

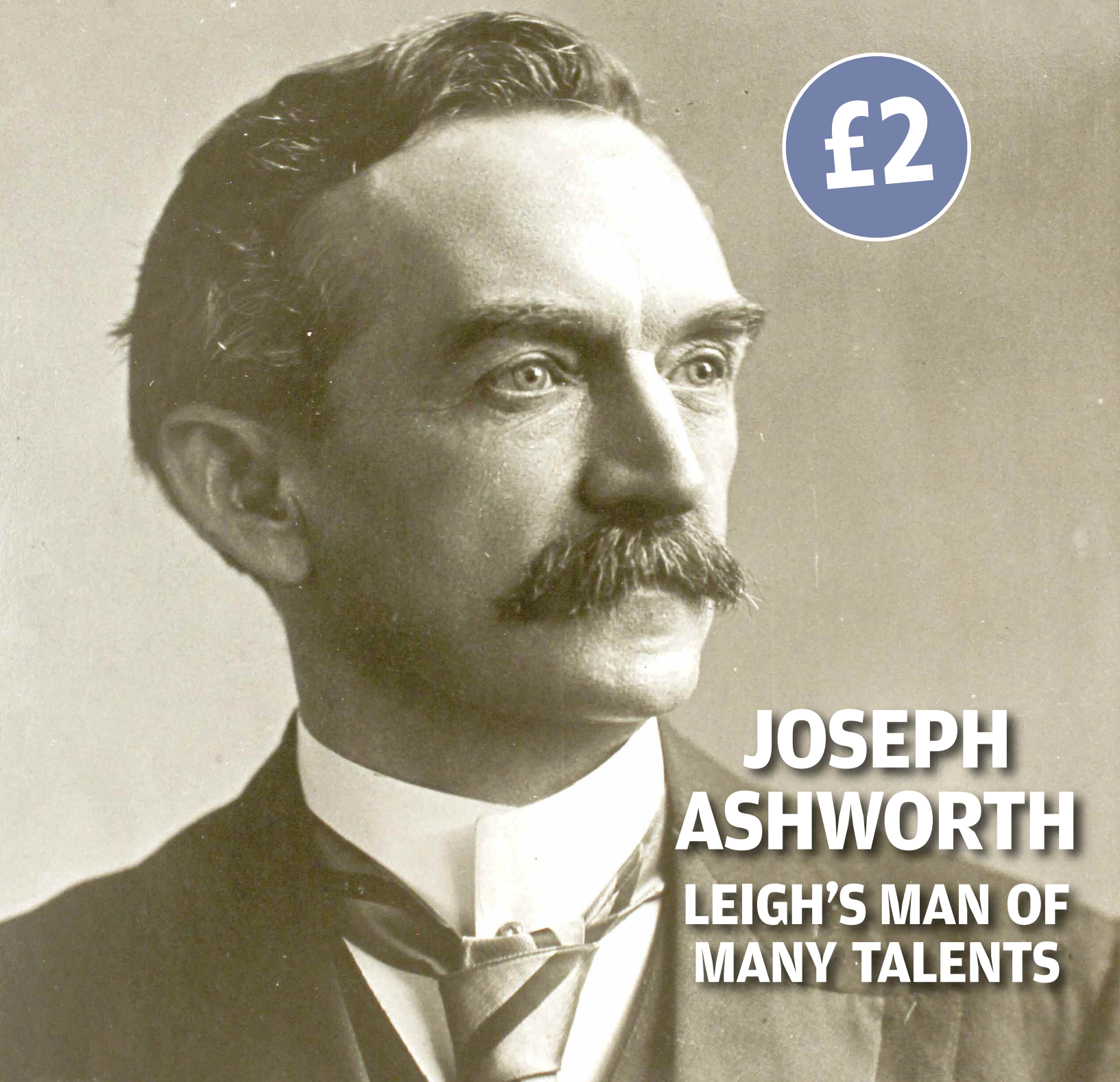
# PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Museums & Archives

Issue No. 72

April-July 2016

£2



**JOSEPH  
ASHWORTH**  
**LEIGH'S MAN OF  
MANY TALENTS**

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### FRONT COVER

*Councillor Joseph Ashworth,  
Mayor of Leigh*

## Letter from the Editorial Team

Welcome to **PAST Forward** Issue 72.

After our successful issue themed around women's history in the Borough (Issue 71), the flow of fascinating and unusual local stories continues.

In this edition we mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, four and a half months of fighting that came to shape our perceptions of the First World War more than any other engagement in the conflict.

We feature two more articles from the 2015 Essay Competition, Julie McKiernan's examination of the life of Mayor of Leigh, Joseph Ashworth (second placed) and Alex Hodge's investigation of medieval crosses in Standish (runner up).

Readers will be taken back to school, spend a pleasant Sunday afternoon in 1950s Scholes and receive a double dose of chemists' treatments from the past...

We're pleased to announce that the Essay Competition will return for 2016 thanks to the generosity of Mr and Mrs O'Neill. Please see page 34 for more details.

We are also looking for your views and ideas on how you would like to see Past Forward develop in the future. Our current format has served us well, but we want to refresh the lay-out and design of the magazine. We would like to make the digital version of the magazine more interactive with links to our new website, Wigan & Leigh Archives Online and bring Past Forward to new readers.

We believe Past Forward is a great read so we will keep publishing your articles as long as you keep sending them; the more the merrier.

If you have any ideas for new features, things you'd like to see more of – or less of – please contact us at [pastfoward@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:pastfoward@wigan.gov.uk)

We hope you enjoy Issue 72!

Alex Miller  
Archives Manager

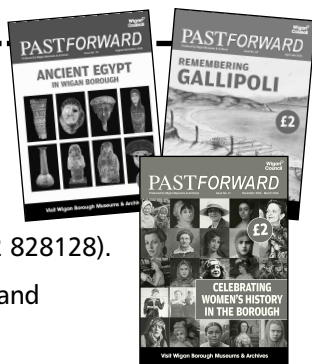
Information for contributors, please see page 19



# PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

## Copy Deadline for Issue 73

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday, 17 June 2016.



### Past Forward Subscription

Magazine subscription is £9 for three issues (incl. UK delivery). Payment by cheque (payable to Wigan Council), postal order or credit/debit card (telephone 01942 828128).

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# Write 1000 words - Win £100!

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

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2nd Prize - £75

3rd Prize - £50

Five Runners-Up Prizes of £25

The Essay Writing Competition is kindly sponsored by Mr and Mrs J. O'Neill.



Winners from the Wigan Borough Environment & Heritage Network, Essay Competition 2016, with the Mayor of Wigan Borough, Councillor Susan Loudon.

### Criteria

- Articles must be a maximum of 1000 words.
- Articles must focus on a local history topic within the geographical boundaries of Wigan Borough.
- By entering the competition you agree to your work being published in Past Forward. The winning article will be published in Past Forward and other submissions may also be published.
- If selected for publication the Past Forward Editorial Team may edit your submission.

### How to enter

- Articles must be received by e-mail or post by Thursday 1 October 2016.
- Electronic submissions are preferred although handwritten ones will be accepted.
- You must state clearly that your article is an entry into the Local History Writing Competition.
- You must include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address (if applicable). We will not pass your details on to anyone.

- It will not be possible for articles to be returned.
- You are welcome to include photographs or images however they cannot be returned.

### Submit to

[pastforward@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:pastforward@wigan.gov.uk)

OR

Local History Writing Competition,  
Past Forward, Museum of Wigan Life,  
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU

BY HANNAH TURNER

# Remembering Wigan Borough's Soldiers at the Somme



*British trench, occupied by the Cheshire Regiment, near the Albert-Bapaume road at Ovillers-la-Boisselle, July 1916 during the Battle of the Somme, Q 3390 Imperial War Museums.*

*'I still go cold when anyone says The Somme. It became a nightmare. Everyday you heard of somebody being killed or injured.' – Taken from Leigh and the Somme by Cyril Ward and Evelyn Finch.*

The Somme, known at the time as the Big Push, aimed to end the stalemate on the Western Front. Following the Battle of Marne in September 1914, where the German Schlieffen Plan to invade France and capture Paris in six weeks failed, a stalemate took hold between the opposing armies. A line of trenches became embedded, stretching from the Belgian coast, through France and up to the Swiss border. Attempts to break the stalemate took place along the western front but they did little to contribute to breaking the deadlock. Endeavours to win the war on other fronts resulted in campaigns such as the chaotic Gallipoli operation.

General Haig produced an idea for an offensive to break through the impasse. The operation would begin with a bombardment of the German troops with artillery to destroy their defences. The bombardment began on the 21 June 1916. British Intelligence had underestimated the strength of the German defences and in some cases they were deep below ground. In fact, Private Joseph Wharf

from Peel Lane, Tyldesley, inspected one of these trenches after it had been captured. Describing them 'as fine works of engineering' he went on to say how some of them were nearly 40ft below ground, so the bombardment failed to completely destroy the German defences and when the whistles blew along the British line on the 1 July 1916 at 7.30am, signalling to British soldiers to go over the top and advance towards the German trenches, German gunners were able to position themselves and shoot at the lines of soldiers walking towards them in no-man's land.

20,000 men are believed to have been killed on the first day of the Somme. Local historian Fred Holcroft's research led him to conclude that over 100 men from the borough died on that day. Despite the massive loss of life General Haig remained optimistic and wrote in his diary, 'The total casualties are estimated at over 40,000 to date. This cannot be considered severe in view of the numbers engaged, and the length of the front attacked'. Haig's optimism kept the offensive continuing until November. By the end of the Battle of the Somme it is believed that there were around 650,000 British casualties and 400,000 German casualties. Some territory had been captured by the allied armies but gains were not close to the anticipated rewards of the campaign.



News of the Somme began to trickle home. Haig's optimism was reiterated by the local press. The Leigh Journal declared 'the opening days of July are destined to stand out boldly in the chronology of the war, marking as they have done, the end of an historic period of enforced waiting and the beginning of a great offensive by the Allies'. Allegedly a wounded British officer interviewed in London described witnessing some of the Manchester Regiments taking part in the battle; he said it was, 'inspiring to see them leap over their own parapets and tail off into the mist of the morning singing'.

Not everyone described the opening scene of the battle in quite the same way as the officer. Private Nolan who had served in the Gallipoli campaign recorded, 'there were more shells in five minutes than were fired at Gallipoli in three months'. Writing to his mother in Tyldesley, Private Alfred Jackson of the King's Own Scottish Borderers told of the 'terrible handling' they received. Wounded and sent home, Alfred died of his wounds a few weeks later and was interred at Tyldesley Cemetery.

Private Thomas Edwin Walker wrote to his mother in Blackmoor from a hospital in Manchester. During the attack Private Walker had been in no-man's land for 19 hours before being 'brought down' and 'in that time I saw some awful sights'. All of the officers in Walker's regiment were killed, including his Colonel.

**AMUSEMENTS.**

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Advertisement for the film, 'The Battle of the Somme' from the Leigh Journal, 22 September 1916, showing at the Palace Theatre, Leigh.

During the offensive, Private Joseph Wharf of the South Lancashire Regiment, was hit by a shell and covered by dirt and sandbags. It took his 'pals' an hour to dig him out. Private Wharf's battalion was one which captured a German trench. He marvelled at the engineering of the trenches as well as the drink and food the Germans had left behind. Similarly, the Leigh Journal reported that Private Stephen Barnish of the 2nd Manchesters had also captured a trench with his battalion but Private Barnish implies a different image, a stark reminder of the brutality of the war:

'We have captured part of the enemy's lines, and a heavy struggle is proceeding. We are progressing slowly but surely... The Germans are good fighters until you get into their trench, and then they throw up their hands, and cry for mercy. If he is a sniper or machine gunner he is a dead man for cert. The sniper is worst of all, for he is the one who accounts for many of our boys when they are crawling along...'


Back in England, local people were given the opportunity to observe the Somme for themselves with the documentary, 'The Battle of the Somme', arriving in cinemas. The documentary is regarded by some as propaganda and was believed to be staged in parts. However, curiosity drove people to the local picture houses. In Leigh, 'The Battle of the Somme' arrived at the Palace Theatre in September 1916. Despite drawing 'record houses to the Palace' not everyone was pleased to see the film; one local recalled, 'I remember my father coming home on leave and as a treat taking us to the pictures...so you can imagine our disappointment when we got there and father found that it was a picture about the Somme battle. He said, "I've seen enough Somme, I'm not paying to see it again." So we all came home'.

The Somme ended in November 1916 but the recollections of the battle still stayed with the survivors. Interviewed in the 1980s a Somme veteran from the Leigh district still 'wept openly at the memories' and then requested that his painful remembrances die with him.

Sources:  
'Leigh and the Somme', by Cyril Ward and Evelyn Finch  
*Leigh Journal*  
*Wigan Observer*  
*Pals on the Somme*

**MILITARY FUNERAL.**

The remains of Pte. Alfred Jackson, of Alfred-st., who died of wounds received whilst fighting with his regiment, the King's Own Scottish Borderers, in the recent heavy fighting in France, were interred at Tyldesley Cemetery on Saturday, with full military honours. The arrangements for the funeral, which was of a very impressive character, were carried out by Mr. J. I. Baker, secretary of the local ex-Naval and Military Association, and Platoon Commander of the local Volunteer Defence Corps. By permission of the officer-in-charge, a firing party attended from the Leigh Prisoners of War Camp, this consisting of men of the Manchester Regiment under Sergt. Almond. The bearers were also men of the Manchester Regiment from Heaton Park, under the command of Quartermaster Sergt. P. Madden. Along the route to the Cemetery, which was lined with sympathetic onlookers, the Temperance Band played the "Dead March" in "Saul," and amongst those who joined in the funeral procession were representatives of the District Council, the Atherton and Tyldesley Volunteer Defence Corps, the men's ambulance Brigade, under Sergt. P. Grundy, the women's ambulance section under Mrs. Grimham, and local soldiers on furlough. The service at the Cemetery was conducted by the Rev. T. B. Jehu, and after the coffin, which was draped with the Union Jack, had been lowered to its last resting place, the band played "Peace, Perfect Peace," the firing party fired three volleys over the grave, and the bugles sounded "The Last Post." Admirable order was maintained along the route, and at the Cemetery by the police, under Inspector Clegg.



Pte. A. JACKSON.

*Private Alfred Jackson of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, died of wounds received at the Somme and buried at Tyldesley Cemetery.*

# THE MAN WHO MADE LEIGH BEAUTIFUL

BY JULIE MCKIERNAN

On the 27 February 1885 the Editor of The Leigh Journal, Solomon Partington, reported on a meeting he had attended at the Co-op Reading Room, with other influential businessmen and community leaders, to discuss their concerns about Leigh's children having nowhere to play.

