

PAST FORWARD

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Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine

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FRONT COVER

Images courtesy of
Dave Green, Wigan Council

Letter from the Editorial Team

Welcome to PAST Forward Issue 88.

As we all emerge from months of restrictions and lives put on hold, you'll be pleased to read that the Borough's historians have not been without ideas for research or stories to share.

This summer edition of Past Forward takes you from Wigan clocks down-under to Evangelism in Edwardian Leigh. We look at the amazing wartime story of Thomas 'Ginger' Jones and the hidden stories to be found on a walk in local cemeteries.

We include more winners from the 2021 Local History Writing Competition, prize-winning essays from Thomas McGrath and Tommy Parkinson, with time enough to pop along to the Bricklayers Arms in Culcheth for refreshment.

So, find a comfortable spot in the shade, cool drink on hand, and enjoy another packed edition of Wigan & Leigh's local history magazine.

2021: Past Forward's 30th Birthday!

2021 marks the 30th anniversary of Past Forward. Over the years it has provided an amazing resource for local historians of all ages to share their research and writing, for local groups to promote their projects and for people to share their stories and memories of the Borough in the past. Readers are always getting in touch with us to explore previous editions and the PF articles archive keeps growing as a permanent resource for researchers – over 700 articles since 1991, written by upwards of 400 different contributors.

We'd love to hear from you about what the magazine means to you – and any memories you have of the memories shared in the magazine over the last thirty years! If you'd like to tell us about your connection to Past Forward, please email us at pastforward@wigan.gov.uk

Archives: Wigan & Leigh

Since our last edition we're delighted to have welcomed our first visitors to the new Archives facilities at Leigh Town Hall. The new

searchroom and exhibition space are now fully open and we'd love to welcome Past Forward readers from far and wide to our new premises. Look out for our forthcoming programme of full building tours around the fully refurbished Leigh Town Hall, as well as events, talks and activities.

Barbara O'Neill

The Past Forward team were saddened to learn of the death of Mrs Barbara O'Neill earlier this year. Barbara was a long-standing champion of local history and sponsor of the yearly local history writing competition. We are proud to be able to rename the competition in her memory. Our thoughts and those of the heritage community in the Borough are with her husband, John, and their family and friends.

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 the Barbara O'Neill 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 J. O'Neill.



Winners from the Past Forward Essay Competition 2019

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 Saturday 15 January 2022.
- 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

Copy Deadline for Issue 89 - Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday 15 October 2021.



THE EMPRESS BALLROOM

BY TOM WALSH

The Empress Ballroom was opened by the Atherton family in 1916, in the middle of the First World War, and, by all accounts, was an immediate success so much so that only eight years later a second ballroom was added: 'The Palais de Dance'. Two events could be held on the same evening or, on nights of 'big occasions', both would be used which caused a little confusion. The balcony of the Empress had large double doors that lead to the ground floor of 'The Pali'; very disconcerting, especially if you'd had a tippie (or three).

On the subject of bars, the ballroom didn't have a licence to sell intoxicants, hence for the Saturday dances or midweek affairs it was non-alcoholic drinks only. For Friday night dances an occasional licence would be applied for on the

grounds that the dance was for some particular firm's works dance or parish dance. In truth, it was a way of circumventing the licensing laws. I must confess that Friday night dances were my chosen ones; the atmosphere always seemed more friendly, I can't think why (hic).

Many readers will remember the sofas round the dance floor. I think they'd been in situ since 1916! They were the most uncomfortable couches you could imagine - springs sticking out at every conceivable angle, rough moquette covering, not to mention the horsehair stuffing finding its way to the surface ready to impale any unsuspecting legs that might seek rest from dancing. It's no wonder girls gave them a wide berth, particularly after the advent of the mini skirt!

On Friday nights, in the mid-60s, the entrance fee was 5 shillings (25p) and the cheapest alcoholic drink was cider, 10d (4p). People danced till 1am to Jess Greenough and his orchestra; mid-week it was Ronnie Carr and The Beat Boys. When the Rolling Stones appeared in November 1963 the entrance was 5 shillings in advance or 5 shillings and sixpence on the door, seems incredible by today's silly money.

I wonder how many people alive today in Wigan, and indeed around the world, owe their existence to The Empress Ballroom. There must have been thousands upon thousands of marriages that happened because of a first meeting at 'The Emp'. In the 40s and 50s the venue was a particular favourite of the 'Yanks' from their Burtonwood base, and many girls from Wigan became G.I. brides. This comment from Wigan World will give some idea of how far its tentacles reached: 'I was looking for information about The Empress Ballroom as a way of connecting with my Mother's past, she passed away in 2005. My Mother was Edna Green, was born in Wigan in 1922 and lived there until married in 1951 and moved to America. She had so many wonderful stories about dancing at the Empress. I'm surprised to see one of her dance partners mentioned here. She spoke a lot about Joe Bertrand and the fun they had dancing at the Empress. I have a piece of the dance floor from the Empress that he had given her on her last trip home I'll treasure it forever. Thank you for the memories shared here – Arlene Norton-Everett, Washington, USA, May 2012.'

On a more parochial front, most 'Wigan folk' would have gone to the ballroom at some time or other. Times were very different then. Young men would ask a girl to take the floor in a polite way - 'may I have this dance?' The offer was usually accepted as it would seem churlish to decline. However, it was made very clear if it



was to be one dance only, by refusing to engage in conversation and looking anywhere apart from her would-be suitor. An often asked refrain, 'Can I walk you home?', would often be rebuffed with a firm, 'I can't leave my friend'. If they hit it off, an arrangement to meet would be made for the following week. Favourite meeting places for a first date would be Woolworths' corner or Lowe's Department Store; alas now just memories, like the Ballroom itself!

When the venue was renamed 'The Casino' it also got a full licence. I was fortunate to have tickets for the opening night. The star was Shirley Bassey, who performed fantastically. However, not everyone was delighted when it was announced, 'the bar will be closed during Miss Bassey's performance'.

As 'The Casino' it went on to find worldwide fame as the home of Northern Soul. It closed in 1981 – not for lack of enthusiasm, the town council owned it at that time and had plans to extend The Civic Centre. In the event, the plans came to nothing, the cost being prohibitive. People still bemoan the closure of this icon to Northern Soul but that's another story for another day!

The Ballroom had an unhappy ending, engulfed by fire shortly after the last 'all-nighter'. So many memories blighted by the sight of the ashes. But, as we all know, memories can't be destroyed! That is clearly exemplified by the remarks from Washington, USA cited earlier. The piece of the dance floor mentioned must be even more treasured after the inferno. These memories of yore will remain: when we 'tripped the light fantastic'; where so many friendships were made; and where many, metaphorically speaking, took the first step down the aisle!

With thanks to Peter Fleetwood for images, courtesy of Wiganworld

The curious tale of a well-travelled Wigan long-case clock

By Richard de Grijis (Sydney, Australia)

Recently, I obtained a copy of the fifth, 'much enlarged' edition of Britten's authoritative 'Old Clocks and Watches & Their Makers'. Its subtitle, 'being an historical and descriptive account of the different styles of clocks and watches of the past, in England and abroad, to which is added a list of nearly twelve thousand makers,' invited further exploration. One entry in this hefty volume from 1922 caught my attention:

'Burges. Henry, long-case clock, about 1690; Mr. W. J. Clayton, South Australia'.

Since this was the only timepiece in Britten's compilation that had made it all the way to the Antipodes, my curiosity was piqued.

Henry Burges, the clock's designer, was a trailblazer in a long tradition of Wigan clockmakers. In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, northwest England was home to numerous master clockmakers, including many famous Wiganites like John Alkner, William Barker, Thomas Bridge, Archibald Coats and Peter Fearnley. Parish records of Wigan's Church of All Saints suggest that Henry Burges was also a Wiganite; he married Mary Roberts in 1665.

Horology - clock making - was a relatively new addition to the region's industrial manufacturing base at the time Burges made this 'long-case' or 'grandfather' clock. The industry's birth coincided with the large-scale expansion of Lancashire's textile manufacturing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution had given rise to a new generation of entrepreneurs who established engineering factories, ironworks, mines and textile mills. They spent their 'new money' on long-case clocks, eager to impress their guests with their newfound wealth and emulate the rural aristocracy with its 'old money'.

Wigan became known as the region's horological centre. As such, the area attracted many skilled craftsmen and watchmakers. But new arrivals could not simply set up shop and offer their services. Only clockmakers who had been made 'freemen' could do so; 'foreigners' - out-of-towners - were not allowed to trade unsupervised. Becoming a freeman was an onerous process, and success was by no means guaranteed. This is probably why Burges sometimes concealed his signature. Moreover, he frequently did not indicate the geographical origin of his clocks on their beautifully illustrated dial plates either.

However, persistence and ingenuity often paid off. For instance, in 1711, Henry's son John applied for Wigan freeman status, keen to join the local clockmakers' guild. At first, his application was rejected. The resident horologists opposed his candidature for Wigan's freedom for fear of increased competition. Nevertheless, the following year John applied again, this time requesting a license to trade as a gunsmith. And so, by 1713, he was eventually listed as a Wigan clockmaker after all.

Henry Burges represented an early generation of Wigan clockmakers, more commonly known as 'clocksmiths'. Their pioneering trade set the scene for the later prominence of Lancashire as northwest England's horological centre. However, market conditions were challenging. In the final decades of the seventeenth century, before the onset of the Industrial Revolution, clock ownership was almost unheard of outside of wealthy London circles. And so provincial clockmakers were struggling to sell even their cheapest and simplest timepieces.

Before the invention of the pendulum clock and the innovative 'endless chain' by the Dutch scientist-scholar Christiaan Huygens in 1658, clocks were kept running by regularly pulling up a weight suspended from a chain or rope. The cheapest clocks were weight-driven 'lantern clocks' and 'thirty-hour' long-case clocks; these required rewinding roughly every 30 hours. Second-generation long-case clocks employed a more complex gear train and became known as 'eight-day clocks'. Henry Burges' Australian clock was likely such an eight-day timepiece.

Given the challenging provincial market conditions in the late seventeenth century, Burges must have tried to make a living by selling the cheapest clocks he could possibly produce. To supplement his income, he was probably forced to seek additional metallurgy contracts or other repair work. Indeed, Brian Loomes, the British horologist, antique clock dealer and authority on Henry Burges, has eloquently pointed out,

'It is difficult to imagine a more sales-resistant group of people to try to sell a clock to than tight-fisted seventeenth-century Wiganites, who didn't need to know what time it was anyway.'

This brings me back to the 'Australian' Burges long-case clock and its unlikely voyage from northwest England. The

timepiece was owned by William Joseph Clayton from Mount Gambier, South Australia. Clayton appears to have been a foreman in George Lewis' local furniture factory. As we will see shortly, his fledgling career in the furniture business may have played an important role in the eventual fate of the Burges long-case clock.

In support of the Commonwealth's war effort, Clayton set sail for England on 22 May 1917. For the remainder of the Great War, he initially worked as an aircraft engineer at A. V. Roe & Company (now absorbed by BAE Systems) and at the Crossley Motor Aircraft Works in Manchester. An assignment at the National Aircraft Factory in Aintree, Liverpool, closed out his contractual obligations by January 1919.

Clayton returned to the Adelaide quarantine station at Torrens Island, South Australia, on the transport S.S. City of Cairo. He was discharged from active service on 28 March 1919. Although nothing is known about the provenance of his long-case clock, I suspect that he most likely only transported the clock's movement (its gear train, escapement mechanism, pendulum and weights), hands and face (the dial plate showing the time) on the long voyage home.

