

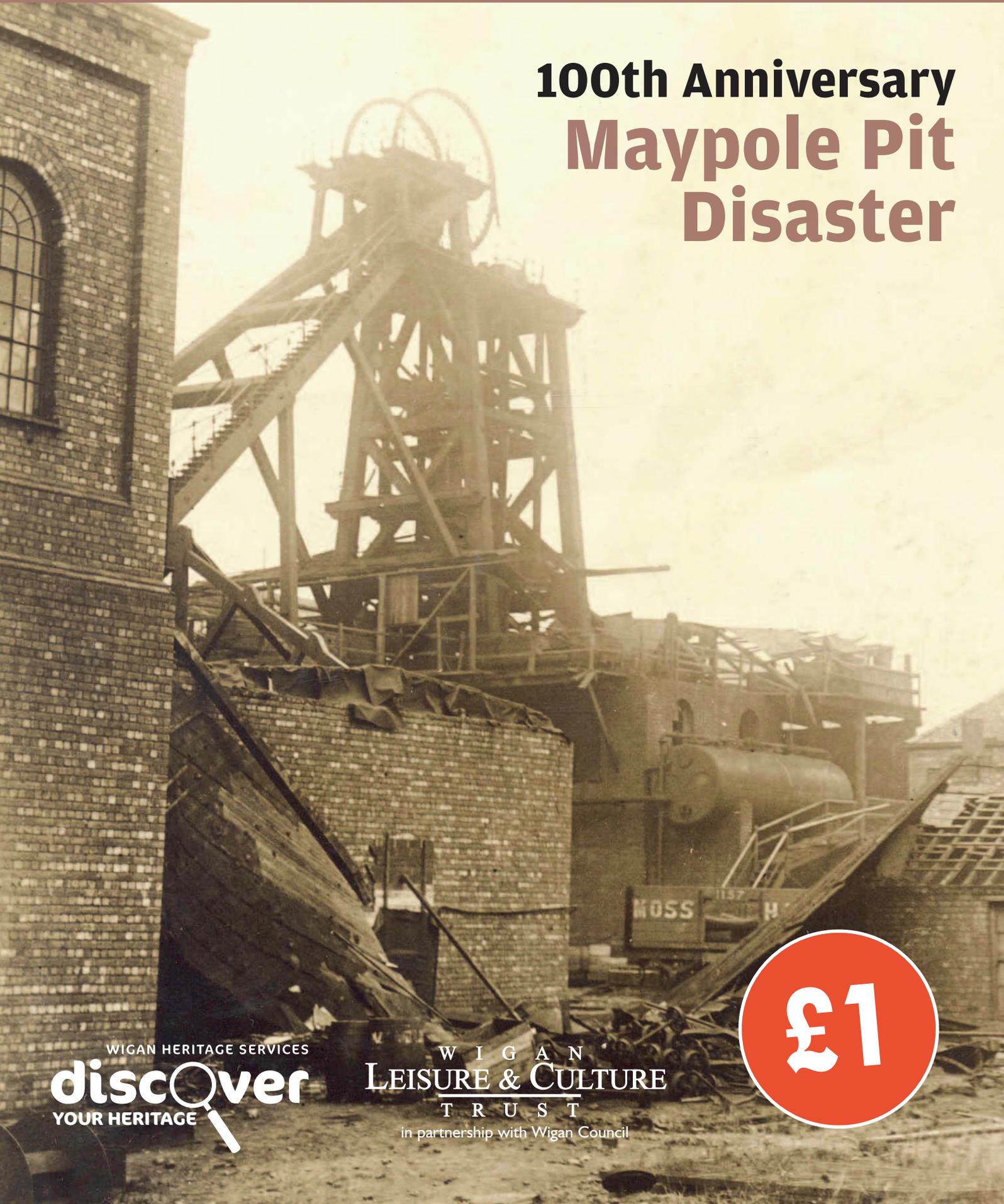
PAST FORWARD

Produced by Wigan Heritage Service

Issue No. 49

August - November 2008

100th Anniversary Maypole Pit Disaster



£1

WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICES

discover
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T R U S T

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Contents

- 2-3 Heritage Service
- 4 Archives Service
- 5 Exhibitions at The History Shop
- 6-7 1908 Olympians of the Borough
- 8-9 Weekend Community Celebrations
- 10-12 The Shy Shooter of the North
- 13 Views of Hindley
- 14-16 Help for the Deserving Poor
- 17 Heritage Events
- 18-20 The Maypole Colliery Disaster
- 22-23 Spanish Flu
- 24-25 Jane Austen and a Wigan M.P.
- 26-27 Do you remember?
- 28-31 Your Letters
- 32 Views of Leigh
- 33 Society News
- 34 Pigeon Power
- 35 Can You Help?

FRONT COVER PICTURE
 Maypole Colliery Disaster 1908, roof blown off the ventilating house

Letter from the Editorial Team

In this issue of **PAST FORWARD**, we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the tragic and terrible Maypole Colliery Disaster which occurred on 18th August 1908. Seventy-five men lost their lives. Chris Watts (Local & Family History Officer) has written an article (see pages 18 and 19) which is published alongside four of the photographs from our archival collection. The front cover also shows the devastated pit.

During the week beginning Monday 11th August 2008 there will be exhibitions in St John's Church at Abram as well as in the former Abram Library. The week will end with a special service in the church on the 18th followed by a procession to the memorial. For more details of the celebrations please contact St John's Vicarage.

The Heritage Service will also be arranging a Maypole Colliery Day on the 16th August followed by learning sessions at the History Shop on the 19th and Platt Bridge Library on the 22nd. For further details please contact the Education and Outreach Manager on 01942 828128.

<p>Friends of Wigan Heritage Service</p> <p>Please find enclosed my cheque for £5.00 <small>(made payable to Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust)</small></p> <p>Name: <input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/></p> <p>Address: <input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/></p> <p><input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/></p> <p><input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/> Postcode: <input style="width: 10%;" type="text"/></p> <p>Tel: <input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/></p> <p>Signed: <input style="width: 70%;" type="text"/> Date: <input style="width: 20%;" type="text"/></p> <p>Please return to The History Shop or via Freepost: Past Forward, Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust FREEPOST NATW 1645, Wigan WN1 1XZ</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> I would like to become a member of 'Friends of Wigan Heritage Service' and receive copies of Past Forward through the post.</p> <p>Please state which issue you wish your membership to begin. <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/></p>
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Lisa Keys

Lisa Keys will be joining us in August as Exhibition and Display Officer. Lisa was offered the post after a rigorous interview process. It was a difficult decision, as the calibre of all those interviewed was extremely high. However, Lisa had the breadth of experience and skills required for this challenging new post, which has been partly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Her main role will be to develop the Heritage Service temporary exhibition programme, working with staff and community groups both in the History Shop and other venues throughout the borough.

After graduating from the University of Liverpool in 2001, Lisa worked as a field archaeologist on sites in the North West. She became increasingly interested in the interpretation of local heritage and the role that museums have in this, so in 2004 took up a Masters in Art Gallery and Museum Studies. She gained subsequent employment at National Museums Liverpool and Lancashire County Museum Service. Her last role was for the Lake District National Park Authority developing various media which would make the historic environment more accessible to the public. Lisa says "I am passionate about interpretation and am looking forward to all the challenges my new role will bring!"

Heritage Open Days 2008

Historic Chowbent Chapel
 Bolton Old Road
 Atherton

OPEN TO VIEW

Friday 12th September
 12.00am - 5.00pm

Saturday 13th September
 10.00am - 5.00pm

Sunday 14th September
 12.00am - 5.00pm

Chapel archives will be on view in the Hall.

All are welcome.

Deadline for Issue 50

Contributors please note that the deadline for receipt of material for publication is 30th September.

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Contributions are welcome, but no responsibility can be taken for loss or damage to contributors' material.

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 March 2008

Your Archives

Improvement work at the Archives is ongoing and we hope researchers will continue to find an enhanced service. Behind the scenes, cataloguing, listing and conservation work helps the preservation of records and we are grateful to all archive users who fill out our short visitor surveys; all suggestions and recommendations are very welcome.

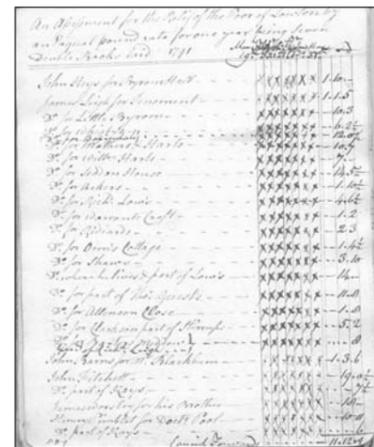
Recent Acquisitions

There is much to mention in this issue in terms of new acquisitions to the collections. Recent accessions include:

- Records of John Wood & Sons, Wigan and Walmsleys (Wigan) Ltd. (Acc. 2008/24)
- Papers relating to the Edmund Molyneux Scholarship Endowment, including last will and testament of Edmund Molyneux, 1613 (Acc. 2008/23)
- Log books of St Thomas' School, Clayton Street (Acc. 2008/22)
- Additional records of The Methodist Church, Wigan Circuit, including Wigan Wesleyan Chapel (Whitley Methodist Church) (Acc. 2008/18)

Using Church Records

At the Archives we have a substantial collection of church records and act as a Church of England diocesan repository for records of the churches in the deaneries of Wigan and Winwick.



Lowton St Luke Overseers Rate Book

Family historians and genealogists will know about well-thumbed church registers but much less used are the other records of these churches. If you find ancestors in the baptisms, marriages and burials, you may gain additional

information from the main collections. Various churches have records giving lists of wardens, council and charity group members and Sunday school pupils. New buildings or renovations brought associated lists of subscribers and older parishes kept rate books for the overseers of the poor; in Lowton these records date from the 1760s. These church records are some of the highlights of our collections.

If you would like more information details are available in the Guide to the Archives, or on the websites of A2A (Access to Archives) and the Greater Manchester Pastfinder.

Remembering the Past: Maypole, 18th August 1908

Archives are used for numerous purposes, including contemporary planning and legal cases, academic enquiry and research, even art and design. Yet, they always serve to allow us to remember the past.

The 18th August 2008 is the hundredth anniversary of the explosion at the Maypole Colliery, near Abram, in which 75 men lost their lives. Reading the records held at the Archives creates a vivid picture of the accident, its aftermath and the effect upon local communities. The material includes photographs of the town and colliery in the days that followed, documentation concerning the government enquiry into the accident, the records of the Relief Fund established to help the victims' families and lists of those subscribing, including scores of local people, King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.

It is a small collection but hints at the very real effect the disaster brought upon local people, so preserving these records, keeping them safe and accessible, helps us to remember.

If you would like to view any of the records from the collection mentioned above (CB/Wi/F2), please contact the Archives.



Telegram from Edward VII, 21st August 1908



Wigan Mayor Cllr Mrs Rona Winkworth with Freemasons: Danny Jones (Wigan Group Chairman), Eddie Caulfield (Assistant Provincial Grand Master for West Lancashire), Fred Lomax (Exhibition Organiser and Secretary of the Wigan and District Association for Masonic Research), Barbara Adderley (The Order of Women Freemasons Grand Inspector for West Lancashire), Pauline Short (Exhibition Organiser).

A Feast of Photography

The Wigan and Atherton Photographic Societies will be displaying their work the History Shop at the end of summer.

Please do come along, it is a chance to show your support for local community groups, and it goes without saying that you will see some stunning photographs.



Wigan Photographic Society: Stick judging. Borrowdale Show. Hilary Fairclough, LRPS.

Wigan Photographic Society
23rd August-6th September

Atherton Photographic Society
9th-20th September

Freemasonry - it's no secret!

No less than 35 Freemasons have been Mayor of Wigan on a total of 52 occasions. These facts were revealed by the Mayor of Wigan, Cllr Mrs Rona Winkworth, when she opened the exhibition celebrating 222 years of Freemasonry in Wigan, held in the Taylor Gallery of the History Shop from the 6th May to the 19th July 2008.

After being welcomed to the exhibition by the Freemasons' Assistant Provincial Grand Master Eddie Caulfield, Cllr Winkworth said: "It is a pleasure for me to be here at this exhibition on Freemasonry in Wigan. Freemasons are renowned for their charitable donations to national and local causes. Wigan and Leigh Hospice has been generously supported over the years, as has Derian House Children's Hospice and various medical charities including the North West Air Ambulance. Many youth organisations in Wigan have received grants to enable them to obtain equipment and to continue their work with the young citizens of the Borough. It is pleasing to see the Shopmobility scooters which local Freemasons provided within Wigan town centre to assist our older citizens for whom mobility is a problem when shopping. It is particularly appropriate for me as Mayor of Wigan to be present here because no less than 35 of my predecessors have been Freemasons. They have held the office of Mayor of Wigan on a total of 52 occasions. Freemasons in Wigan have devoted not just their money but their time, energy and enthusiasm to the cause of being happy and generating happiness among those who are less well off in the community. From the opening of the first lodge in Wigan in 1786 until today, Freemasons have served the local community."

