

PAST FORWARD

ISSUE NUMBER THIRTEEN

SUMMER 1996



"Gules a Castle with three Towers Argent surmounted by a Crown composed of Fleur de Lis Or, and for the Crest, on a Wreath of the Colours. In front of a King's Head affrontee couped below the Shoulders Proper, vested Gules, crowned and crined Or, a Lion couchant guardant Or". And for Supporters, "On either side a Lion Or holding in the exterior Paw a branch of Mountain Ash proper".



The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

Welcome to this bumper Charter commemorative issue of "Past Forward". This edition is three times the size of the very first "Past Forward" five years ago! It certainly has gone from strength to strength. My thanks to all readers who have supported the venture in whatever way, whether it be sending articles or donations, or completing our recent questionnaire. I am delighted to say that virtually all responses were complimentary and constructive and as you will see on p.8, we have already taken some of your suggestions on board!

1996 is proving without question the busiest and most challenging and also the most rewarding for Wigan Heritage Service. Phase 2 of the History Shop, after some unavoidable protracted delays, is now progressing rapidly. As I write, we are thankfully on target for opening the doors to the new ground floor Wickham gallery on 28 August.

On the same day, the Charter 96 exhibition will open and the Charter Mural will be unveiled. I am sure that visitors will not be disappointed. The Charter exhibition will be the highlight of the 750th anniversary celebrations, in which the Heritage Service has been very much involved (see p.10 for the details of the exhibition). I am particularly delighted that, as a result of a Heritage Service initiative, some medieval archives from our twin town, Angers, including its first charter, will also be on display. I am looking forward very much to seeing Gerald Rickard's Mural, which has been commissioned by the Heritage Service, on public view in the History Shop. It certainly looks impressive enough around Gerald's lounge but I am sure will look quite spectacular in the History Shop (see back cover, for a full colour preview!)

Full details of all celebratory events can be found in the Souvenir Programme of Charter Events which is now on sale from the History Shop and many other outlets. I would particularly like to draw your attention to three very special events in Haigh Country Park - the Charter Banquet on 25 August, the Charter Gala on August Bank Holiday Monday, and the Victorian Christmas on 21 December (more details can be found in this issue of "Past Forward").

Don't forget to enter two exciting competitions for Charter Year. The Charter Quiz (see pp.12/13), has been set by yours truly. I defy you to achieve a maximum of 750 points! And from 28 August, visitors to the History Shop will be able to enter a competition to identify the most buildings in Gerald Rickard's Mural. Entry forms available from the History Shop.

I hope you enjoy this special edition of "Past Forward", including the articles on three famous Wigan institutions - Wigan Hippodrome, Woolworths and Wigan Boys Club, all of which have sadly gone, but which still evoke many happy and proud memories of the town's past. Very fitting for Charter Year.

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:

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The Galleries
Wigan, WN1 1PX

Cover Illustration:

The County Borough of Wigan Coat of Arms

The Wigan Borough Coat of Arms, 1922 - 1974, when it was superseded by the present armorial bearings for Metropolitan Wigan. Here is a contemporary description of the 1922 coat of arms:

NOTWITHSTANDING its ancient origin and notable record Wigan was almost unique amongst the Boroughs by having no coat of arms. In 1922 this reproach was removed when a worthy Grant was assigned by the College of Arms to the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors of the County Borough of Wigan, reciting the chief periods of their history with the armorials actually epitomising this history.

The language of heraldry is understood by few people, and although the description of the arms given in the official document is unusually simple, it is not unlikely that a rendering into ordinary language will be appreciated by most readers. The essential part may then be transmuted: "On a red field a three-towered castle in silver, surmounted by a crown composed of fleur-de-lis in gold. And for crest, on a red and silver wreath, a king's head in its natural colours, full-faced and cut off below the shoulders, full-haired, with a gold crown and a red clothing; and in front thereof a lion couchant facing front in gold. And for Supporters: on either side a lion in gold holding in the exterior paw a branch of Mountain Ash (or Wiggin Tree) in natural colours". Mr. J. Paul Rylands describes this coat as "perhaps the very best of all Lancashire town arms, for it might, heraldically, belong to the Middle Ages, and is indeed symbolical of antiquity and loyalty". It is certainly a very privileged coat of arms as few if any coats bear so many symbols of royal favour indeed, the incorporation of royal insignia into armorial bearings is jealously guarded and usually proscribed by the court officials. In Wigan's new grant there are (1) A King's head, CROWNED; (2) the Royal "Leopard" (or "lion couchant guardant"); (3) a medieval royal crown; and (4) the Supporting lions. The king's head in the crest officially represents no particular king; in the words of the Rouge Croix herald (in whose hands the design took shape) it is intended "to be conventional likeness to an early English Monarch". It is actually modelled on the portrait of King Edward III, but from the point of view of the town it symbolises especially King Henry I. On Wigan's earliest town seal probably 12th century there appears a towered or castellated gateway over the centre of which is depicted what seems to be the crowned head of Henry I. These devices, therefore, are taken as the chief symbols

of the new bearings: the towered gateway becomes a Norman castle and the king's head becomes a crest indicating Wigan as a town of consequence and royal patronage at the opening of the 12th century. The Royal lion, again, marks another important period in Wigan history, Edward III, by a charter of 1350, granted Wigan the right (with several other towns) to use a royal seal known as the "King's Recognisance Seal", on which was figured the king's head and the royal lion. The Somerset Herald expressed the opinion that as none of the other towns had made use of the King's permission by adopting the figures in their arms Wigan could with propriety include them, and his view prevailed with the Chapter of Heralds.

Supporters are nowadays usually granted only to the great cities, but Wigan's ancient importance has been thereby recognised: the lions giving fine distinction to a highly dignified and privileged coat of arms. The branches of mountain ash (in full berry) borne in the lions' paws, known in the northern dialects as the Wiggin or Wigan Tree, form a "rebus" or pun on the name of the town, and have the advantage of giving further symbolism to an already significant coat. The rebus has tradition behind it, for the Wiggin Tree is a conspicuous feature of several of the town's medieval seals. The helmet and "mantling" above the shield are normal accompaniments of all coats of arms, but have no heraldic significance. The artist is allowed considerable freedom in drawing this feature.

The motto adopted, "Ancient and Loyal", is in keeping with the Arms. For a great many years Wigan has on all occasions, official and unofficial, invariably referred to itself as the "Ancient and Loyal Borough" but few are aware that authority for its use can be found in the Charter of Charles II the governing charter of the town down to the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835. In that charter Wigan is designated by the King "an ancient borough" and granted a "special token of our favour" for its "loyalty to us", so that nothing could be more fitting than its adoption as the town's motto, and it is doubtful if anything connected with the new grant pleased Wiganers more than the fact that the King, through his College of Arms, has thus officially recognised Wigan's title to the sobriquet.

I remember when . . .

IN the mid 20's the firm of F.W. Woolworth and Co. Ltd., decided to open a branch in Wigan, and the pub on the corner of Station Road and Standishgate had to be demolished to make way for the new commercial venture.

Previously shoppers looking for bargains had to make do with "Peacock's Penny Bazaar" in the Makinson Arcade, or Giles Forshaw's stalls in the old arcade, one next to Gorner's Cafe, the other one opposite the cafe, alongside which was an old "Beam" weighing machine with a leather cushioned seat hanging by chains from one side of the beam, whilst the weight pan hung from the other side with its various weights. Soon shoppers interested in their weight would be able to use a "new type" of machine inside Woolworths when, after inserting a one penny coin in the slot whilst standing on the platform, a pointer would come to rest on the correct weight shown on a huge dial in front of the person to be weighed.

Began to take shape

After what seemed 'ages' of excavating and building, the store began to take shape, and soon "Woolies" would emerge as the first multiple store in Wigan town centre, with frontages to the Market Place, Station Road and Standishgate. There was the usual ballyhoo of merchandisers' bills being posted inside the windows - "OPENING SOON" and "NOTHING OVER SIXPENCE" which became Woolies slogan wherever they owned a store.

On the opening day, huge queues formed down Standishgate and Station Road, of shoppers most of whom seemed intent on purchasing a zinc two gallon bucket for 6d. As a lad of

about 9 years old, I remember joining the queue with my mother and thinking to myself 'Nothing over sixpence', that can't be right, because 0/6d. = nothing, surely it should have read 'Nothing more than sixpence?' However, those before us in the queue, buckets now in hand, were grumbling because they had been charged 9d.- 6d. for the bucket and 3d. for the handle!

"It owt t'bi stopped"

"What good's a bucket weht 'andle" one said, "Ony road it's fastened tu't bucket so they awt be made t'sell it fer a tanner" said another, this notwithstanding that the normal price would have been 2s. 11d. (under 15p)! (There were no trading standards officers in those days). "I don't know" said another "They con do wot they bloomin' well like wi poor folk these days. It owt t'bi stopped."

But as they wandered around their new superstore they soon found that there were real bargains to be had. For instance, many older people used hand held magnifying glasses when reading but now they were able to afford a pair of reading spectacles for 18d. (6d for the frames and 6d. each lens), simply by choosing from dozens on display and reading from a reading board until they found a suitable pair.

Bargains on every stall

On another counter were displayed fountain pens with lever operated filling, (ball-points were not yet invented), offered at 6d. per nib and filler tube and 6d. for the body, total 1s. (5p), whilst yet another offer was a hand held flashlight at 6d., for the case with bulb and 3d. for the battery. There were bargains on every stall.

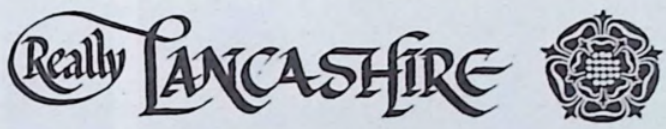
Unfortunately some people came to regard anything bought from "Woolies" as cheap and shoddy, but I can personally vouch for the quality, since I still use an engineer's square "Made in Sheffield" bought over 60 years ago for 6d. and still "true", whilst about a year ago, I discarded a fire screen bought about the same time for 1s. 6d. That was 6d. for the oak frame, 6d. for the inlaid frame mirrors, and 6d. for the centre-piece; and the screen was only discarded because it was old fashioned after 60 years.

The amazing thing, perhaps, on reflection, was how their purchasing officers located their sources of supply at these prices because predominantly everything was British made! I doubt if one could buy such quality these days, as everything I buy (from a habit formed many years ago I examine beforehand - I

was for many years a senior purchasing officer for a multi-national company) although carrying a British firm's household name, is invariably Made in France, Belgium, Italy or Taiwan! For example, my present torch has three countries of origin: case - Hong Kong, battery - France, bulb - Holland. I even refused to buy a hand torch with a British firm's trading name because it was "Made in France". The shopkeeper thought I was "balmy" because every torch in his stock was NOT "Made in Great Britain"!

Ah well, times change, don't they? Unfortunately some of us older ones find it difficult to change with them. Just imagine 28.3592 grams of Help (1 oz) is worth 0.453592 kilos of Pity (1lb)! UGH! And that's the law!

