

PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Heritage Service

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April - July 2011



A Royal Celebration



£1

WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICES
discover
YOUR HERITAGE

W I G A N
LEISURE & CULTURE
T R U S T

museum
of WiganLife

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FRONT COVER

*Clockwise from top right:
Leigh royal visit, 1977;
Sharron Brennan celebrates the
marriage of Charles and Diana;
Coops workers celebrate the
coronation of George VI;
Royal wedding street party on
Belle Green Lane, Ince in 1981;
Royal visit to Wigan, 1954.*

Letter from the Editorial Team

With the royal wedding on 29 April and the success of the 'King's Speech' at the Oscars, this edition celebrates all things royal. Read Hannah Turner's article on page four about George VI's visit to Leigh in 1938. Turn to page 16 for our royal-themed Collections Corner or go to pages 18 and 19 for our royal photographs centre-fold.

On 23 April, at the Museum of Wigan Life, there will be a Super Saturday event called 'Celebrate: St George and the Royal Wedding'. There will be objects to handle, craft activities, a very special performance by the Abram Pace Eggers and much more. Also, coming soon at Leigh Local Studies is a new royal-themed display.

There are plenty of non-royal articles and events too. You should now have completed your 2011 census forms, turn to page 22 and 23 to discover some of the problems historic censuses pose for family history researchers.

And finally turn to page ten for the Heritage Service events calendar. A new exhibition opens at the museum on 23 April and runs until 30 August. 'Seeds of Change' will look at how the Borough's environment has changed over time. Why not bring your children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews along to this fun, interactive family exhibition in the school holidays?

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 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.



PAST FORWARD Survey Winner

The winner of the Past Forward survey was Mrs Elaine Essex from Hindley. She received a Heritage

Service goodie bag which included books, a pencil, a mug and a year's free subscription to Past Forward.

Thank you to everyone who returned their surveys. The survey is now closed. We reported some of the findings in issue 56. The information you have given to us is invaluable and we will use it to make improvements to the magazine.

PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

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

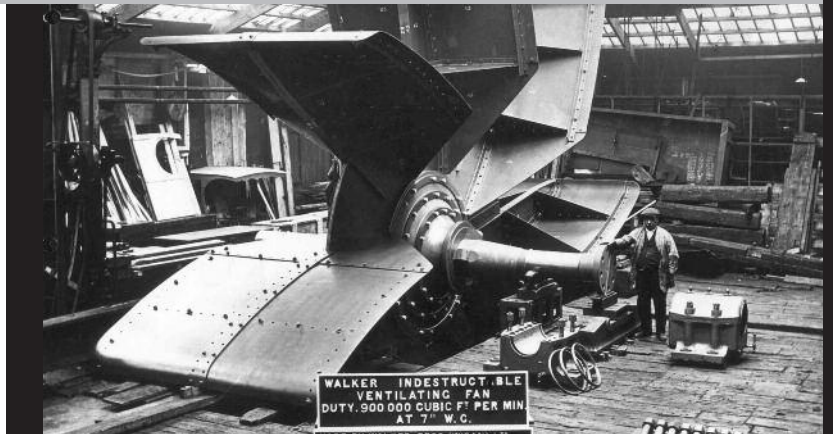
Please state which issue you wish your membership to begin



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.

Return to: The Museum of Wigan Life, Past Forward Subscription, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU



Walker Brothers

As part of the History in Practice Project with Manchester Metropolitan University, the Archives Service have been working with three students from the Department of History. The students have been listing, organising and cataloguing the records of Walker Brothers Ltd, the important Wigan engineering company.

The students will be holding a coffee morning at the Archives on Thursday 7 April, 11.00-12.00. They would like to invite along anyone with an interest in Walker Brothers or the local mining and engineering industries, to learn more about the company and the work the students have been doing on the records. The event is free to all, but please let the Archives know on 01942 404430 if you would like to come along.

Copy Deadline for Issue 58

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday 30 June.

Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone No.

Email

Signed Date

The 1938

By Hannah Turner

Royal Visit

Thrilling! That is how Vincent France described King George VI and Queen Elizabeth's visit to Leigh on May 18 1938. Only seven years old at the time, Vincent can remember the excitement of seeing the royal couple.

Vincent attended XII Apostles Primary School and on the day of the visit he and his classmates were given time off from lessons to see the King. They were organised into groups and each given a small Union Jack. They left XII Apostles and walked to Leigh Road. Allotted places close to Duva Bakery, the children were told to wave the flags when the Royal Party passed by. Overexcitement may have caused the children to give a premature royal welcome to a black cat who had strayed into Leigh Road. The King, with the Queen dressed in blue, drove slowly down Leigh Road to allow the children time to see them.

The King and Queen had arrived at Leigh Station at



King George VI and Elizabeth during their visit to Leigh.

10.30am that morning from their resting place at Lowton Sidings. Hundreds of people waited at Lowton in the hope of seeing the King and Queen. Lowton Junction is a popular place for the Royal Train to spend the night. In 1957 the Royal Train pulled into Lowton Junction at least five times!

Lord Derby and the smell of fresh paint greeted them as they stepped onto the platform (the station had just received a fresh coat of paint). Covered in red, white and blue bunting, the royal route from the station to Leigh Town Hall had been decorated with flags, streamers, gilt crowns and royal monograms. Heavy rain

had actually prevented more decorations from going up!

A large stand had been built especially for the King and Queen's visit. Seating had been provided for members of the Council and Corporation officials. Local people started to gather on Market Square from 7am that morning. One lady armed only with a camping chair had camped out overnight on the square to make sure she had a good view of the royal visitors. No easy feat considering heavy rain had fallen throughout the night and the morning.

As the royal car bearing the Royal Standard approached the town hall, a 'deep-

throated roar' was said to have erupted from the crowds. Lord Derby introduced the King to the Mayor and Mayoress. During royal visits local luminaries would be presented to the visiting royals, on this occasion, Alfred Wilkinson, the Leigh Victoria Cross winner, was introduced to the King. Alfred told the King he had met him before at a garden party in Buckingham Palace. Alfred won the Victoria Cross for volunteering to deliver a message under 600 yards of heavy machine-gun and shell fire which had killed four messengers who had tried before him. Alfred received the Victoria Cross from King George VI's father, George V at Buckingham Palace in 1919.

The King and Queen met other veterans including Mr Riding who had been awarded a Queen Victoria medal for his part in the Boer War and a Mr Cheetham who had fought at Ypres.

Local legend and font of local knowledge, Sarah Aspinall had been given a special seat of honour in the square. At 92 years old Sarah had been dubbed Leigh's oldest lady and was known for her energy and vitality. A wonderful source of Leigh's past, Sarah could recall the first ever edition of the Leigh Chronicle in 1852, old cattle markets and Market Street being so narrow that if a load of hay was taken through on a cart,



It rained heavily during the royal visit.

the hay would brush each shop on either side of the building. Despite all these memories, Sarah said seeing the King and Queen was "the proudest day of my life".

Five miles of cheering crowds are said to have greeted the royal couple as they made their way from Leigh to Atherton and Tyldesley. The inmates of the Leigh Poor Law Institution assembled in front of the workhouse to see the passing royal couple. School children holding flags in the rain had dye running down their hands as they waited to catch a glimpse. The royal couple passed employees of the Lancashire United Transport and Power Company, members of the "B" Company of the 5th Manchester Territorial Regiment and schoolchildren waiting by the Atherton War Memorial. Staff and

councillors waved to their majesties from the steps of Tyldesley Town Hall.

The King had visited the local area several times before. In March 1932 he visited Atherton Collieries and had lunch at Briarcroft Club where he expressed a desire to sample hot pot. The 1938 visit to Leigh is believed to be the Queen Mother's first but she had visited Wigan three years earlier when she was still the Duchess of York. The then Duchess came to inspect the Wigan Subsistence Production Scheme for the unemployed at Parbold and Upholland which had been organised by the Order of Friends. The King and Queen also visited Wigan in 1938. Greeted by the Mayor in Market Square the Queen was overheard to say "I think Wigan is a lovely town". It is nice to know we have the royal stamp of approval.

Your Archives

First of all, I'd like to say a well-deserved thank you to all of the Archive staff and volunteers, after the service was 'highly recommended' in the recent Family History Monthly, Archive of the Year Award. Much of the improvements made at the Archives in the last few years are as a result of the help and hard work of our volunteers, and long may it continue!

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:

- Notebook of Alfred Griffiths, private soldier, First World War (Acc. 2011/1)
- Joseph Hulme Aldred Photographic Collection, glass slide collection, 1880s-1910 (Acc. 2011/2)
- Mayor Isherwood Collection, photographic albums and mayoral scrap-books (Acc. 2011/3)
- Sixsmith's Charity Account Book, 1830-1849 (Acc. 2010/112)
- Illuminated manuscript acknowledging the restoration of the Tyldesley Monument, Wigan Lane, 1886 (Acc. 2010/115)
- Pretoria Pit Disaster, postcard, 1910 (Acc. 2010/95)
- Wigan and Leigh College Records, 1800s-2000 (Acc. 2010/87)

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

Collections Corner: The Joseph Hulme Aldred Photographic Collection

Any recent visitors to the Archives may have seen a strange piece of equipment sitting on the shelves. It has been unfavourably compared to something that might have fallen off the back of a steam locomotive, but is almost certainly 100 years old, and has been used consistently (with a few modifications in the 1970s) for much of its life. This device, the precursor of modern photographic technology, is a glass slide projector.

The projector arrived at the Archives as an added bonus to a large collection of glass lantern slides, forming the Joseph Hulme Aldred Photographic Collection. The slides were given to the Archives as a bequest and had been carefully looked after by several generations of the photographer's family. The collection includes images taken by Aldred, who was from the Wigan area, between 1889 and 1911. These images document an astonishingly diverse range of people, places and events, giving us an insight in particular into the leisure activities and holidays of the Victorian middle classes.

New Brighton, battery.

Big Wheel, Blackpool.



Lifeboat procession.

Market Place, Wigan.

There are images of Wigan, Standishgate and around the Market Square and rural scenes in Billinge, Upholland, Orrell and Gathurst. Local processions and holidays also feature prominently, especially those for a Lifeboat Fund. By far and away the most numerous set of images are those that document Aldred's many trips and holidays around the country.

We see images of Blackpool, of the pier, the big wheel, children playing on the beach and a ventriloquist drawing in a crowd of onlookers. Aldred and his family visited North Wales, exploring caves and rock formations on the coast, and toured around the sea-side towns on the Wirral and at Southport, during the peak of the Victorian interest in seaside resorts and holidays. As much as the content of the images however, one is struck by the clarity of the images and the care and attention that has gone into their composition.

Work is nearly completed cataloguing the images in the Aldred collection, and we hope to digitise a selection to increase access to this wonderful resource.

Thomas Darwell

By Tony Ashcroft

Harrison

Thomas Darwell Harrison was the eldest son of Henry Harrison, one of the founder members of the firm of Harrison McGregor and Co. He was a native of Leigh and like many others had been educated at Leigh Grammar School under the tutelage of Ralph Passe.

His father Henry was the son of Charles Harrison of Butts Corn Mills, Bedford. He was first employed as a moulder at Bedford Foundry before going to work at Platt Bros and Co of Oldham. He returned to Leigh and became a traveller for Picksley Sims and Co. In 1863, along with Mr McGregor and Mr Rich they left Bedford Foundry to establish the Albion Foundry. During his time with the company he had travelled extensively visiting many principal agricultural shows both in Britain and on the continent. His wife was the daughter of J Darwell a veterinary surgeon of Altrincham.

