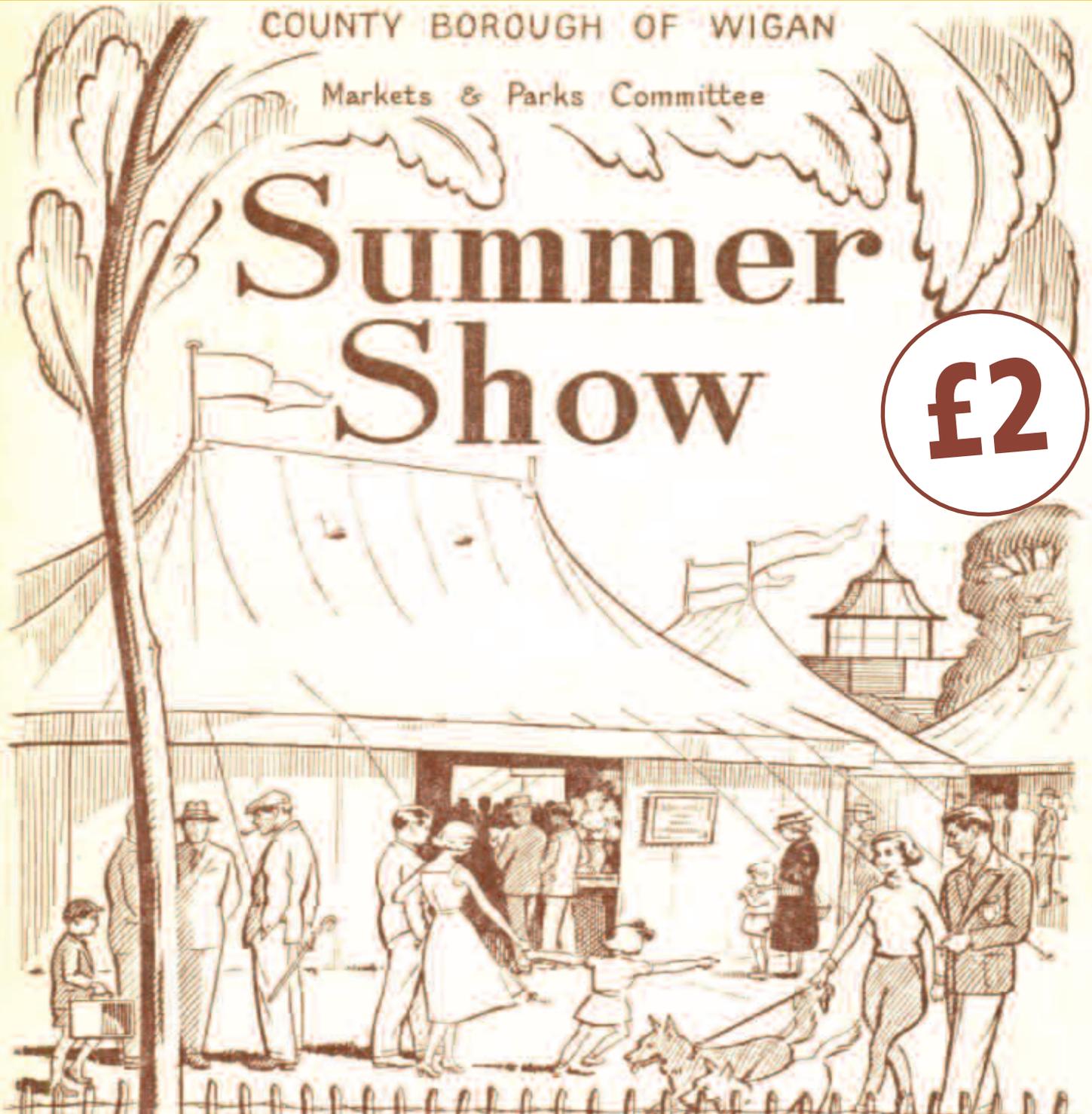


# PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Archives & Museums

Issue No. 76

August-November 2017



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**FRONT COVER**

*Summer Show poster 1957*

# Letter from the Editorial Team

## Welcome to our summer edition, PAST Forward 76!

Our new edition is packed full of fascinating historical reading, whether you are heading for the beach or relaxing at home. Michael Caine takes a look at a subject somewhat hidden from history – often by several feet of dirt – in examining how the Victorians began dealing a major problem of the first consumer age: rubbish. With the school holidays upon us, we remember the history of Shevington Community Primary and a fondly remembered schoolmistress at Wigan Grammar. Leigh Soroptimists celebrate 70 years of service in the local area and we introduce cartoons to Past Forward thanks to one of our Archive volunteers, Chris Murphy, who has taken inspiration from our historic photographic collection to give a new take on working life in Wigan.

Thanks to the continued generosity of Mr and Mrs O'Neill, our essay competition is back for 2017. We receive some wonderful submissions and look forward to reading this year's entries – please see the opposite page for details and don't delay in sending your articles in to us!

We are saddened to let readers know about the recent deaths of two local historians and Archive volunteers, Gordon Rigby and Bob Evans. Both Gordon and Bob made wonderful contributions to our services over many years, helping us publish books, countless Past Forward articles and many hours of work documenting and preserving our collections. They will be much missed by everyone who knew them and all our thoughts are with their families.

Correction: Readers may have noticed a printing mistake in the last edition of the magazine, concerning Sheila Ramsdale's article, 'Irish Immigration in Wigan'. The editorial team would like to offer our apologies to Sheila for the mistake, and to Ted Dakin, for mixing up part of a previous article of his.

# PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

## Copy Deadline for Issue 77

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Monday 16th October 2017.

### Past Forward Subscription

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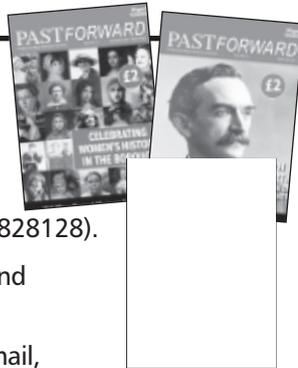
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# Write 1000 words - Win £100!

*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 why not take part in Wigan Borough Environment and Heritage Network's Local History Writing Competition?*

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- 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 Wigan Borough Environment & Heritage Network, Essay Competition 2016*

### 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 Monday 2 October 2017.
- 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](mailto:pastforward@wigan.gov.uk)

OR

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

# THE LANCASHIRE & CHESHIRE MINERS' PERMANENT RELIEF SOCIETY

ESTABLISHED 1872

## 'A FRIEND FOR LIFE...'

BY MOLLY HILTON

On 21 December 1910, the third worst mining disaster in British history took place at Hulton Colliery in Greater Manchester.<sup>1</sup> A mere four days before Christmas Day, families across Westhoughton suffered the devastating loss of 344 men and young boys to the Pretoria Pit explosion, the youngest aged only thirteen. As can be imagined the town's grief was colossal, with almost everyone losing someone they knew or loved. Heavy family death tolls were not uncommon and in addition to the emotional distress, economic hardship consequently prevailed. The harsh reality of the situation was that families lost, in some cases, their only wage-earners.

This left many spiralling into poverty, enduring an even lower standard of living than before. Sympathising with the victims of the accident, the Mayor of Bolton established *The Hulton Colliery Explosion Fund* shortly after, with £140,000 being raised immediately following the disaster to be given to the bereaved families. All but eleven of the deceased were members of The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society (LCMPRS),<sup>2</sup> and they adopted an active role in the Mayor's fund. They carried out much of the administration for the fund, including visiting the families, checking if there were any issues, familial or economic, and acting as their advocate requesting extra help from the fund. They provided money came in the form of one-off lump sums, or annual payments spanning many decades, often only ceasing if a widow remarried or children secured work.

The General Secretary of the fund played a key role in securing relief for almost all of the families affected.

The Lancashire and Cheshire Miner's Permanent Relief Society understood the mining community and took a particularly personal interest in the families, protecting not just their economic interests, but also their physical, emotional, social, and mental concerns. The advocate for the victims stated the '*moral responsibility*'<sup>3</sup> resting upon the Hulton Fund for the care of the children in particular and he pleaded the relief cases of hundreds of families, which extended further than simply an annual benefit. To illustrate the extent of the funds work, several requests were made enquiring about the education of some of the children, pleading with the Mayor's fund to support the families with tuition fees, clothing, books, and transport expenses.

The fund also extended its generosity beyond economic maintenance, furthermore covering healthcare and state-of-mind concerns. Southport Convalescent Hospital, which already typically accommodated the poor from crowded manufacturing districts,<sup>4</sup> was a regular place of rest and recuperation for most of the families. The Lancashire and Cheshire Miner's Permanent Relief Society covered the costs of such trips.

The efforts of The Lancashire and Cheshire Miner's Permanent Relief Society can be interpreted in such a way to demonstrate the way in which the fund nurtured the children in particular, adopting a father-figure role, in place of the paternal guidance they had lost. The society rarely closed cases and continued to provide assistance throughout the lives of the dependents.

One such case was that of the Ecclestone orphans. James Ecclestone left a widow and three children behind on 21 December. The Fund, supported them for many years to come, providing relief in many different forms. The children especially were afforded a significant amount of assistance in terms of their education. In 1913, whilst the family were already receiving an annuity, Mrs Ecclestone pleaded with the Fund to finance the schooling of eldest daughter, Annie, in order for her to pursue her desire to become a school teacher. With little hesitation, the society agreed to this, later increasing the relief to 7/- per week in order to supplement book and clothing costs. The fund demonstrated an exceptionally understanding nature when two years later, Annie decided she would "probably be more likely to succeed by taking commercial subjects rather than by taking the ordinary teachers' course"<sup>5</sup> and therefore requested the funding of another set of school fees, which the Mayor also agreed to. Nevertheless, the Fund's generosity was not wasted as Annie later went on to uphold the position of a lady clerk in Leigh and the Fund were able to provide Annie with a decent start in life, something which most likely would have otherwise been denied to her with the loss of her father. Her two younger brothers, Jack and Harold were also granted access to a higher standard of education than they would have been able to afford without the fund.

In 1918, the family suffered a further colossal loss when the mother, Mrs Ecclestone died and the children were taken in by their grandmother, Mrs Collier. LCMPRS did not desert the family at this point, but instead visited the family regularly, becoming more involved than ever before. The annual grant was also passed onto the grandmother and noticing her deteriorating condition, the fund pleaded with the Mayor for an increase in weekly payments to cover the cost of keeping house and affording the nourishment necessary for recovery.

For decades to come, the Fund watched over the Ecclestone family, like many others much the same. Offering grants, guidance, patience and to some extent, affection for the children in particular. The

families could be seen growing and benefiting in many different ways from the work of the Relief Society. In correspondence to the Mayor of Bolton, the General Secretary epitomised the work of the Fund and the circumstances of the children when he referenced the youngest Ecclestone sibling's need for assistance; "*there is a grave and serious responsibility upon somebody to take an interest in these young people and to give them a helping hand. I hope that in the disposal of the surplus which appears to be expected from the valuation of the Hulton Fund not taking place, that the position of all the Hulton children will receive sympathies and generous consideration.*"<sup>6</sup>

The Hulton children were a community within itself and although they suffered the most devastating of tragedies at such a young age, they were also provided with opportunities and advantages that may have otherwise been denied of them had it not been for the generosity of the Hulton Colliery Explosion Relief Fund, and most significantly the affection and kindness of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society in being the advocate for their needs and requests.

*Molly Hilton is a student at Lancaster University. The records of the LCMPRS were catalogued, indexed and digitised as part of the Counting the Cost Project, supported by The Wellcome Trust.*



*The scene at Hulton Colliery in the aftermath of the disaster, 21 December 1910*

1. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-12010223](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-12010223)
2. [www.lan-opc.org.uk/Westhoughton/Pretoria/pretoria.html](http://www.lan-opc.org.uk/Westhoughton/Pretoria/pretoria.html)
3. Lancashire & Cheshire Permanent Relief Society, Peter Green File, 26 November 1928, Addressed to the Town Clerk.
4. [www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/searchdetail.aspx?id=8995](http://www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/searchdetail.aspx?id=8995)
5. LCMPRS, Ecclestone family file, addressed to the Town Clerk, 1 August 1916
6. LCMPRS, Ecclestone family file, addressed to the Town Clerk, 15 March 1930

BY MICHAEL CAINE

# WHERE THERE'S MUCK, THERE'S BRASS!

## The Rise and Demise of the Midnight Mechanics

*A look at Ashpit and Nightsoil Removal in Victorian and Edwardian Leigh*

In common with other towns and cities throughout Great Britain, the Industrial Revolution saw Leigh change from a largely agricultural, market town to a place of mines, mills, railways, works and foundries. New jobs were created and people moved into the area, settling down and starting families. The population of the three townships that were to form the Leigh UDC of 1875, saw a quadrupling from 6,546 in 1811 to 28,702 in 1891; and then again a 40% increase to 40,001 in 1901.

While the majority of the population was far from wealthy, there was one commodity that was essential, cheap and plentiful, used for warmth, cooking and boiling hot water for cleaning and washing – house coal. Each morning the coal hearths were cleared of ash and cinders, to go on the (often communal) ashpit. Accompanying the ashpit was the privy, where folk went to do their toilet, producing the euphemistically named, 'nightsoil'.

Additionally, it was the place where virtually all the household rubbish ended up: any food waste, bones, broken crockery, old clothing, worn out shoes and clogs, bottles and containers. Dr. Quince's Patent ashbins were in use by 1890 but only the well-off had these. Whilst there was money back on most bottles, either a farthing or a ha'penny, people were much the same then as today. When times and wages were good, they didn't penny pinch, and beer, spirit, mineral water bottles and all manner of returnable glass and stoneware containers ended up in the ashpit. The late nineteenth century and the Edwardian era had seen a remarkable rise in the use of glass and stone containers of all kinds as production costs eased and a

multitude of commodities were produced and purchased – pickles, preserves and potted meats, medicines, poisons, inks, toothpastes, pomades, cold creams, furniture varnish, grate blacking, tinned goods – aided by widespread advertising. The first real consumer age had begun.

The disposal of Ashpit Refuse and Nightsoil was a major problem for the local District Councils, for reasons of health, hygiene and the prevention of nuisances. A system was devised to ensure its safe removal and disposal. The Public Health Act of 1846 had seen the emergence of the post of the 'Inspector of Nuisances'. Further Acts in 1875 and 1890 placed duties and responsibilities upon local authorities, and the Sanitary Inspector emerged, as did the Town Medical Officer. Consequently Leigh had a system of refuse disposal in place by the early 1890s at least.