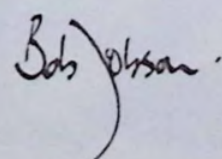
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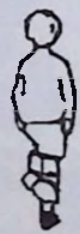

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News from the Archives

AMONGST recent accessions to the archives is one that will bring back memories for some older Wiganers, of growing up between the 1930's and 1950's. Thanks to the efforts of Barrie Davidson of the Wigan & Leigh Council for Voluntary Service, an extensive series of photographs with some documents and accounts relating to Wigan Boys' Club has been donated. This adds to the minutes and other papers deposited some years ago.

The Club was established in 1936 by James Walker of Walker Brothers, A.C. Gibson of Wigan Post Office and Robert South of Williams Deacon's Bank in

Wigan, under the auspices of the Pilgrim Trust, and became affiliated to the National Association of Boys' Clubs, whose purpose was 'to assist in the great work of helping our boys to grow up to be useful, intelligent and industrious members of the adult community of tomorrow'. The founders of the Wigan Club set out to attract as members boys 'of the very needy, between the ages of 13 1/2 and 17 1/2, and to provide an alternative to 'the street corner not for the negative purpose of preventing evil, but for producing good.' Its main club premises for many years were at 3 Clayton

Street, but in 1964 new buildings were opened in Soho Street near Robin Park. By this time other clubs existed in the Wigan area, notably that at Springfield Road where large recreation fields were purchased by the Club in 1947. One of the early highlights for W.B.C. was the naming of its own barge 'The Duke of Gloucester' by the Duke on the Leeds Liverpool Canal at Pagefield Ironworks on 30 July 1937.

Up to his death on a summer camp in 1966 J.B. Gibson served as the club's warden and mainstay, except for war service with Walker Brothers as Personnel Officer and in the

army. Many of the photographs now preserved in the Archives were taken by him. They show generations of Wigan boys enjoying boating on the canal, football, boxing, swimming, and playing in the Club Band which achieved some national fame by playing in London. Outings and holidays, to places such as the Isle of Man, Grange-over-Sands, Wales, the Lakes and even Germany are also recorded,

as well as the camps by the canal at Parbold where the Club acquired a large piece of land. Changing social and financial conditions undermined the Club's role in the 1960's, and it was finally wound up in October 1972. As so often with this type of material, names and places are often lacking, so any suggestions for this small selection published here will be received gratefully.

N.W.

1. The original Club premises, 3 Clayton St., 1936.
2. Model making. 3. Cyril Crompton, a Wigan Boys' Club bandsman. 4. Graham Pearson, selected to play for England three times in 1961/2 but in which sport?
5. Playing quoits on the Club's own barge 'Duke of Gloucester' at Skipton (Leeds-Liverpool Canal) August 1937. 6. Senior members on the diving stage, Windermere, 1947.
7. Members of the Club on Snowdon summit, October 1938. 8. Football coaching at the Police Athletic Ground, 1957: Ray Minshall (Southport) and Roy Kilner (Lancs. Amateurs). 9. Wigan Boys' Club Band, under their conductor Mr. W. Haydock, at St Paul's, London 1953.



In April 1956, Henry Haddock was a probationary fireman with the Wigan County Borough Fire Brigade. The following dramatic true story relates his personal experiences on the night Wigan's nationally-famous theatre was burned to the ground.

"Fierce fire guts Wigan's theatre"

THE *Lancashire Evening Post* and *The Wigan Observer* both carried the story about the death throes of the theatre. The same day there was even a brief mention of the firemen who fought the fire. The headlines said "FIERCE FIRE GUTS WIGAN'S THEATRE. Roof falls as 50 firemen tackle the flames". The report continued, "Wigan Hippodrome, the town's largest theatre with a 1,300 seating capacity, was badly damaged by fire early today. Fifty firemen from towns around Wigan fought the blaze, but were unable to save the roof and the upper circle which were almost completely gutted. Firemen fought the blaze from turntable ladders and from the roof as great tongues of flame leapt 20 feet into the air and showers of sparks fell on them". A careless cigarette smoker in the 'gods' was blamed for the start of the fire.

Nude poser of the day

Because the theatre was next door to the yard area where the firemen had their canteen recreation room and training area a fairly good relationship existed with the management of the theatre and it was not unknown for firemen to act as stage hands. One of the perks of this activity was that it was possible to get free tickets when a full house was unlikely. The Christmas Eve and New Years Eve socials would sometimes be joined by the 'stars' after they had finished their performance on stage.

One of the acts for which we liked to act as stage hands, if we were lucky enough to get the job, was Pauline Penny, a popular nude poser of the day. Another act was Jane, the girl who posed for the *Daily Mirror* strip cartoon which was very popular during and after the war. She was always easy going and friendly and not too worried who was backstage when she was performing. One of her acts in the show consisted of dancing around in a topless cat suit, or at least that was the case in certain towns Wigan Watch Committee was keen on its need to protect public morals, so Jane had to wear a flesh coloured bra. One night whilst she was doing her act in the cat suit she tripped over an obstruction on the stage and hurt her ankle. The greatest danger she was really in was from the firemen rushing

to be the first to carry out first aid treatment! I couldn't actually see the need for mouth to mouth and artificial respiration for a sprained ankle!

There was no one building that constituted a fire station in Wigan. The appliance house and the control room were on the side of Chapel Lane and the bedrooms and one room fire prevention office were two houses similar to those used for bed and breakfast on the other side of Chapel Lane. The other administrative offices were round the corner on Darlington Street. The drill ground, kitchen, mess room, workshops of various types, and the recreation room were situated on undulating open ground between the Palace Cinema and the Hippodrome. The junction between Chapel Lane, King Street and Darlington Street was quite a busy one that was controlled by traffic lights. When the bells went down on the fire station, firemen would appear from all these locations running hell for leather for the appliance room in order to catch the fire engine before it turned out, and woe betide anyone who missed the appliance he was designated to ride. I am sure that the police, whose headquarters were also situated in King Street near the same junction, had to treat many a motorist suffering from shock caused by firemen vaulting over the bonnet of their cars when responding to a fire call!

Careless Smoker

I hadn't been in the fire brigade very long having joined the service on 3 October 1955 after doing my National Service in Iraq with the Royal Air Force. In fact I had only been back from doing my basic training at the Training School at London Road, Manchester for about a month. I had gone on duty on Friday 20 April just 5 days before my 21st birthday. In the early hours of Saturday 21 April 1956 the bells went down, and what had been a room full of firemen lying relaxed suddenly became a boiler house of activity. Firemen scrambled into boots and trousers, clattered the way downstairs and across the road to the appliance room.

"It's the bloody Hipp"

The indicator board in the station informed us that all the appliances including the turntable ladder were being sent to the job. The doors crashed open as all the engines started and continued to rev up like formulae one cars at the starting grid before a Grand Prix. It was obviously something interesting requiring a full attendance. "It's the bloody Hipp" somebody shouted as the officer in charge picked up the address from the Control Room. This meant that we had to get our fire gear on pretty quick before the fire appliance could get round the corner and travel the 100 yards to the Hippodrome. The fire gear consisted of fire boots, water-proof leg slips, fire tunic, helmet and miners lamp. This can be extremely difficult when 5 other men are trying to do the same in the back of a fire engine swaying round corners as the engine speeds on its way. It would have been sacrilege not to have arrived fully dressed.

It was about 1.30 in the morning when the call had been sent in by a policeman sitting in the front office of the police station. He had seen the smoke and flames percolating through the front windows of the building. When we arrived

there was already smoke and flames shooting through part of the roof. There were cascades of sparks not unlike bonfire night as the fire tried to gain a greater hold of the structure. For me there was little time to take very much in. I was still trying to fasten my fire tunic and fix my lamp as I jumped down off the Pump Escape. Firefighting is very much a team operation and despite the apparently chaotic situation there is usually a professional and well practised group quietly and quickly getting to work without the necessity for a lot of shouted orders. This night was no exception and whilst the rest of the crew did whatever they had to do I grabbed a length of hose and branch and headed for the stone stairs leading to the upper circle, or the "gods" as it was more commonly known amongst the clientele. Somebody else was already running a length of hose out from the pump so I followed behind up the dark stone steps until his hose ran out. Mine was connected up and I continued up the stairs on my own whilst the other bloke ran back to the pump to order 'water on'. In the '50s we were expected to be smoke eaters - breathing apparatus was only used when things were exceptionally difficult and we would be expected to be in the fire for long periods. The reasons for not wearing breathing apparatus were many but the principle ones were the length of time it took to service an oxygen set and the cost of the service. It was therefore not unusual to find me working my way upstairs on my knees, dragging the hose behind me through the darkness and the smoke that was rolling down the staircase all around me.

"Banging and crashing"

After what seemed an eternity, the hose suddenly stiffened up like a rod of iron as the pressurised water forced its way through. I tried to hold on with one hand and lash the hose to

continued on page 7

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WIGAN LANE.

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Plumbers and Decorators,
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PROGRAMME

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15th, 1913.

7-0--TWICE NIGHTLY--9-0

MATINEE ON MONDAY at 2-30.

This Programme is subject to alteration at the discretion of the Management
by whom all responsibility is disclaimed for the unavoidable absence of any Artists
announced to appear.

1 Overture ... Conductor - Mr. G. ROBERTSHAW.

2 **Mdlle. Hengleur's**
Wonderful Troupe of Russian Poodles & Champion Leaping Hounds.

3 **HILLIER & HAYNES,**
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4 **ROLAND CARR'S JUVENILE**
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In a Revue of Rag-time, introducing all the New and Popular Secretes.

5 **MABEL COSTELLO,** Prima of Principal Boys.

6 **Novelty Clintons,**
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7 **RAG-TIME SINGING COMPETITION**
Open to all Amateurs. £10 in Prizes.
FINALS ON FRIDAY (BOTH HOUSES.)

8 **JACK EDGE,** Lancashire's Latest Star Comedian.

9 **LES NAPIERS,** A Revelation in Gymnastic Juggling,
Dancing and Comedy.

10 **HARRY MARVELLO** presents
THE SILVER HAT!
London's Latest Novelty.

NEXT WEEK ...

Ike & Will Scott! Eldid! Bi-Bo-Bi!
Siems! The 5 Jovers! and Star Company.

Heywood's PIANOS

Library St., Wigan.

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THIS WEEK
Lily as a Little Mother!
MATINEES—Monday, Wednesday & Saturday at 2-30

TO-DAY MY TAILORS are
William Siddell & Co.
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6, Library Street.

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Repairs of all Descriptions done on the Premises by
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BE SURE AND TRY THE
"THREE GEES"
FINE OLD SCOTCH WHISKY.
GILBEY'S GUARANTEED GENUINE

THE GREAT CIRCUS STORY:
A VENOMOUS BITE!
AT THE PAVILION THIS WEEK.

"Fierce fire guts Wigan's theatre"

cont. from p5

the stair rail with the other using my belt line. Just as I had finished lashing the hose there was a terrific clattering noise as more roof collapsed and burst through the doors. Luckily for me I was to one side of the stairs and was able to hang on as the rubble cascaded down the stairs past me.

