

# PAST FORWARD

ISSUE NUMBER TWO

SPRING 1992



*The Newsletter of  
Wigan Heritage Service*

**FREE**



## From the Editor

This is the second issue of 'Past Forward', the newsletter designed to promote 'heritage' in and around Metropolitan Wigan.

I am delighted to report that the first edition was an outstanding success. I have been inundated with requests for future editions, from as far afield as Tyne and Wear, Kent — even Belgium! It is gratifying to know that there is such an interest out there in our local heritage.

I have received lots of comments regarding the first edition — almost entirely favourable. Do continue to let me have your comments, including critical ones, regarding 'Past Forward', the Heritage Service or anything relating to our local heritage.

I would also welcome articles from you, the public — this is not just a newsletter written by Heritage Staff. To make it an ongoing success, I do need a good supply of contributions. While I cannot guarantee to include everything, at least in its entirety, I will certainly do my best.

You will notice that 'Past Forward 2' is double the size of its predecessor — this is to celebrate the opening of the History Shop and changes in the Heritage Service in Leigh (see the centre pages for further details). I doubt, however, if this will be a precedent, as it is unlikely that funds will permit any further 16 page editions — unless there is a generous sponsor out there who might be prepared to help fund future issues!

These are, in fact, difficult days for local government — as I write, huge savings are having to be made by Wigan MBC, and the Department of Leisure has been particularly heavily hit. For its part, the Heritage Service, although fortunately able to proceed with the History Shop and the new accommodation in Leigh, is nevertheless required to find large savings — far larger than ever before. I am deeply grateful to my staff for their hard work and support at this time of concern and uncertainty. And, of course, your comments and support are particularly appreciated in these difficult days.

Thanks once again for your response to the first 'Past Forward'. I hope you enjoy this second edition. 'Past Forward 3' will hopefully be published in July.

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:

The Heritage Officer,  
Editor,  
'Past Forward',  
Department of Leisure,  
Trencherfield Mill,  
Wigan.  
WN3 4EF

## News from the Archives

AMONGST recent accessions to the Archives is a small notebook of the mid-18th century. It was probably kept by a member of the Farrar family, who owned Higher Hall, Westleigh (now demolished), at that time.

The most interesting part of the book is headed 'An inventory of my furniture, July 5 1755'. All the furniture, ornaments, pictures, tableware, books, etc., are listed and valued, for each room of the house, giving a good impression of the interior of a lesser gentleman's house in the mid-18th century.

The rooms consisted of a hall, best parlour, little parlour, kitchen, back kitchen, pantry, hall chamber (bedroom over the hall), best chamber, green room, lobby chamber, and kitchen chamber (bedroom above the kitchen). There was also a garret and a warehouse.

In medieval times the large open hall was the principal room of a house, but by the 18th century it had been reduced in size and importance. Even so, the hall furniture in this inventory

included a mahogany clock valued at £7. 15s., two square mahogany tables at £3.5s., and a 'screwtoir' (corruption of the French *escritoire*) at £2. 15s. The walls were hung with paintings, maps and pictures valued at £4.10s. 2d. Of the other rooms downstairs, the little parlour contained plate to the value of £12. 7s. and china at £3. 16s. The most interesting items here, however, were the musical instruments — a spinet worth three guineas, and a 'German flute' with a stand and music.

The bedrooms, too, were furnished comfortably. The hall chamber contained a 'blew bed' valued at £11. 5s., the best chamber bed and curtains worth £15. 2s. 8d., and the kitchen chamber a 'bed with two feather beds, blankets and quilt' at £5. 18s. Even the owner's silver buckles (17s.) were included in

the inventory for the hall chamber.

The kitchens contained oak rather than mahogany furniture. The presence of both tea kettle and coffee pot tells us that both drinks had become popular amongst the gentry by this date, whilst the 'brew pan' (£3.13s.) and barrels in the cellar remind us of the importance of domestic beer-making. Cheese-making is confirmed by the cheese tub, pot and press. A gun, powder flask and shot bag are also mentioned.

All the warehouse equipment and garden tools are listed, from scales, weights, counters and 'wisketts' (straw baskets) to a hayknife and flower pots.

The final section of the inventory lists the books in the house. Classical texts such as Plutarch and Josephus, text books on farming and the law, and contemporary writers such as Pope, Swift and Addison are all represented.

The total valuation of the contents of the house was £216. 17s., a very considerable sum in 1755.

*The Heritage Service has been closely involved with the opening of Wigan's New Town Hall, especially with the display of the civic regalia in the distinctive tall glass tubes.*

*And when Princess Diana officially opened the building in November, she saw an exhibition prepared by the Heritage Service, depicting the various town halls in Wigan's history.*

*The royal signature then went in the Distinguished Visitors' Book, which had been prepared by our Senior Technician.*

*Visit of Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales  
to officially open the New Town Hall*

VISITORS:

DATE

SIGNATURE

25<sup>11</sup>/91

*Diana*

Cover: The illustration shows an earlier royal visit to Wigan — on this occasion the then Prince of Wales, soon to become Edward VII, on 18 May 1898. He had travelled from Southampton. The *Wigan Observer* reported that the weather "was quite the antipodes of the previous day — the sun shone brightly. Naturally the place that was the most popular was in front of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Station (now Wigan Wallgate), and certainly it was the most pleasing from a spectacular point of view". Our photograph shows the scene at 4 p.m. outside the station, where the Prince has just entered the carriage of his host, Lord Gerard, to whose home, Garswood Hall, he then went to spend the evening.



# THE THOMAS DOOTSON COLLECTION — A HIDDEN TREASURE

**THOMAS** Robert Dootson was born in the township of Bedford 1864. He went to Leigh Grammar School during the period when Ralph Passe was headmaster. In 1877 he entered the office of the late Mr. W.E. Marsh, then solicitor and Clerk to the Justices. Eight years later Dootson obtained a situation with a firm of solicitors in Manchester.

Always a keen student he attended classes at Owens College and won the Coldden Book Prize for economics. For a time he was a shorthand teacher at Leigh Literary Society's classes in Church Street. In 1895 he passed the solicitors' final examinations with honours, and decided to start a practice in Leigh. His office was in Market Place. Advocacy appealed to him, and his training, public speaking and teaching made him well-suited for this. Dootson's services were always in great demand, especially in the area of workers' compensation. After the disastrous Pretoria Pit explosion Dootson was called upon to make an official inspection of the mine along with others, preparatory to the inquest and government inquiry. Subsequently, he took over 300 cases through the court for compensation.

In March 1923 Dootson was appointed Clerk to the Justices, thus succeeding to an office once held by his first employer.

During the period 1891-1899 he represented South Ward on the U.D.C. and was then returned for Hope Carr Ward at the



*Thomas Robert Dootson 1864-1951*

first election of the new borough. In 1925 he became President of Leigh Liberal Association. He was also a governor of Leigh Grammar School and of Leigh Infirmary and Chairman of Laburnum Spinning Co. Ltd., Atherton and of the Leigh Freemasons.

A staunch Congregationalist, he enjoyed gardening, bee-keeping and motor-ing and had a discerning taste in both watercolour and oil paintings.

Dootson was also a keen bibliophile whose library consisted of several thousand items, including works by Lancashire

publishers and authors as well as a comprehensive collection about the county of Lancashire. In 1927 this collection was vested in trustees, who offered it to Leigh Corporation in 1937. As a result, a scheme for the erection of a new central library with special accommodation for the collection was drawn up but had to be shelved because of the outbreak of World War II.

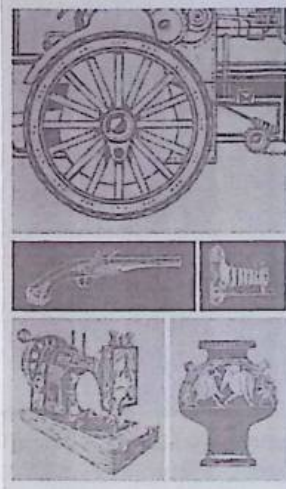
After Dootson's death in 1951, the trustees had the responsibility of disposing of his personal library, comprising some 20,000 manuscripts, books and pamphlets. The decision was taken to hand it over to his native town, with the stipulation that it should be kept intact in one place. The Dootson Library was presented to Leigh Corporation in June 1952 — an invaluable gift to the town, providing a rich source for all those interested in literature, history, local history and geography.