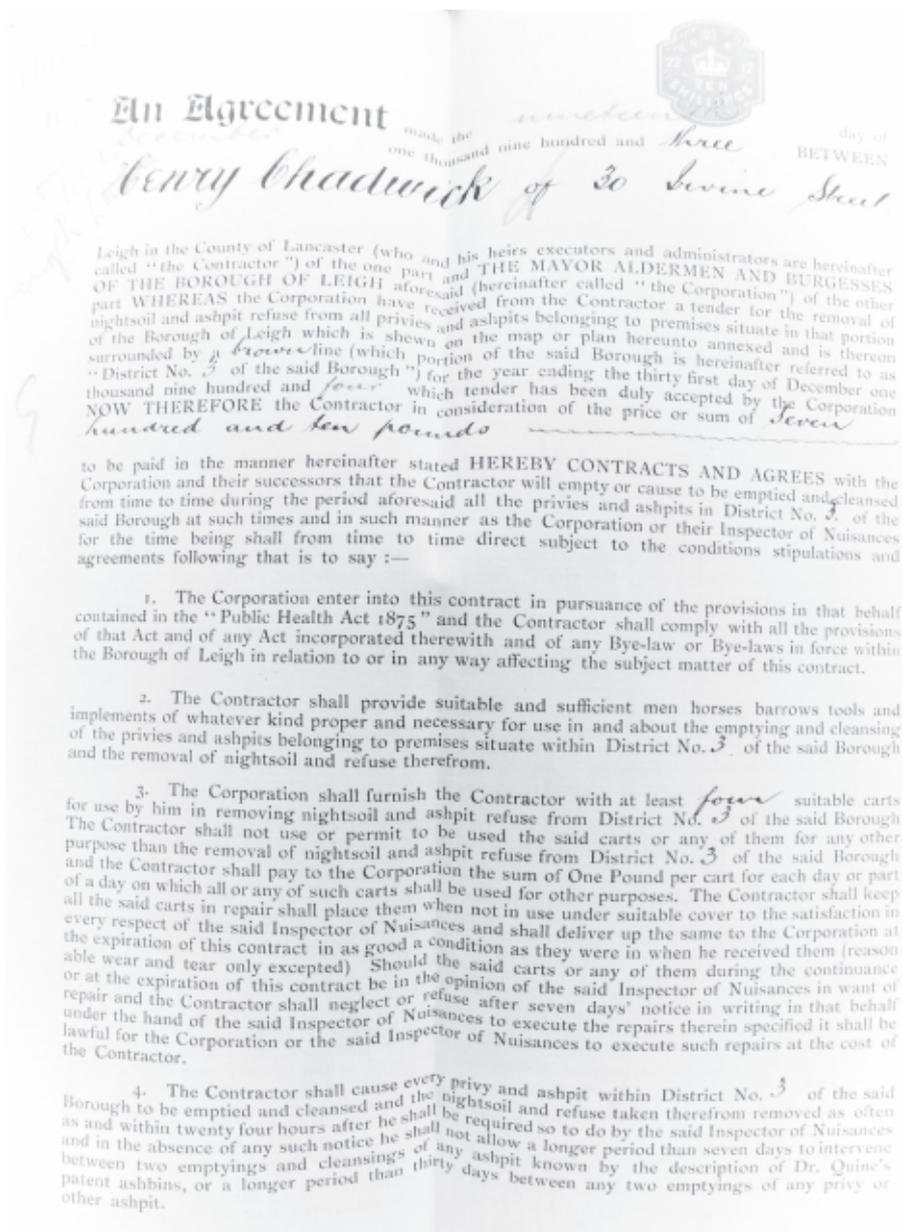
As Leigh grew, new terraced streets were erected. A vigorous Council saw the modernisation and health of the town as a prerequisite for prosperity, developing a systematic contractor based system for ashpit and nightsoil removal with oversight by the Inspector of Nuisances and governed by legal contract. The town was divided into four districts and tenders were sought for contractors to work the areas, with specific streets named in many cases. The four districts were recorded as having a total of 3,135 ashpits in 1896, requiring 12,238 cartloads in the calendar year. The Council also offered a site for disposal – the recently developed Sewage Farm, which stretched from Charity Farm and Bonnywell Farm to Pennington Brook by Hope Carr Hall Farm. Contractors could also dispose of refuse for their own use or profit. If they were farmers



*Bottles, Albert R Dootson, Leigh*

they could improve their own land by filling in ponds or marshy places and indeed farmers were in the forefront for tendering. Of the sixteen tenders for 1897-98 at least six were farmers and it could indeed be a profitable business.

James Farrington of Chadwick's Farm, Pickley Green, received £204 for one contract for part of Westleigh (approximately £24,275 in today's terms). Thomas Pickles of 62 Bold Street, had a larger contract for Number 3 district at £950 for the year 1900. This was the most populous part of Leigh and included the town centre; in modern money, it equates to some £113,000! Not to be sniffed at. A contractor for many years in all four areas was John Wardle of Orchard Lane. In 1894-1895 he earned £987. By 1897, he was still contracted for all four districts, but now at a total of £1,420. He did point out in 1897 that he had to pay £19 a month for hired horse labour, plus a £12 a year lease to Lord Lilford and two other leases of £2 a year for his tipping sites. He also noted that the new contract conditions meant that half of his work was 'night work'. Not all contractors made such money but even a small contract could net £120. That was



*Contract made between Henry Chadwick and the Leigh Corporation, 1903*

pretty good going for what would be a part time job, whereas Thomas Pickles and the John Wardle were most likely full time contractors. Wardle nonetheless assured the Council that, 'I have not got rich out of the job'. Working with and for the Council could be rewarding.

The Council issued detailed contracts with numerous provisions and strict requirements. The contractor had to provide the workmen, horses, tools and implements for the 'emptying and cleaning of the privies and ashpits... and the removal of nightsoil and refuse therefrom'. Importantly they had to use the Corporation's own carts, specially built after a tender process. In 1899, the tender for such carts was won by W Glover and Sons

of Warwick, who could supply 225 gallon capacity tumbler carts at £23 each. This was the lowest of several tenders. The local firm Allred's of King Street were asked to tender but wrote that they could not build the number of carts needed in the time allowed.

Henry Chadwick of 30 Irvine Street was required 'to be furnished with at least four suitable carts' for his £710 contract for District No 3 in 1903. If they were used for any other purpose he was to pay the Corporation £1 per day per cart. Maintenance of the carts was insisted on and was checked by the Inspector of Nuisances. Ashpits were to be emptied at least monthly and patent ashbins weekly. No gratuities were allowed from residents. The contractor was however allowed

to recycle the refuse and nightsoil for his own profit and where this didn't happen a tip or place at the Sewage Farm would be provided. The tipping at the Sewage Farm continued until 1932.

The work was well paid, at least for the contractor, but it was hard work: dirty, smelly, unpleasant and anti-social. The ashpits and privies had to be emptied by shovel into the backs and then shovelled again onto the cart, specially built so it would not leak! This was done through the hatchways in the back walls of the privies, some of which can be seen to this day. Any spillage had to be cleaned up within one hour and then disinfected (supplied by the Council) put down. All work was to be completed by 'Eight o'clock in the Forenoon', i.e., it was 'night work'. Thus the term the 'Midnight Mechanics' was coined, although the contractor was getting the coin.

This system suited both the Council/Corporation, the Contractors, householders and anyone who wanted their land levelling or building up. The Inspector of Nuisances supervised and checked, particularly where spillage occurred and reacted to complaints about smells from tips, which had to be periodically covered and disinfected to keep smells and flies down. The Council improved 'The Land Liable To Floods' by Pennington Brook near the Greyhound, preventing flooding, while Etherstone Hall Farm was a prime example of improved farmland.

The system, along with the Public Health Acts, signalled the end of unrestricted building, and saw the demise of back to back housing, as Councils insisted upon strict building regulations with each street or terrace having an accessible back passage. It meant the street pattern of all our



*Urmston's and Dootson's bottles*

# WHERE THERE'S MUCK, THERE'S BRASS! cont.

towns and cities took on a distinctive pattern with backs running parallel to the streets.

By the 1930s however, Corporations were using their own 'Dustbin Lorries' and Direct Work Forces, as the volume of refuse continued to rise, particularly from firms and businesses, and economies of scale were needed. Greater efficiency and control were also necessary. Most importantly, nightsoil removal had ceased to be an issue once town councils had laid adequate sewers, provided running water, houses were equipped with water closets, and bins were provided for ash and rubbish. The need for the Midnight Mechanics had gone. Rubbish could be collected in the daytime. Leigh Corporation started tipping at the East and South shores of Pennington Flash. The time of the Midnight Mechanics was over.

Capped with clay and grazed on, the old tip sites of Victorian and Edwardian times became pasture and often arable land, despite what lay beneath! Over the years the old tips were forgotten, until in the early 1970s when 'dump digging' became first a craze, then a serious hobby which survives to this day. Such sites in Leigh were the old council sewage farm near the Greyhound, the filled in moat at Brick House Farm down Breaston Avenue, the site of the Sixth Form College by Etherstone Hall Farm and the dump used by the German First World War prisoners held at Lilford Mill. Such places are now dug out or under developments such as Leigh Sports Village, or Leigh Business Park. Others remain hidden, their locations lost and possibly built on.

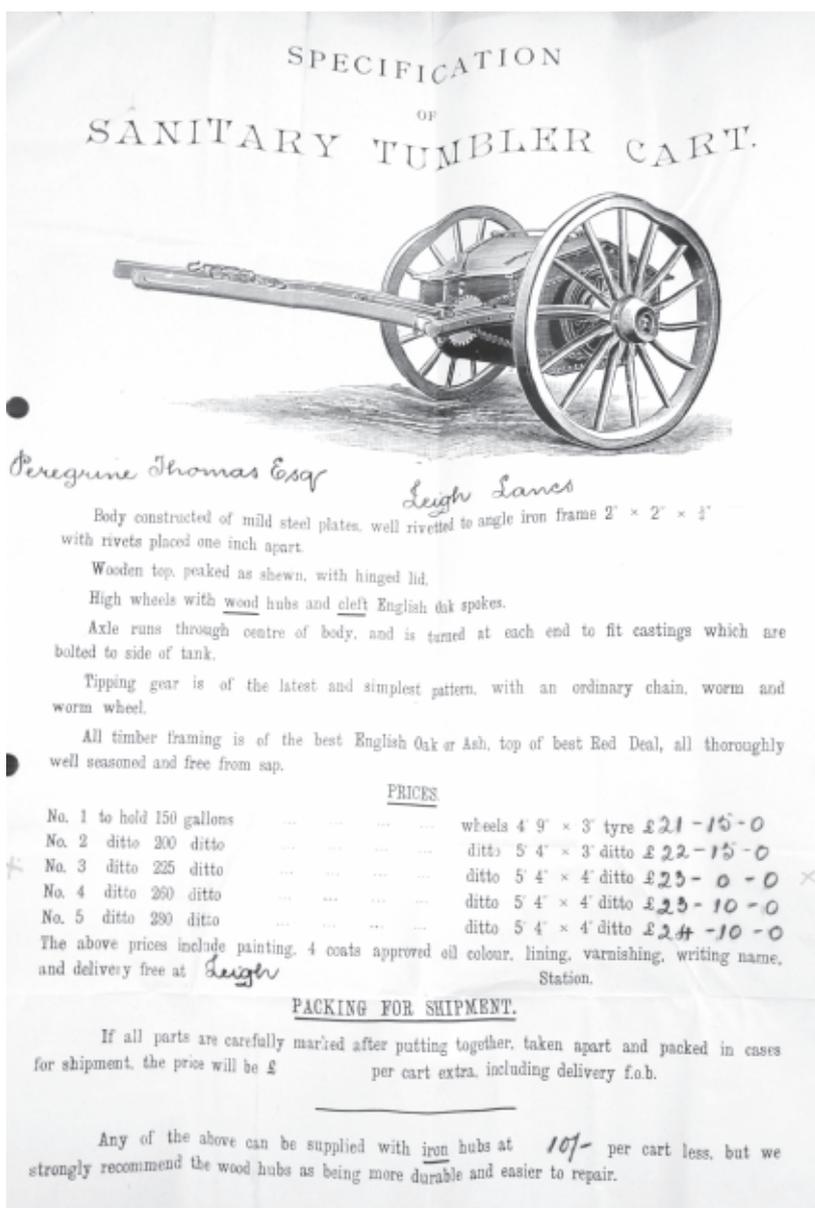
The dumps found and dug have yielded treasures for the diggers: old stone ginger beers and Codd or 'marble' bottles. Locally, old beer bottles from George Shaw's Brewery or Green's Bottlers still surface occasionally, as do mineral waters from Urmston's, Dootson's, Stothert's of Atherton and scores more. Some artefacts tell stories: Mrs Winslow's Soothing Syrup for teething really worked, but sometimes fatally, as it was basically morphine! Thousands of broken clay pipes tell the tale of

tobacco, as it and the farthing pipes were sold in pubs and beerhouses. lung tonics and cough cures testify to bad chests and general ill health. The mineral waters detail the development of the soft drinks industry and the beers and spirit flasks tell the stories of breweries and pubs, many long gone. The tips of the 1920s bear witness to hard times and have a surfeit of medicines, sauces and jampots but are generally poor in content. From 1930s and 1940s dumps, blue milk of magnesia bottles testify to diet and resultant stomach and gullet ailments.

Over the years thousands of stone and glass containers for all manner of products have been unearthed. Some are worth money, most fetch very

little, but their intrinsic value is their history, and their local connections to shops, chemists, mineral water manufactories, breweries and public houses. They are the products of the first throwaway consumer society.

The very real riches were gained by the contractors who saw to the thankless, dirty, mucky and smelly job of ashpit and nightsoil removal in the days before water closets were in every house. Their grimy workers shifted thousands of cartloads every year, until they faded from history if not memory. They earned their money. The saying was never more true: 'Where there's muck, there's brass'...or at least for those who shifted it, the midnight mechanics and their masters!



Specifications for a Sanitary Cart, Leigh

# The Breweries of Leigh in Lancashire

BY STEVE CROOK

*In the first of two articles, Steve Crook explores Leigh's brewing history.*

At the time when the breweries detailed below were constructed, they were all situated in what were the townships of Atherton, Bedford and Pennington, all of these townships being situated in the Ecclesiastical Parish of Leigh. It's worth noting too, that the brewery names were subject to change as the years went by, but the name chosen to head each section below relates to what appears to have become the popular choice over time.

Back in the early nineteenth century, most beer houses, farms and the larger houses and halls would have brewed their own ale. The breweries listed below are those run by Common Brewers, so called because they brewed ales for multiple outlets rather than mainly for personal or family use or for satisfying the needs of a single beer house.

What follows is a brief history of six local breweries taking the form of a collection of key places, names and dates – Derby Brewery; Lilford Brewery; George Shaw; Bedford Leigh Brewery; Bond Street Brewery; and Crown Brewery. References are available for all facts noted but have purposely been excluded in the interests of brevity.

*The second part of the article will be published in Past Forward, Issue 77.*

## **The Derby Brewery (1871-1899)**

Originally known as the Bedford Steam Brewery, plans for the concern were submitted to the Atherton Local Board by Richard Guest (b.1819-d.1898) in early 1871 and approved,

with amendments, two months later. The site was between Back Queen Street, Lord Street, Brown Street and Princess Street in what was then the township of Atherton.

