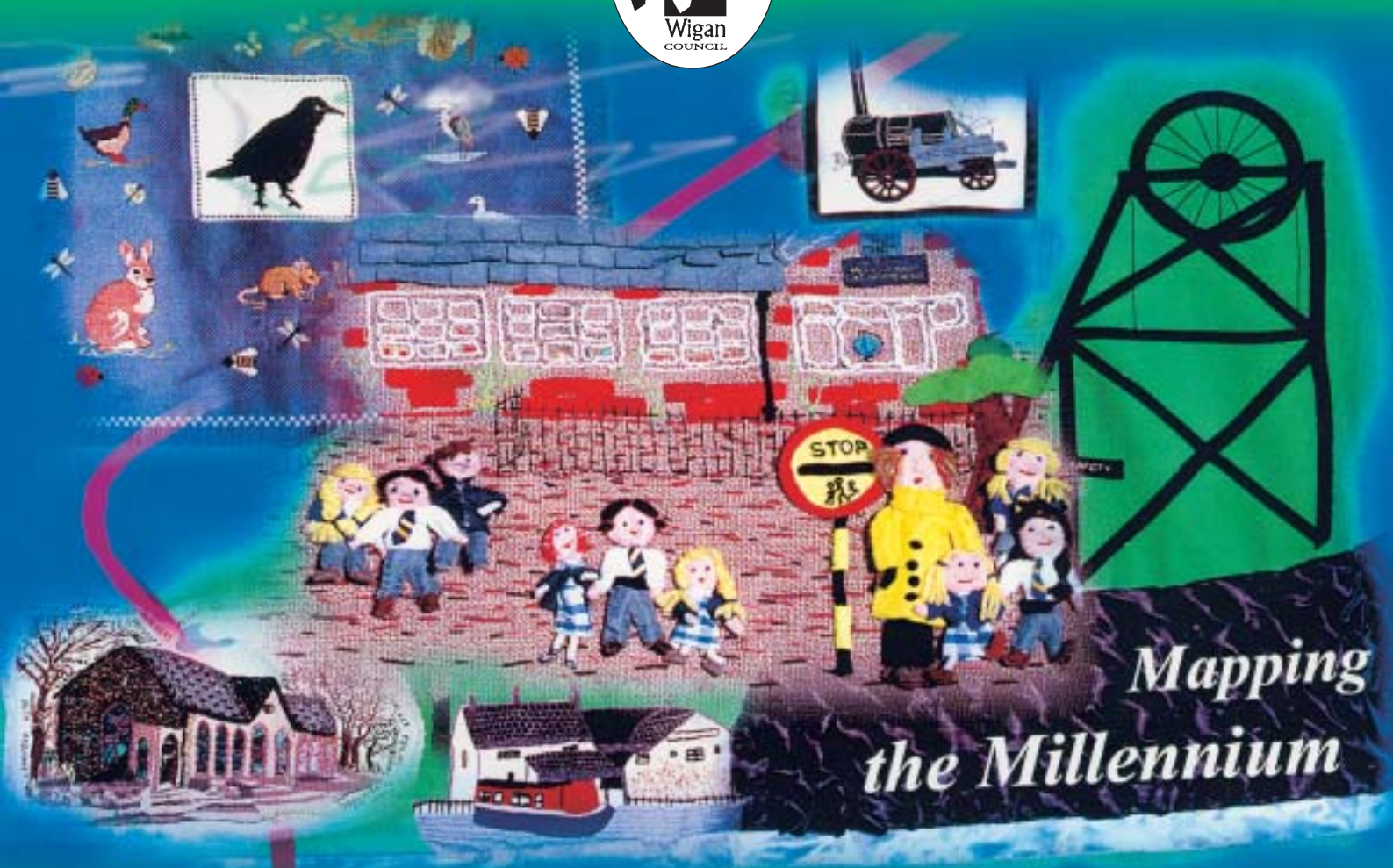


# PAST FORWARD

ISSUE No. 25

SUMMER 2000



*The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service*

**FREE**

## *From the Editor*

The first year of the new Millennium has been an exciting one for Wigan Heritage Service, though tinged with sadness.

The *Mapping the Millennium* Festival was successfully launched on 13 April, at the Mill at the Pier - a thoroughly memorable day. Many of the 28 local sections of the *Parish Map* were on display, seen by a far larger audience than was ever expected. *This is a Borough*, a spectacular audio-visual programme commissioned specially to accompany the *Parish Map* on its tour of the Borough, was received with great acclaim, as was *The Millennium Tree*, a brand new play which was premiered in the evening before a packed house.

The Festival's tour of the Borough is now well under way, and to date has been shown in Leigh, Golborne, Atherton, Wigan, Shevington and Standish (see pp 16, 17 for further details).

The Year 2K exhibition, Wigan Heritage Service's own special Millennium contribution, will open in the History Shop soon after this edition of *Past Forward* hits the streets (for details see pp 14, 15).

Exciting times, but also sad times - as I write this, we will soon be bidding farewell to Bob Blakeman, Education & Outreach Officer, due to ill-health. Bob's knowledge of Wigan's local history was, and will be, second to none, and he will be sorely missed, by staff and readers alike. I've no doubt that his phone will be ringing for many years to come with requests for help from Heritage staff!

This summer's edition of *Past Forward* is once again a bumper issue packed with fascinating articles, with something for everyone - from dialect to Blackpool in the 30's, from an 83 year old on a motor bike to Hitler's Pope!! I hope you enjoy it - from the many, many kind comments you send me (the only complaint I have received is that you have to wait too long between issues!), I have no doubt you will.

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:

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# *Farewell to our History Man*



***Bob in his element, as hundreds of young people will remember him - interpreting our local heritage on the streets of Wigan.***

**IN this issue we bid a fond farewell to a highly popular figure at the History Shop, Bob Blakeman, on the occasion of his retirement.**

Known to all users over the last 20 years as the Local History Officer, Bob's impressive knowledge of our collection and the local area will be very hard to replace. Whether giving a talk on Victorian Wigan to a local society, conducting a summer guided walk around Worthington Lakes or simply answering enquiries from the public, Bob's approach was always thorough and his service excellent.

What many of our regulars will not know is that Bob actually started his career as a teacher, in far off Stoke-on-Trent. This training gives us a clear insight into how he was able to inject such life and relevance when delivering local history for the people of Wigan.

Even his library career cannot be easily categorised - he began as Assistant Children's Librarian at Horwich, before moving to Leigh as Children's Librarian after gaining associate status in 1974. Six years later

he moved to the then Central Library in Wigan (now the History Shop) as Local History Librarian, and there he has stayed for the past 20 years.

In 1992 Bob was finally able to combine all his past training and experience when he became Education and Outreach Manager for Wigan Heritage Service. This post concentrated on local history and heritage provision while still allowing Bob to spend time with the collection.

It is in his educational role that he will be remembered by hundreds of our young people. The look of wonder (and even fear!) on the faces of countless classes experiencing Bob's demonstration of the craft of a pikeman during the English Civil War (with 10 foot pike) was something to behold!

Bob was well known to all our friends in local societies around the Borough and to many other officers within the Authority, and I am sure that they will all join with us in wishing him a long and active retirement. He is likely to be as much in demand in the future as he was at work!

**Covers:** Wigan's *Parish Map* montage (front) and a computer simulation of how the whole Map might look when it is finally brought together during 2001 (back). See centrespread for further details about the *Mapping the Millennium* Festival.



# News From the Archives

NEWS from the Archives is now back to its normal format, you will be pleased to read. Since the last issue there have been quite a few new accessions. I would like to thank all those people who have thought to deposit documents with us. We are always grateful for new deposits and to those people who want others to share a piece of history.

Many of these documents were deposited at other outlets within the Heritage Service, such as the History Shop or Local History in Leigh Library, but rest assured they all make it safely to the Archive. The three sections specialise in different areas but work together to compliment each other and actively preserve the Heritage of the borough as a whole.

## Recent Accessions

### EA 4032

28 Photographs from BICC. Very interesting although highly specific collection of photographs. They include various publicity photographs taken by BICC in Fine Testing Laboratory. There is also an aerial view of the site taken at the beginning of the 1980's. The photograph was taken when the factory was still intact during the company's Golden Age.

### EA 4034 Catalogue Reference MMP 27/3

Three documents concerning Methodist churches in Leigh. The first is a programme of the Leigh Wesleyan Church, Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1931. The other two documents relate to the Bazaar Effort in March 1952 of King Street Methodist Church in Leigh of events that took place. The other is of the Children's Opening on the same day, however it is printed on tissue. It is a lovely, colourful document, but please no hayfever-sufferers!

### EA 4037

Two documents concerning William Grimshaw. Nothing is known about the

gentleman in question as the documents were found by the depositor in a second-hand book! The first document is William Grimshaw's report from Upholland Grammar School, Easter 1917. The second is a certificate from the Royal Drawing Society in 1902. If anybody has an idea who William Grimshaw is or was please contact the Archive, we would be very grateful for any information.

### EA 4039

Something that may be of interest to family historians out there. Admissions registers can be useful tools for genealogical research, but so often the records have not survived, or not been deposited much to the despair of family history researchers! This accession is from Gidlow Senior School, which later became Gidlow Middle School. We have the admissions registers for Gidlow Middle School from September 1972 until 21 March 1988. This accession also includes log books of both the girls' and boys' departments at Gidlow Senior Council School from 1932-1957 (Girls), 1932-1972 (Boys). The first log book of Gidlow Middle School (1972-1975) includes a list of staff on opening of the new school. These log books provide a particularly useful overview of day to day life in the school and in particular the effect of the second World War on school life.

### EA 4041

We were fortunate to receive the Treasurers Account Book 1875-1902 for Orrell Post Methodist Church, which has been added to our existing collection. They have recently had their 150 year celebrations and we hope that they went well!

### EA 4042

The most recent deposit has come from the niece of Mrs. Agnes Owen, secretary of Leigh Technical College, who also taught embroidery. Four items embroidered by Mrs. Owen were on display at the Whitworth Art Gallery as part of an exhibition of old and modern embroidery in 1948. The collection includes seven photographs of the

exhibition, three original watercolours for the designs and a pamphlet about the exhibition. It is a delightful little collection from a talented local lady.

## Windham's Travel Journal 7 July 1769 - 9 January 1770

ref: DDZ/EHC/20

AS summer is upon us, many of us are planning holidays to foreign countries. I thought it would be nice to give an insight into the summer holiday of an 18th century man. The diary is part of a larger collection of diaries, letterbooks and correspondence put together by Mr. Edward Hall.

This particular diary is a highly enjoyable piece of work. The diarist's comparisons of different countries and his encounters with other Europeans are particularly entertaining. Although the diary is not of any particular local interest it is part of a collection that has national and international importance. We are extremely lucky to have this collection in our possession locally. The diaries can tell us so much about the lifestyles of people in the past. We often forget that people had worries, dilemmas, desires and memories as we do today.

*Continued on page 4*

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

**£7.50**  
**PER MORNING OR**  
**AFTERNOON SESSION**

**£11.00**  
**PER EVENING SESSION**  
**COMMERCIAL RATE**

**£17.50**  
**(Day time only)**

REFRESHMENTS ARE ALSO  
AVAILABLE

*If you are interested, contact Mike  
Haddon*

**(01942) 828121**

## News from the Archives

Continued from page 3

The Edward Hall Collection can really help to enrich our knowledge of the past. Windham's Travel Journal and any other diaries in the collection can be viewed by appointment in the Archive in Leigh. We have a detailed catalogue as well as an index to authors' names that can be consulted in the searchroom. Subject and place indices are currently under development. This is part of an ongoing project to promote this highly unique collection and encourage people to perhaps take a break from the parish registers to view these documents and learn more about life in centuries gone by.

p9

*The men in France, who have not been cramped in their youth, by hard labour or for want of proper Food, are for the most part better made, taller and handsomer, than in England. Especially those in the Army and Servants of the Notibility. The French Women in general are plain, and I believe there is more Beauty walking the streets in one Day at London than perhaps can be found in the Half the Kingdom of France.*

*Whatever Gallantry is practised amongst the young people in Paris there is nothing of it appears in that Gross Licentious Manner as in London, so that in the Gardens of Thuilleries you will see Numbers of well Dressed young Men at all times of the Day sitting upon the Benches, reading instead of running after Women of the Town who often walk in the Gardens. This decency of behaviour we should do well to Imitate as likewise their Sobriety; a Drunken Man being a great Rarity at Paris.*

p12 July 31 1769

*Arrived at Fontainebleu. The Road from Paris for about Forty Miles, runs in a strait line, well paved and planted on both sides; the whole country affording very pleasant Prospects and many Fine Country Seats - Extremely well cultivate.*

p14

*Left Lyons August 11th, in the Way to Turin. The Ports not well regulated, so that I was obliged to deal with a Voiturier for four Horses the whole way, including all Expence at the Inns where one is obliged to stop; this Method is convenient, but the way of Travelling very Tedious and Irksome; for their custom is to go a Foots Pace the whole way to Turin about 150 miles which they are Six Days in performing; but upon my return this way, I found means by the help of a couple of Lois, to work them into a Trot and so performed the journey in Half the time.*

*August 28th left Turn after staying there Ten days, and so proceeded to Milan, thro' a Country which for its Cultivation and Fertility deserves to be called the Garden of Italy; abounding with all the Necessarys of Life beyond any part of it.*

p24

*About 30 miles from Milan is the Lago Maggione, in which lye the two islands called the Borromean Islands...such views seldom answer the pompous description given of them...however nothing I saw*

*afterwards in my progress thro' Italy gave me any reason to alter my opinion. The views in Wales and Derbyshire are romantic, and more pleasing than in Savoy and the Environs of London are infinitely more pleasing than those about Rome.*

p26

*The next town I stopped at was Verona; pleasantly situated upon the Adige, a Rapid River that runs thro' the Town. This place does not abound with many Fine pictures some few there are worthy of note by Titian and P Veronese; But the greatest, and only Curiosity worthy of Admiration is the Roman Amphitheater, so much being preserved of it, as to give a distinct Idea of what it was. The vaults underneath, where the Condemned Malefactors and Wild Beast were kept, and the passages that Lead to the Seats above, where the spectators were ranged according to the Respective Ranks, remain in their former State...A most Barbarous Entertainment! At the same time the Most Magnificent...that could possibly be exhibited.*

## Happy Days!



**THEY** wore cheeky smiles, boots, clogs and old clothes but were as happy and contented as can be.

The year was 1930 - long before designer clothes, computer toys and mobile phones. Their toys were pots and pans, cricket bats, tops and whips and trundles.

These boys and girls were standing outside the now-demolished Martland Mill Bridge

Inn by the Leeds/Liverpool Canal, Wigan.

The photo was sent to us by Kathleen Lowe (nee Gore), of Orrell. Kathleen is standing on the left and her playmates to her left are Nora Hughes, Harry Berry, Joan Hughes and Jackie Gore. Kathleen remembers the long hot summer days when every spare minute was spent "playing out".

# Who? Where?

LAST issue's mystery photographs have produced an amazing response. The top right photograph was taken outside Pennington Hall, although no positive identification so far as to the identity of the group. Thanks to so many people for identifying Lowton Youth Club (including nearly all the names!) in the much missed Paramount Ballroom, Lowton in 1946 (bottom right).

But most spectacular of all is the identification, by the doyen of local photographers Austin Lyons, of the stern-faced cardinal (bottom left) as none other than the future Pope Pius XII - Hitler's Pope!

Dear Mr. Hudson

Regarding the photograph (bottom left, showing the persons in an open car) in the last issue of Past Forward, this was, without any doubt, photographed in France. The prelate on the right, in the large brimmed hat, is Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli. He is accompanied on the left by Cardinal Mercier of France. Cardinal Pacelli was at this time the Vatican Secretary of State, a position which he held from 1929 until 1939, when he became Pope Pius XII on 2 March.

On a personal note, it is ironical that exactly 50 years ago, I, as a professional photographer, photographed Pius XII at a special audience in the Vatican, and later that year, also photographed Cardinal Mercier when, as a visiting church dignitary, he attended a rally in Wembley Stadium.

**Austin Lyons  
Aspull  
Wigan**

● Unfortunately pressure on space has prevented the inclusion of any mystery photographs in this issue however, back to normal next time.

*I am deeply indebted to Mr. James Fairhurst of Ashton-in-Makerfield for his steady supply of fascinating articles on a whole range of aspects of Wigan's history. Here he tells the story of Wigan's longest serving Chief Constable, Tom Pey and the night Wigan was bombed by a Zeppelin. Ed.*

## Wigan's longest serving Chief Constable

FOR 25 years, from 1921 to 1946, when he was Chief Constable of Wigan, there was no more respected or feared name than that of Tom Pey, respected it might be said by the law abiding gentry and feared by the criminal classes.

He was born Thomas Joseph Pey in 1879, in Birr, Co. Offaly, Ireland, the sixth child and third son of a farmer. It was soon evident that he was a clever child and at the age of 11 he was educated at a fee-paying Jesuit College, matriculating at the age of 18. For two years he taught at the village school in Birr and on attaining his majority applied to join the Royal Irish Constabulary.

### "Too rough"

He successfully passed the examination, but before an appointment could be offered he visited a friend in Wigan. During his stay he saw the Chief Constable, George Hardy, resplendent in uniform, standing on the steps of the police station in King Street. Impulsively he asked Mr. Hardy for a post in the Borough police. After hearing of his antecedents, Mr. Hardy replied, "You won't last ten minutes here, lad, it's too rough." At the same time, though, he was impressed by the six-foot soft-spoken Irishman and sent him for a medical examination. In October



*Tom Pey, Chief Constable of Wigan, 1921-46.*

1900 Tom Pey joined the Wigan Borough police force as a constable. Promotion came rapidly - he became sergeant in August 1905, Chief Clerk in March 1907 and Inspector in August 1908.

On Friday 12 April, 1918, just before midnight, Wigan was bombed and several people killed. During the air raid, Tom Pey, who lived in Darlington Street, was awakened by a woman screaming. Pausing only to put on vest and trousers, he ran in bare feet over a glass-strewn yard to rescue a Mrs.

Moore who was trapped by her head in the bedroom window of one of the wrecked cottages whose yard adjoined those of the house in which Mr. Pey lived. The Inspector climbed on to the roof of the wash-house, extricated Mrs. Moore and handed her down to two of his neighbours who took her to safety. Returning to the bedroom he freed her two children who were in a bed twisted out of shape by the blast. Shortly after restoring the children to their parents the roof fell in. Inspector Pey also helped a Mrs. Unsworth and her child and a Miss Hunt who were pinned down by the fallen roof in one of the adjoining houses. His meritorious conduct was brought to the notice of the Carnegie Trust whose motto is "He serves God best who most nobly served Humanity." Tom Pey received £20 from the Trust and his neighbours £10 each. The Watch Committee recommended that Mr. Pey be awarded the King's Police and Fire Brigade Medal, the highest award that could be given to a serving officer. Although the award was not made, Inspector Pey's standing in the town was considerably enhanced.

