

PAST FORWARD

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Issue No. 95

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“Co-ma”

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“CLOTHING”



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Contents

4-5	James Marsden
.....	
King Street Heritage	
Action Zone	
6-7	Dr Robert Prosser White
8-9	High Riders to Rolls Royces
.....	
10-13	A Woman Stands for Ince
14-15	The Police Sergeant and the Irishman: A Death in Custody
16-17	Orrell: Our Town
18	Wigan Casino
19	A Wigan Charter
19	Lord David Alexander Edward Lindsay and Haigh Hall
20	Leigh and its own mid-war 'Red Scare'
21	Spooky Sightings: Aliens in the Wigan borough?
22	An Essay on Improper and Unhappy Marriages
23	Collections Corner
24-27	Wrightington Part One: Its History and its Hall
28-29	Moses Morris – An Atherton 'Dipper'
30-31	Past Forward: A Treasure Trove of Wigan and Wiganers
32-33	Crimes not fit to be named amongst Christians
34-35	A Brave Atherton Lass
36-37	Aunt Mabel and the Peers Family: A Generational Saga
38	What's On
39	Society News

FRONT COVER

Fashion plate from Coop and
Company Ltd (D/DY/Co/7/2/8)

Letter from the Editorial Team

Welcome to PAST Forward Issue 95.

As you may have noticed from our fabulous front cover, this issue showcases Coop & Co Ltd., a sewing factory on Dorning Street which manufactured men's clothing. Founded in 1862 by Timothy Coop, the factory was initially set up to reduce the unemployment caused by the slump in the cotton trade and continued production until 1990. Our interest in the subject has been prompted by a recent surprise visit to the Archives from Coop's great great great granddaughter – see page 23 to find out more.

Elsewhere in the issue we continue our focus on the people and businesses of King Street with fascinating articles from Jan Bannister and Jim Meehan, members of the Heritage Action Zone. We are also beginning a new series focusing on Wrightington, with a piece on the hall and its history by Dr Stephen Craig Smith and Barbara Dix.

Our Young Historian section continues to grow with work ranging from a look at a historical essay on improper and unhappy marriages, Leigh's own 'red scare', and even the possibility of aliens in the borough! If you are, or know, a budding historian who would like to contribute to future issues please do get in touch.

We hope you enjoy this edition and we will be back in the new year.

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Farewell to Rosie

In August we said goodbye and good luck to Rosie who has been a Customer Services Officer for Archives: Wigan & Leigh since summer 2020. Rosie was part of the 'Revealing Wigan Archives' project which saw the transformation of Leigh Town Hall and the Archives service over the past few years, and she was instrumental in developing and delivering the new education programme. Although new to the Wigan Borough, Rosie quickly felt at home and she forged many links with community groups, heritage bodies, and care homes. Many of you will also have seen Rosie in our local history videos on our social media accounts. Rosie has headed off to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and we will miss her greatly!



Copy deadline for Issue 96 – Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Monday 12 February 2024.

Barbara O'Neill Local History Writing Competition for Children, Young People and Adults 2024

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 1,000 words - Win £100!

1st Prize £100

2nd Prize £75

3rd Prize £50

Five Runners-Up Prizes of £25

Local History Writing Competition - Young People

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 2023 (wigan.gov.uk) to access some helpful material.

We have two categories for young people: 11-18-year-olds and under 11s. 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 Barbara O'Neill Essay Competition 2023



First prize winner from the 11-18-year-olds category



Young winners from the under 11s category 2023

Criteria

- Articles:
 - Adults – a maximum of 1000 words.
 - 11-18 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 15 January 2024**.
- 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

James Marsden

HOW JAMES MARSDEN COMES TO LIVE AND WORK IN WIGAN

BY GILL CLOUGH

People of a certain age in Wigan will be familiar with the Coops building in Dorning Street where thousands of men's outer clothes were manufactured each year. You can be forgiven for thinking that this family firm was run by the Coop family. While the first wing of the building was certainly built for Timothy Coop in 1872, its subsequent second and third wings were completed in 1889 and 1891/92 respectively after Timothy died in America in 1887.

In 1866 James Marsden (Timothy's son-in-law) became a partner in the firm, which allowed Timothy to take more leisure time for religious work and overseas travel. Over the years four generations of Marsdens were at the helm, until the 1970s when it was sold to Messrs Dunn and Co. Dunns subsequently went bankrupt in 1991, and after the building was left empty for a couple of years, it was developed by Grosvenor Housing Association for its present use.

The events that led to James Marsden becoming the boss are interesting. It began in June 1854 when James was thirteen and living with his parents (Joseph and Sarah) and two brothers in Holmfirth. It seems that Timothy Coop was in the Huddersfield area, probably to buy woollen cloth for his



James Marsden

tailoring business, 'T. Coop, Clothier and Draper' based in the Market Place, near the Fish Stones in Wigan.

James explains how he came to Wigan in a speech he gave in 1892 after laying one of the foundation stones for the Holmfirth Technical Institute. In the Huddersfield Daily Chronicle's article of Monday 18 July 1892, James is reported as saying, 'Mr Coop of Wigan, his late employer, father-in-law and partner in business, came to his father's house, and he (James) was sent for out of the mill. He (James) did not suppose he looked particularly bright, but Mr Coop who had had two Yorkshire boys before, said they were of good stock and he thought he would try another one'.

It is a mystery how Timothy Coop came to choose to visit Joseph Marsden's house, and there are no clues in Timothy Coop's Memoir edited by W. T. Moore. I know that Joseph was a spinner at Ribblesden Mill in Holmfirth, a Wesleyan and a church bell ringer of some note. Joseph and his father, Old Joe, rang in the New Year 1844-45 as part of a team of eight bellringers at Holy Trinity Chapel (now Church), with Joseph being the one calling and conducting the peels with their 6,000 changes. The whole thing took three hours and twenty-seven minutes and I wonder if the local residents got much sleep that night!

Holmfirth was recovering from a difficult period in its history at this time following the bursting of the Bilberry Reservoir during



*James Marsden and his brothers
taken in Huddersfield, c. 1860s
(Image credit: S. Priestley, Huddersfield)*



Joseph Marsden with his wife Sarah Turner (Image credit: James Bamford, Holmfirth)

the night of 5 February 1852. The water rushed down the narrow Holme valley, through the settlements of Hinchcliffe Mill, Holmfirth, and beyond towards Huddersfield. In its wake woollen mills, dye houses, businesses, shops and cottages were swept away and eighty-one people lost their lives, with many, many more losing their livelihoods.

During that February, 500 families were on the books of the relief committee. Among the dead were a Marsden family of four, relatives, but not close ones, of Joseph Marsden. All this might well explain why Joseph Marsden was willing to let Timothy Coop take his eldest son to Wigan as his apprentice, and give him the chance to learn a trade and perhaps make his fortune, which he certainly did.

It seems that at first James found life in Wigan difficult, and it would have been very different from Holmfirth, a small township in a narrow steep valley, surrounded by the wide-open spaces of the moors of West Yorkshire. In a speech reported in the Wigan Observer, he talks of wanting to return to

Holmfirth, but his involvement with the Church of Christ Chapel in Rodney Street sustained him and he decided to stay in Wigan. It must have helped when his parents and, now four, brothers, moved to Wigan sometime between 1863 and the census night of 1871. I am sure that marrying Lois, Timothy Coop's daughter, in 1864 confirmed his commitment to living and working in Wigan.

In the 1861 census, James is living with Timothy Coop at 20 King Street, Wigan and Timothy's second wife, Ellen Haigh; their two small children, Joe and Frank; as well as Timothy's daughter Lois, aged sixteen, from his first wife, Ruth Walsh. Also living there is James Alfred Dawson, twenty, an apprentice tailor and draper from Almondbury (a district near Holmfirth), and a domestic servant, Ann Shaw, from Cheshire. James Dawson and his family remained close friends with the Marsdens and many of them were present at his funeral in January 1914.

Looking at the 1861 census, Timothy's business seems to be going well because he is employing twenty-six men, eleven women, and three boys in a small factory of workshops in premises behind King Street.



Timothy Coop

James is recorded in the 1861 census as James T. Marsden, nineteen, an apprentice tailor and draper, which is the only time I have seen him recorded with 'T' in his name. This puzzled me until I discovered that he was illegitimate, though his parents did subsequently marry each other on 28 January 1844 when his mother Sarah was two months pregnant with their second child and James was two and a half years old. Did James know this? In the parish register for Holy Trinity Church, Holmfirth for his baptism on 16 January 1842, it states that James is the illegitimate son of Joseph Marsden and Sarah Turner of Hey Gap, Wooldale in Holmfirth. However, on his birth certificate James is registered as James Turner, born 16 June 1841 with the section for the name for his father blank. Oh yes the 'T' in his name on the 1861 census surely stands for Turner.

So now it is 1861 and James finishes his apprenticeship and the Lancashire cotton famine begins, and over 9,000 people in Wigan are out of work. This becomes the spur for the building of the Coops factory in Dorning Street and the introduction of sewing machines in the making of men's suits and outer clothing, and subsequently for the fortune made by Timothy Coop and his partner, James Marsden.

Sources

Holy Trinity Church Holmfirth, A Brief History by Pamela Cooksey
The Flood Came and Took Them Away by Rev Joshua Fawcett
Ancestry.co.uk
The Life of Timothy Coop, A Memoir, by W.T. Moore
Huddersfield Daily Chronicle, Monday July 18 1892
Wigan Observer and District Advertiser 21 October 1904

KING STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

'King Street – the street that was', a further update by Jan Bannister

We are now into the final stages of the four-year project. Most of the buildings and many of their occupants in the Heritage Action Zone have now been researched. There is still work to be done to finalise the information and decide what would be of most interest to the people of Wigan.

We are currently looking at several of the prominent people of the area including Doctor Robert Prosser White, builder Mr James Fairclough, and several coroners, including John Hopwood Sayer who notably held the first inquest

without a jury in August 1918 after the passing of the Juries Act which allowed coroners to dispense with juries altogether.

Wigan Local History and Heritage Society have recently been involved in the Heritage Open Days and gave a presentation to almost one hundred people at the Real Crafty in Upper Dicconson Street on 11 September 2023. Titled 'Coccium to Coal Miners', this was a virtual tour originally developed by member Jim Meehan which was expanded to include several of the

buildings from the Heritage Action Zone.

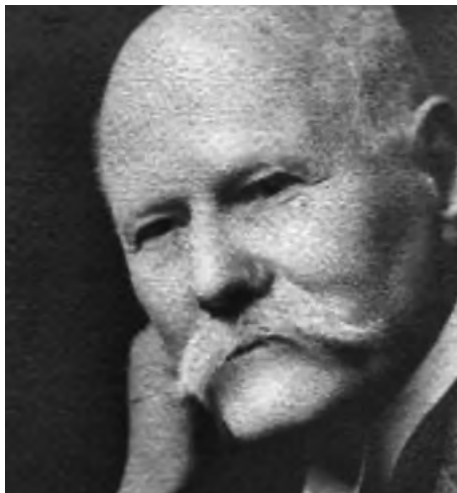
As with any project the next six months will require much reflection and evaluation of our work, what we have achieved, and how we can take this forward. We would welcome any comments and/or suggestions from readers. The King Street Regeneration Company, represented by many Wigan businesses, is actively involved with taking over the project reins from the Council. I hope to be able to bring more news of this in the New Year.

'Prosser' Dr Robert Prosser White (1855-1934) By Jan Bannister

Many of the following references are taken from The Obituary in the British Medical Journal, 13 January 1934, page 84, by W.E. Cooke, stating that 'Wigan had lost one of her most distinguished sons and the medical profession an outstanding personality'.

Robert Prosser was an eminent medical doctor who lived on King Street. He was recorded on the 1861 census as aged six and living with his father James White, also a doctor.

Dr James White, JP, was born in Minshull, Cheshire on Christmas



Dr Robert Prosser White
(Image Credit: British Society for Cutaneous Allergy, Image Restored by Doublesided: <https://doublesided.agency/>)

Day in 1823 and died in January 1897 having spent fifty years as a surgeon in Wigan. Dr White spent time as surgeon at the Dispensary and lived on King Street. In 1892 he moved to 139 Wigan Lane, on the corner with New Lodge, and much closer to Wigan Infirmary to which he moved on its opening in 1873. A commemorative plaque can be seen in St Michael's Church, Swinley, erected by his son Dr Robert Prosser White, M.D.

Robert was the only son of Dr James White, JP, and his wife Mary Hutchings Prosser. He was educated at the Royal Grammar School in Clitheroe, Edinburgh University and University College London. He graduated as a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) in 1880.

In 1885 he was elected honorary physician to Wigan Infirmary, later becoming a lifelong Vice President.

He founded the skin department and gave the first X-ray and

Finsen light apparatus to the hospital. After his retirement he was elected honorary consulting dermatologist and for many years prior to his death in 1934 he was the certifying factory surgeon for the Wigan area.

Amongst many other things he has been recognised for:

- An international reputation as a specialist in industrial diseases, especially relating to their effects on the skin.
- Ex-president of the London Dermatological Society and Factory Surgeons Association.
- Author of numerous medical works. His principal work on 'Occupational Affections of the Skin', the fourth edition published in 1915, has been translated into every European language, and there have also been several American editions.

KING STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

- He was a member of the Permanent International Committee for the Study of Industrial Diseases under the League of Nations in Geneva.

Those who knew 'Prosser', as he was affectionately welcomed by his friends, realised the amount of work embodied in every article he wrote. His knowledge of both medicine and men along with his unbounded energy and keenness left no time for the uninterested or slackers. His love of his chosen branch of medicine was almost equalled by his love of his hometown and its people.

Around 1890 he published a manual for the Church Lad's Brigade Medical Staff Corps. He also became the Medical Officer and Surgeon Colonel of the Brigade and editor of the Brigade's Medical Corps Manual, taking pains to ensure the proper training of the youth of the area. He was interested in the Wigan Mining and Technical College and founded a 'French Travelling Scholarship' allowing Wigan students to spend three months in France or another continental country to study their special interest.

His artistic temperament included a love of poetry and music which

took a practical and beneficial form. He funded the Wigan Parish Church Musical Fund to ensure an annual organ recital. In 1924 he founded the Medical Book Trust Fund at Wigan Public Library to buy books on original research, expensive textbooks, and works on ancillary services.

In his younger days he commissioned young artists to paint and make drawings of the many old buildings in order to preserve records of Wigan. He later donated a collection of forty-five paintings, etchings and drawings illustrative of Wigan and surrounding districts to Wigan Free Public Library which were placed on the walls of the central newsroom.

In 1907 he married Clarice Emma Le Rougetel from Guernsey in Chester. They had two children, the first being Robert Le Rougetel White (1908-1979) who was a Doctor of Economics and a Royal Naval Volunteer who served as a temporary acting Sub Lieutenant between 1943-45.

Their second son, James Helier White (1912-1944), died in Normandy while leading his men during the invasion on D-Day. He was a Captain in the South

Lancashire Regiment and 5th Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment and is named on the Bayeux War Cemetery Memorial in France.

