PASTFORWARD

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£2

Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine

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FRONT COVER
Colliers Corner, Howe Bridge. Photo courtesy of Alan Hale.

Letter from the **Editorial Team**

Welcome to PAST **Forward** Issue 96.

Welcome to issue 96 of Past Forward! We've got thoughtful pieces from local artists who have been inspired by Wigan's built heritage, as you'll see on pages 10 and 26.There's a glimpse of Leigh Town Hall's latest exhibition 'Catch As Catch Can Wrestling', and new voices in the 'Young Historian'.

When you're next in Leigh, check out the new exhibition space on Market Street (open Thursday-Saturday) which marks fifty years of the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan through photographs, archives and oral history interviews.

We are delighted to announce the winners of the 2024 competition, sponsored by John O'Neill in memory of his wife Barbara. The judges would like to thank everyone who entered the competition and commend all the authors on the quality of research and writing in all the essays.

Our 2024 winners are:

Adults:

1st place: Arthur Martland – Gross Indecency and Gross Injustice – Billy Winstanley and Thomas Bunney
2nd place: Helen Lloyd – A Man's Duty
3rd place: Richard de Grijs – Wigan's Queen of Spades
Runner-up: Brian Joyce – Thomas Lee Syms: Tyldesley's Grand Old Man of Photography
Runner-up: Sue Gerrard – By George!
Runner-up: Brian Wilde – Richard Wilde (From Pitman to Father of the Council)
Runner-up: Lynda Hall – The Five Lives of Jonty Hall
Runner-up: Mary Pecekajus – Wigan Whit Walks – A Highlight of the Year

11–18-year-olds:

1st place: Emilia Kaczorek – Wigan's Industrialisation
2nd place: Ellie Bannister – The 'Wiganese Accent' – the Dialect that Binds Our Community

Copy deadline for Issue 97 – Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday 14 June 2024.

‘What’s in Store’ at the Museum?

In May 2024, the Museum of Wigan Life will launch an exciting new exhibition, showcasing more of the borough’s collection than ever before.

What’s in Store will recreate sections of the object stores inside the museum, giving visitors the opportunity to explore our collection and find hidden gems from amongst over 300 objects. Moving away from traditional themes, the exhibition will centre around materials, including wood, metal, ceramics, and organic objects. Our curators will have the chance to display items that have never before been exhibited’, from decorative art to industrial machinery.

A Young Curators Collective, in partnership with Wigan Youth Zone, have worked with the museum staff, choosing objects which speak to them, and giving a new voice to culture in the borough.

The exhibition aims to find out from visitors what you want from your museum: how we should represent you, and what should we display to do this? Extensive consultation and feedback will inform our future, helping the Museum to become what you want us to be.

From summer 2024, What’s in Store on Tour will visit libraries across the borough; a small, travelling exhibition, aiming to give everybody the chance to experience our displays, and give us their thoughts.

With a fantastic series of events, talks and exhibition updates, we hope there will be something for everyone.

COLLECTIONS CORNER

The Cotgreave Library Indicator



What’s in Store has had the Museum team spending a lot of time rooting around, choosing the most beautiful, interesting, and unexpected items to display. We’ve even managed to surprise ourselves; and one exciting morning in the stores we uncovered a small Cotgreave Library Indicator.

A common feature of lending libraries at the end of the nineteenth century, the Cotgreave Indicator helped librarians keep track of the books in their care. Housed in a wood and metal frame are several small ledgers; each tiny, leather-bound volume referring to a book in the library’s collection, from the Count of Monte Cristo to Pirate City. Inside are handwritten notes, giving the title of the book, the library card number of the borrower, and the date of issue.





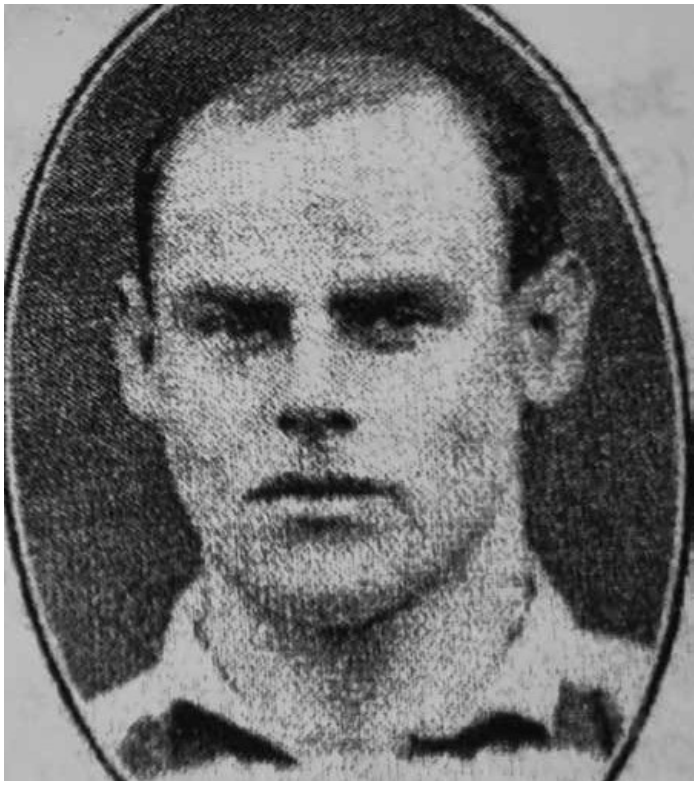
Each book in the library was given a number, and this has been embossed into the ends of the ledger, a blue side to face outwards when the book was available, and red for when the book was on loan. Two ‘OVERDUE’ notices stand out amongst the volumes, with borrowers 4773 and 4518 not having returned *The Treasure of the Tigris and The Sandman’s Hour* respectively.

Although we don’t know for certain which of the borough’s libraries would have used a Cotgreave Indicator, a series of pamphlets housed at Princeton University Library, and embossed with the Wigan Free Public Library seal, mention Cotgreave’s invention. One pamphlet, which notes that Indicator Books were commended by the Conference of Librarians in Manchester, was produced in 1879, a year after the Library Street site opened in Wigan. Perhaps, in coming to the museum for display, the Indicator is returning home.

GROSS INDECENCY AND GROSS INJUSTICE

Billy Winstanley and Thomas Bunney

BY ARTHUR MARTLAND



William Winstanley

William (Billy) Winstanley was born in Platt Bridge in 1884, but, by a grim quirk of fate, after less than a year, Parliament had enacted legislation that was to threaten to destroy his life some forty-four years later.

The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 had started out as a bill with the worthy aims of protecting women and girls from sexual exploitation and of raising the age of consent from thirteen years to sixteen years. During the later passage of the bill however, Henry Labouchere, then the Liberal MP for Northampton, introduced an amendment which declared all sexual acts between men to be acts of 'gross indecency' and illegal. The proposed amendment was accepted. The Act provided no specific definition of what actually constituted an act of 'gross indecency', other than the involvement of two men, which meant that prosecuting authorities and the courts could interpret the 'offence' with a wide degree of latitude, and, not infrequently, in accordance with their own personal prejudices.

Many thousands of men were prosecuted under this Act, notably Oscar Wilde and Alan Turing, but, in 1929, Billy Winstanley, the celebrated Leigh, Wigan and International rugby player, fell foul of the legislation too.

Billy's success at sport blossomed when he began to play rugby as a forward for the Northern Union Football team at Leigh in December 1904. His skill contributed to the success of the Leigh team when, in 1906, the Leigh club became Northern Union Champions, earning Billy himself a championship winner's medal. His athletic prowess led naturally to his being chosen as a team player for the first tour by the Northern Union of Australia and New Zealand in 1910, where he scored five tries in fourteen appearances. After making a total of 171 appearances for Leigh, scoring nineteen tries overall, he was transferred to play for Wigan in March 1911 for, what was then, a very large fee of £150. He last played for Wigan in 1919.

Billy's trial was reported nationally in the press, including locally in the Leigh Journal of 22 February 1929. Billy and his co-accused, Thomas Bunney, appeared before Mr Justice Finlay at the Manchester Assizes, charged with committing an act of gross indecency at Hindley. Thomas, the newspaper reports, was from Platt Bridge, but the headline of the article 'EX-LEIGH PLAYER SENTENCED' made it clear that Billy's fall from grace was the main angle of the reporting. By this time he had long ceased to play rugby for a major team and was working as a labourer for Hindley Urban District Council – a job he soon lost following his arrest.

Finding the men before him to be guilty, the judge commented on their 'grave offence' and 'disgusting crime' before sentencing Billy to eight months' imprisonment and Thomas to five months' imprisonment. Neither of the men had a criminal history but, though the Act did not stipulate it, the

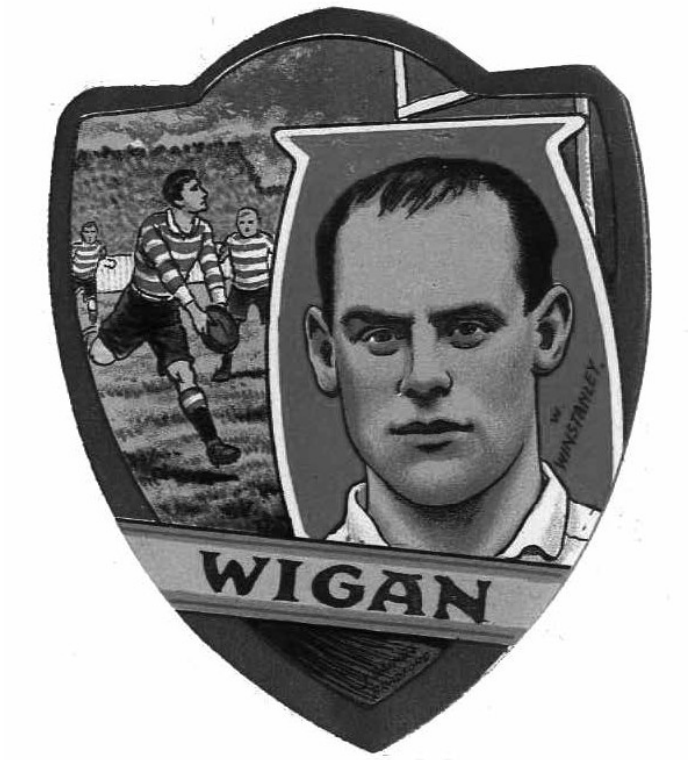


Leigh RFC 1910 tour team. William Winstanley is in the third row from the back, far left

judge himself decided that their prison sentences should be served with hard labour.

As prisoners from the Wigan area, their imprisonment was most likely served at Walton Prison in Liverpool. By 1929, 'hard labour' had ceased to mean stone-breaking work, the treadmill and the crank, and effectively meant work in the ordinary prison workshops. What survived from the Victorian era, however, was that 'hard labour' prisoners were required to sleep on a plank bed without a mattress for their first two weeks in custody (Cross 1971 10).

The Governor at Walton Prison in 1929 was Lt. Col. C. E. F. Rich DSO, who in his memoirs, *Recollections of a Prison Governor*, recorded his time at Walton and his trenchant views on men who have sex with other men.



A Baines collector card showing William Winstanley

In a rant against the male prostitute 'type' (the 'filthiest brute on the market'), Rich expounds upon his final solution as to what he regards as the problem of same-sex activity:-

> 'Why any country should be so weak as to tolerate these creatures running the chance of their bringing into the world others like themselves – since presumably some of them are capable of normal cohabitation with a woman – is more than I can fathom, when there is a remedy to hand. If you have an animal from which you do not desire to breed, you jolly well see to it that the beast becomes incapable of breeding. These people are lower than animals. Why not make sure of *their* not breeding, then? You would not destroy their souls – presuming them to possess any'. (Rich 1932 138).

Reading Rich's views, we can readily surmise that Billy and Thomas would have endured a brutalising and demeaning regime whilst at Walton, certainly not one troubled by thoughts of rehabilitation. From police, to judge, to prison, the whole system was one in which performative cruelty and abuse of an 'offender' was to be seen as an end in itself.

Billy was remembered by his teammate, Johnnie Blackburn, as 'a quiet and aloof man' and he was easily picked out in team photographs due to his receding hairline. [*] Whether his 'quiet and aloof' manner was a manifestation of his consciousness of being different from others, is hard to say. His 'offence' says nothing definitive about his, nor Thomas' sexuality. We can infer however, how a 'quiet and aloof' man would suffer greatly from the targeted violence he suffered from the criminal justice system at every stage and the salacious press reporting he was forced to endure. The record of his non-sporting life is, so far, elusive. I can find no record of him after his court case, nor anything to indicate where he went to after prison. Court records are usually embargoed for one hundred years, so hopefully more information about him and Thomas should become available in 2029.

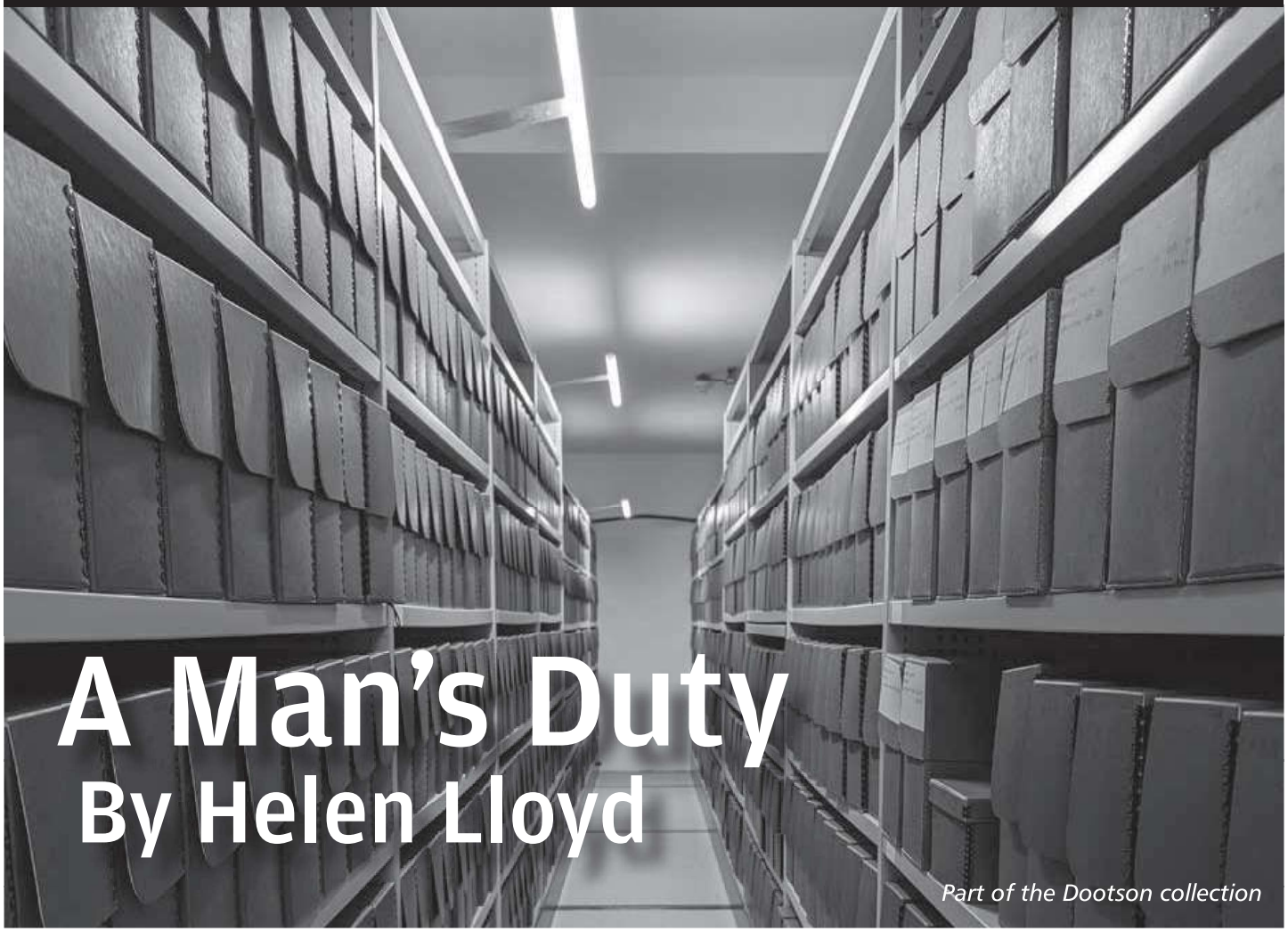
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Cross, R. (1971) Punishment, Prison and the Public. London: Stevens & Sons.

