

PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Archives & Museums

Issue No. 78

April - July 2018



£2

Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine

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Letter from the Editorial Team

Welcome to Past Forward, Issue 78!

We begin this year of celebration and commemoration with an article celebrating the impact of one Wiganer – Thorley Smith – on the campaign for votes for women. Tom Walsh and Yvonne Eckersley are to be particularly mentioned for all their hours of research to bring the untold stories of Wigan and Leigh's suffrage campaigners to a wider audience.

This edition has three pieces that record events from the Second World War, but as 2018 progresses we would particularly welcome any future articles around both the end of the First World War in 1918 and the campaign for suffrage that was fought in Wigan and Leigh as forcefully as anywhere in the country.

We are delighted to announce that our wonderful volume on the life of Nelly Weeton, 'Miss Weeton: Governess and Traveller' edited by Alan Roby, has won the prestigious Alan Ball Local History award, administered by the Library Services Trust and CILIP Local Studies Group. The award is for the best local history publication for 2017. The judges wrote about our entry: *'The judges whittled the shortlist down to three books all of high quality and after much debate concluded that yours was an outstanding publication in every sense.'*



We are grateful that our ever popular Local History Essay Writing Competition is open again for entries for the 2018 prize. Many thanks are due to John and Barbara O'Neill for their continued and generous sponsorship of the competition – further details can be found on the page opposite.

Finally, a reminder that our two wonderful family history groups – Wigan Family and Local History Society and Leigh Family History Group – host their weekly help desks and drop-in sessions every Monday at the Archives & Local Studies (at both Wigan and Leigh). The volunteers from the groups are always happy to help with any of your family history queries, from beginners to those with a particular mystery to solve. The help desks are free to visit, so please come along and see how they can help.

Information for contributors, please see page 35

£1.3m Heritage Lottery Fund investment in Leigh will reveal Borough's Archives

A major funding boost has been secured from the National Lottery to develop Wigan Borough's archives collection and create an enhanced cultural offer for residents and visitors in Leigh.

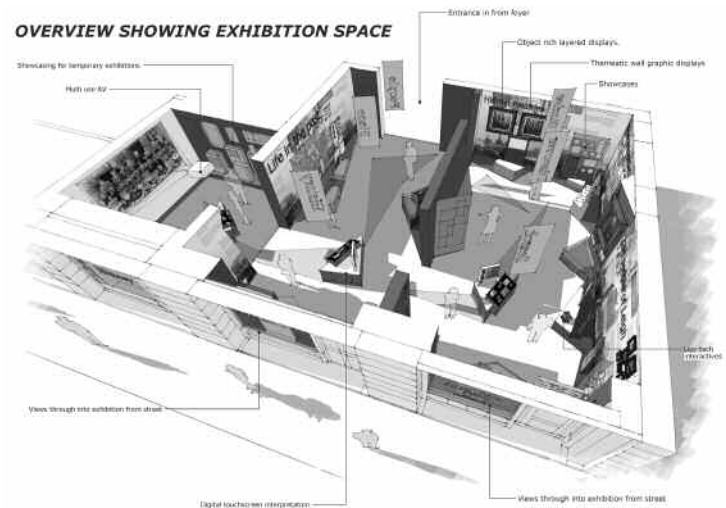
Wigan Council's Archives and Local Studies service has secured a grant of £1,320,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) thanks to money raised by National Lottery players for the 'Revealing Wigan Archives' project.

Along with a new public search room, three vacant Leigh Town Hall shop units will be converted into new exhibition space for archives and additional shop units will be used as specialist storage to protect the collection, which will transform the Leigh archives base and restore part of the town hall building.

The plans also include a new café space in Leigh Town Hall and conservation facilities to catalogue and digitise collections making them more readily accessible.

The shop unit facades adjacent to the town hall will be restored in keeping with the building's design and shop 'windows' created to form part of an interpretative scheme.

Nathan Lee, Head of HLF North West said: "We are delighted to support this project, which, thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, will mean



that more people will be able to get involved with, protect, and learn about the exciting heritage right on their doorstep."

The HLF grant also includes a two-year temporary exhibition programme, with content shaped by community contributions and in partnership with the Museum of Wigan Life.

As well as more outreach and engagement activities there will be a learning programme with schools led by an education and engagement coordinator and an enhanced volunteering programme will be also delivered with various volunteer roles for residents to get involved with including; digitising collections, public talks delivery, hosting visits, welcoming visitors and exhibition stewarding.

The archives contain historic records dating back 800 years and covering the entirety of Wigan Borough's history. They contain records from local councils, hospitals, churches, businesses, clubs and thousands of donations of personal records from individuals and families.

The archives moved to Leigh Town Hall in 1974 and after four decades of collecting records the archives storage is now at capacity. The HLF investment will allow the archives to produce a new vision for what the archives will look like in the future and the services it will deliver.



Thorley Smith: By Tom Walsh

‘He served his Generation Faithfully’

In the early 1900s, Wigan, to many people, particularly in the Metropolis, would be seen as a political backwater. How very wrong the ‘chattering classes’ were to make that assumption. The north of England was a hotbed of discontent, in the forefront of the struggle for women’s suffrage. After all it was in Emmeline Pankhurst’s Manchester home in 1903 that the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed. To the astonishment of the establishment Wigan was at the forefront of the rebellion, paving the way for women’s enfranchisement. Wigan’s result in the 1906 general election proves this in no uncertain manner – sending what I’m sure would be a collective shiver down the backs of the political elite of the time.

Hubert Sweeny was selected in 1904 to stand for Wigan as the parliamentary candidate on a ‘Votes for Women’ platform. Incidentally Thorley Smith backed his campaign enthusiastically. A committee of the North of England Society for Women’s Suffrage, the Lancashire and Cheshire Women’s Textile and other Workers Representation Committee, a group of mainly working class suffragists were amongst those who chose to support a Women’s Suffrage candidate in Wigan. Much of the work to publicise Sweeny’s candidature was undertaken by a group of suffragist working women, especially by the women-led Wigan and District Weavers, Winders, Reelers and Beamers Association. Sweeny received the support from the women of the town in general. Encouragement was also to come from all corners of the country and from many



Thorley Smith. Image courtesy of Tom Walsh

leaders of the suffrage movement in its different guises.

Mrs Pankhurst (WSPU) addressed a public meeting on 27 January 1904 and moved a resolution. Extracts from the report read that she hoped that the worthy example being set by the constituency of Wigan would very soon be followed by other constituencies throughout the country. She further went on to say that she wanted the men of Wigan to set such an example to the whole country that when their grandchildren looked back at the time when women were not enfranchised, the men of Wigan would feel proud of what their fathers had done. This would not be Mrs Pankhurst’s last visit to the

town. She would later visit Wigan to support Thorley Smith after he took up the cudgel on the surprise withdrawal of Sweeny in late 1905, leaving little time to choose a replacement. Thorley Smith was chosen as the new candidate on 2 January 1906, just a few weeks before the poll. Smith threw himself into the battle with great commitment and vigour, addressing up to three meetings each day.

The reason given for Sweeny’s late withdrawal from the fray was that that he would lose his livelihood as a headteacher if he stood. There is possibly more than a grain of truth in that assertion. Remember that most local authorities adopted the policy that on marriage a woman

teacher must leave the profession, with the now unbelievable diktat; no questions, no debate, no exceptions. It is unlikely that Sweeny's employers would have been supporters of women's rights either, at the ballot box or the work place. They may have looked unfavourably at his involvement with those who many would have seen as the 'rabble rousers' of the day. The nagging doubt I have with this synopsis is that he must have known the likely consequences when he accepted the nomination in the first place. I can't help but wonder if he didn't have the stomach for the fight. Either way, more than a century later we are in the realms of supposition and on balance I think it's reasonable to accept the motivation given regarding his employment concerns.

Whatever the reason, Thorley Smith was a more than adequate replacement and it could be argued this was a better outcome given his local connections. I subscribe wholeheartedly with that conjecture. It may seem very parochial but I think Sweeny's southern accent would not have 'cut the mustard' in Wigan, especially in the days before the wireless and other mass spoken communications. This was at a time when accents could vary enormously from village to village. Many would find his accent baffling and bewildering, not to mention his problem with the northern 'lingo'. In Wigan this 'lingo' was often spoken broadly and could seem like a foreign language to the unaccustomed ear!

Not everyone was pleased with Smith's decision to stand on a suffrage ticket, including his colleagues in the local Labour Party, who refused to back his candidature, although they had been happy to support Hubert Sweeny. This must have been a hammer blow. But, being the brave man he was, Smith was determined to carry on without their blessing. He was later made

an Alderman (in 1932) so any animosity must have disappeared with the passage of time.

Nationally, it was a different matter. A few years ago, fortunately and quite by chance, I came across a letter from Keir Hardie, sent to his agent and published in The Wigan Observer during the campaign. This is the transcript of the letter verbatim: *'Dear Sir – it is now quite certain I shall not be able to get to Wigan before the election, as I shall need to be in my constituency where the election takes place on the 18th. I regret this, as I feel the presence in the House of Commons of a member able to devote his special attention to the claims of women for political enfranchisement would be of great help, and I heartily commend Mr. Thorley Smith's candidature to the electors of Wigan – Yours faithfully J. Keir Hardie.'*

This letter must have more than made up for his disappointment at being abandoned by the party locally and must have acted as a great incentive to carry the banner of universal suffrage; knowing that he was far from alone in the Labour movement. He was a Labour member of Wigan County Borough Council so it must have been difficult for him to work with the local party after ignoring their pressure not to stand. However, he was clearly a man who put conscience before party, a rare commodity in politics.

During the Women's Suffrage campaign over eighty meetings were held in Wigan. Due to lack of funds the campaign was fought on a shoestring with most political meetings held in the open. Thorley Smith's, 'doughty henchwomen', the Wigan working weavers, addressed four meetings each day at factory gates, on street corners, at the gas works and tram sheds – anywhere they could find a male voter. Thorley Smith, supported by visiting women speakers, held two

or three open-air meetings each evening – remember this was in the depths of winter. His election campaign reflected his Labour leanings. He promised to support and campaign for all current organised Labour platforms whilst at the same time giving Women's Suffrage his first priority.

Thorley Smith claimed to be the first to stand on a purely Women's Suffrage platform in his 1926 election address, in which he published a letter from Sarah Reddish dated March 1906. To date I have found nothing to contradict his assertion; Mrs Pankhurst's remarks mentioned earlier also seem to lend credence to his claim.

On election day Thorley Smith was seen accompanied by six political 'amazons' who 'amazed the natives' as they drove through Wigan in a carriage pulled by four horses with two women out-riders, the leaders and individuals of various women's groups active in Wigan. In the carriage were Mrs Pankhurst, Eva Gore-Booth, Esther Roper, Selina

AN APPEAL TO THE LADY VOTERS

For services rendered during the 1906 General Election on behalf of the Franchise for Women.

Lancashire and Cheshire

Women Textile and Other Workers' Representation Committee.

Head Office: Trades & Labour Council, 5, John Dalton St., Manchester.

March 1st, 1906.

Dear Mr. Thorley Smith,

The above-named Committee at a meeting recently held in Manchester, asked me to convey to you their very sincere thanks for the services you have rendered on their behalf by your candidature in the Wigan Parliamentary Election. It is a pleasure to tell you that the Committee were unanimous in their expression of appreciation, and in this they recognised your perception of and devotion to principle. We were glad of your help as a practical working man and a known and tried trade unionist. It is true that you, and we, were subjected to adverse criticism by some whom we should very reasonably have expected to be working with us. We were working women on the political path, not lying helpless, but very active, and they "passed us by on the other side."

You accepted this candidature on behalf of this body of working women, because you perceived that their cause included all that you and your trade union were working for, and the same principle exactly—political action to gain representation on independent lines.

You stood for an accepted principle but *alone* in the sense of unusual conditions. It has hitherto been men's privilege to select candidates for Parliament, but in this case woman formed the active body. You did well and we are grateful. Our cause was good—for all workers, men and women,—and it is gratifying that so many Wigan voters saw that that was good.

You polled well, remembering that there were two opponents and very little time for the whole campaign. The fight has done good in having converted many from indifference to seeing the importance and the necessity of the working woman's claim.

Please give our thanks also to Mrs. Smith for the part she took. She was bright, and brave, and true through it all. I believe she quietly spoke a word of cheer to you when she realized that the result was less than complete success.

I am, on behalf of the Committee,

yours sincerely,

SARAH REDDISH, Treasurer.

If this meets with your approval, kindly show your appreciation by recording your vote for the Pioneers who secured the vote which you now enjoy.

Yours truly,

THORLEY SMITH.

Printed and Published by E. Siblethorn, at 21, Millgate, Wigan.

Thorley Smith's election address, 1926, citing the 1906 election as a reason for women to vote for him. Image courtesy of Tom Walsh.

Cooper, Sarah Reddish and Dora Monettiore. What a stir this must have caused and I'm sure it did no harm to his candidature, quite the opposite I would have thought.

The result of the election was:

- Sir Francis Powell (Conservative)
3,573 votes
- Thorley Smith (Women's Suffrage)
2,205 votes
- William Woods (Liberal)
1,900 votes

Thorley Smith secured almost 29% of the vote, pushing the Liberal into third place. The result was all the more remarkable when viewed in context of the national result. The Liberals, led by Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman, won a landslide majority at the election. The Conservatives, led by Arthur Balfour, lost more than half their seats, including Balfour's own seat in Manchester East and leaving them with their lowest ever number of seats.

