

PAST FORWARD

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Step into Spring



Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine

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FRONT COVER
Walking Day, King Street Methodist Church, Leigh, 15.6.1958

Letter from the Editorial Team

Welcome and Happy Birthday to PAST Forward

Past Forward has made it to its 90th edition and is still going strong. Thank you to the hundreds of authors and historians who have carefully crafted over 1,250 articles (and counting) and filled 3000 pages with their research. Past Forward is a wonderful celebration of local history and we are proud to continue to share stories from the Borough, past and present.

So it's goodbye from me...

On a personal note, I will be stepping down from the Past Forward editorial team and moving on from Wigan Council after nearly fifteen years as the Borough's archivist. I will be crossing the border to Lancashire Archives in April to take up the Archives Manager role for Lancashire.

Working on Past Forward since 2013 is a huge highlight of my time in Wigan and Leigh, helping to share your stories and bring the Borough's heritage to life. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to PF and to all the researchers who have been persuaded from a conversation in the Archives searchroom to put pen to paper.

It has been an honour to help look after Wigan and Leigh's archives, working alongside an amazing team, wonderful volunteers and meeting thousands of people passionate about the Borough's heritage. The Borough's archive facilities are now second-to-none and looked after by a brilliant team. I wish the Archives every success in the future and encourage everyone to get involved, find out more and celebrate our shared history.

Alex Miller

Barbara O'Neill Local History Writing Competition, 2022

We are delighted to announce the winners of the 2022 competition, sponsored by John O'Neill in memory of his wife Barbara.

The judges would like to thank everyone who entered the competition and commend all the authors on the quality of research and writing in all the essays.

Our 2022 winners are:

1st Place: Brian Joyce – 'Something of a Novelty', Elizabeth Wheldon, Leigh's First Postmaster

2nd Place: Edward Green – James Pearson Fletcher and the Atherton Volunteers

3rd Place: Alison Armfield – They Paved Paradise and Put Up a Parking Lot

Runner-Up: John Unsworth - The Place by the Brook: A Personal History of Poolstock

Runner-Up: Ted Dakin – A Step Back in Time

Runner-Up: Richard de Grijs – 'Tenpence' – A matter of life, death or transportation

Runner-Up: David Anthony Yeates – First Visit to Central Park, 1978 (Age 7)

Runner-Up: Julie McKiernan – Built to Last

We will be publishing the prize-winning essays in the next couple of editions – look out for the first and second place articles by Brian Joyce and Edward Green in Past Forward 90.

Goodbye and Good Luck

We would like to extend our congratulations to Alex Miller, our Archivist, who is leaving Archives: Wigan & Leigh at the end of March to take up a new position as Lancashire County Archivist.

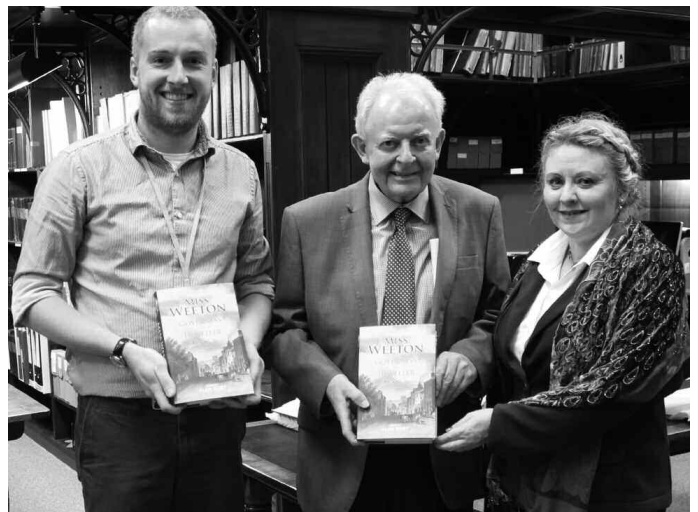
Alex has dedicated nearly 15 years to Wigan and Leigh Archives, beginning work here in October 2007. During this time the Archives service has gone from strength to strength and seen many major developments. It has had many homes, moving from an upstairs room in Leigh Town Hall stuffed to the rafters with collections, volunteers, and researchers, expanding in 2021 to the ground floor with vastly improved facilities and a new exhibition highlighting some of the treasures in the collection.

During Alex's 15 years as Archivist the service has gained archives accreditation and reshelved over 3.4km of collections as part of a major refurbishment project partly funded by £1.3 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, some of the collection being rehomed in the three new strongrooms added as part of the project. Leading a small team with Hannah Turner, he has made a huge and positive impact on our Archives service.

We have built a wonderful community of volunteers and researchers at the Archives and during Alex's time here numbers have grown from one volunteer to over 100! On behalf of everyone here at the Archives, we can say we will miss his cheerful welcome, his immense knowledge, and endless enthusiasm for history and heritage. We wish him all the best in his new home in Preston.



Alex joins Wigan and Leigh Archives October 2007



Alex holding a copy of 'Miss Weeton', with Alan Roby and Dr Ruth Symes



Alex celebrating the 30th birthday of Past Forward, 2021. Image courtesy of Local Life, Wigan edition.

Copy Deadline for Issue 91 - Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday 17 June 2022.

'Something of a Novelty'

ELIZABETH WHELDON, LEIGH'S FIRST POSTMASTER

By Brian Joyce

Until 1892 Leigh's postal business was conducted in a bewildering succession of retail premises in King Street, Market Street and Bradshawgate. Shopkeepers combined the postal business with that of their specialist stores. The situation appeared to stabilise in 1890, when Leigh Post Office moved to a newly built block of buildings at the corner of Bradshawgate and Albion Street. However, the postal side remained subsidiary to the main business of the shop - a printer's and stationers. According to the Leigh Chronicle, Leigh was '...a most important and growing town, with progressive and enlightened people', yet lagged behind smaller places boasting their own main post office and full-time postmaster.

Members of Leigh's governing body, the Local Board of Health, together with its MP, Caleb Wright, lobbied the Postmaster General in London to make Leigh a 'postal town', with its own main post office and professional postmaster. After some debate, the minister finally relented. In February 1892, the town's new status was confirmed. William Moore, the tenant at the Bradshawgate premises, would have to take his printing business elsewhere; a full time postmaster was moving in.

The Local Board broke new ground when it appointed Elizabeth Wheldon.

At a time when non-verbal communication was exclusively by letter, a town's postmaster was one



Elizabeth Wheldon – the Leigh Postmistress (Leigh Journal).

of its most important public figures, and for the Leigh Chronicle, Miss Wheldon's appointment was particularly noteworthy: 'Women's rights have surely been secured at last when a lady has been appointed to the office of 'Postmaster of Leigh'. Everyone has heard and read of the lady clerks in London and elsewhere, but the appointment of one to be chief of a head office is something of a novelty'.

Elizabeth Wheldon was well qualified for her new responsibilities. Her father had been Head Postmaster in Scarborough for many years and had employed Elizabeth and her siblings as post office clerks and sorters. Elizabeth was described in each

census between 1861 and 1891 as either 'post office clerk' or 'assistant in post office'. In August 1892, the unmarried 50-year-old, who had been born and bred in Scarborough, took up her pioneering new job in Leigh, moving into a flat above the main post office at 64 Bradshawgate.

Miss Wheldon inherited an expanding service in the new 'postal town'. Letters to and from Leigh and Tyldesley, Atherton, Warrington, Wigan and Liverpool posted in the afternoon would now have to be delivered the same evening. Henceforth there would be free delivery of telegrams throughout the whole postal district instead of just one mile from the post office, and



Bradshawgate, Leigh, showing the Bank, which was the former post office and is now Santander.

deliveries would continue until 9.00pm. There would now be a direct mail service between Leigh and London instead of via other towns. To facilitate these improvements, Elizabeth doubled the number of clerks; the team of postmen in Leigh was expanded from 10 to 13. During her nine years as the town's postmaster, she increased the number of post boxes from 13 to 24.

Although in 1890 the Leigh Journal had hailed the Bradshawgate premises as 'spacious, well lighted and well adapted to post office needs', Miss Wheldon soon found it too small to cope with the growing service. She began lobbying the local authority, which by now had become an Urban District Council.

In 1895 she informed councillors that the Bradshawgate post office was inadequate. While the amount of space for customers was acceptable, more was needed behind the counter and for back-office functions such as sorting. She had tried and failed to find alternative premises in Leigh town centre. Could the Council build and equip a new building? The councillors procrastinated, promising to approach GPO officials next time they were in London on council business.

Meanwhile Miss Wheldon had to do her best with what she had. When she arrived in 1890, there were only three sub post offices, at Westleigh, Plank Lane, and Chapel Street in Bedford. The

dynamic new postmaster created three more, at St Helen's Road, Leigh Road and Firs Lane. This would relieve pressure on Bradshawgate, as would providing a telegram service at the Westleigh office.

As for Miss Wheldon's request for a new headquarters, the GPO took its time. The Leigh Chronicle observed: 'The wheels of a government department are in one respect like those of the gods, they grind slowly ... Leigh didn't loom with importance to these officials in London'.

Indecision in both the GPO and the Treasury meant that the issue bounced between them, and time passed. When the two departments finally agreed in principle, architects' plans had to be drawn up and submitted to what, by then, had become Leigh Borough Council. The new and self-consciously assertive local authority believed them to be insufficiently

imposing for the new borough, rejected the plans and returned them to London. More delay followed until councillors were forced to concede defeat and approve the original design.

Elizabeth Wheldon had been in place throughout most of these tortuous negotiations and can therefore be credited with both the new post office's conception and birth. However, by late 1902 when the purpose-built office was finally opened at the corner of Silk and Bond Streets, the 60-year-old had retired on a pension and returned to Scarborough. Until her death in 1911, the former postmaster helped her widowed mother run a boarding house.

The late Victorian period saw both a growth in Leigh's economy and in the literacy of its population. Each required an expanded and improved postal service. When Elizabeth Wheldon was appointed, 14,000 letters were posted in the town weekly. By the time of her retirement, the figure had nearly doubled. Deliveries had increased from 16,000 to 27,000 per week. The post office had acquired the experienced and imaginative individual it needed to meet the challenges it faced. While the Leigh Chronicle exaggerated when it claimed at the time of her appointment that 'women's rights have been secured', there is little doubt that by appointing on the basis of experience rather than gender, the authorities in Leigh made the correct decision.



Postal staff outside the Post Office, Leigh.

James Pearson Fletcher and the Atherton Volunteers

BY EDWARD GREEN

The French Emperor Napoleon III was a less fearsome figure than his famous uncle of the same name, but when in 1859 he was rumoured to be contemplating war with Britain an invasion panic swept the country. To placate the public cheaply, the Government resurrected the old Volunteers – civilian soldiers who trained in their spare time at their own expense – and patriotic local leaders rushed to set up Volunteer forces. James Pearson Fletcher of Atherton, whose father Colonel Ralph Fletcher had led the Bolton Volunteers during the Napoleonic Wars, was keen to continue his family's tradition. As an owner of the Atherton Collieries he featured regularly in the Leigh Chronicle, and his efforts can be followed in its pages today.

In December 1859 James presented a petition to the magistrates of Leigh (incorporating Atherton and Tyldesley) requesting a public meeting to discuss setting up a local Volunteer corps. The magistrate who received the petition commented that it was 'very well signed' – unsurprising since he was James' brother, Ralph Fletcher – and a meeting was arranged at Leigh the following week.

Clearly, however, Leigh was not James' main concern, and he pre-empted the official meeting by attending one that called for Atherton to have its own corps. (The curate of Atherton suggested calling it 'the Atherton company of the Leigh corps' and was quickly overruled.) A captain was proposed for such an Atherton corps: James himself, who assured them, in a slightly 'Yes Minister' style, that the proposal came as a complete surprise.

'It was only last night that I saw the hand-bill calling this meeting... I have attended here to-night of course in ignorance of what the promoters have particularly in view in having a meeting previous to the parish meeting... A few words have been said with regard to myself; otherwise I should not have alluded to myself personally... I must confess to you that I have got to that time of life when ease and comfort have begun to have more and more hold upon me...'

He was, of course, willing to accept the post.

The meeting at Leigh the following week could have been trickier, but James was well aware of Bolton's disastrous attempt to

exclude working men from their Volunteers by making the cost of joining too high, and he reassured the attendees that there would be no class distinctions in his corps, where, 'The working man standing side by side with the man who calls himself the man of means, shall be in no respect different'.

Two separate corps – Atherton and Leigh – were formed, with James commanding at Atherton. Members with money to spare after buying their uniform and equipment were expected to cover the cost of equipping the poorer members, and James donated £20 (£2,500 today), with further donations from his brother, Ralph, and their colliery agent, Abraham Burrows. Getting time off work to attend drills and camps was a problem for Volunteers elsewhere, but it presented less difficulty in Atherton, where the Fletchers could grant leave to their own employees and lean on other employers to do the same.

There was still the question of who the ensign (junior officer) of the corps would be. James' teenage nephew (another Ralph) was suggested, but James was clear that it would be 'too selfish for words' for two of the same

family to be officers, and insisted there be an election in which his nephew would not stand. By the following week, however, the Fletchers had changed their minds, and after the vote had been taken the young Ralph announced that he would be standing after all; the vote was retaken and he was duly elected.

By mid-1860 the Atherton corps was up and running. A kind of public relations campaign followed, beginning on 2 January 1861, when James was summoned to the King's Head and presented with a £36 donation to the Volunteers from his workers at the Atherton Collieries. His response, 'This gift affords me the greatest amount of pleasure I ever had in my life', was cheered, and – well-prepared for what was officially a surprise – he gave a speech on the future of the Volunteer movement, which was reported in full by the Chronicle. That evening he threw a party for his employees, where 'besides plain and fancy breads of different kinds an unlimited quantity of roast and boiled beef, mutton, and hams' were served to the 400 people present, followed by dancing.