After a long career in medicine, Robert died on 4 January 1934 and is buried with his father at Lower Ince Cemetery. His obituary in the British Medical Journal states 'he was of fine character. Although breezy and cheerful, and going out of his way to help the underdog, his mind was always on the ultimate good that might accrue from his work'.

With thanks to Pat and Will Sharp, leads for the 'Who Built Wigan Churches?' project; members of the Wigan Local History and Heritage Society; and Jim Meehan for his work on the King Street Heritage Action Zone project.

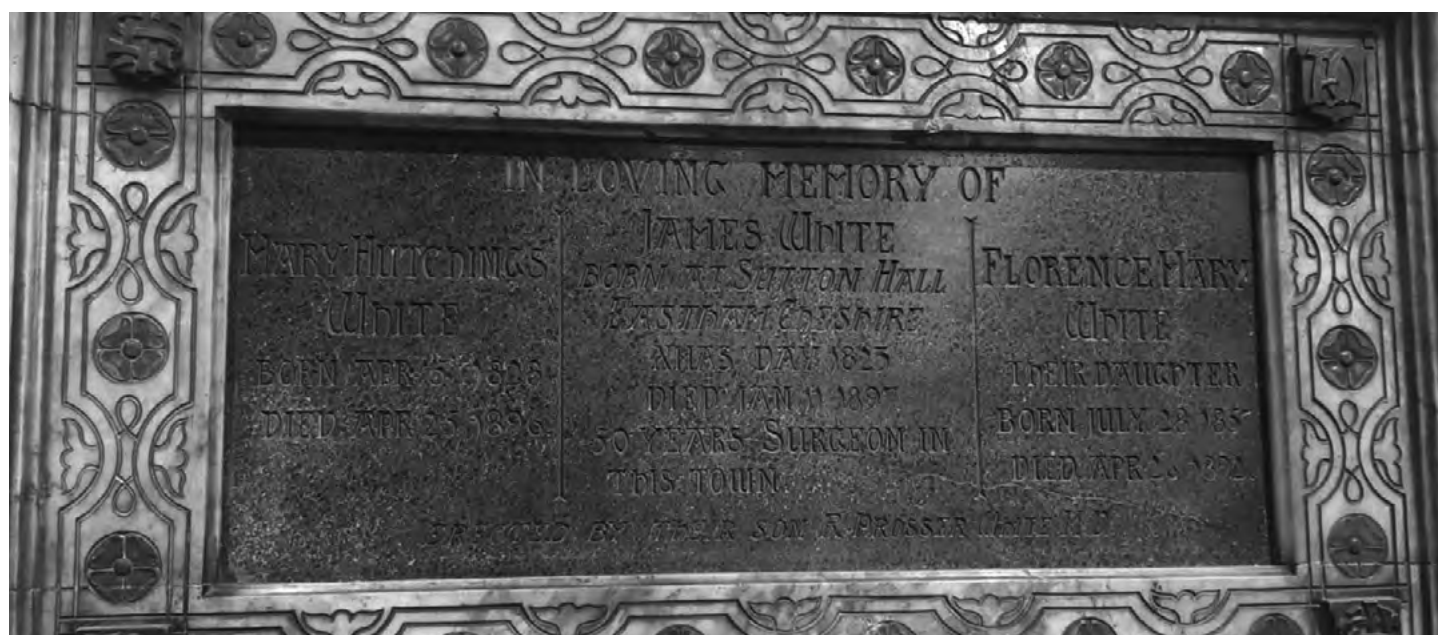
Note:

Much of the information above was taken from The Obituary in the British Medical Journal, 13 January 1934, page 84, by W.E. Cooke.

Other Sources:

www.Ancestry.co.uk

www.Findmypast.co.uk



*Commemorative plaque erected by Dr Prosser in memory of his parents, James and Mary, and his sister, Florence.
St Michael's Church, Swinley.*

HIGH RIDERS TO ROLLS ROYCES

BY JIM MEEHAN



The King Street shop front in the 1890s

For the best part of ninety years H. H. Timberlake was a household name in Wigan. It was synonymous with quality cars and motoring. The driving force (no pun intended) behind the company was Herbert Henry Timberlake, or Bert to his friends. He was born in Maidenhead in 1870 and grew up learning how to make bicycles in his father's factory. The company claimed to be the oldest bicycle factory in the world. They made high riders which became more popularly known as penny farthings. When the modern safety bicycle and pneumatic tyres were invented in the 1880s they did not move with the times and the company ran into difficulty.

This prompted Bert to move north with his Uncle William to set up a network of bicycle depots in Lancashire and Derbyshire. The late 1800s saw a 'cycling craze' as bicycles became safer and more affordable. Cycle racing was a popular spectator sport, and many

banked tracks were built around the country. Bert was an accomplished racer, moving around the country to race for several clubs. While staying in Buxton he fell in love with, and married, Florence Newbold, the guesthouse keeper's daughter. Shortly after, Bert and Florence moved to Wigan and his Uncle William moved to Southport.

H. H. Timberlake's bicycle depot in Wigan was in Victoria Buildings on King Street. Here they made and sold bicycles, tricycles, bassinettes and mailcarts. Bert and Florence settled in Park Crescent before moving to Trafalgar Road. They had a son in 1892 who was named after his father. He was H. H. or Bert junior and would be their only child.

In the 1890s William and Bert were involved in an ill-fated scheme to set up a Trotting and Athletic Company at Springfield Park. Running, cycling, and trotting tracks were built and there

was some initial success. It went bust, though, in 1901. The ground would be used briefly by Wigan Rugby League Club and later became the home of Wigan Athletic. Shortly after this failure William returned south and Bert focused on his growing business in Wigan.

It was a time of rapid change. Companies like Rover and Humber had started as bicycle manufacturers but by the early 1900s were making cars. Bert had learned from his father's mistakes and was determined to move with the times. He made the most of these rapid developments becoming the first in the town to sell motorcycles and cars. His reputation was growing, and he endeared himself to Lord Lindsay by transporting him around his constituency during the 1903 by-election.

Timberlake's needed to expand. Arcade Street and Library Street had recently been constructed. Bert commissioned



Architect's drawing of the Arcade Street Garage circa 1910

a new purpose-built garage and workshop on Arcade Street behind his King Street premises. Bolton architects Ormrod and Pomeroy designed a revolutionary two-story building. It was steel framed which removed the need for pillars. There was a lift to carry large vehicles between floors, allowing cars to be displayed in the first floor windows. They also rented cars and ran charabancs from the site.

KING STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

As the First World War started Timberlake's supported the war effort by making shell casings. They showed versatility by offering a service converting vehicles to run on town gas to overcome the petrol shortage. They also offered driving lessons to women, conscious that many men were away fighting. This helped them come through the war in good shape sparking a period of rapid growth. In the 1920s they built three new showrooms and garages on Library Street, transforming that area of the town centre.

In 1922 Ormrod Pomeroy and Foy designed a high-quality building at number 22 Library Street. From here they would sell a range of cars including Rolls Royces. Directly across the road was a depot selling parts and accessories as well as motorcycles. In the late 1920s they would construct a huge three-storey building with a two-storey glass front and, incredibly, a fully functioning garage and paint shop on the second floor. A huge lift carried vehicles to all of the floors. This building would later become Wallpaper Supplies.



A caricature of H. H. Timberlake from the Wigan Examiner 1928

In the 1920s and 1930s the company was at its peak. Bert junior had trained as an engineer at Vulcan Motors in Southport and set up home there. He and his father were involved in many motor engineering companies as directors and agents. These included the short-lived Westwood Motors; the more successful Pagefield Vehicle Company, a subsidiary of Walker Brothers; and Lea and Francis, who built iconic cars until the 1960s.

H. H. Timberlake's were now selling a range of cars including Austin, Morris, and Ford, as well as more exclusive ranges such as Standard, Triumph, and Alvis, and of course Rolls Royce. They offered everything motorists needed including driving lessons, insurance, servicing, parts, and accessories. Things you associate with modern dealerships.

The start of the Second World War would bring car sales almost to a halt. The company would switch to making shell casings once more. Bert senior did not live to see the end of the war. He died in 1944 aged seventy-three. Bert junior became the managing director and was ably supported by his mother Florence as a director. By now he had his own son Keith who also became a director and sales manager.

At the end of the war they once again showed their ability to adapt. They bought up ex-army vehicles and converted them for civilian use selling them to returning servicemen. The company continued to prosper in the fifties. Bert junior was now in his sixties and Florence had moved to Llandudno where she died in 1954 aged eighty-eight. She was laid to rest next to her husband in Christchurch, Parbold. The family were ready to hand over the reins of the company. It was sold to Hatton's of Southport in 1959 who retained the H. H. Timberlake name. Bert junior and his son Keith moved to Devon where Keith died at the age of forty-nine. His father outlived him and passed away in 1987 aged ninety-four.

In the 1960s running a modern car dealership from Library Street and Arcade Street became untenable. New expansive premises were built on Wallgate in 1968 to house the dealership, which was still known as Timberlake's. In the 1970s John



Timberlakes Library Street premises up for sale in 1970

Baldwin took over the company. He was reluctant to lose the value and reputation of the brand and the dealership became Baldwin Timberlake.

The huge premises on Library Street lay empty for four years before being bought by the Cohen Brothers to become Wallpaper Supplies, part of their chain of DIY stores. They would later sell it to the Bracek family who remain the owners today. The premises at 22 Library Street became a carpet and furniture shop before becoming an upmarket hairdresser. The premises across the road has been home to a recruitment agency and currently houses an architects.

Baldwin Timberlake became a dealership for Leyland motors. The 1970s and early eighties were a tough time for the British motor industry. In September 1983, after months of speculation, the Wigan Observer announced the closure of Baldwin Timberlake with the loss of forty-three jobs. John Baldwin blamed the recession. Roger Stott, the local MP, blamed the Thatcher Government for the collapse of the British motor industry. Whatever the reason, the closure brought to an end the town's ninety-year association with the Timberlake name.



A sign from the 1940s discovered behind panelling in Wallpaper Supplies in 2021

‘A WOMAN STANDS FOR INCE’

The General Elections in Wigan and Ince 1918, 1922 and 1923

BY YVONNE ECKERSLEY



Harry Twist JP. MP for Wigan, 1910 (PC2016.2046)

This is the third of three Past Forward articles looking at women's political activism in Wigan and Ince as they were becoming Labour towns. The first looked at women's contributions to the growth of the Labour movement in and around Wigan (Past Forward issue 92). The second looked at the work and impact of Labour women voters as they helped change the balance of power on Wigan Council (Past Forward issue 93). This article takes a look at the history of Wigan women's involvement in the women's suffrage movement and how they helped make Wigan a Labour town; and explains who the woman was who stood for Ince in 1923.

Women and the vote

.....

Between 1918 and 1923 there were six municipal and three general elections in which women voted. In municipal elections women could register to vote at twenty-one, and formed about half of the electorate. In Parliamentary elections the age at which women could vote was thirty and far fewer were eligible.

Wigan's register of Parliamentary voters for 1923 records the number of registered voters as 40,105 of which 35,829 voted. Of these 24,638 men over twenty-one voted and 13,447 women over thirty, making a gender difference of 11,191 - about a third of the voters. It was a similar picture in Ince. In 1922 there were 31,040 registered voters; 19,323 were male and 11,521 female. Given that the size of the electorate was set in 1918 these figures were, give or take a few, a constant.

The miners stable

.....

All the Labour MPs elected from 1893 to 1923 for Wigan and Ince were miners. They were drawn from a very small geographical area, were members of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation and followed similar career structures within that organisation and beyond.

In a nutshell, Sam Woods, Ince MP in 1893, began work at an Ashton-in-Makerfield colliery aged seven; Stephen Walsh started at Garswood Colliery, Ashton aged thirteen; Harry Twist worked at Cross Tetley's Mains Colliery, Bryn Gates from eleven years of age; and John Allen Parkinson started work at Cross Tetley's Bamfurlong Colliery at twelve.



John Allen Parkinson MP (PC2016.2000)

As they grew up these men became increasingly influential in building the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation and became prominent members of the representative body of local trade unions - the Wigan and District Trades and Labour Council. Walsh, Twist and Parkinson were elected miners' checkweighmen at their collieries, with John Allen Parkinson following Harry Twist at Bamfurlong. Apart from Sam Woods they served their political apprenticeships as members of local councils.

In 1895 Stephen Walsh became one of the first two working men elected on to Ashton Council. In 1905 Harry Twist became an Abram Councillor, before being joined in 1907 by John Allen Parkinson. These men were miners' agents before being selected by the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation as Parliamentary candidates for Ince and Wigan.

Stephen Walsh was first elected as MP for Ince in 1906 and was constantly returned until 1929. Harry Twist was elected for Wigan in January 1910, losing his seat in December of that year. Then, after the war, John Allen Parkinson replaced Harry Twist and became Wigan's second Labour MP and remained so until his death in 1941.

Women fighting for the vote – petitioning

.....

Wigan's women were just as politically ambitious as the men but until 1918 most of their effort was focused on getting the vote. Wigan's women's fight

for their suffrage began when the town's middle class women, disenfranchised by the 1832 Reform Act, and disappointed at not being granted the vote by the 1867 Act, organised a petition, signed by 262 women, demanding their right to vote. In 1868 this was presented to Parliament. Two years later these and other local women formed Wigan's first Women's Suffrage Society.

Wigan's women continuously agitated for the vote. They held meetings organised by the relatively small Wigan Women's Suffrage Society at which local speakers were joined by regional and national speakers from the established societies. As these attracted relatively large audiences of members and non-members, and the local press published reports of these meetings, Wigan's women became aware of the unjust, and often untruthful, reasons presented by the governments of the day to rationalise their reluctance to give them the vote.

In 1900 an effort was made to disarm the argument that working women did not want the vote. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) organised a petition to be signed by women textile workers to prove they did, and Wigan's textile women became actively engaged in collecting signatures.

For thousands of women textile workers, signing this petition may have been the first time they had been actively involved in politics. And this was the first time their opinion had been sought. Furthermore, pride that Wigan's women's opinions were seen to have national relevance was enhanced as Wigan's Weavers Association's president Helen Fairhurst (Silcock), was one of the chosen speakers at Westminster when the petition was handed to Parliament.

The NUWSS organised another petition in Wigan. In January 1910, Wigan's women were again involved in collecting signatures. This time the aim was to persuade as many Parliamentary voters as possible to sign a petition designed to prove male voters approved of women's suffrage. Significantly Wigan's Labour candidate Harry Twist allocated five minutes during each of his campaign meetings to women organisers promoting the petition. By the end of polling Wigan's women had collected 1,000 signatures.

London demonstrations

.....

In June 1908, many of Wigan's political women attended two large women's suffrage demonstrations in London. The first, on 13 June, was organised by the



Stephen Walsh, MP for Ince (PC2015.21648)

NUWSS (non-militant suffragists) and known as Suffrage Saturday. The second was organised by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) (militant suffragettes) on the 21 June and known as Suffrage Sunday.

