

# BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

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("Pegasus")

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# BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

By S. A. HALL  
("Pegasus")

Author of "Wandering Wheels," "A Wayfarer's Chronicle,"  
"A National Gallery of Nature," Etc.

To Sergeant Robert Gallop, R.A.F. Navigator, and  
all of the lads of the borough and district who  
never came back from war service, this little book  
on a part of England they loved is written in  
memory. May none of us ever forget them, or  
the valiant things they did.

WIGAN:

E. SIDROTHAM, PRINTER, 25-27, WIEND

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## FOREWORD



THIS is a little book on a large area. It is written around a district I have known and loved since childhood. It is, of necessity in these days of paper shortage, a small book. To do full justice to everything around Wigan, and in the town itself, I would have needed as many thousands of words as I had space for hundreds. So, if some cherished spot or building or story is omitted, or a district hallowed to readers by association, I can only say it is due to paper shortage.

To the thousands who over the past years since 1933 have read regularly my outdoor articles written on excursions throughout our land, I would add that in all the counties and countries I have wandered few, if any, have more to offer than my native Wigan, and the country immediately around it.

Countless summer evening excursions around the district have gone to the making of this little book. I hope that those who buy and read it will gain from its pages as much pleasure as I have gained in its compilation.

S. A. HALL  
(“ Pegasus ”)

POOLSTOCK,  
JULY, 1947.



## CHAPTER ONE



## THIS WIGAN OF OURS

**W**HEN we are asked to call to mind all that is romantic and beautiful in our land, it is rarely of the industrial north we think. Rather are we inclined to conjure up visions of old towns and cities like Chester, Winchester, Shrewsbury, Hereford, Lincoln, Ely, or of the Lake District, Wales, the Fens, the Cotswolds, or parts of Yorkshire. We people of Wigan, including those around the town in the adjacent townships and villages, are inclined to forget that we live in or near one of the oldest towns in England.

We are apt to overlook, too, the fact that the country all around the town is unsurpassed for its natural charm and beauty. Wigan has around it a great variety of landscape packed into a comparatively small space. It can truly be said that paradise is never very far away from the streets of the Ancient and Loyal Borough. To help you find that paradise, and enjoy it, is the aim of this book. To find it you need some time off, a little energy, or the expenditure of a few coppers on petrol, bus fares, or, in some instances, rail fares.

If you like hills, then windswept, lofty Rivington Pike, Hunter's Hill, Parbold Hill, Ashurst Beacon, Billinge Beacon will not fail to enthrall you. Or, on the other hand, should it be dales you seek, then the lush, fruitful, sylvan Valley of the Douglas from Gathurst onward you will find bewitching. For the lover of woodland ways, Dean Wood, Arley Wood, and Borsdane Wood lie within easy reach of the town. Quiet, winding lanes for easy, pleasant cycling and motoring; a multitude of field paths for the rambler—the district around Wigan has them all. It has, too, a tale to tell: a tale of yesterday, when this England of ours was in the making, and

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

the land all around Wigan played its part. A full chapter of the story that is England may be found, and read, around the old Borough.

Wigan men have ever been proud of the town's motto, "Ancient and Loyal," granted to them by Charles the Second. It was a motto well earned during the trials and tribulations of the Civil Wars. To look back into the town's past you do not need a magic mirror such as Merlin used. The names of the streets of Wigan will help you do that. Hallgate, Wallgate, Millgate, Bishopgate, Standishgate, the Wiend, Parson's Walk, Market Place—all bear eloquent testimony.



WIGAN PARISH CHURCH

The Romans knew the town, for their main route from Roman Warrington to their fort at Ribchester passed through. It was then, as now, on the main west coast route to the north. Funnier even than the present-day name (to music hall comedians) was the Roman name for the town. They called it Coccium. All that is left now of Roman Wigan is the remains

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of a Roman Altar embedded in the splay of a window in the parish church. Also a few coins, unearthened at various times, in and around the town, housed now in the town's library.

Learned historians say that Arthur, king in those far-off dark ages, knew the town. They claim that Arthur and his knights fought four of their twelve battles in the Douglas Valley, two of the battles at Wigan. One of the battles was fought north of the town, at that spot we now know, and has been known since time immemorial, as the "Bloody Mountains." Then, it is said, the river ran red with blood to Wigan and beyond. The second battle is claimed for that part of the town between Chapel Lane and Wallgate. This was one of "The Combats," and fighting, we are told, lasted all through the night. No one will ever really verify whether Arthur did fight at Wigan, yet the town has three claims above all other claimants to support her. Firstly, the name of the town, coming from the old Anglo-Saxon Wigian or Wiggan, which words are insolubly connected with war and warfare. It is said the name Wigan means "Many Fights."

Extensive finds of weapons, bones, etc. in the ground between Chapel Lane and Wallgate when the canal was being constructed in 1790, denoting a battlefield, support the second claim. It is said the finds identifiable definitely dated to Arthur's days.

The third claim is—the winding river which runs through the town on its way to the sea, the Douglas. Old chronicles state that the battles were fought "by the Dubglas, in the region Linuis." We still have, as I said, the Douglas. We also have a continuation of "the region Linuis" in our neighbour town Ince. There the name is the modern usage of old Innius, or Linnius, the region in which the battles were fought.

That, I think, is enough about the past of Wigan, for one could go on and on telling the story of it, and space is limited in this little book. Rather will we talk about the present, about the winding lanes, picturesque spots, field paths, that await all who will explore them around the town.

So, in the following pages I present: This Wigan of ours and the delightful country around it.