The following week he appealed to another demographic by inviting all local families of distinction to the first Atherton Volunteers' ball, where the link between the Fletchers and the Volunteers was made clear by the display of the Fletcher family crest alongside the other military and patriotic decorations. James had, however, overestimated the sophistication of his guests, and the optimistic inclusion of dances 'with foreign and novel names' was, the Chronicle observed, 'freely commented upon as a matter of extremely bad taste... A complete panic was only averted



James Fletcher.

by the abrupt erasure of all such items'. Despite such minor hiccups the ball was pronounced a success, establishing the Atherton Volunteers as part of the local social scene. As a reminder that the new corps was in Atherton to stay, the Fletchers sank a new shaft and named it Volunteer Pit.

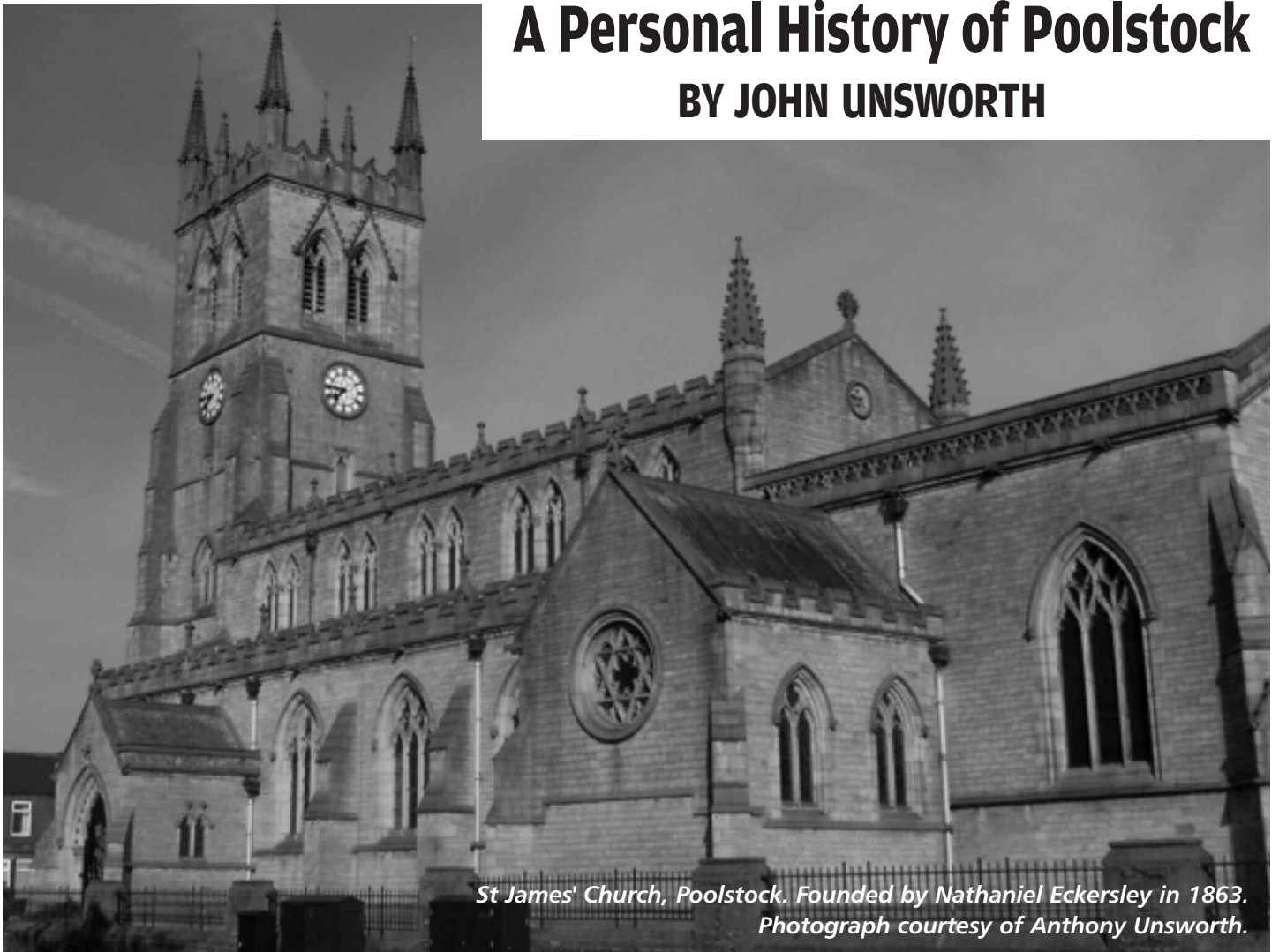
The events at Atherton were not unusual; many Volunteer corps were the initiative of a local family who remained associated with them down through the generations, long after Napoleon III had been consigned to the

history books. After James the Atherton Volunteers would be led by his nephew Philip, Philip's nephew Ernest, and Ernest's brother Clement, under whose leadership they were called up in 1914, ironically enough in defence of France. By then the Atherton company had been folded into the 5th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment, and the family tradition that James had established in 1859 would eventually see five members of the Fletcher family dispatched to Gallipoli.

The Place by the Brook:

A Personal History of Poolstock

BY JOHN UNSWORTH



*St James' Church, Poolstock. Founded by Nathaniel Eckersley in 1863.
Photograph courtesy of Anthony Unsworth.*

Poolstock is a small compact village to the south east of Wigan town centre. Recorded in 1520 as Pulestoke and 1528 as Pullstoke, the name derives from the Old English pul stoc, or place near the brook. If you look at early nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps you can see the open fields and farmland dotted with the occasional dwelling, and skirted by the River Douglas and Poolstock Brook.

In his *Historia Brittonum*, the ninth century Welsh monk Nennius, who believed that

Arthur was not just a legend but a very real person, a king of the Britons no less, listed 12 sites where the king had fought battles to repel the Anglo Saxon invaders. In his 2004 local history/travel book author Charles Nevin speculates that one of the encounters could have taken place on the banks of the Douglas near Poolstock. As much as I would like to believe the story there is no hard historical evidence to support the claims. Still, there is no smoke without fire, as the saying goes.

That apart, however, due to its geographical location on a north to south corridor, Wigan has, over the centuries, experienced the unwelcome attentions of various marauding hordes bent on murder and mayhem - the Romans, Anglo Saxons (possibly), Vikings (Scholes comes from the Viking word skala meaning hut), Jacobites (twice), Zeppelins, and St Helens' fans. In the mid-seventeenth century, during the English Civil War, it was the turn of Cromwell and his Roundheads. In the opinion of many of his contemporaries, particularly

those of the Royalist persuasion, Oliver Cromwell was a thoroughly bad egg - the Devil incarnate. This may sound a bit cavalier but he WAS beastly to the Irish. Though a pious and devout man he was not noted for his forgiving ways - in 1645, after the surrender of Basing House, a Catholic fortress, he had 100 of its defenders put to the sword. And no doubt when he laid siege to Wigan in 1643, and again in 1648, this is what he had in mind for the good townspeople, many of them supporters of Good King Charles. In a letter to Parliament he called the town 'a great and poor town, and very malignant'.

But Wiganers are a warm and welcoming bunch, slow to take offense and quick to forgive, and though they didn't exactly receive Old Noll with open arms, they did name a ditch after him. And not just any old ditch. A depression skirting the edge of Poolstock and describing an arc running from Poolstock Lane to the east, and present day Adam's Bridge to the west it is, depending on your point of view, either a result of mining subsidence, or the remains of Cromwell's siege entrenchments.

In a paper written in the 1930s, Borough librarian, A. J. Hawkes F.S.A, writes 'Camps were pitched in the parson's meadow, and on the banks of the Douglas in the area now known as Poolstock. Here remains of the entrenchments can still be traced, and are marked on the Ordnance Maps as 'Cromwell's Ditch''. And in his 1910 work 'Lancashire in the Civil War', Ernest Broxap writes of a fierce attack on the town, on Easter Eve 1643, from the south east by the Parliamentary forces under Assheton.

Now, I am neither a hardnosed geologist nor, for that matter, a hardnosed historian, but the romantic in me leans heavily towards the military option. As some commentators have pointed out, why randomly name a geological eyesore after Oliver Cromwell, unless of course you are an unforgiving Royalist who hath partaken too much of ye sour grapes. After all, we do know that he visited Hawkley Hall in 1648. No. In my humble, biased opinion 'Oliver Cromwell slept here!' Moving on...

The well-known and respected environmentalist David R Brower, referring to the Industrial Revolution, wrote that it was the time when we '...began applying energy in vast amounts to tools with which we began tearing the environment apart'. And it was this technological and social upheaval, beginning in the eighteenth century, that left a dark satanic scar on Poolstock, deeper than Cromwell's Ditch.

In 1698, traveller and social commentator Celia Fiennes described Wigan as 'a pretty market town built of stone and brick'. By the late 1700s Wigan's status as a centre of the coal mining and cotton industries had left its imprint on the town's landscape. Shafts were dug, canals were constructed, railways were laid and cotton mills built, changing the landscape forever.

In Poolstock, local philanthropist and entrepreneur James Eckersley opened a mill on the banks of the River Douglas on Swan Meadow. And, in circa 1850, what had once been open farmland was transformed into streets of red bricked terraced houses built to accommodate the cotton workers, courtesy of Messrs James (already

mentioned) and his brother Nathaniel, who at the time was a coal magnate and the Mayor of Wigan. Then, in 1863, Christianity came to the village with the construction of St James' Church (founded by, guess who? James and Nathaniel), which was consecrated in 1866 by the Bishop of Chester.

As the century progressed Poolstock witnessed extensive industrial development. From 1889 until the advent of the First World War in 1914 the Swan Meadows Mill was the largest ring spinning company in Britain. By that time the village had become a thriving, flourishing, self-supporting community of workers and small businesses. And in 1902 this sense of insularity and exceptionalism common to most villages and small communities was reinforced when, after years of extensive mining, a large part of the surrounding underground mine workings collapsed to produce flashes, with the result that it was not possible to enter (or leave) the village without crossing over water. With the confluence of the Douglas and the Brook, the Leigh spur of the Leeds Liverpool canal and the newly formed vast bodies of water known as Scotsman's, Westwood and Pearson's Flashes, the village was effectively surrounded by water and Poolstockers acquired the nickname of 'Islanders'.

Cut to the twentieth century and on 13 September 1947, Hollywood came to the village. Clark Gable? Rita Hayworth? Tyrone Power? Must be James Stewart! None of these. The ambassadors from Tinsel Town came in the form of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, movie stars and comedy legends. Stan, real name

Arthur Stanley Jefferson, Lancashire born, had toured the United States in 1910 with Fred Karno's Troupe of Actors, a travelling comedy show. Another member of the tour was Charles Chaplin who in 1903, at the age of 14, had appeared at the Royal Court Theatre in Wigan in a touring production of Sherlock Holmes, playing Billy, a page boy.

It was in the States that both found fame and fortune in the booming film industry, Chaplin as the dignified tramp and Laurel, after 1926, together with Georgian Oliver Norvell Hardy, as half of the world's most famous and best loved comedy duo. In a long and side splitting career they appeared together in over 100 movies, and for the rest of their lives they both remained firm friends, sharing a lot of common interests, including a passion for speedway racing. In 1947, during a six week visit to the UK, it was this passion that brought them to Wigan Speedway, Poolstock, where an estimated 8,000 aficionados watched as they made a circuit of the track wearing their trademark bowler hats. Oliver 'Babe' Hardy died in 1957, and Stan followed his old friend and partner four years later. During the 90s, as part of the duo's enduring legacy, and their link with Poolstock, the Beer Engine, formerly the local Labour Club, hosted the annual meets of the official Laurel and Hardy fan club - the Sons of the Desert. Chapeau!

In this personal history of the place I grew up in it would be remiss of me, not to say unforgivable and downright negligent, if I failed to mention Poolstock's special connection to Rugby League, the sport of commoners.

So, to use a baseball expression, how's this for a triple play!? On first base we have Johnny

Lawrenson, Poolstock born and bred. Johnny played for Wigan from 1938 until 1949 when he signed for Workington Town. While at his home club he made 219 appearances, scoring 187 tries and 128 goals. He represented England on 9 occasions from 1939 to 1950, and Great Britain in 1948/49. In 1960 he returned to his hometown club as coach.

On second base we have an honorary 'Islander', Eric Ashton. Though a St Helens lad Eric played for Wigan from 1955 to 1968, scoring 231 tries and 448 goals in 487+10 games. He played for Great Britain 26 times from 1957 to 1963, and England once.

And on third base we have another honorary Poolstocker, and in the words of my Dad, the greatest player to pick up a rugby ball, and the ideal athlete to make that final sprint to the home plate, legend Billy Boston! Billy played for the Cherry and Whites from 1953 until his last game v Wakefield Trinity (away) in the Championship semi-final in 1968. Playing at right wing with fellow team mate, and Poolstock neighbour, Ashton at right centre they made up one of the greatest, and devastating, combinations in the history of the game. During his career at Wigan he appeared in 486+2 matches scoring 478 tries and 7 goals. He was also a keen cricketer. After leaving Wigan in 1969 he signed for Blackpool Boro, retiring from the game a year later. In 1982 he took over the license of the Griffin Pub in Standishgate. In 2016 a statue of Billy was erected in the town centre to commemorate his sporting achievements. When asked if the honour reflected how much he meant to Wigan, he replied: "What I mean to Wigan? It's what Wigan means to me - it's been brilliant."

And now, as the walrus said, 'the time has come' and I must now end this very personal history of a remarkable little village. When, in 1953, eight years after Laurel and Hardy's visit and 307 since Cromwell dug his ditch, the midwife hoisted me into the air by my ankles and gave me a smack on the bum, Poolstock was a bustling community. Apart from the church, the village boasted a school (which I proudly attended), a surgery and a chemist, two cotton mills, two garages, a rugby pitch, a cricket ground and a speedway/dog track, a Labour Club, a Conservative Club, numerous shops and other businesses, an ice cream manufacturer (De Roma's, yummy!), three pubs, and four chip shops. Two decades later, most of it had disappeared under a tsunami of compulsory purchase orders and slum clearance programmes, a victim of 'progress'. But life goes on, new homes are built over the old, and new histories are formed.