Clayton's eulogy implies that he was a professional cabinet maker, and so he may have constructed the clock's wooden case at a later date. Walnut and marquetry (inlaid-wood) cases were most popular. Upon his return from England, Clayton was first employed in the furniture and furnishings business of Alex McCallum. McCallum had taken over Lewis' furniture factory, where Clayton had started his career. In his later years, Clayton established himself as an independent entrepreneur.

Meanwhile, a century has passed since the publication of Britten's fifth edition. Sadly, the current whereabouts of Henry Burges' Australian long-case clock have become shrouded in the mists of time.

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Long case clock, 1710. This is an early example by renowned Wigan clockmaker John Burges. It features a signed dial with date aperture, cherub and leaf spandrels and a 30 hour movement.

The Tragedy at Winstanley: The Shortrede Family

By Thomas
McGrath



Winstanley Hall, c.1840s – Edward Twycross, The Mansions of England and Wales: The County Palatine of Lancaster, Vol. III, (London: Ackerman and Co., 1847)

In the 1880s there were a series of mysterious deaths on the Winstanley Estate. In the 140 years which have passed, numerous stories have arisen about the tragic deaths of Mr and Mrs Shortrede, along with the death of Mrs Atherton. The narrative is one of drama and passion: an extra-marital affair between Mr Shortrede and Mrs Atherton supposedly led to a string of suicides. This article will re-examine the lives of the Shortredes.

Who were the Shortredes?

Thomas Shortrede (1833-1885) was born in Jedburgh, Scotland. He was the third child of John Elliot Shortrede and Elizabeth Thomson. His parents had a substantial farm which was almost 3000 acres in size.

By 1861 Thomas and his mother had moved to Durham, where he worked as a mining engineer.

In April that year he married Susannah Macintosh in Marylebone, London. Susannah (1833-1880) was born in Chesterton, Cambridge to William Macintosh and Mary Rose. Susannah had worked as a governess in Islington, London but she had returned to her parents after the birth of a child, William Henry Macintosh, in 1857. Upon her marriage to Thomas Shortrede, Susannah left her parents and child in Cambridge and moved to Durham. The couple had three daughters: Mary (1862), Elizabeth (1864) and Annie (1866).

Around 1865 Thomas became the estate agent for the Bankes family at Winstanley Hall and his family lived on the edge of the parkland at Park House. The Shortredes were firmly established in local society and they fulfilled many civic and philanthropic roles. Thomas was involved with: the Wigan Board of Guardians, the Wigan Union School Attendance Committee and the Pemberton,

Winstanley and Upholland Board. Susannah was involved with the British Women's Temperance Association, and she took part in the Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition in 1873 to raise funds for the Infirmary and Dispensary at Wigan. In October 1868, the Shortredes hosted, and paid for, an 'annual treat' day for 350 children from Billinge.

'Sad death of a lady'

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On 10 August 1880, Susannah sent her daughters into Wigan. Around 3pm she gave some instructions to her maid, Mary Hitchen, and told her she would continue the conversation after her walk. At 5pm, Susannah's body was found floating in a well, 285 yards from her home. Her body was recovered by Francis Atherton, a stone mason who also lived on the estate.

Press reports portrayed Susannah's death as accidental, as she was middle class and suicide was illegal. The well could only be accessed by descending some stone steps, so it was assumed Susannah had slipped when attempting to get some water to drink or to bathe her forehead on the hot afternoon. Reports of the event were printed under the title 'sad death of a lady' in newspapers across the United Kingdom. The unofficial tale is that Susannah took her own life upon the discovery of her husband's affair with Elizabeth Atherton (the wife of Francis Atherton). There is no suggestion of this in the newspapers, nor would there be. However, Susannah's mental state at the time of her death was mentioned. It was revealed she had suffered from melancholia for some months. Yet on the day of her death Mary Hitchen stated Susannah 'was very cheerful, more so than witness had seen her for some years.' An inquest returned an open verdict and Susannah was buried at St. Aidan's Church in Billinge.

Another Tragic Death

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The impact of Susannah's death can be seen in the 1881 census. Thomas was living alone at Park House, with the exception of two maids. It is unknown where Elizabeth and Annie were but Mary was living with her maternal uncle in Cambridge.

The following year Elizabeth Atherton died aged 42. In the unofficial story she was overcome with guilt and hanged herself. Yet, there was no

mention of her death in the newspapers which would suggest that there was no inquiry and, therefore, nothing untoward about her passing.

In April 1884 Thomas Shortrede married Mary Cornish Splatt (1841-1893) at St. Saviour's Church, Liverpool. There was a celebration at Park House, which was attended by Thomas' daughters. Thomas was held in high esteem and received expensive wedding gifts from the servants of the Winstanley Estate, the colliery officials and workmen, and the tenants of the estate.

On 4 August 1885 Thomas returned to Park House after an extended period of recuperation in North Wales. He had seriously injured his leg in a riding accident. He entered an outbuilding to shoot some rats. After a single shot, a maid discovered Thomas' body laid half-inside a closet. The shotgun was in his right hand and there was a wound to his temple.

An inquest returned an open verdict and again, Thomas' position and status seems to have been taken into account. Dr Molyneaux suggested that Thomas' stiff knee could have caused him to slip going up some steps and the tumbling gun had gone off. Dr Cowan stated that it was 'utterly impossible to reconcile the thing with any idea of suicide.' Thomas was buried at St. Aidan's.

What Happened Next?

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The Shortrede sisters had suffered double tragedies just five years apart. Mary Shortrede married George B. Murdoch in 1886 and had three children, two of whom she named after her parents. Annie worked as a 'lady's help' in Scotland and died in 1908. Elizabeth trained as a nurse. She died in 1922 and was buried alongside Annie in Edinburgh. Finally, William Henry Macintosh, the little boy Susannah had left in Cambridge, was sent to a boarding school. He won a scholarship and studied his BA and MA degrees at Oxford and became a schoolmaster.

We may never know the full details about the deaths of Thomas and Susannah Shortrede or how Elizabeth Atherton fitted into the actual events, if at all. Behind every historical mystery and dramatic scandal were real people and hopefully this article has shed more light on the lives of Thomas, Susannah and their children.

'FROM GIPSY TENT TO PULPIT': RODNEY SMITH IN WIGAN AND LEIGH

BY BRIAN JOYCE

On a visit to Hull in 1883 the Methodist minister, Rev Samuel F Collier, heard a young man preach at the Wilberforce Hall. Collier was deeply impressed. He later wrote that: 'A dark young man was delivering an impassioned appeal which stirred the audience to its very depths'. Collier did not actually speak to the preacher for another three years, and it took a further three to convince his new friend to base himself at the Manchester Mission. The 'dark young man' was Rodney Smith.

'Gipsy' Smith, as he was universally known, had been born in 1860 to a Romany family in Essex. He received no formal education, and from an early age joined his family in their itinerant life making and selling baskets and clothes pegs. His father was a petty criminal who served numerous gaol sentences. However, when Rodney was in his teens the family repented and converted to Christianity. Rodney himself became a Christian; taught himself rudimentary reading and writing, and the basics of evangelism – preaching and hymn singing.

William Booth recognised Smith's talents after hearing him speak at a Christian Mission meeting in London and persuaded him to become a missionary for what eventually became the Salvation Army. He preached all over the country and the 19 year old attained the rank of 'Captain' in 1879. Wherever he went, his charisma and oratory led to mass conversions.

While stationed in Hanley in Staffordshire in 1882, Smith parted company with the Salvation Army. He broke the organisation's rules by accepting a present of a gold watch from his admiring congregation. His superiors forced him out of the Army, and for the remainder of his life Gipsy



Smith became a freelance itinerant preacher closely associated with the Wesleyan Methodists. It was at this point that Rev Collier heard him preach at Hull, eventually becoming a close friend and persuading 'the dark young man' to move to Manchester. Using the city as a base, Smith toured the country and the English-speaking world as a famous, popular and highly effective evangelist.

In early April 1895, a group of workers from the Manchester Mission appeared at afternoon and evening meetings at the Wesleyan Chapel in King

Street, Leigh. Rev Collier explained that the object of the Mission was to, 'lift the people from pain and degradation'. Sister Ada, one of the 'Sisters of the People' who also spoke at the chapel, asserted that, 'the best way to help the people is to teach them to help themselves'. According to the Leigh Chronicle, 'she had often found that drink was accountable for a great deal of this sin and misery'.

Although the advance publicity for this event billed Gipsy Smith simply as one of the participants, there is little doubt that, for many, he was the reason they attended this religious meeting. The Leigh Chronicle explained that the King Street Chapel, 'was filled in every part, the great attraction being an address and solos from the celebrated Gipsy Smith'.

The evangelist opened by singing the hymn, 'When the Roll is Called up Yonder', after which he explained the work of the Manchester Mission. It was right, he said, to save the souls of foreign heathens, but those in Britain should not be neglected. 'The Mission, he said, proved beyond doubt that the submerged tenth could be uplifted, and that old and empty chapels could be filled and that men could be got to church (Hear Hear)'. As a result of Gipsy Smith's exhortations, several people came forward to declare their conversions and £19 was collected for Mission funds.

King Street resounded with evangelical fervour again just before Christmas 1902. Once more, the chapel was packed for both morning and evening services. The congregations were treated to explanations of the work of the Mission by both clergy and laymen. Sisters Annette and Pattie outlined its labours among the poor and its redemption of the godless, but there is little doubt for whom their listeners were waiting.

According to the Leigh Chronicle, Gipsy Smith, 'who is one of the most devoted and successful evangelists in the country, held his audience spellbound'. In his afternoon address Gipsy, as usual, stressed the importance of the Gospel in reaching the people. He also related his own experiences, including his conversion many years before. By now his autobiography, 'From Gipsy Tent to Pulpit', had been published, and many of his anecdotes were drawn from the book.

Much of this was repeated in the evening meeting, which was, 'crowded in every part'. Again, the Chronicle's reporter was impressed:



'Gipsy Smith, a middle-aged man of striking appearance, with a fine command of language, created a great stir.' Describing the work of the Mission, he asserted that, 'he had been all over the world conducting missions, but he had seen nothing compared with the Manchester Mission in point of enterprise and success'. He particularly praised the missionaries' work in saving many of the 'fallen women' of the city. As usual, he also sang solos including the hymn, 'Pass It On'. A total of £34 was collected for the Mission this time and more conversions made.

Meanwhile, four years earlier, Smith had visited Wigan under the auspices of the Free Church Federation. He was in the town during the first 10 days of October 1898. On the first Saturday evening he addressed Mission workers. Then, starting on the Sunday, he addressed packed meetings at the Drill Hall in Powell Street.

The reporter for the Wigan Observer was as impressed as his Leigh counterparts had been, praising Gipsy as a strong and impressive speaker,

RESCUE AND SLUM WORK.
PUBLIC MEETINGS in connection with the above will be held in the **WESLEYAN CHAPEL, KING STREET, LEIGH, on TUE. DAY NEXT, APRIL 1st.** Afternoon, 3 o'clock; president, Mrs. Bennett, of Tyldesley. Evening, 7-30; chairman, A. P. Cawley, Esq.; speakers, Rev. S. F. Collier, Gipsy Smith, and four of the Sisters of the People. Collection in aid of Manchester Mission. 1824



who '... by the exercise of his dramatic power raises the feelings of his audience... It is remarkable to see the unanimity in which people jump to their feet in response to his appeal to them to go to the enquiry room'.

In fact, at the end of this mission, the Wigan Observer claimed more than 900 converts had entered the 'enquiry room'. The fact that an amateur angler from Ince gave himself the nickname 'Gipsy' Smith when he entered fishing contests is perhaps an indication of the evangelist's far-reaching impact.

