

PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Archives & Museums

Issue No. 84

April - July 2020



**VE Day
75th
Anniversary**



**WIGAN'S
TARGET**



£432,000

Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine

Contents

- 4-5 The Second World War and the Home Front
- 6-8 A Wigan's Soldier Story of Survival
- 9 John (Jack) Morris
- 10-12 The Importance of the Douglas Navigation to the Development of Wigan
- 13 Hercules Dowie
- 14-16 He would not Pay a Farthing
- 17 Mary Tomlinson
- 18-19 Tyldesley Memories
- 20-23 A Glazebury Tragedy
- 24-27 The Snake Grave of Billinge
- 28-30 Out of the Pits and into Parliament
- 31 The River Douglas
- 32 Museum Collection Corner
- 33 Letter
- 34 Talks at the Museum of Wigan Life
- 35 Society News

FRONT COVER
Wings for Victory' poster, 1943 (Wigan Archives & Local Studies)

Letter from the Editorial Team

Welcome to PAST Forward Issue 84.

In this edition we are marking the 75th anniversary of VE Day, with articles that reflect on the impact of the war across the Borough, as well as the experiences of individual men and women from our towns and villages.

Another significant local anniversary this year takes us to the water. It will be 300 years since the Douglas Navigation Act, which allowed the river to be navigable, connecting Wigan with the lower reaches of the Ribble Estuary.

We have more compelling local history stories from Marlene Nolan, Brian Joyce and Kath Graham, and a look at a highly unusual grave in the churchyard at Billinge St Aidan's Parish Church.

To round up the winners of the 2019 Past Forward Essay Writing Competition, you will find Alison Armfield's memories of Tyldesley and a history of the life of the wonderfully named, Hercules Dowie.

Revealing Wigan and Leigh Archives



The Leigh Town Hall project continues to pick up pace as we work towards the re-opening of the building and new facilities for visitors and researchers at the Archives & Local Studies.

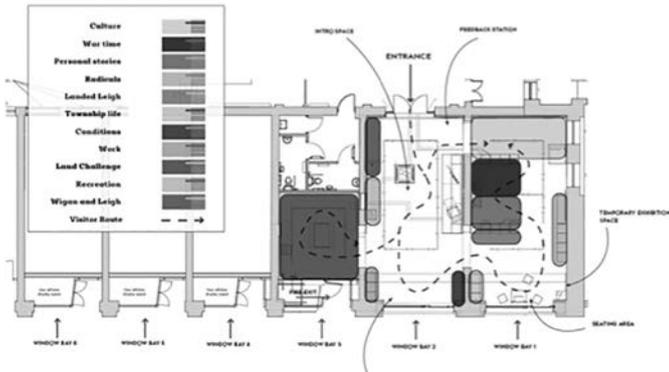
Detailed design work is being completed on the furniture and fittings for the new public searchroom and our specialist conservation and digitisation studio. On the upper floors of the building decoration work is well under way and conservation progressing in the historic council chamber and committee rooms to bring these spaces back to their full glory.

Our exhibition designers, Creative Core, are



Completed restoration work on the copper dome at the top of the cupola on Leigh Town Hall

Information for contributors, please see page 27



Story Map for the new exhibition space at Archives: Wigan & Leigh



Design and display ideas for the new exhibition space

working alongside the Archive and Museum team to finalise the display designs and select objects. We hope to be able to share some of the designs with Past Forward readers in the next edition of the magazine in the summer.

We will also be shortly recruiting for two project officer posts to support the delivery of activities, educational workshops and volunteering for the duration of the National Lottery Heritage Fund supported scheme (until March 2023). If you are interested in applying for these posts, please keep an eye on the Greater Jobs website (<https://www.greater.jobs/>) or our social media pages for more information on when and how to apply.

PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

Copy Deadline for Issue 85

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday, 12th June 2020.

Past Forward Subscription

Magazine subscription is £9 for three issues (incl. UK delivery). Payment by cheque (payable to Wigan Council), postal order or credit/debit card (telephone 01942 828128).

For worldwide subscription prices and information, please contact us.

Digital subscription (delivered by email, worldwide) is £6 per year. Payment options as above.

Please state which issue you wish your subscription to begin at:

Please tick here if you would like to receive information regarding Wigan Museums & Archives activities and events. We do not pass your details to other organisations.

Return to: The Museum of Wigan Life, Past Forward Subscription, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU or email us at archives@wigan.gov.uk



Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone No.

Email

Signed Date

The Second World War and the Home Front

By Hannah Turner

With the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe taking place in May 2020, work has begun on indexing life on the home front of the towns of the Borough. The following article is a very brief introduction to just some of the events unearthed.

Preparation for the war started long before the outbreak on 3 September 1939. In Atherton, local people had been training in civil defence services for two years prior. A travelling gas chamber visited the town from time to time to test the gas masks, and in images from that era we can see people testing masks in the Water Street area of Atherton in what looks like a chamber.

In Wigan, Corporation staff were sent on anti-gas training courses and 70,000 gas masks had been distributed by October 1938. Air raid precaution measures were taken with paid staff and volunteers being recruited for civil defence, air raid wardens, fire watching, first aid and decontamination squads.

When the war did arrive, the local workforce dwindled with people going to serve in the armed forces and work in the munition factories. The first few months of the Second World War is often referred to as the 'Phoney War' since there was little military land operation. Perhaps then it is not



*Visit of Indian troops to Wigan, 6 October 1943
(Wigan Archives, PC2009.13)*



May Marland, Golborne Air Training Corps 1150 Squadron canteen worker (Wigan Archives, PC2013.7016)

surprising that local newspapers reported sandbags rotting, shelters being vandalised, and absenteeism occurring in industry and the civil defence. But then Dunkirk happened, the bombing of Manchester and Liverpool, and the increasing threat of invasion wiped complacency from the town according to the Leigh Journal.

In Wigan, the Borough Librarian, Arthur Hawkes, compiled the 'Air Raid Distress Information Manual'. In the event of a heavy air raid an Information and Administrative Centre was to be set up in the Central Library Newsroom which today we know as the Museum of Wigan Life.

Thankfully, neither Leigh nor Wigan suffered the extreme air raids endured by Liverpool and Manchester but there were still bombing fatalities within the towns. By autumn 1940 the Blitz had spread beyond London to other major cities and both Manchester and Liverpool suffered major Blitz attacks. Local police, fire and civil defence workers went to assist in the affected towns.

Liverpool suffered the most raids after London with

Bootle enduring substantial bombing and evacuees were sent to local towns including Leigh. For the first eight days of May 1941, Merseyside was bombed almost every night. In Bootle, 8000 out of 17,000 houses were destroyed or damaged. In total 70,000 people are said to have been made homeless in Merseyside. No wonder that in the same month the Leigh Rest Centre Service in Leigh fed and housed over 3000 evacuees.

From early 1940 to 1942, alert sirens became an almost nightly occurrence with enemy aircraft flying over to Manchester and Liverpool. In October of 1940 bombs fell in the grounds of Damhouse demolishing a joiner's shop; luckily there were no fatalities. In September of that same year bombs fell on Platt Bridge and a civilian called Elizabeth Meadows was killed. Casualties in Atherton and Leigh followed when Air Raid Warden Peter Shaw and Fire Watcher Harry Wadsworth were killed when bombs fell on Atherton. Another civilian fatality occurred over that same period when Mary Knowles was killed by bombs falling on Leigh.

New neighbours and visitors

With the air raids came evacuees and soon both Leigh and Wigan welcomed visitors from across Britain. Refugees escaping the horrors of the war arrived in Wigan from the Netherlands, Belgium and Guernsey from 1940 onwards. Over 700 Guernsey refugees arrived in Wigan for billeting, some stayed in Wigan throughout the duration of the war.

Visitors from Britain and Ireland also came to Leigh for reasons of employment as the demand for labour was great. Naval training camps and later American forces brought even greater numbers to



Party celebrating Victory in Europe Day, Hurst Street, Bedford, Leigh, 1945 (Wigan Archives, PC2010.3253)

the towns. Troops from different nations visited; in 1943 Wigan entertained and welcomed troops from India.

Keep the home fires burning

Fundraising was a key theme on the home front with many people from the community raising money. The Mayor of Leigh's War Comfort Funds organised dances, concerts, and competitions to raise funds for postal orders to be sent twice a year to those serving abroad. Both Leigh and Wigan adopted and raised funds for warships HMS Ulysses and HMS Janus. HMS Janus was lost in 1944 and a memorial service was held for the officers and men at All Saints Church, Wigan.

The Leigh Journal organised the readers' fund providing cigarettes for those serving abroad. By May 1945 over 6000 parcels of cigarettes had been sent overseas. British Restaurants opened throughout the towns. The restaurants were a communal kitchen to help those on rations, in need, or who were homeless. Atherton opened the first in the Leigh district and the first one in Wigan was on King Street in 1942.

Tom Burke, an international opera singer from Leigh, sang at both the Leigh Hippodrome and Wigan's Ritz Cinema to raise money for war charities. Another celebrated opera international star, Dame Eva Turner, also performed at the Ritz to help raise funds.

The end of the war

Victory in Europe was announced in 1945 and celebrations took place across the country. In Wigan it was said that dancing took over the streets, and local men wearing uniform were invited into the houses of strangers to share drinks. Evacuees from London and refugees from the Channel Islands could finally return home and local church bells could ring to their hearts' content.

The end of the war must have been a sombre affair for many. Hundreds of local people in the armed forces, civil defence and civilian communities had lost their lives leaving many local families bereaved. There were those people still living who would now have to endure the traumatic memories of combat or life in a prisoner of war camp, or the horrors of a concentration camp.

A Wigan Soldier's Story of Survival

BY JIM MEEHAN

This is the story of Donald Jolley. An ordinary lad from Wigan who got caught up in the Second World War and went on a series of incredible journeys that would shape him and his view of the world. Like many of his generation, the war would pluck him away



Donald as a new recruit

from the life he knew. He would travel to places he could not have dreamt of and endure hardships that would severely test his ability to survive. It is said that in times of war ordinary people do extraordinary things. That certainly applied to Donald.

Like most who experience war, he was reluctant to talk about his experiences, preferring to keep his worst memories deep inside. By researching service records, war diaries and archives, and using the recollections of his sons, we can piece things together and tell Donald's story.

When the Second World War broke out, Donald was busy following in his father's footsteps learning his trade as a bricklayer. He lived with his family in a cosy terraced house on Stirling Street. He was just eighteen when he went for his

medical at the Ministry of Labour and National Service, next to the old Ritz Cinema on Station Road, Wigan. A couple of months later, in January 1942, he was on his way to Aldershot to join the Hertfordshire Regiment.

He spent a couple of months defending beaches in South East England, before being transferred to The Royal Fusiliers. This historic regiment was formed to defend King James II. Their ceremonial base was the Tower of London. Along with other London-based regiments, they formed an infantry division known as 'The Black Cats'. Donald came to value their iconic insignia and believed it was both respected and feared by the enemy.

When Donald was given 'embarkation leave', it was a sure sign that he was about to head overseas. He returned to Wigan to spend a precious two weeks with his family. As he looked out from the departing train window, he must have wondered if he would ever see them again. There was just time for a morale boosting visit from George VI, before the regiment travelled overnight to the Firth of Clyde. This is where a convoy was assembled, away from the prying eyes of Fifth Columnists.

He was on his way to join the Persia and Iraq Force. The Mediterranean was controlled by the Axis forces, so that meant a two-month trip around Africa, to India and then across to Basra in Iraq. The young lad from Wigan had to quickly find his sea legs. He

discovered places like Sierra Leone, Cape Town, Mombasa, and Bombay. Any excitement was overshadowed by the constant threat of U-boat attack. The stopping points were safe ports where they received a warm welcome. Donald later confessed to his sons that he enjoyed the hospitality a bit too much in Cape Town and ended up spending a night in the cells!

The regiment's role was to secure the Persian and Iraqi oil fields, as well as a land route from the Gulf to Russia. They spent time learning mountain warfare in northern Iraq. This was preparation for what would come later. Donald was about to start another epic journey. It was now March 1943 and he was on his way to join Montgomery's 8th Army in North Africa.

They headed south through Baghdad, then east through Palestine. They crossed the Sinai Desert battling through sandstorms. They passed through Tobruk and Benghazi on the Libyan coast. They reached Tunisia at the end of April having travelled 3,223 miles in 32 days. It was an exhausting logistical achievement: moving equipment, supplies and armaments across hostile terrain.

The Allies had already pinned Italian and German forces back to the area around Tunis. Operation Vulcan and Operation Strike were to be the last push to take Tunis and the surrounding area. This would give the Allies victory in North Africa.

Donald's battalion reached Enfidaville on 29 April 1943. This was to be the site of the last battle of the Tunisian Campaign. Although the Axis forces faced defeat, they deployed elite troops from the German Paratrooper Regiment and Italian Young Fascist Battalion to make a final stand. Donald's battalion were ordered to occupy a ridge above Enfidaville. There was little cover and each man had to dig hard to shelter from enemy fire. They were continually shelled and mortared suffering 42 casualties.

Further North Allied forces liberated Tunis but fighting continued at Enfidaville. On 9 May Donald's battalion were ordered to advance and take enemy positions on hills overlooking Enfidaville. A smoke screen was created, and then they advanced between tanks and Bren Gun Carriers. As the smoke screen cleared, they came under attack from shelling, mortars and machine gun fire. The Commanding Officer was hit. He managed to crawl to a tank and was hauled inside.

They withdrew but continued to be mortared. They were shelled by their own guns, who were giving defensive cover to a nearby unit. They suffered over 400 casualties. A few days later the Italian and German forces in North Africa surrendered unconditionally.

Donald's battalion were able to recover and bury their dead. The final push came at a high cost. Enfidaville War Cemetery is the final resting place of 1,551 Allied soldiers. This was Donald's first

major battle experience. It must have made a lasting impression on him and his surviving comrades.

The battalion then moved to a camp outside Tripoli, but there was little time to rest. Donald's next journey would form part of Operation Avalanche: the invasion of Italy. Their objective was to land at Salerno, a long sandy bay next to the Amalfi coast. On the voyage across the sea, morale was boosted by the news that Italy had surrendered. They were warned though that they would "have to fight just as hard". This would prove prophetic. As the landing craft was lowered Donald and his comrades must have feared for their lives.

They landed under the cover of darkness and successfully established bridgehead 'Oliver'. They were ordered to take the nearby town on Battipaglia and achieved this with little opposition. Things would soon change dramatically. German forces launched a devastating counterattack. The town was quickly surrounded by tanks of the 16 Panzer Division. Donald's Battalion were ordered to hold the town at all cost.

They barricaded themselves into houses, but they were attacked from all sides. The tanks flattened the buildings they occupied. They retreated but many were cut off. Donald's company were then ordered to hold a bridge with the Grenadier Guards. In just one day, the battalion had suffered 14 killed, 39 wounded, 96 missing and 1



Men of Donald's battalion in Salerno September 1943

missing believed killed. This was half of the battalion. The British and American forces were nearly driven back into the sea by German tanks equipped with flame-throwers. With the help of shelling from Navy ships offshore, the Allies eventually turned things around, and the German forces retreated.

Donald's battalion pushed on to take Naples and move up the spine of Italy using their mountain warfare training in places like Monte Cassino. As for Donald, he was now missing in action. The news reached his family in Wigan in October 1943. There was an agonising wait of a month before it was confirmed he was alive and a Prisoner of War (POW). He was in Stalag 8B at Lamsdorf in Silesia, (modern day Poland).