On the same day one of those children, Joseph Ashworth, turned 14 but was already working as a cotton piecer. He lived in Bedford, which was a densely populated area of small terraced houses dwarfed by the surrounding brewery and mills and filled with fumes from the iron foundry where his father worked as a machine fitter. At the end of a long working day, young Joseph had to meet his friends on the streets or find an unattended building site where they could play. If they satisfied their urge to wander with a trip to nearby Lions' Bridge, they had to be careful to keep to the walks as stepping half-a-yard off was considered trespass.

Joseph's father, who could remember the town still surrounded by meadows, may well have attended the public meeting at the Drill Hall when members of the newly formed Leigh Park and Recreation Ground Committee addressed an enthusiastic crowd about the need for a public park to improve the health of the people. They decided to petition the 4th Lord Lilford, Thomas Littleton, for a plot



*Councillor Joseph Ashworth, Mayor of Leigh.*

of land near Lion's Bridge, which he agreed to rent to them for 10 shillings per annum on condition that it was fenced.

So, in August 1885, the Leigh Local Board met to discuss his offer. Whilst they deliberated in the old Town Hall, Solomon Partington and his

friend, John Drabble, led a 'Thousand Lads of Leigh' march past the building, with Joseph Ashworth amongst those who carried their bats and balls and cried 'we want a playground'. Sadly, the board decided that they couldn't afford to enclose and maintain the land when they were already struggling to finance the town's sewage, gas and water systems so the offer was declined.

Joseph never forgot his involvement in the campaign and his strong Wesleyan Methodist beliefs soon led him to take up a life of community service - first as a preacher and later as a politician. Although only 5' 4" and slight of build, he had remarkable energy and stamina and despite a new and demanding job as Secretary and Manager of the Leigh Friendly Collecting Society, he became one of the most active social reformers in the town. He was elected a Member of Leigh Borough Council in 1904, became a Justice of the Peace, joined the Leigh Liberal Association and chaired Leigh Relief Committee and the Leigh After-Care Committee.

In 1911 Joseph returned to his earliest cause when he joined the new parks and Bowling Green Sub-Committee to negotiate for a plot of land to create a park. He realised that public funds would be better spent on improving housing and transport so he appealed to the wealthier inhabitants of the town, who despite profiting from the labour of their workers, rarely offered much towards their welfare. In August 1913 he published an article, 'Making Leigh Attractive' in which he stated, 'Those who have made their money in the town are under obligation to do something to make it tolerable and attractive.'

In November 1913, aged 42, he was elected the youngest Mayor since incorporation and the first working Mayor. In his inaugural speech he said, 'We can and must provide at least one park for all the citizens, where they can retire at the end of the day and enjoy the healing touch nature gives.' Within six weeks he called a special meeting with the town council to tell them that he had successfully negotiated a deal with the 5th Lord Lilford, John Powys, to give Leigh a public bowling green and a park.

He had done, single handedly, what no other civic leader had managed to achieve in nearly thirty years but he was determined that the burden of paying for it would not be put on the ratepayers. He insisted that rich and poor alike must work together as a community to raise the necessary funds and risked personal financial ruin by ordering 100 park benches from Harrison McGregor's because he was confident he would find enough donors to buy them. He was still selling them on the opening day on the 5 June 1915 but had managed to raise £1,350 of the £1,500 required, no doubt to the relief of his wife and daughters.

At the opening ceremony he said that the park would, 'bring a new pleasure into our lives and create an atmosphere that will stimulate our thoughts and energies on making the town worthy of the pride we should take in it.' Joseph certainly took pride in his achievements that day but it was only one day during almost five years of a long and brutal war.

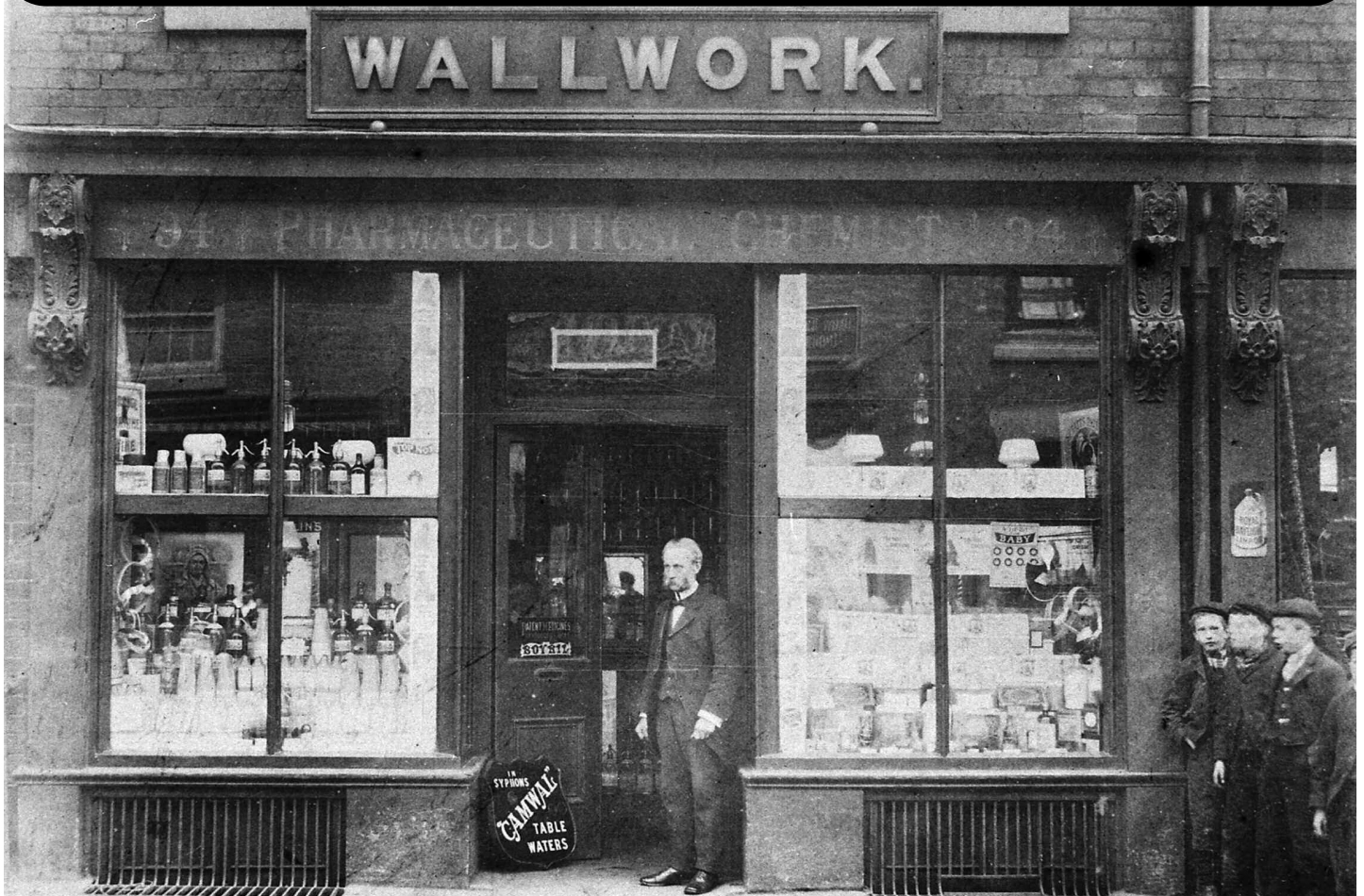
Joseph became Leigh's longest serving Mayor, serving six consecutive terms during which he encouraged local men to enlist as Chairman of the Leigh Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and considered the validity of their reasons for not doing as Chairman of the Local Tribunal. When he finally relinquished his chain of office one might have expected him to take things easier in peacetime but in 1922 he stood, unsuccessfully, for election as a Liberal MP. Despite such a full and active civic life he still found time to listen to music and play bowls, both of which he could do at his beloved Lilford Park.

He died on 3 May 1939 aged 68 and is buried in Leigh Cemetery. Joseph once complained that it was incredible that a town the size of Leigh was 'without a single public memorial or statue of any distinguished citizen', so it seems fitting that there are now plans to erect one to a man who would probably be the last person to think he deserved one - Joseph Ashworth.



BY PHIL LATHAM

# Wallwork's Chemist of Tyldesley



*Wallwork's Chemist Shop, Elliott Street, Tyldesley.*

Joseph Wallwork arrived in Tyldesley in 1860 and moved into the premises at 94 Elliott Street, always known as '94'. He was an apothecary and had learned his craft in the Horwich-Chorley area. He had married a Miss Shorrock, a mill owner's daughter from that area. My understanding is that an apothecary was not considered much of a catch in the mid-nineteenth century, which might have triggered the move to Tyldesley.

Initially I was told that he slept on the counter top but he developed the store rooms above the shop into living quarters for the new Mrs Wallwork. They had six children: Cecil, Harrington, Herbert, James, Charlotte and Martha.

The business was clearly successful and was expanded by the acquisition of 212 Elliott Street,

always known as '212'. This was less well suited to being a shop as it was small and narrow with a small front window but benefited from purpose-designed living quarters, unlike the converted store rooms at 94. I am not certain in which premises the individual children were born.

I am not certain how and when 'apothecary' evolved into 'chemist and druggist', and in turn into 'pharmacist', but the businesses have had all three titles over the years.

The involvement of the family was key to the development of the business with five of Joseph's six children involved. The exception - I hesitate to say black sheep - was James. He qualified as a doctor from Owens College, Manchester, in the mid-1890s, practised for a short while in Tyldesley

before leaving to work in Scotland. He married and started a family but died when still young. He is buried in Tyldesley Cemetery, his headstone raised by grateful patients.

The fact that he was the only one to leave Tyldesley and the only one to marry whilst young enough to embark on a family may speak volumes about the Wallwork's parenting style.

Cecil practised dentistry as well as pharmacy. There was a fully equipped dental surgery at 94 which was in use until the mid 1950s. Cecil married but had no children and later retired to Standish.

Herbert practised as an optician at 212 to complement pharmacy. He married but had no children. He remained in Tyldesley until his death in 1951.

Harrington practised pharmacy, married but had no children. He retired to Blackpool.

Charlotte and Martha worked as assistants in the two shops without formal qualifications. Neither married and both remained in Tyldesley all their lives.

The Wallworks were clearly important trades people in the rapidly expanding town of Tyldesley in the early years of the twentieth century. They were also influential in areas away from the business. When Joseph died his funeral was quite an event. By this time the business was pretty diversified and some of the items on sale would now seem unusual. These included: herbs and spices; fresh coffee; photographic equipment; developing and printing sundries; seeds; fertilisers; dyes and stains; lime and coloured pigment for whitewash; soda water siphons; and tonic wines.

At this time virtually all the medicines, tablets, pills, ointments, capsules and suppositories were made 'in house' from basic ingredients kept in the Dispensary. Many were made to individual prescriptions which were kept in ledgers for reference. Medicines were individually packaged and labelled, wrapped carefully and the package tied with twine and sealed with sealing wax.

As Joseph's children began to age what must have become clear to the family was the lack of succession planning - the five surviving children working in the business all moved into their late forties childless.

At the top of Castle Street, across from the eponymous Flaming Castle and opposite 94, James Latham ran a tripe shop with his wife Sarah. He was the tripe dresser, she made black puddings, renowned in the area. Their younger son, Fred, ran

errands for the Wallworks, apart from on Tuesdays when he had to collect the blood for the black puddings from the town's slaughterhouses.

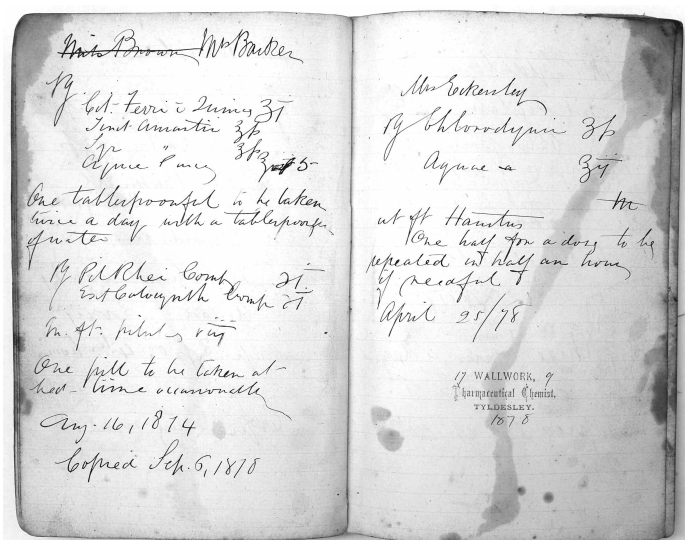
Fred must have been a good worker who impressed the Wallworks. They paid for him to go to Leigh Grammar and when he got appropriate marks in his School Certificate they took him on as an apprentice. This involved working in the business and attending Owens College in Manchester to study to become a registered Chemist and Druggist (pharmacy was not a degree course back then); he achieved this in March 1926.

Fred was loyal to his benefactors. He worked for them until 1941 when he was made a partner in the business. He remained a partner, running 94. He married Nora Duncan in 1947. She had joined Wallworks as a dispenser in 1938. Fred died in 1963 leaving two young children. Nora ran 94 as a 'drug store' - not able to dispense prescriptions - until she retired approaching 70 years of age.

The premises have subsequently been a curry house, a bar and a convenience store.

Harry Twist, a pharmacist with an additional optician's qualification, joined the business in the early 1950s after Herbert Wallwork's death and became a partner in 1953. He ran 212 and lived in the flat above with his wife Marian and daughter Carolyn until he retired.

Readers can view pages from an original prescription book from Wallwork, Chemists, on Wigan & Leigh Archives Online at [archives.wigan.gov.uk](http://archives.wigan.gov.uk)



Entry from a Wallwork's Chemist, prescribing notebook 1878.

# Julia Walkden, Wigan Weavers and Political Activism

BY YVONNE ECKERSLEY

By virtue of standing for All Saint's Ward in the by-election of October 1919, Julia Walkden, backed by Wigan's Labour Party and with the support of the Wigan Weavers' Association, was the first woman candidate to compete for a place on Wigan's Council.

Julia stood again in the November Council Elections. Her election profile records that Julia was born in 1881; aged ten she began work as a domestic; aged twelve she was a housemaid/wardress; aged sixteen a ladies maid, travelling for two years on the continent with her employer; aged eighteen a housekeeper in Liverpool. She then came to work in Wigan's mills. For fifteen years she was a 'fancy warper' at Messrs Eckersley's Mills, leaving in 1916. Her profile lists her occupation as Housewife; up to this point not an untypical history for women of her class.