Although this donation is generally known as the Dootson Library, the wider Dootson Collection also includes the genealogical library of Leigh Librarian William John Duncombe Pink and the original local library collection of Josiah Rose (editor of Leigh Chronicle) whose library had been presented to Leigh Library in 1892.

No complete catalogue of the Dootson Collection has yet been published, but for any further information, please contact Tony Ashcroft, Local History Officer, at Leigh Library (0942 604131).

## NEW CATALOGUE FOR SCHOOLS

Wigan Museum  
School Loans Service  
Catalogue



A NEW catalogue for Wigan Museum School Loans Service will shortly be published. The front cover has been re-designed in a distinctive claret and blue colourway, and it contains all the new additions to the collection. All schools in Metropolitan Wigan will be receiving their copies through the 'black bag'. Unfortunately, costs dictate that only one catalogue per school will be available. Remember, anyone involved in community education, as long as it is financed by Metropolitan Wigan, is entitled to use the collection. So, if you think you are eligible and would like a copy of the catalogue, telephone Yvonne Webb on 0942 828123, and she will do her best to help you.

## Attention all Genealogists!

THE 1891 census returns for the Wigan MBC area have arrived. Complete sets are now available in Wigan Local History Library, Rodney Street (soon, of course, to be part of the History Shop) and the Archives Service, Leigh Town Hall. In addition, returns for the eastern half of the borough can be consulted in Leigh Local History Library.

For the first time, the returns will be available on microfiche rather than microfilm. Demand is likely to be considerable from those inveterate family historians who have been waiting for up to a decade for this momentous event. So please book early to avoid disappointment.

Wigan Local History Library —  
0942 828020  
Archives - 0942 672421 ext 266  
Leigh Local History Library —  
0942 604131



# LIFE BEFORE THE N.H.S.

## After Three Years.

Time is the best test of truth. Here is a Wigan story that has stood the test of time. It is a story with a point, which will come straight home to many of us.

It was 3 years ago that Mrs. Wilkinson began using Doan's backache kidney pills, and the following statement, which she then made, gives the details of her serious illness:—

"A couple of years ago I had the misfortune to catch cold after childbirth, and a violent pain attacked me in the left side. I was treated by two doctors, but in the end they said there was no hope of saving my life. I then went into the infirmary, where I was subjected to hot baths, and injections. This treatment, however, only weakened me, and all the time my body was growing larger. At last the doctor decided to tap me, and 19oz.



Mrs. Wilkinson  
(From a Photo).

of water were taken away, but my body soon began to rise again. I was discharged from the infirmary as incurable, and I returned home, feeling that I could not live long.

"Another doctor was called in, and he said that the only thing he could do was to tap me, which he did, removing 10 quarts of water. He had no hope, though; and I could feel myself filling again—I felt as though I should suffocate. The doctor again tapped me, taking away 12 quarts of water this time. But it was the same thing over again; I got as bad as ever I had been.

"Just then I heard of a case similar to mine having been cured by Doan's backache kidney pills, and I determined to try the pills myself. I used them at the rate of one box a week, and soon I could tell the pills were doing me good, and the water in my body lessened. In four week's time I was able to leave my bed, and each week, each day, I could feel myself improving. The terrible pressure on my heart was relieved.

"A few months later I was so well that my friends could scarcely believe that I was the same woman.

"I think my cure is splendid evidence that Doan's pills are a true kidney medicine."

Mrs. R. Wilkinson, 27, Spring Gardens, Frog-lane, Wigan, says:—"The cure of my droopy by Doan's backache kidney pills has indeed proved a lasting one, for I am still well. I cannot say too much in praise of Doan's pills, for I am sure they have saved my life. I have recommended the medicine to many people and I hope the publication of my case will be the means of bringing relief to other sufferers."

Doan's Backache Kidney Pills are two shillings and ninepence per box (six boxes for thirteen shillings and ninepence). Of all chemists and druggists, or post free, direct from Foster-McClellan Co., 8, Water-street, Oxford-street, London, W. Be sure you get exactly the same kind of pills that Mrs. Wilkinson had.

## You're looking well, old chap!

Yes, I'm feeling fine,  
And the only thing that's done me good  
Is Dr. Wood's Blood Wine.

The wine with a delicious flavor. Invaluable in cases of Nervous Debility and Anæmia. 2s 6d. per Large Bottle. Pocket corkscrew given free with each bottle. Agents: Litherland and Co., Ltd., 22, Market-street, Wigan; Baxter, Wine Stores, Upholland.

## A TALE ABOUT COUGH CANDY.

There was a little man,  
A very little man,  
In his way he was quite  
A Dandy;

But he had a big cough,  
A very big cough,  
And he cured it. With what?  
Cough Candy!

This very little man  
Had a pretty little wife,  
She was both smart  
And bandy;

But she, too, had a cough,  
A woeful bad cough,  
And she cured it. With what?  
Cough Candy!

CALL AT THE NEW SWEET SHOP near the OLD POST OFFICE, Tyldesley, and Try the COUGH CANDY; also Humbugs, Lemon Drops, Anise de Bitterscotch, and other kinds at 1½d. per quarter, 2½d. half pound; also Peppermint, Gingerette, and Raspberry in quarts, pints, gills, and neggins at 1s. per quart.

SOLD ONLY AT

OLLERENSHAW'S, the COUGH CANDY SHOP, near the MARKET PLACE, TYLDESLEY.

This very little man  
Had a knowing little boy,  
Like himself he was quite  
A Dandy.

But he had no cough,  
Not a bit of a cough,  
Yet he said he liked  
Cough Candy!

This sharp little boy  
Had a nice little dog,  
Which he called by the name  
Of Sandy.

He barked and he howled,  
And they thought he'd got a cold,  
So the little boy gave him  
Cough Candy!

## OLLERENSHAW'S,

THE COUGH-CANDY SHOP, ELLIOTT-ST., TYLDESLEY.

Left: From the Wigan Examiner, 16 March, 1917.  
Above (top): From the Wigan Observer, 31 Jan 1914.  
Above: From the Leigh Journal, 1 February, 1884.



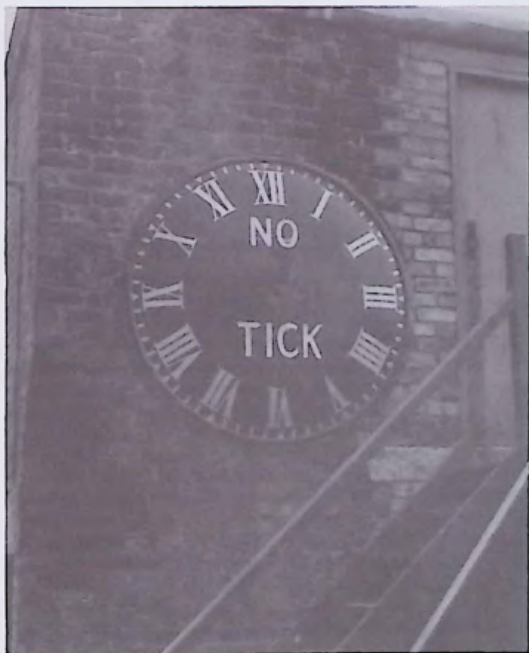
## 26 LEAP YEARS AGO

- from Leigh Journal, 4 April, 1884

### A LADY CHOWBENTER. RAFFLED FOR.

Maidens wanting to get married, says a daily contemporary, and who in that aim are hurried, should adopt the expedient recently initiated by a Chowbenter girl, who just put herself up to be raffled for. There were a hundred tickets issued at five shillings each, and none of them were sold to any but good-looking young men under forty years of age. For a time the local matrimonialists held off, being of opinion that the affair was a joke, but by-and-by they started trooping in, evidently considering that the joke was good enough to spend on. The winner of the raffle was, however, considerably surprised when the maiden declared her intention of marrying him straight away; and as he had not any sufficient excuse for declining to fulfil the contract, the catastrophe duly came off. Other eligible virgins of uncertain age are earnestly advised to go and do likewise. The men of this age are bashful and timid, and they need helping up; but the gambling instinct is strong within them, and so long as they stand the chance of winning something, they care not whether it be a half-crown, or only a wife. Emigration to Manitoba, as a means of getting husbands, seems to be played out. Salt Lake City has even now got more women than the native males are in a position to support. Leap Year proposals are generally considered forward and unmaidenly. The church bazaar lottery is the thing, and maidens who can't get husbands by any other way, can't do better than resort to it.

