

# PAST FORWARD

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***The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service***

**FREE**

## From the Editor

One downside of *Past Forward* - and judging by all your comments probably the only one! - is that it brings home to me, and indeed to all those involved in its production, just how quickly the year flies. I seem to have only just put one issue to bed, before it's time to start preparation for the next one. To those of you who have asked me if it would be possible to have four issues per year instead of three - believe me, there just would not be enough days in the year ..... not to mention funding.

The most newsworthy event during recent weeks has been the opening of the *Year 2000* exhibition in the History Shop. As I write, the exhibition has now been open for a week, and has already attracted much praise and appreciation. Full details appear on pp 16,17; but I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Philip and Dawn, and all Heritage Service staff who have been involved on making the exhibition such a success - despite having to work under the difficult circumstances brought about by staff vacancies. My thanks also to all those in the private sector who have contributed to the exhibition.

The *Mapping the Millennium* Festival has continued its tour of the Borough, and has been well received. The majority of the 28 panels have now been displayed in their locality. Some more maps, which have not appeared so far in *Past Forward*, can be seen on the back cover of this issue. *The Millennium Tree*, a play specially commissioned for the Millennium, is also nearing the end of its run as I write, with the final performance imminent, as part of the Ashton festival. Thanks to all those involved for a splendid production.

The audio-visual presentation, *This Is A Borough*, continues to attract a lot of comments and praise - and enquiries as to how to get hold of a copy. Unfortunately, it is not available for sale, at least for the present - see p14.

On a sadder note, we are losing another member of staff! After years of priding ourselves on its extremely low turnover of staff, the Heritage Service has lost three in just over a year, either through retirement or moving to another job, and we are now about to lose a fourth! Joanne Revill, our Archivist, is on the move. During her short tenure, though, Joanne has made great strides in developing the service, and we will certainly be sorry to see her go (her farewell *News from the Archives* appears on p7).

On a happier note, I am delighted with this issue of *Past Forward*. It has an excellent mix of articles, some serious and informative, some nostalgic and even poignant (Fred Holcroft, for example, has written a splendid piece commemorating the 75th anniversary of Wigan's Cenotaph), but others in a much more light-hearted vein, with a delightful sense of humour. Many of the 'old faithfuls' are here again, but I'm delighted to welcome some new contributors to the fold. Finally, may I take this opportunity to thank all *Past Forward* readers for their continued support, in whatever form, and to wish all of you a very happy Christmas and a prosperous 2001. And don't forget the History Shop for that special Christmas gift - the selection this year is better than ever!



## ‘Something for Your Stocking Madam?’

Whether it's a 'bit of fun' or 'something unusual' you're looking for we're bound to have something to 'tickle your fancy' at the History Shop this Christmas.

We're brimming full of stocking fillers for the kids, including toys you'll know and love and new ones you'll grow to. There are chunky wooden jigsaws in lovely bright colours, from dinosaurs and alligators to Christmas trees and a nativity scene.

Our jewellery selection caters for young and old with both modern and 'antique' designs in silver. New ranges also include children's jewel boxes with matching necklace and earrings and lustrous enamel boxes for the more sophisticated. These are in various designs, including a cabbage and caterpillar. Don't believe us? Then come down and see for yourself!

At the more expensive end of the scale we have a variety of gift ideas, including Victorian cherub paperweights. If you like candle holders you'll find none better than the selection we have in finest pewter of Celtic and Rennie McKintosh design.

As usual we have a large selection of quality Christmas cards, local heritage related items and publications and coal figures. To coin a phrase (and we have plenty of those as well - coins, not phrases!) there's 'something for everyone'.

**Covers: Front** - Mystery Object - Exhibitions Officer Dawn Wadsworth poses the question in the History Shop's new exhibition. **Back** - Two of the Parish Maps on display towards the end of the *Mapping the Millennium* Festival: Ince-in-Makerfield (top) and North Swinley (bottom).

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:  
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Wigan Heritage Service, Market Suite, The Galleries, Wigan WN1 1PX

# A Constant Pledge An Obligation Fulfilled

## *Wigan Cenotaph and War Memorial to the Fallen of the Great War 1914-18*

**THE Cenotaph to almost 2000 men - and one woman - from the former County Borough of Wigan who fell in the Great War, 1914-18 was unveiled 75 years ago on Saturday 17 October 1925.**

The memorial which was unveiled that day was the culmination of six years' effort and hard work. As early as September 1919 Wigan Town Council had debated the possibility of erecting a memorial to the fallen, and in November 1919 a War Memorial Committee was established, chaired by Alderman Ainscough. This committee met at irregular intervals to co-ordinate arrangements. In September 1920 the possibility of replacing the temporary shrine to the fallen, which had been spontaneously built in Mesnes Park, with a permanent memorial was put forward to the Borough Engineer, who estimated the cost at £1500. In April 1921 the committee recommended that the fountain in Mesnes Park should be removed and replaced by the new war memorial; the Council's Property, Parks and Markets Committee, however, disapproved of the choice of site.

Discussions in committee concerning a suitable location continued and several locations were reviewed:

- \* various other sites within Mesnes Park.
- \* outside the Post Office in Wallgate.
- \* at the junction of Wigan Lane and Swinley Road.
- \* on the Market Square.
- \* in the Market Place.
- \* in the grounds of the Royal Infirmary.

Fundraising also continued and in November 1923 a street collection raised over £2000 - a tremendous sum in those days. In

1924, with time rapidly passing, the War Memorial Committee finally chose an acceptable site - immediately in front of All Saints Parish Church, in the very centre of the town - and the Rector and Parish Council promptly donated the land.

### **Unveiled**

Events now moved rapidly and by February 1925 the full Town Council accepted the design by their chosen architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, who had built Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral. By May the sculptor Edward Owen Griffiths was able to commence work levelling the site and creating what is now All Saints Gardens; construction advanced so rapidly that it was finished in time to be unveiled in October 1925, allowing a Remembrance Day Service the following month. The final cost was £4,000, paid for entirely by public subscription.

Shortly after noon on Saturday 17 October 1925 both Wallgate and Market Place were thronged with a huge crowd and traffic was halted all afternoon. The weather during the morning had been showery but the rain ceased shortly after 3 o'clock. The small square immediately around the Cenotaph was restricted to ticket holders, and owing to the shortage of space it was only possible to accommodate one relative for each of the deceased whose names were engraved on the tablets, although a special enclosure was set aside for the orphan children.

The Mayor, who had lost a son in the war, opened the ceremony with a short speech:

*"We are come to honour our brethren who gave their lives for us and for this country in a just cause. This memorial is the witness of our love for their memory; and the constant pledge and reminder to us of their valour and our duty."*

Mr. J.M. Ainscough, the main driving force behind the project, then added:

*"We are assembled this afternoon to fulfil an obligation which has been far too long delayed; an obligation to place in some conspicuous position a permanent tangible memorial to those of our townsmen who gave their lives in the great struggle of 1914-18 that we might have peace and security. After a long and anxious deliberation it was decided to place the memorial on this site in the very centre and heart of our town, a crowned cross the symbol of sacrifice and victory. On these stones we have carved the names not of those who distinguished themselves in the fight; nor that great number who, thank God, returned unscathed many of whom are with us today, but the names of our fellow townsmen who went out in the vigour of strength and youth never to return. I trust then that in the future our people will approach this spot with even greater reverence than in the past and that this memorial may never be defiled by any sacrilegious hands."*

### **Military Dignitaries**

Among the military dignitaries present was Colonel Sir Henry Darlington, Commanding Officer of the 1/5 Manchesters, Wigan's territorial battalion, and Major General Solly-Flood who had

commanded their division, 42nd Division. The actual unveiling was by General Lawrence who had been brigadier of the 1/5 Manchesters in Gallipoli and had commanded the 66th Division including the 2/5 Manchesters. He spoke briefly:

*"I believe that if those whose names are on this monument could convey a message to us today it would be to say:*

*'Be of good cheer  
The night is passing  
The dawn is at hand  
Only have faith in  
yourselves*

*Have faith in your country.'  
And perhaps what is better still, when your time comes and you pass to another life you will meet these old comrades that have gone before you and you will be able to say:*

*'We carried on the fight.  
We never gave in.'*

*I unveil this memorial placed here in the memory of the men of Wigan who fell in the Great War."*

After the Doxology and National Anthem the church bells pealed and there was wreath-laying, first by officials and relatives of the fallen then by the general public. As he laid his personal wreath the late Private Thomas Woodcock's little son wore his father's Victoria Cross.

### **Poignant Reading**

How were the names collected? Already in July 1919 the Borough Library had written to the local newspapers to ask families and next-of-kin of the fallen to submit individual names and had circularised local churches and firms with a request for them to send in lists of their congregations or employees killed in action. Their replies exist in the Borough

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## A Constant Pledge An Obligation Fulfilled

### *Wigan Cenotaph and War Memorial to the Fallen of the Great War 1914-18*

*Continued from page 3*

Archives and make poignant reading.

Sadly this polite but low-key method of assembling the names was doomed to be less than comprehensive and there are hundreds of missing names. To be fair the response must have been erratic. Many families would not have seen the request for names, some families had died out or had left the district, while a few families obstinately refused to accept that their loved ones were dead, and declined to co-operate. Many of the fallen, particularly the Irish, had relatives who lived farther afield. Many of the missing names are of men who had fallen early in the war, or who had no known grave, or who had not belonged to local regiments, or who had fought in distant campaigns. Surprisingly many who had not died abroad but had died of wounds at home and been buried in local cemeteries are also missing from the Cenotaph. Another similarly excluded category is of those who died in the years following 1918 from injuries caused by the hostilities - particularly from gas. The full list of such cases may never be known.

### Many mistakes

Sadly too, the Cenotaph entries contain many mistakes. The process by which the names were collected was quite faulty and made some rather glaring errors. Some names were sent in more than once by different family members, usually by the widow and by the parents, so causing needless repetition. One man is even named three times. Some names were spelt wrongly, so causing further duplication. Often the details accompanying the name were either erroneous or incomplete, usually with regard to the unit in which he served. One man is named on the Cenotaph although he was not dead!

The Cenotaph holds 1,893



*Recently retired Local History Officer Bob Blakeman interpreting the War Memorial to a class of local schoolchildren.*

names of whom all but one were military. The great majority were in the army:

Army	1,857
Navy	20
R.M.	9
R.F.C.	6
other	1

Wigan was an overwhelmingly working-class town (the census of 1911 shows that out of 33,355 males over 10 years old - minimum working age at that time - 29,043 men had a job) so that most men served as private soldiers or non-commissioned officers; only 57 commissioned officers are listed. Wiganers died in every theatre of the war:

Western Front	1,579
Gallipoli	210
Mesopotamia	48
Salonika	22
Egypt	18
Germany (P.O.W.)	7
Russia	2
Africa	1
at sea	6

Wiganers served in almost every regiment in the British Army - 84 battalions and batteries plus the Anzacs, Canadians, Royal Marines and Royal Flying Corps. Wiganers were present and died at every phase of the war: on the retreat from Mons in 1914, wading ashore at Gallipoli in 1915, going over the top at the Somme in 1916, struggling through the mud to Passchendaele in 1917, facing Germany's final attack in

March 1918 before advancing to victory in the autumn of that same year. When HMS *Good Hope* was sunk at the Battle of Coronel in 1914, Arthur Worthington from Newtown and Thomas Roberts from Scholes, two reservists on board for their annual fortnight's refresher training when it hurriedly put to sea at the outbreak of war, also went down. When HMS *Indefatigable* and HMS *Queen Mary* blew up during the Battle of Jutland two more Wiganers were lost, Able-Seaman John Bennett from Ashton's Yard and stoker Francis Blundell from Poolstock. When Earl Kitchener, Minister of War, was lost at sea travelling to Russia when HMS *Hampshire* hit a mine off Orkney, so too was stoker William Wood of Harman Street, Wigan.

### Casualties

Casualties occurred across the political spectrum: Thomas Cartmel Walker and Basil Scarisbrick Walker whose father owned the Pagefield Ironworks; Andrew Brown Tickle, only son of James Tickle, owner of the Vulcan Iron Foundry, Newtown; Arthur Walsh whose father was Labour M.P. for Ince; Joseph Hargreaves whose father was the president of the Cardroom and Ringspinners' Trade Union; Alfred Jackson whose father was the head of the Wigan Co-

operative Movement.

At least 48 families lost two sons in the war. There may be more. Three families in Wigan lost three sons - the Longshaw family from Whelley and Scholes, the Mulraney family from Scholes and the Malone family from Wallgate. Missing from the Cenotaph, as they lived outside the old County Borough boundary, are the four James brothers killed on active service, the sons of Rev. C.H. James, Vicar of St. David's, Haigh. Four families lost the father and one son - Thomas Roden, father and son, from Caroline Street, who both worked at Wigan Rolling Mills; John Lowe and his son Nathan; John Culkin (49) and his son James (19) of 21 Shaw Street, Pemberton and John Thomas Morris and his son Stephen. The elder Morris aged 50 was a former soldier who had fought in Egypt in 1882 and South Africa in 1900 and although a time-expired reservist had volunteered as soon as war broke out.

The only woman on the Cenotaph is Jane Johnston, a stewardess on the Canadian Pacific freighter *S.S. Missanabie*, on a voyage from Liverpool to New York when it was torpedoed and sunk on 9 September 1918 by a German submarine off the south coast of Ireland, with the loss of 45 lives



including Mrs. Johnston aged 39.

Some talented and promising careers were cut short by the war, including Edward Arthur Simm, described by the Wigan Observer as:

*"A promising young artist, having several sketches accepted by the periodical Bystander and many reproduced in this newspaper."*

## Shot down in combat

John Yates Taylor, an old boy of Wigan Grammar School, was one of very few Wiganers in the R.F.C. and was only 20 when he was shot down in combat with two enemy planes on 6 July 1917. His last letter home described an incident only three days earlier:

*"Suddenly we heard 'pop pop' and behind us we saw three enemy machines above our tail. They dived on us in turn firing their machine guns. My observer fired 100 rounds into them and they cleared off. We had tons of bullet holes in our plane, one tyre burst, the main spar was shot through and half the elevator cables were shot away. With luck we just managed to land."*

A few days later his luck ran out.

Lewis Bradley was the only fatality among the 21 playing members of Wigan Northern Union Rugby Club who enlisted, although C. Molloy was permanently blinded. A native of Gloucester, he was playing for Pontypool when he signed for Wigan in 1911. His obituary in a local sports paper included this assessment of his talent:

*"Quick off the mark he was often past his opposing threequarter before the latter realised Bradley had the ball. Shall we ever forget this speedy wing threequarter at Central Park? He was the idol of the crowd and it only seems like yesterday that he was dashing down the touchline, his long flowing hair blowing in the wind, those long raking strides, and that final natural swerve."*

**These are just a miniscule fraction of the numbers involved. There is a story behind every name.**

**Fred Holcroft**

● A photograph of the opening ceremony appeared in *Past Forward* 21, p21. Ed.

