

PAST FORWARD

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The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

WELCOME to issue no. 18 of *Past Forward* - it's hard to believe that the newsletter is entering its eighth year! Looking back at the very first edition in 1991, the size, quality, print run and, of course, circulation, have all increased considerably. So, I'm delighted to say, have the readers' contributions, both written and financial. Please continue to support the newsletter in whatever way you can, so that it can go from strength to strength.

Hindley and Abram Grammar School features yet again in this issue - but so does the first in a serialisation of an excellent article on Ashton Grammar School by Mr. Harold Knowles. As usual, you will also find the usual wide cross-section of articles and contributors.

1998 will be an important and busy year for Wigan Heritage Service. Probably the major initiative during the year will be the setting up of a Friends organisation. The response to the article in the last *Past Forward* was most encouraging, and you will find details of our plans on p.13. If you would like to submit any thoughts/suggestions - and especially if you cannot attend our inaugural meeting in April - there is still plenty of time to do so.

Finally, I am delighted to inform readers that the History Shop was short-listed for the Museum of the Year Awards shortly before Christmas. We did not win - no disgrace, considering that the winner was a National Trust property, Waddesdon Manor, with infinitely greater resources than we could ever hope to have - but did receive a very satisfying report, including a reference to the audio-visual show as "one of the liveliest and best I have seen". This show can still be seen in the History Shop, and is also available for sale on a compilation Wigan Heritage Service video.

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:

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A token of friendship

Dear Sir,

I first met Len Hudson, Wigan Heritage Service's photographer, many years ago when I was able to supply him with several old photographs and information for the archives. Another one turned up recently and Len had arranged to deliver a copy to my home in September. On his arrival, he said that he had just left the home of Mrs Eva Barker, in Hindley. She also was supplying photographs and information to the archives. Amongst them were photographs of Garswood Hall Colliery. Eva's father, Arthur Turner, a very talented and well known local



Arthur Turner, pitman artist, c. 1948

artist, was shown, painting a view of the colliery.

Eva then showed Len Hudson her scrapbook of newspaper cuttings about her father. One page had a photograph of him with Mr.



'Tan Pit Cottages' near Pemberton Collieries, Wigan (1932),
a Watercolour by Arthur Turner.

George Millard who had taught Arthur as a boy at the old Pemberton Colliery School (now Highfield). Mr. Millard had recognised Arthur's talents and encouraged him to continue as he grew up. He helped to organise a large exhibition of his paintings in the school. This was the subject of the newspaper cutting.

As a token of friendship, Arthur gave one of his best pictures to Mr. Millard. Eva had never seen this and often wondered what had happened to it.

In telling this story to Len, she didn't even know if any of

George Millard's family still lived in Wigan or were even still alive. You can imagine her astonishment when Len said, "When I leave here I am going to see a Mr Millard! I'll ask him if he is related and, if so, where the picture might be".

When Len Hudson recounted this, I was mystified for a few moments and then I remembered. As a boy I often visited my Uncle George's home in Pemberton. He was very proud of a water colour given to him by an old pupil, which was entitled 'Blackpool Promenade after a shower' -

1937. On the back of the frame was this hand-written dedication:

"This modest water colour is given as an appreciation to my school master, George H. Millard, for the help he gave me in my school days and the advice and criticism he has given me in my efforts connected with art". (signed) Arthur Turner.

In early October, my wife and I visited George's daughter, my cousin, who is a widow, with no family, and who lives in Yorkshire. When I told her this story she immediately said "Eva must have it back!" I then arranged a meeting with Eva at her home and was delighted to walk in and say "Is this what you are looking for?" You can imagine how thrilled she was at seeing the missing picture.

Incidentally, Eva, who is also a very talented artist herself, is preparing an article about her father (see facing page). From my point of view, there is another happy ending. Eva and her family have decided that this picture should remain in the Millard family after all. So I am now the proud possessor of an Arthur Turner water colour, which can be passed on to my children.

**W. O. Millard,
36 Pemberton Road,
Winstanley,
Wigan. WN3 6DA.**

Cover: It was an idyllic Edwardian summer day (c.1905), when this picture was taken of Alexander Laing (1859-1932) with faithful companion in the garden of his home, 'The Schoolhouse', Charnock Richard, near Chorley. Mr. Laing was the greatly respected headmaster of Charnock Richard School for 30 years, from 1889 to 1919, before retiring to Wigan, where he resided until his death. See p9 for the full story of the Laing family through the discovery of an old family scrapbook.

MY father was born in 1892. His mother, Mary Cockerton, had been a maid at Beech House, Downall Green, and when she married Samuel Turner, a collier, he was a widower with two children aged eleven and nine. Within a year of marriage there were twin boys born who lived less than two months. Then my father was born, and eventually there would be six more children, the first of these dying at 14 months.

The family came to live in Billinge Road, Highfield, and here my father went to school and was taught by a gifted teacher, Mr. George Millard. Mr. Millard came from a well known Wigan family, interested in the arts, and he recognised my father's early ability in drawing. He wanted him to develop this talent and his encouragement extended to an offer to Arthur's parents to pay the fees so that he could go to art school.

My father was expected to go from school into the mines, so this tremendous offer was turned down. Looking back, it would have seemed quite impractical to working class parents with many mouths to feed, so my father went to work at Blundells colliery, but continued to draw. Highfield was rural and Arthur was essentially a country boy who roamed the fields and lanes and knew the name of every tree. Trees, farms and landscape were always favourite subject matter, but later he became equally interested in buildings, particularly churches, and industrial scenes.

As a young man in the first World War he served with the Fifth Manchester regiment in the Dardanelles. His ability to draw was used and he was sent out as a scout to observe and draw enemy gun positions. Whilst in the trenches he was wounded in the right arm, invalided home and was at first told that he would not regain the use of his arm and hand. Fortunately, with determination and exercise he did, and during convalescence at Kidderminster he began to draw again. My mother often told us how, when he returned home, he continued to exercise his

ARTHUR TURNER

1892-1964

ARTIST

AN APPRECIATION BY HIS
DAUGHTER, EVA

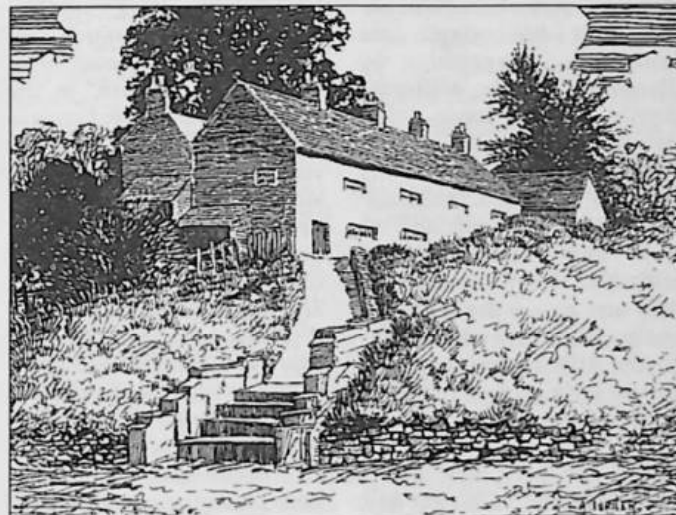


In the dark days of winter Arthur Turner's studio was alongside his gleaming 'Yorkshire Range' fireside. Arthur is pictured undertaking a pen and ink drawing, whilst his wife is busy sewing.

hand until he made a full recovery.

After the war my parents married and he went to work at Garswood Hall colliery, Bryn. He continued to draw whenever he could, cycling out at weekends with sketch book and pencils. He never painted out of doors, being always able to carry an image in his head of colour and atmosphere. His friendship with his old schoolteacher,

George Millard, continued and in the 1930's Mr Millard helped to sponsor an exhibition of over 100 drawings and paintings in Highfield Senior School. He encouraged my father to show his work which was exhibited annually for over 20 years at the Harris Art Gallery in Preston. He also showed work in other important galleries, such as the Lady Lever in Port Sunlight and



A pen sketch of cottages at Basin Lane, Wigan.

the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.

He joined the St Helens Art Club and became great friends with other painters who also exhibited, including Harold Lightfoot and James Sherbourne. This was a period when he produced a large output of pen and ink drawings and water colour paintings, many of which he sold to help with his growing family and to be able to buy good materials and have his work properly framed. Though training was denied him, he studied from books and artists' magazines which at that time included articles by well known professional artists and illustrators. However, constant drawing and observation of nature were always more important to him than any book.

To further help his income he began to do freelance work for Ellam's Duplicating Company. This involved drawing designs with a stylus onto vellum, detailed advertisements for furniture and other products. All this was done after a hard day at the colliery. I remember as a child being allowed to watch as he stretched the water colour paper and began to lay in washes of colour.

His "studio" was a corner of a back bedroom which had a north light, where he had a small folding easel. His materials were kept in a child's desk on top of a small cupboard. He painted on weekend afternoons, and in the dark days of winter he concentrated on his pen and ink drawings at the kitchen table. Many of these were very detailed architectural drawings of cathedrals and public buildings.

His work matured during the late '30's and '40's and he began to work very freely in water colour, capturing the spirit of the subject, whether rural or industrial. Blackley Hurst Hall farm at Billinge was a favourite subject and there were fine industrial scenes of St. Helens and Garswood Hall colliery. He drew press attention when he won first prize in a National Coal Board sponsored competition, with a

continued on p4

News From the Archives

A STANDISH POEM, 1756

THOSE who are already acquainted with the charms of Standish will appreciate some verses contained in a letter I recently came across, written by 'A. Towneley' at Royle near Burnley, to relations at Standish Hall. The letter, dated Easter Monday 1756, was probably addressed to Cecilia, daughter of Ralph Standish (d. 1755), who had married William Towneley in 1735 and inherited the Standish estate on her father's death.

It is a letter written out of great affection, but to whom specifically, it would require further research to find out. Royle Hall, Whalley, was the seat of a branch of the Towneley family, and the letter writer may have been Anne, daughter of Thomas Towneley of Royle.

Recollecting a recent sojourn at Standish, 'the dear time I spent with you madam is past, yet to reflect upon it is rapture...' the writer quotes some lines from Dryden's

Odes of Horace, and continues by saying that had the stay 'been lengthened to ages it had appeared to me but as a day, so swiftly fly those moments that are passed with them we love ... the utmost regard that I can express for you is too little, and though I would show my gratitude I only make my

'Dear Ladies,

My sorrow when I left you, violent grew,
My heart alas still sighed for you;
I thought of pleasures that were past and gone,
And wished (in vain) those moments to return;
Heaven saw my grief, but yet denied my wish,
And bore me swiftly from my loved Standish.

That luckless morn sat heavy on my heart,
When I from all that's good was forced to part;
When from my lips there passed the sad adieu,
My trembling heart was left with Bab, and you;
Heaven sure will sometime grant my ardent wish,
And once more waft me to my loved Standish.

The letter is not part of the Standish archive, but is a stray item in one of the miscellaneous series (D/DZ A 30/80).

poverty appear in having nothing but thanks to offer you for all the affection you have lavished upon unworthy me; I think of you madam with joy, though I seldom mention you without tears ...'

Then follow the four stanzas, written 'after a very hard labour':

May every joy attend to make you blessed,
May you know nought but happiness and rest;
May fortune favour you in all you want,
May heaven your utmost wishes grant;
And e'er the summers fled, gods grant my wish,
To see my much loved friend and dear Standish;

Now for the lovely bride, I make my prayer,
Ye gods my last petition hear,
Of every bliss you have in store,
Upon her beautiful head forever pour,
Oh may she live to see her children's children blessed,
And when she dies be took to endless rest.'

grew up, my father often spoke to me of the importance of George Millard in his life. It has given me immense pleasure to discover that Mr. Millard's family still have this painting. Through a chance conversation with Len Hudson of Wigan Heritage Service, I have been able to meet and become friends with Mr. Millard's nephew, Bill, and to see the painting again. Happily it will remain in the Millard family - this would have given my father great satisfaction.

My father's life would have been very different if that offer of training had been taken up. Subsequently

he had a hard working life and, due to injury to his knees, working underground, he spent much of it doing what was meant to be "light surface work" at the colliery, but in reality was hard labouring in very dirty conditions. He had the support of my mother in continuing to work as an artist and I remember him as a happy man, often singing and always a ready smile and a philosophical outlook on life. He loved his family and we loved him. We have some fine paintings to remember him by and it is good to have this opportunity to write a little of his life and work.

Eva Barker

NOTABLE ACCESSIONS

THERE have been several notable accessions in recent weeks. From the Director of Housing came the original minute book of the committees formed in Standish to celebrate the coronations of Edward VII in 1902 and of George V in 1911 (Acc.3127). This volume sheds light on the formal importance of such events even in small towns such as Standish at that time. It also provides information on some of the leading lights of the local community. The celebrations culminated in a typical grand procession through the town, followed by an afternoon of sports and amusements at Ashfield House. Each religious denomination, school and friendly society was represented in the procession. In 1902 the minutes record that some 1368 commemorative medals and 1260 broaches were ordered for the local school-children, medals for boys and broaches for girls, which incidentally tells us how many were on each school roll. It is intended that a photocopy of the volume will be placed in Standish library.

