

PAST FORWARD

ISSUE No. 22

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The Newsletter of Wigan Heritage Service

FREE

From the Editor

Yet again I have been overwhelmed by the reponse from the many readers of *Past Forward* throughout the world. As always there is not enough room to include all your contributions. However, I am delighted with the content of this particular issue, particularly as it contains articles by a number of new contributors, as well as old faithfuls (I'm sure they won't object to the term) such as Ernie Taberner, Harold Knowles and Harold Smith.

1999 is an important year for Leigh, which was granted its first charter 100 years ago. A number of exciting events have been organised for the second half of the year, and particularly around the first weekend of August (the exact date of the receipt of the charter is 5 August), and full details of events can be found in a special commemorative double spread on pp14/15.

The Millennium is fast approaching, and has already impacted on the Heritage Service. A major new exhibition is planned for the History Shop for 2000 (see p 16), while on a personal note, I have temporarily handed over the reins of the Service to Philip Butler, while I concentrate on my new role of Millennium Festival Co-ordinator. I will be particularly concerned with the *Mapping the Millennium* exhibition (see p13). I will, however, remain as Editor of *Past Forward*.

As always, my sincere thanks to all readers for their continued support and encouragement.

All comments and correspondence should be addressed to:

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Wigan WN1 1PX

Past Forward does it again

Dear Mr. Gillies,

I had to write and thank you for publishing my appeal 'Does Anyone Remember Jimmy Cain's Cake Shop' in *Past Forward* number 21. The response has been wonderful.

The great feature of *Past Forward* is that it unites people with common interests and memories. A number of letters carried by the magazine make mention of how friendly contacts have been established and I am pleased to add myself to this list.

Mrs. Margaret Carroll of Lower Ince wrote to me and together we have found her great grandparents on the 1891 Census. Mrs. Valerie Critchley made contact 34 years after our last meeting. Mr. Bailey of Hodges Street, Wigan, recalled sitting next to my father in Sunday School

in the 1920's. As my father died last year the knowledge that he recalled was most heart-warming. Finally Mr. Eric Stockley, something of a 'man of letters' in Wigan, wrote with memories of wartime Ince.

Like many others I now have the chance to say "thank you *Past Forward*", and thank you Mr. Gillies.

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● An article by Mr. Cain, *Let's Talk Wiggin*, appears on p18.

HERITAGE SERVICE CONTACTS

The Heritage Service has always prided itself on a settled - and, of course, happy - staff. But there have been a few changes of late.

Jennifer McCarthy, who worked alongside Dawn Wadsworth, has moved, but only down the road - to Wigan Pier, as Collections Manager of the new Opie Museum. Thanks to her for a job well done, and best wishes for the future.

Your Editor, while still retaining that role, will spend most of the next 15 months as Wigan MBC's Millennium Festival Co-ordinator. Philip Butler will, therefore, act as Heritage Services Manager, with his former duties being divided between Mike Haddon and Dawn Wadsworth.

Finally, we welcome two new faces, David Tetlow and Christine Watts. David will be particularly involved with the social history collections, and Christine with answering genealogical enquiries in the History Shop.

Wigan

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If you have an enquiry, and are not sure who the most appropriate person is to contact, please ring the History Shop, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU (01942) 828128. You can also send an email: heritage@wiganmbc.gov.uk

Cover: Before the 1870 Education Act many children from the lower classes attended numerous private day schools, which provided cheap elementary education. Younger children attended dame schools ran by older ladies (as depicted in this early Victorian illustration), where, for a few pence per week, they would be taught the rudiments of reading and sometimes writing as well. Older children attended the common day school, where, apart from reading, writing and arithmetic, subjects such as history, geography and needlework were also taught. The latter seems to have been the kind of school run by Ellen Weeton's mother (and later Ellen herself). According to Ellen there were about 14 pupils, and the fees were six shillings per quarter. (See article on p6).

News From the Archives

Recent Accessions

AMONGST recent additions to our holdings are the following:

Acc. 3161: photographs of Moss Lane Youth F.C., and honours list, 1938-62. [kindly deposited by Mr. Mosley of Abram]

Acc. 3163: photographs of Howarth's Post Office and removal cart, Hindley Green, c. 1900. [See separate feature].

Acc. 3165: Wigan Amateur Cine Club records, 1959-74. [Kindly deposited by Mr. Lythgoe of Skelmersdale]

Acc. 3166: photograph of Bowling Club members, Running Horses, Aspull, c. 1920.

Acc. 3168: original architect's plans of Wigan Library and Wigan Union Workhouse.

Acc. 3172: photographs of St. Joseph's Players, Leigh, 1899-1905.

Acc. 3173: deeds re Church Street cotton mill, Wigan, 1832-37.

Acc. 3183: legal papers re Westhoughton Coal & Canal Co. v. Wigan Coal & Iron Co., 1930's.

Acc. 3185: Album of cuttings, photographs and programmes for amateur dramatics productions, Leigh, 1946-1965.

Acc. 3186: sale notice of Lower Woodhouse Farm, 1857.

Acc. 3192: baptism registers of Astley Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1857-1946. [See separate feature]

Registers Deposited

Thanks to Rev. John Leech of Leigh Methodist Circuit, the surviving baptism registers of Astley Wesleyan Chapel have been deposited with the Archives. The two volumes cover the period 1857 to 1946 and, like other church registers, will in due course be microfilmed for use at the History Shop; in the meantime

they will be available for study at the Archives.

The growth of Wesleyanism in Astley is credited to John Horridge of Marsland Green who made his house available for meetings and preaching. The new religion grew rapidly in popularity amongst the labouring classes and by 1806 subscriptions had been collected to build the first chapel at Astley Bridge. A century later the church was rebuilt on the same site, with a new Sunday School.

A Village Post Office

Interesting items often turn up out of the blue. A good example is a pair of stray mounted photographs sent to us from Wales. They show the Howarth family of Hindley Green at the end of the last century. 'Howarth's Buildings', with the date stone 1890, still stand today as no. 779 Atherton Road, although it has been unoccupied shop premises for several years.

A little research has shed some light on the family and their businesses in Wigan and Hindley. In 1891, the census year closest to the date of the building, Henry and Margaret Howarth headed a household of no less than 16, including 10 children, two step-children, Henry's mother and a maidservant.

Henry can be traced back to 1881 when he was a general dealer at 93 Corporation Street, Poolstock. He had seven children

then, and lived at 38 Pool Street. He was described as a wholesale and retail smallware dealer and general house furnisher. By 1887 he was entered in directories as a furniture broker at 67a Mesnes Street and Poolstock. The family then took its first steps towards Hindley Green, for by 1887 Margaret had become post mistress there. They kept their separate businesses until 1892, by which time Henry had taken over the post office, possibly following Margaret's death.

By 1903 Henry's step daughter Annie Southworth had become post mistress, whilst 'Howarth Brothers' (presumably Henry's sons) were working as cabinet makers at 65 Mesnes Street in Wigan. Finally by 1918 Annie was combining the post office with a shop in Hindley Green, and by 1920's both names disappear from the directories. 'Howarth's Buildings' were by then occupied by Storey's grocery and provision stores.

Perhaps readers may be able to add to the story? N.W.



The following splendid article has been written over a period of seven years by Mrs. Margaret Bell. It tells the poignant story of her Great Uncle Harry Bilsbury. Ed.

WHITE HOPE

or

Searching for Great Uncle Harry

WHEN I began to be interested in my family history it was to Dad that I turned for his memories of family and friends. He had a wealth of information including personal memories and stories told to him as a child, of long past relatives. One person stood out from his childhood - his Uncle Harry.

Uncle Harry had been a big, fine young man, very tall, strong, good physique and a good sportsman. He could run and jump and had won lots of races. It was said that he won so many clocks that he mother had one in every room and gave them away as presents. He played a bit of football, wrestled and did some boxing. He was a good all rounder. He volunteered for the First World War, joined the Grenadier Guards and was killed in France.

There was a letter from the Commanding Officer in reply to one sent by my Dad's Dad asking for information. Harry's mother had heard first of her son's death from another soldier writing home and she wanted to know where he was buried. The reply had been that as soon as the C.O. had any further information he would let the family know. As far as Dad was aware there was no further correspondence. He briefly showed me the letter which was kept in a wallet. It was obvious that Uncle Harry had made quite an impression on the then eight year old boy because of his sporting abilities.

I re-discovered the World War I letter whilst sorting through Dad's personal belongings after his death in 1990. As I quietly read through the letter I realised that the Captain had written it during the Battle of the Somme in which thousands of men died; a period of history of which I knew little. My quest to know more about Great Uncle Harry, his final resting place and of the Battle of the Somme began.

'A Leigh Boxer Killed'

Pte. Bilsbury's death was reported in the *Leigh Journal* of 29 September 1916 (see news report this page). The report also mentioned that his friend Pte W. Harvey* with whom he joined up had also been killed that week. It also recorded Harry's sporting achievements in the district prior to joining

PTE. HARRY BILSBURY REPORTED KILLED.

News has reached Mrs. Bilsbury, who resides at Doctor's Nook, Leigh, through the medium of a letter sent by a Westleigh soldier to his home that her son, Pte. Harry Bilsbury, of the Grenadier Guards, has been killed at the front.

Pte. Bilsbury joined the Army about November, 1914, along with his friend, Pte. W. Harvey, who is also amongst the killed this week, and had been in France about 14 months. He was well known in this district as a wrestler, boxer and footballer. He played for some time with the Leigh Northern Union football team. He was 26 years of age, and the youngest of 13 children. Before joining the Colours he was employed at the Albion Foundry. His brother Tom was discharged from the Army, being disabled through suffering from frostbite in the feet.



Pte. H. BILSBURY.

the colours. *The Chronicle* of 29 September printed a long obituary with the heading 'A Leigh Boxer Killed', with a photograph in boxing stance. It gave details of a letter, dated 20 September which had been received by the parents of Pte. G. Waterworth saying:

"No doubt you will have heard about W. Harvey and H. Bilsbury being killed. It is very hard lines. I might say we have had some narrow shaves - too near to be nice - but I suppose it is our luck. It is God's will if we have to stop one".

The same man also wrote to his brother-in-law who was in hospital suffering from shell shock saying:

"I dare say you will have heard about Harvey and Bilsbury being killed They were done close to where you were injured".

It may well have been these reports from local soldiers that prompted the letter of enquiry to the Battalion. The official Army record shows that Harry was killed in action on 15 September, and the next of kin notified on 29 September.

In October, the letter which was in Dad's possession and addressed 2nd Batt. Grenadier Guards, B.E.F. was written by Capt. Wiggins, Harry's Officer. He very much regretted having to say that Pte. Harry Bilsbury was killed in the attack which the Battalion made on 15 September.

"I have not yet received the records of where he is buried, but will let you know when I get it". He went on to say "He proved himself to me on many occasions to be a clean and gallant soldier and a most upright man. I greatly respected him and shall miss him very much in my company. I sympathize most deeply with you and all his relations and friends".

There seems to have been no further communication, and his 1914/5 Star was received by his mother in 1920, and the British War Medal and Victory Medal in 1921.

Touching and sad

Concerned about what happened and where his grave was I wrote to the War Graves Commission, enclosing postage for a reply and asking for details of the grave of Pte. Harry Bilsbury, Grenadier Guards, killed on the Somme. The reply was both touching and sad, for Great Uncle Harry has no known grave and the writer of the letter showed concern for my feelings on reading this news. He is commemorated by name on the Thiepval Memorial, France, which commemorates 72,085 men who died on the Somme sector up until March 1918. Enclosed was an information sheet with pictures of the Thiepval Memorial and details of the Battle of the Somme 1916. It includes details of the battle, the dead, the numerous cemeteries and a map of the battle field, which shows the guards cemetery at Les Boeufs. Originally this was for 40 men of the 2nd Batt. who were killed on 25 September (this was Harry's battalion). Many more bodies were brought in after the war and it now has 3136 graves, about half unidentified.

I felt that I had completed my enquiries until one Sunday evening in September 1996 while listening to a radio programme about the Battle of the Somme



commemorations, I heard a man describing how he traced his uncle's movements up to the time he went missing in battle. He had then gone to France to the place he thought he had been at the time.

Heavily shelled

My next step was a letter to the Regimental Headquarters of the Grenadier Guards, London, requesting information about Harry Bilsbury and enclosing a copy of the original letter from Capt. Wiggins. I quickly received a reply from the Archives with a copy of Record of Service. There was also the helpful suggestion that I visit my local library and borrow 'The Grenadier Guards in the Great War 1914-18' by Ponsonby. These books give all the activities of the regiment throughout the war, including the Somme battle completed with detailed maps. For anyone with a relative in the Guards in W.W.I they are well worth reading.

I chose to concentrate on the volume with the details of the 2nd Batt., and their activities during September 1916, in particular the 13-16th and the Battle on the 15th. The objective was to size Morval, Lesboeuvs, Gueudecourt, and Flers, breaking through the enemy's system of defence. Chapter XIX goes into great detail of the preparation, the battle, and the aftermath of the Guards operations at Ginchy and clearing of the trenches and orchard of Germans which cleared the ground for the advance on the 15th. On 14 September the 2nd Batt. remained in the front trenches all day, where it was heavily shelled. One shell pitched on the headquarters of No. 1 company; Capt. Wiggins (officer who later wrote the letter) was so severely shaken that he retired suffering from shell shock and the Company Sgt. Major was mortally wounded. The Battalion was relieved in the evening, went to bivouac behind Ginchy, rations and rum were served. The men had been in the trenches three days, hardly a moment's sleep. It was bitterly cold at night, and the men, who had no greatcoats, suffered very much. Casualties throughout the three days 13th, 14th and 15th totalled 365, not counting officers, 12 of these being missing, Harry Bilsbury was one of these missing men. The Battle took place on the road between Ginchy and Lesboeuvs, a road under two miles long. Lesboeuvs is where the Guards cemetery is. Could Uncle Harry be one of the un-named soldiers in there?

'A White Hope Killed'

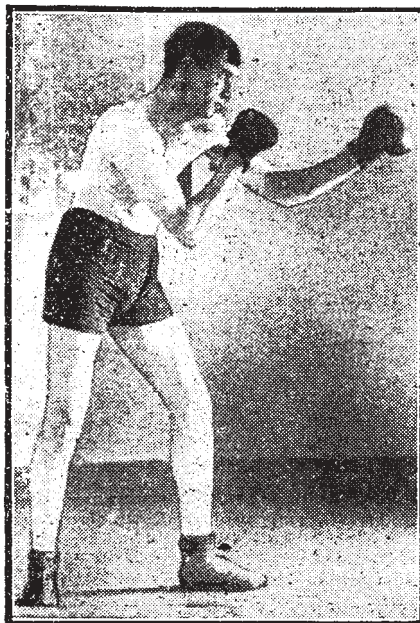
Included in the information from the Guards Archives was a press cutting from the *Evening Standard* dated 25 September 1916. "A White Hope Killed" was the heading. This recorded Harry Bilsbury's 'great sacrifice' and said that he was one of

the best all round athletes in the North of England. His magnificent physique helped in all forms of sport, for he stood at 6ft. 4 in. in height and stripped at nearly 15 st. He was extremely popular in sporting circles and in ordinary life. This recorded his boxing; he went into the semi-finals of the *Sporting Chronicle* and *Daily Sketch* "White Hope" Competition at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, where his hard hitting was a feature. He was persuaded to enter the competition, and trained by Harry Brown of the Crown Public House, Leigh. Jack Smith, a notable trainer at the time, took him up afterwards. He won several matches. While in the Army both in England and France he won a number of contests.