When Gipsy returned to Leigh for a few days in November 1907, he used the Railway Road home of the Baptist minister Rev B D Darby as his base and toured the district by motor car. On the occasions he preached at Leigh Wesleyan Chapel, he was the sole attraction, referring to his life, conversion and evangelical work in order to stress the importance of spiritual rebirth. Funds raised would go to the Leigh Free Church Council, whose President, Edwin Birchall, chaired Gipsy's meetings. Birchall, a draper in the town, controversially told packed audiences that, 'There is no town that needs evangelic work more than Leigh'.

Once again, the King Street Chapel was packed to the rafters when Smith spoke. Despite (or perhaps because of) Gipsy's unfamiliar Essex accent, his audiences hung on every word. The evangelist knew how to stimulate his working-class congregations, starting his addresses with his usual opening sentence, "I'm goin' ta git at ya!", and git at them he did. The Leigh Chronicle's journalist spent some time describing Gipsy's oratorical style: 'He has the sweet musical voice of the born elocutionist and can vary his tones to a nicety. He is adept at making rhetorical pauses and can thunder forth in the finest declamatory style or subdue his tones almost to a whisper'.

While the contents of his message were the same or similar to other non-conformist preachers, his tone was certainly not.

On alcoholic drink he proclaimed to his Leigh audiences: "If I had my way with the drink traffic, I would strike the Devil with the last bottle and get rid of two evils at once. I say that to some here who are always eating peppermints when they come to chapel". This caused gales of laughter and no doubt knowing glances among the King Street congregation.

On theatrical entertainment he quoted the Daily Telegraph's theatre critic, who "...once said it was impossible for a woman to remain on the stage and keep her purity. I am therefore opposed to the theatre".

Smith then denounced dancing, although, "...it is not dancing that does the mischief so much as the cuddling. When our schoolrooms are given up to whist drives and progressive whist – 'progressive devil' I call it – and dances and other things...it is time somebody spoke out". He then went on to blame the three evils of drink, theatre and dance to explain the large numbers of 'fallen women' on the streets.

The evangelist also criticised modern trends in the churches. "A quarter of a century ago, it meant something to be a Christian. Now it is an excursion, a picnic, a social or an endeavour. When I came to Christ I came under the old act, and it meant business. It was a pilgrimage, a warfare, a conflict, a hand-to-hand fight with the Devil. It meant being slandered, opposed, misrepresented. If a man loved Christ, the world would hate him".

However, the modern authorities “have opened the churches too wide and been anxious to take in anybody and prefer to count heads rather than hearts. They’ve been more concerned about filling the church registry than attending to God”.

Smith related anecdotes from his own life to stress the importance of being born again. It could be achieved by anyone, even the humble sinners of Leigh: “I was born at the bottom – that’s no disgrace...God who can make sapphires and diamonds and opals out of lime and sand and water can also make jewels to adorn His crown from the gutters”.

He had stayed in the castles of titled people and had met two American presidents. He had framed letters from Queen Victoria on his wall: “That’s not so bad for a poor gipsy boy...If Jesus Christ can go to a gipsy tent and do so much for a poor gipsy boy, He can do something for you all if you give Him a chance”.

To his congregations in Leigh whose sole experience of gipsies was seeing them as the villains of theatrical melodramas or the owners of travelling fairground attractions, the stirring addresses from this charismatic preacher must have been a revelation. As Edwin Birchall told the congregation after one of Gipsy’s performances: “To put it mildly, you have had a very great treat”.

The evangelist’s final visit to the Wigan and Leigh areas before the First World War appears to have been in March 1914. The occasion was the 10th anniversary of the Queen’s Hall Wesleyan Mission in Wigan. The commemoration lasted for three days and included addresses by several speakers. Among them were Gipsy Smith and Rev S F Collier, who had been on a joint nationwide preaching tour since January. According to the Wigan Observer, Gipsy ‘...who was given a most enthusiastic welcome, delivered a rousing and inspiring address’.

At the Queen’s Hall, Smith used a well-tryed tactic, asking his audience if they remembered his last visit, which in Wigan’s case had been 16 years before. Many hands shot up. He then told his listeners that when he arrived at the entrance that evening, a young man at the door had approached him and asked, ‘Don’t you know me?’ Of course he did, claimed Gipsy: “I had led that young man to Christ, and today he is a Methodist minister”.

KING STREET WESLEYAN CHAPEL
REV. S. F. COLLIER,
GIPSY SMITH
AND
SISTERS OF THE PEOPLE
ON THURSDAY, DEC. 18th,
In aid of the
MANCHESTER MISSION,
3 p.m. and 7-15 p.m.
GIPSY SMITH WILL SING AT BOTH SERVICES.
TEA PROVIDED, 6d. b201

Smith gave his captivated listeners the promise of being reborn if they followed his message: “Though all men are not born equal, Jesus Christ gives the race a new start and a new chance”.

His Queen’s Hall audience also appreciated another of his common themes, dismissing superficiality in favour of inner faith: “You don’t save a patient with smallpox by putting him into a clean sheet, nor make water sweet by painting the pump, nor strengthening a crumbling house by whitewashing it, but Jesus washes white not whitewashes”. The Wiganers vigorously applauded and, as usual, many of them disappeared into the ‘enquiry room’ to confirm their conversion.

Between 1914 and 1918 Gipsy worked among British troops in France on behalf of the YMCA. For this he received an MBE. He continued to evangelise around Britain and the world in the 1920s and 1930s, and doubtlessly returned to Wigan and Leigh on many occasions. In 1947 he died aged 87 on board the Queen Mary during his 45th Atlantic crossing.

The secret of Gipsy Smith’s huge success among mass audiences must have been his humble origins and his willingness to proudly refer to them while exhorting his audiences to become born again. As he said at Leigh Wesleyan Church in 1907: “If you were to ask me to go to the organ and put my finger on the keynote of success, I would put it on B Natural”. And his audience applauded.

Welcome to Wigan Borough's brand new archives facilities based in the refurbished historic Leigh Town Hall



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24 hour parking is available at Town Hall car park, Bengal Street, Leigh, WN7 1YA. Free parking on a Saturday.

Wigan Council

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Hello from the Culture Team...

As our venues start to reopen fully we thought it was a good opportunity to introduce visitors to some new members of the team as well as those you haven't seen during the lockdown months.

Many of our Culture team normally based at the Archives, Museum and The Fire Within have been engaged in redeployment work to support critical Council services during the pandemic, with others continuing work behind the scenes on the Archives & Leigh Town Hall capital redevelopment. It has certainly been a busy 18 months but we're all delighted to be able to welcome visitors, researchers and volunteers back into our venues.

Our Customer Service Assistant team are the first point of contact for most visitors and have a wealth of knowledge about our collections, exhibitions, events and activities. They're always keen to help and look forward to seeing you soon!

Meet the Team!

Tom McGrath

How long have you been in the team? I'm a new starter! I joined the team in July 2021.

What are your local history or cultural interests? I'm very interested in the architectural history of the Borough. We've got some great buildings and monuments and I love to discover the stories behind them.

Why did you choose to work in the sector? I really enjoy engaging with the public and helping them discover more about the history of the places in which they (or their ancestors) lived and worked. It's always interesting to solve a few historical mysteries too!

What brought you to your role in the Culture team? I've previously been a volunteer with the archives and local studies service at Leigh, so I'm glad to be an official member of the team and bring all that experience to the role.

Alistair Cavan

How long have you been in the team? I am in my first week as a member of the CSA team and really enjoying the experience so far!

What are your local history or cultural interests? I am particularly interested in the social history of the Wigan area alongside the artwork and architecture of the area.

Why did you choose to work in the sector? I chose to work in the arts and heritage sector as I believe it is important to keep history and art alive and preserved for younger generations and having the opportunity to work with fantastic historical/cultural resources and with passionate individuals is incredibly rewarding.

What brought you to your role in the Culture team? I have grown up for most of my life in the Wigan area and have always enjoyed the friendly atmosphere of Wigan and the beautiful surrounding countryside.

Stephen Knott

How long have you been in the team? Since September 2013, having been a volunteer at the Archives before that.

What are your local history or cultural interests? I've a specific interest in railway, military and public health history, as well as family history.

Nathan Davies

How long have you been in the team? I have lived in Wigan all of my life and I've been working as part of the Culture & Heritage team for just over

a year. I am relatively new to the archives and museum services as I started out working at The Fire Within art gallery.

What are your local history or cultural interests? My main area of interests are around the first and second world war and reading into all of the amazing stories about local heroes and tragedies that occurred during those times.

Why did you choose to work in the sector? Working in the cultural sector always appealed to my sense of curiosity and interest in the weird and wonderful. I Hope to meet you all soon!

Alexandra Cosme

How long have you been in the team? I have only recently joined the culture team in Wigan, but I am already enjoying it so much.

What are your local history or cultural interests? I'm interested in discovering more about the lives of people across Wigan, both past and present, and giving a voice to those who haven't been represented or have been excluded in the sector previously.

Why did you choose to work in the sector? I chose to work in the cultural sector because I think that arts and culture can have a big impact on people's lives, and I want to be involved in sharing this and making it accessible to everyone across Wigan.

What brought you to your role in the Culture team? After attending the University of Manchester, I became interested in the cultural sector in the Greater Manchester region. Reading about all the fantastic and innovative work in Wigan, primarily in the Cultural Manifesto, excited me and it was something that I couldn't wait to be involved in.

Our new team members at The Fire Within, pictured left to right, Tom McGrath, Laura Makin, Alexandra Cosme, Alistair Cavan



Laura Makin

How long have you been in the team? I'm new to the team having started July 2021!

What are your local history or cultural interests? I'm particularly interested in social history and exploring the stories of ordinary people that lived and worked in the area, and whose voices may have previously been unheard.

Why did you choose to work in the sector? I believe that everyone should have access to great arts and culture experiences, regardless of their background or where they live. I'm excited to be part of a wonderful team that is bringing those experiences to people across the borough. It's very rewarding to see people enjoy themselves or have a meaningful moment with collections.

What brought you to your role in the Culture team? I am from Leigh so I'm looking forward to being involved in what's happening locally and seeing how the cultural manifesto continues to develop, and to learn more about the history of my community through our collections.

Kath Pass

How long have you been in the team? I joined the team in 2017.

What are your local history or cultural interests? I love old books and in Wigan Local Studies I found an amazing library that I was allowed to look after and clean. There is a joy in seeing an old book revealed in all its glory as the dirt is removed from all its pages.

Why did you choose to work in the sector? I enjoy the fact that there are hidden stories in the multitude of boxes that we have stored in the Archives and that there is always something new to discover about our Borough.

By Tommy Parkinson



SPITFIRE CRASH IN ASPULL

Pilot Boleslaw Henryk Paley sat on the propeller of another aircraft (Image used courtesy of Wigan World, <https://www.wiganworld.co.uk/stuff/crash.php>)

In a training session for fighting, Polish pilot Flying Officer Boleslaw Paley had to abandon his aircraft, a Spitfire mark Vb, serial number BL585, due to an oxygen failure. Before he fell unconscious, Officer Boleslaw departed from the Spitfire, but he lost consciousness before he could activate his parachute.

Fortunately, he woke and pulled the rip-cord and the parachute carried him safely down into a colliery in the Golborne area, while his plane dived into a field not far from the Top Lock.

The plane exploded and a crash team removed multiple parts, leaving the rest remaining buried until Mark Gaskell from Orrell researched the site. In 2005 he and a group of friends from the Lancashire Aircraft Investigation Team dug the ruins up.

Officer Boleslaw was a member of the Polish Air Force from 1936 and was promoted to the rank

of Pilot Officer on 1 September 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland (one of the first of the terrible acts the Nazis committed in their conquest for power).

