

RESPONSES BY MEMBERS OF THE WIGAN LOCAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE SOCIETY (WLHHS) TO QUESTIONS ABOUT WIGAN HISTORY AND HERITAGE

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April, 2023

Members were asked to provide their personal insights to three questions:

1. Why is the history and heritage of Wigan important to you?
2. What do you get out of learning about Wigan's history and heritage?
3. What can we do to strengthen recognition of Wigan's history and heritage?

We received 34 responses and here are the common threads in the responses.

- Recording Wigan's rich history and heritage establishes a baseline for understanding and preserving the unique character of the town and Wiganers.
- There is a great deal of pride in Wigan's history, heritage, culture and traditions. These should be documented and preserved for future generations and incorporated more in Wigan's development plans.
- On a personal level, understanding Wigan's history and heritage helps Wiganers understand their ancestors and themselves...who we are and where we came from.
- Learning about Wigan's history and heritage reinforces a bond and sense of belonging to the town and community.
- Improve the dissemination of information on Wigan history and heritage to the public, schools, and colleges.
- Create a "History Hub" with Officers of Wigan Council, Councillors, developers and history and heritage organisations to work together to best promote the history, heritage and culture of Wigan.
- Encourage more members to be active.

"Wigan's heritage belongs to the people of the borough."

(Wigan Council: Historic Environment Strategy)

1. WHY IS THE HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF WIGAN IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I am proud of the town where I grew up. Wigan has a rich history spanning at least 2000 years. Understanding how it developed leads to an understanding of what makes Wigan and Wiganers unique. It is important to document, preserve and share the history and heritage of Wigan so that this uniqueness can be preserved.

Because it is the town where I was born and brought up. It is the town of my ancestors. It is part of my DNA. I have lived away and returned. Wigan is in my blood. I love its culture, its traditions, and its heritage. I am proud to say I'm a Wiganer. Wigan made me who I am.

I think it is important to know how the place where you live came about and how it developed into the place it is today. In my opinion LOCAL history should be taught in every school. It may? give the younger people a better understanding of how their ancestors lived and what they did to make their lives what it is today.

Because it is basically a very working-class town and I felt growing up there was little history about working class people, e.g. miners, textile workers just to mention 2 groups of workers who created the wealth of this town. Also, because like many people in Wigan I come from an Irish background and when researching about immigrants in Wigan in the 70's there was very little to be found in the archives. There was also very little information about women who played such an important part in the industrial and indeed political background to Wigan.

Personally, I find local history fascinating. Especially working-class history that made the environment we all benefit from today. It hard graft that built this country, not the Earls and Lords that exploited & destroyed the health of so many human beings. Being in touch with our history is vital if we not to repeat the mistakes of the past. It also gives me a feeling of belonging to a people and culture that I greatly admire. It's our town and our heritage and it's vital we preserve it for future generations. Including our beautiful buildings that should be retained and preserved for all our future.

My family have long and strong links with the Borough.

its important because it's my history as well as my ancestors. It's interesting to find out how previous generations lived and worked, etc.

I live in Salford and have no connection with Wigan directly but there are archaeological threads that entwine us. My interest in the Romans, mainly, and Burscough, and Roman roads leading from Manchester to Wigan.

It's a window to the past, that should never be forgotten.

I have lived in Wigan for nearly seventy years and so have my ancestors. A lot of Wigan has been destroyed, some of which should have been preserved.

I'm Proud to be from Wigan, having done my family history for many years I can confirm the family of both my parents' sides trace back to Lancashire to around 1700's. There is such history in the Borough and it's great to meet with like-minded people. I'd like to think that we can keep things around for future generations and build on what's already known.

There are three reasons -My family have lived in and around Wigan for 200years and I want to be part of the success of my town that it is a safe productive and vibrant place to live and Inclusive to all.2. Following my ancestry search I discovered a long line of miners mill and railway worker. One killed in the

mines. This led to my interest and research into our Industrial heritage.³ The landscape and geographical location of my maternal family have lived in Wigan and district for at least 300 years

My maternal family have lived in Wigan and district for at least 300 years the town with easy access to Manchester /Liverpool London.