Bilsbury, the Leigh Boxer.

WINS GUARDS' BOXING TOURNAMENT.

At a boxing contest held at the Brigade of Guards' Depot Surrey, on Monday, the great event of the evening was a six rounds contest between Harry Bilsbury, of Leigh, now a private in the Grenadier Guards, and one of Iron Hague's former opponents, who went all the distance in a recent bout with Iron Hague himself, who is also in the Grenadier Guards. Harry Bilsbury was seconded by members of the gymnastic staff, and his opponent, Private Frank Wright, by Iron Hague and others. Both men



stripped in the pink of condition. Bilsbury looked better than he has ever done, the strict discipline and training of the Guards adding to his agility and strength. The first round showed that he has got rather quicker than formerly, and put confidence into his supporters, who at first were rather doubtful, owing to the good record of Wright and his massive appearance. The fighting was swift and furious. Bilsbury went down in the first round owing to a slip, but quickly recovering, he had the best of his man all the way through the fight, knocking him out in the third round. Corporal J. H. Worthington, of Tyldesley, who is on the Boxing Committee, was congratulated for bringing to notice such a good man. There were quite a large number of Guardsmen present who belong to the Leigh Division.

Deciding to follow up yet another lead, I wrote to the British Boxing Board of Control, who passed my enquiries onto boxing historian, Mr. Harold Alderman. From him I received a full compilation of the boxing career of Harry Bilsbury gathered from various sources. Harry did so well that he earned his nick-name 'one round', just as when he was running he earned the name 'long span'. Prior to joining the Guards he had been sparring partner to Bombardier Billy Wells, in exhibitions at the Palace Theatre, Manchester. Mr. Alderman explained that these could only be 'spars' as Harry was a 'novice' starting out and Wells was a 'pro', the British and Empire Heavyweight Champion. Had Harry survived, who knows that might have been? He was improving all the time, and his 'spars' with Wells would have taught him a great deal.

Mother kept a 'good table'

What about the home life of this man who created such an impression on his young nephew? He was born in 1891, at Crab Fold Farm, Atherton, the family later moving to Hart's Farm, Leigh Road. He was the youngest of a family of 13 children, one of whom was my Granny. There was a plentiful supply of food at the Bilsbury farm, where mother kept a 'good table'. He was amiable, got on well with people and was popular. He was always willing to do a good turn and had time for children, having lots of nieces and nephews. As he grew into manhood his sporting activities made him a well known figure. His earliest sporting interest was athletics but they did not stop there; he played rugby football at 3/4 position, although a knee injury gave later trouble; he did some wrestling and, of course boxing.

To sum up, during my search for Great Uncle Harry, I have learned a lot. No longer is he just a missing soldier on the Somme. He was killed in the 'great push' on the 15th on the Ginchy-Les Boeuvs Road. He may be one of the un-named men in the Guards Cemetery, but his name will stand for evermore on the Thiepval Memorial with thousands of other brave soldiers who have no known grave. He died at the young age of 25 years, leaving good memories for family and friends left behind. He died with the friend he joined the colours with. He died with a life full of promise, having already packed a great deal into the short life he had been given.

What a sportsman! What a man! What an uncle for an eight year old boy!

**Mrs. Margaret Bell
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* William 'Bill' Harvey was killed on the Somme on Wednesday 13 September 1916. He is buried in Delville Wood Cemetery, Longueval (grave IV.L6).

Exactly 150 years ago on 12 June 1849, Ellen Weeton died. Her volumes of 'copy' letters of ordinary lives and day to day events in this part of south Lancashire and beyond, some 200 years ago, are of inestimable value to local and social historians. Alan Roby continues with some of Miss Weeton's Upholland experiences and of local characters at both ends of the social spectrum.

ELLEN WEETON

(1776-1849)

GOVERNESS

Village Life - Coarse and Fine

ANCIENT stone cottages and hostelrys built on steep inclines surrounding the 14th century Priory Church of St. Thomas The Martyr, and cobbled, twisting narrow roads and alleyways was the Upholland of 2,427 souls in 1801. A number of the dwellings that Miss Weeton knew so well still survive. To name a few: The one time Earl of Derby's Manor and Courthouse, dated 1633; the 17th century Owl Inn; 'The Priory' home of Rev. John Braithwaite (now known as 'The Priory House'); The Parsonage (now Upholland Conservative Club); the ancient Old Dog Inn and the old Free Grammar School, built in 1667 by Robert Walthew, one of the wealthiest men in the Wigan district.

Miss Weeton was just 11 years old when her mother began her dame school to teach, for a small weekly fee, an elementary education of the village children. Ellen herself was naturally bright. An usher from Mr. Braithwaite's academy attended daily for a limited period to teach her writing, arithmetic, a little grammar and a little geography. Unfortunately her mother believed that she "should be entirely ruined for any useful purpose in life if her inclinations for literature were indulged." Whilst fond of arithmetic, she "burned to learn Latin, French, the Arts and the Sciences" rather than the greater part of her day being devoted, as it was, to sewing, writing copies and washing dishes! At this time her great joy was to greet her brother on his daily return from Mr. Braithwaite's academy, when

they would go outside to "indulge in harmless children's frolics" in the cottage's rear garden. Ellen had but one doll but brother Thomas, being some four years younger, was rather more fond of it than she. Chalk and slate and quill and paper were her preferred indoor toys. By the scribbling of rhymes and enigmas, for which she had a "strong predilection", she teased her brother. To both of them this was great fun and usually ended with collapse into laughter.

Amuse themselves

When the weather was fine they had permission to leave the garden to amuse themselves, sometimes with other companions Thomas brought home with him from the academy. They played marbles, driving the hoop, sailing ships (in a rain-tub), running races and flying kites - both were not allowed to play with their uncouth village contemporaries. Mrs. Weeton zealously and rigidly instructed her children in "every kind of religious duty and observance"



'The Priory', Church Street, Upholland (c.1900), home of Rev. John Braithwaite and his family was the scene of much good humour and careless untidiness in the early 19th century.

and would "never countenance the least impropriety of conduct", stated Miss Weeton at a later date.

Mary Weeton continued her school for some nine years before she succumbed due to her delicate constitution. According to Miss Weeton her mother declined rapidly from an asthmatic complaint brought on by a fright owing to abusive language of one of her pupil's parents. She died on 5 December 1797, aged 51, and lies buried alongside her sister, Margaret Barton, in Upholland churchyard.

At the time of her mother's death Miss Weeton was not quite 21. She had no alternative but to continue her mother's school in order to support her brother, who at the age of 14 had become articled to a solicitor, Mr. N. Grimshaw of Preston. She had promised her mother, that she would support Thomas until he became of age (21) and for two years afterwards - "for, my dear Nelly", had often repeated her mother, "you know your brother is so situated that he can earn nothing . . ." At great personal sacrifice, Miss Weeton fulfilled her mother's wishes. Income from Mrs. Weeton's school never exceeded 12 shillings a week (60p) and after her death was reduced to seven shillings. Eventually Miss Weeton was forced to take in lodgers in order to keep 'body and soul' together.

Loose morals

Miss Weeton was very critical of the loose morals of many

Upholland inhabitants. In a letter to Mrs. Whitehead (a widowed daughter of the late curate-in-charge at Upholland) dated 3 December 1807, she said that a Miss Davenport was in the habit of being frequently 'bled' for fear of growing too fat. Apparently the apothecaries in both St. Helens and Wigan had refused to bleed her any longer but Jackson of Upholland "who would do almost anything for money" continued with the 'treatment'.

Seven months later in a letter to her brother dated 9 June 1808, she reported that "Dr. Jackson is dead very suddenly. He was 60 years old and had 40 children! Four were 'natural' [illegitimate], the rest by two wives. About 20 had lived to grow up."

In a later letter to Mrs. Whitehead, Miss Weeton states that: "Holland, is, if possible, more licentious and more scandalous; such numbers of unmarried women have children, many of whom one would have thought had years, discretion, sense, and virtue to have guarded them. In two houses near together, there had been in each, a mother and daughter lying in, nearly at the same time; and one man (the notorious George Lyon) reputed to be the father of all four!" Even the Rev. T. Meyrick, B.A., incumbent of Upholland Church, 1798-1802, does not escape a wry condemnatory comment: "He is said to have seduced the servant girl of the house where he lives . . . he has used his utmost endeavour to obey that injunction - 'increase and multiply'."

The large numbers of premature deaths testified by the apothecary's children and local gravestones reminds us that in truth those times were not the 'good old days'. Miss Weeton's letters catalogue various illnesses: typhus fever, cholera, consumption, tuberculosis and whooping cough which proved "very fatal". She also records the suicides of two elderly people. A man who hung himself from an apple tree in his orchard and a crippled lady who hung herself from the 'tester' at the foot of the bed. In the lady's case the neighbours did not believe she could have done such a thing -



being a cripple. It was generally known that her husband "used her ill but no proof can be brought".

On Friday 22 July 1818, thoroughly disillusioned with her life in Upholland, Miss Weeton finally quit the village. But before she left Upholland she sold all her furniture and other possessions, and stayed for a few days with the hospitable Braithwaite family at 'The Priory', before going to stay for two weeks or more with her brother Thomas and his family at Leigh.

'The sign of the Swan'

On 22 August she left Leigh accompanied by her brother to "the sign of the Swan, three and a half miles this side, Leigh". Miss Weeton was writing to her brother from her new Liverpool abode in a letter dated 31 August, when she informed him of her itinerary details. This would suggest that she was referring to the Swan Inn at Winwick, near Warrington. As this is not on the direct route between Leigh and Wigan, the next destination, it is likely that on this occasion she travelled, unusually, by stage coach? From about 1762 a stage coach travelled daily along the turnpike road (A49) between Warrington, Wigan, Preston, Lancaster and Kendal.

At Wigan, she dined at the home of Mrs. Scott, the mother-in-law of her brother, before wearily and almost "overcome with heat", arrived at Upholland to stay the night with her Aunt and Uncle Barton. The following morning she walked to Appley Bridge to embark on a passenger carrying canal 'packet' from Wigan to Liverpool, a journey considerably cheaper and more comfortable than the stage coach but which would take over seven hours. Her destination was to Dale Street, Liverpool, the home of her friend, a Miss Chorley, who lived with her parents. Unfortunately Miss Chorley soon proved not to be the true friend, a trusting Miss Weeton believed her to be.

● The next issue will detail Miss Weeton's relatively short Liverpool experiences until a local newspaper advertisement beckoned her to relocate 100 miles to the north. Also a profile on her brother, Thomas, whose rise to prominence as Attorney in Leigh, culminated in utter ruin because of 'sharp practice'.

REV. JOHN BRAITHWAITE (1754-1812)

SEVEN members of the Braithwaite family lived at 'The Priory', located adjacent to the Church of Thomas The Martyr, Upholland and only a few yards from the cottage home of Mrs. Mary Weeton and her family. Both were true friends of her daughter Ellen.

John Braithwaite, a native of Cumberland was educated at St. Bee's School. Not entirely unknown to the people of South Lancashire, he had been employed at Rainford, near St. Helens, for some five years before being offered the position as headmaster of Upholland Grammar School in 1782. A year later he also accepted the post of assistant curate at Upholland, under Rev. Richard Prescott, curate-in-charge at Upholland. Rev. Prescott's preference for the life of a country gentleman, to that of a parish priest, meant that much parish work fell onto the shoulders of young Braithwaite. Additionally in 1783

Braithwaite was appointed first incumbent and the living of St. George's chapel of ease in the parish of Wigan, a position he held until his death.

In due course it became very clear that Braithwaite's great energy was impelled by the desire for success through an insatiable appetite for worldly wealth. Very soon he began to take boarders into home, 'The Priory', which was then an acceptable way of supplementing an inadequate income though very few did so as deftly and successfully as did John Braithwaite. He shrewdly exploited the snobbery of his age by eliminating the name 'Grammar School' with its charitable foundation association, to that of 'Academy', a word far more likely to attract the sons of wealthy people. It worked admirably, the highest boarding fees eventually exceeded one hundred guineas a year, at a time when a schoolmaster's salary rarely exceeded £30 a year.

One year after Braithwaite's appointment as headmaster a certain Mrs. Mary Weeton with her two young children came from Lancaster to live in Upholland. Her daughter, Ellen, later wrote of being envious of her brother Thomas's learning opportunities at "Mr. Braithwaite's most excellent school for boys". Thanks to Miss Weeton's detailed letters it is possible to peep into the Braithwaite household and witness something of their lives:

Affection, good humour and careless untidiness characterised life at 'The Priory' and on special occasions dances and other "gay doings" took place. Little ceremony was observed and although Braithwaite considered

good appearance a supreme virtue, his wife in this respect seemed to fail to meet his expectations. Miss Weeton's opinion was that Braithwaite's wife Anne was a "coarse but good hearted woman" who would help anybody in trouble or distress. Unfortunately her tactless comments or ill-considered actions meant distress was as often caused as alleviated.

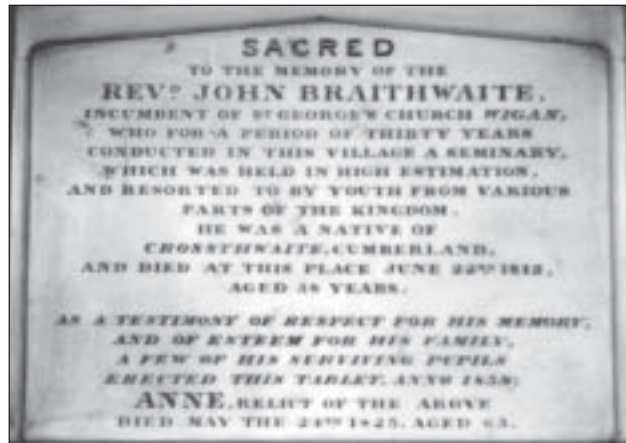
John and Anne Braithwaite had five children - four daughters and a son. All their daughters were friends, in varying degrees, of Miss Weeton, as also were the daughters of Rev. Richard Prescott. Sadly the generally prevailing snobbery marred many potential

g o o d friendships. The daughters of Rev. Prescott in particular "could not avoid showing her that they considered the daughters of a clergyman much superior in rank to that of a school-mistress." recorded Miss Weeton at a later date.

Anne Braithwaite was the eldest daughter and something of a shadowy figure she died shortly after her father of a "decline". Catherine was a rather condescending and supercilious friend of Miss Weeton. Margaret was much more "genteel" and "more accommodating" and with "greater consideration for the feelings of others." She also had a "religious turn of mind" which, despite her father's poor example, was natural to her. Ellen Weeton greatly admired Margaret. Elizabeth the youngest daughter, was rather refined with a quiet disposition in a somewhat boisterous family. Her last illness and death of an asthmatic complaint is touchingly recorded by her admiring friend, Miss Weeton, some 15 years her senior. Nothing is known of son Frederick.

