

PAST FORWARD

ISSUE No. 31

SUMMER 2002



The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

WELCOME to the summer edition of *Past Forward*. As always, you will find a splendid mix of articles by contributors old and new.

These are exciting times for the Heritage Service, which has enjoyed an international profile of late - worldwide publicity followed Alan Davies's feature in the last issue of the recently discovered treasure *Woman's Worth* (see p3), while the History Shop was featured in the final episode of Simon Shama's *History of Britain*, shown in June. And the Service has played a key role in Wigan's contribution to a major exhibition in Angers, its twin town, in September (see right).

Nearer to home, I am delighted with the progress which is being made by the Friends of Wigan Heritage Service, with lots of exciting projects in the pipeline. My sincere thanks to all of you who have shown an interest, including attending the meetings, and also to Philip for all his hard work in developing and encouraging the group.

The 5th Manchester Regiment figures very prominently in this issue - an excellent exhibition is currently on display in the History Shop (this is reviewed on p18), complemented by a splendid article by regular contributor Fred Holcroft (p6). This exhibition has been long in the making, but the wait has certainly been worthwhile. Congratulations in particular to Dawn and all those who have been involved.

I am pleased at the way various articles in *Past Forward* lead other readers to put pen to paper, something which they most likely would not otherwise have done. This issue is no exception - witness the articles on VC's and the Bug, to quote two very differing articles from both ends of the wide spectrum which the magazine covers. If you are one of the many whose memory is triggered by an article you have read in *Past Forward*, and feel moved to respond in any way, do make sure that you put pen to paper - as always, I will do my best to ensure that your name goes in print.

As always, my thanks to all of you who have contributed to the magazine, whether by contribution or encouragement - your many complementary comments are greatly valued!

EUROPE IN FOCUS

Angers 2002

ANGERS is twinned with Wigan, and indeed with a number of other towns, including Osnabruck, Pisa, Haarlem and Seville. During September, the French town will be mounting a major exhibition, *'Europe in Focus'*, which will feature displays and contributions from all its twinned towns.

Wigan Heritage Service has played a leading role in Wigan's contribution, and a selection of museum artefacts and archives

will be loaned to Angers for the exhibition. Local firms Millikens and William Santus, as well as Wigan Rugby League Club, have also made contributions to Wigan's part of the exhibition. Wigan Pier Theatre Company will also be taking part, as will John Harrison, a young flautist from Winstanley College, Wigan.

I will ensure that a plentiful supply of *Past Forward* will be available - a good opportunity to expand the readership on the continent!

The Parish Map

I know many people, and particularly those who participated in the project, have been wondering what has happened to the *Parish Map*.

Good news! It is safe and well, and the necessary funding has now been procured to display it in its entirety in the History Shop. Plans are as yet at an early stage, but I can definitely say that the *Parish Map* will be on public display before Easter 2003. This will be the first time that the map will have been displayed in one venue in its entirety.

More details in the next issue of *Past Forward*. Ed.

'Friends of Mesnes Park' Appeal

Dear Mr Gillies

As Chairperson of the 'Friends of Mesnes Park', I would like to make an appeal through *Past Forward* for 50 volunteers, whatever your particular skills or interests, to join our ranks. If successful, this would enable us to qualify for a grant to help with the rose garden refurbishment. Please contact me as soon as possible if you are interested.

Incidentally, the child handing the cheque over in the top left photograph in *Past Forward* 29 is my daughter, now Karen Strong - and now nearly 40! [see also this issue's Who? Where? Ed.]

Kathleen Banks
'Friends of Mesnes Park'
42 Rylands Street
Wigan WN6 7BL
Tel: 01942 236448

COPY DEADLINE
Please note that the
copy deadline for issue
no 32 of *Past Forward* is
4 October.

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

Past Forward On Tape

I am delighted to announce that this project is now progressing, and this current issue of *Past Forward* is being used as a 'dry run'. Assuming there are no unforeseen problems, then the next issue (no 32, due out in November), will be accompanied by a cassette tape version, for the visually impaired and housebound. Ed.

Cover: King George VI and Queen Elizabeth during their visit to Wigan, 20 May 1938. They also visited Leigh later in the day.

TINY VOLUME COULD REWRITE HISTORY

Ye olde women's lib



370-year-old book on battle of the sexes found in town hall



Manchester Evening News
19/4/02

NATION & WORLD

Book reveals that women's rights were a buzz 370 years ago

By The Associated Press

LONDON — A historian in northern England says he has found a 370-year-old book proclaiming that women are better than men.

Seattle Pacific University

Seattle Times, U.S.A.
21/4/02

Women's history coup

LONDON: A 370-year-old book discovered under a pile of documents in a town hall vault could change the history of the women's movement.

Wigan Council heritage officer Alan Davies stumbled across the dusty book in the basement at Leigh Town Hall, Greater Manchester, while searching in the archives for another item.

Mr Davies uncovered the 163-page volume called *Womans Worth* and subtitled: "A treatise provinge by sundrie reasons that women do excell."

The Chronicle, Queensland
22/4/02

Book found in vault puts start of sex wars at 1630

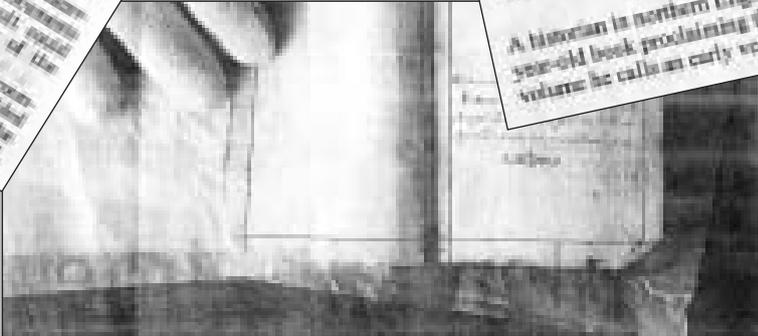
A 370-year-old book discovered in a town hall vault could change the history of the women's movement.

The Independent
20/4/02

Historian Unearths 17th Century Book

A historian in northern England says he has found a 370-year-old book proclaiming that women are better than men. A volume he calls an early voice for women's empowerment.

Star Press, Indiana, U.S.A.
20/4/02



Cavalier attack on men by an early feminist

The book, *Womans Worth*, is a treatise provinge by sundrie reasons that women do excell. It is a collection of letters and essays written by a woman in the 17th century. The book is a significant work in the history of women's rights and is considered one of the earliest works of feminist literature.

Daily Telegraph
20/4/02

Turn to page 4

'Womans Worth' revisited

IN THE last issue of *Past Forward* I mentioned the finding of the manuscript 'Woman's Worth'. The article was picked up by the Council's Public Relations Department, who felt it worth a separate press release, most importantly targeting the Press Association which has world-wide influence. With today's advances in communications, that press release soon found its way onto the screens of journalists around the globe who made it headline news!!

Coverage ranged from Australia's SMH network through to the *Star Press, Indiana, The Seattle Times, The Houston Chronicle, The Sydney Times* and many others. For a brief few days Wigan, and most importantly Wigan Heritage Service, was the centre of the universe - which, of course, we already knew was the case!

Radio interviews were given to CNN News, BBC World Service and BBC Radio Bristol, the latter being carried out on the mobile phone at 10.30 p.m. while sat in the Mort Arms in Tyldesley!

The English press articles ranged from *The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, The Independent* and *Manchester Evening News*, along with our local press.

Richard and Judy!

A phone call from a researcher for the world famous academic chat show **Richard and Judy** led to an invite on the programme to discuss the finding of 'Woman's Worth'. I decided after a brief ten seconds of being starstruck, however, that this was dangerous territory and that we really need an assessment of the work, the study of which falls into a very specialised area of academia. Dr. Roger Holdsworth from Manchester University Dept. of History called round at the Archives to analyse the work, which he felt to be mid to late 17th century. The show felt that, as we could not totally verify that the work was indeed by a woman or accurately date it, they would wait until further research had been carried out.

Academic onslaught

The world of antiquarian book dealers, academics from various spheres of interest, publishers desperate to reprint the work (six so far), as well as interested members of the public, bombarded the Archives with Emails and letters.

An article in *The Daily Telegraph* contained a typical piece of journalistic invention, namely that the work was written "two years before the outbreak of the Civil War"!! This led to a written response from Dr. Margaret Bent of Oxford University who remembered seeing a manuscript in the Bodleian Library (doc no. 1030) with virtually identical content. This in turn set off a trail of research which led to a Revd. William Page (1590-1663), Fellow of All Souls College Oxford, 1618-1648. The manuscript appears to have been left to the Bodleian by his executors after 1663.

Meanwhile, Professor Kari McBride in Arizona (who you may remember from the *Past Forward* article) continued her researches by contacting Dr. Bent and pursuing the content of the Page manuscript. Kari is coming over in summer and hopes to view both 'Woman's Worth' and the Page manuscript. Arizona University is also keen to publish a scholarly transcription. She personally feels the script to be of the late 16th century and based on the Geneva Bible (the Geneva Bible became the most widely read and influential English Bible of the 16th and 17th centuries. It was continually printed from 1560 to 1644 in over 200 different editions).

The saga continues with new avenues of research opening up each week. I feel sure we will soon know the full identity of both the manuscript and the initials RN on the binding. Just imagine if RN turns out to be Rebecca Nurse, the famous Englishwoman who died at the Salem Witchcraft Trials in 1692! She would have been familiar with the Geneva Bible which the Pilgrims used exclusively. The press interest we have seen so far would be eclipsed by a few degrees of magnitude!

Alan Davies
Heritage Officer (Archives)

HCL Motorcycles Leigh – an unknown manufacturer comes to light

THE world of transport in all forms and its history attracts enormous interest around the UK, probably more than in any other country. Britain is famous for its army of 'anoraks', out there boldly researching and documenting the most obscure aspects of transport you can imagine, from the history of a single railway siding to photographing today's latest trams and buses. The photographic legacy left to us by this enthusiastic breed is enormous, and very important, as what features in the background in the photographs is today of great interest.

As with all forms of transport, most of which were either invented or developed in Britain, motorcycles attract a great deal of interest. This interest can often come from those who had to rely on them as their sole means of transport, say from the 1920's through to the 1970's.

Motorcycles are also fascinating from a design history standpoint. The 200 mph monsters of today can be traced directly back to those heavy-duty former pedal cycles with engines bolted on of the late 19th century.

Just before the First World War tens of small scale businesses were attaching engines to frames and declaring them 'motorcycles', each with their own company identity as though unique, when really most motorcycles used a limited number of engines and identical cycle parts.

Enter Mr. Hezekiah Close!

So it was in 1922 that Hezekiah Close of Leigh decided he would begin production of the 'H.C.L.' (Hezekiah Close Leigh) motorcycle. This was not, however, a case of purchasing a batch of frames and strapping an engine on. Hezekiah was an experienced and enthusiastic motorcyclist who relished a run out into the countryside with the family packed into the sidecar. He had his own ideas as to what was required and was determined his bike would be better than the rest.

Hezekiah decided to begin production at 52 Railway Road, Leigh, with a design based around the most common engine of the time, the ubiquitous Villiers 269cc two stroke single cylinder (Villiers themselves began making bicycles in the 1880's and later motorcycles). Hezekiah's frame design cleverly allowed for another more powerful engine to be fitted. This was a J.A.P. (J.A. Prestwich of Tottenham) single cylinder four stroke of around 350cc and 2³/₄ hp, giving slightly greater pulling power and performance.

Incidentally, to give some idea of how much engine design has moved on since H.C.L. days, a model aero engine of today by CMB of only 3.5cc develops as much power as the J.A.P. engine, but instead of developing that power at 2000 rpm it needs 38,700 rpm!



The racey lines of the H.C.L. motorcycle, showing Villiers engine, hand gearchange and belt drive to rear wheel.

Specifications for 1922

As mentioned earlier Hezekiah did not have much choice when it came to cycle parts or engine accessories. His specification reads as follows:

Engine – Villiers or J.A.P. 2³/₄ hp

Carburettor – Amac special two stroke double lever

Ignition – Flywheel magneto or C.A.V. magneto

Forks – Saxon's or specially designed

Frame – Best quality seamless steel tube, all lugs accurately machined in jigs.

Brakes – Two independent brakes on the back wheel (no front brake!)

Wheels – Specially built 26 x 2¹/₄ with 7/16 spindles on front and back, 12 gauge plated or black spokes

Tyres – Clincher

Lubrication – Best and Lloyd semi-automatic vacuum pump, regulated

Mudguards – Special design broad domed

Handlebars – Semi TT or others as preferred

Footrests – Rubber and best mild steel
Carrier – Heavy gauge solid drawn steel tube, all joints welded

Toolbags – Two leather armoured detachable

Tank – Special design tank to suit vacuum oil feeds, capacity 1¹/₄ gallons

Tank fittings – Best and Lloyds

Saddle – Lycetts or any other make as desired

Gears – Burman or Sturmey Archer, two speed and kickstart and clutch

Transmission

Chain and composition belt

Ground clearance – 5³/₄ inches

Finish – Best black enamel, gold and blue

Weight – 160 lbs.

Street racer of its time?

When all those specifications were added together (see photograph taken from the one and only 1922 catalogue) the end result was both nicely proportioned and purposefully designed. Press opinion of the time of the launch in 1922 commented that although the machine did not differ much from conventional designs the capability of using two engines was well thought out; the quickly detachable wheels were highlighted also.

The ease of removing the engine to be stripped down was a plus. The use of wide and low footrests enabled the bike to be parked against the kerb.

A rider of a H.C.L. bike in the 1920's had his hands full and could really have done with additional ones! The left side of the handlebar had a clutch lever and an ignition timing control level (advanced and retard), the right side sported an air control lever (choke) and throttle lever. The hand gear change lever lay to the right, of the petrol tank. Just imagine coming up to a busy junction in heavy traffic signalling by hand and turning right

meanwhile changing down through the gears, plus slightly retarding the ignition!

Performance with the Villiers engine was probably way up in the 30's mph with a fuel consumption around 120 mpg. The J.A.P. engined version might take you up to the heady heights of 50 to 60 mph and still give over 100 mpg.

Ian Johnson of Roxburghshire, whose grandfather was Hezekiah Close and who gave us his father's background, tells us that only six motorcycles were ever made. Sadly the business had to close after the Deva Bakery, Leigh folded, owing Mr. Close's cycle business £800.

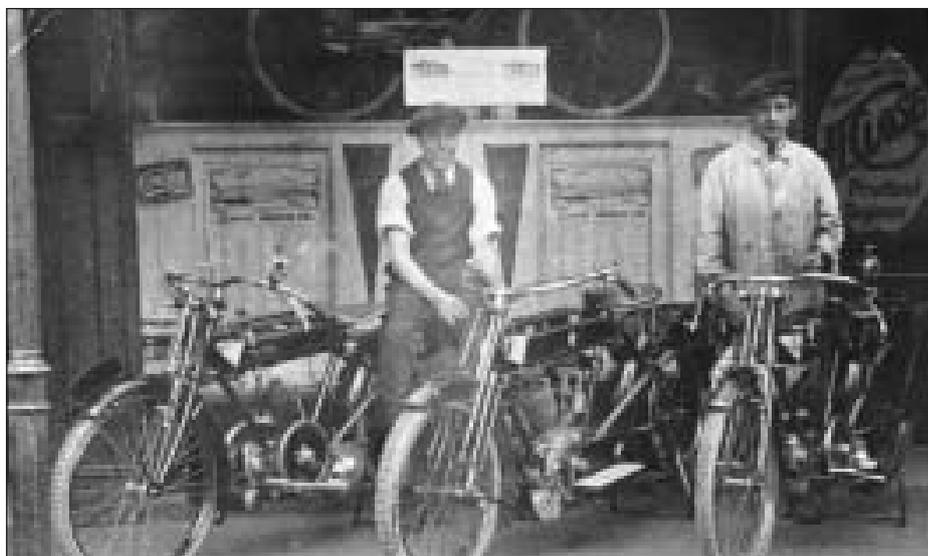
Mr. Close was of strong stock, though, and after years paying off debtors he bounced back as a professional musician! His business card shows he was competent as a tympanist, drummer, xylophone player, and also performed as a soloist. In later life he was the landlord of the Spring View Inn, Plank Lane, Leigh until his death in 1950.

Unique in the annals

As mentioned earlier, British transport historians have covered virtually every aspect of their specialities in enormous detail. Having delved into a number of standard reference works covering all known motorcycles, the H.C.L. was not to be seen. The motorcyclist's Bible, Erwin Tragatsch's *Encyclopaedia of Motorcycles*, does not mention it. Even the Vintage Motorcycle Club was not aware of the bike. Sadly, an example of the bike has not survived, unless someone around Leigh knows of an old bike collecting dust in a shed?

So it seems we have another discovery in our Archives, of national importance (at least if you are a keen motorcycling enthusiast!).

Alan Davies
Heritage Officer (Archives)



The shop front in Railway Road, Leigh, in 1926. Villiers-engined bikes on left and right, JAP-engined bike in centre.

This article is particularly topical, as the Collier Battalion – an exhibition on the 5th Manchesters – is currently on display in the History Shop (see p18).

Saturday Afternoon Soldiers

The Fifth Manchesters in the Great War 1914-18

by Fred Holcroft

FEW Battalions which served in the British Army between 1914 and 1918 experienced such varied conditions or travelled such long distances as the 1st/5th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment, comprising mainly men recruited from Wigan, Ince, Leigh, Atherton, Tyldesley and Eccles. One of the first territorial battalions to volunteer for active service overseas in early August 1914, it was still in action four years later on 11 November 1918, the last day of the war.

After an initial spell defending the Suez Canal, October 1914 - May 1915, the battalion spent the rest of 1915 fighting in the Dardanelles, followed by the whole of 1916 defending the canal, once more including a defeat of the Turks at the Battle of Romani in August of that year. The battalion was then switched to the Western Front where it spent 1917 in the trenches, including a spell in the infamous Ypres Salient. In March 1918 it was present at one of the great crises of the entire conflict, when it was sent to plug a vital gap in the crumbling British defences during the German offensive of that month. Simultaneously it's second-line battalion, 2nd/5th Manchester Regiment, after enduring the climax of the Passchendaele Campaign in October 1917, was facing the full force of the German onslaught and was annihilated. Finally from August 1918 onwards the first battalion was part of the British Army's advance to victory.

“Saturday afternoon soldiers”

The Fifth Manchesters originated as a result of Lord Haldane's reform of the Militia and Volunteer forces in 1908, when a new Territorial

Army was created, based on part-time soldiers in thousand-strong battalions affiliated to their local county regiment. In this way the former First Volunteer Battalion of the Manchester Regiment became the 1st/5th Battalion of the same regiment. Battalion headquarters was the old Wigan Drill Hall and recruiting as far as Patricroft gave an official strength of 29 officers and 980 other ranks. The men were part-time soldiers, working 5½ days a week in the mines, mills, factories, shops and on the railways, while training once a week, usually on Saturday afternoons, which led to their sobriquet of “Saturday Afternoon Soldiers”. In addition a fortnight-long annual camp simulated military conditions in locations as far afield as Parbold, Stalybridge, Caernarvon and Salisbury Plain.