Brewery occupancy (and possibly ownership) changed to Robert Guest (Richard's brother) in 1876. In early 1877, the brewery and associated beer-houses and public houses were offered for sale by auction. The sale realised £16,740.

A new brewery company, the Guest's Leigh and Bedford Brewing & Malting Co., Ltd., (not to be confused with BBMC) was incorporated in September, 1878 with the intention of running the brewery but a petition for the winding-up of the company was lodged in the High Court as early as January 1881 when the Company ran out of cash. The provisional directors had been, Mr. Robert Guest, Spirit Dealer, Bedford; Mr. William Hurst, Fir Tree Inn, Firs Lane, Westleigh; Richard Guest, Etherstone Hall, Leigh; Mr. William Winward, Firs Lane, Leigh; Mr. Robert Yates, Eagle and Hawk, Bedford, Leigh; Mr. Giles Yates, New Inn, Bedford, Leigh; and Mr. Abraham Winstanley, Paviers' Arms, Culcheth. On winding up of the company, the brewery was offered for sale again in June 1881 and was purchased by Edmund Seddon (b.1837-d.1914, see above), James Hurst (b.1857-d.1899, son of William, see above) and Richard Fairhurst (b.1850-d.1885, son of local farmer, Thurstan Fairhurst, who had died around the time of the brewery purchase by his son), the three trading as Richard Fairhurst & Co. as the 'Derby Brewery' it now appears in trade directories from 1885 to 1898 under the ownership of Richard Fairhurst & Co.

It seems that Edmund Seddon and James Hurst continued to operate the brewery under the company name after Richard's untimely death in 1885 but, trading probably ceased after the later death of James Hurst in 1899. Perhaps BBMC saw the writing on the wall and resisted the temptation to acquire the concern (their usual strategy) which they probably concluded would meet a timely and natural end.

The brewery and plant was offered for sale by auction in November 1901 but didn't reach its reserve. The machinery and plant came up for auction again in January 1902. The building has had many uses over the years and has changed hands many times. For decades it was the main office for local builders, Thomas Colliers & Sons, Limited. The current occupation (2017) is by builders' merchant, Travis Perkins.

## **George Shaw & Company Limited (1823-1932)**

Originally known as the Bedford Brewery, being founded c.1823 by John Farnworth (b.1775-d.1845) of Astley and Richard Guest (b.1799-d.1841) of Bedford House (still standing near Lilford Park). The brewery was situated on Brewery Lane, in what was the Bedford Township. The partnership was dissolved in early 1841, Richard Guest taking over sole responsibility for the concern, but he died almost immediately thereafter. Under the terms of Richard's will, the brewery was to be held in trust for 15 years (until 1856) for his sons, Richard Guest (b.1819-d.1898) and younger brother, Robert Guest (b.1827-d.1906). On expiry of that period, one of the sons, Robert, bought the whole concern, but he soon hit



*Looking towards the George Shaw Brewery buildings, from the top of St Thomas' Church, Leigh, 1949*

financial problems and was declared bankrupt in 1862.

The brewery was auctioned off in 1866, being bought by a consortium which had created and floated the Bedford Brewing & Malting Company (BBMC) to acquire and continue operating the brewery. The provisional directors were William Vernon (b.1792-d.1869), Hop Merchant, Manchester; John Edward Sandars (b.1826-d.1890), Maltster, Gainsborough; Richard Guest (b.1819-d.1898), Cotton Spinner, Leigh; Richard Leigh (b.1802-d.1875), Firs Lane, Leigh; Richard Greenhough (b.1814-d.1886), Innkeeper, Leigh.

The company minute books point to early business problems. Under-capitalisation, an inability to produce a consistent quality product and an underestimation of the cost of essential improvements to the brewing plant led to a new manager being

head-hunted from Ashton-under-Lyne in 1867. BBMC approached and appointed William Shaw (b.1822-d.1889) who ran a successful brewery, the Dukinfield Brewery, and who had a reputation as both a canny businessman and as a competent brewer. There was some disquiet expressed by shareholders (during 1868-1870) at this appointment and a case of slander against Mr. Shaw by a brewery director occurred as late as 1885. In fact, on a number of occasions in those early days, various shareholders actively prevented Mr. Shaw's elevation to the Board by resisting attempts by others to reduce the qualifying shareholding for nomination as a director. Ultimately, this resistance proved futile and William became a director in 1883 followed shortly afterward by his son, George, in 1886. History has shown that William was largely responsible for turning round the fortunes of the Company. Soon, he had become the

majority shareholder. By 1887, company share valuation had risen dramatically, underscoring the value of William's contribution to company success.

A major modernisation had taken place at the brewery in 1877, from the designs of Mr. John Barker, architect, Town Hall, Mirfield and a new 65 yards high chimney stack was built in 1891. In 1893, a 400 feet deep borehole was sunk for additional water, electric lighting was installed in 1894, and the brewery almost completely rebuilt between 1902 and 1910 at a cost of £53,000. Also in 1910, an additional 600 feet deep borehole was sunk to satisfy the growing brewery's increasing need for water.

In mid-1889, William Shaw, as stated above now the majority shareholder, died at his home in Ashton-under-Lyne, control of the company being

ceded to son, George, later of Pennington Hall and who became the second Mayor of Leigh Corporation for the period 1900-1901. From the start, George (b.1860-d.1918) adopted a policy of aggressive acquisition of competing local breweries. Tonge's Bedford Brewery (1890), Bond Street Brewery (1897), Reeve's Crown Brewery (1898), and Jackson's Lilford Brewery (1899) were all acquired by BBMC.

In late 1901 (confirmed 1902) it was resolved to change the brewery name to 'George Shaw & Co., Ltd., Leigh Brewery'. Over the following almost twenty years, the business continued to grow until the commencement of WW1 in 1914, which saw some decline, largely due to brewery-unfriendly legislation.

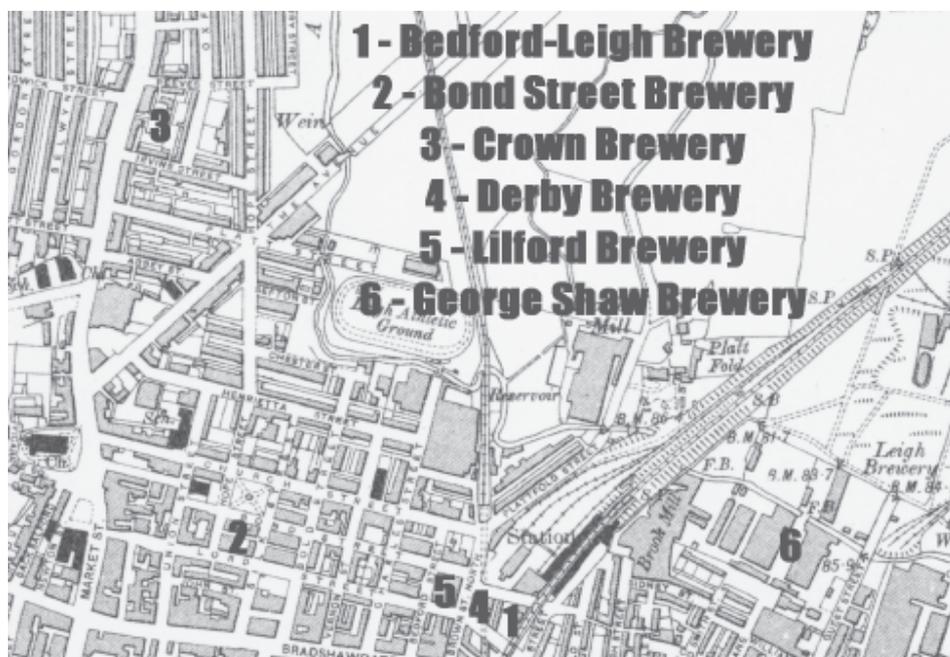
George Shaw died in Southport in June 1918 and the business was passed to his two sons, William (b.1889-d.1937) and Frank (b.1891-d.1949) with overall control being held by the elder son, William.

By 1919, the financial state of the Company was described by the auditor as being "in an extraordinarily good position". However, three factors seem to have contributed towards the demise of the company by 1930.

Firstly, extensive mismanagement, the indulgent lifestyles of the principals (mainly by the M.D., William Shaw) and company overspending throughout all of the 1920s. As one example, in late 1927, two Bolton breweries (Jackson's and Sharman's) were bought by Shaw's but it seems that sufficient funds to complete the purchase were not in place.

Secondly, the company had for over three decades relied upon loan moneys from private investors. The cotton crash of 1928 had seen many such investors lose large amounts of money and this made them more averse to risk thus leading to large amounts of loan moneys being withdrawn from the company.

Finally, and fatally, these two factors resulted in conflict between the company and its bankers who put



*The locations of Leigh's breweries*

massive pressure on Shaw's by significantly reducing the company's overdraft facility. These factors conspired to produce an untenable financial position which led to the brewery being privately offered for sale to competing brewers, Peter Walker & Sons, of Warrington, who completed the transaction by the end of 1930. The purchase price wasn't published immediately but, based solely on the agreed share price and the number of allocated shares, this alone weighs in at £305,000.

Although Walker's initially continued brewing at the Leigh Brewery site (using Shaw's recipes), in early 1932 (allegedly due to an increase in Customs duties) the brewing operation ceased but the premises remained open for many years as a distribution depot to service local licensed premises in the Walker's portfolio. The brewing plant and machinery was successfully auctioned off in March 1933. In 1936, some of the brewery buildings were purchased by Sutcliffe Speakman in order to expand their adjacent carbon works on Guest Street, Leigh.

George Shaw & Co., Ltd., which had retained its trading name after the 1930 Walker's takeover, was dissolved in 1955, but the depot was retained by Walkers. Some time around 1960, Tetley Brewery acquired Walker's (becoming Tetley Walker), was then absorbed by Allied Breweries in 1961,

and later still by Carlsberg UK in 1998.

The old Shaw brewery buildings experienced various occupants until the majority were demolished around the end of the last century to make way for new houses. However, the old brewery offices, later additions 'Oakdene' and 'Inglestan' (a pair of semi-detached properties for years occupied by the Brewery Secretary and Architect respectively) and the bonded warehouse (converted from an adjacent silk mill and dye works in the 1920s) remain and are occupied by various concerns. Additionally, numbers 28, 30 and 32 Brewery Lane, for years occupied by Brewery Travellers and other senior staff, remain as domestic residences.

#### **Source Material:**

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 National Library of Scotland

By Gill Clough

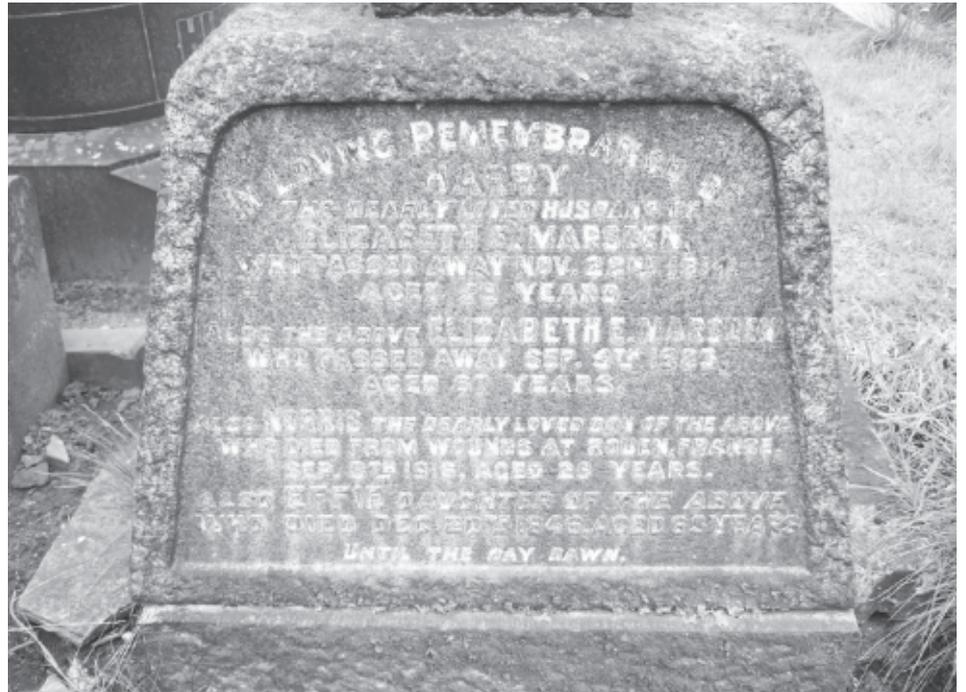
# Norris Marsden, 1887-1916

This is the story of Norris Marsden, as far as I have been able to uncover. His story may be typical of many others who fought and died in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. However the fact that he was wounded in battle on 22 July and did not die in hospital until 8 September, some seven weeks later, is particularly heart-breaking.

He was the fifth living child of Harry Marsden and Elizabeth Ellen Blomerley. Although born in Crewe in 1887, where his mother's brother John Blomerley lived and worked for the railways, it seems Norris lived all his life in Wigan. He had two older sisters (Verna, born 1881 and Effie, born 1883), two older brothers (Clifford born 1885 and Gilbert, born 1886) and a younger brother (Frederick Harry, born 1892); all were born in Wigan. According to the 1911 census there was another child who had died.

After his parents married in Bramley, Leeds, Elizabeth joined Harry in Wigan, where they lived for the rest of their lives. The family home from at least 1901 was at 279 Gidlow Lane and his mother died there in 1923; his sister Effie was living there when she died in 1946.

His father Harry worked as a tailor's cutter, possibly from 1872 until he retired in 1914, with Messrs Coop and Company Limited, Dorning Street, Wigan;



*Grave of Harry and Elizabeth E Marsden, and their daughter Effie, with an inscription commemorating Norris, at Lower Ince Cemetery, Wigan*

their grand building is still standing today.

The factory was a going concern until the failure of Messrs Dunn and Company, a nation-wide firm of men's outfitters in the late 1980s. The Marsden family had sold the business to them in the 1970s.

Coops was set up over a hundred years earlier in 1872, by Timothy Coop and his partner and son-in-law James Marsden. In Timothy Coop's Book the opening of Coops on 4 March 1872 was described by him as a scriptural feast:

'The poor, the lame, the halt and the blind were all represented. Tables were spread in the top

room and the elevator was used as well as the stairway. The elevator itself was a great novelty to many persons, as it had not been generally introduced in this country at that time. The feast was in every way a great success and was followed by music, singing, and short speeches. All returned to their homes with glad hearts, while good wishes were expressed on every side for the success of Messrs. Coop & Co., who had been generous in dispensing hospitality.' Norris' father, Harry, was James's cousin and it seems that James had a habit of employing his relatives at the factory, including his own father Joseph, several of his brothers and various cousins and nephews, with many of them

coming from Yorkshire (mainly Holmfirth) to live in Wigan when Coops opened.