A regular reader of *Past Forward* has saved a set of Upholland Grammar School magazines and donated them to the Archives (Acc.3128). These cover most years between 1936 and 1961 and, like the sets we already have for Wigan, Hindley & Abram and Leigh, will be a fine source for both educational history and family history. Does any reader have magazines for Ashton Grammar School that they would care to donate or deposit, or any for the former secondary modern schools which are not as well represented in the Archives at present? N.W.

ARTHUR TURNER 1892-1964 continued from p3

painting of the colliery. The Harris Art Gallery, Preston, honoured him by buying a water colour for their permanent collection; later they also bought two of his drawings.

He gave one of his best paintings at that time to Mr. Millard; an unusual and atmospheric treatment of a rainy day on Blackpool promenade. This had been one of only two paintings by Wigan artists selected for exhibition in Preston. As I

From the Leigh papers in times past

From the *Leigh Chronicle*,
15 February 1924:

MR. ROBERT DONAT'S RECITALS

A Brilliant Young Elocutionist

ARRANGEMENTS had been made for Mr. James Bernard, the eminent tutor in elocution at Hartley College, Manchester, and Leeds College of Music, and his talented pupil, Mr. Robert Donat, to give recitals at the Leigh Primitive Methodist School on Saturday and in the chapel on Sunday afternoon and evening, but unfortunately Mr. Bernard was taken ill. The full responsibility therefore fell upon Mr. Donat, but he shouldered it in a masterly manner, and his week-end audiences were fully satisfied with the programmes he placed before them. Satisfaction was also expressed that Mr. Bernard had promised to come to Leigh at an early date and give them an evening. Mr. Donat for his years is little less than a genius, and it was marvellous how word perfect he showed himself in the recital during the week-end of no less than 16 pieces of a very varied range. He has a masterly conception of the art of the elocutionist, and is a great credit to his tutor. In the years to come Robert Donat will be found in the ranks of the great elocutionists of his day. There was a good attendance in the school on Saturday night, the chairman being Mr. H. Greenhalgh, and Mr. Donat's pieces were: "The Archery of William Tell," "The Retort," "Pip and the Convict," two scenes from "The Rivals," "Charles Edward at Versailles," "David Copperfield and the Waiter," "The Quarrel of Brutus and Cassius," and two versions of Lord Byron's "Waterloo." Miss Hayward of Pennington,

another rising young elocutionist with an already local fame, at a moment's notice kindly stepped into the breach and gave a splendid rendering of "The Last Hymn," an appropriate piece for a church congregation, and she was warmly encored. Mr. Howe, a member of the choir, also delighted the audience with his rendering of "Captain Mac" and "Friend of Mine."

On Sunday afternoon, in the chapel, the Mayor of Leigh (Coun. J. H. Wright, J.P.) presided.

The superintendent minister, the Rev. R. H. MacFarlane, in introducing the Mayor, said that on a recent Sunday when the Mayor and Corporation paid an official visit to that church, and he as Mayor's chaplain had the privilege and pleasure of preaching, the Mayor was coming to his own home, for he was a former member of the old Bradshawgate church. They heartily welcomed him that afternoon, and he and his people wished for the Mayor and Mayoress a very happy year of office, and hoped that they and their family would come amongst them oftener.

The Mayor said there were a few faces in the congregation that he recognised as having belonged to the Bradshawgate church. A very happy part of his life was spent with them there. He was connected with the Primitive Methodist Church at Dalton-in-Furness, and in 1891 he was welcomed to the Leigh Primitive Methodist Church. At that time Mr. John Wood was very prominently connected with the church, and he remem-

bered him coming to the young men's class and asking for a stranger named John Wright. He had at once a feeling that he was at home, and he continued his connection with the church for eight or nine years, and left through adopting certain ideas he had at that time. He was at home with the Primitives, and if he was not in his present business he would more closely identify himself with them. When one looked back at the year when he first entered their church and remembered that he came to Leigh a complete stranger, a lad with no prospects, who knew nobody, looking for a living and eventually drifted down a coal mine, yet who in spite of all those troubles today occupied the position of first citizen of Leigh, he felt proud. He was not only proud of himself, but proud that a scholar of the Leigh Primitive Methodist Church occupied the position he did that day. Anything he could do to help that particular church during his term of

office he would be only too pleased to render that service. During his mayoralty he was neutral in all matters. That night he would be present at the great Catholic demonstration at the Hippodrome. He was going to be quite impartial during his term of office, and if any organisation wanted his services they would be at their disposal for the good of the community. He hoped their church would prosper and that the small debt that was still on their premises would soon be wiped out.

Mr. Donat's contributions were: "An Episode of the Civil War," "The Split in the Marrow Kirk," "The Round Tower" and "Dimes and Dollars." Mr. Howe sang "The Radiant Morn" and "My Task." At the evening service Mr. Donat recited "The Patience of Father Tim," "He Fell upon Thieves," and "Prayers and Potatoes." Mr. Howe sang "Sun of my Soul." Mr. Sankey accompanied at all the services.

From the *Manchester Guardian*, 16 March 1875:

THE *Leigh Chronicle* records the particulars of a wager among miners which by its frequency may almost be called a custom of a section of that fraternity. A number of colliers, it seems, lately sitting in a tavern at Hindley were talking of the many disagreeable things that had been done and that might be done for a gallon of beer. A collier at Haydock, it was said, had submitted to have his ear nailed to a wall in order to win this measure of drink; and others had devoured live pigeons. One of the company made light of this last effort, and offered to eat some living thing nastier than a pigeon for the modest consideration referred to. What the thing was we forbear to state, lest our readers should be deprived of their appetites for breakfast: it may be enough to say that the wager was made, and that it was won by the challenger. We have only referred to this incident because it may tend to explain much that is otherwise bewildering in the behaviour of a part of the working population. Not to put too fine a point on it, it shows that by the whole tone of their minds some - and these not the poorest - of our fellow-countrymen are in a condition of outer barbarism. The behaviour of the Haydock collier is almost enough to make one sigh for a return to the usages of the time when the law finding him with one ear nailed to the wall for a gallon of beer, would have insisted on nailing the other to the pillory for nothing.

Mr. J. F. Moore, who died in 1982, fortunately wrote down his memories of John Sumner's Haigh Brewery, where he worked in the 1920's and 1930's. Here is the first in a serialisation of these memories. Ed.

Memories of Haigh Brewery

(By someone who worked there 50 years ago)

IT is difficult to realise that a five storey brewery stood at the top of Haigh Road - next to the Balcarres Arms. John Sumner's brewery was, in fact, one of the earliest breweries in the Wigan area. In 1931 it was taken over by Greenall Whitley. Sumners had owned at least nine pubs in Wigan since the beginning of the century, and three of these were owned privately by the Rawcliffe family - the Crispin Arms, Birkett Bank, and the Bay Horse and the Stanley in Whelley. The Crispin and the Queen Hotel, Newton, are the only ex-Sumners pubs standing in Wigan today. The Balcarres was originally a Sumners tied house, but it did not pass to Greenalls with the others, and it is now owned by Burtonwood.

Imagine you are standing under a canal bridge. You are now in a cellar about 60 yards long; under the premises you would find six of these cellars plus one under Haigh School. This was just a walled area - the ceiling was the school floor. Imagine the racket of the children's clogs on this floor. The heart of the cellars was under the offices. Mr. Parr was the Cellarman.

Tunnel under main road

This was the place where the barrels of beer came up in the lift to go on the wagons. A doorway in this also led in to the Balcarres cellar. In addition to all this area there was a tunnel under the main road to a cellar, massive in size under Sumners Row. I have taken part in football games under there. The stone work and flagged floors of these cellars were real works of art. As well as plenty of beer there was also plenty of water in evidence down there. This was all catered for in gullies, the whole network being connected to a well in the Brew House about 40 feet deep. The drainage from this well went over the fields behind Culraven to some septic tanks. I think you will find these at the right hand side of the path from Haigh Road to Toddington. Still on the subject of water, all over the premises you would find taps in pairs, one for the town's water and one for Lodge water. The

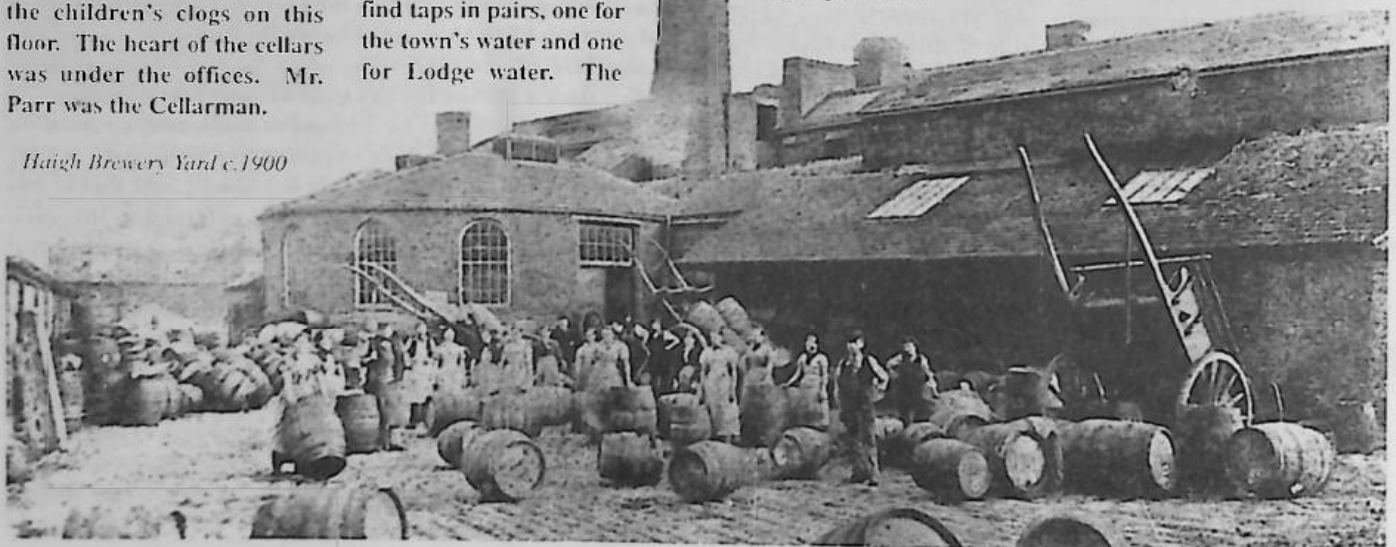
Lodge water was used for swilling down and the other for finishing off - keeping down expenses.

Legend says that the windmill was used for pumping water, but for twenty years a huge tank stood 30ft high above ground. It would be 15ft square and 8ft deep. This was kept filled with water from the lodge in fields behind the brewery. Take a walk down Bolton Road. On the opposite side of the moor from the Mount Pleasant, behind the old houses there was a malt kiln - you may still find the foundations of this building. Here the malt was spread out on the floors and sprayed with water. Under-floor heating caused the grain to grow but it was quickly killed off with extra heating. Why this took place I wouldn't know. This building was four storeys high and was demolished about 1912. The barley from then on must have been brought already malted.

Plenty of horse power

Fifty years ago what is now the entrance to Crawford Avenue was the gateway into Rawcliffe Sidings. Here you would see five or six sets of tracks extending to where Aspull Market now stands. Coal from Meadow Pit No 5 and Moor Pits was brought down the line to Alexandra Pit where it would be shunted on the main lines. Wagons of lime also were carried, manifolds, drain pipes and bricks from Accrington for house building. For the beer, sugar was brought from Liverpool, hops from Kent, and malt from Lincoln. All this activity required plenty of horse power. In its heyday the Company kept 45 work horses and 4 ponies. The purchase of horses was undertaken by Mr. Rawcliffe himself who used to go to Wales to choose the ones he fancied. Before he decided, the horses had to go on the weigh bridge and if they did not weigh over 18 cwt he wouldn't be interested.

Haigh Brewery Yard c.1900



Memories of Haigh Brewery

continued from p6

When you consider the distance these horses had to cover you will realise why they had to be tip-top animals. They travelled to Chequerbent Station, the Punch Bowl at Atherton, the Britannia at Bryn, the Sportsman at Leigh, the George Inn at Pemberton, the Alisons Arms, Appley Bridge, the White Lion, Wrightington, the Cunliffe Arms, Chorley and the Jolly Crofters in George Lane, Horwich. At the time of the closing of the Brewery there were 84 pubs and also 124 clubs. Whichever pub you went to there was always the climb back to Haigh.

Casks of black treacle

I suppose a dozen of these horses would be kept busy around the district for there was coal to be brought from two Lancashire collieries, coke from Blackrod Gasworks and materials for repairs to various premises. Many of the pubs had one, two or three houses attached. Anyone could obtain mortar here made on the spot by a steam driven mortar mill. All those beautiful signs as long as 50ft along the roofs of pubs were made here in the joiners shop. One regular task was carting grain down to the malt kiln and bringing it back to the Brewery. Casks of black treacle came up from Wigan from J. Hall & Co. Although they had good horses they were "blown" when they arrived at Haigh. These horses were not always the gentle giants they appeared. I have seen them going up Haigh Road like devils possessed with a piece of shaft in the harness and the driver and dray left behind. One fatal accident I remember was the death of Mr. Owen's grandfather. Returning home, he would

call at the shop to leave his lunch basket (the shop opposite Our Lady's in Haigh Road). When he went out to the horse there was a mighty clap of thunder which caused the animal to rear, and it came down on him killing him instantly. His name was Bob Johnson.

