

PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Heritage Service

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CELEBRATING 50 ISSUES OF PAST FORWARD



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Letter from the Editorial Team

PAST FORWARD has reached a notable landmark, with this, its 50th edition! It first appeared on the 'heritage scene' in the summer of 1991, boasting eight pages! Now there are 36, packed with fascinating insights into the borough's heritage provided by you, the readers. Well done! The magazine is constantly evolving, and we plan to introduce new features, our first is the Friends of the History Shop Newsletter. However, we do need your help, and you can do that by letting us know what you would like to see in future editions.

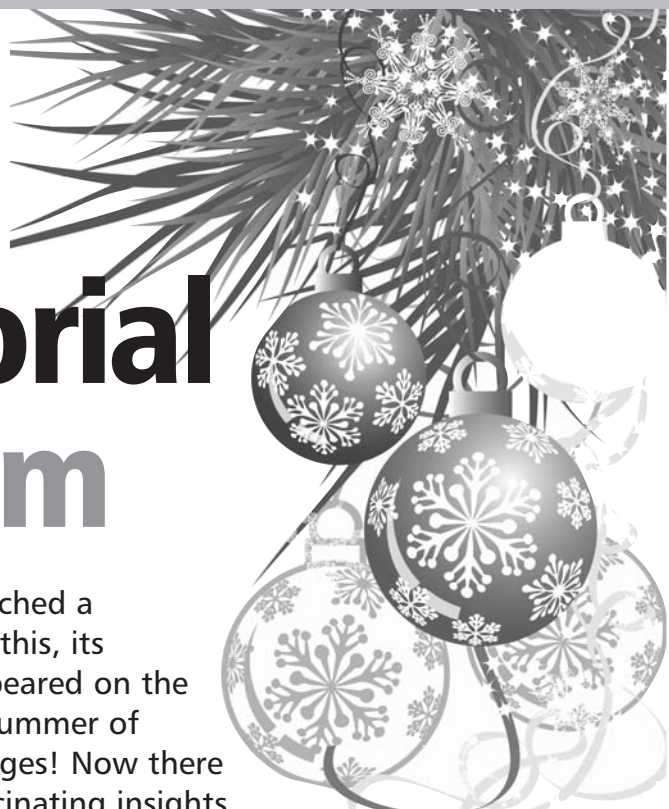
We would like to say a big thank you to Stephen Lythgoe, Reader in Residence at Leigh Library, who has very kindly assisted in the editing of this edition.

Finally, if you are still on the lookout for that elusive Christmas present with a local flavour, we have it here at the History Shop. We wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year, and keep reading **PAST FORWARD!**

Copy Dates for Issue 51

Contributors please note that the period for receipt of material for the next publication is from Friday 30th January until Friday 20th February.

The Editor, Wigan Heritage Service, The History Shop,
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU
y.webb@wlct.org



Information for Contributors

Contributors often ask questions about submitting articles for publication. We have listed some useful information below. It is rather dry reading, but hopefully will help you send in your article, and let you know what to expect.

Publication

Publication of articles is at the discretion of the editorial team, who cannot guarantee publication, and reserve the right to edit material submitted.

Material selected for publication will remain on file until published, after which date it will be disposed of.

Rejected material will be disposed of immediately.

Submission of Articles

Contributions are preferred in electronic format, however, type and handwritten submissions will be accepted. The maximum length should be about 1500 words. Articles are much more interesting if they are accompanied by illustrations, so if you have them, send them in. If you wish to be published in a particular edition, please ensure that you submit by our advertised deadline.

Your submissions must include your name and address. Anonymous articles will not be published, nor kept on file.

All contributions received, will be acknowledged.

We cannot return material, with the exception of photographs, unless requested and accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope.

Requests for Information to be Passed to Contributors

We occasionally receive requests from readers or other contributors to pass information on. We will not pass on your contact details unless you have given us permission to do so, eg published on our 'Can You Help' page. We will ask if you wish to receive such information, but of course you are under no obligation to do so.

Contact Details

y.webb@wlct.org or The Editor, **PAST FORWARD**, History Shop, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NQ.



Good Luck Hilary!

Hilary Fairclough, well known to many of you who regularly visited the History Shop, retired at the end of August. She was our longest serving staff member, and has seen many changes in the Heritage Service. Originally the custodian of the Powell Museum, she was involved with the development of Wigan Pier and the History Shop, working on many exhibitions, with collections and archives. Latterly, Hilary was a valued member of our front of house team. Hilary is passionate about photography (we all admired her photographs, which captured the very essence of Lakeland life, on show in our Feast of Photography exhibitions) and will now have more time to indulge her hobby! We will all miss her, but wish her the very best of luck in her retirement.



Amsterdam 1928

Leigh's Olympic Athletes

By Tony Ashcroft

In the summer of 1928, the IX Olympiad was held in Amsterdam. These Games heralded a new phase in Olympic History

The stadium was designed by Dutch architect Jan Wils, and won him a Gold Medal at the Olympic Arts Competition. For the first time a flame was ignited on the Marathon Tower in front of the newly built Olympic Stadium. This led to the introduction of the Olympic Flame to the Games.

The creator of the modern Olympic Movement, Pierre de Coubertin was prevented from attending by

illness, but he was succeeded by Henri de Baillet-Latour as new IOC President. De Coubertin had always been against women's participation in the track and field events, and consequently women had been ineligible to compete in them. However an organisation which represented women had organised its own games and forced the IOC to compromise. So 1928 saw women competitors in track and field events for the first time. The total number of athletes competing was around 3000 (this included 290 women) from 46 nations.

One of the most successful medallists of the Games was swimmer Johnny Weissmuller who went on to become a film star in the Tarzan films. The British athlete Lord David Burghley became a Gold Medal winner for the 400 metre hurdles.

Amongst the competitors in the British team were three Leythers, one man and two women; the high jumper Geoffrey Turner and gymnasts Ada Smith and Hilda Smith. Although Turner was unsuccessful in gaining a medal, Ada and Hilda Smith helped the

ladies gymnast team to third place and a bronze medal. Whilst Ada and Hilda shared the same surname, they were unrelated. However both represented the same team, that of Leigh's Marsh Gymnasium.

Geoffrey Turner

One of the longest-standing UK records in the inter-war period was Howard Baker's clearance of 6' 5" (1.956) at Huddersfield in 1929, a mark that survived as the UK record until Alan Paterson came on the scene after the second World War.

Baker's mark was equalled, however, in 1929, by a much less celebrated athlete - but one who died without reaching his full potential. That athlete was Geoffrey Turner, who competed for Earlestown Viaduct Athletics Club and Leigh AC in Lancashire.

Born Ignatius Geoffrey Barker Turner on 16 May 1907, the only son of Mr and Mrs Alfred Turner of Woodlawn, Green Lane, Leigh, he was educated at Hawks Yard College near Lichfield and was employed at the Pennington Mill Company with a view to entering the cotton manufacturing trade.

Turner started in athletics when, just casually visiting the grounds of the Earlestown Athletic Club, he saw a group of men high jumping. Without stopping to change he cleared the standard they were attempting in his ordinary attire, and was persuaded soon afterwards to commence training. On his first public attempt (Liverpool, 1926) he cleared 5' 1" but three weeks later he jumped 5' 6" for second place in the Northern Counties Championships. From 1927-31 Turner would win five successive Northern titles, starting with 5' 11" in 1927. He had become one of the best jumpers in the UK by 1927-fifth at



the AAAs, for instance - and made his International debut that summer with 5' 9" for Fourth v France.

Turner's standard improved further in 1928 with a season's best of 6' 2" (1.87) at the Northern Championships. This was enough to make the Olympic Team, though his best in Amsterdam of 1.77 (5' 8") was insufficient to reach the final, as 1.83 (6') was needed to qualify.

His "day of days" was at the unprepossessing Widnes Police Sports on 20 July 1929, where, jumping off scratch in a handicap contest, Turner cleared 6' 5"/1.956, to equal Howard Baker's record. Though the mark might not meet modern specifications in terms of the quality of officials, it was nonetheless the third equal best jump in the world in 1929 - and ranked Turner as the top European.

Days later, in Burnley, he jumped 6' 4" to confirm his excellent form, and in clearing 6' 0" in the match v Germany on 24 August he matched the best efforts of his German rivals.

Turner cleared 6' 0" and later 6' 1" to tie for second place in the AAA's

in 1930 and topped the English rankings with 6' 3" (1.905) at the Fylde Police Sports, St. Anne's-on-Sea. He was only placed sixth at the inaugural Empire Games, though, when a medal might have been anticipated.

In 1931 Turner topped the rankings again with another 6' 3" at the Fylde Police Sports. He had a good win in the International v France and cleared 1.87 (6' 2") in Cologne in a later match v Germany. All looked set for another Olympic campaign in the following year.

At the time Turner's trainer was Paddy Duff, also of Leigh, who worked as a collier driller up to 1940, then at Royal Ordnance Factory, Risley. Duff was also trainer to Leigh Rugby Club, the Police and to several other athletes. He died in 1952 aged 63.

By 1932, aside from his athletics career, Turner had decided on a change in occupation and was set to take up farming - indeed he was about to take over a large farm at Stretton, Cheshire. He was engaged to Norah Spellman of Earlestown and they would have married in the summer.

Tragically he was taken ill with septic tonsils and his local doctor called in specialists from Manchester and London. A blood transfusion from another young man of 24 was tried but despite every effort to preserve his life the case proved hopeless and he died of septicaemia at his father's house on May 2 1932, nine weeks after being diagnosed.

Turner was buried at Leigh Cemetery. His fiancée Norah was quoted as describing him as having a happy, generous and likeable personality and he had friends in many quarters. Later Norah inherited his family house, Woodlawn, but she never married.

Ada Smith

Miss Ada Smith had been a member of the Marsh Gymnasium since 1914. She held the George Holden Cup for four years, 1922-24-25-26.



Ada Smith's Olympic Pass

She felt it was time to give someone else the chance to win it, and was presented with a silver cup by the Gymnasium committee. She came third in the Northern Counties competition, and third in the English Championship Gymnastic competition, open to Great Britain and the North of Ireland.

In the item of fancy skipping, in the all England competition she came first.

In November 1947 Ada married Mr Kazimierze Miga of Lwow, Poland in a service at Leigh Parish Church. She was born in June 1903 and died in Manor Fold, Mealhouse Lane, Atherton in August 1994.

Hilda Smith

Hilda Smith was the daughter of Mrs Smith and the late Dan Smith, butcher, Leigh Road. She was employed on the clerical staff of the Anchor Cable Works. She was also a member of the Anchor Musical Society.

She was the youngest lady gymnast selected to go to Amsterdam. When the list of names for the first test was sent to Mr. William Major, principal of the Marsh Gymnasium, her name did not appear. Feeling the slight very keenly, seeing that the Marsh Gymnasium had three in the first seven out of twenty-six competitors at the English Championship competition, Mr. Major felt it his duty to appeal to the Olympic Committee, with the result that she was permitted to go through to the first test in which she was successful.

Her build lent itself particularly to calisthenics. She won various badges in competitions at the Marsh Gymnasium. In the last competition she won the Marsh Gold Badge, and was only one point off winning the George Holden Cup. She gained the special medal of the Amateur Gymnastic Association. She represented the Marsh Gymnasium in a team in the Manchester and East Lancashire A.G.A. in 1924.



Hilda Smith

Hilda who was born in September 1909, died in January 1995 at Leigh Infirmary.

I would like to thank John Taylor of Leigh Harriers for providing information on the three local personalities.

Gymnastics Medal Table

TEAM COMBINED EXERCISES

According to current rules, each nation's final score is determined by combining the scores of the top five performers on each apparatus.

1896-1924 not held.

1928 T:5 N:5 D:8.10

17 May-12 August

Total Pts.

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1. HOL (Petronella van Randwijk, Jacomina van den Berg, Anna Polak, Helena Nordheim, Alida van den Bos, Hendrika van Rumt, Anna van der Vegt, Elka de Levie, Jacoba Stelma, Estella Agsteribbe) | 316.75 |
| 2. ITA (Bianca Ambrosetti, Lavinia Gianoni, Luigina Perversi, Diana Pizzavini, Luigina Giavotti, Luisa Tanzini, Carolina Tronconi, Ines Vercesi, Rita Vittadini, Virginia Giorgi, Germana Malabarba, Clara Marangoni) | 289.00 |
| 3. GBR (Margaret Hartley, Edith Carrie Pickles, Annie Broadbent, Amy Jagger, Ada Smith, Lucy Desmond, Doris Woods, Jessie Kite, Isabel "Queenie" Judd, Marjorie "Midge" Moreman, Ethel Seymour, Hilda Smith) | 258.25 |

FRIENDS OF THE HISTORY SHOP

FRIENDS OF THE HISTORY SHOP



Helping with Local and Family History in Wigan and Leigh

Who are we?

We are a group of committed volunteers from all walks of life volunteering our own time and help. The Friends was initially set up to improve access to genealogy records such as church registers. Visitors to the History Shop can now access these records through indexes. There are now indexes to census, Church registers and cemetery burial registers, thus simplifying the checking of entries from microfilm.

What do we do?

We transcribe and index information from microfilm and put it in an easily readable form. These can be viewed at the History Shop. We also help out on the Family History help desk and help visitors who need help tracing their family tree. We also index newspapers and cuttings books and help with simple tasks involving our book stock such as re-labelling, re-covering and some cataloguing.

What do we offer?

We hold family history workshops every other Wednesday. We offer one to one session with an experienced

volunteer who will help with starting to trace your family tree. This is aimed at beginners. There is a nominal fee per session of £2.50. An information pack is included in this cost. Copies made during the session are free of charge. We have two sessions 1.30pm to 3pm and 3pm to 4.30pm every other Wednesday.

Can we help you?

Are you stuck with your family tree or do you want to know how to start your family tree? Then come along to a workshop. It's easy to book, just come along to the History Shop or phone 01942 828128 or email heritage@wlct.org

Can you help?

Can you spare a few hours a week? Volunteers are most welcome no matter what knowledge you have. Are you interested in photography or local history? Would you like to help out at Leigh Local History or in Archives? Our Archive at Leigh has thousands of photographs of which 5,000 will be digitised and made accessible through the Internet. Can you help with this?

Ongoing projects

Indexing of cemetery registers and registers of Billinge St Aidan.

Issue no 1
November 2008
NEWSLETTER OF THE
Friends of Wigan Heritage Services

Volunteers
Working for and behalf of Wigan Heritage Services

In this issue
P1 c1 Volunteers meeting
P1 c2 Friends meeting
P2 c1 Constitution

Volunteers meeting 1st October 2008

Volunteers of the History Shop along with some staff members were invited to a meeting and discussions headed by Philip Butler. The meeting started with an informal get together over tea, coffee and biscuits before the main meeting starting at eleven o'clock.

Philip outlined the plans and what would be happening when the buildings moved in with the modifications to the building. A lot of work beforehand and after moving all the books back and forth from the Taylor Gallery for the roof to be repaired be appealed for volunteers for this task. Temporary re-location of the Family History section will be held at Wigan Library for the duration of the modifications. Times of opening will be posted at a later date. The Workshops should still go ahead and not be affected by the move to the Library. Problem arose with a venue for "Outreach" with Trencherfield Mill being unavailable.

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Help Wanted
Volunteers required for moving the books from the Taylor Gallery before and after refurbishment
Dianne Teskey- Outreach would like volunteers for research
Lisa Keys would like help at the Archives sorting photographs prior to digitalising

Introduction
Each member present introduced themselves and explained what staff or volunteering work that they did at the History Shop and what jobs they would like to volunteer for in the future. It was heart-warming to see so many people volunteering their time for such a worthy cause and proud to do it. There was a vast array of volunteering tasks including Archiving, Help Desk, and Workshops, Card indexing, Transcribing micro film, Packing books and indexing to General helping with the stage props for the Learning Team.
Philip Butler, Diane Teskey and Christine Watts praised all the volunteers for all their efforts.

