally from Poland, he came to England in 1887. After a short period in Manchester, he moved to Wigan with his wife and five children, living at 19 Great George Street. Described as a likeable man and a respected Hebrew scholar, Rev Berkowitz was involved in an incident that captured the attention of Britain's entire Jewish population. After an auspicious start for Wigan's Jewish community, their first Rabbi was tragically killed.

It was Passover week, Monday 26 March 1888, and Myer Berkowitz was out teaching. Whilst walking up Wallgate, passing the Victoria Hotel, a lime merchant's horse dashed out of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway siding. Before the Rabbi could move, the shaft of the cart struck the side of his head - he was dead in three

minutes. At the inquest, held at the Swan and Railway Hotel two days later, attended by members of Berkowitz's congregation, the jury returned a verdict of 'Accidentally killed'. A town in shock at the death of a likeable resident, the Wigan Examiner commented: 'It was an extremely distressing case to have the leading minister of the Jewish religion in Wigan, in the prime of his life, killed in such an abrupt manner in one of the principal streets of the town.'

Following the synagogue's move to Bold Street, a meeting was held on 28 October 1900. Here, it was decided that the dispute that plagued Wigan's Jewry would end and 'several declarations of peace were read and passed'. From this date, Wigan Jews united under one body: the Wigan Hebrew Congregation. Later, a Jewish school even opened at 6 Crompton Street. Known as the New Jerusalem Rooms, the Wigan Dorshei Zion Society also held meetings here. Regular lectures on Zionism were given, and the group, led by Solomon Schur of 157 Darlington Street, later joined the English Zionist Federation.

A firm Jewish identity grew in the town. In 1903, Wigan's Jewry again appeared in the local news headlines – this time for a positive reason. On 14 May, the town was honoured by a visit from the Chief Rabbi, Dr Nathan Adler. As part of a northern tour, he arrived in Wigan at noon from Preston, met off the train by Wigan's Rabbi of this time, Rev W Hirshowitz, and other community leaders. The Chief Rabbi spoke at the synagogue, expressing his pleasure at meeting 'those who were members of the small Jewish community of Wigan'. He also

commented on the need for the congregation to maintain unity, if they wished to build a larger synagogue, for the community to survive. After testing Wigan's Jewish children at their Hebrew, afternoon tea was held at the Niman family home on Hodges Street.

The visit of the Chief Rabbi showed how far Wigan's Jewish community had developed in a mere 20 years. However, petty rivalries persisted and the synagogue closed in 1908, with members of the congregation moving to surrounding cities. Sadly, the last known record of

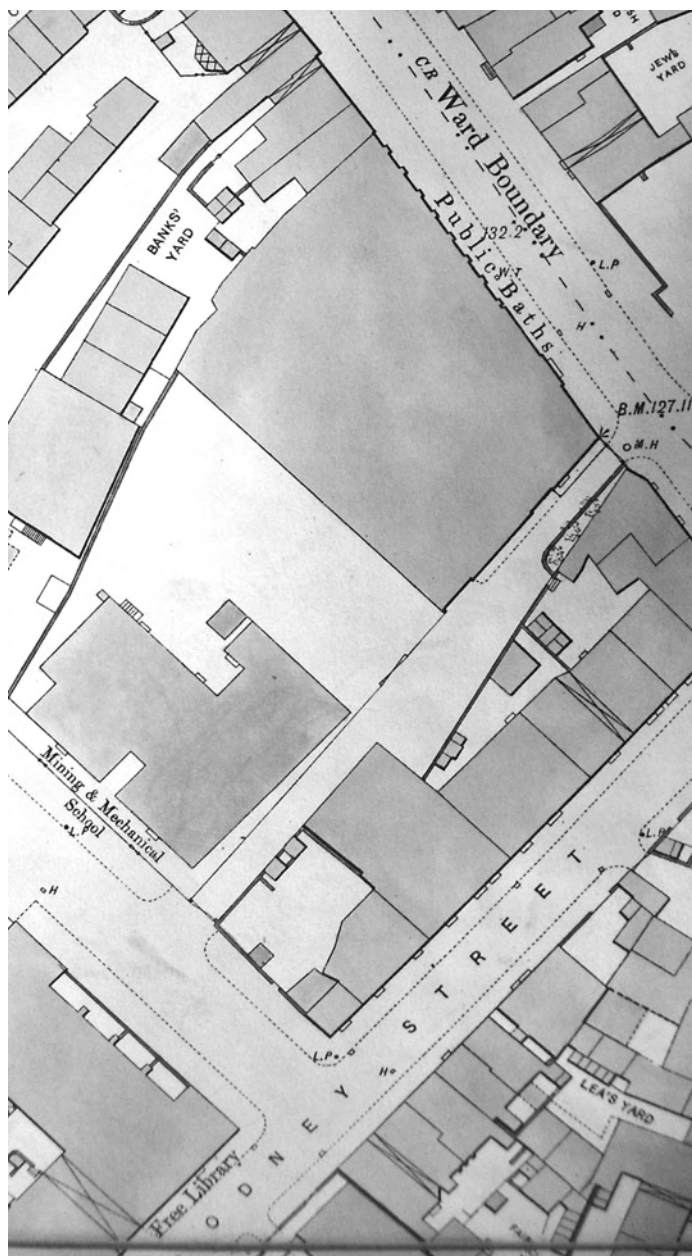
Wigan's Jewish community is a 1935 Jewish Chronicle article, which noted: 'The development of differences apparently led to the final disruption of the community, whose members gradually left. Now, there is only one Jew left in Wigan.'

This is a condensed article, written from ongoing research into Wigan's Jewish community. If anyone can offer any information about the Jewish presence in Wigan, or are interested to read and learn more, please contact the author via email: richard@wjackson.eu

Sources:

The Jewish Chronicle, Census and Enumerator Returns 1951 to 1901, The Wigan Observer and Evening Chronicle The Wigan Examiner.

Jew's Yard can be seen in the top right corner of the map. The Library (today the Museum of Wigan Life) can be seen in the bottom left corner. Wigan OS Street Map XCIII.8.16, Survey 1889, publication 1890.



Lowton Blacksmiths

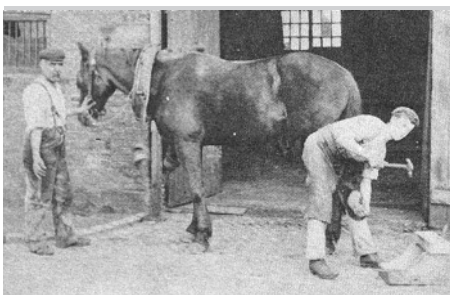
By Susan
Rugby

**THIRD
PRIZE**

In the 1900s no village was without a blacksmith, Lowton was no exception. The supply of work was so high that it was the home to two well established practices, just a stone-throw apart. One was situated on Newton Road and is now the site of a bungalow (263 Newton Road). The other premises still stands on the corner of Kenyon Lane and is presently a classic car showroom.

Work of a blacksmith did not only involve shoeing horses which were obviously more numerous before the introduction of motor vehicles on our roads. They carried out all types of machinery repairs, especially plough, cultivator tine and rake repairs for the local farmers. They carried out welding and fitting iron rims for wheels, made and repaired gates, forks and spades, made bolts and completed many other iron working tasks.

Jethro Higson was a competent Lowton blacksmith in the 1900s, who later transferred the business to his apprentice 'Mat' Howarth. Mat was a lively character who married the barmaid at the Red Lion facing his smithy, a place he regularly frequented. He kept a pair of boxing gloves handy and cleared the smithy floor to host local lads boxing bouts.



Blacksmith Jethro Higson holding the horse and Mat Howarth at work.



The blacksmith's shop on the corner of Kenyon Lane. It is now a car showroom.

This affinity with boxing is much better identified in the other Lowton blacksmiths. Owned and run by Amos Henshaw in the 1900s and then by Chris Jordan after 1918. This place was where Peter Kane started work as an apprentice.

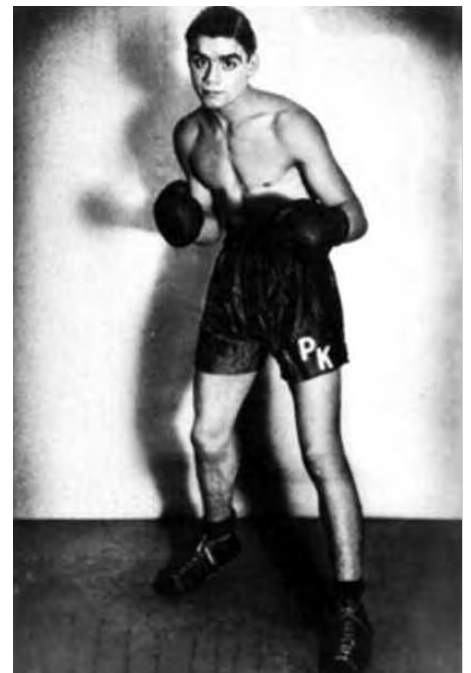
Peter Kane was originally born in Heywood, Lancashire on 28 February 1918, but he moved with his family to Golborne before his first birthday. He made his professional boxing debut in December 1934, at the age of sixteen, when he fought and beat Joe Jacobs in Liverpool. He then went on to record a string of forty-one consecutive wins. Peter became the World Flyweight Champion in September 1938, a title he then held onto for five years. In his boxing career he won over 88 fights. Peter died on 23 July 1991. Throughout most of his boxing career he worked at the Lowton Smithy.

The number of horses dramatically declined after World War I and as a result blacksmith work decreased. One of the Lowton smithies closed in 1920 but the other remained in operation into the 1980s. Chris Jordan passed the business onto his son Herbert Jordan who worked there until he finally retired. The Jordans were competent friendly blacksmiths

and turned their hand to a variety of work as the demands changed with time.

The blacksmith's was not only a place to have things repaired; it was also a focal point of the community. The hot bellows would attract many passersby on cold days. As a child I recall taking shelter in the Smithy on my walk home from school. My father in his later years would happily find things to repair so he could call on Herbert Jordan to catch up on the local news.

As times change and we head off to the DIY superstores to buy new power tools or replacement parts, it is worth reflecting on the skills these blacksmiths had. The blacksmith had the ability to mould iron into shape by just using fire and a hammer. I wonder how much iron work still remains in the Lowton community that was a product of these two great smithies.



Peter Kane.