By now it was completely unbearable. I had started to move down when a voice shouted from down below. "Who's up there, are you alright?" "Me", I replied. "Who the bloody hell is me", the voice now recognisable as the Sub Officer came back. "Fireman Haddock", I shouted. He then told two blokes to get up quick as it was one of the new lads who wouldn't have a clue according to him. I thought sod him and decided to stay, directing the big stream of water that was now belting out of the hose at what appeared to be Dante's inferno beyond the doors. Conditions were a bit choky, my eyes were streaming and my nose was snotty with the effects of the smoke. Two weird apparitions appeared out of the smoke below me. It was two of the other firemen wearing Proto oxygen breathing apparatus. They couldn't speak to me because of the rubber mouthpieces gagging their mouths but one of them gave me a grunt and put his hand on my shoulder. I suppose it was to ask how I was. I tried to tell them what it was like beyond the doors but I couldn't for coughing up smoke. They indicated that I should get out so I didn't waste any further time.

Writhing hose

After a while Cawley the Deputy told me to get back inside. He sent me up the same stairs to the entrance level of the circle. The smoke problem had eased somewhat now that

Opposite: *Wigan Hippodrome was in its heyday, when the programme for Monday September 15 1913, took place. This particular programme was salvaged from beneath floorboards after the fire by an apprentice joiner, who was employed by a building company assisting in the demolition of the burned out shell.*

the roof had partially collapsed and the fire was venting through the roof. Whilst we still couldn't see very well it was possible to make out certain shapes. The upper circle was still in position above us but there was a good blaze going underneath and it was not expected that we would save it.

"Stand from under"

I was beginning to enjoy myself by now and thinking that this was what being a fireman meant, battling against a big fire with hard hitting jets. Unfortunately we were so intent on making progress against the fire that we hadn't realised that we had crept forward beyond the protection of the doorway.

Suddenly the shout "stand from under" came from somewhere above us followed immediately by loud crashing noises as the upper circle started to collapse on top of us. The other two had more experience than I and moved a great deal quicker, leaving me holding the pressurised branch on my own. The back pressure whipped me off my feet and before I could stop myself I was again tumbling down the stairs. This time the jet writhing around like a huge angry snake was following me downstairs. The brass head of the branch narrowly missing me as it jerked back and forth across the narrow staircase. Every time it hit the wall with a smash, huge chunks of plaster would be removed more effectively than any sledgehammer wielded by a navvy. The situation was a bit hairy and I expected to be decapitated at any time. But remembering my training I started to crawl along the hose using my body to hold the writhing snake down whilst I tried to work my way nearer to the flailing brass branch. Just as I grabbed in the darkness for what appeared to be the branch but what turned out to be a jet of water from a burst length of hose, the branch whipped around behind me and shot a well directed pressurised jet of water up between my legs into the nether regions and washed me out into safety beyond the double doors.

Shattered and fed up

By this time any elation I had previously had for the job was gone, soaked to the skin, filthy, legs chafing from wearing wet trousers, and a sore throat from the smoke, I was shattered and fed up. Even when I wanted to scratch my

ear I filled it full of carbon and grit from the fire thus depriving myself of one of the minor pleasures of life – that of sticking a finger in my ear.

I hadn't seen much of the Deputy Chief as he had obviously been busy organising the firefighting elsewhere on the job and had probably missed my important contribution up to date. He arrived on the scene just when I was feeling very sorry for myself. He must have realised how I was feeling but instead of telling me off or telling me to cheer up he told me to be his runner. He took me to all levels of the fire including the opposite side of the fire from where I had been firefighting. At the front of the theatre the small sweet shop was being covered with salvage sheets to prevent further water damage although by this time I suspect that the contents were not fit to eat.

Below the stage the debris had blocked the drains and the water was quite deep. From there we climbed our way through the stage area up into the flies. On the way up I was able to see what a magnificent job the safety curtain had done in preventing the fire getting on to the stage. The actual purpose of that which it was performing tonight. It was designed to prevent a fire on stage affecting the auditorium for sufficient time to enable the audience to escape safely. This was achieved by the metal and asbestos curtain being lowered and then the side nearest the audience was covered with a drencher system. It had certainly done a good job – there was no sign of any fire penetration back stage despite there being no firemen deployed to protect that part of the theatre.

After climbing back down from the flies we made our way to the Green Room which was being used for refreshments in addition to the fire brigade canteen which was next door. The room was quite busy with the crews of fire engines from other parts of Lancashire in addition to the Wigan blokes. I needed little telling to grab a sandwich and a cup of tea and take a break. It was as well because I was feeling a bit knackered and some of my previously felt pains, chafes and blisters were now making themselves felt again.

Snoring his head off

A story I heard after the fire was about the theatre cat which was wandering around the

Green Room looking a bit lost and rubbing up against the firemen's legs. As always at a fire, and despite the fact that the firemen had probably been eating smoke for some considerable time, the policemen are usually near the front of the queue for refreshments provided for the firemen. The night of the fire was no exception and one or two bobbies were having some tea with the firefighters when the cat sidled up to one. One of the bobbies picked the moggy up to give it a comforting stroke whilst he was having his cup of tea. One of the intrepid news hounds spotted him and the next day produced a good story on the rescue of the cat by the policeman, who was subsequently given an award of merit!

The rest of the night was just one hard slog turning over and damping down the smouldering debris. The scene was quite depressing in the increasing light of the dawn as the daylight started to come through where most of the roof had gone as had most of the upper circle. The dress circle was a dismal spectacle of fallen debris and twisted steel girders and the stalls were buried under fallen masonry plaster and steelwork. All the seats were soaked in filthy water which lay in great pools on the floor soaking into the carpets and running back into the orchestra pit.

Most of the musical instruments were warped and damaged. There was a continuous and depressing sound of dripping water where once was gaiety and laughter. It all added to the unreal atmosphere that pervades places after a large fire. Perhaps equally as sad later in the morning was the sight of chorus girls and usherettes weeping over the ashes as they tried to identify their belongings which fortunately had been saved from the fire at the back of the stage.

The fire for me was an exciting start to what was going to be an interesting career in one of the best professions a man could possibly have. For the Hippodrome it was the end of an era of variety, pantomime and drama that was never to return. The site became one of the new fangled supermarkets, all wire baskets and plastic foods.

H. Haddock

● Colin Bean's *Memories of the 'Hipp'* appeared in *Past Forward 9*. Ed.

Past Forward Binder Offer

Due to public demand, from 28 August we will be offering a binder specially designed to store your copies of *Past Forward*.

- Attractively produced, with gold lettering on spine and cover
- Holds up to 15 *Past Forwards*. (5 years supply)
- Easy to use

- Copies of *Past Forward* will not be damaged by the use of a 2-hole punch
- Individual copies can be easily retrieved and replaced.

Available soon from the History Shop and other Heritage Service outlets at only £3.95 (plus £1.00 postage and packing).



Thanks

To Whom it may concern,
Just a note to say thank you for the magazine *Past Forward*.

The patients of the Day Hospital have enjoyed reading them and they have proved a good discussion point.

Thank you again.

Mrs. A. Norris,
Senior Occupational
Therapist,
Wigan and Leigh Health
Services NHS Trust,
Leigh Infirmary,
The Avenue,
Leigh, WN7 1HS

Prompt Service

Dear Sir/Madam,

Once again thank you for your prompt service. It is always a refreshing change dealing with the History Shop. I always come away with the feeling that the staff there are interested in the records and that they are happy to pass on their knowledge.

A.C. Hart,
26 Banklands Road,
Darlington,
Co. Durham.
DL3 9JB

Adopted Leyther

Dear Sir,

As an East Anglian, born and bred, I want you to know how much I appreciate and look forward to each copy of your magazine. I regard it as required reading. It gives me a background to my adopted home of well nigh 50 years.

I first saw Leigh in June 1946 when my Company invited me to take up a new appointment shortly after demobilization. They said, at the time, for a two year period!! When my wife joined me in Jan.1947 we moved to Pennington, previous to that I lived at the Rope and Anchor, Turmpike, Leigh.

One request, please: I think your magazine deserves a suitable embossed storage binder. There must be many like myself who would be happy to pay at least a nominal sum to cover expenses.

Kind regards and all power to your elbow.

L. Ralph Sargent
14 Lancaster Court,
Leigh, Lancs.
WN7 2EE

More letters on
p21 and 22

The Past Forward Questionnaire

A BIG thank you to our readers on two counts. Firstly for taking the time and trouble to fill in and return our questionnaire. Well over 150 respondents gives us an excellent sample size and provides us with essential information. Secondly for all the kind and constructive comments made in your responses. It is very gratifying to know that all our hard work is appreciated.

- It is clear from our own records that we have an extensive mailing list. These results, however, highlight what a high proportion of *Past Forwards* are circulated effectively by post (70%). We feel it is essential that we reach the people who really want to read the newsletter and despite the cost it is beyond question that the mailing list is the best method.

- An overwhelming proportion of you (86%) seem to agree that the mailing list is essential and that you would be willing to meet its continuing costs. Many of you are already very generous with your donations so we shall be thinking very carefully before making any charges.

- The popularity of our newsletter seems beyond question (82% of respondents read every issue). We hope that this will continue well into the future.

Also included in the questionnaire were sections asking for your comments and thoughts. Firstly on your enjoyment of the newsletter:

'All of it; Everything; First to last page; I enjoy it all; An absorbing read; Whole of the newsletter is most enjoyable; All articles are interesting especially the letters page; especially the old photos; particularly the memories and

I Remember; family and local history; old industries; News from the Archives; personal memories; reminiscences of past life in the area; the fact that they are written by local people for local people".

Secondly your comments on how it could be improved were both flattering:

'I think the present format is excellent and cannot suggest any improvements; It's perfect; Keep up the good work; Just keep it as it is" and thought provoking:

'Four issues per year; A hard-backed folder; A binder; An index; A quiz competition; Stories from the 50's and 60's; Help Needed section for research; Readers' letters exchange for genealogy enquiries; Readers' queries answered; More information on the records available at the History Shop".

We intend to look very closely at these comments and improve our service to you. Some things we are going to respond to at once, like a binder for past issues, an index, a guide to our Archive holdings to go alongside our Genealogical Sources booklet, and an invitation here and now to write in with your genealogical problems. Other improvements to the newsletter and the service will be considered once the results of our visitor survey are published.

From the *Past Forward* Questionnaire we found that over half of you had visited the History Shop. Over the last three months visitors have been asked to give their thoughts on our venue in Wigan. We are hoping to have a report on this in the next issue and the results of our free prize draw.

Our thanks are extended to the Arts About Manchester organisation for their help with this project.

P.B.

WIGAN AND ITS CHARTERS

IN the Middle Ages Wigan was a constituent manor of the Barony of Makerfield. The rector was also the lord of the manor, and the inhabitants were unfree villains who rendered labour service to the lord.

In 1246 Wigan received a royal charter, which transformed the manor into a borough and created a class of free men known as burgesses. The burgesses were merchants and manufacturers such as potters, tanners and tinsmiths. The King allowed them to have a guild to administer their affairs. They were allowed a monopoly of trade in the town and exemption from certain taxes, as well as the right to hold markets and fairs (which had been granted a short time earlier). Subsequently the lord in another charter granted each burgess a plot of land, for which they paid money rent instead of labour services, and other economic privileges. All of this was to encourage trade and industry, from which both the lord and the king would benefit.

The factor determining whether a manor became a royal borough (with more privileges than a seigniorial borough) was the political influence of the lord. In Wigan's case the rector, John Mansel, was chief counsellor to King Henry III. There were only four royal boroughs in Lancashire: Lancaster, Liverpool, Preston and Wigan.

