PAST FORWARD

ISSUE NUMBER ELEVEN AUTUMN 1995

WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

1995 has been a year of commemoration, and this, the last issue of 'Past Forward' for the year, contains two further articles on World War II. On p.12 you will find the final part of Mrs Fleming's splendid article, in which she recollects the war years in Ashton-in-Makerfield. By way of contrast, Derek Bullock of Atherton Heritage Society has contributed a thought-provoking article written from the perspective of one born after the War. A review of the History Shop's two commemorative exhibitions appears on p.16.

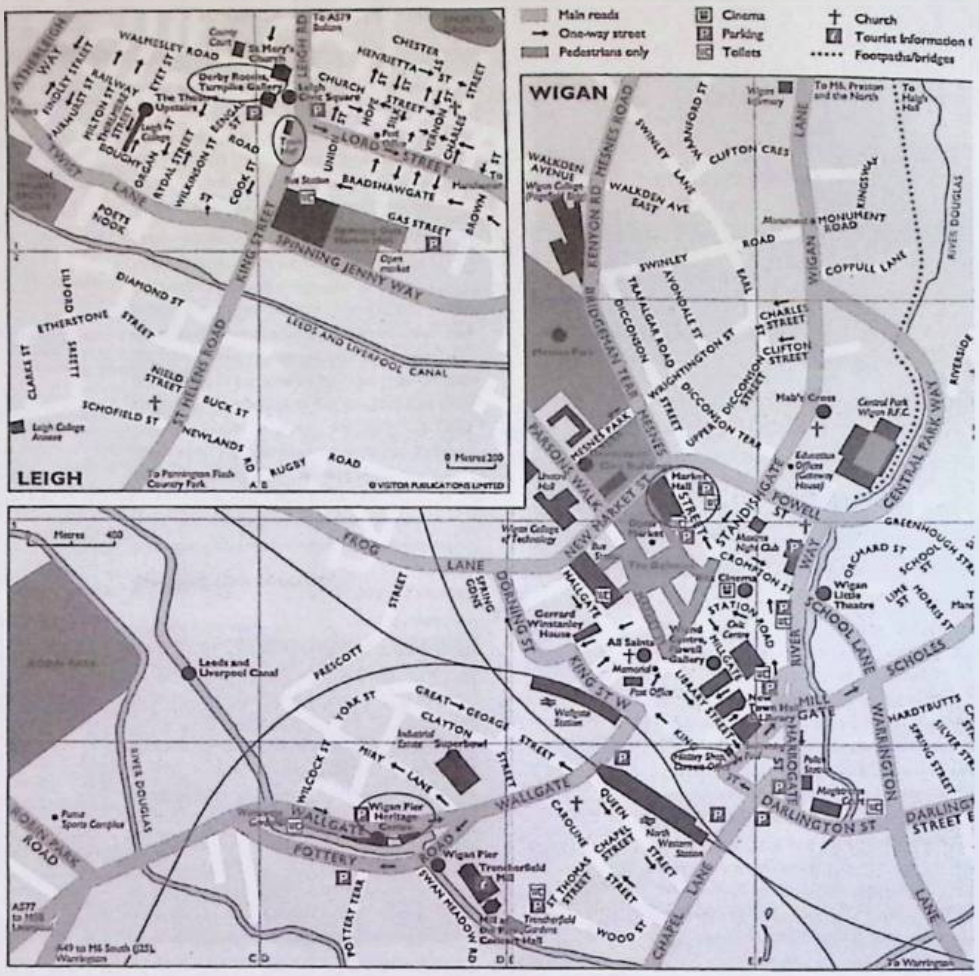
The 750th anniversary of Wigan's first charter falls, fortuitously, on August Bank Holiday Monday, 1996. A number of commemorative events are being planned for the months around that date, including a charter exhibition, gala at Haigh Hall, educational workshops, and a series of commemorative publications – further details in 'Past Forward' No.12, out in March.

You will find a brief questionnaire inside this of 'Past Forward', asking for readers' views on the newsletter, and the History Shop. Visitors to the History Shop in the coming months will also be asked to complete a more detailed questionnaire. These forms have been designed to enable us to be more responsive to the needs and wishes of our customers. So do, please, take a few minutes to complete them - in return, all completed questionnaires will be entered into a draw for a couple of very worthwhile prizes kindly donated by local businesses.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed, in whatever form, to 'Past Forward' during 1995, and a very Merry Christmas and prosperous New Year to all our readers. And don't forget the History Shop for your Christmas gifts (see p.19).

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:
Editor, 'Past Forward', Wigan Heritage Service, Market Suite, The Galleries, Wigan. WN1 1PX

For those readers who are unsure about the exact location of our various services, this map shows the main Heritage Service outlets in Wigan and Leigh.



At Wigan:

Market Suite, The Galleries—
Heritage Services Manager (and Editor of Past Forward)
Alastair Gillies ..... (01942) 827375
Fax: (01942) 827371

History Shop—
Visitor Services Manager *Philip Butler* ..... (01942) 827594
Education and Outreach Manager (and Local History, West) *Bob Blakeman* ..... (01942) 828020
Collections Development Manager *Yvonne Webb* ..... (01942) 828123
Heritage Officer (Industrial History) *Mike Haddon* ..... (01942) 828121
Heritage Officer (Social History) *Dawn Wadsworth* ..... (01942) 828124
Heritage Assistant *Hilary Fairclough* ..... (01942) 828122
Heritage Assistant *Barbara Miller* ..... (01942) 828122
Heritage Assistant *Stephanie Tsang* ..... (01942) 828122
Fax: (01942) 827645

Wigan Pier—
Technician *Denise Bryce* ..... (01942) 828564
Technician *Roy Wareing* ..... (01942) 323666

At Leigh:

Archives, Town Hall—
Heritage Officer (Archives) *Nicholas Webb* ..... (01942) 404430
Senior Technician *Len Hudson* ..... (01942) 404432

Turnpike Centre, Leigh Library —
Heritage Officer (Local History) *Tony Ashcroft* ..... (01942) 404559

If you have an enquiry, and are not sure who the most appropriate person is to contact, please ring the History Shop (01942 828128).

Cover: All Smiles! Girl workers, taken by an unkown photographer (c.1915). They are employees of Howe Bridge Mills Spinning Company, Mealhouse Lane, Atherton, and form part of an unusual set of glass plate negatives recently donated to the Heritage Service's photographic collection. (See p.4)

ERNIE TABERNER continues his 'I Remember When' series with some more motoring memories.

I REMEMBER WHEN...

The owner of a vehicle, car or commercial, used to get real service and didn't have to pay exorbitant charges as they do these days. There were only two establishments in my home town specialising in auto electrical repairs and only one – ours – specialising in magneto repairs up to the outbreak of the 1939-45 war, so there wasn't much competition.

My job was to tour all the local garages and those in the outlying districts carrying batteries, dynamos, distributors, all electrical components and sparking plugs, etc. to replenish garage stocks – used up since my last visit, several days previously. Sometimes before starting my rounds (especially in the winter months) I would get an emergency call from someone who couldn't get his car or van to start, because either his battery wasn't holding its charge, or had been discharged trying to start a sluggish engine. I would go out to him, remove his battery and loan him a fully charged one whilst we charged his own for 48 hours on our charging unit. Cost 5s. (25p) for new acid and charge plus 1s. per day for loaned battery (usually for two days). Total 7s. (35p). Call out charge – nil! Removing old battery and replacing with fully charged unit – nil!

Giving a service

You may now be asking, especially if you're in the motor trade, how on earth did we survive, and the answer would have to be "by giving a service that couldn't be bettered by anyone". By doing so the customer would come back to us when he needed a new battery, dynamo (there were no alternators yet), starter, etc. The profit from the sale of these units covered us for the losses on the other items.

For instance, a customer would come in with a faulty light and on examination it was found he or she only needed a new bulb. The old bulb would be removed, sometimes entailing removing a seized up screw, and the new one fitted. No charge. Our profit from the sale of the new bulb was about 7d. (3p approx). Should a vehicle be immobilised we would tow him in – no charge, remove his faulty unit – no charge, fit replacement unit – no charge except the cost of the FRU (factory replacement unit) reconditioned at the original manufacturer's factory, usually Joseph Lucas Ltd. in Birmingham or A. C. Delco in Dunstable.

Because of temporary excessive demand, meaning we were out of stock, we would ring Birmingham before lunch, say, and a replacement would be taken to New Street Station in Birmingham by messenger, handed to the guard of the next train to my home town 100 miles away, to be collected. I would meet the train, say, about 2.30 p.m., to take the part to our garage where it would be fitted that afternoon by 4.00 p.m. or 4.30 p.m. The customer could then collect his vehicle by 5.00 p.m. or 5.30 p.m. Maximum time of VOR (vehicle off road) – about six or seven hours from breakdown to fully serviced! Cost? Just the cost of the replacement part!

Paid bills on time

That's service for you and your granddad not only expected it but got it. One thing, however, made a deal of a difference in those days, otherwise we couldn't give that service – people paid bills on time! There was only one exception – a travelling showman who always called when the local fair was in town in May and October. He would call in with one or two magnetos to be serviced (which he had removed from his heavy towing units with which he hauled his amusement rides around the north).