The exhibition opening was also attended by the Order of Women's Freemasons' Grand Inspector for West Lancashire, Barbara Adderley. The ladies of Lodge Landmark/Dormer Light provided tea, coffee, sandwiches and cakes for the forty guests.

1908 Olympians of the Borough

by Tony Ashcroft

As the country makes preparations to host the 2012 Olympic Games let us look back to when the IV Olympiad was held in London a century ago. Then, a total of 22 nations with 2008 athletes competed in 110 events representing 22 different sports.

The venue for the track and field events was the White City Stadium. The opening ceremony took place on 27th April 1908 when King Edward VII officially declared the games open. The closing ceremony was on 31st October 1908. In terms of medals, Great Britain topped the medal table with 146 medals (56 gold, 51 silver and 39 bronze). In second place came the USA with 47.

Three local competitors were amongst those chosen for their sporting prowess. These were: Benjamin Jones, Sydney Battersby and Addin Tyldesley.

Benjamin Jones - Cyclist

Ben Jones, or the Wigan flyer as he was known, was a famous cyclist. Prior to his competing in the Olympic Games he had entered and won numerous cycle racing championships including the Mile Bicycle

Championship of Ireland and two Empire championships at Newcastle, all in 1907. In the 1908 Olympics his sporting prowess and stamina enabled him win an individual gold and silver, as well as a team gold. Ben's individual gold medal was for the 5,000m, when he recorded a time of 8:36:2, beating Maurice Schilles and Andre Auffray (both of France). In the 20,000 metres (20 km) track event he was placed second to Charles Kingsbury, also representing the British team. His final gold medal was awarded for his part in the 4,000m team pursuit which Great Britain won by 10 seconds over a German team. Other members of the team were: Leonard Meredith, Ernest Payne and Charles Kingsbury. Both the 5,000 metres and 20,000 metres (20km) men's

track events have since been discontinued. Although I have very little information on Ben Jones I believe he went to South Africa circa 1910 and returned to England in 1920. It is fairly certain that he competed in and won several South African cycle championships.

Sydney Battersby - Swimmer

Sydney Battersby who won a silver medal in the 1500m freestyle at the 1908 Olympics was a joiner and builder of Platt Bridge. He lost out, by three seconds, to Henry Taylor of Great Britain. Although Henry (or Harry) Taylor is not from Wigan it is possible that his parents once resided in Ince, whilst his elder brother was born there. Amongst Sydney's other swimming feats of the same year was a second place



Addin Tyldesley, Tyldesley Swimming Club

in the one mile swimming championship, swum in the River Soar at Leicester. Here he beat Henry Taylor by 19 seconds although he lost out to Beaurepaire of Australia. At the end of July and beginning of August 1908, Battersby took part in the annual amateur swimming championship of the Mersey. There were 14 entrants and for the first time ever, there was a swimmer of 'the weaker sex'. Also in the race was Fred Kearsley of Wigan, a prospective entrant for the English Channel Swim. The course totalled one mile

starting from the Crosby Channel to a point near the Seaforth Battery. Officials and members of the Liverpool Swimming Club followed the contest from the Wallesey ferryboat 'Crocus'. Battersby won the race in a time 19 minutes 50 seconds beating his Wigan compatriot who recorded a time of 21 minutes 18 seconds. In October 1908, at the Guinea Gap Baths at Seacombe, he made an attempt and was successful in breaking the quarter mile record.

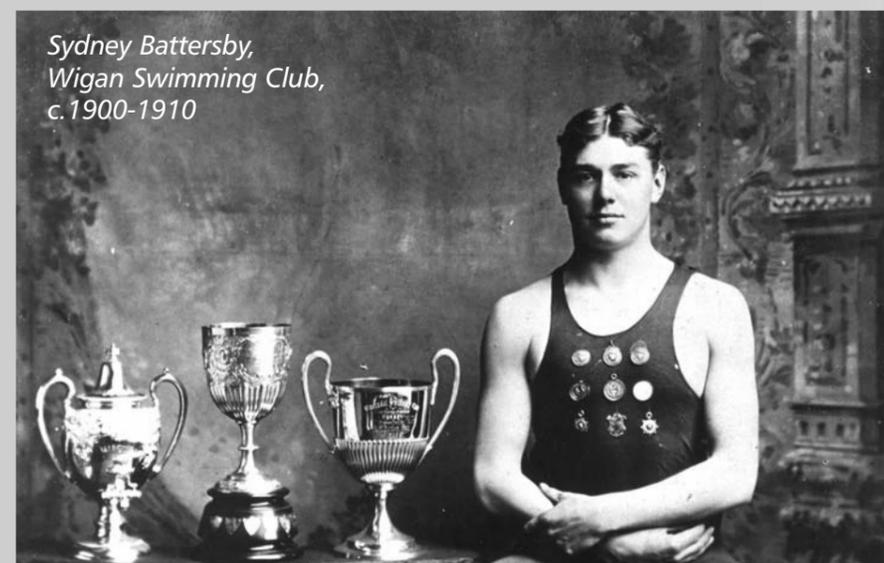
Addin Tyldesley - Swimmer

Addin Tyldesley was born in the township of Tyldesley. His father, who was manager of the local baths, was a keen supporter of the Tyldesley Swimming and Water Polo Club, to which Addin belonged.

He was a renowned swimmer and was chosen to represent Great Britain in the 100m freestyle. Although he managed to progress to the semi final, he was up against strong competition, so he never made the final. In his early years he received his municipal training in the Tyldesley Council Clerks Office before taking up a position as Clerk to the Rothwell Urban Council.

Should any reader have any additional information on the above sportsmen I would be very pleased to hear from you. In future articles there will be references to other sporting personalities of the Borough.

Tony Ashcroft (Local History Officer) can be contacted on 01942 404459. **Editor**



Sydney Battersby, Wigan Swimming Club, c. 1900-1910





Male Voice Choir. This was particularly relevant as Parkside Colliery, Newton le Willows was the last deep coal mine to close in the Lancashire Coalfield in 1993. The concert was held at St. Stephen's Church and was very well attended and enjoyed by all. The Church parishioners were kind enough to provide light refreshments in the interval.



various organisations, Astley Youth Brass Band, a Barrel Organist, an historic village-related play and a colliery history slide show just some examples. The day was a great success with approximately 1,500 people attending.

The entire weekend was particularly satisfying in that it gave people from the community the opportunity to renew acquaintances and enjoy the festivities at the same time. Why not organise a community event in your area. It is hard work, but extremely rewarding!

Astley Scouts and Guides celebrated the completion of the refurbishment of the old school, their headquarters, in Ellesmere Street, Higher Green on Saturday 4th May. It was also 60 years since their activities were established in the neighbourhood.

the Astley Green Colliery Museum. The re-enactment of 'Cutting the first Sod', originally performed by the then Lady Pilkington on May 7th 1908, was ably carried out by pupils from Twelve Apostles School, Leigh. Many attractions were on site with children's games, a miniature railway, and marquee, display stands from

Monday (May Day) 5th May was a Centenary Gala Day at

Weekend Community Celebrations

By Geoff Jones, Chairman - The Red Rose Steam Society

The districts of Astley, Blackmoor and Astley Green, all lying almost within the shadow of Astley Green Colliery for the last hundred years, were the subject of various commemorative celebrations over the May Day weekend, the 3rd-5th May.

The opportunity was taken not only to celebrate the centenary of 'Cutting the First Sod' at the Astley Green Colliery but also the establishment of the Whitehead Hall Millennium Meadow, the refurbishment of the Scout & Guide Headquarters and the 40th Anniversary of St. Stephen's Church.

Earlier in the year it was realised that there was a golden opportunity to involve all sections of the community in the celebrations and as such

a small committee was set up. This included members of the Red Rose Steam Society, who look after Astley Green Colliery Museum, The Friends of Astley Scouts and Guides, and the Astley Green Residents Association. After much planning, fund raising, and ticket sales the results paid dividends and the weekend's events were firmly established.

The evening of Friday 3rd May was given over to a choral concert by Parkside Colliery



The organising committee would like to thank the following sponsors for their practical or financial assistance in making the weekend such a success.

Wigan Heritage Services

Viridor Waste Management

W. Howard Ltd.

The National Union of Mineworkers, Leigh Office

Tyldesley Tyres and Exhaust

Brian Gomm, Leigh Journal

Lakeland Laboratories

Astley Sand & Aggregates

Astley Rotary Club

St. Stephen's Church

Princes Park Garden Centre, Irlam

Cowburn's Hardware Shop, Blackmoor

Uncovering the Shy Shooter of the North

By Alan Bamber and Simon Le Fort

Bob Robinson, known to wrestling fans as Billy Joyce, was one of the greatest heavyweight professional wrestlers of the post war years and yet seems almost a forgotten man amongst modern day wrestling enthusiasts. Whilst lesser men such as Big Daddy, Mick McManus, and Jackie Pallo are still discussed at length, the name Billy Joyce rarely gets a mention.

We talked at length with Billy's daughter, Dorothy Hart, her husband Jimmy, and family friend, Susan. We came away with one lasting impression. Here is a man who still commands enormous love and respect seven years after his death. That sense of love came through every word that was uttered, from Susan's "He was a lovely man," Dorothy's "e wur a bugger," to Jimmy's, "He was a family man, and always wanted to get back home."

Billy Joyce may well have been a family man, but he was also a complex man. As a youngster a hard days grafting down the coal mine would be followed by a 'pull around' 'Catch-as-Catch-Can' style, as he learnt the business of wrestling. Or rather, he learnt how to learn. That was the point of training at Riley's Snakepit. Wrestlers didn't just learn how to wrestle, they learned how to continue learning throughout their life.

The coalmine, Snakepit, the pull around after work, were the experiences of Billy Joyce, who was considered to be the finest technical heavyweight of the post war years. A real wrestler or shooter as the wrestling enthusiasts would call him. There's no need to take our word for it, or that of Dorothy and Jimmy. The great and the good have given testament to Joyce's place in wrestling folklore. Billy Robinson said he was: *"the most complete wrestler of his generation.... without a doubt the best technique wrestler I ever met or wrestled."*

Roy Wood named Billy as the best wrestler to come out of Wigan. Geoff Condliffe (Count Bartelli) said that Joyce was the only wrestler that he would pay to watch wrestle. Condliffe likened his bouts with Joyce to a game of chess, with the Wigan wrestler always thinking two or three moves ahead. That's what 'Catch-as-Catch-Can' style was all about, "giving summat t' get summat." If Joyce offered an



Riley's Gym, Bob Robinson (with belt)

opponent his arm he wanted it to be taken because he was planning the counter, his next offensive, and the follow through. He was the master of the style.

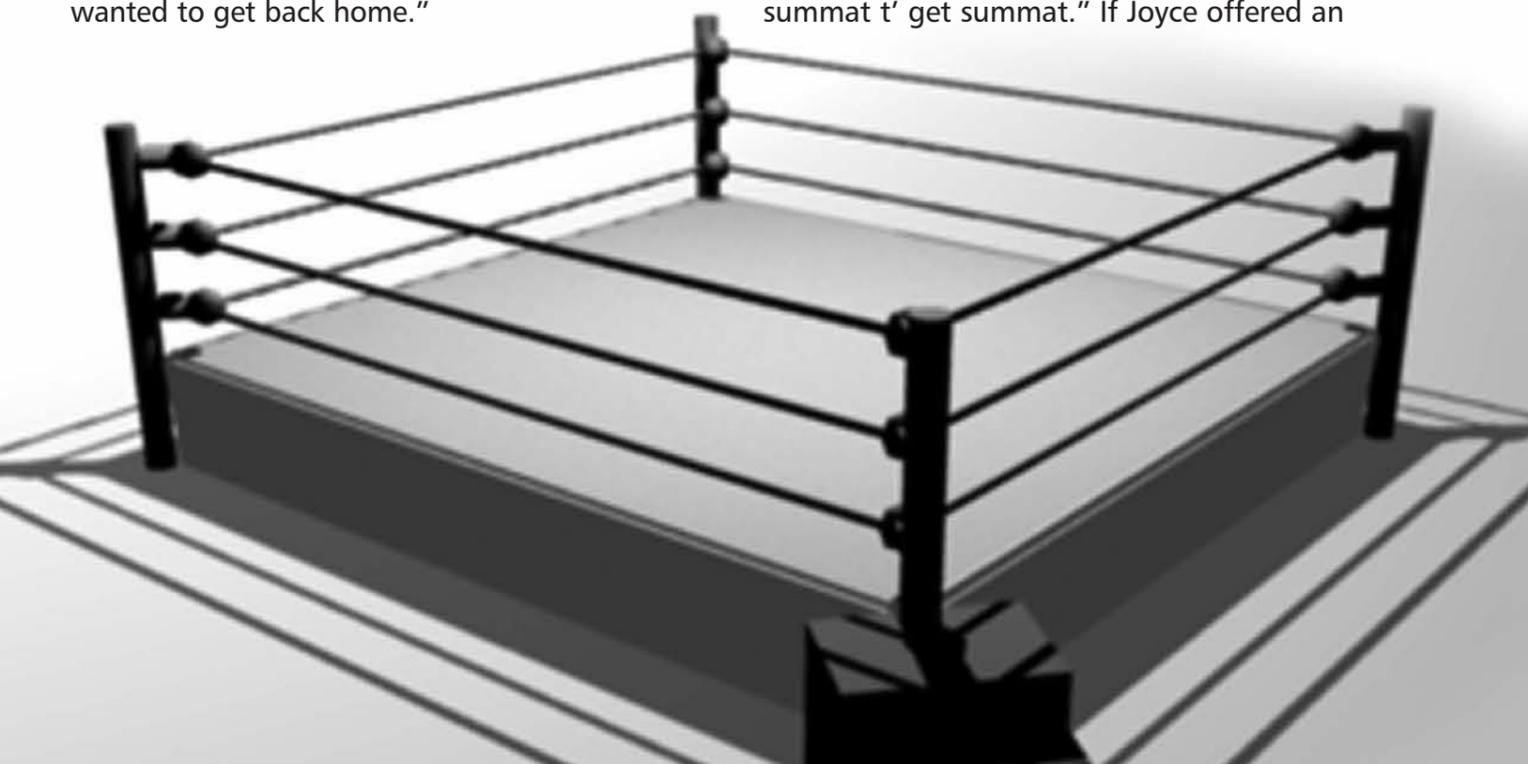
Joyce was said by Karel Istaz (Karl Gotch) to be the last great "ripper" of British wrestling (a shoot wrestler who could genuinely hurt an opponent if he wished). Billy took part in what many believe was the last genuine catch-as-catch-can shoot match for money, a behind closed doors bout against Arthur Belshaw, around 1950. Although just about everyone acknowledged Billy as the best catch wrestler, he suffered one of his rare defeats when his knee was damaged.