This has been my take on a unique part of local history. From Arthurian legend (or fact), the seventeenth century trauma that was the Civil War, and the societal changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution through to the great sporting greats of the twentieth century, not to mention two Hollywood icons, this amazing story has unfolded within an area less than half a mile square! It has a cast of hundreds, if not thousands. It has the makings of a Hollywood epic. Mr Spielberg...!

Editor's Note: This is an extended version of the article that placed as a runner-up in the 2022 essay competition. The full article is produced here to tell the complete story.



gerrumonside!

The passion of rugby league past, present & future

*Image courtesy of
Wigan Post/Wigan Observer*

An exciting new FREE exhibition that celebrates the history of rugby league is now open at The Museum of Wigan Life. A completely redesigned new-look gallery features dynamic displays that follow our local teams' trophy-filled histories, and tells the story of how Wigan, Leigh and Tyldesley left the Rugby Football Union in 1895 to form the breakaway Northern Rugby Football Union.

The family-friendly displays feature original memorabilia from Jim Slevin, Andy Gregory, Jim Sullivan, Phil Clarke, Shaun Wane, Billy Boston, John Woods, Des Drummond, Jimmy Ledgard, and other giants of the game.

The exhibition also showcases the rise of women in the sport, grass roots rugby, and includes medals, shirts, caps and trophies, alongside more unusual items such as a wheelchair from the 2008 Wheelchair World Cup when England lifted the trophy as world champions, an original turnstile from Central Park, and the ball from the famous Prescott match.

Come and walk through the tunnel of champions. You can sit, reminisce, and share memories about past games in the mini-stadium area, while watching original historic match footage of local teams in action. In addition, there is a programme of events and

family-friendly activities to explore and enjoy. We would also love to hear your rugby league memories and stories from recent games, so come and tell us about them when you visit and add them to our fan wall, or share them on the museum Facebook and Twitter using the hashtag #gerrumonside!

'gerrumonside! – the passion of rugby league past, present and future' is open until 19 November 2022.

Museum opening times are Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm.

Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU

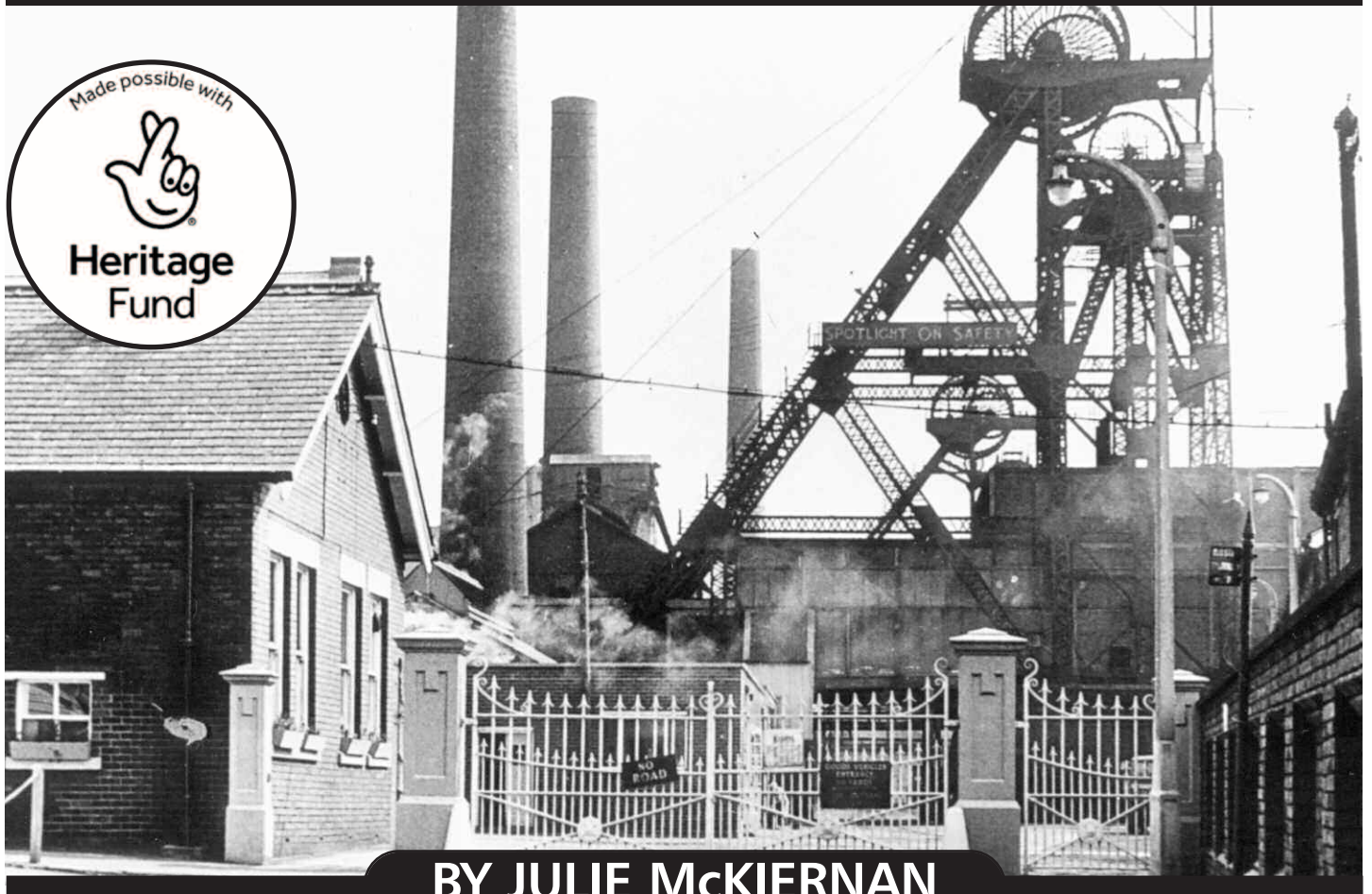
E: wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

T: 01942 828128

W: www.wigan.gov.uk/museum

THE MINE IS YOURS

A NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUNDED PROJECT



BY JULIE MCKIERNAN

If you have ever driven along the A580 East Lancs Road through Astley, you have probably spotted the colliery headgear standing proudly above the hedges and fences. Those of us who are old enough to remember know that it marks the site of the former Astley Green Colliery, and was only one of many headgears that once dominated the local landscape. Now it is the only one left on the whole of the Lancashire Coalfield.

The colliery was started in 1908 by the Pilkington Colliery Company, a subsidiary of the Clifton & Kersley (now spelt Kearsley) Coal Company, and closed in 1970 after only 62 years. Poor geological conditions had made it difficult to produce the required 2½ tonnes per man

shift and demolition contractors were brought in. Fortunately, far sighted officials in Manchester and Wigan managed to persuade the National Coal Board (N.C.B.) to leave the No.1 headgear and shaft winding house, complete with engine, and several outbuildings. Unfortunately, they were left exposed to vandals and the weather for 10 years until the Red Rose Steam Society arrived to preserve the site and restore the engine. The hope was that a heritage museum might one day be developed, and that dream has now been realised, complete with a working engine, mineral railway, miner's cottage experience, and other attractions.

The Lancashire Mining Museum

can be found down Higher Green Lane, Astley and is open to the public on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 1-4pm. There is no admission charge, but donations are always welcome. It is staffed entirely by enthusiastic volunteers who do a wonderful job of maintaining the site and telling the story of the pit, the equipment, and its former employees. They also serve a marvellous cream tea on request!

But the former Astley Green Colliery site has much more to offer than just an insight into the mining industry. It is also a community venue with trees, flowers, grass and seating areas, where exciting events happen. These include Umbrella Arts'

annual 'Scarefest' experience, brass band concerts, firework displays, and even live theatre. In 2020, between lockdowns, Healthy Arts staged the promenade performance, 'The Life & Times of Chat Moss' at three different locations around the site. This introduced new audiences to the Carbon Landscape project and to the museum, and sparked a conversation about bringing more heritage interpretation to the site.

The Healthy Arts not-for-profit organisation celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2022 and over the last decade its artists have produced lots of exciting local community projects, including 'LP100 - celebrating the centenary of Lilford Park' and 'The Leigh Grammar Schools Heritage Project'. We specialise in bringing heritage to life through artistic activities, dramatic performances and interactive community events. So, in 2021, Healthy Arts approached the National Lottery Heritage Fund for funding to deliver a programme of creative arts and wellbeing activities and workshops at the Lancashire Mining Museum. We were successful in our application and have already started our 18 month project, 'The Mine Is Yours', funded by money raised from National Lottery players, with additional investment from Wigan Council and Peel L&P.

Our aim is to encourage a wider range of visitors and volunteers to visit, enjoy and engage with the museum more creatively and learn about our rich industrial past. We particularly want to improve access to the site for everyone by creating a disability focus group whose members will identify issues and suggest potential solutions. We also want to make the museum the centre of mining heritage in the area by creating walking and cycling trails, which will take people from the site to local locations associated with mining



The cast from The Life & Times of Chat Moss.

such as collieries, rescue centres, miners' institutes and memorials. There will be opportunities for groups, schools and individuals to take part in the creative programme – with activities being designed to include creative writing, visual arts, performance, and film-making. The resulting discoveries, art works and performances will be unveiled alongside live music, stalls, and other attractions at a celebratory arts and heritage festival at the museum on Saturday 1 October 2022.

At the end of the project, we hope to have encouraged many more people to visit the museum and helped it on its way to becoming a

regional tourist attraction. Generating a greater footfall will also increase the income to the site which will enable the volunteers to preserve the impressive 98-foot high steel lattice headgear, which is in desperate need of restoration and repair. It is vital that we protect such a key historical landmark of our industrial heritage for future generations.

If you would like to volunteer to help out with any aspect of the project, then please contact us.

Email:

contactus@healthyarts.org.uk

Telephone: 07542 114383

Website: www.healthyarts.org.uk

Facebook: @HealthyArts

SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday 1 October 2022

**The Mine Is Yours
An Arts & Heritage Festival**

**LANCASHIRE MINING MUSEUM
HIGHER GREEN LANE, ASTLEY GREEN, M29 7JB**

A free full-day event for the community!

Memories of an Ashton Lad (Part One)

My father-in-law is Alan Foster and is 'Ashton born and bred' as he proudly likes to boast. Born in 1926 he has witnessed dramatic changes in the way that we live. It was at the end of March 2020, and Britain's first lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, that Alan, like other elderly people, received a letter from the government ordering them to 'stay at home'. Alan lives in a sheltered scheme (not a nursing home), so he was at least allowed visitors, all be it only one at any given time. It was during this time, away from the chatter of normal family life, that I started to listen and take notes of Alan's nuggets of family history and memories. This is the start of his story.

Alan as a Young Lad

Alan's story begins as a young lad growing up at 194 Old Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield. One of seven children, (sadly four had died in infancy) Alan was the youngest; brother Harry was 10 years older and sister Ellen (known as Nellie) was 13 years older. As a boy, Alan's primary school was Evans County (known as Ashton View or 'British' at the time). The school was situated on Wigan Road just opposite Ashton Library. Alan has fond memories - not of going to school, but of playing out after school and getting up to mischief.

Just as Alan had started secondary school at 'Central' (now known as Cansfield) he fell while out on an errand and badly cut his knee on a metal water pipe. Alan's knee became infected and he became seriously ill with tetanus. After staying in the Red Cross ward at Wigan Infirmary for three months, to the doctors' amazement, he made a full recovery. At the time tetanus was a killer, and Alan remembered another young boy



Alan with a bandage on his leg and with niece Beryl.

on the same ward at the time who sadly passed away with the same illness.

Once recovered, Alan resumed his education, but had to restart the year again due to the school work he'd missed. When he was at secondary school, Alan and his family moved to 18 Bryn Road South in Ashton. Alan said life here was luxury compared to their previous accommodation. This house had two bedrooms and an additional box room where Anne, his

step-grandmother, slept. The house was kept warm by an oven in the back kitchen and the open coal fire in the front room (parlour). There was an air raid shelter in the garden, but Alan said this was only used as a coal bunker. Finally, there was the luxury of having a flushing toilet in a small building attached to the back of the house, and hot water in the bathroom upstairs.

Their previous residence had only had an outside loo, which was a shed at the bottom of the garden containing a bucket. This was emptied once a week by a man with a horse and cart. The raw sewage was dumped over an area aptly named 'Muckloe's' (where Alexandra Drive is now). He remembers as a lad this being a great place to get maggots for fishing, as the place was crawling with big black flies in summer time.

Despite the hard life of his parents and sad loss of some of Alan's siblings he remembers his childhood as a happy one. There were day trips out to Southport as a treat and the family would catch the train at Bryn Station. When the Second World War started, Alan remembers times being hard with essential foods rationed. It was all about who you knew. Thankfully, Alan's family had a few tricks up their sleeve. Alan's mum's family owned a chip shop on Warrington Road in Ince, which meant a ready supply of lard. Alan's dad got extra cheese because he worked down the pit. Then there was a neighbour, called Mr Harrison, down the road, who provided eggs, bacon and pork. Alan said that war regulations meant allotments were only allowed one pig, but that Mr Harrison had a second pig hidden behind a false panel in the shed.

Alan's First Job

Back then, children left school aged 14, and so it was at this tender age that Alan got his first job working at Garswood Hall Colliery (where Three Sisters nature reserve is now). Thankfully he did not work down the mines, but instead worked for a firm who made and fitted lockers for miners at the pit. Alan's next job was with a firm called 'Small Parts' in Golborne making parts for conveyer belts at the pit. This was seen as a protected job. Any links to the production



Alan aged 18 in 1945.

of coal during war time were vital. Therefore, when Alan wanted to change jobs, he had to write to the government seeking permission. His next job, aged 15, was painting and decorating, working for a chap called Harry Sankey, who lived on the corner of Pretoria Road and Wigan Road in Ashton.