Your Archives

Dozens of new images from the collection have been added to the Wigan Images Online website. The images are aerial views of the Wigan end of the borough, taken in the years after the Second World War as part of plans for redevelopment in the borough and the provision of new housing. The images were donated by Wigan Council's planning department and can be view at <http://wiganimages.wlct.org/>

Thanks to the hard work of Archive volunteers, several new transcripts are available on the Archives website, including the individuals named in the Wigan Poor Law Union, Vaccination Register, 1899-1909, those named on the 1791 Pennington Window Tax Assessment, and the diary of the Regency era schoolboy, Raleigh Trevelyan.

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:

- Boothstown Mine Rescue Station, papers of Colin Holland, 1980-1990 (Acc. 2011/102)
- Tyldesley Swimming Club, 1976-2005, additional records (D/DS/16)
- Wigan Over 50s Forum, photographic collection (Acc. 2011/108)
- PEMBEC Pemberton Business and Enterprise College records (Acc. 2011/113)
- Opening of the John McCurdy Hall, Wigan, by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, 1954, photographs (Acc. 2011/119)
- Wigan Planning Department, Planning Control images (shop fronts, signs and advertising), 1957-1982 (Acc. 2011/91)
- Leigh and Hindley Methodist Circuit, Westleigh Trinity Methodist Church, additional records (D/NML/8)



Queen Elizabeth II opening the John McCurdy Hall, Wigan, 1954

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

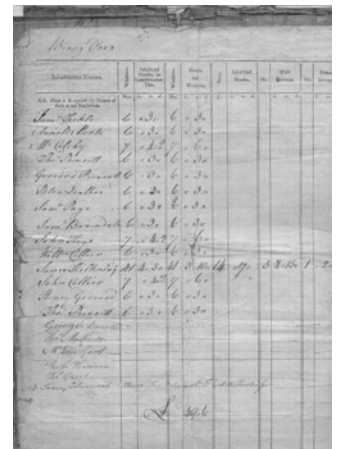
Collections Corner: Court Records

On 13 November 1789, in a letter to his friend, Jean Baptiste Le Roy, Benjamin Franklin famously wrote, 'Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes'.

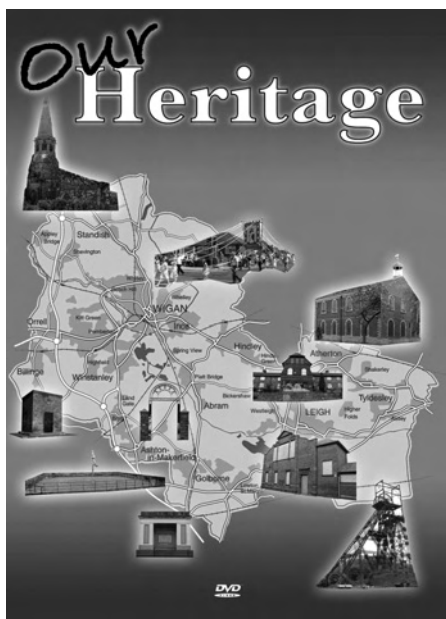
Franklin was reflecting on the United States Constitution, adopted just over two years previously, and his observation on the certainties of life is one that remains true to this day.

Another near certainty is that where there are taxes, there will be records. Most local archives have records of taxation in one form or another that reach back through the centuries. At the Wigan Archives Service there are several important series of records for anyone with an interest in the history of taxation, or more likely, those searching for gaps in family histories.

- Rating Records are vital sources for genealogy. Collected every year, often from the seventeenth century onwards, they provide details of property ownership and residences of tenants. This annual recording makes these sources particularly useful for researchers, in contrast to census data appearing only every ten years. Rates take a variety of forms, including for the poor, water, gas, electricity, and the general council rates that continue to the present, in the form of Council Tax.
- Window Tax, designed to impose a tax relative to the wealth of the individual, generated records that give an impression of the size of households, including whether servants were kept.
- Finally, the Tithe records from the 1830s, generated as a result of the Tithe Commutation Act, are an important source for anyone studying early Victorian land usage and ownership. Not only are all properties listed and ownership recorded in the tithe schedules, but each township was mapped and properties cross referenced to the schedule to allow the Tithe Commissions to accurately decide upon rents due.



Pennington Window Tax Assessment, 1791



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 Borough 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 is available to buy in the Museum of Wigan Life shop and Leigh Library, or online at www.traditionfilms.co.uk. The DVD is priced at £10.

Friends of Wigan Arts and Heritage Services

This newly reconstituted group is looking for new members to help support and actively work jointly with the Arts and Heritage staff of Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust 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, why not come along to see what we are doing? You can make new friends, be part of an enthusiastic and committed team, learn something new, enjoy our success 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 be asked to pay an annual subscription of £10. This brings with it a range of benefits including free entry to 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 on goods from the shop. Why not take advantage of these incentives to join us, learn and have some fun?

Make a note in your diary for Saturday 17 March 2012 at the Museum of Wigan Life. This will be a 'Super Saturday' event run by the Friends in conjunction with staff of the Arts and Heritage Services and will be celebrating all things Irish because it is St Patrick's Day. From 11am until 2.30pm. Watch out for more details nearer the time.

If you would like to join the Friends group please call the Reception Desk at the Museum of Wigan Life telephone 01942 828128 or email heritage@wlct.org.

Customer Service Excellence

We did it !

Libraries, Heritage and Arts have retained the Government Standard Customer Service Excellence standard with full compliance across the criteria. The standard is based on five service criteria- delivery, timeliness, information,

professionalism and staff attitude. Achieving this standard shows the commitment and enthusiasm of staff and volunteers across the Libraries, Heritage and Arts section and is an exceptional achievement considering the difficult circumstances of the last year. Hugh Keachie the assessor commented that passion for the services came across during his surveillance visits at Wigan and Leigh venues and that to achieve the standard to full compliance shows that customer excellence is embedded throughout the service.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2012 Friday 27 January

This year's theme is 'Speak Up Speak Out'. Ceremonies of Commemoration will take place at:

10.30am Council Chamber,
Town Hall, Wigan
(Hewlett Street entrance)
1.30pm Derby Room,
Turnpike Centre, Leigh

These events are free and all are welcome to attend. For information call 01942 828128

Discover Volunteering at Wigan Heritage and Arts Services

Where can you volunteer with us?

Family History Gallery at the
Museum of Wigan Life
Trencherfield Mill Steam Engine
Outreach across the Borough
Turnpike Gallery Leigh Library

What could you do?

- Help people trace their family history
- Meeting and greeting visitors at Trencherfield Mill
- Assisting visitors at the Turnpike Gallery
- Help the outreach team deliver events across the Borough

For more information please contact Lynne Marsh on 01942 828128 or e-mail l.marsh@wlct.org



The Government Standard

INTERNATIONAL POOL REMEMBERED

The new Wigan Life Centre Pool may be open but the old International Pool has not been forgotten. The International Pool opened in 1966 and produced many top swimmers, including Olympic medallist June Croft. The International Pool closed in 2008 to make way for the new Life Centre Pool.

Following the closure, the Heritage Service was contacted by Joseph Johnson whose Uncle, also called Joseph Johnson, laid the foundation stone of the International Pool when he was Mayor of Wigan. Mr Johnson was keen to find out what had happened to the foundation stone following the demolition of the pool. The Heritage Service discovered that the foundation stone was safely in the hands of the building contractors Morgan Sindall. The design team of LCE/Astudio architects and Golders Associates landscape architects were asked to explore options to incorporate the stone into the structure of the new Life Centre building. Unfortunately damage to the stone and the design of the building meant this was not possible. An alternative solution was discussed to incorporate the stone into the landscaping around the site and a site was chosen at the south end of the Life Centre.

Jenny Broadbent, Collections Officer at Wigan Heritage Service says 'I am pleased we have been able to reach a solution and incorporate the foundation stone into the new site. It is



The foundation stone is laid by Mayor Johnson in 1964 © John Anthony Johnson.

appropriately situated near the entrance to the old International Pool where Joseph Johnson originally laid the foundation stone.'

Joseph Johnson stated 'It is most appropriate that the foundation stone from Wigan's Olympic Swimming Pool has been re-laid adjacent to the place it was

originally laid by Joseph Johnson, Mayor of Wigan 47 years ago. On behalf of the family we would like to express our thanks to Jenny Broadbent at Museum of Wigan Life for heading up this project, thereby ensuring we continue to preserve the heritage of the town.'

The inscription reads:
THIS FOUNDATION STONE WAS LAID BY HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR OF WIGAN JOSEPH JOHNSON J.P. ON THE 29TH DAY OF APRIL 1964.



The foundation stone today.



The foundation stone after it was removed from Wigan International Pool.

LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY NEWS

Reference Books added to the stock of the local studies library at the Museum of Wigan Life.

Donations

Crockford's Clerical Directory for the years 1989-90 and 1959-60. 283.025

Trade Union Congress
Two centuries of trade unionism. 331.8

Fyrth, HJ. The foundry workers: a trade union history. 331.88

Ashton, T. Three big strikes in the coal industry. 331.8928

Anglesea, Moses. My life as a pit boy from January 1923 to May 1925. 338.762

Pitt, GJ. Iron foundry practice. 671.2

Standish bazaar 1911. LPV23

General

Corley, T A B. Beechams 1848-2000: from pills to pharmaceuticals. 338.47615

Fielding, S. The hangman's record 1868-1964 in three volumes. 364.660941

A very brief history of Crooke Village. 370.942736

Oxford Archaeology North
Discovering Coccium:

The archaeology of Roman Wigan. 936.273604

Beckman, M. Flying the red duster: a merchant seaman's first voyage into the battle of the Atlantic. 940.54293

Atherton, D W. Kitt Green 1900-1939: Recollections of a bygone age. 942.736

Hughes, R D. Golborne. 942.736

History of the county of Oxford volume XVI Henley-on-Thames and environs.

History of the county of Wiltshire volume XVIII Cricklade and environs.

First steps in Genealogy

Prior to the start of civil registration on 1 July 1837, and continuing on to the present date for many people, the Church has been an important focus and powerful institution throughout Britain. Its records are many and varied and are a great source for our family history research. Over the next few issues I will explore these and show how they will help in compiling your own family's history. In the main they are cheaper to use than civil records and can sometimes be used to bypass civil records altogether.

Baptism registers

The system of the recording of baptisms, marriages and burials by churches started in 1538. Only a minority of parishes have registers going back that far however, and initially, the names of the children may have been written on loose sheets of papers. Over time these have often been lost along with the names of our ancestors! From 1597 special registers had to be kept and any surviving scraps of paper were incorporated into these. Each page was to be signed by the vicar and churchwarden to show it was a true record. Very often however, this instruction was interpreted as meaning that only from the beginning

of the reign of Elizabeth I was this to be complied with. Consequently many registers begin only from 1558, rather than 20 years earlier.

