

# PAST FORWARD

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**Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine**



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**FRONT COVER**

*Front cover image kindly reproduced from the Austin Lyons collections, Wigan Archives*

# Letter from the Editorial Team



## Welcome to the Christmas 2017 edition of Past Forward!

You'll find plenty to read as you relax with a mince pie in a comfy chair over the festive period! First up are some of the winners from the 2017 Past Forward Essay Writing Competition.

Our winner, Anthony Pilgrim, examines the life of the seventeenth century Ashton preacher, James Wood, 'a very godly preacher, a man of good life and conversacon'. Forward 250 years, Julie McKiernan's second placed article traces the influence of the famous Leigh architect, J C Prestwich, the man who designed many of the most well-known and well-loved buildings in the town.

Our 2017 winners in full are:

- 1st – **Anthony Pilgrim**, James Wood – Preacher Man
- 2nd – **Julie McKiernan**, Builder of Dreams
- 3rd – **Marjorie Williams**, Hindsford Boy's Life in France

Runners-up – **Laurence Ince**, Medieval Wigan; **Gerald Marsden**, Memories Like 'Orwell'; **Renee Jones**, William Henry Jones; **Barbara Lane**, Uncle Willie; **Helen Prescott**, Westhoughton, 1910.

Our continued thanks go to Mr and Mrs O'Neill for supporting the competition so generously again this year.

Elsewhere in the magazine we feature further fascinating research into the life of Charlotte Blears, convict and survivor of transportation who managed to return from Tasmania to her hometown of Leigh. We look further at Leigh's brewing history, trace more insights into Nelly Weeton and have a special extended article written by Culcheth Local History group members about Thomas Unsworth, silk weaver and noted felon.

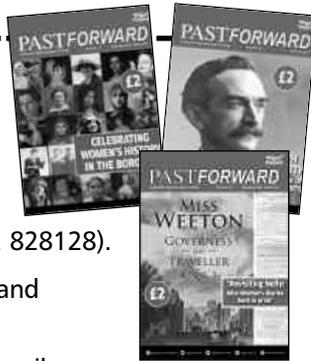
Work is now complete on the Heritage Lottery Fund application for the new archive facilities at Leigh, with the final documents submitted to the HLF in November. Whilst it is a competitive process we are hopeful of a good result. Our proposals are firmly supported by Wigan Council and we hope will find a good reception with the HLF committee. We will receive a decision from the HLF in March 2018. Watch this space for more information on the plans.

Information for contributors, please see page 29

# PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

## Copy Deadline for Issue 78

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday, 16th February 2018.



### Past Forward Subscription

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We are delighted to announce that two of our Archives & Local Studies volunteers won awards at the Greater Manchester Archives & Local Studies Partnership volunteer celebration.

**Heather Pinnell** won Young Volunteer of the Year, whilst **Yvonne Eckersley** received the Volunteer of the Year award in recognition of all the work she does for the Archives & Local Studies.

At the same event we celebrated the completion of our Made In Greater Manchester Project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. In Wigan, we have produced an extensive new catalogue of material from the Walker Brother of Wigan, engineers, collection. You can find out more about the project and new resources here: <https://madeingm.wordpress.com/>

Drawing by Christopher Murphy



# JAMES WOOD

## PREACHER MAN

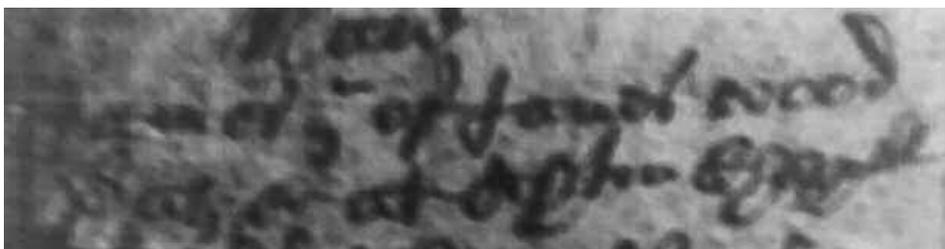
BY ANTHONY PILGRIM

2017 saw the 350th anniversary of the death of James Wood 'preacher of the Word at Asheton in Makerfield'.

Of Mr Wood's early life and ordination there is no record. He first occurs as 'preacher at Ashton Chappell' in the 1639 baptismal record of his son, also James. 'The Diary of Roger Lowe' hints at past involvement in 'wars and troubles' but gives no detail. As a clergyman, his fortunes were tied to those of the Presbyterian party. In 1643 a 'Covenant' between English Parliamentarians and their Scottish sympathisers provided that Presbyterian religious rites and manner of Church government (essentially, selection of clergy by the laity rather than by bishops) should be extended to England. Accordingly, the Book of Common Prayer was replaced by a Directory for Public Worship and the hierarchy of bishops was abolished. An ordinance of 2 October 1646 divided Lancashire into nine 'Classical Presbyteries', and identified James Wood as one of a handful of existing ministers who were 'fit' to serve. Mr Wood was duly elected, and further demonstrated his Presbyterian credentials by signing both the 'Harmonious Consent' of 1648 and the Lancashire clergy's response to the Agreement of the People in 1649. At the same time, his pastoral duties were not neglected. His signature heads a petition of 5 September 1649 on behalf of his plague-afflicted congregation, for whose 'present support and releeffe yor petitioner and some others with have disbursed of there owne money...', and unlesse some Course bee taken they are likely to bee sued and the poore people therein exposed to meare famishment'.

In 1650 commissioners tasked with surveying the Church estate reported that:

'there is a Chappell situated in Ashton... , and Mr James Woodes is Minister there, a very godly preacher, a man of good life and conversacon, but did not keepe the last ffast day appoynted by Acte of p[ar]liam[en]t, for



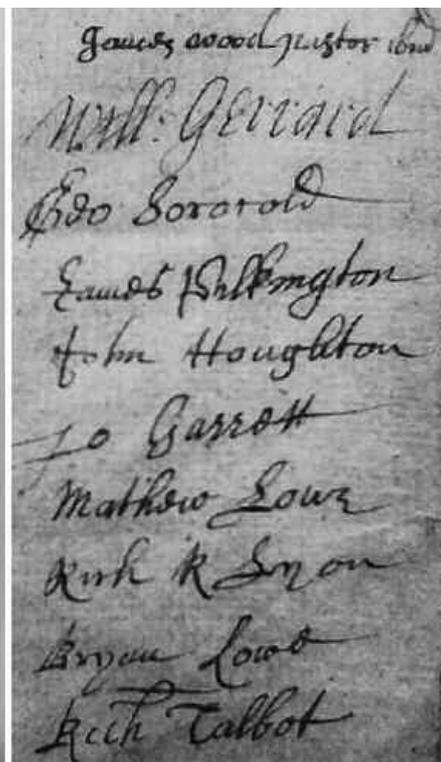
*James s. James Wood preacher at Ashton Chappell' (Winwick St Oswald's Baptism Register, 1 May 1639)*

hee had noe Orders. And hath for his Sallury the Tyth of Asheton by Order from the Comittee of plundred Ministers\*. And came in by free Elleccion of the whole Towne...'

(\*In 1645 the Committee found the township 'soe impoverisht that they cannot contribute to their ministers as formerlie'. It had therefore ordered 'that Mr Wood, minister of the sd chappell of Ashton, have all the rent, tithes, and other proffittes whatsoever

within the townshipp of Ashton that are belonginge or enjoyed in the right of the rectory of the parish church of Winwick'.)

Mr Wood is said to have participated in an ordination at Winwick in 1652. He preached at Leigh on Christmas Day 1660, is cited in a warrant of 18 February 1661, and was included on a list of clergymen prepared at Wigan on 22 October 1661. Otherwise nothing more is heard of him until after



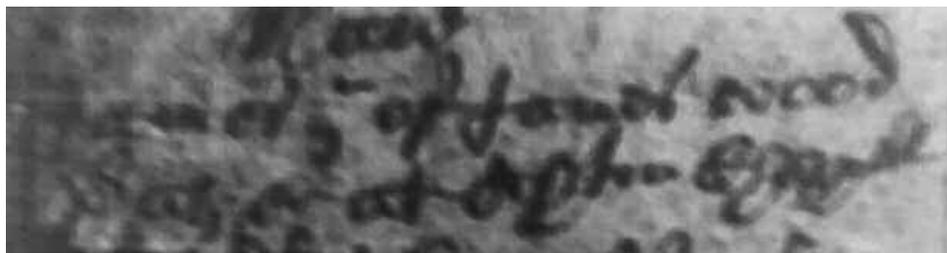
*'Humbly sheweth that the said Township of Ashton-in-Makerfield hath beene for these eight months last past and as yet doth ly under gods heavy hand of the plague... James Wood, pastor.' (Petition for relief owing to plague at Ashton, 5 September 1649)*

commencement of the Act of Uniformity in 1662. By now the Presbyterians had suffered a reversal, and the bishops and Book of Common Prayer had been restored. The Act required that every minister should 'openly and publicly before the congregation assembled for religious worship declare his unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained in ... the Book of Common Prayer, and administration of the Sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies according to the use of the Church of England'. Failure to comply would result in automatic dismissal, and preaching in defiance of the Act in heavy fines and imprisonment.

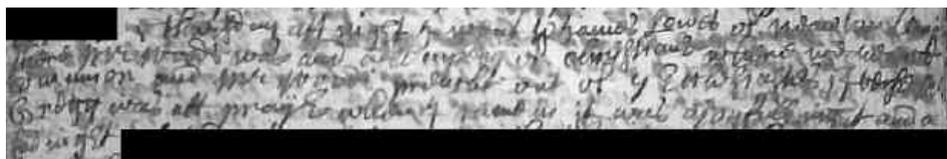
In April 1663 Mr Wood left Ashton to live out his remaining years in Cheshire. Roger Lowe records how, 'with great lamentation', he first took leave of 'every inhabitant', advising them to 'live well'. 'Very much affected he was with parteing with Ashton ...but he would take no leave of me for he thought to see me often.'

Some have questioned whether James Wood was actually removed from office in 1662. No contemporary document to that effect has survived, and use of the title 'minister' in relation to him in the Grappenhall burial register seems to be behind a suggestion that he subsequently conformed and was re-engaged by the Anglican Church at Thelwall. This, however, would have been out of character and contrary to family tradition. The weight of the evidence is that his life after 1662 was that of a nonconformist, relying on the charity of his former congregation and meeting with them for prayer and worship when circumstances allowed. Thus, on 1 November 1663, Lowe receives word that there is 'intended a communion Thursday night next at James Lowes Neawton Comin'. Four days later: 'I went to James Lowes... there Mr Woods was and a company of Christians where we received communion and Mr Woods preached out of 7 Ecclesiastes 14 verse... it was a joyfull night and a sad night'. Such 'private meetings' occur throughout the diary period. The papers of Sir Roger Bradshaigh, captain of the local militia, indicate that Mr Wood was seen at this time as a possible agitator and subversive.

His successor at Ashton, Mr Maddock, barely gets a mention in Lowe's diary but an anecdote included in the 1802 edition of Edmund Calamy's 'The



'[1663, April] 23.—Thursday. Mr. Woods came to take leave of every inhabitant and cald upon me I went with hime and with great lamentation at his going with advice to every family to live well.' (Diary of Roger Lowe)



'[1663] November 5.—Thursday. att night I went to James Lowes of Neawton Comin there Mr Woods was and a company of Christians where we received communion and Mr Woods preached out of 7 Ecclesiastes 14 verse Mr Gregg was at prayr when I came in it was a joyfull night and a sad night.' (Diary of Roger Lowe)

Nonconformist's Memorial' tells of one listener's reaction to his first sermon: 'I think if Mr Woods had only gone into the pulpit and shook his grey beard over us it would have done us more good'.

In February 1667 Lowe 'received that sad sorrowfull newes of Mr Woods death'. He was 63. Calamy writes that James Wood was 'at his Study even to his Old Age, both early and late. And he was an excellent Preacher, and had abundant Success'. These lines, penned by Roger Lowe the day after Mr Wood's leave-taking at Ashton, form a suitable epitaph:

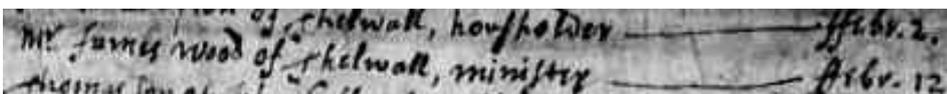
'Though I am shut from Thy house and my own, I both enjoy in Thee, my God, alone.'

#### Note on Sources

The original records of Mr Wood's son's baptism and of his own burial are at Cheshire Archives in, respectively, P 158/1/1 (Winwick St Oswald's Early Registers, 1563-1642) and P 114/1/2 (Grappenhall Parish Early Registers, 1654-1696). Roger Lowe's diary is at Wigan Archives, ref. D/DZ A58. The petition for plague relief is with the Quarter Sessions records at Lancashire Archives, ref. QSP/21/22. The Lancashire Commissioners' returns of 1650 are at National Archives ref. C94/4, but transcripts can be found in "Lancashire

& Cheshire Church Surveys 1649-55" (Rec Soc Lancs & Ches, Vol 1, 1879). The introduction to the latter includes background on the "Solemn League and Covenant" of 1643 and associated documents. The order of the Committee for the Relief of Plundered Ministers, dated 9 August 1645, is at British Library: Additional MS 15,669, fol. 134; a transcript is in "Minutes of the Committee of Relief of Plundered Ministers, Part 1: 1643-1654" (Rec Soc Lancs & Ches, Vol 28, 1893). The suggestion that Mr Wood participated in the ordination of John Howe at Winwick in 1652 is made in a footnote to Rev George Fox's "The History of Park Lane Chapel" (Rawson & Co, 1897). The 1661 list of clergymen is with the Exchequer records at National Archives, ref. E179/61/85. Finally, Sir Roger Bradshaigh's "Letter-Book" for the period 1660-76 is at Manchester Central Library, ref. L1/48/6/1.