When Alan turned 18 in November 1944, he remembers getting another letter from the government; he was faced with three choices in life. The first choice was to go and work 'down't pit'. The second, was to join the army, or thirdly, go to jail. Alan's father had threatened to thump him if he selected the first of these options. Alan's father and grandfather were miners and their experience of working down the mines ensured their certainty that they did not want Alan to follow in their footsteps.

So, given 'Hobson's choice', in January 1945 Alan joined the Royal Army Service Core (RASC) and a new chapter in his life began.

This is the first chapter of Alan's story. It has given us a glimpse into a world so far removed from today. There is much more to unfold as regards Alan's adventures. However, I am so pleased to have seized the opportunity while Alan is still here to have asked him about his past and to have captured a part of it here by writing this article.

WHERE DID YOUR ANCESTOR WORK?

A short guide to business records held at Archives: Wigan & Leigh

BY THOMAS McGRATH

One of the most exciting features of the newly released 1921 census is that it not only tells us a person's occupation, but it also tells us which business or firm they worked for. Here at Archives: Wigan & Leigh we hold a number of business records from around the Wigan Borough. These might help your research and further your journey into the past.

What businesses do you hold records for and what period? We hold records for quite a few businesses which include mills, collieries, engineering works, manufacturers, schools, banks, retail and more. The older material in these collections is around 200 years old, and the most recent is about 50 years old. The most useful records for your 1921 census research will be those which cover the interwar period, and an overview list for this period has been reproduced here.

What will the records tell me? The extent of the material in the business records depends on how much was deposited over time. Some of the best material for tracing individuals comes from wage books, occupation records, and day books. In these records you might find out more about job roles, income, and service records.

What if my ancestor is not named? Even if the records do not specifically relate to individuals it is still worth browsing other material which will help contextualise working conditions a century ago. For example, we hold a large amount of correspondence for many businesses, as well as stock books, floor plans, minute books, accounts, and catalogues. These give us a good insight into the day-to-day operations of these businesses.

Help! My ancestor's workplace isn't in the list! Do not worry! Whilst we do not hold records for all former businesses, we have plenty of other collections which will still be useful. We have many local newspapers on microfilm including the Leigh Chronicle, Leigh Journal,

and Wigan Observer, which contain advertisements and references. Our trade directories and expansive photograph collections will navigate you through the historic streets of the Wigan Borough and help you locate any long lost buildings. We also hold a large repository of local history books and publications, as well as more general histories of trade, industry, and employment in Lancashire.

How can I view these? You can get in touch with the Archives in a few different ways to book an appointment to look at our collections and to make general enquiries. All our business records and other primary material, as well as a number of secondary publications, are held at Archives: Wigan & Leigh. Our sister site, Wigan Local Studies at the Museum of Wigan Life, also holds a huge collection of secondary material, trade directories and microfilm copies of newspapers and other genealogical records. Both locations are open Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm. We look forward to seeing you soon!

A selection of records which cover the 1920s:

- **Alder Spinning Co., Leigh:** mill plans and drawings
- **Brogden & Sons, Leigh:** auctioneers and estate agents – accounts, valuation books
- **Coop & Co., Wigan:** clothiers – registers, accounts
- **Eckersley's Ltd, Wigan:** registers, mill plans
- **Goulding Ltd, Wigan:** hauliers – wage books, accounts
- **Gullick Bros., Wigan:** mining engineers – day books
- **Harrison, McGregor Co., Leigh:** engineers – minutes, wages books, catalogues
- **Howe Bridge Spinning Co., Atherton:** accounts, reports

- **J. & J. Hayes, Leigh:** accounts, stock books, legal papers
- **H. W. Ind, Upholland:** cycle manufacturer – accounts, wage books
- **Livesey & Sons, Wigan:** builders' merchants - accounts, wage books
- **Lord & Sharman, Pemberton:** footwear manufacturers – accounts, correspondence
- **Lancashire United Transport Ltd:** registers, accounts, reports
- **George Makinson, Wigan:** mill furnishers – accounts
- **Midgley, Lawton & Co., Atherton:** paint manufacturers – accounts, wage books
- **Middleton & Wood, Wigan:** funeral directors – accounts, wage books
- **Walker Bros., Wigan:** engineers – accounts, working drawings
- **Pennington Mill Co., Leigh:** accounts, minutes, registers
- **Peck & Co, Wigan:** tarpaulin manufacturers – accounts, wage books
- **Park Webb Ltd, Wigan:** forge masters – accounts, minutes, registers
- **Standwear Manufacturing Co., Wigan:** clothiers – accounts, catalogues
- **Stotherts Ltd, Atherton:** medicinal & soft drink manufacturer – ledgers, members' lists, minute book
- **Alfred Thompson, Leigh:** chemist – account book
- **Tyldesley Coal Co.:** accounts, minutes
- **Trustee Savings Bank, Leigh/Wigan:** ledgers, reports
- **Wigan Coal & Iron Co.:** reports, balance sheets
- **John Wood & Sons Ltd, Wigan:** foundry & Engine works – apprentice indentures, wage books, drawings,
- **Worsley Mesnes Ironworks Co., Pemberton:** adverts, order books, working drawings

Archives: Wigan & Leigh

Leigh Town Hall

Civic Square, Market Street, Leigh WN7 1DY

Email: archives@wigan.gov.uk

Telephone: 01942 404430

Wigan Local Studies

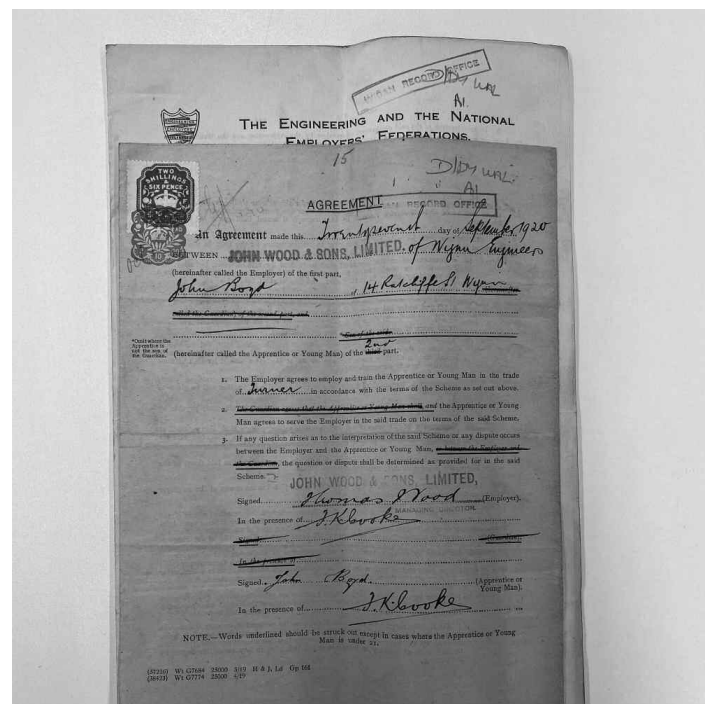
Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU

Email: heritage@wigan.gov.uk

Telephone: 01942 828020



Card frame tenters from Howe Bridge Mills, Atherton c.1918 (PC2010.2968)



An apprenticeship agreement between John Boyd and John Wood & Sons, Wigan, 1920



Railway engine cleaners at Springs Branch Engine Shed, Ince, 1920s. (PC2010.95)

The Knight's Tomb

By Kath Graham and Marlene Nolan



As you enter the churchyard at Newchurch, Culcheth, and look to the left, you will see what is known locally as the knight's tomb. It's not a member of aristocracy who lies there, however, it is a local cotton manufacturer, James Orrell, who rests there alongside his wife Mary.

James wasn't a local man but lived at Culcheth Hall for a number of years. His wealth was based on the manufacture of gingham which, from the eighteenth century, was widely produced by the mills of Manchester. It isn't clear if James was a self-made man who took the opportunities the Industrial Revolution were to offer him, or whether his business was inherited from his father, but he and his siblings became successful and wealthy members of the upper middle classes.

James was one of seven children, three brothers: John, Thomas and Robert, and three sisters: Elizabeth, Mary and Martha. All of these siblings were mentioned in his will.

All seven children were to be baptised at Old St George's Church in Stalybridge.

The eldest, Mary, was baptised on 3 August 1783: the daughter of John Orrell of Stayley, a chapman, and his wife Mary, daughter of James Cook of Stayley. It is likely that Mary died

a spinster and was buried at her church of baptism in 1851.

Their next child, Elizabeth, was baptised on 24 June 1786, followed by her sister Martha in 1792. Elizabeth married Henry Andrew at St Michael's Church, Ashton-under-Lyne in 1813.

Martha was born in 1792. Like her sister Mary, she remained unmarried and died in Ashton-under-Lyne in 1857. Her will was executed by her brother John, a spinner and manufacturer, and she left approximately £2,000.

John, the eldest son, had been born in 1788. When he died in 1864, at his home in Openshaw, he was described as a cotton spinner but, as he left £14,000, it is more likely that

he was a spinning mill owner. He had been the executor of Martha's will a few years before.

Thomas, the second son, was baptised in 1794, and he married Catherine Henshall on 14 October 1821 at St Michael's Church, Ashton-under-Lyne. The couple were to have seven children, He went on to spend his working life in Ashton, first as a pawnbroker, and later as an estate agent. Sometime after 1871 he moved to Spring Bank in Bowdon, Cheshire, dying there on 3 January 1877. When his will was proved his estate came to under £200.

His brother, Robert Orrell, was baptised in 1795, his parents living at Staley Wood. He married Hannah Slater at Manchester Cathedral in 1813, and the couple went on to have seven children. His occupation on both his marriage certificate and his children's baptism records was that of manufacturer. From 1814 to 1821 the family lived in Ashton-under-Lyne before removing first to Stockport, and finally to Belmont near Bolton where, in 1841, he is recorded as owning a cotton mill. He was living at Lostock Hall 10 years later where his occupation is given as cotton manufacturer. His son James was to act as executor to his Uncle James' will. The family removed to Preston and lived at



Old St George's Church Stalybridge.

Bank House in Fulwood, where he died in 1862, aged 67.

John and Mary were still living at Staley Wood in 1797 when the next son, James, was baptised. He married Mary Booth at Manchester Cathedral in 1815, when his occupation was given as cotton manufacturer. James would have been 18 years old at the time, very young for marriage but he had a settled occupation and no need to worry about providing for his new bride.

However, the cotton trade was to take a downturn in early 1832, and the Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser was to report in 1832 that, 'The gingham weavers working for Mr James Orrell have again broken out their warps, he having on Thursday se'nnight [week] to give the prices they demanded'. Two years later the same newspaper reported, 'The gingham trade at Manchester and the neighbouring towns has almost entirely ceased, the greater part of the large manufacturers having totally given the business up, and begun to make other kinds of goods. Some say that machine printing has been a great hurt to the gingham trade'.

James must have held on to his mills, though, as by 1851 his widow, Mary, is living at Culcheth Hall and described as 'aged 50 and a lady annuitant [of] late gingham manufacturer'. The couple had taken over Culcheth Hall when it was advertised for rent by the Withington family in 1840. The property is described as having a 'drawing room, dining room, three sitting rooms, seven bedrooms, kitchens, pantries, servants hall and four servants rooms, two coach houses, two stables of four stalls each, saddle room, pleasure grounds, two hothouses stocked with pines, grapery and a green house and included rights for shooting'.

Obviously the downturn in the gingham trade hadn't materially affected James Orrell. Mr and Mrs Orrell took an active part in the social life of the town. The last time they were mentioned in the press



A typical cotton weaving mill in Manchester during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

was a report of their attendance at the Bachelors' Ball at Higher Hall, Westleigh, on 4 May 1848.

It is to be hoped James enjoyed the evening as he was to die less than two weeks later. The unfortunate event was reported in the Blackburn Standard on 24 May. Mary had stayed at home at Culcheth Hall while James went to visit his brother, Robert, also a cotton manufacturer, in Belmont. It was only to be a four day visit, with James intending to return home on the Tuesday. At about nine o'clock that morning he left Belmont in his brother's phaeton, accompanied by 'a young lady from Bury' and a servant, when the horse took fright and James leapt from the vehicle and fatally banged his head on the kerb stone.

Aged 52 he left a widow but no children. He was buried at Newchurch on 22 May 1848. He left a will in which he appointed his brother in law, Henry Andrew, a commission agent residing in Manchester; Thomas Higson of Manchester, Gent; and his nephew James, a cotton manufacturer of Belmont, the son of his brother

Robert, as his Trustees. He left £1,000 to his brother Thomas, and £3,000 each to his brothers, John and Robert. His sister Elizabeth was to have £3,000, while Mary and Martha were to receive £1,000 each. His wife Mary was to receive the use of the money during her lifetime. Mary was to survive her husband by 10 years before she joined him in Newchurch Churchyard, and her details were inscribed on the knight's tomb. Her will, leaving £4,000, was proved by her nephew John Orrell Andrew, a commission agent.

When Squire Thomas Ellames Withington died in 1840 his widow remarried and moved to Ormskirk. The house was then rented out to the Orrells until Mary's death in 1858, when it was again occupied by the Withington family. Despite his short time in Culcheth James Orrell left a legacy to the people of Culcheth....his tomb which even today is a talking point for those who spot it.

With thanks to Dr Thomas McGrath for his invaluable help in deciphering the will of James Orrell.

By Lucie Thécu, Ambassador from Angers

Wigan and Angers Twinning

Wigan has been twinned with Angers in France for over 33 years. This lasting friendship began in the late 1970s as a cultural exchange between two colleges and was made official on 10 September 1988 in Angers.



