

PAST FORWARD

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The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

Who in 1991 would have predicted the success of *Past Forward* 10 years on? The magazine has certainly come a very long way since its humble beginnings as two A3 sheets – not even stapled together! But such was the immediate response that even by the second issue the size had doubled – and it was stapled together! These were indeed exciting days for a Heritage Service still in its infancy, for not only was *Past Forward* making great strides, but this was also the time of the opening of the History Shop – another big success story. By 1994, *Past Forward* was appearing three times a year instead of twice, and now contained 20 pages.

Issue 13 in 1996 was a notable exception, commemorating as it did the 750th anniversary of Wigan's first royal charter, not to mention the opening of the new Wickham Gallery of the History Shop, with a bumper edition of 24 pages and full colour covers. Full colour was also used during Millennium Year to do justice to Wigan's Parish Map, many sections of which were splendidly reproduced in the *Past Forwards* of 2000.

You, the readers, have grown and grown in number, and also in writing prowess – my postbag has increased to the extent that I, reluctantly, have to disappoint many of you, because I just cannot fit all your contributions in, even in a magazine which has now stretched to over 30 pages! One of the main areas

From the Editor

of satisfaction from editing *Past Forward* is the realisation that, were it not for the magazine, many readers would probably never have actually put pen to paper to record their memories and reminiscences. There are too many contributors and correspondents to mention – although the names of old faithfuls (I'm sure they won't object to my calling them that!) like Ernie Taberner, Harold Smith, Harold Knowles, Neil Cain, James Fairhurst, Fred Holcroft, Kenneth Lucas, Harry Entwistle, Marjorie Bryden and Alan Roby, not forgetting J H Ollerton and Bert Worsley who have sadly passed on, spring immediately to mind. But, of course, there are many, many others – as you will see from the pages which follow.

Nor would many people, not just locally but literally throughout the world, have been brought together in correspondence or in some cases even face to face, through reading the magazine and finding they had a common interest.

You, the readers, are of course largely responsible for all this – and my sincere thanks to all of you, near and far, whether you subscribe to the magazine or are able to pick up your own copy. Do keep sending in your contributions – financial and written. My thanks also to

the Heritage Service staff for contributing to and supporting this venture over the years, as well as to all those involved in the actual printing and production of the magazine. The result is a very high quality and professional product – as this issue once again confirms – which is eagerly anticipated and read throughout the world.

I often think, during the compilation of *Past Forward*, how strange it is that several distinct themes appear. In this issue, for example, two such themes have manifested themselves, by chance, closely linked and running through the magazine - World War II and Mesnes Park. I have recently received a good number of contributions relating to the War, and aviation in particular. The events of World War II have, indeed, been very much in all our minds of late, with the first Holocaust Memorial Day in January. Wigan Council played its full part here (see p15), and particularly with a commemorative ceremony and exhibition in Mesnes Park. The Park, as it happens, is also the subject of Irene Roberts' delightful article on p21, as well as being the subject of a forthcoming exhibition in the History Shop (see p16). The Mesnes Park Parish Map is also reproduced on the back cover.

I know you will enjoy reading these, and the many other, articles, in the pages which follow.

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Covers: Front - The Mayor of Wigan, Cllr Joan Hurst, accompanied by David Arnold of the Jewish Representative Council, plants a silver birch tree in Mesnes Park, Wigan in memory of all those who have died as a result of genocide (see p15). Photo by Jim Pryle. **Back** - Two of the Parish Maps - Wigan Town Centre (top) and Mesnes Park (bottom) - displayed in December in the History Shop, the final venue for the *Mapping the Millennium* Festival (see p16).

The Dr. Mary Tomlinson Story

ONE of the most remarkable stories from the early part of the 20th century was that of Mary Tomlinson. She was born in Billinge Road, Pemberton in 1899 where her parents carried on a business, her father being an old Pemberton Colliery worker who had left the industry with an injury. She attended St Paul's School, Goose Green, leaving at the age of 13 to work at Eckersley's Mills at Poolstock, first in the reeling room and later becoming a weaver. After two years she left to work on the pit brow at Pemberton Colliery, leaving after five years to become, at the age of 20, a nurse at a children's creche in Walsall.

Now launched on a nursing career, she later joined the staff at the Ancoats Hospital, Manchester. During that time she studied for a matriculation certificate, the university entrance qualification at that time. Passing the examination she began studies at Birmingham University and in October, 1929 at the age of 31, she obtained degrees in medicine and surgery, becoming a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians. For six months she worked in a children's hospital in Birmingham and then decided to embrace missionary work.

"Self-sacrifice"

The local press reported on 7 July 1935: *Dr. Mary Tomlinson, who has for the past five years been a medical missionary in the Madras district of Southern India with a Methodist Missionary Society, returned home on leave last week. Her life has been an amazing instance of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty. In twelve months she has mastered the Tamil language which, after Chinese, is probably the most difficult in the world to learn. Whilst on leave, Dr. Tomlinson's restless energy is finding an outlet in a twelve-months medical course at Liverpool University on tropical diseases. Dr. Tomlinson, who is scarcely more than five feet tall and slim built, told of her work and experiences in India. In the Madras district there were three hospitals of the mission, one in Madras City called Galliarna, which is a girl's name meaning marriage and happiness. The lady doctor in charge is a Mrs Monoham who had visited Wigan and addressed a number of meetings. Nearby were two villages with a hospital in each one. The one that Dr. Tomlinson worked in was called Ikkadu, meaning Jungle of Flies. "Believe me," she said, "in the monsoon period it jolly well is. There are two of us at the hospital, Dr. Proudlove who is in charge and myself. It was founded 50 years ago after an outbreak of famine and cholera. The hospital was really meant for children but - needs must - we had to take*



adults in as well. Last year, [1934] we had 34,000 outpatients, and although the hospital had 60 beds there was a shortage of sheets, pillows, blankets and other things. Ten shillings [50p] would save a life."

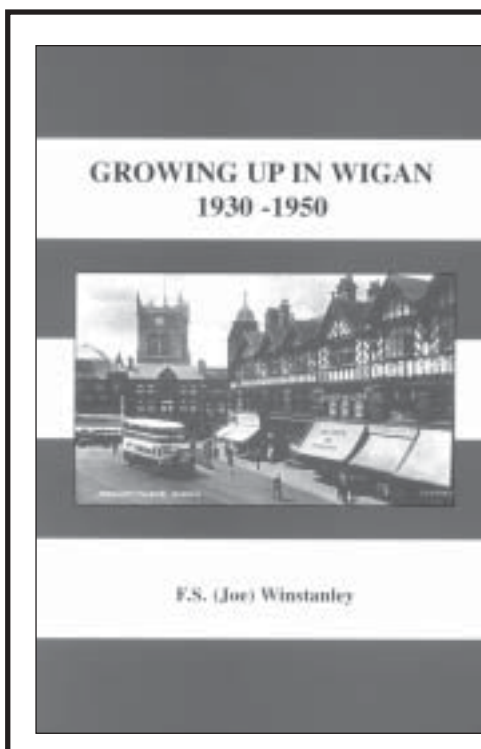
An outcast

Dr. Tomlinson rose at six in the morning, and after Dhoti Bazri, which means "little breakfast", she plunged into her work for the day. About three times a year she visits Madras saying she saw the film "David Copperfield" there. On Sunday 6 February 1936, she spoke at the Wigan Presbyterian Church at Chapel

Lane on the difficulties of medical missionaries in India. She said they had only £75 to buy the drugs and serum to treat tetanus and other diseases which were rife among the village people and her talk was mainly an appeal for funds to carry on the work. She told of one man who was celebrated because he could kill a goat with his teeth. He was an outcast, one of the untouchables, and when his enemies tried to kill him he ran 35 miles with a fractured skull. He wouldn't become a Christian for that would have meant giving up one of his two wives. "I put him in a hut by himself," she said, "and he barricaded himself in, but one night they came through the roof and cut him to pieces." She spoke of the terrible infant mortality, saying she had seen girl wives of 13 and 14 years being carried out dead. She said, "People when they reach us are usually in a bad state because when they are ill they use cow dung and cow urine as medicine. I could weep for the superstitions of the people of India".

So far as newspaper reports are concerned, the trail ran out about 1938 after she had returned to India. However, a Mr Baines from Orrell, who served in the RAF during the war, visited Dr. Tomlinson who, by this time was married. She was living with her husband, Mr. Rolle who was the owner or manager of a chrome factory in Crompton near Madras. She welcomed Mr Baines, and to celebrate opened a tin of tripe which they shared. She had by then left the mission, and he believes she died in the 1990's, somewhere in East Anglia.

James Fairhurst



Book
Review

Growing Up in Wigan 1930-1950 by Joe Winstanley

'Growing Up in Wigan' is a wonderful reminiscence book that explores the town between 1930 and 1950. It follows the exploits of Joe Winstanley (the author) from boy to man in an evocative way that makes for compulsive reading.

Whether you are interested in social, local or family history this book will appeal and is well worth the £5.95 price tag. Available from the History Shop (please add 50p p&p).

Dave Tetlow
Wigan Heritage Service

Election Fever?

You Ain't Seen Nuthin'!

by Fred Holcroft

THE RECENT United States presidential election cliff-hanger certainly made compulsive viewing for those interested in politics, but for local historians it was tame by comparison with parliamentary elections held in the old Wigan Borough during the 19th century. Their progress can be followed in the local newspapers held on microfilm in the History Shop and some election pamphlets survive in the Archives at Leigh Town Hall. Although the franchise was more restricted than nowadays, elections were far more lively affairs than today's dull predictable proceedings.

The General Election of 1857 was typical of what went on although it marked the end of an older era of politicking. The election was called at short notice when the government of the day was unexpectedly defeated in a Commons vote of confidence on the unlikely subject of diplomatic relations with China, due to the defection of some of their supporters to the opposition.

Familiar and bizarre

Three candidates put themselves forward for Wigan's two seats in the House of Commons: Colonel James Lindsay, the Earl of Crawford's son and a current sitting member, Francis Sharp Powell, another Conservative and a man of independent financial means, plus the lone Liberal, local millowner Henry Woods. Their manifesto pledges were a mixture of what are to us the familiar and the bizarre.

James Lindsay told how he had voted against his own government, and so had been party to bringing about the election. He hoped that

income tax will not be a permanent feature of taxation; he regretted the recent higher rates of duty on sugar and tea because these articles contribute so much to the comfort of the working classes, and hoped to solve the seemingly intractable problem in education of reconciling secular instruction with religious teaching.

Francis Sharp Powell wanted to extend the franchise: *I regard the present state of the franchise as anomalous and defective. I desire such an extension as would give the franchise to those numerous but as yet unrepresented sections of the community whose intelligence and education may entitle them to this privilege.*

Who said today's politicians were condescending!

Inquisitorial

Sharp Powell was also a well-known free trade advocate, held similar views on education to his fellow Conservative, disapproved of all taxes which were

inquisitorial in character or had

a tendency to restrict mercantile operations or to hinder the spread of knowledge among the people, promising that he would support *all practicable measures which would improve the condition of the working classes.*

As a Liberal, Henry Woods was used to being portrayed as a dangerous revolutionary by his political opponents and sought to reassure the voters: *although I do not wish to see violent and convulsive changes, still, our national progress is continually making alterations necessary.*

In the remainder of his manifesto, easily the shortest of

the three, he noted that he was replacing the retiring Liberal member, the much respected Joseph Acton, that he himself was a local man and a large employer of labour in the town; he too was a free trader, the franchise needed widening, education was in a mess, and he need not say more because his views were well-known.

The *Wigan Observer* admitted that past elections had been rowdy:

unfortunately Wigan has for a long time enjoyed the unenviable reputation of being the arena of electoral bribery. Distrust we beseech you all who trust to the power of corruption and bribery. He who buys you will sell you.

The paper noted that this time the authorities had taken extra precautions:

a strong body of the county constabulary, well-armed (sic) have been applied for in order to assist the borough police who with the fire brigade are fully able to keep the peace without the aid of the military – the latter force being at so short a distance that they can be speedily called if necessary.

On Friday 27 March 1857 the three candidates were officially nominated. At 10.00 am they met the mayor and magistrates in the Moot Hall where the official papers were signed, after which they adjourned to the Commercial Yard where the nomination speeches were delivered from the steps of the Commercial Hall.

Mild heckling

Each candidate was duly proposed and seconded to which they each replied, mostly in a reiteration of their manifestos, enduring some mild heckling from the crowd in the process. Then the mayor did something which to us

today would seem amazing. He called for a show of hands from the assembled crowd! After glancing round he declared that Messrs. Powell and Woods had been elected. Colonel Lindsay immediately requested a poll as he was legally entitled to do, which the mayor announced would take place the next morning. The election was well and truly on!

In a constituency with two members such as Wigan, each elector possessed two votes, but was not required to use them both. He (for it was a male franchise) could "plump" for only one candidate, or he could "split" his vote, giving one each to two candidates. The franchise was further restricted by age (voters had to be 21 or over) and further qualified by property ownership (of a minimum rateable value of £10 annually). The Reform Act of 1832 had increased the electorate from 21 to almost 800 but it was still a small proportion of Wigan's population compared to today's universal suffrage:

Total population of the borough*	32,941
Total male population*	15,569
Total adult male population*	8,177
Total electorate	794

*using 1851 census

And so at 8.00 am on Saturday 28 March 1857, the polling booth at the Town Hall opened. The registered voters had to turn up in person, show proof of identity, then openly declare for which candidates they wished to vote!

"Treating"

The major difference between now and 1857 was that every individual voter's



choice was clear for all onlookers to see! (there was no secret ballot until 1869). In addition full coverage of every vote cast was published in the two local newspapers and in a specially printed Poll Book – several of which survive in the Archives. There was thus no way in which an elector could accept a bribe from one of the candidates then vote otherwise and expect to get away with it, although bribery was prevalent, especially in the form of “treating” – buying drinks in the local pub.

Another electoral practice which seems amazing to us today was the announcement every hour from the Town Hall steps of the current state of the poll! As a result, promptly at 9.00 am the mayor emerged to read out the number of votes cast by the early birds:

Woods 36, Powell 26, Lindsay 20.

As the morning wore on, a steady stream of electors arrived at the Town Hall in Market Place and every hour the voting figures were read out by the mayor:

10.00 am – Woods 77, Powell 59, Lindsay 46.

11.00 am - Woods 123, Powell 119, Lindsay 95

All morning Henry Woods maintained his slender lead over the two Conservatives. Then at twelve noon came a dramatic announcement:

Woods 163, Powell 163, Lindsay 130.

Although there looked to be two comfortable winners since Lindsay already seemed well beaten there was the natural desire to be first. All three candidates scoured the town for their supporters and Francis Sharp Powell seemed to have the better organisation - an hour later at one o'clock he took the lead for the first time and held it into the afternoon:

1.00 pm - Powell 200, Woods, 190, Lindsay 143

2.00 pm - Powell 258, Woods 233, Lindsay 177.

At the 3.00 announcement, with only an hour to go to the end of polling, there was another twist. Woods hit back:

Woods 350, Powell 335, Lindsay 221.

It was during the last hour of polling that Francis Sharp Powell's superior organisation showed its worth. Although Woods found almost another 100 votes, Powell's messengers combed the borough to bring in the last of his supporters – over 160 of them. At 4.00 the polls finally closed and the final count was declared:

Powell 493, Woods 447, Lindsay 308.

The Market Square in front of the Town Hall was a mass of people packed so tightly together that the reporters had difficulty making notes of the speeches.