I think it is important to understand the history of where we live. History explains why people and places are the way they are and helps us make the most of our future. Supporting and preserving our heritage is vital. Well maintained buildings and places improve our town and enhance our quality of life.

I have a strong feeling that civic pride has become diluted over recent years. I worry that the next generations will be ignorant of the place in history that Wigan has established. The borough council has many assets and responsibilities. Responsibilities that I sometimes feel are not delivered. I worry about our buildings, civic, listed and 'special', together with churches and pubs. They are a physical representation of the town's history and heritage.

Because it's my birthplace and my ancestors lived here too.

It keeps me in touch with Wigan Heritage and history.

I would like to know about the town I live in. I enjoy local history.

Born in Wigan.

I feel people need a bond and a sense of belonging to town or community. love of history and heritage reinforces that bond.

There is a lot of local history in and around Wigan and it should be remembered.

Born in Pemberton, family roots here.

Ever since I came to Wigan 1967, from another historic town, Derby, I fell in love with the place. All the lovely Black and white ones in town plus the lovely side at. I came to live in Standish. Up Green Lane, right by Prospect House. Gone now. The Standish Market place. The church. Never thinking that one day I would keep the Lychgate Pub one day. But I had it 5 years!! With all its below tunnels under the car park to the church! Some funny tales about them. But I do love history. Don't like seeing the council doing things to the town centre. That's another thing!!!

I was born and raised and lived in Wigan for most of my life and it is important to be aware of the History and Heritage of this area so that its future can be secured.

A recognition of Wigan's rich past heritage, pride in our town and appreciation of our ancestors' contribution to the development of our town.

I am proud of the town where I grew up. Wigan has a rich history spanning at least 2000 years. Understanding how it developed leads to an understanding of what makes Wigan and Wiganers unique. It is important to document, preserve and share the history and heritage of Wigan so that this uniqueness can be preserved and adopted into future development and by future generations.

2. WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF LEARNING ABOUT WIGAN'S HISTORY AND HERITAGE?

A sense of belonging and to look back on what the town was like, in better times, when I was growing up.

A sense of achievement and the thought of putting Wigan on the map.

I love meeting like-minded people that are as passionate as me about local history. Again, it reaffirms my sense of belonging to my working-class Ancestors who I greatly admire.

I have a sense of pride when I tell people where I'm from. I have an identity and an affiliation with other Wiganers, I have shared memories, I am part of a community. I love to learn about Wigan in the past, its buildings, it's people ... my ancestry.

I want to know more about their lives and the places, buildings and events they visited.

I like the group, I always learn something that I wouldn't have if I hadn't gone along.

Nice beer...ok, joking, don't drink it! Knowledge, experience (digging) and joy.

Knowledge and fascinating facts about our little town.

Knowledge.

Personally, I enjoy learning the history and the role Wigan has played in development. I've always enjoyed history, now researching for pleasure about my hometown is brilliant. Being part the group allows me to learn from others who have a genuine interest in Wigan.

New knowledge and interest.

My personal life has been shaped by being raised in Wigan for my first 18 years. I have lived in other countries for more than 50 years and could easily have left Wigan behind. However, to understand myself I recognized that I had to understand the history and heritage of the town where I was raised and why I was brought up as I was.

Since joining Wigan Local History and Heritage Group I have found a huge sense of community. The presentations, meetings and discussions have certainly enriched my knowledge base and deepened my interest with likeminded members .The connections WLHAH has made with Wigan Council and other History organisations .

As a retiree, I keep my skills homed in this society and others. Hopefully contributing to their objectives through photography, computing and management.

I enjoy finding out how things evolved in the past and what life was like for my ancestors.

Knowledge and like to visit places of interest. I am not from this area I am from North Wales.

Interesting talks about a variety of subjects which widen my knowledge of Wigan's past.

Interesting facts and discussion.

Enjoyment and a desire to retain the heritage.

I am learning more about the town and surrounding areas from every meeting.

Interested in genealogy and history. Retired history teacher.

A greater understanding of our history

Nothing really, just a nice interest.

By researching our town's rich and varied long history, we can pass on our knowledge to others, especially the younger generation. This will ensure that Wigan's history will never be forgotten.

