

# PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Archives & Museums

Issue No. 86

December 2020 - March 2021

Christmas  
Eve Sunset at  
Astley Green  
Colliery

£2

Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine

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**FRONT COVER**  
 Lancashire Mining Museum at Astley Green, image courtesy of Dave Green

# Letter from the Editorial Team

## Welcome to PAST Forward Issue 86.

We continue to be amazed and grateful for the wonderful local history stories submitted for Past Forward despite continued restricted access to archives and libraries.

Alan Roby takes us back to his youth and training as an apprentice compositor in the printing industry. Brian Joyce turns his eye for a fascinating local history story to the Charlton family of Tyldesley, whilst Dr Stephen Smith delves into the origins of the Wigan Mechanics' Institute.

John Unsworth examines Lancashire's role in the American Civil War and we take a look at some of the star objects from the new exhibition at the Museum of Wigan Life, 'Rebels, Radical, Reform – The Fight for Better'.

Graham Taylor brings us the first part of his exploration of the military service of William Walls of Abram. The diary was transcribed by Archives Volunteer, Susan Berry, and Graham has now researched the full story of William Walls' life.

We're pleased to announce that our Past Forward Essay Competition will continue as normal this year, thanks to the kind sponsorship of Mr and Mrs O'Neill. Please see page three for full details about how you can enter.

## Revealing Wigan and Leigh Archives

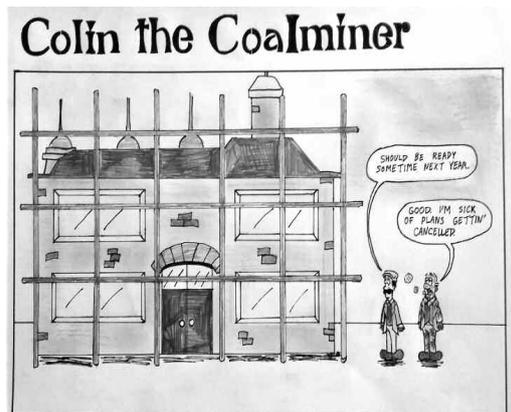


The Leigh Town Hall project is reaching the end of our construction phase. By the time you read this the building work will be complete on our new facilities for visitors and researchers at the Archives & Local Studies.

Our new strongrooms and storage vaults are racked out and environmental control systems are up and running. The Archives team are working hard on preparing the collections for their careful relocation back into the building. By our estimate the new strongrooms have 3.4km of shelving; we're looking forward to filling it all up!

Our exhibition designers, Creative Core, are moving into the fabrication and print stage of their work. Installation of the new exhibition gallery is planned for January and February next year. We'll be releasing some preview graphics to give visitors a sneak preview early in 2021.

We are pleased to introduce our two project officer posts, Rosie Lampard and Jilly McKiernan. They will be getting to work very soon to support



'Colin the Coalminer', by Christopher Murphy

Information for contributors, please see page 26

the delivery of activities, educational workshops and volunteering for the duration of the National Lottery Heritage Fund supported scheme.

Jilly McKiernan: 'I have recently joined the team as one of the project officers. I have previously worked across the borough, from Wigan Youth Zone to Age UK Wigan Borough, my background being mainly in Volunteer Management, including managing around 200 volunteers at Chester Zoo. I have always lived in Wigan and was the Member of Youth Parliament for Wigan and Leigh for four years. I'm really excited to be here and to get started on some amazing projects!'

Rosie Lampard: 'For the last six years I have worked for the Royal Collection Trust, initially as a Warden, giving guided tours in London and leading a small team for seasonal site openings. For the last few years I have worked on the Future Programme project with the Trust, improving the visitor experience both at Windsor Castle and the Palace of Holyrood House in Edinburgh. My volunteering experience has involved tracing family histories with the Adjutant General Corps Museum through to developing outreach projects for care homes for the National Trust. It has been lovely getting to know some of the fantastic volunteers and the team here at the Archives thus far and I am looking forward to what the future holds.'



*New spaces at Leigh Town Hall, from the left: new exhibition looking towards the foyer; exhibition entrance from foyer; vaults created from Market Street shop units; Archives searchroom.*

# Write 1000 words - Win £100!

*Do you have a passion for local history?  
Is there a local history topic that you would  
love to see featured in Past Forward? Then  
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History Writing Competition?*

## Local History Writing Competition

1st Prize - £100

2nd Prize - £75

3rd Prize - £50

Five Runners-Up Prizes of £25

*The Essay Writing Competition is kindly  
sponsored by Mr and Mrs J. O'Neill.*



*Winners from the Past Forward Essay Competition 2019*

### Criteria

- Articles must be a maximum of 1000 words.
- Articles must focus on a local history topic within the geographical boundaries of Wigan Borough.
- By entering the competition you agree to your work being published in Past Forward. The winning article will be published in Past Forward and other submissions may also be published.
- If selected for publication the Past Forward Editorial Team may edit your submission.

### How to enter

- Articles must be received by e-mail or post by Tuesday 1 February 2021.
- Electronic submissions are preferred although handwritten ones will be accepted.
- You must state clearly that your article is an entry into the Local History Writing Competition.
- You must include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address (if applicable). We will not pass your details on to anyone.

- It will not be possible for articles to be returned.
- You are welcome to include photographs or images however they cannot be returned.

### Submit to

pastforward@wigan.gov.uk

OR

Local History Writing Competition,  
Past Forward, Museum of Wigan Life,  
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU

# The Apprentice Compositor

BY ALAN ROBY

It was Monday, 20 April 1957, when I proudly wore dark blue bib-and-brace overalls for the first time. My only accoutrement was a shoulder supported ex-War World War II haversack, containing lunch. At barely 15 years old I had travelled by bus from Billinge, to begin a five year apprenticeship in the ancient and revered craft of Compositor. My destination was Murray's Printing Works Ltd., located in Humphrey Street, Ince Bar, near Wigan. Having arrived early, very early, I took shelter from the incessant rain under the adjacent Doric Cinema's canopy, which ran the full length of the cinema's gable end, and waited patiently wondering what kind of welcome I would receive.

About half-an-hour later a man approached the printing works, unlocked the door and entered. I hesitated before plucking up the courage to enter the same door. Apart from the 'ping' of a bell announcing someone had entered the building, there was no welcome of any kind. The place was deathly quiet and not even the lights were



*Alan Roby,  
apprentice compositor*

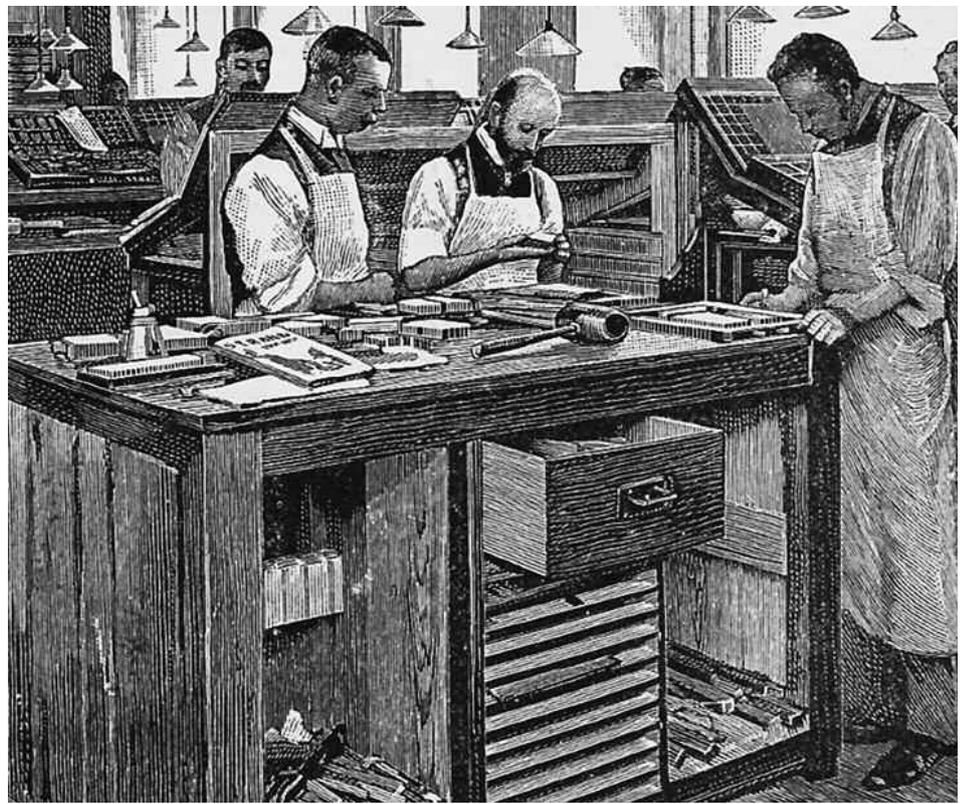
switched on to dispel the gloom. A couple of minutes went by before I heard the sound of footsteps coming down a staircase. The man I had seen earlier appeared, and without saying a word proffered me a long handled brush and a battered gallon sized paint tin full of wet sawdust. A nod of his head towards the floor made me aware of my first task, and as I began to sweep the bare concrete a cloud of rising dust signalled the need for the wet sawdust. So began my working life in that revered trade.

Murray's Printing Works had been founded in 1894, by Mr Albert Edward Murray; his son, Albert Edward jnr., was now continuing in his father's footsteps as a 'jobbing letterpress printer'. An important trade within the printing industry was the secretive craft of compositor, which had changed very little since William Caxton had set up his Westminster Press in 1476.

The composing room was on the first floor and accessed by a single wooden staircase. On first arriving at the top of the stairs, my eyes feasted on a magnificent cast iron contraption, and fine example of robust early nineteenth century engineering. Standing about eight feet tall and weighing one-and-a-half tons, was 'The Columbian' hand proofing press. At its highest point was a beautiful cast iron American bald eagle with the 'Horn of Plenty' and an olive branch in its talons. But far more than decoration, the eagle was an adjustable counterweight to enable the raising of the heavy iron platen with ease, after making a printing

impression. The supporting ironwork included further decoration to include a caduceus, being the 'Staff of Hermes' and messenger of the Greek gods; also serpents, symbols of healing and of physicians. The Columbian all-iron press had been invented by American, George Clymer, and was manufactured in England from 1818.

The composing room consisted largely of rows of racks full of type cases, containing various 'founts' (type styles) and type sizes. Large tables, referred to as 'stones', were much like snooker tables but without a raised perimeter. The stone was the place where type was made-up, or assembled, before 'locking up' into an iron frame, referred to as a 'chase', by the use of 'quoins' (wedges). The locked-up chase was then referred to as a 'forme' and ready for transfer to a press. My work was mainly stone



*Stone work in the composing room, early twentieth century*

work in composing or assembling type for posters, in regular demand by churches and clubs. Weekly cinema posters too kept me busy: The Doric ('The Bug'); The Palace, Hindley; and The Regal, Lower Ince. Billy Riley's wrestling stadium posters were rather more demanding because of their large size, which were usually printed on Double Crown size paper (20in x 30in), or Quad Crown (30in x 40in). I enjoyed the challenge and was often amused by some of the wrestlers' names and titles, such as 'Masambula, the voodoo practising African witch doctor'.

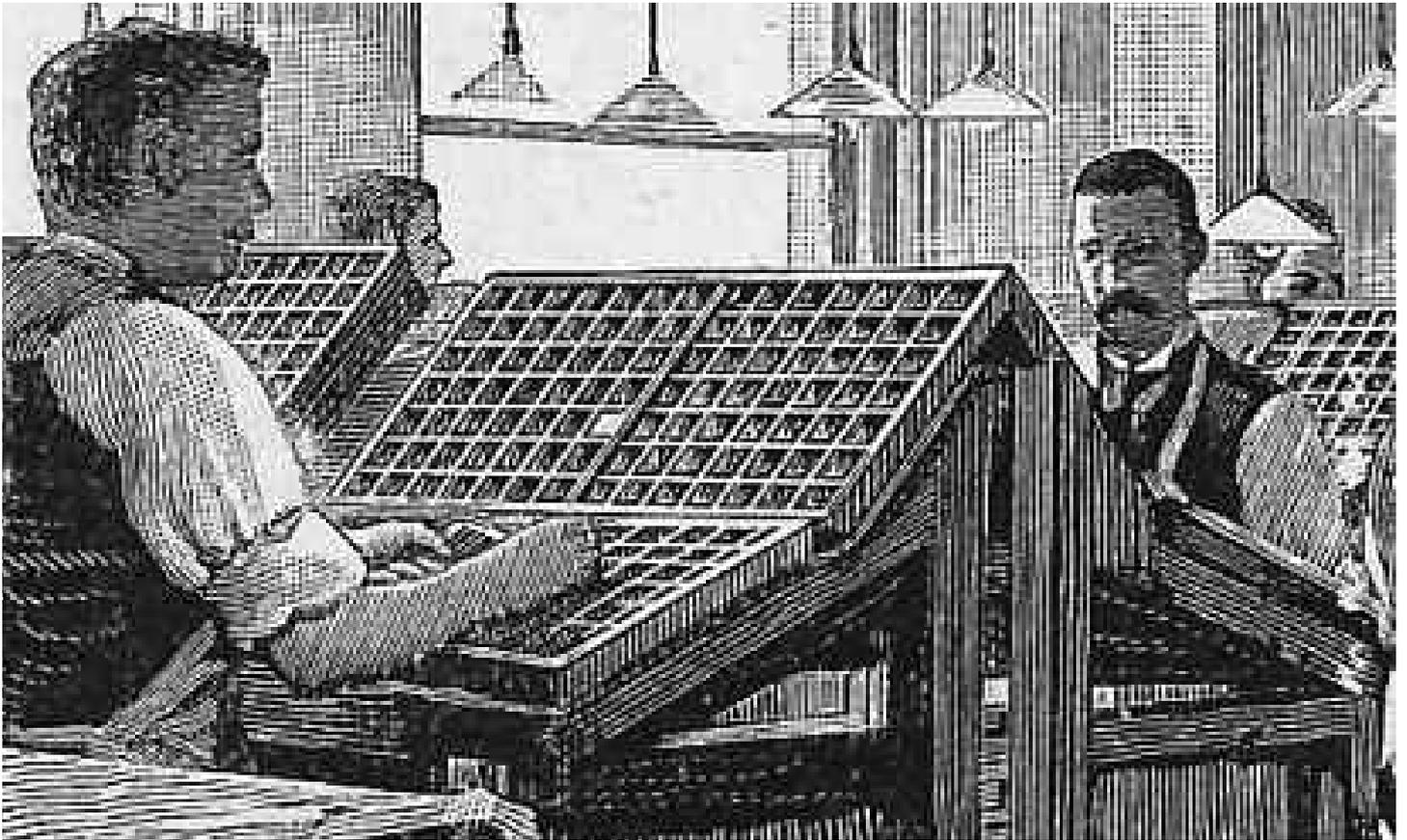
Typesetting for smaller work such as concert programmes, church magazines, dance tickets, wedding and funeral hymn sheets, business stationery and so on, were largely typeset via hot metal composition on the 'Linotype' machine. In the middle of the

composing room was the only source of heat, a pot-bellied cast iron coke stove, reminiscent of those sometimes seen in old cowboy films, with its meandering pipe work exiting fumes through an outside wall. There was no ceiling in the composing room, merely the visible underside of rafters and lathes, supporting slates. Insulation was not something anyone even thought about in the late 1950s.