After the Mayor had read out the final numbers, each candidate spoke in turn. Francis Sharp Powell thanked his supporters and congratulated the electorate on both the large turnout and the manner in which the election had been conducted. Henry Woods congratulated his opponents on their conduct during the election, while Colonel Lindsay, showing no resentment at losing, confessed his gratitude that the election had passed off with so much good humour and moved a vote of thanks to the Mayor.

Borne aloft

Powell was then borne aloft by his cheering supporters to the Royal Hotel and the “immense” (according to the Wigan Observer) crowd quietly dispersed. There had indeed been a huge turnout – over 93% of the electorate of 794 had taken part, and only 55 did not, assumed to be dead, absent from the town (the election took place at very short notice) or not bothering to vote. What a contrast with today's turnouts!

The Corrupt Practices Act of 1854 required the candidates to publish their election expenses in full in the local papers and an examination of the detail shows how Powell was able to

overtake Woods during that vital final hour. He was better organised and he spent more. Total expenses were:

Powell: £674
Woods: £277
Lindsay: £254

Powell had spent twice as much as either of his two opponents. The figures were itemised in detail so that the amounts devoted to the different electoral activities can clearly be seen:

	Powell	Woods	Lindsay
Town Clerk & Election expenses:	£55	£36	£38
Printing & Advertising:	£38	£37	£49
Election Agent & Canvassers:	£312	£38	£34
Messengers:	£109	£35	£3
Rooms, stabling & car hire:	£151	£118	£124

It seems strange that after being an M.P. for 11 years and defeating Sharp Powell in the General Election of 1852, Colonel Lindsay should have neglected his canvassers and messengers – essential to get his vote out. In that earlier General Election of 1852, despite being the most popular personal candidate with fewest “plumpers” Lindsay had attracted enough split votes from the other two candidates to grab one of the two seats:

Plumped for Thicknesse (Liberal): 142
Plumped for Powell (Conservative): 111
Plumped for Lindsay (Conservative): 47
Split vote Thicknesse & Lindsay: 160
Split vote Powell & Lindsay: 149
Split vote Powell & Thicknesse: 64

This gave a final vote of: Thicknesse 366, Lindsay 356, Powell 324.

In the 1854 by-election where Acton replaced Thicknesse he was opposed by Powell and only beat him by five votes!

Acton 339, Powell 334.

In 1857 a large number of Liberals could not bring themselves to vote for anyone other than for Henry Woods who became by far the most popular candidate:

Plumped for Woods: 148
Plumped for Powell: 66
Plumped for Lindsay: 16

This small personal vote put Lindsay at a huge disadvantage and the other two candidates were successful because enough voters felt that they could cross party lines and share their two votes between the quiet reformer Henry Woods and the liberal Conservative

Francis Sharp Powell:
Powell & Woods 217,
Powell & Lindsay 210,
Woods & Lindsay 82.

Powell had a sound personal base, provided by those Conservatives who considered that they could not desert either of their two candidates.

The *Wigan Observer* concluded: *the election has proved that men must not expect to represent an independent constituency when their views on great national subjects are not in accordance with the feelings, interests and settled opinions of the electors.*

The bit now firmly between his teeth, the editor waxed eloquently onwards: *the full, fair and free expression of the voice of the people in all its power and majesty, gives wholesomeness to the institutions which are England's pride, which may be imitated but cannot be excelled by other nations. Like healthy soil, our institutions may be improved by culture and are sure to bring forth good fruit because they are composed of the popular element, and the main portion of their composition is freedom of election.*

They took their elections seriously in those days! And not a chad in sight.

'I Won't Dance - Don't Ask Me'

WELL that's what Fred Astaire sang – but he did dance, didn't he – and how. Kenneth Lucas, writing in *Past Forward* 26, obviously enjoyed his dancing too – unlike the present writer whose answer to the same invitation was roughly the same but with disastrous consequences persisting for quite a slice of his childhood.

I was reminded of that miserable period the other day on picking up a leaflet in our local library. It was headed, *Morris Dancing* and was issued by a society called the *Foresters Morris Men* and I quote a paragraph to set the scene of my ordeal of over 70 years ago.

'Our repertoire consists mainly of dances from the Cotswold villages, the region around Oxford and Stratford-on-Avon which in times past were performed as a Spring ritual. The dances symbolise work, fighting and fertility. We wear white to signify purity, bells to frighten away evil spirits and wave handkerchiefs to pass the magic of the dance to the audience. The audience is also expected to participate by donating towards the collection, which brings the giver the luck of the Morris for the coming year. Each village had its own dances, tunes and style of dance.'

Imagine trying to sell that to a wiry, tousled haired lad of 10 who, just about three years beforehand had been baptised in the font in *The Hen-pen* at Central Park and had since, on numerous occasions, routed t'Saints 100 : 0, even with their star, Alf Ellaby on t'wing. And hadn't he wiped out several Red Indian tribes with the aid of Tom Mix who

lived at the back of The Palace in Bryn Street, Ashton?

Precarious age

The age of 10 can be a precarious age. An age where world events are things that your parents and older people nagged about. Even local news passed unimpaired from one ear to the other – unless of course, a snippet of the dialogue happened to concern the eavesdropper or something in connection therewith. That was **their** world. For one about to complete his first decade of existence on the planet, the world was a totally different planet with a completely different shape. His was a more surrealistic world made entirely of his own machinations and known only unto himself as he made that last lap in the race towards the formative years.

It was, nevertheless, a terrific shock to his ego when the dream of playing for Wigan was rudely interrupted by a Lord Kitchener style effigy appearing from nowhere, complete with God-like voice booming the words, **MORRIS DANCERS ARE AFTER YOU**. Regrettably, he would have been right but let us now look at the reality.

The time is a few months following the end of the 1926 General Strike. Nothing much happened in Garswood, the village of my birth, prior to that event and following the punitive effect of the end of the strike, things were rapidly and more dismally returning to that state if not worse.

There were two pubs, The Stag and The Railway plus a Conservative club and a Labour Club – all male dominated of course, symbolising the adage of the day, *Woman's place is in the home*, and of course,

contributing to the full time employment of the local midwife. Nurse Tabener. The only venue for general meetings was t'Little Skoo, or, St. Andrews C of E Infant School. Little was the operative description as it was meant only to accommodate about 50 infant pupils. Apart from the usual daytime usage the school was used for the occasional dance, a Whist Drive and the Annual Sunday School concert at Christmas, plus any occasion that might boost the coffers of Church or School funds.

Harbinger

But then whispers began to go around that as far as such gatherings were concerned, the days of t'Little Skoo were numbered – summdy 'ad eered thi wus gooin t'build on Marshs' pen (allotment). And how true this was! Little did I realise, however, that it was to be the harbinger of the invasion of my hitherto unruffled existence as a normal (I think) little urchin, happily watching the world go by. Far less did I realise that the blue touchpaper had been lit under the very foundations of my abode.

The announcement that the said building was to be called *The Mission Hall* did little to attract my attention until I learned that the body responsible for the organisation of the project – *The Mission Hall Committee* – was to include none other than my father, as general secretary, an accolade of which even I was extremely proud. He relayed in detail just what it was that this new committee was up to when the real business of scraping funds together was tabled and this, to quote an old term from the days of the cinemagoer, is

where I came in – screaming and kicking.

Apparently much thought had gone into one annual, major Summer occasion which would dramatically boost the coffers – an Olde English Fayre. This, in effect, would be a marked enhancement of the old Sunday School Field Treat with all manner of new inclusions – no longer would the plea *Please Bring Your Own Cups* be necessary. Posters began to appear with the words, in heavy print, *Maypole and Morris Dancing Will Take Place* – and this, I'll swear, was before the committee knew the volunteers (volunteered in my case).

Taciturnity

Fortunately (for Dad) he was able to maintain his taciturnity as the plan of attack had, by then, been relayed to mother – the matriarch superior, herself a granite effigy in The Mothers' Union. Add to this formidable warhead my sister Flo, many years my senior and able to play the piano well enough to be, like myself, dragooned into service though in her case, there was no foreseeable problem – she was going to enjoy the experience. And if reinforcements were needed in the way of not so gentle persuasion, there was always grandfather, recently retired as Sunday school superintendent. The die was cast.

Just how the order was put to me, I cannot recall, but no doubt it started with words like *You will*. I do, however, recall my appearance at the first Morris Dancing practice at St. Andrew's School. Struggling with my blushes at





“Goin’ t’ th’ Emp’ ” was an oft repeated expression by thousands of Wiganers from the 1930’s to the 1960’s. The Empress Ballroom was located in Station Road, Wigan and described by Kenneth Lucas in Past Forward 26 as a popular venue. It’s Palais de Dance annexe had its entrance in Millgate.

the thought of me being involved with the very word “dance” was bad enough but on entering that little schoolroom I became far more agitated when confronted by Mrs Hampson, the then headmistress whom I thought I had seen the last of three years previously on leaving for the Rectory School (the Big School) at Downall Green. It was patently obvious that Mrs Hampson’s rotund assemblage could not be used for demonstration but undeterred, she relayed her instructions to one much younger and far less rotund and, with the music now being played by sister Flo’, we were off – one two three HOP, one two three HOP...the tune still haunts me!

As the weeks rolled by we learned certain variations which involved the waving of handkerchiefs and, with the aid of a long stick, trying to knock lumps off the knuckles of your opposite number – which was the nearest form of physical contact we could

boast, having given up several games of tick rugby on “The Croft” behind the school.

Taken aback

We did, however, have a pleasant change one evening. We were taken to *The Miss Churchill School of Dance* near The Hippodrome, King Street, Wigan (there was always a thrill about a train ride). It was there that I had a temporary change of mind about dancing when I espied a “Tap” class in progress. I was really taken aback with the sight of kids of my age making their feet work like drumsticks. For years, without any instruction of any description, I fancied myself as a tap dancer Alas, Fred Astaire had nothing to fear from me.

The arrival of the date for the Olde English Fayre was like a re-enactment of The Relief of Mafeking. For the first time since being

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The Great Stink of Standish

By Neil Cain

'THERE'S a famous seaside place called Blackpool that's noted for fresh air and fun'. Many of us recall the opening words of the old Stanley Holloway monologue concerning young Albert and the irritable lion.

Way back in 1859 the residents of parts of Standish were crying out for some of that fresh air of Blackpool according to a letter I discovered buried in the files of the Ministry of Health at the Public Records Office at Kew. Written in a beautifully clear hand and seemingly sent to the officers of the Wigan Board of Health, it reads as a pitiful cry to authority by an Edward Woodcock, and contrasts with what some would say is our own over-legislated world. Mr. Woodcock's letter, dated 24 June 1859, reads as follows: *Gentlemen,*

In the lower end of the township of Standish, in the parish of Standish in the Wigan Union, there has been established some years a manufactory of super phosphate of lime from bones, blood and other noxious substances which are now,

and for a considerable time have been, a cause of great complaint in the neighbourhood but which being inhabited by colliers and cottagers generally, it has not found vent.

There are now in the close proximity to these works two cases of illness caused, and very much increased by, the terrible smell from these works.

One is of a man and his wife both confined to bed with illness caused by the stink.

The other is of a widow who is bed-ridden and who has lately been brought to her present cottage to be nearer her children, but who – until her removal was not in any other way ill than by rheumatism – now as she lies on her bed in the midst of this dreadful stink, she is tormented with the most excruciating headaches. The whole neighbourhood is distressed.

The colliers declare they had rather, and do, get their dinners in the pits than come home, for the nuisance makes them

sick and takes away their appetites. There is no Board of Health in Standish.

Lately there has been an additional nuisance by a manufacture of manure from gas-tar and vitriol, which is positively poisonous and endangers life.

Should you be able to put us in the way to put down this nuisance, we shall be glad to adopt any plan.

*I am
Gentlemen
Your most obedient servant
EDWARD WOODCOCK*

Nearly 150 years on, we can feel for poor Mr Woodcock, and those depending on the power of his pen for relief. Just when they thought things couldn't get any worse, the manure works opened up!

One final thought – in case we are inclined to dismiss his efforts as those of a middle class meddler with nothing better to do, may I make one suggestion? Anything capable of putting a mid 19th century Wigan miner off his 'baggin' must have been something indeed!

'I Won't
Dance -
Don't Ask
Me'

Continued from page 7

dragooned my step lightened, having in mind that this was to be the glorious end...I was wrong – we did it all over again for the following year!

Now that really was the end – or so I thought. Three years on, I had moved on to The Central School in Ashton and was perhaps in my second year there when the most popular teacher in the school departed and was replaced by a Mr. Heaton from Billinge. A tall, slim, bespectacled being, with wispy blonde hair. Once established, Mr. Heaton imposed on the pupils a few of his own ideas including some elements of P.T. with which none of us were familiar. (He had been in the army during World War I).

Recruiting forthwith

But then, one fateful day, he stood in front of my form

and began to talk, would you believe, about my pet *bete noire* – Morris Dancing – but worse, he was desirous of forming a troupe the following week and would be recruiting forthwith. I was not altogether unfamiliar with nausea but the occasion somehow evoked a new version, tinged in no mean terms, with fear. But there was worse to follow. From the corner of my left eye I saw a hand raised, in answer to which was Mr Heaton's enquiry, "Yes, Melling". Then came the reply I was dreading like the plague, "Sir – Smith's done Morris Dancing". Mr Heaton's relief was my sentence of penal servitude. Once again it was "one, two three HOP, one two three HOP" but this time in school hours – at least for a week or two.

For reasons best know to himself, Mr Heaton stepped up these M.D. sessions to include Thursday afternoon – **after school**. But here I dug my young heels in and, as a measure of how I hated this form of education, I preferred several weeks of Friday morning canings for refusing to stay behind the previous day for the purpose of compounding my hate.

Though it is far too late to have to prove that I won a Pyrrhic victory, I think on reflection, there was a serious incongruity with the times about to descend on the dark 1930's. Imagine a typical job interview in those dog-eat-dog times: "Any special achievements lad?" "I do Morris Dancing – Sir". "You do what lad? OK....Next please."

Though that was the end of my tempestuous engagement with Morris Dancing, I have to confess that in my more mature years, I did obey the beckoning finger of Terpsichore – from across the ballroom. After a few years of attending local hops where I followed approximately the pattern and the timing of that familiar, counter-clockwise moving queue around the dance floor, I actually acquired an urge to "mend my ways" – my ways around the ballroom that is.

Tommy Moss

To this end, I decided to invest heavily in pursuit of acquiring some knowledge of

what to do with my feet when the band struck up. The cost of this adventure amounted to one 4d. return train ticket to Wigan, the princely sum of 1s.6d. entrance fee to The Moss School of Dancing and the occasional 1s.6d. at The Mission Hall, Garswood (remember all that fuss) to practice what Tommy Moss had taught me, and I have to say that he taught me well, having attained Bronze Standard and going on for Silver.

Unfortunately at the time, there was a war going on and people like myself were at the mercy of what was called *The Essential Works Order* which meant that you could be moved – and I was. I must, however, say a big thank you to Tommy Moss for putting me on the right road for the enjoyment of dancing not to mention that of someone of whom I asked, "May I have the pleasure?" over 61 years ago!

No letters from The Foresters Morris Men please.

J Harold Smith
Sutton Coalfield

See p30 for Ken Lucas's dancing memories. Ed.

Freelance writer Eric Villiers is researching the remarkable story of Mary Connolly, a street singer at the beginning of the 20th century, who rose to international stardom. In 1917 a theatrical agent who heard her in the streets signed her to the giant Moss Circuit. From then until the mid-1920's the former pit brow lass, who grew up in Leigh, Lancashire, became

extraordinarily wealthy as a 'top-liner' on the UK variety circuit. However, in a few short years, as film and radio killed off variety, Mary Connolly vanished from the scene and no one seems to know what became of her. If any reader can throw any light on this mystery, please contact Eric.