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## CHAPTER TWO



*North of Wigan—Mab's Cross—Plantations to Haigh—Boat House—Senecar Lane—Brock Mill—Boat House along the canal at Haigh—Red Rock—Arley—Adlington Park—Worthington—Boar's Head.*

**W**IGAN possesses an entrance from the North which compares favourably in beauty with any I have seen throughout the land. The tree-lined boulevard from the Cherry Gardens Hotel past the Plantation gates to the Infirmary is, through the seasons, most charming.

To reach it one must go from the Market Place afoot or by bus up Standishgate's steep hill to Mab's Cross. Here, moved now from its original site, which was on the opposite side of the age-old route to the town, lies the centuries-old stone so dear to all Wigan people.

Legend connects it with Lady Mabel Bradshaw (named then Bradshaigh), of Haigh Hall, who, at the time of the Crusades, erred in "marrying" a Welsh Knight during her husband's prolonged absence. Her husband returned to find her married to another. He chased, and slew, his usurper. The spot where he slew him is on the road at Newton-le-Willows, some seven miles south of Wigan. It, too, is marked by a stone, a boulder. It is called the "Bloody Stone."

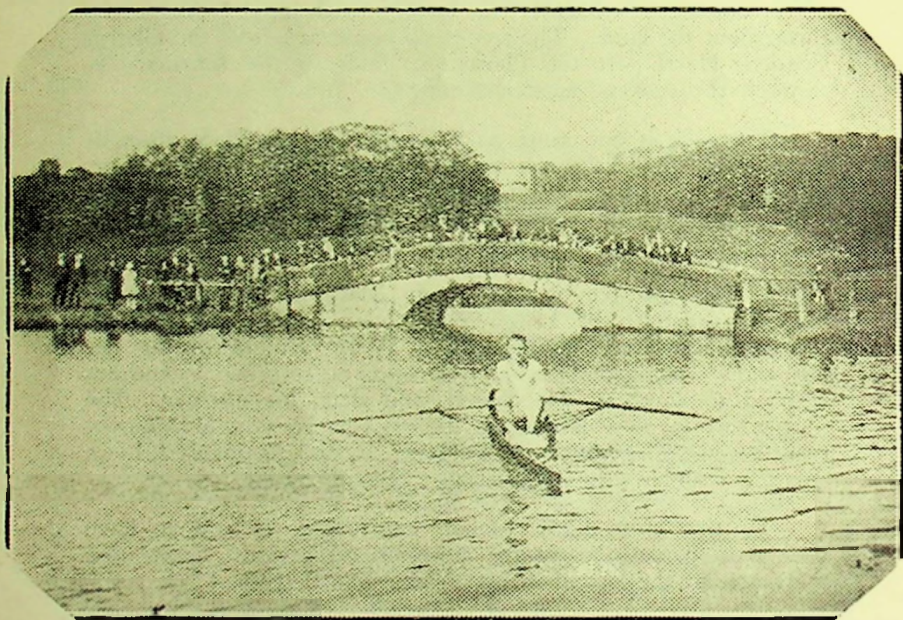
To this cross Lady Mabel, barefooted, is said to have walked in penance daily for a prescribed period. Scott used the theme of the legend in his novel "The Betrothed."

A little further on, surrounded by a low wall, is "The Monument," a tall pillar marking the spot where on August 26, 1651, a force under the leadership of the Earl of Derby, intending to take the town for Charles II, was defeated.

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

The monument not only marks the site of the battle, but really is intended as a memorial to Sir Thomas Tyldesley, who here fell in the fight. He lies buried in Leigh Parish Church, where the curious may find his tomb. It is interesting to note that the defeated Earl sought refuge in Wigan until his wounds were dressed, then went on to Worcester, where he suffered defeat again, with Charles, and capture. Charles went on to Boscobel and freedom, Lord Derby went to Bolton and death.

This was the so-called "Martyr Earl" who suffered execution for his loyalty in Bolton Market Place. The old inn, the Man and Scythe, where he spent his last night, may still be seen, and many personal relics, including the chair he used.



HAIGH BRIDGE NEAR BOATHOUSE

Along the Boulevard is the main entrance to the Plantations. This is both a picturesque and an interesting entrance. The high central arch of bold design blends well with the scene, whilst

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

the gatekeeper's cottage-lodge on either side is in harmony. These extensive grounds of Haigh Hall, long known and used as a favourite "lung" by the townspeople of Wigan by the kindness of successive Earls of Crawford, are paradise indeed.

A few months prior to my writing this, the great collection of art and many literary treasures within Haigh Hall came under the hammer. Then came the great news that, through the untiring efforts of many men who had the cause of Wigan at heart, foremost among them the late Mr. William Henry Tyrer, C.B.E., so long Town Clerk, Haigh Hall and grounds were to be sold to the town for a nominal sum. We can only hope that the generations to follow will love and treasure these acres of natural loveliness in their midst, as those who went before them valued the privilege of using them.

Many visits must be paid to the plantations if all within is to be seen fully. Through the heart of them flows the old river of Arthur, his "Dubglass" I spoke of earlier. Here it is in a sylvan setting, with wooded glades on every hand.

Miles of winding, tree-lined pathways yield hosts of glimpses of natural charm. Here are birds of all types, and the quiet glades resound to their melody.

The main road through, after dropping down to the bridge across the Douglas, goes on to the Whelley entrance near St. Stephen's Church.

The branch by-pass line of the L.M.S., built in the old L.N.W. Railway days to take the goods traffic north and south around Wigan station instead of through it, passes through the Plantations. In only a very few instances is the visitor to the grounds aware that a railway runs through, so well is it screened by trees and shrubs.

To walk along these paths when the many thousands of rhododendrons are in bloom is indeed a unique and pleasurable experience. Then the shrubberies, a mass of multi-hued bloom, give to the scene matchless colourful splendour.



## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

The canal, too, runs between the grounds and Haigh Hall, and the scene at the Boathouse, headquarters of the Wigan Rowing Club, across the water to the arched stone bridge, and beyond to the lush meadows and green lawns around the Hall—that again is unforgettable.

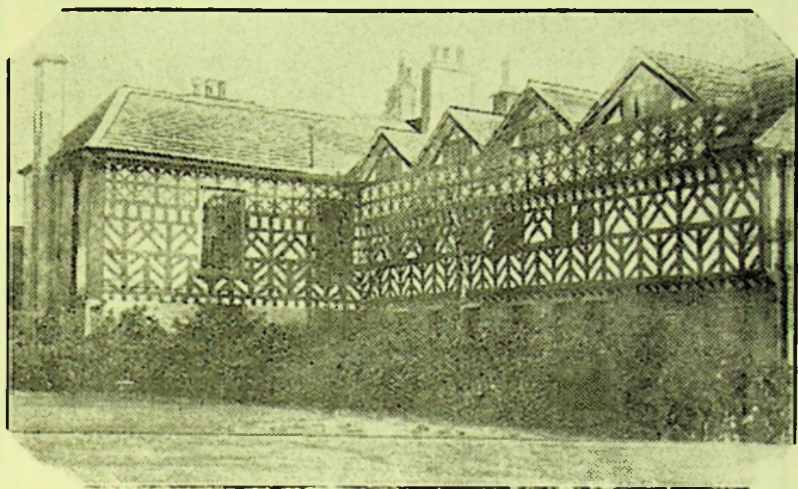
Near here is yet another entrance to the grounds, that at the top of old Basin Lane. Near it lies Senecar Lane, which is hard on the route used by the Romans from Coccium (Wigan) to Brementenaccum (Ribchester on the Ribble). The very picturesque entrance in Basin Lane has gates that open and close at the spin of a wheel—and a spinning wheel at that. The wheel, one of the very old type spinning wheels, is claimed to be the identical one used by Lady Mab.

It was, in the days prior to outcrop mining, and is still in the main, a most charming walk along the canal from the Boathouse to Red Rock. Meadows, woodlands, sylvan dells, old-world cottages, farms, rural serenity, and a great peace, these are the reward of all who walk (or cycle) this way.

Above all, this is a land for children. Here all types of wild flowers abound in due season. Here the soaring skylark fills the air with melody, and links the old fields with his rippling minstrelsy. Here the cuckoo announces with clarion notes the coming of spring. And here are all the rabbits, hares, toads, field mice, and birds such as Alice found in Wonderland. Lots of blackberries, too, in the autumn, are here for the taking. Yes, this is truly old England, rural England, charm and mellow fruitfulness, all within sight and almost sound of modern industrial Wigan.

They say one should, for beauty, go to Kew in lilac time. I say for glory and charm, go to Arley in bluebell time. Then the floor of Arley Woods is carpeted with the children's flowers. When the sun shines, breaking through the roof of the woods and illumining the glades with slender golden pencils of light—then is the time to see it. Then is the blue of the carpet enhanced by the magic of it.

Here are many paths, all interesting, all charming. One leads across the canal, past the Riding School, on over old unmetalled roads to Blackrod, where, from the summit of the hill nigh the church, a grand view awaits the wayfarer.



WRIGHTINGTON OLD HALL

You will find as you wander around here many traces of early mining. Here at Arley outcrops the famous seam of coal named after the place, the Arley mine, or seam. Many of these abandoned workings date back two centuries and more, and nature has covered the defilement of them with her healing magic.

Wigan, and the country around it, must indeed have been amongst the most beautiful spots in our land before dividend seeking mine-owners exploited the district. They took from its bowels the rich wealth, and left behind the wanton desolation of abandoned workings, slag heaps, disused engine houses, and all the other ugly remains of bygone mining so numerous south and east of the town.

From Arley I suggest that the walker goes along one of the many paths to Adlington Park, then back past the Wigan Reservoirs to Worthington, where a bus to Wigan may be boarded, or walk on up to Boar's Head.

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CHAPTER THREE



*South of the Douglas from Wigan to Parbold—Out of the town via Newtown and Highfield to Winstanley—Billinge Village and Billinge Hill Through the glad green lanes to King's Moss, Crawford Village, and Upholland Story of Upholland A highwayman of repute Sister township to Downholland—Last of the proud Hollands—Old Priory—Through woodland paths to Gathurst—Ashurst Hill and Beacon—The road through Dalton down to the Douglas Vale—The road to Lathom House—Leaguers of Lathom—A brave Countess—Tawd Valley—When a river ran down a mine—Scouts' hunting ground—Through Roby Mill to Appley Bridge—Old houses of the district.*

THE next two chapters are devoted to the area north and south of the River Douglas between Wigan and Parbold. The cyclist and motorist will do well to take the route south from the Market Place (A.49) to the fork at the Saddle at Newtown. Taking the left fork for Warrington a hundred yards or so on, they will find a road running off to the right along the side of Alexandra Park. That is their route.

The Rambler must board the Billinge bus from the Market Square or in front of Wallgate Station. The route ascends slowly at first to just beyond Highfield Church, past where it rises sharply for fully a mile to Winstanley Hall and Windy Arbour.

Winstanley was, prior to outcrop mining, a scene of great natural charm. The bulldozer has temporarily shovelled it all away. We are assured, however, that when all is replaced we shall be unable to tell that anything has happened beyond the loss of a few trees here and there.

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

Going straight across the cross-roads at Windy Arbour, the village of Billinge is reached a mile or so on. I would add that a pleasant walk through charming country by field paths may be enjoyed by ramblers.

