

PAST FORWARD

ISSUE NUMBER 8

WINTER 1994

*Dedicated by permission
to LORD BALCARRES of HAIGH HALL
upon his coming of age April 12th 1833*

The Balcarres Waltz



composed
by

RICHARD GREGORY

Organist of St. Elizabeths-Aspull

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The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

THE Year of Drama '94 is still very much with us. As I write, the third of the History Shop's four exhibitions has just opened, with our own offering, 'A Celebration of Local Theatre', going on display at the end of November. The climax of the Year of Drama celebrations will be held on 15 December at Haigh Hall (for further details see p.16). This will be a memorable evening.

The History Shop continues to go from strength to strength, especially as more and more people get to know of its existence. With a varied exhibition programme, a genealogical centre of excellence that really is what it claims to be (and we have letters to prove it), a splendid selection of gifts which are just that little bit different – a must for locals with Christmas fast approaching – an exciting lecture programme (the opening one was a complete sell-out), and regular use of the meeting room this is a very real success story. And it may be expanding – watch this space!

I'm delighted with this issue of Past Forward – particularly as it once again contains so many contributions from you, the readers. You're even taking over the mystery photograph section! Indeed, you'll find a fascinating mystery solved on p.4, and details of how you can help solve a mystery by being a detective for a weekend on p.16. Many thanks to all those who have sent in contributions, both written and, of course, financial. Only today I have received a donation for £30. It is this level of interest and support which has enabled Past Forward, not just to survive, but to go from strength to strength.

Many thanks for all your support, keep sending in your contributions, in whatever form, and may I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous 1995.

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:

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Wigan Heritage Service,
Market Suite, The Galleries,
Wigan. WN1 1PX**

Childhood Memories and Reflections

MANY readers will know or know of Elizabeth Joan Bamford MBE. Born in Wigan in 1908, she has been, throughout her 86 years to date, a distinguished member of the local community. Her two greatest loves have been the church, and music, for services to which she was awarded the MBE in 1978.

Joan has recently produced her 'Childhood Memories and Reflections' which I know many readers will find fascinating. A limited number of copies are now available from the History Shop at only £1.50.

For those readers who have not seen a previous issue of Past Forward, or have mislaid it, here once again is a list of those behind the Heritage Service, and where we are all based.

At Wigan:

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Heritage Officer (Archives) *Nicholas Webb*(0942) 404430

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Leigh Library—

Heritage Officer (Local History) *Tony Ashcroft*.....(0942) 404559

Please note the new Leigh telephone numbers.

If you have an enquiry, and are not sure who the most appropriate person is to contact, please ring the History Shop (0942 828128).

Christmas Gifts with a difference

LOOKING for a Christmas present from the past? Regular visitors will be familiar with the History Shop's range of heritage-related gifts and toys. This year for Christmas we have added some quality items in pewter and brass, Celtic style brooches and miniature glass perfume bottles together with traditional toys for the children. And after last year's success we've also widened our stock of Victorian cards that are just that bit different. If Christmas means a good read, we'll be happy to send a list of our current stock of local, general and family history books for you to select at home and purchase by mail. For further information on any of these, just give us a ring on 0942 828128.

Cover: 'The Balcarres Waltz' was written for the coming of age of Lord Balcarres, eldest son of Lord Crawford, at Haigh Hall in 1893. Haigh Hall will also be the venue for a Grand Victorian Christmas, the menu for which will be based on that enjoyed in the very same room over 100 years ago. The sounds of the waltz itself may well be heard once again. Tickets are still available – for further details see p.16.

Here are some more of Ernie Taberner's motoring memories...

I remember when ...

MOTOR vehicles had brakes operating on rear wheels only, and when eventually designers decided to fit braking systems operating on all four wheels, the fact was advertised to all following vehicles by fitting a red triangle on the rear mudguards declaring it had "Four Wheel Brakes". Presumably this was to warn following motorists that they ought to keep a safer distance between them than normally was the case, because the red triangle meant the leading vehicle could brake suddenly and the following driver would not be able to avoid a nose to tail bump in an emergency.

This very rarely occurred anyway, because if it was a heavy vehicle the maximum speed (if the vehicle was fitted with solid rubber tyres) was 12 miles per hour; the speed was increased to 20 miles per hour if pneumatic tyres were fitted (blown up tyres we used to call them).

Later still, when servo systems were introduced, the red triangle declared "Power Brakes"; when applied these newer designs would stop vehicles much more quickly than hitherto, although jack knifing (when the trailer of an articulated vehicle slewed around whilst the cab and chassis kept on course) was still unheard of. It would be a few years yet before "artics" as they were called replaced the "rigid sixes", so called because the cab and lorry flat were integral, mounted on four rear wheels (two sets of two) on the rear and, of course, two front wheels.

Getting these vehicles mobile on a cold winter's morning was an experience as coil ignition was still not universally fitted; the ignition system was by magneto, a machine which created its own electricity and distributed it to each sparking plug at the correct time. If a "mag", as the magneto was called, had been on the vehicle for some time and not been serviced the magnet in the magneto tended to get "tired" and the slightest damp would impair its efficiency.

To overcome this, some drivers would, at the end of the working day, disconnect the

machine and take it home to stand in the hearth by the fire, or even store it in the fireside oven overnight, thus eliminating damp field coils and contacts, and hopefully contribute to easy starting the following morning.

The machine was clamped on a metal base alongside the cylinder block and geared by a flexible coupling to a drive shaft which in turn was geared to the camshaft. It was imperative that "timing" marks on the driving gear and mag drive were accurately synchronised to produce a spark at the plugs at the right time. Should it be set "too advanced" the driver swinging the starting handle at the front of the vehicle would be thrown across the garage floor, while if it was set "too far retarded" the man could "swing all day" without success.

Occasionally with a stubborn mag, two, three, or even four men would take a rope sling and loop one end over the starting handle; while one man gripped the handle with both hands the others would stand behind him on the rope. When the handle reached "six o'clock" from "three o'clock" all of them would snatch at the handle and pull it through to "nine o'clock". After three or four snatches like this the engine would respond and once running would run all day. Usually after the initial start-up a snatch from "six o'clock" was enough to start the engine as required.

With the introduction of coil ignition, starting up became

much easier, but as synchro mesh gears hadn't yet been developed there was still a problem changing gears. It was easy enough to engage first or reverse when stationary but it was difficult to move up a gear when driving without double de-clutching, and impossible when changing down without employing this manoeuvre. This entailed pressing down the clutch pedal to disengage the clutch (de-clutching) and simultaneously slipping the gear lever into neutral, then de-clutching a second time and engaging the selected gear, timing being essential to avoid an ear-splitting gear grinding. If a gear was missed the driver would have to stop his vehicle and start again!

On steep hills the instructions at the roadside sometimes stated "Engage lower gear". The wise driver knew

not to ignore this, because should he "miss a gear changing down" to use the engine as a brake, the brakes quickly overheated without the engine assistance and lost their efficiency; in extreme cases they would not hold the vehicle while the driver "struggled" to engage a lower gear.

Some Highway Authorities recognised this possibility, and created an "escape route", a roadside slip way excavated at the roadside and filled with loose chippings so that if a runaway vehicle ran off the road it would sink in the chippings and eventually come to a standstill when the vehicle would sink to its axles.

© Ernie Taberner

Ernie's book, 'A Lancashire Upbringing', is available from the History Shop.

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News from the Archives

MISSING biographical information about Ellen Weeton, whose surviving manuscript journals and letter-books form such an important item in the holdings of Wigan Archives Service, has been unearthed and supplied to us by Mr. Leslie Stock of Woolton, Liverpool.

Miss Weeton featured in the Heritage Service exhibition 'Dear Diary' which has been displayed at various times in the History Shop and Haigh Hall. She came to live in Upholland in 1784, aged eight, with her widowed mother who kept a dame school to maintain the family. Ellen received a partial education and continued the school herself after her mother's death in 1797. From 1808 to 1814 she worked as a governess at Dove's Nest near Ambleside, and in Yorkshire, returning to the Wigan area to marry a local factory master called Aaron Stock. The marriage was disastrous and Ellen recorded her misery in the journals. She was beaten and confined to her room by Stock, who also did all he could to prevent her from seeing their daughter Mary. In 1822 she was forced to accept a separation agreement by which she received a meagre allowance on condition that she saw Mary only three times a year and did not enter Wigan whilst Aaron was living there. Only in 1825 when Aaron left the town was Ellen able to return and become reunited with Mary. During her exile she had resumed her residence at Upholland.

Rich Source

Ellen's journals are a rich source of contemporary detail about social life in the early 1800s. In 1816, for example, she described the customary preparations in Wigan for the fair on Holy Thursday: 'The town is going to be in a great

A mystery solved: Ellen Weeton's last days

busile this week, for the fair commences tomorrow, on which occasion it is usual for everybody to clean their houses thoroughly, to white-wash, paint etc.; the confectioners begin of baking for the fair a week beforehand; and the shop-keepers to polish and set their wares in the neatest order; large caravans enter the town with wild beasts, monsters, and jugglers; likewise wooden horses, whirligigs, gambling tables, barrel organs, fiddlers, and hordes of beggars; to add to the usual novelties, a handsome new Cloth Hall will be opened, built by Mr. Tennant, and everybody, I suppose, will go to see it.'

