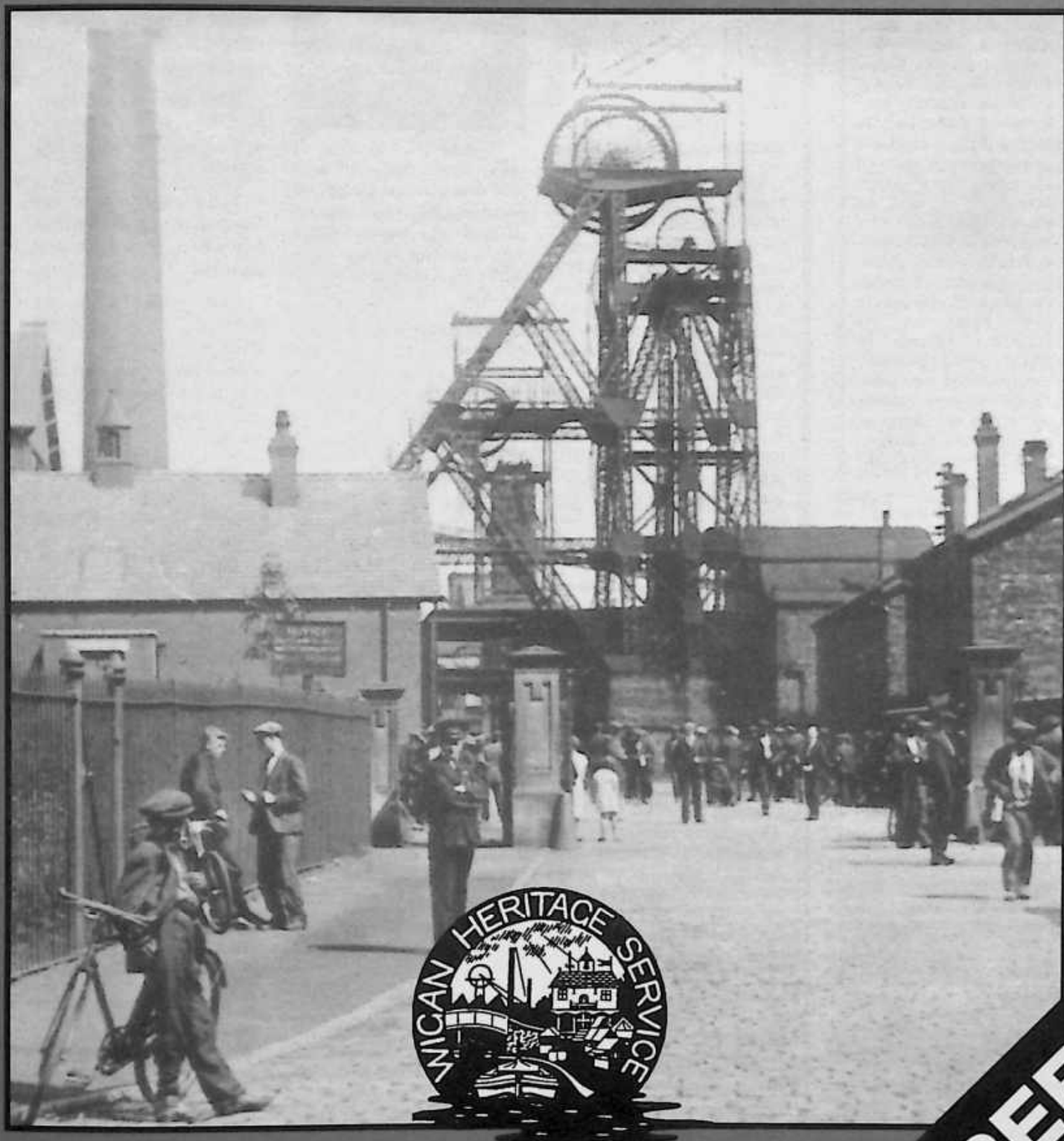


PAST FORWARD

ISSUE No 20

AUTUMN/WINTER 1998



The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

With this issue of *Past Forward* we reach another landmark - 20 issues already! Thanks to everyone who has helped in any way to make this venture such a success.

Readers' correspondence continues to be encouraging and complimentary - as you will see once again from those letters which are included in this issue. Thanks also, as always, to those readers who have contributed articles for the magazine - I will do my best to include all of these when space permits - as well, of course, to all those who have helped with a financial contribution. I am also grateful to those readers who have sent in their views on the projected *Friends of Wigan Heritage Service* - the response has been overwhelmingly encouraging, and we hope to be up and running early in the New Year (see p 13).

Mention of the New Year reminds me that Christmas is, incredibly, only just round the corner. Once again the History Shop will be holding some special events, so those readers who are able to visit the History Shop should look out for further details. May I take this opportunity to be one of the first to wish all readers of *Past Forward* a Very Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

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

Cover: Astley Green Colliery in its heyday (see article on p16).

HERBERT WORSLEY

(1913 - 1998)

Bert Worsley, a regular contributor to *Past Forward* and good friend of the Heritage Service, sadly died in August. He was a well-loved and respected man, as was demonstrated at his funeral, when the church was packed to overflowing.

Here, Alec Hughes of the Leigh Family History Society and Betty Radovanovic remember Bert: the final article which he contributed to *Past Forward* appears on p20.

Ed.

Bert Worsley was born in Lowton at the farm on Newton Road where his family had lived for several generations. On his retirement from farming Bert looked into his family history. He found this so interesting that he wrote and published a book entitled *Family Furrows*. As this included other Lowton residents and history the book was well received and this led Bert to write another book called *The Dwindling Furrows of Lowton*, to include more of Lowton history.



During the writing of these books Bert collected and was given a lot of old photographs of Lowton and decided to incorporate these into a further volume entitled *A Pictorial View of Old Lowton*.

Bert collated the history of Lowton that he had acquired and put together a slide presentation and talk on this which he gave to local organisations and schools. He was a leading member of the Lane Head Methodist Church and gave talks on the rise of Methodism in Lowton.

Alec Hughes

Dear Sir,

My sister sent me part of the *Leigh Journal* with the sad news of Bert Worsley's death.

As we were born in Lowton, we are indebted to him for his books and articles on local history.

He was kind enough to bring his books for my friend, Kathleen Chosich, Lowton born and now living in Melbourne, Australia.

What started as a hobby for his family became appreciated by many like myself.

I have written to his brother, Les, and family to express my sympathy and gratitude.

Bert remembered my beloved grandfather, Michael Rooney, who shared his love of farmland and horses and the lovely countryside in all its seasons.

I'm sure all readers of *Past Forward* will remember Bert Worsley with joy.

Mrs. B. M. Radovanovic

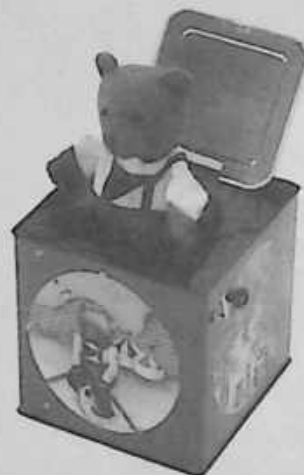
Oh socks... just what I wanted

Don't disappoint your relatives and friends this Christmas, call into the History Shop where you can always find unusual gifts with a heritage theme. For Christmas '98 we have a selection of cards produced by Museums and Galleries Marketing as well as our ever popular range of Victorian cut-outs. We have traditional wood and tin tree decorations, advent candles and stained glass candle holders. If you have a Hindley connection then the latest addition to our local history book stock, "Around Hindley and Abram", could be just the gift you're looking for.

Children are catered for this year with a range of colourful and

high quality toys from "Ernest the Bear", including Dress-me-dolls and Jack-in-a-boxes. We also have toys for 'grown-ups'; reproduction wind-up tin zeppelins, rocket carousels and aerodromes. Also new for '98 a selection of needlepoint kits; bookmarks, pin cushions, needlecases and samplers, in a range of attractive designs.

New jewellery for Christmas '98 includes silver pendants and earrings inspired by the designs of William Morris. As always our stock is available by mail order, just ring 01942 828218 for details. Happy Christmas shopping!



News From the Archives

THE closure of a school is always attended by a certain amount of sadness, especially when that school has served its local community for many years. July saw the closure of Stubshaw Cross Church of England Junior, Ashton-in-Makerfield. The Archivist was able to liaise with the Head Teacher regarding the selection of records for permanent preservation in the Archives, and these are now available to researchers, adding to our considerable holdings of school records which are a valuable source for educational historians, local history researchers and, of course, family historians.

Like many Victorian elementary schools, Stubshaw Cross was established as a National School, whereby it received a grant from the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church (the Society had been set up in the early 1800's in order to improve the lamentable provision of schooling for the masses). Stubshaw Cross opened in 1874 and came to be known locally as St. Luke's because of its association with the iron church of that name built in 1895 as a mission to St. Thomas's. This attractive black and white structure, so familiar to those coming into Ashton along Bolton Road has recently been demolished in order to be rebuilt.

The original Victorian schools were nearby on Bolton Road, too, and these buildings were used right up to 1972, since when they also have been demolished. In that year the school moved to a new site at Willow Grove, pleasantly surrounded by new housing and playing fields. The

records are fairly complete. Log books, kept by the Head Teachers, chronicle the daily life of the school from opening to closure. As was usual, the school was divided into two departments - infants and mixed. Each was inspected separately and between 1880 and 1963 separate log books were kept for the infants school. Admissions registers, the most obviously useful record for genealogists, survive for the mixed school except for 1881-1904. Official copies of the various H.M. Inspectors' reports (which were supposed to be but not always copied into the log books) survive separately

from the 1920's to the 1960's. These show what the inspectors thought about the state and efficiency of the school, and may also reflect changing fashions in educational theory with which inspectors tried to influence teachers.

Another type of record that reflects a vanished era is the punishment books. These often don't survive, but they were properly printed formal registers of corporal punishments inflicted on children as a matter of course. For Stubshaw Cross two books survive, covering the brief periods 1901-1908 and 1935-36. On the evidence of these, it is clear that in

Edwardian times caning was very commonly used, on children as young as seven, for failings such as carelessness, unpunctuality, inattention, laziness, as well as more obvious misdemeanours such as truancy, disorderliness, stone throwing, fighting and odd incidents such as 'cutting buttons off girls' jackets'.

Finally, one very unusual item must be mentioned. This is a single specimen of *The Gleaner* (no. 6 in the series) which was the school magazine. As far as I know this is the only example of an elementary school producing its own printed magazine in the Wigan district; certainly it is the only one in the Archives. This particular number includes a short account by Cecilia Hammond (class VI) of a school outing by train to New Brighton, and of a trip to the theatre in Wigan to see a rare Shakespeare production.

More Registers Now Available

One of the few remaining gaps in our holdings of parish registers within the Metro area has been filled. The registers of St. Michael & All Angels, Howe Bridge, which date from mid-Victorian times, have been microfilmed at the Archives in Leigh; one set has been made for the History Shop, another for Leigh Local History Library. The records filmed are: **baptisms** 1873-1993; **marriages** 1878-1995; **banns** 1896-1994; **confirmations** 1879-1918. The originals are due to be deposited at the diocesan record office in Manchester. Thanks are due to the vicar, Rev. Bracey, and the P.C.C. for allowing us to borrow the records for copying.

N.W.

Stubshaw Cross C.E. School Magazine, ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD.

FEBRUARY, 1926. No. 6.

EDITORIAL.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR to all our readers.

This issue of "The Gleaner" is the first since the Central School took fifty-one of our scholars from us. We trust that many of them will still interest themselves in the Magazine. We are pleased to learn from reports some of them have sent us that they are maintaining the honour of their old school.

No innovations will be found in this issue, except that we have been favoured by two contributions from the Infant Department. Good luck to the budding authors, and to all who have helped the Magazine in any way.

A SCHOLAR'S DREAM.

After a supper of suet dumplings I got ready to go to bed. Drowsily I clambered into bed. I dozed and then awoke about three times, then finally I dropped into a profound sleep.

Suddenly I found myself at a desk with papers littered all around me. I was the Editor of that famous magazine "The Gleaner." I picked up an article which an ambitious youngster had brought in. After reading the first line I threw it into the wastepaper-basket, for it had been copied out of "The Wizard," or some such book.

"Oh dear!" I moaned, "can't I get one good article from someone?"

Wearily I rose and went into the private room, where my staff were puzzling their brains out to try to find a subject suitable for the magazine.

Some, while seeking inspiration, were chewing the ends of their pencils to pulp, and others were resting their heads on their hands and looking thoughtfully into space.

VIOLA SMART

AS Local History Officer, I am continually adding to my biographical files on personalities of the Wigan area. Frequently my information comes from unexpected sources. Recently I was idly thumbing through the October edition of Film Review and noticed a small item recording the death of Viola Keats. Unfortunately the date of death was incorrect by nearly three months. However, I was lucky enough to ascertain that a full obituary was provided in the *Independent* of 8 August 1998 - the only newspaper to record her death.

From my files I already had some basic information on Viola. Actually Keats was only her stage name, her real name being Viola Smart. Born in Doune, Perthshire in March 1911, the family moved to Golborne in 1925 when her father, S.W. Smart became secretary of Messrs. Harbens at Golborne. She lived in the township for about three years. Whilst there she attended the Notre Dame Convent School in Standishgate. A letter I received from someone in Orrell some years ago remembered her as 'a tall slim girl with reddish hair and blue eyes. She had long hands with long tapering fingers. When the class had to have a maths lesson, Viola left the room and went for an art lesson'.

MANY FRIENDS

After her time at Golborne, where she made many friends, she joined the Liverpool Repertory Company in 1930, making her first appearance at the Liverpool Playhouse as Sarah Hurst in Noel Coward's *'Easy Virtue'*. She played a variety of parts with the company until she joined RADA in 1932 where she received the Bancroft Gold Medal in 1933. Her first London stage appearance the same year was as Alex Millward in the *'Distaff Side'* at

the Appollo Theatre. The following year she made her Broadway debut in the same role.