The election saw a 5.4% swing from the Conservative Party to the Liberal Party, the largest ever seen at the time. However, if only looking at seats contested in both 1900 and 1906 the Conservative vote fell by 11.6%. This resulted in the 1906 general election being dubbed the 'Liberal landslide' and is ranked alongside the 1931, 1945, 1983 and 1997 general elections as the largest landslide election victories. On these figures, without Thorley Smith the Liberals could have reasonably expected to take Wigan. The Wigan result must have sent shock waves through the establishment, and I'm sure gave them food for thought at the very least. The astonishment didn't stop at London, The Wigan Examiner exclaimed, 'We cannot believe there are 2,205 suffragists among Wigan voters'.

The Wigan result also compares favourably with the second man to put his head above the parapet, Bertrand Russell, an academic, member of the aristocracy and cheer-leader for the chattering classes, who stood as a Suffragist in the Wimbledon 1907 by-election



Thorley Smith's gravestone. Image courtesy of Tom Walsh.

where he received a respectable 25% of the vote, albeit against a single Conservative candidate.

I think it is not unreasonable to assume that Thorley Smith's Wigan result the previous year must at the very least have given his notion to stand encouragement. Wimbledon's local paper, The Guardian, in an article published on 3 May 2013, claimed that Russell and Wimbledon had made history on 7 May 1907 by being the first constituency to field a candidate on a suffragist ticket; those accolades properly belong to Thorley Smith and Wigan.

I recently located Thorley Smith's grave in Wigan Cemetery. To my chagrin the headstone was in an appalling condition. He himself was a Monumental Mason. Oh the irony of it! After highlighting this in the Wigan Observer a local business has offered to fund a replacement. Wigan Council has also indicated that they are minded to celebrate his life by placing a plaque in his

memory on the Town Hall. The plaque is to be erected in 2018, a year with special significance as the centenary of the first giant step to universal suffrage – which was finally achieved in 1928. I am proud that Wigan, Thorley Smith and my forebears played no small part in that much overdue achievement. Thorley Smith can be summed up by those who knew him best, his family. On his gravestone they chose the epitaph: 'He served his Generation Faithfully'. What a wonderful tribute to a brave and principled man.

Postscript:

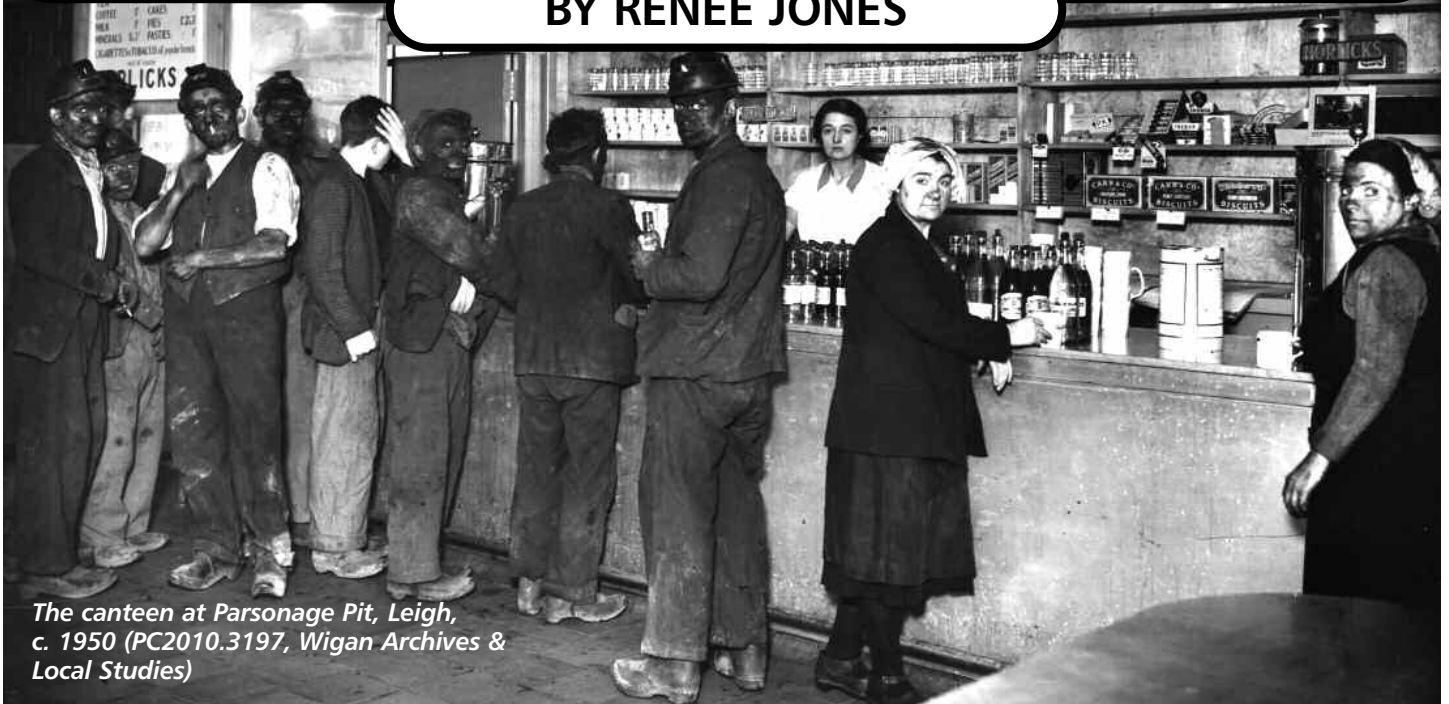
I count myself among the grandchildren of whom Mrs Pankhurst spoke when she said we would look back with pride on what our forebears did in the struggle for women's suffrage. I wholeheartedly concur with her sentiment! A very special thank you to Yvonne Eckersley, Rita Fell and Wigan Archives and Local Studies.

We're delighted to publish two further prize-winning articles from the Past Forward Essay Competition, 2017.

Leigh Lass, **Renee Jones** recalls the life of her father William Henry Jones and **Barbara Lane** remembers her Uncle Willie on page 19.

WILLIAM HENRY JONES

BY RENEE JONES



The canteen at Parsonage Pit, Leigh, c. 1950 (PC2010.3197, Wigan Archives & Local Studies)

This is a story about my dad. His name was William Henry Jones, but most people knew him as Bill. He was the youngest child to Samson and Elizabeth Jones. He was born on the 25 August 1902 and lived in Hurst Street, Leigh. He attended St Pauls School and he loved playing football.

When dad started work, he worked at Priestner's Pit in Westleigh. He worked on top of the pit in charge of the coal tubs that ran along the gantry. One day one of the coal tubs came loose and came off the rail, trapping dad against another tub. This caused a terrible accident; it took dad's leg off just above his knee. Dad was only sixteen.

After a lot of pain and determination Dad was fitted with an artificial leg and he began to walk again. He went back to work in the lamp room at Parsonage Pit. His job was cleaning the lamps and filing them with oil. Unfortunately, Dad had a bad chest and the smell of the oil only made it worse. So, he was given a job as a level crossing gateman, still at Parsonage Pit. His job was to listen for the coal trains to whistle, then go out into the road with a red flag and stop the traffic. The trains would cross the road on their way to deliver coal to the barges on the canal. Dad's first crossing was Twist Lane. He had a cabin at the top of Knowsley Street (where now a car and spray paint garage stands). He was later moved on to Wesleigh Lane. The mineral line Dad worked on was knick-named, 'Peg Leg Line' because of his false leg.

As a child I would go with Mum in the school holidays to see Dad and sometimes have our dinner with him. I remember three coal trains named after Second World War planes – Spitfire, Hurricane and Lancaster. My favourite was Spitfire; it was the loudest.

Dad had a signal box which stopped working on one particular day. He climbed up the ladder to see what was

wrong. There inside was a sparrow sitting on a nest of eggs. Dad chuckled, 'looks like I'm going to be the signal man as well'.

Dad loved his garden. He shared an allotment with his friend and grew flowers and vegetables. He even had a few hens and enjoyed the freshly laid eggs. I remember one hen, my pet, was named Peggy. Dad made a little garden in front of his railway cabin.

He played the piano at the Spinners Arms and Colliers Rest on Firs Lane. I wonder if anyone remembers him.

Dad never let trips or falls keep him from his work. However, he began to lose weight and even gave up smoking his pipe saying it tasted funny. We were on holiday in New Brighton and he threw his pipe into the River Mersey which shocked mum and me. Dad's health got worse and he was admitted to Astley Hospital but came home a couple of weeks later. Dad knew he was dying and wanted to die at home with his loving family around him. He passed away on the 1 April 1965, aged 62, from lung cancer.

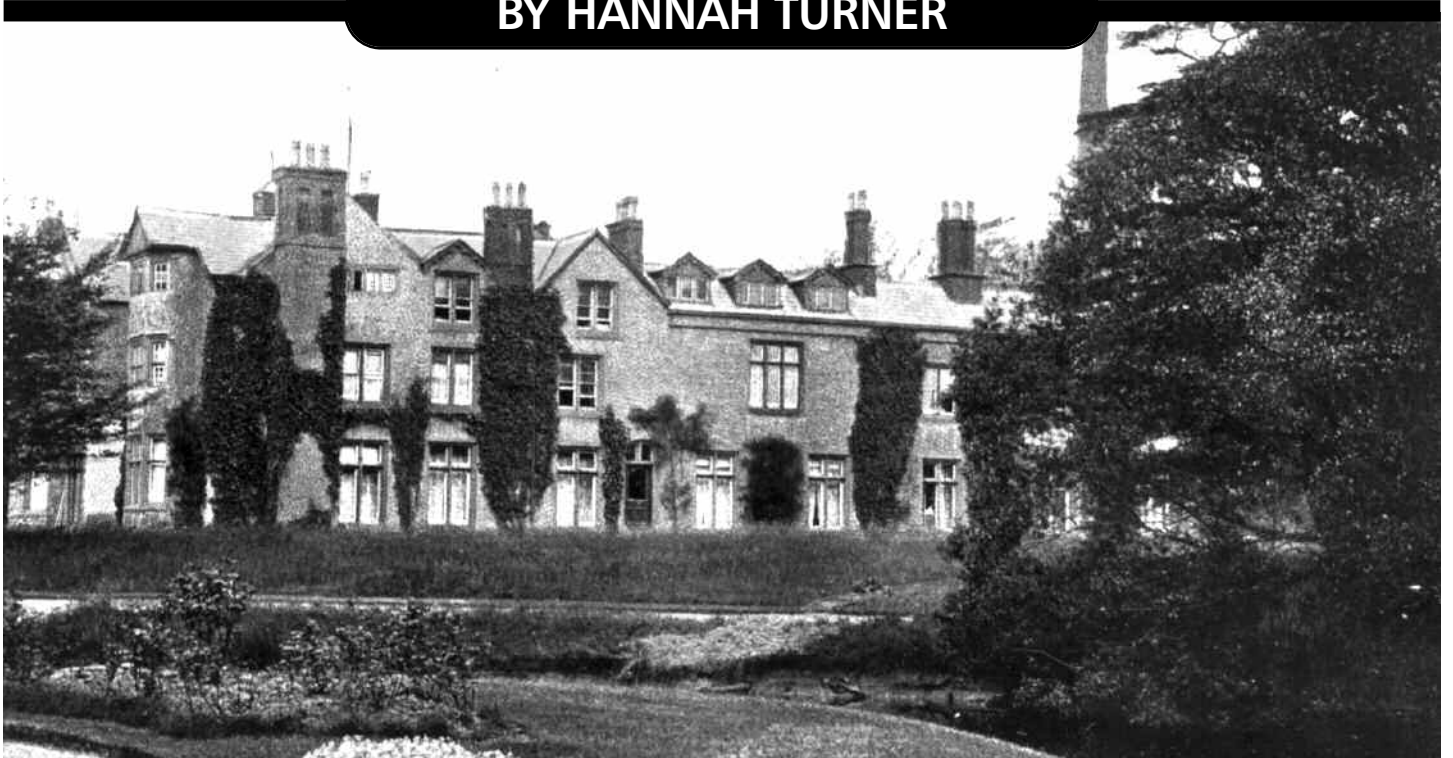
I was only 15 years old at the time and it seemed so unfair that my lovely, caring, kind, comical dad had died. I still talk about him and miss him to this day. I wanted to write this story about him as he was part of Leigh's industrial history and of course, he was my Dad. My son Julian shares his birthday with Dad.

My Dad to me was the best in the world and will always have a special place in my heart.

**By his proud daughter,
Renee.**

DAMHOUSE AND QUEEN VICTORIA'S GOLDEN JUBILEE

BY HANNAH TURNER



Damhouse. Known as Astley Hall when the Wetheralls lived there.

In 1887, Queen Victoria celebrated 50 years on the throne.

Damhouse, an old estate in Astley which stretches back to at least the thirteenth century, marked the jubilee by having a fete within the grounds. The Astley Primrose League hosted the event. Captain George Nugent Ross Wetherall, heir to Damhouse and Chair of the league, allowed the grounds to be at their disposal.

Since its creation in 1883, the Primrose League supported Conservative principles. In the mid-1880s, local Primrose leagues sprang up throughout the local area. One of the earliest, the Astley league, also known as the Wetherall habitation, launched its

opening through 'a grand inaugural fete' on the 14 August 1886. The league met with criticism from radicals and liberals. Caleb Wright, local mill owner, and Liberal MP for Leigh is alleged to have quipped 'Astley was not the soil to grow primroses'.