Vivid Account

In 1825 after a trip to Liverpool Ellen recorded an equally vivid account of travel on the eve of the railway age: 'The dust was almost intolerable ... the roads laid on

McAdam's plan are better for carriages and easier for draught horses, but for human beings in dry weather are almost beyond endurance; they are a continued cloud of dust, blinding to the eyes, filling the nostrils, going down the mouth and throat by quantities to suffocation, and completely ruinous to decent clothing. Houses by the road are inundated with dust, and all cleanliness destroyed and useless. The fields are so covered on each side, according as the wind blows, that they are of much less value an acre than those more distant from it. If Mr. McAdam could lay the dust as well as the roads, he would be a clever fellow.'

Social and religious observations were Ellen's forte. There is, of course, the well-known passage where she described Wigan as, 'that place of mental barrenness where ignorance and vulgari-

ty are their boast, and literature has scarcely dawned; where genius, when it happens to appear, is so often treated with contemptuous neglect....' She was equally contemptuous of Liverpoolians: 'not one in ten can speak their native language tolerably; not more than one in twenty correctly.' Arriving in Liverpool to stay there with friends in 1809, she had, 'expected to have found it filled with intelligent beings, imagining knowledge to be so generally diffused. I begin to discover that it contains as much proportionate ignorance as any little village in England... How astonished am I daily to find so many more ignorant than myself... considering as I have till now done, the great disparity of opportunities for acquiring knowledge between the inhabitants of so opulent a town as this, where science and literature make so great a noise, and the obscure individual of an obscure village where such terms are scarcely ever heard and their signification a mystery.... The people here do not seize the opportunities of improvement that so frequently occur... their ignorance is astonishing!

continued on p.5



Standishgate, c.1836 — a drawing by William Wright. The house at extreme right is believed to have been the residence of Ellen Stock (nee Weeton) between 1827 and 1844.

Collection of Parish Magazines Acquired in House Clearance

A SUBSTANTIAL collection of parish magazines has been deposited recently with the Archives Service through the good offices of Wigan Family History Society. Acquired by the society in a house clearance, the magazines

are unbound issues covering the period 1885-1955 (with some gaps), and have been sorted into annual bundles and deposited for safe keeping. Any member of the Society (or members of the public) may consult them at the

Archives Office in Leigh (ref. acc. 2896).

Although Upholland now lies outside Wigan Metro, it was originally a chapelry within the ancient parish of Wigan, and has always had close economic and social ties with Wigan. The magazines provide useful information for local as well as family history. Each edition contains extracts from parish registers (these have been copied out by the F.H.S. for the use of its members), accounts of church collections and gifts, news of parish events, a good selection of adverts

for local tradesmen, and religious circulars such as *Home Words for Heart and Hearth*, *Church Monthly* and *The Dawn of Day*.

7,000 Inhabitants

The first extant issue (October 1885), for example, tells us that the parish then contained some 7,000 inhabitants. The extent of the parish was such that missions had been established at Dig Moor, Holland Moor and Crawford Village, served by curates. The parish church of St. Thomas was, of course,

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A mystery solved: Ellen Weeton's last days (continued from p.4)

It would almost appear as if ignorance was taught, as if it were something to boast of.

Comfort

Despite being hard of faith and scornful of the Established Church, Ellen eventually found comfort in her membership of an Independent Congregation. Her views of other denominations are of interest in the context of the religious history of the period. For example in January 1818 she went to observe high mass at the consecration of Wigan's new Roman Catholic church of St. Mary, Standishgate. 'It was the first time that I had ever been in a Catholic place of worship, she wrote. 'I have often heard their forms and ceremonies much ridiculed and highly censured, and have felt much pained at the want of charity in my Protestant friends. I have thought their bitterness equalled Roman Catholic bigotry, and felt much inclined to think they were not quite so

ridiculous as they were represented.' Nevertheless Ellen found herself filled, 'with the utmost astonishment that so many millions of people, possessing as much natural sense and discernment as myself, could be so led by such boyish pageantry, or imagine for a moment that Christ, whose kingdom was not of this world, whose life in it was utterly devoid of grandeur or finery, should be pleased with that now, which he censured whilst he was amongst us in his human nature....I should be completely an infidel if the Roman Catholic profession were the only Christian profession on earth.'

Puzzle

One of the puzzles about Ellen has always been her life after 1825 when the surviving journals cease. Edward Hall, who acquired the manuscripts and presented them to Wigan, also edited them for publication by Oxford University Press in the 1930's. He established that Ellen was a member of the congregation of Hope Street Independent Chapel until 1844. She also occurs in Wigan directories from 1834 to 1844 as a pawnbroker, her address being Standishgate. This no doubt

was Aaron's former property, which he had left to Mary. Indeed, in the 1838 directory the pawnbroker's business is entered under Mary's name.

But when and where did Ellen die? Edward Hall apparently undertook a search of likely registers but drew a blank. Certainly she was not buried in Wigan, or Upholland where her mother's grave can be found. Now, Mr. Stock has found her burial record in the registers of the Necropolis Cemetery, Liverpool: grave number 7611. Nelly Stock aged 72, cause of death decay, date of death 12th June, buried 14th June 1849; address Bedford Street. This suggests that she spent her last few years in Liverpool. Why was this? Mr. Stock has also discovered that Ellen married Aaron at Holy Trinity parish church in Liverpool in 1814, and certainly she had lived there for a time with friends before meeting her future husband. Perhaps her old friends had offered to look after Ellen during her old age. It is doubtful whether she lived with her estranged husband's relations. And as for Aaron himself, he spent his last years as a coal-owner at Ashton-in-Makerfield. Perhaps in time additional light will be thrown on the last years of Nelly Stock.

"Of Liverpool"

Ellen's will, which was proved on 15th August 1849, has also been found by Mr. Stock and adds further to the picture. It was drawn up in July 1847, when Ellen described herself as 'of Liverpool'. One of the most interesting points is that she bequeathed her manuscript journals to Rev. William Marshall, then minister of Hope Chapel. She mentions nine volumes of these, whereas previously it had been thought there were only seven, four of which survive today in the Archives. Also bequeathed to Marshall was her copy of Clarke's *Commentary on the Old and New Testament*. The rest of her books, together with furniture, clothes etc. were left to Ellen's daughter, by this time Mary Newell. The residue of the estate was left in trust for the benefit of Mary and her children. Legacies of £10 each were to be paid to the executors of the will, who were, in addition to Marshall, Richard Walmsley of Wallgate, attorney's clerk, and Thomas Dawson of Liverpool, house agent

N.W.

Collection of Parish Magazines acquired in House clearance (continued from p.5)

the surviving church of the pre-Reformation priory, and seats in the south aisle, we are told, were at this time rented to parishioners, the proceeds going to church expenses to make up for the loss of church rates which had been abolished in 1868 by Gladstone's government. The front bench of the north side of the nave, however, was reserved for the 'aged poor' to attend service. An interesting survival from earlier times was the custom of 'churching', the thanksgiving service after childbirth, which was apparently still practised in Upholland. Light is also shed on Victorian clerical attitudes in the vicar's warning that 'the baptism of illegitimate children cannot be chronicled in this magazine.'

Properly Strict

Notes on Bible Classes and Sunday Schools show that these were the main means of giving parishioners religious instruction in late Victorian times. Women were encouraged to attend Bible Classes as long as this was possible 'without neglecting their home duties'. In the Sunday School, marks were awarded for punctuality and conduct, and prizes were given accordingly. Whole marks for conduct were given to 'those who have been perfectly quiet



Rev. George Wills, vicar of Upholland, photographed in the 1920's.

and attentive', and only half marks 'to those who have been really good, though not perfectly so.' The vicar warned that it was 'the sign of a weak and inefficient teacher to make conduct marks too cheap. Instead of gaining the affection of his class, he is less loved as well as less respected than one who is properly strict. Such faults as whispering, playing, eating in school, and leaving the prayer and hymn book at home should never be overlooked under any pretence.'

But church life at Upholland wasn't all gas and gaiters. In 1887 the parish organised a church workers' trip by train to Blackpool. This was a great success, but the vicar warned that 'church work is the only important thing, and that pleasure parties, although very useful for increasing sociability and good fellowship amongst workers, are of compara-

tively trifling importance ... the amount of strong feeling and strong language that is wasted on mere outings or tea-parties in some places is quite shocking'

A New Vicar

In 1888 Upholland welcomed a new vicar, George Wills, who compiled the magazines up to his death in 1927. A Somerset man, he had come to Wigan in 1881 as curate at St. James', Poolstock, where he was well known for his work amongst the young men of the parish and organised a working men's club there. He was appointed to the Upholland living at the age of just thirty. He was also keen on sport, and having played county cricket for Somerset he joined Wigan Cricket Club. He was an ardent bicyclist, and was photographed on a motorbike. Unusually for a clergyman he also served as a district councillor between 1907 and 1910. At his

death *The Times* described him as 'lovably opinionated and tyrannical.'