## Wigan Weavers' Union

However, whilst at Eckersley's Mill she formed a close friendship with Elizabeth Hart, joined the Wigan Weaver's union and was soon one of their most active Committee members. By 1912 Julia was Vice President to Rebecca Kenyon, then from 1917-1919 to Elizabeth Dawber.

The union was unique, as apart from the occasional male secretary, all its democratically elected officials, committee members and collectors were female. These women ran a large and growing union, negotiated for weavers in local industrial disputes and worked to raise the piece work rates paid to their members. Wigan weavers were one of two of the poorest paid groups of weavers in Lancashire.

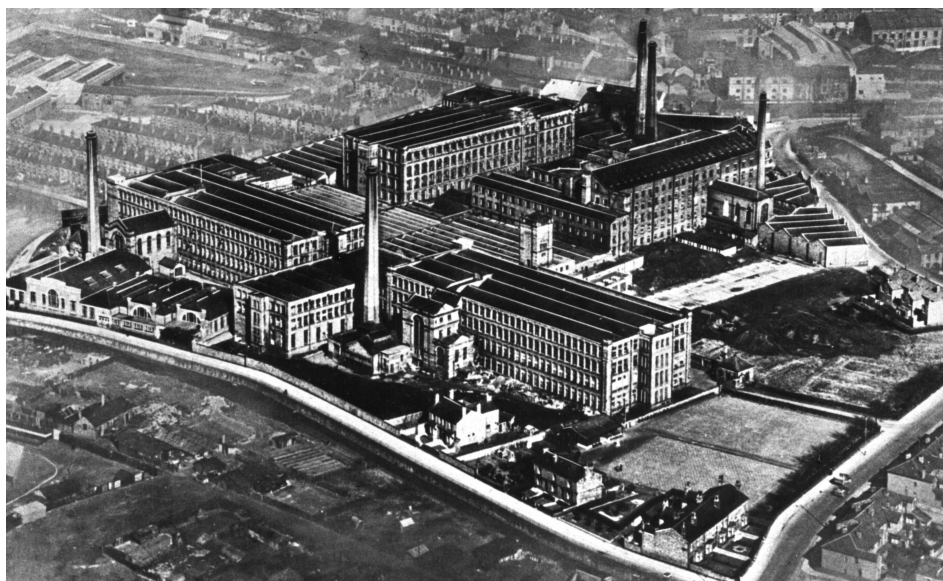
Though largely Wigan-centric, their involvement in union activity was not parochial. Affiliation to the National Federation of Textile Workers facilitated strong working relationships between member unions, particularly in the north. Minute books show committee members, as regular attendees, shared information and ideas gathered from meetings of the Manchester branch of the Federation, as well as Wigan's Trades and Labour Council, the Wigan Labour Party and its Women's Sections.

The Committee did not confine themselves to union business. Their feminism, taking feminism to mean activism designed to improve women's position in society, encouraged them to widen their scope. There are a number of instances where these women joined the nation-wide sisterhood and attacked oppressive practices. For instance, they wrote to the Government objecting to the Defence of the Realm Act's 1918 Regulation, 40D. This legislation enabled policemen to arrest any woman talking to a serviceman, on the assumption she was soliciting, and have her examined for venereal diseases, a re-instatement of the nineteenth century's Contagious Diseases Acts in all but name.

## Feminist and Political Activism

The Wigan Weavers Association had an historical allegiance to Women's Politics. During the campaigns for Parliamentary Suffrage they promoted and supported the first Women's Suffrage candidate for

*Eckersley's Mill, c. 1920*





the 1906 General Election here in Wigan (Past Forward, Issue 71). Post war, because the 1918 Representation of the People's Act gave only a minority of women a parliamentary vote, women still had insufficient political power to effectively influence government policies. This encouraged women to look elsewhere to orchestrate change, which included addressing issues within proposed, new and historic legislation.

Fortunately, the 1914 Municipal Reform Act, which removed the restrictive property qualification – but put on hold for the duration of the war – became fully operational in 1919. Consequently it became more common for women to be elected onto town councils. Once elected they used their position to influence practical policies on women's behalf.

By 1919, Julia was an established member of the relatively new Wigan Labour Party. She was particularly active in its sizable Women's Section – 40 members attended its annual picnic. This section had strong connections to the Weavers Association, holding their meetings and running weekly lectures in their offices at 37 Darlington Street. In October 1919 the Women's Section felt confident enough to request financial help from the union to aid their Municipal election programme and was granted £2 2s. The union's Committee also agreed to support Julia Walkden's candidature.

Another arena where Julia's feminism and unionist activism came together was in her work as a member of the Court of Referees in Wigan. These Courts were part of the Ministry of Labour's procedural framework to oversee the payment of unemployment benefits after the Unemployment Act of 1919.

Local Labour Exchanges employed an Insurance Officer to assess claims for unemployment benefit. If he disallowed payment then the claimant had the right to appeal to a Court of Referees. These Courts comprised in equal numbers, local employers and working men or women with an impartial chairman (paid £3 3s per sitting). Should the Referees find in the claimants' favour, the Insurance Officer could refer the decision to an umpire who made his recommendations to the Ministry.



*Julia Walkden*

In 1919 unemployment, due to the demobilisation of 3.5 million armed forces personnel and over 1.5 million munitions workers, was putting a strain on the Unemployment Insurance fund. Returning military men were to be given priority in the labour market; women it was decided, should either return to their homes or be employed in traditional jobs centred around domestic service. If they refused an offered position then their benefit was to be stopped. Not only women who refused domestic work had their dole stopped. Many Wigan women weavers were disallowed because they did not accept work in non-unionised mills.

In 1919, Julia was also a member of Wigan's Profiteering Committee. The Board of Trade required local authorities to establish Profiteering Committees and Appeal Tribunals. Members of these bodies were to be drawn from labour, women and the retail trades. These bodies were autonomous and each case was to be heard in public. Though ostensibly not gendered, because many of the categories – clothing, household goods, articles for making and mending, knitting and furniture – centred around the home and domesticity much of Julia's work included protecting women's interests.

Not all the activism was reactionary. Julia, perhaps influenced by Martha Hogg (Past Forward, Issue 62), a fellow

Women's Section member, worked to provide Maternal and Child Welfare care in Wigan. She worked closely with Elizabeth Hart as she tried to improve living conditions for miners and miners' wives. Elizabeth went to London in 1919 to give evidence to the Royal Commission into the Coal Industry on the conditions of miners' housing in Wigan (Past Forward, Issue 17). They both identified the powerlessness of pit brow girls to improve their working conditions and in order to give them a voice, worked to unionise them.

Julia was not elected, and perhaps it is for this reason her personal and public achievements have been overlooked.

#### References:

- Wigan Observer, October-November 1919**
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- 'English Feminism 1780-1980', Barbara Caine**

By Tom Walsh

# Sunday Afternoon, 1950s A Sixpenny Wish

In the early nineteen fifties on Sunday afternoons, without fail, I along with a collection of older cousins, walked to Mesnes Park. With church out of the way, we're armed with coppers earned the preceding week from going on errands for neighbours or – on a particularly good week – shillings from the rebate after the gas meter had been emptied.

This time of wealth alas only occurred infrequently. I know more than one school pal, who decided that the collection money meant for the upkeep of the church would be better spent in The Park Café: 'anyway it's only

tuppence and won't be missed', said to justify their misdeed. I must confess to being tempted to follow their lead, but after much soul searching concluded that eternal damnation and the fire that never goes out wasn't worth risking for a few pence. Catholic guilt I suppose!

On the way to the park we would often call at the Market Square to admire the cars that had been parked over night. Each child would decide which car we would like to have when grown up; my choice was always the Triumph Mayflower, an ambition that hasn't totally disappeared.



*Summer planting at Mesnes Park, c.1950.*

On reaching the park gates the race was on to reach the statue of Sir Francis Sharp Powell, each believing the story, that if you rubbed his foot and ran round the bronze figure three times you would find a sixpence. I can't remember feeling disappointed when week after week the promised reward failed to materialise. However, I can still remember the excitement when the predicted dividend almost transpired. That particular Sunday I won the race and having completed the ritual made my way towards the cafe. As I made my way along the path – no walking on the grass in those days – in the distance, glinting in the afternoon sun, I see what I convinced myself was the long looked for tanner. Alas, I was crestfallen on discovering the windfall was only a threepenny bit. After initial disappointment I was pleased with my find. From that day I have believed that this local piece of folklore is at least half right!

Next stop the café, to spend our treasure; in winter months hot Vimto, on warmer days a glass of lemonade, and if funds allowed a Cassinelli ice cream with raspberry. The establishment was always packed to overflowing. My sister, seven years older than yours truly, was usually there and not at all happy to see my smiling countenance. Her group of friends used the cafe to show off their Sunday best and look for eligible young men; more than one marriage had its beginnings in the Park Café. An uninvited little brother may well have cramped her style. More often than not I managed to blackmail her in to giving me a coin or two to make myself scarce. Then, loot in my pocket, off to the playground.

We would play all sorts of games. The girls stuck to seashells, hopscotch and skipping, sung to rhymes such as 'tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich-man, poor-man, beggar-man, thief'. The boys would have no truck with such girly games – perish the thought! You'd have been ostracised if you so much as touched a skipping rope, worse still a ball if it wasn't a football or a rugby-ball. Some games were played by both sexes, hide and seek and my particular favourite 'skilly', a game I think peculiar to Wigan. I won't go into the rules, but I'm sure many readers of Past Forward will also remember it with fondness.

Another popular game the older boys would play was Tarzan on the monkey bars, the younger boys cowboys and indians, and even more

controversial 'Japs and English' or 'Jerrys and Brits'. Remember this time was only a few years after the Second World War and people were far less hung up on political correctness. It was a time when people would examine goods to make sure that they had no input from Germany or Japan. Thank goodness times have moved on and scars have healed. Today terms such as these would be frowned upon, but not so in those days so I felt I ought to mention them for accuracy – certainly not to cause offence.

After the playground a brief visit to the bowling green. The stay there was short because like my sister and her compatriots, the men, always male bowlers in those days, were not pleased with our presence and would threaten us with 'The Parkie'. Now there was a man not to tangle with. The threat ringing in our ears, and a similar welcome on the tennis courts, swiftly off then to see the ducks and then home, passing Sir Francis without so much as a glance. It is strange that on entering the park everyone wanted to take part in polishing his shoe; on the way home he was universally ignored, so much so he might never have lived!

Home then to a good old fashioned tea. Nothing could be touched before hands and face had been washed and the obligatory inspection of said hands had taken place. Mothers would have busy baking in our absence. The tables would growl under the weight of meat and potato pies, meat pies, egg custard tarts and of course home baked bread. Sitting in the middle of the feast a trifle, which couldn't be disturbed until everyone had had their fill of the savouries.

When tea was over the leftovers were carefully wrapped in greaseproof paper and placed in the meat safe. Very few had refrigerators in those days so waste wasn't an option. My Mother was a particularly good manager. Aunties would joke, 'Janey can make a meal out of a dish cloth'. Waste was a luxury that couldn't be afforded. The residue from Sunday would make a lovely Monday tea or 'jack-bit' for Dads and Uncles to take to the pit; today it would be called 'a packed lunch'. Although truthfully, it never tasted as good on the second day. I reasoned it was because the baking aroma had dissipated; on the previous day the smell had the gastric juices flowing on entering into your home, or even passing a neighbour's house. Everybody baked and the smell came from every door. Happy days!



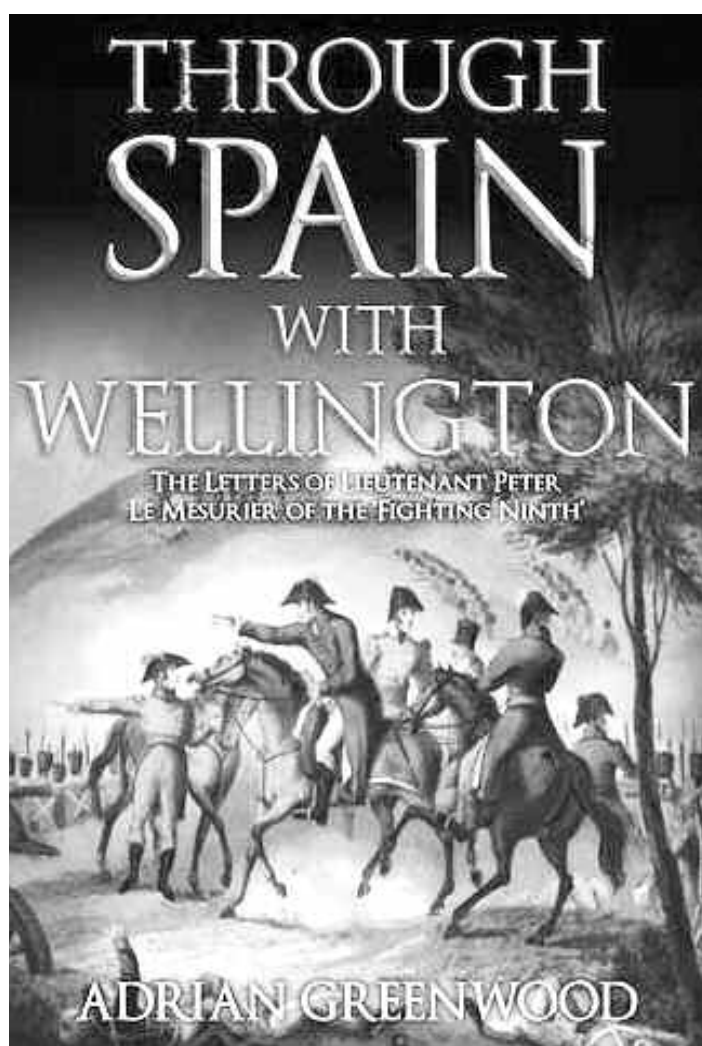
## ‘Through Spain with Wellington’

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We're delighted to announce the publication of another item from the Edward Hall Diary Collection. Edited by Adrian Greenwood and transcribed by Archives Volunteer, Gordon Rigby, the volume is entitled, 'Through Spain With Wellington: The Letters of Lieutenant Peter Le Mesurier of the 'Fighting Ninth'.

It has been reviewed as, 'One of the most revealing first-hand accounts of life in Wellington's army to be discovered for many years' (Rory Muir, author of Wellington).

The letters are one of the most comprehensive and extensive ever written by a British soldier during the conflict – apart from the despatches



of Wellington himself. They reveal the service of a hard-fighting British officer who finds himself in nearly every major engagement of the Peninsular War – a real life 'Sharpe'!

