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FRONT COVER

Tissue, commemorating the Pretoria Pit Disaster. These were printed and sold to raise money for the relief funds.

Letter from the Editorial Team

This issue commemorates the 100 year anniversary of the Pretoria Pit Disaster (21 December 1910) when 27 local men, out of 344 lost there lives in one of the worst mining disasters. We thank those of you who shared their stories with Past Forward.

We've had many comments, both positive and negative in our reader survey (see page 27) as well as lots of suggestions for topics we should feature. However, we must stress that Past Forward is your magazine. We print what you write, so if you want to see an article on a certain topic, start honing your creative and sleuthing skills and get those articles or letters to us. Some of you, it would seem, think that no-one will be interested in what you have to say or that your writing ability would let you down. Never fear! We know that there is a tremendous appetite for local stories and the editorial staff is always willing to lend a hand. We look forward to some good reading.

Finally, the Heritage Service wishes all our readers a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year

Information for 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
- Submissions will remain on file until published
- Submissions may be held on file for publication in a future edition
- Published and rejected submissions will be disposed of, unless you request for them to be returned

- 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
- 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@wlct.org or The Editor at **PAST FORWARD**, Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

Events December 2010

There's something for everyone in our December events programme. To find out more or to book a place call **01942-828128**.

Key: MoWL = Museum of Wigan Life, WAS = Wigan Archive Service (Leigh Town Hall) LLS = Leigh Local Studies (Leigh Library)

Date	Time	Event	Venue / Cost
Wednesday 1 December	1.00pm-3.00pm	History Chat – Christmas in Leigh. Reminisce about Christmas past. Mulled wine and mince pie included!	LLS / £1 Booking advised
Thursday 2 December (Also 9, 16 and 23)	6.00pm-7.45pm	History Chat – Wigan. What are your memories? Loved school, going to the cinema. Come along and share your tales with others.	MoWL / Free Drop in
Friday 4 December	11.00am-3.00pm	Don't Go Down the Mine Activity Day. Based on our new exhibition. Find out the story behind the exhibition. Object handling and crafts. Suitable for all the family.	MoWL / Free Drop in.
Wednesday 8 December	1.30pm & 3.00pm	Who Do You think You Are? Get started on your family tree at our family history workshops.	MoWL / £3 Booking essential
Thursday 9 December	6.00pm-7.30pm	Readers of the Lost Past. Arks, crusades, temples and skulls. Join us on our reading group adventure, as we delve through time.	MoWL / Free Booking advised
Tuesday 14 December	1.00pm 1.15pm	Christmas object of the month. Sash of the Loyal and Ancient Order of Shepherds. Find out how the shepherds of the Christmas story inspired the society's founders.	MoWL / Free Drop in
Saturday 18 December	12.00am-3.00pm	Family fun – Wartime Christmas. Object handling, crafts and stories for under 5's.	MoWL / Free Drop in
Tuesday 21 December	1.30pm-2.30pm	A Story of the Pretoria Pit Disaster Inspired by a Mother's Tale by Jane Finney. To mark 100 anniversary of the disaster.	MoWL / Free Booking advised

PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

Copy Deadline for Issue 57

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday 25 March.

Past Forward Subscription
Subscription is £5 for three issues. Payment by cheque (payable to Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust), postal order or credit/debit card (telephone 01942 828128).

Please state which issue you wish your membership to begin

I am a registered blind person and would like the CD version

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

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Aunt Maggie and the Pretoria Tragedy

(a call to prayer) By Austin Lyons

Around the year 1909 a funeral was making its way up the steep gradient of Castle Hill Road, Hindley, to the local cemetery. In one of the funeral carriages, drawn by the customary two black Belgium-bred horses, were Aunt Maggie and her nephew Arthur.

They had a great affection for each other. The aunt felt a certain responsibility for Arthur, who due to family problems had to make his own way in life. On the other hand, Arthur liked the warmth of his aunt's friendship and the many kindnesses she had always shown him. She did her best to keep him to his religious practices, but wasn't surprised when he occasionally admitted to periods of non-attendance. Their meeting that day was no exception when he forestalled her expected enquiry by quickly proclaiming "But I always say that little prayer you taught me, Aunt Maggie, every night." Disarmed by his sincerity and honesty, she just smiled when, on arriving at the graveyard, he helped her out of the funeral carriage.

We now move towards the end

of the year 1910, where we find Aunt Maggie busying herself with the final chores for Christmas, "Only a few more days and we will be going to Midnight Mass" she thought to herself as she climbed the stairs to bed. But that night would be one she would never forget. She was restless and had little sleep. Around 6 o'clock she was awakened from a dream by her nephew's urgent pleadings, calling loudly "Aunt Maggie, pray for me, Aunt Maggie pray for me!". Shocked and somewhat confused, she got up and knelt in prayer for quite sometime, then went back to bed.

Later that morning, in response to some loud knocking, she opened the door to find a distraught neighbour trying desperately to speak to her, "Have you heard?" she asked, her voice trembling with emotion "There has been a terrible explosion at The Pretoria Pit and they say your Arthur is in it." Shocked and saddened, she thanked her friend then hurried inside, where for sometime she knelt and prayed for the soul of her nephew Arthur and all the others killed in the disaster,

some 350 she would later learn. The explosion occurred at 7.50 am only an hour or so after she had been awakened by her nephew asking for her prayers; some would describe it as a premonition.

The tragedy tore the heart out of the township of Westhoughton. There was hardly a family that had not been affected by the disaster. Father A. L. Coelenbier, the Parish Priest of the Sacred Heart Church, Westhoughton, played an important role in this tragic event. He was the first clergyman to arrive on the scene. He described how he saw hundreds of people, men women and children running to the pit entrance. Some had their hands lifted heavenwards, others had their heads bowed, some crying bitterly, especially women with babies in their arms.

At the pit head as the men were brought up, Father Coelenbier administered the last rites. Many were so disfigured by the blast that no one could tell him their names or religion. By this time some other ministers had arrived and they questioned him "Are they



Rescue team on the scene at the Pretoria Pit Disaster 21 December 1910.

your men?" The priest replied "I do not know who they were, but I have done my duty towards them."

Midnight Mass that year was held as usual, but it was a very sombre occasion. It was more like a Requiem Mass; special prayers were said for all those lost in the terrible disaster and the church was completely draped in black. All rejoicings in the town were stopped, the blinds and curtains in all the houses were drawn and flags on all public buildings were at half-mast. The days over the Christmas period were crowded with funerals and final journeys of farewell, with hundreds of relatives and mourners, many widows and orphans, making their way to

the various graveyards in the area.

In the last of his numerous funeral ovations, Father Coelenbier concluded that Wednesday 21 December 1910 was known as the shortest day of that year but they would remember it always as the saddest for the township of Westthoughton because of the catastrophe that had taken the lives of 350 of their men.

New Year's Day was duly decided for the Memorial Service in the town. Hundreds of tributes expressing grief and sympathy were received from all parts of the country and abroad.

In his special message, the

Bishop of Salford the Reverend Dr. Casartelli, said he hoped that many of those who had perished in the disaster would have had at least a brief time before death to make their peace with the Lord.

Doubtless this would have struck a chord with Aunt Maggie, who had taught her nephew Arthur that little prayer so many years earlier, he who so tragically, had called out to her for prayer in a dream that fateful night. Aunt Maggie had a very full life and a family of her own. In her old age she helped to bring up several of her grandchildren. There are a few friends and relatives who still remember her with true affection.

344 – A Story of the Pretoria Pit Disaster

By Andrea Jane Finney

A conversation with the author

Andrea Jane Finney has transformed the lives of her ancestors into a fascinating book based on the true events of the tragic Pit Disaster a century ago.

From where did you get the inspiration to write '344'?

It came from many years hard work researching my Family Tree. After I had gathered the full information on my Great Grandmother's side I noticed that not only was her life intriguing, but also that of her mother, Elizabeth Gore. What made this research so interesting was not only did my Great, Great, Grandmother have a story to tell about the happenings within her family, but also the fact that she lost her son William Gore in the Pretoria Pit Disaster in Westhoughton in 1910. This pulled at my heartstrings and I began to delve deeper into the tragic loss of 344 lives 100 years ago.

How would you describe your book?

Tear jerking, make sure you have plenty of tissues handy. It is heartbreaking when you read about a family's struggle in life, knowing it is where you came from, but most of all it is in reading the hard facts about the

tragic loss of 344 men and boys who died in Britain's third largest coal mining accident; the youngest boy was just 13.

Your book is a work of fiction based on fact. Can you tell me what proportion is fiction and what is fact?

The majority of the book is fact. The small portion of fiction is describing the facts, for example, the colour of the horses for Elizabeth's father's funeral, and the colour of the ribbons entwined in her hat. However, I have written as close to the truth as I can. The second part of the book is based upon the contemporary Bolton Evening News reports, from which I have taken the wonderful words of a reporter at the scene. In fact, when you read these words from the newspaper, it gives you a sense of actually being there.

What part of your research was most personally interesting to you?

The most interesting to me was the

research of my family, from birth, marriage and death certificates. You can really map out their lives. The most personal was finding the letters from my Great, Great, Grandmother Elizabeth Gore and the correspondence archives files of her son William Gore who died in the disaster at Bolton Archives. These letters were somewhat personal, begging for money to the council. This was not only upsetting but in fact shows just how this disaster changed all of their lives.

Was there anything in the book that you felt was particularly difficult to write?

Yes the words of the reporter from the Bolton Evening News. At one stage some of the bodies could not be identified because of the explosion. Bodies were often described in the newspaper by just their clothing, hoping that a mother or wife would come forward to claim their loved ones.

Where do you see your book in the future?

There have been various plays within the local schools based upon 344. I would hope that with the Centenary of the disaster in December this year, I can rekindle 100 years of history and let future generations read about our history

and the lives they led all those years ago.

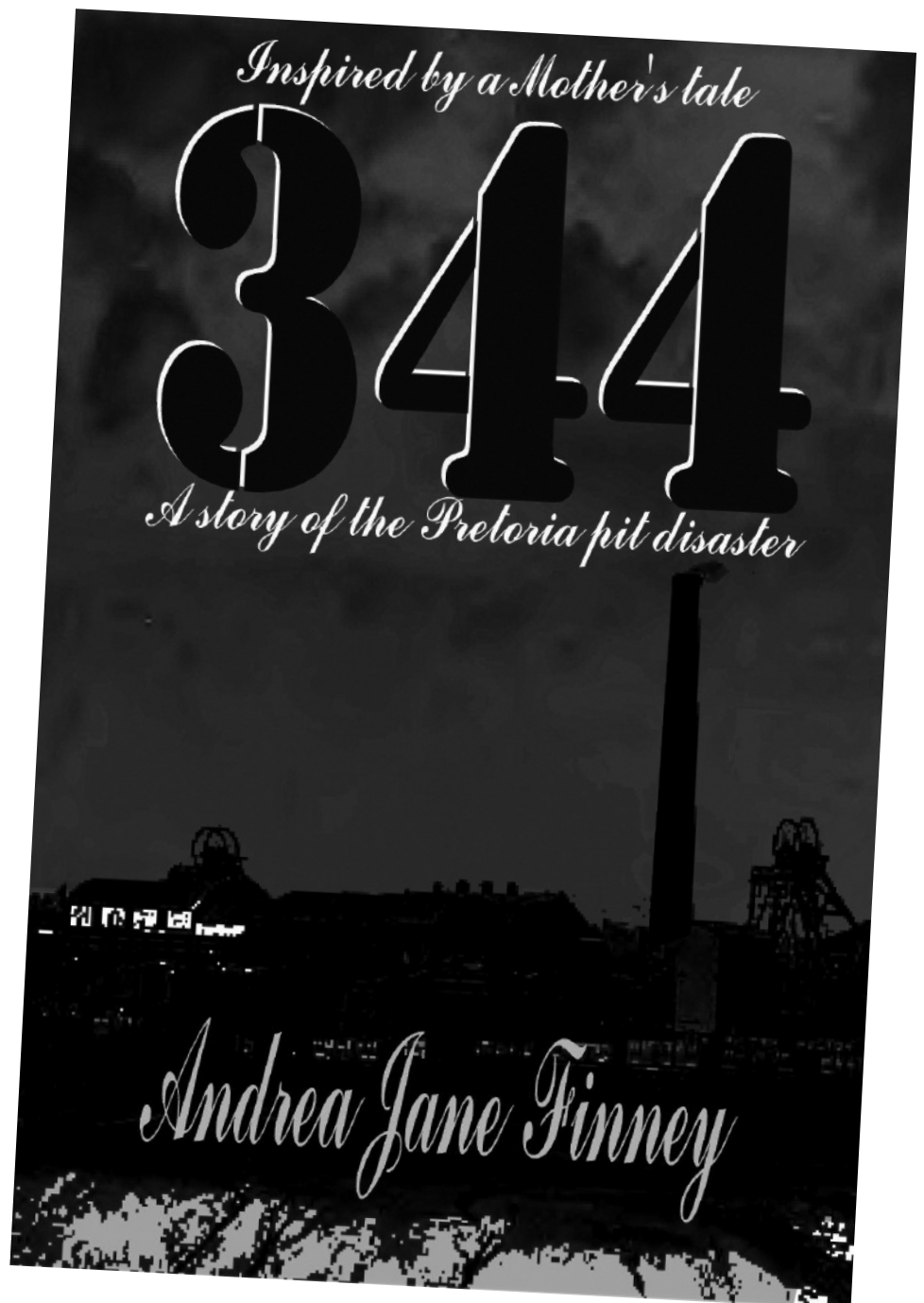
Is there a message in your novel that you want your readers to grasp?