Caleb was the subject of speeches during the Astley Primrose League's inaugural celebration and a year later at the fete for the Queen's jubilee. During one of the speeches it was opined that at some future day, through the energy and work of the Primrosers the league would 'carry the van' and Caleb would have to take a back seat at the next election. Indeed, one of the members went so far as to

sing a humorous song entitled the 'Speaker's Eye' which reflected, probably negatively, on the Leigh MP.

During the jubilee fete Captain Wetherall presented a banner from his mother, to the league. Lady Wetherall could not make the event due to engagements in London. The banner was of blue silk and had the monogram P.L. in the middle of it surrounded by a wreath of primroses.

The grounds of Astley Hall were similarly decorated. The entrance had two upright poles surmounted by a crossbar which bore the inscription 'God bless our Empress Queen', in blue letters, on a white ground. In the

centre of the crossbar was a crown composed of primroses and underneath an oil painting of the Queen. Around the ornamental lake, coloured lamps of blue, green, orange and red were placed. On one side of the lake spectators could sit in parallel rows, and on the other side coloured lamps were arranged to form the letters "V.R." for Victoria Regina.

Once the meeting had finished the fete turned to more leisurely matters. Dancing on the lawn took place with the Mosley Common Band and in the evening fireworks started with a royal salute whilst Chinese lamps of various patterns 'glittered like fireflies from amidst the sombre foliage'.

At 10.45pm, a shocking accident occurred which brought the firework display to an abrupt end. James Taylor, a cab proprietor, living at the Grapes Inn, Astley Green., was engaged in the act of lighting a shell and lighted the fuse with a taper in his hand instead of having it attached to a long stick. The shell exploded sooner than was expected and James was sent staggering to the ground. Dr Dixon was called for and after examining Taylor said he was in a critical condition. Within moments James succumbed to his injuries.

An inquest was held at the Bull's Head Inn in Astley. James had only recently begun his business of cab proprietor and was well known and respected in the local community. He was 31 years of age and had a wife and four children.

During the inquest one of the witnesses claimed James had lit the shell incorrectly causing it to explode sooner than anticipated. This was not the first firework display James had volunteered for. The Jury returned a verdict of 'accidentally killed'.

James' funeral took place at Leigh Cemetery. Members of the Astley Primrose League attended the service.

The Royal Family sent expressions of sympathy through the Weatherall family for James' fatal accident and a subscription list was opened for his wife.

Captain Weatherall received a letter from the Home Office querying the accident and asking for details of what had taken place. The Captain had taken the news of James' death badly and had been unwell since the incident and so the letter was passed to the league's secretary, Alfred Ward, who answered their questions. The Home Office hinted that they would possibly send an Inspector to investigate the incident and to inspect and report on the fireworks which had not been used at the jubilee.

Two days later, the very same fireworks exploded with 'terrible force' in one of the strong rooms. The force was so strong that the safe door was blown open and sheets of fire spread out into the neighbouring room. The Captain on hearing the explosion had fainted twice and was being attended to by

Dr Duncan. The housekeeper Miss Devonport alerted the house and the staff came to the rescue with buckets of water. On being called for, the Tyldesley Local Board Fire Brigade arrived at the scene within 20 minutes and the fire was extinguished.

Following the explosion the Leigh Journal announced that the cause of the blast 'is still a mystery'.

Due to financial decline the Weatherall's time at Damhouse was coming to an end and by November 1889 the sale of the estate was due to take place at the Queen's Hotel in Manchester. A few years later in 1893, Captain Weatherall's health declined too and he died at Hill Crest in Surrey.

The Leigh Local Board bought Damhouse in 1893 in order for it to be used as a smallpox hospital but it became a joint hospital for infectious diseases. Over a century later the hospital was closed and today the Mort's Astley Heritage Trust oversee the management of the house.



Damhouse during its time as a sanatorium.

BY JEAN ASPINALL AND DOROTHY HART

JOHN TRAYNER

Chemist of Hindley

'Trayners chemist has been a familiar sight on Market Street Hindley for over 40 years'. This is a quote from a website. But is this correct? As daughters of John Trayner (1914 - 1997) we are aware that the name John Trayner chemist has been on Market Street for over 80 years: although not at 108 Market Street. In fact the business has had four addresses on Market Street. The locations were, 73, 76, 98 and 108 Market Street.

John Trayner was an apprentice chemist with W.G. Diggle at 73 Market Street, qualifying as a pharmacist from Manchester University in 1936. Soon after this Mr Diggle returned to university to retrain as a doctor and John took over the business. In 1937 he married Annie Fairbrother and in 1939 they started to live on the premises.

In the 1930s and 1940s, prior to the start of the National Health Service in 1948, many people had to pay for a visit to the doctors. This meant that poorer people sought advice and medication from the local chemist. John started to develop his business, but this was interrupted in 1943 when he was enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Most of his army service was in India, dispensing in military hospitals. He returned to Hindley in 1946.

During his time in India, Annie, who was not a qualified chemist, continued to keep the shop open selling whatever she could so that John would return to a working but somewhat depleted business. This was quite a challenge as we were only four years and eighteen months old respectively when he was enlisted. Our mother was ever resourceful in finding opportunities to carry on the business. One memory is going on the bus with her to deliver bandages and dressings to the local pits in Leigh and Atherton. On these visits we were offered refreshments and ate our first chocolate biscuit at Parsonage Pit. She and an aunt also wrapped and sold single saccharine tablets as a substitute for sugar during rationing. In the shop we had a drum of red raddle, a powder which, when dissolved in water, was used to paint terracotta tiles and doorsteps. This was sold as a leg tan when stockings were in short supply. Perhaps the original spray tan!

In 1946 when John returned, the dispensary was reopened but with little resemblance to the present day pharmacy. There were mahogany drawers with glass



Photograph of John sent to his family whilst he was in India.

knobs and gold and black glass labels. These drawers still had the strong smells of their original contents. Tall glass fronted shelves displayed proprietary medicines. Mr. Diggle had also been an optician and evidence of this was tray of multicoloured glass eyes!

Unlike today's pharmacy with boxed, foiled wrapped tablets, tablets were counted from a large container into boxes and bottles. Some tablets, powders and suppositories were hand mixed and ground with a pestle and mortar before being pressed into shape. The family still has some equipment for making these. Sticky labels were hand written using a fountain pen before the invention of the biro and, later, the computer. Cough syrups and liquid medicines were mixed combining a variety of contents from Winchester bottles, measured into smaller bottles and stoppered with a cork.

Used bottles were returned and washed for reuse. Recycling 1940 style! Poison bottles were green, blue and amber with ribbed sides and had red margins on the labels. Ointments and creams were prepared on a glass plate using a palette knife working the ingredients together with physical effort and dexterity, then put in small waxed cardboard drums.

The role of pharmacist led to some diverse services. Local dogs and cats were brought in to be put to sleep. John also went out to houses to provide this service. We think that this was done humanely using either ether or chloroform. Before photographic films were sent away to Kodak for developing, John had a darkroom in the cellar where he processed film. He was also licensed to sell wines and spirits. The licensing laws were very strict, times were regulated when alcohol could be sold and a wine and spirit licence was seen as a privilege.



Photograph sent to John when he was in India, of his daughters Dorothy (aged three) and Jean (aged six).

In 1947, the rented shop at 73 Market Street was needed for the Ministry of Pensions, so the business together with fixtures and fittings was moved across the road to 76 Market Street. This shop was no more than a corridor and the upstairs was used on Sundays for religious purposes.

New drugs had been developed during the war and soon manufacturers started to make medicines on a larger scale. Local chemists no longer needed to produce their own products. With the introduction of the NHS in 1948, free health care was given to everyone, together with free prescriptions. The increased number of written prescriptions to be dispensed enabled the business to grow. At this time doctors and chemists worked in a mysterious way which was closed to the patient. Prescriptions were handwritten by the

doctor in Latin for the chemist to interpret. Perhaps a pre-requisite skill of the chemist was actually the ability to read the doctor's writing.

After wartime shortages more items became available for sale in the shop. We seem to remember that most of the products sold were for constipation, aches and pains, pick-me-up tonics and treatments for nits and headlice. Well-known names were Fiery Jack, Ellmans Embrocation, Horse Liniment, Monastery Herbs, Parishes Food, Wincarnis Tonic Wine, Senna Pods, Sulphur Tablets, Worm Cakes, Syrup of Figs, Bile Beans, Derbac Soap, Suleo Lotion, and metal nit combs.

In 1953, the rental premises at 76 Market Street was needed to expand the gas showroom. Fortunately 98 Market Street was for sale and John at last could buy his own property. This shop had been Latham's temperance bar and pet shop.

A larger property gave rise to a much bigger shop and dispensary to cope with the growing retail and prescription demand. After the austerity of the war years beauty products were more available. New lines in home perms such as Toni and Pin Up were stocked with increased demand at times of local walking days. Goya, Yardley and Max Factor products were displayed on the open shelves of the new shop fittings for customers to browse and select, an early form of self service.

In spite of new proprietary brands being advertised at this time, there was still a large display of the Trayner brands. These included tonics, cough medicines and skin creams, although customers still asked for Mr Trayner to mix a special bottle for their ailment.

Due to our mother's ill health, John sold his business together with his name to Mr Hocking in 1972. However, he continued to work as a locum for Mr Hocking during holiday periods. As he had done since 1936 he wore his trademark uniform - a starched white lab coat. Later when the business moved once again to 108 Market Street he continued to work in the fourth and present shop.

Our mother died in 1974 and at this sad time John decided to work more days in many pharmacies in the Wigan area, Horwich and St. Helens.

When he married his second wife Rhoda, he did less work, but continued to work for England's Chemists in Gidlow Lane and Shevington.

Throughout his life John kept in touch with new medicines and practices by reading the weekly Pharmaceutical Journal from cover to cover. Aged 75, after 53 years professional service he cancelled his membership to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. Perhaps the younger generation of the Trayner family will celebrate the centenary of John Trayner Chemist in 2036.

WILLIAM LANE

Royal Air Force Navigator

BY TJERK KARSIJNS, RODEN, NETHERLANDS

The story of Royal Air Force Navigator, William (Bill) Lane, who almost crashed with his De Havilland Mosquito in the Netherlands, on 27 March 1945.

William Lane was born in Spring View, Lower Ince, Wigan, on 15 January 1920. He was the son of Thomas Lane, a miner, and Elsie Johnson. In 1942 he applied to the Royal Air Force (RAF) and became a navigator in 1943. He flew in Avro-Anson bombers and later on he went to Tunisia, where he flew in Wellingtons on missions to Tunisia, Sicily and Italy in 150 Squadron.

When he returned to England, in 1944, he became the navigator of pilot Leicester George Smith, a New Zealander. The first mission both men flew was on 6 November 1944. On 30 December 1944, they flew for the first time in a De Havilland Mosquito, called the 'wooden wonder', as part of 128 Squadron from Wyton.

Their Mosquito was the DH-98 Mk XV1 code MV-5 V MM 202. In the evening of 27 March 1945, at 19:03 hour, Smith and Lane went on a mission to Berlin. Their Mosquito carried a very heavy Cookie/Blockbuster, an almost 1850 kilogram bomb. Mosquito bombers had a crew of two, no armament and relied on speed and altitude for protection.

After about an hour they passed the coastline of the Netherlands and flew in the direction of the city of Groningen. This was the initial navigation point. The planes gathered there to onwards. Over the village of Roden, about ten miles south of Groningen, there was a collision at a height of 26,000 feet.

What had happened? Navigator William Lane asked pilot Smith to fly higher, because he had problems with the slipstream of other aircraft. In the seconds the Mosquito took to climb they collided with the Mosquito of Gordon Hudson and Maurice Gant, which was flying over them. The time was 20:00 hours. The Mosquito of Smith and Lane was heavily damaged; the right propeller was gone, the windscreen and radiator



William (Bill) Lane

destroyed, a part of the dashboard was lost and a fire began in the right engine.

Smith and Lane were very lucky. The propeller cut a big hole in the fuselage and almost hit both men. After he fell hundreds of meters Smith got control over his Mosquito. The fire was extinguished with the Graviner fire extinguisher they carried. They turned to go back to England. Over the Dutch coast Lane threw off the Cookie to avoid it hitting civilians. Because the windscreen was gone they had a very cold flight to England. They landed at Woodbridge airport.

The men of the other Mosquito – Hudson and Gant – were not so lucky and were killed. They are buried in the village of Zevenhuizen, not far from Roden.

Different people recalled in 2017 about the burning Mosquito RV 326, that flew over some several villages. Before the Mosquito crashed it threw off the Cookie, which exploded near the village Roden, the droptank and the dinghy.

After the collision Smith and Lane flew various missions together until the end of the war. In the last weeks William flew in the 571 Squadron from Oakington. During his service William Lane flew more than 100 missions. Together with Smith he flew 53 missions. Lane received the Distinguished Flying Cross.

After the war, on 29 March 1948, William Lane married Ella Fernay, who lived in Malvern Crescent, Lower Ince. She was born in Spring View, Wigan. William was restless. He found life in England dull and wanted to do something else. In 1952 the family went to Rhodesia.