## TIME FOR A SMILE



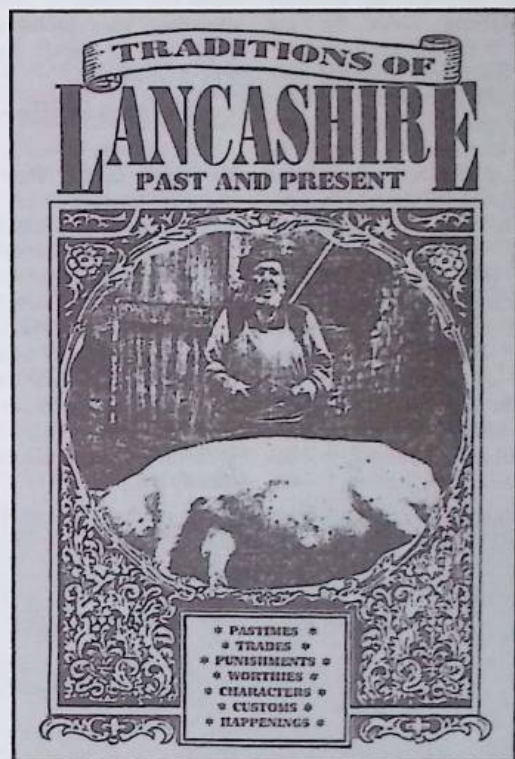
This clock was situated at the entrance to Calderbanks scrapyards, Greenough Street, Wigan. It originally belonged to Coppull parish church.

## A Spirited Tale

Heritage Service staff recently took part in a daring escapade. Technician Denise Whitter and YTS Anne-Marie McCracken spent a night at Chingle Hall, near Preston, in what is reputedly Britain's most haunted house. The intrepid 'ghost busters' lived to tell the tale and quite a few tall tales they had to tell too!

But the girls didn't just raise their heartbeat - they have also raised nearly £1,500 for research into breast and ovarian cancer at Christie's Hospital.

There is still time for you to help this splendid cause - please send your donation to Denise Whitter, Heritage Service, Dept of Leisure, Trencherfield Mill, Wigan. WN3 4EF.



CHINGLE Hall features in a recent publication, 'Traditions of Lancashire', compiled by Alan Roby. There are various references to our own area - Skull House, Appley Bridge, for example, is mentioned, as are seven generations of farming Worsleys from Lowton.

There is an interesting chapter on William Arrow-smith, a professional pig killer who operated around Upholland and Skelmersdale between 1851 and 1916. It was said that "the number of porkers that have succumbed

to his blandishments is legion". 'Owd Penketh', as he was familiarly known, unlike any of the thousands of his past 'victims', died peacefully in 1917 at Pemberton, near Wigan.

This book, full of fascinating Lancashire traditions, will be of interest to anyone associated with historical Lancashire. Published by Owl Books at £4.50 it is good value, and can be obtained from most Lancashire bookshops; it will also be available from the History Shop.

A.D.G.



# WIGAN LIBRARY — The Later Years

AS the new century dawned in January 1900 workmen were busy removing the old gas fittings and installing new, clean electric lights.

The Librarian, Henry T. Folkard, had for years been complaining that gas lighting was a major cause of the deterioration of valuable books. He was not the only complainant. A correspondent wrote to the local press, "The reading room is every night filled with gas which has the appearance of a fog . . . and people who go to the library to read sit down to fall asleep under the influence of a room full of gas . . .

Even those who have seats are often obliged to stand up to obtain sufficient light to enable them to read . . . A late official of the gasworks was eternally complaining about the gas burnt at the library, and therefore the library servants have been afraid to give the readers 'a proper light up' and left them to remain in blind ignorance, or to become stone blind in striving to read by a poor starvation supply of begrudged gas."

In 1901 the whole library contained 55,000 volumes, of which 39,700 were in the reference library. Records were kept of books issued and readers who visited the reference library. In 1905 the most numerous classes using this department were students (3198),

commercial travellers (3435) and colliers (2862). The commercial travellers need not necessarily have been of a studious disposition. As some wit remarked, they probably just popped in to consult the railway timetables.

## Wigan colliers

The colliers, however, were a different matter. They were under-represented in that checkweighmen, firemen and under-lookers, who would normally be classed as colliery workers, were not included in the figures quoted. Folkard always told his library assistants not to underestimate or patronise the Wigan colliers, and to illustrate his point, told the following story, which he personally witnessed.

One day a visiting clergyman called into the reference library and was pleased to see there a collier whom he recognised as having attended a lecture he had given the previous evening. The clergyman strode up to the collier and said in a loud voice, "My good man, I saw you listening to my discourse last night with great intelligence. I'm glad to see you here, improving your mind. What are you reading?"

The collier looked up at the clergyman, but made no reply, whereupon the clergyman repeated his question. Again the collier looked at the clergyman, but said nothing.

Exasperated, the clergyman turned to the librarian and said, "Is the man deaf?"

The collier then gave a jerk with his thumb to indicate a notice behind him, on which was printed in large letters the word "SILENCE". The clergyman, embarrassed and confused, made a hasty departure.

Cleanliness, however, was not one of the Wigan colliers'

virtues. A survey taken a few years previously had shown that a work of fiction, which would last six months in Manchester Library, was worn out in three months at Wigan Library. According to a press report, Councillor Wilson, the then Chairman of the Libraries Committee, said that "it seemed to him that some of the readers did not take the preliminary trouble of washing their hands before commencing to enjoy a good read. Others had left in the books crumbs of bread and butter, splashes of oil, and ink of various colours. A very general action also seemed to be that of wetting the end of a grimy finger, and using the same to assist the reader in turning over the leaves of the book." Most of the dust was, however, coal dust, as is shown by the few books for loan to survive from this period.

The entrance to the library had suffered so much from smokers striking matches on the wall that, after it was repainted, two small metal frames, the centres of which were filled with emery cloth, were fixed to the walls for the convenience of smokers.

## Furore

There was a furore when a complaint was received by the local press concerning disorder in the reading room. Part of the problem was the large number of people who were trying to obtain the latest news about the war in South Africa. On this occasion it turned out that the Custodian, whose job it was to keep order in the library, had not been present. However, there was a great deal of public sympathy for him when it came to light that both he and the Deputy Librarian "voluntarily" worked a seven-day week. For working seven hours on Sunday they received the princely sum of three shillings, which was described as "nothing less than a scandal".

At a council meeting in May 1905 a letter was read out from the Wigan and District Temperance Council asking the authorities to blot out all racing

*continued on page 7*



Wigan Reference Library, noon, 6 April, 1939.



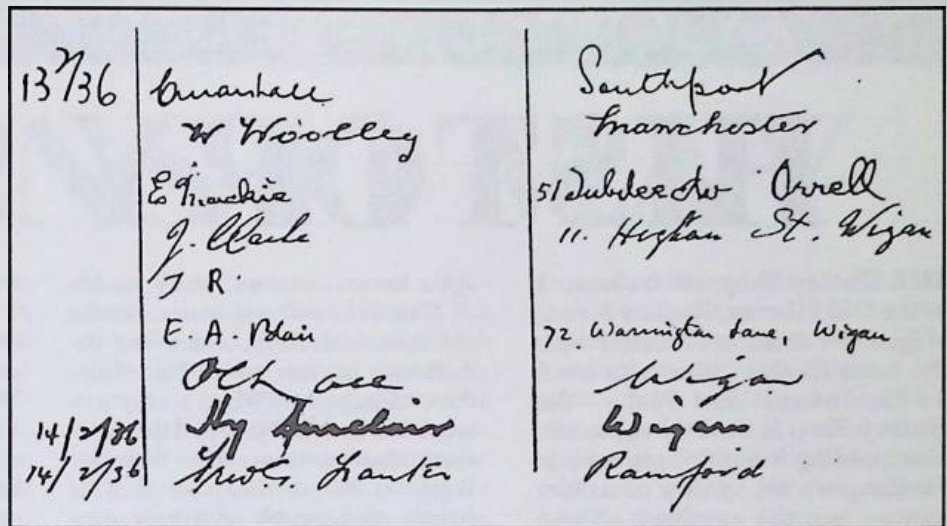
news in the newspapers placed in the library, in order to prevent betting. The Libraries Committee asked the Librarian to find out what the situation was in other towns. With his usual thoroughness Folkard conducted a national survey, the results of which were published. The number of library authorities included in the survey was 138, of which 24 blotted out racing news and 44 had decided against doing so. In the other authorities the question had not been raised. The action on the part of the Temperance Council was motivated by an abhorrence of what they considered to be immoral activity, whereas the librarians were motivated more by the desire to dissuade disreputable characters from using the library, and preventing illegal activity on the premises. It appears that in the case of Wigan no action was taken.