Street Singer who Conquered Empires

IN THE dusty recesses of an old cupboard at Saint Joseph's RC Church, Leigh, a leather-bound First Communion book lists a dozen communicants blessed by the Bishop of Liverpool on 26 February 1899. Near the top of the list is seven-year-old Mary Connolly. That single reference is currently the only document linking Mary to the Lancashire mining community where she grew up.

Her father Joseph, by then a young widower, and Mary's five-year-old brother James, had accompanied her to the service that February morning. Both looked on proudly as the little girl, her long dark hair falling down her back, made her commitment to the church. In the years to come it would be Mary's unshakeable faith in Catholicism that would comfort her as she endured the death of her father and relentless poverty before, at 25 years of age, finding herself a star, literally overnight, on 18 June 1917.

Pit Brow lass

Born at Armagh, in the north of Ireland in 1892, her father, a labourer, brought the family to Lancashire to find work in coal mining. When she was 16 Mary followed him into the mines where she worked as a pit brow lass at Hulton Colliery. Tragedy struck again on 20 December 1910, when Pretoria Pit, where Mary worked, blew up killing 344 men and boys, including Mary's childhood sweetheart to whom she had been engaged to be married. She had not been at work that day as she was recovering from pneumonia caught while working at the open air picking belts. She was so ill that she could not be told of the disaster for two weeks.

When she was, she vowed never to set foot in a colliery again.

With her father's health failing and her brother invalidated out of the mines, Mary kept the family going by working as a farm hand. When her father died in the winter of 1916-1917, to fulfil his dying wish to be buried in his native Dublin, Mary sold or pawned all that she owned, including her shawl, to pay for the burial. It meant that only James could accompany the body, leaving Mary to walk to Liverpool and sail home as an open deck passenger.

During the 30-mile walk Mary sang and collected pennies as she went. She never begged, but people were so taken with her beautiful mezzo-soprano voice, that they thrust money into her hands. She was, however, a reluctant street singer. Stranded back in Dublin, where the death rate had been the highest in Europe and worse than Calcutta and, unable to find work, she starved for three weeks.

Worth culturing

Finally, with James by her side, she found the courage to go out at night singing in the wealthy suburbs on the city's south side. One of the residents, Miss A L Stuart of Aylesbury Road, was astounded as she watched people in the most prosperous area of Dublin come to their doors and into the street to push money into Mary's hands. As Miss Stuart later told reporters: "I would never have believed that anyone could bring the people of Ballsbridge into the streets. Truly she has a voice worth culturing."

Miss Stuart saw to it that Barney Armstrong, a theatrical agent for the giant

Moss Circuit, took her on. And when 'Mary Connolly, the Dublin Street Singer' opened for her first week of concerts at the Empire Palace Theatre, so many wanted to hear her that she had to be held over for a second week. In the build up to her debut the excitement had been so intense that a reporter on the *Dublin Evening Herald*, with an eerie prescient of the John F Kennedy assassination, noted that everyone could remember where he or she was when they first heard Mary singing in the streets. He had been 'on top of a tramcar going to Rathgar'.

For his part the Dublin diarist Joseph Holloway – regarded by many as the world's greatest theatregoer – listened from his study window and wrote of 'a voice that thrilled me to my heart's core'. Later he said that hearing Mary on stage was 'one of the most thrilling experiences I ever remember in a theatre . . .' It was quite a compliment coming from the man who designed the Abbey Theatre for W B Yeats and was a friend of literary giants like James Joyce and John Millington Synge.

Extraordinary scenes

With her Ballsbridge patrons keen to see Mary get into grand opera, a fund was set up to pay for her musical education. News of the fund produced extraordinary scenes at the Dublin Empire, when spontaneous collections broke out as soldiers' bonnets, gentlemen's hats and cloth caps, brimming with 'cheques, sovereigns, half-sovereigns and coins of every kind' were carried to the stage and emptied at her feet.

During her first two tours – of Ireland and the UK – collections were made for the fund at nearly every theatre. In Liverpool the *Daily Post and Echo* dubbed her 'The People's Star' and the money flowing in made her immediately wealthy. However, she never did get a proper musical education; the demands of the variety circuit took up all her time.

For the next seven years or so Mary went on thrilling audiences in every major UK city, breaking box office records in theatres where the likes of W C Fields, Harry Lauder and Charlie Chaplin had appeared. The lowly labourer's daughter had become the living embodiment of Professor Higgins' Eliza Doolittle, and was honoured in her home town of Armagh with a civic reception, during which she was presented with an inscribed gold pendant and necklace.

Sadly, while she was admired by millions of her contemporaries, Mary's achievements are a forgotten chapter of theatrical history. It appears that the people of Lancashire did not realise that the tiny singer's remarkable voice had been nurtured in their church and school choirs. Advertisements, theatre reviews and news reports in English newspapers make no mention of the connection. They were content to report the romance: a sensational turnaround in fortune for a 'little bare-footed street singer from Dublin', as the *Bolton Evening News* described her in that summer of 1917.

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In this issue Alan Roby describes Miss Weeton's disastrous marriage; a walk through Wigan's streets with daughter Mary and preparations for Wigan Fair. In addition he provides information about Parr Hall, near St. Helens, where Mary was sent as a boarder, and its controversial principals.

ELLEN WEETON

(1776-1849)

GOVERNESS

Persecution and Despair

IN September 1814, Miss Weeton became Mrs. Ellen Stock. With the marriage came the legal obligation of giving all her shrewd investments and savings to her husband. At a stroke she no longer existed in law, as a separate individual. Her very personality and individuality upon the marriage became, in effect, incorporated into that of her husband.

The marriage took place at the Holy Trinity Parish Church, Liverpool. The choice of church may have been one familiar to Miss Weeton whilst living in Liverpool from August 1808 to December 1809.

Aaron Stock, just 11 months older than Miss Weeton, was a widower with two jealous adult daughters living in his home at the rear of his cotton-spinning mill, Chapel Lane, Wigan. In addition there appears to have been a succession of easily influenced servants. It was to this cheerless crowded home that Stock brought his new bride. The marriage was a disaster. Miss Weeton was surrounded by the latent possibilities for wicked doings, which soon became a reality. Stock was dominant, unfeeling and violent tempered. Very clearly his only interest in his new bride was her money, investments and savings. These were vital to prop up his cotton spinning concern, which was on the brink of bankruptcy. There is also ample evidence that he could be free with his fists via the local Session Rolls of that period:

'On the 17th July, 1815, Aaron Stock, cotton spinner, entered into recognizances (his sureties being Richard Eccles, surgeon, and Thomas Ashcroft, a stone-mason) for an assault on Robert Balshaw, a cotton rover.'

'In October, 1821, Aaron Stock, cotton spinner, entered into recognizances (his sureties being John Johnson, book-keeper, and Joseph Crompton, cotton spinner) for an assault on Nelly Stock, his wife.'

"Deadly blows"

Nevertheless just nine months and nine days after the marriage a daughter, Mary, was born. Following the birth began calculated and consistent cruelty, made worse with a background of cavilling members of the family and servants. All were united only in their intense hatred for Miss Weeton, whom they considered an 'interloper'. She believed her life to be in danger and became afraid to eat or drink for fear of being poisoned by her husband. Constantly she was on her guard "against the deadly blows he sometimes gave me at the back of my ear, unprovokedly, and when I was least expecting it."

Her child, whilst appearing healthy, seemed too weak to be weaned and the mother herself suffered "great depression of spirits". It became impossible for her to nurse her. A wet nurse was procured and Miss Weeton then went to Southport for a few weeks to convalesce. Eventually both mother and child fully recovered but alas the cruelty continued.

* * * *

By the summer of 1816 there appears to have been a sort of truce and Miss Weeton's letters take on a more vibrant tone. She describes a pleasant day in Wigan with her, by now, precocious little daughter:

"I have been much diverted by Mary today. I took her by the hand, and she walked all the way from hence as far as our late house in Chapel Lane. She had so many things to look at that I thought we should scarcely ever arrive. She stopped at every open door, to look into the houses. There were many groups of little children in the street, and she would walk up to them and shout at them; she set her foot upon the step of a door where there happened to be a cake shop, so I bought her a cake; and then she wanted to stand still in the street whilst she ate it. I thought her first walk should be to her who first nursed her, as she lives in Chapel Lane. I knocked at the door; I had to wait a little, and Mary, too, would knock. After our visit was over, we walked to see a neighbour who lived opposite to our old house; many people were at their doors, and Mary stopped to look at them all, and if they had infants in their arms, she stood some time. Many laughed, and said she was a sharp little thing. She went up steps at one house to a child of three or four years old (with a little help), who gave her what he was playing with. The noise of looms in a cellar next attracted her attention; she struggled hard to go to the windows; but she is so fond of kicking, that I expected nothing less than the breaking them, so I enticed her to go after some poultry, and there was a little race."

Then Miss Weeton goes on to give us a very descriptive spirit of carnival that was in the air. It was Wigan Fair, held on 23 May, 1816:

"The town is going to be in a great bustle this week; for the fair commences tomorrow, on which occasion, it is usual for everybody to clean their houses thoroughly, to white-wash, paint, etc; the confectioners begin of baking for the fair a week beforehand; and the shop-keepers to polish, and set their wares, in the neatest order; large

caravans enter the town with wild beasts, monsters, and jugglers; likewise wooden horses, whirligigs, gambling tables, barrel organs, fiddlers, and hordes of beggars to add to the usual novelties. A handsome new Cloth Hall will be opened, built by Mr. Tennant, and everybody, I suppose, will go to see it."

* * * *

But the truce could not and did not last. Contained in her 'Occasional Reflections, A.D. 1818' which was a kind of diary, she describes events in her home in heart-rending terms of barbaric proportion. At various times she was turned out of doors into the street in mid-winter; she was not allowed to sit at the dining table with the family; she was deprived of money for house-keeping and clothes; she expected daily and nightly to be murdered; she was forced into solitary confinement in her own home; she was threatened with being sent to a Lunatic Asylum, and was actually imprisoned at least twice on false oaths.

Compounded by feelings of intense isolation and despair she appealed to God in humble petition:

"Have mercy! Have pity upon me, Oh my Father! And enable me to sustain Thy chastening hand with more submission and humility. Forsake me not at this trying time, and help me to see which way I should act, so as to please Thee and save my own soul.

Is it thy will that I submit to the tyranny of him who so cruelly uses me, and abuses the power which he has over me? Oh, that I could say that it were any other than my own husband. He that should nourish, cherish, and protect me; he that should protect me, so that even the winds should not blow too roughly on me – he is the man who makes it his sport to afflict me, to expose me to every hardship, to every insult. Or am I right in struggling to free myself from his griping[sic] hand?

Bitter had been the years of my marriage, and sorrowful my



days. Surely the measure of this is full! My life, my strength, cannot sustain many more such."

Deed of separation

Sadly much worse was to come before her prayers were finally answered. By the end of January 1822, threatened by the horror of a Lunacy Commission, she was forced to sign a 'Deed of Separation' forbidding her residing within two-and-a half miles radius of Wigan. The Deed's main feature was that she was barred from visits to the town upon any pretext whatsoever, which by definition meant she could not see her own child, except via three formal 'interviews' a year. Her net gain was her liberty and an irregularly paid and inadequate quarterly allowance, paid in arrears.

So seven-and-a-half years after marrying, Miss Weeton found herself childless, a wreck of her former self and an income (in the form of a dole). And because she refused to acquiesce over the condition of bound visits to see her child on specific dates, eighteen months was to elapse before she saw her daughter again.

Miss Weeton's brother Thomas, a Leigh solicitor, had been no help at all. To mollify his wife, who had no love for Ellen and to avoid upsetting his influential friends, he refused to take his sister's side. In fact he agreed to act as Aaron Stock's legal advisor against Ellen.

In the latter part of April 1822 she returned, we may be sure unwillingly, to the village of Upholland, an exile in the country of her birth. Hard times had descended upon the village as upon the rest of the countryside, being the after-effects of a protracted war. She rented a room at Ball's Farm near the summit of the hillside, overlooking Wigan, where intolerable tedium was to be her lot. There she ate comfortless and solitary meals, whilst the farmer and his wife fought off the spectre of Enclosure.

Emaciated scarecrow

Her former scholars had grown up; marriage and death had reduced the number of former acquaintances. The emaciated scarecrow that she



Handloom weavers' cottages, Wigan Lane, 1904. These are the type of cottages described by Miss Weeton about her walk with daughter Mary through Wigan on 22 May, 1816. The cottages were typical of many which housed Wigan's weaving looms in the 18th and 19th centuries. Power looms eventually rendered the cellar-based domestic handloom weavers obsolete.

had become was under no illusion about her situation, and the locals' wariness of her in that insular village community served only to increase her sense of isolation. Gone forever was the sociable atmosphere inspired by the presence of the late tippling master of the household of Rev. John Braithwaite (see *Past Forward* 22 p7, Summer 1999) - Mrs. Braithwaite, her very good friend, was a dying woman with a consumptive daughter, Elizabeth. It was now solely upon the able shoulders of daughter Catherine to which the household responsibilities now devolved. Miss Weeton was still undeniably a welcome visitor to their priory home but no more than that.

In an effort to further wean child from mother, Aaron Stock had decided in 1819 to transfer the care of their daughter to the Grundy partners, the husband and wife principals of a 'Boarding Academy for Young Ladies'. This was located at Parr Hall, St. Helens. Although Parr Hall was some seven miles from Upholland and eleven miles from Wigan, Miss Weeton submitted to the idea. The one consolation was that no longer would Mary be surrounded by the evil influences in her father's home. Unfortunately the decision simply increased Miss Weeton's difficulties, exposing, as it did, the misuse of the label 'education' which the principals

at Parr Hall offered. The establishment in every way was deficient in the substitute for the devoted care of a mother.

The Grundys were manifestly unfit for a role in the education, moral, religious and physical well-being of their charges. Mrs. Grundy was drinking herself to an inevitable premature death, while Mr. Grundy apparently amused himself with amatory dalliances. Not surprisingly Miss Weeton attempted, without success, to remove Mary from such an improper atmosphere.

Strictest supervision

Whilst the child does not appear to have suffered positive ill-treatment at the hands of the Grundys, she rapidly became very thin. Of even greater concern to her mother, was the blighting influence Mary suffered, resulting in the loss of some of her engaging little ways. Her affectionate disposition which had endeared her to her mother's heart was gradually being eroded. The strictest supervision was instituted from the outset (the Grundys being perfectly well aware of the conditions attached to Miss Mary's continued patronage of their establishment). Also in existence was a deliberate system of interception of Miss Weeton's letters through the connivance of Aaron Stock and the Wigan post-master.

In desperation Miss Weeton finally decided to regularly

walk to Parr Hall from Upholland, a distance there and back of some 14 miles. Her 'Journal' dated 21 October 1823, records:

"Set off from home about 10 o'clock, to walk to Parr Hall, to see my darling Mary, whom I had not seen since May 23. I told no-one where I was going. Not being well acquainted with the road beyond Billinge, I walked near a mile in tracing and retracing. About half past 12, I arrived there. When Mr. Grundy entered the room, he looked so grave and solemn, not the least smile embellished his features, that I thought it was a prognostication of a refusal to see my child. However, I brought a cheerful countenance, and kept it, which seemed to part some of its influence on Mr. Grundy, for by degrees the cloud on his brow disappeared . . . In about quarter of an hour my little sweet one came into the parlour, looking very pale and very thin. She looked glad to see me. In a short time, dinner came to me on a single plate. Mary was called away to dine with her schoolfellows . . . At half past three, I took leave, Mr. Grundy and Mary accompanying me a little way. Heaven bless her! A time may come when this distressing mode of seeing her may be done away with. If not - Thy will, Oh my Father, be done. With Thy help, I can resign myself cheerfully, for, in a few years, death will silence us all, and then what matters it?"