It was a large camp with 120,000 prisoners. It is the camp where Douglas Bader (a skilled aviator immortalised in the book and film *Reach for the Sky*), was held. Donald had to knuckle down and accept life as a POW. The Geneva Convention did not allow POWs to be used as forced labour, but many volunteered. Life on a working party at least got him out of camp. There are many accounts of prisoners establishing a good rapport with their working party guards and the local people they worked with.

Donald was put to work in a coal mine. This held little fear for a lad from Wigan, but the work was hard and there are accounts of prisoners deliberately placing their hands on rail tracks to get



Enfidaville War Cemetery: the final resting place of Donald's Comrades.

transferred away from the mines. Donald's working party was in Konigshutte-Bismark. This was on the outskirts of modern-day Katowice, which is the large town Donald recalled being taken to for medical tests when he was taken ill. There was a sub-camp of Auschwitz there, which housed Jewish prisoners forced to work at the steel plant. Donald always remembered the dreadful acrid smell that emanated from the concentration camp.



Donald, centre, being liberated near Berlin in 1945.

The months rolled by, punctuated by the occasional Red Cross parcel or letter from home. One particular letter from his father at Christmas 1943 would become precious to Donald. Excitement ran through the camp when they learned British troops reached the bridge at Arnhem in September 1944. The advance eventually failed. It was 'a bridge too far'. It would be several months, as well as another journey with more extreme hardship, before liberation finally came.

Donald was about to face the hardest journey of his life. As the Russians advanced from the east, the camps were emptied and prisoners forced to march west to remain under German control. It was January 1945 during a freezing Silesian winter when Donald and his comrades were forced to start walking. The conditions were incredibly harsh with little food or water. Armed guards forced them to keep moving. Many did not have the strength and were left by the wayside to die. Some were shot and a number of guards were later

prosecuted for war crimes. There are stories of Jewish and political prisoners being marched into the sea. The marching went on for several hundred miles and lasted for three months.

The 'Long March' reached Altengrabow Camp, (west of Berlin), when his captors realised Allied forces advancing from the west were nearby. There was a peaceful surrender and the prisoners were at last liberated. What an incredibly joyous moment that must have been for Donald and his comrades after spending so long in captivity. Donald was ready for one more journey. He would head home to Wigan. Victory in Europe was marked by VE Day on 8 May 1945. Six days later Donald set foot on British soil for the first time in three years. However, there would be some sad news.

Donald's father Edward did not get the chance to greet his son's return. He had passed away a few months earlier. His letter from Christmas 1943 became even more precious. Donald had carried it close to him throughout the gruelling 'Long March'. It must have helped to keep him going. It was simply about the family and what was happening back in Wigan, but for Donald it provided a precious link with home and his father. Miraculously it survived in near perfect condition. Donald's son Anthony continues to keep it safe.

Donald had been on an incredible journey during his formative years. He travelled thousands of miles. He



The precious letter from his father that Donald carried on the 'Long March'

had been involved in fierce fighting on two continents. He had faced life threatening situations. He had survived, but watched many others close to him perish. He had endured the hardship of being held prisoner and survived the 'Long March'. How different the world must have looked as he returned home to Wigan to start the rest of his life?

His service record showed Donald was entitled to three medals. Second World War medals had to be claimed unlike First World War which were automatically issued. Donald never explained why he hadn't claimed his. Perhaps he just wanted to get on with his life or perhaps he simply didn't get around to it. Nearly 75 years later, his son Anthony applied to the Ministry of Defence to receive them posthumously. After a few weeks a package arrived. Anthony was filled with pride to find five gleaming medals enclosed: The Africa Star (with 8th Army clasp), The War Medal, The Italy Star, The 1939/45 Star, and The Defence Medal. A precious tribute to an ordinary lad from Wigan.



Donald's medals received by his son Anthony in 2019, over 74 years after the end of the Second World War.

JOHN (JACK) MORRIS

POW 4224

BY RITA FELL

From an early age I had always known that my Uncle John, known as 'Jack', had been a prisoner of war (POW) in German hands and that he was captured in France on 28 May 1940 and interred in a camp in Upper Silesia, Poland.



I never met him as he was tragically killed before I was born. This happened on 25 April 1950, in a road traffic accident on Princes Street, Edinburgh. I have had a lifelong interest in his life, prompted by family photographs of him in uniform and I think some of them were taken in a POW camp. I began my research into Jack's Second World War service by contacting the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) Central Tracing Agency in 2009. After many months I received a covering letter from their office in Geneva along with the following Attestation information.

Gooderwerlat is given as the place of capture; I think this has been mistranslated and should be Godewaersvelde which is a village in France near the Belgian border. This fits in with research I have carried out into the fall of France between 10 May 1940 and 25 June 1940. Jack is recorded as being held firstly from 11 June 1940 in Stalag XX1B Szubin, and then transferred to Stalag V111B Lamsdorf, from 22 August 1944.

Jack was born on 17 September 1915 at 1 Fitzadam Street, Wigan. His Army Trace Card shows he first attested in Wigan on 8 November 1932 and was given the Service Number 824255. Three years later on 7 November 1935 he transferred from the Regular Army to the Army Reserve. Living at 52 Wigan Lane, the 1939 National Register also records that he was a Regular Army Reservist; this meant he was called up at the outbreak of the war.

In August 1940 an appeal was published in the Wigan Observer by his wife who was a Conductress for Ribble Motor Services and living in Scholes at the time. She was asking for any information concerning his disappearance. Jack had been serving in France since February 1940 and was last heard of on 28 May 1940. He was a Lance Bombardier in the 58th (Sussex) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, which was part of the 44th (Home Counties) Infantry Division, an all Territorial Army formation.

Jack was part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and was originally listed in the British Army Casualty Lists as missing on 14 June 1940, later to be listed as a POW, number 4224.

The Order of Battle for the BEF records that on the day of Jack's capture the 44th Division was located in an Abbey at Mont des Cats, about a mile from Godewaersvelde. The Germans were attacking around the area of Cassel and Hazebrouck. On 28 May, German forces broke through the defences. I think that this is when Jack was captured; I hope to discover more when I receive his Service Record.

Despite surviving The Long March and four years a prisoner, on liberation he remained a Class Z Reservist. This was a Reserve contingent of the British Army made up of previously enlisted soldiers, now discharged, that were available for recall if under 45 years of age.



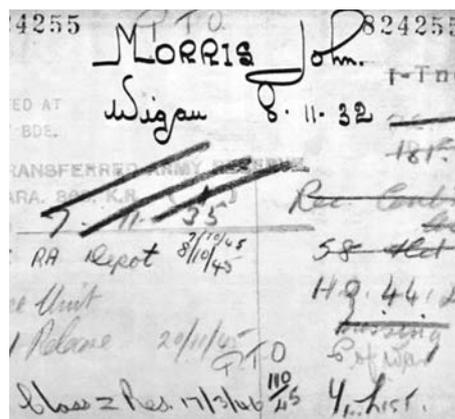
Jack Morris (centre)

ICRC
DCIARCHInfo Geneva, 22.4.2009

ATTESTATION

The Central Tracing Agency has received the following information:

Name, first name	: Morris John
Date of birth	: 17.9.1915
Place of birth	: Wigan
Father's name	: William
Mother's maiden name	: Derbyshire
Family's address	: Mrs. Morris, 101 Scholes, Wigan, Lancs.
Rank	: "Gef." or (and) LCpl or (and) "L. Bombdr."
Unit	: R.A.
Service number	: 824255
Date and place of capture	: 28.5.1940, Gooderwerlat
Place of detention	: - Prisoner of war in German hands. - Admitted to Stalag XXI B on 11-6-1940 (according to an information dated 11.6.1940). - Transferred from POW Camp Stalag XXI B to Stalag VIII B (according to an information dated 22.8.1944). - Reported held in POW Camp- Stalag VIII B (according to an information dated 17.8.1944).
Prisoner of war number	: 4224
Liberation/Repatriation	: No records
Source document(s)	: - 2 information issued by the German authorities - 1 information issued by the acting senior British Officer in Stalag VIII B



Jack Morris' trace card

The Importance of the Douglas Navigation to the Development of Wigan

By Dr Stephen Craig Smith

2020 marks the 300th Anniversary of the Douglas Navigation Act, passed on 24 March 1720, allowing the River Douglas to become a navigable waterway connecting Wigan with the lower reaches of the Ribble Estuary. It was not the first attempt to make the River Douglas navigable, that occurred in April 1713, but the earlier attempt was unsuccessful.

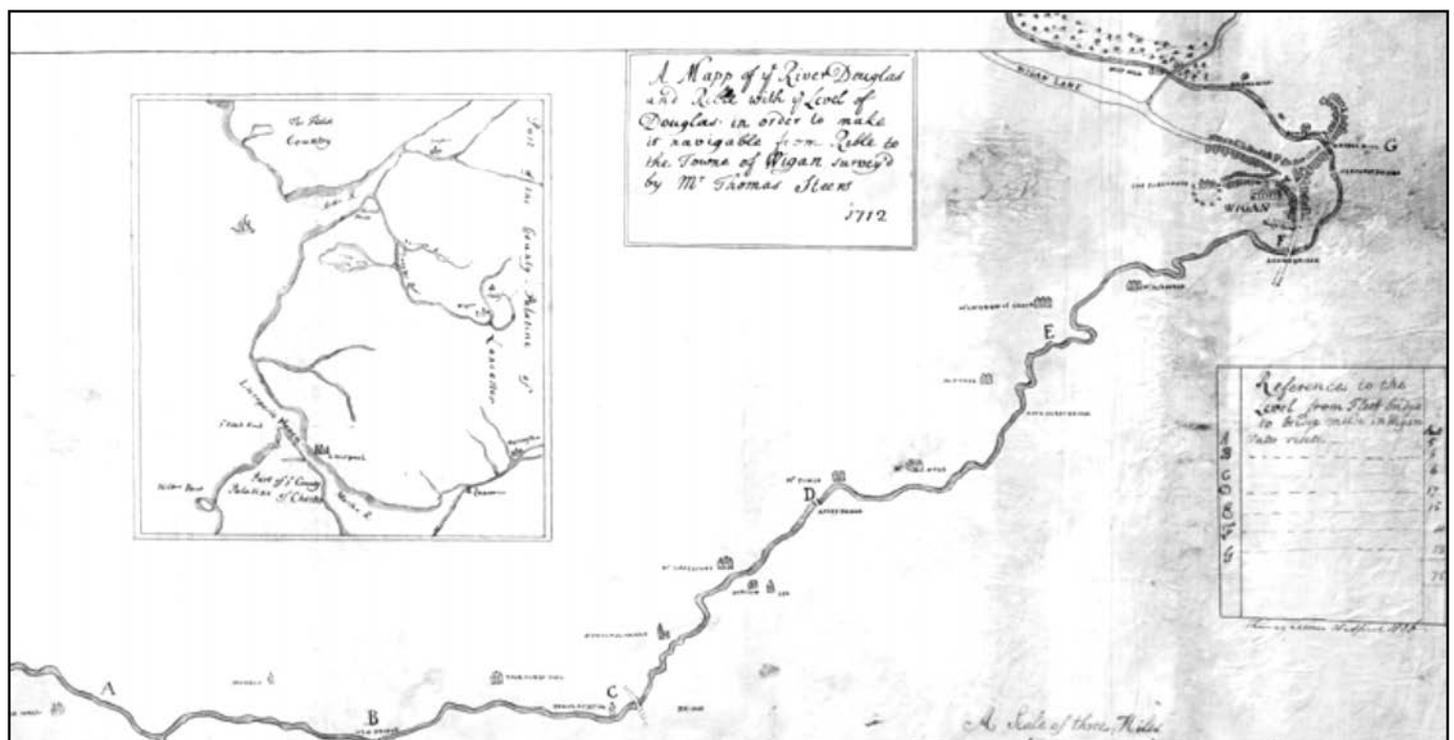
Although the Douglas Navigation existed for a relatively short time (it was finally opened in 1741 and all lock gates had been removed by 1782) its significance as a catalyst for the development of the Wigan Coal Field is out of all proportion to its short period of active use and its relatively mediocre financial performance.

Wigan had been associated with coal extraction for many centuries before the Douglas Navigation Act was passed. There is reference to coal extraction as early as 1320 when 'Margaret of Shuttlesworth exchanged land with Robert of Standish but he reserved firestone and sea coal if it be possible to find in the lands mentioned' (Hannavy, 1990) and in 1434 reference was made 'to coal mining in Pemberton and Orrell' (Shryhane, 1994, Anderson, 1975).

Until the opening of the Douglas Navigation all mining activity was small scale and focused on a local domestic market. This was due to the appalling state of Lancashire's roads prior to the eighteenth century. Coal is a heavy, bulky product which had to be transported either in paniers carried by, or in carts pulled by, horses. This involved roads which were quagmires in winter and rutted obstacle courses in summer. The cost of coal at the point of extraction doubled after carriage of only a few miles.

Liverpool was expanding rapidly around the early 1700s both as a settlement and as a port. Liverpool merchants were keen to improve docking facilities and following an Act of Parliament in 1710, contracted Thomas Steers to build a new dock. Improved docking facilities made Liverpool more accessible by sea, but profitable trading also depended on accessing coal from inland locations. Liverpool merchants were well aware of the high-quality coal and cannel mined in and around Wigan but how could it be transported to the port cheaply and efficiently?

Steers had a good understanding of the relationship between transport and commerce and by 1712 had surveyed the River



Copy of the original Thomas Steers 1712 Survey of the River Douglas
Copyright - Lancashire Record Office

Douglas to assess its navigable potential to connect Wigan with Liverpool by water transport. On the upside there were relatively few water mills to contend with between Wigan and the river mouth, but on the downside there was frequent risk of winter flooding. Steers felt the Navigation was possible with the construction of seven locks on a total river rise of 75 feet between the river mouth and Wigan.

A Bill was duly presented to Parliament on 10 April 1713, although it is unclear exactly who was behind the project. Steers may have been, Sir Roger Bradshaigh and the Earl of Barrymore, both significant landowners around Wigan, were certainly keen supporters having much to gain if the proposed project went ahead (Anderson and France, 1994).

Although there was much support for the Bill there were many against it. Serious opposition came from local riverside meadow and marshland owners who feared the Navigation would interfere with seasonal flooding thereby depriving them of periodic rich silt deposition on their land. In the face of this opposition the Bill was rejected by the House of Lords on 6 June 1713.

Following the failure of the 1713 Bill there was little interest in the project for the next six years. When interest finally returned, Steers became more closely involved, being named 'project undertaker'; Liverpool merchant William Squire was a strong supporter and Wigan M.P. Sir Rodger Bradshaigh expressed enthusiastic interest. The Borough and Corporation of Wigan, together with other interested parties, petitioned Parliament in 1720.

This time the project proposal was more favourably received. It passed its first reading on 21 January and after some amendments passed its second reading ten days later. Following further petitions from local landlords still concerned about riverside farmland, and Ormskirk merchants afraid trade might bypass their town, the Bill was finally sent to the House of Lords where it was approved following further minor amendments (73 for and 27 voting against) on Thursday, 24 March 1720. Thomas Steers and William Squire, both of Liverpool, were named undertakers of the project and 32 landlords were named commissioners whose job it was to settle any disputes between the undertakers and local landowners. The Act stipulated that the River Douglas, between Miry Lane End and its outfall into the Ribble Estuary, had to be completed within 11 years (i.e. 1731).