The work of the library was severely hampered during the First World War, with the three senior male assistants serving in the armed forces. The library closed for six weeks at the height of the influenza pandemic of late 1918 and early 1919.

### End of an era

In August 1916 T.H. Folkard was killed by a runaway horse as he was crossing Mesnes Street. The son of a London doctor, he had become Wigan's first Librarian in 1877, and had held the post until his death.

He was succeeded by Arthur J. Hawkes, who came from a Dorset family. His grandfather was a shoemaker and leather merchant at Poole. After a spell working in Bournemouth Library he was appointed Borough Librarian for Wigan in 1919. Among the other posts held by him concurrently with this post were that of Lecturer in Librarianship at Manchester University, Examiner for the Library Association, and Chairman of the Wigan Education Society 1932-1942. At the time of his retirement he had written 21 works on a wide variety of subjects ranging from an anti-suffragist pamphlet entitled *The Degradation of Womanhood* to a book on the clockmakers of Wigan and



Wigan Reference Library's Visitors' Book, 13 February 1936. George Orwell signed under his own name, E.A.Blair.

their clocks. But Hawkes was primarily a historian, and like Folkard before him was a Fellow of the prestigious *Society of Antiquaries*. It was largely on Hawkes's initiative that the muniments of local landowning families such as the Ince Andertons and the Marklands were deposited in the Wigan archives.

### 'New broom'

"A new broom sweeps clean", they say, and Hawkes was no exception. In February 1920 he abolished the old 'indicator' system, whereby borrowers ordered books and the staff went to the shelves to get them, and replaced it with the 'open-access system', which allowed the public to wander freely among the shelves. He increased the loan period from 7 to 14 days. He appointed an extra assistant to help re-classify the reference library, after a study had revealed that many of the resources were not being used because of inadequate classifying and cataloguing.

Since the latter years of the 19th century Folkard had been complaining that the library needed extra space for books, and had suggested that a separate building be found for the newspaper room, a logical proposal that had never been implemented. In 1926, at a time when the situation in the reference library was critical, with books in piles on the floor being knocked over and trodden on by members of the public, Hawkes finally managed to

obtain some storage space on the first floor of the Powell boys' reading room in Station Road.

The situation in the lending library, however, remained unsatisfactory, with books piled on the window-sills and on the issue counter, and with readers complaining about lack of space. The difficulty was eased somewhat in 1932, when a separate entrance to the newsroom was opened from Library Street and the space occupied by the newsroom corridor was incorporated into the lending library. However, lack of space still necessitated bookshelves that were taller than usual.

On 13 February 1936, there was a notable visitor — George Orwell spent the day in the library, gathering information for his book 'The Road to Wigan Pier'.

On the outbreak of war in 1939 notices were put up stating that readers would not be allowed into the library unless they were carrying gas masks. In the event of an air-raid they were to get under the tables! The opening hours at the central library were reduced, and Beech Hill Library was closed completely. Over 30 cases of rare books and documents were moved into the country. However, these precautions were unnecessary and the library survived the war unscathed.

### Reforms

April 1950 saw the retirement of A.J. Hawkes, and the

Libraries Committee followed what had become a tradition by appointing another historian as Borough Librarian. H.H.G. Arthur, like Hawkes before him, set about making reforms, withdrawing thousands of outworn and outdated books, and setting up a special commercial section in the library. He complained bitterly about the lack of a proper museum and art gallery in the town! In 1959 he introduced a record collection. The collection contained only one Elvis Presley record, for which there was a six-month waiting list! Originally records could be borrowed without payment, but a charge was introduced in 1968. In December of that year Arthur took up the post of Chief Librarian and Curator to Birkenhead Corporation.

Arthur's successor was Noel Willis, formerly Deputy Director of Wigan Libraries and Arts Department, who saw the library service through the difficult period of local government reorganisation in 1974, when Wigan Metropolitan Borough was born.

April 1990 saw the lending and reference libraries leaving the building they had occupied for over a century and moving to the New Town Hall in Library Street (originally the premises of Wigan Technical College). The local history and genealogical collections, however, have remained behind to become part of the brand-new History Shop.



# HISTORY SHOP

**THE History Shop will be located in the Old Library, Rodney Street, Wigan (for those not familiar with the town the best idea is to head for the International Pool — the History Shop is directly opposite). The building is highly appropriate for the purpose, in view of its history — see the excellent articles on the history of Wigan Library by Wigan's Local History Officer in this and the previous edition of 'Past Forward'.**

The History Shop will open on 11 May — a few weeks later than originally planned, but bearing in mind the difficulties with which the Authority has had to contend in recent months, thank goodness we will be able to open at all!

There will be an official opening towards the end of June, at which time the temporary display area will open, with a display of the work of Wigan painter Lawrence Isherwood (see below).

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From 11 May, Wigan will once

again have a museum. Many readers of 'Past Forward' will remember the old Powell Museum, which was demolished in the mid-1980s. Since then, Metropolitan Wigan's only museum has been in Hindley Library — apart, that is, from 'The Way We Were' at Wigan Pier, but this, of course, concentrates on a very short period c.1900.

## State-of-the-art

The new History Shop display, although not large, will be very much state-of-the-art, and a marked contrast to the old Powell Museum. On one side of the former first-floor reference library, we will tell the story of the Metropolitan Wigan area from the earliest times to the present day. The underlying theme of the display will be coal and how its presence has shaped the whole history of the area — from its formation millions of years ago right up to the closure in 1992 of Bickershaw, the last working colliery in our area. The wheel has gone full circle. The winding wheels

will turn no more.

On the other side of the Library, from the end of June, a series of temporary displays will be mounted. These will include art exhibitions, in which the Heritage Service's own art collection will figure prominently, in-house and travelling displays. In the opening exhibition, a selection of the paintings of Lawrence Isherwood will be on display.

Also on display will be a selection of rare books from the former Wigan reference library's collection. It is hoped to change not only the actual books but also individual pages regularly. Some of these historical treasures will be an exciting new attraction for all visitors to the History Shop.

## Centre of excellence

Visitors will have the opportunity to carry out some research for themselves. The History Shop will have its own study/research centre, incorporating the Wigan Local History collection and a genealogical centre of excellence. Although the original

## ISHERWOODS ON VIEW AGAIN

THERE will be a double celebration towards the end of June. The History Shop will be officially opened then; and an exhibition of the work of Wigan artist Lawrence Isherwood will go on display for a period of three months. The exhibition will have as its theme — 'Isherwood - the local man and his work'.

Lawrence Isherwood was born in Wigan and lived

there till his death in 1989. During his lifetime he was rather under-rated; he is now, however, becoming a figure of national importance in the art world. He has often been compared with his better-known friend L.S. Lowry, and it may well be that of the two he was actually the greater painter.

Significantly, Lowry once said,

"I only buy pictures I like

and I bought an Isherwood years ago".

Prince Charles also bought an Isherwood.

In the Arts Guardian, 1974, Isherwood was described as "a man living in the wrong age, living in the Paris 1900 style but yet in Wigan in 1974".

*This summer, Wiganers will have a unique opportunity to enjoy his paintings — the first major display in Wigan of Isherwoods for over 20 years.*

## A LIKELY STORY

LAST October the History Shop underwent a massive, but short-lived, facelift.

According to the BBC Childrens Drama Dept. the old reference library was the only library in the North West that had hardly changed this century — all the original shelving and other fittings

were still intact! As such, it was the ideal location for a library scene in the filming of 'A Likely Lad' by Gillian Avery, telling the story of two Manchester families around the turn of the century.

The day before filming, all modern fixtures and fit-

tings were either removed or covered over with small paintings. The room was given its most thorough clean in over 100 years. On the day, some 30 BBC staff invaded the library. Buses were a very real problem — just as a 'take' began, a bus would

rumble past. Eventually, some 15 minutes were 'in the can', of which less than three were actually included when the episode was shown on 4 March.

The day after filming, all the mess and clutter had returned. I just hope we can remove it as quickly on the eve of the History Shop opening!



Wigan Central Library in recent years floor.