In 1958 they returned to England. William bought a shop on Warrington Road, number 312, and started a cycle shop. Not long after that he bought a grocery at the other side of the street, 314 Warrington Road. In 1961 the cycle shop was sold and William went to Rhodesia again, alone. After a year he came back. In 1963 the grocery was sold. In that year William went to Rhodesia again, for one year. After that the family emigrated to Rhodesia.

During each period in Rhodesia, William was a station foreman on the Rhodesia Railways. In the period between his stay in Rhodesia he was a sales representative for a catalogue clothing/household goods company in Wigan. Because of the political situation William and his wife Ella returned to England in 1974. Their daughter went to the United States and one son, Karl, returned to England after University, several years before the rest of the family returned to England.

William and Ella took up a position managing newsagents, first at Lymm in Cheshire. William worked there until his death. He was a keen sportsman. He played rugby for the Airforce and after the war for two rugby league teams in his area. He was also a cyclist and won the British national half mile grass track sprint championship as well as many longer road races up to 25 miles. He was also an amateur boxing enthusiast and in spite of the weight and height difference, he was only 5ft 6 inches, he sparred frequently with the former British heavyweight champion Tommy Farr.



William (Bill) Lane

William told his children that he was pleased to have been recognised for his sporting prowess, particularly cycling and his boxing association with Tommy Farr. He played rugby as scrum half for two rugby league clubs, Orrell and Salford in England in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In Rhodesia he played for two clubs, Alexandra and Lochinvar and on returning to England he played again at the age of 44 years for Earlstown. William Lane never knew what exactly had happened that evening in March 1945. He thought they collided with a German Messerschmitt or were hit by anti-aircraft fire, but after the intelligence briefing he must have known it was a collision with another Mosquito.

William died in Leigh Infirmary, on 1 May 1992, aged 72. He was buried at Hindley Cemetery and is resting in the same grave as his mother Elsie Lane, who died in 1996. On 10 July 2015, Ella Lane died in Nelspruit, South Africa, in the house of her son Karl.

Much of the information included in this articles was researched by Tjerk Karsijns and kindly given by Susan and Karl Lane, children of William Lane, who Tjerk Karsijns contacted in the United States and South Africa. Tjerk Karsijns has written a book about the crash and can be contacted through the Archives & Local Studies for more details.

BY NATHAN SINCLAIR

TALES OF A STANDISH PARISH NUISANCE INSPECTOR



Market Street, Standish, circa 1900 (PC2010.2168, Wigan Archives & Local Studies)

I recently delved in to the archives and discovered the monthly reports of a Nuisance Inspector in Standish, Thomas Bentham.

An Inspector of Nuisances was a person employed by a parish to inspect for breaches of the law. They were brought in around 1846 with the passing of the 1846 Nuisance Removal and Prevention of Diseases Act.

Thomas Bentham was born around 1859 in Standish. In the 1881 census he is listed as living at 1 Rectory Lane, Standish with his wife Mary Bentham. At this time he was working both as a School Attendance Officer and a Parish Nuisance Inspector. This suggests he was a well-known man in the village.

In this article I will present a small digest of the most amusing or interesting things he discovered in his work. I have fully transcribed the complete collection electronically and they will be available soon on the Archive website. They give a good insight into the living conditions of the era. They are also a useful guide to plans being submitted to the Standish UDC for houses and who was building them.

1 November 1875

.....

I wish to call your attention to the very dirty and filthy state of properties at Engine Row. They are almost sickening to describe the amount of excrement deposited on the boards of floors where you might gather up shovels full in each petty.

1 July 1878

.....

The worst thing I have to call your attention to is some unknown persons who are in the habit of throwing and drowning dogs in the ponds of water on the sides of the highways and to deal with such nuisances I have been obliged to remove the dead animals and bury them to abate the stench arising from them.

11 August 1879

.....

I have to call your Board's attention to the practice of fish hawkers depositing offal of fish in the streets. My attention was called on Thursday the 7th last to two boys

who had been depositing putrid crab fish in Pole Street in contravention of the second bye law of our board.

6 October 1879

I would also draw attention to two cottages situate at Robin Hill the property of Henry Standish Esq. These cottages were formerly used as a farm house and is now let as two cottages to John and William Halton. The roofs of the houses are full of large cracks and wind and rain beats through so that my visit on Friday last the occupiers were obliged to place mugs on the bedroom floors to catch the waters. The windows have scarcely a whole square in them and are patched with paper and rags. The bedroom floors are so rotten and decayed that the children have actually gone through and are now patched up with old sacks. As Winter is now approaching, these two houses, if left not repaired, will be in a most deplorable state and the health of 13 persons who are now living in them will be in danger. Notices are already served in these two cases.

17 April 1880

I have to call your Board's attention to a case of overcrowding near Wellington Place in High Street of a most alarming character. The house is in the occupation of George Simm and there resides George Simm, his wife and three children, William Fairhurst, his wife and two children and Margaret Walsh aged 49 years and mother in law to Simm. 10 persons in all the house itself has only one living room and one sleeping both on the ground floor. The area of the sleeping room 16 feet long by 6 feet wide by 7 feet 6 inches high contains only two beds for the 10 persons and is in a most pitiable condition and badly ventilated for the

number of persons that sleep therein. In this I have served notice on the occupier for the overcrowding to be abated in three days and in default we shall be obliged to take proceedings for the abatement of the nuisance without further delay.

4 October 1880

I have also to call your attention to the dangerous practice prevailing in the township of children firing explosives in the public streets to the annoyance of the inhabitants. The practice is daily growing worse. For instance, some boy on Saturday the 25th September placed some kind of explosive beneath the ancient cross which has stood in the Market Place from time immemorial and disturbed the stone work all around and in my opinion has removed the cross so that it is now becoming dangerous to passengers. I would thank your Board to instruct me what is to be done in this case as the damage must be restored by someone.

1 May 1882

The nuisance that was complained in Market Street nothing has been done and upon my examining the premises I find the back yard is not the only place to complain of. There is a cottage in the occupation of Mr John Taylor in a most dilapidated state being one of those houses that are commonly called thatched houses where there are large holes through the roof into the room where Taylor is sleeping, so much so that upon my visit I found four mugs upon the room floor to catch the water that was pouring through the roof. And in consequence of the water coming through the roof having damaged the walls so much as to render the house unfit for human habitation.

Child's Play – a Celebration of Childhood

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'

CHARLES DICKENS, GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Childhood can be a magical time full of love, family and wonderful experiences that shape the life ahead. But it wasn't like that for all children. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many children faced extreme poverty, living in poor housing with little access to medical care or personal hygiene. Others were born in the workhouse. For those that survived past birth, diseases such as scarlet fever, measles and mumps meant many, rich or poor, were lucky to survive their fifth birthday.

Children often did paid work, looked after younger siblings or helped the family business. Schools were largely for the wealthy until the education reforms of the late Victorian era. Boys and girls had very different expectations and experiences. Childhood in Wigan Borough was shaped by family income, gender and urban/rural life.

A new exhibition at the Museum of Wigan Life will examine what it was like to be a child living in Victorian times and explore how it was different to the childhood of today.

Come along to discover how very young children were put to work and experience how they played and learned. You will see what it was like to be a chimney sweep with an interactive chimney activity and sample how the Victorians learned at school. This **FREE** interactive exhibition is suitable for all ages and is open from 3 April 2018.

For more information contact 01942 828128 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk



By Barbara Barclay

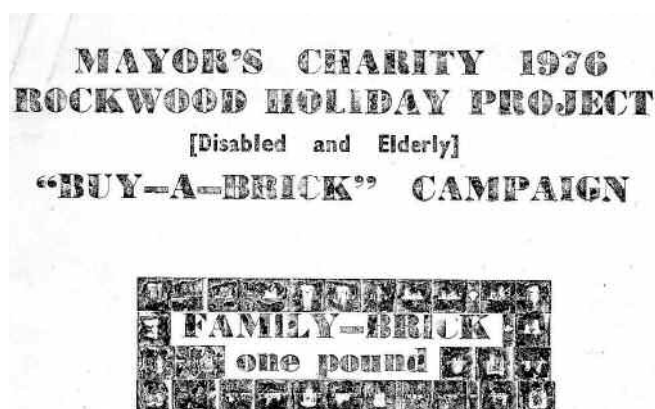
Holidays by the Seaside

A large house, built in 1882, on a terrace cut into the wooded hillside of 'Bryn Euryn', about one mile from Rhos-on-Sea in North Wales, was an imposing family home in extensive grounds

About 1952-1953, Wigan Borough Council purchased the property from a Yorkshire mill owner for £8,750. It was to accommodate long-stay elderly people from the Wigan area, and was known as 'Rockwood'. During 1974/75 the residents were transferred back to Wigan and improvements were made to the home. The intention was to create a Holiday Home, under the control of Wigan Social Services, where elderly and 'handicapped' people could enjoy a holiday by the seaside.

John Barclay, a Lancastrian from Wigan, but who had been in charge of a similar home in Rhos was appointed Officer in Charge. Rockwood became a 'home from home' providing respite for Wigan residents of all ages and could accommodate sixteen guests. In 1976 the Mayor of Wigan, Councillor Albert Eckersley and Gerry Poyner, Director of Social Services felt that there was a need for the home to provide for disabled people who had more complex needs which could not be met in the accommodation available.

It was envisaged that if money could be raised an extension to the current building could be built. Councillor Eckersley announced that he would make this his Mayor's Charity for the year. The public were encouraged to 'Buy a Brick' for Rockwood'. Cards were printed and sold - 25p for one brick and a family brick, representing ten bricks for £1. Along with local organisations other fund-raising events were held.



Mayor's Charity, 1976



John C Barclay

John was invited by groups in Wigan to give presentations about Rockwood extolling the holidays it provided.

Social Services in Wigan and its Care Manager, Jim Lee liaised with the staff at Rockwood to arrange holidays for groups and individuals to spend a week by the seaside. The Authority provided a mini-bus which transported the visitors to and from Rhos-on-Sea. During the week the bus was used for outings to nearby resorts, scenic drives to the lakes and hills of Snowdonia, and across the Menai Strait to Anglesey. Arrangements could also be made to take guests to evening shows or to country inns.

The Victorian home had modern conveniences and facilities to help the visitors to be independent, but staff were always on hand to help in whatever way they could to make the holiday as enjoyable as possible. Carers who came with guests valued the freedom from their usual chores and were able to fully enjoy the holiday as well.

Just like a small hotel, meals were provided and special diets catered for. Visitors could relax in the comfortable TV lounge. The home's elevated position meant that panoramic views of the Irish Sea and the Little Orme could be enjoyed from the windows and from the front terrace when the weather was fine. By the lawn was a large summerhouse with facilities for serving tea and coffee. A toilet was located behind the summerhouse.

In the summer of 1976 a party of young people, with staff, camped for a week in the grounds. They played football and spent a day climbing in the foothills of Snowdonia with John, staff and volunteers. They also visited Llandudno.

Over two and a half years the vision of an extension to Rockwood began to be realised.

The sum of £9,000 from the Mayor's Charity Fund and £30,000 contributed by the Area Health Authority

meant that the building became a reality. The extension was officially opened by Councillor Eckersley on the 10 January 1979. It provided accommodation for guests with limited mobility, and their spouses if appropriate. Rockwood was then able to offer twenty two people a holiday in Rhos-on-Sea. Extra staffing, improvements in the main building and a new minibus with a lift, gave enhanced facilities for all who stayed at the home.

In 1990, the charge for one week in the summer was £86 and in the winter £74. John and the staff created a comfortable hotel-style environment, with a wide range of amenities, all the year round.

Over the years, until March 1991, when the home closed due to financial constraints, a great many of Wigan's residents enjoyed their seaside holidays. Comments from visitors prove that Rockwood was very much appreciated.

'It's great here, good food and trips, what more could you want', a young man from Hindley.

'If you offered me a fortnight in a Blackpool hotel or a week at Rockwood, I would choose Rockwood'. Elderly widow from Worsley Menses.

'We had trips, good accommodation and lovely food, the break made me feel so much better'. Elderly lady from Norley Hall. Her friend said, 'You could not wish for a better holiday'.

'I would go at a minutes notice, we went in February but it was still lovely.'

'There is a Welsh menu once a week, John is the only Welsh speaking Wiganer.'

'They made me a cake and we had a birthday party and a sing-a-long', 80 year old widower who lived alone in Scholes.

'When I need a break I always go to Rockwood', 80 year old on her fifth visit.

Rockwood started life as a family home then decades later visitors were invited to come to stay for a week and to think of it as their home in Wales. It would be good to think that they all had happy memories of their holidays by the seaside.

The home closed in 1991 and was later purchased by Methodist Homes for the Aged.



A stroll by the seaside for young people from 'Amberswood', Training Centre, Hindley on a day trip to Llandudno from 'Rockwood'

ARCHIVES & LOCAL STUDIES EVENTS

'The Button Pit Murder'

Talk by Marianne Howell
Wednesday 9 May 2018,
2.00pm – 3.00pm

Wigan Borough Archives
& Leigh Local Studies
(the ground floor of
Leigh Town Hall)

Booking essential:
£3.00 per ticket

Please contact 01942 404430 or email
archives@wigan.gov.uk to book or for
more information



'The Manchester Drag Ball'

Talk by
Thomas McGrath
Friday 10 August
2018 1pm.
Leigh Library

Booking essential:
£3.00 per ticket

Please contact
01942 404430 or
email archives@wigan.gov.uk to book or for
more information



'Leigh for All'

Wigan Archives and Local Studies will be
hosting the annual Open Heritage Day on the
Civic Square of Leigh Town Hall in partnership
with The Soroptomists, Leigh Parish Church,
Turnpike Gallery, Leigh Neighbours, Leigh Rotary,
Leigh Library, Old Leigh Photographs volunteers
and more.