Yes. The poverty and hardship within a community and the loss of so many lives which should never ever be forgotten. If we lost 344 lives today in 2010, it would be headline news all over the world; it's a pity these families suffered in silence during this dreadful.

'344 – A Story of the Pretoria Pit Disaster' is obtainable directly from Andrea at andreafinney@aol.com, and at most good bookshops.

Editor's note - Andrea is proud to be part of the Westhoughton Town Council 100 Anniversary Memorial Committee. Through their hard efforts, a statue of a 1910 miner will be placed in Westhoughton along with a marble plaque which will list the names of the 344 men and boys who died.

The unveiling is on 19 December and the 100th Anniversary Service on 21 December.



**DON'T
GO DOWN
THE MINE**



Come and see the new exhibition at the Museum of Wigan Life.
Share your mining memories. From 3 December 2010 until 22 March 2011

The Queen's Shilling

By Bill Melling

My great-great-grandfather, James Higson, was born on 20 December 1821 at Blackrod, a village some four miles to the north east of Wigan. The Higson's were an old established Blackrod family with a reputation for having provided generations of bell ringers at the village church. It was here that James grew up, learning his father's trade as a plasterer. The 1841 census shows him living at home with his parents, four brothers and two sisters. All his brothers were listed as coal miners and the fact that the two younger ones were aged just 10 and 11 respectively gives some idea as to how hard life was in the 1840s. It was possibly these hard conditions and overcrowding that led James, on 7 June 1842, to walk to Manchester and take "the Queen's shilling" by enlisting in the First Battalion of the Queen's Royal Regiment for a period of 21 years.

If James had joined the army seeking travel and adventure his wishes were soon fulfilled as three months later, on 3 September, he embarked on a troopship and sailed for India to join his regiment. Once there he was soon involved in action against a local Mahrattas ruler who had broken his agreements with the British, and as James' army pay book records, he was present at the storming of a number of Mahrattas forts. When not involved in active service in the field he was stationed in Poonah and later Bombay until in 1846 his regiment returned home to England. The next year, 1847, saw the regiment stationed at Portsmouth, and it was during this period that James probably met his future wife, Elizabeth Andrews, a young lady from Haytesbury, near Bath.

During the late 1840s the Irish Potato Famine was at its height and causing great unrest and resentment against British rule in Ireland. This led, in 1848, to a rebellion led by the Young Ireland movement. Although this was quickly

quashed by the British there was still a great deal of unrest, and this was probably the reason for the Queen's Royal Regiment being ordered to Ireland. It was whilst they were in Ireland that James sent for his sweetheart and they were married in Monkstown in Dublin on 5 February 1849. As was the custom in those days, Elizabeth became part of the regiment and travelled with James wherever he went. In 1851 Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth Ann, who like her mother was to follow the flag throughout the rest of James' military service.

After three years of peacekeeping duties in Ireland the regiment was sent to South Africa where they were to remain for the next nine years. During most of that time James was stationed at Fort Hare, a military outpost, guarding the small town of Alice, named after Princess Alice (a daughter of Queen Victoria) and situated about 200 miles south west of Durban. It had been established in 1824 by the

Glasgow Missionary Society, originally to bring Christianity to the native Xhosa people, but had become a centre for Scottish Presbyterian settlers to colonise the area. There were numerous such settlements, with attendant forts throughout the Eastern Cape and the increasing occupation of the Xhosa's tribal lands by British settlers was greatly resented by the native people. Matters came to a head in 1850 when the Xhosa prophet Mianjeni predicted that the Xhosa would be unaffected by the colonists' bullets and this led to a number of attacks on British troops. Many of the forts, including Fort Hare, were besieged and for a while it appeared that all of the native people of the Eastern Cape were taking up arms against the British. However, the British fought back and with the arrival of reinforcements from Cape Town they were able to suppress the uprising. The remnants of the rebel forces were driven west into the mountains, where for the next two years they conducted a campaign of guerrilla warfare until finally their leaders were killed and the rank and file drifted back to their homelands. James was actively involved in all this fighting and was awarded the South Africa War medal for his services.

Further east, in China, the western nations were putting pressure on the Chinese for them to open up their ports to British, French, German and American traders. By 1859, negotiations had broken down and the British sent a naval force to convey diplomats to Peking (the present day Beijing) to try and resume negotiations.



This force got no further than the Taku forts at the mouth of the river leading to Peking, Here they met fierce opposition and they were forced to withdraw with the loss of four gunboats. This defeat led to the setting up of an Anglo-French expeditionary force to punish the Chinese, and troops for this were sought from all parts of the empire including South Africa The Queens Royal Regiment was rushed to Hong-Kong where they formed part of a force of nearly 20,000 men and 173 ships that sailed north in the summer of 1860. They landed near Taku forts which were captured after three weeks fighting and then marched towards Peking. On the 21 September, James and his colleagues inflicted a crushing defeat on a Chinese army of 10,000 men. This included the elite Mongolian cavalry who were annihilated by the concentrated firepower of the Anglo-French force. Peking was captured two weeks later and on 18 October. Lord Elgin, the British High Commissioner for China, ordered the Emperor's summer palace to be destroyed as a

punishment for the torture and murder of almost twenty western prisoners, including two British diplomats and a reporter for the Times. It took 3500 British soldiers (probably including James) three days to burn down the palace and its priceless contents, an act of cultural vandalism that brought down worldwide condemnation on its perpetrators. Hostilities came to an end when the defeated Chinese signed the Convention of Peking, in which they conceded to practically all of the Western demands. For his part in the operations James received the China Medal with two clasps inscribed 'Taku Forts 1860' and 'Pekin'. In addition to this, and his Africa Medal, James had been awarded five good conduct badges and the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal which carried with it a gratuity of £5.

In 1863, after serving queen and country for twenty one years James was discharged from the army with a pension of one shilling and one penny per day (5p). This may not seem much but in those days it was equivalent to the wage of a skilled worker in the building trade. He returned to Blackrod and obtained employment on the Haigh estate of Lord Crawford where he held a variety of positions, watchman, coachman and gardener, before being appointed gatekeeper at the Wigan Lane Lodge, the main entrance to Haigh Hall.

In 1869, at a time when James was employed as a watchman tragedy befell the Higson family when their unmarried eighteen year old daughter became pregnant. She married the child's father in February 1869, gave birth to a baby boy in April and died of child-birth fever on the 8 June. Eleven days later her husband died of typhoid fever, leaving James and Elizabeth to bring up their new grandchild who

they christened James. This new baby was my grandfather and much of this article is based on the tales he told me that had been related to him by his grandfather.

In the mid 1870s James and his family moved to the Wigan Lane lodge in his new position as gatekeeper to lord Crawford. He was on call twenty four hours a day, seven days a week to open the gates for coaches going to and from Haigh Hall and this required him to 'live on the job' in the two small building either side of the impressive main gate. Each of these contained a single room, the left hand lodge being used for daytime living and the right hand one as a bedroom. My grandfather often used to recall how as a child he had to go out in the snow and rain to go to bed.

James was gatekeeper for nearly twenty five years and became a familiar and well known figure to the many people using Wigan Lane or going through the gates to walk in the lower plantations which were open to the public. When he died in 1898 he was given a lengthy obituary in the local paper. In the interview with their reporter his wife said "There are not many who travel the world over, in the service of their queen and country, who came to lie in their own graveyard. He was dearly liked in the army, he was dearly liked out of it. He never gave me an angry word in his life, he never drank and never kept a penny from me. He was a good kind man and a better never was born... we have lived together all these years in Wigan Lane. I don't think we have made one enemy either amongst the rich or amongst the poor". As the author of the obituary commented "The last word is said, there is nothing that anyone can add, in eulogy, to what has already been said".

Aspects of Local Life in the 'Wigan Gazette' and 'Wigan Times'

By Tony Berry

Amateur local genealogists who perhaps are beginning to tire of compiling extended family trees may find their interest reinvigorated by browsing through old Wigan newspapers on microfilm. The following articles from the Wigan Gazette and Wigan Times are some that I found interesting, touching or amusing while investigating the years 1838-51.

Wigan's involvement in coal-mining meant that this subject was quite often in the news usually due to unhappy circumstances. Apart from the well-known mining disasters, each involving a great loss of life, minor incidents generally with a small number of fatalities were a regular occurrence, especially in the nineteenth century. The Wigan Gazette reported three accidents in the summer of 1839, one, unusually, having a happy outcome.

'DREADFUL ACCIDENT'

On Monday evening last, Wm. Spencer, a man employed at Messrs. Blundell's New Pit, Worthington, fell out of the basket whilst ascending. He was found dead at the bottom of the pit, with his heels uppermost, his head being immersed in the water, and both arms were dreadfully fractured'. 12 July.
'An accident that had been nearly

attended with a serious loss of life occurred at a pit belonging to RB HB. Blundell, Esq., of Pemberton, called the 'Adventure Pit', on last Monday afternoon. An explosion of fire-damp took place, and although a great number of men were employed, only two received any injury, and that so light that they will be enabled to resume their work in a few day'. 12 July.

'On Monday last, as four children were descending the Carr(?) Pit, in Pemberton, belonging to Messrs. Woodcock and Halliburton, the basket came in contact with one of the sheeting boards which had broken loose, with such violence as to pitch two of them out. They fell to the bottom of the pit, about 100 yards, and were killed on the spot'. 23 August.

It is almost heartbreaking, even after so many intervening years, to think of the victims as they fell to their deaths in the darkness,

especially the poor children.

Whilst on the subject of accidents, the following report appeared in the Wigan Times, 20 December 1850.

'ACCIDENT- CAUTION TO AMATEUR GAS MAKERS'

Last week, Mr. Thomas Hilton, landlord of the George Inn, at Pemberton, got his hands and face severely burned by incautiously letting a hot cinder drop on some coal tar connected with a small gas work in his yard, of which he had lately taken the management, upon the former owner leaving the village. Under the judicious treatment and skill of Mr. Buller, surgeon, he is, however, fast advancing to complete recovery'.

One wonders why such a dangerous piece of equipment. Incidentally, many years before this, in 1829, there was a coal gas works in Chapel Lane Wigan presumably supplying gas to the town (Pigot's Directory of Lancashire).

On a lighter note, the Wigan Gazette of 25 January 1839 included the following item.

'THE AURORA BOREALIS

On Saturday and Tuesday evenings, this beautiful celestial phenomenon was visible and presented a most splendid appearance'.

Many people who watched the recent TV programme about the actress Joanna Lumley's search for the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) in northern Norway must have been fascinated and moved by their ethereal and ever-changing beauty. My father recalled seeing them in Upholland, probably in the 1920s. But then, in those days after nightfall, when you headed in a northerly direction up Mill Lane towards Ashurst Beacon any traces of man-made light were few and far between. The conditions were thus almost perfect for viewing the occasional appearance of the lights on a clear night, in complete contrast to the well-lit local urban areas of modern times.

An unexpected article was published in the Wigan Times of 20 December 1850.

'MEETING OF ORANGEMEN AT INCE

On Monday evening last a numerous meeting of The Grand Protestant Association of Loyal Orangemen took place at the house of Mrs Newsham, the Squirrel Inn, in Ince. There were about one hundred of the Brethren present, representing the various lodges in Wigan, Chowbent, Upholland, Ashton, etc'.

Since my mother reckoned that an Orange sash belonging to her grandfather had been found in the attic of the family house in Lamberhead Green I used to think that he must therefore have originated in Liverpool or Northern

Ireland. However, my subsequent genealogical researches proved that his family was definitely local going back at least into the eighteenth century. The above article solved the mystery, showing that some local men were Orangemen in my great grandfather's time.

Finally, two items published in the Wigan Times in the spring of 1851 referred to the census taken in that year.

'THE CENSUS FOR 1851

The Census will be taken on Monday morning next. The usual notices which must be filled up by householders, stating the names, occupations and place of birth of all persons who sleep in the houses between Sunday night and Monday morning, have been issued in Wigan. The officers

employed for the purpose will call for the papers on Monday morning'. 28 March.

'DISTRICT INTELLIGENCE - ASHTON QUERY - 75 OR 77?

One of the persons engaged in taking the census called in due course at the house of an old woman who, of course, had not filled up the schedule. The officer, therefore, proceeded to fill it up and, on asking the old lady what age she was, she replied - "I should have been 77, but I war ill 2 years, so yo mun only put me deawn 75." 11 April.

I suspect that the old lady's statement was intended as a joke and that the census taker seriously underestimated both her intelligence and her sense of humour!



Damage to shaft at Maypole Colliery 18 August 1908

Leigh Workhouse

In this final article on Leigh's Workhouse children for the years 1899-1910, my intention is to allow the stories to speak for themselves. I have had to be selective; many more stories can be found in the Leigh Guardian Minute Books in the Archives.

Catherine (Kate) Mallon

In 1900, aged 14, Catherine was categorised as deserted. Close to death when she returned from Holly Mount School in 1902 (Past Forward 54), she was nursed, first at Leigh then at the Convalescence Hospital, Southport. When Catherine returned to Leigh she was placed into service.

In September 1903 she applied through Bishop Berry's Catholic Emigration Society to emigrate to Canada. Leigh Guardians assisted her, applying for necessary monies from the LGB for her passage. Catherine set sail. By October she was back in Leigh. No-one had considered it pertinent to mention Catherine's latent lung disease to the Canadian emigration officials. When asked in Montreal about her health Catherine recounted her medical history, as a result she was denied entry and returned to England.