# OPENS 11 MAY

archives for the area will continue to be kept in Leigh, many have been transferred to microform for use in the History Shop, to develop the resource bank available. There will be a complete set of census returns for the Metropolitan Wigan area, from the earliest in 1841 to the newly-released 1891 returns.

For the convenience of readers, the research centre, across the bottom end of the room, will be divided into four areas, for genealogy, local history reference, maps and photographs.

## Shop

At reception, visitors will find a small shop, selling a range of heritage-related articles. These will include local photographs and postcards, distinctive quality souvenirs, and a range of genealogical and local history books, including the launch of a new series of Heritage Service publications.

## Meeting / lecture room

The History Shop will have its own meeting/lecture room, on the ground

floor. This room will be as multi-functional as possible. We will, for example, be presenting a programme of lunch-time and evening lectures, by a wide range of speakers. From time to time this room will be used for additional displays. And do remember that the room, which has seating for approximately thirty, will also be available for hire by local societies and groups, at competitive rates. So if you are unhappy with your group's present venue, contact Heritage Office Alastair Gillies on 0942 828560 to discuss details.

The History Shop will be open from 11 MAY as follows:

Monday . . . . .	10.00 - 7.00
Tuesday . . . . .	10.00 - 5.00
Wednesday . . . . .	10.00 - 5.00
Thursday . . . . .	10.00 - 5.00
Friday . . . . .	10.00 - 5.00
Saturday . . . . .	10.00 - 1.00

Party visits outside these hours will also be possible, by prior arrangement.

Users of the research centre should

note that, in cases where the material to be consulted is on microform and a machine will therefore be required, it is strongly recommended that an appointment be made in advance. This can either be done in person or by telephoning 0942 828128. Appointments are purely for the reader's benefit, so that a machine can be reserved and a wasted visit avoided.

● *The History Shop is a major achievement for the Heritage Service of Wigan M.B.C. We are confident that it will attract widespread media coverage, and that it will have regional and even national appeal. But most of all, it is something of which we hope the people of Metropolitan Wigan will be proud. We believe that it will have something for all local residents — from the schoolchildren contending with the National Curriculum to the senior citizens reliving memories of the past, from the casual visitor to the serious researcher.*

**SO DO GIVE US YOUR SUPPORT.  
WE'RE DEPENDING ON YOU**



The History Shop will be on the first

## Archives come down in the world

WIGAN Archives Service now has a new home. For years, the public searchroom has been tucked away at the end of a corridor in the attic of Leigh Town Hall — unknown and inaccessible to many.

At long last, however, the Archives Service is now within reach of everyone. The new searchroom, still in Leigh Town Hall, is now on the second floor, only a metre away from the lift. Although slightly smaller than before, it is a superior room, much more conducive to work by the public and staff alike.

During April, the Archives Service will operate on a similar basis to before. With the opening of the History Shop in May, however, genealogists will find their needs catered for there, while in the Archives Service the emphasis will be on the use of original archive material. For those requiring census returns (on microform), a complete set will still be available in the Archives Service; returns for the eastern side of the borough can also be consulted in Leigh Local History Library (0942 604131).

Users of the Archives Service should make an

appointment in advance, on 0942 672421, ext. 266. This is very important to enable the hard-pressed staff to continue to offer the high-quality service for which they have become known.

The new opening hours for the Archives Service are:

<b>Monday</b>	10.00 - 1.00, 2.00 - 4.30
<b>Tuesday</b>	10.00 - 1.00, 2.00 - 4.30
<b>Wednesday</b>	Closed
<b>Thursday</b>	10.00 - 1.00, 2.00 - 4.30
<b>Friday</b>	10.00 - 1.00, 2.00 - 4.30



# WIGAN AT PLAY IN DAYS GONE BY



*Poolstock Greyhound Racing Track with St. James's Church and Poolstock Mill. The owner, Tom Kenyon, claimed to have introduced greyhound racing to Wigan. The stadium closed in 1973, after 40 years. Dog-racing had also taken place at Springfield Park until 1952.*

"WE must have recreations: they are a necessary of life" said Rev. George Huntington when he gave his lecture on 'Amusements, and the Supplying of Healthy Recreations for the People' in the schoolroom of St. Thomas's Church in Wallgate. He had originally given this lecture to the members of the Church Institute of Manchester, but such was the interest in the subject that he had been invited to lecture in Wigan also.

Cultured and educated Victorians were much concerned with improving the quality of leisure activities among the mass of the people. When we look at the nature of most people's spare-time activity during the first half of the 19th century, their concern becomes understandable, because the chief leisure activity was excessive drinking with all the evils of increased poverty, ignorance, vice and violence that accompany it. The usual Sunday activity of the local colliers, for example, was to take a cask of beer to the colliery slag heap and drink it there. So much heavy drinking took place at the week-end that most colliers did not work on Mondays.

The existence of "Play Monday", a day of absenteeism, may be a surprise to us, for we imagine that the 19th century worker had to work appallingly long hours. And this is true.

The miners were an exception. A combination of factors including a highly-skilled and dangerous job that could not be

done by just anybody, combined with a strong group solidarity, meant that employers could do little to break the custom. But for other workers the story was different. Most textile workers were working a 10½ hour day, with only two days, Christmas Day and Good Friday, as holidays. Statutory holidays, paid leave, and a 5½

day week were not introduced until 1871. Shop assistants did not obtain a half-day's holiday each week until 1890. For others the situation could be even worse: tram drivers were working a seven day week with no lunch breaks.

## Pasty-feasts

Yet in spite of the limited time at hand, a wide variety of leisure activities became available in Wigan, and the behaviour of the mass of the people became more civilised. The miners who, in 1840, would have been drinking on the pit bank would, by 1890, have been drinking in one of Wigan's 139 public houses or one of its 62 beerhouses. These pubs were centres of social activity. Some of them had picnic clubs which organised outings into the countryside by wagonette. Many had bowling greens attached, and others organised dog-racing competitions. A local custom was the holding of pasty-feasts, in which little china dolls were put into large pies, the finder having to pay for a round of drinks. Musical entertainments took the form of 'free-and-easies', in which any customer



*Dog and Partridge, School Lane, Standish.*





The 'Old Dog', Coopers Row, off Market Place, 1908. This comprised a public house and music hall. Behind the 'Old Dog' was the Alexandra Hall (Wigan's first purpose-built music hall), which became the Empire Palace in 1892. Performers there included Vesta Tilley, Madame Petri and Will Fyffe. It later became a cinema, then a bingo hall, before finally being demolished in 1978.

continued from page 10

could get up and sing a song. It was from these 'free-and-easies' that the music hall developed. Amateur singers were replaced by professionals and the scope widened to include conjurers, jugglers, etc. In 1874 Wigan's first purpose-built music hall, the Alexandra, opened in the Wiend. Theatres were developing at the same time as the music halls. Although plays had been performed in such places as the Royal Hotel (now John Menzies) in the early years of the 19th century, Wigan's first purpose-built theatre was the diminutive Theatre Royal, situated behind the present TSB Bank in King Street. Opened in March 1851, it was duly replaced in 1886 by the magnificent Royal Court Theatre across the road. The new building could house 3,000 people. Around the turn of the century the owner converted the adjoining building, the Public Hall, into a ballroom.

### Brass bands

The chief rival to the pub as a social centre was the church or chapel. There was sometimes a connection here with the temperance movement, which provided a counter-culture to that of the pubs. Congregational tea parties with music, recitations and songs (often with a moral point) were very popular. Brass bands, too, were often connected with the temperance movement. In the mid-19th century brass band fever swept the country and thousands of people would

listen to the bands playing in the public parks on Sunday evenings.

Brass bands were in great demand for another Victorian pastime, the procession. Religious, national and civic events and anniversaries would call for a procession with bands and banners from the churches, friendly societies, temperance groups and trade unions. It was in these processions that one might find a type of dancing peculiar to the region — the processional morris dance, originally performed by men, and later by boys. From this form of folk dance developed the carnival morris dance so popular among Lancashire girls today.

The 19th century saw the growth of organised amateur

sport, beneficial to health. The savage 'purring' or kick-fighting with clogs, for example, was gradually replaced by wrestling.

Wigan Cricket club was founded in 1848. Its first ground was in Brick-Kiln Lane. In 1860 it moved to a new pitch on a site now occupied by Mesnes Park. In 1875 it moved to Prescott Street, and in 1898 to the present ground at Bull Hey.