Signing the Twinning agreement, 1988 © Photothèque de la Ville d'Angers

To keep the twinning dynamic, Wigan Council has supported an exchange scheme for young ambassadors. This consists of representing Angers in Wigan, encouraging exchanges and helping to develop projects between the various organisations. The ambassadors have worked in collaboration with their counterparts across the Channel.

Over the years, there have been more than 33 ambassadors from Angers and Wigan working together. To strengthen the links between the two communities, the Ambassador organises events such as exhibitions and film evenings and raises awareness of the importance of maintaining this friendship. The twinning has continued to grow over the years and now involves a wide network of organisations: businesses, schools and colleges, activity clubs, sports, culture and community groups.

Each ambassador works closely with schools to raise awareness of the importance of learning about other cultures by participating in exchange projects with schools in Angers. A large number of projects have been carried out and have enabled schools to link with other schools in France over the years. Letters, Christmas and New Year cards, and drawings were exchanged. It is also an opportunity for the Ambassador to visit schools to exchange with the students, introduce them to Angers and participate in various activities. Julie Abi-Khalil, Ambassador from Angers in 2013, introduced primary schools to the 'Kermesse' and they all took part in entertaining each other at the end of term.



Christmas cards exchange ©Ambassador from Wigan in Angers

In 2009, Daisy Stitchers, a local Community Group linked with Marcel Menet Centre Weaving Group. Two years later, after refurbishment, the Marcel Menet Centre reopened with an art exhibition. The theme of the exhibition was 'The Colour Green'. Daisy Chain Stitchers exhibited the 'Twin Tapestries' and 'The Green Surrounds'.

In 2021, #LoveYourTwinTown exhibition invited everyone to discover

their cultural awareness through taking photographs of what they loved about their home towns, 40 of which were selected for an exhibition.

The exhibition showcased the cultural diversity, unique landscapes, heritage and architectural riches of Wigan Borough and Angers. The exhibition is a meeting of two cultures and was shared as a digital exhibition on Instagram and an exhibition in Leigh Library in summer 2021. The project pointed



#LoveYourTwinTown Exhibition © Dave Green

out the importance of connecting the people through digital 'touch' and the universal theme of love and happiness. The #LoveYourTwinTown exhibition will take place in May 2022 in Angers as part of Angers Fête l'Europe Festival.

An Angers Twinning Association (ATA) was created and was first called the Anjou Society in 1992. The ATA supports the Ambassadors' work. Every summer, a Community Event takes place in Wigan town centre, when the ATA and the Ambassador promotes the twinning to the general public.

Noémie Courant, Ambassador from Angers for Wigan Council organised the Quiz and managed to raise £262 for the Mayor's charity in 2017.



Noémie Courant presenting the Mayor of Wigan with a cheque for £262, 2017

Over the years, the residents of the twin towns have developed strong ties. In 1992, Jim and Marjorie Latham, both members of the Angers Twinning Association, visited Angers with the Anjou Society. At a twinning event, they met Régine and Dominique Daveau, whom they have known for 30 years, keeping in touch at first by letter and then by email. In 2016, Jim and Marjorie stayed with Régine and Dominique to watch the Tour de France pass through Avrillé down to Angers city centre. Jim and Marjorie have also hosted several French students, who arrived in Wigan for work experience, often staying for three months at a time.

Every year since May 1989, an Angevine delegation has come to Wigan, and the Wigan delegation travels to Angers at the occasion of the Accroche-coeurs Festival in September.

Three major anniversaries were celebrated in Wigan and Angers during these 33 years of twinning:

- For the 20th Anniversary of the Twinning in 2008, about 250 Wiganers travelled to Angers along with Anvil Street Drummers, MOCO, Parkside Colliery Male Voice Choir, The Thistle Society, Wigan Youth Brass Band and Wigan Youth Jazz Orchestra. Textile artist Elizabeth Smith held an

exhibition of her work in Espace Welcome and St Laud Railway Station for the occasion.

- At the occasion of the 30th Anniversary in Angers in 2018, The Brasserie Angevine and the Wigan Brew House designed an Anniversary beer. The brewery from Angers came to Wigan to brew his beer, which was so popular, it rapidly sold out. A cake was also shared with Wiganers and Angevins people to celebrate the anniversary.

Over the past 33 years, numerous exchanges between Wigan and Angers tightened the strong bonds, making this special link a strength and a richness and this link continues to endure.

Participate in building the Twinning Archive: everyone is invited to share their

memories, their photos, their experiences related to the twinning. It is an exciting project and we want to include you in documenting your experiences and memories.

- You can share your memories and stories with us by sending us an email at angers@wigan.gov.uk.
- There will also be the opportunity for you to come along and meet us in Leigh and Wigan. You can contact the Ambassador by email at the following angers@wigan.gov.uk telling us whether you'd be interested in coming along to a drop-in session in Leigh or Wigan. Anyone under 16 must be accompanied by a parent or carer, and any material donated must have consent from the owner.



*30th Anniversary cake
© Ambassador from Angers*



30th Anniversary brewing at the Wigan Beer House ©Ann Pearce

GETTING SIDE-TRACKED WHILE VOLUNTEERING

by Glenys McClellan



Bickershaw Colliery Band with Rowland Jones, front row, third from the right.

When I started researching my family history in the 1980s there were very few computers and no such thing as the World Wide Web. You had to travel to the appropriate Record Office to look at original baptismal, marriage or burial registers or apply to the Registrar General's Office for a copy certificate if you had the correct details. Now life is much easier as you can consult so many details from the comfort of your own home at any time of the day or night. A lot of the information now available online has been put there as a result of many volunteers busily inputting indexes and transcribing census returns.

I decided that as I had reached the 'family history brick wall', it was time for me to put something back and volunteered to help catalogue the Wigan & Leigh Archives' photographic collection. The vast photographic collection project is divided into towns and various other topics, e.g. canals, churches, transport and industries. Volunteers had to describe as much information as possible about each image. Those of us with local knowledge helped each other with recognising places and buildings, and marvelling at the way areas have changed over the years, or discussing the changes in fashion.

Once that project had been completed I continued to transcribe other projects, or input hand written transcriptions completed by other volunteers. This included listing women who had worked in the coal-mining industry or attended Trade Union meetings in the cotton industry. Later I input many names mentioned in the Minute Books of the Wigan Union Workhouse over many years. My latest transcription project has been the Diary of Local Events, which is a collection of various articles that have appeared throughout the years in the Leigh Chronicle from about 1858 to 1957.

It is amazing how many times one can get side-tracked whilst doing any of these volunteering projects and one day one entry in 1947 caught my eye.

'Rowland Jones, a wages clerk at Bickershaw Collieries, solo euphonium player and tenor vocalist in Bickershaw Band, signed a year's contract to sing with Sadler's Wells Opera Co.'

I was intrigued to see that someone who worked at the local colliery was having such a change of life-style and started to check out more about this man. I discovered

that Enoch Rowland Jones had been born in South Wales in 1912 and at the age of 12 had joined his local brass band which was conducted by his grandfather. He was soon playing at national contests and in 1934 the conductor of Black Dyke Mills Band recruited him to join their band, and provided him with a job working for the company in Queensbury, Yorkshire. In 1939 he had a better offer of a job as a wages clerk at Bickershaw Colliery to enable him to join the Bickershaw Colliery Band.

As he was also a talented tenor singer he was encouraged to take voice lessons with Leigh's Tom Burke and would perform solos at the band concerts. Whilst living in Leigh he met his future wife, Rose Anne Reburn, and they married in 1941. Then in 1947 he auditioned as a soloist at the Sadler's Wells Opera Company, and he moved south to take on major roles with the Company until the 1960s, when he went on to work at Convent Garden and appeared on the BBC radio shows.

According to the online Brass Band magazine '4BarsRest.com' he also worked as a singing tutor at the Guildhall School of Music and sang at the Proms. In 1969 he performed at the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle. He spent his later life living in North Wales and was a peripatetic teacher. He died in 1978 at the age of 66.

I was telling a lady I have known since my childhood about my volunteering and explained that I had found this fascinating excerpt when her face lit up. 'Oh,' she

said. 'I remember Rowland Jones. He used to have a meal at our house before taking part as a soloist at special services at Carmel Welsh Chapel in Ashton-in-Makerfield!' This would be in the early 1940s before Rowland Jones had left the colliery. Now I was really amazed. My father, Alfred Hughes, also attended the Welsh Chapel and the only English services were usually Harvest Festival. All other services were conducted in Welsh. My father also used to organise the concerts at the Chapel and would definitely have known Rowland Jones.

As my father often listened to BBC radio broadcasts, I probably heard Rowland Jones singing on the radio myself and never realised that my parents had known him. So one little excerpt that had intrigued me had come full circle back to be part of my own family history.

I have tried to get in touch with Rowland Jones' family to find out if they have any record of his times in the local area but have been unable to make contact.

Now the Archives has re-opened, I wonder what other great finds will side-track me and how they will jump off the pages as this had done. It also shows that you can find out much more by going to the original source rather than just sitting at home looking at a screen.

www.4BarsRest.com

www.biography.wales

Leigh Chronicle

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THOMAS HALLIWELL

FROM PRINTER TO OUTLAW

By John Hesford



Victoria Place, King Street, Leigh

Thomas Halliwell, the son of a labourer, was born c. 1822 in Wigan. From his humble beginnings he entered the printing trade where he speedily progressed in his chosen career. By the early 1840s he was courting Ruth Tickle, the daughter of Samuel Tickle, a Hindley shoemaker. They married at All Saints, Hindley, on 10 August 1843, both being of full age.

Their first child, Sarah, was born in Wigan in 1844, but by 1845 Thomas had removed to Leigh where he had been engaged as manager of a stationer's shop, agent to Mr. Ramsdale, book seller of Wigan and Leigh, and secretary to the Mechanics' Institute.

Fired with the enthusiasm of youth, he soon went into business on his own account, opening a printing shop behind Ruben Crompton's workshop in Market Street, where his second child, William, was born, quickly followed by Ruth in 1847 and Thomas in 1849. It was here, in 1848, that Halliwell started Leigh's first monthly newspaper, 'The Leigh Advertiser'; but he abandoned it after the first month, as the then current law imposed a duty on monthly, as well as weekly, newspapers.

With the burden of a steadily increasing family – Agnes, born in 1852, and Ann, in 1854 – Thomas took advantage of the law courts ruling in January 1852 that duty be removed from all newspapers, to publish

the first issue of the Leigh Chronicle and Weekly Advertiser for Astley, Atherton, Bedford, Lowton and Tyldesley. The monthly newspaper gradually expanded into a weekly issue, increasing his prosperity and standing in the community.

Thomas was an extremely popular and respected man in the town, and over the coming years he was on the first Pennington Board, a postmaster for the town and a stamp distributor for the district. Over the same period his wife gave birth to two more daughters: Elizabeth, 1858, and Dora, 1860. In 1856 he removed to Victoria Place, opposite Bradshawgate, Leigh, running it as a printing, bookselling, stationery, and newspaper establishment. It also served as the Post Office, with Thomas as postmaster.

The Reverend William Moore and his family rented a four-bedroom house from Halliwell near King Street, Leigh, later removing to Manor House in Lowton. His eldest son, William, held a prominent position in the printing works and, on 30 August 1864, he married Thomas Halliwell's eldest daughter, Sarah, at the Bethesda Chapel, Leigh; none of the parties were aware of the bombshell that was soon to follow.

About 3 September 1866, a Mr Wilkinson, of the 'Well Intended Benefit Society', opened an account with £20 in the Post Office Safety Bank. Halliwell should have

entered the amount in, and given Wilkinson a deposit Savings Book; instead, making excuses, he gave him a common receipt. He should also have entered the amount on a sheet that would be forwarded to London; this he did not do. In October 1867 Wilkinson was given a book, but it was one that had been made up by Halliwell. He had entered the amount for the past year, and the amount of interest due.

The following year, Wilkinson, unbeknown to Thomas, had read the instructions on the book and sent it off to London, for the year's interest to be added. On the evening of Tuesday 20 October 1869, Thomas Halliwell was visited by Mr H Murlock from the General Post Office, London and admitted that he could not account for the money. He was taken into custody and appeared before Richard Guest J.P. on a charge of embezzling £20. He was given bail on the surety of Thomas Drayers Hayes and Herbert Leather for £25 each until Friday.

On the day of his court appearance at the Town Hall, Leigh, he did not attend, and it was found that he had absconded with all of his family. A warrant for his arrest was granted accordingly, and the recognisances were ordered to be entreated. It was feared that many other cases of embezzlement were yet to be discovered.

The following Wednesday, a meeting of creditors was held at the White Horse Hotel, and Mr Railton of Manchester, accountant, stated that his liabilities were a little over £2,000 (at today's value £243,452) and his assets could not as yet be ascertained. It was understood that at the adjourned meeting the creditors would decide whether they would issue a fiat [a power signed by the Lord Chancellor authorising a creditor to present his complaint before the bankruptcy court], or entertain any proposal that might be made for carrying the concern for the benefit of the family.

After rumours circulated into fact, Mrs Mary Jackson of Church Street, Leigh, almost 80 years of age, discovered that she had fallen foul of Halliwell's defalcations. For six years she had been accumulating a little money, intending to give it to her daughter when her savings reached £50. On each deposit she had been given an ordinary receipt; there was not a single genuine recording that any money had been paid into a savings account.

It also came to light that the Lowton Druids' Society had deposited £152 in 1862. They were given a book. A few small withdrawals had been made and interest

entered, but this had been done by Halliwell himself; they had been defrauded of £143. It was also reported that he had appropriated up to £30 donated for the relief of sufferers of the Hindley pit explosion and other disasters. A £20 reward was offered for his apprehension.