Unsurprisingly she found it difficult to re-adjust. Sent to the Catholic Girls Home, Preston, in May 1904, the once obliging girl, committed 'several offences', 'which made it impossible [for her] to remain'. On 16 May she returned to Leigh. Soon after the Guardians ceased to have responsibility for her.

Michael Laffy

Michael's attempt to emigrate to Canada was more successful. Writing in 1906 he said he was doing well and wished to be remembered to those who knew him. The first reference to Michael is when his 'flogging' by Mr Unsworth of the Twelve Apostles School, Westleigh, was brought to the attention of the Guardians in 1899. They took the beating, in an era where corporal punishment was the norm, very seriously. Mr Unsworth was required to explain and whilst the Guardians accepted this explanation, they made it clear the responsibility for punishment lay with them. Soon after Michael was in service at Kenyon Hall Farm, moving to, 'one of the Manchester and Salford Boys and Girls Refuges' in 1900.

Mary (Pollie) Donnelly

Admitted in 1896 aged six years as a deserted child, Mary was sent to Holly Mount School in August 1901. She was returned in a wretched condition. But whilst all the other girls were 'filthy', she was clean. The Sisters said she wet the bed. The accepted punishment for bedwetting was cold baths; in later years the Holly Mount Sisters resorted to caning. In 1903 she was sent to Bishop O Reilly Memorial School, Leyfield, West Derby. At the age of 13, Leigh Guardians placed her in service in Pennington where she stayed for three years. From 1909 to 1910 she was placed into service every few weeks and

returned repeatedly. Eventually the Guardians employed her in the Workhouse Laundry.

Walter Betton

More details are available for Walter courtesy of the records at Liverpool of the Training Ship, Indefatigable. He was admitted onto the ship aged 12. He was 4ft 23/4 ins. tall; weighed 56 lbs; educated to the third standard at St Paul's School Leigh; Anglican; his mother was 'dead'; he was 'illegitimate' and had an aunt in Leigh. He was discharged onto the SS Mount Royal as a 'Boy', earning 20 shillings monthly in October 1905. By March 1906 he was missing. Leigh's Master was asked to investigate his whereabouts but by May he was still not located. On 28 December 1913, Walter returned to the Indefatigable. There he recounted how owing to an accident involving his eyes he had left the Mount Royal, after which he was run over by a traction engine and lost his left hand. He said was looking for work as an electrician in Birmingham so the Ship's Master gave him the necessary indentures.

John and Thomas Murray

Whilst at St Vincent's School, Fulwood in January 1905, the Guardians received an application from a Westleigh colliery contractor to take the brothers into service. But as they had musical talent and passed for the Royal Navy Band this was refused. Nothing further is recorded for Thomas. Of John, the Minute books record:

Children's Stories

'On the 10th John Murray, one of our old boys arrived here, having been discharged from the Royal Navy School of Music, Portsmouth, and intending to sail to Boston USA, on Saturday next. This youth has no family or friends in town...Murray has a pass to Boston in his possession, paid by his uncle but he has very little other means, only about 2 shillings. Since he arrived here he has satisfied the Shipping Company of his intention to sail on Saturday next, and has received a reply that he cannot unless he pays the extra fare, owing to the boat being one of the fast ones...there is an ordinary boat on Wednesday next.' It was resolved that he was to stay in the Workhouse. On Wednesday 22 September 1908 he sailed from Liverpool on the Iventua.

George, Robert and Zachariah Singleton

I found two references to Zachariah, absconding and returning in 1901 and again in 1903. Robert was discharged from the Training Ship Exmouth to the SS Dominion in November 1905. The Clerk visited the ship and as a result tried to enroll him in the Royal Navy but he was not tall enough. By January he was allowed to go to his boatman father but by August there was a problem. In September Robert was placed with an uncle. In May 1907 he moved to live with his brother, aged 17. The Guardians responsibility ended there.

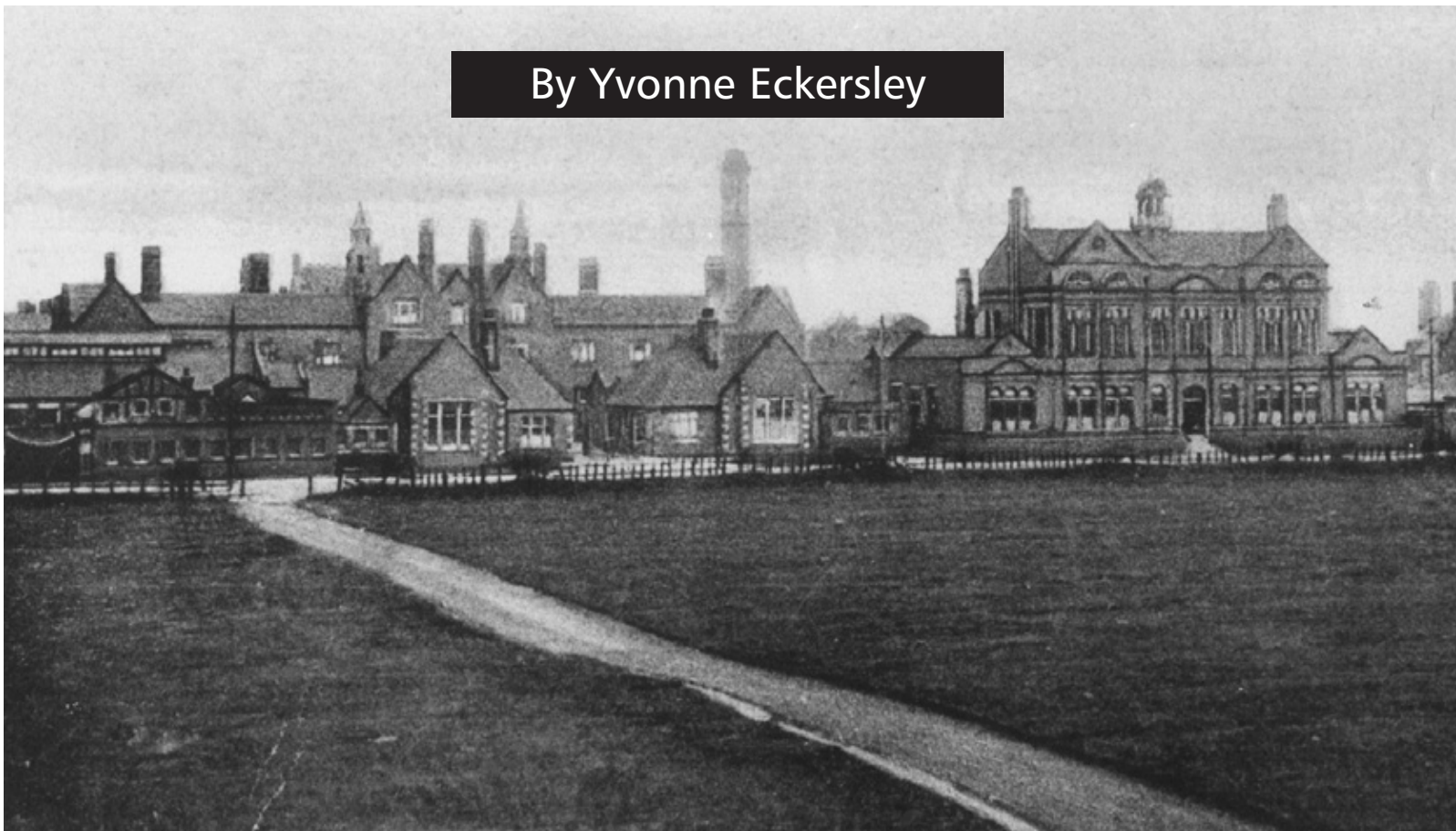
George was placed on the Training Ship, Clio. In March 1906 he was committed to Calder Farm

Reformatory in Yorkshire. He had targeted and bullied a 'shipmate', eventually beating the boy so severely he died. After his release in 1909 Leigh Guardians endeavoured to have him recommitted. There is no further information on George.

Margaret (Maggie) and Sarah Ann Hares

Their story had a happier ending. After returning from Holly Mount their mother applied for her children. Guardians made an inspection of her home and 'found it a most unsuitable place'. In March 1903 they were sent to Leyfield School. In June their mother, now Mrs Eyres, was allowed to take them home. After her marriage the same home was deemed suitable.

By Yvonne Eckersley



A Wigan Childhood – Shopping in the 1940s

By Philomena Morgan

The local small shops were quite near our house In Dicconson Crescent, Wigan and were used frequently as there were no supermarkets, and if there, were most people wouldn't be able to drive to them as they didn't have a car. Actually you could go to a shop and have your order delivered if there was too much to carry.

Delivery boys, never girls, would be seen riding around the streets on bikes specially adapted to hold a large basket at the front and the name of the shop they were working for was sometimes written on a panel under the cross bar. Women would carry shopping bags which resembled holdalls or baskets and these would last them for years, they would normally be hung behind the back door together with the door key. Some shops provided brown paper carrier bags with string handles which also could be reused.

The clothes shops were fitted out with shelves and sliding open drawers. The assistants often had to climb small ladders to reach things down which would usually be boxed. Your purchases would then be carefully wrapped in paper and sometimes tied with string. The era of browsing through racks of clothes and trying things on at liberty hadn't arrived. Even Marks and Spencer's, Woolworths and British Home Stores had laid out counters with assistants behind where you would pay for different items individually, and not at a checkout. Things like underwear or socks wouldn't be packaged but grouped in piles of size and colour,

with their prices, 1s/11d or 2s/11d, and so on. It was when places like C & A's opened that things began to change and this was mainly in the cities to begin with. When we went to buy new shoes our feet were measured with an x-ray unit without it ever being considered that this could be detrimental to our health. I suppose once a year didn't do us much harm.

We were always being sent on errands, which we called messages, not errands. The nearest shop to us was Westhead's, which had been there for years. My mother and her sister used to play with Molly Westhead as girls. It was a grocery shop on Standishgate with a bakery at the back where they made homemade meat and potato pies. On Thursdays we used to take a large plate round to the shop to carry home the pies which had a deep

crust into which was ladled a big spoonful of thick brown gravy. The other grocery shop across the main road, Rimmer's, was much more modern, here we bought homemade ice-lollies made with Dandelion and Burdock or Tizer. Here we also had the excitement of buying our first 'sliced' loaf of Rathbone's bread wrapped in waxed paper. Polythene was still a thing of the future. Us children, could now make our own jam sandwiches or even sugar ones which maybe we did anyway using the large bread knife. It's hard to imagine life before sliced bread. The normal thing was to slice the bread when it was standing upright and first to butter it. Grandma was the champion at this and produced perfectly paper thin sliced bread.

McKenna's toffee shop was another wonderful place to go and for a



Standishgate, Wigan in 1951. Notice Woolworth's on the right hand side.

penny there was no end to the rubbish you could buy. Actually a lot of it wasn't rubbish but really good sticky toffee and chocolate. Large glass jars with screw lids containing all types of sweets lined the shelves, Uncle Joe's mintballs, Bassett's liquorice allsorts, caramels, pear drops with their smell of acetone and terrible if swallowed whole, Sharpe's toffee, Thorne's chocolate centres, Mintoes, Mint Imperials and our Grandma's favourite, chocolate gingers. Miss McKenna was only a small lady and it's a wonder how she managed to lift and tip those heavy jars or scoop out a measure to weigh the sweets before putting them in a paper bag.

The counter would be full of lots of temptations like wooden liquorice sticks, coltsfoot rock, twists of barley sugar and pink sticky toffee, sherbet dips with black liquorice sticks which had to be sucked and not blown, sherbet bombs, sherbet fountains and sherbet dabs. Some others that come to mind were Midget Gems, Love Hearts, Pontefract cakes, Lavendar Drops and the famous Dolly Mixtures. Fisherman's Friends were popular if you had a cold. Also, slabs of treacle toffee on bonfire night which Miss McKenna broke with a small hammer. Wagon Wheels with marshmallow centres were a later addition, and Crunchy Bars, Refreshers, Spangles and Rowntree's Fruit Gums.

There were wonderful bars of chocolate and incredible boxes of chocolates tied up with ribbon. Wrigley's chewing gum and bubbly gum weren't allowed, but tried all the same, and if accidentally swallowed would go round and round inside you, stretching and doing terrible damage. One of our favourites of course was a packet of artificial cigarettes with their little red ends, I used to strike a good pose with one of those.

Keeping People in Touch in a Snowbound Wigan

By Marion Maggs

In January 1940 I was nineteen years old, a young telephonist at the Wigan Exchange in King Street West. When I woke one Monday morning it was to find a very snowy world with all the buses and trains at a standstill. I hurriedly struggled round to a neighbour's house to use their phone to tell the exchange that I couldn't come in. "Please try" they said, "It's like Blackpool Illuminations! We need you all very badly." So I said I'd do my best and went back home to collect my handbag. I set off to walk the five miles to Wigan from our house near Billinge Hospital.

After a couple of miles I came to an abrupt halt when two workmen trying to clear a path down the middle of the road shouted a warning not to move. I was on top of a ledge which was nearly at an end. They managed to reach me, with a foot on each of their spades and an arm around each neck; I was safely put down on the cleared path. That was the only alarm but the sight of the Seven Stars Bridge was very, very welcome indeed.

Work was hectic and we did lots and lots of overtime. My two friends Kath (Mrs K. Monks) and Pauline (Mrs P. Walker) were toiling away. Kath had walked from Upholland but Pauline, who lived on Wigan Lane had been contacted on the Sunday and so was reasonably 'local' and already on her second day.