On 13 June 1908, the NUWSS organised 10,000 women to march through London to the Albert Hall, many of whom had travelled there in special trains. Once there they marched behind bands and banners. They were organised by their occupations, political allegiances or as members of specific organisations. As Lancashire women formed a large contingent of the march I assume some of Wigan's working women marched. Perhaps Wigan's weavers marched behind the banner 'Weaving Fair and Weaving Free - England's Web of Destiny'.

We know more about the second demonstration via an article in the Wigan Observer. We know that the WSPU held a meeting attended by 2,000-3,000 people on Wigan's Market Square. They informed the women there that a special train had been arranged to take them from Wigan's L&NWR Station in Wallgate, (the fare was eleven shillings and tickets were on sale from W. Grimes and Son's Music Warehouse, the Arcade, King Street).

The women who planned to go were asked to wear white dresses with the WSPU colours. The train was to leave Wigan at 8am and arrive at Euston before 1pm. At Euston there would be a welcome party, with bands playing, and marshals to lead them with their

banners to their starting position among the 30,000 marchers. From 1pm they were to march five abreast through London to listen to speakers in Hyde Park, before returning to Wigan.

On 17 June 1911, Wigan women took part in the Women's Coronation Procession in London. There 40,000 women took part in a seven miles long procession with the aim of getting the King's support for women's suffrage. It was a co-operative effort by the militant and non-militant women's suffrage organisations. The NUWSS, including the Wigan Branch, raised money for 300 assisted train tickets for poorer women to allow them to take part in the event.

In 1913 Wigan women took part in the NUWSS' five weeklong (between the 18 June and the 26 July) Women's Pilgrimage. We know this because Mrs Ainscow of Wigan's Suffrage Society made an appeal for money in order to buy train tickets for women who could not afford the fare. The women walked from Carlisle to a rally in Hyde Park, London in support of women's suffrage. Some Wigan women may have walked all or part of the way, or simply went to cheer them on as they passed through nearby towns (the nearest were Chorley and Southport).

Women and Parliamentary elections

.....

Wigan's women were no strangers to Parliamentary elections. In 1906, the same year the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation ran the successful campaign of Stephen Walsh in Ince, Wigan's women, mainly working women, were running the campaign of Wigan Labour Councillor Thorley Smith as he stood as Britain's first women's suffrage Parliamentary candidate (Past Forward issue 71).

Twelve years later Wigan's women, now integrated within the electorate, worked to promote and vote for the person and political party they believed would improve their quality of life. And as the election results show, the majority had faith in the Labour Party's candidate to work in their best interests. John Allen Parkinson was a local working man. He had a track record of working for the benefit of his class, and as a working miner he had experienced for himself the same obstacles as they had. Therefore his claim that 'Your interests are my interests' had a ring of truth.

Throughout all of his campaigns, although he did not neglect national politics his main themes centred on

ameliorating the everyday hardships faced by working men and women in their workplaces, when suffering from poor health to improving their homes and the education of their children. At campaign meetings these themes were reiterated and extended by women who were well known for working to improve the life chances for working people. These included women like midwife, Labour councillor and chair of the Women's Labour Party, Martha Hogg, and Wigan Guardians Mrs Ashurst and Helen Fairhurst, as well as National Party leaders Arthur Henderson, Dr Marion Phillips and others.

From 1922 John Allen Parkinson gave hope to Wigan's unfranchised when he stated clearly that he stood for removing the property qualification and wanted 'Adult suffrage, [with] equal rights for men and women'.

Wigan Liberals were at a crossroads. From at least 1910 Wigan's Liberal and Labour Parties' aims were so similar they had both supported Labour's Harry Twist's candidature. However in 1918 Harry Twist stood down. Consequently the Wigan Women's Liberal Association and the Wigan Men's Liberal Association met to discuss the situation, the outcome of which was that they adopted Robert Alstead, owner of a large tailoring factory, as their candidate. He came bottom of the poll and they did not contest Wigan again. I assume many Liberals returned to voting for Labour candidates, as at the next election John Allen Parkinson was styled as the Labour-Progressive candidate by the Wigan Observer and Wigan's Liberal Party was often referred to as the party of progress.

At each election the campaigns of the Conservative candidates, R. Neville (1918), Alderman Baucher (1922), and Lord Balniel (1923), mentioned the importance of the women's vote but nothing women-specific was said, neither did they include women on their campaign platforms, instead they concentrated on national Conservative policies. From this I conclude that the women who voted for these men did so out of loyalty to the Conservative party.

In nearby Ince, Stephen Walsh, the sitting labour MP, was challenged in 1918 by William Paul, a Marxist Socialist. There was no Conservative candidate. In 1922 Walsh was opposed by the Conservative Unionist candidate, E. L. Flemming. And in 1923 he was opposed by the Conservative candidate, Rachel Parsons. Stephen Walsh maintained his seat with large majorities.



Miss Parsons (Wigan Examiner, December 1923)

Who was Rachel Parsons?

Very briefly – Rachel was a London woman from wealthy stock and educated at Cambridge University. She was a feminist, an associate of the Institute of Naval Architects – and a champion of women engineers. She helped form the Women's Engineering Society of which she was its president in 1919. This society was set up so women could get training, jobs and experience in engineering after the Restoration of War Practices Act had removed them from their wartime jobs.

On the face of it she seemed an ideal candidate to attract the votes of women in an area where engineering was important. Yet she, like Lord Balniel in Wigan, prioritised the National Conservative Party's unpopular and controversial scheme designed to reduce unemployment, rather than focus on policies that would directly affect women. The Conservative Party had called the election to get a mandate for the introduction of tariffs on imports to protect British industry. In divisions like Ince and Wigan, where most people's livelihoods depended on the continuance of free trade, the introduction of protectionism would create rather than cure the problem of unemployment. It was this misjudgement on the part of the Conservatives that paved the way for the first Labour Government a few weeks later.

Resources

Wigan Observer and the Wigan Examiner

The Women's Suffrage Collection at Manchester Archives +

A Death in Custody

The Police Sergeant and the Irishman

By John Unsworth

The old Town Hall, Leigh, 1905



As Police Sergeant Peter Caffrey walked out into the fading light of a cold October evening he may indeed have felt that a policeman's lot was not a happy one. The year was 1863 and Caffrey and a PC Clifton had been called out to a disturbance near the Town Hall on King Street, Leigh. It was around 8.20 pm and they saw a crowd of people not far from the police station, which was housed inside the Town Hall building, two of whom were 'pulling each other about'. Clifton arrested one of them and looked round to see Caffrey 'dragging someone in'.

The sergeant may have felt it necessary to deliver a short sharp shock in order to get the detained man into custody as quickly as possible. He may have recalled the recent drink fuelled attacks on police officers in the town, during one of which he himself had been called to render assistance to a fellow policeman. We can only speculate as to what Caffrey's thoughts were at the time. What we can be certain of is this - within thirty-five minutes of the arrest, a twenty-three-year-old Irishman was lying lifeless on the floor of the police station.

The inquest began the next day in the George and Dragon Inn, opposite the Town Hall, before County Coroner W. H. Rutter. It took place over a period of three separate days prompting a lot of local interest, most of it partisan. Various witnesses were called, and it was agreed that Bartholomew Stone, the deceased, in company with two men, and very much 'in liquor', had attended a funeral earlier that day.

In his drunken and boisterous promenade through the town he had, due to his condition, attracted the unwanted and mischievous attentions of a gang of 'boys'. He became very animated, chasing the youths and receiving a number of kicks and punches, not only from the hooligans, but also his companions. On at least one occasion he fell heavily to the ground. With the appearance of the two constables he went very quiet and gave no indication of resisting arrest. One of them, Caffrey, took him 'in charge', and with some brutality shunted him into the station where it became apparent that Stone was in some difficulty.

G. E. Evans, surgeon, who was called out to attend to the dying man somewhere around 8.50 pm (Stone died at 8.55 pm), asserted that it was his opinion that he had died from a ruptured liver, possibly due to a fall, and that as the abdominal cavity contained a large amount of blood, 'pints' was the word he used, death would occur not later than an hour after the injuries had been inflicted, and certainly not less than fifteen minutes. Intoxication would also contribute to the effect of a fall on the ruptured organ. Step forward PC 88 George Holmes.

Giving evidence, Holmes stated that he had witnessed the arrest and had observed the sergeant, upon reaching the Town Hall with his prisoner, get his leg in front of the man, who was not resisting, and they went down together. He then struck the man's head against the kerb, uttering the words 'blast you', before dragging him inside. In his opinion the violence used was unnecessary. He also added that the night before the inquest Caffrey had called on him at home and asked did he intend to tell the truth. Holmes replied that he did. It was then revealed that there was bad blood between the two men and the Coroner said that this would be investigated.

With the introduction of Holmes' evidence the inquiry had taken on a darker aspect. It was about to get even darker. The surgeon, Mr Evans, made a statement saying he had been misled, deliberately or not he couldn't say, into believing that Stone had expired within minutes of his arrest. He had since learned that the young man had been in custody some time before he died from his injuries. This meant that, given the time frame of a minimum of fifteen minutes after sustaining the ruptured liver before death occurred, it was possible Bartholomew Stone could have received the fatal blow during the course of his detention by Caffrey. And, while not exonerating the rowdies, it still brought the officer's actions under closer scrutiny.

Numerous witnesses then came forward, among them fellow policemen. Some said that they saw nothing untoward in the officer's conduct, but others testified that after 'legging' the deceased over, Caffrey had come down with his knee heavily on the young man at least three times. Police Constable Clifton, who had accompanied the sergeant to the disturbance, warned him, as Stone lay dying on the floor of the station, that 'kneeing was a dangerous business'. And when PC Holmes, who was present, said 'You have done for him', Caffrey replied 'Yes, the

fellow thought to turn rough on me, but I shewed him; I gave him the leg'. In conclusion, the Coroner formally committed Police Sergeant Caffrey to trial for manslaughter in Liverpool that December.

Police Sergeant Peter Caffrey, a 'humane man', according to one witness, duly appeared before the Assizes at Liverpool on 16 December and, after a trial lasting seven hours, was duly acquitted of manslaughter, the jury taking thirty minutes to deliberate. After agreeing with the foreman, who commented on the 'brutal treatment' of the deceased, the Judge then discharged the prisoner. It was a hollow victory. As a result of his actions the sergeant, a 'useful and active officer' lost his job, Bartholomew his life, and two needy parents back in Ireland lost a son and breadwinner.

We can never be entirely sure that the young Irishman's death was a result of the sergeant's rough treatment of him. Holmes, probably the most hostile of the witnesses against him, hated him from 'head to toe'. This may have tainted his evidence. It may well be that the actions of the gang of hooligans was to blame. But what should have been a routine arrest, followed by an uncomfortable night in a police cell, an appearance before the magistrates and a fine of five shillings, ended in tragedy on that fateful and fatal long-ago night when the police sergeant met the Irishman.



The George and Dragon

ORRELL – OUR TOWN

BY ELAINE AND TONY HANMER

On Friday 15 September 2023, Archives: Wigan & Leigh brought a selection of their documents, maps and books, relating to Orrell and the surrounding areas, to Greenslate Community Farm. This was a culmination of our three years research into the history of Orrell, which started during the first lockdown in 2020.

In January 2020, a new community group, Brighter Better Orrell, was born. Initially it was a litter picking group with a desire to make Orrell and its surrounding areas a cleaner and safer place to live and work. As members, we wanted the local residents to take an interest and pride in where they lived. At the start of the first lockdown, the group began looking at the history of the area and a number of Facebook posts were created asking the older members of the community about their memories and old photographs. The response was amazing and it was decided that we would hold a community Heritage Event during the National Heritage Week in the September of that year. This would be an outside event with all the social distancing rules in place.

In July 2020, when we were able to travel, we visited a small town in Shropshire called Bishop's Castle. The town had a Town Trail, with a leaflet outlining the history of various sites and buildings around the town. This gave us the idea to create our own Orrell Heritage Trail. Once home, we started our research. We walked around our area taking photographs of any interesting buildings and created a walking trail, with key areas highlighted. We then got to work on our research. Most of this was via Google, Wigan World, and books and maps that we purchased; and then in August we were able to visit Wigan Local Studies at the Museum of Wigan Life, where they had old photographs and trade directories.

We were able to gain lots of information and started producing 'Orrell Heritage' Facebook posts about the history of Orrell and the surrounding areas. These were simple, easy to follow posts that were enough to capture interest without being too complicated. The feedback was incredible. We even found out that one of the local primary schools was using the posts for their local history lessons.



Orrell Heritage Trail

For the weekend event and trail, we posted old photographs of the original buildings along the route. The event was promoted in the Local Life magazine, who had kindly helped produce the trail map, and, to our surprise, it was even advertised by the Museum of Wigan Life! Over the weekend of 19 and 20 September 2020, the beautiful weather brought people from all over Wigan, St Helens and even Liverpool. It was an overwhelming success and gained a lot of recognition for the community group!

Early in 2022, we contacted Archives: Wigan & Leigh as we were starting the planning for a second Orrell Heritage weekend. In 2020 the Archives were in the process of moving back into Leigh Town Hall after extensive renovation work so we had not been able to visit for the previous event. Our first visit to the Archives was in March 2022, when we met with a lovely member of staff called Rosie. She showed us around and explained what was possible to research. Since then, we have been regularly visiting the Archives. The amount of information, documents, maps and books we have been given access to has been overwhelming. There is so much available and we were often side-tracked as one piece of information led us to research another completely different topic. Every week Marie brought out more and more boxes of papers for us to look through. On one of our first visits Kath brought out the Orrell Tithe Map from 1838 and we spent days looking at it, recognising Orrell family names that are still around today.

In July 2022, Rosie contacted us to see if we would be interested in a pop-up exhibition in the community, with some of the Archive's collection relating to Orrell. This was the start of the planning for the 'Orrell – Our Town' event. We already had a local Heritage weekend arranged for September 2022 for which we were using lots of the information and photographs we had gathered in a relatively short time. At first we thought we could combine the two events but there were so many documents available we put this off until 2023.

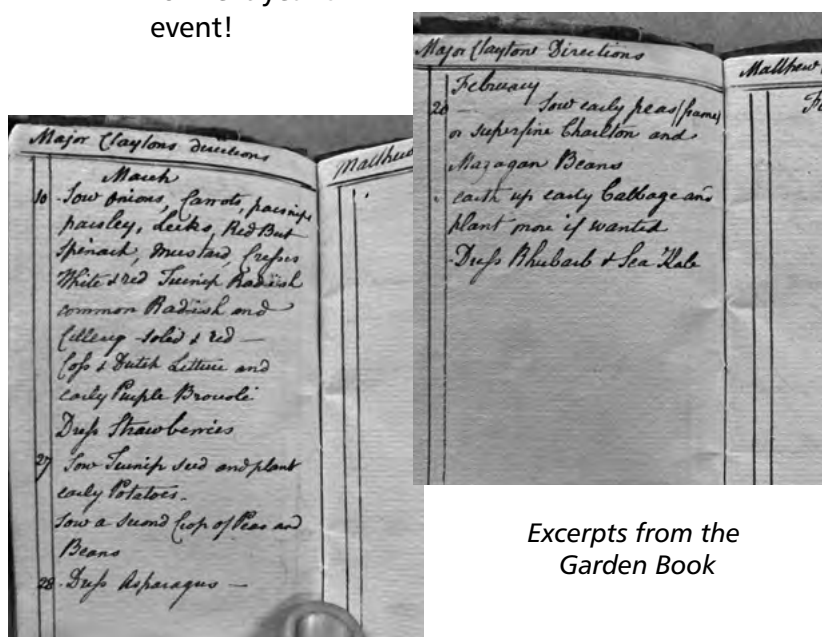
Again, the Orrell Heritage weekend, held in September 2022, was a huge success. We were able to collaborate with our local churches, who opened their doors for visitors and held various heritage activities, and schools, who celebrated the Orrell history with their pupils throughout the week. We launched the weekend with the opening of our very own local heritage board, complete with the trail map, some history relating to the 'Little Ommers', the nickname for the local nailmakers, and a QR code to download the trail guide.