He carried on fighting in Romania (against the Central Powers), then continued on to France (which was on the Allies' side then) and joined the French Air Force. Later on he fled from France, which was being overrun by the Central Powers, to carry on serving directly from British command.

On 7 June 1944, the day after D-Day, he had to abandon his Spitfire IX serial MJ310 after experiencing engine failure over the French town of Insigne. He was captured and remained a Prisoner of War until 7 May 1945. He was awarded a Polish Cross of Valour and died a year and a day after he was freed from imprisonment.

These parts were excavated at the site of the plane crash:

- Rusting machine gun, with a 303 inch calibre
- From a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine (V12 cylinder) was found a piston and connecting rod
- A piece of a three-bladed wooden propeller
- Oxygen contents gauge
- 20mm cannon shell in its case and a second one without its case (both deactivated)
- Small maker's plate
- Compressed air tank for retracting landing wheels and firing the guns

As a 10 year old who has had two great grandfathers who have helped the war effort, I am extremely proud of Flying Officer Boleslaw.

My mum's mum's dad, Grandpa Bert, was a mechanic and he fixed planes - Spitfires to be exact. I am glad that memories like the aeroplane crash can be linked to our ancestors. Who knows, Grandpa Bert may have worked on that plane! If only Grandpa Bert was alive to tell us his tales.



*Spitfire parts dug up from the crash site at Aspall
(Image used courtesy of Wigan World,
<https://www.wiganworld.co.uk/stuff/crash.php>)*

My other great grandfather (my mum's dad's dad) was another mechanic; he worked on trains. I respect Boleslaw Henryk Paley a lot. He had helped out in the Polish, French and British air forces! It feels to me very sad that Officer Boleslaw died a year after the day he was set free as a Prisoner of War.

I would like to give a big thanks to Grandpa Bert, my brother Luke, Mum, Dad and stepdad Paul who have all helped me get through lockdown easier than I would have done – Tommy

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 the 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 but please

contact us if you would like to submit an article of a greater length

- 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.

THOMAS JONES: A MINER AND WAR HERO

BY ANDREW ATHERTON

Born at home in Tram Street, Platt Bridge, Thomas 'Ginger' Jones was the third of four children to Thomas Lloyd and Elizabeth Jones. His father was a sergeant in the Royal Lancashire Regiment during the First World War, was wounded, and sadly died in France in 1917, aged 30. Young Thomas had just turned three years old.

Tommy went to schools in Platt Bridge and Abram and spent some of that time looking out for his sisters; in particular his sister Bertha, who was teased for wearing glasses, which didn't go down well with a young Tommy.

He was a keen sportsman, excelling at both football and boxing, representing the town at football. He left school at 14 and, like many others, he went to work in the local mines working as a miner right up to the Second World War.

Miners were exempt from the draft due to the critical role they would play, but Ginger was keen to join up and wanted to join the commando regiment. To make this happen, he resigned his position in the mines and left Wigan to move to Scotland in order to join up with the Argyll and Southern Highlanders. He then volunteered for the SAS on its formation in North Africa by Major David Stirling and Lieutenant Blair 'Paddy' Mayne in 1941.

Jones went on to serve on countless SAS missions, and was a



The keen sportsman.

29 year old seasoned veteran by the time he was selected for Operation Gain, one of the SAS's D-Day missions.

In the immediate aftermath of the D-Day landings, SAS patrols were parachuted into France, to sabotage road and rail links which were speeding enemy units to the Normandy beach-heads. Jones formed part of a 12 man patrol, under the command of Captain Patrick Garstin MC and his second-in-command, Lieutenant John Wiehe.

For their first mission, in early June 1944, the patrol dropped into a region just to the south of Paris, where they blew up ammunition dumps and a train, before executing a daring escape from a

Luftwaffe airbase at nearby Etampes.

Upon arrival back in the UK, via the RAF C47 warplane that had rescued them, Garstin and his men were tasked to return to France, to carry out a raid on the airbase from which they had been rescued.

Unfortunately, for their second drop into occupied France, the patrol was the target of a *funkspiel* – radio game – operation, via which the Gestapo sent false radio messages to London, luring in air-drops of arms, supplies and men. As a result, Garstin's patrol parachuted from a Sterling aircraft at night directly into enemy hands.

Jones was one of the last to be captured, fighting until his ammunition was exhausted. Along with eight other captives – some very severely wounded – he was taken to the Gestapo's 84 Avenue Foch headquarters in Paris, to face interrogation and torture.

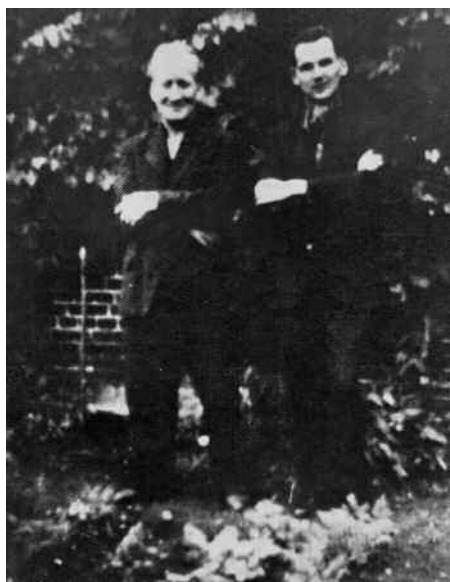
After several weeks of such treatment, during which Jones repeatedly sought to escape, the captives were sentenced to be executed without trial. Forced to dress in civilian clothes, they were driven to a patch of remote woodland and lined up for execution. Seeing this, Captain Garstin – terribly weakened from his own injuries - ordered his men

to try to escape, as he stood firm to take the fire.

Jones, and one other man, Corporal Serge Vaculik, managed to rush their would-be executioners and execute a daring getaway. From there the two escapees teamed up with the local French Resistance, carrying out sabotage operations and helping liberate the town of Bresles when Allied forces advanced.

With liberation, Jones and Vaculik's first thoughts were for their murdered comrades. They returned to the site of their would-be executions and tracked down the grave in which the bodies were buried.

Re-joining the SAS, both men would serve on operations until the end of the war, after which they would play a pivotal role in the work of the SAS War Crimes Investigation Team, which sought to track down Nazi war crimes suspects – those accused of murdering captured Allied SAS, Commandos, SOE (Special Operations Executive) agents and others. In the summer of 1947 Jones and Vaculik were the key eye-witnesses in the trial of the surviving Gestapo and SS executioners – those who had gunned down their SAS comrades



Tommy with Serge Vaculik.



'Off to Bonnie Scotland'. Tommy in his Argyll and Southern Highlanders uniform.

in cold blood. All of the accused were sentenced to death, or to long prison terms.

Returning home after the war, Ginger, wearing the suit he escaped in, was reunited with his mother, who was now living in Pagefield Street, Gidlow. He married May in 1946, and they moved to Darlington Street East where they had two children, Glenys and Norman. Norman still lives in the town.

Ginger went back to work in the mines where he worked for a number of years. It was when working at the Astley Colliery that Ginger had another near miss when he, along with his fellow pit men, was caught in a 'fall' and buried alive. They were dug out; but after that narrow escape, he decided to leave the mines.

Tommy then went to work in social clubs and became a very popular club steward at clubs in and around Wigan. He was well suited to the role, which he loved up until his retirement. In 1987 Tommy moved across to Oldham, nearer to his daughter Glenys, and spent more time with both Norman and Glenys and their families.

In September 1990, Tommy was admitted to hospital, where he

was diagnosed with an embolism in his right leg. The leg needed to be amputated. However, years of working in the mines meant that he wasn't able to be given the typical anaesthetics. This didn't faze Ginger and his bravery and humour came to the fore yet again. He asked the surgeon for a pair of headphones, put on Pavarotti, and instructed him to get on with it; with just one wish, that the leg was to be pickled and put in a glass case, telling the surgical team, "It once scored nine goals for Wigan Town team."

He was discharged from hospital and seemed to be on the mend, but only weeks after Ginger developed pneumonia. This proved too much for his damaged lungs.

Poignantly, Jones would pass away on 6 December 1990, with Serge Vaculik, his fellow escapee, also dying the very next day. Jones and Vaculik had met together often post-war, to commemorate and remember, and they had shared a powerful connection.

Jones was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French Government in 1964, in recognition of his courageous acts in the summer of 1944, behind the lines in France. The bravery of all those involved will never be forgotten.



Decorated and remembered by France. Tommy with his Croix de Guerre.

A Hidden Story

By Susie Mallon & Amy Hodcroft

It might sound strange but I enjoy walking round cemeteries; I think it stems from childhood. When they first got married my mum and dad lived with my maternal grandparents. Then, when I was five years old, we moved out and went to live in the Lodge House of a large cemetery. From what I remember, mum and dad were looking for a house of their own, and the company my dad worked for (a brewery I think!) owned a property that they needed a tenant for... the Lodge House of Craigton Cemetery, Glasgow.

To a five year old child the house was massive and I loved living there; as an adult I've driven past the house on trips back home to Glasgow and it looks somewhat smaller than I remember, but still looks like a grand building.

Not long after moving into the house, I clearly remember my mum coming in to the sitting room and being absolutely horrified to find me, my younger brother (three years) and sister (two years) all excitedly cheering, clapping and waving as we stood at the enormous bay windows. Well, at that age we had no concept of the solemnity of a funeral procession – all we saw were fancy black cars and beautiful flowers. We thought it was something to celebrate! Over the next seven to eight years the cemetery became an extension of our garden and we knew every path and corner there was to explore.

In August of last year I was contacted by Hannah, daughter of a former Vicar of Astley, who was looking for volunteers to help with a research project for her dissertation. It involved spending 10 minutes twice a week 'engaging in a green space', and I thought it would be good to have something to focus on for six weeks whilst we continued to navigate the ongoing pandemic. I opted to walk round Tyldesley Cemetery. It was easy enough to access as it was within walking distance, and was compatible



The Lodge House, Craigton Cemetery, Glasgow

with the requirements for Hannah's research project.

After the first week I encouraged Amy to walk with me; she had come home from university in March as we entered lockdown, and was awaiting updates about if and when the new term would start. As we approached the gates Amy spotted the sign stating there were Commonwealth War Graves in Tyldesley Cemetery. Although we had been through those gates so many times previously this was the first time she had registered the sign. Within a few minutes of our walk she spotted one, then a second! She was hooked and immediately the questions started... how many were there, where were they, would we be able to find them? Thanks to the wonders of technology I was able to 'Google' there and then and, according to the Commonwealth War Graves records, we discovered there are a total of 34 listed under Tyldesley Cemetery.

When we came home Amy set about finding out more. The Commonwealth War Graves site provided name, rank and service number; unit, regiment and country of service; date of death and which section of the cemetery they were commemorated in. She converted this information into a chart and resolved to find them all.

Over the next five or six weeks we enjoyed a walk round the cemetery much more frequently

than my planned twice weekly trips. We were on a mission to find out where all 34 graves were as they were scattered around the cemetery and not in one place as we had encountered on the continent. We walked with our eyes peeled looking for the very distinctive shape of the Commonwealth Grave headstones, and soon became adept at spotting them in the distance.

Within a few weeks all of the listed War Graves were found and ticked off the list, but during our searches Amy also spotted other graves showing references to involvement in conflicts. One that particularly caught her eye was a mention of Margaret Ellen Stoney on the headstone of 'William Stoney, of Astley'. This was obviously a family plot as several family members were listed, but Amy was intrigued by the reference to Margaret. When we came home she headed for the computer and did some research.

The headstone stated that Margaret was a Matron in Chief of the South African Nursing Services, a member of the Florence Nightingale Order and Royal Red Cross. Margaret is actually interred in South Africa in the Old Military Cemetery in Pretoria.