Given eight years had elapsed between the initial survey in 1712 and the passing of the 1720 Act one might have expected a swift construction start but financial problems delayed progress further. Unfortunately, the Act was passed at the time of the South Sea Bubble when shares soared to dizzy heights only to crash a short while later.

Some construction work started but was severely limited by a chronic lack of capital. A ford was removed and replaced by a bridge near Rufford, about one and a half miles of river downstream from Rufford were widened and straightened, and a start was made on a second lock. At this point construction work stopped, and little further activity took place until the 11-year 1731 deadline was rapidly approaching.

Alarmed at lack of progress and cognisant of the approaching 11-year deadline stipulated in the 1720 Act, Alexander Radcliffe of Ormskirk and Alexander Leigh of Wigan both

offered to take over supervision of the project. This was granted on 12 June 1731 and a further 11-year construction extension period was granted. Both these individuals had been against the initial project in 1720 but now recognised its future potential and its benefits to the Wigan coal mining industry.

A new river survey was commissioned and completed by William Palmer in March 1733. This survey recommended 12 locks each 12-foot wide, 60-foot long and 3-foot deep to cope with the 60-foot fall in river level between Wigan and the Ribble estuary. This was estimated to cost £6,684. The possibility of rerouting the Navigation in its lower reach across Martin Mere and entering the Irish Sea just north of Southport was considered but rejected.

In spite of this renewed interest and enthusiasm, and with just five years left of the 1720 Act's extended terms, no further construction started until 1737! Four locks were constructed in 1738 and a further three in 1739. By mid-1739 the river was navigable from its mouth to Bispham and Lord Derby could export his coal down river to the Fylde. In 1741 Steers was paid for advice on Crooke Lock and a mooring basin at Wigan. In 1741 at a cost of £12,385 the Navigation was finally in full use – 21 years after the passing of the successful Act and 30 years after the project was initially conceived.

The Navigation, ten miles in length with just under two miles canalised, finally comprised thirteen locks: Croston Finney, Rufford, Wanes Blades, Bispham, Douglas Bridge (Newburgh), Chapel House, Gillibrands, Appley Bridge, Upholland (near Bank House), Gathurst, Crooke, Hell Meadow, and Harrison Platt just below Wigan.

Boats using the Navigation were of two kinds. Small open boats called 'flatts' were confined to river work and capable of transporting up to 20 tons of cargo. These were pulled along the river by men walking along the riverbank, crossing boundary fences using stiles. Larger boats capable of carrying 30 or 40 tons had fixed masts and sails so these boats were confined to the open sea, sailing from the river mouth to north Lancashire, to Liverpool or across the Irish Sea to Dublin.

In the early 1840s 'Resolution' (20 tons capacity), and 'Dispatch' and 'Speedwell' (both 30 tons capacity) worked the river, but by the late 1740s there were 12 boats in regular operation plus a 'Pleasure Boat', probably used for river inspection purposes. Private traders operated their own boats – one Samuel Bold claiming he worked on the Navigation for 35 years, transporting over 2000 tons of limestone to Wigan over the years.

Once open, the Navigation facilitated a significant increase in the volume of coal transported to north Lancashire via the Fylde, and the rest of the world via the port of Liverpool. Wider markets encouraged increased coal extraction, formation of larger mining companies and an expanded work force. Coal was not the only commodity carried on the river, but it was very significant. Other materials carried on the Navigation included limestone, pig iron, timber, building stone, sand, gravel, slates, soap and ashes.

The Navigation was a success, but it had its limitations. Like many early navigation projects, there was initial scepticism about just how profitable it might be, and with limited investment much construction work was not of the highest quality requiring much maintenance and repair. The fact that

cargo had to be moved from one type of boat to another at the river mouth was a further drawback. Variable river flows ranging between raging floods in wet weather and a lack of water during long dry spells was another issue.

Despite its economic limitations the Navigation did lead to further advances in water transport which have also to be considered when examining the project's full significance. Not long after the Douglas Navigation started operation, great strides were being made in canal engineering projects which ultimately overtook most of the original river navigations - the Douglas Navigation included.

The Douglas Navigation had operated for just 25 years when there was a national interest in canal construction the length and breadth of England. Canals had many advantages over river navigations: greater reliability of water levels, fewer bends and curves and properly planned tow paths. The major scheme to potentially affect the Douglas Navigation was a Lancashire and Yorkshire joint plan to construct the Leeds and Liverpool Canal from Liverpool on the Irish Sea coast to Leeds in west Yorkshire via Preston and the Aire Gap – a natural low point over the Pennine chain.

This idea was first reported in a York newspaper in 1764 and was followed by numerous surveys the following year. Many possible routes and options were discussed. Leeds wanted the canal to cross the Pennines via the Aire Gap between Skipton and Preston, being the lowest crossing point and therefore the cheapest option. Liverpool merchants, on the other hand, wanted the canal to take a more southerly route thereby connecting Liverpool with the Wigan and Burnley coalfields. This was a more expensive option but of greater benefit to Liverpool.

Without fully resolving the 'cross Pennine issue' the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Act was passed on 19 May 1770. The Douglas Navigation operators had a keen interest in these developments, and although they lodged an objection to the initial idea they were not totally averse to some form of cooperation. Not only did the 1770 Act allow for a branch canal to link Parbold with Wigan, by November 1771 the Douglas Navigation operators had sold the greater part of their operation to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company. (The branch canal was called Leigh's Cut after Holt Leigh - Alexander Leigh's son and a major shareholder of the Douglas Navigation) (Clarke, 2016).

The first section of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in Lancashire (linking Liverpool with Parbold) was launched with an opening

ceremony in November 1770 and work on Leigh's Cut soon followed. By 1774 the Leeds and Liverpool Canal was open to Parbold and Leigh's Cut linked Parbold to Gathurst. The final section from Gathurst to Wigan was still via the River Navigation.

By 1776 another branch canal linking the Leeds and Liverpool Canal with the mouth of the Douglas Navigation was started. By 1781 the entire Douglas Navigation was duplicated by canals from its mouth on the Ribble Estuary to the heart of Wigan thereby rendering the old river navigation redundant. By 1782 all lock gates on the river navigation had been removed emphasising the end of its working life. One lock gate remained on a link between the canal and the river at Gathurst, but this was primarily for controlling water levels.

Financially, the Navigation itself was not a great success and operated for just 40 years but, taking a broader view, it is important to remember the significant increase in coal extraction made possible by the Navigation. This expansion generated substantial profits for numerous colliery enterprises in and around Wigan. It allowed Wigan collieries to expand before the height of the industrial revolution and, thanks to Leigh's Cut linking Wigan with Liverpool, the Leeds and Liverpool Canal operators finally changed their mind on the northerly Aire Gap route to a more southerly one which put Wigan on the path of one of the most significant canals in England.

Wigan owes a lot to the Douglas Navigation.

References

Anderson D. (1975) The Orrell Coalfield, Lancashire 1740 – 1850 Moorland Publishing

Anderson D. and France A. (1994) Wigan Coal and Iron, Smiths of Wigan

Clarke M. (2016) The Leeds and Liverpool Canal, Milepost Research

Hannavy J. (1990) Historic Wigan, Carnegie Publishing

Shryhane G. (1994) Potted Guide to the History of Wigan, Malbon Books

Steers T. (1712) Survey of the River Douglas Lancashire Record Office, Preston

Acknowledgements

Alex Miller and Kathryn Pass for help and support



Cargo transhipment at Tarleton



Joining the Douglas from the Ribble



The river narrowboats at Parbold

Hercules Dowie 1780-1851

BY JEAN BRANDWOOD

When I discovered several years ago that I had a four times great-grandfather called Hercules, who lived in Wigan and whose father was a sailor, I felt sure that this was going to be the highlight of my ancestry research. My imagination got somewhat carried away as I pictured him as a huge red-bearded Scotsman (he was born in Newburgh in Fife), probably a sea captain and most likely to have performed an act of heroism. The story I discovered about Hercules' life, however, was very different to this.

Hercules Dowie was baptised on the 3 September 1780, at Newburgh Parish Church. His parents were William Dowie and Catherine Craigie, who had married in 1774 in Aberdalgie, Perth. Hercules was their third and youngest son. His brother, Robert, was born two years prior to this and may have been Able Seaman Robert Dowie who was killed at the Battle of Trafalgar on the HMS Bellerophon in 1805.

In the late 1700s, according to his will, a Robert Dowie, a shipmaster baptised in 1761 in Newburgh, moved to Liverpool. This was very likely a relative of Hercules, perhaps his father's cousin. Robert died in June 1800, leaving his effects to his parents and five siblings. Records showed that Hercules had been living in Liverpool in 1800 and it seems possible that he arrived with Robert in the late 1700s, probably seeking employment.

Using parish records and census returns, I began to piece together what Hercules was doing in the North of England in the 1800s. On the 28 June 1801, Hercules married Alice Layland at St. Thomas' Church, Upholland. In 1802 they had a son, William, followed two years later by another son, John. The family were then living in Scholes, Wigan and Hercules was employed as a weaver. Sadly, William died of 'dropsy' (a term previously used to describe swelling caused by heart failure) at the age of two in 1804. Alice gave birth to four daughters between 1805 and 1813 but tragically none of them survived beyond the age of two; causes of death recorded on their burial records being croup, smallpox, fever and weakness. A few weeks after the birth of their fifth daughter Alice died of 'consumption' (an earlier term for tuberculosis). She was buried on the 23 August 1813 at All Saints Church, Wigan, where her five babies had all been laid to rest. Hercules and his son John continued to live at the family home on Queen Street, Ince. It is unclear if Hercules was still working around this time. He was mentioned as being a weaver in 1810 at the time of the death of his daughter, Margaret.

Three days after Christmas in 1814, Hercules married my four times great-grandmother, Ann Rigby, at All Saints Church, Wigan. Ann gave birth to four daughters and six sons between 1817 and 1833. Of these ten children only three daughters and one son survived beyond childhood. Four of the children died between the ages of two and twelve weeks old of fits or weakness; ten months old baby Hercules junior died of weakness and nine year old William

died of dropsy in 1831. The family continued to live at Queen Street, Ince but there is no mention of Hercules working.

Lancashire Quarter Session Records revealed that in December 1826 a Removal Order was made by Wigan Parish authorities stating that the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor from Ince-in-Makerfield, Wigan should have the Dowie family (which then consisted of Hercules, Ann and their four remaining children) removed to Liverpool. The order states that the family had not gained a 'legal settlement' to live in Ince nor had they 'produced any Certificate owning them to be settled elsewhere'.

Settlement Certificates were issued by parish authorities to prove which parish a family belonged to and subsequently, if needed, which parish was legally responsible to provide poor relief. The 1662 Act of Settlement and Removal was responsible for the establishment of this system. A Removal Order was served if the family did not have 'right of settlement'.

Documents state that Hercules made an appeal against the Removal Order and it appears that he won as in the 1841 census Hercules, Ann and their daughter, Fanny (my three times great-grandmother, born in 1829) were still living in the Parish of Wigan on Broome Street, Ince. Hercules was then working as a cotton weaver.

Hercules' son, John, had married in 1826 and his wife, Martha, gave birth to seven children between 1826 and 1839. Sadly, they also lost two children: William in 1832 aged 20 months from weakness and Alice in 1834 age 13 months of measles. The address given at the times of baptism and burials of most of John and Martha's children was Queen Street, Ince. John and family were living in the same street, if not the same house, as their father Hercules and family. The loss, suffering, hardship and the incredible sadness this family must have faced year after year is almost incomprehensible. In the space of 30 years, between 1804 and 1834, Hercules lost his first wife, twelve children and two grandchildren, many to poverty related illnesses.

Hercules died in 1851, followed by his wife, Ann, in 1858. He was buried in an unmarked grave in Wigan All Saints Church graveyard, where so many of his family had been buried previously.

A new Poor Law in 1834 introduced workhouses and stated that 'All relief whatever to able-bodied persons or to their families, otherwise than in well-regulated workhouses shall be declared unlawful'. Would Hercules and his family have fared better under this new system? I'm not so sure. But what I do know is that, despite Hercules being a weaver and not a ship's captain as I'd originally envisaged, and after discovering what he and his family had to endure, he will always remain a hero in my eyes.

HE WOULD NOT PAY A FARTHING

BY KATH GRAHAM AND MARLENE NOLAN
WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO JOHN HARDY

This is the story of a love triangle between John Sinclair, a stonemason, 'a very worthy man', his wife, Susan, 'a young handsome and well-educated person' and a Methodist Minister, Henry Cook, whose 'rascality and duplicity' had hitherto been unsuspected.

The Minister in question was Henry Cook, a Minister on the Leigh and Hindley Primitive Methodist Circuit. Born in Lowton about 1842, the son of Thomas Cook, a railway porter and his wife Ellen, formerly Shaw. Henry and his four siblings followed in their mother's footsteps and became silk weavers. Aged nineteen he married a local girl, one year older than himself called Sarah Ashton. By 1871 he was settled in Church Lane, Lowton where he gave his occupation as coal agent and a Methodist local preacher.

The Wigan Observer notes that Henry Cooke spoke at a gathering



Runcorn Workhouse, Cheshire

at the Primitive Methodist schoolroom in Platt Bridge in October 1868. He became a member of the Circuit Committee and in 1871 became a trustee of the Lowton Chapel. Any further promotion within the church ceased, when in September 1875 the minutes of the Committee reported that 'in the consequence of the damaging reports afloat respecting him (he was to have) his number and name taken off the plan'. By 3 June 1876 his name was to be discontinued and all contact with the church ceased.

Sarah had given birth to nine children between 1862 and 1875 but four of them had died soon after birth. Their eldest child Lucy lived with relatives, William and Emma Shaw, very near to her parents in Church Lane. Lucy was probably a sickly child and is described in 1881 as 'not well, no employment'. She died five years later aged 23 and was buried at St Luke's church in Lowton.

By 1881 Sarah, abandoned by her husband, is living in the Old Workhouse on Turnpike Road with four of her children. William aged seventeen, and now described as a coal agent, and three daughters Jemima, Sarah and Eliza. She gives her status as married and her last child Eliza was born on 5 May 1875. When her husband, Henry, was already carrying on his affair with one of his parishioners, Susan Sinclair.

Susan was the daughter of George Edwards, a shoemaker, who according to the 1871

census was born in Tipperary, Ireland. Prior to her elopement with Henry Cook we know very little about her. The first sighting of her is in Liverpool when she married John St Clair at St Michael in the Hamlet on 12 December 1866. She was resident in the parish, living in Parkfield Road, an affluent area, and was probably a domestic servant.

The marriage produced three sons, the first two born in Liverpool, John in 1868 and George in 1870. Her youngest son, Thomas, was born in 1872 at the family home Hob Hey Lane, Kenyon. Susan then had a daughter, Mary, born 26 February 1876, also at her family home in Hob Hey Lane. By the time she registered the child on 31 March, however, she is living at China Court in Bedford. Her husband does not appear as the father on Mary's birth certificate. She was actually the child of Henry Cook, whose daughter by his wife Sarah was only ten months old at the time. In 1871 John and Susan St Clair had been living in Warrington Road, Bedford with their two eldest sons but by 1875 she had met Henry and begun an affair with him.

On 1 June 1876 the couple attempted to elope but were intercepted at Parkside Railway station where her husband, John, administered a beating with a stick to his wife's lover. This act ended with Henry being summoned to Leigh Petty Sessions to answer for his

actions. It would appear that this wasn't the first occasion that Henry and John had crossed swords, as a number of threats had been recorded as far back as January of that year. The couple must have made their getaway as the Bolton Evening News records that Henry had returned from Warrington for his court appearance whilst Susan had remained in Warrington.