Through 2023, we have again spent lots of time in the Archives, finding more and more information. The condition of many of the documents is remarkable, and the writing so clear. We were even privileged to examine Ellen Weeton's Diary, an astonishing journal of an incredible lady, who grew up in Upholland and was later a Sunday School teacher at Salem Church (now The Living Faith Church), whilst John Holgate was the minister. When we were asked to select items for the 'pop-up', it was really difficult. The list we came up with, including the Tithe Map and Ellen Weeton's Diary, was far too long and ambitious. Unfortunately, it was not possible to bring the diary but everything else was agreed upon including a

beautifully written, small brown book, titled *James Pettigrew Garden Book To Major Clayton's Directions*, which listed all the garden jobs to be done and the vegetables being grown each month.

On the day of the event, we had about seventy visitors, some staying for over two hours looking at the old documents and our own heritage posters, giving brief details of the Orrell and Billinge Higher End history using the information we have gained over the last three years. Some people recognised relatives on the photos which was quite emotional. Other people had their own anecdotes from their younger days. Others brought old documents for people to look at, or were wanting to find the history of their own houses. This highlighted how easy it is to visit the Archives and research these things with the help of the staff.

All in all, it was an enjoyable and successful day and we thank the staff at Archives: Wigan & Leigh for their enthusiasm and help throughout our 'journey' back in time. We will be back soon to start planning for next year's event!



Excerpts from the
Garden Book



The James Pettigrew Garden Book



Visitors exploring the different exhibits from the Our Town project, Orrell

50 Years on the Soul Stays Strong

Wigan Casino Anniversary Events

Throughout September and October, the Culture Team organised a series of events and exhibitions to commemorate fifty years since Wigan Casino began its now legendary Northern Soul all-nighters on 23 September 1973.

At the Museum of Wigan Life this included the display of an extremely rare copy of Frank Wilson's 'Do I Love You' record, one of only two demo copies left in existence. We also held a series of fascinating talks including Wigan Casino DJ Russ Winstanley, author Stuart Cosgrove on Soul Music and Social Change, and a panel made up of Northern Soul DJs and record collectors sharing their stories and memories from the scene.

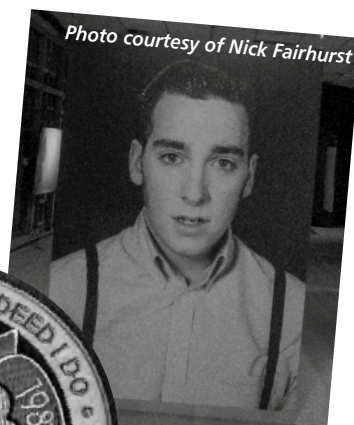
Outside of the museum, residents could view an outdoor exhibition on Standishgate featuring images from Francesco Mellina. The Liverpool based photographer was commissioned by NME to document the last all-nighter at Wigan Casino in September 1981, eight years after the club first opened its doors.

Finally, a temporary exhibition '50 years on the Soul Stays Strong' was held in Wigan Town Centre. This explored the influences of Wigan Casino on contemporary culture with contributions from artists Dean Chalkley, William Titley and students from Wigan and Leigh College.

This included 'Young Souls' by Chalkley, comprising of a series of portraits of young people who have recently fallen in love with the scene. This was shown alongside a short film bringing to life the atmosphere of going to a club on a night out. William Titley's 'Time Machine' piece comprised a deconstructed jukebox allowing residents an opportunity to explore fifty Northern Soul songs and the memories these held for people.

All these events have received fantastic feedback, with visitors commenting how this has brought back great memories and as if they had stepped back in time. One visitor, Alan Martindale, even composed a poem about his experience.

Northern Soul objects can still be seen within the 'Make Some Noise' exhibition at the Museum of Wigan Life until February 2024. You can also relive some of the related talks via the Wigan Council YouTube page.



Wigan Casino badge designed by We are Willow



A VISIT TO WIGAN ON MY BUS PASS

*Oh my god, they've nailed it!
I didn't expect to feel
Exactly how I did back then
Wigan's real deal.*

*Darkness beckons through the doors
A mystery recall
To 50 years ago today
We entered the Casino Hall.*

*Life sized photos, dancing posed
Music we adore
Wigan Casino long ago
They've even got the floor.*

*A naked juke box greets you there
And straight away you're high
On soulful classics, 60's gems
Boy how time does fly.*

*You cannot help but spill the tales
Of Northern Soul back then
You're captivated, trapped inside
A soulful music den.*



*I got my badge, I got my patch
I'm waiting for the 'tees'
The special 50 sew-on patch
My knees will be the bees.*

*I dance outside and film for fun
And Wigan ladies jest
I'm sure that Wigan folk were key
To Wigan Casino's success.*

*The feeling from the 70s
With everything 'Hey-ho!'
Returns when dancing in these shoes
23rd Sept, 50 years ago.*

BY ALAN MARTINDALE

The Young **New** Historian

In this issue, our Young Historians have been delving into the Archives to research a wide range of stories from the past – from UFO sightings to coming of age balls, we have it all! If you would like to be involved with the next issue, please get in touch. Our email is: pastforward@wigan.gov.uk

A Wigan Charter Dominic

Inside the Leigh Town Hall Archives lies the 1314 charter from from Edward II declaring that the Wigan borough would be a borough forever and giving our borough special liberties which allowed us to become the borough we are today. The document is very old and is written in Latin, but it has been preserved very well and has been able to remain in good condition. The charter is a key part of our history and is extraordinary to look at. The charter confirmed free action and movement to the burgesses which were originally granted in 1246.



Lord David Alexander Edward Lindsay and Haigh Hall By Charlotte Fern

Despite being born in Aberdeen, Scotland and living in London, Lord David Lindsay (then Lord Balcarres and later the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres) used Haigh Hall as a place to host extravagant events such as his 'Coming of Age' dinner and ball in the spring of 1893, with hundreds of guests hosted in the dining tent on the grounds over several days. Colour coded invitations were distributed in order to indicate when and where they would be required to be shown in order to be allowed entry. Although this may have caused confusion amongst guests as a further letter was distributed later to clarify the use and purpose of the coloured cards as well as instructions for using them upon entry. Distinguished guests included people of all titles including Colonels and Lieutenants who Lindsay would have known as he ranked as a 2nd Lieutenant just a year prior and would go on to rank Captain during his twenty-year career.

Later on in life, he and his wife Lady Constance Lilian Lindsay (her maiden name being Pelly) would host a grand garden party at Haigh Hall in the summer of 1911 to 'meet with Members of the Conservative Committees of the Chorley Parliamentary division', as Lord Balcarres had taken his position as an MP by this time. Clearly the impressive grounds of Haigh Hall, in the peaceful and more tranquil part of Britain, were a great place to host - away from the noise of London, and not imposing on the personal connections with their roots in Scotland: a balanced location with the size and prosperity to welcome hundreds of esteemed guests.



Leigh and its own mid-war 'Red Scare' - Kai Barclay

When you think of the 'Red Scare', your mind will instantly think of the times of Ian Fleming's James Bond and the Cold War it was representing. The last thing to come to your mind is Leigh town's library in 1940 and the controversy over a newspaper in it. But a small article in the Leigh Chronicle notes just that. Tucked away, the small article titled 'Russian Papers in the Library' is a piece that tells of the fear of communist literature at the time and the questioning of how free the press should really be.

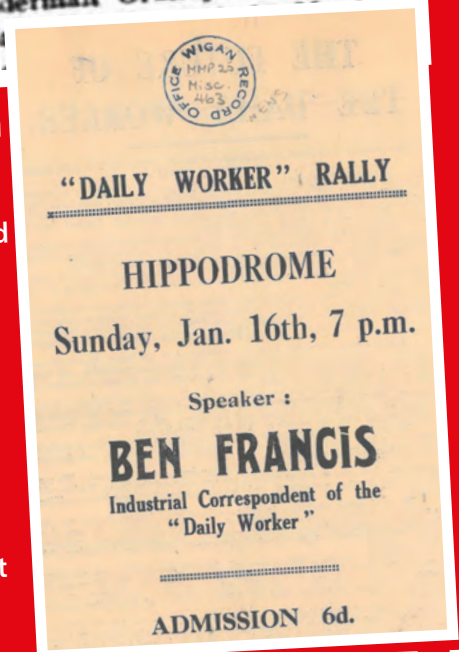
Russia was not only communist, but also a nation that did not want to join or help Britain in the war. Britain, fighting a war in France against the Germans, had concerns over socialism and communism after the rise of communism in Russia and its attempts to spread communism abroad. Leigh library at the time acquired copies of the *Daily Worker*, a newspaper printed in Britain for the working class and one with communist undertones and political rhetoric. It was this very political rhetoric that stirred up worries throughout Britain. It was this worry of political upheaval that led the discussions at the Library Committee set up to discuss Leigh Library's collection.

On one side you had councillors P. Newton and W. Blackshaw, both concerned that the very point of these newspapers was to bring on sympathy to revolution, something that no nation could afford especially at a time of war. The *Daily Worker* had cartoons that depicted capitalists as the very crux of evil and violence, while also encouraging national strikes against the war effort. These gentlemen suggested that such newspapers were both dangerous in what they promoted and the very opposite of what democratic nations should want. Why let democracy fail as it did in Weimar Germany or Tsarist Russia when you can stamp out thoughts of revolution by limiting what can be published, which could very well be dangerous to democracy?

But yet the other side of this argument was well established: should you limit freedom of speech? Is there ever a just reason, even in time of war, to limit your right to expression? And what constitutes propaganda? The *Daily Worker* was not printed in Moscow despite it being nicknamed the 'Moscow Paper'; it was the forerunner to the Morning Star paper today. Yet its sentiments are communist, or at least socialist.

This article undoubtedly showcases the questions that dominated the mind of many western groups around the fear of all things communist. My lecturer at university stated that newspapers are a rarely thought of, but integral part, of history. I didn't expect to find such a chaotic part of history in a 1940 copy of the Leigh Chronicle, one that makes you consider how lucky we are today to have the freedom of the press and political freedoms we enjoy daily all in an archive that I've only just started to explore.

RUSSIAN PAPERS IN THE LIBRARY.
Councillor P. Newton raised question of the following minute of Library Committee:—
Resolved that the resolutions of this Committee granting applications of Mr. J. Collier for permission to place copies of "Red To-day" and of the "Morning News" in the Reading Room at expense, be and they are hereby rescinded."
He said he thought that questions of that description were more or less a political question, for if there was any ground of suspicion or seditious character, the police or the Home Office could take action and they had better do so. Personally, he had been very disappointed with Russia's conduct for a long time and he hoped the Council would allow that minute to stand back for further consideration and not move that.
Councillor W. Blackshaw, in seconding, said that matter was discussed at the Library Committee, and he tried to persuade Alderman Grundy not to press the matter as it was frivolous. Alderman Grundy was present.



SPOOKY SIGHTINGS

ALIENS Fiona IN THE WIGAN BOROUGH?



Looking at the newspaper collection at Archives: Wigan & Leigh you can uncover several local reports regarding UFO sightings – so this begs the question, have aliens visited our borough? Is their intended intergalactic destination Wigan Pier, Leigh Town Hall or perhaps even the Turnpike Gallery? From looking at past articles it is evident that people have always thought that this *could* be the case – UFO sightings are indeed not a recent phenomenon.

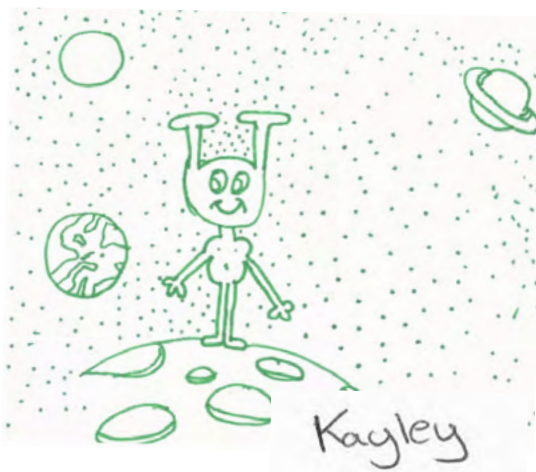
For example, on 2 November 1967, the Leigh Journal printed an article titled *Six See Hovering UFO*. Over both Tyldesley and Little Hulton there were reports of a 'glowing red oval UFO'. But make no mistake in thinking that this was a humorous article, no, the journal reports that *two independent* groups made *identical* reports to the police. The article goes on to list who made the reports and includes excerpts from the interviews with witnesses – one witness (Mr Crilly) describes himself as 'completely sceptical' of all things alien but his sighting felt so real that he was moved to make a police report.

On 9 November 1967, just a week later, the Leigh Reporter also published an article regarding UFOs - they even went as far to title it *Saucers 'invade' South Lancs* – this is perhaps a little on the nose, or it could be tapping into the fear that an alien visit could potentially be hostile. As opposed to the Journal article, this piece includes an interview from a member of the public (Brian Fishwick) who was a self-proclaimed 'keen believer' as opposed to the sceptical Mr Crilly. Mr Fishwick states that this was not his first sighting as his initial extra-terrestrial encounter happened in August of that year. Brian even provided a sketch of his sightings (see image opposite) and keeping up with this habit, we have included pictures by Jo and Kayley of what we think aliens *could* look like, seeing as no one has a real photograph of aliens/UFOs at the time of writing this article.



The news piece goes on to reference the Journal article to update the ongoing case as 'a spokesman for Jodrell Bank said they may have seen the debris of satellite-launching rockets falling back to earth' – what a truly spooky sight! It is interesting to see a mention of career here as we are inclined to trust people in positions of authority e.g., bank employees – with this in mind, do you believe that what they saw was alien activity? Were these people onto something far beyond our realm of comprehension? I can't say that I have the answer to these questions but it is interesting to think about – if aliens and UFOs by extension are real, then why wouldn't they come to our borough?

We have lots of rich history, culture, and scenic views on offer – what's stopping them!



