

PAST FORWARD

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SPOTLIGHT ON CRIME

Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine



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FRONT COVER

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Letter from the Editorial Team

Welcome to PAST Forward Issue 92.

This is the first issue of Past Forward that I've had the pleasure of editing – and I'm delighted to say it's criminally good (sorry).

From Brian Joyce's tale of the comically audacious fraudster-at-large Ann Poole, to John Unsworth's gruesome account of the tragic Ackhurst Hall murders, our writers have unearthed some of the strangest true crime stories from Wigan, Leigh and beyond.

While Brian, John et al bring us some of the most nefarious characters from the borough, Yvonne Eckersley paints a picture of one of the most admirable: Helen Fairhurst was a Union activist and supporter of women's suffrage who worked tirelessly on behalf of the Wigan Weavers, Winders, Reelers and Beamers Association, and drove Labour politics forward throughout the Edwardian period and beyond (and is my new personal hero). Keith Sutch continues his history of Wigan Warriors, from the post war years to the early nineties (when I went to my very first match – and had my first pie and peawet – at Central Park).

If this issue has piqued your interest in Wigan's past, head to page 34 where you'll find updated listings of the active local history societies in the borough. Get involved, get researching... and get writing for Past Forward!

Peter Davison



We were saddened to learn of the recent death of Professor Peter Davison, who passed away in August at the age of ninety-five. An academic and editor, Peter became an 'unparalleled' voice on George Orwell. Identifying many lost letters, talks and articles, he took on the thirty-five-year long formidable task of editing a twenty-volume 'Collected Works'.

You can find Peter's collection of books and other material, which he kindly donated to the Orwell Society, at Wigan Local Studies in our George Orwell reference area.

Image courtesy of the Davison family.

Hello to our new Archivist, Helen Kavanagh, and Lead Officer (Museums), Eleanor Whitehead

A little about me: I grew up in Ashton-in-Makerfield, and attended Byrchall High School and Winstanley College.



I qualified as an archivist in 2012, after studying English at Lancaster and falling in love with archives there. Since then I have worked at Cumbria County Council, and in project posts for organisations across the country. These include the Theatrical Guild in London, Huddersfield University, Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, and Liverpool Hope University, where I catalogued the papers of philosopher, R.S. Peters. I am also co- Editor of Archives and Records, the Journal of the Archives and Records Association, and a freelance editor for the Church Times – so editing Past Forward is a great opportunity to use both sets of skills! I used to have hobbies, but now spend most of my free time chasing my three-year-old around the Three Sisters. I am very excited to be living and working in Wigan Borough, the centre of the universe.

Hello, my name is Eleanor and I'm the new Lead Officer (Museums), based at the Museum of Wigan Life. I joined the team in mid-July, and my role is to care for the Borough's collection, and to increase access to it through exhibitions and events.



I first began volunteering in the heritage sector when I was fourteen and have worked in several museums across Greater Manchester. Prior to this role, I worked for eight years as Assistant Curator at Manchester United's Museum, caring for the collection, curating displays, and leading a project to collect oral histories from female fans. I knew I wanted to work in a museum with its community and visitors at its heart, hence my move to Wigan Council.

A museum lover through and through, in my spare time I am a trustee at Bakewell Old House Museum and Historical Society. The house is a beautiful Tudor building which was lived in until the 1950s, when it was nearly demolished. Luckily, it was rescued and is now a wonderful social history museum. If you're in the Peaks – I'd highly recommend it!

Goodbye to Hannah

As many readers will know, Hannah Turner, Customer Service Officer and local studies librarian, left Archives: Wigan & Leigh at the end of October. She'll be heading up the M6 to Lancashire County Council to be reunited with former Wigan & Leigh Archivist Alex Miller, and will be transforming local studies across the region.



The impact she has had on the service was clear from day one. Since she started in 2009, her bubblyness, knowledge and can-do attitude has driven the service forward, from a two-person operation in a library basement to a state of the art facility and community hub. She'll be hugely missed by staff and volunteers alike. Good luck Hannah. Remember to visit!

Copy deadline for Issue 93 – Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Monday 13 February 2023.

‘Oh no! It’s our Annie, and she is dead.’

Ackhurst Hall



England in 1868. Christmas! Victoria has been a queen for thirty-one years, and a widow for seven, having lost her beloved husband and Prince Consort, Albert, to typhoid in 1861. But despite the funereal pall that looms over Windsor – the queen would wear black for the rest of her days – the nation is soldiering on. Militarily, Britain still rules the waves. A massive expansion in industry and shipbuilding, together with free trade policies that benefit almost everyone, contribute to a thriving, exuberant and healthy economy. There is ample coal to provide warmth and energy (in Wigan alone there are over 1,000 mine shafts in operation) and cotton to clothe and cover a rising population. And labour conditions are improving. The Sanitary Act of 1866, administered by local authorities, provided

for general sanitation in any factories and workshops not under existing factory acts, and the Representation of the People Act of 1867 enfranchised part of the urban male working-class population in England and Wales for the first time. The nation basks in its history and traditions and celebrates the festive period, if you are wealthy, with presents, Christmas trees and greetings cards. There is a spirit of optimism and hope for the future. Popular songs of the day include ‘The Whispering Hope’, ‘The Sweet By and By’, and ‘The Man on the Flying Trapeze’. But unfortunately, every silver lining has a cloud, and that cloud is soon to hover over the Lancashire mining and mill town of Wigan, bringing tragedy, heartbreak, and despair. And an unsolved murder!

The murdered child was found by her mother. On the evening of Tuesday 15 December, Mr William Houghton (a farm bailiff) and his wife were returning from Ackhurst Hall, Gathurst, a small village near Wigan. With them was a man named Parkinson, who was the overlooker at one of the collieries owned by a Mr Roper – a wealthy local businessman, owner of the Hall, and William's employer.

Approaching their home, a converted barn rented out to them by Roper, Mrs Houghton, walking ahead of the two men, noticed what she at first thought was a flock of ducks in a nearby field. Climbing a fence, she approached the 'ducks' and then realised with horror and astonishment that it was the blood-spattered body of her daughter, Annie. The Houghtons had five children and here was the eldest, hacked and bloodied at her feet. Overcome with grief she gasped, 'Oh no, it's our Annie, and she is dead.' Then, giving way to panic and alarm, she screamed, 'They've killed my children.' Her cries brought the men running and they were soon joined by people from the Hall who all gazed with shock at the young dead girl on the ground.

It was then that Mrs Houghton, the maternal instinct stronger than ever, rushed to the house to see if harm had come to any of the other children. Entering by the kitchen, she was confronted by a scene normally associated with the melodramatic and gory popular penny dreadfuls. Earlier that evening they had left the house and children in the care of Annie, now lying dead outside, and what had been a haven of domestic tranquillity was now complete madness and mayhem. The kitchen furniture was upended, and the walls and table were splattered in blood. The front living room had been ransacked and it seemed that, apart from cold blooded murder, robbery was the motive for this senseless act of carnage. The pressing question now was where were the other children?

Desperate and anxious, Mrs Houghton called out and was answered by the feeble sobbing of her youngest daughter Kate, who cried, 'Is that you, mother?' and whose blood-soaked clothing indicated that she also had been a victim of the remorseless attack.

Further investigation of the premises by the men, who by now had joined Mrs Houghton in the house, revealed that the other two boys and the baby infant were safe and sound. In fact, the boys had remained asleep upstairs all through the terrible events of that evening. At this point, the police having been sent for, the adults began to question Kate about what had actually happened and who had been the perpetrator. Weak from loss of blood, the tearful young girl recounted her story.

According to Kate, at around 7pm, the fire going low, Annie had gone outside for some coal. It was then that a man appeared from out of the dark behind her sister and asked was this the residence of William Houghton? She described him as rather taller than her father and with the appearance of a collier. Annie told him it was but that her father was not at home at the moment. This seemed to anger the man and he went berserk, reaching inside his jacket for a large hammer, with which he struck the young girl a blow on the head from which she reeled but did not fall. She attempted to escape from him by running into the kitchen, but her assailant managed to deliver several more blows as she fled. Still frantic with fear, Annie somehow made it back into the yard and set off running for the Hall. But it was all in vain. Her relentless pursuer overtook her and struck her about the head again, this time ending her young life by crushing in her skull and causing severe trauma to the brain. With Annie dead, it was Kate's turn next!

The attack on Kate was almost a copycat version of that on her sister. The man struck her head and upper body with the hammer, and when she was on the floor kicked and stamped on her mercilessly, all the while ranting and raving and threatening to kill her and the baby, which was nearby in a cradle. His ghastly work complete, he picked up the wounded and frightened child by the throat and threw her through the door and into the field, which was adjacent to the one in which her sister lay.

He then ransacked the house, overturning furniture, and emptying drawers, before escaping into the dark from which he had emerged. It was later discovered that the



St James' Church, Orrell, where Annie Houghton was laid to rest

proceeds from this cowardly, violent, and unpremeditated attack, that claimed the life of a young girl and caused serious injuries to another, not to mention the profound psychological effect on the rest of the family, was a silver fob watch!

Not long after the events described, the police arrived in the form of Superintendent Ellison from the Pemberton police station, followed by Dr Huet, a surgeon from Up Holland, who tended to Kate's horrific wounds. An extensive search of the house and surrounding area uncovered the murder weapon, a large blood-stained lump hammer with strands of hair from the young girl's head adhering to it. It was found in a field roughly a hundred yards from the house. Through further inquiries it was revealed that the hammer belonged to a local smithy and had last been seen around 5.30pm.

The motive for the attack was further established when it was found to be common knowledge that due to William Houghton, among his other duties, being Mr Roper's acting wages clerk, it was customary for large sums of money to be kept at the Houghton residence. So, the police had a motive and a

very important piece of evidence. And at the inquest held on 30 December it was further revealed by Kate that during the attack Annie had frequently called out that she would tell her father, but her assailant had responded to her pleas snarling that he did not care for her father. She also added that the stranger wore dark clothes, a peaked cap and spoke with an accent 'between Irish and English.' But despite local and national newspaper coverage: 'Horrible Murder of a Girl', screamed the Wigan Observer, while The Leigh Chronicle headlined, 'The Wigan Tragedy'; and a reward of £50 for information, as yet they had no suspects. Step forward local collier Mr Thomas Jones.

On Saturday 2 January 1869, nearly three weeks after the attack, Jones, twenty-five years of age and a collier from the Wigan area, was formally charged with the wilful murder of Annie Houghton on the 15th day of December 1868. He had been arrested after acting suspiciously near some railway sidings at Brighouse in West Yorkshire. The local police instantly made the connection, tenuous as it may seem, of the shifty vagrant to the atrocity in Gathurst, and the suspect was transferred to the jurisdiction of the constabulary in Wigan.

Questioned thoroughly by detectives, Jones would neither confess nor deny that he was the murderer of the young girl. However, further inquiries revealed that the young man had been working at nearby Orrell at the time of the killing and also that, while in Brighouse, he had sold a pair of bloodstained trousers. And so, despite his apparent strategy of maintaining a silence that would do justice to any self-respecting Trappist monk, the law had him bang to rights. Or so it seemed. Step forward Mr John Dickinson.

The case against Jones seemed pretty watertight, even though heavily circumstantial, and it seemed that the prosecution had woven a case from which the accused had no means of escaping the hangman. But what one can weave, somebody else can unravel. And the case against the young collier began to unravel at the speed of a cotton shuttle.

Jones' landlord, the aforementioned Mr Dickinson from Haydock, stepped out into the limelight and announced that at the exact time of the murder the defendant had been working at nearby Garswood Colliery, and that after ending his shift had returned back to his lodgings and remained there for the rest of the evening. Then the shopkeeper from whom Jones claimed, during one of his rare moments of responding to direct questions, to have purchased the trousers, stepped forward to confirm that he had indeed sold Jones the trousers and that they had been stained at the time. Underpinning all of these revelations was the fact, of which the prosecution was aware, that young Kate had failed to identify Jones as the murderer of her sister Annie. The bottom was out of the barrel, and he was allowed to walk free. Exit Thomas Jones. He was the only person ever charged with the killing.

Annie Houghton, twenty-five-years-old, her life ended by five fatal hammer blows to the head, was buried in the cemetery at St James' Orrell on 20 December. It was not to be closure for the remaining members of the family. There was still the inquest to come and then, after Jones' was apprehended, the trial. It appears from newspaper reports that following the attack Mrs Houghton channelled all her love and attention into Kate and the other children.

But for her husband it was a different matter. He suffered 'terribly' and was close to a breakdown.