Norris attended Wigan Grammar School and on leaving school he went to work at Church Iron Works in Ince. Following that he went to work at Bispham Hall Colliery in Orrell, another business owned by James Marsden. At that time it was run by Albert Marsden, James' second living son, who in 1905 had married Norris' sister Verna. In February 1916 Norris enlisted with the King's Royal Rifle Corps as a member of the 2nd Battalion and was sent out to France in June. The 2nd Battalion saw action during the early part of the Battle of the Somme at: the Battle of Albert, 1-13 July; the Battle of Bazentin, 14-17 July and the Battle of Pozieres 23 July-3 September. The Battle of the Somme didn't end finally until 13 November, by which time a total of 310,486 men on both sides were killed or missing and there were over one million casualties. The Battle of the Somme has been described as a bloody stalemate, with high casualties on both sides, with the Allies gaining little ground.

From the local Wigan newspapers of 11 and 18 September, we learn something of what happened to Norris:

'Mrs Marsden of 279 Gidlow Lane, Wigan, has received official notification that her son Lance Corporal Norris Marsden died from wounds while in hospital at Rouen. Lance Corporal Marsden, who was well known and highly respected, was the third son of the late Harry Marsden, who for a long time was associated with Messrs Coop and Co., Dorning St., Wigan. The deceased who enlisted on 9th February this year went out to the front in June. On 22nd July, he was wounded in



*Albert and Verna Marsden (Norris' sister), June 1924 at James Marsden's 80th birthday celebration*

the head by a high explosive shell, a piece of shrapnel from which penetrated the steel helmet which he was wearing. Afterwards he was in hospital in Rouen and he died on 9th September.'

Norris died in Number 5 General Hospital, Rouen and his mother received £4 2s 1d after his death. He also received the Victory and British War Medals, commonly known as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred. Norris is buried in Grave B. 23.40 at St Sever Cemetery, Rouen, one of the many graveyards maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. His name appears on the cenotaph in Wigan and he is commemorated on the grave of his parents and sister, Effie, in Lower Ince Cemetery, Wigan.

A short life with such a tragic end.

#### **Norris' Brothers and Sisters**

All but one – Clifford – of his brothers and sisters continued to live for the rest of their lives in

Wigan. Verna married Albert Marsden, who managed Bispham Hall Colliery and had three children. Effie became a school teacher and never married. Clifford became a railway engineer, married, had two children and lived in Ayr, Scotland. Upon retirement he had been the Divisional Engineer for South West Scotland Railways. Gilbert married and had one child, a son and in 1946 was a tobacconist. Frederick became a mining engineer and surveyor and after the First World War worked for Albert Marsden at Bispham Hall Colliery, married and had one child, a daughter who went to live in America after the Second World War.

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BY YVONNE ECKERSLEY

# THE 1929 COALFIELDS DISTRESS FUND IN THE LEIGH AREA: A SNAPSHOT

*This article gives a brief account of the attempts to relieve poverty in the Leigh Borough, Leigh Rural District, Golborne, Little Hulton, Astley, Tyldesley, Atherton, Worsley, Irlam and the townships of Lowton and Kenyon, from May to October 1929.*

## Problems and Solutions

By the late 1920s, in Leigh and its neighbouring towns, where there was a concentration of declining industries – mining, textiles, iron and engineering – years of unemployment and under-employment had impoverished thousands of families.

By the onset of the worldwide Depression in 1929, it was obvious that areas reliant on these traditional industries were not in a position to sustain their populations and would not be able to in the future. The situation was dire. The level of need had gone beyond the capacity of the area's distress organisations; the Local Government Act of 27 March 1929 had transferred the responsibility of poor relief, from the Poor Law Board to the struggling Lancashire County Council's new Public Assistance Committee.

Nationally, the cumulative and escalating claims for unemployment benefit were placing a strain on the National Insurance Scheme. Three main strategies were devised to address these problems: the creation of a large scale charitable organisation; a degree of social engineering; and the encouragement of local government work-creation schemes. These strategies were male centric. Solutions to women's unemployment fell below the radar of the schemes discussed.



*Children leaving from Westleigh Station for a holiday in Conway, 1929, Leigh Journal*

## Charity: Coalfield Distress Fund

The Lord Mayor of London's Mansion House Coalfields Distress Fund was launched in 1928. All monies it collected were matched by the government, resulting in approximately £2m. Its brief was to supplement, not replace or contribute directly to, government agencies' statutory support programmes. Furthermore, help was to be concentrated in the coalfield towns.

In the Leigh area, the charity was administered in each town by a volunteer sub-committee. As members of their communities with relevant local knowledge, they were considered to be in an ideal position to investigate each claim sympathetically. They made their recommendations to the main local committee in Leigh town hall, who had the power to issue vouchers to be redeemed for goods, subject to

the Fund's criteria. Wives and children of unemployed men had first call on relief. The fund did not relieve unemployed single women or men, fathers, childless married couples or low paid workers. For the applicants, the process could be laborious and not always successful.

It had been difficult to get the Fund's central committee to consider Lancashire a depressed area. It was by virtue of the high levels of poverty among unemployed textile workers, that the fund was extended early in 1929. By June, it had withdrawn one of its central forms of relief in the county. The suspension of the provision of boots and clothing to women and children during the summer months hit the Leigh area particularly hard. From June to September the monthly value of relief, was steadily reduced from £973 11s 6d to £112 2s 5d; the number of

families assisted fell from 326 to 42. At this time there was no increase in employment opportunities for women or men. That year all but three local mills, had been closed, or worked short time and virtually none of the idle pits had reopened.

This drew condemnation from Leigh's Trade and Labour Council and Lowton and Kenyon Council. At the same time the number of special emergency grants rose from 10 to 40, from £10 13s 0d to £86 1s 4d, and covering sickness and accident, extra nourishment (usually eggs and milk) and 'Outfit Grants' to provide men with suitable clothing to undertake fresh employment.

## Social Engineering

A common image of northern unemployment at the time, was of men hanging around street corners, looking dispirited and entrenched in psychological inertia. Perhaps it was this that encouraged the Minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield, and many in government circles, to believe that these long term unemployed men needed 'reconditioning'. It was perceived that they had grown 'soft' and needed 'hardening' through hard manual labour to enable them to move on. Unemployed women did not attract such notice.

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour, a network of residential Transitional Instructional Centres was established, mainly, but not all, on Forestry Commission land. There, unemployed men could be sent for three months agricultural training, aimed at encouraging their relocation to southern farming areas, then experiencing a boom. Though attendance was ostensibly voluntary, men who refused to go simply had their dole stopped.

Interestingly, from the Coalfields Distress archive housed in the Wigan Archives at Leigh Town Hall, we know that during 1929, at least 40-50 local men were sent for an eight week course of heavy outdoor work at the Transfer Instructional Centre, Blackpool, by the Labour Exchange in Railway Road, Leigh. Their task was to prepare a field for use as Blackpool's Municipal Aerodrome at Stanley Park. Local men were also sent to Instructional Centres in London, Suffolk, Birmingham, Dudley

and Slough and one man emigrated to 'the land of the maple leaf'. Anticipating these men would require assistance, Leigh Labour Exchange sent lists of names to the fund's committee at Leigh Town Hall.

There is no evidence of out-of-town retraining being offered to local women, perhaps as government expenditure was unnecessary. The majority of unemployed working women had been redirected into domestic service from 1918. As domestic servants, they were not entitled to unemployment benefit and not a drain on the National Insurance Scheme. A Domestic Instruction Centre, offering courses in domestic skills, had opened as the Domestic Centre, Twist Lane, Leigh, in 1923.

## Work Creation Schemes

Town Councils recognised that the need to earn a living was paramount to individuals and the area's economic recovery. Encouraged by the Development (Loan, Guarantee and Grants) Act of 1929, many Councils instigated Public Schemes of Work. Leigh Council applied for loans, to undertake work in Lilford Park, numerous street reconstructions and were ambitious enough to take the opportunity to 'lay conduit lines and cables, provide a substation and transformer equipment for electricity supplies to Westleigh and beyond Pennington Railway Station'. Golborne Urban District Council also planned

street works in Harvey Lane, construction of surface water sewers and cleaning Millingford Brook. Golborne temporarily fell foul of regulations. They were rebuked and reminded that rather than hire workmen directly, they were required to hire the men Ashton in Makerfield Labour Exchange sent.

## Children

On a lighter note, during the summer of 1929, fund administrators cooperated with local authorities' Education Departments to help finance holiday camp experiences for poor children. Approximately 300 local children were sent to the Holiday Fellowship Camp, Conway during September 1929.

## References:

- Coalfields Distress archive (Wigan Archives & Leigh Local Studies, MB/Lei/E14/1)
- Leigh Borough Minute Books, 1929 (Wigan Archives & Leigh Local Studies, MB/Lei)
- Golborne Council Minute Books, 1929 (Wigan Archives & Leigh Local Studies, UD/Go)
- Leigh Chronicle, 1929 (Wigan Archives & Leigh Local Studies)
- Leigh Journal, 1929 (Wigan Archives & Leigh Local Studies)
- 'British Concentration Camps', Simon Webb Hansard



*Under the Public Schemes of Work, men from Leigh were employed to pave areas such as Charles Street, Leigh*

# Not just the 'Three Rs'

BY LOUISE WADE

*'Thomas Blezard from the second class has been absent 9 weeks, this week included. He is staying with his grand-parents in Cheshire being out on a pleasure journey, but he is to return shortly I am told'*, extract from School Log Book, John Bassnett, 19 December 1872.

Shevington Community Primary School celebrated its 200th birthday in 2014, having been built 'for pious and useful learning by voluntary subscription in the year of our Lord 1814' according to the date stone on the front facade, now a private house.

Following this inscription the date stone carries the initials RPR which are presumed to stand for Richard Perryn, Rector. Richard Perryn was the Rector of the Parish of Standish (of which Shevington was a part) and was the son of Sir Richard Perryn who was a judge and Baron of the Exchequer.

The original trustees of the school in 1814 are named on a later lease (1876) lodged in Lancashire

Archives and include local luminaries, Richard Gerrard Perryn (son of Reverend Richard Perryn, a gentleman living at Trafford Hall in Wimbolds, Trafford in Cheshire), The Reverend Richard Perryn, Sir Thomas Darympole Hesketh Baronet (3rd Baronet of Rufford of Rufford Hall), Edward Wilbraham Bootle (1st Baronet of Skelmersdale), The Reverend Streynsham Master (Rector of Croston), Edward Holt (probably of Ince Hall), John Baldwin (a local landowner), James Stopforth (Yeoman of Shevington), Henry Wignall (a farmer and shop keeper of Shevington) and William Wood (whose identity is yet to be confirmed).

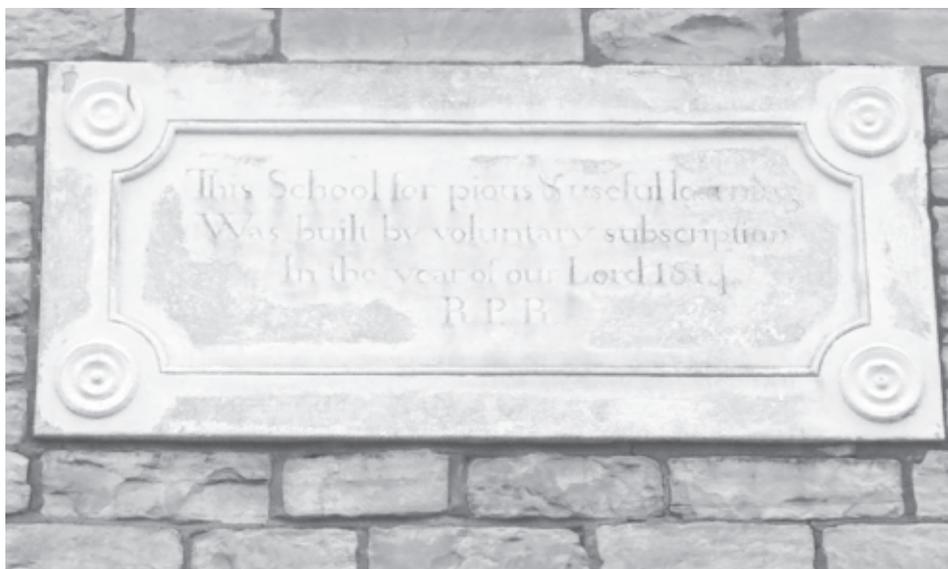
The first Master of the school is thought to be Thomas Gerrard, since his son, also Thomas, was baptised at St Wilfred's Church, Standish in 1817 and Thomas' occupation and abode are given as 'Schoolmaster' and 'Shevington'. Thomas remains in charge of the school and is recorded as residing there on the 1841 and 1851 census,

but is buried in 1854 at Upholland.

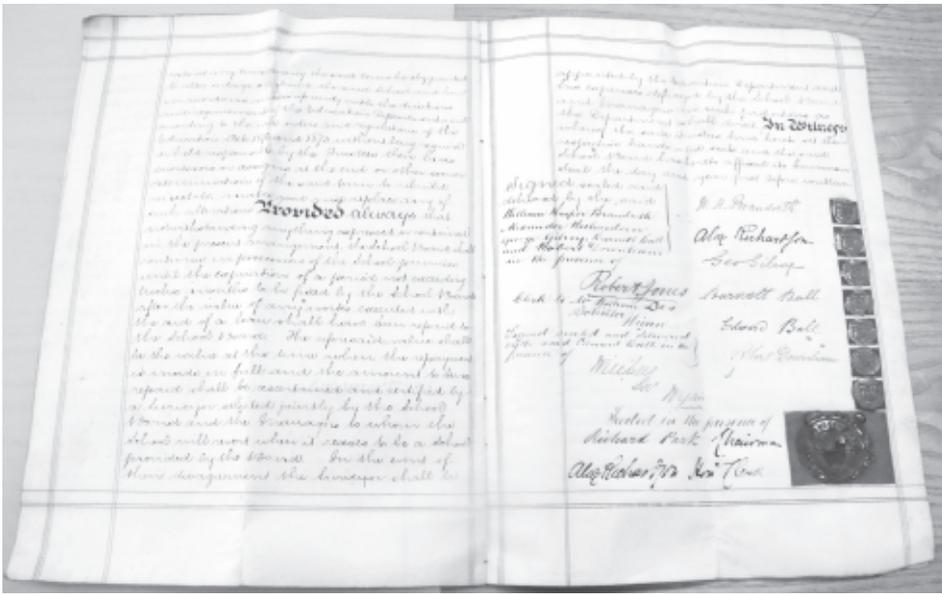
Between 1854 and 1869 the schoolmaster is unknown, but by 1869 John Bassnett had taken up post as verified by his marriage certificate to Elizabeth Knowles, a farmer's daughter from Wrightington. John, also a farmer's son, was the sixth child of Richard and Harriet Bassnett, born in Dalton in 1842. Sadly John's father died when he was only three years old, leaving Harriet to bring the children up alone on her dressmaker's earnings. However, she must have made her children attend school since both John and his brother Joseph became School Masters, Joseph being the Master at Upholland during a similar period to John's employment at Shevington.