The fact that a borough had a royal charter was no guarantee that it would continue to exercise the freedoms specified in it. Monarchs frequently abrogated them, so boroughs were eager to receive confirmatory charters from succeeding monarchs. Later



Portrait of Charles II within the initial letter of his Charter granted to Wigan Corporation, 16 May, 1662.

charters often contain verbatim accounts of earlier ones. In this way we know the contents of Wigan's first royal charter, even though it has not survived.

Sometimes later charters contain added privileges such as incorporation, which allowed the burgesses to be treated as a single legal person, and enabled the borough to purchase land. Some were granted for specific purposes such as one of the two granted to Wigan in 1836, which was drawn up to deal with political unrest at the time.

Although the wording of many borough charters follows a similar pattern each one is different from the other because each dealt with an individual town. The exception, in Wigan's case, is its sixteenth and last charter which was granted in 1974, and has the same standard wording as those for all the new metropolitan boroughs which were created at the time.

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We all have old photographs of loved ones, pets, relatives etc. often hidden away in drawers and attics.

You may think that because they are in poor condition they are all but lost

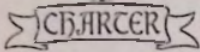
Not necessarily so!

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THE HISTORY SHOP CELEBRATES WIGAN'S FIRST CHARTER

A NUMBER of events have already been held to celebrate the 750th anniversary of Wigan's first royal charter. The Heritage Service, for example, held a competition for schoolchildren to produce a project relating to the history of their local area. An excellent response was received, and the Mayor of Wigan, Councillor Bernard Coyle, presented the prizes to the winning entrants in the History Shop. A selection of the winning entries will be on display in the History Shop until 20 July, and

then again 28 August - 14 September.

Two other temporary exhibitions in the History Shop have a strong Charter flavour. Calligraphy - the Handwriting of the Charters' will run 23 September - 16 November, while from 25 November visitors will have an opportunity to view a number of patchworks specially produced in a series of workshops on the Charter theme.

But the highlight of the year for Wigan Heritage Service and indeed of the Charter celebra-

tions is the opening of phase 2 of the History Shop with the Charter 96 exhibition. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, a legacy from Doctor Monica Wickham (last surviving daughter of Victorian Wigan vicar, Rev. William Wickham) and North West Museums Service, this major development will convert the former ground floor Lending Library into a large exhibition area, fittingly called the Wickham gallery.

Permanent features include the town's first traditional art gallery, where some of the Heritage Service's fine art collection can at last be displayed, an audio-visual display area and a small ground floor research area.

Two attractions are particularly appropriate for Charter year - the Charter Exhibition and the Charter Mural. The

exhibition will feature all the surviving charters on display for the first time for many years and tell the story of 750 years of local history in a highly entertaining and innovative way. The exhibition will be further enhanced by a selection of archival treasures from Angers, the town of Henry III which is now, appropriately, twinned with Wigan. This exhibition will also be very relevant to the National Curriculum - teachers please take note. (see p14 for further details). For further information on the Charter Mural, see pp.15, 24.

N.B. The History Shop will close on 10 August, to allow final conversion work to take place. The fully expanded History Shop will open to the public with the Charter Exhibition on 28 August.



Children from eight different schools in the Borough took part in a competition to produce displays for the History Shop in recognition of the 750th Charter Exhibition. Pictured with the Mayor and Mayoress of Wigan Councillor and Mrs. Bernard Coyle, is Heather Stanton (left) of Stubshaw Cross Primary School, winners of the competition. Runners-up prizes went to Leigh C of E School, represented by Daniel Whalen, (right) and Ince C of E School, represented by Nicola Barrett (centre).

Photo courtesy of Jim Prylo

The History Shop has a Meeting Room, with a capacity for 36. This is available for hire by local groups and societies at a very reasonable cost:

£5.00 PER MORNING OR AFTERNOON SESSION

£7.50 PER EVENING SESSION

REFRESHMENTS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE

If you are interested, contact Philip Butler

(01942) 827594

SOUVENIR BOOKS FOR CHARTER YEAR

1996 will see no fewer than five publications to mark Charter Year. Three have already been published:

- *The Official Souvenir Programme* (£1.00)
- *Around Leigh*, (£9.99)
- *Guide to the Archives*, (£2.95)

A booklet describing the charters and the civic regalia will accompany the Charter Exhibition in the History Shop. (£1.95)

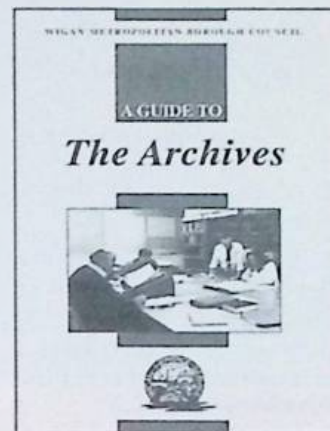
On 24 August 'Wigan - A Historical Souvenir' will be launched. Compiled by

former Wigan Local History Officer Bob Blakeman, this will be a top quality photographic record of Wigan, which will fill a significant gap in the printed documentation of the borough. Many of the photographs are being published for the first time. The book also contains a number of 'Do You Know?' sections - a novel way of promoting discussion and argument at home or in the pub.

'Wigan - A Historical

Souvenir' makes an ideal purchase for Charter year - and is also the perfect

Christmas gift to send to a Wigan exile. Excellent value at £14.99.



Wigan's 750th Charter Anniversary

Official Souvenir Programme

1246 - 1996



£1.00

The Charter Anniversary Official Souvenir Programme is now available, price £1.00. Available from the History Shop, Smiths of Wigan, John Menzies, Wigan Library, Leigh Library, Haigh Country Park, TIC, Wigan Pier and other selected outlets.

Charter China

To celebrate the 750th anniversary of Wigan's first charter the Heritage Service has commissioned a range of exclusive souvenir china. The pieces will feature the Moot Hall design as used on the ancient Borough Seal.



In white, with maroon decoration, the souvenirs will include a plate, cream jug, beaker, miniature pieces and bell. Prices to start at £1.50 for a thimble. The china will be on sale at the History Shop's new ground floor shop, adjacent to the Charter Exhibition.

For further details call Dawn on 01942 828124.



THE CHARTER QUIZ

This is for everyone, with questions ranging from very easy to quite hard and, in one or two cases, extremely difficult, to ensure no one gets full marks! We had wondered about 750 questions, but settled on 75, with 10 marks each. Any entrant who does achieve the maximum 750 will receive a special commemorative award. There will of course be some splendid prizes for the winning entries, kindly donated by the local business community.

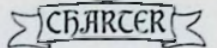
1. Wigan is one of the four oldest boroughs in Lancashire. Name the other three.
2. Who is the present Mayor of Wigan?
3. In which year did Mesnes Park open?
4. In which year was gas first supplied to Wigan?
5. In the Borough Arms of 1922, the lions hold a branch of mountain ash. What is this tree better known as locally?
6. Which well-known building in Library Street was opened by the Countess of Crawford in 1902?
7. Wigan's first public baths opened in Millgate. When?
8. Who was rector of Wigan in 1246?
9. In all, how many royal charters have been granted to Wigan?
10. What was the Roman name for Wigan?
11. Why did the population of Wigan increase by a third in 1904?
12. Who officially opened the New Town Hall in 1991?
13. Which of Wigan Council's Committees is the only one to have survived from 1836 to the present day?
14. Which king granted Wigan its first royal charter?
15. Who was Mayor of Wigan for the first part of Charter Year?
16. What was the exact date of the granting of Wigan's first royal charter?
17. When was the present Market Hall opened, and by whom?
18. Approximately what was the site of Wigan's Moot Hall?
19. Which Victorian architect designed Wigan's Central Library, now the History Shop?
20. What is the date of the earliest surviving Wigan royal charter?
21. Which side did Wigan support in the English Civil War?
22. Who traditionally rang the 1 o'clock market bell?
23. Which well known Wigan building did the Prince and Princess of Wales open in 1873?
24. Which Council Department is housed in Civil Buildings?
25. Who has been commissioned to paint the Charter Mural?
26. Who was Town Clerk of Wigan from 1819 to 1836?
27. What is the link between the granting of Wigan's first charter and Metropolitan Wigan's twin town?
28. Who is the present rector of Wigan?
29. When did Wigan become a county borough?
30. Why was the choice of William Rogers as mayor in 1888 an unusual one?
31. What was the name of the borough court until the 1830's?
32. When did the first double-decker bus arrive in Wigan?
33. Where is the Borough Treasurer's Department based today?
34. How old is the present Wallgate station?
35. Which king presented the State Sword to the town?

You'll find all the answers in the History Shop (especially the Charter 96 exhibition); you'll also find quite a number in the Charter Anniversary Souvenir Programme. So do have a go - and find out more about your town during the last 750 years.

• *Entry forms are available in the History Shop. The closing date for receipt of entries is 14 December, 1996.*

36. How many former districts, apart from Wigan County Borough, did the new Wigan Metropolitan Borough comprise in 1974?
37. Who traditionally rang the 9 o'clock bell in the town?
38. When did Wigan's last tram depart?
39. When was the earliest reference to the office of Town Clerk of Wigan?
40. When did Wigan receive the first grant of arms?
41. Who is the Chairman of the Recreation and Amenities Committee?
42. Who was the first Mayor of Wigan Metropolitan Borough?
43. Why is Hallgate so named?
44. Which king granted charters to Wigan in 1832 and 1836?
45. When was electricity first supplied to Wigan?
46. What is Ralfe Bank's claim to fame?
47. In which year did Wigan's first woman Police Constable appear on the beat?
48. Who opened a Penny Bazaar in Wigan Market Hall c. 1891, whose name is still a familiar one in the centre of town today?
49. Which famous Wigan 'institution' will celebrate its 400th anniversary in 1997?
50. Which motto was adopted by the town in 1922?
51. Who is the earliest recorded clock-maker in Wigan (1662)?
52. When did the first traffic lights appear in Wigan?
53. How many people in Wigan had the vote as a result of the Grant Reform Act of 1832?
54. What is the dedication of Wigan Parish Church?
55. The original All Saints fair moved to the feast-day of which particular saint in the 17th century?
56. The Municipal Corporation Act of 1835 divided Wigan into five wards. Name them.
57. Which two important market buildings were built in 1784 and 1816?
58. Which town centre arcade will celebrate its centenary in 1998?
59. Which Council Department is based in Municipal Buildings?
60. Which well-known Wigan attraction celebrated its tenth birthday earlier this year?
61. Which famous building appears on the town seal?
62. Dr. John Bridgeman (1577-1652) was rector of Wigan for many years. Which two other important offices did he hold?
63. Who is the present leader of the Council?
64. What is the motto of Wigan Metropolitan Borough?
65. How many members make up Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council?
66. Which alderman was stripped of his title 'because of his bad carriage and most lewd and most uncivil in his behaviour and hath committed many fowle enormities'?

Wigan - A Borough - 1246-1996



CHARTER QUIZ

Continued

PHOTOGRAPHIC SECTION

67. This photograph was taken in 1898, just before the two central buildings were demolished to make way for a new street. Name the street.



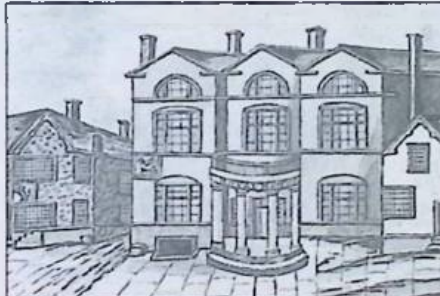
68. Who is the gentleman, and what is his claim to fame?