John Braithwaite tried hard to play the part of the country parson, yet towards the end of his life he succumbed to drinking heavily; though it would be a mistake to look on him as degenerate. At that time drunkenness was very common and even fashionable in the upper classes, where many gentlemen were proud to be considered "three bottle men".

Despite his failings, the very human and somewhat charismatic John Braithwaite was greatly admired and loved by his own family and by his pupils, amongst whom he found great respect and affection. So much so that 30 years after his death at the age of 58, a group of his old pupils erected a tablet to his memory. It still exists where it was placed, on the south wall of Upholland church and above the pews once reserved for the scholars.



MISS WEETON, THE GREAT WALKER AND VERSIFIER

MISS Weeton's favourite exercise was walking and it was very regular. In the process she saved many a shilling in an age when stage coach travel was a matter of considerable expense and discomfort. Walking 10 to 15 miles in a day was normal for her. She often walked from Upholland to Wigan (4 miles); to visit her brother when at Leigh (6 miles); to visit her daughter at Parr Hall boarding school, St. Helens (7 miles). When residing at Beacon's Gutter, Liverpool, she regularly walked to busy Castle Street (about 2 miles) and to Prescot, (about 8 miles).

She combined her love of walking with her great love for the countryside through undertaking walking tours alone. In 1812 she extensively toured the Isle-of-Man and in 1825 toured North Wales, where in a single day, at the age of 49, she undertook a 25 mile excursion which included the ascent of Snowdon. Both tours would, in themselves, make interesting books.

When at Upholland from childhood to maturity she never lost an opportunity to visit favourite local beauty spots. Writing to a Liverpool friend from Upholland in February 1808 she said:

"I was enjoying a charming walk between 12 and 2 o'clock I think you would have liked. I passed Tower Hill [Upholland], from whence the clearness of the air gave me such a delightful view of the whole country! The Welsh Hills were uncommonly distinct and the landscape in front of them though very level and disfigured in places by large patches of moss was still infinitely pleasing. All round me, for some hundreds of miles in circumference, I had a variety of prospects. The air above me was so beautifully mingled with clouds of various shades, that that alone would have charmed me had there been nothing else to admire.

*When I survey such thrilling scenes,
O Thou the great First Cause
My swelling soul denies the means
To utter my applause."*

The above four lines of verse were taken from, or later included in, her 104-verse poem *A Ramble in Dean Wood*, dated May 1809, of which 11 verses are printed below. It perfectly captures her overwhelming love of the natural world and recalls the happy times spent with her brother in Dean Wood, near Upholland, when both were children. Today the poem might be considered overly long and unnaturally 'rambling' in places, yet it clearly shows a natural flair and not a little influence of Thomas Gray and Oliver Goldsmith.

Almost 200 years later Ellen Weeton's poetic description of Dean Wood still holds true - the "solemn beauty", the "scarcely murmuring" Dean Brook, the "rustling gales" and "the warblers on the spray" - can still be enjoyed by all:

A RAMBLE IN DEAN WOOD NEAR UPHOLLAND

*Dear are those hills, and dear these vales,
but ten-fold dear this wood;
where, list'ning to the rustling gales,*
full many an hour I've stood.*

*The solemn beauties of the place,
the warblers on the spray,
the sorrow of my heart effaces,
and melt my soul away.*

Oh! I could muse from morn than night;
could dwell with rapture here,
could view each scene with new delight,
could ev'ry tree reverse.*

*Great Pow'r above! How kind Thou art
such beauties to create;
from them to Thee th'attracted heart
rebounds with joy elate.*

*What silence reigns! Each leaf is still,
the brook scarce murmurs by;
nor whisp'ring breeze, nor clacking mill,
disturb the solemn joy.*

*Save where yon blackbird's mellow note,
the throstle's shrilly sweet;
the robin too with swelling throat
with love, with joy replete.*

*Save where yon wearied collier boy,
with eager step plods on;
who loudly carols out his joy,
now his days work is done.*

*You dearly love, I know you do,
to ramble often here;
and I'm as fond, as pleas'd as you;
we'll come again don't fear.*

*Farewell! Ye hills, ye vales, ye woods,
scenes of my youthful days;
Farewell! Ye streamlets, harmless floods
ye songsters on the sprays.*

*And must I quite these scenes forego?
No! Still I'll raptured sing
the beauties Dean Wood thou canst show
in Summer, Autumn, Spring.*

*For dear those hills, and dear these vales
but ten-fold dear this wood,
where, list'ning to the rustling gales,
so many hours I've stood.*

* 'gales' in old poetry means 'a gentle breeze' (v1).
'than' means 'until' (v3).



William Yates's map of the 'County Palatine of Lancashire', 1786. The main road layouts of this part of South Lancashire are little changed in over 200 years.

Mr. C. Daniels of Blackrod has contributed this very evocative poem, written in 1929 by his father Jack, then aged 29, following a serious pit injury. *Ed.*

‘Down There’

by Jay Dee

Dedicated to R. Makin, that he may join with me in reverent thought, to the average five who are killed daily.

Down there is a man, whom perhaps we forget,
Till “headlines” of horror, stir in the mind.
As we gaze at the news, from the press still wet,
Quite aware of the sadness to find.
Yet ere print has dried, or wreckage all clear,
The picture we painted is a blur.
We turn to the sport, or news of good cheer,
And so we forget that man, “down there”.

He went there and swung, on that line yesterday,
He’s gone again today risking “snap”.
Tomorrow he’ll go, though fate can bid him stay,
There’s confidence and trust in that chap.
He sends us the heat, we’re dependent upon,
But we’re blind to the blood in it’s glare.
The price that is paid, for coals that are won,
By the man who is, slaving “down there”.

Dennis Turner, from Marsh Green, Wigan, a West Lancashire Countryside Ranger, has recently been involved in a project in Dean Wood, Upholland. This coincided with Alan Roby’s articles in *Past Forward* on Ellen Weeton, and prompted Dennis, a keen poet, to put pen to paper in a reply to Miss Weeton’s verse written 190 years earlier.

Hello, Ellen Weeton

One hundred and ninety years ago
You wondered through Dean Wood
To write poetry as only you could
As I read your visions they stand out
I become inspired with all your thoughts
My mind pictures the time in which you lived
Moments, with the written word, this precious gift
Sentence by sentence, feel the joy it gives
If only you could see me now
The words come upon a screen
Press a button, out they come from printer to me
So much has changed since your day
When you wrote while you passed this tranquil way
Now its me who walks amongst the trees
Flowing brook, ruins of old, waterfall bouncing,
on slabs of stone
Mother Nature, still as friendly, still free
I’ll sit awhile, words come into my head
Pen goes to paper,
Like you I will leave words
To be looked at, and read

At earth’s gaping mouth, he’s to enter a cage,
A conveyance not worthy of note.
Where a few pulsing seconds, seem quite an age,
As he’s swallowed deep down that black throat.
His eyes are affected, as down, down he swings,
By a darkness that’s felt “as it were”.
His safety-lamp glows, but on distorted things,
Till his sight is accustomed, “down there”.

Dropping so swiftly, through a void black as night,
Imprisoned by the bars of a fence.
He’ll sigh when the cages, have passed by alright,
It relieves concentrated suspense.
Till around his ears, a slackness he feels,
In the foul smelling uprushing air.
He hardly need the soft thud, under his heels,
To signal he’s landed “down there”.

Into the workings, he’s a distance to tramp,
But not along a smooth concrete road.
Obstructions on his way, plus drink, tools and lamp,
Give the start to a day’s heavy load.
A stumble and bruise, as he plods along,
May give cause for an unconscious swear,
That suddenly turns, to the hum of a song,
For it’s a part of the day “down there”.

The end of that journey, means “something achieved”,
As he lays on one side drink and food,
Strips off his sticky rags, and “how he’s relieved”,
It’s a comfort to be in the nude.
The temperature, has risen rather high,
There’s a trickle from under his hair.
Have you ever thought, as you gaze at the sky,
That there’s a man and a “hell” “down there”.

His place he will test, before starting a hew,
By scrutiny and tapping around.
A strong pocket of gas, may need moving through,
And the roof give a deep hollow sound.
Supports badly broken, or tilted askew,
Will call for some dangerous repair.
It may mean a death, but does it trouble you,
A lost husband or laddie, “down there”.

A cracking he hears, and down falls some rock,
If fortunate he’s scrambled clear.
He’ll move it away, at the risk of a knock,
Without any hear-throbs of fear.
‘Tis only a sample of fate’s many tricks,
With more inconvenience to bear.
There is no surprise where the earth is on sticks,
The unforeseen’s expected “down there”.

He’ll pause for a breath, ease his limbs from a cramp,
Listening that everything’s quiet.
He’ll go find his food, by the aid of his lamp,

The usual jam and bread diet.
Little time is allowed, for him to break fast,
And must squat on the floor anywhere,
With some filthy odours travelling past,
And the presence of vermin, “down there”.

Sanitation is nil, there’s no white-tiled sink,
A grimy cave, is that man’s canteen.
Filth smears his food, unless he washes in drink,
But his thirst can’t give way to hygiene.
Illiterate we brand him, lacks etiquette,
But are we not a little unfair?
He’s caught in the strands of environment’s net,
That are woven around him, “down there”.

Accidents to him, are numbered by the score,
The daily little “cuts” never fail.
A few broken ribs, a crushed finger or more,
How his blue mottled flesh tells the tale.
Yet under his scars, his rippling muscles dance,
Portraying the energy to spare,
Should the voice of a comrade, be heard by chance,
In the call for assistance “down there”.

He gives his heart and soul, for a pittance to get,
As away in that treacherous hole.
Steam shrouds his body, from rivulets of sweat,
Dripping down on to that “bloody coal”.
There’s no scene to cheer him, no sun to shine,
In his lungs, gassy dust-laden air.
But his constitution comes, from a long line,
Of the fathers who have been “down there”.

Few are his pleasures, the sacrifice is great,
For a spark there can wrap him in flame.
Yet we cast him aside, when youth is of late,
And we don’t put a “sir” to his name.
When our fire is low, and the room has got chilled,
We think those black jewels incompared.
But what of the man, who has gone to be killed,
Cutting that “bloody coal” from “down there”.

That man’s memorial, would reach in the sky,
If we built it as to honour due.
It would cover the ground, that we could not pass by,
Without memory stirring anew.
Won’t you remember, when the glow’s in your room?
Won’t you try giving one little prayer
For the man who has gone down in the gloom,
For the man who is “all man”, “down there”?

In the fourth and final extract from the Memories from the Life of James Albert Davies, the author recalls his wedding and married life during the War years.

Memories from the life of James Albert Davies

WE knew that there was trouble brewing on the Continent, but like the ostrich we buried our heads in the sand and tried to ignore it - wishful thinking as we well knew, but when the announcement came over the radio on 3 September 1939 that 'We are at war with Germany' it was as though the bottom had really dropped out of our world. Naturally, our first reaction was selfish. I was 27 years of age, able bodied, and could be up and away to war at any moment. For months we had been planning and working towards marriage, and suddenly we knew that it could now be years. Mary was heartbroken on two counts: uncertain marriage prospects (more important to her than to anyone in normal circumstances, living with guardians as had been her circumstance for many years) and Yours Truly having to go to war - something no woman relishes.

In the following days, detailed announcements were issued re arrangements for enlistment, and the rationing of much of our necessities. Though the war was an urgent necessity I was relieved to learn that schoolteachers over 24 years of age had been put on the reserved list, so there was respite for the immediate future.

Soon after the war started Mary's uncle and aunt (guardians) decided to move to a new bungalow in the Old Parish of Coppull, despite the fact that there was no bedroom for Mary. A camp bed in the communal lounge was to be her situation for as long as she stayed with them. This arrangement was no use to a woman of Mary's temperament, and this, plus the respite from call-up, acted as incentives to push forward towards marriage,

and we re-doubled our efforts to reach a point where it was possible. Mary chose Easter Monday 1940 for her big day.

* * * * *

We had planned a quiet wedding but immediately Father began to plead for a family gathering (and it was a big family). We continued the fight for our original intention of a quiet ceremony, but in the end, we lost the verbal battle when Father offered to make all the arrangements himself and foot the bill!

He also wanted us to stay in Coppull, but we wanted 'out' from Coppull for a while, and were prepared to take the risk of a time of pleasure, however short. Accrington was a good base from which to conduct my joint appointment at

Haslingden and Hindley Grammar Schools, confining my lengthy journeys to the two days, and we found a large terraced house in Plantation Street.

The 'do'

On 25 March 1940 we were married in the Spendmore Lane Methodist Church, Coppull, of which we had both been members since childhood. The 'do' had been arranged in the Sunday School room, catered by the local confectioners. I remember the taxi refusing to start when we were due to leave for the photographers in Chorley, and a relative having to run us down - we had allowed ourselves to be talked out of going to a Wigan photographer who we had dealt with previously, and regretted it ever after as the Chorley one wasn't in the same league.

We had the rest of the Easter Holiday in which to make our house a bit more comfortable; we knew before we went that it wasn't what we (Mary) really wanted - semi-detached had taken over from the old rows (now terraces) in the building world, but we had taken it for 3 months and intended to make it more presentable.

* * * * *

Mary spent much of her time looking for a house that she really liked, and found one being built in Coppice Avenue, a newly developed little cul-de-sac down at the foot of a steep mound which

rose from the edge of the town to the moors beyond. It would stretch us financially but it had to be and we settled to rent it from the builder with a view to buying it at a later date. We moved in on completion, just as our lease on our first home ended; the new house wasn't far away and the builder even moved us.

Soon after moving Mary discovered that she was pregnant and we settled down quietly to await the arrival of our firstborn, setting the house up in readiness; we roamed the Coppice, attended cinemas etc, but mostly were content to be at home.

When schools received a directive from the War Ministry commanding them to release to industry any skilled workers on their staffs - workshop practice teachers, mainly - I was ordered to report to a Board in Blackburn, and very soon received an order to report to a factory in Accrington which had turned from manufacture of mill machinery to aeroplane production, and was instructed to report for work the following Monday. On reporting back to my Head he immediately objected to me being released to industry until the end of that term, and won his objection. In the back of my mind I was bent on entering the service of the Royal Marines, and had no wish to go back to the bench, so took no further action.

Sometime later, I received notification to



report for interview to the Bristol Aircraft Corporation in Accrington, and was asked if there would be any trouble getting me released from school. I told them to consult my Head, and heard nothing further.

Commandeer the machinery

Yet a third attempt was made to get me into industry. An organiser of Adult Training at an Accrington centre (engineering) came to commandeer the machinery we had in school workshops, and was amazed to find me still in school - he thought we were either in industry or on the war front. He was desperately short of instructors and here was I, a qualified instructor still teaching children. When I explained the position to him he said that he was commandeering me along with my machinery as soon as he returned to base, and assured me that the head wouldn't 'scotch' his orders.