Also in 1933 she made various B movies such as *'Double Wedding'* and *'Too Many Wives'*. Unfortunately these, like many other films, were destroyed after Warner's Teddington Studio closed and the British Film Institute refused to take more than ten films for preservation.

GAVE UP MAKING FILMS

Luckily, one film of this period which survived was Michael Powell's *'The Night of the Party'* (1934) which



Miss Viola Smart

was made for Gaumont British. Tom Vallance, who wrote the obituary for the *Independent*, noted that 'Keats breathes conviction into the sometimes stilted dialogue and makes even the denunciative "You swine" seem natural'. Following on from this she made *'The Last Affaire'* another Powell film. She also appeared in the 1935 film *'The Guv'nor'* which also starred George Arliss. In 1936, after appearing in the film *'A Woman Alone'* (aka *'Two Who Dared'*) with Henry Wilcoxon, she gave up making films for over 20 years, as she wished to concentrate on her theatrical career.

Viola appeared in *'Gentle Rain'* (1936) on the London stage before travelling to America. During the

1940's and 1950's her theatrical credits included *'Macbeth'* (1941), *'Murder Without Crime'* (1943), *'Angel Street'* (1944), *'The London Tree'* (1948) and *'Anne of a Thousand Days'* (1948) on Broadway, where her role was that of Elizabeth Boleyn, mother to Anne. Later this play was to be made into a film starring Richard Burton and Genevieve Bujold. By the early 1950's she was touring Australia in Tennessee William's play *'A Streetcar named Desire'* in which she took the part of Blanche Dubois. In 1953 she was back on the London stage with *'Down Came a Blackbird'* which opened at the Q Theatre before being transferred to the Savoy.

After this she returned to films and appeared in *'No Time For Tears'* (1957), a nursing story in which Anna Neagle played Matron. This was followed by *'She Didn't Say No'* (1958), *'On the Fiddle'* (1961), *'The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone'* (1961), *'Witchcraft'* (1964) with Lon Chaney Jr. and *'The Witches'* (1967) with Joan Fontaine.

RETURNED TO THE STAGE

Once again she returned to the stage and took on such roles as Lavinia in *'The Heiress'* (1964) at the Ashcroft Theatre, Croydon, Leonora in *'Ladies in Retirement'* (1965), Mrs. Harcastle in *'She Stoops to Conquer'* (1966), Lady Frinton in *'Aren't We All'* (1967) at the Savoy and the Abbess in *'Abelard and Eloise'* (1972) at the Wyndham Theatre. In 1974 she joined the National Theatre at the Old Vic for *'Next of Kin'*. One of her last appearances was as Mrs. Culver in W. Somerset Maugham's play *'The Constant Wife'* (1975) in Leatherhead.

After her long and varied stage and screen career, Viola spent her retirement in Brighton where she finally died. She was twice married, firstly to Harold Peterson in 1933 and then to William Kellner, both of whom she outlived

T.A.

I FIRST became aware of Ellen Weeton in the late 1960's. It was through a local newspaper article following the publishing of *Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess* (David and Charles, 1969) in two volumes. The books have long been out of print and it was to be many years later before I became the owner of the two volumes, courtesy of a second-hand book dealer.

My interest in Ellen Weeton was rekindled because of two interesting articles in *Past Forward* (Nos. 8 and 9) relating to hitherto unknown information of Miss Weeton's final days, including the discovery of her death certificate. And only very recently my incidental discovery of the gravestone of Miss Weeton's Aunt Barton, now set in a churchyard footpath.

Some may be unaware of the importance of Ellen Weeton's 'copy' letters and journal, which are today of inestimable value to local and social historians, detailing, as they do, everyday life in Lancashire and beyond and especially in Wigan and districts some 200 years ago.

Painstaking editor

The facts relating to Ellen Weeton's life were first brought to public notice by an enthusiastic collector of books and diaries and also painstaking researcher, Edward Hall. It was a most fortunate day in 1925 that Edward Hall, Surveyor to Upholland District Council, discovered the bulk of Ellen Weeton's 'copy' letters and extracts of her life in the shop of an ignorant Wigan book dealer. Edward Hall realised their significance through the exceptionally gifted and descriptive writer that was Miss Weeton. His meticulous editing resulted in the publishing in 1936 and 1939 of *Miss Weeton* (Oxford University Press) in two volumes.

Ellen Weeton's life, many years of which was spent at Upholland, Wigan and Liverpool, has all the ingredients of a "best seller". So stated the late eminent historian, J. J. Bagley, M.A., in his new introduction to the 1969 edition:

"The widow reduced to poverty after losing her husband at sea; the young heroine selflessly sacrificing her youth and declining the hand of a suitor;

ELLEN WEETON

(1776-1849)

GOVERNESS

the courage shown by the heroine when her rapacious aunt presses her to pay her late mother's debts; her weak, ungrateful brother and socially ambitious sister-in-law disdain her; the scheming widower, who, in league with her traitorous brother, marries the heroine for her money. The inevitable wretchedness of the heroine, after many years dutiful devotion to her brutal husband, reaches a climax in her false imprisonment and enforced separation from her daughter".

Rejected at Leigh

In the end justice appeared to prevail, but the weight of years had taken their toll. The discredited husband moved from the district; the daughter eventually chose to live with her mother; the weak and traitorous brother and one time Clerk to Leigh Magistrates was rejected at Leigh in "the light of corroborative proof of his loose interpretation of the duties and opportunities of an Attorney".

In the absence of any record by her own hand beyond 1825, the final years of the heroine could only be surmised until very recent times.

Discovery in Liverpool

A county directory testified that the heroine that was Miss Weeton (then known as Mrs. Stock) resided in Standishgate, Wigan, in 1844, the home of her daughter. In the same year the house was sold. Unfortunately no local newspaper existed at that time which might have contained information relating to her death. The *Wigan Times*, which existed from 1849 to 1851, revealed no trace of an obituary notice. Edward Hall himself believed and stated "that obscurely as she lived, so obscurely she died". A further 60 years was to elapse before in 1994 more information on Miss Weeton, came to light. It was through the discovery in Liverpool of her death certificate. She died possibly at the home of her daughter and son-in-law, William and Mary Newell, of 71 Bedford Street, Toxteth, then a fashionable area of the city.

Her death is recorded as 12 June 1849, age 72. Cause of death is stated as typhoid fever. In an age of high rates of infant mortality and premature adult death rates, the heroine, against all odds, presumably finally lived in peace and relative comfort and clearly exceeded life's allotted Biblical span of three score years and ten.

J. A. Roby
Orrell, Wigan

• In future issues of *Past Forward* it is planned to publish occasional articles on extracts from the life of Ellen Weeton and also details of her circle. The first of these will appear in the Spring 1999 issue with the story of Miss Weeton's parentage and her early life at her Lancaster birthplace and why, with her mother and brother, she removed to the ancient village of Upholland, near Wigan. In addition will be details of Miss Weeton's Aunt Margaret Barton, described earlier as "the rapacious aunt". Margaret Barton's gravestone, removed from its original position, now forms a highly visible part of a recently laid footpath in Upholland Churchyard. Ed.



Upholland St. Thomas the Martyr Church, c.1900. This view is almost as Ellen Weeton would have seen it as a resident of Upholland in 1822. The building on the right was The Parsonage and was rebuilt in that year (now Upholland Conservative Club).

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 third and final part in a serialisation of these memories. Ed.

Memories of Haigh Brewery

(By someone who worked there 50 years ago)

ONE end of the stores was used for the storage of bottles filled ready for dispatch. The shelves in this single brick building were 2½ft apart and were from floor to ceiling. The shelves were of 2" thick stone and we placed two of the old style plaster laths across the back of the shelf about 2" from the back and 4" apart. We then placed a row of bottles on these lying on their sides, then another row of laths and more bottles. Up to six rows could be safely stored in this way. The shelves were deep enough to take a second row in front and never did I see a single bottle burst or fall down. At the beginning of November, I began to prepare for Christmas, filling every available space I could spare. By the middle of December I tried to have about 3,000 bottles ready to cover the orders up to New Year's Eve.

Sumner's brand of whisky

Filling the bottles required careful scrutiny to make sure they were not cracked, and a quick sniff also was needed in case they had been used for paraffin. Sitting on a three legged stool I would put a dozen at a time into a basket made specially for holding these. The bottles were corked and labelled by hand. All that remained to complete was a covering of the correct colour of sealing wax - blue for port, brown and yellow for sherry (the two kinds). The spirit bottles also had different lead foil tops, which were then given a gentle squeeze in a rubber-joined hand press to give the crinkled effect. Years ago Sumner's brand of whisky was known as Snowflake, but during my time there it was re-christened Glen Haigh. Most important were the Excise Certificates. Every order going out to clubs, pubs and off licences had to carry with it one of these certificates, giving the

address and description of the bottles supplied. I had to keep a copy written on tear-away counterfoils supplied by Mr. Burston. I had a notion that when we drew the spirits from bond we only paid the actual cost price, the duty payable being charged on the amounts declared on the certificates. This was probably the forerunner of the present VAT.

Like Crachit and Scrooge

On his travels around Mr. Burston would collect those certificates and once a month he came in and, like Bob Crachit and Scrooge, we sat at the desk. For an hour or so I was reading from my Excise book whilst he checked the counterfoils. All being well, we took a quick check of the bottle stock. After carefully measuring with his brass dipstick every cask, he would be on his way.

In addition to the liquid refreshment I also took care of the cigarettes and tobacco trade we ran. The hotels were expected to buy from us, but we had no authority over the clubs, although most of them did patronise us. The cigarettes were delivered by the railways and by motor wagons from Manchester. I was quite intrigued by these wagons, which were Carrier wagons. The roof of the driver's cab overhung the engine a little way. I expect it was to protect the driver from the rain, as there was no windscreen. The best quality cigarettes came in 20,000 boxes, the cheaper kind in 50,000 boxes. The popular brands at that time were Players, Capstan, Gold Flake and Craven A. These were sold at 8s.3d. for a 200 carton. The largest demand was for Woodbines, Robin Star and Park Drive. A 250 pack of Woodbines was 5s.11d. and a 200 pack was 4s.11d. You may

notice that I make no mention of matches, for they would have been very poor bed-fellows in a wine and spirit stores! Thin twist tobacco was in good demand, thin brown for chewing down the mine, and black for smoking at home in a ½oz. pkt. It was sold for 5s.3d. a pkt. Our turnover for cigarettes and tobacco was approximately £280 per week.

Important instructions

Messrs. Lawton, Gibson and Hampson were allowed a bottle of whisky and a syphon of soda each week, for their callers I suppose. When I took over charge of the stores I was given two very important instructions. Firstly I must never go out of sight of the door unless it was locked and the keys were in my pocket. If I was going out of the yard for an hour or more on some errand I must hand the keys to Mr. Scotson in the office. The second order concerned a bottle of sherry, a wine glass and a napkin on a tray. Inside the stores I could unlock a door leading into a small cloakroom. The adjoining room was used only for the quarterly board meetings. The tray I placed on the hallstand, every day of the week including Saturday, an extra bottle being left for Sunday.

Every evening around 10 o'clock the visitor, having a key to the gate and the office, spent about an hour inside, then left as quietly as he had arrived. These nocturnal visits were allowed to take place in complete agreement with the watchman's dog. Unfortunately one evening the sequence was broken - our visitor only arrived at one o'clock in the morning, and was promptly bitten by the dog! Within a few days he had to lose his arm and a little later he died. This was Mr. Peck, the Director who lived at Culraven House.

Cabbage Club

All orders came by post on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; these were studied by Mr. Harry Ainscough and arranged into convenient wagon loads. Over the years he had become accustomed to decoding these orders, restoring a little sanity to them. One sheet of paper, for example, gave only one word as the address - Wackuns. This was followed by the order, but gave no signature. This could only be J. Winstanley, George Inn, Pemberton! Another gem was from Tyldesley Allotment Holders Association. The Club Secretary probably didn't believe in wasting ink, for he just gave the address as Cabbage Club. Another regular order came from the Tower Buildings in Wallgate, and for this I had a collection of wines, spirits, champagne and bottled beer. These were to satisfy the needs of the elite gentry who held their functions there. The trips to the Tower Buildings I never relished, for it meant a climb of 52 steps to the top floor and another trip the following morning to bring back the unconsumed stock and empties.

We also had a mystery man who sent in orders for beer and spirits from the farms and large houses around Goosnargh, Chipping and Longridge. I never met him, but my brother Tom knew him, for he delivered these orders once a fortnight. In those days some of these country travellers used to combine a sideline along with their regular role. Our Private Secretary, Mr. Lawton, was a native of that area, which probably led to the orders from there.

Memories of Haigh Brewery

continued from p6

"Grogging"

We also supplied golf clubs at Arley, Hindley, Gathurst, Dean Wood, Shaw Hill, Chorley and Fulwood, Preston. My friend, John Anderton, a clerk, also had a private sideline. Into every spirit cask which was emptied I would pour about three gills of water and plug up the hole where the tap had been. Then I rolled this away to the dutch barn where the casks were stored and every few days I would take a trip down there and give the cask a little "up and under". After a few weeks we drained the contents and our reward was quite a palatable drink. This "grogging" was actually an offence by law!

From 1 o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Platt and Mr. Hughes came in to make their report and cash in. This was an opportunity for me and, taking one of the cars, I would deliver a few local orders. There was the communion wine for the Vicarage, orders for Haighlands, the Moat House, Haigh Hall and for Mr. Maurice Stone at the Curfew, who for years was a Representative of the Shell Oil Company.

Overnight the cars of Mr. Hughes and Mr. Platt had to be in the garage, and they themselves would catch the bus into Wigan. Motor cars were thin on the road. The first car in Haigh was a Daimler used by Dr. Cooke, the next one an Overland which my father had in 1921. Around Wigan most of the cars were ex-army and they must have been brought over from France at the end of the war. There were Buicks, Chryslers and Lancias. Mr. Gibson owned a small French Citroen car, but he never mastered the art of driving it, although Mrs. Gibson did! Mr. Hampson had his pony and trap, of which he was very proud, and used to say that he could beat any wagon home from any pub. I think he could, for the pony went as if possessed. Provender for the pony came from Cravens at Chorley, wholesale grocers who delivered to Gregory's at the corner shop,

now the Post Office, and also to Mr. Casson who had the post office next door.