69. Who was the royal visitor welcomed to the town, and when?



70. Which building now occupies the site of this famous old town centre Hotel?



71. The 'Pavilion' was demolished in 1959. Which building now occupies this site?



72. Where is the concert taking place?



73. This building, which still survives was formerly a church. Which denomination, and where is it?



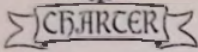
74. The gentleman in the centre of this photograph, taken in 1909, is Andrew Carnegie, the famous philanthropist. Where was it taken, and what was the occasion?



75. Wigan's Public Hall no longer survives. Where was it?



750 YEARS



Wigan - A Borough - 1246-1996

1996 IN THE HISTORY SHOP

Temporary Exhibitions

- 17 June - 20 July
Display of Childrens' Charter Projects
- 27 July - 10 August
Wigan Photographic Society Annual Exhibition.
- 28 August - 14 September
Display of Childrens' Charter Projects
- 23 September - 16 November
Calligraphy
The Handwriting of the Charter (with workshops).
- 25 November - January 1997
Display of Charter Patchworks

History Shop - Phase 2

- 28 August - 1997
The Charter 96 Exhibition. By far the largest and most ambitious exhibition ever mounted by Wigan Heritage Service, the exhibition tells the story of 750 years of local government in Wigan, and includes all the surviving charters from 1314, on public display for the first time for many years, as well as a selection of archive treasures from Wigan's twin town, Angers.

The Charter Mural

This splendid work will be unveiled to the public on the same day as the Charter Exhibition.

Lectures

- 29 August
An Evening with Gerald Rickards - the artist talks about his Charter Mural.
- 9 October
Medieval Wigan and its Charters
Bob Blakeman
- 13 November
Wigan before the Industrial Revolution
Johnathan Pratt
- 11 December
Victorian Wigan
James Fairhurst
- 8 January 1997
An Evening with Gerald Rickards - the artist talks about his work, and presents the prizes to the winners of his Charter Mural competition.

Guided Tours for School Classes of the History Shop and Wigan Town Hall

- 25 September
 - 1 October
 - 9 October
- Teachers should contact Bob Blakeman (tel: 01942 828020)

History Shop

Opening Hours: Monday 10.00 - 7.00; Tuesday - Friday 10.00 - 5.00 Saturday 10.00 - 1.00
N.B. The History Shop will close on 10 August and re-open on 28 August
 The History Shop, Rodney Street, Wigan, WNI 1DG.
 Tel: 01942 828128. Fax: 01942 827645.



A Victorian Christmas

at Haigh Hall
21st December 1996

7.00 for 7.30 pm Carriages 12.30 am

Five Course Dinner

Musical Entertainment including

The City Waites

'Welcome, My Lord Sire Christemas!'

Victorian costume to be worn.

Tickets 26 Guineas (£27.30) available from

September from:

Haigh Hall (01942) 832895 or TIC (01942) 825677

Credit Cards Accepted

Further details from

Alastair Gillies,

Wigan Heritage Service (01942) 827375

750 YEARS



THE SPIRIT OF WIGAN

Over 2000 years ago, Celtic warriors settled in Wigan. Roman legions built a fort here. Then in 1246 King Henry III chartered Wigan as a free Borough, beginning its making as one of the powerhouses of the industrial revolution.

Wiganers waited over 300 years before the first local reference to whisky when, in 1557, Richard Brereton de Ley, of Brereton, left in his will 'A boke to distill waters'.

Lancashire Whisky Producers of Wigan have produced a 'Charter Whisky'. This single malt whisky has been made

using local water and the method of Preston's distillery in the reign of Victoria. For ten years this Charter Whisky has been waiting for the day you can raise a glass in true Lancashire spirit, to Wigan past and present, to 750 years of noble miners, honest spinners and whisky makers, who have kept the spirit alive.

The Charter Whisky is available through the History Shop at £37 per bottle. Please ring 01942 828128 for further details.

THE CHARTER MURAL

THE Charter 96 celebrations are not just about the last 750 years - Wigan Heritage Service has come up with an idea for a project which is intended to last for the next 750 years!

Well-known local artist Gerald Rickards has been commissioned to paint a mural as a legacy for the future.

This will be no ordinary mural. It will stretch the full width of the new History Shop gallery - 37 feet in all! Since the beginning of the year Gerald has been hard at work at home, gradually developing the mural in a series of four foot sections.

The Charter Mural will include buildings past, present and even future. Many Wiganers will remember, for example, the Hippodrome, sadly burned down in the 1950's. Fewer will remember the old Moot Hall, demolished in 1869! The majority of the buildings featured are, of course, still in existence, but a few, such

as the prestigious Investment Centre, have only recently been built, while in the case of the new Robin Park development, Gerald has had to work from an artist's impression.

The identity of all the other buildings depicted in the mural will be a closely-guarded secret until 1997. Between the unveiling at the end of August and the New Year, visitors to the History Shop will be able to enter a competition, with prizes for those who can identify the most buildings. There will be two categories - children and adults. Gerald will present the prizes at a workshop which he will be giving in the History Shop on 8 January 1997.

But there will be an opportunity to meet Gerald before that. On 29 August, he will be in the History Shop talking about the production of the mural - without giving away the identity of any of the buildings (further details from the History Shop, tel: 01942 828128).

A special plaque, containing the names of those who have helped to fund the production of the mural, will be placed underneath. If you, whether as a business or an individual, would like to

support the mural in this way, there may still be time - please contact Heritage Services Manager Alastair Gillies by early August. This is an opportunity for your name to be remembered for the next 750 years!

Wigan Heritage Service is very grateful to those who have promised support for the Mural to date: Wigan City Challenge, Sainsbury's, Lloyds Bank, Waterfields (Leigh), Smiths of Wigan, Joy Mining Machinery, Wm. Santus & Co., CTP Limited, Miller Development.

SCHOOL SONG

Those readers of *Past Forward* who attended Wigan Grammar School will no doubt remember this song, which is particularly appropriate in Charter Year. Unfortunately, however, I don't know the tune - can any reader oblige? Ed.

Oh, Wigan is a grand old town;
The Romans knew it well;
It always had a Good King Coal
As long as folks can tell;
And so because its rule has been
From age to age so royal
Its sons today their town still call
"The Ancient and the Loyal".

Refrain -

*For the honour of the School
We'll fight with all our might.
For the very name of Wigan.
We are told implies a fight,
Though not ancient we are loyal,
And we'll fight a battle royal
For the good old School of Wigan
That we love so well.*

And for three hundred years and more
Our School all storms has faced,
Till now it stands on solid rock,
By Wigan town embraced;
Our City fathers with just pride
Have helped our Founders' aims,
We boys will show we've grateful hearts
By work at School - and Games

THE CHARTER PLAY

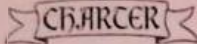
AS part of the Charter celebrations, Ed Applewhite, Artistic Director at Wigan Pier, has been commissioned to write and produce a Charter Play, to be performed by Wigan Youth Theatre.

Various scenes from the granting of Wigan's first charter through 750 years to modern times will be re-enacted in an

entertaining and informative way. The play is suitable for all ages.

The premier of the Charter Play will take place at Haigh Park on August Bank Holiday Monday at 7.30 p.m. following the Charter Gala. It in turn will be followed at 9.30 p.m. by the Charter Fireworks Display.

Two further performances will be given at the Formby Studio Theatre, Wigan Pier on 29 and 30 August, at 7.30 p.m. Tickets £2.50 (£2 concessions) available from the History Shop (tel: 01942 828128) or at the door.



Wigan - A Borough - 1246-1996

Come and celebrate Wigan's 750th Birthday,
at an evening of feasting, fun and frolicking

The Charter Banquet

Sunday 25 August 1996
7.30 p.m. prompt

in the Charter Festival Marquee,
Haigh Country Park

Take a trip through 750 years of Wigan's proud
history with a Medieval Feast well fortified with
ales and wines and Entertainment whilst you feast
with

Jesters, Jugglers, Medieval
Musicians, Fire Eaters and
Falconers

Dancing from 10.00 p.m. to the authentic sounds of

The Toll Bar Band
(bar and coffee facilities)

Medieval costume or dress as you wish.

Prize for the best costumed couple: Dinner for
two at the High Moor Restaurant

Tickets £22.50

(includes feast and accompanying ales and wines)

Available from: Haigh Hall (01942) 832895

The History Shop (01942) 828128

T.I.C. (01942) 825677 Credit cards accepted.

Reductions for parties of ten

Further details from: Alastair Gillies, Wigan

Heritage Service (01942) 827375

with support from the High Moor Catering Company



Bank Holiday Monday
26 August 1996

Charter Gala Day

(incorporating the August Carnival)

Celebrate the 750th anniversary of
Wigan's first Royal Charter at
Haigh Country Park
11.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m.

All the fun of a medieval fayre featuring:

The Knights of Ackley
Witness the thrills, colour & pageantry of a
Medieval Jousting Tournament

Golden Eagle Medieval Archery Display
Spectacular demonstrations of the traditional longbow

The City Waites
Medieval Magical Mystery Tour

Hawk Experience
Medieval Falconry Demonstration

Ship of Fools What a Palaver!
with Magic, Stilts, Fire Eating & Juggling

Dragons Fire
Medieval Folk Music

Scherzo Dance Company
plus Workshops Medieval Sport, Music, Dance
& Special Childrens Entertainment including:

Silcocks Funfair
Admission only £1.00 at the gate, 50p car park

with support from the High Moor Catering Company



750 YEARS

A number of classes and workshops are being held during Charter Year, including some organised by Literature Development Officer Bron Williams, who advised Mrs. Coleman to submit this story for inclusion in Past Forward. Ed.

“I was born on VE Day”...

AS my fiftieth birthday was getting near, I kept thinking to myself: *What do I want to do – a night out, a meal at a restaurant for all the family, a weekend at the seaside? I just couldn't decide.*

Then I saw it, there in the local newspaper one night. It read: *50 volunteers wanted to represent Wigan Borough at the VE Day Commemoration Concert in Hyde Park, London.*

That's it! That's it! I'm going to do something for myself for once in my life. Parties you can have any time, or days out, provided you're not skint.

That same night I wrote a letter saying why I wanted to go to the VE day celebration, because you had to apply through the Mayor's office in Wigan, who I suppose would nominate you.

My letter read:

Dear Sir,

I was born on VE day, 8th May, 1945, minutes after Sir Winston Churchill gave his speech that the war was over. My parents, Alice and Tom Jackson, named me VERA VICTORIA – Vera for VE day and Victoria for victory – so this year is very special to me, not just because I'll be 50 on that day but for how I got my name, and the meaning of peace and victory.