'Wood' or 'Woods'? As Rev B Nightingale observes in Volume 4 of his 'Lancashire Nonconformity...' (John Heywood, 1892), 'members' of the family signed themselves 'Wood', though contemporary writers often gave them the benefit of an additional letter 's'. Assuming the man himself would have known best how his name should be spelt, I have followed his example.



'Mr James Wood of Thelwall, Minister. Febr.12.' (Grappenhall Burial Register, 1666/7)

# J. C. Prestwich: Builder of Dreams

By Julie McKiernan

Traditional streets are no longer at the heart of the retail trade but Leigh's Market Street is a classic example, with its Town Hall shops, in big demand when the building opened in 1907, now standing empty. Architect J. C. Prestwich had originally intended to include more but the decision was made to focus on the building's role as the civic centre of the Municipal Borough of Leigh. Built in an impressive Edwardian Baroque style, it still commands attention as one third of the triumvirate of public buildings on the Civic Square, but J C Prestwich would be shocked to learn that his building is no longer a hub of local government. However, there are exciting plans to turn the ground floor into an improved archive and museum centre which would transform the use and appearance of this much loved building inside and out.

J. C. Prestwich did more than anyone else to transform the physical appearance of Leigh, designing buildings to reflect its growing industrial strength, wealth and power. As Pevsner CBE FBA, writes, 'Any building of any merit (in Leigh) which is not a church or a mill is almost certainly by the local firm of J. C. Prestwich & Sons, capable – sometimes very capable – in a number of styles'. However, few people know that Leigh's principal architect first had to transform his own life by overcoming a tragic past, which may even have inspired his desire to create a lasting legacy.

James Caldwell Prestwich was born in 1852 to James and Ellen Prestwich in Atherton, the youngest of seven children. Caldwell was his paternal grandmother's maiden name. His father founded Prestwich's Smithy, a nut and bolt works in Bag Lane but died aged 44 in 1860. This wasn't the first tragedy for the family which in 1857 had buried their eldest son, Wright (21), and youngest daughter, Ellen (2 years and 9 months). Worse was to come with remaining daughter, Jane (10) dying just six months after her father.



*Architectural drawing of early proposal for Leigh Town Hall by J C Prestwich, 1899, Wigan Archives*

In 1861, young J. C. was still living in Bag Lane with his mother, who was now running the family business, and older brother John. John, and other brothers, Moses and Amos had followed their father into the family trade but young J. C. must have shown academic ability as he attended Leigh Grammar School. In 1864, when he was twelve, his mother died, which may be why he moved to Nantwich Grammar School which took boarders. By the age of seventeen he had moved to London where he was articled to Rowland Plumbe, Esq. F.R.I.B.A., living with a family in Hampstead.

Sadly, there were further family tragedies when in 1871, John died (23), and Amos was admitted to Prestwich Asylum. Despite this, J. C. continued to attend London Architectural Association classes, before becoming assistant to Messrs Innocent & Brown, and later, Thomas Brown. He finally returned to Lancashire in 1875 shortly after Amos had died in Belle Vue prison, Manchester. Perhaps J. C. returned to see his remaining sibling; Moses was still living in Atherton with his family, running the family business or perhaps he just saw the potential of Leigh as the place to start an architectural practice.

One of J. C.'s earliest works shows him starting his career in a conventional High Victorian Gothic style with the Lilford Hotel in 1876, whilst in 1880 he designed the frontage of Leigh Bazaar with elaborate gables. By 1881 he was living at Atherton Cottage in Pennington and married to Georgina. Business was clearly good as they could afford a domestic servant. That same year he saw his design for Leigh Public Baths completed and was working on others including one for the Theatre Royal.

But he was also making a name for himself as a surveyor and in 1883 his skills were required for an unusual and macabre job as a witness at a murder trial. John Gibbon was accused of killing his uncle, Joshua Rigby at Cheetham Fold Farm, Lowton and J. C. was commissioned to produce a detailed plan of the building identifying all access points to the deceased bedroom. But the prosecution's evidence was found insufficient and Gibbon was set free.

By 1891 J. C. had moved to 46 Church Street with Georgina and their five children: Harold, Lewyn, Herbert, Earnest and Evelyne. He was now Leigh's main architect and designing public and private buildings in his distinctive Renaissance Revival style including the Public Library & Technical School (1894), The Rope & Anchor (1895), and the Central Buildings (1897), the grandest commercial building in Leigh in which J. C., a member of the Freemasons, incorporated purpose-built rooms for the Lodge.



*The Rope and Anchor Hotel, Leigh, Wigan Archives*



*Swimming Baths and Theatre Royal, Wigan Archives*

The next few years saw his business continue to expand and by 1901 he had moved into offices at 14-18 Bradshawgate with prominent raised initials announcing the occupier. The family had also moved to a larger property, Highfield, 73 St Helens Road. J. C. had reaped the benefits of a good education so it isn't surprising that Harold and Lewyn were now both architect's pupils, but it is interesting to note that even daughter Evelyne was a boarder at Cheltenham Ladies College.

J. C. continued to design many important local buildings including Leigh Infirmary, Leigh Club, Parr's Bank, The Hippodrome, The Palace Cinema, and the Cenotaph, and in 1908 he went into partnership with eldest son, Harold, becoming developers with a range of properties on Beech Grove. Earnest also later joined the firm.

In 1911, J. C. became a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architecture which must have been one of the highlights of his long and distinguished career. Despite working so hard it was said that he was very good at making conversation and had a lot of friends, particularly at Leigh Cricket Club where he was one of its oldest members.

He retired in 1930 aged 77. When he died in 1940 he was the longest lived of his immediate family, and most of his graceful buildings still remain which is a testimony not only to the strength and beauty of their design but also their adaptability to change.

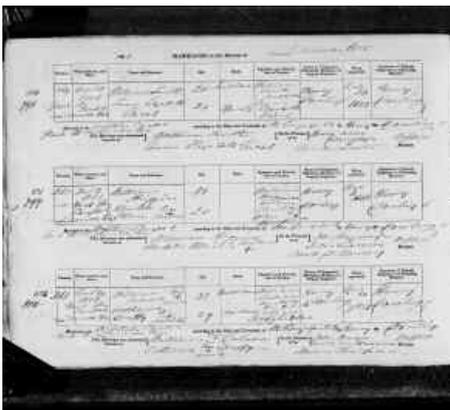
# Charlotte Blears

## ... the story continues

BY KATH GRAHAM

In the last article about Charlotte Blears (Past Forward Issue 75) I commented that for most transported convicts, transportation was for life, irrespective of the number of years stipulated by the Court. There were a number of reasons for this but the two most common were that a convict might marry and have a better life in Tasmania or the cost of a return passage to England was often not affordable to a former convict. Charlotte was to prove the exception to the rule.

We know that in 1851, Charlotte had a bank account containing eleven shillings. This may have funded her passage to Geelong, Australia reported in The Cornwall Chronicle of 13 November 1851. Charlotte Blair is listed as a steerage passenger on the Sea Belle where she was recorded as arriving in the colony as a free woman. Her future husband was also recorded as a passenger on the same boat. The couple must have returned to Tasmania as



*Marriage Charlotte Blears & William Higgins 1852*



*Christopher Murphy's interpretation of Charlotte Blears*

there was a marriage on the 3 November 1853 at York St Baptist Chapel Launceston of William Higgins a bachelor aged 33 and Charlotte Blaire aged 28.

Several men had previously applied to marry Charlotte. Henry Fry's first application had been refused and the second approved but there is no record of a marriage. In 1845, Joseph Wilcox had made his application to marry Charlotte but again no marriage ensued. However, in April 1846 Charlotte gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth, who lived only a few days, dying of convulsions. Elizabeth Wilcox had been baptised in Launceston, her father Joseph Wilcox was a gardener. An application from John Dawson in 1846 didn't result in a marriage

either. In November 1848 a newspaper article reports a complaint by Charlotte against her husband Mr Robinson but again no marriage has been traced.

There is no evidence of what happened to William Higgins but by 1855 Charlotte is back in England and living in Leigh using her maiden name of Blears. Her spell in Tasmania does not appear to have had the desired effect however as she was back before the local Magistrates, an event reported in the Leigh Chronicle for February 1855 under the heading 'Charlotte in Trouble Again'. She was described as 'an old offender...well known to the police' when she was found guilty of being drunk and fined 5 shillings with costs. It seems she had been back in Leigh at least long enough to earn the above description.

Charlotte appeared again in the Leigh Chronicle of 11 April 1857 described as 'Charlotte the Harlot finding Succour in a Tabernacle'. The article records 'a woman named Charlotte Blair, of well-known vicious propensities, and who has one already left her county for her country's good was charged with having robbed an elderly man who is a pensioner, named Reuben Whittle'. Reuben went to Charlotte's home to retrieve his money but was met with derision when 'both she and her mother gave him very saucy answers'.

There seems to have been some debate in the courtroom as to

Reuben's relationship with Charlotte. Although he accused her of stealing the money he also admitted that he had 'given her many a shilling when she had asked him.....when her grandmother was dead in the house she asked him for money and he gave it to her'. Since Charlotte was illegitimate it is unclear which grandmother is being referred to, as her maternal grandmother Sarah Blears had died and was buried at St Oswald Winwick on the 14 April 1847 when Charlotte had already been in Van Diemen's Land for four years.

Charlotte claimed that Reuben had sent a man called Thomas Tabernacle to 'her father's house' for her and that her stepfather had received money from Reuben. The father/stepfather must refer to Thomas Jarrett who was named along with his wife Elizabeth as Charlotte's next of kin in the Chester Court Documents of 1861, rather than Richard Dickinson who married her mother Elizabeth at St Oswald's, Winwick in 1825. The evidence of Thomas Tabernacle proved Reuben Whittle's testimony to be untrue and accordingly Charlotte was acquitted.

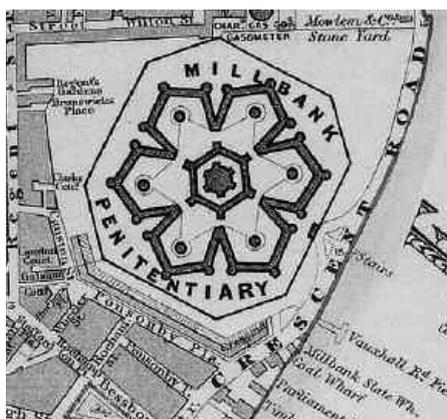
In 1861, Charlotte was again in trouble. The Cheshire Observer & General Advertiser of the 26 October 1861 reported 'Charlotte Davidson 43, Leigh near Warrington was charged with stealing nine shillings and a watch from the person of James Newton of Monks Coppenhall on the 11 Oct ... Prisoner pleaded guilty to stealing the watch. A previous conviction having been proved she was sentenced to seven years servitude'.

While awaiting transport to the prison where she was to serve her sentence she was temporarily housed at Chester Castle where many of her details were recorded. At this time, the castle did not appear to hold prisoners long term probably because conditions were poor. On the 9 November 1861, Charlotte was taken from the Castle to Millbank Prison in London. While at Millbank, her conduct was recorded as good, her progress at

school was moderate and her prison trade that of laundry maid. Millbank had been completed in 1821 and up to 1868, everyone sentenced to transportation was processed through its doors. Charlotte was to stay in Millbank for twelve months and two days before she was again transferred, this time to Brixton Prison on the 1 November 1862.

According to the parole records Charlotte was quite tall for a woman of that era and stood at five foot and seven inches. She had a sallow complexion, brown hair and hazel eyes, her face was long and her build was proportionate to her height. Identifying marks included two cuts above the left eyebrow and a series of initials on both arms and left shoulder. Many convicts arrived in Tasmania with tattoos and many of the letters were to remind them of family and friends left behind in England. When she arrived in Van Diemen's Land, she had the letters N.S., an anchor and cable, 7 dots on her right arm and IB on her shoulder.

Charlotte's prison records also note her next of kin as being her parents Thos. & Elizabeth Jarrett of Leigh. Again, Charlotte's Lancashire accent caused confusion, as her stepfather's name was Thomas Garrard, not Jarret. He had been living in Leigh as a lodger with Betty Dickinson in 1851 in Diamond Street and Thomas and Elizabeth married in 1852. In 1861, they were living in Duckinfield Street. This document also listed all her former convictions covering the years 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842 and her transportation for 10 years plus further convictions in 1858, 1859



Millbank Penitentiary



Millbank Burial Ground

and 1861 along with her many aliases: Charlotte Davidson (Davison), Charlotte Blears, Jane Yarwood, Hannah Thomas and Charlotte Yates. She claimed to be married, although not using her married name of Higgins and was aged 43 years.

By 1866, she had served five years of her sentence when on the 31 May 1866 she received an Order of Licence which allowed her freedom under certain conditions. If these conditions were not met, she would be eligible to complete the remaining two years of her sentence. Luckily, for Charlotte transportation of prisoners had ceased in 1853 under the Penal Servitude Act and the use of licence for prisoners who had behaved well was substituted for the 'Ticket of Leave' system. We must therefore assume that Charlotte had behaved well in prison and had fulfilled all the requirements when on licence as no evidence of her has been found in the criminal justice system under any of her aliases. Similarly, there is no evidence of her death, but it is possible that she remarried or adopted another alias as Charlotte disappeared from the records after 1866.