At the start of his career, T D Harrison began work as an apprentice in the firm's turning shop before passing through all the departments of the agricultural machinery works, thus gaining a practical knowledge of the business. Later he became interested in the commercial side of the business which he represented in the Midlands and west of England. Like his father before him he attended all the principal agricultural shows in Great Britain. For over 35 years Mr Harrison travelled extensively throughout the United Kingdom and was held in high regard by all the leading industrialists. Prior to World War I he visited the firms depots in France, Belgium and Germany.

Thomas eventually became managing director of the company after his brother William Harrison JP OBE, relinquished the position. William became managing director of Jas. Buchanan & Co Ltd Whisky Distillers. Buchanan's later became part of the Dewar whisky group. He also became Mayor of Leigh in 1908. His wife Eleanor Constance was the daughter of Thomas Scotson of Bickershaw and the granddaughter of Abraham Ackers of Bickershaw Hall.

Thomas was a member of the Agricultural Engineers Association of Great Britain and Ireland and a former chairman of the harvesting section of

that body. He was also a member of the Council of the Royal Lancashire Agricultural Society as well as being president of the Leigh Branch of the National Farmers Union. In 1915 when the Leigh Allotments Committee was formed he was elected chairman and remained president until the town council took control. During the war he was vice-chairman of the advisory committee to the Military Tribunal. He was also appointed chairman of the directors of the Lilford Weaving Company Ltd of Leigh.

In 1912 he was appointed as a county magistrate. In politics Thomas was a conservative and was made a vice president of the Conservative Club in Leigh. He also worshipped on a regular basis at Christchurch, Pennington.

Besides his business interests he was also a keen sports supporter, being a member of the Leigh cricket team when it was based at Down Croft on which part of the Albion Ironworks stood. In 1910 he became its president. Golf also played an important part in his life and he was one of the founder members of Leigh Golf Club, subsequently becoming captain. Another part of his life involved freemasonry. He was a member of the Marquis of Lorne Lodge at Leigh.

Recreational interests included gardening, especially the growing of roses. At his home at Brookfield on St Helens Road at Leigh he had an annual display which was the envy of many. For many years he kept a kennel of fox terriers and was a successful exhibitor at many shows.

On his death there was an impressive service at Christchurch where the vicar Rev Murdoch conducted the service. Internment took place at Leigh Cemetery where the vicar performed a masonic service at the graveside,

Amongst the many beneficiaries in his will was the Leigh Grammar School to which he left his editions of Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Lytton, Harrison Ainsworth and Charles Lever. He also left £500 to Leigh Infirmary for the endowment of a cot known as the Harrison cot, £100 to the Leigh and District Nursing Association and £250 upon trust for Christchurch, Pennington.

Southport at Callender's: World War II's Holidays at Home

By Yvonne Eckersley

There is a box in the Archives at Leigh. This box holds numerous documents detailing the enormous feat of co-operation, organisation, goodwill and expended time that culminated in Wigan and Leigh's Wartime 'Holidays at Home' programmes.

Until 1942/3 the War in Europe had not been going that well. At home the government was facing a war-weary population, severe shortages and a fuel crisis. A strategy was devised to help ease the situation.

The Ministries of Health and of Labour and National Service announced their 'desire' that industrial workers take their one week annual holiday in their home towns as 'all unessential travel...must be avoided'. They reasoned that these holidays could only be justified if 'those who take them return fitter than before for their war jobs'. Public authorities and volunteer organisations were urged to collaborate in providing 'recreational and other attractions' to transform their Wakes Week into 'Holidays at Home'.

Local committees were established under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, to draw local authority and volunteer organisations together. Wigan's Arthur R Hawkes and Leigh's William Hakersley headed their committee's efforts. Calls were made, public meetings held, organisations came forward and programmes were devised.

Although ostensibly each organisation was responsible for the preparation and execution of

their own events, they could not operate freely. Everyday commodities were subject to war-time restrictions, requests for these were subject to the approval of governmental departments. The various Ministries (including the Ministries of Information, Food, Health, Labour and National Service, and War Transport, Fuel and Power), Timber Controllers, Paper Controllers and the Board of Trade, to name a few, all had the power to allow or refuse use of valuable resources.

Acquiring extra commodities entailed long and convoluted processes. For example, the archive box houses a series of letters between Dean Wood Golf Club, the Board of Trade and the Dunlop Rubber Company, concerning the release of rubber to make extra golf balls for the Club's 'Grand Professional Golf Match'.

Both Wigan and Leigh featured canal barge trips. Wigan's were

from Springs Bridge to Botany Bay, Chorley and Leigh's from Leigh Bridge, to Worsley. Organisation of these trips was very involved. Besides gathering people to run them, barges had to be located and hired and they had to be converted using timber begged from the Timber Control Board. An agreement had to be made with the Leeds Liverpool Canal Company to set tolls, there was insurance to organise, and tickets to print and sell. The venues chosen for refreshments en route had to apply to the Food Controller for food coupons.

Inevitably mistakes were made. In 1943 Mr I Williams, from New Springs, felt compelled to write. Damage had been caused to his land in 1942 by the public walking across it to board barges, he had been happy to let that go but when the same route was chosen and no-one had sought his permission he felt aggrieved.



BICC Works, Leigh, Holiday at Home, 1942.



*Leigh Canal Cruise,
Holiday at Home, 1942.*

On a happier note, BBC Radio did broadcast passengers' community singing during Leigh's ninth barge trip.

During each Wakes Week most of the larger parks, for example Mesnes, Alexandra and Central in Wigan, Morley Street's Bandstand in Ince, Pennington, Liford, Firs, Westleigh and Dootson's in Leigh held ENSA shows, civilian (including Colliery and British Legion) and military band concerts. Organisations co-operated to enhance children's play areas, provide food outlets, to ensure their bowling or tennis competitions ran smoothly and much more. The logistics of staging many park events was also complex. At outside venues marquees, seating, audio systems had to be sourced, costed, ordered, transported and erected, advertising posters designed, printed and displayed, tickets to be priced and sold. Subject to permission of course.

The contract to supply the food for Wigan park events was given to Wigan's 'British Restaurant'. British Restaurants were government-backed restaurants where the population could get a cheap meal to supplement their rations. These were particularly important for a workforce

working long hours. However the manager of the Wigan branch attempted to overcharge the committee enormously. In the archive box there is an indignant letter querying their bill as to quantities of food used and claims for labour.

Callender's Cable and Construction Company in West Bridgewater Street was one of the main facilitators of the success of Leigh's 'Holidays at Home' week. William Hakesley and his team transformed Mather Lane Rugby Field, into 'Callender's Pleasure Field'. Billed as 'Lancashire's Greatest Concentration of Entertainment' on the programme. This formed the nucleus for family entertainment. Fifty tons of sand was brought from Formby near Southport, there were pony rides, Punch and Judy shows (by Leigh's Robert Horrocks), shows by Wilding's Marionette Theatre and side shows. There was also a dog show where organisers appealed for entrants by asking 'have you a dog that looks like Hitler?', talent competitions, Peppini's Royal Circus 'from the Tower Ballroom Blackpool' and a clown named 'Henri' who performed balancing feats and conjuring. People were even encouraged to 'See the Great Death Slide' by Mademoiselle Retza, known as 'The Doll of the Air' twice daily!



*BICC Works, Leigh,
Holiday at Home, 1942.*

Of course many events had more serious themes and were used as vehicles for transmitting information, boosting morale, and encouraging the sense of being prepared, psychologically counter-balancing the fear of invasion. There were fire-fighting displays, serious displays of competence as well as opportunities to poke fun at the enemy ('Hitler's Fire Brigade') and an unarmed combat display, where people were encouraged to 'come and see how we dealt with the Nazi Guards in the raid at St Nazaire'. There was a competition to raise £10,000 by collecting waste paper 'needed to win the War', Red Cross Victory Garden competitions, (part of the Dig For Victory campaign) and first aid competitions.

The programmes included cultural elements. Wigan's twelve cinemas were screening films, there was an Art Exhibition, and a performance of Somerset Maugham's play 'The Land of Promise'. Open air dancing was held at Wigan's Mesnes and Alexandra Parks to Roy Turner's Band. In Leigh the dancing was at St Josephs Hall, the Co-operative Hall or in 'Callender's Canteen', and the mayor held a 'Select Supper Dance' in the Co-operative Hall.

Sport had a high profile, there was a 'Grand Cricket Match' at Bull Hey, 'Grand Bowling Matches' at the Springfield Hotel, golf matches at Hindley and Wigan golf clubs, and bowling handicaps at Pennington Hall, Lilford Park, Butts Parks and Dootson's Playing Field in Leigh. Angling Contests were held throughout the Borough, as were rugby matches and wrestling tournaments. The swimming baths in Wigan had a gala and water polo match and both town's pools were open for mixed bathing.

All this history from one box in the Archives!

Heritage Service Events

APRIL-JUNE 2010

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

A full list of our events can be found at www.wlct.org/Culture/Heritage/events.htm.

Date • Time • Venue/Cost

Sat 2nd April • 12.00pm • LLS/£1.00
Leigh Town Trail Walk

Sun 3 April • 1.00-2.30pm • MOWL/£2.00
Wigan History Walk

Tues 5th April • 1.00-1.15pm • MOWL/Free
Object of the month talk:
George Formby Life Membership Medal

Fri 8 April • 11.00am-12.00pm
Ince UDC Cemetery/£2.00
Carved In Stone Walk: Ince UDC Cemetery

Tues 12 April • 11.00am-12.00pm
Lower Ince Cemetery/£2.00
Carved In Stone Walk: Lower Ince Cemetery

Sat 16 April • 1.00pm • MOWL/Free
Spring to Mind: Wigan Pier Youth Theatre present a piece of drama

Thurs 21 April • 5.30-7.00pm • LLS/Free
Mr Dootson's Reading Group: 'North and South' and the cotton and silk industry

Wed 27 April • 1.00-3.00pm • LLS/ Free
Leigh History Chat: Pennington Flash

Thurs 28 April • 6.30-7.45pm • MOWL/£2.50
includes light refreshments
An Evening with... Wigan Heritage Service's Dianne Teskey 'Thomas Taylor - Man of Means'

Sun 1 May • 1.00-2.30pm • MOWL/£2.00
Wigan History Walk

Wed 4 May • 2.00-4.00pm • TF/£6 per person or £10 per couple
Cotton, Canal & Cream Cakes: See the mighty Trencherfield Mill engine in steam and enjoy a cream tea on our canal boat cruise

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

Date • Time • Venue/Cost

Sat 7 May • 12.00pm • Leigh Cemetery/£1.00
Grave Concerns Walk

Tues 10 May • 11.00am-12.00pm
Lower Ince Cemetery/£2.00
Carved In Stone Walk: Lower Ince Cemetery

Tues 10th May • 1.00-1.15pm • MOWL/Free
Object of the month talk: Coal Measure Fossils

Thurs 12th May • 6.00pm-7.00pm • LLS/Free
Museums at Night: Rare Gems
Find out what's hidden in Leigh Library's basement and discover gems from the archives

Fri 13 May • 11.00am-12.00pm
UDC Cemetery/£2.00
Carved In Stone Walk: Ince UDC Cemetery/Ince

Tues 17 May • 10.30-11.00am • MOWL/Free
Museum Highlights Tour

Thurs 19 May • 5.30-7.00pm • LLS/Free
Mr Dootson's Reading Group: 'Three Men in a Boat' and leisure time for Leythers

Wed 25 May • 1.00-3.00pm • WAS/ Free
Leigh History Chat: You Live and Learn

Thurs 26 May • 6.30-7.45pm • MOWL/£2.50
includes light refreshments
An Evening with...
Local author and ex-Lancashire Mining Museum Curator Alan Davies. 'The Pretoria Pit Disaster'

Wed 1 June • 2.00 - 4.00pm • TF/£6 per person or £10 per couple
Cotton, Canal & Cream Cakes As above

Thurs 3 June • 10.00am-4.00pm • MOWL/Free
Meet our Volunteer Army
Come and meet the army of volunteers who help us at Wigan Heritage Service

Date • Time • Venue/Cost

Sat 4 June • 12.00pm
Leigh (exact location TBC)
A Walk in the Park
Bring the buggies, get out of the house and discover local history

Sun 5 June • 1.00-2.30pm • MOWL/£2.00
Wigan History Walk

Fri 10 June • 11.00am-12.00pm
Ince UDC Cemetery/£2.00
Carved In Stone Walk: Ince UDC Cemetery

Tues 14 June • 11.00am-12.00pm
Lower Ince Cemetery/£2.00
Carved In Stone Walk: Lower Ince Cemetery

Date • Time • Venue/Cost

Thurs 16 June • 5.30-7.00pm • LLS/Free
Mr Dootson's Reading Group:
'Goodbye Mr Chips' and school life

Tues 21 June • 1.00-1.15pm • MOWL/Free
Object of the month talk: Guernsey Plaque

Wed 29 June • 1.00-3.00pm • LLS/Free
Leigh History Chat: Leigh Youth Groups

Thurs 30 June • 6.30pm-7.45pm • MOWL/£2.50
includes light refreshments
An Evening with...Archaeologist Ian Miller,
'Roman Wigan'

FAMILY FRIENDLY EVENTS

Why not bring along your children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews?
Super Saturday events include object handling, crafts, quizzes and something special!