Almost opposite the Ben Jonson Hotel, on the route from Goose Green to Bryn, the paths may be entered. Another path from Goose Green joins the route midway, and the two together come out finally near the foot of the hill up to Windy Arbour.

Billinge Village is mostly stone built, and is very rural in appearance. It is built on high ground, and in winter must be bleak indeed. In summer time, however, it is tempered with cooling breezes.

The church here was rebuilt 230 years ago, in 1718, in a style resembling Renaissance mingled with Gothic. Further work

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## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

was carried out in 1907. Under a domed roof within one may find black and white marble paving the old chancel apse, and an 18th century candelabra hanging between the arcades. In keeping with the gruesome tastes of old times is the stone in the churchyard here shaped like a coffin and carved with a hanging curtain.

It is to Billinge Hill near by, crowned with the famous Beacon, that I would direct all, however they travel, to go. This square stone beacon was raised here in 1780 as a seamark. From it one may look out, on a sunny day, across 16 counties and the sun-gilded expanse of the Irish Sea.

Go there, if possible, at sunset. Then most of the splendour of the dying glory of the day touches the land with its magic, and the beholder is enthralled by it.

The gay winding lanes from Billinge across to King's Moss, Crawford Village, and Upholland yield many delights for the cyclist or the motorist. This is a land where every acre is tilled, where the plough is mightier than the sword or industry. On King's Moss, peat gatherers may be found plying their age-old trade, cutting, stacking, and drying the peat, now used for many commercial processes.

Of old Upholland, with its story of the past, I could write volumes, but must make only passing references. Here is a lofty windswept township of old time. Here are tall stone built dwellings which take one back along the corridors of time. Here are many glimpses of old English country-town life. Here are the remains of a priory.

Six centuries ago Robert de Holland founded this priory in his township of Upholland. He betrayed his master, the Earl of Lancaster, who later received his severed head. The Hollands were a great and proud family, and they fought for successive monarchs and causes, and died for them too, until finally their power vanished when Henry the Sixth lost his throne.

The last of the family was seen in Flanders, begging alms. He returned to fight for Henry at the battle of Barnet, and finally a faithful servant (probably from Upholland) saved him



## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

from starvation. One day they found his body floating in the sea near Dover. Thus passed away the great and proud family of the Hollands.

The great priory was planned grandly, but it never saw completion. Its chancel serves to-day as the nave for the township's parish church. Here indeed is glory, the glory of lofty arcades and clustered pillars, and a slender, graceful chancel arch, all soaring away to the high roof.

The old oaken font here is one of some six in all our land. The "Mary" window, too, is unique and of great interest. All the Marys of the parish paid for the fragments of glass from the six-centuries-old windows to be made into a beautiful glowing patchwork.

A long time ago Upholland boasted a highwayman. His name was George Lyon, and his grave is pointed out to the curious in the churchyard. He robbed many places and people, including Westwood House at Wigan. Lyon expiated his offences by execution at Lancaster Castle, from where his body was brought on a cart. His house too may be found, by the church, and the old inn he was wont to visit.

Upholland was a sister township to Downholland, a few miles across country. Both were in the domains of the Holland family. From Upholland many walks may be undertaken along field and woodland paths through country of unmatched natural beauty.

Several paths lead one to Dean Wood. There nature is predominant, and winding woodland ways are rich in charm. The path fords the stream twice, and at the far end of the wood, near the banks of the Douglas, where the Douglas Valley begins to widen, one may find a refreshment house. It is from here but a mile to Gathurst, where train or bus may be boarded back to Wigan. Or, as an alternative, one can continue walking along the banks of the canal down to Croke and Martland Mill.

From Upholland also one may easily reach, by road or field path, Ashurst Beacon. The beacon-topped hill commands, like

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

neighbour Billinge, extensive views of far counties, of the sea, and the Douglas Vale, then across to the Fylde, Morecambe Bay, and the distant Lakeland hills. These beacons, it is interesting to note, were laid down not only as landmarks for shipping, but as a means of warning against invasion.

From Ashurst it is but a short ride or walk, again along road or path, down to Dalton, then across to the Tawd Vale and Lathom Park. Tawd Vale lies in the Douglas Valley, and is but a short length, yet it is very beautiful. In the thickly wooded vale the Scouts of Liverpool have their permanent camp.

These are the grounds of Lathom House, old home of the Derby family. The old Lathom House, demolished by Act of Parliament after the Civil Wars, held out against a strong besieging force for many months. The commanding office in charge of the besieged was a woman, Catherine de la Tremouille, Countess of Derby. In Ainsworth's "Leaguers of Lathom" one may read the full story of the defence by the heroic countess and her handful of followers. The tiny river Tawd running through the valley once overflowed its banks and ran down a mine. As the mine was on fire, and had been for months, you can imagine the natural reaction which followed.

An alternative route from Upholland, mainly by road, although some field paths do exist, is the really beautiful one through old Roby Mill to Appley Bridge. Here again one finds much of interest. Old farms that have come unscathed through the centuries, cottages, halls, and old fields that have known the plough through the centuries.

Here time has stood still. Here the spirit of rural England is strong indeed. Here one finds it hard to believe that one is so near the industry and teeming populations of south-west Lancashire. Here is paradise indeed.

BYWAYS FROM WIGAN



STANDISH PARISH CHURCH



## CHAPTER FOUR



*North of the Douglas from Wigan to Parbold—Boar's Head, Standish—Cat-ith'-Window, Almond Brook—Shevington and Mill Dam—Field paths around the district—Wrightington—Mossy Lea and Harrock Hill—Robin Hood, Stony Lane to Delph Gardens—Parbold Village and Hill—Along the Valley to Dalton Lees and Appley Bridge.*

FROM the entrance to the Plantations, the farthest north we reached on a direct route in Chapter Two, one can go by bus or cycle or car to Boar's Head. Alternatively, one can walk from the town, through Mesnes Park, Wigan's most lovely park, where blooms of all kinds may be found throughout the seasons, then across Walkden Avenue and on over Whitley Fields.