*I would like to thank the following people for their input and support in documenting the life of Charlotte:*

Pat Bellas, Project Co-ordinator  
Leigh & District Family History Society  
Hannah Turner, Wigan Archives & Leigh Local Studies  
Colette McAlpine, Female Convicts Research Centre Tasmania  
Brian Joyce  
Ronald Hurdus

BY BARBARA DIXON

# MISS ELLEN WEETON

## Mother-in-Law and Grandmamma

Miss Ellen Weeton, who was actually christened Nelly and was the second wife of Aaron Stock of Wigan, wrote the journals and letters which were edited by Edward Hall to become 'Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess'. More often than not Ellen is referred to by her maiden name rather than Mrs. Stock. The work was first published by the Oxford University Press in two volumes in 1936 and 1939, then followed by a reprint from David & Charles with a revised epilogue in 1969.

New on the scene is a rather splendid, generous single volume of the work entitled 'Miss Weeton, Governess and Traveller'. Edited by Alan Roby and containing updated and additional material, it is published by Wigan Archives & Local Studies at £20.

Unfortunately, not all of Ellen's journals survived. Volume Six, covering most of 1818, is one of those missing and it would probably have contained some mention of the events related here.

My aim was to establish whether the Jane Stock who married Thomas Peck, brother of George Peck, founder of the Wigan tarpaulin business J H Peck & Co., was Ellen's stepdaughter. If that were so, I would welcome Ellen, albeit rather tenuously, onto my extended family tree.

There was, however, no trace of a wedding at Wigan. But there was a marriage for a Thomas Peck and a Jane Stock at Olney in Buckinghamshire in 1818, the only one nationally listed for a couple with those names. Both the bride and the groom I was looking for



*Standishgate, Wigan, 1836. The property on the extreme right was the residence of Ellen Weeton and her husband Aaron Stock from 1816 until 1822, Wigan Archives*

were from Wigan so, in the days of tiring travel by horse and carriage, why choose Olney? Could it be a runaway marriage? In Ellen's own words about Jane, she had 'a gallivanting propensity which inevitably indicated expedited marriage'. Without any knowledge of a connection between Wigan and Olney for either the Stocks or the Pecks, was this marriage I had found even between the right pair?

Shortly after marrying Aaron in September 1814, Ellen wrote to one of her former pupils 'I have got one daughter..... 15 years old! She has a very pretty face, and she is of such a sweet, amiable disposition, that everybody loves her'. By 1818 that daughter would still be a minor and need the consent of her father to get married. Clearly the next step was to seek out any documents in the Olney vicinity that would hopefully identify Jane Stock.

A request was made to the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies at Aylesbury for a copy of the relevant marriage entry from the Olney parish register. The archives section was very helpful and suggested that as the marriage was by licence I might also like to see copies of the Bond and Allegation.

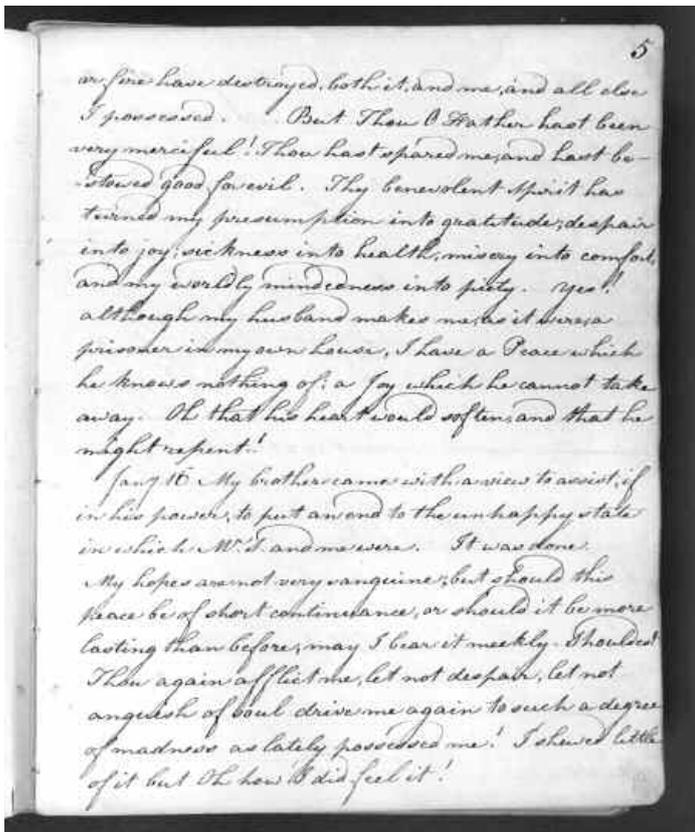
When the paperwork arrived, there seemed immediate promise in that Thomas Peck was from Wigan and that Jane was a minor. On the other hand, perhaps those details were no more than coincidences, because the marriage register simply recorded that Jane was 'of this parish'. I did not recognise the names of the two witnesses, James Simmons and Hannah Simmons.

The Allegation which Thomas Peck signed stated that Jane 'has had her respective place of abode in the parish of Olney aforesaid for the last four weeks and upwards' and that her father (unnamed) had given his consent.

Thomas also signed a Bond and the other signatory was James Simmons, the same person as the male witness on the entry in the marriage register. The other witness was Hannah Simmons, could she have been James' wife, his sister or even another relative? An initial search for a marriage for James Simmons brought no result. But, looking further afield, there was one for James at Wigan and it rewarded me with the proof I was seeking. He had married Hannah Gilbert, Aaron Stock's stepdaughter and Jane's half-sister.

James and Hannah's Wigan wedding was on the 20 July 1818, after which they made their home at Olney. Exactly one month later Jane married 'Handsome Tom' Peck in Olney.

So it would seem that Jane did not entirely indulge in a runaway marriage in the expected sense but there is no indication that her father Aaron was there. It is highly unlikely that Ellen was, due to the deterioration of the marital situation between herself and Aaron. One can only imagine his reaction to the event.



A page from Ellen Weeton's 'Occasional Reflections' describing her life with Aaron Stock and his family, Wigan Archives

There is a slight hint in an extract from a letter that Ellen sent to her husband stating 'if Jane's conduct has hurt you in any way, consider [that] the snare she fell into in marrying Peck, was more Hannah Gilbert's doings than her own; and, oh what a serpent she has been in our family; the destroyer of all our peace, and the complete ruin of Jane'. This quotation appears in Volume Two of the 1969 David & Charles reprint. It is in a chapter dated 1817, which is the year before the marriage took place, but is qualified by Hall saying 'but this is to anticipate'.

In spring 1819, Hannah Simmons and Jane Peck both had their first child, two daughters, nine months after their respective weddings. Both daughters were named after their mother Elizabeth Gilbert. And, of course, this means that Ellen became a step grandmother for the first time. It was more than 20 years before her own daughter Mary married and provided her with two grandchildren.

Eight more grandchildren eventually arrived, six for Hannah and two for Jane.

In conclusion, Thomas and Jane Peck returned to Lancashire and lived at Haslingden, where they had three children, Elizabeth, Hannah and Aaron Stock Peck. Thomas was an oil cloth manufacturer and cart sheet maker. There is evidence in Wigan Archives at Leigh of him obtaining tarpaulin from his brother George Peck.

Unfortunately there is no happy ending for Thomas and Jane as they did not stay together, although it is not clear exactly when they separated. Haslingden's rate book records for 1829 has entries in Thomas' name for a house and several empty warehouses and vaults while Pigot's National Commercial Directory 1828-9 lists their address as Higher Lane, Haslingden. Their children at that time were aged ten years and under but then all three of them were christened on the 1 May 1830 at Wigan, when the family's address was given as Millgate. It is simply not possible to hazard a guess when they left the small town but by the 1841 census, members of the family were living in separate places across Lancashire. The elder daughter Elizabeth did retain her connection with Haslingden because she married a local man there in 1842.

Thomas lived for more than a couple of decades at Failsworth where he died in 1862. Jane moved to Blackpool, where she lived with her son Aaron, a bread baker of Market Street, until her death in 1866.

James and Hannah continued to live at Olney with their seven children, Anna-Elizabeth, Eliza, Mary Wells, John, James, Edmund Wells and William. Sadly, Hannah did not reach old age; she died young as by 1837 James had remarried. He died at Dartmouth, Devon, in 1861, in retirement.

But there should always be a surprise at the end of any good story and there is with this one; James Simmons was the Baptist Minister at Olney from 1818 until 1858. James did not perform the marriage ceremony for Thomas and Jane because their wedding took place at Olney parish church. On reflection, after having read of the mischief wrought, there is a second surprise that Hannah should have ended up a pastor's wife.

My special interest in this 200 year old history is because of my link with the Pecks. My great-great-grandmother, Ellen Fouracre married Richard Peck, youngest son of George Peck mentioned above. Thomas Peck who married Jane Stock was his uncle. When Ellen married Richard she already had a young son and he took the Peck surname as his own. The jury is forever out on whether Richard was his father. My grandfather was born at Wigan and my maiden name is Peck.

# LEIGH'S POLITICAL WOMEN AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE 1910-1914

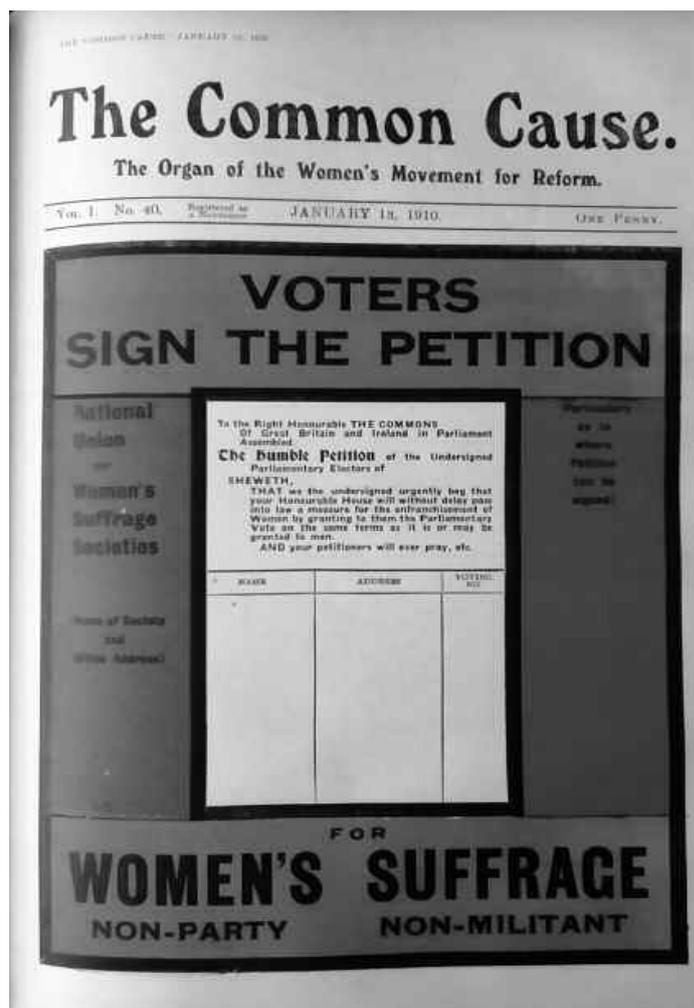
BY YVONNE ECKERSLEY

Leigh's association with women's suffrage did not begin in 1910. In October 1900, Mrs A Urmston, Leigh Co-operative Women's Guild secretary, wrote to C.P. Scott, the Leigh MP from 1895 to 1905, to request his vote on the Women's Franchise Bills. He answered in the affirmative. In 1908, H.Y. Stranger, Leigh's County Court Judge, introduced a Women's Suffrage Bill. And, in July 1909, members of the Women's Social and Political Union created a disturbance in Leigh.

Then, during the General Election of January 1910 the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) visited Leigh with the object of collecting signatures for their Voter's Petition. This unofficial referendum aimed to prove male voters were in favour of votes for women. With the cooperation of local suffragists, an impressive 2843 signatures were collected at Leigh polling stations. After which, the specially made banner stating '2843 Men of Leigh Demand Women's Suffrage', was used to advertise Women's Suffrage meetings.

Following on from this, the NUWSS held a consciousness raising campaign, which culminated in the formation of the Leigh Women's Suffrage Society in October 1910. Its first secretary was Miss Florence P Hindshaw BA, followed by a Miss L Cook of Railway Road. Membership of the Leigh branch was not gendered and non-party. The campaign took the form of a series of public meetings/debates led by prominent pro-women's suffrage workers, supported by local interested parties and out of town speakers including C.P. Scott. NUWSS key speakers included Mrs F.T. Swanwick, Kathleen Courtney, Lisbeth Robinson, Margaret Robinson and Manchester Councillor Margaret Ashton. These women constantly stressed their non-militancy, non-party and law abiding credentials in order to address some women's fear of being identified with the 'shrieking sisterhood' of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

There were legitimate reasons for unease and fear. When Margaret Robertson spoke at a Leigh Teachers Association meeting, some male members in the audience 'moodily twirled their moustaches and gazed at the floor' and the chair 'kept a few from that energy of opposition that often ends in blows'. This latent aggression did result in violence, and in one particular instance was condoned in the local press. When a Tyldesley socialist was mobbed for hanging out a 'Votes for Women' banner, Leigh Chronicle opined 'he asked for it' and 'deserved what he got'.