Of course there was no way Kath and I could get home so one of our supervisors, Miss Smith, found us digs with her brother and his wife who treated us like royalty. Not just a bed to sleep in but nightdresses, toothbrushes, H.W.B's and lovely meals. We stayed with them for three nights until a train from Wigan Wallgate

started to run up to Rainford on the Liverpool line and we were able to get to Orrell station. It was quite an adventure!

The snow hadn't quite finished with me though. When I reached home there was a letter from my boyfriend, later my husband, saying he was arriving at Liverpool that evening on embarkation leave and I set off down to his parents to check on arrangements. Dashing out of our front door, I took a short cut across the lawn, forgot about the snow, and had to go back indoors to get cleared off!

As a footnote, years later I and my husband, who was a regular in the RAF, were asked by my father-in-law to go up to Orrell for the official opening of the new Upholland Grammar School where he was the Headmaster. We were being introduced to the staff when, amongst them, I saw Francis Smith, our 'landlord' from that snowy January. Everyone was treated to the spectacle of the Headmaster's daughter-in-law indulging in a big hug with one of his masters! I still smile when I remember the astonished faces!

150 years of Cutacre Clough

By Bob Evans

Until very recently the Cutacre tip was the largest of the many mine waste heaps, or rucks, which gave such a distinctive character to the landscape of the Wigan area. Though most of it lay in Bolton the view from Shakerley Lane illustrates that it rose up as a prominent feature along the skyline northwards of Tyldesley and Atherton. Its steep southern scarp overlooked the small farmstead of Padiham which can be seen on the photograph taken a few years ago from the crest of the tip.

In contrast, as the 1848 map illustrates, in the mid-nineteenth century, Padiham was the on the side of the Cutacre brook in an area of cultivated farmland. The brook itself occupied a broad shallow valley, flowing on the surface from Middle Hulton southwards to merge with other streams to form the Hindsford brook, the boundary between Tyldesley and Atherton.

In recent times no-one viewing the brook's discoloured and iron-stained, polluted water, seeping as it did from a culvert beneath the foot of the tip, could possibly believe that 150 years ago its



water and the land around it could be considered as a source of a township's water supply. Yet between 1863 and 1867, the minute book of the Tyldesley Local Board records just such a proposal for a reservoir here.

Soon after the Board's formation in the autumn of 1863 a request was made for, 'a plan of that part of Cutacre Clough required by the Board' (p24). An analysis of water quality was received and members were unanimous in their view, 'That the analysis is satisfactory and that the Cut-acre Clough Scheme of water works be proceeded with.' (p28).

Professional engineering expertise was sought from Mr Hunter of Wigan. His terms, 'for plans and working drawings and superintendence would be 5% on the estimated outlay for all works required in the construction of the Cut-acre clough water works and mains' were accepted. It was agreed, 'that the surveyor have a cheque for £3' (p32).

Disappointingly the township records do not include copies of these plans. Absent also is a map referred to in the letter sent to the 'Trustees of the late Ellis Fletcher' requesting the purchase, 'of seventeen Statute acres ... for purpose of forming Reservoirs and

Water Works for the supply of Tyldesley –cum – Shakerley" (p63/64). It was resolved that, 'for the purposes of the contemplated Waterworks the sum of £8650 be applied for under the Public Works Manufacturing Districts Act 1863. The first instalment of £4000 to be received on the 30 June 1864 and the remaining £4650 on the first of April 1865' (p87). A later request was made, 'to borrow the sum of £3000 to purchase the Land for the intended Reservoir and other works connected therewith' (p232). Repayment of these loans would be made over a period of years from the rates.

During 1864 and the early part of 1865 the minutes record decisions indicating the Board's determination to implement the scheme with payments being incurred for the necessary preliminary work. In June 1865 Mr Hunter claimed £100, 'for his professional Services in making the plans etc of the proposed Waterworks' and a cheque for this amount was made out, 'on account of his services as Consulting Engineer' (p244).

Similarly Mr Cross of Bury was engaged to value the land and decisions were taken to secure its purchase. One minute states, 'That notices be given to the occupiers of Land in Shakerley required by this board for a Reservoir and other works connected with their proposed Water Scheme' (p 133). A later agreement specified the purchase price to be £2750 and included an agreement to meet, 'the Tenants at present in the occupation of the Land, Buildings etc at Padiham to arrange with them as to compensation for their tenant rights, damages etc'.



**TYLDESLEY WITH SHAKERLEY
LOCAL BOARD. — WATERWORKS. — To
Ironfounders, Brassfounders, Sluice Valve and Hydrant**

(p271). Preparations for undertaking the work went as far as advertising for tenders in Leigh Chronicle in December 1864.

During all this period regular repayments of the loans were being authorised. It was not until the latter part of 1865 that doubts about the viability of the scheme began to be expressed at Board meetings. In September a motion by one member to abandon it was rejected.

Ratepayers were beginning to register opposition in petitions to the Board. In one they argued that Manchester could supply water which was, 'in all respects found to be very far superior' and they should, 'be supplied with [the] softest and finest water that can be obtained' (p353). In a second petition in March 1866 they emphasised concern about the effect on future rate-bills, 'that the carrying out of the Cutacre Water Scheme will be attended with great risk.....and would entail upon the Township ruinous and needless expense' (p369). It may be that the Hindsford mill owners also feared that the proposed reservoir with its limited catchment area would limit their supply of water.

The Board minutes refer to negotiations which continued over the next twelve months about the possibility of obtaining a supply from Manchester's large Pennine valley reservoirs. Agreement was finally reached and a letter from Manchester dated 22 March 1867 confirmed, 'that the Corporation will in all probability be able to supply water to your district in October next' (p491). On 12 October the Leigh Chronicle's report of the previous week's Board meeting noted that minor

amendments to the agreement with Manchester were still being discussed but confirmed that water would be supplied by the end of the year.

With this assurance the Board agreed to publish, 'a scale of Charges for the Supply of Water for domestic consumption and for Baths and water closets', and, 'charges for water delivered by meter' (p546). As a result Manchester was able to provide the first large, reliable water supply to meet the future needs of the growing populations and expanding industries of Tyldesley, and later Atherton. The abandonment of the original scheme made the Board liable for compensation to farmers whose land had been required for the reservoir. Mrs Barnes of Padiham, the farm on the photograph, was offered, '£2 in settlement of all claims' and replied, 'that she would take time to consider' (p523).

From the late nineteenth century this land once thought suitable as a source of water became shadowed by a vast derelict mound of waste brought both from neighbouring collieries and later from more distant mines.

The Cutacre brook was lost, channelled beneath its surface. Just as our communities now no longer live under the threat of mining disasters so our landscape is now recovering from the scars inflicted on it by the industry. In the case of Cutacre, open-cast mining is now providing deep excavations into which the mine waste can be deposited and sealed by a covering of the original surface rock and soil. From Tyldesley and Atherton the future view will be of an undulating forested upland crossed by new rights of way for public access. From here walkers will still be able to enjoy the same panoramic view across the Cheshire Plain which previously the tip offered. A relocated Cutacre brook, free from contamination, will again flow on the surface to feed new lakes of clear water supporting a wide variety of aquatic life, providing an added attraction for anglers.

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the archivist for making available the Tyldesley Local Board minute book (UD Ty/A/A1/1), the page number of each extract is given. Bolton library is the source for the 1848 map extract. The Local History Officer in Leigh Library is thanked for providing access to Leigh Chronicle references. Photographs were taken by the writer.



Medieval Farming in Abram

By A Morris

Much of what we know about medieval Abram is gathered from information contained in the documents of Cockersands Abbey relating to holdings given to it by members of the Adburgham (Abram) family. It seems odd to us now that inhabitants of Abram should donate land to a distant abbey, but this kind of charitable act seems to have been a regular occurrence during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Most townships in the Wigan area appear to have given large areas of land to the abbey.

Farming

The medieval township or "vill" of Abram could not be considered a "village" in the modern sense of the word. It consisted of a number of individual homesteads which were scattered over a large area. Neither could Abram be called a self contained manor. By the late Middle Ages Abram Hall was a fairly substantial building which could be called a manor house but this was on the edge of the township and did not form a community nucleus. There were other large halls and indeed there is evidence to suggest that other manors over spilled the boundaries of their townships into Abram. Also the Abram family held lands elsewhere. A further complication was the large portion of the township which belonged to Cockersands Abbey.

The many mentions of 'messuages' (farmhouses with customary rights) rather than 'tofts' (homesteads), in the documents of the era, tends to suggest a picture of tenants with

some degree of autonomy over the land they held. This land was probably around the messuages. One of the Cockersands Charters granted "common of pasture" to the abbey canons, so allowing grazing of cattle on land which was communally held. This was probably the poor quality marsh land which was in existence around the township at this time.

There were three main types of farming land, arable, meadow and pasture. Crops were grown on arable land. In the summer months cattle grazed on pastures and meadows provided hay to feed the stock during the winter months. In the early Middle Ages, the main crop cultivated on arable land was barley, which could be used for food, animal feed and brewing ale. Medieval farming developed under the manorial system.

The overwhelming picture of land use in Abram in the medieval period is one of scattered farmsteads surrounded by areas of

woodlands and grazing land held in common. A document of 1303 gives further evidence for this belief. The land of Beatrice, daughter of Thomas de Okelshagh, was described as being "20 acres of (arable) land and one of meadow". There is no mention of pasture, as presumably, cattle were grazed on common land. Similarly in 1481 the land of the daughters of Gilbert Abram was described as "124 acres of (arable) land and 10 acres of meadow". Again there is no mention of grazing land suggesting that at this time such land continued to be held in common. Eventually even the common land was enclosed. In 1509 the holdings of John Urmston are described as "120 acres of land, 10 acres of meadow, 20 acres of pasture". Here John Urmston appears to have grazing land under his direct control and presumably enclosed. Similarly in 1604 "Henry Byrome of Byrome, esquire held 40 acres of land, meadow and pasture in Aburgham alias Abram."

The early landholders

Henry II gave Abram to Warine son of Godfrey Banastre somewhere around the year 1170. The gift was 'in fee farm' which meant that Warine was now a free holder. Warine and Godfrey were thought to be related to the influential Banastres of Prestatyn. The Barony



of Newton was probably granted by King Henry II to a descendant of Godfrey's elder brother.

The "Great Inquisition of Service of 1212" states that "Richard of Edburgham (Abram) holds half a carucate of land in Edburgham by the gift of King Henry in fee farm and renders yearly four shillings. And of those four bovates (half a carucate) the third part has been given in alms." Richard was possibly the first person to adopt "Edburgham" (Abram) as a hereditary surname.

In 1246 Peter de Burnhil was described as "tenant of 200 acres of land in Adburham" (Abram). John de Adburgham quitclaimed (gave up the rights of) these 200 acres to Peter on payment of six marks of silver. Included in the agreement was land and tenements in Ashton in Makerfield.

A list of land holders compiled sometime between 1242 and 1268 includes Richard son of Warin, in the town of Abram; John son of Richard de Abram, in the same

town; William Gillibrand (who was also known as William de Occleshaw) within the bounds of Abram. In 1268 John Gillibrand held Occleshaw for 12d a year.

In 1303 Thomas de Okelshaw acknowledged a messuage (a dwelling house usually with attached manorial rights), twenty acres of land and one acre of meadow, as belonging to Beatrice who was probably his daughter.

Richard, son of John de Abberham (Abram), and Henry, son of Richard de Abberham, are mentioned in 1323.

The Exchequer Lay Subsidy roll of 1332 lists five taxpaying freemen in Adburgham, described as being part of the "Wapentake of Derbyshire (West Derby). Richard de Altburgham and William Gilibrand each paid 3 shillings. William de Asshton, Roger del Wode and John Del Wych paid 2 shillings.

The Rental of Cockersand Abbey names four freeholders in the Abram township in 1501. They are

John Heshton (Ashton) and William Culcheth who lived in Abram and paid 12d. Richard Andreton and Robert Bolton lived in "Bekyrschawe" (Bickershaw) and paid 6d.

In 1509 John Urmston, son of John Urmston Esquire, held lands in Abraham as well as in "Westley, Astley and Hyndeley".

The Decline of the Manorial System

As more common land became enclosed and more people became freemen it was usual for customary services to be replaced by extra rental payments. The lord of the manor used the money so gained to pay independent labourers to do the necessary work. There was a division of larger manors into smaller units so lessening the power and status of the lords. A dispute in 1395 between Roger de ***** (unreadable) and Thomas de Asshton on one part and Geoffrey and Lucy de Athirton on the other, over a 'moiety' of the manor of Bykersha, is an example of this in Abram. Moiety (literally a half) is the practice of subdividing a manor into smaller units.

In 1552/1553 Bamfurlong Hall was described as a 'capital messuage' indicating that it was now a chief house on an estate containing other messuages. Terms such as 'gentleman', 'yeoman' and 'husbandman' begin to appear. The manorial system was beginning to collapse and the picture was one of estates owned by gentlemen farmers and yeomen.

New Year Resolutions – or a walk for all reasons

By Mr E Dakin

Can you remember those well-meaning New Year resolutions? What were they I wonder? To go on a diet, join a gym, stop smoking, to save all your loose change or to be a better person and go to church? If so, are you still beavering away, fretting and getting nowhere fast?

When I was a young, and I could be wrong here, I never heard of anyone making a New Year's resolution. Oh, resolutions were made, that's part of life, but they didn't make owt of it. It didn't fill a page of the Daily Mail. No, they just got on with it. There were no dramatic denials and definitely no starvation diets. Besides, most folk down our way were glad to scoff what was put in front of them. So dieting didn't exist.