The Manchesters were a cross-section of the district's social scene. Officers were drawn from the middle-classes: solicitors, doctors, teachers and businessmen, while the rank-and-file came from the working classes. Unlike the regular army, where the upper class officers had little in common with the lower class other ranks, there was more camaraderie in the

territorials where the officers and men, although from different backgrounds during the week, mingled as equals in the Drill Hall, as far as military etiquette would allow.

In Egypt

War came suddenly. In July 1914 the battalion had just returned from its annual peacetime camp at Stalybridge when, on 4 August 1914, it was mobilised for war. The territorials were intended only for home defence against an invading army, but when the Government asked them to serve overseas, to a man the Fifth Manchesters agreed, and by October 1914 found themselves in Egypt.

This was to prove a severe culture shock for the men, most of whom had never been further than Blackpool or the Isle of Man in their lives, as they visited the pyramids and the sphinx, browsed the bustling bazaars of Cairo and Alexandria, and gazed in awe at the mighty River Nile – what a contrast to their polluted “Duggie”! They retained their sense of humour and christened the Suez Canal “t'cut” and the vast expanse of endless desert “t'croft”. The men's time was taken up in training, manoeuvres and route marches, so that they became fitter than at any time in their lives – this was to stand them in good stead. Losses among the regulars in the Dardanelles had been heavy, so in May 1915 the Fifth Manchesters, part of the 42nd Division, found themselves in the front line trenches on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

After a month of trench warfare and sniping, on 4

June 1915 the Fifth Manchesters took part in the Third Battle of Krithia, yet another attempt to break out of the small British bridgehead. After an initial artillery bombardment of the Turkish trenches, they “went over the top” in what can only be described as “in fine and gallant style”, graphically described in the survivors' letters home. They brilliantly captured all their objectives – three lines of Turkish trenches – but when the French colonial troops on their right were beaten back, the Manchesters were forced to retreat or be cut off and their already heavy losses doubled.

Trench warfare

The next two months consisted of interminable trench warfare, followed on 6 August 1915 by another attempt to break out, which was again beaten back with more heavy losses. After a wet and cold autumn the entire expedition was evacuated from the peninsula back to Egypt. Here they rested, recuperated and rebuilt their strength, and when the Turks finally attacked the Suez Canal in force late in 1916 the 42nd Division, now a mobile column, mounted the counter-attack which drove them back. Yet it was not the battle itself (where they did not lose a man) which was the battalion's worst ordeal, but the gruelling pursuit of the defeated Turkish Army across the burning hot desert.

The threat to the Suez Canal removed, the British were able to switch resources to the Western Front, and in February 1917 the 42nd



Division was posted to the snow and cold of France. Here they learned a new type of trench warfare, very different from Gallipoli and Egypt. They soon became adept at trench raids, and began to dominate the no-man's-land in their front. In September 1917 their ghastliest fortnight of the War was the hell of the Ypres Salient where, helplessly sheltering in open trenches, they endured the mud, rain and incessant shelling. The story of the second-line battalion begins here when, in October 1917, their division was hurled at Passchendaele in a desperate attempt to capture that shattered strategic village before the weather got even worse. The district had now provided two local battalions to the war effort, plus thousands of men serving elsewhere.

The 2nd/5th Manchesters, although relatively inexperienced soldiers, had already made an audacious trench raid of the war on 8 June 1917, when 300 men crossed 'no-man's-land' in broad daylight! Following a creeping artillery barrage they reached every objective, captured scores of prisoners for information, destroyed enemy trench mortars and blew up stretches of enemy trenches and dugouts. Over 100 Germans were claimed as killed, while their own losses were six killed, 46 wounded and two men missing. Over a year later the 1st/5th Battalion, already experienced trench raiders, pulled off their most audacious raid of the war, a small eight-man sortie also in broad daylight in order to secure a prisoner for regimental identification and to "kill some Boche" as their war diary laconically puts it. The affair reads like a story in "Boys Own Paper".

Heroic fighting

But by March 1918, German strength was growing in preparation for an offensive. The 2nd/5th Manchesters had been moved to the Somme areas to a (mistakenly) presumed quiet

sector, but on 21 March 1918, after a devastating German artillery bombardment, they were swamped by the stromtroopers' and follow-up infantry attacks, and despite a heroic fighting retreat lasting over a week, the battalion lost threequarters of its strength, so that it had to be disbanded. The 1st/5th battalion was in divisional reserve when the German offensive erupted, and they were switched to where the battle was finely balanced. Moving across the open French countryside, they saw ahead the burning dumps of equipment, fuel and ammunition, while towards them limped the survivors of the British frontline defenders. The battalion formed a line with its fellow territorials from Rochdale, Oldham and Manchester, beating off dozens of desperate German attacks as they frantically tried to break through.

Once the exhausted Germans had been beaten back, they lacked the resources to try again and were forced onto the defensive once more. Now it was the turn of the British Army, and the 1st/5th Manchesters took their turns in the lead as the 42nd Division advanced remorselessly towards the German frontier – not without heavy losses once more – until the Armistice.

It was during this phase that Private Wilkinson from Leigh won the battalion's only Victoria Cross of the War [see *Past Forward* 30 p8], a fitting end to their contribution to the conflict.

Fred Holcroft

◆ **Fred's next local history book will be *Saturday Afternoon Soldiers*, which describes in more detail the activities of the Fifth Manchesters, utilising the same format as his earlier Great War trilogy, with the words of those who took part and numerous maps and photographs. Given the limited print run, readers wishing to obtain a copy would be advised to contact Fred on 01942 225077 to reserve a copy. Ed.**

CENTENARY OF WIGAN CORPORATION TRANSPORT GALA

**Sunday 29 September
10.00 - 5.00**

at

Haigh Country Park

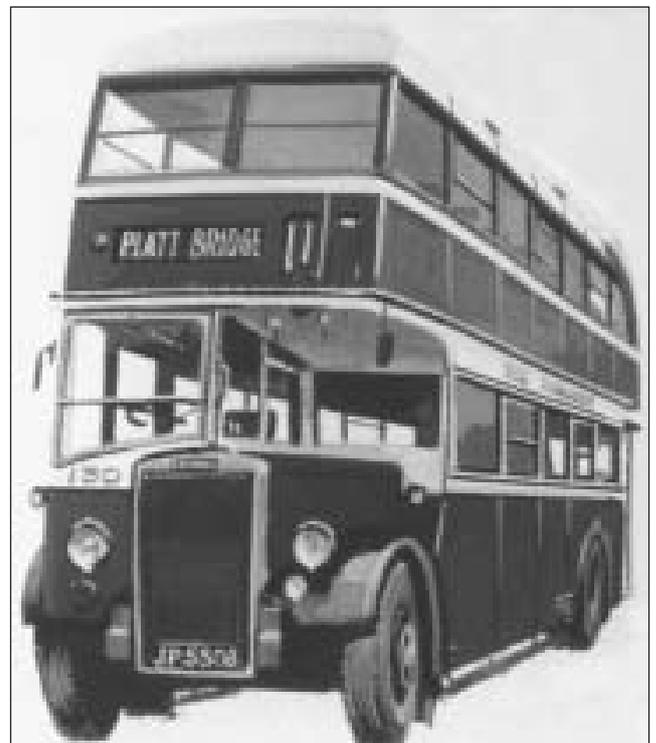
Fun for all the family

Vintage Buses - Fairground Rides

Refreshments - Exhibitions

Many Other Vehicles - Craft Stalls

If you own an interesting vehicle and would like to display it at the Gala, or if you would like to have a craft stall for the day, please contact Arthur Collier, 4 Leominster Place, Ince, Wigan, WN2 2BY (tel: 01942 248946). Arthur would also like to hear from anyone who can help him find the oldest surviving employee of W.C.T.



ADMISSION FREE

THE VICTORIA CROSS

ON 29 JANUARY 1856, Queen Victoria signed a Royal Warrant for the conferring for the first time ever of the Victoria Cross. This enabled acts of bravery by the lower ranks such as privates, to win the same decoration as officers in the armed forces. At this time, the Crimean War was nearing its end and the bronze cross, the need of which had been recognised before, was made from the guns of Sebastopol which the first recipients had helped to silence. Its peculiar value lies in the fact that while any member of the armed forces can win it, it is given to the next of kin of those who have won it. The inscription is "For Valour" and is given only for conspicuous bravery in the field.

The Wigan VC

The only V.C. to actually come from Wigan was Thomas Woodcock, who lived in Tech Street, off Darlington Street East. His award was for carrying a wounded comrade to safety with shells dropping all around him. He attended St. Patrick's School, worked as a boy in the Hindley Green pits and enlisted in the Irish Guards in May 1915. The citation read: "For the most conspicuous bravery and determination. He was one of a post which was surrounded and after holding out for 96 hours, superior forces compelled them to retire. Woodcock crossed a river but, hearing cries for help around him, returned and waded into the stream to rescue another member of the party. He carried the latter across the open ground in broad daylight towards the front line, regardless of machine-gun fire that was directed at him."

Woodcock returned home to a hero's welcome in 1917, and at the Pavilion on 3 March the Mayor, on behalf of the people of Wigan, presented him with an illuminated address together with £165 which had been subscribed to the "Woodcock V.C. Fund". On St.

This article is a follow-up to the feature by John Christy on Private Wilkinson V.C., which appeared in the last issue (p8).

Patrick's Day, the congregation of St. Patrick's Church, which Private Woodcock attended, added another £50. His response was to say, "I am going back tonight to do a little bit more for King and Country." Sadly, on 27 March, he was killed at Bullencourt in France and buried in French soil. He was 29 years of age.

The Gallipoli VCs

John Elisha Grimshaw of Abram took part in the Gallipoli landings in April 1915. The War Office announced that "...the V.C. has been bestowed on 282609 Sergeant Grimshaw of the First Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers on 25 April 1915, in effecting a landing to the west of Cape Helles in the face of deadly fire from hidden machine-gun fire which caused a great number of casualties. The survivors, however, cut the barbed wire entanglements and gained the cliffs. Captain Bromilow, Sergeant Stubbs and Corporal Grimshaw have been selected by their comrades as having performed the most signal acts of bravery and devotion to duty."

John Grimshaw, aged 24, was formerly employed as a carpenter at Messrs. Cross & Tetley's Collieries in the Wigan coalfield. He enlisted in June 1912, two years before the outbreak of war and was drafted to India the following year. He returned to England in January 1915 and was sent to the Dardanelles with the first landing party. During the rest of his life he never forgot the landings, saying that only 32 out of a batch of 800 survived the ordeal. On 24 March 1916, Sergeant Grimshaw of Warrington Road, Abram, received his V.C. from King George V at

Buckingham Palace. After the War, he continued his military service, retiring in the early 1950's. He died in London in 1980.

The Ashton VC

In the same Lancashire landings, as they were called, on 25 April 1915, Private William Keneally of Ashton-in-Makerfield was also awarded the V.C. The news was received with delight at Stubshaw Cross and a large number of nearby houses displayed Union Jacks. The announcement made on 28 August 1915 said: "His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to award the V.C. for conspicuous bravery in the field to Captain Richard Willis, Sergeant Alfred Richards and Private William Keneally." As before, the recipients had been selected from other ranks.

Private Keneally's father was from Wexford in Ireland, where William had been born on 26 December 1886. After working in the coal mines at Ashton-in-Makerfield from the age of 13, he had enlisted and served for seven years in the Lancashire Fusiliers, six of them in India. He was recalled at the outbreak of the War. His father, who was a check-weigher at Bryn Hall Colliery, had served 24 years in the Royal Irish Regiment and had five sons serving in the army. One, Private Frank Keneally, had been killed in action in the first months of the War, leaving a widow and child.

The Golborne VC

The other local V.C., Private Harvey from Golborne, won his award in a similar manner to Private Wilkinson, i.e. risking his life to convey information to headquarters. The writer has been unable to find detailed information, and hopes readers could supply the deficiency.

© James Fairhurst

John Monk Foster

A Wigan Miner, Author and Publisher

1857-1930

JOHN MONK Foster was my maternal grandfather, born in the Weavers Arms Yard in Scholes, Wigan, in 1857. He was the eldest of seven brothers. His father, Richard, came from a long line of yeomen farmers, located in the Skipton area since 1645. He went to a “Dames School” which was situated in Scholes on a site later taken over as a “Common Lodging House”, grandly known as The Royal George. This was roughly around Scholes Crossing and Scholes Park.

His obituary in the *Wigan Observer*, dated November 1930, was headlined “Death of Miner Author”. He was 73 years old. He had a very mixed sort of life but perhaps at this stage it is best to let him tell his own story, as told in the advertising blurb preceding the opening instalment of a ‘thrilling’ mining serial named “Facing Death” which was to be published in the *Peoples Journal*, written when he was 47 years old.

The following is what he had to say at the time:

Born in Wigan in 1857 I had small chance of such advantages the ordinary day schools are supposed to confer on those who attend them. Lessons were never a delight to me. They were shirked when possible; and I remember to this day many a good hiding that I earned by playing truant – occasionally for as long as a fortnight at a spell.

At nine, however, my schooldays ended, and the battle of life began in earnest when I went to work in the cannel pit at Rylands, a colliery on the outskirts of the town. I

was glad then, but had reason later to wish myself back at school. The seam was a very low one, not much more than two feet high, and the lads employed as “drawers”, “haulers” or “waggoners” – (pitmen will understand these terms) – were usually very small and not much more than 10 or 12 years of age, a pair of them helping one another to draw. An instance may be given to show the lowness of the mine. The drawers did not commonly place their hands on the top of the “tubs” or “boxes” for fear of having them crushed, and it was a customary thing to find the youngsters with a bald patch in front of their craniums owing to their shoving the waggons with their heads. [JMF was bald from the age of 10 until he was 15].

The solitary accomplishment I had brought away from school was the ability to read, and even at that time I was passionately fond of reading such cheap literature as came my way, though it must be admitted that studious lads lacked then, almost all the opportunities thrown so profusely at the feet of youths today! Still,



I and several of my workmates managed to get hold of an abundance of a certain class of reading for which we used our threepences and sixpences allowed to us each fortnight as spending money on the different penny journals then in vogue, and after reading them, lend them to each other, and so furnished ourselves with mental pabulum, albeit not of the highest class. I even went so far as to make an arrangement with one local newsagent to take such of his unsold copies of old journals at half price.

Here one point may be stated which I think will

be worth the while of every aspiring lad to consider. During the eight or ten years when there was no really good reading within my reach, save the cheap and lurid periodicals referred to, I never missed wading through the correspondence columns of each journal, and so contrived to pick up, absorb and assimilate odds and ends of infinitely varied information, which I afterwards found to be of great use. And to this day the correspondence column of any paper has still a keen attraction for me.

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John Monk Foster

A Wigan Miner,
Author and Publisher
1857-1930

Continued from page 9

First Opportunity

When I was between 18 and 20 the opportunity of my life came. By that I mean no more than this. Suddenly wide fields of literature were thrown open to me. One gentleman in Wigan had built a fine library, another had stocked it with excellent books, and henceforth I was enabled to feast on the works of those great authors whom I had hitherto known only by name. I read right and left with avidity, if with small discrimination, reading more with an eye to mental pleasure rather than intellectual profit, and dropping any book no matter how 'classic' the author's name, the instant it ceased to please. That is my rule in reading still.

Later when I was 23 a local weekly offered prizes at Christmas for stories and poetry. I plucked up courage to compete, and was in the highest heaven of delight when I secured second and third prizes for a tale and some verse. The following year I won the chief prize in the same newspaper; and soon after that, emboldened by my own success, I entered one of the "Peoples Journal" Christmas competitions, when I succeeded in winning one of the minor prizes.

Then I began to think of striking at higher game and entering the literary field in earnest – as an amateur still, of course. The paper I shot at was the once well known London weekly journal "Bowbells" and

the short story I sent was accepted, printed, and paid for at what I considered a very good figure, three guineas.

Having so far done fairly well with my fledglings, I was induced to continue writing in my leisure time, and during the next two or three years I was able to contribute short tales or articles to various papers – "The Weekly Budget", "Chambers Journal", "Household Words" and "All The Year Round" among others.

Stories Accepted

The younger Charles Dickens I had always found exceptionally kind to me. He had accepted a good deal of the stuff I had sent to his journals; had corrected such errors as I had fallen into; I had ever been careful to note his slightest alterations and corrections, and it was mainly owing to that gentleman's kindness and suggestions that I discovered my forte – that of writing stories of the mines amidst and among whom and which I had spent more than half my life.

One rather curious experience I had with Mr. Charles Dickens is worth relating. I had written him a tale dealing in a vivid and realistic manner with a Lancashire mining explosion, and his sub-editor, on writing me respecting the same, had said that the narrative had greatly impressed him, but he intimated that if the story were true, he would have to reject it, whereas if it were fictitious he would accept it with pleasure. I suppose they must have feared an action for libel in the former event. So I wrote explaining that the various incidents set forth in the tale had actually happened, only at different times and in various localities, being

woven together for my purpose alone. Of course the story was published!

By this time I had found out that if a writer desired to succeed with editors he must have not only a story to tell, but have also some special subject of his own. I had one. There were hundreds of authors a thousand times more brilliant than ever I could hope to be, but there wasn't one in the whole bunch who knew the pits and pitmen so well as I did. There was my subject, my opportunity, and I gripped it.

Fame

In 1885 it occurred to me that I had then been working in the coal mines for 17 years, and yet had never to my knowledge set eyes on one of H.M. Inspectors of Mines. At that time I was driving, by contract a tunnel at the Moss Hall Collieries, near Wigan, and the result of the thought indicated was a paper entitled "Mining Inspections a Sham" which with great daring, I sent to Mr. Knowles, editor of "The Nineteenth Century".

To my amazement and delight the article was accepted, was published immediately, and the very week the great review came out a terrible mining disaster occurred at The Clifton Colliery in a district of Manchester; and that sad event had the effect of drawing public attention to my paper and making its writer somewhat of a notoriety. It was June then, I remember, and before the month was over I did see a mines inspector underground; but it was only when he came to see and interview me. That government official was the chief inspector of the district, and is now I believe at the head of the whole mines inspection department. I

found him to be both a gentleman and an honest man, for in discussing the whole question of pits, pitmen, and the general management of coal mines he had the candour to admit that in the main my drastic article was justified.

That "Nineteenth Century" paper on mining inspection brought me a little notoriety, but it put an end to my work as a colliery contractor, and I had to knuckle down again to the pick and spade, writing meanwhile, various articles and short stories for various periodicals, all treating of mines and miners.

At the time he was sacked as a contractor by Moss Hall Collieries, John Monk Foster was employing six men; they were driving new tunnels, making new roads and opening up new working faces. Luckily for him and his family, being a skilled miner, he had no trouble getting well paid work for other companies.

His paper on mining inspection in the mines was quoted in a debate in The House of Commons and also featured in many of the days papers throughout the country. Ultimately many of the suggestions contained in the article were put into effect!

First Novel

But one must pass on to my literary life that is, that part of my career which was to be devoted solely to the pen. It was in 1888 that I finally left the coal mines. I then had wrought in them for over 20 years, and had been almost everything a lad or man could be underground. I had liked the work too, and when I left it was at the request of a certain literary syndicate.

In the year just mentioned my first long novel was published. It

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NOTICE.--"The Comet" is now Published Weekly

THE COMET

JOURNAL OF
FACT, FICTION AND FREE OPINION

SATURDAY, MAY 20th, 1893

No. 20. Vol. V Price One Penny

NEW SERIES.