Front cover of 'The Common Cause' petitioning for women's suffrage

A proportion of Leigh's women had organised themselves into political associations before this campaign. The Leigh Women's Liberal Association was particularly large. Three hundred women were taken by train from Westleigh to Lowton, to be thanked for their part in P.W. Raffan MP's 1910 Parliamentary campaign. From 1910 to 1914 they held tea meetings where 100 to 200 attendees were addressed by speakers. Female Conservatives organised in either the Leigh Women's Unionist or Conservative Associations. These too were large organisations, with sufficient kudos to attract the Rt Hon. Austin Chamberlain MP. Though the Leigh Labour Party was in its infancy (forming in 1908), it had a politically active women's section.

The Women's Labour League (WLL) was essentially a Labour Party pressure group formed in 1906. Its aim included the promotion and support of male and female Labour candidates for parliamentary and/or municipal office, and Boards of Guardians. There were WLL branches at Bamfurlong, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Golborne, Lowton, Leigh and Tyldesley. The Leigh Labour Party was ambitious, Tom Greenall was its Parliamentary candidate in January 1910 and it was increasing its membership of Leigh Council.

The Lowton and Leigh WLL branches had a committed and energetic leader. Mrs Mottram was a founder and secretary for Lowton (1911+) then Leigh (1912+). These branches were small, reaching 20 in Lowton and 60 in Leigh. Notwithstanding this, they made a decisive impact during Leigh's municipal elections.

Mrs Mottram herself stood, unsuccessfully, as a candidate for Leigh Rural District Council and the Guardian's elections in 1913. She attended WLL Conferences - at Earlestown she argued for equal pay for women; she was a member of the Leigh Insurance Committee; during the War she agitated for Municipal Lodging Houses for women munitions workers; was a member of the Leigh War Emergency Workers Committee; and helped devise systems to aid Leigh's Disabled Soldiers and Sailors. Like Ellen Wilkinson, Labour MP and leader of the Jarrow Marchers working in Tyldesley, Mrs Mottram was both a WLL and NUWSS organiser. At this time NUWSS leaders, particularly in the North, were increasingly identifying with working class women. In 1910 they launched their 'Friends of Women's Suffrage' initiative. This enabled people who could not afford the membership fee, become members simply by pledging their allegiance. This widening of their demographic increased membership. Between 1910 and 1914 the number of full members and 'Friends' rose from 21,571 to over 100,000.

Mrs Mottram's feminism and labour politics came together during Leigh's 1912 and 1913 municipal elections. Mr. J L Prescott, the successful Labour Candidate for St Mary's Ward in 1912, acknowledged that the work of Mrs Mottram and her women co-workers had been a big factor in his success against the Liberal J. Sargent. It is probable that Mrs Mottram's co-workers, were drawn from the women's sections of all Leigh's political parties. In 1912 the NUWSS, which contained a large Liberal contingent, disappointed by the Liberal Party's continual rejection of Women's Suffrage Bills, reached an agreement with the Labour Party. As the Labour Party was the only party to pledge their complete support for Women's Suffrage, the NUWSS agreed to support Labour parliamentary and municipal candidates. The Conservative Party in the main, were anti-women's suffrage. In St Mary's, Conservative Councillor W R Boydell, fighting for re-election in 1913, had no women's helpers, despite there being a large Women's Unionist Association in the Ward. The victor, Labour's J.H.Wright, when praising WLL canvassers, commented that Boydell had had to do 'all the spade work' himself.



*NUWSS banner for Leigh in 1911.  
Image supplied by British Pathe.*

However W.R. Boydell, with George Hunter, Liberal Councillor for St Mary's in 1911, was a proven women's suffragist. In 1911, at the request of the NUWSS, Leigh Council was one of only 146 County, Borough and District Councils nationwide, to petition Parliament in support of enfranchising women householders. In Council, it was Councillor Hunter who moved the resolution, with Councillor Boydell seconding. Throughout this period the NUWSS called on its member societies to take part in the mass demonstrations and rallies that are so well known. As a significant proportion of the participants were northern working women, prominent among these being pit brow women and mill workers, it is safe to assume Leigh women were represented. As the photograph shows, it looks as though at least one Leigh woman was in London for the Demonstration of 18 June 1910.

Furthermore, despite the fact that details of ordinary women's personal involvement are so hard to find, there is evidence that a group of Leigh women spent weeks making goods to sell on the Leigh, Wigan, Farnworth and Eccles' stall at the 1912 NUWSS fund-raising Bazaar at Manchester's Midland Hotel.

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BY LAURENCE INCE

# MEDIEVAL WIGAN AND THE TWO INCE FAMILIES



*Deeds from the Anderton papers at Wigan Archives concerning the Ince family, DD.AN.23.3 dating from 1260 and 1291*

In the late 1930s C W Ince of Barbados undertook much research into the Ince family and their origins in Lancashire. Much of his correspondence with Arthur Hawkes, Wigan's Librarian, has been preserved. One of the problems that confronted him in his research was the question of whether there were two or one land owning families at Ince who took the name of the manor as their surname.

Ince is an ancient English Celtic name that means a watery place. The manor of Ince became a town and is now an eastern suburb of Wigan. Much research was undertaken by the staff of the Victoria County History of Lancashire (VCHL) into the history of Ince. Land at Ince in 1212 was owned by Alfred de Ince, who was the son of Orm de Haydock. It was quite common to change your surname in medieval times to reflect your land holding or where you lived.

However, the family name then continued, for Alfred was followed by Henry de Ince and his sons John and Thomas de Ince. There was a big change in land ownership in the manor when land was purchased in the early 1260s by Henry de Sefton whose son would acquire the name Richard de Ince. Henry de

Sefton was purchasing land in Ince but also in Wigan, Aspull, Pemberton and other manors. C W Ince, after weighing up the evidence of deeds and charters leaned towards the fact there was only one Ince family. The account in the Victoria County History is also indecisive about the two families. However, in the notes to the article about the Manor of Ince there is a very interesting fact. This is a reference to a long running legal suit in the 1280s which mentions that Henry de Wigan was the father of Richard de Ince.

The one document that these researchers did not have access to at that time was the Ince Roll. This is a fourteenth century roll which consists of copies of deeds dating from the early 1260s. This records the acquisition of land around Ince, Pemberton and Wigan by Henry de Sefton and his son Richard de Ince. Some of this land was acquired from the first Ince family. The Roll throws much light on Ince family history and clearly demonstrates that there were two families with that name. Before these purchases of land there is little record of Henry de Sefton's activities and there are few references to him after these events. With the name Henry de

Sefton you would think that there was a strong Lancashire connection to his family. In one deed he is named as Henry de Schefton. Sceftonia was the Latin word for Shaftesbury in Dorset.

These were important times for Wigan for in around 1245, John Mansel (Maunsell) became Rector of Wigan. This also made him Lord of the Manor. Mansel was an adviser to and close friend of Henry III. He was a cleric but also fought in the French Wars. It is said that he was given 300 benefices during his life producing a yearly income of 4,000 marks. One shadow did hang over his career at the royal court. His father had trained as a priest yet he married and had children. A special dispensation had to be obtained from the Pope so that John Mansel would not be classed as illegitimate. However, John Mansel also played the same game as his father; he married and had children. He had at least three sons. The Ince Roll records a third generation attempting to follow this path. Mansel is known for being the person who obtained the first charter for Wigan in around 1246. It was an important step forward for the town but also for Mansel as he was Lord of the Manor. The rights granted in the charter would mean more business in Wigan and more income for Mansel. The amount of income this could generate is demonstrated by the accounts of a later rector whose income during the year March 1638 to March 1639 amounted to just over £566. The grant for this initial charter was witnessed by several men including Henry de Sefton who was Mansel's bailiff in Wigan. Not only was Henry de Sefton a bailiff but he was also a 'Clerk to God' as stated in a deed of land he gave to Cockersand Abbey.



*Deeds from the Anderton papers at Wigan Archives concerning the Ince family, DD.AN.23.5 dating from 1260 and 1291*

Little is heard of Henry de Sefton after the mid-1260s. However, a legal tussle erupts in the 1280s over the land he had left to his son Richard de Ince. This is recorded in legal records and the Ince Roll. In the proceedings Richard de Ince is named as the son of Henry de Wigan. The land in question is listed as being bought by Henry de Sefton. It was not unusual in medieval times for a man to use more than one second name. The case was brought by Richard Mansel of Heaton who names himself as brother to Henry de Wigan. It is known that John Mansel had at least three sons including a Richard and Henry. Richard Mansel claimed during the proceedings that Richard de Ince was illegitimate. It is obvious that Henry de Sefton (de Wigan) was John Mansel's son and was the third generation of Mansel clerics to get into trouble over marriage and children. As Rector of Wigan and Lord of the Manor it is obvious that John Mansel would need a trusted servant to look after his affairs. A son would be ideal but not one bearing the name Mansel; that would be a step too far for a man of the cloth and the people of Wigan. Henry de Sefton's death in the 1260s is explained by the fact that John Mansel's son Henry is thought to have died in 1265 at the Battle of Northampton. Henry de Sefton supported the de Montforts while John Mansel remained loyal to Henry III.



*Deeds from the Anderton papers at Wigan Archives concerning the Ince family, DD.AN.23.3a dating from 1260 and 1291*

By Steve Crook

# The Breweries of Leigh in Lancashire

*In the second part of his study of the brewing industry in Leigh, Steve Crook explores the history of some of the smaller breweries in the town.*

## **Lilford Brewery (1895-1899)**

This Brewery was erected by Joseph Jackson (b.1845-d.1896), the landlord of the Lilford Hotel, between September 1894 and March 1895. It was situated to the rear of the Hotel, between Brown Street, Lord Street, Bedford Street and Bradshawgate, in what was the Atherton Township. Joseph died shortly after in October 1896. A contested Estate saw the Hotel with attached brewery (excluding plant and equipment), dwelling houses and shops sold by auction to the Bedford Brewing & Malting Company (BBMC) for £16,150 in April 1899, giving the latter 'practically an undisturbed monopoly in the Leigh district'. The brewing plant and equipment was auctioned separately in June 1899. The brewery, and bottling plant which preceded it, was for many years occupied by R. Green & Company (bottlers and distributors). A conversion to flats is currently under way.

## **The Bedford Leigh Brewery (1868-1890)**

First references suggest that Ralph Tonge (b.1828-d.1890), previously landlord at the Saddle Inn, bought or (more likely) leased the Railway Hotel on East Bond Street. This Hotel had an attached brewery to the rear, along the Leigh railway branch line, both buildings having been built c.1868 by Robert Guest (b.1827-d.1906), of Bedford House. The record shows that Ralph Tonge was granted a spirit licence for the Railway Hotel in September 1868.

In January 1877, a provisional notice of auction listed for sale, amongst a number of beer houses and public houses, the Railway Hotel including the attached Bedford Leigh Brewery. The final auction schedule was published in March 1877 and (for reasons still unclear) Tonge's Bedford Leigh Brewery had been substituted by the Bedford Steam Brewery on Brown Street, later to become known as the Derby Brewery. It seems, at that time, that both breweries were in the ownership of Robert Guest. Later, in April 1878, the Bedford Leigh Brewery was re-offered for letting by Robert Guest, but the record shows that Ralph Tonge remained in occupation.

The Bedford Leigh Brewery, together with thirteen tied houses and cottages, was in July 1890 bought by the BBMC, by private treaty, for a sum in excess of £28,000. This was the start of a systematic push toward brewing monopolisation by the BBMC. Ralph Tonge, the Brewery proprietor for over twenty years, died a few months later although he had been in feeble health for some years. It seems that the Brewery was then decommissioned and the tied houses etc. were added to the BBMC portfolio. The Railway Hotel and adjoining properties were demolished in the 1990s after having been in a semi-derelict state for many years.

## **Bond Street Brewery (1864-1897)**

Founded in April, 1864 by James Shovelton (b.1822-d.1880), previously the licensee of the Chat Moss Tavern, Bury Lane, Culcheth. The new brewery premises occupied a site bounded by Bond Street, Hope Street, Lord Street and Silk Street, in what was the Pennington Township. The original structure was added to during 1866 and again in 1869. James died in late 1880 and the business continued for 10 years more in the name of the Executors of James Shovelton. A manager, John Henry Fricker (b.1829-d.1910), was appointed to oversee the operation sometime around 1881, being superseded by William Kay (b.1822-d.1893) who took over as manager in 1884 and who remained in post until late 1890. In June 1890, preliminary notice of their intention to auction off the concern (brewery, houses, beer houses, shops, dwelling-houses and land) was published by the Executors.

Although it was the intention of the BBMC to acquire the concern (max. bid resolved by the Board to be £30,000), it was ultimately snapped up for £32,700 by a local syndicate of seven individuals; William Horrocks (b.1847-d.1927 and Mayor of Leigh Corporation in both 1902-1903 and 1906-1907.), William Prescott (b.1847-d.1914), William Chadwick (b.1848-d.1921), Peter Hayes (b.1855-d.1926), Margaret Shovelton (b.1830-b.1891 and James Shovelton's sister), Joseph Smith (b.1849-d.1919), and Henry Boydell (b.1851-d.1938).

Almost inevitably, the Bond Street Brewery related premises was sold to the BBMC at the second attempt

in January 1897, by private treaty, for the sum of £87,500. The brewing operation was decommissioned, some of the main building demolished to accommodate a new Post Office on Silk Street and other parts let to Collins & Darwell, printers, and to the local Catholic Association for a club house. Little else has changed to this day.

### Crown Brewery (1877-1898)

Built by Peter Reeves (b.1829-d.1891) during 1877 and situated between Leigh Road, Irvine Street, Oxford Street and Reeves Street, in what was then the Township of Atherton. The steam engine was officially christened and trading commenced in the following year, 1878.