Margaret trained at Bolton Royal Hospital and also spent time at the Women's Hospital



Headstone for Margaret Ellen Stoney, Matron in Chief, South African Military Nursing Services

(Bruntsfield) in Edinburgh. The information shows that Margaret was sent, 'by mission of the Free Church of Scotland' to South Africa in 1929 to be the Matron of the Victoria Hospital, Lovedale, where she worked for four years. (Victoria Hospital was established in 1898 through the Lovedale Missionary Institution: it was the first hospital in South Africa to train nurses of colour.)

In 1947 Margaret was awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal. The citation is found in the Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge, volume LXXVIII, No. 538, p 525 and states:



'Margaret Ellen Stoney, chief (nursing) matron of the military services of the Union of South Africa. Enrolled in January 1941, organised a large number of hospitals. Worked with unflagging ardour not only during the war but also after the war. Her colleagues are inspired by her personal example and her spirit of sacrifice.' (Obtained by Barbara Lukas from the Archives & Records Management Service of the International Federatino of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in July 2000.)

She was also awarded the Royal Red Cross Medal – as yet Amy has not found any other information to support this but it appears these were the two highest honours that could be bestowed on nurses in South Africa.

Margaret died on 7 March 1948 and was buried in South Africa. In an extract from an obituary a South African correspondent wrote: 'She was in many ways a remarkable woman. Probably no member of the nursing profession has ever been more respected than she was by the South African medical profession. Though of humble birth [in Tyldesley] she possessed in rich abundance the innate qualities of the truly great. Having much to give she sought to serve, and South Africa gave her both service and honour.' (A typewritten sheet held by BJH)

There is probably more to uncover about Margaret's working life but we hope you enjoy this snapshot... all uncovered because we had a walk through Tyldesley Cemetery.

Wigan Technical College finally gets a home of its own

In 1825 the town of Wigan established one of the country's earliest Mechanics' Institutes designed to encourage self-learning amongst its many working people who operated machinery in mines, engineering works and textile mills, (Past Forward, Issue 86, pp 24-27). This institute in turn led to the development of England's second oldest Mining and Mechanical School in 1858, (Past Forward Issue 87, pp 26-27). Both these establishments played a significant part in the education of Wigan's working population at a time when funding for technical education was very meagre indeed. Only in the closing years of the nineteenth century did public funding become available for mainstream technical education.

Opportunities for expansion. Earlier attempts to establish a permanent home for the Mining and Mechanical School had been thwarted, either by a lack of students or temporary economic downturns, and the temporary building, known locally as the 'Old Tin Tabernacle' at the bottom end of Library Street, was too small and hardly fit for purpose. Up to this point the school had operated 'from hand to mouth', solely dependent on voluntary subscriptions. One of the largest of these voluntary donations came from Mr John Henry Johnson of the Abram Coal Company, who donated £5,000 to the school.

In 1888 County Councils came into existence. The duty of providing technical education was placed upon them in 1889, and by 1890 increasing sums of money became available for the provision of technical education across the country. This increase in funding, however, was limited, with insufficient funds for extensive new building programmes.

After making do with its temporary home for many years, the Mining and Mechanical School finally decided that a Public Appeal should be launched, to coincide with Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, for a well-designed and fully equipped building. It was estimated that to build and equip such a permanent structure, (soon to be classed as a college) would be around £40,000.

Given these new public funding opportunities, the Wigan Mining and Mechanical School Committee decided to join forces with Wigan Borough Council and Lancashire County Council to manage future technical education. This arrangement was so unusual it came to the notice of the Royal Commission on Secondary Education which reported the following: 'We know of but one instance of a complete combination of a County Borough and an adjoining County Council working together to promote technical instruction. The Borough of



The photograph shows the building taken from Library Street looking along the side of the building towards Millgate where a row of the original houses can still be seen standing.

Wigan has agreed with Lancashire County Council to devote all its share of the Local Taxation Grant to a long-established Mining and Technical School and make it available to the adjoining portion of the county. In return, Wigan not only obtains a contribution from the county fund for its Mining and Technical School, but it also benefits from county scholarships and exhibitions.'

The Wigan Mining and Mechanical School Committee gave the use of its property, John Henry Johnson's endowment, and all annual subscriptions. Wigan Borough Council gave all it received yearly under the Local Taxation (Custom and Excise) Act, and Lancashire County Council provided a minimum annual sum of £500. It was under this new committee and arrangements that the 'Wigan Mining and Mechanical School' became the 'Wigan and District Mining and Technical College.'

A site of over 3,000 square yards, costing £10,000, was secured within easy reach of all railway stations, and subscriptions ranging from £5,000 to 6d were received. The Wigan Coal and Iron Company donated £5000, Sir Francis Powell, Bart. M.P. £1000, and Alfred Hewlett £700 and a further offer to furnish the Board Room and provide stained glass windows in the Assembly Hall.

The diagram shows many details of the area around which the proposed building would be constructed. Opposite the temporary Mining School building, to the bottom right of the diagram, can be seen the library (currently the Museum of Wigan Life) on the corner of Library Street and Rodney Street. In the 1890s Library Street did not extend any further towards Wallgate. The proposed building was planned to face the newly extended Library Street, upon the soon to be demolished Elbow Lane, Gaskell's Yard and Crispin's Court. The proposed building was not at this stage planned to extend onto Millgate.

A competition was held for the best design for the new college building and seven entries were received. The Building Committee, with Mr Henry Hartley F.F.R.I.B.A. of Liverpool as advisor, chose the winning design submitted by Messrs. Brigg and Wolstenholme F.F.R.I.B.A. of Liverpool and Blackburn. In January 1900, the building contract was given to Messrs Joshua Henshaw and Sons of Liverpool.

The new building of one million cubic feet had a Commemoration Plaque placed by the Countess of Crawford on 11 July 1900. Two years later the building was completed, but not yet officially opened. From the 15-18 October 1902, a 'Bazaar and Exhibition' was held in the new building to raise more funds.

The Official Opening. On Monday 12 January 1903, the new building was officially opened by the Countess of Crawford, and the name 'College' was substituted for 'School'. The ceremony was arranged for 7pm so that prizes could be distributed after the opening. An awning was erected at the main entrance on Library Street with electric lamp bulbs supplied by Wigan Corporation. The countess, after being met by Mr Hewlett and others, was handed a gold key with which she opened the main gate to the College.

College Expansion. The new building enabled the college to offer a wider range of courses and enrol a higher number of students. On Speech Night 1905, the speaker E L Morant, Esq. C.B. said to all assembled, "We are alright in Wigan. We have got this splendid building which is a good a thing as there is in England of its kind".

In September 1906, a 'Preparatory Trades School' (later renamed the Junior Technical School) was established. This was a successful college department which ran for the next 40 years. Following the passing of the Coal Mines Act of 1911 special classes were established for colliery firemen, and a second series of part-time day classes was opened in 1912 for mining and engineering apprentices.

This rapid growth in enrolments, however, temporarily slowed during the Great War. Within the first six months of World War 1 over 130 students had enlisted to fight, but at least two new areas of activity increased: (1) men, and later women, training to be shell turners, and (2) the introduction of short full-time courses for the training of women clerks with a view to their employment in place of men required for military service.

In 1917 Junior and Senior Commercial Schools were introduced, whilst the Day Trades School continued to prosper thanks to the Wigan Education Committee and Wigan Consolidated Charities which

gave generously to a scheme of scholarships. By the end of 1917 there were 1,202 students, 15 full-time and 29 part-time members of staff.

Post War Development. Peace time saw great change. The Junior Technical School completed its first full-time three-year programme, and two student organisations were established: a Students' Association for current students and a Past and Present Mining Students' Association to maintain contact with former students.

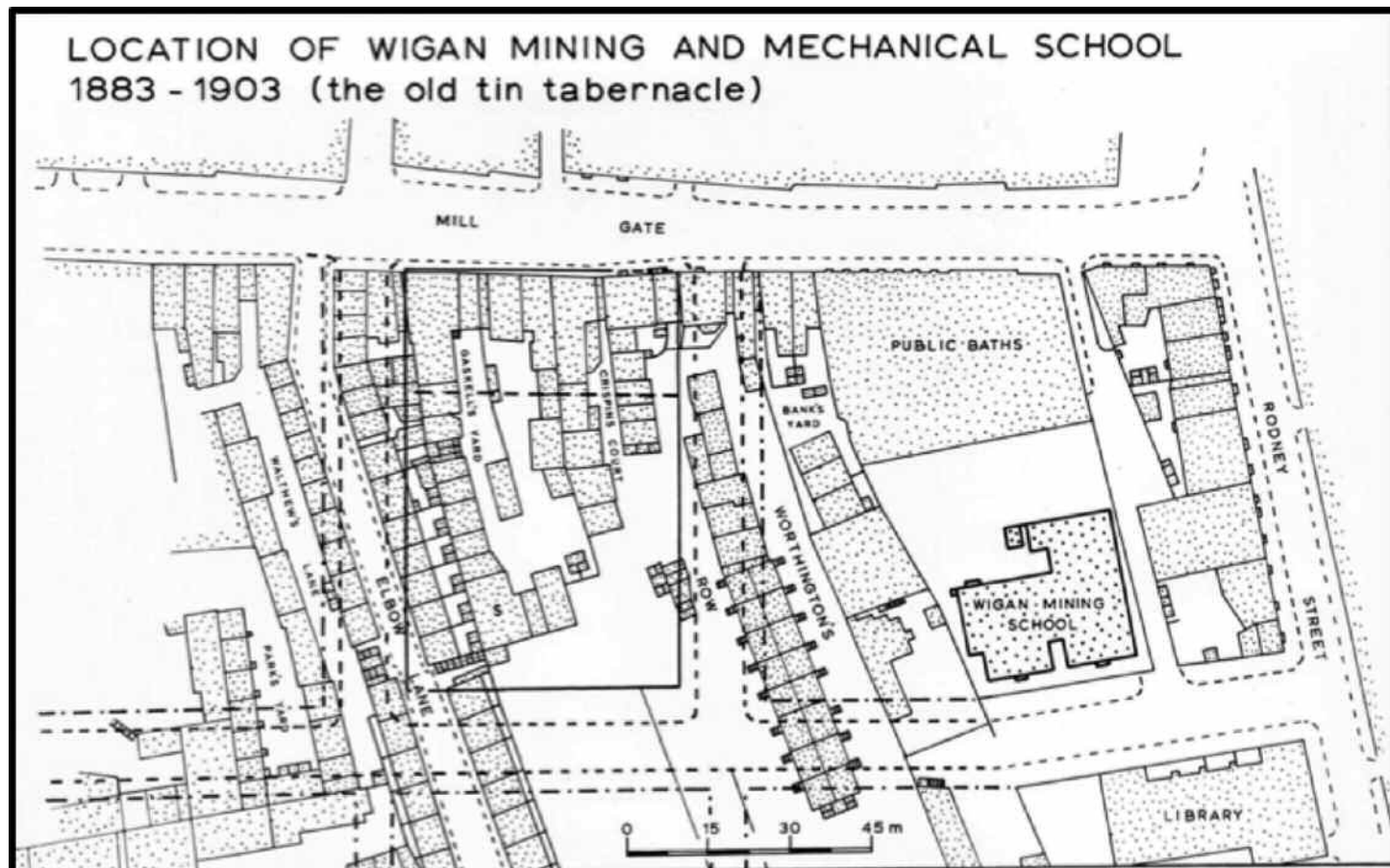
Although the new building was a great boon to the college, post war student growth led to a need for expansion even by 1919. An appeal was made for funds to enable a one storey temporary annex to be erected at the rear of the building on a small plot of land fronting Millgate. This served as an overflow to the main building from 1921 to 1929.