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Proprietor and Manager - Mr. H. J. Worswick.
The most Thriving in Lancashire.—Public Opinion.

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THE ROAD TO FORTUNE
A story of the Diamond Search. New Drama. New
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Time and People's Popular Prices as usual.

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Mr. Royal Worswick has decided to leave his Theatre,
during the Summer Season, as follows—
Tues. 7th, Wednes. 8th, Thurs. 9th, Fri. 10th,
Sat. 11th, Sun. 12th, Mon. 13th, Tues. 14th,
Wed. 15th, Thurs. 16th, Fri. 17th, Sat. 18th,
Sun. 19th, Mon. 20th, Tues. 21st, Wed. 22nd,
Thurs. 23rd, Fri. 24th, Sat. 25th, Sun. 26th,
Mon. 27th, Tues. 28th, Wed. 29th, Thurs. 30th,
Fri. 31st, Sat. 1st, Sun. 2nd, Mon. 3rd, Tues. 4th,
Wed. 5th, Thurs. 6th, Fri. 7th, Sat. 8th, Sun. 9th,
Mon. 10th, Tues. 11th, Wed. 12th, Thurs. 13th,
Fri. 14th, Sat. 15th, Sun. 16th, Mon. 17th, Tues. 18th,
Wed. 19th, Thurs. 20th, Fri. 21st, Sat. 22nd, Sun. 23rd,
Mon. 24th, Tues. 25th, Wed. 26th, Thurs. 27th,
Fri. 28th, Sat. 29th, Sun. 30th, Mon. 31st.

Persons (if accompanied by Gentlemen) admitted
Free on Thursday Night only.
Speciality Performances will be Expelled, and no money
returned.

A POWERFUL COMPANY
ONE BEST WEEK.

Moving Performances on Monday, at 2 p.m.
PEOPLE'S POPULAR PRICES.

MATT BUCKLEY,
Flagger, Slater & Contractor
4, GREAT GEORGE STREET,
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He having had long and large experience in
laying Keweenaw Tiles, and other work, in preparation
to accept Contracts.
All orders receive prompt attention. Estimates
Free.

Suits, 50/- Trousers, 13/6
Covert Coats, 30/-
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High-Class
TAILOR,
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ROYAL COURT THEATRE
Manager and Lessee - Henry S. Cox.

Last Two Nights of **WEE-PON-NO-MAN**—The
Indian Mail Carrier.

WEDNESDAY, May 20th, and during the Week,
Messrs. C. MELVILLE and E. DOTTENDON'S
Company in their New and Original Drama,
REALITY.

In which the Favorite Actor, Henry Coxson, will
play the dual part of the Tragic Hero and
Comedy Character.

N.B.—If Monday is wet there will be a Morning
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Time and Place as Usual.

Monday, May 20th, Tuesday and Two Days
FAST MAIL.

DO YOU WANT
GOOD BRUSHES
CHEAP! IF SO, BUY
LEVI BOOTH'S,
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Brush Manufacturers,
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Warrall and Birkenhead Agricultural
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WINES AND SPIRITS.
SPECIAL WHISKIES.

Bottled Ale and Stout
J. WALDRON,
PROPRIETOR.

NOTICE.
REOPENING OF THE
"DOG AND PARTRIDGE"
CONCERT ROOM.
(Under New Management.)
Proprietor - Mr. J. F. Farnham.
EVERY MONDAY, FRIDAY, AND SATURDAY EVENING,
at 7 o'clock.
Choirmen - Mr. T. Hutton and Mr. F. Fisher.
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Performers of Sparkling Ale and Stout, Wines,
Spirits, and Cigars of Best Quality.
Business Dealt as Usual.
"DOG AND PARTRIDGE" (Next the Post Office),
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READY MONEY
Drapery Stores,
INCE BAR.

DRESSMAKING
BY ABBE HARRIS.

QUICK AND EFFICIENT.
LATEST FASHIONS. PERFECT FIT.
COMFORT & STYLE GUARANTEED.

MILLINERY Done at the
Shortest Notice.
ALL THE FINEST HEADS IN FLANNERS,
FRAYSERS, HIBBONS, &c.
OF
WALKER'S
READY MONEY DRAPERY STORES,
INCE BAR. (21)

The Comet was a small paper, about the size of todays Daily Mirror, whilst the broadsheet Wigan Observer was absolutely huge.

John Monk Foster

A Wigan Miner,
Author and Publisher
1857-1930

Continued from page 10

was called "A Miners Million". It ran through half a dozen newspapers simultaneously; was generally accounted a success because of the realistic descriptions of mining life and incidents it contained; and it led as I have said, to my exchanging the pick for the pen as a tool of trade and entering the service

of Messrs. Tillotsons and Son, Bolton, with whom I remained until two years ago.

This was his first full length novel, first of a number he was to write over the coming years. He was now 30 years old, and leaving the pits after 21 years underground, he said: "goodbye to the dangers, the darkness and the toil, sweat and blood". But he never forgot his friends the miners. In his writing he continually stressed the perilous nature of the miner's work – the poor pay, long hours, the almost sub-human conditions down below. He was one of the earliest advocates of state ownership

of the coal industry, although he didn't live to see the nationalisation of mines. Now we continue in JMF's own words.

Since I commenced as a 'regular hand' at story telling, about 30 novels have been written by me, most of them dealing with mining life as one sees it in Lancashire mines; some half dozen treating likewise of life and work in the cotton mills; while two or three have been written around the theme of ironworkers and ironworks – all, if I may so term them, romances of industry, wherein are set forth the conditions under which the toilers exist, the

hardness of the common lot, the success and power the chosen few may win, the hope, despair, and elemental passions which colour all our lives.

Of the many tales I have spun I can say nothing save this; they have been accorded a welcome in every industrial centre in the United Kingdom; have been widely read in the United States of America and the British Colonies; and one or two have been reproduced in German and French newspapers.

"Facing Death", my last story, will, I think, compare well with the strongest I have ever penned!

THE COMET

That is as far as his own recollections went in that particular article; strangely he hadn't mentioned another brave venture. In 1889, co-operating with a fellow Liberal Radical named James A. MacNab, a Scottish journalist, also a veteran of the Indian Mutiny, Monk Foster launched a "Journal of Fact, Fiction and Free Opinion".

It was at first a fortnightly publication; the offices were in King Street, Wigan with my grandfather as editor and MacNab as manager. It was certainly to throw a bright new light on local politics, this in the days when political feelings ran at high temperatures!

The publication of *The Comet* threw Wigan and district into ferment by reason of its bold, trenchant and outspoken comments. So much so, that within two issues of publication, Jackson's the printers, whose premises were situated on the corner of Station Road and Millgate, were pressed by other factions to cease printing the paper. Jackson, who also printed the then popular penny dreadfuls including *Blood and Thunder*, said they were threatened by withdrawals of other printing work. Nevertheless this obstacle was soon overcome and *The Comet* continued to appear. The editor and his partner had a hectic life; old MacNab the Black Watch veteran said it reminded him of his old soldiering days on the North West Frontier. As bad as that!

True to its name *The Comet* had a brief but brilliant existence of five years. It was said at the time that Monk Foster, in straight from the shoulder style, pleaded the cause of the working

class; MacNab wrote, not with ink, but with a mixture of gall and wormwood.

The paper had a rough existence, but many of Wigan's well known people suffered as well! William Taberner, Honary Secretary of Wigan Infirmary, for example, was made fun of; we know from other sources that he was accused by the manager of Pearson & Knowles Collieries of "cooking the books" in favour of other donors to hospital funds.

At a banquet held to celebrate *The Comet's* first birthday, the hall was crowded with Wigan's leading names. Speech after speech applauded the paper's success, until "The Miner" (JMF) slowly rose to his feet and said – "Mr. Mayor and gentlemen, if I were at all flattered by small things, the innumerable kind words you have said tonight of "The Comet" would move me to tears. But I am neither grateful nor pleased. Why? Listen. Nearly every gentleman who has lauded our publication tonight has on some other occasion damned it from the bottom of his heart. And it is certainly interesting for me to notice the wondrous change which has come over you. They who would ban "The Comet" when it was struggling for its very life now bless it because it is successful".

Many causes were taken up. The volumes, which still exist in the History Shop, are full of injustices. One case taken up was that of Coop and Co. of Dorning St. Wigan (the building still exists as a monument to those time). It seems they were laying off workers at Wigan, telling them that trade was slack, while secretly desiring to open a new factory in Crewe where it would seem they could pay lower wages. They must have been embarrassed by the publicity, for as Wigan people will know they survived in the town, and during

the wars made thousands of military uniforms; they were later famous for their made to measure suits and were later to be taken over by Dunns, the well known men's outfitters.

William West was another victim of injustice. He was a miner severely injured in the pit, who spent three weeks in the Infirmary and received benefits from The Miners Permanent Relief Society; after being discharged, however, he found that his benefits from the society were to cease, even though he was still unable to work. *The Comet* compared this story with that of James Murphy, also injured in the pits, who being a member of the miners union, was represented by Mr. Thomas Aspinwall. (Visitors to Wigan Infirmary can still see a memorial to him, recording his work as the miners agent). Aspinwall did well for Mr. Murphy, gaining him 30 gold sovereigns as compensation! The editor concluded the story by saying, "The moral is, my friends, that verily verily it is wise to belong to the union; if you are so unfortunate to get crippled in the mines, you will stand a poor chance of obtaining justice unless you belong to a miners union. Therefore join it!"

Of course one of the main targets of the partners was what James MacNab called "The Old Lady of Market St." This was, of course, as older Wiganers will recall, the headquarters of the local Conservative Party; the party members were regularly taunted by the editorial team. It seems the management were often served with writs, none of which ever reached the courts; but if you were to read some of the columns in the paper for yourself, you would begin to wonder why on earth not. My uncle, George Barl

VINCENT GREEN

LANCASHIRE DIALECT AUTHOR

LOCAL newspapers can provide us with a useful reflection of our every day life in addition to the masses of other work they do. At one time we used to see examples, fictional and otherwise, in the way of poems, short stories and articles.

My father, Vincent Green, wrote a weekly fictional comedy piece for the *Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley Journal* from c. 1920 into the mid 1940's. Using the nom-de-plume Tom Pickett, he called the items 'articles'; they were, in fact, short stories, averaging 1000 words and never serialised. The dialogue was the local Lancashire dialect; the non-dialogue was a slightly softer version of the same dialect. The male principal characters were two coal miners – both grown men called Waddy and Soupy – while the principal female character was Poll, Waddy's wife. Each weekly tale had a unique title, such as "A Windy Neet".

My father himself had been a coal miner until the mid 1920's when, following an accident, he had to take up alternative work, as a lamplighter. His weekly submissions to the *Journal*, however, continued with only a slight delay. It was about 1933 that our family



began to hear about appreciative readers of "Tom Pickett" who had emigrated to Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Through friends, it was conveyed to my parents that the sense of local Lancashire life arising from the dialect stories was quite remarkable, and enjoyed for its own sake.

One day in 1937, my father met John Toft, Principal of Leigh Municipal College. John was curious about my father's sources of inspiration in producing regular short stories for the

Journal without serialisation. My father told him that he always kept an average-size dictionary close by and would flick this open at random during writing. He had found that formal dictionary definitions could sometimes sound a little pompous and occasionally slightly absurd to "his own mischievous ear". At such moments his mind was tuned to watch out for ideas and suggestions; occasionally the experience led to the basic idea for a story. Subsequent fleshing-out of the ideas was of course all part of the magic of story-telling.

During the Queen's Jubilee year of 1977, my father was asked by the *Journal* if he could make some sort of contribution to their Special Jubilee Edition. Although he was by then 78, he readily complied with one last 1000-word story. He died in 1984, aged 85.

Alas, there can be few readers alive now who enjoyed the stories as they came from the printing presses; yet I can remember many that did. It is the total appreciation of all of those over a 20-year period that my father would have greatly valued.

Vincent Green junior
Stafford

Foster, said it became necessary to appoint a "fighting editor", needed, it seems, to "stave off the threat of invading, furious Tories, who carried riding whips in their melodramatic fashion." It seems the man appointed to protect them was "Young Tom Connors", a man who was later to become a World Champion wrestler.

Readers will have no doubt noticed that at no time in this story has the opposite sex been mentioned. It was very obviously a man's world in those days, and one does wonder if JMF was a male chauvinist – at the end of an unflattering article about a local doctor, he wrote: "You deliver lectures – your are no lecturer. You write letters with no rhyme or reason, you say you write books, although in truth they are no more than booklets. They are booklets on how to dress and feed a baby, but no you cannot, no really cannot write of this when we all know dressing and feeding babies is women's work."

I doubt if he would escape criticism for the use of those words these days! Nevertheless, he and my grandmother had nine children.

Death

With the tragic death of his partner and continuing problems with printers, Monk Foster reluctantly decided to call it a day, even though the paper was showing a profit at the time. He was still writing for Tillotsons, but in 1904 decided to go freelance, during which time, at *The Manchester Guardian*, he was able to associate with the likes of H.G. Wells and others.

Through failing eyesight he was forced to retire from active writing at the age of 55; he had hand-written every word in beautiful script, this with a maimed right first finger, a legacy of the pits. He had then written nearly 400 long novels, short stories, sketches and articles, and in 1889 a potted "History of Wigan". As his son, G.B. Foster, said, "Not a bad record for an ex pitboy who was almost entirely self educated".

John Monk Foster died in November 1930, only a month or so before I myself was born. Perhaps it is best if I let the last few paragraphs of his obituary in *The Wigan Observer* finish off his story:

"His wonderful memory, only fully opened to his closest friends and intimates, was always a source of wonder, delight and interest. His well known figure and striking personality was known to thousands of Wiganers, so much so that he became an institution, and "Owd Monk" seemed to have always been a part of the Ancient and Loyal Borough and seemed likely to continue being so. But the irrevocable hand of time began to press heavily on his shoulders, but "Owd Monk" still kept bravely on, enjoying to the utmost the daily meetings with his host of friends and acquaintances, and his endless visits to the Wigan Library. Wigan should be proud of this son of hers, who by determination, grit and self education, literally lifted himself from the 'bowels of the earth' to a high place on the literary ladder. His career should be in these days of easy education, a great incentive to all who seek education and the laurels and fruits that it can be made to bestow."

© Don Rayner

Allan Miller's book on George Lyon, the Up Holland highwayman, was featured in Past Forward 29. The book proved a great success, and was sold out in a very short time. I am delighted, however, to publish this article which Allan has written for Past Forward. Ed.

George Lyon

Up Holland Highwayman?

The Legend

GEORGE LYON was hanged at Lancaster Castle in 1815. As early as 1883 the *Wigan Observer* was collecting information on the "history of George Lyon, the notorious robber, whose exploits in the early part of the present century, are now invested with a degree of interest almost amounting to romance."

In 1904, when the haunted house in Church Street, Up Holland, aroused national interest, some 'experts' contended that it was George Lyon's ghost "visiting the scenes familiar to him in life, for rumour has it that Lyon, while following his profession on the highway, lived for some period in this identical house". However, his defenders retorted that George Lyon "would not resort to such pranks."

In 1946 Harry Parkes published a book entitled *The Life of George Lyon the Wigan and Up Holland Highwayman*. The book was based on stories acquired "by talking to the old people of Up Holland" and in particular, by listening to Up Holland clogger, Richard Baxter, who had "almost first hand information" about George Lyon. The picture of Lyon that emerged from Mr. Parkes' book is of a 'Robin Hood figure', of someone with a 'genuine desire to help the poor of the district' and of somebody who was 'more of a saint than a sinner and was certainly more sinned against than sinning.' The book contained romanticised stories about the exploits of the hero of Up Holland. Perhaps the most famous was the alleged hold up of a stage coach at Tawd Bridge by George Lyon and his gang. But even Harry Parkes was forced to admit in the book that "in the absence of documentary evidence" the story was "highly problematical", though he confusingly concluded that "it seems to fit facts".

The 'softening touch of time' seems



Church Street, Upholland, 1930's. This scene would have been very similar when George Lyon walked its lanes and alleyways in the early 19th century. Lyon is buried just over the church yard boundary at the bottom of the picture.

to have given George Lyon 'a veneer of respectability' and 'pilgrims' like the famous Wigan long distance cyclist, Tom Hughes, made an annual visit to Lyon's grave during the first half of the century.

Another myth maker was Barl Foster. Writing in the *Wigan Observer* in 1958, he condemned Harry Parkes' book as "flimsy stuff". Mr. Foster believed that the truth about George Lyon was "hidden in the folk tales and legends that grew up around him". However, he was convinced that his reputation was acquired "not because of petty thefts and a little house breaking". He contended that Lyon "used his minor offences as a cover for his more serious business", which included 'secret accomplices' and 'fences'. According to Mr. Foster it was "well authenticated that Lyon used horses, that he carried pistols, that he rode the high toby" and was "certainly a stand and deliver highwayman".

Finally, Barl Foster regretted that Up Holland was "in danger of losing one of its few legends by the modern urge to debunk people and places".

The Reality

The first documentary evidence of George Lyon's criminal life occurred in April 1786 when he was tried at Lancaster Assizes for "feloniously apaueling Robert Smith in the King's Highway (at Winstanley) in the Parish of Wigan and robbing him of Sixteen Shillings" (was) capitally convicted and received sentence of death". However, his capital sentence was commuted 'by the King's mercy'. Instead of the death sentence George Lyon was to suffer "Transportation to Parts Beyond the Seas for seven years".

Even if Lyon were transported, it was certainly no deterrent. When he was captured in 1814, it was stated



that George Lyon, David Bennett and William Houghton had "long been connected with, or were leaders of, a lawless banditti" who eluded "the most vigilant efforts" of the police. An indication of the extent of their personal, mini crime wave was indicated on 15 October 1814 when George Lyon was charged with "having burglariously broken and entered the dwelling house of Peter Robinson, at Wigan, and with having stolen therein, a silver watch, a pair of sheets and divers other articles, his property; also with having burglariously broken and entered the dwelling house of Charles Walmesley, at Ince within Makerfield, and having stolen therein, a silver tea chest, a silver basin and divers other articles, his property; also, with having burglariously broken and entered the dwelling house of John Fogg, at Wigan and with having stolen therein, a silver tankard, a silver pint and other articles, his property; also, with having stolen a silver watch, a gold chain and various other articles, the property of Henry Gaskell, at Wigan; and also, with having stolen a silver watch, two guineas, five half guineas, a pair of silver buckles and a gold ring, the property of Robert Yates, at Wigan".

Capture

In 1814 George Lyon, Bennett and Houghton met with Edward Ford to plan the robbery of Westwood House in Ince, the home of Charles Walmesley. In August 1814 Charles Walmesley and family were staying in Southport, leaving Betty Aspinall, housemaid, and her sister, along with William Johnson, husbandman, and his wife, to look after the house. The gang hid with their pistols, skeleton keys, bludgeons, iron rooks or crowbars and picklocks until the servants had retired to bed. The burglars found the windows and doors 'all made fast'. Lyon stood 'watch on the outside' whilst Houghton held a 'dark lantern'. Ford and Bennett broke into the house and stole a silver tea caddy, a sugar basin, three half crowns and 'several other things'. Lyon took possession of the silver plate "and it was to be kept until they should have robbed the Parish Church". The men proceeded towards Henhurst Bridge in Wigan, trying to avoid being recognised by Abraham Barrow and his son who were approaching from the other direction.