# Pit Brow Girls' Protest

THE 1911 Coal Mines Act, the most important piece of mining legislation of the 20th century, caused consternation, while being framed, among the pit brow girls, because of an amendment. This,

proposed by Sir Arthur Markham, MP., a wealthy coal owner, excluded all women from colliery work except those needed for cleaning purposes.

There was an immediate protest from Wigan for many of the women at work on the pit brow had lost their husbands in mining accidents and had children to support. For others, because of health reasons, the alternative of mill work was unsuitable. An appeal was made by the women to the town's representatives who were told that great hardship would result if this form of employment were taken from them. Support was given at once by Wigan's mayor and mayoress, Mr. Sam Wood and his wife, Stephen Walsh, the

Ince MP, Mr. R.N. Neville, Wigan's MP, Mr. J. Knowles, JP, Dr. Cooke of Aspall and Haigh, Dr. Angrion, a Wigan surgeon and the Vicar of Abram, Rev. Twemlow.

## Deputation

It was decided that a deputation be sent to the Home Secretary, made up of 43 pit brow girls from the collieries of Abram, Coppull, Haydock, Hindley, Ince, Pemberton, West Leigh and West Houghton. To avoid the suggestion that financial help was received from the colliery owners who had an interest, it was agreed that each would be responsible for their own expenses. On Thursday 8 August, 1911, the deputation left Wigan at 10.20 am and arrived at Euston at 2 pm, from where it was conveyed by brakes to the Buckingham Hotel, the White House and the Morris and Browns Hotel, all in the Strand. Mrs. Wood, the Lady Mayoress, accompanied the women as chaperone.

After lunch, the girls put on their pit brow clothes in readiness to proceed to the House of Commons. Marching through Whitehall their progress created an undoubted sensation among the London people, their unique attire of shawls, aprons (all freshly laundered) and "wooden boots" i.e. clogs, being something to which the Metropolis was altogether unaccustomed. On reaching the House, the deputation was shown to the room where the Coal Mines Committee was sitting and where Mr. Masterton was waiting to receive them. Mr. Winston Churchill, the Home Secretary, in passage from one engagement to another, looked in for a few moments and then departed, leaving his deputy to hear the deputation's case.

## Fit and proper occupation

Mr. Masterton told the women he wished they had

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*The pit brow girls of Long Lane Colliery (aka Crowpit), Bryn Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield. The pit closed Easter 1955.*



# Pit Brow Girls' Protest

Continued from page 5

come earlier for the amendment had been fully discussed the day before and carried by the Committee. The only question as he saw it was whether colliery work was a fit and proper occupation for women. Sir Arthur Markham on behalf of the amendment said that the conditions of mining differed entirely from the conditions of any other industry. He maintained that "women are engaged in loading wagons, moving heavy tubs on the pit bank and working in an atmosphere of dust which makes them filthy. In some cases, women are working among machinery which is an added danger. The lifting of coal, in many cases very heavy pieces, sometimes causes internal trouble which is a serious danger to health. In some pit districts, such as Durham and Northumberland, women have long since vanished from the pit brow."

Sir Arthur concluded, "There is a growing disposition despite the protest being made to this Committee to follow those who have voluntarily abandoned the work for the more natural occupations for women."

## "Junoesque figures"

Stephen Walsh (MP, Ince), who had introduced the deputation, said he had had 30 years experience of the work of the pit brow girls of whom his wife had been one. The old screens had been replaced by new ones and consequently the work was much cleaner. The old conditions were disappearing and belts were now being used that eliminated dust and most were enclosed against the inclement weather. The women lived in a district in which it was not easy to find other occupations. In the Wigan district there was a population of 7,000 per square mile, the most dense population in the world. The girls had chosen their occupation, wished to continue in it and, not having the vote, had a right to be consulted by the Committee and their views given fullest consideration. He urged Mr. Masterton to listen to the

womens' case, saying it was not a party matter but one on which all sections were agreed. Mr. Neville (MP for Wigan), corroborated Mr. Walsh's evidence and added that all the women were perfectly healthy and anyone who studied the classics would know what he meant when he said they had Junoesque figures [laughter].

The Mayor of Wigan, Alderman Sam Wood, said, "I have lived in Wigan all my life and have been associated with colliery workers for the last 25 years.....As recently as last Monday I made a surprise tour of the collieries and saw between 400 - 500 girls at work. Only three were handling tubs and gravitation was the motivating force for the road sloped gently to the tippler. That the work is not heavy is proved by the fact that girls of 16 can do the work satisfactorily. No woman now handled wagons and pieces of coal on a belt weighing more than 30 lbs."

Dr. Angrion, a physician in Wigan for 25 years, said that in all that time he had never had to deal with a case of hernia among the women. He told the Committee he had gone further and consulted the matron of Wigan Infirmary, Mrs. Macaulay. "She told me that in her 21 years there she could not remember a single case of this nature being treated at the hospital or as an out-patient. The women like the work and view the prospect of being prevented from doing it with great alarm."

## Very healthy

Dr. Cooke, another Wigan doctor, said that the girls were very healthy compared with other classes of workers. He said the young women had been forced by ill-health to leave the mill, and lately the manager of Strangeways Colliery at Hindley had told him that 30 of the 90 women employed there had come there on doctor's orders. At one of the Coppull pits a 71 year old woman was still

working, having been on the pit brow for well over half a century. The vicar of Abram testified as to the moral character of the women.

Mr. Masterton was greeted with cheers when he said that he had toured the Wigan collieries in November last and had come to the same conclusion as those who gave evidence previously. He regretted that the deputation had arrived late to see him for the amendment had been carried in Committee. However, he promised that the Government would do its best to see the amendment defeated when the Bill came before the House. The deputation then retired to be shown over the House by Mr. Stephen Walsh, then treated to tea on the terraces by Mr. Neville and Mr. Harmer Bannerman.

## Sightseeing in London

The next day, Friday 9 August, the women left Euston after a morning sightseeing in London and arrived back in Wigan at 9.20 pm. They were greeted at the Wallgate station by an enthusiastic large crowd and as the party made its way along the platform towards the entrance they showed themselves to be in rare humour, as they sang, "We're the Lasses fra' Lancashire" and other songs. Cheers were raised for the Mayor and Mayoress with the crowd singing "For he's a Jolly Good Fellow" and "She's a Jolly Good Lady". When silence was obtained the Mayor requested the pit brow girls to sing the National Anthem in which the crowd joined heartily and Auld Lang Syne.

Later in the month Mr. Wood was called from a meeting to receive an urgent telegram from the House of Commons. It said briefly, "Amendment defeated. Regards, Neville and Walsh". It was half a century later when technology in the form of washeries banished the women from the pit brow for ever.

James Fairhurst



# News From the Archives

WELL, it is all change again here in the Archive. Whilst this is only my third article, it is in fact my last. To regular readers of *Past Forward* it probably seems that I have only just arrived although it is in fact only a week off one year. I am off to the Liverpool University Archive to work on a specific cataloguing project using specially designed archival software (Encoded Archival Description). A lot has been achieved in the year that I have been here and seeing the progress that has been achieved, it does make me sad to leave.

**A limited service will be available on Tuesdays and Thursdays, until a new Archivist is in post. If you wish to see any documents, please book in advance. To avoid disappointment, please do not arrive without speaking to a member of staff. I must apologise for any disruption to the service whilst the post is vacant and refer people to the History Shop for any advice.**

However, before I go, I would like to thank all members of staff and the public who have given me help and support during my time here and wish you all the very best with your continuing research. I will leave you with some useful information for all of you with an interest in local and family history.

## 1901 Census

Many of you are eagerly awaiting the release of the 1901 census, so here is an information update on the present situation. The information collected for each decennial census is kept closed for 100 years. The release of census data collected in 1901 is scheduled for January 2002. When it came to planning the release of the 1901 material the Public Record Office in London set itself the immense challenge of making the information available to researchers worldwide via the Internet. The project involves scanning microfilms of the 1901 census and transcribing the returns for approximately 32.5 million individuals into a database that can be searched by name. A pilot of the project will be made available early in 2001 using the 1891 census for Norfolk.

The Public Record Office's web site has current information and an email address for comments and questions, plus mailing lists for people wanting to be kept up-to-date with progress. The web site is certainly worth visiting if you are interested in the past.

## Recent Accessions

### DDZ C/1 Wigan Rugby League Club Programmes

For all you fans of Wigan Rugby League club you may be interested in a collection we received in August. A local resident in the borough deposited a small, but delightful, collection of family memorabilia. This collection also included a larger collection of Wigan Rugby League club Programmes. The collection is not complete, but covers matches from the 1960's up to the 1990's. The bulk of the collection is from the early 1980's. Earlier programmes are more sporadic. The programmes are in good condition and are certainly worth perusing if you like rugby.

The collection has been catalogued but is too large to publish here, so if you wish to view any of the programmes please telephone the Archive to make an appointment, quoting the document reference DDZ C/1 and the years you are interested in. For security reasons programmes will be limited to three per person at any one time.

### DDS 56 Minute Books of the Golborne Townswomen's Guild

Townswomen's Guilds began about 70 years ago and came originally from the Women's Suffrage Movement, when four guilds were formed as an experiment in the study of citizenship. At a Public Meeting on 20 March 1963 it was resolved that an evening Townswomen's Guild would be formed in Golborne; 84 members joined on this date. The Guild still exists today and recently deposited their minute books from 1964 to 1995.

### DDS 1 Record Book of the Wigan and District Field Club Volume 3

The Archive is already in possession of the papers of the Wigan and District Field Club, which includes other record books. Anyone with an interest in the natural history of the local area should have a look at the record books of this society.

### EA 4048 Photographs of Church Walking Days (Leigh area)

A collection of 27 photographs was found among the possession of a Leigh lady who recently died. The photographs are mainly of church walking days in the 1930's.

### CB Wi A2/47 Minute Books of the Wigan Youth Service

A collection of administrative minute books relating to youth clubs in the local area that closed down in the mid 1990's. Areas covered include Tyldesley, Leigh First Lane, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Ince and Platt Bridge Tramlines to name but a few. There are access restrictions in place on some of the documents at the request of the department.

### DP 23 Registers of St Nathaniel's, Platt Bridge

The Archive is the diocesan record office for the 37 churches in the deaneries of Wigan and Winwick. We thank the Reverend Kevin Crinks for depositing more recent registers to add to the existing collection in our possession. Hopefully these will be available on microfilm in the near future.

**All of the collections above are catalogued and can be viewed by appointment when the full service resumes.**

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**



# Dance to the Music of Time

THE item on dance halls and coffee bars in the last issue of *Past Forward* generated a tremendous response. It is clear that many readers still have vivid memories of Miss Gee in particular. A big thank you to all those who so generously shared their memories with me. The following are only two of the many replies received.


Dear Mr. Ashcroft,

Re your article in the Summer 2000 issue of *Past Forward*. I am enclosing a photocopy of a programme, which is advertising a Display of Dancing by the Pupils of Miss Gee. This event was held in aid of the war effort, and, as you can see the two final dances represented our dance teacher's patriotism for her country, I think we were a little too young to appreciate the significance at the time. The only dance I can remember was 'I want to be happy'. The names of all the dancers are listed on the back of the programme. I was E. Taylor, and was the one who led the troupe out onto the stage.

My mother would take me every Saturday morning to the upstairs studio in King Street West. You can still make out the name of Gee's School of Dancing on the wall as you walk along King Street West, although it is rather faded now. I was in the tap group and although I loved tap dancing I would have liked to have been in the ballet class, but I was deemed to be too tall.

I left the dancing school shortly after this concert, but I remember I was very happy during that time and feel very proud to have danced on the stage where so many famous people have performed. I am still in contact with two of the dancers; it would be interesting to know what happened to the others.

**E. Berry**  
38 Larch Avenue  
Pemberton  
Wigan WN5 9QN



WIGAN HIPPODROME.

## Display of Dancing

BY PUPILS of Miss GEE.

22nd MAY, 1943.

**PROGRAMME.**

OPENING ENSEMBLE.		PUPILS TAKING PART.	
I WANT TO BE HAPPY ... .. Cabaret Class	OPERATIC ... .. Operatic Class	E. Abbott, J. Ainscough, J. Appleton, I. Bidly, O. Berry, M. Barnes, J. Bamford, M. Brown, D. Birchall, J. Blackledge, A. Culliffe, J. Crompton, J. Clough, J. Chadwick, J. Charnock, A. Darbyshire, I. & J. Darbyshire, M. Delan, U. Day, M. Doved, I. Fairhurst, F. Farrinwood, L. Fowler, I. Fenton, B. Fenton, D. Fairbrother, A. Gore, B. Griffiths, E. Gregory, R. Green, B. Green, I. Grosvenor, R. Gerrard, M. Gibbost, M. & R. Hold, B. Hazen, A. & M. Houghton, I. Houghton, I. Hazewell, C. Hallwell, A. Hart, D. Hampton, J. Hales, A. & M. Harrison, M. Heaps, J. Hiley, E. Jess, P. Jordan, T. Kelly, J. Kenyon, H. Lybch, K. Lowe, J. Lang, L. Laitheale, A. Marsh, I. Moore, J. McClure, Y. Macsparos, F. Nicholson, O. Pees, J. Price, U. Pilkington, D. Prescott, J. Rigby, D. Rothwell, R. Roughley, B. Smith, C. Smith, N. Sison, S. Smallshaw, J. Skirvington, J. Steadford, J. Smith, K. Stevens, G. Shuttleworth, M. Taylor, M. Tacey, E. Taylor, M. Tickle, R. Tomlinson, M. Unsworth, A. Valentine, E. Wood, O. Williams, J. Wilkinson, G. Waring, U. Waring, B. Wirestasley, M. Whittle, A. Yates, J. Yates, C. Yates, M. Burgess, B. Darnell, E. Earton, V. Moletram, K. Molineux, J. Shephard, M. Warner, C. Hart, M. Hardman.	
"MANDY IS TWO" ... .. Babies and 1st Class	TINIES ... .. Mildred, Dorothy, Margaret and Yvonne		
JOHNNY DOUGHBOY ... .. Jane and Theresa	CAMEO ... .. Margaret, Rita and Joan		
"MOONLIGHT COCKTAIL" ... .. Jean, Rita, Norman & Marial	LA CAMPARSITA ... .. 3rd and 4th Class		
GARLAND ... .. 2nd Class	"ONE DOZEN ROSES" ... .. Jean		
RUSSIAN PEASANT ... .. Joan and Norman	TEDDY BEAR'S PIC-NIC ... .. Irene, Eileen and Iris		
"SOFT SHOE SHUFFLE" ... .. Iris, Eileen and Irene	SWING TIME ... .. 4th and 5th Class		
URCHINS ... .. Jean and Rita	BABY GIPSIES ... .. Babies and Helen, Margaret, Margaret, Joyce, Carol and Joan		
FAIRIES AND ELVES ... .. Babies and 1st Class	8 TAPPING FEET ... .. Theresa, Audrey, Joan and June		
TARANTELLA ... .. 4th Class	GOLLY ... .. Spring		
"YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU" ... .. Rita	"STARDUST" ... .. Cabaret Class		
PINK AND YELLOW ... .. 2nd and 3rd Class	"OH! THE PITY OF IT ALL" ... .. Marial		
"ELMERS TUNE" ... .. Exam. Class	A. T. S. ... .. Marie, Eileen, Iris, Irene and Rank		
WAITER, PORTER & UPSTAIRS MAID ... .. Mary, Irene, Audrey	ENGLAND ... .. Ensemble		
HARLEM ... .. Cabaret Class	IRELAND ... .. Ensemble		
	SCOTLAND ... .. Ensemble		
	WALES ... .. Ensemble		
<b>INTERVAL.</b>	<b>GOD SAVE THE KING.</b>		

Dear Mr. Ashcroft,

Your article (eaters, shoppers and dancers) brought happy memories to me. In 1948 I met my husband Joe at Gee's School of Dancing and we were together for 51 years.