### 29 Applicants

Three years later, with the resignation of the Chief

*Continued on page 6*



## Wigan's longest serving Chief Constable

*Continued from page 5*

Constable, Mr. Percival, pending, the 29 applicants for the position, including Mr. Pey, were reduced to eight. The choice was Mr. Maby, the Acting Superintendent of the Bristol police. However, he was advised by his doctor that Wigan would not be conducive to his wife's health and he turned down the post. The chairman of the Watch Committee then suggested that Mr. Pey be appointed. Voting was 7-7 but, as the chairman had the casting vote, Mr. Pey became Chief Constable.

Immediately, there were two memorable events, a miners' strike lasting 13 weeks and a visit to Wigan by Edward, Prince of Wales, later the Duke of Windsor.

In May 1926 there was a general strike lasting nine days, after which the other workers returned to their employment leaving the miners to fight on alone. The strike was relatively peaceful until Monday 13 October when coal was wound for the first time at Pemberton Colliery. A crowd estimated at 2,000 had gathered and Mr. Pey, expecting trouble, ordered the crowd to disperse, then led his officers in a baton charge. This was the only incident in which the police had to use force, and became known as "... the battle of Enfield Street." Allegations were made that women standing at their doors and onlookers were struck, but nobody needed hospital treatment. Wigan's MP, John Allen Parkinson, tried to bring up the matter in Parliament but was ruled

out of order by the speaker. There is no doubt that in the opinion of one writer, the incident "...soured relations between the police and that community for a generation." Throughout the strike, Mr. Pey never left the town and on occasions slept at the police station. In 1927 he was given the OBE for his services during the strike.

### Communitistic activity

The 1930's began with communitistic activity in the town, along with protests against the Means Test. Several men appeared at the Manchester Assizes on 1 March 1932, charged with disturbing the peace. They were bound over to keep the peace after one of their number had asserted that the man who should have been in the dock was the Chief Constable, Mr. Pey.

Throughout the 30's there were traffic problems and a reduction in police pay because of the depression. The war years brought further troubles which were coped with successfully. One area of contention was that Mr. Pey would not have women in the police force. He was adamant that policing was a man's job and resisted all attempts to bring women in, despite the fact that women were taking over what had traditionally been mens jobs in every part of the country. Mr. Pey retired in August 1946, only weeks short of serving for 46 years. Alderman Pagett on behalf of the Watch Committee offered congratulations which other members endorsed. Replying, Mr. Pey said it was gratifying that his long service was appreciated. Congratulatory messages poured in, including a telegram from Lord Derby. Mr. Pey died in 1972, aged 93.

James Fairhurst

# The Bombing

IT WAS just before midnight on Friday 12 April 1918, and the streets of Wigan were fully lit and the tramcars still running. Suddenly, the drone of a Zeppelin was followed by a loud explosion. More bombs fell and the flashes lit up the darkness as people ran into the streets. After dropping a total of 27 bombs, the raider fled as quickly as he had come, leaving a trail of devastation in Lower Ince, Hardybutts, Scholes, Platt Lane, Whelley and New Springs.

The raid on Wigan took place in darkness because Zeppelins had become vulnerable to attack by defending aircraft. For this reason, Zeppelin captains began to choose dark or misty nights, and consequently some lost their bearings and dropped bombs in the wrong places - this, it was believed, was the case with Wigan. Because of wartime restrictions, only vague reference was made to "a northern town" at the time and, in fact, the first full account of the Zeppelin raids was not made known until four years later, when it was printed in *The Times*. At first it was believed that the raider intended bombing the steel works at Kirkless, but if so, the bombs were wide of their target. A police inspector on duty in the King Street police station told later of receiving the news from private sources that hostile aircraft had crossed the coast but no official preliminary warning was given. However, although Wigan was taken completely by surprise, special constables went around blowing whistles - there were no air raid wardens then - and urging people to take shelter in their cellars.

### Blown to bits

The tale is told of one lady who came out in her nightgown and was told to

go back and put something more on. She did so and emerged a little later, still in her nightgown but with a hat on! When the skies lit up, people got out of bed, dressed and came out into the streets looking on the raid as a novelty. In Birkett Bank there was a gas lamp with an iron base, around which locals sat discussing how the war should be conducted. The lamp was blown to bits and never replaced.

Sixty years later someone who signed himself "Old Pembertonian" wrote, "In 1916-17, the Pemberton Colliery Company formed what could be called an emergency team of tradesmen and labourers to be on hand to help if required in the event of enemy action. Tools of all kinds were placed in large wooden boxes and kept in the power house at the colliery, an electrical generating house which was the assembly point for the 20 men. The team was recognised by the police and specials and wore "Special Constable" badges. I was 16 and had the job of knocker-up, with a list of men in case a message came from the police. My area was from Pemberton Library to just beyond the Wigan Hall boundary. On the night of the raid I was called and went knocking-up. A policeman, Bobby Ship said to me, 'I believe some Zeps have gone over towards Top Place and dropped some bombs.' We were given orders to disperse and report at eight o'clock in the morning. Then, we loaded a wagon with rolls of hessian-based felt and bundles of wooden lathes and ladders. We made our way to Birkett Bank and started to shore up windows that had been blasted. Most of the inhabitants were just sitting

# of Wigan, 12 April 1918

there or wandering about not knowing what to do. The bomb must have dropped on a privy-closet and destroyed about six."

## Terrific bang

Another eye-witness wrote, "I was about 11 years old at the time and lived in Birkett Bank. We had a shop there and my father was a clogger and shoe repairer. I was sleeping with my brother in the back bedroom when we were awakened by a terrific

shouting. I remember seeing a big blaze at the top of Birkett Bank. The big gas lamp in the centre of the road had been demolished and I think the gas had been ignited. Next morning I went to look at the damage. All the window panes had been smashed and the floor was littered with glass, broken crockery and soot. The remarkable thing was that we had all walked barefoot over the broken glass and not one of us had a scratch."

A woman said she was writing a letter in her home in Northumberland Street,

fatalities. Five people - a husband and wife, a father and son, a mother in bed with a four-month-old baby - were killed outright. Mr. Tomlinson, a gas inspector, and his wife, of Harper Street, were asleep in bed when a bomb blast hurled them through the window and into a clay pit, killing them both instantly. William Harris of Whelley was carrying his two-year-old son downstairs when he was disembowelled, suffering terrible injuries from which he died. The child died instantly when a

b o m b  
f r a g m e n t  
shattered its  
s k u l l .  
M a r g a r e t  
Ashurst of  
Platt Lane  
was in bed  
with her four-  
month-old  
b a b y ;  
apparently  
disturbed by  
the noise, she  
lifted her  
head and was  
struck by a  
b o m b  
f r a g m e n t  
which killed  
her instantly.  
Neither the  
baby nor the  
other four  
children in the  
house were  
hurt. Mary

Cumberbatch of Scholes Lane died in the Infirmary from her injuries nine days after the raid. June Weston of Harper Street died in hospital on 19 April from pneumonia aggravated by shock. While the raid was in progress, Mr. George Walker of the Walmsley Arms went to the nearby police station to see if he could be of service in the emergency. He was shot in the stomach by the accidental discharge of the revolver of a mounted policeman who was

attending to his equipment prior to going on duty. Mr. Walker died 20 minutes later.

## Visited by thousands

The bombed places were visited by thousands on the Saturday and Sunday following the raid. Collecting boxes were placed at strategic points to help the Distress Fund and over £300 was contributed. Some remarkable stories were reported after the bombing. Among the debris, the police found a fox terrier which could not be induced to come out. Investigations showed she had a litter of pups. In one house a bomb had dropped on a feather bed that had been slept in during the day by a miner working on night shift. The unexploded bomb was put under the stairs where the coal was kept. When the police arrived there was a long queue waiting to see the bomb. The householder had to be threatened by all the penalties of DORA (Defence of the Realm Act) before he could be persuaded to part with his dangerous souvenir.

A German communiqué from Amsterdam on Sunday 14 April stated: "On the night of 12 April 1918, Captain Strasser with one of our marine airship squadrons attacked important storage, manufacturing and shipment places of war in Central England. Birmingham, Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Hull and Grimsby were bombed. Despite the extremely strong gunfire and pursuit by airmen, all the airships returned safely."

This would seem to clearly indicate that Wigan had indeed been bombed accidentally.

**James Fairhurst**



*Devastation in Whelley, Wigan, caused by a Zeppelin raid in 1918.*

bang. Through the window I could see vivid flashes of light and I heard the smashing of glass. I had just covered my head with the bed clothes when the entire window frame fell across my bed. I heard my father shout 'It's the Germans! Get up!' We all got out of bed in great haste and went to my grandmother's house in Manchester Road, all of us looking like a troupe from Uncle Tom's Cabin, all covered with soot. Birkett Bank was crowded with people rushing about and

Whelley when a bomb dropped and she found a piece of shrapnel in her back gate. "The strangest thing was that when I went back into the house the pen I had been using had disappeared. I found it several years later embedded in the staircase wall - it had been blasted there by the bomb. Another thing was I found my canary dead in its cage the morning after the raid and could only assume it had died of shock."

But there were other



*Here, a highly topical, and emotive, issue takes Ernie's mind back to the 1920's.*

# *I remember when . . .*

**WIGAN had its own 'refugee crisis' in that many of its inhabitants were struggling against instability and malnutrition, when every day presented its own challenge of existing in a daily war on want.**

Since most Wigan men at the beginning of the century which has recently come to an end were miners or ex-miners, whose fathers and brothers had fought in the Boer war, and in some cases also in the First World War against Germany, many became disillusioned to find that on demobilisation war of a very different kind was only just beginning. A war of an economic kind at home in the 1920's!

## **"Are you working?"**

Such was the extent of poverty that ex-servicemen in the early stages of rehabilitation in the early 1920's did not use the familiar greeting of "how are you?" but a new one with a more significant meaning of "are you working?". If the answer was in the affirmative, the next question would be an incredulous "you're not, are you, where?", as if a miraculous happening had just occurred.

Older Wiganers (and many ex-Wiganers) would tell their own stories of the daily battle against deprivation which affected former miners and the constant fight against disease, particularly tuberculosis and, even more seriously, the miners' and quarry workers' illness of pneumoconiosis, a killing disease arising from the worker's lungs becoming blocked with dust, eventually causing certain death.

Recently we have read of illegal immigrants arriving in Britain from Kosova, fleeing bullets and bombs. On discovery in Britain, often hiding under lorry tarpaulin sheets, they are then put in the care of the Social Services, where they will be looked after until their trial, usually some months later.

While we can all deeply sympathise with their plight, at least, however, we know that they will be adequately fed and housed. But not so with our own ex-soldiers 80 years ago, returning home to "a land fit for heroes". In reality, they were returning home to a very different war - a war on want not of their own making, and from which there was no escape at that time.

## **Dreaded Means Test**

For the benefit of younger readers - your grandfathers got less to live on and keep a family for a week than you would now spend on a night at the cinema! If a married couple had no children the rate of unemployment pay was 29s. (less than £1.50 weekly), and when the first child came along, it went up by 3s. (15p), with a further 2s. (10p) for the next child.

But later the dreaded means test was introduced, which caused utter degradation in many households. This scheme meant that after 26 weeks in receipt of unemployment benefit, the claimant had to submit a claim whereby all money coming into the house, by whatever means, for himself, wife and children was assessed and taken into consideration. In effect a teenage son or daughter's earnings was added to his own unemployment allowance, which would be reduced accordingly.

To try and overcome this reduction, the son (or daughter) would move out of the family home into a relative's or neighbour's house, ostensibly as a boarder or lodger, and if the new 'landlady' was not on benefit herself, then all was well and the new system of means testing was defeated.

The situation was further exacerbated by youngsters leaving school at 14 years and getting jobs as errand boys. But on their 16th birthday they could claim an increase in wages; to obviate paying the increase, the employer could sack the 16 year

old and take on a 14 year old in his place. The sacked youngster would therefore have no income at all, as unemployment pay was only paid to a junior who had paid insurance stamps for 26 weeks following his 16th birthday. Occasionally a benevolent employer would continue to employ the 16 year old until he had the requisite 26 weeks of stamps on his card before dismissing him, thus enabling the youngster to at least draw benefit in his own right. Getting a job was a different matter, though - I remember one youngster who became unemployed at the age of 16 and was still unemployed when he married at 21, still with no prospect of a job.

## **Assisted passage**

To try and ease the situation the Government introduced an assisted passage scheme, whereby anyone wishing to emigrate to Australia or Canada could do so for £10 - both these countries were desperately short of manpower. I know one family of Wiganers who went to Australia, then returned to Wigan, only to re-emigrate to Canada where they still live. But Wigan is, and will always remain, their spiritual home!

It wasn't only one way traffic, though - we did have settlers from overseas in Wigan! Marsdens butchers in Wallgate was owned by a German gentleman who already resided in the town. But after the 1914-18 war, he changed his family name of Marnekarne to Marsden. The well known Mr Charles Mittleberger was a Swiss confectioner who had left his native country to create his own exquisite delicacies near Mab's Cross in Wigan Lane. According to local gossip, Mr Mittleberger would not divulge his recipes to anyone, and insisted on mixing the cake mixtures alone in his bakery at night, when all his staff had gone home.

An effort to ease the poverty in the town, several local business men belonging to the Quaker movement (the Society of Friends) conceived the idea of

purchasing a farm to be manned by 'volunteer labour'. The objective was to encourage unemployed men to grow their own farm produce, to help support their families by working for no wages.

## **SSPS**

So it was that a company was formed with a base at the top of Prospect Hill in Standish, with the trading title of 'The Standish Subsistence Production Society' (SSPS). A farm was purchased in Wrightington. No wages would be paid but the 'volunteers' could 'purchase' any goods produced on the communal farm, according to the total hours worked, while still being paid, with Government approval, their dole money.

Later, a dairy, then a coal round, a transport business and, I think, a second farm were added to the scheme. In the course of time, 'volunteers' became quite superior to some of their neighbours who were not in the scheme - they would have to use their dole money to purchase from local shops at normal rates, whereas the 'volunteers' only had to produce their 'hours worked' record cards, when the agreed number of hours (according to purchases) would be deducted, thus leaving their dole money intact.

In due course the organisation closed down. One of the 'volunteers' attributed the closure to items of produce being taken home without the correct number of hours worked being deducted from the 'volunteer's' total - in effect, "biting the hand that fed them". Apparently, this practice had little effect at first, but when more and more started to "dip into the till", not surprisingly the organisers of the scheme felt they had had enough.

On reflection, one wonders how those Wiganers who suffered the effects of poverty - stark, abject poverty - ever succeeded in getting back on their feet again. As the old Wigan saying goes, "there's nowt so bad az cudden be wuss". We are all living testimony to that.

© E. Taberner



# EATERS, SHOPPERS, AND ONE-TIME DANCERS WANTED

TOWARDS the end of the year there will be an exhibition on display in the History Shop which will focus on food and shopping in the Wigan area. Included in this will be sections on cafes and restaurants, as well as local food production businesses such as Heinz, Santus, Vimto, Sovereign Toffee Works (Lowton) and Mather James (Golborne). If anyone has memories of working for any of the above firms, or for some not mentioned such as Sarah Lynn's, Rathbones or Waterfields, please let me know.

Does anyone remember eating out or sitting down to a cup of coffee in any of the numerous coffee bars such as The Leigh Espresso Cafe and Restaurant (14 Chapel Street, Leigh) which opened on 4 September 1959? You could even buy lunch here for 2s. 6d.

In Wigan there was the New Empress Coffee Bar and the Wimpy Bar at the Bodega, King Street which opened in November 1959. At Hindley you could find a seat at the Monaco Cafe and Restaurant which opened its doors on 16 February 1959. Situated in the Monaco Ballroom you could purchase morning coffee or lunches during their opening hours of 9.30 am to 6.00 pm Mondays to Saturdays

Around this time there was also the penchant for Chinese meals such as the New Makusa Chinese Restaurant at 10 Wallgate, Wigan (next to Joan Barries).

Did anyone go to the Brass Farthing on its

opening on 13 February, 1975. This eating place could be found at 12 Woodcock Street, Wigan.

Besides requiring information for my files on the above topic, I would like to hear from anyone who has happy memories of dance halls and dance bands. From the more leisurely paced waltz, foxtrot, quickstep, tango etc. through the dance crazes of the 1960's such as the Twist, Locomotion or Madison at local venues.

Did any of you dance the night away at the Paramount Dance Hall at Lowton (opened 1937, closed March 1960) or at the Leigh Casino with Johnny Prior, for instance? Did you ever attend Gees School of Dancing, at King Street West, Wigan or go for dancing lessons to Margery Wright's School of Dancing at 23a Market Street Leigh. What about works dances at the Co-operative Ballroom?

If so please let me know.

Tony Ashcroft  
Local History Officer  
Leigh Library  
Tel: 01942 404559

# Friends

**FROM now on, there will be a section in *Past Forward* devoted to Friends' news, activities and events. Here is a very brief update on progress so far.**

**Membership of the Friends has continued to grow apace, and now stands at something over 300 members. However, for some reason we have not had any nominations for committee members or regional representatives for the group. In order to facilitate the full formation of an active group, we shall have to take the steps outlined in the previous issue of *Past Forward* and nominate the inaugural committee. We have the constitution in place and a number of you have indicated your support for it; at the first meeting of the group, therefore, it will be adopted.**

**We suggest that this meeting takes place in the early autumn, after the opening of the *Wigan 2000* exhibition. All friends will receive personal invitations, so please try to attend if possible.**

## MARJORIE G. WRIGHT SCHOOL OF DANCING

### Ballroom Examination Results

Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing  
AMATEUR MEDAL TEST

Seniors:—

Gold Star—Florence Soragg.

Gold—Brenda Barrow.

Silver—Alice Alldred, Kenneth Battersby, Bernard Boone, Joseph Chadwick, Dora Grompton, Frank Hampson, Eric Hart, Irene Hoar, Kevin Keegan, Marjorie Knowles, Alan Lloyd, Dorothy Wallwork.

Bronze—John Atkinson, Bernard Boone, Mary Collinson, Jean Grompton, James Dootson, Harold Farrington, James Foster, June Fryer, Lily Gaskell, Joyce Gill, Gerald Grady, Milton Graham, Mary Hibbert, Kevin Keegan, Frank Knowles, Amy Lewin, Hilda Lyon, Margaret Newcombe, Kenneth Pearson, Brian Smith, Martha Stott, Eileen Tuily, Peter Witcombe.

Juniors:—

Gold—Jean Wilson.

Silver—Mavis Morris.

Bronze—Irene Aspinall, Marie Flynn, Mavis Morris, June Reynolds, Marian Roddy.

Grade III (Baby Gold)—Anita Boardman, Edna Bowker, Margaret Newton.

Grade II (Baby Silver)—Edna Bowker, Marlene Evans, Margaret Newton.

Grade I (Baby Bronze)—Marlene Evans.

International Dancing Masters' Association  
AMATEUR MEDAL TEST

Senior Gold—Florence Soragg (Highly Commended), Brenda Barrow (Commended).

Junior Gold—Anita Boardman (Commended).

Junior Silver—Anita Boardman (Highly Commended).

Junior Bronze—Anita Boardman (Highly Commended), Edna Bowker (Highly Commended), Marlene Evans (Highly Commended).