The rugby club had its ground in Frog Lane, and its changing rooms some distance away in Woodcock Street. It had been formed in 1872, a year after the creation of the Rugby Football Union.

### Springfield Park

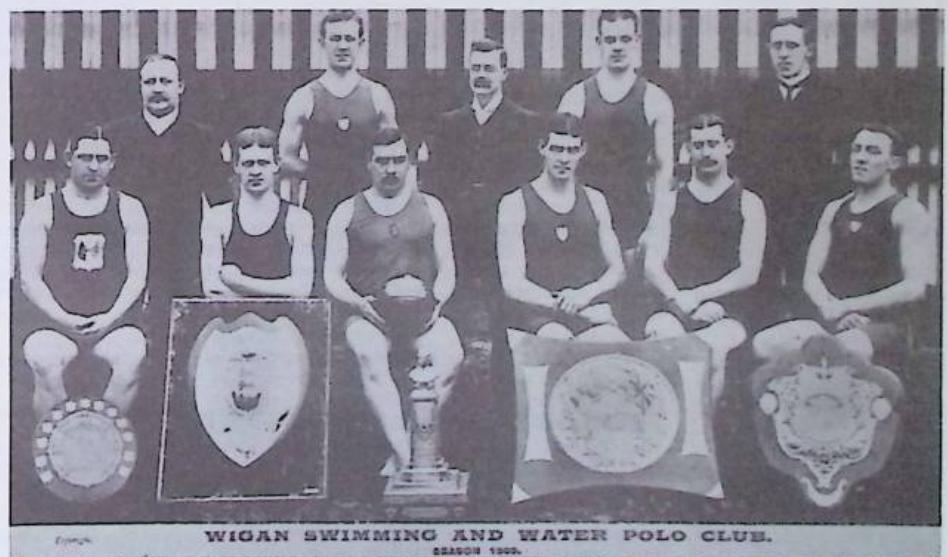
Local amateur football at

that time was going through a very popular phase. Every few streets seemed able to throw up a team. A glance at the local press reveals names such as the Park Lane Wonders and Standish South End. In 1900 there were six different leagues operating in Wigan, composed of 75 clubs, excluding the Wednesday and Sunday School Leagues. The first all-Wigan club, Wigan County, was founded in 1897-98, primarily to play on the new ground at Springfield Park, which had been constructed for the Wigan Trotting and Athletic Company. Apart from the football ground, it had a cycle track and a running track.

Local government throughout the country was also involved in providing leisure facilities, primarily parks and gardens, swimming baths, libraries, museums and art galleries. By the turn of the century Wigan had examples of the first three — the last two were a notable exception!

Longer holidays gave Wiganers the opportunity to travel more. Cycle rides into the countryside had an increasing appeal, and for those who wanted to travel further afield the local railway companies offered excursions, not only to the usual seaside resorts such as Southport and Blackpool, but also to rural beauty spots such as Dovedale, and even, for those who could afford it, a conducted tour of Paris.

So in spite of the long working hours and widespread poverty, Wiganers certainly found the time to enjoy themselves, much in the same way as we do today. As the Rev. Huntington had said, "recreations are a necessary of life".



Wigan Swimming and Water Polo Club, 1909.



# HAIGH COMES TO LIFE

A SIGNIFICANT gap in our published local history has now been filled by the recent publication of Donald Anderson's 'Life and Times at Haigh Hall'.

The author is an acknowledged expert on coal-mining; he has also enjoyed a life-long interest in and affection for Haigh Hall, going back to various student activities in the 1920s! Familiar as I am with the depth of Donald's knowledge and his meticulous attention to detail, I can think of nobody better-qualified to write a history of Haigh Hall.

There is a wealth of fascinating information here. The main section of the book, for example, looks at the various owners of the Hall, from Hugh le Norreys in the 12th century through nearly 600 years of the Bradshaighs to the Lindsays, who held the property from 1785 until its sale to Wigan Corporation in 1947. The close links between the owners of the Hall and the town of Wigan — only two miles away — is clearly brought out. During the 17th and 18th centuries, for

example, "the Bradshaighs played a major role in civic life. They were Mayors of Wigan eleven times between 1661 and 1729 and M.P.'s for Wigan and Lancashire for 73 years. They were Aldermen from 1660 to 1747 and holding these various offices they had much to do with the Parish Church."

## 'Man's man'

The six Lindsays (Earls of Crawford) who presided over the Hall included James, who was responsible for the present Hall, Alexander, who built up one of the finest private libraries in the world, and the colourful Ludovic, who became President of the Royal Astronomical Society, yet "proved himself a 'man's man' — at one election he won all the votes in a street in Scoles by wagering to jump over a man . . . and there was a story about him jumping over an open pit shaft".

There is an excellent account of the building of the present Hall between 1827 and 1849. And we are given a good insight into life on the estate

and in the Hall itself — how many employees worked on the estate, how many servants were there in the Hall, what were their duties and how much were they paid?

## Eminently readable

It is evident that the author has meticulously researched all available sources; and he has made the book eminently readable — rather than giving a blow-by-blow chronological

account, for example, he has wisely opted for an arrangement under several main headings. The text is complemented by a large number of good-size illustrations and maps.

The book is attractively produced, and is available from the publishers, Smiths Books Ltd., 41 Mesnes Street, Wigan; it will also be on sale in the History Shop. At £12.95, it represents excellent value.

A.D.G.

# Life and Times At Haigh Hall



*Eight Hundred Years of History*

Donald Anderson

## SIR ROGER ON TOUR

ONE of the Heritage Service's most significant paintings will be on tour throughout the North-West for the rest of 1992. 'Sir Roger and Lady Bradshaigh', by Edward Haytley, will be a feature of a touring exhibition entitled 'Up the Garden Path', telling the history of garden design.

The painting, which hung for a number of years in 'The Way We Were', Wigan Pier, has only recently returned from the National Portrait Gallery, where it was on loan as part of the prestigious 'Portrait in British Art' exhibition. On its return to Wigan at the end of this year, it will

be on display for local appreciation in the History Shop.

The painting, approx. 3 ft. x 2 ft. and dated 1746, shows the Elizabethan Haigh Hall, seat of the Bradshaigh family who owned it until the late 18th century. This Hall was demolished in the 1830s, and the gardens completely re-landscaped. The Hall is seen from the south; the main driveway to the present house approaches it from the east, under the hillock on top of which can be seen the original Haigh Tower.

Little is known of the painter Edward Haytley, except that he would appear to

have originated from the Preston area, and was best-known for his small-scale portraits in landscape settings reminiscent of the better-known Arthur Devis.

Indeed, a number of Haytley's portraits have traditionally been attributed to Devis, including the Bradshaigh painting, which has a very interesting history. A similar copy was made in 1750, by Joseph Highmore. Dorothy, Lady Bradshaigh, was a great admirer and friend of the novelist Samuel Richardson — whose masterpiece 'Clarissa' was recently dramatised on television. In March 1750 the novelist asked Lady Brad-

shaigh's permission to have a copy made of the Haytley "that hangs over your chimney in New Bond Street (the Bradshaigh's London house). You know not the pleasure I shall have in looking upon it, when you are at that seat [Haigh Hall] which is there drawn in so lively a manner, and is so very delightful."

Highmore's painting differs in certain respects from the Haytley. The dog, for example, has been replaced by a fallow deer, called Fanny; the parrot has moved chairs. Highmore also painted a portrait of the novelist, entitled 'Samuel Richardson, author of Cla-

risa', with his copy of the Bradshaigh in the background. Both paintings are now in the National Portrait Gallery.

Venues are as follows:

- Townley Hall, Burnley, 22 March - 3 May
- Blackburn Museum, 16 May - 4 July
- Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool, 18 July - 29 August
- Lancaster City Museum, 12 Sept - 24 October
- County & Regimental Museum, Preston, 7 November - 19 December
- Haytley's delightful painting appears on the cover of Donald Anderson's new book on Haigh Hall pictured above.





## 'Congratulations'

Congratulations on the first issue of PAST FORWARD. What a treat to find a Local Authority 'arts' journal that is decently written. So many of them depend entirely on heavy-weight, glossy paper to impress and the words are almost unreadable. You may care to consider a couple of subjects for future issues.

First, a brief history of pottery manufacture in Wigan. I don't know the exact date, but around two hundred years ago there were potteries in the area now behind Eckersley's Mill and Pottery Road. As late as after the last war the area

was always known as 'The Potteries'. The names, Pottery Road and Pottery Street suggest possible boundaries for the area. Or perhaps these streets were built to house workers in the trade.