Always shining bright

Drivers were expected to keep their wagons always shining bright, and with a plentiful supply of hot water from the washhouse, there was no excuse not to do so. The resulting bright appearance these wagons always seemed to give was due to a final rubdown with a cloth dipped and rung in a bucket of water and a pint of paraffin. A supply of paraffin was kept because the Crawford at Red Rock was wired for electricity, powered by a small petrol paraffin engine. The landlord at that time was Mr. Bert Tarbuck.

Entering the hotel at that time one was confronted by a frying pan hanging on the wall and on this were painted the fingers and numerals of a clock. Below on a plaque was painted the following - "Owing to the inefficiency of our local anglers, we have put the frying pan to better use".

A woman from the bottling stores used to come in once a week to wash the floors and generally clean up. There was one small task I had to attend to myself. Sometimes a cask ceased to run from its tap, where there could be a further gallon or so remaining. Then I would take out the tap and empty what liquid remained into a wooden bucket. This mixture of wood shavings from George's brace and bit didn't look very appetising, but at 12s.6d. a bottle I had to salvage what I could, through an old time method of purification. Imagine an old style butter churn with the barrel fixed upright in its frame, holding about two gallons with the top open. Under the base was attached a short brass pipe and so with a hole in the barrel the contents could run through. Attached to the collar on the pipe I tied a small linen bag like the old time money bag with drawstrings. Now I had a supply of what resembled thick blotting paper and, taking a sheet about 9" square, I would pull it into small pieces over a basin of cold water and stir it, making a pulp. Then I poured this into the barrel and it dropped through to the linen bag as clear as crystal.

In the winter time the two postmen would call on us to thaw out in the boiler house, but in summer they went down the cellar to quench their thirst. Jim Bibby from near St. Elizabeth's Church worked the Aspull round the Walter Couch, then living in a cottage at Holly Nook, delivered around Haigh and Redrock.

A grand party

Around Christmas time we were entertained at a grand party at the Running Horses, Aspull, and as a Christmas box we received a cash bonus. This was supposed to be in line with the amount of trade accomplished over the year, and was usually eight or nine days' wages.

Please don't take the view from these few notes that here was a free and easy establishment, for we were a collection of conscientious folks, as dedicated as a bunch of shareholders. The old proverb that all good things must come to an end came true, when the rumour spread around that we may be "taken over". A few

weeks later it was to become a reality, when two wagons came into the yard with 50 barrels of bitter beer from Greenall Whitleys, St. Helens. From then on the clouds really gathered as more and more beer was brought in. My stock of cigarettes came to an end and the customers were left to make their own arrangements. The final blow seemed to come when the last brew was made. This was also the last visit by the farmers for their grains.

All the orders were diverted to St. Helens and, after a final check by Mr. Burston, the contents of the stores were also taken away. I was left with just the cobwebs to lock up. The boiler fires were drawn. The premises to which we supplied electricity were connected to the village supply and the engine was switched off. This gave us all that real churchyard feeling. I think the only folks who went along with the business were Mr. Lawton, Mr. Jolly and the travellers. At the end of a week's notice we were given £10 for every year's service. The hotels, the stock and the goodwill were sold for £250,000.

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In the second extract from the Memories from the life of James Albert Davies, the author recalls his days at Wigan Technical College.

Memories from the life of James Albert Davies

IN 1925 I moved on to the Wigan and District Mining and Technical College and entered a wonderful new life; travelling by train. I had a free contract to visit Wigan whenever I pleased, and I entered a further form of education which was 'right up my street'.

After moving on to the Wigan Technical College, I kept up my leisure activities with the Coppull Moor community; most of my contemporaries up there went to work in the mine on leaving school at 14 years of age, but I still enjoyed being amongst them for football and other leisure pursuits, although there wasn't as much opportunity as formerly.

One of our favourite pastimes was swimming in a clay-pit in Chisnal Wood, just behind the mine where they worked; they would come straight from their work at the end of their shift (2 pm), and during school holidays I was able to join them; it was only a 'long walk' from where I lived. No swimsuits, or towels etc, as I would have been in trouble with my parents if they'd known what was going on. I always took a piece of soap with me on these occasions, as there were no bathrooms in working class houses in those days. A 'wash' in the clay-pit was better than nothing, and after a swim and a race round an adjoining field we were dry enough and didn't need towels. Neither were there pit-head baths, and the miners were as black as the coal when they 'came up'. I remember offering them my piece of soap on one occasion, to be met by point blank refusal - "What's the use of having a wash, we'll only get black again tomorrow!" Quite literally, they were only washing their hands and faces before going out at night, apart from bath-times in the old tin bath out in the yard at the back of the house.

I was reminded of such practices many years later when our son used to come home from Grammar School covered in mud from the rugby field, up to his neck under his clothes, apart from his hands and face. He contended that there wasn't

time to have a shower between lessons, but at least he was dispatched to the bath as soon as he met Mum!

Never "doffed off"

Women were never employed underground in the mines, but were used 'on top' on the washing and sorting of coal which the men had sent up, and a hardy race of females they were. Some of them used to follow the lads to the 'swimming pool' when they found out what was going on, but, unlike us, they never 'doffed off' and got in - they used to sit on the bank and taunt us, daring us to get out, and as often as not would finish up in the water, having been dumped in by the miners when their patience was exhausted. We always fished them out, as, unlike us, they never had the chance to learn to swim - almost impossible to get to the public swimming baths in towns, and they couldn't 'cast off' and learn in the rivers and ponds like lads.

Looking back, swimming was my salvation with the Coppull Moor fraternity - being at the Tech had improved my swimming in 'leaps and bounds' and I was easily the best in the water - not so in the field of wrestling and trials of strength on land, however! Working in the mine had made them too strong for lads who were still at school and always came off second best, but I always enjoyed myself with them and I don't remember any quarrelling or anger in their 'play' - I have pleasant memories of the Hall's, Frith's, Duffy's, Heyes's, etc, and keep coming across their descendants in the neighbourhood.

'Bath time' in those far off days was a mammoth undertaking for mums of large families - working-class houses

didn't have bathrooms, and the norm was a portable tin-bath, filled by kettles and pans etc which were heated on the old Yorkshire ranges, some of which had in-built side tanks where water was heated by the fire and ladled out for use with a lading-can, and a busy time was had by all - in front of the fire in winter and out in the back yard in summer, weather permitting. In Coppull, we were luckier than most people; although there was no bathroom, there was a back boiler to the 'posh' range and a small cylinder upstairs in a bedroom where some hot water could be stored and drawn-off through the taps when required - boiling kettles were still needed to top-up, but it was easier. We also had a posh hip-bath, rounded inside and with a back rest like an arm chair; the rounded bottom of the bath sat in a fixed skirt which sat the whole thing firmly on the floor.

Bath night

Friday night was the regular appointed bath night with no excuses; Marjorie (very young) always had first use of the bath, but I don't remember any other 'pecking order' - probably depended on who was ready; the same water topped up by the ever-ready kettles, and when we were all done, the emptying of the bath (lading cans and pans etc) and the mopping up left little of the night for anything else. On one occasion, as the last candidate was getting out of the bath (Arthur, I think) it parted company from its skirt, and what a panic - water all over the floor; no carpets in those days, either lino or oil-cloth the usual covering, and loose rugs which were taken up if in any danger of getting wet.

Every year, as a family, we attended the Sunday School tea-party and concert at High Street Methodist Church, Standish - father's home ground. It wasn't exactly a thrilling affair, having to listen to adults like Auntie Ethel and Uncle Stanley singing boring songs, etc, but it was one

way of keeping in touch with our Standish cousins. All the men used to retire to the cellar boiler-house for a smoke, and if we wanted father for anything we had to go down there for him (if we could see through the tobacco smoke and the smoke and fumes from the coke-fired boiler). It is contended, nowadays, by the knowledgeable, that smoking is a 'killer' - if this is so, all those men in that smoke-hole should have collapsed and died on the spot, but they probably lived to a ripe old age (without doctors) as my father did.

We didn't make this annual event one year - father had sent us to a back street barber to get our hair cut in readiness, and when we returned home and they saw the result, mother almost passed out, three of us, with not a hair left between us, having been close-snipped all over. Father was by no means a fussy man, but even he couldn't for shame to take us to the party in that state, and he had to go by himself.

* * * * *

The General Strike: 31 March - 25 November 1926

Rumblings of industrial unrest, which started soon after the resumption of 'normal' life after the end of the war, were getting louder and louder, and more and more worrying to all adults. The land fit for heroes to return to was not transpiring. Workers were far from satisfied with the return for their labour, and the result was a declaration of strike action by the miners on 31 March 1926, which was to last 29 weeks until 25 November 1926 and caused untold misery and hardship throughout the country.

Strictly speaking, it was the coal-strike, but as everything depended on coal for power, the whole country's industry was virtually shut down. Low



wages after the war-time subsidies had been removed, following the high war-time pay the miners had enjoyed, and subsequent short-time working now that the urgent demand for coal to prosecute the war was over, had been causing discontent for some time, increasingly so until it finally boiled over and the strike was declared at the end of March 1926.

Soup kitchens

Again, we didn't seem to be unduly affected as youngsters, but no doubt mother and father must have found it difficult to cope yet again so soon after the difficulties of war, along with all the working-class people throughout the country, and the longer it lasted the worse everything went. Soup-kitchens were common throughout the land, and were the salvation of many; as a family, we never needed them and I don't remember talk of them in our village, but it is possible that they were in use without us knowing. The business which father had bought had at some time been a confectioner's; there was a 'bake house' at the rear complete with a large oven, and this was commandeered by the authorities and school children's lunches were cooked therein and carried across the road to the nearby Council School.

Jack was attending Balshaw's Grammar School, and usually travelled by train - but there were no trains and no alternative transport other than his own 'Shanks' Pony'. For the duration of the strike, apart from school holidays, he walked from Coppull to Leyland on Monday mornings, staying with Uncle Harry and Auntie Nellie and family all week, returning to Coppull after school on Fridays to week-end at home.

I was attending the Tech College in Wigan, cycling daily on father's old bike for the duration - like Jack, I normally travelled by train on a contract.

No job for a "puff"

The summer holidays that year were spent mostly in searching for fuel for the fire - most of the cooking was done on the fire - and day after day we cleared all the dead wood from farmers' hedges and woods, with their co-operation (they also needed fuel). The usual arrangement was one-half

for them and one-half for us - their timber, our muscle. We became 'men' very young during this belt-tightening period. Cutting trees down with a handsaw was no job for a 'puff', and dragging them home with chains o'er hill and dale (and main roads when possible). We must have been a good help for our parents in respect of fuel at least, and the local farmers, including Charnock Richard, benefited by having their dead-wood cut down and timber to burn. I already knew many of them through helping out with rounding up cattle and milking during school holidays and weekends.

The strike put an end to our parents' hopes of succeeding in business; in a very short time, there was little or no money around in mining areas - no strike-pay or any income apart from a little odd-jobbing, and shopkeepers let their stock out 'on tick' in the hope that the strike wouldn't last long. Capital and stocks disappeared, and father went out to work as 'collector' for the Standish doctors, and there he continued to work until he retired on his 65th birthday in 1938.

Became disgruntled

His work was hard, cycling a large area including the hills of Harroek, Hunters and Parbold, in all weathers, and little wonder that he became disgruntled with his lot. Whenever I was available, I used to do his round for him, especially when the weather was foul (better a teenager getting a thorough soaking than a 60-year old!). It was all day of a job, often returning home late, having been soaked all day, and carrying far more money than was wise, apart from the weight of it and ledgers wherein it was all entered! Working-class families paid their doctors' bills by weekly instalments of 6d or 1s. per week - no National Health. It was ironic that father should end his working days collecting debts for doctors, when all the money owing to him through his help to the area in the strike was never recovered and made the rest of this life so much more difficult. I remember burning his books after his death and being staggered by the amount of money owing to him.

When father went out to work again in 1927 mother was left to run what little remained

of the business, with the help of Jack and myself. Jack had finished school before the end of the strike, and had started work as a Dental Mechanic with a Chorley dentist (Mr Ward).

In 1928 we suffered the severest blow of all, which was to affect the rest of our lives, particularly mine - mother 'went down' with an illness from which she never recovered, and to which she finally succumbed in 1933 after a five-year battle, in and out of hospitals.

Jack was working, and helping with the family income, so I was withdrawn from Wigan Tech in my 3rd year to take charge of things at home. In the emergency it was the obvious course to take, but it soon became apparent that it was no temporary arrangement, but permanent. I was doing extremely well at the Tech and already earmarked to enter the Senior Tech on an Engineering Degree Course. Several attempts were made by the Authorities to get me back in the running, but to no avail.

It wasn't easy for a 16 year old boy to run a family household and shop, and there was little time for anything else in the beginning (mother was at home, but bedfast - able to help only with instructions). The shop hadn't done much after the disastrous strike, and I had no love for the job in any case, so it was decided that it would be better if it was continued as an evening venture only and leave me free to go to work. Mother was at this time undergoing treatment in Elswick Sanatorium near Blackpool (1928).

Deep recession

In 1930 I went to work at Leyland Motors Maintenance Department, ostensibly as a clerk, but with an assurance that I would be employed as an apprentice joiner as soon as it could be arranged. For a while this was fine - there was little work for a clerk, and I spent most of my time in the joiners' shop; but officially the transition was never made, and I was still a 'clerk'. I had an interview with the Works Manager (a Mr Spurrier) and all seemed well. There was a problem about me being over-age for an apprentice, but I was assured that the 21/2 years I had spent at the Tech would satisfy that

problem, but nothing further transpired and I was stuck with a job I disliked. Working in the Joiners' shop ceased, as it was unofficial and the Union was strong - they accepted the routine in the beginning, as I was to join their ranks according to the bosses, but by now a deep recession in trade and industry countrywide was setting in and my employment as a clerk at Leyland Motors was terminated on the basis of last-in, first-out. I was there approximately two years. When it became apparent that mother's illness wasn't going to be of short duration, she was admitted to Elswick Sanatorium in May 1928, mother was in the Sanatorium just over a year, and most of the visiting fell to me; it was an awkward bus journey, which father or Jack used occasionally, but the bike-ride was no trouble to me and I was the regular visitor, Saturdays and Sundays, usually.