Alas for him (not me) my call-up papers came through before he could complete officialdom, and it was irrevocable. I saw him again when he came immediately after his visit to pick up my machines and he was annoyed to think that he could have had me six months earlier if he had been aware of the situation. I remember gleefully telling the Head he couldn't object to my release this time!

My call-up papers instructed me to report to the Royal Marine Depot at Lympstone, Devon on 18 February 1941. By this time Mary was nearing confinement, and I decided to appeal to the War Office for an extension of civilian life to attend to the birth, explaining all the facts, and at midnight pre my early morning departure for

Devon a policeman came to our home to inform me that my request had been granted and that my re-arranged call-up date was 18 March, not February, 1941.

To say that we were relieved was putting it mildly; everything was getting difficult because of the necessities of the war; Mary wasn't as active as previously, and my presence was invaluable. Mary duly entered the Roughlee Nursing Home in Accrington at 3.00 am on the morning of 26 February 1941 and the baby was born at 6.45 am - a close call but everything went well and they were soon home.

The month's delay in my call-up for active service was later to prove more of a blessing than we at first thought; all intakes to the Royal Marines were being subjected at that time to an initial training period of seven weeks at Lympstone R M Depot and drafted into MNBDO (Marine Naval Base Defence Organisation) and dispatched to Crete. Without a doubt I should have been one of them, and on the Island when it fell to the Germans with heavy losses. When I finally arrived at the Depot on 18 March I, along with others, was one of the first intakes to be enlisted into Marine Battalions instead of automatic drafting into MNBDO, with an obvious mission to provide the spearhead for an invasion of Europe at some future date. And so I became a 10 Battalion Royal Marine - PO/X 105254.

Firstborn son

On 27 April 1941 Mary arranged to have our firstborn son James Alan christened at the Spendmore Lane Methodist Church - needless to say I was otherwise engaged and

couldn't be present.

Christmas and New Year leave in 1941 were limited to a fortunate few who were lucky in the draw. I drew New Year, and wanted Christmas; a Scottish counterpart drew Christmas and wanted New Year (Hogmanay), so we joyfully exchanged, and I left Goodwich in high spirits when the day dawned. As I was about to board the train, I was handed a telegram which read 'Go home in Coppull, Mary'; so I went straight there travelling all night, and arrived about 7.00 am. The telegram should have read 'Got house in Coppull' - she knew I was coming home and was warning me (so she thought) that I had a flitting on my hands, instead of the festive leave I was anticipating, so I hared off to Accrington and set to work immediately. There were no men around and all I could get to help was a man and an elderly driver, and casual labour, if any. It was obvious from the start that my short leave wouldn't be sufficient to see the job through, and I appealed for an extra day - no reply, so I took French leave and added an extra day to make things a bit more comfortable for Mary and Alan. I knew I should be in trouble when I returned to base, but was willing to take the rap.

* * * * *

My hopes for a quick release after the end of the war didn't materialise, and aggravating was putting it mildly. The big day eventually arrived and I left Eastney on 8 November 1945, bound for Colchester to collect my civilian clothing. I didn't waste any time over choice - I knew that I wouldn't wear any of it back home, and was on the railway station at Colchester in double quick time, and still

had a long journey home. So still in uniform and carrying my new civvies I boarded the first train bound for Wigan and was a civilian again.

I arrived in Wigan too late for any transport home to Coppull and had two choices, either wait for early morning services or walk, and as I was raring to get home there was no contest - I walked, and was home long before the first bus out! I remember lightening my load by jettisoning my newly acquired civvies en route, as they were cumbersome to carry. The farmer in Standish must have thought that Christmas had home early when he found it next morning!

* * * * *

Throughout my time away from home I knew that everything was not a bed of roses for Mary, despite having no money difficulties; essential goods were in short supply and she found it hard to make do; and after almost 5 years without me around, it showed. Be that as it may, I wasn't prepared for what I found on returning to Coppull; the first serious problem was lack of heat and the wherewithal of producing it. It was strictly rationed (except for miners) and there wasn't nearly enough to keep a fire going all day. Those who knew Mary knew what that would do to her - she'd had rheumatic fever as a child and for ever after had needed heat to keep her comfortable. Across the village my Father had his greatcoat on for over 3 weeks, and that was inside the house!

Picking coal

The villagers had taken the law into their own hands we and were picking coal on the local mine slag heaps;

Continued on page 12

Memories from the life of James Albert Davies

Continued from page 11

along with a pal, Jake Goodman, I joined the army - and I was only just demobbed. We certainly earned the coal which we gleaned from Welch Whittle pit slagheap; we had to bike to the site, the last stretch along a field footpath leading down to the valley, climbing the ruck on arrival and waiting for the skip to tip its waste - location unknown within 20 yards or so, and we were literally risking having it dropped on us.

Amongst the waste there was always coal, and when our sacks were full there was the long trek home, lifting everything over stiles and fences, with two hands needed to push one laden bike up the steepest parts. It was late November, dark early, so at first it was weekends only. I was on leave, but Jake was working. I spent some time going down on my own; I could only handle smaller loads, but it was worthwhile and solved immediate problems for both us and Father. Weekends we doubled up, and soon had coal in hand, but we kept up with the practice all through the summer. We had several brushes with authority, but nothing that an ex-marine couldn't handle. The only thing that mattered was that we were able to have a fire when we needed it and put the bath back into general use.

I don't remember much about the first Christmas back home, as there wasn't much entertaining going on

through this time of rationing (except for those who had contacts and were dealing in the black-market). Alan was approaching his 5th birthday, almost ready for school, and it was useful for him to have a dad around permanently, instead of the 'visitor' he was accustomed to. Mum had bought him an old, dilapidated tricycle from 'Dirty Jack' on the Flat Iron (Chorley market) and we soon had it overhauled and painted for him. It was too big for him at the time and I had to put blocks on the pedals so that he could reach it. He couldn't have had more pleasure out of any Rolls Royce version of a tricycle, and Ann after him.

In May 1946 a house owned by my Father became open to us through the death of his tenants - next door to his own house in Spendmore Lane. He approached us with a plea to come back home, more or less. He said that he would make any improvements we wanted, and quoted a lower rent than what we were paying at Marley Terrace. Left without a leg to stand on, we finally agreed; he knew, as we did, that it would be much better for himself if he had us next door. During the Easter holidays we were able to get the whole house decorated (what a job!) ready to move in.

* * * * *

'Civvy' again

My demob leave came to an end all too soon, but it had given me time to become accustomed to being a Civvy again; inevitably the day dawned when I had to take up the job I had before I enlisted - 3 days at Haslingden Grammar School and 2 days at Hindley - and it

was doomed from Day One. My war-time stand-ins, both joiners, had each been engaged for an extra day as each school had grown during the war, and though they had agreed to stay on for the extra day the situation was hopeless. Settling back into the old routine wouldn't have been easy without these additional difficulties, and I remember sending my class home early one day and catching a bus home - I'd had enough.

The travelling routine didn't help of course, and there was no hope of getting a house in the Haslingden area again. There was no alternative to finding a job nearer home and cut out my excessive travelling time. A 12-hour day at Haslingden and 9-hour day at Hindley was no routine for a teacher. I had already spent almost 5 years away from home and had no intention of wasting any more of my time on buses! Soon after moving to Spendmore Lane I successfully applied for a teaching post at Leyland Senior School. The school and the staff wasn't the same as I'd left 5 years earlier, and I never settled down there again. I worked out my notice until January 1947 and left without any regrets.

In the February of 1947 Mum learned that she was pregnant for the second time. We had waited throughout the war years to increase our family and we settled down throughout that summer to get everything shipshape for the new arrival. There was still much to be done to the house. Along the way there was trouble which necessitated visits to Wigan Infirmary and private consultants. In the September of 1947 Mary duly gave birth to Ann.

With his departure from Hindley and Abram Grammar School, and the birth of his daughter Ann, this brings to an end these extracts in Past Forward from the Journal of James Albert Davies. The Journal, however, continues up to 1977, when he retired from teaching at the age of 65. It tells primarily of his 30 years at Leyland Senior School (later Wellfield Secondary Modern) and regular holidays with Mary in their beloved Colwyn Bay, despite her steadily deteriorating health.

Ann, who compiled the Journal and who brought it to my attention, has written these words as a conclusion:

"Dad's journal was begun in earnest in the last year of his life. He was often to be seen writing at his bureau, but eventually he became unable to complete his book, leaving the last few years untold. He remained a constant and devoted carer to Mum, rarely leaving her side, until her death on 20 May 1989, aged 75 years.

Thereafter he continued his quiet life in Charnock Richard, often to be found helping others. He was still able, in his 80's, to enjoy cycling, swimming, motoring, and his beloved woodwork. He was dedicated to helping his children and grandchildren in every possible way.

Dad died of lung cancer on 28 January 1994, just before his 82nd birthday. Those who saw him in his final days spoke of the joy around him; his work was done.

He is buried with Mum in Christ Church churchyard, Charnock Richard."

Sew for the Millennium

What is a Parish Map?

A PARISH Map is a demonstrative, value-laden statement made by and for a community, exploring and showing what it cares about in its locality. Cartographical accuracy is not important - what is important is that the map is your own representation of your home place. A parish map offers a way of communicating, creatively and socially, how rich everyday places are, and what importance seemingly ordinary things have to people.

The Parish Map project encourages people to share and chart information about their locality as a first step to becoming involved in its care. Asking each other "What do you value in your place?" puts everyone in the role of an expert. A Parish Map should be the starting point for local conservation action, not an end in itself. Our hope is to help people to find ways of involving themselves in creating the future in their locality.

The concept was launched countrywide in 1987 with a touring exhibition of maps commissioned from artists called 'Knowing your Place', and our Wigan Borough Parish Map launches took place in Wigan and in Leigh last autumn. The project is growing from strength to strength and has the full backing of the Local Authority.

The parish map concept is very new to our borough but ever since 1987 hundreds of maps have been made by civic societies, tenants, groups, artists, parish councils, schools, local history evening classes, womens' groups and environmental organisations. Parish Maps can be made by anyone, at any age, in any form - textiles, painting, ceramics, photography, audio and video, newspaper, performance and song have all been tried - our map will be made from textiles.

Our hope is that the process of making a parish map will stimulate discussion about what makes our place particular and how much it means to us. By displaying the map in a public place it will act as a reminder of what is valued (so that things are not lost through ignorance) and continue to stimulate debate about how local people want their place to be. Many Local Authorities have taken on the idea for Agenda 21 as it is a way to consult the people of the borough and ask them what they value about their local community.

There has been a national exhibition of Parish Maps which started at the Barbican Centre, London in 1996 and followed a course of 10 regional and 50 local exhibitions across the country.



Soroptimist International
of Wigan



About our Project:

In 1974 local authority boundary changes gave birth to the Wigan Metropolitan Borough - swallowing up 14 districts. Each district has its own distinct identity and has things particularly important to them in their immediate locality.

Our project aims to bring the communities in the districts together with a view to considering their own local environment, deciding upon what is important to them and then going on to display this visually by way of making a Parish Map. Each district will then depict, in textile form, whatever they consider is important to them and contribute to their individual district's map. The 14 Maps will then be put together and form a HUGE Borough Map, and this will be donated to the Borough for the Millennium.

We have included as many people organisations as possible and have already contacted all types of socio-economic groups - schools, youth groups, womens'/ mens' groups, ethnic organisations and the blind, hard of hearing and the disabled - everyone is welcome to join in the project - the more the merrier! We have children as young as 5 years old working on the project.

The whole project is owned by the participants - they decide what to include on the Map, what materials to use, the colours, designs etc - an artist is on hand to give guidance at every workshop, and to help us in the planning stages. The Project focuses on emphasising community spirit and learning about the local environment with the people of the community planning, creating, developing and eventually displaying the Map for all to see. The Map will be hung in a public place following its initial 'tour' of the borough.

Monthly workshops are being held centrally at the Professional Development Centre, Park Road, Hindley, Wigan and an artist will be present at each workshop. The whole point of the centralised workshops is for the best practices to be shared throughout the groups - for people to learn new skills and pass on to others skills which they already possess - and this is indeed happening already at the workshops. Participants bring along their pieces of work to show the rest of the group and to share their ideas and methods with everyone.

We are keeping a photographic record of the project as it evolves, and will arrange for a display to be established which will accompany the Map when it goes on tour around the districts. This will consist of video recordings of the participants at work and also still photographs - the participants will be able to 'see themselves' working on the project as well as the end result.

Everyone is updated regularly - at the central workshop and then by means of a monthly newsletter. This regular contact keeps the group united and involved and also keeps everyone aware of timescales and deadlines which need to be met. The groups should be motivated with the regular press coverage which has been promised and we intend to use local radio stations to promote the project.

The project was launched in both Wigan and Leigh in autumn 1997, and we plan to hold an 'unveiling ceremony' just before the Millennium when the map will be accepted by the Mayor, and then it will be hung in a public place for everyone to enjoy for many years to come - a tangible reminder of everything important in our Borough at the Millennium.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, YOU MAY JUST STILL BE IN TIME TO HELP MAP THE MILLENNIUM - BUT HURRY! RING MARION ON 01257 426610

One hundred years old

As one of Lancashire's historic small towns, Leigh has a very proud history. As the centre of an ancient ecclesiastical parish its church embraced the neighbouring towns of Atherton and Tyldesley. Leigh was the scene of a skirmish in the Civil War, the district siding with parliament against the king. Its rich dairy country produced a local delicacy - the Leigh cheese - and before the Industrial Revolution the people practised traditional trades such as hand-loom weaving and nail-making. Linens and fustians made in Leigh were important before the large cotton mills came to employ so many thousands of men and women in Victorian times. Silk-weaving, too, was developed in the 19th century and had only just died out when our grandparents were young.

The coming of the canals helped the infant coal industry grow to be one of Leigh's major employers by the early 1900's. Engineering, notably iron founding, was the other of Leigh's big three industries.

Yet until comparatively recently Leigh town was divided between a number of separate townships - Bedford, Pennington and Westleigh - which were only brought together in 1875 to form the Leigh Local Board. Following the 1889 Act of Parliament, Leigh became an Urban District Council in 1894. Finally, in 1898 the UDC sent a petition, signed by 4000 ratepayers, to the Crown seeking their town's incorporation as a borough. This was duly approved and Leigh received its royal charter, incorporating it as a municipal borough, on 5 August 1899. On 23 December of that year the borough was granted an official coat of arms. Leigh's splendid Town Hall was opened in 1907. Leigh, of course, remained a municipal borough until local government reorganisation in 1974, when it became part of the newly formed Wigan Metropolitan Borough.



Arms granted to Leigh Municipal Borough, 1899. The quarterings consist of a spearhead (Westleigh), a mullet (Pennington), a shuttle (Bedford) and a sparrowhawk (Atherton). The crest is a bear's paw grasping a spearhead, representing respectively the Powys family (Lord Lilford) and the Urmstons of Westleigh. The motto Aequo Pede Propere means To make Progress Steadily.