Gradually I became fluent in the trade's bewildering vocabulary, and its unique measuring system, known as the point system and based on 72 points to the inch. Words often indicated point sizes, such as 'nonpareil' (6 points) and 'pica' (12 points). Equipment and tools too had their special names: 'reglets', 'founts', 'leads', 'clumps', 'quoins', 'setting stick', 'shooting stick', 'chase',



*Murray's Almanac*



*Compositors at work, early twentieth century*

'forme', 'mallet' and 'planer' were the normal words of the composing room. With daily practice, I became very competent in guiding single characters of type from the upper and lower type cases to my trusty setting stick. Each letter had its own compartment in a case. The upper case contained capital letters and the lower case lowercase letters, plus 'sorts' (punctuation marks). Small type sizes of 18 points and less were contained in a single type case, upper and lower case type to the left of the case and upper case to the right. Poster type, from 72 points (1in) up to 576 points (8in), was stored on shelves angled at 30 degrees. The largest type sizes were accessible only by way of step ladders.

As referred to earlier concerning wrestling posters,

paper sizes were described by a name, not by size, e.g. Large Post (21in x 16 ½in), Large Post folio (16½ in x 10in), and Large Post quarto (10in x 8in). Large Post quarto was a popular size for letterheads and bill heads. By the early 1960s imperial sizes began to give way gradually to metric sizes.

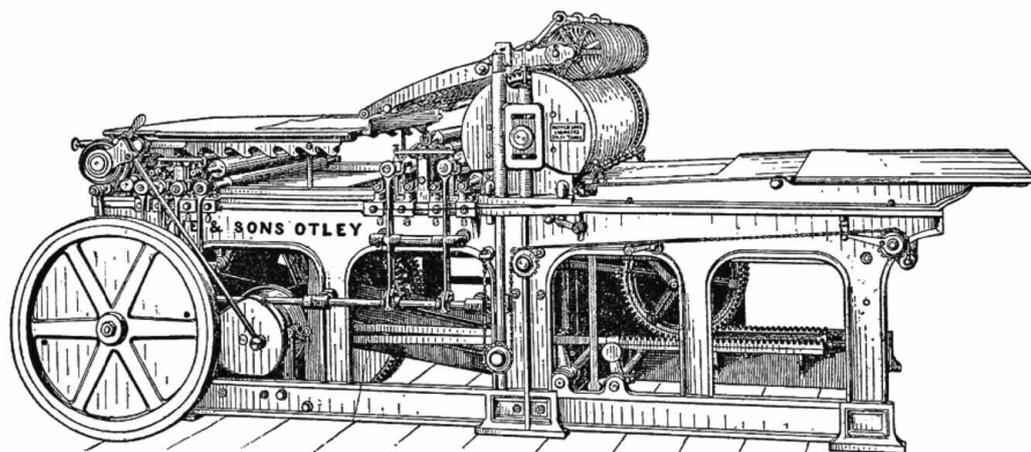
The machine room contained three large 'Wharfedale' stop cylinder letterpress printing machines. But the company's work horse was a Thompson platen machine, which was in continuous use printing business stationery, Labour club draw tickets, social event tickets, wedding and funeral hymn sheets. The machine room's only source of heat was a more modern vitreous enamelled rectangular coke stove. For additional heat in severe cold weather, a Tilley lamp was

used, not for the benefit of employees but focussed only on a machine's ink rollers to assist viscosity.

All the large stop cylinder Wharfedale printing machines were activated by a single electric motor at one end of the room, which drove a continuously revolving metal shaft affixed just below the ceiling, running the full length of the room. At various points along the shaft were revolving pulley wheels. Around each pulley wheel was a thick canvas driving belt positioned immediately above a printing machine's two pulley wheels. One was a free-wheeling pulley wheel and the other a driving pulley wheel. Whenever a printing machine was required for use, the continuously revolving driving belt on the free-wheeling pulley wheel

was simply pushed across onto the driving pulley wheel.

At that time Murray's enjoyed a monopoly on printed matter required for the Independent Methodist Church. The Murray family had had a long connection with that particular non-conformist denomination, in which Mr James Murray, Albert Jnr's uncle, had been a prominent and well respected local preacher for many years. 'Uncle Jim', as he was known by all, came into the office two days a week to do some proof reading and other administrative work. In fact, it was 'Uncle Jim' who was proof reading a funeral hymn sheet I had typeset, when he suddenly came out of office with a look of triumph on his face and chuckling. Now chuckling was a most



Wharfedale stop cylinder printing machine as used at Murray's

unusual characteristic for normally po-faced Uncle Jim. He said: "Alan, ho, ho, ho, they're going to bury this man, not put him in prison." That was the day I learned the difference between interned and interred.

Five years later I had mastered the necessary knowledge and skills, acknowledged by the Typographical Association,

to call myself a competent journeyman compositor. At long last, in the manner of Chamberlain returning from Munich, I proudly waved in the air my City and Guilds Final Certificate for Compositors' Work. But little did I know that in 15 years hence the 500 year old craft of compositor would be consigned to history.

# PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

## Copy Deadline for Issue 87

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# Wigan's Women

## Welfare, Work and War

By Yvonne Eckersley

*This article looks at the experiences of Wigan's women, individually and in groups, as they faced specific challenges in the early months of the First World War.*

### Incomes for Wives

At the outbreak of war, the army agreed to a weekly separation allowance of 7s 7d for wives and 1s 2d for each child but had no system for paying the money. They enlisted the services of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (SSFA) to administer payments temporarily. Immediately there was a problem. Because the payment was to be paid monthly, many families had no income for weeks. To prevent destitution, local SSFAs loaned money to be paid back in instalments, as and when wives' weekly allowances came through.

Not all wives were aware or able to take advantage of this, and some defrauded the system. At least one mother was living in extreme poverty. Her husband and two older sons had enlisted, an adult daughter could not work because of advanced TB and she had three other children. The family was reliant on 10s 9d a week, the earnings of her 14 year old son. When this was discovered she was recovering from childbirth and had been too ill to seek help. Another woman found, as a result of the six week delay in receiving her separation allowance, she was unable to

pay her rent. Consequently, her landlord locked her out of her home. Concerned magistrates asked police to investigate. Five Ince women were imprisoned as a result of fraudulently claiming loans whilst being paid their allowances. At trial they said the money was used to feed and clothe their children. They felt victimised and wanted to know why they had been arrested when others had not.

Wives of soldiers had no automatic entitlement to this allowance. Any woman who did not appear to be a suitable wife for heroic soldiers, or mothers of soldiers' children, could have their allowances stopped. From the early months of the War the government encouraged

authority figures to assess the degree to which women conformed to this and to report any who fell foul of expectations. When a government circular requested education authorities to ask teachers to report women who 'neglected' their children and were 'unworthy' of receiving the allowances, Hindley's Education Committee refused. They recognised that the gap between middle class expectations and the reality of life for poor working class families (in 1914 many Wigan children went to school barefoot during the summer months, and in winter wore clogs supplied by the Chief Constable's Fund) might lead to unjust accusations.



*Red Cross workers in Hope Street School, n.d.*

## The Prince of Wales Fund and Relief

.....

The separation allowance fell below the normal income of families, only covering half of families' expenses. Soldiers could allot part of their pay to help support their wives and children but as a private's pay was less than 7s, dependents could not expect much. As local Distress Committees were swamped, national charities, such as the Prince of Wales Fund, were established to help. Local mayors were to set up contributory Funds. Wigan people subscribed as individuals, groups of workers, employers, and local dignitaries. Their names and contributions were listed in the Wigan Observer. After concern that money collected in Wigan might not be given locally, it was decided Wigan donations were to be registered with the National Fund as part of the Lancashire district, but be distributed in Wigan. In the event of a shortfall, Wigan's fund was to be supplemented by the National Fund.

There was a national framework for administering this Fund. Each town was to establish Local Representative Relief Committees, consisting of women, working men, councillors, and clergymen, answerable to the town's main Relief Committee. And, because of high unemployment among women, the government required towns to establish subcommittees within the town's Local Representative Relief Committees (Wigan's had 10 women and three men) to consider the question of the



*Munition Workers from Coops, c. 1917*

provision of work for unemployed women.

### Employment of Women

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On 12 October, a deputation from Wigan's Subcommittee (which included Helen Fairhurst (Silcock) in her role as trade unionist and labour leader) met the Council's Distress Committee to discuss women's unemployment. At that meeting the Town Clerk reported that the Mayor and himself had met with Mr Marsden (Messrs Coop and Co. Ltd) who offered to employ 50 women who could use a sewing machine. Coops was an established manufacturer of military clothing.

Which seemed very promising. However, in February 1915, Wigan Corporation suspended their contract for Coops to supply police uniforms whilst they undertook an enquiry into the company's working practices. The Wigan branch of the Amalgamated Union of Clothiers accused Coops of paying female workers below local rates as enshrined in the

Council's Standing Orders and required by the 1909 Trades Board Act. The workers had objected to Coops adding a farthing to their wages to satisfy the minimum wage requirement, on the proviso that they did more work.

The union tried to organise the women. Coops objected. They appeared happy to accept that their male workers were unionised but not the female. Coops' employees were dissatisfied. The union balloted the workforce, and 97% were prepared to hand in their notice and move elsewhere. Something that would not have been possible a few months later. Then, they would have needed Coops to provide a leaving certificate, without which no other firm could legally employ them. Mr Marsden, Coops' Director, objected to the union's involvement. He claimed that they had a 'perfect right to manage our business as we think best'. He stood on his status, considering it 'a very undignified position for a

director of a firm of such standing' to be called to address the accusations. After the enquiry the council found in Coops' favour.

For Helen, who, as an organiser for the Women's Trade Union League, had, from 1888, fought alongside its presidents Emilia Dilke then Mary Macarthur, against sweated labour and for the establishment of Trades Boards to arbitrate and regulate wages, the methods of Coops to exploit female labour would have been distressingly familiar.

### **Soldiers' Wives' Clubs**

.....  
An article by Alice Acland of the Cooperative Women's Guild, in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies' magazine, 'The Common Cause', advocated the establishment of Club Rooms for the wives of soldiers throughout Britain. The aim was to support wives by providing venues where they could meet for recreational purposes twice a week. They were to be given space to meet, do their knitting, repair their children's clothes, read newspapers, listen to music, and enjoy other women's company over a cup of tea or coffee. This was a very similar raison d'être for Women's Cooperative Guild's meetings. Wigan's NUWSS branch Committee (with secretary, Mrs Ainscow, and organisers, Ada Newton and Helen Fairhurst (Silcock)) approached Wigan's Women's Societies. Helen Rushton, mentioning only the Women's Liberal Association, the British Women's Temperance Society and the Women's Co-operative

Women's Guild by name, published a letter in the Observer asking for interested parties to write to Mrs Lamb. Soon after, the British Women's Temperance Society, with Mrs Lamb in the Chair, suspended all their meetings to concentrate their efforts on the Club Rooms.

A joint committee of Wigan's Women Societies was created with Mrs Lamb as president and Mrs Ainscow as vice president. They formed district committees to organise clubs in every ward. The first Wives' Club met in the School Room in Rodney Street and was attended by representatives of Wigan's Women's Societies, local dignitaries and wives of enlisted soldiers and sailors.

There was some confusion as to what exactly was needed for Club Rooms. The committee made an appeal in the Observer asking for the loan of rooms and donations of furnishings. This was successful with more rooms being offered. This included one in the basement of the Tower Rooms, which held meetings of 200 wives. A piano was loaned and Mrs and Mr Ainscow gave eight comfortable armchairs, four useful tables and two rugs.

The Wigan Observer reported that the NUWSS initiative impressed Lord Kitchener's sister, Mrs Parker. As a consequence, she worked to found Tipperary Rooms. These venues were promoted as alternatives to pubs and Mrs Parker envisaged their establishment nationally. Then, with Gwendoline Jellicoe (wife

of Admiral John Jellicoe), Eleanor French (wife of Field Marshall John French), Mrs Winston Churchill and others they established a League of Women's Service Clubs.

### **Women working for soldiers**

.....  
Wigan had three Auxiliary Military Hospitals: The Woodlands, Mariebonne, and The Beeches. It was usual for these hospitals to be staffed and run by unpaid (until 1917) female Volunteer Aid Detachments. Wigan's hospitals were administered by numerous local women and run with the help of large numbers of staff, as listed in the Wigan Observer. In the Observer's report there was no classification as to whether these were VADs, paid staff or Wigan volunteers. The hospitals were financed by local subscriptions; lists of donors of cash and other gifts were recorded in the local press.

Many other women formed Red Cross, church, school or independent sewing groups and comfort committees. They made items which were sent to soldiers at the front and for the use of the incoming wounded soldiers at the Southampton Detention Hospital.

Wigan's Lady Ratcliffe Ellis established a Queen Mary's Work for Women Workshop, dubbed 'Queen Mary's sweatshops' by Sylvia Pankhurst, as they paid extremely low wages. Lady Jellicoe and Lady French wrote to thank Lady Ratcliffe Ellis and the Wigan Ladies for the

garments they had made for troops. At the same time, the Wigan Observer published a message from the Queen Mary's Work for Women Fund encouraging unemployed women to emigrate. The Fund promised to pay the cost of women's fares to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand providing they trained as domestic servants.

## Networks

What became obvious as I was researching for this article was the existence of networks of women whose work in one sphere overlapped with others. For instance, I found Helen Fairhurst (Silcock), Mrs Lamb, Miss Rushton, Mrs Ainscow, and many others' work intertwined. Helen Fairhurst was an organiser, Mrs Ainscow was secretary and Mrs Lamb and Miss Rushton were prominent members of the NUWSS; Mrs Lamb and Helen Fairhurst were active members of the SSFA,

the Clubs for Wives of Soldiers and Sailors movement and the Local Representation Relief Committee. These were the women whose activities were recorded by name; many, many more anonymous women developed support networks in their neighbourhood.