Secondly, still in the same area, a history of the boat building and repair that was done on the canal by the Pottery Road bridge. This went on until well after World War II. I have a feeling that the firm's name was Mayer, or Mayor, but can't be sure of that.

K. Riley  
31 Marina Drive  
Wigan.

## WARTIME SOURCES SOUGHT

Since beginning my work for a doctorate at Manchester University, I have made use of the County Record Office and various libraries but I have many good reasons to be grateful to the Archives Service at Leigh Town Hall.

I am researching the effects and impact of World War II on some local authorities in Lancashire, and am making full use of the superb collection of Council minutes, records and papers

from the authorities which, in 1974, were incorporated into Wigan Metropolitan District Council. It says much for the foresight of the Council and its staff that such an invaluable and well-organised facility now exists — unfortunately not one which every Council has seen fit to provide or even contemplate.

Additional sources of material on the wartime period may have survived and I am

keen to contact anyone who served on, or who was employed by, any of the Councils of Abram, Ashton, Atherton, Hindley, Ince, Leigh, Orrell, Tyldesley or Wigan during the period 1938 - 48 and who has any relevant items or information.

E. McPherson  
99 Walton Road  
Sale  
Cheshire.

## New light on old Estates

Thanks to Wigan Council opening the Archives Service, at Leigh, I have been able to examine all the relevant documents that I wish to look at.

I am in consequence copying out all the Atherton Collection, up to a date yet to be decided upon.

When I have transcribed all the papers, they will show how the estates were run; how, and to whom, and how much for, the owners of the estates leased their lands; and thus cast a light upon the estates, lying not too far away, or next to Wigan. Those estates next to Wigan are now totally built up, but formerly they were all open meadow, pasture, crop growing, woods, and wet lands, with

all necessary facilities to process the estates' wares.

All these transcripts, when completed, and put in date order and context, will be available to all persons to view, read at leisure, and learn from, with ease.

The above is only a part of my work; other papers, too, will be deposited with the Archives Service.

Since embarking upon this work, some considerable years ago, I have found the Archives staff approachable, friendly, helpful and knowledgeable, able to point out further avenues of research, where needed.

John Barker,  
Wigan.

## Atherton's magnificent edifice

*Atherton Parish Church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and situated in a conservation area which includes the obelisk, King's Head public house and Market Place, is the focal point of the town. It has attracted a great deal of attention over the last two years because of its need for structural repairs and consequent refurbishment. The cost seemed prohibitive but thanks to English Heritage, among others, and the parishioners and people of Atherton, who have organised all sorts of fund raising events, the work was able to proceed.*

*Atherton was shocked last summer when, just weeks before its re-opening, the east end roof suffered an arson attack; but this year should see this majestic edifice back to its former glory — and incidentally well worth a visit.*

Mrs. M. Gilbertson,  
Atherton Heritage  
Society.

## From Down Under

Thank you and please note my gratification to you and the Heritage Service staff for your kindness in sending me the photostats of my grandfather's obituary in the Wigan papers. It will give a great deal of pleasure to my family and their children.

My father was Robert Gregory and born in the Platelayers Arms [near Miry Lane, Wigan] on 1st May 1876. He worked in Portsmouth where I was born on 8/11/1907.

Should you or any of your staff visit South Australia my wife and self would be pleased to meet them.

R.W. Gregory  
South Australia.

## Family historian rewarded

The entire membership of the Wigan Family History Society have used the Wigan Archives and Library Service in their various researches for a considerable number of years. All have benefitted from the services offered in one way or another, and hopefully, will continue to do so.

As a family historian of many years standing, I personally traced my family members in Wigan, from the present day back to the 1580s; this enabled me to continue my researches at Lancashire County Record Office, adding another 400 years of 'family facts'.

Genealogy, although interesting in itself, is somewhat life-

less compared with family history, which is very rewarding when the documents held at Wigan and various other places are studied in depth. The Court Leet rolls and the Court of Kings Pleas rolls alone are well worth perusing, being very informative, and then there are wills — and one didn't have to be rich or famous to leave a will — and various other documents.

From the Wigan rolls etc., we've found ancestral relatives who were collenderers, pewterers, gatelwaiters, assistant surgeons, rectors, miners, priests, tram drivers, skippers, cordwainers, and one of my family, in the 1400s, was the

Master Forester of Pendle and Trawden, for the de Lacy family of Clitheroe Castle.

The Wigan parish registers date from 1580 and record nearly all the baptisms, marriages and burials in Wigan and are now on microfilm. Wigan has a rich heritage in its documents, registers and photographs, research of which certainly pays — why not by it?

More information can be obtained through the Local History Library, Archives Service or the Wigan Family History Society.

N.L. Marsden  
Secretary  
Wigan Family  
History Society

## THANK YOU

On behalf of our group, I would like to thank your Local History Officer, Mr. Blakeman, once again for a fascinating talk. Though many of us have lived in

Wigan all our lives, we all learnt so much that was new to us. We hope he will return at a future date to give us more insight into our local heritage.

M. Kennedy  
Secretary  
Wigan Carers' Support Group

Letters should be addressed to:  
The Heritage Officer,  
Editor,  
Past Forward,  
Dept. of Leisure,  
Trencherfield Mill,  
Wigan WN3 4EF



# "Dear Diary"

**DIARIES** present a unique record of an individual's life and the diarist's perception of his or her world. As such, they constitute a valuable 'unofficial' record.

The diaries, journals and letter books held by Wigan Archives Service are one of its most interesting and unusual series. Some have been deposited individually, but most of them form part of the collection given from the 1940s onwards by the late Edward Hall.

The aim of the exhibition is to look at some of the best of these documents, which range from the 17th to the present century, and relate to people both from the local area and other parts of the country. Many of the diaries held in the Archives are of national historical significance, and are attracting the attention of a number of scholars from Britain and abroad.

## Roger Lowe

The earliest diary used in the exhibition is that of Roger Lowe of Ashton-in-Makerfield, who kept a detailed record of his life between 1663 and 1669. Lowe was an apprentice to a Leigh mercer (general dealer), and looked after his master's shop in Ashton. He became a respected local man, and was

probably far more literate and educated than most of his contemporaries.

Although a deeply religious man, Lowe recorded his many nights in the local ale-houses. On one such occasion in February 1664, after evening prayer, he 'went into ale house . . . and spent 4d., but had a very sickly night, and, Munday, had a very sad, sickly day all day . . .' He also enjoyed music and games. In August 1665, for instance, he went to play at bowls on Golbom Cop.

On another occasion he went bird's nesting with a couple of friends, looking for a 'throstell' (thrush), finding instead the nest of a 'piannet' (magpie).

Lowe's diary contains one of the earliest references to the so-called 'burning-wells' at Pemberton. National events, too, impinged on local life. In October 1666, for instance, Lowe was chosen as one of the collectors in Ashton for charitable donations 'towards the relief of such needy persons as had sustained loss by the great fire in London'.

## Ellen Weeton

Another remarkable local diarist whose life and times are featured in the exhibition is Ellen Weeton. Ellen came to Upholland from Lancaster in 1784 at the age of eight, with her widowed mother, who kept a dame school to maintain the family. Ellen received a partial education, and continued the school after her mother's death in 1797. From 1808 to 1814 she worked as a governess in the Lake District and Yorkshire, returning to the Wigan area to marry Aaron Stock, a factory master. The marriage was disastrous, and Ellen recorded the misery she endured in her journals. She was beaten and confined to her room by Stock, who also did all he could to prevent Ellen seeing their daughter. The exhibition includes the original recognizance for assault issued against Stock in the Wigan Quarter Sessions files.

Ellen describes herself as 'taller and thinner than most women and very plain featured — yet not I think so ugly as to attract passers by'. Although we may sympathise with Ellen for her personal sufferings, her snobbish dislike of the common herd is undeniable. She wrote, for example, of how 'the simplicity of the peasantry is soon discovered to be tiresome ignorance; and their wis-

dom little better than cunning'. She had a low opinion of Wiganers, describing their town as 'that place of mental barrenness where ignorance and vulgarity are their boast, and literature has scarcely dawned; where genius, when it happens to appear, is often treated with contemptuous neglect'. In another entry she wrote about a coach overturning outside the Eagle Inn: 'many were severely hurt, but their heads were proof, being Wiganers. One man's head was fractured, but he came from Bolton'.