The Act also asked for copies of the registers to be made and sent to the bishop's office. These bishop's transcripts, as they are called, are normally kept in the nominated archive offices of the ancient dioceses such as Lichfield, Lincoln, and York rather than the modern dioceses of Chester or Liverpool etc. These transcripts can be useful when the original register has been lost or is difficult to read.

Early registers in the main have few details with sometimes only the father being named and often without a mother's name. These are usually in Latin. For example in the registers of All Saints Wigan are the entries:

Margret Forde : f : James F de Scowles December 4 (1580)

Adam Bancks : f : John Bancks March 7 (1585)

This improves over time to:

Anne daughter of Peter Thomason of Hindley 14 March (1601)

With occasional slips to:

A daughter of Thomas Shawe of Hallgate April 5 (1620)

The Civil War years add another dimension to church registers with in fact many persons not being baptised until the ending

of hostilities and the return of a vicar who may have fled at the start of the war. Between 1653 and 1660 the registers became the responsibility of a local official known as the Parish Register, who was elected by ratepayers and approved by the magistrates. He recorded births not baptisms, marriages and deaths, not burials. Many of these new registers do not survive. The Parish Register was very often the Parish Clerk, who often filled in the old parish register as well, though some parishes have no details for this period.

The detail given in baptism entries often varies from church to church. At Hindley All Saints for instance mothers are sometimes mentioned:

May 28 Margret d Wm Hilton & Elizabeth his wife, born May 17 (1689)

It is not until 1721 however that this becomes the rule:

April 23 Ellen d William Mather Hindley fustian weaver and Abigail his wife.

By the late 1770s some churches had adopted a more detailed approach to their baptism entries. From 1779 up to 1812 the registers at All Saints Wigan have the following details:

Jan 1 Joseph 3rd son Thos. Thacker of Wigan founder and

Jane (the) daughter of John and Elizabeth Ellam. Born Nov 25 1778.

Baptisms, burials and marriages were, up until 1812, all recorded often within the same book. Following the Rose Act of 1812, separate printed registers had to be used for each event. This resulted once again in the loss of a lot of detail but ensured consistency in detail across all Church of England churches.

Catholic Churches of course follow a different pattern, with Latinised names, dates and places being the norm through to the present date in many churches. However, there are English entries in some of our local churches. Tracing Catholic ancestors can be difficult. Persecution usually meant Catholics had to be more secretive in practicing their religion and often their registers have not survived prior to the 1700s, meaning other sources have to be used to confirm family members. These sources will be discussed at a later date.

Customs

Baptism was administered as soon as possible after the birth. In the Middle Ages, this was seen as essential to salvation. From Elizabethan times children had to be brought to church and baptised within one month of their birth. Parents would be fined if they did not. The Book of Common

Prayer recommended Sunday as the day baptism should be performed or a holy day, unless the child was close to death. Over time and parish this changed but was rarely more than a fortnight. A celebration normally followed. Traditional gifts were apostle spoons, porringers, bowls and mounted coral teething rings for the baby to cut its teeth on as well as a protection against witchcraft. This was disliked by the Puritans who changed it for a Bible, a tradition continued up to the early nineteenth century.

It was the custom to sprinkle the back of the baby's head not the forehead with water, while the heels were dipped in the font. After baptism a chrisom, a white robe, was put on the child as a sign of their innocence and which would become their shroud if the child died within a month. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the infant would be carried to church covered in a mantle known as a bearing-cloth, later becoming known as a christening robe. It was also believed that a pregnant woman who stood as a godmother would either cause the death of her own child or the godchild. However, meeting a poor person on the way to the church was thought to bring long life to the baby.

Next issue: Marriage

My Christmas Past

By Edith Coombe

I vividly remember the Christmases of my childhood as occasions of unalloyed joy and delight, as they ought to be for a child. My parents were hard up, but always managed to make Christmas special and something to be happily anticipated. The wintery season was all part of the Christmas celebration, as were the Christmas related activities at the school and chapel.

We always had a lovely party at the Digmaor School at the end of term, and a carol service one evening just before the holiday. We practiced singing carols, and a few of the students were chosen to read the passages of scripture. Just once I was chosen to read one of the lessons, Luke Chapter 1, verses 26 – 33. Of course I memorised it; I didn't actually need to read it on the night! We had parties and concerts at the Digmaor Sunday school as well. We would practice our parts in those little plays for weeks beforehand. Then another occasion would be the Christmas tree party at the chapel, where the parents paid a certain sum of money for a gift to be hung on the tree. Father Christmas would hand out the gifts.

A cherished memory of my childhood was of travelling on a Ribble bus along Ormskirk Road from Tawd Bridge to Wigan, counting all the lighted Christmas trees displayed in the front windows of the houses along the way. We always had a Christmas tree at home. It was a little old artificial one that someone had given to my parents, and I loved it! It was so old that it even had candleholders fitted on the end of the branches. Although we could have little candles in the holders, we were never allowed to light them, to my disappointment. But we did have a set of electric fairy lights! We used the same beloved decorations every year. Nobody else had a Christmas tree as lovely as ours.

Dad always went to midnight communion at Upholland church on Christmas Eve, but Mam stayed home and organised the food and our presents after we had gone to bed. On Christmas morning we woke up with cries of "He's been!" and delighted in opening our presents. We always had a Christmas stocking. This would have been one of Mam's old winter-weight worn out stockings, possibly with holes through which you could spy the bits and pieces inside. There was always an orange or a tangerine in the toe, and then lots of small toys and

sweets. We sat all together as a family and exclaimed over everything that emerged from those stockings. We spent Christmas day together at home but then we would go to Nana's for tea. There my brother and I would get another set of presents from Dad's side of the family. We were the only children and grandchildren in that family, so I suppose we were a bit spoiled! On Boxing Day we went to Gran's house. There was always a big gathering of family and friends, and we would receive more presents from Mam's side of the family. Here we had cousins and often other assorted children (friends of the family) to play with. We often had parlour games such as pass the parcel with Gran providing the music on the piano. We had a lovely tea including Gran's famous cakes and trifles, (served on Gran's best china!) We always had Christmas crackers and everybody wore the silly hats. In the evening there would always be singing around the piano with Gran's family and all the friends from the chapel – we all could sing! Everybody joined in and really enjoyed it.

It sounds rather sumptuous, and so it seemed to us children. But it was very simple then. All those gifts were wonderful and happily received, but they were all small and quite inexpensive. A couple that I can remember were some hand knitted mittens from Auntie Hilda, and one year she gave me a little doll for which she had made the clothes herself. It had a yellow satin dress and a petticoat with real lace. I thought it was wonderful and I still have it! We also used to get Mars selection boxes (chocolates), which we loved. But it was nothing like the big ticket items that children are getting these days! These days I look through the junk mail catalogues that arrive before Christmas and I absolutely cringe at the commercialisation and avarice. I often wonder if the kids of today really want or appreciate the huge number of very expensive gifts they get, or if they would be satisfied with something a bit more simple.

My parents, my brother Harold and I migrated to Australia in 1958. Our first Christmas in Australia was a living nightmare for me (I must have been such a pain in the neck for my parents). Christmas had always been so important to me, and now in this country nothing was the same and nothing was right. Firstly, we didn't follow all the same seasonal traditions at school or Sunday school. Secondly, the season itself was wrong. It was summer! And as luck would have it, it was one of the hottest summers on record in Victoria. It was so hot that the birds were falling dead



out of the trees, and babies and small children were dying in alarming numbers. They put out an appeal on the radio for people to donate fans to their local hospital to try to keep the sick children cool!


We were living in temporary accommodation, a small one-bedroom bungalow built of fibro-cement sheeting. It had large windows and no insulation and it used to get so hot!


We didn't bring our old Christmas tree and fairy lights to Australia. I guess Mam and Dad had other priorities and limited space in the trunks. I wish they had brought it; it would have made a world of difference to me. I wanted a Christmas tree! It was so important; I just wanted some shred of normal Christmas when everything else had been stolen from me! Mam and Dad were very hard up, struggling to make ends meet. They couldn't afford to go out and buy a new Christmas tree. Our landlord was very kind and helpful. He went out and cut a big branch off the bottom of a pine tree and stuck it in a tub. With a bit of imagination and sense of humour you could have accepted it as a Christmas tree. I couldn't and wouldn't! There were lots of tears that Christmas. I don't think I was a spoiled brat, wanting the world. I was just homesick.

I think that the memories of the Christmases of my childhood and the unfavourable comparison with the festive season in Australia were probably the main cause of my homesickness throughout the rest of my life. Our second Christmas in Australia was much better. We moved to Narre Warren, a very small village in the county. We had a Christmas concert and prize giving at our little school, a much more acceptable situation for me! We attended a different Sunday school, where we also had a 'proper' Christmas concert. By then we could also afford a Christmas tree with fairy lights. So although it was still the wrong season and way too hot for me, I felt more accepting and almost back to normal.

My aunty Belle and family migrated to Australia a couple of years later so it was great to have more family close by, and especially at Christmas.

Eventually, we adapted and assimilated into our new country and settled down very well. But for me, the spirit of Christmas still dwells in Tawd Bridge, Digmaor Chapel, and in the cherished memories of lighted Christmas trees in the front windows all along Ormskirk Road.

Museum Shop






Unique Christmas Gifts

Give someone special a gift from Wigan this year
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Quoting Reference: PF59

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

01942 828128
www.wlct.org/heritage

A Medieval Religious Recluse

By Bob Blakeman

Alina was one of those medieval religious recluses known as anchorites. She was recorded as living in Wigan in 1322. We do not know what motivated her to become a religious recluse. It may have been a love of Christ or a fear of purgatory. Or the reason may have been more mundane, such as the need to avoid a forced marriage or escape a brutal father. Either way, she would not have been considered an eccentric loner. Anchorites were numerous in medieval society, and were part of a religious population that included monks, nuns, friars and priests. Anchorites and hermits were 'solitaries', that is, they did not live with others of their kind as monks, nuns, friars and some priests did. Hermits, however, were free to wander, whereas anchorites were confined to a small room or 'cell'.

The life of an anchoress was so difficult that Alina would have had to obtain permission from the Bishop of Lichfield before she was enclosed. At a special ceremony he would have sealed the door of her cell with his signet ring, and she would have been confined for the rest of her life.

Anchorites' cells were usually situated in churchyards, and were often attached to a church. They were sometimes

built of stone, but usually of wood and thatch. Sometimes there was a window in the wall of the church, so that the anchorite could observe the services that took place within. The interior of the cell would have contained a small altar on which were set religious objects such as a crucifix and the image of a saint. There would have been a few devotional books. There may have also been a small loom, for some anchoresses spun yarn and wove cloth which they gave to poor people.