Parr Hall

Boarding Academy for Young Ladies

Principal: William Grundy

PARR HALL was located in the Redgate/Blackbrook area of St. Helens. It was associated with Queen Catherine Parr's ancestors. On the death of Catherine Parr's father in 1517, who owned part of the manor, it passed successively to the Byroms of Lowton, the Claytons of Liverpool and the Orrells of Blackbrook.

The building was described in 1778 as "a capital mansion house". It became a boarding school for young ladies in the early 19th century run by William Grundy and his wife. From 1834 it became a Catholic boarding school run by the Morgans until about 1856. Part of it collapsed in 1893 – having by then been sub-divided into tenements. Its remaining wing was demolished in the 1960's.

It was in 1819 that Aaron Stock sent his daughter, Mary, to Parr Hall Boarding Academy for Young Ladies. The decision was not satisfactory to Mrs. Stock (Miss Weeton), who believed their daughter's exclusion from her mother's care was detrimental to her welfare. Miss Weeton also believed the Grundys had been instructed by Mr. Stock not to allow the mother access to Mary in private, if she ever visited Parr Hall. In addition she believed the Grundys unfit for their role – as detailed in the accompanying article (pp10 and 11).

In a letter to Miss Hawarden, a Wigan friend, on 16 April 1825 (by which time Mr. Grundy was a widower), she wrote:

"Mary's health requires a mother's care; there is not a girl in the whole school who looks so ill. Mr. Grundy always represents her as enjoying good health – with no better motive, I fear, than the emolument of her board; for I hear a very poor character of him, both in Prescot and St. Helens, for meanness, avarice, and bad temper. Mrs. Grundy, it is said, never knew a moment's happiness after she married him. It is very necessary that Mary should, for a year or two, be unconfined in any school, or she will be thrown into a consumption; besides, it is astonishing to many, that Mr. G's school should flourish as it does, with a widower like him at the head of it



Parr Hall, near St. Helens, as it appeared in the 18th century. The windows in the illustration indicate its glory as a "capital mansion house" – they are some of the 52 assessed for tax in 1715.

and a set of young unmarried women only, to manage it. I have a high opinion of Miss Jackson, but she cannot act against Mr. G's will in any thing; her situation depends upon pleasing him."

* * * * *

Respected historian, Dr. Theo. C. Barker, wrote a series of local history articles for a St. Helens newspaper in the 1960's entitled 'More People of the Past'. One such article was devoted to William Grundy, principal of Parr Hall. His thoroughly researched account describes a very different character than that described by Miss Weeton. In the article Dr. Barker describes Mrs. Stock as "an embittered woman, and her diary reveals that she put the most unpleasant construction upon anything that occurred."

It is clear from Dr. Barker's research that William Grundy was a very capable man and a pillar of the community at St. Helens. Furthermore Dr. Barker rightly points out that the principal of Parr Hall Academy was placed in a difficult position on account of Aaron Stock's custody of Mary:

"Born in 1774, he [William Grundy] was one of Francis Morley's predecessors

as headmaster of Cowley school. Exactly when he became principal of Parr Hall Academy is not known. Indeed, there is a complete lack of evidence about him until 1819 when, as we have noticed, Mary Stock was sent to his school.

In that same year we also hear of him as a pillar of the Independent Chapel in the town (now the Congregational Church), and for the next 20 years the church records are full of his bustling activities. He came upon the scene when the Rev. Isaac Sharp, who had been minister for more than 40 years, was failing fast.

The old man needed much assistance and William Grundy helped him in many ways, often occupying the pulpit in his stead.

Eleanor Pilkington, sister of the two brothers, Richard and William who founded the glass firm, wrote in a letter on 6th April 1819: 'Since Mr. Sharpe has been so great an invalid, he has had a regular assistant in the person of Mr. Grundy, and I may safely say he has given general satisfaction, at least as far as I am able to judge. He gave us last week but one a sermon of his own



composing.'

At the beginning of 1821 he became a member of one of the trusts administered for the church's benefit and, two years later, when the Rev. Isaac Sharpe was at long last prevailed upon to resign and a committee of management was elected by the congregation, Grundy was unanimously appointed its secretary and treasurer.

He went to live at Hoole Bank House, which he bought, with its surrounding estate of six Cheshire acres. (Hoole Bank House was situated on the west side of Merton Bank Road, St. Helens).

Retirement from school-teaching did not diminish his activity at the Independent Chapel; when a new minister received the call in 1849, for instance, it was Grundy who dealt with all the correspondence. He lived for four

Whilst I can understand that many would, in Miss Weeton's circumstances, become bitter and depressed in the extreme, my personal viewpoint is that Miss Weeton's Christian faith, which never seemed to waver throughout her writings, appears to have protected her from a lapse into self-destructive bitterness. She was, nevertheless at times greatly depressed and vulnerable to listening to and believing adverse or even scurrilous comments about the Grundys.

A letter written by William Grundy, dated 1 July 1816, has survived. It confirms that he was indeed both educated and capable. Attached to the letter, recently donated to St. Helens Local History and Archives Library, is a 'Bill' for 'Board and Disbursements'. This was sent to Charles Angus (1770's - 1820) of Liverpool (formerly of Stranraer, Scotland), the father of three daughters.

Charles Angus's wife had died at the age of 18 in 1805 and their three daughters were subsequently placed in the care of the Grundys at Parr Hall.

Space does not allow reproduction of the three page exquisitely written letter and two page list of disbursements, except for its signature and footnote to the letter. The whole is written in a beautiful clear copperplate style and shows a man of above average intelligence, with a good command of the King's English. However, so too was educated, capable and pillar of the community Miss Weeton's Machiavellian brother, Thomas, who in adulthood, treated his sister and others with contempt. (See Thomas Rawlinson Weeton, *Past Forward* 23 p7).

J. A. Roby

• All photographs/illustrations courtesy of St. Helens Local History and Archives Library.



Parr Hall's remaining wing as it appeared in the early 1900's.

Although the records show that he had only the haziest notions about double entry bookkeeping he appears to have kept the accounts faultlessly during a very critical period in the church's history.

The old chapel was pulled down in 1826, and a new one – the central part of the present church – was erected in its place. At the same time, the Cowley trustees, then all Nonconformists, were engaged in a costly action in Chancery.

All this expenditure meant that the newly-appointed church treasurer was kept very busy trying to raise money from a congregation that was then small and not particularly wealthy. Despite all his efforts, there was a deficit of more than £1,000. Nine church members came to the rescue with a loan of £425 and Grundy himself lent £600 out of his own pocket – a considerable sum in those days. The loan was repaid in instalments, the last payment being made in 1834. This coincided with Grundy's retirement from Parr Hall.

years longer, dying on 10th July, 1844, and leaving a fortune of £5,000.

William Grundy, the extremely active church worker, seems a totally different man from William Grundy, the dissolute headmaster whom Mrs. Stock portrays. Has her portrayal been distorted by her own bitterness or was Grundy a man who lived a Jeekyll and Hyde existence? We shall probably never know the answer."

I am dear Sir!
Your very Obedt and obliged Servt
William Grundy

I will just add respecting your Daughters, that in whatever point of view we consider them, whether it be temper, industry, improvement, general manners or conduct, They are our pride and our pleasure and I have no doubt they will prove their Parents comfort and delight whenever they are received again under the paternal Roof. —

CRASH LANDING AT ASPULL

The tale of an American B24 Liberator bomber

ON 27 AUGUST 1943 an event took place at Hall Lane, Aspull in the form of an American B24 Liberator bomber, that was forced to make an emergency crash landing. It caused quite a stir among the local populace at the time and lots of people came to the site to take a look and to satisfy their curiosity. I too made the trip, just as fast as a ten year old schoolboy's legs would get me there!

The local police were quickly on the scene and soon had the area cordoned off. Debris from the aircraft was scattered over a large area. One of the propellers was left sticking up in the field near the point of impact, its engine had careered over an hedgerow and came to rest in the roadway some distance away. I remember seeing perhaps two or three of the crew members lying some distance away from the aircraft, having been placed there by rescuers that were at the scene of the crash soon after it occurred. I noticed there was a small flicker of flames coming from one of the starboard engines, a small pail of water would have extinguished them, but no one seemed to be too concerned about this and the flames were left to multiply until they eventually engulfed the whole aircraft. Onlookers were advised by the police to keep well clear as there might be bombs still on board. As the flames began to engulf the aircraft, the ammunition for the guns began to explode and most people began to edge away to a safer distance.

Within a couple of days of the crash, a clean up party comprising American servicemen (they were accommodated at Pennington Hall farm whilst the clean up was in progress) had removed all of the remaining pieces of the aircraft. They did a very good job too – I and a couple of friends scouring the area soon afterwards came up empty handed. We had hopes of perhaps finding a few empty ammunition shells and maybe a piece or two of the aircraft that the clean up team had overlooked, but we were out of luck.

Stories abounded as to what had

Dear Sir,

I trust you will find the following article of sufficient interest to include in one of your future issues of *Past Forward*. I am sure there are many readers of your magazine that have often wondered about this particular event that occurred in the late summer of 1943. I have been unable to contact any surviving crewmembers, or next of kin here in the States up to the time of writing. This is no easy task, but the search continues.

Hugh Heyes
69 Locust Street
Salisbury
Mass: 01952
U.S.A.

Email: scrumpy@hawkaccess.com

actually happened to cause the crash. But these turned out to be nothing more than mere speculation and not based on fact. In the end, all one could say about the incident was that this bomber had experienced some kind of problem during flight and was forced to make an emergency landing in Hall Lane and ended up across the road from Darlington's farm.

It has been many years since this incident occurred and I have often wondered just what did happen on that fateful day. Just how many crewmen were on that flight? Who were they and what injuries did they suffer? What was the cause of the crash and where did it come from? After some consideration, I decided to take it upon myself to find out the answers to these questions.

After many months of research, letters and telephone conversations, I have managed to piece together enough information from various eyewitness accounts and the official records, to give a reasonably clear picture of the events that culminated in the crash of the B24 Liberator. What follows is an account of that incident from the information collected.

*Type of Aircraft – B24H Liberator –
No 42-7467*

*Station – Wendling
8th A.F.B.C. attached to the 392 Bomber
Group, Burtonwood Air Depot*

*Crew Members: Hester, Richard L, Pilot
1st LT ser: No 0-427334;
Campbell, William H, Co-Pilot
2nd LT ser: No 0-659244;
Froelich, Bernard H, O.G.
2nd LT ser: No 0-856589.*

Flight Mission - Test

The aircraft took off at 1900 hrs from Burtonwood Air Depot, circled the airfield twice and climbed to 8000 ft, then proceeded in a northerly direction. Lt. Campbell, the co-pilot, noticed that the No. 3 propeller was running a little too fast. Trying to adjust the speed, he found there was no response from the propeller control and the r.p.m. continued to increase. A similar condition arose with the other propeller controls, the aircraft began to lose altitude and became violently unstable, rolling into a 90 degree vertical bank attitude, from one side to the other.

Both pilots would now be busy trying to keep the aircraft under control. At about 4000 feet the pilot, Lt. Hester, called for parachutes and headed the ship towards the sea. Having a large amount of gasoline on board he did not want the ship to fall into a populated area. At 1000 feet, the pilot felt he had gained enough control of the ship to crash land it. The aircraft settled rapidly to the ground in a N. Easterly direction at an air speed of approximately 115 mph. The pilot went out the window on his side and the co-pilot on his side. Lt. Froelich was found lying unconscious some 20 feet behind the ship. At the time of the impact, 1920 hrs, the ship was at an angle of 5 degrees port wing down. It bounced three times, broke apart and finally came to rest 10 – 15 feet from and facing the roadway.

In closing, I would like to thank the many people who responded to my request for information regarding this incident. Their input has been of considerable help in putting the final picture into perspective.

Holocaust Memorial Day was commemorated for the first time nationally on 27 January (the 56th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz), and Wigan Council, including the Heritage Service, played a full part in remembering all those who have died as a result of genocide during the 20th century. There were three main aspects of our commemoration – two tree-planting ceremonies, two exhibitions and two series of readings.

Ceremonies of Commemoration

Two ceremonies were held on Friday 26 January, and both were very well-attended by a cross-section of the community. In the morning, the Mayor of Wigan planted a commemorative silver birch tree in the heather garden of Mesnes Park, as part of a very moving ceremony which included readings and



meditations by David Arnold of the Jewish Representative Council, Gosia Clarke, a guide at Auschwitz, the Friends of Mesnes Park and drama students from Lowton High School, followed by a minute's silence. A similar commemoration was held in the afternoon at Firs Park, Leigh, where the Leader of the Council planted a tree, and the Friends of Firs Park took part in the ceremony.

Exhibitions

Two exhibitions were held. In Mesnes Park Pavilion/Café, visitors could walk round *With Us In Mind*, a

symbolic maze exploring the universal concepts of openness and freedom. This installation by Elaine Bennet from Leigh had recently completed a national tour of cathedrals. An exhibition by the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre was also on display.

The Beth Shalom exhibition could also be seen in Leigh Library, along with other material brought together by Reader-in-Residence Stephen Lythgoe to reflect the story of 20th century genocides.

Readings

Alan Clegg, a local author and historian, whose in-laws were members of the Dutch Resistance, read from his books and talked about the Holocaust, in the History Shop and local libraries.

Stephen Lythgoe, Wigan Library Service's Reader-in-Residence, also visited local libraries with a moving programme of readings and music.

Those we Remember

1½ million Armenians

3 million Ukrainians

6 million Jews

6 million Gypsies and Slavs

25 million Russians

25 million Chinese

1 million Ibos

1.5 million Bengalis

1.7 million Cambodians

First they came for the communists and I did not speak out – because I was not a communist

Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak out for me

*Pastor Martin Niemoller
World War I German submarine commander*

Opposed and imprisoned by the Nazis 1937-1945

I had many illusions when I was liberated. I thought ... that generations to come would be free from prejudice forever. Alas, I was wrong.

*Anita Lasker Wallfisch
Survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen*

Those we Remember

½ million Indonesians

200,000 East Timorese

¼ million Burundians

½ million Ugandans

2 million Sudanese

800,000 Rwandans

2 million North Koreans

10,000 Kosovans

30,000 Karens

Genocide and other mass murders killed more people in the 20th century than all the wars combined.

HISTORY SHOP NEWS

Exhibitions in the History Shop

THE final exhibition of 2000 in the Taylor Gallery was also the final show for the touring version of the Parish Map Millennium Exhibition, and a fine show it was. The map sections on show clearly demonstrated the skill and dedication of the local people involved, and their intense pride in their hometown. Of course the whole project was designed to illustrate individual communities within the borough, yet the fantastic outcome has provided the opportunity to bring together these communities and the people involved.

We are looking forward eagerly to making plans for a much bigger exhibition of the Parish Map in the History Shop some time next year. In the meantime the individual sections of the map are resting after the tour! If you missed this show make sure you watch out for it second time around.

This year has seen the opening of the Heritage Service exhibition **Open All Hours – Food and Shopping in the Wigan Borough** in the Taylor Gallery. As usual it is down to the hard work of the team to prepare these exhibitions and once again they have done us proud. The text follows the development of food retailing in the area and the differing patterns of shopping that have existed over the years. The exhibition is illustrated with many photographs from our own collection and objects from our storerooms, showing the characters, the packaging and the advertising from shopping in a bygone age. For instance did you know that Safeway opened their second supermarket in Leigh as early as 1966?

The exhibition will still be up for a few weeks after the publication of this issue of *Past Forward* - until early April 2001.