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[*] I am indebted to Mr Mike Latham, Chairman of Leigh Leopards, for generously providing me with this and other information about Billy, together with his encouragement of my research, which is ongoing.

© Arthur Martland



A Man's Duty

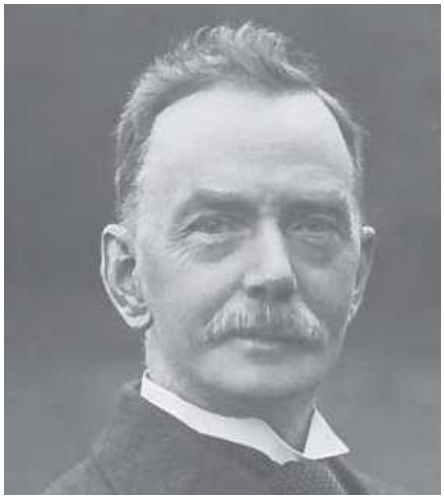
By Helen Lloyd

Part of the Dootson collection

Our tour guide drew his finger along the top of gold-edged pages showing us the residue of century-old soot and I was hooked. An open fire, together with cigarette and pipe smoke from the office of local solicitor Mr T. R. Dootson, would have been responsible for this in the time before he made the generous donation of his vast personal collection to the people of Leigh. Some 20,000 books (the earliest published in 1608), manuscripts, maps and ephemera are preserved in temperature-controlled conditions at Archives: Wigan & Leigh. I was also curious to find out more about Mr Dootson himself, especially after seeing his charismatic photograph that staff kindly sourced.

Thomas Robert Dootson was born in 1864, the eldest son of a silk twister from the Bedford area of Leigh. After working for firms of solicitors in Manchester, he qualified with honours at Owen's College. He set up his own practice in Market Place, Leigh in 1895 and married Helen Crompton of Glazebury the following year.

His generous gift was offered towards the end of his life and plans for a new library in Leigh included an area for 'The Dootson Collection'. Unfortunately, the Second World War saw these plans shelved and it wasn't until a year after his death in 1951 that the trustees, which included his wife, handed over the collection in the Mayor's Parlour at Leigh Town Hall.



Thomas Robert Dootson

The collection consists of two main sections. The Lancashire section features work of local authors (250 in dialect), biographies, history, geography, local industries, and many pamphlets. Of the latter, fascinating examples include one of a Reverend Stephens whose visit in 1838 was thought to be a contributing factor to Chartist agitation and the 'Leighth Feight' of 1839. Another, the harrowing *Life of James Johnson*, tells of an escaped slave from North Carolina travelling through Lancashire before settling in Oldham. There are publications of many societies such as the Cheetham Society and the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, and microfilm of parish registers and census returns. Manuscripts include the 1630 diary of Adam Mort of Dam

House and a Turnpike Account Book. There are maps and even small items of ephemera such as playbills and train tickets, and over a thousand photographs which have been updated by Leigh Photographic Society.

The second section is of general interest, mostly from the nineteenth century, and includes literature, Egyptology, morality, religion (including an unusual Bible), folklore, customs and fables. In 2004 over fifty items and nearly one hundred copies of illustrations were put on display, including 'Mother Goose', 'Jack Giant Killer', 'Pied Piper' and Christina Rossetti's 'The Goblin Market'. Illustrations of woodcuts, engravings and lithographs featured famous names such as Kate Greenaway, Walter Crane, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

I was surprised to find references to a Dootson Collection of Art, which proved to be fifty-four items bequeathed to Pennington Hall and then passed to Wigan Museum Services in 1978. These are mainly oils and watercolours, including work by well-known nineteenth century British artists such as Frederick Leighton and Luke Fildes.

As interesting as the contents of the collections proved, details of the life of 'TRD', as he was affectionately known, fascinated me. Another title given to him was 'Compensation Lawyer' and was nobly earned. He had helped the House of Lords formulate the 1906 amendment to the Workmen's Compensation Act just four years before the Pretoria Pit disaster at Westhoughton in 1910 - then the second-worst mining disaster in England. Soon afterwards, Dootson called for an official inspection of the mine and was one of the party that carried this out before the inquest and government enquiry. Subsequently he was trusted by the Miners' Federation to take over 300 cases through court for compensation. He dealt with over 200 other compensation claims during his career.

By 1937 Mr and Mrs Dootson were living at 'Parkfield' on Orchard Lane, Leigh, and many parties were held in their large garden. He is quoted as saying that it was a man's duty to do things for the town he grew up in, and there are records of him giving both time and money to the local community. He was an enthusiastic speaker and was believed to be an anonymous benefactor to many good causes. An active member of Leigh Congregationalist Church, he bought land for its expansion in 1926.

Alongside his practice, Dootson served twenty-eight years from 1923 as clerk to County and Borough Justices and represented the South Ward on the Urban District Council from 1891 to 1899. He was president of Leigh Liberal Association in 1925, served as a Governor of Leigh Grammar School and Leigh Infirmary, and was Chairman of Laburnum Spinning Co. Ltd., Atherton. He was a Freemason and also supported Christie Hospital.

In 1931 he donated eight acres of land near Butts Mill for Dootson's Park, and in 1937 six and a half acres of land in Westleigh was presented to the town and named Watson's Playing Fields in memory of his mother who played there as a child. His speech that day was forward thinking, promoting the need for green spaces to be preserved as 'lungs' even if nothing could be done with them immediately and outlining resulting benefits to children's health. He went on to propose that school playgrounds be made available to older children in the evenings by providing caretaker cover and lighting.

A tribute from the Magistrates' Court after the death of this philanthropist praised his firm belief that the cause of justice must be administered rightly. In a fitting legacy his literary collection is kept together, as he requested, just next to the library that stands on the site of his solicitor's office. Having learned of his character and that he was childless, I feel that Dootson collected with the explicit intention of donating to the people of Leigh. The archives are always keen to update their content with contemporary evidence which makes me wonder if there are any present day 'Dootsons' who may one day seek a home for their own collections!

With many thanks to Archives: Wigan & Leigh



Parkfield, Atherton, home of Thomas Dootson

BARBARA O'NEILL ESSAY WRITING COMPETITION 2024: **3rd PLACE**

WIGAN'S QUEEN OF SPADES

BY RICHARD DE GRIJS (SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA)



Recently, I came across a deck of playing cards that had been designed for Sydney's Malt Shovel Brewery in 2013. They were meant to promote its signature 'James Squire' range of beers — named after the English convict who first successfully cultivated hops in New South Wales, Australia.

Back in England, James Squire (1754-1822) had been caught stealing '… four cocks, five hens and divers other goods and chattels the property of [his neighbour] John Stacey …'. Consequently, on 11 April 1785 he was sentenced to seven years of transportation 'beyond the seas'.

Squire appears to have been a womaniser of sorts. Indeed, among the Malt Shovel Brewery's staple beers, 'Four Wives Pilsner' is a perennial favourite. The deck's illustrator, Christopher Nielsen, used the card game's four queens to represent the women in Squire's life. I was particularly intrigued by his second woman, Mary, the Queen of Spades, a fierce-looking woman unapologetically labelled 'Thief' (pictured left).

Like Squire, Mary Spence(r) (1768-1822?) had been sent to New South Wales on the 'First Fleet' (1787-1788) to atone for her crimes. On 9 October 1786, the Lancashire Assizes, through the Wigan Quarter Sessions, had sentenced her for theft, from one Charles Felton of Crosby (Liverpool), of two handkerchiefs, one cotton and one black silk; a green quilted tammy (glazed, partly wool) petticoat; and a black silk cloak, total value unknown.

Little is known about Mary's early life; her convict record does not include an occupation. A daughter of James Spencer and Elizabeth Hughes, she was baptised on 19 June 1768 at St Peter's Church — 'The Ancient Chapelry' — in Formby (north of Liverpool). She had likely had multiple encounters with the law before being sentenced to transportation; such sentences were usually reserved for repeat offenders.

Mary's sentence, five years of transportation, was unusual; typical sentences were for seven or fourteen years of transportation, or for life. Although her shorter punishment could have been a clerical error, it features among a long list of other convicts' punishments, all listing sentences of seven or fourteen years, so a clerical error seems unlikely. It is possible that her shorter sentence was driven by considerations for her youth, her relatively minor, non-violent offence or possibly even by mitigating personal circumstances.

The First Fleet departed from Portsmouth on 13 May 1787. According to the passenger manifest, Mary, heavily pregnant, had been assigned to the Prince of Wales with at least fifty-six other convicts. James had embarked on the Friendship; he was later transferred to the Charlotte.

On 1 July 1787, while en route from Tenerife (Canary Islands) to St. Sebastian (Rio de Janeiro), Mary gave birth to a daughter, whom she named after herself. Baby Mary was baptised on board the Prince of Wales on 19 August 1787 while in port at St. Sebastian. Mary had probably become pregnant while awaiting her departure to the Antipodes; the baby's father may have been a prison guard, possibly at Lancaster Gaol.

The infant's survival chances were slim in the harsh conditions of the strange land they would soon call home. By 22 January 1788, all eleven ships of the First Fleet had arrived at their destination of Botany Bay, south of present-day Sydney, after up to 252 days at sea. Sadly, baby Mary died shortly after their arrival; she was buried on 5 April 1788.

There is some evidence that Mary and James started a relationship shortly after their arrival in the colony. Infamously, when caught red-handed while stealing a quantity of 'horehound', James claimed to need the medicinal herbs for his partner Mary, who was ill, or so he said. Instead, he allegedly used the hops-like plants to brew some of the first batches of Australian beer. A judge ordered that he receive 150 lashes with the cat-o'-nine tails for his transgression. Today, the James Squire range of craft beers features an excellent pale ale, aptly called 'One Fifty Lashes'.

It appears that Mary soon resorted to her old life of theft and petty crime. As punishment, now heavily pregnant with James' son, on 5 March 1790 she embarked on H.M.S. Sirius for transportation to the secondary penal settlement of Norfolk Island, where she arrived on 15 March. Their son, Francis (1790-1851), was baptised there on 1 August 1790. Unable to care for her infant son, when she returned to Port Jackson (Sydney) on 21 September 1792 on H.M.S. Atlantic, Mary left Francis behind.

Despite James' developing entrepreneurial talents, at this time he was not yet in a sufficiently financially secure position to provide for his infant son. Therefore, in 1792, he enlisted the boy into the New South Wales Corps as a drummer, at the young age of just fifteen months. Francis eventually left Norfolk Island on 6 November 1795, on H.M.S. Supply. He was added to the Corps' payroll on 13 June 1797. Eventually, in 1822, Squire acknowledged Francis in his will:

I give and bequeath unto James Spencer the son of Francis Spencer of Sydney aforesaid who is a natural born child of mine by Mary Spencer, deceased, the sum of thirty pounds.

Meanwhile, on 10 August 1797, the Reverend Richard Johnson (1753?-1827) married Mary and John Palmer (1754-1832) in St Philip's Church of England in Sydney, with Governor John Hunter's consent. Palmer, a corporal in the New South Wales Corps, had arrived in Sydney in 1790 on the Second Fleet's Neptune. The couple had two daughters, Ann (1796) and Elizabeth (1799); Elizabeth died in infancy. By the turn of the century, Mary disappears from the official records. The final record, from December 1799, shows Palmer suing one Robert Courter for £250, alleging criminal conduct involving Mary. John Palmer and Mary may have separated at this time, but the official records do not contain any additional information.

A strong, independent woman able to navigate difficult situations and maintain her dignity and self-respect in the face of adversity, Mary Spence's nickname as Wigan's Queen of Spades is clearly highly appropriate.