This was the true legacy of that bleak and dreadful night of 15 December. A family in grief and a man who would go unpunished for this horrific attack on two young children. The odds, however, were always in his favour. A remote house, defenceless and vulnerable children, and a police force geared more to deterrence and prevention than detection, the art of which was still in its infancy. The science of forensics would have to wait until 1892 before the system of fingerprint analysis, 1930 before the classification of blood into its various groups, and 1994 before the enactment of DNA databank legislation. But all of this was too late to bring to account the merciless, relentless, and frenzied killer who came out of the gloom of a cold December night and brutally murdered a young girl who had gone out to fetch coal to warm herself and her siblings.

LOCAL HISTORY STORIES COMPETITION

The National Archives and the British Association for Local History invite you to enter our 20sStreets local history competition, where we're looking for local history stories that capture the imagination.

Entries are open for both individuals and local history groups (archive professionals are welcome to enter personally but not as an archive service). The story must have a link to the 1920s and relate to the areas covered by the 1921 Census of England & Wales (England, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands), but the rest is up to you. The story doesn't have to be local to entrants – if it's a tale worth telling, we want to hear it! There are fantastic prizes to win, such as a year's premium subscription to Findmypast, offering unlimited access to the 1921 Census. Please share this competition with your users and enter the competition yourself!

Check out 20sStreets local history competition (nationalarchives.gov.uk) to find out more and enter the competition by 31 January 2023

‘Tenpence’ A matter of life, death or transportation

BY RICHARD DE GRIJS

A deep dive into obscure archival records is bound to uncover intriguing, sometimes surprising, aspects of seemingly ordinary lives. Take the case of one John Wilson (1768?–1800).

On 10 October 1785, Wilson’s life was thrown into major disarray. The magistrates presiding at Wigan’s Quarter Sessions Court condemned the Lancastrian sailor to ‘transportation to some parts beyond the seas for the space of seven years.’

At only seventeen, young Wilson’s thoughts must have been racing in despair as he was led to the Wigan Borough Gaol at Millgate, a small holding area adequate for just six detainees. Pending the execution of his sentence, before long he would be sent to Lancaster Castle.

Yet, implementation of sentences of transportation had become a most pressing matter. Britain had long used its convicts as cheap labour, particularly in the American colonies. However, the American War of Independence of 1775–1783 had put a firm halt to that practice.

And so, while many petty criminals were sentenced to seven or fourteen years of transportation, there was literally nowhere to send them to. With the Industrial Revolution causing enormous economic hardship and mass unemployment, instances of petty crime – ‘felonies’ – surged dramatically. Prisons became dangerously overcrowded, forcing the Government to convert disused ships into the now-notorious prison hulks.

By the mid-1780s, prison overcrowding had become such a critical concern that urgent action was needed, if only for public health reasons. On 6 December 1785, therefore, Thomas Townshend, Viscount Sydney, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, drew up Orders-in-Council (legislation passed by King George III’s Privy Council) to establish a colony in New South Wales.

On the favourable recommendation of Captain James Cook, on 18 August 1786 the Government selected Botany Bay as the new settlement’s location. However, as noted by the journalist and author Norman Bartlett, ‘[t]here is no

evidence that either [Prime Minister] William Pitt or any member of his cabinet thought of Botany Bay as anything more than a convenient place, distant enough for the safe disposal of social waste.’

On 13 May 1787, shackled in leg irons and in the company of almost 800 other convicts on eleven ships, Wilson departed from Spithead Roads, off Portsmouth, confined to the convict ship *Alexander*. Today, flights from the UK to Sydney’s Kingsford Smith international airport (coincidentally located at Botany Bay) take the better part of twenty-four hours. In the late eighteenth century, however, the ‘First Fleet’ took more than 250 days to arrive in New South Wales. A seven year sentence of transportation hence quickly became a life sentence of exile; very few convicts made their way back home upon their release.

Such a fate seems harsh by modern standards, particularly given Wilson’s apparently minor offence. He was alleged to have stolen ‘nine yards of cotton cloth called velveret, of the value of tenpence’ from one Robert Wignall, a Wigan haberdashery merchant, ‘contrary to the peace of our lord the King, his crown and dignity.’

Perhaps counterintuitively, Wilson’s conviction of having stolen goods valued at a mere ten pence actually saved his



Wigan’s Millgate, location of the original Borough Gaol, in times gone by (Credit: Sandra Whalley/Pinterest)

life. In late eighteenth century England, theft to the tune of a shilling (twelve pence) or more resulted in an automatic death sentence. Jurors and magistrates were well aware of these consequences, and so they often resorted to 'controlling values' to save lives.

That context explains the selection of Wigan's Quarter Sessions Court, established during the reign of King Edward III (reigned 1327–1377), as Wilson's trial venue. Quarter Sessions were local courts which heard less serious cases, in essence any crime that did not carry a death sentence or life imprisonment. More serious cases were heard by the Courts of Assize. In 1972 the Crown Court of England and Wales replaced the Quarter Sessions and Assize Courts.

Since the earliest records of 1583, Lancashire Quarter Sessions had been held at Lancaster for the 'hundred' (ward) of Lonsdale; at Preston for the hundreds of Amounderness and Blackburn; at Wigan during Epiphany and Michaelmas, at Ormskirk at Easter and Midsummer for the hundreds of Leyland and West Derby; and at Manchester for the hundred of Salford.

The Quarter Sessions Court records of 'The King ag[ains]t John Wilson For Petit [sic] Larceny' on that fateful Michaelmas day in October 1785 put the cost of the trial at Wigan's New Town Hall (£3 3s 2d), the nominal value of the stolen goods and the irreversible wrecking of a pauper's life in stark contrast.

Following his arrival in January 1788, Wilson served out the remainder of his sentence in New South Wales. Upon his discharge, he soon disappeared into the bush and became a 'white wild man' who clearly preferred living 'among the natives in the vicinity of the [Hawkesbury] River to earning the wages of honest industry for settlers,' wrote David Collins, the colony's deputy judge advocate and lieutenant-governor. Wilson was warmly welcomed by the Dharug Aboriginal people, to whom he became known as 'Bun-bo-e', until he was speared to death in 1800 because of a transgression involving an Aboriginal woman.

Yet history is full of unexpected twists and turns. In 1790, 19-year-old Simeon Lord, a fellow Lancastrian, was sentenced by the Manchester Quarter Sessions Court to seven years of transportation for also having stolen goods worth 'tenpence' – including 100 yards of muslin, conveniently valued at sixpence, and 100 yards of calico, deemed worth just fourpence.

In the 1860s Simeon Lord's grandson, Dr Edward Pierson Ramsay, then-curator of the Australian Museum in Sydney, became the first Australian-born biologist to publish important research about the ground-dwelling 'superb lyrebird' - originally, and incorrectly, known as 'a bird of the pheasant species', or the Australian bird of paradise. His material was largely based on pioneering observations from the 1790s by John Wilson, the original 'lyrebirdman'.

And so did an otherwise unremarkable Wigan convict have an unexpectedly large impact on the foundation and development of a new branch of biology, allowing researchers to relate the modern lyrebird species to its prehistoric ancestors whose fossils are found scattered all across southeastern Australia.



Lyrebird (*Menura superba*) (Credit: John Gould, *Birds of Australia and Adjacent Islands*; ca. 1848)

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Volunteers' Voice

Welcome to the volunteers' page of Past Forward! Across all our cultural and heritage sites, a team of volunteers work hard cleaning, transcribing, and cataloguing our collections. They are always coming across interesting items and stories, so this is the space where they can share their discoveries.

Wigan Court of Quarter Sessions

BY PETER THOMPSON

Wigan and Leigh Archives has a very large collection of documents spanning several centuries, together with photographs, maps, and historic books, all of which are housed in a state-of-the-art facility beneath Leigh Town Hall. This huge resource includes the Wigan Quarter Sessions records from 1773 to 1754 and from 1790 to 1971. To improve public access to the information contained in them these court records are currently being transcribed and digitised by Archive staff and volunteers but, as can be imagined, this is a lengthy task.

So, what were Quarter Sessions and what do the records contain? As their name implies, there were four sessions each year roughly coinciding with the traditional quarter days of Epiphany, Easter, Trinity, and Michaelmas. They owe their origin to the legal changes adopted by the Plantagenet kings in the fourteenth century with the aim of improving the provision of justice through statute law. Procedure varied over the years, but in general Quarter Sessions cases were heard by justices of the peace (magistrates) and dealt with any criminal case that was not serious enough (like capital offences) to come before a judge at an assize or higher court. Each county had its Quarter Sessions Court as did some boroughs, of which Wigan was privileged to be one. The following looks at the system as it had evolved by the mid-nineteenth century when



Wigan Borough Courts, where the Quarter Sessions were held (PC2016.7523)

a Wigan Court of Quarter Sessions consisted of two or more justices of the peace presided over by the recorder and assisted by the clerk of the peace. Trials were by jury. Most of the criminal cases dealt with were for burglary, theft, receiving, or assault, but these courts also dealt with licensing and other matters.

The records for each quarter were bundled together and stored for posterity but the term 'Quarter Sessions records' is a little misleading. The bundle for a quarter will also contain a large number of records from the numerous Petty Sessions of the previous three months. Petty Sessions were held quite frequently by one or two justices of the peace and examined

incidents as they occurred. At these courts most cases were dealt with summarily, some being dismissed but most resulting in fines or a period of hard labour at Kirkdale House of Correction. Petty Sessions also had a preventive function, binding many to keep the peace for six months or more or suffer a penalty. All these transactions were recorded on documents that were later enrolled, or filed, at quarter sessions and make up a large proportion of a Quarter Session bundle. When the case warranted, or the accused declined to accept summary justice at the Petty Sessions, it would be scheduled for the next Quarter Sessions. In these cases witness statements would be taken and the accused would either

be imprisoned or bailed to appear. In an average quarter perhaps eight or ten cases remained to be heard at the Quarter Sessions, with seventy or more already having been dealt with at the Petty Sessions. The Petty Sessions' proceedings were a vital part of the system and enabled the Quarter Sessions to be conducted in just one or two days.

At the Quarter Sessions a grand jury would examine the evidence for each case presented and decide which, if any, could be dismissed without trial. The remainder (usually most, if not all of them) would be tried before juries of twelve, selected from the ordinary jurors summoned to attend. The witnesses gave their evidence during which the accused could ask questions; but these always seem to have been quite brief...

Question: 'Did you not say I could take the chicken?'

Answer: 'No'

...and the court would move on to the next witness. Very few defendants took legal advice, which was expensive, but when they did the questioning was naturally more thorough. When all the evidence had been heard the jury made its decision and, if guilty, sentence was pronounced. The next case began at once.

The documents of the Quarter Session itself included lists of jurors, a calendar of prisoners for trial, notes of any previous convictions, indictments for each of the accused, and summonses for prosecutors and witnesses. All of these contain names, often with addresses and occupations, details of the offences, the nature and value of goods stolen, and various other details all of which combine to make these records a valuable insight into human nature (which does not seem to have changed much) and social and economic conditions (which certainly have). Other documents in the bundle include prosecutors' bills, the clerk's expenses for the previous sessions and the coroner's bill, all of which had to be authorised by the court.