Lancastrians are known as straight forward sort of people. They take others as they find them and don't stand on ceremony. Billy Joyce was all of that. He was a straight forward, decent sort of man. Scratch beneath the surface, though,

and the complexities of the man become apparent.

Here was a wrestler who could really hurt an opponent, and yet he instinctively lacked the killer touch. Bill Robinson said, *"his only weakness was he was too nice, he wanted to beat you but not hurt you."*

Joyce was a man with a strong temper, not easily roused, but evident to all around him when it was. Family and friends tell of a placid man, a family man. Dorothy remembered her father as a shy man who shunned the limelight. "If a photo was being taken Bob would make sure he was on the back row," chipped in Dorothy's husband, Jimmy. This reluctance to push himself forward was undoubtedly one of the reasons that Billy was overshadowed by more extrovert wrestlers of his generation. Not that it mattered to Billy. He was content that his life was full of his two loves, his family and his wrestling.



The family always came first. Billy was married to Edna, and they had the one child, Dorothy. After each match Billy would return to Wigan and rarely missed a night at home. Even when wrestling in places as far away as Middlesborough or London Billy would get back in the car and drive home to arrive in the early hours of the morning. Mind you, that was easier than in the early days. When Billy first began wrestling, during the war, he would cycle to many matches. A small bag containing his gear, a hot or cold drink, and off he would go, wrestle his bout and then all the way home on his bike, raining or not. For matches further afield he would rely on a lift from one of the other local wrestlers, until he had saved enough to buy a small second hand car.

Family man Billy would sometimes reluctantly take Edna and Dorothy with him when wrestling locally. His reluctance was simply because he didn't like to see Dorothy's distress. "I wanted to go with my dad, but I used to get really upset," said Dorothy, "This was my dad and I couldn't understand why everyone was booing and shouting at him. I used to cry, and he would tell me that it was all alright, but I didn't understand."

Tragedy hit the close knit family on 8th October 1952. Many family members, including Billy, his brother Joe and sister Vera, were travelling with the third brother, Jimmy, on the Perth to Euston express, for Jimmy's return sailing from Southampton to his home in America. Shortly after 8.00 am their train and another collided in Harrow and Wealdstone station, with a third crashing into the wreckage minutes later. It was the worst rail accident in history. Three hundred and forty people were injured and a hundred and twelve died. Amongst the dead was Billy's sister, Vera.

Billy and Edna remained devoted to one another for over fifty years. Together they owned and ran a shop in Swann Street, Wigan. They were rarely apart until Edna's death in January, 2000. Billy was never to recover from his loss, and he himself passed away in September of the same year, two weeks before his eighty-fourth birthday. Jimmy Hart told us that everyone said he died of a broken heart.

Whilst Edna was his first love, Billy had another love, which was his wrestling. Wrestling was in the blood. Brother Joe had introduced him to the catch style whilst Billy was working at the colliery.

Billy would wrestle after his shift finished, initially for fun, then a student and later as a professional. Joe introduced him to Billy Riley who began to train the youngster. The professional career began in 1942. The family name, Bob Robinson, had to be discarded because a wrestler of that name was already active. Like most of the miners Billy was not particularly big. He was wiry rather than muscular, but very fit and strong.

For the next thirty years wrestling was to remain at the heart of Billy's life. Each day would begin and end with three hundred press-ups, add to that five hundred sit ups each morning, and a daily visit to Riley's Snakepit for more of a pull-around, perfecting his own techniques and bringing on the young 'uns, which was always important to Billy.

Amongst those young 'uns was a Belgian that came to Britain in 1950, and was to be a regular visitor for the next eight years. His name was Karel Istaz, but he later became famous in the USA as Karl Gotch. Istaz came to Britain for one reason only, and that was to learn how to really wrestle, at Riley's Snakepit. The man that taught him all he knew was Billy Joyce. Not only that, but Billy and Edna opened their home to the youngster, and he lived with the two of them whenever he came over to Wigan.

Billy's professional career saw him universally recognised as the very best, a British and European champion. Although he disliked travelling too far from home he did venture into Europe on occasions. His good friends Billy Robinson and Karel Istaz tempted him to Japan, but he refused all offers to wrestle in America. He couldn't have been an easy man to work with, for as Dorothy told us he knew he was the best and refused to let anyone better him. He always told her "If I can lick 'em, I'll lick em," which of course he did. There were some that were genuinely afraid and refused to get in the ring with him. For the most part, however, Billy Joyce was well liked by his colleagues because he was such a lovely man, and respected because his skill and knowledge rightfully commanded their respect. He may go to the back of a wrestling fans mind, just like he went to the back of the photograph, but Billy Joyce will never be forgotten.

Billy Joyce is remembered on the website www.wrestlingheritage.co.uk

VIEWS OF HINDLEY



Market Street, Hindley



Castle Hill, Hindley



**WIGAN
FOOD & DRINK
FESTIVAL 2008**

come dine with us

3rd - 13th October 2008

and celebrate taste and tradition



Come join us again for the second year of the Wigan Food & Drink Festival. This year you are invited to come dine and drink with us as we celebrate the tastes and traditions within Wigan.

WIGAN
LEISURE & CULTURE
TRUST

HITCHEN FOODS

Watch out for...

The Wigan Good Food Trail – a fine food trail comprising of a selection of the borough's best quality restaurants.

Oktoberfest – two mini real-ale festivals in association with Wigan Camra – one in Wigan, one in Leigh!
Café Culture – a celebration of the high street café. A specially commissioned photographic exhibition celebrating the high street cafes of Wigan Borough and their contribution to local and northern life.

Events programme – this year will include the Wigan Outdoor Market Kitchen Theatre, tasting events, cookery demonstrations and themed nights in our restaurants.

For more information telephone Wigan Tourist Information Centre on

01942 825677 or visit www.visitwigan.com

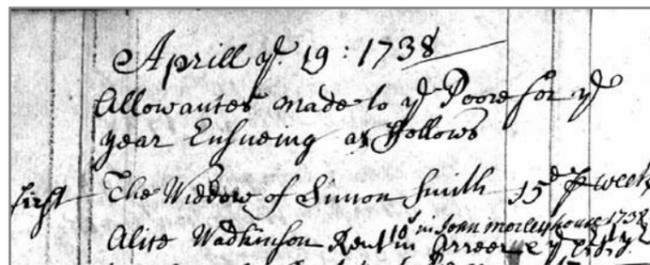
Help for the Deserving Poor

By R. Evans

18th Century Social Security

The 1601 Elizabethan Poor Law Act laid responsibility on the ratepayers within a community to provide for the welfare of the poor, the sick, disabled and orphaned or abandoned children. A local rate was levied and one of the ratepayers chosen to serve as Overseer of the Poor to provide this assistance. Pleas for help were heard at monthly ratepayers meetings. The minutes of these meetings in the township of Atherton between 1731 and 1767 still survive on the first 40 pages of a thick hard-backed book that appears to have been then used for another 50 years to enter a variety of other miscellaneous records. The following extracts illustrate the means by which the overseers attempted to ease the burden of poverty that was prevalent during this century and at the same time ensure that the ratepayers' money was not wasted.

The emphasis was on supporting the poor and destitute by wherever possible providing the means by which they could continue to work in their own homes and through their own efforts earn at least a small income. Those unable to work because of age or disability were provided with a small weekly payment, agreement for which was granted at the first meeting in the overseer's year.



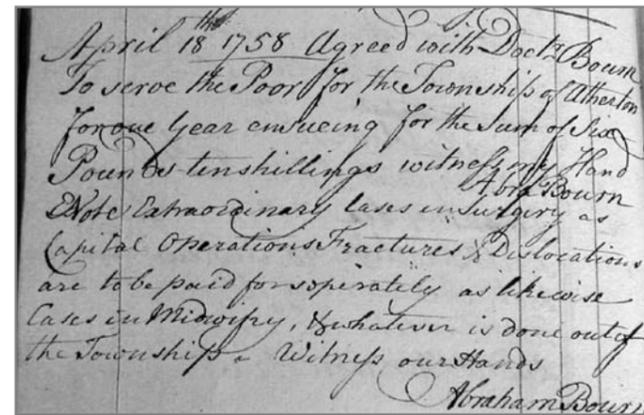
The majority of the townspeople were uneducated labourers who in many instances lacked the means to obtain both the tools necessary for their trade and the raw materials to work with. To make employment possible looms and cards were offered to handloom weavers. Similar assistance was given to, presumably, a nail-maker:

(1761/62) *Hired Thomas Harrison a pair Bellows From workhouse at 12d pr Quarter or Three Shilling for a whole year*

Even, if in employment, work could be irregular and wages were low, with the result that income was often still inadequate for basic needs. Each month decisions were made to pay rents and provide fuel, clothing and footwear. The 1743/44 minutes include:

"Tho' Hatton's Wife two Smocks Allow'd Ten Shillings tow'ds rent for Tho' Smith Allow'd Seven Shillings six pence towards Cloathing Robt Charlesson's blind child Civill Hilton two Shillings for tenting Wadkinson's Wife Allow'd Seven Shillings six pence towards John Smiths Rent's Betty Cowdall A pr of cards Sam Garstang One pound five Shillings towards rent A pr of Sheets for Ric'd Carefull's Wife A Coat for Jn Smith and making"

Medical treatment was available for people who were sick or had suffered injury and other township records include many bills and receipts for treatment given by local doctors:



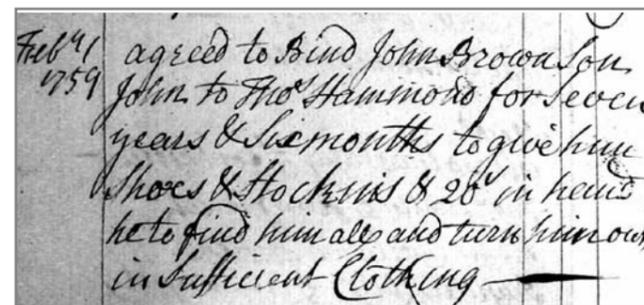
But not necessarily all the costs were met by the overseer:

(1747/48) *"Eleanor Harrison haveing broke her leg is allow'd 10d but they are to pay the Doctor"*

Help was also available for those unfortunate to have physical disabilities

(1758/59) *"Deaf Jane - 6d aweek Blind Jack 12d pr week but find himself Cloaths"*

Young children, many orphaned following the death of mothers or in some cases abandoned by parents, were either placed in the care of other townspeople or arrangements made to bind them as apprentices.



At the same meeting it was agreed:

"also Bound Mary Daughter of Saml Garstang to Israel Garnet for nine years 21 in hand and 21s 9th of feby 1760 he to find all and turn her out in Cloathing Suitable for Such an aprentice"

For those unable or unwilling to accept home support the alternative was the workhouse in Pennington where by being given employment they could contribute to the cost of their keep. This was not the preferred option and the overseer often offered the choice between

a small payment towards home support or going to the workhouse. Henry Harrison could choose:

(1752/53) *"16d pr week and then find yr Child Cloath's or go to the workhouse"*

Nevertheless throughout the period the minutes regularly record the names of townspeople who were sent there:

(1745/46) *"persons ordered for yr workhouse Abraham Harrison workhouse James Throp Joseph Dixon Do"*

Sometimes reasons are specified such as husbands deserting or being sent to the House of Correction. Richard Cowdall risked being sent there when payment was allowed for rent owing to Betty Cowdall for "Houseroom" but *"for yr future if he dos not pay as he goes on to go to the workhouse"*

In no way do the records suggest that life in the workhouse was unduly harsh. The response to the behaviour of Thomas Suddoth perhaps reflects this.