I posted off the letter the next day and waited. After a week, the Mayor's secretary rang me up and asked if he could pass on my letter to the local newspaper. I said "No, I don't mind – I think it's a good story." The Evening Post came and took a photo of me holding up my old ID card, which I'd kept. The next few weeks flew by and I still wasn't sure if I was going to Hyde Park or not. Then one morning I received my ticket for the VE day concert. Great! I

was made up, and the concert was on 8th May as well. I could now make arrangements – I wanted everything to be just right. I got in touch with one of Pat's relations who lives on her own just outside of London to see if she would let me stay for a couple of days. Then all I had to do was wait. Every night I took out the brown envelope with my VE day concert ticket in and studied the plans on the back of the ticket. It was like a Wembley ticket with a map of the ground at the back. I kept looking at the South Stand and Gate G. I looked how to get to the seat area via Park Lane entrance. I also had another ticket and invitation card for a reception in the War Veterans' Centre, which also proved interesting.

Two days to go and I'll be off to London, I was thinking as I was going to the hairdresser to have a trim. In the hairdresser's shop, I started talking to Audrey Bennett, our local Councillor. The VE day concert at Hyde Park came into the conversation and I said that I would be representing Wigan Borough. "Haven't they given you something as a representative?", said Audrey. "What do you mean?", I said. "They should give you a badge with Wigan coat-of-arms on it, seeing that you're representing Wigan", Audrey replied. "Ring the Mayor's secretary and tell him what I've said. Okay?" and then she said "Good luck and enjoy your day."

When I got home, I rang the Mayor's secretary and explained the story, which he already knew about, and he told me to call in at

the Town Hall and he would leave something for me.

Friday came and I went into Wigan to do some shopping. Jan, a friend who lives in our street, came with me. When we had done our shopping and I was rabbiting on about going to London, I stopped dead in my tracks. "Hey! I forgot. I have to call in at the Town Hall to collect my badge," I said. "Come on!"

I dragged Jan to the Town Hall and went into the reception. I said to the receptionist "Hello! I'm Mrs. Coleman. The Mayor's secretary has left something for me." She reached under the counter and gave me a Town Hall carrier bag. I thanked her and practically ran outside, I was so excited. Me! Getting a gift from the Town Hall of Wigan – it's usually a bill! Jan said "Open it and let's have a look." Inside was a beautiful white lady's scarf edged with red and a huge coat-of-arms in one corner. I felt as though I was holding an M.B.E. or something similar. I said to Jan "I'm going to feel proud wearing this badge when I go to London." and she replied "You deserve it, kid!"

Saturday came and I was overwhelmed with cards and gifts off friends, neighbours and family. I don't know about being 50 – I felt only 20! It gave me such a buzz, just what I've been needing for a while. Pat came down to mind the children; it didn't concern me having to leave them for three whole days even though I've never been apart from them for so long before. It was something I felt I had to do and the break would just be great. I made some red and white buntings for the street and everyone dressed their windows with red, white and blue decorations. I'm glad I was able to see it all before I went to London.

I finally persuaded my mother to come with me for the break. I knew she couldn't go to Hyde Park or the concert as she had no ticket, but she wanted to see her brother whom she hadn't seen in a long time; and at the age of 85, who could stop her? I just hoped that the journey wouldn't be too tiring for her!

Come Sunday and I was nervously giving out orders to the children and making sure that I had my train ticket, concert ticket, etc. I told the children to open all my birthday cards on Monday, 8th May, seeing that I wouldn't be there to open them.

The car came to take me to my mother's in Ince. The street was quiet as we were leaving. I was glad really; it would have been too much, everyone waving me off. I might have changed my mind and not gone! As we pulled up outside my mother's house I gasped – there was a HAPPY 50TH BIRTHDAY banner outside on the upstairs window. "Oh, how lovely", I said to the driver. My mother and I collected our bags and went by car to the train station. We didn't have to wait long before the train for Euston arrived. It was quite full so we grabbed the nearest empty seats. In between chatting and cups of BR tea, we were finally coming into London. I was fascinated by the huge buildings that were in sight. I felt like a school-girl on holiday with her mum – so excited. We got off the train and walked up the steep platform; the air was warm but fresh. My mother spotted her brother waiting for us. I hadn't seen him for a good many years but I still recognised him. He gave us both a big hug and showed us to where he had parked his car. "Nice car," I said as I fastened my seat belt.

Cont on P18

"I was born on VE Day"...

Cont from p17

He said, "I'm going take you on a quick tour of the city because you probably won't get a chance to see it after today." Apparently, when there is anything big happening in London a lot of the main streets are closed off. We went past St. Paul's Cathedral, the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, over Waterloo Bridge, and Downing Street – we saw practically everything! Crowds of people were flocking in from all over the world for the big VE day celebrations. Everyone we saw had either a red, white and blue hat, carried a Union Jack, or wore red, white and blue outfits. At that moment there was nowhere in the world I'd rather have been than there in London. The following day was my big day – the 8th of May had finally arrived! *Happy Birthday Vera* I said to myself. I had to get out of bed and look through the window to see if I really was in London. My mother was still fast asleep, so I didn't wake her. I went downstairs and my uncle was just making a cup of tea. He wished me a happy birthday and gave me a card from both of them, it was a card showing all the events and happenings of 8th May, 1945 – something I'll always keep.

A little later, we went to a park where you could see practically all over London; it was just like looking at a picture. I could have stayed there all day, there was so much to see. I was getting a bit nervous by now, the thought of going to Hyde Park on my own scared the life out of me. Late afternoon came and it was time for me to get ready for the Hyde Park concert. My uncle couldn't take me as all the roads would be shut off. He went out and bought me a bus pass, which meant I could travel on as many buses as possible. My uncle wrote down the bus numbers and places where to catch the bus to take me to Park Lane, which is opposite Hyde Park. He gave me some

advice: dress simply, don't wear any kind of jewellery, don't carry any money, or handbag, as pick-pockets and muggers would be having a field day due to all the thousands of people flocking to London.

The many plans and pictures I had had in my mind over the past few weeks were nothing like the vision I saw in the mirror – plain black suit, white blouse, flattish shoes (for running), a carrier bag containing my concert ticket, VIP ticket for the reception, can of pop, banana and two sandwiches. I stuffed a £10 note in my bra in case of emergency, for a taxi or something, and held the bus pass stiffly in my hand.

I got off one bus and on to another, sitting near the driver each time – another of my uncle's tips. On the next bus I could see elderly couples, the men wearing medals. I thought, *Great, I'll follow them – they must be going to Hyde Park.* I kept thinking and planning all the time. A young coloured man sat down beside me on the bus and I started talking to him and telling him that I was going to Hyde Park, that I'd come from Wigan and that I was 50 today. He was lovely, he had a big smile, and when he knew it was my birthday, he kissed my hand and said, "Lady, you don't look 50. Have a lovely day." My head felt as big as Big Ben!

It was time to move. I spotted the couples with medals getting off the bus. I hurried along beside them and realised I was in Park Lane. The crowds of people there were frightening, but really it felt good. I had the feeling that someone was with me all the way, pushing me forward and thinking for me. I was alone but I didn't feel alone; it was weird. I talked to different people walking into Hyde Park and just used my commonsense and friendliness – really that's where my Wigan roots come in handy. Wiganers are very friendly and open.

Now! I had to find the War Veterans' centre for the reception. When I found it, it was all roped off and two RAF lads were letting in people with invitation cards only. There were RAF men and women, army soldiers and

cadets, and police everywhere you moved; security was brilliant.

The War Veterans' Centre was a marquee about as big as three of our streets at home. I showed my card and went inside to find a show going on in one part. The music blended in with the setting of the VE day celebration. Young performers were belting out numbers such as *Roll out the Barrel* and *Lambeth Walk*. I stood and watched for a while but had to move away when they started to sing *We'll Meet Again*. There was an old soldier standing alongside me proudly wearing his medals and he had a tear rolling down his face. I just swallowed hard and moved on.

A lot of people were carrying souvenir VE bags with posters in and other items. I asked a gentleman where to get one and he pointed out a stall where two young soldiers were standing guiding people about. I went over to them and asked if I could have one as a souvenir for my children. I had my VIP invitation card in my hand and they looked at it and said "Yeah, sure you can!" I sat down for a minute to see what was inside the bag; there was a poster with a picture of a soldier returning home to his wife and son, and postcards the same, together with a VE day key-ring, pen, brooch and a BT phone card with VE day celebrations on the front, all finished off in a red, white and blue folder. I want to pass these on to my children to keep for the next 50 years.

I started to look around for the reception area, by invitation card only. I looked closely at the card; it said, *Dress: Jacket and Tie (Medals may be worn)*. I thought to myself, *You must be important to get in here – you're only a housewife from Wigan!* A woman spotted the card in my hand and said, "You can go in, you've got a card." Everybody stood aside and two soldiers there said, "Come through, madam." I walked in, gobsmacked. There were tables set out with bottles of wine and beer – you name it, it was there on a table. On small round tables were trays of bite-size treats – that's the only way I

could describe them. A waiter asked what drink I would like; I chose orange – I had to think straight otherwise I would never have got back home! A lady came and stood by my side; she wore a pink suit with a big pink hat. I thought, *Oh no! Watch it – it might be somebody important!* We got talking and she was smashing to get on with, not a snob or anything. We both tried all the food on the trays; it was gorgeous. Waiters kept topping up my glass (orange, of course) and food was shoved in front of us all the time. I nearly threw my carrier bag away; I was getting a bit conscious of it or was getting a better deal with these gourmet snacks. The lady's name was Ellen and she pointed out to me different celebrities all around us. I nearly choked on a vol-au-vent – but there were MPs, Mayors, show-biz stars (I was looking for my idol, Cliff Richard, but didn't see him), Colonels, Majors, Princes and Princesses. I felt like doing a cartwheel across the floor, I was that excited. I glanced at my watch and said to Ellen, "It's time for me to go and find my seat for the concert." We said our goodbyes and I thanked her for her company. I wouldn't have stayed in there for two minutes on my own.

I made my way down a long path leading to the seating area for the concert; crowds of people were hurrying down to take their seats. I had to find Stand G. As I looked up at some scaffolding with signs on, A - B - C - D, I found it. It was so high, I thought I was climbing Blackpool Tower; at the top of the steps, a young soldier was checking tickets and he handed me a programme for the evening's show. I found my seat and sat down; most of the seats around me were empty. Looking in front of me, the stage seemed miles away, as the seating area was right at the back of the park. Large screens were close by so that one could see what was going on on stage.

Well Vera, you made it, I smiled to myself. I took a few photos, one of *The Dove of Peace* held high over the park, clearly

Cont on P19

**"I was born on
VE Day"...**

Cont from p18

giving out the symbol of peace, the dome, a map of the world and flags of the world encircling it. Inside *The Dome of Flowers*, four flames had been lit by the Youth of the Nation, another symbol of peace and remembrance. Over to the right I could see *The Beacon*, which was to be lit by the Queen together with Miss Emily McManus, the twelve-year-old great-grand-daughter of Sir Winston Churchill, who was representing the youth of the nation. All the other beacons would take their cue from this and the evening sky would glow with fires across the United Kingdom.

On the stage, various bands took it in turn belting out some of the wartime songs; a gospel choir, Irish dancing, pipe bands. It was so moving. Seats were now filling up and the gates opened for the public. Hyde Park was now filled to its limits with thousands of people, all into the VE day swing. Me too! I was on my own but didn't feel it. I sang and clapped and cheered along with the rest of them.