The book is now for sale from **Amberley Books and the Archives** and Adrian will be giving a free talk on the letters on Thursday 31 March, 6.30-7.45, at the Museum of Wigan Life – please call 01942 828128 to book a place.

## Coroner's Court Records

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Many deaths in the past were caused by accidents at work and numerous local businesses were dangerous places to earn a living. To mark the World Day for Safety & Health at Work, we will be publishing online some of the records from the Wigan Coroner's Court from the years of the First World War. These are fascinating records that reveal much about working conditions in the 1910s. They include details of the deaths of local female munitions workers, suffering from poisoning caused by contact with TNT used in manufacturing explosives for the war effort. The records and transcripts will be published at [archives.wigan.gov.uk](http://archives.wigan.gov.uk)

## Civic Histories: Wigan Borough Mayoral Project

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We are launching a major new volunteering project in conjunction with the Office of the Mayor of Wigan Borough. The project, 'Civic Histories', will attempt to create a complete database of every person who served in the Borough as Mayor or Chair of one of the former urban or rural districts. We hope to compile a complete list – as far back as we can go – and then research the lives of every individual.

As you might imagine, this will take some time and effort and so we're looking for help.

We're looking for volunteers to help us work through the records available to compile the

biographies of these people who dedicated their lives to public service. You do not need to have any previous experience, just a sense of curiosity for the past. We will show you – either at Wigan Local Studies, or Leigh Local Studies & the Archives – how to use different sources and ultimately publish the research on Wigan & Leigh Archives Online. If you have any experience of doing a family tree, you'd be perfect for the job!

If you are interested in getting involved, please get in touch with us.

Civic Histories:  
Wigan Borough Mayoral Project




Civic Histories: Wigan Borough Mayoral Project

The borough has a proud history of mayors past and present. We are looking for volunteers who want to get involved in their community and help research the history of the borough's mayors and council chairs.

Training will be provided and we will show you how to use local studies and archive documents as well as help you to get online and start researching. We want to create an online database celebrating our civic database celebrating our civic history as part of the Wigan and Leigh Archives Online website.

For more information please contact Wigan Archives and Leigh Local Studies on 01942 404430 or by emailing [archives@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:archives@wigan.gov.uk)

[WiganCouncilOnline](#)
[wiganouncil](#)
[@wiganouncil](#)
[wigan.gov.uk](#)

## Women's History #BelieveInHerBiographies

Thank you for everyone who has been in touch about our special Women's History edition of Past Forward. We've had a wonderful response to the articles and stories shared in the magazine.

We'd like to try to capture some of the untold stories of local women who have been important in reader's lives – so we are looking for short pen portraits of someone from history or your past who has had an influence on you or the Borough. They will all go into the Archives for future generations and the best published in Past Forward – with a winner receiving a subscription for a year to the magazine.

The #BelieveInHer Biographies should be no more than 200 words, ideally with a photograph, and can be emailed to [archives@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:archives@wigan.gov.uk)

## New Accessions and Collections

- Records concerning the life of William Liptrot and military service during the First World War, 1910s-1920s (Acc. 2015/82)
- Records concerning the professional practice of Norman Trevor Burnett, General Practitioner, Ashton-in-Makerfield (Acc. 2015/87)
- Alan Roby Collection, Title Deeds, relating to land around Orrell, Shevington and Wigan 1730-1930s (Acc. 2015/92)
- Records of Haigh and Aspull, St David's Church (additional records), 1961-1999 (Acc. 2015/93)
- Notebook giving details of customers and medicines prescribed by Wallwork Pharmaceutical Chemist, Tyldesley, 1878-1880 (Acc. 2015/95)
- Trevor Hardman, Leigh Grammar School Collection, Collection of exercise books, 1965-1972 (Acc. 2015/96)
- Personal and military diaries of George Derbyshire, 1930s-1960s (Acc. 2016/3)
- Records concerning the operations of the Haigh Foundry, 1830s-1860s (Acc. 2016/4)

# Ernest Ball

## Mayor of Wigan County Borough, 1937-1938

BY PETER WALKER

***To launch the Archives & Local Studies project, Civic Histories: Wigan Borough Mayoral Project, Peter Walker examines the life of Ernest Ball, the former errand boy who would meet the king, transform public transport in Wigan, become Deputy Lord Lieutenant of the County, Freeman and JP in Wigan and be awarded the CBE.***

"I set out to do a job on behalf of the ratepayers and I hope I have kept faith with them".

I met Alderman Ernest Ball when he was the most senior man on Wigan County Borough Council and I was a mere office junior. Always courteous and supportive to his officials, no matter how lowly, he was a man respected for his ability and leadership, especially in the field of public transport. He was a man of vision who valued the contribution of his political opponents and saw unpaid 'public service and the betterment of life generally as his occupation usually at the helm, other work his hobby'.

To those who knew him (though perhaps not to his face) he was Ernie Ball. These notes are based on the writings of those who knew and respected him and I feel that informality helps give a clearer picture of the man who the Wigan Observer described in 1972 as 'Mr Wigan'.

Ernie Ball was born just over the Wigan boundary in Standish Lower Ground, on 14 May 1891, shortly after his twin sister Elsie, fourth child of William, a coal miner, and Martha Jane Ball.

Educated at Standish Lower Ground and Crooke Village Schools, Ernie left when he was thirteen to enter the

grocery trade with the well-known Wigan firm of O&G Rushton. Later he joined the grocery department of Wigan Co-Operative Society.

On Friday 5 June 1908 Ernie's father, William, set off to work as usual at the John Pit of the Wigan Coal and Iron Company. At some time that day an accident occurred; William was crushed and fatally injured when a huge stone fell on him. He died a few hours later. Ernie was seventeen; his widowed mother was expecting her eleventh child, James, who was born a few months later.

On 1 August 1914 Ernie married Mary Ann Kay at St Mark's Church Newtown; they had one child, a son named Clifford.

In 1916 he joined the 2nd Battalion of the Manchester Regiment in France as No. 1 Lewis Gunner. His section relieved the section of the late Thomas Woodcock VC in the fighting around Munchy. He was lucky to avoid a fatal German bullet.

After the First World War he joined the firm of Holland & Clough, wholesale merchants in Scholes, where he remained to become the firm's senior traveller. His employer, Councillor John Holland, JP, was a member of Wigan Town Council.

A member of Newtown Labour Club, he became ward secretary and vice-president before standing for election in 1925 to represent Pemberton North Ward on Wigan Town Council. A position he would retain for almost fifty years.

His was interested in open air sports generally; both he and his wife were

members of Gathurst Golf Club and he enjoyed bowling and gardening.

In 1927 he was elected deputy Mayor of Wigan and in 1929 became chairman of the Transport Committee, the role for which he would be best remembered and honoured.

He led the change from trams to buses, wiped out the tramways department debt from revenue and saw the service set up on a sound financial basis. On his being elected mayor in 1937 the Wigan Observer reported that it was:

'...in large measure due to his energy, foresight and enthusiasm that the Transport Department has been lifted from a position of debt and liability to the Corporation to a most successful undertaking, successful both from the point of view of finance and service'.



*Ernest Ball, 1938.*

When he was granted the Freedom of the Borough of Wigan in 1954 the Lancashire Evening Post reported:

'It was Alderman Ball who drove the last electric tram to the transport depot on March, 28, 1931, an act symbolic of the victory against die-hards who still wanted electric trams to be the mainstay of the transport undertaking'.

Alderman Hancock, in moving the resolution that Alderman Ball be elected freeman, said that when he took over as chairman of transport in 1929 the transport system was a 'chaotic conglomeration and great debt'. Trams on narrow gauges, wide gauges and trolley buses. Alderman Ball and his committee held firm to their faith in motor buses and got the resolution through the council.

Councillor Arnold Walker, in proposing the toast referred to the town's poverty in 1925 when Alderman Ball was first elected and the prosperity enjoyed in 1954. This prosperity was in part owing to the modernisation of the transport system brought about by Alderman Ball and his Committee. The provision of cheap, reliable, transport was essential to a growing economy.

In 1937 he was elected Mayor of Wigan, choosing his employer, Councillor John Holland as his deputy. His duties as Mayor included the opening of the new Cleansing Depot in Frog Lane, described as a 'State of the Art' recycling facility and the Ritz Cinema in Station Road when he said:

'Only this weekend I read that 23 million patronise cinemas each week in the country. The effect of the cinema on the people can be for good. I hope that the people who visit the Ritz Cinema will not only be entertained but educated as well'.

Other duties included tree planting in schools and parks across the borough to commemorate the coronation of King George VI, hallowing of the extension to St Stephen's Church in Whelley, and visiting local organisations where he often spoke on transport issues.

He represented the town on an official visit to the Wigan Corporation Stand at the British Industries Fair in Birmingham and met King George VI and Queen

Elizabeth on their visit to Wigan as part of their tour of the northwest following the Coronation.

In 1938 with the threat of war looming in Europe there were still hopes that conflict might be avoided. A movement for peace grew and meetings were held in Wigan on the Market Square and at the Queen's Hall. In April 1938 a 'Peace Week' was organised in Wigan and the Mayor invited people to attend a united service on the Market Square.

Addressing the crowd he said that:

'The world's greatest need today is peace, and the attainment of peace should be the first concern of every responsible citizen. Wars, and threats of war fill our days with anxiousness, and it is only too obvious that we must find a way to peace or civilisation will crash'.

In October 1938 he launched an appeal to help refugees from Czechoslovakia. Despite the fears of war and his official duties the Mayor also found time to lead a team of councillors and officials in a bowls match against a team captained by the Mayor of Southport at the Bellingham, the home of Wigan Bowling Green, in Wigan Lane. In memory of a happy occasion the Wigan team presented him with a gold wrist watch.

In 1942 Ernie was elected Alderman, and in 1948 elected Chairman of the Municipal Passenger Transport Association Area 'C'. This area comprised the thirty four municipal transport undertakings, over a third of the municipal transport bodies in the country.

In 1954 he was made a freeman, the highest civic honour the town could bestow; yet, more honours awaited him. In 1959 he was awarded Commander of the British Empire (CBE) for political and public services, and in 1968 he was appointed Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire. The Lancashire Evening Post reported that:

'No one has given greater service or more of his leisure time towards the betterment of Wigan than Alderman Ball.'

During almost fifty years service he served on all the Council committees, was chairman of Transport, Deputy Chairman of Finance, Chairman of the Borough Boundaries committees and leader of the Labour Group. Further

afield he was vice-chairman of Makerfield Water Board, Chairman of the Post Office Advisory Committee for Wigan Council and a magistrate. An acknowledged expert in Public Transport he became Deputy Traffic Commissioner for the Northwest, represented the Northwest on the Municipal Passenger Transport Association and was a member of the Highways Transport Committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations.

In the 1960s he supported the Murrayfield Scheme to redevelop the centre of Wigan; the failure of this scheme was his one disappointment in a life devoted to public service that saw most of his dreams achieved.

In the 1960s, with the 1974 re-organisation of Local Government on the horizon, Alderman Ball served as chairman of a body studying re-organisation of county boroughs in the Northwest and was vice-chairman of a conference of local authorities covering Lancashire, Cheshire and the Peak District of Derbyshire - the area that would eventually become Greater Manchester.

The new system had no place for Aldermen and imposed a seventy five year age limit on elected representatives. Alderman Ball was disappointed at having to step down from public life, being still active he felt he had a lot of experience to offer. However, he supported the need for change, recognising that it was ridiculous at his age to stand for election and keep a younger man out. He wished to go at a time of his choosing.

'I set out to do a job on behalf of the ratepayers and hope I have kept faith with them'.

On his retirement in May 1972 he was presented with six silver goblets bearing the town's coat of arms which he promptly gave back to the town to become part of the civic regalia.

He passed away at the age of 87 at Acton House, Scholes, a widower, his wife and son having died before him.

*This is a slightly abridged version of Peter Walker's research into Mayor Ernest Ball. The full text with all sources will be published on Wigan & Leigh Archives Online; please visit [archives.wigan.gov.uk](http://archives.wigan.gov.uk)*



# In search of Cecilia Strickland of Sizergh Castle, Cumbria

by Stan Aspinall

Historical trails are unpredictable, often confusing but at times very exciting. This one started when I thought my research into the Standish family was coming to an end. I was on a guided tour of St Wilfrid's Parish Church in Standish, the only grade one listed building in the entire Wigan Metropolitan area. The tour led us eventually to the private chapel of the Standish family, above the crypt where most of them were buried from the sixteenth century onwards and since the 1930s permanently sealed.

There were lots of plaques on the wall but my attention was drawn to a white marble commemorative plaque dedicated in Latin to Cecilia Towneley, which included the name of Ralph Standish, her father and the man I was researching. The plaque had been put there by Thomas Strickland Standish, her grandson, in recognition of the many things she had done for the village. The guide saw my interest and said, 'there's a portrait of her daughter, Cecilia Strickland, at Sizergh Castle in Cumbria.'

To the memory  
Of Cecilia Towneley, daughter of Ralph  
Standish, a soldier,  
(also the widow of William Towneley, a  
soldier, who was born in May, 1714  
and died on 13th February, 1741,  
and is buried at Weston Close  
by the side of Rathonia:)  
born in July, 1714, she, Cecilia, died on  
21st December, 1778.

And indeed also  
To Edward Towneley Standish,  
their third son,  
who was born in July, 1740 and died on  
28th March, 1807.  
Thomas Strickland Standish, her grandson,  
ordered this to be made with a grateful  
and duly loving heart.

*(A Translation of the Plaque)*



*'We think this copy of Cecilia Strickland might have been painted by Harriet Anstey, a niece of Walter Charles Strickland, the owner of Sizergh at the time when the original Romney was sold in the 1890s. We know she copied a number of the family portraits that were sold at that time, so she is quite likely to be the artist.'*

So I went to Sizergh Castle on a cold October day to view a portrait and was greeted at the doorway of this National Trust property by a volunteer guide. He asked if I'd been there before and needed any help and I explained I'd just come to view the portrait of Cecilia Strickland. Two children, a girl aged about twelve and a boy, probably ten, stood by his side. The young girl spoke next; 'I know exactly

where that portrait is; I can take you to it.’  
‘That’s very good of you, ‘what’s your name?’  
I said. ‘Cecilia,’ she replied, ‘Cecilia Strickland,  
the lady in the portrait has the same name as  
me. This is my Gran’s castle’.