Saturday night at Gees was the highlight of the week. It was a family affair. Marion Gee (always spoken of as Miss Gee) and her husband Harry used to

demonstrate new dances and give private lessons in modern and Latin American dancing; pupils were rewarded with Gold, Silver or Bronze medals. Miss Gee's mother always served tea and biscuits at the interval.

Whenever any local churches or works held their annual dances at the Court Hall or the Empress Ballroom, we used to dance the night away - that is until 10.30 pm,

when the last waltz was played. Special dances were allowed to carry on until 12 midnight. Happy Days!

**Florence Westhead**  
2 Crescent House  
School Street  
Hr. Ince  
Wigan WN2 2AX





# Take Your Partners Please

WHILST still an Atherton schoolboy and a Briarcroft Club member in 1950, I weighed up what joys were associated with the pleasant pastime of ballroom dancing and in a few short years I was hooked, spending time reaping satisfaction, tripping the light fantastic around various dance floors, dancing sometimes to big bands like Ted Heath and Johnny Dankworth used to have, at Blackpool Tower, Blackpool Winter Gardens and Morecambe's Floral Hall.

Friday evening dances were held at Howe Bridge St. Michaels school around 1950, and elaborate, more expensive "Farmers Balls" and "Police Balls" were organised at Atherton's Formby Hall, a hall which for years showed "Bobbie Beacon" - police, road-safety films for local children. Around 1952, whilst running out my final school months in Mr. Dixon's class at Hindley's Argyle Street School, I learned that recorded "music for dancing" was played in the gymnasium at dinner-time.

## Ince Public Hall

Most routine, basic and advanced dancing-steps were learned and practised at either Tommy Moss's or Marion Gee's (Wigan) dance schools, but the 'Court Dance School' had an upper-floor studio

besides the Station Road Ritz Cinema, and Bowdens had another grand dance school off Argyle Street, near to Hindley Labour Club. The old record-players never ceased playing!

Dancers won't need reminding that the Ince Public Hall had "tremendously-sprung" floors. How many Incers have attained interval pass-outs, quaffed a short or an alternative good-headed pint at the Manley Pub opposite Ince Public?

It was at the Ince Public Hall that in 1955 I first danced a barn dance, "A Pride of Erin", and a square-tango, and quickstepped to "The Yellow Rose of Texas". Thousands danced to the "Wheels Cha Cha", and to Frankie Vaughan's great hit "Green Door". "Love is a Many Splendoured Thing", "Tammy", "When You Lose the One You Love", "Till" and "Always" were unforgettable dance melodies. Think back to your own dancing days!

## Wigan Empress Hall

The Wigan Empress Hall and the Casino were always popular venues, as were Leigh Casino, Bolton Palais, Lower Ince Labour Club, St. Andrew's Labour Club, Scholes Labour Club; many, who liked to combine bingo with dancing, thought Barnsley Street's Railway Club was a gem!

Belle Vue's fantastic Elizabethan Ballroom, with its revolving stage, its "piped Handel's Water Music playing fountains", plus a dedicated, well-trained army of bouncers - intent on preserving the peace - was the best ballroom I've visited, but the Isle of Man's "Palace" and "Villa Marina", (where the all-girl Ivy Benson Band once played) were popular haunts.

## Dim Lights

The Manchester Ritz Ballroom had dimmed lights and its ceiling seemed to revolve, shimmering with miniscule lights, like a star-spangled-banner! Hindley Monaco, Bolton Civic Hall and the top-floor of Hindley Industrial Co-operative Society Building (prior to 1950), attracted hordes of dancers.

How many local people recall dancing on the "old" school hall floor at Hindley St. Peter's School, or remember the last Hindley St. Peter's Dance organised in the Hindley Cardinal Newman R.C. School Hall? How many packed into the Hindley Park High School's Drama Theatre for an exceedingly successful "Easter Bunny Hop Dance" in 1988, run by the P.T.A. people?

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

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I understand that Miss Gee died fairly recently. If any reader can supply more details, please let me know.

For those teenagers in the 1960's and 1970's, do you remember the *Twist*, *Locomotion*, *Madison* and other dance crazes? Do you remember where you danced? Was it any of the following:

Room at the Top Beat Club, Central Chambers, Wigan; Golden Clog Club, Wigan (opened by Matt Munro, May 1961); Ashton Baths or Wigan Baths Hall; Carlton Club (opened by Lita Rosa, 4 November 1960); Pink Elephant Coffee Club, Wigan; Beachcomber Club, on the site of the now demolished Boulevard

Shopping Centre, Leigh; Club Caroline at Keg O'Kees, Atherton; Garrick Club, Leigh (opened by Ronnie Carroll, 17 November 1961); Ollivers Club, King Street, Wigan; The Casino, Wigan (opened 27 August 1965 - Shirley Bassegy appeared on the opening night)

These are only a few of many. If you remember any

others, please contact me.

Finally, I am keen to obtain any information on the Left Book Club, which met in Leigh (monthly, in Yates' Cafe, Railway Road) and Wigan.

**Tony Ashcroft**  
Local History Officer  
Leigh Library  
Tel: 01942 404559

*Alan Roby continues his most evocative series of articles on the life of Miss Weeton as she travels to Yorkshire at the time of the Luddite Risings, to take up a position of governess to the wealthy Armitage family.*

# ELLEN WEETON

(1776-1849)

## GOVERNESS

### ‘Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child’

**IN 1812 Miss Weeton was in her 36th year, in her prime and had gained in confidence. For almost 18 months she had lived and experienced life in the busy sea-port of Liverpool after the stifling atmosphere of village life at Upholland, near Wigan. For a similar number of months she had lived in the cheerless home of moody and unpredictable Edward Pedder at Dove’s Nest, Ambleside, Westmoreland. She had recently enjoyed the excitement and exhilaration of a strenuous walking tour of the Isle-of-Man. Now she was ready to take on a new challenge. For that she looked eastward over the Pennines to an area suffering greatly through the activities of Luddites.**

Miss Weeton travelled by stagecoach from Liverpool via Manchester to Huddersfield during July 1812 and managed to get a seat next to the coachman who was “very communicative” and who described every object or place worth mentioning en route. She arrived at *High Royd*, the home of her new employer, Joseph Armitage, Esq., the following day. *High Royd* was then a country house overlooking the village of Honley, some four miles from Huddersfield on the Holmfirth road. The building still stands although greatly altered.

*“It stands on high ground, and will be much exposed to the storms and cold of winter; but, as Mr. A. has plenty of coals on his own estate, only a few hundred yards off, we shall have fire enough; and I rejoice exceedingly thereat”* was Miss Weeton’s first impression.

The Armitage family was the oldest in the district; dating from the 14th century. The family was prosperous through the trades of ‘clothiers’ and ‘coal-getting’; they also ‘served the usual offices’. Joseph Armitage, was the eldest son of Sir George Armitage, J.P. (known as “Th’Justice”), who had recently vacated *High Royd*. The property’s isolated location afforded some

protection against the labour troubles Joseph had himself experienced at his previous home at Lockwood, where stones had been thrown at the windows, and where he had been shot at. All around *High Royd* tragedies were taking place because of the introduction of power looms which had made the old domestic wool weaving industry redundant, resulting in much displacement of labour.

### Woollen trade

Miss Weeton described Mr. and Mrs. Armitage as young people “not yet 30, I dare say, either of them. Mr. Armitage is engaged in the woollen trade, has a handsome fortune of his own and another with his wife.” She described her usual working day and the dispositions of her four\* charges in detail:

*“There has been a good deal of company since I came; but, though I dine or drink tea with them, I am obliged to leave the room so immediately after I have swallowed it, that I may truly be said to see little of them.*

\*At the time of Miss Weeton’s arrival there were six children in the family. Mrs. Armitage eventually became the mother of 15 children.

*“My time is totally taken up with the children; from 7 o’clock in the morning, till half past 7, or 8 at night. I cannot lie any longer than 6 o’clock in a morning; and, If I have anything to do for myself, in sewing, writing, etc., I must rise sooner. At 7, I go into the nursery, to hear the children their prayers, and remain with them till after they have breakfasted, when I go out with them whilst they play; and am often so cold, that I join in their sports, to warm myself. About half past 8, I breakfast with Mr. & Mrs. Armitage, and then return again to the children till 9, when we go into the school-room till 12. We then bustle on our bonnets, etc., for play, or a short walk. At one, we bustle them off again, to dress for dinner, to which we sit down at a quarter past; the children always dine, with their parents. By the time dinner is well over, it is 2 o’clock, when we go into school, and remain till 5. Whilst I am at tea in the parlour, the children eat their suppers in the nursery. I then go to them, and remain with them till 7, either walking out of doors, or playing within, as the weather may permit. I then hear their prayers, and see them washed; at half past 7, they are generally in bed.*

### ‘Punctual as the clock’

*“Mrs. Armitage conducts her house in so excellent a manner, that we are as punctual as the clock. I never have to wait of anyone; and I take care that no one shall have to wait of me. It is the same with all in the house; breakfast, dinner, tea, or supper, are always within five*



*High Royd, c.1910, where Ellen Weeton was engaged as governess to the wealthy Armitage family from July 1812 to June 1814.*





minutes of the appointed time. The only thing I feel inclined to grumble at, is the being obliged to attend the children at their play in a morning, as they are only in the yard. I should voluntarily choose to do it sometimes, but the nursery maid, I should think, would be sufficient in general; however, I get a little air, and it will render me less subject to take colds; it will do me good, though I don't like it.

### 'Ill-tempered'

"The children, though well ordered by their parents, when out of their sight are as unruly, noisy, insolent, quarrelsome, and ill-tempered a set, as I ever met with. I am beginning to get them to pay some respect to my mandates, and perhaps by and by, I may to my requests; but I assure you, I have had, and still have, a tough task to perform; and if Mr. & Mrs. Armitage had not given me every authority, in the most liberal manner, I must have despaired of doing any good. A few days ago, I felt a necessity of proceeding to some very severe methods; certain, almost, at the same time, I should meet the displeasure of Mr. & Mrs. A. in consequence, when they came to be informed; but how great was my satisfaction, when they expressed their approbation of the method and severity of punishment which I had inflicted. It has given me spirits to proceed with tenfold more confidence, and a greater desire to please them, than before. The little creatures are very affectionate to me already; and of the three younger ones, I think I can make something. Miss A., the eldest, is the bad sheep that infects the flock: punishment or reward make no lasting impression; I fear she is naturally depraved. Though 7 years of age, she has no ideas of common modesty; it is a wrong thing in parents to inure children to be stript entirely in

## The Luddite Risings of 1812

THE Luddite Risings of 1812 were not a sudden response to the introduction of new machinery. There were a number of causes and it is necessary to look at the years preceding the explosion into rioting and machine breaking.

It was at the time of the Napoleonic Wars; England had been at war with France since 1793 and in 1812 England was also at war with America. One result was the virtual closure of the ports for the import of food and the export of goods. The position was exacerbated through bad harvests and no grain could be imported; combined with high unemployment, culminating in great distress and starvation.

In 1806 the Government published a 'Report on the State of Woollen Manufacture in England'. This was because of opposition to the growth of factories and the introduction of machinery. The powerful Croppers union had been objecting to the use of machinery for some time. What they wanted was a revival of obsolete laws against the use of machinery and they were in a good position to cause trouble.

Croppers were highly skilled workers, the elite of the woollen industry, keeping themselves an exclusive minority by restricting the intake of apprentices. Croppers' hand shears were 4ft long and weighed 40lbs and clearly needed great skill and strength to operate. At a time when other workers received 16 to 18 shillings a week, Croppers could earn 24 shillings or more and additionally were often paid five per cent of the value of the finished cloth. Furthermore it was well within their power to make or mar the quality of the cloth.

When trade depression finally came about through the introduction of machinery and subsequent redundancy, the highly skilled and specialised Croppers were unable to turn to other employment.

It was against this turbulent background that the Luddite Risings took place in and around Huddersfield in 1812.

the nursery, whilst washing. I am endeavouring to correct this, by degrees, as no innovation must be made suddenly that affects the mistress of the house or the servants.

### Value of minutes

"I have begun to teach the children to dance; and a sweet boy of 5 years old, to write; and he does both, admirably. Their instruction, and sewing for Mrs. A., keep me very busy the whole of school-time; I begin again to know the value of minutes, and to be very careful to waste none of them."

In a letter to a Mrs. Price dated 22 December, 1812, Miss Weeton makes a direct comparison with her former employer, Edward Pedder and her current employer, Joseph Armitage:

"This part of Yorkshire seems to be principally inhabited by manufacturers and farmers; a plodding, money-getting, good kind of people; even everything in this house is conducted with tradesman-like regularity and bustle; no sitting after breakfast or dinner, as we used to do at Mr. Pedder's. I generally rise from table with some of the meal in my mouth. Yet I like the family

far better than Mr. P's; no quarrelling, rioting, or drunkenness here, that used, when I was at Dove-Nest, to terrify me so. Here, I know what I have to do; there, I never did."

However, Miss Weeton was concerned that whilst Mr. & Mrs. Armitage accepted the teaching and discipline meted out by their undoubtable and methodical governess, they seemed unconcerned as to the improvement of her pupils:

"As Mr. & Mrs. A. never examine into the progress their children make, except in a very trifling manner, they are totally unacquainted with a great part of what their children learn. A weekly account which I render every Saturday, and which is totally my own doing, is listened to with greater indifference than I could wish; and the children's education has never, that I recollect, been a subject of conversation since my arrival. For anything the parents might know, I might teach the children to be Deists, or Atheists; or, what is almost worse, might never teach them anything like religion at all. 'Why does God make lions?' said George one day, 'when they do nothing but kill and eat us, or anything else they can catch?' (George has often an idea of the superior excellence of mankind in general, and of his own in particular). 'If flies could speak, George,' I answered 'they would say, why does God make little children, who do nothing else but kill us for sport?'