Date • Time • Venue/Cost

Tues 12 April 1.00-2.30pm MOWL/£2.50 per child
Easter Eggstravaganza!
Something for children up to 12 years, for egg sample... we've got story telling for under 5s, an Easter Egg hunt as well as craft activities. Activities will vary on different days. See below for other dates.

Thurs 14 April 1.00-2.30pm MOWL/£2.50 per child
Easter Eggstravaganza! As above.

Sat 16 April • 1.30 - 2.30pm MOWL/Free
Stories from our World
Special story and rhyme sessions for under-5s.

Mon 18 April • 2.00 – 2.30pm MOWL/Free
Family Friendly Museum Tour

Tues 19 April • 1.00-2.30pm • MOWL/£2.50 per child
Easter Eggstravaganza! As above.

Thurs 21 April • 1.00-2.30pm • MOWL/£2.50 per child
Easter Eggstravaganza! As above.

Sat 23 April • 11.00 – 2.00pm • MOWL/Free
Super Saturday: Celebrate! St George and the Royal Wedding

Date • Time • Venue/Cost

Sat 23 April • 1.30-2.30pm • MOWL/Free
Stories from our World As above

Sat 30 April • 1.30-2.30pm • MOWL/Free
Stories from our World As above

Sat 7 May • 1.00-1.30pm • MOWL/Free
Family Friendly Museum Tour

Sat 7 May • 1.30-2.30pm • MOWL/Free
Stories from our World As above

Sat 14 May • 7.00-9.00pm • MOWL/Free
Museums at Night: Creatures of the Night
Discover the natural history of the borough with some special guests!

Sat 4 June • 11.00-2.00pm • MOWL/Free
Super Saturday: Fantastic Fossils



Clogs

By Tom Heaton

A pair of ladies clogs



If you were to ask me for one word that would remind me of my childhood in Wigan it would be 'clogs'. In Scholes, clogs were worn six days a week but rarely on Sundays – except in winter when it was freezing and "t'Clarry were 'howdin". I feel sorry for children today who will never know the delight of sliding on iron shod clogs. The lower part of Great Acre Park facing St George's School, known to most as the bowling green, was set at a perfect angle for 'slorin'. At the first sign of a hoar frost a line of lads wearing clogs would choose a patch of grass and, facing uphill, holding on to each others waist, would slide their feet backwards and forwards. In a relatively short time, the surface turned to ice forming a perfect 'piste' or 'slorr' as it was called in Wigan. Of course girls couldn't slide very well as their clogs had 'rubber irons'. I never mastered the skill but some lads could skate on the frozen

Clarrington Brook on the inside irons of their clogs as fast, if not faster than many a real ice skater on skates.

Clog irons of course wear out which meant a trip to the nearest clogger's. My favourite of several in Scholes was the wood yard off Greenough Street. In front of the entrance to this clog factory lay a gigantic tree trunk. I used to think that this provided the material for all the clog soles they made but I suspect now that I was wrong as I have discovered that blocks of wood roughly the size of clog soles were made in the woods, often in Wales by people, many of them by gypsies, who lived in tents on site. George Borrow mentions this in his famous book 'Wild Wales', written in the early part of the nineteenth century. He said that they were made of alder and exported to the Lancashire clog makers. Alder was a particularly waterproof wood, useful for working in wet conditions often encountered in some of the mines around Wigan. "O'er t'clog tops" was a common expression. Sycamore, a soft, easily worked wood is mostly used today I have learned. I still have a vivid picture in my mind of a line of little lads at the wood yard sitting on a long form in their stocking feet, swinging their legs as they waited for their newly shod clogs to be handed over. Time didn't matter as there was an array of fascinating machinery to entertain them as the experienced workers stitched the leather uppers together before nailing them onto the skilfully shaped, wooden soles.



Wigan mill girls, circa 1900. Notice their clogs.

There were three main types of clogs; lace-ups with leather laces favoured by men and big lads and low-down clasped ones worn by us younger lads and strangely also by old men. Girls of course wore a more elegant version with a dainty strap across the top. My memory tells me that there

were only about three or four boys in St George's school who wore ordinary shoes. They were at a distinct disadvantage during games lessons as none of us could afford football boots and football and rugby (League of course) was played in clogs. On the other hand I seem to remember that those who wore shoes for some reason were always the ones who were selected to play the drums in the band. I was always given a triangle, except on the odd occasion when I was chosen to play a clapper. Do I suspect here that a class system was in operation at St George's?

As I got older I remember mastering the art of attaching new clog irons. The irons were readily available from clog shops and it was cheaper to fix your own. You only had to prize off the old irons with a claw hammer, fill in the nail holes with matchsticks and then nail on the new ones. It was important, as winter approached, that you fitted new irons in good time as these didn't slide very well and needed to be run-in. On the other hand if you let them wear too much they would break, making walking very difficult with a tendency to trip you up. Excessive wear and broken irons were often caused by kicking sparks – great fun but not recommended if you didn't want the proverbial 'clout round the earhole' off your Dad.

Wearing in of new clogs was possibly one of the more painful experiences in life as, unlike the modern items worn today by clog dancers, the leather was extremely thick and took a long time to soften up. A few boys I remember avoided the painful experience of breaking in new clogs by having clog soles nailed to the soft leather uppers of worn-out boots, known as having your boots 'clogged'. Unfortunately, wearing these didn't do a lot of good for your 'street cred'.

An even more painful experience was to have a clog sole break. This meant that every time you put your foot down the two halves closed up and gave the sole of your foot a nasty nip. A poignant line in an old Lancashire dialect song goes "Mi clogs are boo-oth brokken, shoon ah've gotten none, tha'd hardly gi mi tuppence for all ah've gotten on."

It's impossible to talk about clogs without mentioning the noise created by a large group of people wearing them. I used to live close to a junction of several streets where every morning people from lots of other streets converged on their way to the mills and coal mines of Wigan. As a lifelong insomniac I can remember Lizzy 't'knocker-up' starting her rounds in the morning just as St Catherine's clock struck four - I never did



A clogger's shop in Astley, circa 1910.

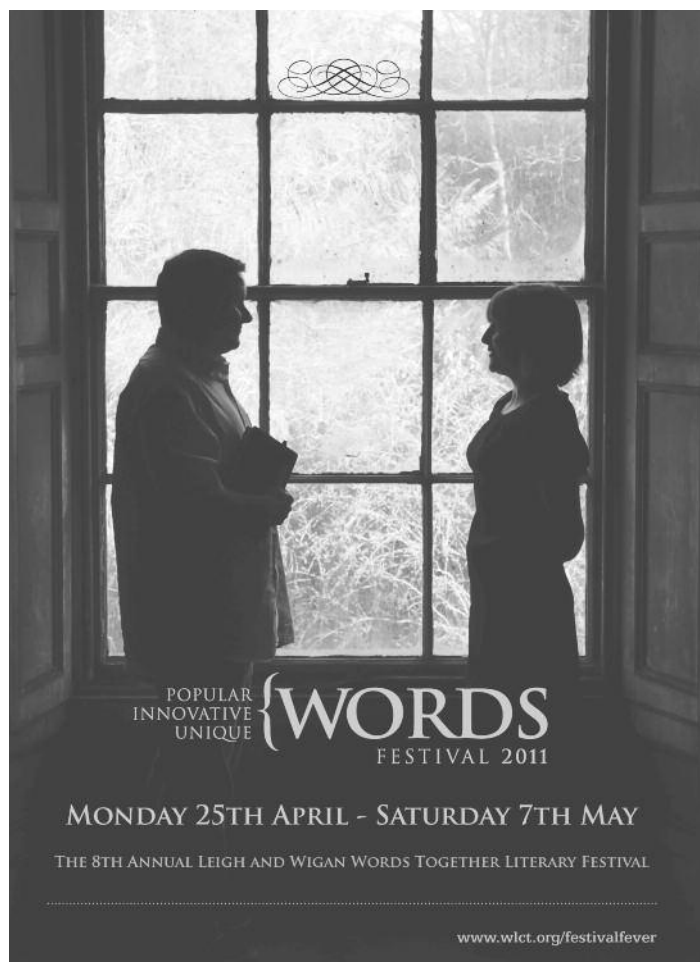
discover who knocked Lizzy up. She wore rubber irons which weren't too noisy but when she rattled on doors and windows that was another story. Soon after Lizzy the clatter of clogs started, slowly at first, rising to a deafening crescendo I guess around 7.00am. Outside of the busiest time it was sometimes possible to recognise individual footfalls and some of these would be an accurate indicator of time, especially when 't'pegleg' went past. It could be an urgent call if Mam shouted: "T'pegleg's gone past", meaning you might be late for school. I think his name was Tom and as the nickname implies, he had a wooden leg and wore a clog on the other foot giving a distinctive clack, thump, clack, thump, clack, thump as he passed. I believe he lived in Whelley and worked at the forge in Ince.

The clatter of clogs was greatly muffled in times of snow, but this created another problem. Snow tended to ball-up under the ball of the foot and sometimes added another three or four inches to ones height – useful for a shorter fellow like me but it was a bit like walking on stilts and created problems of balance. Kicking a foot against the wall of a house was a useful way of removing the resulting 'pad' for a few yards but the continuous

thump, thump of clog against wall could become more disconcerting than the usual clack, clack. The compacted lumps of snow left on the ground could become dangerous weapons for the more irresponsible lads during snowball fights.

Clogs themselves could become formidable weapons but, though fights were common in the schoolyard, fists were still the weapon of choice and I never remember clogs being used. I did once see a poor coalman given a 'porrin' for being suspected of delivering 'one bag short' but even then the assailant aimed at a less vulnerable part of his anatomy - they were gentle people who lived in Scholes! My Dad told me that older men had told him of serious clog-fighting taking place around Wigan with betting and prize money at stake. There is no better description of clog fighting than can be found in the novel 'Rose' by the famous American writer Martin Cruz Smith, set in Wigan in the 1870s. How he found Wigan after placing his best known novel, Gorky Park, in Moscow, I will never know. They were never 'weapons of mass destruction' but clogs may have gone to war. An old retired miner friend of mine once told me of leaving Wigan Drill Hall at the start of World War One wearing pit-clogs. He marched with the 5th Manchester Regiment through Wigan and over the Iron Bridge to Wigan North West station – what a noise that must have made. He said that they also wore dress uniforms as there were no khaki uniforms available at the time. I often wonder if they went to France dressed like that and what would Jerry have thought.