Like virtually all people in the Middle Ages, Alina would have believed that the way to heaven was to reject all worldly comforts and concerns. To this end she would have renounced family and friends, eaten little food, and that unpalatable, she would have worn uncomfortable clothes and foregone heating in winter. Much of her day would have been spent in prayer, religious ritual, mortification and reading devotional works.

Although she was called a recluse, it would be wrong to imagine that she had no contact with other people. She would have had a servant, a young girl, who ran errands, acted as a messenger, brought her food and water, and removed bodily waste through a hatch in the cell wall. Her cell

would have been at the heart of the local community, the parish church, with people passing all the time. Anchorites gave advice to the sinful and offered prayers on their behalf. Often the problem was not the lack of human contact, but the need to keep away intrusive visitors.

One of the best ways of acquiring merit, for those who did not have the strength or inclination to practise austerities, was to support those who did. Every anchorite had a patron who provided for his or her worldly needs.

Alina's patron was Sir Robert de Holland, one of the most powerful men in south Lancashire, and the founder of Upholland Priory. He provided 30 pence annually for her sustenance. However, in 1322, Sir Robert was involved in a failed rebellion against King Edward II, and his lands were confiscated by the Crown. But the men in charge of the forfeited property, John Travers and John de Lancaster, refused Alina her allowance, and she had to appeal to a higher authority for restitution. Alina may have wished for material security in order to devote herself to the religious life, but the patronage system meant that she could not avoid being touched by the violent power-struggles of her age.



The Princess Mary gift box

The Princess Mary Gift Box

This Princess Mary gift box contains a Christmas card, a photograph of Princess Mary and a bullet shaped pencil.

The gift box was the idea of Princess Mary who had wished to send a personal gift to every soldier and sailor who was fighting for the country during the First World War. Her original intention had been to pay for the gifts out of her private allowance. This was impractical so instead she lent her name to a public fund, which raised the money to provide the gift. Buckingham Palace released a letter, signed by the Princess, explaining the purpose of the Fund:

I want you now to help me to send a Christmas present from the whole of the nation to every sailor afloat and every soldier at the front. I am sure that we should all be happier to feel that we had helped to send our little token of love and sympathy on Christmas morning, something that would be useful and of permanent value, and the making of which may be the means of providing employment in trades adversely affected by the war. Could there be anything more likely to hearten them in their struggle than a present received straight from home on Christmas Day? Please will you help me?

In order to administer the fund, a Committee was established which included the Prime Minister. To begin with, for practical reasons, the committee limited the scheme to 500,000 soldiers and sailors serving under specific commanders. However due to the large amount of money raised, mostly from thousands of small gifts sent by ordinary people, the scheme was extended. Eventually every man 'wearing the King's uniform on Christmas Day 1914' received a gift from the Princess' Fund.

The embossed brass gift boxes formed the principal feature of the gift and were designed by Messrs Adshead and Ramsay. The central image on the box of Princess Mary in profile with a laurel leaf border. To the left and right of the image is the monogram 'M' for Mary. Above the image is the text 'IMPERIUM BRITANNICUM' and below the image it says 'CHRISTMAS 1914'. There is also a decorative border

around the edge of the tin which contains the names of the United Kingdom's allies Belgium, France, Russia, Japan, Serbia and Montenegro.

The committee had decided that the box should contain one ounce of pipe tobacco, twenty cigarettes, a pipe, a tinder lighter, a Christmas card and photograph of the Princess. After some discussion the Committee agreed that there should be an alternative selection of presents in the box for non-smokers including a packet of acid tablets, a khaki writing case containing pencil, paper and envelopes.

After problems with getting supplies of original items for the boxes, substitute gifts were brought in. These included tobacco pouches, shaving brushes, combs, pencil cases with packets of postcards, knives, scissors, cigarette cases, purses and bullet pencil cases. This set contains one of the bullet pencil cases which consists of a silver case bearing Princess Mary's monogram and with a pencil inside.

The boxes were held in special regard as though plenty of tobacco and cigarettes were consumed and the pipes smoked, a great many men carefully repacked their presents and sent them home to their wives and families.

With thanks to heritage service volunteer Fiona Calladine for researching the gift box.

This item will form part of the 'Christmas Treasures' talk at the Museum of Wigan Life on Saturday 10 December at 11.30am. Please call 01942 828128 for further information.

The bullet pencil case

Princess Mary's photograph was one of the gifts



The Christmas card

Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley



This edition we're putting forward a series of images from Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley for readers to interrogate. These five images are part of a larger collection of images of events and activities.

For many of these images we can take a reasonable guess about what they show, but exactly who and where, we're not certain at all.

As always, if any readers can shed any light on the contents of these images, or recognise and friend or relative in the photographs, please let us know at the Archives Service. Call 01942 404430 or e-mail a.miller@wlct.org.





The Fate of Two Soldier Friends

by Graham Parkinson

Before the First World War Thomas Cunliffe had worked as a miner at Park Lane Colliery. Like many young men at that time he enlisted, together with his friend William Calderbank, as a private in the Grenadier Guards in order to 'do his bit for King and country'. It was June 1914 when the two friends enlisted and then went on to be trained in the skills of warfare at Caterham. Quite what preparation this was for the horrors of the trenches over in France we will never know but the two nineteen year olds were probably, like all young men of that age, fearless and relatively ignorant of what their possible fate could be. Therefore it was in that state of mind that the two friends set off for France early in the new year of 1915.

By all accounts the journey to France was uneventful but this was soon to change. The Grenadier Guards were involved in some memorable and terrible confrontations with the enemy and the two young soldiers were often fighting side by side whilst their comrades fell beside them. Notable and well documented engagements such as Hill 70 and the Battle of Loos happened during their time together, and they must have thought that their luck would see them soon return to their home town.

Unfortunately this was not to be and in October 1915,

nine months after they had landed in France, William was killed. Thomas, who was obviously very close to his comrade wrote to William's relatives in Wigan, telling them of the sad news that he had been killed. He wrote:

Dear Friends, I am sorry to inform you that your son got killed on the 7th. Poor lad he got hit in the head and his death was instantaneous. He has been in my mind ever since his death. A fellow came up the trenches and said, "Your mate had gone under". I could hardly realise who it was at first and then he said, "Bill



Private Thomas Cunliffe

Calderbank". Well I felt as if I'd been hit. I went to see him, poor fellow. He had a decent burial. The Catholic priest was there and read over his dead body. He had only just put his head up over the trench and he got hit by a sniper. Accept my deepest sympathy. All his chums hope you will accept their deepest sympathy.

William does not have a known grave, but his name is recorded on the Battle of Loos Memorial. The pathetic feature of this story is that the very next day after Private Calderbank was killed, Thomas was wounded. A bomb exploded near Thomas

blowing off one of his legs and damaging the other so badly that it was later found necessary to have to amputate it. He was moved from the front line to a Base Hospital at Wimereux, where his wounds were tended. He once again picked up his pen but this time to write to his parents back in Wigan, Joseph and Mary Cunliffe. He wrote:

Hoping this finds you quite well as I am still alive but hardly kicking. It is the first opportunity I have had of writing but I hope you have heard from the priests who have been to see me. I will tell you how it happened. We attacked and the Germans managed to throw a bomb which dropped at my feet. You may guess what happened. I managed to crawl out somehow, I don't know how, but anyway I am here with one leg on and half the other off. It's the right one that is off. My left was a near touch too but they managed to doctor it up. I'm getting on alright and I must not grumble. I expect I shall be in hospital for at least a month. I hope to see dear old England; I have done my bit for my country. Poor old Bill Calderbank, he shook me up. Give my best regards and love to all at home. I hope I shall be able to have my Christmas dinner at home this year all being well. I hope Muriel and Harry and Veronica are good. Give them all a big kiss from me.

Unfortunately the story did not have a happy ending, and on 23 October 1915 Thomas died from his wounds. The lady superintendent at the hospital wrote to Mr and Mrs Cunliffe telling them of their son's death. She wrote:

Your poor soon got gradually weaker and weaker in spite of all we tried to do for him, till last night at ten minutes to eight he died very easily and quietly. He was unconscious for hours before the end and we are quite sure he did not suffer at all at the last. He will be buried in the cemetery here in Wimereux. It is a pretty place on a hillside and there are many

flowers there in spring and summer. My assistant matron takes a great interest in it and sees that it is nicely kept in order.

Many young men lost their lives in the trenches of northern France during those dark days of World War I but few can have such poignant stories attached to them as these two young Wigan lads who had looked out for each other for so long but who from the moment they left England were never destined to return to their beloved home town again.

Editor's Note:
Thomas Cunliffe was the author's Great Uncle.

Thomas Cunliffe's next of kin memorial plaque



All Things Bright and Beautiful

BY BILL MELLING

Most archives are based on a geographical area such as a particular town or county. There is however an unwritten understanding between archivists that if something in their collections might also be of particular interest to another area, then it is made available to the appropriate archive. This is how the following letter came into the Wigan Archives. It came from the archivist in a nearby town where it is in the collection of papers deposited by a family who owned a number of local newspapers. The recipient of the letter is not named but whoever they were they had clearly written an article in praise of chimneys that had come in for some criticism.

Dated the 28th June 1922 the letter reads:



The Duchess of Rutland.

16, Arlington Street, S.W.1

I am immensely delighted at yr. praise of factory chimneys – I was born at my Grandfathers house called Haigh Hall - & lived there a great deal as a child. The view of Wigan and its factory chimneys from there always pleased my eyes. Tall aspiring things, lovely I thought them at all hours of the day - sunset especially. Later on in Italy the many towers of San Gimignano reminded me of my young ideas of Wigan & often I have painted chimneys in landscapes. Clusters of Towers like chimneys in little towns in places in Italy always please me. I wonder who the writer of those paragraphs can be - who disagrees with you ! Artistically their grey smoke & mist - & flames are beautiful – Nothing that is useful need be ugly – certainly high soaring chimneys & little villages below them are most picturesque in any landscape and their suggestion of Employment an immense added interest

For always sincerely
Violet Rutland

One of the joys of working as a volunteer at the Archives is coming across letters such as this one and then researching their authors and the context in which they were written. The advent of the internet has greatly aided this process and a

few 'Googles' soon revealed that the author of this particular letter was Violet Manners the Duchess of Rutland.

She was born in 1856, the daughter of Charles Hugh

Lindsay, the third son of the 24th Earl of Crawford, – hence the connection with Haigh Hall. She was born there, and as her father was a professional soldier, probably spent much of her childhood there.