Even when not hauling, the vehicles' engines were constantly running, driving the dynamos necessary to provide current for the rides and side shows, so a magneto failure would cripple him financially, and in consequence he always kept two reconditioned units as spares. When he brought them in he always insisted on the full treatment, new field coils, new slip rings, new tungsten contacts, magnets fully remagnetised – in fact, new in every respect except the outer shell. When he called in May, he would pay for the previous October's repairs and again in October he would pay for the previous May's repairs. The method of payment was always the same. He would empty his two linen bags containing pennies, sixpences and shillings on the counter of the reception area, leaving the office staff to count it, shake hands with the boss, and disappear until the next fair.

Incidentally, the amount was always correct. If only such trust and service existed these days, what a better trading atmosphere would prevail.

Certainly his bill could be truthfully endorsed "Paid in Cash".

(Ernie's book, 'A Lancashire Upbringing', is available from the History Shop. See also p.20). Ed.

News from the Archives

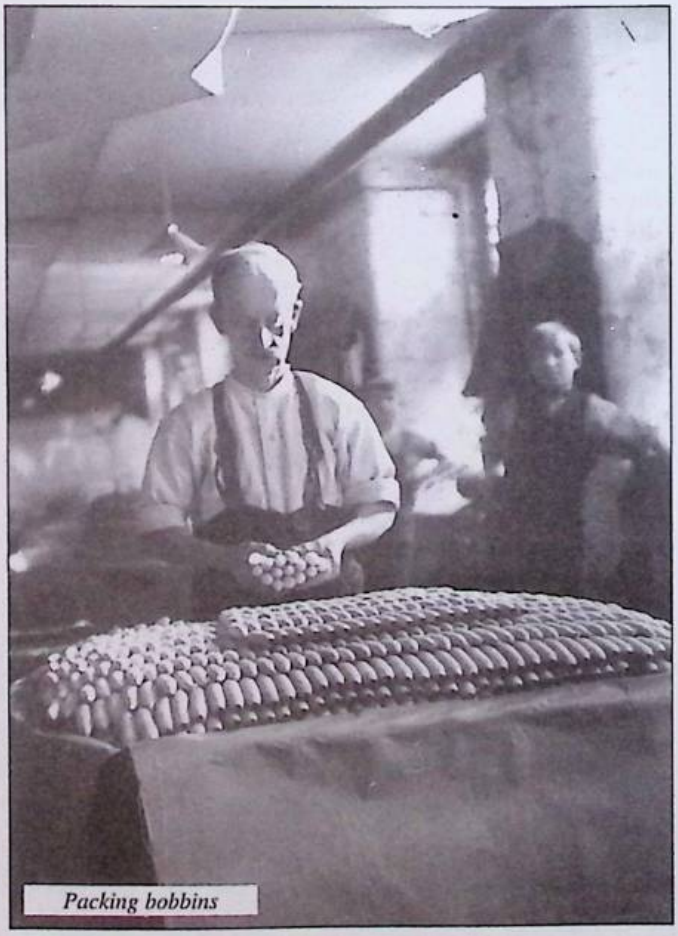
An unusual set of glass plate negatives, taken by an unknown amateur photographer around 1915, has been kindly donated for the photographic collection by Mr. F. Elcock of Atherton. There are 16 views in all, and despite some damage and wear to the originals, the Heritage Service's photographer Len Hudson has produced a fine set of prints from the plates. A selection is reproduced here. The photographs depict scenes at the Howe Bridge Spinning Company's mills on Mealhouse Lane, Atherton. Exterior views include groups of juvenile workers of both sexes (the young girls wearing trousers), and a possibly unique one showing women playing hockey on rough grassland in front of the mill. Interior views show some of the processes in cotton spinning, and unusual scenes of an office staffed by two women (one hatted) and the factory floor at tea break-time. The depth of field of these plates records vivid details and gives the modern viewer a great sense of being present in the mill.

Howe Bridge Mills began as an independent company in 1868. James Fletcher and Abraham Burrows of Fletcher-Burrows Collieries were chairman and vice-chairman respectively. Six mills were built altogether, the last during the brief post-1918 boom. In 1929 at the beginning of the Great Depression, when the textile industry was already suffering from foreign competition, the company merged with Combined Egyptian Mills which later became part of the Viyella group. Two of the Howe Bridge Mills were demolished in 1965.

N.W.

In the office

Play time



Packing bobbins

Tea break

Unloading cotton bales: The wagon belonged to Samuel Platt of Crab Brow Farm, Atherton.

A schoolgirl's reminiscences of life on the Pit Brow at Victoria Colliery, Standish, during the early 1950's.

During my school summer holidays in the early 1950's, I often visited Victoria Colliery with my father and uncle who were coal merchants. The purpose of these visits was to collect pit props and sleepers from the colliery timber yard. This timber was eventualy turned into firewood and sold to our customers, as blocks at 2s. 6d. for approximately 30, or as bundles of sticks at 1½d. per bundle, or 1s. 6d. per dozen.

Whilst the lorry was being loaded I was given the opportunity to visit my great aunt at work. Having been allowed to climb the open wooden staircase to the pit brow, I would look for my great aunt and her friend who, like many other local women, were pit brow lasses. During the 19th century and early 20th century the collieries in Standish had been major employers of women as well as men, and prior to marriage both my grandmothers worked at Broomfield and Prospect Pits. The pit brow lasses who worked at Victoria Colliery during the early 1950's, however, were the last women to be employed at a Standish colliery.

My great aunt worked for 47 years on the 'shakers', as the belts used for screening the coal were called. Having started work in 1906, at 13 years of age at Prospect Pit, then transferring to Victoria Colliery in 1908, she remained there until her retirement in 1953, at the age of 60 years. Life on the pit brow was arduous, but nevertheless, the women always seemed cheerful. Many including my great aunt were small in stature, and although their primary task was to sort the dirt from the coal by hand, other laborious tasks, such as filling coal and breaking large pieces of coal, formed part of the daily routine.

The pit brow itself was covered only by a structure of timber and corrugated tins; consequently, the changing seasons created problems in this hostile working environment. In winter the wind blew across the elevated pit brow making it extremely cold and draughty. The women had to work with their coats on, and wore gloves without fingers on their icy hands. In summer, by contrast, the pit brow was very hot and dusty; the women,therefore, wore long sleeved overalls to protect their arms from the dust, which could cause dermatitis. They also wore dust caps to cover their hair, black stockings and clogs.

Due to the lack of adequate washing facilities on the pit brow the women could only wash their hands before lunch; soap and towels were, however, issued to all colliery workers annually. My great aunt carried her soap and towel and lunch, to work in a small case, together with her cup, and three small tins containing tea, sugar and Nestles milk.

At the end of the working day all the pit brow lassies would walk up Lurdin Lane together, to catch the bus into Standish. My great aunt always called at our house on her way home, as my grandmother (her sister) had a cup of tea and a snack waiting for her. Both of them would then listen to Mrs. Dale's Diary on the radio, but my great aunt often fell asleep in the chair before the episode had ended – she was very tired, and deserved a well earned rest after a hard day at work on the pit brow.

Freda Farrimond,
Standish, Nr. Wigan.

FURTHER STONE-AGE DISCOVERIES IN UPHOLLAND

On 29 July, 1995 farmer Harry Bostock of Jollies i'th Dean Farm, Upholland, along with two other gentlemen discovered a stone skull, when he opened up a Stone-Age site or grave. Over recent months Mr. Bostock has made many exciting discoveries in the glacial sand he has been excavating. The skull was probably buried after the fourth ice-age and may be up to 100,000 years old. It is his most exciting discovery to-date. Adjacent to the skull he also found a "stone-hand vice", used by prehistoric hunters to sharpen their wooden weapons. Experts from the Sites and Monuments Records at Lancaster University gave Harry the go-ahead to investigate his find. In order to do this he used a hand pick and broke through the stone and dried mud which covered the site. He found the skull lying snuggly in the glacial sand beneath its rock hard covering. It lay exactly in a North/South direction, adjacent to which he found a spear shaving vice.

His finds listed to-date are as follows:

a) Large granite boulder, a saddle-stone', used for grinding berries and nuts.

b) Two rubbing stones used in conjunction with the above.

c) A small stone tooth or nail file.

d) Two flints, one used for skinning animals, the other's use unknown at present.

e) Three skin cleaning stones or scrapers, one of which is a tree fossil.

f) A spear sharpening stone-vice, still bearing marks of human and animal grease.

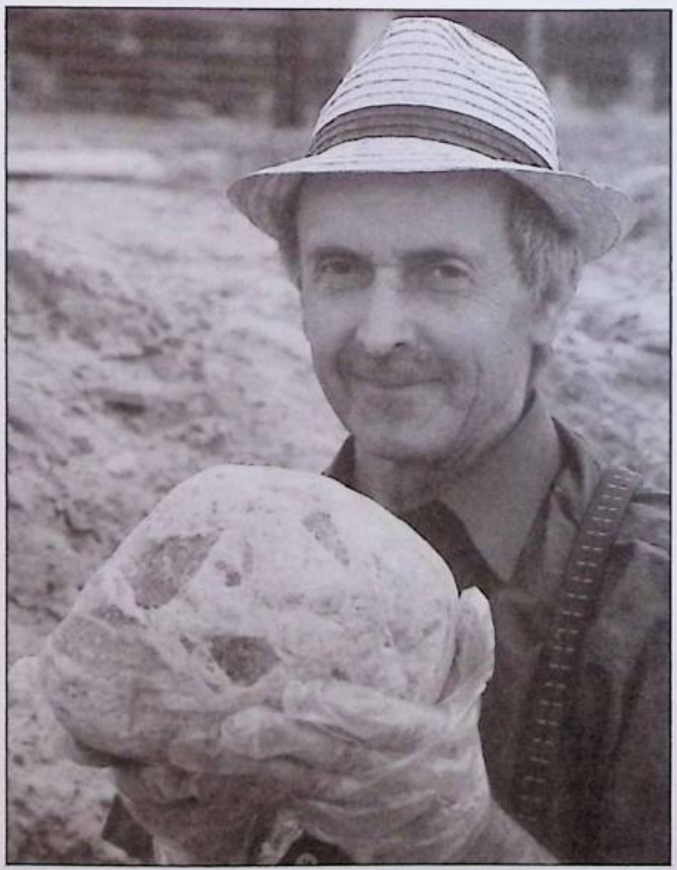
g) Religious sandstone, a "sun sign" or perhaps an early identification stone.

h) Finally Harry's unique discovery to date – a stone, shaped in the form of a human skull, weighing 23 lbs (10.4 kgs).