Thank You
Friends meeting
The "Friends" meeting convened after the Volunteers meeting with Philip Butler heading the meeting. He requested that the group discuss their purpose and future given the time elapsed from the last meeting and the changes with the venue. Max Finney stated very clearly that he felt the Friends should continue and was reflected all through the

group. Max also stated that the volunteers should join the Friends and be invited to join the meetings. Philip Butler suggested that a committee be formed within it we could progress as our own group and call meetings ourselves at regular intervals.

Chairman of Friends
Election of Officers took place with all posts duly proposed and seconded. David Lythgoe as retiring Chairman was re-elected as Chairman.
Chairman David Lythgoe was elected as Chairman and would also represent us on the Cultural Partnership.
Vice Chairman Gerald Marsden was duly elected vice-chairman
Secretary Max Finney was duly elected as Secretary
Barbara Davies would be in charge of projects liaising with Christine Watts and volunteers.

Newsletter compiler John Wogan volunteered for this project and would also coordinate for Past Forward.

Other matters
Binders for Past Forward as we cannot purchase these anymore it were suggested we design our own.
Would workshops continue through the refurbishment. Yes? Workshops printed matter to be signed for Copyright issues.
Past Forward the Friends to have dedicated space and contribute more material.
Projects a lively discussion took place, formulating in Barbara Davies being appointed to this position.
Old Grammar School plaques find out more with collections team.
Full Index for Past Forward one existed but needed updating AOB and next meeting 10 Dec 2008 12.30-1.15

Constitution
Friends of Wigan Heritage Service

This was the Heritage Service Constitution from Past Forward 23.

Parties involved
Wigan Heritage Service – part of Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
Friends of Wigan Heritage Service

Aims & Objectives:
To further the aims set out in the mission statement of Wigan Heritage Service and the objectives set out in the Access Plan 1998 – 2001
Specifically to enable the Heritage Service to provide an improved customer service and greater public access

How it achieves these objectives
By providing project work groups, function/event organisation/voluntary help, opportunities for fundraising, local knowledge/information, supporting, regular meetings, page in Past Forward

Governing Body
Initially chaired by the Heritage Service
Suggested Committee of 6
Chair
Secretary
Treasurer
Group / project representative
• Museums
• Archives
• Local History
Correspondent – regional, national, international

Election & appointment
Election – nomination and vote through Past Forward and Past Forward mailing list

Appointment – local appointments by Heritage Service

The first method is preferable and would provide the nominations and then the committee, but will take longer. The second needs to remain an option dependant upon response.

Should the group for any reason cease to exist, all assets goods and services of the group will become the assets goods and services of Wigan Heritage Service. These assets would be treated as a donation to the Heritage Service to be used only for the following purposes:

- To improve/develop the Heritage Service
- To provide improved access to collections
- To improve the storage and documentation of the collections
- To further Heritage communications through Past Forward
- To help purchase items for the collection

According to the rules laid down by the Museums and Galleries Commission and the codes of the Museums association.

There were then notes headed: Friends – How will it work? Meetings / Past Forward / Activities / Projects
These can be viewed on PF no. 23 p15.

Next meeting
Since the Constitution was first compiled a vast amount of changes have occurred and the articles as it reads is out dated and needs bringing into line with all the changes that have happened. The Friends will discuss this at the next meeting.

Join the Friends.

I would like to become a "Friend of Wigan Heritage Service" and receive copies of the Past Forward through the post.

Name _____
Address _____
Postcode _____
Tel _____
Signed _____
Date _____

Please state which issue you wish your membership to begin _____

Please find enclosed my cheque for £5 (made payable to Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust)

Please return to the History Shop or via freepost ;
Past Forward ;
Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust,
FREEPOST NATW1645,
Wigan
WN1 1XZ

For Publication
"Friends" I am now your link to Past Forward of which we hope to have our own page in future issues. If you have found anything interesting whilst searching your Family tree or found any interesting artefacts or have any interesting stories to tell childhood/work experience etc we would like to hear from you. If you would like to have anything published or if you have any queries regarding the "Friends" please contact me at johnwogan@btvonder.co.uk
Or alternatively
John Wogan,
C/o History Shop,
Library Street,
Wigan,
WN1 1NU
John Wogan coordinator
Newsletter/Past Forward
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TRUST



My Grandfather

By Robert Berry

Further to my article on Robert Berry, my grandfather, in Issue 47 of Past Forward, perhaps I may be permitted to fill in some more of the details of his life.

Robert was an only child, born in Skelmersdale in 1872. He lived at 78, Sandy Lane.

When it was realised that he was left handed he was forced, as was the custom in those days, to use his right hand for the usual manual tasks. This does not seem to have caused any detriment to his later development since he became ambidextrous and could write in "copper-plate" with his right hand.

It is interesting to note that when his father William (born 1841) got married in 1872 he and his younger brother John, who was a witness, both signed the register in "copper-plate", the handwriting of the Upholland parish clerk being of noticeably poorer quality!

Also his grandfather Robert (born 1800) signed the marriage register in 1823 in the hand of someone who was used to writing. (Not the usual childlike scrawl of someone who had practised writing it for just that one special occasion).

The above evidence of handwriting ability becomes more remarkable when it is considered that his father William seems to have been a coal miner for most of his working life with occasional excursions into agriculture. His grandfather Robert was a handloom weaver and agricultural labourer with just one

attempt as a husbandman (small tenant farmer).

After leaving school in the mid 1880's my grandfather Robert was employed in a chemist's shop in Skelmersdale.

Perhaps the chemist had approached Robert's headteacher and asked him to recommend for possible employment one of the lads in the top class who was strong, willing and a good writer. This kind of approach by small local businesses to schools was still carried out as late as the 1950s.

In the later 1880's Robert moved to Wigan with his father and mother (Ellen) and settled in at 18, Oldfield Street, Poolstock.

It appears that he was learning to play the violin at this time since he had lessons with a professor of music, one of two in Wigan at the time. Certainly money would have been available, in a small family situation, to pay for his tuition. Robert used to tell the tale of how the professor had to go away from Wigan for a while and, before leaving, he gave Robert and a fellow male pupil pieces of music to practise while he was away. At the first lesson on his return, the professor invited the other pupil to demonstrate his prowess. When it became apparent that the pupil hadn't been practising, the professor flew into a rage, grabbed the violin and broke it over the pupil's head!

Robert, however, was apparently a serious student. He accumulated a large amount of sheet music; and also tried his hand at violin manufacture as a leisure

occupation, and fashioned one out of a large cigar box.

Unfortunately his collection of violins was sold when he died to help with my Grandma's day to day living expenses.

Recently one of the collection was presented to my brother Bill by an old friend and proved to be a violin of surprisingly good quality.

Bill was a violinist for many years with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (formerly the Scottish National) and on "retiring" was snapped up by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra for a while. So evidently Grandfather's talents were passed on to our generation!

In 1891, at the age of 18, Robert was a railway porter, presumably at a Wigan station.

In 1895, he was a labourer at Worsley Mesnes Colliery. His job there was filling coal wagons manually by shovel, for which he was ideally suited, because of his size and strength. He recalled watching fellow workers, from Eastern Europe, dipping their fingers in the grease boxes on the wagons and eating what was presumably some kind of animal fat!

Later Robert joined the Lancashire Constabulary, serving as a constable in Rochdale and Blackburn Higher divisions from 1895 to 1898.

In Nov. 1898 he married Esther Bown at St. James', Poolstock. I don't know how they came to meet, since Esther was born and brought up in Alfretton, Derbyshire, and in 1891, at the age of 14, she was living with an

aunt's family in Leyton, near London in domestic service.

My father, William Henry, towards the end of his life could not provide an answer, but no doubt his sister Nellie, who died first, would have known.

Quite recently my brother provided the answer.

In a book of Grandma's that he has, there was a draft letter written on the inside cover. The book was a Sunday School prize, dated March 1894 and awarded in the Leyton area.

Grandma had written:-
"My dear father and mother, just a line in answer to your last welcome letter. I have been looking forward to you coming to Rochdale. It is so nice to have you come to see us. We all seem very happy and comfortable now and hope that we shall continue so. I am your affectionate daughter EB."

The letter is quite nicely composed, especially for a working class girl. Her mother seems to have been literate even though her father wasn't. The letter also indicates that Grandma was not alone and there is some evidence which suggests that two or three of her sisters may have been in service in the Rochdale area at about that time.

Thus, Robert and Esther were in Rochdale at about the same time and that is, no doubt, where they met.

Grandma didn't speak in a Derbyshire accent. Perhaps her years in service from the ages of 12 to 21 resulted in her speech becoming more refined.

At the time of their marriage Robert was working as a wagon repairer and living with his parents at 6, Sandon Street, Poolstock, which was a grocer's shop.

This became their marital home for the next 14 years. His mother Ellen ran the shop but was too soft-hearted to make much profit from

it. No doubt she let some customers have goods without payment even when eventual settling of the bill was doubtful.

Grandfather told the story of an incident from the early years of his marriage. Robert and Esther were walking along a street in Wigan when they came across a man being attacked by three others. Influenced by his police training, Robert immediately removed his jacket with the intention of helping the victim. Esther, a sturdy girl, tore the shirt off his back in an attempt to hold him back, fearing for his safety! The attackers, realising that they were about to experience some serious opposition, broke off the fight and made off, shouting back to Robert, "We'll get thee later!"

A few days passed and Robert was making his way alone along Chapel Lane towards Poolstock when one of the three men overtook him at a run. When Robert reached the next street corner all three were waiting for him!

They began to attack but his quick temper boosted his strength considerably. Unwisely coming at him singly, the first two were sent crashing to the pavement with well-aimed left hooks, and the third, when he saw what awaited him, turned tail and ran away!

By the time that my grandparents' first child, Elizabeth Ellen, was born, in 1902, Robert had changed his occupation again and was working as a cooper apparently alongside his father.

Yet another job change, to general labourer, had occurred by 1906 when my father, William Henry, was born.

In 1909, in Wigan Market Place, three adjacent shops were reconstructed and transformed into Lowe's large new store. Robert was employed as one of the labourers during the construction which involved some encroachment into All Saints churchyard.

They had to open up some of the graves and he reckoned that some of the remains were remarkably well preserved, one skull still having hair attached!

The well-drained hill-top situation and the presence of sand below the surface, as revealed when The Galleries were being built, may have been the reason for this. In 1912, when his mother Ellen died, the family moved to 30, Mill Lane, Upholland, across the road from what was then Heaton's farm.

At some time during the 1914-18 War, Robert was employed as a carpenter in Knowsley Park, Lord Derby's estate, helping to erect stables for the army horses which were quartered there, presumably prior to being shipped from Liverpool to the battlefields of Europe.

He was still employed as a carpenter in 1922 when their third and final child, Robert, was born. In 1926 he was recorded as being a collier, thus following for a while in the footsteps of his father William, who had died in 1917.

In the 1930's depression, like many other people, he found himself without regular employment although by then he was approaching what would now be regarded as retirement age.

There was occasional work to be had in agriculture, and he sometimes accompanied my father, doing the rounds of the local farms with the threshing-machine.

I believe the last time I saw him alive, when I was about 8 years old, he was sitting on a bench near the old mill in Mill Lane, chatting to a friend, no doubt entertaining him with some of his tales!

I remember him as a tall, burly man with a large moustache who could be rather moody at times, a characteristic that I sometimes share myself.

Robert died in July 1947, in his 75th year.

2968

Text and
photographs by
David Ward

and some of Wigan's surviving railway heritage



2968 at Bridgnorth, Severn Valley Railway

Some of you may be unaware just how much of Wigan's local railway heritage still exists in other parts of the country. There are many engines that are connected to Wigan preserved at steam railways and museums up and down the UK. The best known to local people is probably Wigan Coal and Iron Company built industrial saddle tank 'Lindsey.' A lot of local support and work was given to its' restoration in the 1980's and it ran for a time at Steamtown, Carnforth. It is now in store there, and has not steamed for several years, but its' survival is safe, though it is uncertain whether it will ever be restored or indeed be on display to the public again, as Carnforth is now closed to public as an engineering facility.

However there are several more active preserved survivors of the local area. One of the most active is Standard 4 76069, owned by Ian Riley and Son Limited of Bury. It is based at his engineering works at Bury, its' main function is to operate main line tours all over the country. 76079 was a workaday engine, built for both passenger and freight work, but by the time it came to Wigan there were very few steam worked passenger services in the area, as by then there were a larger number of diesels at work on British Railways. Therefore its main work was freight trips around the area and further afield, usually involving the transport of coal from the local mines. It was based at Springs

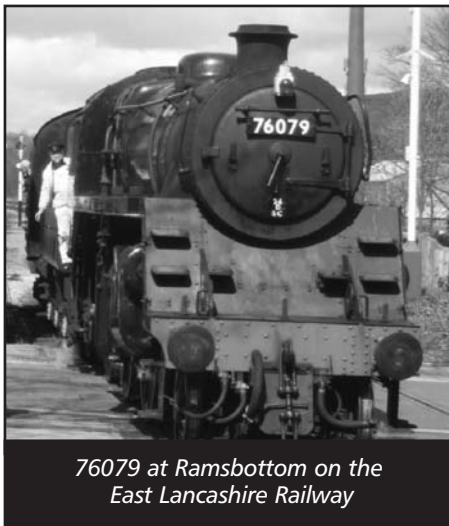
Branch shed, Lower Ince in the mid 1960's, and was part of a large batch of engines that upon finishing their service days in the area, were all sent to Woodham's scrapyards at Barry, South Wales as a mass purchase order.

Barry Scrapyard was the exception among the 1960's scrap dealers who dealt with surplus railway equipment. Dai Woodham took an interest in steam himself, so sidelined most of the locomotives in his yard and while his men concentrated on wagons and other railway equipment and so allowing time to preservation groups to get their funds together to buy and thus preserve the engines.

Over 200 engines were saved from the cutter's torch at Barry. Recently, another member of this batch has seen several years service on the Great Central Railway. This engine, 78019 is slightly smaller, being of a standard class 2 type.

They were primarily designed for local passenger services but at Wigan would have been used on light freight work and shunting. I have been lucky enough to fire this loco on the Great Central Railway, adding to my list of local engines worked.

So now onto the another surviving member of that batch of former Springs branch residents which is to me the most interesting of



76079 at Ramsbottom on the East Lancashire Railway

them all and is arguably the most historically significant: 2968...

2968 is what's called a Stanier Mogul. It isn't much to look at, but has a very important place in UK steam engine development. It was designed by Sir William Stanier in 1933, not long after he joined the London Midland and Scottish Railway Company (LMS) from the Great Western Railway's (GWR) Swindon Works. At that time the GWR was ahead of most other railway companies in terms of engine design. The LMS was somewhat behind, relying on the designs of the old Midland Railway's Derby Works. The only really decent engines that were around this area on the LMS were Horwich built products of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway (LYR), but after George Hughes, the Horwich designer had retired, following LYR's absorption into LMS, his practices and designs had been stopped in favour of Derby practice, due to the larger number of existing engines to their designs. Realising that they needed better engines to cope with rising traffic demands and higher speeds, Stanier was appointed from the GWR to shake up the LMS. His first design was the Stanier Mogul. It was based on the Horwich designed Crab mixed traffic engine, but had a GWR style, more efficient and tapered, higher pressure boiler along with other Swindon style modifications. The engine was a success for the mixed traffic work it was designed to do and 40 examples were built.

In fact so successful, that the design was developed later in Stanier's famous Black 5 design of which over 600 examples were eventually made. So it was the design that started the improvement of the LMS engine fleet, with subsequent LMS designs all being based around similar components and style. This standardisation practice was copied from the GWR and revolutionised the LMS system, and made Stanier into one of the most respected engine designers of all time.

2968 was built as part of the batch of 40 Moguls in 1934 at Crewe. It lead an uneventful and normal working life being based at different sheds including Crewe, Holyhead, Willesden (London) and Chester before it came to Springs Branch in 1964, by which time the LMS had become part of the nationalised British railways, who renumbered it as 42968.