Religious Crusade

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Wills, like many of the clergy, advised his flock to see the war as a religious crusade against the 'German Despot's lust for World Empire'. He enjoined his male parishioners to do their duty by serving in the army, and the women to join the local Red Cross Society in Upholland. During the war a useful roll of honour was published in the magazine recording details of Upholland men serving, killed and honoured. Although the magazines published during the Second World War are less informative (no doubt due to stricter censorship), generally there continues to be plenty of local detail regarding parish activities in Upholland right up to the end of the series.

N.W.

DEATH OF

MR G OLIVANT, JP

To the general regret of his many friends in Leigh and district, Mr. George Olivant, JP, formerly of Henrietta Street, Leigh, passed peacefully away on Friday afternoon at his residence, "Woodleigh", Old Colwyn, near Colwyn Bay, at the age of 70 years, leaving a widow and three daughters, Mrs. Hobbs, Mrs. Prestwich and Mrs. A.H. Widdows. He enjoyed pretty good health up to about twelve months ago. This summer he underwent an operation from which he never properly recovered. During the last few years he spent his time alternately between his residences at Old Colwyn and Leigh. When he was appointed one of the first borough magistrates in 1903 we gave the following particulars of his career:—"Mr. Olivant was the second son of William and Jane Olivant, and was born at Hardwick, a small hamlet in Clumber Park, the seat of the Duke of Newcastle, and one of the group of noblemen's estates now almost universally known as the Dukeries, situated in the centre of Sherwood Forest, so well known as the haunt and home of the notorious outlaw, Robin Hood. He commenced his education at a dame's school in the park, which was founded and maintained by the Duke for the children of tenants, and afterwards attended the Old Abbey National School, Worksop, in connection with the Priory Church, and finally the Park Place Academy of the same town. After leaving school he was apprenticed on the estate, in the Clerk of the Works' Department, as a joiner, and was subsequently engaged in some important works in the county. Later on he resolved to try his fortunes further afield, and accepted an engagement in Liverpool under the contractor who had

GEORGE OLIVANT — OBITUARY

*Leigh Chronicle,
24 September 1920*

the making of Sefton Park. This was opened by Prince Leopold. Afterwards he accepted engagements of the brewery of Messrs. Greenall, Whitley and Co. The chemical atmosphere of this vicinity, however, proved too much for a Dukery sapling, and in consequence of failing health Mr. Olivant sought refuge under the more congenial climate of Leigh, and worked for the firm of Messrs. Picksley, Sims and Co. On October 26th, 1874, he commenced business in the building trade, and having erected several properties gave up business to devote greater attention to political work and estate agency. Shortly after arriving in Leigh he identified himself with

The Conservative Party in the town. He took an active part in the acquisition of a site and in the formation of the Leigh Conservative Buildings Club Company Limited, which was incorporated on November 8th, 1877, for the purpose of building the present Conservative Club in Railway-road. The club was erected by Mr. Joseph Limon, and opened on October 11th, 1879, by Sir Richard Asheton Cross (now Lord Cross), and of the then sitting members for South-West Lancashire, which included Leigh. Mr. Olivant was elected a member of the first committee on the 4th November, 1879, and was appointed Registration Agent for the Leigh sub-

district of South-West Lancashire in June, 1881, and elected secretary to the Conservative Club and the Conservative Club Building Company Limited, on 28th March, 1882. After the passing of the Distribution of Seats Act, in 1885, he attended



George Olivant, Esq., J.P.

the Conference at the Sessions House, Liverpool, in connection with the sub-division of the county and the regulation of the boundaries for the newly-formed Leigh Parliamentary Division, and succeeded, in the face of great opposition, in getting the division named Leigh. The Atherton men badly wanted the district to be called Atherton Division. On 7th May, 1885, he was appointed

Registration Agent for the division. He was elected secretary of the first Leigh Richmond Building Society on April 2, 1888, and was appointed a manager of the Leigh Savings Bank in January, 1895. Mr. Olivant retired from the position of Registration Agent, and was presented in 1900 by the Finances Committee and a few friends with a

purse of gold. He also resigned the secretaryship of the Leigh Conservative Club on the 31st December, 1902, having held a continuous connection with the same since its formation, and being largely interested in the establishment of branch clubs in nearly all parts of the division, and latterly the new clubs opened in Bedford and Firs Lane, Leigh. Few men worked more for the Conservative party in this district. He was indefatigable — in spite of the fact that his health of late years had not been of the strongest — in improving the organisation of the party, and was held in great respect by local conservatives, and was given a long service medal under the Association of Conservative Clubs. He was appointed a Burgess auditor upon the incorporation of the town in 1899, and retained the position for many years, eventually resigning."

One of the first members of the Leigh Literary Society, he was elected a member of the first committee. He was a vice-president of the North of England Conservative Registration Agents' Association, and was at one time president of the Leigh Property Owners' Association. He was a considerable property owner in Leigh, and carried on a business of estate agent and valuer at his office in Church-street many years. When it was decided to form the Alder Spinning Co. he took a

very great interest in the movement, and was elected one of the first directors. He retained the position until the mill was turned over to the new company in the early part of this year. He was also financially interested in several other Leigh mills, and a very useful member of the Borough Allotments Committee. In religion he was a Churchman.

When the war broke out he swore in the

Leigh Special Constables

and joined the force himself. He took part in the various drills, went on the route marches, and set a splendid example to the younger men. Had he lived he would have received the riband and the long-service medal for special constables which are shortly to be presented by the Chief Constable of Lancashire to those entitled to them in the Leigh district. Mr. Olivant was presented at the dinner given last winter to the Leigh special constables at the Co-operative Hall, and made an interesting speech there, recalling amusing experiences as a special constable. Mr. Olivant had a large circle of friends who greatly admired him for his sociability, his rich fund of humour and his good business outlook. He will be much missed in this district.

The Funeral

The funeral took place on Tuesday at Old Colwyn. Those present from Leigh comprised: Ex-Supt. S. Ross, Mr. J. Part, Mr. R.H. Leach, Mr. J.E. Warhurst (Secretary Alder Spinning Co., who took wreaths from Sir J.H. Holden, Bart., Mr. G. Holden, and Mr. H. Pemberton, and from the Alder Mill), Mr. J.C. Prestwich, Mr. T. Brogden (Plate Glass Association), Mr. T. Ince, and Mr. Oakes. The Leigh Conservatives were represented by Messrs. T. Lonsdale, J.P., W. Morgan, J.W. Aldred, and E.J. Smith (secretary and registration agent).

The Spinning Jenny panel

THE original panel which illustrated a lady in a green dress standing beside a spinning wheel is now in the care of Wigan MBC Heritage Service until enough money can be found to finance the restoration work and return it to something like its pristine condition. The Spinning Jenny Panel, as it has become known locally, was placed into the wall of the shop which stood at the corner of Spinning Jenny Street, by the then property owner George Olivant J.P., in 1911. Olivant wanted to help perpetuate the history of the street (constructed and named in 1908) which was near to the site of 59 King Street, where Thomas Highs had lived and produced his own version of the spinning jenny and water frame.

The panel eventually became a symbol of pride for local people and when the property was demolished to make way for the new Spinning Jenny Way the panel came into the hands of Wigan MBC. Unfortunately the original tiles have not weathered well. Atmospheric pollution has caused a great deal of damage although luckily only three of the tiles are cracked. Restoration work is thought to be in the region of £3,000 and once this has been completed it is hoped to put it on permanent display in the Spinning Jenny shopping centre for the people of Leigh once again to see it in its glory.

Should any person wish to contribute towards the renovation/restoration costs of this piece of Leigh history, please contact either of the following Leigh & District Civic Trust members:-

Roy Thomas	or	Betty Isherwood
(0942) 492457		7 Pennington Mews
		St. Helens Road
		Leigh.
		(0942) 672058

Thomas Highs' three storeyed house on King Street later became a common lodging house and ended up as a bill posting station before it was demolished in 1926 by order of the Leigh Corporation. It had become a health hazard and unfit for human habitation. T.R. Dootson, the well known local solicitor, acting on behalf of J.W. Barlow, the owner, attempted to stop the demolition order from being carried out but was unsuccessful.

T.A.

Book Reviews

A PEOPLE APART?

LANCASHIRE has a special place in the annals of the Roman Catholic Church in England in that it was, for centuries, the county in which the overwhelming majority of Catholics lived. Catholic Lancashire is therefore worthy of special study, and in this book the author traces the origins, development and decline of a distinctive sub-culture.