I used to think that clogs were unique to Lancashire but I now know that they were worn all over the north of England and in Wales. Clog dancing, once a popular form of entertainment, probably a forerunner of tap but in recent years practised mainly by certain Morris dancing troupes, seems to be making a comeback. I knew that all-wooden clogs (French: sabots) were popular in Europe and are still worn by some country people in Brittany. However I was surprised to find, talking to an old lady now living in the south of France but originally from Paris, that they wore wood and leather clogs which, according to her description, were exactly like ours. I have since seen them in a museum in the south of France. They were called galôches but were no different than the clogs we wore.



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Vive le Clog!

MARK THOMAS HUGHES

By Christine Watts

Mark Thomas Hughes was born in Sheffield in 1851 and died in Wigan in November 1899 at the age of 48. His parents were Thomas Heathcote Hughes, a foreman iron moulder and Emma Hubie. The family came to live in Wigan sometime after the 1861 census.

For the greater part of the last 13 years of his life he was ill but he still managed to regularly produce paintings, drawings, poems and stories and to travel to Denver, Colorado in the USA. At 28 he founded and was the Secretary of the Wigan Literary and Scientific Society. He contributed lectures and during the second year of its existence he edited the society's journal 'Dawn'. He lived at 'The Studio' at 53 Standishgate and gave his trade as illuminating artist. He later

operated from 6 Springfield St, Swinley. That his skill was great can be seen by the two beautiful illuminated addresses presented to Thomas Taylor and the mother of Doctor Joseph Taylor Winnard upon the opening of what was then Wigan Library (now the Museum of Wigan Life). Ill health seems to have slowed his output down but not his enthusiasm.

Drawings of the places he loved, alongside his poems, were published and edited by himself in the periodical 'In Wigan Town' which came out in September 1898. The periodical was to be published in 16 parts. Subscribers only received 12 parts however. He died before he could publish more. An extract from 'In Wigan Town' is printed below. His poems and drawings are kept at the Museum upstairs in the local studies library. He is buried in Wigan Lower Ince Cemetery.

*Not a grand sort of place
Is this borough of mine!
So you will answer,
But it needs no defending,
Nor with critics contending;
For its size, Where'll you mend it,
Tell me that, If you can? Sir!
If not a grand place.*

*A rough sort of place
Is this Wigan of ours!
No doubt it is so;
With more clogs than kid boots,
And more fustian, than suits
Made to order for dudes,
Who will not wish to know
This rough sort of place.*

*But a right sort of place
Is this Wigan of ours!
For those who will work,
For the world never moves
By the hand that wear gloves;
So 'tis not for the man
Who would industry shirk-
The right sort of place!*

*Not a bad sort of place
Is this Wigan of ours!
For you, if you live
Without show or pretence,
Where much "side" gives offence
To all who are genuine;
This praise than you'll give
Not a bad sort of place!*

*A first-rate sort of place
Is this Wigan of ours!
If all will unite
In unselfish endeavour,
To improve more than ever
This borough of ours,
Soon with pride we may write
A first-rate sort of place!*

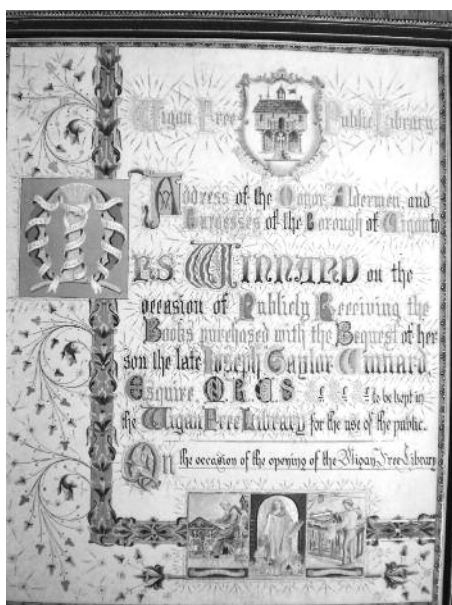
REFERENCES

Extracts from *In Wigan Town*
WYH 894
Wigan Observer April 21 1961 p14
Wigan Observer November 1899

WHAT SORT OF A PLACE

*What sort of a place
Is this Wigan of yours?
Such is the query
With which you'll be greeted;
If you should be seated
Mid'st strangers loquacious
Pugnacious or sneery,
What sort of a place?*

*A poor sort of place
Is that village of his! Says the man
of the city
Refined, but conceited,
As though he repeated-
A dictum unquestioned
And said it with pity,
A poor sort of place?*



*The illuminated address
designed by Hughes and
presented to Mrs Winnard*

COLLECTIONS CORNER

Continuing our Royal celebration, Collections Corner focuses on a pair of clogs made to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's silver jubilee in 1977.

The clogs have a wooden base and are a size seven. The uppers are made out of suede and coloured in patriotic red, blue and white. They were made by local clogger Jack Ashcroft. The museum collection contains many mass produced commemorative items for royal visits, anniversaries and coronations including medals, coins, mugs and plates. These clogs however are a more unique and personal tribute.

Jack Ashcroft started in the shoe making business after school. He moved to clogging and was one of the youngest cloggers in the country. By 1966 he employed two assistants. He was able to make 50 pairs a week, that's 20 minutes per pair!

In 1977, to celebrate her jubilee year, the Queen embarked on a series of goodwill visits around the country and Commonwealth. She was in this area on 20 June 1977 and visited Wigan and Leigh. In Leigh thousands lined the street to greet the Royal couple who had travelled from Wigan in their motorcade. There were even complaints in Leigh Journal that some could not see because various councillors and their wives blocked their view by standing on chairs.

Jack Ashcroft did not present the clogs to the Queen during her visit. However, he displayed them in his shop window at 36 Chapel Street, Leigh. This was on the royal route so maybe the Queen saw them!

Later that year, Jack Ashcroft donated the clogs to the museum collection. This has ensured his personal tribute has been preserved for future generations to enjoy. If you would like to see the clogs they are on display at the Museum of Wigan Life in the 'Let's celebrate!' section of the permanent exhibition.

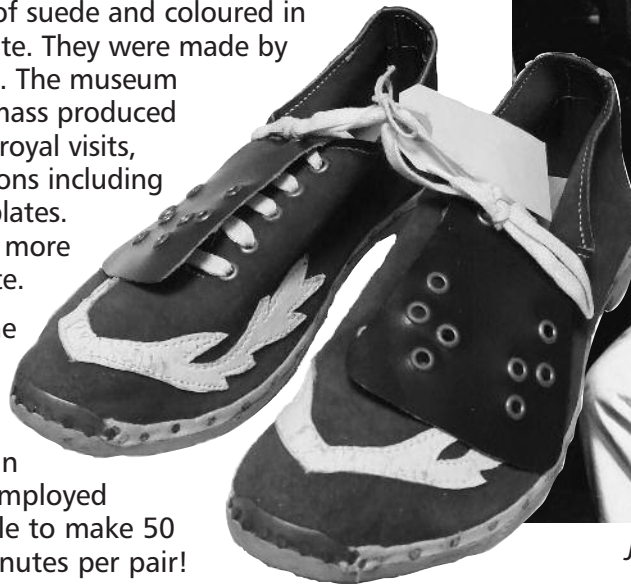
If you would like to find out more about the museum collection, come along to one of our Object of the Month talks. The talks are free and are held at the Museum of Wigan Life between 1.00-1.15pm.

Upcoming talks include:

Tuesday 5 April - George Formby Life Membership Medal

Tuesday 10 May - Coal measure fossils

Tuesday 21 June - Guernsey plaque



Jack Ashcroft at work in his shop at 36 Chapel Street, Leigh, 1978.

Exhibitions

museum of WiganLife

Seeds of Change
23rd April - 30th August 2011
Museum of Wigan Life

Discover how the Borough's environment has changed over time. A fun, interactive exhibition for all the family.
Free

For further information contact
The Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan
01942 828128
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Image © The Natural History Museum, London

Something New

The Museum of Wigan Life regularly receives donations of objects from local people. To showcase some of these new acquisitions there is a small display in the local and family history study area at the museum. This display will be refreshed throughout the year with new items. The items currently on show include a brass band conductor's baton, a Wigan Mining and Technical College medal and two tins of Heinz self-heating soup dating back to World War II.

Anyone can offer to donate an object to the museum collection. All offers are considered by our Collections Panel. The panel meets on a regular basis and uses the Acquisition and Disposal Policy to guide decision-making. The panel considers whether there is already a similar object in the collection. The condition of an object, its provenance and significance to the history of the Borough are all taken into account.

If you have an object you would like to donate to the museum collection then please contact Yvonne Webb, Collections Development Manager on 01942 828123.

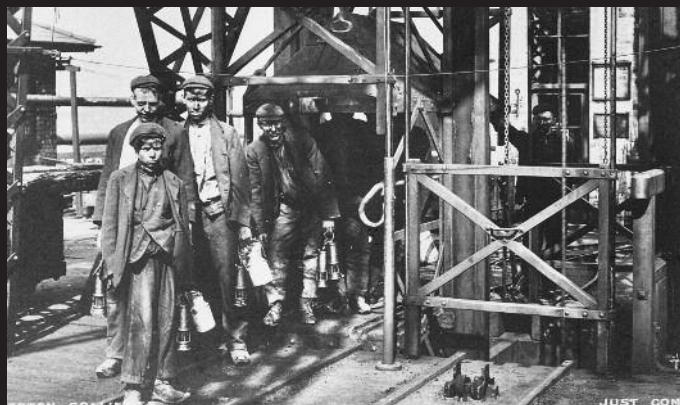
Items accepted into the museum recently are:

- C10.001-004 – Four turned wood chair, circa 1920's. Made by a local furniture manufacturer at Pennyhurst Mill
- C10.005 - Brass Band conductor's baton presented to James Rylance
- C10.006 - Mug, inscribed Standish Schools 1887
- C10.007 - Ceramic flagon, Joseph Ashton of Standish, 1912
- C10.008 – Wigan Mining and Technical College, Governors' Silver medal awarded to Tom Heyes, 1921-1928
- C10.009 - Insignia of office, worn by the president of the Newton-in-Makerfield Sunday School Teachers Association c.1989-2005
- C10.010/1 - Tin of Heinz Oxtail Soup
- C10.010/2 - Tin of Heinz Mock Turtle Soup
- C10.011 - Metal teapot awarded to Mrs Pilkington of Standish for nursing services, 1914-1919
- C10.012 - Medal, proficiency in red cross nursing, awarded to A Gornall
- C11.001/1 - Small diary/directory of the Lancashire and Cheshire Colliery Deputies Association, dated 1931. Belonged to Richard Sutton of Leigh.
- C11.001/2 - Contribution Card, dated 1930-31, Lancashire and Cheshire Colliery Deputies Association, Tyldesley Branch. Belonged to Richard Sutton.

'Don't Go Down the Mine'

EXHIBITION REVIEW

By heritage volunteer Holly Dallman



'Don't Go Down the Mine' was on display at the Museum of Wigan Life from December 2010 until 22 March 2011. Its installation marked the centenary of the Pretoria Pit Disaster, an explosion which killed 344. The exhibition looked at other disasters that occurred, resulting in the foundation of the Mining and Technical College in 1903. It successfully pieced together the many aspects of working down a coal mine – poor conditions which often led to disease, the hardship of families whose men were injured or killed down the mine and the camaraderie felt by those who worked together.

Overall, the exhibition handled the difficult subject of the ordinary people and their extraordinary jobs with sensitivity and understanding.