When it came to Wigan, like the other engines mentioned it was mainly utilised on freight work around the area, but in 1966 had a brief spell in the limelight. It was used on an enthusiast's excursion of many of the freight only railways in the Wigan area. It became part of the batch sent to Barry in 1967, but it's working life was far from over.

As it resided, rusting away in Barry Scrapyard enthusiasts had become aware that by now this was the only Stanier Mogul still in existence, and it was decided that an effort should be made to save this historically significant engine design from being confined to the history books.

The Stanier Mogul Fund was set up with the aim to buy it from the scrapyard and restore it to operational condition. In 1973 sufficient funds had been gathered and the engine was towed out of Barry and moved to the Severn Valley Railway at Bridgnorth, Shropshire which was to be its' new home.

The long task of restoration from a rusty hulk commenced, as well as the often overlooked huge publicity and fund raising drive. The groups efforts were rewarded in 1990, as the engine finally ran under its own steam again, restored to 1930s LMS livery. The engine was also certified to operate on the main line and ran a number of excursions around the UK. The most notable was when it substituted at short notice for 60009, "Union of South Africa", a large express engine, on an excursion from Crewe to Carlisle. This trip took it past Springs Branch again, now a diesel depot. I managed to photograph it



2968 at Arley on the Severn Valley Railway in typically well turned out condition

passing Springs Branch, but only really realised the historic connection later on.

Later, on that trip, it went over the famous Settle and Carlisle railway, a demanding and challenging route, the loco surprised many observers by proving more than capable to the task in hand, storming up the hills and it earned itself the nick name the 'Mighty Mogul.'

Double headed with another Severn Valley engine, GWR mogul 7325, they became the first engines in preservation to ascend the Lickey Incline near Birmingham, the steepest gradient on a UK main line.



78019 at Loughborough on the Great Central Railway.

The engine was winning many new fans, as the class in service days was small in number and eclipsed by the Black 5s, however 2968 was proving that Stanier's Moguls were indeed an excellent engine in their own right. This came to a temporary halt in 1998, when it was withdrawn from traffic due to the condition of its boiler, however after a swift overhaul, thanks to the superb money raising capabilities of the Stanier Mogul Fund, and monetary help from those who had enjoyed its performances so far, 2968 re-entered traffic in 2003.

This time it was turned out in British Railways Black livery as

42968, complete with a Springs Branch shed plate, as it would have been during its time in Wigan, however nowadays as a cherished engine rather than an everyday workhorse, its appearance is far cleaner!

Unfortunately, it has not returned to the main line due to the cost of new, expensive, modern electronic safety devices, but is very busy as part of the Severn Valley Railway's engine fleet operating passenger services up and down the line. It is not unknown for it to clock up to 10,000 miles a year between Bridgnorth to Kidderminster. As a unique survivor it is in demand by other railways to hire it. It has visited in recent years the Keighley and Worth Valley, West Somerset, Great Central and Llangollen Railways, gaining new fans and impressing engine crews everywhere it goes, as it is a very capable machine.

The combination of small wheels and a good steaming boiler makes it very powerful with good hill climbing and acceleration abilities, well suited to preserved railways.

So where do I fit into the story? Well during my spare time I work on the Severn Valley Railway and have been lucky enough to be fireman on 2968 many times and it is indeed one of my favourites. So much so that I am now a paid up member of the Stanier Mogul Fund, along with many other people, and if I am ever at Bridgnorth and 2968 is there and not in service, I try my best to give it a good clean.

If you have enjoyed this article and would like to know more about 2968, the group always welcomes new members and

donations. The more money the fund receives, the further into the future the engine will operate and not be confined to static display, delighting future generations and continuing to be a working piece of Wigan's history!



2968 at Bridgnorth in 1998 in LMS 1930's condition

The fund also archives photographs of other Stanier Moguls and Springs Branch shed in the 1960s, and provides members with a bi-annual magazine about the engine and recently documented archives.

The contact address for the Stanier Mogul Fund is Mr. J. Norman, The Secretary, 7 Chaucer Place, Abram, Wigan, Lancs WN2 5QB.

The fund also has a website: www.staniermogulfund.org.uk

2968 is currently based on the Severn Valley Railway which operates between Bridgnorth and Kidderminster in the West Midlands, however while it is not always in traffic, it is usually viewable to the public, but if travelling to see the engine, it is best to get in touch with the SVR first.

Contact details for the SVR are 01299 403816 or www.svr.co.uk.

Maypole Colliery Disaster

Centenary Commemoration Weekend 16th-17th August 2008



Geoff Jones (Chair – Red Rose Steam Society) led the guided walk as well as delivering the talk and slideshow later the same day and giving an account of the disaster at the Commemoration Service.

The weekend of the 16th and 17th of August heralded the centenary commemoration of the Maypole Pit Disaster in Abram.

If you managed to read the last issue of Past Forward and Chris Watts' excellent article about the tragedy, you will know that the Maypole Colliery Disaster happened just after 5 o'clock on the afternoon of Tuesday 18th August; 75 men and boys were killed and a whole community's worst fears were realised.

To mark this occasion and to remember the victims of the Maypole Disaster as well as the thousands of people who have lost their lives in the pursuit of coal, Abram Community Link organised a full programme of events which included a guided walk around local areas of coal mining interest, a talk and slide show about coal mining history, a commemoration service at the original site of the Maypole Colliery, a parade through the former pit village and rededication of the Memorial in Abram Churchyard culminating in a commemoration service on the actual day of the anniversary – Monday 18th August. The rededication of the Memorial was based on the service held at the original dedication, and this archival research was undertaken by the Reverend June Steventon of Abram Parish Church.

An exhibition was on display in the church which portrayed details of the Maypole Colliery Disaster and Abram over the past hundred years, and also featured mementos and recollections of local people and the effect the disaster had on their lives.

Just under 1,000 people participated in the commemoration weekend, and visitors included Councillors from Mayo County Council and relatives of those lost in the disaster who hailed from Ireland, as well as people from the

locality and the region. Members of Abram Community Link have since made a reciprocal visit to County Mayo and were graciously entertained by civic dignitaries and the local community.

A new memorial plaque (donated by Bloor Homes) was unveiled by Sir Patrick Duffy and John Kennedy during the Sunday Commemoration service. The well organised subsequent procession march through the town was made up of local groups and organisations who were all honoured at being such an important part of the proceedings; these groups included local and visiting dignitaries and clergy, Tyldesley Brass Band, descendants of those involved in the disaster, Abram Morris Dancers, 15th Wigan Boys Brigade and 15th Wigan Girls Association, 5th Ince Holy Family Girl Guides and Brownies, 1st Abram Scouts, Cubs and Beavers and members of the local and visiting community.



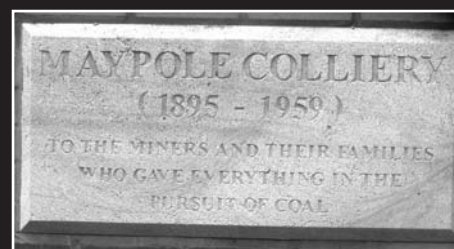
Participants over the weekend included Councillor Joe Mellett from Mayo County Council (4th from left), Irish relatives of those involved in the disaster (left of Councillor Mellett) and Eamonn Connor, Chair – Abram Community Link (3rd from right).

At a small gathering following the procession at Abram Community Centre held for dignitaries and families affected by the disaster, Councillor Mellett presented Heritage Services with a bound collection of

newspaper articles from Mayo about the Maypole Colliery Disaster. This has been accessioned into Heritage Service's collection, and is available for the public to view.

Fitting reminders of the tragic events of 1908 can be viewed around the former pit village; a tree was planted before the centenary which holds a commemoration plaque, and a pit tub sits at the entrance of a new housing estate adjacent to the former colliery site.

Two commemoration stones have been set in each of the two pillars on the entrance to the former Maypole Colliery site. One of the stones displays the 1908 date, and was actually removed from a gable end of a mine building prior to its demolition. The commemoration stone opposite reads 'Maypole Colliery 1895-1959. To the Miners and their families who gave everything in the pursuit of coal'.



The new memorial plaque donated by Bloor Homes.

Abram Community Link would like these poignant markers of the tragedy of lives lost in the collieries in Abram and beyond to stand as a reminder and awareness raiser to future generations of their coal mining heritage.

Abram Community Link would like to thank the following sponsors for their financial, practical and moral support:

ABRAM PARISH CHURCH

HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND

WIGAN LEISURE & CULTURE TRUST (HERITAGE SERVICES)

COUNCILLOR EUNICE SMETHURST

COUNCILLOR CARL SWEENEY

COUNCILLOR EDDIE RUSSON.

"Do you remember?"

By E Dakin

Our House

Recession, recession, recession. Day after day the message is loud and clear. No one will escape! Money, jobs and essential goods are in short supply.

Once again the pawn shops are thriving. In the futile attempt to beat the latest doom and gloom down turn, high street shops wave their tantalising SALE signs in a desperate bid to attract custom.

Bricks and mortar too, are crumbling before our very eyes as the housing market is now witnessing the worst property crash since The Great War. FOR SALE signs are removed and replaced by TO LET signs, as the struggle goes on.

Young couples wanting a place of their own are in a quandary. To buy or not to buy? To sell or not to sell?

Now that was one dilemma that the working class Wiganers of times gone by never had to face; because every house, and I mean every house (where I lived anyway) was landlord owned.

I was born and raised with my two brothers and a sister in the bottom house of Miry Lane, off Wallgate, next door to Gallagher's bone works.

Can you imagine living next door to a works whose produce was bone-meal

fertiliser, glue and sausage skins, all derived from farm animals? In those days the intestines (rops) from slaughtered pigs were used for sausage skins; and Gallagher's had a "rop shop" where they were thoroughly cleaned and produced wholesale to make delicious beef and pork bangers.

The place was heaving with rats, whose staple diet was the firm's bone-meal and animal fat, and with a stagnant oasis called owd Nick's pond close by to slake their thirst, they bred relentlessly.

Those long, hot summer days were unforgettable. Apart from the stench from the bone works, thousands of flies and bluebottles swarmed, indoors and outdoors alike.

The yellow, twisted flycatchers hung from living room ceilings were soon smothered with the dead and the dying and had to be changed at regular intervals.

Aye, in the heat of those memorable days, those houses were hot...very hot! There were no electric fans in those days. Not down our way, anyroad.

No, our ventilation system was simple – open the back door and close the curtains to keep the sun out.

To open a window could be a little dodgy. They were sash-windows and sometimes could be a bugger to open and close, especially if the weighted sash-cords had broken.

And apart from that problem, a certain amount of dry yellowing rolls of The Wigan Observer and The Wigan Examiner had to be removed (part of our winter heating system).

Every year, when the winter arrived, (and they were gradely winters too, those icy winds, would howl down the canal bank and past the bone works and would whistle through those generous window-gaps, up skirts and trouser legs threatening to amputate certain parts of one's anatomy.

Pegging a rug was one sure way of avoiding this painful experience, because as every working class Wiganer will tell you, with a length of hessian sacking draped over your knees whilst pegging coloured bits of cloth into it and seated in the front of the fireplace, was a certain way of keeping blood flowing.

Those gaps were that wide, you could pop your hand through and wave to a passing neighbour. And that's the truth...Well, nearly.

There was one thing for sure, though, no repairs of any kind, whether it was painting, papering or plastering, were ever, ever done by the landlord. Accidentally broken windows had to be replaced by the tenant or puttied along the crack to hold the glass together.

Over the winter months, oil-lamps, even candles in bottles and jars, were placed close to lavatories' water pipes to prevent a burst or freeze-up. If you were unlucky enough to have a leak – and with a landlord working on the assumption that a burst would only occur again- he left it well alone, and you had to carry water from the house to the lavvy till spring arrived.

They still called for the weekly rent though. Miss Ballard, our landlady, did her own collecting and would always quote to Mam at regular intervals, the following. "Halfpennies make pennies, pennies make shillings and shillings make pounds." Then the cheeky sod would pocket our money and initial the rent book before skipping off to another des res (or should I say, another undesirable residence) round the corner. Believe it or not, until Dad fashioned a crude coal-bunker in the yard, our coal was kept under our uncarpeted stairs near the backdoor.

When coal was in short supply, which was often, me and Dad would push Grandad's wheelbarrow to the gasworks in Sovereign Road, fill a couple of sacks and trundle them home. It cost a shilling a bag if I remember rightly.

Now coal was a devil to stroke up and keep burning, so you needed a few pieces of wood, a few bits of coal (if you

were lucky to have any) a shovel, a sheet of The Wigan Observer placed against the fireplace and away it went. But it still required plenty of attention. However, not everyone resorted to this way of keeping the home fires burning.

Adjacent to Miry Lane and by the side of the nearby railway sidings, tons of coal were piled high in miniature mountains awaiting collection and transportation to different areas. And as Oscar Wilde once said, "The only way to beat temptation is to give in to it." And quite a few desperate locals did just that. Prams, bikes trucks and barrows... and of course, strong shoulders were brought into play to ferry that precious fuel from track to grate. But this was a somewhat risky business.

Railway police and the bobby on the beat had to be avoided. But one chap had a unique, almost infallible method of eluding capture.

Occasionally, he would borrow, a neighbour's pram, yes, baby too, and with the gurgling infant aboard, he would meander down to the sidings.

On arriving, the baby was placed carefully on a nice patch of grass while he surreptitiously filled a sack with coal, placed it in the pram, covered it well with blankets and sat the baby on top.

The return journey, although somewhat slower and more arduous, was usually made with the child sleeping blissfully on a pile of ill-gotten (but necessary) gains.

How on earth did we ever manage in those early years of austerity? No TV's, toasters, telephones, Hoovers, central heating or double glazing. No carpeted bedrooms or stairs,

or electric lights. A stone flagged living room with a solid, square dining table in the middle and one gas mantle above it.

God help anyone who broke a precious mantle!

There was one luxury (apart from our black-leaded fire range, of course) and that was our acid battery wireless in the corner. A miracle of modern invention.

And towering above all adversities, was Dad. Unflappable, strong and reliable. And Mam. Cooking, cleaning, scrubbing, washing, darning and knitting. She ran our home with love, discipline and tact.

Deep in the cobwebs of my mind I can still hear her voice echoing up our rickety stairs and into my bedroom. "Edward! Edward! Are you out of bed yet? C'mon, you're goin' to be late for school." I didn't want to go to school.

But I knew if I lingered much longer it would mean a wet flannel across my face! And that was how it used to be. Dire circumstances, hard work, discipline and Mam's loving and caring hand that fashioned and shaped our very lives.

A two up and two down terraced house, landlord owned.