In an effort to end the local crime wave, the local police made an



The Owd Clog Shop at Up Holland where tales of George Lyon were told. Mr. Richard Ashcroft, aged 90 years, Mr. Richard Baxter, Master Clogger, aged 86 years, Booth Royd, apprentice.

application to Mr. Nadin, Deputy Constable of the Manchester force, for "the loan of one of his thief takers", John Macdonald, to assist village Constable Berry in liaison with Constable Cooper of Wigan. The plan was to infiltrate Macdonald into Lyon's gang so that "information might be obtained that would lead to a discovery of all, or at least some of the robberies". Following a series of meetings with George Lyon at the Bull's Head public house in Up Holland, Macdonald convinced Lyon that he himself was a criminal and was a dealer in stolen goods. A naïve Lyon was taken in by Macdonald, boasted that he himself was known as 'King of Thieves' and agreed to sell Macdonald some silver. Macdonald reported back to Constable Cooper who gave Macdonald £20 in marked notes to effect the sale of the stolen silver. In the Bull's Head, Lyon handed over the silver plate and Macdonald paid him £10 in marked money. With this evidence Constable Cooper and Macdonald arrested Lyon at his home where they found "another man (David Bennett) and a woman were in bed, in the same room".

Trial

Thus George Lyon was "apprehended for housebreaking, which he had carried on as a regular profession for nearly thirty years (and was) fully committed to Lancaster, to take his trial". The charge was that on 13 August 1814 "with force and arms at Ince of Makerfield in the county of

Lancaster the dwelling house of one Charles Walmesley there situated, feloniously and burglariously did break and enter with intent the said dwelling house (and did) steal...with force and arms one silver caddy of the value of three pounds, one silver sugar basin of the value of one pound, two pair of silver tongs of the value of five shillings each, four silver tea spoons of the value of one shilling each and one silver tea caddy spoon of the value of one shilling of the goods and chattels of the said Charles Walmesley..."

A contemporary account of the trial was published to describe "in what manner the notorious characters were brought to justice, after having for several years committed the most daring depredations, and eluded the vigilance of the neighbouring police". It was hoped that the publication would serve as "an awful warning to those persons who are guilty of similar practices, hoping that it might prove a useful lesson in deterring them for proceeding in such a system of conduct".

A Grand Jury of 23 Lancashire landowners found that "the preceding indictment was found" and that the trial could proceed. A Petty Jury of 12 men was sworn in and Mr. Raine for the Crown gave "a speech of much eloquence, which he delivered in a most impressive and energetic manner". The Prosecution called a number of key witnesses to give evidence.

Mr. Charles Walmesley identified

Continued on page 16

George Lyon Up Holland Highwayman?

Continued from page 15

items stolen from his house. John Macdonald told how he had entered Up Holland in the guise of a pedlar and had met Lyon in the Bull's Head on a number of occasions. He had convinced Lyon that he was a dealer in stolen goods and offered to stand 'fence' for stolen items in Lyon's possession. Both men seemed to have much in common - both used 'flash language' in their conversations, during which Lyon admitted sending 'fawneys' (gold coins) and a 'grenadier' (silver tankard) to the London underworld. Lyon boasted of his reputation as "Head, or Captain of Thieves" and agreed to supply Macdonald with silver plate. Macdonald returned to Wigan to brief Constable Cooper and was given £20 in marked bank notes. Lyon produced about 30 ounces of plate, for which he was paid £10 in marked notes.

In court, Mr. Coltman for the Defence, attacked Macdonald for his use of 'flash language', his alleged criminality and imprisonment for assault. Macdonald responded by claiming that he dealt only in goods "honestly come by" and that for the last seven years his only employment had been as a paid assistant to Mr. Nadin. The Judge intervened and commented that this was "strong proof of the witness discharging his duty faithfully in his employ".

John Cooper, Constable of Wigan, gave evidence that he had supplied Macdonald with "fourteen one pound and three two pound notes" and identified the marked bank notes used to trap Lyon. He had found in Lyon's home a pair of loaded pistols, a quantity of skeleton keys and other keys, some picklocks, a dark lantern, two watches, a glass decanter, and a double eye glass - "the property of the prosecutor of this indictment, which were stolen at the time of the burglary, the subject of the present prosecution, was committed".

Edward Ford admitted "seventeen or eighteen burglaries with Lyon and others" but turned 'King's Evidence'.

In his closing speech, Mr. Raine instructed the Jury "strictly to attend

to the evidence he should lay before them for their consideration". If they were "convinced from the testimony...it would be the duty of the Jury, under his Lordship's directions, to find them guilty". However, if "they entertained any doubts upon the testimony, they would let the prisoners have the benefit of those doubts, and give a verdict accordingly".

The Judge decreed that defence counsel could not address the jury, and the prisoners "neither made any defence, nor called any person to speak to their characters". He then summed up the evidence and the Jury "without hesitation" declared prisoners "guilty, to the satisfaction of a very crowded court". His Lordship passed 'Sentence of Death' on all except Edward Ford who had 'admitted King's evidence' and thus escaped the capital sentence.

Hanging

Lyon, Bennett and Houghton were to face execution for robbery, and on Saturday 22 April 1815 the prisoners "underwent that awful sentence of the law". Members of the public were allowed to watch the hanging at Lancaster Castle. "The scene, as an example, was awfully affecting, and it is hoped, will have its due weight upon their unhappy partners in iniquity, teaching them and all others, to refrain from the works of darkness and evil doing; and to prepare for that truly awful day, when all must appear before the Great Judge, against whose

sentence there can be no appeal". It was hoped that this "dreadful example" of public execution might "operate to make bad men more honest, and good men more sensible of the inestimable blessings of our happy Constitution".

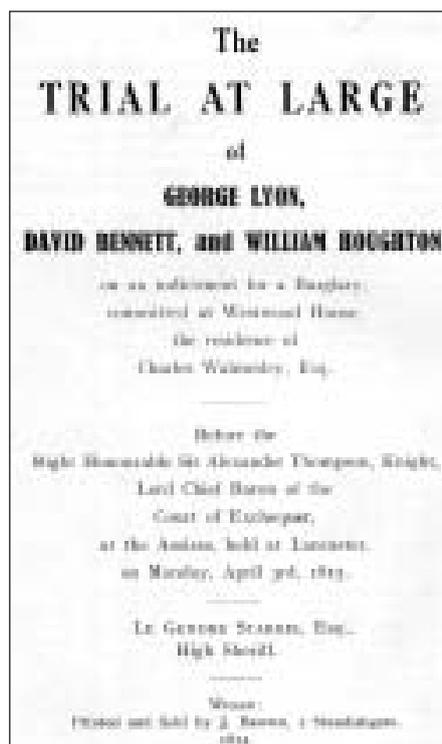
After the execution, George Lyon's body was handed over to Simon Washington of the Old Dog public house in Up Holland. The journey back to Up Holland was nightmarish. "Vivid flashes of lightning and terrific claps of thunder seemed to be centred around their horse and cart" as it proceeded along the rutted road from Lancaster. On Sunday 23 April 1815, George Lyon was buried in Up Holland Parish Churchyard "amidst a concourse of several thousand spectators".

Public reaction at the time of the execution may be judged from this contemporary newspaper comment: "we have to congratulate the inhabitants of Wigan and its neighbourhood and indeed the country at large on the conviction of George Lyon and a part of his desperate gang...for different burglaries and robberies...He was commonly known by the name of the King of Robbers".

The Real George Lyon?

As recently as 1958 in an article entitled *Lancashire's Dick Turpin*, David Heaton concluded that George Lyon had "a lasting place in local, if not national, folklore". However, the documentary evidence suggests that George Lyon "never was a highwayman but only a petty thief" who had contacts with the London criminal underworld. His 'limited range of activity' gave him a 'local notoriety'. Miss Ellen Weeton, a contemporary of George Lyon, commented that in Up Holland, "in two houses near together there have been in each, a mother and daughter lying in, nearly at the same time; and one man (the notorious George Lyon) reputed to be father of all four". Perhaps the real George Lyon was best summed up by Reverend Frederick George Willis, Vicar of Up Holland (1888-1927): "No shrine of Saint or Martyr could be more eagerly sought than the plain flat stone which does not even bear the name of the man whose fame seems so altogether out of proportion to his deserts, or even to his eminence as a criminal".

Allan Miller
Orrell, Wigan



HISTORY SHOP NEWS

Exhibitions in the History Shop

FROM the archives of Wigan Heritage Service we present a small but evocative tribute to our Queen. There are photographs of her previous visits to the borough in 1954 and 1977, of the crowds of Wiganers cheering her on and of some of the many street parties held throughout the Borough during the Silver Jubilee. Also featured in the exhibition are objects made to commemorate the Coronation, such as a teacup and saucer and a biscuit tin, as well as items made to commemorate the Silver Jubilee,

The Golden Jubilee June – July

like a Royal Air Force plate and medal and even a milk bottle top! These items quickly become very collectable.

It will be very interesting to see what commemorative items are made for this Jubilee. More cups and consumables without doubt, but there are always other less predictable items which reflect the times – for example we wouldn't have seen a Silver Jubilee phonecard back in 1977! If any readers do spot any particularly eye-catching or unusual commemorative items perhaps

you could let me know, especially if they also feature Wigan in some way (contact Philip Butler at the History Shop, tel 01942 827594).

The Jubilee Exhibition provides a lively and colourful (red, white and blue) addition to the Wickham Gallery on the ground floor of the History Shop. This area is fully accessible with a ramped entrance and automatic doors, and is of course free to all visitors. Why not come down and see if you can spot yourself in any of the celebrations?

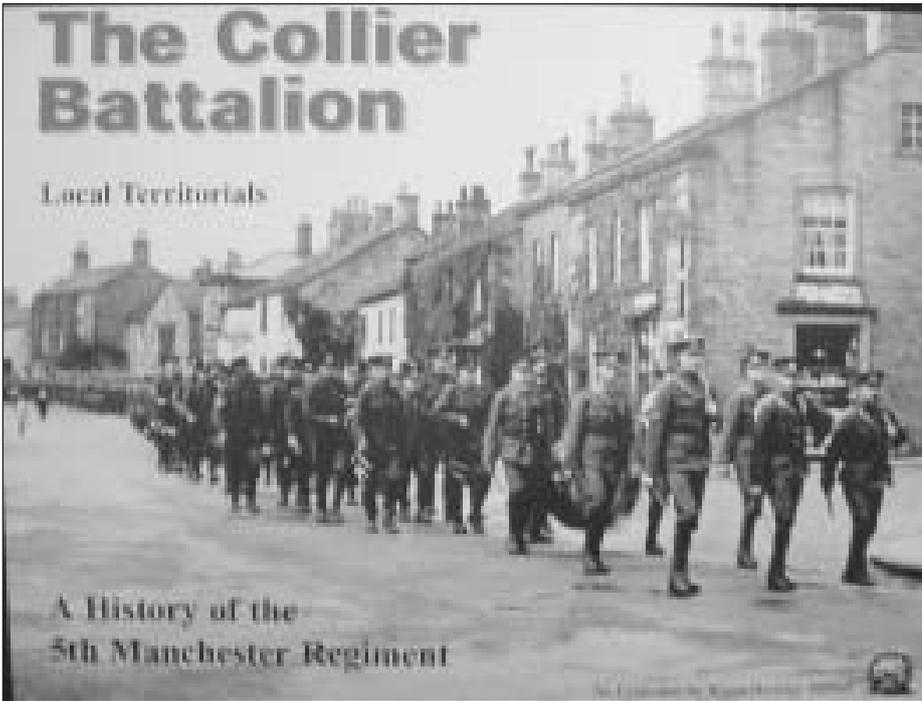
Also on display in the Wickham Gallery is **Wigan 2000**, a look at Wigan as it was at the turn of the Millennium, as told through a series of documentary photographs and imaginative displays. This modern view of the area is contrasted with some old archive photographs and some objects from the museum display.

Following the Jubilee Exhibition, on 15 July we will be showing **Policing through the Lens**, a display of visual images of the Greater Manchester Police from the 19th to the 21st centuries. This is a selection of 65 photographs, some taken from the large collection housed at the Force Museum, alongside others chosen from the Force's Media Photographic Unit. Together they provide an insight into the history of policing in the county and events which have shaped people's memories. The exhibition highlights the dedication and professionalism of the



Continued on page 18

HISTORY SHOP NEWS



Exhibitions in the History Shop

Continued from page 17

officers and support staff of the Greater Manchester Police who work to provide an efficient, modern service across the county.

This exhibition will be on show for five weeks from 15 July through to 17 August 2002.

Upstairs in the Taylor Gallery **The Collier Battalion** is here at last and well worth the wait! You may have noticed in previous editions of *Past Forward* that this exhibition, about the 5th Manchester Regiment, was originally scheduled for last year. Well, the project has grown from its inception as a small exhibition giving the history of the Regiment to a far more detailed story featuring the local men and their role as well. It now fills the first

floor of the History Shop's temporary area and will be on display there until 7 August 2002.

"On 4 June around a hundred men from Wigan were killed in Gallipoli".

"On 5 June hundreds of local men were evacuated from France by boat".

These headlines would, in actual time, have been 25 years



apart. The third battle of Krithia in Gallipoli was fought on 4 June, while 5 June marked the beginning of a desperate 72-hour evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk. What ties the two events together is the involvement of local men, the 5th Manchesters.

Their proud history is the story of a volunteer battalion that became one of the first 'territorial' forces to see active service during the Boer War. Originally the 21st Lancashire Rifle Volunteer Corps with their HQ in Wigan, they became the 1st Battalion of the Manchester Regiment in 1888, and twelve years later were fighting in South Africa. Yet it is under the banner of the 5th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment that the force is best remembered. It was as the 5th Manchesters that local men saw service during the wars in the first half of the 20th century and their nickname changed from the 'tram conductors' of the Manchester Regiment to the 'collier battalion'.

Described as ***'...a battalion of heroes who willingly gave up everything, if necessary, for this Britain of ours'*** by their Colonel J.W. Holmes OBE, it is their story that is told in detail in this excellent exhibition. Photographs, letters, medals, a mocked up tent and even a Drum Major's Staff engraved with the military honours of the battalion, enhance the story. Most of all it features the local men, whether being shot at in the desert or trench, nearly drowned in the English Channel or just on camp in North Wales with their comrades.

We have had a great deal of help with this exhibition from veterans themselves and from proud relatives who have been only too happy to provide us with information, treasured keepsakes and photographs. We would like to thank all of you for contributions and invite you all to the History



HISTORY SHOP NEWS

Shop to see the finished display. (See also p6 of this issue of *Past Forward* for an excellent article by Fred Holcroft on the 5th Manchesters).

The slightly extended period of this excellent exhibition does full justice to it, and already it has generated much interest. The timing will take us right up to the summer exhibition of the **Wigan Photographic Society** in mid August and followed closely by the **Atherton and District Amateur Photographic Society** exhibition at the beginning of September.

The photographic exhibitions will be followed by one about **Wigan Corporation Transport's** vehicles and services. This exhibition will complement a rally of preserved local buses at Haigh Country Park on Sunday 29 September, (see p7 for further details) to mark the centenary of the takeover of the privately owned Wigan & District Tramways Company by Wigan Corporation on 30 September 1902. From then until its demise on 31 March 1974, the corporation was the principal provider of the town's public transport.

Exhibitions

The Wickham Gallery
Wigan 2002

June 2002-Winter 2002.

Golden Jubilee

June 2002- 8 July 2002.

Policing Through the Lens

15 July – 17 August 2002

The Taylor Gallery

The Collier Battalion

June 2002-17 August 2002.

Wigan Photographic Society

24 August – 6 September 2002.

Atherton & District Amateur Photographic Society

9 – 20 September 2002.

Wigan Corporation Transport

October 2002. (provisional date - please telephone to confirm)

FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

I AM very happy to report this time that our Friends project has officially been heralded a success by the Council. This time last year the Cultural Forum agreed a development programme for community involvement in cultural activity. Our contribution to this, under *improving Access to Information*, was the development of a Friends group. This year, with the emphasis being put on increased participation, we have been asked to submit a new set of strategic objectives.

At the next meeting of the Friends group, likely to be in mid to late July, we will be discussing this and coming up with the objectives. However, if you have any suggestions I would be very pleased to hear them and outline them to the group.

Some suggestions have already been made :

1. Completing some of the work projects started this year and beginning new ones:

- complete the 1861 census surname index
- make this available by publishing on paper or electronically
- begin other census indexing, like wider coverage for 1891 or re-index the 1901 streets and districts
- look to begin other useful indexing projects at the History Shop, Leigh Local History or the Archives

2. Starting wider work groups (both subject area and venue)

- if indexing projects could be set up in Leigh then both our collections and our service will become far more accessible.
- subject areas could again be genealogy or wider local history tastes could be catered for. Work on our collections of maps,

newspapers or photographs would be obvious choices. Alternatively, in the Archives in Leigh there are always a number of original documents that require listing and indexing.

The next step forward for the Friends will involve more of this project work but also more of what you want the Friends to be. **Please would all Friends take a few minutes to consider this.** You could be totally happy with the proposed project work, looking forward to the results or even about to volunteer to get involved. On the other hand you may feel that there are other activities that the Friends should be getting involved in eg:

- special themed events/activities in the galleries based upon the current exhibitions
- talks and lectures organised for local Friends
- Friends outings to other museums, libraries or houses
- workshops run by the Friends to interpret exhibitions or to guide visitors on local or family history research
- possibly you feel the Friends should be involved in fund raising for specific displays or objects of equipment.

Finally, as mentioned last time, the group is looking for a volunteer to take responsibility for social activities and public relations. Not rocket science, just adding some ideas and fun to future meetings or events. Why not give it a try? Contact me on 01942 827594 for a chat or come along to the next Friends meeting.

Whatever you think the Friends group should be doing, we will consider it. So get your ideas to me, Philip Butler, at the History Shop, as soon as possible.

FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

Name

Address

Interests

Please enclose £5 subscription for one year's membership. 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, starting with the current issue unless you request otherwise.

N.B. If you do not wish to cut this coupon out, a cheque along with your details on plain paper is fine.