When she eloped with Henry, she deserted her three young sons aged eight, six and four. Her baby, then around three months old fared no better as she was left with a friend in Frodsham. Unfortunately, Susan either failed to leave any money to care for the child or the money ran out and the 'friend' placed her in the workhouse at Runcorn.

On 19 July the Runcorn Board of Guardians accordingly contacted Susan's husband, who in law, was deemed to be the child's father, requiring him to provide financial support. John replied that 'he would not pay a farthing' as the child was not his and he was attempting to divorce his unfaithful wife. Although, they acknowledged the unfairness of the situation, the Board of Guardians felt they had no option but to try and recoup their costs from John but Henry Cook, to his credit, did acknowledge paternity, so Mary now became his responsibility.

There is no record of Susan's feelings about abandoning her three sons or baby daughter, so we don't know whether she felt any guilt or remorse for doing so. However, the couple, along with baby Mary, disappeared before John could serve the promised divorce papers. It took two years and the efforts of an amateur detective before they were located and the papers could be served. We don't know what happened to the couple after that as the divorce was never finalised and presumably, they changed their name and left the district.



Advertisement for John Sinclair, Monumental Mason 1885

John Sinclair was born in Scotland but lived variously in Liverpool, Kenyon and finally Leigh. He was a stonemason who, eventually, set up his own business as a Monumental Mason in Queen Street, Leigh. A business which must have had some success. Unfortunately, his marriage to Susan was less successful and he sued for divorce on the 20 February 1877 naming Henry Cook in the petition. The petition claims that up to 21 August 1875 Susan and Henry were carrying on an affair and the couple separated on that date. From 21 August 1875 to

6 October she was residing with Henry at Landside, near Kenyon. At which time she returned to her husband but by May 1876 she had resumed her affair with Henry Cook. Unfortunately, Susan and Henry disappeared and it was not until nearly three years later that they were discovered.

John must have been a very determined man and must have had a substantial income. Divorce was very uncommon for the ordinary man before 1857 when the Divorce Bill was passed. Although it was still out of the reach of many due to the high cost. The report of the Royal Commission reported that 'the total cost, under the most favourable circumstances, of obtaining a divorce can hardly be less the £700 or £800 and when the matter is much litigated, it would probably reach some thousands'. At the very least John would have been looking at £700 for the court case alone which today would have equated to between £45,000 and £50,000, well out of the reach of a man like John Sinclair. The fact that he then hired an amateur detective to trace the couple over a two-year period would have added to this cost. This would explain the fact that in 1877 only 551 divorces were granted and by 1901 the number was still low at 1848.



'The Tea Party in Wigan' © Morag Burton

In 1879, the Leigh Journal published a story outlining John Sinclair's case. The eloping couple had disappeared in 1877 making it impossible for him to proceed with the divorce. So, determined as ever, he employed Mr Reid, a tailor and amateur detective from Leigh, to find them. He traced Henry, Susan and Mary to a house in Wigan. After obtaining the citations from London, John and Mr Reid visited Mrs Sinclair's next-door neighbour. The neighbour was shocked to hear their story and declared that the couple, who had been her neighbours for the last five weeks, were the most moral people in Wigan.

Mrs Sinclair, upon entering her neighbour's house and finding her husband and a detective waiting for her and after being revived by brandy on several occasions, agreed to sit down with the two men to discuss the situation. According to the report she handed her wedding ring back to her husband and begged his forgiveness. The neighbour, the detective, John, Henry and Susan then sat around the table drinking tea. It's not clear what happened next but it was reported in one newspaper that Henry, fearing financial implications, sold his stock, left the farm, his wife and family and 'incredible as it may appear, still continues to be a lip-reverent, sanctimonious backslider, who has stolen his neighbours wife'.

This is the only mention of Henry living at a farm, which it was claimed was at Landside. However, many men combined his main occupation with running a small farm. It is not clear what happens to Henry and Susan after this date but by 1881 John claims to be a widower living with his mother, Margaret, and three young sons at 32 Lloyd Street, Bedford.

Two years later he has moved to new premises in Queen Street, Leigh where he is involved in the prosecution of John Harrison who had stolen a coat from his



Bradshawgate Primitive Methodist Chapel

workshop. His mother Margaret had died that year but his youngest son Thomas, was still living and working with him. He witnessed the theft and was allowed to give evidence in court even though he was only eleven years old. In 1885, John advertised his business in the Leigh Postal Directory where he advertises that he is a 'first class monumental mason (using) Scottish granite'. Sadly, when he died four years later of tuberculosis, at the early age of 51, there was no headstone to commemorate his life over his grave in Leigh Cemetery.

When he died on 8 April 1888 at 53 Princess Street, Leigh, he left a will. This was probated at Liverpool on 4 May, the executors named as Colin Sims, schoolmaster of Chapel Street and Thomas Stones, an agricultural machinist of Queen Street. His effects amounted to £132 2s 11d gross with a net value of £52 1s 1d. Three days later Henry James Widdowes placed an Advertisement in a Leigh newspaper requesting people who might have a claim to John's will to contact him. This was not unusual for a man in business as he may have had debts to settle or people may have owed him money before probate could be granted.

John's will makes provision for his sons George and Thomas, but

no mention is made of his eldest son John, who would have been 20 when the will was made, so perhaps regarded as independent. His two younger sons, George, then aged 18 and Thomas aged 14, were to continue to live together in the family home until they reached the age of 21. The Executors and Trustees, Colin Simms and Thomas Stones were to provide George the sum of £1 per calendar month and Thomas 15 shillings per calendar month out of the estate until the youngest son became of age and then the property was then to be sold and the money divided equally between them.

His eldest son John had moved back to Liverpool but by 1891 he had moved to Warrington where he was living with his second wife and daughter in Gorse Lane. He died there in 1942 and was buried in Warrington Cemetery. George remained local all his life, marrying his landlady's daughter, Elizabeth Tyrer, and living for 20 years at Clarence Street, Bedford. He then moved to 92 Edale Road where he died on 5 June 1947 leaving £633 14s 6d to his wife Elizabeth. Thomas was less easy to trace, and the last confirmed sighting of him is when he registered his father's death in 1888, when both men were living at the same address.

Of Susan, Henry and their child, Mary, there is no sign. Perhaps they changed their name and moved to an area where the scandal of their elopement could not follow them.

Sources:

Ancestry

Find My Past

The British Newspaper Archive

Postal Directory for Leigh 1885

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1843

Primitive Methodist Circuit Minute Books 1867-1885 – Wigan Archive

MARY TOMLINSON

An Inspiring Pit Brow Lass who became a Missionary Doctor

BY SHEILA RAMSDALE

For a number of years I corresponded with this wonderful woman, Mary Tomlinson, who started life in 1899 in a terraced house in Loch Street, Pemberton.

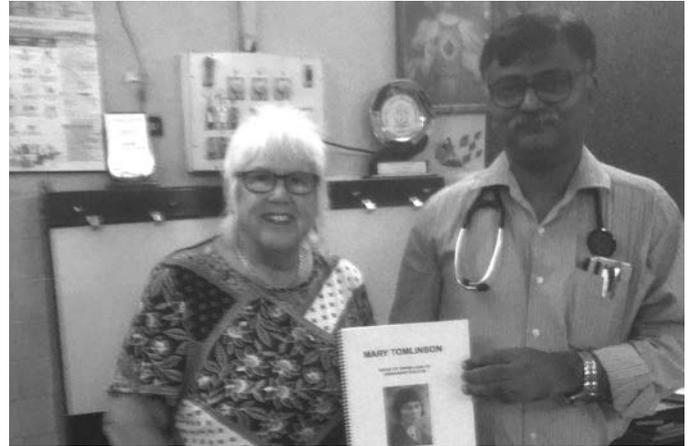
She worked in the cotton factories at the age of thirteen and later in the mining industry on the coal face, but also had a religious calling to one day become a missionary in India. She had never heard of India until she spoke to the Methodist Minister at her local church. He set her on the path to obtaining qualifications at Wigan Mining and Technical College (now the Town Hall), then further training to become a nurse. Finally, she was encouraged to become a doctor and completed her studies in 1930.

She decided to become a missionary doctor and embarked on a six month journey to Madras in India, ending up in a Methodist Missionary hospital in an outlying village called Ikkadu where she worked with very poor young women.

I discovered her when I was doing research on Irish immigration to Wigan. I read a newspaper article which showed her on furlough in Wigan in 1936 where she was giving lectures and fund raising for her hospital. She completely fascinated me, and by then she was long retired and living in a village near Great Yarmouth. I managed to contact her and she agreed to send me copies of her diaries, which I then transcribed. By then she was in her 80s and it was very clear she wanted no publicity in her lifetime. She stated, 'I have only been a servant of God'. She was a very humble person but her story was truly remarkable.

After Mary died at the age of aged 101, with the help of a friend, Rita Fell, who also at the time worked in Wigan Local Studies, I wrote a booklet about her fascinating life. Before completing the book I went over to Chennai with my husband to find the hospital she had worked in. I met the Medical Director of Health, Dr Jannath, and I was awe-struck to be standing on the very spot she had lived and worked. I promised I would return when I had completed the booklet and I did this in January 2020. Needless to say Dr Jannath was very surprised when I turned up one Monday morning to present him with a copy. My mission was finally accomplished.

If you wish to know more about this wonderful woman, copies of the booklet can be purchased at a cost of £7.50 from the Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan or from Sheila Ramsdale on 01942 244309.



Sheila Ramsdale presenting a copy of the book to Dr Jannath, Medical Director of Health

WIGAN BOROUGH ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE NETWORK

Wigan Borough Environment & Heritage Network is the representative body for all local societies, groups and individuals interested in protecting and promoting the Borough's Heritage and Natural Environment.

The network provides advice, speakers, site visits and partnership working with Wigan Council, Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles, Greenheart and other relevant bodies.

All are welcome to our meetings, held every six weeks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

For further details please contact the Secretary on 01942 700060, joe41@blueyonder.co.uk or visit www.wiganheritage.com

Tyldesley Memories

By Alison
Armfield

I was delighted to read in the Leigh Journal 26 September 2019, that the once thriving mill town of Tyldesley has the chance of being awarded £1.7 million from Historic England. This is to make improvements to Elliott Street, the main street of the town.

Locals will recognise the name Tyldesley Bongs. Bongs is an old word for banks (a sandstone ridge). The town was once known as Tyldesley Banks due to its geographical 250-foot position on top of the banks.

I am a Bongser. I have lived in the town for most of my life and my childhood home was 243 Elliott Street. Mum Irene and Dad Ernie decided to move the family from Golborne to Tyldesley when I was seven. They had purchased a shop which was to be the family home as well as being a source of income and future security. As a mere seven-year-old girl I didn't appreciate the enormity of the move, I just remember being devastated at being wrenched away from my friends.

In Golborne I lived in a bay windowed council house with a large garden and now I was expected to survive in one room and a lean-to kitchen 'back of shop'. No separate dining room and parlour and no garden to play in. I did at least have my own bedroom, but my overriding memory is of how cold it was. I can still see the icicles hanging from the bath taps. Room temperatures were not helped by the fact that a huge cellar ran underneath the entire building. A great place to play hide and seek with my brother and perfect for keeping 'rescued' newts and frogs in the stone sink and the dolly tub, but warm it was not!

243 Elliott Street was flanked on one side by The Mort Arms Public House and a hairdresser's. On the other was Hardman's bakery, Grundy's sweet shop (with the Beechnut Chewing Gum dispenser fixed to the wall) and Bainbridge's greengrocer and fishmonger. Further down the street was a coffee bar with a jukebox. I was only allowed to listen to the strains of Frank Ifield's 'I Remember You' from the backyard of the premises because, as I was informed on more than one occasion, I was too young! I was, however, allowed into The Temperance Bar at the top of Castle Street, to eat Smith's crisps and drink hot Vimto to my heart's content.



Pownall's Shoe Shop, Tyldesleyj20

At this time in Tyldesley's history, Elliott Street was lined on both sides with shops. From its junction with Manchester Road at one end, to where it joined Castle Street near the Parish Church. Butchers, bakers, grocers, greengrocers, fishmongers, newsagents, speciality shops. The smell of fresh ground coffee emanating from Redman's grocers and pork butchers was delightful.

Those were the days when if you lived in Tyldesley, then you shopped on Elliott Street and you had plenty of choice. At least two of each type of shop. Bond's butchers and the Co-op butcher, Bainbridge's fishmonger and Wrend's, Hudson's and Bainbridge's greengrocers, Co-op, Redman's, the Bob Shop were all grocers and Hardman's and Withington's were bakers and confectioners. I had my first Saturday job at Withington's and it was where I met my now ex-husband!

Believe it or not there were also at least four shoe shops in Tyldesley. The Co-op, Freeman, Hardy and Willis, Dearden's and yes, 243 Elliott Street. Pownall's Shoe Shop, my mum's pride and joy! It turned out that she was a very astute businesswoman and Pownall's Shoe Shop became the 'go-to' place for your school shoes, plimsols, socks and stockings as well as the latest ladies fashion shoes. She was also a very innovative woman. If the shoe that you liked didn't quite fit, perhaps you had an awkward bunion, then she would disappear into the cellar with said shoe, take out her cobbler's tools, soften and work the leather until hey presto, the shoe fit - sale made!

From the age of seven until I left home at eighteen, I lived with shoes. Shoes weren't just stored in the shop, they infiltrated the living room, under and on the dining table, on the stairs, even in my bedroom. Wednesday afternoon was half day closing when all the shopkeepers on Elliott Street replenished their stock. For Mum and Dad this meant a weekly trip to Manchester to the warehouses. Mum would always insist that they also visit the street barrow boys to buy fruit and veg and stock up on cheeses, hams, bacon and sausages from the market. Consequently, my brother and I could often be seen crouching in the shop doorway after school, waiting for them to return! I grew to hate shoes and even now I am a barefooter!

Moving to Tyldesley at the age of seven was hard. It was smack bang in the middle of the school summer holidays, so I had no opportunity to meet other children. However, I discovered that there were three girls living next door but one at the sweet shop. Amazingly the eldest was my age exactly. By the time school went back after the holidays we were best of pals and found ourselves in the same class at Tyldesley British School on Upper George Street.

I often wondered why my school was known as 'The British School'. Recent research has gone some way to answering that question for me. It apparently refers to the move away from education establishments being dominated by the church and private 'philanthropic' organisations to a more non-sectarian approach that recognised the social needs of children. Joseph Lancaster was the founder of this approach and it is credited with being the beginnings of the education system as we know it today.

Tyldesley British School was opened in 1902 and its headmaster was George Beddow, who presided over the school until he retired in April 1926. On his retirement he was described as 'an outstanding teacher of great ability and personality'. The headmasters of my time at the school were Mr Robinson and Mr Houghton, both of whom I remember as being loud and scary.

My time at this school was relatively uneventful bar one memorable occasion when my Mum, Irene Pownall,

Chair of The Parent Teachers Association, President of Atherton and Tyldesley Chamber of Trade, was summoned to the Headmaster's office! Why? Her precious daughter (me!) had been caught fighting in the school yard. Mum was mortified and on getting me home, gave me a sound dressing down and confiscated my reading books - I just loved reading! She deemed this to be a just punishment for having had her reputation as a successful businesswoman and outstanding member of the community tarnished.