So I was led into the castle by a young girl  
skipping ahead of me, who just might be the  
direct descendant of the woman in the portrait  
I’d come to see. She led me up the staircase and  
through the wood-panelled dining room with its  
portraits of Stuart monarchs and into the ornate  
Georgian drawing room, finally arriving at the  
portrait of Cecilia Strickland, where my young  
guides left me alone to look and admire. The  
portrait is set in a Romney frame and shows a  
young and attractive dark haired woman in a  
blue satin dress adorned with pink ribbons. She  
is holding a shepherd’s crook and smiling. My  
observations and thoughts were at that point  
interrupted by a tap on my shoulder.

‘Excuse me’ said another of the room guides,  
‘you seem very interested in the portrait; I have  
to tell you we now think it is Margaret  
Messenger, Cecilia Strickland’s sister in law.’

‘But it says Cecilia Strickland here at the bottom  
of the portrait,’ I answered in some dismay. ‘Yes,  
I know,’ he replied, ‘The National Trust are not

keen to admit this isn’t Cecilia. We think the  
original is now in Cuba, though I understand Mrs  
Angela Hornyold Strickland has a copy of the  
original in her private quarters here at the castle.’

Intrigued, I wrote to Mrs Strickland, explaining  
my research, sending a copy of *The Loyal Owls*  
(my new book) and asking permission to view  
the portrait. Nothing happened for two months,  
but then a letter arrived and I was invited to  
make an appointment to view ‘the portrait we  
bought of Cecilia Strickland copied from the  
original which is now in Havana, Cuba.’

I returned to Sizergh Castle and was welcomed  
by Mrs Strickland and at last given sight of  
Ralph Standish’s grand-daughter, Cecilia  
Strickland; someone I would come to know very  
well in later months, as I followed the evidence  
trail once more to the Wigan Archives.

The Wigan Archives, housed in Leigh Town Hall,  
are a priceless community asset made even  
better by a friendly and welcoming staff. Over  
the next several months I was able to study and  
transcribe some hundreds of letters written by  
the Standish, Towneley and Strickland families.  
The story which emerged has everything from  
unexpected pregnancies to a scandal that  
shocks even today.

## Information for Contributors

We always welcome articles and letters for  
publication from both new and existing  
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
- Published and rejected submissions will be disposed of, unless you request for them to be returned
- Submissions may be held on file for publication in a future edition
- 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@wigan.gov.uk or  
The Editor at **PAST FORWARD**,  
Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street,  
Wigan WN1 1NU.

# Medieval stone cross bases in Standish

by Alex Hodge

I've been intrigued for many years with the stone cross base which is situated in an earth bank part way down Standish Wood Lane in Standish. This has led me to investigate the potential history of this cross base and the other two that are situated nearby.

The Standish Wood Lane cross base is Grade II listed and is also a scheduled ancient monument. Scheduled Ancient Monuments are sites of national historical or archaeological importance which are given legal protection by being placed on a list or 'schedule'. The cross base is cut from a single block of local grit stone and has a socket hole in the top where the cross shaft would have stood.

The cross was probably in the form of a crucifix and could have also been constructed out of grit stone or out of wood. Information on the Historic England website notes that there may be remains of its steps embedded in the bank which partly covers the base block.

*Cross base at Beech Walk.*



The other two cross bases nearby are also both Grade II listed and scheduled ancient monuments. They are of a similar size with a socket hole in the top. One is situated on Green Lane in Standish, the 'Green Lane cross base'. The other cross base is at the junction of Green Lane, Standish Wood Lane and Beech Walk at Standish, the 'Beech Walk cross base'. The Beech Walk cross base was originally on the west side of Green Lane at the junction with School Lane. It was moved in order to widen the lane for a road to the housing which has been developed there since the Second World War.

According to Historic England these cross bases were medieval crosses intended as way markers on the route between Wigan and Chorley. Reference is made to them within the Pevsner architectural guide as a sequence of crosses between Standish and Wigan.

Two other stone crosses were historically in Worthington but there is now no trace of them. It is noted in 'The Ancient crosses and holy wells of Lancashire' that one cross was situated a quarter of a mile from Hic Bibi well on Hic Bibi Lane. The other was about one mile north of Standish Parish Church on the bridleway near Cross Hey Wood.

There are additionally three potential explanations why all the crosses in Standish and Worthington were built and these are outlined below:

- They were used as roadside or weeping crosses erected purely for devotional purposes.

*Cross base at Green Lane.*



- They were used to rest the bodies being taken to burial at Standish Parish Church when the Parish of Standish covered all the following areas: Standish with Langtree; Shevington; Welch Whittle; Charnock Richard; Duxbury; Heath Charnock; Adlington; Anderton; Worthington; and Coppull. Bodies would have been carried over roads that turned to quagmires when it rained and in some cases over a considerable distance. Frequent resting places would therefore have been a necessity. There could have been many crosses that radiated across the Parish.
- They were marking long-distance routes frequented on pilgrimages.

Crosses during this period were also used as boundary markers. For instance, land in Worthington and Langtree was given during the thirteenth century to the Abbey of Cockersand. Reference is made to crosses used as boundary markers in a deed dating from between c.1212 and c.1240 between Richard of Langtree and the Abbey.

Crosses would probably have been a common sight across the local area from at least medieval times. All would have been destroyed either during English Reformation in the sixteenth century when the Church of England broke away from the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church, or during the English Civil War in the seventeenth century.

The destruction of crosses would have generally been motivated by the adoption of a literal

interpretation of the Ten Commandments, which forbids the making and worshipping of graven images. Since Lancashire remained more solidly Catholic after the Reformation than any other part of England the crosses could have survived here much longer than in other areas. The demolition of the crosses could have occurred at the same time as the smashing of stained glass windows, the desecration of shrines and statues, and the whitewashing of religious paintings.

It is also open to supposition why these three cross bases have survived, when other such bases have not done so, including the crosses in Worthington. I propose a number of potential reasons why they could have survived:

- They were used as boundary markers.
- They were saved from full destruction by the Roman Catholic Standish family at nearby Standish Hall. This family had considerable influence in the district and potentially could have ensured their survival, perhaps with the intention that if the 'old faith' returned the crosses would be replaced.
- It was too much trouble to remove them.

We shall never know why they have survived but they are rare in Lancashire. They contribute significantly to our understanding of medieval religious customs. They provide evidence of medieval routes and serve to remind us of medieval travellers and the importance of religion in medieval life.

*Cross base at Standish Wood Lane.*





By Rita Musa

# Wigan's First World War Military Tribunals

Before the First World War there had never been compulsory military service in Britain. The first Military Service Bill became law a century ago in January 1916, following the failure of recruitment schemes to raise sufficient volunteers.

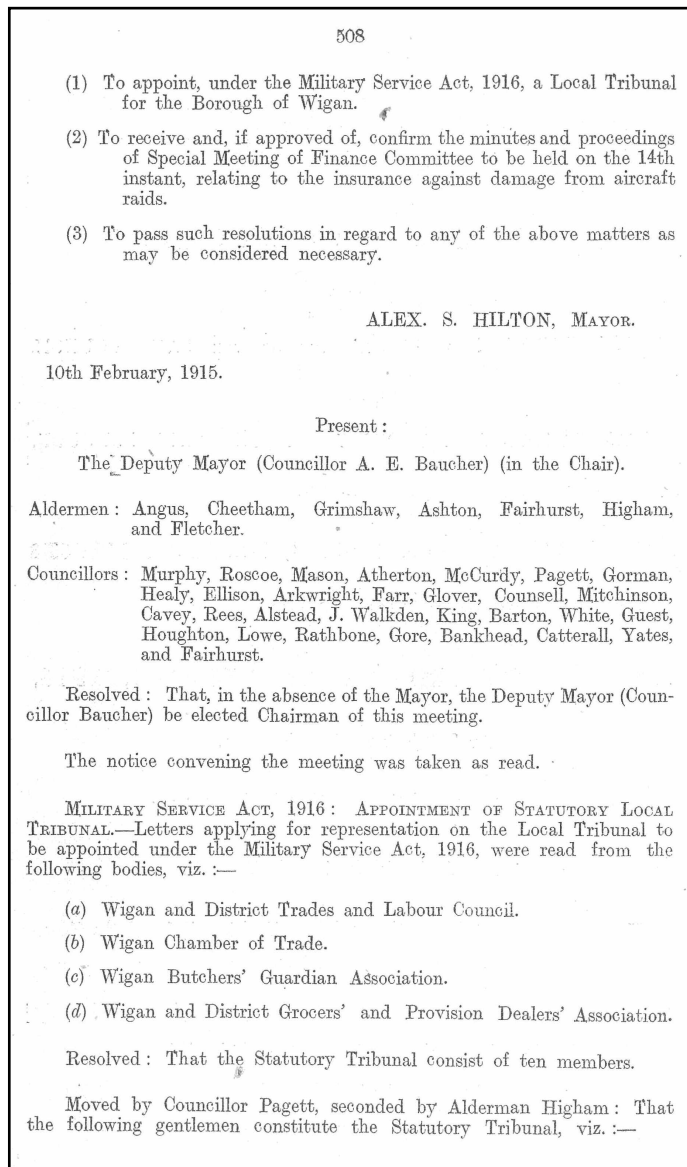
Military service became compulsory for all single men in England, Scotland and Wales aged 18 to 41, except those in work essential to the war effort, sole supporters of dependents, the medically unfit or 'those who could show a conscientious objection'. Later military service laws tightened occupational exemptions, included married men and raised the age limit to 50.

Men could apply to local Military Tribunals for exemption, or appeal against a local decision at County Appeals Tribunals and the Central Tribunal based in London.

Due to the sensitive issues that surrounded compulsory military service during and after the war, only a small number of tribunal papers survive. After the war, the Government gave instruction for all tribunal material to be destroyed, except for the Middlesex and Lothian & Peebles records, which were retained as a benchmark, along with samples from the Central Tribunal. We are fortunate that in the collections at Wigan Archives, the Military Tribunals for Leigh have somehow survived.

Arguments given by applicants to the tribunals are varied, with applications made on medical grounds, on family grounds, on economic grounds and on moral grounds.

A 'Special Meeting' of the Town Council of the County Borough of Wigan was held on 15 February 1916. One of the purposes of the meeting was to appoint a Statutory Local Tribunal for the Borough of Wigan under the Military Service Act. Letters applying for representation were read from Wigan and District Trades and Labour Council, Wigan Chamber of Trade, Wigan Butchers' Guardian Association and Wigan and District Grocers' and Provision Dealers' Association.



It was resolved that the tribunal should appoint ten members.

May 1916 saw reports in the Wigan Observer of the first conscientious objectors to be brought before Wigan Borough Police Court. There were eight men in total. They were arrested as absentees and for failing to report under the Military Act. The defendants were not legally represented and it was reported there was a large crowd in the public gallery.

The names and addresses of the eight defendants were given as follows:

William Welsby, 9 Dobbs Fold  
Frederick Derkin, 11 Fletcher Street  
William Dakin, 31 Poolstock Lane  
Alfred Stoker, 3 Gidlow Avenue  
Harold Smith, arrested at his home,  
61 Hodges Street,  
Eli E Trotter, 37 Darlington Street  
Richard Worthington, 30 Kenyon Road  
Osmond Bolton, 20 Chancery Street

It was not just individuals that could appeal to a tribunal. Businesses could apply on behalf of employees. A well-known, unnamed Wigan ironmonger applied for the exemption of a 38 year old tool specialist on the grounds that he was indispensable and that the company was supplying munition works and reserved trades with equipment. He was given exemption as long as he remained at his present position.

A representative of the Amalgamated Association of Master Cloggers appeared on behalf of a 21 year old Master Clogger on the grounds that clogging was on the Board of Trade's reserved list. The Military Authority said they had no official information to that effect. The matter was adjourned for a week whilst information was obtained; the outcome is unknown.

Wigan Council applied for exemption on behalf of the Professional Auditor, Reginald G Taylor, who had been called up and after being medically examined was certified for Home Service only. The Town Clerk was instructed to make a representation on the grounds that he would be more useful as Auditor than serving in a sedentary occupation in His Majesty's Forces and that he should be placed on the Corporation's list of Indispensables. The matter was referred to the General Purposes Committee for advice as four members were on the Local Tribunal.

Individuals appealed on economic grounds. A clothing factory employee pleaded that he was the only support of a mother who had been a widow for 23 years. It was calculated by the Military Authority that the mother would have as much to live on if her son went away as she had now. It was also stated that an aunt living with them paid the rent on alternate weeks. The decision was that he had to remain in his group for call up.

Questions were asked on this subject at a meeting of attested married men, held at the Pavilion, Wigan in March 1916. Had not a wife an only husband? Had not children an only father? Could they tell the difference in the positions? What

about every married man and every wife? If he or she were allowed the same privilege as the economic conscript under the law, every married man's wife would have the right of appeal that her husband should be let off because he was her main source of maintenance.

Butcher, Edward Pepper, of 155 Hodges Street claimed absolute exemption as a conscientious objector on account of being a preacher with the Churches of Christ; he had a strong objection to military service of any kind. The Advisory Committee considered that if the applicant could kill a calf or a lamb he was capable of killing a German. They suggested that it was really the loss of his business that was actually troubling him.

The Orrell Tribunal, under the Chairmanship of Mr C Hartley, saw three unnamed attendees appearing as conscientious objectors. The first applicant asked for total exemption on both combatant and non-combatant service. The next applicant, the previous applicant's brother, claimed exemption on the same grounds of duty towards God and that he could not fight or help in any way. The third applicant was described as a local preacher of the Wigan Wesleyan Circuit. In all three cases the applications were refused.

A number of conscientious objectors appeared before the County Tribunal, sitting at Liverpool Town Hall in April 1916. Appeals were dealt with from Ince and Orrell amongst other places. The Lord Mayor of Liverpool complained that people would send letters to him concerning forthcoming cases; they did their friends a great deal of harm and of course no notice was taken of the letters.

A grocer's assistant from Platt Bridge, appealed against the decision of the local tribunal which had passed him for non-combatant service. His grounds of appeal were that he didn't get an impartial hearing and that he was refused the privilege of quoting Scripture to support his case. The appeal was dismissed and the decision of the lower tribunal was confirmed.

John Coop of Lord Street, Hindley, was employed as a co-operative branch manager. His appeal was on the grounds that his parents had taught him that all wars were wicked and also on domestic grounds in that his highest duty was to his parents who were in ill-health. The appeal was dismissed and leave to appeal further was refused.

Further information concerning other cases can be found in Wigan Council Minutes and the Wigan Observer held on microfilm at Wigan Local Studies.