This stone, the source of which is unknown to the author, is unfamiliar and not of local origin.

Meanwhile Harry is continuing with his exciting excavations. He still hopes for more interesting discoveries and for more mysteries of man's past to be solved. Speculations abound but hard facts are difficult to come-by.

Francis B. Rylance



Farmer Harry Bostock, with his unique discovery of a stone shaped in the form of a human skull

Photo courtesy of Lancashire Evening Post

NOTES ON JACOB ROBSON, FIRST VICAR OF TYLDESLEY

Jacob Robson was born on 27 June 1799, one of the five children of a Northumbrian farmer. The family lived at that time at East Kielder Farm, in the North Tyne valley just south of the Scottish border. Where Jacob went to school we do not know. The sons of his younger brother John all attended Merchiston Castle School in Edinburgh, but this only opened in 1833. It is possible that Jacob was educated at a small academy in Edinburgh run by Dr. Chalmers before he set up Merchiston - there was certainly money in the family - and then he was admitted at the age of 25 to Emanuel College, Cambridge as a "sizar" (a student who received help with living expenses in return for performing menial tasks in college). He read Divinity as a "ten year man". Under the Elizabethan statutes of the University a man who became a member of a college over the age of 24, studied theology and kept his name on the books for ten years was then entitled to proceed to the degree of Bachelor of Divinity without taking any previous degree. Eventually this became a way of getting a degree without any formal study.

First incumbent

He was appointed first incumbent of the new parish of Tyldesley in 1825, as a curate. The church of St. George had just been erected by the Church Commissioners; the bells had been cast in Leigh and brought to Tyldesley by horse and cart. Tyldesley became an independent parish in 1829, and Jacob eventually was promoted to vicar in his own right in 1842. The patron of the parish was Lord Lilford and he "presented" the first three incumbents before the advowson was transferred to the Bishop of Manchester in 1866.

The Reverend Jacob Robson lived at Ivy House (not the present vicarage). He seemed to have been popular in the town and involved himself totally in the community. For a few years in the 1830's a cattle market was held in the Market Square on the last Monday in September. In addition to being one of the organisers, Jacob led the procession which preceded the fair. He also appeared to support teetotalism as he allowed the use of the church for temperance meetings.

Dispute

He was involved, probably reluctantly, in a dispute over the church rate levied upon all the townspeople to meet the running costs of the church, regardless of whether they were Anglican or Nonconformist. This was naturally very unpopular and discontent came to a head in 1837 at a public vestry meeting at which Minister Langridge of the Top Chapel moved that it be abolished, but the objectors failed to get a majority. (The rate yielded just over £24 10s. 0d. per annum). Other income came from renting pews. These were high and straight-backed with a door at each end. People who could not afford one had to sit on crude benches which were much more uncomfortable. In a letter home in 1829 Jacob mentions a ball to be held for church funds. He also mentions a new sounding board over the pulpit. He himself would have been severely dressed for services in a black gown with white clerical bands. The Lords Prayer and the Creed were inscribed in large decorated letters on the end wall for the benefit of those who did not have books.

"Tyldesley not Tildesley"

It was Jacob who decided the present-day spelling of Tyldesley. At the end of 1833 he put a note in the Register of Baptisms: "In accordance with what I conceive to be the general usage of the neighbourhood and more particularly the Courts of the County and Diocese, I now intend to write Tyldesley and not Tildesley".

"Fireside companion"

We have another of his letters to his parents from 1830. He had been home to Kielder for a visit, and describes his four day journey back to his parish on a pony, via Alston, Cross Fell and Penrith. The weather was bad, and he nearly lost his hat and umbrella on the Fell. He also mentions in this letter his regret at not having a "fireside companion" to share his life. Fairly shortly after this he found such a companion and married Thomasine Pennington Cowling, daughter of Dr. Richard Cowling of Wigan. Sad to relate, Thomasine died a couple of years later on 17 June 1835, ten days before Jacob's birthday. She was only 28 years old. There were no children. Her death may have been in childbirth. (Until recently, a stillborn baby, which did not live to be baptised, was not regarded by the Church of England as a human being, and could not be buried in consecrated ground, so would not have been recorded on the mother's headstone).

In December 1839 he married again. His second wife was Anne Eccles. She was the daughter of William Eccles, a substantial businessman and mill owner of King Street, Wigan. They had four children. Little Jacob died in infancy, while his younger brother John died when only one year old. Their third son William Eccles was born in 1845 and survived. Then they had a daughter Elizabeth Catherine, born c. 1846.

The Reverend Jacob died on 19 January 1851, aged 52 years, and is buried in his own churchyard at Tyldesley. Three years later, little Elizabeth Catherine died aged eight, leaving the widowed Anne with just the one son, William Eccles. She took him back to his relatives in Tynedale around this time to live, instead of staying in the Wigan area with her own Eccles family, despite her brothers all being wealthy citizens, town councillors, magistrates and so on.

Fascinating Questions

There are many fascinating questions about the Reverend Jacob. Why did a farmer's son from the very north of Northumberland decide to go to Cambridge and then take Holy Orders? (His younger brother John stayed at home and his descendants, many also called Jacob, were prominent and propserous farmers, educated at Public School, Masters of Foxhounds and on good terms with the Duke of Northumberland). How did he end up with a parish in Lancashire? Did he retain his Northumbrian accent? What was life like amongst the mills and slums of the new industrial towns of Lancashire, with appalling hours of work, gin-drinking, disease, child labour, the Chartist Movement, strikes and lock-outs? He was obviously one of the "establishment", for he married into a mill-owning family, but he must have been strongly motivated to do good for his parishioners, so how did he get on with his father-in-law over politics and social questions?

He suffered great sadness, with the deaths of his first wife and then of two out of his four children (he would not know that yet another was to die shortly after him). To jump ahead, his son William Eccles Robson was to die at the early age of 34 of tuberculosis, which raises the question whether it was rife in Tyldesley. If the earlier deaths had been from the same disease, it might explain why Anne brought her only remaining child back to the Robsons in Tynedale to get him away from it and into the fresh country air, but alas too late. She herself outlived him and died on 16 January 1889. She is buried in Greystead churchyard beside the North Tyne near Kielder.

R.H. Robson
Houghton le Spring
Tyne and Wear.

We remember them too!

This summer marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, with massive celebrations, quite rightly aimed at the generation who participated and perhaps understand those dark days best. Unfortunately for those of my own generation (i.e. born during the ten or so post-war years) our views of these historic events will go without comment! Sadly this will happen despite this war onstensibly being fought on our behalf and ignoring our own unique knowledge of the times gained through personal contacts with family and friends.

Indelible mark

My own insight into those war years has broadened and deepened as each personal conversation with those able to recall their own unique experiences of this destructive era has added to my own overview. A child's eye-view of "doodle-bugs" exploding in South London streets, their sheer destructive power leaving an indelible mark on his memory. Grandad sheltering under the kitchen table – refusing to surrender to the Heinkel's bombs, Grandma feeding with fish and chips from her shop survivors of Dunkirk, as they passed through Wigan on their long march northwards, at no charge of course. Blackout seductions in a Lancashire signal box of trainee women doing their "war service". Others robbed banana trains to help line the pockets of black-market profiteers, on the Whelley loop line in Wigan that has long since gone.

"Hell Hole"

Cameron Highlanders visits to Sudanese brothels, only to be raided by the M.P.'s. Serving with the B.E.F. in the Maginot Line, with the phoney war followed by a "Hot War" on the beaches of Dunkirk. Then shipped out east to the "hell-hole" of Kohima in the Burmese hills. Fighting with Monty' in the tanks and shrapnel, with wounds that will never heal. Anzio beach was an expensive victory, only compensated by a warm Naples welcome. Monte Cassino with those brave Polish forces fighting to the end at the foot of this holy mountain. With Italy finally falling to them all, those Desert Rats' certainly deserved their campaign medals!

All of these stories and many more helped expand my knowledge of these moments of history; yet family memories are the most poignant of course, especially when they involve both sides of the story – victory and defeat can both be painful, each extracting a terrible price!

Executions

Through a Polish wife I soon discovered many heart-rending tales of the personal price defeat in war brings. I've seen and experienced survivals of this all-out war in a Poland that will never be the same. The memorials seemingly on every street corner, remembering executions of Warsaw's Underground Armies, 25 here, 40 there, all ratchet up the awful score – killed by the firing squad men, women and children too! On the Vistula's eastern bank the pre-war buildings of Praga remain pockmarked, but still lived in, a testimony to a frantic street campaign.