She was educated privately at home and from an early age showed artistic talents. These were encouraged by her family who arranged a lengthy visit to Italy for her. She became a very proficient artist who throughout her life exhibited alongside professional artists at all the major British galleries.

She grew up to be a much admired beauty and in 1882 married Henry Manners, heir to the dukedom of Rutland. They were an ill matched couple, he engaged in the usual upper class pursuits of hunting, shooting and fishing whilst she belonged to a group of aristocrats known as 'The Souls', famous for their avant-garde artistic tastes and cultural sophistication. After she had provided her husband with a daughter and two sons they drifted apart and Violet set up her own London establishment at 16 Arlington Street, SW1. Here she had her studio, entertained her friends in the artistic and theatrical circles of the day and pursued her own independent intellectual interests.

She had two further daughters who, although they were rumoured to have been fathered by men other than her husband, were accepted by him, and when he succeeded his father as Duke of Rutland in 1906 they were accorded all the titles due to the children of a Duke. The family seat was at Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire where they had extensive



The towers of San Gimignano, photograph by Basilio Speziari.

estates and like Violet's own family, much of their income came from the coal beneath their lands.

The scenic effects she so much admired from the lofty eminence of Haigh Hall were produced by the coal dug by the thousands of miners who, as the letter says, were provided with employment by her grandfather, the Earl of Crawford. The whole tone of the letter reflects the mind-set of the Victorian aristocracy and when I first read the letter my mind jumped back over seventy years to morning assembly at my primary school where we used to sing the hymn 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' which contains the verse now often omitted as not politically correct:

*The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate*

In the case of Violet, her estate was very well ordered. She was privately educated, made a good marriage and having done her duty and produced an



heir and a spare, went on to pursue her artistic talents in the bohemian circles of her choice. For the last 22 years of her life, having outlived her husband, she was the Dowager Duchess of Rutland. She died in 1937, aged 81, leaving an estate valued for probate at £14,752 over £500,000 today's money.

If you would like to learn more about Violet and her colourful life colourful life go to <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/49527>

Sowing Success:

A brief history of Harrison, McGregor

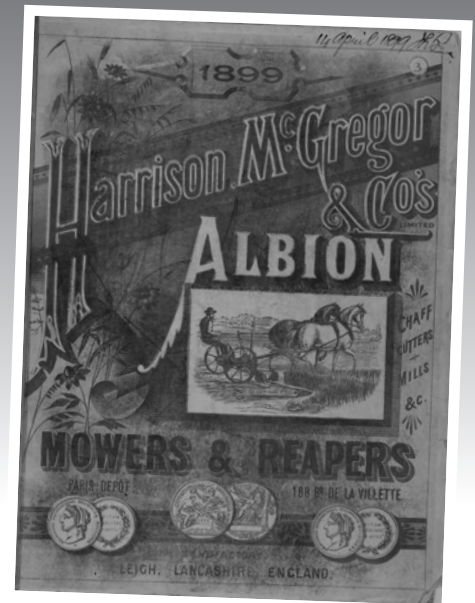
By Amy Calderbank

If you were to look into the history of farming one major player would crop up time and time again in charting the manufacturing and distribution of innovative farming machinery. If you have not already guessed, I am talking about the Leigh based company, Harrison, McGregor and Co Ltd. A reputation for high quality and longevity in the performance of the farming equipment produced set this company apart from any other throughout its trading history. From being owned by Harrison and McGregor right through to becoming a part of the Case Company, the machinery made in Leigh was famous in the world of farming and still much used worldwide.

As an undergraduate History Student, I jumped at the chance to complete a work placement study at Wigan Archives, and as a part of this study I had the pleasure of working on the Harrison, McGregor collection. The collection includes catalogues, pamphlets and leaflets (some showcasing wonderful artwork of machinery) dating from the 1870s through to the 1970s, as well as account books documenting the rise in capital right from day one. The many testing reports, design sketches and photographs illustrate the steps that were taken to improve the machinery and suggest the desire for

modernisation and development that allowed the company to triumph in its field. With this in mind, I thought it would be interesting to write about the history of such a successful company and the steps that they took to upkeep their reputation and popularity.

The Harrison, McGregor Company was founded by Alexander McGregor and Henry Harrison in 1872 under the name Harrison, McGregor and Co. They set up business at the Albion Street Foundry to produce mowers but went on to reach unexpected heights. By 1891 the company had been incorporated as Harrison, McGregor and Co Ltd, and under the Albion patent, manufactured machines such as barn food preparing machinery, plate mills, oat crushers and reapers and binders – a far cry from the original plan of mowers! It was also at this time that Harrison, McGregor and Co Ltd began to forge links with overseas traders in Europe, Southern Africa and South America as they expanded in foreign markets. However, their success was threatened when machinery exports declined after the First World War and depression hit; the introduction of concentrated cattle feed also loomed over trade in barn machinery. To combat this Harrison, McGregor and Co Ltd extended the range of farming equipment to include horse rakes, swath turners and corn drills.



Farmers had traditionally relied on horses to pull farming implements but in the 1930s tractors became more widely used. Designs had become standardised and machines were faster, hence their popularity. To keep up with advancements in farming technology the company launched a range of power-driven mowers and binders which were to prove successful for the company during the Second World War when Harrison, McGregor and Co Ltd was the only company producing agricultural binders in Britain. Wartime production was concentrated exclusively on these machines and the output of binders rose to 3,800 per year.

Once the war had finished Harrison, McGregor and Co Ltd wanted to resume with normal production and planned to re-establish their other well known machines. To do this money would have to be injected into the business and a new director was appointed to this end – Oscar Guest. From this point onwards the company became known as Harrison, McGregor and Guest Limited. They continued to produce farming machinery under the Albion patent until 1955 when

it was bought by David Brown Tractors Ltd of Meltham, Huddersfield.

At the time of the take-over the company was well established, owning thirteen and a half acres of land in the centre of Leigh with 426,000 square feet of covered manufacturing space. There were around 514 employees and 27 overseas dealers. Since its formation 83 years earlier the company had earned more than 500 gold, silver and bronze awards at agricultural shows. The purchase of the company by David Brown Tractors Ltd secured further success for the enterprise.

Under new ownership, Harrison, McGregor and Guest Ltd took over the manufacture of the David Brown range of tillage equipment. New production techniques were put into place to fit in with more modern methods of production and manufacturing; castings were replaced with steel fabrication and wooden guards with new glass fibre. It became evident that such new innovations were popular as the amount of exports had increased by fifteen times in 1957 and as a result the number of employees rose to over 600.

In 1961 the company entered a new phase in its history. The rapid



Harrison and McGregor Foundry, circa 1905.

increase in demand for David Brown tractors led to an urgent need for increased tractor production; the Leigh factory became responsible for this task and as a result the factory was fitted with new, more modern machine tools. Production at the factory boomed and it was not long before workers were able to produce completely finished parts for assembly meaning that output greatly increased. As the volume of production began to grow, older buildings were modernised and new production shops were built. However, space for expansion became limited until luck changed

in 1967. An adjacent mill, named Rose Mill, became available and its purchase provided 49,875 square feet of extra floor space. An £11,000 apprentice training school was also set-up to ensure that a highly skilled workforce was maintained.

Under David Brown the company became the third largest tractor manufacturer in Britain and the first company to win a Design Council Award for a farm tractor design in 1976, in recognition of the Hydra-Shift semi-automatic transmission. The company also won several Queens' Awards to Industry as well as holding the Royal Warrant. Despite these achievements David Brown Tractors was sold to an American company in 1979. Bought by Tenneco Inc of Houston, Texas, the original Harrison, McGregor and Co Ltd was to become known as Case.

Case, at first, seemed to be doing well and at its peak had 1255 employees. Yet in its last eight years of production this number began to drop and Case was forced to close its doors and cease business in February 1988. The site has since been demolished for new development.



A Harrison and McGregor mowing machine on Langly Platt, Atherton, no date.

Beginnings of the White Cross Movement in Leigh and District

By Tony Ashcroft

Background

During the mid to late nineteenth century, campaigns for moral and social reform were distinctive features of public life. Movements were varied and encompassed such issues of temperance, child prostitution, education and social purity. The late Victorian social purity movement was responsible for heralding a new phase of moral regulation, generating substantial levels of support for the ideal of male chastity and the elimination of sexual double standards.

One branch of the purity movement was the White Cross Army. The values of the Movement were characteristically militaristic. Members were addressed as soldiers. In the battle against society's impurities, the values needed to counteract the enemy were self discipline, duty and comradeship. The Movement was one to which males only were invited to attend.

The Movement was inaugurated in England on 14 February 1883 by the Bishop of Durham, Dr Lightfoot, where 300 Durham pit-men gave their pledge to live to a higher moral standard. Also taking part in proceedings was Ellice Hopkins. Dr Lightfoot's action was influenced by Hopkins' study of the moral conditions of the northern counties of England.

She also formed the Ladies' Association for the Care of Friendless Girls and was involved with the National Union of Women Workers. She regarded prostitution as a moral outrage, favoured an increase in state legislation for its regulation and canvassed support for the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) which raised the age of sexual consent from thirteen years to sixteen.

Hopkins' interest in the movement was influenced by the sexual double standard of the day. She pleaded with the Church of England to take more interest in preventing of the degradation of women and condemned the church's indifference to the plight of fallen women, challenging men to take responsibility for their own moral conduct. She was aware that the subject of sexual chastity would have only a limited appeal for men, so she portrayed the White Cross Army as a modern order of knighthood governed by faith, chivalry and military heroism. The brief statement of principles drawn up by Hopkins, Lightfoot and Rev Armitage Robinson (Lightfoot's chaplain and later Dean of Westminster) was as follows:

1. To treat all women with respect, and endeavour to protect them from wrong and degradation.
2. To endeavour to put down all indecent language and coarse jests.

3. To maintain the law of purity as equally binding upon men and women.
4. To endeavour to spread these principles among my companions and to try and help my younger brothers.
5. To use every possible means to fulfil the commandment 'Keep thyself pure.'

1884, Beginnings of the White Cross Movement in the Leigh Area

On 31 March 1884 a conference was held in the National Schools, Leigh, to find the best means of promoting social purity, and was extensively reported in the Leigh Chronicle. Rev J H Stanning (Vicar of Leigh) presided and was joined by members of the local clergy and local dignitaries, including Ralph Fletcher, Jnr JP, Mr A Burrows, Dr Jones and F Le Mare.

Rev Clayton advocated that a branch of the White Cross Army be formed.