(1747/48) *"Octr 1 Whereas frequent complain has been made against Thos Suddoth & his wife's behaviour in the Workhouse Now he certifyrth that for the future he will behave as becomes an Inhabitant of that house. As witness his hand. Thos Suddoth His Mark"*

There is also evidence that care was given to spiritual as well as physical welfare.

"1736 May 6 Lant Rachell Smith a Bible Given to workhouse Shee promising to Return it back when Calld for By the Town"

There was no sympathy for the idle or those who particularly shirked responsibility for maintaining their families. The overseer had to justify his expenditure to the ratepayers:

(1743/44) *"Augst 3 every Overseer shall be obliged to bring in an acct of Money receiv'd and money Disburs'd regularly drawn out, so that at the Monthly Meeting every Contributor shall have Satisfaction to See how much is receiv'd, how much disburs'd & what is due to Ballance, either Dr or Cr"*

Hence the minutes include many decisions where relief was considered totally unjustified

(1747/48) *"May 7 Jn Rowson & Thos Bromiley to have Jn Battersby's Children at 12d each child the Town to find Cloaths. The Father to the House of Correction he refusing to pay 18d Week towards the Children."*

In the same year James Smith was given an option of either caring for his children or being placed in the workhouse:

"Apl 2d ordered James Smith 12d pr week and he promises to maintain his Children without further Charge of Rent or Clothes or go into workhouse"

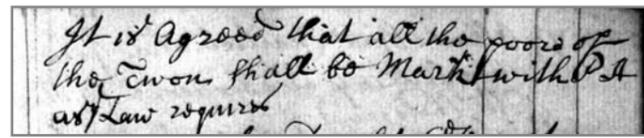
The 1756/57 minutes include:

*Jack Hallewell To the House of Correction for neglect of his Family
Henry Buckley's drinking was criticised but nevertheless it was agreed to pay his rent:
(754/55) "Henry Buckley Drink less and he will have fewer fitts but a quarters rent be pd"*

Similarly help was only available to people with a settlement in Atherton (basically born in the township). Those originating from elsewhere were expected to have a certificate naming their home township from where they should seek relief if they became destitute. A list was made of such outsiders without certificates, reflecting the fear that they could become an additional burden on the local ratepayers.

*"By Thos Young
October 16th 1749 Names of Inmates That have not Cirtificats –
Joseph Partington Lives with Nathaniel ?
Robert Kearsley Lives with John Worthington
Benjamin Asworth Lives with wm Simonds
John Oaks Lives In Lovers Lane with widow Hey"*

While the records indicate an element of compassion towards the needs of the poor they also make it clear that those who sought parish relief would be marked out as paupers. This was made clear to everyone within the community when in 1743/44 the following decision was taken:



The P was for Pauper and A for Atherton. The overseer's accounts of that year record payment to John Rider for making these badges - 20 at 1d each. Memories of this pauper stigma remained long after the Parish system was replaced as the provider of relief and served as a deterrent to many who could have been entitled to receive help.

Sources and Acknowledgement

All the quotations in this account are from the Allowance and Cash Book - TR Ath/C/2/29 in the archives in Leigh Town Hall. As the pages in it are not numbered the location of each extract is identified by the year in which it occurs either in the text or at the side of each (eg 1744/45). Thanks are due to the archivist and his assistants for making the records available for study.

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WIGAN LEISURE & CULTURE TRUST
In partnership with Wigan Council

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Every Thursday from the 29th July to 19th August at 1.00pm and 4.00pm

Price £5.00 children, £3.00 adults, family ticket (4 persons) £14.00.

Booking is essential, contact 01942 828128.



FAMILY HISTORY WORKSHOP DATES

**3rd, 17th September 2008
1st, 15th, 29th October 2008
26th November 2008
10th December 2008**

Sessions are at 1.30am and 3.00pm and cost £2.50 per session.

Please note that if the above dates are inconvenient, we can arrange workshops for other afternoons.

To book telephone **01942 828128**, or call in at The History Shop.

VICTORIAN HOLIDAYS

Take a step back in time and discover how the Victorians spent their holidays. Find out what they did for fun, places they visited and how holidays have changed. Take part in a craft activity. Suitable for children aged 5-11. Booking essential contact: **01942 828128**.

Date: Tuesday 28th October Time: 1.00pm-2.00pm.
Price: £2.00 per child.
Venue: The History Shop, Library Street, Wigan.

WITCHES & WIZARDS

Eye of newt and wing of bat, toe of frog and tail of rat, come and cast a magic spell, and create some spooky tales to tell.

In your fancy dress you'll come, to undertake some fiendish fun, to make a mask will be your task, then you must do what we ask!

Suitable for children aged 5-11.
Booking essential contact: **01942 828128**.

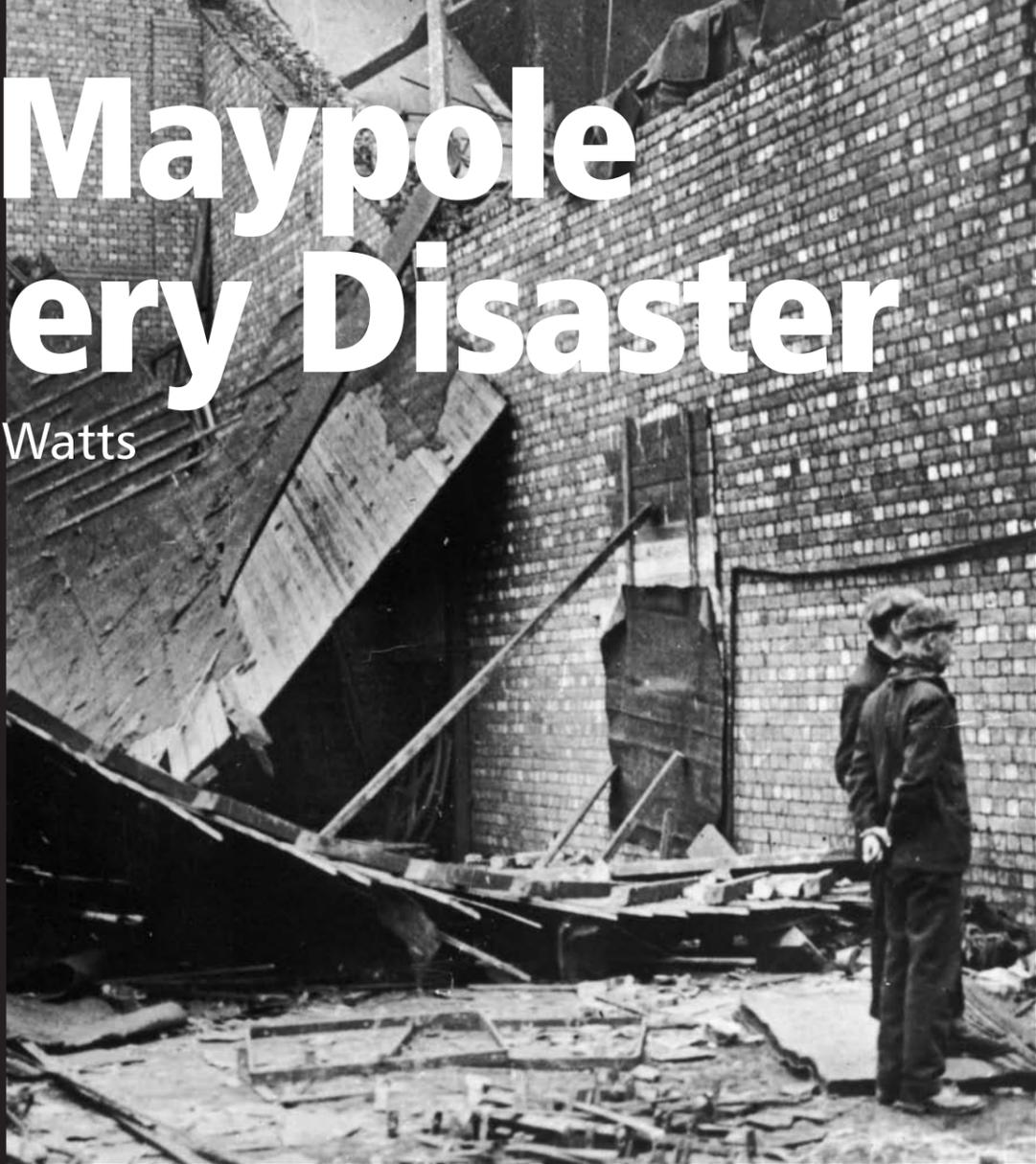
Dates: Wednesday 29th-Friday 31st October.
Time: 1.00-3.00pm Price: £3.50 per child.
Venue: The History Shop, Library Street, Wigan.

ALL EVENTS SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN AGED 4-11 YEARS ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT. PLACES ARE LIMITED, SO BOOKING WITH PRE-PAYMENT IS ESSENTIAL.

The Maypole Colliery Disaster

by Chris Watts

This year sees the 100th anniversary of the explosion at Maypole Colliery, Abram and the loss of 75 lives. A new memorial marks the spot on a new housing development, where once the sprawling colliery and its attendant paraphernalia once stood.



The damaged ventilating house.

The pit was owned by Moss Hall Collieries and employed several hundred men. On the morning of the explosion, Tuesday 18th August 1908, the Mine Manager Mr Arthur Rushton was returning from his holiday. At the Coroner's Inquest he said that on approaching home he heard a low rumble and saw a cloud of dust. He immediately went to the Colliery where he saw that some of the fan house masonry had been blown away. The headgear to No. 1 pit was partly demolished and the cage was down below.

There were two shafts which gave access to tunnels several hundred feet below ground and which in turn connected with adjoining collieries at Wigan Junction and Bickershaw. Rushton got the under-manager to take a rescue party down the shaft at Wigan Junction Pit and to enter the Seven Feet Mine that way. Having done that, Rushton got the engineman to knock down the No. 2 pit. Minutes later, having got a signal from the rescue party from the Seven Feet Mine, Rushton concluded that the seam was clear at that point.

The rescue party continued but soon encountered rubble which blocked the roadway. Having cleared the roadway and been joined by men from Wigan Junction, the rescue parties began to move forward. Fortunately, a little over an hour before the explosion the men from the day shift had returned to the surface, leaving only the shot-firers, firemen and general maintenance men below. There were therefore 78 men remaining below.

As relatives gathered on the surface waiting for news of

their loved ones, the rescuers slowly made their way through clogged roadways, through foul air and dust and rising temperatures. Breathing became difficult, and with one rescuer showing signs of acute distress, the party prepared to return to the surface. They came across three uninjured men, William Doran, Edward Farrell and Richard Fairhurst. The three lone survivors were working in the Seven Feet Mine, the rest, all 75, were working in the Four Feet Mine.