In 16th century Lancashire the Protestant Reformation clashed with a vibrant Catholicism that was experiencing a local revival; which may explain why Catholicism proved to be more resilient here than it did in other parts of the country. The typical recusants were the local community leaders, the gentry, from which class were drawn the justices of the peace who were supposed to enforce the penal laws against Catholics. With their help the Catholic community managed to survive, in spite of its connections with enemy states such as France and Spain and support for the Stuart pretenders to the throne of Great Britain. In the 17th and 18th centuries Catholicism gradually emerged from secrecy into openness, and in the 19th century from openness into full participation in the social and political life of the country. During this century the Catholic community in Lancashire was transformed from a network of rural and seigneurial groups into an urban mass movement largely composed of Irish immigrants and governed by supporters of papal absolutism. The community reached its greatest development in the first half of the 20th century but this apotheosis was followed by a rapid decline, so that the writer concludes that Catholicism in Lancashire has begun to wither away.

The author has the knack of describing complex historical processes in a simple way, without losing anything in accuracy or veracity. He claims a

Catholic LANCASHIRE



HILTON, J.A.: *Catholic Lancashire*. Phillimore, 1994. ISBN 0 85033 893X. Price £19.95, hardback.

self-denying ordinance on anecdotes, but the work is enlivened throughout by fascinating snippets such as the account of a fight that broke out between Catholic and Protestants when the landlord of "the ale-house on Hindley Common" proposed a toast to the (Protestant) King William; and by amusing comments such as the following:

"Thomas Weld....proceeded to sing one of his favourite songs, 'I am Mad Tom, behold me'.... However, he began it at too high a pitch, but persisted in it, bringing on a fit of apoplexy, which resulted in his death, a melancholy example of the danger of persisting in error".

Mr. Hilton is a member of the North West Catholic History Society, and has a considerable number of previous works on English Catholic History to his credit. He does not hide his pre-Second-Vatican-Council and Cisalpinist sympathies, but they do not detract from the objectiveness of the work, which is exemplary, except perhaps for an idealized description of the pre-Reformation church, at the beginning, and some arguable statements about contemporary society at the end.

Catholic Lancashire is well-written, informative and entertaining. It deserves a place in every Lancashire local history collection.

B.B.

A POET AND PRIEST IN LANCASHIRE

SOME poets are inseparably associated in the mind of the reading public with a particular place, such as Wordsworth with the Lake District, Clare with Northamptonshire, and Hardy with Wessex. Gerard Manley Hopkins is not one of these, partly because he frequently moved from one place to another during the course of his life. He did, however, spend a considerable time in Lancashire.

Hopkins was born at Stratford, Essex in 1844. When he was a child his family moved to London. As a young man he attended Balliol College, Oxford, where he experienced a crisis of religious faith. At this time the Roman Catholic Church was undergoing a period of expanding influence. In 1850 Pope Pius IX had re-established the Roman Catholic hierarchy in this country, and earlier the Oxford Tractarians had created a movement dedicated to bringing the Church of England closer to the Roman Catholic Church. Hopkins was converted and received into the Roman Catholic Church by John Henry Newman, one of the most notable converts of his day.

A convert has to decide how much of his life is to be devoted to his new faith. Hopkins did not stint. He joined the Society of Jesus in 1868, and became a priest in 1877. The result was unhappiness. His personality and abilities were unsuited for the role which he had taken upon himself. Intelligent and academic, his sermons were rarely successful with his down-to-earth congregations. His conversion had resulted in his being cut off from his family, and he needed to settle and establish

roots, but he was frequently moved from one post to another by his superiors. He was sensitive and impulsive, yet he had joined an order whose members prided themselves on their stoicism. But Hopkins was determined that he should be first and foremost a Roman Catholic priest, and that this role should take up the whole of his life, even to the extent of denying his need to write poetry.

During the course of his life Hopkins stayed at several locations in Lancashire. In describing his life in these places, the writer of these essays shows us 19th century Lancashire as a mosaic of different communities. Hopkins experienced Anglican Rochdale, Catholic Preston, Jesuit Stoneyhurst and the Irish community in Liverpool. But the place where he was really happy was in Leigh.

Hopkins came to Leigh in October 1879, and worked from St. Joseph's Church for about three months. Articles from the *Leigh Chronicle* describing events in which he took part are reprinted in this little book. Hopkins was deeply impressed by the serious attitude of the local Catholics towards their religion, and the open-hearted, friendly, and yet respectful way in which he was treated by the people made him feel relaxed and appreciated.

The book provides interesting insights into the various Catholic communities in 19th century Lancashire, and their effects on a man who was a newcomer both to Catholicism and to Lancashire. The writing is of the usual high standard that we have come to expect in the publications of the North West Catholic History Society.

B.B.



**HOPKINS' LANCASHIRE:
Sesquicentennial Essays**

Edited by John McDermott.
Published by the North West Catholic History Society, 10 Ellesmere Road, Pemberton, Wigan WN4 9RR. Price £3.00 inc. postage. Cheques to be made payable to the N.W.C.H.S.

The Diary of Roger Lowe of Ashton-in-Makerfield, 1663-1678: (including a record of burials at Winwick Church 1666-71.)

Edited by Ian Winstanley,
Picks, 1994 [101p]
ISBN 0 9516843 4 5
Paperback: price £4.99*

THE original manuscript of Roger Lowe's diary is now deposited with the Archives Service in Leigh Town Hall. An earlier edition of this diary, edited by William Sachse (now out of print) was published by Heinemann in 1938. This particular reprint by Ian Winstanley is taken from the unpublished version which first appeared in *Local Gleanings relating to Lancashire and Cheshire* and later in 1876 was printed in the antiquarian column of the *Leigh Chronicle*. The following year it was reprinted with a brief introduction and notes as a separate publication. In this version several passages were

omitted from the original manuscript and it is this version which appears to have been published by Ian Winstanley.

Lowe (sometimes called the Lancashire Pepys) was a 17th century apprentice to a South Lancashire mercer who resided in Ashton-in-Makerfield. Like any diary writer, Lowe presents the reader with a picture of village social life because this is what he has most intimate knowledge of. We read about the fun he had, the girls he courted and the ale he drank. Lowe uses interesting language to express his militant non-conformity and his hopes and fears. Although he rarely refers to national issues, he does present an excellent picture of Lancashire rural life and customs. Unfortunately Lowe was not as faithful a diarist as we would have wished for, as there are often frequent gaps between entries, widening as the time

passes.

Ian Winstanley is to be applauded for making this diary once again available to a wider reading public. The modern reader, however, may find some of the old English somewhat antiquated by today's standards, but with a little perseverance the meaning will become clear. Winstanley provides a comprehensive introduction to Roger Lowe and the entries are interspersed with notes. Personally I should have preferred these to have been either at the bottom of the page or else included in a separate appendix which could have been expanded to include background information on some of the personalities referred to.

Unfortunately this particular volume lacks an index which would have been indispensable for cross-referencing. Like any diary this can be picked up and dipped into at any time without losing the feel for the period.

The book is attractively presented and the quality of reproduction good. For only £4.99 this is good value for money, especially if you are interested in the history of Ashton-in-Makerfield and its environs.

T.A.

*Available from the History Shop.

THE TALE OF THE MARKET STREET "MASSEUR"

"I am not a miracle-man, I am a fully-qualified masseur", [pronounced massoor]. These were the words, in 1949, of a market tinker/trader whose canopied stall on the heavy stone setts was located on the Market Street side of the Wigan Market entrance adjoining Wilcock Street. The speaker was a large man with a full florid face and taken-back silvery-grey hair. He wore brown shoes, cotton shirt with collar and tie; the sleeves were neatly rolled up to his elbows. His portly belly was contained in heavy-pattern blue serge trousers, and his partially-buttoned waist-coat sported a fob-watch and chain.

Being a vendor, he was endeavouring to encourage the bulk of his rather sizeable audience to purchase a small glass vessel (around 50 ml.) containing his product of inestimable efficacy as far as rheumatism, arthritis and rigor-mortis were concerned, for the instant obtaining of relief from locked-joints. On being asked whether the balm held a potential to loosen padlocks, the vendor was unsure; he had never been called upon for that purpose, but he felt that he could suggest the positive. He was very impressive, yet not pushing too hard for the price of 2s. 6d. (12½p) for a jar of that for which the medical Universities of the entire world were clamouring. Only he knew the secret of the potency of his product. A few coins chinked here and there, following his demonstrative application

of his cream and fingers to the aching wrist of the odd middle-aged woman.

The cream-man looked around with bland eyes and in strong forthright tone asked for any volunteer, no matter how severe or long his or her suffering, to speak up whilst the opportunity was at hand. There came a voice from an insignificant fellow, maybe in his fifties whose peculiarity was that he looked sideways over his right shoulder and at an angle to his body when he addressed the masseur in order to display and confess his wretchedness.

Guiding the man by an arm in a crab-like sideways-movement, the Fakir led his subject to be seated on an incidental wooden-chair, there to be questioned in an analytical manner. The victim couldn't remember the time when his eyes actually aligned with the symmetry of his feet. All of his life he had walked sideways, the only advantage of which was the comparative ease with which he negotiated crowds. When on the rugby terraces he was able to see all the points registered at the score-board end, but if he wished to see the other half of the field of play then he had perforce to pay an extra 6d. and transfer to the other side of the field. His plight aroused a general murmur of sympathy from the now-increasing audience. Even I found myself to be deeply moved.