Studio: 23a, Market St., Leigh

From Leigh Journal, 29 April 1949.

*Alan Roby continues his very evocative series of articles on the life of Ellen Weeton with some of her stage-coach experiences, during the 'golden age of coaching'.*

# ELLEN WEETON

(1776-1849)

## GOVERNESS

### The Stage Coach Traveller

SOME 200 years ago saw the golden age of the 'grand tour', when it was deemed vital for all self-respecting young ladies and gentlemen, looking to improve the mind, to soak up a foreign culture. About the same time but for a period of little more than 30 years, there was another 'golden age' - the 'golden age of coaching'. This continued until the mid-1830's.

Ellen Weeton lived through the 'golden age of coaching' and witnessed its decline with the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830.

Whilst walking remained Miss Weeton's favoured method of getting around locally up to seven or eight miles distance and back again in the day, she wrote in detail about her coach experiences. Whenever a journey of further distance was necessary and could not be undertaken by canal packet, her preferred method, she would reluctantly use the coach.

#### Poor roads

Poor roads often made journeys by coach at best uncomfortable and often very dangerous. The possibility of a seat inside next to an uncouth and unwashed stranger for lengthy journeys was to be avoided if at all possible. An overturned coach was often the cause of much injury and death, especially for outside passengers.

In fact Miss Weeton recorded a coach accident in the centre of Wigan in a letter to a Mrs. Price on 23 October, 1816. At the same time she could not resist a satirical comment about the townfolk:

*"You would hear of a coach being overset here lately, opposite the Eagle Inn\*. Many were severely hurt; but their heads were proof, being Wiganers. One man's head was fractured but he came from Bolton."*

Just before she set off for a two month visit to London (12 May to 30 July, 1824), she recorded real fears for her safety:

*"In this state of mind, I set off for London, considering it to be very probable I should never reach it; when such numbers are killed by the overturning of stage coaches, what right have I to expect escape?"*

The seasons appear not to have lessened her preference for an outside seat; although a thorough soaking on one occasion made her feel she should not have undertaken the journey from Southport to Liverpool:

*"Set off to Liverpool, outside the coach from Southport, on a tremendously wet morning. Had I not taken my place the day before, I would not have gone. I shall take care how I secure a place again, when there is not absolute necessity to go to a certain day, unless I could at the same time*

\* The Eagle Inn's full title was 'the Eagle and Child and Royal Hotel'. It was located in Standishgate on the site occupied currently by W. H. Smith.

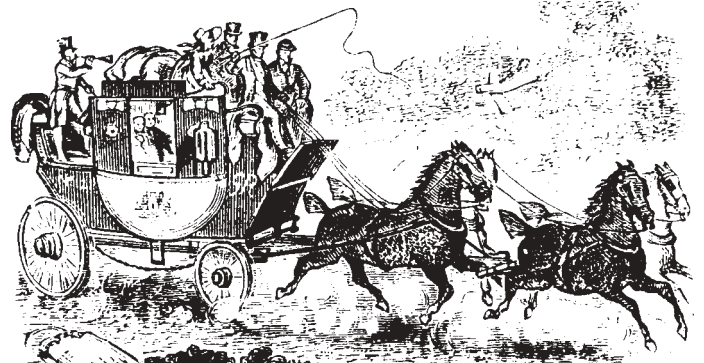
*secure the weather. The wind blew so furiously, no umbrella could be opened or carried. The coachman was very attentive and kind to me; he gave me a stout horse rug to cover my shoulders, and another to cover my knees, and in this elegant costume, I rode through Ormskirk and Liverpool to the Inn there, as heedless and contented as possible, the rain soaking through all the way, driving in at a little crevice between my hood and my neck, and trickling in little streams down my back, so that I was literally wet to the skin; and when I descended from my elevated situation, my cloaths were so entirely wet, that I found I was a woman of much greater weight in Liverpool than I had been at Southport."*

#### Ill-mannered passengers

Miss Weeton writes in some detail about her experience of fellow travellers, good and bad. On the return journey from London she describes the difficulties of travelling with ill-mannered passengers:

*"When we got to Birmingham, it was just dark, and I could see little else than a vast number of fires and lighted windows. At the Inn, we changed coaches, and took up 6 Irishmen of the lowest description, which wholly destroyed the comfort of the*

*remaining part of the way, by their selfish rudeness. One of them had usurped my seat. I was quietly submitting to it, rather than contend with him, but the guard took up my cause, and a long scuffle ensued, in which I thought, between them, they would have overturned the coach. I then begged the guard to say no more, and I rode the rest of the night on a very dangerous outside seat behind, backwards. We were four upon it, and it was too short by much for the number; but every seat was equally crowded. It was very necessary to keep my eyes open, for the least drowsiness, and I should have dropped headlong. The man on my left kept a constant motion with his head upon my shoulder, up and down, the night through, being heavy to sleep, the brim of his hat endangering my eyes. The guard and he quarrelled again, but neither good words nor bad had any effect. I expressed my obligation to the guard, and begged him to trouble himself no more with the man, and so made peace, for the Irishman seemed determined to have the last word and the last blow, had they quarrelled for a week. The iron rail bruised me sadly, I was so jammed against it. About 6 in the morning, one of the Irishmen in front left the coach; when I saw that, down I dropped, and up into his seat like a cat, and was much more comfortable, although I had one on my left as filthy as possible,*



*A mail coach c.1825. Mail coaches were painted maroon and black (blue and orange in George III's time) and decorated only with the royal cipher and insignia. Note the low iron support rail was the only means of stopping the outside passengers from falling off. Miss Weeton said that such an iron rail "bruised me sadly".*



and his head likewise jolting against me perpetually. It was intolerable!"

## 'Heavenly Friend'

Yet on the same journey she was so impressed by the views and scenes of the countryside that she was inspired to heap paeans of praise on her "Heavenly Friend" for having had the good fortune of witnessing a magnificent sunset:

*"The sun was getting low as we passed through [Warwick]; and its fine rays upon the Cathedral and Castle added much to the grandeur of their appearance. I cannot here forbear breaking out into exclamations of rapture, awe, gratitude and praise to the God of beauty and of wonder!"*

*Within thy circling pow'r I stand  
On ev'ry side I find they hand;  
Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,  
I am surrounded still with God.*

*Amazing knowledge, vast and great  
What large extent" what lofty height!  
My soul, with all the pow'rs I boast  
Is in the boundless prospect lost."*

Illustration by Kevin Dunleavy



AN artist's impression of Ellen Weeton. By her own hand we have an accurate description of Miss Weeton. She was plain, tall, skinny and bony. At the age of 34 she complained that luxurious living as Governess at *Dove's Nest*, near Ambleside, Westmoreland, the home of Edward Peddar of Preston, had given her a "pimpled face" and feared a "mask of purple" when the spots had gone. At 37, as Governess at *High Royd*, Honley, near Huddersfield, the home of Joseph Armitage, one of her charges had called her "ugly face". At 42 her then husband, Aaron Stock, ridiculed her "thin face, haggard countenance and skeleton figure".

## MISS WEETON'S APPEARANCE

At 48 she was white haired and had the ability to look over the heads of a crowd at a London function. A year later, in 1825, whilst on a walking tour of North Wales, she perceptively and candidly noted:

"I do certainly observe myself to be looked at here more than I ever recollect before; for why, I cannot discover. Perhaps because I am a stranger, and alone; then, I am taller and thinner than most women and very plain featured - yet I think, not so ugly as to attract passers-by - perhaps I am; few of us know how we appear in the eyes of others. Many of the country people I meet on the road, bow or curtsy to me, as if I were of some rank or respectability of appearance; the market people turn one and all to look after me, and when I inquire the price of anything, ask exorbitantly. My dress is very plain, that I may pass unnoticed; a dark print, no way remarkable in the make of it, and a bonnet likewise plain. Strangers, I should think, are so common that they would excite little attention".

GREAT improvements in coach design and speed came about by a reform of the Royal Mail in 1784, by adopting the idea of mail-coaches rather than the old method of using postboys or mailmen who averaged six miles per hour. If the Mail had previously been carried by stage coach it would have been quicker but was illegal. The Post Office had a monopoly of the Mail and to send a letter by stage coach would have defrauded the Post Office of its revenue.

Mail coaches were designed with a boot at the back and a seat for the guard, who had his feet on the mail box. The guard's 'tools' of his trade contained in a case was a sword, a cutlass, a brace of pistols and a blunderbuss. In addition he carried a timepiece to strictly record on his 'time bill' time of arrival and departure at each stage of the journey and a horn to warn other road users to keep out of the way. The horn also warned the pikeman at the Toll gate to have the gate open. For nothing was to impede the Mail (under penalty of £50!).

At first no passengers were allowed on the top of a mail coach but this was changed

in the early 1800's. One passenger was allowed next to the driver with two or three immediately behind. No one was allowed to sit next to the guard!

The mail coach was a prestige vehicle and faster than the stage coach - which was compelled to give way to the 'Mail'.

Gradually it became fashionable to ride 'outside'. Thomas de Quincey once said: "It was five years of life to have an outside place on a coach carrying the first news of Britain's victory in the Napoleonic Wars." Passengers apparently enjoyed an almost royal passage, be-decked with ribbons and laurels when carrying news of the victory.

By the time Miss Weeton travelled to London by stage coach in 1824, both stage and mail coaches were of recognisable type but superficial variations were numerous.

In the 1750's stage coaches took four and a half days to reach London from Manchester but by the 1820's the journey by both stage and mail coaches took one and a half days. Coach advertisements then claimed "only one night on the road" between the North West and London.

**Right:** An advertisement from the *Liverpool Mercury* 1815, for the 'Umpire' stage coach which regularly travelled between Liverpool and London. The Umpire may have been the coach on which Miss Weeton travelled. She met the coach at Prescot on Wednesday, 12 May, 1824, and "set off exactly at 2 o'clock outside all the way to London". The listed itinerary and timescales are almost as she describes.

### UMPIRE.

A NEW AND ELEGANT LIGHT POST COACH to London, (only 4 insides) every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons, at one o'clock, from the SARACEN'S HEAD INN, Dale-street, Liverpool; and arrives at the Saracen's Head Inn, Snow-hill, London, the next evening, only one night on the road;

	dist. time allow. arrives at		
	miles	h. m.	h. m.
THROUGH			
Warrington	18	2 20	3 20
Knuttsford	12	1 30	4 50
Breerton Green	10	1 10	6 0
Newcastle	14	1 55	7 55
Sandon	13	1 35	9 50
(Supper allowed 30 minutes.)			
Litchfield	18	2 25	12 25
Atherston	16	2 10	2 35
Lutterworth	18	2 35	5 10
(Breakfast allowed 30 minutes.)			
Welford	8	1 10	6 50
Lathbury	30	4 30	11 20
Hockliffe	15	2 10	1 50
Redburn	12	1 40	5 10
(Dinner allowed 30 minutes.)			
London	27	4 0	7 40

The above establishment is entitled to the particular attention of the public, as persons arriving from London the preceding day on business will have the following forenoon for transacting it, and by this conveyance may return to London in the afternoon, which they will reach the next evening. And as this Coach leaves Liverpool two hours after the delivery of letters by the Irish Mail, it will afford a facility of communication with London, which has been much wanted by the Mercantile world.

Performed by B. BRETHERTON & Co.

# The Exploited Generation

**WHEN I was young the red colouring on the world atlas predominated the globe and, once a year, we schoolchildren were given the day off to celebrate "Empire Day". Our country, which in the 20's and 30's was one of the richest and most powerful of most nations, still had children of the poor in cotton dresses enduring bitterly cold weather with no coats, or even cardigans, to alleviate their plight.**

I was one of the lucky ones in Wigan in those days with shoes and not clogs to protect my feet, warm clothes to wear and plenty of nourishing food to eat. My maternal grandparents, who married when they were both 19, had worked very hard and eventually grew prosperous enough to have built two streets of terraced houses by the time their daughter (my mother) was only 19.

Our youth was war and deprivation, but the in last decade we have seen wholesale destruction of our beautiful planet with air not fit to breathe, water not fit to drink or sometimes even bathe in. Will our grandchildren see millions of their generation die of droughts, floods etc. due to this wanton destruction of our earth? What a terrible bleak future to live in a world without rain forests or wild animals, with dust bowls or swamps replacing all that once was such a pleasure to enjoy - what price passive smoking against the illegal dumping of God knows what, toxic waste?

## Severe food rationing

The war years consisted of the civilian population being subjected to severe food rationing and, of course, to the young, and not so young, there

Dear Sir,

I enclose 'The Exploited Generation', a snippet from the memoirs of my mother, Molly Hodge. Also my article 'May Day' and a poem 'The Lamplighter's Pole' - written for Radio Lancashire about ten years ago by me.

About a decade ago my book 'Wigan Fair' was published by Wigan MBC - there is a reference in the History Shop in Library Street concerning this. 'The Lamplighter's Pole' was never submitted for publication in this anthology.

Yours faithfully,

Elene Humphreys  
Rockcliffe Cottage  
Corwen Road  
Treuddyn, Mold  
Flintshire CH7 4LE

were people who had to fight and thousands who had to die. People were very patriotic in those days and were very keen to contribute to their cause, and it should be noted that Churchill was in his 60's, but could still have such an inspiring influence on teenagers as well as the rest of the population. He was a marvellous orator with such charisma.

A personal note at this point is that I remember that my cousin, Jane, and I were about to have our first long dresses made at this time and went

**ON HEARING the expression "May Day" the inner stirrings of my mind are not preoccupied with Cavalier Charles II in his tree-top hidey-hole, gaily painted maypoles or the international distress system, nor even communistic parading of impressive weaponry. "May Day" recaptures for me a more poignant pang of nostalgia - the hour designated to launch the procession of the "May Queen".**

In the area where I spent my formative years (according to popular phraseology) the "May Queen" was as much part of life as Christmas, birthdays or Easter bunnies. "May Queen" was an expression which not only encapsulated

along to the dressmaker, to be measured and choose a pattern then return later with our material. That was during the month of August in 1939 and as all the world knows War broke out on 3 September.

On that particular day (Sunday) I had arranged to stay overnight with a friend. In those days radio was on in most homes during all our waking hours, and although we realised that the situation was very serious and that the government had issued an ultimatum to Hitler, we really didn't believe that war would begin. Hadn't



the entire entourage but also lent its title to the proud young damsel at the spearhead of proceedings.

## Busy mums

To be absolutely precise, "May Queens" were not necessarily held on May Day itself but on any Saturday in May - at least that was the order of things in Newton, near Wigan, where I lived. Busy mums would have baked cakes, made jellies and prepared plates brimming over with

our fathers fought in the First World War which was "The war to end all wars?" We could not grasp Neville Chamberlain's words, that since it was now 11 a.m. and we had not received any reply from the German Chancellor, that a state of war existed between our country and Germany.

## "State handouts"

If ever a generation was conned by various governments it was mine - the old age pensioners of the present (the early 90's). We are the worst paid "Senior Citizens" in Europe, yet all of us paid contributions so that our old age would be provided for. We are also made to feel our pensions are "state handouts", yet if that is so, what happened to the millions of pounds paid in to the pension scheme to which we all contributed?

*Molly Hodge - late of Gordon Street, off Darlington Street, Wigan (died 1994, aged 70 years)*

sandwiches, and for weeks and weeks beforehand could be discovered with armfuls of crepe paper, oiling antiquated sewing machines and whipping-up chique and be-ribboned creations with every bit as much enthusiasm as was ever displayed at the House of Dior.

To the onlooker the "May Queen" itself might have seemed like a cross between a pagan bridal ceremony and a somewhat miniscule carnival. It was basically a fancy dress parade, and apart from the Queen herself and a requisite number of fairies in attendance, everyone-else could be attired according to personal whim.





Clowns were always a popular choice, both with participants and interested onlookers, and there were a number of other of what nowadays might be termed “unisex choices”, such as teddybears or animated chocolate boxes. Sweeps and tramps were eagerly portrayed by the boys, but little girls would usually clamour for a more glamorous role, such as a ballet dancer or a gypsy; nurses or bus conductresses were ever firm favourites.

### Excited babbling

At a pre-arranged time (usually around 2.00 in the afternoon) the procession would set off from the corner shop or some similar landmark. The excited babbling of the participants would then cease as the serious business of the “May Queen” got underway. It was usual for the parade to make a circular tour of the local side streets, keeping well clear of the main road and having to resort to mounting the pavement, if necessary, when confronted with vehicular opposition. Collectors would gratefully accumulate coppers in converted cocoa tins and the proceeds would be put towards the next year’s “May Queen”.

The sighting for the second time of the corner shop would mean that the procession was soon to be at an end, and tea would be served “in the backs” on trestle tables borrowed for the occasion which looked rather grand when covered with a neighbour’s white sheets. The Queen would sit at the head of the main table with attendants either side, and was always first to be served with the various delicacies! Then after tea had ended everyone would go back to their respect homes.

I have many warm memories of being involved in these “May Queens” and the various costumes I wore. One year my mum made me an outfit on which she had painstakingly sewn what seemed like hundreds of tiny bells, another time I was a cigarette girl with a tray of “dummy” packets supplied by a local retailer, and I can remember at least two occasions when I was one of the attendant fairies; but will I ever forget the year when I was chosen to be the May Queen?

### Hardly slept

The Saturday allocated for our procession just happened to fall on 1 May, and its memory is linked to a private fairytale. I had hardly slept during the night before the event as my excitement was totally unquenchable (holding a ribbon on the Sunday School banner didn’t hold a candle to this!) - earlier in the evening I had the final try-on of my beautiful white dress (a veritable masterpiece in crepe paper), and then had to endure the unbearable wait for the “May Queen” to commence.

### On a chiffon cloud

At long last (I caught my breath) - the thrill I felt made me feel dizzy. It was difficult to take in - May Queen, I was May Queen. I floated as if on a chiffon cloud around the processional route, feeling every inch a queen from the top of my sparkling cardboard coronet (it was a bit small for a crown, really) to the tip of my slightly shop-soiled satin shoes, displaying as much refinement as a truly unsophisticated eight year old could muster.

This was always to be my May Day.

## The Lamplighter’s Pole

*Dids’t ever ‘earken tale o’t little fella,  
oo went roun’t gas lamps, leetin’ ‘um ut neet?  
Wen it wer dusk wi’t pole ‘ed cum roun’t corner,  
yud see ‘im in ‘is wellies, top o’t street.*

*‘E’d leet each one ‘n stan’ back ‘n admire it,  
‘e tended each wi’ pride ‘n lovin’ care.  
‘Ed allus raise ‘is cap t’greet mi muther,  
‘n pat me top mi yead, if a wer ther.*

*Wen ‘e ‘ad finish’t streets ‘n streets uf ‘ouses,  
e’d catch er double decker buzz t’t town,  
‘n if ‘e manage’t gerr a seat on’t bottom,  
‘e’d perch ‘issel on th’edge, ‘n lie pole down.*

*But one day ther ‘wer’ only room on’t platform,  
lampleeter stood ther ‘wi’ ‘is pole ut side,  
wen young man oo’d jump’t on as it wer’ movin,  
fount ‘e wer’ gerrin’ more thun just er ride.*

*‘E ran fert buzz an’ leep’ reet ut last minute,  
try’t swing ‘issel’ isside bi graspin’t rail,  
but grabb’t isstead, t’is dismay, lampleeter’s wooden pole,  
an’ ended up in’t puddle, shock’t ‘n pale.*

*Elene Humphries  
(Read on Radio Lancashire)*

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# HISTORY SHOP NEWS

## WIGAN 2000 – The Way We Are

**DURING** the currency of this issue it will be all change at the Wickham Gallery at the History Shop. In mid September we are hoping to open our new exhibition *Wigan 2000 - The Way We Are* and create a whole new feel to the downstairs gallery. In short the exhibition explores Wigan (the Borough) today, what it is like for people living here in the 21st century. We will feature information from individuals, community groups and businesses, from public services and the private sector.