# A Wigan Man's Eastern Journey

# Mesopotamia

By Hilary Baker

*Hilary Baker continues her examination of the military service of her grandfather, William (Bill) Bentley*

At the outbreak of the war in 1914, British troops had been sent to Basra to protect the British oil interests in Southern Persia. Comanded by Generals Nixon and Townshend they experienced some initial successes and were drawn further and further north, taking Baghdad before being besieged by the Turks at Kut in December 1915. The siege started just one month before the last Lancashire men quietly left the beach at Gallipoli in January 1916. Talk about going from the frying pan to the fire.

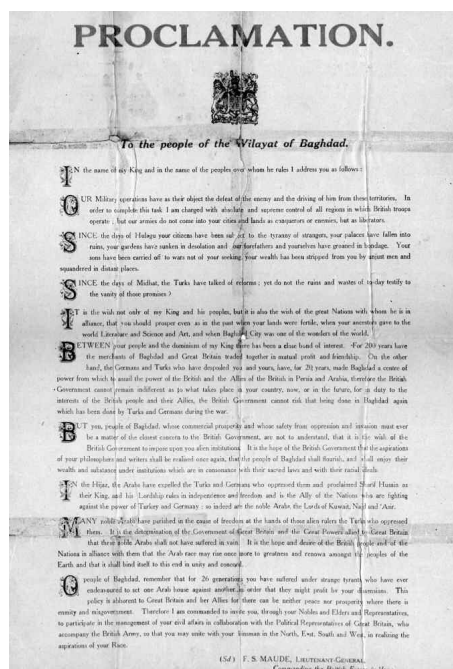
After the silent night time evacuation of Gallipoli, some of the troops were transferred back to Europe, mainly to France, whilst some were transported to Egypt to await further orders. Clement Attlee – the future Labour Prime Minister – was the penultimate man to be evacuated, the last being Gen Sir Frederick Stanley Maude, who took Baghdad in 1917.

At this point I am not entirely sure which regiment my grandfather, William Bentley, was in as his discharge papers show him being transferred to several different regiments, all of which fought at both Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia. I am certain however that they were all eventually sent to Basra, in what is now called Iraq.

upriver to captivity somewhere in Asia Minor – to be interned by the sea as Kahlil Pasha had promised. On the first night they were left without food, water or shelter. Three hundred men died of gastroenteritis within the first few days but worse was to follow.

There is a famous scene in the film Lawrence of Arabia where Lawrence comes across a trail of bodies in the desert and is driven mad with rage and grief at what he sees. This scene shows part of the horrific death march that most of the rank and file soldiers were subjected to. Starved, beaten, robbed, younger soldiers raped, humiliated and dying of disease, three thousand men simply disappeared into the deserts never to be seen again. They were mistreated by Turks and Arabs alike. Although there were some instances of kindness shown by some Arabs, these were rare and of the 2,592 rank and file British prisoners from Kut 70% died in captivity.

Following the losses at the battle of Umm El Hanna on 21 January under General Aylmer, the 6th Service Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment, 13th Division, were being ordered to journey up the Tigris in river steamers. On 5 April battle commenced for the 13th division. Once again Captain Clement Atlee was present with the Lancashire men and suffered a serious



*Proclamation received by the people of Baghdad, issued by General Maude.*

The siege of Kut lasted from December 1915 until the British surrendered on 29 April 1916. What followed was horrific to say the least. Khalil Pasha, the Turkish commander of the whole region, had assured General Townshend that every care would be taken of the emaciated soldiers who could only just walk; they would become the honoured guests of the Ottoman Empire.

The lucky sick and wounded were allowed to go downstream and the officers were taken to Baghdad by boat but the rank and file were to be marched

wound. Hit in the leg by shrapnel from a British shell whilst storming an enemy trench at the Battle of Hanna in Iraq.

Atlee played no further part in the campaign but was sent back to Britain to recover; he spent much of 1917 training soldiers and was promoted to major. During the final few months of the war he served on the Western Front in France.

The next battle was at Fallahiya. The 40th Brigade led the battle, followed by the 38th and 39th. The Turks were described in the regimental history as, 'hanging on doggedly and waiting for the bayonet'.

The men were desperately trying to relieve Kut and fought battle after battle with the Turks who were equally determined to stop them. The weather didn't help as a strong wind from the north blew the melt water from the mountains right across the forward positions in the marshes of the Tigris river. 13th Division

casualties had now reached 46% and time to save the garrison at Kut had run out. Townshend surrendered on 29 April.

Hot weather was now approaching; it could get to 128 degrees in the shade and the heat was accompanied by dust storms, dysentery, sand-fly fever and malaria. Oh, and yes – the flies!

Between 9 and 13 February the South Lancs cleared 5,500 yards of enemy trenches plus three strong points in fierce and continuous fighting. Eventually they pushed the Turks back to Baghdad where on the 9-10 March the Turks abandoned their last position covering Baghdad.

There is some dispute regarding which regiment entered the city first but I know that my grandfather was there because the only war souvenir he had was a copy of the proclamation issued by General Maude. It was folded up and kept, looking slightly the worse for wear now, but it was the first indication we had that he

was there as he never spoke about it, to my father at least. It was issued in both English and Arabic and was dropped from airplanes onto the city.

The troops were only allowed a short respite before marching off again to more battles with the retreating enemy. They pursued the Turks right up to the Persian border and it was not until November 1918 that the Turks were finally defeated.

Demobilization did not begin until December 1918 with key workers such as miners going home first. Only in the spring of 1919 did the 6th battalion cease to exist as a unit. William Bentley was transferred to reserves on 26 April 1919 and at last returned home. I am sure he must have been very glad to see Wigan again.

They had done four years continuous service in terrible conditions in Gallipoli, Egypt and Mesopotamia, where casualties had been very high, but surprisingly no campaign medals were issued for any of these theatres of war. He was only given the usual three medals – Pip, Squeak and Wilfrid.

Sadly many of these place names are still familiar to us today as scenes of conflict in the more recent times.

*The first part of William (Bill) Bentley's story can be found in Past Forward, Issue 67.*

#### References:

'History of the South Lancs. Regiment', Fulwood Barracks 'Battles on The Tigris', Ron Wilcox (Pen and Sword Military), 2006



*William Bentley and family outside their home at Heather Grove, Pemberton.*



# Around Wigan

with Bob Heaviside

Bob continues his look through the newspaper cuttings files at Wigan Local Studies to uncover the forgotten stories of bygone days in Wigan.



Two Bavarian basket weavers arrived in Wigan in November 1933 to teach local workers their art at the basket works at the former Oldfield Brewery, Poolstock; the works employed 150 women at the time and had been recently opened – taken from the Wigan Observer, November 1933.



To finish a tour around the world, we're off to Rome. Four Roman Catholic men from Wigan were selected as part of a contingent of unemployed British Catholics from a wide range of professions, to take part in a pilgrimage to Rome in the summer of 1933. The four men shown were J Hoy, J Brookwell, R Rogers and J Shannon, all from Ince and Wigan, and members of the pilgrimage group were granted an audience with the Pope at the Vatican.

From basket weavers to Hollywood! Gracie Fields, the Rochdale singer and actress, visited Wigan as well that year. She visited to support the Mayor of Wigan's Cot Fund for the Wigan Infirmary, appearing at the Market Square in front of a large crowd and stayed for a Lancashire hot-pot lunch at the Grand Hotel.

Out of the

GRIMSHAW & CULSHAW  
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comes health!

YOU buy health with every bottle of G. & C. Milk. Every quart of this milk is pasteurised and bottled under the strictest sanitary regulations. Its cream contents is high and never varies, it is rich in the elements that build sturdy bodies. Hence, every child and adult should consume at least one pint a day.

Place an Order for the Daily Delivery of Milk.

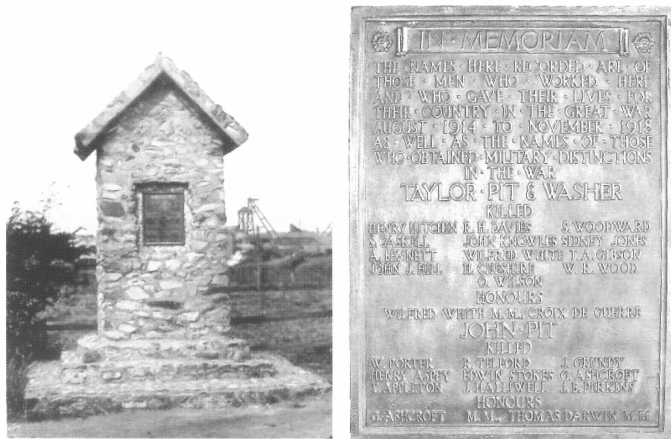
**GRIMSHAW & CULSHAW, LTD.,**  
MESNES STREET. Tel. 2455.

Another nice advertisement from the 1930s newspapers. I'm sure many of you may still have milk delivered from a local dairy – this advertisement is for Grimshaw & Culshaw Limited, of Mesnes Street. Do any readers remember them?



# A Monument's Story

## Taylor and John Pits, Standish by John O'Neill



Very few local residents are aware of 'The Monument', constructed in the 1920's by mineworkers of the Taylor and John Pits in Standish, to commemorate those of their workmates who gave their lives in the Great War (1914-1918), or the significance of the bronze plaque fronting St. Anne's Church in Shevington.

The brief story related here attempts to explain the Monument's part in our local heritage.

In order to commemorate the lives of those men of the Taylor Pit and Washer and John Pit, who had been killed in the Great War, 1914-1918, their fellow workmates constructed a monument to them adjacent to the mineral railway that ran through those collieries from stone and other materials available to them in that vicinity, and placed a bronze plaque containing their names upon it.

Following the monument's erection in the 1920's, the collieries which had been established in the 1830's-1840's continued production to closure in the 1950's.

From that time, nature gradually took over the sites, assisted by the removal of tracks, equipment and buildings, including over a longer period, the slag-heaps which had been a familiar sight from Wigan Road.

The monument itself fell into disrepair and the plaque was removed. Despite widespread enquiries, its whereabouts were never identified.

A series of bronze plaques identical in style to that from the monument and commemorating the lives of miners from a number of collieries in the Wigan coalfields, including the Taylor and John pits, who had also lost their lives in the Great War, were attached to the inside walls of the Standish Peace Gate, off Market Place. These were erected in 1925 by public subscription, leading through to St. Wilfrid's Parish Church entrance, where they remain to this day.

In 1995, Councillor John O'Neill, having established Standish Community Forum and chaired its meetings, brought the deteriorating condition of the monument to the forum's attention and obtained members' agreement that it should, if at all possible, be restored.

Having obtained the landowner's permission, as the site was now in private ownership, the chairman engaged a local developer, Laurel Limited, to undertake the restoration work financed by Wigan Council's Brighter Borough Budget scheme.

However, within a short period of commencing that work, vandals stole the newly-laid flagstones, damaged new tiles, scattered wreaths and destroyed a temporary plaque.

Despite the set-back, the Forum agreed, with the support and assistance of Standish Royal British Legion and the Vicar of St. Anne's Parish Church, Shevington, the Rev. John Riley that an Act of Remembrance be held there on Saturday, 11 November 2000.

Sadly, because of the monument's isolated position, making it almost impossible to protect from further vandalism, it was agreed that the project be abandoned and instead that a replica plaque in St. Wilfrid's Peace Gate be cast and placed, with the permission of Blackburn diocese and the Vicar, on the grassed area fronting St. Anne's Church.

Historically, there had been a strong link between the Church and local miners who had contributed funding towards the building of the Church which was opened in 1887. It was, therefore, appropriate that the plaque be placed on a raised stone block where it remains to this day as a permanent memorial; whilst the original monument gradually sinks into the now natural landscape of a site no longer recognisable as an area of industrial activity for over a century.

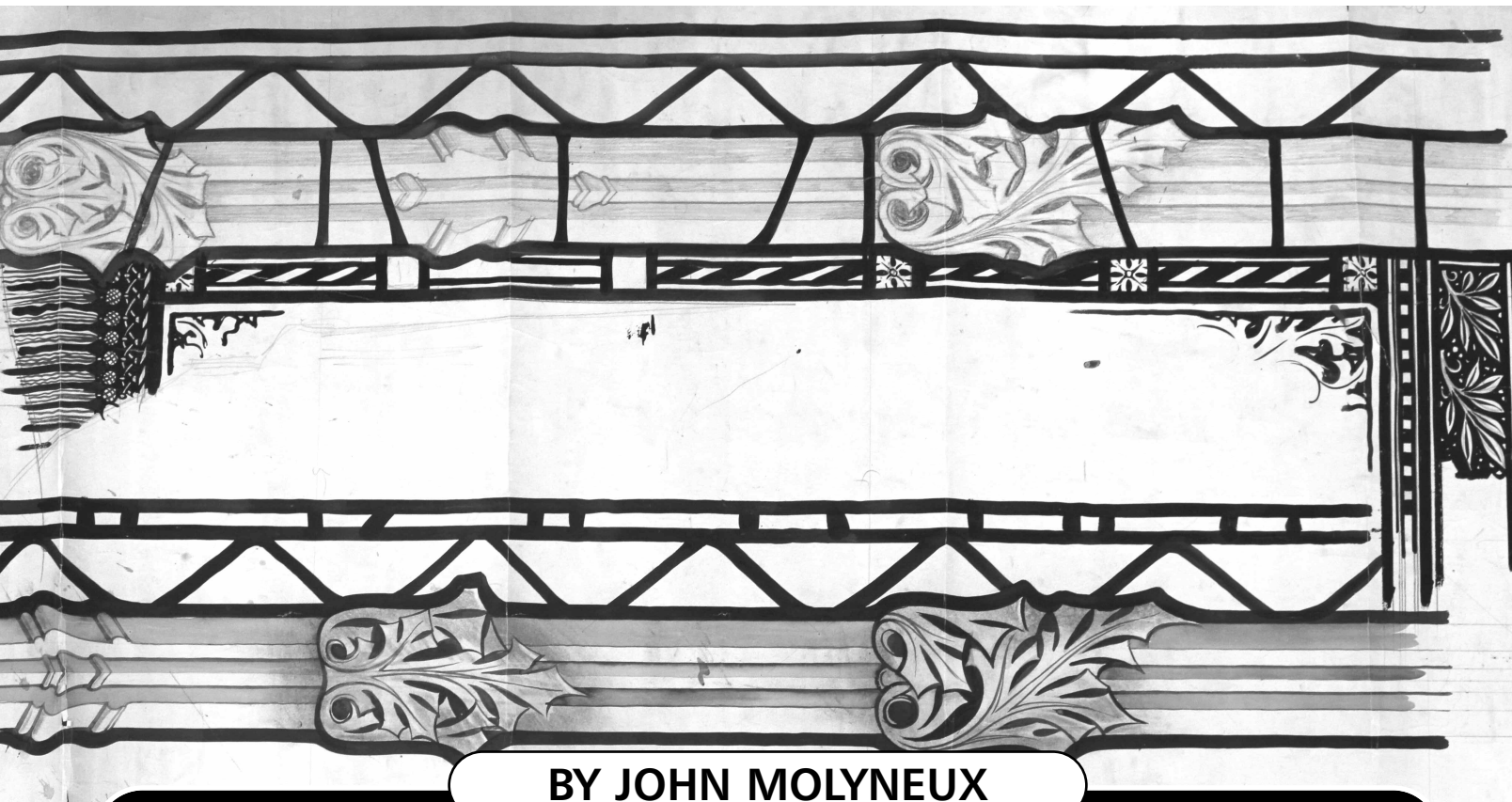
The memorial reads:

'The following men who worked in the Taylor Pit and Washer and John Pit gave their lives in the Great Way 1914-18, and as a tribute to their memory this monument was erected by their workmates

Henry Hitchin, S. Gaskell, A. Bennett, John J. Hill, R.H. Davies, John Knowles, Wilfred White, H. Cheshire, O. Wilson, S. Woodward, Sidney Jones, T.A. Gibson, W.R. Wood, W. Porter, Henry Aspey, T. Appleton, R. Telford, Edwin Stokes, J. Halliwell, J. Grundy, G. Ashcroft, J.B. Perkins.