The Chairman agreed, adding that:

"the sin of impurity was quite as much a national sin and disgrace as drunkenness"

Ralph Fletcher gave a lengthy speech and referred to the work done by Ellice Hopkins. He intimated that the social purity question was of a major concern to him:

"As a magistrate and a Poor law Guardian I have seen and heard more, perhaps, than many in this room have done. We have here not many actual professional prostitutes, I am thankful to say, but the records of the Leigh Police Court show that we are not without these social pests altogether...We are, moreover, within such easy distance of Manchester, that many of our young men fall into the snare of this class of women when frequenting the town at nights."

He ended his speech by suggesting 15 ways in which they could improve matters if acted upon, including: checking all bad and obscene language; training all children in the habits of cleanliness and decency and that fathers, elder brothers and teachers of young men should urge on them the necessity of respecting the womanhood of all the women and girls with whom they have to associate and explain to them the abominable selfishness of tempting poor girls to ruin and loss of both self respect and character.

Other speakers agreed and it was resolved to form a branch of the White Cross Army consisting of ministers of all denominations together with a few laymen.

At the inaugural meeting of the Leigh Branch in the Assembly Rooms in October 1884 the chairman gave the first address to the crowded meeting made up of mostly young men.

Rev Stanning suggested that the Englishman had a character to maintain. He then suggested that public opinion be galvanised so that they could heap disgrace:

"on those who were traitors to their country, and who were

bringing disgrace on the name they so much prized -Englishmen."

Rev Karfoot moved the second motion which stated that, "the efforts of the White Cross Army to cope with the evil deplored in the previous resolution calls for and deserves the support of all who had at heart the welfare of their fellow men, inasmuch as they tend to form a higher public opinion on the matter of social purity." He implored all to join the movement and, "stand bravely up for the honour of women".

On 18 December a further public meeting was held at Leigh in St Peter's Schoolroom, Westleigh. Ralph Fletcher, in the chair, argued the the work of the White Cross Army must be attempted gradually. He wanted to persuade men and women how important it was to keep themselves in temperance, soberness and chastity.

"It was a shame that respectable people could not walk the streets without having their ears disgraced by the language they frequently heard.... and if they wished to be respectable and useful members of society they would keep themselves chaste."

This was followed by a speech from Rev Fogg, suggesting six ways to live a more pure way of life:

1. To think and look at every woman as if she was his mother or sister.
2. To persuade young men that God's law in this matter was the wisest counsel.
3. Think of the results of impurity on individual lives.
4. They should attempt to cultivate the idea of purity in their own homes.
5. Mill life. Cracking of coarse jokes and coarse fun by coarse men at

pure minded women to be abhorred.

6. Those attending social gatherings or meetings should not be hurtful to others.

The final address, given by W Norbury, included the following:

"We admire the hardy warrior, or the chivalrous knight, but everyone despises an effeminate man-a carpet knight, a man of tea and muffins, a molycot who does a woman's work.... The boy affects masculine sports and disdains the doll rags and gew-gaws which are so proper for his sisters, who are designed for domestic duties.

"Look around you at young lads and lasses that got married before maturity. For the most part they are sickly, puny, poverty stricken, exhibitions of misery, a girl scarcely out of her teens dragging wearily along the way one child hold of her slatternly dress, another in her arms and she herself about to become the mother of a third."

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THE DIARY OF A LEIGH TOMMY 1915-1916

Thomas Cooke 1884-1957

By J Taylor and by kind permission of the Cooke family

Ten years ago I was fortunate enough to acquire a copy of Thomas Cooke's diary from his family, in which he recorded his experiences of the First World War in France, 1916. Born March 1884 in Leigh, Thomas Cook was one of three children. He began work as a general clerk at the Co-op Friendly Society on Leigh road. At age 26 he married Emily Harvey at St Peters Church, West Leigh. In 1909 Tom was elected Honorary Secretary of the newly formed Leigh Harriers and Athletic Club. Five years later, in November 1914, he enlisted into the 20th Battalion of the Manchester Pals Regiment as Private 1052, and was promptly sent to Heaton Park, Manchester for his basic training.

Tom's diary begins 9 November 1915, He left staff quarters at Heaton Park and was taken by train with the 7th Division to Folkstone to board the SS Princess Victoria bound for Boulogne, France. 'Arrived at 4pm, a lovely morning but it commenced to rain in the afternoon. The channel crossing was terrible, awfully rough sea, nearly everyone was sick, when arrived spent the night under canvas just outside Boulogne. Rained continuously but spent a comfortable night under the circumstances.'

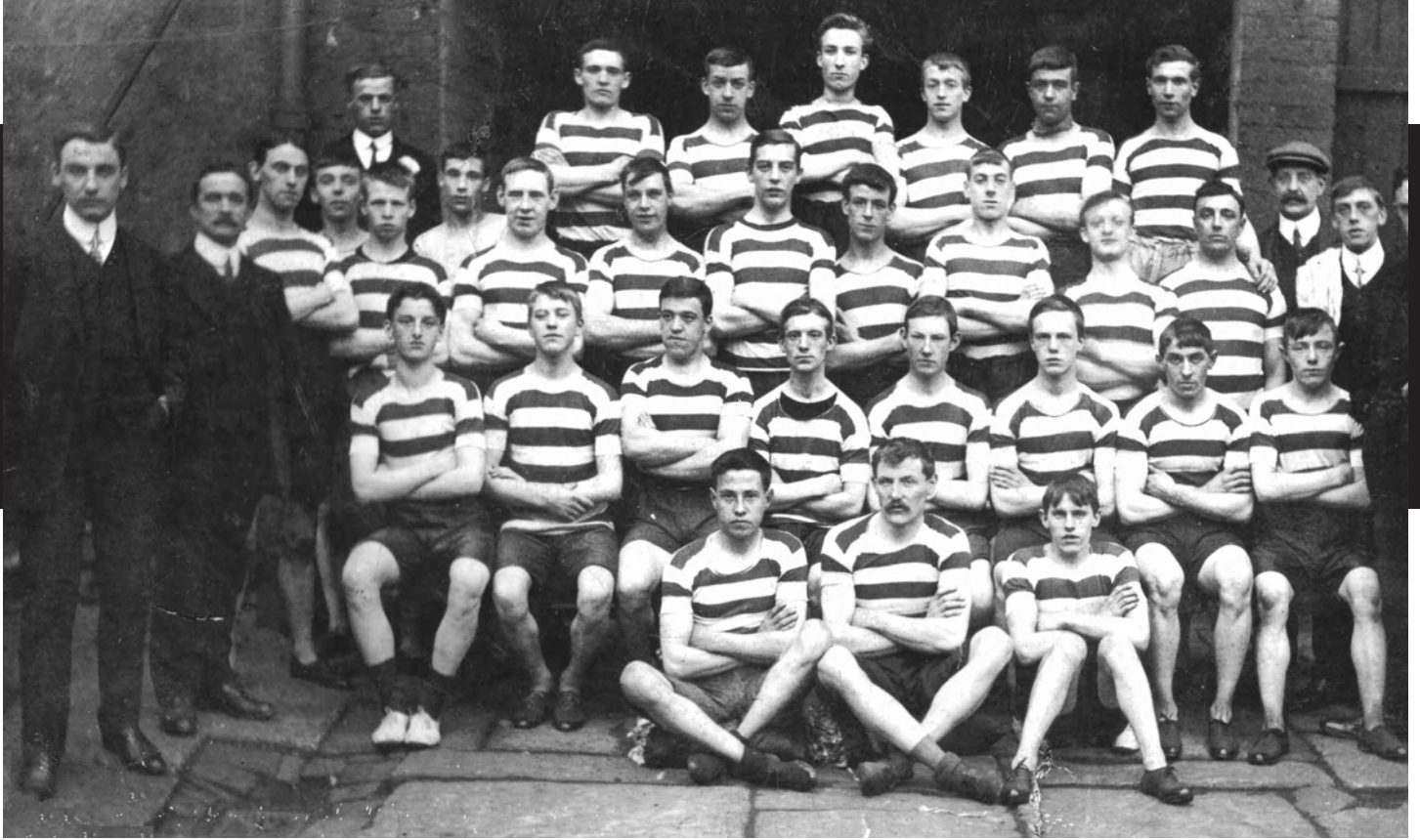
Wednesday 10 November, Tom wakes to sunshine and a march around town, before being packed 'like a herring into a cattle truck, awful

journey'. The troops were then marched ten miles to the next billet camp. 'Slept from 5am to 8am rotten not the word for it, fed up.

The journey to the front continues for thirteen days, from village to village, by marching and truck, sleeping both in barns and under canvas despite heavy rain, snowfalls and mud. On 23 November after another ten mile march Tom is finally in earshot of the guns. Up to this point the entries in the diary are dominated by the poor conditions namely food, rain, cold, mud, excessive marches and menial tasks such as washing carts. In particular an entry regarding lack of sleep '16 in tent, no boards, keen frost'.

29 November, Tom awakes to rain, a thaw and a surprising aeroplane attack. Later in the day, just behind the trenches, he meets a RG Rice from Surrey Athletics Club and has an interesting chat about athletics. On 30 November, Tom makes his first visit to the trenches carrying rations and is clearly alarmed at the conditions as he records 'we have to go into this at 3pm this afternoon'. He then goes on to say 'In the trenches writing this bit in a dug out. Don't know how the lads have stuck it they are in a terrible condition knee deep in mud and water, I am in an awful condition, cannot describe it'. Tom remained in the trenches in heavy rain for 48 hours he noted 'an awful experience' but happily received his first letter since being in France from his sister in Leigh. Although Tom has not written his exact location at this time, we can establish that he was in the area of the River Somme.

5 December, Tom is subjected to a six mile march from the trenches 'most trying I have had, because I am caked in clay and wet through, terrible'. He spent the following night under canvas, 'awoke to a breakfast of two biscuits a little bacon and jam, rotten! What would they think



Thomas Cooke 1909, standing far left, as Hon. Secretary of Leigh Harriers.

of that at home after weeks of hard work and only three nights sleep, will try to clean up today, to move tomorrow. 1st letter from Misses, read last night'

There are few entries up to Christmas, more marches and increasingly difficult cold conditions. He has a surprise visit from Sammy Green of Leigh Harriers, who was also

with the 20th Manchesters but in the Cycling Corps. Tom and his pals are permitted to spend Christmas Eve in a French cafe, he bought two bottles of champagne and together with food parcels they had a 'nice spread for tea on Christmas Day'. 31 December Friday New Year's Eve, 'Had hard days work - Field Operations'.