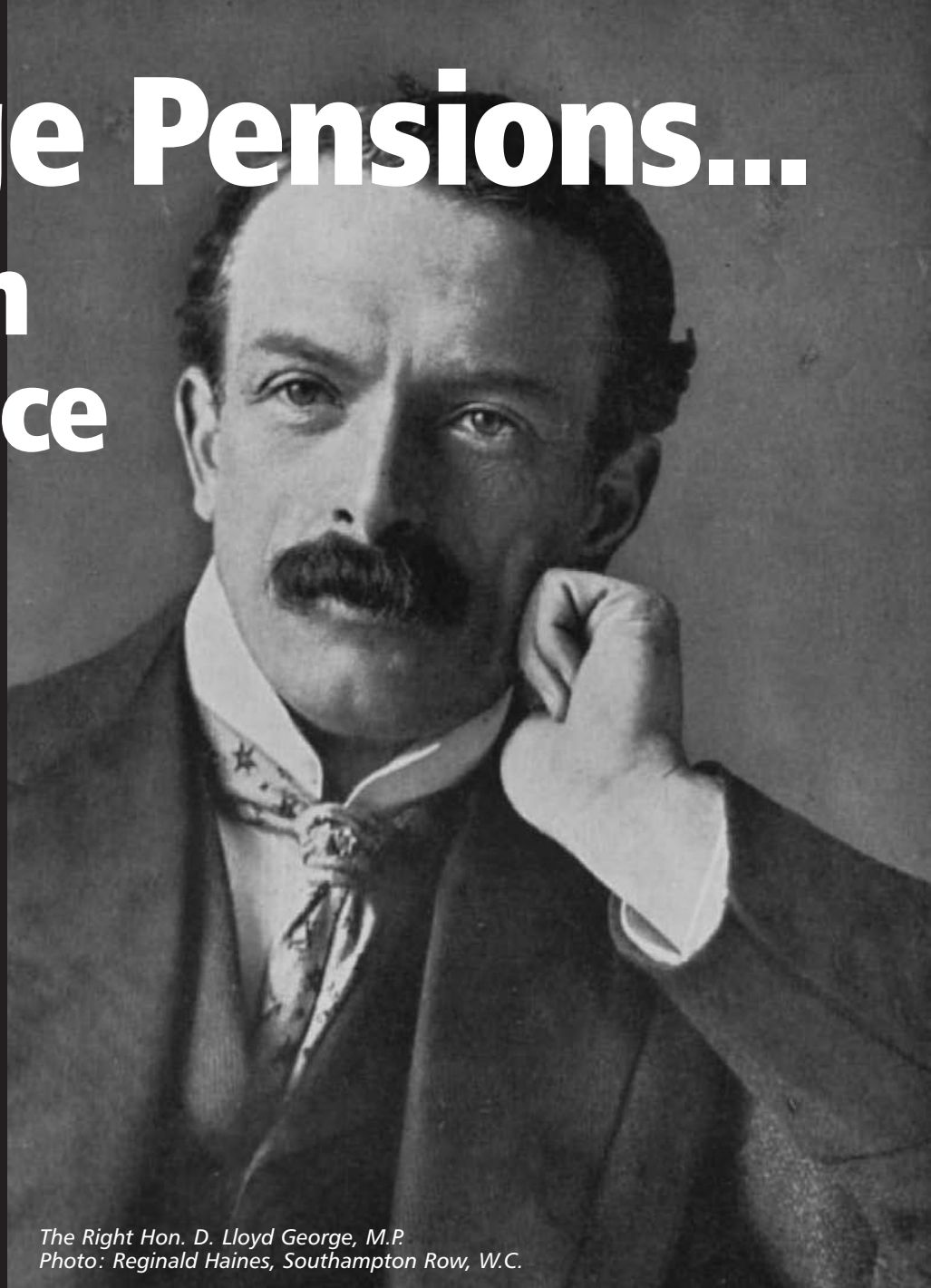
**We called it
"OUR HOUSE"**

**"Do you
remember?"**

Old Age Pensions... the Leigh Experience

by Yvonne
Eckersley

It was with relief
and gratitude
Leigh people over
70 years of age
drew their "Lloyd
George" from Silk
Street, Post Office
on Friday
1st January 1909



*The Right Hon. D. Lloyd George, M.P.
Photo: Reginald Haines, Southampton Row, W.C.*

On that first morning an old lady wearing a mop cap and her face "wreathed in smiles" and two "old veterans decked in red ribbons" who offered "three cheers for Mesthur Asquith" drew their pensions (Chronicle January 1909) whilst one old person expressed popular sentiments regarding David Lloyd George (who as Chancellor of the Exchequer awarded the pensions) "bless the little Welshman" she proclaimed (Leigh Journal 15 January 1909).

The "Lloyd George" was not an enormous amount of money but it was a guaranteed income for one of the poorest sections of

society. Many of whom, due to the nature of working in industries which were subject to cyclical unemployment, were always just one step removed from destitution and the dreaded Workhouse.

This was a particular feature for Leigh people, particularly those working in the Cotton Industry. At the same time as pensions were being introduced Leigh Council was finding work for "100 unemployed men whose wives and children may be on the edge of starvation" (Leigh Council Minute Books 13 Nov 1908). And as a result of the financial hardship caused by cotton manufacturers' seven

week "lockout" of its workforce, the Council was deliberating ways, including public works, to relieve general "Distress" in Leigh. The Workhouse was required to increase its capacity for unemployed male "casuals" above its capacity of 28 to 39 by 4th Sept and by the 11 Dec 1908 there were 50 inmates.

Some Leigh pensioners had managed to save but by the time they were 70 years of age this money was running out. A couple's savings in the "Co-op" was down to "the last sovereign". Another couple, the husband having been unable to work for 14 years and "never a big wage getter", had "saved

some", but had "nothing left we'en drawn th' last". (Chronicle. 8 Jan 1909).

For them the spectre of the Workhouse (commonly termed the Bastille) loomed. For many this was already a reality. It was Lloyd George's professed intent to "lift the shadow of the Workhouse from the houses of the poor".

Entitlement to an Old Age Pension (the Lloyd George) was granted on the 1st August 1908 and the payment of pensions began on the 1st January 1909. It was a non contributory pension scheme available to those who satisfied certain criteria. These criteria were to a certain extent judgemental. Not only were the few people who had been in prison, who had not lived in Britain for twenty years, or people who were "habitual drunkards" disqualified, so were people living just above destitution.

Payments were means tested and only paid to those who could prove they had an income of less than 12s a week (£31. 10s annually). The pension was on a graduated scale with a maximum of 5s per week (£21 annually).

Calculations of income were subject to rigorous investigation. Married couples sharing a house were taken as one unit. Attempts to manipulate the allowances were anticipated, hence the rules stipulated that if a person "deprives himself of any income or property in order to qualify for an old age pension it should be taken as part of his means" and any "yearly value of money hoarded or property not profitably used was to be considered".

Another proviso was that the recipient must not have been in receipt of poor-law relief in the year prior to their entitlement to pensions. This caused some confusion and consternation in Leigh. Councilor Chris Aubrey was particularly concerned to ensure

potential claimants did not fall foul of this condition. The Chronicle reports his question to the Council "Can we do anything in the way of warning old people about accepting relief on a date which would prevent them securing Old Age Pensions?" (Chronicle 28 August 1908). The Chronicle advised pensioners "not to receive poor-relief within the specific period (yet to be announced) or "they would be disqualified" (Chronicle 4 Sept 1908) and The Trades Council (4 September 1908) also advised they wait, as the pensions were "larger and more honourable" than poor-relief.

This fear of being disallowed was not unfounded. In the "Disqualifications" section of the full text of rules and regulations published in the Chronicle of 25 September 1909, it was stated clearly, persons "who have received poor relief at any time since the 1st January 1908" would not receive a pension on the 1st January 1909. Chris Aubrey stated at the Trades Council meeting of early November, that it was absurd that "if an old couple had received any relief from the union any time during this year, they were debarred from receiving any pension until 1910" (Chronicle 6 Nov 1908).

The claimants had to prove they were 70 years of age or above. This also caused problems, not least in the application for and cost of birth certificates. The Chronicle advised that if the "claimant was born after 1837 then there is no need to send for one as the pensions Officer may apply to the Registrar General with the object of verifying their date of birth" (Chronicle 4 Oct. 1908). Later the Chronicle advised those who had been born before 1837 to apply to the clergy for a certificate of birth as the Pension Officer could not get them for them (13 Nov 1908). This paper reminded the applicants, that as January was only 7 weeks

away "No time should be lost... all arrangements for giving pensions have to be made before then". The Chronicle kept the local population informed of each stage of the process.

Old Age Pensions were to be introduced under the auspices of the Department of Customs and Excise. The government required every borough and urban district with a population of over 20,000 to appoint a Local Government Board to oversee the implementation of the Act and the government appointed paid Pensions Officers.

Interestingly, the Pensions Officer appointed for Leigh, a Mr. W.J. Day, was the grandfather of the poet Philip Larkin. From the Customs and Excise Office at 85 Church Street, Leigh, he was responsible for the smooth running of the claims process. It is a mark of the high esteem in which this man was held, that his Golden Wedding anniversary (in 1933) was reported in the Chronicle. After his death in 1942 the Chronicle printed an obituary which praised his work as Pensions Officer and the Conservative Club flew the Union Jack at half mast.

Local Pension Committees and subcommittees were to be appointed "at the earliest date practicable" to give time for applications to be considered for January payments. The Council was to select these committees before the end of August and these Committees were to have not less than seven members. It was advised that the council would be able to obtain names of "suitable and representative persons for service from trades unions, friendly or other societies". In the event Leigh Council resolved, "That all the members of the Council (5 to form a Quorum) be appointed "The Local Pensions Committee" "(Leigh Council Minutes 21 August 1908). The process was subject to administrative delays. Before the

committee could begin the task, it required the official rules and regulations from the government. The Town Clerk needed to reassure an impatient Council that he would distribute them and a leaflet on the Act as soon as they arrived (Chronicle, 29 August 1908). It was September when official documentation arrived in Leigh.

The onus for claiming lay with the claimant. This was not always easy for a section of society who had been born on or before 1838. The complexity of the terms and conditions of applying and the completing of the necessary application forms would have been beyond the capability of people who had not experienced even a rudimentary education. Many of this age group had not been able to sign their name on their marriage certificates.

The Chronicle voiced some of the main concerns, highlighting the need for support for the illiterate and stressing the inability of the infirm to second a close relation to collect their pension. On pensions day misunderstandings did occur. A husband wanting to claim his wife's pension found himself unable to. The clerk at Leigh Post Office had to refuse to pay. Fortunately the man's wife arrived and her pension was paid (Chronicle 8th Jan 1909). There were sad instances. A Mrs Maddock of Bedford "said to be Leigh's oldest resident did not claim at all. For death slipped in on Friday" (Journal 15th Jan 1909). In total, out of 363 entitled, there were 180 pensions paid from Silk Street Post Office on that first day.

Nationally the result of the means test resulted in over 90% of applicants receiving the maximum 5s a week. Applying this statistic to Leigh, of the 363 pensions awarded in 1908 at least 326 people received the maximum 5s. Add to this the people who had been disqualified for various reasons, including their being in receipt of a pittance from the

Poor Law Guardians, we get a glimpse of the dire poverty experienced by Leigh's elderly.

This generation was born in an era where it was considered a moral failing to be destitute and an economic climate that dictated that poverty would be the norm for many. They had been children during the 1840's (the so-called "Hungry Forties") when many reached starvation point. They were young adults during the Cotton Famine of the 1860's and in the later nineteenth century, as miners or mill workers, they experienced horrendous working conditions.

Around the close of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a great deal of social research was undertaken and published on the experience of and causes of poverty. Among the more significant was the work of Charles Booth (1899) who devised a feasible scheme of old age pensions. Consequently by the Edwardian era the belief that poverty was a consequence of social and economic conditions began slowly to displace the Victorian belief that the cause of poverty was caused by a deficiency of character which led to a lack of foresight by individuals to save for old age and hard times.

Change was in the air. Prompted by concerns of "National efficiency", the poor health of Boer War recruits and no doubt by the increased power of working class politics, among others, pragmatism dictated a social interventionist approach to the problem. However the introduction of Old Age Pensions was not straight forward. Several governments in the decade before 1908 Act had set up Commissions to look into the situation and although all recognised the problem there was disagreement as to how, or if at all, it could be addressed. These Commissions, though generally favourable to the need for pensions could not agree to

the spending of public monies to provide them or reflected the belief that pensions should be given to the "deserving" poor only. In 1896 Lord Salisbury's Commission found "we are unable, after repeated attempts, to devise any proposal free from grave inherent disadvantages". A Royal Commission of 1898 found 1.3 million people in want but "nothing can be done" whilst at the same time acknowledging the successful introduction of pensions in New Zealand! In May 1899 Joseph Chamberlain described Charles Booth's proposals as "a gigantic system of outdoor relief for everyone, good and bad, thrifty and unthrifty, the waster and the idler, as well as the industrious". Whilst in 1900 a Departmental Committee led by Sir E Hamilton, reported that the cost of pensions was prohibitive.

From 1902 when George Barnes (Labour MP) founded the National Committee of Organised Labour for Old Age Pensions and toured Britain in support of pensions and the issue became more publicly debated. A large number of societies joined in the debate. The British Constitution Association's pamphlet of 1907 "Old Age Pensions A Better Way" argued that pensions were a "burden of taxation", presented an inflated estimate of costs and pronounced that as the friendly societies adequately provided for old age, state pensions are unnecessary. The Poor Law Guardians subscribed to the view that their institutions provided a satisfactory service stressing their belief that state pensions would encourage people to become dependant thus they are "full of danger" for the "welfare of the Nation", old people "would be better in a Workhouse" and pensions "would be a mere subsidy to interest in savings advocating the limiting of relief to "deserving cases" on the "grounds of character or conduct".

Wigan Civic Trust

Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.30pm. The venue is Drumcroom, 2 Parsons Walk, Wigan. Contact Mr A Grimshaw on 01942 245777 for further information.

Monday, December 8th
Women and Children in the Mines
Speaker Mr A Davies

If you have an interest in the standard of planning and architecture, and the conservation of buildings and structures in our historic town, come along and meet us.

Atherton Heritage Society

Winter Programme

Tuesday, November 11th 2008
Blunderbuss and Baksheesh
Speaker Alan Fildes

Tuesday, December 9th 2008
A Brief History of the Music Hall
Ray and Joyce Holmes
Christmas Buffet
(Tickets required)

Tuesday, January 13th 2009
Beatrix Potter - Part 1
Speaker Margaret Curry

Tuesday, February 10th 2009
Taking Coals to Newcastle
Speaker John Shaw

Tuesday, March 10th 2009
The Life and Voyages of Ernest Shackleton
Speaker Malcolm Tranter

Aspull and Haigh Historical Society

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month at Our Lady's RC Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull at 7.30pm. All are welcome, contact Barbara Rhodes (Wigan 222769) for further details.

Hindley & District History Society

Meetings are held on the second Monday in the month at the Museum at Hindley Library 7.00pm to 9.00pm. Admission is £1.00 for members and £1.50 for non-members. Everyone is welcome.

We have recently opened our latest museum display - a replica of a typical early 1900's working-class kitchen. The museum is open to the public at least once a week and entry is free. Contact the library staff for times and dates or telephone our Secretary, Mrs Joan Topping on 01942 257361 or Mrs Norma Brannagan on 01942 258668.

Leigh & District Family History Society

Chairman: Tel 01942 743428
Secretary: Tel 01942 729559
Monthly meetings held in the Derby Room of Leigh Library at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month.

Weekly Help Desk run by members of the Society each Monday from 1.30pm to 3.30pm in the Local History Section of Leigh Library.

2009

Tuesday, January 20th
AGM followed by Members' Talks

Tuesday, February 17th
Ashton-in-Makerfield Revisited
Speaker Walter Carney

Tuesday, March 17th
Protestation Oath Returns of 1642
Speaker Tony Foster

Tuesday, April 21st
Members' Help Evening

Volunteering with the Heritage Service

If you love your local history and heritage and are interested in finding out more, why not consider volunteering with the Heritage Service?

If you have a few hours, or a few days, to spare each week then there may be a role for you. The Heritage Service runs an organised volunteer programme working with the extensive local collections and of course the public at all our venues. If you enjoy face to face contact we need volunteers to help researchers and amateur genealogists, or if 'backroom' work is more to your liking, generating lists, files and indexes for the collection are ongoing projects both in Wigan and Leigh.

For more information on how to get involved contact Christine Watts at The History Shop in Wigan on 01942 828020.

THE HIGHWAYS OF ATHERTON

IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY BOB EVANS

Over many centuries travellers, through experience and repeated use, identified the most convenient and easiest paths to reach neighbouring communities.

The lines they followed reflected the need wherever possible to by-pass poorly drained land, avoid steep gradients and seek fording points of streams.

By the mid C18th the Yates map shows that the routes of the main roads radiating from the centre of Atherton were well established with only minor changes occurring since.



During the early years of the century, two Overseers of the Highways, for the Higher and Lower parts of the township, were chosen each year on the 26th December by the Atherton township ratepayers.

Under a threat of a £5 fine for failure to carry out this duty these officers were then required to review the state of the roads and levy a local rate to pay for any repair work that was necessary.

Seldom did one person accept the duty for more than one year and on several occasions it was delegated to a deputy. The township's inhabitants provided the labour force.