In 1881, the Brewery was the subject of an attempted takeover by the Corona Brewery Co., Ltd., involving share capital of £50,000. None of the six subscribers resided locally, being from Henley-on-Thames, Peckham, Stoke Newington, Annerley Park, Dulwich and Cophthall Chambers. The attempt came to nothing and, in March 1882, four Directors of Corona and the Company Secretary were summoned under the Joint-stock Companies Act, 1862, for refusing to allow a Complainant to inspect the Register of Members. In August 1883 a resolution already having been passed by the Court for a voluntary winding-up, an order was now made to continue the voluntary winding-up under Court supervision.

Peter Reeves was declared bankrupt in mid-1884 probably mainly due to being financially over-extended by his purchase and improvement of the Abbey Lakes pleasure grounds near Up Holland. He was eventually

discharged from bankruptcy in 1886 but the record suggests that by this time (and until 1888) the Brewery was being managed by his daughter, Miss Margaret Fell Reeves.

In November 1888, it was reported in the local press that BBMC had likely bought Reeves's Crown Brewery. In reality, the Brewery had been bought by Isaac Lawrence and Sons, Ince Brewery, Lord Street. Ince whose own Brewery had been all but destroyed by fire earlier that year. Much evidence points to the new owners running a brewing operation at the Crown Brewery from 1888 to early 1898.

The founder of the Crown Brewery, Peter Reeves, died in Southport in May 1891.

The Ince Brewery was rebuilt on Belle Green Lane, Ince, probably no later than September 1892.

Notwithstanding this development, and as alluded to above, Isaac Lawrence and Sons retained their brewing presence in Leigh until early 1898. In June 1898, the Brewery was acquired by BBMC by private treaty for £4,200 and was promptly decommissioned. In 1899, plans were lodged with the council for the erection of a new licensed hotel on the site (and again in 1900 and 1904) but the scheme never came to fruition. The premises became William Collier's Duva Bakery probably sometime around 1914. The former brewery/bakery buildings on Leigh Road were redeveloped into a tax office and then, more recently, into flats and houses c.2010.

Isaac Lawrence died in Southport in February 1916.

**BOND STREET BREWERY, LEIGH.**

Exors. of the late James Shovelton.

**SUPERIOR BITTER AND MILD ALES AND PORTER.**

SPECIAL BREWS FOR FAMILY CONSUMPTION.

SUPPLIED IN 4, 9, AND 18 GALLON CASKS.

PRICE LIST :			
Mild Dinner Ale	...	...	1s. per Gallon.
Superior ditto.	...	...	1s. 2d. do.
Strong ditto.	...	...	1s. 6d. do.
Bitter Ale	...	...	1s. 6d. do.
Porter	...	...	1s. 2d. do.

THE USUAL DISCOUNT FOR CASH.

PROMPT ATTENTION TO ALL ORDERS ADDRESSED TO

J. HENRY FRICKER, Manager. c234

Bond Street Brewery advert, Leigh Chronicle, 1881

# Hindsford

by Marjorie  
Williams

# Boy's Life in France

For many years I had heard snippets of conversations about my uncle William Mather. How he was a famous jockey who went to France to train in the 1930s. However, it wasn't until my visit to the archives and local studies in Leigh that I found out just how amazing his short but successful career was. I was very excited to see photographs and read familiar family names in the articles that had been collected from Leigh newspapers and kept with the fascinating biographical cuttings resource. Here is what I found out about my uncle William.

On the 14 February 1930 the Leigh Journal reported 'Atherton Boy, Accepts French Engagement'. My uncle William, at 14 years old, had been accepted to the Chantilly racing stables in France. At the time he was attending St Anne's School in Hindsford. He gained his experience working with horses delivering milk when he was not at school. His father, my grandad John Mather, told



*Saint-Cloud Racing Course, 1905*

the newspaper that he thought his son would be successful. At only four feet four inches tall and weighing 4 stone 6 pounds he said 'his natural weight he can develop and then not be too heavy'.

The Journal reported on the 2 March that the people of Hindsford gave William a great send off. Scholars at St Anne's School had bought gifts for Williams including an attaché case and a wallet. They were presented to him by Thomas Woodward the school boys' captain and Margaret

Daniels the girls' captain. William set off on his journey, the Journal noting that '... a local man conveyed him to Manchester in his motor car.' In Manchester he joined with seven other aspiring jockeys and they set off to Paris. The Journal also stated that it was William's ambition to one day ride a winner in the Derby.

William appeared in articles a number of times in the Leigh Journal and Chronicle newspapers keeping people back home updated with his successes. In May 1931 his

trainer Mr. J Cannington described William's duties as an apprentice:

'Following exercises the boy has to make himself generally useful about the stables and 'drinking the horses' and other similar duties form the day's work. Some little time ago, along with others, he was engaged in 'breaking' yearlings. He is shortly to spend a month under another trainer - an Englishman - at Senlis. Although in France, he has a Lancashire boy as his chum, John Jackson of Bolton.'

In 1932 he was granted his riding licence.

1935 was a good year for William as news reached home about his race wins. Headlines such as 'Hindsford Jockey Wins Big Race in France' and 'Brilliant Future Predicted' must have made our family very proud. In April 1935 it was reported that William had won the Prix Elf on Don X at St Cloud. Winning by two lengths and a half. The race was the 'big race of the day, the stake being for 25,000 francs'. The paper reported how a huge crowd greeted the 'Lancashire lad' with cheers of 'Bravo Mather!' as his horse was led in. His biggest success was winning the French classic the Prix de Sweepstake de Grand Prix de Paris, riding a horse named Orichalque; a race valued at 100,000 francs!

Tragically, William had his promising career cut short when he died, aged 21, in a riding accident whilst racing in Longchamps, Paris in August 1936. William was riding a horse named Muscadet in the Prix de Ranelagh. It was reported that his horse was brought down by another and he fell off onto his head fracturing his skull. He was taken to the Maison Laffitte Hospital where he sadly died. His father left for France after receiving an urgent cablegram about the accident. Unfortunately, William had already passed away by the time he reached France. Other family members managed to attend William's funeral that took place in Chantilly, France on the 1 October. In addition, many well-known press and sporting personalities attended, attesting to how popular and respected he had become as a jockey.

Over his career William rode 33 winners. The Journal reported that, 'A tragic feature of his death was that he was to have ridden one of the Chantilly horses in the Cesarewitch this year. It has always been his ambition to ride the winner of the Derby, and the Cesarewitch might have proved a step nearer his ambition.'

The Leigh Chronicle reported 'Mather handled his mounts

## To Be Jockey.

### Hindsford Boy Goes to France

The 14-years-old Atherton boy, William Mather, son of Mr. J. Mather, 38, East-st., Hindsford, who, as announced in the "Journal" about a month ago, has been accepted as a jockey-apprentice to the Chantilly racing stables, France, was given a great send-off by the people of Hindsford on Tuesday evening, when he left for the Continent. A large number of people saw him off, and a local man conveyed him to Manchester in his motor-car. Here he joined seven others, including two from Swinton, who were on the same mission. They proceeded to London, Felkestone, Boulogne and Paris. Previously the boy had received gifts from the scholars at Hindsford St. Anne's School, where he was vice-captain. These consisted of an attache case and a handsome wallet, which were presented by Thomas Woodward, boys' captain, and Margaret Daniels, girls' captain, respectively. The boy is apprenticed for five years. He is 4ft. 4in. high and weight 4st. 6lb, fully clothed. His greatest ambition is to ride a winner in the Derby.



WM. MATHER.

*William Mather,  
Leigh Journal, 1930*

like an expert, and it was a proud father who told the news of his successes'. I am very proud of my uncle William Mather just as his father was and I can only imagine how devastated he and the rest of the family would have been at the time of his death.

I am very grateful to the Archives and Local Studies at Leigh who saved the newspapers cuttings that has enabled me to get to know my uncle's story and share it with my family.

BY SHEILA RAMSDALE

# Wigan women come together for the war effort

When the First World War started in 1914, thousands of local men from all communities enlisted leaving a huge vacuum in the employment market. Many women signed up to do jobs previously excluded to them.

Wartime excitement at times bordered on hysteria at the beginning. The hard facts still remained that there had been strikes and huge unemployment in women's trades, plus a sharp increase in the cost of living. This left many women wondering how they were going to cope with their men away fighting. However, it didn't take long for women to organize themselves and various representatives from the Women's Societies in Wigan, including the Suffrage Society, the British Women's Temperance Association and the Co-op Women's Guild among others, called a meeting about the plight of the women in Wigan and outlying districts. Nationally, middle class women had a long tradition of supporting their men in the task of controlling society and maintaining authority; consequently they entered enthusiastically into voluntary activities with other women.

It was agreed by all that the setting up of societies for Soldiers' and Sailors' Wives and families would be a good thing and would help to keep up the spirits of the women left behind. The idea behind the initiative was to provide accommodation in the shape of club rooms where wives and mothers of the men in the armed forces could find social interaction and congenial company to help maintain their morale.

From the articles in the local papers it would appear these women got together regardless of class or political persuasion and became a tremendous success. It also provided women with the opportunity to contribute to the national war effort.

It would appear that the first one was situated in Rodney Street Schoolroom (which is next door to our Museum of Wigan Life) and this had been placed at the disposal of the women's societies for the use of families on two afternoons per week.

Apparently everyone was very surprised and excited when the room was packed out on the first occasion (Wigan Observer, 21 December 1914). It was very well attended by prominent local women including the Mayoress, Mrs Grimshaw and Lady Ratcliffe-Ellis.

Local business women such as Mrs Lamb, Mrs J Marsden, Mrs A Ranicar, Miss Dawson and Helen Rushton were heavily involved in organising the afternoons. Entertainment was put on for the women and their families, including songs, recitations and musical items – followed by tea and sandwiches.

The event was such a success it was felt desirable to look for other premises. Another Branch was set up in Hindley and according to the Wigan Observer it was felt the meetings were very welcome; they helped to ward off the gloom and foreboding which the women could not help feeling at such times.

It was apparent to everyone concerned that there was a large demand throughout the town. All sorts of activities took place: women sometimes were given the opportunity to write (or have written for them) letters to their loved ones; sewing classes were started up, including making items for the men, mending children's clothes, knitting, crocheting, generally relaxing and chatting to other women who were all in a similar position; as well as discussing the war with someone who had a sympathetic ear.

Soon, Wives' Clubs were being set up all over Wigan. Another was set up at Whitley Hall and was attended by the Reverend Father of St. Williams, Ince, who gave sympathy and also an address on the duties of the women left behind. This apparently appealed strongly to those who had the privilege of listening to him. Bananas and sweets for the children were provided by the Church.

Whilst these meetings gave an outlet for women to get together there was also a call for women to get their men to do their bit and contribute by enlisting.

In December 1915 there was an appeal by Lady Mary Gerard of Ashton. She stated that all the young men who remained at home had heard time after time the reasons why they should come forward, but their consciences had not been pricked. Speakers were at the meeting to encourage women to turn the men to what they considered to be the right path. Every man was wanted and should join up.

Lady Gerard appealed directly to the mothers in particular, saying that if they had eligible sons they should let them go. She stated that her only son had gone to war and was severely wounded and for three weeks was in grave danger of losing his life. He had had three terms fighting in France. She stressed it was necessary that every eligible man should join the Colours in order to defend the homes of England against a terrible and dangerous foe.

With hindsight it is easy to see the pressure this would put on women attending such meetings who still had men at home. The Wigan Observer reported on 12 October 1915 that Lord Derby, Director General of Recruiting, had the assistance of Labour Leaders. He was Chair of the West Lancs Territorials and travelled the country recruiting. He stated quite clearly that the way things were going compulsory conscription was on the cards. His opinion was aided by the two largest churches in the town, St. Patrick's and the Parish Church, All Saints, who organised large Church Parades as part of the recruitment drive to get 10,000 men to sign up for the reserves (Wigan Observer, September 1915).

In October 1915, 200 women turned up at the Soldiers' and Wives' Association, when the President, Mrs Lamb spoke and Miss Lily Lowe sang, 'When the Boys Come Home'. The campaign continued after tea when a Recruiting Officer spoke and twenty new members were enrolled in the Association. This drive was further helped by a letter sent to the Hindley Soldiers' and Sailors' Club. They had received a letter from Harold Hollis, stating he found it hard to leave home at first, but felt it was his duty and by enlisting his conscience was clear as he was just trying to do his duty (Wigan Observer, 26 October 1915).

During the war years these clubs continued to be popular and were functioning well after the war years, proving the bonds made between the women had been very strong.

## HINDLEY SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' WIVES' AND MOTHERS' ASSOCIATION.

Under the auspices of the above a splendid evening entertainment was given in the Public Hall, Hindley, last week, by children of Wigan and district, the dresses and training being by Mrs. Smithson, Wigan. The hall, which was kindly lent by the Hindley Industrial Co-operative Society, was filled to overflowing, many having to be turned away unable to gain admission. The costumes of the children, combined with the fairy dances, musical drills, Dutch dances, etc., evoked the applause and high appreciation of all present. Mrs. Law and Master Blackburn deserve also the highest praise, whilst Mr. Harris, with his humorous songs, completely carried the audience with him, creating roars of laughter. Mrs. Harris also delighted the audience with her choice selections on the piano. Mr. H. J. Bophaer, D.C., who was chairman of the meeting, said how pleased he was to see such a large number present, especially as the object was such a worthy one, namely, to help to support the hospital inaugurated by the St. John Ambulance Association for wounded soldiers and sailors in France. He had before him a cutting from a paper in which Col. Trimble, who was in charge of the Base Hospital, stated how complete in every detail were the arrangements for dealing with the wounded as they arrived from the ambulance, showing that all that possibly could be done for their comfort had been considered, and assuring them that the proceeds of the concert would be helpful in some small measure to the carrying on of the institution. He had great pleasure in thanking Mrs. Smithson, and also the children, who must have had a considerable amount of patience taken with them to bring them up to give the display they had done that night, Mrs. Law, Master Blackburn, and Mr. Harris, with his humorous songs, and Mrs. Harris had contributed very much towards the success of the concert; also Miss E. Smithson and Mr. Green, mandoline and pianist; Miss D. Smithson and T. Walsh, dancers, deserved special mention. Mr. Eccleston replied, on behalf of Mrs. Smithson, who he said was always willing to help forward any object such as this, and she felt repaid to know that she was doing something which was appreciated.