The writer's father, William Frederick Bullock, in the Far East, 1946, shortly before returning home

Her wrists tattooed with extermination camp number, discovered in a most unusual way buying stamps in a Warsaw shop, she proudly displayed her past pains!

From Westerplatte to Warszawa this war had unfolded, evils upon evils heaped together, with slave-labour 'death camps' and long forced marches. All these and much worse, deeply affected the Poles – including those inflicted by our 'old friend' Joe Stalin!

Secret weapons

A baby, born in Ravensbruck, survives in a suburban tower-block, her father long since executed, her mother's pain never-ending. An A.K. woman fighter today, not really looking the part; fighting in the Warsaw uprising against both the 'Reds' and the Nazis, at the end of the war brought only disgrace. Her secret weapons were hidden under the very eyes of the evil Gestapo officers, behind panels of a Warsaw 'salon'. Providing them with cakes and coffee by day and death by night!

Then there was my father-in-law. Newly qualified as an engineer, he was shipped into Germany as a slave-labourer suffering a terrible ordeal. He witnessed the tests at Peenemunde of VIs under development, including some strapped beneath German aircraft. His most distressing times, however, came later during the massed bomber attacks on nearby Hamburg. Those air-raids continued relentlessly Americans by day, the British at night. With mixed emotions he watched some crashing in flames, their crews parachuting into the Nazis arms. After the firestorm receded it left a grisly aftermath, a terrible carnage of burned bodies in the streets and cellars – never would he forget those images!

Live on

What of my own experience of visiting this tortured land, seeing for myself those places that to most are only names on maps or in books? The 'chilling' inside of an Auzchwitz gas chamber. I've stayed in a house built on the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto in Muranow; only ghosts now remain. Other lasting reminders of history's evil men at work remain in Warsaw – the last desperate thoughts scrawled on the walls of a Gestapo prison cell by a doomed A.K. fighter. His memory will always live on!

Hitler's bombed bunker, a monument to an ill-fated missed opportunity – this East Prussian complex survives with its eerie past intact. A nearby unfinished autobahn, a pre-war Nazi fantasy of joining both parts of the Fatherland across Polish territory. Historic Danzig and the heart of Berlin each added to my sense of history.

All these poeple and places contributed to my ever expanding understanding of those times. I must, however, rate my own father's experiences as having the most decisive influence on my views.

Direct hit

At the height of the Liverpool blitz, whilst approaching the city by train from the East, the adjoining Edge Hill gasworks received a direct hit. The gasometer rose dramatically skywards, like a rocket taking off. A ball of flame rolled down the road, an awesome sight to witness and to survive!

In 1940 Lancashire's Horwich Loco Works produced Bren-Gun carriers, as part of its contribution to the war effort. Whilst cycling to work with a mate, along the road the carriers were driven, they came under air-attack from a Heinkel marauding across the county. Diving immediately into an adjoining hedgerow they survived to fight another day.

Whilst en-route to India, via the Cape, his troopship called into Freetown, a port in the (then) Sierra Leone in West Africa. This area is known as the "White Man's Grave", due to the prevalence of yellow fever. Unfortunately for him he caught the disease, but thankfully survived the ordeal, only to face more terrifying dangers elsewere in the Far East!

When en-route to the Far East by troopship, they put into the port of Mombasa, along with their sister ship, loaded with refugees. This latter ship left before the troopship and being mistaken for them, was sunk by a submarine, "There but for the grace of God go I", springs immediately to mind!

Breaking point

As part of Britain's forgotten 14th army fighting with their backs against the wall, facing the massing Japanese forces pressurising the 'Gateway to India' at Imphal, a personal ordeal had begun! Short of food and ammunition, surrounded and heavily outnumbered for 80 days, Allied Forces were at breaking point. Only surviving by supplies dropped by hazardous air-drops, these young men were fighting for their lives.

Suffering from malaria and dysentry, also much reduced in weight and under constant sniper fire, a fateful accident occurred. His Ack-Ack gun exploded, killing one of the crew, badly wounding another and blinding a third. My father was trapped under the gun which crushed his leg. He was taken to a field hospital. Through a "bloody haze" he heard ominous words "Would you like a wooden one or a metal one?" As a 20 year old young man this thought terrified him most, so he pleaded that they 'let it hang'. By a strange quirk of fate, the surgeon, hearing his Wigan accent, enquired about his birth place. As a doctor who had practised in the town before the war, he promised to do his utmost to help him keep his leg. Luckily for him, his leg was saved.

His war was still not ended. He visited Nagasaki, soon after the atom bomb was dropped, and was given a

A cablegram sent from Burma by William Frederick Bullock to his brother in Wigan. 1944

poignant souvenir by the British P.O.W.s – a postcard of Suwa Park, Nagazaki, its edges burnt by the flash of the explosion which ended this despicable war.

* * *

Perhaps my own recollections of others' wartime memories show that, despite not being present through these events, my own generation can still appreciate the sacrifices made by our parents those 50 years ago.

With personal respects to the wartime generation, I end with the thought, that WE REMEMBER THEM TOO.

Derek John Bullock,
Atherton

Hard Times in E

A recent addition to the holdings of original diaries and memoirs at the Archives Office has been an autobiographical MS. of some 78 pages written by William Henry Evans. Thanks to his daughter, Mrs. Pat Saungikar of Peterborough, Ontario, this has been donated to Wigan. The importance of the document lies not only in its content, but also in that it is, so far, one of the very few 20th century records of its type to have found its way to the archives.

William Evans was born on 14 July 1900, one of at least nine children of Walter Owen Evans (a journeyman cabinet-maker) and Mary Ellen Goodwin, who had married at St. George's parish church on 5 September 1896. At the time of William's birth the family lived at 5 River Street, which was a new street of terraced houses (built in the 1890's) in the Water Heyes district, directly opposite Central Park rugby ground. By 1904 the family had moved a short distance to 8 Vaughan Street. William Evans has left a record of what appears to have been an unusually poverty-stricken and difficult upbringing in the early 1900's – Wigan's last years of industrial prosperity. His descriptions of hardship and domestic squalor are a valuable antidote to the notion of the 'good old days' of the Edwardian period.

Readers may be interested in the following edited extracts, which we hope to continue in future editions of *Past Forward:*

It's now mid-summer 1960, and as I've nothing better to do, as I'm all alone, having lost my wife some years ago and my two children gone their own sweet ways....I'll try and turn the clock back about 60 years....So back we go to about 1896, four years before I was born, when mother and dad got married....dad was much older than mother by about 16 years, and mother got married at 18. [Walter was 34, Mary 19 according to the register]. Dad wore a heavy moustache and side boards, as was very popular at that time, also salt and pepper trousers as he called them, and black jacket and waistcoat with square opening at neck, plus cuffs and walking stick and bowler hat. Mother was very nice looking with her dress of that day....plus starched collar and cuffs.

Plenty of smacking

It seemed more a marriage of convenience than love....for I knew full well that I had neither my dad's or my mother's affection at any time. The first year of my life I know absolutely nothing, as is only to be expected, but one day I can remember wondering how it was that my brother and sister could walk yet I could only crawl. They both had a broad brimmed hat made of straw, and as boys and girls of that time had skirts and frocks, one didn't know boys from girls. I remember crying my heart out for a hat like theirs, only to come in for plenty of smacking....The house seemed to be very clean, and the fire irons shone very brightly - they were made of steel and had to be emery papered every day.

Before starting school proper....I hadn't any books or pencils or picture books to learn from. The only things we ever got to play with were empty cartons or empty sugar packets or any empty cartons - there was even a squabble for them, and birthdays or Christmases were almost non-existent.

Mail cart

We had at that time what was called a mail cart, what you would call a pram these days. This had a seat at either end and a space in the middle for your feet. While the two older ones were at school, mother used to take the other three of us out shopping....She always wore a veil over a very large hat, as dad would never allow her to go out without a veil. Her skirt or whatever it was almost touched the ground.

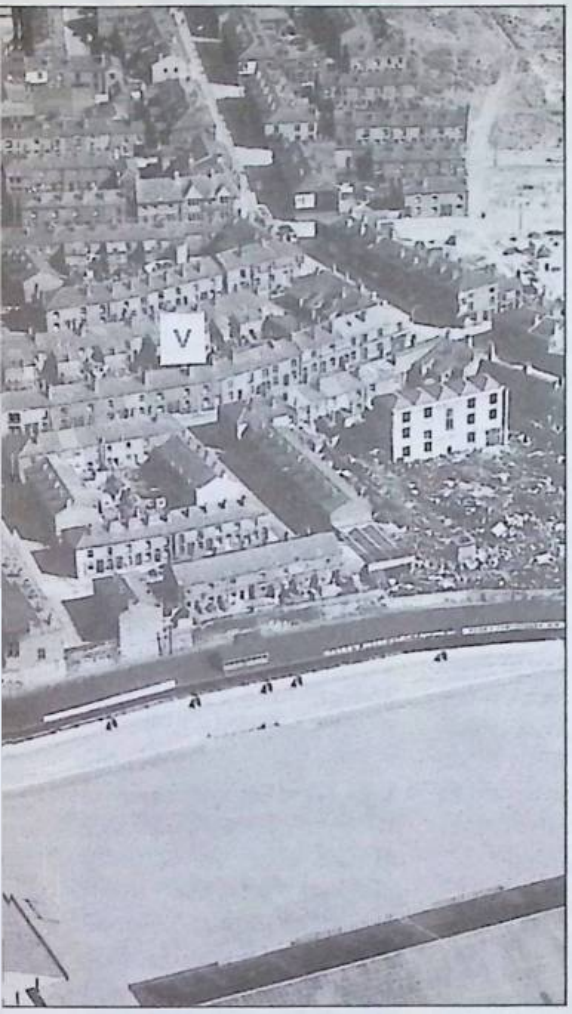
It wasn't only toys we were desperately short of but wearing apparel and food....Both mother and dad thought that one slice of bread was quite sufficient for a meal for any child, and in this respect I don't think they ever changed much. The little weight I had was slowly slipping away and I was persistently crying all day long for something to eat, and most of the night, only it didn't help any, only plenty more smacks. Each one of us was getting more or less the same treatment. So when we used to go out shopping I was always hungry, and tears running down my cheeks. People used to stop us and ask us what was the matter....the two younger children were in the mail cart one at either end, while I was running alongside. I couldn't always keep pace, as I had neither the heart nor the strength, so after a while mother lifted me into the centre of the mail cart to sit crosswise on the bottom, with two pairs of feet for company, but it was better than walking. Maybe they both had a dummy to keep them quiet, but I'd long realised that a dummy was no earthly use, unless there was something behind it, and I needed solid food not liquids.