## Allan Birch

Even brief and commonplace diaries of more recent date can help to build up a picture of domestic and social life. A local example is that of Charles Allan Birch. Born in 1903 in Delph Street, Wigan, Birch was educated at the Wesleyan School, Dickenson Street, and then at the Grammar School. His father worked at Coop's clothing factory (which closed in 1991), earning 28s. a week at the time of the boy's birth. Birch did well at school, and realised his ambition to become a doctor.

His juvenile diaries concentrate on home and school life, and on his many expeditions on foot and bicycle. He wrote of his camping holiday at Harrock Hill in 1916.

*continued on page 15*



The Pavilion, Library Street, opened in 1909 and owned by the famous Worswick family. The first act was the Minnehaha Amateur Minstrels. In the 1920's it became a cinema, the Picturedrome. The building, which occupied the Library Street section of the present Wigan Pool, was demolished in 1959.



C. Allan Birch in his scouting uniform, c. 1915. The 1st Wigan Scout Troop was established in 1908 by G.C. Chambres, headmaster of Wigan Grammar School.



# SOCIETY NEWS

## Aspull and Haigh Historical Society

The programme for the remainder of 1992 is as follows:

- 9 April 'Wigan Charters' - Nicholas Webb (Archives Officer)
- 14 May 'The History of Coins' - Mr. H.V. Prescott
- 11 June 'Lancashire Ghosts, Myths and Legends' - Mr. R. Hart
- 10 Sept 'Views and History of Wigan Pier' - Mr. Holian
- 8 Oct 'Windmills and Watermills' - Mr. R. Bramwell
- 12 Nov 'More Lancashire Stories and Dialect' - Mr. B. Clare
- 10 Dec Christmas Party (7.30).

The society meets in the Village Centre, Bolton Road, Aspull, at 8.00 p.m. If you are interested, contact Mrs. Dorothy Dootson, 5 Standcliffe Grove, Aspull. (0942 831204)

## Atherton Heritage Society

The programme for the remainder of 1992 is as follows:

- 13 April 'Bakewell and Haddon Hall' - Mrs. F. Greenhalgh
- 3 May Trip to Bakewell and Haddon Hall.
- 8 June 'Royal National Lifeboat Institute' - Mr. Weilding
- 10 Aug 'The Fletcher Family' - Mrs. Gilbertson
- 14 Sept 'A Local Family' - Mr. Carney
- 12 Oct 'Pendle Story' - Mrs. Greenhalgh
- 9 Nov 'Victorian Artefacts'.
- 14 Dec Mulled Wine and Mince Pies

The society meets in Atherton Library at 7.30 p.m. For further information, contact the library (0942 878369).

## Leigh and District Family History Society

This society meets in the Turnpike Centre's Derby room on the third Tuesday of each month. Meetings take the form of either a talk on a family history-related topic or a workshop evening when members discuss the various problems in researching family history. New members are given help and advice on how to start tracing their ancestors.

Members also undertake project work. The society has already published a book, 'The Leigh Register Guide', which lists the whereabouts of all church registers in and around the town. The latest publication will be a record of the monumental inscriptions of Golborne St. Thomas's on microfiche.

Visits are also organised to Archives Offices and other places of help to members researching their family history.

The above publications and further details are available from the Society's Secretary, Mrs. G. McClellan (0942 729559).

## Wigan Archaeological Society

The Society meets on a monthly basis with a guest speaker whose subjects can range on anything from Egyptology to the Industrial Revolution. Field trips to archaeological sites as far afield as Hadrian's Wall and Caernarvon Castle are organised. Occasional excavation is carried out on local sites such as Roman roads, moated halls and watermills.

For further details, contact Sharon Varley (02575-2986).

Dear Diary —  
continued from page 14

There are references to two early Wigan cinemas — the King's Electric Theatre in Clarence Yard, and the Pavilion in Library Street. He also recorded the Zeppelin raid on Wigan in 1918, which killed seven and injured thirteen. And despite being a scholar, Birch still got into scrapes at the Grammar School: 'got two cuts of the cane for kicking up a row in classroom on Monday night. It didn't hurt a bit.'

\* \* \*

Other diaries featured in the exhibition include those of an army corporal between 1749 and 1762, an English lady's tour of Australia in 1900, and a World War I flying acc.

• 'Dear Diary' is currently on display at the Stables Centre, Haigh Country Park.

## ANOTHER COLLIERY COUP

LAST year, Astley Green Colliery hosted the Trans-Pennine Run, the commercial equivalent of the London-Brighton Run. The organisers were so pleased with the result that once again Astley Green will be the venue for this prestigious event, during the first weekend of August.

The Colliery has also secured another 'first' — the Worsley Cruising Club will be hosting a Federation of Bridgewater Cruising Clubs rally there over the Whit Bank Holiday weekend.

More good news — the overhead crane in the engine house has now been renovated, and should be operative once more very soon. This will enable further restoration work within the engine house to proceed.

It is very encouraging to be able to report such good news at a time when funds are so hard to find. In particular, it is a welcome boost to the morale of the dedicated volunteers from Red Rose Steam Society

who keep the site running in these difficult days.

The programme of events for 1992 is as follows:

- 29 March North West Stationary Engines Society Engine Rally
  - 18-19 April Red Rose Steam Society Crank Up
  - 23-25 May Federation of Bridgewater Cruising Clubs Boat Rally
  - 11-12 July Wigan Hospice Steam Rally
  - 1-2 August Historic Commercial Vehicle Society - Trans-Pennine Run
  - 6 September Village Fayre
  - 3-4 October Lancashire Motor Caravanners Rally
  - 4 October Fairground Organ Preservation Rally
- Everybody welcome.

## There's a bit of a smell at the Pier

THE New Year began with a new Piermaster, Chris Abram (pronounced as in Abraham and not as in the place of that name near Wigan — he'll be lucky!) Chris's main aim is to bring in as many local people to Wigan Pier as possible.

One change which has already taken place is that the Pier is now a smellier place than before. In the past, visitors have been able to see and touch; now they are also able to smell. They can enjoy the aroma of freshly made vanilla toffee or cheese, the nostalgic smells of carbolic soap, of gran's old cottage with its coal fire and of the wash-house out the back. Perhaps enjoy is the wrong word when it comes to the market fish staff, or the sweaty pit pony!

A major new attraction will be the opening of the Palace of Varieties. Here visitors will be able to enjoy such events as Old Tyme Music Hall and magic lantern performances.

Later in the year, a series of Citizens Days are being organised — again with the aim of encouraging local people to see inside Wigan Pier, and it is hoped that a 'Friends of Wigan Pier' organisation will encourage more local involvement with the Pier.

If your group or society would like a slide presentation on Wigan Pier, please contact the Assistant Piermaster, Yvonne Corrigan, on 0942 323666.

Amongst the many special events to be held at Wigan Pier in the coming months are:

- 3 May Old May Day Fayre
- 27-28 June Steam Fair and Canal Boat Rally
- 9-18 July Jazz Festival
- 19 July Vintage and Veteran Car Rally
- 23-29 August Visits by the bands of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Texas Rangers and the Carabinieri



# Who and Where?

WE obviously chose some difficult 'who and wheres' in the last issue. Only one suggestion for the pit women — perhaps they were employed by the Wigan Coal and Iron Company. And nothing at all for Richard Plumbley — it may well be that the plaque has not survived.

The two photographs of the charabanc elicited more response. A number of readers correctly identified the location as the Haigh Foundry site, off Leyland Mill Lanc. And thanks to Mr. John Hannavy for pointing out that the photographer was Fred W Dew and not Drew as printed. John carried out a lot of research on Wigan photographers for his book 'Living and Working in Wigan', and found that Dew had studios at 1 Parson's Walk from 1913. Miss Joan Bamford remembers the house (which is

still there today, beside the cricket ground) in the 1920s as having a display of photographs in the bay-window; Dew's speciality was industrial-type photographs. The 'posh' portrait photographer then was Cyril Foley, who had a studio next to the old St. Paul's Congregational Church, Standishgate.

● *The mystery photograph this time was taken in the 1890s by the Victorian vicar and photographer, Rev. William Wickham. Does anybody recognise the building or the couple?*



If you can help us with any information about this photograph, please telephone 0942 828122 or write to the Heritage Officer, Dept. of Leisure, Trencherfield Mill, Wigan. WN3 4EF

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