A pleasant walk also is the one from Beech Hill, past the Royal Ordnance Factory at the top of Gidlow Lane, by the old Gidlow pits, then right to Boar's Head or left to Standish.

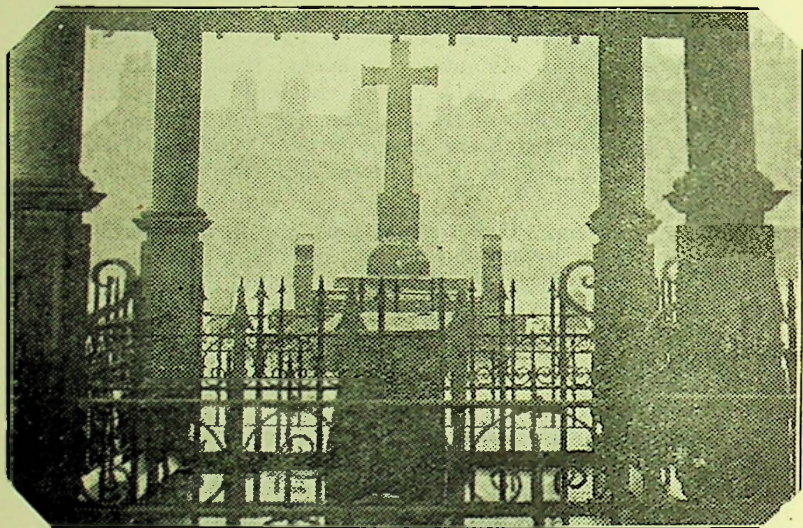
A mile and a half on lies Standish, Wigan's northern neighbour township. Old and new mingle here, and whilst Standish has much that is modern, it also has much that is old to interest.

Here, on an ancient site, is a church made new four centuries ago. If Cromwell himself did not come to it, his men, it is said, certainly did, and much damage they wrought. In front of the church one can find still the little old square which was the centre of the old village life in the era before rapid transport and "talkies."

Here still is the old dipping well, but the stocks, where offenders throughout the weary time of their penance watched the slow-moving life all around them, have gone. Or, if in

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

religious vein, they could turn their eyes to the cross. There is here a new cross now, but it rises from the steps of the very ancient predecessor. In the churchyard we may find a huge boulder, relic of the glacial period when our land was covered with ice. It was found deeply buried in the soil.



STANDISH STOCKS AND VILLAGE CROSS

Inside the church is a mixture of old and new. All manner of monuments are there, bidding us remember old worthies of the district, and old wars. The most singular historic monument is that to Edward Chisnall, of nearby Chisnall Hall, one of the defenders of Lathom House along with Standish rector Ralph Brideoak, who at the time of the siege was chaplain to Lord Derby. A panel in the wall is engraved with the commission given Chisnall by Charles Stuart, and above the panel lies a helmet, all riddled with bullet-holes stopped with clay. It is the helmet Chisnall wore in the siege.

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Leaving Standish, one may go on across the traffic lights up School Lane, past the brewery, then past St. Marie's Roman Catholic Church and down to the Cat-ith'-Window. Here stands a modern cottage with three representations of black cats on its gable end.

The predecessor of this modern cottage went back along the centuries to the Civil Wars, and beyond. It is said that during the wars the occupants, Royalist sympathisers, placed in the window a statue of a black cat whenever the coast was clear of Roundheads. Thus they kept aware of danger or safety their Royalist friends hiding hereabouts.

A left turn at the old Black Bull Hotel at the foot of the brow a few hundred yards on takes us down to the end of Arbour Lane, and on to Shevington, where the roads fork, left for Crooke and Wigan, straight ahead for Gathurst and Orrell, right for Whitehall Brow, Shevington Vale, and Appley Bridge.

A little short of the village the traveller afoot or awheel may turn left, up the road past the grocer's shop in the new houses, for Shevington Mill Dam. Here a whole network of field paths may be explored, through delightful quiet country. They lead one across the land bounded by Boar's Head, Standish, Shevington, Crooke, and Beech Hill.

Going, alternatively, straight ahead from the Black Bull, through Almond Brook, one very soon comes to Wrightington Ponds and Bridge. Here a scene of great charm meets one. Twin lakes, with tree-decked islands, lie on either hand. Trees of all types are in profusion everywhere, and the renovated bridge still retains its old gracefulness and charm.

Beyond the bridge, Parbold-wards, lies the entrance to the old hall. Once this was the ancestral home of the Wrightingtons, who gave their name to the district, and whose name goes back to Norman times and beyond, then a branch of the Gerards. To-day, however, the hall is in use as a hospital for the treatment of tubercular diseases. Lancashire County Council own it, and run it. They have preserved the lakes and grounds, and have, if anything, improved the scene.



## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN



WRIGHTINGTON BRIDGE

Back towards Almond Brook half a mile lies a cross-roads, or by road and field path from the bridge; turning left there one may ride or walk along past the end of Pepper Lane to Mossy Lea and Wrightington Bar, or, turning left just before Mossy Lea, travel by charming route via old-world Tunley. Whichever route one goes, and both are interesting, one can reach Wrightington Parish Church, from where the road runs down, then left, to Harrock Hill. It may be reached, too, across the fields and makes an interesting walk.

On top of Harrock lie the ruins of an old windmill, about which one can learn very little. Certain it is that no living man knows of or remembers it working, at least none that I have found.