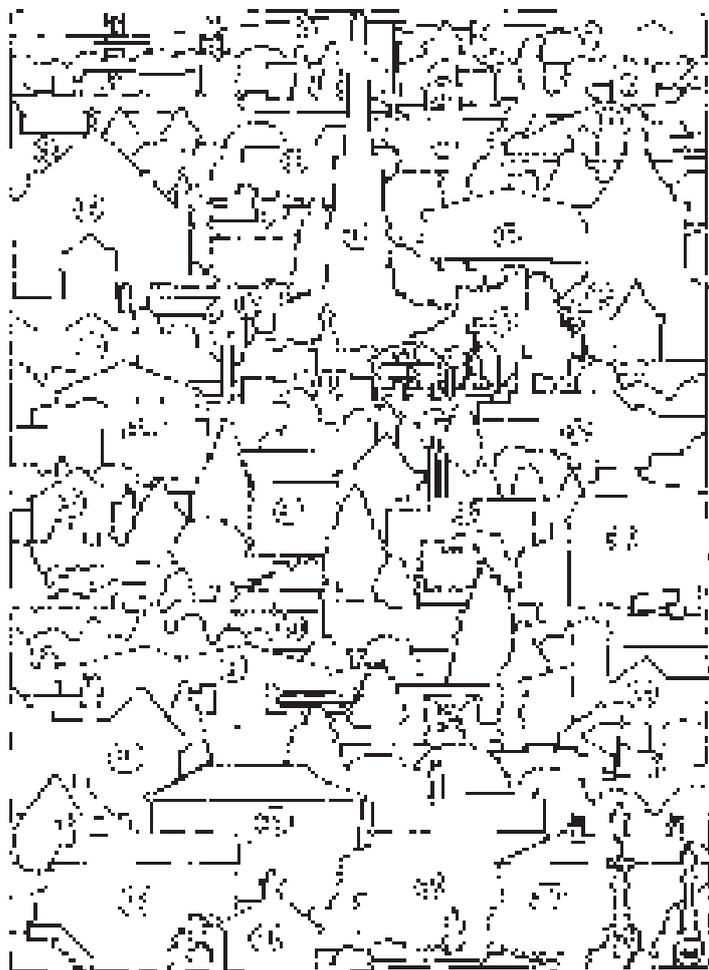
Standish

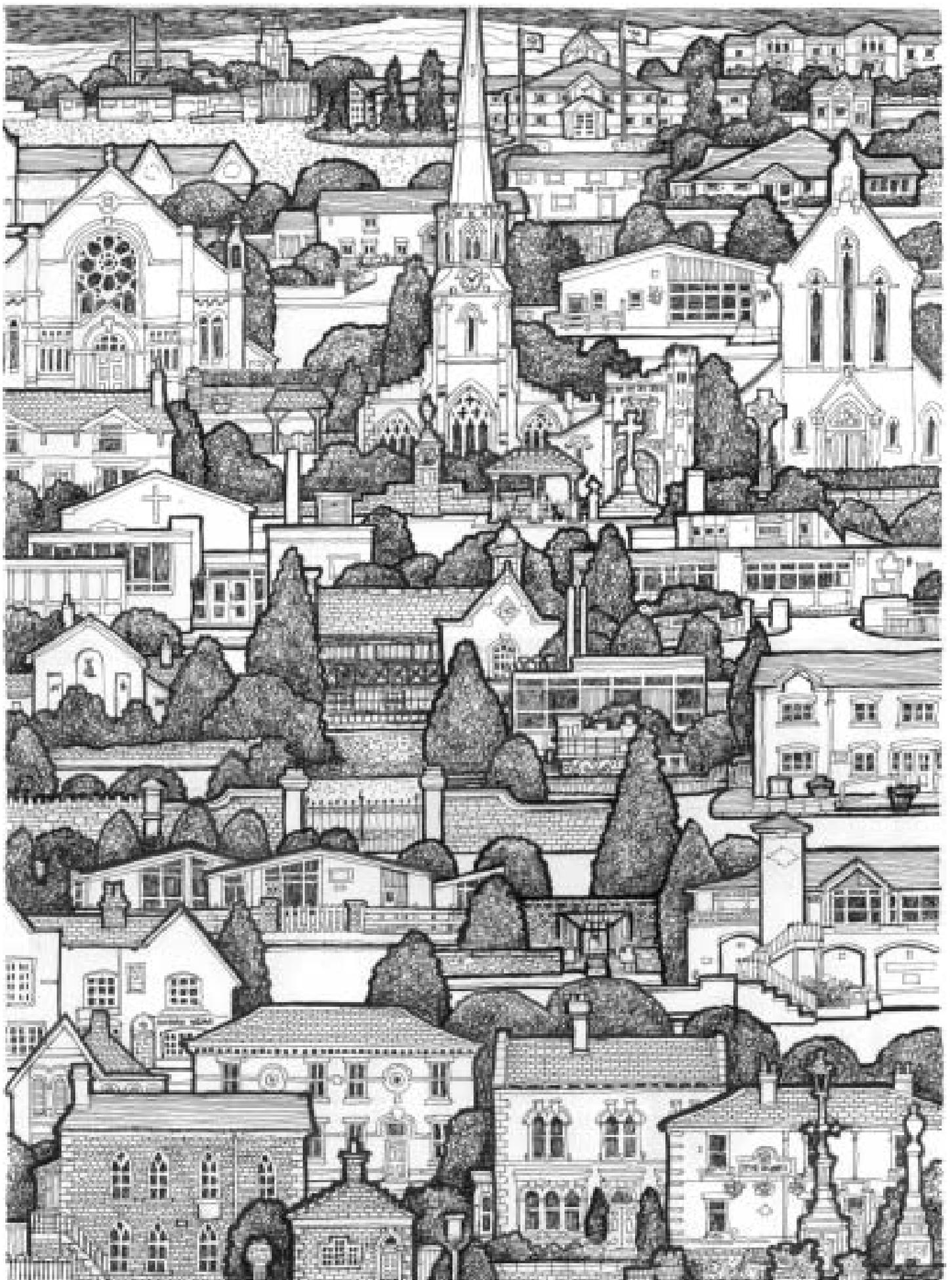
HERE is the third in the series of line drawings by Gerald Rickards, covering all townships in the Borough. Gerald knows the Standish area well, having lived in nearby Coppull Moor for a time and played for the cricket team at Standish. He writes: "I thought this justified including the family cat in the drawing, but rather than put a minute dot alongside the distant cricket ground, decided a spot near the town well, where I designed the notice board, would be more appropriate." A few years ago he was also commissioned by the Standish Forum to paint the Standish triptych, which now hangs in Standish Library.

Paintings of the first three drawings in this series, suitable for 20" x 28" frames, will be available for purchase in the near future – look out for further details.

For the next three in his series of drawings, Gerald will turn his attention towards the east of the Borough, starting with Leigh. Ed.

1. Prospect Park, where houses now stand, was once the home of Wigan Old Boys' Rugby Union Club.
2. Water Tower, erected in 1936. A familiar landmark.
3. Rivington, with the Pennines in the distance.
4. 'Ashfield House', named 'The Fields' when built by Felix Leach. Owners who followed the founder of the Crawford House business in Wigan, include the 19th century MP John Lancaster and Mrs. Nathaniel Eckersley. It is now a restaurant.
5. Standish Cricket ground in Green Lane, where matches have been played for more than 80 years by a club founded in 1877.
6. Standish Community High School, opened in 1978. A specialist language college, it holds the Prime Minister's Charter Mark for excellent public service. It is also the first educational establishment in the UK to become an Investor in People.
7. Weigh house and buildings at Bleach Works.
8. Cast-iron bridge over the River Douglas at the foot of Red Rock Brow. Bradley Brook is close by.
9. Somerfield's Supermarket at the main cross roads, near where the Wheatsheaf and Almond's Brewery used to stand.
10. Rectory Lane Farm buildings, which have been converted into private residencies.
11. 'The Owls' at Standish. The present restaurant is part of the previous large rectory building.
12. Clubhouse at Standish Court Golf Club.
13. Methodist Church in High Street. Built in 1897 on land where there had been a pond, which was much frequented by the local skaters, until it was filled in by a local mine owner.
14. St. Wilfrid's Church. Largely rebuilt in 1589, on a site first used in 1205. The spire as seen today was erected in 1867. The only Grade one listed building in the Wigan Borough.
15. Standish Library in Cross Street, an important focal point of the community. Built after the White Hall was demolished in 1958 - it had offices belonging to Customs and Excise.
16. St Marie's Roman Catholic Church, built in 1884. The War Memorial Cross is alongside.
17. The cottage in the Market Place dating from 1703, which became the Eagle and Child public house until it lost its licence in 1916. For a number of years it became a butcher's shop.
18. Lychgate in Rectory Lane.
19. Coat of arms on church wall depicting the owl above the rat.
20. The ancient town well, rebuilt in 1988, after being damaged in 1943 by an American army service vehicle.
21. Village Stocks, of medieval origin, occupying the traditional position against the cross steps.
22. The Market Cross, a scheduled ancient monument, erected in the 14th century.
23. The Tudor style Peace Gate, leading to the church. Built to honour the fallen in the First World War, and completed in 1926.
24. St Wilfrid's Church of England Primary School in Rectory Lane, which replaced the building near the church.
25. St Marie's Catholic Primary School in Avondale Street, opened in 1966, just over 100 years after the first Catholic Day School was started in a room at Cat i'th' Window Farm.
26. The Cat i'th' Window cottage, where a porcelain cat in the window was a sign that a fugitive priest was in residence at Standish Hall to conduct mass.
27. The Tudor wing of Standish Hall rebuilt in the 1740's and part of the chapel, on a site connected with the Standish family for many centuries. Gradually dismantled from the 1920's, there is interesting evidence on the present whereabouts of various parts of the original structure.
28. Mere Oaks Special School at Boars Head, with the brightly coloured railway engine amongst the trees.
29. The new Health Centre in High Street.
30. Gateway to the original Mere Oaks House, near to the Wigan boundary.
31. Wood Fold Primary School in Green Lane.
32. Quaker Burial Ground alongside Preston Road.
33. Chadwick's Buildings and Clock Tower.
34. 'The Boar's Head', once a hostelry for pilgrims on their way to visit abbeys in North Lancashire and Yorkshire.
35. Police Station. Erected in 1877 it is the oldest station still in use by the police in Greater Manchester.
36. Old parish school, built as a Victorian elementary school for girls. A later extensions is seen beyond the steps.
37. Milestone, dated 1837, recently restored near its original position on Preston Road.
38. Wigan Road Lodge. One of the original gated entrances to Standish Hall.
39. 'The Beeches' Restaurant; once the family home of Almonds, who owned the nearby brewery.
40. 'The Globe' Hotel with garden in front.
41. Queen Victoria Fountain, with distinctive lamp, erected in 1897 on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee.
42. War Memorial, with the First World War dates of 1914 to 1919.





Another Great Day on the Great Central

The 5.4 a.m. Irlam

Of all the trains that left Wigan Central the first train out in a morning was the 5.4 a.m. Wigan Central, all stations to Irlam, taking the 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. shift to the steel works.

For the driver and fireman the day started much earlier than 5.4 a.m.; it started at 12.1 a.m. when the knocker up, Arthur Roscoe, signed on duty in the old railway carriage that was the office. Arthur lived in Standish and came to work on his bike (he was also the part time barber at the shed). Before signing on duty, Arthur would call in the cleaners' mess room to say good morning and leave his bike; there was a good reason for this.

One particular morning, as was the usual practice, the 5.30 p.m. cleaners from the day before (Jimmy Parkinson, Harold Bond, Glenn Chadwick, Fred Darbyshire and Bob Fox) were enjoying a lid of tea and a game of cards; Arthur's job was to go round

Dear Sir,

May I first introduce myself? I am the Fred Darbyshire mentioned in *Past Forward* 30, p5, "Great Days on the Great Central", and was responsible, together with mates of mine, for identifying the workmates of Stan Morris (see no. 22, p19).

I am heavily involved in writing my memories of working on the L.N.E.R. at Lower Ince Shed, with the help of the few remaining mates who also worked at the Lower Ince Shed. I am in regular contact with Neil Cain and his Uncle Stan Morris, and because of Stan's partial blindness I have started to read my story and record it on tape for him.

Please read my first effort of a short story, it would be nice to see it in print.

**Fred Darbyshire
Higher Ince
Wigan WN2 2HR**

to the office as soon as possible and keep the night shift shed engineman Fred Ford busy for about an hour, chatting and going over the list of engine crew who needed knocking.

No nonsense

Fred Ford was a big man and stood no nonsense from the cleaners; he did not allow them to play any games inside or outside of the mess room, hence the reason for Arthur Roscoe to keep him busy – the cleaners had done their nightly duties and liked to finish their shift with a quiet

game of cards.

The shift ended at 1.30 a.m. with the cleaners filing into the office to sign off duty; this was the signal for Arthur to go back to the mess room for a cuppa, by which time the 11 p.m. cleaners (Cyril Moran and Bill Baxendale) had finished helping the night shift storeman (Peter Hurst) measure out the oil for the early morning engines and put the cans of oil on the engines warming.

They both came into the mess room for a brew and to discuss with Arthur who they were going to knock up for him – Arthur could not be in

two places at once, and some of the engine crew lived as much as three miles away from one another. As Cyril Moran lived in Hardybutts, he was the knocking up expert round Scholes and Whelley. One particular morning Arthur asked him to knock up Bill Hartford at 2.45 a.m., to work the 5.4 a.m. Irlam. Bill lived in the shadows of Central Station, in a little street overlooking the River Douglas, opposite Wigan Little Theatre. He was one of the older drivers who worked over his time because of the War (it was mid-1944). Cyril set off at 2.30 a.m. to knock Bill; he knocked on the door a couple of times, got a reply and headed back for the shed. But at 4 a.m. Fred Ford came into the mess room asking "whose knocked Bill Hartford?" Cyril replied, "me, Fred". "Well, he's not turned up yet".

Fred now had to decide what to do, and sent the 4 a.m. cleaner (Frank Murphy) to give Bill Hartford's mate, a past fireman, a lift to get the engine ready for the road; it was now 4.30 a.m. and getting time for the engine to leave the shed for Wigan Central. Still no sign of Bill Hartford, so Fred sent the engine out of the shed with Bill's mate as driver and Frank Murphy as fireman.

Knock up

Before long, Bill Hartford was rushing down the footpath to the shed office; once inside, he demanded to know who had knocked him up as he was going to claim a day's pay because the knocker up had not waited for his reply. Fred Ford assured him there had been a reply, and proceeded to get Cyril in the office. Bill asked Cyril, "are you sure you got a reply when



Bill Hart, fireman and Jack Green in front of P2.46434.

you knocked me?" "Yes", was the reply from Cyril. "Are you sure it wasn't the parrot that answered?" asked Bill. Everyone was now smiling. Cyril was forgiven, and Bill went to Lower Ince Station to take over his driving duties when the train returned from Irlam some time later.

As the train arrived at Lower Ince, the platform was full, a mad scramble to get a seat; there was a blue haze over the platform from cigarette smoke, while a few late comers were buying their daily paper from Jimmy Entwistle, the local newsagent who was at the station entrance from 4.45 a.m. each morning, summer or winter. In winter one of the lady porters (Edna Moran or Maude Taylor) would arrive at the station early to light the fire in the waiting room.

Then away again, this time for Hindley and Platt Bridge. Once on the flat, the train would move at a good speed. Then Hindley Station came into view, same as Ince station – another full platform, grumpy workmen pushing and shoving, trying to find a seat, but as the train was already full, how they all got in I'll never know.

Next, the train runs over the level crossing into Bickershaw and Abram station; not as many passengers here. Then on to West Leigh and Bedford; as you leave the station you can see Wigan Junction Colliery on the right and beyond, the famous Maypole Colliery chimney with the drumstick shaped chimney (which is the only chimney left standing), a nice easy run to West Leigh for the fireman. Next its Lowton St. Mary's; just before the station the St. Helens line joins, right away for Culcheth. Then Newchurch, and right away again for Glazebrook, under the road bridge, past the Wrens' camp on the left, (later in the day you would get a wave from the girls), over the Moss, nice and level but a

good distance; you would need to fire up a couple of times. At Dam Lane Junction you joined the main Cheshire lines; the line to the right would take you to Risley, Warrington, Widnes, Liverpool and Southport. Straight on in the distance you could see Glazebrook West signal box, sat high looking over a bridge. Right away again, this time for Irlam passing Glazebrook East box with the road to Cheshire going to the right, the large sidings on your right, under another bridge, and Irlam Station came into view.



J10 working 5-coach passenger.

Quartered

A quiet station suddenly became alive, with workers hurrying through the subway, along the other platform to the exit, then the rush to clock on at the steel works. Some of the workers were lucky as they worked at the station end of the massive works; others were not so lucky – if the train was even just a couple of minutes late no amount of rushing would get them to the clock on time, and they all got quartered. My first job as a 14 year old was at the steel works and I had to run every morning to clock on, not very good though for the older workmen, my dad included.

I can say that all the drivers I worked with really tried hard to keep time, both going to Irlam and the return trip back to Wigan, where a lot of the men had buses to

catch. If you had been on the 2-10 p.m. shift, then you would miss the last bus if the train was late getting into Wigan; this meant a long walk home, for a very tired workman, and a mouthful for the engine crew the following day!

The return journey meant tender first back to Wigan; in winter it could get very cold on a footplate running tender first. As we arrived at Lower Ince station, the platform on the other side was alive with passengers waiting for the 7.5 a.m. Risley train; then right away for Wigan.

The driver would not ease the regulator as the train approached the canal bridge and the staff pick up with the signal man/woman standing nervously on the small platform close to the up line with the staff held high. The fireman would hang on the side of the cab, holding the handrail with his left hand and catch the staff with his right hand; it would thud into his hand, and let me tell you it hurt to catch this metal staff. Should you miss the staff, the driver stopped the train, which would then be late arriving at Wigan Central.

Suicide

I personally worked the 5.4 a.m. Irlam job several times before the shed closed. I remember a story involving driver Tommy Owen and fireman Jack Clayton. They

were leaving Culcheth station; Jack had just finished with the fire and was hanging over the cab side, when he suddenly turned to Tommy and said, "I've just seen a body on the track". Tommy came across the footplate and looked over Jack's side, but couldn't see anything; well, he wouldn't if the train was moving! At Irlam they both agreed to look for the body on the return trip and this time they both saw it. At Culcheth station Tommy reported the body and it was later found out that a local man had committed suicide; in his pocket was an appointment for what he thought was a serious operation at Warrington hospital, but it turned out to be only a minor one. Further investigations revealed that it was a Trafford Park crew working the last train out of Wigan for the night who had killed the man; the small tank engine had been found with blood on the back end.

I will finish the story on a happy note. Joe Dean, a Trafford Park fireman, had been fancying his chances with Lily, one of the signal women at Wigan Goods. On one occasion, when Joe was leaving Wigan Central on the last train, Lily came down the signalbox steps at Wigan Goods to collect the staff; Joe had his mind on other things and completely forgot the staff. Lily shouted to him, "throw the staff off, Joe", which he did – straight into the Leeds and Liverpool Canal! Wigan fire brigade had to empty the lock to regain the staff – but he did eventually marry Lily.

My thanks to former engine crew mates from Lower Ince Shed Jack Green (old hand on my shift) and Bob Fox, without whose help I could not have written this true account of the comings and goings of the 5.4 a.m. Irlam.

Fred Darbyshire

Open door for the 'Penny Rush'

COMPARED with our continental neighbours, the British are famous for the orderly way we queue and we certainly got a lot of practice doing this during the Second World War. This orderliness, however, did not apply to the queue for the Labour Hall Cinema in Scholes. When Rueben Williams, his wife, or one of their daughters, opened the door for the Saturday afternoon matinee (or the 'Penny Rush' as it was better known), I swear that the throng would have been at least seven or eight deep. The rules strictly followed Darwin's Theory of Survival of the Fittest – the biggest and toughest got in first.

The cashier for the day would then disappear through the lower half of the stable door that formed the front of the pay-box. Her face would soon appear, silhouetted by a glaring light, through the tiny, arched bob-hole in the upper half of the door. No fancy machine here to spew out tickets on demand, but a small coloured ticket torn from a roll in exchange for the penny deposited on the highly polished, tiny, brass counter. Richer patrons, I should add, at that time had to pay tuppence for the privilege of having a plush, tip-up seat on the balcony. I remember being told by older people, that at one time the price of admission used to be one jam jar – the jam jar being a common unit of currency for many items even in my day. One jam jar would, for instance, buy a donkey stone to whiten the step. I also remember, as a little lad, paying one jam jar for a ride on a tiny roundabout pulled around the streets by a horse. The children called this ambitiously, 'Wiggin Fair'.