Standing in front of Fred Wood's house you may find the remains of a long stretch of building along by Haigh House, by the side wall. Here were the blacksmith's shop, the plumber, the cooper's and the engineering shop. About 1920 an extension was made opposite these buildings for the bottling dept., a new joiners shop and the power house. Electricity was made by a diesel engine, its flywheel being about 10ft in diameter, driving a large generator. At the rear of these buildings was a converted 12 stall stable. This was occupied by long benches on which stood glass accumulators. These were to hold current when the engine was shut off. In addition to power for the Brewery, power was supplied to Culraven, Haigh House, Haigh School and the church. Close by here was the wash house and covered yard for the barrels.

Malt was hoisted to the third, fourth and fifth floors. You could always find 70 to 80 tons of grain. The grinding machine was on the fourth floor and the grain was put in from the fifth floor and drained back again in a hopper to the third floor. From here it passed down to the mashtun on the second floor where the actual brewing began. The mashtun was a tank 15ft in diameter and 5ft deep. The grain were shot down a chute into this, along with the sugar. A sprinkler outfit was let down over it with boards. The sprinkler was turned on, and rotated whilst steam jets gave it the required heat. Two hours cooking was necessary to complete the operation. This extract of malt was then drained into a tank below on the ground floor, but pumped

right away up into the copper. This was round and 15ft in diameter with a port hole near its highest point. This was supported by iron framing 25ft from ground level in order that on completion of brewing it would flow next door into anyone of 10 vats. Hops, treacle and water were added and the cover screwed down and the steam turned on. It was like a giant pressure cooker with a safety valve, for occasionally froth would escape and coming through the ventilators would float down Haigh Road like large lumps of candy floss.

Being strained to remove the hops it is allowed to cool overnight. Yeast is then added, and it can then stand for two days. On the third day the yeast is skimmed off, and after another day the remaining yeast is removed. Up to three days is allowed for the brew to mature, and it is then ready for the barrels. A very important substance here is the finings which was like dried slabs of fish, which when soaked in water resembled wallpaper paste. Almost half a gill was put into each barrel on arrival at the hotel. These finings helped to settle quickly any sediment.

The vat room resembled one of H.M. Prisons, I am sure. Steel railings were erected to make passages around and between each vat, with yards and yards of flexible piping complete with brass unions, detachable for cleaning.

Rebecca Seddon

I must now mention Rebecca Seddon who, with bare feet and her skirt pinned around her knees, emptied the mashtun. As soon as it was possible to stand on the grains because of the heat, they were emptied on to the floor. In the wall alongside were two chutes through which the grains were shovelled into farm carts in the yard below. A cart load cost 7s.6d. Rebecca Seddon emptied the mashtun for 41 years. Because of the heat of the grains her feet became turned outwards.

There seemed to be no end to the cleaning and polishing of the copper as this was most important. The fireman kept a supply of very fine dust on hand and this was used on a damp cloth as you would use a scouring powder. Climbing down a ladder into the copper and scouring every inch of it must have taken much effort along with two or three pints of beer. A ladder was necessary to reach all around the copper.

Every brewing left a surplus of yeast, which was put in a cheese press and every Friday this was pressed tightly into barrels. On top was placed a layer of hop sacking and the hoop was then hammered over. Being of a volatile nature this had to go by passenger rail from Hindley, Ladies Lane Station. On Saturday morning it was taken along with the empty malt sacks which went to Lincoln. The yeast was sent to manufacturing chemists at Welwyn Garden City. The carter had to pay sixpence to pass through Pennygate, the toll gate near the station.

I must mention here an incident relating to the toll gate. Once, at the closing of the Pleasure Fair on Aspull Moor, its next assignment was at Hindley. The Fair would travel to Hindley via New Springs, Schofield Lane and Ince. On this day, the Fair people decided to take the short trip down Hall Lane. On arrival at the gate, the usual fee would be requested which would be a considerable amount for the engines, trailers and caravans and carts. This upset the Fair people who refused to pay it. After a dreadful argument the whole outfit was driven at and over the gate which resulted in a huge bundle of firewood. I gather that from that day no-one paid again at the toll gate!

(To be continued)

Ernie Taberner continues his recollections of life around Wigan Pier in the 1920's.

I remember when . . .

DURING dark winter nights, one of our main games as children was gazing in the lighted windows of corner shops and guessing.

Every street had a corner shop, and some had others half way down, often converted front rooms of ordinary houses. We would gaze at all the items on display and whoever was caller, would give two letters of the alphabet, the first and last of the name of the item chosen, and when someone shouted out the correct name, off everyone would run across the road to the corner shop opposite.

Then the whole process would be repeated in reverse. Our mothers never minded for several reasons:

- 1) There wasn't room indoors because families were so large and living rooms so small there wasn't enough space for everyone.
- 2) We could easily be seen when she called us in at bedtime by just popping her head out of the door which usually opened directly on the pavement.

3) We couldn't get knocked down by cars - there were none, and a trotting pony and cart could be heard half a mile away.

4) Last but not least the game taught us observation and spelling.

In our street there was a small shop on one corner, but the opposite shop was half way along the street adjoining. Both were general stores where one could buy anything from sweets and cigarettes to soda and sugar, with cards and bottles hanging from hooks along the shelves, displaying medicines, pills and ointments for all the everyday ailments. Castor oil, olive oil, oil of eucalyptus displayed alongside Beecham's Pills, headache pills, teething powders for babies etc.

Lizzie

One of these shops was owned by a lady called Lizzie. On entering, a bell on a large spiral spring would ding dong for quite some time each time the door was opened. Lizzie would appear to serve the customer, wiping her hands on her apron as she left

the kitchen sink or her pans on the gas stove, at the back end of the shop. Hygiene was practically non-existent, and it's a wonder there weren't more epidemics than there were. However, I really wanted to tell you that Lizzie kept a parrot in the shop and every now and again it would squawk in a broad Lancashire accent, "SUMMDY INT' SHOP, Lizzie", even if no one had entered as the bell would have warned her. Polly had quite a few phrases off pat, and every once in a while would squawk out, "Pinchin' yer toffees, Lizzie!"

Lizzie used to keep some sweets on the counter in cardboard boxes without lids and occasionally youngsters would pocket one before Lizzie could get behind the counter from the living room or the kitchen. I remember one youngster "pinchin'" one when Polly yelled out, "Pinchin' yer toffees, Lizzie" - he promptly threw it back and flew out of the shop!

What he hadn't yet learned was that Polly would squawk that phrase sometimes out of boredom, but it took us a long time to convince that youngster that Polly hadn't picked on him personally. But it had the desired effect because he wouldn't pinch another after that experience, and when eventually he did risk going back into the shop he kept Polly under close observation until he became convinced that the bird just squawked when she felt like it and not just when someone was helping themselves from the counter.

"A penn'orth of humbugs"

When I think of old Lizzie's shop I always remember a story that used to circulate at the time of a similar shopkeeper who serving two or three young lads together asked the first one what he wanted. He replied, "A penn'orth of humbugs," which were on a shelf out of reach, so the shopkeeper got her steps, reached down a jar of humbugs, weighed them and handed them to the lad, then replaced the jar on the shelf, and turned to the second lad with, "And what would you like young man?" "I think I'll have a penn'orth of humbugs please," was the reply, whereupon the shop keeper got the steps out again, reached up for the jar, weighed out a pennyworth of humbugs on the counter scales and before replacing the jar on the shelf she turned to the third lad and asked, "Do you want a penn'orth of humbugs while I have the jar down?" Whereupon the lad said, "No," so she replaced the jar on the shelf for a second time.

Turning to the third lad once again she said, "And what would you like?" Back came the reply, "A hayporth of humbugs please!"

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Lives of a Victorian Family revealed in a Scrapbook

MANY years ago I acquired an old family scrapbook which contained a number of newspaper cuttings, family photographs and other memorabilia. At the time of acquisition I was unable to devote the time to assessing and absorbing the contents and so it was put in a polythene bag, placed in a drawer and forgotten about. I recently rediscovered the scrapbook and my interest was stimulated when I came upon a lengthy newscutting from the *Wigan Examiner* dated 28 February, 1914. It was a detailed report about a very "interesting function" at Charnock Richard:

"The Rev. T. H. Leeson presided over the parishioners of Charnock Richard, who met in the schoolroom on Tuesday evening [24 February] to pay honour to Mr. And Mrs. A. Laing, who for 25 years have been Headmaster and Sewing Mistress respectively of the school in the parish. The room was crowded to excess, every available space being taken up by an enthusiastic audience ... The presentation he [Rev. Leeson] had been asked to make consisted of three parts. The first was an illuminated album, with the names of practically all who had subscribed therein. The second part consisted of a mahogany sing-song clock and the third part was a purse of gold amounting to £31. 2s."

Anxieties and joy

On closer inspection I discovered the scrapbook allowed a fascinating peep at one family's aspirations and achievements for a period of over 100 years. It spans the reigns of six monarchs - from the Hanoverian George III, through the nation's colonial ambitions under Victoria, the Great War and subsequent national social and economic turmoil during the reign of George V. Scenes of contented family life are forever captured through a number of photographs in a tranquil Edwardian England, as also is recorded via news cuttings, anxieties and joy during the War by both the military service and marriages of two

sons. The scrapbook ends with a detailed obituary of Alexander Laing (1859-1932) - seven years before the maelstrom that was World War II.

It does not tell us so, but the scrapbook was probably started by the above-mentioned Alexander Laing, the predominant character in it. Alexander was, as printed newspaper extracts and photographs of him suggest, archetypal Victorian middle class. Educated for the teaching profession, influential pillar of the community, headmaster, practising Anglican, Conservative, Freemason, musician and sportsman.

The story begins in Fifeshire, Scotland, with the birth of Alexander Laing, the elder, in 1817. Alexander was "a man of high principle and unostentatious, with a thorough knowledge of his trade"

Unfortunately the scrapbook does not inform where Mr. Laing worked at his trade in Scotland, or why he eventually moved to Wigan, before finally moving back to retirement in Scotland, though clues abound:

Firstly Alexander Laing was "regarded as a high authority on horticultural matters and his advice was much sought after." Secondly a couple of loose cuttings in the scrapbook from the *Weekly Scotsman* of 20 December, 1930, are of a stately home with the caption: "Balcarres House - seat of the Lindsays of Crawford". And thirdly in the obituary report of

one of Alexander Laing's sons, whose name was also Alexander, is briefly stated that "Mr. Laing came to Haigh, near Wigan, with his parents when he was eight years of age". The year would be 1867.

Three clues

These three clues lead me to believe that Alexander Laing was initially in the employ of the Earls of Crawford and Balcarres at Balcarres House, which was situated in East Fifeshire, Scotland. It was the seat of the Earls of Balcarres until 1848 (after that date the Earls of Crawford and Balcarres). Alexander 6th Earl of Balcarres married Elizabeth Dalrymple, heiress to Haigh Hall, Wigan, and subsequently sold Balcarres House to his youngest brother, Robert Lindsay.

As an employee at Balcarres House, Alexander Laing would have had knowledge of the Earl's Haigh Estate at Wigan and of course be in a prime position to take advantage of any advancement in his employment prospects.

Alexander died in August 1891, in his 75th year and was interred in Row(sic) Churchyard.

Enquiries about the location of 'Row' Churchyard revealed nothing. However 'Rhu' Churchyard is located near Helensburgh, formerly in Dumbartonshire (now Argyll and Bute). The Reference and Information Librarian at Helensburgh Library confirmed that Alexander Laing resided at 'Burnbrae', 32 Campbell Street, Helensburgh, at the time of his death. He was survived by his widow, Catherine, two sons, three daughters and 31 grandchildren.

Alexander Laing, the younger, was born in Stewarton, Ayrshire, in 1859. He was just eight years old when he moved with his family to Wigan. As a boy he attended Haigh National School. In due course he went to train as a teacher at Saltley Training College, Birmingham, before returning to the school he

attended as a boy, as a pupil teacher. His career then took him first to Penrith Boys' National School, followed by Adlington National School near Chorley, then St. Thomas' School, Wigan, before finally taking up a position at Charnock Richard, which he was to occupy for the next 30 years.

It is clear that life for young Alex Laing was not all about 'burning the midnight oil' in serious study. He was an enthusiastic sportsman and when at Penrith was instrumental in forming Penrith Rugby Club in which he was a playing member during the 1884-5-6 seasons.

Time to fall in love

He also found the time to fall in love with a Miss Smirk, of Hallgate, Wigan. Miss Smirk appears to have been a highly appropriate choice. Like Alex Laing she had a deep interest in religious work, and was a greatly respected Sunday School teacher at the Bluecoat School, Hallgate. A cutting from the *Wigan Examiner* dated April 1877, records that Miss Smirk was presented by Rev. H. F. Lloyd on behalf of her pupils with "*as a mark of respect and esteem, a beautiful workbox and writing case combined. The box was of leather and worked in satin, with the usual contents ornamented in pearl, and the writing case was of white calf leather with nickel silver fittings*".

Alexander Laing and Miss Sarah Ellen Smirk were married at Wigan Parish Church (All Saints) on 26 December, 1888.