Late 1929, 30 and 31 were difficult years; running a shop in the evenings, all the household chores of a large property and family, working at Leyland from 7.30 am to 5.00 pm (cycling there daily), maintenance of Marjorie in a fit state to attend Grammar School (uniform, etc, long wavy hair which took ages to brush and comb). Father was useless around the house like most miners, but he didn't go to work till mid-morn so was there to see Marjorie and Arthur off to school after Jack and I had attended to everything before going to our own work.

And thus we struggled on; mother's general health had improved greatly whilst in the sanatorium, but not the leg-infection, and in 1928 she was transferred to Preston Royal Infirmary for surgery, with little effect. Visiting was easier, and shared by all (I continued to cycle, preferring it to the train and a long walk). She came home towards the end of 1929 - the treatment which she was receiving at Preston could be continued at home, and she pleaded for her release - she had been away for more than two years.

I had finished at Leyland Motors, and was 'to hand' all through the day, and for a time we were almost back to normal,

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This splendid photograph was kindly provided by a very good friend of the Heritage Service, Colin Bean. It shows Wigan Borough F.C. in the early 1920's. Colin has identified three of those featured - his father, H. Bean, a recent arrival on the staff at Pendlebury's, (back row, second from right), R. Oliver Somers, sports shop owner (second row, right) and L. J. Cockerell, one time supervisor and trainer/instructor at Wigan Baths (second row, second from left). Can any reader identify any others?

Memories from the life of James A. Davies

continued from p9

and the evenings at least were more or less free. I took the opportunity to take a life-saving course at Wigan Baths, and occasionally found an opportunity to swim in the Ribble at Walton Deep's - the first pleasure I'd had for a long time.

Frustrating time

But I still had no work; with mother at home I couldn't have gone out to a regular job, even if I could have found one, and I remember it as a very frustrating time. I would have liked to join the Navy, but that was impossible! I thought about the police-force, as I was just big enough and could have 'walked' the exams, but that also would have meant leaving home - a friend was trying to join and I was teaching him the maths needed ($2+2=4$). I finally made enquiries at Wigan Tech, and found that there was course for training handicraft

(woodwork) teachers - I was remembered from my days there as a boy; it was a three-year course, the first two meant three nights per week at the Tech and the third year meant a full-time course including teaching practice, and though I couldn't see how I could take the final year (at that time) I enrolled for the course and was under way - I earned the money to pay my fees by odd-jobbing in the neighbourhood (benchwork mainly, which meant that I didn't have to be away much).

I regretted having to miss out on sports when my school days were so abruptly terminated; I played football and cricket for the Tech, and our local chapel took out a lease on tennis courts in the village, but though I joined, my attendances were so limited that I never really made anything of the new sport. Jack excelled in all games, and there was no contest about who had to stay home on duty.

When mother was readmitted to hospital in November 1932, for what was to be the

last time, I was embarked on the 2nd year of my evening course at the Tech, and everything became more and more difficult - Wednesday and Saturday afternoon visiting mother in PRI (I was the only one free in the afternoons), three evenings per week at the Tech, trying to study and working as a journeyman to pay my fees etc, plus still being the dog's-body at home and shop, didn't leave me with much leisure. I was determined that my plans for the future were not going to be scuppered for the second time, and the others had to pull out a bit more. Early in 1933 we were told that we could visit the hospital anytime, day or night, and 'through the night would be most helpful'. As the others were working, except for Marjorie who was still at school, I was the only one available for this session.

I stubbornly refused to quit the Tech, but on my nights there it meant cycling through to Preston after classes (9.00 pm), spending the night with mother and getting home around 6.30 am to start coping with the chores, 'cat-napping' whenever

possible. During the exams in May 1933 I remember an invigilator waking me up and asking me 'if I was all right'.

Matured very quickly

Mother died within days of the exams finishing. I didn't need to wait for notification that I had failed. It took us a long time to recover from our staggering loss, (so young!), even after five years of everyone battling on her behalf. She was very special to all of us, and throughout our responsible years we were all more than ready to render any assistance of which we were capable - her load was great throughout our childhood. We matured very quickly as teenagers through necessity, and never regretted losing our childhood a little earlier than usual. Once we had recovered from the heartbreak her death had caused, the work-load eased; although still in charge at home, I had more time to get out and earn the money I needed to pursue my studies, and the following September I enrolled at the Tech to re-take the 2nd year exams, and this time there was no problem.

"Come Welcome the New Year with Anthems of Joy"

THERE are many accounts of carol singers going out on Christmas Eve around the country, sometimes singing throughout the night. Many of these groups would have their own local carols. However, in Roby Mill, near Wigan, the singers went out on New Year's Eve. There was, of course, carol singing at Christmas, but this was of the usual fare sung by mixed groups. What made the New Year's Eve singing different was that, instead of the usual Christmas carols, just three hymns were normally sung. These were one each in common metre, long metre and short metre. This gave the singers the opportunity to sing all their favourite tunes, but they only had to learn three sets of words! The three hymns in question were "Come let us join our cheerful songs", "A charge to keep I have" and "Praise ye the Lord! 'Tis good to raise" - not hymns normally associated with this time of year at all. From talking with past participants it would seem that the tunes and the desire for a good sing were more important than the words. The only other hymn used occasionally was "Lead kindly light" when the singers visited a Catholic house. In addition the singers had a New Year carol which started "Come welcome the New Year with anthems of joy".

Methodist Chapel

No one I have met knows when the custom started, but it would seem likely that it was in the 1860's when the Methodist Chapel at Roby Mill was built. It was certainly going strong by the end of the century. The singers were mainly chapel members, but were joined for the evening by friends and relations. At one time, before World War II, a singer travelled from South Manchester to join

them. The custom stopped for a while during the War years, but was revived again afterwards and continued until about 1974 when numbers dwindled to such an extent that they felt that they could no longer go out. This was caused by people moving away, and the village life changing through the area becoming part of commuter belt Wigan. Although this was a very important custom, it should be seen in the light of other activities that took place throughout the year: men's socials, women's socials, theatrical productions and the 'Turkey Club' - but that's another story!

In the period from 1935 to the outbreak of the war, Ken Smith joined the singers. He was 15 on his first outing and his father had been singing with them since the 1920's. There were usually about 18 singers, although the number had dropped to 10 by 1939. They started at the Rathbone's House in Lafford Lane, Upholland, once all the mill's blowers had sounded to welcome the New Year. From there they went to College Road, which would be the first place the New Year's carol was sung. The route went down to Roby Mill, Ayrefield, and back to Roby Mill for a 'breakfast'. Then the singers went on to Elmers Green (now part of Skelmersdale) going over the flanks of Ashurst Beacon, down to Hall Green, to a farm at the top of Tower Hill, on to Holland Moor, finishing at Beech House (Aunt Polly's) for a second breakfast about 7 a.m. During the evening's singing they would raise about £26 for the chapel funds. The first time Ken Smith went out they caught the first Campbell's bus from Upholland to Roby Mill. Other than that the whole route was walked, a distance of about nine miles. In the evening

of New Year's Day they would all go along to a concert at the chapel.

Big breakfast

After the War the custom was revived although with a slightly shorter route. They no longer went to Elmers Green and Hall Green. Even so about 50 houses were visited, and they would be out until 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. Sometimes they would start after the watchnight service at Digmaor Chapel. Again a big breakfast of cold meats and trifle etc. was laid on at about 3 a.m. There were about 20 singers in the post war revival. To start with they used to walk, but in later years they used cars and then a coach to get them round. The singers went to the congregational tea in the afternoon of New Year's Day and always used to finish with "Come let us join" to the tune Standish (a locally written tune by Arthur Alker) and the New Year carol.

The singers have some wonderful stories to tell, like the time they turned up at a house to find the two daughters of the household shivering on the doorstep. They had been night clubbing and their parents would not let them into the house until the carol singers had let in the New Year! The singers always performed inside the houses they visited. If the occupants had gone to bed, they would be left keys to let themselves in, sing up the staircase and go out again, popping the key back through the letterbox. In the early 60's a recording was made at one house in the early hours of the morning without the singers knowing. This is probably the only recording ever made. It is of them singing "Come let us join" to the tune "Brocco Bank", a particular favourite.

Local tunes

The tunes used before and after the War were very similar, mainly being popular tunes from the Primitive Methodist hymnbook, although many found their way into the appendix of the 1933 Methodist Hymnbook. However, there were a few local tunes. In addition to Standish, there was Silver Hill, a popular brass band piece. Before the war they used a tune called Harvey House. This was written by a Mr. Gaskell who lived on Gathurst Road. He was the gardener at Harvey House and the school next door. The tune was recorded by Besses o'th' Barn Band along with one called Edwinstowe which was also used.

After the war the singers sometimes visited The Fox on New Year's Eve before going out. There was also a group that went out from Digmaor Methodist Church, but this was a mixed group which finished early, about 2 a.m. Occasionally the two groups would meet. It seems unlikely that there would be two such visiting customs so close together and not others in the area. I would be interested to hear from any readers who remember these groups, or other similar customs in the area.

Thanks must go to the residents and ex-carol singers of Roby Mill who gave me all the information for this article.

Peter Bearon,
14 Church Street,
Westhoughton,
Bolton,
BL5 3RS.

HISTORY SHOP NEWS HISTOR

EXHIBITIONS IN THE HISTORY SHOP

THE TAYLOR GALLERY

5 October - 5 December

Ancient Seats - Old Halls of Wigan District

14 December - 27 February

Brass Bands (Title to be finalised)

THE WICKHAM GALLERY

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

Reverend William Wickham - A Victorian Photographer

After its successful showing in the Taylor Gallery the Heritage Service's Exhibition 'A Good Send Off' had a three week show at the Derby Room in the Turnpike Centre, Leigh, during September. Enabling a wider audience to appreciate it, the exhibition looked very professional adorning the walls of an area which is open to the public during the day and often used for meetings in the evenings.

Over the summer the Taylor Gallery hosted three excellent photographic exhibitions. As part of the Wigan Visual Arts Festival, Paula Latham exhibited a series of her fascinating portraits. Each face was full of character and juxtaposed with a shot of the subject's treasured possessions.

In August the Atherton and District Amateur Photographic Society put on an excellent show of work past and present. The history of the club from its formation in 1938 to the present day was traced with text and prints, showing a consistent level of achievement by members of the society over the years. Thank you to you all for the show which went on to have a very successful fortnight at the Derby Room, Leigh, in October.

The last week of August and first week of September saw the Wigan Photographic Society's annual show. This regular event



Tom Banks, President of Wigan Photographic Society with the Mayor and Mayoress of Wigan

was staged very smoothly, was very well produced and provided a visual treat. Once again the Mayor enjoyed officially opening the show and its many visitors were not disappointed. Our thanks go out to all the members.

These successful local exhibitions in our temporary gallery are always very welcome. If you represent a local group who produce work you think we should all see and would like to utilise this space, please contact Philip Butler on 01942 827594.

Now showing in the Taylor Gallery is another chance to see the fascinating exhibition Ancient Seats. A favourite at the History Shop this exhibition features the development of medieval halls, moated site and grand houses in the Wigan district. It also traces the families who built and lived in them, the uses they were put to when those families moved away and, in many cases, their inevitable decline. Illustrated with many photographs from our own collection the exhibition is accompanied by a display of books from the local history collection featuring fine plates of some of our old halls.

Coming up in December we are hoping to set the tone for Christmas with an exhibition on brass bands. These traditional institutions are much more than the music they produce, the story behind the band leaders, the social importance and even the instruments promises to be very interesting. Hopefully we can invite a band to the History Shop during the week before Christmas to play some carols. Keep a look out for announcements in your local library or at the History Shop about this and other Christmas events.



Atherton and District Amateur Photographic Society's excellent display of work in the Taylor Gallery

PUBLIC LECTURES IN THE

11 November

The Age of Stonehenge

An illustrated talk by David Hunt

9 December

Barons and Saints: the Gerard Family of Ashton-in-Makerfield
Walter Carney

13 January

A Humorous Look at the Honours System
Brooke Westcott

10 February

Local Railways in the Late Steam Era
An illustrated talk by Dennis Sweeney

HISTORY SHOP NEWS HISTORY SHOP

Some recent additions to the Local Studies Collection at the History Shop

942.736 Ashcroft, Tony.
Around Ashton-in-Makerfield and Golborne. Stroud: Chalford Publishing Company. 1997. 128pp. ISBN 0 75240797X. [A collection of old photographs with informative captions. Written by one of the Wigan Heritage Services staff.]

929.106 Blatchford, R. and Heslop, G. *The Genealogical Services Directory 1998.* York: G.R.S. Specialist Information Services. 1998. 228pp. ISBN 0 9530297 19. [Lists some family history societies, support services, record offices, registrars, libraries, probate offices etc.]

728.8. Brazendale, David. *Lancashire's Historic Halls.* Preston: Carnegie Publishing Ltd. 1994. 298pp. ISBN 1 85936 004 1. [Chapters on a selection of ten Lancashire halls including Rufford Old Hall and Hall i' th' Wood.]

338.4767721 Rose, Mary B. (Ed.). *The Lancashire Cotton Industry. A History Since 1700.* Preston: Lancashire County Books.

1996. 404pp. ISBN 1 871236 39 8. [Twelve chapters on various aspects of the subject by specialists in the field.]

385.0942736 Sweeney, Dennis. *A Lancashire Triangle. A History of the London and North Western's Railways in and Around the South Lancashire Coalfields.* Part Two. Leigh, Lancs: Triangle Publishing. 1997. 195pp. ISBN 0 952 9333 22.

[Covers the Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley area.]

338.4767721 Timmins, Geoffrey. *Four Centuries of Lancashire Cotton.* Preston: Lancashire County Books. 1996. 92pp. ISBN 1 871236 41X. [A useful summary of the history of the industry.]