### Vacant minds

"When I arrived, the two eldest could read but few words of 3 or 4 letters; the 3rd, words of only 2; and the fourth has his alphabet to learn; they did not appear to have received the slightest verbal instruction! I never met with children of such vacant minds,

Continued on page 12

**ELLEN WEETON**  
**(1776-1849)**  
**GOVERNESS**  
**'Spare the Rod and Spoil**  
**the Child'**

*Continued from page 11*

considering the natural quickness of their capacities; and so indulged, that they seemed to know what obedience was. I have had, and have even yet, a hard task to bring them under any degree of subordination; but the worst, I think, is over; though I am still obliged to correct and punish much more frequently than I could wish. Now they begin to want more books, and I mentioned, the other week, a few such as I could wish them to have. Mr. A. made objections to all, without proposing any others in their stead. The expense seems to be an object, and I am surprised at it; for those who choose to keep a governess, should not be afraid of a few shillings in books."

But by September 1813, Miss Weeton was beginning to feel the strain.

"I feel more at home here now than I have done any time

since I came first into Yorkshire; and could be very comfortable if it were not for the perverse and violent tempers of the children. And they really are terrible; whether I can ever subdue them, is doubtful. For a few months before the holidays, I flattered myself that I had reduced my pupils to greater order than they had ever been before; but - the holidays have undone all, and again have I all to do. Such screaming and shouting and incessant loud talking I dare say you never heard in any family before; and such everlasting quarrelling.

### The rod

"For a month since my return, the two boys never attempted to say a lesson without throwing themselves into violent fits of passion; screaming dreadfully, if I persisted in making them say it. I have at last resorted to the rod, notwithstanding it is so repugnant to the present mild system of education; and if you had heard their screams, you would have thought I was really killing them, when frequently I had only struck their clothes; but for the last week, I have made them feel it,

and I have found the benefit of it, though my reward from the two Mrs. Armitages [mother and daughter] is sour looks and cool treatment. A mother must indeed feel for her children, and so do I feel for them; my spirit droops under such a task; but my duty to God is to fulfil the duties of my present situation, which I cannot do by indulging the children in their own perverse ways, as their mother has done.

"The eldest girl, for some weeks, would not study a single lesson. She sat with the book or slate before her, doing nothing. What would you have done in such a case? I requested, persuaded, insisted; but she would only smile carelessly in my face, and toss her head. I then incessantly confined her at play hours, till she had finished not only her present lessons, but all of which were in arrears. Cool looks from Mrs. A., were the consequence; Sarah Anne's health would suffer, she thought. So I thought; but something must be done, and as Mrs. A. did not propose any better way, I persevered, notwithstanding her unjust treatment, though a frequent fit of weeping was the

consequence; and I think I have conquered. Miss A. is again become not only tractable, but affectionate."

### All weeping

After almost two years with the Armitage family it was time to move on. On the night before her departure, Miss Weeton thought she heard the children quarrelling. When she went to see them, she found they were all weeping, because she was leaving. The next morning all the children rose at five and walked with Miss Weeton part of the way (it was 4 miles to the coach). They parted company with the children still weeping.

She boarded the coach for Liverpool in June 1814, where she spent a fortnight before travelling back to Upholland to see her old friend Mrs. Braithwaite.

Two months later, in September 1814, at the age of 37 she married Aaron Stock of Wigan, a widower. Where or when she met Stock is not known but little did she know that the decision to marry him would be the biggest mistake of her life. (See 'Aaron Stock of Wigan' *Past Forward* 24, p11).



### Book Review

#### The Wigan Coalfield compiled by Alan Davies with Len Hudson

READERS will no doubt be aware of Tempus Publishing Ltd.'s 'Images of England' illustrated book series through the various local town titles already produced in conjunction with Wigan Heritage Service.

Their latest volume concerning this area is different in that it covers an industry rather than a specific locality. The Wigan Coalfield also differs in that it involves a third party, the compiler being Alan Davies who until the recent and very

regrettable closure of the Lancashire Mining Museum at Buile Hill Park, Salford was its curator. As with the other local books in this series, all the prints used for reproduction were prepared by our own Senior Technician, Len Hudson.

Some 2000 photographs have been selected by Alan from his own Museum's collection, from the holdings of Wigan Heritage Service (Archives) and from a notable private collection. Alan's choices range from the earliest views available in the 1860's to the end of the industry in the 1990's; he also has a good geographical spread around the coalfield and covers many aspects both technical and social. The selection of illustrations is further enhanced by his comprehensive captions, which makes for a very interesting read, and which has certainly given

added value to the Heritage Service's photos. To set the industry in its historic context a four page introduction describes the origins, development and ultimate extinction of coal mining in the Wigan area.

With the notable exception of the Astley Green Colliery Museum, virtually every physical vestige of coal mining has been removed from the landscape, so this highly recommended volume will be especially important in giving future generations an appreciation of the working lives of miners and pit brow lasses, together with an impression of the surface buildings and headgears, which were once such a common sight in the district.

**The Wigan Coalfield is available from the History Shop @ £9.99 (plus £1.00 p & p).**

**M.F. Haddon  
 Wigan Heritage Service**





# The strange case of the vanishing statue

by J. A. Hilton

IN 1903, following the end of the Boer War, a memorial to the soldiers of Wigan who had fallen in the war was erected in Mesnes Park. The work of Gascombe John, the monument was the marble figure of a soldier holding a bronze pistol in one hand and a bronze flag in the other. Now all that remains at the top of the steps in front of the pavilion, is the base, inscribed "This memorial was erected by public subscription to the memory of the men belonging to the regular, volunteer and imperial Yeomany forces of Wigan and district who fell in the South African War 1899-1902.

## Controversial

The war had been controversial. The Conservatives and Liberal Unionists, who together formed the government, were, of course, in favour of the war. The Liberals were divided by the war, but the Independent Labour Party opposed it. The supporters of the war regarded it as the just defence of British citizens abroad. The opponents of the war condemned it as the unjust conquest of an independent people.

The origins of the war went back to the beginning of the 19th century, when Britain, at war with the French and their Dutch allies, annexed the Dutch Cape Colony to protect the sea-route to our Indian empire. Subsequently many Dutch settlers, who were called Afrikaners or Boers (Dutch for farmers), trekked out of the Cape and founded the independent republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Finding itself menaced by the Zulus, the Transvaal agreed to be annexed by Britain in 1877, but, after the Zulu War, it successfully fought for its independence in 1881. Then in 1886 gold was discovered in the Transvaal, and numbers of



*An artist's sketch of the unveiling of the Boer War memorial in Mesnes Park, Wigan, published in the Wigan Observer, 11 February 1903.*

foreigners (called Uitlanders by the Boers), mainly British, arrived to work in the goldfields. The Boers refused to grant the vote to the Uitlanders, but levied high taxes on them. As relations between the uitlanders and the Boers worsened, the Uitlanders appealed to Britain for protection, and in 1899 war broke out between Britain and the Transvaal, which was supported by the Orange Free State.

## British defeats

The war began with British defeats including Spion Kop (Once commemorated by the Kop at Central Park, but now demolished). However, these defeats only served to stiffen British resolve, and reinforcements were sent out to South Africa, including not only regulars but also volunteers and yeomanry (part-time) cavalry). Eventually the Boers

surrendered in 1903, and the unions of South Africa was formed.

The speakers at the unveiling of the statue acknowledged that the war had been controversial, but hoped that the monument would be a lasting monument to the local respect for Wigan's war-dead. Sir Francis Powell, MP, admitted that 'There had been differences of opinion respecting the war itself which must always exist in a free country, but there was no difference as to the regard and estimation in which they held those who fought for England'. Sir Francis, whose own statue still sits in the park, declared that 'the monument would remain during many years as an indication of the honour in which they held those who fought, and suffered, and died in the cause of their country'. He trusted that the monument 'would be treasured by the inhabitants of the town during many generations as proof of what Wigan men had done and

how they had given an example to those who came forward in this country's cause', and he knew that the memorial 'would be long regarded by the people of that town and district'. Councillor Fyans, the chairman of the memorial fund, regarded it as 'a memorial, which should be for all time a monument to the bravery of Wigan's soldiers'. And so it long remained. Indeed, the memorial became a popular place for volunteers in subsequent wars to be photographed.

## 'Removed altogether?'

However, by 1965 the *Wigan Observer* asked 'Has not the time come when this heroic figure of a soldier might be removed altogether? Erosion, vandalism and the ravages of time generally have created havoc with the figure of the soldier...The South African War Memorial statue has become ignominious, so battered and damaged it is today'. Eventually, in 1968, the Borough Council ordered the removal of the statue, but decided to leave the base in place. According to Geoffrey Shryhane, 'it rotted away and was eventually disposed of at the bottom of a compost heap'.

Obviously the statue was suffering from decay and vandalism. Politics is the art of the possible and it was deemed that the removal of the statue and the preservation of the base was an acceptable compromise. Nevertheless, the disappearance of the statue reduced by half, and the more dramatic half at that, the number of Wigan's public statuary. The response to vandalism was an act of greater vandalism.

Does the statue really lie under a compost heap at the back of the Park? Could it, therefore, be excavated, and restored to mark the year of public sculpture and the centenary of the South African War or will its absence continue to be a reproach?

# Mapping the Millennium

As I write, the *Mapping the Millennium* Festival is nearing its completion. Nearly 20 different venues have hosted the exhibition, including libraries, public halls and community resource centres, and feedback has been both positive and encouraging. The last few venues are as follows:

**Atherton Library**  
20 - 27 Nov

**Atherton,**  
Tyldesley/Hindsford

**Ince Library**  
27 Nov - 11 Dec

**Ince-in-Makerfield**

**History Shop**  
11 Dec - 6 Jan

**Wigan Town Centre**  
Mesnes Park, Swinley

(Two of the above maps - Ince-in-Makerfield and North Swinley - appear on the back cover of this issue of *Past Forward*)

## Midi Music

During the summer, 100 young people were given the opportunity to write and perform their own songs, expressing their hopes and aspirations for the new Millennium. Sessions were held in eight different venues throughout the Borough. The feedback has been distinctly positive, with a clear wish for repeat sessions.

In the meantime, a CD is currently being produced, which will include the songs composed and performed during the sessions.



## This is a Borough

This 17 minute audio-visual presentation, produced by Colin Balls of Chorley, and based on the entry which recently won him the British audio-visual championships, has been a great hit wherever it has been shown. It has been widely praised for its evocation of days gone by, and for its imaginative interpretation of the Parish Map.

There is only one problem - it is not for sale! Many visitors have enquired about purchasing it, but unfortunately, for commercial reasons, this is not feasible at present. However, I hope to be in a position to commission Colin to produce a brand new programme to accompany the display of the Parish Map in the History Shop in a year's time, and hopefully by then a video of both programmes will be on general release.

Thanks to all of you who have expressed an interest.....and please be patient!

## Free Fall



Another success story. Some marvellous colourful parachutes, with their own artwork transferred onto them, have been produced by over 400 children of the Borough. Some of these parachutes have been displayed along with the local sections of the Parish Map during the Festival tour, before being given back to the various community groups to use as a play resource. More sessions are planned.

## The Millennium Tree

The Millennium play proved to be an outstanding production. Although the objective of taking the production to as many venues within the Borough as possible resulted in some performances playing to less than full houses, the run certainly began on a very high note with a capacity audience for the premier at the Mill at the Pier, and finished with well-supported performances in October as part of the Standish and Ashton festivals.

The enthusiasm of the Youth Theatre was infectious, and the script was brilliant. Congratulations to Edward and all concerned, both on stage and behind the scenes.

## The Millennium Souvenir

Thanks to some generous support from Wigan Council and private sponsorship, an attractive leather bookmark was presented to each nursery and primary schoolchild in the Borough, bearing the words:

**Presented to each young person in Wigan Borough  
to commemorate the new Millennium - 2000 AD**



*Millennium Festival Co-ordinator (and Editor of Past Forward)*  
Alastair Gillies presents Millennium souvenir bookmarks to pupils of Bedford Hall Methodist Junior School, Leigh.



# Mapping the Millennium

Excellent video, very interesting, brilliant.  
Pictures + music. Well worth 17 mins  
of anybody's time. Well done!!!  
P Horrobin

This is a Borough, is a very interesting  
video. Some of the shots are stunning,  
and unusual. Very evocative of the times  
lasts for 17 minutes, but only seemed like  
5. Very interesting  
P. P. P.

A great idea, excellent features on the map,  
the colliery particularly poignant. An interesting video  
very nostalgic. Great for newcomers!

Fullan

Absolutely brilliant Video, made me feel very emotional.  
Excellent photographs and music/narrative. Did it make it  
to leave the library. Could watch it over and over.  
V. Altherton

This has been a wonderful project and it's great to see the interesting  
results of people's enthusiasm and hard work. Well done, everyone who  
has taken part. A Altherton, Wigan, 27/7/00

## 2001 - So what next?

Hopefully, all 28 sections of the Parish Map will come together for the first time next autumn, under one roof. This will be in the History Shop, following the *Year 2000* exhibition. Wigan's answer to the Bayeux Tapestry! A candidate for the Guinness Book of Records?

But the success of the Festival has shown that there is so much unfulfilled potential in this project. It will not be enough, for example, to simply display the Parish Map - it has immense educational potential, for example, and is ideally suited to interactive interpretation.

It is hoped that the complementary activities of the last year will play a major role in the History Shop exhibition. It will lend itself, for example, to the display of some specially large Millennium

parachutes, with artwork by local children. Some midi music interactive displays, following on from the success of the midi music sessions for young people during the summer, are also planned. *This is a Borough* has been so highly acclaimed that a brand new audio visual programme is under discussion, devoted entirely to an exciting and innovative interpretation of the Parish Map. A dedicated web-site is also planned.

But all this needs money! To this end, a bid has recently been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund, to enable this exciting vision to be realised. A result is expected early in the New Year, so hopefully, I'll have some good news in the next issue of *Past Forward*, due out in March 2001. Watch this space!

# Wigan 2000

## The Way We Are



*A new look for the Wickham Gallery.*

In the last issue of *Past Forward* (No. 25 pp.14, 15) we went into a great deal of detail about the exhibition and its aims, its content and how the wider community were involved. While not wanting to repeat this, the main features are:

- An exhibition to celebrate the new Millennium by reflecting life in our borough today.
- Not an exhibition about the past.
- An exhibition based on a set of archive photographs specially commissioned by the Heritage Service from local photographer Peter Muir.
- Not an exhibition of photographic prints.
- An exhibition involving all elements of the community in its development and display.
- Not an exhibition written by curators.
- An exhibition exploring the ideas of marking a special moment in history with putting together time capsules, recording your favourite object or relating a day in the life.
- Not an exhibition of the objects themselves, but of the reasons for the objects being shown.
- An exhibition that will be visually exciting and fun to visit, with the mystery object challenge and the BBC Community Archive Project.
- Not an exhibition to be missed!

After all the time, effort and hard work put in by the exhibition team, the new exhibition in the Wickham Gallery is finally complete. *Wigan 2000 - The Way We Are* had its official opening by the Mayor of Wigan Cllr. Mrs. J. Hurst on 30 October. However regular visitors will have spotted that the doors were open much earlier on the 9th and will have enjoyed a sneak preview. We are all indebted to all our partners for help with this exhibition - businesses, local groups and the public alike - as we set ourselves the challenge of reflecting life as it is today, not as it was in the past. We think the re-display of the gallery has gone very well and we are delighted with the exhibition - but we would love to know what you think. Come and look at the exhibition and let us know.