May they rest in peace'.

*Reproduced with kind permission from the publication by John O'Neill.*



BY JOHN MOLYNEUX

# A Canadian Surprise for Leigh St Mary's Church

Whilst researching a window dedicated to Basil Claude Hall in St Mary's Church Leigh, I made an unbelievable discovery. Looking on an auction website, I was amazed to find original sketches from an eminent nineteenth century stained glass maker, James Powell of London. It was being sold by a dealer in Ontario, Canada.

These sketches depicted parts of the window to the right of the one I was researching. When the listing was first published what caught my eye was the heading, 'St Mary's Church, Leigh'. I hoped when I saw the listing it would be for my window but realistically not expecting anything of the sort.

Armed with photos of the sketches I visited the church

during an open period and assisted by Eileen Ball at the church, we tracked down the actual window the sketches relate to. They were dedicated to Rev J H Stanning, who was Curate and then Vicar during the between 1874 to 1908. The window was installed around 1910, once the design and funding were settled.

The Canadian seller bought the sketches as part of a main lot some years ago. He told me, 'It was likely that the sketches from James Powell would have been sold when Powells closed down in the 1980s'. He added that he had bought some drawings and a few of the Powell sketches as a bundle. The drawings had been gradually sold and just one or two window sketches remained.

We were able to secure the sketches for the Church by applying for a Brighter Borough Grant. The local Leigh West Ward Councillors, Lord Peter Smith, Myra Whiteside, and Susan Greensmith were delighted that they could help to secure such an unlikely find for the people of Leigh.

The next step was to get the sketches framed and put on display in church for all to see. After briefly looking at options for framing, I took the sketches to Wigan Archives in Leigh Town Hall to see Alex Miller and Hannah Turner for their advice. Their opinion was quite a revelation. Alex stated that the sketches were certainly worth preserving and needed expert care. They advised that the work should be entrusted to a specialist company that dealt

with items needing museum standard protection.

That comes with a cost and I am now looking at sources of funding to pay for the framing costs. It is hoped that this will materialise fairly quickly and the sketches will be on display in St Mary's Church in the near future.

When the prints arrived from Canada, included in the pack was a third sketch. Like the other two the sketch had 'Leigh Lincs.' as part of the description. It also had what appears to be an order number. Unfortunately this sketch did not quote the actual church. We are now hoping that readers will recognise the picture and tell

us in which church this window can be found. It could be that the sketch was a proposal which was never taken up. On the other hand the church could have been demolished. Enquires have been made to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London to explore the order books of James Powell & Sons, in the hope that more information can be found. We will keep our fingers crossed.

The sketch shows what seems to be the left and right hand sides of the proposed window. I expect the horizontal section will connect both sides together but it may not. It could also be that the sketch shows options for the sides. It may be that the design

was modified after the sketch was made so an exact match may not be apparent.

If you can help to identify the window or have any more information about the work by James Powell, please contact John Molyneux, at [johnmolyneux@gmail.com](mailto:johnmolyneux@gmail.com)

Leigh Parish Church is open on Wednesday and Friday mornings, between 9.00am and 12.00pm. All are welcome to visit the Church and the Vestry, which is also open for tea, coffee and toast on Wednesday and Friday mornings.

## The Rigby Bell by Ann Glacki

There is a monument in the Church of St. Luke at Lowton to commemorate Thomas Rigby, donated by his daughter - but who was Thomas Rigby?

Thomas Rigby was born in Lowton Common in 1815. His father was a farmer. Starting as a bar man, at the age of thirty he commenced business at the corner of Crosshall Street and Whitechapel as a wholesale and retail wine and spirit dealer. He eventually purchased a large number of pubs around town and became the owner of one of the largest chains of public houses in the country.

Rigby's Buildings in Dale Street, Liverpool, takes its name from Thomas Rigby. He acquired the building in about 1852, at which time it was known as the Atherton Buildings. Rigby bought the site mainly for its yards and warehouse at the rear for use by his business.

As his prosperity grew, he went into politics in Liverpool. In 1858, standing as a Conservative, he contested but lost the St. Paul's Ward to Mr J Clerk. Rigby challenged Clerk's qualifications and after two years litigation, he gained the seat. In 1861 he was defeated by Mr J B Spence. In the same year he tried to take the Vauxhall Ward and was again defeated. Finally in 1864 he successfully opposed Mr Robert Bradbury in St. Paul's Ward. Thomas Rigby's service to his party was appreciated and in

1868 he became an Alderman. Rigby owned 19 Dale Street from approximately 1852 until his death in 1886, although he was never listed as a victualler.

When he died in June 1886, so many people wanted to attend his funeral in Roby that a special train travelled from Lime Street out to the village. All his public houses closed and many of them flew flags at half mast. It was he who donated the money for the Rigby bell to St. Luke's at Lowton.

In 'The Church Bells of Lancashire' by F H Cheetham says that:

'Hung in wooden frames in the west tower, the smaller bell is by Luke Ashton of Wigan, the lettering being in his characteristic lower case type with heart-shaped stops. The church was built in 1732 and the bell hung in a bell cot over the west gable until 1863 when the tower was added. The larger bell was given by a Mr. Rigby and is also used as a clock bell. The weight is given at 70 cwt 0qr and 15lbs.'

An interesting aside - Mr Cheetham, carrying out historical research during the First World War, noted that the rector denied him access to the bell tower, believing that he was a German spy! In the end, he obtained his information from Mr Eckersley, one of the church wardens.



# GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

BY GRAHAM PARKINSON

From the outside nothing much has changed - the tall clock tower looming over the site, the long brick built wings encompassing the wide quadrangle. The cloisters beneath the hall have been bricked up but their distinctive arches are still visible. The first thing that struck me was the number of vehicles parked in neat rows from one side to the other.

I first walked down that path in 1959 onto the playground at Wigan Grammar School; all I

remember was a sea of boys resplendent in their school uniforms, some, like me, in rather ill fitting blazers and peaked caps. Not knowing exactly what lay ahead we climbed the stairs by the woodwork room and entered the back of the hall. Seated nervously on hard wooden chairs we had our first glimpse of a grammar school master, his dark robe flowing behind him as he entered the room. Our names were read out and

then we were assigned a school house and a form number and sent to our form rooms. The journey into grammar school education had started.

I had returned some 50 years after I left these hallowed halls to take my mother to a medical appointment. The grammar school is now rather ironically called the Thomas Linacre Centre. This irony won't be wasted on those of us who remember trading insults across Parson's Walk with our secondary school adversaries! The old school is still more or less the same on the outside but behind that red brick exterior the old place has inevitably lost some of its character.

Entering the building beneath the clock we walked down the corridor to the main reception. I didn't see the hospital signs, the waiting rooms, the wheelchairs and pharmacy but instead could picture the science lab on my left and gym on the right. I could see the gym master's office where I once, and only once, received six of the best for cheating in a science test! I didn't do it again.



*Schoolboys playing marbles, Wigan Grammar School, 1966.*



*Wigan Grammar School.*

The staircase on the right didn't seem to be there any more having been replaced with a modern lift but I could still see those stairs leading up to the staff room and the art room at the end of the corridor. I loved that art room – an inspired and talented art teacher gave me a love of drawing and painting that I still practice today. I never did have the opportunity to thank him.

We sat in a waiting room at the end of the wing and I worked out we were probably sitting in the library. Looking through the window behind me I could see Mesnes Park, the café and the duck pond. I remember escaping into the park on many occasions with my drawing board and sketch pad.

We were called down to the consultant's room and walked down the corridor that I had last walked down in 1966. Sitting in a tiny room I was looking through a window that I'm fairly sure was in my old form room. The original windows are still there. Sitting in that sanitised, hospital

environment I pictured myself looking through that same window while struggling with my Latin conjugations. The ceilings have been lowered but there are tantalising glimpses of truncated arches disappearing up behind the modern fabric.

Moving back out into the corridor I stopped to look at a display cabinet holding several sports shields and trophies. There's an old cricket ball from a match when a grammar school

player took five wickets in five balls; there's the swimming shield and several athletics trophies. As a young athlete I won the Baker Cup for Junior Champion athlete but unfortunately that particular trophy is missing from the cabinet. Some were donated to other local schools when the grammar school closed in 1972 so hopefully it's still competed for somewhere.

At that point my mother chose to tell the story that I walked home after sports day, put the cup down on the table and simply said 'Oh, I've won this!'

Wigan Grammar School was a great place. It taught me a great deal and the masters who gave me the benefit of their knowledge and skills did a lot for me as a person. I went on to have a career in education and was fortunate to reach the peak of my chosen profession. It was good to see the old school again. There is still enough of it there to awaken memories.

## WIGAN BOROUGH ENVIRONMENT & HERITAGE NETWORK

Wigan Borough Environment & Heritage Network is the representative body for all local societies, groups and individuals interested in protecting and promoting the Borough's Heritage and Natural Environment.

The network provides advice, speakers, site visits and partnership working with Wigan Council, Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles, Greenheart and other relevant bodies.

All are welcome to our meetings, held every six weeks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

**For further details please contact the Secretary on 01942 700060, [joe41@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:joe41@blueyonder.co.uk) or visit**

**[www.wiganheritage.com](http://www.wiganheritage.com)**

# Pills and Potions

by Bill Melling

The other day I was looking for something in the medical section of the local supermarket when my eye was caught by a bottle labeled TCP. Immediately I was transported back to my childhood in the early 1940s.

In those days – before we had the NHS – the initial treatment for most medical conditions, at least in our house, came from a collection of pills and potions kept on the top shelf of the kitchen cupboard. One of these was TCP, which I remember as a greenish-yellow antiseptic liquid, smelling strongly of hospitals. At that time it was routinely used to clean cuts and grazes and to treat bites, stings, spots and pimples.

The follow up treatment for such emergencies was Germolene, a pink ointment smelling of oil of wintergreen. If this did not work and the wound turned septic then there was always the dreaded hot Kaolin poultice to 'draw' out the yellow pus. At this time, antihistamines had yet to be discovered and rashes, itchy spots and bites were treated with calamine lotion, a pink liquid which was applied to the 'affected parts' where it dried out leaving a pink coating, rather like an early version of spray tan.

For stomach disorders our cupboard contained a wide range of medicines all claiming to cure flatulence, colic and heartburn. These included Woodward's Gripe Water, milk of magnesia and Bismag tablets. Constipation was an ever present problem, probably due to the stodgy wartime food, coupled with the fact that our lavatory was at the bottom of the garden, a fact that tended to put you off paying a visit on cold winter nights in the blackout.



*Medicine man: a corn curer at work in Wigan Market, 1938.*

There were a variety of products of various strengths and potencies aimed at 'keeping the bowels open'. The initial treatment was Andrews Liver Salts, a white powder, a teaspoonful of which was stirred into a glass of water to give quite a pleasant fizzy drink. If that did not produce results the next stage was a dose of syrup of figs at bedtime and if that failed then the ultimate weapon was Beechams Pills, guaranteed to move mountains and worth, so the makers claimed, 'a guinea a box'.

At Christmas we children used to sing, 'Hark the Herald Angels sing, Beechams Pills are just the thing, sure relief for constipation, two at night should do the trick'. I can not remember the rest, perhaps someone out there can finish it!

Wigan children were familiar with another Beecham product from their advertising department. This was a little brown pocket book containing multiplication tables, weights, measures and other useful information. It was widely distributed in schools and ensured that I, and thousands of other Wigan children left primary school knowing our times tables and how many furlongs there were in a mile.

Probably the largest selection of remedies in the cupboard were for coughs and colds. Raised temperatures were treated with Fennings Fever Cure, Beechams Powders or Aspro, whilst sore throats got Buttercup Syrup or Glycerin, Lemon and Honey Linctus. If something a little stronger was needed, then a few doses of Famel Syrup, with its strong odor of creosote, generally did the trick.

The remedies for tight chesty coughs were Fennings Little Lung Healers, tiny brown pills containing the herb ipecacuanha, followed up by Vick Vapour Rub. This was an ointment which was rubbed into the chest and stuffed up the nose leaving you walking around in a haze of menthol fumes. Menthol crystals, along with Friars Balsam, also had a place in the cupboard as treatments for stuffed noses. The technique was to drop a few crystals into a bowl of very hot water and then to place your face directly above it and inhale the fumes, all the time with a towel draped over your head and the bowl so as to get the maximum benefit from the aromatic fumes.

Muscular aches and pains were catered for by rubbing into the aching muscle such evil smelling concoctions as Sloans Liniment or Ellimans Rub. Ellimans was a white creamy liquid, smelling strongly of turpentine; the makers claimed it was powerful enough to be used on racehorses.

Other remedies I remember were oil of cloves for toothache, droplets of warm olive oil in the ear for earache and probably the best medicine in the cupboard, a quarter bottle of Martell's three star brandy. A tot of this, in a little hot water and sugar, was given as a 'pick me up' when you were feeling under the weather.

# SOCIETY NEWS

## 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 from 2pm to 4pm. All are welcome, contact Barbara Rhodes for further details on 01942 222769.

## Atherton Heritage Society

Monthly meetings held on second Tuesday of each month in St Richard's Parish Centre, Mayfield Street, Atherton at 7.30pm.

Admission – Members, £1.00, Non Members, £2.00, including refreshments. Contact Details: Margaret Hodge, 01942 884893.