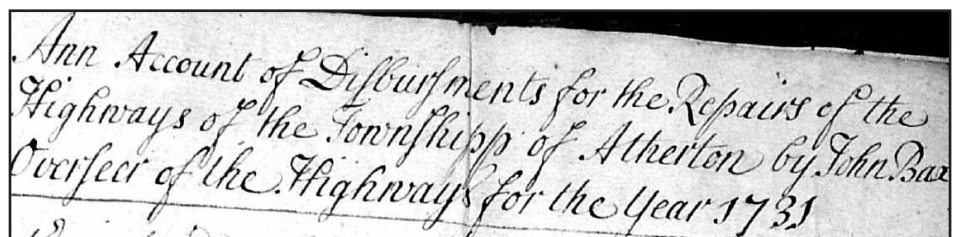
The law required each person, with the exception of apprentices and hired servants, to provide six days unpaid labour each year.

In addition farm tenants had to supply horses and carts. Apart from this compulsory requirement extracts quoted in this account make it clear that payment was made to some workers for particular tasks.

There are no contemporary written accounts or pictures of the local roads of the period to help visualize their appearance across the landscape. This must be inferred from the highway surveyors' accounts recording payments for the work they supervised.

They include many archaic terms with variable spelling whose meanings have since passed out of use. For this reason the records are not always easy to understand and any alternative interpretation of the terms and the work that was being done would be welcomed.

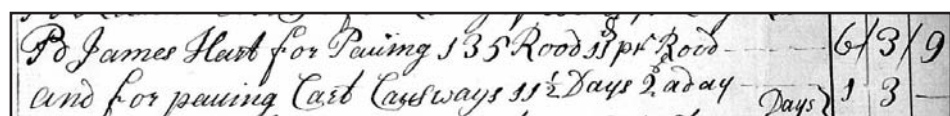
Travellers of the period write about the poor state of roads, which became quagmires after heavy rainfall and deeply rutted in dry periods, so that they were often only suitable for packhorse transport and personal travel on horseback.



(E/2/3/54)

The Atherton records refer to stretches of roads as horse and cart" causeways or causeys". These terms suggest that they consisted of a relatively narrow embankment, particularly where drainage was poor, bordered by a broader lower level.

The accounts include the cost of paving stones and payment made to pavers. (E/2/4/79)



Whether this implied that particular stretches were provided with a firm, level and relatively impermeable surface is not clear. Most of the records suggest that generally the roadways were constantly simply built up and resurfaced with locally obtained loose materials such as stone from 'delphs', gravel from the beds of streams and waste referred to as 'slack or sleek' from coalpits and smithies.

In 1723 George Hilton's accounts included: (E/2/2/42)

'pd for 6 Load of Smithy Slack to John Green 1s - 6d'
'pd for 1 load of Coalpit Slack had at Westleigh Colepit 0 - 4d'

Other materials named in the accounts include sand sometimes described as 'scalpings or scalping stones', 'platt stones', 'broken bricks' and 'potshards'. George also paid:

'for 20 Load of sand had out of Carbank Ground - 6s - 8d'

'for A platt Stone had at Delfe Lying near HowBridge - 1s - 0d'

Work was often done on 'platts', the crossing points of streams. The inference is that these consisted of a simple bridge continuing the line of the horse causeway above the level of the water bordered by a levelled and possibly stone surfaced ford for carts to cross.

The accounts include several references to work where the road to Leigh crosses a stream at Howe Bridge. In 1711 Peter Collier recorded: (E/2/1/15)

'pd for Mending Plat 8d and for Levelling by the Howbridge 3s - 8d £0 - 04s - 04d'

followed by 'Thomas Collier for his Debuty John Baxter' who noted in 1720: (2/2/35)

'pd for Repairing Plat by the Howbridge £0 - 8s - 0d pd for repairing of the Plat in Baglane for Timber 11s Laying of 3s - 8d 14s - 8d'

The 1746 accounts include: (2/4/79)

'Pd Edward Mills for Building a Stone Bridg Near Howbridg £5 - 13s - 4d'

There are many references to flooding after heavy rainfall and payments made to remove surface water and keep bordering ditches open. In 1743: E/2/4/75)

"pd Joseph Dixon In Aprill 3 Day Letting of water by Guttering 2s - 6d"

pd for Letting of water fallen Sudenly and Making Diches Deeper To Carry it of In Seuerall places and at Seuerall times This year 12s - 6d"

These drainage features are often described as 'sloughs' and 'gripyards'.

In 1706 Richard Radclife paid: E/2/1/10)

'Ralph Hulmes 2 men for one dayes work.. ?... yr cawsies betwixt Howe Bridge & Leigh 00 - 02s - ? for one dayes work Laying a peece of wood att Side of yr cawsie and Making of gripyard att Side of yr cawsie att Kirke Lane End and Setting yr stoops 00 - 00s - ?'

The impression created by these records is that these 'roads' were unconfined tracks across sparsely populated agricultural land. The cart causeway, particularly, was liable to spread outwards as drivers sought a better surface for their carts to the side of deeply rutted or churned up lengths. On moonless nights and when storms or fog reduced visibility, or after heavy winter snowfall, there would be little to guide a traveller.

The frequent mention of the payments for 'setting stoops' suggests that a sequence of vertical posts were erected to make clear the line of the road in such conditions. Thomas Morley listed the following payments in 1715: (E/2/2/23)

pd to Jeremiah Meanley for 8 floops 4: per floop - 0 - 2 - 8'
pd to Peter Collier for 2 floops 5: per floop - 0 - 0 - 10'
pd to Ralph Darbyshire for 1 floop - 0 - 0 - 4'
pd to Hugh Miller for setting floops - 0 - 4 - 6'
pd to Roger Escherley for 9 floops 4: per floop - 0 - 3 - 0'

Further guidance was provided by a 'finger post' - a sign-post at a road junction. In 1739 Jeffery Oakes noted: (2/3/67)

'pd Robert Kearsly for a finger post 0 - 6s - 5d
pd for Carting & Setting yr
Same post 0 - 1s - 6d'

Many accounts, as in 1718, include payments for purchasing and "setting studs". (E/2/2/31)

'pd for setting of 179 Studs at 1d p Stud - - 15s - 9d
pd for 23 Studs at 3d p Stud 91 Ditto at 4d p Stud
£1-16s-1d'

No explanation of what this work involved has so far been provided.

It can be no surprise that the state of the roads in the early part of the century often gave rise to complaints to the Justices. One document from 1728 indicates that the Justices were satisfied with remedial work: (Tr Ath /E/3/2)

'Whereas the Inhabitants of the Township of Atherton...Stand Inditted.....for Suffering the Highways Lyeing betwixt the Town of Leigh (or Stock plat bridge) and William Hursts Smithy in Atherton afores'd to be out of repair And time being given for repairing....haveing viewed the Said Highways Do hereby CertifyeThat the Said Highways are well and Sufficiently repaired.'

By the mid century there are increasing references to the planting of 'quicks' or 'quicksets' - hedgerows - the suggestion being that they were intended to provide a boundary to limit the width and prevent encroachment of the roadway onto cropped land. In 1758 John Morley recorded: (2/5/104)

'pd to Jn Worthington & Edmd Brown for ten hundred of quicks at 12d p - 10s - 0d'

From the mid century overseers such as John and James Clowes with a greater commitment and expertise were appointed to serve continuously for several years.

Instead of providing labour the townspeople were given the option of paying a commuted sum. With this money the overseer was able to employ a regular workforce.

In the 1760s the main Leigh to Bolton road through Atherton was improved and then maintained by a Turnpike Trust financed by a toll charged on travellers using it.

Nevertheless the responsibility for most of the township roads remained with the overseers until the formation of the Local Board in 1864.

Sources and acknowledgements

This admittedly tentative account is an attempt to interpret the significance of the payments recorded in the account sheets submitted by the Atherton Township Highway Surveyors now in the archives in Leigh Town Hall.

These are in files Tr. Ath. E/2/1 to 5, the reference to each extract being provided in brackets. Thanks are due to the archivist for making the records available and for help in suggesting explanations.

Reference has also been made to the Oxford English Dictionary for help with definitions of words used during the period.

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Christmas at The History Shop

Christmas Day in the Workhouse

(MAYOR AND UNSUNG ARTIST)

By Austin Lyons

The above title, was for many years, the butt of many of the old-style music-hall comedians, but I never thought, that one day for me and a few others, it would become a reality.

In 1938, Alderman Thomas Ramsden, was Mayor of Wigan, and as a keen young press photographer, I was making one of my usual calls at the Town Hall, to check out the Mayor's Christmas engagements. After a short time, the Mayor himself arrived and soon becoming aware of what we were trying to arrange, said "Why don't you come along with us in the mayoral car and photograph our visits to the hospitals and parties? I readily and thankfully accepted. Christmas morning found me with the Mayoral group, first visiting the infirmary and later the smaller hospitals - taking the customary photographs of the Mayor and Mayoress greeting the patients-both young and old.

Unaware of the time in all this activity, we found ourselves around mid-day at the Frog lane Institution Hospital, at that time, more commonly known as the "The Workhouse." After greeting the patients and taking my photographs, we were invited to join them for their Christmas dinner. I doubt if anyone would believe us, if we tried to tell them of that "unique experience."

Later that afternoon, we attended and I photographed three children's Christmas parties, hosted by various organisations in the town. It proved a rather hectic but successful day for me, but ensured that the Mayor got his fair share of showing how he participated in the town's Christmas festivities.

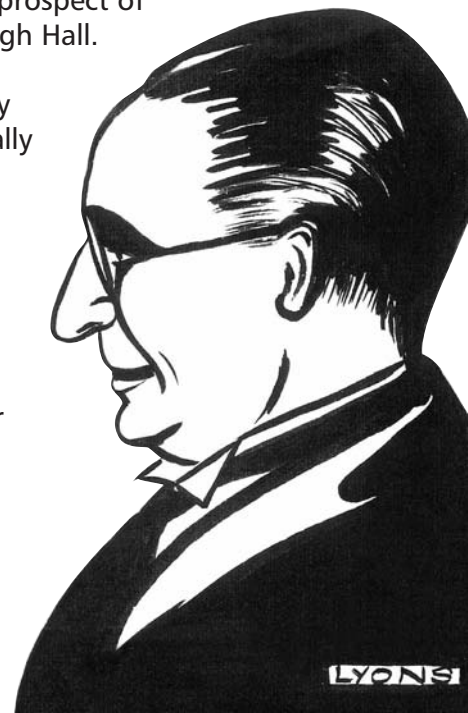
Tommy Ramsden as he was better known, was also a proficient water-colour artist- one of his earliest works probably painted in the early 30's "Sunrise over Wigan Pier," featured as a colour postcard in newsagents and stationery shops for many years, holding its own alongside the traditional sepia photographic views of the town.

The painting was atmospheric and had the touch of the Turner technique, although his later paintings were chiefly of the rural scene. I particularly remember "A snow scene at Red Rock" which he displayed in his Health Shop window at the top of Makinson's Arcade - as a window scene. He had caught the mood very realistically.

As a young artist myself, I used to watch him at work, in the tiny corner of his shop, which was just large enough for himself and his easel. Tom Ramsden had made his mark in the Art World, long before Lowry or Isherwood (who usually worked in oils) came onto the scene-he was doubtless an unsung exponent of the traditional watercolour landscape. He made no secret of his pride in being Mayor and truly was a man of the people.

Ever mindful of his family connections with the place, he presented several of his paintings to the Hindley and District Council to mark his year of office as Mayor of Wigan. After his death, several watercolours were donated by his family to Wigan Town Council with the prospect of their being hung in Haigh Hall.

Personally, I will always remember him as a very kindly man, but especially for his generosity and consideration to me at that time, as a young press photographer; but in the main he will doubtless be remembered for that painting - "Sunrise over Wigan Pier", which transformed what had become a derisory nationwide joke into a worthy work of art.



This is a caricature of Alderman T. Ramsden, sketched in 1938 by Austin Lyons.



Trencherfield Mill Engine 100 Years and still going strong!

On October 3rd 2008, it was 100 years to the day since Trencherfield Mill's steam engine started powering the cotton machinery in the Mill that keeps Wigan famous in industrial heritage circles today. It was the third mill built on the site by the Woods family, and the unusual name comes from 'Trencher Meadow' as the site was known before the first mill was built on the site around 1820. This began the series of mills that culminated in the one built in 1907 that still stands today. Each new building took on technical and structural advances at the time to improve the cotton quality and increase output.

At the heart of the mill was and still is the magnificent steam engine which acted as the central power source of the Mill. It was ordered in 1905 from John and

Edward Wood of Bolton. It was built at their workshops in 1906 and assembled on site at Trencherfield in 1907. The steam was provided from 6 coal fired Lancashire boilers made by Ticker and Shenton of Hyde. To refer to it using correct terminology, it is a 'horizontal twin tandem triple expansion steam condensing engine.' This can be broken down to explain the engine's layout; Horizontal refers to it being laid out along the ground, twin tandem because there are two sets of cylinders linked together on each side of the engine, triple expansion because the steam is used in three distinct phases and once the steam has been used it goes into a condenser. The three phases of steam use are firstly in the high pressure cylinder, then it is used in the intermediate pressure cylinder, before splitting into two

and being used in the two low pressure cylinders. The cylinders work together to drive the huge flywheel of approximately 70 tonnes. The flywheel contains all of the engine's power, all 2,500 horse power when it worked at its full speed of 68 revolutions per minute, with steam pressure of 200 pounds per square inch from the boilers. On the rim of the flywheel are 54 grooves each of which accommodated a cotton rope that was fed up to the rope race behind the flywheel. The ropes in the rope race drive smaller pulleys, and attached to these were line shafting that ran from gable end to gable end on each floor of the mill. From these, leather belts drove each cotton manufacturing machine individually. Up to 1,250 different machines were powered off the flywheel. As well as the machinery, the flywheel drove two DC generators that provided electrical lighting throughout the mill, one of the first buildings of this size in Wigan to boast such a facility.

The engine started work in October 1908, powering the mill. The two sides of the engine were christened Helen and Rina at the opening ceremony on the 3rd

October. Tradition had it that the two sides of a mill engine were named after the mill owner's daughters. However, Wigan folklore has it that Colonel William Woods was so impressed by the engine that they are in fact named after the designer's daughters, and the two generators, Margaret and Jean were named after Colonel Woods' daughters. And so the present Trencherfield mill started production of Cotton Yarn, a function that it was to continue for many years.