*A family group look at the numeracy and literacy interactive area.*



## BBC HISTORY 2000: Community Archive



*Examples of the Museum's own time capsules.*

As outlined last time, the Heritage Service has entered into partnership with the BBC to become one of their local history centres. On top of displaying their *History 2000* programming and distributing their newsletter, we are getting involved in their Community Archive Project. Members of the public are invited to bring in a personal item that has historical relevance to them and have it recorded digitally along with their reasons for choosing it. We will be running supervised sessions to get started, so come down to the History Shop or ring up to find out the date of the next session. Once again the BBC want these images and it is possible you and your object could end up on telly!



*Wigan businesses got very involved and helped with much of the exhibition.*



*What's in and what's out - the fast moving world of teenage fashion.*



*Peter Muir's characters jump off the panels to greet you.*



*The personal view. What ordinary members of the public might save for posterity.*



# HISTORY SHOP NEWS

THE summer round of photographic exhibitions at the History Shop proved as popular as ever. Both the Atherton and the Wigan Photographic Societies mounted a fine selection of prints, much enjoyed by our visitors. Visitors to the Wigan group's show had an opportunity to vote for their favorite print; the winner I can reveal was 'Taj Mahal' by Jeremy Malley-Smith LRPS.

A big thank you for all involved with the displays.

As we go to press the

Taylor Gallery is host to a splendid selection of paintings by local artist Gerald Rickards. The theme is buildings in and around Haigh. Gerald has been on hand during the exhibition to chat to visitors and offer his advice at workshop sessions.

Our final exhibition of the year will display the Wigan Town Centre and Swinley sections of the Parish Map, the last event in the Millennium Festival tour. Come along and admire the skill and dedication of local people.



Opening of Wigan Photographic Society Annual Exhibition 2000, President Derek Swift with the Mayor of Wigan, Cllr. Joan Hurst

## Wigan Heritage Service Exhibition Programme

### The History Shop - Wickham Gallery

**From October 2000**  
*Wigan 2000 - The Way We Are*  
Wigan Heritage Service's new exhibition, a look at life in Wigan today.

### The History Shop - Taylor Gallery

**11 December - 6 January 2001**  
*Mapping the Millennium*  
The Wigan Town Centre and Swinley sections of the Parish Map.  
**15 January - 31 March**  
*Food and Shopping*  
A Culinary History of the Borough  
**7 April - 27 June**  
*The Collier Battalion*  
Local men in the Manchester Regiment

### Leigh Library - The Derby Room

**6 November - 2 December**  
*The Wigan Coalfield*  
From the book by Alan Davies and Len Hudson

**F R I E N D S**

The Friends organisation and indeed a Friends meeting have once again taken a back seat due to the staff turnover and work on our new exhibition 'Wigan 2000 - The Way We Are'.

The time has now come to concentrate on this important initiative. Despite lack of impetus from our side, the membership list stands at a very healthy 450 and is growing steadily. Please look out for your Friends autumn mailing which will include details of our planned constitution and committee composition, as well as an invitation to a special general meeting to agree the plans and select the committee. There are two points I would particularly like to stress:

1. Please put yourself forward or nominate someone who would like to be involved in the organisation, as stressed in the last issue.
2. If you would like to join the Friends all new members are very welcome and are also eligible for appointment. Please fill in the slip on the right or write to us to save defacing your magazine.

Meanwhile to assist us with regularizing the system of subscription may I remind you that your £5 annual subscription for 2001 is due on 1 January. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish all our Friends a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year - although I do hope to see many of you at our meeting before that.

**PHILIP BUTLER**  
Acting Heritage Services Manager & Friends Co-ordinator

**FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE**

Name .....

Address .....

.....

.....

Interests .....

.....

.....

**Please enclose £5 subscription for 2001.** Cheque/P.O. payable to: Wigan Council and return to the History Shop, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

Remember your subscription entitles you to a priority mailing of *Past Forward* three times a year.



# The first two years of World War II

(as recalled by a then 6th Form pupil at  
Ashton-in-Makerfield Grammar School)

IN THE summer of 1939 I, along with others of my age, was awaiting the School Certificate results, but meanwhile, during the summer holiday, a goodly number of us went to Belgium on what was known as the Annual School Continental Holiday. We stayed for eight days at the seaside resort of Heyst sur Mer and had a thoroughly good time. Little did we think as we rode on enormous tricycles along the promenade, made trips into Holland, and visited First World War battlefields, that within a short time there would be more battlefields.

Soon after we arrived home my friends, Alice Prescott, Kathleen Naylor and I were relieved to hear that our School Certificate Results were good enough for us to go back to school and become sixth formers.

## Outbreak of war

Then, of course, came the outbreak of war. We were told that parts of the school must be prepared for emergencies. There would be a First Aid area, an Air Raid Precautions Post, etc. We began to attend half-time, alternate weeks, mornings and afternoons. We still seemed to do a lot of work and certainly a great deal of homework, but we had our lighter moments. The first winter of the war was very severe and the snow seemed to lie for weeks. If we had the afternoon off groups of us would

go to the "Skitters" with makeshift toboggans and have snowball fights.

As regards the War, nothing much seemed to be happening, so we began to attend full time. There would be the occasional air raid warning when we would make our way to the air-raid shelters at the Old Road side of the school. I was given the task of forming a choir to sing while in the shelter. Sometimes we would only be there for two or three minutes but other times it could be up to two hours.

## Bombing

Then came the serious bombing of Liverpool. We were told that part of the school would be occupied by evacuees from Bootle - so it was back to half-time again. The sixth formers were asked to help in any way possible. Alice, Kathleen and I managed to find a handcart which we trundled around Ashton and Bryn, begging for blankets, clothing, etc. We had a very good response, considering that these items, if replaced, would cost precious clothing coupons. We also helped in preparing breakfasts and making tea.

Many of the evacuees were resentful at having to leave their homes and didn't make life easy. But there were exceptions. One I remember was a little woman called Mrs. Gillibrand who helped all she could. Unlike many of the others, she was determined not to take her five children back to Bootle. She found a cottage to rent by the green in Downall Green. There they

stayed till well after the War was over. When I was home from college and later from teaching in Birmingham, I often used to walk up from Bryn to have a chat with her.

## Blind eye to munching

The evacuees finally went back or found other accommodation and we began full time schooling again. It's funny what little things come back to one's memory. Eldon Griffiths, later an M.P., was in our form. We had very little in the way of sweets, owing to the rationing, but he, somehow, often had some. I must say that he was very generous with them and would pass them round in Prep Times. Miss Hodgkinson was often sitting in with us and turned a blind eye to our munching, occasionally partaking herself.

In the spring of 1941 it was time to start applying for Teachers' Training College. I wanted to go to Whitelands C. of E. College in Putney and my friend Alice chose Southlands Methodist College, also in the London area. We thought we would be able to meet occasionally. We were both successful in our choices but Alice's college was evacuated to Weston-Super-Mare and mine to Durham City - poles apart.

We were sad to leave Ashton Grammar. In spite of the War we had some lovely memories.

*Nora Preston (nee Glover)  
(formerly of Bryn)  
Rainhill  
Merseyside*

# From Wigan to World Tour

## The Life of Mary Alicia Hodkinson 1912-1995

**THE medical details of her arrival into the world on 18th September 1912 fascinated Mary Alicia. She could not ignore the marks of the forceps on her forehead noticeable until early middle life. A grave decision had been made, too, as her mother had been given chloroform and there was no way of knowing if the patient was allergic to it. It was a Wednesday.**

Her father was Joseph Hodkinson, one of a family of 13 who were members of the New Jerusalem Church (Swedenborgian) in Wigan. Joseph was a lay preacher and when he visited Preston to preach, he met Miss Edith Mary Clarkson who, like Joseph, was a member of a family who had been Swedenborgians for four generations. She was a milliner, working in a haberdasher's shop in town. They continued a mode of courtesy by which a person was addressed and spoken of by title, 'Mr. Mrs. etc.'. They became engaged to be married after an acquaintance of twelve months during which due to their advanced age (27 and 30) a chaperone was not obligatory. Money was not discussed - this being bad form - but Miss Clarkson had a certain prudence so consulted a local person with an Ouija board and asked "what does Joseph Hodkinson earn?"



Postcard to Grandparents Clarkson, 1913.

Dear Sir,

I have only recently seen your magazine and I am very impressed by its presentation and selection of material, aimed at readers who wish to be informed and entertained by what is best in our local heritage.

I enclose a little book which could be of interest to you, particularly in relation to the Swedenborgian Church in Wigan. Whatever the influences were in Wigan or in this branch of the Christian church, they certainly bred a stalwart in Mary Alicia Hodkinson, born in the town in 1912.

**Mary, Mary, Nurse Contrary** (ISBN 09511642 3 6, 136pp, paperback, illustrated in colour, 1997) is available from New Church House, 34 Dalton Street, Manchester M2 6LE, @ £5.95 plus 70 p&p. All proceeds from the sale of the book go via the University of Central Lancashire Charitable Foundation towards the setting up of a student nurses' prize.

**Anne Bradley  
Higher Walton  
Preston**

• *The story of Mary Alicia Hodkinson is a fascinating read. The author has kindly given her permission for the reproduction here of the opening pages of her book, relating to Mary's first five years spent in Wigan. I hope it will whet readers' appetites to read the whole story of this remarkable lady.* Ed.

The answer spelled out the word 'Money'. Edith married him, bore and brought up three children who treated the anecdote with hilarity.

### Standishgate

Their first child Mary was born in King Street, Wigan but not long after Joseph was established enough in his watchmaker's and jeweller's business to move to 52 Standishgate. The adjoining

shop, a florists, needed only the ground floor so Joseph had the use of all the cellars, also the first and second floor rooms above both shops. The upstairs drawing room was so large that he planned to install a full size church organ in the chimney alcove. Two suites were upholstered in blue velvet, the three-seater sofas would convert into chaises longues. Here were held musical soirees with other business and professional people as guests. There was a resident maid and a daily woman for rough work.

A bright future was planned for the young first-born. Father decided she was to be an interior designer and he built her a big dolls' house on the second floor and she was to have free range to furnish. Many years later Mary did have scope in her career for interior design, but it was re-arranging furniture in geriatric hospitals.

Only 13 months after Mary, brother Harold was born and before Mary was five a third



Mary Alicia Hodkinson  
1912-1995

baby, Margaret. The busy mother, who was also learning to do the business accounts was glad to let Mary spend much of her time in the shop downstairs away from the new baby and from young Harold whose good health was not yet established.

### Behind the Aspidistra

Mary loved the peace in the shop and liked to conceal herself behind the fixtures. Her favourite hiding place was behind the aspidistra in a jardiniere poised on a mahogany column. Customers received a shock when entering an apparently empty shop a childish voice, well instructed in formal courtesy, piped: "Forward, Mr. Hodkinson, please" and her father materialised from his workshop.

The maid Cissie escorted Mary to her first school, a small private establishment in a Standishgate house. When





Mary was collected at midday, she was standing on the steps to the street holding out her hand to the teacher saying "Thank you very much for having me. I shall not be coming any more. Your children are too rough and



*Edith Hodkinson with Mary (2-3 years) and Harold*

noisy". The long quiet hours spent with her father had a profound effect on Mary, a lasting appreciation of peace and silent companionship.

This warm relationship with her father was rudely shattered: within six weeks of Mary's first half day at school Joseph was dead and Mary was not at school again until she had completed a world tour. Her father was a victim albeit in undramatic circumstances of the First World War.

## Years of carnage

By 1917 there had been three years of carnage on the battlefields of France. Conscription required age groups - late 30's - to attend for medical examination. Stripped and waiting in a draughty hut, Joseph developed pleurisy. Partially recovered after hospitalisation he was sent to a convalescent home at Grange-over-Sands. He returned home from there seeming well enough and played the piano at Mary's birthday party. She was five when her father died, officially from pneumonia, on the 15th October 1917.

The two older children were taken to the neat bedroom as he lay there and told that Daddy had gone to sleep and would not wake up. He was going to stay with Jesus who needed him. They would not see him any more but he would always be

near them. Harold, nearly four years old, timid and sickly, took his Mother's hand and said "Don't worry Mother, I'll be Father now".

Later that day Mary was taken outdoors under a clear autumn sky. One star twinkled brightly. Her mother said this was "Daddy's Star" and a sign that he was always thinking of them. It was a simple belief that sustained Mary in the trials to come.

Brother and sister attended the funeral service at the New Jerusalem Church in Wigan. Each carried a Madonna lily whose white trumpet flower erect on the stem was taller than they were.

## Courteous

Mr. Hodkinson had been a popular businessman and local memories also lingered on of his father, an enlightened coal mine owner who, after a serious mine flood, had installed pumping gear and was able to keep men employed for another 14 years.

As the cortege moved along Standishgate it was lined with people paying their last respects to a courteous man of business, the official clock winder and repairer for the Borough and a notable lay preacher.

Financially the family was ruined. As an apparently strong young man Joseph had acted confidently with his trade, investing wisely in equipment to expand the business. He had paid cash to purchase gold and silver plating baths and had handed over money to colleagues who were planning similar ventures. Unusually he had not obtained receipts but had acted on the old

understanding that a gentleman's word is his bond. Sales apart from watch repairs for soldiers had fallen drastically during the war years. Joseph's widow never recovered any money. Worse was revealed. To assemble the cash Joseph had let his life insurance payments lapse.

However, the possibility of his wife becoming a war-widow had been faced and a plan suggested. Edith Mary Hodkinson, rigorously conscientious to her spoken word, had agreed and now intended to fulfil it.

## Better life

At the time of his marriage in 1911 her husband had financed the passage to Australia of three of his sisters. His wife had no sisters, though five brothers. It was a fond assumption that the fatherless children would be assisted to a better life by their aunts in Australia. So, to find the means to travel there, the business must be sold. Furniture, silver, china, jewellery was auctioned. After the purchase of second-class tickets for £90 for one adult and three children there was £48 left. Unsold silver and



*Nursemaid Cissie holds baby Margaret; Harold and Mary, 1917*

jewellery was packed to be later sold for living expenses and as gifts for relatives. Further confidence was given by a letter of introduction to the Australian agent of the Preston printing business in which the children's

Uncle Jack was engaged.

Mary's beautiful dolls' house, so large that she could walk into it, was converted into packing case. The tickets for sailing were late arriving but, with his usual thoroughness, Uncle Jack got things moving. Later he wished he had allowed the muddle to reign, as he knew that his sister would have called off the whole expedition which he deplored from the start.

The U-boat blockade had been all too successful. On the 31st January 1918 when the family were aboard the Ionic it was the last sailing of women and children for Australia during the War.

Uncle Jack had arranged for identity tags for the children to be printed on waterproof material. Three to four inches wide and two inches long they were firmly sewn on the inside of their vests. 'To whom it may concern: if this child should be picked up alive OR dead in the Northern Hemisphere contact John Clarkson (address): in the Southern Hemisphere contact Mary Hodkinson (Australian address of aunt). The care of this child will be rewarded'. Mary was very proud of this proof of her own worth alive or dead and managed to keep it, transferred to other vests, on dry land, until she was nearly eight years old.