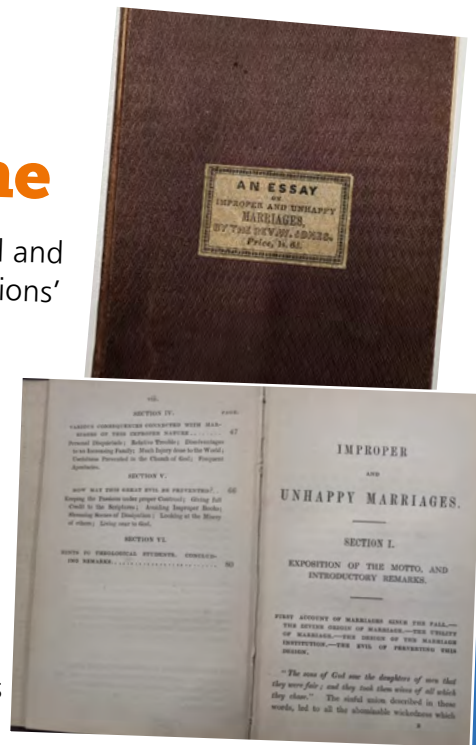
An Essay on Improper and Unhappy Marriages by the Rev. William Jones Golborne

This essay from 1842 is by a minister of a chapel in Bolton. It cost 6d and was intended to guide young people 'of various religious denominations' in forming life connections. The author, who calls himself their 'affectionate friend', wrote six sections to help them with this, ranging from the consequences of improper marriages to hints to theological students.

The section of the essay which I found most interesting was the section which states that 'novel reading has corrupted and destroyed the morals of many and ruined the happiness of the marriage connection'. This is very surprising to modern readers as the most famous novels from the 1840s such as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are actually promoted as reading materials in modern schools and colleges. Clearly, the Reverend would be incredibly shocked to hear about young adult novels from this century such as *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight*!

Additionally, the Reverend goes on to add that 'the evils resulting from reading such trash, are many and pernicious. Those who read them lose their taste, in a great measure' and that novels 'give to the youthful imagination unreal representations of domestic life'. Although this belief in the evil of novels is very outdated, it is still extremely interesting to read to understand young people's lives throughout history.

Amy



Calling all young creatives aged 15-25!



Are you looking to dive headfirst into the world of creativity, gain valuable workplace experience, and develop your arts leadership skills? Then become an Everyday Creative!

At Everyday Creatives, we're all about nurturing your artistic skills and providing a break from the academic grind, through engaging cultural and creative activities. We're building a community of like-minded people who want to get involved and get inspired and our first in-person events are kicking off very soon!

Everyday Creatives Masterclasses

Over the next few months, practitioners and professionals working in creative careers will be joining us at our Everyday Creatives Masterclasses, to share their inspiring journeys, answer YOUR questions and conduct FREE engaging workshops. We've invited a range of speakers from artists to poets, filmmakers to theatre directors so make sure to check out the link below to grab your free tickets.

Aside from our inspiring speakers, why should you join us?

- Low-fuss networking with like-minded individuals
- Free pizza to keep those creative juices flowing
- Valuable insights into a range of creative careers that could inspire your future

The events run from Thursday 9th November 2023 until Thursday 14th March 2024, in Wigan town centre. Booking is required. Head to <https://everydaywigan.eventbrite.com> to view our special guests and book your FREE tickets!

Everyday Creatives is a young person's programme produced by Everyday and supported by Wigan Council.



COLLECTIONS CORNER by Helen Kavanagh, Archivist



‘Dear Ernest, May 22nd [1945] – I can faintly recollect you wanting me to write you a letter as minutely as possible – well as you will no doubt be able to observe, I am full fitting to that task...’ So begins the letter of Standish-born Harry Davenport to his brother Lance Corporal Ernest Davenport, serving in the army. What followed made my eyes water – not because the letter contained anything particularly scandalous, but because it is written in such tiny cursive script, letters barely scraping 2mm high, that I had to strain to read a single word of it.

Through the reams of small talk (he adopted a deliberately long-winded style just to fill the page) there are glimpses of Wigan in its post-victory haze: ‘Wigan has enjoyed a brief visit from the fair... Everything is calm again after the victory celebrations – one wouldn’t know the country had gone wild for two days’ – and recollections of girls falling out of clubs to the disapproval of Aunt Hilda. As he strains for news, the writer resorts to gossiping about his friend becoming a father – ‘he got married more than nine months ago, so don’t go thinking that’.

This lovely donation is not only an impressive achievement, but also a testament to the lengths we will go to to prove our siblings wrong.

[Acc. 2023/57]

In September, we had a surprise visit from Gill Clough, the great great granddaughter of Timothy Coop. She donated a wonderful portrait of the businessman and philanthropist that once hung in the wood-panelled boardroom of Coops & Co, next to a portrait of his son-in-law, James Marsden – whom she writes about on page 4. The photos and correspondence that accompanied the portrait tell the story of subsequent generations of Coops descendants, and that of the building and business associated with his name. The publicity shots of dapper Fifties’ models in Coops’ finest offerings are particularly charming. We can’t wait to get this new accession seen.

[Acc. 2023/57; Acc. 2023/61]

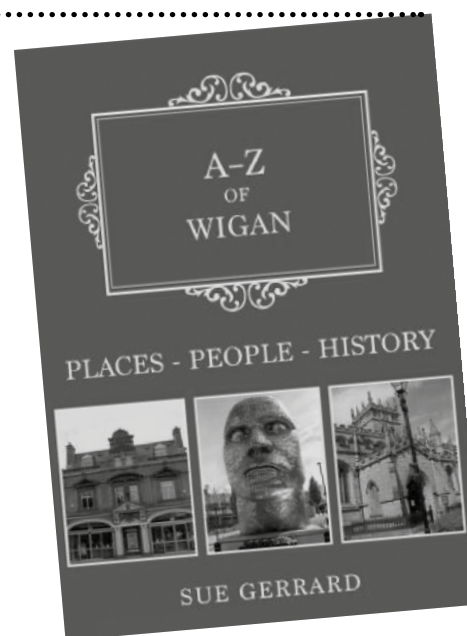


Timothy Coop

A-Z of Wigan by Sue Gerrard

This book reveals the history behind Wigan, its streets and buildings, businesses and the people connected with the town. Alongside the famous historical connections, are unusual characters, tucked away places and unique events that are less well-known. Readers will discover tales of an opera singer who captivated Hitler and spied for Britain, all-night dancing at the home of Northern Soul, and a fatal Zeppelin raid among many other fascinating facts in this A-Z tour of Wigan’s history. It is fully illustrated with photographs and will appeal to all those with an interest in this historic town.

Published 15 July 2023. Price £15.99



WRIGHTINGTON

PART ONE: ITS HISTORY AND ITS HALL

By Dr Stephen Craig Smith and Barbara Dix

A mere four miles northwest of Wigan town centre lies an area of approximately 4,000 acres of Lancashire countryside comprising a section of the winding Douglas Valley, west of Shevington and east of Parbold, and rolling hills rising to 400 feet above sea level at Harrock Hill. Even today this area is essentially a rural enclave with a current population of around 3,000. There are only two significant villages, Appley Bridge on its southern border and Wrightington village at its centre. Since the passing of the 1894 Local Government Act the area has been known as the Civil Parish of Wrightington, but this area has witnessed, and taken part in, many interesting events for almost 900 years.

Shortly after the Norman Conquest of 1066 King William ordered a detailed survey of his newly acquired land – the Domesday Survey - which was published in 1086. Lancashire is not specifically named in this survey because it was only granted county status in 1182, but fortunately the survey does cover much of what is now that part of Lancashire lying between the rivers Ribble and Mersey. This area is broadly described in the Domesday Book as consisting of woodland and mosses, with relatively few

small patches of land cleared for cultivation surrounded by many thousands of acres of waste. There were no major towns at that time and the total population comprised around 10,000 people at most. As there is no mention of Wrightington in this detailed survey one may presume that it did not exist in 1086.

Around seven years after the Norman Conquest, King William granted much of what later became South Lancashire to Roger de Poitou, who in his turn granted land to his most eminent supporters with 'baronies' for which he was paid in military service in true feudal fashion. The Grelley family was one such family granted land within the Barony of Manchester. Albert Grelley the elder, who died in 1162, gifted the 'vills' of Wrightington, Parbold, and adjacent Dalton in West Derby Hundred, to his son-in-law Orm when Orm married Albert's daughter Emma. This appears to be the earliest documented reference to Wrightington's existence. Clearly, the township of Wrightington was a well-established part of the future Lancashire landscape by around 1162 and most probably sometime before that.

Unfortunately, little is known of much of the early history of the township and its hall beyond the fact that the manor was divided among several families. Geoffrey de Wrightington was lord of at least a significant part of the manor in 1282 and the Wrightington family took their family name from the local area. According to Professor Board, Wrightington Hall is generally thought to have been built sometime around 1282, and that the Wrightington family had strong links with the township from then until 1658, a period of almost four centuries.

So, what is known about the Wrightington family? One Geoffrey de Wrightington was recorded as lord of at least part of the manor in 1282; another Geoffrey de Wrightington received further land in 1365; one John Wrightington, son of Robert Wrightington who died before 1503, left his son and heir, Thomas Wrightington, eight messuages of local land around 1544; and the Wrightington estates were estimated to be worth at least £800 per year in 1616.

By good fortune the last Wrightington owner of the Hall, Edward Wrightington (1589-1658), was sufficiently

important to have his biography recorded for posterity. His father, John Wrightington, was one of the few committed protestants on the Lancashire bench and commended as one of the most severe 'justicers'* amongst the recusants according to Sir Francis Bacon, by whom Edward Wrightington was trained in the king's causes.

By profession, Edward Wrightington was an English lawyer and politician. He matriculated at Brasenose College, Oxford in 1594, became Member of Parliament for St Mawes in 1621, and a bencher of Gray's Inn in 1637. He made little impact in the House of Commons, but may have been useful on committees, as several of his appointments concerned legal reforms. Upon retiring to his Lancashire estates, he continued his legal practice, both locally and for the 'Council in the North' at York, whose president, Viscount (formerly Sir Thomas) Wentworth, appointed Edward a judge and ensured Edward received a knighthood for his efforts in August 1640.

Edward was the last of the Wrightington family line to live in Wrightington Hall. He died on 5 October 1658. Despite his advanced age he left only a nuncupative will in which he bequeathed over £800 to his servants, £100 to each of the four parish churches closest to his home, and £700 to various cousins. Edward was a lifelong bachelor and on his death his estates passed to his nephew, Hugh Dicconson.

Hugh Dicconson (1630-1690) and his wife Agnes Kirkby

(1634-1719) were the first Dicconson family members to own and live in the Hall. In 1666 Wrightington Hall had fifteen hearths subject to hearth tax, the greatest number in any one property in the district. In respect to the earlier owner of the Hall, Hugh erected a tomb to Sir Edward Wrightington in Standish Parish Church. Hugh, like Sir Edward before him, was a staunch Anglican and lived a relatively peaceful life at the Hall until his death in 1690, but that could not be said for two of his three sons who became strong supporters of the Roman Catholic cause.

His son, William Dicconson, was implicated in a plot to overthrow the government of the day under the rule of William and Mary with a view to bringing back exiled King James II to England. Together with several other Lancashire Catholic gentlemen, William was put on trial in Manchester for treason in 1694 but was acquitted through lack of evidence. Upon acquittal, William immediately left for France to join James II in exile and became a tutor to Bonnie Prince Charlie.

His son, Roger Dicconson, continued living in Wrightington Hall and supported the 'Old Pretender' in the abortive 1715 rebellion but fortunately neither he, nor the Wrightington estate, suffered for his part in it. The Hall standing at this time was a much earlier building than the Hall standing today.

According to Gary Miller, author of *Historic Houses of Lancashire, The Douglas Valley 1300-1770*, the Hall which predated the current Hall was most likely a sixteenth century timber framed manor house significantly remodelled in the seventeenth century with the ground floor rebuilt in stone. By good fortune this earlier Hall survived demolition when replaced by a newer Hall in the early eighteenth century. The earlier Hall was retained to serve as a storage area and for servant use until its ultimate demise around 1930.

Building of the present Hall was started in the early years of the eighteenth century but it was only completed sometime around 1742. The balustraded bridge carrying the Standish to



Photograph 1
The original Wrightington Hall as it was in the early 18th century

Parbold road over the adjacent ornamental lakes – locally known as the 'Fish Ponds' - was completed in 1778. This was the period when surrounding ornamental grounds and water features were considered as important as the design of the house itself. Thomas Eccleston, nephew of Edward Dicconson, inherited the Hall in 1784 and his son Charles in turn inherited the Hall, also adopting the family name of Dicconson in 1810.

The next family member to inherit the Hall was Charles' sister Elizabeth, widow of Captain Edward Clifton. Elizabeth funded the cost of altering and restoring some of the Hall in the early 1860s which involved the building of an impressive front door entrance porch on the western facade, partial gutting and renewing of some of the interior of the house, and adding a servants' wing on the northern side. Some of this restoration work can be seen in photograph 2.

The next owner, Thomas Clifton Dicconson, was born in London in 1820 and was the son of Edward Cuthbert Clifton and wife Margaret, nee Eccleston. In the 1861 census Thomas was described as Head of

Household of Wrightington Hall, unmarried, and supported by six servants. When Thomas died on 4 January 1881, he left an estate worth approximately £140,000.

Thomas was followed by his younger brother William Charles Clifton Dicconson, who was born sometime around 1821. He lived in Wrightington Hall following the death of his older brother in 1881 until his own death in December 1889. William left an estate worth approximately £31,000.

Third son Charles Clifton Dicconson went to live in the Hall on the death of his brother William in 1889 but little information can be found about him.

The next owner entitled to call Wrightington Hall 'home' was the Honourable Robert Joseph Gerard (1857-1918), nephew of the previous hall owner, Charles Clifton Dicconson, and on inheriting the Hall Robert also added Dicconson to his Gerard family name.

Robert was born on 8 August 1857, the son of Robert Tolver Gerard, 1st Baron Gerard, and Harriet Gerard, Baroness Gerard of Bryn. Robert married Eleanor Sarah Banks on 19 April

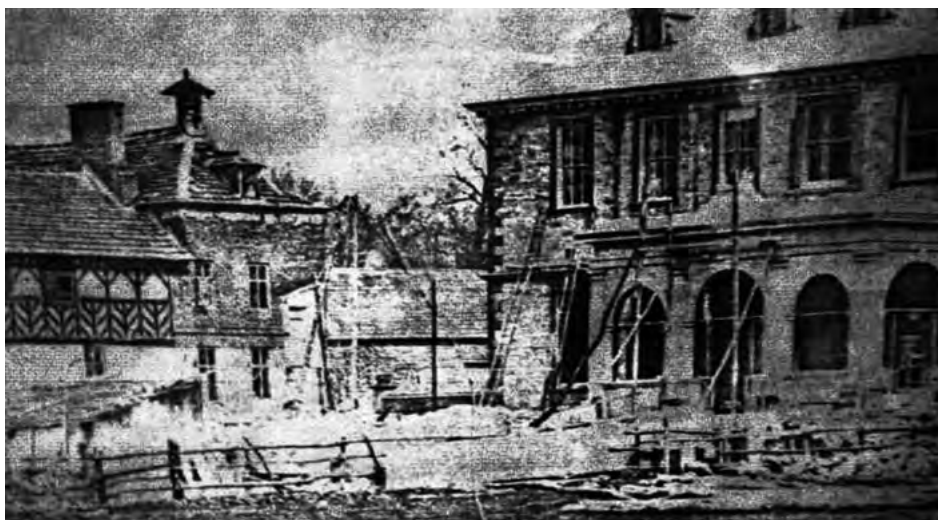
1888 and gained the rank of Captain in the service of the 3rd Battalion of the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment.