The engine continued to power the mill for a succession of owners until 1968, when Courtaulds, the owners at that time changed the production focus of the mill to smaller scale clothing manufacture in the upper floors of the mill. The Lancashire boilers were taken out for scrap at this time and a pair of smaller oil fired boilers installed to heat the mill. The engine however had not been forgotten, a small band of volunteers still used the barring engine to turn the engine over occasionally so that it did not seize up beyond repair. By now as the Lancashire cotton industry had been drastically shrunk, and steam engines no longer used to power the mills, it was appreciated that it was now a unique survivor. In 1983 after local pressure, Wigan Museums service took over the Engine House and with the help of the Northern Mill Engine Society installed a new steam line from the new boilers to engine, and in 1984 after some restoration work it ran again, now as a tourist attraction. In 1986 It became a part of the Wigan Pier Museum complex and cotton machinery was assembled from closed local mills to give a cotton making demonstration in the machinery hall adjacent to the engine house. By now the engine was the largest working mill steam engine of its type in its original setting, so as a result attracted

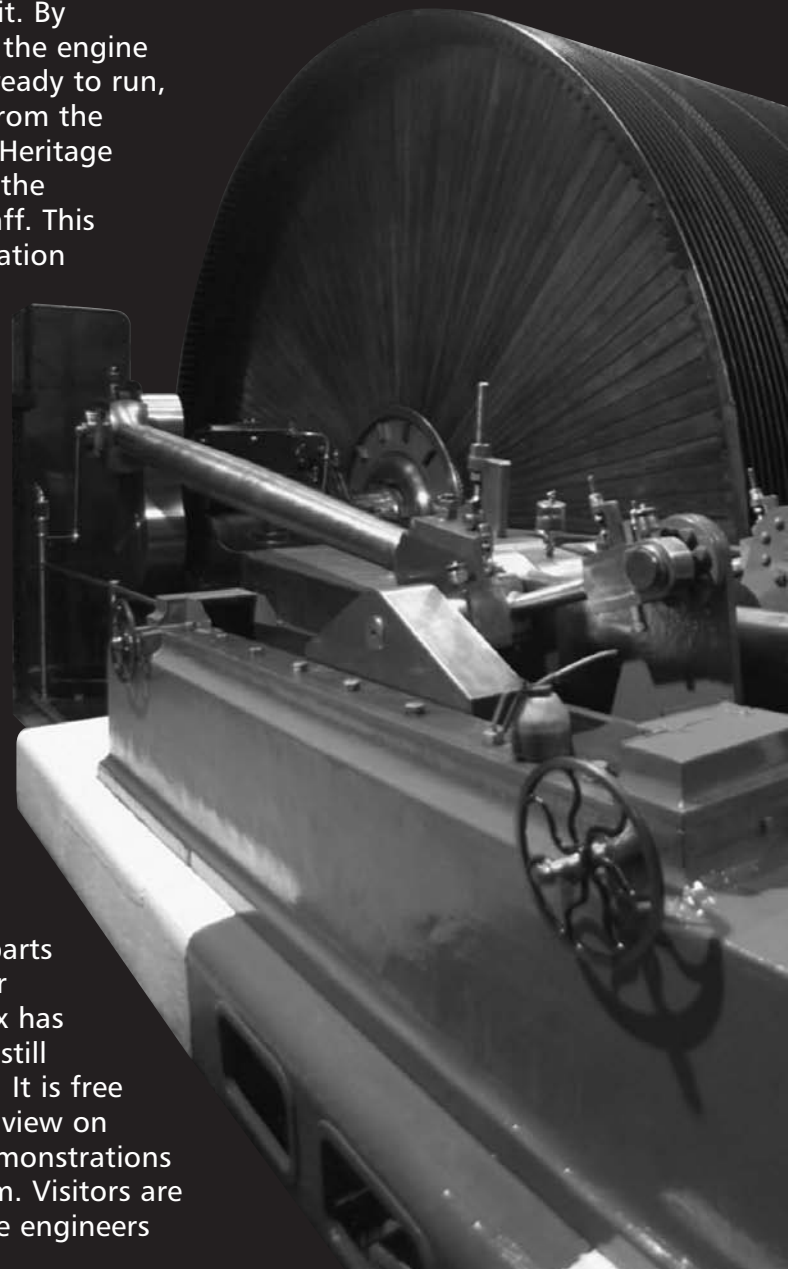
visitors from all across the world, who have been mesmerised by its power and beauty.

However that is far from the end of the story for Helen and Rina. In 2001 the engine had a problem with the flywheel and was no longer safe to run. It sat silent once again while a survey was undertaken into the work required to get it running again. In 2003 a successful bid was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for help to get the engine running again, and the restoration commenced. The grant was given because the Lottery Fund appreciated that the engine was of national importance, a unique and important survivor, being the only mill engine complete with its intact rope race and mill building around it. By September 2004 the engine was once again ready to run, thanks to work from the Glasgow firm of Heritage Engineering and the Engine House staff. This time a full restoration was carried out and the engine repainted into its original green colour scheme. Since then a new boiler has also been installed burning low emission bio fuels giving the engine 'green' credentials that could never have been thought of in 1908!

Since the other parts of the Wigan Pier Museum complex has shut, the engine still continues to run. It is free for the public to view on Sundays with demonstrations at 11am and 1pm. Visitors are free to talk to the engineers

who look after it. Just listen for the whistle that blows before every session. Parts of the mill are being redeveloped as an arts and heritage complex which will have the engine as its centre piece, so this free to view opportunity may not last for ever. So what better time near the centenary of the mill opening, to come and pay Helen and Rina a visit. Visit this reminder of a bygone age! It's a fascinating place for people of all ages.

Activity days and special events are held at different times of the year. For information of these, normal engine visits or for private group bookings please contact The History Shop on 01942 828128.



BROOK LANE

MEMORIES

By Mr Berry

For the first twelve years of my life (1939-51) I lived quite near to Brook Lane (Lamberhead Green), which street appears to have been, according to my researches, the ancestral home of my mother's side of the family.

Indeed, Mother used to reckon that her's was the first family to come to the Green, which is quite a claim since the name of the village appears to have been Anglo-Saxon in origin!

However, there was a man in 1466 holding land in Pemberton whose name was the equivalent of the modern name John Forshaw and we had a direct ancestor in the nineteenth century with the same name, so one never knows!

My childhood playmates (all of them lads) lived on Brook Lane (or Bruck Lone in the vernacular) in the section from the junction with Redwood Avenue, where I lived, down to the Wigan Wallgate-Liverpool Exchange railway line.

We never seemed to play with the girls with the exception, of course, of our own sisters within our separate domestic boundaries and two other exceptions, of which more later.

I would come into brief contact with some of the girls whenever I was sent to bring in my sister Rose, who is 4 years younger than I, at bedtime.

They would call me a big bully if I sometimes had to pick up my protesting sibling and carry her back home over my shoulder!

I suppose we lads were regarded as being too rough for the girls, one of our favourite pastimes being good-natured wrestling, where two lads would be pitted against two others or perhaps three against three. My mother, in her childhood a slim, pretty girl, was a self-confessed tomboy who played with and fought with the local lads! This may have been an unconscious attempt to redress the balance in her family where she had seven sisters and only two brothers.

We never played in the section of Brook Lane leading towards Ormskirk

Road for that was where the "Big Lads" used to hang out.

They were much older than we were, and one of them was reputed to be able to remove the metal cap from a pop bottle with his teeth!

To return to the matter of not playing with the local girls, one of the exceptions was a half-hearted attempt at a May Queen procession and the other was a summer picnic.

Where the idea of a picnic came from I don't recall. Perhaps one of our mothers had suggested it. Anyway, on a glorious, sunny day we set off down Brook Lane with our bottles of tap-water and jam-butties, soon reaching the cart-road section and proceeding down the cutting until we reached the Big Tree and the flat area of land once known as the Arches.

From there we took the cart-road to the right, climbing past the entrances to Red Wood and Bradburn's Farm and over the railway via the Red Bridge. On reaching the Long Wall which surrounds Winstanley Park we followed it to the right until we came to a patch of grass outside one of the entrance gates and decided that this was to be the place for the picnic.

The road continued to the right, climbing up to Winstanley Road and passing Fouracre's Farm on the left. We knew this as Nicholson's Lane (or Pee Nick's Lone!).

When we had finished our feast someone looked through the open gateway and noticed a patch of bluebells just inside. This proved too big a temptation to resist and we all trooped inside and began gathering them. After a very short while this peaceful idyll was rudely shattered by the arrival of the gamekeeper, with a shotgun under his arm, who told us in no uncertain terms to drop the flowers and leave the park. If I had known then what I know now, as they say, I could have pointed out to the gamekeeper that our collier forefathers had helped to create the wealth of the local landowners by their labours and sacrifices.

My own great grandfather Elijah Wright had been killed by a fall of dirt at Winstanley Colliery in 1876 at the age of 39, leaving behind a wife and 8 children.

But then, I suppose, the gamekeeper was only doing his job.

Not far from where we had the picnic, growing in the hedgerow at the side of the cart-road, there used to be tall plants with hollow, fluted stems. We lads were reminded of these plants whenever the green hawthorn berries (or haigs as we used to call them) began to appear, since cut-off lengths of the plant stems became our pea-shooters and the haigs became our peas!

We were aware that, within a few minutes of applying the shooters to our lips, they would become covered in what appeared to be sores, presumably caused by some kind of poison exuded by the stems.

However, the observance of the pea-shooter tradition was deemed more important than any discomfort we knew we would experience!

From the bottom of Brook Lane you could follow a wide path on the left, starting at the Big Tree and leading to the level-crossing at the railway line and thence across a flat area of pit-waste known as the Summersales, finally arriving at the day-eye colliery with the same name.

Once, in the Summersales, we observed a number of cloth-capped men, presumably miners, standing in a ring and playing "pitch and toss". The game was illegal at that time and so this quiet area would be considered to be away from the watchful eye of the local bobby!

On the railway side of the first part of the path the ground fell away steeply to the brook from which Brook Lane took its name. The official title of the brook seems to be Smithy Brook but to us it was always t'Brook (or to our elders t'Bruck). This area was known as the Nursery, presumably because mothers and older siblings brought toddlers here perhaps to play roly-poly down the grassy slope and to watch the trains passing by.

Between the brook and the railway was a flat, grassy area in which was an old, open pit-shaft.

Although it was surrounded by a brick wall, one of our favourite pastimes was to climb the wall and peer into the depths of the shaft, sometimes dropping a stone down and counting the number of seconds before it splashed into the water far below.

The grass surrounding the shaft was of a wiry texture and became tinder-dry in summer and the urge to set it alight was sometimes irresistible. I suppose we were encouraged by the fact that grass fires caused by the sparks from passing steam locomotives were a common occurrence near the railway tracks.

We discovered that the core of a piece of old colliery winding cable would begin to smoulder if we focussed the sun's rays on it through a piece of thick bottle glass. A fire was then easily started by placing the core in the grass and blowing on it. Perhaps I should state here that none of us was a Boy Scout and so panic used to set in if the fire spread rapidly!

First we tried stamping on the flames, then applying water using the natural method, and finally beating out the fire using our jackets! Goodness knows what we smelt like when we later made our way home! However my mother never seemed to complain.

A few yards from the level-crossing the brook enters a tunnel under the railway. The walls of the tunnel used to be covered in slimy green moss, and the brook here was usually quite shallow so another temptation presented itself. We would proceed a short way from the entrance and shout into the darkness.

The echo was somewhat disconcerting and we were frightened to venture any further for we had been told that if we did so "Jinny Green Teeth" would get us!

One of the games we played in the Nursery area was follow-my-leader which involved jumping over the brook. The eldest lads would lead the procession, to show how easy it was, with the youngest tagging on behind. For some reason we called this game "jumping craddums" and you could guarantee that one or two of the youngest would land in the brook with one foot or even two!

The unfortunate ones would be squelching around for the rest of the afternoon, although sometimes we would make it an excuse to build a drying-out fire!

A few hundred yards down the railway line from the level-crossing, heading towards Pemberton Station, a stone bridge crosses over. This was known as the Venture Bridge, presumably named after the local colliery. The old pronunciation had been passed down to us so that we knew it as t'Venter Bridge.

According to my father, this was the scene of a remarkable incident. A local lad, probably influenced by a serial film he had seen at the cinema, climbed onto the parapet and launched himself into space as a goods train was passing underneath, shouting as he did so, "To be continued!" Luckily for him, it would appear that the train was slow moving and he landed in an empty coal-wagon, apparently without much injury.

If we got the call of nature while we were playing in the Nursery we were fortunate in that one of the lads lived nearby in the Arches area. His family had an old outside closet quite some way from the back of the house and the great advantage of this was that there were two holes cut in the board that acted as a seat. If two of us were "caught short" at the same time we would sit there side by side quite without any embarrassment!

Sometimes in the Nursery we got involved in helping to dam the brook using grass sods. The murky paddling pool thus created wasn't very inviting and it wasn't long before we further amused ourselves by breaching the dam and letting the water flow again.

From time to time the water of the brook would assume a yellow tinge whenever drainage water from old mine workings seeped into it upstream.

Another of our favourite play areas, a few hundred yards upstream, was Red Wood (Captain's Clough on the map), although at that time there were few trees left possibly as a result of outcrop coal mining there during the 1926 strike.

I remember one lovely summer afternoon when we battled on the slopes of the wood, seemingly for hours, using swords cut from nearby bushes. We were each "killed" several times, falling prone in the grass and ferns, but after a minute or two we miraculously recovered and continued the fight! Shades of Shakespeare's Henry V:- *"On, on, you noble English,thathave in these parts from morn till even fought, and sheathed their swords for lack of argument."*

As regards the clothes we wore in those days, our summer outfits weren't much different from our winter ones. On hot summer days we would strip off our shirts and vests and be bare from the waist upwards except for the braces holding up our lined, winter trousers! These were the years following World War II when there was little cash available for fancy, lightweight clothing.

At the far end of Red Wood there was a barbed-wire fence which marked the eastern boundary of Glover's farm which was in Edge Hall Road, Orrell. Being generally law-abiding we never tried to cross that boundary although my brother Bill, who is 5 years older than I, once did so with a few of his pals. When they had been for a while in that forbidden territory they were surprised by the farmer who was carrying his gun. Jokingly he said to them, "Don't move, or I'll shoot yuh dee-ud!" One of the lads, no doubt influenced by the cowboy films he had seen at the Saturday afternoon tuppenny-rush at the local Queen's cinema, stuck his hands up and exclaimed in all seriousness, "Don't shoot, Mr. Glover, don't shoot!"

Quite recently I had a nostalgic walk through the scenes of our halcyon, childhood days and was rather saddened by the changes that had occurred in the past 60 years or so.

I found that the Nursery was largely overgrown with bushes and small trees. The antics and exertions of the children in our day had kept nature at bay and the area in good order. The Big Tree was no longer there and the Arches area was completely overgrown. There used to be several occupied cottages there, one of which, Pingot Cottage, had a well in the garden which, in the days before piped water, was an important source of drinking water for Lamberhead Green.

Red Wood still exists although it is hard to discern the path leading to it. Red Bridge is still unchanged but the road surface across it requires some maintenance.

When I left St. John's Primary School at the age of eleven my playing-out days were over. Living just over the border in Orrell, I went on to attend Upholland Grammar School and thus there was a final parting of the ways: one of my Brook Lane pals and my two best friends from St. John's were already attending Wigan Grammar School.

YOUR LETTERS

Dear Editor

I really enjoyed Roy Crabtree's contribution (issue 49) and I am pretty sure he had a sister named Millie, who played the piano.

I am from Ince, and went to Rose Bridge School, where Miss Anderton was our headmistress. It was a lovely school, and I enjoyed every day of going there.

Roy mentions a Dorothy Rawson whose parents had a grocers shop in Ince Green Lane. My mother used to send me for bits of things when she ran short of anything, but it had to be something urgent because she said "they were too dear."

She used to send me to a shop in Birkett Bank, which was quite a long way off, over the canal, I remember that the name of the shop was Berry's.

I went for a loaf one day, and on my way back I was crossing the canal bridge, and I let the loaf fall into the water. It was a hot day and people were swimming there.

One of them got the loaf out, and I sat in the hot sunshine trying to get it dry, because my dad was at home and he was very strict. I guessed I would get a clout over the ear hole. I have forgotten how I went on over the loaf.

I lived in The Grove, off Ince Green Lane; it was a lovely estate, with beautifully kept gardens, and great neighbours.

At the top of the street were four very old houses and in one of them lived a man named Mickey

Dalton. Everyone in Wigan knew him. He used to join all the Sunday School Walking Days, wearing a black suit with a buttonhole, and a topper hat.

I was eighteen then and working on the buses (war job). I turned out at 3.45am one morning, and I could hear a lot of banging and swearing, and I could see Mickey trying to get in his house, but his wife wasn't for letting him in. However, just as I got level to him, he turned round and sat on his step, just as his wife opened the door, and he fell in backwards. I laughed out loud, and somehow he managed to get up and come staggering after me. I've never run as fast in my life.

I had forgotten all about this, but reading your contribution

brought it all back to me. Maybe this letter will be too long to have it put in Past Forward, but if it is, I hope you see it, and thanks for bringing back memories, I am 82 now.

**Mrs Ethel Almond
Newtown, Wigan**

Dear Editor

Further to my article in Issue No. 30, Spring 2002, regarding my great grand-father's (Richard Coupe) engine building business at Worsley Mesnes Ironworks.