A rare tin of Heinz soup

Tom Heye's Wigan Mining and Technical College Medal



Let's Celebrate

Royal weddings, visits, jubilees and coronations have often been a cause for festivities in Wigan Borough. As we celebrate the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton we look back on some of these commemorations past.



A street party for Prince Charles and Diana's wedding. Taken at the top of Belle Green Lane outside the Prince of Wales pub.



Crowds line Market Street, Wigan during Elizabeth II's 1954 visit.



A street party for Elizabeth II's Coronation, Wigan, 1953.



Workers in the Mule Room, Taylor Mill, Miry Lane, Wigan. The mill is decorated for the Coronation of George VI in May 1937.



Local people line the streets as Elizabeth II visits Wigan in 1954.



George VI and Queen Elizabeth meet disabled soldiers on Market Square, Wigan in 1938.
H.M. THE QUEEN AT WIGAN 1938



Royal visit of George V and Queen Mary to Wigan in 1913.



George VI and Queen Elizabeth during their visit to Wigan in 1938.



The old 'Mission School' with the stained glass windows in the background



The stained glass windows in the now demolished Tyldesley Central C of E Primary School prior to removal



The stained glass windows in their present position in the St George's Central C of E School hall

The Stained Glass By L Sharrock Windows in the School: A Memorial to Mr Kay

Parents entering the hall in Tyldesley St George's Central C of E Primary School can be excused for asking how these beautiful windows came to be fitted in this relatively new school. I will attempt to shed a little more light on how this came to be...

The story begins on the 1 October 1895 at the Waterloo pit, a small single shaft colliery in Shakerley, when a terrible explosion of firedamp gas in a new airway claimed the lives of five people including the manager John Kay. Mr Kay was a highly respected treasurer and sidesman at the mission on Darlington Street, Tyldesley, which was both a school during the week and a place of worship on Sundays. It was reported in the Chronicle on 29 November 1895 that a fund is being raised for the erection of a stained glass window at the Darlington Street Mission, Tyldesley. The members and friends subscribed to provide a lasting memorial to celebrate Mr Kay's life

and work at the mission and a stained glass window was commissioned from J Holloway and Sons, of Liverpool at a cost of £20. The window was unveiled by William Ramsden, the Wellington Pit owner, on the 8 February 1896. It was unveiled in the presence of many local dignitaries including the Reverends J Lund (vicar), R W Willett and R Hodson (curates), Dr Duncan, Dr Dixon, and the widow and family of the late Mr Kay, the mission being crowded to excess.

The window, which was reported in the Leigh Journal at the time as being very much admired, had the inscription running along the base 'To the glory of God. In memory of John Kay, died October 1st, 1895. Erected by members and friends of Tyldesley Church Mission'. The window consists of two lights with lancet heads, and the subjects chosen for illustration are symbolic figures of Faith and Hope. These are worked out in the richest coloured glass, and are relieved by a background of diapered glass of dark shade. The usual emblems are introduced. Faith holds in one hand a bible, and the other rests on a cross. Hope looking upwards

rests her right hand on the anchor, and in the other carries a lily. The window is completed by an ornamental arrangement of the conventional rose in panels at the base, and with palm trees enclosed by suitable canopies filling the heads.

The Mission has seen many happy and some very sad times over the years particularly one which occurred on the 13 January 1936. Fire swept through the home of the Tyrer family at Green Bank Street taking the lives of all nine of the children, five of whom were scholars at the Mission School.

The window remained in place in what became the Tyldesley Central C of E Primary School's hall until November 1998 when it was removed and repaired prior to the building being demolished. A new school, an amalgamation of St George's and Central schools had been built on the site and the window was placed in the hall of the new building where it remains to this day. It is a fitting reminder of times past in a very modern setting.

It has been a busy time for the Heritage Service and we are pleased to announce that we have received a trio of awards.

Urban Design and Building Excellence

The Museum of Wigan Life has won the Urban Design and Building Excellence Award for good design, environmental improvement and building quality. This is excellent exposure for the architects

© Wigan Council



The Urban Design Awards are collected by representatives of Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust, the architects and contractors

(Bradshaw, Gass and Hope) and the contractors (William Anelay). The award was presented at a ceremony held at Wigan Cricket Club and we will now go forward to the regional selection panel. Wigan's Building Excellence Award promotes sustainability and the project had to demonstrate how it has made a positive contribution to the local environment and helped to improve the quality of life for many.



Customer Service Excellence

The Heritage Service has been awarded the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation. CSE is a

government standard that puts the customer and citizen at the heart of public services. Along with colleagues and volunteers

from Arts and Libraries, we were visited by an assessor, Hugh Keachie. Over a week, he interviewed staff and volunteers, viewed sites and checked over relevant paperwork, policies and procedures. Comments from Hugh were extremely positive classing the Museum as "superb" and telling us he will be bringing his family back to visit Trencherfield Mill steam engine. Hugh was also extremely impressed with Alex Miller's knowledge in the archives.



Museum Accreditation

The Museum Accreditation scheme sets nationally

agreed standards for UK museums. In order to achieve accreditation museums have to meet an agreed standard in governance and management, services for users, visitor facilities and collections management. The Museum Of Wigan Life has been awarded full accreditation.

Carole Tyldesley, Head of Heritage Services, wishes to thank all volunteers who have helped to achieve these awards. You can see the certificates and trophies on display at the museum reception.

Creative writing

This poem was written by a member of the Pemberton Pens group during a creative writing workshop run by the Heritage Service.

Peggy the dog was out walking with her owner when a 12 year old boy called Tommy Brown fell into the Leeds-Liverpool Canal. Peggy jumped in, caught hold of his clothing and managed to keep him afloat until help arrived. Peggy was awarded the Daily Mirror Brave Dogs award. This poem is inspired by Peggy's story.



PEGGY THE DOG

by Harold Lyon

*The water was cold and came as a shock
I grabbed at a bramble as I fell
I struggled like mad, not able to
take stock*

Crying out I gulped of the canal

I lashed out fiercely, I couldn't swim

Panic was now setting in

*I wished I hadn't gone for those
blackberries to win*

Mother, oh Mother have I done such sin

Suddenly my foot kicked on something

Could I have reached the bottom

*Then my hand felt something yielding
I grabbed in desperation not knowing
what from*

*I clung on for dear life to a thing that
was furry*

*I knew I had to hang on for my life
It surfaced with me gasping like fury
It was a dog saving me in my strife*

It swam for ages with me in tow

Until it neared it's owner

Great thanks and praise from now on

I owe

To Peggy the dog and it's master

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

Many researchers arrive at the Museum for the first time having used many internet websites which ask for large amounts of money in order to search resources. These same researchers are then amazed to find that there are many websites which give crucial information for free. Websites such as www.lancashirebmd.org.uk are compiled by volunteers who are experienced researchers, in association with local register offices. Whilst the original records themselves are not viewable on these sites, they will in the case of a marriage, pair the groom to his bride, a date and a church. Armed with this detail it may then be possible to view the marriage certificate here at the Museum or at Leigh Local Studies (in Leigh Library).

www.lan-opc.org.uk even has the details on the marriage certificates for a great number of churches in the local area and beyond. There are also details of baptism and burial registers. Again it is volunteers who carry out this detailed work.

If you are looking for municipal cemetery burials try www.wiganworld.co.uk. Listed under 'stuff' are several Wigan cemeteries again provided by the dedication of a volunteer researcher. New this month is the addition of registers for Ince UDC cemetery from 1857 to 1880. More will be added as soon as is possible.

Finally, one of the oldest websites which is currently being updated is www.familysearch.org. This is more commonly known as the Mormon Church's website. Again this lists references to baptisms and marriages in local churches especially before 1837 and the start of registration. Again the reference to your relative should then be checked against our church records for the full data.

As with all online resources, the original documents should be viewed before accepting the detail given on a website. After all volunteer indexers are human and like the rest of us make mistakes.

A common mistake made by transcribers of documents whether they work for Ancestry.co.uk or Lan-opc is to mis-read the handwriting in the document. S is often mistaken for F even L, W for H and that is even when the handwriting is good and the document without damage. Add in poor



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handwriting and a page that has suffered from dampness, the difficulty in reading the item is increased and more mistakes possible. This is wonderfully demonstrated by an enquiry received by email here at the Museum many years ago when the 1881 census had been transcribed for the Mormon church and issued on CD Rom. At that time we had no indexes to any census but we did have our local census on microfilm. The enquirer wished us to check an entry for her relative. She was puzzled as to the location of the place named in the census as the birthplace of the relative. I duly looked this up and had to agree that she was right to be sceptical. The Mormon transcription on CD gave the birthplace as Jaberwocky, Lancashire! In actual fact the original entry stated it was Mawdsley, Lancashire!

There is one further point about transcriptions of the census to be aware of. In the early census it was the norm for a great number of the population to be unable to read and write. Many could read but not write beyond maybe their own signature or even write their signature. Therefore when the census enumerator called, it was he who would fill out the forms and therefore he who would spell their names. Therefore it was he who would spell Clark with or without an e and give little John's age as 2 when in fact he was 6.

If the enumerator was unfamiliar with the local accent, then he may assign the wrong name to a family and certainly at best the spelling of the name would be compromised. Once compulsory education became the norm this situation changed and often it was the child in the household who completed the form. I am reminded of the time when I started out researching into my own family history 25 or so years ago. I was looking at the 1841 census and came to Orrell district where my family lived and was at first puzzled as to where Crabtree Lane was. It was a while before I realised the local accent was in play here. Combined with the lack of sign posts for streets and poor spelling skills

on the enumerators behalf, the street was actually Crabtree Lane (now Church Street)!

So beware the typed out entries of indexes and transcripts and of course Ancestry.co.uk. Look at the full entry and make up your own mind what it says and if you are not sure ask someone else for a second opinion.

If you would like a free copy of our website sources for family history why not call in the Museum.

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

General

- Rankin, J. Tales of Rid 283.42736
- Scott, D. Urban cowboys: the lost worlds of doorstep milk 338.1771
- Coates, Chris. The Wigan sheds volume 1: Springs branch motive power depot 385.0941
- Davies, A. Coal mining in Lancashire and Cheshire 622.334
- Davies, A. The Pretoria Pit disaster: a centenary account. 622.8
- Fearnley, David A. War memorials in Ashton-in-Makerfield churches 940.467
- Barlow, K. Mild and bitter were the days 942.736
- Beta. Wigan remembers: a Beta research book on World War II 942.736

Genealogy

- Ashton St Thomas CE Baptisms 1698-1809 Index & transcript
- Hindley All Saints CE Baptisms 1644-May 1814 Index & Transcript
- Ince St William RC Baptisms April 1873- March 1900 Transcript and index
- Lancashire Parish Register Society Vol NC6 Birch in Rusholme (St James) cd rom
- Lancashire Parish Register Society vol 172 Melling in Lonsdale 1720-1851
- Newtown St Marks CE Baptisms 1885-May 1926 Index & Transcript
- St Helens St Thomas of Canterbury RC Burials 1893-2003. Index & transcript
- Wigan All Saints CE Baptisms 15 February 1825 to 17 July 1836. Index and transcript
- Wigan All Saints CE Baptisms 14 April 1848 to 24 July 1857. Index & transcript

Microfilm

- Wigan Observer 2009



Pit Brow lasses in the screen room at Gibfield Colliery, Atherton in 1918. Mary Tomlinson worked as a pit brow lass around this time.

MARY TOMLINSON

By Sheila Ramsdale

I first came across the story of Mary Tomlinson over 20 years ago whilst doing some other research on Irish immigration in Wigan.

Mary was born on 25 August 1899 at 254 Billinge Road, Highfield. As child she was a pupil at St Paul's School, Goose Green. What struck me as most remarkable was that she had started life working in a weaving shed in a cotton factory; she had then progressed to the pit brow and eventually qualified as a doctor working as a missionary in a leper colony in Ikkadu in India.