016.67721 Wyke, Terry and Rudyard, Nigel. *Cotton: A Select Bibliography on Cotton in North West England.* Manchester:

Bibliography of North West England. 1997. 295pp. ISBN 0 947969 14 4. [Contains about 3,000 entries listing the principal printed publications relating to the Lancashire cotton industry located in the major libraries in pre-1974 Lancashire and Cheshire.]

All the above books are for reference only.

'F R I E N D S'

THANK you for all your responses to our appeal for Friends. It seems that it is a concept you are very much in favour of and, in many cases, a project you are very keen to get off the ground. Don't worry if you missed the last issue or forgot to register your interest, another form is printed below. Please fill it in and send it to Wigan Heritage Service Friends, The History Shop, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

Just to recap, we asked for your help in whatever form you felt you could give it.

Attendance at our events and venues;

Advocacy to tell people what we have to offer;

Feedback to let us know how we are doing;

Generosity to spare us some time and support;

Projects to possibly help in the future with our work.

The good news is the project is going ahead and the first members of the 'Friends' will be registered in January 1999. There is an annual membership fee of £5 and you will go straight onto our Friends mailing list. We are hoping to have our first meeting in January, so don't delay, fill in the registration form today!

FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

Register of interest

Name Title

Address

..... Tel.

Do you support the idea of a Friends Organisation Yes/No

General Area of Interest (e.g. museums, local history, archives, genealogy)

Area of any specialist knowledge

Ways you feel you can help (e.g. research, organisation, fundraising)



HISTORY SHOP

10 March
Dad's Army - A Humorous Look at Real Army Life During World War II
H. Tildesley

14 April
Cavalier of Contrasts - A Portrait of Prince Rupert
Irene Jones

ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD JUST BEFORE AND DURING WORLD WAR II

THERE was always some sort of casual work available, but it didn't jump up to greet you - you had to seek it out. You had to be prepared to 'get on your bike' quite literally, and knock on a few doors to find the work, and that is exactly what I did after sitting my School Certificate examinations, while waiting for the results. It was mid-summer and I knew that there was always work available on a farm in summer so I cycled round the local farms looking for a job. I had no luck for a couple of days and I had to cast my net a bit wider, but then I 'clicked' at Billy Cliff's farm, Tithebarn Farm, on Tithebarn Road in Garswood. Mr. Cliff was just about to finalise the sale of the farm to Tommy Fearn, a local haulage contractor, but he was still in charge, presumably until all the crops had been harvested.

Billy Cliff was a big man, a typical farmer, gruff and a bit intimidating until you got to know him. From what I can remember it was a mixed farm, mainly arable, but with some beef cattle being reared and I don't think there were any dairy cattle. The farm seemed to be run by Mr. Cliff with two workers - Horace and Arthur - and still relied mainly on horsepower - the four-legged variety. Horace was the horse man among other things. When I first saw him harnessing up one of the horses I was amazed at the skill necessary to get the harness fitted properly and quickly. He stood no nonsense from the horses - it was almost a tangible experience to see him imposing his will on these massive animals. Arthur was different, quieter. If he had been in charge of the horses they would still, as with Horace, have done what was wanted, but they would have thought they were doing what they wanted to do.

Hard physical labour

Farming in those days meant hard, physical labour. There were few labour-saving devices - labour had been cheap and plentiful between the wars and expensive labour-saving equipment, even supposing such equipment had been available, might have cut into profits already barely adequate.

I remember working on the wheat harvest. The wheat was cut by the reaper and binder, the sheaves being thrown out ready for stacking. That was where I came in. There was a proper method of stacking so as to maximise the passage of air through the stacks and once I'd been shown how, it was straightforward enough. Later the dry sheaves would be loaded by pitchfork onto carts and taken to the barn in the farmyard to be stored ready for threshing.

I also remember having to endure my share of practical jokes. During the first few days, I was sent into a field containing what I was assured were docile cows.

They were, of course, frisky bullocks, who thoroughly enjoyed chasing this two-legged intruder out of their field.

Mostly I remember the physical nature of the work and the pleasure of honest tiredness at the end of the day. I remember the satisfaction that comes from knowing that a job has been well done and my growing respect for those who earn their living by hard physical effort. To this day I have never lost this respect.

Lather Boy

My younger brother, Derek, following the family tradition of earning his own pocket money, found himself a rather unusual job - he went as lather boy to Bert Hughes, one of the local barbers. In the days of wet shaves and cut-throat razors some barbers employed a young lad as a lather boy. The job was exactly what it said - the lather boy would, using shaving brush, hot water and soap, apply lather to the face of the customer in readiness for the barber to do the actual shaving with his cut-throat razor.

Most barber shops had two, and occasionally three, chairs in the shop and in busy periods production could be stepped up and waiting time reduced by having a lather boy to settle the customer into a chair, fit the apron-cum-towel round his neck, and lather his face ready for the barber. The lather boy was also a general factotum - he swept up the hair clippings, kept the wash basins clean and ran errands for the barber. It was, of course, a part time job, principally all day Saturday and, I think, Friday evening.

Four barbers

There were four barbers in Ashton in the late 1930's/early 1940's. There was Abel Ogden in Gerard Street, next door to Heywoods music shop and George Chapman in Wigan Road at the bus stop opposite Painter's garage. Both of these had the barber's salon in the rear of the premises, the front part being a tobacconist at Abel Ogdens and sweets/tobacconist/newsagent at George Chapmans. The other shops were barbers only - Ernie Wynne at the top of Bryn Street and Bert Hughes a hundred yards or so along Bolton Road where Derek worked.

If I say that Bert Hughes was a bit of a character it would be a gross understatement. He was a lot of a character, in fact he was the character to end all characters. You didn't go to Bert Hughes for anything as mundane as a haircut or a shave. Indeed no! You went, and paid, to be entertained and the shave or haircut was thrown in free! He had a vast repertoire of stories, most relating to his exploits as a barber over the years. He also happened to be a very good barber. Someone once asked him what he would do without his electric clippers. He showed him by giving the next customer a first class haircut using comb and scissors only.

He used to tell of the time when, as a young man, he was asked to go to a very large, posh, private house to render his services. When he got there he was admitted by a maid in uniform and shown to a small ante room. The master of the house came in and asked for a haircut. Bert, who had, of course, brought his scissors and combs etc, got on with the job. When he



had finished the man asked Bert how much he owed him. This was the first time Bert had ever done a job like this and he didn't know how much to ask. Apparently at that time his charge for a haircut in his barber's shop was about 6d(2½p) so he thought that, since he had gone to a lot of extra trouble he would ask for half a crown (12½p). 'Half a crown?' demanded the man, loudly; 'Half a crown?' he asked again in an incredulous voice and Bert thought he'd overstepped the mark. Then the man turned to his wife, who had just entered the room. 'Mary' he said 'Give the gentleman a pound!'

Air Raid Precautions and the Blackout

At the beginning of the war Air Raid Precautions was a matter of the most urgent national importance. The British Government knew that the Germans would try to destroy, by bombing, Britain's industrial capacity and pave the way for an invasion which would be likely to result in a German victory. Consequently the appropriate defensive measures were put in hand.

A blackout was imposed, making it an offence to show light from any building or, indeed, from elsewhere, during the hours of darkness. In lighted rooms curtains or blinds had to be fully drawn and if they were not already light-proof, additional material, usually plain black, had to be put up. Shops, and particularly chip shops, whose doors were constantly being opened at night by customers installed Heath-Robinson devices involving a thin rope which ran over pulleys on the ceiling from the door to a tubular-shaped shade over the bare bulb of the shop light. When the door was opened the rope went slack and the weight of the shade pulled it down over the

light bulb, plunging the shop into almost total darkness. When the door was closed the rope pulled up the shade to reveal the light bulb again. It was a crude, but effective, device. Air Raid Wardens, who were all volunteers, patrolled the streets and one of their duties was to enforce the black-out. Their cry of 'Put that light out!' became one of the catch-phrases of the Second World War.

Headlights blacked out

In addition to the blackout restrictions on buildings, all street lights were extinguished for the duration of the war. Motor vehicles had their headlights blacked out, leaving a narrow horizontal slit in each headlight about four inches wide and one inch deep. These slits didn't really give the motorist much light to see where he was going - their main purpose seemed to be to show that a motor vehicle was either stationary or moving. It was very fortunate that, not only was the number of licensed motor vehicles quite low, but strict petrol rationing drastically curtailed the number of vehicles actually in use at any one time.

Most public buildings, such as Police Stations, Town Halls, Public Libraries and others had a sort of sandbag emplacement constructed at their main entrances to minimise the effects of blast in case of bombing.

There were Public Air Raid Shelters in all towns and cities. These were very often surface shelters, basically a brick box with a solid concrete floor and roof, the brick walls being about 18" thick with blast walls at the entrances. Similar air raid shelters were erected near to blocks of flats and factories. Where space was available in back gardens and yards most people were provided with Anderson shelters. These were named after a Home Secretary, Sir John

Anderson, and were of prefabricated corrugated iron construction delivered to households in kit form. They were half sunk into the ground to a depth of about two feet and they had an arched roof which was covered to a depth of 12" or 18" with earth and rubble. There was a square opening at one end which served as the entrance. They were usually installed by the Local Council, but, of course, the Council workmen did only the basic installation work.

Wailing of sirens

Many people put down carpet and decorated the inside of their shelter; they put in bunk beds or upholstered seating, fitted a door and installed electric light. Since the shelter floor was well below ground level, steps were needed to get down into it and drainage could be a problem. If some of these measures seem to be over-elaboration, it should be remembered that in London,

Plymouth, Coventry, Liverpool, Tyneside and in many other towns and cities, bombing and - almost as bad - the wailing of the sirens to signal an alert meant a night in the shelter and anything was worthwhile if it made the long hours spent in the shelter a little more comfortable. In Ashton-in-Makerfield we were fortunate - the air raid siren was very infrequent, usually when a German bomber lost his way either going to or returning from Liverpool and came over our area.

Because my family had four children - I had two younger brothers and a sister - we were given a brick air-raid shelter, built in the back garden. It was about 10 feet x 6 feet with brick walls and a brick arched roof. I can't remember whether or not we ever used it in an air raid, but if we did we must have been very lucky. One night after the shelter had been built for

continued on p16

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

£6.20

PER MORNING OR
AFTERNOON SESSION

£9.30

PER EVENING SESSION

COMMERCIAL RATE

£12.40

REFRESHMENTS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE

*If you are
interested, contact Philip Butler*

(01942) 827594

The Heritage Service is indebted to Red Rose Steam Society - it is through their splendid efforts over many years that the Astley Green Colliery site remains a unique reminder of our industrial heritage, and can look forward to an exciting period of expansion and development in the near future. Here, Red Rose Chairman, Geoff Jones, tells the story of the Museum. *A Brief History of Astley Green Colliery* is also available from the Society (address below) or from the History Shop at £1 plus 50p postage and packing.

Astley Green Colliery Museum

A Brief History of Astley Green Colliery



1908 to 1970

THE RED ROSE STEAM SOCIETY

IF YOU travel along the East Lancashire Road (A580) you may have noticed a Colliery Headgear and Engine House standing in the fields close to Tyldesley and Boothstown. This is Astley Green Colliery, which is now the home of The Red Rose Steam Society, and Astley Green Colliery Museum.

The Colliery had an active life from the first coal being wound in 1910 until closure in April 1970. Originally belonging to the Pilkington family, of glass making fame, it was subsequently included in the amalgamation of several local mines, which became

Manchester Collieries in 1928. Nationalisation in January 1947 gave rise to its ultimate development into a modern mining complex. Unfortunately the economics of deep mining led to its closure after 60 years of coal extraction.

Industrial Monuments

Following closure, demolition and landscaping of the mine began rapidly and the two shafts were progressively filled with slurry from other collieries. Fortunately Lancashire County Council, and later Greater Manchester Council, realised the historical importance of the No.1 shaft headgear, engine

house and the steam winding engine it contained. All three were duly 'listed' as being significant industrial monuments to the once famous Lancashire Coalfield, and action was taken to prevent their further deterioration.

At this time, the early 1980's, the Red Rose Steam Society was looking for a home to house its collection and further its aims in the restoration of steam driven artefacts and equipment. An agreement was reached whereby the Society would re-locate to Astley Green in exchange for an undertaking to help preserve the winding engine. Eventually, with the demise of the G.M.C. and local boundary changes, Wigan M.B.C. realised ownership of the site. Since this time, and in a spirit of co-operation with the Council, many former mining and local history items have been collected for exhibition in the Museum, which has now been firmly established.

The former Mine Manager's office has many displays relating to the geology, mine operations, safety and history of the pit itself. There are also exhibits outside in the former pit yard and the Society has the largest preserved collection of former colliery underground locomotives in the country, which eventually will be included as part of a narrow gauge passenger-carrying railway around the site.

Ashton-in-Makerfield during W.W.II

continued from p15

about five or six weeks we heard a loud rumbling during the night. I thought it was thunder, but when we got up the next morning we discovered that the air raid shelter had collapsed! Fat lot of use it would have been in an air raid or for any other use for that matter. It had been built by Council workmen and the Council sent their men to clear away the rubble and build another. To be fair to the Council, they were suffering from the universal shortage of manpower and materials which began to have effect very early in the war. They would almost certainly have had to rely on semi-skilled or even unskilled labour to carry out most of the Air Raid Precautions work. The new shelter was properly built - it

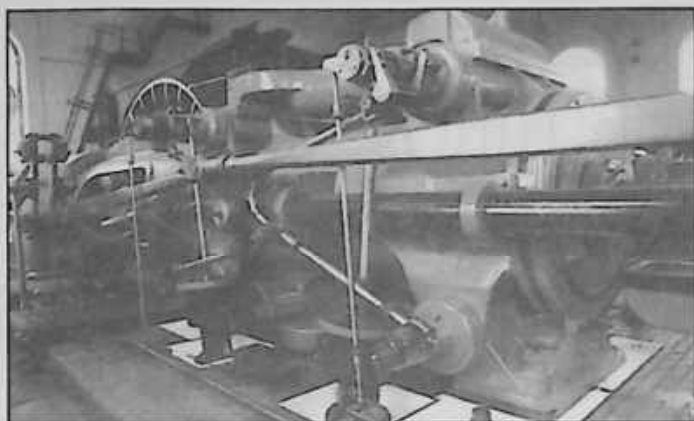
had a concrete floor and a flat concrete roof with brick walls about 15 inches thick. At least it never fell down and was used for storage purposes after the war. It was still standing when my mother left the house in about 1970 and for all I know it could still be standing there.