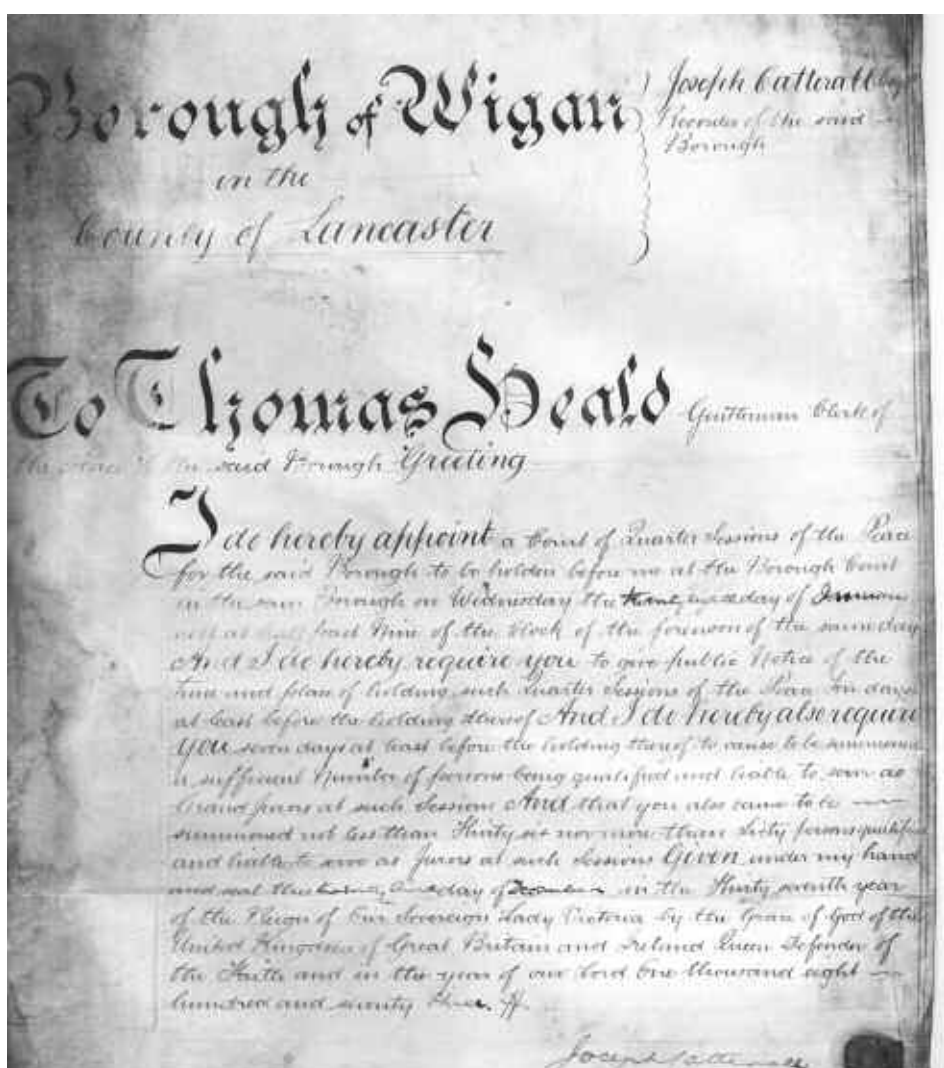
The fines imposed by these courts were substantial in their day but not

excessive. In the 1850s drunkenness usually attracted a fine of five shillings with costs of perhaps nine shillings. Assault or riotous behaviour could be two or three times as much, all this at a time when a weekly working wage was about ten or fifteen shillings. Monthly returns of the fines levied at the Petty Sessions show that most of them were paid promptly to avoid further punishment. The potential penalties for breaching an 'order to keep the peace', though, were very high indeed (£20 for the miscreant and £10 for their guarantors) as was the penalty for ignoring a summons to the Quarter Sessions (£25). These huge incentives to comply seem to have been extremely effective.

Custodial sentences were various. Few cases attracted more than six months' hard labour, some much less, and offenders under sixteen years of age were often whipped instead. For serial offenders and those with previous convictions the court could, and did, impose sentences of

transportation. While that system remained in force several of Wigan's sons made the trip to New South Wales at the behest of Wigan Courts of Quarter Sessions, often causing great hardship to dependants left behind.

The remit of the courts was, of course, to uphold statute law, but occasionally a case leaves one feeling that there could have been a little more compassion and understanding. Like that of poor Jane Ince who had absconded from the Union Workhouse in Frog Lane and came before the Petty Sessions late in 1857. As to why she left, the records are silent but in running away she would have saved the future cost of her maintenance. At the time, though, she had clothes and clogs, property of the workhouse, to the value of five shillings. For this wilful theft she received a month's hard labour at Kirkdale; but was she really expected to leave naked and barefoot?



Document appointing a Court of Quarter Sessions, 1873

ANN POOLE

A SMASHING LADY

BY BRIAN JOYCE

In August 1871, the Leigh Chronicle reported that 'a fashionably dressed woman of ladylike deportment' had appeared at Leigh Magistrates Court charged with 'tendering counterfeit coin'. Initially, she had refused to give the police her name, but the newspaper speculated that it was either Jane Jackson or Eliza James. When she later appeared at Atherton Sessions, it was under the name of Ann Poole. For the sake of consistency, she will be referred to by this name from now on.

The production of counterfeit coins was something of a cottage industry in poor areas of Victorian cities, and deliberately spending counterfeit coins was a common offence. As the Leigh Magistrate pointed out, Ann was 'by no means a new hand at the game'.

By the 1860s, 'coiners', the people who actually manufactured the counterfeit money, were using separate plaster of Paris moulds to produce the face and reverse sides of the coins. Low denomination silver coins were best; retailers paid them less attention than they did gold sovereigns. The cruder forgeries contained pewter and 'Britannia Metal' from melted-down beer mugs and spoons. Better quality forgeries comprised a mixture of silver and copper. Counterfeit gold sovereigns and half sovereigns of the type Ann passed were less common. Retailers tended to scrutinise them more than silver coins and good copies required a fairly high gold content. However, after gold strikes in Australia in the 1850s, the Royal Mint began to increase its output of gold coins at the expense of banknotes.



No.	Name	Aliases	Age	Height	Weight	Complexion	Build	Occupation	Place of Birth	Place of Detention	Period of Detention
107	Ann Davis	Ann Poole	30	5 ft 6 in	120 lb	Fair	Slender	Needlewoman	Liverpool	Leigh Prison	1862-1863
108	Ann Davis	Ann Poole	30	5 ft 6 in	120 lb	Fair	Slender	Needlewoman	Liverpool	Leigh Prison	1867-1871

Ann Poole's record from the Calendar of Prisoners showing the aliases she used

Once a finish had been put onto the fake coins, they were bought in bulk by the criminal equivalent of wholesalers. These people either employed 'smashers' to pass the coins into circulation or sold them on directly to small scale smashers who were in business for themselves. It is unclear which type of smasher Ann was. While male smashers tended to operate in pubs, fairgrounds and race meetings, females like Ann Poole plied their trade in shops. Ann, an experienced smasher, arrived in Leigh in August 1871.

Nine years before, in July 1862, Poole, then known as Ann Davis, was imprisoned for one month for 'uttering false coin'. Six months later, she was given twelve months hard labour for the same offence. Ann had committed both crimes in Liverpool, and repeated the offence there in April 1867. This time, the thirty-year-old was sentenced to five years. The records describe her as a widowed needlewoman with two children, but this is the only reference to her marital status I can find.

In previous years, Ann would have been transported to the colonies for these repeated offences, but the practice had recently ended. The prisons had become overcrowded as a result, and to alleviate this, the 'Ticket of Leave' system was introduced. Put simply, an offender who had behaved well in prison could be released early on licence. Prison records reveal that her conduct had been consistently good, so in August 1870, three years into her sentence, Ann was released on licence from the women's



Date	Offence	Sentence	Remarks
1862	Uttering false coin	1 month	
1867	Uttering false coin	12 months	
1867	Uttering false coin	5 years	

Ann Poole's coining record showing her ticket of leave date

prison in Woking, Surrey. She had been taught domestic skills such as kitchen and laundry work, as well as creating mosaics from pieces of marble (the latter activity unique to Woking). However, these attempts to rehabilitate her seem to have had little impact on Ann. She made her way back to Lancashire, and soon returned to her old ways.

Ann was arrested in Leigh on Thursday 10 August 1871. The following narrative is based on newspaper accounts of her various court appearances.

That morning, she had visited a hatter's shop in Market Street. Ann's appearance and ladylike manner seems to have charmed Charles Eaton, the 30-year-old assistant, who later told magistrates: 'I was mistaken in consequence of the respectability of the party.' Ann purchased six linen-faced collars, which Eaton boxed for her. They cost twopence halfpenny, for which she tendered a half sovereign. Eaton gave the lady 9s 9d halfpenny change, and she left with this and the box of collars. Eaton placed the half sovereign in his gold drawer without checking it. When he admitted this in court, Ann denied passing the forgery deliberately, and blamed him for accepting it: 'I think you ought to have tested it, and by doing so, you would have saved both yourself and me the trouble of being here today.'

At this point, Eaton admitted that he had been duped by her apparent respectability, to which she replied disingenuously: 'And might I have not been mistaken in the same manner as you were? I certainly gave you half a sovereign, but I received it among a lot of change. It is very advisable that people should test their gold before taking it. Had you only taken the trouble to test this, you would have saved me from being in this unpleasant position today!'

After successfully passing the half sovereign at the hatter's shop, Ann had made her way to the grocery and beer house run by Betty Ratcliffe in Kirkhall Lane, which was then in Atherton.

Ann purchased a 2lb cottage loaf, which cost 3d for which she tendered a gold sovereign. Betty Ratcliffe gave her 19s 9d change, and she walked out of the shop. Once Ann had left the premises, the shopkeeper examined the coin, which looked more yellow than usual. She called in her daughter, who lived with her baker husband next door. Elizabeth Fishwick threw the sovereign onto the flagstones to listen to the sound it made, a process nicknamed 'ringing the changes'. The coin sounded too tinny, and Betty Ratcliffe rushed from the shop to look for Ann.

As it happened, the suspect was making her way back to Ratcliffe's premises to ask Betty whether she

sold tea. Gesticulating to the coin on the flagstones, Betty snapped back: 'This is not a good sovereign' and demanded the return of the change she had given the apparently respectable customer. Ann picked up the coin from the flags and put it between her teeth to test it; it would bend if counterfeit. It did not, and Ann exclaimed triumphantly: 'You don't call this a bad sovereign, do you?' She gave the coin to Elizabeth Fishwick, who found it to be genuine. Ann then purchased some groceries, paying with some of the silver change Betty had given her, and left the shop.

Mother and daughter quickly concluded that Ann had perpetrated one of the tricks that smashers commonly used when they were challenged. She had probably switched coins by keeping the counterfeit sovereign in her mouth and substituting a genuine one.

Once more Betty Ratcliffe left her shop and scanned Kirkhall Lane. Police Sergeant James Clegg was passing by, and once the outraged shopkeeper had explained her problem, he followed Ann up Kirkhall Lane. Aware she was being followed, Ann dived into a house and sat down, much to the surprise of the



Ann Poole's ticket of leave



*Prisoners on a fire pump – Woking Women's Prison
(Paul Renouard - Wellcome Collection website)*

startled resident, who had never seen the intruder before. Sergeant Clegg escorted Ann back to Betty Ratcliffe's shop.

Immediately, Elizabeth Fishwick yelled: 'She's got it in her mouth!' A customer also spotted this, and Clegg demanded she pull out the coin. When Ann refused, the officer seized her by the throat, causing her mouth to open, at which point the witnesses saw her swallow the counterfeit coin. In court, Ann denied this had been likely: 'Do you think it is possible that a woman could swallow a sovereign when her throat was being tightly grasped?'

Whatever happened to the counterfeit sovereign was, for the moment, immaterial. Sergeant Clegg had found the box of collars in a satchel carried by Ann. He later took the box to the Market Street hatter's shop, where an embarrassed Charles Eaton took out the half sovereign, the only gold coin in his till. It was clearly a forgery, and Sergeant Clegg charged Ann with knowingly passing a counterfeit coin, an offence she denied. He then charged her with the deception on Betty Ratcliffe.

When asked at her first court appearance if she had any questions for Betty and her daughter, Ann replied: 'It is no use for me to ask anything as the whole evidence is a lot of falsehood which has been concocted between them.' On the accusation that she had swallowed the counterfeit coin, the prisoner replied: 'I have nothing more to say than to ask you gentlemen if you think it was possible while that man [i.e. Sergeant Clegg] was holding me round the throat and another man had hold of me. I ask was it possible for me to have swallowed anything under these circumstances?'

The police needed to communicate with the Royal Mint, which prosecuted counterfeiting cases.

Meanwhile, Ann was remanded in custody to Kirkdale Prison in Liverpool.

At Ann's next appearance before Atherton Magistrates, William Rigby, a Leigh jeweller and silversmith, confirmed that the 'half sovereign' she had tendered in the hatter's shop comprised a mixture of tin and other metals.

Meanwhile, PC Irving, who had escorted Ann to Kirkdale, told the court what had transpired on the journey. He claimed that, among other things, Ann had told him that she was well-known at Kirkdale, so she might as well tell him the truth. She claimed to have bought half a pound of fake sovereigns and half sovereigns at a house in Angel Meadow, Manchester. She had paid two shillings for this purchase. On the day of her arrest, she arrived in Leigh by train from Bolton. She had a mixture of genuine and counterfeit coins in a pocket. She intended paying for the collars with a good half sovereign, but had mistakenly laid a counterfeit coin on the counter. She should have corrected her error but did not.

