

# Haigh Hall .

## A Pearl in Wigan's Proud History

The ongoing dispute about the future of Haigh Hall which now seems to have been resolved in the council's favour , I'm sure the vast majority from our town will applaud the stance the council has taken.

The Hall and grounds were bought for £18,000, by then Wigan Corporation in 1948 . Our Civic Leaders of the time were farseeing and opened up the grounds to the public , and to make the grounds more accessible ran a tractor with open carriages in tow , it ran from The Plantation Gates , Wigan Lane, the terminus was The Hall itself, it was direct, no stops along the way ; the fare was 3d . Older readers will remember as the tractor made its way ,seemingly out of nowhere gangs of young boys would chase it and jump on to the back of the last carriage and cling on precariously until the the terminus, risking life and limb for 3d! A visit to The Hall in the early 1950s was quite a big day out, the ride on the tractor making it more special . On. arrival you could buy an ice cream or a bottle of 'pop' from a selling point near the main door run by the Raffo family who traded under the name Lewis, many readers will remember they had several Milk Bars in Wigan the largest was on Wallgate opposite the G.P.O. another in King Street also one on Greenough St. Lads, including me would collect empty' pop bottles' left on the lawn in front of The Hall by people too lazy to return them, we collected the 3d deposit for every bottle , 'a nice little earner' as Del Boy might say.

As children little did we think about the history of the of the estate stretching back over 800 years , of course we had heard the legend about Lady Mabel and the story about her penance wading barefoot to Mab's Cross , in atonement for a bigamous marriage. Sir William Bradshaw and Lady Mabel de Haigh were real people. They are well documented , their effigies lie side by side in Wigan Parish Church where they are buried. Elizabeth Ashworth's book ' An Honourable Estate, is a good read , a piece by the same author can be found on the internet 'The Legend of Mab's Cross' which visits the legend in some detail. Another book that is invaluable regarding the estate and family is The Life and Times of Haigh Hall by Donald Anderson is very well researched, unfortunately it is now out of print, but it is available in local libraries. Bob Blakeman's "Mab' Cross " - Legend And Reality is also an excellent piece of work by any reckoning and well worth reading.

Allegedly in 1319 Lady Mabel stated that her husband was dead. She is said to have married a second husband, but there is no documentary evidence. Whether the tale be fact or folklore will be debated for centuries to come. Mark Twain is reputed to have said "Never let the truth get in the way of a good story"! I'm sure of the businesses surrounding Loch Ness would attest to that proposition !

The history of The Hall is such that it would take volumes to do the subject justice ,so I have selected a few intriguing facts that may be of interest and cause people to give consideration to the history of 'The Pearl' in our midst -

There had been timber-framed Manor House from the late 12th century, The earliest recorded inhabitants were the Norreys, who lived there between 1193 - 1220 . The present hall was built between 1827 and 1840 by James Lindsay, 7th Earl of Balcarres, The stone was hard sandstone from quarries in Parbold ,it was transported by canal , it is thought that part of the 1720s brick building was refaced rather than completely rebuilt. The porch was added in 1844 in a different stone as Parbold stone was no longer available. The house was heated by hot air channelled through brass grilles in the skirting boards from seven stoves in the basement. [absolutely cutting edge technology in those days](#)

The undoubted highlight in the history of The Hall was the visit in 1873 by Prince and Princess of Wales, later King Edward and Queen Alexandra , when they visited Wigan to open the Royal Albert Edward infirmary. The house was redecorated and refurbished at a cost of £80,000 in preparation for the Royal Visit , many millions of pounds in today money; this figure all the more remarkable when you think that the Hall had only been completed 33 years earlier, so it hardly have been threadbare. I cannot but wonder how the people of Wigan would have reacted to this profligacy, had they known, when many people didn't have enough to keep body and soul together.

The Royal couple arrived at North Western Station by rail on Tuesday 3rd. June and proceeded to Haigh Hall where a formal reception was held.

The following day the official party made their way to the Infirmary, leaving Haigh plantations via the Whelley gates. The procession arrived at their destination at approximately 2.45 pm where they performed the official opening ceremony for the Infirmary and also for the Bazaar and Exhibition which had been organised as part of the festivities for the occasion The group made a tour of the Bazaar and exhibition before returning to Haigh Hall.

When researching I came across items relating to an earlier chatelaine - Lady Dorothy 1607 -1648 in her will, she left an amount of money to set aside for colliers, quarrymen, and other

workmen from the estate who had fallen on hard times, but anyone owning a dog will not be considered a worthy person - intending to controlling poor people from her tomb ! Forgive my little rant .

Lady Dorothy was also responsible for building of The Almshouses, originally called The Receptacle. The list of rules was all encompassing ,to give brief examples the list included the following - The house is intended for the use of poor, disabled and superannuated workmen, servants or others who may deemed worthy - and such are reputed honest ,sober and well inclined . - The inhabitants to be all of the Church of England and I do require that (as long as they are able) they do attend Divine Service at the Parish Church once at least every Sunday and Holy-days ,unless good reason can be given for their absence'.

The third paragraph reads -' If any inhabitants of The Receptacle should be found guilty of any impious enormities such as drinking, swearing, gaming, lewdness, indecency either by word or deed, quarrelling or the like, then it is my will that they should be dismissed'. ( I think they would be hard pushed to find tenants today! )

I think it's fair to say that Lady Dorothy was a woman who liked her own way whilst alive, and intended her writ to run beyond the grave !

To be fair in those times she was probably considered bountiful, when many landowners didn't give a second thought to the needy . Lady Dorothy .must be given some credit she did make strenuous efforts to care for the poor and in-firmed albeit with the strictest conditions imaginable, which today would seem as completely draconian , but this is now and that was then .

TOM WALSH.