We are then eagerly awaiting the return of an exhibition with which we were heavily involved last year, yet has not so far been seen at the History Shop - **Mesnes Park**. This exhibition, put together by the Friends of Mesnes Park group and mounted by us, was prepared specially to mark the centenary of the Park and took centre stage at their celebrations in the summer. We are now putting on the show at the History Shop and are hoping to liven up the exhibition about the history of the Park with some interesting and even unusual objects related to the story. This will open in April 2001. (See p21 for Irene Roberts' memories of Mesnes Park).

In July, as in previous years, we will be having a show connected to the annual Wigan Arts Festival, and then in August and September the ever popular photographic exhibitions from Wigan and Atherton Photographic Societies. So there is plenty to look forward to in the first half of this year at the History Shop.

Finally, for anyone who is eagle-eyed enough to have spotted that the exhibition **The Collier Battalion** will not be making its scheduled appearance this April as stated in the last *Past Forward*, fear not. This show on the history of the local recruits to the Manchester Regiment will now go ahead in the autumn. More information in the summer edition of *Past Forward*.

NEW BOOKS ETC OCTOBER 2000 - FEBRUARY 2001

CRUMPTON, G *Standish and its People 1900-26*.

FOOT, W *Maps for Family History*.

GIBSON, J *Marriage and Census Indexes 8th edition*.

GREATER MANCHESTER CONSERVATION OFFICERS' GROUP *Conservation in Greater Manchester*.

HOLDING, N *Location of British Army Records 1914-18 4th edition*.

HOPE, T *Atherton in Bygone Days; Memories of Leigh*.

SCHOLES, J *Bolton: a Bygone Era*.

TOWNLEY, C H A *The Industrial Railways of St Helens, Widnes and Warrington Part 1: St Helens*.

WIGGINS, R *My Ancestors were in the Salvation Army*.

FICHE

CULCHETH WORKHOUSE 1834-36

MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS – St Thomas the Martyr Up Holland; St Paul's Skelmersdale; St Thomas Golborne; St Mary's Lowton; St Richard's RC Skelmersdale.

PARISH RECORDS – St Paul's Skelmersdale:- 1) Index of Baptisms 1817-1920; 2) Index of Marriages 1859-1980; 3) Index of Burials 1822-1975.

MISCELLANEOUS

PIGOT'S Directory of Lancashire 1830 and 1834

HIRE OF MEETING ROOM

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:

SOCIETY RATE

£7.80

PER MORNING/ AFTERNOON SESSION

£11.50

PER EVENING SESSION

COMMERCIAL RATE

£18.00

PER MORNING/AFTERNOON/EVENING SESSION

If you are interested, contact Philip Butler

Tel (01942) 828128

HISTORY SHOP NEWS

Friends of the Heritage Service

A BIG thanks to all of you who have joined the *Friends of Wigan Heritage Service*. We are now nearing our first target of 500 members, a great achievement, and we hope you all enjoy this edition of *Past Forward*. Of course there is potentially much more to the Friends than the magazine.

◆ **For those of you who live nearby there are regular meetings being established to deal with all Friends issues. The second of these meetings was held on 16 December 2000 in the History Shop.**

Friends of Wigan Heritage Service
Special General Meeting 16/12/00
The History Shop, Wigan

PRESENT

- Max Finney
- David Lythgoe
- Yvonne Morris
- Gerald Marsden
- Barbara Davies
- Eric Davies

P Butler – (Chair & Minutes)

APOLOGIES

- Mrs I Thomas
- Mr Neil Cain

- 1.0 Welcome & Introduction.
- 2.0 Constitution model put forward, OHP slides discussed and agreed, with access to Heritage Service Planning Documents.
- 3.0 Committee – model put forward, discussed and agreed to elect 6 members present to an interim committee.
- 4.0 Meetings.
- 4.1 Both venue and time were discussed by the group. It was agreed that the meetings would continue in Wigan at the History Shop initially as it was easy to get to with a town centre location. The choice of a Saturday afternoon was also agreed to be convenient, although there was some feeling that one week before Christmas was always going to be difficult.
- 4.2 It was felt that meetings should continue to establish the group and not try to compete either in frequency of content with other local groups. It was also felt strongly that the meetings should be open and not confined to established Friends.
- 5.0 Next steps.
- 5.1 The next meeting will be aimed at creating greater interest and participation and confirming the committee.
- 6.0 Any other Business.
- 7.0 The next meeting will be held at the History Shop on Saturday 17 March 2001 at 1.30 pm.

As you can tell from these minutes the group is still at a very early stage, but that only means that it needs as much support as possible. The next two meetings, after 17 March, will be on 16 June and then 15 September. We need local people interested and willing to get involved to come along and join in.

◆ **For those of you who live further afield I have two ideas that may be of interest:**

- 1. Correspondents. If you are an ex-Wiganer living far away you can still contribute. Write to us about your memories or your attempts to find out more about your family history from overseas. We could introduce a regular Correspondent slot into the Friends section.
- 2. Another idea, if there is sufficient interest, is for actual overseas branches of the group. If anyone in, say, Australia or North America would like to set up a contact group in their country, write to me and let me know. Through our lists I could put you in contact with other Friends out there who may want to get involved.

◆ **Of course the direction communication is taking in this fast moving world is towards us all being closer together, no matter where we live. If any of you out there now have electronic addresses please send them in so that we may add them to our database. More and more people are equipping themselves with access to the Internet and apparently genealogical study is one of the fastest growing areas. Pretty soon it will become the main form of communication for us all, and then we can have virtual Friends all over the world!**

Philip Butler.

If you are interested in joining the Friends of Wigan Heritage Service or subscribing to Past Forward please fill in the coupon below.

FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

Name

Address

Interests

Please enclose £5 subscription for 2001. Cheque/P.O. payable to Wigan Council. Please 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.

PROSECUTIONS for neglect and cruelty to children were relatively uncommon according to police statistics at the turn of the 20th century. In 1903 there was a total of 33 such cases recorded by the Wigan Borough Police force. Of these four charges were withdrawn and seven were discharged leaving only 22 convictions.

Surprisingly, figures today are not very different. From April 1999 to March 2000 there were 34 cases of cruelty and neglect to children in the Wigan division of the Greater Manchester Police.

It is not the place of this article to delve too deeply into the reasons for child cruelty during the early 1900's. However, health and housing conditions in 'poor and industrial Wigan' were described as 'deplorable' in a report by the Medical Officer of Health for Wigan whilst questioning high child mortality figures. There is no doubt that such appalling physical conditions – combined with numerous other factors (including drunkenness, poverty, lack of

morality and depression) – led to cases of child cruelty and neglect in and around Wigan.

It is a sobering and rather ironic fact that in the Wigan Borough Police Returns for 1903 there were fewer cases of cruelty to animals than there were cases of cruelty to children.

Sergeant Robert Newcombe – who had three grown children of his own by 1902 – describes a disturbing scene that confronted two of his constables one dark and miserable night behind the door of a slum cottage in the back streets of



Wigan.

Many thanks to the *Greater Manchester Police Museum* for their assistance in producing this article and to Inspector Mike Gorse from the Wigan division of the Greater Manchester Police.

Dave Tetlow
Wigan Heritage Service

Wigan Borough Police: A tale from the Graveyard Shift

“OBSERVING a man who was drunk crossing from a side street followed by a woman, evidently his wife who was not much more sober than her husband but who evidently thought herself an example to him by the sharp lecture she was giving him, her language being hot and strong. These policemen let them get away a few yards as though taking no notice of them, then set off in a smart walk, turned down the side street the man and woman had emerged from, evidently intent upon some purpose premeditated. This apparently was no less than to search the house whilst they were ahead. Judging from their condition the door would be open, which was the case. They occupied one room, the front downstairs, the door connecting with the

remainder of the house being fastened up. What a picture of dirt and misery met them, an old iron bedstead in the corner beside the window. What appeared to be a large bag made of sacking filled with chaff lay on the iron lathes, old shawls and sacks were the covering when used as such. A horribly dirty three-legged table stood on the floor, upon it a broken teapot and three or four odds and ends of crockery. On the floor on the other side of the fire lay some more sacking upon which lay a dirty sickly child about two years old, asleep. Two or three broken chairs and an empty bacon box comprised all the furnishings. A young woman, evidently drunk, lay asleep on the filthy bed, another sickly dirty child was playing among

the ashes on the hearth in front of a dwindling fire. Light was supplied by a smoky paraffin lamp. Searching one cupboard the Policeman could not find a scrap of food, butter, tea or anything of a nourishing nature whatsoever. The older child who was about five said she had not had any food at home that day. She had got some bits in the street. No impression could be made on the drunken, sleeping girl, she only growled like some half wild animal. At this moment the drunken couple returned and at once commenced using the vilest language at the Constables, threatening them with all sorts of violence and law for entering their house. All this was without apparent effect, the Policemen quietly informing them in an interval when they

were breathless that this visit completed their case and they would be immediately prosecuted for cruelty to their children. Their threats then changed to whines, each accusing the other of being drunk and as the cause of all their poverty and misery.

The prosecution resulted, I believe, in three months imprisonment for each, the children being cleaned and cared for in the Workhouse during this period. Many of these cases are completed under difficult circumstances.

A Policeman must be well acquainted with the people and their habits and also have a knowledge of their children. It requires a final visit like the one described to bring about a punishment that will act as a warning to these miserable parents.”

Reminiscences of events in Atherton Township in 1941

DURING 1941 two separate “incidents” occurred in the town caused by German aircraft releasing ‘ordnance’ from the sky – one during February (or March), the other about six weeks later.

The first happened in the early hours of a particular Sunday. At the time, I was aged 11 years old and lived on Car Bank Street with my parents and two younger brothers. On the previous day I had been playing ‘cricket’ with pals – wickets chalked on the wall of an ‘Air-Raid Wardens Post’. Come dusk and teatime, we finished play and agreed to continue next day – which we never did!!

That day, as normal, my brother and I went to bed in the front bedroom, overlooking the street, and no doubt were asleep soon after. My next conscious rousing was a vivid flash and terrific bang from close by! Within seconds our parents came stumbling into the room calling our names. The immediate need was to get dressed, find some light and move downstairs. It was soon realised that windows and doors had been blown in by the blast, with plaster and glass underfoot, but fortunately no injuries had been sustained by anyone.

Seek shelter

Having gathered our wits, found torches and dressed in outer clothes, a decision was made to move away from the property. Our only course was to seek shelter with relatives, who lived on the town

outskirts, along the Wigan Road. Cash and valuables were collected and, together with the pet budgie (which had survived the explosion) in its cage, we set off on the trek in pitch darkness, along country lanes, luckily in dry conditions. On leaving the house, a large blaze was observed at the road junction, but we did not stop to investigate.

Some time later, we roused our bewildered relatives – five survivors seeking refuge! With the return of daylight, my father and I returned to the house to assess the damage, to find the area ‘cordoned off’, but we still managed to pass through. The house – and others close by – was no longer habitable – roof slates were missing, plaster had been blown from walls and ceilings, and in our bedroom the remains of a chimney-stack were visible, resting on the ceiling lathes.

Deep crater

We were informed quickly that it would need months to make repairs, and so it proved – we did not re-occupy until the following September. The ‘missile’ which landed – one of two – was actually a ‘parachute (sea) mine’, proof of which was in the scraps of rope and other material found in the deep crater which had been made; also in the crater were dozens of buckets and other containers used to toss water on the flames we had seen earlier. The explosion had cracked and ignited a gas main. The belief then was that a lone raider flying to/from the Liverpool Docks had

become lost and simply released his pay-load.

About six weeks after the first ‘incident’, a further one occurred. Having been obliged to move house, my daily journey to school in Bolton was extended, which needed an extra bus service. On one particular day, I left home, took the first bus into the town, to connect with another, at which point I was informed that the service was disrupted at a point near Atherton Central Station, due to damage to roads and adjacent property – about which I was completely unaware – caused by an air raid! It was then necessary to leave one bus, walk through the damaged area to board a waiting vehicle,

and so continue the journey.

Two bombs

As was later reported, two bombs (not para-mines) had dropped – one landed in a stream at the rear of a small engineering firm on Bolton Road, resulting in the surrounding area being deluged by mud and other debris, the other landed some hundred yards distant on a small farm, which was completely demolished. The owner was killed. There was speculation that Atherton Station and freight sidings were a target for this ‘raider’.

Harold Leather
7 Lomond Avenue
Lytham St Annes
Lancs FY8 3LX

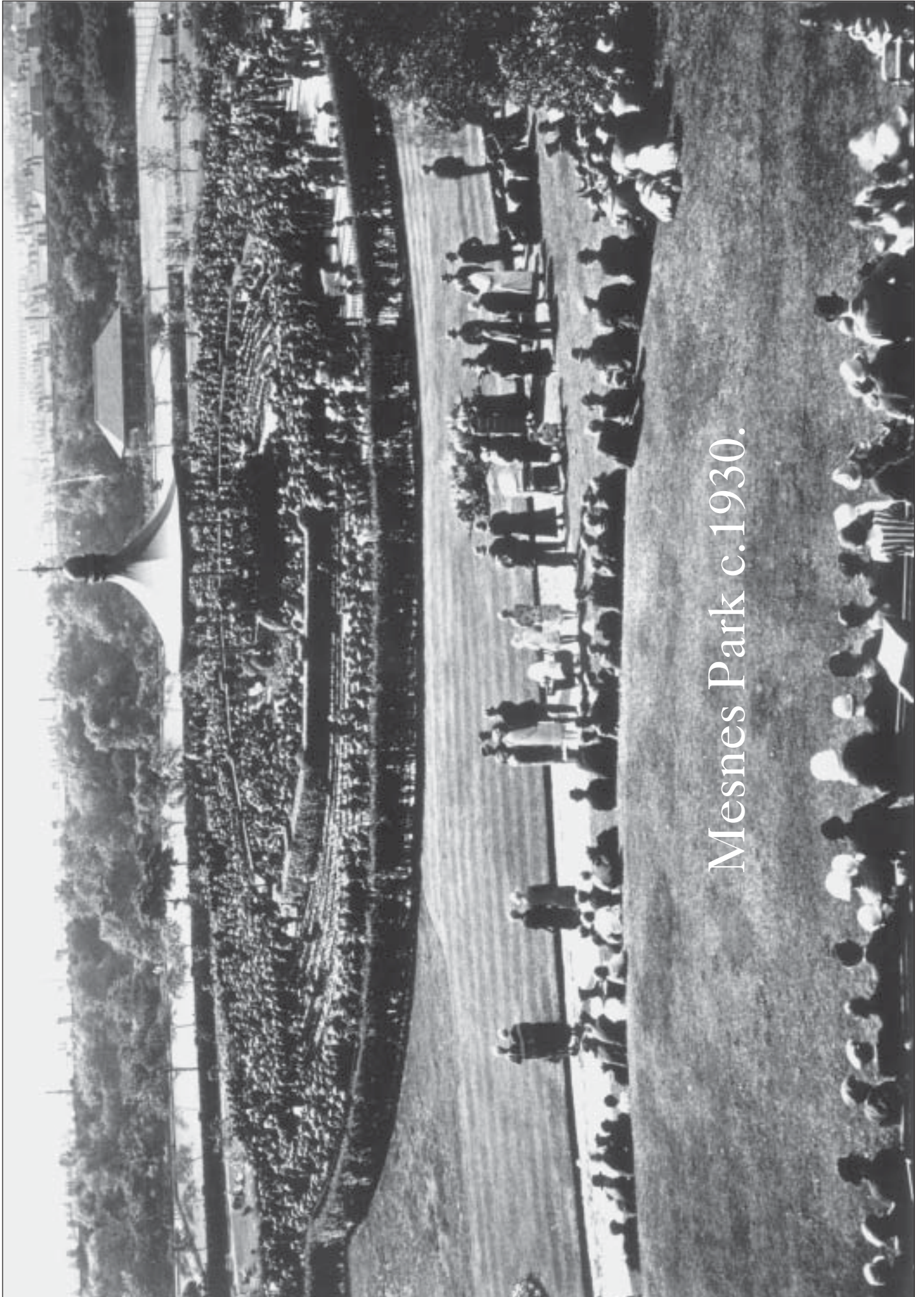
SECOND HAND BOOK FAIRS

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&
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Near Wigan

10 am – 4.30 pm
30 stalls and thousands of books.
These Fairs now in their 2nd year
Admission Charge & Concessions.