She confirmed Betty Ratcliffe's account of her visit to Kirkhall Lane, but denied swallowing the fake sovereign. Ann claimed to have thrown the counterfeit coin away once she realised that she was being followed by Sergeant Clegg.

Ann's reply to PC Irving's story was to deny it: 'It is not likely that I should have made such a statement. I mean to say that that man has made that statement against me because I would not allow him to take liberties with me on the road to Kirkdale and though I am an unfortunate woman, I am not to be dragged about the country to be insulted by an officer.'

On being told that her accusations against PC Irving were 'absurd', Ann replied: 'No, sir, it is not absurd. I shall seek to be justified at the Assizes if I am not justified here', and reserved her defence. As she had anticipated, Ann was committed to Liverpool Assizes to be tried for both offences.

At her trial in December 1871, Ann conducted her own defence. The Royal Mint provided the prosecuting barrister. We are told that Ann made 'a long address' to the jury, in which she denied passing a bad coin to Betty Ratcliffe. She had given Charles Eaton, the hatter's assistant, a counterfeit coin by mistake. Despite these protestations, and her claim that PC Irving had tried to seduce her, the jury found Ann guilty.

The judge then publicly criticised the fact that by law, the previous record of a prisoner was kept from juries. Only judges had access to the history of an

accused before the jury reached its verdict. He urged the prosecuting barrister to lobby parliament to change this.

Meanwhile, Ann handed the judge a written plea for mercy. His reaction was an angry one: 'You ought to ask pardon from God for having brought against the officer a charge of such a gross character – a charge which might have got him into serious trouble.' He admitted to being so enraged at her claims that he would not pass sentence there and then 'in case I should go beyond what she deserves'.

The judge appears to have calmed down, because a few days later Ann appeared before him for sentencing. He admitted that, like Charles Eaton the hatter's assistant, he had been taken in by Ann's cultivated demeanour and smart dress: 'She has an appearance and manners that would recommend her.' He had then read her criminal record, which had enlightened him. He sentenced Ann to seven years in prison, and as she had been on a ticket of leave when she committed the offences, the unserved portion of her previous term would be added.

What happened to Ann Poole after ten years in prison is open to conjecture. She may have been rehabilitated. On the other hand, once released she may have immediately sought out her previous contacts and commenced reoffending as she had done before. As a smasher she had traded on her attractive appearance and refined bearing. Indeed, her trial judge had remarked: 'She was just the person to be fixed upon by coiners to carry on their

nefarious traffic.' However, one wonders how ten years in Woking would have affected the forty-five-year-old's chances of success as an attractive smasher.



*Solitary Confinement – Woking Women's Prison
(Paul Renouard - Wellcome Collection website)*

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The Murder on Market Street

BY THOMAS McGRATH

In 1882 John Lowe set up a pawnbroker's business at number 4 Market Street, Atherton. He was no doubt enthusiastic about his business venture, as a lot of the working-class residents of Atherton in the nineteenth century relied on the pawnbroker's shop as a final barrier between poverty and complete destitution. It is often recalled in other histories of working-class areas that the poorest people would pawn their best clothes after using them on a Sunday and then reclaim them on Saturday to be worn again.

Lowe's business was clearly profitable and in 1889 he opened another shop at 29 Market Street. Lowe needed more staff and he recruited 21-year-old Walter Davies to act as a manager of the second shop in May 1889. Davies came to Atherton from Sutton in St Helens. His wage was 23 shillings a week and he lodged with Mrs Ann Hodson at 22 Mealhouse Lane. Little did Walter Davies know that this job would ultimately cost him his life.

Monday 22 July 1889

.....

Walter's day started like any usual Monday morning:

7am – Davies leaves his lodgings and bids Mrs Hodson good morning. He immediately goes to Lowe's shop at number 4 Market Street where he is given his instructions for the day. He is given a box of watches, chains, and rings to make a display of in the shop window, and also told to clear the cellar of mud, as heavy rains over the weekend had caused it to flood.

7.15am – Davies unlocks the shop at 29 Market Street and begins his day. Mrs Clewes, who lives next door at 31 Market Street, was still in bed but

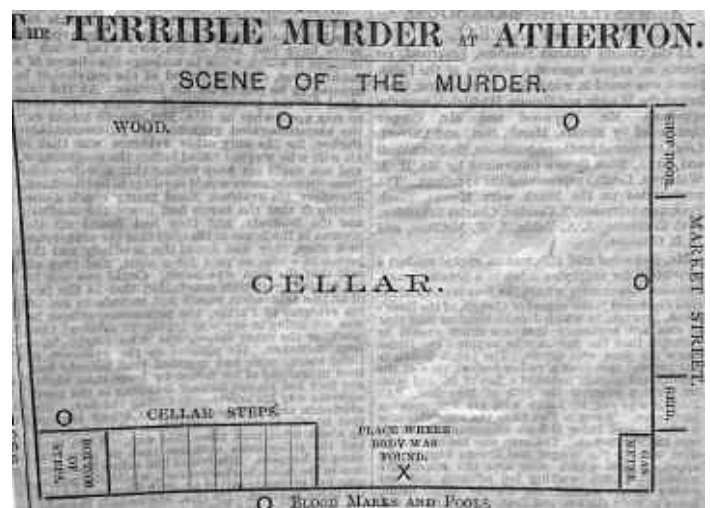
'heard him whistling and apparently in the best of humour.'

8.30am – Mrs Clewes goes for milk and sees Davies arranging the watches in the window.

8.55am – A friend of Davies calls into the shop to have a chat but notices he is busy selling a silk handkerchief to a male customer. His friend leaves.

9.10am – Mrs Clewes calls into the shop. This is what she saw in her own words, taken from the Leigh Chronicle:

'Shortly after 9 o'clock I went into the shop where I noticed Davies working about an hour before, and not seeing him I called out "Walter" but got no answer. I then went to the top of the cellar steps, and I heard a moaning noise. [She goes next door to get her 18-year-old son, Frederick] Then both of us went into the pawnshop through the front door, and we went down into the cellar, my son reaching the bottom of the steps in advance of me. He found Walter lying in a pool of



Map showing the scene of the murder - Leigh Chronicle, 26 July 1889



The murder of Walter Davies - Illustrated Police News, 3 August 1889

blood under the water tap, his face turned to the wall, he was lying on his left side.'

Frederick Clewes stated, 'When I got into the cellar I said 'Walter! Walter! Who has done it? but he could not speak, he apparently understood what I said, for he tried to speak but could not and only sobbed twice.'

Doctor Sephton was called, as were the police, but Walter Davies was already dead. There was a pool of blood on the floor and down the cellar steps. The walls were smeared with blood as was a shelf containing the gas meter. Davies was described as 'a muscular and well-built youth' and there must have been a struggle between him and his assailant. Davies had a fractured skull and two deep wounds behind his ears caused by a blade. Lowe was brought to the shop, and he noticed that a gold watch, three silver watches, and an unknown quantity of silver ladies' watches had been stolen. Davies' pocket watch had been ripped from his body as well.

Walter Davies was buried a few days later in his hometown of Sutton. At the funeral, his distressed mother was heard to exclaim, 'Oh, my murdered Walter! Don't tell me my Walter is murdered. What have they murdered him for?' She had to be carried away from his grave. Walter's sweetheart, Miss Sarah Roberts, who had seen him only the day before his death, was also overcome with emotion and had to be carried from the grave.

Who did it?

.....

It was suspected that the murderer and thief was the man who had been seen buying a handkerchief by Walter's friend. The assailant then fled the scene and headed towards Central Station. An unidentified man, who was described as being of 'nervous excitement', called into the Bluebell Hotel on Bolton Road shortly after 9 o'clock and asked the landlady, Mrs Higginson, the time.

A man named John Lorn was identified as a suspect in October 1889, but he was found to have a firm alibi on the day of the murder. However, another man, William Chadwick, quickly incriminated himself. Chadwick was imprisoned in Strangeways for stealing luggage from trains. He was said to have been reading a newspaper about the Atherton murder case and remarked that Lorn was innocent. This remark coupled with his history of violent robberies, an association with pawnshops, and handwritten evidence against him was enough to convict him of the crime.

Chadwick was found guilty and hung at Kirkdale Gaol near Liverpool on 15 April 1890. Chadwick pleaded his innocence to the end and left long letters to his brother, sister-in-law, the press, and the Home Secretary. The evidence against him was circumstantial and it may never be known whether he killed Walter Davies or not.

A Remarkable Coincidence

By Fra

By Frances Raftery

Some time ago, leaving the Tyldesley Aldi supermarket, I accepted a coin for my trolley from a stranger, a man in his seventies like me. I asked if he knew that a new Iceland was opening soon across the road. He replied that he had both an Iceland and a Morrison's on the street where he lived. I told him that would be on Armitage Avenue at Little Hulton. He was surprised that I knew the road, so I told him that I was born in the next street, Peel Lane.

Alan (for that was his name) started asking if we knew the same people from the past, but I couldn't remember any, having moved from the town over fifty years ago. Then he asked if I knew his best friend, Derek Mather. This rang a bell and I asked if he had a sister. 'Yes,' Alan replied. 'She was murdered many years ago by a soldier.'

I told him that only the week before I had been sorting through some old family photos and one showed a group with my grandmother and a woman who, according to my mother, had been murdered at a Tyldesley fair. Alan thought the woman might have been his friend's sister. He asked if he could show the photo to his friend, and we exchanged addresses.

At home, I dug out the photo
and on the back someone had



indicated who the woman was and the circumstances of her sad demise. This information caused me to look up the murder on my computer, and I found that a Jack Wright had been hung at Strangeways on 3 July 1951 by hangman Albert Pierrepont for the murder of Mona Mather. This was well over sixty years earlier! Was this the same woman in my photo? Was she Derek's sister, Mona Mather?

I went to Bolton Library and looked at past newspapers; surely the murder would have been reported? After twenty minutes I found the article. There was a picture of Mona - exactly the same lady as in my photo. She had gone out on that fateful evening with an older brother, Joseph, and his wife but left them to go to the fair. Apparently, she had met a local



youth, Jack Wright. The exact details of what happened that evening are unknown, but later that night he strangled her with her scarf.

Her body was found at 6 am the next morning by Fred Broad of Wigan Road, Atherton. She lay near a boundary stone between Little Hulton and Tyldesley – three yards inside the Tyldesley area.

I made two photocopies of the article and soon Alan took it, and a copy of the photo, to his friend. I was concerned that these things might upset the octogenarian, Derek, but I need not have worried. Derek had never seen this photo – a group of women ready for a coach (charabanc!) outing to Blackpool. My spectacled grandmother is seated fourth from the left on the front row.

Besides Mona (second row, second from right, floral dress) there was also, quite unknown to anyone, Derek's mother, and his other sister in the group! Derek was fifteen when the murder happened, and it had made his day to see the faces of his mother and sisters again.

Coincidence? What are the chances of two strangers meeting where one has a photo – over sixty years old – of the murdered sister of the other's best friend? And what are the chances of this coming into the conversation at the simple exchange of a coin for a supermarket trolley?



– New exhibition at the Museum of Wigan Life – MAKE SOME NOISE – FROM STAGE DOOR TO DANCE FLOOR

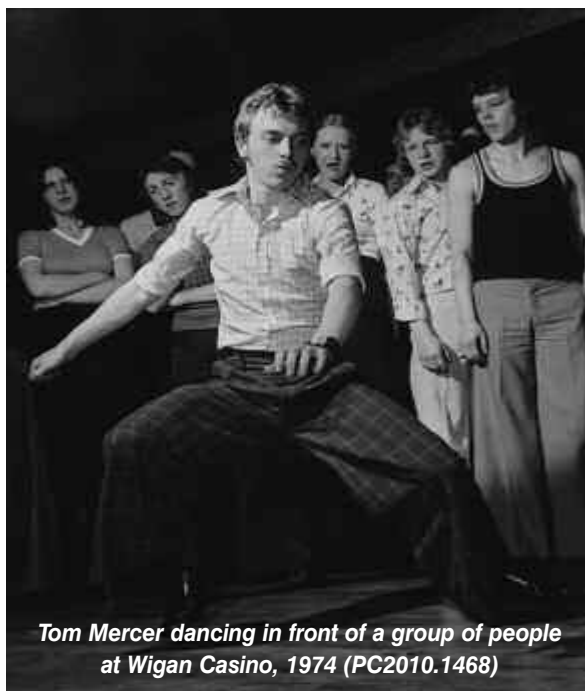
An exciting new **FREE** exhibition that celebrates music from across the Borough opens at the Museum of Wigan Life on Saturday 28 January 2023. Celebrating the incredible venues and wealth of talent that we are known for world-wide, the dynamic and interactive displays will showcase the very best.