At 8.30 the Royal Family arrived, to the sound of massed bands. Mr. Robert Hardy came on stage to read an extract from *The Churchill Papers*. It went so quiet. My mind wandered back to 8th May, 1945. My mother had told me that I was born at home minutes after Churchill's speech came on the radio. I could picture it in my mind and I held my breath. I gasped as the sound of a cannon echoed through Hyde Park; the woman sitting next to me said, "Are you okay?" I breathlessly said "I've just been born!" That was it; I'd been back to when I was born – what a great 50th birthday present.

Everyone stood for two minutes' silence. In front of me were ex-soldiers in their seventies, standing so proudly with their regimental berets held tightly to their chests; there were a lot of tears for the ones they were

remembering on this special day.

A second maroon (cannon) fired. The Queen then lit the beacon to the sound of *Trumpet Prelude*. On a large screen, we were able to watch the other beacons being lit across the country. Massed military bands played *We'll keep a welcome*.

I had to go. It was just starting to get dark and I had to get back to my uncle's in one piece. I knew I would be missing most of the concert but my safety came first, travelling alone at night in London. I hurried out of my seat, down the steps and looked for the way out. I had to walk with someone, anyone. I saw an elderly gentleman walking towards the exit. He looked okay, so I trotted alongside him and nervously chatted about the VE day celebrations and how I was worried about going through the underground passageway and catching the right bus. Guess what! Luck was with me – he was travelling the same bus route as I was. *Oh thank you, God*, I said to myself as, smiling, I looked up to the now dark skies.

We chatted all the way about Wigan, rugby, Uncle Joe's mint balls, and whatever else we are famous for in Wigan – we're more famous than you think! The following day we were to go home. I couldn't wait to see my children; I had missed them, but it was something I had to do. Well, I don't think I'll be going to the next 50 years' celebration! Time flies when you're having fun, and before we knew it, my mother and I were on the train back to Wigan. My mother said that she'd enjoyed seeing her brother, and I'd said enough!

Driving back into Carr Street, I could see a sheet flapping out of my window. I thought, *Oh no, don't say Pat's hung the washing out!* I stepped out of the taxi and saw *Happy 50th Birthday Vera from all your friends and neighbours*. That was a symbol of friendship!

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Lime House, Lowton and Mr. P.T. Eckersley, M.P., R.N.V.R., Pilot, and Lancashire C.C. Captain.



Lime House, Lowton

LIME HOUSE was built in 1903 by a wealthy millowner, Mr. William Eckersley, on the site of an older property of the same name, though on one or two of the census returns the spelling of Lyme House was used. The old house must also have been quite large according to the returns of 1841-81 which show that in each case several servants were kept. During that period the occupants were all Liverpool business men; one, a Mr. W.H. Livesey, was chief accountant to the Mersey Dock and Harbour Board. The property extending to about 20 acres was part of the Birdgewater Estate and all the tenants seem to have maintained a nursery until Mr. Eckersley became the owner.

The 1881 census records that Mr. R. Milner resided there with his young wife and his own grown up family; he was 65 – his wife 36. Although it is not shown in the census, Mr. Milner had a daughter, Mary Ann, who eloped one night with Enoch Sankey, a handsome young farmer from Croft. She escaped through a bedroom window using a ladder that had been conveniently left nearby. Mr. Sankey became one of the biggest horse dealers in Europe before and during the 1914 War. There are many stories told of this flamboyant character, who always dressed as the wealthy farmer with bowler hat, expensive waistcoat, breeches and highly polished top boots. The one I heard when I was very young recounts that he liked to gamble, and that one night in a

Liverpool hotel he was winning heavily and wanted a reason to get away; he excused himself for a few minutes during which time he telephoned Lime Street Station to book a special train to Kenyon Station for "Lord Croft". He returned to the table for a while before he announced that his special coach awaited him at Lime Street. The disbelieving company followed him to find that Lord Croft had indeed a coach waiting for him.

In 1887 Mr. W. H. Arnott became the owner and occupier. He had the paper mill at Golborne, and still maintained the nursery – in fact a large vinery was shown on the plans at the time of the purchase.

The Arnotts sold Lime House in 1902 to Mr. Eckersley who was responsible for building the new house in 1903. My earliest memories were of the high wall the whole length of the property on Newton Road and down Heath Lane to the main gate. The large entrance and drive onto Newton Road were part of the alterations made by the Golborne Urban District Council in 1935. As young boys we would climb the wall to peep over on to the lawns hoping to see a famous amateur cricketer, many of whom were entertained during their matches with Lancashire County. Rumours would go round that Ranji or A.P.F. Chapman were staying the weekend, but I must

Cont on p20

Lime House, Lowton

Cont from p19

confess that I never saw any of them. Delegations of boys went occasionally to ask for cast-off bats and were not often disappointed. Many of the bats found their way on to Highfield Moss to be used by all the locals. In the 1920's it is doubtful if we would have had a cricket bat to play with but for the generosity of Mr. P.T. Eckersley, Mr. William Eckersley's son.

Captain of Lancashire

P.T. as he was known, played for Lancashire from 1923 to 1935, being captain for the period 1929-35, winning the championship in 1930. Needless to say we read the cricket scores every day to see how our local hero had performed.

Peter Thorpe Eckersley was born at Lime House in 1904. As well as a cricketer he was a keen amateur pilot, several times in the 1920's landing his bi-plane on Mr. Rigby's field at Locking Stoops Farm. One unique record was that he arranged the first flight ever to take a cricket team to a fixture. Two planes were used to take the Lancashire team from Cardiff to Southampton. The journey took 51 minutes. Peter also had a keen interest in politics becoming M.P. for the Exchange Division of Manchester in 1935, resigning his captaincy of the county to concentrate on his duty as a politician. At the outbreak of war in 1939 he immediately joined the Air Arm of the R.N.V.R., although he could have claimed exemption on the grounds of being an M.P., an act which cost him his life.

Mr. R. Warburton of the Lancashire C.C. sent the following quotation from the archives of the club, in the form of an obituary:

"Eckersley, Peter Thorpe Liet. R.N.V.R., M.P., died on August 13th, 1940, at the age of 36 as the outcome of an accident when flying. Known as the "cricketing airman", he often flew his own plane to matches. In 1928, when prospective candidate for the Newton Division of Lancashire he announced the compulsion of deciding between politics and cricket and that he chose cricket. Experience at Rugby and



County Champions 1930. Left to right: G. DUCKWORTH, J. L. HOPWOOD, J. IDDON, F. M. SIBBLES, G. HODGSON, M. L. TAYLOR, E. PAYNTER, Front Row: C. HALLOWS, E. TYLDESLEY, P. T. ECKERSLEY (Capt.), E. McDONALD, R. TYLDSLEY

Cambridge, where he did not get his blue, equipped Eckersley so well in batting and fielding that after one season in the eleven he was appointed Captain of the Lancashire County Club when only 24. This difficult position, with little amateur companionship, he held with honour for six years and led his side to the championship.

In the seasons 1923 to 1936 Eckersley often played well when his side were badly placed, scoring 5,730 runs, including a very good century against Gloucestershire at Bristol. A first-rate fieldsman, he set his team a splendid example, notably at times when some slackness was apparent. Still he retained a liking for politics and, reversing his previous decision, he contested the Leigh Division in 1931, before he achieved his ambition by becoming Unionist M.P. for the Exchange Division of Manchester in 1935.

He consequently resigned the captaincy of Lancashire, but his restless nature, known well to his intimate friends, influenced him to join the Air Arm of the R.N.V.R. when war broke out. Despite indifferent health he was always keen for duty until his strength became overtaxed."

Lime House

Lime House came into the

possession of Mr. P.T. Eckersley on the death of his father in 1925. Mr. Lloyd the old coachman still worked there, though the horses he had been so proud of had long been replaced by the limousine, and Mr. Coe the head gardener still kept the grounds in immaculate condition. In 1935 the property was sold to Golborne Urban District Council which, as was earlier mentioned, built the splendid drive and gateway on to Newton Road; it also removed the high wall on the Newton Road boundary revealing the pleasant garden and large trees. The premises made ideal Council offices, the Council chamber itself being quite a grand meeting place. During World War 2 Lime House was the headquarters of some of the volunteer services. The particular one I was involved with was the Gas Decontamination Squad. We were housed in the stables behind the main building, and were expected to report each time the air raid warning sounded. The siren was installed in the main offices; the "warning" and the "all clear" were all too familiar sounds during those years.

On the reorganisation of the councils in the 1970's Wigan Metro became the owners of Lime House, using the offices less and less until they finally disposed of the property to a

Catholic Charity who have adapted the buildings to make a very pleasing home for the elderly.

Two short letters that appeared in the *Past Forwards* of Autumn 1995 and Spring 1996 prompted me to write of Lime House and Mr. P.T. Eckersley. Mr. Alec Hughes tells of his childhood memories of Mr. Eckersley's plane landing on the fields behind his home, and Mrs. Stroud of the stained glass window in Atherton Chowbent Unitarian Chapel. Until reading of the memorial window I had not known of its existence. With the help of Mrs. Stroud I was able to take a photograph of the window and the Eckersley family pew. As a young girl Mrs. Stroud can remember Peter with his young wife and family coming to the service; she has a vivid memory of Peter's uniform and pilot's wings.

The inscription on the window reads:-

Pro Patria

LT(a) Peter Thorpe Eckersley
R.N.V.R. J.P. M.P.
A Trustee of Chowbent Chapel
born 2nd July 1904.
Killed flying on active service
13th August 1940.
Devoted remembrance from
his wife mother and sister.

H. Worsley, Lowton



The best yet

Dear Sir,

I was visiting my daughter in Blackrod recently and during a visit to Haigh Hall, I picked up a copy of your excellent magazine: I think it is one of the very best I have yet come across.

Here in Grimsby we have a Heritage Centre, an Archive Office and a great collection of local history in our Reference Library, but nothing approaching the organisation in Wigan. Your citizens should be immensely proud of Wigan's approach to the history of their area.

The object of this letter is to introduce myself to you with the hope that I may be of some small help to the people for whom you are offering your Heritage services.

As you will know, Grimsby was once the very centre of the country's fishing trade and known all over the world. During the town's rise to that prominence in the 19th century, many boys were brought here from orphanages, reformatories and workhouses all over the country, to become - very often unwillingly - apprentices to the trade.

Grimsby's record concerning the treatment meted out to a lot of those lads became known nationally for the disgrace that it was. They were beaten, starved, sexually abused and, in some cases died of exposure and various misadventures.

All this has been chronicled in official Mercantile Marine registers which were donated to the

town some years ago. Those registers then became the basis of a superb book written by the Deputy Librarian, David Boswell.

Now, from that book I have established that some of those recruits came from your area of the country: these are listed at the end of my letter.

Possibly this information might be of some use to family tree researchers in local societies in the Wigan region? Their secretaries could perhaps contact me and I will try to ferret out the information they require but in any case I enclose the address of the Archive Office below and Mr. Wilson will be happy to help with any enquiries:

Mr. John Wilson,
Area Archive Office,
Town Hall Square,
Grimsby, DN31 1HX.
Tel: 01472 323585

The list of places from where the apprentices came contains:-

Bolton; Liverpool; Liverpool Industrial School; Liverpool Boys' Home; Manchester; Manchester Boys' Refuge; Manchester Industrial School; Manchester Orphan School; Manchester Reformatory; North Lancashire Reformatory; Preston; Rochdale; Runcorn; Salford; Stockport; Stockport Industrial School; Warrington; Warrington Industrial School; Wirral.