The backdrop for the exhibition will be a specially commissioned set of photographs recording modern life, taken in the run-up to the Millennium celebrations by local photographer Peter Muir. These shots reflect life today and will be kept together and added, as a collection, to our extensive archive of images kept at the Town Hall in Leigh. The value of archive photographs is clear to see from the legacy left to us by local vicar Reverend William Wickham. These shots taken at the turn of the last century give us a unique insight into life here in the past. They are also picked up as examples of regional, even national life by researchers from far and wide.

We are hoping that this archive will prove just as useful for future generations. In this day and age of images on film and paper, even electronic formats, how much of it is being saved for the future? Our photographic archive and this Wigan 2000 collection will be available to researchers of all types for

generations to come.

The benefit of using these photographs for the exhibition is that they can be seen and examined today, not just in the future. The photographs will, however, only be used as a backdrop, this will not be a photographic exhibition. The exhibition will feature objects and information that we have collected from the local community in the widest sense. These will sum up a flavour of life today, but are not intended to be comprehensive. The main problem we have had putting this exhibition on is that it is about contemporary themes, not heritage ones, so we needed to enlist help.

The approach we have taken is to develop the exhibition as a community involvement project. By inviting the public, groups and businesses to become partners we have been able to engage very widely, and are very excited about their input. The various areas of the exhibition deal with different elements of life today, such as childhood, leisure time, work, travel, public services etc... but there are three main themes running through the whole display:

### TIME CAPSULES

**With the excitement that surrounded the occasion of the turn of the Millennium, much was made of recording or preserving something for posterity. Time capsules were even available in department stores for you to fill and bury with a message for the future. In the exhibition there will be a number of time capsules on display from various points in history, all put together for different reasons and containing different messages.**

### FAVOURITE OBJECT

This is intended in a very wide sense. We have invited members of the public to tell us what object they would like to see on display in our exhibition. The sort of criteria used are what object sums up modern life to you, what object could you not do without, or just your favourite thing today. We then invite each contributor to tell us why they have selected the item, putting it firmly in a modern context even if it is an old object. We have involved people from all age groups and areas, so the spread of choices is very wide. For the exhibition we will display the object in our formal museum environment and link it to the thoughts of the people who made the choices. It will make quite a feature.

### DAY IN THE LIFE

The other theme running through the display is the first hand description of what life is really like in our Borough today. Again, we have a varied selection in terms of age, occupation and area. As an added feature there may be one or two twists on this theme to look out for, like the day in the life of a supermarket, for instance.

There are also two other features of the exhibition that should make your visit more fun. Firstly there are some 'mystery objects' to identify, and some clues to help, should they prove too mysterious.

Secondly there is the 'community archive'. In partnership with the BBC History 2000 project, we are hoping to provide access to their community archive project through the exhibition. In brief, this entails you coming into the History Shop and recording electronically the item or image you would want to save as representative of life today (much like our Favourite Object display). The electronic record could then be used by the BBC for future programming, depending on the response. So you and your object could end up on telly, a great reason to come down and



*A typical scene of Woodhouse Lane, Wigan 1891, photographed by Rev William Wickham.*



*One of the photographs by local photographer Peter Muir, specially commissioned by Wigan Heritage Service for the Millennium.*



# HISTORY SHOP NEWS



Two artist's impressions of **Wigan 2000 - the Way We Are**, the History Shop's new exhibition, due to open in the Wickham gallery in mid September.



get involved. We are likely to run supervised sessions for this project initially, so look out for dates and times in the autumn. We will also be using the images captured ourselves and build up an image wall through the exhibition to show the kinds of things you have chosen.

This is just a brief list of the features of this exciting new exhibition. Hopefully it will also include an A/V show, and have a console with internet access to the BBC and Council websites.

The Heritage Service is indebted to the Council's own Millennium Festival Fund for most of the funding, and also to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for some publicity funding.



## Wigan Heritage Service Exhibition Programme

### The History Shop (Taylor Gallery)

1 - 29 July - Wigan Artists Network

A contemporary arts exhibition in conjunction with the Turnpike Gallery, Leigh

1 - 17 August - Atherton Photographic Society

The annual exhibition of a local photographic society

19 August - 2 September - Wigan Photographic Society

Come along and vote for your favourite image

11 September - 30 November - Haigh

New paintings of the area by local artist Gerald Rickards

11 December - 2 March 2001 - Food and Shopping

A culinary history of the Borough

### The Derby Room, Leigh Library

6 November - 2 December - The Wigan Coalfield



The History Shop's exhibition to cover the Easter holiday period was a display of work by local schools. The children of Haigh St. David's and Aspull Our Lady had been challenged to discover the history of their school and village. This resulted in a very colourful display of models, projects and artwork. Congratulations to all the children involved.

This was followed by *The Wigan Coalfield*, an exhibition of pictures and text from the book by Alan Davies and Len Hudson. The book, a wonderful collection of coal mining photographs of the Wigan area, is a best seller in our shop. The exhibition has proved to be equally successful, many of our visitors having connections with the old coal industry.

The summer sees our annual art and

photographic exhibitions, and this year we are carrying on with the artistic theme throughout autumn. Local artist Gerald Rickards is exhibiting new paintings of the Haigh area. He will also be offering 'meet the artist' and workshop sessions during the life of the exhibition:

#### Meet the Artist

Friday 15 September 10.00 - 12.00

Saturday 7 October 10.00 - 1.00

Monday 9 October 3.00 - 7.00

#### Children's Workshops

Tuesday 24 October 10.00 - 12.00

Thursday 26 October 2.00 - 4.00

(age 8-11 pre-booking required).

#### Adults Workshop

Thursday 9 November 10.00 - 12.00

(pre-booking required).

# Mapping the

## The Festival is Launched

THE *Mapping the Millennium* Festival was successfully launched at the Mill at the Pier on 13 April by the Mayor of Wigan.

The response to the invitations was overwhelming, with two 'full houses' during the day, including many of those who have worked so conscientiously on the project over the last couple of years. The event also attracted good media coverage, including Granada's Fred the Weatherman, no less!

Unfortunately, space did not permit the display of all 28 maps, but at least large colour photographs of the unlucky ones were on display.

The *Parish Map* was enhanced by a magnificent audio-visual programme, *This is a Borough*, and by the premier of *The Millennium Tree*, a play specially commissioned by Wigan Council. Both were given an outstanding reception.

The celebrations concluded the following evening with an outstanding concert given by the Wigan Youth Jazz Orchestra, with special guest star Don Lusher. The concert was preceded by another showing of *This is a Borough*.

The *Parish Map*, complemented by the award winning *This is a Borough*, an exciting display of children's parachute work and, in selected venues, *The Millennium Tree*, is now on tour throughout the Borough (see programmes opposite).

## This is a Borough

THIS is a magnificent audio-visual programme, produced by Colin Balls, and based on a programme which recently won him the British Audio-Visual Championships. To a background of highly evocative music, the programme begins by looking at 2000 years of history within the borough, then focuses on Wigan's *Parish Map*, showing fascinating details which you might well miss with the naked eye, and concludes with a look ahead to the 21st century.

The 17 minute programme will accompany the *Parish Map* on its tour of the Borough, and is an absolute 'must see'. Already, it has attracted a host of glowing comments, including many requests to purchase it on video. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be commercially viable at present, but I can assure all those who have expressed an interest that I am investigating a number of possibilities, and am confident that it will be on sale during 2001.



## Photographs for Sale!

High quality colour photographs of all sections of the *Parish Map* are available for sale. In many venues, photographs of the maps actually on display can be purchased at reception, @ only £1.50, while orders can be placed for the others (£2.00 including p&p).

In addition, the *Parish Map* montage and a computer simulation of how the whole *Parish Map* will look when it is brought together in 2001 (both are reproduced on the cover of this issue of *Past Forward*) are also available.



# e Millennium



The Festival was launched in April by the Mayor of Wigan, Councillor Evelynne Smith, accompanied by the Mayoress, Mrs. Elaine Stevenson. Also shown above are the Leader of the Council, Lord Smith of Leigh (right) and Alastair Gillies, Millennium Festival Co-ordinator (and Editor of *Past Forward*). The launch was also attended by Granada's Fred the Weatherman (left), for *Granada Tonight*.

## The Millennium Tree

A SPECIAL Millennium musical play, *The Millennium Tree*, has been commissioned, for performance in various venues during the Millennium Festival. Written and produced by Edward Applewhite, Artistic Director at Wigan Pier, with music by David Powell and performed by Wigan Pier Theatre Company and Wigan Pier Youth Theatre, the play gives a brief history of the last 2000 years, from the Romans through to the Battle of Hastings, onto Shakespeare, and finishing with the Spice Girls.

The play is both funny and informative, and is undoubtedly a **must for all the family**.

*The Millennium Tree* will be performed as follows (all performances begin at 7.30, and admission is £1, payable at the door, unless otherwise stated):

21 July	Derby Room, Leigh
28 July	Lowton Civic Hall
18 Aug	St Peters School, Orrell
25 Aug	Haigh Country Park
29 Sept	Mill at the Pier, Wigan
12 Oct, 7.45	Unity Hall, Standish
20 Oct	Byrchall High School, Ashton

## FESTIVAL PROGRAMME JULY - DECEMBER 2000

	VENUE	MAPS ON DISPLAY
5-24 July	Leigh, Turnpike Centre	Leigh, Westleigh
24 July-7 August	Lowton Civic Hall	Lowton, Golborne
7-14 August	Marsh Green CRC	Pemberton/Newtown, Lamberhead Green
14-21 August	The Priory Wood	Orrell
21-25 August	Aspull Library	Aspull, Haigh/Worthington
25 August-4 September	Haigh Hall	Haigh/Worthington, Aspull
4-11 September	Tyldesley Library	Tyldesley/Hindsford
11-18 September	Astley Green Colliery	Astley, Tyldesley/Hindsford
18-25 September	Scholes CRC	Scholes
25 Sept-9 October	Wigan Library	Wigan South (inc Marus Bridge/Poolstock), Town Centre
9-16 October	Standish Library	Standish, Shevington Moor
16-30 October	Ashton Library	Ashton-in-Makerfield
30 Oct-13 November	Hindley Library	Hindley
13-20 November	Abram Library	Abram/Platt Bridge/Bickershaw
20-27 November	Atherton Library	Atherton, Tyldesley/Hindsford
27 Nov-11 December	Ince Library	Ince
11 December - 2001	Wigan, History Shop	Wigan North (inc Swinley), Town Centre

For further details about the *Mapping the Millennium* Festival, contact the Festival Co-ordinator (01942) 734732.

*This article concludes the fascinating story of Ruth Symes' Wigan born great-great grandmother, Lydia Fletcher:*

# *Tamperin' Wi' T'Moon:*

## *the life of Lydia Fletcher (1845-1933)*

### Canals

**THE end of the 1860's was to be traumatic for the Cookes for other reasons. On 13 February 1869 Lydia's father, Enoch, was making his usual early morning trip home from the Commercial Inn at Top Lock, Aspull when he stumbled and fell in an intoxicated state into the Leeds-Liverpool canal. Enoch drowned in one of the world's most famous commercial waterways, the historic canal joining Wigan to the great 19th century industrial centres of both Liverpool and Manchester. In a way, it was a fitting death for a man who had been born and raised in the industrial age and who had lived and worked for much of his life alongside that strategically important piece of water.**

Five days after Enoch's death an inquest was held. *The Wigan Observer and District Advertiser* reported the case as follows (Lydia herself, of course, would not have been able to read it):

*Saturday February 20th 1869*

*CASE OF DROWNING* An inquest was held at the house of Mr Nathan Tyrer, Commercial Inn, near Top Lock, Aspull on Tuesday last, by F. Price Esq., deputy coroner for the district, on the body of Enoch Fletcher, engine fitter, employed at the

*Wigan Coal and Iron Company's Works deceased fell into the canal on Saturday evening, near the Top Lock, and was quite dead when taken out. He was 54 years of age, and leaves a wife and family. A verdict of "accidentally drowned while intoxicated" was returned by the jury.*

Enoch Fletcher's death certificate records that he died on 13 February 1869 near Kirkless Works, Aspull. Kirkless Works was the seat of the iron-smelting business run by the Wigan Coal and Iron Company. Its headquarters were in Ince about two miles from Wigan and Enoch's own birthplace. His bloated body was found floating in the water around here, a place in which one contemporary historian remarks that "immense furnaces are blazing [...] from morning until night, and their glare can be seen for many miles round, lighting up the murky landscape after dark, and imparting a Rembrandt-like hue to their surroundings." If the furnaces were blazing on the night of Saturday 13 February, the drowning Enoch Fletcher may well have imagined himself floating in hell.

For his family, of course, the death of Enoch Fletcher could not have taken on these artistic overtones. He left behind seven children, five of



whom were under the age of 21 and three still at school. In the absence of a welfare state, his wife would find herself suddenly without a breadwinner and his only son-in-law, Lydia's husband, James Cooke, would be expected to take on more responsibility for his wife's family.

By a strange irony, the Leeds-Liverpool canal was to claim another life within Lydia's family just over a decade later. In 1881, at the age of 77, Lydia's father-in-law, Lawrence Cooke, described by this point as a cotton spinner and journeyman, was to drown in similar circumstances. *The Wigan Observer and District Advertiser* recorded that when Lawrence was pulled out of the canal, his pockets were searched and found to contain a knife and an apple, poignant reminders of a simple life suddenly curtailed.

The drownings of Lydia's father and father-in-law draw attention to the alcohol problem in Wigan in the latter half of the 19th century. By 1889, the town boasted 139 public houses, 62 beer houses and eight breweries in addition to hosting numerous alcoholic public fairs throughout the year. The public houses had their own picnic clubs and pastry feasts at which vast quantities of alcohol were consumed. To

counteract this, the town also supported a vociferous temperance movement. There were, in fact, two temperance hotels and eight coffee taverns. Family legend has it that Lydia herself was fond of alcohol. Whilst working in the factory as a girl, it is likely that she would have spent some of her wages on beer either in one of the pubs in Aspull or at a beer retailer. Evidently she was unaffected by the popularity of the temperance movement in some of the factories and she certainly hadn't signed "the pledge." Tradition has it that as an old lady Lydia would hitch up her long skirts and make her way down the cobbled streets of central Wigan late at night to fetch a pint. Once home, she would dip the red hot poker into the beer to produce a bit of fizz. The British Women's Temperance Movement which held its annual meeting in Wigan in 1889 would have left Lydia distinctly unimpressed.

### Births, Deaths and Censuses

By the end of 1869, Lydia was pregnant for the third time. Less than six weeks before she gave birth, however, her son, William, fell ill with croup and died on 20 May 1870. He was just 16 months old. With little time to recover from her grief, Lydia went into labour with her daughter, Sarah Ann, born on 4 July, 1870. The little girl must have been highly cherished, but she was destined to follow her sister





and brother into an early grave. She died of marasmus, a form of tuberculosis which led to a wasting of the flesh, on 28 January 1871, the third child of Lydia's who failed to reach the age of two. Even in those times of high infant mortality (approximately 153 children died at birth out of every thousand at the latter end of the 19th century) Lydia must have felt her misfortune deeply.

## The Married Woman's Property Act

At around the time of these births and deaths, in 1870, a momentous Act was passed. The Married Women's Property Act allowed women, for the first time in their history, to keep control of any property that they owned prior to marriage. The Act was seen as a great step forward in the increasingly vigorous campaign for women's rights. For Lydia, struggling to make ends meet, of course, it was meaningless. She had owned nothing on her marriage and had nothing to gain. Like so much legislature passed at the beginning of the women's campaign, this Act really benefited only the wealthy.

By the time the census of 1871 was taken, the by now childless and seemingly penniless Cookes had moved back in with Lydia's mother, at Cale Lane, Aspull. The man who took the census that night must have found a crowded household. Enoch Fletcher's untimely drowning had left the family fatherless and Lydia's eldest brother, James, had moved out, but her unmarried sisters Mary, now 22, and Margaret 18, still lived with their mother and worked as calico weavers. Her brother John, aged 16, had followed his grandfather into the smithing trade and is recorded as a blacksmith striker. As for the younger

children, Giles, aged 11, Enoch, 9 and Jane, 5, all were at school. It is possible that the 25 year-old Lydia acted as a surrogate mother to her siblings at this point, although she was already pregnant again. Her younger sister, Jane, so close in age to Lydia's own first daughter, Alice, must have been in Lydia's close charge and certainly she enjoyed a close quasi-mother/daughter relationship with Jane in later life. Lydia's mother, Margaret Fletcher was recorded on the census of 1871 as a "housekeeper." It is rather unclear what was meant by this term, but, as women's domestic work in their own households was never recorded, it is likely that Margaret had taken up work as a domestic servant for one of the wealthier Wigan families. With her husband dead and her eldest daughter available to look after the younger children, she may have become one of the chief breadwinners for her large family.

On 26 November 1871, into this crowded establishment came a new addition to the family, Lydia and James's daughter Elizabeth. Delight at having a child again was to be short-lived, however, for the child died, this time less than three months later on 28 February. Once again Lydia was childless but once again she revived and three months later she was pregnant for the fifth time. Before this child was born, its grandmother, Margaret, shocked the family by marrying, at the age of 45, a 36 year old bachelor, James Arrowsmith, who was a forgerman in Central Wigan. The marriage took place in the Registry Office at Wigan, and both parties gave their address as Scholes Street, Wigan, though it is likely that Mr Arrowsmith actually came to live with the Fletchers at Cale Lane.

On 9 February 1873, the Cookes were pleased to

announce the birth of their son Thomas. With a new stepfather resident in the house, it is likely that Lydia and James felt the need to move out and rent a house of their own again. At the time of Thomas's birth they are recorded as living at another address in the neighbourhood, Vaughans' Houses, Aspull, not far, but at least separate from, the rest of the Fletcher brood. After the loss of four children, Lydia must have been delighted to give birth to another son. Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that all was not right with little Thomas. Like Elizabeth before him, he suffered from convulsions and for the first few months Lydia feared that he would die like his siblings. As his condition worsened, perhaps she wished that he had died. The child was never able to walk properly and is described as having been an "imbecile" from birth. The fact that by the age of 28, Lydia had managed to give birth to no less than five unhealthy children, is perhaps a sign of her own ill-health, her poor diet or her anxieties as the family struggled to keep afloat.