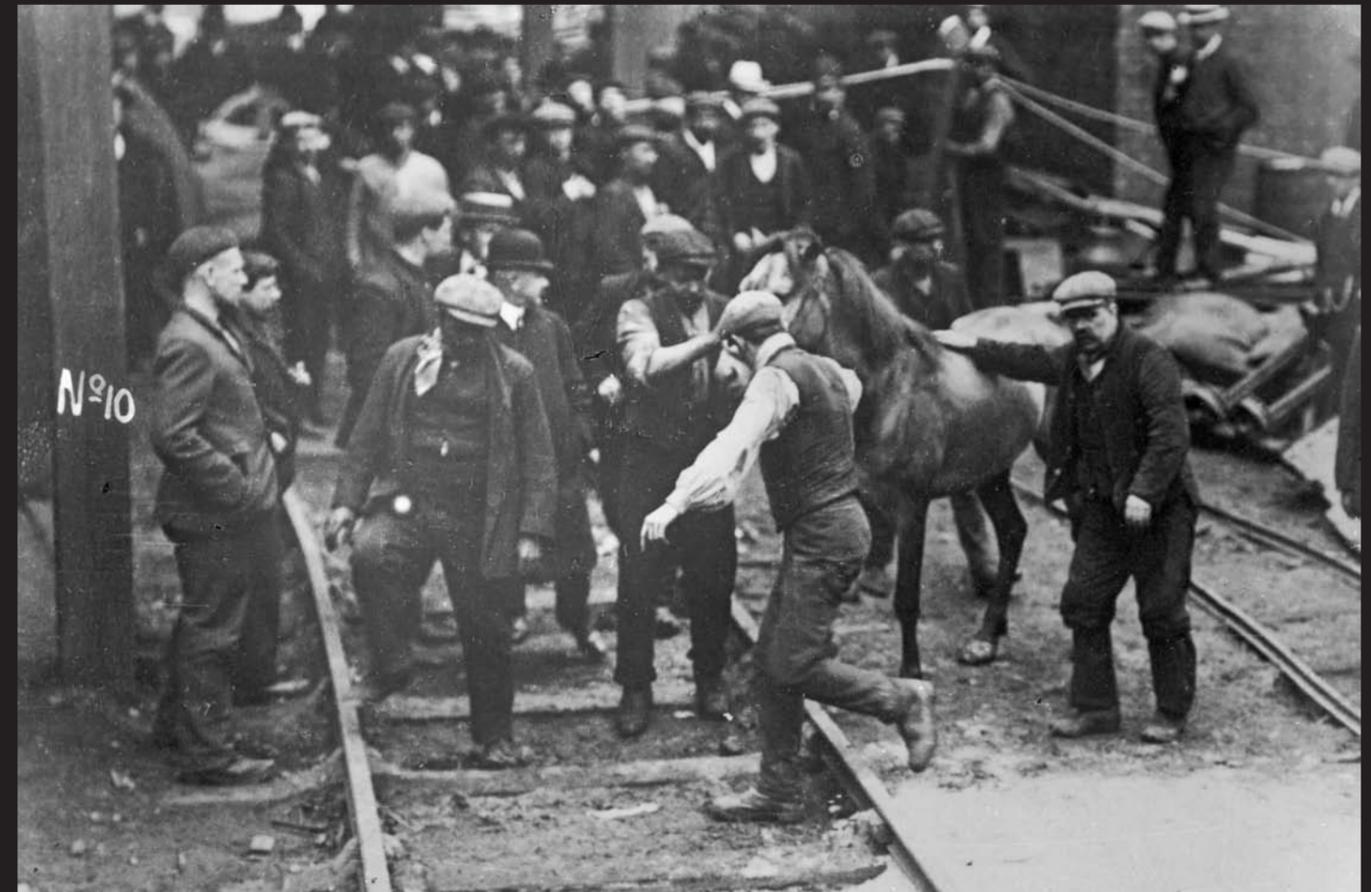
Around 9 o'clock that night, Rushton descended No. 2 shaft again, this time with Mr Hall, His Majesty's Inspector of Mines, and a rescue party from Garswood. Several hours later they came across the first badly charred body.

Others were soon found. Late in the afternoon of the following day, a list naming the victims was issued. So far only seven bodies had been found and 70 were presumed dead. One man, William Moore, originally counted as a victim, was later located working above ground. He had mislaid his tally and had not reported the fact. His name would later be added erroneously to the commemorative postcard as a victim. George Melling also was found alive and to be on the list of the dead. He too had lost his tally. Again he would be listed, complete with photo, on the postcard!

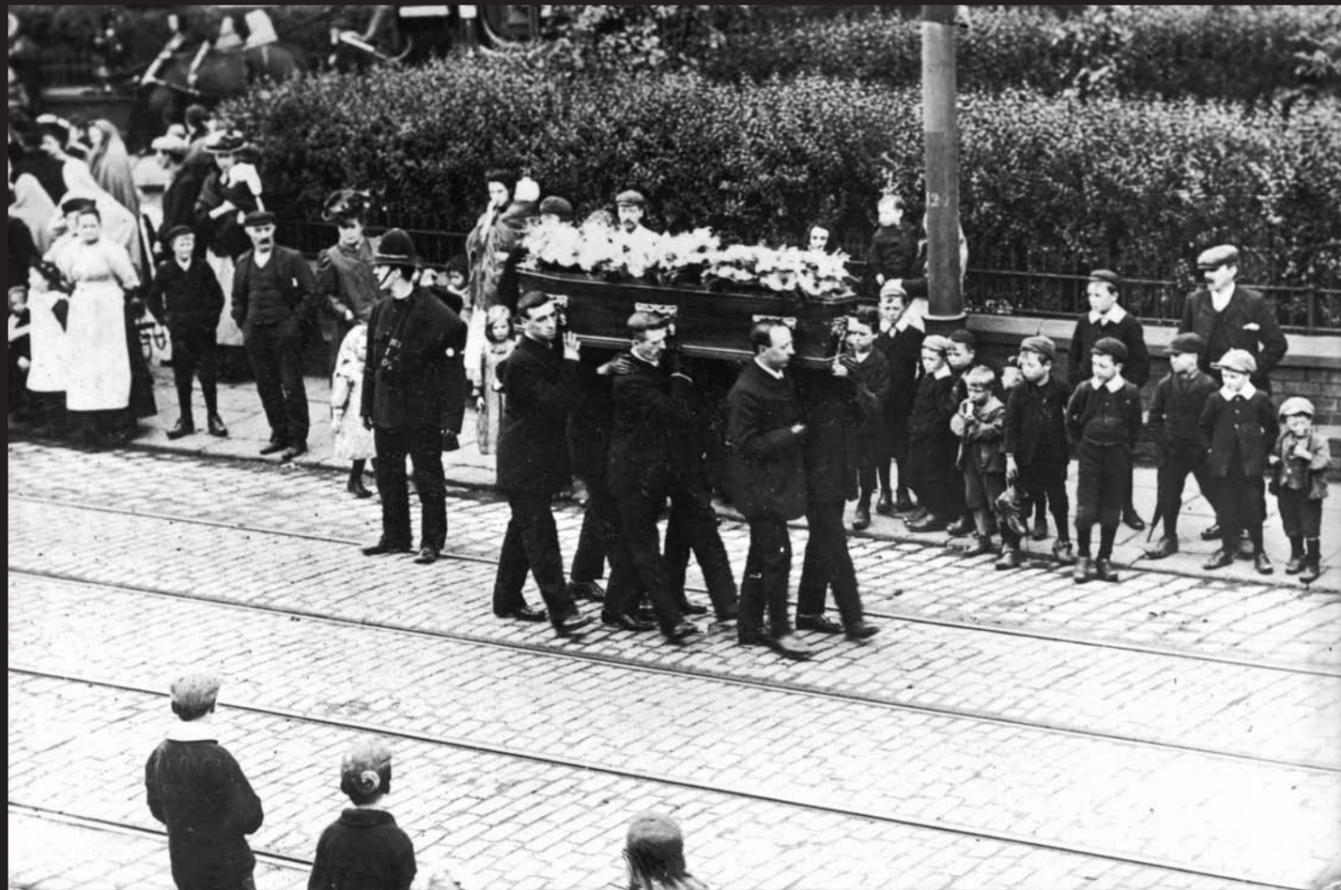
The rescue party was still bringing bodies to the surface when a second explosion occurred. They ran for their

lives. Fire swept through Wigan Four Feet igniting pockets of gas and thus causing further explosions. It was then realised that two men were still below ground in the pumping station. Tom Morris and James Fox volunteered to go below to find them. Armed with only wet cloths for their faces, they were lowered down once more. Having found the barely conscious men, they came back to the surface.

The water pumps were now out of action and water was fast filling the tunnels. This continued with further pumps being turned off to direct water to areas on fire. The fire raged on for four weeks with more explosions occurring, the last terrible one happening on Sunday September 14th. In all



Bringing up the pit ponies.



The funeral of Albert Draper 22.8.1908

it was estimated that 100 million gallons of water were poured down the shafts. Further rescue was out of the question as was searching for evidence of the cause of the original explosion until the water subsided. After starting an inquest into the deaths of the seven recovered men, the Coroner adjourned and later reconvened the court when it became obvious that the water level would not go down quickly and bodies would not be recovered in the immediate future. The inquest was finally closed on July 8th 1909 after 23 sessions.

The verdict arrived at was death by an explosion caused by a mixture of coal dust and gas, fired by a shot using a permitted explosive but where all reasonable precautions were

not taken. Men had been allowed to work where there was gas and at the time when shot was being fired. If this alone had been observed the death toll would have been two or three instead of 75.

During the week beginning Monday 11th August 2008 there will be exhibitions in St John's Church at Abram as well as in the former Abram Library. The week will end with a special service in the church on the 18th followed by a procession to the memorial. For more details of the celebrations please contact St John's Vicarage.

Sources.

Wigan Observer August 1908
The Maypole Colliery Explosion. Coroner's Inquiry. Ackers and Macquiban.
Mining Disasters
John Hannavy and Roy Lewis
The Maypole: diary of a colliery disaster.



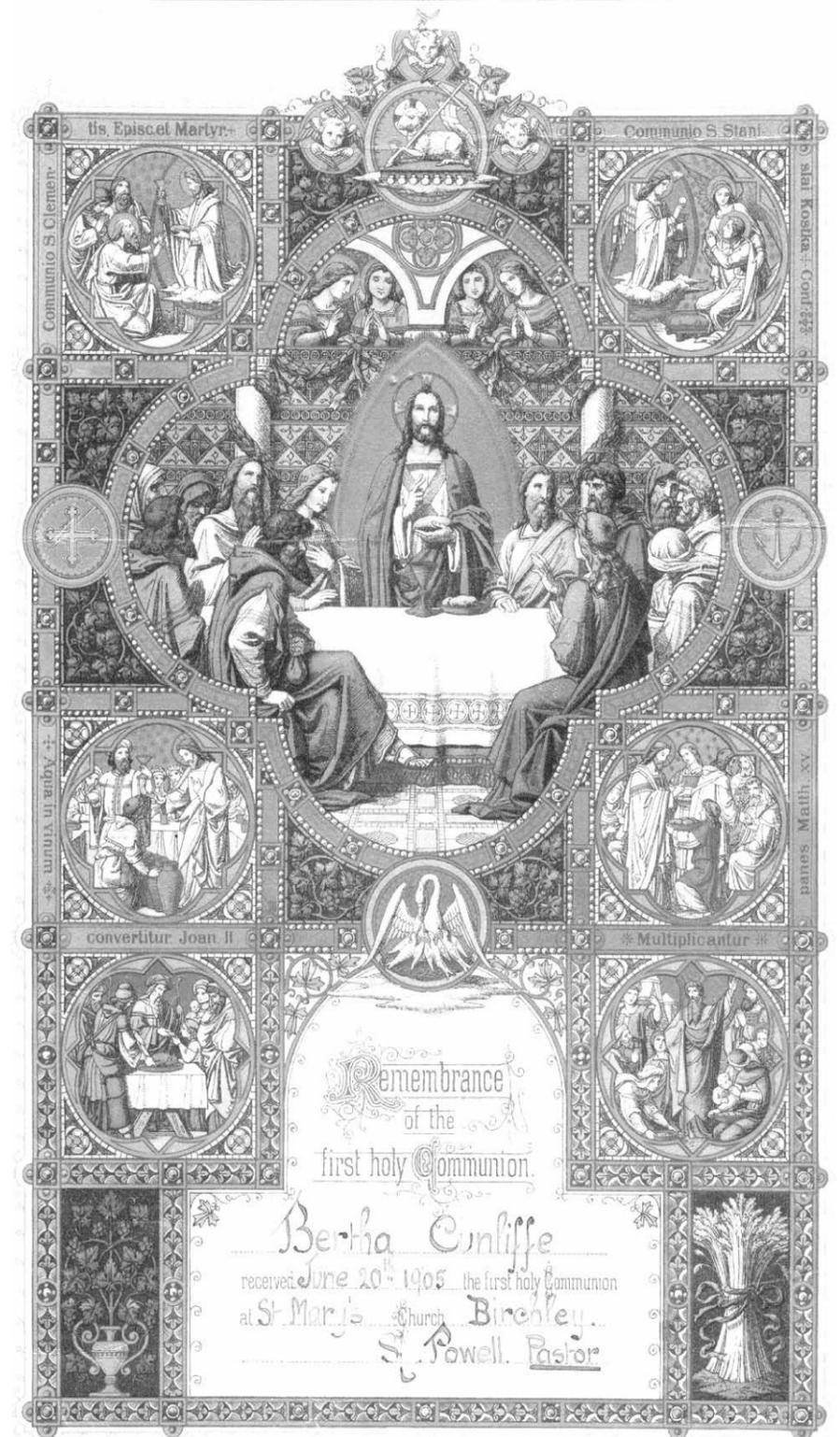
A rescue team.

Bertha Cunliffe Communion Certificate

Reader Cecilia Hughes has found this First Communion Certificate issued to Bertha Cunliffe on 20th June 1905 at St Mary's Church Birchley.

She is willing to give it to relatives of Bertha.

Anyone with information, or if you are a relative of Bertha, please contact the Editor, and your details will be passed to Cecilia Hughes.



Heritage Open Weekend

Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th September 2008

Contact
01942 828128
 for further details

By Yvonne Eckersley

Spanish Flu

Spring 1918 to Spring 1919 in Leigh, Atherton & Tyldesley

It was a cruel twist of fate that the nations whose armies had been at war for four years, and whose populations had suffered from the absence and loss of their young men, were to experience an epidemic of sickness and death on an unprecedented scale.

The so called 'Spanish Flu' pandemic is reputed to have killed between 50 and 100 million people world-wide. The estimate for British deaths is 230,000. There were three main visitations of the disease, summer 1918, autumn 1918 and spring 1919. The Leigh Medical Officer of Health, Dr J Clay Beckitt, recorded more than 100 deaths. Atherton experienced approaching 100 and Tyldesley approximately 60. Many hundreds more were incapacitated.