At the Manchester Bankruptcy Court on 15 June 1869, Thomas Halliwell, now a declared bankrupt, failed to appear and was deemed an outlaw. An agreement must have been made by the creditors that the only means of reclaiming their losses was for the Leigh Chronicle to remain open, as the following statement appeared in the Chronicle 10 June 1869: 'William Moore, (late Thomas Halliwell), General Printer, Bookbinder, respectfully informs the public that he intends to carry on the business, lately conducted by his father-in-law (Mr Thomas Halliwell), in all its branches, for the benefit of the family as usual, and trusts that the liberal support hitherto given may continue. Within the last four months an entirely New Steam Printing Machine has been erected, which will greatly facilitate the execution of large orders with punctuality and cheapness. Any kind of printing, any style or pattern, on the shortest notice. Headed Letter and Pamphlets. Note Papers. Prospectuses. Invoice Heads. Rate Books. Order Books. School Circulars Lithographic Printing done to Victoria Place, King Street, Leigh'.

Little was heard of the Halliwell family until his obituary was published in the Chronicle. After the usual platitudes that whitewashed his crimes, it stated that he had been living in Belgium for the past eight years, working for an English newspaper and acting as a frequent correspondent and contributor to the London Times. After falling ill, he had returned to London where he died at Whitechapel 27 September 1877, aged 55 years. He was buried in Leigh Cemetery in an unmarked grave. It appears that at least some of his family returned to Leigh, as his youngest daughter Dora, aged 31, married Jacob Holt, a 52-year-old widower and son of Robert Holt, gentleman, at St Mary the Virgin, Leigh on 1 January 1894.

References:

Leigh Chronicle

Rochdale Observer

Manchester Courier

Staffordshire Advertiser

Bolton Evening News

The Morning Post: Births Marriages and Deaths

Poverty in the Depression Years: The Work of Wigan Guardians and Wigan Councillors in the 1920s

By Yvonne Eckersley

This article looks at the extent of poverty caused by prolonged unemployment in Wigan; the efforts of the Wigan's Poor Law Guardians and Wigan Councillors to alleviate that poverty; and the constraints placed on them by various government attitudes, actions and policies as recorded in Guardian and Council minute books from 1921-29.

By 1921 Britain's short post war economic recovery was over. Export markets, especially for cotton, coal and iron products, were drying up as countries developed their own industries. As these were Wigan's main industries this competition reduced their export markets and led to unemployment and hardship.

The article begins when Lloyd George's Coalition government returned coal mines to private ownership on 31 March 1921, and mine owners demanded miners accept pay cuts of 13.5% and longer working hours. When the miners refused mine owners locked them out. Miners continued to refuse until poverty drove them to accept owners' conditions in mid-July of that year.

From the outset, Wigan's miners suffered as a result of government legislation. Towards the end of the dispute miners' personal resources were exhausted, and contributions from trade union funds to miners and their families were drying up. The result was destitution for many.

Miners could not expect help from the Poor Law. By refusing to accept coal owners' conditions, government legislation ruled they had made themselves unemployed, and so were not entitled to poor relief. Guardians complained to the Ministry of Health that the refusal of relief for miners' wives and children who were destitute was unfair.



Coal picking during the 1926 strike.

Guardians Supplementing Unemployment Benefits

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As the recession deepened the unemployment rate rose. Although those who were eligible could draw unemployment benefits, they needed to supplement these by claiming poor relief. This put a strain on the Guardian's coffers. Wigan Guardians and Councillors, annoyed at the injustice of this, wrote to the government complaining that, because unemployment benefits were inadequate to maintain a household, they were shifting the responsibility for unemployment onto the local rates. In a similar vein, Guardians also complained to the Ministry of Labour, that because the government had refused to pay unemployment benefits to men and girls made unemployed by the engineers' strike, Guardians were having to find money to support them.

There are more instances where government actions impacted negatively on workers, Guardians, and ratepayers. The National Insurance Act of 1911 had entitled insured workers

to 15 weeks of unemployment benefit a year. In March 1921 and May 1922 the entitlement period was extended. However, transition from one system to another involved a four week gap in 1921, extending to six weeks in 1922, when no benefit was paid. During these gaps unemployed workers sought poor relief.

In 1924 Wigan Council, identifying this extra burden on the Guardians' finances, and consequently Wigan's ratepayers, added their voice to growing opposition nationally. They wrote to the Labour government asking them to remove the gap period. The government at that time was guiding a new Unemployed Insurance Bill through its second reading in Parliament and a clause within the resultant Act abolished the gap period.

One unfortunate group of Wigan's workers were the mainly unskilled and lowest paid labourers who worked on a daily basis. Despite paying their unemployment contributions, they had to prove they had been constantly unemployed for three days, extended to six days in 1921, to entitle them to

benefits. If at any time during these days they got a job for a half or a full day, the time period began again. This doubling of the waiting period in 1921 saved the government just £9,000. The most unfortunate were the unemployed uninsured workers who were completely dependent on poor relief.

Poor Relief as Loans

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Guardians could give relief to supplement unemployment benefits in the form of loans to be repaid when people went back to work. These repayments were means tested and the low repayments, often as little as one shilling a week, indicate the level of poverty in Wigan. It is noteworthy that some families were still paying off these loans in 1936.

There were an enormous number of Wigan people borrowing money to survive. The 1927 Guardians' minute books record that they bought 14,000 books to record repayments. Managing the loans was an expensive and time consuming task. Each borrower was investigated by a Relieving Officer to assess their needs, decide the levels of loan to be offered, and how much their weekly repayments were to be as they moved in and out of work.

Guardians employed collectors. They collected money in person, recorded the amount in the individual's payment book and in their own ledgers, from which their commission of 15-20% was calculated. Not all borrowers could afford their repayments. In 1927 one woman applied for her repayment to be reduced as she was paying off six other debts. Some loans were written off as the Guardians deemed them unrecoverable, and some defaulters were prosecuted for non-payment.

Emergency Powers Act 1920

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During the 1920s depression years, under this Act's remit, successive governments tried to ensure, as far as they were able, that the country would continue to function. The Act was first used on 31 March 1921, the eve of the miners' strike, amid fears that the strikers would restrict food, power supplies, and disrupt transport. Local councils were asked to put into place measures to prevent this.

The government was also afraid of the potential threat of mass disturbances. In April 1921, as negotiations between miners and employers broke down, Lloyd George announced a National

Emergency and mobilised the naval and military reserves for active service. He also formed the National Defence Force and wrote to all local councils asking them to help form Volunteer Defence Corps. Councils were asked to invite members of the Territorial Force, ex-service men and civilians to form units, and to use their influence with employers to encourage them to support workers who had joined. Wigan Guardians objected. Ashton-in-Makerfield Trades and Labour Party protested to Wigan Council that it was unnecessary as there was no sign of disturbance. The council, as an organ of government, had no option but to comply.

Hunger Marchers in Wigan Workhouse

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In 1922 the communist National Unemployed Workers' Committee organised Britain's first Hunger March. They walked from Scotland to London collecting men and women from areas of high unemployment as they marched. They often stayed at workhouses in towns they passed through. On 18 December 1922 one contingent of 45 marchers, who had walked from Govan near Glasgow, stayed in Wigan's workhouse. The Guardian's clerk had been approached beforehand by its Wigan Branch leaders and between them they decided on the details of the marchers' accommodation. Minute books record that the marchers did not want to sleep in the casual wards (because of the association with pauperism) and, rather than eat workhouse food, they had brought their own bacon and eggs for breakfast the next morning.

Although Hansard records that marchers who stayed in workhouses were very well behaved, Wigan's Matron and one Guardian accused them of being noisy, with some appearing drunk. And, as more contingents of marchers were expected, some Guardians felt they ought to be treated as casuals. This was put to the vote and the majority of Wigan Guardians voted against it.

The Coal Emergency Directions, 1926

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These forbade the sale of domestic coal and coke without a permit, but buyers were allowed to buy 28lbs of coal and 28lbs of coke over the counter on the proviso they took it away themselves. Coal bought this way needed to be carted home on a very regular basis, often by women with children in tow. Until reading this, I wrongly presumed photographs showing women pushing prams laden with coal illustrated them having picked it from coal heaps.

The Directive shows the government either feigned knowledge of, or were in complete ignorance of, the reality of people's lives, or indeed the geography of Britain. For example, in July 1926 the Secretary of Mines believed most home coal was picked from pit heaps, which assumed everyone lived close to a heap; or that government disregarded any difficulties the Directive would create for working people; or something rather more antagonistic or mercenary on the part of coal owners.

Tellingly, to protect their interests before the 1926 lockout, coal owners



Ex-miner and Leigh MP, Harry Twist, addressing a mass meeting of miners in 1922.



Locked out miners gathering at the 'Big Lamp', Market Place, Wigan, 2 April 1921.

had stockpiled 10 million tons of coal, and made arrangements to import coal from the US and Poland. So, although there was potentially no shortage of coal, the government felt the need to demand permits for people buying domestic coal.

Wigan Council's Industrial Emergency, Household, and Domestic Subcommittee assessed the Coal Emergency Directions and decided on a course of action. They would sell domestic coal themselves. Consequently they wrote to the government asking them to pass legislation which would allow them to do that.

The Work Test

The 1924 Unemployment Insurance Act introduced legislation that disallowed unemployment benefits if claimants could not prove they were 'genuinely seeking work', that is, pass the work test.

To prove they were actively seeking work, Wigan's unemployed had to register at the Labour Exchange three times a week, three times each day, queuing for hours outside without shelter; something Guardians and Wigan councillors repeatedly complained about to the Ministry of Labour. Then there was the difficulty of being able to look for work in places where there was a reasonable chance you would get a job. The establishment and organisation of local Employment Exchanges was not conducive to helping workers find work. Wigan's workforce was drawn from a large area and Wigan employers advertised in Wigan's exchange. Guardians complained to the Ministry of Labour that because workers living from Ashton, Standish

and Horwich were not allowed to register at Wigan, they were at a disadvantage.

In 1927, among fears that some of the unemployed were shirking work and living off ratepayers, a further Act was passed. This stipulated that men not eligible for unemployment benefits were not to be given poor relief. Instead Guardians were to devise schemes of work, employ these destitute men and pay them 12% below the district wage rate. Wigan Guardians were reluctant to implement this. They wrote to the Ministry of Health stating they thought it unfair to insist Guardians do so, reasoning that this would result in the Guardians, not the government, taking responsibility for the unemployment crisis.

This caused some consternation for the Ministry of Health. In 1928 they wrote to the Wigan Guardians saying that they were not prepared to ignore the fact that the Guardians were not applying the test work clause, and were still giving able bodied men relief. They gave an ultimatum, ordering them to comply by 31 March. Wigan Guardians seem to have ignored this as, in April 1929, a letter from the Ministry declared they were not going to accept the Guardian's non-compliance.

Soon after, on 10 May, the Ministry wrote to express approval that the Guardians had developed a test work scheme, and placed 87 men to work on their Greenslate farm in Billinge. Unemployed men and women were also placed at the Billinge Poor Law Hospital, working in the hospital and in the grounds.

Their capitulation can be explained. The Board of Guardians (Default) Act

of 1926 decreed that the Ministry of Health could remove Poor Law Boards who were not performing well and replace them with Ministry Commissioners. As the Wigan Guardians had run up enormous debts during the depression, they may have felt they had no option.

Wigan Council and Work for the Unemployed

In 1921 the Ministry of Health proposed that councils devise unemployment schemes and apply for grants to help fund them. The Council's Distress Committee, which included eight Poor Law Guardians, identified four potential schemes. The committee were unhappy that they were expected to pay wages at 12% lower than the standard wage rates. The Town Clerk wrote to the Ministry of Health asking if they would agree to pay the full rate, or reduce the 12% suggested. In the event Wigan was not eligible. Funds were only available for councils with Direct Work Departments.

From 1922 Wigan's Unemployment Committee, an initiative of the Minister of Labour to facilitate the sharing of expertise by Councillors and Guardians, worked well. For instance, in 1925 they applied to the Central Unemployment Grants Committee for loans to pave certain streets as a scheme for relief work. In 1926 they asked the Ministry of Health for a loan of £25,000 for road repairs. In early July 1927 Wigan established a Direct Works Department under the auspices of the Unemployment Committee. The Committee recommended to the council that they delegate to the Direct Works and the Housing departments special powers to find work and to buy the materials needed to carry out the council's Relief Schemes.

By 1929 the Distress Committee and the Unemployment Committee formed a Joint Committee. Together they applied to the government's Unemployment Grants Committee for a number of projects, including £1,303 to culvert Clarington Brook, and £7,218 to develop the site of Alexander Park.

Sources - from Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall:

Wigan Board of Guardians 1921 - 1929

Wigan County Borough Council Minute Books 1921 -1929

Photography by Daniel Cheetham



AROUND THE MATCH

Whether it's the 1960s or last week, being outside a football ground once the match begins provides an interesting contrast of the senses. Deserted streets filled with a sea of voices coming in intermittent waves from a crowd you can't see, makes for a powerful and somewhat eerie setting...

To then push through the turnstiles, and experience the energy and passion of people of all ages and backgrounds pitch side can feel otherworldly.

A new commission for Wigan and Leigh's hosting of the UEFA European Women's Championship by WE ARE WILLOW creative studio & art collective, in partnership with THE TURNPIKE and WIGAN COUNCIL, celebrating the area's rich history and cultural diversity.

THE PLAN IS TO CREATE A NEW TEAM, FILM DOCUMENTARY AND ACCOMPANYING MEMORABILIA

that offers fresh insight into the women of football in and around the match - the female voices that make the game on and off the pitch. The work will engage with new audiences, sharing histories, bringing generations together, and exploring those special moments associated with the game that affect people long after the final whistle is blown.

THE TEAM

Eleven women of diverse ages and backgrounds brought together to discuss their experiences of the game and what it means to them. Exploring themes of nostalgia, heritage, community, and the future of football.

THE FILM

A documentary featuring a combination of interviews with the new team of 11 interspersed with archive footage of women's teams from the past century.

THE MEMORABILIA

An exclusive team emblem, football shirt and lapel badge, the design based on the interviews gathered with the 11 women.

A UNIQUE MATCH PROGRAM

Featuring photography and stories of the women who contributed to the work as the new football team – celebrating solidarity, inclusivity, and positive community ethos.