Many of the shopkeepers on Elliott Street were community orientated, getting involved in various local initiatives. In addition to being involved in the PTA and the Chamber of Trade, Mum was also actively involved in Tyldesley Old People's Welfare Society. Together with a colleague she began a Meals on Wheels Service for the elderly residents of Tyldesley. The meals were prepared at Frank's Chippy on Elliott Street and then delivered by volunteers. My Dad Ernie was one of those volunteers delivering tasty meals from the back of his car.

The Meals on Wheels Service was a great success and as it expanded it was taken over by the local Social Services. This was probably one of the first indications, alongside the closure of local pits and mills, of the demise of Tyldesley as a thriving, independent town.

As a Bongser, I have witnessed this decline with sadness. Gone are the shops and the community spirit of my childhood. What exists today is a plethora of pubs, eateries and takeaways. There have been occasions when a more adventurous entrepreneur has attempted to change things but to little avail.

The news of a potential £1.7 million funding pot shows the emergence of a new positive spirit for the regeneration of Tyldesley. Too late I'm afraid for my old school on Upper George Street. After a stint as a Wigan Education Authority Youth Club (of which I was both a member and later an assistant youth worker) and then as a Community Life Centre, it was left empty and derelict. It was eventually demolished and the land on which it once proudly stood is now a Guided Busway car park.

As for Pownall's Shoe Shop, 243 Elliott Street, it served the town for almost 30 years. It has since been a florists, an accountants, a renovation workshop, a lighting shop amongst other short-term ventures. Its future is uncertain as it lies outside the conservation area of Tyldesley town centre which will be the focus of the £1.7 million. Mum Irene, Dad Ernie and my brother Greg have all passed away, so number 243 Elliott Street feels particularly special to me now. All good things come to an end they say. I live in hope that 243 will find its place in the future of Tyldesley. Failing that, I look forward to seeing, experiencing and living in the 'new' Tyldesley.

A GLAZEBURY TRAGEDY

*Gill and Hartley's Mill,
Glazebury*



BY BRIAN JOYCE AND MARLENE NOLAN

On the afternoon of Wednesday 17 August 1921, a funeral procession slowly wound its way from Gill Street in Glazebury to the parish church. This would be no ordinary interment. A reporter from the Leigh Journal believed it to be "...a spectacle unprecedented in the memory of the present generation..." quite a claim considering the Great War had ended just a few years before.

The whole village appeared to have turned out, along with hundreds of mourners from the surrounding towns and villages. Shops were closed and blinds were drawn in the customary manner. The men in the hushed crowds lining the streets removed their hats as the cortege passed and some wept alongside their womenfolk.

The coffin was borne into the church on the strong shoulders of eleven workers from Gill and Hartley's Mill, colleagues of the deceased. Following a funeral service, the men carried the coffin to the graveside and after further prayers were said, it was gently lowered into its final resting place. Eventually a headstone was erected to the uniform design specified by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The inscription reveals that the deceased was a former private in the 21st (Empress of India's) Lancers. He had recently returned from service in the North West Frontier but was not a casualty of war. He had not died at the hands of Afghan tribesmen. Private William Hindley of Glazebury had been shot by one of his managers at Gill and Hartley's Mill.

Hindley had been born into the tightly knit community of Glazebury in 1889. His parent's occupations reflected the economy of the village. Frederick Hindley was an agricultural labourer and his wife Elizabeth a cotton winder. The 1911 census reveals that William, their only child, was a railway labourer living with them in Fowley Common Lane, in the same four room cottage in which he had been born 22 years before.

Living a few cottages away from William in 1911 was 21-year-old Annie Slater, who was keeping house for her widowed father and her siblings. Annie had been born in Hutton near Preston but since the death of her mother in the 1890s, the family had been peripatetic before arriving in Glazebury. Annie's elder brother was a railway labourer;

perhaps it is through this connection that she met her near neighbour William Hindley. Either way, the couple married in April 1912 at the same parish church where William was baptised and would be buried. Annie gave birth that same autumn, although the baby died soon afterwards. The couple had no further children.

The Great War disrupted the Hindleys' unremarkable lives. We do not know whether William volunteered for service or was conscripted. He may even have been a Regular by 1914. What is certain is that from 1918 he was in India serving as a Private in the 21st Lancers. His unit was attached to the First Battalion Dragoon Guards



E. M. Monaghan Wm. Hindley

stationed on the North West Frontier resisting incursions from Afghanistan during the so-called Third Afghan War.

After serving for two and a half years in India, William was demobilised and in 1920 returned to the close-knit village of his birth. He secured a job in the dye house of Gill and Hartley's Mill, where his wife Annie was already working as a weaver. The couple had every reason to assume that their lives would resume the same predictable rhythm that they had experienced before 1914.

However, in 1921 a stranger arrived who would shatter their expectations.

Ernest Morris Monaghan came from a lower middle-class family in Walkden. He was single, and at only 21 years old was still living with his parents in Egerton Terrace. His younger brother had died in 1912, leaving Ernest the youngest of his parents' surviving five children. Monaghan had his eighteenth birthday in May 1918 and so had not had time to experience the Great War at first hand.

In early 1921, he obtained employment as the Assistant Manager and bookkeeper at Gill and Hartley's Mill in Glazebury. This was a very responsible position for such a young man, particularly as the manager, John Wood, was 70 years old and very deaf. At the time, Glazebury was a fairly isolated village on the road between Leigh and Warrington. A large amount of money, for which Monaghan was responsible, was kept at the Mill. He was often on the premises alone at night.

Furthermore, the Irish War of Independence was at its height in 1920-21 and Sinn Fein activists brought the struggle to the British mainland. There were terrorist outrages throughout the North-West. In late 1920, eighteen warehouses and timber yards were set alight in Liverpool, and cotton warehouses in Manchester were similarly attacked. In 1921, Sinn Fein arsonists were suspected of causing fires around Manchester at a chemical works at Newton Heath, an oil depot at Holt Farm and a factory at New Cross. Arsonists had also attacked cotton



Warrington Road, Glazebury

mills in Failsworth, Royton and Hollingwood near Oldham. A policeman had been shot at Bridgewater House, a packing and shipping warehouse in Manchester.

Given the potential threat to Gill and Hartley's, the police had issued Monaghan with a permit to carry a gun. After this, the 21-year-old assistant manager appears to have routinely carried a loaded automatic pistol, and in June 1921 demonstrated that he was prepared to use it. Boisterous horseplay among a group of youths outside the mill had led to a cracked window. Monaghan hurried outside. The boys (some of whom were not much younger than he was), refused to answer his questions. In response, Monaghan pulled the pistol from his pocket and opened fire.

The bullet struck the ground and ricocheted, striking the clog of one of the youths and lodging between the iron and the sole. It may appear incredible to us, but neither the boys nor their parents reported this potentially fatal incident to the police or anybody else for two months. When the case finally did come to court, the father of one of the youths intimated that the boy was afraid of losing his job if they launched a complaint. The man himself was out of work and was looking after eight children. Such was the apprehensive climate in the post-war recession.

Ernest Monaghan failed to learn his lesson from this shooting incident and a tragic sequence of events began to unfold at the mill the

following month. The young assistant manager was patrolling round the weaving shed, when he spotted a weaver reading at her loom when she should have been working. This was Annie Hindley. The 21-year-old reprimanded her, warning her that if she was not careful in future, she would be given her cards. That evening she told her husband what had happened.

The following description of events on the afternoon of Tuesday 9 August is based on police and eyewitness testimony. These accounts are surprisingly consistent. At about 2.45pm, John Wood, the mill manager, spotted a group of employees standing talking near the dye house adjoining an orchard at the rear of the mill. William Hindley and another dyer, James Adamson appeared to be looking into the orchard. Wood warned them they could get into trouble for this, perhaps hinting at dismissal, and told them to get back to work. Meanwhile Monaghan had joined the group and asked Adamson whether there was anybody in the orchard. Adamson replied in the negative. By then most of the men had drifted back to the dye house, leaving only Monaghan, Hindley and Adamson. A heated argument between the tough ex-soldier and the callow assistant manager now erupted. Accounts of what exactly was said vary, but they centred on Monaghan's warnings to Annie Hindley a week or two before.

According to Adamson, Hindley became excited and said, "It looks as

if some people can have their cards and some can't". Adamson said Hindley continued, "It was only the other day you wanted to give my wife her card". Monaghan himself claimed he replied, "I don't intend to give her her card. That's my business, not yours". Adamson claimed Monaghan went further, "I don't intend to give her her card, but you are asking for yours". Monaghan himself confirmed this, saying that Hindley had accused him of two-faced dealings and that there were people at the mill who ought to have their cards besides his wife. Monaghan admitted to replying, "Yes, and you are going the right way to get yours".

Both Superintendent White of the Lancashire Constabulary and James Adamson claimed in court that Monaghan actually sacked Hindley on the spot: "Right, you can have your insurance card". Hindley then yelled: "Well, you can give me my ***** card". William Hayes, the foreman dyer, worried about where these events were leading and pleaded: "Come inside and don't argue the point here". But if he said this, Hindley ignored him.

There is virtual unanimity as to what happened next. Monaghan turned away and walked off with his hands in his jacket pockets. Hindley then sprang at him, grabbed him by the throat, yelling "I will ***** bash you!"

In his right jacket pocket, Monaghan had the automatic pistol which contained two live rounds. He later claimed: "Hindley was shaking me when instinctively my hand grabbed at the revolver. I tried to take my hand from my jacket pocket when there was a report. Hindley staggered back and said: 'My God, he has shot me!' He walked one pace and sat down on the embankment". He was lying on the bank unconscious by the time Annie rushed up a few minutes later.

William Hayes had just re-entered the dye house when James Adamson ran in shouting: "He is shot!" Hayes was hurriedly leaving the building when he encountered a shaken Monaghan who was on his way in. "Have you shot him?" asked the foreman. When Monaghan admitted what he had done, Hayes demanded: "What the **** did you do that for?".

"I don't know" Monaghan replied. "What can we do for him?"

Hayes went on: "I went with him up the yard and I said, 'I think the best thing would be for you to send for the police', and he did so". PC Busk soon arrived. Later the officer quoted Monaghan as stating in the mill's office: "I had some bother with him near the dye house. He rushed at me and got hold of me by the throat, and in the struggle, I accidentally shot him". He then reached in his pocket and gave Busk the pistol, which contained one live and one

spent cartridge. PC Busk arrested him and took him to Leigh Police Station. There Monaghan was cautioned and charged with feloniously wounding William Hindley, who, after being examined by Dr Flitcroft, a local physician, had been rushed to Leigh Infirmary with abdominal wounds.

On being charged, Monaghan stated "I didn't intend to shoot him; it was a pure accident". Monaghan was kept at Leigh Police Station overnight and appeared at Leigh County Police Court the following day.

While stating that he quite appreciated that the police wished Monaghan to be remanded in custody, the young man's solicitor AH Hayward offered the court what he called "very substantial bail". As part of this offer, he intriguingly claimed that: "A Member of Parliament says he will go bail for the young man". Unfortunately, Hayward did not name the MP concerned, but Monaghan's hometown of Walkden lay in the Farnworth constituency, whose MP at the time was the Unionist Captain Edward Bagley.

Superintendent Whitehead objected to this request. Hindley was still critically ill at Leigh Infirmary, but once he was off the danger list, the police would drop their objections to bail. The magistrates therefore remanded Monaghan in custody until Friday 12 August, when he was further remanded.

Meanwhile, surgeons at Leigh Infirmary had frantically attempted to save the life of William Hindley. Monaghan's bullet had entered his body two inches below the navel, seriously damaging his intestines. No exit wound was found, so it was assumed the bullet had lodged in the muscles of Hindley's back. The doctors repaired his injuries, and he appeared to be making satisfactory progress. However, he showed increasing symptoms of blood poisoning throughout Saturday and Sunday and his condition deteriorated badly. Hindley died during Sunday night, August 14, five days after having been shot.

By the time Ernest Monaghan appeared in court the following day, the charge against him had been amended to that of murder. He was



Glazebury, showing the location of the Mill

remanded in custody until Wednesday 17 August, when a coroner's inquest was held.

Monaghan flanked by a police constable attended the inquest at Leigh Infirmary. The Coroner, SF Butcher and the Foreman of the Inquest Jury expressed sympathy with the widow. Monaghan's solicitor echoed this on behalf of the young man's parents, who were also to show their sorrow by attending Hindley's funeral. The eyewitnesses, an emotional Annie Hindley and the accused himself, gave their accounts of the tragic events of Tuesday 9 August. Then the Coroner gave his summing up.

Butcher reminded the Jury that murder presupposed malice, either expressed, evident or implied. The crime of killing was reduced from murder to manslaughter if a person was attacked, had reason to fear grievous bodily harm and took reasonable grounds to protect themselves. According to the Leigh Journal, Butcher continued, "I will tell you straight away that I don't think it is a case of murder because although Monaghan was carrying a pistol there is no evidence of their having been any quarrelling anterior to this time. On the other hand, there is something to be said on the question of manslaughter". In other words, on the day, Monaghan, with Hindley yelling threats and gripping him round the throat, was justified in defending himself by shooting his attacker. The Jury concurred and returned a verdict of manslaughter. Ernest Monaghan was committed to appear at Liverpool Assizes in November.

After the inquest, the Coroner had told Monaghan's solicitor he would not object to the County Court releasing Monaghan on bail. Consequently, he was released at the end of the week on his own recognizance of £50 and two others of £25 each from his father, an insurance agent, and his brother, a master furrier with premises in Bolton.

We do not know for certain whether-or-not Monaghan returned to work at Glazebury Mill during the subsequent two months, but the



William Hindley's gravestone

chances are that he did not. He did make a further court appearance though. After the death of William Hindley, the parents of the boys involved in the previous shooting incident outside the mill in June now came forward to complain. For "wantonly discharging a pistol within fifty feet of the centre of the carriageway", Monaghan was fined four shillings, a sum which to us appears derisory.

In November 1921 Monaghan appeared at Liverpool Assizes and gave evidence on his own behalf. He claimed he had not intended to shoot Hindley. According to the Leigh Chronicle, "Monaghan said he did not know the automatic pistol was in his pocket. When he drew his hands from his pocket to defend himself, the weapon went off. He had no idea of using it in self-defence". He told the court he himself had telephoned for the police and a doctor "and the whole affair had filled him with deep remorse".

The Leigh Journal summarised the Judge's reaction to this defence. "The judge said there was not one jot of evidence that prisoner fired the revolver [sic] with the intention of inflicting injury upon Hindley. The charge of involuntary manslaughter remained, and that turned upon whether or not prisoner had been guilty of culpable negligence".

There was a recent precedent. In the previous year George Williamson, another 21-year-old, had been carrying a loaded automatic pistol, this time in Little Hulton. He had supposedly reached into his pocket for a handkerchief and the gun had gone off. The bullet had shattered a window nearby and killed a 15-year-old girl. The inquest jury had found that the young man had fired the pistol inadvertently, so the girl's death had been an accident. The Coroner in that case had accepted the verdict, adding: "The sooner people get rid of the habit of carrying revolvers about, the better".

When the jury considering Monaghan's case returned, they too accepted that although the shooter was carrying a loaded automatic pistol with the safety catch off, he was not culpable. They found Ernest Monaghan not guilty of manslaughter. He was discharged and walked out of the court a free man. Annie Hindley's reaction to this was not recorded.