At five years old sailing to Australia, like the other passengers, she was required to wear a life-belt at all times, and near the war zone, had to go to bed fully clothed even to an overcoat with a cork life belt on top.

**Six weeks later, Mary arrived in Australia. But this was only the beginning of a world tour, followed in due course by a position in a Workhouse Hospital, giving medical assistance to Freedom fighters in World War II, upsetting the Government in an offshore island after the War and becoming in her chosen profession of nursing a pioneer in geriatric care.**

**To bring dignity and fullness of living to the end of life was her aim. Her life story will encourage and inspire all who wish to bring such blessings to those in their care.**

*In this issue, Ernie recounts the days when he became the proud owner of a motor bike!*

# *I remember when . . .*

**IN AN earlier feature in *Past Forward* I wrote in the centenary year of the car (1996) that “only affluent people owned motor cars”. Whilst that was manifestly true between the 1920’s and the time of writing it, there was always the exception as this feature will show.**

For instance, if one was prepared to acknowledge that “pride and prejudice” could be two imposters and act accordingly, it was possible to join the growing ranks of motorists.

In my own case I became the proud owner of a motor bike that had stood rusting away in a neighbour’s back garden for years. When she asked if I would push it down to Calderbanks scrap yard, in Woodhouse Lane, out of sheer curiosity I decided to see if I could “get it to go” first.

I had to pay out 5s. (25p) for a second hand tyre. I couldn’t find a float chamber cap to replace the missing one so I made one from a metal paste tin lid and punched a hole in the centre to accommodate the float needle. That was all it cost me to fix the bike, which then carried two of us every Saturday (returning the following day) to Squire’s Gate Holiday Camp for the whole season! In those days it was a sandy piece of ground, alongside the railway where campers were welcomed at a cost of 9d. (under 5p) per person per night!

**“Give me nine pounds . . .”**

Many years later, I needed to replace the front section of wiring harness on my Hillman Minx. I found what I wanted in a Minx in a Coventry scrapyards, and asked the owner for a price. He said, “Give me

nine pounds and take the car”, and added, “There’s nothing wrong with it except the engine cuts out without warning but I think its fuel starvation, because the owner drove it here for three miles with me following, and it seemed OK”

Checking it in his yard I found the cam driven petrol pump was choked with sand, so after cleaning and replacing the filter, it started easily. I bought it, but within a few days the sand blockage returned. I then decided to flush out the tank and “recovered” sufficient sand to lay a line of bricks if I’d had a bit of cement handy!

Now to enjoy myself and family with my nine quid’s worth of car which had by now become my pride and joy, to the extent that I became so sure of its reliability that we booked a holiday cottage near Kirkham. For good measure I even booked my parents (who still lived in Wigan) into a holiday apartment at South Shore Blackpool, intending to pick them up daily and explore the Fylde area together.

## **Ominous ‘wiring’**

For three days all went according to plan, until I stopped at a main road halt sign on the fourth day and all I could get, on letting in the clutch, was an ominous ‘wiring’ sound. At first I thought it was the clutch slipping, but on inspection I found it to be a sheared rear axle half shaft. What could be worse? Halfway through the holiday in a place like Blackpool in the holiday season, what garage would undertake such a repair? Not that I could afford it anyway, having already committed myself by treating my parents to what was to be a holiday of a lifetime for them.

So the two imposters “pride and prejudice” had to be relegated once again, and a

search for a scrap yard began, once I’d arranged transport for my passengers to their two holiday locations. I remembered that there was one in the Cherry Tree district but having hitched a lift from a passing motorist, found that he didn’t have the part I so desperately needed. However he knew “two lads” in Preston who did, only to be told when he phoned them that, as it was 7.30 pm, they were about to lock up. However, they agreed to keep open until I arrived, and the motorist who had given me a lift so far agreed to take me to Preston Coach Station.

## **Catastrophe!**

A patrolling beat bobby knew the yard and accompanied me to the corner of the street. After just a few minutes walk there was “one of the lads” (a man in his early 30’s) at the gate of his yard waiting to close. Catastrophe! His mate had loaded the half shaft into their lorry and it was buried under a few tons of miscellaneous scrap! On hearing of my dilemma they both agreed to unearth my precious shaft for me with my help! Never was I so pleased to be “a Lancashire lad” as that night, as everyone I met wanted to help, particularly as my parents were on their first week’s holiday ever.

Now the “proud possessor” of an identical half shaft (cost £2.50p) I could have kissed the oily boots of the scrapyards “lads” quite cheerfully when they said they couldn’t run me back, but would take me and my precious possession, now wrapped in old newspapers, to the beginning of the Blackpool new road, as they called it, where I could easily get a lift. They were right. The first car I “thumbed” was a Blackpool taxi returning,

having dropped his fare beyond Preston, who on hearing my story, not only agreed to stop at my holiday cottage, whilst my wife made up a pack of sandwiches and a flask of tea, but also insisted on touring the outskirts of Blackpool to locate my stranded conveyance on the grass verge. He didn’t want to leave me alone but apologised as he had only just started his night’s work and “had a living to make”. He wouldn’t even take my fare and said, “have this one on me”.

**So you Lancastrians everywhere, give thanks that you belong to such a breed!**

## **Easy in the garage**

And my repair job? Any engineer will tell you that removing a broken half shaft is easy in the garage with all facilities, but digging one out on a standard car jack on the grass verge with only the spare wheel as an extra safeguard (in case the jack slipped) at 2.30 am in a gale on the main Blackpool-Lancaster road is a different matter. It was an achievement I feel I can be proud of, especially since my only illumination was from a hand torch propped on a halfbrick!

That said, I can only recall one other occasion which gave me equal satisfaction. A coach load of American and German tourists stranded in Lichfield on an eight day tour of England and Scotland asked me, as their relief coach driver, if I knew where Wirksworth Church was, as that was where the parents of two of the Americans were buried. Wirksworth Church actually stands on the side of a 1-in-4 hill near Matlock, nearly twice as steep as Parbold Hill - but that’s another tale for another day (and another *Past Forward!*)

Happy motoring to all.

© E. Taberner



IT MAY be surprising to learn that street violence had a prominent role in the towns and cities of Britain throughout the 19th century. Obviously, sensationalised stories in newspapers and the attitudes of powerful people have sometimes distorted stories involving crime and violence, but few suggest that it did not happen.

The 19th century was particularly grim for many people. Some parts of Wigan were overcrowded and many people lived in damp conditions where disease was rife. Low incomes and the availability of drink were contributing factors in many cases of unruly behaviour in public.

# Wigan Borough Police - A tale from the Graveyard Shift

“USUALLY in Borough Police Forces the section upon duty from 6pm to 10pm is made up both of the day and night men, a certain number of night men coming on from 6pm to 2am to stiffen up the remainder when the streets are busiest. Over the weekends in the busiest thoroughfares these men generally work in couples so our evening duty is with two policemen. This is a distinct pleasure where two old friends come together - time passes pleasantly and any disagreeable job is undertaken with more confidence. However, very often the old constable has a recruit for company; this is often unpleasant but if the older man has any common sense he will do justice to his companion who for all he can foresee may be his future inspector, or even Chief Constable.

## Gasping for breath

The street at 6pm is usually packed on the footpaths with millhands leaving work. Monday evenings often find plenty of occupation for the policeman as many of the young colliers and drawers - having not spent all their wages - stay off to get rid of the remainder. Soon comes a call to a vault frequented by the rougher

element, but upon arrival the policemen's service is not required. The landlady, a fine tall determined old woman well liked by her customers had her own way of dealing with rowdy fellows. She would push up alongside them as they were wrestling and kicking, thrust an uncorked bottle with some spirits of ammonia under their noses and the fight ceases instantly. When the police arrived the two offenders were running into the street gasping for breath. This effective proceeding was usually taken in good part and only once did it lead to a broken window; this was an unprofitable proceeding, leading to three months hard labour upon the offender.

Plenty of occupation was found in keeping the corners clear and there were many surly glances from the rough young fellows who appeared to think they were entitled to cause an obstruction. This part of the town was infested by a gang of this stamp called the “Black Gang”, and many were the struggles between them and the police for supremacy, considerable damage being done on both sides. Nothing suited these fellows better when mischievously inclined to come in contact with a young constable who did not know them, if only to jeer and insult him. If too much drink

Throughout history there have always been witnesses who saw such grim realities of life first hand, people with a tale (or two) to be told. Often, such stories were handed over to the newspapers, but some people wrote their experiences down in diaries. One such person was Sergeant Newcombe of the old Wigan Borough Police force. Sergeant Newcombe worked the streets of Wigan and Scholes between 1881 and 1902. Printed here with kind permission of the Greater Manchester Police Museum is just one of the many stories that Sergeant Newcombe recorded in his diary.

had been taken then assault would follow.

## “Monkey Moyle”

Two of these roughs met two policemen on the footpath placing themselves in such a position as to intentionally jostle the recruit. One, a thin dark evil-looking young fellow, noted more for his skill in arranging mischief than his courage, best known as “Monkey Moyle”. The other a very tall, very thin young man with a cast in one eye, known in this place as “Sneering Jack Dyer”. The older officer noted their action and rapidly changed positions with the recruit. This movement was observed by Moyle who smartly left the footpath. But Dyer who had not noticed the change shouldered the policeman and turned with a curse to ask the cause of why he had been knocked about like that. He was somewhat startled when he found the push did not have its desired effect and that a powerful hand gripped his collar. Moyle urged him to resist and not be taken, waving his arms and shouting for assistance. This was at about 7.00 pm and the streetlights were just lit. The streets were full of people who quickly thronged around.

Now was the time to show what a man was made of. The policeman was an old enemy with only an inexperienced recruit to assist him. If his nerve

and courage failed him for one moment, woe be to him in the future. Directing the young policeman who was a well-built serious-looking young fellow to grip tight the prisoner he drew his own staff. This caused the gathering crowd to move except Moyle and another fellow. A sharp blow on the corner of the shoulder to the leader and another on the side of the knee to the other put them out of action for the moment. Dyer had gripped the recruit round the waist but the feel of the staff laid across his face accompanied by a sharp threat, cooled him considerably and he said he would go quietly. A howling, disorderly crowd of people accompanied their masterly retreat to the police office, but the stern determined face and ready truncheon of the older fellow caused them to keep a respectable distance. A few stones were thrown, missing the police and doing damage to the prisoners friend. When they reached the office, the older part of the crowd had departed and by the time they had disposed of their prisoner and returned, there was very little sign of anything unusual except a few more women standing about the corners of the streets where they lived.”

● More tales from the graveyard shift to follow in the next edition of *Past Forward*.

**Dave Tetlow**  
Wigan Heritage Service

# GOD'S GOOD FRESH AIR

**HISTORY repeats itself, so says an old 19th century proverb. With this, I would say, the majority of us more mature beings would agree and probably throw in some personal experiences to substantiate the statement.**

One such instance in my experience took almost a generation to materialise but the similarities, up to a point, are somewhat singular. At the age of 13, in the early 30's my late, youngest brother contracted a synovitis knee which later developed into tuberculosis. Alan was the youngest member of our family of eight and had not entirely shed the maternal attentions, mother accompanying him at all medical appointments. It came as no mean shock following one such appointment when mother announced that Alan would have to go into hospital for a period of a year or so because of the change in the condition of his knee.

The hospital concerned was in some far off place called Wrightington of which I, and I suspect, other members of the family had never heard. The effect was immediate and so our little brother was taken from our midst, off to this place called Wrightington. Many weeks passed by during which visiting was confined, either by accident or design, to mother and perhaps one elder sister. This of course meant that I had not seen my brother for many weeks.

## **New bicycle**

But this was about to change, and without a word

to anyone. The period coincided with that of my procurement of a new bicycle - a brand new Raleigh 22inch frame Gents Roadster with all the trimmings, Sturmey Archer 3-speed hub, Lucas dynamo and headlight etc., etc. It would be true to say that this machine was ruling my life at the time and was influencing the most unlikely eventualities like asking if I could run errands, where previously such an event would trigger off an attack of profound deafness!

Though still without a clue as to Wrightington's geographical location I was struck by an uncontrollable urge to cycle there on a day in between those of mother's visiting days. It would be true to say, however, that in the heat of my new found urge, I had tried to get a fix on Wrightington's geographical location in as casual a fashion I was able to muster at the time. This was via a chat with a friendly miner Jimmy H., a lovable wag in his 40's who was forever seeing leg-pulling opportunities, which made my enquiry, "Hey Jimmy, hey dust get t'Wrightington?" somewhat hazardous. His answer was, however, in serious vein. "Sithee lad, ah cawnt tell thi, bur ah think'n its sumweer t'other side Orrell." That was a start, I knew roughly where Orrell lay and I could always ask

when I got there. And so, that was the plan.

## **"You've learnt a bit o'sense"**

Came the Saturday morning for which I had waited impatiently the best part of a week. The sight of me wheeling my bike through the backyard gate was nothing new in our house - I could have been going anywhere. Had I divulged my intention, the bike would have been confiscated and locked away until - to quote one of mother's favourite phrases - "yuv learnt a bit o'sense."

Free of all possible shackles I was away, with not a word to anyone. Up Station Road, on to Simms Lane End (or Lone End), then the long climb up to Windy Arbour where I tarried awhile to admire the stocks, a reminder of harsher times. On through Winstanley and Orrell and such idyllic sounding names as Roby Mill and Appley Bridge.

## **Break-neck speed**

I distinctly remember one spot on my travels, in the name of Back (or was it Bank?) Brow. Until I encountered Porlock many years later, this was the steepest road hill I had ever seen. To this day, I shudder to contemplate the possible consequences of the rapidity of my descent at break-neck speed which, at the time, was possibly the greatest thrill of my young life!

A few miles further on I came across a road junction,

the name of which, I learned, was Dangerous Corner. There was a ring of superfluity about this name as I thought about the almost daily warnings since the advent of my bicycle. Mother, whose charge of any vehicle was limited to a succession of bassinets and go-chairs, over a period stretching from 1904 to 1922, had warned me daily that ALL corners were dangerous.

## **Alfresco existence**

The entrance to Wrightington Hospital was, if I remember correctly, just a short stretch from Dangerous Corner, and though the thought of the long journey home was somewhat daunting, I was glad to find somewhere to lean my bike and make my entrance into the hospital grounds. After a few enquiries I located brother Alan in one of the many beds situated in the open air which was not all that surprising in view of the spring-like weather. It was, however, difficult to comprehend Alan's remarks during my visit that this alfresco existence was the norm!

Long after the visit and indeed as I pedalled my way back to Garswood, the thought of sleeping out in the open dominated my waking hours. Sometimes on the coldest of nights as I lay in bed with my other late brother, our feet feeling for the warmest area of the heated oven shelf mother had caringly placed between





the sheets, I thought of Alan exposed to the elements. How could the authorities allow such cruelty? Little did I realize that, 20 years on, I was to find out at first hand - quite by accident.