## Wigan's women as women

Despite differences of class, culture and economic position, Wigan's women, as women, appeared to have a sense of responsibility for, identified with, and experienced a shared pride in their fellow women. Wigan's women's sense of shared identity, independence, and pride, may have been consolidated by witnessing women's involvement in a huge Labour Demonstration in July. In particular the powerful sight of members of the Women's Weavers Association, walking from Wigan's Market Place,

through the town to the Westwood Grounds with their impressive banner, dressed identically in the frothy white dresses associated with the huge women's suffrage demonstrations in London and preceded by a large brass band.

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*Charles Dilke*  
*Roy Jenkins*  
*Various Websites*

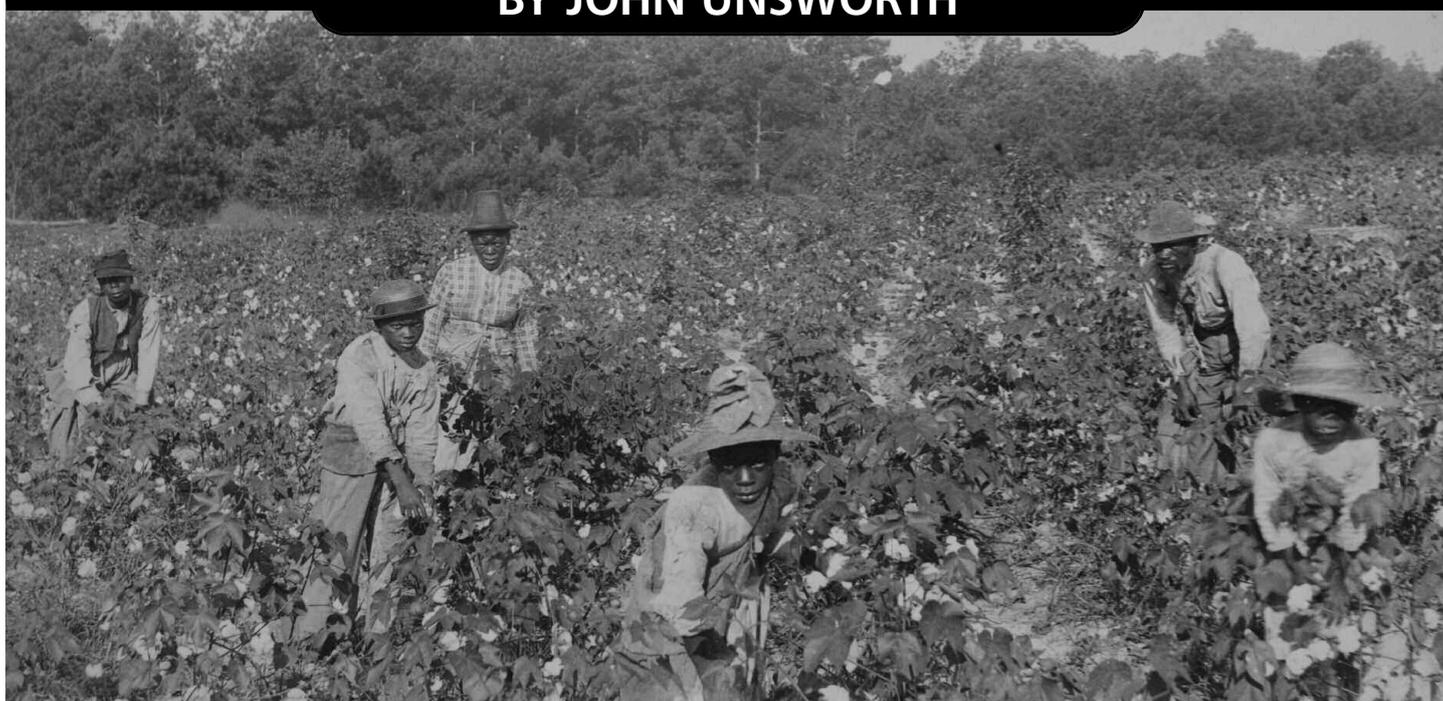


*Wigan Weavers walking with their banner, Wigan Observer*

# COTTON IS KING

## LANCASHIRE AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

BY JOHN UNSWORTH



*A group of six African American men and women posed picking cotton in a field in Savannah, Georgia. Photographers, Launey & Goebel. Image reproduced courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

In the early hours of 12 April 1861, Mary Boykin Chesnut, the wife of a United States senator and slave owner, sat in her room anxiously awaiting the sound of cannon fire in Charleston Harbour. At 4:30 the heavy boom of artillery rumbled across the city as South Carolinian forces opened fire on the Federal garrison at Fort Sumter. Mary fell to her knees in prayer. Not only would the bombardment propel her husband out of the Senate and her state out of the Union, but unknown to her, would end forever the cloistered and patrician lifestyle she had enjoyed since childhood.

As she knelt in supplication, 3,000 miles away in Lancashire thousands of men, women and children were labouring in countless textile mills, attending to looms or spinning frames, equally unaware of the devastating effect on their less genteel lives that those distant explosions heralded. The firing on Sumter would bring on a Civil War of seismic proportions that would send shock waves across the Atlantic of unimaginable magnitude, bringing privation and destitution to whole communities. The breakup of the American Union would severely disrupt the flow of cotton, and lead to severe economic depression in Lancashire and other parts of England and Scotland. To better understand how this came about it is necessary to look at the war aims of both North and South.

The cotton famine was a product of Union and Confederate military strategy. The Northern blockade of ports like Savannah in Georgia and Mobile, Alabama, imposed by Lincoln's government to undermine the Southern economy, severely restricted the export of cotton to Europe and other parts of the world. Southern leaders knew that the only way to lift the naval stranglehold and possibly achieve independence was recognition as a sovereign nation by the major European powers. In this they needed the support of Great Britain, whose powerful navy was capable of lifting the blockade. To achieve this end they embarked on a policy of King Cotton diplomacy, gambling that British economic reliance on the staple would lead either to her military involvement or acknowledgement of the South's independence. As one Southern senator announced, "What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years?...This is certain, England would topple and carry the whole civilised world with her....Cotton is King".

To achieve these goals Confederate leaders were willing to allow thousands of bales of cotton to rot on Southern wharfs in the belief that starving Britain of the staple would force her into acting on behalf of the South. Hungry millworkers and a possible economic depression were seen as a powerful

incentive for some form of action by the British government. In Lancashire alone the 1861 census showed that 384,000 people, of which 211,000 were women, were employed as workers in some 2,650 cotton factories, powering 30.4 million spindles and 350,000 looms. And in January of the same year, according to *The Economist*, 'nearer four than three millions are dependent for their daily bread on this branch of our industry'. A year earlier the value of all cotton goods in Britain was valued at £85 million and exports at £32 million. King Cotton, it seemed, possessed the Midas Touch.

In Britain it took some time for the strategy to take effect. In the early stages of the war there was still a reasonable flow of cotton to the mills, bolstered by the stockpiling of some local traders and millowners. But as the conflict escalated and the Union blockade tightened, the situation changed dramatically. In Lancashire, where there was a deep seated dependence on cotton, the impact of the famine, when it took hold, can be perceived from the following figures. In 1862, the second year of the war, and at the height of the distress, an estimated 247,000 operatives were out of work. A further 485,434 people were reliant on relief. In hard hit Wigan 14,959 were dependent on charity. In Bolton and Bury the figures were 19,525 and 20,926 respectively. In Leigh, one of the lesser affected towns and one of the rare few which tended towards a pro-Northern stance, 2,722 of the needy were on some form of financial assistance. An unknown Lancashire bard, in 'A Plea Fra' Lancashur', a poem sent to *Punch*, laments that

'...noo mi hert its breakin, Poonch,  
Mi bairns ar wantin bred:  
It maks me sae doonherted,  
that I ni most wish me dead.'

In the light of all this hardship it is easy to reach the conclusion that the majority of the population of Lancashire would automatically support the North, viewing the Confederacy as the source of all their sufferings. But if the local newspapers of the time are anything to go by there is a predominance of sympathy for the South. This sympathy does not equate with an approval of slavery, but rather a cynical perception of the North's commitment to end the 'peculiar institution'. It was felt that Lincoln and his government were more in favour of saving the union of the states than the freedom of the subjugated blacks. Lincoln had said as much in a published letter to the *New York Tribune*. "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery". In the opinion of some, only Southern independence would eventually lead to the end of involuntary black servitude.

In December 1861, as the effects of the blockade were beginning to tell, both the *Wigan Observer* and the *Bolton Chronicle* showed themselves inclined towards some British intervention in the conflict and thought it 'reasonable to look for the mitigation of our people's wretchedness through the opened ports of secession.' And in May of 1863, the *Observer* proclaimed that 'There are many men in this country .....who now wish to see the Confederacy, under Mr

Davis (The Confederate President), recognised as an independent nation, and admire the gallant people who have so stoutly defended themselves against a peculiarly cruel foe.' There were even elements in the government who were sympathetic towards the Southern cause. But a lack of resolve, coupled with vacillation and indecision and changing events on the other side of the water, led to Britain's retaining her neutrality up to the end of hostilities. For many, however, among the labouring classes, Northern federalism and Southern disunion were mere abstractions. They had families to feed and rents to pay. As they saw it, only an end to the war and the resumption of the flow of cotton could alleviate their plight.

In the final analysis the ultimate failure of the South to entangle Britain in the war was due to an over-inflated belief in international, especially British, reliance on cotton. In the opening months of the war when entry to foreign markets was unrestricted, Southern merchant vessels had ready access to international commerce. This, however, was only a temporary state of affairs and could not last. After a slow start the Northern stranglehold, christened the Anaconda Plan, eventually paid dividends as the slow constriction of Southern ports led to their virtual closure from international trade. It can be argued that the ruined cotton could have been used less as an instrument of blackmail by the South, and instead to purchase arms and Liverpool built blockade runners to smuggle in much needed food and other essential supplies.

This lack of foresight was to lead to social and economic distress in some parts of the Southern states that was equal, if not more extreme, to those prevailing in the textile manufacturing areas of England and Scotland. For their part, the British government, under Palmerston, was not prepared to risk war with the Union over the livelihoods of cotton operatives in Lancashire and elsewhere. Instead they relied on local relief committees and Poor Law Unions to alleviate the sufferings of the unemployed and their dependents. New suppliers, from India and Egypt, were found. By the end of 1863 raw cotton began to arrive in the country from the United States. But it was not until later in the following year that full imports from the U.S were restored and the textile districts of England and Scotland once again enjoyed the benefits of a return to full employment.

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# Self-Made By Brian Joyce The Charltons of Tyldesley

Given the apparent rigidities of the Victorian class system and the gross inequalities between the classes, it is perhaps easy to assume that social mobility was next to impossible. This is probably too easy an assumption to make though, because the nineteenth century was also the period of the 'self-made man'. Caleb Wright of Tyldesley, for example, was one of 13 children, who started work as a piecer in a cotton mill at the age of nine. He rose to become a mill owner himself, and eventually the first Member of Parliament for Leigh. The Charlton family, contemporaries of Caleb Wright in Tyldesley, could have provided a similar, if less elevated example. However, in their case, promise and ambition were cut short by tragedy.

James Charlton and his wife, Catherine, both power loom weavers from Stockport, moved to Tyldesley some time in the late 1840s. They already had two children: Sarah Ellen and Daniel. Two more sons, James and Henry, were born at the couple's new home in Tyldesley. This was a shop in Elliott Street. In the census of 1851, James Charlton was described as a 'provision dealer and retailer of beer'. Catherine was listed as a 'housewife', although no doubt she also helped with the business. Sarah Ellen, at 13 years old, was described as a 'barmaid'.

At the time of this census the three boys were at school, where they clearly flourished. After attending St George's National School in Tyldesley, Daniel Charlton graduated to Leigh Grammar School, and then the prestigious Manchester Grammar School. Whether or not this was the result of gaining scholarships, paying fees or a combination of both, it was a big step forward for the publican's son.



*Hest Bank, near Morecambe*

The family's upward trajectory continued when the young James Charlton followed in his older brother's footsteps.

Meanwhile, their father's own progress continued. When the proprietor of the King's Arms public house died in 1862, James Charlton senior had the wherewithal to purchase it. This imposing block of property stood at the junction of Castle Street and Factory Street and consisted of the pub and outbuildings, an adjoining brewery, and several cottages. This was quite a step up for Charlton, whose respectability was confirmed when in 1865 his daughter, Sarah Ellen, married George Arnold Mort, a schoolmaster at St George's.

His two older sons were also flourishing. After leaving Manchester Grammar School Daniel Charlton, who intended to become an Anglican priest, went up to St John's College, Cambridge. This was financed, at least in part, by a so-called 'sizarship', a scheme whereby poorer students could pay for their studies by undertaking menial tasks around the College. In the summer of 1865 Daniel graduated, and his younger brother James was poised to replicate his brother's achievement once more. He too

had obtained a sizarship at St John's, in his case to study music.

In June 1865 the brothers, Daniel, James, and Henry Charlton, went for a week's holiday in Morecambe, perhaps to celebrate the completion of Daniel's final examinations. They spent Thursday 22 June at Windermere. On their return journey, they disembarked from the train at Hest Bank station at 7.10pm, intending to walk the two miles along the shore to Morecambe. The brothers, with 16 year old Henry leading the way, sauntered along the sands unaware of the fast-approaching tide. It was not until they were opposite the village of Bare that they suddenly realised they had become cut off from the shore by remorselessly rising water.

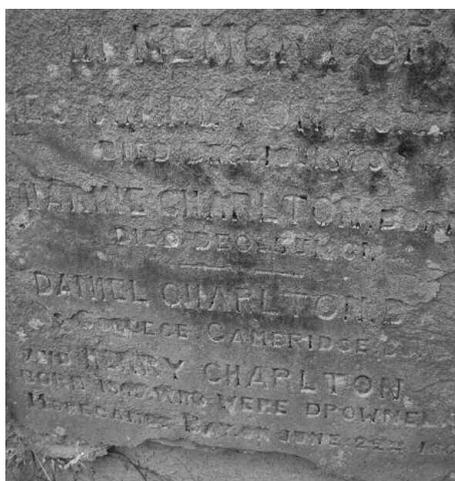
Daniel shouted to his younger brothers to strip off their clothes and try to wade to safety. According to the Lancaster Gazette, 18 year old James related the following day: "We all went forward into the water to try to reach the bank. I got up to my neck and turned back. We all called out to a man on the bank who had a horse with him at a good distance from us, and he called back something. I didn't know what it

was, but we understood him to say: 'Come on quickly! Come straight over!'"

The man was James Dodgson, a farmer. He had actually shouted to the Charltons to stay where they were while he went for help, but the noise of the sea and their panicked state led them to misunderstand. By the time Dodgson returned a few minutes later, James had managed to reach shallow water and wade across to safety. Daniel, with Henry desperately clinging to his back, had jumped into much deeper water. The two brothers disappeared under the waves and drowned.