From Harrock one has a splendid view of the Douglas Vale, with the low-lying land to the coast beyond, then the sea.

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

One can, on a good day, see across Morecambe Bay to the Lakeland hills, and across Liverpool way to the wild, fantastic hills of Wales.

Near here, within easy cycling and motoring distance—and walking, too, if you're good at it,—lies old Mawdesley. There one may still find the old craftsmen, and women, weaving baskets and skips by hand and primitive machine from the reeds and rushes grown in the district.

A mile or two away lies Rufford, where the centuries-old home of the Fermor-Hesketh's, Rufford Old Hall, awaits. This hall now belongs to the nation through the National Trust, and is open daily throughout the year. Go there, especially in summer time when the lanes are at their best, and you will not fail to be charmed by it.

Back along the lanes from Rufford several routes offer themselves to Parbold. Then, the village reached, refreshment or a meal may be enjoyed in sylvan surroundings in the Delph Grounds and café. Here grounds covering many acres cater for hosts of visitors annually, mainly those coming afoot and awheel, though not a few by car or train.

Behind the Delph lies Stony Lane, stony no longer now, but still steep of ascent. This route leads to Robin Hood, and the lanes or field paths to Dangerous Corner. Of the latter place an amusing local tale says that it is so named because of a local resident who, burying his wife, bade the cortege go slow around the corner. During a previous attempt to bury her, the hearse had turned over at this spot, and the "corpse" had come to life. This time, to make sure, the wary husband slowed things down with the words, "Easy, lads, this 'ere corner's dangerous for me!"

Another route from the Delph to Dangerous Corner, the one most used, is that up Parbold Hill. Once on the hill's summit, all the world seemingly lies at one's feet, and the scene is one not easily forgotten. To the left lies Ashurst, behind lies Wigan and Rivington, ahead lies a great plain to Southport and the sea.

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

Alternatively to either route one can reach, from Parbold, without ascent, Appley Bridge and Gathurst. By road the route to Dalton Lees, through the Valley, is followed, first turn left over the Douglas Bridge at Parbold.



PARBOLD HILL

By path, afoot, and towpath at that, the canal may be followed. For the whole five miles or so to Gathurst the walk is very lovely, enhanced by many rural scenes. By road, too, it is quite charming, for this route through the valley takes one across land farmed for centuries. Few are the houses or cottages here which had not their foundations set in Tudor times, or before. From Gathurst, Wigan may be reached by train, bus, or, again on shank's pony, by towpath.



## CHAPTER FIVE



*East of the town to Hindley—Entrance to Raynor Park—Borsdane Wood—Dicconson Lane to Haigh—Blackrod to Horwich—Lever Park and Rivington Park—A ramblers' paradise—Belmont and Tockholes—A land of great hills and rolling moors.*

**E**AST of Wigan lies Ince and Hindley. Old Ince Hall was scene of one of the stories in Roby's Legends of Lancashire. Hindley, the next township, reached by bus or train or by road, is, in the main, similar to Ince. It has, however, one or two exceptions. One of the exceptions is the church of St. Peter's, on the cross-roads by the traffic lights. There is housed a very old and a very wonderful Schultze organ, unique in being one of a very few left by this great organ-builder from Germany.

The other of Hindley's exceptions is Borsdane Wood. This wood, entered from the town by way of Raynor Park at the top end of Market Street, is very lovely indeed, and gives great pleasure throughout the seasons to the town's residents and all others who go there. It runs the whole length to Dicconson Lane, and to explore it one must walk, for cycling is not allowed and motoring is impossible.

Through this wood meanders the tiny Borsdane stream. Here, for all to enjoy, are flower-filled glades, all suffused with the gold of the daffodils, or the haze of bluebells, in season. Here are wooded, leafy glades, quiet paths, bird sanctuaries, all teeming with the wild life which is encouraged here in its natural state. Do not take my word for it that Borsdane is beautiful; go to see for yourself. Words alone cannot convey one half of the quiet, simple, abundant glory Borsdane's acres contain.

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

The far end reached, the main road may be gained past the Bee Hive Cotton Mills: then, forking left, Aspull's Finger Post, and, further on, Haigh Village. From behind Haigh church, mainly of modern architecture, paths lead down past the old windmill to the roads across the estate. One leads to New Springs, another to the road to Red Rock, and yet another to the canal banks and the bridge across to the Plantations.

Here lies Haigh Hall, bought, with grounds, as I mentioned earlier, by the Corporation of Wigan for a very low sum through the good offices of the present Lord Crawford. There has been a hall here at Haigh through the centuries, although this present one was built only a hundred and seven years ago.

It is but a short way, again by road or path, from Haigh to Blackrod. The village of Blackrod is a little quiet now that the busy arterial main route north-south (A.6) by-passes it along the new road. Near here the Douglas flows from its source on Rivington's heights beyond Horwich down to Wigan and the Ribble estuary. Here, it is thought, was fought one of Arthur's four battles "by the Dubglas in the region Linuis" as mentioned earlier. Across the valley lies Horwich, and the charming park bought by the late Lord Leverhulme and made free for ever to you and me by his kindness.

Find, in this park, the two old-time barns, the Small Barn and the Hall Barn. Both are unique, and built in the style of bygone days. Find here the old village and chapel, and find here also the many winding ways, some traversible by car, but most afoot, up to the chalet, and the Pike. Find also, when deacquisioned and unbarbed-wired, the ruins of the castle by the lake, a perfect replica of Liverpool castle in a bygone age.