Lydia continued to look after little Thomas, managing his fits as best she could and trying to help him walk. Though James had full-time employment, money would have been tight for the Cookes in the mid 70's and it is probable that Lydia had many means of supplementing the family income. It was common for women in her position to take in lodgers, or do washing, cleaning, sewing or childminding for others. The next six years marked a better period for Lydia. She gave birth at fairly regular intervals to four more children and this time they were healthy. First, on 13 September 1875, another son, Enoch James, was born. The family were still living in Vaughan's houses, Aspull, at

the time of Enoch's birth. Their fortunes seem to have improved again and by the birth of their next son, John, on 26 October 1877, they were living in a more substantial home at 50 Ivy Brow, Aspull. This house was to be the family home, on and off, for many years. A daughter, Mary, the girl who would become my great-grandmother, was born on 22 October 1880 and on Boxing Day 1881, another son appeared. Lydia named this child William in memory of her first son who had died 11 years previously.

These four children were to survive into adulthood and there are perhaps several reasons for this. Lydia was slightly older and leading a more settled life, she had a husband in work and a home of her own (albeit rented). These good years were not without their blight, however. The disabled Thomas, the eldest child, died before his little brother William was born on 28 January 1881, the fifth of Lydia's children to die. During this period, the elder Cooke children, Enoch James and John, would have attended school in Aspull. The Education Reform Act of 1870 allowed for the creation of schools free from the control of churches out of the rates and ensured that all working-class children received some education. In fact, the new schools were not needed in Wigan which was already amply supplied with educational establishments. By 1869, Aspull boasted a number of schools including an Endowed School, a National School, a Roman Catholic School and a Wesleyan School. The registrar who recorded most of the births and deaths of Lydia's children was one William Clark who was also a master at the Endowed School. It is likely, however, that the Cooke children - with their

*Continued on page 20*

**Tamperin' Wi'  
T'Moon:**  
*the life of Lydia Fletcher  
(1845-1933)*

*Continued from page 19*

Church of England background — would have attended the National School.

With her growing family and occasional piecemeal work, Lydia would have had little time for amusement. Like other local working-class couples she and James probably visited Mesnes Park and the grounds of Haigh Hall at the weekends, when James's shifts at the pit allowed. By the 1880's, Wigan was a bustling town, somewhat larger and more prosperous than in Lydia's youth. In addition to the horse-drawn omnibuses, a tram service developed to take travellers over short distances. In 1883, Lydia could have heard the news that a driverless engine had run down the Ormskirk Road before hitting a stationary engine and car, killing a passenger. Some working-class people managed to take the train as far as Southport or Blackpool at the weekends or during the Wakes weeks when the factories and pits were closed. If they couldn't run to this, the Cooke family would certainly have enjoyed the numerous fairs that came to Wigan throughout the year. In the summer of 1884, Lydia was pregnant for the tenth time and with her three sons and little daughter around her, probably felt quite contented with her lot.

## Coal

The prosperity of Wigan lay largely in coal. The town was also particularly renowned for its resources of cannel, a kind of coal which yielded a clear flame in

burning and was used in the making of gas. Cannel or 'parrot' coal as it became known (because of the crackling that it made when burned) could also be polished into ornaments, candlesticks, sugar boxes, etc. As a result of the money to be made from coal and cannel, the pits of Lancashire became known as the "black diamond fields." Cannel coal was to be found at a depth of 600 feet and was abundant in Wigan though it thinned away in neighbouring districts. As one local historian put it, "mineral wealth cannot be won with the use of kid gloves, and that of Wigan is wrested from the bowels of Mother Earth by sturdy and hard-working men who know their business and carry it out to the end." There were numerous small pits in and around Wigan and James Cooke had worked since his boyhood for No. 1 Crawford Pit for the Wigan Coal and Iron Industry. It was a tough job with men being paid for the amount of coal that they extracted. The Cookes with their increasing brood of young children would have been almost entirely reliant on James's wage in the 1870's and 1880's and money must have been tight.

The Wigan Coal and Iron Company employed approximately 10,000 men. During the 1880's in addition to all the obvious dangers of the mine, a new peril was introduced. Roburite, an explosive developed in Wigan, was used in some mines and colliers complained of stomach and headaches after using it. It may well have been an experiment with Roburite which led to the next disaster in Lydia's life. In September of 1884, at the height of the Cooke family's better fortune, Lydia's husband, James, was killed by a roof fall at the pit. *The Wigan Observer and District Advertiser* on Saturday, 20 September 1884 recorded the

event as follows:

*FATAL COLLIERY ACCIDENT on Wednesday, at the Crown Inn, Aspull, Mr Edge coroner, held an inquest touching the death of James Cooke, a miner, 42 years of age, who resided at Ivy Brow, Aspull, and who lost his life through a fall of roof at the No. 1 Crawford Pit, belonging to the Wigan Coal and Iron company. It seemed that on Monday morning he was engaged at his work in the mine when a portion of the roof suddenly fell upon him and completely buried him. He was extricated as soon as possible, but was found to be quite dead. The deceased leaves a wife and four children. Mr Webster was present at the inquiry on behalf of the company. The jury returned a verdict of "accidentally killed."*

Some years later in 1889, the Wigan Coal and Iron Company was to state in defence of its safety procedures that:

*Ambulance classes are periodically held at different parts of the works and examinations in this connection are frequently conducted under the auspices of the St. John's Ambulance Association. The knowledge and experience thus gained have proved of great service in those cases of accident which are inseparable from the vigorous operation of such an industry as this, but which, considering the altogether exceptional magnitude of the company's works and the multitude of men employed therein, are, we are glad to say, comparatively few in number and infrequent of occurrence."*

Had Lydia been able to read, it is likely that she would strongly have disagreed with this account of safety in the pit. At 39, she was left a widow with four children, Enoch James aged just 9, John aged 7, Mary aged 4 and William aged 3. In addition,

she was pregnant again. It must have been a heavy day the day that James Cooke was buried. It was probably a Sunday in accordance with working-class practice and James's body, laid out in all probability by his wife, would have been placed in the house for several days beforehand so that the neighbours could pay their last respects. The next six months of Lydia's pregnancy must have been draining, but the baby girl was born healthy on 7 April 1885. The family named her Lydia after her grief stricken mother.

Lydia spent some months in mourning, widowhood ironically returned her to her full legal status but deprived her of so much else. In the close-knit mining community, friends and relations rallied round. One of James's friends, a fellow collier and hewer named James Hilton who hailed from Whelley, was soon sharing her fireside and offering comfort. A relationship developed. Just as her mother had remarried with what seems almost indecent haste, Lydia married James Hilton on 18 July 1885 at St George's Church, Wigan. She was just a month short of her 40th birthday and had not satisfied the usual mourning period for a dead spouse of a year and a day. But Lydia was a practical woman. She needed financial and emotional support. Left on her own with five children, she would have faced dire poverty as her mother had done some years earlier.

James Hilton's family had long been beer retailers and naval suppliers, based in the Wiend in the centre of Wigan. After his marriage, James left the mines and became a publican and Lydia helped him. In return, James took on the five surviving Cooke children as his own. Lydia's daughter, Mary, who had been only four at the time of her real





father's death, recalled James Hilton fondly in later years and described a happy childhood in the environs of the pub.

## Syphilis

James wanted a child of his own and a year after her second marriage, Lydia became pregnant again. The Hiltons' daughter - Lydia's 11th pregnancy - was born on 5 May 1887. She was named Sarah, perhaps in memory of her earlier dead sister, Sarah Ann. Sarah was to be the last of Lydia's children, but like so many of her siblings she was destined not to survive infancy. She died aged just 9 months on 16 February, 1888 having suffered from convulsions. Lydia may well have wondered whether she had the same epileptic condition as her earlier boy, Thomas. But the cause of Sarah's death was far more ominous. She had *syphilis*, one of the most deadly killers of the 19th century. Syphilis was a highly prevalent and much feared disease throughout Britain until the discovery of the healing properties of penicillin in the 20th century. Children with the disease were pitied and shunned for their peculiar appearance. Commentators described them as decrepit, wizened little figures covered with eruptions. One description of the typical syphilitic child from 1918 describes him/her unflatteringly thus:

*Born at seven months of an equally syphilitic father and mother, it was a sickly creature of minuscule dimensions, a dirty yellow in colour, and so lifeless and emaciated that it hardly seemed worth taking care of it. This miserable creature was wrapped in warm wadding and placed in the best possible conditions to prevent it from getting chilled. It could hardly swallow a few drops of sugared milk or water.*

We can only imagine the horror of James and Lydia as their prematurely aged-looking baby wasted away without hope of a cure whilst the other children ran around. There was little chance of survival for poor Sarah. As by far the most usual cause of syphilis in young children is the sexual history of the father, one is forced to speculate on James Hilton's own sexual history. He was a single man aged 36 at the time of his marriage to Lydia and may well have frequented prostitutes. Perhaps he caught from them the deadly disease that he would pass on to his child. Certainly prostitution was rife in Wigan in the 1880's. Sarah's brief life, though she knew it not, was passed at a time when the British government, doctors and social campaigners were vigorously debating the matter of sexually transmitted diseases. It was fear of syphilis which had led to the controversial passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the early 1880's. These Acts, designed to protect sailors in the seaports from infection by prostitutes, sanctioned the arrest and examination of prostitutes in some towns. The Acts were greeted with great hostility by many who believed that the human rights of the prostitutes were being violated. The Contagious Diseases Acts and their repeal were linked to the birth of the feminist movement in Britain, with middle-class women standing up for the rights of their poorer sisters.

Whether James and Lydia connected the national furore with their own situation, we cannot know. It is likely, however, that they concealed the cause of Sarah's death from the neighbours. "The clap" was an unsightly and socially unacceptable disease. Ironically, people would have been all too ready to point a moralising finger at James, whilst also fearing that they

might catch the disease from the family by ordinary contact, such as through sharing food and clothing. Lydia herself, it would seem, remained luckily unaffected by the disease. Whatever the truth of James's or indeed Lydia's own sexual history and whatever their feelings of guilt or remorse, we can unfortunately know nothing more. All we know is that after Sarah, there were no more children.

## Old age

It is to be hoped that the rest of Lydia's life passed peacefully. She was to live almost as long again, succeeding her first husband by 49 years. Lydia saw in the Boer War, the death of Queen Victoria, the First World War - in which several of her grandsons fought — and the General Strike. When women over 30 were finally granted the vote in 1928 Lydia was 83, and still agile enough to take a ride on her grandson's motorbike! Whether or not any of these national events made much impact on Lydia's life must remain a matter for conjecture. Her domestic life probably remained largely unchanged. She continued to live in poverty, spending her latter days in a home described by her grandchildren as a cellar. She remained intimately involved in the family cycles of life and death. In 1920, when her daughter Mary's four-year old daughter, Alice, died from the measles she was on hand to lay her out and organise the funeral, even seeing to it that the little girl was buried with her doll, "Sunshine." Lydia also witnessed the births of several of her own great-grandchildren, no mean feat for a woman who had buried so many of her own offspring.

Lydia finally died from nothing more serious than bronchitis. She breathed her last not far from where she was born, in her son John's

house at Billinge, on 3 February 1933, thus avoiding the fate that she had dreaded most of her life — being sent to the workhouse at Frog Lane. She was 87 years of age, although her death certificate records the age as 86 suggesting that John, who was present at the death and who registered it, was not entirely clear exactly when his very elderly mother had been born. She was buried alongside her granddaughter Alice.

Lydia's great age was quite an achievement. As a young woman, she had lived in an era when the average life expectancy for a professional man living in Manchester was only 38 and for a similar man in the countryside (eg Rutland) only 52. Given the fact that she had survived 11 childbirths, escaped syphilis and the pulmonary diseases of the mill, and fought poverty tooth and nail for decades, her enduring health is remarkable. In her length of years, Lydia was exceptional. In most other respects she was an ordinary woman who left us nothing tangible by which we might remember her. There was no property in her name, no furniture or mementoes by which we might judge her taste, no secret novel lying in some curtained cupboard under the stairs, no letters to help us speculate about her reactions to the vicissitudes of life that tossed her around. To the historian, this lack of evidence might seem, at first, insurmountable, enough to write Lydia off as a suitable subject of investigation. Yet it is in the very silence and the emphasis that this inevitably puts on the maternal aspects of Lydia's life, the cotton, the coal and canals, that we can properly sense her history. Here too we can sense, to some degree, the collective lives of those other working-class women who, like her, scrubbed the steps of the back streets of a Lancashire town as the 19th century passed into the 20th.

*Harold Knowles's Memories of Ashton-in-Makerfield appeared in issue no 23. Here, he continues by recalling a memorable holiday in Blackpool in the 1930's, the beginnings of a working life and the onset of war. Ed.*

# MORE MEMORIES OF ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD IN THE 1930's

**IN about 1936 or 1937 my dad decided he could afford to take the family to Blackpool for a week's holiday. We had all been to Blackpool before but only for day trips by train or motor coach (we were still calling them charabancs or, colloquially, "sharrahs") and to stay over for a full week was going to be quite an adventure for parents and children alike.**

We stayed in a boarding house in Springfield Road on Blackpool's North Shore. The boarding arrangements seemed rather complicated to me although such arrangements were, apparently, quite common in Blackpool at the time. We had all our meals in the boarding house but my mother bought some of the food from local shops and Mrs. Bevington, the landlady, cooked it or otherwise prepared it for the table. To this day I'm not sure why it was done - and it didn't apply to every meal. It could have been for reasons of economy or so that "fussy" eaters could be sure of getting the sort of food to which they were accustomed. This latter consideration wouldn't have bothered us much - there were never any fussy eaters in the Knowles family, not with three big growing lads (and our sister, of course) to cater for. Whenever I thought about this arrangement in later years it seemed to me to be a most complicated business, but it was very common and seemed to suit both guests and landladies very well.

## Magical place

In the last few years of the 1930's Blackpool was a magical place for children and especially for a young lad of 10 or 11. It was Wonderland come true with a "free" show every few yards along the Golden Mile. It sometimes seemed as though every freak and oddity from every fairground in the country had come to the Golden Mile in Blackpool for the summer. Of course you had to pay to go in to see the freak show in full, but the showmen knew the value of whetting the crowd's appetite, and there were plenty of tantalising glimpses at the front of the shows to provide enough free entertainment for a young lad who would rather spend what money he had - which wasn't a lot - on more permanent attractions. One of these was the first gyroscope I had ever seen and I was fascinated by it. They were being sold by a chap on the Golden Mile for the princely sum of one shilling (5p.) I stood and looked at these gyroscopes for a long time and saw repeated demonstrations. Then I went for a walk round - after all, a shilling was a lot of money to a young lad. Eventually, I came back, forked out my shilling and bought one. It was one of the

best investments I have ever made! I had hours and hours of pleasure from it. It was extremely well made, of solid steel throughout, the steel spinner, about two inches in diameter, being painted in banded colours to give a pleasing effect when spinning. It came in a strong red cardboard box complete with a small, metal, Blackpool-type tower on which it would stand and slowly rotate while spinning. I thought it was marvellous.

I used to disappear immediately after breakfast each morning and the same after lunch. After tea it was a different matter. My dad liked to take in as many shows as he could while he was in Blackpool and we went to shows as a family. I rather enjoyed those shows. There was no television to raise our level of sophistication and, in those days, a family show meant exactly that. Most Blackpool shows were variety programmes with magicians, jugglers, balancing acts, singers and comedians. They were very good family entertainment and excellent value for money.

Wandering along the beaches between the North and South piers was fascinating. There was always some sort of entertainment, either to watch or to join in. Because of the length of the beaches and the large numbers of people using them there were several entertainers such as Punch and Judy men, ventriloquists and escape artists. These latter were fascinating. They usually had an assistant, male or female, whose job it was to truss up the artist in a straight-

jacket and then they would sometimes add a few ropes or chains for good measure. Then the artist would begin his routine, contorting his body into, seemingly, the most agonising shapes in his attempts to escape. They were very good at prolonging the escape routine without taking up so much time that their audience would become bored and drift away. The Punch and Judy men were always good entertainment and, since there was more than one of them, they provided a bit of variety.

When you'd had enough of Punch and Judy etc. you could always find a game of beach cricket to join. All you needed was to do your share of fielding (allowing "Auntie Mabel" or "Uncle Bert" to have a welcome rest) and eventually you'd be given a turn with the bat or even a spot of bowling.

I used to enjoy the Aquarium in the Tower. It was in the basement and there was something very soothing about the semi-darkness and the relative silence - even the visitors seemed always to speak in whispers. Also, the fish seemed to be contented and looked very healthy. I didn't like the Tower Zoo quite as much as the Aquarium.

## 'Yo Yo and 'Biff-Bat'

Blackpool always seemed to be the place where the latest national "fads" or "crazes" would be given maximum publicity, usually in the modern Woolworths store on the sea front. One year it was the "YO-YO" and in 1936 I think it was the year of the





“BIFF-BAT”. The “BIFF-BAT” was a wooden bat similar in shape and size to a table-tennis bat but with a rubber ball about an inch and a half in diameter attached to the centre of the bat by an elastic cord about six feet long. The idea was to hit the ball repeatedly, usually horizontally, and keep the rhythm going as long as possible. Woolworths had the world “BIFF-BAT” champion, a girl, in suitably sporting attire, standing, most prominently, on a counter in their Blackpool store, entertaining crowds of shoppers by keeping the ball bouncing, back and forth, up and down, side to side, in and out, this way and that, for, seemingly, hours at a time. After a while, the exercise, seemed to become distinctly pointless but it certainly helped Woolworths to sell an awful lot of “BIFF-BATS”.

Blackpool is unique among English seaside resorts in having not one, nor even two, but three piers! Since my family always stayed on the North Shore I became more familiar with the North Pier than the other two. Most publicity “blurb” for piers suggests that, with only a little imagination, one could easily think oneself to be at sea when one is on the pier. I wouldn’t go as far as that but there is a certain, almost slightly hypnotic, effect of maritime isolation when one stands at the seaward end of a long pier and the view in three directions is of nothing but water. I used to enjoy walking to the very end of the pier, any of the three piers, when the tide was in, trying to make out the blurred outline of a distant ferry on its way to or from Liverpool or Heysham. Sometimes - it varied from year to year - admission to one or more of the piers would be free but, in any case, it only cost a penny or two. On the Central Pier, I think it was, there was a daily afternoon open-air concert to which admission and deck-chair seating was included in the pier admission charge. It wasn’t exactly the London Palladium or even the Wigan Hippodrome, but it was free and quite entertaining to a

juvenile and unsophisticated taste like mine.

Our family went to Blackpool every year from 1936 until the war regulations and shortages became too restrictive, but, even though I always enjoyed myself, I never, ever, recaptured the sheer magic of my first week’s holiday in Blackpool.

The naturally adventure-some inclination of children was, pretty much, given free rein in the 1930’s. During the long, summer school holidays - when the weather in distant, fond memory was always fine - groups of children would wander miles from home, often provisioned with a packet of squashed jam “butties” and a bottle of “pop” - if they were lucky - or more usually water.