This 'flu' did not originate in Spain. It was labelled 'Spanish Flu' (or the Spanish Lady) because Spain, as a neutral country, openly reported its presence at a time when the British and Allies' censors suppressed reports in an effort to maintain morale. It is reputed to have begun in an American training camp, and then taken to the trenches. Once there, owing to the confined conditions, it spread. From there it was carried throughout the world and in Britain no doubt, via soldiers returning on leave or invalided home.

The disease could not have come at a worse time. Nationally and locally medical services were struggling to cope, as many doctors had been posted to care for wounded soldiers in France, thus leaving the civilian population short of medical staff. The Leigh Chronicle reported the strain on medical professionals stating they "work from morning until late at night with scarcely time for meals" (12th July 1918).

For Britain's War effort the 'flu' epidemic resulted in great losses of production as factories experienced huge staff shortages. The Leigh, Atherton and

Tyldesley Chronicle reported that many collapsed at work and had to be taken home ill. There were "a good many at Chanters Pits belonging to Messrs Fletcher, Burrows & Co. Ltd." so affected, and "a number of men at the Bolt works of Messrs Bullough, Blakemore and Prestwich are off work with it" (July 1918)

The effect of the epidemic on individuals and communities was devastating. The human cost was more hardship, owing to the loss of income, since there was little or no financial support system in place to help. In many towns and cities public feeding stations were provided. Locally it was "resolved there was no need at that time" for a communal kitchen (May 1918).

As so many men were fighting in France, the brunt of the burden of coping with the disease fell on the female population. The situation for so many became bleak. The local Medical Officers of Health recognised the tendency of women to become exhausted caring for the ill. "The mother, who may be suffering herself, feels it incumbent on her to do the nursing, with the consequence, sometimes fatal, always harmful" (Atherton Council Minute Book 20th Feb 1919).

This encouraged the Councils to provide extra nursing care for "the seriously ill who had no one to look after them" (Feb 1919). The "services of the Health Visitor and School Nurse" were thus directed and "two or three home helps" were employed and placed with families in most need. In one such family every member had the disease.

The female population suffered most from the illness. Dr J Clay Beckitt (MOH) asserts in his Special Report on the Influenza in 1918 that three quarters of influenza deaths were females between the ages of 15 and 45. Similarly in Wigan and Warrington the high proportion of female deaths was noted. A dominant feature of the deaths was the age range of its victims. Where normally deaths from influenza came from the weaker sections of society (elderly, ill or young children) the overwhelming numbers of deaths were among young, fit people.

Other features of this specific strain of influenza included the speed with which death occurred after the first symptoms were identified. Many of the deaths notified occurred often within "a few days". Thus a 21-year old female spinner "died on the 4th day of illness" (July 1918) and a 37-year old was "two days ill" (Aug 1918). Also "in some cases an attack one day has been followed by death the day after" (Oct 1918).

Not surprisingly there was a concerted effort to contain and prevent spread of the disease. National initiatives were applied locally. Educative pamphlets and posters were produced and circulated. Local schools were closed when the disease was at its most dangerous and school children were prevented from attending any public amusements whilst these closures were in force. These venues, whilst remaining open to adults, were required to close for at least a half hour interval between performances. This was to allow for the opening of all doors and windows, in an effort to replace the stale air with fresh.

The first visitation of the 'Flu' coincided with the annual holidays. This was considered a positive coincidence insofar as the closure of schools and workplaces was said to have reduced temporarily the effects of the disease. Dr. J Clay Beckitt's 1918 report states "a factor which I consider contributed to the moderation of the epidemic locally, was the school and general holiday falling just at the beginning". Although this may have proved beneficial to the population as a whole, the tragedy of individual deaths was compounded by the fact that many people contracted the disease, and even died, whilst on holiday. At a time when holidays at the seaside were still a rare treat this seems particularly cruel. The Chronicle and the Journal report that in Leigh "a twenty-six year old (was) brought home from Blackpool", and "a twenty-nine year old widow died in Blackpool". In Tyldesley "a number of cases (were) brought home from Blackpool and the Isle of Man" and in Atherton a 37-year old contracted the disease in Blackpool and died a fortnight later. A particular tragedy is the death of a 37-year old from Dukinfield Street, who was the mother of five children, and whose husband had been killed in action. One can only wonder what became of the children. The closure of local elementary schools and the denial of access to public places of amusement were strategies employed during all three visitations. However, Leigh Grammar School was closed just twice, in

November and February and the library on one occasion in November 1918.

Local people were not the only casualties. German Prisoners of War interred at Leigh lost four men and in one week in December 1918, there were forty sufferers in hospital. Many local services were stretched. In February 1919, The Journal reported that "during the first four days of the week there were 22 internments at Leigh Cemetery... rather more than the average number" and in July 1918 "owing to an outbreak at the Workhouse visiting has been prohibited".

Given the horrendous nature of the Pandemic one could be forgiven for wondering why it did not have a higher profile at the time. But on reflection the relative absence of press coverage as the disease raged, can be interpreted as one of degree. The War, with its unprecedented horrors naturally dominated the pages of the press. A high priority for the local press was to report on the War. This included lists and photographs of local war dead. Much space was given to details of rationing as well as the prosecution of those who sought to profit from the War. There were special appeals for money for war equipment and in particular, reports of various charitable efforts to support the soldiers at the front (including one that provided cigarettes for soldiers or "Smokes for soldiers"). Winning the War was therefore the priority.

Once the Armistice was signed on the 11th November 1918, reporting on the wholesale relief of the people and the joyous celebrations filled the newspapers. The anticipated return of soldiers and the return to normality preoccupied local people and authorities alike. Peace time political campaigning for the 1918 General Election, which for the first time included the newly enfranchised masses, had as its emphasis a sense of new beginnings and a better life.

Sources.

Leigh Council Minute books 1918-1919

Atherton Council Minute Book 20 Feb 1919

Leigh Medical Officer of Health's Report to Leigh Council 1918

Leigh Atherton and Tyldesley Chronicle

Leigh Chronicle

Leigh Journal

Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal

Jane Austen

By Bob Blakeman

and a Wigan M.P.

At the end of July 1806, Mrs Austen and her two unmarried daughters Cassandra and the future novelist, Jane, set out to visit Mrs Austen's cousin, the Rev. Thomas Leigh, Rector of Adlestrop in Gloucestershire. They arrived at the rectory to find the household in a state of excitement. The Rev. Thomas had recently been informed that he, his nephew James Leigh, and another relative James Leigh Perrot, had all been left an interest in a very valuable property, the owner of which had recently died. This property was Stoneleigh Abbey, a Palladian mansion set in thousands of acres of fertile land on the banks of the River Avon in Warwickshire.

The Rev. Thomas was soon to receive a letter from his lawyer, Mr Hill, to state that he and his wife would be arriving at the rectory on 4 August, and that they needed to go to Stoneleigh directly on business concerning his inheritance.

Naturally the Austens were invited to accompany the party, and in due course they arrived at Stoneleigh.

While the Rev. Thomas and his lawyer were busy with legal matters, the Austens took the opportunity to explore the mansion. Artistically this was a profitable time for Jane: she used Stoneleigh Abbey as the basis for Sotherton Court in her novel *Mansfield Park*.

During the next few days various other friends and relations arrived at Stoneleigh. On 12th August they were joined at dinner by Robert Holt Leigh, at that time a Member of Parliament for Wigan, who entertained them all with his lively conversation, which he peppered with classical quotations, as was his habit. (This would have impressed Jane as she valued academic learning highly). He was a friend of James Leigh, and was at Stoneleigh presumably to keep an eye on his friend's interests. In a letter Mrs Austen described him as, "a single man, the wrong side of forty; chatty and well bred, and has a large Estate."

Robert Holt Leigh was the product of two powerful families that had virtually controlled the economic and

political life of the Wigan district for decades: the Holts and the Leighs.

Originally the wealth of these two families was derived from agricultural land, but with the coming of the Industrial Revolution they became involved in canal-building, coalmining and iron founding. Robert Holt Leigh's paternal grandfather, Alexander Leigh, and his business partner Robert Holt were instrumental in the construction of the Douglas Navigation, a forerunner of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. Alexander Leigh married Robert Holt's daughter, and their son Holt Leigh inherited Whitely Hall, Wigan, the home of one branch of the Holt Family. He purchased Hindley Hall, Aspull; acquired the manors of Orrell and Billinge, and bought land in Heath Carnock. His son Robert Holt Leigh continued to expand the family estates. He demolished the old Hindley Hall, built the present one to his own design and resided there. He was active in politics, and represented Wigan in Parliament from 1802 to 1820. He was made baronet in 1815.

Jane Austen, by contrast, lived in genteel poverty, but she could at least claim distinguished relations on her mother's side. As well as being related to the Barons Leigh of Stoneleigh, she was also related to the Dukes of Chandos. Mrs Austen believed Robert Holt Leigh to be a very distant relation, but this is questionable. It has been both asserted and denied by various authorities that they were both descended from Hamon de Legh, who was lord of a moiety of High Legh, Cheshire, in the time of Henry II.

It has been suggested by one of Jane's biographers that Mrs Austen encouraged Jane to "set her cap" at Robert Holt Leigh. Although there is no documentary evidence for this, it is a reasonable assumption. Like Mrs Bennett in Jane's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Austen had daughters she wanted to marry off; and there was Jane, at thirty years of age past her sell-by date on the marriage market, sitting opposite a single man, older than herself and in "possession of a good fortune."

At first glance the couple would appear to have little in common. Robert Holt Leigh was an industrialist and entrepreneur from Lancashire, a region that was at the forefront of technological change; whereas Jane was the daughter of a clergyman and lived in rural

Hampshire, where agricultural practices were slow to change. Yet they had much in common. Both were Tories in their politics, staunch Anglicans in their religion, and both were highly educated.

However, nothing came of their meeting. Neither Jane nor Robert Holt Leigh ever married, although later in life Robert Holt Leigh had an illegitimate son. (Jane would not have been impressed by that!)

When she was a child, Jane amused herself by writing fictional entries in her clergyman father's marriage register, with herself as the bride and various other imaginary men as the grooms. Perhaps we may allow ourselves a similar flight of fancy, and imagine what would have happened if Jane had married Robert Holt Leigh. Well, she would have lived at Hindley Hall, mixed with the best of Lancashire society, and, who knows, perhaps written a novel set in Wigan!



THE HISTORY SHOP

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

WITCHES AND WIZARDS

Eye of newt and wing of bat, toe of frog and tail of rat, come and cast a magic spell, and create some spooky tales to tell.

In your fancy dress you'll come, to undertake some fiendish fun, to make a mask will be your task, then you must do what we ask!

DATES: Wednesday 29th-Friday 31st October 2008
TIME: 1.00pm-3.00pm **PRICE:** £3.50 per child
VENUE: The History Shop, Library Street, Wigan

Suitable for children aged 5 to 11 years. **Booking essential.**

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Do you Remember?

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS IS THE SECOND INSTALLMENT OF MR DAKIN'S MEMORIES, SEE THE FIRST IN ISSUE 48

By Mr E Dakin

She who must be obeyed!

Although most husbands would never admit to it, the woman of the house was in sole charge of the purse strings. Every Friday night he would hand over his pay packet, and expect very little in return. Perhaps an odd shilling for a pint and a packet of woodbines, but there was always money put to one side for the rent collector, Christmas club, and other necessities.

That's entertainment

There were enough silver screens in Wigan's town centre alone to keep everybody more than happy. The Ritz, County, Pavilion, and the Palace, gave us hours of pleasure - matinees and evening shows, six days a week, every week. Just for a change, there was our very own music-hall, the Hippodrome. With a wide range of acts, from real drama to farce, you couldn't go wrong, all honest to goodness entertainment; and not a single Anglo-Saxon obscenity to be heard.

What about the cigarette smoke in these places? Nearly everyone smoked, especially men. The swirl and drift of expelled smoke was everywhere. They must have had fantastic ventilation. Smoking in those days was the working man's drug. It helped him to relax and take brief respite from the toils and troubles of struggle, especially while watching a good film or having a pint.

I will never forget that place of refuge, The Three Crowns, where local entertainers helped us if only for a short while to forget our trials and

tribulations, Paddy on the piano, Harry tenor solo and Mavis soprano. My mate Billy was the finest accordionist for miles around. Every Saturday night, I, his friend for life, played an important role in this world of entertainment. In between satisfying drinks of lovely complimentary beer, I would strenuously turn the pages of his music, while Billy, down to his shirt sleeves, and tie undone, rattled out all the favourite tunes of the day 'Danny Boy', 'Just a Song at Twilight', 'Bless this House' and many others.

When time was called there was always a finale of singsongs. Finally, on the way home, a call for fish and chips followed by some raucous street singing, then home to bed. What a night!