This splendid title panel, which once stood in Spinning Jenny Street, will be unveiled, fully restored, in its new home in the Town Hall on 5 August.

Celebrate Leigh's Centenary

Celebrations are already well underway. However, the main events will be held in early August.

Leigh Town Square

5 August

Leigh Charter Day - presentation of the Charter and the unveiling of the restored Spinning Jenny plaque, fairground rides, Victorian fancy dress competition, dancing and fireworks finale.

Pennington Flash Country Park

6 August - 7.30p.m.

(tickets £2, over 60's £1)

A Flash Concert, featuring Gary and Vera Aspey, the Appalachian Step Dancers and the Skyliner Band.

7 August - 7.00 pm

(tickets £25)

Grand Centenary Ball - reception, dinner and dancing to the big band sound form Wigan Youth Jazz Orchestra with Mark Potter.

8 August

Family Fun Day - music, entertainment, children's disco.

9 August

Children's Playday.

Tickets for 6 and 7 August from:

Rita Jones, Colliers Photographers, Railway Road, Leigh (tel. 01942 671040). Dorothy Bowker, Cooks Shoes, Market Street, Leigh (tel. 01942 672567)

Leigh Town Centre

14 August

Festival of Transport - various displays throughout the day

Top right: The foundation stone of Leigh's new Town Hall was laid on 24 October 1904 by the Mayor, Alderman Henry Cowburn JP.

Right: Three years later, on 24 July, crowds gathered to witness the official opening of the building.



HISTORY SHOP NEWS

EXHIBITIONS IN THE HISTORY SHOP

THE TAYLOR GALLERY

2 - 31 July - Presenting the Figure - An exhibition by Wigan Artists' Network

21 August - 4 September - Wigan Photographic Society annual exhibition

8 - 23 September - Back To Your Roots - A beginners guide to tracing your family history

25 September - 9 October - Atherton & District Photographic Society annual exhibition

12 October - 13 November - Back To Your Roots

17 November - January 2000 - Around Standish & Shevington - The exhibition of the book

The Parish Map Display, organised by the ladies of Wigan Soroptomists and their artist Tony Unsworth, was a very popular show. Many ladies from different groups who have contributed to the project came in and brought their family and friends to see their work displayed in our formal gallery setting. The work itself is of a very

high standard and of great local interest. The next stage in the project is pulling all this work together and creating a single, huge, parish map. We wish all concerned with the project good luck, and will keep you our readers informed of plans for its final resting place.

The exhibition just closed was from the North West Sound Archive (see article in *Past Forward* 21 p.14) and explored the history of sound recording. This was supplemented by an exploration of the written recording of events 'Dear Diary', an exhibition from our own important archive collection of personal diaries dating from as early as the 1660's when local Ashton apprentice Roger Lowe began recording his life.

THE WICKHAM GALLERY

* Charter '96 - A Celebration of 750 Years of Local Government in Wigan

* Reverend William Wickham - A Victorian Photographer

THE DERBY ROOMS, LEIGH

6 - 29 October - The Peoples Music - A Celebration of Brass

FRIENDS OF THE HERITAGE SERVICE

The FRIENDS project has really taken off now with 150 paid up members. Don't worry if you haven't filled in a form yet, there is still plenty of time. Everyone on the old mailing list will continue to receive *Past Forward* to the end of this year, then will transfer to the FRIENDS mailing list on payment of the £5 subscription.

Anyone subscribing as a FRIEND now will guarantee membership and their copy of *Past Forward* for the year 2000. Remember as well as your three *Past Forwards* a year we are hoping to that an active FRIENDS group will provide the opportunity to attend private views, events and even work on projects. A formal meeting of the FRIENDS group will take place on Monday 6 September at 7.00 pm. in the History Shop.

Please fill in the slip, make your cheque payable to Wigan MBC and return to us at the History Shop.

The History Shop has a Meeting Room, with a capacity for 36. This is available for hire by local groups and societies at a very reasonable cost:

£7.00

PER MORNING OR AFTERNOON SESSION

£10.50

PER EVENING SESSION

COMMERCIAL RATE

£15.00

(Day time only)

REFRESHMENTS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE

If you are interested, contact Mike Haddon

(01942) 828121

FRIENDS OF WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE



Registration Form

Name Title

Address

.....

..... Tel

Subscription 2000 (£5.00)

Interests

.....

.....

.....

Please make cheque payable to: Wigan MBC and return to the History Shop, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

HISTORY SHOP NEWS

WE NEED YOUR HELP

The Year 2K and Beyond Photographic Project at the History Shop, Wigan

We are very excited about this ambitious new project for the Millennium. In the largest gallery of the History Shop, we will be creating an innovative new museum display with a difference. Set to run for the whole of the year 2000 this display will deal with today not yesterday, building up a picture of life in Wigan at this momentous time.

The Display is something new and exciting for us; new in that as a contemporary exhibition it deals with modern concepts, ideas and objects; exciting in that it relies on bringing us into partnership with the wider community.

The idea is to document everyday life in the area through photographs and objects, to look at the way we are living today, the technology that supports it and the implications for the future. The main vehicle for this will be a major photographic project which we are commissioning to reflect life as it is today here in Wigan. This project will lead the display and also act as a lasting photographic archive for the future. The concept is to take the visitor forward in time, through a context setting area, to around 2080 - a time far enough in the future to be largely unpredictable yet not so far as to be too remote.

The Exhibition will then be able to step back in time to the year 2000, and take a look at



everyday life in much the same way as our Wigan Pier Experience does for life in 1900. We are considering broad subject areas like home life; working life; transport; trade & commerce, fashion & youth issues; health & lifestyle; education & public services; the environment. One area we would particularly like to explore is the creation of time capsules, which would sum up life in Wigan at the turn of the Millennium and could be created by groups and individuals from all areas - schools, community and FRIENDS.

The Appeal is for help with the exhibition itself, the objects, the ideas, the contacts and the time capsules. We need you to get involved, get to know the project, suggest ideas and partners and provide objects for the time capsules. For the exhibition we also need partners from businesses, private sector, public services, community groups

and schools, providing us with ideas and objects for the display covering each of the subject areas outlined. We already have support from an encouraging number of local businesses and services, the Authority's Millennium Festival Co-ordinator and national interest from the BBC History 2000 Project.

The next step is to get involved and come along to a meeting to find out more. There is not long to go now before the end of the year so we need to act quickly. A meeting for anyone interested in getting involved will be held in the History Shop on **Monday 26 July at 7 pm** at which the project will be outlined in more detail. If you can help then please fill in the slip to let us know you are coming and give us your daytime telephone number in case we have to change the arrangements.

RECENT DONATIONS TO THE HISTORY SHOP

The History Shop has recently received a large number of donations from Mr. Ted Cheetham of Shevington. These include copies of First Edition (c.1890) Ordnance Survey maps, scale 25 inches to the mile, covering all or part of the following areas: Billinge, Bispham, Bryn, Charnock Richard, Haigh, Hawkley Hall, Haydock, Hindley Green, Mawdesley, Platt Bridge, Swinton, Tontine, Welch Whittle, Westthroughton and Winstanley.

Also parts of the church registers of the following churches: Croston Hall R.C., Croston Holy Cross, Croston St. Michael C.E., Mawdesley S.S. Peter and Paul R.C., Wrightington St. James the Great C.E., and Wrightington St. Joseph R.C. Together with graveyard plans of the following churches: Charnock Richard Christ Church C.E., Chorley St. Gregory R.C., Chorley St. Peter C.E., Coppull Parish church, Mawdesley S.S. Peter and Paul R.C., Wrightington St. James the Great C.E. and Wrightington St. Joseph R.C.

All this has involved Mr. Cheetham and his associate Mrs. Margaret Davies in a great deal of work, and we would like to thank them for their generosity. Researchers should note that all the maps are now available for consultation, but only a few of the registers and plans have been bound and processed at the time of writing. Enquirers wishing to consult these items should telephone the History Shop (01942 828020) for information regarding the current situation. **B.B.**

YEAR 2K & BEYOND

General Meeting Monday 26 July at 7 pm.

In the History Shop

*I would like to attend this meeting

*I am unable to attend this meeting

*I am unable to attend but would like to help in this project

(*Delete as appropriate)

Name

Address

Tel:

Return to the History Shop, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

'Let's talk Wiggins'

THOSE whose eyes have been attracted by the headline may be in for a surprise, but hopefully not a disappointment, as the following is not an article on dialect. Much as I regret that the old language of Wiganers is now a rarity, submerged by the awful telespeak of today, this is rather a tale of two old men and their memories. Memories of days when Wigan was a different world; a world of hardship and heartache for many, but stamped with a native wit and humour. How doe the tale come to be told?

An accident of birth brands me 'born in Middlesex' though I eschew the term Londoner. My heart, loyalty and bloodline belongs to Wigan. My ancestors on my father's side were Highams, colliers and weavers from Wigan and Amberswood, Ince. My good fortune is that I have two uncles alive who between them have clocked up 184 years! Edward Cain is a hale and hearty 93 this year and Stanley Morris a young shaver of 91. Conversations with them have provided a wonderful insight into life in Wigan earlier this century, and I urge anyone who knows a talkative old Wiganer to plunder their memory banks before those precious jewels of recollection are lost forever. My experience is that older Wiganers can talk the hind legs off Jane Green's donkey given the chance.

Running errands

Edward Cain was born in Francis Street, off Belle Green Lane, Ince in November 1905. This was in an area of terraced housing built in the shadow of the huge Kirkless iron and steel complex that closed in 1930. His father, Jimmy Cain, had been born in Ince in 1883 and was running errands at a halfpenny per mile (one fifth of a pence today) by the age of thirteen. He later became a furnace keeper at the ironworks and in later life ran Cains - the confectioners at the bottom of Belle Green Lane. (See letter on page 2).

Earlier I made mention of heartache, and to illustrate what I meant I use the illustration that in 1881 Jimmy Cain's parents lost a daughter Margaret, aged two years, in January, and a son Edward, aged five months, in the April.

Life at the Ironworks was hard. The heat from the furnaces, together with the back-breaking toil led to many illnesses such as pneumonia, hernias and blindings from sparks. My late father recalled taking beer to the men on the site and watching in amazement as they swallowed it without drawing breath. He took over this task from his brother Teddy (mentioned previously). The ironworkers tools were a prized possession. Jimmy Cain took to hiding his in the shallow part of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, where furnace number ten came close to the bank. Are they there to this day? I often wonder.

Hard man

Jimmy had married Mary Elizabeth Stone in 1905 and on his first shift at the ironworks after their wedding his workmates laughed to see him so well turned out - marriage had paid its first dividend. Mary's father was a hard man, probably made more so by losing his wife in her early forties after bearing him 13 children. Mary, and her sister Sarah, sold 'crumpets' from a basket door to door in order to make ends meet. I know they

walked from Manchester Road Ince to Sennicar Lane at Haigh and back, which is a good distance for little girls carrying heavy baskets!

This hard side of life was offset by fun and jollity when opportunity allowed. A potato pie evening seems to have been a favoured event. Supposedly a dog at the Bush Hotel in Ince had a pie baked for him and afterwards was given a pipe to

smoke! What the animal rights campaigners would have had to say back then God alone knows. Whether such tales owed anything to the ale at the Bush is another question.

Whilst on the subject of animals, Jimmy Cain often told of a cat that kept warm in the oven set in the range next to the coal fire and a woman who lit her fire each day by using a piece of flaming wax strip torn from her window blind!

Another well known source of entertainment was provided by the attractions on King Street in Wigan - the Theatre Royal and the Hippodrome, well known to many readers of *Past Forward*. One tale concerned a rather impressionable soul who, having seen a play entitled 'The Face at the Window' fled back to Ince and hid in a rain barrel in terror! Strong stuff indeed.



James Higham, born 1853 at Common Bridge, Amberswood, Ince, with Elizabeth, wife and Elizabeth daughter.



James Cain, born Caroline Street, Ince 1883. Furnace-keeper at Kirkless Ironworks.

Something of an expert!

Jimmy Cain's son Teddy told me in graphic detail of the day the flue became blocked in the family's bakehouse. Having obtained work at the explosives works of Roburite at Gathurst, Teddy considered that, in spite of his tender years, he was something of an expert in the field. He was in no doubt that a small charge would clear the blocked flue. Clear it did. Unfortunately it blew the door clean off the oven and caused the family dog, Teddy's



accomplice in the deed, to flee all the way back to the top of Belle Green Lane up the steep hill! Needless to say Teddy's expertise was not sought in future, as a hefty repair bill for the oven had not been expected.

My other uncle, Stan Morris, was from the Spring Street area off Darlington Street East. He can tell a yarn with the best and has had a number of jobs in his life from which to fashion his skills as a raconteur. He knows as well as anyone the hardships found in Wigan in the 1920's. As his father died while Stanley was still small, he immediately became the man of the house, selling pans from a cart in the streets in and around the town. His face lights up when he gets to talking of his days on the railway, and an old photograph shows him proudly swanking on one of the beloved locomotives of the Great Central Railway. Stanley was based at the depot between Warrington Lane and Darlington Street East with a right motley crew of characters.

Cook on the shovel

One story concerns a morning turn on one of the engines. Between shunting jobs the driver put his breakfast to cook on the shovel close to the firebox. Suddenly it became necessary to move the engine and believing that such a simple manoeuvre could be entrusted to the young lad Stanley, the driver instructed him to get on with it! One yank on the control, a bellow and snort from the engine and the eggs and bacon shot up through the funnel! The language that ensued is best left to the imagination so I am told.

After knocking off work at the depot it was necessary to repair to the local, often the

Manley on Ince Green Lane. After a convivial evening one chap, known as Parky, could hardly stand, let alone walk back to his home in Poolstock. Next day one of the lads asked after Parky to be told he was "awreet, we set him ont' cut bank, he'll find t' road" (My apologies here for liberties with the dialect). A drunken man on a canal bank in the dark could well have been a case of sink or swim! What touching concern from his pals.

As these snippets of life in the old days are concluded I will keep to the theme of railway engines by mentioning another member of my family, my great uncle Evan Williams from New Springs. There may still be folks of a particular vintage that will recall the day an engine hauling molten slag overturned on the huge tip abutting Henfield Road, off Belle Green Lane. Evan, the driver, was trapped, badly injured but thankfully survived as the newspaper cuttings of the day reported. Today these men would be recipients of large compensation settlements, then they got better and clocked on again. Hard times indeed.

ACCIDENT AT KIRKLESS IRONWORKS.
ENGINE FALLS OVER TIP SIDE.
PLUCKY DRIVER STICKS TO HIS POST.
 An alarming accident occurred at the Kirkless Ironworks, belonging to the Wigan Coal and Iron Company, Limited, on Friday night last week. A locomotive taking a bogie of molten slag from the furnaces to a huge slag heap overran the stop-block and fell over the side of the tip. James Roman, the stoker, managed to escape injury, but the driver, Evan Williams (39), of Longfield-street, New Springs, stuck to his post, and went over with the locomotive. He had a miraculous escape from death, but was injured, and had to be removed to the Wigan Infirmary, where he was detained.