There are three logbooks (the oldest of which dates from 1 April 1872), several registers and a punishment book still in the possession of the school. By the time John Bassnett commences writing in 1872 the school has come under the control of a local School Board and is referred to as 'Broad o' th' Lane Board School'. He writes approximately weekly entries about the life of the school, including which lessons have been taught, names of new scholars and those leaving, punishments meted out, attendance statistics and events happening in the wider world.

John records punishments for 'stupidness', 'throwing stones at neighbours' dogs', 'striking the girls', coming to school 'with dirty clogs', climbing trees, insubordination and telling lies.



Shevington Community Primary School, date stone



Shevington Community Primary School, lease, 1876

Absence was a particular problem, reasons given included inclement weather – some of the children having to walk several miles to school – assisting their parents at harvest time and picking potatoes, childhood illnesses, such as measles and whooping cough, church fetes and 'treats', Wigan Fair, trips to see their grand-parents and differences of opinion between the Master and parents!

Furthermore, children whose parents earned their living on the canal only attended when their boat was moored locally. In April 1872 there were 107 children on the 'roll', all being taught in the same room – imagine the noise! However, attendance varied widely between 50 and 100 children per morning or afternoon session. Absentees were reported to the Attendance Officer and parents admonished and sometimes fined by the School Board.

Although not strictly a church school the local clergy are frequent visitors and impromptu teachers at the school. On 7 May 1872 the Curate of Shevington, Reverend Alexander Richardson, even goes so far as making suggestions for the placement of the new desks; Mr Bassnett does not record whether his advice was taken.

Holidays were generally planned in advance, three weeks in the summer being standard. At Christmas time it was usual for school to be open until Christmas Eve. A half day was usually given on Shrove Tuesday and a week at Easter. Other 'holidays' happened on a much more ad hoc basis with school closing if too few pupils arrived in the morning, or if the Master wanted to attend a meeting, a funeral or an examination.

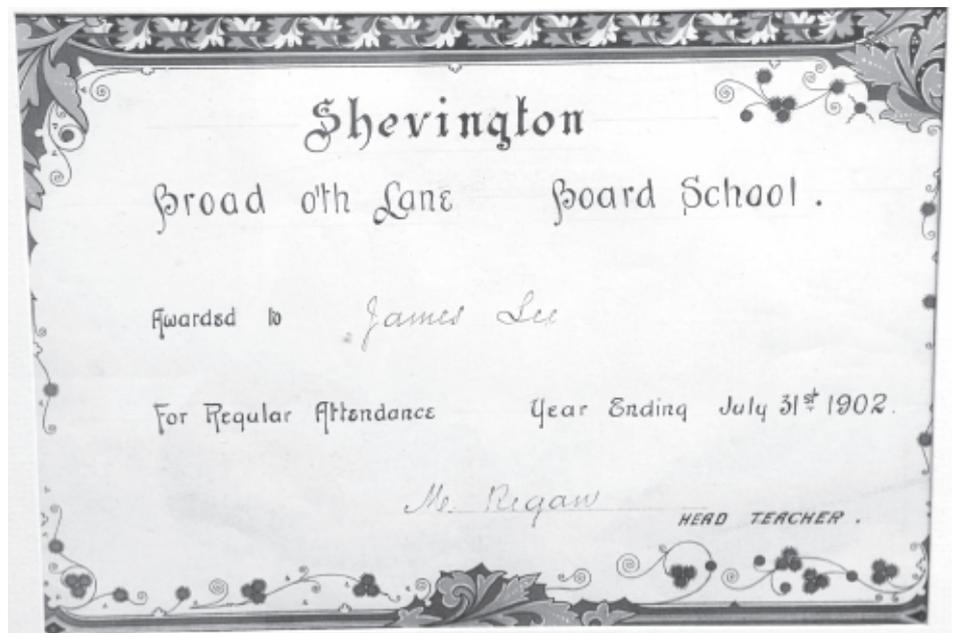
School fees were payable by the week and in addition the parents paid towards coal for the fire, the only source of heat for the building.

Fire money, as it was known, appears to have been a bone of contention between parents and the master, with two children noted as leaving because their parents refused to pay.

Standard lessons included the 'Three Rs' – reading, writing and 'rithmetic – but also included geography, history, religious education, sewing (for the girls only, with woodwork and drawing later on for the boys) and drill.

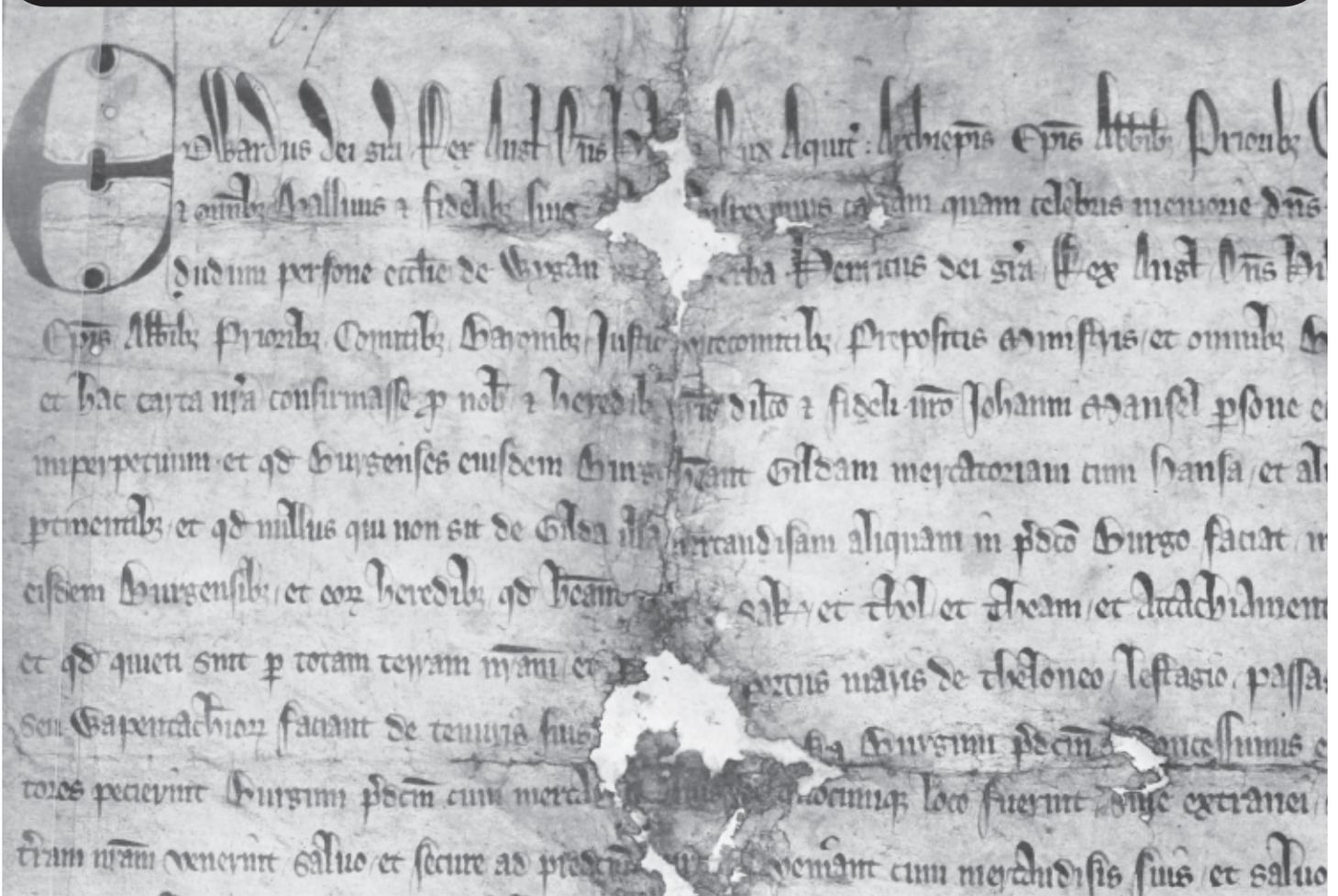
John Bassnett died suddenly on 10 December 1879 of 'double pneumonia', at only 37 years old. He was buried in Wroughtington three days later. In January a new Master took over, however his wife, Elizabeth, continues working as the Sewing Mistress for many years after his death and John's children Richard, William and Harriet continue as scholars. Harriet and Richard later follow in their father's footsteps becoming pupil-teachers at the school.

School log books are an under-utilised, yet fascinating source of local and family history. Simply collecting birth, marriage and death certificates cannot possibly give us the wealth of detail about our ancestors' lives and the local community that are hidden here.



James Lee, attendance certificate, 1902

# WHO WAS WIGAN?



*Extract from Wigan's Royal Charter, granted by Edward II in 1314*

The meaning of the place name Wigan has puzzled historians for over a hundred years. In the nineteenth century some romantically inclined antiquarians thought that it derived from an Old English word meaning 'war'. They based this idea on the unsubstantiated belief that the legendary King Arthur fought some battles in this district.

When later, a more rational approach to the meaning of place-names came to the fore, Henry C Wylde, writing in 1911, admitted: 'I can find no satisfactory suggestion',<sup>1</sup> and in 1976, David Mills concluded that the etymology was 'doubtful'.<sup>2</sup>

However, in 1922, Eilert Ekwall had offered some suggestions. He believed that Wigan was a personal, or given name, and claimed to have found a place in Anglesey called Wigan. He suggested that this was a shortened form of the type, Tref Wigan or Bod Wigan, meaning, 'The village or homestead of someone called Wigan'.<sup>3</sup>

But, Andrew Breeze, writing in 1998, stated that the place name Wigan was derived from a common diminutive of the Welsh gwig, meaning 'a little settlement'. It has nothing to do with the personal name of any Celt. As for the personal name Wigan, he was emphatic 'It did not exist'.<sup>4</sup> There are problems with Breeze's interpretation.

Firstly, before 1100 CE most settlements in the North-West consisted of hamlets of a handful of homesteads or single, isolated homesteads. These dispersed settlement patterns could be found in townships near Wigan such as Abram, Ince and Pemberton, where no central village existed. There is no point in calling a place 'The little settlement', where virtually all settlements are small.

Secondly, the personal name Wigan may not have existed in Celtic Wales, but it did exist in another Celtic region: Cornwall. (And here it is worth mentioning that Ekwall surmised that Wigan was related to the Old Breton name

Uuicon; Brittany being of course, another Celtic region, just across the Channel from Cornwall.)

Two individuals named Wigan appear in the records of Cornish lands held by Merton Priory in Surrey for the period 1107-1121 CE. One of these individuals is named twice.

The relevant passages read:

'Ruald, son of Wigan, gave and granted to Bernard the Scriptor all the ecclesiastical lands which he held of Brictricius Walensis...'

'The thicket of the Castle of the fee of Ruald, son of Wigan...'

'At which were present, Robert de Turci...William, son of Odo...Wiganus Marescall.'

Moreover these records contain another interesting entry:

'The land of the Botwei de Wigan of the fee of Richard de Luci.' <sup>5</sup>

So we have here, in the records of the Priory, the use of Wigan as both a personal and a place-name.

Cornwall Record Office could find no trace of a settlement in Cornwall simply called Wigan, but stated that Lambriggan was formerly known as Lambourne, Wigan. This would have been to distinguish it from other places called Lambourne. The use of a personal name used in this way is found in other counties for example, Charnock Richard, Lancs. and Fenton Vivian, Staffs.

We should not be surprised that Wigan town was named after a person. After all, in modern times, roads, airports, towns and even countries (Rhodesia and Bolivia) have been named after important people.

Wigan was a Celtic personal name, and we find, in the Wigan district, several place-names of Celtic origin (Ince, Bryn, Pemberton and Makerfield) from this we may infer that Wigan was a man of some standing, at least in the locality; a man of Celtic heritage, living in a community where Celtic influence was well established.

1. Wylde, H C (1911), 'The Place-Names of Lancashire', London, Constable
2. Mills, D (1976), 'The Place-Names of Lancashire', London, Batsford
3. Ekwall, E (1922), 'The Place Names of Lancashire', Manchester, Chetham Society
4. Breeze, A (1998), 'The origin of the name Wigan', Lancashire History Quarterly
5. Heales, A (ed) (1896), 'The records of Merton Priory in the County of Surrey, Amen Corner', Oxford University Press.

I am greatly indebted to Bill Aldridge and S Floyd for directing me to these records.

# Borough's mining history to be commemorated

Wigan History and Mining Monument (WHAMM), is raising money to fund a statue featuring a miner, pit brow lass and a child, which will sit near Wigan Town Hall the borough's former mining college.

Wigan Council's Brighter Borough pot has contributed £7,000 to the £40,000 raised so far but the group needs £150,000 to fully fund the project.

Speaking about the fundraising, Sheila Ramsdale, WHAMM chair said: 'I set up a local history and heritage group around five years ago with my late friend Anne Catterall and we were extremely passionate about getting a mining statue in the town centre. Just before she passed away two years ago, I promised her I'd do my best to make this happen, which marked the beginning of WHAMM.

'Ideally, we'd like the statue installed in the next couple of years but of course, the sooner we can raise the money, the sooner we can get the work started!'

The deputy leader of Wigan Council, Councillor David Molyneux said: 'Wigan Borough's incredible coal mining history should be remembered for years to come. Unfortunately, as more years and generations pass this can be forgotten, so it's our duty to teach our young people about their town's heritage and the history of their grandparents and great grandparents.

'Wigan Borough is filled to the brim with proud residents and it's because of this I urge everybody to donate as much or as little as possible.'

If you'd like to donate to the page, visit [www.wiganminingstatue.org.uk](http://www.wiganminingstatue.org.uk) where you will find a link to the group's JustGiving page.

BY BRIAN JOYCE

# 'Ringing the Sinner In'



*William Hogarth's engraving, 'Hudibras Encounters the Skimmington'*

When rural labourers moved to towns during the Industrial Revolution, they tended to take their traditional customs, sports and leisure pursuits with them. These soon came under attack from employers, clergy and the middle class, concerned about the risks to lives and property from these often drunken and violent activities. For example, it was hoped that sober 'rational recreation', organised by the middle class could replace some of the more disreputable pastimes of the common people. Trade Union leaders and even many Chartists joined in the assault in an attempt to prove that working class men were respectable and worthy of the franchise.

Despite this opposition, the death of rural traditions among the new urban working class was a slow one, and it is perhaps surprising that so many old rituals lingered for so long.

One such was the practice of 'tin kettling', which was also known as 'skimmington' or 'rough music'. This was the public humiliation of those believed to have challenged or broken the unwritten moral code of a small community. It would act as a punishment

to the perceived wrongdoers and a deterrent to those tempted to follow the same course. Examples of these miscreants included adulterers, wife beaters and widows whom the community believed had remarried too early.