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Mesnes Park c.1930.

This delightful article is Irene Roberts' second for Past Forward, following her memories of Ince in the last issue. It is very topical, as discussions and plans are underway for the future development of the Park and Café/Pavilion.

Yesterday in the Park

ON MY living-room wall hangs a sepia photograph of a rather odd-shaped café in an elegant park, and I have only to stare at it for a few moments before the sepia changes to colours and I am back in Wigan Park in the late 1950's. I am six years old and I see again my parents, now gone, and I put my hands in theirs and we wander together once more, along the path under the trees to the duck-pond, in the dappled sunlight of long ago. The flower-beds are set out in beautiful designs and the grass is velvet, because we obey the notices to "keep off".

We never go on holiday, except for half a day at Southport's Peter Pan playground, but summer Sunday afternoons see us taking the "tractor" through the cool, shady plantations to Haigh Hall or strolling round Wigan Park (we never call it Mesnes Park). The highlight of this visit is a trip to the café with its – even then – old fashioned air. On the shelves behind the counter, drinking-glasses are set out in little pyramids on overhanging lacy paper doilies, and the faces of the boys on Fry's "Five-Boys" chocolate smile or grimace at us from behind their glass cover. What shall I have to drink? A milk-shake? Or a glass of Vimto with a blob of ice-cream in it? The milk-shake is a shilling. "Ee Bob, it's dear", says my Mum, but Dad says "It'll do 'er good, milk!". I choose the pop-with-ice-cream-blob and ask "can we sit upstairs?" – you could then – and up we go.

It's special up here, quiet and echoey, with windows all round, and I can see out all over the park – the duck-pond, the bandstand, and Ryland's Mill at the back. The sun slants in and little dust-motes dance in its rays, and the cries of children in the playground sound muted and far-away as we sip our drinks; and I know, without knowing why, that there is something different about

this café. I will be grown-up before I realise that it has a 1920's feel.

As we step outside, the birds are singing and there is a scent of warm earth and heavy blossom. There is a statue by the door of a man holding up a rifle and my Dad always reads the inscription out loud, but it means little to a child when the steps to the cafe wait to be run up and down, and the grassy slopes on either side hold out an invitation to roll over and over to the bottom! Further down is another statue of a man sitting in a chair, and Dad lifts me up to rub his shoe, but his sightless eyes frighten me and I only pretend to make a wish. Later in the year, when snow covers the roof of our terraced house and curtains are drawn against the winter night, I imagine Sir Francis Sharp-Powell sitting in the icy darkness, and I shiver and edge closer to the fire.

But summer comes round again – many summers – and I am 22 and I have a sketch on display in the annual Summer Show in Wigan Park. Mum and Dad, older now, meander with me through the marquees, admiring fruit and flowers, cakes and crafts, and we go, once more, to the café. The little girl no longer runs up and down the steps, the milk-shakes are no longer a shilling, and they've never heard of a glass of pop with a blob of ice cream in it, but that special atmosphere – that old-fashioned calm – still lingers, and I know then that I want my own children to experience it.

A few years on, a little boy and girl put their hands in mine and we too wander through dappled sunlight to the duck-pond. But the duck-pond is being drained and is just sludge, and proves just too tempting to my inquisitive son, who slips in and emerges yelling and looking like the creature from the black lagoon! We go home in a taxi –

we didn't make it as far as the café!

Then, suddenly it seems, he's 22, as I was at the Summer Show, and he buys me a video for Christmas - it's called "Bygone Wigan". "You'll enjoy that, Mum", he says, and he's right. At the touch of a button there is Wigan Park in the 60's – long-dead flowers are once again a riot of colour, and on the swings, children who are by now grandparents still play, locked forever in time on a long-ago summer's day.

"Vandals hit Park Café!" screams the Wigan Observer in the summer of the Millennium, and I am sickened by the mindless destruction – the beginning of the end, I fear, for our Victorian Park in an age when respect means nothing to many – but by no means all – young people. But one day a lady appears at the photographic counter where I work. "Can you do anything with these?" she asks, and I look into faded 70's photographs of flower-beds and trees and paths. "We're holding an exhibition" she says, as the old photos are fed into our new machine and buttons are pressed. "It's in August", she enthuses, "and you wouldn't believe the history that is coming to light about the park!" And I know, then, that it will be alright, that people care, that our park is not without friends, and it will go on. And as the photos appear, the colours are warmer and brighter, as if the sun has come out.

Irene Roberts
Abram Nr. Wigan

• *As Irene says, it will be alright! The exhibition was a success and will be on display once again later in the year, in the History Shop; and in January I mounted an exhibition in the Café to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. The Friends of Mesnes Park (sorry Irene!) are a dedicated group of volunteers who, along with Wigan Council's Park staff, will shortly be putting together a plan for the future development of the Park and Café. Ed.*

Here, Ernie recalls the days of cigarette cards and a thirst for knowledge.

I remember when . . .

I WAS a little boy we all collected "cigarette cards", one of which was free in each carton of cigarettes sold; each card was numbered 1 to 50, so that it was an achievement when a lad managed to get a full set of 50 of any series. A particularly popular series was the one headed "Do you know" which gave the illustration on one side of the card of the query posed, with the explanation on the reverse. With a full set of any series any youngster had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject portrayed.

A popular request at the time, when a man was seen

lighting a cigarette in the street, was "Got any cigarette cards, Mister?" from some youngster trotting alongside him. Should the nipper be lucky enough to collect one previously missing from his collection, that was some achievement indeed, and his "full set" became valuable as a bartering commodity in future, depending on the rarity of the series. I once got 6d. for a full set, and if by today's reckoning that was small recompense, it should be remembered that this covered three entrance fees at the tupp'ny rush at the Saturday morning kids'

matinee at the Palace Cinema in King Street.

Lasting impression

One card I particularly remember. It depicted a young boy asking a middle aged mariner questions on the shore, and the 'old sailor' pointing out to sea, no doubt telling his young listener enthralling stories of his life across the ocean. It was, of course, "The Boyhood of Raleigh", and it no doubt left a lasting impression on my own mind.

Just up the road from where I lived there was a patch of waste land in Beech Hill which in due course became a council house complex, c.1928; at the top of the hill on the avenue between the shops and those houses built earlier (c.1924), there was a wooden bench seat made of old railway sleepers, where the older ex-miners would gather to recall their individual past experiences of work and army life in the 1914/18 war.

There they would gather, no doubt having come out for a "breath of fresh air", while their wives got on with their housework. I used to wander up and listen to their latest

news and in due course I asked one of them after listening to him 'telling his tale'- "Do you mind if I ask you something Mister Jones?" "Ax owt tha likes lad, cos that's th'onny road tha'll larn owt, what dost'a want ta' know?"

Debating society

I was 11 years old then and my insatiable thirst for knowledge was enlightened by my introduction to the local debating society, where I learned how to catch rats with ferrets, train racing pigeons, breed pigs and hens, mend clogs, and 'fettle owt wot went wrung', as well as how "we" won the 1st World War, the Boer War and the Crimean War, which was won by one of the gang's uncles when he "wor bot 20 at t'time".

I can't vouch for the veracity of some of the recollections, of course, but some of the tales of underground incidents and disasters were obviously true, as they all bore the typical blue/black scars on shoulders and legs to prove it.

One outstanding memory I must relate, I never heard a bad word or any local scandal, because if one of them started relating anything salacious another would stop him, with "Hey thee, way've a young lad 'ere, so watch thi'sel".

How times have changed!

© E. Taberner

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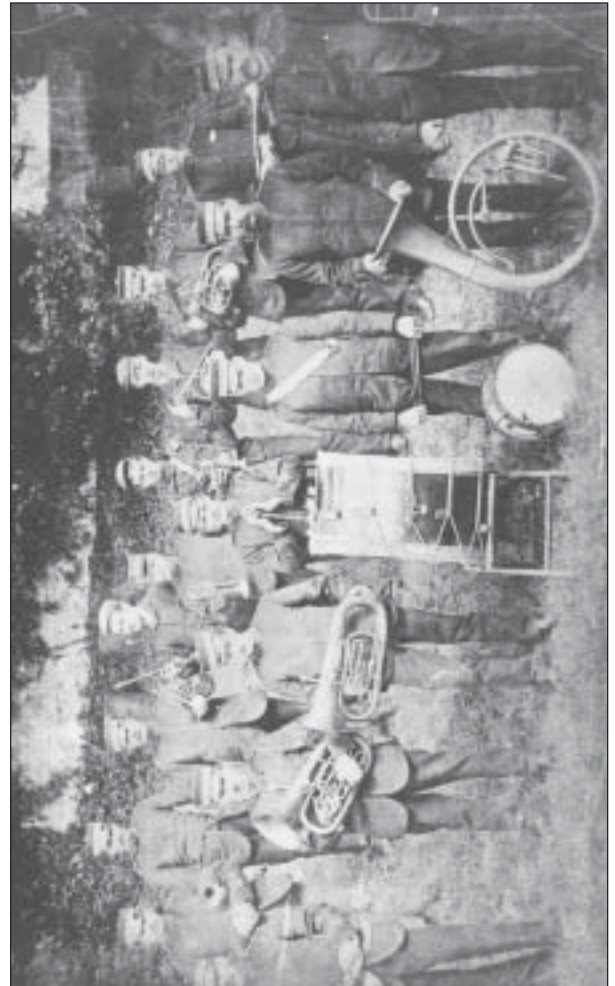
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Who? Where?

This issue of *Past Forward* sees the return of the popular *Who? Where!* feature. Can any reader throw some light on any of these splendid photographs?

All suggestions please to:
Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall,
(01942) 404432



Great Grandma Alice

I WAS about eight years old when Alice died. I remember her as a very dignified old lady; in fact I was very much in awe of her. I thought that she was the most romantic and interesting person I had ever known – she had been married THREE times! That really impressed me.

Alice was born in Liverpool on 7 April 1855. She was one of several children born to James and Eliza Skillicorn (nee Kinley). James and Eliza were Lonan folk; Eliza was the daughter of Isabella Kinley, midwife of Lonan and stepdaughter of Thomas Kewley of Minorca. James and Eliza Skillicorn settled in Liverpool, James being employed on the dock railway – later he progressed to become head dock gateman.

An old lady

At the age of 11 Alice was quite ill with whooping

cough, and to help her recuperate she was taken by a family friend, Captain Gibbons, on a sea voyage to Chile and Peru – this was in the days of the sailing ships. On this journey she was taken by the Captain and his family to visit some of their relations in America. Alice remembers meeting “an old lady” who she later learned was Harriet Beecher Stowe – the author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Actually Mrs. Stowe would be about 55 years old at the time, which probably, especially in those days, did seem old to an 11-year-old child.

Alice made a further journey by sailing ship, again to South America when she was 16. This time she went as companion and mother’s help to the Captain’s wife and family. On the 1871 Liverpool census Alice is the only member of the family not listed....this ties up with her being away on her second voyage to South America.

Alice married for the first time on 7 July 1837 when she was 18. Her bridegroom James William Nichols was 39. He was a merchant seaman of American origin. (Could she have met him two years previously in America?) The marriage took place at St. Thomas’s Church, Toxteth Park, Liverpool – in those days a quite select area. Their son James Hervey Nichols was born on 27 November 1875 whilst his father was on the way home from a sea voyage. James had written to Alice asking her and the baby to meet him in Marseilles, but not until he had written a further letter giving her exact details.

Buried at sea

Alice received no more communications from her husband, and eventually she learned that he had taken ill with a fever, had died and been buried at sea. As he had forgotten to inform his employers that he had married, notification of his death was sent to his supposed next of kin in Brooklyn, USA. Alice and her baby remained in Liverpool, making frequent trips to Lonan to see her relatives.

On 28 October 1883 Alice re-married, this time her cousin Lee Kewley, eldest son of Captain John Kewley. This marriage also took place in Toxteth Park, this time at Holy Trinity Church. Lee and Alice

remained for a while in Liverpool, Lee taking employment as a railway porter. Two children were born in the city, then the family moved to Lonan where two other children were born, including my grandmother Catherine Fredia.

Towards the end of the 19th century they moved once again, this time to the Lancashire coal fields where Lee probably thought he could obtain more regular employment. They settled in Hindley, near Wigan. Lee worked in a local coal mine. His stepson Hervey was also a coal miner. At the age of 18 Hervey had his arm amputated as a result of a pit accident.

Common grave at Ince

In the spring of 1902 Lee was taken ill. He died on 9 May – his death certificate gave his cause of death as “enteric fever and exhaustion”. During the last days of his illness he repeatedly said this his dying wish was to see once again “the little chapel at Agneash”. Lee Kewley is buried in a common grave at Ince, Wigan. Captain John Kewley died on 2 February 1905 – in his will he left £10 “for the children of my late son Lee Kewley to be divided share and share alike”.

When she was in her 60’s great grandmama Alice married for the third time. My mother always refers to this husband as Grandad Latchford, and remembers him as a very kind and lovely man.

Alice Skillicorn-Nichols-Latchford died in May 1941 and is buried in the municipal cemetery in Leigh, Lancashire.

**Mrs Maureen Parkinson
Highcroft
161 Royal Avenue
Onchan
Isle of Man IM3 1LG**

**Who do
you Think
YOU ARE
KIDDING!**



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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).

19 April (NB change of date)

A Spring Evening

10 May

A Moving Experience

Philip Reading

14 June

Th'owd Remedies

Fred Barton

Atherton Heritage Society

Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30 pm at St Richards Jubilee Hall, Atherton. Admission £1 (members), £1.50 (non-members). Further details from the Secretary, Mrs M Hodge, 82 Leigh Road, Atherton M46 0PA (01942 884893).

10 April

The Cotton Queens

M Gilbertson

8 May

Life Times – a new heritage project about working life in Salford

Anne Monaghan

12 June

Children in the Mines

Graham Stirrup

Billinge Local History Society

For further details contact Jack Boardman, 38 Garswood Road, Billinge, Wigan, WN5 7TH, (01744 892613), or visit our web site at www.billinge-history.com

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).

SOCIETY NEWS

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).

17 April

Subject to be announced

Dan Muir

15 May

First Name Variants

Alan Bardsley

19 June

Visit to be arranged

17 July

Visit to be arranged

Leigh Literary Society

The Society has been in existence since 1878 and has 50 members. Meetings are held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library, on Mondays at 7.30 pm. Subscription £11. Visitors £1.50. No programme for the rest of 2001 is available as yet, as the Society is currently without a secretary. Any volunteers should contact the President, Mrs H Gaskell (01942 605685).

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)
Visit our web site at www.arnw02593.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

19 April

More of God's Wonderful Railway

Stan Smith

Wigan Archaeological Society

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

4 April

A Modern Crusade

Chris Eldridge

2 May

Armenia

Tim Strickland

6 June

Tutankamun Revisited

John Johnson

4 July

Lathom House

Mark Fletcher

Wigan Civic Trust

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

9 April

The Life and Times of L S Lowry

Geoffrey Shryhane

14 May

A new lecture by Wigan Council's Conservation Officer

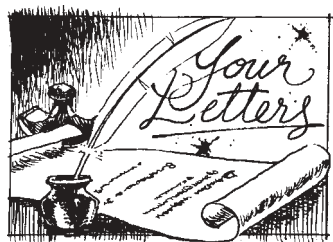
Philip Powell

11 June

TBA

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).