### **Billinge Hill**

The area loosely termed “Billinge Hill” with its disused quarry was a firm favourite with the lads from our locality. We loved to climb up and down the sides of the quarry, totally unconcerned as to the danger. It was quite a distance to Billinge Hill from where we lived but the attraction far outweighed the drawback of distance.

Rather closer to home was another attraction - Almond’s Pit, off Low Bank Road, near the entrance to Skitter’s Wood. If the climbing up and down the quarry at Billinge Hill was dangerous - and it certainly was - the hazards at Almond’s Pit were infinitely more perilous. The Pit was a former colliery which had been closed many years previously. The colliery buildings had not been demolished and had now reached a state of dereliction where hazardous was much too mild a word adequately to describe their condition. The site was plastered with “Trespassers will be Prosecuted” notices but, of course, we ignored them. The ridiculous thing, in retrospect, is that there was really hardly anything in or around the colliery buildings that really interested us. All the windows had been smashed years ago and there was nothing of any interest to us left in the

buildings. We even knew how extremely dangerous the place was - we weren’t stupid and it was staring us in the face anyway. I think what made us do it was sheer dare-devil bravado coupled with the fact that none of us wanted to be the first to back out.

Once we got wheels - bicycle wheels that is - the world, or, at least, that part of it called Lancashire, became our oyster. It’s a fairly “naff” sort of thing to admit to these days but I really did get a bike for passing the scholarship. What had hitherto been tiresome errands now became a pleasant spin on the bike. My paternal grandparents lived at Potters Row on Bryn Road and in pre-bike days the round trip on foot would take about an hour. By bike it was a quick 15-minute trip. I went everywhere on that bike, either by myself or with others. Carr Mill Dam and Billinge Hill became a favourite trip - I could fit both places in on the same ride. I went to school on the bike, I visited all my relatives on it - I think the only place I didn’t take it was to bed and that was only because I wasn’t allowed to!

### **Hare-brained scheme**

During my second year at Ashton Grammar School, in the summer holidays, a pal of mine, Jack Eggleston from Bryn, and I cooked up a really hare-brained scheme to go to Southport on our bikes. We took no refreshments of any kind, not even so much as a bottle of water, we had no money, no maps and only a vague idea that Southport was somewhere on the other side of Parbold. We set out straight after lunch and I think I may have vaguely mentioned at home that I was going to Southport on my bike. We were only about 12 or 13 years old and after a couple of hours hard pedalling we knew we were up against it. We should have turned back then but pride and determination not to give in drove us on. We finally reached Queen Victoria’s statue on the promenade in Southport in the late afternoon. We took only a five or ten minute breather -

another mistake, we should have rested longer - and, in low spirits, set off for home. I can’t remember much about that ride home but I know that it was one of the worst experiences of my young life so far. We were very tired, very fed up and very aware of our excessively bad judgement. I finally pedalled wearily into Grove Street just as it was going dark. To my very great surprise I didn’t get into as much trouble as I expected. Perhaps they were even glad to see me!

That trip to Southport was, for me, an ill-wind that blew me a lot of good. I had been given a very sharp lesson in the stupidity of leaping before looking and the vast benefits to be gained by sensible forward planning. The experience didn’t put me off cycling but I never forgot the lesson.

\* \* \* \*

During my last year at Ashton Grammar School I began to think more and more about what I was going to do when I left school. The one thing I had known from quite a young age was that I wanted to be an engineer. I hadn’t quite decided exactly what kind of engineer I was going to be - I was still thinking about that. One Friday evening, after I had left school and my job on Billy Cliff’s farm had finished, I was in Rickards Temperance bar in Gerard Street, Ashton, with a group of friends when we were joined by a couple of other young chaps known to some of our party and I got talking to one of them. I told him of my engineering ambitions and he asked me if I had ever considered mining engineering and surveying. He said that he worked for his brother, Leon Whittaker, who was the Chief Mining Engineer to the Garswood Hall Colliery Company. He thought that his brother might either have a vacancy himself, or might know of an opening in some engineering concern in the area. Then he gave me the jackpot news - he said that if I wanted to come to the Garswood Hall Colliery

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## MORE MEMORIES OF ASHTON-IN- MAKERFIELD IN THE 1930's

*Continued from page 23*

Offices at 9 a.m. the following morning (Saturday - everyone worked on Saturday morning in those days) he would have a word with his brother who, he was pretty sure, would see me. I could hardly believe my ears! I would have gone straight way if I had been able to!

### Got on my bike

The following morning I got on my bike - quite literally, anticipating Norman Tebbit's advice by about 50 years - and went to see Leon Whittaker. He said that there were no vacancies in his office at the moment but he had a talk with me about engineering generally to get some idea as to the type of engineering which might suit me best. He thought that Local Authority engineering might fit the bill and, after he explained what it entailed, I agreed with him. Things then rapidly went from good to excellent - Mr. Whittaker happened to be a good friend of Mr. Dennis, the Engineer and Surveyor to Ashton-in-Makerfield Urban District Council. He rang Mr. Dennis there and then, Mr. Dennis had a vacancy for an article pupil and agreed to interview me for the vacancy on the following Monday morning at 9 a.m. sharp. By Monday evening it was all settled. I was appointed as a pupil, article to Mr. Dennis and it just remained for my father to agree the terms of pupilage with Mr. Dennis. I started work a day or so later. I have never ceased to be grateful to Mr. Leon Whittaker, his brother and to Mr. Dennis.

At the time I began work, the staff of the Engineer and Surveyor's Department consisted of Mr. Dennis, the Deputy Engineer and Surveyor, Harold Marsh, a man in his fifties, Bill

Howarth, a man well beyond retiring age who had been brought back into employment because of the acute manpower shortage, a short-hand typist, the Fuel Control Officer, Mrs. Arkwright, and three article pupils, Jack Wildman, Ted Heaton and Alan Morris, all three of whom were ex Ashton Grammar School. Jack and Ted had each served about 15 months of their articles and Alan Morris just a few weeks.

All pupils were normally required to serve a three year period of articles before their articles were awarded to them, but, in certain circumstances, articles would be awarded to a pupil by the Principal - Mr. Dennis in this case - before the full term of articles had been served. The "certain circumstances" included conscription into His Majesty's forces and eventually applied to all four pupils at Ashton. Within nine months or so we were down to just two pupils, Alan Morris and me, Jack and Ted getting their calling up papers within a couple of weeks of each other.

### Jazz enthusiast

Although we were sorry to see them go there was an immediate benefit in an easing of fairly crowded conditions. The front drawing office which was home to the four pupils and Mrs. Arkwright was only about twelve feet square - from memory - and it really was a bit of a squeeze to fit us all in. I was particularly sorry to see Jack Wildman go. During the few months we had been in the same office I got on with him very well. He was a very keen jazz enthusiast (I knew very little about jazz at that time) and he delighted in passing on to me some of his enthusiasm for the music of Louis Armstrong, Gene Krupa, Coleman Hawkins, Jack Teagarden and many others. Thanks to Jack Wildman I remain an enthusiast to this day.

With Jack and Ted in the Forces, Alan and I developed a comfortable working relationship. Since we were both at the same level in our studies we attended the same

day-release and evening classes at Wigan Mining and Technical College and, being at the same career level, we were learning the practical aspects of our work together. Looking back, I think we were also fortunate in the people with whom we worked.

Mrs. Arkwright was a "gem"! She was old enough to be our mother - her son, Bob Arkwright, was in my class at Ashton Grammar School - but her presence in the drawing office was in no way the inhibiting factor which it might have been. Her very presence, of course, ensured that we didn't get too boisterous, in word or deed but she, herself, would often prompt our confidences about our enterprises and adventures and she always seemed to be genuinely interested in our "doings".

### Copperplate script

Mr. Marsh, the Deputy Engineer and Surveyor and Bill Howarth worked in the other drawing office. Mr. Marsh was kept very busy with his day to day duties but he would spend whatever time he could instructing Alan and me in surveying and engineering matters. Bill Howarth was employed as a draughtsman. He was straight from the old-fashioned school of draughtsmen. He embellished his drawings with copperplate script, his titles and headings were in Gothic style and it was all beautifully set out and executed, freehand. Today you need computers to execute work of the quality that Bill Howarth produced freehand.

Sam Allen was the Highways Foreman, a physically big man with an equally big and generous nature. He was always ready to spend time passing his knowledge on to Alan and me. In the early 1950's, I think it was, Sam, with his brother Tom, set up the firm of Allen Brothers, Building and Civil Engineering Contractors of New Springs, near Wigan. I think the firm is still in business at the time of writing.

## Wholesome reconstruction

Most of the work Alan and I were involved in was the usual routine work of a Local Authority Engineer and Surveyor's Department. Wartime restrictions meant that there was virtually no new work being undertaken. There was, however, a good deal of investigative and preliminary forward planning work to be done. Even early in the war it was obvious that wholesale reconstruction, including the replacement of housing stock destroyed during hostilities would be given high priority. During the war, it had been decided that, because of the very large number of housing units which would be needed, quickly, prefabricated dwellings would be the most suitable way to meet the anticipated demand. Although Ashton had not suffered any loss of housing stock due to bombing we were, nevertheless, identifying suitable sites for prefabs and preparing preliminary layout plans. Plans were also being prepared for the continuation of the pre-war development schemes. A complete survey was also undertaken of land use, identifying agricultural land as either pasture or arable land. Even in the very early 1940's the line of the M6 motorway had been provisionally identified and was being shown on our district plans.

Despite all this post-war planning etc. both Alan and I knew that we were on borrowed time and, in the event, we were allowed to serve only about two years of our article pupilage before we were on our way into uniform, Alan into the Navy, I into the Army.

But that's another story!

● **A few years after the war, A.K. Dennis left Ashton to become the Engineer and Surveyor to Bedlington Urban District Council in Northumberland. Apparently he was a native of that area. In about 1966 I was sad to see his obituary in our Institution magazine. H.K.**



# Childhood Reminiscences of Haigh

by Jane Fairhurst (nee Marshall)

**MY earliest recollections are of when I lived at Winstanley Farm, Haigh with my three sisters Mary, Alice and Eveline and my two brothers John and Ernest. Dad was a tenant farmer - the land being leased to him by the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres who owned a large estate. The farm was a mixed farm of arable and pasture land, so that a horseman and a cowhand were employed. There was no modern machinery in those days - everyone worked long and laborious days, often with little reward for their efforts. Some of the workmen lived in the farmhouse as there was no means of transport to enable them to start work at 6 a.m. and often, especially at harvest time, continue working till dark, sometimes being called in the night to attend a calving cow, a foaling horse or a breeding sow.**

Mother, in addition to cooking, preparing meals, housekeeping and attending to six children, used to help with milking the cows (no machines in those days), but she was wonderfully patient and hard working. We, as children, tried to help with the chores and jobs about the farm as much as possible. I remember helping to deliver the milk, collect the eggs, wash up in the dairy, knock manure, cut sets and plant potatoes, thin and weed the turnips, make haycocks, fix the sheaves of corn into stocks and 'flash' the turnips ready for harvesting. At milking time each cow was given a bucket of provender and grains, the latter being obtained from the local brewery, often collected when they were warm after the brewing of the beer (they smelled delicious!). The smell from the brewery permeated the air for a radius of about a mile.

When the potatoes were ready for harvesting (the children had a holiday known as potato picking time) we

Dear Sir,

I enclose my mother's reminiscences of her childhood at Haigh, written originally for her grandchildren.

Born in 1907, she is now aged 92, and lives at Lakeside Rest & Nursing Home, within a stone's throw of where she was born. She has taught generations of Standish women over a long teaching career, and is well known in Standish.

I hope the article is of interest to *Past Forward* readers.

**John Fairhurst  
Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands**

gathered the withered tops. Then the (horse drawn) potato picker went along the drills and scattered the potatoes over the ground about two yards wide, while the children picked them in aprons and buckets, emptied them into wicker hampers, which were in turn emptied into the horse drawn cart to be taken to the ready prepared 'holes' or clamps. Here they were covered with layers of straw and several inches of soil to be stored for the winter. Whenever they were opened they had to be carefully sealed again to prevent damage by frost. The turnips were usually stored in the barn and each day we sliced sufficient hampers to give fodder to the cattle in winter. At that time dad kept about two dozen cattle - mostly shorthorns, and one or two 'polly' cows which were hornless.

## Warmed bricks

I think I knew every inch of the ground around our house - an L-shaped stone house with very spacious rooms. We had coal fires and oil lamps which needed trimming and filling every day. We used candles when we went to bed, and warmed bricks in the oven with which we warmed the beds - we also used oven shelves for that purpose. The provender salesman came regularly when dad would order split corn, indian meal, bran, indian corn, flour, oatmeal and other necessary provisions. Mother had a huge panmug in which she kneaded a dozen pounds of flour at once. We went to Red Rock shop for a quarter of yeast. She would leave the

dough to rise in front of the fire and we pushed wood under the oven to get it sufficiently hot for baking. When the dough was risen I often used to grease the baking tins, cut the dough into suitable pieces, knead it again and leave it in the tins on the shelf at the top of the huge Yorkshire range to allow it to rise a second time before placing it in the oven. After about half an hour we would turn the loaves in the oven so as to enable them to be evenly baked, and leave them to bake a further period till they were nicely browned. While the oven was hot enough mother baked several fruit pies (apple, plum, damson, blackberry) and huge currant Chorley cakes (like today's Eccles cakes).

Every so often Mr. Ibisson, who lived in a lodge belonging to the estate, would come and kill a pig which was later cut up and preserved for eating by the family. It was salted and left on stone shelves arranged round a darkened section of the pantry for about a fortnight, after which the hams and flitches or sides of bacon would be hung up in the kitchen to dry. The pork was cut up, put into stone jars, cooked in the oven and allowed to set in a jelly. This could be used for weeks afterwards for pies, etc. The leaves of lard were rendered down, allowed to set and later used for baking and cooking purposes. As there were no refrigerators in those days these were a means of preserving food.

## Prepare 'Baggin'

Whenever necessary, usually at about six monthly

intervals, the threshing machine visited the farm. It was a busy time - hands were needed to feed the sheaves into the machine, guide it through, collect the bags of grain at one end and the baled straw at the other, afterwards being stored in their respective granaries. Mother had to prepare 'baggin' and lunch for several helpers. She used to make a huge hotpot or potato pie with crust in an enamel bowl that would scarcely fit in the large Yorkshire oven, and also a huge rice pudding. Both were cooking 2 -3 hours, and certainly smelled delicious when served along with boiled turnips and red cabbage pickles.

At Christmas time we all helped to pluck the fowls, usually ducks and chickens, which were sold for the Christmas fare. Mother would prepare the Christmas puddings weeks beforehand, but it was necessary to reboil them on Christmas Day. Although we had few luxuries (an apple and an orange and a few sweets each in our stockings) we greatly appreciated them. My two cousins, Florence and George Lowton, who lived in a cottage about 200 yards away, and Auntie and Uncle usually joined us at our little gathering.

We had a long walk, over two miles, along country lanes and paths to Haigh church on Sunday morning. All our family attended church and Sunday school and we regularly won prizes for doing so. It was quite an event when the Earl of Crawford and family were in residence (they had other estates in Scotland etc.) The congregation would sit in awed silence waiting for the Lord and family to appear in the gallery at the back of the church, and wait till they had left the church after the service which many of his employees attended - gardeners, farm labourers, estate officers, tradesmen who kept all the estate buildings in repair, servants, coachmen etc. There was a Home Farm and dairy which supplied the hall and workmen with farm produce.

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## Childhood Reminiscences of Haigh

Continued from page 25

There was a row of cottages called the Boffey where the gardeners lived and other workmen's cottages were scattered around the estate.

### Toasted workmen

When the Earl of Crawford's son and heir came of age the Lord toasted his workmen. He also invited the scholars of Haigh and Red Rock schools to a party at Haigh Hall. We thought it was grand - we had never been inside a sumptuous building like that before and in addition to supplying us with presents and refreshments he had engaged a conjurer and magician to entertain us. We had never seen the likes of it before.

Two village schools served the estate, Haigh and Red Rock. We attended Red Rock, an all age school with three teachers. It consisted of a large room divided by a sliding partition. We had coal fires in the winter. There was a girls' playground and a boys' playground. Each was partly flagged (where we played hopscotch) and partly asphalt, each had a verandah and water closets and a cloakroom with wash basins. There was a cane and a school bell.

I can remember the day I started school at three years of age. Alice and cousin Florence each held one of my hands. We walked along the cart track from the farm and along the 'narrowpad' which ran along the hedgerow dividing two of Mr. C. Hodge's pastures. Quite often the cattle with their dreamy eyes would stand and stare, and we had to avoid their deposits on the footpath. I had a furry hat which got drenched in rainy weather. When the snow was deep, Mary the eldest would walk first along the footpath and the younger members of the family would follow in her footprints in the snow. If the snow drifted, dad would come to school at dinner time by the roundabout way to bring our lunches in the horse and cart, as the weather was

unfit for us to walk home in the drifting snow.

### Commotion

When I arrived at school I was placed in the infants' class run by Miss Gregory. There were about 20 infants whose ages ranged from 3 - 7 years, and consisted of boys and girls whose fathers were mostly farmers, labourers, mill workers or miners. I was taught the alphabet and learned to count on the abacus and with cowrie shells. We used slates and pencils, plasticine and boards. I never remember any difficulty in learning to read. At playtimes we played 'ticky', 'hide and seek', 'hopscotch' and skipping rope. When it rained we tried to amuse ourselves under the verandah. The school bell was rung when break was over. We lined up in classes in an orderly fashion until allowed to proceed to the classroom. Our family had a black retriever dog called Nell which always followed us to school and waited in the front porch till hometime. Whenever the wagons from the Bleachworks came along Nell would run alongside barking loudly and would continue until she could no longer keep up with them. This barking seemed to provide a diversion for the scholars in a quiet country school, but I hated it, as I felt very embarrassed about 'our dog' causing a commotion.

### 'Babes in the Wood'

At Christmas time the children gave a concert performed by all ages of children to which the parents were invited. Alice often took a prominent part in these productions. She had a clear speaking voice. I particularly remember her taking part in 'Dainty Dancing Maidens', a song and dance performed by four girls dressed in pale blue, pink and yellow voile dresses. I was a robber in the 'Babes in the Wood' and I had to fall and feign being killed which I managed to do successfully without hurting myself. I can remember the day I had news that I had passed my Bursar to High School. The Headmistress sent me to tell the Vicar of Haigh who was the incumbent at that time.

If we had to attend any function on dark nights (which was very rarely) we took a storm paraffin lamp to help us

to avoid puddles and uneven surfaces in the cart tracks. If we were anxious about any of the family being lost in the dark, we were relieved when we could see the flicker of light approaching in the distance. We had two trap lamps, each with a candle inside, which fitted into brackets at the front of the trap which was only used for visiting on special occasions.

### 'Cockies' thrived

During fine weather we played cricket, rounders and catchers. There was a pond in a nearby pasture where tiddlers or 'cockies' thrived. We would each go armed with a jam jar, a cane with a piece of string attached and some worms which we had previously unearthed. We tied a worm on the end of the string for bait. We felt justly rewarded if we caught two or three 'cockies'. Quite often mother sent us to return the 'cockies' to the pond.