After some exploring I discovered Mary had relatives living in Birkenhead. I contacted her cousin who kindly sent me transcripts of letters received from Dr Rolls (Mary's married name). Mary was still alive but definitely wished for no publicity because she felt she was unworthy of it! Consequently, I put her story on the back boiler and years later discovered her story once again. By the time I contacted her cousin again I discovered she had recently died but had been living

in a nursing home in Norfolk until she was over 100. By this time we both agreed the story of Mary Tomlinson needed telling for a variety of reasons not least the fact she was incredibly inspiring and had led such a remarkable life. As her cousin Margery Griffiths states "she never sought publicity, but I do feel merits a mention in Past Forward as so many people in Wigan must still remember her as the 'Pit Brow Lassie'." Mary progressed from pit brow, through Birmingham University with the help of church members, qualified as a doctor and then worked as a missionary in India. Her husband whom she met in India, died many years ago and Mary then settled in her husband's family home in St Olaves, near Gorleston-on-Sea. She remained there until she was 95 years old, when she decided she should no longer be living alone and went to the Methodist home.

Prior to this there had been correspondence between Mary and her cousins with regard to some family history research they had been undertaking. This is a transcript of the reply Mary sent back to them. The first transcripts started to arrive in May 1987:

My own history started from June 1912 – it would take a book to write it all. On a certain Saturday morning between 6am and 7am while I was ‘mopping’ the stone flags in our kitchen, at a special spot, a voice said very firmly, “you must go to India when you are older”. At that precise moment I was thinking about going out into a small field in which we kept hens and had a garden, and my brother Frank and I were digging a pond to put sticklebacks in. I knew nothing of India and had not even had it in geography, because I remember getting up from my knees trembling, and going out into the backyard and on to the field. Everything was intensified – the blue sky and the green grass were lovely. Have you read Masfield’s ‘Everlasting Mercy’ I knew then that somehow or other God would find a way, and he did in many wonderful signs. I was led – step by step, and here I am in my 88th year. Time and time again I have failed him, but He has been by my side. He has never failed me. At this time my father had been injured in the pit but received no compensation for years and was unable to work. How mother managed I don’t know. She was wonderful. She never complained and took in washing. Frank used to help in the barber’s shop at weekends and take papers out. Harry, my youngest brother, was too young to appreciate what was happening. We used to go to the tip at Blundell’s and pick coal – anything to help the family finance.

At 13, when I started working, I got 2/- weekly as a learner in the Reaching Room at the factory, Eckersleys in Wigan. I left home before 5.30am to be there before 6am – otherwise the gate was closed and one had to wait outside until 8am breakfast half hour. It was slave labour really, and for a few months that winter I went to Stan’s mother as help for 2/6d a week. Whilst there I went to Evening School and got a scholarship for the Technical College for the next winter session so I started really to study.

I was homesick and went back home as I had an offer of 5/- weekly working as a ‘reacher – in’ in the factory. The ‘drawer-in’ was the boss and they paid the ‘reacher-in’ who eventually became a ‘drawer-in’ but it rarely happened, for those folk were the aristocrats of the weaving sheds. They had good wages and were more refined than the rest of the girls and remained until they were too old to work. The First World War was on at this time and I took bread, margarine, occasionally a bit of jam to enliven it, and an apple. After a few weeks I decided to go into the weaving shed and became a weaver again on 5/- a week. One’s ‘Missis’ was a four loom weaver, and she paid you and you cleaned the four looms every Saturday morning, and ‘picked’ the rolls of calico after they had been taken from the loom. Each piece was examined for oil and a jar of salts of lemon was always there to remove the oil. Eventually I became a two loom weaver. One gradually progressed to the four looms, but I began to faint each month. The hours were long, and bread and margarine were not the best ingredients to build a

growing girl of 15. By this time in the winter months I would walk back home, nearly two miles after standing all day from 6am to 5.30pm and then after a meal would walk back to the ‘Teck’ as the college was familiarly known. I studied English, French, Shorthand and Chemistry! There was no mugging in those days and I was never afraid of the dark mornings and nights walking about alone.

One of my Tomlinson cousins worked on the pit brow, the wage was 10/- which was what I earned working two looms, and the pit was almost next door to us, and they finished at 3pm. It was also practically in the open air, so I suddenly decided to go on the pit brow, and because the manager knew and respected my father I got the job. We started at 6.30am but I could get there in 10 minutes, and we had a special uniform made of very thick warm wool- I wish I had a photo of that and me in it. We also wore a special bonnet made of black material, we had to make our own. I loved that time from 15 to 20 years of age. It was not easy at the beginning, the language was not the ‘Kings English’ and was quite an education to me.

Editor’s note: Sheila has further letters in which Mary describes her training as a nurse and doctor, and her experiences working as a doctor in India. These will be published in a future edition of Past Forward. Sheila would love to hear from anyone who has further information about Mary Tomlinson.



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“I’m

Margery Booth

from Wigan”

By Holly Dallman

Margery Booth was born on Hodges Street in Wigan in 1905. She went on to become a famous opera singer, and spy for the British forces during World War II. She even sang for Hitler with secret documents hidden in her knickers.

Despite having moved to Southport with her family as a child, it seemed only right that Margery Booth should make her English operatic debut at the Queen’s Hall on 4 October 1935. Having been a part of Wigan’s Operatic Society since her teens and training in nearby Bolton, Wigan was her home.

In 1936, she appeared in London’s Covent Garden. That same year, she married a German, Dr Egon Strohm. The pair met when Booth was training at the Guildhall School of Music in London. She had become a part of the Berlin State Opera in 1928 and appeared at the Wagner Festivals in Bayreuth. By the time the War began, her career was going from strength to strength.

She first met Hitler in 1933, when the German leader went to her dressing room after her performance and gave her 200 roses, wrapped in a swastika. So enchanted by her was he, that he chose her to sing for him as an example of Germany’s cultural dominance over Europe. Though her loyalty remained with the British forces, she was asked to sing at a British Prisoner of War camp in Genshagen, just outside Berlin. Her loyalty to her birthplace came through even in these times, as she began all performances introducing herself, “I’m Margery Booth from Wigan.”

It was at the camps that German officials hoped captured British soldiers would be persuaded to defect to the Nazi cause and could be sent back

into the British forces as a spy. Due to the nature of these establishments, they were known as ‘Holiday Camps’ for the captured soldiers.

In 1943, a soldier called John Brown was transferred to Genshagen, having convinced the Germans that he was such a soldier. In fact, trained for a special mission, he secretly remained loyal to Britain, working as a double agent for them. His part in the British Union of Fascists helped win his place amongst the Nazis, and he and Booth had soon begun working together against their Nazi hosts. Booth faced a thorough questioning from the Gestapo on a regular basis,



and insisted on closing her performances with a rousing rendition of 'Land of Hope and Glory' – possibly the clue that made Brown realise she was still loyal to the British cause. But Hitler trusted her so much, that he gave her a personal promise of protection when the British accused her of being a traitor. She was even publicly disowned by her family in 1941.

One infamous story from Genshagen comes when John Brown handed her a pile of secret documents, ready to be passed on to British Intelligence, minutes before she was due to go on stage. With nowhere else to put them, Booth had no other choice than to put them under her dress, and perform for Hitler with them hidden in her underwear. Discovery of this covert operation would have meant certain death for the pair and they were lucky to have gotten away with such a plot.

It wasn't long, however, before Brown's secrets were revealed and Booth was arrested. Despite questioning, and even torturing, by the Gestapo, Booth remained silent about her part in the conspiracy and was soon released. She fled Berlin and made it to Bavaria, before being picked up by a group of American soldiers.

At the end of the War, it was the information that she and Brown had recovered that led to the arrest and subsequent hangings of two British traitors – William Joyce (also known as Lord Haw Haw) and John Amery.

John Amery was arrested and tried for treason, after it was revealed that he had produced Nazi propaganda and played a large part in the recruitment of the British into the Nazi cause. At first he pleaded his innocence to these claims, stating that he was an anti-Communist, rather than a Nazi, but on the first day of his trial on 28 November 1945, he pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to death. His hanging took place on 19 December 1945.

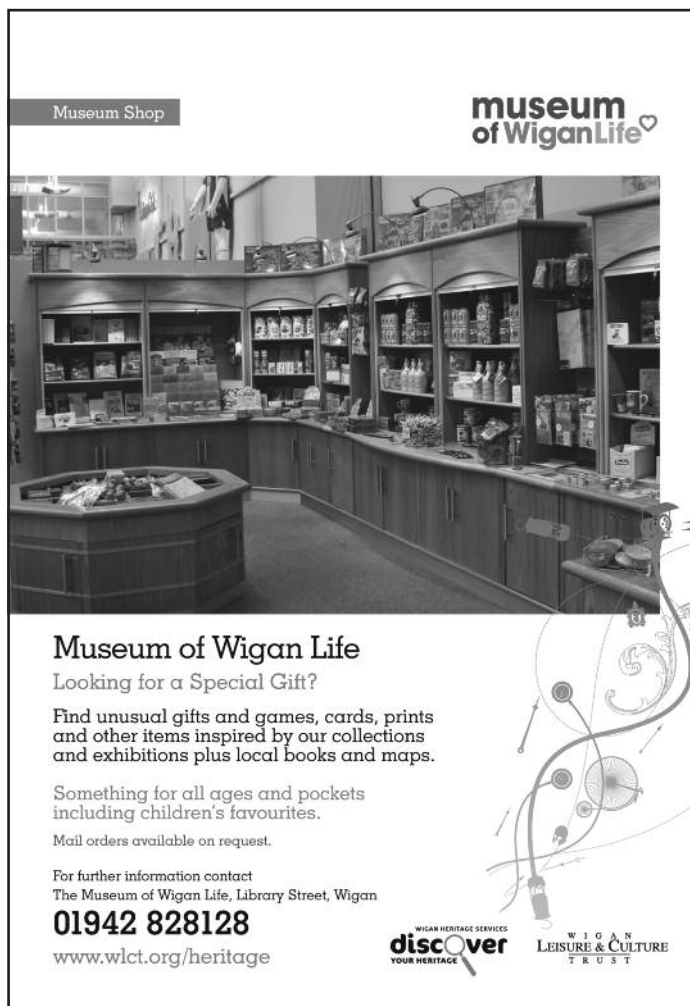
William Joyce was a radio broadcaster for the Nazis, urging the British forces to surrender. His trial took place in September 1945 and resulted in a verdict of guilty of treason. Despite being American, his possession of a British passport signalled his allegiance to the King and he was given the punishment of hanging. The appeal based on his American nationality fell through and he was hung on 3 January 1946.

But, while John Brown was hailed as a hero for the capture of these traitors, Margery Booth's friendship with Hitler led the British to believe that she was a Nazi. Following the divorce from her husband, she returned to England, where she struggled to find work, due to her supposed Nazi associations. She eventually moved to New York, where she died in 1952, following a battle with cancer at the age of 47.

Pleas for a posthumous award for her part in capturing these traitors have largely been ignored. But how long can these refusals last? Despite everyone thinking they knew who Margery Booth was, her tale has only recently come to light. Not just a beautiful woman, with a voice that enchanted Hitler, but also the ability to use these talents to befriend him, while all the while revealing his secrets, from the very depths of her petticoats.

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BURNEY'S

AND OTHER MEMORIES

BY ALAN PARKINSON

R W Burney was established prior to World War Two. It was situated on Woodhouse Lane, occupying several buildings of the old Douglas Bank Colliery, plus new buildings. Incidentally, my Great, Great Grandfather, Matthew Harmer, was killed at this pit in 1889. The factory closed down when it was requisitioned by the Army, circa 1939-1945, re-opening after the war. I worked at Burney's from 1947 to 1953, it employed approximately 100 people making handbags, most of which were sold at Marks and Spencer.