The bodies were recovered from the water at 3am on Friday. One of the shocked boatmen journeyed to Lancaster, from where he telegraphed the tragic news to Tyldesley.

The inquest was held at the Morecambe Hotel later that day, and on Saturday morning a grief-stricken James accompanied his brothers' coffins back to Tyldesley. The Leigh Chronicle noted that huge crowds greeted the train at the town's railway station at the bottom of Wareing Street, and thousands more lined the route as a hearse took the Charlton brothers back to the King's Arms. The oldest and youngest of the Charlton brothers were buried in St George's Churchyard on the Monday.



*The grave of Daniel and Henry Charlton, St George's Churchyard, Tyldesley*



*Castle Street, Tyldesley, showing the King's Arms on the right*

The wife of the publican, James Charlton, had died in 1861, and he had now lost two of his three boys. After the tragedy of June 1865, his surviving son, James, returned to his sizarship at St John's, Cambridge to complete his studies. He graduated in Music in 1867 and took his MA in 1870. According to the Leigh Chronicle, James had 'an exceedingly quiet and retiring disposition' and was 'refined and gentlemanly to a degree'. It would appear that the younger Charlton had little or no ambition to follow his father into the licensed trade. When the older James Charlton died in 1870, the King's Arms passed, via the publican's daughter, Sarah Ellen, to her husband, George Arnold Mort. The humble schoolmaster had graduated to become one of Tyldesley's leading publicans.

The surviving Charlton brother did not stray very far from his native Tyldesley. The younger James used his university degree to make a living teaching music and training would-be organists. Among his pupils was James Boydell, who served as organist at Christ Church, Pennington for more than 40 years. Charlton himself attained the position of organist at Leigh Parish Church, a position he held for 43 years.

In 1875, Charlton married Frances Richards, a daughter of the Vicar of Tyldesley. Less than a year later, James was struck by yet another tragedy when his wife died at the age of 26. James Charlton, who by then had moved to Leigh, remained a widower for nearly 10 years.

He eventually married Ann Blears, his housekeeper, and lived an uneventful life as 'professor of music' and church organist. The couple and their son lived in comfort at 'Fernroyd', 66 The Avenue in Leigh, a substantial house in one of the most prestigious residential roads in the town. Charlton's son, also named James, followed in his father's footsteps into music teaching.

Meanwhile, yet another family drama was played out in 1890, this time over the fate of the King's Arms, Charlton's former home in Tyldesley. After the death of Charlton's sister, Sarah Ellen, in 1874, her husband, George Arnold Mort, had remarried. When Mort himself passed away, his second wife inherited the business, a situation challenged in the courts by James Charlton's nephew. It is tempting to speculate that Charlton was able to observe this commotion, which is a story in itself, with detached and scholarly amusement.

Charlton died in 1912 after suffering a stroke. At the request of his widow the funeral was, like the man himself, private and very quiet. In the opinion of the Leigh Chronicle, 'Mr Charlton leaves behind him an honoured name and an unblemished reputation'. However, the shadow cast by the drownings of his brothers had never gone away. The memories of older residents were stirred when the Leigh Chronicle reprinted its original story of the tragic events on Morecambe sands 47 years before.

# REBELS RADICALS REFORM

## The Fight for Better

A new exhibition has opened at the Museum of Wigan Life that covers 600 years of local protest. Early radicals like Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers movement, Jacobite Risings and Peterloo, right through to WASPI, Black Lives Matter and climate change are just some of the many campaigns featured in which local people stand up for equality and fairness. Sometimes political, always personal – civil war, rebellion, suffrage, and strikes have all played a part in the story of the Borough. Exploring the role places have played in social change, the exhibition highlights some of the many causes people have fought for throughout the centuries.

On display alongside objects from the museum and archive collections are loans from organisations including Manchester Art Gallery and Working Class Movement Library, Salford, local unions, action groups, community groups, young people and residents who have kindly shared their personal experiences through film, photographs, art and objects.

Protest has never been more topical or relevant. 'Rebels Radicals Reform – The Fight for Better' is now open and is FREE to visit. Please ring the museum or check the website and social media for current opening times prior to visiting.

**Museum of Wigan Life,  
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1N  
E: [wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk)  
T: 01942 828128**

*Some of the many highlights on display include:*

**Peterloo Handkerchief, 1819.**

Local radicals joined 60,000 men, women and children who walked to St Peter's Field in support of political reform. This became known as the Peterloo Massacre. This delicate handkerchief is a reminder of that fateful day when, within half an hour, at least 15 people were dead and many more bludgeoned, maimed or crushed by horses. On loan from Manchester Art Gallery.



**Standish Case and Jacobite treasures, 1715 and 1745 Risings.**

Prominent local families: the Gerrards, Tyldesleys, Stanleys and Standishes, supported the Jacobite cause, meeting in secret at Standish Hall. Following the failed 1715 Rising in Preston, prisoners were marched through Wigan for trial in London. Five were publicly executed in Market Place. During the 1745 Rising, Bonnie Prince Charlie stayed locally at Walmesley House. On loan from John Nicholls MBE.



**The Dinner Hour in Wigan by Eyre Crowe (1824-1910), 1874.**

This iconic painting shows the workers of Victoria Mill in Wigan. It is a rare visual record of Lancashire mill life, painted nearly a decade after the Lancashire cotton famine. It shows a group of mill girls, dressed in clogs, shawls, and aprons, as they relax during a lunch break. On loan from Manchester Art Gallery.





Political Posters, 1910.

In 1910, two general elections took place after the House of Lords refused to pass Lloyd George's peoples' budget. The main issues of the time were free trade, the reform of the House of Lords, Irish home rule and workers' rights.

Wigan and Leigh Archives and Local Studies holds a stunning collection of posters relating to these elections and a selection are displayed here for the first time.

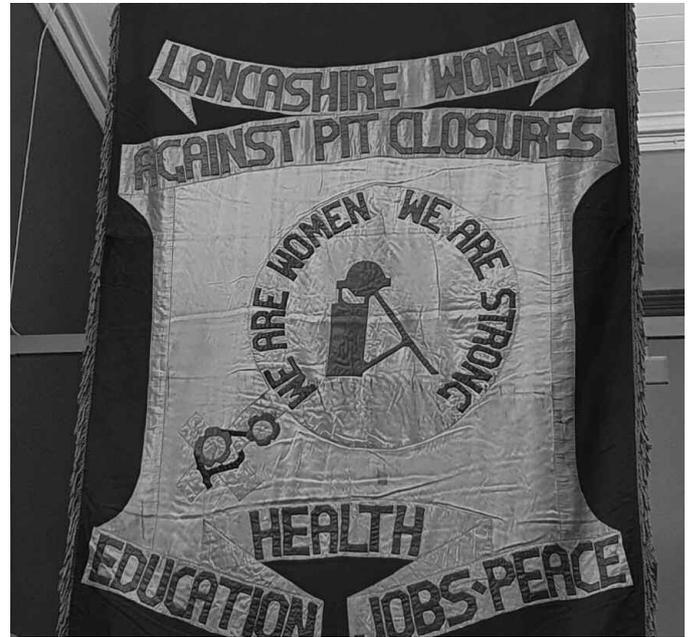


Love Pies, Hate Racism Placard, 2015.

This home-made placard was used by local counter-protestors at a National Front demonstration rally which took place outside the Post Office in Wigan Town Centre on 19 September 2015.

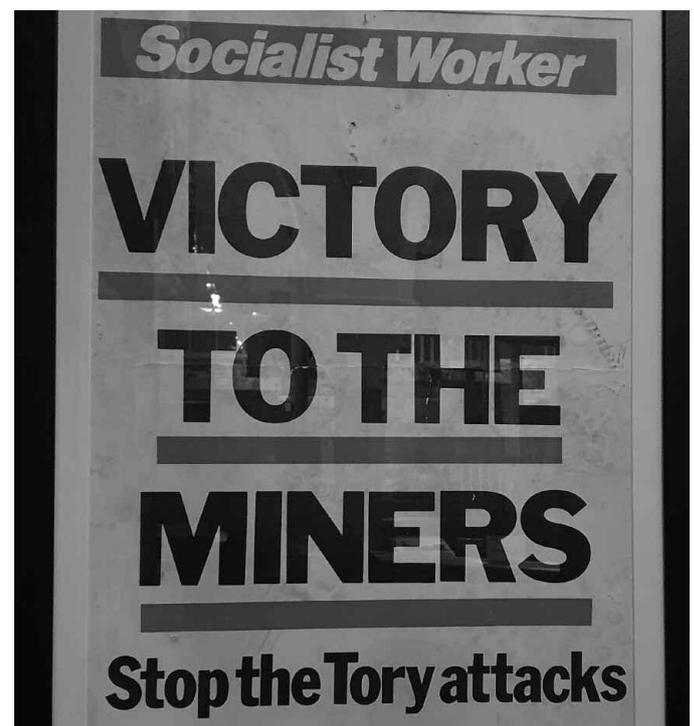
## Women Against Pit Closures Banner, 1984-85.

Banners are an instantly recognisable feature of the trade union movement and protest in general. Traditionally colourful and visual, this banner was hand-made and represents the vital and essential role local women played in the miners' strike. On loan from Working Class Movement Library, Salford.



Victory to the Miners poster, 1984-85

1 March 1984 saw the start of what is considered by many to be the most bitter industrial dispute in British history. Within days, miners all over the country were on strike without the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) calling an official ballot. The severe hardship endured by local families is still felt to this day.



# The Diary of By Graham Taylor William Walls Part 1 of Abram 1915-1919

## Introduction

The WW1 diary of William Walls of Abram has been transcribed by Wigan Archives' Volunteer, Susan Berry. There are two volumes and the transcribed version is 228 pages long. It is rare to come across a diary written by a Private soldier that covers his whole wartime career, in this case between March 1915 and February 1919. As well as accounts of being in the trenches and in action on the front line, William records the more mundane activities of military life back in the rear areas.

Reading his diary reveals the things that William treasured the most and kept him going during his long absence from Abram in the Great War. These were his religious faith, his letters from home, especially the ones from his sweetheart Annie, and his passion for football.

This summary of the diary will help to put it in its historical and social context, and also clarify the military situation that William found himself in during the First World War.

## Abram Village

William Walls was born on 28 January 1892 at 428 Warrington Road, Abram and baptised three months later on 24 April by Reverend Hewitt Linton at St. John's CE Church. He was the youngest of nine children, six boys and three girls; but two of his brothers, his namesake, William, and Harry, had sadly died in infancy before he was born.

The relationship between his parents, William Walls Snr who hailed from Darwen near Blackburn and local girl Mary Livesey, had got off to a rocky start. They had had a baby girl born out of wedlock in 1871, and Mary named her Annie Walls Livesey, using William's surname as the child's middle name. Circumstances changed however, and William and Mary finally married two years later in April 1873 at St. John's Church.

William Jnr was eight years old when his coal miner father died in 1900 aged 54. The following year, the 1901 census shows the Walls family had moved the short distance to 448 Warrington Road.

William was a deeply religious person, being confirmed on 18 May 1907 at St. John's by Bishop Chavasse of Liverpool. He attended church regularly for Holy Communion and, as well as being a member of the choir, he later became a Sunday School teacher at the Good Shepherd Mission Room, Lily Lane in Bamfurlong.

At 4pm on the afternoon of Tuesday 18 August 1908, 16 year old William finished his shift underground at nearby Maypole Colliery in Park Lane and walked the short distance to his home in Warrington Road. Just over an hour later, at 5.10pm, an explosion ripped through the pit killing 76 miners. 'Lady Luck' was shining on William that day, as she was to do so all through the Great War.

Statistics from the 1911 census show that the population of Abram was 6,893, residing in 1,364 households and of those, 1,005 people worked in the mining industry in Abram and the surrounding areas.

The village had a very diverse population. As well as residents having been born in all parts of Lancashire, 492 residents were born outside the county. They came to live in Abram from 24 different English counties; mainly from Staffordshire, Shropshire, Cheshire, and Yorkshire but also the Isle of Wight, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and as far afield as America and Canada.

The much loved and respected Vicar of St. John's, who went by the grand name of Reverend Thomas Frederick Brownbill Twemlow, had been born in Manchester, his wife Mabel came from Hereford.

Church Sexton and school caretaker, Arthur Coultas, was born in Leeds, his wife in Upper Gornal, Staffordshire. They lived at 174 Warrington Road



*Private William Walls,  
King's Royal Rifle Corps*

with their three children and a servant Ellen Evans, who hailed from Keele in Staffordshire.

The village's medical practitioner, Andrew Occleshaw Bentham (who by chance is distantly related to the author) lived at Springfield House on Warrington Road and was born in High Street in Standish; his wife Elizabeth was a Chorley girl.

The Matron of Abram Sanatorium in Park Lane was Annie Mead, who hailed from Harwich in Essex. The only patient at the time was six year old John Maddison from Haydock.

The Manageress of the Bucks Head Hotel was Annie Melrose Edwards, who hailed from Carfrae, a village in Berwickshire in the Scottish Borders. Annie was a widow and had moved to Abram with her three young sons from Macclesfield in Cheshire where she had been a Publican.

Station Master, Septimus Smith, lived at 80 Bickershaw Lane and came from Retford in Nottinghamshire; his wife Alice was born in Kirton Lindsey in Lincolnshire.

The Headmaster of the Elementary School was 56 year old George Winfield from

Weaverham in Cheshire. He lived at 333 Warrington Road with his wife Mary and three children.

Forty two year old Police Sergeant Robert Gordon came from Kincardineshire in Scotland, as did his wife Jane. They lived at 497 Warrington Road with their two daughters, who had both been born in Colne in Lancashire.

Sixty five year old John Garvin, a retired miner living at 91 Warrington Road, had been born in the USA; his wife, Mary Ann, came from Frome in Somerset and their eldest son, Henry, had been born in Wales. Living with them was their niece, Grace Parker, born in Blackheath, Middlesex.

Elizabeth Ann Harrison and her two year old son, Thomas, were in lodgings with grocer Alice Barton at 46 Warrington Road. Elizabeth had been widowed when her husband, Thomas, was killed in the Maypole Pit disaster. She was five months pregnant at the time and her husband never got to see his son. Elizabeth was being financially supported with a pension from the Maypole Colliery Fund.