3. WHAT CAN WE DO TO STRENGTHEN RECOGNITION OF WIGAN'S HISTORY AND HERITAGE?

It needs different history organisations working together along with Officers from Wigan Council and the 'heritage champion' councillor, currently Terry Halliwell. It needs a 'History Hub' where like-minded people can come up with ideas on how to best promote the history and culture of Wigan. Improved signage to places of special interest, information boards, guided tours, QR code tours, booklets about local historical places, heritage walks, heritage talks, heritage meetings.

The Council to actually do something Instead of just paying LIP SERVICE to the community i.e., the KING STREET PROJECT!!!! My prediction, in 5 years' time NOTHING will have changed in this street. I'm not a fortune teller by any means but I predicted what would happen to the town centre when the GRAND ARCADE was built. It is documented on various web sites.

I would like to explore more about our Viking heritage.

By having archives and materials which are accessible to people who are not necessarily academic and having information which is transparent.

Contemporary visual/audio presentations in an easily accessible building.

I think there could be more in the libraries about how Wigan grew into the town it is today.

Not really - I think you do an excellent job, and I wouldn't presume to know enough about it.

1. Develop better working relationships with Wigan Council and developers. 2. Improve outreach to schools and colleges. 3. Encourage more members to be active.

Stop tearing it down and embrace it rather than erasing it.

On the approaches to any town in France, there are notices telling you what you should see in the town. Sometimes they make something out of nothing! We should promote what is left in a more positive way.

Getting the local papers interested and articles both in print and online. Support from council for what the group does, Wigan Life, Past Forward and council website. Raising the profile of the group.

The society could be advertised better. I have met several people who I know are interested in everything Wigan who had no idea about the History Society.

Local history should be taught in local schools, trying to get teachers involved would be beneficial.

I think we do a pretty good job using all available channels. Perhaps having a physical presence in the town might be useful e.g., pop up stall in a shopping area, library, or in community spaces. I also think we could do more to attract young people by getting into schools and the College.

Engagement with WMBC. Liaison with like-minded societies and bodies. Act as an enabler for research and knowledge.

The principal Heritage Officer at the council is mainly invisible and does not acknowledge or respond to any emails. He should be replaced with someone who is genuinely interested in the heritage of Wigan. The council have a long history of not engaging with residents therefore I do not see how anything can be improved with ongoing Labour control.

Information posters in the libraries and the Book Cycle.

Town should have more walks and talks. People need to sell the incredible Industrial Revolution our town has and how this has shaped the people into who they are now. Also, how local names originated.

The twitter account seems under used.

More emphasis on local history in schools, more interest from the council and elected representatives.

I appreciate all that is being done at present.

Given how Wigan was central to the industrial revolution perhaps something for schools? Given the state of the town today, it is difficult to see anything having any effect in the town itself.

Not sure about that question. Peter Fleetwood would answer that one better than me!!

Greater promotion of the Wigan Museum.

History and our heritage need to be given a far higher profile, especially in Wigan town centre and schools encouraged to teach local history alongside National history. This will give a sense of pride, awareness, and personal involvement in history.

4. THE FOLLOWING RESPONSES WERE SUBMITTED BY EMAIL

- i. I joined the historical society because I am interested in local history. I am from Preston and lived in Wigan for 20 years. I like Wigan and think it is underappreciated, despite the state of the town centre (like many others). I love all the green areas around it. I also joined for its social aspects, being on my own. I greatly enjoyed the canal trip last year and everyone is so friendly. A friend has joined, and we attend meetings together. I also did a little delving into local history at the museum a few years ago when I saw a ghost in my house and have discovered since, that the previous people living here had also seen someone! - terraced houses near the Brockett.
- ii. My personal reasons to be interested in the history of Wigan are as follows: -

I was told stories of my Irish ancestors coming over to Liverpool barefoot during the potato famine. They were of farming stock and settled in Ormskirk before moving on to Wigan. I have researched the farms they occupied and drive past one of them daily although these days it's a private house and all the land around it has been sold off.

My great grandfather worked as a tram driver in Wigan, and I love to see any old photos which show the tramlines and can imagine him taking his passengers all around the town for work and pleasure. I have a photograph of him in his uniform.