The event will take place on Saturday
8 September 2018

Please contact 01942 404430 or email
archives@wigan.gov.uk for more information



Rockwood

*The old grey house sits square above its lawn
Within encircling trees, blossoms abound
In bright formations, quietly holding ground
In solitude from busy world withdrawn.*

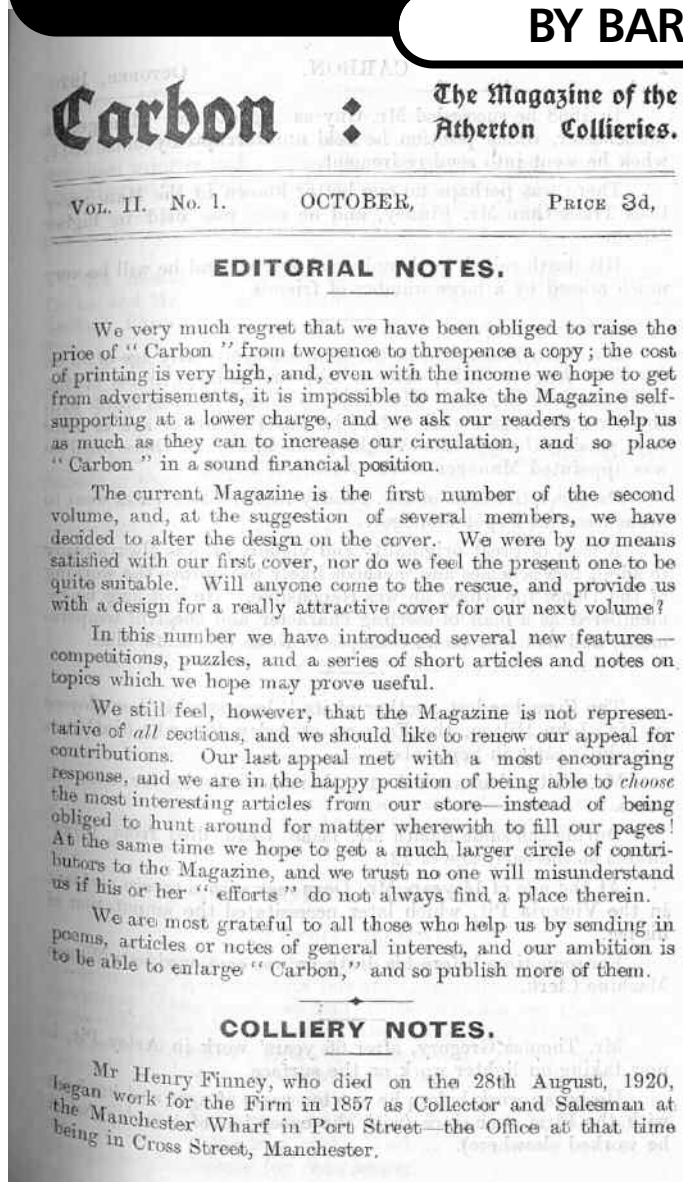
*This house, with hills about, awakes at dawn
When work is done and labours past, they come
To see across dark sea, with glory crowned,
To rest awhile from town's uncaring rush,
Far peaks engraved with tints and hues newfound,
Out from a selfish seeking myriad
And thus to peace is each thing living drawn.
This place in tune with earth's silent kingdom.*

*Gives each soft rest to lullaby of thrush,
From which they rise refreshed with
new hope glad.*



UNCLE WILLIE: WILLIAM ANTHONY THOMAS

BY BARBARA LANE



Born William Anthony Thomas in the nineteenth century in Whiston, he was the eldest of nine children. The family moved to Golborne because their father started work in the local colliery. Uncle Willie was my Grandad's brother and both family and friends spoke well of him. He was a man before his time, as they say.

He started work underground at Gibfield Colliery in Atherton which was then a private mine owned by Fletcher Burrows. He sustained an injury and enrolled at night school where he gained enough knowledge to be offered employment in the office at Gibfield. He became General Secretary of Atherton Collieries Joint Association and edited 'Carbon'; this was a magazine for Atherton Collieries in the 1920s and later became the magazine for the Manchester Collieries. He then became editor for the whole of Manchester.

There are many volumes of 'Carbon' and I am lucky enough to have been bequeathed four books containing quite a few volumes in hardback form 1922, 1924 and 1932.

The variety of articles written in 'Carbon' is amazing and makes very interesting reading. From holiday experiences in China

(even in those days), visits to Boys & Girls Camps at Filey and all manner of different sporting events with competitions. Also discussed are photography, essay writing, needlework and joinery to name but a few.

Short stories were popular, jokes, historical information, poetry and ambulance classes with examinations held at certain times in Hindsford and Howe Bridge, with presentations of awards being published and winners receiving certificates, vouchers, medallions and labels.

Most of the stories from the local area were gleaned from activities at Briarcroft, but prior to that they used to meet at the Village Club in Howe Bridge (which is still there) and The Coffee Pot in Atherton. As membership grew larger, premises were required and Briarcroft was built as a meeting place to house all the activities.

It was a community centre like no other. Uncle Willie became a well-respected member of the community because of the time he devoted to all the families, especially those connected to the pits. He produced performances, put on pantomimes, Shakespearean plays and dances.

There were many romantic liaisons formed, especially with one of Uncle Willies nephews, Albert Cook, who met and eventually married Annie Battersby. They went on to have two daughters, Olive and Margaret.

Uncle Willie was remembered by many children and families for his generosity. A letter was sent to Leigh Journal in 1997 by William (Bill) Frost, all the way from Los Gatos, California, USA. He said how he had read with interest, Tom Boardman's contribution about the Briarcroft in another story placed on the internet from the Journal in which it was said that the club was run by William Thomas, a fine and respected gentleman. Bill Frost stated that they had lived next door to Uncle Willie and his two spinster sisters, Alice & Maggie, in Allenby Street, Howe Bridge.

Every Christmas Uncle Willie invited the children of the neighbourhood to his house where he put on film shows using a 35mm projector. This was quite a thing in those days. Then he disappeared and returned as Father Christmas, giving each child a gift.

Each year a carnival was held in Atherton with floats of all descriptions and young people from Briarcroft took part. Briarcroft had a Royal visitor in 1923, when the Duke of York came to Atherton and signed the visitors' book at Briarcroft. The Duke of York ran a camp each year for a week at his expense to which he invited public school boys and 200 boys in industry. That year two local lads – Joseph Dodson and George Birchhall, were selected to enjoy the camp. This was written about in 'Carbon' in the October edition of that year.

Howe Bridge really had a wonderful community spirit, organised by some very hard working and community-minded people who all pulled together to make it all work.

It is a lesson for us all to heed and thank you to 'Uncle Willie' for making it happen and for giving us such interesting tales to read.

Wigan Town Centre Gasholders Dismantled

A familiar view in Wigan Town Centre is set to be transformed as National Grid dismantles the unused gas holders at their Darlington Street site.

Nowadays gas is stored in underground pipes. The sight of gasholders rising and falling as gas was drawn off to heat homes and power businesses has long since gone. National Grid has a national programme to dismantle these unused gasholders and bring the land back into beneficial use. Work on two of the gas holders off Darlington Street is expected to be completed by the spring with a third later in 2018.

Coal gas was first produced at Darlington Street in 1823 with construction starting a year earlier. The site formed part of the much wider Wigan Gasworks, which extended north towards Darlington Street and west towards Chapel Lane. The gasworks consisted of three gasholders, tar tanks and condensers (banks of air-cooled gas pipes to remove tar and liquor from the gas). There was also a coke plant, a retort house (where the coal was heated to produce the gas), workshops and stores.

Gas production continued until the 1970s when North Sea natural gas was discovered. This spelt the end for town gasworks across the UK and in Wigan over the next few years many of the buildings were decommissioned and dismantled.

The three gasholders remained in operation and were used to store and distribute natural gas. The gasworks was adapted for natural gas and the gas transmission compound in the southeast corner of the site was built.

Since the 1970s, the majority of the site has been used by Cadent (formerly National Grid Gas). Two large steel-clad buildings, built in the 1980's, were used as a garage and depot but fell out of use some time ago. The below ground tanks and fuel pumps were removed and the voids filled in the mid-1990s. The gasholders themselves were last used in 2012.

The process of dismantling gasholders is complex but as Kat Scargill, Land Regeneration Manager at National Grid explains, it is one that National Grid and their specialist contractors are highly experienced in:

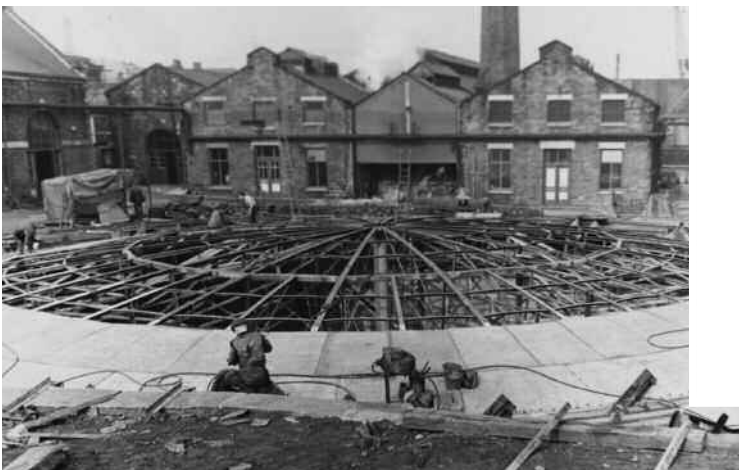
"Nationally we have removed over 75 unused gasholders with the land contributing to everything from new homes to retail parks. Safety and environmental protection are paramount during the project. The process starts with the removal of the water and any debris that has built up over the years in the bottom of the tanks. Work can then start on the dismantling of the frames, lifts and other steelwork. All the steelwork is recycled and we monitor dust, noise, vibration and odours during the work to ensure we are a good neighbour."

Once the holders are dismantled the final part of the project is to fill the large holes in the ground left where the holder tanks used to be. National Grid is currently exploring opportunities for the long term future of the site with Wigan Council. Any future re-development would be subject to planning.

Heritage is also an important part of the work National Grid do, as Kat explains:

"We recognise that gasworks and gasholders have been a significant part of local landscapes and people's lives, often across generations. We undertake heritage recording at all sites. We record the structures, construction methods and materials used so this important aspect of our industrial past is not lost. We also work closely with the National Grid Archive to share information and make it accessible. This can include working with local councils and history groups to provide details of the sites for their archives."

If anyone has any questions about National Grid's work in Wigan you can get in touch with their Community Relations Team on **freephone 0800 8199 071** or email **nationalgrid@wigangasholders.co.uk**



Images showing construction of the Darlington Street Gasholders (National Grid)

REMEMBERING JOHN VICTOR RANDALL – 'JACK'

BY CHRISTINE BARBOUR-MOORE

Born: Liverpool, 21 September 1917

Died: Off the coast of Boulogne, France
7 December 1941

Sergeant Jack Randall, 974663, served with the Royal Air Force (RAF) Volunteer Reserve, 61 Squadron. He died when his Avro Manchester bomber crashed in the sea near Boulogne, France, on Sunday 7 December 1941. His body was never found.

His name can be found on Panel 51 at the RAF Memorial at Runnymede, Surrey, United Kingdom, commemorating the 20,000 British Empire aircrew from the Second World War with no known grave. This Memorial overlooks the River Thames on Cooper's Hill at Englefield Green between Windsor and Egham on the A308, 4 miles from Windsor. His name is also on the war memorial at Shevington near his home village of Appley Bridge in Lancashire.

Jack Randall's aircraft was listed as missing on operations on the night of 7/8 December 1941.

L7494 had taken off at 17.42 from Woolfox Lodge. It was part of a force of 19 aircraft consisting of Manchesters, Wellingtons and Hampdens tasked to attack Boulogne. It was the only aircraft lost. The Avro Manchester aircraft exploded and crashed into the sea off of Boulogne; the cause was not recorded.

The crew were:

Squadron Leader John Lawrence RILEY, 39620, age 26 of Sandyhills, Glasgow;

Sergeant Cyril Leslie WELLS, 918373, age 22;

Pilot Officer Reginald ADCOCK, 106142, age 30 of Redhill Surrey;

Sergeant John Victor RANDALL, 974633, age 23 of Appley Bridge, Lancashire;

Flight Sergeant John WILSON 747796, age 33, of Jordanhill, Glasgow;

Sergeant James Benjamin LEIGH, RNZAF 40942, age 23 of Grey Lynn, Auckland New Zealand;

Sergeant James CRAWFORD, 1379167 age 17, of Linton-on Ouse Yorkshire;



Jack at Yatesbury 1940



Half a century: THE JOURNEY OF ONE GREENGROCER'S SHOP

by Lena Kubikova

There were 15 shop closures a day across the UK in the first half of 2016. One sad closure relates to the sign saying 'finished trading' that appeared on Ashton-in-Makerfield's 'Anne's Fruit Shop', which was previously known as Eccles Greengrocers.