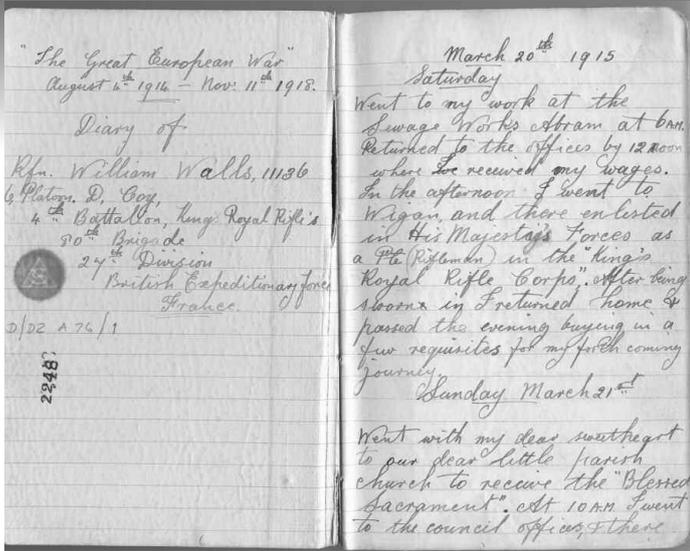
By the time of the 1911 census William Walls was still living at 448 Warrington Road with his mother and siblings. Along with his brothers, Bob and Jim, he was working underground in the pit as a haulage hand, but he was soon to leave for a career in the water industry. His sisters, Betsy and Maggie, were both cotton weavers. His eldest sister, Annie, was still living there with her children, Henry and Nellie, but had separated from her husband, Thomas.

At the outbreak of World War One William was courting a girl named Annie Lowe, originally from Ashton in Makerfield but on the 1911 census was living at 160 Warrington Road, opposite Lee Lane. Annie and her three sisters, Mabel, Hilda and Mary, worked in a cotton mill; their father James was a colliery locomotive driver.

## For King & Country

With the First World War just eight months old William made his first entry in his diary on Saturday 20 March 1915:

'Went to my work at the Sewerage Works Abram at 6AM. Returned to the offices by 12 Noon where I received my wages. In the afternoon I went to Wigan and there enlisted in His Majesty's Forces as a Pte (Rifleman) in the King's Royal Rifle Corps. After being sworn in I returned home & passed the



William Walls' diary



Warrington Road, Abram

evening buying in a few requisites for the forthcoming journey.'

Two days later, recruit No. R11136 Rifleman Walls travelled by train down to the Rifle Corps Infantry Depot at Peninsular Barracks in Winchester, Hampshire. He was accompanied by another Wiganer from Manor Street in Newtown, by the name of Bill Battersby, who had enlisted at the same time. In early July, with training completed, William was granted four days home embarkation leave.

On 21 July, as part of a Troop replacement draft, he boarded the SS Princess Victoria at Southampton bound for Le Havre. Early next morning William set foot on French soil for the first time and entered the Theatre of War on the Western Front. At the Infantry Base Depot in Rouen he was posted to the 4th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps, who were in the 80th Brigade, of the 27th Infantry Division.

After a day's train ride William finally joined his unit at Erquinghem-Lys near Armentieres on the Belgian border, where his new unit was resting for two weeks out of the line. On the journey he had met up with Joe Ward who came from Dudley in the Midlands. They were to become best friends and both were allotted to 16 Platoon of D Company.

William experienced trench warfare for the first time on 9 August when his unit relieved their sister Battalion, the 3rd King's Royal Rifle Corps, in the front line near Armentieres. Luckily, it was a quiet sector of the front at the time with little activity from both sides.

The Battalion War Diary records that on the 10 August a high explosive shell bursting over the

trenches wounded three men, and on the same day a soldier negligently discharged his rifle, killing a rifleman and wounding a Lance Corporal. After a week in the trenches they were relieved and moved into support at L'Armee from where they once more relieved the 3rd Battalion.

On 30 August, the Battalion moved back to bivouacs in Erquinghem-Lys as Divisional Reserve. Two weeks later they marched 12 miles to Strazeel to join up with the rest of the 80th Brigade. Then on 18 September they marched to Hazebrouck where they entrained for the 75 mile journey south to the Somme Valley, eventually moving into billets at Cappy on the 21 September.

For the next month or so the 4th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps moved up and down the Somme Valley area and occupied trenches in Frise, Eclusier-Vaux and Morcourt, resting out of the line in huts in Froissy, Bray-Sur-Somme and Cappy. On 25 October the 27th Division handed their positions over to the French and the next day started a three day march through the city of Amiens to Revelles.

At Revelles William's and his comrades' curiosity was aroused, as he notes in his diary, when for the next couple of weeks they practised a new form of training. Instead of trench warfare it was open field work; plus, they also practised loading supplies on to mules.

## The Salonika Campaign

On 28 June 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife Sophie were assassinated in Sarajevo by a Bosnian Serb nationalist by the name of Gavrilo Princip. This act was to lead ultimately to

the carnage of the First World War. As a punishment Austria and Hungary declared war on Serbia and attempted an invasion but this was successfully resisted by the Serbian Army.

Fifteen months later on 6 October 1915 a second attack under German control took place against the Serbs. Soon after, Bulgaria, an old enemy of Serbia, allied itself to the Central Powers of Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Turkey and declared war on Serbia, who was allied to the Western Powers.

In response a multi-National Force was formed in an effort to aid Serbia. This diverse force, eventually comprising French, British, Greek, Italian and Russian troops, came under the command of French General Maurice Sarrail and numbered 600,000 men at its peak.

However, the intervention of the allies came too late to save the Serbs from invasion by the Central Powers. The remnants of the Serbian Army were forced to retire through the mountains of Montenegro to Albania, losing over 70,000 men in the winter snow. Tragically 140,000 civilians also perished of starvation or disease during the 'Great Retreat'.

William's Division, the 27th, was ordered to relocate to the Balkans to reinforce the British Salonika Force. The British Salonika Force, which would eventually number over a quarter of a million men, had Colonial troops from India, Africa and Indo China and also volunteer units from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Malta under its command.

On 12 November, the Battalion marched 12 miles from Revelles to Longpre station and entrained for a three day journey to Marseilles. A week later, on the 19 November, they left the killing fields of France and boarded the SS Marathon at Marseilles. They set sail via the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea for the Port of Salonika (now modern day Thessalonica) in the northern Greek region of Macedonia. Disembarking at 4pm on 26 November in Salonika they marched to a camping ground a couple of miles outside the city.

William wasted no time in describing the conditions in his diary:

'Saturday Nov 27th Reveille at 7A.M. On looking out of our tents we were all surprised to see about a foot of snow on the ground, and I for one thanked my God that we had pitched our tents the night previous. There were about twenty of us in a

tent so we had not felt the cold very much during the night. We had rather a rough toilet that morning having to go about a quarter of a mile for a wash, & then when we got to the stream we had to break the ice before we could wash, also we had to shave in icy water it was champion I can tell you. At 9a.m. we had to turn out to peel the Coy's potatoes, my word what a job, peel a potato then blow the hands for about five minutes.'

William and his unit had arrived in Macedonia just as the allies were withdrawing back from Serbia into Greece, and a front line was being established about 20 miles north of Salonika. The Macedonian Front was destined to become a sideshow to the war in France and Flanders and the British Salonika Force soon became the forgotten army. On a 260 mile front that stretched from Albania in the west to the mouth of the River Struma, just east of Salonika, hostilities turned into a stalemate that was to last for three long years.

The British Forces held 90 miles of front including the Struma Valley and the strategic position of Doiran on the Macedonian border. On the Struma Plain there wasn't a continuous trench line but a series of redoubts or entrenched strongholds. In between these were lines of barbed wire entanglements which were patrolled periodically.

Living conditions for soldiers on both sides were harsh with them experiencing extreme weather conditions. During winter they had to endure blizzards, trench foot and frostbite, and in summer temperatures of 112 degrees in the shade. In a barren and hostile terrain, the only reliable mode of transport for supplies was the pack mule. To the troops the campaign was characterised by the '3 Ms': Mules, Mountains and Mosquitoes.

Early in the campaign it was feared that the Port of Salonika would come under attack so it was made into a bastion with a trench line about eight miles north of the city protected by hundreds of miles of barbed wire. The troops nicknamed Salonika the 'Bird Cage' owing to the huge amounts of barbed wire used. William and his unit were to do their share of the work. Trudging over the surrounding hills from one location to another they made roads, dug trenches, laid wire, and fortified outposts for weeks on end.

*To be continued in the next edition...*

# LEIGH V AUSTRALIA: 7 OCTOBER 1959

*Written by Brian Wood in conversation with Brian Fallon*

Watching Leigh Rugby Club could be described as a Rugby League roller-coaster. Several times the club has threatened to break into the big time without managing to stay there, with the result that Leigh supporters tend to get their highs not from eras of success, but from recalling individual matches. For supporters of my generation one such game took place on 7 October 1959 when Leigh became the first club side to defeat the touring Kangaroos. The game, played under Leigh's floodlights, a rarity for a Rugby League match at the time, proved to be memorable for several reasons, not least the overnight creation of a local hero in scrum half Brian Fallon.

In fairness, the 1959 Kangaroos were not the strongest team to visit Britain, being the last to lose an Ashes here, but they were confident of adding another scalp to their belt, especially as Leigh were not in good form. Indeed, it was locally reported that a chemical company had offered the players injections to guard against a repeat of the previous year's flu epidemic, but that supporters had suggested other types of injections might be more useful!

Brian Fallon recalls that there were no special preparations for this game. After all, Leigh were playing their thirteenth game in seven weeks, a typical start to a season in those days.



*Autumn mists and early floodlights made seeing difficult*

"Anyway, nobody expected us to beat them," he says; and "there was certainly no extra win bonus on the table!"

For myself there was to be no repeat of the disappointment earlier that season when 20,000 plus spectators squeezed into the ground, forcing me to the back of the terraces and blocking out virtually all the action. The only exception to this lack of view was the occasional frightening sight of Billy Boston charging towards Eddie Waring's 'dark, satanic mills' at the railway end of the ground, as Leigh drew 22-22 with mighty Wigan.

So, on this occasion, this nine year old was there when the gates opened, taking up pole position at the front, and right behind the posts at the Chadwick Street end of the famous old ground.

At the same time, the Kangaroos arrived at Leigh Town Hall for a civic reception to partake, after speeches, of 'light refreshments' with their opponents (less than two hours before kick off!) Perhaps there was something in the water, or maybe special pies had been brought in from Wigan; whatever the circumstances few could have foreseen that, within hours, the hosts would prevail in dramatic circumstances.

By the 7pm kick off, yours truly had been joined by 12,000 others (receipts £1335), who had resisted the attractions of the likes of Doris Day, Boris Karloff and Anthony Newley at the eight local cinemas. By 9pm they must have been glad that they did!

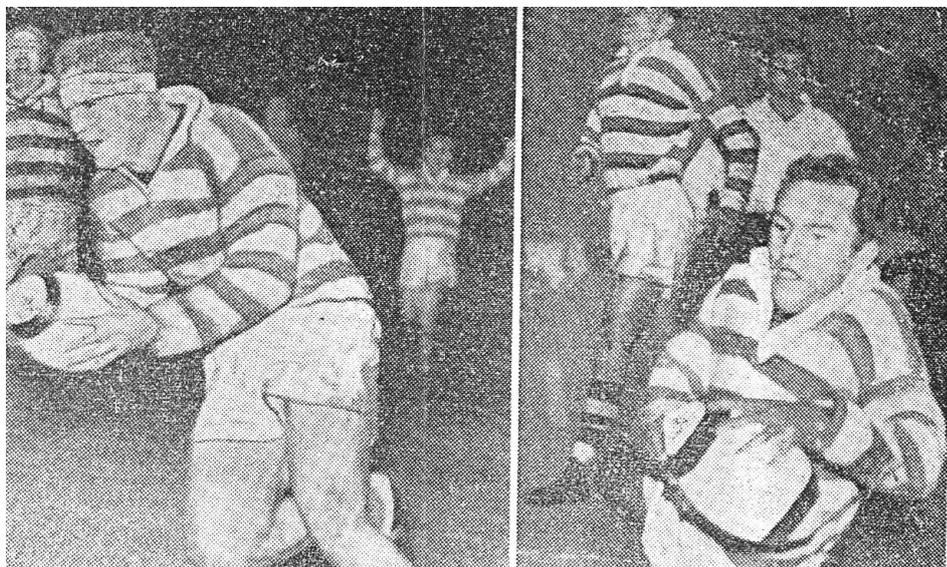
The country was experiencing a record 'Indian summer'. All recent Leigh and District Amateur League games had been postponed due to hard grounds! It had been another warm, dry day and so, after the Australians had performed their war cry and referee Davies of Manchester had blown his whistle, the game began on a pitch perfectly suited for fast, open rugby. Those early floodlights were not particularly powerful and, as a typical early autumn mist descended (not unusual in the days of factories and coal fires), the choice of a black and white striped ball proved a master stroke though, as Brian Fallon remembers, this simply enabled the spectators to get a better view of the visitors' spectacular play.

The Leigh Journal noted: 'Australia gave a display of football which had the crowd cheering. Time and again the tourists, led by their back division had Leigh reeling'.



*Mick Martyn and Derek Hurt congratulate Brian Fallon*

The Kangaroos were ahead after just three minutes when forward, Elton Rasmussen, sprinted 40 yards for a try, converted by Parish. After 20 minutes the 6ft 5inch Toowoomba man repeated the dose, and by half time they had added a third try from Hambly which, along with goals from Parish and Carlson, gave them 15 points; to which Leigh replied with just six, coming from two penalties by Cumbrian, Derek Hurt and one from Fallon: a very handsome lead in those days. Leigh were further handicapped by a leg injury to centre, Ray Fisher, causing him to leave the field. These were pre substitute days which meant Leigh's star forward, Mick Martyn, had to move to centre.



Derek Hurt and Brian Callaghan score the tries

At the start of the second half Fisher returned, but as a passenger. Yet, amazingly, the tide began to turn. Contested scrums were a major feature of the game in those days, and with experienced front rowers like Stan Owen and hooker, Walt Tabern, Leigh began to turn the screw.

As 'Leighite' of the Leigh Chronicle reported: 'Leigh, with 2-1 possession from the scrums, established a firm hold on the game and, despite having a cripple, gradually got within a point of the tourists'.

Fallon and Carlson traded penalties before Leigh began to turn their dominance into points; a stirring rally resulting in tries from wingman, Callaghan (65 minutes) and Hurt (69

minutes). Fallon's conversion of this last try made the score 16-17.

Leigh, now firmly on top, 'continued to have most of the play but the Aussies were grim defenders'.

After 76 minutes Leigh were awarded a penalty. Brian Fallon recalls that he was persuaded to kick for goal, though he felt it was a bit too far out. Eleven thousand nine hundred odd people held their breath, but then came a collective groan as the ball fell short and wide. Had Leigh's last chance gone?

However, there was one final twist to the plot. As the Leigh Journal reported: 'thrills followed thrills as the minutes ticked away on the

illuminated scoreboard clock' and then...