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2 *https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/1753177/enders-comprehensive-pictorial-overview-convicts-c*

3 *de Grijs, R., 2023. Artificial Intelligence Not Yet Intelligent Enough to be a Trusted Research Aid. The Scholarly Kitchen, https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2023/04/27/guest-post-artificial-intelligence-not-yet-intelligent-enough-to-be-a-trusted-research-aid/.*

4 *Cobley, J., 1970. The Crimes of the First Fleet convicts. Sydney: Angus and Robertson; https://convictrecords.com.au/convicts/spence/mary/129162.*

5 *FamilySearch. Mary Spence, 1768. England Births and Christenings, 1538–1975; https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:CN9Q-6VN2.*

6 *http://firstfleet.uow.edu.au/details.aspx?surname=spence&gender=F&term=5&ship=&age=&notes=&-recid=33298*

7 *https://convictrecords.com.au/convicts/spence/mary/129162*

8 *Biographical database of Australia. Biographical report for Mary SPENCE/R; https://www.bda-online.org.au/mybda/search/biographical-report/10011065801. Her baptism was registered at St. Philip's Church of England, Sydney.*

9 *Australian Food News, 2014. James Squire launches new variety of Hop Thief brew; https://www.ausfoodnews.com.au/2014/04/28/james-squire-launches-new-variety-of-hop-thief-brew.html.*

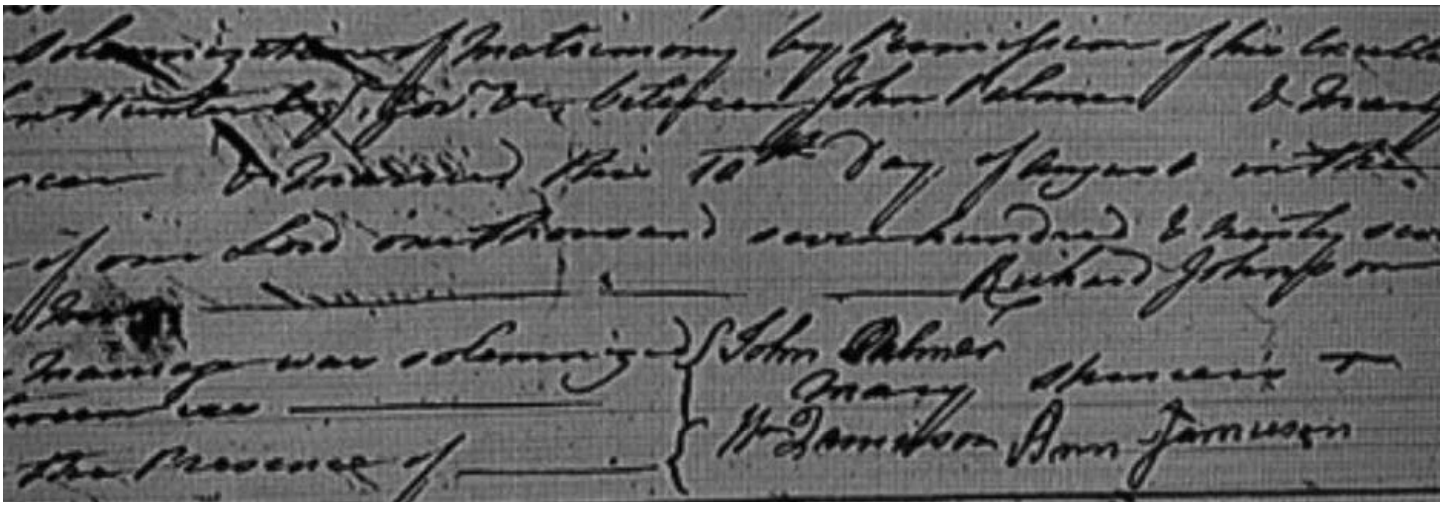
10 *http://hmssirius.com.au/mary-spencer-convict-prince-of-wales-1788/.*

11 *Gillen, M., 1989. The Founders of Australia: a biographical dictionary of the First Fleet. North Sydney: Library of Australian History.*

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13 *http://hmssirius.com.au/mary-spencer-convict-prince-of-wales-1788/; 13Last will of James Squire of Kissing Point, April 1822.*

14 *Gillen, 1989. Op. cit.*



Mary Spence and John Palmer's marriage vows, 10 August 1797 (State Archives and Records of New South Wales: Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1787–1856; vol. 4, No. 250, p. 54).

An Artist's-Eye View of Wigan Town Centre

Alan Martindale

Old buildings speak to us. They proudly display their jewels as ornament. Architectural design, until the advent of steel frames and reinforced concrete, grew in a natural progression of experience and skill passed down for the development of buildings and their construction.

My sketches, drawn in November 2023, focus unwittingly on the proclamations of identity which adorned buildings of the Victorian era during which time many of Wigan's town centre 'gems' were created and still remain for our pleasure and pride to this day.

I suspect most visitors or residents of Wigan look no further than shop window level (or maybe no further than 'sale' or 'two for the price of one'). But these little captures are there, just above, for all to observe in wonder as to their origins and purpose. You may spot them on your next visit to Wigan town centre.

Using Archives: Wigan & Leigh and follow-on sources. I include my new knowledge of the items sketched and a poem I wrote following the experience and subsequent visit and tour around Leigh Town Hall.

13 November 2023



Sign on the former Victoria Hotel, Wallgate: Road & Path Cycling Association badge, one of only a probable five remaining from the late nineteenth century.

On the Library Street gable of the Museum of Wigan Life (formerly the Wigan Free Library). Built in 1877 by Alfred Waterhouse using an original gift of £5,000 from Thomas Taylor, 1873.



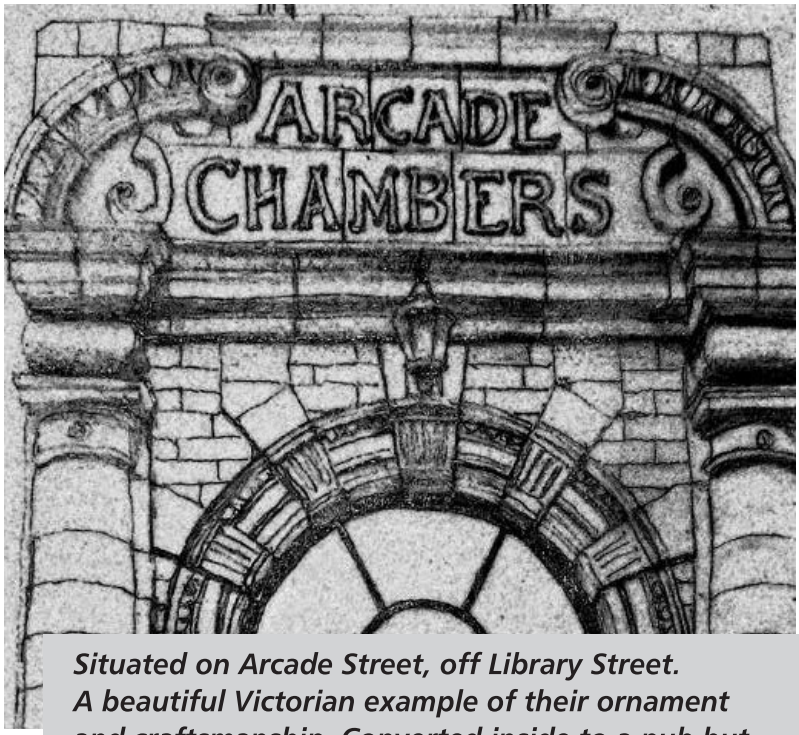


Stone panel over the entrance to the pub at 49 Hallgate, more recently used as a drop-in centre for the homeless, having one noted landlady known as 'Yvonne the one McCann' (with thanks to www.closedpubs.co.uk)

This fascinating street sign refers to the adjacent (former) pub 'The King of Prussia' which now stands as a chip shop at 28-28a Hallgate.

'Why the King of Prussia?' you ask. No conclusive explanation, I'm afraid. But Ian Gray must be credited with this quotation: 'Concerning the pub name 'King of Prussia' one such pub, 'the Moorfield' in Eskdale, Cumberland, was renamed this in 1815 in honour of Prussia's role in helping Britain defeat Napoleon'.





Situated on Arcade Street, off Library Street. A beautiful Victorian example of their ornament and craftsmanship. Converted inside to a pub but unaltered externally.

Let the buildings speak
As the years go by
From the town hall teak
To the cupola in the sky.

Let the stained glass glow
Midst stone structure so strong
Bright multi-colour show
To the lucky who throng.

The quietest study
In the archives preserved
Clears keen minds once muddy
New knowledge deserved.

Yes, the buildings do speak
Architectural voice
To the strong and the meek
Please enter – your choice.

Relief panel over the Hewlett Street entrance to Wigan & District Mining & Technical College, 1887-1975 (now Wigan Town Hall). I have fond memories of this building where I studied for the ONC and HNC in construction for four years in the early seventies.



WRIGHTINGTON

PART TWO: ITS HISTORY FROM HALL TO HOSPITAL

By Dr Stephen Craig Smith and Barbara Dix

'Wrightington – Part One, Its History and its Hall' focused on the origin of the ancient township of Wrightington, the various land-owning families who managed the township over the greater part of nine centuries, and Wrightington Hall itself, both its earlier Elizabethan structure and the current hall dating back to the mid decades of the eighteenth century. 'Wrightington – Part Two: Its History from Hall to Hospital' overviews the last nine decades focusing on the conversion of the eighteenth-century hall into a nationally renowned hospital.

All too often homes of the landed gentry were put up for sale during the early decades of the twentieth century or, worse still, were demolished! To quote but two local examples, Standish Hall, a couple of miles southeast of Wrightington, was demolished in 1923 and Lathom House, just five miles west of Wrightington, was demolished in 1925. By very good fortune Wrightington Hall escaped demolition and became a well-known and respected hospital - so how did this come about? Why were halls belonging to the landed gentry so vulnerable to being sold off or demolished, in the early decades of the twentieth century? There were many reasons for this.

Houses of the landed gentry had been built, extended, modernised, and even totally rebuilt from earliest times, but previously the gentry had the money to effect the changes. Income from the lease of their lands and relatively low taxation in earlier times allowed landowners to enlarge their homes, or totally replace them with larger structures in landscaped grounds. The construction of an entirely new Wrightington Hall surrounded by landscaped grounds and ornamental fishponds in the eighteenth century was a case in point. Labour was relatively cheap, so large houses requiring numerous servants faced no serious issues. According to the 1881 census, for instance, there were no fewer than twelve domestic servants looking after just the internal running of Wrightington Hall.

The need to sell off so many country houses in the early twentieth century was forced on their owners by social, political, and most importantly, economic change around that time. By the early twentieth century death duties – a form of inheritance tax - were beginning to bite hard. 1907 saw the introduction of a 'differentiation tax' which was deliberately designed to be more punitive to those who lived off investments rather than from earned income. After the First World War there were more job opportunities, especially for young female labour, beyond domestic service, so domestic staff were becoming increasingly more difficult to recruit and consequently more expensive to employ. These changes had significant consequences for the life of the landed gentry of which Wrightington Hall was not immune.

Some furniture and paintings belonging to the Hall were sold off sometime prior to 1920 and ended up at 'Robertsons of Knightsbridge' in London. These items were subsequently purchased by Mr and Mrs B. Robinette and gifted to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1928. The Hall contents can still be seen in Gallery 378, European Art 1500-1850, on the third floor (as can be seen in the image on the right).



The need for medical treatment of tuberculosis in the early twentieth century and the purchase of the Hall

Pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) is caused by an infection, usually of the lungs, by the bacterium mycobacterium tuberculosis and was a significant cause of death before the use of vaccines (from around 1921) and antibiotics (from around 1944). Poor living standards, poverty and squalor created an ideal environment for the spread of this disease which caused the deaths of around 4 million people in England and Wales during the sixty years between 1851 and 1910. A third of those 4 million died between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four; half died between the ages of twenty and twenty-four!

Within the Greater Manchester region there was only Manchester Hospital (established in 1875 in Manchester and transferred to new premises in 1886) and Baguley Sanatorium (opened around 1915) for the treatment of tuberculosis cases. There was clearly an urgent need for more beds, especially for children, in this part of Lancashire.

Wrightington Hall fortuitously came on the property market around the same time Lancashire County Council was formulating its long-term plans for the development of a new TB hospital in the general vicinity of Wigan. Exactly when the Hall was purchased by Lancashire County Council for the sum of £16,473 is a little uncertain, some sources say 1918 and other sources say 1920. As the TB Hospital was constructed between 1929 and 1931 there was clearly a long period of time for prior preparation and planning. The official opening only took place on 16 June 1933.

The Hall slowly morphs into a hospital

The future hospital required three things: (1) sufficient grounds adjacent to the main Hall on which to construct a number of medical wards specifically designed for the use of TB patients; (2) the demolition of the original Elizabethan Hall, long used only for storage, to provide a suitable site on which to build a purpose-built nurses' home, subsequently called the Annex; and (3) some conversion work to the eighteenth-century Hall so it could be used for hospital purposes. The initial cost of construction and renovation came to £129,520.

When it finally opened in 1931, the hospital had 226 beds, of which 146 were for children. The first patient admitted was a nine-year-old boy from Ashton with TB of the spine. He stayed at the hospital for eighteen months being treated in a 'spinal box' with psoas abscess injections; and in those early days parental visits were only allowed on the first Saturday of the month! Treatment mainly consisted of fresh air and rest, resulting in



Aerial view of the hospital and grounds

many patients' beds being placed on outside verandas overnight! There are many stories of patients waking up in the morning, leaning out of bed and making snowballs. Because children suffering from TB had to remain in hospital for such long periods of time there was a separate hospital school on site from 1932 until the final closure in 1980.

As a large specialist tuberculosis hospital run by a local authority Wrightington was unique, and although it initially experienced some staffing difficulties these were fortunately soon overcome. The hospital accepted patients from all over Lancashire and treated them according to established sanatorium regimes which focused on rest, fresh air, and good food. It did not take long for the hospital to became nationally renowned for its treatment of TB and its part in helping contribute to a significant national annual decline of TB across the country.

The hospital had been operating for nine years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War and was not then commandeered for the war effort, being allowed to continue its efforts towards eradicating TB. The war time Emergency Medical Service had, however, built seven extra wards and these fortuitously became available to the hospital when the war ended.



One of the original open wards

Under the National Health Service, which came into operation in 1948, tuberculosis was governed by Regional Health Authorities rather than Local Government Authorities, thereby removing control from the Lancashire County Council Tuberculosis Committee. In 1948 the hospital came under the management of the Manchester Regional Hospital Board, with its day-to-day administration managed by Wrightington Hospital Management Committee.



The main building and the 1930 annex to the left of the photograph

The immediate post war period saw new antibiotic treatments for TB coming into use, and improved prevention of the disease by such things as the widespread national use of pasteurised milk. Dr Dobson, Medical Superintendent at Wrightington during the war years, was involved in research that identified Streptomycin as the first successful drug treatment for TB in 1943. The significant reduction in the number of tuberculosis sufferers during the 1950s however, forced Wrightington Hospital to change its focus to other areas of health specialties, thus avoiding the hospital becoming significantly underused.

The hospital shifted its focus towards hip and orthopaedic surgery, an area of expertise developed by Dr John Charnley (1911-1982) who later became Sir John Charnley, F.R.S. John Charnley was disillusioned with managerial red tape at Manchester Royal Infirmary and decided to relocate to Wrightington where he could set-up a centre for hip surgery in 1961. In late 1962 he carried out the first successful total hip replacement and later turned his attention to infection control in major surgery. He helped create a sterile air flow system to be used in operating theatres and a system for handling surgical instruments, improvements that are still used around the world today. A rheumatology unit was also opened at the hospital in 1967.

In 2001 Wrightington Hospital merged with Wigan and Leigh Health Services to form the Wrightington, Wigan, and Leigh NHS Trust, with Wrightington still specialising in joint surgery and rheumatism.

In December 2015 a new state of the art orthopaedic centre was opened at Wrightington Hospital at a cost of £18 million – a far cry from the £16,473 for the purchase of the Hall around 1920 and £129,520 for the initial construction of wards and renovation of the Hall around 1930!

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Acknowledgements

Kathryn Pass of Archives: Wigan & Leigh for information and research assistance.

KING STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

Heritage Action Zone Project final Update February 2024.

In September 2019 the Northwest was allocated £18.7 million as part of the initiative to revive historic high streets across the country. Wigan was one of the sixty-nine selected to help transform disused historic buildings and received £1.27 million.

There were three streams to the project:

'The street that was'
'The street that is'
'The street that will be'

Being made a High Street Heritage Action Zone by Historic England has hopefully given the King Street area the recognition, and the lift it deserves. It is not just about the buildings though; it is about the people who used them, the people who lived in them, worked in them, shopped in them, or had a drink in them. They are all part of the story.