WE ARE WILLOW is a UK based creative studio and multidisciplinary arts collective, collaborating on projects engaging in cultural, commercial and community interest, on a national and international scale.

For more information and how to apply to be part of the project please email hello@wearewillow.com

www.wearewillow.com
www.theturnpike.org.uk
www.wigan.gov.uk



Wigan 
Council


Wigan & Leigh



Wigan Technical College Expands and Diversifies during the Interwar Years

BY DR STEPHEN CRAIG SMITH

Dr Smith continues his examination of the history of Wigan Technical College.

The euphoria of moving into its own specifically designed building on Library Street with room for further expansion did not last very long. Throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century the number of residents in Wigan and its surrounding district continued to increase, local industries including mining, textiles and engineering continued to expand, and the need for technical qualifications became ever greater. Although the Great War caused a temporary decline in student numbers, this was more than offset by increasing demand following the war's end.

When the college moved into its new premises in January 1903 the college comprised 20 staff who collectively covered the disciplines of mining and geology, mathematics, metallurgy, woodwork, cotton technology, chemistry, building, technical drawing, commerce, and the arts, serving around 1000 full-time and part-time students. (Reference: 'Wigan Technical College finally gets a home of its own', Past Forward, Issue 88, August-September 2021).

By the mid-1920s, a mere two decades later, the college had grown to 31 full time and 41 part time lecturers and 9 administrative staff, collectively covering mining and geology, mathematics, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, chemistry, physics, building trades, commerce, and the arts, serving round 2,400 full-time and part-time students. Student numbers had increased by 250 per cent. No wonder the college was looking to expand its teaching space.

As early as 1921 the college had to erect a temporary wooden annex behind the college building on waste ground facing Millgate to accommodate extra classrooms. Given the significance of the college to the mining industry, and the urgent need for more space, in 1921 the Miners' Welfare Fund provisionally allocated a sum of £20,000 for further

college building, and £5,000 for future teaching and research equipment. In 1926 their earlier offer was increased from £25,000 to £37,000 'to enable the Governors to erect and equip a four storied extension to the Library Street building'.

The original 1903 college building faced Library Street between Hewlett Street and College Avenue but did not extend all the way back to Millgate, thereby occupying only 60 per cent of the ground bounded by the four named streets. Plans were now prepared in collaboration with Architects Messrs. Briggs and Thornley F.F.R.I.B.A. of Liverpool to provide extended building space for an enlarged Mining Department, a college library, extensions to the departments of Physics and Engineering, together with additional classroom accommodation. When these plans were approved by the Board of Education in June 1926, the provisional grant offered by the Miners' Welfare Fund was confirmed, and contracts for building the extension were granted to Messrs. Johnson and Sons of Caroline Street, Wigan. The temporary wooden annex built in 1921 was demolished so extra classrooms, to compensate for the

temporary loss, were found at the Wigan Girls' High School.

The Official Opening Ceremony for the college extension took place at 7.30pm on 13 June 1929, attended among others by the Chairman of the Miners' Welfare Committee, the Right Honourable the Viscount Chelmsford G.C.S.I., G.C.M.C. At this ceremony Viscount Chelmsford, Arthur Moore Lamb (Vice-Chairman of the Governing Body), and George Hiram Winstanley (H.M.I. Board of Education) were awarded College Diplomas honoris causa.

Although the extension onto Millgate was designed by different architects, and built by different contractors, the extension is very similar in scale, building materials and layout to the original 1903 building. What is now Wigan Town Hall is actually two buildings constructed three decades apart but blended so well most people would never know unless they were exceptionally observant.

The completed extension provided an opportunity to review the whole question of room accommodation, which involved the reuse of some rooms, the reallocation of others, a complete renumbering of all



Wigan Technical College extension of 1929.

the rooms, remodelling of out-of-date electrical lighting, and total redecoration of the entire building. A full-time librarian was appointed in October 1929 and the college library greatly expanded its books and journal stock. In November 1930 the college introduced a refectory, so student meals could now be purchased on college premises.

Ironically, student numbers declined slightly in the early 1930s as a result of global economic depression affecting many local industries, coinciding with a fall in the birth rate during the First World War. Fortunately, student numbers rebounded, and by 1935 continued to increase. In 1929 senior commerce courses were re-established after a period of dormancy and a college diploma in general science was introduced, followed by a diploma in mathematics in 1930, and in physics in 1932.

The original 1919 Students' Association rules were updated to better meet the needs of 1930s student life. One of the more successful student activities organised by the Students' Association was a 'Rag Procession' to escort the invited speaker from the station to the college each Founders' Day. Unfortunately, this student custom did not survive the war years and was not resumed in 1945.

One of the greatest drawbacks to college life in general was the lack of suitable playing fields. Westwood Athletic Ground was rented by the college, but this arrangement was far from satisfactory, and in March 1931 the college Governing Body gave its formal approval to a scheme for the purchase and development of its own grounds. Wigan Borough Council gave its approval in late March and Lancashire County Council followed suit in April 1931. Unfortunately, this was a time of severe economic depression and no progress had been made by 1934.

Wigan philanthropy came to the fore on Founders' Day, 23 November 1934, when former college student, Mr George Alfred Christopher, presented the college with a gift of 11 acres of freehold land at Standish Lower Ground for conversion into playing fields. Conveyance was completed by December that year and College Governor, Mr Arthur Moore Lamb, promised £500, and Chairman of the Governors, Mr Joseph Thomas Gee, £100, for a playing field pavilion. By 1935 a public appeal for subscriptions to build a pavilion had reached £1,100.

A scheme to level, drain, fence, and surface the land for cricket pitches and tennis courts was approved by the County Architect, a contract was signed



The Christopher Park Sports Pavilion.

with Messrs. Bradshaw Bros. of Leicester, and work started in June.

The newly completed playing fields were officially opened in May 1936 with an informal opening ceremony involving a cricket match, where the Vice-Chairman of the Governing Body and donor of the land, Mr G A Christopher, bowled the first cricket ball to the Chairman of the Governing Body, Mr J T Gee. It was now possible to terminate the college agreement with Westwood Athletic Ground. With insufficient funds to build a sports pavilion however, temporary arrangements were made to use a barn as changing rooms on adjacent farmland.

As part of the 1934 11-acre gift there was also an option to purchase a further 16 acres; this was taken up by the college in 1937 and completed in 1938, followed in June by the Governors of the college deciding to name the playing fields 'Christopher Park'. As funds were insufficient to start construction of the pavilion, further money was provided by Wigan Education Committee to make it possible to start construction in 1939.

Although advances were made in many aspects of college life in the 1930s there was no improvement in classroom accommodation. For instance, six rooms at Warrington Lane Junior School had to be used by the Commerce Department for evening classes, but as the school furniture was designed for children and the evening classes were attended by adults, this was far from an ideal situation.

In 1936 the Board of Education carried out a national survey of Technical and Art Education which showed the Wigan area to be in a poor situation regarding overall accommodation.

Given the financial difficulties facing the country during the early 1930s, central government funding was reduced

wherever possible. The National Economy Act of 1931 reduced overall public funding by 10 per cent, eased to 5 per cent in 1934, and finally abolished in 1935. Along with the rest of the country, this affected the number of teachers who could be employed, which in turn affected the number and nature of courses offered at the college.

Scholarships, gifts, and bequests were exceptionally welcome at this time. There was a travel scholarship to visit France in 1922, a travel scholarship to visit Geneva in 1933, and a travel scholarship to Germany in 1935. Many books were gifted to the library, and rock specimens were donated to the geology museum including gold-sand from Uganda, bauxite from British Guiana, and gold from Tanganyika and Kenya. The college enjoyed an enviable international reputation with former students working in senior positions in Uganda, Nigeria, India, and Turkey, as well as in most coalfields across Britain.

Although significant, the issues described above soon appeared minor when overtaken by the shadow of imminent war. By October 1938 the Board of Studies was already considering air raid precautions and formed two sub-committees, one to deal with first aid, and the other to deal with fire precautions. At the outbreak of war in 1939 concrete posts were erected across Christopher Park playing fields through the voluntary work of staff and students to prevent possible landing by enemy aircraft. All matters of accommodation had to wait for a more suitable future time, but that is another story.

Acknowledgements

Alex Miller and Kathryn Pass for research support relating to obtaining background material.

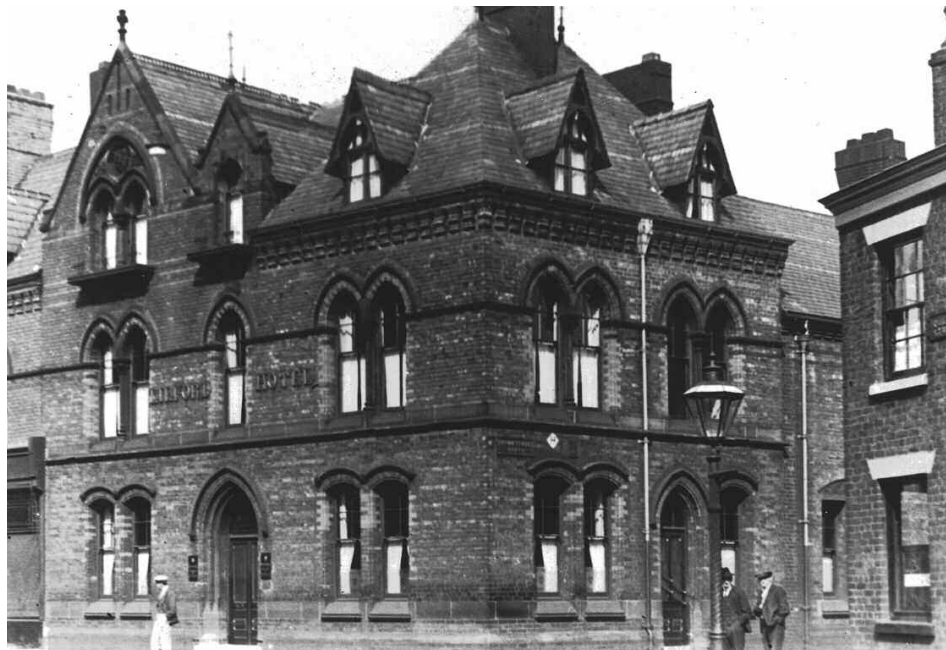
J C Prestwich – A Leigh Town Trail

By Heather Lawler

I have always been interested in buildings – both from an architectural and socially historic point of view.

Some years ago I became aware of James Caldwell Prestwich, initially as the architect of Leigh Town Hall. It did not take long for me to discover that he was responsible for many of Leigh's fine buildings. It is quite unusual for the works of one architect to predominate in a town.

The diversity of his creations – both in design and use of materials - is impressive. A comparison of the Town Hall and the Co-operative building on Bradshawgate serves to illustrate this point. It also demonstrates how varied his clientele were, having both municipal and commercial commissions.



Lilford Hotel, Bradshawgate, Leigh (PC2012.13212)

He was essentially a local man, having been born in Atherton and educated at Leigh Grammar School. Despite an extensive training in London and Europe, he chose to return to Leigh to embark on his career and establish his family. I think he must have loved the town as

he both lived and worked here, involving himself in the local life.

During lockdown I decided to investigate the man and his work in more detail. On my weekly shopping trips to Leigh I would visit, one at a time, each of his remaining buildings in the town. I was familiar with many of them but found a hidden gem in the original Infirmary building. I struggled to find it as it is now completely surrounded by modern additions but it must have been impressive when viewed from The Avenue when it was first built.

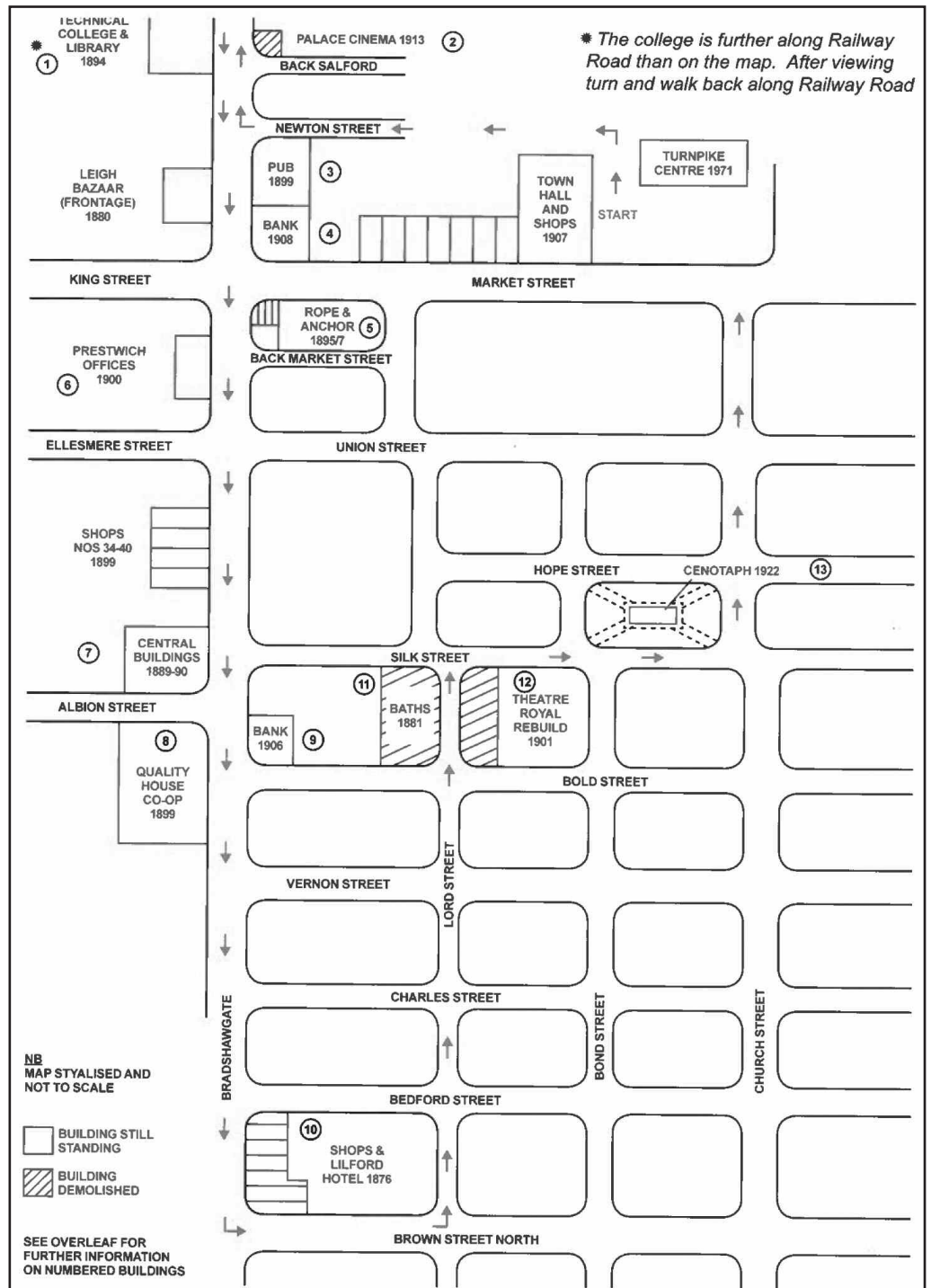
Inspired by all these wonderful buildings I felt Prestwich needed to be appreciated by a wider audience and perhaps more honoured by the town he did so much for. Hence this trail.