By the early 1920s the college reopened classes on cotton technology at the request of the Wigan Association of Cotton Employers. These classes had remained dormant for 12 years. By now the average student attendance was 154 hours, making a total of 200,000 student hours involving 31 full-time and 41 part-time members of staff.

Few people in 1903 would have thought that the new college building would be operating at full capacity by the mid-1920s. Further building expansion was needed and college focus now turned on how the existing college building might be further extended; but that is another story.

Acknowledgements

Alex Miller and Kathryn Pass for research support relating to background material.



Tina Haworth - Bends of the River

REVIEWED BY YVONNE ECKERSLEY

Published in hardback 2021
ISBN: 978-1-978-8225-4
Priced at £24.99 with 600+ pages.

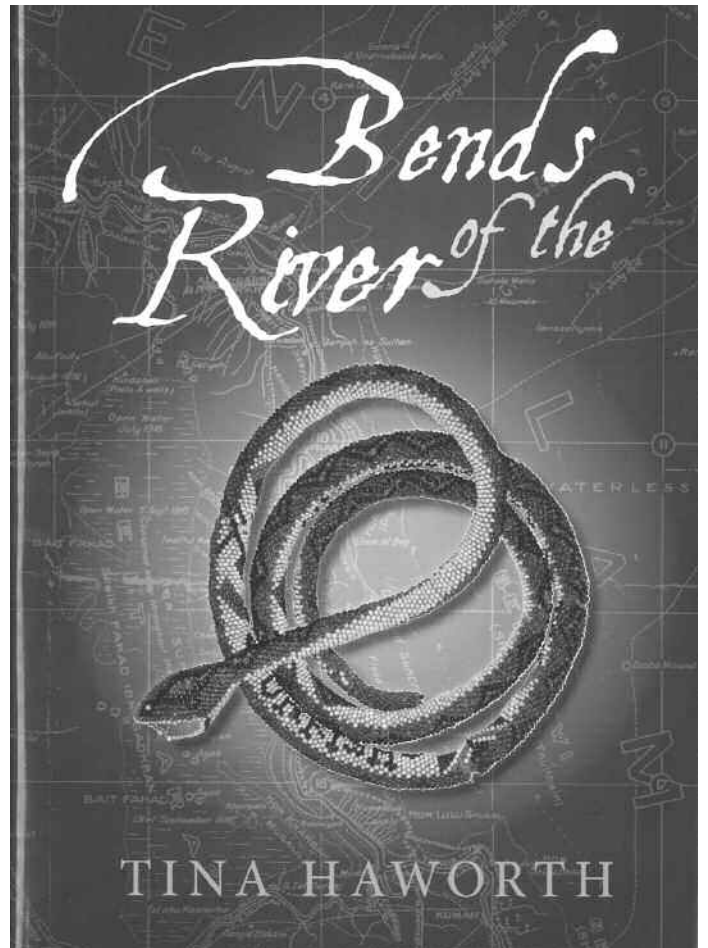
This is a well-crafted book, sturdy with clear text. Its content is extensively researched and its sensitive topic sympathetically told.

The book has a glossy teal blue wrap-round dust cover, printed from edge to edge with an Army Signals map of the main fighting zones of the Middle East. Superimposed on this are: the title page, with an intriguing image of a beaded snake woven by a Turkish POW; the back page, with images of three young men, the subjects of the book, and a short introduction to the book's content; and the internal flaps, which have images to further expand readers' expectations of the book's content.

Tina's declared reason for writing the book was to give an account of her three great uncles, Jimmy, Harry and Willie Eckersley, and their journey from an Ashton-in-Makerfield childhood, their experiences working at Garswood Hall Colliery, through to their enlistment, fighting and dying in the First World War.

Her aim was to write a book that 'will pay a fitting tribute to a generation of young people who went to war' (Wigan Observer June 2021). And the book does just that.

Furthermore, by constructing a detailed and personalised account of her uncles' experiences as soldiers, as they negotiated a way of life where they were expected to kill by any means possible, and where violent death, including the possibility of their own, was a



constant presence, she gives a voice by proxy to the many thousands of men too traumatised to talk about their own experiences.

The narrative is grounded in contemporary military records, i.e. enlistment, training, then their deployment in the Lancashire regiments, battalions and brigades in three main theatres of the war, with special emphasis on the Somme in France, Ypres in Belgium and the Middle Eastern campaign (especially Gallipoli). The dry official statistics of battles fought, quantity and types of weapons used, and numbers of men killed or injured are enriched by the collected knowledge gleaned from

family and local historians, libraries, international, national and local archives, and a range of published histories, to produce the human face of the war. Although there are no footnotes, she does list her sources, which may be useful for other researchers.

These records are bridged by carefully chosen photographs taken at the time. Besides illustrating both official documentation and interpretive accounts they add other dimensions not readily expressed in words. In this way they encourage the reader to interpret for themselves the images they portray.

The book begins with a thought provoking first sentence voiced by a nameless uncle in 1917: 'It seems right and just and necessary to shoot the men', and goes on to lead the reader to an understanding as to why he abandoned the morality within which he was raised.

The book's structure is complicated and a little difficult to navigate initially; perhaps an introduction and/or a contents page would help. Its 609 pages are divided into 30 chapters. These are subdivided into sections of three chapters focusing on important stages

along a timeline from 1903 to 1918. Within each section each chapter is dedicated to the respective brothers serially; hence Jimmy, Harry then Willie.

Tina uses the brothers as conduits to recreate the experiences common to many fighting soldiers of the First World War, from mundane routines to the horrific details of warfare. This includes vivid descriptions of their first experience of killing a man at close quarters and, in the case of Jimmy and Willie, their own deaths. By presenting the brothers' personal histories in the present (I, we,) rather than the past tense, a process known as writing in the historical present, she encourages readers to feel as if they are witnessing the events as they happened. This sharing of the brothers' immediate thoughts and emotions as they prepare, fight, kill, or reflect on the killing, engenders a deep empathetic understanding of the universality of soldiers' sufferings.

By writing what are ostensibly the stories of three young men from Ashton, Tina gives all First World War soldiers a voice. In my opinion she successfully pays 'a fitting tribute to a generation of young men who went to war'.

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The Bricklayers Arms, Culcheth A Pub Through Time



The Bricklayers Arms

Anyone walking through the village of Culcheth in 2020 would remark on the number of hostelries supplying food and drink. However, if these people could be transported back 200 years they would have found a very different scenario. Gone would be the establishments offering fine dining, wonderful wines and a large selection of beers, and in their place would be local people brewing and selling ale for consumption off the premises, often sold from shops which also sold groceries. Expensive wines and fine dining would be reserved for the local

Squire and his family and partaken of at his home. Working men would have had to make do with home brewed beer if they were not able to afford to buy ale from the local shop. So the concept of the local pub wasn't around at this time.

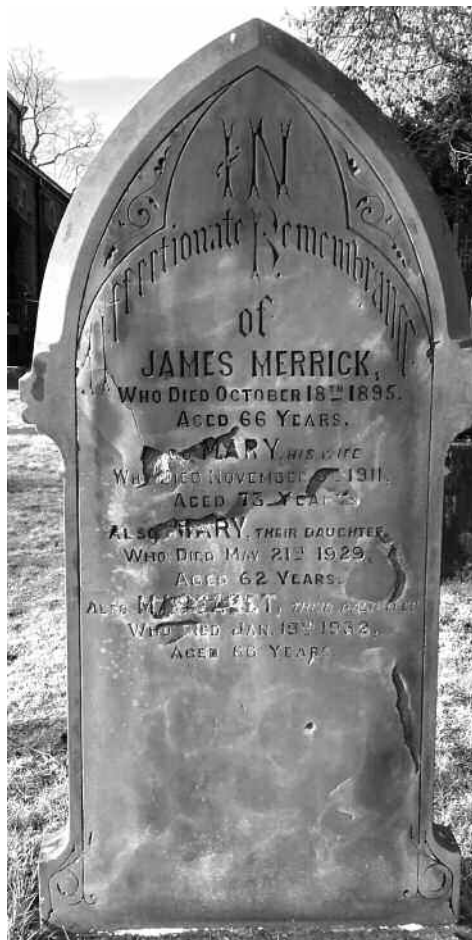
There is some evidence to suggest that what was to become known as the Bricklayers Arms, and later a new building called the Cherry Tree, probably started life as a grocer's shop about 200 years ago. School Lane does not appear on the census until

1861, when George Lowe is recorded as a grocer living with his wife, Mary, and seven children at the corner of School Lane and Wigshaw Lane. It is probably this grocer's shop which was later to become the Bricklayers Arms; although Thomas Unsworth is recorded as a blacksmith and beer seller in the same returns. There is very little information about either of these men and it is not until the Merrick, or Meyrick, family becomes associated with the Bricklayers Arms that we get a clearer picture of life in Culcheth in the nineteenth century.

Thomas Meyrick was born in Culcheth in 1773, the son of another Thomas. In 1798 he married Martha Hindley, and in the same year was recorded as living in a property in Culcheth which was rated at £1 14 shillings, and owned by Sir Frank Standish. In 1825 a Thomas Meyrick is listed in the Baines Directory as the Governor of Culcheth Workhouse, but by 1841 he is living in Lowton Lane, Culcheth and his occupation is that of a bricklayer. He died on New Year's Day 10 years later, aged 76, and is buried at Newchurch.

John, Thomas' son, born in 1800, was also a bricklayer by trade. He married Margaret Whittle in 1822, and the couple had four children before his wife's death in 1837. An illegitimate son, William, was born in 1835. John married his late wife's sister, Ellen, four years later. The couple had a daughter, Hannah, baptised 19 January 1844, who must have died as an infant because another daughter Hannah was baptised the following year on 26 January. He died aged 75 in 1875, and was also buried at Newchurch.

The fourth generation of the Merrick family, James, was born in 1829 and he became a bricklayer, like his father and grandfather before him. At age 24 he married Ann Evans, a local girl, and they had two children, John and Margaret, before Ann died in 1861. Two years later James married Mary Oultram, the daughter of John Oultram who had been a witness to James' first marriage. The two children from his first marriage had died in infancy



The Merrick gravestone, Newchurch

and he then went on to have five children with his second wife. The baptism of the youngest child in 1879 is the first one to record James' occupation as publican. James died in 1895 and was buried at Newchurch along with his ancestors.

It was probably James who first transformed the building from

an off licence selling produce, which included beer to be consumed off the premises, to an on licence where beer could be consumed on the premises. This was made possible by extending the building, an extension which was to be the first of many. The final stage of this development was to include an addition for living quarters. Local legend has it that Merrick, being from a family of brickmakers, excavated the clay from land at the side of the property to make the bricks himself. This left the garden at a much lower level than the building itself.