The usual Wednesday afternoon gathering was held, when Messrs. Bunting's Party gave the audience a good entertainment. Each of the artistes received a special reception, having repeatedly to respond to encores to which the audience would have no denial. Programme:—"Kathleen Mavourneen" and "Flight of Ages," Mrs. Webb (one of the members whose husband is now in the trenches); piano and concertina solo, Messrs. G. and J. W. Bunting; song, "When mother says good-bye," "When the boys come home again, and the band begins to play," "When we fight for King and France," Mr. W. Yates; concertina solo, Mr. T. H. Bunting; humorous song, "Jack McGrath," and song and dance, Mr. Enoch Battersby; concertina and bone solo, Messrs. T. H., Peter, and James Bunting; song, "Wonderful rose of love" and "Good-bye," Miss Hammond; accompanist, Mr. Jas. Bunting. Mrs. Buckmaster, on behalf of the members, thanked the artists for so kindly giving up their time to come there, and so ably entertain them. They had all enjoyed the entertainment very much, and were very much benefited by them. Their thanks were also due to Mrs. Fairhurst and party for the tea arrangements. She also read a letter from Private Harold Hollis, who is at present in the trenches, in which he stated that it was hard to leave his home at first, but now he did not regret the step he had taken, as he felt it his duty, and the duty of every young man to help his country at the present time. Whether he came through all right or not, his conscience was clear—he was trying to do his duty. The singing of "Tipperary" in which the audience heartily joined, the "Marseillaise," and "God save the King," brought an enjoyable afternoon to a close.

*Article from Wigan Observer regarding the Hindley Soldiers' and Sailors' Wives' and Mothers' Association.*

*Dated 26 October 1915*

If you need Christmas present ideas for anyone interested in local history, biographies or historic diaries look no further...NOW ON SALE, the story of the compelling Lancashire diarist, Nelly Weeton.

Written in solitude, Miss Nelly Weeton's letters, journal entries and other autobiographical writings transport the reader through Georgian Lancashire and beyond.

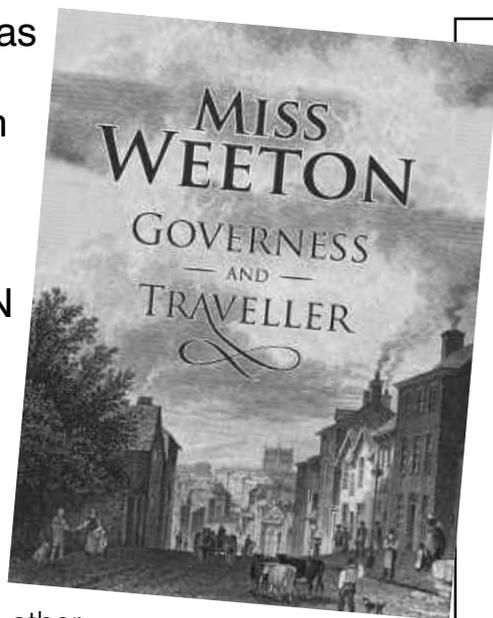
Edited by local historian Alan Roby and published by the Archives, the volume brings new research into Miss Weeton's life to print for the first time, updating the works of the diary collector, Edward Hall.

We are extremely proud of the new volume and it is a testament to Alan's meticulous research – as well as his career in the printing industry, in producing such a high quality volume. It includes several wonderful colour reproductions and biographies of the key individuals in Miss Weeton's story. Crucially, we hear Nelly Weeton's life recorded in her own voice, giving us a near unique insight into Wigan and the North West (thanks to her extensive travels) in the Georgian period.

In Alan's words: 'Miss Weeton was an ordinary woman who was highly gifted. She learned the complete alphabet in three hours at little more than the age of two and her favourite toys were chalk, slate and quill. She was a voracious reader who seemed to have access to a bottomless pit of appropriate adjectives to describe people and events. Every word she used meant just what she wanted it to mean, nothing more and nothing less.'

We could not recommend it highly enough – a perfect Christmas gift for anyone interested in history!

*The book, 'Miss Weeton: Governess & Traveller' is priced at £20 and is available from the Museum of Wigan Life and the Archives. We are happy to take postal orders (cost of £2.80); more information can be found on our blog at <http://missweetonbook.wordpress.com/> On sale at the Museum of Wigan Life, Wigan Waterstones, online through the blog or by cheque for the sum of £20 plus £2.80 p&p, made payable to Wigan Council at Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU.*



## WIGAN HERITAGE AND MINING MONUMENT

WHAMM 22 Milton Grove

Wigan WN1 2PG

Charity reg. No. 1171275

Email [whammstatue@gmail.com](mailto:whammstatue@gmail.com)

[www.wiganminingstatue.org.uk](http://www.wiganminingstatue.org.uk)



### WIGAN MINERS DESERVE A MONUMENT!

WHAMM is a group of local people who have come together to provide a monument to the men, women and children who once worked in the mighty mining industry. It will be placed in a prominent town centre location.

The sculptor, Steve Winterburn, has made this model of how the statue may look. Will **YOU** help, perhaps in memory of an ancestor involved in mining? Any donation will be welcome, along with supporting our events.

We have raised over £100,000 so far, but have some way to go to reach our target. If every family in Wigan gave just £1 we would achieve our aim.

To find out more visit

[www.wiganminingstatue.org.uk](http://www.wiganminingstatue.org.uk)

Visit Just Giving to donate

[www.justgiving.com/wigan-heritage](http://www.justgiving.com/wigan-heritage)

# THE LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE MINERS' PERMANENT RELIEF SOCIETY

BY ARTHUR JONES

Mining underground for any type of mineral was always a very hazardous operation. None more so than in the deep-shaft pits of the Cheshire and Lancashire coalfields.

Accidents resulting in serious injury or death were a constant danger, not to mention illness from the many insidious diseases such as Pneumoconiosis and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). These lung diseases crept up on men and could affect them many years after they finished their employment in the mines.

In the early days of mining, many of the mine owners were not particularly interested in the welfare of the miners; as long as the coal was coming out of the ground in sufficient quantities they were quite content. Certainly, they were even less interested after a miner retired from his pit. Subsequently, because of this attitude, if a miner was unable to work through accident or illness he and his dependants would have very little on which to live. Some local welfare or charity payments may have been available but this would have depended very much on the local council members, many of whom could in any case have been mine owners. After a miner died, his wife would receive even less and would most likely become destitute.

In 1872, a welfare system was formed for miners under the name of, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society'. This was for the relief of the miners who were no longer able to work through injury or illness. The relief would pass to his dependants, more often than not a widow, upon the miner's death. On occasions the society would be required to fund instant relief for a large numbers of widows when serious and life-taking accidents occurred, as in the Pretoria Pit disaster on 21 December 1910, when 344 men lost their lives. This was the third worst pit disaster in Britain in terms of fatalities.

Each pit or company had an agency, which was given a number so as to enable recognition of the particular pit. The miners paid a weekly contribution in the sure knowledge that should they require financial assistance, it would be available to them.

The names of all contributors were entered in ledgers at each agency for recording purposes and any payments made recorded in further ledgers. All the ledger entries were also transcribed into master ledgers to enable easy reference to the whole information regarding members, beneficiaries and actual payments made.

The dates that relief started, ended, and the reason for termination were also entered into individual ledgers. Reasons for suspension of payments to widows were death, remarriage, entry into long term hospital care and misbehaviour (i.e. cohabiting). If a beneficiary wished to live outside the district, they had to first seek the Society's permission. Individual personal record cards were also kept, with such information as member's names, dependant's names and addresses. In the event of death, copies of wedding certificates and death certificates were added.

It historically had its headquarters in Wigan. The functions of the society were taken over by 'The Sheffield Druids Society', and later 'The Manchester Oddfellows'. The last payments were made in 2006.

All this information has been transcribed, catalogued and digitised thanks to a grant from the Wellcome Trust and much hard work by a volunteer team, and is now held in Wigan and Leigh Archives.

It is an invaluable source of information for research into miner's welfare, as well as for anybody researching family members who were employed in the Lancashire and Cheshire coalfields.



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# Memories like 'Orwell'

By Gerald Marsden

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After reading George Orwell's description of living conditions in Wigan for the second time in his book 'The Road to Wigan Pier', I decided to put into words my own recollections of growing up about the same time that he was in Wigan.

I was born in 1930 at 48 Warrington Road in Newtown and my dad always said I was so small that I would fit into a pint cup. Perhaps this was a figure of speech or his imagination. He worked at Bickershaw Colliery and he used to say that one day he had to work late and all public transport had finished for the night. So he decided to walk home. To do this he went along Crankwood Road to Abram and on to Wigan. At about midnight he was approaching the gateway at Ince Cemetery and a policeman, wearing a cape, stepped out of the darkness in front of him, imagine what went through his mind.

My maternal grandmother lived at 24 Warrington Road and my paternal grandmother had a shop at no. 36, but lived in Billinge Road.

In 1934 my grandfather bought my parents a terraced house in the same row as himself. It was a two up and two down dwelling with an outside toilet. Lighting was by gas and just the two downstairs rooms had a coal fire. The fire in the front room was only used on a Sunday as this was when relatives visited. Entertainment was by radio, this consisted of a base board and a front panel, hence all the valves etc, could be seen. It was powered by two batteries, a dry cell and an accumulator. The dry cell needed to be replaced occasionally and the accumulator had to be taken to the local hardware shop for recharging. We had electricity installed after the end of the Second World War in 1945.

The first school I attended was Highfield St. Matthew and I remember being put to bed every afternoon in the nursery class.

When my grandmother stopped running the shop, she would go to Newtown every Friday evening to collect money owed. It was what had been put on the 'strap' at the shop.

She also went to the Mechanics Arms pub at the junction of Warrington Road and Victoria Street where she worked as a 'waiter on'.

Behind the row of houses in Billinge Road my grandfather had a large garden, with a long greenhouse, apple and pear trees, as well as hens. There was also a hand operated water pump which needed to be primed to start working. He grew tomatoes and chrysanthemums in the greenhouse. Some tomatoes were opened up to allow the seeds to be saved for growing the following year. Lots of plants were grown from the seeds and some were taken to other growers. We did this by hand truck, delivering as far as Moor Road in Orrell and Scot Lane in Newtown.

When threatened with the outbreak of the Second World War, we dug our own air raid shelter using bricks for the floor, metal sheeting for the walls and railway sleepers covered with soil for the roof. When it was complete the next thing that happened was that it flooded as we had gone below the water table.

Rubbing Board



Dolly Legs



Mangle



Slopstone



I continued to attend Highfield St. Matthew's School until 1942 and then went to The Junior Technical School until 1945. This was at Wigan & District, Mining & Technical College, which is now Wigan Town Hall, therefore I had to get the bus.

We lived quite close to a bus stop, but in order to save money, I had to walk to the stop further away. From the stop close to home it cost one penny into Wigan but from the stop further away it was one half penny. (This was when twelve pennies made one schilling and another of Dad's sayings was 'look after the pennies, the pounds will take care of themselves').

On Wednesday it was games at Christopher Park, Martland Mill. We also had swimming lessons at the baths when the entrance was from Millgate. There were two pools, one for men and one for women. In winter the men's pool was closed and a floor laid over the pool so that it could be used to hold dances.

Attending the technical school during the war meant that most of the teachers had come out of retirement because the others were serving in the armed forces. For lunch it was convenient to go to the British Restaurant which had been set up in the Court Hall in King Street

During this time my maternal grandmother who was blind lived with her half-brother and her niece.

In 1943 her niece who did the housework and shopping got married and moved out of the house. This meant that my mother had to do the tasks required and

visit grandmother every day except Monday, washing day. Remember at that time we did not have a washing machine or electricity. It was a rubbing board, washing tubs, dolly legs, wringer and coal fired boiler.

Still remember our wringer (mangle) to this day. The reason being, having put my right hand index finger through the gear guard there is quarter of an inch missing from the end.

So time was limited, consequently it became my duty to visit grandmother each Monday, in case she needed anything. When I got home from school I got on my bicycle and went to pay her a visit. There wasn't any need to knock on the door as it was always unlocked during the daylight hours. Imagine doing that today.

As I have said before grandmother was blind but could just make out the glow from the coal fire and oil lamp when lit. The house was a two up and two down with the toilet one of a block in the communal backyard.

Referring to the toilets, brings to mind, in the early mornings, seeing the horse drawn night soil carts, with two men sat on top, returning to the depot after the night's work.

In the kitchen the floor was made with stone flags, not very flat, also a cold water tap, a 'slopstone' (a meat safe for storing food) and coal for the fire was stored under the stairs.

The 1901 census shows two families living there and consisted of three adults and three children, it makes you wonder where they

all slept. This is very much how Orwell described living conditions in Wigan.