At Ashton Grammar School four large concrete, semi-underground air raid shelters were constructed on the school playing field near the tennis courts. The shelters were about 60 feet long, running longitudinally north to south with the entrances at the north end. I don't think they were ever used in anger. They never fell down.

Rationing

Although rationing and, in particular, food rationing, weighed heavily on the civilian population during the war, it was not something which greatly exercised the thoughts of me and my pals.

Our mothers, of course, bore the brunt of the difficulties of war on the domestic front, but, with an in-bred resourcefulness, they contrived to produce nourishing meals from the most meagre resources. For most families the basic ration had to suffice and people accepted these privations as part of their contribution to the war effort. I can't remember the quantities of rationed food per person, per week, but the amounts were not generous. Perhaps it was just as well that people didn't know that food rationing was to last until 1954, long after the end of the war. A picture of a ration book for 1953/54 accompanies this article, as does a picture of an Identity Card, issued during the war to all adult civilians. These Identity Cards, which were in use until 1951, had to be carried at all times, the penalty for non-compliance being 'a fine, or imprisonment, or both'.



A section of the magnificent steam winding engine at Astley Green Colliery.

Winding engine

A visit to Astley Green can never be considered as complete until the magnificent steam winding engine is seen. This giant, all 3,300 horsepower of it, was built and installed by Yates and Thom of Blackburn in 1912, and is believed to be the largest remaining of its type in the world. At the peak of coal production, it was sufficiently powerful to lift nine tons of coal to the surface every two minutes, at a maximum rope speed of 58 m.p.h. It is currently being restored to full operational condition. A Heritage Lottery application is being submitted so that this work can be completed, as well as restoration of the headgear and the provision of a boiler house and brick chimney. Other funding opportunities continue to be explored with the full, and welcome, co-operation of Wigan M.B.C. so that once again the headgear pulleys will be seen to spin as a fitting memorial to all the men and women who worked in the Lancashire coal mining industry.

There is much to see at the Museum, so why not pay a visit? It is run entirely by volunteers and there is no admission charge, although donations are always most welcome! We will also be able to tell you about our future projects, for example, an 'Underground Experience' which will enable visitors to sense what

a miner's life was like underground, without leaving the surface.

Opening Times are:
Tuesdays and Thursdays
2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Sundays 10.30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Open all year

The Museum is open all year round, and the Society's members will be pleased to show you round, or if you wish, you can pick up a 'Self-Guide' and wander at your leisure. There is also a shop where momentos can be purchased, as well as a welcoming hot or cold drink.

If you wish to visit by car, turn off the East Lancashire Road at the junction sign-posted for Higher Green. Follow Higher Green Lane for about 400 yards and the Museum is off to the left. The colliery headgear is a landmark to look out for! Alternatively, there is a bus service from Leigh to Astley Green Village, which stops outside the site.

If you require any further information please write to:

The Secretary,
Red Rose Steam Society,
Astley Green Colliery
Museum,
Higher Green Lane,
Astley,
Manchester.
M29 7JB.

ASHTON SWIMMING BATHS - A NOTE

HAROLD Knowles' absorbing recollections of Ashton-in-Makerfield in the '30's, *Past Forward 19*, contain a reference to a short-lived public swimming baths in his home town. Having had cause to do some research into the history of baths in the Wigan area a while ago, maybe I can add a little to the story...

The Edwardian baths at Ashton was undoubtedly one of the least successful in Lancashire, perhaps in England!! It was opened, with the usual great ceremony of those days, by Lady Gerard of Garswood Hall in 1910, on a site given by her husband to Ashton U.D.C. at the corner of Morden Avenue and Spion Kop Road.

As with so many public projects in those times, the baths had a long gestation period, having been mooted as early as 1894. Baths were seen mainly as a benefit to public health at that time, and Ashton was aware that Wigan (1882), Leigh (1881) and Tyldesley (1876) already had very popular facilities. The only known photographs of the building can be seen in the *Wigan Observer* article following the opening ceremony. We also have in the Archives a set of plans (Acc. 2661). The architect was none other than J.C. Prestwich of Leigh, whose firm designed many buildings in the district such as Leigh Town Hall, Infirmary, Baths, Technical School, as well as public buildings up and down England. At the ceremony the guest speaker (the mayor of Wigan!) remarked that baths were 'not constructed by municipalities for making fortunes' .. but 'for the enjoyment of the people and to make them more clean and healthy and, therefore, better men and women. If they had a clean body they had a clean mind.'

Ashton's baths were of standard small town design, with a plunge of 75' x 30', 43 collapsible dressing boxes around the pool side and a gallery around three walls. As in Wigan's old baths, a moveable floor was installed to enable the plunge to be used as a public hall. There were showers 'for the use of the more dirty bathers' and 12 private baths. Separate swimming sessions for men and women were intended, this being still the rule in Edwardian England.

Sadly for the good people of Ashton the brave hopes of municipal enterprise were soon dashed, for within a few years the baths were closed due to the effects of mining subsidence, perhaps from Lord Gerard's own mines! From October 1916 the baths were shut *pro tem* due to water leakage and financial problems. Discussions rumbled on after the war regarding a reopening but eventually, as Mr. Knowles recalls, the building was turned over permanently for use as the Baths Public Hall; the towels were given to Ashton hospital and the stock of bathing drawers to Leigh Corporation! At the height of the Lido movement in 1930, Ashton U.D.C.'s surveyor was asked to look at sites for a new open-air baths, but the scheme floundered. The Council's Baths Committee continued to meet and the surviving files pay tribute to its efforts, including plans for a new baths at Millingford Grove in 1967. In the event Ashton had to wait 60 years for a replacement, when Ashton Leisure Centre was opened in 1977 for joint use with Cansfield High School.

N.W.

Mrs. Marjorie Bryden is well known to Past Forward readers for her articles on Hindley and Abram Grammar School. Here she turns her attention to her primary school in Hindley Green. Ed.

Sacred Heart School, Hindley Green (early 1930s)

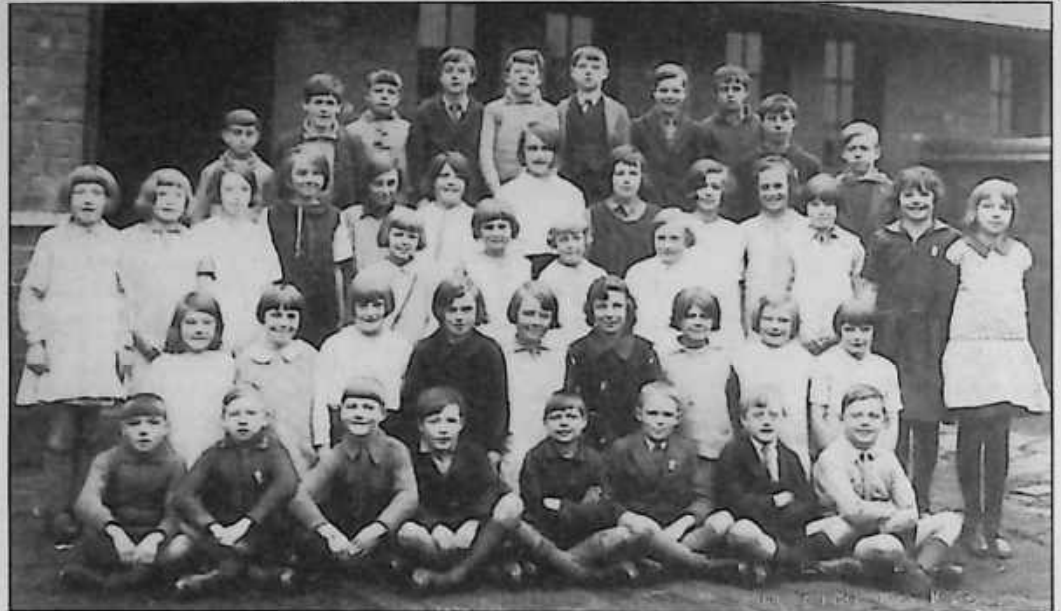
I ATTENDED Sacred Heart School, Hindley Green, from 1929 to 1933. It was virtually a "country" school, with only three teachers and, at that time, under the jurisdiction of the priests of St. Benedict's, Hindley. The headmistress was Miss Catherine Baron, my mother's 2nd cousin: it had a good reputation scholastically and it took children from 5 to 14 years of age. Miss Baron taught what could loosely be described as the seniors, Miss McVey taught the juniors and Mrs. Leather the infants.

On Sundays the school was used as a church: the priests came out from Hindley to say the Mass until the parish built its own church. The school consisted of one large room, divided into two by, at first a curtain, and later by a glass partition. This held the Junior and Senior classes. A further part was partitioned off for an altar and altar rails and both partitions were drawn back to make one large room on Sundays. There was a small room, leading off the altar part, which served as a vestry.

The infants had a separate room and there were two cloak-rooms, one at each end of the school. The lavatories were across the yard. The first lavatory was much bigger and better than the others; it was the sanctum sanctorum - the teachers' lavatory!

Fastidious little girl

I was rather a fastidious little girl and one day I didn't like the look (or smell!) of any of the children's lavatories, so I decided that I would use the teachers' one. Of course, somebody saw me go in and immediately rushed to inform Miss Baron that "Marjorie Lowe was



Back row: Tootal, Gregory, Jn. Prescott, F. Purtell, S. Hayes, D. O'Halloran, J. Moran, Ted Kay, Winstanley, Jn. Young.

Second row from back: A. Collier, I. Stevens, E. Dickinson, M. Peters, Bes. Berry, ? Abram, M. Hughes, A. Ratcliffe, H. Southern, L. Yates, M. Gregory, W. Owen, M. B. Battersby.

Middle row: M. Lowe, ? Unsworth, Peg. Mortimer, R. Aspinall.

Fourth row: A. Unsworth, K. Houghton, W. Bradshaw, M. Seddon, ? Abram, K. Gallagher, Lomax (I think), A. Pie, Nell. Peters.

Bottom row: Jim Prescott, A. Aspinall, Houghton, Abram, Tom Tootal, W. O'Toole, Billie Bradshaw, Tony Briddon. The top class c. 1931 - 44 present, a few absent. What of class sizes then?

in the teachers' lavatory". The message came back, shouted through the door that I was to "get off immediately!" By the time I opened the door, a crowd had gathered to see who had committed this heinous crime, but I never heard anything further about it.

Miss Baron was a strict disciplinarian, but a very good teacher. There were over 40 children in each class, of a wide age range - what would the teachers of today say? And I can't remember anyone who couldn't read!

Some lessons were taught to the whole class, and some, like arithmetic, in groups. The only changes made were for an hour on Monday and Wednesday afternoons, when Miss Baron took all the Junior and Senior boys for Art, while Mrs. Leather took the girls for sewing, and Miss McVey took the infants. Mrs. Leather wasn't

much of a needlework teacher. I started making a flannelette nightdress when I started at the school, aged seven years, and I hadn't finished it four years later!

Miss McVey was an Irish lady, as one would expect from the name. She invariably arrived at school wearing a leather coat and wellingtons. Every playtime she made herself a hot drink. This used to intrigue me: she had a little stove. It had a metal base, on which she placed a very small white oblong, which she lit and it sent out a small flame. There were three legs, which protruded upwards from the base and on these she precariously balanced a pan of water. I don't know what the white oblong was: I think that it must have been something in the nature of a very small fire-lighter. However, she always got her cup of tea.

Mrs. Leather was rather a character. In those days, when a lady married, she had to leave, but Mrs. Leather was either a widow, or she had a sick husband, so she was able to return to teaching, though I don't think that she was certificated. She was enormously fat, with short arms, which hardly met round her ample bosom. One day she slipped on some ice in the playground and couldn't get up! It took the combined efforts of both the other teachers and a couple of senior boys to get her upright again.

"Nowty things"

She was given to lapsing into Lancashire dialect and often called children "nowty things". She also kept a canary, called Peter, in a cage in her classroom and I had the doubtful "honour" of cleaning out the cage every Friday after-

noon - an honour which I would willingly have foregone.

One day Miss Baron was absent. Miss McVey was taking the infants and lower juniors and Mrs. Leather the remaining juniors and seniors. Horror of horrors, it came to Mrs. Leather's knowledge that three boys, who shall remain nameless, had found a bird's nest and had cut off the legs of the baby birds with a penknife. Mrs. Leather had the three boys standing before the whole school and she told them that she was going to cut off their fingers! She took the screaming first boy, the ring-leader, and laid his hand on the desk, then she took the wrong side of a very blunt knife and started theatrically sawing it across his fingers in a very exaggerated manner. I realised, in later years, that she was putting no pressure on, but he was screaming the place down. After she had done this for a minute or so she said, "Well, if I don't saw off your fingers, will you promise never to do such a terrible thing again?" Of

course, the boys were only too glad to promise and it would certainly teach them a lesson. None of the parents complained, Miss Baron told me, years later, I wonder what would happen if a similar scene took place these days.

Unfrozen by playtime

The school caretakers were a Mr. & Mrs. Cadman, who lived just across from the school. At that time there were no school dinners, but you could buy a cup of tea from Mrs. Cadman for 1d. You had to take your own cup, but by the time you had carried it across the road and the length of the school playground to the infant room, where you were allowed to eat sandwiches, it was far from warm. Occasionally, on Fridays, you could buy 1d. worth of chips from Mrs. Cadman. I travelled to school from Hindley, originally on the tram, and later on the trolley bus, alighting at the bottom of Swan Lane and walking up, so I always had to stay for dinner. In exception-

ally cold weather, Mrs. Cadman would light a fire in the big school room and the crates of frozen milk used to be placed round it, in the hope that it would be unfrozen by playtime.