The memories of my two uncles have provided much of what has gone before. I just hope that like me you enjoyed their stories, to me CD Rom isn't a patch on old boys' tales.

Neil Cain
 28 Sheridan Terrace
 Whitton Avenue West
 Northolt
 Middlesex
 UB5 4JS



Stanley Morris (top right) and workmates at Great Central Railway Works, off Warrington Lane (c.1925).

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Following the feature on wrestling in *Past Forward* two years ago, Thomas Heyes, a keen wrestler himself, has contributed this article on some other notable Wigan wrestlers in the early years of the century. Ed.

Wigan Wrestlers at the Alhambra

THE 1997 summer issue of *Past Forward* featured photographs of Wigan's wrestling champions, including pictures of Bob Perry, and Jack and Joe Carroll. Readers may be interested to learn that these wrestlers were accompanied by 12 other wrestlers from the Wigan area, (amongst them Jim Foster and Joe Smith, who may be the two men pictured with the Carrolls). These men competed in the National Sporting Club wrestling tournament, held at the Alhambra Theatre, London, from 24 January to 5 February 1910.

This twelve-day professional 'Catch as Catch Can' wrestling tournament was the third annual event held under the patronage of the National Sporting Club. It attracted 195 wrestlers, with competitors from as far away as Russia, India and the Caribbean.

Once the formalities were completed wrestling got underway in the three weight classes. In the preliminary rounds a simple touch fall was allowed, supplemented by a points system and time limit. For the semi-finals and final, the pin fall no time limit rule was introduced.

Next came the middleweights (under 12st). Jack Carroll (Hindley) beat H. Mathin (Russia) in 15 seconds, and Joe Carroll (Hindley) defeated Londoner J. Moore in 41 seconds. It only took 27 seconds for Wigan's Bob Berry to dispose of Catford's Charles Helf. Jack Cunningham (Spring View) and Jim Foster (Pemberton) both won. F. Moffat (Bryn) was eliminated.

At heavyweight (open), Wiganer James Stockley beat Italian Peter Pierri in 30 seconds, but was eliminated in the second round when he lost to Laurent Heaucarrols of France.

With four rounds at lightweight still to be contested a clash amongst the seven local wrestlers was always a possibility. It came in the second round when Willie Woodcock (Ince) came to grips with S. Daley (Standish), winning by a fall in 6 minutes, only to face Sam McKenna (Pemberton) in the third round, beating him inside 11 minutes. However, by the fifth round only two of the seven men remained, Joe Shambley (Westhoughton) and Willie Charnock (Newtown). Joe Shambley lost to Peter Gots (Southern England), and Willie Charnock lost to young Olson of Newfoundland.

Meanwhile at middleweight a place in the semi-finals was at stake for five local men as the competition went to the fourth round. Jack Carroll drew Indian Buttan Singh. The two men were well matched. After the full 30 minutes had elapsed, during which time Carroll had almost secured a fall, the match went into 10 minutes of extra time, before the judge awarded Singh the match on points. Joe Carroll came up against Jamaican Frank Crozer, the defending middleweight champion. Carroll caught Crozer with a flying mare, bringing him feet first over his shoulder, in the opening minute. He may have gained a fall had he not thrown Crozer from the mat. The two men gave little away, and were forced to wrestle two rounds of extra time, after which the judges declared Crozer the winner.



Olson of Newfoundland

Jack Cunningham lost to Peter Bannan of Burnley, but Bob Berry beat Jim Foster on points. He then went on to beat Peter Bannan in the semi-final, earning himself a place in the final against Buttan Singh. Berry, by all accounts a strong clever wrestler, kept Singh on the defensive for most of the match. With 29 minutes gone Berry's tenacity paid off, when he trapped Singh's leg in a scissor lock, then forced his shoulders to the mat to gain the first fall. Singh, who had earlier been engaged in a gruelling match with Frank Crozer, began to tire. Berry, still as strong as a horse, stepped up the attack, at one point driving the Indian off the mat onto the table occupied by the press. Berry had obtained a crotch hold, which for some reason the referee allowed him to retain when the pair returned to the mat. Berry, seeing his chance turned Singh upside down and drove his shoulders on to the mat for the second fall to win the match and the middleweight championship.

As one observer commented 'Berry was a trifle lucky to win few will deny, but at the same time he is a greatly improved wrestler'.

Thomas Heyes

SOURCES

1. *Takedown* (issue no3) 1996
The Journal of the British Amateur Wrestling Association.
2. *Wigan Observer* January-February 1910

The Museum of the Century

‘OPIE’S Museum of Memories’, which opened its door at the end of May, is located on the ground floor of Trencherfield Mill and houses the famed collection of Robert Opie, featuring over 40,000 household items and images of yesteryear.

The attraction provides a journey through life, covering each decade of social history from Victorian times to the present day, and using the Pier’s award winning and imaginative interpretation and interactivity.

“Each decade has a dedicated area with displays of newspaper, comics, toys, games, music, advertising, furniture and fashions,” explained Wigan Pier Manager, Elizabeth Bates.

“The “Theatre of Memories” greets visitors, enabling them to explore the phenomenon of memory. The Memory Wall tests people’s recollections of the past, and a street inside the museum hosts street parties and theatre performances”.

“A major element of the museum is a street which displays shop fronts from many decades. There is a 1940’s Anderson Shelter where visitors can sit in the blackout and sing songs from the war, and a 1960’s boutique from London’s swinging Carnaby Street where clothes from the decade can be tried. Listening booths in Groove Records, the 1970’s record shop, allow visitors to listen to Hendrix and The Beatles when they were cool the first time around.”

Outside the well known 1907 mill, a



new pedestrianised piazza recreates a fireside scene on a grand scale.

Additionally, the building’s facade has undergone an exciting transformation with the commissioning of a public artist to create a fireplace mantle-piece above the entrance and a collection of family portraits on the ‘chimney-breast’, all of which are cleverly designed to move continuously.

Elizabeth added “Wigan Pier is today one of the more popular days out in the North West and with the opening of the new attraction, it will consolidate this position for many years to come. Bringing the exhibition to life will be innovative interpretation and of course the Wigan Pier Theatre Company, following the groundbreaking tradition of interactivity that Wigan Pier became famous for when opening its doors for the first time in 1986.”

THE ROBERT OPIE STORY

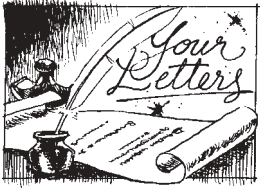
AT the age of 16, Robert Opie realised that the ever-changing style of packaging was being thrown away, and from that moment on he saved contemporary packs (now for over 30 years). Within a few years, his search had begun to track down examples of earlier packs, products and promotional material. Gradually, from all these assembled items, the story of our consumer revolution emerged. In a sense, Robert had become a supermarket archaeologist.

In 1975, part of his Collection went on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in the widely acclaimed exhibition. “*The Pack Age: A Century of Wrapping It Up*”. By 1984, Robert had achieved his ambition by opening the Museum of Advertising & Packaging in Gloucester, Britain’s first Museum devoted to the story of our consumer society.

Since then, Robert has written a number of books, including a series of Scrapbooks, which cover all the subjects now encompassed within the Collection - newspapers, magazines, postcards, film posters, radios, cameras, records, toys, comics, royal souvenirs, and much, much more.

With some 500,000 items, it is possible to understand the pulse of the nation, it’s culture and lifestyle since the Industrial Revolution. Through having the actual things of domestic life, the story can be seen of how technology and mass-production brought about changes in fashion, mass travel, the coming of the supermarket era and, ultimately, the arrival of our “leisured society”. The consequences of this revolution have been widespread - from the emancipation of women to improved standards for all.





The King and I

LIFE, it may be said, is not entirely dissimilar to the progress of solving one of those giant jigsaws without the aid of a peep at the final picture. We start with an amorphous heap of unrecognisable bits which mean nothing in particular, and it takes some little time before we find that there are parts of a picture on every piece. Later, we find, or are shown that certain pieces can be joined together to make larger sections of the picture and via that step, it becomes evident that given time, we could eventually produce a complete picture. As we see the picture grow, the eagerness with which we hunt for certain pieces increases.

But isn't there the continuous re-appearance of one or two pieces that find themselves in your hand, only to be put back to the pile as unbefitting at the particular stage.

One particular piece in my life's jigsaw concerns, for some unaccountable reason, King Charles II. Needless to say, I have no royal blood connection, unless I could claim my sharing of the Christian name with he who perished as a result of that 'arrowing experience' in the Battle of Hastings, as a legitimate line!

It must be said that on the first occasion I picked him up in my life's jigsaw, I was at the tender age of five or six when I was more interested, if that is the word, in the atmosphere surrounding me on the occasion of celebrating a certain incident in his life.

On 24 May we had Empire Day, the day our village woke up to view a landscape of red white and blue, wafted by Union Jacks waving in the most unlikely places, including the headgear at the colliery of Stones's (J & R Stone Ltd.) and of course, most important of all, we got a half day holiday from school.

A typical scene in the St. Andrews Infant School on Empire Day morning would portray 40 to 50 small pupils, suitably scrubbed and combed for the occasion. Headmistress,

Mrs. Hamson would say a few words about the importance of Empire Day as Miss Hutton quietly drew a chair up to the ancient piano, blew the dust off the keys and, come the end of Mrs. Hamson's homily, she would thump out a couple of introductory bars whence followed the chorus, in 40 or 50 approximations of the chosen home key, the song:

What is the meaning of Empire Day

Why do the canons roar

Why does the cry of God Save the King, echo from shore to shore

Why does the flag of Britannia, float proud over fort and bay?

Etc., etc., complete words available on request.

Any resemblance to school work that followed that morning was a little clouded by the thoughts of being turned loose at the stroke of twelve, not to return till at least 21 hours later.

Just five days later, we were, for reasons not understood at the time, expected to wear a sprig, or even just a leaf of an oak tree about our persons. This I did without question but now I see it as a picking up of Charles II's bit of jigsaw.

It was most likely on the first 29 May, on my way with other children to the "big" school at Downall Green, that I learned a little more about the reason for the wearing of the oak but even then, I recall no mention being made of the name King Charles II. That pearl of wisdom was probably dropped as I engaged, with other lads, including much older ones, in the dislodging of sprigs of oak foliage from a huge tree standing at the side of our road to school. Eagerness to avoid the punishment for failing to display about my person a sprig, or even a leaf of oak, i.e. a "netting" at the back of the knee (no long 'uns until the age of 14) or the contents of a rose-hip emptied down one's shirt neck, was paramount. In between lobbings of whatever missile came to hand, my information was probably imparted in terms like, "There was this king that knoes and sum sowdyers was after im, fert kill 'im so, 'e run in a wood an' hud in th' oak tree till they'd gone." And so, I at least learned that a king was involved and - for some little time, I thought that our tree was THE tree. Alas, the name, King Charles II never came to the surface while at Rectory School in Downhall Green!

Over 60 years flitted by before I picked up Charles's piece of jigsaw again. On this occasion

I was to learn more about one period of his life than I would have done in a whole term at school. In my capacity of programme secretary and publicity officer of the Sutton Coldfield Photographic Society, I joined one of the close season's Sunday morning short outings. On muster at Sutton Park, it was announced that we would be visiting Boscobel House at Whiteladies, just over the Shropshire border from here. I had to admit that I had never heard of Boscobel House, but at the same time I would have to learn as much as possible in the short time available as a full report in the following week's Sutton Coldfield News would be expected.

On arrival at Boscobel House, the element of surprise was almost tangible. In a paddock just by the house we saw ladies in the dress of mid 17th century, tending cooking pots over open fires, their menfolk cleaning their guns and other implements of war. It transpired that the historical society, the Sealed Knot, was visiting Boscobel House to perform mock battles depicting scenes from the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

But that was just the beginning; or organiser had done his homework well in getting permission for us to ramble all through the house and grounds, taking photographs of anything that we found of interest. And there was so much - including THE Royal Oak tree, or at least a direct descendent of same. It would be difficult to describe the feeling at the sight of it.....

The extent of the material collated for my report far outweighed the space I was likely to be allowed in *Sutton Coldfield News*, but being on friendly terms with the then editor, he did allow just a little more. The day of publication, Saturday, was a day I shall always remember. After reading my report several times, the smugness was almost unbearable and the rest of the day was spent floating around on Cloud Nine.....until the evening, that is.

Meeting my old friend, Barry, at our local that evening, his opening remark was, "Saw yer report in the Rag, very good but you are wrong about the Royal Oak. A lorra folk make that mistake, the actual oak tree is the Mitred Oak at Hartlebury. There's an iron rail round the trunk to protect it from damage. The pub across the road is called The Mitred Oak."

Barry was no fool, a senior maintenance manager of a number of power stations

throughout the West Midlands - and he had been born and bred in Stourport and was an ex pupil of Hartlebury Grammar School, no more than two cane lengths away from this now intrusive Mitred Oak. So I simply had to check his words. I wrote to Worcester's counterpart of Wigan Heritage Service. They took some little time to reply but when they did, it was more than comprehensive, including extracts from history books and old newspaper cuttings but most acceptable of all, was a collection of references to five separate oak trees, all of which were subjected to confusion with the authentic Royal Oak at, with tangible relief, **Boscobel House!**

And so, once again, that piece of my jigsaw was put back in the pile, only to be picked up again 10 years or so later and this, believe it or not, is where *Past Forward* finally, I hope, put me in my place.

Collecting a morning paper one morning in March 1996, I was amazed to see a pile of tabloid sized magazines on the subject of Rugby League on the counter. This would be the equivalent of finding a Bible in one of Handsworth's (Birmingham) Muslim Mosques! Having been baptised at the font in the "Hen-pen" at Central Park at the age of seven when the legendary Jimmy Sullivan was in his second or third season with Wigan and having been reluctantly exiled therefrom for over 40 years, I just had to pick up a copy to find out who it was who had dared to infiltrate into the territory of Aston Villa, Birmingham City and a lesser following of "the other" rugby game.

It transpired that this 50p's worth of Rugby League news was a joint effort between Sky B TV and Birmingham Post & Mail to announce the then new Rugby Super League. It was well presented, in essence, a coloured collection of details of each of the clubs forming the new league, roughly one page per club. It gave details such as grounds, colours, managers, coaches and even the nick-names of each club. It was the latter connection that I immediately decided that an arrest should be made, and so I went into print, in the *Wigan Observer*.

As a result of its publication, I received, a few weeks later, a phone call from Mr. Neil Cain to whom I shall remain eternally grateful, not only for his subsequent correspondence but for his introduction to *Past Forward*. As promised in his phone call, Neil posted to me cuttings from the defunct Picture Post, mentioned in my letter to

Wigan Observer, plus, I am delighted to report, two back numbers of *Past Forward*, one of which was issue 13, Spring 1996.

The back of this issue is delightfully illustrated in full colour, being the design of Gerald Rickards' portrayal of Wigan's Charter Mural. Interesting though I found this, coupled with the reference on page 15 of the same issue, I could not help thinking that here was some kind of ethereal, belated reprimand for having, in the past, opted to occupy a seat at the back of the class whenever history lessons came on the scene.