From cinemas and local legends to brass bands and northern soul, this exhibition brings to life the incredible range of genres our towns have embraced and called their own. Expect to see and hear the very best our borough has to offer with original objects and music from Wigan Casino, Jazz, Community Voice, The Verve, and much more. This hands-on, interactive, family friendly exhibition has something for everyone, and memories will come flooding back.

We dare you not to dance!

You can sit, reminisce, and share memories about past events, venues and favourite songs in the mini auditorium, or you can be a rockstar and perform on our stage. There is also a programme of events and family friendly activities to explore and enjoy. We would love to hear your memories, so come and tell us about them when you visit and add them to our music wall, or share them on the museum Facebook and Twitter using the hashtag

#MakeSomeNoise.



*Tom Mercer dancing in front of a group of people
at Wigan Casino, 1974 (PC2010.1468)*

**‘MAKE SOME NOISE – FROM STAGE DOOR TO DANCE FLOOR’
IS OPEN UNTIL JANUARY 2024.**

Museum opening times are Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm.

Please note that the museum will be closed until 28th January, but the Local Studies library will remain open.

Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU E: wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk T: 01942 828128

Barbara O'Neill Local History Writing Competition for Children, Young People and Adults 2023

.....

Do you have a passion for local history? Is there a local history topic that you would love to see featured in Past Forward? Then why not take part in the Barbara O'Neill Local History Writing Competition?

Local History Writing Competition - Adults

Write 1000 words - Win £100!

1st Prize £100

2nd Prize £75

3rd Prize £50

Five Runners-Up Prizes of £25

New for 2023 - Local History Writing Competition - Young People

We are pleased to announce we are adding two new age categories to the competition for 2023, 11-16 year olds and 11 years and under. Are you, or do you know, a young person with a passion for writing? This can be about any person, place or thing in our local area! To get your research started visit Past Forward Essay Competition 2022 (wigan.gov.uk) to access some helpful material.

Enter our competition – win a gift voucher

Prizes for each category:

1st Prize £20 gift vouchers

2nd Prize £15 gift vouchers

3rd Prize £10 gift vouchers

All essay competitions are kindly sponsored by Mr J O'Neill.



Winners from the Past Forward Essay Competition 2022



A winner from the Past Forward Essay Writing Competition 2021

Criteria

- Articles:
 - Adults – a maximum of 1000 words.
 - 11-16 year olds - 500 words or fewer.
 - 11 and under - 200 words or fewer.
 - Articles must focus on a local history topic within the geographical boundaries of Wigan Borough.
 - By entering the competition you agree to your work being published in Past Forward.
- The winning article will be published in Past Forward and other submissions may also be published.

If selected for publication the Past Forward Editorial Team may edit your submission.

How to enter

- Articles must be received by e-mail or post by **Monday 16 January 2023**.
- Electronic submissions are preferred although handwritten ones will be accepted.
- You must state clearly that your article is an entry into the Local History Writing Competition.
- You must include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address

(if applicable). We will not pass your details on to anyone.

- It will not be possible for articles to be returned.
- You are welcome to include photographs or images however they cannot be returned.

Submit to

pastforward@wigan.gov.uk

OR

Local History Writing Competition,
Past Forward, Leigh Town Hall,
Market Street, Leigh WN7 1DY

PALAEOGRAPHY PUZZLER

CAN YOU DECIPHER THE MYSTERIOUS HAND OF THIS TRADER?

Palaeography – or the study of old handwriting – can be a challenge even for the most seasoned historian, but it's an enjoyable one. With that in mind, Archives: Wigan & Leigh are inviting readers to help us to unscramble this elaborately cursive hand, belonging to an East India Company trader. This account book, which survives within the Edward Hall diary collection, details the expenses he accumulated on his travels across South East Asia.

Tips on transcribing:

Go through the documents once, and on a piece of paper, write out the letter forms you do recognise. Vowels are largely similar across many different hands, as are l, p and t

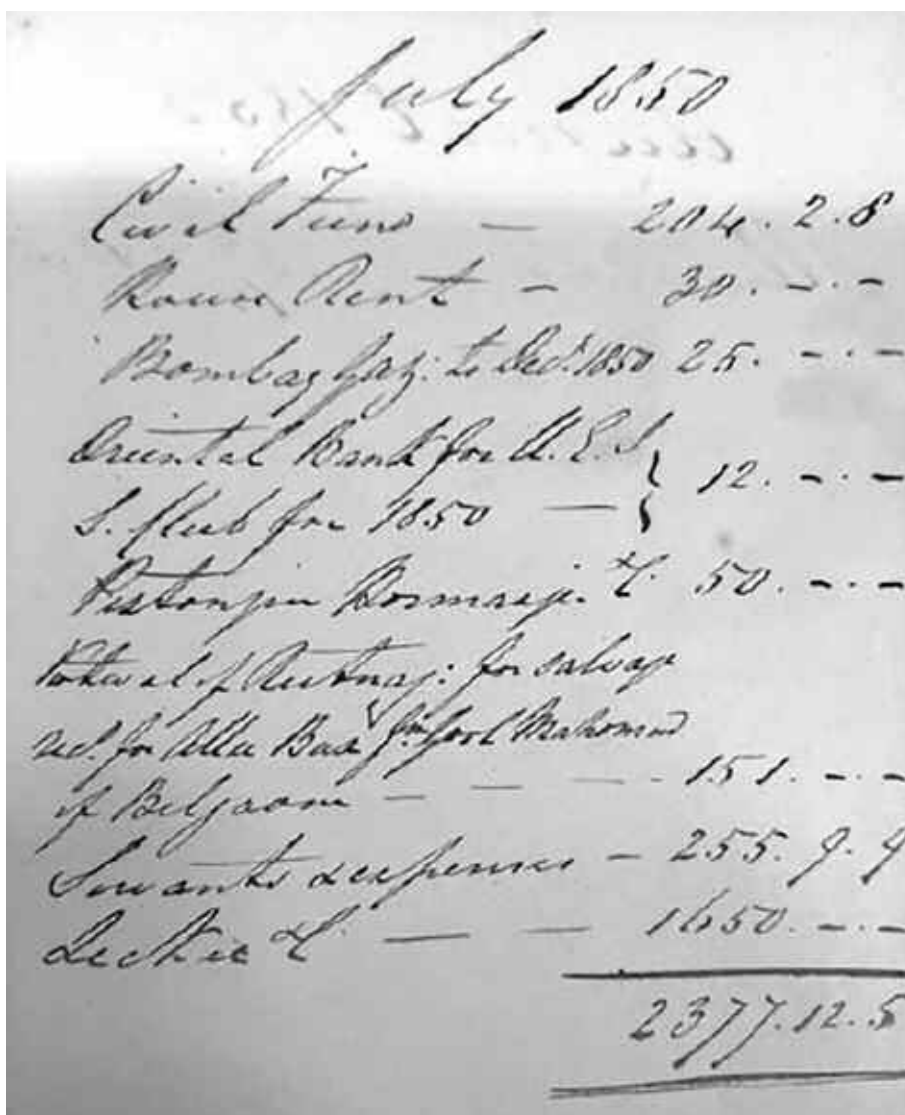
Every time you decode an unfamiliar letter add it to an alphabet grid to help with other words (see below)

Always transcribe exactly what you see, don't be tempted to slot in punctuation or correct peculiar spelling

Remember that a semi colon sometimes indicates an abbreviation, as does a superscript flourish

In your transcription, use '/' symbol to indicate a change of line

For more palaeography practice, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/



a	b	c	d	e	f	h	i
k	l	m	n	o	p	s	t
u	v	x	y	z			

Answers can be emailed to: pastforward@wigan.gov.uk, sent via Twitter - @ArchiveWigLeigh, or posted to Past Forward, Leigh Town Hall, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1DY

Wigan Warriors – 150 years of history



WIGAN TOURIST - 1950

Standing - Gordon Ratcliffe, Jack Cunliffe, Joe Egan, Jack Hilton, Ernie Ashcroft
Kneeling - Martin Ryan, Tommy Bradshaw, Ken Gee

After the war years, Wigan Warriors, and the game of Rugby League in general, once again started to prosper as the club commenced a development programme at Central Park. This saw the introduction of turnstiles, exit gates, and an entire wall across the front of the ground. A public address system was installed in 1947, and this was first used when Wigan entertained Carcassonne in a friendly game on 12 March 1947.

In the 1948 Challenge Cup Final at Wembley, Wigan beat Bradford by eight points to three, with Joe Egan becoming the first Rugby League player to receive the trophy from a reigning monarch, King George VI.

The Championship play-off demolition of

Huddersfield, by 20-2, on 13 May 1950 at Maine Road, Manchester was perhaps Wigan's most prominent win of this era, after the triumph at Wembley. This was due to the fact eight players were missing from first-team duties having been selected for the Australian tour (Gordon Ratcliffe, Jack Hilton, Martin Ryan, Ernie Ashcroft, Joe Egan, Tommy Bradshaw, Ken Gee and Jack Cunliffe).

Wigan and Central Park celebrated their fiftieth anniversary with a game against Rochdale Hornets on 6 September 1952. All surviving players from the original game at Central Park in 1902 were invited and a special edition programme was produced to commemorate the occasion. Wigan won 40-15.

Sadly for the Riversiders, 1952 saw the breaking

of another great team and the club entered a period in the Rugby League wilderness with another rebuilding project being undertaken, focused around a significant Welsh signing from Tiger Bay, Cardiff.

The significant Welsh signing was an eighteen-year-old winger, none other than William John Boston. Club directors, Jack Taylor and Billy Gore, persuaded the young Tiger Bay starlet to sign for Wigan, perhaps reminiscing about Jim Sullivan, another Cardiff talisman who signed thirty years previously.

Boston signed for Wigan on Friday 13 March 1953, and the on-field rebuilding was built around him and other greats including Eric Ashton, Mick Sullivan, Brian McTigue, Frank Collier and Dave Bolton. They became the foundation of the club for many years as success returned to Central Park.

A total of 47,747 people packed into Central Park to watch Wigan defeat arch-rivals St Helens by nineteen points to fourteen on 27 March 1959. Modern stadia, and regulations in respect of spectator safety, dictate that crowds such as this will probably never be witnessed again for regular league fixtures.

On the field Wigan continued to reap success. Following the Challenge Cup wins came triumphs in the 1960 Championship Play-Off Final against Wakefield at Odsal Stadium, Bradford, and two Lancashire League Championships in 1958-59 and 1961-62.

The 1961-62 Lancashire League was the only trophy won by coach Griff Jenkins, although he did take the club to Wembley in 1963. Following some dismal performances, he was replaced by Eric Ashton, initially in a caretaker capacity until his official full-time appointment in November 1963.

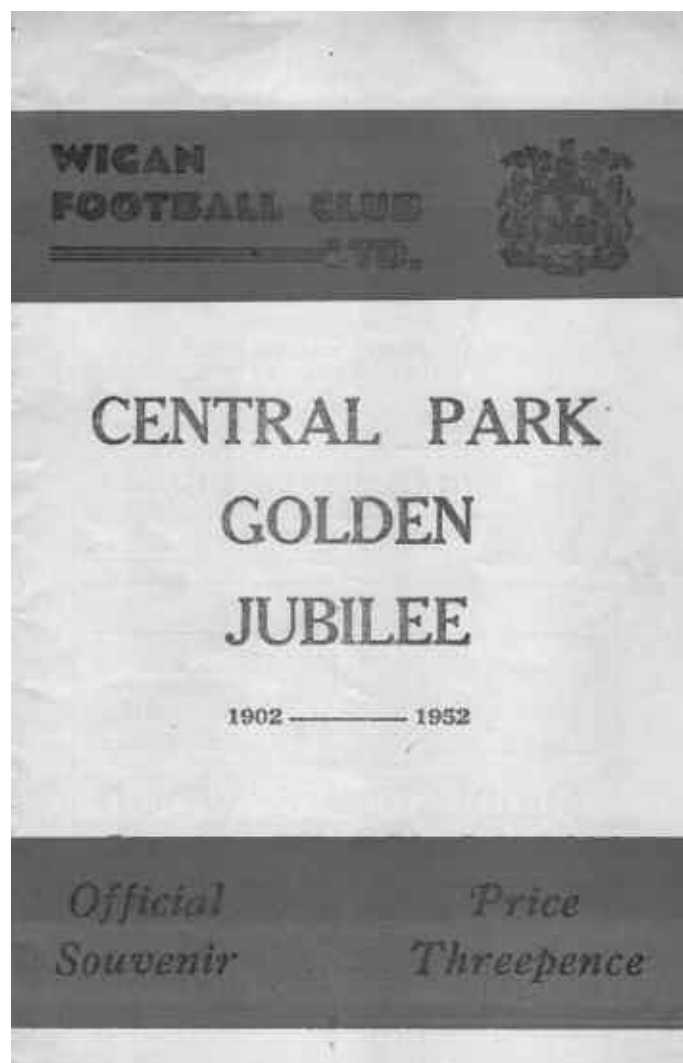
Eric Ashton was a respected player at Wigan. During his time in the role Wigan won six out of eight games, and he quickly earned respect as a coach. His first game as full-time coach was against the touring Australians on 18 November 1963, with Wigan losing narrowly by ten points to eighteen. Ashton guided Wigan through their most successful period since the Jim Sullivan glory days attaining six trophies, his first being the 1965

Challenge Cup which has been described as one of the best finals ever seen at Wembley.