The diary continues with few entries, but those he writes are largely about his boredom, cold, rain, poor food, hunger and joy of receiving food parcels from home. On 18 January 1916 there was a 'divisional cross country race there were nearly 1,000 competitors, a splendid sight'. During the week of 7 February, Tom is supposed to be resting, however he makes three difficult marches to and from to the trenches, where he is employed digging. Tom's diary entries become shorter and less detailed.

21 February, 'Stood to for one hour, Hun attack on left, Lieutenant Braithwaite killed'.

6 March, 'My Birthday, parcel from wife, Verdun Citadel'

29 March, 'Burt Shieham had a narrow escape from shell when on W.C. very funny'.

Continued on page 30



Lce-Cpl Thomas Cooke Regt No 17052, sitting far right middle row. 20th Battalion Manchester 'Pals' Regiment. 7th Division, A Company, 2nd Platoon.

30 March, 'Inspected by Lord Kitchener' This is two months before Lord Kitchener drowned when the HMS Hampshire stuck a mine sailing to Russia on 5 June 1916.

As weather has improved Thomas entries become less frequent and although conditions appear less harsh, the fighting has

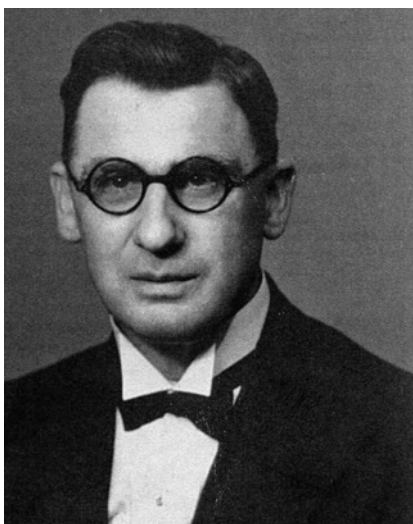
increased, Tom spends an increasing amount of time in the trenches. He makes several comments about heavy bombardments of shells, and 'lucky escapes'

On the 8 May Tom was injured and wrote, 'My unlucky day, 8th May, just after 4pm I was training with Chas Sharpe and William Slow, when a shell came over catching us quite unawares. Up to now I have not heard whether they were killed but from what I saw they must have died. My left arm was terribly smashed, and after field dressing was moved to C Hospital where operation was performed and I am now a one armed man, but never mind the worst is now over I think, and I thank God for preserving my life'. Chas Sharpe, of Stockport, was clearly a good friend of Tom's as he had his home address in the back of his dairy, Chas is buried at Fricourt, Somme, France. Tom has written my 'unlucky day', not realising that he may ultimately have been fortunate, in only six weeks time he certainly would have been involved in the Battle of the Somme, which was one of the largest battles of the First World War. The 1 July 1916 saw the British Army suffer the worst one-day combat losses in its history, with nearly 60,000 casualties.

10 May, 'Another small operation early this morning, very painful, they did not give me enough gas. Left C Hospital at 2pm for Le Havre. Very trying journey I am doing very well though'.

12 May, 'I never thought I could be so uneasy on a nice soft bed after being anywhere for months. I am able to sit up now; I am a little deaf perhaps it's with the shock. I have also a small wound behind my left ear, but these are only minor ailments'.

13 May, 'On board Hospital Ship HM Asturius very nicely fitted up it is too, as good as the hospital in every way'.




Thomas Cooke, pictured right in 1939 as Worshipful Master of Makerfield Masonic Lodge 2115.


14 May, '11am sailing for Blighty. It's a grand day, 8pm arrived in Southampton after a splendid voyage.

The last entry was on 1 August Tom wrote 'Pay from paymaster from Preston Hospital, initial payment of £1 then regular weekly payments of 10s 6d'. Tom was officially discharged from the army 25 November 1916.

We know from a newspaper report in The Leigh Chronicle dated 9 June 1916 that 'Tom Cooke has been transferred from Stockport Hospital and is now an inmate of the Leigh Infirmary, he is doing very well and will soon return to civil life'. The 30 June The Leigh Chronicle reports that Lance Corporal Tom Cooke was an interested spectator at Leigh Harriers sports with other Leigh wounded heroes. In 1918 he was appointed the Leigh Corporation's Pensions Officer, and ended his career as Clerk at the County Court.

He resumed his Hon. Secretary position with Leigh Harrier's in 1917 until 1922 when he became involved with the Leigh Branch of the British Legion committee as Hon. War Pensions Secretary Officer, he was also Branch Chairman of the British Limbless Ex-Servicemen Association. He remained in these voluntary roles up to his death in 1957 age 73. His funeral service took place at St Thomas's Church, Bedford, Leigh followed by cremation at Overdale, Bolton.

Events & Exhibitions




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 21 February 2012
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 Then come along to our new exhibition by Wigan Photographic Society featuring the work of their very talented Society members.

Drop into one of the 'camera clinics' and improve your skills.

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

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YOUR LETTERS - CAN YOU HELP

Dear Editor

It saddens me to see what is happening to the Leigh Rugby League Club. I am 81 years of age now but I was one of the first volunteers who built up the banks surrounding the pitch with loads of pit dirt. The pitch was separated by a wooden fence and lots of people joined in to make the transfer from the old ground a fast one.

The team was fantastic to see on the field. What the full team was on the first match I can't remember but some names were Tommy Sale, Alan Ackers and a front row man the size of a gorilla. He was too big to run but just pushed his way forward. We had players any club today would be proud of. My favourites were Jimmy Ledgard, Trevor Allan, Ted Kerwick, Alan Harris, Joe Egan, Mick Murphy and I could name lots more.

The point I am trying to make is that the club meant something to the people of the town so what went wrong? We had full houses when we played Wigan, St Helens, Warrington, Leeds, Lancashire County matches and national teams. Other clubs have progressed so why not Leigh? Is it the fans not doing enough or is no one interested anymore? What a pity to let the club die a sad death; still, I have a lot of good memories.

All the best,

Jimmy Heaton

Dear Editor

I am trying to identify this photograph. If any readers have information about it then please contact me by e-mail grannypledge@btinternet.com.

Many thanks,

Maureen Parkinson



Dear Editor

Again, another great read in the last edition of Past Forward.

In Issue Number 58, August-November 20011, the article entitled, 'Sunday at 32 Kendal Street', Les says that he is not sure what happened to Ronnie Grice who was a Japanese POW.

There is a website which gives details of the Commonwealth casualties in the First and Second World Wars at <http://www.cwgc.org/>

From this I can see there is a death for a Ronald William Grice who died in the Second World War. The entry is as below:

Ronald William Grice
Nationality U.K.
Rank Aircraftman 2nd Class
Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
Age 24
Date of Death: 30/03/1945
Service No: 994444
Additional Information: Son of James John and Ada Alice Grice, of Wigan, Lancashire.
Casualty Type: Commonwealth War Dead
Grave/Memorial Ref. Column 456
Memorial: SINGAPORE MEMORIAL

Best wishes,

Jean Jones,
Ashton-in-Makerfield

Dear Editor

We have your magazine every time it comes out and we find in it many interesting letters. Perhaps it is because we are getting older.

Regarding Mrs Stewart and Mr and Mrs Stanley in Issue Number 57, I lived in Number 62 Prescott Street and the Stanley family lived about three doors down. They had no children but made me very welcome in their house and shop. Mrs Stanley taught me to bake and Mr Stanley took me to their shop on Saturdays and I used to serve and learned how to tie sausages into links. My parents kept two pubs in the area, the last one in Great George Street.

Thank you for a great read.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs M Newman (née Linkman),
Orrell

Dear Editor

My friend's late mother had in her possession a letter from Thomas Grundy, dated 29 April 1917, sent from the trenches in France. Grundy was serving in D battery, 170th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery.

It is my friend's desire to return this letter to a direct descendant of Thomas Grundy. Grundy was born 29 December 1894, in Wigan. He enlisted in Wigan in 1915 there and died in Wigan in May 1985, at the age of 90.

I would be most grateful to any readers of Past Forward who can help in fulfilling my friend's wish.

Yours sincerely,

Don Kennett,
British Columbia, Canada
dakenn@shaw.ca

Frank

By Yvonne Eckersley

(1912-2003)

Ridyard Horrocks

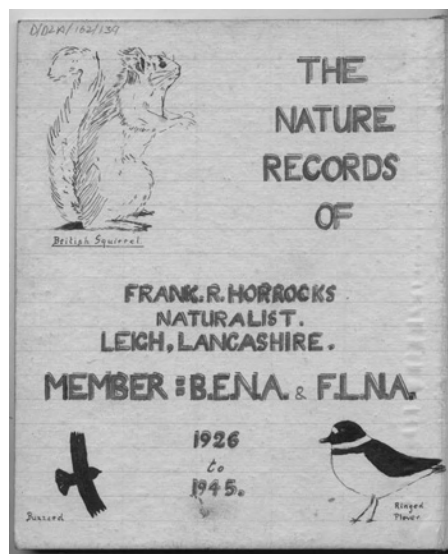
An Unremarkable Pioneer?

Frank Horrocks was ostensibly a typical working man of his generation insofar as he left school aged 14 and worked as a paver for Leigh Council all his working life, however, archived material reveal a much more complex individual.

Frank's story shows that his quiet diffident exterior masked an inner strength of character which gave him the tenacity to pursue his then obscure hobby out of its obscurity. Fascinated by the natural environment he joined other innovative naturalists across Britain in developing the appreciation and respect for wildlife we take for granted today.

Writing in 1986 Frank acknowledged the isolation and loneliness of his position, 'to be unalterably different wasn't easy', of his hobby 'nobody wanted to know' and his search for like minds led him to associate with 'rat catchers, bird catchers, pigeon-fanciers and shooting miners'. For years, alone, armed with a small pair of opera glasses (his first pair of binoculars he got from a German during the war in exchange for a few cigarettes) a second-hand guidebook and his field diaries, he cycled to the then inhospitable local flashes, railway embankments and moss-lands watching and recording the local flora and fauna.

Eventually he did meet like minds. In 1939 he and three friends



formed the Firs Lea Naturalist Association, meeting at Frank's home. This group of young men approached their hobby in a professional manner from the outset: electing officers; devising aims; drafting a precise format and protocols for recording and reporting back and buying the necessary stationary. They reached out and affiliated with similar bodies including the Lancashire and Cheshire Flora and Fauna Association and the British Empire Naturalist Association. Frank also formed close links a number of newspaper nature columnists. The Bolton Evening News' F A Lowe and Frank's relationship became mutually supporting. Frank supplied information receiving support and publicity in return. Similarly the Daily Dispatch and the Manchester Guardian ran regular columns with Frank supplying the data.