The history of the buildings associated with the Heritage Action Zone has been divided by 'existing' historic, 'long gone' lost buildings, and people of the street. All the buildings researched by Wigan Local History and Heritage group and Wigan Buildings Preservation Trust have played a part in the history and heritage of our town.

The project is scheduled to end at the beginning of April 2024 and the team are currently busy finalising all the information relating to buildings and people in King Street, part of Rodney Street, and a part of Library Street.

The last few weeks have concentrated on the best ways to produce the enormous amount of information gathered and how to make it accessible to the public.

The current plan is to make it available through a website which can be linked from several places. For example, the Archives: Wigan & Leigh site, Wigan Council site, and the Wigan Local History and Heritage Society site.

We plan to set a launch date for April 2024 and provide links to the above sites as mentioned. Until then progress so far can be viewed on the WLHHS web page:

https://www.wiganlocalhistory.org/king-street-heritage-action-zone

As the project lead, I would like to thank everyone who has been involved with the research.

Jan Bannister Thomas on behalf of Wigan Local History and heritage Society.

Oysters in Wigan!

The Old Curiosity Shop and the Oyster Saloon

By Ken Scally on behalf of the Wigan Local History and Heritage Society (HAZ project)

Records in the Wigan Observer and District Advertiser in 1871 mention oysters in Wigan at Connolley's Oyster Saloon, Clarence Yard, Wallgate. Later, from 1881, Patterson's Oysters could be found at the Silver Grid Bar, King Street; Empire Oyster Saloon, Coopers Row, Marketplace; and numbers 15 and 16 in the Market Hall.

Of particular interest is Walter Patterson. He was born in Liverpool circa 1847, his mother being Jane McGregor who married Robert Patterson in 1848 in Wigan. By the 1891 census Walter was recorded as an oyster dealer living at 2 Coopers Row, Wigan, where they lived until his wife's death in 1913.

Walter Patterson's Oyster Bar

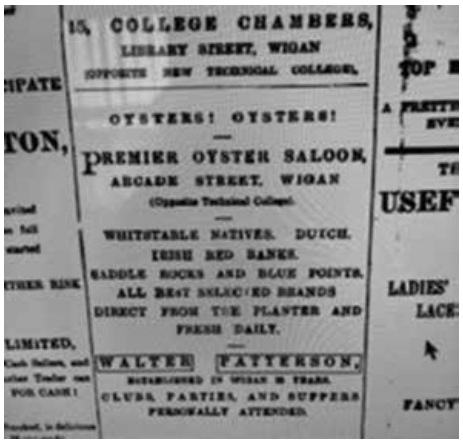
Coopers Row, 1890s

The building that projects into Coopers Row on the right-hand side is now a public house: the John Bull Chophouse. The building originated in the seventeenth century as three cottages and is one of the oldest in the town. Some bricks of the period can still be seen inside.

It is believed that Walter Patterson, oyster dealer, of Marketplace, Coopers Row and Arcade Street, moved his business to a larger premises in the newly created Arcade Street, renaming the bar, 'the Premier Oyster Saloon'. In 1902 the Wigan and District Advertiser reported his business as being an oyster dealer of twenty-five years,



Mr Patterson outside of the Coopers Row Oyster Bar c. 1890s



Coopers Row Oyster Bar advert from 1902

being based in Arcade Street opposite the Technical College (now known as the Town Hall). It was in an adjoining building that he opened his Old Curiosity shop.

The Old Curiosity Shop:

'A treasure trove of antiquities and curiosities' (Wigan Observer, August 1903).

Established around 1902 the shop was adjacent to the Oyster Saloon and held many interesting finds, several noted in newspaper articles as far away as Belfast.

Walter was reported to have held many Roman finds: pottery excavated from Library Street and coins from other digs (Wigan Observer correspondent 5 August 1903). The same article mentions artefacts from the Cromwellian era, possibly the battle of Wigan Lane. For example, the spurs from a cavalry soldier, brass buttons from an officer's tunic, a leather scabbard and musket balls. Also believed to have been found on Millgate were many clay pipes from the older industries of Millgate such as clay mouldings.

A particularly interesting report from a correspondent was found in the Wigan Observer 23 March 1907.

The headline read: 'A romantic picture found in a Wigan Old Curiosity Shop'.

The story told how a picture by the celebrated eighteenth-century portrait painter Sir Godfrey Kneller was found in Wigan. A gentleman had walked into a curiosity shop in Arcade Street, next to which the oyster saloon bar was attached. He found a canvas without frame, the portrait appealed to him, and Mr Patterson sold the canvas to the gentleman for five shillings. Later the buyer was shocked to find that it was a signed self-portrait of Sir Godfrey Kneller. The old painting was very valuable as Kneller was a major painter of his generation. The painting had nearly sold once before; one customer bought the frame but got Mr Patterson, to remove the canvas not knowing the history of the painting. Mr Patterson acquired the painting and a dozen other canvasses for the princely sum of 12 shillings at an auction. One presumes that when Mr Patterson found the true value of the painting, he would have been mightily upset.

Six months later, in September 1907, Messrs Green and Trickett advertised an auction selling a collection of antiquities. Among other things, the advert listed collections of elegant furniture, china from various periods, both Chinese, Japanese and many examples of English china including Royal Dalton and Wedgwood. It also included examples of Medieval and Roman pottery found at the Library Street excavations, and many other archaeological finds including valuable coins, many from the Roman occupation.

The 1921 census records Walter living at 4 Fairhurst Yard, Millgate, aged seventy-five. His son John, recorded as a visitor, was a fish salesman. John died in 1935 in Wardle, near Rochdale and is buried with his wife and son in Wigan Cemetery.

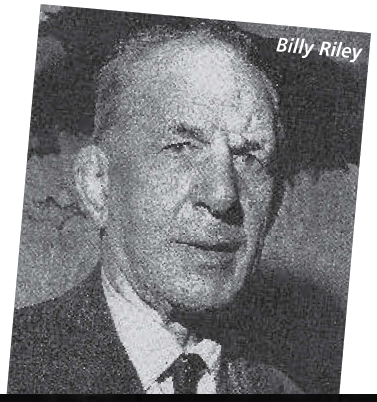
At one time it was possible to enjoy an oyster supper in this locality. Today picnickers and the John Bull customers use the pleasant open space created in the early 1970s by the clearance of the Empire Music Hall and a dense maze of buildings on the higher ground at the Wiend and Believe Square.

With thanks to Archives: Wigan & Leigh and the *Wigan Town Trail* for additional information on Coopers Row.

NEW EXHIBITION

Wigan's Wrestling Past

By Helen Raymond


Billy Riley

Wrestling hasn't always been a performance.

It was once an intrinsic part of this borough's culture, and a new exhibition in Leigh Town Hall will tell the story of how the Lancashire style – Catch-as-Catch-Can Wrestling –came to influence martial arts practice far beyond the UK. The story begins with one man – Billy Riley.

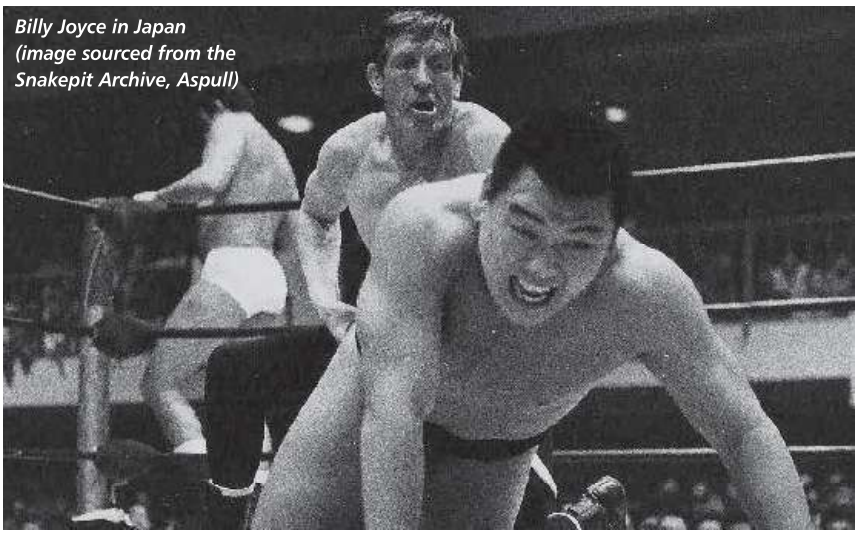

Billy Joyce in Japan (image sourced from the Snakepit Archive, Aspull)

Many in the wrestling world are familiar with this name. Leigh-born Riley was a moulder in a foundry, and like many miners and labourers would also wrestle – for extra money, for fun, or to settle disputes. Many miners would finish a shift and settle disagreements of the day on the pit brow, fighting one another on beds of shale.

Riley was passionate about training the next generation, and bought a plot of land in Whelley, where he and his students built a tin-roofed shack which came to be known as Riley's Gym. Here Riley trained dozens of fighters who went on to have distinguished careers, including Karl Gotch, Roy Wood, and Billy Joyce. These fighters took the style to Japan, revolutionising wrestling there. There is now a gym in Japan called Riley's Gym Kyoto, named in honour of Catch's Wigan roots, and wrestling events known as Muga showcased the style.

The Archives exhibition will go back to the beginning, telling the story of Catch from Riley's time to the present day, in which the sport is enjoying a resurgence in popularity. This is largely due to the hard work of Roy Wood, Riley's student who took over the gym when he retired, and Andrea, his daughter. Together, they run and teach at the Snakepit in Aspull and continue to develop wrestlers and coaches who spread the word both nationally and internationally. The Catch Wrestling World Championships come to the North West every year, attracting global competitors.

The exhibition is the final element of a £10,000 National Lottery Heritage Fund project, which sought to preserve an extensive wrestling archive collected by Roy and Andrea Wood over several decades consisting of programmes, entry forms, posters, trophies, medals, photographs, and VHS tapes. One item from the archive proved that the first black British Olympian was wrestler Louis Bruce who fought in the 1908 games – this discovery made the front page of the Guardian in 2022.


Billy Joyce in Japan (image sourced from the Snakepit Archive, Aspull)

Archives trainee Lorna Thompson has repackaged and catalogued the material, and digitisation company 'Creating Memories by Rachel' have made digital copies of the VHS, some of which would have been lost within the next five to ten years had there been no intervention. Photos, which have been digitised, will be shared on Archives: Wigan & Leigh's photographic archive page very soon.

The Young Historian



Welcome

Hello all and welcome back to 'The Young Historian'!

If you're new here, this space is both written and produced by young people who want to explore their passion for local history – if you've seen us before, hello again!

This issue may look a little different than usual as it is dedicated to showcasing the 11–18-year-old entries from our annual 'Past Forward Essay Competition'. At the YH we want to extend our congratulations to all this year's entrants – from their hard work you'll get to learn all about how dialect binds our local community, the importance of coal mining for our borough and how industrialisation has shaped our local history.

If you would like to get involved and see your work on these pages you can join in by emailing pastforward@wigan.gov.uk with any ideas or questions you may have. We look forward to hearing from you!

Exploring the Archives

By Adam

Visiting Leigh and taking the Leigh Town Hall tour has been such a worthwhile experience. The tour, led by the Archives: Wigan & Leigh service, takes you through the many archive strongrooms including what used to be the Town Hall's vault, all of which hold multitudes of books, maps, registries and more detailing the area's rich past. I was impressed at the sheer amount of information and how it was all neatly categorised.

The items went deep into the past including an over 300-year-old indenture by King Charles II. Despite it being written in Latin I could clearly understand its importance and appreciate the elaborate portrait of the king it contained, as well as the prime condition it has been kept in.

My interest did not have to be limited to the locality as the archives contained many items from outside the area, including an amazing collection of ancient Persian manuscripts. They were illuminated manuscripts, many ornately decorated with gold leaf.



Each room went far, far back containing thousands of boxes and most impressive was the sheer height of one room which had shelves stacked to the ceiling, requiring Gladys the lovely hydraulic lift to access its heights.

The tour continues upstairs to the Town Hall chamber, a large and bright committee room that contains beautiful and vibrant stained glass windows, placed in 1907. The art depicts the many valued industries of the time as well as coats of arms on the staircase windows.

Overall it was a fulfilling experience, and I cannot wait to return as there is too much that captures your interest than you can read in one day!



Wigan Industrialisation

by Emilia

1st PLACE

Wigan has a past that has influenced its modern-day geography, residents, and vibrant culture, from its beginnings as a burgh to its contemporary relevance as one of northern England's industrial strongholds. That is why it is vital to study about Wigan's history, as it shaped not just the town itself, but also the surrounding cities and villages.

Wigan's history stretches back to the seventh century, yet its area was conquered by the Romans in the first century, the region being a principal colony to them. Celtic people of Britain were active in the area throughout the Iron Age. Later, the territory was colonised by the Anglo-Saxons, and in the tenth century it was flooded with Scandinavians exiled from Ireland. Hence Wigan's modern-day Scandinavian route names.

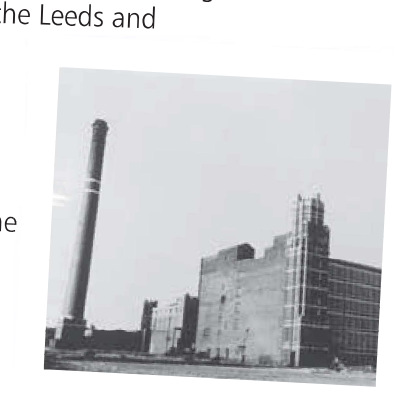
Two centuries later, the territory was constituted as a borough, and the town thrived throughout the mediaeval period. The town had a population of 3000 people back then, its two primary industries being coal mining and wool manufacture. During the English Civil War, numerous significant engagements were fought there between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians. The Royalist armies suffered defeat, thereby losing control of northern England. James Stanley was no longer in command of Wigan's domains.

Wigan was an important market town throughout the industrial period. This was due to the abundance of materials generated by its inhabitants, including pewter items and clocks. When the Leeds and Liverpool Canal opened in 1779, Wigan grew in prominence as a centre for the transfer of coal from Lancashire mines to further towns along the canal's course. The underlying coal seams and the power of the fast-flowing River Douglas resulted in enhanced prosperity, but at a high social cost.

In the 1800s, the town grew into a textile manufacturing centre. There were eight cotton mills in town by 1818. Wigan's role as a coal mining region was maintained, with fifty-four collieries accounting for one-sixth of all collieries in Lancashire. Not only was Wigan notable for its coal supply, but it was also one of the first English towns to be connected by a railway in the 1830s. This linked Wigan to larger cities including Manchester and Liverpool. At the time, the town was still a prominent player in the country's cotton sector, producing approximately 6 billion square metres of cotton cloth. This persisted until the twentieth century.

Burgess plots were filled with congested houses designed to accommodate the large number of incomers eager to thrive in the new industrial age. As lovely as Wigan was, the rising usage of steam contaminated the environment to inconceivable proportions. This did not deter people from visiting Wigan to witness its industrialisation.