According to village folklore 'Bobby', as he was known by Appley Bridge locals, did not gain the respect granted to previous hall owners. He was considered a spendthrift and was fanatically addicted to blood sports. He had kennels in the hall grounds and kennels on the home farm, the former kennels focusing on the breeding of hounds. He spent much of his time hunting foxes and stags within the Hall estate which abounded with deer and game of every kind.

The last person to call Wrightington Hall 'home' was Captain Charles Robert Tolver Michael Gerard D.S.O. (1894-1971), the son of Robert Tolver Gerard, although for how long he was associated with the Hall is uncertain. The 1924 edition of Kelly's Directory of Lancashire states the following: 'Wrightington Hall, the seat of Capt. Charles Robert Tolver Michael Gerard D.S.O. is situated in a fine park stocked with deer and has a Roman Catholic chapel dedicated to St. Joseph. Capt. Charles Robert Tolver Michael Gerard is lord of the manor and chief landowner'. This clearly suggests that he was living in the Hall at least until 1924.

So much for the owners – what about the Hall itself?

Although the replacement Hall, constructed during the first half of the eighteenth century, underwent various additions and repair, it changed relatively little over its first 150 years of existence. The Hall, with its front porch and northern



*Photograph 2 Building alterations during the mid-19th century
(image source: www.wiganworld.co.uk)*

servants' wing, can be seen in photograph 3.

The Wrightington Hall of today, constructed sometime around the 1740s and altered sometime around 1860, was built in a half H-plan from squared sandstone with ashlar dressings and hipped slate roof. It is a plain two-storied classic building with the front facing east and slightly projecting ends with hipped roofs. The building is of stone with wood cornice and green slated roofs, but the original barred windows have given place to modern plate glass.

On the first floor a long gallery runs the full length of the building from north to south lit by windows at each end and a bay on the east side. Wrightington Hall is said to have been the first house north of the Trent to have sash windows, but this probably refers to a former building, part of which remains on the north-west side of the main block at right angles with the west front. It was probably erected in the seventeenth century but seems to have been partially rebuilt since in stone.

Its north elevation retains in its upper part the original half-timber work, with four attic gables and curved and diagonal bracings, with a plaster cove marking each floor line. The



Photograph 3 Wrightington Hall late 19th century
(image source: www.wiganworld.co.uk)

ground storey has been refaced in stone and has sash windows. The interior of this older wing retains much of its original oak panelling and has two rooms with fireplaces.

On the north side of the Hall, at the east end of the older wing, is a former private chapel, which although no longer used and curtailed in size, still retains its classic altarpiece with Ionic columns and twisted altar rails. The altar is at the north end under a plain semicircular arch.

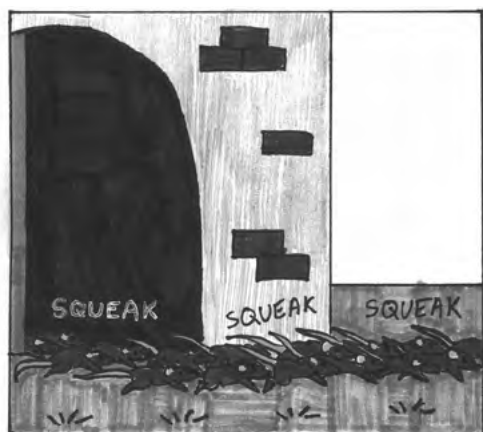
A door between the old wing and the servants' quarters is the original seventeenth century door of heavy oak and studded nails. The new north wing was further added to, and new

offices built more recently. To the north-east of the house are the eighteenth-century stables and riding school.

Following the death of Robert Joseph Gerard Dicconson, who died on 16 September 1918 at the age of sixty-one, it would appear from the Kelly's Lancashire Directory of 1924, that his oldest son, Capt. Charles Robert Tolver Michael Gerard D.S.O. (1894-1971), then became lord of the manor and chief landowner in the district. The Hall and its surrounding grounds were then sold for use as a hospital - but that is another story!

*(*An old medieval term for a Justice of the Peace.)*

Past Times *by Chris Murphy*



MOSES MORRIS

AN ATHERTON 'DIPPER'

BY BRIAN JOYCE



*Moses Morris and his wife Rachel at the time of their Golden Wedding in 1902
(Leigh Journal)*

Moses Morris, who started his working life as a seven-year-old underground mine worker assisting his brother and father, and ended it as the owner of Swan Lane Colliery in Hindley Green, had two consistent strands to his life. The first was a life-long connection to mining. The second was an unswerving loyalty to the Baptist cause.

As an adult, Morris was fond of telling an anecdote from his childhood. At the time of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838, the local Church of England schools gave a bun to each of their pupils. The seven-year-old Moses, determined not to miss this treat, temporarily abandoned his Baptist Sunday School and attended the Anglican one. According to Morris he was spotted as an outsider and one of the children exclaimed: "'Don't give him a bun – he's a Baptist! He doesn't feight for t' Queen". I said, "Who doesn't?" and I started purring away at one of them. Someone said, "Give him a whole

bun; he'll feight for t' Queen", and so I got one'.

Morris, together with a friend, was baptised at the age of eighteen. Again, he reflected on the difficulties encountered by Baptists, or 'dippers' as they were nicknamed, in the early years. In 1903, when a new chapel was opened in Dan Lane (today's Tyldesley Road), Morris remembered: 'Me and my friend Mr Yates were two of the first to be baptised in this neighbourhood, and I assure you if I had to tell you all we had to go through, you would hardly believe it. We were stoned, we were sodded, we were pelted with things, but we learned to love our enemies... In those days we had to pull eawr coats off and feight and then we had to love our enemies and come here and pray for them. It was no small task that we had. I was deawn t' pit when a chap said: "Dippers don't feight." "Don't they?" I said and I geet him on my back and chucked him'.

In 1907, the Reverend Ivor James described the problems of Moses Morris' generation of Baptists rather more prosaically: 'It is much easier being a Baptist today in Atherton than it was in the early years... We are indeed indebted to them. Sixty or seventy years ago, Baptists were few. They had no social status. They were even despised. Baptists have always been misunderstood and misunderstanding is generally bitter and spiteful'.

Despite these early difficulties, the Atherton Baptists flourished. Their numbers eventually outgrew their original cottage meeting places, so having leased a site in Dan Lane from Lord Lilford, they built a small chapel. This in turn proved to be inadequate, so in 1842 it was demolished and the so-called Hephzibah Chapel was built on the site. The youthful Moses Morris apparently helped excavate its outdoor baptistry in an adjoining clay pit.

The Baptist cause was boosted in 1868 when Morris' employer Abraham Burrows, the chairman of both Fletcher and Burrows Collieries and the Howe Bridge Spinning Company, became a full member of the church. This brought prestige and much-needed patronage to the denomination.

Both Moses Morris and Abraham Burrows had been Sunday School teachers in the Baptist Chapel at Dangerous Corner on Leigh's boundary with Hindley Green. When the stone laying ceremony for a new building was held in 1890, Burrows conducted the service and Morris, as

one of the most long-serving local Baptists, laid a stone. He fulfilled the same function in 1902, when the old Hephzibah Chapel in Dan Lane was replaced with a new and larger building. As the Reverend Ivor James observed at the time of Morris's death in 1907: 'He was no mere ornament of the church but one of its active spirits'.

The Baptist Sunday School had provided the only formal education Morris underwent. From the age of seven, he worked underground from 5.00am to 5.00pm at Gib Field Colliery, helping his nine-year-old brother Aaron, who was a drawer for their father. Aaron's work involved dragging wooden boxes full of coal hewn by Morris Senior along the galleries by a belt or chain attached to his body. On reaching the main road, the boxes were lifted onto trucks, transported to the vertical shaft and hoisted by chain to the surface. For assisting Aaron, the young Moses was paid between a shilling and one and sixpence a week, a useful contribution to the family budget. His mother and at least five other siblings also worked at Gib Field. At eighteen, Moses, still assisting his brother Aaron, graduated to hewing coal.

In his early twenties, the young miner married Rachel Smith of Astley. The couple went on to have at least six children, five sons and a daughter. Despite her demanding parental responsibilities, Rachel appears to have had a life of her own. The census of 1871 reveals that the family was living in Market Street in Atherton where Rachel kept a china shop.

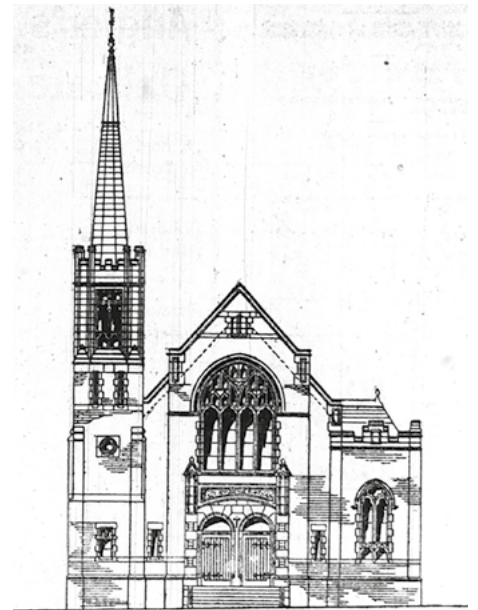
Meanwhile, Morris' career progressed steadily. As time wore on, he became an assistant manager at Lover's Lane, Crombouke, and Chanters pits. Following an explosion at Lover's Lane in March 1872, Moses and Herbert Fletcher, the consulting engineer to Messrs Fletcher, descended to search for casualties. One cannot imagine the

grievous shock suffered by Morris when he stumbled upon the remains of his son Thomas, an apprentice surveyor at Lover's Lane. Presumably, Morris' religious faith and the support of Atherton's Baptist community helped him to eventually recover from this tragedy.

In 1877, after forty years at Atherton Collieries, Moses moved on to manage Swan Lane Colliery at Hindley Green. When Edward Johnson, its owner, ran into financial difficulties in 1893, Moses purchased Swan Lane. The colliery's new owner played a full part in the community, serving on the Hindley Local Board and later the newly-formed Hindley District Council.

Moses Morris moved to Blackpool in his old age, and at the time of his death in 1907, was living at Osborne Road, a short walk from the Promenade and South Pier. However, at the stone laying ceremony for the new Baptist Church in Dan Lane Atherton in 1902, he had claimed, 'I am a poor collier, and shall have to go down the mine on Monday'.

This was not as disingenuous as it sounds. After he had died, the Leigh Journal reported that Morris had travelled from his Blackpool home to Swan Lane every working day. 'Thus it was that a few years ago, the people of Hindley Green were familiar with the spectacle of



*The newly erected Baptist church in Dan Lane, Atherton, 1902
(Leigh Journal)*

a septuagenarian colliery proprietor changing his suit of conventional black on the pit brow for that of the ordinary toiler below ground, pit shirt and clogs included, and descending the mine in order to follow the everyday occupation of a metalman or road maker'.

Moses Morris was a Baptist and a miner until the last. He had claimed at his Golden Wedding celebration in 1902 that if he had the chance of starting his life again: 'I would still have the same mother, start in life as a collier, choose the same wife and select the same chapel. None of those things would I part with or change'.



Atherton Baptist Chapel

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 listing our collections. They are always coming across interesting items and stories, so this is the space where they can share their discoveries.

PAST FORWARD: A TREASURE TROVE OF WIGAN AND WIGANERS

By Marianne Howell

Past Forward has been published since summer 1991 and has evolved from a 'newsletter' into what must be one of the best local studies and archives magazines produced by any local authority.

I have begun to compile a new, searchable index to all the issues, although it will be some time before it will be publicly available. I have been impressed by the very wide range of subjects covered, and the intriguing nuggets of information contained within.

From the beginning, the cover of each edition contained an arresting image. Number one showed a 'keawring' or squatting miner in 1891. How fitting that the first photo appearing in Past Forward was that of a miner, thus bearing witness to the long, proud history of the Wigan coalfield and the thousands of men, women and children who toiled over decades to power the national economy, often for very little reward and in harsh – and sometimes lethal – conditions.

Issue one was a slim eight pages, compiled by staff members. In introducing the publication the (anonymous) editor wrote, 'Past Forward is designed to promote 'heritage' in and around Metropolitan Wigan....What is heritage? Heritage is many things to many people; basically, although certainly closely connected with history, it is more than history – heritage is what actually remains of our past'.

As more and more issues were published, the number of contributions from members of the



The first edition

public increased, alongside news from staff about events and acquisitions. Many editions showed photographs on the back cover, asking for help in identifying people and places. Past Forward has a readership not only in Wigan and the rest of the country, but in many other countries where people have connections with the town.

Amongst the most interesting items are the recollections of Wiganers about their childhood and school days, sometimes from many decades previously. It seems that some people, in their mind's eye, can walk along streets as they were in the past, and remember shops and shop-keepers with accuracy and fondness. There are a great many articles about sport - especially rugby, of course! Numerous articles describe the lives, and sometimes the brave deaths, of

people who served in conflicts from the Boer War onwards. These are especially important as their stories fade from living memory.

I have picked out some interesting features in the following issues:

People with Wigan connections

- 'A chat with Miss Lily Brayton', an actress who appeared on the London stage (issue 9, p7)
- 'Philip Larkin: the Leigh connection' (issue 15, p9)
- 'Leigh – did you know' regarding Arthur Rostron – Captain of the Carpathia which came to the rescue of the Titanic passengers and crew (issue 19, p4)
- 'Mary Tomlinson: an inspiring pit brow lass who became a missionary doctor' (Sheila Ramsdale, issue 84, p17)
- George Orwell. Articles about him appear in many editions (e.g., issue 22, p26) because of *The road to Wigan Pier* and the controversy about his views of Wigan and Wiganers. A section of the first floor of the Museum of Wigan Life is devoted to Orwell.

Places and communities

- 'A community called Bottling Wood' (R D Heavyside, issue 7, p6)
- 'Village life in Abram 1902-1911' (Mary Sayers, issue 35, p13)
- 'Garswood – The old village' (Frank Cunliffe, issue 36, p34)

- 'The origins of Makerfield' (Bob Blakeman, issue 54, p8)
- 'Wigan's lost Jewish heritage' (Richard W Jackson, issue 59, p6)
- 'Black families in Victorian Leigh and Tyldesley' (Brian Joyce, issue 79, p4)

Sports

- 'Wigan at play in days gone by' regarding greyhound racing (issue 2, p10)
- 'The lovely ladies of Coop's swimming club' (Tom Heaton, issue 28, p35)
- 'Joseph Bates – British speed skating champion' (issue 41, p7)

Disasters

- 'The Atherton Mill disaster' – when six (named) women were killed (issue 10, p7)
- 'The Maypole Colliery disaster' (Chris Watts, issue 49, p18).