An aerial photograph taken in 1959, shortly before the ar brought up are marked R = River Street, V = Vaughan Street where the Evans children were educated. Water Heyes cotto

Dinnertime

As dinnertime came round there was always something cooking, but it didn't make any difference to our diet; one slice of bread, by the time you'd eaten it, it just about started you off that you wanted something to eat. Occasionally we had a potato dinner, two potatoes boiled with jackets on, and a small piece of margarine for gravy - but when you got potatoes you got no bread. As the potatoes supplied less energy than the bread, we naturally began to dread the pan going on the fire with the potatoes in. Malnutrition was fast taking its toll, and I was being reduced to a skeleton. Around about this time my mind went a blank. I must have taken poorly - I'd be about 4½ years of age then, and I think it was

dwardian Wigan



was redeveloped. The houses where William Evans was and other features can be seen such as St. George's schools mill and Wigan Rugby League ground

peneumonia. The next thing I can remember....I was sleeping with my mother in the parlour, and the bed had been brought downstairs....I couldn't go out of the room, nor could any of my brothers and sisters come in to see me. I also remember having three pennies in a small box. I've no idea how I came by them....evidently they'd been given to me when I was very poorly to help to get my mind on something, as I'm afraid there was nothing in the house as could have been helpful and they couldn't waste money buying anything. If I'd any bright ideas of what I was going to do with the money they were short lived, for it disappeared the same way that it came, most probably to buy bread.

Bread poultices

When I got well enough to mix with the others, I was back where I started, to carry oon the best way I could. I didn't get anything extra to build me up - all the bread I hadn't eaten must have gone in bread poultices....nobody was worried about how thin I was, only me.

Our house .... was in a block, two rooms and a small one which dad kept shuttered off for his photography upstairs, and two rooms and what we called a back kitchen downstairs. The back yard was a small affair, only about as big as the living room, walled all around, and a wooden gate. On one side like an extension to the back kitchen, was what you would call a lavatory, just a wall built up with two large slabs of stone for roof, plus door. Dad called it a w.c. but wherever he got the w. from I'm afraid I don't know, for it consisted of a large can with two handles on, and a board across built into the walls with a large hole in the centre, which the corporation men used to empty every week. [N.B. the 'night soil men' were employed to empty middens and ash pits. Much of the 'night soil' was transported by canal to be used as manure on farmland between Wigan and Southport] I don't suppose the hole in the board was any bigger than anybody else's, but as we were all very small and extremely thin, it looked such a large hole to us. When we used it we had to keep our elbows on the side for support and the back of the hole for a back-rest, or you were in danger of slipping through. Anybody looking in the lavatory could only see your head - all the other part of you was through the hole!

Cockroaches

The place was overrun with cockroaches, mice and bugs. Cockroaches were all over the place - you couldn't move anything without them running all over the place, and the more you killed the more there seemed to be....It was more noticeable when dad decided to paper the living room and everything had to be moved. Oh my! I'd never seen so many. We hit them with everything we could, collected about two shovels full and they were only what didn't get away.

We had only one bed in our room, so we all had to sleep sardine fashion. When one felt like turning over we all had to turn over, otherwise one would slip off the bed....the times I fell out of bed, well it was more or less a nighly occurrence. Eventually they decided to put three one way and three the other. This seemed quite a good idea and I wondered why they hadn't thought of it before, but the bogey was we had only one bolster and no pillows, so we had to make shift with some old coats - these depleted our bedding as we had no sheets or blankets - we only had old overcoats and jackets, mostly dad's old ones, what they used to call a monkey jacket. We had no furniture in the bedroom, so you either put your clothes on the bed or on the floor. In case of emergency the light was left on all night. This was just a gas bracket sticking out of the wall with a jet at the end pointing upwards with a very thin slot in the middle. The flame came out fanwise, but it was a poor affair as you could hardly see anything when it was on full blast, and one of us older ones had to turn it down when we had all got settled, if that was ever possible.

Bugs on the walls

During this period as was only to be expected, we found a few bugs on the walls, so we just squashed them, drawing a line with it about five inches long. It wasn't long before all the walls had plenty of the tell tale marks on and created a smell of its own. Not content with that, we gleaned that they came out of small holes in the plaster, so we went looking for them. By this route we found more to squash. When dad found out he was furious, so they plastered all the holes up and gave the room a good coat of whitewash or limewash....only to find still more marks on the walls immediately.

Clogs if lucky

We usually had clogs if we were lucky, either given or on a clothing coupon [an installment system operated by local clothing clubs] as you paid to at a few coppers a week until you had paid £1 or whatever it was, sometimes only 10s. If you did happen to get a pair of clogs they were expected to last...As they didn't get ironed very often [i.e. fitted with fresh clog-irons] we were through the soles in no time, then it used to crack across the middle and gradually the crack would go wider and most of your foot on the floor, and they didn't half nip your feet. For stockings I had to wear mother's cashmere cast-offs. As there were no feet in already she used to trim it then stitch the toe to the heel and sew up the sides.

N.W.

The Conclusion of an excellent 3-part article by Mrs. Fleming of Ashton-in-Makerfield

Observations of life as a child in Ashton-in-Makerfield during World War II

MEDITERRANEAN CHARM

After the French the Italians were the next to hit town. They were housed in huts on Garswood Park where Byrchall High School and St. Edmund Arrowsmith High School now stand. They were perhaps our first real taste of the "enemy". The townsfolk were at first antagonistic towards them but gradually their Latin charm won us over. They were not considered to be a great risk and so were able to circulate freely in the town, but they were not expected to travel more than a five-mile radius. In place of money they had white tokens with the monetary value stamped on in black. Throughout their stay they were put to work on various projects, on local farms and in the locomotive sheds at Horwich.

Our Italians, those who came to work on our farm, built a Dutch barn for us. They were a mixture of social classes from the poor of southern Italy and Sicily right up to the prosperous business men and professional classes of Milan.

Condensation all day

Every day they were brought in a truck. My family would not allow them in the house but confined them to a dusty, dirty out-house where they ate their lunch. It so happened that was where my mother did the Monday wash in an old hand-operated Acme washing machine, a dolly tub with a copper "pozzer" as it was known. This was bell-shaped and attached to a long wooden handle with which the clothes in the dolly tub were pounded. In one corner of the outhouse was a boiler with a fire built underneath it. Here water was heated for the wash and then transferred to the washer with an aluminium ladling can. In the absence of our modern detergents clothes were boiled in this boiler to get them "whiter than white". A substance called dolly-blue enhanced the process. On a rainy day the whole wash was hung around the fire to steam after being put through a big wooden mangle which got rid of some of the moisture. Rainy days were miserable affairs with no chance of sitting by the fire. Windows streamed with condensation all day. I was glad to go to school on rainy Mondays.

"Somebody's Sons"

One Monday the weather was foul and our Italians were sitting around in the out-house – on the troughs which contained the animal feed and even on the boiler where the clothes were bubbling merrily. Mother's nerves were getting more and more frayed. However when lunchtime arrived her heart was melted. The overseer arrived and handed out to each one half a loaf and one sardine. Some of them made a hole in the middle of the bread and stuffed the sardine inside. To quench their thirst they were told to fill up their tin cups from the tap in the out-house. This was covered in spiders' webs. Among the group was Carlo, a teacher from Milan. He just could not bring himself to drink from this tap. He was heartsick. From that moment on my mother took them all under her wing. After all, as she said, they were somebody's sons and if her son was in the same situation she would hope that someone would show him kindness. She looked after them even when they had gone back to Italy. In fact her kindness to them was talked about back home which led the postmistress from Naples, one Gilda Crisci, to write to her up to Mother's death in 1966.