To the practitioner the situation seemed to pose no problem, even though his subject was fixed some-

thing like Bela Lugosi's 'Igor' in Universal's 'Son of Frankenstein'. The heavy woollen neck-scarf was removed to reveal a wisp of a neck with a pallor alike to the man's cheeks, when the magician took up his position, not behind his seated subject, but alongside. For a few moments the enquiring fingers searched knowingly both within and around the undernourished neck; this was no hangman but clearly a force of power within his field.

Then in a ceremonial fashion the unbroken jar of the nostrum was produced, and in now total silence the screw-top was removed. A small quantity, maybe sufficient to cover a shilling was taken by soft and supple fingers before being gently applied to the 'welded' neck of the unfortunate 'victim', during which time the exponent asked gentle questions from and gave confident assurances to his patient. Clearly the moment of truth had to come, and oddly enough this took little more than a couple of minutes. Just imagine, two minutes within 50 or more years! This would or would not be a miracle; but an apocalypse, and the entire audience knew it!

The massaging ceased, and with strong hands the tilted head was taken in a firm grip, with the now too-late caution that a slight stab of pain might be felt. The only scream or like-sound came from members of the audience who collectively felt that they had witnessed a man

having his neck forcibly broken. I personally felt the urge to dial 999!

But not so, for the subject was on his feet and shaking his head like a dog newly-out of water, whilst attempting to replace both his scarf and cap. I remember observing that he displayed little difficulty in adopting a forward movement of his two feet. From this point onwards it is doubtful which made the most noise, the bottles of the balm or the chinking of coin in the exchange thereof.

When I thought that I saw the 'weld-neck' man exercising a similar business, the time seemed to have arrived for the discerning-man to throw in the towel, so I did just that. But the cream, dear reader, of which you walk in ignorance whilst I who know have none in my possession and we are neither the better-off. In confession I suspect that I purchased a bottle from a local chemist at some later date and in conjunction with an athletic-rub, but I'm not too sure.

The name of the balm was — hold it — 'Meeson Cream', but Meeson is dead and as far as I am aware he took his secret to the grave along with him; so in your any like personal suffering then you'll have to stick to Aspros!

This was Wigan Market over 40 years ago.

© Donald Bradley Norton

Krithia,
3 Queensway,
Ince-in-Makerfield,
Lancs. WN22 2HL

NATHANIEL ECKERSLEY

ONE could not read anything about the local affairs of Wigan between 1845 and 1890 without the name of Nathaniel Eckersley coming into prominence in every aspect of Wigan's civic and industrial life. William Henry Tyrer, born in Whelley in 1876 and Wigan's Town Clerk from 1911-1946, once said that he probably did as much for Wigan as Joseph Chamberlain did for Birmingham.

The Eckersleys were an old Lancashire family who came to Hindley from Hulton, near Bolton in the late 17th century. Nathaniel Eckersley was born in Millgate on 15 December 1815 and for some years attended Wigan's Grammar School which was then in Rodney Street. After a further period of study at the Birchall Academy in Warrington he joined his father and brothers in the management of the Wallgate cotton mills. Mr. Eckersley was first elected to the Town Council in 1843, being re-

turned unopposed for the Queen Street Ward which he represented during the whole of his association with the Council. He refused to accept an aldermanship, preferring to submit himself to the electorate each election year. In 1851 he succeeded his friend, Ralph Darlington, as Mayor and Chief



NATHANIEL ECKERSLEY,
(1815—1892)

Magistrate of Wigan, and was to serve in that office a further five times, i.e. 1852, 1870-71-72 and 1873.

In July 1852, during a Scholes riot, Mr. Eckersley gathered 20 police officers and, placing himself at their head, led a charge down Scholes crying, "Come on, my lads!" The ejaculation was later translated by him into the French, "En Evant, mes enfants", and incorporated into the family crest. During the cotton famine caused by the American Civil War a crowd of 500 gathered in protest outside the Relief Rooms. The agitation disappeared when

Mr. Eckersley went out to meet them. There was a silence and then a cry of "Hats Off!" for it was well known that the Eckersley family had made a large contribution to the Relief Fund.

Mr. Eckersley represented Wigan in Parliament from 1866 to 1868 and was asked to stand for office again when Thomas Knowles died suddenly in 1883. He was returned unopposed, being the only nomination. In March 1878, Nathaniel Eckersley was appointed High Sheriff of Lancaster, the only Wigan man ever to be given this honour. During his local government career Mr. Eckersley was influential in persuading the Corporation to purchase the manorial rights in 1860, and to acquire a water supply in 1853 and a gas supply in 1874. He was responsible for the laying out of Mesnes Park and provided the £2,000 necessary for the lands purchase, resisting all the efforts of his fellow councillors to call it "Eckersley Park". He gave generous help in the building of Wigan Infirmary, officially opened in 1873, and the Grammar School in 1879.

Nathaniel Eckersley died on Monday 15 February 1892, in his 77th year. All work stopped in Wigan on the day of his funeral and flags flew at half mast from municipal buildings. The local press ended an appreciation by saying, "If Mr. Eckersley's life seems too perfect, if no flaw has been recorded here, the explanation is that no flaw has been found".

James Fairhurst,
36 Tatton Drive,
Ashton-in-Makerfield.

FROM GOOD TO BAD

Bamfurlong was a reet good
place once tha knows,
Not nay fur badness like a
swollen river flos;
Tha cannot tell friend from foe
divel's geet in
He's took place oer, an fur
filled it up wi' sin.
To find owt good tha'll need
sum special eyes,
Its a damned hard job, tryin' t'
sort truth from lies;
Dead uns must be turnin' oer
in their grave
To think o' cumin' back, they'd
need t' be reet brave.

Mrs. M. Evans,
Bickershaw, Nr. Wigan.

A TERRIBLE AND PAINFUL ACCIDENT

WHEN one looks at certain things in history, the pain of the situation has to be imagined. In this case the pain is very real, even after 49 years.

The cruelty of it all is clear to see; the accident happened on 30 April 1945, just eight days before the end of the 2nd World War; Loudovic Berry was 67 years old. He only had about one more hour to work before the end of his shift, and was on his last trip of the day. His grave is unknown and unmarked to most people, and lies in Abram a few hundred yards from the grave of his wife. All the family should lie together, in peace.

Loudovic Berry was born at home on 12 September 1877. His parents were Martha (nee Walshaw) and George Berry of 146 Crawshaw Cross Terrace, Lower Ince.

'Just like Dad'

As Loudovic's father was a colliery engine driver, like all boys, he wished to follow "just like dad". As a child, his father would take Loudovic on the footplate of his engine while he was working, and if by chance Mr. Berry saw his family while working, he would give them a toot on the whistle and a wave.

As Loudovic grew older and left school, he became a colliery engine driver. As a young man, he was a trustworthy, steady type of lad, a face in the crowd as you might say. He did differ from his fellow brethren in one respect—he was the finest snipe shot in the area.



Loudovic as a young man.

At the age of 37 years, Loudovic married Ethel Clayton, spinster, 16 years his junior. Her father was a coal hewer, of 484 Warrington Road. Loudovic at that time was living at 177 Walthew Lane, Platt Bridge and working for the Wigan Coal Corporation. He tipped up the family's money on pay day — until that final and blackest of all days, Monday 30 April 1945.

On that fatal day, Loudovic was driving his beloved Dorothy, the engine which he thought the world of and treated like a

child; he was always to be seen cleaning her. His son-in-law would also help in this chore. Sometimes he would drive Daisy, but as often as not, it was his Dorothy. His son-in-law and grandson would accompany him on the footplate—a right proper family business!

Early on in his shift on that last day, at about 10.30 a.m., he gave his daughter and grandson Adrian a wave, and a toot on the whistle, like his own dad used to do years before. At about 4.00 p.m., Loudovic was shunting 13 waggons, loaded with about 150 tons of coal; he had about one hour to pass before the end of his shift, on this the last trip of the day. No doubt he was thinking about his tea.

Skidding

John Ward and Joseph Hindley were the brakemen, walking one on each side of the train. Ward was nearest to the front of the train and signalled to Loudovic to pro-

ceed on the Number 8 siding. The train proceeded slowly on the gradient to the place, when Ward noticed about five waggons length of shale missing from under the lines ahead. He signalled to Loudovic to stop; the brakes were applied, but the train carried on in a skidding manner. As the waggons reached the area in question, one after the other they precipitated themselves down a cavern that had opened up in the front of the train. Loudovic may have tried to stop his train going down the hole or tried to jump off it; or perhaps he was thrown from the train down the hole—the truth will never be known.