The collapse of the coal and cotton industries in the mid-twentieth century had a devastating effect on Wigan, resulting in several years of mass unemployment and complex social problems. However, because the money was spent back into the town, Wigan was able to recover during the last two decades and has now remade itself as a key northern tourist destination.



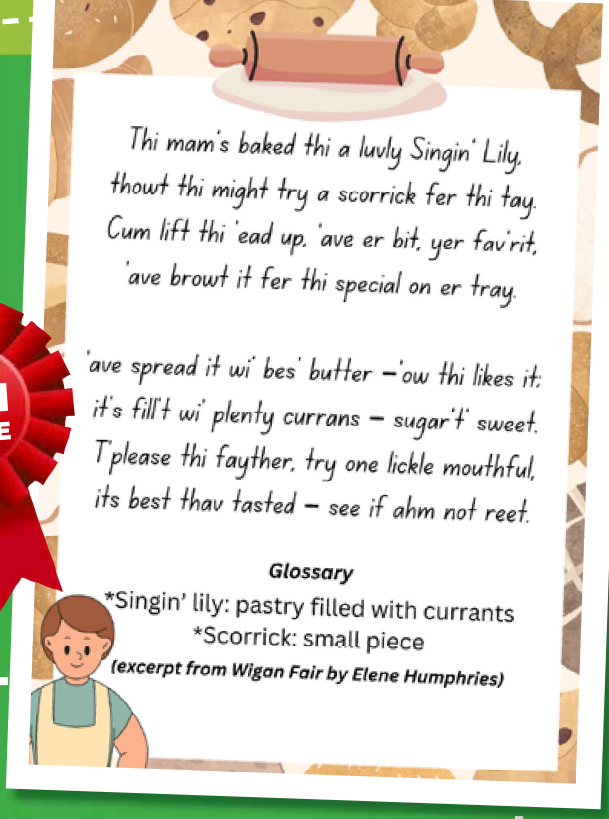


The 'Wiganese' accent

by Ellie

2nd PLACE

The dialect that binds our community



Language is undoubtedly at the core of any region's identity; it's a constant reminder of stereotypical class, historical roots and local culture. This is why Wigan's distinctive accent is so remarkable. In the UK, there are nearly forty different dialects - so why is Wigan's so unique?

Wigan is a part of Greater Manchester, with a history so deep that words over 1,000 years old are still being used today (Wigan's name itself can be traced back to the seventh century). As a northern town, its first settlers were Vikings with Old Norse speakers - the shadow of their influence is still recognisable in words such as 'agate', 'muck' and 'rugged'.

The more recent answer as to why the nicknamed 'Wiganese' dialect is so individual, however, stems from the industrial revolution during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Wigan became a hub of coal mining and textile industries, attracting a diverse population seeking employment opportunities. As people from various regions migrated to Wigan, a melting pot of linguistic influence was created. Irish immigrants, employees from Lancashire, links to smaller towns like Bolton and Leigh - thousands of individuals contributed their own accents to the town's diverse sound.

The industrial nature of Wigan contributed to a town with a typically working-class identity, which made a unique linguistic style. The local accent became a marker of shared experiences and showed a sense of belonging among the working-class communities. Language brought people together, at a time when nothing else could.

Over time, the Wigan accent subtly changed as it was influenced in social, economic, and educational ways. As industry declined, Wigan experienced social changes that impacted on it linguistically. Education and more widespread media exposure began to play a more significant role in day-to-day life, influencing speech patterns and introducing a way of speaking that was more standardised.

Despite these changes, the Wigan accent remains, reflecting a sense of pride and local identity. In recent years, efforts to document and celebrate regional accents, including Wigan's, have gained momentum. Linguists and cultural enthusiasts find preserving these individual accents is important to the UK's broader cultural heritage.

Overall, the 'Wiganese' accent, with its rich history and cultural significance, powerfully demonstrates the industrial, social, and cultural forces that shape the language a community uses. The accent's preservation continues due to many generations who use and pass down its distinctive features.

Therefore, this dialect is truly a symbol of Wigan's current identity - which many of us will proudly use and recognise to this day.

Leyth – Leigh

Lobby-gobbler – native of Leigh

Pie-eater – native of Wigan

Bent & Bongs – townships of Atherton and Tyldesley

Eigh up – hello or what's going on?

Havin' a baht o' th' apple afore tha's bowt t'tree – premarital relations

Clemmed – extreme hunger, starving

Lobby – a local stew

Butty – sandwich

Singing-Lily – a sweetmeat, short pastry encasing currants

Prayter – potato

Leigh Toaster – cheese from Leigh

Feight – fight

Purrin – clog-fighting

Scutch – to beat

Pow-fagged – tired-out

Sken – to have a quick look at something

Coal Mining in Wigan

by Naaz

3rd PLACE





The coal mining sector played a major role in shaping Wigan's history and helped to create an industrial legacy that lasted into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shaping the town's identity. Located in the heart of Lancashire, Wigan rose to prominence during the Industrial Revolution as a significant coal mining town thanks to its subsurface resources.

Wigan's coal business became well-known when vast amounts of coal were discovered beneath the city's soil in the eighteenth century. Because of the accessibility of this valuable resource numerous collieries were built, altering the topography and transforming Wigan into a hub for the production of coal. Collieries such as the Wigan Coal and Iron Company employed a rising number of people and were vital to the economic growth of the region.

The actual mining process was challenging and risky. Miners worked in cramped, dark areas, extracting coal from the interior of the earth with rudimentary instruments. The usually inadequate safety measures resulted in multiple accidents and health hazards. The life of a miner in Wigan was hard and had a serious detrimental effect on their health.

Wigan became known as 'the town that was born underground' and was linked to the production of coal as the coal industry grew. Because the town's prosperity was directly correlated with the availability of coal, its financial fortunes changed with the situation of the coal market. Wigan's coal advanced society locally and beyond by powering homes, industry, and railroads.

Coal mining had a profound effect on Wigan's social structure that went beyond economic concerns. Collieries gave rise to mining towns, which were close-knit communities where inhabitants developed a special affinity through shared struggles. The customs and stories that sprang from these mining towns have a significant influence on Wigan's rich cultural legacy.

But Wigan was shadowed by the collapse of the coal industry in the latter half of the twentieth century. Many collieries closed as a result of technological breakthroughs and changes in energy choices, which caused social unrest and severe unemployment. With abandoned pitheads and mining infrastructure strewn throughout the town, the once-thriving mining environment now stands as a reminder to Wigan's coal mining legacy.

In conclusion, the history of coal mining in Wigan is one of perseverance, hardship, and transformation. It reflects the town's evolution from being a coal-fuelled powerhouse to a community dealing with the challenges of deindustrialisation. Examining this history reveals the economic intricacies of a bygone age as well as the human stories that are woven into the very fabric of Wigan's identity.

The Reader

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Colin the Coalminer



And the Band Plays On!

Charlie Taylor brass bandsman extraordinaire

By Alison Armfield



Brass bands are made from moments like this - thanks Charlie!

Charles Taylor was born in 1926 to parents Hannah and Bob. I think it is safe to say that as they gazed into the eyes of their newborn son they would have had little inkling of the iconic role that he was destined to hold in the world and folklore of brass bands.

It is generally acknowledged that the first all brass band was formed in 1832, well before Charlie's time. It is claimed that the formation of brass bands was originally influenced by church associations and temperance groups. Indeed, it was the Salvation Army that fostered Charlie's love of the genre. The most popular account, however, appears to be that brass bands became an integral part of most towns in the north of England with manual workers joining in large numbers as an escape from the grind of daily life in the factories and collieries. It is purported that many of the bands were established by factory and colliery owners in an attempt to create peaceful communities and to divert workers' attention away from politics.

The industries most supportive of brass bands were collieries, railways, and iron and steel. Given the number of collieries that were functioning at the time in Wigan, Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley, it is easy to see why the area has been home to so many brass bands. However, in 1947 every colliery in the country, including their associated bands, came under the management of the National Coal Board. In the 1980s Margaret Thatcher's controversial 'streamlining' of the mining industry resulted in collieries being closed down forever and pressure put on the brass bands to fold. It is testament to their value and importance to working class culture that many bands fought to survive and continue to play today.

Tyldesley Band appears to go back to 1887 when Tyldesley Good Templars Brass Band was reported to have attended the opening of the public baths. In its long history the band has had a number of name changes and has achieved many successes and a few disappointments. The Leigh Chronicle of July 1893 reported that twenty-one members of the band got off work at breakfast time and got into Liverpool at eleven o'clock in time to get to New Brighton for the scheduled competition slot. Three band members were unable to leave work until noon. Foregoing dinner they ran to catch the train, only to arrive in New Brighton a matter of minutes after the band's allocated time slot. The band was disqualified much to their dismay, especially as

they were expected to win a prize. The band has come a long way since then, gaining a place in the National Championships being one of its more recent achievements.

It is to this remarkable band that Charlie Taylor pledged a lifetime allegiance. Charlie was nine years old when he was first introduced to the cornet. Over his lifetime he became proficient on various instruments and was still playing the drums aged eighty-seven. He joined Tyldesley Band aged fifteen, and this is where his passion for the music blossomed and his love for his local band began. By the time he 'retired' in his late eighties, he had undertaken the roles of treasurer, librarian, secretary, and chairman but never held any ambitions to conduct, adjudicate or leave Tyldesley for any other band. His enthusiasm lay in playing and teaching.

Many residents of Tyldesley will remember Charlie as a 'character', easily recognisable with his strong northern accent and, in later years, his regular mode of transport, the caravanette. However, for some of the many children taught by him it will be the caravanette's predecessor, the seatless van, that conjures up happy memories – being picked up for band practice in the back of the van, treated to a chip supper at Frank's Cafe afterwards, then being driven home.

Everything that Charlie did within the world of brass bands was voluntary. Putting his hand in his pocket to support the cause was typical of him. It is said that the life blood of brass bands are the Championships. Charlie always looked forward to Pontins' Easter Brass Band Championships when he would load his favourite mode of transport with all the necessities - black peas, lobby, and his beloved portable stove. Everyone knew where to go if feeling peckish! The caravanette was occasionally left behind when National Finals necessitated a trip to London and a stay in a 'posh' hotel where they served what Charlie called 'green cauliflower' (broccoli!).

Charlie first began to teach local children at his home in Derwent Street, Tyldesley, where it was not unusual to see him march his young proteges up and down the street. I personally never met him but have strong memories of Charlie's Angels, an affectionate name given to the band of young players that Charlie took around town at Christmas time. My Christmas didn't start until they had serenaded me on the last Sunday before Christmas Day.

When he died, over 300 people attended his funeral from all aspects of the brass band world. Tributes were made to him in popular brass band publications and his collaboration with Fred Longworth High School was honoured by the creation of an annual student award in his name. A true testament to the respect and admiration in which he was held. In his eighty year commitment to the same band he influenced innumerable men, women and children and has left a family dynasty behind him. The names Taylor and Peacock are synonymous with brass bands. His children and grandchildren share his love of the music and started their band careers at his beloved Tyldesley Band. There are now great grandchildren waiting in the wings to carry on the tradition. Thus, the band plays on!

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Charlie's daughter Margaret Peacock for sharing her precious memories of her remarkable father



Charlie Taylor (1926-2015) – legendary bandsman

Creativity Through Nature and History:

Creating Place II

Helen Mather and Anna FC Smith

Progress with Light Steps

Helen Mather and Anna FC Smith's commission for Creating Place II at the Turnpike Gallery was inspired by Wigan Council's cultural manifesto theme 'A New Heritage' and supported by funding from the National Lottery via Arts Council England.



History and archives are our inspiration

Archives are a central pillar to our work as artists, often unearthing detail that provides inspiration for the direction of a project. We work with people on a journey of discovery, whether that is on a walk with a naturalist or historian, or accessing archives with a group to learn with and from each other in collaboration.

We met through an ACE funded artist development programme in Wigan in 2017, but it was in our first meeting at the archives in Leigh where we found our common interests in history, politics and socially engaged art. Since then, we have collaborated on a number of projects, most recently the long-term project, The Botanical Society, which takes inspiration from eighteenth and nineteenth century working-class botanists; how they observed and documented nature during huge industrial change and how we might learn from them in our age of climate crisis. It is under this wider project that our current work at the Turnpike is realised.

A New Heritage

The stained-glass windows in Leigh Town Hall celebrate the town's past industry along with the heraldic achievements of the town's landed gentry, proclaiming the town's foundational mythology. These are symbols of civic identity, and we were moved by the beauty of the windows, the glow from the panes of coloured glass proclaiming our inheritance, pride, placemaking, personifications of industry and ideals like 'education' which spoke to the townsfolk. These windows symbolise collective identity using mottos, motifs from nature and idealised images. Leigh's motto states, 'progress with steady steps' and in the nearby parish church, under similar industrial images, the Speakman window proclaims, 'All these trust in their hands. They will maintain the state of the world and all their desire is in the work of their craft'.

The windows provided us with a visual medium and a concept to reflect on 'A New Heritage' for the town, what has happened to these industries, and what can people build hope and community around today.

We turned to Bickershaw Nature Reserve, a former colliery site that is transformed into an abundant green space. We were interested in the site as a place of growth and recovery. Plants have recolonised the land turning barren earth into green space rich in biodiversity. The miners' axes have become conservators' spades, cramped conditions to open spaces, cleaning the air that once hung heavy with smoke.

On a frosty morning in late November, we invited local people to join us on a walk in Bickershaw Nature Reserve. It was led by Dave Wilson, a local naturalist and ornithologist.

Walking and talking, we recorded their reflections on the idea of 'A New Heritage' alongside their connections to the land past and present, and how they might see these areas of nature as a future

forming legacy in Leigh. People came to the walk for different reasons: to make connections, to discover a new area for future walks, one woman came to walk on the same ground as her ancestors. The sky was cloudless, and the air froze our breath as our conversations meandered: of a new flash in creation, of bird migratory routes, and of our need for open spaces, with our feet crunching on the icy ground near to where endangered willow tits nest.

Progress with Light Steps

Following the walk, we gathered again for a stained-glass collage workshop, inviting people to reflect on and discuss a new heritage at Bickershaw. Using imagery and transcripts from the walk we furthered the conversations and expanded on the walk. People created images that reflected what felt important to them. Bringing together words and imagery we started to assemble the essence of these new connections, giving visual shape to ideas through collage.

Taking the collages and sound recordings we re-worked and re-collaged, gathering more imagery taken directly from the stained-glass windows in Leigh with plants and wildlife mentioned by Dave on the walk. We mixed a sound track of field recordings of ambient sounds and trickling streams with conversations that gave a sense of the walk in sound.