Past Forward No. 25

Dear Mr. Gillies

Another excellent production with items to stimulate, amaze, amuse and give food-for-thought.

Tony Perkins of Whelley

introduced me to *Past Forward*, the History Shop and some basics in genealogy, all of which have added to my hobby. Hope you are reading this Tony – many thanks.

I look forward to letters in future issues regarding the late Molly Hodge's 'Exploited Generation'. I have no personal knowledge of the times of which she wrote but people I know born in the 1920's do not seem to view things in the same way.

Past Forward is ten years old in 2001. Any tenth birthday plans?

Continued success.

Yvonne Morris (Mrs)

26 Altcar Lane

Little Altcar

Formby

Liverpool L37 6AX

Names started loud bells ringing

Dear Sir/Madam

After finding Ruth Syme's articles in back issues of *Past Forward*, I have been inspired to follow up on the Hilton, Hindley, Greenhalgh and Pugh families within your area. Some of the names mentioned within your pages started loud bells ringing. In 1993, I had some help with my research from your Bob Blakeman, I wish him well in his retirement. Other people in the area, who I have corresponded with in past years, have always been very helpful; your magazine was

recommended many years ago, and I now eagerly await the arrival of the next issue!

I wonder if it would be possible to have the enclosed contribution and photographs published.

My congratulations on a worthy publication.

Mrs. Elspeth Bradbury

31 Dalewood Close

Eleebana NSW 2282

Australia

Email:

kenbradbury@hunterlink.net.au

Continued on page 26

THE HILTON FAMILY – FROM ASPULL TO AUSTRALIA

MY grandparents made the big move from Aspull, Lancashire, to new horizons in 1912 and settled in the Lake Macquarie area of New South Wales, in a little town called Boolaroo – early aboriginals from the Awabakal tribe had named the area. The Aboriginal meaning is “place of many flies”; notwithstanding that, once coal was discovered in the early 1800’s, in many places around the Lake, settlement progressed. Boolaroo itself, settled in 1886, stemmed from the establishment of a mine later known as “Stockton Borehole” which attracted many miners from Wales, Lancashire, Scotland and Holland, some taking advantage of the Commonwealth Government assisted passage scheme. From these early settlers, names including Ebbeck, Mitchell, Hawkins, Frith, Johnson, Shaw, Odgers, Wardley, Cressey, Gilbert, Denham, Briggs, Hindley, Hilton, Wilkinson, Lee, Parr, Pugh and Rees are still found in the area.

John William Hilton, my grandfather, was born at Top Lock, Aspull on 18 December 1868, the son of William and Margaret (Hindley) Hilton; William was a collier (later described as fireman), Margaret a cotton reeler, the daughter of Joshua Hindley, a beerseller, and Betty (Elizabeth) Rothwell, residing at the Jolly Carter in 1851. William and Margaret married in St. Peter’s Church, Hindley in 1859. Of their children Elizabeth, James, Joseph, Gertrude A, John William, Mary, Martha and Joshua, only John William and Joshua seized an opportunity and came to Australia, the others resided in the Wigan area and married – Joseph to Martha Litherhand 1896, and James to Margaret Ellen (Mary Ellen) Ashton c.1895. Joshua married Alice Hindley and returned to Wigan in the 1950’s after her death; he resided with his sisters Annie and Elizabeth and died in Wigan, 1975.

My great grandfather William was born at Aspull Moor 1829, the son of Robert Hilton, a labourer. All the Hilton men worked in the Crawford Mines, and this was the trade of John William, who had entered this occupation at the early age of 10. His family moved around a bit – I have found them in Withington Lane 1881, Cale Lane 1891 and Whelley Road 1897, the latter being the address John William gave when he married Sarah Ann Pugh in 1897. Sarah’s address was 25 Byrom Street, Poolstock; she was the daughter of Thomas (a miner) and Jane



Gertrude Hilton and Edwin Greenhalgh, married 1922, Parish Church, Bickershaw. (I think this Gertrude was my mother’s cousin).

(Hughes) Pugh, who moved to Wigan from Pontesbury in Salop.

After their marriage at the Church of St. Thomas and St. James in Poolstock, the couple resided in Bolney Street, Aspull, and their children – Gertrude, b. 1898 (my mother) Olive, Sidney, John William and Joshua – were all born here. John William journeyed to Australia, possibly with his brother Joshua and wife Alice, in 1911, and his wife Sarah and the family came in August 1912 aboard the Waimana sailing from Liverpool to Sydney. A home was quickly established in Boolaroo and John William worked at the Stockton Borehole Colliery, obtaining the status of Deputy, and establishing himself and his family as respected citizens of

substance within this district. His sons, Sidney and Jack (John William Jnr.) followed their father to the Colliery, Sidney working on the pit top and Jack as a lamp mechanic.

I can remember Grandma Hilton’s many tales of New Springs, and people she knew there – some kept in touch through the years, sending letters and family photos but sadly these photos, although now in my possession, are without names and I can only speculate on identities. Some are obviously from grandmother’s brother James Pugh and his family who resided in Wigan up until 1935 at least. Oh, how I wish I had listened more to Grandma Hilton, or even to my mother (Gertrude) Annie!

I am left with a few visions of the snow, and ice, where mother had to skate to school and the sound of the miners going to work, their clogs recording their progress down the cobbled road in the early morning hours. Mother often told stories of visiting a relative, a gamekeeper on an estate who was in charge of the kennels [sounds very like Haigh] and trained the hunting dogs, including a black retriever named Jess, who would trot to the butcher with a basket and a note tied to his collar, and bring home the meat, only taking his bone after he had delivered the basket safely. Tales of my aunt, pinning Jess’s ears together with a safety pin – the dog not perturbed during the process! We were often told to put “board’ in t’hole” – little words of Lancashire origin would pop into conversation, especially in an heated exchange. Sadly I never knew my grandfather, who died in 1930 at the age of 62, a grand age for a coalminer – but that was before I came along.

Several names connected with the family come to mind from earlier times; once when young I had a little correspondence with Tom Holcroft, who resided in Wigan, about 1945-50. Jim Hall came to stay with grandmother on leave from the navy during World War II – where they all fit into the picture, so far eludes me. Sally Parr was often spoken of by Grandma Hilton. After reading some issues of *Past Forward* similar names appear, and I only mention my recollections in the hope that someone may come up

with solutions and fill in further details of my family story.

Life in Boolaroo moves on at a “snail’s” pace – sadly the little town is now somewhat neglected, with nothing much to hold the young people who have moved on to wider horizons. The pit-top whistle, which summoned the miners to their daily shifts, is a memory for those who grew up in the district in the 20’s, 30’s, 40’s and 50’s.

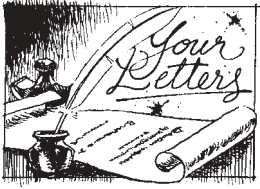


Jim Hall - Navy or Army - on leave at Sixth Street, Boolaroo, NSW, Australia c1945.

Where once streams of miners walked, or rode their bikes to and from the pit, lunch “cribs” dangling from their hands, now a procession of cars at “knock off time” – from other industries around the suburbs and adjoining townships, and the cities of Newcastle and Maitland. No more scrubbing of blackened bodies or soiled “pit clothes” – mining is now much more sophisticated, the “long wall” and “open cut” collieries of the Hunter and Lake Macquarie districts offer a different scenario, as mechanisation and technology stride hand in hand.

Little towns like Boolaroo have been sadly overtaken, but the people who made the town and developed the area from so far afield left a legacy for their descendants, a life and opportunity to wider fields in a land of plenty and a lasting bond with the land of their origin – a gift that is not forgotten and is greatly appreciated!

Elspeth Bradbury



Past Forward brings lots of pleasure Down Under

Dear Editor

My name is Christopher (Chris) Green, I was born in 1933 at 34 Willow Road, Beech Hill and when aged five the family moved to 15 Eastwell Road, Beech Hill.

I married in 1953 at St Joseph's Church in Caroline Street, Wigan, and in 1959, my wife Helen and our two children Janet aged four and Jeffrey aged two came to live in Australia. We decided to live in Australia because of the depression at that time in the Building Trade, which is where I worked.

My family still lives in and around Wigan. My brother Jack Green lives in Worsley Mesnes, it is

through him that keep in touch with what is happening. He sends *Past Forward* out to me, also various books that are published about the Wigan area.

Issue 23 of *Past Forward* (page 3) really brought memories flooding back as we had our wedding lunch at the Roy Café in Wigan. On page 6 in the magazine it mentions my great grandfather Christopher Higham who lived in the "Star Inn",

Ambleswood Common, in Ince. Items such as these gives us fond memories of our days in England.

My late father Christopher Green played Rugby for Highfield Rugby League in the 1920's.

My wife's parents kept the pub called the "Buck ith Vine" (Whitewash) which I think may have been the oldest pub in Wigan; the name Whitewash came about as in the earlier days the coaches used to change horses at the pub.

On our trips to Wigan since living in Australia we have found that even though Wigan changes it seems to remain the same.

In closing I will say that your magazine brings us a lot of pleasure and as long as it is published we will continue to read it..

**Chris Green
Woden
Australia
(c/o 7A Chesterton Close
Worsley Mesnes
Wigan)**

Photograph wanted of Bongs' Toffee Shop

Dear Editor

I am hoping your readers can help with a query. My mother-in-law worked in a toffee shop in Tyldesley in the 60's and 70's. The shop was owned by a Mrs. Evan and made Bong's original toffee; my mother-in-law and wife and sister were only a handful of outsiders to watch the recipe being made.

Now for my query. My mother-in-law died last year and so I thought I would paint a water colour picture of Evan's toffee shop for a surprise birthday present for my wife. The problem is I cannot get hold of a copy of the shop front as it looked in the 60's. I have tried the Heritage Service, Tyldesley and District Historical Society, the Journal etc. I am hoping one of your readers can help. Any photographs loaned will be returned promptly with extra copies if required.

**T. Jackson
51 Leigh Road
Atherton
Near Manchester
M46 0LX
Mobile phone 07779202599**

THE STATE OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

Dear Editor

A few weeks ago while travelling by bus to Bolton I was entertained by two fellow travellers who were discussing the state of the National Health Service. Needless to say they spoke as if things could not get any worse and my mind wandered to my first encounter with a hospital.

The year was 1937 and my father took my five-year-old brother, John and myself up to Billinge Hospital to see my mother who lay dying in a small side ward. As we walked down the corridor, which to a seven year old seemed never ending, I think if walls could talk they would have shouted authority, because when we arrived at the entrance to the ward a very efficient looking sister discussed with my father as to whether we children could be allowed in. However, as it was Christmas time the rules were bent a little and in we went to stand at the foot of the bed looking at my ill-looking mother with white starched sheets draping the bed; quietness prevailed.

At the time I am writing about I had a two year old sister Margaret in the same hospital; Margaret would be termed today as a spastic child, a child of special needs (but there was no special needs money). A few days after this visit my father was summoned to an office at the top of King Street Wigan. I remember going with him and looking up at the counter to hear a stern looking man tell my father that he would have to pay nine shillings a week off the arrears for hospital treatments. Shortly after that Margaret was sent to the Workhouse (Frog Lane, Wigan), so for the next 18 months of Margaret's life I was taken to the Workhouse to see her.

In 1953 I was married and expecting a child; I was told by our local doctor that my husband was suffering very badly with TB of the lungs and would have to go into Pemberton Cottage Sanatorium where he was a patient for 12 months. Fortunately by then we had the National Health Service which covered all the cost of the expensive treatment – an injection of Streptomycin every day for 12 months at the cost of £1 an injection.

In 1966 it was a case of Billinge Hospital re-visited when as a nurse I worked on the same ward that I had encountered 30 years before. What a transformation! The small side ward had been transformed into a cosy little day ward where patients could sit and watch television or have a chat while drinking their morning coffee. Open visiting had been introduced where relatives could visit patients any time of the day, and there was a menu for patients' meals.

The corridors were alive with activity while patients were taken to the theatre for various operations. New buildings had sprung up e.g. a new Nurse's Home, a central sterilising department and an extended X-ray department.

One could term all the changes as progress, but I feel sure that the National Health Service played an important part. Could it be that we the public have changed our attitudes and become more demanding? I think so.

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

Dead end at present

Dear Editor

I am currently researching my family history and have come to a bit of a dead end at present and I wonder if any of your readers can help me to progress.

The person that I am looking for is a David Winstanley who was born on 27 February, 1880, at Victoria Road off Platt Bridge, Ince. His father was William and his mother Mary (formerly Bradshaw). He married a Mary Jane

Thomas on 16 April 1900, at the church of St. Peter in Hindley and was residing at 56 Walthew Lane, Platt Bridge. His wife Mary Jane lived at 36 Walthew Lane before she was wed.

Any help that any of your readers can give would be greatly appreciated.

**R. Winstanley
3 Primrose Lane
Boston Spa
Wetherby
West Yorks
LS23 6DL
Tel: 01937 844483**

Revealing Secrets

Dear Editor

I am a researcher working for Multi Media Arts, an independent television company based in Liverpool, Manchester and Dublin and I am writing to you in connection with Revealing Secrets, a new series we are making for Channel 4.

As a native of Wigan familiar with your magazine, it occurred to me that you would be a valuable source of potential stories and contacts. Basically, the aim of the show is to bring history to life through the investigation of the kind of mysterious objects anyone could have in their attic or cellar. There will also be opportunity within the series to examine "case closed" stories, where a puzzle has been solved and we simply retrace the steps taken along the way.

**Ewan Phillips
Multi Media Arts
65-67 Dale Street
Liverpool L2 2NS
Tel: 0151 476 6050
Email: ewanpmma@hotmail.com**



Dear Sir

I am a member of the Lancashire Aircraft Investigation Team.

As I am researching aviation links in the Wigan area, especially World War II, I would like to hear from anyone who remembers any aviation incidents ie crashes, forced landings, etc and other aviation related stories, including details regarding captured enemy aircraft placed on display in the Borough and

Information wanted on aviation incidents

surrounding areas.

I am particularly interested in finding further information on the two Wigan presentation Spitfires, *Women of Wigan* and *Wigan and District* (the latter is believed to be only the second one presented by a town after Coventry), and the subsequent "Wings for Victory" campaign which followed on from the presentation scheme. Back in 1963 the original cheques, a copy of the plaque from the Air Ministry, photographs and other

documents relating to the *Wigan and District* Spitfire were presented to the Wigan Branch of the RAF Association. A booklet regarding the Spitfire Fund was also published at the time by a Mr Horace Hutchinson. Unfortunately, however, the branch appears to be no longer in existence and the whereabouts of the artefacts unknown. Do any readers have any recollections of the club or the whereabouts of the artefacts.

I would also like to learn

more about the Upholland "Wings for Victory" campaign, where the village planned to buy seven Spitfires at a cost of £35,000. I understand that they reached £42,000 – quite an achievement – but I know nothing further.

If any reader has any relevant photographs or documents which they would be prepared to lend me, I would have them carefully copied and promptly returned.

Any help or assistance is greatly appreciated.