Wooden forms

This balcony consisted of a dozen rows of seats, each one a step higher than the previous and naturally situated at the back of the auditorium. But the majority of the children sat on long wooden forms stretching from ones side of the hall to the other, with a passage on either side. It was not unusual at these crowded matinees for one child to fall off the far end of a row as another one was squeezed on to the other. The tinies, who started at around the age of three, including me in my day, invariably chose to sit on the front row, which was about four feet from the screen.

Entrance to the auditorium, which was situated above the old Scholes Labour Club, was afforded by a flight of highly scrubbed wooden stairs. I emphasise the cleanliness of the place as it was sometimes, like many of its contemporaries, known unfairly as the 'Bug', but believe me, as someone with inside knowledge, I can

assure you that no place was scrubbed cleaner than the Labour Pictures.

Mrs. Faulkner, who lived only yards from the front door of the cinema, was responsible for cleaning, and she would scrub the place until it was spotless and use gallons of disinfectant in the process. I doubt if any modern multiplex cinema is cleaner than the Labour was after Mrs. Faulkner had finished scrubbing the wooden steps and the rubber matting made from old mining conveyor belts that covered the aisles.

One side of the balcony was separated from the entrance corridor by a thick, green curtain, affording shelter for those wishing to pelt the incoming hoard completely undetected. This opportunity was considered by some to be well worth the extra penny invested. The investment might sometimes be regretted. If the victim of the ambush happened to be one of the tougher fraternity, of which there were not a few around Scholes at that time, retribution would be taken by beating up everyone who could possibly have come within arms reach of this curtain.

Boring bits

Similar advantages were obtained by sitting on the far side of the balcony. The seats there were still of the tip-up variety, but covered in leather and rather less comfortable than the plush ones. Nevertheless, boundless opportunities were available to pelt the other kids, as the passageway to the toilet ran

between the balcony rows. There was a constant stream of visitors to the toilet, especially during boring bits of the film. These usually involved Gene Autrey or Roy Rogers, and a song and a girl. Such an interlude inevitably led to a general restlessness in the hall and the noise could rise to an unbearable crescendo.

It was at this point that the chucker-out, Tommy Allan, came into his own. Up to now he had usually managed to quell any bouts of talking, or other misbehaviour, with a quick smack on the head of the offender with his eight foot long cane, with which at a stretch, he could just about reach the centre of the row. He could also make a loud "thwack" with his cane by smacking it down on the tiny stage in front of the screen. His cry of "T" chucker out's on the warpath" would usually calm the mob for a short time.

Despite the judicious use of this fearsome implement, Tommy Allan was a popular man with most of the kids. It was he who would herald the start of the performance by standing, like a member of the Royal Family at an unveiling ceremony, at the side of the two feet wide stage and pull the cord that opened the thin, green curtains covering the screen.

"Three stodies"

But the most important event was the switching on of the emergency lights prior to the house lights being extinguished. This was



greeted by a loud cry of "T'ed leets!" followed by a great cheer. The signal meant that only five minutes remained before the start of the film. The main feature was always preceded by a short comedy, and by far the most popular of these was the Three Stooges or Three 'Stoodies' as the children of Scholes always called them. The icon that came on the screen along with the title – a pair of grinning actors' masks – was instantly recognised by even the youngest of non-readers among the seething mass. The roar that went up was deafening and, as I remember as a three-year-old, quite frightening.

During this, and the following serial (always called a 'following up'), the chucker-out could relax – the peashooters would not appear until the boring bits of the 'big picture'. Pearl barley, rather than peas, provided the main ammunition for these antisocial devices, as the spread-shot effect was far more likely to hit a target, or even several targets at the same time. A rather more noxious and revolting effect could also be achieved by using chewed up orange peel. Those not particularly interested in hitting a chosen target would point their weapons upwards sending the shot on a parabolic course, mortar fashion. Thus they were almost guaranteed to hit somebody, with the added bonus of the creation of a meteor shower effect as the missiles flashed through the beam of light coming from one of the square holes in the wall above the 'balcony'.

When all the ammunition had been used up and pop bottles had been emptied, other interesting diversions had been devised. Empty bottles could now be rolled under the rows of seats. With an uncarpeted wooden floor, this made an interesting rumbling noise that could be

heard in the Labour Club below. But the noise of rolling bottles was nothing compared to the thunder of hundreds of pairs of iron-shod clogs being stamped on the floor in the event of a breakdown in the performance. Many a big break on the billiard table in the club below must have been brought to a premature conclusion when this occurred!

Uncle Fred

Behind the rear wall toiled my Uncle Fred – the most important man in Scholes and possibly the world at that time. It was he would make it all happen, because Uncle Fred was the projectionist. Fred Heaton was also a great friend and ally of Tommy Allan. They used to go cycling together and took me with them occasionally in later years, leading no doubt to my present love of cycling. When all Tommy's attempts to gain control appeared to have failed, he only had to shout "Switch if off Freddie!" and on would come the house lights and off would go the film. Order would then soon be restored.

Being Fred's nephew provided many privileges for us - as well as receiving complementary tickets, it also brought the added bonus of being allowed to pass the steel-lined door into the projection room, where I used to help him to manually rewind the reels of film. This room was the most exciting place in the universe. The large metal boxes full of glowing valves of the amplification system and the sparking carbon rods providing the bright light for the two massive projectors, made the place seem like the inside of Flash Gordon's space ship. I sometimes went into the pictures on a Sunday,

when it was closed to the public, when he was having a practice showing of some of the following week's films. I remember being frightened to death as the only person in the auditorium when he was giving 'The Mummy's Hand' a trial run through!

Incredibly fit

Uncle Fred, though so quiet and unassuming, must have been an incredibly fit person. As well as being the projectionist, he was also the bill-poster. Carrying a large sack of posters and a can of paste, every week he would cycle many, many miles around the outskirts of Wigan, posting bills in the most unlikely places. His trusty steed was an aged lady's Hercules that I remember well as being covered with bill-posting paste.

The exit from the cinema after the show was probably more boisterous than the entry. The cowboy film always ended in a long chase when we had ample opportunity to boo the 'baddies', always dressed in black, and cheer the posse, dressed, of course, in

white. With the chase being successfully concluded and the villains naturally receiving their just deserts, we would emerge like a herd of stampeding cattle, blinking into the bright sunlight. Charged with adrenaline we would gallop off down Scholes, slapping our backsides to urge our imaginary steeds on to greater speed, kicking sparks with our clog-irons and sliding on the flags past Joe Carter's barber's shop.

Sadly, with the arrival of television, the Labour Hall Cinema was one of the first of the local cinemas to close. Uncle Fred moved down the road to the Scholes Picture House. He then moved on to the Regal Cinema in Lower Ince where the new technology of Cinemascope was brought in to try to revive the flagging industry that had given pleasure to several generations of children and adults. I wonder what he would have made of the multi-screen cinemas of today.

**Tom Heaton
Telford
Shropshire**

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This article was written just after Wigan had won the Challenge Cup, yet again, for 2002.

The year is . . . 1959

by Neil Cain

LIKE MANY an historical tale, this one begins with the words ‘the year is’. In this case the year is 1959. Wigan have just demolished Hull at Wembley to win the Challenge Cup for the second year in a row, and 200 miles away from Wigan, a blonde curly-headed two- and- a- half year old is receiving the first piece of advice that he will remember his father giving him.

“Hold it with the lace pointing away from you.” Yes, rugby balls had laces back then and a tin of dubbin was a household necessity. The advice having been given, it was time for the first lesson in my education which would lead to 40 years of ‘Central Park studies’. Lesson one, then – learning to sell the dummy. This first step on the road to the love affair with Wigan Rugby League Club was taken under the amused gaze of our southern neighbours, who termed the half-sized rugby ball I so lovingly cradled “a long ball”.

What a prize!

Time to move on; it is now 1965. Again Wigan have carried off the cup by beating Hunslet in a classic match at Wembley. Dad has gone to Wembley, but I am considered to be just a bit too young still, because of the crush at the ground. Aware of Wigan’s triumph, thanks to Eammon Andrews on the wireless, I put on my kit and boots and wait outside for dad’s return. Clouds roll up, it starts to drizzle, but I wait it out. Finally, dad appears and I get a ticking off for standing in the rain. Another

lesson learned – triumph and disaster can be seconds apart. My deflation is short lived, however, as soon after my dad hands over my autograph book that has been sent away to a Mr. Lawrenson in Wigan. Inside are the signatures of the entire Wigan team – what a prize!

Some weeks pass, and it is time for our annual visit to see Grandad Cain in Holt Street, Ince. This is a strange, but wonderful, world of things I only see in his house. Eccles cakes, a huge grandfather clock, dominoes, a mountain of coal in his shed, a big pot in the form of Winston Churchill’s head, and, best of all – an outside toilet. Grandad talks to my dad about players he saw as a young man. Charlie Seeling, a New Zealander who sailed on the old ‘windjammer’



Jonnie Lawrenson, Wigan star of the 1940’s.



Programme from 1965-66 season.

ships and said he had travelled the world, but Wigan was the best place out of everywhere. Bert Jenkins, who played his best games when he left the pub minutes before kick off, and his wingman – the legendary Jimmy Leytham. Grandad told of Jack Price, a forward way ahead of his time in being fast and mobile. The story I loved the best was of the South African Van Heerden diving beneath the legs of a police horse to score when Wigan first won the Challenge Cup in 1924!

Intricacies

Once in a while, rugby wasn’t the main topic of conversation. Occasionally, grandad and my dad would contest a game they called ‘Chap-a-babbie’. The game and its intricacies escape me, but may ring bells with *Past Forward* readers. Likewise, someone may recall a little ditty grandad would

sometimes come out with. Obviously dating to the Boer War, the song started, “The baby’s name was Kitchener Carrington”, and went on to mention key figures in that war such as Powell and Kruger, French, and Lord Roberts who appeared in the song as ‘Bobs’. Would any reader have heard this song as a child and be able to list the entire cast?

So, its August 1965 and Wigan have a midweek match against Liverpool City. I am told we are going to go, and I’m to begin active service that over the years to come will bring heartache and bliss. I’m also told that if we are lucky we may run into Mr. Lawrenson, one of dad’s childhood pals who, thanks to the autographs, has become a cross between the Archangel Gabriel and Father Christmas in my mind. Years later I discover my decision to award him

mythic status is shared by many as he turns out to be one of Wigan's finest ever three-quarters, having played for England at both Union and League, as well as Great Britain.

The evening arrives. Dad and I set off on the epic journey to Central Park via Peel Street (alas no longer there), Birkett Bank, Schofield Lane and Greenhough Street, and so to heaven. Dad says that we will go to 'Top Corner', between the barn and Rathbones stand as this was grandad's favourite spot. The 'Entry of the Gladiators' plays out over the ground and there they are – 13 men in cherry and white hoops; its like Christ and His Disciples have appeared and the spell is cast.

True shame

Wigan win, as should happen in a fairy tale situation; but then something terrible happens Wigan then decide to lose every game I see for 20 years! The following Saturday we return to Central Park where Oldham beat them. The true

shame of losing a final to St. Helens escapes me next May, but the gut wrenching agony of defeat at the hands of Castleford in 1970 is my first awareness of that feeling that your world can collapse. Next lesson . . . the meaning of the word ignominy as learned at Fulham, then the understanding of the phrase 'to rub salt in a wound' – that's Wembley in 1984 and defeat to Widnes.

But there was a new Archangel Gabriel learning how to usher us mortals into paradise, although in the programme he is a fullback called Shaun Edwards. His 'Heavenly Host' is slowly assembling at Central Park and the miracles they will perform are just a short time in coming. Last lesson . . . the meaning of Nirvana, or Wembley 1985 as I call it. The last match that my dad and I



Wigan players autographs – 1965 Cup Winners.

will see together. He lost his shoes, so great was the press of the crowd in our enclosure, but a new legend joins the Pantheon, John Fergison.

We go home on the bus, after dad spends time gazing fixedly into the emptying stands for Mr. Lawrenson, without success. New legends may be etching their deeds on our memories, but we still

seek out the legends of old. Now I watch the young faces as the TV cameras pan around the JJB Stadium. Their heroes now carry the epithet 'Warriors', but as they grow I hope they learn there was a time when Wizards and Colliers ruled the Magical Kingdom. Where was Harry Potter then? Ian Potter Now that's more like it!



Ticket from Wigan's 1965 Wembley win.

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HERITAGE SERVICE WINS LOTTERY FUNDING

GOOD news for the Heritage Service and all those of you interested in the textile history of north-west England! The HLF has awarded £86,000 to fund a survey of textile pattern books in our area.

In partnership with five other museums and academic institutions (Bolton Museum & Art Gallery, Macclesfield Museum, Quarry Bank Mill, John Moores University and Manchester Central Library) we will catalogue the pattern books, produce a touring exhibition and a publication. The aim of the project is to increase awareness of this important source for the study of north-west textile history, and to increase access for the public and researcher alike.

What are pattern books? They are a record of the designs, materials and manufacturing instructions for fabrics produced by the manufacturer for the companies they supplied. Here at the Heritage Service, we have c.50 concerning the silk industry in the Borough (dating from c.1840 to 1880) given by George Hilton, silk weavers of Leigh. Small samples of woven fabric are attached to the pages of each book, accompanied by instructions for their makeup, colours and quantities. We hope the survey will reveal fascinating insights into the design history of the textiles, the processes of mass production and the operation of the industry in our Borough.

Between us, we have over 2000 pattern books to survey, but the entire project must be completed in three years time, at a total cost of £96,000. Each partner is contributing, and we will also be applying to the North West Museum Service for an additional grant.

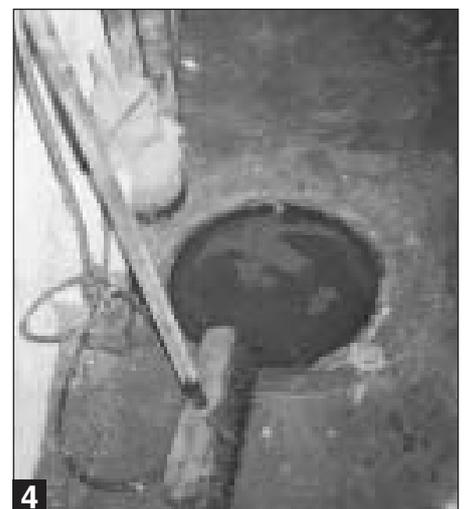
Bolton Museum & Art Gallery is the lead organisation for the project (contact Angela Thomas 01204 332212). If you have any queries about our own collection, contact Yvonne Webb at the History Shop (01942 828123).

So watch this space! We will keep you updated. Y.W.

The four photographs shown here are all linked. If you fancy a puzzle, have a go at finding the connection. I am grateful to Geoffrey Molyneux of Sutton Coldfield for bringing this intriguing story to light. Ed.

1. A Ladies Football team, with three male supporters, 1921.
2. Abram Parish Church's soup kitchen helpers, during the miners' strike of 1921.
3. Geoffrey Molyneux's mother, 95 year old Doris (nee Bennett) and brother Philip outside Springfield Park, Wigan, shortly before its demolition.
4. The flooded sump of the cellar of Abram Parish Church, 2002.

For Geoffrey's simple but intriguing answer, please turn to p30.





Cliff Reeves, of Parish Video, has sent in this splendid photograph of Bickershaw Colliery in the 1970's. The colliery opened 125 years ago, and closed 10 years ago.

BICKERSHAW COLLIERY – A WEALTH OF MEMORIES

Dear Sir,

Re the last issue of *Past Forward*, the only person I am able to identify in the photograph on p40 (bottom right) is the man holding the 'Manager's spot lamp', on the right; he is Mr. James Henry Unsworth, one time Manager, Group Agent and Area Production Manager at Bickershaw Colliery and after nationalisation. I served my time under him at Bickershaw and subsequently as an Official at no 4 pit.

Re Alf Wilkinson V.C. (p 8), I was the person responsible for the 'lab' at Bickershaw Colliery when Major Ernest Hart M.C. recruited Alf to work at the colliery c. 1935. He was totally unfamiliar with colliery work, but came to help me with gas and dust samples in the 'lab'. After a

month's training, he was fully competent and did the job extremely well, as required by the CMA.

I left my full time connection with Bickershaw in 1937 when gaining a scholarship to Wigan & District Mining & Technical College, but was kept as a trainee during the next five years, to qualify as a Mining Engineer, Mine Manager and Mine Surveyor, returning as a Junior Mine Official (Overman) in 1940.

My congratulations on the article which brought back such a wealth of memories to me and my wife, who remembered J.H.U. and his wife May, son Alan and many of the Unsworth family since they were neighbours.

Harry Hindley
Whitley Bay
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ANSWERS TO PICTURE PUZZLE ON p28

1. My mother, then Doris Bennett, (back row, right, with arms folded and no headwear), while still a pupil at Hindley & Abram Grammar School, also played at Springfield Park for an Abram Ladies Football team against the famous Dick Kerr's Ladies team. (This Preston based team, supposedly the subject of a film starring Rita Tushingham and now amply recognised at the National Football Museum in Preston, once played before a crowd of over 50,000 at Goodison Park, Liverpool). The purpose of the Springfield Park match was to raise money in support of those distressed by the Miners' Strike of 1921.
2. The Bennett family attended St. John's Church, Abram. The revenue from the charity football match helped to fund the parish soup kitchen.
3. Returning to Springfield Park some 80 years after her appearance on the pitch, my mother cannot remember the score, despite her otherwise remarkable recall of the names of her team colleagues and of her childhood in Abram, where she lived with sisters May and Gertie and brother Eric in the Ancient Order of Foresters cottages which are still standing at 166 Warrington Road.
4. Very practically, but rather bizarrely, one of the two soup tureens pictured in 1921 was later incorporated as a drainage sump in the concrete floor of the re-built church of 1937, where its rim is just visible above the water level (information here supplied by my mother's cousin, Doris Ainscough, a great church helper).

My mother and her cousin Doris are fairly sure of the identities of almost all those photographed in 1921.

Ladies' Football Team, 1921

(Back row, standing, left to right): Walter Kelshaw, trainer, Dora Whitehead, Beattie Eddleston, (not known), Alice Eddleston, goalkeeper, Mr. Moore (his wife famously smoked a clay pipe), Daisy Taylor, Doris Molyneux (nee Bennett, my mother), Mary Molyneux (no relation, she married Bill Wright and emigrated after her daughter to Australia), Beattie Eddleston's husband (dapperly dressed, and the son or step-son of John Alan Parkinson, M.P. for Wigan). (Front row, left to right): Rose Grimshaw (landlady, Buck's Head), Martha Gregory, Maggie Greenwood, Mrs. Young, Mrs. Collier)

Soup Kitchen, 1921

(Left to right): Joe Southworth, Church Superintendent (1st standing), Jack Higham (bending), Tommy Hilton (bending), George Henry Gaskel (front), (Back row): Chris Greenwood, Ernie Bates, Tommy Eddleston, Moses Green, Peter Grimshaw (husband of Rose), Ewart Charnock (church organist), Fred Haines?

I remember . . .

Dear Alastair,

It is with no small amount of pride that in your editorial in *Past Forward* 30 you mention that a few of us have been involved with the magazine almost from day one, and I know from my own post box how true this is.