5 NOVEMBER 1952, mid-morning, near Dunchurch astride the A45, 10 miles south of Coventry.

On my fortnightly run from my then home south of Birmingham to Vauxhall Motors Ltd., Luton, Beds., I encountered the all too familiar build-up of traffic whose average speed on such stretches was more or less governed by the then H.G.V. speed limit of 20mph. It is a sobering thought that since my marriage to *Past Forward*, I have learned that it was within the realms of possibility that, heading one of those crocodiles, might have been our own Ernie Taberner driving one of his Queen Mary monsters!

### **Passage to oblivion**

The government of the day, in their wisdom and effort to make full use of every square yard of road, devised the idea of dividing some wider trunk roads into three lane, single carriageways, a novel idea if not a little suicidal. The centre lane was purely for overtaking - if, of course some driver coming the other way was not seized with the same idea which might provide an instant passage to oblivion for at least one party! It was under such circumstances that I found myself far too rapidly approaching a large pantechnicon with very little opportunity of a quick change of mind!

The inevitable happened,

though the geometry of the contact was in my favour, the collision being broadside on. I was thrown forward, hitting my head on the frame of the windscreen of my fairly new Austin A40 Devon. In the space of time that happened, both car and self had been unceremoniously pointed in the direction from whence we came - transferred somehow onto a grass verge just a few feet from a hawthorn hedge.

### **Excruciating pain**

One or two of the onlookers who gathered helped me out of the car which by then, had lost quite a bit of its newness. Someone must have phoned for an ambulance which, thankfully, took little time to arrive. By that time my right leg had filled most of the spare room in my trouser leg, though the excruciating pain in my knee had subsided somewhat. The senior ambulanceman (the name paramedic hadn't been invented) took one look at my leg and without as much as a "Do you mind?" produced a large pair of scissors from his kit and proceeded to cut, then tear, my trouser leg from bottom to top. As if to appease the effect of his vandalism he prodded very gingerly the swelling around my knee then announced, "I think you've got a broken kneecap, son, but we'll have to see what the doctors say." Continuing in avuncular fashion, he assured me that life without a kneecap was not all that much of a handicap, thanks to all the modern medical advancements. "In fact", he went on, "the current wicket keeper for England only has

one kneecap."

My leg splinted, I was stretchered into the ambulance and driven at speed to I knew not where, until I was off-loaded at the accident bay of Hospital of St. Cross in Rugby. And there began the most miserable seven weeks of my life.

### **Little sign of blood**

Taking my first glance at the outward visible sign of the damage, I felt that my presence there was fraudulent. All that could be seen was a horizontal cut, less than an inch long. There was little sign of blood. The inner damage, though, was a little more sinister, having been caused by the sharp end of the window winding knob as I was thrown forward in the collision - seat belts were still several years away. The area would have to be X-rayed, the wound sutured and I would have to stay in bed for at least ten days. No operation could be performed until the wound had healed.

My leg re-splinted I was put to bed though it was not yet late afternoon. There I was left to contemplate on the events of the day. Dominating my thoughts was that of how lucky I was to be alive. Had the geometry of the collision been, say, five or six degrees to the right, the bed I was lying on would have been very much harder and considerably colder, and the staff employed would have been more concerned with the problem of which bit went where.

As the light failed, in came the evening meal delivered by a young nurse who, on arranging the tray etc., enquired, "Would you like to see the fireworks

later on?" Without further thought I answered, "Oh, yes please".

### **Wicked plan**

I was a fool. With the benefit of hindsight this could have been a wicked plan to test out my stamina for what the following seven weeks had to offer. Shortly after tea, two nurses came in the ward, one positioned herself at the foot of my bed, the other at the head. There was a click, effecting a slight elevation of my bed and I was on my way out of the ward, along a corridor and actually out into the cold night air which was being stirred by a fairly steady breeze. On we went, over a grassy slope and eventually parked within a Roman Candle's distance from a huge pyre which was about to succumb to rising flames, aided and abetted by the aforementioned night breeze.

Suitably attired and reasonably mobile, there is something childishly thrilling about the presence of a bonfire with all the attendant letting off of fireworks, hot potatoes, treacle toffee etc. No such joys filled my mind, however, as I was left unattended, dodging the odd shower of sparks, a rip-rap in free flight etc., as well as wrestling with bed covers which were gradually losing their fight against the gusting wind which in turn was finding its way to my torso, reducing it to the ambient temperature. Long before the stock of fireworks was exhausted I motioned that it was time to call a halt to the merriment.

Wheeled back to the comparative comfort of my ward, to which I was

*Continued on page 26*

# GOD'S GOOD FRESH AIR

*Continued from page 25*

becoming just a little attached, my bed was re-arranged and I was plied with a cup of cocoa. Some time later I was approached by a different officer (probably the bed officer) who sat by my bed, ran her finger down a list on a clipboard and announced, "Oh yes....tomorrow morning you will be transferred to the main ward - The Sun Pavillion." There was an air of incongruity about the last phrase, bearing in mind the month in question and the fact that, up to then, the 5th, an unannounced total eclipse lasting about four days had descended.

But the lady was true to her word. Immediately after breakfast on the following morning she came again to witness my transfer to the Sun Pavillion. Wheeled once again down the aforementioned corridor I was amazed that what I thought was the great outdoors the night before was actually part of my new digs for the duration of my stay. I immediately decided the Sun Pavillion was nothing more salubrious than a large verandah, open to the elements in all their moods.

## **"Pavillioned in splendour"**

Contrary to Hymn 167 (A. & M.) it was patently evident that I was NOT going to be "pavillioned in splendour". Neither was the Hospital of St. Cross to be girded with praise. All 12 or 14 beds were placed on the

wall side of the ward so that the patient's view was the permanently open framed, glass doors. Although these were intended to slide shut, no one without the express permission of the hospital board was allowed to do so.

The novelty of suffering from exposure was short-lived, though, for the first couple of days were bearably mild. The nights, which were virtually sleepless, became a constant battle against petrification.

On one particularly horrid day when the wind brought with it some nasty sleet and rain, the slope of the fall covered half the width of the wooden floor of the ward with a deep film of water. This condition claimed one victim in the form of a patient returning to his bed after having a rubber heel fitted to his half plastered leg. Whether the poor chap's accident tipped the scales, I cannot say but shortly afterwards, I took it upon myself to get out of bed, cross the floor and, with a little difficulty, close the sliding door.

## **Act of vandalism**

It was a grave mistake - the ward sister having witnessed my act of vandalism. The result was a ticking off, but it didn't end there. The following morning after breakfast the same ward sister attended my bedside, dragging along with her none other than the hospital matron - an Amazon, in her official regalia, to add a little drama to the proceedings. Mounting her imaginary podium she proceeded to read me the Riot Act which, in essence, was a long-winded dissertation about breaking hospital rules. Not

once did she enquire if I was warm enough or comfortable. My question of how such conditions were supposed to help matters went unanswered. It was nice to see her go.

## **Blood clot**

Before the 10 or 12 days of healing of my wound was up, I started to run up a very high temperature which was causing some concern. Investigations revealed a blood clot (a chemical clot it was called) caused by whatever it was that was injected before suturing. This meant an operation to remove the clot.

On return to the ward I was deprived still further of the defence against the arctic gales blowing freely into the ward and all areas within the sheets that were supposed to afford warmth. To avoid contact with the affected area there was now a cage, rather like a miniature Nissan hut, cancelling out any possibility of insulation against the elements, placed over my leg.

The writing of a letter or even reading was a process of instalment, broken into short periods of just how long one could survive the intense cold on one's arms and hands. On occasion a trolley would be wheeled into the ward, tended by rehabilitation personnel. I would imagine that in the summer months the idea of offering the opportunity of trying out one of the many crafts on offer was quite sound. In the subject period, however, it was a non-starter.

## **Near Belsen conditions**

Eventually the day of my second operation dawned. I

did not lose my kneecap as it was decided to remove the splinters, file the rough edges to a presentable curve and stitch things back again. As before, however, I received no relief from these near Belsen conditions, exacerbated therefrom until my discharge by a particularly cold spell including one day of incessant snow storms driven by tooth chattering winds that found their way to every conceivable part of the body. In some strange way, one got inured to the conditions which, I learned later, were a legacy of when the ward was actually used as a T.B. ward. It was then "discovered" that such conditions were helpful in the knitting of broken bones.

On the morning of Christmas Eve I was taken to the plaster room where my plaster was fashioned in such a way as to be easily removable for leg exercise. There it was announced that I could be allowed home from where I could visit a local hospital for subsequent treatment.

And there ended the saga of Hospital of St. Cross. A stone and a half lighter and having notched up no more than about six hours sleep during my seven weeks incarceration, I went home to the strangest Christmastide I can ever remember!

P.S. On the 40th anniversary of the event, I wrote to Hospital of St. Cross in similar vein to the above account. They thought it was hilarious and asked my permission to include the article in their monthly magazine, *Update*.

**J.H. Smith  
Sutton Coldfield**



# Coal Fires and Loved Faces

## Memories of an Ince childhood

DO you remember when you were seven? It was the summer of 1960, and five weeks' school holiday stretched endlessly before you, with the promise of sparkling mornings, golden afternoons and warm summer nights. Do you remember taking a picnic to Ince Park - a brown paper carrier bag containing jam-butties and pop? Down past the rhododendron bushes and ornate green wrought-iron seats, to the playground, where else? A woman who was a child still, was there, always, on the swings. And the crumbling old toilets, shadowy under overhanging trees, evil-smelling, silent and menacing, where fear lived, and children scared each other with tales of bad men. The "Please keep off the Grass" notices, and the "Parky", who made sure you obeyed.

Do you remember Can-Row Brook, where you fished for tiddlers and took them home in jam-jars? And why did sixpennyworth of hot, golden chips taste better out of newspaper from Maggie Scott's or Blinkhorn's chippy than they ever did off a plate? Or perhaps you ran to Cain's in Belle Green Lane, trying to decide between a mouthwatering hot potato pie or a chocolate eclair, as you gradually shuffled round in the queue - a decision which reached agonising proportions when it was YOU NEXT! Days when you had all the time in the world to "follow-my-leader", stepping over cracked flags to avoid bad luck, and doing intricate footwork on hopscotch squares chalked on the flags, avoiding newly-mopped and donkeystoned front steps. And why was the hated school-playground suddenly so enticing when you weren't supposed to be in it?

### "What could be nicer ..."

If you listen carefully, can you still hear the ice-cream man playing "Greensleeves" on a baking hot afternoon, the sound rising and falling as he meanders round the streets? Which was

your favourite? Mr. Whippy, or Ferretti's who sold threepenny iced lollies in pink or green, with their tops dipped in chocolate, which gave a satisfying crack as you bit it? And you chanted - wait for it ..... "What could be nicer than a Pendleton's Twicer-ice-cream with a lolly each end!" (You'd forgotten that, hadn't you?!)

Walking-days, when people sat gossiping on chairs in Ince Green Lane long before the banners appeared, and men came out of the *Long-Neck*, beer in hand, to watch the procession. People running into the road to give children threepenny-bits and sixpences as the sun melted the tar and new white sandals stuck to the road, and older sisters sported bee-hive hairdos, stiletto heels and sticky-out dresses supported by net underskirts - a special day when bands played and Aunties came to watch the "scholars" and you had boiled ham, lettuce and tomatoes, and jelly-and-custard for your tea. The same chairs and the same people were there for the carnival, and on the day when we cheered until we were hoarse as a double-decker bus carried our rugby team round the streets as they came home, triumphant in cherry-and-white, from Wembley.

### "Old Mother at Hindley Fair ..."

Did you ever organise a May-Queen in someone's backyard, with mum's old net curtain and a cardboard crown, and sally forth through Ince streets with a little retinue in fancy-dress, collecting pennies on a warm spring day? I think you played two-ball on our gable-end didn't you? - I'm sure it was you - dexterously catching the ball, throwing it up in the air and under your leg as you chanted "Old Mother at Hindley Fair, get some papers to curl my hair". And wasn't it you just behind me as we waited our turn to jump in the rope being twirled by two girls, singing "Eeper

weeper, chimney-sweeper", and "Polly in the kitchen, doin' a bit o' stitchin', in comes a bogey-man and knocks Polly out"!

### Coronation Street

And, as the evenings grew chilly and the nights drew in, didn't you help us drag branches across the back field for our bonfire, and stand with us under the gas-lamp with our Guy-Fawkes with his grinning pink cardboard face? Remember going with your mum to jumble-sales at the Ince Central School and St. William's Parochial Hall? Always at 6.30 on winter evenings, so you got home just in time to watch "Take Your Pick" in black and white, and the new serial, "Coronation Street", where the people were just like us.

Do you recall when we went carol-singing or playing tap-latch on the cobbles in Pickup Street and Bird Street on frosty

nights? And when fog hung low in eerily-silent terraced rows, and the lighted window of the corner-shop shone out like a beacon, and noses were pressed to glass as you chose penny arrows or halfpenny "chix", cherry-lips, pear-drops or cough-candy?

Laughing, carefree childhood days when you were busy making memories, but thought you were just playing. And now, forty years on, when the corner-shops are gone and the gas-lamps extinguished, when walking-days are just a disruption to impatient drivers instead of a procession of witness to be enjoyed, when children's hands hold mobile phones instead of skipping-ropes, and coal-fires and loved faces are no more, wouldn't you love to go back for just another glimpse of your world when you were seven?

Irene Roberts  
Abram, Nr. Wigan

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### **Aspull & Haigh Historical Society**

Meetings are held in Our Lady's R.C. Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull on the 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 December**

Christmas Party.

### **Billinge Local History Society**

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).

### **Leigh & District Family History Society**

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. O. Hughes (01942 741594).

#### **16 January**

Members' Evening

#### **20 February**

AGM

#### **20 March**

*Preserving the County's Written Heritage*

Lancashire Record Office

#### **17 April**

Subject to be announced

Dan Muir

### **Leigh Literary Society**

Meetings are held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library, on Mondays at 7.30 p.m. Subscription £11. Visitors £1.50. President Mrs. H. Gaskell (01942 605685)

#### **27 November**

*The Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal*

Mrs. M. Fletcher

#### **4 December**

*Christmas Evening - A Lancashire Entertainment*

Mr. & Mrs. Starkey and Mr. & Mrs. Darlington

#### **8 January**

*The Persian Gulf and the Red Sea*

N.L. Brown

#### **15 January**

*Manchester Cathedral*

G. Robinson

## **SOCIETY NEWS**

#### **22 January**

*The West Highland Way*

D. Cookson

#### **29 January**

*The Bayeux Tapestry*

Fred Holcroft

#### **5 February**

*Crown Prosecution Service*

P. Watson

#### **12 February**

*Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder*

Miss A. Brown

#### **19 February**

*Scandinavian Delights*

G. Cooke

#### **26 February**

Annual Dinner

### **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 telly and have an informative and cheap night out. Contact the Secretary (01942 514271 or [rydings@cablenet.co.uk](mailto:rydings@cablenet.co.uk).) Visit our web site at [www.arnw02593.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.arnw02593.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

#### **21 December**

*English Christmas Traditions*

Fred Holcroft

When and where did those traditional celebrations begin?