In due course the happy couple were blessed with the births of three children - two boys and a girl. Alexander John (first born), Harold Stanley and Elsie. There are no recorded dates of their births although there are details of their sons' War service in France and their eventual marriages - both of which took place during the War.

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Pictures from the Family Scrapbook



The School and Schoolhouse, Charnock Richard (c.1899), home of the Laing family from 1889 to 1919.



Ann Holmes and Elsie Laing (right) at the Lych Gate of Christ Church, Charnock Richard. c. 1899



The Laing family c. 1902. Mr. and Mrs. Laing with Harold (left), Elsie and Alexander jr.



A vivacious Sarah Ellen Smirk c.1888, before she became Mrs. Laing. Alexander's photograph was clearly taken many years later.



Harold Laing (top) and brother Alexander jr. On the right is sister Elsie. All c. 1905.



The clouds of war were looming on this beautiful summer day c.1913. Mr. and Mrs. Laing with Elsie and Alexander jr. The gentleman rear right is not known but thought to be Mrs. Laing's father.

*Lives of a
Victorian Family
revealed in a
Scrapbook*
continued from p9

Alexander John Laing, Quartermaster Sergeant was on leave from the West Lanes Field Artillery in France when he married Miss Norah Richards at St. John's Church, Whittle-le-Woods, near Chorley, on 15 April, 1916. His brother Harold, also on leave after 14 months' service in France as a driver with the 46th North Midland Division - Mechanical Transport, was his Best Man. On 28 July 1917, Joan Alexandra, a daughter of Alexander and Norah Laing was baptised at Charnock Richard.

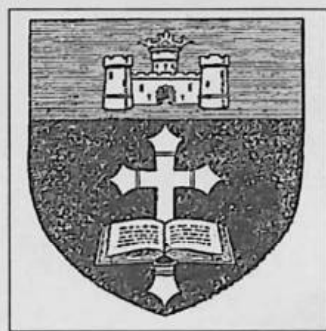
Harold's own wedding followed just 18 months after his brother's when he married Miss Elizabeth Grounds at the Parish Church, Bispham, Blackpool, on 13 October, 1917. It is not recorded as to whether his brother reciprocated as Best Man, but it is recorded that sister Elsie was Bridesmaid.

Greetings from the Front

Beyond a number of Christmas greetings cards from the 'Front' in France and a number of uncaptioned photographs taken possibly before the War, there is little information about the lives of the newly-weds after the War. However, it is clear that Harold's life was not without heartache. A brief news item announced that he married [for the second time] on 26 December, 1929, Annie Elizabeth Brown Laing in Edinburgh. Annie Laing was the daughter of Mr. William Laing and believed to be the younger brother of his father; thereby marrying his cousin of the same surname. An announcement in Charnock Richard Parish magazine in March 1932, announced that Elizabeth Anne the daughter of Harold and Annie Laing was baptised.

The scrapbook tells us little about Miss Elsie Laing's adult life, or whether she ever married. A number of photographs exist of a beautiful young girl on the verge of womanhood. All are

uncaptioned but are certain to be of Elsie Laing. Just one small news item concerning Elsie is of interest, which also tells us that she was still a spinster in 1931, at the approximate age of 35. Whilst residing at 46 Park Road, Wigan, for submitting a very "workmanlike composition", she won an award for winning the selected design for the new badge for All Saints' Senior Church School, Wigan. The school was opened in 1932.



All Saints Senior Church School badge, which was designed by Miss E. Laing. The design was adopted for use when the school opened in 1932.

Devout Christians

Caution requires exercising when reading detailed obituary reports from past local newspapers, especially when the eulogies elevate mere mortals almost to the level of saints. But in the case of Alexander Laing clearly he was truly a good man. As devout Christians both he and his wife were committed to the welfare of their pupils throughout their respective careers, and were selfless contributors to the common good in the wider community.

His lengthy obituary report carried in both the *Wigan Examiner* and *Wigan Observer* of 14 May, 1932, states that Alexander Laing passed away at the age of 73, at his home, 46 Park Road, Wigan:

"Before removing to Wigan on his retirement, he had been Headmaster of Charnock Richard C.E. School for 30 years, from January 1889 until May 1919, where he had also been churchwarden and organist. His home had been 'The Schoolhouse' adjacent to the school.

"When at Wigan he was a regular attender and sidesman at Wigan Parish Church. In later life he was also an enthusiastic supporter of both cricket and

football and was a well-known figure at Springfield Park in the days of the old Boro' Club.

"Mr. Laing was in his politics a Conservative and also a Freemason and member both of Wigan Conservative Club and the Peace Lodge.

"The Rector of Wigan, Canon C. C. Thicknesse, conducted the service at Wigan Parish Church, which was fully choral, and assisted by Rev. E. Storm, Vicar of Charnock Richard Parish Church. He was interred at Charnock Richard Parish churchyard. Family mourners were Alex, Harold (sons) and Mr. W. Laing (brother)". There is no mention of Sarah Ellen, his wife, or their daughter, Elsie.

"He was what he seemed, a man of culture, a sportsman, a gentleman and a most unassuming and sincere Christian. He was of those who 'in honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit, with patience'."

By definition a scrapbook means that there will be gaps and questions unanswered. Since the book effectively ends in 1932, it is within living memory that a reader of this article may know something of the Laing family's fortunes since that time? It is believed that number 46 Park Road, Wigan, remained a Laing family home after the death of Alexander Laing, but is unlikely to have been the home of son Harold, whose last known place of residence was Pentland, East Keswick, Yorkshire. By now Alexander's children - Alexander John, Harold Stanley and Elsie - all born before the turn of the century, will themselves have passed on, but there were grandchildren and possibly great-grandchildren. Who knows, there could even be a Laing family sequel in a future issue of *Past Forward*?

J. A. Roby, Orrell, Wigan

*After this article was written the Laing family scrapbook was kindly donated to Wigan Archives at Leigh. Ed.

EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

After submission of Mr. Roby's article for publication, Wigan Heritage Service's Education and Outreach Manager, Bob Blakeman and staff discovered the following information which may interest readers:

BALCARRES AND CRAWFORD

James 24th Earl of Crawford and 7th Earl of Balcarres, died in 1869. He was originally simply 7th Earl of Balcarres, but put in a claim for the supposedly extinct Earldom of Crawford. After an investigation of the genealogical evidence by the House of Lords, he was granted the title 24th Earl of Crawford. He demolished the former Haigh Hall and built the present one. He married Margaret, daughter of 1st Lord Muncaster. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Alexander William (1812-1880), 25th Earl of Crawford and 8th Earl of Balcarres.

ALEXANDER LAING (1817-1891)

Alexander Laing, residing at Home Farm, Haigh, appears in the Wages Book of the employees of the Haigh Estate from 1869 until May 1875. He was earning £3.00 per week, one of the highest paid on the payroll. His actual job title is not stated but he was replaced by a James Rigg, who was known as Farm Bailiff.

An entry in the 1871 Census for Copperas Lane, Haigh, states:

Alex Laing	head	married	53	farm bailiff	born Scotland
Catherine Laing	wife	"	51	bailiff's wife	"
Alex Laing	son	"	11	scholar	"
William Laing	"	"	6	"	"
Alexander Laing*	grand son	"	2	"	born Lancs, Haigh

*There is some confusion as to who this particular Alexander (grandson) is. The surname 'Laing' could mean that he was an illegitimate son of one of Alexander's three daughters? Clearly his daughters did not reside with them at the time of the Census.

ALEXANDER LAING (1859-1932)

An entry in the Register of Wigan Parish Church states that Alexander Laing was married on 26 December 1888:-

"Alexander Laing, aged 29, bachelor, schoolmaster of Adlington. Father's name was Alexander Laing and his occupation, a 'farmer'. Sarah Ellen Smirk, aged 31, spinster of Hallgate, Wigan [no occupation given]. Father's name was John Smirk and his occupation, a 'smith'."

A trade directory of 1887 gives Sarah Smirk's occupation as a Dressmaker, and her father's occupation as a 'foreman'. Their home was near the National and Bluecoat School.

THIS article, the second in a series (see Past Forward 10 for the story of 100 Years of Banking in Standish) is reproduced with kind permission of the Royal Bank of Scotland.



1922-1997

75 Years of Banking in Orrell



The branch at Orrell during the 1920s.

Orrell branch of Williams Deacon's Bank opened in March 1922. Orrell, a small but growing village four miles west of Wigan, had begun to develop following the opening of a station on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway's line from Wigan to Liverpool in 1848. Although the station was named Orrell, it was actually located in a hamlet known as Far Moor, about a mile south of Orrell Post and Orrell Mount. Coal mining was the predominant local industry during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and there was also brick and nail making. A Local Board for Orrell was formed in 1872 which later became Orrell Urban District Council, and the electric tramway from Wigan to Penlington was extended to Orrell Post in 1906. By 1921 Orrell had a population of 6,773 and a wide range of local shops and services. Mining, nail making and cotton spinning were the main sources of employment, and Orrell was also home to three surgeons or physicians, two photographers, a fish and chip dealer, a hatter and six public houses.

Williams Deacon's Bank, founded in London in 1771, amalgamated with Manchester and Salford Bank in 1890, continuing the latter's strategy of extending its branch network in the north-west of England. During the First World War, with reductions in bank staff as men went to serve in the forces, this policy was deferred. However, by the end of the war, in 1918, Williams Deacon's had identified various opportunities for growth, the directors stating that their 'policy in future would be one of steady expansion wherever reasonable prospects of satisfactory business and deposits showed themselves'.

The bank already had an established branch in Wigan and smaller offices close by, and in the early 1920s decided to extend this presence by opening an office in the Far Moor area of Orrell. The bank's board authorised the purchase of premises at Orrell near Wigan for £250 suitable for a new sub-branch, and the new office opened for business on 7 March 1922 at 6 Church Street, although the property was not actually purchased until the beginning of April. Williams Deacon's was the first bank to establish an office in Orrell, and the new sub-branch, managed from the main office in Wigan, was open on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 10.45 am and 1.00 pm. By the end of 1922 the branch had fifty-two accounts on its books, and acted as treasurer to the Urban District Council. The first floor store rooms above the branch were let to tenants.

The expansion of Orrell itself was reflected in the gradual increase in the number of accounts, which reached 220 by the end of 1929 even though profits at the parent branch in Wigan collapsed during the late 1920s. The bank as a whole, with its business concentrated in Lancashire, was severely affected by the depression, and by the end of the 1920s the bank urgently needed support from a larger partner. In 1929, through the offices of the Bank of England, The Royal Bank of Scotland made an offer for the company's entire share capital, and a deal was finally agreed the following year. The English branch network continued to trade separately under the Williams Deacon's name.


At Orrell branch structural alterations were made to the property by Bywater & Sons during 1929

and 1930, and over the following decade the number of accounts at the branch continued to grow, reaching 297 by 1939. In that year The Royal Bank of Scotland acquired the old-established bank of Glyn, Mills & Co in the City of London, but both the Scottish and the English banks continued to trade as separate entities under the title of The Three Banks Group. The Second World War ushered in a period of shortages and control for the bank, with constraints on foreign exchange and lending priorities and responsibility for the marketing and distribution of savings certificates and defence bonds. After the war the branch increased its business hours, opening on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

By the early 1960s the branch at Orrell had more than 600 accounts. During that decade both the last local coal mine, Pemberton Colliery, and Orrell Brick and Tile Works closed, but by this time many of Orrell's residents worked in Wigan or beyond. In 1966 alterations to the branch premises were carried out by Arthur Wardle (Builders) Ltd. The ground floor frontage of the branch was rebuilt, incorporating large floor to ceiling windows, stainless steel cladding and the bank's coat of arms, and the interior was remodelled, including a new counter. Once the work was completed the following year, the branch began to open daily. In September 1970 the English subsidiaries of The Royal Bank of Scotland merged to form Williams & Glyn's Bank and Orrell branch was renamed accordingly.

Alterations were made to the first floor of Orrell branch in 1972 to enable it to be used by the bank, and in 1977 the adjacent shop at 8 Church Street was acquired to provide more space for both staff and customers. The counter, previously at right angles to the road, was realigned to its present position. A few years later, in September 1985, Williams & Glyn's merged fully with its Scottish partner to form The Royal Bank of Scotland plc and thereafter Orrell branch traded under the Royal Bank banner.

The branch became part of the Wigan-Warrington grouping of branches in 1995, and now has a total staff of ten. Today, seventy-five years after its foundation, Orrell branch continues to provide a high quality banking service to the local community.

 The Royal Bank
of Scotland plc

6 Church Street
Orrell
Wigan WN5 8TG

HISTORY SHOP NEWS

FRIENDS

THANK you for your responses to the 'We need Friends' notice in the last issue. It is always very heartening to realise just how many friends you have! And don't forget if you would still like to let us have your thoughts on how a Friends of the Heritage Service group should be organised then it's not too late. Jot your ideas down and send them to the Editor at the address on p.2.

There will be a public meeting in the History Shop to discuss the issues involved at 7 pm on Thursday 23 April. Please come along, listen to what we have to say, put forward your ideas and most importantly enrol as a 'Friend'.

Don't worry if you can't make it to the meeting. If all goes according to plan you will all have a chance to enrol in the next issue of *Past Forward*. Hopefully by then we will have formalised our ideas and be able to set out, in detail, the basis of Friendship.