I love the history of the church whit walking days. I belonged to Sacred Heart, Springfield and remember a number of churches congregating on the market Square. I was a tomboy and I think it was the only day of the year that my parents could get me to wear a frock!!
It was an annual event where everyone young and old processed through the streets to show their faith. I enjoy looking at photos and old cinefilm of the "walks".

I was born and brought up in Springfield and we spent a lot of time on Springfield Park watching Wigan Athletic. My dad was a lifetime supporter and first started watching them as Wigan borough in the 1920s before they became "the Latics" we know today.

Woodhouse Stadium was another of our regular places to visit.
I've seen an old Mitchell and Kenyon film from 1904 showing a trotting match there.
It's fascinating to imagine that as children we were running around the very same circuit for our school sports days as the pony and traps had done all those years ago.

I have an old map of Wigan drawn up by a John Mather in 1827.
I have Mathers on my maternal side of the family and am sure that one of them was a surveyor.
I would love to find out if the map maker was one of "my" Mathers.

The extensive Victorian photographic collection by William Wickham, the vicar of St Andrews Church Springfield is a particular favourite of mine. He captured everyday people doing ordinary things and I really enjoy looking at them. A number of his photographs are particularly personal to me....

one showing a shop that I used to be sent to for cigarettes for my father.

Another showing day trippers leaving the Woodhouse Inn on a horse-drawn cart - a pub which I used to frequent in the 1980s.

Also, a photo of a threshing machine, taken near Douglas Bank. I often wonder if any of the folk are my relatives from the farm nearby.

Of course, you can't mention Wigan without talking about the mining industry. I find it incredible that any buildings survive at all due to subsidence. It is said that by 1840 there were over 1000 pit shafts within a 5-mile radius of Wigan Town centre. I remember seeing photographs of Victorian tunnels which were unearthed under Wigan baths when they were excavating the site ready to build the new international pool which opened in 1966. I spent many an hour in there with friends and often looked through the steamed-up windows at the deep end to see how busy it was before entering.

I'm proud to be a Wiganer and thank you so much for all you do for the society.

- iii. Personal reasons for being interested in our history and heritage is an interesting question. I have spent over 40 years researching the history and archaeology of our town, and I sometimes find myself asking the same question. I'm not particularly attracted to the place – it's just another depressed area in the Northwest suffering from many years of industrial decline. And surprisingly I'm not always proud of being brought up here either (when people ask, I very often find myself saying something vague like Manchester or south Lancashire) - but pride does sometimes rise to the surface particularly when football or rugby teams do well. This probably comes from the fact that my roots are here - both parents and grandparents were brought in the Wigan area. Perhaps I'm looking for other reasons to be proud - when people disparage my hometown I want to be able defend it with surprising (and verifiable) facts. These facts will not generally be known about, but can reveal through research and archaeological investigation - and as you know, over the years we have had some success in this direction (with more hopefully to come). Against all odds it turns out Wigan certainly does have a lot to be proud of in its history and heritage.
- iv. My sister and I are doing research about Wigan churches. As we are finding out, this gives you a valuable insight into the rich and wealthy of Wigan (who often like Blundell at Highfield) paid for the buildings but also provides an interesting (and funny) look at the social life of the churches and the town. We are doing well. We have shared our story of one church with the vicar in charge and we will circulate it to the people who go to the church soon. We hope they will add to it so it becomes a shared endeavour. Then we can think about making it more widely available.
- v. When I think about Wigan, my overwhelming emotions are gratitude and affection for my hometown. It gave me a great start in life, and I treasure the memories of family, education, chapel and the town itself which made me what I am. I went to university in 1960 and have never returned. I lived and worked in Bristol and London and have been in Hertfordshire for the past 30 years. Family links with Lancashire have dwindled and I rarely come North. Throughout these years, however, I have retained my love for and pride in Wigan. I seize on every reference to it in the media, I describe its history and achievements at every opportunity, I defend it passionately if anyone is inclined to mock and I constantly try to enhance its good reputation. If anything, as I have got older, I have become more emotional about what it means to me. I know I can be boring on the subject but it's a fault I carry with pleasure! The Society has given me so much more to be

eloquent about. I am in awe of the scholarship that is behind the presentations, and I look forward to being even more grateful, impressed and moved in the coming years.