More recently you kindly printed a request from Mr. Rod Nuth whose brother-in-law had found an old engine plate bearing the name R.J & E Coupe of Wigan. I made contact with Mr Nuth and

Dear Editor

A friend let me have a copy of the Past Forward magazine. I was very interested to read about Roy Crabtree. He played at our wedding sixty years ago on 11th August 1948, at Ince Public Hall.

Sadly, my husband, Fred, did not live to celebrate our 60th anniversary, but we did reach 55 years together.

Three taxis from Middleton and Wood took everyone to St. Peter's Church, Hindley and then on to the Ince Public Hall.

Ince Public Hall was then five pounds to hire, and I have forgotten how much Roy's

band cost. Austin Lyons was the photographer, - it cost nine guineas for the whole album. Bolan's from Platt Bridge were the caterers.

One of our gifts was a freezer full of ice cream from Cassinelli's who were related to our family. It also rained all day, but we had a wonderful time!

The Crabtree family were great friends of our family. (Mellings - from the Farm in Ince). The correct name for the farm is Moss Hall Farm, but it was always known to everyone as Mellings Farm.

**Mrs M Taylor,
Hindley**

recently he and his sister, widow of the finder of the plate, presented the 1882 name plate to me as a representative of the Coupe Family.

The plate came from the "Black Country" company of Alfred Hickman's Iron & Steel Works in Bilston. This firm was taken over by Stewart and Lloyds who in turn became part of British Steel. As part of capacity reduction, these works were finally closed and the blast furnace "Elizabeth" shut down. This historic plate was found during the final demolition by Norman Clarke, a long serving Stewart & Lloyd's man who unfortunately has recently died. His widow Mrs. Julie Clarke kindly presented it to me. It is thought that this plate came from the large "Wigan built" steam engine powering the rolling mill.

Through the help of "Past Forward" this example of an engine plate came back into the Coupe family after 126 years.

Many Thanks

**Joan Francis
Bolton**

Dear Editor

In reply to Mr. F. Atherton's request for information about "Dean Wood" fairground, at Gathurst, I first remember being taken there by my mother and brothers about 1935. We would get the train from Wigan to

Gathurst, then walk along the side of the railway to Dean Brook, cross it and you came to the fairground owned by Mr Robinson. He had "swings and bockie boats," we thought this was marvellous.

Workers did not get paid for holidays. I think it was 1938 when they got one week, so you can see why Gathurst was so popular. One penny halfpenny on the train and you were in a different world.

My mother used to take most of the kids from Prescott Street, Miry Lane and Horsefield Street with us. A bag full of jam butties and a bottle of water was all you needed. At the end of the day we would walk home along the canal. Even the smell of Gallagher's Bone Works was welcome after a three mile trek. I still visit Dean Wood every week when I go fishing with my grandson. I have tried to show him where the fairground was, but it is overgrown with trees and it is hard to imagine what it looked like with dozens of people there.

It has been a very important part of Wigan since the 1700's; coal from many pits was transported down the River Douglas to Navigation Lock, where it joined the Liverpool Canal. I was talking to the new tenant of the lock house and he thought the house was built back to front, but it was built overlooking the canal. The canal through Wigan hadn't been built at this time and the

lock is in his front garden. If you search around the fields you will find a dam that was built to raise the water level to form a lake to supply water for the river and lock. All the stone used for building the canal and weir was brought from Up Holland via Roby Mill across a rail track to Dean Wood, and on the opposite side of the river from the fairground you will find evidence of sluices used for driving a corn mill. I can remember a cottage there up to 1948. My girlfriend and I used to walk from Appley Bridge and the lady in the house would make us tea and scones for eight old pence.

When I go there now on my fishing trips, I just sit and think how things have changed completely. It was like an open sewer when I was a lad, but now it supports many species of fish. One day I sat quietly fishing and a kingfisher landed on my rod. Another thing I have noticed are the different types of transport that cross the spot. The track from Roby Mill to Gathurst. The river tow path, canal, railway, road, M6 motorway, and "you know whose" helicopter all cross this spot. It is truly a wonderful place. I don't know of any other place where so many types of transport converge.

I am sure Mr. F. Atherton has some happy memories of Dean Wood to share.

**P. Clarke
Wigan**

YOUR LETTERS

Dear Editor

A little while ago, someone writing in Past Forward asked if anyone knew anything about Hindley Green. Well, I can give a little information about that.

In 1930, Sacred Heart School, Swan Lane, Hindley Green was trying to raise funds to build a church. They were, at that time, served by the priests of St Benedict's, Hindley.

Somebody had the idea of a grand garden party in the school grounds. There was to be a procession through the streets culminating in the crowning of the Rose Queen. I was that first Queen, and my name at that time was Marjorie Lowe. I was crowned by Mrs Nesbitt, wife of the Medical Officer of Health, Dr Nesbitt.

After the crowning, there were all kinds of stalls and activities to raise money, a baby show, fortune teller, band, sale of handicrafts and guess the weight of the cake. It proved such as success, that it was repeated for some years. The following year, Peggy Mortimer was the queen, then Alice Hitchen and after that I'm afraid I lost track.

They eventually got their church, and became a parish in their own right.

**Mrs Marjorie Bryden
Eastbourne**



Marjorie Lowe's crowning as Rose Queen. From left Father Gregory Buissant, Miss Baron (headteacher), Stanley Ellis (who carried the crown) Mary Mortimer, Betty Nesbitt, Nurse Norris, Mrs Nesbitt, Nurse Grimes, Dr Nesbitt and in front of him Peggy Mortimer, Nellie Peters and Alice Goodman.

Dear Editor

I was interested to see the photograph thought to be of Norley Hall c. 1950 on page 15 of Past Forward No 48.

My great-grandfather, William Thorburn, was a tenant farmer at Norley Hall from approximately 1850 until 1871. My grandmother, Jenny Thorburn, was born there in 1852. She was an amateur artist and at my home in Scotland a charcoal drawing of Norley Hall by her hung on the wall.

It is over 50 years that I last saw the drawing and it was most likely thrown out after my mother died. I had no great interest in family history in those days. However I have a dim recollection that the windows on

either side of the central doorway were more Georgian than Tudor with stone mullions as in the photo.

In November 1992, following an enquiry about Norley Hall, I received a letter from the then Heritage Manager (Mr Blakeman RB/BM 11/11/92 signed by A. Gillies). Apart from the early mediaeval history nothing more about Norley Hall seemed to be known. The letter also stated that it was not known when Norley Hall was demolished, possibly about 1883.

I have read with great interest Past Forward from its inception.

Yours sincerely

**Margaret Sellers
Guilford, Surrey**

Your Archives

Volunteers play an important part in the work at the Archives, listing and cataloguing collections to improve access.

New lists are now available or will be shortly for the records of:

The Lancashire & Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society,
The Pink/Dootson of Leigh Collection,
and the engineering drawings of the Worsley Mesnes Ironworks, Pemberton.

The Archives is furthermore involved in a nationwide project to scan and digitise archive catalogue lists.

Working with The National Archives (TNA), the digitised lists are to be made available through the website of the National Register of Archives (NRA), administered by TNA.

Some of our archive collections are already listed on the websites of Access to Archives (A2A) and the Greater Manchester Past Finder, but we hope to fill in as many gaps as possible using the NRA, and in time make detailed descriptions available on-line for all our collections.

Recent Acquisitions

The Archives Service depends upon friends and volunteers to alert us to records in danger of being destroyed or lost that need professional care and preservation, be they minute books, maps or manuscripts. This is our shared heritage, so please let us know if you have any tip-offs...

Recent accessions include:

- Leigh Girls Grammar School, School Magazines and School Photographs (Acc. 2008/27)

- Pemberton Colliery Plans, including Venture Pit and King Coal Pit, c. 1905 (Acc. 2008/30)
- Marriage Registers of Park Lane Unitarian Chapel (Acc. 2008/37)
- Marriage Registers of Lowton Road Methodist Chapel, Golborne Acc. 2008/38)
- Records of Terry Wynn, M.E.P. (Acc. 2008/39)

Using Solicitors' Records

Solicitors Records hold some of the hidden gems of the Archive Collections, including everything from property deeds, to turnpike records, mining company documents and workhouse papers.

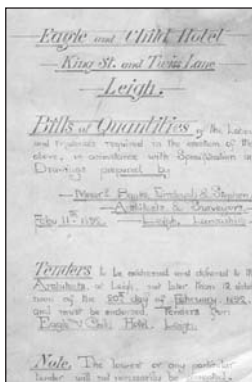
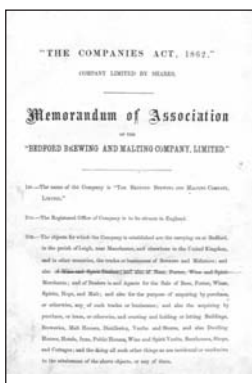
The papers of Wright and Appleton contain those of

Thomas Grimshaw, town clerk and coroner of Wigan between 1818 and 1835: the collection includes a list of militiamen in receipt of alms (1811), leases for shops and houses beneath the Town Hall (1764-1806 – the original Moot Hall depicted on the town seal and other insignia, including the old Wigan Grammar School badge), and the records of the Wigan Indigent Clothing Society.

In Leigh, the records of Marsh, Son & Calvert include important documents relating to the foundation of the Leigh Poor Law Union and the workhouses.

Substantial collections of business records appear in Solicitors' Collections and were retained as important legal documents, essential to the functioning of business operations. The records of Peace & Ellis, Wigan, include files on various colliery (Abram Coal Co., Wigan Coal & Iron Co., Sankey Brook Coal Co.) and railway companies.

Marsh, Son & Calvert contains documents concerning the Astley Estate Co., as well as brewing, malting and public houses in Bedford and Leigh.



If you would like more information details are available in the Guide to the Archives, or on the websites of A2A (Access to Archives) and the Greater Manchester Pastfinder.

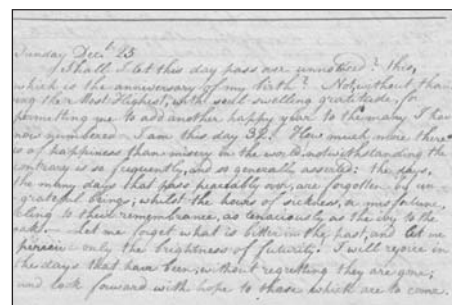
Remembering the Past: A Christmas message from... Ellen Weeton, 25th December 1808

Sunday Decbr 25

Shall I let this day pass over unnoticed? This, / which is the anniversary of my birth? Not, without thank / ing the Most Highest, with soul-swelling gratitude, for / permitting me to add another happy year to the many I have / now numbered – I am this day 32. How much more there / is of happiness than misery in the world! Notwithstanding the / contrary is so frequently, and so generally asserted: the days, / the many days that pass peaceably over, are forgotten by un / -grateful beings; whilst the hours of sickness, or misfortune, / cling to their remembrance, as tenaciously as the ivy to the / oaks. Let me forget what is bitter in the past, and let me / perceive only the brightness of futurity. I will rejoice in / the days that have been; without regretting they are gone; and look forward with hope to those which are to come.

Ellen Weeton was at this time residing in Liverpool with the family of Miss Chorley, initially a friend but later the cause of much anxiety and ill-temper, "Oh, Miss Chorley, you are in this house what Buonaparte is to Europe. A scourge!". Ellen was shortly to leave Liverpool and take up a position as a Governess to a family in the Lake District.

The diaries and letters of Ellen Weeton form part of the Edward Hall Diary Collection (Ref. EHC/165).



Recent additions to the Reference Collections at the History Shop

Donations

Centenary of the Church of Christ, Rodney Street 1841-1941.

Goold, Madeline. Mr Langshaw's square piano.

Howe Bridge, Atherton Cemetery Burials 13 Jan 1975 - 31 Dec 2007. (CD ROM and paper copy)

Standish Hall RC Chapel Baptisms, Marriages and Burials 28 July 1728 - 18 Dec 1864.

Standish St Marie RC Church Baptisms 8 Jan 1865 - 13 Oct 1963.

Standish St Marie RC Marriage index 16 June 1871 - 15 March 2008.

Standish St Marie RC Church Burials and cremations 29 Jan 1865 - 12 June 2008.

Turton, Georgina
A public childhood.

Sunflower Project.
Families: a collection of stories and poems from the Pemberton area.

Westwood Cemetery Burials 1946-2007. (CD ROM)

Wigan Lower Ince Cemetery Burials 3 Sept 1856 – 23 July 1865, revised edition with grave numbers and religion. (CD ROM)

Wigan Lower Ince Cemetery Burials 21 Feb 1873 - 11 June 1880. Revised edition with grave numbers and religion.

Genealogy

Lancashire Parish Register Society Volume 167: The registers of Standish 1653-1732.

General

306.480941 Bygone Britain on Holiday 1900-70.

343.4 Wigan Council Licensing policy statement 2008-2010.

352.042736 Wigan Council Wigan Borough Community Plan 2005-2010.

362.73 Kershaw, Roger
New lives for old (the story of Britain's child migrants).

625.1 Kichenside, Geoffrey
Great train disasters.

790.1922 Kelleher, Susan
The games we play.

796.3331 Clayton, Ian
When push comes to shove.

796.3331 Wilkinson, Phil
Legends: 35 great players of Wigan RLFC.

821 WEL Wellings, Hazel
Shadows: a collection of poems.

942.719 Sharpe, Alan.
Croft: history of a village.

942.76 Lancashire Local Historian No. 20 Aspects of Lancashire History; essays in memory of Mary Higham. (2007-08)

942.76 Record Society of Lancashire & Cheshire Transactions Vol 143: The Court records of Prescott 1640-1649.

942.76 Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire Transactions Vol 156.

942.76 Antiquarian Society of Lancashire & Cheshire Transactions Vol 103 (2007).

Project News

Volunteers and Friends have yet again been very active transcribing records and donating copies of their work to Wigan Heritage Service. Freda Chorlton, since completing coverage of indexes for Wigan Lower Ince Cemetery up to 2007, has started to revise the older indexes and has included grave numbers and religion. At the same time she has indexed both Howe Bridge and Westwood Cemeteries. Westwood Cemetery in particular is an important addition to our records since we previously had no burials records at all for this cemetery. Freda is hoping to tackle more local cemeteries in 2009.

Other equally prolific transcribers have been at work. Gerry Rigby's Pimbo Group has once again completed yet another large project. This time it is St Marie's at Standish.

HERITAGE NOTICE

From the **23rd December 2008**
The History Shop will be temporarily closing.

They are also currently working on St Mark's CE at Newtown, Pemberton and the registers of Holy Trinity at Downall Green, Ashton in Makerfield. The group of transcribers on this occasion consisted of Pam Ashcroft, Alma Harrison, Barbara Davies, Marianne Humphreys and Shirley and Gerry Rigby. Many thanks to all concerned for your industry and dedication!

One donation not listed above, is that presented to our Learning and Outreach Manager, Rachel Orme, at the commemoration service for the Maypole Disaster on Sunday August 18. You may remember the article in Past Forward 49 telling the story of the events following the explosion.

A considerable number of Irish miners were killed in the explosion and the disaster was reported widely in the Mayo newspapers, in particular The Connaught Telegraph. The Mayor of Mayo County Council, Joe Mellett was present at the Commemoration and presented Rachel with a bound copy of the articles from the Irish newspapers. These add some knowledge concerning the victims in that their home villages and some relatives are noted. This volume is available at The History Shop for all to read.

Meanwhile the Lancashire BMD indexing project marches onward. For those of you starting out on family history, it would be useful to look at the www.lancashirebmd.org.uk website. This invaluable site has been steadily growing in coverage over the past few years as volunteer transcribers throughout Lancashire (and some other counties, notably Cheshire) gain access to the indexes of birth, marriage and death registrations that are in use in local town register offices. Currently Marriages for Wigan registration district are complete on the site for the years 1837-1950. Births are fast approaching the same dates, with most parts of the borough indexed as far as 1921. Up until recently, however, there was some doubt as to whether burials would be included for Wigan and Leigh on the site.

Fortunately, it now seems that former problems have been ironed out and once births are also indexed up to 1950, the deaths will indeed be started.