Traditionally, this meant crowds surrounding the victim's cottage and then creating a cacophony of noise by banging kettles, metal trays, and pots and pans for hours on end. An effigy of the victim was often paraded through the streets and then burned. A vivid, if fictional description of one such event is provided in Thomas Hardy's 'The Mayor of Casterbridge'. In France, the practice was known as 'charivari', and European settlers took the custom to the USA and Australia, where it soon took root.

A few examples from our area will put the custom into context. In the summer of 1883, an adulterous husband from Tyldesley deserted his wife in order to live with relatives of his mistress in Ashton in Makerfield. Soon afterwards, his wife trekked to Ashton to find her errant spouse. Locals clearly sympathised with her and showed their disapproval of the situation in the time-honoured tradition of tin

kettling. As the Leigh Chronicle described it: 'For nearly two hours a procession composed of men, women and children, beating cans, jeering and shouting, kept the neighbourhood in a state of turmoil until the arrival of the police, when proceedings were put an end to'.

Two years later, the wife of a Tyldesley man left him to cohabit with a new lover residing in nearby Johnson Street. Local women disapproved of this arrangement, especially as the wrongdoer's new paramour was married himself, his own wife having deserted him. The unwritten community rules on marital and sexual behaviour having been broken, the Johnson Street house was surrounded by outraged women, who broke its windows. Then, according to the Leigh Journal, old frying pans, cans, 'and other articles calculated to make a big noise were brought into requisition'. The newspaper account does not mention effigy burning, and the adulterous couple, at least in the short term, withstood community pressure and stayed together.

Two effigies remained intact in Little Hulton in 1872. The targets this time were a married man who had outraged locals by flirting with what the Leigh Chronicle described as 'a buxom widow' in a local pub. Self-appointed guardians of morality paraded effigies of both miscreants through the streets, but 'contrary to custom', they were not burned but placed overnight either side of the man's front door.

The most epic example of tin kettling I have found so far occurred in Atherton in October 1866. A woman called Blakemore had been jailed for seven days for assaulting another female. A grand tin kettling and effigy-burning plot was hatched by hostile locals to greet her on her return home. Unfortunately for them, the police got involved almost immediately. In the early evening of Mrs Blakemore's release, the sound of a large crowd and the rattling of cans were heard by Constable Harbourne in the Atherton police office.

Accompanied by PC Wilson, he left the station and confronted a crowd in Croft Place, Bolton Road. He later estimated that 1000 people had gathered. The procession was headed by two boys, Joseph Edge and William Cleworth, who were carrying an effigy of Mrs Blakemore on a long pole. The officers seized the effigy before it could be burned and took the boys to the police station. Edge and Cleworth gave their names and were released.

The constables then hurried to Harrison Fold where the crowd had assembled. The noise was deafening, and the demonstrators refused to disperse, Walter Taylor, a ringleader shouting to the mob: 'Take no notice of the old b\*\*\*\*\*s. We have as much right on the road as they have'.

The officers had interrupted and challenged a longstanding custom, imported from traditional village life and the crowd was angry. Stones were thrown at Harbourne and Wilson and it was not until police reinforcements arrived that Atherton began to calm down. Nobody appears to have been charged over these events.

The last example of public shaming of perceived breakers of community values I have come across occurred in 1915. In this instance, a mob flung mud at a bride emerging from a church. In their opinion she had married too soon after the death of her first husband. The practice now appears to have disappeared, except perhaps in the case of public demonstrations against suspected paedophiles living within a community. Whether or not the disappearance is due to the breakdown of common values or the modern toleration of a variety of different lifestyles is probably best left to the sociologists.



A SERENADE OF 'ROUGH MUSIC.'

# 'PAST TIMES'

By Chris Murphy

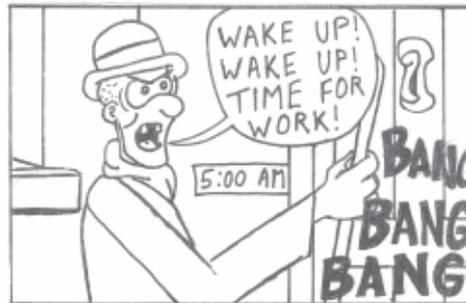
Archives & Local Studies Volunteer, Chris Murphy, has been working with Hannah Turner from Leigh Local Studies to develop educational sessions for schools visiting the Leigh Spinners Mill.

Christopher has a passion for cartoons and graphic novels and has used his illustration skills to produce a series of cartoons for the Archives.

The cartoons have used various sources from the Archives as a starting point, including the famous photographic collection of the Reverend William Wickham, and are all inspired by a young person's working life in Victorian Wigan.

We think they are a brilliant interpretation of Wigan's history and hope you enjoy them! We'll be publishing more in future editions of Past Forward.

Early one morning on a Victorian Wigan street...



...off to work at the mill...



## WIGAN BOROUGH ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE NETWORK

Wigan Borough Environment & Heritage Network is the representative body for all local societies, groups and individuals interested in protecting and promoting the Borough's Heritage and Natural Environment.

The network provides advice, speakers, site visits and partnership working with Wigan Council, Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles, Greenheart and other relevant bodies.

All are welcome to our meetings, held every six weeks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

**For further details please contact the Secretary on 01942 700060, [joe1@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:joe1@blueyonder.co.uk) or visit [www.wiganheritage.com](http://www.wiganheritage.com)**

## 25 YEARS GONE MINING HERITAGE WEEKEND AT ST PETER'S CHURCH, WESTLEIGH

The Church is holding an exhibition to celebrate mining heritage in the local area. This coincides with the 25th anniversary of the closure of Bickershaw and Parsonage Collieries, both located in our Parish. Come along to see artifacts, photographs and memorabilia, including material from the Archive collections. For more details please call 07966643950 or Facebook: Benefice of St Peter and St Paul Westleigh

Opening times are:  
Friday 29th September 2017, 6pm-8pm;  
Saturday 30th September 2017, 10am-4pm;  
Sunday 1st October 2017, Gathering 2pm-3pm, Exhibition closes 5pm



*Bickershaw Colliery*

# A DIFFERENT ANGLE ON MY GREAT-GREAT GRANDDAD

BY BRENDA SEDDON

In Wigan Cemetery, there is a grave marked by a headstone decorated with a fishing basket, a rod and some fish. It is dedicated to my great-great grandfather, Joseph Bradshaw. Very distinguished! But behind this monument lies a very human story of sadness, poverty and skewed Victorian values.

In 1892, Joseph represented Lancashire in a fishing contest against arch rivals, Yorkshire. He won, landing 102 fish at various venues against his opponent's twenty — a rather decisive victory.

In 1897, Joseph died at the age of 46 and Wigan Anglers spent a significant sum of money erecting the headstone rather than on his wife, Margaret and their children who were nearly destitute. One of these children was my grandmother, Ann.

Three years later, his wife, Margaret, died of a drink-related condition, so the family was split up: the younger children going to live with the older siblings in already overcrowded conditions, around Millstone Yard, off Wigan Lane. These houses had only a front door, so you climbed out of the window to get to the privy, or faced a walk round the houses.

Drink in those days was cheap and dangerous, but sometimes, during his short life, Joseph would, 'sign the pledge' and promise to give it up. While this lasted, life for the children was good, when wages and winnings from fishing competitions were not spent on alcohol.

Ann went to work in the mill and lived with her brother, Joseph and his wife, Amy in Millstone Yard. One pay-day, on her way home from work, swinging her sandwich tin – which contained her wages – the lid shot off and all her wages rolled down a drain, all 11s 9d! She knew that she did not dare go home without her pay so, lying in the road, she proceeded to feel in the drain for her money. First came a 3d coin, then a shilling, last came the half-guinea (10s 6d).

A few years later Ann met the love of her life, Thomas Bate, at a 'social' at St Michael's Church. The romance blossomed and Tom wanted Ann to marry him. The complication was that Tom had applied to emigrate to Canada. He had signed up for a job in the Cape Breton Mine, near Halifax, Nova Scotia and his departure date was set.

Ann refused to accompany Tom, as she did not want to leave the rest of her family, who had been through so many rough times together.

Tom went alone, his repeated pleas for Ann to marry and join him there were declined. He completed his two years and returned to wed his sweetheart at St Michael's Church in 1909. They went on to have three daughters, Mary Ellen, Amy and Margaret and lived for most of their married life in Holme Street, behind St Michael's church.

The money that was spent on the memorial did have some unforeseen outcomes: I can now go and see his memorial in the cemetery; read about his exploits as described in the Wigan Observer's '25 and 50 Years Ago' columns; or wear the beautiful Maple Leaf silver enamelled brooch which my grandfather, Tom, brought back from Canada as a present to my grandmother, Ann.

*Postscript: On a visit to Albert Dock in Liverpool, in 2006, I discovered a ship's passenger manifest which included Tom's name on the voyage from Liverpool to Halifax in Canada. Exactly 100 years after his departure I retraced his footsteps and did a tour of the Cape Breton Mine.*



Gravestone of Joseph Bradshaw, Wigan Cemetery

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# Best of Sisters: 70 years on

By Margaret Molyneux

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Soroptimist International Club of Leigh and District is celebrating 70 years of service locally, nationally and internationally in 2017.

The organisation was founded in 1921 by a Rotarian, Stuart Morrow, in Oakland California. The name Soroptimist loosely translated from Latin, means the Best of Sisters, which has caused much debate, confusion and misspelling over the years. Clubs in London, Manchester and Liverpool in the early 1920s were established in a climate of increasing women's emancipation and striving to achieve gender equality. Official links with Rotary ceased in the 1920s, but partnership working on local projects has continued over the years.

The Soroptimist Emblem designed by Anita Houts Thompson, from Reno Nevada, is very Art Deco in design.



*Current Soroptimist Club President, Pat Woodward, wearing the Club Chain of Insignia*

The woman with uplifted arms depicts a gesture of freedom and accepting responsibility; the acorns depict the strength of Soroptimism and the leaves and laurels typify achievement.

The Leigh Club was formed with the support of neighbouring Bolton and Wigan Clubs. Its inaugural meeting was held at the now demolished town centre Rope and Anchor pub, on 16 November 1946. Twenty-one women from various local businesses and professions made the decision to form a club known as Leigh & District, which acknowledged the neighbouring Urban Districts of Atherton, Tyldesley, Lowton and Golborne with the Borough of Leigh.

Miss Phyllis Nanny was elected Founder President; together with a small executive team she led the chartering of the club on 17 February 1947. This took place during a national fuel crisis and one of the harshest winters on record.

The Divisional Union President of the day presented the original charter; the Divisional Union has in recent years become the South Lancashire region. Currently there are 17 regions in the UK with a total of 350 clubs. Worldwide there are four Federations with clubs in 133 countries and a membership of 75,000.

The Leigh Club's initial Chain of Insignia and badge incorporated the Leigh Coat of Arms, but in the mid-1960s attempts to repair the enameling were unsuccessful. A new badge was commissioned when a donation of £100 was offered. After a design approval the badge was first used at the Charter Dinner in February 1969.

The Leigh Club also has a very unusual badge, which is worn by the President Elect. Hazel Kraus gave the gold badge with diamond inserts to the club from friendship club Quakertown in California. Hazel was a long-standing friend of Leigh Soroptimist, Kathleen McDonnell, a well-known local Headmistress who died in 1973 and the gift was in memory of Kathleen.

International Conventions have always had strong membership representation from Leigh members and pioneering women attended conferences in Copenhagen, Toronto, New York, Hawaii and Istanbul when air travel was in its commercial infancy. From these intrepid Soroptimists developed links with clubs worldwide and existing friendship clubs have continued with Quincy in California and Mons Borinage in Belgium, as well as Haverfordwest in South Wales.

Club representation on a wide variety of committees such as the Girl Guides' Association, Marriage Guidance Council, Citizens Advice Bureau, Civic Trust, and Old People's Welfare ensured the profile of Soroptimists was highlighted. Representation on the Executive Board of the Soroptimist Residential Club at 63 Bayswater Road, London encouraged club members to visit London whether alone or in a group, staying in a beautiful Victorian building strategically based opposite Hyde Park and Lancaster Gate Tube Station nearby.

A feature of being part of an International Organisation has been a four year quadrennial project when all four Federations combined to raise funds for a specific country or



*Founder members of the Leigh Club, 1947*

district where a great need has been identified. Examples of these projects have been medical boats in the Maldives, safe water in Senegal, Sight Savers in Bangladesh and Hope for Homes in war torn Sierra Leone.

Local projects have been developed through members identifying specific target areas where 'Making a Difference' would enhance the lives of women and girls. In 1948 an over 70s club was founded. Activities, refreshments and friendships aimed to prevent social isolation. This club continued for 35 years until centres were established which offered elderly people comprehensive care on a more regular basis. For 25 years practical help has been offered: in providing transport for local residents to be taken to the Parkinson Society meetings in Bolton and undertaking delivery of 'Meals On Wheels'.

Raising funds for various projects have included car boot sales, race nights, barn dances, Jazz evenings, fashion shows, balloon races and sponsored events. Key projects have encompassed health, environment and education as the major focus. Lots of bulb and tree planting around the Leigh and District area have taken place over the years and the fruits of these initiatives are still a feature today.

In 1998, Leigh Soroptimists considered a service project in the town, which would not only commemorate the centenary of the Borough of Leigh but also be a Millennium project of lasting value. Members were aware that the Spinning Jenny plaque, which had

hung at the side of the Regal Cinema building had been removed when the building was demolished in the 1990s to make way for a new bus station. Further investigations discovered the broken tile plaque in the basement of Tyldesley Bath. Monies were raised via local businesses and fundraising events for the £4000 restoration project. Jackson Tile Company in Ironbridge built a new tile surround around the repaired plaque. Wigan Council agreed to fund a mahogany frame to be placed in the foyer of Leigh Town Hall that was in keeping with the existing décor. In 1999 council officials and Soroptimist members unveiled the plaque. Subsequently, Leigh Soroptimists have undertaken town hall tours, proudly explaining the Spinning Jenny tile restoration during the annual Leigh for All Heritage weekend event.

Educationally, monetary awards have been given to students who have achieved academic success despite physical, mental or emotional disabilities. Competitions have also been held amongst primary school children for entries of prose, art or poetry, with outings provided for the winning school. Environmentally, the club was awarded a certificate in 1990 in the Queen Mother's Birthday Awards in recognition of the town centre clearing of 'Grot Spots' and provision of litterbins.

In recent years in order to provide funds for breast cancer now, club members have collected unwanted or used bras to be sent to third world countries or recycled. To date a total of 38,000 bras have been collected and over £2,000 raised.

A Federation Soroptimist Award was given to the Leigh club in November 2016 in recognition of its 'Just the Job' initiative. Based in premises at Church Street, Leigh, and organised by several club members, its aim is to assist local women to gain employment, whether following a career break or long-term unemployment. Confidence building, provision of interview attire, preparation of CVs and interview practice has led to success stories in women finding work.