Not only you, sir, and your extremely capable staff, have achieved what I personally wanted to see happen – to put Wigan and its proud “Ancient and Loyal” past on the map. This was mainly because, on my extensive travels as a young man, I was accustomed to such derogatory remarks as “You don't come from Wigan, do you?”, especially in towns and cities in the lower half of the country. And you are already aware that I consider George Orwell did Wigan no favours at the time of his publishing *The Road to Wigan Pier*, dwelling as he did on his unsavoury choice of digs and the characters he met who were mainly unemployed ex-miners through no fault of their own, and not “average Wigginners”.

On my own travels in my earlier life and my own experiences since, I have discovered that indeed “Owd Wigginners”, and especially those whose grandparents and parents were forced by circumstances to “look Westwards” for (to quote Winston Churchill) “the sky is bright”, have nevertheless retained their affection for, and also fond and detailed memories of, the town of their birth. Not only their offspring have been able to reap the benefit of their grandparents' and parents' decision and foresight - but also so have the many readers, worldwide, of your excellent magazine

Your correspondents in *Past Forward* No. 30 (p23), Olwen Mary Colquhoun of Hobart, Tasmania and her brother Ron Green and his family, whose letter you published in *Past Forward* No. 29 (p36), are evidence of this fact, and my own personal roving reporter, Mrs. Chas. Smith of Orrell, along with her sister and brother-in-law, have just returned home to Wigan, having personally visited them in their homes in Australia.

Frederick Sims of Wyoming, USA, whose local knowledge of the Union

Bridge area exceeded my own (incidentally the shop on the corner he mentioned with the blind drawn was once a Taberner's!), which also allows me to answer a query by Don Rayner of Standish (*Past Forward* 30 p16). I may be related to William Taberner of the Wigan Infirmary in 1883, but I don't know definitely. Certainly, both my grandmother and mother had spells of working there, but as ward maids would have had no opportunity to “cook the books”!

Harold Smith of Sutton Coldfield, with his intimate knowledge of the Ashton area, and Neil Cain of Northolt, Middlesex, with his memories of the Ince side of the borough, have brought many happy memories for those readers whose antecedents were domiciled in the areas they recalled. In my own case, born as I was on the doorstep of the Wigan Pier Heritage Centre, and whose residents were distributed mainly to Pemberton, I am inclined to be a little “myopic” with my Wigan recollections, since my boyhood and “the cut bank” were my world, although I walked from the Pier to Parbold many times as a junior, as did Frederick Sims, whom I have already mentioned. His latest letter to me actually arrived whilst I have been writing this to you.

All thanks to you, sir, and your original idea. Imagine, please, the joy of some Australian friends of mine who recently phoned me early one morning to thank me for sending some earlier copies of *Past Forward*, which included stories of Ince by Neil Cain. She had been brought up as a girl in Ince and was, as they would have said in her locality, “o'ert moon”.

How can we possibly thank you sufficiently, except to continue to support *Past Forward* because “from little acorns mighty oaks doth grow”. So on behalf of all, contributors, as well as readers, who “couldn't write a letter to save my life”, a very big thank you to all at *Past Forward*.

Ernie Taberner
62 Westwood Road
Earlsdon
Coventry CV5 6GE

Charles Albert Berry

(1852-1899)

CHARLES Albert Berry was born in Leigh in 1852 at his father's shop. His father had come from Wrexham and at the time of Charles' birth, he was practising his trade as cabinet maker and furniture dealer in Chapel Street, Leigh. Husband and wife were thrifty and industrious, and business was good. His parents were members of the Congregational Church and well respected in the community.

Charles attended Sunday School and was remembered by his teacher, Mr. Whitehead, as a bright merry boy. An early incident in Charles' life shows inklings of his true vocation when he gave a sermon for his mother and sister and her dolls. In later life he would recall how his mother had told him she had prayed before his birth for "God to give her a son for a

minister"; perhaps this had been the occasion which had prompted this confession. The family left Leigh and moved to Bolton for a short while before settling in Southport. The move may have been undertaken for the health of the family, for only four of the eight children survived into adulthood; but whatever the reason, it was fortuitous for Charles for it was here that his

childhood aspirations towards the ministry ripened under a series of beneficial influences and personal determination.

Strong clear voice

Despite suffering a slight speech impediment he resolved not to let it hinder him, exercising the muscles of his throat and voice box by pacing the seashore shouting at the waves with a cork set firmly between his lips. This ingenious self-help had beneficial results and he developed a strong clear voice. He joined the church choir and took part in school entertainment, showing a flair for impersonation and playing 'Bob Rustic' in the school play.

His teacher had hopes of Charles becoming a pupil teacher and directed his studies accordingly, but Charles was destined for other work and reluctantly he let him go. After a short stint as a clerk in a telegraph office, Charles went to work at his brother's drapery shop in Ormskirk, often hitching a ride on the train. He became friendly with the engine drivers and developed a life long interest in the mechanics of engines and machinery in general. He and a friend made a model engine and constructed telegraph wires between their homes. At this time he may well have been lost to the Church, as a cherished childhood ambition of becoming an engine driver must have beckoned him. In later life many of his sermons took their analogies from his knowledge of the mechanical work-a-day world.

Past the test

Around this time Charles joined the Congregational church at Ormskirk whose minister, a Dr. J.M. Macauley, had come from New York. He was an important factor in inspiring young Charles towards the church. Under his

tutelage he joined whatever form of church work was available. He was also tutored in classics and mathematics in anticipation of the exams he would need to pass, for by now he had decided to apply to Airdale College, Bradford for the ministry. Berry went to Bradford for his interview with the college committee. He was 17 and the members of the committee were stuck by the novelty of one so young applying, and also his sincerity; he was admitted despite not meeting the usual requirements. He worked hard and gained a scholarship, acquiring knowledge of French, German, Hebrew and church history.

He received his article training in various churches, but Grassington in the Lake District in particular was considered by students and congregation alike as the true testing place and far more exacting than any college committee. He passed the test at Grassington, but it was during this time of travelling to and from churches, often walking miles in extreme weather, that he caught a severe cold that led to rheumatic fever and the later development of heart trouble.

In 1875 he took up his first pastorate at St. George's Road Church, Bolton, and later that year married Mary Agnes Martin from Southport, to whom he had been engaged for three years. His time spent at Bolton was hard working and productive; he was an active member of several church based committees, and worked towards a fellowship of all local churches. He took the public platform for free, progressive, unsectarian education, and wrote a series of social and political sketches for the *Bolton Journal*. Despite the hectic pace of work, he found time to travel, visiting Norway, Switzerland and America, where he was the guest of the world famous showman Mr

Continued on page 32



Wrexham
Charles A. Berry

Charles Albert Berry (1852-1899)

Continued from page 31

P T Barnum. They became close friends and he felt that the great showman was “a man of deep spirituality”. Once, when invited by Barnum to attend one of his shows at Olympia, he was shown with much state into what proved to be the royal box, and as Barnum rode round and round the ring he would pull up the pony chariot and make profound obeisance, leaving everyone wondering what august personage they had amongst them.

In 1883 he was invited to take up the pastorate of Queen Street Congregational Church, Wolverhampton. He accepted, and was soon immersed in the work of the church and community. Going from one busy ministry to another, and giving himself unstintingly, put an untold burden on his already weakened heart, but typically his method of recuperation after a period of ill health was not one of peace and quiet but rather travel. He called his journeys to foreign lands his ‘out of church ministry’. In all, he made five long ocean voyages, visiting different continents and meeting all manner of people. He felt he learned immensely from these experiences and that he was taking the influence of God’s word.

Henry Ward Beecher

In 1886 on his return home from Egypt and Palestine, he met the American pastor, Henry Ward Beecher. Berry had been asked to give an impromptu speech of thanks at the end of a reception given for Beecher at Liverpool. So impressed was Beecher that an invitation was extended to Berry for him to visit him at the Plymouth Church, Boston, Beecher’s own

church. Unfortunately, Beecher died early the following year before Berry had time to visit him. Beecher, however, had spoken so glowingly about Berry to his congregation that it was decided to offer him the pastorate of the church. He visited the church and gave five sermons and was met by unanimous approval.

But for Berry this time of decision was “the greatest ordeal of my life”. Ultimately, after an intense search for guidance, he declined the offer. He stayed in England and continued to work ceaselessly. In 1889, he took the platform with Charles Stuart Parnell and Sir Charles Russell at a national demonstration against the Coercion Act. He was also a member of the committee of National Liberal Federation. He was asked to stand for the position of Secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales and offered the pastorate of Westminster Chapel and a church in Brixton. None of these positions were sought and each request cost him weeks of anxious soul searching to divine God’s will. In the end he stayed, much to the relief of his Wolverhampton congregation.

His health was causing concern, however, and he was ordered to have complete rest. As before, his recuperation took the form of travel, and in June 1891 he set sail from Liverpool on *The City of Paris*, his ultimate destination being Australia. Rudyard Kipling was also travelling, under the pseudonym of Mr. MacDonald. Berry became friendly with Kipling and tried, unsuccessfully, to help him to keep his anonymity. They parted company in San Francisco after sharing a laugh at the reports in the paper that Kipling was dying of paralysis in Italy and Berry was breathing his last in the Channel islands! The idea of them both being ‘dead uns’ cheered them up immensely.

Australia

He was able to visit many of the places that had long

been of interest to him whilst he waited to take ship for Australia. He eventually set sail for Sydney on the *Monowai*, calling at Honolulu and Samara, where he hoped to meet Robert Louis Stevenson but was disappointed. He also visited Tasmania and New Zealand.

His return to England found him hard at work once more. He entered enthusiastically the movement for Christian Reunion and the federation of the Free Church. He also contributed a series of *Notes and Sketches of Travel* to the church newspaper. He took part in a series of conferences that took him abroad once more to Switzerland. In 1892 he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Iowa College, USA. In 1893 he fought the cause of the miners of Cannock Chase who were locked out through their refusal to take a proposed reduction in their wages. He also found time in this year to write his first volume, *Vision and Duty*. Later works followed – 1893 saw ten of his sermons published. In 1895 St. Andrews University, Edinburgh conferred a Doctor of Divinity degree on him. He was at the forefront of the movement for the greater unification of the churches and to this end the first Free Church Congress had been held in Manchester in 1892. This Birmingham Congress was important in getting funding under way and laying down the foundations of the movement.

Berry’s administrative skills were put to good use, with Messrs. Richard and George Cadbury promising large donations.

In 1897 he returned to the USA on a visit to the Plymouth Church which was celebrating its jubilee. It was decided to use this occasion to further the work of the Evangelical Free Churches, a group of churches that had got together and formed a council for international arbitration and peace. Berry was sent bearing a letter to the American churches on behalf of the association. During this visit he covered over 3,000 miles of rail travel and spoke at hundreds of venues, including Yale

University; he also offered prayers in the House of Representatives and the Senate. He had a series of meetings with leading statesmen and had communication with President McKinley whom he would have met but for the unfortunate death of McKinley’s mother.

Breakdown

He returned home at the end of 1897 and it was clear to everyone that his health had been undermined. He tried to continue with his heavy workload but was often incapacitated by excruciating chest pains. This led to a complete breakdown of his health in 1898. He was sent back to the balmy air of Southport to rest, but once his strength seemed to be returning his need to once more be in the thick of things returned, and he was allowed to take some sermons at his Wolverhampton church.

When a good friend died, Berry was determined to conduct the funeral service. Whilst saying a few words in prayer he died, aged only 47. In a letter to a friend shortly before, he had written, “I would rather preach and suffer than be silent and be strong. Our day is short enough, and I begin to grudge every moment that is not spent in the cause of the kingdom”.

T.A.

Christchurch, Pennington

The consecration of the above church took place on 12 June 1854. To celebrate the 150th anniversary I intend to rewrite the history of Christchurch and would be most grateful if anyone who has been involved with the church or any of its organisations would contact me with their memories. Also should anyone have photographs of walking days etc., please let me know.

Tony Ashcroft
Leigh Local History Officer
(01942 404559)

Ashton-in-Makerfield Probus Club

Members of the Club are retired business/professional people, who meet at the Angel Hotel, Ashton-in-Makerfield on the first Wednesday of every month at 11.00a.m. New members are always welcome, and can receive details from the Hon. Secretary, Alan Bradshaw (01942 726493).

7 August

The Pretoria Colliery Disaster

4 September

Snippets from the Past

Tony Ashcroft

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 7.30p.m. Further details from the Secretary, Barbara Rhodes (01942 222769).

12 September

My Dive to the Titanic

Steve Rigby

10 October

Tony Hilton

11 November

Elizabeth Gaskell

Liz Williams

12 December

Christmas Party

Atherton Heritage Society

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

13 August

The Doomsday Book

Fred Holcroft

11 September

Cotton Wool Country

Margaret Curry

Industrial Archaeology made simple and entertaining

8 October

AGM, followed by 21st anniversary celebration and buffet

12 November

Confessions of a Night Porter

Rev Frazer Smith

10 December

Bess of Hardwicke

Lizzie Jones

A Christmas Treat

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

SOCIETY NEWS

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 7.00pm. Non-members are welcome. Further details from Ron Marsh, P.R. Officer (01942 926027).

Leigh & District Family History Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month at 7.30p.m. in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. O. Hughes (01942 741594).

20 August

Members' Evening

17 September

The Pretoria Pit Disaster

Brian Clare

15 October

Getting Started

19 November

The Lancashire Cotton Queens

Maureen Gilbertson

17 December

Christmas meeting

Leigh Literary Society

This will be the Society's 125th season. Meetings are held in the Derby Room at the Turnpike Centre on Monday evenings at 7.30p.m. Annual subscriptions £11; visitors £1.50 per meeting. For further details contact Tony Ashcroft, Local History Officer, Leigh Library (01942 404559).

7 October

Waterways of the Tzars

Agatha Brown

14 October

The Indian Coast & North to Kashmir

Norman Brown

4 November

Beyond the West Highland Way

David Cookson

18 November

Historic Buildings of the North West

Rory Murphy

2 December

Through a Glass Darkly

Len Hudson

16 December

Traditional English Folk Customs

Fred Holcroft

Leigh Probus Club

Members of the Club, which is non-sectarian, are generally retired professional/businessmen. The club meets at the Leigh Masonic Hall on alternate Thursday afternoons between October and April. New members are welcome - anyone wishing to join should contact H. Wilkinson (01942

671943).

Shevington Memories Group

This small, informal group meets each Friday at 2.30p.m. in Shevington Methodist Church (New Lounge), to share memories about old times. Anyone is welcome - just turn up! Contact Maurice Hilton (01942 223107) for further details.

Tyldesley & District Historical Society

Meetings are held on the third Thursday of every month from September to May at the Tyldesley Pensions Club on Milk Street at 7.30p.m. No entrance fee but voluntary contributions are always welcome. Contact the Secretary (01942 514271) or Email: rydings@cablenet.co.uk. You can also visit our website at www.amw02593.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Wigan Archeological 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.

Wigan Civic Trust

The trust stimulates public interest in the Wigan area; promotes high standard of planning and architecture; and aims to secure the preservation, conservation, development and improvement of the historic parts of town and country. The Trust meets at Drumcroon Education Arts Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan, on the second Monday of the month at 7.30p.m. For further details contact the Secretary, A.J. Grimshaw, 6 Bridgeman Terrace, Wigan (01942 245777). New members always welcome.

9 September

The Life of John Ruskin

J A Hilton

14 October

World War II Roll of Honour for Wigan & District

Dr Eric McPherson

11 November

AGM

9 December

Christmas Party

Wigan Family & Local History Society

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month at the Springfield Hotel, Springfield Road, Wigan, at 7.30p.m. For further information contact the Secretary, Tracie-Ann Brown, 16 Florence Street, Higher Ince, Wigan WN1 3JS.

This article appeared in the *Leigh Chronicle*, 26 May 1905.

'Terrible Gas Explosion' at Leigh

‘ABOUT a quarter past ten on Tuesday morning a terrific gas explosion occurred at the two-storied house, 24 Ellesmere Street, Leigh. The sound was like the bursting of a bombshell, and the [*Leigh*] *Chronicle* office, which is just across the road from the scene of the accident, shook as though there had been an earthquake, and twelve of the windows in the office and adjoining house were smashed.

The people in the neighbourhood immediately rushed out into the street and found it filled with dense volumes of black smoke and dust, and falling debris. In a few minutes there was a large crowd upon the scene. The first thought of the crowd was to rescue anyone in danger, but it transpired that though the house is usually occupied by six people – Mrs. Mary Berresford, a widow, her son John, her two daughters Nellie Berresford and Alice wife of Frank Hudson a collier, and a young man lodger – there were at the time of the accident only two at home, Mrs. Hudson and Miss Nellie Berresford. Fortunately at the moment when the explosion occurred both women were standing on the front doorstep, having come there to see if a workman was coming from the gasworks, word having been sent down there about a quarter to nine that morning. The force of the explosion was such that both women were blown a considerable height in the air and then dropped on to the paved street. Mrs. Hudson fell near a horse and



Gas Explosion at Leigh, 23 May 1905.

lurry belonging to Mr. Ditchfield, but the driver pulled up at once and averted a serious accident. She was picked up and carried into the *Chronicle* office. Doctors were summoned by telephone from the *Chronicle* office and bicycle messenger, and the woman having been conveyed into Mrs. Foxwell's house, 30 Ellesmere Street, Dr. Wynne attended to her and found her suffering severely from shock. Her legs and face were bruised, and there was a cut on her chin.

Miss Berresford was more seriously injured. She was carried in the air much further than her sister, and

coming into violent contact with the ground she was rendered insensible. She was carried into the house of Mrs. Wood, Ellesmere Villa. Dr. H.S. Hall was speedily in attendance, and it was found she had sustained concussion of the brain, severe shock, and had several cuts and bruises. She remained unconscious for many hours and in the evening was conveyed to the workhouse hospital where she is progressing favourably.

Mrs. Hudson made satisfactory improvement, and in an interview with our reporter she said: "Two plumbers came to our house yesterday afternoon and

examined the gas pipes and said that the leakage must be on the other side of the meter. On Monday evening, as it was growing dark, the smell of gas, which we had noticed for some weeks, again became strong, and so Frank, my husband, went and turned it off at the meter and we only burned candles and lamps. We expected a workman to come from the gasworks this morning, and when we saw a barrow in the street we thought the workman had brought his tools. My sister and I went to the front door when there was a terrible bang, and the next thing I remember was being blown through the air and dropping in front of Ditchfield's lurry. I do not know whether the horse touched me or not, for I was dazed for a second, and then I jumped up and ran away and a man caught me in his arms. My shoes were blown off and my clothes torn in many places."

One of Mrs. Hudson's shoes – a brown leather one – has been found, but the other has completely disappeared. Her sister also had her boots torn and her clothes rent. Mrs. Berresford, the mother of the two women, was away at the time of the accident in Burton-on-Trent; Mrs. Hudson's husband was at work in the pit, and her brother and the lodger were also out working.

Mrs. Wood, of Ellesmere Villa, was an eyewitness of the accident. She said first of all there was a great cloud of dust and then she could see the two women flying through the air like birds. ♡



HERE is a little colour to add to the picture painted by Irene Roberts in issue 30.