The parish was always trying to raise funds to build a church, which they achieved fairly soon. One such fundraising event was a garden party, with the crowning of the Rose Queen in the school grounds. It took place on 20 June 1931 and I was the first queen. There was a procession through the streets of the queen and her attendants and the rest of the school, all culminating in the crowning of the Rose Queen. My mother made my dress. She was an excellent needlewoman and some nuns at a Bolton convent, who made vestments for clergymen, made the train. I was crowned by Mrs. Nesbit, the wife of Dr. Nesbit, the Medical Officer of Health. There were stalls of all kinds, a fortune-teller, a baby show, a cotton-dress show and some dancing by the children.

The event was such a success that it was decided to hold a similar event every year and this went on for a number of years. My mother donated the train to the school for future use.

Immensely proud

Every year all the schools in Hindley and district used to compete on Argyle Street School playing fields for a Grand Sports Day. There were cups and shields for seniors and juniors for running, jumping and other events and for schools with the most points in all the categories. Being a small school, there was little chance of winning a cup or shield, as there were so few in the various age groups to choose from. One year, however, we had an excellent all round athlete at school - Ivy Stevens - and she won the Senior Girls' Trophy. The school was immensely proud.

In 1933 I left Sacred Heart School to go to Hindley & Abram Grammar School - but I have already told that story!



Lowton Memories

Dear Sir,

I recently saw, in the *Daily Telegraph*, an obituary of a son of Lancashire, cricketer Lionel Lister. My interest was aroused by the paragraph mentioning Peter Eckersley who lived at Lime House, Lowton, and has been the subject of articles and letters in *Past Forward*.

My parents moved to Lowton when I was two years old and childhood and schooldays were spent there. An early memory is of visiting Lime House during the Second World War with my mother, perhaps for Ration Books or Identity Cards. I felt such a sense of awe walking down what seemed (to a very small child) a very long

drive with trees on each side to the front door of the house. Of course, we only ever stood in the entrance hall where our enquiries were dealt with at a door to the right.

The articles by Bert Worsley have stirred childhood memories; as children we would walk past the 'pink cottage' on the way home from the Council School, which was called the 'Chapel School' by the older generation of the village. We children had a different name for the cottage, it was the "red house". In warm weather an elderly lady was often sitting outside the door. The walk along Newton Road was quite a long one and there was always the hill over the railway to climb, but we seldom used a bus.

I look forward to more articles on Lowton history in *Past Forward*.

Mrs M. Bell,
Leeds, Yorkshire.

Canal Cottages

Dear Sir,

I am trying to find out more about Canal Cottages - also sometimes known as Canal Bank and Canal Yard. I'm looking for a photograph of any information. I have been told that they are not the same cottages that are on the canal bank near Trencherfield which are occupied at the moment. My great grandfather, Richard Forshaw, and his family lived at Canal Yard in the late 1800's early 1900's and were at the address on numerous certificates that I have. Richard was a foreman boat builder.

My second "mystery" concerns Margaret Crooks (formerly Beesley). Margaret was born in 1856 in Haigh; she was my great grandmother. She had two children before she married - William James, born June 1876 and John Thomas, born February 1881. In the 1881 census she was living with her parents at 10 Brock Street, Ince. Margaret

married William Crooks, 3 January 1882, at Wigan Registry Office and later had three more children, Alfred, Annie and Margaret, but the two children before her marriage retained the name Beesley. I have not been able to trace the family in the 1891 census and wondered if any of your readers could help.

Finally, congratulations on your magazine - it's great to hear about my birthplace and it brings back lots of memories. I look forward to future issues.

Margaret Hegan,
Chester Road,
Stevenage,
Herts. SG1 4JY.
Tel: 01438 223687.
m.hegan@pipex.dial.com

'The Four Parishes Research Group'

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to let you know of the existence of this group which started life as an Adult Continuing Education Class under the tutelage of Paul Booth of the University of Liverpool.

We are engaged in researching the mid 16th to mid 17th Century history of the four ancient parishes of Christleton, Waverton, Tarvin and Tattenhall. They lie to the east and north east of Chester and were (and still are) very rural. Our main sources are the

extant Wills and Inventories of the period which we are currently transcribing and analysing under the headings of:- Agriculture, Domestic Industry, Furniture and Furnishings, Luxury Goods, Clothing.

We would be interested in exchanging information with anyone engaged on similar projects.

Mrs. Idina Hastings,
Hon. Secretary,
Springfield Cottage,
Hitchens Lane,
Bulkeley, Malpas,
Cheshire. SY14 8BX.

The Lowton United Charity

ON the south side of Winwick Church there is a gravestone which is inscribed: "Here lyeth William Leadbeater, late of Lowton, yeoman, who by his deed gave his lands in Lowton and Golborne to the poor thereof and dyed on 16th day of April Anno Domini 1686 aged 79". The farm land referred to was in Church Lane and is now the playing field of St. Luke's School.

For about 200 years following the death of the above, the rent from the farm was distributed on Maundy Thursday to the poor of Lowton as lengths of red flannel or loaves of bread, according to the size of the family. This practice was carried on into the early days of this century, instead of goods. These were distributed on a particular day in the St. Luke's Infants Schoolyard. Nowadays a sum of money decided by the trustees is given out to those in need at Christmas time.

In the latter part of the last century other people of Lowton bequeathed funds for the same purpose, and on 22 March 1892 the charities of William Leadbeater, Nicholas Turner and Elizabeth Byron, along with Browns' and Morris's charities and the Thomas and Margaret Cook Memorial Fund, united to become the Lowton United Charity. The Charity Commissioners of England and Wales administered the scheme, the interest from the invested funds being made available for the benefit of the people of Lowton resident within the parish boundary as from March 1892.

The object of the charity is to relieve persons who are in need, hardship or distress by making grants of money or paying for items, services or facilities calculated to reduce their problems. No commitment

can be made to repeat or renew the relief on a regular basis, although allowances for a limited period to meet a particular need, sudden distress, sickness or infirmity are in order. Provision of items may well be gifts of furniture or fittings, supply of tools or books, payment of fees for instruction or travelling expenses so as to help to earn a living. When the hardship is caused because the person is either old, sick, convalescent, disabled, handicapped or infirm, whether mentally or physically, the trustees may either pay directly or advance money to beneficiaries for a wide range of service.

Today, by consulting the Department of Health and Social Services of the Local Authority concerned with people in need, the trustees may learn what assistance these may be given and, more importantly, the needs of people which the statutory services are unable to relieve completely. In this way the trustees also ensure that the provision of assistance will not affect any supplementary benefits available from the departments. The body of trustees consists of 13 persons who, through residence, occupation or employment have special knowledge of the area of the Parish of Lowton. The Rector of St. Luke's and the Vicar of St. Mary's are permanent members, three trustees are nominated by Wigan MBC and eight others are co-opted to serve for a period of five years. Any competent trustee may be reappointed. The trustees are obliged to hold at least two ordinary meetings in each year, but four are usually held. Special ones may be summoned at any time if urgent matters arise. No trustee shall receive remuneration or be interested in the supply of work or goods at the cost of the charity.

Every church in Lowton is represented on the charity by at least one trustee. My own father served for more than 30 years until 1955, being a representa-

tive of the Methodists at Lane Head. Mr. A. R. Thompson has filled the same position since the early 1970's. His father, Mr. R. R. Thompson, was a trustee from 1949 to 1970.

It is interesting to note that Mr. A. R. Thompson's great grandfather, Mr. James Hill of Heath Lane Farm, was co-opted to serve in 1912 along with Mr. Charles Guest of the Elms, gentleman, Mr. James Prescott of Brook Cottage, printer, Mr. William Clarke of Laurel House, gentleman and Mr. Joseph Leigh of Pear Tree House, retired florist, all of Lowton. It is probable that all were trustees of the Leadbeaters Charity before the union of the several Charities in 1892. I knew all these gentlemen in my boyhood days. Over the years other fathers and sons have been trustees, including Mr. L. Baldwin and Mr. A. Baldwin of St. Mary's and St. Luke's.

The original bequests were as follows:-

*Charity of William Leadbeater.
Rent from farmhouse and land on Church Lane.*

*Charity of Nicholas Turner.
Rent from a close called Little Meadow, in Golborne.*

*Charity of Elizabeth Byron.
Rent from house, shop and garden (old toll house Stone Cross Lane) and cottage and garden, Dunkirk Hall, Newton Road.*

*Brown's Charity.
Rent from house, cottage and garden, Lane Head, cottage and garden, Blacksmiths store room and garden.*

*Morris's Charity.
Rent from house and land in Heath Lane, cottage and garden, Lowton.*

H. Worsley

Atherton Photographic Society

Atherton Photographic Society has this year been celebrating its 60th anniversary; events have included exhibitions at the History Shop, Wigan, and the Derby Room, Leigh. The theme of the exhibitions has been to show work from the past through to the present. Photographs from six decades have been shown, going back to some from 1941, which were shown for the first time since the 1940's, and culminating in digital images from 1998, taking Atherton into the next Millennium.

The Society is fortunate to own its own premises in Atherton, thanks to the foresight of some of its founder members. It believes that it should take photography into the community and has helped Duke of Edinburgh Award candidates and uniform groups with their badges and schools with projects. Anyone needing help with a project should contact Atherton Photographic Society at its Email address *adaps 2@aol*, or phone Len on 01942 677726 or Harry on 01942 727027. The Society will soon have its own Web page.

Forthcoming events in the Society rooms include a colour printing demonstration by Bert Haddock in November, a digital evening with two of Atherton's leading exponents in January and the Chemical Company, Tetnol, in February. Anyone is welcome to visit on a Thursday night at 8pm for an evening of photography.

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).

12 November

'A Taste of Christmas' by Sheila Gallagher

10 December

Christmas Party

Atherton Heritage Society

Monthly meetings with talks on local history held at St. Richard's Jubilee Hall, Crabtree Lane, Atherton, on Tuesdays at 7.30 p.m. Non-members £1.50, including refreshments. Everyone welcome. Visits throughout the year to places of historical interest. Information from Hon. Sec. (01204 651478).

9 November

'Local Railways of the Past' by Mr. Sweeney

14 December

'Tom Burke - the Leigh Caruso' by Mr. Farrington

12 January

'Look Behind You' by S. Barton

9 February

'Glorious Ludlow' by S. Greenhalgh

9 March

'Rivington' by D. Smith

13 April

'Women in the Mines' by Mr. Stirrup

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).

10 November

'The History of Lowton' by Alec Hughes.

SOCIETY NEWS

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).

17 November

'Irregular Marriages' by Bob Blakeman

15 December

'Christmas Festivities' with Lizzie Jones in a 17th century cameo.

14 January

'Getting Started'

16 February

Talk by Fred Holcroft

16 March

Talk by Andrew Todd

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 Pensioners Club, Milk Street, Tyldesley, on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30 p.m. Entrance is FREE. Further details from the Secretary (01942 514271).

19 November

'Mining through the Centuries: Mining as seen in works of art from 6000 BC to Today' by Alan Davies.

17 December

'The Construction of the Manchester Ship Canal' by Chris Driver (preceded by A.G.M.).

21 January

'The Wood End Pit Disaster, Haydock, 1878' by Ian Winstanley.

18 February

'God's Wonderful Railway' by Stan Smith.

18 March

'The Meaning Behind Nursery Rhymes' by Fred Holcroft.

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.

Wigan Civic Trust

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

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).



Past Forward Therapy

Dear Mr Gillies,

The word *Therapy* is one of those special words, in the past almost confined to the vocabulary of the medical world, but now used by a more enlightened proletariat. There are many suffixes like *physio* or *audio*, but I do believe I, with the help of Wigan Heritage Service, have discovered a new suffix, making up the whole word, PAST FORWARD THERAPY ... and it works, even at a

distance of 3,000 miles over the Atlantic Ocean. But let me explain.

For many years I have maintained a very active correspondence exchange with a friend and fellow Garswoodite, Bill Wright, who emigrated to Toronto, Canada, at the end of World War II. Frequency of exchange was three or four long letters per annum, but nearly three years ago, Bill's letters came to an abrupt halt.

As I thought the worst, especially as his style was becoming rather incoherent, I thought I would allow a little time for any development, as Bill was living alone in apartments. None came. Some months later, however, Bill's sister rang from Darlington. I had not seen

or spoken to her since about 1935. She informed me that she had been to Toronto in response to a message from a nursing home. He had a serious fall which had resulted in a broken hip and was in a very bad way. Through Marian, Bill had asked me to continue my letters, but it was extremely unlikely that I would ever get any replies. I was pleased to oblige and that was a period which more or less coincided with my introduction to *Past Forward*. Even that tasty morsel gathered no catch until just after he must have received Issue 18.

A long letter arrived from his Canadian niece, of whose existence I was unaware. I still blush when I think of the accolade - suffice to say that she has seen such an encouraging

change in Uncle Bill immediately after reading my letters which, she went on, he read two or three times, then asked her to read them out aloud. Best of all, stapled neatly at the back of her letter, was a letter from Bill - the first in well over two years, the result, so his niece claimed, of some bullying. It was quite well written and back to his usual articulate style.

Flattered though I felt, it was patently obvious that the big stick had been wielded by the pages of *Past Forward*, and in particular, Harold Knowles's article on Ashton Grammar School - Bill is an ex-pupil. He did, in fact, say that he was looking forward to the second part, which I am pleased to report he will now have received and

probably revised it several times.

Since starting to write this letter, it has crossed my mind that it is within the realms of possibility that there may be other ex-employees of John Woods Ltd., Wigan, who might remember Bill who served his apprenticeship there. There may even be a reader or readers who would like to make an old man (now in his mid 80's) happy, in which event I would oblige by forwarding his address.

In the meantime, my kindest regards to you and all at Wigan Heritage Service.