Wigan Library Bookplate. The coat of arms on the left belonged to Thomas Taylor, donor of the library. The motto, translated, means, "where there is honey, there are bees".

EXHIBITIONS IN THE HISTORY SHOP

THE TAYLOR GALLERY

Held over by popular demand until 28 March

- * Shelf Life - The Story of Our Building

20 April - 27 June

- * Living with Death - Funeral Customs Through the Ages

6 July - 31 July

- * Wigan Arts Festival (subject T.B.A.)

3 August - 15 August

- * Atherton Photographic Society Annual Exhibition

21 August - 5 September

- * Wigan Photographic Society Annual Exhibition

THE WICKHAM GALLERY

- * Charter '96 - A Celebration of 750 Years of Local Government in Wigan

- * Reverend William Wickham
A Victorian Photographer

The exhibition to celebrate the history of our building here in Wigan has been a great success. The opening, by the Mayor Cllr. K. Pye, was combined with the official opening of the ground floor gallery and the unveiling of the plaque marking the contribution by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This took place on the evening of 6 November. Thankfully everything was ready on time, and everyone



Wigan Reference Library in the early 20th century.

seemed to enjoy the occasion. So if you still have not managed to come in and see it take your chance now as the exhibition is being held over until the 28 March. It deals with the history of the site and the building, the personalities involved and the library service which occupied it for nearly 120 years. Of course the main exhibit, the building, will still be on show after March, hopefully for another 120 years. Who knows?

The exhibition following 'Shelf Life' is subtitled 'Funeral Customs Through The Ages' and begins on 20 April. Hopefully not as depressing as the title suggests, the exhibition will deal with the fascinating story surrounding our basic desire to lay our loved ones to rest. All sorts of factors have influenced our customs, not least religion, poverty, public health, local authorities and funeral directors. As the backdrop changes from churchyards to cemeteries to crematoria, the exhibition explores the corresponding changes in funeral customs.

PUBLIC LECTURES IN THE HISTORY SHOP

8 April

Pevsner's Lancashire Churches
An illustrated talk by Richard Bond

13 May

Hannibal, Enemy of Rome
A talk by Trevor Lucas

10 June

To be arranged

HERITAGE WALKS

11 May, 6.30 p.m.

Atherton Town Trail
(Meet at Atherton Library)

14 May, 10.00 a.m.

A Tour of Atherton Cemetery
(Meet at the Cemetery Gates)

8 June, 6.30 p.m.

Leigh Town Trail
(Meet at Leigh Library)

22 June, 10.00 a.m.

A Tour of Leigh Cemetery
(Meet at the Cemetery Gates)

Admission to lectures & walks is £1 (numbers limited)

IN December 1997, The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society celebrated the 125th anniversary of its establishment. The Society, which has long been associated with Wigan, still continues to pay a benefit to widows and children whose husbands and fathers die as the

result of a mining accident or industrial disease. At the present time a widow now aged 89 has been in receipt of benefit from the Society since the death of her husband in 1933. We are grateful for this timely contribution by Mr. G. Magrath, Chief Executive of the Society.

The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society

THE Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society was founded in Wigan in 1872. It was set up to provide Pensions for the Widows and Orphans of Colliery accident victims and to provide benefits for workers recovering from accidents. It was the third of its kind in Britain.

The origins of the Society date back to the 1860's. This was a period of peak production for the Lancashire Coalfield which lasted up to the First World War and it was to have a powerful and lasting effect on the development of this region. The picture that emerges is one of enormous industrial growth. The Wigan Coal and Iron Company, the 'giant' of the Coalfield, employed 47% of its workers and was the largest joint stock company in the country with the exception of the railways. The iron works and its coke works at Kirkless alone were the largest in Britain with the exception of those of the Barrow Haematite Steel Company. The Company expanded extensively not only throughout Lancashire but the Nottinghamshire Coalfield as well. At the same time it developed private railways and transport system nationally as well as locomotive building. Extensive interests were developed into limestone quarrying, haematite mining

and in Russia in a Caucasian Manganese Syndicate.

Fatherless children

It was Lancashire that pioneered the deep mining techniques which laid the foundations of the modern mining industry. Yet at the same time industrial expansion brought tragedy. During the 1860's, a series of disasters occurred bringing enormous loss of life to the Wigan district and leaving many Widows and Fatherless Children. The rate of mortality throughout the Coalfield made it notorious throughout the country. Small scale Colliery Clubs which did provide permanent benefits or take children in to account and disaster funds which responded only to large scale disasters but did nothing in the case of the individual loss of a Father or Son were unable to cope with the scale of relief necessitated by these explosions.

The 'gatherings' of Widows at the colliery pay office became a pitiful sight. William Pickard, a well respected Miners' Agent for the district claimed that, "Widows were being forced into the Poor Law unwillingly" and one must remember that before the state involved itself in the lives of ordinary citizens, that is before the Workmen's Compensation, National Health Insurance, Unemployment Benefit or Pensions for the elderly, an accident or the death of a breadwinner would put a

woman and her children into 'The Big House' in Frog Lane, (Wigan Workhouse). It was pauperism that the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society was set up to prevent and Peter Higson, the Government Inspector for the district had proposed such a Fund on several occasions.

A terrible explosion

The Rector, Canon Bridgeman, took the initiative. A terrible explosion at Pearson and Knowles Colliery at Ince stunned the district and shocked the nation. Bridgeman wrote to his friend, Sir Lovelace Stamer, Rector of Stoke, where Bridgeman had worked for a time. The Rector of Stoke was also the Chairman of the North Staffordshire Coal and Ironstone Workers Permanent Relief Society. On Stamer's advice Canon Bridgeman

brought together the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society's leadership. Canon Bridgeman became its President and its Vice-Presidents were Alfred Hewlett, Manager of the Wigan Coal and Iron Company Ltd. and William Pickard, Miners' Agent. William Pickard was chosen because he was trusted and respected by both management and the men. One must remember that the Society's Board of Management and Honorary Members comprised the proprietors and managers of some of the biggest collieries in the district. William Bryan JP of the Rose Bridge and Douglas Bank Collieries was its Chairman. George Lamb Campbell was its General Secretary and the only salaried member of staff. By April 1879 the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society had 90 agencies. Membership rose quickly from 10,424 in 1874 to 54,601 in 1896. No society of the magnitude and over such an extensive area had ever before been attempted in the country. It went out of Lancashire, stretching across two counties from Wigan to Skelmersdale, Accrington and Ashton and from Stoneclough near Manchester to Neston in Cheshire. Because of its size a worker could go to a different colliery yet still retain his membership which was unusual at a time when most colliery clubs were exclu-

continued on p15



The Hon. and Rev. G.T.O. Bridgeman, Rector of Wigan, Founder of The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Permanent Relief Society

The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society

continued from p14

sive. It was even intended that a worker who moved from a 'Permanent Society' in one part of the county to another area in which another 'Permanent Society' was also operating would be able to transfer his interest from his previous Society into that, in the same way as members in large affiliated Friendly Societies such as the Oddfellow.

Located in the Old Arcade

The Society was open to all persons employed in or about a coalmine in Lancashire or Cheshire. Its Central Office was located in the old Arcade in Wigan. The Coalfield was divided into colliery based 'agencies', consisting of workers, an agency secretary and medical men who served that colliery. An agency secretary received remuneration amounting to 5% of the workers contributions in the colliery he represented and in return he was expected to take a lively and conscientious role in the Society. Meetings were held in the colliery office which was also used to collect the workers contributions and administer benefits. This was a considerable improvement on most Friendly Societies and looked upon as a very important concession at that time since it kept management fees low. It is important to remember that most Societies, even non-permanent ones, were usually in deficit, yet the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society was solvent by 1917 and paid Permanent Benefits.

A great deal of the Society's success lay in the responsible management it enjoyed throughout its long life. It was this that enabled a Society of

this size to achieve a centralised administration despite its size and to standardise the administration of its funds and medical provision. It is necessary to remember that we are talking about a time when the state made no provision and compulsory insurance, unemployment benefit and old age pensions were unheard of.

Five shillings for life

But what was special about the benefits provided by the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society was that during some of the worst industrial battles in coal mining history workers remained in, or if they left returned to this Society. On the death of a husband, the Society provided a widow with five shillings for life as long as she 'conducted herself with propriety' or until she remarried. The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society paid two shillings and sixpence to each son and daughter until the age of twelve and thirteen respectively. At the same time a widow was entitled to a funeral benefit of ten pounds. Disabled workers received an allowance of eight shillings per week for a full member and four shillings for a half member. In addition, the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society provided relief immediately subsequent to a worker joining the Society, whereas some smaller societies were unable to cope with immediate calls on their funds. Also, it paid for the first week's disablement.

Special treatment

The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society was unique amongst the permanent relief societies in Great Britain in that it was the only one to provide medical provision. The high accident rate in this coalfield plus the colliery club medical system in which

colliery clubs had their own doctors, was continued by the Society. Even in 1911 when the National Health Insurance system started workers had panel doctors who were expected to attend accidents, the Society chose to keep its own medical men instead of saving eight thousand pounds a year by dispensing with them. The Society was more concerned that panel doctors would not have the time to give coal workers the 'special treatment' that they needed and certainly it was sure that they would not be willing to come out at night as their own colliery doctors did. As it was Lancashire coal workers ended up with two doctors, a panel doctor such as most workers had, and their own colliery doctor and this system was continued until the 1940's and even enlarged to 120 medical men.

The Society demonstrated an innovative approach to its medical provision and when both the Workmens Compensation Act and the National Health Insurance Act

had failed to provide specialist medical provision which it believed was vital for workers and was in fact received by German workers, the quality of treatment provided by the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society went some way to remedying that deficiency. At the same time specialist provision was able to remove many permanently disabled members from the Benefit Fund, thus helping all the Society's workers since it was instrumental in the Society achieving solvency in 1917. It was David Shaw, the Society's second devoted General Secretary who was responsible for this development and at the end of the First World War he was equally quick to take on board the revolutionary orthopaedic techniques acquired in France and developed locally at St. Helens at the Pilkington Hospital by James Kerr, the pioneer in orthopaedic surgery.

G. Magrath,
Chief Executive

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RECENT editions of 'Past Forward' have featured a number of articles on Hindley and Abram Grammar School. As a change, here are the memories of Mr. Harold Knowles of his days at Ashton Grammar School. Further articles by Mr. Knowles, on his recollections of life in Ashton-in-Makerfield during the 1930's and the War years, will follow in future editions. Ed.

ASHTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL – AND ALL THAT

ASHTON - I N -
M A K E R F I E L D
Grammar School was
founded in 1588, the year
of the Spanish Armada.

The school was first established at Seneley Green, Simms Road End, near Billinge, but eventually moved to a new site, in 1938, between Old Road and Wigan Road at the latter's junction with Nicol Road.

In that year the school consisted of a large two storey brick building which housed a number of classrooms, the science laboratories, a lecture theatre, the staff common room, the boy's cloakroom, the school secretary's office, the headmaster's study and the headmaster's house. Close by this main building and of similar brick construction were to be found the woodwork shop, the bicycle shed, the boys' toilet block and the boys' changing rooms for Gym and Games. There was also a large wing of mainly timber construction attached to the main brick building, having been built, presumably, at a later date. This timber extension housed about six classrooms, a domestic science laboratory and kitchen, the dining room, the school library and a large and airy Assembly Hall which doubled as the Gymnasium.

Austere and aloof

The pupils were mainly children who had passed the "scholarship" examination as it was then known (later to become known as the 11 plus). In addition to scholarship pupils, a number of places were reserved for fee-paying pupils but these were very much a minority. The



Ashton Grammar School, Seneley Green.

school functioned under the administration of the local education authority, Lancashire County Council. The headmaster was F. G. Hall, M.A. (Cantab), a tall, powerfully built man, somewhat austere and aloof.

The school was divided (on paper) into four houses - Roman, Spartan, Trojan and Viking, who competed against each other in athletics and games and other school activities. Normally a new pupil would be allocated to one of the four houses at random but, if one had a relative at the school, one was allocated accordingly. My cousin, Freda Duxbury, was already at the school in Roman House and a Roman I became.

Happily capless

I started school in September 1938. I had a brand new leather satchel and cap in the school colours of brown with a green circle. It lasted about three days - the cap I mean - and then it vanished never to be seen again. I subsequently discovered that my experience was par for the course - the caps of most new boys would vanish within the first couple of weeks but, during the whole of my five years at the school, I never found out where the missing caps went. I never

got another one and remained happily capless for the rest of my school life in common with most of the boys.

Living only about half a mile from the school I could comfortably walk or cycle to school and I did both as I fancied; I also came home for lunch. Some pupils weren't so lucky, having to travel from Poolstock in the north, Haydock to the southwest, Garswood and Billinge to the west and Golborne to the east, a very large catchment area.

I started school in Form 3a, a mixed class of about 12 girls and 12 boys. Each form had a form teacher for general and administrative purposes but different subjects were taught by teachers who specialised in those subjects. Since we had all come from Primary Schools where one teacher was appointed to one class to teach all subjects we found the new system strange at first but we very quickly adapted to it.