Poems

- 'What is a tackler?' (issue 10, p17)
- 'The lamplighter's pole' (Elene Humphries, issue 25, p13)
- 'The ballad of Billinge Hill' (J Harold Smith, issue 38, p30)
- 'Wigan' – written on the Somme, May 1918, by Donald Mackenzie (issue 40, p36)

Intriguing titles which invite the reader to find out more

- 'Dr George Henry Evans and his pyrotechnic time signal' (issue 9, p3)
- 'New Jersey tombstone which leads to link with Wigan windmill' (David Lamb, issue 12, p6)
- 'I amused the children this dinnertime by parading on the velocipede' (Adrian Morris, issue 12, p7)
- 'Stickability on a fiddle' (Austin Lyons, issue 48, p16)
- 'The snake grave of Billinge: George and Kitty Smith' (Charlie Guy, issue 84, p24)

Traditions

- 'Come welcome the New Year with anthems of joy' - Roby Mill carollers who sang around the neighbourhood on New Year's Eve (Peter Bearon, issue 20, p11)
- 'Whit Monday' (Tom Walsh, issue 63, p28)

Members of Parliament

- 'The illustrious 'Little' Steve - Stephen Walsh MP for Ince (James Fairhurst, issue 21, p5)
- 'Jane Austen and a Wigan M.P.' – Robert Holt Leigh (Bob Blakeman, issue 49, p24)

Industry and trades

- 'The rise and fall of the 'Westwood' – a make of car built in Wigan between 1919 and 1924 (Michael Worthington-Williams, issue 33, p12)
- 'Travelling dentists: Moseley, Gabriel and Eskell' (Hilary Thomas, issue 66, p6)
- First launderette in the borough (issue 23, p21)

Whilst indexing Past Forward I came across two articles which happened to be relevant to my house in Earl Street, Swinley.

One of the documents which came with the purchase is an indenture dated 1925 which mentions that Frank Mittelberger, confectioner, undertook to buy the house. He is mentioned by J. H. Smith (issue 16, p8), who was recalling the shops down one side of Standishgate near Woolworths and Marks & Spencer and remembers Mittelbergers as 'high class confectioners'.

The vendor of the house was John Counsell, a director and chairman of Wigan Rugby League Club. Past Forward 32, p15 contains an article by Allan Millar about Counsell's diary.

John was a director and chairman of Wigan Rugby League Football Club and a significant Rugby Football

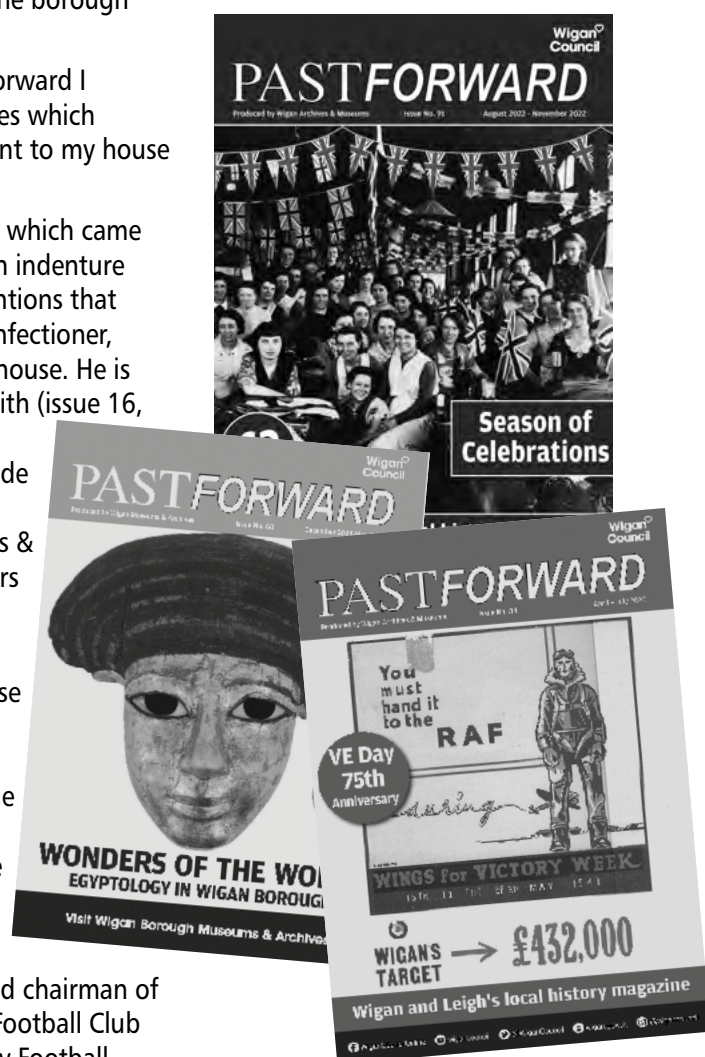
legislator for many years. Between 1898 and 1938 he kept a diary with 'meticulous care'. They provide many intriguing insights into the history of Wigan and Rugby League's history in general. There are many examples, here is one of the more 'light hearted' ones...

27 March 1908: 'Made sandwiches at home for Wigan team travelling to London.'

So it is possible that John Counsell wrote his diary in the very room I am sitting in now, writing about him!

Nearly every past copy* is available in the first-floor research facility in the Museum of Wigan Life and also at Archives: Wigan & Leigh', and each new edition is available to buy. While you are there, you can discover all the other riches of the collection, or visit Leigh Town Hall to see the exhibition or explore the archives there.

**Do you have a copy of number 3 which you could donate to the collection?*



Crimes not fit to be named amongst Christians

The historian, H. G. Cocks, noted 'It is certainly the case that more men were executed and imprisoned for sodomy and other homosexual offences in the early nineteenth century than in any previous era of English history'⁽ⁱ⁾ and this fact is resonated in Wigan's own queer history.

In 1806, following the raid on the house of Isaac Hitchin at Great Sankey, near Warrington, a socially mixed group of twenty-four men (ranging from seventeen to eighty-four years of age) were arrested, but only nine men were prosecuted. Five of the men arrested and tried at the Lancaster Assize were hanged later that same year.

As the investigating magistrates, Richard Gwillyn and John Borron⁽ⁱⁱ⁾, zealously continued their enquiries as to who else had frequented Hitchin's house by interrogating those whom they had arrested, many more men were implicated. One of the accused, Thomas Rix, provided testimony regarding places in Liverpool and in Manchester where men could meet other men for sexual contact. He also gave information regarding those

from higher social classes, whom he alleged were practising sodomites.

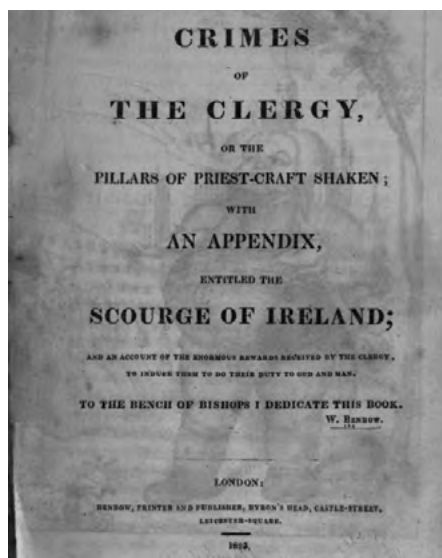
As information about the case spread like wildfire, so did rumour and speculation as to who else was involved. The local gentry and clergy were suspected. In a private letter written on 20 September 1806 by Borron to Earl Spencer, who was, then, Secretary of State at the Home Office, various names were cited. Those named, who were never publicly accused, included Meyrick Bankes of Winstanley, (who had been Sherriif of Cheshire in 1805), and various local South Lancashire MPs and clergymen, including the Reverend Ireland Blackburne and the Reverend Geoffrey Hornby, the rector of Winwick.

Subsequently, many men were arrested on suspicion of being sodomites in Manchester and Liverpool, and investigations led to the arrest of a man from Wigan named Thomas Bolton. Little is known at present about the circumstances of Bolton's arrest. However, such was the widespread interest in the crimes uncovered in Lancashire, that his conviction for

'unnatural practices' and for an 'attempt to commit an unnatural crime at Wigan' were recorded in both the Hereford Journal (8 April 1807) and the Lancaster Gazette (8 August 1807). In April 1807, Bolton was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and ordered to stand on the pillory; the Gazette records that Bolton was placed in the pillory in the market place in Lancaster on Saturday 1 August 1807.

The active search for local sodomites seems to have palled after Bolton's trial, but nationally further cases of alleged sodomitic activities continued apace. In 1810 in London, following a raid by the authorities on the White Swan molly house in Vere Street, several men were convicted of a variety of same-sex activities; two men were hanged and six placed on the pillory. Speculation intensified after the men were tried, as to who else had frequented the White Swan for sex with other men. Eventually, in 1813, accusations were made against a dissenting minister, John Church. Lurid pamphlets, counter-pamphlets and newspaper reports were circulated accusing Church of ministering to the

Six of the unfortunate men, sentenced to die, at our last Assizes, were on Saturday last executed on the drop, at the back of the Castle, viz. Saml. Stockton, John Powell, and Joseph Holland, for sodomy; Luke Lockard, and Peter Higgins, for forgery, and James Yates, for a rape.—Soon after twelve o'clock, Stockton ascended the scaffold; he appeared much agitated, indeed his trembling limbs seemed almost inadequate to their task; Powell was the next, he seemed much affected, although he did not display such dejection as the former; Holland then ascended the steps; he appeared in a state of the greatest agitation, the contrition of his countenance truly indicating the penitence of his mind; on the scaffold his feelings appeared the most acute, he seemed impressed with all the horrors consequent to a situation so awful, and to implore the pardon of Almighty God with the greatest fervency, and scarcely seemed to bestow a single glance on the surrounding multitude; he was a man advanced in years, of a gentlemanly appearance, and was possessed of very handsome property. Yates (a young man) ran up the scaffold steps in a manner extremely indifferent, and seemed little affected; Lockard and Higgins, (young men) appeared both very much affected.—About half past twelve o'clock, when an awful silence prevailed, these poor unfortunate wretches were precipitated into eternity!—Isaac Hitchin, and Thomas Rix, for sodomy, are respited for a fortnight from Saturday last.





John Church

sodomites who visited the tavern. One writer, Robert Bell⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾, fulminated against, 'the disgrace and pollution which Christianity might suffer from the immoral character of any of its teachers' (p7), and 'moral contagion that has been the ruin of Empires' (p13). He alleged that the sodomites had 'nominated' John Church 'to be their Chaplain; and that he officiated in that capacity. By virtue of his functions, in this situation he was often employed in joining these monsters in the 'indissoluble tie of matrimony!!!' (p17). Bell urged others to join him in uncovering those who were causing the Christian religion to suffer 'under disgrace and pollution' (p14).

As with the Hitchin case, where local clerics had been suspected of being sodomites, the case of John Church highlighted the fact that Christian ministers were not immune from rumour and accusations. And we see again that seemingly distant cases and furores were mirrored in local events in Wigan for, in 1813, the same year that John Church had been denounced, the Reverend George Hendrick, minister at All Saints Church in Hindley, was arrested and indicted as a sodomite.

Reverend Hendrick was 'charged with an assault, with an intent to commit an unnatural crime on Frederick Moults, a hair-dresser, at Knutsford'. (Chester Courant, 28 September 1813). Hendrick is reported as being in his forties at the time of the offence, and Moults was twenty-six years of age. The alleged

offence was said to have taken place at Moults's barbershop in King Street. Hendrick was sent for trial at the Quarter Sessions in Chester.

His trial was reported, as follows, in the edition of the Chester Chronicle for Friday 17 September 1813:

REV. GEORGE HENDRICK,

Aged 44, from Hindley, Lancashire, was next put to the bar, charged with an attempt at an offence, as the indictment emphatically mentioned, not fit to be named amongst Christians. – The trial occupied from ten o'clock in the morning till four o'clock in the evening, and as we are prohibited by the Court from entering into the disgusting and unnatural details, we shall abstain from laying the evidence before the public. – We have therefore merely to say, that the evidence was not thought sufficient to conviction, and the prisoner was – Acquitted – The Court was unusually crowded. And here we should deem ourselves guilty of an act of injustice, were we not to say, that the eloquent and affecting address to the Jury, by Mr. Cross, on behalf of the prisoner, was one of the finest specimens of elocution we ever heard in that court, or anywhere else.

(NB Minor spelling / typesetting errors in the original text above have been corrected, but no other changes made.)

Whilst the Reverend Hendrick had been acquitted, his reputation never recovered. What few records remain show his fall from grace, for whilst he officially held the living at All Saints until 1830 in reality the management of the church was placed in the hands of others. Looking at the baptismal register for All Saints from 1813 to 1840, baptisms by Hendrick ceased in July of 1813 with the majority of later ones being performed by the curate, Hugh Evans. Evans went on to baptise at least five of his

own children, no doubt, thereby, providing spurious evidence to his parishioners that he was unlike the Reverend Hendrick in one major respect at least.

Despite having proved his innocence conclusively in one of the highest courts of the land, Hendrick was not allowed by the church authorities to escape without censure. He remained, in name at least, the incumbent of the parish (i.e. the minister of the church), but as John Leyland in his book *Memorials of Hindley*^(iv), noted:

'In 1813 the living [i.e. the monies, benefices etc that were due to All Saints parish, which Hendrick as the incumbent could use as he thought fit] was sequestered, [a legal process that removed control of parish money from Hendrick and gave it to another appointed by the local bishop], in consequence of some impropriety, or alleged impropriety, on the part of the then incumbent, the Rev George Hendrick, and the Rev Hugh Evans was appointed curate in charge, the duties of which office he continued to discharge until Mr Hendrick's death, in 1830.' (p29)

Notwithstanding his efforts to cover parish duties, Evans did not succeed Hendrick as the incumbent of All Saints, as the next man to hold that office in the parish was Edward Hill.

Arthur Martland ©

(i) Cocks, H G 'Safeguarding Civility: Sodomy, Class and Moral Reform in early nineteenth-century England' in *Past and Present* no 190 (Feb 2006)

(ii) Borron achieved further notoriety in 1819 when he was one of the magistrates who ordered the militia into St Peter's Field in Manchester.

(iii) Bell, Robert 'Religion and Morality Vindicated Against Hypocrisy and Pollution' London: R Bell, 1813

(iv) Leyland, John 'Memorials of Hindley' Manchester: John Heywood, 1873.

A BRAVE ATHERTON LASS

BY JOHN HESFORD

Police Constable George Henry Thompson was walking his usual beat on Bolton Road. It was around 11.15pm when he heard a disturbance in 'The Walk' where a crowd of some sixty people had gathered. John Peacock was the centre of attraction, abusing his wife, and using foul and disgusting language.