By the close of the 1960s, another era had come to an end for the club with the likes of Eric Ashton, Mick Sullivan, Brian McTigue, Frank Collier, Dave Bolton, and Ray Ashby either moving to pastures new or retiring.

These departures signalled one of the worst periods in the club's history, with only two Lancashire Cup Final victories noted for the Central Park faithful to cheer. Although Wigan did reach the Challenge Cup Final on 9 May 1970, the defeat against Castleford was tainted following the infamous moment when Wigan full-back Colin Tyrer was injured in a clash with Castleford's Keith Hepworth.

Although Wigan didn't win the Challenge Cup on this occasion, the team had previously won their last eight league matches and started the 1970-71 season by winning their first twenty-three games, setting what is still a club record of thirty-one league matches without defeat and, to my



The special edition of the programme produced to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the club and Central Park

knowledge, the longest unbeaten run of league matches recorded in Rugby League.

This unbeaten run of league matches is a significant part of the club's heritage, and perhaps due to the success of the super league era, is not always bestowed with the credit it deserves. Although the playing side was experiencing hard times, the directors finally agreed to replace the old wooden Douglas Stand. Sadly, the construction work brought its own tragedy.

As the 1971-72 season came to a close, the old Douglas Stand was demolished and work commenced on the new structure. On 26 May 1972, a driver shortage had prompted serving club director, and owner of the construction company, Eric Ayles to offer his services, but as he drove a tipper lorry through a gateway, a concrete lintel was dislodged and came crashing down. The lintel landed on the lorry crushing the cab and tragically killing Mr Ayles.

Although the work on the stand at the time of Mr Ayles' death was ahead of schedule, sadly his firm collapsed and work came to an end on 28 June 1972 with just the footings in place. The New Douglas Stand, as it was named, would be the last major work seen at Central Park for some years due to several factors, but mainly due to the club's performances on the pitch.

As the performances declined so did the crowds and the club suffered financially, which meant the directors had to look for alternative options to bring in more income. The club already had a social club but concerns had been raised over how it was being run. In 1977, the social club was refurbished and reopened as the Riverside. The Riverside, under the direction of John Martin, became the town's iconic weekend venue and, due to its success, John Martin was invited onto the board of directors.

On the field, the club continued to struggle despite the team featuring such talent as George Fairbairn, Bill Ashurst, Doug Laughton, and the O'Loughlin brothers: Kevin and Kieron. This culminated with Wigan suffering the humiliation of being relegated from the First Division at the end of 1979-80.

As the darkest hour in the club's history descended, there was a need for change and this came in the form of a boardroom restructure with the number of directors being reduced from



Billy Boston

twelve to four. Maurice Lindsay led the rebirth alongside local businessmen Jack Robinson, Tom Rathbone, and former player Jack Hilton. This new boardroom shuffle would ultimately have a significant effect on the future of Wigan Rugby League Football Club.

Following a solitary season in Division Two, Wigan regained their place back in the topflight finishing second to York under player coach George Fairbairn, who had helped the club gain promotion. However, Fairbairn was relieved of his duties and sold to Hull K.R. and was subsequently replaced by Maurice Bamford.

The gang of four had the task to make the club great again and deliver trophy success, ensuring the good times returned to Central Park. Although money seemed to be readily available to achieve their objective, initially the journey to success for the new board did not run smoothly.

Bamford's reign was short-lived as Wigan finished the 1981-82 season just two places above relegation. His replacement was the controversial Alex Murphy, who many Wiganers had not forgiven in the wake of his tactics in the 1966

Challenge Cup Final. However, the four directors wanted success and they saw Murphy as the man to do it.

Major recruitment took place with leading Australians brought in to wear the famous cherry and white shirt, including Brett Kenny, Steve Ella, John Ferguson, and Greg Dowling along with New Zealand captain Graeme West.

A South African contingent of Ray Mordt, Rob Louw, and Nick Du Toit also joined the party, not to mention the big-money signings of Ellery Hanley and Joe Lydon.

Murphy brought Wigan's first piece of silverware to Central Park since 1973 in the form of the John Player Trophy, with Wigan defeating Leeds at Elland Road, home of Leeds United F.C., by fifteen points to four on 22 January 1983. The Wigan revival was underway.

The following year Murphy took the club to its first Wembley Challenge Cup final since 1970, but Wigan were comfortably beaten on the day by Widnes. In the wake of this defeat, a dispute behind the scenes saw Murphy leave Central Park. Wigan took an auspicious step and for the first time employed joint coaches in Colin Clarke and Alan McInnes. Both had worked under Murphy, and they continued the most successful period for the club since the Eric Ashton days.

Wigan returned to Wembley on 4 May 1985 and won the Challenge Cup in a game still regarded as the most memorable final ever seen at the stadium, winning twenty-eight points to twenty-four against Hull FC. Clarke and McInnes added the Charity Shield, Lancashire Cup, and the John Player Trophy before they were replaced by Graham Lowe.

Lowe brought in a different style of rugby, as well as further success with perhaps his most treasured win coming in the World Club Challenge against Manly on 7 October 1987. A game that is still vivid in the memory of those fans who were there to witness the victory.

Under Graham Lowe's coaching, Wigan re-emerged to be a major power in the British game, leading the club to their first Championship in twenty-seven years during the 1986–87 season. Ironically Lowe moved back to Australia to coach the team he had beaten in 1987, Manly Warringah.

Lowe's successor, John Monie, was appointed in September 1989. Monie was a relatively unknown

Aussie at the time but he carried on where Lowe had finished, guiding the team to four consecutive league Championship and Challenge Cup doubles, a feat no other coach has achieved in the English game.

If Graham Lowe made Wigan a major force in British Rugby League, then John Monie's achievements go well beyond that in respect of silverware in the Central Park trophy cabinet. From 1988 to 1995, Wigan won the Challenge Cup eight seasons in a row, including their 27–0 win over St Helens in 1989, the second time a team had been held scoreless in a Cup Final at Wembley by Wigan following the 10–0 defeat of Barrow in 1951. This period was Wigan's most successful to date.

As Wigan approached the 1990s, new legislation regarding safety at sporting venues led to Central Park reducing its capacity. Significant ground improvements took place with a revamp of the Douglas Stand, crush barriers being replaced, and the development of the Whitbread Stand.

John Dorahy became the coach for the 1993 season. Despite supervising Wigan through to the Challenge Cup and the Rugby Football League Championship, Dorahy was dismissed in May 1994 only days after the club's return from Wembley. In a statement by the club, Dorahy was said to have been sacked for 'gross misconduct'.

The Wigan fans then petitioned successfully for Graeme West to be appointed as coach.

In his first month as coach, at the end of the 1993–94 season, West secured the First Division Premiership Trophy against Castleford. He then travelled with the team to Brisbane, guiding them in their 1994 World Club Challenge victory over Australian premiers the Brisbane Broncos in front of a World Club Challenge record attendance of 54,220.

At the end of his first full season, he and the team won the League Championship, Challenge Cup, Regal Trophy, and Premiership - the 'Grand Slam' of all four trophies. Even though Wigan dominated the Rugby League from 1985 to 1995, it was the only season that the club achieved this feat. The following year saw a whole new era emerge with the onset of the Super League.

A STEP BACK IN TIME

By Ted Dakin



That Mon In't Park

I was born in 1931, in the 'Great Depression', when everyone wanted work but struggled to find it. Obviously, being new-born, serious matters didn't trouble me, but I was still part of it. Dad's working days were sporadic and poorly paid, and for Mam, with a brood of four, without the luxury of domestic appliances, a lack of groceries, and the worry of making cheap substantial meals, life was grim. To ease the family budget, nothing was thrown away. Children's clothing was passed down through the family brood; make-do-and-mend, pass it on, hand it down. It was never ending, and at the centre was Mam, sewing, knitting, darning, patching, cooking, and cleaning.

But the years trundled on. I remember my first day at school. After a good scrub and a polish to my shoes, Mam walked me the odd mile or so to St Joseph's Catholic school. Then going down this long narrow corridor, through a heavy door, and a teaching nun sitting me on her desk, and me kicking her in the stomach. Not a very good start. I hated that school for the rest of my learning days.

After leaving school, jobs weren't plentiful, especially for me, with a poor education and not much 'upstairs'. I walked the streets for weeks knocking on doors. Finally, I found a labouring job with the 'Wigan Corporation Water Department'.

My first job was digging three-foot-deep trenches for cast iron water mains. As time passed I became part of a workforce that was unique.

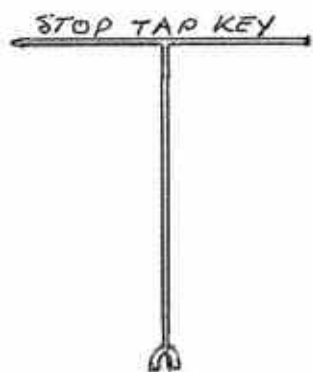
Sitting on a couple of bricks or a toolbox in front of a makeshift brazier, brewing tea and eating butties, became truly enjoyable.

After a few months I was asked to be available for call outs. Burst mains occurring after hours (weekends, Christmas and New Year) were classed as urgent and given priority.

One day my foreman asked me to go on night turn. Night turn? Unknown to me at the time, the Corporation had a team of uniformed inspectors. They read meters, rewashers taps, and attended to emergency household bursts. (None were plumbers, it was just a question of turning off the burst or flattening a lead pipe.) But the most skilful job was waste water detection; that is, detecting unseen water escaping from underground pipes into broken sewer pipes, drains and cavities. Apparently, only one inspector was proficient at this detection work. His name was Ken 'Blanny' Blan.

Nights were chosen because they provided ideal circumstances for listening purposes in order to pin-point burst pipes, all essential in keeping reservoir levels topped up. On my first night of leak detecting, Blanny taught me the skill of 'sounding' with the warning, 'You've got to have an ear for it'. Luckily, I did.





With this step up from spade work, I was promoted to inspector, which meant my daytime work – apart from re-washinging taps and attending to inside burst pipes – included investigating noisy pipes, dirty water, high meter consumptions, and closing

down mains for repair gangs. Eventually, I took over from Blanny, was promoted to supervisor status, and had the pick of colleagues for night work.

I shall never forget one particular night, 21 April 1956. I received a call from the fire brigade, asking could we be available if needed, the Wigan Hippodrome was going up in flames. They didn't need us, but it was sad to see our iconic theatre burn to the ground.

The year 1960 saw many changes. Time robbed us of the old slow, but efficient ways. Gone were the days of using plastic bus tokens and travelling by bicycle with a stop cock key tied to the crossbar. With Wigan at the centre, twelve authorities merged to become the Makerfield Water Board. RTs (radio telephones) were fitted in all vehicles. I was taught to drive, I was granted a home telephone, and we moved to a new depot at Goose Green.

New people, with new ideas, clashed with our proven ways. But not one of those newcomers had a waste detection section, so by luck and a little

hard graft, I was still employable. Eventually, though, we all came together and the change worked.

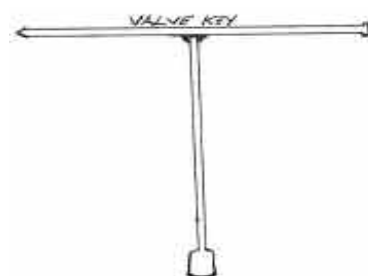
The winter of 1962-63 was a shocker. Frost went two and three feet deep. Mains popped off like fountains, frozen lead pipes cut off supplies to all properties, and we toiled robot-like, day and night. Some of the poorer areas, with outside toilets and lead pipes, were a big problem. Unable to reach the stop cock, we used metal dustbin lids as shields to reach and flatten the pipes.