Postscript

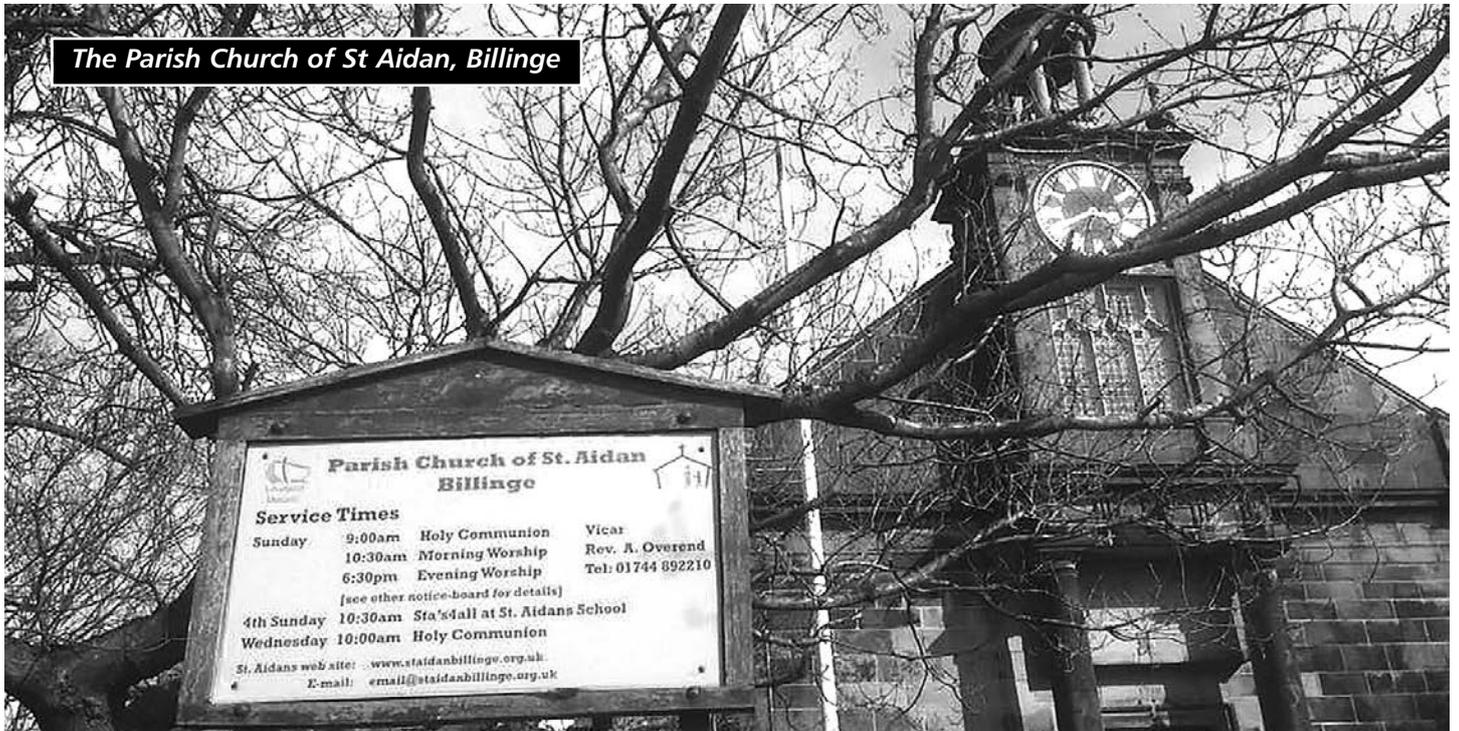
Annie disappears from the record after this. She may have remarried. Certainly, an Annie Hindley whose date of birth coincides with the former Annie Slater's baptismal date married Walter Jones in the Leigh registration District in 1930. If this was the widow of William Hindley, she was living as Annie Jones in Liverpool in 1939.

Ernest Monaghan is easier to track. After his trial and acquittal, he decided to leave the North West, probably wisely. He moved across the Pennines to Huddersfield, where he married Henrietta Roberts Tait in 1927. The couple had at least one child. In 1939, still in Huddersfield, he was listed as a "foreman healding and twisting woollen and worsted". He remained in the textile industry, moving to Gloucestershire and dying in Stroud of lung disease in 1978.

The upwardly mobile young man who had been assistant manager at Glazebury Mill in 1921 was listed on his death certificate as "Textile Clerk Retired"

By Charlie Guy

The Snake Grave of Billinge - George and Kitty Smith



The site of the church of St Aidan's, Billinge, has been a place of religious worship for over 480 years. Built at around 1539, the original chapel was probably erected where the church now stands. It spared the village residents from having to make the journey into Wigan to perform their devotions, and has remained a steadfast place of worship despite periods of economic, social and religious reformation.

In 1552, in the aftermath of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries (1536-1541), the church bell was taken by the King's Commissioners and sent to the Tower of London to be melted down. Officially, this was done to prevent embezzlement of goods by 'corrupt' church officials, but the reality is that it was actually a thinly-veiled ploy to compensate for the boy-King Edward VI's (1547-1553) desperate need for money. It helped to help restore the crippled treasury he inherited from his father, and cover the costs of quashing small-scale rebellions, a futile war with Scotland, and the ultimately unsuccessful defence of Boulogne-sur-Mer. Following Edward's death at the tender age of 15 this process was reversed by Mary I (1553-58), who ordered the return of such valuables. However, there is no record of the bell, or its

equivalent value, being returned to the parish during her reign or at any other time. In 1553, an inventory of items taken from the church listed the value of the bell at £3.

Despite the ongoing religious and political upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the church persevered and by 1718 a new chapel was erected. Professed in its day to be one of the finest in the area, it had a grand 200-worshipper capacity. It is a mere two years later that our tale begins.

During the Industrial Revolution, the North West of England became a world leader in the development of industry, technology, culture and economy. To support this unprecedented development, the area became heavily dependent upon seasonal 'tramping', often by highly skilled labourers carrying with them occupational surnames such as Tinker, Chapmen, Pedlar and Hawker. The contemporary travelling labourer was a much-valued thread in the fabric of everyday working life, providing a large, seasonal, casual workforce which played a particularly important role in agricultural events, such as the bringing in of harvests.

Amongst the hundreds of thousands of travelling

workers making their way across the country in the summer of 1720 were George and Kitty Smith. Young, and very much in love, George and Kitty stole away one afternoon, with the idea to enjoy the privacy afforded at the top of Billinge Hill. George, a strong man with dark, handsome features and a kind manner, was utterly devoted to his red-haired lover, Kitty; a natural beauty with an enviable singing voice. Upon reaching the summit they sat upon the hill, enjoying the summer air and the peace of each other's company. But their happiness was not to be. On lying back within the tall grass, Kitty, unwittingly, disturbed an adder and was bitten. She died shortly thereafter in her devastated lover's arms.

George, beside himself with grief, carried the body of his beloved back to the village, before taking his own life. The community were so affected by the loss of such a vibrant, young couple. They responded generously, and arranged a burial in the finest spot of the finest churchyard, with an elaborate memorial commissioned to stand atop the grave. The resultant monument remains to this day, as a testament to their tragedy and devotion. It consists of a coffin-shaped grave marker (complete with what are likely decorative bier or pall-bearing rings), and a skull, with the wings of a bat, encircled by the adder who so cruelly took young Kitty's life. The relief sits in front of a curtain, symbolising grief and the unknown twists of fate.

Or, at least, that is how one version of the local legend goes.

In another version, it is George who falls victim to the adder, resting from work at a local quarry. In yet another, an unknown man is found dead from a snake bite at the top of Billinge Hill. But then, how did they settle upon the name of George, and who was Kitty?



The grave of George and Kitty Smith

In reality, very little is known about the real George and Kitty Smith. The church, despite having extensive records, has no official document of the burial. While this has served to strengthen the legends surrounding the mysterious couple, the burial records for the years 1715-1720 are in fact missing in their entirety. It would appear that a ledger was at some point removed and has not been returned, and it is indeed far more likely that the entries for George and Kitty Smith have been lost, rather than never having existed in the first place.

A further problem arises when we consider the supposed manner of George's death. Until the passing of the Suicide Act of 1961, suicide within England and Wales was both a criminal offence and a grave sin. As such, George's burial within consecrated ground would not have been permitted. While local traditions for dealing with the burial of suicides varied from region to region, common methods throughout the eighteenth century included burial at a crossroads, and burial head-down - both in un-consecrated ground. However widely these burial methods varied, many were connected by the belief that a suicide was an 'unnatural' death, and therefore could subsequently only produce an 'unnatural' corpse. Burial at a crossroads, for instance, therefore served to confuse the spirit of the dead, who - if risen - would be disoriented by the junction at which they found themselves and therefore be unable to find, and trouble, the living. The burial of suicides in consecrated ground was not permitted until 1823 - over 100 years later than our tragic lovers - and even then it was only permitted between the hours of 9pm and midnight, and without any form of ceremony.

Given that the grave of George and Kitty Smith lies not only within consecrated land, but also close to the south side of the church wall, the suicide element of the story becomes even more unlikely. The geographical placement of the grave is significant when we consider that burials on the north side of the churchyard would lie behind the church itself. The north side of the churchyard was therefore considered of lower status socially than the south side. People walking into the church would not pass by those graves, and so would not pray for the souls of the individuals within them. It therefore became common for wealthier individuals to be buried in south side plots, and poorer, less affluent members of society to be buried on the north side.

There is, however, arguably some room to speculate that the couple were from a travelling community. The

name Kitty, a common Irish shortening of Katherine, was in popular use even before Kate came into fashion. The informality of the use of Kitty (rather than Katherine) on the grave is reminiscent of a Romany community – being historically far more likely to use an affectionate sobriquet than their contemporaries. Also, the name Smith is occupational, being related to metalworking, and could suggest an occupation as a blacksmith. This would have been an important position within a travelling community, who at that time would have relied heavily upon their horses for means of both travel and trade. However, this is mere supposition, as by the seventeenth century the name was also widespread amongst people outside this profession.

While it would be nice to believe there was an element of truth to the community funding of the memorial, a grave as elaborate as this would not have come cheap. It is far more likely that the couple were instead wealthier members of society, and it is likely that they either commissioned the grave themselves, or it was commissioned by their relatives and paid for from their estate. Interestingly, the date 1720 has at some point been re-cut into the stone, while the rest of the script, untouched, is now illegible. The names, which are cut into the lower end of the stone, also appear out of place with the rest of the inscription, and have the



The grave of George and Kitty Smith

appearance of having been re-cut at some point in the nineteenth century (being of a more common Victorian scroll). Some speculation as to whether-or-not George and Kitty Smith are actually resident within the grave could therefore be afforded - what came first - the dead, or their legend? Without the missing ledger, we might never really know.

Whatever the story behind the couple, the grave itself is a remarkable example of memento mori and is indeed the only surviving example of its kind within St Aiden's churchyard. Grade II listed status was granted in 1985.

Memento mori translates quite literally as 'remember you shall die', and artistic representations on gravestones and monuments became common practice throughout both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. So, what do the symbols here really mean?

Let's start with the shape of the grave itself. A coffin shaped burial marker serves as a literal message from the dead to the living: we were once alive, just like you... and one day you'll be dead, just like us. Not very subtle, but it wasn't supposed to be. The purpose of a memento mori was to ensure the viewer kept in mind the fact that death comes to everyone, regardless of social status. We all end up the same. As such, a good Christian should always be mindful of the day of judgement and take immediate responsibility for the care of their immortal soul. This was also the purpose of the skull. A churchgoer, walking past the grave of George and Kitty, would immediately be reminded of their own inevitable death, and the sense that all pleasurable experiences are fleeting. It would therefore serve them best to be modest, rather than fall to pride and vanity; being conscious of the transient nature of experiences, material possessions, and life. Through such reliefs the dead are able to give lessons to the living in how to spend their days, with their message being that the best use of time is spent in contemplation of the afterlife.

The bat wings, however, are a much more unusual addition. Wings on a grave usually serve to represent the soul's ascent into heaven, and would usually depict those of a bird, or angel. Butterflies are also commonly seen on graves, being representative of rejuvenation of the soul, and the circle of life and death. Bat wings, however, are more representative of the underworld. Far from suggesting the fiery descent of George and Kitty, however, the use of bat wings here is likely to serve as a reminder of the consequences of not living a good life. Demons, temptation, and the prospect of eternal damnation are never far away.



The Parish Church of St Aidan, Billinge

And now for the adder, the creature responsible for the tragic death of Kitty Smith, curled around the skull as a macabre warning of the dangers of long grass. Alas, it is here that our legend loses further traction. It is extremely likely that the legend of the snake bite arose as the meanings of the carvings were lost to time. Snakes were a common depiction on eighteenth century gravestones, and the way in which they are carved serves to represent differing messages. Usually Biblical in meaning, an uncoiled snake on a gravestone represents the devil, sin and the perpetual closeness of evil, while a snake depicted crawling through a human skull would be representative of the dangers of falling to temptation - that nobody is safe from the devil, even after death. The snake here, however, has been carved as a hooped snake (or ouroboros) with its tail in its mouth. This symbol is representative of eternity, immortality and rejuvenation. The presence of an ouroboros suggests to the viewer the beginnings of a new life in paradise and is also representative of unity. An appropriate marking, therefore, for a married couple.

Finally, we reach the curtain, unusual also primarily for the manner of its carving. Curtain rings have been added to distinguish it from a veil - which would usually be representative of the veil between life and death, through which we all must pass. A curtain, however, sets a scene for the memento mori: the playing out of life and death, the need to always be mindful of the soul, and the Christian promises of eternal life in paradise.

We may never know the true story of George and Kitty Smith, but the memento mori they left behind provides many fascinating clues into the times in which they lived.

Information for Contributors

We always welcome articles and letters for publication from both new and existing contributors.

If you would like to submit an article for **PAST FORWARD**, please note that:

- Publication is at discretion of Editorial Team
- The Editorial Team may edit your submission
- Published and rejected submissions will be disposed of, unless you request for them to be returned
- Submissions may be held on file for publication in a future edition
- Articles must be received by the copy date if inclusion in the next issue is desired

Submission Guidelines

- Electronic submissions are preferred, although handwritten ones will be accepted
- We prefer articles to have a maximum length of 1,000 words but please contact us if you would like to submit an article of a greater length
- Include photographs or images where possible – these can be returned if requested
- Include your name and address – we will not pass on your details to anyone unless you have given us permission to do so

We aim to acknowledge receipt of all submissions.

CONTACT DETAILS:

pastforward@wigan.gov.uk or
The Editor at **PAST FORWARD**,
Museum of Wigan Life,
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

Out of the Pits and into Parliament: Part 1

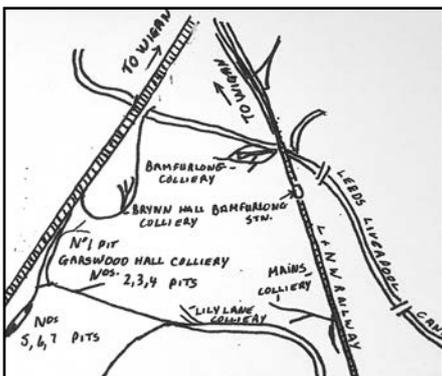
The legacy of Ashton-in-Makerfield Miners

By Yvonne Eckersley

In 1893 the Wigan Observer reported 'Ashton in Makerfield is at present the largest mining township in the County of Lancashire and there has probably been more colliery development in that township during the last ten or twenty years than any township in England'.

Little physical evidence of this remains. The pitheads, spoil tips, mineral railways and footpaths that criss-crossed the area and mining communities have long gone.