Currently the club has a membership of 30 and fortnightly meetings take place on Mondays, 7.00pm at the Greyhound Hotel. We would welcome women of all ages and backgrounds to join our club, which would enable us to expand our range of projects and networks. If any readers have memories or photos linked to Leigh Soroptimists over the years we would be delighted for you to share these with us.

**Contact details**  
 soropleigh@yahoo.co.uk  
 sileigh.co.uk  
 Find us on Facebook  
 @LeighSoroptimist



*Leigh Soroptimist – coach trip for the over 70s, 1952*

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRASS BANDS IN THE LEIGH AND DISTRICT AREA

BY PHIL BOARDMAN

The development of brass bands in the Victorian age has been described as the first mass involvement of Britain's working class people in the art of instrumental music. Professional musicians had always existed but these musicians tended to be clustered around the artistic centres where employment was available.

The period 1850 to 1880 witnessed an explosion in the number of brass bands being created amongst the working populace. Brass bands had been in existence prior to 1850 and there are a number of notable examples but these did not always consist solely of brass instruments and there were far fewer bands in existence than was evident later in the century.

Some modern brass bands, such as the Stalybridge Old Band and the famous Besses O'th Barn Band, can trace their heritage back to brass and reed bands. These bands were community bands consisting of whatever instruments their players had access to. They would certainly have had clarinets and other reed instruments. These bands later converted to an all brass instrumentation years after their formation, as did many other bands which have long since gone out of existence.

From 1820 onwards, a series of improvements were made to the design of brass instruments which

ultimately led to the ability to play all notes of a scale. This, allied to the improvements in industrial processes and developments in instrument technology and design, gave an added impetus to the momentum of the brass band world. Brass instruments could now be created by mass production methods, whereas keyed woodwind and stringed instruments relied heavily on individual craft skills. Brass instruments were durable and used raw materials easily available.

My colleague and I have been researching the growth of brass bands in the Leigh district. We have chosen Leigh because it is our home town in which we played with both the brass bands that still remained in the 1970s and 1980s. Leigh is also lucky enough to have an archive of local newspaper reports dating back to 1845 making it easier to track the growth of brass bands in this area.

It is commonly supposed that brass bands were formed as the result of benevolence of employers, there are numerous examples of this in later history, with many local pits and large mills boasting a brass band. However, the research into the Leigh area refutes this assertion as the majority of brass bands formed appear to have resulted from church associations or temperance groups.

The first report of a brass band found so far is made in the Leigh

Chronicle dated 15 August 1857 which refers to Hindley Brass Band playing God Save the Queen at an Ancient Order of Foresters Dinner at the Kings Head Public House. It has not yet been possible to identify when this band came into existence, or whether it was in fact a wholly brass band or a composite band consisting of reed and brass.

The first reference to a brass band from Leigh is contained in an advertisement for the annual Recitations Festival at St. Joseph's Church on Christmas day, 1858, when it was announced 'St. Joseph's new brass band will be in attendance'. This is the first evidence of a brass band being mentioned in local newspaper that can be identified as a Leigh band. The following year 1859 saw the emergence of the Rifle volunteer movement which acted as a stimulant for the formation of brass bands on a national level. Both Atherton and Leigh volunteer detachments, 60th and 55th Corps respectively, formed their own brass bands. It must be reiterated that these were not necessarily all brass in their instrumentation. The photograph produced below shows a band which is believed to be a local band, possibly a volunteer band, comprising 13 brass players and two clarinets, 2nd and 4th from the left in the second row. Although the picture is undated it appears to have been taken in the second half of the 1800s.



*A local brass band – possibly a Volunteer Band*

The volunteer movement paid for the services of their bands and this caused controversy when it became apparent that the 'Capitation Grant' (the Government funding paid to each detachment) was being used to quietly fund the volunteer bands to the detriment of the rank and file volunteers, although there is no evidence to suggest this was the case with either of the local volunteer bands. Both the Atherton and Leigh volunteer bands were active in military and community events in the district. Both bands competed in brass band competitions, albeit not very successfully. The Atherton band was more active in this field than its Leigh counterpart, it had the distinction of attending Enderby Jackson's Great National Contest in July 1861 when they were conducted by Thomas Hough.

The Bedford Church brass band is also reported as being active in the 1860s. From that date onwards there are many other brass bands being formed. There are an increasing number of references to

brass bands, some having assistance from other bands to start up. St. Joseph's brass band gave a number of concerts in order to raise money for the Westleigh band to provide instruments and tuition. In addition to the Westleigh Band, Firs Lane Band had its own band, this being instituted in the early 1880s.

Lowton boasted two bands, Lane Head Temperance and Lowton band, with Lowton claiming to have been formed in 1856. Glazebury also had a brass band, and is reported to having been formed in 1860 as a band affiliated to Gill and Hartley's Mill at Glazebury. This band would seem to be an exception to the majority of other bands formed in the area which generally were associated to churches or other social groups. As with all brass band research, bands are referred to at various times by different names, this band is sometimes titled the Bury Lane brass band in local newspapers.

Astley public band competed in

contests in 1884 and 1885, presumably being formed in the years before those dates. Tyldesley had at least two bands, St. James Tyldesley and the Good Templar Band. Again, this is complicated by newspapers using differing titles to describe the same band.

As can be seen above, there is no mention of bands from Leigh or the surrounding district until 1858, after which there is a proliferation of bands being named. These all took their part in the community, being used for dancing as well as civic and church functions. Very little documentary evidence from bands themselves survives from this early period, but this project continues to try and unravel the story behind the emergence of this mass working class movement involved in popular music.

If any person has any information to offer regarding local brass bands we would be grateful to hear from you and can be contacted on [research@bedfordband.co.uk](mailto:research@bedfordband.co.uk)

# Samuel Kniveton - Methodist Local Preacher

BY BILL MELLING

Samuel Kniveton was born in Astley on the 14 April 1814 into a family of strict Methodist handloom weavers. Like most children of poor working class parents at that time he started work around the age of seven doing a variety of menial jobs around his home and village. The 1820s were a particularly hard time for the people of Astley, the cruel Corn Laws meant that food was expensive and the decline in handloom weaving resulted in ever decreasing incomes. In these circumstances Samuel had little choice but to leave home as soon as he reached his teens and become apprenticed as a shoemaker to a Mr Higgingbottam in the nearby village of Davyhulme.

As an apprentice he lived in his master's' house and the change from a strict Methodist upbringing to a household where religion had no place seems to have gone to Samuel's head. He began to ridicule, scoff and sneer at religion and religious people, and took a delight at annoying them at every opportunity. It was to this end that when he heard of a religious revival in Astley he visited his parents one weekend and attended the Sunday service in the local chapel. However, instead of creating mayhem he seems to have gone through some form of religious experience since he returned to Davyhulme in a state of great anxiety. During the following weeks he started to attend the Methodist chapel in Davyhulme and was eventually admitted as a member in 1831 when he was 17 years of age. Two years later, having completed his apprenticeship, he returned to Astley where he set up in business as a boot and shoe maker.

He immediately threw himself into the work of the Astley chapel, helping with the Sunday school, prayer meetings and cottage services to such good effect that he was nominated for training as a local preacher. Local Preachers were in effect part time ministers who were allowed to preach and conduct services and provide a valuable link between the full time ministers and the local congregations. The Methodist Church was, and still is, divided into geographical areas known as Circuits, each presided over by a Superintendent. On completing his training as a local preacher Samuel was appointed to the Leigh Circuit thus starting an unbroken connection with that Circuit that was to last until 1888. On the occasion of his 50th anniversary as a local preacher the Leigh Journal contained a lengthy biography which has provided much of the material for this article.

Samuel had little formal education, practically his only reading had been one book, the Bible, which he came to know from cover to cover and from which he could quote extensively. His application of biblical quotations to everyday situations made him a popular preacher. Soon he was preaching every Sunday, sometimes at both morning and evening services at chapels throughout the Leigh Circuit.

To get to chapels as far afield as Irlam or Hindley, Samuel had no alternative but to walk. In his obituary in the Leigh Journal it was estimated that in his 52 years as a local preacher he had walked 15,750 miles in all weathers and over all terrains. Living as he did for much of his life at Astley on the edge of the notorious Chat Moss, an area of swampy peat bog, he regularly had to make the three mile journey across the Moss to preach at Irlam, Cadishead and Rixton. This could be a hazardous undertaking, particularly in bad weather or after heavy rain when the ditches flanking the track overflowed and made it impossible to distinguish the highway from the swamp.

One December evening Samuel and a fellow local preacher, George Royle, were returning across the moss after conducting the services at Irlam, when they found their progress impeded by floods. Before they could reach the other side darkness descended and since they



*The first Astley Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, c. 1900*

had no light they were in grave danger of stumbling into one of the deep ditches and drowning. They had no alternative but to go down on their hands and knees and crawl through the muddy waters feeling their way as they went. After proceeding in this fashion for some time they were becoming exhausted and dispirited. When they saw a light in front of them, a little above ground level, they began to shout for help. The light that they saw was a lantern being carried by the Station Master from Astley who was walking home to Glazebury along the railway line that ran across Chat Moss. He heard their cries and was able to guide them to the railway from where they were able to continue their walk home.

As well as his Sunday preaching, Samuel also laboured on weekday evenings on behalf of the Methodist church, 'to save the young people from the immoral practices of pigeon flying, dog-racing, Sabbath desecration, profanity, gambling, bull and badger baiting and cock fighting which were indulged in by the inhabitants of Astley' at that time. He was instrumental, with others, in setting up a mutual improvement class where people of all ages could further their education. Along with the Bible classes and prayer meetings, this had a profound effect on the lives of the people of Astley. In later life Samuel took great pride in the fact that many of his pupils from these days had gone on to occupy positions of responsibility in the Methodist church, including six who had become local preachers.

At around the time Samuel moved back to Astley to set up in business as a shoemaker, he got married to Elizabeth Hooson. She was four years older than Samuel, and like him, her parents were handloom weavers and also members of the Wesleyan church. During the next twenty-one years the couple had 14 children. Their eldest son John (b. 1835) showed great promise. He was an avid reader and became an effective and intelligent speaker in the Sunday School and at meetings. He seemed all set to follow in his father's footsteps as a local preacher. He had been taught the trade of shoemaking by his father and when his apprenticeship was complete he went to work for a Mr George Brearley of Tyldesley so that his place in his father's workshop could be taken by his younger brother Amos, (born 1835). It was whilst working in Tyldesley that John caught typhoid fever and after lingering for fourteen days died in December 1857 at the age of twenty-three. Such tragedies were a familiar feature of Samuel's and Elizabeth's lives; of their 14 children, five died in infancy and five in their teens or early 20s leaving three sons and one daughter to survive their parents. All these surviving sons Amos (b. 1835), Benjamin (b. 1845) and Joseph (b. 1855) became shoemakers and Amos and Benjamin followed their father to become local preachers.

In the 1860s, following the death of his wife, Samuel moved to Leigh, possibly to be near his son Amos who had a thriving shoe making business in Bradshawgate. He continued his work as a local preacher and became



*A group of preachers from the Astley Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, c. 1890*

an active member of the King Street Wesleyan Chapel where he soon became a 'Class Leader'. (Methodist congregations were divided into 'classes' each with a leader who was responsible for their spiritual and moral welfare).

Amongst Samuel's charges was Miss Jane Inkster, 17 years his junior, who became his wife sometime in the period 1868- 1871. Just what his children thought of their new stepmother is not known but the 1871 Census shows the two youngest, aged 16 and 19 respectively still living with their father and their new stepmother along with a lodger named John Inkster, who was possibly Jane's brother.

The Census also shows that Jane and John Inkster were born in the Shetland Isles. By the time of the next census in 1881 the children of Samuel's first marriage had left home and a daughter, Margaret, had been born in 1872 to Samuel and his new wife. The family had also moved to a better house in Henrietta Street, Leigh, but the fact that Samuel had two lodgers living in the house at the time of the Census suggests that he may have been having difficulties making ends meet in his old age, a reminder that in those days there was no Old Age Pension. A few years later, at Christmas 1888, it was recorded in the minutes of the Poor Fund Committee of the King Street chapel, that they gave him ten shillings.

Samuel died on 8th April, 1889 the day before his 75th birthday, after an illness lasting nearly twelve months, the cause of death being given as 'disease of the bladder'. His death and funeral were reported at length in the local papers, the Leigh Journal describing how, "the chapel, which was well filled, was appropriately draped in black, and the presence of a full choir added much to the solemnity of the occasion. The funeral cortege comprised a hearse and seven carriages, at the head of which walked a number of local preachers. Many of the blinds on the route to the cemetery were drawn out of respect for the deceased."

BY JOHN SHARROCK TAYLOR

# Madame Teapot Takes Drastic Measures



THE STAFF, JUNE 1953.

*Back Row:* W. BEDFORD (*School Secretary*), N. T. NEWHOUSE, J. S. SHEPHERD, J. O. GRIFFITHS, J. D. RIMMER, J. BRADBURN, E. COCKRAM, J. A. BULLOCK, A. J. WOLFENDALE, F. W. STRANGE, R. DOWNING, F. A. LEYLAND, H. DRAPER, F. BALMER, W. A. STEVENSON, J. HALTON (*Laboratory Steward*).

*Front Row:* P. T. GORE, P. W. SKIRROW, W. W. BARON, F. DENNING, W. G. ALLANSON, I. W. JOHNSON, L. W. WARREN (*Headmaster*), J. BOSWELL, T. A. WALKER, W. B. SAVIGNY, H. R. NUTT, I. A. GALLOWAY, Mrs. TISON.

*Wigan Grammar School staff, 1953 – Mme Tison seated on the front row*

*This article is adapted from the chapter with the same title in my book *Six Steps from Wigan Pier*.*

Madame Teapot was one of the more intriguing members of the cast of characters who enlivened my time as a pupil and later a master at Wigan Grammar School. A petite, shapely, dark-eyed woman in her fifties, her hair always in an immaculate pleat, Margaret Elise Wettstein, was of Swiss descent, though she had actually been born in England before moving to France, where she met and married World War Two Resistance hero Jean Robert Tison. She certainly looked thoroughly Gallic and even had a couple of well-groomed, well-behaved poodles who waited for her in the car while she was teaching and

greeted her enthusiastically when she returned.

From early childhood I have been attracted or repelled by voices and Madame Tison's voice was one of the most attractive I had heard, a deepish contralto with the clear, rounded vowels and cut-glass consonants of Eastbourne College. Her spoken French was of course impeccable and this was clearly the basis of her part-time role at WGS, rather than the grammatical grind which dominated the examination syllabus.

In a school in which playing-up the staff was a time-honoured sport, Madame Tison never had to raise her voice and she appeared to have absolutely no discipline problems. During one of our individual

sessions during my final year at school when I was in the 'scholarship' Sixth Form I asked her about this.

"Ah! But it wasn't always so. When I joined the school just after the War the barbarians gave me a very rough time. And of course one is expected to sink or swim on one's own merits. If I had gone crying to the headmaster it would have confirmed the chauvinists in their predictable prejudices."