I do remember one of my Dad's resolutions, though. One day he decided to pack in smoking and he sent off for this miracle cure. One month's supply of yellow, blue and brown tablets, and the label read: to be taken three times a day with meals. A brown one at breakfast, a yellow one at lunch and a blue one at tea time. So, with his fags conveniently hidden away in a cupboard, the ritual began. For two whole days that man suffered like no man should be allowed to suffer. Then he cracked! Out came the fags, and happiness once more shone like a beacon from a face wreathed in tobacco smoke. And those miracle pills? Well, I never did find out what happened to them, but I can hazard a guess.

However, as an antidote to counteract the effects of the odd Woodbine, Dad enjoyed long country walks, which included some deep breathing, and one day, I too came to learn the benefits of this much neglected exercise. It was during a walk along the Leeds to Liverpool Canal that I received my first lesson and which I still practise to this day. But first we had to leave behind the stench of Gallagher's bone works, and cross the wooden canal bridge, known locally, for apparent reasons, as the White Bridge, at the rear of Walker's Iron Foundry.

Once on the other side, we passed Mayflower Meadow and a stretch of tall grass near a pond edged with bulrushes, and which we called 'The Long Grass' a place where me and my mates, Alan Scott and Bill Gallagher had many a frolic and a furtive fag.

On past these oases of pleasure towards Gathurst and the rural part of Wigan. Then Dad, breathing deep, said: "Breathe in through thi nose, lad, deep and steady like, then hold it for a few seconds, then exhale through your mouth, but make sure this lasts longer. Always empty your lungs proper, it gets rid of the impurities, understand?" I tried and went dizzy and my chest hurt a bit. I soon packed it in, because for one thing I were a bit young and giddy like. But as I got older and wiser, although I don't think wisdom comes into it, not with me anyroad. Perhaps a dash of common sense would be more

appropriate, I began to realise the benefits of walking and deep breathing.

Remember too, any doctor will tell you that the vast majority of the human race do not breathe properly, they only shallow breathe. These days I can inhale long and deep and no problem. I don't power walk, I leave that to the young uns. I step out early mornings, 6 days a week, when the air is fresh and invigorating. Sometimes I walk briskly, sometimes not. As long as you're walking, why bother. My walks last an hour or more, but walk, however short, is good for you. By the way, don't worry if you forget to deep breathe, it wouldn't be enjoyable to so continually. Do it when you feel like it. But you'll soon realize even when you're not consciously deep breathing you'll be breathing deeper just natural, like. So why don't you have a go? It's good for your heart, lungs and mobility. It keeps your weight stable (you'll even lose weight if you keep at it) and it's good for the mind, because there's nothing better for beating stress. And it doesn't cost a penny, in fact a walk for all reasons.

Aye, the memory of what Dad taught me that day long ago, before today's mania for gym health clubs and diets and unkept resolutions, will stay with me forever.

The Family History of Kilhey Court, Standish

By John Wogan

Kilhey Court was built with beer money, lots of it! The builder, Thomas Fairhurst was the son of James Fairhurst, who was the publican of the Kings Arms, Scholes, Wigan in 1841. At that time, Scholes was a run down, poverty stricken area, where beer appeared to come first. It made James Fairhurst a wealthy man. In 1858 he was brewing ale behind the Kings Arms, and by 1869 he had his own brewery in Warrington Lane, where he continued to brew beer until his death in 1886. Thomas Fairhurst inherited the brewery from his father.

Thomas was born in Wigan in 1839 to James and his wife Elizabeth Heyes. In 1851 Thomas and his brother William (who went on to be a cotton manufacturer and died in Chorley in 1895) attended boarding school at Rivington, a village not far from Wigan. After finishing school, Thomas trained to be an engineer at Leyland Mill Foundry, but followed in his father's footsteps, as he acquired his own public house in Wallgate, Wigan. He also married into the trade, on his marriage to Elizabeth Swift, at St John's Church, Pemberton. Elizabeth was the daughter of Joseph Swift, a publican and brewer (deceased at the time of her marriage) and Sarah Ashton of the Manor House, Worsley Mesnes. In the 1871 census, Thomas's occupation was described as a brewery manager and he owned the brewery. It is unclear which brewery this was, and could have been either that owned by his father's, or that of his wife's family.

Thomas and Elizabeth lived at Talbot House, Worsley Mesnes, and had two children, Ada Elizabeth and James Ashton. By 1881 the family were living at Kilhey. There must have been a previous dwelling on the site, as the present house was reputed to have been built or finished by Thomas in 1884 as a 21 wedding anniversary present for Elizabeth. It is not until the 1901 census that Kilhey Court appears as an address. In 1912, Thomas died at his Borness estate in Borgue, Kirkubrightshire in Scotland. Elizabeth sold the house and the Warrington Lane Brewery in 1920. The latter was sold at auction for £66 13s along with 11 public houses. Six of

these were bought by Walker Cain, which is now trades under the name of Tetley's.

The next owner of Kilhey Court was Alexander Young a mill owner (believed to be Trencherfield Mill) who bought the house for his new bride Agnes Murdoch McLellan, on their marriage at Hope Congregational Church Wigan in 1920. Despite being caught up in the stock market slump in 1929, the family was very happy here and blessed the house with two daughters, Alison and Barbara, the first children probably to be born to the owners since the house was built. After the death of his wife, Alexander lived at the house alone before remarrying at St Wilfred's, Standish in 1948. His second wife was Ada Booth, a widow, and the sister of Ezra Sidebotham, the owner of a well known printing firm in Wigan. Alexander died in 1955. On his death, the house had no electricity and the undertaker was reputed to have fallen through the floor. He missed the detour that Ada had taken to avoid the rotten floorboards caused through the leaking roof! Alexander gifted a painting, 'Going North' to the Wigan Council which now hangs in the Council chamber. Ada was left living alone at Kilhey Court.

The last family occupants moved in to Kilhey Court in 1960, when Leonard Sidebotham and his wife Mildred joined his aunt there. There were still no electric lights in the

house, and Mildred insisted that before she moved in that she wanted electricity. Leonard died in 1981 and Mildred and her son Michael lived at Kilhey Court until 1983. I had the pleasure of talking to Mildred and her son Michael they both had fond memories of living in the house.

In 1983 Roy Thomas who owned the Bellingham Hotel on Wigan Lane bought the house to convert into a hotel. He started to do jobs himself, but eventually did not have the funds to complete it, and he sold the property on to Rodstock Leisure Industries. They converted the building to a hotel and built extensions, but left the main building Kilhey Court alone with all the features still intact. Rodstock went into receivership and the hotel was managed by Principal Hotels on behalf of the receivers. It was bought by two business men, Richard Bradshaw a builder and Trevor Bradshaw, a chemist. They managed it until 1992 when Richard Branson's company Virgin Hotels managed it on their behalf. Richard and Trevor then sold it to Macdonald Hotels in August 1996.

Since then it has been in a number of owner's hands and extensive extensions added but the original house is still standing. Kilhey Court is a fine example of Victorian architecture in superb grounds and the original house has not lost its charm over the years.



Going North by George Earl, 1875

Life after ... Who Do You Think You Are?

Staff and volunteers on the Museum's help desk are faced with a steady stream of family historians fired up by the latest programme in the Who Do You Think You Are? Series. This hugely successful programme has quite rightly been praised for its interesting and touching stories of famous people. It has rarely lacked human interest. However, it has often been criticised for not showing the nuts and bolts of the actual research process and this has led to many misconceptions among the researchers we see every day.

Staff and volunteers at the Museum have one huge characteristic in common- their desire to help ordinary folks discover their heritage! This is very difficult however when our visitors expect to see a complete tree without any input from themselves. The programme regularly skates over the lack of information for the living members of a family to zoom in on the distant more interesting relatives in exotic locations. They do not dwell on how they know these people are connected and rarely show any linking documents. No wonder some consider that little personal input is required.

So I will attempt over the next few issues to give some tips for the correct way to go about growing your own family tree. Each issue will highlight a particular problem area, starting with – starting!

Begin with yourself. This may seem too obvious but your tree should be peopled with relatives who are definitely related to you and not those you may think or have been told are related to you. By all means ask all living relatives for as much information as you can. But also ask them for documents and in particular birth, marriage and death certificates.

These now cost £9 from the local register office. So save yourselves a bit of money also by sharing these with your family. The fathers named on your parents' marriage certificates should be named on your parents' birth certificates. And of course your own birth certificate should show your father and mother's names. This chain of certificates should stretch back to the start of civil registration in July 1837.

Don't jump straight to grandparents unless of course you have certificates that link properly from them to you. Many a researcher has missed this step out to find later that actually their grandparents, and even sometimes their parents are not who they were lead to believe.

So once you have the start of your chain extending back to say 1911 or 1901, you can start to put some flesh on the bones by looking at census records. At the Museum we have free access to the Ancestry website so you can go back quite quickly from 1901 to 1841. These censuses show each family member alive at that time, their occupations, ages, their address and, crucially, where they say they were born. If you suspect Irish ancestry this may be the only source

of discovering which county in Ireland they were from. Of course if they were born in England and Wales or Scotland, the town where born will also be given if known.

Wigan and Leigh researchers are blessed with a very large supply of original documents at their fingertips. Virtually every church in the Borough is represented in our microfilm library. All are searchable for free. A great number are indexed on the internet. All that is necessary is a little bit of homework and some patience looking for ancestors. Always take notes of what you find and what records you have searched (even if you found nothing) in order not to go over the same records endlessly looking for the same person.

Keep an open mind. Some people were very coy about giving their ages and sometimes these are downright lies. One of my great-grand-mothers claimed she was 25 on her second marriage to a much younger man when in reality she was in her forties! Illegitimacy was very common in the Victorian era and was regarded as a stigma. Some relatives deliberately avoided their children's questions as to their parentage, whilst others were quite open. Expect surprises therefore. Above all seek out those birth, marriage and death certificates from the local register office or try the Museum for church wedding certificates to keep costs down. Our certificates cost 50p if you or one of our volunteers copies the film or £1 if staff do this.

Next issue: more tips.

Books added to the reference stock at the Museum of Wigan Life

Donations

Civic ceremonial: a handbook of practice and procedure. 352.041

Longworth, J.H. *Triplane to Typhoon: aircraft produced by factories in Lancashire and the North West of England from 1910.* 629.133

General

Gorman, J. *To build Jerusalem: photographic remembrance of British working class life 1875-1950.* 305.562

Smith, A. *Mr Mott's madhouse: Haydock Lodge and the insanity trade.* 362.21

The Police: 150 years of policing in the Manchester area. 363.2094273

Bruck, H.A. *Lord Crawford's observatory at Dun Echt 1872-1892.* 522.1

The challenge of cholera; proceedings of the Manchester Special Board of Health 1831-33 edited by A Kidd. 614.514

Coalopolis to pie eaters: a celebration of 100 years of Schools Rugby League. 796.3331

Marsh, Julie R. *With penitence and pride.* 823 MAR

Fairhurst, Peter. *'My granddad': the life and legacy of William Fairhurst.* 920 Fai

Transactions of Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society volume 105.

Francis Frith's travels: a photographic journey through Victorian Britain. 941.081

Times gone by: photographic record of Great Britain 1856-1956. 941.081

Melling, Joseph. *A long journey.* 942.736

Gratton, JM. *The Parliamentary and Royalist war effort in Lancashire 1642-51.* 942.76062

Victoria county history of Cornwall volume 2.

Victoria county history of Gloucester volume 12.

Recusant History – Journal of the Catholic Record Society.

Catholic Record Society. Bishop Herbert Vaughan and the Jesuits: education and authority

Genealogy

Lancashire Parish Register Society
Volume 45a the registers of Newchurch in Rossendale part 1: 1606-1722

Volume 171 the registers of Whalley part 5: 1813-37, Darwen 1723-1759 & Tockholes 1725-1758.

Volume NC5 St John the Evangelist Bacup 1788-1812 (DVD)

Thomas Dainton and Stalag XXA

A recent acquisition at Leigh Local History has revealed the fascinating life of a local Atherton man, Lance-Corporal Tom Dainton. The book 'Stalag XXA' is about Tom's experience as a prisoner of war in Poland during the Second World War. Tom's son, Paul, has compiled a collection of memories about life in the camp.

Tom was born on 29 January 1911 in Mather Street, Atherton. Tom went to Lee Street Baptist School. He later became a driver for the Lancashire United Transport & Power Company in Howe Bridge.

On 29 October 1939 Tom enlisted and completed his Initial Training Course at the Lancashire Fusiliers Barracks in Bury. He was assigned to the Royal Army Service Corps in December 1939 as a driver with the rank of Private, and joined the regiment on 3 January 1940.

On 6 March 1940, Tom went to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. Whilst serving with them he was promoted to Lance-Corporal but was captured on 21 May 1940. He was inside a bunker when a German officer on opening the hatch pointed a Tommy gun and said, "It's all over for you chaps." Tom was taken to the Stalag XXA POW Camp in Torun in Poland.

He remained in captivity there until the end of the war. He told Paul how he remembered listening to the BBC and being asked by the guards for the latest news. He could also recall how much the British despised the Nazis but how he respected the men of the regular German army who also despised the Nazi soldiers.

Towards the end of his captivity, Tom along with 400 prisoners endured a horrendous 800 mile march from Poland to Germany in 1945. The prisoners of war had to battle freezing conditions



with little food or shelter. Out of the 400 soldiers who started out on the march, there were less than 200 by the end, some had died and some had been hospitalised.

Tom returned to Britain in April 1945 where he was reunited with his family. He was discharged on 31 October 1945 with a record of Exemplary Military Conduct.

After the war Tom worked for the National Coal Board and the David Brown Tractor Company. He spent his remaining years at 1 Devonshire Place in Atherton with his family. Tom died on 23 December 2001.