#### **18 January**

*A History of Manchester Cathedral*

M. Richards

The fascinating history of the medieval Collegiate Church which gained cathedral status in 1847.

#### **15 February**

*Votes for Women*

Maureen Gilbertson

The story of the important role of local mill girls in the struggle for women's suffrage.

#### **15 March**

*Funeral Customs*

Tony Ashcroft

Funeral practices from near and far, from past and present.

#### **19 April**

*More of God's Wonderful Railway*

Stan Smith

An illustrated talk about the Great Western Railway holiday lines in South Devon.

### **Wigan Archaeological Society**

The Society meets at the BP Centre (Scout HQ) in Greenhough Street on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. Entrance is only £1.

#### **6 December**

*Ramases the Great and his Forts in the West*

Dr. S. Snape

#### **3 February**

*Historical Angers (also AGM)*

Tom Glover

### **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.

#### **11 December**

Annual Dinner

#### **8 January**

*The Wigan War Memorial* - an illustrated talk

Fred Holcroft

#### **12 February**

*Agenda 21* - an update on progress to date in Wigan

Janet Withington

#### **12 March**

*Victorian Wigan Murders*

James Fairhurst

#### **9 April**

*The Life and Times of L.S. Lowry* - an illustrated talk

Geoffrey Shryhane

### **Wigan Family & 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 December**

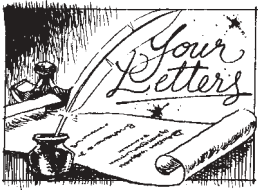
Open meeting

#### **19 December**

*Early Settlement of Lancashire* (followed by Christmas buffet)

Fred Holcroft





## THE OLD RUMOUR

Dear Sir,

In the summer edition of *Past Forward* my old friend Jim Fairhurst repeats the old rumour that the "Battle of Enfield Street" was caused by the Pemberton Colliery "winding coal". This was a strong union pit and during the General Strike it did not cut, level or wind coal. A few years ago I was told by the late George Ashurst, formerly safety officer with the N.C.B., that the union had agreed to the colliery officials going underground to feed and look after the 200 pit ponies stabled underground.

There was a picket and a large crowd at the colliery gates to prevent coal merchants buying coal from the pithead stocks. My late uncle Thomas Holcroft was there. When the headgear wheels were seen turning a silly woman in the crowd shouted "they're winding coal". The crowd surged forward and the rest is history.

**Fred Holcroft**  
54 Pemberton Road  
Winstanley  
Wigan WN3 6DA

## MISSING MILL GIRL

My great grandmother Margaret Beesley (power loom weaver) was born in Haigh in 1856. She later moved with her parents Richard and Mary Ann to Ince-in-Makerfield. Margaret had two children before her marriage, William James Beesley in 1876 and John Thomas (Jack) Beesley, my grandfather in 1881.

In 1882 Margaret married William Crook(s); both were living in Wigan at the time of the marriage, and they went on to have three more children, Alfred, Annie and



## Ince Boys' Brigade at Camp, Arnside 1929

Dear Alastair,

I wonder whether you would have an interest in the enclosed photographs for publication in *Past Forward*?

They show Ince Boys Brigade at camp at Arnside in 1929 and Arnsdale in 1931. The large photograph is c.1929 judging by the appearance of my father Jack Cain who is second from left in the band quartet (with bugle), and third from right in the second row on the big photograph. The age seems very similar to me.

Should you see fit to publish these, I would be delighted to hear from any surviving member - now in their 80's - or similarly from their children who could put names to faces for me.

The phonograph is a period piece don't you think?

**Neil Cain**  
26 Sheridan Terrace  
Whitton Avenue West  
Northolt  
Middlesex UB5 4JS



Margaret.

My great grandmother Margaret died in 1897, aged 40, at Taylors Yard, off Caroline Street, Wigan but up to now I have been unable to trace the family in the 1891 census.

I wonder if any of your readers has any information of this family or their descendents.

**Margaret Hegan**  
67 Chester Road  
Stevenage  
Herts SG1 4JY  
Tel: 01438 233687  
mhegan@tinyonline.co.uk

## HELP!

Dear Editor,

My Abbott ancestors were found in Crow Lane, Dalton, near Wigan in the 1841 census and were still there on the 1891 census. Some worked at the Crisp Delf quarry and one was a farmer there at Welshman Heys. The lane was highly populated in the 19th century.

Today Crow Lane is in open country with little more than a couple of cottages at one end.

Does anyone have prints or photos of the lane in the 1800's? Or of Crisp Delf quarry or Welshman Heys farm?

When was the housing

knocked down?

Yours in hope.

**Doreen Elcox**  
56 Cansdowne Grdns  
Jesmond  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
NE2 1HH

## Thank You

Dear Editor,

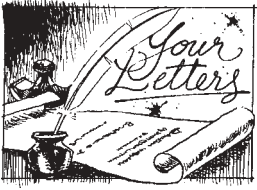
Thank you for your kindness for the inclusion of information regarding the Lancashire Dialect Society in *Past Forward*. I really appreciate your help.

It may be of some interest to you that Mr. J. Barnes of 122 Bridgewater Street,

Hindley, Wigan, won the top award at the Fylde Folk Festival Dialect Competition on Sunday 3 September. He entered a poem entitled "Memories of Agincourt". I will be presenting him with the Samuel Laycock Trophy on 25 September.

A nice story has come from this. Mr. Barnes has just married last year's winner, Sheila Mellor, also from Hindley!

Thanking you once again.  
**Derek Stanton**  
Lancashire Dialect Society  
30 Thirlmere Drive  
Withnell  
Chorley  
PR6 8AY  
Tel: 01254 830776  
stanton@ldsociety.fsnet.co.uk



**Hindley  
Subscription  
Brass Band  
1936  
(not 1913)**

Dear Mr. Gillies,

I was born in Delegarte Street, Ince and brought up in Platt Bridge. I met my future husband Danny at Haydock Racecourse, where he was serving as a Military Policeman; between 1944 and 1946, he served in France. We married in 1946, at Holy Family Church, Platt Bridge, and went to live in the U.S.A. in 1947. Sadly my husband passed away on 23 May 2000, after 54 wonderful years together, but I have two fine sons, Daniel and William, and two equally fine grandchildren. I am also very proud of the fact that my son Dan is a past Mayor of Berkeley Height, New Jersey.

On a recent visit to Wigan, I saw a photograph of the Hindley Subscription Brass Band, in the *Around Hindley and Abram* book. I knew immediately that some of the information given was wrong because my father Tommy Taylor was standing there in the middle row. The photograph was taken in 1936 and not 1913 as stated. Below are the names of the other members of the Band.

Hindley Subscription Prize Band 1936.

Bass Drum, Peter Catterall. **Back Row:** Fred Whittle, Jack Howe, Danny Battersby, George Dale, Jack Battersby, Jack Wilks, Jack Green. **Middle Row:** Jem Howe, Tommy Taylor, Tommy Smalley, Bill Buckley, Dick Tollitt, Bill Smalley. **Front Row:** Harry Sutton, Danny Eaton, Dick Liptrot, Arthur Cooper, Richard Wayne, Fred Mort, Albert Dawson.

I still have many friends and relations living in and around Wigan and

Dear Mr. Gillies,

You may be interested to reproduce in *Past Forward* the attached photograph of Form 4B, Wigan Grammar School, 1933/34. For identification purposes I am fourth from the left on the middle row. The photo includes the familiar faces of people like Freddie Holmes, Teddy McEvoy, Eric Hewitt etc. Of special mention on the back row is Alan Harvey who safely negotiated school with only one arm - the science of prosthetics was largely undeveloped then.

Forms 3 and 4 were

housed at that time in redundant, wooden Army huts. The situation changed in 1935, the Silver Jubilee year when the new Grammar School was opened by Oliver Stanley, the Minister of Education.

You will be interested to know that as a result of my item in *Past Forward* I have made many interesting contacts. For example, I have had extended correspondence with the Revd. Roger Taylor of Lindsey near Ipswich who was a school friend at Wigan Grammar School. He wrote about serving tea in the

Rectory to Mr. Whitehouse, our former Headmaster, but he was not recognised, possibly because in previous encounters Mr. Whitehouse had only viewed his posterior as he administered six of the best for behaviour infringement!

Two other contacts are worth mentioning. I was pleased to receive a letter from Robert Ramsdale who was one of the four who passed the scholarship from Warrington Lane School in 1932. This was after I had received a surprising letter from a Mrs. Hitchen in

Salcombe. She was in fact the Miss Derbyshire, our scholarship year teacher, now in her 90th year. I was able to put them in touch with each other. **May I explain that anyone reading the tone of these letters will surely acknowledge the therapeutic value of *Past Forward*.**

Finally, I am left with one regret, I have still not made any contact with the Tyrer family, but the search continues.

**J.H. Ollerton  
9 Fairfield Park  
Broadstairs  
CT10 2JT**

**Wigan Grammar School – Form 4B 1933-34  
Form Master Mr. Thompson**



elsewhere, both in the U.K. and abroad. I am an avid reader of your excellent magazine *Past Forward*, which helps me keep in touch with things “back home”. I have used the facilities in the History Shop, (including the very kind and helpful staff) on many occasions, to assist in tracing my family tree. One rather unusual event occurred during my recent visit - I managed through my good friend Barbara Davis, to make contact with a Mr. Gordon Urmston of Wigan, a relation through a shared great, great, grandfather. Strange to say Barbara and Gordon’s first wife had trained together as nurses at Wigan Infirmary and Gordon had also worked there.

**Marion Palladin  
New Jersey  
U.S.A.**

**Does anyone know anyone  
on this photograph?**

It’s Abram C.E. Colliery Mixed & Infant School, 1900 or 1909. We are hoping a relative is on the photo Taylor - Hill - or Tighe. Any information appreciated. **C. Taylor (01942 682700)**







## PATRIOTIC POEM ABOUT – INCE

Dear Editor,

This fabulous locally patriotic poem about Ince has been placed in various Wigan newspapers periodically, having been forwarded by one, Mr. Stanley Turner, (Taylors Lane, Ince) and by an Ambleside Incer, Mr. Jack McCann, some years ago. Mr. McCann believed that "The Beauty of Ince" was written by an un-named 'Can Row' gentleman author and that the poem was printed on an Ince census cover originally around 1940! My wife Elsie believes that people paid 1s. years ago for a specially printed version of this poem. As Jack McCann told us in 1990, "The Beauty of Ince" would be gratefully received as a Christmas present!

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

*Mr. Lucas recalls his dancing days on p9 Ed.*

### THE BEAUTY OF INCE

Folks have talked in praise of Blackpool  
And of Rhyl and Colwyn Bay  
Of Southport and of Morecambe  
Whilst lots of folk who say  
That the Ise of Man is nicest  
'Cos there's such a lot of sea  
But Ince my dear old birthplace  
Is by far the best to me.  
Ince has got a perfect climate  
Suitable for young and old  
For in summer we've got warm weather  
While in winter time we've cold.  
As for air that's soft and balmy  
There's no better to be found  
Than the air that's wafted over  
From the refuse tipping ground.  
We've beauty and a splendour  
That beats Switzerland to bits  
Where the Leeds and Liverpool canal  
Flows by the Rose Bridge pits  
And although we have no mountains  
Yet there's one thing we can claim  
We've a great majestic slag tip  
At the top of Belle Green Lane.  
We haven't any promenade  
Or gardens like Belle Vue  
But we have a nice few dirt tips  
And a colliery or two  
While there's nothing I like better  
than to sit down with a book  
'Neath the shade of might oaks and elms  
On the banks of Carrow Brook.  
I have oft times in the morning  
To the singing of the lark  
Walked across Amberswood Common  
And around Walmesley Park.  
I've spent many happy mornings  
With this singing overhead  
But I now find early mornings  
Are much nicer spent in bed.  
I love to see the Common  
Where the dandelions grow  
Where the buttercups and daisies nod  
When the gentle breezes blow  
Where the dashing hares and rabbits  
Try to dodge the sportsman's gun  
Where the cows roam in the meadow  
And Jane Green's donkeys run.  
Yes, the Common is of interest  
Though it smells of rag and bones  
For it's wonderful to watch them  
Carving out the rubbing stones  
And 'tis here that happy children  
From all corners of the land  
Play with unrestricted freedom  
With rubbing stones and sand.

**APOLOGIES:** The correspondence re the Prince's Cinema, Wigan, still goes on! Mrs. Roby has pointed out that the opening of the cinema was on 29 October 1934 and not 1935 as stated in Mr. Fairhurst's letter in *Past Forward* 25, p30.

Mr. Fairhurst is also due an apology, however. Unfortunately, 20 years were inadvertently added on to the life of Tom Pey (see *Past Forward* 25, p6). The final sentence in the article should have read, "Mr. Pey died in 1952, aged 73".

## 'INCE ALL BLACKS' 1917-19

Dear Sirs,

I hope you can publish this photograph of yesteryear. Perhaps some of your readers may recognise some of the players, or be related to them.

My dad Billy Lees (pictured first player from the right, front row) was a St. Patrick's lad. Most of them were miners. I wonder who the little boy was (left front row)?

Any reader who can add to the story of "Ince All Blacks", 1917-1919, please contact me.

Sadly Billy died in 1981 aged 80 years. He was 19 when the photo was taken.

**J. Lees**  
49 Sherwood Drive  
Wigan WN5 9QX  
Tel: 01942 223496



## What happened to Priscilla and Sarah Fearn?

Dear Editor,

I have been researching my family history and wonder if any of your readers could help me to solve a local mystery.

In 1902, Sarah Fearn died in childbirth in Hindley. She left a husband, Joseph William Fern, a coal miner, and three small children James (1902), Priscilla (1904) and the new baby, Sarah (named after her mother), 1904. The Fearn family had lived in Aspall and Hindley for about 30 years, but they actually came from Macclesfield. Joseph's wife Sarah was a Rayner. She was one of about 10 children, the younger ones having been born in Aspall, the older ones in Patricroft, Salford.

Although I struggled to find out what had happened to the family, I eventually discovered that Joseph William moved after his wife's death to Salford, Manchester, with his son James. The two girls didn't go with them, but were adopted, somewhere in Wigan. James William later re-married, and died in Salford in 1927.

In the 1970's, shortly before he died, James came

to Hindley/Wigan to search for his lost sisters, but found no trace of them. James knew that they had been adopted in the Wigan area, but had no details of the families who had taken them in. Descendants of this line of the family know of the lost family members, but have never been able to find any trace of them.

I am trying to find out what happened to Priscilla and Sarah Fearn after 1904. Were they adopted by one of their aunts or uncles (the Rayner family)? It would be marvellous if one of your

readers had Priscilla or Sarah in their family tree.

This is a very personal search for me, as I believe that Priscilla may have been my grandmother, who died giving birth to my mother at the age of 28 in 1930, but about whom we know very little. I am desperate to try to prove or dis-prove a link. Any help that your readers could give me would be gratefully received.

**Janet E. Ward (Mrs.)**  
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North Yorkshire  
LS24 8EZ

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