With the last play of the match Leigh worked a position in front of the Aussie posts. Brian Fallon modestly refuses to claim that it was a carefully worked move, but the little scrum half sent the striped ball soaring above the posts with the sweetest of drop kicks (two points). The Aussies claimed that the ball had gone far too high for the referee to be sure but Mr Davies simply turned to Fallon remarking, "what a cracking goal" before blowing the full-time whistle.

Over 60 years on I can still see the striped ball flying through the night sky, and there are many in Leigh who still share that memory.

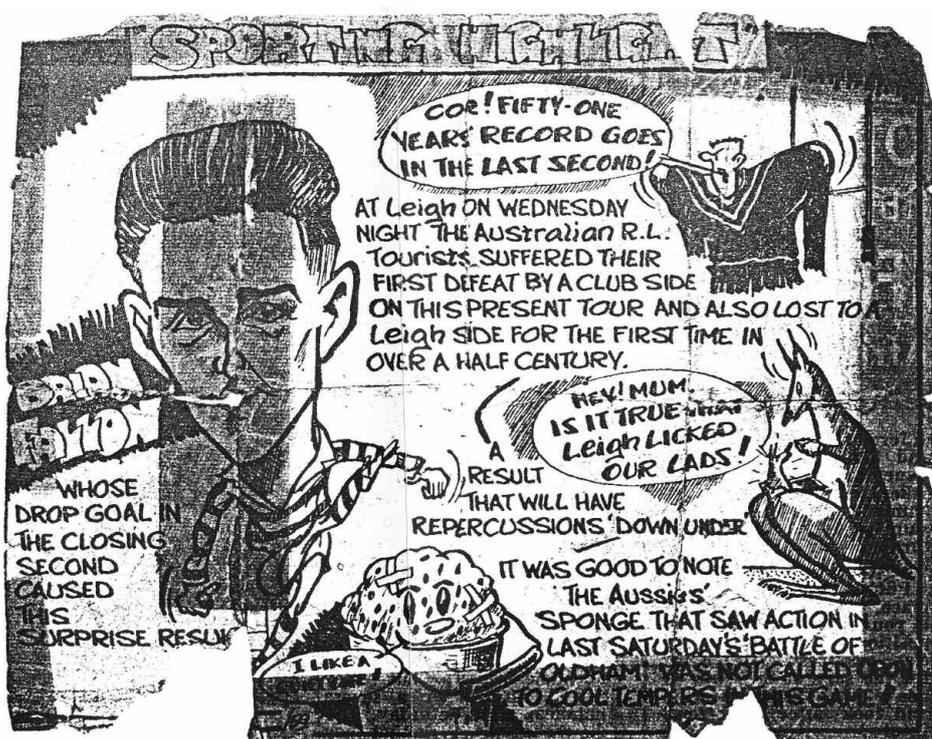
Reputedly the Aussies took their defeat well and later joined the hosts in the long-lamented Casino club in the centre of Leigh where, according to the next Leigh match programme, 'high jinks took place'. Perhaps we should leave it at that but the last word must go to 'Leighite' whose headline the next day read:

'AUSTRALIANS ANNIHILATED'

Well, perhaps a slight exaggeration, but as Leigh supporters will readily agree, we have to make the most of these occasions.

For the record, the Leigh team that appeared in that match were:

Davies, Callaghan B, Gibson, Fisher, Cartwright, Howard, Fallon, Owen, Tabern, Callaghan E, Hurt, Martyn and Dickens.



Bygone art. A celebratory cartoon.

By Dr. Stephen Craig Smith

# Wigan Mechanics' Institute

An early step on Wigan's road to Mining Education Excellence

Wigan's Mechanics' Institute is little talked about today, but it played a significant role in facilitating worker self-learning during much of the nineteenth century, and was the forerunner of the Wigan Mining and Mechanical School which, in its turn, evolved into the Wigan and District Mining & Technical College. What was the Mechanics' Institute, where was it located and what did it do for the Wigan community?

By the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution was advancing at a rapid pace, and many people migrated from rural areas in search of industrial work. Such work was generally focused in, and around, rapidly growing towns such as Wigan. These migrating rural workers became increasingly involved with operating machinery in mills, mines, and factories and the generic term 'mechanic' came into general usage to describe a labourer, an artisan, a tradesman, or a manual worker. Because elementary education only became compulsory through the Elementary Education Act of 1870, it is estimated that only around one in five of the nation's working population could read and write in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. (Tylecote, M., *The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire* before 1850, Manchester University Press, 1957.)

Some of the more enlightened members of the community began to recognise a pressing need to establish educational self-help opportunities for this rapidly growing urban based worker population, and this led to the formation of Mechanics' Institutes across Britain, especially between the 1820s and the 1860s. A Mechanics' Institute was a voluntary organisation designed to facilitate self-learning opportunities for manual workers. To achieve this objective its services were generally free of charge and operated in the evenings and at weekends when working people could attend. Ideally these institutes would have a



*Public Hall, King Street, Wigan*

library, a museum, and a laboratory, and offer public lectures on applied science and courses in various skills, but very few mechanics' institutes had all these facilities. Wealthy industrialists and mine owners, who felt that they would also benefit from having a more knowledgeable and skilled workforce, often made donations to institute running costs.

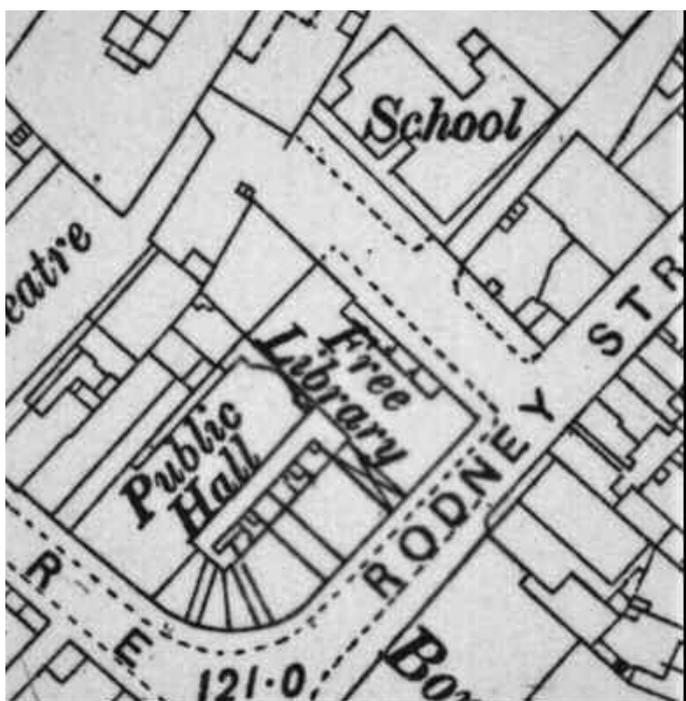
According to Tylecote, London opened its first Mechanics' Institute in 1823, Manchester followed in 1824 and Wigan founded its Mechanics' Institute in 1825, making it one of the earlier such institutes to be established. Where the Wigan Institute was housed in its early years is uncertain and it may well have lived a somewhat peripatetic existence using any suitable building available at the time.

The early life of the Wigan Mechanics' Institute was far from easy, 'the institute in Wigan, a town of 25,000 people in the eighteen forties, was reported to exist principally in name only in spite of support given by local M.P. Ralph Anthony Thicknesse.' (Tylecote, M.1957.) At the 1847 General Election, R.A. Thicknesse (1800-1854) was Wigan's first elected Whig M.P. and remained in

office until his death in 1854. He was philanthropic in nature, establishing a small free library, possibly attached to the Institute. (Blakeman, B., *The Thicknesse Family of Beech Hill*, Past Forward Issue 66, pp8-9.)

The Great Exhibition of 1851, housed in the Crystal Palace, London, engendered a greater national awareness of the need for more worker education, and many mechanics' institutes, including that at Wigan, began to enjoy greater general interest, popularity, and support. By early 1852, Wigan Town Council decided to build a Public Hall on King Street near the corner with Rodney Street. Whilst this was to be a general multipurpose public hall, it also became the home of the Mechanics' Institute with its library and newsroom. There were also to be two large rooms suited for concerts, balls, or public meetings. (Worrall's *Wigan and District Directory* 1881.)

Council requests were made for architect plans and drawings for such a building and by April 1852 the Council Committee responsible for the Public Hall project unanimously chose the plans submitted by architect Richard Lane of Manchester. Building tenders were received by July and Wigan Mayor, Nathaniel Eckersley, laid the Foundation Stone on Wednesday 11 August. (*Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*, 1852 Vol 15, p305.)



*The Public Hall on King Street on the 1894 25-inch O.S. Map*

An interesting Wigan mystery surrounds this Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony. It was common practice in the nineteenth century to place a selection of mementos below a foundation stone and this took place here. 'On the following Saturday night or early Sunday morning, the foundation stone was removed and a glass bottle containing a crown, a half-crown, a florin, a shilling, a sixpence, four penny pieces, a silver halfpenny piece and some copper coins, together with a number of papers and documents connected with the origin of the Public Hall were stolen. On Sunday morning the bottle was found broken in Darlington Street, about a quarter of a mile from the site of the building, and with it were found the papers that had been deposited therein. The thieves had lifted the covering stone and moved it to obtain possession of the bottle and the copper plate with which the bottle had been covered. The copper plate was found on the ground about a yard from the stone. Fortunately, the stone was uninjured, and an attempt had seemingly been made to restore it to its proper position.' (*Manchester Guardian*, 18 August 1852, page 7.)

This original architect's drawing shows a building in the 'Italian style' with the lower compartment being of stone and an upper compartment of stock brickwork, with stone quoins and dressings to windows. A flight of steps, 13 feet wide, led to a vestibule and the principal staircase. On the right was a library and newsroom and on the left was a committee room, and from the centre of the vestibule were doors leading to a large public room, 80 feet long by 40 feet wide, and 30 feet high. Over the library and newsroom was a large salon, 40 feet by 30 feet, for balls, public meetings, and lectures, etc. The space below the large room was designed specifically for the use of the Wigan Mechanics' Institute.

Building construction was completed by October 1853 and the Mechanics' Institute (which occupied the building for the next 30 years) held an inaugural opening soiree. A permanent home for the Mechanics' Institute could not have occurred at a more fortuitous time.

The 1851 Great Exhibition had led to more than

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just greater support of Mechanics' Institutes. Following the exhibition, the South Kensington Science and Art Department was created as a division of the Board of Trade, which advocated a national need for centres of learning outside London with an emphasis on the needs of local staple industries. Edward Cardwell (1813-1886), later to become Lord Cardwell (a prominent mine owner), discussed the desirability of fostering mining education in Wigan with the co-trustees of the Wigan Blue Coat School in early 1857. The trustees then in turn held talks with the directors of the Wigan Mechanics' Institute which already had some involvement in adult education and now enjoyed a permanent home.

It was from this meeting with the directors of the Wigan Mechanics' Institute in 1857 that the second oldest Mining School in the country was founded in Wigan - just six years after the establishment of the Royal School of Mines in 1851. The Wigan Mining and Mechanical School went on to play a significant part in providing mining and technical education in Wigan and enjoyed international recognition in just a few years - but that is another story.

## After word

The Mechanics' Institute continued playing its part in self-help education and enjoyed the use of the Public Hall for many years, delivering lectures, lending books and as a meeting place for discussion. In 1905 the Public Hall was eventually sold to Richard Rennick who converted the building into offices for the Wigan Examiner, and at some stage the ground-floor frontage was altered to incorporate shop units on each side of the original main entrance doorway. (Kelly's Directory of Wigan, 1905.) The newspaper closed in May/June 1961 after which the building seemingly remained unoccupied until its demolition in the 1970s. Modern buildings now stand on the site.

## Acknowledgements

Alex Miller and Kathryn Pass for research support, and Ron Hunt and Brian Cooper for supplying mechanics' institution information relating to the nineteenth century.

# Information for Contributors

We always welcome articles and letters for publication from both new and existing contributors.

If you would like to submit an article for **PAST FORWARD**, please note that:

- Publication is at the discretion of Editorial Team
- The Editorial Team may edit your submission
- Published and rejected submissions will be disposed of, unless you request for them to be returned
- Submissions may be held on file for publication in a future edition
- Articles must be received by the copy date if inclusion in the next issue is desired

## Submission Guidelines

- Electronic submissions are preferred, although handwritten ones will be accepted
- We prefer articles to have a maximum length of 1,000 words but please contact us if you would like to submit an article of a greater length
- Include photographs or images where possible – these can be returned if requested
- Include your name and address – we will not pass on your details to anyone unless you have given us permission to do so

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The Editor at **PAST FORWARD**,  
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Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

# Wigan Local History and Heritage Group: history and background information

Ann Catterall and I had been friends for over 20 years. We first met when Ann was doing a teacher training course at Wigan and Leigh College and I was one of her tutors. We discovered that we had many things in common, not least a love of history and particularly local history. Throughout the years we spent many hours researching local history down at the archives of Wigan Local Studies at the Museum of Wigan Life. There we met Rita Fell and she became one of our partners in crime, searching the catalogues for snippets of interesting information.

Once Ann retired our ambition was to set up a local history group to look at the people, industries, politics, and other aspects of industrial life that made up Wigan. We held our first meeting in September 2013 at Book-Cycle in Beech Hill, and we were delighted when over 15 people, including Rita, turned up for the meeting. Since then the group has gone from strength to strength. As well as having local speakers such as Alan Davies, with his vast knowledge of mining, and Yvonne Eckersley, with her knowledge of feminists and local industry, we had guest speakers from



*The finished statue commissioned by the Wigan Heritage and Mining Monument group.*

further afield. We also went on visits to other museums including: The People's History Museum at Manchester,

The North West Labour History Museum in Salford, and as far afield as The National Coal Mining Museum up in Wakefield.

Unfortunately, Ann took ill suddenly, and despite her tremendous courage, she died from cancer on 6 April 2015. We were all very shocked and upset. Right to the end Ann was discussing our projects and I promised her the group would carry on regardless, and that we would achieve our goal of getting a mining statue erected in Wigan.

We set up a Charity out of our history group which we named WHAMM (Wigan Heritage and Mining Monument); we had eight trustees including our MP, Lisa Nandy, and the Leader of Wigan Council, David Molyneux. We also had other members of the committee who helped with our fund raising. This took us over three years to accomplish. However, we achieved our goal with help from the people of Wigan, Brighter Borough money from local Councillors, and a very generous anonymous donation from a local benefactor. Our finest event was when Maxine Peake came to St. Michael's Church. This was a sellout. We had a marvellous evening and made over £4,000 for WHAMM. The statues of a miner, pit brow girl and young boy were unveiled during lockdown by the contractor, Stuart and myself. We are intending to have an official unveiling once the Covid Virus becomes more manageable.