On 9 November 2010, 70 years after Tom was captured, his son Paul will return to Poland where a memorial stone will be officially unveiled and dedicated to the Prisoners of war held captive at Stalag XXA from 1939 to 1945.

The book 'Stalag XXA', is available to view at Leigh Local History.

Celebrate the New Year with a Chat

'History Chat' will be welcoming in the New Year with a range of local history topics to talk about. Amateur dramatic societies will ring in 2011. If you can remember, or want to discover, the history of local groups such as St Joseph's Players then come along.

Over the past year the history chatters have explored a range of local history themes. Using a variety of resources such as old photos, local publications and on one occasion film footage, they have discussed cinemas, coal mining, silk weaving and even local pubs and breweries!

Volunteer Yvonne Eckersley says, "I have found History Chat has been a really friendly way to discover more of the history of my home town. For History Chatters this year's programme will reveal many hidden

gems of local knowledge. I am especially looking forward to the sessions on medieval manuscripts and looking at 40 years of the Turnpike Centre."

The drop-in sessions alternate between Archives at Leigh Town Hall and Local Studies in Leigh Library. For more information please ring 01942 404559.



History Chatters led by Yvonne Eckersley (right) get stuck in!

Date 2011	History Chat	Location	Time	Cost
26 January	Amateur Dramatic Societies	The Archives, Leigh Town Hall	1-3pm	Free
23 February	Living in a Mining Community	Local Studies, Leigh Library	1-3pm	Free
29 March	Women's groups and individuals of Leigh	The Archives, Leigh Town Hall	1-3pm	Free
27 April	Pennington Flash	Local Studies, Leigh Library	1-3pm	Free
25 May	"You Live and Learn"	The Archives, Leigh Town Hall	1-3pm	Free
29 June	Youth groups; The Scouts,	Local Studies, Leigh Library	1-3pm	Free
27 July	Medieval Manuscripts	The Archives, Leigh Town Hall	1-3pm	Free
September	Heritage Open Days	TBC	TBC	Free
26 October	Photography	The Archives, Leigh Town Hall	1-3pm	Free
30 November	Celebrating Leigh Library's 40 Birthday	Local Studies, Leigh Library	1-3pm	Free
December	Christmas Celebrations	TBC	TBC	TBC

'People Power' - The Big Society Agenda

During recent months, volunteering has become a central player in the government's vision for the Big Society. In Liverpool in July the Prime Minister launched the Big Society plan and the 'Building a Big Society' document, sets out plans for a society where the lead force for social progress is social responsibility, not state control. As the Prime Ministers', 'great passion', this agenda would mean empowering communities to run their own services such as housing projects and leisure venues.

This could include:

- placing more power and opportunity into people's hands
- encouraging people to take an active role in their communities
- transferring powers from central to local government
- supporting co-ops, mutual's, charities and social enterprises.

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council has neatly summarised what this may mean for cultural services and venues in Britain. The Big Society could offer an opportunity to emphasise:

- the role of museums, and indeed heritage services, in celebrating and exploring democracy and citizenship
- the contribution that the sector makes in creating a sense of community and bringing diverse groups together

- the part played by museums in providing volunteering opportunities and providing positive activities for young people to engage with their communities.

The Heritage Service is closely monitoring progress in regards to the Big Society agenda for the future. At our sites, we have already begun to offer a wider range of opportunities for volunteers. For example, during September and October, several volunteers took part in a short Object Handling training course enabling them to deliver object handling sessions, with objects from our permanent collection, at our events. This involved learning about what damages objects, how to keep the object safe and how to tell the story of that object. They also spent time practising object handling with members of the public and with the staff trainers, Jenny Broadbent (Collections Officer) and Jennifer Roberts (Learning Officer). Putting their new skills into practice at Powerfest on Wednesday 27th October, they showcased several objects connected to science and engineering.

ARE YOU AN EXPERIENCED FAMILY AND LOCAL HISTORY RESEARCHER?

We are currently looking for people to volunteer their time to help out in our local and family history libraries. If you feel you have experience in researching local and/or family history and would be

willing to take research enquiries from the public, or willing to learn, then please get in touch with us about volunteering. We would particularly welcome applications from any ex-Library assistants or Librarians to assist on Fridays with shelving and library organisation. Whatever time commitment you can offer, we would be interested in hearing from you.

DO YOU ENJOY TALKING TO PEOPLE?

Trencherfield Mill is in need of volunteers to assist with meeting and greeting visitors during its busy opening times on Thursdays and Sundays. If you are interested in our industrial heritage, enjoy talking to people and wouldn't mind greeting our visitors at the main reception desk and pointing out information to them, then please contact us to talk about volunteering with us. There will also be opportunities to learn more about the engine and perhaps assist with delivering talks to the public in the future.

Please email heritage@wlct.org for more information or a Volunteer Application Form, or alternatively, ring our main reception on 01942 828128.

If you know anyone who would be particularly interested in becoming a volunteer then let them know about our opportunities!



Volunteer Sandy Davidson examining a selection of objects during the object handling training.



Sarah Lowe showing a stereoscope to one of our young visitors at Powerfest.

Your Archives

We have had another busy few months at the Archives. Volunteers are continuing important work on the photographic collection; others are now working on cataloguing previously untouched papers from the Haigh Estate and uncovering many interesting records, including the estate insurance policy in the event of German war-time zeppelin raids.

An important index has also been produced from the Wigan and Leigh Canal Boat Registration volumes by one of our regular researchers, giving details of all boats registered locally, their owners, occupants and state of repair. Please contact the Archives for more details.

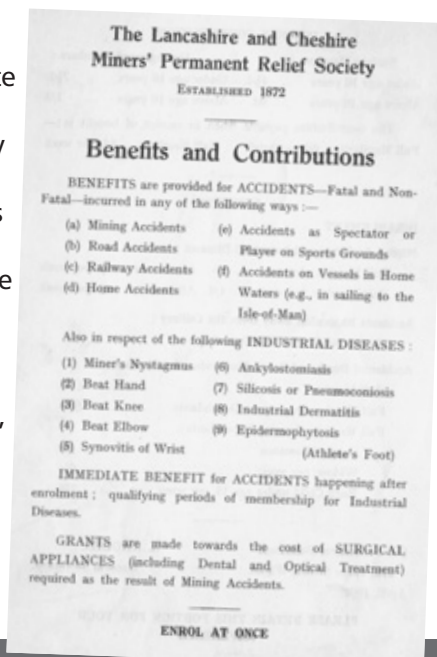
Collections Corner

The Lancashire & Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society (LCMPRS)

The collection documents the activities and history of the LCMPRS and its role in providing financial relief for miners and their families. It was a regional body with offices in Wigan and many historic records are now in the care of the Archives Service.

The society was formed in 1872 in the aftermath of a series of mining disasters in the years 1868-1871, under the advocacy of William Pickard. It aimed to provide a regional direct-relief scheme for communities and replace the previous employer-operated relief schemes that were unable to cope with large disasters and maintain effective support in the long term.

The society however provoked much debate amongst miners. The scheme was reviled by some miners who perceived that the ties between the society and mine owners were too strong; the owners, relieved themselves of direct welfare commitments, were thought less likely to make adequate provision for safety. Moreover, miners were



frequently compelled to join the scheme, against the advice of the unions.

Nonetheless, the society provided relief for thousands of individuals and families throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it played a major part in local communities. Evidence of the impact on people's lives is reflected in the records held. These include:

- Board minutes and Committee papers
- Individual claim and case files for miners and their families
- Yearly award ledgers
- Trustees papers
- Actuarial reports

The Archives Service is shortly to commence a project to better catalogue and index the entirety of the LCMPRS collection, with the help of the Archive Volunteers. If you would like to get involved, please contact the Archivist.

Recent Acquisitions

New listings continue as usual thanks to the work of Archive staff and volunteers. Collections accepted or listed in the last few months include:

Records of Bedford High School and Leigh Grammar School (SR/113)

Worsley Mesnes Methodist Church, marriage registers, 1956-2009 (D/NM(W)1/16)

Astley Wesleyan Chapel, Lower Green Lane, marriage registers, 1908-2009 (D/DM(W)2/2)

Records of Conroy Brothers Limited, Fruit and Potato Salesmen (Acc. 2010/40)

Joseph Collier Collection, musician (Acc. 2010/53)

Collection of images of The Verve in concert at Haigh Hall, Wigan (Acc. 2010/79)

Details of the collections listed above are available from the Archives Service, as is further information on other recent acquisitions.

PAST FORWARD READER SURVEY

Son of a Son

We left our famine blighted poor homes
In our hundreds and thousands, to you we
Were Ignorant Micks
We came to build your canals and railways
Backbreaking labour,
Shovels and picks!
We toiled in your mines congregated in the
Poorest parts of town
Bad housing, dysentery and cholera
Struck yours, and our children down.

Some were afraid of us and our religion,
Said we were ruled by Rome.
We knew how to enjoy ourselves with the
Drink and the dancing,
Reminds us of good times at home.

We fought for this country, our children too.
We may have, and are proud of our ancestors' names,
But we're English like you.
We've come a long way, our children are your kin,
To this country endowed.
I am a son of a son of Erin, say it loud.

By Patrick Murphy

Thank you to all of you who completed our reader survey. Over 90 of you have responded. The information and opinions you have given us is invaluable, and will be used to make improvements to the magazine in the future.

To give you a flavour of what is emerging; 94 per cent of you agreed that you looked forward to reading your copy. The most popular features were letters and questions, closely followed by local and family history update and local history articles. The least popular were the volunteer and Friends update, society news, adverts and learning and outreach news. Many of you wanted more local history on a variety of topics, help with family history enquiries and more letters.

Your comments included:

"given the size of the magazine, I think you provide a varied and interesting publication and I am satisfied with the mix. My sister in New Zealand thinks it's wonderful"

"really enjoy the magazine, one of the best I read"

"do not like colour – black and grey, black and white pages too distracting, what's wrong with plain white page?"

"too many adverts for Heritage Service"

The comments were overwhelmingly positive. A more detailed report will appear in a future issue. We have taken to heart the problems around the background colour of printing, and hope that you find this issue easier to read.

We promised to give a 'Heritage Service 'goody bag' to the respondent 'drawn out of the hat'. The lucky winner is Mrs Elaine Essex of Hindley.

WIGAN BOROUGH
ENVIRONMENT &
HERITAGE NETWORK



***"Our local
Environment and
Heritage Matters"***

If you agree, groups and individuals are warmly invited to join our network

The Network provides:

- Regular Meetings
- Advice & Information
- Workshops
- Site Visits
- Grants
- Speakers
- Partnership working with Wigan Council, Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust and other relevant bodies in the Borough



WIGAN
LEISURE & CULTURE
TRUST
Building the future together

Contact the Secretary **Joe Taylor** for more information:
T: 01942 700060 E: info@nwcan.org W: www.wiganheritage.co.uk

Captain Walker's War Diary

The Archives Service has a large collection of personal journals and diaries, known as the Edward Hall Collection. The collection was donated by Edward Hall, a local book dealer and collector, and husband of Emily Littler of Wigan. The oldest item in the collection, a nautical log and navigational aid belonging to James Hole, dates from 1698. Over 250 pieces record two and a half centuries of personal histories, documenting the lives of people from all walks of life and from around the world.

One of the most interesting items in the collection is the field service army book of Captain E. G. S. Walker of the Royal Flying Corp (RFC). The volume gives a wonderful account of Walker's service over four months in early 1915; records tell us that he remained in the RFC until 1919, but no further diaries survive.

The diary (EHC/208) has now been transcribed in full and the original and transcription are available at the Archives Service.

Thursday Feb 25th

Bright cloudless day. N.W. wind. Rather misty. I dug Shepherd out of bed at 7.0am, and he took me down to the aerodrome in his Rolls Royce. The engine still went round, so I pushed off. She was in a better mood today, so I flew at 3000 in the sunshine & felt happy.

I intended to circle over Ewhurst by way of a farewell to Gen B.P. [Baden-Powell] - but over Robertsbridge my

engine again got very tired, so I came down at Ewhurst and mended the fourth high tension lead that had broken, also the weak tyre burst. I had a second excellent breakfast with the General and Lady B.P. -who seemed quite pleased to be visited by air! The Gen had cut his knee, but hobbled out on two sticks to see the machine.

Wed March 24th

My engine still out of action. A pouring wet day: at the aerodrome things were so desperately dull that we were reduced to playing pitch and toss with one frame bits in the mud. I won two francs and stopped playing! Howell told us at lunch time of a visit he once paid to a friend of his who lived in a large institution. They had long and interesting talk on many matters when suddenly his friend struck an attitude like this:- and said 'Pour me out! Pour me out!' He thought he was a tea-pot.

I wrote home for more clothes to replace the lost ones sent to be washed. Within an hour the wandering garments turned up beautifully washed, darned & mended.

Sun March 28th

A sunny cloudless day with a biting North-Easter. At half past six I started with Stringer as observer. After half an hours climbing my aneroid showed the height at which our sort of work is done, -6000, so we pushed off to the spot over the line where our job waited to be done. It is a place where aeroplanes go every day, and the

Germans have a unique collection of archibalds [anti-aircraft fire or artillery piece] stationed there. While we were still a mile or two from the spot, four little compact balls of white blue smoke suddenly appeared and came floating down wind towards us, quickly followed by four more. They had seen us coming and had sent them up to get the range.