The clothes of the day

These were the hard times of 'make do and mend'. Nothing was thrown away unless it was completely useless. Clothes were worn to the extreme, and always neatly patched and sewn to extend wear. Children's clothing was passed down to the next in line, until it finally became too shoddy to wear. If you were lucky enough to wear something new, like shoes or a jacket, there was always a flippant observation to be endured. "Now, mate, what shop did you break into?" Or, if it was something that didn't suit some wearer who was passing by "Look at 'ere, shop must 'ave been giving them away for free" It was all said without malice or intent; in days when folk wanted things they couldn't have, but didn't give a damn, and just got on with living the best way they could.



Wigan Hippodrome

The power of the community

Do you remember before the demolition men moved in, and whole communities had to move out? I do. I was born and bred in a part of Wigan where trust, compassion, and comradeship went hand in hand, when a knock on a neighbour's front door didn't warrant an answer, you lifted the latch, walked right in, sat down, accepted a cup of tea, and had a good natter. Where are they now, these friends and neighbours? Scattered like seeds on barren ground, pressing TV remotes and remembering the past.

Remembering those carefree Sunday, childhood jaunts along the canal to Gathurst, armed to the teeth with jam butties and bottles of tap water, I can see those breadcrumbs floating around in those bottles. Then came the walk home, sun-tanned, tired and starving of hunger; to be greeted with mouth-watering aromas of mam's scrumptious homemade

bread and cakes and pies; and of course, custard, blancmange and jelly. After tea we went back outside playing street games until dusk; followed by a thorough scrub-down at the slop stone, then up the wooden hill to bed. How can you ever forget where you were born and bred, where neighbours loved, cried, laughed, married and died.

A Christmas Prediction

And I remember a snuff taking mystic neighbour who read tea leaves. Legend has it that she once made a prediction that the husband of one of her clients would lose a leg. That Christmas Eve, that same woman sent her husband to do some Christmas shopping, with strict instructions to buy a nice piece of lamb. And doing what comes naturally to most men at Christmas time, he nipped into The Three Crowns pub, had one too many, and left all his shopping, including a nice leg of lamb in the snug. He never did get that leg back!

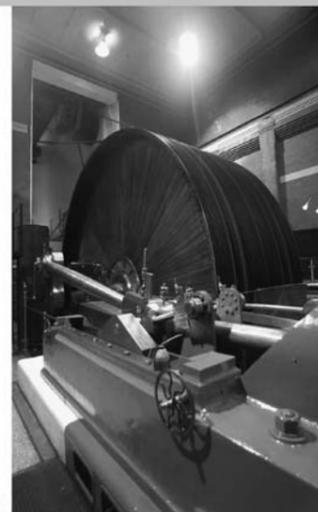
SEE THE MIGHTY TRENCHERFIELD MILL STEAM ENGINE!

Built in 1907 and recently restored to its former glory, discover the fascinating history of the engine.

Hear talks from the engineers and enjoy an exciting audio-visual show.

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Roy Crabtree

Dear Editor

During the last War I attended Ince Rose Bridge Secondary Modern School and left at the age of 14 with a letter of recommendation from the Headmaster, Mr F Staveley, to my first employers.

I took my place at the Wigan Coal Corporation offices at Kirkless, New Springs. Kirkless was the hub of the Corporation's coal industry, which included engineers' fitting shops, stores and all the main offices with many departments from wages to coal sales. I was the boy assistant in the porter's lodge delivering correspondence to all departments. I remember on the day of the board meetings waiting at the main office entrance for the arrival of Lord Crawford, Earl of Balcarres, who was the Chairman of the Board, I would open his car door and carry his briefcase to the boardroom.

It was expected of my age group that we should attend evening school classes for further education - I still have my certificates for bookkeeping, shorthand and arithmetic. I had begun to have piano lessons at the age of 11 and, by age 14, was able to appear on concerts for the War effort, playing the piano accordion.

At the age of 15, during one of my evening classes, the classroom door opened and in came my father, accompanied by Mr Tom Barnes, the Ince

Council Chairman. They spoke to the teacher and I was ushered out to an awaiting car which contained my piano accordion in the boot. It was explained to me on the way to Ince Public Hall that a company of American soldiers had booked the hall for the evening and the American dance band had failed to arrive.

I remember it as though it was yesterday, entering the hall, seeing about 200 soldiers, and may be as many young ladies (some local), and making my way up to the hall stage. There was a man with a saxophone, a man with a violin and a young lady at the piano, who I knew as Dorothy Rawson (her father had a grocer's store opposite St William's Church). There was also a young American soldier sitting behind a drum kit. I remember his words to this day that he said to me, "Hi, My name is Hal, what's yours?"

We somehow got through the evening, playing the tunes of the day and they danced, they sang and they drank their drinks. Every time I think of the film "Saving Private Ryan" I think of these soldiers, and especially Hal, and wonder how many of them returned home. My father told me later that they were to be in the first draft onto the beaches of Normandy on D Day.

After playing at this function, this was the start of my days as a dance band leader for the next 23 years in and around Wigan, but that is another story

Roy Crabtree
Llandudno

Harry Glover

Dear Editor

Having been out of touch with my native Wigan for some years I was interested recently to receive a subscription to 'Past Forward' from my brother, Jack Glover, who lives in Gidlow Lane, Wigan.



My attention was attracted in Issue 48 by the photograph of St. John's Ambulance Brigade, sent in by Mrs M J Vizard. In the picture I identified one of the persons in the group as my father, Harry Glover. He can be seen as the only subject who wears the full set of three Great War medals. The existence this photograph was unknown to me and other family members, although we were aware of the Ambulance brigade.

I have never had an interest in family history but this photograph aroused curiosity for more details about my father's background. After some research, I found that he was

born in 1892, at Billinge Road, Pemberton. He attended St Cuthbert's RC School until the age of 12. This was the only formal education he received. No information has been available concerning his employment on leaving school. However, what is known is that at the age of 15, he was orphaned and homeless; his older siblings having left home some years earlier. Such welfare authorities that existed at that time allocated him a place for training at sea. The ship owners, Booth Line of Liverpool, agreed to employ him on the S.S. Basil, a cargo vessel on the South American trade run. The Basil visited Brazil and Peru via the Amazon, then on to Mexico and the USA. Finally, they collected a cargo of cotton in Galveston, Texas to take back to Liverpool, where the crew were then 'paid off'. Now 17 years old and homeless, he joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Seaman. He was to remain in the Service for eleven years, travelling to many parts of the world.

In the war which was soon to follow, the S.S. Basil fell victim to a German torpedo in the English Channel. Its cargo of munitions destined for the British Army in Flanders was lost together with its crew. My father served the entire war at sea and was involved in several engagements, notably in May 1916, when he took part in the Battle of Jutland when serving in HMS Revenge. After the end of hostilities he came out of the Navy in 1919, returning as ever

to Wigan. For some years he lived in the Wallgate area. He married and started a family. He was employed at Pemberton Colliery as a miner until 1925.

In that year he secured employment as a labourer at Wigan Electricity Works, where he spent the remainder of his working life. Always a man with a strong sense of public duty, he spent much of his time in what he perceived as contributing to the welfare of others. His membership of the Ambulance Brigade is one example. It ought to be remembered that those were the years before the NHS, and people had no recourse to Accident and Emergency Departments. Brigade members gave their service free of charge. They were required to fund their own equipment by way of antiseptics, bandages and the like, for which they received no reimbursement.

In the years between the wars he became very active in the charity side of the British Legion, acting as Secretary, and member of its Benevolent Committee in Wigan. In spite of these commitments he somehow found time to support Trade Union activities, and for some years was Wigan Secretary of the T.G.W.U. Always with an interest in local politics, he was elected as a member of Wigan Town Council after the end of the Second World War. He remained a Councillor until his death in 1962 at the age of 70.

I do not know when the photograph was taken, but my guess would be 1937; Coronation year. The wearing of medals by the Brigade suggests a ceremonial rather than operational event. That year, as I remember, was filled with rallies, parades, fetes etc. The Wigan Grammar School, newly built, was opened. I became a pupil there at age eleven. It was a memorable year.

When my father died, he owned nothing of value to bequeath, and, perhaps the most fitting testament to his life is that he overcame a disadvantaged beginning to live a life of selfless endeavour, bringing benefits to others he met along the way. That is the 'picture' of the man in the photograph.

Mr Harry Glover
Saddleworth

Beech Hill

Dear Editor

Thank you for your wonderful magazine Past Forward. It was given to me from my sister-in-law while she was visiting me in Melbourne. I was born in Wigan, my dad was a miner and mam worked in the cotton mills. It was really hard. My Dad died at 53 years old and for my mam a young woman of only 40 years - quite a shock.

But my story is not about my parents, its what can happen to everyday people, like my husband and myself. Terry and

YOUR LETTERS

I were married in 1965 and coming from the background we did, it was hard to buy your own home, but we decided to save hard and go for it. I was 20 years old and Terry was 24 and we both worked in Wigan, Terry at the Gas Board and I was at Plessey's.

We bought a bungalow in Martland Crescent, Beech Hill, a lovely new house. It cost £2,075 pounds and we had to save £500 which was hard but we scrimped and did it. The house was on a new estate which was on, what we thought originally, apple orchards. We loved the place and enjoyed the Beech Tree Pub, our local.

We settled in nicely and I was expecting my first child. I was eight months pregnant, when two well dressed business men visited us, to tell us they were from the Coal Board. A bulldozer on the estate had sunk, where it was working, into the ground. Something was wrong, and they were telling us that what we thought was orchards, was a mine-working over 300 years old. The plans were very bad and so that was a shock, as the shaft could be under our house. We had to move out and lived with mam as they drilled underneath the house and the shaft was under the lounge room - what a thrill!

They finally worked on the property for eight weeks

eventually pumping concrete to cap it. My solicitor said when it was finished 'you can build Blackpool Tower on that' but it never felt the same after all that.

It just shows you, you never know what is in your future. I have now lived in Melbourne for 28 years and we all love it, but my heart will always be in Wigan.

Mrs Margaret Ward
Melbourne,
Australia

Spring View School

Dear Editor

I was born in Lower Ince and went to Spring View School during the 1940s.

Following the printing of a previous letter in Past Forward I am now in regular contact with many school day friends. What a wonderful time we had at Spring View and what talent came out of the school. All of the boys that I have now been in contact with - and some I have met during visits back to Wigan - were level headed and have gone through life in the same way - wonderful people such as Syd Berry, Graham Worthington, Albert Short and many more.

Did they spare the rod? Not a chance, nor did we resent it. Spring View was not for sissies, was it chaps?

My brother Tommy also went to Spring View many years before me. He is now 86 and thankfully very well. He lives in Hindley and no better brother could a man have. As a result of my letter I also was contacted by Rick Fernay who knew Tommy in their days at Spring View. Rick is well and I receive many e-mails from him. Sometimes I can even smell the fish and chips from Rudge's Fish and Chip shop along Warrington Road when a Wigan contact comes into my 'In box'.

I have been in Africa now for 44 years and was Managing Director and Chief Chemist for a large South African Pharmaceutical Company until I started our own medical manufacturing company over 26 years ago. John, my son, now runs the company although I am still around if needed.

I hope one or two who read this will remember Veronica Maxwell of the off license on Warrington Road. We were married for 47 years after a courtship which started when we were 14. I was blessed to have had such a wonderful wife as Ve for so many years. Sadly she died of cancer in 2003.

I had no intention of marrying again but fate stepped in and through the intercession of my daughter in Cambridge, who said to Liza and I during a meal



to say goodbye to Liza, who was returning to Greece the following day "Let me arrange

the marriage Dad, between you and Liza". The world became a blur after that but I married Liza. Liza was a ballet dancer over 50 years ago and is Greek. In the photo we are both 71. Liza was known to friends and family for over 35 years and especially to Ve.

We now spend time between Johannesburg, Capetown and Athens and visit Wigan as often as possible. We are leaving for Athens and the States in June and will be in Wigan later in July before returning home via Athens

from Manchester. Both of us are crazy for the Wigan fish and chips (and mushy peas!). I am told to ask for potato and meat' pies for I have to be in line with the British masters in Belgium.

God's truth, Mr Hayes - would turn in his grave at such stupidity!

Roy Winnard
Johannesburg,
South Africa

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active living
Get Active... Get Healthy...

The Active Living Team

What do we do?

The Active Living Team provides programmes to support people in becoming more physically active to improve their health and quality of life. We are responsible for maintaining and increasing the numbers of people involved in health and physical activity programmes across the Wigan Borough.