And the Pike, ascend it at all costs if Anno Domini will allow the exertion. I know of few finer sights experienced in all our land than the one from the lofty Pike. Here you are 1,800 feet above the sea. Here still stands the old stone tower where on a night long ago the watchman lit the beacon which spoke its message of flame to Snowdon and its neighbour mountains, to the ships in the Irish Sea, to the watchers in the Isle of Man, and those also on the Cumberland and Yorkshire

hills, telling them all of the coming of the great Spanish Armada even then sailing up the Channel. Below you as you stand here lies the park of 400 acres, a natural playground for all in perpetuity. There are winding roads and paths, wooded hillsides, and silver lakes whose water helps sustain life in distant Liverpool.

For miles around Rivington stretch rolling moorlands, crossed here and there by a few roads and a great number of footpaths. Here one may wander afoot as I have done often for half a day without ever seeing a road or a living soul. Here the sheep and the wild birds reign, and here there is a solitude and loneliness deep and profound and very beautiful indeed. Here is a veritable paradise for the rambler. In fact my walking friends of the Wigan Y.H.A. Rambling Section use this area for about sixty per cent of their week-end excursions.

Across the moors, over the hills, lies old Belmont, and beyond that Tockholes. Both have charm, most particularly the latter. At Tockholes many exciting things may be found by those who seek. There is the base of a preaching cross 1,500 years old. It is the Toches Stone, and gave its name to the village. There too lies a Norman arch above a well by the wayside, and in the churchyard is a memorial to John Osbaldeston, inventor of the weft fork. In the farmyard behind the church grows a hollow oak tree seven centuries old, grown from an acorn planted by one Adan de Tockholes.

A mile or so away, across the moors, lies the Victoria Jubilee Tower, out of repair at the time of writing, through last winter's storms. In normal times magnificent views across the shires were yours as a reward of climbing the steps to the summit. Sunnyhurst Woods, just below the tower, must really be seen to realise their great charm and beauty. Yes, this altogether is a charming land, and it lies but a few miles away from Wigan, though, of course, not belonging to it. It is indeed a land of great hills and rolling moors; of stream and river sources; of great lakes, old villages, scattered farms, and all that goes to make an excursion over it one long to be remembered.

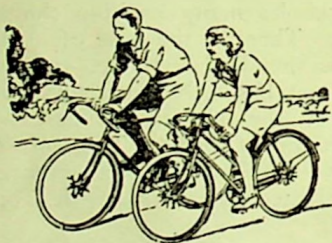


## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

You may reach Wigan by many routes from this region. Main route, however, for the walker, is by bus from Abbey Village to Chorley, then to Wigan; or by bus from Belmont to Bolton, then to Wigan; or by car or cycle over one of the many routes to Bolton, Chorley, or Horwich back to Wigan.

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## CHAPTER SIX



*South of the town to Goose Green—Many paths around Hawkley all spoiled by industry—Flashes, haunts of wild life—Bryn and the Roman road south—North Ashton, Holy Trinity Church—Ashton-in-Makerfield—The two churches of Ashton—Tale of the hand of Father Edmund Arrowsmith—Old Garswood Hall—Locks and hinges—Old craftsmen dying out—Haydock Racecourse—Footpaths to Golborne and Haydock—Newton-le-Willows and its three tragic stones—Castle Hill and King Alfred: Was it site of Battle of Maserfield?—Back to Wigan—All these routes from Wigan Pier.*

**FROM** the bottom of Wallgate, at Miry Lane, the traveller by road may take two roads south. One goes by way of Poolstock and Worsley Mesnes to Goose Green Corner; the other by way of Newtown, left at Saddle, to Skew Bridge and Goose Green. The latter route is the old route south and forms part of the west coast north-south route (A.49).

From Goose Green one may go afoot or awheel along the old "Coach" Road, crossing midway the Worsley Mesnes route, then on to Hawkley Hall, past the explosives factory. From the old Hall, still retaining much of its old charm despite the encroachment of industry almost to its front door, many field paths diverge.

They lead one on across a land of meres, or rather "flashes," all great sheets of water, mainly caused by mining subsidence. Despite all the evidences of extensive mining on every hand, this area is not without its attractions.

Here wild life of all kinds may be found, particularly wild birds. Here comes the angler with rod and line at week-end; here comes too the botanist with his specimen tin, the bird's-egg

## BYWAYS FROM WIGAN

collector, and the butterfly hunters. Yes, I have had a great number of enjoyable cycle rides, and walks, along these paths, despite the spoliation of the scene by ugly abandoned or working mines counted here in their teens. Soon, past the Ben Jonsen Hotel and up the hill to Landgate, Rose Hill is reached, then Bryn. The name of this village comes, of course, from the old English and signifies a mount or a hill. Bryn has little to show us, however, save its name. A right turn at the automatic lights at Bryn leads on to Downall Green. Here, in the church of Holy Trinity, is some of the finest woodcarving in the whole of the district. The church is a small building built in the early days of Victoria; yet what it lacks in age it makes up in beauty within. Here are stalls with open tracery and poppyheads; here are misereres of an angel and St. George, and a carving of the Good Shepherd. The whole is crowned by a massive eagle lectern of oak.

The road from Downall Green to Ashton joins, a little short of the town, the Old Road from Bryn. This road, it is claimed, is part of that ancient one mentioned here before which Roman hands first made from Wigan to Warrington.

Ashton has two churches to show us, both fairly modern, one Protestant, one Roman Catholic. Built last century, St. Thomas's, on Warrington Road, is Church of England. Its roof is well timbered, and it has a sanctuary lined with beautiful traceried panelling. Here is a collection of fine old carved chairs.

Here too are many colourful windows to brighten the church within, and a carving of a woman standing above a wounded soldier. She holds back the figure of Death. This is a memorial to Lord Gerard's wife, Mary Cansfield, who was greatly loved for her work during the 1914-1918 war.