We bathed in a large zinc bathtub in front of the fire. There was a wash boiler where the fuel was placed underneath, used mostly on wash days. There was also a side boiler in the Yorkshire range. It was filled by means of a bucket and emptied with a ladling can. There was a large stone slopstone in the kitchen, a large dresser with a white top - I scrubbed this regularly - a long wooden table and forms alongside it. The flagged floor had to be mopped frequently and afterwards sanded - we thought we were posh when we first got a piece of coconut matting to cover it. Sacks were used to wipe our clogs on. Owing to the rough roads, the irons were frequently coming loose so that dad had period of 'ironing clogs'.

The iron used for ironing clogs was hollow inside and was filled with charcoal. Later we progressed to an iron with shaped heaters, which were heated in the coal fire. Each had a hole where the poker was inserted to transfer it from the red hot coals to the box iron. It was very hot when the heater was newly put in but the heat gradually decreased. We had a rack hanging from the ceiling in the kitchen on which clothes were hung to dry and air. Washing was long and laborious - a scrubbing board, dolly peg and tub and a mangle with heavy rollers were used. Washing soda, bar soap, dolly

blue and starch were the only aids - there were no detergents in those days.

### Canal barge

Another event in our lives was the walking day when the tinies rode on a decorated lorry and the walkers held the ribbons of the banners. I also remember a boat trip on the Leeds and Liverpool canal to Whittle-le-Woods. The canal barge was horse drawn - the horse walked along the towpath and as we passed under the bridges we held our breath in case someone dropped something into the boat from the bridge. We often watched the horse drawn barges, laden mostly with coal, pass along the canal. It was quite an event when we saw the first convoy of motor barges.

Dad's cattle, which grazed in the pastures alongside the canal, used to step down the muddy bank to drink, and on one occasion a cow got stuck in the mud and had to be hauled out by the workmen. In those days it was a sad occasion when a veterinary surgeon visited the farm - it meant that an animal was very ill or dying. Normally dad drenched the animals himself - we kept a stock of Red Drink or Black Drink which very often effected a cure. If a cow was 'offside' it was allowed to stay indoors.

Sometimes, walking in the fields we would find a plover's nest with eggs, the cry of 'peewit' attracting us. Occasionally we discovered a rabbit's burrow, and we kept tame rabbits, which we loved to fondle, in a hutch. The children from neighbouring cottages came to play in summer. When we played 'hide and seek' we hid in the garden, hen cotes, granary barns, haylofts, Dutch barns, looseboxes and cartsheds. The 'it' person sometimes got exhausted and gave in.

On dark evenings we played cards, ludo, dominoes and snakes and ladders. We were thrilled when someone gave us a lantern with slides which were shown on the window blind in the parlour. Other forms of amusement were playing a comb, a mouth organ and a piano. The nearest shop was at Red Rock. Dad brought provisions from Wigan when he delivered milk.

We accepted our lifestyle and were contented. All these reflections are of when I attended Red Rock School. When I started to attend Wigan Girls' High School (at age 13) and we moved to Rectory Farm, Standish, life took on a different pattern.



### Aspull & Haigh Historical Society

Meetings are held in Our Lady's R.C. Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull on second Thursday in the month at 7.30 p.m. Further details from the Secretary, Mrs. Rosalie Naylor, 3 Pennington Close, Aspull, Wigan (01942 256145).

#### 14 September

Rev. Kevin Foulkes

#### 12 October

*Daisy, Dobbin & Death*

Nigel Morgan

#### 9 November

*Old Tools*

George Howard

#### 14 December

Christmas Party

### Atherton Heritage Society

The programme includes monthly meetings with talks on local history and visits throughout the year to places of historical interest. Meetings are held usually on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. at St. Richard's Jubilee Hall, Atherton. Admission: Members £1. Non-members £1.50. The annual membership fee is £3. Information from Hon. Sec. (01204 651478).

#### 8 August

*Collecting Old Silver*

Mr. J. Dawson

The pleasures and pitfalls of collecting pieces of old silver explained by our speaker who will bring some of his own items and tell their stories.

#### 5 September

*Coastal Lakeland*

Margaret Curry returns to complete the Lakeland talks; the area's natural beauty through wonderful photography and informative narrative.

#### 10 October

The necessary A.G.M. followed by Elaine Hurst from the Dam House Society, who will give a short talk on how Dam House, Astley was rescued from demolition.

#### 14 November

*Pretoria Pit*

Mr. B. Clare

December 20th is the 90th anniversary of this mining disaster when 344 men and boys lost their lives. A local tragedy which we should not forget.

#### 12 December

*Elizabeth I*

Lizzie Jones

A special Christmas treat for Millennium year - an evening with Elizabeth I, by gracious permission of "Lizzie".

### Billinge Local History Society

A web-site is currently being prepared, and a Millennium Exhibition is planned for later in the year. For further details contact Roger Hart, 57 Windsor Road, Billinge, Wigan. WN5 7LD (01744 892915).

### Golborne & Lowton Local History Society

Founded in 1984 the society now has an average monthly attendance of over 20. Meetings are held at Golborne Library on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.00 p.m. Non-members are welcome. Further details from Ron Marsh, P.R. Officer (01942 726027).

#### 12 September

*Question Time*

#### 10 October

*Childhood Memories*

Golborne Library "Book Chat Group"

#### 14 November

*Reminiscences Quiz*

Trevor Lucas

### Leigh & District Family History Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. For

## SOCIETY NEWS

further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. O. Hughes (01942 741594).

#### 18 July

Visit to the History Shop at Wigan

#### 15 August

*Getting started* - help and question time.

#### 19 September

*Members' evening*

#### 17 October

*Guild of One Name Studies*

Harold Culling

#### 21 November

*To be arranged*

#### 19 December

A.G.M.

### Leigh Literary Society

Meetings are held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library on Mondays at 7.30 p.m. Subscription £10. Visitors £1. Secretary Mrs. H. Gaskell (01942 801743)

### Leigh Local History Society

Meetings are held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library, on the last Wednesday of the month. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. Norma Ackers (01942 865488).

### Tyldesley & District Historical Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month from September to May at the Tyldesley Pensioners club on Milk Street at 7.30 p.m. We do not charge an entrance fee although voluntary contributions are always welcome. Refreshments available. Everyone is welcome, so come along, drag yourself away from the tele and have an informative and cheap night out. Contact the Secretary (01942 514271).

### Wigan Archaeological Society

#### 6 September

*Seti I, Father of Ramases the Great*

J. Johnson

#### 4 October

*Medieval Anglezarke/Rivington*

Dr. M. Bain

#### 1 November

*Armenia in Roman Times*

T. Strickland

#### 6 December

*Ramases II and the Great Fortress of the West*

Dr. S. Snape

### Wigan Civic Trust

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

### Wigan Family and Local History Society

Meetings are held on the first (workshops), and third (speakers) Tuesday of the month at the Springfield Hotel, Springfield Road, Wigan, at 7.30 p.m. For further information contact Mrs. Lynne Kearns, 28 Wareing Street, Tyldesley, Manchester M29 8HS (01942 878549 evenings/weekends).

#### 5 September

Open Meeting

#### 19 September

*The Wigan Murders*

James Fairhurst

#### 3 October

Open Meeting

#### 17 October

*Victorian Family Albums* - bring along your family photos for dating and analysis

Audrey Linkman

#### 7 November

Open Meeting

#### 21 November

*Interpreting Old Wills*

Brook Westcott

#### 5 December

Open Meeting

#### 19 December

*Early Settlement of Lancashire* - Talk and workshop followed by Christmas Buffet

Fred Holcroft

## LANCASHIRE DIALECT SOCIETY



### Are you from Lancashire?

• Site Maintained by Derek Stanton

• Well You Have just found a Home from Home.

• **Greetings.** My name is derek stanton and I have re-formed

**Lancashire Dialect Society**

• The Lancashire Dialect competition takes place annually during the first weekend of September, why not **enter** a poem, song, or story.

• **Note this is not only for dialect writers but open to all. If you write poems, stories, or songs, in your own vernacular that would be fine. If you are interested in Lancashire you are more than welcome to join.**

• <mailto:stanton@ldsociety.fsnet.co.uk>

Dear Editor,

I was passed *Past Forward* No. 23 by a friend of mine and found it to be of great interest.

I would like to inform your readers of the re-formation of the Lancashire Dialect Society. All meetings now take place at St. Chad's Parish Centre, Town Lane, Whittle-le-Woods, Chorley.

The information on our web site can be found by going to file then open, input, [www.ldsociety.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.ldsociety.fsnet.co.uk). then OK. The search engines are not as yet finding our web pages. This method works well.

We are also looking for sponsors for our future projects, thanking you in appreciation of any help you can possibly give.

Derek Stanton  
Lancashire Dialect Society  
30 Thirlmere Drive  
Withnell, Chorley  
Lancashire, PR6 8AY  
Tel: 01254 830776

E-mail: [Stanton@ldsociety.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:Stanton@ldsociety.fsnet.co.uk).

Find your roots again. Do you know anyone here? We may be able to put you in touch with each other.

**L.D.S.**

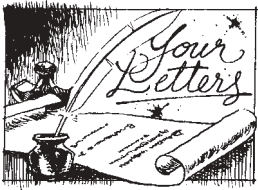
*It will be exciting-----*

**LancashireDialect Society.**

*Join in this adventure.*

This is the page for all **Lancastrian's** who are away from our native county.

Through Internet it is now possible to organise a global society. Web meetings can be pre-arranged at specified times.



Sir,  
My paternal grandfather hailed from Northampton where he farmed. His sister came to Wigan as lady's maid to the Rector's wife and subsequently persuaded her brother Charles to join her in the town, where he opened a

Dear Sir,  
We returned in October last year from the very first visit to our brother's grave in Johannesburg, South Africa. At the age of 19 he was killed on a training exercise at RAF Baragwaneth in 1942, some 57 years ago.

Ronnie Barnes was born and brought up in Wigan, as were the family of seven brothers and sisters who lived at 25 Stirling Street, off Mesnes Road. All went to St. Michael's School and I think Ronnie was amongst the first intake to go to All Saints Senior Church School in Frog Lane, now, I understand, called the Deanery. He worked for a time for Valentine Grocers on Mesnes Road, and later as a Mechanic for Timberlake's. He volunteered for the RAF at the outbreak of war.

The family consisted of Gerald, Gertie, James, Jeffrey, Ronnie, Jean and Irene - and it was the two youngest remaining sisters, Jean and Irene who, both in our 70's, flew to Johannesburg. As arranged beforehand, we met, and were escorted from our hotel by, the South African Agent for War Graves' Commission, Brigadier Anderson and his wife, who drove us to the C. of E. section of Braamfontein Cemetery and on to Ronnie's grave - it was a

## Charles Sawbridge Ltd. Wholesale and Retail Butchers

small shop in The Wiend and married Alice Dix, a local girl.

Later, more shops were opened, in Wallgate, Chapel Lane, Goose Green and in the market area. There was also one on Wigan Lane but that belonged to George Sawbridge and was separate from Charles Sawbridge Ltd.

Grandfather and two brothers, William and Harry, ran the business, William as director and Harry as buyer, aided by their blind father. In the school holidays I went to Abergelly, North Wales, where dad bought sheep and my afternoons were heaven spent with the dogs after their

## FARAWAY BUT NOT FORGOTTEN



Ronnie Barnes

very emotional experience indeed. We scattered a dish of English soil which we took with us before placing our British Legion Crosses - red poppies and fresh flowers - on the grave. We took lots of photos. We were then driven to another part of this huge cemetery to place our crosses on the grave of the pilot of the Tiger Moth, in which they both died in 1942.

Of the other members of the family, Gertie died in 1980 at Standish where she lived. Gerald died in 1990, also in Wigan where he lived. We were also fortunate enough to

have visited Jeffrey in Australia in 1996, a year before he died (he had emigrated in 1950 under the £10 scheme which was popular at that time). James died in 1998, leaving his wife Phyllis living in Tenby, South Wales. They were childhood sweethearts from their St. Michael's days when they were Scout and Guide Leaders respectively, Phyllis only living in the next street to Stirling Street, Holme Terrace. They celebrated 57 years together.

Irene the youngest, worked with Ashton's Tobacconists in Wallgate and has lived in South Wales for about 56 years. I (Jean) worked at the 'Wigan Examiner' and then at Coop & Co. before serving in the WAAF for 3 years. I later emigrated to Canada, then returned to live in South Wales.

Perhaps anyone who remembers Ronnie from 58 years ago, will be interested to hear that he has never been forgotten and that our visit was evidence of this - something we never dreamed would be possible during our times at Stirling Street during the war.

**Jean Ramsay**  
13 Gwynfryn, Tirydail  
Ammanford, Carmar.  
SA18 2LW

## REMEMBER THE 'STARDUST ROOM'?

The article and photographs relating to the Roy Cafe in issue 23 have aroused a great deal of interest, including that of Mrs. E. Taylor, whose father was chef there and Mrs. E. Murray, whose wedding reception was held there. Ed.

Dear Mr. Gillies,

In my dad's time as chef the 'Roy' was owned by three brothers - Bill, Harry and John Noble. I had my 21st birthday party and

## ROY CAFE

Dear Editor,

Your article on the Roy Cafe in issue no. 23 of *Past Forward* brought back many happy memories. The decorations in your photograph of the Roy Cafe and the staff were to celebrate the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (now the Queen Mother) which took place,

if my memory serves me correct, on 12 May 1937, and was broadcast over the radio.

It was later in the year on 11 September 1937, that I remember the Roy Cafe with much happiness - that was the day I married and the wedding reception was held at the Roy Cafe. Our wedding cake was also made there and the Roy Cafe proved to be a perfect venue for such an occasion.

wedding reception there in the 60's. The room, as I remember, was just like it was in the photo in *Past Forward* and was then called 'The Stardust Room'.

One of the shops underneath (where the back entrance to BHS now is) was a bread and cake shop owned by the Roy.

**38 Millcroft Avenue**  
**Orrell, Wigan**  
**WN5 8TP**

A few shops and further down Marsden Street from the Roy Cafe nearer to Mesnes Street, was the photographic studio of Foley & Scott, so it was quite handy to have a studio photograph taken there.

We were married at Greenough Street Independent Methodist Church; unfortunately during World War 2 the church was hit by a bomb and afterwards had to be demolished and rebuilt.

work was finished and the sheep penned.

William's son, James came after the death of William and Harry, but as his only experience of life was in the RN, for the duration of the war, he soon decided to give up butchering and the business folded. James then took up residence in St. Anne's on Sea, where he gave full vent to his love of sailing and I believe he worked on Ernie in Blackpool.

**Mrs. H. Bonikowski**  
(nee Sawbridge)  
**Bury, Lancs.**

## BULL AND DOG DISCOVERED

Dear Sir,

Your recent item in *Past Forward* 24 'Cursing King George at the Bull and Dog', reminded me that I knew of the existence of a yard in Scholes called the Bull and Dog yard which would presumably be the yard to the Bull and Dog Public House, but to find the location you would need to consult the 1890 Ordnance Survey Map.

Bull and Dog Yard was reached via a covered entry alongside a pub called the Oddfellows Arms which was situated in Scholes, almost opposite Upper Morris Street. At the top of Upper Morris Street there was the Conservative Working Men's Club; in the early part of the 20th century a new club was built on the Bull and Dog Yard, taking up most of it and renamed Scholes Conservative Club. The large and imposing entrance to the new club was on the site of the demolished Oddfellows Arms.

The Oddfellows Arms was the meeting place for the members of the Oddfellows, a Friendly Society. It is obvious that the Oddfellows Arms had been originally called the Bull and Dog, but its name was changed in keeping with what was then a very popular Friendly Society, probably as much as 150 years ago.

**John Murphy**  
37 Knightshill Crescent  
Springfield  
Wigan  
WN6 7EJ

There had been a choir practice the evening the church was hit but, fortunately, everyone had left the church before the bomb dropped.

I am now 86 but my memory of these events is very clear to me and your photos and article will serve as a happy reminder.

Many thanks and every success to your magazine.

**E. M. Murray**  
**Ince, Wigan**

## HARD TO BELIEVE

Dear Alastair,

Harold Smith recently commented in *Past Forward* that "it is now hard to believe what life for old Wiganers was like before *Past Forward* came into our lives". How true that comment was, especially for those like me who are unable to visit the old town as often as we would like to.

Both you and I felt, back in the summer of 1991, that "from little acorns mighty oaks doth grow", when you launched an eight page *Past Forward* No. 1. You know, sir, from your readers' letters - or should I say "our" readers' letters, since I feel part of the growing family of Lancastrians (and particularly Wiganers 'abroad') - that today, *Past Forward* is our common bond, and I know from my own experiences that the bond is experienced worldwide, even in some cases by descendants of ex-Wiganers who have never even seen the town.

I am the first to acknowledge the dedication of your staff and the support initially and since of Wigan Council. But we all know, sir, that it was your foresight and dedication that gelled it all together. On behalf of all late Wiganers (now deceased), many of whom couldn't even write their own name, thank you!

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

● The latest in Ernie's 'I Remember When' series appears on pp 8. Ed.

## Happy Memories

Dear Mr. Gillies,

I enjoyed reading Charlotte Ashurst's article in *Past Forward* 24. It brought back happy memories of the days I played for Crompton's Works. I was the goalkeeper. I also remember playing football and cricket against a team from Crompton's Downall Green Works. What a laugh that was!

In the photograph of the Wigan Ladies and Ref's, I recognise Hilda Corless, and the girl on her right-hand side was a girl called Mary France, who lived on a farm down Ashton Heath. I think she was an international. There was also a girl named Margaret Bishop who lived at Britannia Inn, next to Bryn Station. She also was an international.

*Past Forward* has brought a great deal of happiness and memories.

Thank you very much.

**Ida Fairhurst**  
44 Newton Road  
Billinge, Wigan





## From a Leigh born and bred chap

Dear Sir

As a Leigh born and bred chap, may I say now I greatly enjoyed the article 'Lanky Tawk' in issue No. 24 of *Past Forward* by Ernest Ford, and as a great believer in the need to preserve and maintain our Lancashire Dialect I enclose a copy of a favourite poem written many years ago by that wonderful Lancashire author Sam Fitton. He was one of seven children, born on 30 June, 1868 at Smallwood, near Congleton but later moving with his parents to Rochdale and later at High Crompton.

To me, he was the 'Lowry', of his day; his caricatures of workpeople and his later reputation as a 'Dialect Reciter' won several competitions. But unlike

Lowry, - he loved being with his fellow men and was at his happiest entertaining drinkers in a country pub tap room.

Ammon Wrigley, writing the introduction to the book 'Gradely Lancashire' by Sam Fitton, says: "He was a poet, prose writer, playwright, painter, cartoonist, actor, mimic and an inimitable entertainer - but for all his gifts, he was wise enough never to write upon subjects that he knew little or nothing about".

The attached poem 'My Owd Case Clock' is particularly attractive to me as an old-time student of Lancashire long case clock makers.