But our suffering was nothing in comparison to the repair gangs. Every burst main was urgent, bringing chaos, disruption, and the challenge of working in freezing water and oozing mud. They were the heroes of that winter.

Even now, after years of retirement, that winter is unforgettable. Not being the robust type, I was always colder than the average person. In fact, 'I was colder than that mon in't park'.

But what stays with me too, is the camaraderie, friendship and the coming together of a small workforce, who banded together as a team to keep Wigan's water supplies flowing.

Ahead, though, lay further changes, but I had seen the best of something that could never be replaced, and so, after many, many years of enjoyable work, I moved out.



Information for Contributors

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

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

- Publication is at the discretion of Editorial Team
- The Editorial Team may edit your submission
- Hard copies of published and rejected submissions will be disposed of, unless you request for them to be returned

- Submissions may be held on file for publication in a future edition
- Articles must be received by the copy date if inclusion in the next issue is desired

Submission Guidelines

- Electronic submissions are preferred, although handwritten ones will be accepted
- We prefer articles to have a maximum length of 1,000 words but please contact us if you would like to submit an article of a greater length

- Include photographs or images where possible – these can be returned if requested
- Include your name and address – we will not pass on your details to anyone unless you have given us permission to do so

We aim to acknowledge receipt of all submissions.

CONTACT DETAILS:

pastforward@wigan.gov.uk or

The Editor at PAST **FORWARD**,
Museum of Wigan Life,
Library Street,
Wigan
WN1 1NU.

Painting Wigan Red

Women and Wigan's Labour Movement 1914 – 1918



Weavers' office window in 37 Darlington Street (B82.552)

In 1914 Wigan's labour movement was a loose conglomerate of trade unions affiliated to Wigan's Trades Council; a Labour Representation Committee and its affiliated members; the Wigan Labour Party, not yet the major partner; political groups not directly affiliated to these bodies; and a growing groundswell of common feeling among working class people.

Whilst, admittedly, Wigan's Labour movement was dominated by men, especially the relatively wealthy miners, the work of women, particularly members of the Wigan and District Weavers, Winders, Reelers and Beamers Association was essential in the evolution of labour politics in Wigan.

Wigan's textile workers, the majority of whom were female, formed the second largest occupational group after the miners. Like the miners they had a distinct identity forged by shared experiences and necessity. Mill workers were highly visible. Twice a day thousands of women tramped in an almost constant stream through Wigan's narrow streets to work long

hours in poor conditions for low wages, and then home again. They lived and worked in closely knit, mutually supportive communities where women, especially married women with children, turned to other women for help. They carried this camaraderie into their union.

The Weavers' political activism

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The union had been a politically active member of Wigan's Trade Council from 1893 with their then President, Helen Silcock, on the executive. At the 1902 Trade Union Congress, Helen, on the union's direction, introduced the motion that Congress vote to support women's suffrage. After its rejection she was appointed to their Parliamentary Committee.

In 1906, the Weavers, with Helen (now Fairhurst) still the union's president, and the Lancashire and Cheshire Women's Textile and Other Workers Representation Committee, of which Helen was an active member, came together to run Britain's first

Women's Suffrage Parliamentary candidate in Wigan. In the General Election of January 1910 the union supported Harry Twist as he became Wigan's first Labour MP. After his defeat in December 1910, they continually voted for his reselection until he retired in 1918, thereafter supporting John Allen Parkinson, (Wigan Labour MP 1918-1941).

From 1913, as a member union of Wigan's Trade Council, they played an active part in the unification of local labour organisations. In 1913, following a motion by Elizabeth Hart, they became affiliated to the Wigan Labour Representation Committee (LRC). As Wigan's Independent Labour Party (ILP) was a constituent member of Wigan's LRC this affiliation facilitated a close working relationship between the ILP and the union. This was helped as Helen Fairhurst, who was familiar with, but not then directly involved with the union, was Wigan ILP's vice-president then and throughout the war years.

In September 1914, the Weavers voted for the fusion of Wigan's LRC and its Trades Council. Then in 1915 they voted for the Wigan LRC to be included in the Lancashire and Cheshire Federation of Labour Parties. In this way they helped meld the Wigan-centric labour movement with regional politics.

During the war years they sent delegates, with the union's agendas, to the joint political meetings of

Wigan's LRC and Trades Council, and different delegates to Trades Council meetings. Their agendas were informed.

Gathering knowledge and making their voice heard

The union spent a considerable amount of time, effort, and money sending delegates on fact finding exercises and/or to vote for specific courses of action. Each delegate was required to report back to the committee, who then discussed the reports before disseminating information to their members, taking a poll if necessary before deciding on the next course of action.

Delegates were sent to most, if not all, the local, regional, and national Labour Party conferences, Trades Union Congresses, LRC conferences, and the United Textile Factory Workers Association conferences. The Textile Association's role was to represent and advise textile workers on political matters. As an indication of their status within the Textile Association their secretary was elected to its legislative council. In 1918 the union sent delegates to Ruskin College, the United Textile Factory Workers Association, and the National Labour Party conferences to discuss the Labour Party's proposed new constitution. And there were many more.

This required a substantial number of women willing and able to be delegates. The union's 1917 rota of delegates lists sixteen women. Of these, fourteen went to TUC conferences and fourteen to LRC and Trades Council meetings. Interestingly thirteen of the sixteen went to all three. The union paid rail and tram fares, the cost of an overnight stay, where relevant, and an allowance.

Connectivity and networks

Wigan women who wanted to be involved in labour politics and could not be members of a trade union, had an alternative. The Women's Labour League (WLL) was formed to work for the ILP in connection with the Labour party and had several branches in the Wigan district. Although not trade union based, one of their aims was to encourage and support local women as they formed trade unions. In the Wigan district, league members worked alongside Mary MacArthur's National Federation of Women Workers' organisers, Helen Fairhurst and Ada Newton, as they helped Wigan's pit brow women start their own union.



Helen Silcock, 1902

In 1910, WLL members Elizabeth Hart, Julia Walkden and Julia Smith met with the Weavers' Committee to ask for their support. The Weavers promised to promote the League among their members, and gave them practical and financial help.

Members of the League used the Weavers' Darlington Street office as their base as they organised their political activism and ran educational programmes. This was something they continued to do after 1918 when the WLL morphed into the Labour Party's Women's Section. From there they helped run the election campaign of WLL member and weaver Julia Walkden as she stood as the first woman candidate for Wigan council in 1919. The Weavers' Union also paid her expenses.

Though Julia was unsuccessful, fellow league member Martha Hogg was elected as Wigan's first working woman councillor the following year. With Wigan's ILP they had worked for Helen Fairhurst's election onto Wigan's Board of Guardians. In 1915, Helen, as WLL member and ILP vice-president, became Wigan's first female labour Guardian.

An important element in developing a strong labour community, and where the Weavers' Union had a role, was the reaching out to working people in the neighbourhoods. Many working people identified with organised Labour's efforts to work for political legislation to protect and improve employment and economic conditions. Yet, for many reasons, they were not able to play a direct role in the struggle to accomplish these aims. But they did have a role to play in the development and growth of the Labour movement.

To cater for these individuals a programme of building Labour clubs was devised. Labour clubs provided venues where working people could be part of and support the Labour movement. The clubs were funded in part by loans from trade unions. The Weavers' Association's committee member, Elizabeth Hart, a member of the Directorate of Wigan's Labour Clubs Building Company, arranged a loan from the Weavers' Association to help finance the scheme. This had positive results. At the 1914 Labour demonstration in Ashton-in-Makerfield, Newton Labour Club, Earlestown's Grant Street, and Earlestown Number 2 Labour Clubs, joined the procession.

Labour women's increasing status

In 1911, the WLL was the only, and barely visible, representative of a women's organisation at the annual Labour demonstration of 10,000 male trade

unionists in Ashton-in-Makerfield. At this and contemporary Labour demonstrations, large May Day demonstrations, and Trade and Labour demonstrations, the issues discussed by the speakers were male centric. By 1914 women's issues, particularly women's suffrage and women's trade unionism, had a higher profile, no doubt helped by women's increased involvement in suffrage and labour politics. Consequently, there was a rapid increase in the status and numbers of women's organisations taking part.

As an indicator of change, Wigan's women weavers headed the 1914 Wigan and District Trade and Labour Demonstration procession. The procession walked through Wigan's streets from the Market Square to congregate at Westwood Grounds in Ince to hear leaders of the Labour movement speak. In prime position, walking with their huge banner, preceded by a brass band and wearing white dresses, the weavers recreated an almost mirror image of the mass women's suffrage marches in London, made familiar in the press and newsreels. In this way, by linking their membership of the trade union movement, and, by extension, the Labour movement, with the fight for women's suffrage, they suggested to Wigan's women a possible route to their enfranchisement.

Anti-Conscription

Men like Harry Twist and Stephen Walsh, the Ince MP, some members of Wigan Trade Council, and Ince Labour Party agreed with the National Labour Party's resolution to support the Government's conscription policy from September 1914. Members of the Wigan Weavers' Union, following the WLL and the ILP's pacifist stance, opposed it.

In 1915, the National Registration Act, designed to quantify and identify possible military recruits and people who could be drafted into war-work, was passed. The Act required everyone between fifteen and sixty-five to register at labour exchanges. The WLL declared that 'under no circumstances had the state the right to demand compulsory service from its male citizens'; whilst the Lancashire and Cheshire Division of the Independent Labour Party published a leaflet denouncing the Act. For them, the main object of the Act was 'to introduce a system of conscription that would bring the whole male population under the control of the ruling class'.

During the anti-conscription campaign that followed the introduction of the Compulsory Military Service Bill in January 1916, Wigan Weavers sent their secretary to the National Conference which had been



Wigan Weavers lapel badge (C20.02)

called to discuss the Bill. Upon his return they drafted a letter of protest and sent it to the Prime Minister, Wigan's MP, and the press. Much of the wording of this letter echoed the ILP leaflet, but going further it expressed the fears of many in the trade union movement, namely that the Bill 'is only the thin end of the wedge towards not only military but industrial conscription'. The Prime Minister was forced to take this into account and inserted a clause in the Act that prevented industrial conscription.

Wigan Weavers and The Peace Campaign

On 3 March 1917 Russia signed a peace treaty with Germany and withdrew from the war just before their revolution of 8-12 March. Inspired by a convention held in Leeds, the ILP, the British Socialist Party, and the Fabian Society planned to establish Russian style democratic Councils of Workers and Soldiers in Britain. One of their aims was the promotion of world peace. In July 1917, the Weavers' committee voted to send supportive delegates to the Workers and Soldiers Councils' Manchester Branch conference on 11 August.

At the same time the Weavers resolved to send their secretary to the special Labour conferences planned for the 10 and 21 August in London. These conferences were called to consider the possibility of the Labour Party accepting Russia's invitation to send delegates to the International Peace Conference in Stockholm organised by international socialists.

At the conference on the 21st a ballot was taken of delegates representing two and a half million labour members. They voted by a majority of three in favour of Labour's Arthur Henderson going to Stockholm. However, the Government, press and military establishment considered the pursuit of a negotiated peace defeatist and Henderson was denied a passport. It is impossible to know for certain how the Weavers' secretary voted but given they supported many of the Independent Labour Party's anti-war policies it would seem reasonable to assume they voted in favour.

War Meeting at the Pavilion

By late 1917, with the death rate on the front proving problematic and in the face of calls for a negotiated settlement of the war, the Government began a propaganda campaign in order to justify plans to extend the upper age limit for conscription to fifty years with an option of fifty-six years. In Wigan the British Workers League, an anti-socialist group, arranged a meeting led by Stephen Walsh, Ince MP to counteract socialist objections to conscription. During the war 886,000 of the 2.5 million British men died.

References

Primary Sources:

Wigan Weavers Minute Book, 1908 - 1924 - Wigan and Leigh Archives, Leigh Town Hall

Wigan Observer, 1911 - 1920, Wigan and Leigh Archives, Leigh Town Hall

The Labour Leader - The Labour Party History Archive, Manchester



NEW WHAT'S ON GUIDE JANUARY-MARCH 2023

Look out for the latest 'What's On Wigan & Leigh guide' out in January. It includes events, activities and exhibitions for all ages from across the Council's cultural venues to kick start your new year, get involved in, and meet new people. As well as the Museum of Wigan Life, the Turnpike Gallery, and Archives: Wigan & Leigh, the new edition includes the Borough's libraries with a host of exciting opportunities, from National Storytelling Week in January/February to World Book Day in March. Look out for copies in our venues and the digital version online.