The Local History and Heritage Group have still continued meeting, but I decided to resign as Chairperson because of other commitments. Luckily, two of our members, Clare and Paul Kenyon, agreed to take over the running of the group which has been a great success. What was once a cosy little group of friends has grown into a large society with a new dynamic web site, and with a huge following on social media. The group meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 7pm, at Wigan Cricket Club. Everyone is very welcome to come along; I am sure that you will enjoy our sessions.

*Sheila Ramsdale*

(President Wigan Local History and Heritage Group)

# BOXING DAY

BY JOHN ASPINALL

This year marks 25 years since the last 'proper' Boxing Day derby between the old Rugby League rivals, Wigan and St. Helens. The fixture dates back to 1905 and was played almost continuously (even during wartime) from 1908. For many years it was held at Knowsley Road, St. Helens with the reciprocal league game at Central Park, Wigan on Good Friday. In 1955 the pattern changed with the Boxing Day game being played at Wigan, which was the venue in alternate years thereafter.

As well as a major sporting occasion it was also a social event eagerly anticipated by many in the two communities. It was a chance to catch up with friends, relatives, old acquaintances, and exiles returning home for the Yuletide celebrations. The match crowd was always much bigger than average and local hostelries did a roaring trade. Christmas has never been quite the same since!

At the time, the Wigan club was at its peak after a decade of dominating Rugby League and widely recognised as the best rugby team (of either codes) in the world. The following spring brought the introduction of Super League and summer rugby (March to October) with its salary cap and full-time professionalism for all clubs. Wigan's eight year run of Challenge Cup victories ended at Salford and it marked the beginning of the end for the club's near monopoly of major domestic honours.

The Wigan side for the last Boxing Day league game included two ex-rugby union superstars in Scott Quinnell and Va'aiga Tuigamala. They proved to be the last in a long line of Welsh and Antipodean converts who had graced rugby league and the cherry and white colours – going back to Bert Jenkins, the Welsh centre who played and scored in 1905. A few weeks before the game, the Rugby Football Union had finally adopted professionalism and the flow of players started to go the other way.

For a rugby-mad baby-boomer like me, 1995 was also significant in another way. Although mobile phones were already around, only one person in seven in the UK had one. In that year, the term 'smartphone' entered the language and soon life was never to be the same again.

## Boxing Day: Past, Present and Future.

(Or, 'A Baby Boomer's Boxing Day.')

*Boxing Day blues are threatening anew  
With Wigan v. Saints no longer on view  
Central Park's buried and events move on  
Great times past. Now sadly long gone...*

*Christmas Day's over for another year  
The turkey hangover starting to clear  
Prospects aired as we made to the ground  
Kop End packed. Good cheer all around.*

*Tannoys blared out their shrill festive beats  
Turnstiles clicked merrily for bumper receipts  
Saints soon practising their melodious old chant  
Quickly drowned out. By the WI-GAN! rant.*

*Sidestepping, swerving, and shoving a lot  
Heading like bloodhounds for our favourite spot  
River Caves, Sullivan Bar, then Popular Side  
Here we go! Ready for the ride.*

*Finally slotted into our rightful places  
Stood shoulder to shoulder with familiar faces  
Dry humour...warm pie aroma...tribal song  
True Wigan nirvana. It's great to belong!*

*The Gladiators refrain saw a flurry of sleet  
Players trod gingerly to stay on their feet  
Both sides up for the ferocious start  
No quarter given. Straight from the heart.*

*Full cocktail of skills was soon on display  
Every facet, every player, having their say  
Intense and combative as derbies ever were  
Courage and wits. A spectacle to share.*

*Home crowd stunned by a brace of tries  
Clever kicks were the element of surprise  
Wigan claw back to regain some control  
First half over. It's certainly no stroll!*

Lights shone down through mist and gloom  
Steam billowed up from the engine room  
Saints just ahead and might shut the door  
Big effort needed. Crowd bayed for more.

A cherry and white tsunami began to flow  
But would it breach our resilient foe?  
Time running out in the mounting din  
Big climax delivered. As Lydon raced in.

Then off up the Lane to sink a few  
Relatives and friends mingled in the queue  
Banter was rife and glee filled the air  
Winter was deep. But we didn't care.

Royal Oak, Griffin or Bowling Green pub  
Fox and Goose, Millstone or Swinley Club  
The game replayed and lives laid bare  
News, tales, memories. All stored to share.

The vanquished trailed back over the Hill  
Each struggling to digest their bitterest pill  
Once more we'd avoided our innermost dread  
Xmas was complete. Happy New Year ahead!

Boxing Day now seems such a waste  
No rugby, no pub, no reason for haste  
It's th'internet or telly someone said  
Must be joking. Better off in bed.

I could lie for hours with a smile on my face  
Ferguson and Offiah - what balance and pace!  
Hampo's huge leaps and Botica's cool precision  
Skerrett and Platt. Re enforcement and collision.

Potter and Case gave toil and graft  
Gregory and Edwards direction and craft  
Goodway and Betts kept going for miles  
Deano's cruel tackles. Gill for the smiles.

Westy and Ellery were leaders supreme  
How lucky we were for such a great team....  
But suddenly I awake with a sickening thud  
Checkouts lined up. Where we once stood.

To the many past players (Saints and all!)  
You've all got a place at the Boxing Day Ball  
The occasion lives on in our mind's eye  
Thanks for memories. That money can't buy.

Nostalgia heightens at this time of year  
As favoured flashbacks magically appear  
With no live rugby in the Twixmas break  
We will remember! Another Boxing Day Wake.

Every generation will create its own fun  
Food for the anecdotes that run and run  
Ubiquitous technology is now the leisure king  
Comfort and compulsion. Not the real thing.

Derelict pubs and town centre demise  
Collateral damage from the monster's rise  
No need for community or a human face  
Our future reality. An existence in space.

Facebrick, Netflush and the Twaddle trend  
Instergripe, Skyr..... where will it end?  
'Essential modern aids' but spurious toxic brew  
So constructive ambiguity. A sceptic's way through.

What will 'tech' impose on us next?  
A world run by AI and automated text  
All contact through media with emotions relayed  
Knowing the score before the game's played.  
(It's Orwell's vision. Though a little delayed).

But let's put perspective into the debate  
Too much imagination could trivialise our fate  
Our lifestyles evolve as the choices grow  
Don't dwell grumpily. On with the show!

Phone boxes, coal fires and colourless TV  
No Google, no Catch Up and only BBC  
Today's not so depressing as it may seem  
Why crave Luxemburg. When we can stream?

Access to all is as wide as can be  
Everything on a screen for anyone to see  
If you think 'progress' is marching too fast  
There's always YouTube. To rekindle the past.

Then along comes Covid to strengthen the trend  
FaceTime and Zoom our new best friend  
Thankfully, technology helps ease the strife  
Like or loathe. A fact of life.

People are still about work, rest, and play  
Doing the same things but in a different way  
Boxing Day illustrates how times have changed  
Some things lost. But most are rearranged.

The present and future deserve their chance  
To play their part in life's long dance  
Though our history is a tonic for every fan  
Focus on them. While we still can!

Of course, each dimension fulfils a need  
When the wheel of life revolves at speed  
As the future shortens the past looms large  
Escapism for oldies. An opiate on charge.

# Memories of a Student's Holiday Job at Tyldesley Cooperative

By Malcolm Pearson



*Ford Thames Co-op Van (Wikipedia Creative Commons, Charles01)*

Being a Tyldesley 'lad' I attended Leigh Grammar School, after passing the 11 plus, until I was 18 years of age in 1965. On leaving school I did not wish to go on to full time further education and so was fortunate to land a Student Apprentice/ Management Trainee job at Electric Power Storage in Swinton (formerly Chloride), which allowed me to continue education whilst also working towards a career. As I took 'A' level exams, my term finished in May/June time. My new job did not start until September. I was, therefore, left with between two and three months of free time to fill. I took this opportunity to take a job and earn some cash! In those days I was fortunate to have learned to drive at 17 years of age and so, at 18, held a full driving licence. Therefore, a driving job would suit me nicely. Memory does not allow me to remember how I got it, but my Summer job came in the form of holiday relief driver at Tyldesley Co-op. The Co-op at the time operated a variety of vehicles in its fleet and I was to get to drive most of them.

A large part of my time was spent on the bakery vans. These were three battery electric delivery vehicles which, in effect, were milk float chassis with

van bodies built on to them and a roller shutter door at the rear.

Whilst the primary role of these was to distribute bread from door-to-door around the town, it did carry quite a responsibility. The operators were effectively door-to-door salesmen responsible for selling bread around the town and, on certain days, other confectionary items. So, taking cash, keeping 'sales records', and balancing the books were all part of this job. At the end of each day was a stock take of 'left over' bread and then a projection of sales for the next day, resulting in the placing of an order to the bakery for the next day's bread. Quite a responsibility for an 18 year old straight out of school! Once into the swing of it though, I quickly learned the tricks of the trade, such as where one could get away with supplying one of 'yesterday's loaves'. I was also amazed to find the debts held on the books, with a few customers paying a regular weekly amount to reduce their 'slate'. However, in a couple of cases the amount paid did not even cover bread supplied that week! Even I as a young lad could work out that that wasn't particularly profitable!

The day started by taking the van off charge at the garage in Primrose Street North and driving across the road to the bakery loading bay to load up with the day's bread order. Then off on to the round. There were three rounds to cover and I took a turn at each as the regular salesmen took their holidays, spending time with each learning the round and then taking over as their holidays came along. One round covered the north and west side of Tyldesley, taking in streets near to 'The Common', Lower Elliott Street, Shakerley Road, and 'Wimpey's'. The second round covered the south, taking in Astley Street, Princess Avenue, Astley, and Blackmoor. Whilst the third covered the east, taking in Manchester Road, Sale Lane, Lynton Road area, and Mosley Common. After 'doing the round' the day ended with cash up and placing the next day's bread order.

After covering the bread rounds came 'the big boys'. Tyldesley Co-op operated two Commer 'Walk-Thru', two ton payload vans which had a variety of uses.

I was in with 'the big boys'. Each of these two vehicles had a regular driver in Tommy and Ernie, and once again I spent time with both 'learning the ropes' before covering for their holidays. In addition to some general duties, each van serviced a fixed number of the Co-op shops in Tyldesley keeping them stocked. There were, from memory, 12 Co-op shops in Tyldesley which all needed to be serviced.

Typically, the day started around 7.30am at the garage, with a short manoeuvre across the yard to the dairy for each vehicle to load up with fresh milk for delivery to their respective list of shops, and then off to deliver it; hopefully with a 'cuppa' offered at one of the 'friendlier' calls. By the time we returned to Primrose Street North, the bread vehicles had left on their rounds and so we then reversed on to the bakery loading bay to load up with fresh bread for the stores. A similar pattern to milk then followed as we distributed bread to the various stores.

Following these two daily routines there were other activities to pursue on a less frequent basis. Each store had to have its weekly stock top-up from the warehouse in Primrose Street North, so I guess we must have done, more or less, a shop per day. As the warehouse supplied the shops locally so it needed to be restocked itself and that necessitated a weekly trip to the Co-op Distribution Centre in Manchester for a bulk warehouse restock. In between these routine and regular jobs were occasional 'special' requirements such as large items of furniture delivery from the furniture/hardware store at the top of Johnson Street. Although the hardware store had its own one ton Commer van some items were too large for it and so the big boys were called in.

On occasions, I was called in to drive the one ton van, which was a strange experience at first as the



*Commer Walk-Through Van (Wikipedia Creative Commons, Zandcee)*

driving position was ahead of the front axle and so the steered wheels were almost behind you. This van, painted black, was also used by funeral services but I am sure I do not need to go into detail on that and, needless to say, that was one operation I was not involved with!

Throughout this time at the Co-op, one of the highlights of being a 'young innocent' was to rush back from lunch to join up with other drivers and site workers in the yard canteen in Primrose Street North to listen intently to the stories of other drivers' 'experiences'.

My final duty was on the butcher's van; a Bedford chassis with a 'mobile shop' body built on to it. The van had a customer entrance to the rear with sliding doors. This enabled customers to step up inside the rear of the vehicle, where there was a counter across the van, on which was the obligatory side of stewing steak skewered to a butcher's wooden block, as in any butcher's shop. The butcher entered the service area from the driver's cab at the front of the vehicle, through a shelved area where meat was stored. From memory, no refrigeration!



1953 - Morrison Electricar - MVP 144 Bread Van, similar to those used in Tyldesley (Wikipedia Creative Commons, ozz13x)

Normally the butcher's shop was driven by a qualified butcher, but in my time, when he took his holidays, the stand-in butcher did not hold a driving licence, so my role was to act as chauffeur! This did not come without a couple of incidents. On one occasion I realised the driver's door had not closed fully and so, whilst travelling along Manchester Road, I decided to open the door slightly to slam it shut. What I did not take into consideration was that the doors were rear hinged and so, as I released the catch, the wind took the door from me and promptly smashed it into the side of the van, smashing the wing mirror in the process! On another

occasion, on a Saturday, being two young guys, we wanted to get home for football and so speeded our journey up somewhat. As we neared the end of our round we exited Sherriffs Drive onto Lawnswood Drive a little too fast. The sliding doors on the rear slid open, the stewing steak and butcher's block slid off the counter and into the middle of Lawnswood Drive. Needless to say, we pulled over, collected the steak off the road, dusted it off, and continued as if nothing had happened!

As I wrote this article it struck me, what an organisation Tyldesley Co-op was in such a small town. All needs were catered for, from food to clothing, furniture to funerals, along with door-to-door deliveries of bread, milk and meat, not forgetting the 'divi cheques' that could be cashed in at the Co-op offices above the shop complex on Elliott Street. Such an organisation, all a credit to the management of the day. I hope you enjoyed the read and apologise for any inaccuracies as the whole thing was from memory some 55 years on!

## THEO AND HIS MONSTERS - MICHAEL HOWARD

The Museum of Wigan Life is delighted to host this online talk on Thursday 17th December at 7pm.

Theodore Major (1908-1999) was a Wigan born artist. In 1994, five years before he died, Theodore wrote 'I am still busy painting – it's my only escape from all the cruelty in the world, but I must express it all in paint'. With incredible energy he produced around 300 extraordinary works, his 'Monster' paintings, into which he poured all the pain, anger, humour, frustration and love that had nourished a lifetime's dedication to his art.

Michael Howard is a writer and lecturer. He has written numerous books, including 'L.S. Lowry, A Visionary Artist' and 'Ghislaine Howard, the Human Touch'. He is currently working on a major publication dedicated to Theo, 'Walking on Fire'.