The coal fire in the living room was the only means of heating, the kettle was boiled on it and it also heated the oven. When grandmother made a cup of tea, she would pour water from the kettle and put her finger in the cup to tell when it was nearly full. She enjoyed listening to the radio which had been supplied by the Workshop for the Blind who had premises in Darlington Street. It was powered by two batteries and I had to check that they were doing their job.

The everyday shopping was done at a small shop close to the Saddle Junction. If she wanted fish or fruit the shop was in Ormskirk Road near Scot Lane. She liked cockles bought in the shell, sold by the pint and boiled before eating.

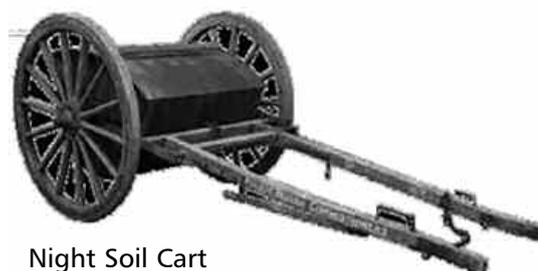
When all tasks had been done I had to thread needles with sewing cotton which were then placed in the front window curtain so that she could find them. These were things I had to do until I started work in 1945.

Another thing that happened when I started work was my Dad gave me half-a-crown and said 'don't spend that and you will never have to say that you are broke'.

In 1951 grandmother's half-brother died and she continued to live alone until she passed away in 1953 at the age of 85. Don't know anything else to say but will most likely have forgotten something.



Dolly Tub



Night Soil Cart



'Just Like Grandmother's'

BY MEMBERS OF THE CULCHETH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

# THOMAS UNSWORTH

## A TICKET OF LEAVE MAN



*Silk weaver, Wigan Archives*

It is possible to gain an insight into the changing Victorian penal system by tracking the career of a habitual criminal. We have managed to do this by examining prison and other records relating to the life of Thomas Unsworth.

Thomas was born in Culcheth in March 1808, the son of Peter and Betty Unsworth. He was baptised the following month at Newchurch. Like so many others in the area, the Unsworths were a weaving family, and Thomas himself followed in his father's footsteps. He probably received a very basic education at a charity school, because a prison record notes that his reading and writing were 'imperfect'. His intelligence was assessed as 'moderate'.

If the researcher is seeking external factors which might help explain Thomas' subsequent career as a

petty criminal, the vicissitudes of the silk industry should not be overlooked. While handloom weaving was widespread in the area, and at times provided a good income, it was also subject to fluctuations in supply and demand. Should the silk crop fail, supplies of raw material from the Manchester silk companies dried up, and there was little work for weavers. On the demand side, economic recession could cause a fall in demand for the finished article. Silk goods were more or less luxury items, and cash-strapped consumers could reduce their purchases fairly painlessly. Again, this would cause unemployment among handloom weavers.

Besides, as the nineteenth century wore on, these weavers faced increasing competition from steam-driven looms in factories. Those determined to continue using their traditional skills often had to

face cuts in payment from the putters-out or cessation of work altogether.

While not necessarily explaining Thomas' drift into petty crime, financial need could be a factor in his turning to theft as a survival strategy. Having said that, most underemployed or unemployed handloom weavers did NOT adopt such a strategy.

In fact, Unsworth's first court appearance in 1839 was not for burglary or theft, but for 'neglecting his family'. Thomas never married nor had children, so he was probably guilty of failing to provide for a poverty-stricken aged parent. Children, particularly the eldest, were expected to help their ailing parents to prevent them from becoming a burden on the parish. Thomas either could not or would not do this, and spent three months in Kirkdale, the county gaol for South Lancashire, as a punishment.

Physically, the 31 year old who appeared in court that day had a few distinguishing features. He was a little taller than the then average at five feet eight inches. His grey eyes also set him apart from his contemporaries. Unsworth's fair complexion was marked with a distinctive mole on his left cheek. He is also described as having a lump in the centre of his throat, but unfortunately the description does not specify the size, appearance or cause of this.

Although the unmarried Unsworth was living with family members in 1841, he was prosecuted for vagrancy the following year and sentenced to three months in Kirkdale. The prison had adopted the 'separate system', which kept prisoners in solitary confinement. This, it was hoped, would help them reflect on their misdeeds and encourage them to reform.

However, in Unsworth's case, this proved to be wishful thinking. In March 1844, he was charged with burglary in Culcheth the previous September, in which a cheese and a pair of boots went missing. The prosecution could not prove that the prisoner actually broke into the house, and the cheese materialised in another room. However, the boots were found in Unsworth's possession. He received two years hard labour in Kirkdale for this.

At Kirkdale, hard labour probably meant oakum picking – pulling apart scrap rope to make waterproof caulking for ships' timbers. Even this unpleasant work did not prevent Unsworth from reoffending. In October 1850, he committed another burglary in Culcheth and stole 16s. Because of his

previous record, he was sentenced to ten years transportation to Australia. At this point Unsworth was designated a 'convict', a label normally attached to recidivists like Thomas or those convicted of serious offences awaiting transportation.

All convicts due for transportation were sent from their county gaols to Millbank Prison in London. (Readers may discover more about Millbank by reading Dickens' *Bleak House*, which was written about this time). Unsworth once again faced the 'separate system'. His cell would have contained a washing tub, a wooden stool, a hammock and bedding. His hard labour would have consisted of oakum picking or stitching mail bags. A Bible and other religious books were provided for his edification, and he would have had to attend compulsory religious services.

Soon after his arrival at Millbank, Unsworth, like many other prospective transportees, appealed against his sentence. At this point, transportation was being slowly wound up, and for whatever reason, the 40 year old Thomas had his sentence commuted to ten years in Dartmoor Prison.

This notorious gaol had started life as a prison for French and American servicemen captured during the wars of the early nineteenth century and had closed in 1816. It was refurbished in late 1850 and began receiving convicts in 1851, so Thomas Unsworth was one of the first to be admitted. On arrival, he was assigned the number 856, his head was shaved and he was issued with a forage cap and uniform of coarse woollen cloth printed with the government's broad arrow mark. He was put to work stone quarrying under armed guard.

In 1853, a sharp splinter of stone flew up and caused Thomas a serious eye injury. He was temporarily blinded and spent several months in the infirmary. His eyesight was permanently impaired, which may well have adversely affected his chances of obtaining employment on release.

Unsworth's prison record also reveals that he had a 'weak chest, perhaps a result of being exposed to Dartmoor's often vicious climate during his stone-breaking work. The gaol was cut off by blizzards several times during his stay.

There were some serious mutinies while Thomas was in Dartmoor. He appears to have managed to steer clear of these outbreaks, and his conduct reports were always either 'good' or 'very good', if so he would have worn a 'G' or 'VG' badge on his sleeve.

Prince Albert visited Dartmoor Prison in 1852. One cannot help wondering whether the paths of Queen Victoria's consort and the Culcheth weaver ever crossed.

By 1854, pressure of numbers weighed heavily on the prison system. To alleviate this, the so-called 'Ticket of Leave' system was introduced. This innovation allowed prisoners serving a ten year sentence to apply for early release after four. Convicts with a good conduct record could make a formal application to the government's Home Department. On approval, the prison chaplain wrote to an individual nominated by the prisoner who could possibly give employment to the released man. If there was a negative response or no response at all, (in Unsworth's case, his nominee, Samuel Norman, a cordwainer in Platt Lane, Culcheth did not reply), the chaplain would issue him with a certificate of fitness to work and he would be released anyway. Unsworth was issued with his Ticket of Leave in the summer of 1855, and he returned to Culcheth.

Although Thomas is listed as a silk gater and twister in the 1861 census, we cannot be sure how much work he was able or willing to take on. The introduction of the Ticket of Leave system caused a nationwide panic among respectable citizens anxious that their lives and property would be endangered by roaming ex-convicts. Many of these men found it difficult to convince potential employers that they were trustworthy. A return to their interrupted life of crime was often the result. In Thomas Unsworth's case, his defective eyesight and weak chest probably added to his problems. Furthermore, in a community as small and close-knit as Culcheth's, Thomas and his criminal record would have been well-known.

Whether he found adequate employment or not, Unsworth fell foul of the law again one night in March 1860. The Leigh Chronicle publicised his transgressions to all and sundry with a whole-column story under the headline 'Theft at Culcheth by a Ticket of Leave Man'. After spending an evening in the Harrow pub, Unsworth left at midnight. On his way out, the 'Ticket of Leave Man' picked up an umbrella left behind by a forgetful customer and walked out with it. Thomas Arnold, his erstwhile drinking companion witnessed the theft and reported Unsworth to Sergeant Turner of the Lancashire Constabulary.

The officer found 'the unhappy wretch', as the Leigh Chronicle called Thomas, lying on a pallet of straw

in a joiner's shop. Unsworth claimed that someone must have planted the umbrella near him to get him into trouble, but this cut no ice with the Magistrate at Leigh Petty Sessions. Thomas was committed to Kirkdale Quarter Sessions, where he received a three month sentence.

As if Unsworth needed any further stains on his character, the Leigh Chronicle wrote 'we understand that during the period the prisoner has been at large on Ticket of Leave, many petty offences have been committed of which he has been suspected, but which never could be conclusively traced to him'. This kind of innuendo certainly would not have helped Thomas in his search for employment, assuming that is what he wanted.

A sense of growing desperation can be sensed in Unsworth's next court appearance the following year. In October 1861, Thomas earned yet another three months in Kirkdale after he was arrested in an outbuilding at the Harrow. He had wolfed down the left-overs from the dinner of the local Agricultural Society. Unsworth had not broken into the building, but had squeezed through a gap between the timbers. The Leigh Chronicle suggested that '...he had gorged himself so full that he could not effect a retreat through the same passage'. PC Atkinson probably could not believe his luck.

It could well be that by this time Unsworth's handloom weaving days were virtually over, and he was increasingly dependent on the poor law system. Culcheth was a parish within the Leigh Union, and there is evidence that the ageing Thomas received out-relief in the 1860s. By the time of the 1871 census, Unsworth was an inmate at the workhouse in Leigh Road, Leigh, still listed as a silk weaver. By 1881, the 73-year-old was an agricultural labourer, probably working on the Union's own land which helped provide food for the workhouse.

Meanwhile, Unsworth's slow decline had been interrupted by another spell in familiar surroundings. On Christmas Eve 1876, the workhouse master sent Thomas to Culcheth to inform the relatives of another inmate that he had died. The Leigh Union provided Thomas with a new suit of civilian clothes for this occasion. Thomas took the opportunity to abscond, and for the next six months the workhouse had to survive without him.

Meanwhile, in June 1877, Thomas found himself in Leigh Petty Sessions on a charge of unlawful wounding. After some horseplay in a smithy, during which James Cleworth pretended to try to push

Unsworth on to a fire, the old pauper hit him across the head with an iron bar. We are fortunate that the Leigh Journal published some of Thomas's testimony verbatim.

Thomas claimed that he had been 'sent straight through the fire'. On being asked whether he had been burned, he replied 'no, by the providence of God I was uninjured, same as the man who was put into the fiery furnace we read of in the scriptures'. (Whether this Biblical reference was the result of his basic childhood education or his compulsory chapel attendances in Kirkdale, Millbank and Dartmoor, is a matter of speculation). The magistrates concluded that Unsworth had been provoked into the assault, and the charge was dismissed.

However, as we have seen, Thomas was not the luckiest of men. The Leigh Union workhouse master was coincidentally at the court on another matter, and remembered Thomas as being an absconder. He also recognised the suit of clothes sported by Unsworth. Before the latter could walk from the court a free man, he was charged with absconding from the workhouse in Union clothing. Sixty-eight-year-old Thomas Unsworth had to think on his feet. He explained his offence as follows:

"I did my duty, and then I met some friends, who treated me kindly". (Laughter in court). "I was unaccustomed to such fare, and could not stand it". (Laughter). "I kept going the round of my friends", (Laughter) "and they were fresh every month. I have

always been received every month with a fresh entertainment". (Laughter). "I knew the clothes were not mine, but I wasn't eating anything at the workhouse while I was outside". (Laughter).'

Thomas was sentenced to another month in Kirkdale. He responded 'Bless God for it. The weak has overcome the strong. I thank you and go down on my knees for it'.

The ex-handloom weaver and 'Ticket of Leave Man' died at the Leigh Union Workhouse in May 1884 aged seventy-six. The cause of death was noted as 'senile decay'. He was given a pauper's burial in the graveyard at St Mary's Church, Lowton.

More or less the only working-class Victorians to get their names in the newspapers were those who died an unusual death, those who appeared in court, and associated family members and witnesses. Sadly, Thomas Unsworth would have been yet another anonymous handloom weaver – one among scores of thousands in the Leigh area whose traditional skills were increasingly irrelevant - had it not been for his tendency to commit opportunistic offences. As it is, he has left a deeper footprint than most of his contemporaries.

*Thanks to:  
Zoe Chaddock  
Brian Joyce  
Marlene Nolan  
and the late Terry Creaney*

## Information for Contributors

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

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

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

## Submission Guidelines

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

We aim to acknowledge receipt of all submissions.

### CONTACT DETAILS:

[pastforward@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:pastforward@wigan.gov.uk) or  
The Editor at **PAST FORWARD**,  
Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street,  
Wigan WN1 1NU.



# Christmas Sing-Along

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Bring your scarves, gloves  
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With Live Music  
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## Volunteering

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To find out more ask a member of staff for details or visit:  
[www.wigan.gov.uk/Volunteer-Culture](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/Volunteer-Culture)

## 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

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

## Leigh Family History Society

The Leigh & District Family History Help Desk is available every Monday afternoon (except Bank Holidays) from 12.00pm to 2.00pm.