Silver bracelet

I can picture every one of "our Italians" even now 50 years later. Many had been captured in the North African desert, some at El Alamein. A few had been wounded there. They were mostly young, some as young as 19 and none of them had wanted to be in the war. There was Francesco from Caserta – young, but with a thin, lined face, Oreste, tall with a dark moustache, also liked to drink oxo, Paolo from Venice, in his long, green overcoat which he claimed kept his legs warm, and always with a smile for everyone. There was tall, slim Giovanni from Florence, who dyed his brown uniform black so that he would not look like a prisoner-of-war – he was the mug for all the others. Little Giovanni came from Sicily, along with Michaelo who made me a little silver bracelet out of his cigarette case. The front has his initials and the back has 1939 engraved on it, the start of the war, but he was moved before the end of the war. I still have that bracelet and fond memories. I also have a photograph of myself, their little Guiseppina as they called me, framed in silks. Mario was the fireman at the camp or, as he called it, manfire. Alviero from Perugia was small and stocky and with such a kindly face, a very gentle man.

After the washday incident they were all welcomed to the house. They would knock at the door on Saturday afternon with the words "Good afternoon, how are you"? Quite frankly they would come in the evenings as well. One Saturday afternoon, in May 1944, as Francesco was leaving, he turned to look back to our orchard. It was warm and the pear tree was thick with blossom. The tears welled up as he said, "Oh, one day when I do not have to go back to camp!"

Vociferous

Sometimes tempers flared as they worked together on the barn. One day there was an almighty racket at the top of the farmyard. One young Italian thought himself a cut above the rest. From the smoothness of his hands he had done no manual work. To dig a hole for the Dutch barn

supports was quite beneath him so he had lounged about all day. When the overseer returned in the evening he realised what had happened so the young Italian was made to dig. The rest of the gang stood around taunting him and blowing cigarette smoke into his face. One in particular was more vociferous than the rest. This so enraged the young man that he went into a frenzy. He had a good command of English and when Grandad went to find out the cause of the commotion he screamed, "I work, he shout. I'll smash heez bloody face in with theez shovel".

Apart from welcoming them into our homes we also saw the Italians in St. Oswald's church. The parish priest at the time was old Canon O'Meara. He had been there for over 50 years, most of them as parish priest. At that time the church had a basic crib at Christmas with just the three central figures of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Some of the Italians set to work making the type of crib which they had in their own country. The whole village of Bethlehem was created with hillsides, shepherds, sheep, houses with little lights, inns, a tumbledown stable, domestic animals drinking at a pond. All in all it was magical and attracted visitors from far afield. I used to kneel before this crib drinking in the scene and reading the inscribed plate telling us that it was made by Italian prisoners-of-war and presented to the church in 1943. Sadly it disappeared some 20 years ago.

Lively town

Our social life went on despite the war. Ashton was quite a lively town. For dancing we had the parochial hall, affectionally known as the Pro. (Now we have the Nupro). I do not know about marriages being made in heaven but many were made at the Pro. We also had three cinemas, the Palace in Bryn Street, the Queens in Wigan Road and the Scala in Heath Road. This was known as the bug house, just why I have no idea. Each cinema showed two films per week so it was possible to go out to the cinema six nights a week. There was no Sunday cinema so when it was fine we went for walks, strolling along Liverpool Road or Warrington Road as far as the 'East Lancs' which was still referred to as the New Road. Most people would end the evening at one or other of the two snack bars. Rickard's was on Gerard Street just further up than Cromptons' offices and two doors away from "A" Court. I remember there was a stuffed crocodile on the wall. At Dickinson's on Wigan Road we used to drink warm vimto or sasparillo and eat ice cream with raspberry sauce. Oh we had such simple pleasures!

Goodbyes

When the Italians were due to leave Ashton we had a party at the farm. My mother made a huge hotpot, neighbours lent a wind-up gramophone and a pile of records. I remember Auntie Lily dancing a Viennese waltz with little Michaelo. Towards the end of the evening goodbyes had to be said. One in particular, Francesco, got very distressed. He said that since the beginning of the war he had cried only twice, the first time when he said goodbye to his mother and now when he was saying goodbye to his wartime mother.

It was not really goodbye because every week she went to their new camp with a basket of goodies. The new camp was at Stanhill near Accrington. As Christmas approached the Italians wanted to see my old grandad. That year Christmas came early for us. We used up all our Christmas rations to entertain them. I have no idea how my mother organised everything. Petrol was in short supply but somehow she persuaded a taxi driver, George Davies, to bring them. She went off in the taxi with a load of old raincoats which they wore over their uniform. To minimise the risk of detection they crouched down on the taxi floor until they were well away from the camp. If they had been discovered my parents would have been in deep trouble with the military police.

We still kept in touch with them after the war. However many of them married eventually and we lost touch.

THE GERMANS

After the departure of the Italians Ashton saw its last wartime invasion, that of the Germans.

Initially, as in the case of the Italians, we viewed them with suspicion. Some of the townspeople invited them into their homes but we at the farm never had much dealings with them. The most I saw of them was in a line outside St. Oswald's church, waiting to go into Mass. I had never seen the Italians marched in, in this way. Some of the local girls went out with them and the boys used to watch them play football by the camp fence. The star of these games was Bert Trautman who stayed after the war to play for Manchester City. He became famous for completing a game at Wembley despite sustaining a broken neck.

Sit out the war

One thing was different about the uniform of the Germans – there were yellow circles sewn on. Later I was to understand that these were fluorescent material. I suppose this would make it more difficult for them to escape. Unlike the Italians who were content to sit out the war once captured, the Germans seemed more likely to attempt an escape.

In retrospect I was sorry that I had no contact with them. Eventually when I grew up and travelled abroad I felt that I did not know the German people as well as other nationalities.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The first seven years of my life should have been ones of fear, one would think. For those of us who lived away from the big cities it was a very secure childhood. Writing this account I felt rather guilty of these sentiments until I discovered that many of my contemporaries felt the same way.

Not so our parents I suppose. They, of course, knew the wider implications of war but any worries which they had were not communicated to the children. As I had had so much contact with other nationalities down on the farm I never felt anything but friendship for people of other lands.

Appley Bridge

FILLING in an application form for a new passport (surely my last at 86!), I pause at Place of Birth: APPLEY BRIDGE. Ought it to be "near Wigan", or is it now "Greater Manchester"? I leave it to stand alone.

Travelling on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway between Wigan and Southport, it came between Gathurst (already a superior dormitory of Wigan) and Parbold, where they had large leafy gardens, two churches and some of the children even had a governess and rode ponies. As the train slowed down for Appley Bridge, strangers looked at each other uneasily, unable to believe their senses: in this case, the sense of smell. We were passing the 'Bone Works', where muscular young women, wearing clogs, thick skirts and sacking aprons, their hair tied up under black sunbonnets, wheeled barrow loads from piles of rotting stinking bones into a factory for making glue. We suppressed our smiles and got out quickly, pretending not to notice.

Black sunbonnets

Below the station stood the large red pile of the Linoleum Works. There were houses and shops, and the Mission Room, for Appley Bridge did not have a church. The Mission Room was an outpost of Douglas Parish Church, the beautiful church standing on Parbold Hill. That was where people were buried and got married. I do not know if the Vicar, Mr. Gleave, ever came to Appley Bridge. The Mission Room was looked after by a Lay Reader, but it was filled on Sundays, with hearty hymn singing and a thriving Sunday School. Further down, the Leeds and Liverpool Canal ran under a bridge, and we leaned over to watch the horse first emerge, at the end of a long rope, pulling a barge, sometimes piled high with a load of coal, slide through, with the men and their wives, who also wore black sunbonnets, looking silently up at us. We were disappointed that they never spoke, for we were told that the women could swear better than the men!

'Pa' Hardy

Above the station, up the hill, we passed the delph on our right, an old quarry. It was already sprouting bushes and trees. I saw men snaring singing birds there, using birdlime on twigs to catch them. Further up still was the 'Stone Works', with a noisy tall unending chain of buckets taking stone to the top for crushing, perhaps for roads or cement. A row of houses faced it across a field, called Ashfield Terrace. We lived in one and I try to recall the names of our neighbours, whose faces I can still see. There were the Rigby's, with two girls, Peggy and Connie, who were friends of mine. I admired Peggy, who was clever and could run fast. Another neighbour was Pa' Hardy, the retired Chief Constable of Wigan. In appearance he resembled the Kaiser, but he was a jovial man with a hearty laugh. We had a front garden with an arbour festooned with Dorothy Perkins roses, and my father grew pansies in the border, and paid me a penny a week to keep them dead-headed.

Noted artist

Behind, in a large house shielded by a wooded 'hump' lived the Whitters, who owned the Linoleum Works. They had two sons, but no daughter. When my youngest sister was born, Mr. Whitter jokingly asked if he could buy her. We were terrified my mother might take up his offer after my father died. Nearby, in a house covered with ivy in a tangled garden, lived another friend, Mary Brown, with her widowed mother and her brother, Alan, who became a noted artist, I believe. Mary died inexplicably aged about twelve.

On the road going up the hill was a row of houses, in one of which I was born. My mother called it Crevenish after her home in Ireland. We had to move to a larger house when the twins arrived. On the same side, but further up still, came the Wesleyan Chapel in a garden of shrubs and trees. During the First World War a workroom was held there, where they made dressings and garments for the Red Cross. I remember concerts being held there in aid of the same cause, with local singers rendering "A Perfect Day" and "Roses of Picardy", with others giving comic recitations.