**Tickets are free and can be booked via Eventbrite.**

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/museum-of-wigan-life-31447221347>

# *The Weavers' Cottages in Twiss Green Lane, Culcheth*

**By Kath Graham & Marlene Nolan**

Although not on the 1838 tithe map, Hawthorne Cottage and its neighbour, Meadowcroft, are included on the schedule so were probably in the process of being built at the time. The owner of Plots 272 and 271 was Thomas Ellames Withington, but the cottages were almost certainly erected as tied cottages and were rented to James Green, a gamekeeper, and Joseph Fearnhead, a gunsmith.

James Green, his wife and six children resided in Plot 272 which was to become number 36, later number 48 Twiss Green Lane, and sometime later Hawthorne Cottage. Plot 272 was listed as house and garden, arable, and three of James' sons were recorded as labourers and one of his daughters a silk weaver. Joseph Fearnhead lived next door in Plot 271 with his wife and family, including his sons who were also gunsmiths. This cottage was later renamed Meadowcroft and is number 46 Twiss Green Lane.

The 1841 census gives us a bit more information. James Green, the gamekeeper, is aged 40, his wife Alice is aged 45, his three older sons: John, aged 20, William, aged 20 and Richard, aged 15, were all labourers and his eldest daughter, Betty, was aged 15 and a silk weaver. His two younger sons were James, aged nine, and Peter, aged six, and all the family were born in the county. Intriguingly, next door to James Green is William Askew, incorrectly recorded by the enumerator as Askew William, a wheelwright living with his family. Next door to William is James Fearnhead, aged 45, a gunsmith, with Martha Fearnhead, aged 45, Thomas Fearnhead, aged 20, and John Fearnhead, aged 15, both gunsmiths, with younger siblings, George Fearnhead, aged 14, Joseph Fearnhead, aged 10, Martha Fearnhead, aged 8, and Henry Fearnhead, aged 6, all born in Lancashire. The cottage inhabited by the Askew family does not appear on the tithe map of 1838.

By 1851 James Green has left and Rebecca Broadhurst is living at number 36 with members of her family. Rebecca, the daughter of John and Ann Broadhurst, had been born in 1807 in Culcheth, the eldest of five children. In 1841, her father John is recorded as living in Twiss Green with his son John although Rebecca was not living with them. The 1851 census then records Isaac Warburton, a silk handloom weaver, as living next door to Rebecca, with Joseph Fearnhead next to them.

By 1861 the three cottages have become two, with the middle cottage perhaps becoming part of one of the other cottages. John Broadhurst, Rebecca's brother, is living at number 36 whilst James Fearnhead, son of Joseph, is living next door. These two families will remain neighbours for, at least, the next 30 years.



*Hawthorne Cottage*

In 1901 James Broadbent has taken over the tenancy of his father's cottage and James Fearnhead, now aged 73, is living in the adjoining house with his daughter.

In 1911 the property is recorded as 36 Twiss Green Lane and Thomas Broadhurst is living there with his son, Edwin. The property is recorded as having five rooms, probably three bedrooms and kitchen and living room downstairs.

In 1919 Thomas Broadhurst buys the property from the estate of Thomas Ellames Withington for £205 and Thomas and Ann Broadhurst continue to live there until his death in 1936, after which Ann continues to live there alone. The cottage was probably still very basic when the Broadhursts bought the property in 1919 but they did make one significant change when they installed electricity in 1928. Before this their only source of lighting would have been oil lamps.

In May 1936, only three months after her husband's death, Ann also dies and the property is bought by Mary Farrington. We do not know why the property is bought by Mary rather than her husband, John, as he is definitely living there when the Register was taken in 1939 (the Register was taken so that government could allocate ration books). She is recorded as a retired fruiterer and he as a retired carter. When Mary died in 1962 the property is listed as 48 Twiss Green Lane for the first time on official documents.

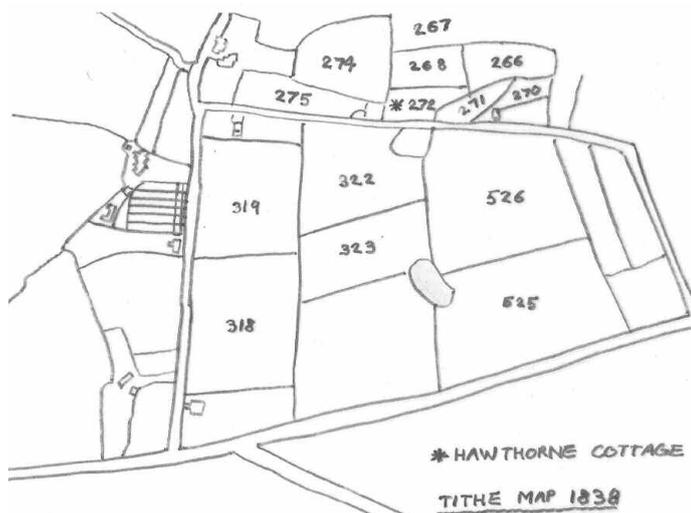
Mary appears to have willed the property to her next door neighbours, the Masons, who then rent it out to Mrs and Mrs Bolton. They continue to live there with their daughter, Sue,

until 1983 when Sue Clothier and her husband buy the property and add a two storey extension. This extension, which included a lounge downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs, changed the façade of the original property which now looks very different from the five room dwelling of 1911. Sue remembers visiting the cottage as a child. She remembers the front door being in the corner of what is now her dining room and seeing Mr and Mrs Farrington then, very infirm, in what was then the living room. Mrs Farrington was in bed facing the front of the house and Mr Farrington, then blind, would be reclining on a chaise facing the fireplace. What is now part of the kitchen would, before the alterations, have been one long room, originally used to store cloth woven in the cottage, or as the weaving shed where the cloth was produced. The original stairs are now long gone but Sue thinks that they were in the corner of the kitchen with a removable side to facilitate the movement of the finished bales of cloth.

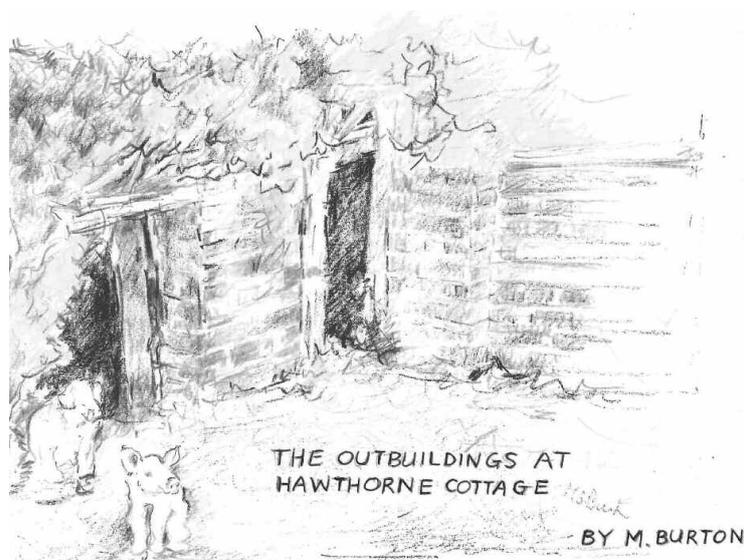
The cottage has seen many changes over the last 150 years: extensions to the original property, selling off some of the land and becoming more enclosed when other buildings were erected around it. However, the ambience of the cottage has remained very much the same and I am sure that if John Broadhurst, born in the village in 1776, were to come back today he would feel at home there. His family, after all, had lived in the cottage for around 100 years, each generation adding something to the cottage.

In the garden some of the original outbuildings remain. There is what would have been an earth closet with what would possibly have been the pigsty attached.

Number 46 was also originally owned by the Withington Estate and rented out to tenants until the house was bought by Mrs M J Hampson on 7 November 1919 for the sum of £230. Mrs Hampson only inhabited the cottage for a year before selling to a Mr James Merrick. Mr Merrick then remained in the cottage for nearly 40 years when he must have died as Mrs Belshaw, to whom the cottage must have passed, sold the house to Mrs and Mrs A.S. Mason in 1957. This couple were to inherit the adjoining cottage in 1962 on the death of Mary Farrington. Mr Mason, a professional engineer, along with his wife then sold the property to its present owner, Mr A.W. Mercer.



*Tithe Map 1838*



It has been quite difficult to trace the two properties from 1838, when they appear on the tithe map, until the present day and both the current owners have been extremely generous in allowing us to look at all the original documents they hold for the two houses.

The puzzle remains as to the outline of the two properties in the mid nineteenth century. However, in 1838 only two properties are shown on the tithe map, yet two years later, while the Green and Fearnhead families are still living in the cottages they do not appear to be next door to each other. Another family, William Askew, a wheelwright, his wife and seven children are listed as living in a separate property between the two.

By 1851 James Green has moved to a farm in another part of Culcheth and the Broadbents are now living in Hawthorne Cottage and Isaac Warburton, his brother and two sisters have taken over the tenancy from William Askew. Both the Broadbents and Warburtons are silk handloom weavers while Joseph Fearnhead is still a gunmaker. Ten years later the Broadbents and the Fearnheads are now listed as directly adjoining each other, so what happened to the property in between? There could never have been three separate cottages but that is how the enumerators for the 1841 and 1851 census returns recorded them. Meadowcroft, however, was always the larger cottage and during the 1840s and 1850s must have been split in some way as to form two separate dwellings. How this was done is not clear but the information from the census certainly records three dwellings rather than two dwellings, one of which is inhabited by two families.

We shall never know the answer, but it is interesting to speculate how the cottages looked at that time and how the people who lived there spent their time in and around Culcheth.

With thanks to:

Mrs Clothier and Mr Mercer for their generous help with the background information for this article.

Morag Burton for the sketch of the outbuildings

*Please note that events listed may be cancelled and groups may not be meeting in light of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Please check with event organisers for further information before attending.*

## **Aspull and Haigh Historical Society**

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month at Our Lady's RC Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull from 2pm to 4pm.

All are welcome, contact Barbara Rhodes for further details on 01942 222769.

## **Atherton Heritage Society**

Please note – From 2019 the meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of the month.

Meetings begin at 7.30pm in St. Richards Parish Centre, Mayfield St. Atherton.

Visitors Welcome – Admission £2, including refreshments. Contact Margaret Hodge on 01942 884893.

## **Billinge History and Heritage Society**

Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at Billinge Chapel End Labour Club at 7.30pm.

There is a door charge of £2.

Please contact Geoff Crank for more information on 01695 624411 or at Gcrank\_2000@yahoo.co.uk

## **Culcheth Local History Group**

The Village Centre, Jackson Avenue. Second Thursday of each month.

Doors open 7.15pm for 7.30pm start.

Membership £10, Visitors £3 Enquiries: Zoe Chaddock – 01925 752276 (Chair)

## **Hindley & District History Society**

Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.00pm at Tudor House, Liverpool Road, Hindley.

Please contact Mrs Joan Topping on 01942 257361 for information.

## **Leigh & District Antiques and Collectables Society**

The society meets at Leigh RUFC, Beech Walk, Leigh.

New members are always welcome and further details available from Mr C Gaskell on 01942 673521.

## **Leigh Family History Society**

The Leigh & District Family History Help Desk is available every Monday afternoon (except Bank Holidays) from 12.30pm to 2.30pm, at Leigh Library.

There is no need to book an appointment for this Help Desk. Monthly meetings held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month (except July, August and December), contact Mrs G McClellan (01942 729559).

## **Lancashire Local History Federation**

The Federation holds several meetings each year, with a varied and interesting programme. For details visit [www.lancashirehistory.org](http://www.lancashirehistory.org) or call 01204 707885.

## **Skelmersdale & Upholland Family History Society**

The group meets at Upholland Library Community Room, Hall Green, Upholland, WN8 0PB, at 7.00pm for 7.30pm start on the first Tuesday of each month; no meeting in July, August and January. December is a meal out at The Plough at Lathom.

For more information please contact Bill Fairclough, Chairman on 07712766288 or Caroline Fairclough, Secretary, at [carolinefairclough@hotmail.com](mailto:carolinefairclough@hotmail.com)

## **Wigan Civic Trust**

If you have an interest in the standard of planning and architecture, and the conservation of buildings and structures in our historic town, come along and meet us. Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.30pm. The venue is St George's Church, Water Street, Wigan WN1 1XD. Contact Mr A Grimshaw on 01942 245777 for further information.

## **Wigan Archaeological Society**

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, at 7.30pm at the Bellingham Hotel, Wigan on the first Wednesday of the month (except January and August). There is a car park adjacent on the left. Admission is £2 for members and £3 for guests.

For more information call Bill Aldridge on 01257 402342. You can also visit the website at [www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk](http://www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk)

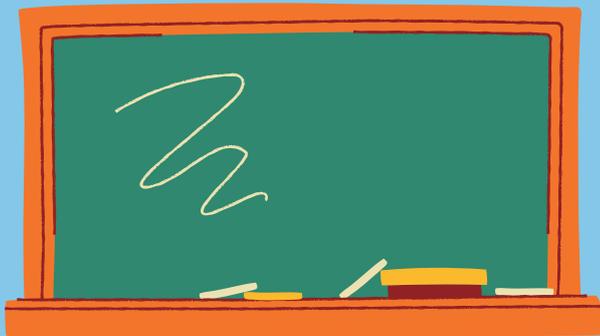
## **Wigan Family and Local History Society**

We meet on the second Wednesday at 6.45pm, at St Andrews Parish Centre. Please contact [wigan.fhs@gmail.com](mailto:wigan.fhs@gmail.com) to find out more information. Attendance fees are £2.50 per meeting for both members and visitors. Our aim is to provide support, help, ideas and advice for members and non-members alike. For more information please visit, [www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory/](http://www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory/) or see us at our weekly Monday help desks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

## **Wigan Local History and Heritage Society**

We meet on the second Monday of each month, with a local history themed presentation starting at 7.15pm in The Function Room at Wigan Cricket Club. Doors open at 6:30pm. Members, £2.50, Visitors, £3.00 per meeting. For more information please contact us <https://www.facebook.com/wiganhistoryandheritage/>

As we prepare to open our brand new space in Leigh Town Hall in 2021, we are looking for people to join our amazing team of Volunteers to help make it a success!



## **OUR ROLES ARE VARIED**

and include things such as supporting our education sessions as Learning Volunteer.

## **OR HELPING TO GREET VISITORS**

as a Visitor Engagement Volunteer and helping to show them some of the amazing local history on display.



## **FOR MORE INFORMATION ON VOLUNTEERING OR TO APPLY**

Please contact [Jilly.McKiernan@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:Jilly.McKiernan@wigan.gov.uk) or visit:  
<https://www.wbcommunitypartnership.org/volunteer-heritage-culture-and-leisure/>