I used to do my shopping here and I got to like the taste of their fresh vegetables and fruits. I often found various products which the supermarkets did not sell. I will miss Anne Lawrenson and her nephew – their nice, sincere attitude to customers. As Anne told me the greengrocer's had 50 years of history and customer service. Half a century of business is worthy of going down in local history, so I decided to ask Anne, former owner of this small shop, for an interview to talk about how everything started. This is what she told me.

For many years your customers visited Anne's Fruit Shop, but previously the shop was called Eccles Greengrocers, where you started to work as a young girl. How did you find out about working in the trade?

That was in 1970. A friend of my mum told us about the job with the greengrocer in Ashton-in-Makerfield. When I was on my way home from school, I met the boss and his wife. They showed me how to use the scales and add up and the job was mine. The first day was very scary, even though I had worked in other shops. I didn't know these people. I was young and wanted to impress them.

When, where and how did the shop come into existence and how did it come to be run by this couple?

The shop was originally opened in Bryn Street in about 1966 I think, I'm not exactly sure. 1965 or 1966. They were old terraced houses originally and the back gate of the shop opened out onto Garswood Street. Because the incline of the street on Bryn Street side is much steeper than the incline on Garswood Street, people would automatically walk up the gentler slope in Garswood Street. Crossing the market square was a



quick short cut to the town centre and so more people used it, even though it was really a back street to Garswood Street. My boss realised there was potential there to capture customers as they walked by and opened first of all a very small stall there, at his back gate. It was a very good and successful idea.

Can you tell me something about your boss and his wife, his family and their business?

They were very nice people, a young married couple with no children at that time. They had only been married two or three years and lived in the flat above their shop. Their parents were also involved at intervals too. My boss and his wife enjoyed the challenge that running their own business posed then. He loved the challenge of buying. Bidding on different quantities of produce to get the best prices. Everything was bought with cash then to get the edge and the best deal. They opened six days a week, 8:30 to 6:00pm, but closed at lunch-time on Wednesday. At first I simply worked Saturdays, school holidays and often evenings after school to help set out the stall for next day. My wage was £1 per day, lunch included. I always had a job because like any young girl I wanted to be fashionable and go out with my friends. My parents both worked very hard, but there were four children and very little spare money at the end of the week so as long as my homework and chores at home were done they were happy for me to work.

Do you recollect how customers used to pay for produce?

I cannot be absolutely certain but I would estimate a small bag of potatoes (the equivalent of 2kgs) would cost about 18p in today's currency. Apples were 18p for 400gms, 1.5kg of carrots for 50p. It was sold in pounds and ounces. The currency used was pounds, shillings and pence. Both quite different from today.

Where did they purchase the fruit and vegetables?

When I first started work here in the late sixties and early seventies, there used to be a small wholesale market in Wigan where my boss would go to buy his produce. It was very old and quickly replaced by a new one opposite the entrance to Sainsbury's. It was there each morning that we would go in the van, before the shop would open, to buy the produce for the day. Goods there on that market would come in overnight from all over the country and also Europe. A lot of the vegetables and salad would come from the local farms in Lancashire as it is a very good area here for growing that sort of produce. The shop sold, fruit vegetables and fresh fish, which again we would buy on the small wholesale market at Wigan. All that time ago produce was quite cheap.

Anne's Fruit Shop and Eccles Greengrocers were situated near the market. Was the market a big competitor?

On Tuesdays and Saturdays the shop was really incredibly quiet because the market was on on those days, which was huge and very busy – hard to imagine now, I know. So our small shop on the other side of the street was very very quiet on these days so they needed to do something to increase their trade. On market days they put a table and chair at the bottom of their back yard, inside the gate (where the shop you know, is now) and sat and waited to serve any of their customers as they went past. They would run up the yard into the shop to get the goods, then back down to the customer.

The stalls on the market were so varied; a stall selling underwear, one selling wool and knitting patterns. One selling cottons, embroidery silks, needles and pins. One sold materials to make dresses, skirts, trousers and zips. Another sold bread and cakes. Two or three stalls sold clothes, dresses, skirts, sweaters, there was also a butchers stall, a fishmongers. Two more fruit and vegetable stalls. A stall selling shoes and slippers. In all honesty you really could buy almost any thing on the market. It was a huge, vibrant place, very busy and interesting.

Did you have any funny situations which made you laugh?

One of the reasons why I loved my job was that it was just fun. I have worked with lots and lots of people over the years; it was hard work and not well paid but

enjoyable because of the fun we used to have. At one time during the shop was actually a big stall. Facing out onto Garswood Street, covering the full length of the front of the shop. Like most greengrocer stalls the fruit was in trays sloping upwards, resting on trestles. To make things look good we had sheets of artificial grass hanging over the trestles and down the front. The only way to get out from the stall onto the street would be to crawl on your hands and knees through a small gap between the trestles. As you can imagine I would pop my head out from beneath the grass as customers were being served. They were often very startled and I was thought to be a dog on lots of occasions as people who had not paid attention when I asked them to allow me through, felt something tickle their legs unexpectedly; very flattering!

We know from history that the 1970s was a very hard time for Britain. Did your boss have any difficulties with the business in this complicated period?

Although this was the seventies and as you said times were hard, for my boss and his wife business was very good. They were a good team, worked long and hard and made lots of money. Those were really good times for them. Town was growing at that time. There were lots of people moving in from Liverpool and Ashton was a popular town. These people had good, well paid jobs in Liverpool and travelling to and from work was relatively easy with the A580, so it was all good for the growth of the town, and its businesses. It was a thriving town with a very busy market and a huge variety of shops.

You took over the shop in 2005. Who gave the shop the new name, Anne's Fruit Shop?

When I took over the shop it had always been known as The Eccles Greengrocers, but as I had already worked there for so many years and so many of the customers knew me already it just seemed natural to call it Anne's Fruit Shop. I was really delighted when I first took over the shop. Even though I had worked there for so many years, it was very exciting to be running it as my own shop. I changed quite a lot of things, many of them quite small, but I was doing it my way. It felt good! My Dad was very pleased when I took over the shop. He always thought I would do well. Very supportive, but isn't that what Dads do best?

In all honesty the last four years, 2012-2016, were a struggle as each year thing declined. We tried various things to boost trade but the addition of the supermarkets and cheap shops in town, together with shops that sell everything including fruit and vegetables, really meant that our time was drawing to a close. Sadly it was inevitable.

Saturday Morning Shopping

By Glenys McClellan



Gerard Street, Ashton-in-Makerfield (PC2010.573, Wigan Archives & Local Studies)

Have you ever thought how shopping has changed in your lifetime? I grew up living on what was known locally as 'The Banking' on Wigan Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield, during the 1950s and early 1960s. When I was about eleven years old around 1960, I would do the weekend shopping on my own. There was no car journey to the local supermarket, no pre-packed butcher's choices, no credit cards – just a list from my Mum, a reusable shopping bag and cash. I think one of the reasons a child could do the shopping on their own was because all the shopkeepers knew me and what my Mum would be expecting them to supply.

So let's go for a walk around Ashton-in-Makerfield in the early 1960s. I'd start by looking at the latest shoes in fashion at Horace's shoe shop at the corner of Bryn Street and Wigan Road. Next, having checked the time on the big clock above the window in Speakman's jewellers, I'd walk past a couple of dull painted shops and come to the newly modernised Harold William's chemist.

This had been two shops and was refurbished with huge plate-glass windows across the frontage. The Christmas window display was always a highlight with sparkling lights on glass shelves displaying the gift packs of toiletries.

Next door I would call in the wool

shop. Here Mum would have wool saved and I would buy a few balls and when the garment was completed any remaining balls would be returned into the shop's stock.

Next door was a sweet shop and tobacconist. If my parents were taking me out on a Saturday evening, Dad would call in and buy a packet of Cadbury's Neopolitan chocolates, little chocolates that were like the big Dairy bar. On past the Queen's Cinema the next shop was taken over by a distant cousin, David Morris, an optician.

We always shopped at Roberts Butchers. For a time my Mum worked as a cleaner there and in the school holidays I would go with her.

I remember being fascinated watching the butcher make sausages in the backroom.

After a shop selling shoes and handbags I would come to Howe's hardware shop. This was before the B&Q days.

Now as I come to the bend of Wigan Road turning to Gerard Street I may have forgotten some of the shops. I do remember when Cousin's bakery shop opened. I loved their little cakes, my favourite being their chocolate box.

There was also a newsagents, Melia's grocery shop and Slinn's wallpaper shop, before arriving at my next call at Mort's grocery shop. The manageress, Beatrice, would have had my Mum's order for most of the heavier items delivered during the week.

I would take a little notebook (no online ordering) and pay the bill. I would probably select biscuits from the many biscuit tins displayed in front of the counter. The bacon would be freshly sliced on the huge machine at the end of the counter. Items were kept in little drawers behind the counter and displayed on shelves there. There was no self-service in those days.

Passing the bank on the corner and the huge Congregational Church, I would start to go along Gerard Street. I think the first shop was a record shop. Then Mr Ogden's barber's shop. He also made umbrellas and I found out years later that my first long adult-like umbrella with a point on the end had been specially made so that it wasn't too long for me.

Further up was Kilshaw's butchers and then Johnson's cleaners, where one of my parent's friends was the manageress. At the end of this row was Unsworth's electrical shop. I think my record player may have come from there.

There was another wallpaper shop and then Slater's outfitter where school uniforms were displayed. Next door, the shops were set back and the ladies outfitter was owned by a man who had been a cutter at the factory where my Mum had been a tailoress. He made the pattern for my Mum to cut for my new winter coat. Next door I would buy Cambridge Sausages or potato cakes from Mark William's butchers.

Now moving up the hill, the row included Green's greengrocers, before they converted it to one of the first supermarkets. Then I came to Billington's stationers with all the fountain pens displayed in their window. On the corner leading to the market was a dress shop and then a newsagents before another men's outfitter and finally Peet's furniture shop.

I may have to go to Bryn Street, to call at Mr Hampson's cobblers shop before going on the market to collect eggs and a chicken. The whole area, including the area now covered in

tarmac, would be full of stalls. Most of my dresses were made from material bought there. Crockery, handbags, shoes, cheese, fruit, carpets and much more were all available with several stalls selling the same things, so giving plenty of choice.

I would leave the market via Garswood Street, on to Bryn Street where the big Electricity Board showrooms had the latest cookers and fridges. Mrs Green had a fish shop and lastly I would pay for the newspapers at the newsagent. At the corner of Bryn Street and Old Road was a lovely dress shop owned by the Cunliffe family.

I would probably do the shopping in two or three trips so that I could carry the items. The reward later in the day would be 1s 0d (10p) to go upstairs at the matinee at the Palace Cinema and have 3d for an ice cream. I'd look forward to the weekly serial and Laurel and Hardy! I'm sure this will have brought back memories for lots of people of my age.



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JOHN CHEETHAM

Mayor of Wigan, 1918-1919

John Cheetham was born on 2 August 1858 in Pemberton. His parents were Thomas Cheetham and Elizabeth Rylance. He had five brothers and one sister. His father was a collier.

Alderman Cheetham attended the Wesleyan School in Lamberhead Green. The Master of the school, William Lord thought highly of the young John and asked his father when John was 12 if he could find him a more promising job than minework.

John became a mine worker like the rest of his family, starting as a pony driver in the Arley Mine of the old Orrell Colliery. He moved on to become a colliery drawer for his father and elder brother Thomas, he witnessed the death of his brother from a roof fall whilst working in this capacity.

While working as a drawer, he attended the old Wigan Mining School and was successful in gaining several certificates in mining. In later life he became a member of the Governing Body of the Wigan & District Mining and Technical College.

At the age of 21 John became a fireman at the Orrell Colliery and then moving to the Pemberton Collieries. In 1884 Ald. Cheetham became a checkweighman at the Pemberton Collieries, a position he held throughout the rest of his working life.

On 26 November 1883 he was elected Secretary of the Pemberton Miners' Association. He was so well regarded that he held this position for over 50 years and in recognition of his service to the Association, was presented with a silver tea set in 1933.

Alderman Cheetham was a part of mining history. He was the representative for the Pemberton Miners' Association at the conference which resulted in the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1888 and 1889. He was the first President of the Wigan & District Miners' Permanent Society, a position he held for



Alderman John Cheetham, J.P., Mayor of Wigan

over 20 years. He was also a miners' delegate in the trade union world.

Whilst working as a checkweighman, Alderman Cheetham and Charles Whitburn were accused of fraud and committed to trial at the Liverpool Assizes on the charge of conspiracy. The trial came before a jury on 29 November 1895. The charge read: 'At Pemberton between the month of January 1894 and the month of August 1895, unlawfully, fraudulently and wickedly did conspire, confederate and agree together to make certain false entries in the papers or weigh sheets used for showing the weights of coal gotten from a certain mine called the King Coal & Cannel Mines of the King Pit of the Pemberton Collieries, belonging to Henry Blundell ...with the intent thereby to cheat and defraud the said Henry B H Blundell'.

The charge was that they conspired together to increase the weights represented upon the weigh sheets to increase the colliers' wages. After the Prosecution case was concluded, the Jury

Foreman asked the Judge if they could end the case as they felt that there was insufficient evidence to convict the men and moreover thought that the case against Ald. Cheetham should never have been brought. Both men were acquitted of the charge.