There were five colliery complexes in the immediate area of Bryn Gates and Bamfurlong alone: Garswood Hall, (their spoil tips were the Three Sisters), Lily Lane (Coffin Wood), Bryn Hall (Bryn Gates Lane), Bamfurlong Pits (Bamfurlong), and Mains Colliery (Mains Lane, Bryn Gates). All of



Plan giving showing the proximity of Bamfurlong, Bryn Hall and Lily Lane Collieries

these complexes were connected to the London and North Western Railway via the mineral lines. They employed thousands of people, many of whom lived in the miners' cottages, mostly built by the colliery owners.

Some examples of these houses include Bryn Gates (Crippens Lump), built to accommodate the Welsh Miners brought to work at Crippen's Bryn Hall Colliery. Bamfurlong, where Cross Street and Tetley Street were built by Cross Tetley Collieries. And much of the housing along Bolton Road into Ashton which was also built to house the miners.

There were so many Welsh miners living along Bolton Road that the stretch from Ashton to Stubshaw Cross was known as Little Wales. These miners were considered vital to the emerging trade union and labour movement. This is borne out by the fact that speeches given at the miners' mass meetings in Ashton were delivered first in English and then in Welsh.

Miners Unions - Problems and Solutions

Ashton Miners Association and their fellow miners had been demoralised and impoverished by the unsuccessful seven-week strike of 1881. The strike had been called, in part, to challenge the power of employers in insisting that as a condition of employment, miners should opt

out of the 1880 Employers Liability Act. The 1880 Act had the potential for miners to hold an employer responsible for accidents if negligence was proven. By opting out of the Act, and accepting the terms of their employers, the miners of Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Permanent Relief Society accepted that they, not their employers, would be legally responsible for deaths or injuries caused in the mines.

The morality of this was publicly questioned by union leaders after the Bamfurlong Mining disaster. On the 14 December 1892, sixteen miners, eight of whom were boys, had been killed during a fire accidentally started by 13-year-old lasher on, John James Rowley. The boy, new to pit work, was put in charge of the underground engine that ran the pit's endless rope haulage system, without training or adult supervision. Though a verdict of accidental death was recorded, Inspector Henry Hall criticised the mine's managers for putting such a young and inexperienced boy in charge of the engine. Should the inquest have found Rowley's actions in any way negligent then he, not his employers, would have been charged with manslaughter. Sam Woods MP and Thomas Aspinwall who represented the miners at the inquest, questioned the wisdom of Cross Tetley in insisting the boy opted out of the 1880 Act.

Throughout the 1880s the union movement remained weak. However, farsighted union leaders were working to build a financially viable and unified miners organisation, strong enough to challenge mine owners' power. It was not an easy thing to do and was a long haul. District unions were established and resistant to change. They were in essence neighbourhood lodges, meeting in local pubs rather than at pits where they worked. In 1893 Leigh had nineteen different miners' lodges meeting at nineteen different pubs.



Three Sisters, Garswood Hall Colliery spoil tips (Wigan Archives, 1675.39)

This could cause problems for striking miners at the same pit who lived elsewhere. Wigan based miners from Bryn Hall Colliery found that their lodges were unaware of the need for strike pay. Many local strikes failed because of lack of funds. As membership subscriptions were the only source of income, they were often in competition with neighbouring unions for members. There were many conflicts. Tyldesley, Leigh and Atherton objected to a new lodge, split from Leigh, joining the Platt Bridge District. Platt Bridge objected to new lodge formed through Bamfurlong Miners Association, especially as some members had previously been members of Platt Bridge. And Bamfurlong objected to Ashton and Haydock taking some of their members.

With the aim of creating a counterbalance to the powerful Coal Owners Association, miners were forming large Federations. Ashton Miners Association (Lancashire's largest union) amalgamated with Haydock and Bolton. They became the successful Ashton and Haydock Miners Federation with thirty-three affiliated branches. Within months of the 1881 defeat, the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation formed, with Ashton

miners' agent Sam Woods as president. Almost ten years later Sam Woods was elected a vice president of the newly formed Miners Federation of Great Britain.

Colliers' checkweighmen based at the pit head, and in constant contact with miners and employers, were in an ideal position to promote the benefits of Federation. This was helped as union lodges and checkweighmen's funds were often the same organisation. For instance, Stones Hope of Garswood Union Branch and Checkweigh Fund, Pride of Golborne Miners Trade Union and Checkweigh Fund, and the Platt Bridge Miners and Checkweigh Association.

The potential power of miners' checkweighmen did not escape the notice of colliery owners. The manager of Ashton's Green Colliery (at Parr) tried to sidestep the 1887 Coal Mines Regulation Act by choosing his own candidate to be elected by a show of hands. The potential for intimidation had been recognised, hence the Act's stipulation that miners had the right to elect a man of their choosing by ballot. Sam Woods took the issue to Parliament, the

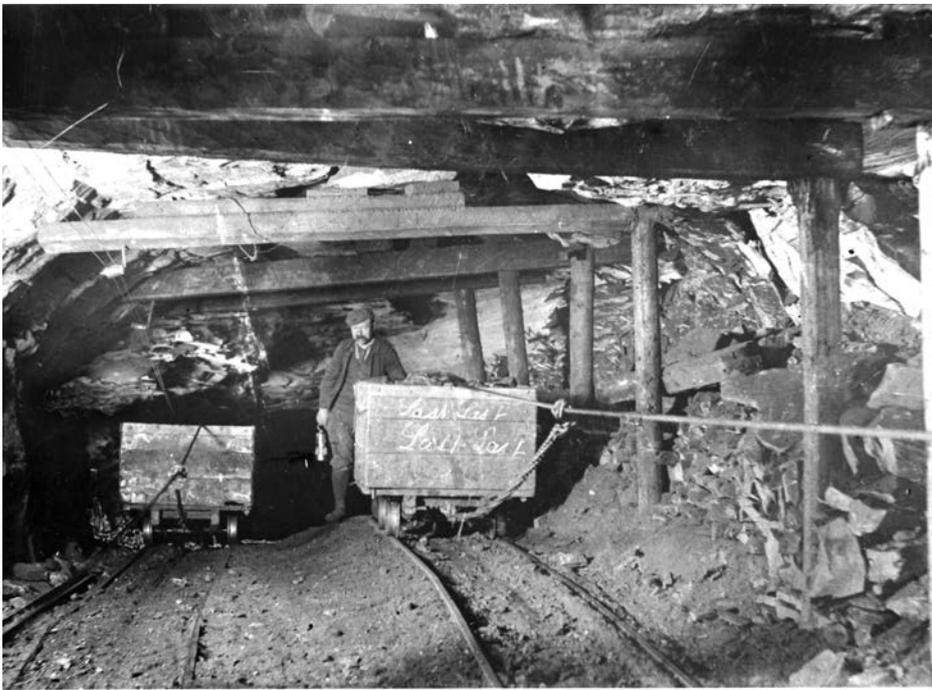
manager was criticised and an Inspector appointed to oversee a new ballot.

Miners and Politics

But building Federations of miners was not enough. By 1890 there was a growing realisation that until miners had a voice in Parliament, they would remain vulnerable to exploitation.

Ashton and Haydock Miners Federation led the way. In April 1890 their branches elected Sam Woods as their Parliamentary candidate for the Ince Division. They formed an election committee with Stephen Walsh as Secretary. This committee created an election fund, levying members a penny a month. Then on the 1 May they notified the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners Federation and asked them to take over the financial responsibility for the campaign, expenses, and salary of Sam Woods.

Not all district unions in the Federation wanted to pay the levy but risked disaffiliation if they didn't. Thomas Aspinwall offered a £15 donation from the Liberal Party. There were



*Bamfurlong Colliery's endless rope haulage system
(Wigan Archives, PC2010.2070)*

Conservative miners on the election committee, therefore because of the miners' divided political loyalties, to accept the money would risk alienating those Conservative miners. Despite deciding the campaign would be neutral, Sam Woods was elected as a Lib-Lab MP in 1892, defeating the Conservative candidate Colonel Blundell.

In reaction, the Wigan Conservative Labour Union (a blue button union), was established. Although not all Conservative miners joined, its leaders claimed a membership of 2000. As they campaigned to establish branches locally, many miners questioned their claim that they were a politically neutral working miners organisation. In Leigh, miners asked that if they were non-political, why was 'Conservative' in their title? And, if they were not a Master's Association, then why did they send condolences to Messrs Cross Tetley and Co. concerning the Bamfurlong Disaster, rather than giving grants to support the widows and orphans as the Miners Federation had.

In an attempt to influence the political direction of miners, they sent their Ince delegate, Tom Ward, to the 1893 Miners Federation Conference. In Birmingham, he was refused admittance. Conference leaders considered his union did not have the miners' interests at heart, as the union was only formed because of Woods' defeat of Blundell.

Not that resistance to the growth of trade unionism was confined to Conservatives. One of Sam Woods' first successes as an MP was the defeat in Parliament of Liberal, George McCorquodale's persecution of his Newton le Willows compositors, for joining a trade union.

McCorquodale had issued an ultimatum; if the compositors joined a trade union they would be sacked. Sam Woods took their case to Parliament. After a number of debates, Parliament decided no contracts would be given to companies that interfered with the legitimate rights of their working people to become members of a trade union. To save his government contracts, McCorquodale rescinded his ultimatum.

The 1893 Strike

This strike was the direct result of coal owners' efforts to enforce archaic practices to facilitate a 25% wage reduction, and the miners refusing to be manipulated. Their policy of building up coal stocks at pit heads and railway sidings, then cancelling miner's annual contracts, waiting until the miners were impoverished, then renewing these binding contracts at a lower rate of pay had worked well in the past. Following this pattern in July 1893 the Coal Owners Association issued miners with an ultimatum. That they accept a 25% reduction in pay, or their contracts would be ended.

For the first time in history they were thwarted. The Coal Owners Association had miscalculated the financial position, organisation, and tenacity of the miners. For sixteen weeks 300,000 miners, supported by their unions, held out. There was no abrupt end to the strike. With miners struggling, Miners Federations agreed to allow miners to return to work at collieries who agreed to revert to the status quo. Returning miners, and Bamfurlong miners, were among the first. They remained solidly behind miners still on strike, paying a levy of 1 shilling a day to support them. On the 7 November the strike was over. Owners capitulated, pits reopened, and miners were paid pre-strike pay rates. A precedent had been set. From 1893 wages no longer fell with the price of coal. The Miners Federation had called for a living wage, miners had responded as one body, and proved a match for the coal owners.

References. Wigan Observer - 1881-1893 Raymond Challinor, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Miners'

THE RIVER DOUGLAS

BY BOB HEAVISIDE

I always thought of the River Douglas as the 'Wigan river', until recently when I started getting interested and what then?

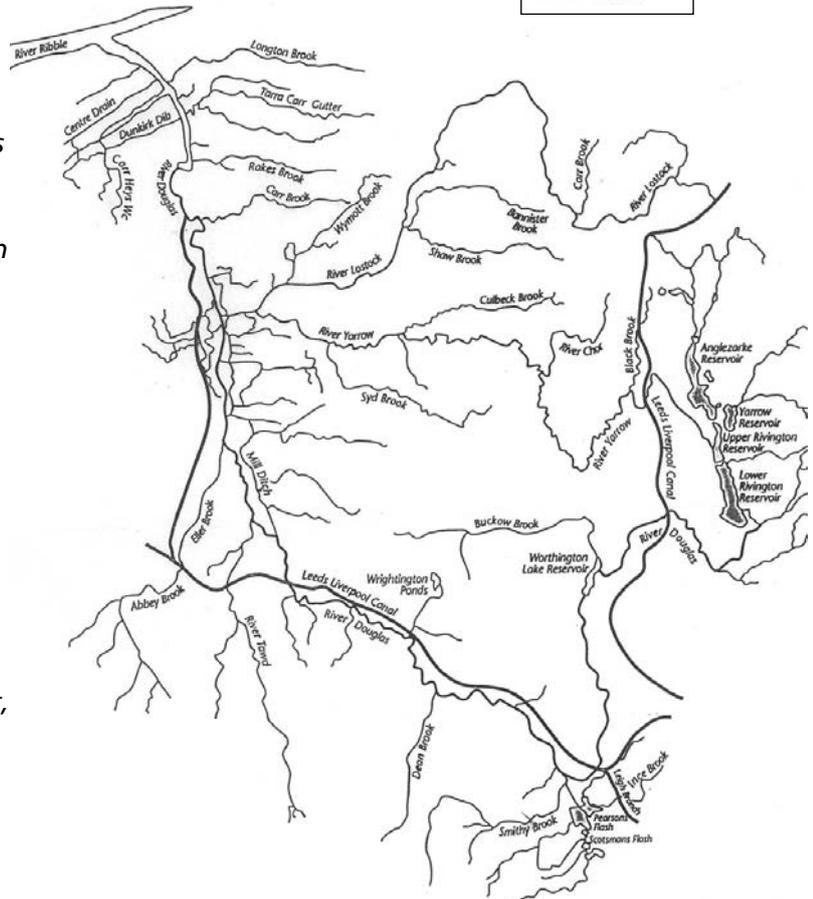
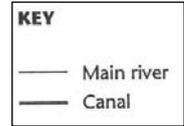
I could not find a map that gave me all the evidence, yet I had always understood that it finally emptied into the River Ribble.

The Douglas, also known as the Asland and Astland, is a river that has two main tributaries, the River Tawd and the River Yarrow. Parts of the Douglas were thought to have been used by the Romans, but only in small boats and for short journeys.

It has its source at Winter Hill; its length is 35 miles. It flows in a sweeping pattern, commencing from Rivington in a number of streams, flowing down to the reservoir, then as a river, joined by the Bucklow Brook, on to the Worthington lake reservoir, through the Plantations into Wigan town centre. From there it goes under Greenough Street before which it is crossed by the Leeds and Liverpool Canal a short distance from Pearson's and Scotman's Flashes,

At this point it takes 'in a sweeping curve', where the Leeds and Liverpool continues to keep in touch with it, later to be joined by the River Tawd, and the Eller Brook and the Mill Ditch. It is now in the region of Rufford then Tarleton and at long last it becomes a tributary of the Ribble, and so into Preston.

Regarding the material on the River Douglas in this short digest, I have to thank the Wigan Local Studies Library where there is much more information to be found.



Route of the River Douglas



The location of the water wheel at Jolley Mill on the River Douglas, alongside Chorley Road



The river Douglas at Wigan. Baptists used to use it for their baptisms and it was once the haunt of salmon fishermen. Now eight million gallons of sewage a day are discharged into the river by industrial works

RIVER DOUGLAS POLLUTION

Call for new joint disposal body

By our own Reporter
Sixteen local authorities in Lancashire are being urged to set up a new joint sewage disposal authority to help to control excessive pollution of the river Douglas, once one of the finest salmon rivers in the North. More than 8 million gallons a day of sewage effluent are sometimes discharged into the river.
The Lancashire River Board, in a special report, says that many of the existing sewage works along the river are obsolete; others are inadequate to deal with the flow. "Gross pollution" occurs, and evidence has also been gathered of neglect and misuse of the river by certain firms.
The River Douglas flows for 30 miles through south-west Lancashire. It has its natural source about three miles north-east of Horwich at Douglas Springs, and two miles on enters the Lower Rivington reservoir of the Liverpool corporation water works department. It is said to "sneak unpropriously out of the back-door" into the Ribble estuary some six miles south of Preston.
The river board's report, now being considered by the local authorities, says that much of the pollution could be avoided if more individual concerns and councils showed more concern over the use of the river. A meeting of the board's special sub-committee dealing with the state of the river meets again on October 29 to consider replies from the 16 authorities.