As a 16 year old, I started work as boiler man, packing, maintenance and management trainee. Our handbags sold for about 27s 11d (£1.40 today). I ran a Mail Order Catalogue, and saw a real leather bag for sale at £7 10s (£7.50), which equated to a week's wage then. I suggested to Mr Burney we could replicate this bag, and he gave me the money to buy it. We pulled it to pieces, copied it, and had it on sale in Marks and Spencer for 27s 11d!

Burney's was quite a happy place, he was a good boss, and quite often tipped me 10s (50p) for cleaning his Rover car. As I was only earning about £3 per week wages (which I tipped up to my parents) it was a fortune! I left Burney's in 1953 after our first child was born. The manager, Joe Hayes, was killed on the railway at Whitley soon after. Burney's closed down circa 1968 when Wigan Co-op built a petrol station/garage on the site. Mr Burney's son, Derek, carried on in a smaller capacity in a small factory behind the Woodhouse Pub.

I grew up at 194 Woodhouse Lane, in a terrace of five houses, four of which were occupied by relatives. In the Second World War, an army camp was established opposite our houses. About 30 soldiers lived in Burney's factory, they marched to the camp every morning at 8am, headed by a black Labrador. This camp was a Salvage Depot, and Italian Prisoners of War were

shipped in to help with the work. At night only two soldiers were left to 'guard' the camp, and after dark many a silk parachute, rolls of linoleum, bicycle parts etc were smuggled out to our back doors. Some nights, if my friends were on duty, I would go and play snooker with them on the camp. I was given dozens of different regiment cap badges, jack-knives, a Very pistol, and even a sword!

Next to the camp was Stringfellows Removals, 'The Bridge Between Two Homes', which was also a coach firm. My Grandad had a pen behind their garage, where he kept hens. My earliest memories are of going with my Grandad to collect eggs. After repairing a coach, Stringfellows would sometimes give me a ride on the test-run.

When the army camp was closed down after the war, I believe Webster's Coaches took over, later to become Smiths, then Shearings. Stringfellows had by then relocated to Martland Mill. Then Union Tyre Factory (Firestone) built on the site (around 1951) and remained there until Pemberton Caravans took over.



Female employees at Burney's during the 1953 coronation celebrations.

Male employees at Burney's during 1953 coronation celebrations. Mr Parkinson is on the back row on the left.



YOUR LETTERS - CAN YOU HELP



Dear Editor

Brass Band Conductors Baton

A brass band conductor's baton has been donated to the museum collection. The silver hallmarks on the baton date it to around 1911. The baton is inscribed with the text.

'Presented / to / J. Rylance / by members of / W.C.S.D. / B.B.'

James Rylance was a well respected local brass band conductor. He lived in Pemberton and died in 1927 aged 74. During his life he was involved in many local bands and became conductor of the following - Pemberton Victoria, Pemberton Bridgewater, Ashton-in-Makerfield St Thomas, North Ashton, Garswood and Coppull Subscription.

Unfortunately we have not been able to find out the name of the band that presented the baton to him. Do you know the full name of the Brass Band with the acronym WCSD? It could be Wigan Catholic Subscription Brass Band, but if this is the case what does the 'D' stand for? We have assumed the 'W' stands for Wigan but it could also be Winstanley. James Rylance worked as a street pavior for Wigan Corporation so it could even be a Wigan Corporation band. Alternatively the 'C' could stand for 'Co-operative.'

If you have any information please contact Jenny Broadbent on 01942 827594 or e-mail j.broadbent@wlct.org.

Dear Editor

Victory Medal

A World War I Victory Medal has been sent to Wigan Heritage Service anonymously.

The medal is inscribed '36611 Pte. H Mc HUGH R. LANC. R.' The owner appears to have undertaken some research and discovered that Private McHugh was in the Royal Lancashire Regiment no. 36611 and North Staffordshire Regiment no. 41695.

The owner has requested that we try to find the family of Private McHugh through Past Forward. If you think you may be a relative of Private McHugh then please contact Jenny Broadbent on 01942-827594 or j.broadbent@wlct.org.



Dear Editor

At the time of the 100th anniversary of the Pretoria Pit Disaster I began to do some research around my family's involvement.

One of my maternal grandfather's younger brothers, John Roberts, was killed in the disaster, aged 26. He left a widow, Sarah and three young children, of whom the youngest, Irwin, was only five months.

My late mother always said that she understood John's younger brother Robert was involved, but survived. Researching this, I realised he was not one of the three named survivors, neither was he the Robert Roberts of Seddon Street, Westhoughton, named amongst the victims.

Further research has now revealed that Robert appears to have been a member of the first rescue party led by Alfred Tonge and received the Edward Medal (2nd Class) for his bravery. As Robert was my great uncle, I would love to know more about this and if his family still have the medal. I know that he married a Sarah Jane Crook at St Bartholomew, Westhoughton in 1908 and had at least four children - Gladys (1909), Hilda (1911), John (1914) and Maud (1916).

If any of their descendants are out there and know the full story, then I would love to hear from them. My e-mail address is loisdean@mac.com and my address is 2 Gatemere Close, Worsley, M28 7UY.

Regards,

Lois Dean

YOUR LETTERS - CAN YOU HELP

Dear Editor

Whilst digging in my garden in Winstanley I found a medal. The inscription reads:

Chorley and Dist. UPS
Third Light Breed
Pen Section
R. Ashurst 1934-35



I think the medal may be related to pig breeding but I do not know for sure. If anyone knows anything about the medal please contact me. I would like to return it to its rightful owner.

Alma Jones

Dear Editor

Enclosed is a copy of a photo. I found it in a frame behind a photograph of my father's football team taken when he was 15 years old.

I was very excited and ready to claim these people as long lost relatives. My 95 year old aunt and 84 year old aunt, dad's sisters, assure me they are not our family

and they have never seen the photo before. Dad passed away in 1999. I'm wondering if someone gave the frame to my grandmother to put the photo on the wall. Dad was her youngest child and there were two football photos in large wooden frames.

My husband and I think they are an impressive group of people and hope some of your readers may be able to unravel this mystery. If you have any information please contact me. Imprinted on the cardboard



surround (which is falling to pieces, though the photo itself is perfect) is 'Cyril Foley, Photographer, 96 Standishgate, Wigan.'

Best wishes from Australia,

Gail Munro

Dear Editor

In 1946 my mother arranged for me to have my photograph taken at Ashurst's Photographic Studio on Ormskirk Road, Pemberton. I was eighteen at the time and my



photograph was taken in my army uniform. The photograph was framed.

Recently I removed the backing from the framed for the first time. In the frame I found two photographs that had been used as packing material. I would be interested to hear from anyone who knows anything about these photographs.

Harold Wood

Editor's note: *If contributor's contact details are not listed please contact the Past Forward Team. We will be happy to forward any correspondence. Contact details can be found on page two.*

Dear Editor

I was born in Wigan in 1935, where I lived until 1974. I attended Rose Bridge School from 1946 until 1951. I started my apprenticeship for a well-known decorating firm, Pagett's based in Powell Street, Wigan. Mr Pagett was a well known JP in Wigan and the firm's main contracts were cinemas, hotels etc. The company's specialty was church decorating, and design. There were approximately 25 to 30 painters in employment with a number of apprentices.

In 1952 we secured the contract to redecorate the Church of St John, Powell Street, Wigan. This Catholic church was adjacent to our premises which was extremely convenient.

Over the six months the decorating took to complete, I was allowed to help in various jobs in the church. The main ceiling and sanctuary received the most attention, the former being stencilled in complicated patterns and colours. The sanctuary was largely covered in gold leaf and looked rich and impressive.

I was only 16 and was amazed at the skills of the local tradesmen. The transformation was truly amazing. The head priest was Father Complett, who compared it to the Sistine Chapel, perhaps a little OTT!

I visited Wigan and St John's three months ago and called in to see how it looked. A service was being held so I sat and waited. I found it hard to believe when I looked up. The whole decorative scene was as vivid as it was when it was completed 62 years ago. A man came to inquire who I was and when he found out was amazed. As it turned out, he was an altar boy at St John's when it was painted. He was actually serving there and I was an apprentice, what an amazing coincidence. He gave me a quick tour round the church and the memories came flooding back. The men, the jobs, the errands I ran, all the tea made. All things that shaped my character and personality.

Well, Editor, that's it. What a nostalgic wallow that was. I will be planning another trip shortly to Wigan.

Yours faithfully,
Ron Banks

Dear Editor

On being given a copy of your magazine I found it most interesting.

Reading an article by Austin Lyons on the Hindley Fire Brigade and the Town Yard I was reminded of my father and Gilbert the grey shire horse who was stabled there. Gilbert was known over Hindley and Hindley Green as he laboriously pulled the heavy dust cart throughout the town collecting the contents of the dustbins.

A slow, patient and docile animal, he was a firm favourite of my father's who was brought up with horses. Gilbert was very well known for his habit of enjoying chewing tobacco. Most mornings before going into his office my father would call in and give Gilbert a 'chew' of tobacco and then go over to the Town Hall to his office. His job was that of Town Clerk and his name was Frederick Hickson, clerk from 1934-1960.

Barbara Hill

Dear Editor

I wonder if any of your readers remember Mr and Mrs Stanley's grocer and butcher's shop in Wallgate. Mr Stanley was something to do with the scouts. My mother and I were trapped in a shelter in Liverpool when the yanks got us out. Our house had gone as well. I was an evacuee but fretted so went home to my mother. After the shelter my mother got us on the first bus. She had a baby in her arms and just a bundle of clothes. When we got off the bus she saw a

bobby and told him where we came from and asked was there anywhere we could go and he took us to Mr Stanley. There was a room in Clayton Street and a bed. From then on him and his wife became our Auntie and Uncle.

I don't think they had any children. He helped my Mam rent a shop owned by Mrs Clarkson. She had a shop on the corner of Victoria Street. I don't know where the furniture came from as we had nothing. We were woken by the sound of clogs. We thought we were in a foreign country. I think they deserved medals as my mum lost a baby and they opened their grave for me Mam. I wonder if they have any relatives left.

Mrs L Stewart

Dear Editor

With regard to your story of the Hindley Green Hall and Flora statue (Past Forward Issue 53). Yes the statue was in a big garden allotment at the rear of Leigh Road, Hindley Green, the property of Tom Brown. It was kept on show for many years after he died, by his son. When he died the new owner still kept it there but one night, sometime in the early 1990s, it was stolen. It was believed to have been taken for scrap as it was solid lead. The last tenants of the farm were named Fletcher and some of them lived in Wigan Road, Leigh for quite a while after.

Yours

D Timmins

The Glory of **BENJAMIN**

by Bill Melling

The Wigan Borough Archives at Leigh Town Hall contain thousands of documents and photographs all carefully catalogued and available for reference. However, there are also a number of boxes whose contents are unrecorded. These have arisen over the years when firms and organisations have been closed down, often suddenly, and someone has realised the documents being discarded might have some historic significance. They then bundle them up and send them to the archives, assuming that someone will be there to sort and catalogue them. This is not always the case, particularly when large quantities arrive en bloc as happened when the Wigan Metropolitan Borough was created and all the Urban District Councils were absorbed into the Borough.

A team of volunteers is now engaged in working through this backlog, listing the contents of the boxes so that they can be properly catalogued and referenced. Much of the material is as dull as ditchwater but occasionally gems of information emerge which give a wonderful insight into the past. One such document is a political tract called 'The Glory of Benjamin' which some unknown person had copied from a book called 'Wigan Broad-sides' (If anyone has a copy of this could they please contact the Archivist). It is written in the form of a biblical psalm and as an exercise in smearing your opponent it makes the material in the recent Oldham East and Saddleworth election scandal look like an Enid Blyton fairytale.