Perhaps now, with Charles II in mind, I can truthfully say, God save the King... he may still be needed to fill in the empty space.

Should be more Peers at Wigan

Sir - As a follower of Wigan R.L.F.C. for 72 years, albeit 40 of these as an unwilling rugby league exile, any scrap of news of R.L. appearing in this Midland wilderness is avidly devoured. In this connection I refer to a new publication by the Birmingham Evening Mail headed 'Convert to Rugby Super League' which seems heavily biased towards London Broncos and (dare I say it?) Sky Television.

Interesting though this publication might be, I found in the pages given to club information the adoption of 'Riversiders' as the nickname of Wigan R.L.F.C. as rather innocuous and, I would suggest, to any but the avid Wigan fan, quite meaningless.

It is doubtful if more than a generous handful of the residents of Wigan are aware that the trickling tributary of the River Ribble has babbled behind the stands at Central Park since long before the first brick was laid.

But to mention Wigan in any spot imaginable through the U.K. and the word 'Pier' will inevitably follow and, I might add with a rapidly diminishing denigration that might have been the case long ago.

With the adage, 'If you've got it - flaunt it' in mind, I suggest that the defunct Picture Post had it right in the early 50's. Unfortunately, my dearly cherished copy found its





Readers of *Past Forward* may be interested in this letter from Dr. G.K. Makinson to Mrs. Carole Banks, following her letter in issue no 20. Ed.

KNOWLEDGE GAINED ABOUT THE MAKINSON FAMILY

Dear Mrs. Banks,

I write to express my thanks for the information contained in your letter published in *Past Forward* 20. This information has filled in a gap in my knowledge of my family.

George Makinson, who indeed founded the ironmonger's business in Wigan, was the elder brother of my great-grandfather, the family originally hailing from Upholland, where they were staunch members of the Parish Church. George's elder brother, John, was also a businessman and was, at various times, an auctioneer and quarry owner. He resided in Newgate, Upholland, at Hall Green House, Upholland and latterly at Orrell Hall, which

I believe lies somewhere between the M6 motorway and the Heinz factory, in the vicinity of the Old Engine public house.

I have little information on the life of George Makinson but a report of his death in the *Wigan Observer* of 10 January 1894 states that he died "at his residence, Collinfield, Wigan". Until reading your letter, I had not established the location of the property or if it still existed. His widow, Elizabeth, died in 1898, four years after her husband and they share a grave situated immediately outside the north wall of Upholland Parish Church. It is possible that the Makinson interest in Collingdale lapsed on Elizabeth's death. I know that George and Elizabeth

had three children - a report of Ethel's marriage was published in the *Wigan Observer* of 10 December 1898 - but again I have no information on them.

My paternal great-grandfather, Nathan Makinson, struggled to make his way in the world. His mother died at the age of 43, leaving five children of ages ranging from 15 to 7, Nathan being 9 years of age. His father eventually re-married and, as Nathan reached working age, he worked on the family farm in Upholland. Eventually though he left home and is recorded in the census of the period as working as a farm servant in the locality. Quite why he left home will remain uncertain. It is possible that he didn't see eye to eye with his step-

mother but an equally likely explanation is that, with the coming of the railway between Wigan and Liverpool and its demand for land, Bridge Hall Farm was sequentially reduced in size and was eventually unable to support Nathan. He therefore moved to Ince and, I believe with the help of his elder brother, George - and possibly also, John - he became the owner of a grocery business, situated on Manchester Road. There was some experience of grocery in the family and I date his move to Ince as around 1891.

Since that time, the rest of the family remained in Ince. I was born in Ince and lived there until my marriage in 1954, when I moved to Manchester. Since my retirement in

1988, I have attempted to trace my family background and the documents in the History Shop, Wigan have proved invaluable. As one gets older, interest in the family background increases, especially when one has grandchildren in areas of the country far removed from Wigan, and I believe that it is essential that they have some knowledge of their family background.

Your contribution to *Past Forward* was extremely valuable. Many thanks.

G.K. Makinson (Dr.)
123 Crossfield Road
Cheadle Hulme
Cheadle
Cheshire
SK8 5PF

The King and I

Continued from page 22

way via a covetous route to John Lawrenson, ex Wigan, Workington and Swinton. Oh how I would love to get my hands on another.

From memory, the copy referred to had a cover picture of Wigan players and a leader of perhaps four pages headed in heavy print 'The Peers'.

Admittedly this may, to some, have a slightly corny ring but I suspect that the writer had taken some journalistic pride in coining this clever homonym. Why then cannot followers of the best rugby league team in the world be proud of the nickname, Peers?

J. Harold Smith
108 Worcester Lane
Sutton Coldfield
West Midlands.
B75 5N5

• Mr. Cain has made two contributions to this issue of *Past Forward* - see page 2 and 18.

Giant's Hall Colliery, Standish Lower Ground, near Wigan

Whilst reading a old copy of the *Oxford Mail*, the final edition of Friday 12 August 1955 to be precise, I was surprised to see reference to the above colliery. The article particularly caught my eye because my late grandfather, also Paul Gaskell, was manager of Giants Hall in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

Under the heading "Miners' visit", the report refers to a football match played the previous April between Bletchingdon, which is a small village some eight miles north-east of Oxford, and the visiting Giants Hall Colliery Sports Club. The Oxfordshire side won by four goals to three. It goes on:

"It proved a wonderful success and created a

strong bond of friendship between the members and supporters of the two clubs. The Lancashire folk enjoyed their visit so much they recently wrote asking if they could come again in August to play football or cricket.

The result is that a cricket match has been arranged for August 20. The visitors are expected to arrive about 1 pm. and the match will start at 2.30 pm., with tea in the village hall. The day will end, as it did in April, with a dance.

Giants Hall S.C. want Bletchingdon F.C. to visit them during the season and it is hoped that the necessary arrangements can be made for this to take place next April."

I have now examined the local Oxford

newspapers for the period immediately before and after 20 August 1955, and also for the months of April and May 1956. I have been unable to find any further reference to the planned football and cricket matches, and certainly no results or reports appeared.

Possibly the readers of *Past Forward* might wish, via future editions of the magazine, to share their recollections of the activities of Giants Hall Colliery Sports Club. Does any *Past Forward* reader recall the fixtures referred to? Did any *Past Forward* reader actually participate in them?

Paul Gaskell
28 Bulan Road
Headington
Oxford
OX3 7HT

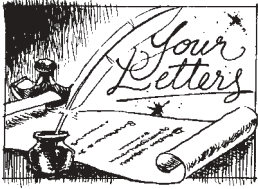
Dawson family relatives wanted

Dear Sir,

Would it be possible to publish the following in one of your future issues? I am trying to trace any living relatives of the following Dawson family. There were brothers and sisters of my Grandfather James "Fred" Dawson who was buried in Wigan in 1934.

Newark Shipley
Dawson married Jane Leech 10 September 1902 in Wigan. May Agnes Dawson married Alfred John Davies 2 August 1909 also in Wigan. Caroline "Carrie" born 1883, John born 1884, Ernest born 1888 and Norah born 1890. I would like to contact any relatives and would appreciate any help you may be able to give.

Margaret Hegan
(formerly Dawson)
67 Chester Road,
Stevenage,
Herts. SG1 4JY
Tel: 01438 233687
mhegan@dial.pipex.com



Wigan in the 20's and 30's

Dear Sir,

I read the concluding memories of Harold Knowles in his article "Ashton-in-Makerfield during the 1930's" with great interest. I could identify with many of his memories although I lived in Wigan in the 20's and 30's.

He mentions the dustmen who came weekly to empty the bins. As kids we loved bin collection day. The dustcart, horse drawn, would come up Greenough Street, turn left into Turner Street and stop just round the corner. Although the horse would be given his nose-bag,

kids from nearby would come with tit-bits; broken biscuits from Mortons the grocers, carrots, crusts, the odd lump or two of sugar etc. The horse seemed to love these 'starters' before tucking into his oats and putting up with small hands patting and stroking him. While all this was going on the full dustcart was being unhitched from the shafts and the empty one which had arrived on a wagon was being winched down on metal ramps and hitched up to the horse, and the full dustcart winched on to the wagon and taken away. What a performance!

We had a busker/singer, our very own Caruso, who included Greenough Street on his regular rounds. He had two props; one a bucket, painted red, to add a touch of glamour, two, a leather or rubber skull-cap. He would, with great aplomb deposit his bucket on the pavement, secure his skull-cap on his head and then proceed to stand on his head in the bucket and start singing "Twinkle

twinkle little star", and other long forgotten ditties. When he eventually stood up, his face well I can only describe it as similar to a very bloated, creased and crumpled tomato. He was then grateful for the odd copper that was tossed in his bucket. With a grand histrionic gesture of thanks he picked up his bucket and moved on to his next pitch. What entertainment!

One of my favourite market traders (I don't remember what he sold) had a small wooden gadget on his stall, and I used to worm my way to the front of the crowd to see if I could unravel the secret of this printing gadget. He would insert a plain piece of paper in one end, turn a handle two or three times and lo and behold a ten bob note would come out at the other end. I swore to myself that I would acquire one of these gadgets when I grew up. What riches! Dream on Joe!

At the bottom of

Greenough Street by the bridge over the Douglas was a Gentleman's, a telephone box and an extra wide pavement. Here, mainly on days when Wigan Rugby League were playing at home, a man would arrive with what seemed as many lengths of chain that you would see in the dry dock at the launch of a ship. He would gather a crowd and obtain the assistance of some of the onlookers to chain him up. When they had finished with him he seemed to be all chains. However he eventually worked his way out of the constraints and showed the crowd the marks on his face, hands, arms and legs, while his side-kick went through the crowd with his cap. What a Houdini!

Coloured people were very few and far between in Wigan in those days, but we took for granted the few who were there. There was, for example, a coloured lad playing for Wigan R.L. even then. One day I opened the front door to see who was

knocking and there before me stood this seemingly very tall gentleman with a big beard and coloured turban. He was holding an open case in which were displayed various sizes of writing paper, envelopes, wooden pens, boxes of nibs, ink, rubbers etc. I called for Mother to come and see him.

Unfortunately the Sikh didn't make a sale at our house because all the goods he had we could buy at the Post Office next door but one. The Post Officer and his wife (Shepherds) kept a vast array of goods, including the bamboo canes that our Headmaster at St. Mary's used on us. I remember this well because he used to give me money to buy canes from the Post Office and take them back to School. To finish on a tragic note Mr. Shepherd ended his life on the railway line. R.I.P.

Thanks for the memories Harold!

Joe Brooks
13 Ashfield Crescent
Billinge, Wigan

A LETTER FROM A LAD OF EIGHT – IN 1939

Dear Sir,

After just moving into the area adjacent to Haydock Park, I took a stroll around the racecourse. My feet took me to the Golborne-end of the massive car-park, and I have to say, it hadn't changed one bit since my last 'visit'. To be precise - that was over 60 years ago, when I was a lad of 8 years of age, in 1939. The very same trees that sheltered the exiled soldiers of Poland and Czechoslovakia were still standing. How easy it was to feel deep sorrow for these people - many being boys very little older than myself. The tents they were billeted in were no larger than the ones we had for camping-out, as young boys.

Each and every night, two or three hundred of them would be waiting the arrival of the evening newspaper, and one would translate the news to them. There was never a sound, as they heard of home. I used to find it hard to sink in, why many of these soldiers would be weeping unashamedly. It was a few years later when we all found out why they were upset.

After them, c.1940, came the "Free-French" sailors. All had berets, with a small red bobble on top. I got to know one, who stayed on in Ashton after the War. He was known to virtually everyone as "French George" - a gentleman in every sense of the word.

What I found quite striking was the great number of them who marched to St. Oswalds every Sunday morning for mass. All three lots of foreign soldiers and sailors had their own priests.

Some would argue that the French were followed into Haydock Park by the Americans, in 1943. This was not correct, the troops from the U.S.A. were stationed across the road in Ashton, on Lord Gerard's Estate. They always seemed flush with money. Maybe that was one reason why the girls from miles around made a bee-line to the camp almost every night!

Then came the Italian prisoners-of-war, who took the place of the

Americans. The interests of the Italians, in general, seemed to go no further than the girls, who were always hanging around the camp gates. In fact, on one occasion, there was a near-riot. I daresay it was understandable, when young servicemen come home on leave to find the ones they had left behind 'involved' with the ones many had been at war against. It wasn't long before the Italians were moved on.

Then came the German prisoners-of-war. Most were extremely well-behaved - much different than we had been led to believe. In fact, one still lives in Ashton, where he married and 'settled' after the War was over. I meet him most days, and we

do have many interesting chats. Anyone who worked in the coal-mines alongside him, will tell you that he was a great worker. Many will recall the German international goalkeeper, Bert Trautmann, who gained fame at Maine Road for Manchester City. He had been interned at the Ashton camp, where he began his footballing career as centre-half; he only played in goal because he wanted to play football.

Ah, those wonderful memories. Memories do make the world go round - that's a fact!

John Scully
11 Hampson Close
Ashton-in-Makerfield
Nr. Wigan
WN4 9EN

Aspull & Haigh Historical Society

Meetings are held in the Village Centre, Bolton Road, Aspull, on the second Thursday of the month at 8.00 p.m. Further details from the Secretary, Mrs. Rosalie Naylor, 3 Pennington Close, Aspull, Wigan (01942 256145)

Atherton Heritage Society

Monthly meetings with talks on local history held at St. Richard's Jubilee Hall, Crabtree Lane, Atherton, on Tuesdays at 7.30 p.m. Non-members £1.50, including refreshments. Everyone welcome. Visits throughout the year to places of historical interest. Information from Hon. Sec. (01204 651478)

July

No Meeting. HOLIDAYS

10 August

Rivington by Mr. D. Smith

One of our favourite local walking places. Mr. Smith will tell us all we need to know of its long history and brings along his book on the subject.

14 September

Deadly Dwellings by Mr. N. Morgan

"Home Sweet Home" sang the Victorians, but the terraced houses built for the workers of the Industrial Revolution could be yet another hazard to health in the 19th century.

12 October

AGM, followed by *The Archivist at Work* by Mr. T. Jackson.

Our own archivist will tell us about the numerous queries he answered over the year, and tell us some things that perhaps we didn't even know ourselves about our town.

SOCIETY NEWS

9 November

Atherton 0 - 2000 by Mrs. Gilbertson

A 'quick run through' of Atherton history over 2000 years. Afterwards a selection of Lancashire cakes with your drink.

Golborne & Lowton Local History Society

Founded in 1984 the society now has an average monthly attendance of over 20. Meetings are held at Golborne Library on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.00 p.m. Non-members welcome. Further details from Ron Marsh, P.R. Officer (01942 726027).

14 September

Croft and Culcheth by James Daxon

12 October

Clandestine Marriages in the 18th Century by Bob Blakeman

Leigh & District Family History Society

Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month in the Derby Room of Leigh Library. For further details contact the Secretary, Mr. O. Hughes (01942 741594).

20 July

Visit to Leigh Library

17 August

Getting started and Question time.