My memories of my first year at the school are very pleasant. We weren't put under a great deal of pressure academically although we did work hard, particularly on subjects new to us such as French, Latin, Physics

and Algebra etc. We were not, however, subjected to the sort of pressure that we would later experience in School Certificate year when the pace was stepped up a couple of gears. We also had many facilities which most of us would not have known at our primary schools, such as an Assembly Hall doubling as a Gymnasium, changing rooms with bathing facilities, and large playing fields adjoining the school. We had a school library, a specialised workshop for woodwork, a covered bicycle shed with purpose made cycle racks, and a facility which most of us could hardly believe - a tuck shop selling sweets and all manner of goodies. Unfortunately our enjoyment of the tuck shop lasted only about 12 months or so because soon after the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, sweet rationing was brought in.

'Daddy' Reed

One other facility which wasn't a facility but part of the teaching services was our very own music teacher, a doctor of music, no less - Dr. Reed (known as 'Daddy' Reed). He was peripatetic in the sense that he divided his time between a number of schools in our part of Lancashire and I think we had him at Ashton for a day or a day and a half per week. Music classes seemed to consist mostly of us singing rather strange songs about youths bearing banners emblazoned with strange devices through Alpine villages midst snow and ice. I suppose Dr. Reed was constrained by the syllabus to teach that sort of stuff but what an opportunity was lost to imprint, upon the musically blank canvas of our young minds, a



Ashton Grammar School – and all that

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basic appreciation of fine music.

Another feature of school life which was different from our previous schools was the distribution of school morning milk. In about 1935 or 1936 the distribution of mid-morning milk had been introduced into schools on the basis of half a pint of milk per pupil at a cost of 1/2d (1/5p) per half pint. At most primary and junior schools the milk was delivered to each classroom in crates of half pint bottles. Each bottle had a cardboard cap with a weak circular centre spot which could be pushed down and a straw inserted through which to drink the milk.

Novelty

At A.G.S. the arrangements were different; at morning break we gathered in the dining hall where milk was already poured out in cups, some hot, some cold. I decided to try the hot milk since it was a bit of a novelty and after a couple of days I thought it could do with livening up a bit. I thought I would bring some sugar to school but that night when I went to the kitchen cupboard to get the sugar I spotted a tin of Rowntrees "Elect" cocoa and it hit me that cocoa made with hot milk and sugar would be very nice. So I took a teaspoonful of each in a screw of paper to school the next day and at morning break made myself a cup of delicious hot cocoa. It was a sensation! I wish I'd been able to patent it because the idea took off like the proverbial rocket. It certainly persisted until food rationing was introduced, then sugar was rationed and cocoa was in short supply and I suppose it died a natural death.

Woodworking incompetence

The woodwork master, universally known as "Owd" Gee, was one of the characters of the A.G.S. teaching staff. I believe that he was connected in some way with the long estab-

lished firm of Ashton builders, Kearsley and Gee. He was certainly a master craftsman and, in retrospect, I have to feel sympathy for him and understand his feelings when he was confronted with some of the more extreme examples of our woodworking incompetence. In fact he had a very simple method of dealing with the worst samples of work offered for his approval - he destroyed them!

I remember one project in particular when we had to make a small wooden household stool. We never had any choice in what we made and every boy had to make the same thing - a stool about 15" x 9" at the seat and about a foot high. The stool project extended over several class periods and when we had finished we gathered round Mr. Gee for the traditional inspection. A couple of stools were carefully examined and passed muster. Then he came to mine. I knew that my stool was strong because, in making it, I had not used one nail where two or more might be squeezed in and where glue was called for liberal use had prevailed. But it looked a bit rough and ready and earned Mr. Gee's condemnation. He pushed a circle of boys back to give him adequate space for his performance. He placed my stool on the floor and jumped on it. Nothing happened. He jumped on it again. Mr. Gee stumbled and the stool creaked a little. Yet a third jump. Still the wretched stool defied him and now the boys gathered round began to titter, even to laugh. He knew he was beaten and, to his eternal credit, he even gave a wry smile. He kicked the stool across to me without a word. No other stools were examined that day!

During the two or three years I spent in his woodwork classes I learned a lot from Mr. Gee. His favourite saying was "Keep your wood as long as you can, as long as you can". It is a motto I have applied to many things in life as well as to woodwork.

Rebuke

One of his favourite forms of rebuke, when a boy had transgressed, was to say, "Well never mind - you can always make a

living sweeping roads for the Council'. He must have said this, or something similar, to most of his boys at one time or another. I was able to turn the saying back on him when I met him quite a few years after leaving school. I told him he'd been very nearly right about me and roadsweeping since, in the job I then held, one of my responsibilities was to direct the activities, which included roadsweeping, of my Council's Highways Department! We both enjoyed the joke. Although we came into conflict a few times he never used his authority with malice. I liked him, I respected him and I remember him with great pleasure.

Mr. La Hive was the Physical Education teacher or gym master as we called him. We always thought he had been a regular soldier and he certainly had a military bearing. He was at least six feet tall, barrel-chested and probably weighed about 16 stone. And yet he seemed as light on his feet as a seven stone ballerina! He was the epitome of an ex-regimental sergeant major ramrod straight, sparkling white slacks with knife-edge creases, spotless white gym pumps, a pristine, white polo-necked long-sleeved sweater, not a lot of hair but what he had was always firmly in place.

'Ozzy'

He exuded a natural air of authority and discipline, yet with us boys he was kindness itself, although not soft, not by any means. Gym lessons (we never called it PE, it was always gym) were the most popular lessons in the curriculum, not only because of the informal nature of the lessons but also because of Mr La Hive's personality. His nickname was Ozzy and everyone thought that his Christian name was Oswald but we never found out for certain. One day a week, after school, Ozzy would take a party of boys to Wigan Baths. For those who couldn't swim he would give swimming lessons for a whole season at a modest charge of 5 shillings (25p) per boy. Even those boys who could already swim and weren't having lessons could still join the party and do their own thing in the pool.

As it happened, I didn't need to avail myself of Ozzy's swimming lessons because a year or two previously, I had been taught to swim by my Uncle Jimmy using the time-honoured, and very basic, 'sink-or-swim' method. Uncle Jimmy had lost an arm in the trenches of the First World War but it seemed to cause him little inconvenience. He taught me to swim in Carr Mill Dam, a very large stretch of open water, just off the East Lancashire Road, near St. Helens. Carr Mill Dam was, and, I believe, still is, used for sailing and power boat racing. We went with our next door neighbour, Billy Bramwell, who was about the same age as Uncle Jimmy. We took our 'cossies' and towels and, since it was a fine summer day, we probably walked there. It should be mentioned that swimming in the Dam was, of course, strictly prohibited but such trivialities didn't bother Uncle Jimmy.

Aquatic endeavours

We got changed and I stood on the bank, mindful of the fact that my previous aquatic endeavours had been confined to splashing about at the seaside. I wondered if the water was as deep as it looked. The next moment I found out because Uncle Jimmy gave me an almighty shove from behind and in I went. The water was even deeper than it looked and I instinctively began to 'doggie-paddle' furiously towards the bank with Billy Bramwell, who was already in the water, shouting encouragement alongside me. I reached the bank safely, and, realising that with two grown men there I had nothing to worry about, I began to enjoy myself. By the end of the day I had perfected my 'doggie-paddle' and I realised that I liked swimming very much indeed. Over sixty-odd years later I still do and I swim several times each week.

A strange thing about the female teaching staff when I was at A.G.S. was that all the women teachers were unmarried. The rumour was that they had all been engaged to be married but that all their fiancés had been killed in the First World War. It was a

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Ashton Grammar School – and all that

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romantic notion and may have been true in some cases.

Miss Warren, for example, taught French and very good she was too. She taught me French for the whole of my five years at A.G.S. She had a very effective teaching method - she banned English from the classroom and insisted that French only was to be spoken. After a few difficulties during the early days it proved to be surprisingly effective. It must have helped a great deal in her job that she was a great Francophile. I remember clearly the day in June 1940 when she announced to our class that France had surrendered to the Germans. The tears streamed down her face as she spoke. We had never previously seen any teacher so upset and it had a very sobering effect on us.

Precis writing

Mr. Mitchell taught English to the senior forms. I think it was Mr. Mitchell who drummed into us the art of precis writing i.e. the condensation of a passage of writing into a concise form of about one third the length of the original passage while still maintaining its original sense and meaning. Precis writing was a compulsory question in the School Certificate English Grammar examination and I think many of us would have had reason to be grateful to Mr. Mitchell in the exam. I know I was, not only then but later in my professional work when I often had to condense lengthy legal and technical Government publications into a more digestible form for my reports.

In addition to athletics, the high spot of which, for both boys and girls, was the annual sports day, the girls played netball and hockey, the boys played football and cricket. When I was in the Upper Fifth form a few of us made a desultory attempt to introduce rugby football but it failed due to lack of support.

We did, however, experience quite a sensational cricket season one summer. A chap called "Dicky" Davies, who was a year or so older than me, suddenly became the talk of the school with his fast bowling exploits. Having knocked down wickets galore in House matches he was quickly installed as "strike" bowler in the first cricket XI. He was a chap with red hair, who had a well-built type of physique and, when bowling, he had a very long run-up of which a modern fast bowler would be proud. He bowled very fast, directly at the stumps, and frightened the life out of opposing batsmen. He didn't bowl bouncers - he wouldn't have been allowed to - but he didn't need to. In schoolboy cricket, speed and accuracy plus line and length are a sure recipe for bowling success. Such runs as were scored off his bowling were, almost invariably, scored behind the wicket. I often wondered if, after leaving school, "Dicky" Davies continued his fast bowling activities.

"Potato Picking" Holiday

In the Wigan area and possibly elsewhere, the October half-term school holiday was usually referred to as the "potato picking" holiday. There was always a demand for casual labour to help in harvesting potatoes, peas and other crops. In wartime, shortage of manpower intensified the demand and the school responded by arranging for a large party of boys from the senior classes to go in camp at Burscough, near Ormskirk, to help with the harvest. Burscough was the hub of a very large farming cum market garden area and even in peace time the industry was heavily dependent on casual labour at harvest time.

We were billeted in disused cottages and other miscellaneous farm buildings. The boys went to Burscough by bicycle, the supervising masters by car. We went daily by bicycle to the fields in which we were working. Although the work

was hard it was great fun; we had free board and lodgings and earned a bit of money into the bargain.

Air Training Corps

During the war, certain volunteer youth organisations were set up, one of these being the Air Training Corps (ATC). The purpose of the ATC was to provide boys aged 14 and over with basic instruction in such subjects as navigation, aircraft recognition, signalling and radio communication, the Morse code and, of course, the elements of foot drill. All of these skills would be relevant whichever branch of the services one eventually joined and the Government felt that a knowledge of the above subjects would be very useful in the highly likely event that the war would last so long that boys of 14 in 1940 would eventually be called into the Forces. It was also considered that, among the spin-offs, there would be a valuable boost to civilian morale, something that was desperately needed after the collapse of France and the Dunkirk evacuation in June 1940.

We joined No 790 Wigan Technical College Squadron, Ashton Grammar School Flight. Service in the ATC was voluntary and no pressure was put on boys to join, although almost all boys did join. I remember that there were just a very few boys who refused to join, one excuse being that ATC duties would interfere with their studies. In fact the disruption to school work was absolutely minimal, lectures and drill being held outside school hours.

One weekend we went on a visit to the RAF station at Speke Airfield, Liverpool. It was probably, for most of us, the highlight of our ATC service. We were shown virtually everything, from hangars and repair shops to the airmen's quarters. We saw different types of aircraft under repair and aircraft on the runways ready for flight. We had a meal in the Mess Hall (we all thought the food was great) and ended our visit with the high spot of the day - a flight over the airfield in a twin-engined De Havilland

Dragon Rapide. We went up in small groups of seven or eight at a time and the flight lasted about ten minutes. It made our day, our week, our month, our year even!!! But after all that, when I eventually went into the Forces I joined the Army!

Punishments

F. G. Hall, the headmaster, was the only member of staff at Ashton Grammar School who was allowed to inflict corporal punishment. This took the form of strokes of a cane upon the backside of a bent-over boy. The punishment was known as "the whack" and, as it was intended to, it hurt. I speak from experience! The cane used was a fairly substantial instrument, about three and a half to four feet long and of solid bamboo about as thick as a man's thumb. Normally three, but sometimes more strokes would be administered according to the degree of offence. F. G. was a tall, powerfully built man and I don't recall that he used anything but his full strength. He left marks, vivid red marks, and it was the custom, after being whacked, for the victim and his friends to retire to the cloakroom where a detailed physical inspection would take place. Sympathy was not, usually, offered!

Although the whack was the "ultimate deterrent" there were, of course, lesser punishments. I don't recall that lines were very much used as a form of punishment but there was a system whereby "bad marks" were handed out for various misdemeanours. Three bad marks in the same week meant Saturday morning detention from 9 am to 12 noon. Many times since I have wondered why there were no good marks!

My brother, Derek, followed me to A.G.S. starting school one year after I had left. He has since always maintained that his time at the school was blighted by the reputation I left behind for somewhat troublesome behaviour and that, whenever there was any doubt in matters of behaviour relating to him, his guilt would always be presumed. Sheer nonsense of course!