12 April 2016 – The Life and Times of the

Real Robin Hood – Mark Olly

10 May 2016 – 'Demon Drink',

The Temperance Movement – Dr Anne-Marie McAllister

14 June 2016 – Blackpool for Fresh Air and Fun – John Doughty

## Billinge History and Heritage Society

Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at Billinge Chapel End Labour Club at 7.30pm.

There is a door charge of £2.

Please contact Geoff Crank for more information on 01695 624411 or at [Gcrank\\_2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Gcrank_2000@yahoo.co.uk)

## Hindley & District History Society

Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.00pm at Tudor House, Liverpool Road, Hindley. Please contact Mrs Joan Topping on 01942 257361 for information.

## Leigh & District Antiques and Collectables Society

The society meets at Leigh RUFC, Beech Walk, Leigh. New members are always welcome and further details available from Mr C Gaskell on 01942 673521.

## Leigh & District History

[www.leighanddistricthistory.com](http://www.leighanddistricthistory.com)

January saw the launch of an exciting new, free, local history website, covering Leigh

and the surrounding districts. This free, local history website, covering Leigh and the surrounding districts, boasts a list of births, marriages and deaths, 1852-1856, including cemetery internments, nineteenth century letters from soldiers serving abroad, a scrapbook of interesting articles, local railway accidents and an embryonic photograph gallery. There are also links to other sites covering historic and genealogical interest.

## Leigh Family History Society

As the Local Studies Section at Leigh Library has now merged with the Archives Department on the Second Floor of Leigh Town Hall, the Leigh & District Family History Help Desk will also be available there.

The Help Desk is on Monday afternoon (except Bank Holidays) from 1.30pm to 3.30pm.

There is no need to book an appointment for this Help Desk which can be reached by lift.

Monthly meetings held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month (except December).

Contact Mrs G. McClellan (01942 729559)

19 April 2016 – Where has the Cemetery Gone? Selling Graveyards for Commercial

Re-development – Les Leggett

17 May 2016 – Saving the Hulton

Collection – Jacquie Crosby and

Keri Nicholson

## Local History Federation Lancashire

The Federation holds several meetings each year, with a varied and interesting programme. For details visit [www.lancashirehistory.org](http://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](mailto:Suehesketh@blueyonder.co.uk) or visit

[www.liverpoolgenealogy.org.uk/SkemGrp/Skem](http://www.liverpoolgenealogy.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 St George's Church, Water Street, Wigan WN1 1XD. Contact Mr A Grimshaw on 01942 245777 for further information.

## Wigan Archaeological Society

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, at 7.30pm, in the Standish Suite at the Bocket Arms on Mesnes Road – on the first Wednesday of the month (except January and August). There is a car park adjacent on the left. Admission is £2 for members and £3 for guests.

For more information call Bill Aldridge on 01257 402342.

You can also visit the website at [www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk](http://www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk)

## Wigan Family and Local History Society

We meet on the second Wednesday of each month at St Andrew's Parish Centre, 120 Woodhouse Lane, Springfield, Wigan at 7.15pm.

Attendance fees are £2.50 per meeting for both members and visitors. Our aim is to provide support, help, ideas and advice for members and non members alike. For more information please visit,

[www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory/](http://www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory/) or

see us at our weekly Monday afternoon helpdesks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

13 April 2016 – The Origin of Surnames – Peter Watson

## Wigan Local History & Heritage Society

We meet on the first Monday of each month at Beech Hill Book Cycle at 6.30pm. Admission to the meeting is £2.50

For more information please contact Sheila Ramsdale at

[sheila.ramsdale@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:sheila.ramsdale@blueyonder.co.uk)

# YOUR LETTER/CAN WE HELP

## Dear Past Forward

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I would like to express my delight at reading in the last edition of Past Forward an article about my auntie Lily Hodson. My father was Lily's brother, Walter; her sister Auntie Maud, who had a completely different personality to Lily, was an usherette at Wigan Hippodrome.

I have fond memories of visiting her home in Barnsley Street. Auntie Lily had a great love of growing hyacinths; I remember as a child at certain times of year we were told not to go under the stairs or open cupboard doors as they were filled with plant pots that needed to be kept in the dark.

When Lily was awarded her MBE she never told anyone. It was only by chance that we found out about it; she was a very private person. I was aware that she travelled to London on a regular basis but didn't know why.

In my possession I have photographs of an event held at Haigh Hall which Lily attended, including a photograph of Lily with Lord George Brown, former Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. I also have her letter from Downing Street informing her of her MBE award and her will.

I was really nice surprise to see her featured in Past Forward. I especially liked the caricature!

Regards,  
Margaret Bibby, Standish

.....

## **FAMILY HISTORY**

### *How can we help?*

Past Forward is delighted to announce a new family history column in which both the Leigh and the Wigan Family History Societies will try to help you solve your genealogical glitches. So if you have a problem with your family tree, big or small, please contact [pastforward@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:pastforward@wigan.gov.uk) and we will get the experts to have a look for you.

Our first query comes from Stephen from Leigh: Whilst searching through the England and Wales National Probate Calendar I discovered that my ancestor Abraham Knott has two entries. The first entry is dated the 15 March 1886 and takes place in the Manchester Registry and the second entry is dated the 13 August 1898 but this one takes place in the London registry. Are you able to explain why this happened?

Glenys and Terry from Leigh Family History Society suggest that if there is a will mentioned in the National Probate Calendar you should order them. Glenys also discovered that a Mary Knott had died on 17 January 1897 and lived at Holly Bank, Newton Heath. She left £903/5/5. Mary could be Abraham's widow and perhaps whilst dealing with Mary's estate they unearthed some more paperwork which once belonged to Abraham.

Wigan Family History Society had a look online at the entries on the National Probate Calendar and discovered that both entries mentioned administration; therefore it is likely that a will won't exist. In the first case of Abraham Knott 1886, Mary Knott, as the surviving spouse would be granted administration. Mary Knott, died in 1897, we believe also intestate. Administration would then go to the next of kin. The next of kin would have to apply to the High Court of Justice who would then grant him Administration. This is most likely where the London connection transpires.

To discover more about probate and wills please consult the following guides:

The National Archives published a book called, 'Wills & Probate Records: a Guide for Family Historians'. This is a really useful guide to locating and understanding wills.

You can find a will or probate for England and Wales at: <https://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate>

You can contact the Family History teams through the Archives – or directly through their websites. Free helpdesks are available with expert members every Monday afternoon at Wigan Local Studies and at the Archives in Leigh Town Hall.



## WRITER NEEDED!

Local historian Joan Szymanowski needs someone to write the story of the 'Button Pit Murder'.

The victim, James Barton, worked at the Button Pit pump engine room in Haigh. On the night of the 2 January 1863 James went to work there for the last time. It is believed that during his shift, James was struck by a metal bar and his body disposed of in the furnace.

James is Joan's great, great, great grandfather and she has been researching the murder for several years but now needs someone to help turn her research into a story.

If anyone is interested in ghost writing this story please contact Joan through Wigan Archives and Local Studies on 01942 404430 or by emailing [archives@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:archives@wigan.gov.uk)

## Wigan's reaction to the Dublin Uprising, 1916 with Sheila Ramsdale

Monday 4 April, 12.00-1.15pm  
Museum of Wigan Life £2.50

This Easter marks the 100th anniversary of the Easter Uprising in Ireland, a key date in the struggle for Irish independence from the British Empire. The Uprising and subsequent executions were a defining moment for Ireland and the Republican movement.

Find out how local people in Wigan reacted to events in Ireland in this fascinating talk about a historic event in a nation's history.

## The Norse Gods with Vincent Atherton

Thursday 26 May, 12.00-1.15pm  
Museum of Wigan Life £2.50

The Norse gods held the peoples of Northern Europe in their grip for thousands of years. Their myths are full of strange and unbelievable stories. So what did the Saxons and the Vikings believe before they became Christian? Did they believe? Who were these amazing gods? And how do we know any of this anyway? Vincent Atherton searched these beliefs when writing his historic novel "Viking Voices" which tells of the Norse in NW England. Now he reveals Dark Age mythology to you.

## Vikings for Kids

Tuesday and Thursday, 31 May and 2 June,  
1.00-2:30pm  
Museum of Wigan Life £2.50 per child

The Vikings have landed at the museum for ferocious family fun! Get stuck in with the activities on your own Viking adventure. Places are limited so booking is essential.

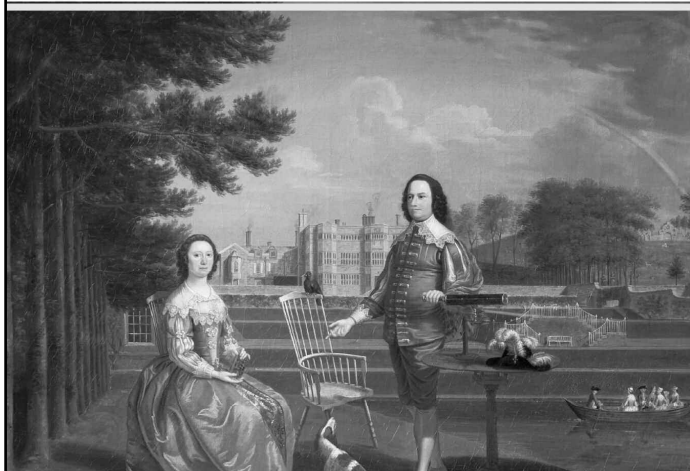
## Battle of the Somme Film (1916)

Tuesday 5 July, 12.00-1.30pm  
Museum of Wigan Life  
Free but booking required

A special showing to mark the centenary of one of the fiercest battles of the First World War. The first 24 hours of the Somme were the bloodiest in British Army history. The first ever film to show real battlefield footage and British dead, it was the most popular film in British cinema until the release of Star Wars in 1977.

Please book all talks on (01942) 828128 or email [wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk)

Leigh Local Studies - Leigh Family History Society Helpdesk



### Wigan and Leigh Family History Society Helpdesks

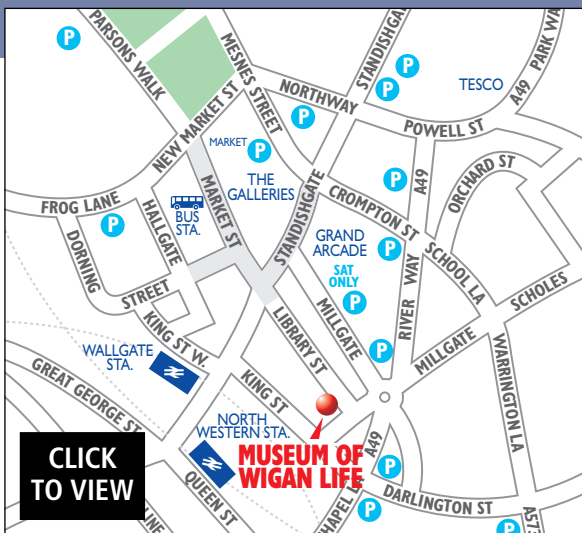
Members from Leigh and Wigan Family History Society provide free drop-in sessions on family history tips and guidance on how to research your family tree.

The Leigh Family History Society is based in Wigan Archives and Leigh Local Studies on the second floor of Leigh Town Hall. For more information please phone 01942 404430 or email [archives@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:archives@wigan.gov.uk) Every Monday from 1.30pm - 3.30pm

The Wigan Family History Society Helpdesk is based in Wigan Local Studies on the first floor of the Museum of Wigan Life. For more information please phone 01942 828020 or email [heritage@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:heritage@wigan.gov.uk) Every Monday from 1.00pm - 3.00pm

[WiganCouncilOnline](#) [wiganCouncil](#) [@wiganCouncil](#) [wigan.gov.uk](#)

# How to Find Us

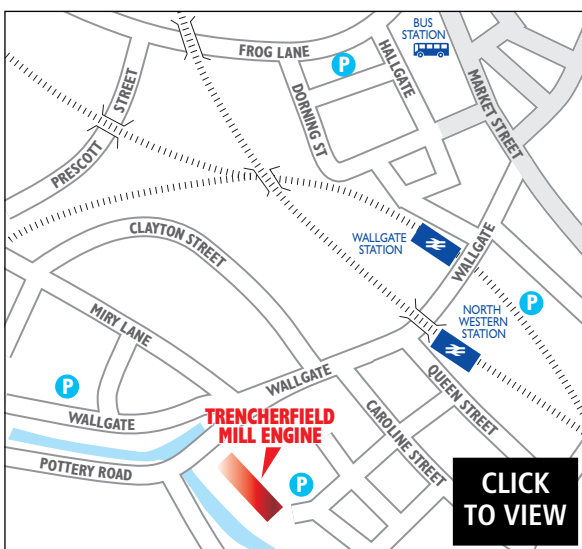
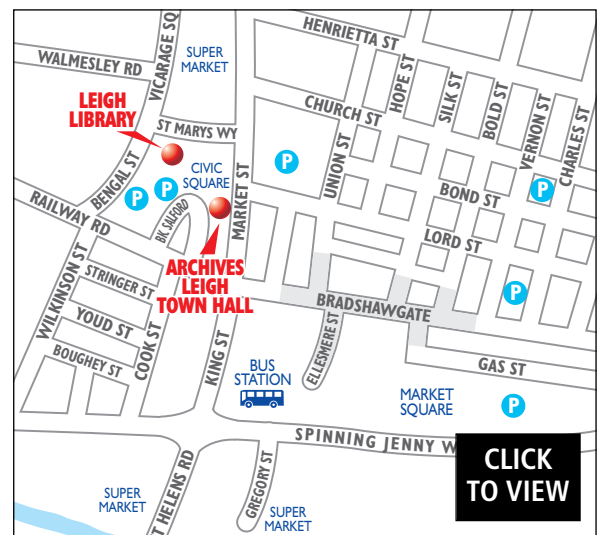


## Museum of Wigan Life & Wigan Local Studies

Library Street,  
Wigan WN1 1NU  
Telephone 01942 828128  
[heritage@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:heritage@wigan.gov.uk)

## Archives & Leigh Local Studies

Leigh Town Hall, Leigh WN7 1DY  
Telephone 01942 404430  
[archives@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:archives@wigan.gov.uk)



## Trencherfield Mill Engine

Wigan Pier Quarter, Heritage Way,  
Wigan WN3 4EF  
Telephone 01942 828128  
[b.rowley@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:b.rowley@wigan.gov.uk)

YOUR LOCAL MUSEUM

Bolton Bury  
Oldham Rochdale  
Salford Stockport  
Tameside Wigan

Take a closer look [www.gmmg.org.uk](http://www.gmmg.org.uk)



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