Skull House

Behind the chapel were other houses set at right angles. One was called Skull House, where Mr. Charnock, a bachelor, lived. He had a gentle and kind housekeeper, Mrs. L'Estrange, the widow of a doctor in India. They had a parrot, the only parrot in Appley Bridge! The house was believed to be very old, and had a skull in a small nook by a window, though I was never told where it came from. After the chapel came a row of small houses with beautifully tended front gardens. Our favourite was the one belonging to the Hesketh's. Mike had a workshop at the back; he made clogs and mended shoes. He was always cheerful and welcoming, in spite of holding the nails between his lips as he hammered at his last. His brother Abram, with a beard, was much more solemn: indeed, he looked very much like his namesake in the Bible. He came to help with our garden.

Parson's shop

Beyond them, overlooking the Cricket Field, was one of the chief attractions of Appley Bridge, Parson's Shop. Mrs. Parsons, who ran it (I do not remember a Mr. Parsons, though her son Douglas was a friend of my brother) stocked everything you could possibly want, or so it seemed – not only groceries, but haberdashery, paraffin, postcards, not to mention sweets: liquorice shoe laces, gob stoppers, and even sherbet bags.

There was another row of houses, in one of which my piano teacher, Miss Griffiths, lived. On the hill was a large house in a garden occupied by Alderman Leyland and his wife. At the top of the hill, almost at Dangerous Corner, was a smithy, where we stood to watch the horses being shod, the smith beating out the glowing iron horseshoe on his anvil, and then testing it on the horse's hoof. The wall of the smithy was covered in the summer with what I now know to be Gloire de Dijon roses. I never see them without recalling the acrid smell of singed hoof.

Squeaky slates

I went to school not far from the smithy, at the corner of Finch Lane. It was conducted by Miss Barnish, the sister of a Hindley doctor, who took about a dozen pupils and taught them 'the 3 R's'. We sat around her dining table, writing on squeaky slates until we progressed to copy books and pens with nibs. We learnt much by heart, some of which I can recite to this day. We had to curtsey when we went in, while the boys had to salute; and we knelt down on her hearthrug, made of scraps of cloth, to say prayers before starting. Miss Barnish played the harmonium in the Mission Room on Sundays.

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A LONG WAY ROUND TO WIGAN PIER

Most of my direct ancestry, back as far as 1800 and a bit beyond, is confined to Wigan with slight extensions to the north and west. However, the one quarter part going back from my mother's mother has proved to be of unusual interest and illustrates the often considerable and complex movements of people in search of work in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The story develops from four pairs of great great great grandparents who were mostly born in the period 1775 to 1800. They were:- Daniel Wren, weaver, and his wife Eleanor of Kendal in Westmorland, Thomas and Hannah Trueman of Pontefract in Yorkshire, William and Mary Hughes of Droitwich in Worcestershire and Richard and Mary Leek, also from Droitwich.

Home town

Daniel Wren's eldest child, Dorothy, who was baptised at Kendal in 1827, moved to Lancaster – presumably in search of work – and there, when 18 years old, she met and married George Trueman, aged 26, son of Thomas Trueman of Pontefract. They were wed at the parish church and, to save costs while the banns were read, they lodged at the same address. Before long, George took his wife back to his home town where their first child, Hannah Ellen, was born in 1847. The Truemans remained in the district and Thomas, their fourth child, was baptised in next-door Castleford in 1861. Meanwhile Hannah was growing up and ultimately entered domestic service in Whitwood not very many miles away. It was there that, when about 21 years old in 1868, she met her destiny in the form of Levi Leek, one of the last of many children of Thomas and Elizabeth (nee Hughes) of Droitwich.

Employed in his trade of skilled bricklayer, Levi, when of age, left home and journeyed northwards possibly engaged on the construction of new road and rail bridges. On that journey he got no further than Whitwood where, when about 23, he met Hannah Trueman and a male child soon appeared. Notwithstanding this hiccup, there was a deep and life-long affection and after marriage and a move to Wigan, my maternal grandmother, Florence Jane, was born in Queen Street, Wigan in 1870.

Wren's of Wigan

To get to this final stage there had been travels in four counties – Kendal to Lancaster, Pontefract to Lancaster, Lancaster to Pontefract, Droitwich to Pontefract and then Pontefract to Wigan. I was puzzled and asked myself – why come to Wigan and leave the burgeoning industry of Yorkshire?

The answer was unexpected. When casually searching the indexes to the 1851 Wigan census for the more unusual surnames in my pedigree, my eye was caught by two references to Wren, 1851 being six years after Dorothy Wren yielded her surname in favour of Trueman and 19 years before Dorothy's daughter, Hannah came to Wigan. To my delight, when I looked at the actual census, the Wrens of Kendal and the Wrens of Wigan were the same for, some time after his daughter's marriage in Lancaster, probably after the death of his wife, Daniel Wren had moved to Wigan with his youngest daughter, Elizabeth. Their details were as follows:

Daniel Wren born in Kendal, Westmorland, age 48, widower, lodging in High St., St. George's district.

Elizabeth Wren born in Kendal, Westmorland, age 15, unmarried, "at home" in lodgings in the Queen St. district.

Thus, 19 years later than this census, the newly married young Leeks moved to Wigan, not as a random choice, but so that they could live with or close by Hannah's aunt, Elizabeth and grandad, Daniel, if he was still alive.

Childhood days

Both my parents were born in Wigan in 1894 but moved away in 1920. Like many others, I regret not having enquired about my parents' early life when I myself was younger. It was only during my mother's fading years that we talked about her childhood days in Wigan and she told me of the affection of Grandad Leek and his telling her of the lovely countryside where he was born and about which he often dreamed. Despite the stirring of her imagination for, even as a child, she also loved such things, place names were not impressed on her memory and she could only remember that grandad had come from "near Wales" or so she thought.

I'm saddened to think that, in adult life, mother visited her grandad's home area but was evidently unaware of it and thus denied the pleasure that the knowledge would have given her. My father joined the East Lancashire Regiment from Wigan in the Great War – after the carnage in Flanders he was moved to the Manchester Regiment – and he was wounded twice. After the more serious wounds he was sent back to Blighty for a spell and was in hospital in Worcestershire. My mother, not long married, visited him there and never forgot the lovely countryside associated with those magic hours, countryside which, had she known, had stirred her imagination when she was a child.

Romantic saga

My wife who, typically, did the major amount of work, only began her researches after mother's death. How mother would have loved the romantic saga of the travels between the four counties and the thoughts of numerous distant relatives in lovely Lakeland and along the Welsh Border and even, dare I say it as a Lancastrian, in Yorkshire!

Anon.

Appley Bridge continued

Fairy Glen

But down Finch Lane lay the jewel of Appley Bridge, that made us believe that we were infinitely superior to either Gathurst or Parbold – Fairy Glen, an enchanted wild place. Does it still exist, I wonder? Our mother took us there for picnics, pushing a high pram with the youngest propped up with lemonade and sandwiches. Later, we went with our friends, hiding in the bracken, rolling down the slopes, making up adventures and running wild.

In 1921, when I was twelve, my father died, and though my Irish grandmother paid our rent, our mother could not afford to go on living there, so we left. I have been back once, 20 years ago. It did not seem to be changed very much, but I was surprised how quickly I was driven through. Now that I am old, I remember Appley Bridge with affection and gratitude.

Mrs. Margaret Swain, Edinburgh

EXHIBITIONS IN THE HISTORY SHOP – *A Year of Success*

1995 has been a very busy year at the History Shop. The reputation of the venue as the major museum in Wigan has been enhanced by an extensive temporary exhibition programme.

The year began with the Theatre Exhibition still in place. This had been launched most successfully the previous November by local celebrity Colin Bean and following its show at the History Shop has gone on to tour the libraries throughout the Borough. It will be back in Wigan at the central library in November and December 1995.

This was followed in February with a thrilling Rugby League exhibition **'When Push Comes to Shove'.** A star-studded opening ceremony was attended by the creators of the exhibition, officials from the Rugby League world and stars from Central Park.

Rugby mad Richard Finney who plays for Ashton Bears under eight side visiting the exhibition of rugby league photographs at the Rodney Street History Shop. The display was organised by Wigan MBC Leisure Services and featured photographs taken by the award-winning Michael Steele, from the book on rugby 'When Push Comes To Shove'. Richard is holding the World Cup which was also part of the display.
Photo courtesy of Lancashire Publications Ltd.

1995 will be remembered as the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II and the History Shop commemorated the fact with two exhibitions. Beginning in April **'Wigan at War'** explored Wigan's Home Front during the fighting and was in place for the VE Day celebrations in May. Again we called on our old friend Colin Bean (Private Sponge from Dad's Army) to do the honours for us at the opening. Incidentally the book to accompany that exhibition **'Wigan at War'** is still for sale at the History Shop, price £3.95.

The second commemorative exhibition marked the end of the war proper with the surrender of Japan, 15 August 1945. This exhibition, featuring the experiences of local men out in the far east, inevitably centred around the campaign for the reconquest of Burma. We are indebted to the Wigan Branch of the Burma Star Society for their help and support, and more delighted when their President agreed to speak at a special VJ Day event at the History Shop. We were further honoured by our new Mayor Cllr. Bernard Holt attending and saying a few well chosen words.

*See letter on P18.

Both of these exhibitions are probably best remembered for the excellent audio-visual presentations accompanying them which were specially commissioned by the Heritage Service.

Accompanying the V.J. exhibition there was also an educational display featuring on panels and video the story of Anne Frank and the danger of nationalism in Europe.

* * *

Between these two commemorative exhibitions the History Shop staged **'Baskets for Business'.** This showed not only the tremendous scope of items made from wicker but also how the wood is grown, harvested and used.