Alderman Cheetham was held in such high regard by the people of Pemberton and they felt that he had been unfairly treated by the charge laid against him that they made two public presentations to him as a way of showing their support. In January 1896, a concert was held at Mount Zion School in Lamberhead Green with the proceeds of the concert used to buy a gift. Ald. Cheetham was presented with a gold albert and pendant as a token of the respect and esteem in which he was held and as a memento of the recent trial he had just gone through. In February 1896, he was also presented with a marble timepiece with the inscription 'presented to Mr. John Cheetham JP by his friends in Pemberton'.

Alderman Cheetham was said to be the first working man to be made a Justice of the Peace in England. He was appointed in 1892 aged 34 working as a checkweighman at Pemberton Collieries.

At the age of 60, Alderman Cheetham was selected to become Mayor of Wigan in November 1918 by the Mayoral Selection Committee. At that time, he was leader of the Labour Party in the Town Council. His mayoralty took place after the First World War. He urged the people of Wigan to subscribe to Victory Loans which were used to help the Government clear up war debts in the hope that they would bring about better trade, more employment and reduce the cost of living. The Mayor unveiled a shrine in Mesnes Park in memory of the Wigan men who had lost their lives during the war.

In November 1919, members of the Pemberton Miners' Association held a complimentary dinner in honour of Alderman Cheetham retiring as Mayor. It was held at the Association's headquarters, the Halfway House Hotel in Pemberton.

Ald. Cheetham married Elizabeth Ashcroft at the United Methodist Church, King Street, Wigan on the 7 December 1877. The family lived at several addresses in the Pemberton area. They had nine children. Their eldest son Henry lost his life in a colliery explosion in America in 1894 and their youngest son Fred died in 1926; he was the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for Pemberton.

In 1925, Alderman Cheetham was made an Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Wigan and in

honour of the event was presented by the Town Council with a silver gilt casket which contained a scroll on which the worthy record of his public work was inscribed.

When Alderman Cheetham found time he was a keen gardener with a special interest in the cultivation of roses.

Alderman Cheetham died aged 76 on the 10 July 1934. His funeral took place at St. John's Church, Pemberton, a church he had a long association with. He was buried at that church. Elizabeth Cheetham, his wife died in 1937.

The article above was produced as part of the Wigan Borough Civic History Project. The project entails volunteers researching biographies for mayors and chairs of past and present boroughs and urban districts. This is an ongoing project and we are always looking for more willing volunteers to get involved. To find out more about how to get involved please contact the archives on 01942 404430 or by emailing archives@wigan.gov.uk To see the unedited biography of John Cheetham and others from the Civic Project please visit <http://archives.wigan.gov.uk/>

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Dunkirk – The Aftermath

BY BILL MELLING

In the recently released film, 'Dunkirk', which tells the story of the successful evacuation of the British army from France in 1940, there is a scene where a British soldier is waving his fist and screaming at the German dive bombers strafing the beach, "...where the h--- are the RAF?'

In fact the Royal Air Force (RAF) were very much in evidence in the form of squadrons of fighter planes, based in France at airfields just behind the front line, where they could be up and ready to intercept the German planes before they reached the Dunkirk beaches. There is an account of the activities of one such squadron, No. 73, in a diary in the Borough Archives at Leigh Town Hall, where it is part of the Edward Hall Diary Collection.

Edward, who was married to a Wigan girl, donated the collection to the town shortly after the end of the war, possibly as a gesture of thanks to the Wigan librarian for his help in the past. As well as containing the diaries of a wide range of scribes the Edward Hall Diary Collection contains some of Edward's own work, particularly his diaries and letters from his time in the RAF in the Second World War.

Of particular interest are those from the period covered by 'Dunkirk', when Edward was in the thick of the fighting in France and which form the basis for this article. He was 42 at the time and had qualified as a pilot in First World War and had been awarded the Air Force Cross for bravery. He had been called up from the Reserve at the start of the war and posted immediately to 73 squadron in France. He had been given the rank of Pilot Officer but as he was too old to fly he was put in charge of administration.

73 Squadron was part of the RAF's, 'Advanced Air Strike Force', which had been sent to France immediately after the outbreak of war in September 1939 to protect the British army from air attack. The squadron was equipped to operate as an independent, self-contained unit and had its own motorized transport, including mobile

workshops, offices and kitchens, and had the ability to pack up, move to a new location and be operational again in a very short time.

During these moves Edward, as Adjutant, was in command of the column of some forty vehicles, whilst his commanding officer, the Squadron Leader, was in charge of the relocation of the aircraft. These were single seater Hawker Hurricane fighters which for the first eight months of the war were based at Rouvres, a small village near Verdun, just behind the front line. During this period – often known as the 'phony war' – whilst there was little activity on the ground, 73 squadron was active in the air, mainly against German reconnaissance planes and their escorting fighters.

The phony war dragged on until things changed dramatically on 10 May 1940 when the Germans launched their surprise blitzkrieg attack through Holland and Belgium. Caught completely unawares, the squadron was awakened one morning by the sound of a nearby French airfield being bombed and strafed by enemy aircraft. Fortunately, the British field escaped any damage as it was shrouded in early morning mist and the Hurricanes were able to take-off and engage the enemy. Whilst they

were still airborne the order was received for the ground staff to pack up their equipment and retreat to Reims some fifty miles away, a move that was successfully accomplished under Edward's direction. By evening they were united with their aircraft and fully operational again.

From then on the squadron was in the thick of the fighting with the ground staff having to periodically fall back and organise makeshift airstrips as the Germans advanced. For the next five weeks they never remained longer than a week in any one location, often having to move out at a moments notice to keep ahead of the relentless German advance. When the German tanks eventually reached the coast on 20 May they had split the British army in two. To the north, trapped in an ever decreasing area around Dunkirk, were a quarter of a million of the best British fighting troops, cut off from their supply lines and support facilities and with their backs to the English Channel.

They were rescued from this seemingly impossible situation by 'Operation Dynamo', in which a fleet of boats of all shapes and sizes was assembled at short notice and used to ferry the bulk of the trapped troops back to England. They were subject to constant attacks from German bombers but sixteen



Hurricane at Rouvres Aerodrome (Wigan Archives & Local Studies)



Edward Hall, 1939 (Wigan Archives & Local Studies)

squadrons of RAF fighters, based to the south of Dunkirk, flew over 3500 sorties and took a heavy toll on the attacking bombers. Soldiers being bombed and strafed while awaiting transport were for the most part unaware of the efforts to protect them, as most of the dog-fights took place far away from the beaches. As a result many of the British soldiers bitterly accused the airmen of doing nothing to help. The last British soldier was plucked from the beach on 4 June thus bringing to an end the evacuation of Dunkirk. This was also the point where the film ended.

What became of those cut off to the south of the German column, where 200,000 non-combatant and logistical support troops were scattered about north west France in areas not yet captured by the Germans?

These included Edward Hall's 73 Squadron, along with other RAF squadrons, who continued to fight alongside the French forces. The British High Command set up Operation Aerial to rescue these remaining troops. They were ordered to make their own way to

ports on the Atlantic coast such as St. Nazaire and Brest. These had the facilities to handle large ships and many thousands of men were successfully rescued during the period 15-25 June. On 17 June, the Cunard liner, *Lancastria*, was sunk by German bombers with a huge loss of life. Estimated losses varied from 4000 to 9000 but it was certainly the biggest loss of life in Britain's maritime history. When news reached Churchill he forbade its publication on the grounds that, 'the newspapers have got quite enough disasters for today at least'.

It had been intended to break the news of the disaster at a more favorable time but it became forgotten until well after the end of the war. What follows is an account of Operation Aerial, seen through Edward Hall's eyes.

73 Squadron retreated south-west, passing south of Paris and for a brief period were based at the famous car racing circuit at Le Mans. Even after the last British troops had been evacuated from Dunkirk the squadron continued to engage the enemy in support of the

French forces, gradually falling back until they eventually reached Nantes on 17 June. That was the day the French surrendered; defeat was inevitable and so the remaining Hurricanes were ordered to fly back to England. Most of the ground staff made their way into Nantes and boarded ships bound for England, leaving behind a small party, commanded by Edward, to service the aircraft for their flight home and to destroy any equipment that might be of use to the enemy.

After seeing the aircraft safely away, Edward led the remaining personnel to the port of La Rochelle. Here he found two small British cargo boats that had been used for delivering coal from South Wales. They were about to leave but he managed to get his party aboard the s.s. *Philip M*, along with hundreds of other stragglers and refugees. After an uncomfortable voyage they eventually arrived safely at Newport in South Wales. The squadron's aircraft had flown back to Church Fenton in Yorkshire and the surviving ground staff made their way back there. When eventually a roll call was carried out it transpired that 35 men from 73 Squadron had been amongst the many thousands lost in the sinking of the troopship *Lancastria*. This was a bitter blow to Edward who had been very proud of the fact that during the time he commanded the ground crews in the retreat across France he had not lost a single man. Edward was intensely proud to have been a member of 73 Squadron and always claimed that the part it played in the Battle of France was never properly recognised because of the way Operation Aerial had been written out of the Public Record. He claimed that as far as the Royal Air Force was concerned, the squadron was 'first in – last out', and that the 55 pilots who served in France (only 26 of whom survived the war), truly deserved the title of 'The First of the Few'.

The exact number of those rescued will never be known but the best estimates in the official records are:
 Operation Dynamo 366,162; Operation Aerial 191,870
 Total: 558,032

Note: The full transcript of Edward Hall's diary can be found on the archives website at www.wigan.gov.uk/archives

Leigh Grammar Schools Project



Leigh Grammar School Pupils

We're delighted to be able to report on progress from the Leigh Grammar School heritage project, gratefully supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.



Our three project interns – Laura, Tom and Heather – have been working cataloguing, digitising and researching the existing Grammar School collections held by the Archives.

All the new resources will be made available online as well as used as research for other elements of the project, including the celebration day in July.

If you have any memories of the Grammar Schools, or objects you would like to share with us, please get in touch with Healthy Arts or the Archives & Local Studies.

Mr Thompson was a fully qualified engineer before he trained as a teacher. When he arrived at Leigh Grammar School he said he was astonished to find that so few of the boys were interested in handicraft, something that he set out to change. He said, 'My aims as a teacher were to teach the boys to make useful and beautiful articles and to pass on some of the pleasures and joy I have had from making these things.' He scrapped what he considered to be the 'old ideas' that had been around since he was at school, such as making rulers and toothbrush stands. He

Come along to the...

LEIGH GRAMMAR SCHOOLS CELEBRATION DAY

Saturday 14 July, 11.00am – 3.00pm
Bedford High School, Manchester Road, Leigh

Interactive presentations, films and exhibitions showcasing the memories of former pupils from the Grammar School system in Leigh

This is a **FREE** Open Day for the general public with no need to book. If you require further information, please email contactus@healthyarts.org.uk or phone 07542 114383

Leigh Grammar School Project Intern Laura Makin

While cataloguing, I came across several copies of *The Leighian*, the Boys' Grammar School magazine. One volume, from 1967, featured an interview with a former teacher carried out by a student. The teacher's name was Mr Thompson and he was interviewed by R Graham. On a staff list for the school, there is a William D Thompson, listed as working there between 1945 and 1966, which seems to fit with the information given in the interview. He taught handicraft at the school and was said to have been fondly remembered by staff and students.

WIGAN BOROUGH ENVIRONMENT AND 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 or visit www.wiganheritage.com

decided to work with hardwood and make things like small tables and stools. Soon after, they held an exhibition and the other teachers were so impressed they thought Mr Thompson must have made them all himself and not the students.

Interestingly, Mr Thompson was in favour of the comprehensive system as he believed it offered 'the best opportunities for all concerned'. Although, he was concerned about the patchwork way in which this was happening in many places, including Leigh. He thought that the grammar schools had made a 'wonderful contribution in the past', but that it was time for the old system to go.

I thought this was something worth sharing because it is reflective of what we are doing in this project today and some lovely memories were recorded. Hopefully, we can uncover lots of equally interesting stories with our own interviews and research.