Directly referencing the Town Hall windows we chose three shield shapes to explore three key areas defined in our conversations: water, air and earth. Water spoke to the promises of wildlife with the creation of New Water at Bickershaw, of reed beds and the birds that roost there, and of the Stop the Flow research project with wide reaching effects. With air we spoke about birds and migratory routes, of clean air and the seeds that travel on the wind, all while the reeds gently rustled in the background. Earth reminds us of the history under our feet, of excavation and mining and then waste, now being processed and cleaned through networks of fungi and plant life actively feeding on the metal rich earth and creating new ground.

In the final installation, hanging shields are suspended by chains of industry, fragmented and fractured, in the process of reassembling. Soft spotlights reflect and refract the colour and shapes through the translucent fragments, creating a calm reverie, inviting meditative contemplation. Sounds loop from swirls of wind through long reeds to the rhythmic pounding of machinery like ghosts of industry resurfacing and then snippets of overheard conversation, of connections to the land. The installation is a quiet contemplative space to consider the idea of 'A New Heritage' in Leigh, of how we think about and use the natural spaces in our town and how we might find a new pride in this.

The title of the work re-imagines the Leigh motto, 'Progress with steady steps' to 'Progress with light steps', as a reminder about our place in the landscape; our heavy footprints that have caused damage; the balance of living with and supporting rather than dominating nature; and the precarity of our age of climate crisis.







PARK SHOW

BY PAT AND WILL SHARP



The Park Show (courtesy of the Wigan Observer)

'The Park Show'. Those three words set off fond memories for those of us who were brought up in Wigan in 1960s and 70s.

It took place each year at the end of the summer. Huge marquees were erected in Mesnes Park in the area in front of Rylands Mill. There were displays of flower arranging, fruit and veg, and competitions for school kids to enter: painting and drawing, woodwork, knitting (a dishcloth), embroidery. Was there a pets' tent or a Cruft's style dog show? There were certainly bands playing and on the last night a firework display on the old tennis courts. Cassinelli's were in charge of the catering.

A distinct memory for a lot of people was the Heinz tent where they gave away (very) small paper cups of tomato sauce for free! There was always a queue.

But well before our Park Show, there was another summer park event. We want to remember the Grand Bazaar which took place over several days in July 1880 to raise funds for two of Wigan's churches. The Wigan Observer and Advertiser of Friday 30 July 1880 tells us all about it. The Parish Church tower had been pronounced unsafe and dangerous and £300 was needed to repair it. St. Michael's Church in Swinley had opened in 1878. The Observer tells us that the church owed a debt of £1,902 to the Rector of Wigan, Canon George Bridgeman, who had done much to get the church built, and the now flourishing parish wanted to pay off the debt as soon as possible. And so a committee was formed and the idea of the bazaar was born. So far, so familiar.

We're told the bazaar took place by the side of the Grammar School, presumably on what is now the rose garden. It was a very grand affair, approached from Parson's Walk by a broad flight of steps, 12 feet wide. You do wonder if it was open to everyone or if just the great and the good of Wigan at the end of the nineteenth century were welcome. Eighteen stalls were planned but 'so great was the number of articles sent for sale' an additional six stalls were needed. The Observer tells us that it was simply impossible to describe the stalls: 'Let the reader imagine tastefully draped boudoirs containing an endless display of beautiful and costly articles, resplendent in colour, silken in texture and elegant in design'.

Lady Sarah Lindsey from Haigh Hall sold exquisite specimens of blue china, some well executed paintings, and a number of singing birds. Mrs Rowbottom's stall displayed a number of choice knick-knacks and pretty baskets, hand screens and dolls, and Mrs Mayhew offered a number of Indian curios and a 5 o'clock tea tablecloth with hand worked borders. The younger members of the House of Haigh sold buttonholes and 'netted a considerable sum'. Mrs Pearce dispensed refreshments from, we are told, a 33 feet long refreshment counter. Sadly the Observer doesn't tell us what food was on offer. Pies or hotpot?

No need to worry about the weather. A bazaar pavilion was erected. Messrs. Meek & Sons, a drapers' firm, furnished it. They were a Wigan firm

with a showroom at 17-19 Wallgate. This building is still there as Little 15. Employees of Meek & Sons must have worked frantically to get the place decorated and beautified in time for the opening, fabric being measured, carried from the showroom to the new building, and fitted carefully.

No small affair, the building was 150 feet long and 60 feet wide with a height of over 15 feet. As well as room for the stalls, the building had a cloakroom and a retiring room, a room reserved for the committee, and a special space where a Mr Marsden of Chorley exhibited his electrical machines. There was even a theatre with 'the usual dressing rooms'. Alas, want of ventilation rendered the atmosphere extremely oppressive and disagreeable.

The furnishings provided by Meek & Sons sound luxurious. The stalls were draped in pink and white with grenadine valances. The floor was covered with grey linen to keep down the dust, and around the room were a number of spring ottomans in blue. The entrance was covered with crimson cloth, each side being ornamented with plants. But had the firm over reached themselves on this no doubt prestigious commission? By 1884 the town was awash with rumours and sure enough the firm ceased trading having been declared bankrupt.

It's interesting to see who was there.



THE GRAND BAZAAR

TO BE HELD

ON THE MESNES, WIGAN,

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF

The MAYOR and MAYORESS of Wigan;

The Earl and Countess of Crawford and Balcarres
The Earl and Countess of Bradford
The Earl and Countess of Ellesmere
The Earl and Countess of Lathom
Lord Lindsay, M.P., and Lady Lindsay
The Lady Sarah Lindsay
The Right Hon. Sir R. A. Cross, G.C.B., M.P.
The Rev. the Hon. Canon Bridgeman, Rector of Wigan
Colonel Ireland Blackburne, M.P.
Thomas Knowles, Esq., M.P.
John Lancaster, Esq., and Mrs. Lancaster
Colonel McCorquodale and Mrs. McCorquodale
&c., &c., &c.,

IS TO BE OPENED AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK

ON

THURSDAY, 29TH JULY,

BY

Sir RICHD. ASSHETON CROSS, G.C.B., M.P

SALE TO BE CONTINUED ON

FRIDAY, SATURDAY, AND MONDAY,

The Celebrated BANDS of the 1st ROYAL DRAGOONS and the 53rd REGIMENT.

One or other of these will be in attendance.

"H.M.S. PINAFORE" and other Attractions.

See posters, to be issued in a day or two.

Advert for the Grand Bazaar, July 1880, Wigan Observer

The bazaar was opened by Sir Richard Cross, MP for South West Lancashire (which then included Ince), a former Home Secretary, and a Chairman of Parr's Bank. Canon Bridgeman, the Rector of Wigan, attended. Henry Woodcock, a former mayor, and Colonel ffarrington, the current mayor, spoke. These two men were both churchwardens at the Parish Church and attended charitable and social events in Wigan. They are commemorated in various ways in the Parish Church.

The ladies' attire is described in detail. Lady Lindsey wore a blue velvet robe relieved with satin, and the Mayoress was attired in black. But the new colour, 'old gold', appeared to be much in favour, while pink and brighter hues did not seem to have lost their attractions.

A band played, and not just any band. Somehow the services of the forty strong band of the 1st Royal Dragoon Regiment were obtained and they played from the opening of the bazaar to late in the evening. The play list is recorded in the Observer and numbers included a Russian Dance, a polka, songs from HMS Pinafore and, of course, ended with 'God Save the Queen'.

There was, the Observer reports, a strong hope that the target of £2,000 would be reached 'in addition to the amount requisite for the payment of the heavy expenses which must necessarily be incurred'.

The Observers fails to provide the final total raised. Given the expense and effort which went into the venture, you begin to wonder! Elsewhere in the newspaper is the real world of Wigan. There's a report of a robbery with violence near Scholes Bridge, a new railway siding to the gas works is opened, and there's deep concern about the low price of coal and subsequent effect on wages.

So next time you're in the park, look towards the old Grammar School, or have a wander in the rose garden and imagine the Dragoon Band playing, the younger Lindsays selling their buttonholes, people reclining on the comfy blue ottomans, and wonder whether it was pies or hotpots that Mrs Pearce provided.

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

Submission Guidelines

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

We aim to acknowledge receipt of all submissions.

Contact Details

pastforward@wigan.gov.uk
or The Editor at
PAST **FORWARD**, Archives: Wigan & Leigh, Leigh Town Hall, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1DY.

Clarice Hall Pomfret

1930- 2014 By Thomas Jackson

I still remember the day in 1988 that I first met Clarice. I'd decided to take a pottery class at Tyldesley Tech and on the first night I was slightly worried in case the class didn't suit me. Even though I do lots of other art and crafts, my best medium is in water colours.

Clarice introduced herself to the class. Then she set about having us all handling, rolling, cutting, kneading, and then airing our clay ball so that the air pockets wouldn't explode in the kiln. Soon I was enjoying the class and began to make clay tankards, a couple of which I still have today.

After a few classes, Clarice asked me one night where I lived. It seemed I only lived a street away from her and walked past her house to go to the pottery class. She offered me a lift and, getting to classes earlier, I would help her to put tools and other items out ready for the class. After the class was finished, I would help her clean up to keep the room tidy and neat for the next class.

It was on our way home one night that she mentioned



Clarice Pomfret

she did paintings in acrylics, and I replied to her that I did the same but in water colours. Clarice told me she had tried water colours but couldn't control the colours as she did with acrylics.

Stopping in front of her house that night she asked me in so she could show me some of her work. She introduced me to her husband then we went upstairs to stand in front of a tall wardrobe. When she opened the double doors, I saw that the wardrobe was crammed with paintings on boards. In fact, she told me, there would probably be about 300 dating from the early 1960s onwards. Downstairs, chatting and sipping tea from a mug Clarice had made, we both decided to swap painting mediums, just to give it a try. Unfortunately, I had to go back to return the acrylics to Clarice, saying that acrylics weren't for me. She laughed and gave me back my water colours and agreed we should stick to our own mediums.

It was during one night in our pottery class that Clarice came over to chat and told me quietly she would have to give up taking the pottery class soon as she had been told her eyesight was failing and she would probably need a guide dog. Chatting that same night at her home, she made a statement about her paintings and sighed when she told me she only had the fire station to paint that stood in Flapper Fold Lane in the 1960s.

I set about finding photographs for her and had them printed off to show her when we left for the next class. I was excited really as it was the least I could do for her. But the excitement was short lived as when I showed her the pictures, she turned her head away and sadly said that she couldn't see the pictures, her sight

was failing quicker than expected.

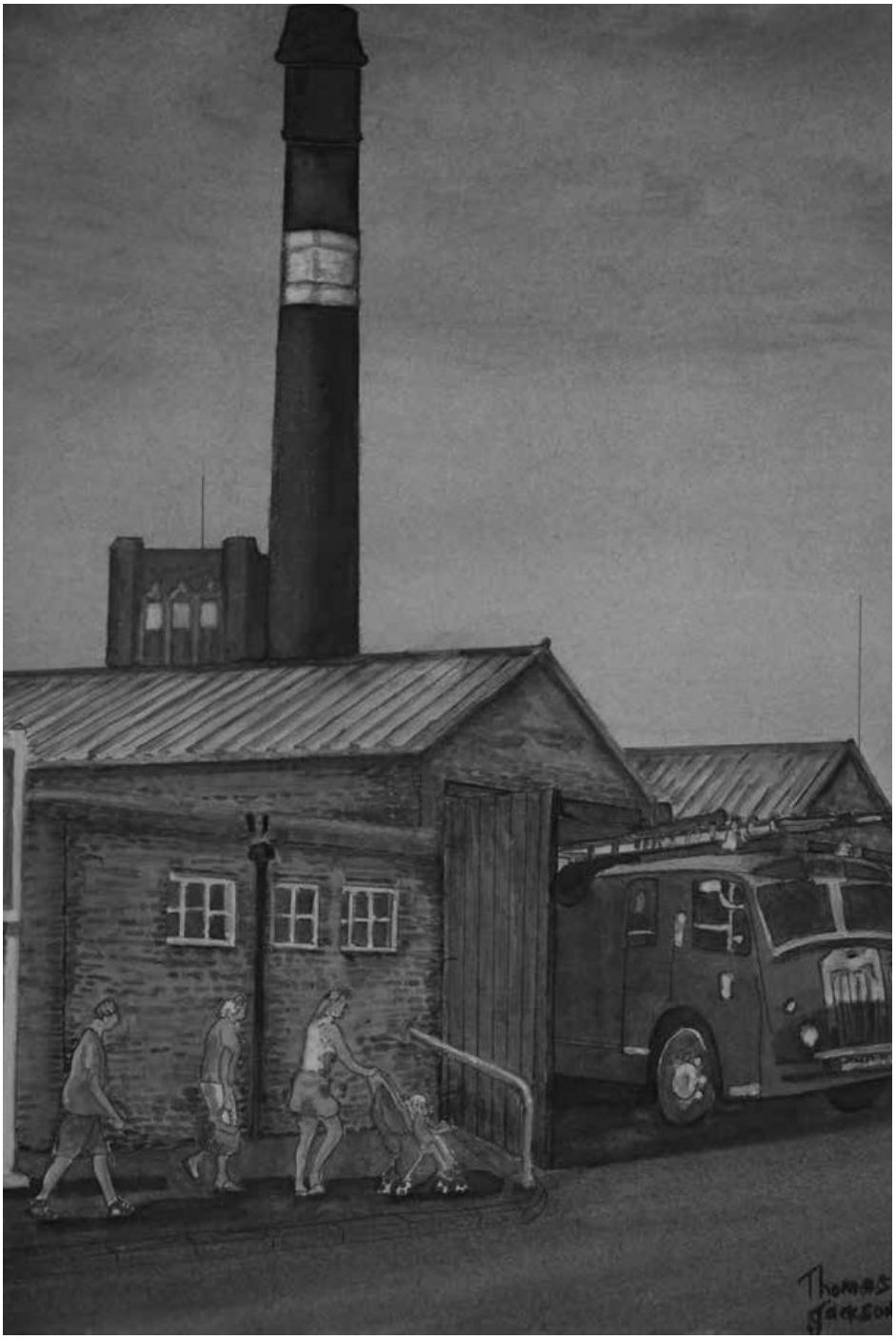
When Clarice had to give up the class I did also. I couldn't do the class with any other teacher. I saw Clarice a lot in Market Street and stopped for a chat when she was out with her guide dog, just to ask how she was keeping. I would also go to her house for a chat and ask if she could make me prints from some of her local pictures.

It was in December 2014 I heard from one of Clarice's neighbours and close friends that she had passed away, and a few days later I called to see Clarice's husband to pay my respects and relate to him about our pottery class nights, our chats and love of art.

Looking through my photographs, I came across the photographs I had collected of Atherton Fire Station in Flapper Fold Lane, so I decided to finish the picture Clarice didn't get to paint.

After posting the picture and story on a local Facebook site, a journalist from the Leigh Reporter contacted me and asked for the full story so he could include it in a column in the Reporter. A few have asked for prints of the fire station; it's just how they remember it from that time in the 1960s.