21 September

Members evening, fiche and family history books and advice

19 October

Haigh Hall and the people who lived there by Carol Banks

Leigh Literary Society

Meetings are held in The Derby Room, Leigh Library on Mondays at 7.30 p.m. Subscription £10. Visitors £1. Secretary, Mrs. H. Gaskell (01942 801743).

Leigh Local History Society

Meetings are held in The Derby Room, Leigh Library, on the last Wednesday of the month. For further details contact the Secretary, Mrs. Norma Ackers (01942 865488).

Tyldesley & District Historical Society

Meetings are held at Tyldesley Pensioners Club, Milk Street, Tyldesley, on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30 p.m. Entrance is FREE. Further details from the Secretary (01942 514271).

Wigan Archaeological Society

The Society meets in the History Shop on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 p.m. New members are always welcome.

Wigan Civic Trust

The Trust meets at 7.30 p.m. on the second Monday of the month at Drumcroon Arts Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan. For further information contact Anthony Grimshaw, Secretary (01942 245777). New members are always welcome.

4 September

Visit to Ribchester

Guided tours of both St. Wilfrid and St. Saviour at Stydd.

Wigan Family History Society

Meetings are now held on the first and third Tuesday of the month, at the Springfield Hotel, Springfield Road, Wigan, at 7.30 p.m. For further information contact Mrs. Lynne Kearns, 28 Wareing Street, Tyldesley, Manchester, M29 8HS (01942 878549).



When shanks pony was the answer

Dear Sirs,

Whilst visiting my sister in Bolton I came across your *Past Forward* magazine and being a Hindley Grammar old boy she told me about the articles you had printed concerning HAGS.

I thought I would send the only relic of the time I

spent there. I'm the youngest member in the photograph, about 15 years old.

Here's one little incident private to myself. I started at Hindley when Dr. Edkins was Headmaster. At that time we lived at Hart Common (no transport) so using shanks pony was the answer. Being the oldest of four a bicycle was too expensive an article. Being a football fanatic and as there was not traffic, I passed my small ball from kerb to kerb running all the way to and from school.

At this time Fairbrother lived at Willow Bank, a house in the fields, near Westhoughton Golf Club. He cycled to school and on occasions, to my sorrow when he saw me yelled "Hindley! On my step. I'll



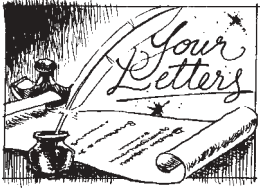
*Hindley & Abram Grammar school 1st XI 1919?
Causey, Gregory, Fishwick, Livesey, Hitchinson, Flitcroft
Lord, Rigby, Young, Smith, Rudd
Hindley, Taylor*

give you a lift". One foot on the step, one knee on the carrier - the most uncomfortable journey to school possible to imagine.

I was delighted when he became Head the following year - I could use my legs!

Best wishes to you.

Jack Hindley (born 7/11/05)
55 King Street
Westhoughton
Bolton.
BL5 3AX



Orwell's 'denigratory description' addressed

Dear Sir,

I have just received, by courtesy of my sister

Mrs. J.E. Dixon (nee Ollerton), who lives in Camforth, a copy of issue number 19 of your magazine *Past Forward*. I am responding to the letter from Mrs. Muriel Swann, featured on page 21, in which she seeks information about the Higson and Ollerton families.

I am the eldest of three children who lived at 5 School Lane. Whilst I am not aware of any blood relationship with the Higsons, I was for a long time their errand boy.

Every Thursday, I was sent to Morton's grocers in Greenough Street to collect their tea requirements for a week. On one notable occasion, I was sent to get a gill of milk from Hampson's in Lower Morris Street. It was a wet day, and on the way back, to get more liquid in the jug, I stuck it under a down spout in Butler Street, and handed over the jug without comment. Not too long after, the Higsons came back quickly to ask about the black spots in the milk.

I assured them I was trying to help!

Two other incidents may be of interest to Mrs. Muriel Swann. I acted as guide dog to Richard Higson one foggy day and led him via the L and Y Railway in Station Road to Irlam and back. The second sadder event was when Richard Higson was ill in Billinge Hospital. I went to visit him and he instantly explained that he was gasping for a smoke. For the first and only time in my life, I lit and puffed on a cigarette, which I

quickly handed to a relieved patient.

Clearly there are many many other memories over the 15 years we were neighbours. The elderly lady who spoke to Mrs. Swann was my mother, who died in 1988 (aged over 90).

Finally, I enclose a copy of an article I wrote for the *Guardian* in 1984. The motivation for this at the time was the extreme irritation I felt over George Orwell's denigratory description of ordinary Wigan folk:

'How George Orwell took a running jump at Wigan Pier - and missed'

It is ironic that George Orwell made a point of staying in Wigan, my home town, wrote his book, 'The Road to Wigan Pier', but signally failed to describe the sort of people among whom he briefly lived.

Orwell certainly gathered his statistics to show house size, cost of living, and the level of income which dominated the lives of many Wiganers at the time. Missing is an account of the pride, the spirit, the humour, and the determination to survive, which characterised these folk. But does it really matter, now, in 1984?

It matters for two reasons. First, the vision left by the book and its commentators does less than justice to the many families who overcame appalling social and economic adversity. Second and more importantly, it would have brought into perspective the so-called hardships being suffered in the 1980s.

As local Wigan commentators add their voices to the Orwell pictures of Wigan, they, too, fail to bring out the will and spirit of the time; living in the town but in such garden suburbs as Beech Hill and Bottling Wood, how could they have experienced the sights, sounds and smells which told of a special breed of people.

The most serious indictment made by Orwell, admittedly based on a singularly unfortunate choice of lodgings concerns the attitude to hygiene and cleanliness. Did Orwell never see the housewives on their knees at their regular ritual outside their front doors? With bucket, mop, and scrubbing brush, they cleaned the first line of flagstones outside their door and with the rubbing stone (Donkey brand) produced a whitened finish to doorstep and outside window sill. Indoors there was the daily Zebra black-leading of the fireplace and oven.

Another practice took me as a youngster to an outstation of the Wigan health department at the foot of Library Street. There, for a nominal charge, a bottle would be filled with black strong smelling disinfectant. This was regularly poured down the suff, our name for the outside sink, where the black liquid first produced a rainbow effect on the water and then turned milky white. But did it see off the flies.

We learned cleanliness the painful way. A visit to Wigan baths in Millgate - not the £3 million international pool which has produced swimmers like June Croft and Osgerbys - meant first of all a hard scrubbing with the coarsest brushes imaginable and an inspection before entry to the plunge. All good sense, because not everybody used their tin baths regularly.

Sandwiched between the health department in Library Street and the public baths in Millgate was Dawsons, the manufacturing chemists. Their major product which had a moving effect on the population far beyond Wigan was the celebrated Dawsons Squares. These were packed in flat square tins and wrapped in silver paper to look like Cadburys, but this was no chocolate, but a powerful laxative. My father was a heath and heather man who didn't believe in chemicals, so we had senna tea (pods or leaves) every week.

So concern with hygiene was not just domestic but related also to inner cleanliness. We had the twice yearly blood cleansing which was best brought about with a daily spoonful of brimstone and treacle; a never to be forgotten experience is to meet a pocket of unmixed sulphur in a mouthful of treacle.

So much for the concern for cleanliness in bug-ridden slum property. How did people make ends meet? Were there no popular uprisings against impossible conditions? The nearest we got to a riot was when a certain Rev. Kensit of the Protestant Truth Society came to Wigan market square (second largest in the country) and declaimed against the Catholics. Each night his van, and possibly the man himself, were turned upside down. The battle was for beliefs, not social equality.

We did have some safety nets against the greatest rigours of poverty, and they are reminders about the real nature of change since Orwell came to Wigan. From 1925 to 1932 I attended Warrington Lane Council School, just round the corner from George Orwell's lodgings in Sovereign Road. Prominent amongst many memories is the free meal service we received. Four

days a week, Monday to Thursday, week after week, month after month, we were given thick, green pea soup. The high point of the week was the meat and potato pie served on Fridays. I have since had many dietary experiences around the world, but never shall I forget that pea soup, nor will I ever eat pea soup again.

A happier memory is that each year I received a free pair of clogs which I collected from Monaghans, the cloggers in Warrington Lane. The gift came not from the state, the local council, or some wealthy benefactor, but from the Chief Constable's Clog and Stocking Fund. Whenever I saw Mr. T. Pey, the Chief Constable, who with his helmet and sword looked the spitting image of Kaiser Bill as he walked in the mayor's procession, I thought of my free clogs. Come to think of it, I rather liked our local bobbies who patrolled Scholes and School Lane where I lived. I knew them by name, Bobby McNulty, Bobby Maguire. I once asked why they all seemed to be Irishmen. The answer I got was that you had to be a Catholic to be in the police force. I hope Northern Ireland readers note the reply. More seriously, though, such memories indicate the relationship between people and their children in hard times with the police.

The third example of a safety net starts with my arrival home one day with the news that "I have passed the scholarship for Wigan Grammar School". This was no time for rejoicing. I couldn't wear clogs, my regular footwear, at the grammar school. As for a suit, this simply was unattainable. The solution was suggested by my father's workmates at the Wigan Coal and Iron Works, who suggested that as an ex-serviceman he should join the British Legion and I would be fitted out free once a year. This he did. I was measured up and duly arrived in my very first suit at Wigan Grammar School in September, 1932. At assembly in the schoolhall, it did not take me long to spot the other lads similarly attired. After all, this small arrowhead motif was pretty unmistakable - trainee convicts, we said we were.

J.H. Ollerton
9 Fairfield Park
Broadstairs
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A pledge fulfilled

Dear Alastair,

I thought I would dispense with my usual "I Remember When . . ." style of presentation in favour of a letter to the editor for two reasons:

1) You will have to apologise to one less contributor by introducing a new name perhaps in the next edition and

2) I am probably one of only a few readers of *Past Forward* who remember your very first editorial in No. 1 in the Summer of 1991.

By the way I have a reputation among *Past*

Forward readers of having a phenomenal memory, when the truth is that sometimes I can't even remember what I've gone in the kitchen for. And perhaps a greater surprise would be that I suffered a total amnesia in 1940/41 arising from the Coventry Blitz!

To revert to your first editorial in 1991. You wrote: "***We are concerned with an area of very rich heritage in which we should all be interested and of which we should all be proud. I hope Past Forward will help convince you of that.***" I know, Sir, I echo the sentiments of many Wiganers along with ex Wiganers and their descendants, who are very proud indeed, some of whom have never even been to Wigan, from far flung corners. You know that one *Past Forward* reader could describe Wigan in detail simply

from stories of her mum, now deceased (God rest her), even to the Dog & Partridge pub down the entrance to Wigan Parish Church from Market Place, when you had to remind her that it was now known as The Bees Knees.

I didn't know that, even, but I do remember Chris with his pavement book stall at the entrance, all spread out on waterproof covers. Name the newspaper, periodical, special editions - they were all there as well as the money which customers left as payment in his absence when he popped down the underground toilets outside the Tram Office in Market Place. Chris was there at 6 a.m. and frequently stayed until the last tram (later buses) at 11.45 p.m.

Recalling Chris reminds me of Bob Wright who stood at the corner of King Street and Wallgate all day from early morning

'till late at night with more copies of daily papers under one arm than the average shopper these days would push in a shopping trolley! His brother was in charge of their wholesale underground bookstore and newspaper business in the Wiend, and all paper shops for miles around had accounts with the Wright Bros.

Yes, sir, your hope in your first editorial that *Past Forward* will help convince us that we should all be proud of our heritage has been fulfilled. Personally I have always been immensely proud of that fact, and I now look forward to your projected "Friends of Wigan Heritage Service" bringing to the surface many more proud Wiganers and their offspring as it will, I have no doubt.

Most overseas ex Wiganers emigrated in the depression years on £10 assisted passages to help

relieve the pressure at home of too many people on the dole and not enough workers paying into the kitty to cover the cost. Their descendants have grown up and had their own children who regard Wigan as their spiritual home of which they are all proud.

The thought continuity which can be conjured up will be overwhelming and no longer will people say "You must be very proud indeed!" Much of it is due, in no small measure, to the Heritage Service activities under your guidance and the enthusiasm of your excellent staff. Well done all of them.

Good luck to you sir in your extended responsibility for Millennium activity in Wigan.

Sincerely,

Ernie Taberner
62 Westwood Road
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Coventry
CV5 6GE

Distance no problem

Dear Mr. Gillies,

I know that you will be well aware of the great distances travelled by copies of *Past Forward* so you probably won't be at all surprised by what I am about to tell you.

A few days ago I received a letter in the form of an audio tape from a chap called Joe Griffiths who lives in Australia. Joe Griffiths can make two claims on my acquaintance - his family and mine were next-door neighbours in Stubshaw Cross until I was six years old. In 1932 both families moved to the Crescent Avenue/Cansfield Grove area of Ashton-in-Makerfield. Joe's family

lived in Crescent Avenue while we lived about 50 yards away in Grove Street. Joe had seen my articles in *Past Forward* and, I am delighted to say, decided to write to me and renew our acquaintance.

There were three children in the Griffiths family, Joe, the eldest was about two or three years my senior, his brother, Bill, was my age and their sister, Anne, was about two years younger than Bill. Naturally, I saw more of Bill than I did of Joe because of his age difference, but I distinctly recall that Joe would occasionally join in our activities, usually providing a more skilful and mature approach. As an example, I mentioned in my memoirs, recently published in *Past Forward*, that we boys once experimented with home-made model parachutes in which we

used "pop" bottle screw caps as the parachutist. I related that an older boy went a step further and carved a realistic wooden model of a man as his parachutist - Joe Griffiths was that older boy.

Joe didn't go to Ashton-in-Makerfield Grammar School - he tells me that his family financial circumstances at the time were such as to require him to leave school at the age of 14 years in order to begin to contribute to the family finances. (Both his children, however, a boy and a girl, went to Ashton Grammar School and, later, made excellent use of the opportunity by, in both instances, going on to university).

In the late 1930's, the fact of not having attended a grammar school constituted a very severe educational handicap, a handicap in no way

mitigated by the fact that its cause was, in so many instances, financial hardship. Nevertheless, when Joe was demobbed from the Royal Air Force at the end of the war, he set about overcoming this educational handicap and did so admirably, achieving the professional qualifications of A.M.I.Mech.E., M.I.S.M.

Joe went to Australia

in 1973 and now lives in Western Australia, near Perth. His son has a Master's degree in computer technology and his daughter, who also has a degree, is a teacher in Canberra.

Harold Knowles
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METROPOLITAN
WIGAN

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Who? Where?

No suggestions for the bottom photograph in last issue's **Who? Where?** But an overwhelming response to the other three! These have been identified, in descending order, as:

St John's RC, Wigan

Opening of St Cuthbert's School, Wigan

Opening of St Edward's School, Wigan, c.1959

This time, we would like your help with another church, a couple of houses, a pub/hotel, and a Home Guard parade. All suggestions, please, to **Len Hudson in Leigh Town Hall (01942) 404432**