"So what did you do?"

"I had a particularly rowdy fifth form class. So I shifted their next lesson to the classroom at the top of the tower, where there are no witnesses if one has decided on drastic measures."

"Drastic?"

"Ecoutez-moi. I set them a piece of written work and I warned them that if anybody misbehaved or even spoke until the bell went for the end of the lesson there would be unpleasant consequences."

"And then?"

"Of course the class clown, the usual ringleader, was the first one to break the silence. So I hit him."

"You hit him?"

"Yes. I know exactly how to hit people. I can hit them very painfully in ways which leave no marks."

"And it worked?"

"As you see. I was a young widow and I needed the job. Reputations can be made very quickly if one is determined or desperate and I was both".

This was even more intriguing. A pretty, petite young widow who was expert in inflicting pain? Even in those pre-PC days these were not skills routinely taught at English teacher training colleges. As with most of our handful of interactions during the several years during which I knew her, first as a student and later as a colleague, I did not share this conversation with any of my contemporaries, one or two of whom had teased me about my one-to-one classes with what they chose to call my French Mistress.

"Madame is old enough to be my mother," I told them stiffly.

"Quite true but she's also a cracker".

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes I do and so do you."

Though I came to know her rather better than most of my contemporaries Madame Tison was not of course pally with her pupils. Teachers weren't in those days. She similarly seemed to keep her distance from the male staff, floating in elegantly to take her classes

and then floating off with her poodles rather than joining in any of the staffroom chat. Even so she was invariably polite and pleasant to all, with one exception: the German assistant, whom she cut dead. The year I returned to teach at WGS the assistant was a pleasant, quietly spoken girl who was puzzled and distressed that the only other female on the staff would not even acknowledge her existence. I felt sorry for Fraulein Löffler, who was gentle, doe like and had nice legs, so acting on my usual principles of 'where Engels feared to tread' I tackled Madame Tison about the problem. She regarded me sombrely but paid me the supreme compliment of not telling me to go and boil my head.

"John, the Germans shot my husband". I saw many, many other unspeakable things done by the Master Race to the people of my adopted country. No, I will not speak to any of them. And if I thought it would prevent such things happening again I would strangle their babies". In 1943 Jean Tison's cell had been operating in the Pas de Calais, the area from which the V1 'vengeance' rockets were being launched against London. A special Gestapo unit had been formed to defend the launch sites against Resistance attack. Immobilized by a leg fractured in a motorcycle accident, Jean had been dragged from his hospital bed, tortured, summarily tried and executed along with eleven other Resistance leaders. Buried in a common grave, his body was identified after the Liberation by the plaster cast on the injured leg.

As a teacher in later years I often noticed how some of my pupils seemed to have put on an extra spurt of growth during the vacations. After registration on the first morning after the summer holiday, I took the Lower Sixth register back to the school secretary and found her in conversation with my French teacher.

"Bonjour, Mesdames".

Madame Tison regarded me with a faint smile then, to my great surprise, took one of my hands in both of hers.

"This boy is becoming a man". She murmured quietly to Mrs Lyons. "You can tell it from his hands."

"Careful, Madame, you'll be making him blush", another faint smile. "I think not".

I have remembered this small incident with considerable pleasure for almost fifty years but neither then nor now did I exaggerate its significance and of course I would not have dreamed of sharing it with my schoolmates. It could only have happened with another female member of staff present and (unfortunately) it would never have occurred in one of our one-to-one sessions. There was nothing flirtatious about it. It was simply charming and very French.

## 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

Monthly meetings held on second Tuesday of each month in St Richard's Parish Centre, Mayfield Street, Atherton at 7.30pm.

Admission – Members, £1.00, Non Members, £2.00, including refreshments. Contact Details: Margaret Hodge, 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. Members £10 Visitors £2 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 & District History

An exciting new, free, local history website, covering Leigh and the surrounding districts. Still in its infancy, it already boasts a list of births, marriages and deaths, 1852-1856, including cemetery internments, nineteenth century letters from soldiers serving abroad, a scrapbook of interesting articles, local railway accidents and an embryonic photograph gallery. There are also links to other sites covering historic and genealogical interest.

[www.leighanddistricthistory.com](http://www.leighanddistricthistory.com)

## 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.

There is no need to book an appointment for this Help Desk, which can be reached by lift.

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

Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month, at 7.30pm, in the Standish Suite at the Brocket Arms on Mesnes Road - 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

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday at 6.45pm. 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 afternoon helpdesks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

## Wigan Local History & Heritage Society

Meetings are held on the first Monday of each month at Beech Hill Book Cycle at 6.30pm.

Admission to the meeting is £2.50 For more information please contact Sheila Ramsdale at [sheila.ramsdale@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:sheila.ramsdale@blueyonder.co.uk)

# Civil Defence Project

BY HANNAH TURNER, LEIGH LOCAL STUDIES



*Military vehicles passing along Market Street, Leigh, 1943, during 'Salute the Soldier' Week (Mayor Kearney Collection, Wigan Archives)*

During the First World War, Britain was bombed by Zeppelins and Gotha bombers. Indeed Wigan had been erroneously targeted (the pilot thought he was bombing Sheffield) and seven civilians were killed due to the effects of the zeppelin raid.

The civilian population were at risk from future aerial bombardment and in the 1920s a new committee known as Air Raid Precautions (ARP) was formed. They looked at the issues a future war could bring; aerial attacks on civilians; provision of air raid shelters; evacuation; blackouts; and the threat of poisonous gas.

With the rise of Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany, the shadow of war loomed over Europe and by 1935 the Home Office had already issued the First Circular on Air Raid Precautions. From 1938 local authorities became responsible for the running of the ARP services.

Following the outbreak of war on the 3 September 1939 Leigh established ARP warden posts throughout the district. The Auxiliary Fire Service was put into operation and special constables and police guarded vulnerable sites. At 3.30am the following morning the first air raid siren in Leigh warned of approaching aircraft. Fortunately it proved a false alarm, due to some unidentified aircraft over the East Coast and the Midlands.

Wigan made arrangements for a permanent civil defence information centre in the Public Library or as we know it today, the Museum of Wigan Life. A manual, compiled by the Borough's Information Officer Arthur Hawkes, consisted of an A-Z guide of civil defence, from air-raid shelters to what to do with water after a heavy bombardment – boil it.

In the event of a heavy air-raid, executive officials from the different civil defence services would assemble in the library, and an administrative centre would be set up in the newsroom by the Library Street entrance.

## Compulsory Enrolment Forms

In 1941 and 1942 compulsory enrolment took place for both men and women respectively. They each had to fill in one of the forms shown in this picture.

Fortunately, Leigh Municipal Borough Council and Tyldesley Urban District Council retained some of these records, the majority of which have been filled in by women. Volunteers have been busy transcribing around 10,000 cards. The names are now available to download on the Wigan Council website and the cards themselves are available to view for free at Wigan Archives and Leigh Local Studies.

## References

'Air-Raid Distress Information Manual', WLS Upper WD1679 C3

'Wigan at War', Yvonne Webb and Dawn Whitham Memorandum to heads of ARP and AFS, Leigh Local Studies



*ARP Group, Leigh, 1943 (Mayor Kearney Collection, Wigan Archives)*

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

We are delighted to announce the publication of two new books from the Archives & Local Studies.

Working with local author and historian, Joan Szymanowski, supported by Marianne Howell and Jane Williams, we have produced an updated history of the Wigan crime that shocked the nation, the Button Pit Murder of 1863, 'a murder most gross, foul and unnatural'.

'Far East; From Westleigh' is an autobiographical account of local man, William Stowell, recording his life growing up in Leigh in the 1940s and his travels around the world on National Service.

Both books are available now from the Archives & Local Studies, the Museum of Wigan Life, or by post – 'Button Pit' (£5), 'Far East; From Westleigh' (£10). Please contact us for more details.



# BACK TO SCHOOL

Many thanks to a regular Past Forward reader who kindly sent us two school photographs to publish.

The first is of pupils from St Peter's School, Hindley, taken outside the Houses of Parliament during a school trip to London around 1956. The second image is of a class group at Thomas Linacre School, captured in May 1960.



*Thomas Linacre School, 1960*

We have been sent the names of some of those people shown, but if anyone can help us identify any individuals, please get in touch.



*St Peter's School, Hindley, c. 1956*

## Leigh For All: Heritage Open Day 2017

Our annual event is back on Saturday 9 September 2017, 10.30 3.00, to celebrate Leigh's history and heritage. We will be opening the historic buildings on Leigh's Civic Square – Leigh Town Hall and Leigh Parish Church – for public tours, there will be a vintage car rally, local and family history fair, heritage displays, musical performances and vintage bus tours, linking up to the Canal Festival taking place over the same weekend.

For more information please contact us: 01942 404 430 or [archives@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:archives@wigan.gov.uk)

## What's On at The Museum of Wigan Life

All events **£2.50pp** incl tea or coffee unless otherwise stated.

Places are limited so booking is essential. Please book on **01942 828128** or email **wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk**.

### Animal Mummies

1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th August  
1pm - 2.30pm, £2.50 per child

Join us for summer fun as we make our own animal mummies and learn about Ancient Egypt. Get stuck in with activities and trails then discover the real animal mummies on display!

### Explore Egypt

Thursday 27th July and 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, 31st August  
1pm - 2.30pm, £2.50 per child

Make your own treasures as we explore the Land of the Pharaohs! Try super trails, crafty treats and discover some real Egyptian artefacts.



### Sex and Murder - Lancashire's 19th Century Women Poisoners

with Martin Baggoley  
Thursday 5th October,  
12noon - 1pm, £2.50 per person  
incl tea/coffee

Discover the gruesome history of women murders, their methods and final punishment. Hear about the case of Ann Burns, involving illicit sex, murder, insurance claims and infanticide in Wigan.

### Spooky Halloween for Kids!

Tuesday 24th and Thursday 26th October  
1pm - 2.30pm, Price: £2.50 per child

Visit for Spooky Halloween activities. Make your own mask and ghoulish treats. Be there or be very afraid. Fancy dress welcome!

### Dead and Buried: The Wants and Worries of the 19th Century Deceased

by Charlie Guy MA  
Tuesday 31st October 1pm - 2pm,  
£2.50 per person incl tea/coffee

Join us on Halloween to dispel the dark myths of the Victorian dead and shine a light on some of the forgotten, outdated and downright creepy funerary practices, traditions and superstitions of the age.

### The Mummies Unmasked

Dr Campbell Price  
Thursday 16th November, £2.50  
per person incl. tea/coffee

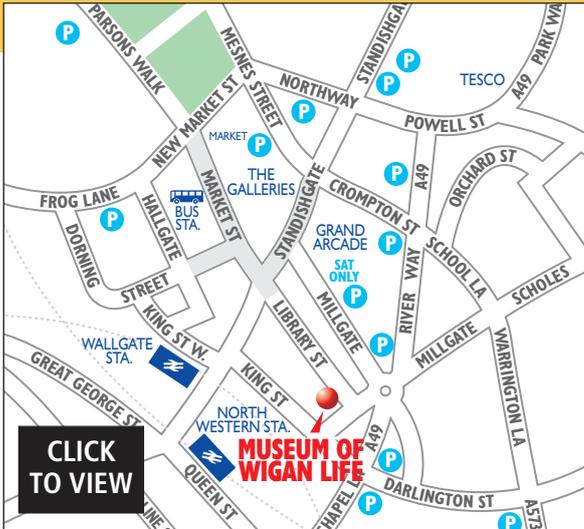
A special look underneath the bandages of Manchester Museum's Egyptian mummies. The unique collection of mummies has undergone investigation using CT scanning and this is an amazing opportunity to hear firsthand about the findings. What do the scans reveal about mummification? Who were the mummies? How were the mummies made? Back by popular demand.

### The Pretoria Pit Disaster

By Alan Davies  
Thursday 23rd November  
12noon - 1pm, £2.50 per person  
incl tea/coffee

Find out about the largest mine disaster in the Lancashire coalfield. On the morning of the 21st Dec 1910, 344 men and boys were killed at Hulton Bank No.3 Pit. Discover more about this tragic event and its impact on the local community.

# How to Find Us

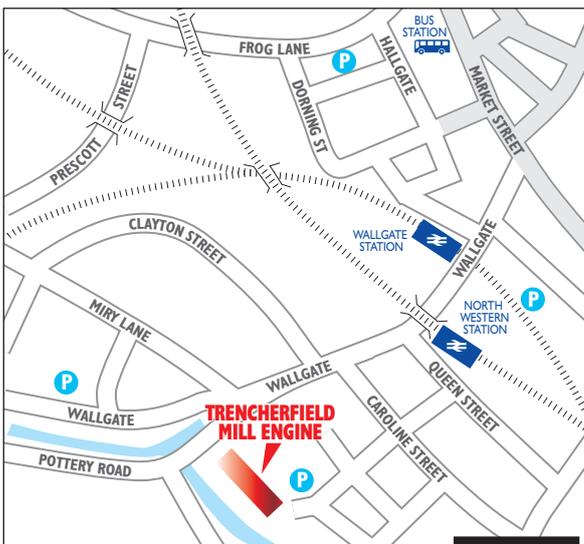
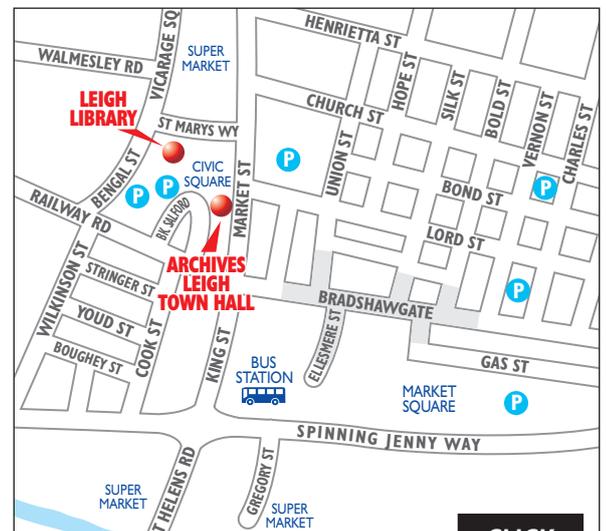


## Museum of Wigan Life & Wigan Local Studies

Library Street,  
Wigan WN1 1NU  
Telephone 01942 828128  
heritage@wigan.gov.uk

## Archives & Leigh Local Studies

Leigh Town Hall, Leigh WN7 1DY  
Telephone 01942 404430  
archives@wigan.gov.uk



## Trencherfield Mill Engine

Wigan Pier Quarter, Heritage Way,  
Wigan WN3 4EF  
Telephone 01942 828128  
b.rowley@wigan.gov.uk

YOUR LOCAL MUSEUM

Bolton Bury  
Oldham Rochdale  
Salford Stockport  
Tameside Wigan

Take a closer look [www.gmmg.org.uk](http://www.gmmg.org.uk)



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