The Active Living Team provides physical activity and health programmes for sedentary adults including:

- Steps to Health Exercise Referral Scheme
- Next Steps, Community Activity Programme
- Well at Work, Workplace Health Programme
- Food & Physical Activity, targeting 0-5 year olds and their parents/carers

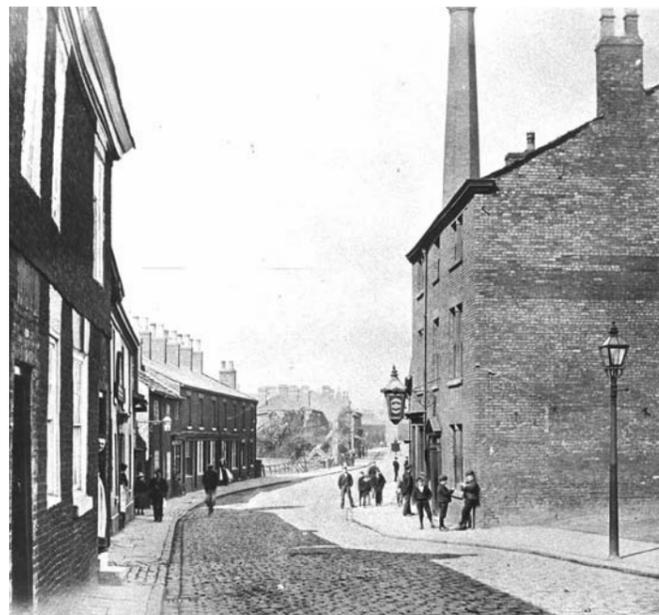
As well as programmes that target people with Learning Disabilities, Mental Health Problems and those at risk of falling.

For more details on the Active Living Team's physical activity programme, please contact **01942 488481**

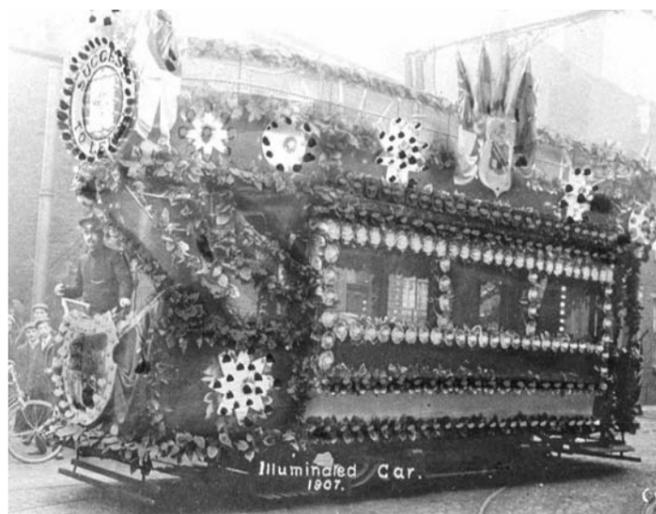
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Wigan Civic Trust 2008

Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.30pm. The venue is Drumcroom, 2 Parsons Walk, Wigan. Contact Mr. A Grimshaw on 01942 245777 for further information.

July – No meeting, summer break.

August – No meeting, summer break.

September 8th

A History of the beginnings of Wigan Infirmary.
Speaker Mrs B Lythgoe.

October 8th

The Leeds, Liverpool Canal in the Wigan Area.
Speaker Mr T Lucas.

November 10th

Annual Dinner.

December 8th

Women and Children in the Mines.
Speaker Mr A Davies.

If any of these topics interest you, or you have an interest in the standard of planning and architecture, and the conservation of buildings and structures in our historic town, come along and meet us.

If you have any problem with the proposed entry, please do not hesitate to call me, George Hollingsworth on 01942 244876 for and on behalf of Wigan Civic Trust.

Atherton Heritage Society

AUTUMN PROGRAMME 2008

August 12th

600 miles down the Nile. Speaker Alan Hayhurst.

September 9th

Cheethams Library. Speaker Dr. Michael Powell.

October 14th

Annual General Meeting followed by Henry Hacking Beats the Hangman. Speaker Bill Taylor.
Please note - 7.00pm start.

All meetings are held in St Richards Jubilee Hall, Mayfield Street, Atherton at 7.30pm on the second Tuesday of the month.

Admission - members £1.00. Non Members £1.50.
Refreshments included.

Leigh & District Family History Society

Chairman: Tel 01942 743428

Secretary: Tel 01942 729559

Monthly meetings held in the Derby Room of Leigh Library at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month.

Weekly Help Desk run by members of the Society each Monday from 1.30pm to 3.30pm in the Local History Section of Leigh Library.

August 19th

Getting Started.

September 16th

The Liverpool Scottish Regiment. Speaker Ian Riley.

October 21st

Members Help Evening.

November 18th

Vicars and Scoundrels. Speaker Jenny Todhunter.

December 16th

Quarter Session Records. Speaker Dr Alan Crosby.

WORKSHOPS & EVENTS FOR ADULTS
CRAFT CIRCLE

Fridays 1.00pm - 2.30pm
5 September
3 October
7 November
Meet in the Gallery.

Whatever your interests - card-making, knitting, embroidery or any other crafts - the Craft Circle is the place to meet like-minded people and share tips and ideas. It's free and there's no need to book, just turn up on the day. Please bring something you're working on.

WORKSHOPS FOR ADULTS

LIFE DRAWING
Saturday 27 September, 10.00am - 1.00pm
This life drawing session for adults will be led by an experienced tutor. Drawing boards will be provided, please bring your own materials. Cost: £8. Places are limited, please book in advance.

WORKING WITH MIXED MEDIA
Wednesdays: 17 & 24 September, 1, 8 & 15 October, 7pm - 9pm
An introduction to mixed media techniques, suitable for those with little or no experience. Participants will work with a range of materials including acrylics, pencil, pastels, charcoal and inks. The sessions will be led by our regular tutor Paul Brotherton. Cost: £25 for all five sessions including materials. Places are limited, please book in advance.

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Howard Hodgkin, Souvenir, 1981 www.wlct.org/turnpike

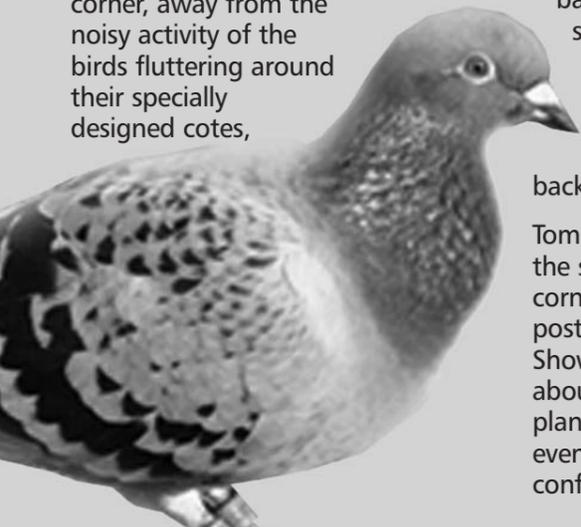
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Pigeon Power

by Austin Lyons

“When I was a lad,” as old men are wont to say, as in their dotage, they amble down the years back to their younger days to tell a story—here is one of mine.

It would be around 1928, my old school pal was Tom Jackson and we both attended St. Benedict’s School on Market Street, Hindley. We lived only a short distance from each other in the vicinity of Argyle Street. The two of us were very interested in gardening. I had a small one in our backyard, but Tom’s house lacked this facility. One day, as we met after school, I noticed that Tom was sporting a penny, probably earned for running an errand for someone. At his suggestion, we set off to Southam’s Garden Nursery in Hindley’s Raynor Park, top see if we could buy a plant. Tom came away carrying a small French marigold carefully wrapped in a newspaper. We hurried to his father’s ‘Pen’ an allotment used to house a flock of homing pigeons. In the far corner, away from the noisy activity of the birds fluttering around their specially designed cotes,



we dug up a few feet of earth and gently planted the French marigold.

In the next few weeks, we made several visits to the Pen and were surprised at the plants rapid growth, buds were already appearing. Then came the long summer holidays and in between the usual football games and ‘Cowboys and Indians,’ we would sneak into the Pen daily to inspect our plant’s progress. To our surprise, it was now in full bloom and had grown twice the size of the other French marigolds we had seen in other gardens. As the holiday weeks passed so did the plant increase in size, it was now several feet high.

Meanwhile, the usual activity of the pigeon fanciers continued at the other end of the Pen. Men were constantly going out with their pigeon boxes to a fixed distant point, whilst others remained in the Pen to time the released pigeon’s arrival back home, using specially made match-clocks. None of these men gave a second glance at our giant plant as they came in and out of the Pen.

Their activity was known as ‘pigeon tossing’ these dedicated fanciers had their own technique as to the best way to launch their birds into the air. The action was similar to that of an ‘over-arm’ cricket bowler, with the bird held firmly in the right hand and- the arm is flung back and then thrust forward at speed, almost throwing the pigeon into the air. The bird would then usually make a brief circuit of the area, before hopefully heading back home.

Tom and I, one day, having been to the shop on Chapel Green to buy corn feed for the pigeons, noticed a poster advertising the local Flower Show at Hindley Public Hall, and set about questioning whether our plant could win a prize at the event, such was our boyish confidence at the time.

As we grew older we took different paths, Tom followed his father into the mines and I into the ramifications of professional photography. Shortly after World War II, when things had generally normalised, I found myself covering a story of a retired miner’s gardening success, winning first prize with his allotment in Liverpool Road, Hindley. He attributed his success to the fact that when he first took over his allotment, the whole area was a mass of cinders. He had already removed these and dug up the soil, he thought the cinders might have helped in draining the area. What I noticed at the time was how exceptionally tall all his flowers were. I took my photographs which made a good picture-story for the local newspaper. It was sometime later, just by a chance remark, that I discovered, that some years earlier, this allotment had been used by some pigeon fanciers, then ‘the penny dropped’. His prize-winning garden, had, during that time been well peppered with pigeon droppings, hence his ‘very tall’ flowers. Not long after this revelation, I was walking along Francis Street, Hindley and had to pass Tom’s old pigeon pen. It was no longer used as previously, as Tom’s father had died some years earlier. The present occupier had dug up the whole of the pen area and planted a grove of dahlias. There they were row after row of beautiful blooms but ‘extraordinarily tall’ yet healthy in appearance. Even the small-headed ones had assumed a giant stature. Just for a moment, in memory, I was back there again with Tom, looking through the fence at the exact spot, where we had planted our French marigold. The realisation, the story had come full-circle, hadn’t Tom’s gigantic French marigold, along with all these lovely dahlias, been fed with the same fertiliser, pigeon droppings? Some would call it ‘Pigeon Power’

CAN YOU HELP?

Gathurst Swing Boats

Dear Editor,

I wonder if any of your readers remember the swing boats at Gathurst and if they have any information about them. When did they start and finish and who owned them? There was a stall selling pop and teas. People used to walk to Gathurst or go on the train (if they could afford it).

I am sure one of your readers will have some information.

The attached photograph shows my sister enjoying a day out at Gathurst with the swing boats in the background c. 1939-40.

Frank Atherton
Aspull



P. W. Davies

Dear Editor,

Recently, whilst walking the footpath from the Harrow Inn, just outside Golborne, to Viridir Wood, I came across a memorial stone to P. W. Davies and became curious as to who he was and why he should have a memorial stone at this point. Can you or any of your readers shed any light on the matter?

Arthur Jones
Ashton in Makerfield



Have you a family or local history query you think our readers can help you with? Please write to the editor.

If there are no contact details with individual letters, please send information to the Editor, and it will be forwarded.

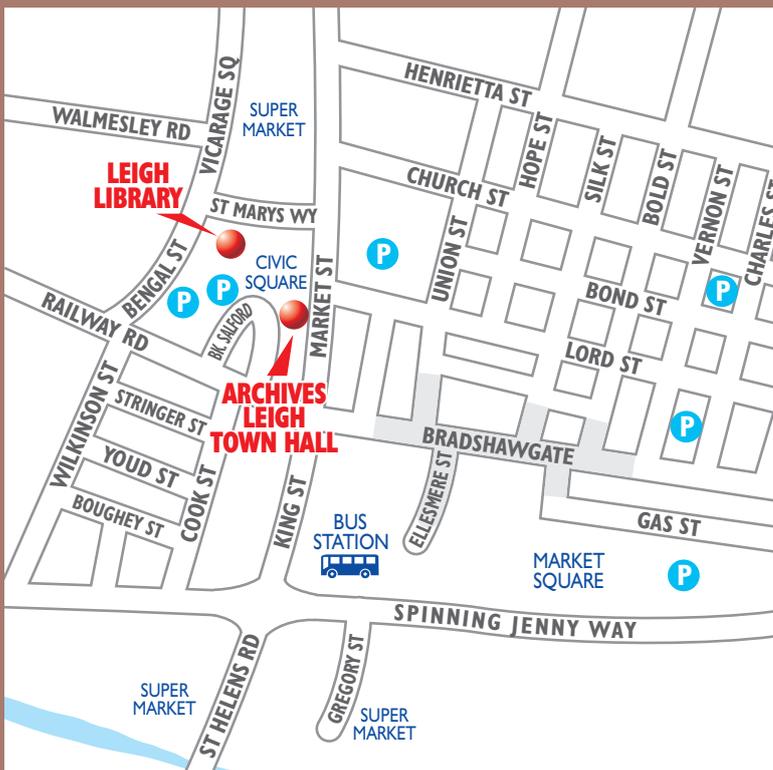
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