Shock

When the people got to the spot, and after the shock of it all wore off, there was a cloud of steam from the engine, a fire from its fire box (its door being flung open) and the train itself could be seen nose up about 50 yards down the cavern. Dorothy, its driver, 13 waggons and



Loudovic on the footplate of "his beloved Dorothy".

ACCIDENT AT ABRAM



Loudovic and Ethel on their Wedding Day.

150 tons of coal are still there to this day. A rescue attempt was contemplated, but was thought to be too dangerous, as stone, shale and dirt were still running into the cavern. His son-in-law insisted on making a rescue bid by himself, but was physically restrained from doing so — for his own safety. Afterwards the hole was filled in and left.

What had brought this painful episode about? The hole in fact was an old pit shaft about 12 feet wide, named the Brookside Pit (also called the New Zealand Pit by the locals). It had been sunk some 60 years before the accident and had continued as a working mine until 1919. From 1919 till 1931 the pit was used for ventilation purposes; it was then filled from the bottom to the top — no capping as we know it today.

Water action at the bottom of the pit had probably begun to wash away the infill, and with the shuddering of trains crossing and recrossing the old pit, bit by bit the infill was slowly removed, leaving a crust which caved in on that day and opened a hole — an inverted irregular cone 50 by 35 feet.

The family of Mr. Loudovic Berry and the writers of his story wish authority to raise Mr. Berry and bury him with his wife in Abram. Also to raise his beloved Dorothy, clean it up, and put it on show as a tribute to Mr. Berry and to the spirit of all working men, past and present, in commemoration of the 50th year of his death, and continued isolation from his family. Or at least to erect a monument to his memory on site.

John Barker
Carl Ainscough



Loudovic the family man.

Councillor George Davies has kindly brought to my attention the story of his Aunt Charlotte, who retired in 1952 having completed 52 years service as a pit brow lass. Ed.

Charlotte was one of two daughters, and eight children, of John Davies, a nail-maker from Staffordshire, who in 1871 moved with his wife Sarah to Park Lane, Ashton-in-Makerfield, in order to find work. Charlotte and her sister Mary Ann left school at the age of 13 to work on the pit brow of No. 2 pit, Park Lane, where their father and six brothers all worked underground. When Park Lane closed the girls were transferred to Long Lane Colliery in Bryn Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield.



Charlotte.

A typical day would have started at 6.00 a.m. and finished at 5.00 p.m., during which time the girls would have pulled the coal down the screens with rakes — very hard work indeed.

In 1949 Charlotte completed 50 years' service on the pit brow. On 2 January 1950, she was awarded the British Empire Medal; the next day congratulations poured in with letters from King George VI, Mr. Atlee, the Prime Minister, and Hugh Gaitskill arriving at her home in Willow Street, Park Lane. Charlotte, of course, was at the pit brow in her clogs and shawl, working on the screen.

Charlotte retired at the age of 65, having completed 52 years service. She died in 1962, aged 75. Her sister, Mary Ann, spent 35 years on the pit brow. Her brother William was presented with a certificate for 54 years loyal service to the mining industry. Indeed, the family — father, six sons and two daughters — could boast a total of 442 years' service to the industry!

THE WAY WE WE

THE ringing sound of clog irons on the flags at about 7 a.m. woke me better than any alarm clock. These were the mill girls, tightly wrapped in their shawls, on their way to work at our own dark satanic mill, Dicconson Lane Mill, at the bottom end of Aspull, near Wigan.

Our village was typical of the area at that time. Rows of two up, two down brick-built houses erected in the late 19th century and kept spick and span by their occupants. The stone flag at the front door came in for particular attention, being constantly stoned to a very high degree. The front room was never used except for special occasions such as Christmas and New Year.

Working conditions at the mill were extremely noisy. The sound of machinery made conversation impossible, so the factory workers became expert in 'Mee Mawin' as we called it. This involved mouthing the words in exaggerated fashion, with gestures with hand and arms to pass their message.

The time was the mid 1930's, and I was a young lad of eight years old. I remember the time particularly as the Italians had just invaded Abyssinia, and we kids used to sing a little ditty.

*"Will you come to Abyssinia
will you come
Bring your own ammunition
and your gun
Mussolini will be there,
shooting bullets in the air
Will you come to Abyssinia
will you come".*

The mill was situated at the end of Mill Lane and had a large dam which was fed by Borsdane brook. During the winter, the dam would freeze up and off we would go in our clogs to skate. The way to do it was to turn your feet

at an angle so that your clog irons were skating along the ice. With a little practice this was easy to do and some pretty pirouettes performed. Not quite Torville and Dean, but really enjoyable to us kids.

Wearing clogs was a way of life in those far off days, and we kids used to love running down the flags and quickly striking the irons on the concrete to create good sparks. We had a small shop at that time, and we sold clog irons, nails, etc. in all sizes. Most of the men owned a cobblers last for repairing the worn out irons. Those that didn't took their items to the clog repairer in Dicconson Lane.

Life was hard

Life was hard at that time. I suppose the average income was about £3 per week if the parents were lucky and had a job. Consequently, we youngsters had to make our own pleasure without spending so much as a penny. It is

said that the memories of childhood are the most vivid of all, and I well remember the activities of our time.

We were forever climbing trees at the Aspull end of Borsdane Wood and jumping the stream of the brook at the bottom. One episode stands out vividly, and this was 'walking the pipe'. The pipe in question is a waste pipe of about three feet diameter crossing a culvert at our end of the wood. At the centre of the pipe there is a drop of 20 ft. or so to solid concrete on which the supports are built. The distance to be walked, or run, was about 30 yards or so.

**"...factory
workers
became
expert in
Mee
Mawin..."**

The trick was not to look down, but to keep your eyes firmly on the far bank. When you had 'walked the pipe' one felt about 10 feet tall. Why none of us fell off and broke legs and arms I'll never know, but we didn't.

We would look for a tree with a Y shaped branch to make a catapult, or, as we always called them 'two legs'. When you had cut your wood to size, you found some old cycle innertube, cut to size, and bound it on to your 'two leg'. With a ready supply of pebbles from the brook we became very accurate with this weapon, and decreased the number of rats running along the mill wall at the end

of the stream!

Bow and arrows was another of our pursuits. Find a three foot length of tree, preferably yew, about one inch in diameter, shape the bow, and then string it. The arrows we made from lengths of willow, dead straight and hardened, but we never used any flights on them. It was amazing the power and accuracy we got from these simple toys.

Good fire

We made our own cave amongst the trees, lining the floor with ferns, then got a good fire going in front of the cave; having found a few potatoes from the field, we would stick them in the red hot embers until the skin turned black. Everyone then tucked into the spuds and enjoyed the feast.

In the autumn it was black-berry time, and many hours were spent collecting the berries. During all the time we spent in the wood, we knew where all the best bushes were, and filled quite a number of the old blue sugar bags with luscious fruit and sold them to people in the village for a few pence a bag.

Collecting scrap iron was another way of managing to earn a few pence. Parts of the old mill, including the chimney, had been demolished, so there were bits of iron to salvage.

When summer came around, it was swimming time at 'Jarruts lodge', about a mile walk through the fields at the top of Dicconson Lane. This is a fairly large pond, still used for fishing I believe, but to us it was a positive lido. The powers that be would say that it was a

RE — IN ASPULL

health hazard, but I never knew anyone coming to grief in our time, and we enjoyed many, many hours of swimming there.

Couple of whacks

School was just up the road from our house where we were taught the 'Three Rs' from the age of five to fourteen. Any miscreants were sent to the headmaster, who took his cane from his desk and gave a couple of whacks on the outstretched hand. No-one wanted a second helping.

Similarly we had our local bobby, and his method of punishment was a clout round the head with his gloves. If you complained to parents about this, you would probably get another clout from your dad.

No-one had much money in those days, so all our play was of our own devising. We particularly liked playing 'skillee', where we picked two sides and made a den, usually under one of the gas lamps. One side was released and the other side had to catch them. When caught, you went in the den and stayed there unless one of your team ran into the den without being caught, and shouted 'Skillee' thus freeing all the prisoners in the den. When all the side had been caught, the other side were the victors and took their turn.

'Piggy'

Another game we played was 'Piggy'. The piggy was a piece of wood about two inches long, and sharpened to a point in the shape of a pig's nose. You placed the piggy on a flat stone, and with a

piece of wood about three feet long gave a sharp rap at the pointed end so the piggy rose in the air. You then gave it a hefty crack and off went the piggy into the wild blue yonder. Sometimes the piggy would be lost in deep grass and the way to find it, in our innocent wisdom, was to throw up another one in the area so that it would 'find' the lost piggy. Sometimes it worked.

When Saturday came around, if we were lucky, we got 6d. to go to the 'pictures'. We set off in a gang to walk the three miles to the Empire in Westhoughton.

Along Mill Lane, down past the mill, and through the woods to Westhoughton to the cinema. Admission price was 2d. and we were enthralled watching Buck Jones and Co. coming out on top against the 'baddies'.

All the films at that time were what we called 'following ups' with our hero, 'Flash Gordon', at the end of the reel in an impossible situation. We were on pins for a week to see how he extricated himself, but he always did.