Clarice won first prize in a nationwide painting competition, which resulted in her work appearing at the Walker Gallery, Liverpool, in Manchester City Art Gallery, and also in an exhibition at Woburn Abbey. Such a deserving tribute to a very talented artist, a lovely lady and person, but I'll always remember her from the pottery class and the first ever glimpse of her laden wardrobe. It's the inspiration from Clarice that has kept me painting old scenes, the people and long-gone buildings of Hindley and Atherton from old black and white photographs.



'Atherton fire station' by Thomas Jackson

THE UNSUNG HEROINES OF WIGAN

By Sue Gerrard

Many brave Wiganers fought for their country both on the battlefield and home front and, unknown to many, some fought in the dangerous world of spying and resistance work to help the fight for victory. Here are two such remarkable Wigan women who deserve their place in history.

Wigan-born Margery Meyers Booth was an international opera singer who became a spy and captivated Adolf Hitler. She was born in 1906 in Hodges Street, Wigan, daughter of Levi and Ada Booth who later moved to Southport. She joined the town's operatic society as a teenager.

Booth trained as an opera singer in Bolton, Knightsbridge, and the Guildhall School of Music where she won a scholarship in 1925. Her professional debut was at the Queen's Hall, Wigan on 4 October 1935. By 1936 she was a mezzo soprano at Covent Garden Opera House, and even visited Hollywood to appear in a film version of Aida. In 1936 she married Dr Egon Strohm, son of a wealthy German brewing family, and moved to Germany.

When the Second World War started she was a highly successful singer with the Berlin State Opera and a great favourite of Adolf Hitler.



Margery Booth

Their first meeting was thought to be as early as 1933, when she carried the Holy Grail in the spectacular finale to the Wagner opera Parsifal at the Bayreuth Festival. Hitler was so enamoured that he went to her dressing room and told her how elegant and lovely he thought her. The following day he sent her a basket of 200 red roses tied with a sash with a swastika on it, and a card signed 'Adolf.'

She was allowed to perform for British prisoners of war at a camp in Genshagen near Berlin and helped prisoners send coded messages to London spy chiefs. She even performed for the Fuhrer with cyphers hidden inside her costume. However, in early 1944, she was arrested by the Gestapo as a suspected spy and, although tortured, did not reveal any information. When released she went west and was liberated by the advancing U.S. Army. Booth eventually gave evidence against SS officers at the London Royal Courts of Justice (the Old Bailey) soon after the war. She emigrated to New York and died on 11 April 1952 aged forty-six.

In 2014 this story was told in the film *The Spy in the Eagle's Nest* starring Anna Friel as Margery, Stephen Fry as Goering, and Susan George as Ada Booth.

Mary O'Shaughnessy, who was born in Ashton-in-Makerfield in 1898, is one of Wigan's Second World War heroines. In 1920 she gave birth to an illegitimate baby boy called Thomas, who went on to join the Royal Navy and become a war hero as well. Mary's status as an unmarried mother caused friction in the family, which resulted in Mary going to France as a nanny while the baby was left with her parents.

She was working in Provençale at the outbreak of the Second World War, and when France surrendered Mary helped the French Resistance even though they were under German occupation. While working for MI9, part of British Military Intelligence, she hid British servicemen and directed groups through escape lines to the Pyrenees.



Mary is stood at the back of the photo

However, she came to the notice of the Gestapo and was on their wanted list. While in Paris her apartment was searched, and Mary arranged to come home through Spain. However, before this happened she was betrayed by a 'friend' and arrested in March 1944. Mary was interrogated by the Nazis for ten days during which time she gave no information. She was then sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp. This camp, north of Berlin, was a women only concentration camp which housed more than 132,000 women and children in horrific conditions.

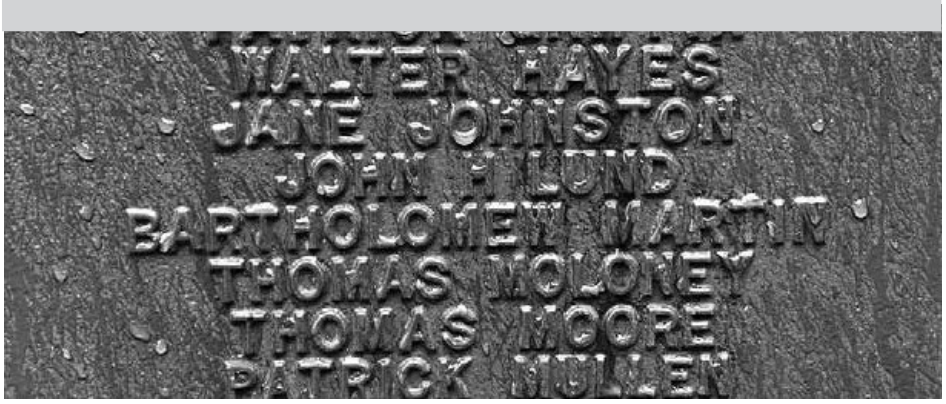
As Mary only had one arm, she was sent to Uckermark Youth Camp which was for those too ill or weak to work. Conditions were harsh and prisoners were randomly selected for execution. It is believed 92,000 out of the 132,000 prisoners died there.

Mary was rescued from the concentration camp in April 1945 by the Swedish Red Cross and is believed to be the only Englishwoman to have survived Ravensbrück. On her return to Britain via Sweden she was a witness at the Nuremburg War Crime Trials. Mary was also made an honorary member of the RAF Escaping Society.

In the early 1950s she returned to working with children in Kenya and survived the Mau Mau uprising. She was visiting Brighton for a reunion event when she died on 4 April 1973; she is buried in an unmarked grave there.

There is now a Mary O'Shaughnessy Society and a commemorative bench has been unveiled in her honour in Jubilee Park, Ashton-in Makerfield.

As we salute these two courageous women, it is also worth noting that Jane Johnston is the only woman named on the Wigan Cenotaph. She was a stewardess on the Canadian Pacific freighter SS Missanabie on its voyage from Liverpool to New York. It was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine on 9 September 1918, off the south coast of Ireland. Mrs Johnston was thirty-nine and one of forty-five lives lost.



Prehistoric Aspull

Excavations by Wigan Archaeological Society (Part 1)

BY BILL ALDRIDGE

We first became aware of this site in 2019, when it appeared as a crop mark in aerial photography of a field on the outskirts of Aspull (we're not giving its location at the moment for security reasons). The dark green circle seemed to represent a circular ditch and, as it appeared over a number of years, we knew that it was more than just agricultural activity. Our excitement grew when LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging, a technique which uses pulsed laser light to remotely measure the height of the ground, producing the result as a 3D map) revealed a low mound in the centre, although this was difficult to see on the ground. This led to speculation that it could be a Bronze Age barrow (possibly 3,000-4,000 years old), albeit quite a large one at over 40m in diameter.

With the easing of lockdown in 2021, we were able to get into the field and carry out a geophysical survey, which confirmed that the mark represented below ground archaeology. By the end of the year we had drawn up a project plan laying out how we proposed to excavate the site, and in April 2022 we cut our first trench. Because of the size of the feature, we decided our work that year would be restricted to determining the nature of the ditch (if that is what it was), i.e. its width, depth and overall size, leaving the investigation of the interior mound for the following year.

Excavation

Our first trench was located in the northwest quadrant where the results of our geophysics and the aerial crop marks coincided most closely. Fortunately for us, the farmer was as keen as we were to find out what was in his field, and also quite willing to help with the removal of the topsoil. As soon as this was done, we were able immediately to detect a colour change in the sub-soil indicating the location of the ditch.

A few visits later and we had the whole ditch section exposed and its fill removed. However, I must admit the size of it took us by surprise being over 3.5m wide and 1.5m deep with steep sides. It was cut, not just through the hard clay surface, but bedrock as well, leaving a flat bottom almost 3m wide. The fill material revealed two layers of soft sandy clay, showing a re-cut or perhaps two periods of backfilling. Strangely though, apart from this, there were no signs of silting, and the floor was generally clean. This suggested that the ditch had been backfilled in one session, i.e. not left open to fill naturally.

Without any finds, it was going to be difficult to date the feature, although the size of the ditch would tend to suggest something much older than Bronze Age such as a Neolithic henge (but a henge in this part of the country would certainly be unprecedented). Luckily we were able to retrieve a





small piece of charcoal from the very bottom of the ditch, large enough to get a radiocarbon date from it. With funding from the Council for British Archaeology, we duly sent it off to labs in Oxford for analysis, but it would be towards the end of the year before we received the result (which I will talk about at the end of the article).

Phase 2

Our excavation had confirmed, though, that the crop mark and geophysics did represent a ditch, which was our initial aim. The

second phase was to reveal the full extent of the feature. We therefore selected our next trench in an area where the images and survey results were less clear, i.e. on the westside quadrant of the circle. To our surprise, Trench 2 revealed no sign of a ditch, just sub-soil and a layer of soft sandy clay lying on top of the hard natural surface.

We were greatly relieved therefore, on opening Trench 3 on the southeast quadrant, when it showed the telltale colour change in the sub-soil. When fully excavated, it gratifyingly revealed the same structure as Trench 1, i.e. rock cut with a flat bottom (albeit slightly smaller at 3m wide but slightly deeper at 1.6m). Our next trench, Trench 4, dug on the southwest quadrant, once again revealed the same trapezoidal shape, only this time bigger than Trench 1 (almost 4m wide and 1.75m deep). Again, there were no signs of layering or silting apart from the dip of a secondary fill.





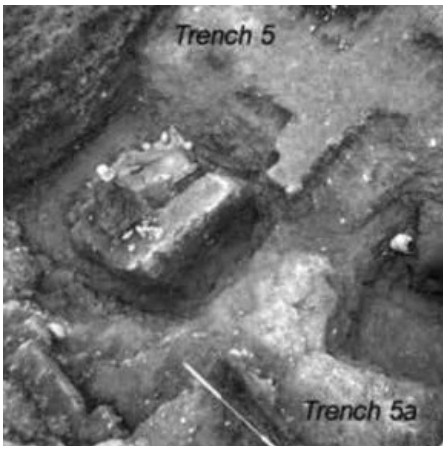
We now had three confirmed ditches, all cut through the natural hard clay into underlying bedrock. Assuming our feature to be circular, we located our fifth trench in an area where we expected the ditch to be, in the northwest quadrant. Again things did not go to plan however as, when we eventually located the ditch, it turned out to be a good 5m further out (and frustratingly under our spoil heap). After moving the pile, our excavations once again revealed the usual shape but slightly smaller than the rest at just over 3m wide and 1.3m deep.

Termini

We were aware now, that our feature was not perfectly circular and had a possible entrance on the west side. This, together with the size of the ditch, was strengthening our conviction that this was a henge rather than a Bronze Age barrow. However, there were no signs of an outer bank (something usually associated with a henge) and we had a mound on the inside (again something not normally expected with this type of monument).

But was there an entrance? - if the feature was oval-shaped, had we just missed it? Our next trench, Trench 6, was therefore located just a few metres south of Trench 2, where the entrance was perceived to be. Straight away, signs of the ditch appeared exactly where we expected on the circular projection. Without fully digging it out, we moved closer towards Trench 2 to open another trench, Trench 6a. Gratifyingly, this produced a ditch terminus and, when fully excavated, revealed it to be a semi-bowl shape (well, almost). The only sign of bedrock was at the bottom of the ditch, so it was difficult





determining the exact profile. This was particularly true at the very end where there was evidence of extensive tree root damage. Further investigations of this area produced what appeared to be a slope leading into the ditch.

We were now confident that we had an entrance, so we began to look for the north-side terminus. By now we were using an auger (a 20mm by 1m long screw) to give us some indication where to look. We planned to chase the ditch from where we had found it in Trench 5 towards Trench 2. Auguring however can be misleading, particularly where the ground is stony, as was the case in the area next to Trench 5. This led to us digging our next trench, Trench 5a, right next to Trench 5, thinking that this was where the terminus was (although we knew this was strange, as it would have made the entrance worryingly huge). Fortunately, this turned out not to be the case, but it did reveal something even more



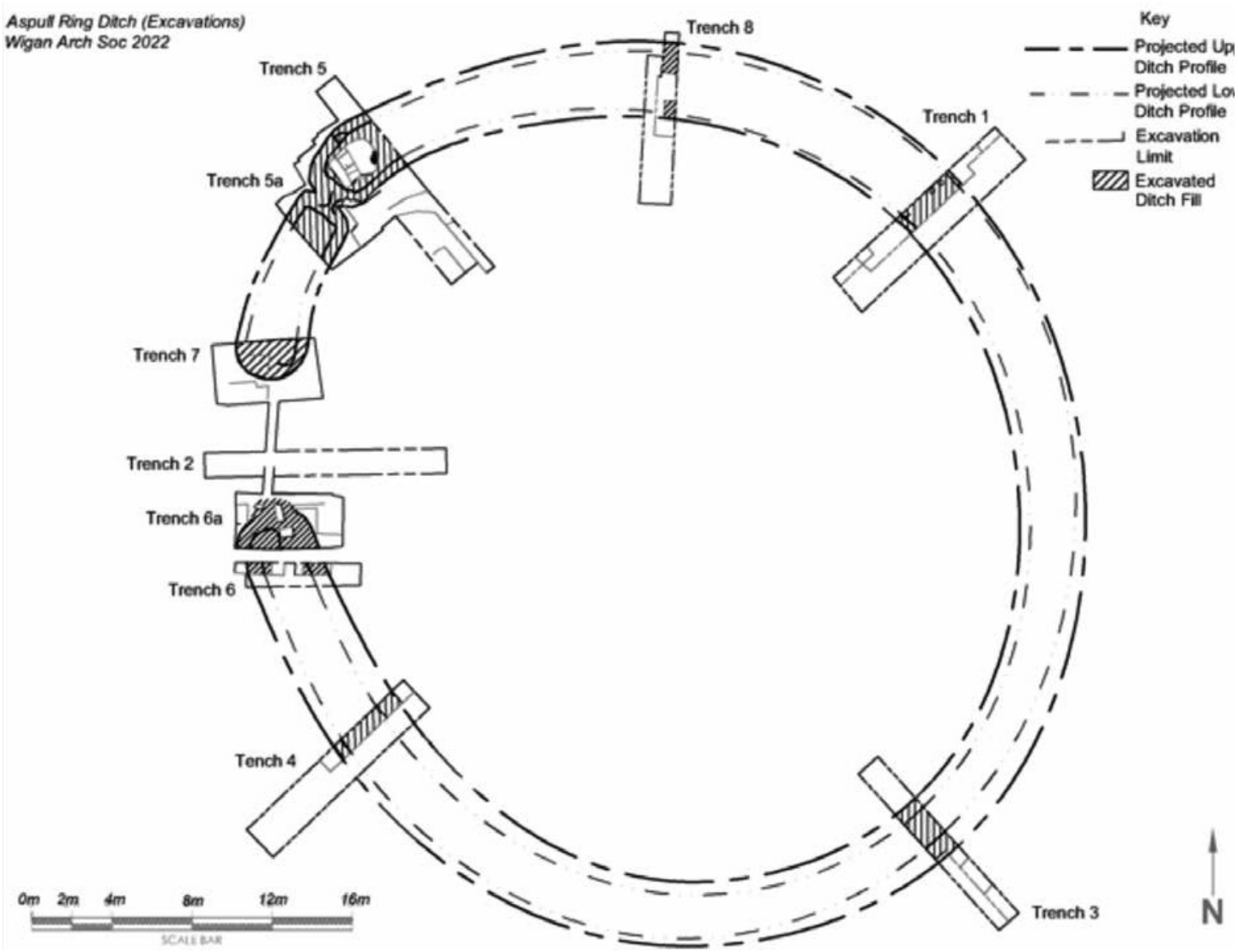
peculiar. When the two trenches were expanded and joined together, to our surprise we found a junction of two ditches.