The current exhibition, **'Wigan Streets'**, 2 October - 25 November is a fascinating view of our town through the eyes of popular local artist Gerald Rickards. More than 60 paintings and hand tinted prints fill the bays of the History Shop, each one bringing fresh detail to an otherwise familiar scene. Also featured in the exhibition are the paintings which appear in the new Metro '96 calendar on sale at the Shop, priced £2.95.

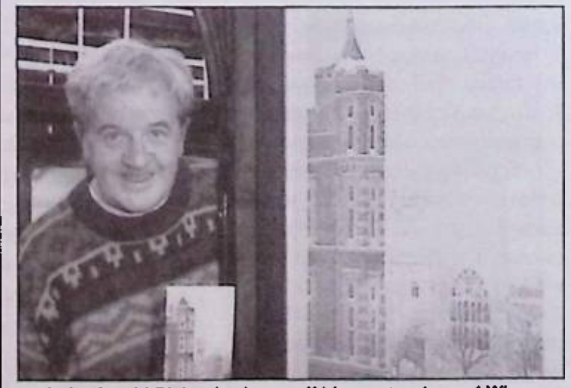
This exhibition too got off to a flying start with a special preview evening on 2 October. Gerald was extremely busy trying to speak to all the guests and once again we were honoured by the attendance of the Mayor Cllr. Bernard Holt.

Gerald himself then opened our new season of lectures the following week, talking about his work and the exhibition. Unfortunately the lecture clashed with the England v Fiji rugby league game at Central Park, but all those who fought their way through the traffic thoroughly enjoyed it. Another event was held in the History Shop on Friday 10 & Saturday 11 November when the artist was 'in residence' displaying current projects and talking about the exhibitions.

Coming up over Christmas, 4 December - 13 January 1996 at the History Shop is **'A Woman's Place?'** This fascinating Heritage Service exhibition explores the role of women in local society both at home and work. Featuring a 1950's room set, items from the Heritage Service collection and a video specially compiled by the North West Film Archive, this exhibition should prove both popular and educational.

Exhibitions at the History Shop are selected and developed for their interest and diversity. Hopefully one thing they all have in common is a strong local theme. The temporary exhibition area is open as is the rest of the History Shop 10 - 7 p.m. Monday, 10 - 5 p.m. Tuesday - Friday and 10 - 1 p.m. Saturday, admission free. As you have read from time to time we hold events here, openings, previews, talks. These are usually advertised in the press and alway advertised at the History Shop, so don't miss the chance to attend these cultural activities in the middle of Wigan.

P.A.B.



Artist Gerald Rickards shows off his masterpiece of Wigan Parish Church from the original small postcard.
Photo courtesy of Lancashire Publications Ltd.

Volunteers Needed!

An exciting opportunity has arisen for you to play a part in one of Britain's top heritage-based visitor attractions.

Wigan Pier, winner of a dozen major educational and tourism awards, is now seeking to appoint a team of voluntary helpers to assist visitors and provide information.

As knowledge and skills are developed, you may be trained to give explanations of displays and assist with interpretative tours.

If you are interested in local history, have highly developed communication skills and can make a commitment of at least one day per week, contact Julia Bryan, Heritage Interpretation Officer on **01942 323666** for more details and an application form.

Where History Comes Alive!

HISTORY SHOP GIFTS FOR CHRISTMAS

Regular readers of Past Forward will be aware that the History Shop offers for sale, by mail order and over-the-counter, a wide range of local history publications. The shop also has available many items that would make excellent gifts as the Christmas season approaches. So if you are a reader who has not yet visited the History Shop why not come along and combine Christmas shopping with learning more about your heritage? Lines for Christmas '95 include:

- Quality pewter jewellery and gifts
- Traditional wooden toys
- Cast coal replicas and souvenir mining plates
- Victorian style Christmas cards
- Wooden and brass tree ornaments
- Traditional silver charms
- Wigan Metro 1995 Calendar featuring works by local artist Gerald Rickards (also available by mail order).

We will also be offering for a limited period only (1 November - 31 December) the chance to buy any five of the Heritage Service Publications 1 to 8 for only £10.00, a saving of up to £9.75! The titles available are: 1. Two Athertons. 2. Murder, Terror and Revenge in Medieval Lancashire – The Legend of Mab's Cross. 3. The Devil's Hill – Local Men at the Battle of Spion Kop, 1900. 4. A Terrible Nightmare – The Lancashire Cotton Famine around Wigan. 5. The English Civil War around Wigan and Leigh. 6. Standish – Eight Hundred Years of History. 7. Wigan at War – Life on the Home Front in words and pictures 1914-18. 8. Shevington in Old Photographs and Documents. This offer is also available by mail order. D.W.

Christmas Package Opens Exciting Year for Wigan Pier

Probably the World's most famous Pier - Wigan Pier – is this month celebrating receiving another prestigious tourism award; this time the National Award for Business Through Tourism, for its popular and innovative 'Murder At The Pier' weekend break Murder Mystery Experience.

Next year, the eight acre complex celebrates its tenth anniversary as a heritage-based tourist attraction. The occasion will be marked with a two week festival of events, which will begin 21 March – ten years since Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth opened the facility. 1996 is also the National Year of the Pier, and Wigan Pier will be playing its part by hosting special events.

Meanwhile, the finishing touches are being put onto this year's Christmas programme. From 2 December, the newly named 'Orwell's Folly' building (next to The Orwell public house) will take centre stage in the "Holly at the Folly" Christmas programme. The programme will invite visitors to join the Heritage Interpretation Officer for a fascinating talk and look at the different ways in which the Victorians celebrated the festive season. Victorian Christmas talks are available for groups during the week, subject to availability, and individuals visiting Wigan Pier at weekends. (1.00 pm and 2.00 pm, 75p per person).

For younger visitors there are "Christmas Box" packages which include a Victorian toy session, where you can both handle Victorian toys and make a toy to take home. This is followed by a visit to Santa, or for older children, a visit to "The Way We Were" and the Trencherfield Mill Engine. (Prices from £4.25 per child).

Three seasonal Sundays on 3, 10, and 17 December will be putting people into the traditional Christmas spirit with choir concerts, brass band recitals, Christmas tree and decoration sales and gift ideas on sale in the gift shop. Christmas lunch will be available in the "Pantry at the Pier, offering a choice of starter, dessert and a main course selection of turkey, beef or creamy leek croustade.

The finale to the proceedings will be an original musical performance by the Wigan Pier Theatre Company based on Hans Anderson s fairy tale -"The Sandman". Performances are 7 —15 December at the Mill at the Pier, with matinees at 2.00 pm and evening performances at 7.45 pm. Tickets are available at the Tourist Information Centre, Wigan Pier (tel: 01942 825677), priced £5.50 and £3.50.

Wigan Pier is open to visitors Monday - Thursday 10.00am - 5.00 pm, Saturday and Sunday 11.00 am - 5.00 pm, closed Fridays. For more information on Wigan Pier and its events, call 01942 323666.

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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 in Sterling to 'Wigan MBC')

Who are they?

The brass band photograph in 'Past Forward Ten' was identified by many readers, some of whom were actually members of the band! It was the Wigan Boys' Club Band, during Walking Day, on Ormskirk Road, Pemberton, 1954.

The other photograph, however, has proved a real puzzler – only a few tentative suggestions, ranging from a ship, to a wine lodge, to a cotton mill. Any further suggestions?

This time we're asking for the identity of some pupils whom even Ernie Taberner cannot remember. The photograph shows Mr. Garner's class at Beech Hill School, c.1930. Ernie has identified most of the pupils, but there are a few gaps, with which readers may be able to help. The photograph may well bring back fond memories for some.

STOP PRESS!

As 'Past Forward' goes to press, notification has just been received that the History Shop has been awarded a grant of £201,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund! This makes it the first recipient of a National Lottery grant in Wigan and the first local authority museum in the North West to achieve this success!

Along with a legacy left to Wigan Heritage Services by Doctor Monica Wickham, last surviving daughter of Victorian Wigan vicar, Rev. William Wickham, and a grant from North West Museums Service, this will enable the History Shop Phase 2 development – for an enhanced exhibition area and Wigan's first traditional art gallery – to proceed. Completion is scheduled for 1 July 1996.

A truly wonderful Christmas present for the people of Wigan – especially in Charter Year!

If you can help to complete the identification of this class, and especially if you actually appear in the photograph please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942) 404432

Beech Hill Council School, Netherby Road c. 1930. Standard VI Teacher Mr. W. Garner (Assistant Head), Headmaster Mr. Percy Glover (Captain Wigan Cricket Club).
All reading left to right:
Back row standing: Percy Lyon, Eric Prentice, Jimmy Rudd, A.N. Other, Harry Vizzard, Mr. Garner, Willie Wadeson, Fred Gaynor, Harold Whittle, Norman Bannister.
3rd row from front: John Horrocks, Wm. Row, Billy? Birchall, Bernard ?, A.N. Other, A.N. Other, 'Fatty' Russell, Ernie Taberner, Harry Rankin, ? Higham.
2nd row from front: Sam Wareing, Billy Jones, Fred Ledbetter, John Butler, A.N. Other, Harold Ainsworth, Geoffrey Barnes, Eric Woosey, Fred Ryding, Albert Stringfellow.
Front row: ? Shaw, John Smith, Paul ?, ? Lyon, Sydney Cross, Wilfred Roper, Billy Higham, Fred Turner.
The unidentified 4th left back row standing lived in the Gidlow Houses.