What Happened Next? Exploring the Leavers Book of Leigh Girls' Grammar School Project Intern Thomas McGrath

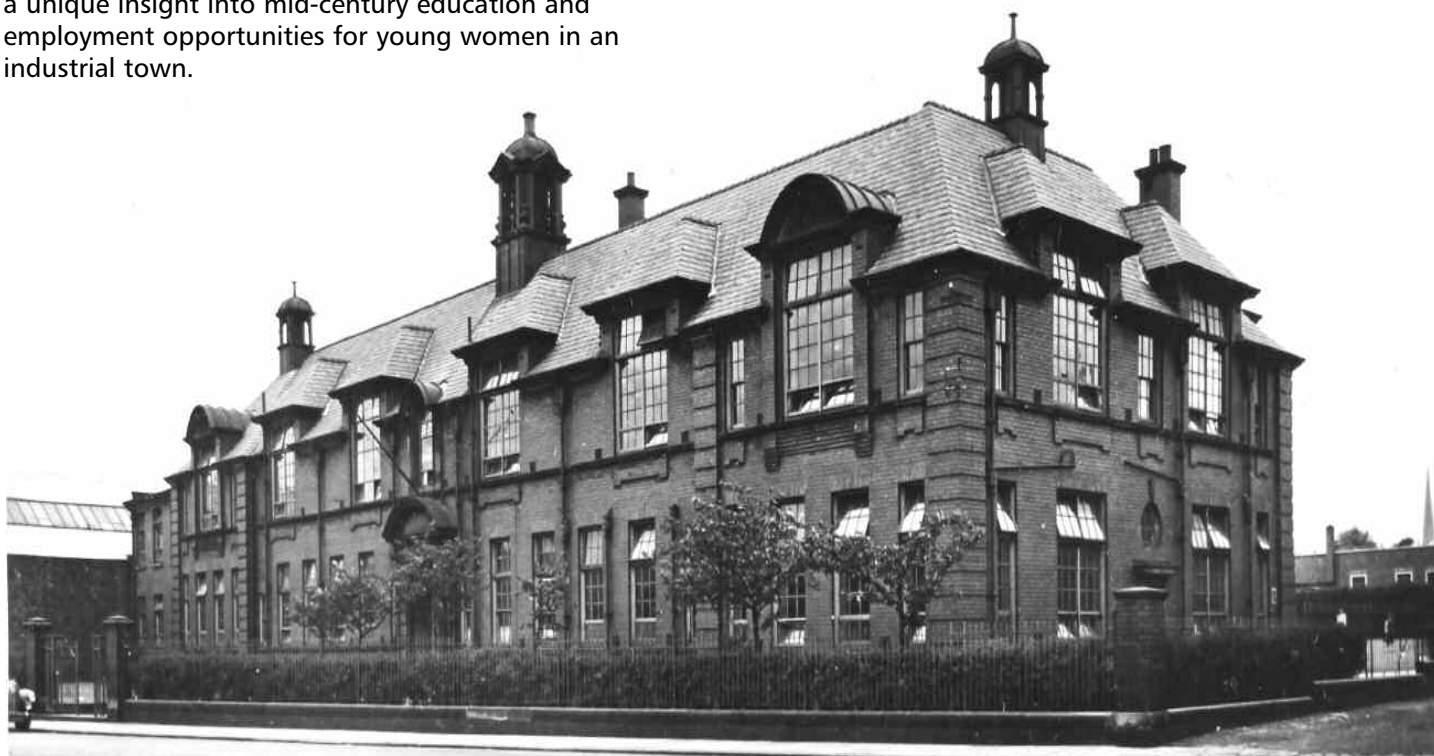
The Leigh Girls Grammar School leavers book contains many fascinating details about pupils at the school between 1954-1976 and interestingly it records what each girl did after she left the school, either after fifth form or after sixth form. Thereby, the records offering a unique insight into mid-century education and employment opportunities for young women in an industrial town.

For the purpose of this short article, a sample of was taken from across the years. The education or employment role of the alumni has been split into the following categories; further education (either university or technical college), nursing and health care, retail and customer service, local government and Civil Service, clerical work, domestic situations (either at home or the family moved from the area) and unknown.

Job roles within nursing and health care was a steady source of employment for leavers; offering roles as nurses, dental nurses and radiographers to name a few. In 1959 only 2% of leavers went into this profession, however there was a spike in the early 1960s, with 15% of leavers following this route in 1961 and 1962 respectively.

For those girls who left Grammar School in 1955 27% went on to some form of higher education, whereas 46% went into clerical jobs. An office job at the time offered well-paid, professional employment and was clearly highly desirable. A decade later in 1964, the figures are slightly more balanced with 35% of leavers going into higher education and 31% in clerical work. By 1975, free higher education offered under the 1962 Education Act appears to have created more opportunities for the girls; 39% went in higher education and the number of girls going into clerical jobs fell to 17% and only 10% of girls went into retail and customer service roles.

This a just a short sample of the wealth of material offered at Wigan Archives and Leigh Local Studies.

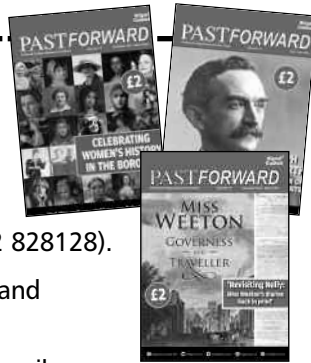


Leigh Girls' Grammar School

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Signed Date

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?

Local History Writing Competition

1st Prize - £100

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 2017 Past Forward Essay Competition

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 Monday 1 October 2018.
- 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

OR

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

Dear Past Forward

I would like to tell you about Tom Boardman of Leigh who's just passed away in his hundredth year. Tom was a sincerely steadfast gentleman who went through a great deal during the Second World War. He suffered starvation, disease and constant beating but kept morale up in the camp by organising concerts.



Born in Howe Bridge, Tom attended Howe Bridge School and Hesketh Fletcher Secondary. He went onto to work for Lancashire United Transport and became a Traffic Manager.

Tom volunteered for service in 1939 with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and sailed to Singapore from Liverpool. However, in February 1942 Japan occupied Singapore and Tom became a Prisoner of War. Tom moved to Changi base camp where work began on the Burma Railway. In October Tom was forced to travel to Thailand in cattle trucks living on only one meal a day.

Tom was one of thousands of allied prisoners who over twelve months built a rail link between Bangkok and Rangoon in horrendous conditions. During his captivity Tom contracted malaria 32 times as well as several bouts of dysentery. He said the only way to survive was to stay positive that this nightmare would come to an end. 'You had to have willpower to survive; if you couldn't overcome the desperate situation then you would die'.

To boost the camp's morale Tom made a ukulele out of a Red Cross wooden boxes and telegraph wires for entertaining the other prisoners. This ukulele is now housed at the Imperial War Museum North.

Joan Szymanowski

Dear Past Forward

I would like to share with your readers the story of Flora MacDonald (later Whittaker) from Leigh.



Flora MacDonald
as a child

Flora MacDonald grew up in Butts Basin, Leigh. At the age of three she developed joint problems. Her mum took her to the doctor who said, 'She has weak joints and needs to take up an activity to improve her mobility, such as dancing'. So she started attending classes on a Saturday morning in the upstairs room of a butcher's shop in Leigh with lots of other children. They must have made a lot of noise!

Her Auntie Mae worked in a mill in Leigh, as did Flora's mum. Auntie Mae wanted Flora to be a bit different and took on Flora to help her learn. She lived a few houses up from her by the canal at Butts Basin. Eventually, Flora progressed so well that she took ballet examinations in Liverpool. She then proceeded to classes in London, where she attended the Royal Ballet School.

I remember Flora saying that on the day the Second World War broke out that there was a big rush to get home. The train carriages were full of people. There was nowhere for the men to go to the toilet on the train. So, one woman said: 'Ladies! Eyes left!' This allowed the men to pee out the window! A true story!

By the age of seventeen, Flora was starring in musicals. 'Tap happy', she called it. An ENSA [Entertainments National Service Association] representative came to the theatre in London and asked people if they wanted to join. Flora volunteered. The man said they had to be 18 to sign up, 'but don't worry, you'll be 18 by the time you get back!'.

So she joined up and had three big parts. Her memories have been recorded and are available to listen to. She recalled many other things from the war years, such as visiting the concentration camps.

Andy Strowman

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.

10 April – 'The Crown Jewels',
Frances Raftery
8 May – 'Concorde', Peter Hampson
12 June – 'Captain Kidd', Brian Halliwell
10 July – 'Fingerprinting and Forensics',
Susan Sirou

Admission – Members, £1,
Non Members, £2, including refreshments.
Contact Details: Margaret Hodge,
01942 884893.

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

Culcheth Local History Group

The Village Centre, Jackson Avenue.
Second Thursday of each month. Doors open 7.15pm for 7.30pm start. Members £10 Visitors £2 Enquiries: Zoe Chaddock – 01925 752276 (Chair)

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
An exciting new, free, local history website, covering Leigh and the surrounding districts. Still in its infancy, it already 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

The Leigh & District Family History Help Desk is available every Monday afternoon (except Bank Holidays) from 12.30pm to 2.30pm.

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 July, August and December), contact Mrs G McClellan (01942 729559)

Lancashire Local History Federation

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

Skelmersdale & Upholland Family History Society

The group meets at Upholland Library Community Room, Hall Green, Upholland, WN8 0PB, at 7.00pm for 7.30pm start on the first Tuesday of each month; no meeting in July, August and January. December is a meal out at The Plough at Lathom. For more information please

contact Bill Fairclough, Chairman on 07712 766288 or Caroline Fairclough, Secretary, at carolinefairclough@hotmail.com

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 Brocket 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

Wigan Family and Local History Society

We meet on the second Wednesday at 6.45pm, at Sunshine House Community Centre, Wellington Street, Scholes. Please contact wigan.fhs@gmail.com to find out more information.

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

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

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.



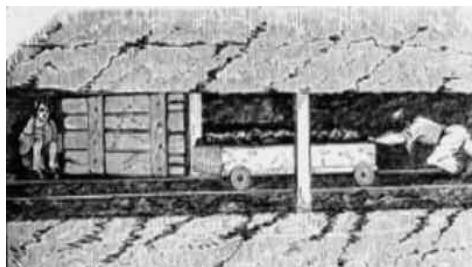
'Titanic – The Wigan Story'

Talk by Caroline Heaven
Friday 6 April, 12.30pm-1.30pm,
Museum of Wigan Life £2.50 including tea/coffee



'The Invention of Childhood'

Talk by Dianne Teskey
Thursday 26 April, 12.30pm-1.30pm,
Museum of Wigan Life £2.50 including tea/coffee



'Children down the Mines'

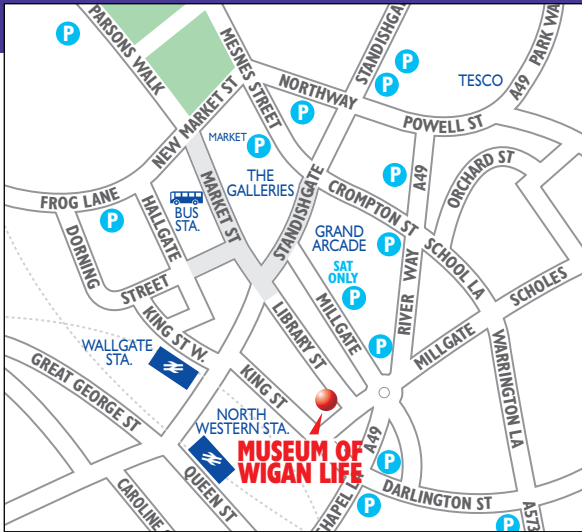
Talk by Alan Davis
Thursday 17 May, 12.30pm-1.30pm,
Museum of Wigan Life £2.50 including tea/coffee



'Invasion of the Body Snatchers'

Talk by Charlie Guy, MA
Thursday 28 June, 1.00pm-2.00pm,
Museum of Wigan Life £2.50 including tea/coffee

How to Find Us



Museum of Wigan Life & Wigan Local Studies

Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU

Telephone 01942 828128

heritage@wigan.gov.uk

Mon-Wed 9am-2pm Thursday-Friday 12pm-5pm

Saturday 9am-2pm

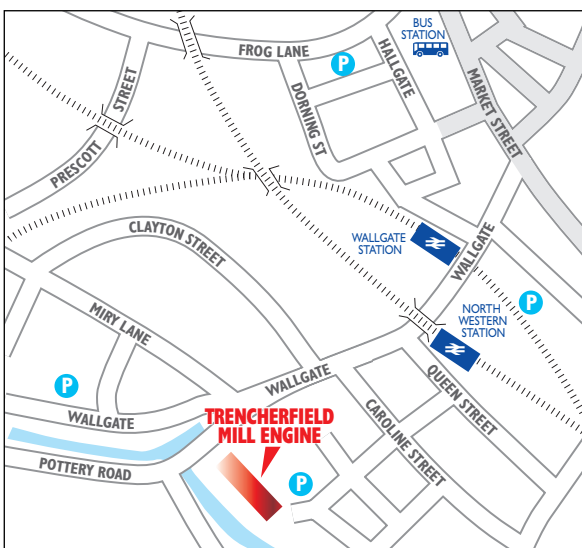
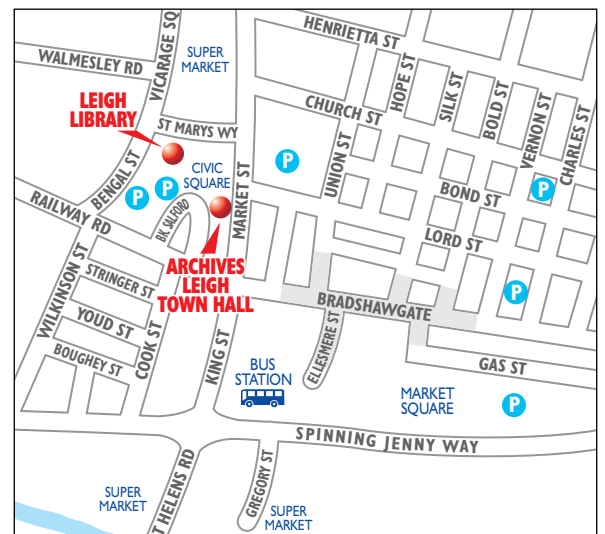
Archives & Leigh Local Studies

Leigh Town Hall, Leigh WN7 1DY

Telephone 01942 404430

archives@wigan.gov.uk

Mon-Wed 9am-2pm Thursday-Friday 12pm-5pm



Trencherfield Mill Engine

Wigan Pier Quarter, Heritage Way,

Wigan WN3 4EF

Telephone 01942 828128

b.rowley@wigan.gov.uk

Please see website for Steaming Sunday calendar

YOUR LOCAL MUSEUM

Bolton Bury
Oldham Rochdale
Salford Stockport
Tameside Wigan

Take a closer look www.gmmg.org.uk



GREATER MANCHESTER MUSEUMS GROUP



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