Wilf Waterworth  
235 Leigh Road  
Leigh, Lancashire  
WN7 1SH

## A REQUEST FOR INFO ON FRED W. DEW

Dear Mr. Gillies,

I am seeking information on FRED W. DEW, photographer, of The Studio, Park Road, Wigan. He produced official photographs for Massey Bros., bus body builders of Enfield Street, Wigan. I should like to know if examples of his work have been preserved. He was active c. 1937.

Eric Ogden  
40 Burnedge Lane, Grasscroft  
Oldham, Lancs. OL4 4EA  
Tel: (01457) 873661

## CAN YOU HELP?

Over the last few months my research into my family's history has got more difficult. Can any of your readers help me in my quest to find out more about the **Robinson family**? They lived in Lowton and then at the end of the 1880's they moved to Abram, first to Ayr Bridge Farm, then to Warrington Road. I would like to find out more about the following people:

**Thomas Robinson** born in Lowton c 1781, married **Mary** born c 1777

**James Robinson** born 3 May 1811, married **Betty Longton**, 1815

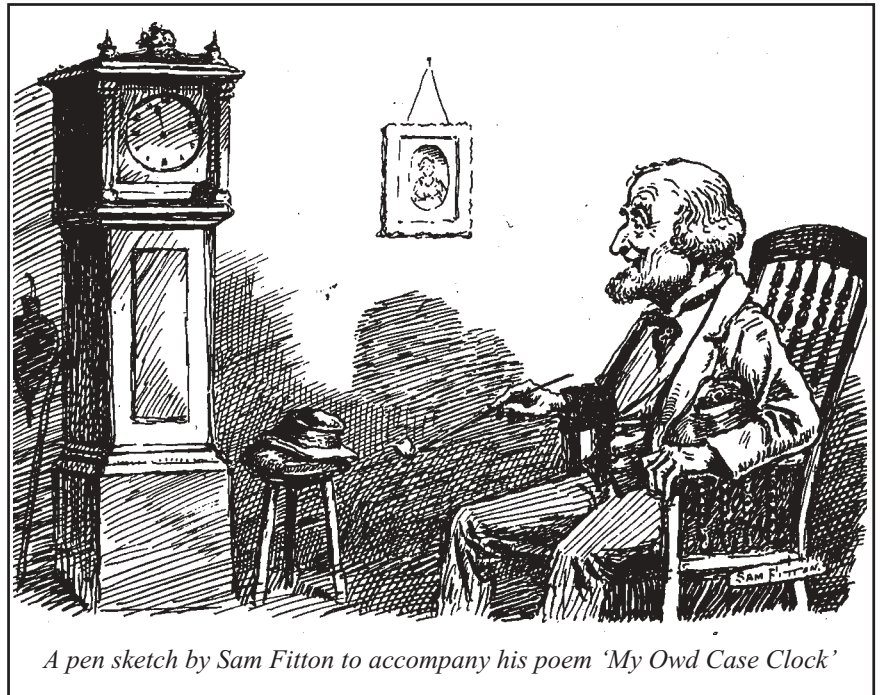
**George Robinson** born 29 March 1842, died 30 March 1902, farmer and labourer, married **Elizabeth Wood**, born 1847

**Fred Robinson** born 9 March 1837, died 17 November 1937, butcher, married **Ann Unsworth**, born 11 October 1872, lived at Ashton Road Farm, Golborne.

Any information on Robinsons in Lowton before 1840 would be most interesting.

C. Holden  
71 Manor Road  
Blackpool,  
Lancashire  
FY1 4EA

# MY OWD CASE CLOCK



A pen sketch by Sam Fitton to accompany his poem 'My Owd Case Clock'

We o' han' cherished things no doubt,  
We somehow feel we cornt do 'bowt,  
Some furniture we value heigh,  
We'n things 'at money couldna' beigh.  
I have an owd case-clock a' whoam  
I wouldna' sell for ony sum;  
It stood i' th' corner, so I'm tow'd  
When first I coom to live i'th' fow'd;  
It stons theer yet, an' neet an' day  
It measures time an' ticks away—  
"Tick, tock; tick, tock."

Its cheery dial seems to say:  
"Let's laugh to while the time away,"  
An' though it hasno' changed its chime  
It's sin some changes in its time;  
It's gazed on o' our household crew,  
It's watched 'em come, it's watched 'em goo.  
When little Jack were ta'en one day  
It watched us side his things away,  
An' when our tears began to flow  
It said "Cheer up, Time heals, I know;  
"Tick, tock; tick, tock."

It's like a sentinel i' th' nook;  
Th' owd lad con read me like a book,  
An when I've had an extra glass  
It seems to know, it does bi' th' Mass!  
That clock's both human an' divine;  
One neet I geet a bit o'er th' line;  
It chuckled, as it winked one e'e:  
"Tha's had a drop to' mich I see,"  
It hiccupped, "Well tha art a foo";  
The beggar seemed to wobble too :-  
"Tick, tock; tick, tock."

When little Bill were born, th' owd clock  
Seemed fain to have one moor to th' flock,  
But while it smiled it little knew  
His mother wouldna' live it through;  
It watched 'em lay her in her shroud  
An' somehow didna' tick so loud;  
It seemed to say: "There's trouble here,  
They'n lost their main-spring, too, I fear;  
I'll howd my noise till th' trouble's o'er."  
But now it ticks on as before :-  
"Tick, tock; tick, tock."

It's sin some marlocks in its time,  
When I were young an' in my prime  
It watched me courtin' eawr Nell;  
It seed us kiss, but winno' tell;  
It seed me smile on th' weddin' morn,  
An' swell wi' pride when th' first were born;  
It's sin o' th' childer in their pomp;  
It's watched 'em laugh, an' sing' an' romp,  
An' when I've joined 'em in their play  
It's said "I'm fain I'm wick to-day—  
"Tick, tock; tick, tock."

Alas! there coom a time when trade  
Were bad an' I felt much afraid  
I'd ha' to sell my dear owd clock  
To pay for corn to feed my flock,  
I felt distracted, Things grew worse,  
An' when a chap's an empty purse  
An' hawf-a-dozen meawths to feed,  
If he's a heart it's bound to bleed,  
I sowed th' owd couch to buy 'em bread,  
An' th' owd case-clock looked on an' said:  
"Tick, tock; tick, tock."

I axed th' owd clock: "What mun I do?  
I welly think tha'll ha' to goo;  
I'm loth to part wi' thee, owd lad,  
But th' childer starve, an' times are bad.  
Say shall I sell thee, too, owd friend,  
Or does ta think 'at times ull mend?  
I know tha'd raise a pound or two,  
So mun we part? Come, tell me true."  
I welly thowt it shook its yed;  
It seemed to frown on me an' said :-  
"Tick, tock; tick, tock."

I didna' sell th' owd clock at o'.  
For times improved, It seemed to know.  
It's like a dog, for wark or play,  
It knows quite every word I say.  
When times are good it looks so glad;  
Its dial drops when times are bad,  
Then, like a sage, it ticks an' sings,  
Remindin' me 'at time has wings;  
An' when I've gone to—God knows wheer,  
Th' owd clock ull still be tickin' theer:  
"Tick, tock; tick, tock."





The correspondence continues about the Princess (or rather, as Mr. Miller rightly points out - the Heritage Service's photographic archive confirms it - the Prince's) Cinema in Wigan. Ed.

## It's all in the name

Dear Editor,

In the latest edition of *Past Forward*, the letter from Mr. Jim Pryle purports to put the record straight about Mr. Bennet's letter. In fact, both correspondents make the basic mistake of incorrectly naming the cinema.

The cinema's name was the PRINCE'S Cinema - not PRINCESS. I should know - I was a regular customer there ever since its opening!

Mr. C. Miller  
28 Norbreck Crescent  
Wigan WN6 7RF

## PRINCE'S CINEMA OPENING

Dear Editor,

Regarding the opening of the Prince's Cinema in Wigan as reported in the Spring edition of *Past Forward* the local press commented as follows:

"Wearing a black two-piece suit and a black Breton sailor hat, Miss Anna Neagle, the British film actress, visited Wigan for the first time on Monday 29 October 1935, when she was present at the opening of the

## Bongs Wakes 1858 vintage

Dear Sir,

Sam Fitton - an appreciation  
I wonder if you would find the enclosed old newspaper cutting of interest for inclusion in *Past Forward* (right).

The caption "Tum Fowt" is local for "Tonge Fold" a district of Bolton. The most part of the newspaper was printed in Lancashire dialect as shown. I felt it was particularly interesting because of its reference to 'Tyldesley Bongs'.

Arthur Orrell  
33 Auberson Road  
Bolton BL3 3AU

Prince's Cinema in Wallgate which was built at a cost of £30,000 in the record time of three months. On arrival, she was taken to the lounge of the cinema where she was introduced to the Mayor, Councillor James Hall, who later declared the cinema open. John Allen Parkinson, Wigan's MP, expressed his thanks to the guests and directors and congratulated them on having built such a magnificent building in so short a time.

The first film to be shown was "The House of Rothschilds", featuring George Arliss who, at the time, was Britain's most distinguished film actor. At the conclusion of the proceedings, Miss Neagle paid a surprise visit to Wigan Infirmary where she left a bouquet of roses to decorate the ward."

James Fairhurst  
36 Tatton Drive  
Ashton-in-Makerfield  
Wigan WN4 9TY

See pp 5-7 for two further articles by Mr. Fairhurst.

# The Bolton Loominary,

TUMFOWT TELEGRAPH,

UN LANKSHIRE LOOKIN-GLASS

No. 39.]

SEPTEMBER 25, 1868.

[Vol. 10

## SPORTIN INTELLIGENCE.

### BONGS WAKES

As th' newspapers print notices oth sports ut, are to tak place at races, un sitch loike affairs, aw think its nobbut reet ut th' sports ut are to tak place at th' wakes uv sitch a lerge un important city as Tinsley Bongs, should ha th' benefit o publicashun; un aw therefore send you a bill, containin aw th' partikulars, trustin that, you'll foind a place for um i' your valuable papper; that those members oth greight family ut delight in rail owd English sports mny know wot there is in store for um, providin they'n a mind t' avail theirsels oth opportunity, un get up a chep trip on shanks galloway to th' scene uv aeshun.—JIM-O-JACK'S-O-RED-SALS-O-OWD-HARRY-LUNG-LEGS.

### FUST DAY, SETTURDAY, SEP. 25.

To stert wi, there'll be an exhibishun o Daylias, fruits, vegetables, roots, un settera, includin Eighrish appos, payshunt docks, smert-beawse, un dandelion.

Then there'll be—

- 1.—A Goose Snatching Match, for a purse o silver.
- 2.—A Wheelbarrow Race by peoplo cawd men, blindfolded, for five shillins. Three to stert, or no race.
- 3.—A Smookin Match, through a tubed pot (a taypot very loikely) by boath sexes, un uv aw ages, fro three heawrs to three-score un ten, for hawve-a-peawnd o bacco.
- 4.—A Grinnin Match through a collar, for a gallon uv ale.
- 5.—A Foot Race, by men uv aw ages, un aw condishuns, whether wooden-legged or crutched, for foive shillins.
- 6.—A Bowlin Match, for 10s, un a good name.
- 7.—"Speedy Relief," or Traikle Dippin, for two-un-sixpence, which ull be gien to th' candidate ut ull tak an oath on an owd spellin-book that he's full.

### SECOND DAY, MONDAY, SEP. 27.

- 1.—A Donkey Race, by Jackasses, for a new bridle. Three to stert, or no race. *Gentlemen* riders (not lads). No gentleman is expected to ride his own steed. The last comer-in to win.
- 2.—A Race after a Pig wi a soaped tail. He that catches said pig by th' tail un howds it will be *entitled* to 2s. 6d. Th' Bill doesn't say whether he'll get it or not. Praps that's not bin fully decided.
- 3.—A Handicap Race by Dugs, for a new collar, or th' cheighee uv a copper kettle. Ten to stert or no race. Th' chap that wins un chooses a kettle is expected to fill it wi aggomisheighny un trayt aw his friends to a drink.
- 4.—A Bowlin Match for a sweepstakes o 2s. 6d. each. Th' Bill says aw are invited to compete; un adds "win if you can!" which leovs it open to suspishun whether to win is not regerded as impossible.
- 5.—A Foot Race by Ladies, uv *all ages* un *ranks* (merk that!) for a new dress. Three to stert, or no proize. So if two runs they're to do it for th' fun oth thing, or to show to those whom it may concern that they can put their best leg forrud when theyn a mind.
- 6.—A Seck Race, by men only, for a new pair o clugs. Three to stert, or no race.

### TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28.

On this, the third day, there may be sport, or may be not; it aw depends on th' peculiar state uv affairs. Heawever, there is announced a Bow'in Match for a sweepstakes, open to aw England, un aw inquiries are ordered to be made "At the Bar;" a Foot Race by Gentlemen, over 60 vers uv age, for a new hat, just to fit th' block; a Doanciu Match, by Ladies, (uv aw ranks, uv course) acknowledgin theirsels over 50 vers uv age, for a new cap. Target Shootin also for proizes. Jumpin, un Wrostlin Matches.

Th' Bill winds up wi this splendid bit o English: "As well as any and all usual performances at such season, includin soaped poles for prizes." It also says "Engagements have already been made with such artistes that will (it is presumed) totally eclipse *anything of the sort* engaged in this locality for that occasion *in by gone* times." Th' Clerk oth Course has, uv course, consented to tak the usual course, un offshiate as before. Good order may therefore be expected, un everythin performed in true sportsmanlike fashun.

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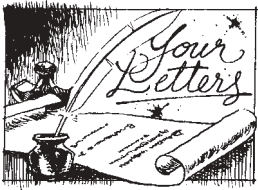
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**BOOK NOW AND BE SURE**

An advertisement from the 'Wigan Observer' dated Saturday, 15 November, 1941



## Another Hindley landmark bites the dust

Dear Editor,

Yet another once well-used Hindley landmark, the Loyal Regiment's former Barracks, with its rifle-range in Lord Street, has bit the dust. And this only months after Moresby House on Atherton Road, where at one time lived one of Hindley's most respected families, that of the younger Doctor Charles Brayton, was demolished.

The Loyal Regiment's

large headquarters in Lord Street was used by the Territorials for some time, and Cadets have also used the building. For years a knitwear business has used the building since the Loyals moved out. Now the site is supposedly scheduled to be made into flats. Sooner or later everything changes.

I recall how, around 20 years ago, invitations went out to interested persons to attend the Loyals' final dance, led by a four or five piece band. As usual there was a good buffet and bar. Unfortunately, on the night the heating system refused to work and, as the weather was rather inclement, a huge, red, electric blower was brought in.

**Kenneth Lucas  
80 Park Road  
Hindley, Wigan  
WN2 3RX**

## 'YOUNG' ARTHUR TURNER – VERSATILE ARTIST

Dear Mr. Editor,

I have only recently been introduced to your very interesting *Past Forward* magazine.

One such, dated Spring 1998, was of particular interest, pp 2, 3 containing an article about the artist Arthur Turner.

I am acquainted with his son "young" Arthur Turner, an old cycling acquaintance of mine, and living in Downhall Green Lane, Wigan. "Young" Arthur, from what I have seen of his sketches and paintings, has carried on the skills of his father.

On a recent cycling tour of Majorca, we rode out to a small quiet village in the north, where Arthur wished to sketch the statue of a famous young cycle-racing boy, a local hero, who unfortunately met with a fatal accident.

Arthur in his time has also been quite an artist on his bicycle, particularly at racing, managing, amongst many other trophies, to win the National Championship 24 hrs. T.T. event with a distance of 457 miles in 1954!

**W.L. Wilkinson  
Braeside, Foxholes Road  
Horwich, Bolton BL6 6AJ**



'Young' Arthur Turner sketching in Majorca.

# Mr. Wilcock's daughter throws some light on grocery store

Dear Sir,

I have been most interested in the items you have printed in issues 22 and 23 - regarding the premises of 779 Atherton Road, Hindley Green. As I am the daughter of Mr. Wilcock, a partner in the grocery store, I hope to be able to throw some light on the missing period 1909 to 1949.

Firstly, I have had the good fortune to be loaned a brochure printed in 1909 for a Bazaar at St. John's School in Hindley Green. In it I found an advertisement for the above premises owned by Messrs. Storey and Wright along with a shop in Leigh (see above). I know that my father (Albert Wilcock) returned from four years service in France in the first world war to work in this Leigh shop, but that sometime before 1922 he transferred to work under Mr. Storey in the Hindley Green shop and continued to do so until Mr. Storey retired in 1928. Then my father and Mr. Harry Ashurst (who I think had been working in the Leigh shop) formed the partnership of Wilcock and Ashurst, and worked together until 1956 when my father retired on health grounds. He died in February 1957. Mr. Ashurst carried on working in the shop a few more years until ill-health also forced him to retire.

You may find some of

## ERNIE'S NOT ALL RIGHT!

Dear Sir,

I noticed in the recent issue of *Past Forward* you mentioned Howfen (Westhoughton). And you have had the occasional item from that quarter.

The dialect item from Ernie Ford was interesting. But I don't think that he has got it all right. Westhoughton was different to Wingates, although it is only half a mile different. Have you any knowledge of that area, and where the name came from? I think Winnie Yates kept a pub there near the main road from Manchester to Preston, at the junction of Manchester Road and Chorley Road.

**J.H. Crompton  
65 Piedmont Road  
Plumstead, London  
SE18 1TB**

## STOREY & WRIGHT,

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DIVIDEND 3/3 IN THE £.

**779, ATHERTON RD., HINDLEY GREEN**

AND

**65, RAILWAY ROAD, LEIGH.**

my memories of the 1930's and 1940's interesting. The shop always had a van but as Mr. Ashurst did not drive he used to go by bicycle to collect orders from customers, and was in the shop during the rest of the week. My father drove the van, going to Excel Bakery in Hindley each morning for fresh bread, taking out the order to customers and visiting wholesalers. In between he did the book-keeping and served in the shop. Another job in the early days was the packing of provisions. I have memories, as a child, of seeing sacks of flour and sugar, etc. in the back room. All these commodities had to be weighed and bagged. Then there were smaller sacks of dried fruits - currants, raisins and sultanas - all to be weighed into half pound packs in blue, purple and pink paper, respectively. (Try making a neat parcel, tied with string, of half a pound of currants in a piece of paper about 10" square!)

During the years I remember there were many problems to be overcome so that customers could receive their food. One Sunday

morning in the 1940's, we awoke to an extremely heavy snowfall and on Monday morning Atherton Road was impassable for traffic. My father, along with myself and a friend to help, pushed a handcart to Hindley (2 miles) to collect the bread. During the war-time blitz on Manchester a Manchester wholesaler was unable to deliver to shops. I went with my father in the van to help to collect the provisions and I will never forget the devastation. Many buildings had been demolished, some were partly demolished standing like skeletons, rubble and bricks were everywhere, all clouded in smoke. For miles the van had to be manoeuvred round all the rubble and dozens of hosepipes lying in the gutters and roads, but we managed to get the food back to Hindley Green. War time rationing brought ration books, coupons and points to be dealt with - but that's another story.

**Joyce Wilcock  
952 Atherton Road  
Hindley Green, Wigan  
WN2 4TA**

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Mapping

the Millennium