In the 1950's, the Doric (Ince Bug) was owned by a Mr. Hesketh who also owned the Castle Cinema (usually called Vic, as it was in the Victoria Hall) above the Hindley Conservative Club, and the Rink, Church Street, Westhoughton. I was a friend of his son Stanley, and although I was working at the pit, at the weekends I used to do maintenance jobs at all three cinemas, until they closed in the late 1960's.

The first job after closure was to remove the projectors after the last performance, and these were then broken up for scrap. When the 'Bug' closed, I helped convert it to a warehouse, which was connected to the hardware shop on the corner of Careless Lane, Ince, which was run by Mr.

'THE BUG', 'THE VIC' AND SOME HINDLEY CHARACTERS

Hesketh's two sons. The 'Bug' was a corrugated iron structure, and kids used to run down the side dragging sticks along the corrugated sides to make a machine gun like noise – to the annoyance of people in the cinema.

The Castle (or Vic) was a much grander cinema. The Victorian décor was evident but by this time, the late 1960's, it had faded a little. The evening projectionist was called Dick. I cannot remember his surname, but he worked at Mains Colliery, Bamfurlong where I also worked. His job on the haulage rope was at the bottom of a steep incline. One day a run of tubs broke free; Dick managed to get inside a manhole (refuge place) but the tubs jumped off the rails and went into the manhole. Sadly, Dick was killed instantly. I had another friend killed in an accident in Mosley Common Colliery about the same time. In a mining community you have to put these tragedies to the back of your mind and get on

with it. Stress and trauma were unheard of at that time!

Hindley Characters

I was born in 1931 and remember during my school days some of the characters mentioned by Irene Roberts, such as Billy Boydell, Moses Elias (known as Mo Lias), and an eccentric old lady called Clare Aubry dressed in Victorian garb, strutting up and down Market Street talking to herself. If any kids tormented her, she would set about them with her broom. Bill Tracy was another character – as strong as three men. If he had no horse, he would pull the rag and bone cart himself.

One evening my dad and mam were coming home from the Palace Cinema, during the war time blackout. In Low Mill Lane, Dad said "Look out, lass, there's a horse tekin' boggarts". They hid in a doorway – but when it passed it was Billy Boydell playing horses, with his boots with steel heel irons clattering on

the cobbles!

During the war years, Billy often could be seen pulling a truck (with mangle handle wheels) laden with coke from the Gas Works in Cross Street, to earn a copper or two. He would spend these coppers riding on a Wigan Corporation bus from the top of Market Street to the Bird i' th' hand public house, and catch the next bus back.

Mo Lias would earn his coppers doing errands. In my mind's eye I can still see him shuffling along with his basket on his arm, and clutching a piece of paper. His cap had a safety pin at the back because he had a small head, and he wore the biggest pair of clogs in Hindley.

Thank you, Irene Roberts, for awakening a few memories, and I hope I have done the same for any old Hindley-ites, via *Past Forward*.

W. Brownbill
Lowton
(Ex Hindley-ite)

AN ACTOR'S NARROW ESCAPE

'Mr. Edwin Beverley, an actor, who is playing at the Leigh Theatre Royal this week in Shakesperian and other plays, had a thrilling experience. He says: "I was lodging in the house next door, No. 22, my room being on the ground floor. I had just had my breakfast and the breakfast things were still on the table, and I was sitting in a chair at the table studying my part in Richard III. All at once there was a dull boom and the window in my room was smashed and the pieces fell on my book and on the floor. The breakfast things

were smashed. I did not know whether it would be safer to stop in or rush out, but in a few seconds the bricks were falling all round me and dense volumes of smoke and black dust and fumes of gas poured into the room and almost choked me. I hurriedly jumped through the window and got into the garden and over the railings into the street. About half-past five yesterday afternoon I noticed a very strong smell of gas and told my landlady that I thought it was dangerous, and that she had better turn the gas off at the meter. She did so, and last night we only had candles and lamps. When I got back from the theatre the smell had gone.'

SEQUEL TO THE LEIGH GAS EXPLOSION

PROPOSED RELIEF FUND

A memorial has this week been presented to the Mayor, signed by a number of influential Leigh residents, asking him to take steps to raise a fund for the purpose of refurnishing a home for Mrs. Berresford and her family, who resided at the house, 24 Ellesmere Street, where the gas explosion took place last week. The memorial pointed out that two of Mrs. Berresford's daughters were seriously injured, and are likely for some time to require medical treatment, and that she was in need of

financial assistance. The following committee has been appointed to carry out the suggestions contained in the memorial: - The Mayor (Coun. H. Speakman JP.), Ald. T.R. Greenough, J.P., C.C. Rev. Canon Stanning, Coun. G. Hunter, Messrs. J. Wood, J.P., C.C. Jos. Isherwood, A. Betton, C. Downs, T. Smith, T.E. Ince, S. Wigham, J. Battersby, jnr., and Jas Boydell. The Mayor has been appointed Hon. Treasurer and the Town Clerk (Mr. S. Wilson) Hon. Secretary.'



The Frog Lane 'Ghost' and other spirits!

Dear Sir,

I was interested in the story of the Frog Lane "Ghost" in issue 30 of *Past Forward*. The young man chased by the supposed ghost was my grandfather, William Greenwood, of Kendal Street, Wigan. My father told this story to my brothers and me when we were children.

My grandfather was aged 19 at the time of the incident and frequented the Collier's Arms and the Guardian's Inn which, as you are probably aware, are on Frog Lane. Perhaps it was after an evening in these establishments that the incident occurred!

S. Greenwood
9 Maple Avenue
Hindley Green
Wigan WN2 4LS

Spring View, Lower Ince School

Dear Editor,

In the 30th issue of *Past Forward*, I read with great interest the article that Margaret Hirst, nee Middlehurst, wrote. She spoke of her father being headmaster of Spring View Lower Ince School. I was brought up in that area and attended the same school. I am 87 years of age now. Enclosed is a photograph (right), of pupils of various ages, as they are all mostly brothers and sister.

I hope the photograph will be of interest to readers of your magazine.

Mrs G. Darbyshire
7 Victoria Road
Platt Bridge
Wigan WN2 5DJ

Apologies for anyone trying without success to respond by Email to Betty Lalonde's letter in the last issue. Her correct Email address is: blalonde1@compusmart.ab.ca

SPRING VIEW TEACHERS IN THE LATE 1930's

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the two articles by Mrs. Margaret Hirst in issues 29 and 30, namely 'A Wigan Childhood' and 'A Matter of Belief'! In both articles she mentions her father, Mr. Middlehurst, headmaster of Spring View Senior Boys' School.

I have pleasure in sending you this photograph (below), taken, I believe, in the late 30's showing Mr. Middlehurst, third from the left, Mr. Hilton on his right and my father John Heyes who later became headmaster of the school and taught there all his life, on his left. I think the teacher at the centre of the back row is Bob Grange, but I don't know who the others are.

Daniel Heyes
18 Sunny Brow
Coppull
Chorley PR7 4PE



Mrs. Horrocks of 10 St. Andrews Drive, Wigan, has kindly supplied these two photographs.

The photograph above must be almost unique, showing as it does four different generations of Wigan ladies.

Ethel Houghton (top right) was the youngest of the four.

She married Harry Brooks, and was the daughter of Ellen Jarvis (top left), who married William Houghton (inset), a winder in a colliery in Frog Lane. Ellen's mother is seated bottom left, and in turn her mother (and Ellen's grandmother) is seated bottom right.





'The Romans Knew it Well'

Dear Editor,

Thank you for all the previous issues of *Past Forward* which I have received; I have enjoyed the articles and looking at the photographs to see if I knew anyone, or could recognise the district. However, I never thought I would be compiling a letter to you.

Firstly I would like to give you a potted history of my background, then I will lead into the reason for this letter. I am 78 years of age and was born in Gorman Street; later we moved into Newark Street, off Woodhouse Lane, then in 1930/31 to a new Council house in Beech Hill. I was educated at Wigan Grammar School, and first worked as a Junior Clerk in the Wigan Cemetery Office at Lower Ince. From 1942 to 1947 I served in the R.A.F. My chosen occupation, however, eventually brought me to the south of England in 1958, when I became the first Superintendent and Registrar of the then new Portchester Crematorium. I retired in 1984.

The article in *Past Forward* (no. 30, p 29) which prompted my attention was "Roman Coal Mining in Wigan". When we were living in Beech Hill my father Charles Norman

(coincidentally he was a colliery worker at the Maypole, and also a member of Wigan Wheelers in his younger days) showed me a coin which was found in the garden and said it must be very old and could be Roman. At the age I was then, however, I was not all that interested in a coin about the size of a farthing, and all I knew about Latin was trying to learn it at school, and a little ditty which went:-

*Wigan is a grand old town
The Romans knew it well
It always had an old King "Cole"
As long as folks could tell.*

I kept the coin though, and about three years ago I decided to go to our local library and look up Roman coins. I found a reference to a coin which was very similar to the one in my possession. The letters on the obverse side of the coin are CONSTANTINVS AVG and on the reverse S A R M A T I A DEVICTA. RIC.

In 296 Constantius I invaded Britain. His son, later to be Constantine the Great, was born c.274; in 305 he joined his father who was then in France, and they later crossed to Britain where he and his father fought a campaign in the North. Constantius I's death occurred at Eboracum (modern day York) in 306. Constantine the Great was immediately proclaimed Emperor; he died in the year 337.

I hope this will be of interest to readers.

**Clarence Appleton
6 Boxwood Close
Portchester
Hants PO16 8TQ**

A FAMILY TRADITION OF SINGING AND POLITICS

Barbara O'Neill, wife of Langtree Councillor John O'Neill, is well known around Wigan for her involvement in choral singing, a tradition which has been handed down within her family. One photograph shown here has a musical theme.

The other photograph shows

John and Barbara O'Neill and Barbara's parents, Eva and Harold Johnson, in London with Ince M.P. Tom Brown in 1954. As Barbara says, perhaps this inspired her husband to take up politics many years later - very appropriate, as he has just become Deputy Leader of the Council. Congratulations, John!



Left to right: John and Barbara O'Neill, Tom Brown (MP for Ince), Eva and Harold Johnson.



Ashton Baptist Church Choir, c.1918. Barbara's grandfather, father and uncle were members of the choir.

TRINITY SUNDAY WALKING DAY

Dear Sir

It was a real joy to read the very interesting article by J Harold Smith (issue 30, p15) about the Trinity Sunday Walking Day at Downall Green.

It certainly brought back some very happy memories of that great family gathering on the Green and our much loved rector, Rev W.R.H. Hall taking the service for so many wonderful years. The final service on this day was Evensong - always a moving service,

when we sang the lovely old hymns, "Christ Is Made The Sure Foundation" and "The Day Thou Gavest Lord Is Ended", and gave thanks to Almighty God in the words of the General Thanksgiving, "for all His goodness and loving kindness to us, and to all men".

These were the days when the Church of England was at its best!

**Alan J Smith
26 Dellside Close
North Ashton**



HAIGH HALL FARM KENNELS

THANK YOU

Dear Sir,

Thank you for the photograph of the Hindley and Abram Grammar School football team. One of my school friends is on the team, Derick Huntington, who lived in Bird Street, Higher Ince and now lives in York. The goalkeeper, Harry Sharratt, played for Wigan Athletic in the Springfield Park days. I know he played at Wembley in the Amateur Cup Final – I think it was with Bishop Auckland when he was at Durham College. Like me, he and Derick would be in their 70's now; they were quite a good team in their day.

My second story is of a man who won the V.C. in the First World War. My interest was awakened when I saw his name on a memorial in the Methodist Church at Bamfurlong; the board came from the Jolly Jacks Club just across the way from the church. His name was Kerneally and he was in the Irish Guards; he lived on Bolton Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield.

I have also read about another man named Grimshaw who came from Abram; he went on to enjoy a military career and lived to a good old age. I have also heard a lot about the Woodcock V.C., after whom Woodcock House in Wigan is named. Perhaps these two others are remembered somewhere as well. It seems a shame to me that these two young men are not remembered in the way Woodcock is.

**A.E. Smith
Winstanley
Wigan**

See p8 for further information on these local V.C.'s. Ed.



The Kennels, Upper Haigh Plantations, 1968.

Dear Sir,

I wonder how many of your readers will recognise this unusual building (left) as being the farm's kennels at Haigh Hall? They were situated near to the Laundry House, which was on the south side of the Upper Haigh Plantation; I took the photograph in 1968.

Beech Hill Infants School was opened in Aug/Sept 1932 – 70 years ago this year. The photograph below was taken in 1933 or 1934,

and shows one of the first classes to pass through. How many 74 or 75 year olds will recognise themselves or their former classmates? I can put a name to all the boys, but some of the girls' names elude me. I would appreciate any help or contact.

Best wishes to your magazine which helps to keep me in touch with Wigan.

**J. Smith
85 St. Michael's Drive
Cupar
Fife KY15 5BP**



BEECH HILL INFANTS SCHOOL

Miss M. Cleaton's or Miss Finch's class – 1933 or 1934

Back Row: R.A. Walsh, J.S. Barnes, A. Garner, M. Hoggarth, M. McLaughlin, C. Liptrot, M.J. Davies, R. Tilley(?), W. Rigby, H. Tomlinson, L. Rylance, ?, J. Davies(?), D. Bennett, J. Fairhurst, S. Barton, H. Molyneugh.
Centre row: T. Culshaw, J. Marsh, ?, ?, I. Derbyshire, ?, J. Houghton, Burton(?), R. Barton, ?, G. Smith, J. Smith.
Front Row: A. Andrews, A. Fishwick, D. Markland, A.R. Parkin, N. Birchall, W. Porter, Mr. Green, N. Milner, T. Smith, A. Jackson, E. Gee, S. Prescott, W.K. Lowe, G. Kennan, J.V.W. Davies, A. Evans.

REMEMBERING THE ZEPPELIN RAID ON WIGAN

Dear Editor,

I am a regular reader of *Past Forward* and although I have been an "exile" since 1936 I am still proud to be a Wiganer.

I remember distinctly the Zeppelin raid on Wigan in 1918. I was seven years old. My granny lived in Lorne Street behind St. Catherine's Church, and a bomb fell in her back garden, leaving a huge crater. Crowds of people came to see the damage and our Red Cross collecting box was soon filled.

I lived in Elizabeth Street at the time. My brother, sister and I were awakened by the bomb blast. We all

crowded into Mother's bed and pulled the covers over our heads. We were very frightened. Our Dad had been in the 5th Manchester Regiment and had been in the War from the beginning.

Thank you, James Fairhurst, for recalling the memory. It was not a happy one but very interesting. I am rather curious to know if many of my friends still remember that dreadful night.

**Lily Hitchen
(nee Derbyshire)
East Portlemouth
Salcombe Devon**



Picked up a copy of *Past Forward* in America

Dear Sir,

Last year I was on holiday in America, and whilst there I was given a copy of *Past Forward* 28. I was very impressed with your magazine, excellent reading!

At present I am in the process of doing our family tree; my mother and her family were all born in Wigan. My grandfather William Dunn was in the 5th Manchesters, so I am told. My grandmother was born in the Wigan Union Workhouse in 1896.

I would like to hear from any readers who knew, or are related to anyone with the following surnames – Marnin, Strong, Dunn or anyone who is aware of an adoption of Ellen Duckham by Sarah and Elijah Coleclough in the late 1800's. Thank you.

Mrs I. Marsh
56 Burnley Road
Edenfield
Nr. Ramsbottom
Bury BL0 0HW

SILVER JUBILEE KING GEORGE V, 1935

Colin Bean has sent in this photograph of the party in Margaret Street, Wigan, to celebrate King George V's Silver Jubilee, 1935. Colin is fifth from the left (the one with his head in the air, as usual!), while his brother Kenneth is fourth from the

left. Councillor Fairhurst is on the right; Colin thinks that he visited all the street parties in his ward, and at each one asked the children to stand and sing the National Anthem, and give three cheers for King George and Queen Mary.



Instant Recognition

Dear Sir,

Last week someone left a copy of the latest *Past Forward* in my reception area; this was the first time that I had seen this magazine and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it.

On looking through I found the picture of "Aunt Hanna Brooks". I instantly recognised Doris and Albert Calderbank. Albert and my father were cousins. I remember as a child Albert and Doris coming to Abram for visits as

they had moved along with other members of the family to Doncaster to work in the pits. Doris would come two or three times a year to visit her mother and her brother Lawrence. Aunt Hanna's nephew (I think his name was Bill) and his wife Kitty used to have the local 'outdoor' and ran this shop for many years. They had a daughter Eunice who married Leonard Houghton; I think Eunice still lives in Abram. Doris and Albert had a son by the name of Jackie.

Margaret Simm
Damar
1 Atholl Grove
Wigan WN3 5NA

A place of mystery

Dear Sir,

Does anyone have any information on a place of mystery which, long ago, was a part of the Upholland district.

On sheet 20 of the 1st edition of the 1" Ordnance Survey of England and Wales (Bolton and Blackburn) published about 1843, is marked a Whitley Hall. It lay to the S.E. of Walthew Green, near Roby Mill, on a road aptly named Whitley Road.

My mother grew up

HOPE STREET CHAPEL, LIVERPOOL

Dear Alastair,

I can confirm, as a native Liverpoolian (make that Evertonian), that there was a church in Hope Street, Liverpool. Bob Dobson raised this query in Issue no. 30 regarding Thomas Chapman.

Hope Street Chapel opened its doors in 1837, and in 1841 became the Anglican Church of St. John the Baptist. It later became the Hope Hall Cinema, and the site is now the Everyman Theatre.

I was recently told about a World War II WAAF camp on the Winstanley Hall Estate. Has anyone any information on this?

Derek Cross
7 Chervil Walk
Highfield
Wigan WN3 6AR

in Roby Mill during the 1920's/1940's, and had never heard of it – indeed, she had never heard of Whitley Road, even though an Upholland Urban District 'official plan' of the 1950's clearly shows the road (but no Whitley Hall).

I read *Past Forward* with great interest, and have learned many things from its pages, so any help with this item of query would be gratefully received.

Chris Derbyshire
48 Tennyson Drive
Billinge
Wigan WN5 7EJ

Death of Mr Les Hill

Dear Mr. Gillies,

Readers in Golborne may be sorry to hear of the death of Mr. Les Hill, for many years Postman at Golborne Post Office, as was his father "Billy Hill". Les served in the R.A.F. during the war years, then went to live in Queensland, Australia with his wife Lucy and two sons.

There was an interesting letter from Les in the Summer 1997 issue of *Past Forward*, in which he reminisces about old times in Golborne.

William Hill
107 Broadwater Ave
Maroochydore QLD 4558
Australia

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Who? Where?



Firstly, we have received a belated, but definite, identification of the top left **Who? Where?** photograph in issue no. 29. This shows Mrs Kathleen Shegog, on behalf of the National Children's Homes, receiving a cheque for money collected by children representing different Wigan churches and schools; the presentation took place in the Linaker Hall, Wigan, c.1972 (see also letter on page 2).

The bottom right photograph in issue no. 30 produced a good response. It was taken at Bickershaw Colliery, c.1948, and shows Tom Robinson, ex-mayor of Leigh (3rd from left). Bickershaw Colliery is also featured on p29. The church (bottom left) has been positively identified as Bradshawgate Primitive Methodist Chapel, Leigh.

If you can provide any more information on photographs from past issues or think you can identify any of the four below, please contact Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942 404432).