Trip to Wigan

About a year later, my mother treated our Norman, about three years older than me, and myself, to a trip to Wigan! This was a day of great excitement for me, as it was my first visit! It was around Christmas time and we caught the No. 15 bus to Wigan at a fare of 2d. The journey to Wigan took about half an hour, finishing at the

terminus on Station Road opposite Woolworths. We walked through Market Place, wide eyed at the sight of all the shops, particularly the butchers, with their stock of chickens, geese, turkeys, pork etc. on the slabs outside the shops.

A walk down the Old Arcade brought us to Gomer's Cafe, where we had a good meal for about a shilling. A walk round the town centre through the hustle and bustle of the Christmas shoppers and a final visit to Woolworths and back to the bus stop across the road, to catch the bus back home. A red letter day.

Saturday night was bath night. The tin bath in front of a blazing fire and filled with hot water from the gas boiler, and listening to the wireless. This was always "In Town Tonight" with the orchestra playing "The Knightsbridge March" and sounds of the London traffic in the background, halted by a stentorian voice shouting 'STOP', when the half hour programme continued.

The following programme was Henry Hall's Guest Night, and, closing my eyes I can still hear his introduction: "This is Henry Hall speaking and tonight is my guest night" and so the hour long programme continued.

Concert

A few of us played musical instruments as this was brass band country. My preference was the cornet and I was a member of Haigh Brass

Band. Christmas Day was the time for playing carols in the area, our first stop early Christmas morning being the magnificent mansion of Haigh Hall for a concert for the Earl of Balcarres and his family, who were then in residence. When we had finished, the servants brought out drinks all round, and usually a five pound note for the collection. After playing at various places round Aspull and New Springs, we finished about twelve o'clock at one of the pubs where the bandsmen had a few pints to slake their thirst.

At Whitsuntide, we played in the procession for the Whit Walks. This was a big occasion, and I well remember marching through the streets, particularly through Scholes with its warrens of back streets. The families, mainly of Irish descent, lined the streets, and the band played all the Irish gigs to the delight of the onlookers.

Sombre tones

I have now arrived at the end of 1939; on 3 September, Mr. Chamberlain the Prime Minister came on the wireless at 11 a.m., and in sombre tones announced that we were at war with Germany. An era of peace had come to an end.

So I come to the end of my childhood days of over 50 years ago. They were hard times but we enjoyed them for all that. This was the way we were.

Mr. C. Alker,
5 St Marys Road,
Aspull,
Near Wigan.

*"... off
went the
Piggy into
the wild
blue
yonder ..."*

LECTURES IN THE HISTORY SHOP

THE third year of lectures in the History Shop got off to a rousing start on 12 October with a very full house for James Fairhurst's talk on '19th Century Wigan Murders'. Lectures are held on the second Wednesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. — excellent value at only £1, including coffee. Tickets can be obtained in advance from the History Shop (0942 828128)

9 November

'A History of Turton Tower (near Bolton)
Martin Dowland

14 December

'They Burn Witches, Don't They?
Witchcraft in the 17th Century'.
Lizzie Jones

11 January

'Women in the Mines'
Graham Stirrup

8 February

'An Introduction To Heraldry'
Jock Straw

9 March

'The Formation of Rugby League,
1895—Myth and Reality'
Mike Lathom

Victorian costume to be worn
Tickets: 24 Guineas (£25.20) available from Halgh Hall
(0942 831046) or TIC (0942 825677)
Credit cards accepted
Further details from Alastair Gillies,
Wigan Heritage Service (0942 827375)

EXHIBITIONS IN THE HISTORY SHOP

11 October - 23 November
Palaces of Variety*

28 November - 28 January
A Celebration of Local Theatre*

6 February - 24 March
Rugby League Centenary

*A Year of Drama 1994 Exhibition

THE HISTORY SHOP'S MEETING ROOM IS AVAILABLE FOR HIRE BY LOCAL GROUPS AND SOCIETIES, AT VERY REASONABLE COST:

£4.40 PER MORNING OR AFTERNOON SESSION

£6.60 PER EVENING SESSION

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, PLEASE CONTACT PHILIP BUTLER

(0942) 828124

A Victorian Christmas at Haigh Hall December 15 1994



Menu

Entrée
Cold Turkey Soup

Entrée
Chicken à la Maitre

Roast
Cold Roasted Turkey for the Ladies

Entrée
Cucumber Salad

Dessert
Trifle - Orange - Mince
A. A. S.

Cheese & Nut

Wine
Old Blend - The Queen - Port - Tea

Programme of the Evening

(Place of Commence - Old School Hall)

7.30 *Arrive*
Introduction to your host, Lord Hallywell
by Lord Hallywell of Hallywell

8.00 *Dinner*
Music by the Hallywell String Quartet

9.30 *Tea & Coffee*
The Queen
Lord Hallywell
Haigh Hall

10.00 *Victorian Christmas*
The Wigan Theatre Company perform a
public play in the evening every day of the
weekend

11.00 *Christmas Carol*



Victorian costume to be worn
Tickets: 24 Guineas (£25.20) available from Haigh Hall (0942 831046) or TIC (0942 825677)
Credit cards accepted
Further details from Alastair Gillies, Wigan Heritage Service (0942 827375)



CALLING ALL LOCAL SLEUTHS

IF you fancy yourself as a budding Sherlock Holmes why not try your hand at solving the Hallywell Hall Mystery — a truly original murder mystery with a difference set in the gas lit rooms at the Way We Were Museum at Wigan Pier and performed by the resident professional Theatre Company.

These highly successful weekends take place each month and have attracted would-be sleuths from all over the country. The weekend includes:

- A wine reception and briefing in the town giving full details of the mystery surrounding the death of Albert Simmons, long time gamekeeper to Lord Hallywell on the Hallywell Estate. Was it suicide or murder? You must decide.

continued on p.17

Aspull & Haigh Historical Society

The society meets in the village centre, Bolton Road, Aspull, on the second Thursday of the month at 8.00 p.m. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. Dorothy Dootson, 5 Stancliffe Grove, Aspull (0942 831204)

Atherton Heritage Society

All meetings are held in Atherton Library on the second Monday of the month at 7.30 p.m. For further details contact Mrs. M.P. Madden, Secretary, 22 Butterfield Road, Over Hulton, Bolton BL5 1DU (0204 651478)

Golborn & Lowton Local History Society

The society was founded in 1984, and now has a membership of 35, with an average monthly attendance of over 20. Meetings are held at Golborne Library on the second Tuesday of the month, at 7.00 p.m. Over the years we have concentrated on local history — we are not an historical society. Non-members are always very welcome. For further information contact Ron Marsh, Public Relations Officer (0942 726027)

Leigh & District Civic Trust

For details contact the Chairman, Betty Isherwood, 7 Pennington Mews, St. Helens Road, Leigh (0942 672058)

Leigh & District Family History Society

For further details contact Mrs. Olive Hughes, Secretary (0942 606155)

Tyldesley & District Historical Society

17 November
Stars of the Gramophone — a nostalgic look at some of the big names and voices from the early days of recording
Mr. Smith

SOCIETY NEWS

15 December

Edwardian Scandals — fascinating tales from the beginning of the 20th century

Mr. Oldroyd

19 January

Wigan's Textile Heritage — the Wigan conservation officer details the important issues surrounding the preservation of our industrial past

Mr. Powell

16 February

Earlestown. Yesterdays of a Railway Town — concluding part of the talk begun in October

Mr. Carman

16 March

The Photograph Collection of the Lancashire Mining Museum — an illustrated talk about this important collection recording this once great local industry

Mr. Davies

20 April

The Paupers Palace — the history of Bolton General Hospital from its opening as a workhouse in 1860 to the present
Mrs. Connor

18 May

Annual Visit — a guided tour of Wet Earct Colliery surface features, 7p.m.

Meetings are held at Tyldesley Pensioners Club, Milk Street, Tyldesley at 7.30 p.m. Entrance is FREE. For further details contact the Secretary (0942 893241)

Wigan Archeological Society

The society meets in the History Shop on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. For further details contact Bill Aldridge, 5 The Beacons, Appley Bridge, Wigan WN6 8DU (0257 252529 or 0772 34051)

Wigan Civic Trust

For information, contact Anthony Grimshaw, Secretary (0942 45777)


Wigan Family History Society

Meetings are held twice monthly at the Seven Stars Hotel, Walgate, Wigan. For details contact Len Marsden, Secretary (0942 217764)

continued from p.16

- A clue qualifier trail.
- A chance to see the murder/suicide scene for yourself and then work undercover observing events at Hallywell Hall including the opportunity to attend the Hallywell Banquet where you will dine with Lord and Lady Hallywell.
- An invitation to attend the Hallywell Music Hall in the Palace of Varieties.
- An opportunity to interrogate the suspects.
- Return on Sunday morning and have another opportunity to ask more questions before putting your case and finding out whodunnit!
- Price includes a free day pass ticket to Wigan Pier on the Sunday.