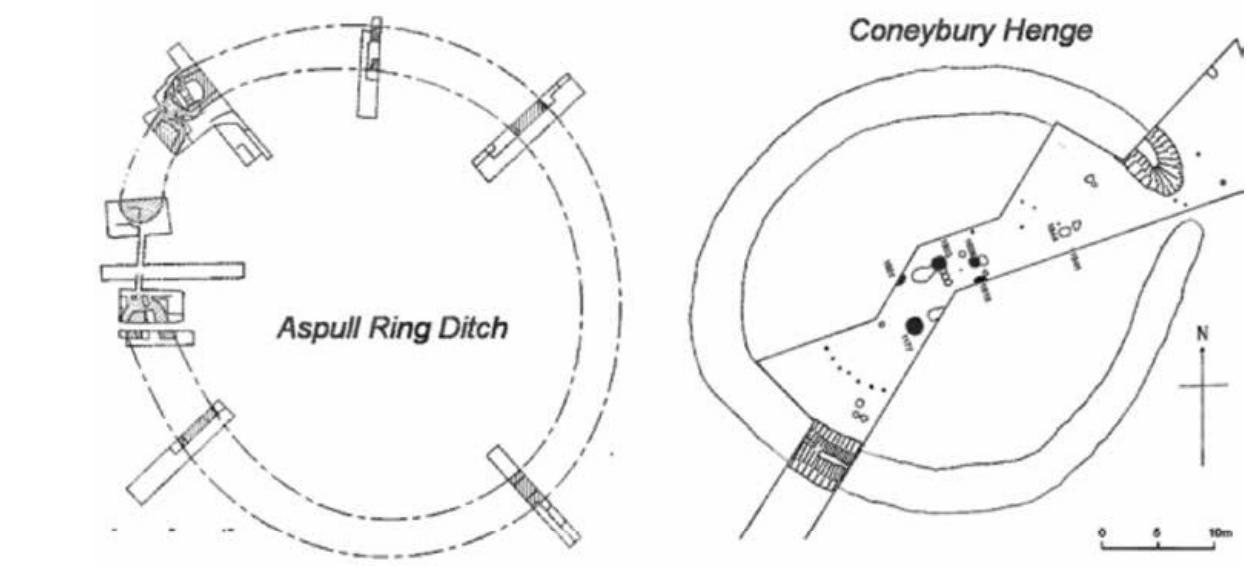
Using the auger with due diligence this time, we located our next trench, Trench 7, much closer to Trench 2. This thankfully revealed the north-side terminus, showing the entrance in the ring ditch to be perhaps 6.5m wide. Our investigations revealed the terminus to be a semi-bowl shape profile, as with the south-side terminus, but with a squared-off base (similar to Trenches 5 and 5a).

Our last trench, Trench 8, was dug on the north quadrant, just to confirm the shape of the feature in that area. We now had a clear picture of our monument, i.e. slightly oval-shaped with an entrance on the west side and a junction between two separate sections on the northwest axis (there could well be more junctions, but this can only be determined by opening more trenches).

Dating

Before receiving the result from the radiocarbon analysis, we had been relying on typology, but this had not been easy, as at 47.5m x 41.5m, there are not many sites of similar size and form to ours (to get an idea of its size, the stone circle at Stonehenge would fit inside it). We looked at a group in North Wales and one in particular, at Pentrehobin, with similar proportions, has a ditch 44m in diameter, 4m wide by 2m deep. Another group can be found on the Isle of Thanet in Kent. These were excavated in the 1970s and 1980s and one, called Lord of the Manor III, even has a central mound.





Perhaps the closest, proportionally, to ours, though, is a site not far from Stonehenge itself called Coneybury henge. As with ours, it has no outer bank (assumed to have been ploughed out) but unlike ours, it doesn't have a central mound. All these sites date to the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age (i.e. 2400 to 2100 BC) and, although many contain burials, rarely have a central mound. When this does occur, it may suggest a transition period when the incoming culture reused existing monuments.

When the date came in, therefore, it was a bit of a surprise, i.e. mid Bronze Age – 1425 cal BC. The sample was taken from the very bottom of the ditch suggesting that the henge monument (if that's what it was) had been cleaned out before being repurposed by the Bronze Age people.

Whatever the date of its construction, there's no doubt this feature is a very significant prehistoric monument, perhaps of national importance, but certainly something unique for this region.

In 2023 we returned to investigate the interior of the ring ditch and this produced even more remarkable results (the subject of the next instalment).

(Wigan Archaeological Society are an enthusiastic group of amateurs who meet once a month for lectures and discussions on topics of historical or archaeological interest**.** You can find out more about our Society on our website here www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk)

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

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

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

Events/Venue Details

Museum of Wigan Life,
Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU
Call: 01942 828128
Website: wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk
Email: wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

A Lindsay's Story – The Man Called Jeremiah with Ripton Lyndsay

Ripton Lindsay is the great x4 grandchild of Alexander Lindsay (6th Earl of Balcarres) and great x4 grandnephew of Jeremiah. This talk will give an in-depth look as to why the 6th Earl became a slave owner and how he became one of the most powerful and successful slave and plantation owners in Jamaica. The story that history never told.
When? Saturday 15 June, 1-3.30pm
Where? Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU
What is the cost? £5
Do I need to book? Yes. Book via Eventbrite

Wigan's Wonderful Women Weavers with Yvonne Eckersley

Local historian Yvonne Eckersley looks back and explains why Wigan's weavers formed their own trades union, how this union was established, and how it developed into an organisation of significance beyond supporting its members. Yvonne will also look at their role in the women's suffrage movement, municipal and parliamentary politics, and more.
When? Thursday 11 July, 12-1pm
Where? Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU
What is the cost? £3.50
Do I need to book? Yes. Book via Eventbrite

Archives: Wigan & Leigh,
Ground Floor, Leigh Town Hall,
Civic Square, Leigh, WN7 1DY
Tuesday – Friday, 10am-1pm & 1.30pm-4pm. Saturdays 10am-2pm
Call: 01942 404430
Website: www.wigan.gov.uk
Email: archives@wigan.gov.uk

Walking Tour of Atherton Cemetery

Join us on a guided tour of Atherton Cemetery to discover more about the fascinating lives of former residents of the town.
When? Saturday 15 June & Thursday 11 July, 11am-2.30pm
Where? Atherton Cemetery
What is the cost? £1.50
Do I need to book? Yes. Book via Eventbrite

Golborne – Our Town

Join us at Golborne's library and discover the rich history of Golborne at our Archives: Wigan & Leigh pop-up stall.
When? Saturday 8 June, 10am-1pm
Where? Golborne Library
What is the cost? Free
Do I need to book? No. Free, drop in

Leigh In The 40s and 50s: War Then Austerity with Michael Caine

Join Michael Caine as he takes us through Leigh as it was during the 1940s and 1950s and learn about the impact of the Second World War on Leigh and its people.
When? Wednesday 14 August, 2pm & Saturday 17 August, 11am
Where? Archives: Wigan & Leigh
What is the cost? £2
Do I need to book? Yes. Book via Eventbrite
Refreshments provided

Turnpike Gallery Studio,
Turnpike Gallery, 1st Floor Leigh Library,
Civic Square, Leigh WN7 1EB
Call: 01942 4044469
Website: www.theturnpikegallery.org.uk
Email: theturnpikegallery@wigan.gov.uk

The Art Explora Mobile Museum

will be on the Civic Square with a fantastic display of artworks from the Tate Collection.
When? 20 April to 22 June, Tuesday-Friday, 10am-4pm, and Saturday, 10am-2pm
Where? Civic Square, Leigh
What is the cost? Free
Do I need to book? No

The Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize exhibition

presents over 120 artworks by national and international artists. Alongside the exhibition will be a summer 'Festival of Drawing' with events and activities in the gallery, on the Civic Square, in community venues and libraries.
When? 20 April to 22 June, Tuesday-Friday, 10am-4pm and Saturday, 10am-2pm
What is the cost? Free
Where? Turnpike Gallery Studio and other venues including Civic Square, Leigh.
Do I need to book? No

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
Every other Monday from 15 January, 1pm-3pm at the Museum of Wigan Life, Wigan.
Free / drop in

Turnpike Tots

Turnpike Tots is our creative play session for little artists aged 0-5 years and their grownups! Free weekly session on Thursdays, term-time only, 10.30-11.30am in the Turnpike Gallery Studio. Visit trybooking.co.uk/BOMV to book

Leigh Town Hall Tours

Join us at Leigh Town Hall to discover the history of the building and explore the archives collections on this free guided tour. Last Wednesday of the month, 11am start. Free to book online via the Archives: Wigan & Leigh Eventbrite page

Saturday Family Workshops

Join us every other Saturday for free family fun in the gallery. Suitable for children aged 5+ and their families.
The Turnpike Gallery Studio, Leigh.
11, 25 May; 8, 22 June; 13, 27 July; 10, 24 August; 14 September, 11am-1pm. Free activities just drop-in

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-2pm. Free entry

Archives: Wigan & Leigh new temporary exhibition: Catch as Catch Can Wrestling Exhibition

Did you know that Wigan was long known as a hot bed of wrestling? Discover the history of the unique Catch-as-Catch-Can wrestling style, and the stories of the fighters keeping the sport alive. Free entry – exhibit will be on display from 9 April (TBC), check with venue

Turnpike: Chance Encounter (Jeanette Orrell & Len Green)

Meet two artists originally from Leigh who have established national careers. Janette's inspired textiles and drawings are presented with Len's vibrant paintings at the Turnpike Gallery Studio, Leigh. Free to drop in from 20 April to 22 June, Tuesday-Friday, 10am-4pm, and Saturday, 10am-2pm

Wigan Museum: What's in Store

Coming up in May - Look out for the new exhibition which will bring together items seldom seen by the public, bringing both local and global history to life.
Museum of Wigan Life, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1NU
Enquiries - 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 April: 'Women Who Lived as Men' by Brian Joyce
21 May: 'Bravery Without Fear' by Julie McKiernan
18 June: 'Madness – the History of Mental Health Care' by Louise Wade
July & August: No meeting
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 September 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.

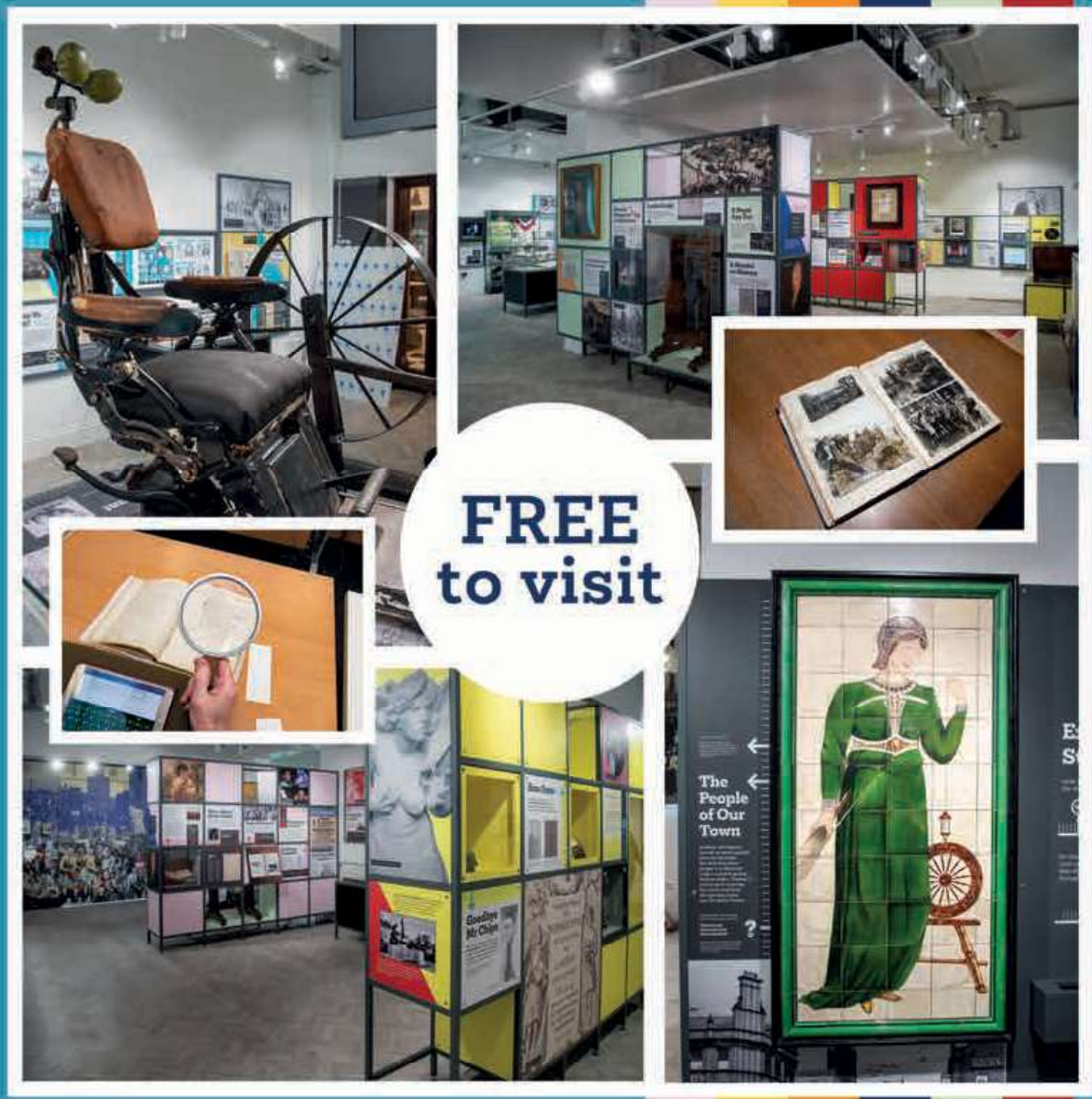
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AML ARCHIVES: WIGAN&LEIGH

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

ARCHIVES: WIGAN&LEIGH

Family-friendly local history exhibition open



Tuesday-Friday
10am-1pm & 1.30pm-4pm

Saturday 10am-2pm

archives@wigan.gov.uk
@ArchiveWigLeigh
/ArchivesWiganLeigh
www.wigan.gov.uk/archives

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