Below us was the ground on which the famous battle was fought not long ago,- described in the papers as the victory (!!!) of ----- ----- . The ground was a perfect network of trenches which showed up extraordinarily clearly in the early morning sun;- for some forty or fifty miles all round the country stretched away dead flat, thickly studded with little farms and villages [sic]; it all looked so sunny peaceful that it was difficult to realise all the wholesale killing & pillage [sic] that had been going on so recently.

As soon as we had crossed our trenches and were over the Germans, the merry fusillade [sic] began; some burst with white smoke, some with flame and black smoke, while others have no smoke at all. Not only was archie at work, but also howitzers with H.E. Our work was such that we had to fly up and down in a straight line and at the same level, so the gunners had plenty of chances of correcting their errors! They made plenty of hits, including one which went through the fusilage [sic] and cut an elevator wire,- but luckily it was duplicated to provide for such a case, so there was still one left. After

about twenty five minutes of cruising up and down one really fine bang came just overhead, the engine was hit and began to clatter like a broken down motor-bus and a chunk of shell fell by my foot.

Stringer waved to me to turn back, - but it wasn't necessary, for I had already done it! The engine was still going round, but not quite enough to support us, - however as the wind was in the East we were safe to come down over our own lines.

S. had moved uneasily in his seat when the burst came, and as he had never turned a hair at the others I thought he might be hit, so I yelled down the speaking tube to ask if he was hurt, 'I'm all right' he shouted, and then started telling me a story more humorous than printable: but I only caught part of it, as the engine was making such an infernal din. I meant to come down in a town we passed over just behind our lines, but couldn't find the landing ground, so determined to make a shot at getting back to our headquarters. We managed it in rather a lame duck sort of fashion, and when we fetched up S. said he had practically the whole of the information we had set out for, which was cheering.

We were both frozen nearly solid! I climbed out and noticed Stringer seemed stiffer even than I was, so two men helped him down. Then we saw a big hole in the back of his coat, and another lower down, and found that a piece of shell after going through the top plane, down through the fuselage, and the wicker seat, had gone through the skin of his back for about ten or twelve inches out again and after making a hole in the petrol tank had dropped by my foot.

As he lay on his face on his bed with the RAMC orderly picked bits of leather coat and mauve vest out of the hole in his back, he dictated the details of what he had seen. It was a pretty bad hit and very painful, but not dangerous. We shoved him in an

ambulance van and sent him off to hospital. A loss to our mess, I only hope he will be sent back to us and not rejoin his regiment, the 5th Lancers.

Wed. March 24th my engine still out of action.²⁹
 A pouring wet day; at the aerodrome things were so desperately dull that we were reduced to playing pitch and toss with one franc bits in the mud. I won 2 francs & stopped playing!
 Howell told us at lunch time of a visit to one friend to a friend of his who lived in a large institution. They had been having an interesting talk on many matters when suddenly his friend struck an attitude like this: -
 and said "Passez-moi! passez-moi!"
 He thought he was a tea-pot.
 I wrote home for more clothes to replace the lost ones sent to be washed. Within an hour the wandering garments turned up beautifully washed, I earned a mounded.

Things to do	Things to buy	80
Wire E.P.C. L.M.	Uniform	small
Pay off Harrods	Putties (stoking & ord nags)	
Cox's repay	Boots	10
B's clothes etc	Slippers	MS
Cheques 500F mtd	Ameroid	with
Old time breeches cleaned	Supplies to DE	amount
Alarm watch repaired	Handkerchiefs & Comb	90
Flying coat repaired	Toothbrush	2000
Pay 2 K.M. amount	Rolypos	1000
War office re Army list	Cardboard 8' x 6'	1000
Ph's 5 garhke. 23H. 8.8.	Soap	1000
R.D.W. 5 R.F.C.	Socks	1000

YOUR LETTERS - CAN YOU HELP

The Mysterious Lady of Ashton Cross

Dear Editor

Ashton-in-Makerfield was a very rural area in the early 1950's. Many of the housing estates we now know had not yet been built. In 1952 Liverpool Road was a very pleasant walk to Ashton Cross. On the left hand side was a high stone wall, which had enclosed Garswood Hall, home of lord Gerard, which had been demolished in 1921. On the right hand side there were open fields after the little catholic school of Oswald's, right up to Home Farm owned by the Worthington family. Across the fields was the Skitters Wood, very little traffic was on the road at that time so it was a quite and peaceful walk.

It was my boyfriend, later to be my husband, who I often enjoyed a walk with on a summers evening after work. But this time it was to be different. The old road wound round past the farm, not the straight road it is today. Just past the farm, open fields carried on to Stones Colliery, these fields were later to be excavated to make the M6 motorway. We had just passed the farm, looking across the field when we saw walking towards us, from the direction of Ashton Cross, a lady who appeared to be dressed in old fashioned dress from years gone by. She kicked out her dress as she walked; she had long skirts in a dark material with a long cape with a hood, and a bonnet on her head.

As she got nearer we were amazed to see that she seemed to walk just above the ground. How could that be? She went past the back of the farm walking towards the field that would lead to Skitters Wood. Suddenly she just disappeared vanished completely into thin air. We had been watching for at least four or five minutes, had we seen a ghost? As we both saw it at the same time, it was the only conclusion we could come to. Where had she gone, who was she? How could she just disappear before our very eyes?

Needless to say we did not continue our walk to Ashton Cross, but turned back the way we had come, walking quite quickly feeling quite scared. My boyfriend had always been quite sure that there were no such things as ghosts, he just did not believe in them, but now he was completely convinced that this was what he had seen.

Over the years I have heard reports of other people having seen this lady. The story, of course not proven, was that she was one of the Gerard family who walked to Bryn to meet her lover.

Dear Editor

I am looking for Wigan Athletic Programmes, 1965-1970, and rare group team photos of the team about that time. Also, photographs of the Wigan Corporation single deck buses, mauve and white 1963, which served Wrightington Hospital 333 service. Contact me at 20 Graham Avenue, Appley Bridge, Wigan, Lancs, WN6 9EA or telephone 07910-651639. I am doing a book about my life in Wigan during the 1960s. Any help would be appreciated.

Yours Sincerely,

Patrick Abram

Editor's note – Wigan Archive Service has a vast collection of historic photographs related to the borough. We preserve and make them available for use by all. If you have any old photographs, we would love to hear from you. Mr Abram, if you get in touch with us, we would be delighted to help.



Dear Editor

I am Mary Collins, 74 years, born and brought up in Westhoughton. I lived in Wigan from 1964 until 2006 when widowed. I came to live in the Colliery Village of Langley Park, Durham in a miner's bungalow to be near my daughter and family.

My mother was Alice Monks and the little china cup and saucer was given to her when she was 11 years old because her brother, John Monks, 19, was killed in the Pretoria Disaster. She told me all the children who had lost someone got them. I don't know who gave them out.

John is buried in Westhoughton Cemetery on his grandparents, and his body was identified by a birth mark on his arm. Mum also lost an uncle and three cousins, all Monks.

I wonder how many of us are left that knew somebody who was there in 1910. My mum had first turned 11 in the October. She said it was a very sad, sad Christmas that year.

I have two cousins, both now 81, Joan in Bolton and Norma in Canada.

My next door neighbour, Muriel Green, sends me the Past Forward to help me keep in touch with Wigan. I saw in Issue 55 that you would welcome contributors.

Keep up the good work.

Mary Collins
Langley Park
County Durham

Editor's note – If anyone ones else has a story or information about this tea-cup and saucer, please contact me.

Dear Editor

I was born in Wigan, and started work in the pits at the age of 14. During the following 12 years I worked at several pits in the area. I started at Garwood Hall as an engine driver. My last underground job was at Robin Hill as a face driller.

I worked with a lad called, Bill Turner, and we both agreed to emigrate to Australia under the £10 package. He left with his wife and two children; my wife and I promised to follow. We had one very young baby daughter. Along the way, even though we had our sailing tickets to leave in September 1956, fate sent us to America. We are now back in the UK and living in Taunton, Somerset. I am 83 years old but happy to say in good condition. My wife Margaret came from Beech Hill. We celebrated our 60th wedding anniversary last year, still cycle and keep ourselves fit. We spend our winters in Florida as we still have lots of old friends there. If anyone remembers Bill Turner, or if he or his family are still around, I would love to get in touch.

William John Critchley
(but was always referred to as Jack)
william-critchley@btinternet.com – please email Mr Critchley with any replies.

John Thomas Dootson

Dear Editor

Our Grandfather, John Thomas Dootson of 77 Warrish Lane, Westhoughton was one of the miners killed in the Pretoria Pit Disaster, which occurred on December 21 1910. He was 26 years old and the son of Esther Dootson. He married Annie Greenough in 1904. There were

three children; John (our father) born 1906, Joseph born 1907 and Esther born 1909. Our grandmother was pregnant at the time of the explosion, and on 19 March 1911, a daughter, Mary Jane was born. Due to the shock of her husband's death, our grandmother became blind and did not recover her sight until after the birth of Mary Jane. Our grandfather had been accepted into the police force on 1 January 1911, and had decided to work at the Pretoria Pit until Christmas in order to buy toys for the children.

John Thomas Dootson's body was identified after the explosion and was buried in a private grave at St Bartholomew's Parish Church in Westhoughton. At a later date, his burial site includes his mother, wife, two sons and one daughter.

According to family papers, the Hulton Colliery Company of Chequerbent, near Bolton were ordered to pay £20 to Annie Dootson (wife) and £270 11s for the benefit of her and John Dootson, Joseph Dootson and Esther Dootson.

We are his surviving grandchildren. Esther Rigby lives in Bamfurlong, near Wigan and Eunice Chadwick lives in Indiana, USA.

Esther Rigby Bamfurlong and Eunice Chadwick, Indiana, USA

THE FRIENDS OF WIGAN'S BOER WAR MEMORIAL



Dear Editor

I read with interest Christine Watts' article, 'Sir Francis Sharp Powell' (Past Forward, Issue No. 55). Sir William Goscombe John, the adjudicator in the competition for Powell's statue, was the sculptor of the Wigan Boer War Memorial, also in Mesnes Park, and indeed Powell spoke at its unveiling in 1903. Unfortunately, this statue was removed in 1968, though the plinth remains, but our group is working for its restoration.

Yours faithfully,

Mr J. A. Hilton, OJ, BA, MPhil, FRHistS
Hon. Secretary

Dear Editor

When I was a boy, just before World War II, my mother, née May Fletcher, told my brothers and me a story about the CSS Alabama and a family connection with it.

She reckoned that a relative of hers was a crew-member aboard the Deerhound as an engineer, and he had been given two gold buttons by Captain Semmes for helping to rescue his crew. This relative got drunk one day and drowned in the Leeds-Liverpool Canal near Top Lock.

I have recently been able to verify part of the story with the help of a friend. This was to the effect that her great-grandfather, Enoch Fletcher who, a couple of years after the incident, had got drunk and fell into the canal, and apparently was the first person to have drowned in that length of the canal, in 1869, aged 54. I, unfortunately, haven't the capability to verify that he was a crew-member and have to rely on my mother's word. For the record, my mother was born in the Higher Ince area, and as a girl, went to Belle Green Mission School.

Incidentally, the Alabama was built at Laird's in Birkenhead, and named the Enrica. It left Birkenhead as a freight/passenger ship. The 'Big Wigs' who sailed at the launching, were dropped off at Holyhead. The ship then proceeded to the Azores, where it was converted to a warship. From then it could be classed as a privateer, sailing under false colours, on the pretext of preventing trade to and from the Yankees' half of the USA. The British Government had intelligence of its activities and shadowed it when it got to the Cherbourg area, where the battle took place in which the Alabama was sunk.

Mr G. Speakman
Wigan

Dear Editor

This is just a snippet I found. It may be interesting to your readers.

Leigh's First Motoring Offences:

The very first prosecution under the Motor Car Act in Leigh was brought against John Higham on the 12 June 1911. He had no lights and failed to produce his licence. He was fined £0 7s 6d and required to pay fees of £0 10s 6d with a term of imprisonment should he default. He paid the fine in Court. One week later Frank Shaw, 19 June 1911, was prosecuted for exceeding the speed limit. Fined £0 10s 6d with fees of £0 11s 6d, again with the threat of imprisonment should he default, he too paid in Court.

Almost a year later, on the 29 April 1912, John Bullough was drunk in charge of a motor cycle in Astley. His punishment was a fine of £0 10s with fees of £1 10s 6d and the threat of

imprisonment on default. He also paid in court.

Information from Leigh Petty Sessions Book at the Wigan Archives at Leigh Town Hall. Many details of early motor car owners in Wigan and surrounding districts are held there.

Yvonne Eckersley

Dear Editor

Having been introduced to your magazine, Past Forward by a friend, Ms Kay Burgess, of Hayling Island, I read with interest about the Pretoria Pit Disaster, 21 December 1910.

I had an uncle, Steve Hulme, who died in that disaster, and was buried on his birthday. He left two very young daughters.

You will appreciate the concern of all the family when I, his nephew, was conscripted as a 'Bevin Boy' on my eighteenth birthday, Christmas Day, 25 December 1944. It brought back memories of Uncle Steve. I had as a youth been a member of the ATC and naturally expected to be recruited into the RAF. I trained at New Town Collieries, Swinton, then transferred to Parsonage Pit, Leigh, where I stayed until I was 'demobbed' in 1948.

My work in the mines proved vastly different from my usual employment with a firm of Chartered Accountants. Nevertheless, I settled down well and enjoyed the company of fellow miners. The work was hard, happy at times and at other times very sad, sometimes with loss of life. At one time I contemplated staying in mining, but the family would not hear of it. How wonderful men are, who are still willing and happy to dedicate their lives to such important yet dangerous work.