Mark Gaskell
6 Blackledge Close
Farriers Park Orrell
Wigan WN5 8TB

Email:

mark.gaskell@ntlworld.com

WILL "MYSTIC HERALD" PLEASE ELUCIDATE

Dear Sir

Constantly down the years of the 20th century if ever the Antipodes gave anything to the Sporting World on an International basis in general, then surely it must be their gift of the 'All Blacks'. Most everyone bows his head in reverence to acknowledge the quality on the rugby field of the men from under the Southern Cross in perpetuity, whilst wondering at the same time from just where another might, or might have challenged the title.

In edition No. 26 of *Past Forward*, a Mr. Lees has appeared like some mystic herald to provide an answer when he wrote of the "Ince All Blacks" of the period prior to the 1920's and before. So, Mr. Lees, may we ask your indulgence when seeking further information, such as what life did the club have and where was the ground on which they played? In fact, anything to reveal the existence in Ince of anything to suggest a sort of challenge, be it past or no, to the emblazoned "All Black" club way down-under who have gone so long possibly under the mistaken impression that their own sacrosanct identity was unique. But of course they would most likely have been totally oblivious of the existence of geographical Ince and its environs, together with the knowledge that in Ince virtually anything can happen and at any time.

Clearly your correspondent of the Dance Halls [see p9] is therein well versed. I would ask if the gentleman concerned ever heard of 'Th'ut' (The Hut) from somewhere in Hindley around 1943-44? It was suggested by a reliable informant that the place was located somewhere down Liverpool Road in the region of the Bridgewater. Myself, I never knew, but my informant (now deceased) was not a liar, and as you will readily know, good dancing shoes 'll dance anywhere, so who knows?

Donald B Norton
(Harry Entwistle)
Krithia
3 Queensway
Ince-in-Makerfield
WN2 2HL

Ellen Weeton: Information from over the Pennines

Dear Sir

My neighbour who is a keen family historian has drawn my attention to the fascinating article about Ellen Weeton in *Past Forward* No. 26. I have a continuing interest in the Armitages of Honley and have several items of family significance.

First, Miss Weeton's eldest charge, George Armitage, collected the signatures of his family members and friends, by removing them from the end of personal letters and sticking them into a book. Here can be found the autographs of his parents, Joseph and Ann and grandparents, his contemporaries and nephews and nieces, and a great many others.

Secondly I have a book entitled *The Ladies Calling* published in Oxford in 1673. This has a fascinating story to tell from the names that are recorded on its first page. It reads *S. PEARCE 1729*.

Does any P.F. reader have a clue?



Dear Sir

This is an old photo that I found at my Aunt's house after she died.

I haven't a clue who these young men are, but perhaps your readers may know.

Mrs. A. Cotton

62 Winstanley Road Billinge Wigan

Sally Walker to Sarah Armitage 1809 Marianne Armitage. Marianne Armitage was George's sister. She had received this book from her mother, Sarah who in turn had been given it by her mother Sally, Sarah Pearce's daughter. Mr. and Mrs. Pearce's signatures have been included amongst the signatures.

Marianne is also much honoured in her former parish of Honley as she paid for the building of St. George's Brockholes. It is said she was so

touched by the sight of the Brockholes children walking a mile or more to Honley in the pouring rain that she resolved to build a church for them. She lived in what is now the Conservative Club behind the church.

I believe that there are now no descendants of Joseph and Ann Armitage's family alive. One part of the family, that of the Rev. George Dowker Armitage, one time Vicar of Broughton Astley, retired to live outside Scarborough. I

have a photograph of the family after his wedding to Matilda Constance Louc of Tydd St. Mary on 25 July 1875. The church of St. Wilfrid's Harrogate has a beautiful font cover, designed by Leslie Durbin, in memory of their youngest daughter Violet.

The Very Reverend
Henry E.C. Stapleton
Rockland House
20 Marsh Gardens
Honley
Huddersfield
HD7 2AF
Tel: 01484 666629



SIMPLY FICTITIOUS

Dear Editor

The incident of the woman calling attention to the headgears moving and starting the trouble at Pemberton Collieries in 1936, quoted by Fred Holcroft in the Winter issue, is, like many others which I could give if space allowed, simply fictitious. Knowing the lock-out was likely to be protracted, the ponies were brought up at the beginning and spent the summer in the nearby pony field. The following information is from the Wigan Examiner, 16/10/26. "By the beginning of October, 171,419 miners were back at work, 10,560 of these in Lancashire. Coal was wound for the first time since the stoppage at Pemberton Collieries on Monday 11 October 1925 with 391 miners attending. The news caused a large



crowd to gather but there was no trouble until Wednesday..."

Having known Fred Holcroft for over 30 years and admired his scholastic attainments and the meticulous research of his excellent articles, I am at loss to understand how he could come to believe and repeat what is nothing more than an old wives tale.

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

** I think we'd better call this one a draw! Ed.*

RECOGNISE ANYONE?

Dear Editor

The enclosed soccer team photograph c.1926 includes my father, Eli, in the back row, 2nd from right; he died in 1985, aged 79.

Do any of your readers recognise anyone or the venue? I suggest it might be a Westwood Methodist team from Lower Ince.

**G. Cherrington
4 Douglas Drive
Orrell
Wigan WN5 8NT**

Gidlow Girls' Senior School 1939-42

Dear Sir

Having taken a great interest in the *Past Forward* issues, I noticed in the summer 2000 you wanted information of any kind about *Gidlow Girls' Senior School*.

I attended this school from 1939-42 and have many happy memories of my years there. It was a very impressive building, long fronted as the Boys School was attached by the Main Hall in the centre. We never mixed with the boys!

When I first started at the school I had not lived in the area very long so I was placed in a C form so they could check my work. I soon worked up to 1A. The then three R's teacher kept me in after school to practise my writing (real writing as it was called in those days). A

few taps on my knuckles soon sorted it out.

We were taught various subjects. I enjoyed sewing and cookery, as we had never done it before. The first article we made in sewing was our cookery aprons which were hand sewn.

We always wore gym slips which we removed when doing games. We hated showing our navy blue knickers which always had a small pocket for our hanky. Sometimes the boys used to peep through the fence and make fun of us!

The War had been on all the years I was at school. As a prefect in my last year I came back to school in the evenings to help the teacher who did Fire Watch duty. We would walk round the school buildings to check

everything was in order and no mishaps.

We always walked to school as not many families had cars like today. Very few buses were on the roads also.

How many hours the teachers must have spent checking our reports. The Headmasters signed them also, always using red ink.

I went to see where my old school used to be and was amazed to see what seemed like the original walls, fencing where the grounds and gardens and front entrance gate used to be for the school. I do not think the fencing could be the original as these were mostly taken for scrap in the war.

**Jean Shawcross (Mrs.)
120 Newbrook Road
Over Hulton
Bolton BL5 1ET**

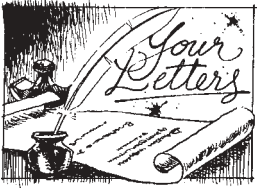
YESTERDAYS

I was born before the corner shops
Were taken over by Spar,
Churchill was smoking Pasha
And the world was still at war.
All the food was rationed,
There was no ITV
You heard ITMA, on the wireless,
And it was always Spam for tea.
It was time for evacuation
For children in the blitz,
And you followed family tradition
By working in the pits.
Discipline at school was strict,
You didn't give Sir any cheek,
I'll guarantee that if you did
Your cheeks would smart all week.
Nowadays kid's get lines
For stepping out of place,
I used to get mine off my Dad,
With his hand across my face.
Though life was such a struggle
From one day to the next
We had something rarely seen today,
That something is respect.

**Dave Hawkins
Goose Green**



Mrs. Shawcross's needlework class wearing their cookery aprons and caps.



Dancing Days – the sequel

Dear Editor

As a sequel to the last issues 'Dancing Days' could I perhaps mention a few other halls I visited enjoyably, albeit on a lesser scale during the late 1950's.

Hallgate House, close to Wigan's "Grand Hotel", held well attended weekly dances, and the **Platt Bridge Parochial Hall** ran dances which the younger element attended – the fashionable three-quarter length velvety collared coat wearing, drainpiped trousered "mock Edwardians"... the "Teddy Boys" effectively, with D A hairstyles, chasing the smart flared skirted Teddy Girls.

Churchills, which I never actually attended, had a Dancing School in the Wigan area a long time ago and some locals, now advancing in years, attended arranged dances at **Burtonwood U.S. Aircraft Base**.

Ashton-in-Makerfield Baths was a very popular dancing venue, as was **Abbey Lakes** (which nestles in the shadow of the Upholland Parish Church). The Lakes have been an attraction for decades for garden lovers, fishing types, picnic-parties, etc., and I've heard it said that many years ago, there used to be a cycle-racing track there.

No 'Dancing Days' letter mentioning Wigan could be completed without a reference to Pemberton's **Andrew Carnegie Public Library Building**, for the Carnegie attracted dancers from all around in the 1930's.

One of the nicest Wigan ballrooms was without doubt the **Royal Court Hall** in King Street (not to be confused with

GERMAN "SPY" SPOTTED IN HIGHER INCE

Dear Editor

It is almost 50 years since I lived in Higher Ince, but the copies of *Past Forward*, which my sister religiously sends to me, revive many memories of life at the top of Belle Green Lane. The following is an account of one such memory.

Hemfield Road is a private and unmade road, which at the time of this incident wound its way from Belle Green Lane, past the slag tip, to Hindley Station. I believe that much of the road disappeared with the demolition of the tip. Running parallel with the road was a railway line and separating them were several fields and a disused bowling green, the railway end of which was overgrown with bushes.

John Gregory and I lived on opposite sides of Hemfield Road and often spent many hours playing in the area. On such an occasion, in the summer of 1941, we were walking amongst the bushes when a face appeared through the branches. That face was adorned by what I can only describe as a "Hindenberg" moustache, the type portrayed on the posters which warned us of the need to beware of spies. At this time, of course, Britain's fortune was at possibly its lowest ebb of the whole war and

the Court Dancing School). The King Street Court Ballroom (formerly attached to a theatre which offered *Othello*, in 1900, and later pantomimes), was softly lit and had a well sprung floor. Its refreshment area was, I'm told, a "Wartime British Restaurant". Dancers frequenting the King Street Court Hall usually were accompanied by their partners, and move-on and progressive dances were rarely played here.

Hopefully, all the Dance Halls have now been covered.

Thanks.

Kenneth Lucas
80 Park Road
Hindley
Wigan WN2 3RX

messages such as "Walls have ears" and "Be like Dad and keep Mum" were to be seen on most hoardings.

"Hindenberg" gestured for us to approach him but, our suspicions aroused, we retired to a safe distance, only to be pursued by what we had now decided was a German spy. On reaching the houses on Hemfield Road the German dispelled any doubts, which we may have had, by attempting to open the Air Raid Post door. So we did what any patriotic 11-year-old boys would do by reporting the incident to Joe Boardman, the Air Raid Warden. Joe immediately

donned his helmet and gave chase.

Later that day my mother was alarmed by the arrival of a detective wishing to interview me. When asked for a description of "Hindenberg" my answer was, of course, "He looks like a German spy". To the question "Did he speak to you?" my reply was that he spoke German. He actually said "come here" which, having convinced myself, sounded very much like German. As soon as the policeman left, I ran to meet John who had been undergoing a similar interrogation. We agreed that we would

probably be awarded a medal and perhaps even receive it from the King.

Some days later the same detective visited us again and praised us for our awareness and patriotism, before informing us that "Hindenberg" was a railway man who was investigating the theft of fog signals in the area.

John and I often saw our German spy again but the scowl on his face always suggested that we should keep our distance.

Gerald Riley
383 Halliwell Road
Bolton BL1 8DE

Wigan Telephone Exchange sealed lifelong friendship

Dear Sir

My husband and I have read with great pleasure the last four issues of your magazine. They have been sent to me by my very good friend Marion Maggs (nee Atherton) who lived near Billinge Hospital but is now living in Dereham, Norfolk. We both worked at Wigan Telephone Exchange in the late 1930's until we volunteered for the ATS in 1942 and have been friends ever since.

The photograph (below) was taken at the time of the change from manual to automatic operation at the Exchange. Miss Wise, Supervisor, and Dorothy Smith, Sectional Supervisor, who are shown, were there during our time. Our other great friend there was Marie Lydon (later Trickett), daughter of Sergeant Lydon of Wigan Police Force and aunt of

Joe Lydon of Wigan Rugby fame.

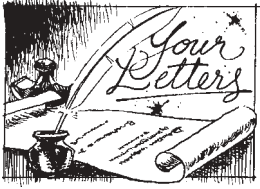
I was at the Exchange from 1937 to 1942. After war was declared, if an air-raid was about to come over the area a message came to the Exchange and certain telephonists were given a list of numbers to ring to say "Air Raid Warning Red". Soon afterwards sirens would go. When the danger was over we had to give the message for the "All Clear" siren.

From 1942 to 1946 I was in the ATS, then after demob I was back at the Exchange for a year before leaving for Australia to marry my fiancé, whom I met while we were both stationed on a R.A.F. camp.

Kathleen Monks nee Baxter
Woodend 2 The Chenies
Petts Wood
Kent BR6 0ED



Last day of service of the old Wigan Telephone Exchange before the new Wigan 'Common Control' Automatic Exchange system began service on 11 March 1933.



Crook Village inspiration

Sir,

A friend of mine, Paddy Murphy, who lives in Woodhouse Lane and who has been involved with the folk music scene for some years, showed me this poem he had written after taking a walk through Crooke Village one winter's afternoon. I thought you might be interested in including it in *Past Forward*.

I had to chuckle when I read it; I hope you find it funny too.

**Colin Fishwick
Pemberton
Wigan**

CROOK'S GEORGE CROSS

Captain Herman Von Gerkin,
For the fatherland tried to do his bit,
So he thought of this plan to sail up the canal,
And blow Wigan Pier to bits.

Up the Mersey under the cover of darkness,
The submarine silently sped,
Took the first left straight into canal,
Then it was full steam ahead.

Now when they reached Gathurst,
They were making such good time,
And the crew were all in the pink,
They decided that at the next pub they come to,
They'd all get out and go for a drink.

So they tied up at Crook Hall and went in,
In their blue sweaters they just looked like Bargees,
They started bragging about how their captain
Was unbeatable at Fives and Threes.

When the Crookers heard this they were fuming,
Their champion were the landlord no tub,
An they said that he'd play 'em,
For anything they wanted,
Like your barge against our bloody pub.

So they decided to play best out of three games,
But the German had no chance from the start,
Because the landlord was a much better player,
And besides all the dominoes were marked.

Then the captain a man of honour took it like a man,
He said well that's it lads we'll have to make our way,
Back to Germany best as we can.

When the council at Wigan heard about it,
They were all thrilled to the bone,
And they recommended 'um for George Cross,
But the Crookers said they'd sooner have one of their
own.

So there, my story's through,
And tho the allies brought Fuhrer to his knees,
The villages of Crook did their bit,
With a game called Fives and Threes.

Paddy Murphy

Lowton 'Step Houses' Then and Now

Dear Mr. Gillies

The readers of *Past Forward* may be interested in the two photographs enclosed, one shows houses as they were in early 1900 and the other as they are today; I was born in the house on the right.

The houses are at the junction of Winwick Lane and Newton Road, Lowton opposite the Lime House Nursing Home. There are four houses now, but originally

there were eight, back to back with the back being called Hammer Street. The reason that the steps are gone is because the road camber was wrong and one side had to be raised. The houses were originally called 'The Step Houses'.

**Alec Hughes
1 Beech Avenue
Lowton
Warrington WA3 2BZ**



Smith family of Astley

Dear Sir

I would like to know if any reader has an interest in the Smith family of The Lingards, Astley c.1917. If so, I have a copy of a letter that may be of interest to them.

**Brigitte Cox
45 Miller Street
Hughes ACT 2605
Australia
Email:
dbdcox@bigpond.com**

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