G.H. Black,
84 Pershore Avenue,
Grimsby,
S. Humberside.
DN34 5QA

Smiths Hosiery Co. Ltd.

Dear Sir,

My great grandfather, John Smith, set up the first bicycle shop in King Street, Wigan in 1869 where he also sold sewing machines. He later established a business in Pennyhurst Mill in Wallgate and in 1913 built a factory in Dorning Street, Wigan for his

firm 'Smiths Hosiery Co. Ltd.' The firm and the building ceased to exist in the 1950's.

I have very little knowledge of the firm and I should be very grateful if any reader could provide me with any information or photographs relating to the above. All photographs will, of course, be returned.

I.O. Smith,
'Brigsteer',
29 Timms Lane,
Freshfield, Formby,
Merseyside.
L37 7DW

Lovely time

Dear Mr. Blakeman,

Thankyou for letting us come to the History Shop. We all had a lovely time there. We liked the things what we saw there. When we got back from school everybody was talking about the trip. All of us are making a video of where we walked around. Mrs. Williams kindly let us draw some pictures. All of us drew the key and the policemen's whistle and some of

us tried to draw the curios, the vacuumcleaner, and also the handcuffs. I think the key was the best because it had lots of patterns on it. We had a very enjoyable time, and thankyou for showing us around the old building.

Yours sincerely,

Danielle Goodwin
Marsh Green County
Primary School,
Kitt Green Road,
Marsh Green, Wigan
WN5 0QL

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Memories flooding back

• The photograph and article about St. George's Ward in *Past Forward* 11 had produced an enormous response of happy and nostalgic memories of days gone by, including this letter from Mr. Joe Brooks.

Dear Editor,

Memories came flooding back after seeing the June 1959 aerial photo in *Past Forward* No. 11, the plan of St. George's ward and my brother's letter in No. 12. Times were hard in the 20's and 30's but most of my memories were happy ones.

Scholes, that is a name to conjure with. We were fortunate in that next door to 59 Greenough Street, lived Mr. Hamill. He had a butcher's shop in Scholes and his generosity to our family saw us through some difficulties. The shop was managed by Harry, ably assisted by Maggie. Harry was also Mr. Hamill's chauffeur and he gave me my first driving lessons. Some of my earliest recollections were sitting on Harry's knee holding the steering wheel and going for rides! Harry was always good for a penny when I took him papers I had collected. He used them in the shop for the outer wrapping of the meat. Mr. Hamill had a daughter Kathleen who married into the Walsh family who also had a butcher's shop quite close to Hamill's in Scholes. Kathleen and her husband used to live at Beech Hill.

I knew Scholes quite well because our dad, also Harry, worked at the Pepper Mills near the Gas Works. Every day I would dash home from school (St. Mary's near Central Park) collect my dad's dinner and then via Every Street, Boy's Well Lane, by the slaughter house and Scholes hope to be at the Pepper Mill by 12.30. The Pepper Mill was a fascinating world of whistling belts, noisy machines and lathes, and the floor covered with brass filings. "Harry, here's your lad" the shout went up when I came in the finishing shop. Then back home for my dinner and off

Wanted - memories of Atherton

Dear Editor,

As the Official Archivist for Atherton Heritage Society I would be most grateful if you would print a letter in the next issue of *Past Forward* asking any of your readers if they have any memories of Atherton, if they can send them to me so that I can preserve them for future reference and generations. Memories can be about any topic as well as happy ones, such as sad, bad, disasters, families, places of work in Atherton, days out to the

to school. I used to pass the cinema in Scholes. It was too posh for us. I went there once only to see Shirley Temple in 'The Good Ship Lollipop'. That was a talking film.

On the other side of the road from the cinema was a sinister looking shop. No name, nothing, just the large front window painted in dark green. I went by this place with great trepidation and occasionally attempted to peer through a scratch in the paint. There were films going around at the time called "Charlie Chan", "Chou Chin Chow" etc. The name of the owner of this shop was "Moy Toy". Who he was, apart from being Chinese, and what he did was a mystery to me. My brothers told me later on that he took in laundry, that they had been in there but had always felt uneasy.

Talking of films, one of our favourite haunts was the "Bug House", at the other end of Scholes just past Scholefield Lane on the same side. You needed a hard earned penny to get in on Saturday mornings. The seating was all benches and as they were squeezing kids in at one end some poor unfortunates at the other end were falling off. Then came the man with the spray. What we were sprayed for I can guess, but not what we were sprayed with. We were too excited to care. Tom Mix, Ken Maynard, Buck Jones or the Three Stooges were coming on. The film would flicker into life, the captions had to be read and we couldn't wait to find out what had happened to our heroes from the previous week. All hell was let loose in that glorified hut, especially if the film broke down and couldn't be

seaside, picnics, walking days, childhood memories, stories told by parents or grandparents. Memories can be half a page long to as many pages they take to complete and if photographs can be included these will be copied and quickly returned to the owners.

Thank you for any assistance you can give me.

T. Jackson,
51 Leigh Road,
Atherton,
Nr. Manchester
M46 0LX

repaired. We went home however with one precious penny refunded.

Just near the 'Bug House' was our barber. I think his name was Carter. I'll swear he used to pull out our hair by the roots at the back when he was using his hand clippers. The final touch was the singeing of the back of the neck with a lighted taper, presumably thus removing any hair that his blunt clippers couldn't cope with, or maybe it was a technique that was way ahead of its time. A visit to the barber was a pain for me and the longer I could delay it the better. We knew him as 'Sweeney Todd'.

To supplement his wages (about £3 per week at this time) dad used to do some decorating, white washing ceilings, papering etc. One time he asked me to collect a pane of glass and some putty he had ordered from a D.I.Y. shop in Scholefield Lane. The glass seemed pretty big to me and the chap in the shop asked me where I was going with it. I told him I was taking it to my dad who was working on a house at the back of the Monument in Wigan Lane. Well, he said, if you want a rest make sure you drop the putty first and then put the glass down. I had a rest when I got down River Street by the Douglas. Then via Coppull Lane I reached where dad was working quite safely.

Yes we were poor but I enjoyed my early years and Scholes played a small but integral part of those years I spent in and around Wigan.

Joe Brooks,
13 Ashfield Cresnet,
Billinge,
Wigan.
WN5 7TE

SOCIETY NEWS

Aspull & Haigh Historical Society

Meetings are held in the Village Centre, Bolton Road, Aspull, on the second Thursday of the month at 8.00 p.m. The new Secretary is Mrs. R. Naylor, Pennington Green, Hall Lane, Aspull, Wigan (01942 256145).

12 September 'Salford Quays'. Illustrated talk by Heritage Centre.

10 October 'Memories of Old Parbold'

Miss Judith Dawber

14 November 'Haigh Hall and the People who lived there'

Mrs. Carole Banks

Atherton Heritage Society

Meetings are now held in the Methodist Church Hall opposite Atherton Library usually on the second Monday of the month, at 7.30 p.m. Further details from the Secretary, Mrs. P. Maddon, 22 Butterfield Road, Over Hulton, Bolton BL5 1DU (01204 651478).

12 August L.S. Lowry - 'The Myths and the Magic'

Royston Futter.

9 September 'William Morris'

Mrs. P. Madden

14 October 'A Soldier in the English Civil War'

Neil Howlett

(preceded by AGM)

11 November 'A Victorian Antiques Roadshow'

Mrs. Lilian Edwards.

Golborne & Lowton History Society

Founded in 1984 the society now has 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. Non-members welcome. Further details from Ron Marsh, P.R. Officer (01942 726027).

10 September 'Churches and Chapels in Earlestown and Newton'.

Barry Carman

8 October 'The North West Water Board' NWWB

12 November 'A Journey Across Canada'

Bert Worsley.

Leigh & District Civic Trust

New members are always welcome. For details contact the Vice Chairman, Betty Isherwood, 7 Pennington Maws, St. Helens Road, Leigh. (01942 672058).

Leigh & District Family History Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month in the Derby Room, Leigh Library. The programme for the coming months is as below:

20 August Project Evening

17 September Members Evening - 'Getting Started'.

For further details contact the Secretary Olive Hughes (01942 741594).

Leigh Local History Society

For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. Norma Ackers (01942 865488).

Tyldesley & District Historical Society

Meetings are held at Tyldesley Pensions Club, Milk Street, Tyldesley on the third Tuesday of the month. Entrance is FREE. Further details from the Secretary (01942 893242).

Wigan Archaeological Society

The society meets in the History Shop on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. New members are always welcome.

7 August Trip TBA.

4 September 'Roman Bath Houses' Vita Hall

Wigan Civic Trust

The Trust meets at 7.30 p.m. on the second Monday of the month, at the Drumcroon Arts Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan. For further information contact Anthony Grimshaw, Secretary (01942 45777).

Wigan Family History Society

Meetings are held on the first and third Monday of each month at 7.30 p.m. at the Seven Stars Hotel, Wallgate, Wigan.

Where?

Three of the mystery photographs in *Past Forward 12* have been given 'positive identifications'.

Reading downwards, these are:

the entrance to Great Acre Bowling Green, Longshoot, Scholes, c.1939.

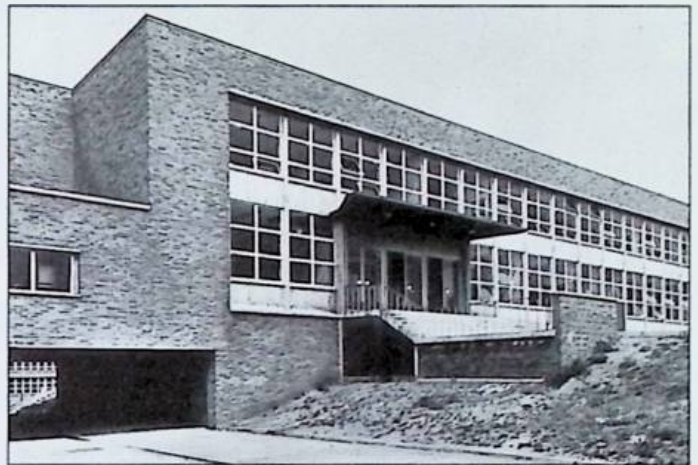
Sefton Farm barn, Sefton Road, Orrell (the building has since been demolished).

(bottom left) Mount Zion Independent Methodist Church, Ormskirk Road, Pemberton.

Many thanks to all the many readers who rang in.

Here are five school photographs - any ideas?

If you can help identify the location, please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942) 404432



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MURAL MASTERPIECE TAKES SHAPE



Local artist Gerald Rickards has been commissioned to paint a 37-foot long mural to commemorate Wigan's 750th Charter Anniversary celebrations.

Gerald is well equipped to produce such a demanding and prestigious work. Formerly the head of art at Winstanley College, he specialises in paintings of buildings, and has recently completed a series of murals for the new Terminal at Manchester Airport. He has had one man exhibitions at galleries in the

North West, Cambridge, London, Salisbury and Norwich Cathedral. Many visitors to Wigan Pier will have seen his splendid canal trail paintings.

A section of the unfinished mural is shown above, and below. Gerald can be seen putting the finishing touches to another section at his home.

See page 15 for further information and details of *The Charter Mural* sponsorship scheme and also a competition in connection with the mural.