Prices start from £19.50. The next murder weekend takes place November 26/27. For details of this and other Murder Weekends please call the booking office at Wigan Pier on 0942 323666.



WIGAN PIER THEATRE COMPANY
in association with
WIGAN PIER YOUTH THEATRE



present

Christmas Carol

by CHARLES DICKENS

A brand new and completely original musical adaptation of Dickens' festive favourite

A must for all the family

Specially written to celebrate Metropolitan Wigan's participation in the Year of Drama 1994

Adapted for the stage by Edward Applewhite
Music by David Powell
Stage Design & Management by Colin Hurst



Proudly supported by METROPOLITAN WIGAN

at The Mill at the Pier,
Wigan Pier, Wigan,
from 8th - 16th December

Performances:
Matinee 2.30pm, Evening 7.45pm
(Please note - there are no performances on 12th Dec.)

Tickets
Adults £5.50
Concessionary/Line Members £3.50
Family Tickets (2 adults & 2 children) £15.00
Group bookings & school parties welcome -
Price reductions available upon request.

Ticket Office
Wigan Tourist Information
(0942) 825677
Leigh Turnpike Centre
(0942) 604131
Group and School Bookings
and other enquiries
(0942) 323666

The Wigan Pier Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges the kind support of
Courtauld's Textile Home-wear
and Lathom Van Hire

The project has received financial assistance from **bsis**



Tom Who?

I am enclosing photographs which may interest you. I am afraid I know nothing of Tom Hughes, even though I am one of the "spring chicks" on one photograph.

My father, who was Harry Lees, must have known him. My father was a keen cyclist for many years and most

Sundays he met other cyclists to go out into the country.

I hope you can perhaps use the photos.

Mrs. Marjorie Stevenson,
Hazel Grove, Stockport.

• Those readers who keep all their copies of 'Past Forward' will find a double-spread on 'Owd' Tom Hughes in issue No. 4. Ed.



Above: Tom Hughes, founder of the 'Autumn Tints' Cycling Comrades. Eligibility for membership (either sex) is 50 years of age. Right: Tom with arms folded (front), and members of his 'tints' on 14th June, 1942.

The Nicest Place to Live

I thank you for the kind appreciation of the poem "The Winding Engine" which you saw fit to publish in Issue No. 7 of "Past Forward", — nice to see ones efforts are appreciated now and then.

Although I have been away from Wigan some forty years or more I still regard it as "home" whenever I refer to it.

I was born and brought up in Abram in the 1920's and have always said it was the nicest place to live despite how hard times ere then; we had all the wide open fields in which to roam around and we managed to find enough to keep us amused without resorting to any mischief. (We also had a smashing football team, all amateurs but what enjoyment they provided).

Warrington Road had a surface of granite setts and I remember watching the pavior renewing worn patches. How expert he was at the job, laying the new setts to match the road camber, tap-

ping them into position then giving them a solid wallop with his "pummer" to bed them in, after which he would fill the gaps with small chippings which were followed by a dose of tar poured in from an old watering-can — real tar too, that was, with a glorious smell, and reputed to be a cure for any chest ailments such as bronchitis or asthma. For many years I thought that the old tar-boiler was Stephenson's "Rocket", as it had the same outline, and on one ever thought to enlighten me; if I remember rightly the pavior's name was Edwin Prescott.

When anyone was seriously ill, straw was laid on the road to deaden the sound of the iron-rimmed cart wheels — there was very little other traffic then.

How nice it was to follow the old lamp-lighter as he went along with his pole bringing the gas-lamps to life — very handy these gas-

lamps were for naughty lads to climb up to light a fire-work or a very illicit cigarette (made mostly from old "dog-ends").

Friday nights would bring Seth Ratcliffe from Platt Bridge with his cart full of fruit and veg, fish and rabbits at 1s 6d a pair. You could choose your own and Seth would skin and clean them in a twinkling; all they would need then would be a good wash, then into a big dish with a bit of stew-beef, carrots, barley and onion, topped off with a nice thick suet crust and you had a feed fit for a king!

Alas, all this and much more is past and gone, but memories are still alive and treasured.

A small donation is enclosed towards the upkeep of "Past Forward"; would that it could be more, but pensions do not allow it.

Best regards,

T.G. Quinn,
Southport, Lancs.



A CRUISE BACK IN TIME

AROUND 75 people from Standish and district took to the water on a fine autumn day to sample the atmosphere and learn a little of the history of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal during this year's Standish Festival. Following the success of historical coach tours of the Standish area during the previous two Festivals, it was decided to try something a little different this year. Participants travelled by coach from Standish to The Crawford Arms at Red Rock, where they embarked on Arthur, a modern narrow boat built in traditional style. They cruised at a leisurely pace as far as Hall Lane Bridge at Haigh, listening to a commentary by

the Heritage Service's Archivist Nicholas Webb.

A surprising variety of features can be seen and recalled along this stretch of a mile or so of water. Three modes of transport have converged at Red Rock Bridge, each enjoying its own heyday — the road from Haigh to Standish, the canal itself, and the railway which closed in 1960. The canal was originally part of the Lancaster Canal which was connected to the Leeds-Liverpool at Haigh in 1816 to complete the trans-Pennine route. On the official opening day the company's barge was saluted by Lord Crawford with cannon as it passed Haigh. He

had been instrumental in bringing the canal through Haigh Park, largely for the benefit of his collieries. Stone was brought from Parbold along the canal for the rebuilding of Haigh Hall in the 1830's and '40's.

Other sites en route included the scene of the notorious 'Button Pit Murder' near Bawk House in 1863, and Basin Quay, where raw materials for Haigh Foundry were unloaded, and more recently Wigan Rowing Club had their boathouse. On the return journey passengers were soothed by the music of Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Handel, and were fortified with afternoon tea at the vestry on their return to Standish. Three identical cruises were made in the day, the success of

which was due to the skill of the boatmen, the comfort of the boat and the planning of the Festival Committee.

Standish Festival is now in its eighth year, and has secured an important place in Wigan Metro's cultural and artistic life. The Heritage Service this year has contributed, besides the Cruise, another showing for its historical exhibition on Standish in the Library, and a photographic quiz for all ages based on items in the archives.

If you would like information about future Standish Festival events please write to The Secretary, Standish Festival, 17 Milton Grove, Orrell, Wigan WN5 8HT.

N.W.

On the 'Wrong Side of the Blanket'

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for printing my letter 'Awd Joe Ambrose Wench', in a copy of Past Forward last year. I had a good result from the enquiry as to why local people referred to my great grandfather (Pilkington) as AMBROSE. Well the mystery has been unravelled thanks to the kindness of a gentleman at Wigan Register Office, who provided me with the necessary certificates. These showed that as my family had suspected, there were a lot of births on the 'wrong side of the blanket'; in fact Pilkington was the maiden name of great great grandma (Nancy) who eventually married the father of her children, whose surname was Ambrose, although the children had already been registered as Pilkington. Mystery solved, and thanks to readers of Past Forward.

Well after that success, my family decided that you or your readers may be able to help us yet again. Please find

enclosed two photographs (which you may keep for your collection). They belonged to my grandmother Gertrude Brown, who lived at 58 Shevington Moor, Standish (opposite the Hesketh Arms) when she was a young girl, 1901-1918. Later she married my grandfather Joseph Pilkington from Rectory Lane, Standish.

The first photograph is of a football team, c. 1914-18, from either Standish, Shevington or maybe even Wrightington. The lad on the far right of the front row also features in a later portrait photo that we have; other than that we know nothing of the photograph. Can you help?

The other photograph of nurses and, we think, ambulance men dates from the 1920's. On the back of the original is written the following:-

"This is the group that formed the Guard of Honour for the Old Colonel; there is only me on it that you know, I am one of the three on the back row, Annie."

Annie was my great Aunt, Anne Simm Pilkington, seen here on the right of the three nurses who are standing. Can anyone help us to discover who the old Colonel was? What was the event? What was the organisation's name — St. Johns, Red Cross etc..? We presume the W.C.C. is Wigan Cricket Club.

Thank you for your help and

for the very informative and interesting magazine, Past Forward. We hope that it goes from strength to strength. We also hope that you find the photos of interest.

Mrs. L.C. Peterson
Westview Cottage
West End
Stainforth
Doncaster
South Yorkshire



If you would like to receive future editions of 'Past Forward' through the post, please complete the coupon (unless you have already sent one previously) and post to:

The Heritage Services Manager, Editor, 'Past Forward', The Heritage Service, Market Suite, Market Hall, The Galleries, Wigan WN1 1PX.

NAME

ADDRESS

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.....

I enclose a contribution of £.....towards production costs.
(Please make all cheques payable to 'Wigan MBC')

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November 1994

Who, Where and When?



Two of the four mystery photographs in 'Past Forward 7' have now been identified — Billinge School, Main Street c. 1929 (top), and Pemberton Primary School, Norley Hall Avenue.

If you can identify the photographs shown here, please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (0942 404432)