I am grateful to Mrs. Irene Roberts of Abram for her donation of a comprehensive list of 'Notes for Parents Of New Entrants' at Hindley and Abram Grammar School, dating from the 1960's. Also a copy of the 'School Rules' and 'Notes on Girls' Uniform.

Although more recent than previous articles relating to HAGS, the following extracts nevertheless give an interesting insight into school life - and life in general - over 30 years ago.

Ed.

Dear Sir,

Further to our telephone conversation, I enclose the notes for the new entrants of Hindley & Abram Grammar School in 1964, which I hope will be of use both to the History Shop and to readers of Past Forward who have shown such interest in the recent articles about the school, and I am delighted to be

able to donate something of my own life to the archives for future generations, even though it makes me feel like a fossil!

Best wishes to everyone at the History Shop.

Mrs. Irene Roberts,
115 Warrington Road,
Abram,
Wigan.
WN2 5QH

HINDLEY and ABRAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL

NOTES FOR PARENTS OF NEW ENTRANTS SCHOOL YEAR 1964-65

Clothing.

All clothing, shoes, satchels, etc. must be clearly marked with the owner's name. We insist on this so that owners of lost property can be easily traced, and not to cause unnecessary trouble or expense. Both boys and girls are strongly advised to have a pair of light indoor shoes or sandals - preferably not pumps or tennis shoes, since it is not a good thing to wear these all day. (See also separate sheets for boys and girls).

Dinners. These are provided in the school

dining hall at 1/- per meal. Payment for the coming week is collected on Monday morning. Any pupil ordering school dinners will be expected to have them for the whole term. Pupils may bring their own dinners, which they must eat in the room provided. They may of course have dinner at home or at a relatives, but they must not go to cafes or snack bars.

National Savings. Money for saving can be handed to Mr. Lord each Friday morning at Break.

Parents' Association.

You are given a hearty invitation to join the Association. The Annual Subscription is 3/- for each family, and may be paid either to the Treasurer, (Mr. C. T. Pratt, 29 Gibson Street, Bickershaw), or to the Headmaster at school. The Secretary is Mr. J. O'Connell, 13 Violet Street, Lower Ince.

SCHOOL RULES

Attendances

1. No pupil may be absent from school during the regular hours of attendance, unless permission is previously obtained, except in the case of illness or any other unavoidable cause.
2. When leave of absence is desired, application must be made in writing to the Headmaster at least two days beforehand. The letter must state why leave is desired. Leave will not be given when no reason is stated, or when the object is merely amusement.
3. If a pupil is absent through illness, a note written by the parent or guardian should be sent to the Headmaster as soon as possible. The note must state the nature of the illness.
4. If the illness is infectious, or if there is infectious illness in the pupil's home, the pupil must not return to school until a certificate of freedom from infection has been received by the Headmaster.
5. You are asked please to arrange visits to doctors, dentists and opticians outside school hours if at all possible, so that time lost at school can be kept to the minimum.

Work

1. The amount of homework is graduated according to age, and every pupil has a Time-Table showing the amount to be done each evening. If it is found that the Homework is taking much more or much less than the time prescribed, the Headmaster should be informed.
2. The use of cribs, and other dishonest methods, is forbidden, and will be punished. The minimum punishment if cribbing takes place in an examination is cancellation of the whole of the culprit's paper.
3. Amusements or social engagement are not taken as an excuse for neglecting homework.

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Uniform

All pupils are required to wear the School Uniform to and from School, and on all public School occasions, including visits to other schools, for games, concerts, etc. unless the express permission of the Headmaster to do otherwise is obtained beforehand. Details of the uniform are provided on a separate sheet.

All items of clothing (for normal wear and for games and physical training and personal property such as satchels, pencil boxes, etc. must be marked with the owner's name. This is essential because it is otherwise impossible to trace owners.

Indoor shoes or sandals are recommended for both boys and girls. Plimsolls are very undesirable for wear throughout the day because of the bad effect on the feet and because there are many occasions when pupils have to go to other classrooms outside the main building, possibly in the wet.

Parents or guardians are asked please to co-operate in this matter of school clothing, because a neatly turned out pupil can take pride in his appearance and be a credit to his school at the same time. We do not want to suffer by comparison with other schools.

Hair Styles

Hair must be kept neat and tidy and there must be no extremes of styles. Styles must allow school caps and hats to be worn properly.

Conduct

1. Disorderly or unmannerly conduct of any kind on the part of pupils coming to or returning from school by train or bus, or in the streets, will be treated as a grave breach of discipline. This is to be taken to include standing around at such places as street corners, which is an undesirable practice.
2. Pupils are forbidden to cut or write upon any part of the School furniture or walls, and they must pay for any wilful damage to school property. Any damage must be reported immediately to the Headmaster.
3. The books used by pupils are School property and must be kept in good condition. When books are lost or damaged, the pupil using them is required to replace the lost or damaged books.
4. Orderly, quiet behaviour and tidiness are required in the passages and corridors and in classrooms and cloakrooms at all times. Movement about the School should be in single file, in general keeping to the left and there must be no raised voices or unnecessary noise. Books, satchels, etc. are not to be left in corridors or on top of lockers. Games kit must be taken home after use, not left at school.
5. No pupil is allowed to be in possession of a dangerous weapon.

NOTES ON GIRLS' UNIFORM

Winter Uniform

1. Navy blue serge pinafore frock. (Mr. Greenwood, Atherton Road, Messrs. Pendlebury, Wigan, or Mrs. Smith, Market Street, Hindley).
2. Long sleeved white blouse with collar. (Mrs. Smith, Market Street, Hindley).
3. School tie. (Greenwood's, Hindley, or Mrs. Smith, Market Street, Hindley).
4. (a) Ankle socks in grey or white, or full length stockings in silk or nylon.
(b) Black or navy blue shoes, with medium or flat heels.
5. Navy overcoats or raincoats. (Mrs. Smith, Market Street, Hindley, can supply quilted lining for wear inside these for the colder days).
6. Navy blazer with school badge. (Greenwood's, Hindley, Messrs. Pendlebury, Wigan, or Mrs. Smith, Hindley).
7. Navy cardigan. Sweaters in School or House Colours may be worn instead of cardigan, but these must be regulation style as displayed.
8. Navy blue knickers.
9. House girdles. (To be obtained at school, price 3/6d).
10. Navy blue felt hat with school band. (To be obtained at Pendlebury's, Wigan, or Mrs. Smith, Hindley). During the Summer, girls are per-

mitted to wear a Panama hat, with school band.

11. Plain brown hair slides, or navy blue ribbons may be worn to keep hair tidy.

For Games and P.E.

1. White Aertex blouse - shirt or button-through type. (Greenwood's, Hindley, Pendlebury's, Wigan, or Mrs. Smith, Hindley).
2. Black divided skirt. (Greenwood's, Hindley, Pendlebury's, Wigan, or Mrs. Smith, Hindley. Price according to size).
3. White gym shoes.
4. Hockey boots.
5. Knee-length woollen stockings in House Colours.
6. A bag in which to keep this equipment is essential. It should be preferably waterproof, and clearly marked with the owner's name.

Summer Uniform may either be bought made-up from Mrs. Smith, Hindley, or made at home from Regulation Patterns - to be obtained only from Mrs. Smith, Market Street, Hindley. Material by the yard will be supplied by her.

Where Pinafore frocks are made at home the following information will supplement the sketch:-

1. The skirt has four gores, with no gathering at the waist.
2. Side opening, fastening on left, extends above and below the waist, to fasten with a zip fastener.
3. An inside pocket in the right side seam on the skirt is fastened by a zip fastener, and is compulsory.

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. Further details from the Secretary, Mrs. Rosalie Naylor, 3 Pennington Close, Aspull, Wigan (01942 256145).

9 April

'Haigh Hall' by Carole Banks

14 May

'Peggy's Spout' by J. A. Hilton

11 June

'History of Herbs' by Dilys Barry

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. Members £1, Non members £1.50. Everyone welcome. Further details from the Secretary, Mrs. P. Madden, 22 Butterfield Road, Over Hulton, Bolton, BL5 1DU. (01204 651478).

6 April

'Votes for Women in Lancashire' by M. Gilbertson

11 May

'The Romans in Atherton' by T. Jackson

8 June

'The Story of Chowbent Chapel' by Rev. P. Hughes

Golborne & Lowton Local 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).

SOCIETY NEWS

14 April

A.G.M.

12 May

'Pictorial Wigan, Leigh and Ashton-in-Makerfield' by Trevor Lucas

Leigh & District Family History Society

Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. O. Hughes (01942 741594).

21 April

'Welsh Family History' by Dafydd Hughes

19 May

'Burial Customs' by Tony Ashcroft

(Also A.G.M.)

16 June

Visit to the Friends Meeting House, St. Helens

21 July

Visit to St. Helens Record Office

Leigh Literary Society

Meetings are held in The Derby Room, Leigh Library on Mondays at 7.30 p.m. Subscription £10, Visitors £1. Secretary: Mrs. H. Gaskell (01942 601743).

Leigh Local History Society

Meetings are held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library on the last Wednesday of the month. 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 Thursday 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.

6 May

'Roman Wilderspool' by Ian Rogers

3 June

'Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit' by Mike Nevell.

1 July

'Medieval Parks and Gardens' by Dr. Mary Higham

Wigan Civic Trust

The Trust meets at 7.30 p.m. on the second Monday of the month at the Drumcroom Arts Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan. For further information contact Anthony Grimshaw, Secretary (01942 245777). New members are always welcome.

11 May

'The Employment Agency' by Melanie France and Ian Broad.

8 June

'The Borough's Textile Heritage' by Philip Powell.

Wigan Family History Society

Meetings are now held on the first and third Tuesday of the month, at the Springfield Hotel, Springfield Road, Wigan, at 7.30 p.m. For further information contact Mrs Lynne Kearns, 28 Wareing Street, Tyldesley, Manchester, M29 8HS (01942 878549).



Dear Sir,

I am indebted to my friend Joyce Dennis (no relation) of Walkden Avenue East, Wigan, who has sent me a copy of your very informative newsletter. She also enclosed a copy of her photograph, featured in one of your previous issues.

I wonder if the following is of interest?

My mother, Mrs. Maud Boyd, nee Maud Wilkinson, of 305 Warrington Road, Lower Ince, passed away in Melbourne on 28 August 1996, at 95 years of age. She migrated to Australia in 1926.

Since last September I have written on three occasions to the *Wigan Observer* with details of Mum's life, which I thought could be of interest to readers of their newspaper. However, this was not to be as I never received an acknowledgement. When Mum passed away I

MAUD BOYD (nee WILKINSON) AN AUSSIE WIGANER

thought perhaps that someone in the Wilkinson/Lunn families, still residing in Wigan, might be interested to know what had become of Maud Boyd (nee Wilkinson) who had departed so long ago.

As a young woman she was employed by Austins, who were pastry-cooks in Mesnes Street, Wigan, and she had been in contact with May Austin who, in the 1970's, visited my mother here in Australia.

Maud was the only daughter of George and Emma Jane Wilkinson. George was a coal miner while Emma (nee Lunn) worked at the clothing factory of Coops, which was something of a Wigan institution in those days. I gather that most of Emma's (my grandmother) sisters worked there also. I have a large photograph taken in Coop's workroom during the 1914-18 war in which my grandmother, her youngest son, Bill, and one or two of her sisters all feature.

Maud had three older brothers - Tom, George and Bill. All were returned Servicemen from the 1914-18 War. George and Bill both worked at Coops before and after World War I. Tom worked at Wigan Waggon Works, as I think it was then called. Maud's husband, John Boyd, was also from Wigan. The Boyd family resided in Woodhouse Lane and it is only within the past two years that Ethel, widow of my cousin Jack Brown, has moved to Upholland. Dad joined the British Army towards the end of World War I as a boy soldier just 16 years of age, but did not see active service. He passed away in January 1979.

It was during their courting years in Wigan when, like most other countries, England was in the grip of the great depression, that Jack finished his engineering trade apprenticeship, but found himself "out of work" and remained so for some years, doing what-

ever jobs were offered. Jack's life-long friend (Ernie Wetton, late of Coniston Avenue, Wigan) was able to assist with odd jobs during this time. Maud worked at Austins and became one of their extended family. She always referred to the Austin Brothers as Mr. Joe and Mr. Jim.

Jack sailed for Melbourne in 1925 on the understanding that Maud would join him when he found work. Maud arrived in May 1926 and I was born in 1927, their only child. I am in touch with my father's family and also two Wilkinson cousins, both of whom live in the Southport/Blackpool area. Maud's parents, George and Emma Wilkinson (nee Lunn), arrived in Melbourne about 1930 and Maud's youngest brother, Bill Wilkinson, and his family arrived soon after.

Maud and Jack worked and prospered. Together they made three trips "home" to Wigan and after Jack died in 1979 Maud

made three more trips, the last being in 1989 when Maud was 88 years of age. My mother was very proud of being a "Wiganer".

When I was a child there seemed to be no other conversation at the dinner table other than of Wigan. I even knew where the Dog and Partridge* was, and I hadn't even been there! I once remember Mum saying that she could count 20 or so cousins living in Wigan.

Finally, may I say that I found your newsletter to be of great interest and I am particularly sorry that I never knew of your publication before this - I would certainly never have bothered or persevered with my attempts to contact the *Wigan Observer*! I hope your endeavours meet with the success they deserve.