He recognized Peacock who had five previous arrests and had served sentences from between one to nine months for assaulting the police. It was with some trepidation that the officer approached the scene. He asked Peacock to moderate his language and to go home. He refused, and being fighting drunk, he struck PC Thompson on the head and chest. They struggled and fell, with Peacock on the top of Thompson, where he affected several blows.

It was a hostile crowd. Peacock's wife was crying, with a baby in her arms. His brother's wife shouted, '*give it to him Jack he's just your weight*'. Then someone in the crowd booted the officer in his side. Thompson shouted, '*won't someone help me*'. The crowd jeered, but a young lady, later identified as Mary Alice Hartley, pushed through the crowd and attempted to pull Peacock off PC Thompson. She was slight of build and was easily assaulted and thrown to one side. Undaunted, she managed to grab the officer's whistle and gave a blast before it was torn from her hand and broken.

The two men grappled for about fifteen minutes. Thompson was dazed and exhausted and eventually had to release Peacock who tried to headbutt him. However, the officer dodged to one side and Peacock



The Walk, off Bolton Old Road

ran his head into the wall, and then staggered into his house.

A short time later Superintendent Whitwell and PC Mitchell arrived on the scene. The door to Peacock's house was locked, so they picketed the house. Suddenly the door burst open, and Peacock stood there brandishing a coal hammer. He was pulled back inside, probably by his wife. After several minutes he reappeared with a knife and slashed PC Thompson down his face, from his forehead through his earlobe and down his neck, cutting several blood vessels. Peacock then went to cut Superintendent Whitwell who hit him on the forearm with his truncheon. The Inspector followed Peacock back into the house and arrested him in the kitchen. On the way to the police station, using a foul word, he said, '*Is he dead? I wish it had been the Inspector I would have put it through his heart*'.

On 8 November 1910 at Leigh Police Court, John Peacock, a collier of The Walk, Atherton, was charged with

unlawful and malicious wounding of a police officer. The prisoner appeared in the dock with a cut on his head about two inches long, and had also spent some time in the prison hospital with head injuries. After several hostile witness statements, Miss Mary Alice Hartley, of 29 Hilton Street, Atherton, a weaver at the Lee Spinning &



Mary Alice Hartley

Weaving Co., Atherton, gave evidence. She was the only person in the crowd to assist the police officer.

The offence was too grave to pass sentence in the police court and the prisoner was committed for trial at the Manchester Assizes. Mr Dootson, solicitor for the prisoner, applied for bail, which was refused. In addition, his application for solicitor and council under the Poor Prisoners Defence Act was refused.

John Peacock appeared before Mr Justice Avery at the Manchester Assizes, with Mr Lindon Riley for the prosecution and Mr Burgess for the defence. Again the evidence against him was repeated. Further evidence was given as to the seriousness of the wound Peacock had inflicted. If it had not been for the fortunate circumstance that a medical student was passing at the time, who staunched the bleeding, Thompson would have bled to death. Even a month after the attack he was in a very weak condition.

The prisoner's defence was that the police officer was the aggressor, and that he himself had had a drink; he was a good workman and husband, and that his wife and children would be destitute if he was sent to prison.

Judge Avery concluded that Peacock had a history of drunken bouts, and that whilst he was under the influence of drink he was known to follow police officers which had resulted in five previous convictions for assaults on them. When asked if he had anything to say, Peacock said that he deeply regretted the suffering he had caused to PC Thompson, and to remind his worship that he had been in hospital for a month, he had never used a knife before and did not remember using the knife. The judge replied that he must take care to ensure Peacock did not have an opportunity to use a knife again, and it was idle to use drunkenness as an excuse for crime. Peacock was sentenced to three years penal servitude with hard labour.

At the end of the proceedings Judge Avery called Miss Hartley before him and he told her, 'you appear to have

been the only person among the crowd witnessing the assault who did anything to help the policeman, and the only person, in fact, who behaved like a good citizen. To mark my sense of your conduct I make an order of you to receive a reward of £1'.

Following the trial, Mary Alice Hartley was requested to attend a ceremony on 8 December 1910 held at Leigh Police Court, when Alderman J. Clegg, on behalf of his brother magistrates and the whole of the police in the Leigh District, presented her with a handsome gold watch (by Benson of London) and chain and a purse of gold for her plucky conduct. The watch was inscribed: *'Presented to Miss M. A Hartley by police and friends for valuable service rendered to a constable 15 October 1910'.*

Superintendent Ross said, *'That after a policeman called for help, Mary Alice Hartley without considering the danger, ran in, being herself assaulted, she had rushed to the constables assistance, and it has been the unanimous wish of the officers, sergeants and constables of the division that we mark our appreciation of Miss Hartley's services that a token should be given to her, therefore a sum of money being subscribed by the men, assisted by the magistrates, we have been able to procure for her, something that I trust, being besides useful to her, will be a reminder of our goodwill and appreciation towards her'.*

After several more speeches Miss Hartley said in reply, *'I don't know how to thank you for this beautiful present. I only did my duty, as any other person ought to have done, and I could not stand by and see a policeman ill-treated the way he was. I shall wear this watch in remembrance of the kindness you have shown me'.* The assembly rose in applause.

References

Bolton Evening News 17 October 1910,
18 November 1910
Cotton Factory Times 16 December 1910
Genealogist
Leigh Chronicle 16 December 1910
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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
- 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

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- 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.

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Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1DY.

Aunt Mabel and the Peers Family – a generational saga

BY WILLIAM GRUNDY

Aunt Mabel

Do you remember
Pretty Aunt Mabel?
(Please don't mention
Her name at table.)
She ran off to Scotland
Without a 'Good-bye',
And it caused such a fuss
Though I didn't know why.
(Aunt Ellen said sharply,
Her face like a mask,
That nice little girls
Ought never to ask.)
She went with a Man,
As I understood
And I heard people say
He was Up To No Good.

Some long while later
Aunt Mabel came back
With a noisy fat baby –
By name of Jack.
Not a sign of the Man,
Which seemed rather strange
(Though I must say I thought it
A quite fair exchange.)
Not much of a welcome
For poor little Jack –
My mother looked grave,
My father looked black.
And nice Aunt Amy
Piped her eye.
I wondered why.

Winifred M. Grundy

My starting point is a poem my late mother, Winifred M. Grundy, nee Peers, (1915-2002) had published in Lancashire Life over fifty years ago – Aunt Mabel.

Actually, I don't remember 'pretty Aunt Mabel'. I don't think that I ever met her, nor do I have a photograph of her. The events of this true story took place around one hundred years ago, when mum was a small child.

Mabel was the youngest child of my great grandfather William Peers (1851-1905) – pictured in his police sergeant's uniform. My grandfather, Charles T. Peers (1874-1963) was the eldest,

and was very nearly twenty-four when Mabel was born in 1898.

William Peers was born in Saughall in rural Cheshire and joined the Wigan police force in 1872. He was promoted to sergeant in 1880, and in 1884 was promoted to police and fire inspector, when the fire service was part of the police force.

I would think that, coming from an agricultural background, he may have been assigned to the police horses which would have drawn the fire tender. It was once reported in the Wigan Observer (before 1880) that Constable Peers was sent to deal with a rabid dog that was running amok in Wallgate.

One thing I remember Great Aunt Amy telling me when I asked about him was that the part of his job he hated most was attending colliery accidents, which were tragically frequent.

His personal life was also plagued with tragedies. My grandfather was the only surviving child of his first marriage. His second son, Alfred, drowned in the River Douglas

near Darlington Street bridge. There were two other childhood deaths and his first wife died of tuberculosis, aged thirty, in 1884. He remarried in 1886 and had six more children, Mabel being the last.

In 1899 there seems to have been nothing less than a purge of the Wigan police force when Captain Bell was replaced as Chief Constable by George Hardy. Seventeen constables and two sergeants were dismissed; and two sergeants



Charles T. Peers, Boer War, c.1901

and an inspector resigned, that inspector being William Peers. I prefer to think that he had health reasons for retiring after twenty-seven years' service to the people of Wigan.

After his retirement he became the licensed victualler of the New Inn on Caroline Street, where a carpet warehouse now stands, the whole street having been demolished in the 1970s. I imagine a large family living in a public house would not have been unusual in those times. The



William Peers, c.1880

family moved to Hodge's Street when William died, aged fifty-three, from cirrhosis of the liver.

My grandfather started work, aged twelve, as a post office telegraph boy and eventually progressed to deputy head postmaster for Wigan. He served in the Boer War from 1901-1902, which is now a controversial period of colonial history, but at the time the returning soldiers were treated as heroes. My mother, the youngest of his four children, says that they called it the 'bore war'. It seems that they were disinterested in his war stories.

His younger brothers, George and Fred, served in the First World War. He wanted to go as well but apparently the post office would not agree to guarantee his job. If he had gone my mum probably wouldn't have been born and I wouldn't be writing this article.

To return to the story in the poem. I haven't yet managed to find the date of Jack's birth; I would guess around 1920ish. In 1926 Mabel married John Brown



Winifred Grundy (nee Peers),
c. 1930s

and they had three daughters. My mother lost touch with the family so I don't know if there are any living descendants.

Jack spent much of his childhood with his spinster aunt Amy and bachelor uncle George. When he grew up he fell into bad ways and spent much of his life in and out of prison. My mum described him as a plausible conman who would have tried to have conned me if I had met him. Ironically, one of mum's cousins on her mother's side, Sam Hodgson, was a police superintendent in the Lancashire force.

Aunt Amy and her brother George never married and lived out their days together until the 1970s.

'Aunt Ellen' was actually my great aunt Hilda Ellen Richardson, my grandmother's sister, who was a teacher and a rather 'prim and proper' spinster.

My mother was a teacher at Beech Hill Infants' School from about 1966-1974, having primarily done home teaching of children unable to go to school. She had also taught at St Paul's, Goose Green from 1938-1948. She loved literature and could recite Shakespeare's sonnets and Keats' odes by heart.

In the mid-1920s the Peers family moved up in the world from Hodge's Street to Mesnes Road. The Grundy family lived around the corner in Milton Grove, facing Marylebone Park. My parents married in 1947 and when my grandma Grundy died in 1966 my dad inherited the house where they lived the rest of their days.

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WHAT'S ON

There's lots going on across the Council's cultural venues to get involved in and make the most of the winter days. Here's a selection of just a few events and activities but do keep a look out for the new January to April 2024 What's On guide, our website and social media channels for full listings.

Events

Thursday 18 January 12-1pm

Uncle Joe's - Making Life Sweeter for Over 125 Years with Anita Tulty

Uncle Joe's is a much-loved name in Wigan and well known around the world. Join Anita for an illustrated, nostalgic lookback at one of the town's most famous success stories.

Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU

£2.50 per person, booking is essential.

Call 01942 828128 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

Saturday 10 February 12-1pm

Tales From the Lux with Dylan Harris

In conversation with Dylan Harris and guests. Hear stories from the Wigan music scene of the early 2000s, the Lux Club, and the background to bringing acts such as Arctic Monkeys, Pete Doherty, and The Fall to Wigan.

Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU

£2.50 per person, booking is essential.

Call 01942 828128 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

Saturday 3 February 10am-2pm

Chinese New Year Celebrations with Confucius Classroom

Join us for a festival of colour and tradition with FREE family fun as we celebrate Chinese New Year with music, dancing, costume, and craft. Watch the fabulous Chinese Lion and Dragon dancers parade throughout the town centre before a special finale event at the museum. Learn traditional crafts including language, handcraft, calligraphy, tea ceremony, and more.

Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU. **FREE**, no booking required

Tuesday 20 February & Thursday 22 February 12-2pm

Half Term Chinese New Year family activities with Confucius Classroom

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

Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU. **FREE**, no booking required

Saturday 24 February 5pm-10pm (times TBC)

Wigan Punk: Creating Our Own Culture, 1977-1991

This event will join the dots and examine the lineage of the underground punk scene in the Wigan borough. The panel event with guest speakers will identify the cultural significance of this grassroots movement, of which the reverberations are still being felt today. There are also live performances from: The System, Cress, and Slutch.

Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU. Cost TBC. Booking is essential.

Call 01942 828128 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk or book via Eventbrite (Please check social media for details)

Regular Activities

Soul Time

Join Manchester Camerata for 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 from 15 January 2023, 1pm-3pm. **FREE**, drop in

Turnpike Tots

Turnpike Tots is our creative play session for little artists aged 0-5 years and their grownups!

The Turnpike Gallery Studio, Leigh.

Weekly on Thursdays, term-time only, 10.30am-11.30am.

FREE, visit trybooking.co.uk/BOMV to book

Saturday Family Workshops

Join us every other Saturday for free family fun in the gallery inspired by our Creating Place II exhibition. Suitable for children aged 5+ and their families.

The Turnpike Gallery Studio, Leigh.

20 January, 3 & 17 February, 2, 16 & 30 March. **FREE**, drop-in

Leigh Town Hall Tours

Discover the history of Leigh Town Hall and explore the archives collections on this free guided tour.

Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall.

Last Wednesday of the month, 11am start.

FREE, book online via Archives: Wigan & Leigh Eventbrite.

Exhibitions

Archives: Wigan & Leigh

permanent exhibition
Family-friendly displays showcasing the stories and original objects and archives that make up the local history of the borough.

Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Ground Floor, Leigh Town Hall.

Tuesday-Friday, 10am-1pm & 1.30pm-4pm, Saturdays 10am to 2pm. **FREE**

Creating Place II

Creating Place II features four new commissions by Nicolette Lafonseca, Julie McKiernan, Helen Mather and Anna FC Smith, and Joe Whitmore. Discover new stories about local people, places and our environment in a series of multi-media installations.

Turnpike Gallery, Leigh.

20 January-30 March, Tuesday-Friday 10am-4pm and Saturday 10am-2pm.

FREE, drop in

Make Some Noise! Exhibition Tour

Fancy something exciting to do during your lunch break? Then look no further! Join us at the museum for our final music exhibition tour on Wednesday 17 January, 12-12.45pm.

FREE, booking essential, ring 01942 828128 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

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

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 & District Family History Society

When: 3rd Tuesday of the month (no meetings in July, 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
Programme for 2024:
 16 January: AGM and 'Real Life Scrooges – homes and hoarding in Victorian Britain' by Dr Tom McGrath
 20 February: 'Leigh between the Wars' by Michael Caine
 19 March: 'The Manchester Martyrs' by Brian Joyce
 Volunteers from the Society run a family history help desk at

Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Tuesday-Friday, 10.00-13.00, by appointment only.
 Ring 01942 404430 or email archives@wigan.gov.uk

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 carolinefairlough@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

Schools' Culture Workshops at the Museum of Wigan Life, Archives: Wigan & Leigh, and the Turnpike

FREE* workshop sessions for SCHOOLS

Time-limited offer until March 2024



Explore the depths of the Archives, Museum, and the Turnpike with your class at one of our workshops designed to support the national curriculum for history and beyond.

Number of free sessions limited per school *free if you engage in feedback with us!

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.gov.uk
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theturnpikegallery@wigan.gov.uk

Family-friendly local history exhibition open



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

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