Across the way stands the Roman Catholic Church of St. Oswald's. No matter what your denomination, this church will come as a great surprise to you. It is but a few years old, yet it has great charm. Built in Norman style, this modern temple rises from a green churchyard surrounded by trees. Quite near the bustling streets and main roads, it nevertheless is somehow peaceful.



Within it is as surprising as without. Everywhere inside one is surrounded by lovely arches, and overhead are two blue domes above the four arches spanning the nave. The huge stone pulpit has two grotesque birds drinking from a bowl. Beautifully worked iron gates enclose the shrine where a silver casket keeps safe a grim reminder of the days when religious persecution stalked the land. Inside the casket lies the hand of Father Edmund Arrowsmith, a martyr, who died at Lancaster for his faith 300 years ago.

A lancet window in the shrine has scenes of Arrowsmith's life and his portrait. We are told that he was only a child when his parents were dragged off to prison. They were taken in the middle of the night, and Edmund, with three other children, was dragged out of bed, and left there, cold and frightened, not daring to cry or move.

A benevolent priest undertook Edmund's education, and sent him to the English College at Douai, where his uncle, Edmund also, was a professor. After some years the young man offered himself as a missionary for England, and was ordained a priest. He worked for quite a while in Lancashire before being arrested. It was in fact 1628 when he was denounced and taken to Lancaster Castle gaol.

At that time Parliament was insisting on cruel laws being applied against the Catholics. As Father Arrowsmith refused to take the oath of allegiance, he was accused of having become a priest abroad contrary to the law. The judge was hostile, and the priest was condemned before there was any definite evidence against him. Two days later he was dragged on a hurdle to the place of execution a quarter of a mile away.

It is said that the Father's hand was cut off after death and brought to nearby Garswood, where his mother Margery was a lady of the ancient family of Gerards of Garswood. The legend of the "Dead Man's Hand" states that the Father said to his spiritual attendant that the hand, if cut off, would keep its freshness, and would also have the power to work miraculous cures on all who believed and had faith in its powers. Through the years the hand was kept at Garswood after having been

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first kept at Bryn Hall. Subsequently it was passed on to the priests at Ashton, where it now lies enshrined in this glorious modern temple.

Behind Ashton lies Garswood Park, where lay up to recent times Garswood Hall. Ashton people can and will tell many tales of Garswood and the Gerards who dwelled there. Particularly will they tell of Lord Gerard's Yeomanry. The old barn where recruitment took place lies yet in the town, near the junction of Wigan Road and Gerard Street.

The manufacture of locks and hinges forms one of the staple trades of Ashton. Cotton too used to play a great part, but locks and hinges have superseded it. Up to quite recent times the making of certain types of hinges was a job for the old-type craftsmen, who took their work home. It was no uncommon thing to see one of these old artisans wheeling his week's work to the factory at week-end, and taking home the raw material for another week ahead.

Near Ashton lies Haydock Park Racecourse. Here gathered men from all the allied nations during the war. I myself spent ten months working there for the U.S. Forces during the 1939-45 war. Here on race days the scene is a grand one indeed. Then the great crowds, groomed horses flashing by, gay-coloured shirts of the jockeys, make a colourful scene, and, with the meadows and trees surrounding the whole of it, compares favourably, I am told, with gay Epsom on Derby Day, and Royal Ascot.

A few miles on lies Newton-le-Willows, or Newton-in-Makerfield as it prefers to be called. Here lie awaiting you three interesting stones. The first stone, by the wayside, is the "Bloody Stone," which I mentioned in Chapter One. It lies built into the kerb half a mile south of the town where the main road crosses the railway. The second stone lies beside the railway proper, and is a memorial one. It calls to memory that grand day over a century ago when the world's first great railway was opened, from Liverpool to Manchester. There had been a railway prior to this, but never one so ambitious. The stone marks the spot where the Rocket, driven by Stephenson himself, knocked down and killed Mr. Huskisson, Liverpool's M.P. This was the world's first railway fatality. The third stone, a little



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past the "Bloody Stone," marks the site of Gallow's Croft. Here Parliament troops hanged their captives during the Civil Wars.

Leading from the town to Golborne, the road ascends a small stiff hill, Castle Hill, it is called. Here, legend says, Alfred is buried (the king who burned the cakes). Here, too, legend says, lies a great hoard of buried gold, silver, and jewels.

Alfred's burial chamber has never been found, neither has the alleged fabulous hoard of treasure. Many local clues make learned students of history presume the site of the interment lies hereabouts.

Castle Hill, however, is known to be a tumulus, a burial mound from the remote dark ages. When it was entered last century many interesting things were discovered, including a great pile of calcined bones, remains of fallen warriors who had perished in some distant battle.

It is thought that the Battle of Maserfield was fought hereabouts. Then it was that pagan Penda slew Oswald, champion of Christianity. Maserfield, which could have been the old-time Maserfield, stretched from Wigan to Winwick. On the tower of Winwick's ancient church is graven a representation of a pig. We call it T' Pig on t' Wa'. Penda's sign, as a pagan, was a boar, and he may have had it carved here after his victory.

The church, throughout ten centuries and beyond, has been known as St. Oswald's; and in the middle of a field near here lies a well, also named after the saint. The water is said to have flowed forth at that spot first when the Saint's head touched the ground.

Many routes may be taken back to Wigan, and most of them will lead over Seven Stars Bridge into Wallgate. Near here is Wigan Pier. Around it throbs the life of old Wigan, the Ancient, the Loyal; and from it, octopus fashion, radiate so many delightful routes by road and path to the country of enchantment which awaits us all around Wigan.

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