

Wigan Local History and Heritage Society

Minutes of the meeting held on: Monday 10th February 2020 at 7.15 pm.

1. Presentation by Marianne Howell:

Local historian, Marianne Howell, gave a fascinating and informative presentation on The Button Pit Murder.

Marianne talked about 'The crime that shocked a nation' and how on a winter's night in January 1863 an innocent father of 12 children was brutally murdered at the pit in Haigh where he worked. Marianne outlined the case which resulted in finally catching his murderer, who would surely have escaped justice if his brother had not handed in a watch, a vital piece of evidence to the police three years later.

Descendants of the murder victim, James Barton were present at the meeting and two families met each other for the first time. A very interesting discussion took place around the personal research of one of the descendants.

It was a very popular talk, which had attracted a lot of local interest on social media, resulting in a good attendance by both members and guests.

2. Members meeting - Apologies.

Apologies were received from Ken and Elizabeth Scally, Sheila Senior, and Carl Middleton

3. Minutes of last meeting held on Monday 13th January 2020

These were agreed as an accurate account of the meeting.

4. Matters arising.

The continuing search goes on for the 4 missing paintings of the Gidlow sisters and the stained glass window, which were all previously situated in Wigan Infirmary. It has been suggested by Councillor George Davies that they could have been stored in the cellar at The Elms.

Action Point 1: Sheila Ramsdale is to ask George Davies for further details of this.

It was agreed, that if there is nothing forthcoming from the discussion then an investigation should be carried out, starting with Freedom of Information Requests for further information sent to Wigan Council, and the Hospital Trust.

5. Election of unfilled Officer Posts:

*Treasurer *Membership Secretary

The posts remain unfilled, however the Acting Treasurer and the Secretary have both agreed to fulfil the roles until the AGM in September.

6. Treasurer Report.

The Treasurer reported a bank balance of £273.25 and provided a written report outlining the receipts and withdrawals.

7. Secretary Report - update social media, Past Forward subscriptions

The secretary had previously circulated a written report to members, both by email and on the Society Messenger Group Page, outlining things which had been taking place in the background, with regard to a growing social media presence which aims to inform members of the local community about local history, to encourage more people to come along to meetings, to develop an interest in local history and eventually to join the Society.

There has been very good progress made, with the numbers of followers increasing dramatically, and also with the followers taking a more active role, beginning to ask questions, to make relevant comments, and in some cases to help with research. There is a lot of local knowledge out there and it is so good to see people sharing this with each other.

Membership numbers are also increasing as a result of this, taking current numbers up to 26.

8. Wigan Historic Buildings Preservation Trust update- Peter Fleetwood.

Peter Fleetwood gave an update on The Common Seal Stonework project and outlined the details of a meeting which had taken place with Wigan Council.

Peter and Councillor Lawrence Hunt will now push this forward, with the support of Councillor Terry Halliwell.

9. Update on Wigan Local History and Heritage Hub Network. - Peter Fleetwood - web page, logo, mission statement etc

This is still work in progress, update at the next meeting.

10. List of Speakers for 2019-20 based on the specific interests of members

Copies of the calendar list of speakers were circulated for member information.

11. Trips - discussion - Secretary

A discussion took place regarding suggestions for visits to places of historical interest: How many per year? When should these take place? Should these trips be local to Wigan? This needs further discussion and will be included as an agenda item at the next meeting.

12. Any other Business

Sheila Ramsdale gave a talk about her fascinating new book, about a local girl who had started her career working as a pit brow lass, who then went on to study as a doctor, and set up a hospital in India. Sheila outlined her writing journey, which concluded with a trip to India to personally present a copy of the book to the hospital. Copies of the book were available to purchase at the meeting.

It was a special big birthday day for the Secretary and she was presented with beautiful flowers, cards and chocolates from all the members. It came as a big surprise to her and she thanked everyone for their kindness.