Further research into the document has shown that it almost certainly relates to the general election of 1852 and that the Benjamin referred to was Benjamin Powell the vicar of St Georges Church, Wigan. Although he was in charge of a relatively poor parish Benjamin was in fact a wealthy landowner who was prepared to bankroll his eldest son in his bid to become an MP. His son, then aged 27, was Francis Sharp Powell (he of the statue with the shiny toe in Mesnes Park) and standing as a Conservative. The tract which follows was probably put out by his Liberal opponents.

THE GLORY OF BENJAMIN A Song of Praise

- (1) Rejoice, all ye inhabitants of the Borough, and be exceeding glad.
- (2) For, behold! BENJAMIN, the Incumbent, hath waxed rich, and he will strew your paths with gold.
- (3) He hath endued his Son, F.S. Powell, with wisdom; he hath sent him to the East to gather knowledge, and to the West to learn the statesman's craft.
- (4) He hath extolled his virtue in sermons, and sounded his praise from the pulpit.
- (5) Now he setteth him before you, saying, "Here is my immaculate Son; he vouch safeth to serve you, he is my own boy, and he shall be your member."
- (6) Ye Publicans, rejoice! For your houses shall be opened, and the beer shops in Scholes shall flow with drink.
- (7) Shout for joy, ye Venal Voters, for ye shall be bribed; and ye that be imprisoned for Debt, for your deliverance is at hand.
- (8) Rejoice ye, therefore, together, and sing his praise, for great is BENJAMIN, the Incumbent, and the depth of his pocket is past finding out.
- (9) There is none like unto BENJAMIN; there is none with whom he can be compared.
- (10) His purse is full, and is open to those that serve him, and who give their votes unto his Son
- (11) He lendeth freely to the needy, and taketh but a vote in payment.
- (12) He lavisheth money on the dwellings of his tenants, and their votes are his only recompence.
- (13) Yea, he bribeth them with subtlety, and they say we are not bribed.

(14) As the fowler enticeth the bird into his snare, so doth BENJAMIN decoy the unwary Voters.

(15) Though he prideth himself on his wealth, yet is he all meekness to the ten-pounder.

(16) He entereth the dwelling of the Voter with humility; he praiseth his wife and caresseth his children; but the wicked who have no votes he regardeth not.

(17) When he entreateth a Tory he remindeth him of times past – how he hated Radicals, persecuted Papists, and clung to Protection.

(18) But when he canvasseth a Whig, he saith, Behold! My Son is with you: a largeloaf and religious liberty are as the apples of his eyes.

(19) Wherefore, ye men of Wigan, will ye cleave to unworthy members, when Perfection's Self, FRANCIS SHARPE POWELL, is before you?

(20) What is Ralph, that ye support him? And why should an Earl's Son be preferred to the Son of BENJAMIN?

(21) Surely the Father of RALPH was a backslider, and wrote a book, and the sins thereof have, by a cunning device, been fixed upon his Son.

(22) And did not the Earl snub BENJAMIN in times past? And shall he not repay his contumely with interest.

(23) Yea, the Earl shall feel the power of BENJAMIN, and his warlike Son shall quail before him.

(24) By his wealth and his wisdom he commandeth both seats, yet he is gracious, and taketh one only.

(25) The Son of BENJAMIN, (FRANCIS SHARPE POWELL) shall be an ornament to you; his renown shall be spread to the end of the earth, and he shall have honour before the nations.

(26) He (FRANCIS SHARPE POWELL) shall become ruler of the kingdom, and shall have great power, and shall reward his father with a mitre.

(27) For great is BENJAMIN, the Incumbent; and the wisdom of his transcendeth belief.

(28) Let the day come when the Son of BENJAMIN shall be exalted, and there shall be great rejoicing.

(29) Ale shall flow as a river, and strong drink as mountain stream.

(30) The broad Parish shall rejoice, and the Out-townships shall meet in exultation.

(31) A fire shall be kindled on the heights of Billinge, and Aspull shall respond with a blaze of light.

(32) From far off Dalton, which lieth on the hill-side, even unto Abram, in the Valley, there shall roll one tide of joy.

(33) They shall come from Upholland, and their delfs shall be deserted.

(34) From the mines of Orrell, and Pemberton, and Winstanley, they shall gather by hundreds; and multitudes shall issue from the deep pits in Ince.

(35) From Hindley they shall, and even from Haigh, although the Earl forbid, and though their pastor admonish.

(36) For free drink is more powerful than the commands of an Earl; and strong drink than the precepts of a Parson.

(37) And in that day shall BENJAMIN be lifted up; he, and his Son, FRANCIS SHARPE POWELL, shall be exalted together.

(38) His enemies shall hide themselves, and be ashamed, and the scoffers shall be confounded.

(39) Trumpets shall sound his praise, and the Scholes band shall swell the chorus.

(40) The people shall cry aloud, saying, Who is great like BENJAMIN, the Incumbent; And what mortal possesseth the wisdom of Francis Sharpe Powell, his Son.

(41) The sun shall shine on BENJAMIN with unclouded lustre, and all nature shall rejoice as in the spring season.

(42) The small birds shall warble their joy as he passeth; the cocks shall crow exultingly; and the asses shall bray forth his praise.

Just what effect this propaganda had is impossible to say but Francis came last in a three horse race and was not elected. In later life he went on to become a successful and long serving MP but he did have one blot on his copybook. After winning in the 1881 election his result was declared null and void because although the judge found no evidence of corruption by Francis himself, two of his supporters were proved to have resorted to bribery. Could it be that this Wigan hero has feet of clay - or should they be brass?

There are still plenty of boxes waiting to be listed so if anyone fancies joining the team they would be very welcome.

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 £2.00. Contact Margaret Hodge for further information on 01942 884893

12 April Meccano by Don Palmer

10 May Wingates Band by David Kaye

14 June The 'Real' Robinson Crusoe by Brian Halliwell

14 July It's Not Politically Correct by Michael Clarke

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. 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).

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.

19 April Help Evening and Members Talks

17 May Old Education Records – Hilary Ambrose

June No meeting

July No meeting

16 August Getting Started

A weekly Help Desk is run by members of the Society each Monday from 1.30pm to 3.30pm 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

26 April AGM and discussion re: project War Memorials

24 May Discussion on Wills and how to find them. Speaker - Brooke Westcott

28 June Talk and film slides on the Watkinson's Bible. Speaker - Sue Evans

July 2011 No Meeting

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.

11 April 2011

'The last lighthouse keeper' – by Mr G Medicott.

A Wigan man talks about his 32 years service as a lighthouse keeper

Wigan Family 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

18 April

The science of detection
Speaker - Alan Hayhurst

16 May

Language and laughter of Lancashire
Speaker: Brian Clare

20 June

Society AGM + George Formby
Speaker: Neil Forshaw

Wigan Archaeological Society

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, at 7.30pm, 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

6 April Excavations at Buckton Castle
Speaker - Brian Grimsditch
4 May Roman Carlisle
Speaker - Rachael Newman
18 May Committee meeting

Wigan Archaeology (Discovery) Group

Wigan Archaeological (Discovery) Group undertake a wide range of archaeology projects across the borough. These include site surveys at suspected Roman roads and Mesnes Park excavations. The group is open to all ages. The meeting place is Scout Hall, Earl Street, Wigan WN1 2BH. Please contact Brian Parr for meeting and project dates.
E-mail: b_parr@hotmail.com /
Telephone: 07704 16021

Editor's note: Would you like your society to feature on this page? Or do you have further information about one of the societies listed for example upcoming speakers lists? If so please contact the Past Forward Team by 30 June and we will include your details in the next issue.

Be Prepared

This edition's image shows a group photograph of the Tyldesley and Astley scouts with 661 blankets and rugs. We don't have a date for this picture, or a reason why they collected 661 blankets. Can you tell us anything? Please contact Jenny Broadbent on 01942 827594.



Last edition's picture



We had lots of information about the last edition's picture. Mr Miller called us to say that he thought the picture was taken in the 1920s because his Aunt Miriam Miller (nee Hill) worked there. She isn't

in the photo though. He said lots of women from Platt Bridge and Abram worked there.

Mrs Kelly from Hawkley Hall also contacted us. She worked at Burney's from 1945-1953, from when she left school to when she had her first baby. The company made handbags for Marks and Spencer's, as well as other companies, and produce was sent all over the country. Branding labels in the handbags read 'Burnella', which was a combination of the owner's wife's christian name, Ella, and their surname, Burney.

Mrs Kelly said that the factory closed down during the war as the handbag business was classed as a luxury. The factory building was taken over by the Pioneer

Corps and used as an army base. Italian prisoners of war were kept there and it was also used as a munitions works. Mrs Kelly said that the photograph was taken before the war.

Mrs Kelly was the first youngster they took on. She was taught everything and classed as an apprentice. Mrs Kelly was asked to be a supervisor at the age of 19, but didn't take up the position. She finished work there in the cutting room.

Some interesting facts that Mrs Kelly told us about Burneys:

- The factory was on the site of the old Douglas Bank colliery. The workers used to tip their trimmings down the old mine shaft at the back of the factory.
- The scarves that are worn in this picture were an early health and safety measure. They prevented women from getting 'scalped' by the fast rolling blades that were used to cut the material.

To find out more about Burney's read Alan Parkinson's article on page 24.

See the images on our online photographic archive at www.wlct.org/heritage

How to Find Us



Museum of Wigan Life

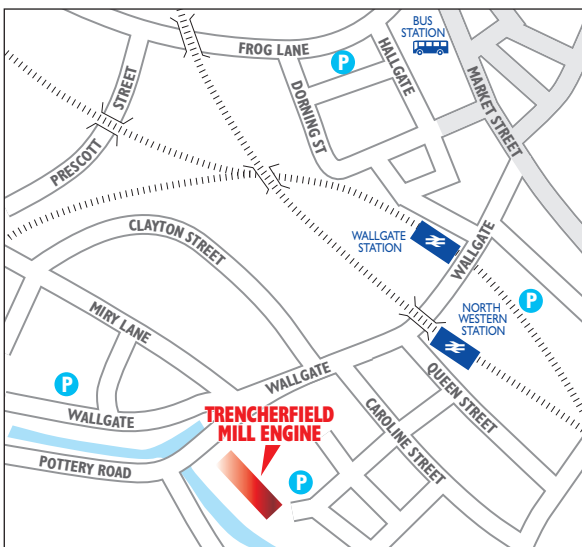
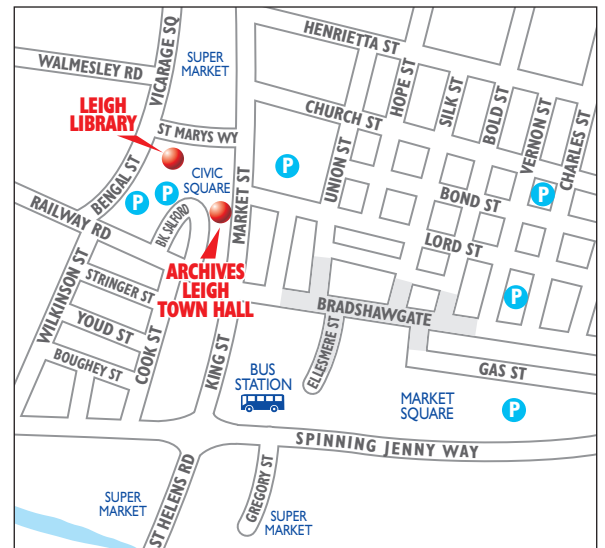
Library Street,
Wigan WN1 1NU
Telephone 01942 828128
heritage@wlct.org

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,
Wigan WN3 4EF
Telephone 01942 828128