One immediately thinks of those men trapped in that mine today, trapped already for so long, not knowing when they will be rescued. Everyone is praying for their early return back home.

Will look forward to continued connection with your magazine.

Yours faithfully,
M. A. S. Wilkinson

Editor's note – happily, the men Mr Wilkinson refers to, are the Chilean miners who were rescued between the 12 and 14 October.

YOUR LETTERS - CAN YOU HELP

Hindley Green Hall and the Flora Statue

I read with great interest the article about Flora, in Past Forward 53, and have one or two observations to make and a possible further mystery about the statue's location in the early 1930s.

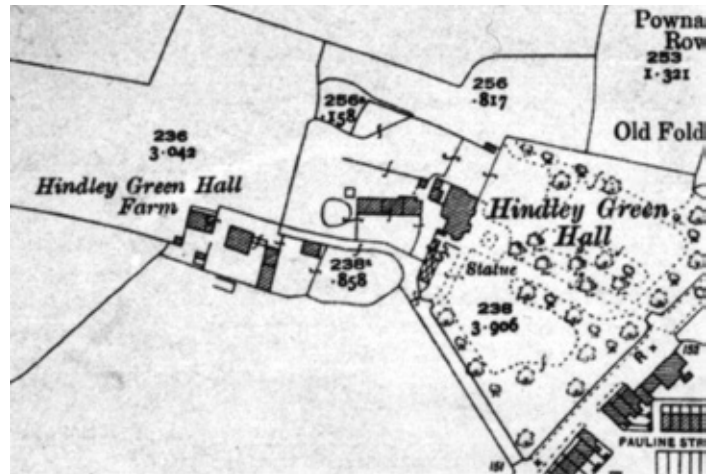
My mother's parents, Jim and Annie Sykes, were the tenants at Hall Farm (behind Hindley Green Hall) from 1926 to 1943. My mother was born in 1932, and as a child played in the grounds of the hall. Her recollection is that the large greenhouse, and the building immediately to the rear of the hall, had by then been demolished. Significantly, she does not remember the statue of Flora at all. Her memory is born out by the photograph of the hall which appeared in PF issue 52 (of which I have a larger copy) the greenhouse has gone and Flora is missing. The 1:2500 OS map of 1937 provides further corroboration – the buildings are not shown and the statue is no longer recorded.

The hall and farm, shown in the 1:2500 OS map of 1928. The Flora statue is still marked.

My mother also recalls playing in the rubble of the hall after it had been demolished, sometime in 1938 or 1939. This means that the hall was razed much earlier than the 'Evening Chronicle' article suggested, and was not removed to make way for the Turner Brothers factory, built 10 years later.

So, where was Flora when the photo in PF52 was taken? Had Tom Brown already purchased the statue by this time, had it been put into storage when the hall fell into disrepair, or was it elsewhere? Perhaps one of your readers will know.

On a related topic, I would be grateful if you could ask your readers



whether they know of photographs which show the farm itself. I would very much like to find some. Possible sources might be;

- descendants of George Walker, the farm's tenant up to 1926
- descendants of the last tenant(s) from 1943 to around 1947/8, when the farm was demolished in preparation for the construction of the Turner Bros factory
- descendants of the farm's owners, the Wild family, who, I believe, lived at 112 Leigh Road
- the construction company that built the factory – site survey photographs might have been taken.

Editor's note – please contact me if you have any information.

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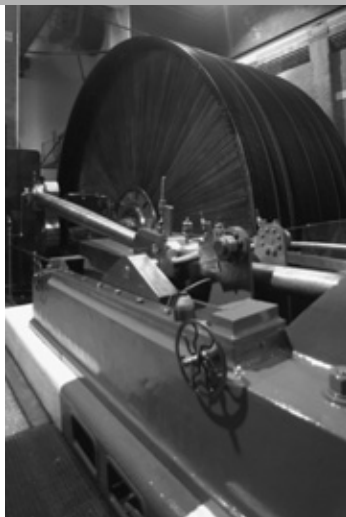
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The Eckersley Sword

Nathaniel Eckersley was born in Hindley in 1779. He had a distinguished military career, winning the awards of the Russian Order of St Anne, Guelphie Order and the Saxon Order of St Henry. He enlisted on 29 May 1800 to the first regiment of the Royal Dragoon Guards, rising to Lieutenant in 1809. He served under the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsula wars and in Canada, Paris and the Caribbean.

After the Peterloo riots in 1819, Manchester was made a military station, and Nathaniel Eckersley was appointed Brigade Major of the District. He remained there from 1819 to 1827. He was highly regarded and it was said that, 'at all times he was ready to assist the Manchester Civic authorities in the maintenance of order.' In 1827 he was appointed Deputy Quartermaster General of the Forces in the Windward and Leeward Islands, West Indies, with his headquarters in Barbados. On leaving Manchester he was entertained at a public banquet, and presented with a sword and snuffbox.

The sword is in the Wigan Borough Museum Collection. It is a 1796 pattern light cavalry sword with a stained ivory grip. The pommel (or knob on the top of the sword) is in the form of a seated lion. The sword blade is curved and has a single edge. It is decorated with scrolling foliage, classical figures, urns, trophies and angels. On one side it is engraved:



The pommel and handle

'PRESENTED TO BRIGADE MAJOR NATHANIEL ECKERSLEY BY A NUMBER OF GENTLEMEN, INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN AND NEIGHBOURHOOD OF MANCHESTER, AS A TRIBUTE OF RESPECT AND ESTEEM, AND IN GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION OF THE IMPORTANT PUBLIC SERVICES RENDERED BY HIM DURING A RESIDENCE OF 8 YEARS AMONG THEM - 1827.'

On the other side:

'WOOLLEY SARGENT AND FAIRFAX, Sword Manufacturers to HIS MAJESTY'S HONOURABLE BOARD OF ORDINANCE and the HONOURABLE EAST INDIA COMPANY, BIRM.'

The protective cover for the sword blade, known as a scabbard, is covered with brown velvet and silver gilt, hallmarked Birmingham 1827. The scabbard is decorated with foliage, serpents, dogs and a griffin.

The sword has a wooden presentation case with brass fittings and a plaque inscribed 'Lt. Col. Eckersley.' It also had a rough wood travelling case.

After six years of service in the West Indies, Colonel Eckersley retired from active service. He spent the remainder of his days at Laurel house, Hindley, a property that he inherited in 1810 from his aunt, the widow of George Eckersley. He died there on 12 November 1837. He was buried in the graveyard of Hindley Church and a marble tablet has been erected in the church to his memory.



The scabbard

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Aspull and Haigh Historical Society

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month at Our Lady's RC Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull at 7.30pm. All are welcome, contact Barbara Rhodes for further details on 01942 222769.

Atherton Heritage Society

Meetings held on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm in St Richard's Community Centre, Mayfield Street, Atherton. Members £1.00, non members £1.50. Contact Margaret Hodge for further information on 01942 884893

Atherton Heritage Association

We are a non profit organisation dedicated to preserving our Atherton heritage. We are located in Atherton Town Hall, 91 Ashfield Road. The Heritage Room is open Tuesday 10.00-12.00am. Contact us on 650 688 6540 or meo@rjoster.com. Further information www.ci.atherton.us/heritage.html

Billinge History Society

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month at Billinge Chapel End Labour Club at 7.30pm. For further details visit www.billinge-history.com

Hindley & District History Society

Meetings are held on the second Monday in the month at Hindley Museum in Hindley Library from 7.00pm to 9.00pm. Please note

there is no meeting in July and August. Admission is £1.00 for members and £1.50 for non-members. Everyone is welcome.

The museum is open to the public at least once a week and entry is free. Contact the library staff for times and dates or telephone our Secretary Mrs Joan Topping (01942 257361) or Mrs Norma Brannagh (01942 258668).

10 January 2011

Hindley – Coal, Cotton and Community
Speaker - Tony Hilton

14 March 2011

The History of Wingates Band
Speaker - David Kaye

Over the weekends of 5 – 19 March, the museum will hold an exhibition about George Formby to commemorate the 50 anniversary of his death. Opening times – Fridays 10.00am – 3.00pm, Saturdays 10.00am – 12.00am

Leigh & District Family History Society

Monthly meetings held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month, except June and July.

18 January 2011

AGM followed by
The Atherton Murder
Speaker - Derek Matthews

15 February 2011

Family History and Estate Records
Speaker - Les Hardy

15 March 2011

Introduction to Local Studies
Speaker Hannah Turner

A weekly Help Desk is run by members of the Society each Monday from 1.30 p.m. to 3.30 pm in the Local History Section of Leigh Library.

For more information contact Mrs M Harrop (Chairman) 01942 743428, Mrs G McClellan (Secretary) 01942 729559 or email: leighfhs@blueyonder.co.uk

Local History Federation Lancashire

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

Meetings held at 7.30pm on the fourth Tuesday each month at Hall Green Community Centre, UpHolland. There are no meetings in July or August. For more information contact Sue Hesketh (Secretary) 01942 212940 or Suehesketh@blueyonder.co.uk or visit www.liverpool-genealogy.org.uk/SkemGrp/Skem

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 Drumcroon, 2 Parsons Walk, Wigan. Contact Mr A Grimshaw on 01942 245777 for further information.

Wigan Family & Local History Society

Meetings are held at the Bowling Green, 108 Wigan Lane, Wigan on the third Monday of each month (7.30 for 8.00pm). No meetings are held in July and August. Please note we do have a small charge for each meeting of £2.00 for both members and visitors. For further information call (01942) 727875 or visit www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory

17 January 2011

Private William Tomlinson, the Indian Mutiny and the Opium Wars
Speaker - Bill Taylor

21 February 2011

Folklore and Traditions of the North West
Speaker - John Doughty

21 March 2011

Haigh Hall and the People Who Lived There
Speaker - Carole Banks.

Wigan Archaeology Society

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, at 7.30, at the Upper Morris Street Working Men's Club in Wigan, for lectures and discussions on topics of historical or archaeological interest. Admission is £2 for members and £3 for guests.

For more information call Tom Glover on 01695 624372 or Bill Aldridge on 01257 402342. You can also visit the website www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk

Burney handbag manufacturers

This is a picture of workers at Burney's handbag manufacturers in Wigan. What date was this picture taken? Can you tell us more about Burney's? Did you know anyone who worked there? If you have any information or a story to tell, please email I.keys@wlct.org or call 01942 828126.



From Issue 55

We had a few responses to last edition's picture- all of which tell a different story! One PF reader tells us that the 1968 date was wrong for the bath's construction, it was 1958. Another PF reader says they remember using the baths in 1964 when they were at the college. One PF reader remembers when the Pavillion Cinema was on the site.

After a bit of research, we can shed some light on the matter! The Pavillion Cinema, which was situated on the corner of Library Street, had to be demolished by 1959. This was to make way for an extension to the old baths, which faced onto Millgate. Preliminary excavations for the baths extension began in 1963, with stone being laid in 1964. The new baths, incorporating the old baths, opened to the public in April 1966. The old baths remained in use whilst the extension was being built. From this, it seems that this picture was probably taken at some point between 1959 and 1963.



How to Find Us



Museum of Wigan Life

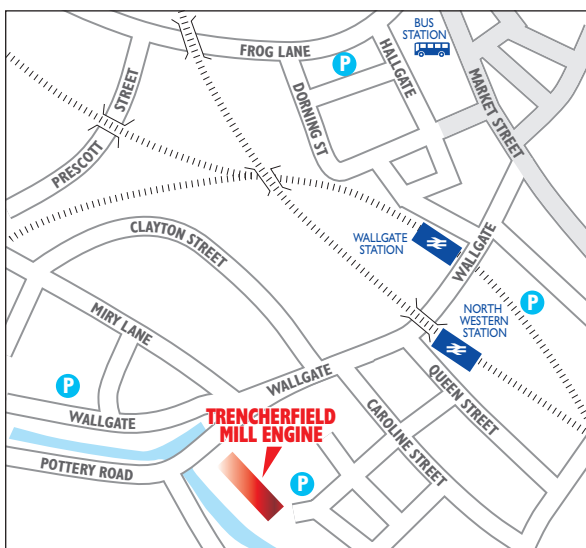
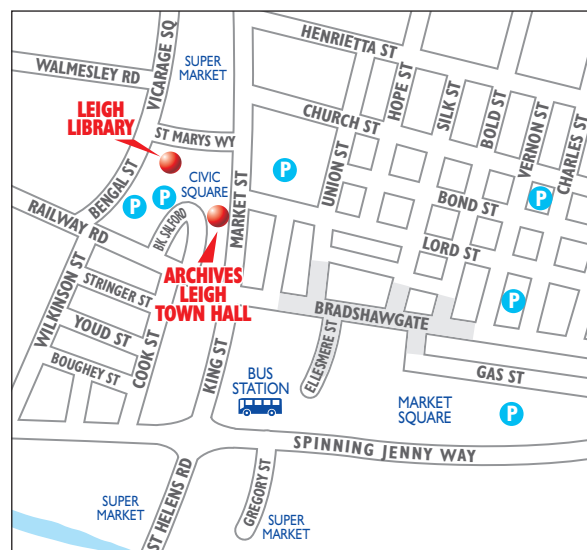
Library Street,
Wigan WN1 1NU
Telephone 01942 828128
heritage@wlct.org

Leigh Local History

Leigh Library, Turnpike Centre,
Civic Square, Leigh WN7 1EB
Telephone 01942 404559
h.turner@wlct.org

Archives

Leigh Town Hall, Leigh WN7 1DY
Telephone 01942 404430
a.miller@wlct.org



Trencherfield Mill Engine

Wigan Pier Quarter, Heritage Way,
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