The closure marks the start of an exciting £1.3 million refurbishment which is due to be completed in early 2010.

From **Monday 5th January 2009** an interim heritage service will be available at **Wigan Library**. Facilities will include:



- A **local and family history area** – with a selection of resources and **'Ancestry.Com'** – the leading genealogical resource of its kind online. **FREE** to use. Booking essential. Contact: 01942 828020.

Heritage Services Opening Times at Wigan Library:

Monday	10.00am	4.00pm
Tuesday	10.00am	4.00pm
Wednesday	CLOSED	
Thursday	10.00am	4.00pm
Friday	10.00am	4.00pm
Saturday	10.00am	1.00pm
Sunday	CLOSED	

Wigan Library, College Ave, Wigan WN1 1NN

Further services will continue to be available at:

Heritage Archives

(Leigh Town Hall)
01942 404431

Leigh Local History

(Leigh Library)
01942 404559

In addition, look out for heritage activities and events happening throughout the borough!

For further information please contact

01942 828128 or visit:

www.wlct.org/heritage



CAN YOU HELP?

Johnson

Dear Editor

My father comes from Lancashire as does the paternal side of my wife's family. I am enjoying the research in areas of the country new to me.

The family I am interested in and around Wigan is the Johnson family, relatives of my wife. Her Great Grandfather was James Henry Johnson (b. 1829) manager of Strangeways Hall Colliery and subsequently partner and then director of Abram Coal Company Ltd.

In 1871 he, his wife Elizabeth Orme Scarlett Johnson (nee Litler) lived in Low Green House with their 10 children and servants.

James was a JP and the first chairman of the local board of the Abram Township. He was a great benefactor donating money to the Children's Wing of Wigan Infirmary, the Mining School and Bickershaw Church.

I have found a great deal of information from the internet but I am sure there is much more to be found in Wigan as well I hope of relatives of whom we are unaware. It is our intention to visit Wigan in the near future. Prior to then it would be nice to make contact with possible relatives in the area and others who are also researching the family. Hence my letter.

Finally I see from past issues of **PAST FORWARD** you have referred to Speed Skaters and locals who were entered in the 1908 London Olympics.

Although not a resident of Wigan, the youngest son of James Henry Johnson of the same name (James Henry Johnson born in Southport in 1875) won a silver medal in the pairs ice skating of 1908 with his wife Phyllis. They were also World Skating champions prior to WWI. I mention this out of interest albeit not of direct local interest.

I hope you are able to include this in your publication which I find most interesting and extremely informative.

Yours faithfully
David Pott

Joseph Houghton

Dear Editor

I am trying to establish the when and where my great, great grandfather Joseph Houghton died and also his burial place. He was born Warrington 1824, his father's name was Samuel Houghton, mother's name (unknown). His son, Thomas, was my great grandfather, and married Jane Lathom (ex Chester) and lived in Warrington. His son, my grandfather, also named Thomas, was born in Croft, later married and lived in Leigh before moving to Hindsford/Atherton in the early 1900's

I am aware of all the aforementioned, when and where they, and their families are buried (Warrington and Croft) just Joseph is an enigma! I have visited archives, checked census, and last noted 1882, when his wife, Jane, died whilst in residence at their home in Cockhedge Lane, Warrington. We have gone through all relevant internment books at Walton Lee Crematorium and Cemetery, also Manchester Road cemetery where Jane is actually buried, together with their daughter and grandson, but of Joseph there is nothing. We have also approached Wigan and Leigh cemeteries but to no avail!

If anyone can help, please email:
l.battersby80@ntlworld.com.

Acknowledgement for any information will be forthcoming.

Mrs B Battersby

Lost Orders, Please!

For those readers of "PAST FORWARD" who are unfortunate enough never to have caught my ramblings on "Wigan World" (www.wiganworld.co.uk) and other Wigan based sites, I'd like to introduce myself and ask for assistance in my latest project.

My name is Ian McLoughlin, I am based in the "heart of Wigan's Theatreland" as it states unashamedly in my blog, and my latest project is a comprehensive history of the Pubs and Beer houses in the borough from around 1800 to the present day.

With eventual publication in mind – either as a book or, more likely, as a web-based resource, "Lost Orders" will provide a fascinating glimpse into the history and culture of the people of the borough through their relationship with that most cherished and, sadly, disappearing of institutions, the Pub!

Not only do I want this to be a compelling social history of our town, I also want to provide a resource for people studying their family history as well as simple pub fanatics like myself.

So, for example, if you discover a James Treffit in your family tree who you thought might have had a pub, you could check with Lost Orders and find out that in fact it was the "Buck i'th'Vine" in Wallgate, which went on to become the "Clarence" and is now "Harry's Bar" ! (James was landlord there in 1816!)

None of the little I have achieved so far would have been possible without the help of the staff of the History Shop and at the Borough archives who have been unbelievably patient and kind (and are a fantastic and invaluable resource) but I am also aware of another practically untapped source of information sitting out there: YOU!

I want to know what YOU remember about your favourite pub; the characters, the foibles, the amazing pints and "donkey-choker" sandwiches (Thanks Zeta!) and just what that place meant to you.

I'm also looking for any photographs of pubs; any you submit to me will be lovingly scanned and repaired if necessary and full credit given. It may not be the subject of the photo; you may have an old photo of a walking day with the "Shovel and Broom" on Scholes Bridge in view – here's hoping!

If you feel that this is something you would like to know more about or be involved in please feel free to drop me a line and cheers!!!

Ian McLoughlin

E: ianmcl13@googlemail.com

B: <http://blog.wiganworld.co.uk/ianmcl>

Have you a family or local history query you think our readers can help you with? Please write to the editor.

If there are no contact details with individual letters, please send information to the Editor, and it will be forwarded. **Editor**

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Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust.*

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December 2008

A Personal Road to Wigan Pier

By Roger Fisher

The following narrative records a recent visit I made to Wigan. I would be interested to hear from anyone who remembers the shop in Leader Street, although it ceased to be about 50 years ago. For this reason I append a contact address and phone number at the end of the text.

In August 2008 I visited Wigan for the first time; the purpose was to search for my paternal great-grandparents, Henry and Ellen Fisher.

My expectation was to find a coally, small and possibly mean town. Quite wrong. It is small but smart and the people warm, friendly, helpful, but so broad-accented that it was often difficult for a southern ear to understand what was being said.

It turned out to be a wonderful experience. I had looked at parts of Wigan on Google Earth before the visit so did realise that many if not most of the mid-nineteenth century streets had been totally rebuilt although the general street pattern observable on the old maps remained.

There were some right at the top of the town in an area I now know to be called Scholes that certainly had retained some of the original terraces of houses - and this was an area I knew to have been the home of my family.

I drove up from Oxfordshire on a Monday, arriving in the early afternoon, time enough to spend an hour or so in the Wigan Heritage Centre before closing hour at 4.00pm.

I booked into the hotel, selected for its proximity to the town centre, and set off on the journey of exploration. It took about 3 minutes to become lost and doubt my map reading abilities.

Hesitating at a pedestrian crossing I was approached by an elderly man carrying a shopping basket. He summed me up. I looked helpless. He asked if he could assist (I did managed to translate that).

The Heritage Centre, I pronounced (and he managed to translate that). Well, he said, I could not have asked a better man as he was, proudly, a retired postman, born and bred in Wigan.

About 20 minutes later we finished a conversation that ranged from the location of every land mark in the town to the rebuilding of much of it including the demolition 45 years ago of the house he had been born in. By then I was getting to understand at least every third word of his Lancashire dialect and had learnt much about the pride with which the locals think of their town.

My friend the postman's directions led me to The History Shop. The active history part is small, well arranged and staffed by knowledgeable people. I started work right away and within 10 minutes had made the first hit. But closing time at 4.00pm came quickly and that was it for the day. So back to the hotel, into the car and a geographical tour of the district looking at the suburbs (once villages) surrounding the town where the Fisher clan had lived from time to time.

Finally back to the main town and the parish church. All Saints was to be the high point of the exploration as it was the place where several ancestors had married and others had been baptised, although they did not lay buried by the walls as there was no graveyard.

'Open on Saturday morning' read the notice on the portico gate. This was not to say it was not obviously still an active church. The church fathers probably wisely accept the failure of religious order to make all men honest and respectful of public adornments. This was very disappointing as I would not be there on Saturday.

On Tuesday morning it was in the car again and up to the Scholes above the town. The first discovery was a real original cobbled street. Moreover the old terraced houses, albeit somewhat refurbished, still stood proudly along each side of it - and in the neighbouring streets as well. It was those neighbouring streets that were the focus of attention. as in two of them - Leader Street and Belvoir Street - were the homes of my great-grand parents between 1850's and the 1890's.

Belvoir Street was their earlier residence. On one side the old terraced houses still stood neatly but on the other the old had given way to small modern bungalows - and this was the even-numbers side

where Henry and Ellen Fisher first established a grocery shop, probably during the mid-1850's, in the years immediately following their marriage.

So off up the hill a short way to Leader Street. Wonderfully complete. Number 25, the one-time Fisher home and shop. a corner house had an entirely rebuilt new frontage but was otherwise little changed.

On the opposite side the old terrace houses had been retained and above the one there was a sandstone plaque built into the eave bearing the words MARIAN TERRACE 1875. So this was when the street was built. The Fishers probably moved there at about that time, acquiring the large corner property into which to expand home and business.

The rest of Tuesday was spent at the heritage centre. One of those days when not much happens except the slow elimination from the search of a few miles of microfilm.

Early on Wednesday off to Manchester and the John Rylands Library which holds a voluminous collection of Methodist church records. Henry Fisher had been in his later years a primitive Methodist lay preacher and his son, John Fisher, my grandfather, became ordained as a minister in that church. The research room at John Rylands is housed in a modern extension of a beautiful neo-gothic building of the 1890's housing a superb collection of rare books and manuscripts, many on display in tall carved oak shelving gleaming with a century of polish.

The Methodists proved fruitful. I discovered for the first time that John Fisher spent the years 1873 to 1878 in the east end of London. In April 1871 he had been with his family in Wigan. Age 18 he is recorded as being a local preacher and draper, so this was probably within his probationary period prior to ordination. From the contemporary church records it appears that the probation was a full four years, with examinations at the end of each year. It is likely that his move to London was his first appointment as an itinerant minister - the word itinerant does characterise the rest of his life.

Back to Wigan. Looking at the photographs taken in the previous days I noticed something that had escaped my eye during the Tuesday morning visit to Leader Street. So a quick breakfast and back up to that part of the town. Parked the car and walked a short distance to No 25. And there it was. High up embedded in the new front wall of the house was an old sandstone plaque. Badly eroded but not so badly that it was not possible to discern the carved writing:

**MOUNT TERRACE
H & E FISHER
AD 1876**

I was overwhelmed by emotion - and very annoyed with myself for having failed to notice it at the earlier visit.

Just at that moment a car pulled up and parked. The driver got out, a precise man in a suit, walked over to the door of No. 25, opened it with a latch key, went inside and closed the door behind him.

I was still in a state of mental paralysis but this woke me up. There was only one thing to do - go and knock on the door. It opened. The look on the man's face was one of adverse curiosity which anyone would adopt when finding a total stranger on the door step at a relatively unsocial hour of the day - it was about 08.30.

The only way to disarm his suspicion was to explain that he had my great-grandparents' names on his wall. The effect was immediate. The usual Wigan friendliness turned on. Yes, he said it had been a shop once and is now an accountant's office; it still has a very large cellar underneath. The original house is now divided into two, No. 25a, at the corner, and No. 25 next to it.

So it looks as if my entrepreneurial grandparents had taken the premises when newly built and may have influenced the design of the property so that it would accommodate not only the family but the grocery and provisions business as well.

There was more to come that morning. Returning to the centre of town with some 20 minutes to wait for the heritage centre to open I thought to go and have another look at the parish church. As I came near to the portico a lady tried the gates and found them locked. She turned and went over to a friend sitting on a nearby bench holding bags containing bunches of flowers. Together they began to make their way round to the side of the building. It occurred to me that these may be flower ladies whose duty was to decorate the church, so I followed.

As they approached the side chapel door one withdrew a large key. The moment had to be grasped. I went up to them and asked could they possibly let me see the inside of the church as my great-grandparents had been married there 150 years ago.

Once again the Wigan warm heartedness won over suspicion of strangers. A short conversation and a few moments later I was standing in the aisle down which 22-year old Ellen Gaskell walked on 19 June 1852 to become the bride of Henry Fisher. Another deeply emotional moment. I had come home.

If any reader remembers the shop at 25 Leader Street please contact the author by email at: mopanitree@mweb.co.za or by phone: 01235 521680

Westleigh Local History Group – Post-16 Learners

I use Past Forward as one of my learning resources on a 10-week local history course I run out of Westleigh Community Centre for post-16 learners. I find the publication an excellent source of local history information and research, and the learners enjoy the articles immensely. Rachel Orme

The learners say: "I found the article in Past Forward on the Maypole Disaster very interesting as it had been the subject of one of our local history group sessions. Thank you, Past Forward."

"Past Forward – a great read full of interesting articles and super sources of information for research into the Borough's heritage."

"Yippee! Time for another edition of Past Forward. Great articles and pictures about the people and places who came before us".



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Thursday 29th January 2009

Holocaust Memorial Day

Ceremonies of Commemoration

10.15am
Atrium, Wigan Town Hall

1.30pm
Derby Room, Leigh Library

With the Mayor of Wigan, local schools and other guests.

Join us for readings, music, drama and personal testimonies. This year the ceremony will also feature the lighting of candles as we remember the victims of the Nazi Holocaust and other genocides.

Everyone welcome
Refreshments available

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Past Forward Down Under!

My wife and I moved to Australia in 1987 to be near to our daughter who lives in Sydney.

We had lived all our lives in the Wigan area prior to this and, as you can imagine, this was a big move at our time of life.

We missed many things from home – friends, social life, tomatoes, sausages and many other things.

In 1994 we returned to Wigan for a holiday and to catch up with family and friends and it was during this trip that we visited the History Shop to research information in relation to Wigan Boys Club.

In 1946 I was a member of the boxing team representing Wigan and I was interested to find out if there had been any record of this event in any newspapers etc. of the time.

I was lucky enough to find a copy of an advert in the Wigan Observer publicizing the event and also a short article advising of a win by Wigan against Lancaster which also reported a win for myself.

It was during this visit that I heard about the Past Forward magazine and I decided to subscribe. I also arranged to get copies of all previous publications.

I thoroughly enjoy reading this publication. Each edition manages to bring many memories flooding back.

Ernie Taberner is one of my favourite contributors to the magazine and I always look forward to reading his articles which bring back memories of days long forgotten. He must have a wonderful memory.

I also enjoy News from the Archives - which again take me back to my younger years in Wigan.

I have recently enjoyed the memories of Austin Lyons. Especially as I was privileged to know him personally for many years through my work at the Lancashire Evening Post in Wigan and the Daily Express in Manchester. My wife, Lena, also had a baby linen and wool shop close to his photographic shop in Market Street, Hindley for many years.

It is difficult to select individual items of interest as I must admit to enjoying the publication as a whole. "Past Forward" is a nostalgic trip back through time of the Wigan scene through the ages, it is also full of knowledge and memories.

I wish to congratulate all the people involved over the past 50 editions of the magazine for the effort they have contributed in making it one of the best such publications in England.



I would just like to end with a bit of self-praise. Two years ago I was privileged to receive from the Mayor of Hornsby Shire Council, "The Citizen of the Year" award for services to the community. I only mention this to show that it is never too late to serve your fellow man/woman, who is less fortunate than yourself. I am 78 years young.

Fred Rosbottom
Sydney,
Australia.



How to Find Us



History Shop

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Wigan WN1 1NU
Telephone 01942 828128
heritage@wlct.org



Leigh Local History

Leigh Library,
Turnpike Centre,
Civic Square,
Leigh WN7 1EB
Telephone 01942 404559

Archives

Leigh Town Hall,
Leigh WN7 1DY
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