Co-op, Bradshawgate, Leigh, 1907 (PC2015.13176)

Key to Map

1. Building closed in 2010.
2. Cinema closed in 1957 – was original B&M store in Leigh.
3. Built as White Horse – was Tropics in 1990s.
4. Built for Parr's Bank.
5. This is all that remains of the large pub which filled the entire corner onto Market Street.
6. These offices were occupied by Prestwich & Sons until 1989. In the 1970s they employed over 50 staff.
7. These buildings were developed by Dr Richard Strange Hall and a plaque can be seen on the wall facing onto Albion Street.
8. Co-op closed in 1999.
9. Building recently closed as HSBC Bank. When built was for shops and Leigh Club premises.
10. Look up at the roof to see small stone creatures.
11. The baths closed in 1977.
12. Theatre originally built in 1884. The foundation stone is preserved opposite the Post Office. Theatre closed in 1954 and became a dance hall, then Reubens Night Club which closed in 1996. It was demolished in 2008. Reubens Court flats now occupy the site.
13. Gardens opened in 1901.



Other Prestwich Buildings in Leigh

Leigh Infirmary, The Avenue – 1904

Our Lady of the Rosary, Plank Lane – 1938

Sportsman Inn, Firs Lane (demolished)

Chatham House, Chatham Street – 1905 (accommodation for Atherleigh Hospital)

Windermere Road School – 1908 (demolished)

Atherleigh Hospital, Leigh Road (demolished 1999)

Additions to Albion Foundry & Warehouse, Albion Street (demolished)

Houses on St Helens Road, Beech Grove and Hand Lane

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events coming up at the Museum of Wigan Life. For details of any of these events and to book, please call 01942 828128 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

SOUL TIME – music and chat group

Join Manchester Camerata for Soul Time – a music and chat group for people living well with dementia and their families. Covid safe.

- **When?** Monday 21 March and then every other Monday, 1.30-2.30pm
- **Where?** Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU
- **What is the cost?** Free event
- **Do I need to book?** No need to book, just drop in.

Super League Saturdays – family craft activities

Join us for fun-filled rugby themed family-friendly craft activities, including making your own team foam finger and designing your own badge.

- **When?** Every second Saturday of the month unless otherwise stated, 10am-3pm. Please check social media or contact the museum for updates.
- **Where?** Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU
- **What is the cost?** Free event
- **Do I need to book?** No need to book, just drop in.

gerrumonside! lunchtime exhibition tours

Fancy something exciting to do during your lunch break? Then look no further! Join us at the museum for our new bi-monthly

rugby league exhibition tours. See original memorabilia never seen before, and more unusual items including the original turnstile from Central Park.

- **When?** Starting Wednesday 6 April and then the first Wednesday 1 June, 3 August, 5 October, 12-12.45pm
- **Where?** Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU
- **What is the cost?** Free
- **Do I need to book?** Booking essential. Ring 01942 8281288 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

Wigan Rugby League Heritage Society launch

Wigan Rugby Heritage Society (WRHS) would like you to join them for a special launch day at the museum. Wigan Rugby Heritage has been set up as a non-profit organisation designed to preserve and promote the history and heritage of Wigan Rugby League Club. Rugby league fans, collectors and enthusiasts are invited to come along and find out all about the WRHS and talk all things rugby league, sharing stories through memorabilia, programmes, family friendly craft activities, and much more.

- **When?** Saturday 2 April, 10am-4pm
- **Where?** Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU
- **What is the cost?** Free event
- **Do I need to book?** No need to book, just drop in.

Museum of Wigan Life lunchtime building and permanent exhibition tours

Fancy something exciting to do during your lunch break? Then look no further! Join us at the museum for our new bi-monthly building and permanent display tours.

Our curators will guide you through the museum's permanent displays including Romans, Ancient Egyptians, early trades, and 600 years of protest across Wigan Borough. Find out who built our amazing building, its past use, and explore our fantastic local studies library and all the resources it has to offer.

- **When?** Starting Wednesday 4 May and then Wednesday 6 July, 7 September, and 2 November, 12-12.45pm
- **Where?** Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU
- **What is the cost?** Free
- **Do I need to book?** Booking essential. Ring 01942 8281288 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

Coalopolis – Wigan's Mining Heritage by Alan Davies

In the late nineteenth century Wigan took on the title 'Coalopolis'. It was the most important coal mining town in the world with 700 years of developing mining methods, technical advances and mining education. Join Alan Davies for this fascinating talk to find out more about Wigan's amazing mining heritage.

- **When?** Thursday 21 April, 12-1pm
- **Where?** Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU
- **What is the cost?** £2.50 includes tea or coffee
- **Do I need to book?** Booking essential. Ring 01942 8281288 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

Alfred Waterhouse by Sean Jinks

Alfred Waterhouse was an English architect particularly associated with the Victorian Gothic Revival style of architecture. He designed many celebrated buildings including Manchester Town Hall and Natural History Museum, but did you know he also left his mark on Wigan? Join local historian Sean Jinks for this fascinating talk where he will bring to life the man, his beautiful buildings, and his links to the Museum of Wigan Life.

- **When?** Saturday 7 May, 12-1pm
- **Where?** Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU
- **What is the cost?** £2.50 includes tea or coffee
- **Do I need to book?** Booking essential. Ring 01942 8281288 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

Information for Contributors

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

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

- Publication is at the discretion of Editorial Team
- The Editorial Team may edit your submission
- Published and rejected submissions will be disposed of, unless you request for them to be returned

- Submissions may be held on file for publication in a future edition
- Articles must be received by the copy date if inclusion in the next issue is desired

Submission Guidelines

- Electronic submissions are preferred, although handwritten ones will be accepted
- We prefer articles to have a maximum length of 1,000 words but please contact us if you would like to submit an article of a greater length

- Include photographs or images where possible – these can be returned if requested
- Include your name and address – we will not pass on your details to anyone unless you have given us permission to do so

We aim to acknowledge receipt of all submissions.

Contact Details

pastforward@wigan.gov.uk or The Editor at **PAST FORWARD**, Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

Events coming up at Archives: Wigan & Leigh. Please book by calling 01942 404430, email archives@wigan.gov.uk or search for 'Archives: Wigan & Leigh' on Eventbrite

Playful Saturdays at the Archives

The first three Saturdays of every month are Playful Saturdays – bring your little archives explorers to Leigh Town Hall to build, play, draw and explore! We'll be running special family friendly sessions so come and join us.

- **When?** Every Saturday of the month unless otherwise stated, 10am-4pm. Please check social media or contact Archives: Wigan & Leigh for updates.
- **Where?** Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1DY
- **What is the cost?** Free event
- **Do I need to book?** No need to book, just drop in.

Archives Relaxed Open Morning with sensory storytelling session

Come and explore the archives exhibition in Leigh Town Hall as part of a relaxed

morning for people with autism and other sensory processing needs

- **When?** Last Saturday of every month, next sessions: 30 April and 28 May, 10:30am
- **Where?** Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1DY
- **What is the cost?** Free event
- **Do I need to book?** No need to book, just drop in.

The Women Who Said 'Yes' – a talk by Dr Ali Ronan.

Ali Ronan joins us again to talk about the ground-breaking women who stood for Parliament in the 1918 election

- **When?** 20 April, 1.30pm
- **Where?** Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1DY
- **What is the cost?** Free event
- **Do I need to book?** Booking essential. Please book by searching for Archives: Wigan & Leigh on Eventbrite.

Women's Euros

Get excited for the upcoming Women's Euros and learn about the Pride of Preston, Dick Kerr Ladies football team, times to be announced

- **When?** 18 June , 11am
- **Where?** Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1DY
- **What is the cost?** Free event
- **Do I need to book?** Booking essential. Please book by searching for Archives: Wigan & Leigh on Eventbrite.

Archives: Wigan & Leigh Town Hall Tours

Join us for this exciting tour of Leigh Town Hall and see behind-the-scenes of the new Archives: Wigan & Leigh.

- **When?** The last Wednesday of every month, 11am-11.45am
- **Where?** Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1DY
- **What is the cost?** Free event
- **Do I need to book?** Booking essential. Please book by searching for Archives: Wigan & Leigh on Eventbrite.

We're always adding new events and activities so to stay up to date, visit [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk) or check our what's on page at [What's on - Museums and archives \(wigan.gov.uk\)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk)

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Please tick here if you would like to receive information regarding Wigan Museums & Archives activities and events. We do not pass your details to other organisations.

Return to: The Museum of Wigan Life, Past Forward Subscription, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU or email us at archives@wigan.gov.uk

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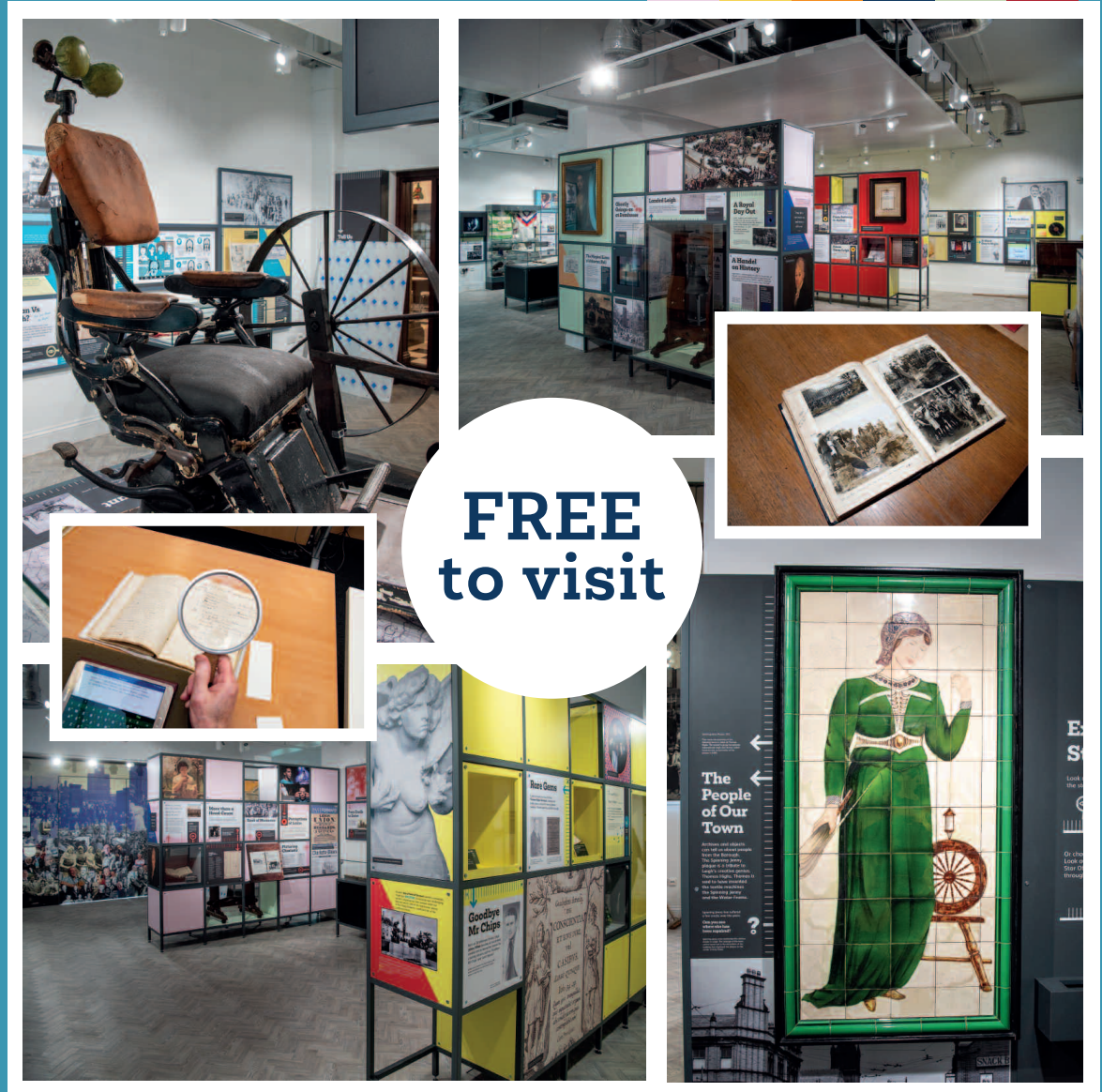
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Family-friendly local history exhibition open



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to visit

Tuesday-Saturday,
10am-1pm & 1.30pm-4pm

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