Mrs. Audrey Dennis,
17 Beleura Grove,
Lower Plenty 3093,
Victoria, Australia.

* Younger readers will know it as 'The Bees Knees'. Ed.



Flying Officer Edwin Jones

Dear Sir,

I would like to ask your readers if anyone can help me trace descendants of a relative of my husband.

The relative was Flying Officer Edwin Jones, born 1919(?) who was married to Mrs. M. Jones of 49 Heather Grove, Pemberton. He was posted missing in December 1943. He was educated at Wigan Grammar School, was a member of Wallasey Police Force prior to joining the RAF and was the son of Mr. William Jones (Farrier of Chapel Lane) who lived at 94 Poolstock, Wigan.

If any of your readers are able to help me in my research I would be most grateful.

Mrs. J. C. Wheatley,
8 Jessop Drive,
Northleach,
Cheltenham,
GL54 3JG.

Meaning of B.Y.H. House revealed

I was recently contacted by a Mrs. V. Sixsmith (nee Haden) of Charles Street, Golborne. Mrs. Sixsmith passed on to me a copy of a local newspaper dated 20 September, 1960, detailing information about the B.Y.H. House, Golborne, and mentioned by Les Hill of Queensland, Australia (P.F. No.16, p.9).

In referring to the house, which once stood in Rob Lane, near the boundary of Golborne with Newton-le-Willows, Les jokingly said that as boys they said the letters 'B.Y.H.' in

H.A.G.S. 'ALL YEARS' REUNION '98

Dear Sir,

I read with great interest the letters/comments/items that have featured in your columns over the past year concerning H.A.G.S. (I was a pupil there, 1946-1950).

In September '96 we held a reunion of former pupils and staff who attended the school in the 1940's and the response was such that we have decided to hold an ALL YEARS reunion of ALL ex-pupils and staff.

To be called the H.A.G.S. Reunion '98, it will be held in the Monaco Ballroom, Hindley, on Friday, 18 September '98. Anyone interested should contact me, and, most importantly, spread the word, remembering this is an All Years Reunion.

Thanking you in anticipation and wishing *Past Forward* every success in the future.

Gerald Simpson,
5 Sunbeam Grove,
Leeds. LS11 6BY.
tel: (01132) 711439
or (01132) 566540

BLAKEMORE FAMILY

Dear Sir,

I am trying to trace my family history and I have come to an abrupt stop on one particular family and their business. I am writing to yourselves in the hope that you can print my appeal in your *Past Forward* magazine.

I am trying to trace any knowledge of the Blakemore family who originated The Original Lancashire Screwworks situated in Bag Lane, Atherton. The company later became J. Blakemore & Sons, Nut & Bolt Manufacturers, then the Rivet Bolt & Nut Company before becoming part of G.K.N. The company was founded by Thomas Blakemore around 1830 and it is his ancestors or descendants that are of interest. I would also be interested in any documents relating to the history of the company.

Thomas Blakemore is a direct ancestor of myself on my mother's side. My father worked for the company from 1933 until he retired in 1983.

Harry Schofield,
147 Wigan Road,
Euxton, Chorley, Lancs.

HILTON AND PUGH FAMILIES

Dear Sir,

I am researching the maternal side of my family and am anxious to contact descendants of the following families who resided in the Wigan/Aspull area.

I am seeking descendants of the Hilton and Pugh families.

James Hilton and Mary (Ashton) married Wigan 1895. Known issue of this marriage Gertrude born 54 Cale Lane, Aspull, 8 January 1899. (Possibly others) Gertrude married Edwin Greenhalgh 13 November 1922. Edwin was a Tailor, the son of William Greenhalgh.

James Pugh and Elizabeth (Taylor) married Wigan c.1904 Issue: William Stanley born 1905 married Freda Issue: Michael, Ann. Thomas James born 1908 Wigan, May born 1910 Wigan, John born 1912 married Megan, Elizabeth born 1917.

Mrs. Elspeth Bradbury,
31 Dalwood Close,
Eleezana, NSW.2282,
Australia.

THAT DISTINCTLY SINKING FEELING

Dear Mr Gillies,

Thank you for your kind letter today, for the edition of *Past Forward* which I always read with interest in which you have printed my poem 'Wigan'. You say in your letter that you will do your best to publish my poem 'The Mines' in a future issue. Thinking about it today there came into my mind something my father told me which may be of interest.

There was a strike amongst the miners and soldiers had been brought up to keep order. The Officers had never seen a mine previously and they had decided they would like to go down and see what it was like. The banksman heard of this and he said to the winder "They are going down this morning so when they come I won't put catches down I will just press button an tha mun let it go". Eventually they came and were getting into the cage when the last Officer stopped and said "What do we get hold of in this contraption my man" to which the banksman replied "Tha mun get owd o' that rod on top an stik to it tight cos bottom drops owt o' this here cage sometimes" and then he pressed the button and down went the cage at full speed and from my own experience when I once went down with father I should think they would feel that the bottom had dropped out, and father said we were only going slowly. This might interest your readers with my poem on 'The Mines':

THE MINES

6 a.m. the miner was on his way
For the first shift of the day
His lamp checked in
The day's work about to begin
They crowd into the cage
The engines then engage
Thousands of feet down below the ground they go
Always very fast not slow
Until they reach the working ground
With the roar of machinery around
In Queen Victoria's days
There were very different ways
Children of four were down, from food to keep the rats
away
And there all day they would sit and stay
Children of seven were down to tend the ventilation doors.
Constructed on the different floors
At Leigh a boy of eleven in the engine room a minder
Acting as an engine winder
The miner reaches the appointed working place
The dark dismal and low coal face
Almost with a breaking back
At it with the drill he will hack
Suddenly it comes down with a roar
Tons of coal and dust tumbling onto the floor
At length in tubs and cages it finds its way
Onto the surface where it will stay
Until burning in someone's fire the room it will warm
Providing comfort and shelter from wind and storm
The miner to the surface he comes back
At last he can straighten his aching back
The long hard day's work done
He can once again enjoy the light of the sun

The Rev. J. R. Hibbert M.A. H.C.F.,
Inisfail Rest Home,
15 Watling St. Road,
Fulwood,
Preston,
PR2 8EA.



Wigan Dole School?

Dear Mr Gillies,

I write to enquire whether your department is able to shed any light on the existence of what was colloquially referred to as The Dole School or perhaps readers of *Past Forward* might help.

During an extended period of unemployment, I was assigned to that establishment (surely not referred to as above!) in the early/mid 1930's. Though I have a vivid memory of the school, probably an abandoned elementary school in, I think, a cul-de-sac the name of which I cannot recall, though Douglas keeps rising to the surface. I do remember that after alighting from the train from Garswood, I proceeded to King Street via the overhead footbridge which I think terminated near the Hippodrome. Here I would turn right into King Street and walk down to the first road junction. Here I would turn left and then ??? Perhaps with the aid of a street map of the period I might just be able to pinpoint the building.

But to the school itself. Even allowing for the surfeit of cranial sawdust at that stage of my existence, there is no way one could describe a term or terms at that establishment as an infallible indemnity to one's bursting upon the scene at M15 or even the lower cells of the Civil Service.

The Principal, if indeed that was his title, was a particularly lovely chap, one might say, of

the last line of gentlemen, perhaps Mr. Chips of Wigan Dole School. He was always smartly attired, but I did on one occasion observe rather a large "potato" in the heel of one of his socks. There was the demure Mr. Baron, or Barron who, contrary to what one may have expected, was a little reticent, but there if he were needed.

Now Mr Sharples was different. A rugged looking, open air bronze with steely grey hair and, unfortunately for such a determined outlook, a one-legged amputee from World War I. He was always ready to discuss so-called engineering matters and he even allowed me to use the only lathe in the establishment, an event which caused a little stir as it had always created the impression that it was a static display.

We did become quite friendly, to the extent that he invited me to his bungalow home in Abbey Lakes behind which he had a most interesting workshop. During the visit he showed me and demonstrated a very attractive short wave wireless set which he had constructed, not, I hasten to add, yer ordinary short wave wireless set, but a four valve job - FOUR valves, imagine that in the early thirties. Noticing the envy which the demo evoked, he offered to sell it to me. He might just as well have asked me to jump in Abbey Lake. At the mention of £7, the corridor between that sum and assets available would, in effect, be as wide as that set by today's inflated equivalent of £1,400.

During my term at the D.S., a friend, not a fellow pupil, inspired me with news of a new giant factory being built in a place called Euxton and that there would be jobs just for the asking - would I like to accompany him - TOMORROW? And so, without a word to anyone, the following day we set out for this place without a

clue about its geographical location. To this day I am unable to recall any detail of how we even got within striking distance of Euxton and it was more from good luck than good management that we arrived there at all as we kept asking people the way to YEWKKSTON!

But arrive we did, more dead than alive from the mammoth walk. Mentally rejuvenated at the sight of this huge complex, still an incomplete jigsaw of half finished buildings, muddy roads leading to nowhere in particular, we continued to walk in the hope that eventually we would encounter some building or other whereat we could discharge our well rehearsed question, "Gor any jobs mister?"

Trepidation could not be denied as we wandered further and further along un-made roads, dodging under not a few temporary barriers, cutting a corner here and there until at last, a large wooden building outside the doors of which was a man in uniform who at once became the answer and a threat to our mission. It soon became obvious that he was not as pleased to see us as we were to see him as he approached us in hurried step. Our well rehearsed question quickly evaporated and the roles of questioner were completely reversed with some belligerent embellishment.

"Hey you two - where d'ye think yer goin? How did you get into the site? What's yer names?" And before we could answer, our new friend invited us, rather agitatedly I must confess, into the said hut to meet yet another uniformed being of intelligence, two buttons higher. He asked the same questions, though with an accent more nearly approaching King's English. We were then left in one corner whilst our captors occupied another corner in a huddle.

After about five minutes of

this tête-à-tête, which on both of us had the effect which would have evoked a performance to out-perform by far one box of Beechams Pills, even at one guinea a box, our first-found acquaintance approached us and commanded, "Cum wi me".

So we did, in complete silence, until we reached what I suppose would eventually be a main exit or entrance when "he" broke the said silence in the guise of, "Now bugger off and don't let me see you anywhere near again".

Such is life! It was in the mid-fifties when residing in Bolton that my role of sales engineer took me to Leyland Motors Ltd. on a fortnightly basis. On a number of occasions I would pass the gates of Euxton R.O.F., but never without a humorous thought of how, so many years before, I could have finished up sharing a cell, if not the fate of one William, Lord Haw Haw in the infamous Tower.

Oh, incidentally, I was carpeted by the powers that were for playing truant from the Dole School and docked one day's dole. Penalty 1s.11d.

On opening my postbag in the New Year, a further letter was received from Mr. Smith:

Dear Mr Gillies,

At Christmas time one is usually prepared for the receipt of anything from a Christmas card to a gift parcel, especially if, as in my case, one has connections far and wide.

There were, however, surprises in store for me in the festive season just past. That large buff envelope which dropped through my letter box was not, as I had guessed, yet another epic from Ernie Taberner, but a sheaf of publicity cuttings from Tommy Moss, plus a lovely long letter briefly scanning the 50 odd years since we last met.

It would appear that *Past Forward* will find you out,

wherever you are or whatever you might have got up to in your past life. Evidently, even dancing students have access to the seemingly ubiquitous Newsletter as Issue 17 was shown to Tommy (I knew him as Tom, but he evidently decided that the diminutive form had a more personal ring) by one of his pupils.

The whole parcel gave me the greatest of pleasure in the knowledge that Tommy has put Wigan well and truly on the map of professional dancing and that he is installed at the famous Wigan Pier on a regular basis. I was particularly delighted to read that he was equally successful in creating, with his wife Bridie, a very happy family unit. Needless to say, I have replied to Tommy in full.

A few days after Tommy's letter there arrived with a shoal of Christmas cards, a letter from Mrs. Jennie Clarke of Padigham. Hitherto, I had always thought that blushing was the province of the teenager plus...but blush I did as an 80-year-old on being reminded that I had referred to Jennie as a Grecian Beauty. (See Issue 16 *Past Forward*). Thankfully she did not refer to the fact that I had also referred to her as "Her from Marks & Spencer!" All in all, it was a lovely letter, updating me on family matters and general history since last we met some 40 years ago.

May I add, with consummate appreciation, that since I availed myself of the joy of receiving *Past Forward*, I have really begun to fully understand the import of the chosen title of this very worthwhile newsletter.

Looking forward to the Spring Number of *Past Forward* with great interest.

With kindest regards,
J. Harold Smith,
108 Worcester Lane,
Sutton Coldfield,
West Midlands. B75 5NJ.

Published by Wigan Heritage Service, Leisure Services Department, Market Suite, Market Hall, The Galleries, Wigan WN1 1PX.

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March 1998

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NAME

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I enclose a contribution of £.....towards production costs.

(Please make all cheques payable in Sterling to 'Wigan MBC')

I do / do not require a receipt

Who? Where?

Two positive identifications have been made for last issue's "Who? Where?" The Wrestler (top middle) is Jack Atherton, an ex-miner from Hindley who later became a wrestling promoter. The view (bottom left) is of the bottom of the Common, Parbold, going towards Chorley Road.

IF you can help identify any of these photographs, please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942 404432).