This takes us to the fifth generation of the Merrick family. John Merrick was baptised on 7 February 1864, the son of James and his wife, the former Mary Oultram. The eldest of five children, John was the first in the family not to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors by becoming a bricklayer. In 1881 and 1891 his occupation is given as that of tailor, so he must have followed this occupation for some time. It may even have afforded him the opportunity of working away from his home village as, although he was still living at home in 1891, in August 1895 he married Jane Agnes Wright



Map showing The Bricklayers Arms, 1905-1907

MERRICK FAMILY TREE

THOMAS MERRICK

Born around 1735
Possibly married Alice Smith
21 Oct 1759 at St Oswald Winwick
Buried 6 Nov 1800 at Newchurch
aged 65, abode Ashton

THOMAS MERRICK

Born in Culcheth on 16 Dec 1773,
baptised 6 Dec 1774 at
St Oswald Winwick
Married Martha Hindley on 4 Feb
1798 at Grappenhall Warrington
Occupation: bricklayer
Buried at Newchurch 1 January
1851 aged 76, abode Culcheth

JOHN MERRICK

Born in Culcheth on 25 May
and baptised on 22 June 1800
at Newchurch
Married Margaret Whittle on
3 Feb 1822 at St Oswald Winwick
Married Ellen Whittle on 18 June
1841 at St Oswald Winwick
Occupation: bricklayer
Buried at Newchurch 14 June 1875
aged 75, abode Culcheth

JAMES MERRICK

Born in Culcheth on 15 June and
baptised 2 August 1829
at Newchurch
Married Ann Evans 2 June 1853
at Newchurch
Married Mary Oultram 15 Oct
1863 at Newchurch
His occupation is bricklayer but
from 1879 his occupation is
recorded as publican
Buried at Newchurch 21 Oct 1895
aged 66, abode Culcheth

JOHN MERRICK

Born in Culcheth and baptised at
Newchurch 7 Feb 1864
Married Jane Ann Wright on
20 August 1895 in Windermere
His occupation is tailor but
from 1895 his occupation is
recorded as publican
Buried at Newchurch 23 May 1901
age 37, abode Culcheth

in Windermere, then in
Westmorland.

In November that year,
however, he is recorded in the
Leigh Chronicle as having taken
over the licence of the
Bricklayers Arms from his father,
James. John was only able to
enjoy his change of occupation
for a short time as he died six
years later at the very young
age of 37, and was, like his
ancestors before him, buried
at Newchurch.

John and Jane do not appear to
have had any children, and in
his will John left his estate of
£178 15s 2d, worth roughly
£14,000 today, to his wife.

John's mother was still alive in
1901 but she had given up the
rights to the public house in
favour of her son, John,
allowing him to pay a nominal
rent while she went to live in a
cottage not far away.

After her son's untimely death,
Mary now decided to restake
her claim on the property and,
along with her father, brought
a case against her daughter-in-
law for restitution of her rights.
The case was recorded in both
the Manchester Evening News
and the Manchester Courier.
The jury found for the
defendant, Jane Agnes Merrick,
but something must have been
agreed between the two parties
as, in 1911, the Leigh Chronicle
reported that the tenancy had
been transferred from 'the late
Mary Merrick to her daughter'.
The daughter concerned would
have been Mary Merrick, the
younger daughter, as
Margaret, the elder, was
described in the 1911 census
as 'dumb from infancy'.

In 1912 the Leigh Chronicle
reports the auction of the

valuable freehold beerhouse,
known as the Bricklayers Arms,
at the corner of Common Lane
and Wigshaw Lane, Culcheth.
The business included a wine
licence, and the property
consisted of approximately
1,153 square yards and
included gardens and
outbuildings. The property
obviously stayed in the family
as Kelly's Directory for 1913
and 1923 confirms that a Miss
Mary Merrick is recorded as a
beer and wine retailer. As for
Jane Agnes, she disappears
from the records, although a
Jane Agnes Merrick, aged 64,
died in Newton Heath in 1930.

The Battersby family took over
in July 1929, and in 1939 James
and Theresa Battersby are still
living there, although James'
occupation is given as
Departmental Foreman in a silk
and cotton mill, most likely
Daisy Bank Mill, while his wife
has no outside occupation.
Perhaps Theresa was running
the pub at this time allowing
her husband to take other,
perhaps better paid, work. Their
son William, then aged 19, is in
the army but he later takes over
the licence from his father.

At this time beer was sold at
five pence per pint and was
sold in clay pots decorated with
wide blue bands. On
purchasing a pint of beer the
customers were entitled to a
free clay pipe and book of
matches. The food on offer
would have been cheese and
onions, which also came free
with the purchase of beer.
Special deals are not new
to the trade as on Sunday
lunchtime you would get a free
drink, and Friday evenings a
free meal of roast potatoes
and butter beans.

Competitions organised by the Bricklayers were also part of local life. Pigeon racing, best singing bird competitions, guessing the number of peas in a jar, and even flower shows were all part of the entertainment offered. Some of the competition would appear cruel by our standards, most involving dogs, ferrets and rats. One inhabitant of the village, known as 'Thrasher Bill', was famous for releasing a rat in the bar so that dogs brought in by the other customers would set upon it and cause chaos.

Most men, no women you notice, who frequented the pub were farm workers or railway workers, and would spend their winter evenings around a blazing log fire with ale warmed on the fire. If it wasn't hot enough there was always a

jar of ginger available to provide the added spark. The contraption used to heat the ale was called an 'ale warmer' and the device owned by the pub was, in the early 1950s, in the possession of one Harry Jackson. It would be wonderful if descendants of Harry Jackson could find a way of returning it to its original home?

The Bricklayers underwent a temporary change of name during the early years of the Second World War. It became the favourite haunt of a large number of Irish visitors involved in the building of the Royal Ordnance Factory, who rechristened it 'O'Connor's', perhaps after the landlord at that time. Pubs were often known by the landlord's name and many people were known to go for a pint at 'Merrick's'.

Finally, in the 1960s, the building, which had served the community for many generations, became derelict and was demolished, to be replaced a year later by a brand new hostelry called The Cherry Tree.

The name and the clientele may have changed over the years, but in 2020 The Cherry Tree is still going strong, offering food and drink to their customers. As far as is known, they don't offer a free pipe and matches, or indeed free roast potatoes and butter beans, but perhaps the latter will appear on the 'specials' board at some time in the future as a new and quirky addition to the menu.

With thanks to Zoe Chadwick for her help with this article.



Cherry Tree, Culcheth, 2020

The Diary of By Graham Taylor William Walls Part 3 of Abram 1915-1919

In the last edition Part 2 covered William's service on the Macedonian Front during 1916 and 1917, his casualty evacuation to Malta and his ongoing battle against malaria.

The Last Year of the War

.....

In bitterly cold weather, on 6 January 1918, William rejoined his unit on the front line at Apadji. He was assigned to No.1 Redoubt and the next six days were spent strengthening defences, patrolling the wire and on observation post duty. On 10 January he notes that they had to rub their feet with whale oil to prevent frostbite.

Two days later they were relieved by the 3rd Battalion and moved into billets at Marian Camp. When not on military training the troops were utilised to improve the River Struma defence line. On 27 January they moved to Agomah and saw a period of action patrolling in front of the wire, one time coming into contact with Bulgarian Forces and suffering three casualties. In the village of Ada they set ambushes in the hope of surprising enemy troops, and William notes that they saw an enemy plane brought down, the occupants being burnt to death.

During February William was taken ill several times. On the 27th he was strapped to a mule once again and taken to 82 Field Ambulance at Dimitric. He was discharged in early March and rejoined his Battalion who had moved to Nigrita.

William had another malaria attack on 17 March and was admitted to 86 Field Ambulance. Three days later,

whilst still at the Aid Post, he wrote: *'Wednesday March 20th 1918. The third anniversary of my enlistment having served almost three years on active service without a days leave home, when I shall get a few days at home I don't know there doesn't seem to be any chance at all. May God give me patience and strength to endure. I feel a bit stronger today and expect going back to my Batt any day. My chum Joe Ward came into hospital today with fever.'*

On 2 May William collapsed once more with fever and was taken to 82 Field Ambulance. The next day he was admitted to hospital at 40 Casualty Clearing Station, where he stayed for eight days.

William's Battalion was recalled back to France in June and on the 17th bade farewell to the 27th Division. They departed Guvesne by train and travelled across Greece to the port of Itea.

On the journey he records that the steam engine failed to climb a gradient and came to a standstill. After reversing down again, and after two more failed attempts, the occupants were ordered out and made to push the train up the hill.

A week later the Division embarked aboard SS Odessa bound for Otranto in southern Italy. Whilst at sea William had another bad malarial attack and, on arrival in Italy, was admitted to 79 General Hospital. The next day he was diagnosed with an

enlarged spleen and was in a hospital bed when the train carrying his unit left without him on their way to France.

Three weeks later, on 16 July, he was released from hospital and left Otranto by train with other discharged patients. Over the next 10 days they travelled over 1,800 miles to the north of France, finally reaching Le Havre on Friday 26 July. On arrival back at his unit William immediately reported to the orderly room and applied for home leave.

A Spell of Leave

.....

Armed with two days' rations and 16 days' supply of quinine, William sailed from Boulogne on Tuesday 13 August. He arrived at Wigan North Western station at 6.30 am the next morning. After a tram car ride to Platt Bridge and a walk up Warrington Road he was finally back home after three years away on active service.

In a bid to return to normality he took his mother to church and to Wigan Market to do some shopping, joined in with choir practice, and took Sunday School classes at the Good Shepherd Mission in Bamfurlong.

He spent as much time as possible with Annie, walking through the fields to Bickershaw, or gathering blackberries in the fields of Ingram's Farm. William was very knowledgeable about herbal

medicine and would take the opportunity on walks to look for comfrey and other plants that could be used for medicinal purposes.

On the Saturday of the first week he went to Wigan to buy Annie an engagement ring. Later they had supper with good friends, Matt and Helen Round. The next day, after church, they walked down to Ingram's farm for supper.

During the second week he took Annie and her sister, Molly, to the pictures and also spent a day in Preston visiting Reverend Twemlow at St. Peter's Church.

On the Friday William took Annie to Wigan Market. After a meal in town he had his photograph taken, then accompanied her to Prospect Mill in Platt Lane, Hindley to pick up her wages.

On Monday 26 August he travelled back down to London with his friend, Dan Burgess, who was also reporting back to his regiment from home leave. Dan lived at 482 Warrington Road with his widowed mother and brothers, Luke and Richard.

The Western Front

The 4th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps had arrived back in France from Salonika in time to take part in the 'Hundred Days Offensive', a series of offensives starting on 8 August 1918, designed to push the Germans back from their gains of their own spring offensive back in March.

On 3 September, after his home leave, William reported back to his unit at Martin-Eglise on the outskirts of Dieppe. The Battalion had been assigned to the 151st Infantry Brigade of the 50th Division, alongside the 6th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the 1st Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Ten days later his Battalion moved by train from Dieppe on the coast to Bouquemaison where they started training for battle in earnest. From



Life in the trenches, France

there they moved to Bertangles on the Somme, and then, on 1 October, they moved into the support line at Epehy, north of Saint Quentin, finally relieving an Australian regiment in the front line at Bony. Here they were prepared for an upcoming attack on the once impregnable Hindenburg Line.

Just before dawn on 3 October the attack was launched and the 4th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps went over the top. Despite suffering some casualties from their own artillery barrage, all objectives were taken. The next morning they were relieved briefly but went into action again at dusk. Again all objectives were taken with very light casualties suffered. The Battalion war diary states that they took two officers and 52 men prisoner and captured 25 machine guns and two trench mortars.

William had been chosen to become a Brigade runner and was attached to Brigade headquarters. He spent the battle carrying despatches between headquarters and the various units in the Brigade. This was a very hazardous job and many runners were killed or wounded.

The German army was in withdrawal all along the front line and the Allies kept the pressure on with a series of

attacks. On 10 October William's Battalion moved out of the line for a spell of rest in the village of Marez.

They left Marez on the 16th and moved to Escaufort from where, the next morning, they went into action again at dawn. During the battle William and another runner had to take a despatch to Brigade headquarters; part of an entry in his diary describes his experience:

'On our way back I helped many of my Batt chaps that were wounded to the sunken road to be picked up by the motor ambulance. Never shall I forget the hellish sights I saw on that sunken road; many of my intimate friends that had been with me from the beginning of my army life lay there dead or dying, as I looked back on that road it seemed a broad red stream with the blood of my comrades. I could have stopped helping chaps all day but duty had to come first I had my message to deliver at Hd Qrts. Our chaps gained their objective, but at a cost.'