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



Remembering 'owd' Gee and others

Dear Sir,

The article in *Past Forward 18* on Ashton Grammar School, by Harold Knowles, brought back happy memories of my time there in the 1930's. Everyone who did woodwork will remember 'owd' Gee and his sayings. My first post after university was at Hindley and Abram Grammar School where he also taught woodwork, so it was interesting to meet him as a colleague. I recall Mr. Mitchell with some affection because, although I was in the Science Sixth, I did subsidiary English and it was he who gave me my love of literature, especially Wordsworth.

Other teachers I recall were Mr. Gardener, Mr. Roscoe, Miss Hodgkinson, "Lizzie Mint", Billy Whish and Piggy Brindle. I apologise for the nicknames, but for some I cannot remember their real ones. I remember Mr. Gardener threatening the prefects with expulsion if we were caught once more in the billiard hall in Gerrard Street and Miss "Hodge" taking some of us to the Queen's picture house on a Friday evening. Does anyone remember Caretaker Rimmer giving the prefects the key to his shed so that we could have a smoke? I can't imagine what "Freddie" Hall would have said if he had known.

I have a different recollection to Harold Knowles

Descendants of Robert Arkwright (born 1606) wanted

Dear Sir,

I read every issue of your fine publication and look forward to each new issue. I always look for a news item or mention of the Lancashire name, Arkwright, but have never seen it in print in *Past Forward*, perhaps this may be an opportunity for a mention.

It seems that, as we grow older and move away from our place of birth, curiosity about our roots and origins increases, this is so in my case.

My grandfather, John Arkwright, was killed in Springs Branch Pit, Ince, at 5 o'clock a.m. on Wednesday, 30 December 1903, aged 25 years.

My father was only 2 years old at the time and was raised by his mother's family, the Langton's. His mother, Sarah Langton, remarried and consequently my father, for some reason, lost all contact with his father's sisters.

His aunts were:

Ann Arkwright	born 1 July 1871	married Jack Lofthouse Date unknown
		named John Grimshaw 11 October 1890
Rachel Arkwright	born 23 January 1874	married William Jones 28 December 1895
Mary Arkwright	born 27 April 1876	married George Orrell 7 May 1898
Ellen Arkwright	born 30 June 1880	married John Baker 3 August 1901
Jane Arkwright	born 25 August 1882	married Thomas Havard 9 August 1902

I would very much like to establish contact with any of their descendants. I have traced our family back to Robert Arkwright born 1606 at Dorton, Broughton, Preston, and would like to exchange family information with my near relatives.

If any of your readers can help me in any way I will be very grateful.

Peter Arkwright,
3507 Reid Circle,
Monroe,
North Carolina 28112-7591,
USA
Telephone: (704)-764-7751
e-mail: union.jack@trellis.net

about wearing a school cap. I remember Head Boy Martlew standing at the outside the school gate making sure we were wearing our caps. In many ways the Head Boy, especially Martlew, was more feared than the staff.

The Gorner family in general had a strong connection with Ashton Grammar School in the 20's, 30's and 40's as at

least 7 members - Frank, another Frank, Len, Dorothy, Norman, Horace and myself (Ron) were pupils in this period.

I have only recently seen a copy of *Past Forward* so I am very much looking forward to future editions.

A. R. Gorner,
Bolton.

The Wigan Observer, 6 January 1904.

A WIGAN COLLIER KILLED AT INCE

A young man of 25 years, named John Arkwright, of 25 High Street, Wigan, was killed at 5 o'clock on Wednesday morning at the Springs Branch Pit, Ince, belonging to Messrs. Latham Brothers. He was following his employment as a coal cutter, when a large stone fell from the roof and killed him instantly.

THE INQUEST

Mr. Brighthouse, County Coroner, held an inquest at the Walmsley Arms, Higher Ince, on New Year's Eve. There were present at the inquiry Mr. Matthews (Inspector of Mines), Mr. Knight (manager of the colliery), Mr. D. Latham (Surveyor) and Mr. Hewitt (manager).

Sarah Arkwright, wife of the deceased, said they lived at 23 High Street, Wigan. He was a coal cutter, working for Messrs. Latham at their Branch Pit of Manchester Road, Ince. He was 25 years of age. He was brought home dead on Wednesday night. Deceased had not worked long at the place.

George Orritt, Broomfield Terrace, Ince, said he had worked at Messrs. Latham's colliery. On Tuesday night he and deceased and four others were working together with a coal cutting machine. Witness was in charge. They started cutting coal at 11 o'clock and had cut about 36 yards of coal when the accident happened at 5 o'clock in the morning. The machine is worked by an electric cable. It was necessary for two men to be in front of the machine to lay the rails as it came along. When they took up the rails behind they put props in their places. Witness was examining further up to see about the setting of a prop and deceased was watching the machine come over a joint in the rails, when a stone came down without any warning and fell on the deceased. The stone broke off the coal face and the top. The foreman had examined the roof half an hour before the accident. Witness thought the roof was safe.

By Mr. Matthews: it knocked one iron bar out. There were spare props if they had wanted them. Following upon a suggestion by the inspector that bars were preferable to props in such work, Mr. Knight said they had decided to have systematic barring in the future, the bars being set every four feet.

Thomas Stott, Bell Green-Lane, fireman, said he was at the place of the accident at twenty minutes to five, and had sounded the roof where the machine had to go. There was no indication that anything was going to happen. There was not much vibration with the coal cutting machine. Witness did not think when he examined that there was any necessity for bars to be placed there.

By Mr. Matthews: The roof was very strong at that place. It would be safer to put the bars up systematically than propping.

Mr. Matthews said he examined the place and found that a large stone parallel with face had come down. Altogether it measured 26 ft. in length and capped two or three of the props. He thought the system they were going to adopt at the colliery would be safer to bar; because if any weight came on it very often it came at the fulcrum and that was the point that required to be protected.

Mr. Knight said where they required the bar they had 100 yards without, but in the future they were not going to think of the expense and would bar all the way, (hear, hear).

The Coroner said there was a coal cutting machine going down what was practically an alley 3 ft. high and 4 ft. 6 ins. wide, and one could see that the alley must be a good deal safer if roofed over with bars than if not. It was the old rule told over and over again, one the inspectors were continually talking about, that the more systematic the timbering was the less loss of life there was, whatever they were doing advancing their coal face, making a roadway, or airway, or anything else. On the other hand, one could see that the place was supposed to be sufficiently perfected, and a good many of them shut the stable door after the horse was gone. The management seemed to be quite willing to do anything that was reasonable to protect the life and limbs of the men and do it voluntarily without any pressure from anyone. They had already adopted systematic barring, and that being so, he would ask the jury to say whether they thought it was accidental or seeing that the management had voluntarily and already started the better system, there was any necessity to say anything further in their verdict.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death" with the addition that they would be pleased if the proprietors would carry out the recommendation of the inspectors.



"You don't come from Wigan do you?"

Dear Alastair,

I wonder if I could crave your indulgence and ask if you might consider this letter for inclusion in your "Letters to the Editor" feature of *Past Forward*?

I have recently received from an old Wigan friend of mine a copy of "*Wigan Pier - A Canal Trail*" which I consider an admirable publication and I would like to thank, through your columns publicly, Eric Steed and Tom Almond, ably supported by the pictures by Gerald Rickards and all the supporting staff involved in the production of such a comprehensive resumé of "*The Leeds and Liverpool Canal*".

You, sir, are already aware of my self appointed commission of a WIGAN roving ambassador, because when I first started my "wandering abroad" I was completely non-plussed when acquaintances used such derogatory remarks as "You don't come from Wigan do you?" - almost as if Wiganers suffered from an undiscovered offshoot of Leprosy. It was then I made up my mind that I would do everything I could to influence these bigots to

make the effort and visit, and I've lost count of people who have visited Wigan, The Heritage Centre, and reported back to me how pleasantly surprised they were.

Without knowing who the little boy was who carried the midwife's bag when he had been despatched to summon her, pending the delivery of the latest addition to their family, I have repeated that tale very often in the past, and now for the benefit of *Past Forward* readers who have never heard it:-

The midwife showed the new arrival to the boy and told him the new baby was in the bag he had carried for her when he exclaimed: "Aye an if I had known I would have clod it in't cut". For non-dialect speakers: "Yes and if I had known I'd have thrown it in the canal!"

I never knew who that little boy was, but I now know it was Tom Almond, the canal narrator in "*Wigan Pier - A Canal Trail*" and I cannot only personally vouch for the veracity of his reminiscences, I can add a bit of depth to them.

The lock keeper was Wm. Derbyshire (Bill Derby to us kids), who could run across the tops of the closed lock gates quicker than he could get to the towpath; next door to his cottage was Mr. Jones's smithy who used to let us watch him shoe the horses for the boaters.

The row of cottages mentioned was Driving Lane which stood back from the water between Ballard's Rope Walk and Henhurst Bridge opposite the horse slaughterer's field across the canal. The slaughterman was Joe Stanway who also had a drysaltery business in Chapel Lane, supplying donkey stones for whitening the housewife's doorsteps and window sills. Salt was sold in large blocks by him, as well as

gritted sand for the public bars of pubs, where cast iron spittoons were on the floors. If the customers missed their aim, the sand would soak it up and it would be swept out by the cleaners later.

Boat horses could be stabled in the stables behind the Fox Tavern at the top of Bridge Street, adjoining Chapel Lane. The licensee was John Willie Sharples, who also had an interest in hare coursing on Westwood Park. Sadly Mr. Sharples was closing the gates to the park when one fell on him and killed him. There was betting on the dogs during the contests and Mr. Stanway was a well known character in Chapel Lane who always wore brown lucc up boots when everyone else wore iron shod clogs.

No doubt Mr. Almond knew a fellow boater who lived two doors away from us in Driving Lane, when he wasn't hauling along the canal between Leeds and Liverpool with his wife as mate. He was Charlie Lamb and, when he came home from a trip and had been paid, would stop and search his loose change and give all the neighbours' children a penny each.

One memory outstanding in my reminiscences was when the Lambs were "at home" they had to borrow everything from us - frying pan included, as everything was stored in the boat tethered on the canal outside. They didn't even have mugs - they used empty jam jars, "borrowing" margarine, cups of sugar, even kettles of boiling water until their own fire got under way.

Mr. Almond's anecdote regarding Airey's brewery I can verify because I too went there for twopennorth o'barn (Brewer's Yeast) and was familiar with the odd cork blowing off (not always during the night) and if

one hit the coal house door (we stored ours in the inside coal house under the stairs) it sounded like a gun going off.

On the subject of gambling, it was well known that miners would have a bet on anything, even flies crawling up the window being cited on occasion. Although I never saw a clog fight (youngsters weren't allowed near) I was once a spectator at a bizarre wrestling match where an able bodied serving soldier was challenged by a one legged amputee ex soldier!

Apparently, whilst drinking together, the subjects had a personal difference on the Saturday night and the serving soldier had remarked "If you were a fit man I'd give you a Jamn good hiding", whereupon his opponent had said "Don't let that stop thee" and added "We will have a wroastle (wrestle) on't cut bank in't morning starting from a sitting position. Best o'three falls two showders (shoulders) touching the ground for a count of three counts as one fall!" Word quickly got around and at the appointed time a crowd of 20 or so gathered as spectators to back their hero, the disabled contestant, a local cobbler. The other contestant was (although a local man) a serving soldier

overseas and home on leave, so therefore regarded as a stranger to the area. I can't remember who won, but there was quite a commotion whilst the 'contest' was in full swing.

At the end of the contest the bets were settled and immediately card schools were formed; we kids enjoyed that because we became "bobby" watchers, whose job it was to warn the gamblers when the policeman's helmet showed above the top of Henhurst Bridge as he patrolled Chapel Lane and Poolstock. When the school of gamblers disbanded the winners gave us a halfpenny each, unless the game was pontoon, when we got a halfpenny extra if the banker won with a total of 21 in his two dealt cards.

Pleasurable as it was for me to read Mr. Almond's and Mr. Steed's account in their booklet, I have enjoyed the added pleasure of not only confirming the veracity of their recollections and research, but also being able to add a few bits and pieces as evidence of that truth!

Thank you so much to all concerned.

Ernie Taberner,
62 Westwood Road,
Earlsdon,
Coventry,
CV5 6GE.

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

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November 1998

Who? Where?

THERE was a very good response to last issue's "Who? Where?" - particularly with regard to the four photographs of Old Elms. Many readers wrote in to identify it as the large house in Elmfield Road, off Wigan Lane. Mrs. Carole Banks was even able to give precise details of the occupants of the house:

Dear Sir,

I presume that the Old Elms referred to is the large house in Elmfield Road, off Wigan Lane (the last turning before Mere Oaks School).

My mother (who died in 1985, and was born in 1906) knew the house well as a girl. It had been divided into two parts.

In the left hand side lived Mr. & Mrs. George Makinson. He was the owner of the ironmongers shop of the same name, which was in Standishgate (now part of the Halifax Building Society). There was also a showroom in Station Road, in part of the old Central Station building.

My grandfather, Harry Blacow, worked for George Makinson in the office, later becoming manager of the shop - and mother told me that they often visited the house in Elmfield Road.

In the right hand side lived Mr. & Mrs. Price and family. Mr. Price was a

solicitor, with a practice in King Street (apparently he used to walk to Boars Head Station and catch a train to Wigan N.W. Station - then walk across the iron bridge to his office). His last remaining daughter, Mrs. Sally Liptrot, died about three years ago. She and my mother were great friends and used to play together in the gardens at the Old Elms as children.

The photo could have been taken in either of the gardens (c. 1920-30). I believe that the lady on the left of the second photo is my grandmother - Mrs. Jane Blacow - who was well known as a Methodist local preacher (born 1880), so I assume that the 'Mothers Day' has a church connection, but I'm afraid I can't explain the caption.

Thank you for another excellent edition of *Past Forward*.

Mrs. Carole Banks,
13 Crowhurst Drive,
Wigan,
WN1 2QH

No positive identification as to whose funeral was shown in the three left-hand photographs, but one reader did narrow the date down to 1906 at the earliest.

A very mixed bag this time. The colliery may be one at Abram, where the Manager was J. H. Weaver. The house with the lady standing in front is called Osbourne House. That is the only information we have. Any suggestions? If so please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942) 404432