The stage was set; the association acquired a camera and developed the confidence to write newspaper articles themselves. Unfortunately the outbreak of war necessitated its suspension. The four young men were conscripted. Frank Horrocks served in the Royal Artillery, Tom Walle (Durkin) was killed in Italy, Tom Edmondson, who later developed into a valuable communicator of data gathered by Frank, and Wilf Cartledge left Leigh.

After the war the work of our Leigh naturalists was given a boost from the formation by Reg Kenney of the short-lived (1948-1950) Leigh Field Naturalist and Town Improvement Society. Frank was a committee member of the naturalist section which did much to publicise Leigh's wildlife.

During the 1950s and 60s, Frank continued his daily round, visiting local flashes and mosses, amassing enormous amounts of data. It was catalogued in a precise and accessible form, then disseminated for publication to other enthusiasts, where it formed a vital part of the topography of South Lancashire's wildlife.

In 1960 he helped form the Leigh Bird Ringing Group, which linked up with the Merseyside Bird Ringing Group in 1964. Their continual ringing and logging of visiting birds added to the international understanding of bird migratory patterns. Frank was the

Leigh link, filing monthly reports to the government backed British Trust for Ornithology based at the British Museum, whilst simultaneously monitoring migratory waders for the University of East Anglia. Closer to home his work was published in the Leigh Ringing Reports and the Lancashire Bird Ringing Reports.

National interest in protecting and conserving birds had a direct impact on Frank. After the Protection of Birds Act of 1954, Frank and Tom Edmondson, like Sir Peter Scott founder of the WWT, renounced the sport of wildfowling. They became vociferously opposed to the arguments in support of shooting birds. Shooting birds was common around Pennington Flash until it came under local council control. October, November and December, was the shooting season at Astley Moss. Frank's bird watching permit for the Moss, issued by Manchester Collieries, excluded these months.

As Frank became recognised as an expert in birds, their breeding patterns and habitats, he was



Frank Horrocks (front row, second from right) with members of the Leigh Ornithological Society

approached in the mid 1950s by the RSPB. They were in the process of assessing Chat and Bedford Mosses as possible nature reserves. Their rejection of the Mosses was a great disappointment to him.

Frank's fame grew when in the 1950s he discovered breeding Reed Warblers in the area. This created quite a stir among the bird spotting fraternity as previously Reed Warblers had only been recorded singing in South Lancashire. Then Frank discovered a breeding pair in Leigh! Articles were written, F W Boyd of the

British Birds magazine, among others, sent congratulatory letters and the event was broadcast on BBC radio.

Frank wrote in Early Days that by 1966 he was joined at Pennington Flash by a group of enthusiastic young men who went on to form the influential Leigh Ornithological Society in 1971. The LOS, with Frank as a committee member, was instrumental in the development of Pennington Flash, first as a nature reserve later as a country park.

He was associated with the LOS until his death in 2003.

It was during his involvement with LOS that Frank experienced his fifteen minutes of fame. In the 1970s the forerunner of Granada Reports presented a weekly nature feature from various local venues. Bedford Moss was one such venue and Frank, accompanied by Peter Eckersley, was filmed.

Unfortunately I have not been able to ascertain the precise date of its transmission. If anyone has any information on the programme, or indeed has a copy of it, please get in touch with Alex Miller at the Wigan Archives Service at Leigh Town Hall.

Testimonials to Frank's influence can be found in the bundles of letters, newspaper cuttings, writings, photographs and specialist magazines archived at Leigh. A rather more public memorial is the Frank Horrocks Hide at Pennington Flash. This hide overlooks the spit where the railway to Wigan used to run and was one of Frank's favourite places.

Information from the Frank Horrocks Archive D/DX/162 at Wigan Archive Services at Leigh Town Hall.



The Frank Horrocks Hide at Pennington Flash.

Goodbye the Palace

By Ted Dakin

Do you remember the Palace Cinema at the bottom of King Street?

As a young lad, the Palace to me, was like a second (affordable) home, and the most preferable of all the Wigan picture houses. Aye, the Palace always seemed to show the most western films, and boy, did I like westerns. What snotty-nosed Wigan lad did not?

During the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the Palace was littered with spent bullets and empty cartridges, which had to be swept up after every picture. Two of my favourite cowboy actors were Buck Jones and William 'Hopalong Cassidy' Boyd who appeared there so many times it was rumoured that they, and a few pesky Indians, stabled their horses at the rear and booked themselves in at the nearby Shakespeare Hotel. Ken Maynard was another favourite, he rode a horse called 'Tarzan, The Wonder Horse' and who, according to some, was a better actor than Maynard.

Because of its popularity, you could always expect long queues for the Palace. If I remember right, if you were heading for the cheap seats, the pit and the stalls, you queued back to the Hippodrome. If it was the more salubrious circle seats 'the gods', you queued back to Chapel Lane. I remember one particular Saturday night when me and a couple of mates were queuing (as usual) for the cheapest seats. Tough-like we decided to have a much-needed cigarette. I took my first drag, inhaled deep, turned and almost blew smoke in my dad's stern-set face. I did a quick about turn, dropped the cigarette and thought 'That's it. I'll get the kilt when I get home'. I did not enjoy that picture one bit, but I needn't have bothered, good old Dad never said a word.

For many years, the Palace was a place of wonderment, a place to be entertained, right through from boyhood to manhood. Once again, as in other areas of everyday living, technology was instrumental in the decline of make-belief and simple, innocent pastimes. Slow strangulation by television had begun. The communal get-togethers came to a sad end and like many more the Palace cinema closed its doors forever.

In the severe winter of 1962, I was in the employ of The Makerfield Water Board as a wastewater inspector. One freezing cold morning at approximately 2am, I was called out to a suspect burst at the bottom of King Street, which proved to be somewhere inside the now defunct and decaying Palace cinema. Armed with a torch, hammer and chisel (used for the emergency flattening of burst lead pipes) I climbed over the iron gate, and splashed down onto the sloping walkway that led to the pit and the stalls. Once inside the auditorium, the beam from my flashlight traversed the now dust-caked and rotting seats and, unbelievably, highlighted the still intact, but now yellowing

'silver' screen. How many times had I (and thousands more) sat entranced in front of that magical screen? Where stars and stories came to life, to create an exciting, entirely different world to the one we knew; a world of cowboys and Indians, gangsters and slapstick comedy, The Lone Ranger and Tonto and, of course that magnificent white horse Silver. A Fiery Horse with The Speed Light and a hearty 'Hi ho, Silver and away' fantastic! As time passed, we went onwards and upwards, to better films and better actors. What memories!

However, there was still work to be done, and making my way to the toilets, I discovered a frost-severed pipe and decided to shut down the outside master stop cock, and as a reward for my services, I found a small hammer (a fitting memento of my visit) left behind by a forgetful caretaker or handyman. So with one final look around, I took my leave and left behind those cinematic ghosts of yesteryear, who once came to life and entertained us all in a place never to be forgotten. Goodbye the Palace.



Palace Cinema, King Street, Wigan, King Street, circa 1930.

Aspull and Haigh Historical Society

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 £2.00. Contact Margaret Hodge for further information on 01942 884893

10 January 2012
The History of Leyland Motors
Malcolm Tranter

14 February 2012
A V Roe. The History of Aviation in Manchester
David George

13 March 2012
The History of Postcards
Mr D Palmer

Billinge History Society

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

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.

18 December 2011
Where Does Time Go?
Peter Watson

17 January 2012
AGM followed by Look at Leigh's Locals: Leigh Cemetery
Hannah Turner

21 February 2012
The Edward Hall Diary Collection
Alex Miller

20 March 2012
The Country Asylum – Rainhill
Laura Rafferty

A weekly Help Desk is run by members of the Society each Monday from 1.30pm to 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 Drumcroom, 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. For further information call (01942) 727875 or visit www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory

Wigan Archaeological Society

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, at 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 Bill Aldridge on 01257 402342. You can also visit the website www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk

How to Find Us



Museum of Wigan Life

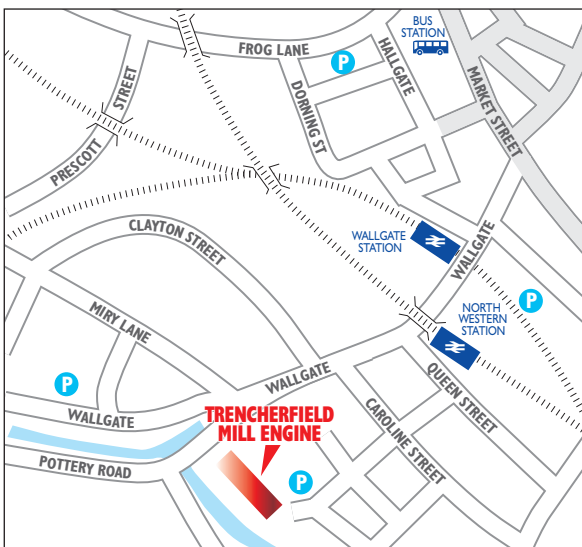
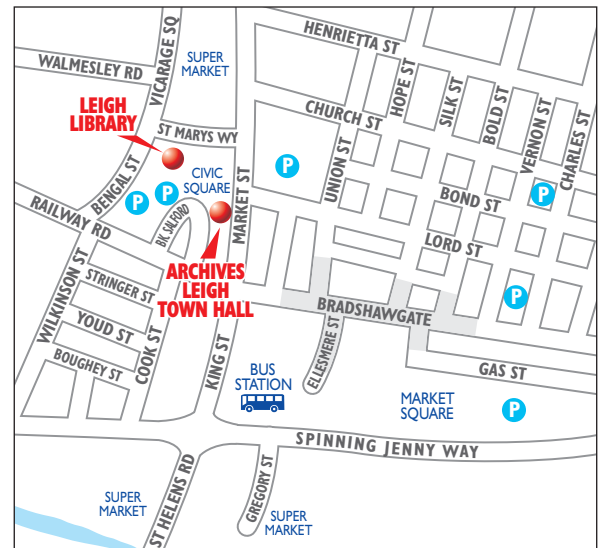
Library Street,
Wigan WN1 1NU
Telephone 01942 828128
heritage@wlct.org

Leigh Local History

Leigh Library, Turnpike Centre,
Civic Square, Leigh WN7 1EB
Telephone 01942 404559
h.turner@wlct.org

Archives

Leigh Town Hall, Leigh WN7 1DY
Telephone 01942 404430
a.miller@wlct.org



Trencherfield Mill Engine

Wigan Pier Quarter, Heritage Way,
Wigan WN3 4EF
Telephone 01942 828128