Newspaper article describing levels of pollution in the River Douglas

Second World War Collections

Recently we have been looking through our objects relating to the Second World War, as we prepare for the upcoming 75th anniversary of VE Day on 8 May.

Many of our artefacts focus on the soldiers themselves and we hold a selection of documents, photographs and medals relating to local men who were posted to the frontline. For example, this framed photograph and five medals belonging to Billy Flynn who fought both in Italy and Africa.



Framed photograph and medals belonging to Billy Flynn (C16.220, Wigan Museum Collection)

We also have collections from campaigns further away and have recently taken in material from the Wigan branch of the Burma Star Association, much of which relates to this period. This includes a framed piece of wood which is claimed to be from the Bridge over the River Kwai.

One of our more unusual objects is a self-heating soup can. These revolutionary tins were a joint development by Heinz and ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) and were reputedly invented for the D-Day landings. Inside the can is a metal tube which is filled with a smokeless chemical and a fuse. When the cap on the top of the tin was removed the fuse would light, taking four and a half minutes for the soup to heat up. This allowed troops hot food in all conditions without the need to light fires, which could reveal their location to the enemy. The soup came in several varieties – tomato, oxtail, pea and even mock turtle and was hugely popular with British, American and Canadian troops.



Self-heating can of Heinz oxtail soup (C16.220, Wigan Museum Collection)

As well as representing those serving overseas our collections also aims to reflect what life was like on the Home Front. In particular, we

have objects relating to the Civil Defence Service. This included both the Auxiliary Fire and Air Raid Precautions Service. One revealing item is an Air Raid Wardens booklet belonging to James Charlton of Tyldesley. This lists local wardens, duties and equipment as well as providing advice on first aid. Included in the back of the booklet is a full list of people who owned ladders and water pumps for firefighting.

Many women entered the workforce during this period to fill the gap left by enlisted men. This is reflected with objects such as a pair of rubber safety clogs worn by female munition workers or a bus conductor badge worn by Lilian Watts who worked on Wigan Corporation Transport.



Part of Civil Defence Uniform (B83.199-200, Wigan Museum Collection)

Some of these artefacts will soon be on display in a showcase exhibition at Wigan Local Studies. If you have any stories or objects from this period, you wish to share please get in touch.

VE Day Book

It is important to preserve our local history.

In commemoration of VE day in May 2020 I am planning a project to collect letters and postcards sent from local soldiers serving in the Second World War to their families, and vice versa.

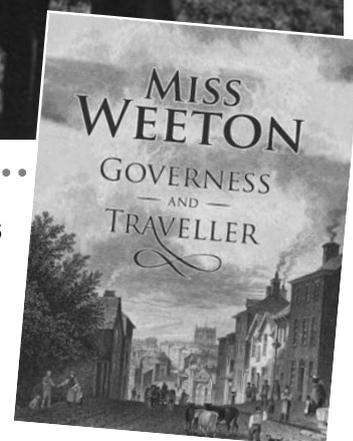
I am hoping to publish these online, alongside any photographs and to also publish a book.

There will be a VE day coffee morning held in Leigh Library in May with a display of copies of these letters and postcards.

If you have any such letters in your family and would be willing to participate in this project, please contact:

Maureen O’Bern
07845170856
maureenobern@outlook.com

Thanks very much, Maureen O’Bern



.....

If you need gift ideas for anyone interested in local history, biographies or historic diaries look no further...NOW ON SALE, the story of the compelling Lancashire diarist, Nelly Weeton.

Written in solitude, Miss Nelly Weeton’s letters, journal entries and other autobiographical writings transport the reader through Georgian Lancashire and beyond.

Edited by local historian Alan Roby and published by the Archives, the volume brings new research into Miss Weeton’s life to print for the first time, updating the works of the diary collector, Edward Hall.

We are extremely proud of the new volume and it is a testament to Alan’s meticulous research – as well as his career in the printing industry, in producing such a high quality volume. It includes several wonderful colour reproductions and biographies of the key individuals in Miss Weeton’s story. Crucially, we hear Nelly Weeton’s life recorded in her own voice, giving us a near unique insight into Wigan and the North West (thanks to her extensive travels) in the Georgian period.

In Alan’s words: ‘Miss Weeton was an ordinary woman who was highly gifted. She learned the complete alphabet in three hours at little more than the age of two and her favourite toys were chalk, slate and quill. She was a voracious reader who seemed to have access to a bottomless pit of appropriate adjectives to describe people and events. Every word she used meant just what she wanted it to mean, nothing more and nothing less.’

We could not recommend it highly enough – a perfect gift for anyone interested in history!

The book, ‘Miss Weeton: Governess & Traveller’ is priced at £20 and is available from the Museum of Wigan Life and the Archives. For more information visit <http://missweetonbook.wordpress.com/> On sale at the Museum of Wigan Life, Wigan Waterstones, online through the blog or by cheque for the sum of £20 plus £2.80 p&p, made payable to Wigan Council at Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan. WN1 1NU. Please note that the Museum of Wigan Life is currently closed. Please do not send cheques during this time. See the website for updates.

TALKS AT THE MUSEUM OF WIGAN LIFE

Please note that some of the events listed may be cancelled in light of advice to restrict movement due to COVID-19

Due to government restrictions the Museum of Wigan Life temporarily closed on 18 March 2020. If necessary, talks will be rearranged where possible. Please check the website before attending. All talks £3.00 include Tea/Coffee

Places are limited so please book by phoning 01942 828128 or emailing wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk



Cotton Town Chronicles

by Peter & Barbara Snape
Thursday 14 May, 1pm-2pm

Cotton Town Chronicles is a folk song-based presentation that provides an interesting overview of working life during the age when cotton and coal were king. It is a journey in which key moments of social history provide the context for the song to take centre stage. Each song tells a story; it's grease and grime, mills, mines and machinery, poverty, struggle, love, humanity and the ability to look on the bright side of life.

Protest Under the Pharaohs

Friday 5 June, 1pm-2pm

Ancient Egypt saw the first recorded strike in human history, and there is plentiful evidence for ordinary people reacting against centralised rule of the Pharaohs. This lecture explores some of the alternatives to the image of the powerful Pharaonic state. Come along to this illustrated talk by Dr Campbell Price.



125 Years of Rugby League in Leigh and Wigan

by Mike Lathom
Thursday 6 August,
1pm-2pm

Calling all Rugby League fans!

In this special anniversary year, join us for an audience with sports journalist and Leigh Centurions chairman Mike Lathom as he looks back on the highs and lows of what many people in the Borough regard as the Greatest Game of all. Whatever side you favour, this talk has specific reference to both Leigh Centurions and Wigan Warriors.



TRADITION FILMS

Tradition Films is a North West-based film production company specialising in heritage, arts and social issues.

We have our own YouTube channel which features several films about local history within Wigan Borough, including Crooke Village, Wigan Pier, Abram Morris Dancers and Bedford High School War Memorial. A brand new addition to the channel is 'Culture Counts!'.

Filed a few years ago, 'Culture Counts!' highlights different strands of arts, sports and heritage in Wigan, including Aspull Olympic Wrestling Club, Tyldesley Little Theatre and Wigan Archaeological Society, all linked by performances by Manchester poet Tony Walsh.

Please visit: <https://www.youtube.com/user/traditionfilms> to find out more.



Tony Walsh narrating, 'Culture Counts!'



Young people taking part in a Wigan Archaeological Society dig

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Please check with event organisers for further information before attending.

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 from 2pm to 4pm. All are welcome, contact Barbara Rhodes for further details on 01942 222769.

Atherton Heritage Society

Please note – From 2019 the meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of the month. Meetings begin at 7.30pm. in St. Richards Parish Centre, Mayfield St. Atherton. Visitors Welcome – Admission £2, including refreshments. Contact Margaret Hodge on 01942 884893.
April 8th - "REVEALING WIGAN ARCHIVES PROJECT" Speaker - Alex Miller
May 13th - "PEACE & WAR - 2nd/3rd September 1939" Speaker - Jeff Scargill.
June 10th - "THE OLD PERSON'S GUIDE TO NOSTALGIA" - Speaker - Peter Watson.
July - 8th - "THE WORLD OF FRED KARNO" - Speaker - Brian Halliwell.

Billinge History and Heritage Society

Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at Billinge Chapel End Labour Club at 7.30pm. There is a door charge of £2. Please contact Geoff Crank for more information on 01695 624411 or at Gcrank_2000@yahoo.co.uk

Culcheth Local History Group

The Village Centre, Jackson Avenue.
Second Thursday of each month. Doors open 7.15pm for 7.30pm start.
Membership £10, Visitors £3 Enquiries: Zoe Chaddock – 01925 752276 (Chair)

Hindley & District History Society

Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.00pm at Tudor House, Liverpool Road, Hindley.
Please contact Mrs Joan Topping on 01942 257361 for information.

Leigh & District Antiques and Collectables Society

The society meets at Leigh RUFC, Beech Walk, Leigh. New members are always welcome and further details available from Mr C Gaskell on 01942 673521.

Leigh & District History

www.leighanddistricthistory.com
An exciting new, free, local history website, covering Leigh and the surrounding districts. Still in its infancy, it already boasts a list of births, marriages and deaths, 1852-1856, including cemetery internments, nineteenth century letters from soldiers serving abroad, a scrapbook of interesting articles, local railway accidents and an embryonic photograph gallery. There are also links to other sites covering historic and genealogical interest.

Leigh Family History Society

The Leigh & District Family History Help Desk is available every Monday afternoon (except Bank Holidays) from 12.30pm to 2.30pm, at Leigh Library. There is no need to book an appointment for this Help Desk. Monthly meetings held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month (except July, August and December), contact Mrs G McClellan (01942 729559).
21 April, 'Everyone Remembers their Co-op Number', Stephen Caunce;
19 May, 'The Working Class Movement Library', Royston Futter
16 June, 'The Clergy of this Parish', Richard Sivill July-August, no meeting held.

Lancashire Local History Federation

The Federation holds several meetings each year, with a varied and interesting programme. For details visit www.lancashirehistory.org or call 01204 707885.

Skelmersdale & Upholland Family History Society

The group meets at Upholland Library Community Room, Hall Green, Upholland, WN8 0PB, at 7.00pm for 7.30pm start on the first Tuesday of each month; no meeting in July, August and January. December is a meal out at The Plough at Lathom. For more information please contact Bill

Fairclough, Chairman on 07712766288 or Caroline Fairclough, Secretary, at carolinefairclough@hotmail.com

Wigan Civic Trust

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. Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.30pm. The venue is St George's Church, Water Street, Wigan WN1 1XD. Contact Mr A Grimshaw on 01942 245777 for further information.

Wigan Archaeological Society

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, at 7.30pm at the Bellingham Hotel, Wigan on the first Wednesday of the month (except January and August). There is a car park adjacent on the left. Admission is £2 for members and £3 for guests. For more information call Bill Aldridge on 01257 402342. You can also visit the website at www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk

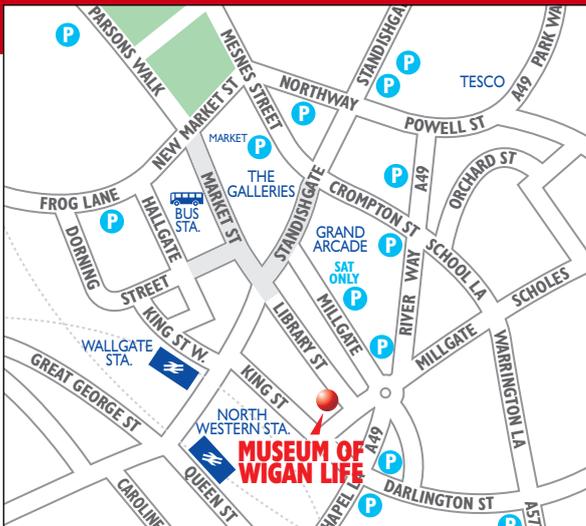
Wigan Family and Local History Society

We meet on the second Wednesday at 6.45pm, at St Andrews Parish Centre. Please contact wigan.fhs@gmail.com to find out more information. Attendance fees are £2.50 per meeting for both members and visitors. Our aim is to provide support, help, ideas and advice for members and non-members alike. For more information please visit, www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory/ or see us at our weekly Monday helpdesks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

Wigan Local History & Heritage Society

We meet on the second Monday of each month, with a local history themed presentation starting at 7.15pm in The Function Room at Wigan Cricket Club. Doors open at 6:30pm. Members, £2.50, Visitors, £3 per meeting. For more information please contact us <https://www.facebook.com/wiganhistoryandheritage/>

How to Find Us

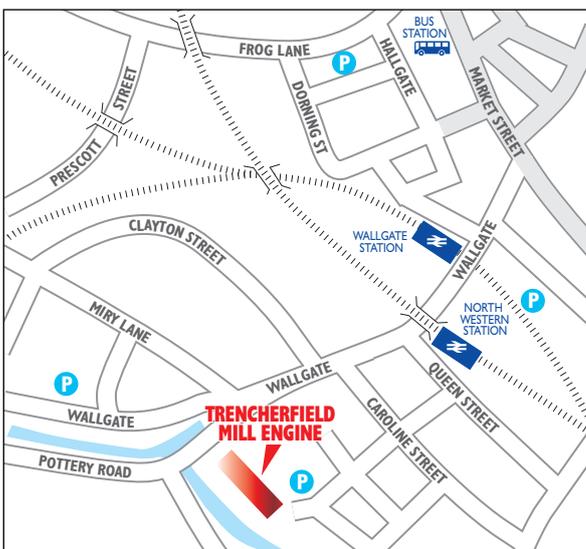
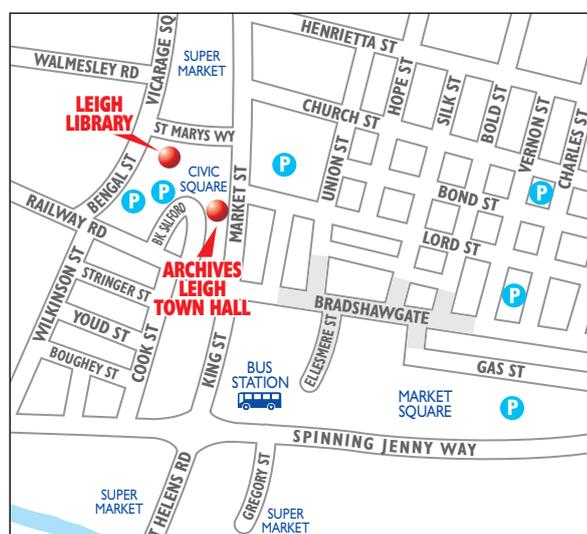


Museum of Wigan Life & Wigan Local Studies

Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU
Telephone 01942 828128
heritage@wigan.gov.uk

Archives & Leigh Local Studies

(temporary location until 2020)
Leigh Library, Leigh WN7 1EB
Telephone 01942 404430
archives@wigan.gov.uk



Trencherfield Mill Engine

Wigan Pier Quarter,
Heritage Way,
Wigan WN3 4EF

Due to Government advice related to the coronavirus our services are temporarily closed. Please check the website for further updates.

YOUR LOCAL MUSEUM

Bolton Bury
Oldham Rochdale
Salford Stockport
Tameside Wigan

Take a closer look www.gmmg.org.uk



GREATER MANCHESTER MUSEUMS GROUP



@WiganArchives Service

@MuseumofWiganLife



@WiganMuseum



@wiganandleigharchives