On the morning of the 18th his Battalion went over the top yet again and captured their next objective. The next day 50th Division was relieved and 4th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps moved out of the front line to the village of Busigny.

On 28 October, whilst taking despatches to the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, William took ill with another malarial attack and, on return, had to report to the Medical Officer for some quinine. The next day his unit left Busigny via Maurois for rest billets in Le Cateau. William managed the first part of the route march but was too weak to complete it so had to be transported on one of the limbers.

The Battalion war diary shows that the casualty returns for the month of October 1918 were 74 killed in action, 272 wounded and five missing.

On 3 November, William moved with Advance Brigade Headquarters to Bousies in preparation for an attack the next morning on the Mormal Forest. Two days later he wrote in his diary:

'Tuesday Nov: 5th 1918. We rigged a bivouac up for about eight of us, by the side of an 8" inch gun that my Battalion (4th KRR) had captured. Pte Fox and I had to go to the Inniskillings with despatches and two coils of telephone wire. It was a treacherous road we had to travel being swept by machine gun fire pretty frequently. On our way back we came across scores of our dear lads wounded, and we gave a helping hand to the R.A.M.C. with the stretchers. As we were going along with one poor chap badly wounded on the stretcher a machine gun opened out on to us the poor fellow was hit again, and I was very fortunate but God preserved me once more, for as I was going along with the stretcher on one shoulder and my rifle on the other by my side a bullet came and caught the butt of my rifle as it hung by my side, and it turned away into the hedge.'

Over the next couple of days William records in his diary accounts of close calls from artillery shells and machine gun fire whilst moving about the battlefield carrying his despatches.

On 7 November he wrote:

'My Batt who occupied St Aubin suffered very heavy losses here our Commanding Officer Capt Tryant

getting killed. I lost a lot of my pals here that had been out with me ever since we first joined the 4th K.R.s in France in 1915 and this is the last night in the trenches I believe for my Batt.'

The next day his Brigade went over the top again and gained their objective. Later that day they were relieved and moved from the front line to Monceau-les-Leups.

At 9am on the morning of Mon 11 November 1918 William had the task of taking despatches round the Brigade and informing the various unit commanders that the Armistice had been signed and hostilities would cease at 11 o'clock. The Great War was about to end.

In the three years and four months that William had served on active service with the 4th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps his unit had suffered 149 killed, 474 wounded and 26 missing. By the end of hostilities the total casualties for his unit during the whole of World War 1 amounted to 334 killed, 1,125 wounded and 307 missing in action.

Demobilisation started in December but it wasn't until 22 February 1919, the day after his unit moved from La-Longueville to Jolimetz in the Forest of Mormal, that William was finally told that he was being sent home. He was moved to a delousing camp where he had a hot bath, issued new underclothing, had his khaki uniform fumigated and underwent a medical examination.

Four days later he embarked aboard the SS Caesarea at Dieppe bound for Southampton, then travelled to a dispersal unit at Prees Heath Camp in Shropshire to be formally demobilised.

William's final entries in his diary were made on Friday 28 February 1919:

'I arrived at Wigan station about 3am and stayed in Soldiers Rest Billet until 4 am. When I proceeded to Platt Bridge by the first workmen's car. As I journeyed along Warrington Rd Abram on my way home I called on my sweetheart and saw her just

before she set out to work. After a short stay I made my way home getting here about 8am. After a few minutes with my Dearest Mother I had a little breakfast and went to bed for I was completely fagged out not having any proper sleep for three or four nights.

This ends my career as a soldier of his Majesties Forces. I leave the Forces as I started it four years ago as a common, private, rifleman but by the grace of God, one who always strived to do my duty, not counting the cost. I am one of millions who will pass out of this great army of ours into the obscurity of civilian life, unknown, and forgotten by the world (unless another war should crop up); but by the grace of god I hope to carry on the fight for Christendom until the bugle sounds The Final Last Post.

I have since received my 1914-15 Star, General Service Medal, Victory Medal, also the Army Football medal I won there.'

Epilogue

After the war William returned to his old job at Abram sewerage works. He married Annie at St. John's Church on 20 September 1919, their witnesses being his brother, James, and Annie's sister, Mary. They went on to have two sons: James, born in 1920, and Arthur in 1924.

The register of England and Wales, taken in September 1939 at the start of the Second World War, shows William, Annie and their two sons living at 316 Warrington Road. His occupation is shown as 'general labourer sewer man' and also a part time ARP warden.

William Walls died on 17 May 1973, aged 81, at 394 Warrington Road, Abram, the day after burying his beloved wife Annie's ashes in St John's churchyard. His cremated remains were buried alongside her 12 days later on 29 May in Grave No. 795 B CYE.

Graham Taylor
Aug 2020

The story of my Great Aunt Charlotte

By Councillor George Davies

Charlotte Davies was one of two daughters, and eight children in all, of John Davies a nail-maker from Lower Gornel in Staffordshire, who in 1881 moved with his wife and children to the pit houses in Willow Street, Park Lane, near Bryn.

In order to find work Charlotte and her sister Mary Ann left school at the age of thirteen and started work on the pit brow of Number 2 Pit, Park Lane, where their father and six brothers all worked underground.

When Park Lane closed the Davies family and other families were transferred to Long Lane Colliery on Bryn Road, Ashton in Makerfield. A typical day started at 6.00am and finished at 5.00pm, during which time the girls and other working women would have pulled the coal down the screens with rakes and taken away the dirt from the coal – very hard work indeed.

In 1949, Charlotte completed 50 years service on the pit brow and on 2 January 1950 she was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM). The next day congratulations poured in with a letter from Buckingham Palace, which reads:

'I greatly regret that I am unable to give you personally the award which you have so well earned. I now send it to you with my congratulations and my best wishes for your future happiness. George R.'

Charlotte was also presented with a clock by officials and work colleagues of Long Lane Colliery to commemorate the long service to the coal industry. Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister, sent Hugh Gaitskill with the BEM and when he arrived at her home in Willow Street, Park Lane, Charlotte was at the pit brow in her clogs and shawl working on the screen.

My Great Aunt Charlotte retired at the age of 65, having completed 52 years at local pits. She died in 1962 aged 75. Her sister, Great Aunt Mary Ann, spent 35 years on the pit brow and indeed the family of father, six sons and two daughters gave a total of 440 years service to the mining industry.



'Culcheth Characters': a new book on the history of Culcheth

'Culcheth Characters' is a newly published book written by members of the Culcheth Local History Group. The authors undertook much of their research at Archives: Wigan & Leigh in its various locations in Leigh Library and Leigh Town Hall, before it was renovated.

The authors have unearthed original sources to examine the lives of villagers who resided in and around Culcheth. Some of these men and women helped transform the village for the better, others were criminals, or the victims of crime.

The lives of many of these inhabitants were changed by circumstances beyond their control – the mechanisation of weaving, for example, or reforms to the Poor Law system. Other people, such as the village doctor and constable, helped make Culcheth and Glazebury healthier and more law-abiding places.

The authors have examined the lives of villagers of all classes in this generously illustrated book. After reading 'Culcheth Characters' residents and non-residents alike will have gained a deeper understanding of this fascinating village.

'Culcheth Characters' may be purchased at 'forget me not toys and books' at the CPS Centre, Common Lane, Culcheth, WA3 4EH. Price £8.50



WHAT'S ON AT ARCHIVES: WIGAN & LEIGH?

We've got an amazing programme of events coming up. Find out more by popping in to Leigh Town Hall or calling 01942 404430 to speak to a member of staff.

To book online, just search Archives: Wigan & Leigh on Eventbrite to book on to the events opposite, and many more. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/archives-wigan-and-leigh-32455516349>

AML ARCHIVES: WIGAN & LEIGH

3 AUGUST - BUILDING MEMORIES LAUNCH IN LEIGH TOWN HALL



Playday 2021
Wednesday 4 August



This year's theme is ...

Summer of Play

4 AUGUST NATIONAL PLAY DAY HERE IN LEIGH

11 AUGUST REALLY RUBBISH WEAVING



Free Online talks hosted by The Museum of Wigan Life

Discovering Coccium: The Archaeology of Roman Wigan by Ian Miller

Saturday 14th August, 1pm-2pm. FREE online Zoom talk.

Chance finds of Roman artefacts have been discovered in various locations across Wigan town centre during the 19th century, but the first archaeological evidence for Roman settlement in Wigan was not uncovered until the 1980s when the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit carried out excavations at The Wiend. Some 20 years later, excavations along Millgate by Oxford Archaeology North revealed the remarkable remains of a Roman bath house, adding considerable weight to the suggestion that Wigan did indeed originate as Coccium. This talk draws the key results from these excavations to present the current understanding of Wigan's fascinating Roman past.

Wigan's Railways and a 19th Century Stationmaster by Marianne Howell

Saturday 18th September, 1pm-2pm. FREE online Zoom talk.

Peter Peters – a life given to the London and North Western Railway. This illustrated talk sketches the development of the railways in Wigan, but focusses more particularly on one stationmaster at Wigan North Western station whose working life was spent on the railways and who met an untimely death because of it. Queen Victoria's royal train played a tragic part in the story of Wigan Stationmaster Peter Peters.

Tickets are free and can be booked via Eventbrite. <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Museums-archives/whats-on.aspx>

gerrumonside! – The passion of rugby league past, present and future

An exciting new FREE exhibition that celebrates the history of Rugby League in the Borough and internationally opens in October at the Museum of Wigan Life. Following our local teams' trophy-filled histories, come and learn how Wigan, Leigh and Tyldesley broke away from the Rugby Football Union in 1895 and formed the Northern Union.

The family friendly displays will showcase original memorabilia from Jim Slevin, Andy Gregory, Jim Sullivan, Phil Clarke, Shaun Wane, Billy Boston, John Woods, Des Drummond, and other giants of the game. The exhibition also showcases the rise of women in the sport, grass roots rugby and will feature medals, shirts, caps and trophies, alongside more unusual items such as an original turnstile from Central Park.

There will be a tunnel of champions, a stadium area, and a programme of family friendly activities to explore and enjoy. Another highlight of the exhibition will be historical film footage of local teams in action, complemented by images from the Archive: Wigan & Leigh and the Wigan Observer.

We would also love to hear your rugby memories, so come and tell us about them when you visit and add them to our fan wall!



'gerrumonside! – the passion of rugby league past, present and future' runs until May 2022. Please ring the museum or check the website and social media for current opening times prior to visiting.

Museum of Wigan Life,
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1N
E: wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk
T: 01942 828128

Please note that events listed may be cancelled and groups may not be meeting in light of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Please check with event organisers for further information before attending.

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

Please note – From 2019 the meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of the month.

Meetings begin at 7.30pm in St. Richards Parish Centre, Mayfield St. Atherton.

Visitors Welcome – Admission £2, including refreshments. Contact Margaret Hodge on 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.

Membership £10, Visitors £3 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 Family History Society

The Leigh Family History Society Help Desk is available at Archives: Wigan & Leigh, at Leigh Town Hall.

There is no need to book an appointment for this Help Desk. 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 07712766288 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 (except January and August), at 7.30pm at the Bellingham Hotel, Wigan. 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 St Andrews Parish Centre. 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 Help Desk at Wigan Local Studies, at the Museum of Wigan Life.

Wigan Local History and Heritage Society

We meet on the second Monday of each month, with a local history themed presentation starting at 7.15pm in The Function Room at Wigan Cricket Club. Doors open at 6:30pm. Members, £2.50, Visitors, £3.00 per meeting. For more information please contact us <https://www.facebook.com/wiganhistoryandheritage/>

Wigan Council

30 YEARS OF PAST FORWARD