The 5th Manchester Regiment Living History Association and Museum

By Deborah Pugh

As the years pass and we get further removed from the events of the First and Second World Wars it is more important than ever that we hold on to remembrance. As all First World War veterans, and the majority of those from the Second World War, who fought for our freedom are no longer with us it is up to the current generations to carry the torch of remembrance forward. That torch is often manifested through stories and personal possessions that are passed down through families.

The 5th Battalion Manchester Regiment had its origins as far back as 1861 when it was formed as the 21st Lancashire Rifle Volunteers. The Territorial Force was established in 1908 and replaced all local volunteer and militia units. The Territorial Force was originally intended for home defence but the outbreak of the First World War changed that and most territorial units volunteered to serve overseas. Such was the case with the 5th Battalion Manchester Regiment who fought in Egypt, Gallipoli, Sinai and France. During the Second World War the 5th Battalion were part of the British Expeditionary Force and fought in the Battle of France and the evacuation from Dunkirk.

The 5th Manchester Regiment Living History Association was set up to preserve the memory of the men who served in Wigan's territorial battalion by sharing and recording their stories. The Association was created in 2018 by local military historian Dave Myers



Officers of 5th Battalion Manchester Regiment including Major (later Lt. Colonel) Henry Darlington on the right

who felt a personal connection to the 5th Battalion as his great-uncle William Myers served with them during the First World War and was killed at Gallipoli. His grandfather Edward Seddon also served with the 5th Battalion during the Second World War.

The Association is represented through a group on Facebook which brings together relatives and descendants of the men of the 5th Battalion, although anyone is welcome to join. The group has grown to become a place for members to connect with others, many of whom have a personal connection to the 5th Battalion. Hugh Darlington, for example, is the grandson of Sir Henry Darlington, commander of 1/5th Battalion from 1914 to 1919. Both Graham Taylor's grandfather, Francis Taylor, and great-uncle, George Taylor, served with the 5th Battalion

during the First World War. Francis Taylor was a company's quarter-master sergeant and received the Meritorious Service Medal. Another member, Larry McCarthy, is the great-grandson of Thomas McCarthy who received the Distinguished Conduct Medal, was a champion wrestler and future trainer of Wigan RLFC. Association secretary Deborah Pugh's grandfather, Austin Pugh, joined the 5th Battalion in June 1912 at the age of seventeen. One of five brothers to serve in the First World War, he was shot and wounded at Gallipoli.

With the Association established and wanting a more tangible way to preserve the memory of the battalion and pass on remembrance, especially to the young, Dave Myers formed the 5th Battalion Manchester Regiment Living History Museum. Starting off

by sourcing items of military history from both World Wars the museum now boasts an extensive display of wartime memorabilia.

The museum is mobile and presented by wartime British Army re-enactors. It showcases many authentic pieces from the First and Second World Wars, allowing a side by side comparison of the standard kit of the British Army soldier during both conflicts. Displays include an array of battlefield relics, British Army weapons, uniforms, and the kit a soldier would be expected to carry including webbing, ammunition, rations, mess tins, wash kit and many rare personal items such as money and photographs.

One of the museum's prized possessions is a recreation of the 5th Battalion Manchester Regiment King's Colour. This colour had its first official outing in Wigan's Remembrance Parade in November 2021 and this was the first time the colour of the 5th Battalion had been on parade since 1946. The original King's Colour from the First World War is hanging in Wigan Parish Church. It is in a very poor state and it was hoped to have had it preserved under glass, thus preventing any further deterioration and safeguarding it for future generations. Unfortunately Queen's Regulations do not allow this, although exceptions have been made with others in the past so there is still hope.

The Museum is available for display to any groups with an interest, including schools and military organisations. The exhibits on show can be tailored to your needs if space is limited.

If you would be interested in displaying the museum at your event please contact Dave Myers at d.myers5thmanchester@aol.com.



5th Battalion Manchester Regiment on parade in Wigan Market Square in 1946



Part of the displays of the 5th Manchester Regiment Living History Museum



Dave Myers of the 5th Battalion Manchester Regiment Living History Association with the King's Colour at the 2021 Remembrance service in Wigan (second from right)

Aspull and Haigh Historical Society

When: 2nd Thursday of the month

Where: Our Lady of Immaculate Conception Parish Room, Haigh Road, Aspull, WN2 1YB

Time: 2pm start

Costs: £3

Contact: Barbara Rhodes
01942 222769

Billinge History and Heritage Society

When: 2nd Tuesday of the month

Where: Chapel End Labour Club, 213 Main Street, Billinge, WN5 7PB

Time: 7pm for a 7.30pm start

Costs: Unknown

Contact: Geoff Crank 01695 624411

Bolton Historical Association

When: Monday 5 December, Monday 9 January, Monday 6 February, Monday 6 March

Where: Bolton School Girls' Division, Chorley New Road, Bolton, BL1 4PB

Time: 7.30pm

Costs: £4 per meeting, students are free

Contact: For details of lectures see <https://boltonhistoricalassociation.wordpress.com>

Culcheth Local History Group

When: 2nd Thursday of the month

Where: Culcheth Community Centre, Jackson Avenue, Culcheth, WA3 4EL

Time: 7.30pm

Costs: £3

Contact: Zoe Chaddock
01925 752276

Leigh Family History Society

When: 3rd Tuesday of the month (no meetings in August and December)

Where: Derby Rooms, Turnpike Centre, Leigh, WN7 1EB

Time: 7pm

Costs: Members – £1, non-members – £2

Contact: Mrs G. McClellan
01942 729559

Skelmersdale & Upholland Family History Society

When: 1st Tuesday of the month (no meetings in January, July and August)

Where: Upholland Methodist Church, Alma Road, Upholland, WN8 0NR

Time: 7pm for a 7.30pm start

Costs: £1

Contact: Bill Fairclough
07712766288 or Caroline Fairclough
at carolinefairclough@hotmail.com

Tyldesley Historical Society

When: Last Monday of the month

Where: St George's Primary School, Darlington Street, Tyldesley, M29 8DH

Time: 7pm for a 7.30pm start

Costs: Unknown

Contact: www.facebook.com/tyldesleyhistoricalsociety

Wigan Archaeological Society

When: 1st Wednesday of the month (no meetings in January and August)

Where: Real Crafty, 9 Upper Dicconson Street, Wigan, WN1 2AD

Time: 7.30pm

Costs: £3

Contact: www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk

Wigan Civic Trust

When: 2nd Monday of the month

Where: Deanery Church of England High School, Frog Lane, Wigan, WN1 1HQ

Time: 7.30pm

Costs: Unknown

Contact: Peter Taylor 01942 725828

Wigan Local History and Heritage Society

When: 2nd Monday of the month

Where: Real Crafty, 9 Upper Dicconson Street, Wigan, WN1 2AD

Time: 7.15pm

Costs: Membership from £10 per year

Contact: www.facebook.com/wiganhistoryandheritage

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Why not combine a visit to the Archives and Turnpike in Leigh to create an extra special experience? Or a trip to the museum in Wigan with a session in the library.



Email us at: archives@wigan.go.uk
wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk
theturnpikegallery@wigan.gov.uk

As winter draws in there's lots going on across the Council's cultural venues to get involved in and keep you busy. Here's a selection of just a few events and activities, but do keep a look out for the new January – March What's On guide, our website and social media channels for full listings.

Please note that whilst Wigan Local Studies Library will remain open, the Museum of Wigan Life will be closed from the end of November until the end of January for an exciting exhibition change-over.

EVENTS

Friday 20 January, 11.30am–12.30pm

Crime in Victorian Lancashire: The Wigan Quarter Sessions in Context

In the nineteenth century, there were many changes to criminal justice and law enforcement due to the development of the textile industry. The presentation will explore this and also take a closer look at the Quarter Sessions documents, looking at how they can be used by family and local historians.

Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, FREE, booking essential

Tickets can be booked through Eventbrite, or by phoning us on 01942 404430

Saturday 28 January, 12pm

Wigan Little Theatre presents an excerpt from Humpty Dumpty, introduced by Bill Collins

Experience the magic of pantomime with a performance of a section of Humpty Dumpty introduced by Bill Collins, who has been the author of the Wigan Little Theatre's panto productions for over thirty years. He is also a veteran panto dame and will have some funny anecdotes to tell. Oh yes he will!

Museum of Wigan Life, FREE, drop in

Saturday 4 February, 12pm

Learn to play the ukulele with The George Formby Society

To celebrate World Ukulele Day, come to the museum and learn to play the ukulele! In this fun, hands-on, family friendly session for all ages, you will learn the basics. The light-hearted, 40-minute free session will provide a beginner's introduction and instruments will be provided.

Museum of Wigan Life, FREE, booking essential - ring 01942 828128 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

HALF TERM Tuesday 21 and Thursday 23 February, 12-2pm

Half Term Chinese New Year family activities with Confucius Classroom

Join us for FREE family half-term fun celebrating Chinese New Year. Try your hand at traditional activities including paper cutting and calligraphy, and then dress up in beautiful Chinese costumes.

Museum of Wigan Life, FREE, drop in

HALF TERM Friday 24 February, 11am and 12pm

Moonsmile puppet show

Join us for two very special performances of Moonsmile, a puppet show without words set to a fantastical soundtrack. This show is perfect for families looking for an absorbing and magical day.

Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, FREE, booking essential

Tickets can be booked through Eventbrite, or by phoning us on 01942 404430

REGULAR ACTIVITIES

Soul Time

Join Manchester Camerata for Soul Time – a music and chat group for people living well with dementia and their carers and families.

For more information contact info@manchestercamerata.com

Museum of Wigan Life, Wigan

Every other Monday, 1.30pm–2.30pm,

FREE, drop in

Mindful Mondays

Join us in the Archives for mindful conservation cleaning of the rare book collection. Bring your friends, come to meet new people, or just sit and enjoy the warm welcoming space in the Archives.

Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall

Every Monday throughout January, 10.30am–12.30pm

FREE, booking essential

Tickets can be booked through Eventbrite, or by phoning us on 01942 404430

Museum Minis

Join us at the museum for a fun and relaxed session full of engaging storytelling, songs and craft activities for parents and carers with little ones. Suitable for age 0-5 years.

Museum of Wigan Life

Weekly on Wednesdays from the beginning of February, 10.30am–11.45am

£1.50 per child (includes drinks for parents/carers and children), drop in

Turnpike Tots

Turnpike Tots is our creative play session for little artists aged 0-5 years and their grownups! Visit trybooking.co.uk/BOMV to book.

The Turnpike Gallery Studio, Leigh

Weekly on Wednesdays, term-time only, 10.30am–11.30am

FREE, drop in

Make Some Noise! Exhibition tours

Our curators will guide you through our new music and entertainment exhibition from cinemas and local legends to brass bands and northern soul, with original objects and music from Wigan Casino, Jazz, Community Voice, The Lathums, The Verve, and much more.

Museum of Wigan Life, Wigan

Wednesday 8 February, Wednesday 1 March, Wednesday 3 May, 12-1pm

£2.50 including refreshments, booking essential – ring 01942 828128, or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

EXHIBITIONS

Every Community Needs a Stage

Celebrate the rich history of Our Town exploring the archive collections of local townships. Part of the permanent exhibition and display of local history in Leigh Town Hall.

Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, Tues–Sat, 10am–1pm & 1.30–4pm, FREE

Turnpike Gallery Open Exhibition

The Turnpike Gallery's OPEN exhibition showcases new contemporary artwork by professional and amateur artists living and working in Wigan Borough.

Saturday 28 January–Saturday 18 March, Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–4pm, FREE

Make Some Noise: from stage door to dance floor

From cinemas and local legends to brass bands and northern soul – this exhibition brings to life the incredible range of genres our towns have embraced and called their own. Expect to see original objects and hear music from Wigan Casino, Jazz, Community Voice, The Verve, and much more. This hands-on, interactive, family friendly exhibition has something for everyone, and memories will come flooding back. We dare you not to dance!

Museum of Wigan Life, Wigan

From Saturday 28 January, Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–4pm, FREE

Family-friendly local history exhibition open



**FREE
to visit**

**Tuesday-Saturday,
10am-1pm & 1.30pm-4pm**

✉ archives@wigan.gov.uk
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🌐 www.wigan.gov.uk/archives