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)

## Local History Federation Lancashire

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 07712 766288 or Caroline Fairclough, Secretary, at [carolinefairclough@hotmail.com](mailto:carolinefairclough@hotmail.com)

## Wigan Civic Trust

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

## Wigan Archaeological Society

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, at 7.30pm, 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

We meet on the second Wednesday at 6.45pm, at Sunshine House Community Centre, Wellington Street, Scholes. 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

We meet 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)

# Searching for Grammar School Memories

Healthy Arts, in partnership with Wigan Council Archives Service and Bedford High School, have won Heritage National Lottery support for an exciting new project, 'Remembering Grammar School Education in Leigh'.

Healthy Arts, a local not-for-profit arts consortium specialising in heritage projects, has received £42,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), made possible by money raised from National Lottery players. The 12-month project will explore the memories of former students 40 years after the schools closed and share them with current pupils and the community in celebratory events and workshops.

The project will create opportunities for three young heritage interns to be trained within the Archives Service as well as involving Young Heritage Volunteers from Bedford High School in leading and running the project. Oral histories and artefacts gathered in a series of workshops will lead to the development of a celebratory event with interactive performances and a photographic display. People's experiences of the 11+ exam will be of particular interest.

The project will enable pupils from the school and others interested in heritage to come together and explore attitudes to education, discipline and changes in the curriculum. Working with heritage professionals from Wigan Council, creative practitioners from Healthy Arts and film experts from North Star Digital will make for a vibrant and exciting showcase of the memories gathered.

If anyone would like to find out more about the opportunities for young people to get involved in the internships or would like to share personal memories of attending the Grammar School system in Leigh, please contact Martin or Julie on 07542 114383 or email [contactus@healthyarts.org.uk](mailto:contactus@healthyarts.org.uk)



- 16 to 25 years old? Resident in Wigan Borough?
- Want to gain experience working in Archives and Heritage?
- Interested in digital skills and historical research?
- Three flexible placements available; £1,000 bursary per apprentice

Contact Martin on 07542 114383 or email [contactus@healthyarts.org.uk](mailto:contactus@healthyarts.org.uk) for information.

# Trencherfield Mill Celebrates 110 Years

During 2017 and 2018, Trencherfield Mill will be celebrating 110 years of history with a number of events marking its place in the history of Wigan and Wigan Pier.

Did you, a relative or someone you know ever work at Trencherfield Mill?

Trencherfield Mill Residents Association are attempting to contact people who may have had a direct or indirect connection to the Mill by cataloguing their stories and lives in this working mill. We are interested in information from any point between 1908 and 1986, when the Queen visited Wigan Pier and Trencherfield Mill Steam Engine.



If you would like to share any story of working life at Trencherfield Mill or Wigan Pier, please contact Dave King, Chair, Trencherfield Mill Residents Association at [davekinguk@gmail.com](mailto:davekinguk@gmail.com)

# LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA

Some months ago while 'surfing the net' I found the article in your magazine entitled, 'The Sins of the Father: Parishioners and the Vicar of Leigh', by Denise Colbert. I made contact and was able to download the article. As a family historian I thought I would tell you why the article was important to me.

The Reverend James Irvine was the older brother of my great-great-grandfather, David Irvine, who came to Australia (Sydney) in 1840 from Scotland. After some time in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales – working to pay their bounty – the family moved to the Manning Valley, settling at Dingo Creek. David purchased his first land in 1850 and began farming. The family still reside there today and farm the same land.

The family consisted of: James, born 1791 (Vicar of Leigh), Alexander, born 1793 (a botanist), my ancestor David, born 1796. Their parents were James Irvine and his wife Jean Airth of Daviot, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Many years ago I found a letter written by a great aunt to the Society of Australian Genealogists asking for help in tracing her family. She commented, 'Grandfather had two brothers, one a botanist and the other a clergyman and named them'. In this way my long search began to learn something of the family that my relatives had lost contact with or even, if lucky, find a long lost cousin.

In our family records there is a letter written to the family by Alexander's son, James, in 1873. It states that his father would not have his 'likeness taken' and that his uncle, the Reverend James, was very frail (he died 1874). The family obviously lost contact after this, so I was delighted to see the portrait of the Reverend James; I had not seen a photograph of David so this portrait was special.

Alexander married and had a son James who died unmarried. In The Colonial Times and Tasmanian Hobart Town, 8 February 1850, I came across a letter that was published, written by the Reverend James Irvine to one of his parishioners. It was intriguing to see this letter published in an Australia newspaper of the time, but I guess for settlers from 'the old country', it was important to read the news of the time and the church had such power.

My research has given me some insight into what a determined man the Reverend James was and he certainly stuck to his beliefs, no matter who he offended. I found that he had two children from his first marriage to Susan, who died in 1852. I have been unable to find a record of this marriage. Susannah Louisa Ann Irvine, born 1825, and James, born 1827 were the two children, born in Northamptonshire.

In 1856, James married Ellen Gregory and had two daughters, Mary Jane and Catherine Ellen. The son, James, was recorded on the 1841 census but I have found no more. I would welcome help in finding out what happened to James or any further insights into this family.

I enjoyed reading the other stories in your journal and I hope to find more online in the future.

With kind regards

**Barbara Waters (Irvine)**

Tinonee, New South Wales, Australia



*'Past Forward Issue 65 - Denise Colbert's article on James Irvine appeared in this edition'*

## 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, [joe41@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:joe41@blueyonder.co.uk) or visit [www.wiganheritage.com](http://www.wiganheritage.com)**

# LETTER FROM AMERICA

I first became aware of Wigan after reading George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* sometime around 1980 and still remember wondering whether it was pronounced 'Wiggan' or 'Weegan'. Despite Orwell's description of the town, Wigan seemed as far away and exotic to my younger self as Paris and London, perhaps even more so as it was a less traveled destination. I considered myself as likely to ever visit Wigan as I was to travel to Timbuktu, yet more than three decades later, in March of this year, in Wigan I was!

My husband and I arrived in Wigan as participants in the Orwell Society's 'Wigan Weekend', a two and a half-day series of events commemorating the 80th anniversary of the publication of Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Meeting in the hotel lobby late one Friday afternoon, our group had dinner together at the hotel restaurant before the evening events began. I was charmed by the young waitress who spoke to me with a strong northern accent, even though I found myself repeatedly saying, "Excuse me?"

It amused me to realize that I needed to listen so carefully in order to understand another native speaker of English and wondered if my American accent made her feel the same. Hotel employees asked us where we were from and seemed genuinely interested, and I sensed something different about this place that I could not immediately pinpoint. After dinner we headed over to the Sunshine House Community Hub for an event featuring the *Wigan Diggers* and a talk by Orwell scholar John Newsinger. A social reception followed, and it was then, watching the people interact, that it dawned on me: real community still exists here. I felt as though I had stepped back in time, and it was a good feeling.

We gathered at Sunshine House early the next morning. I noticed its 'People's Café' and thought about how this would have pleased Orwell. I found the Wiganers warm and friendly, yet due to their humility, the fact that we had come all the way from the US to spend the weekend in Wigan seemed to bewilder them. 'You must visit Liverpool!', some advised us. 'Why don't you go to Manchester?', others asked. 'Because we've come to see Wigan', I wanted to say, but didn't, fearing my good intentions might sound snippy instead, my words misconstrued. In a room filled with poets, authors, musicians, and scholars – even the Mayor of Wigan and George Orwell's own son – I was embarrassed when a BBC reporter asked to interview me. I was suddenly interesting simply by virtue of having traveled the farthest to get there. Nervously I agreed and answered a few questions, feeling foolish.

The day's events began with a brief address by Barbara Nettleton, who told the group a bit about the history of Sunshine House and explained how it serves the community. Following a formal welcome by Councillor Ron Conway, Mayor of Wigan, the events began, and the line-up was impressive indeed. Alan Gregory's performance of three original songs from his *Beyond Wigan Pier* opera was top-notch, and Wigan performance poet Louise Fazackerley's reading wowed me so much that I purchased two of her CDs. The real highlight of the morning for me, though, was the dramatic performance of poems and dialogues written by the Wigan Writers Group, a group of eight amateur poets mentored by Louise Fazackerley. Having prepared for the event by reading Orwell's book and then responding from imagination, memory, and family lore of Wigan and Leigh, their performance was utterly unique. The writing was witty and clever, providing the audience a rare glimpse of Orwell through the eyes of real Wiganers, to which Terry Burtonwood's 'Some Wiganers' Thoughts on George Orwell' attests, the final stanza reading:

*He gotten his book and made loads of money  
Takin mick outa Wiganers an makin um look funny.  
Sum thowt his book was a load of crap  
An sum folk said 'he put Wigin ont map.'*

During the break for lunch, my husband and I sat and chatted with some members of the Writing Group. Lamenting the fact that the Wigan accent

had prevented me from understanding the poems completely, one of the group members immediately offered me her transcript of the performance, which I gladly accepted, and Terry Burtonwood volunteered to send me a copy of the poem with words such as 'bog' and 'tash' explained in standard English. They told us about their town and its history, and I found myself envying their connectedness to their community and their rootedness in their past.



*Wigan Writers Group and Louise Fazackerley*

Moving on to the historic Museum of Wigan Life after lunch, we all took in the elegant surroundings, thinking back on how it must have been when Orwell was here researching his book. Orwell Society members Leslie Hurst and David Craik gave fascinating talks on Orwell and Wigan, and photographer Tim Foster presented a thought-provoking slideshow of photos depicting present-day Wigan. The evening concluded with a visit to the Mill at the Pier to see an ingenious original interpretation of Orwell's book presented by students of ALRA. Before leaving, we got to talk with these talented young people and hear about their experience making the play.

On our final morning, we reconvened at the Old Courts for a showing of 'The Night Train'. My husband and I took a seat next to an elderly lady and her adult son; she looked at us with a sudden flash of recognition and exclaimed: 'I saw you on the telly!' and it was not the only time we were recognized that day. Following the movie, Louise Fazackerley – we met her again! – guided us around the majestic old building, now an arts center and in the process of being restored.

The next day we headed back to London to leave for home. I checked my email and saw that Terry Burtonwood had sent me a translation of his poem as promised, along with a note saying that he had seen our interview on the BBC Northwest News. I smiled as it occurred to me that my 15 minutes of fame had been spent in Wigan. On the way back to London, we stopped at a small museum. The attendant asked if we were enjoying our stay and what other places we had visited. Hearing that we had just returned from Wigan, she scoffed: 'Wigan! Just where everyone who visits England wants to go!' She meant no harm, I knew, yet I couldn't help but feel miffed. We told her about the wonderful time we had had in Wigan; I wanted to add that it was not Orwell's book, but the warmth, unpretentiousness, and generosity of the Wiganers that had truly put Wigan on the map for me but realized the allusion would likely be lost on her.

Months have elapsed since we visited Wigan, but I am now looking forward to visiting the town again next April, when Alan Gregory is scheduled to perform his folk opera near Wigan Pier. I've already familiarized myself with the Wigan dialect, thanks to Louise Fazackerley's CDs, and who knows? Maybe I'll be lucky enough to have lunch with some of people from the Wigan Writers Group again. One thing is certain: if I get to eat a Wigan kebab out of a snap tin, I'll feel like an honorary Wiganer myself!

**Carol Biederstadt**

# How to Find Us

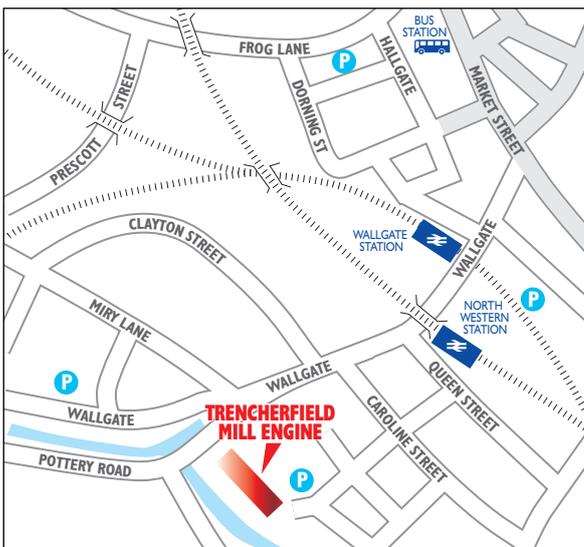
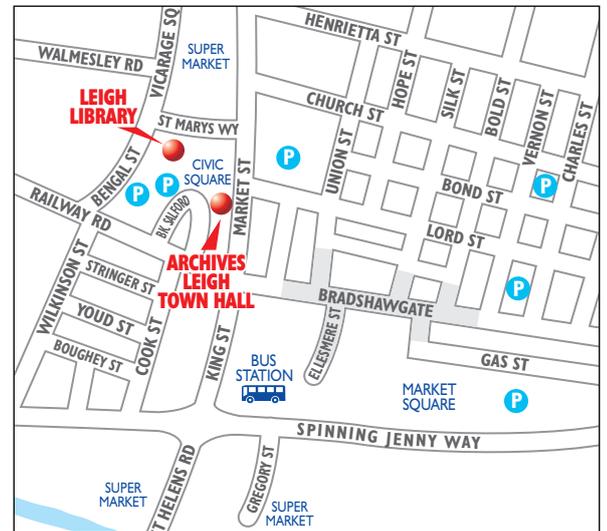


## Museum of Wigan Life & Wigan Local Studies

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

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