

PAST FORWARD

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REMEMBERING THE GREAT WAR

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Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine

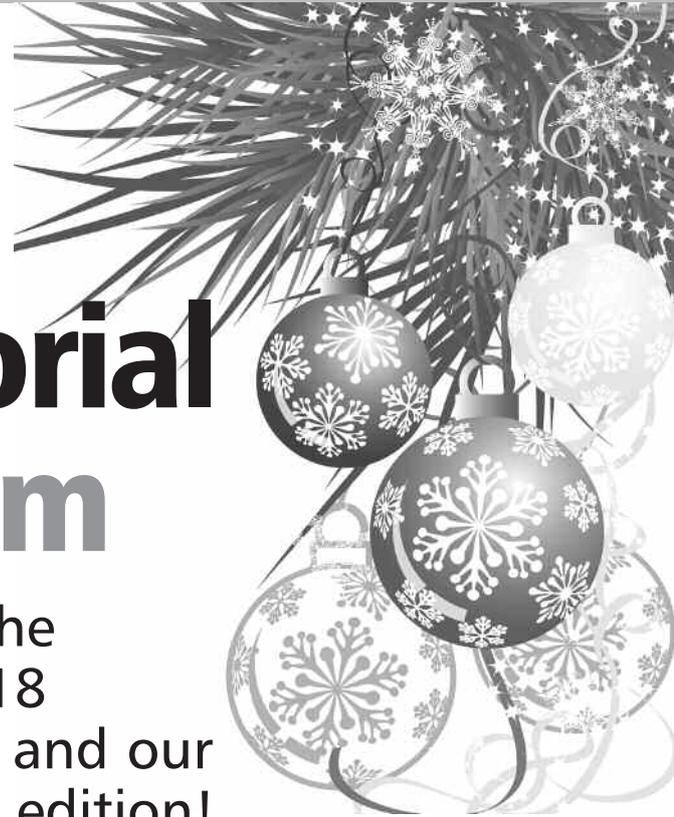
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FRONT COVER

Unveiling ceremony of the Wigan War Memorial outside All Saints Parish Church, Wigan, 1925

Letter from the Editorial Team



Welcome to the Christmas 2018 Past Forward, and our 80th birthday edition!

2018 Past Forward Essay Prize Competition

We are delighted to be able to announce the winners of the 2018 Past Forward Essay Prize Competition, generously sponsored by Mr and Mrs John O'Neill. The competition goes from strength to strength and all the judges would like to thank everyone who submitted an article for consideration. The judges were impressed by the wide range of fascinating topics researchers examined and there was very little to choose between the prize winners.

You will find several of the winning essays in this edition of Past Forward, with further articles to be published early in 2019.

The full list of competition winners for 2018 is:

1st – Brian Joyce, *'There Are No Flies on Brierley': The Theatre Royal, Tyldesley*

2nd – Tom Heaton, *A Child in Wartime Scholes*

3rd (Joint) – Anthony Pilgrim, *Bert Trautman and POW Camp 50*

3rd (Joint) – Diana Brooks, *Comical Cris*

3rd (Joint) – Julie McKiernan, *Mary Pownall Bromet*

Runner-up – Christine Booth, *All the King's men – the Eckersley brothers*

Runner-up – Terry Sloan, *James Topping*

Runner-up – Jean Aspinall and Dorothy Hart, *Jane Nisill Traynor*

Information for contributors, please see page 33

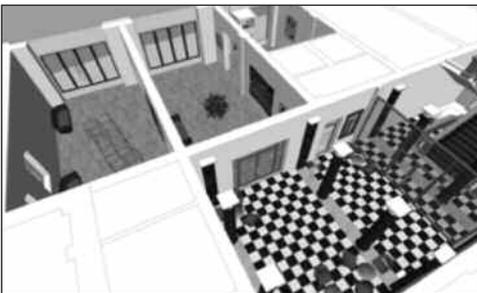
Revealing Wigan Archives Project and New Opening Times

Regular visitors to the Archives will know that we have been closed since August ahead of the full refurbishment of the Archives & Leigh Local Studies at Leigh Town Hall. With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and thanks to National Lottery players, we will be creating new archive facilities at Leigh, including new research and conservation spaces, specialised strongrooms, a café and a new museum exhibition area.

Since August, we've certainly been busy though. The Archives & Local Studies team have been engaged in a project to relocate the entire archive collection to a secure temporary storage unit ahead of the refurbishment work. All the collections have been repackaged, labelled and inventoried. Over a six week move programme, 700 pallets with 15,000 boxes were safely transported off site, leaving behind some unoccupied strongrooms, last seen with this many empty shelves some time around 1974!

The Archives & Leigh Local Studies will continue to operate from a temporary searchroom in Leigh Library for the duration of the building works at Leigh Town Hall. Our opening hours will remain the same (see the back page of the magazine for details), but access to some collections will be limited, so please get in touch with us if you would like to access specific records.

Our temporary searchroom will be open to visitors from January 2019 at Leigh Library. Services at Wigan Local Studies will continue as normal with no changes to access to collections located at the Museum of Wigan Life.



Ground floor visual of Leigh Town Hall showing the location of new exhibition spaces bordering Market Street (top of the picture) and new café area in the Town Hall foyer.



An archive-free Strongroom 2 at Leigh Town Hall

Visuals for the Market Street view of Leigh Town Hall for the Revealing Wigan Archives Project

'There are no flies on Brierley'

THE THEATRE ROYAL, TYLDESLEY

BY BRIAN JOYCE

Processions of wagons transporting prefabricated theatres from town to town were commonly seen in Victorian Lancashire. The parts were usually numbered to facilitate rebuilding. Once erected, the theatres were inspected for safety by local police, and if deemed satisfactory from this and other perspectives, licensed for a specific period by magistrates. Eventually the proprietor would dismantle the building and move to a new town.

In June 1890, such a wagon train disgorged its cargo at a vacant site in John Street, Tyldesley, and a 600 seat wooden theatre was swiftly built. The structure, 95 feet long by 32 feet wide, belonged to William Walter Brierley, who had entertained Horwich audiences in the building for the previous two years.

The police inspected Brierley's 'Theatre Royal' for safety and offered no objections to the licensing magistrates. Brierley assured the justices that in an emergency an audience could leave via three exits in one minute. All these doors opened outwards and all were at ground level in the single storey building. The magistrates also worried that Tyldesley audiences may be corrupted by what they witnessed on stage. Brierley reassured them that all plays had been passed by the Lord Chamberlain and were of 'the correct moral tendency'.

The venue's respectability was re-emphasised when relicensed in 1892.

'Chair of Magistrates: "What is the character of the plays you put upon the boards?"

Brierley's solicitor: "Plays of the present day, dramas and Shakespearian plays".



Site of the Theatre Royal, Tyldesley

"They are purely theatrical pieces?"

"Yes"

"Nothing of an objectionable nature takes place?"

"No"

William Brierley, a 50 year old Boltonian who had been landlord at the Birkett Bank Hotel in Wigan before going on the road, eventually decided to commit to Tyldesley instead of moving on. As a stopgap, he spent £40 in repairing the rotting structure in 1896. 'It does not now rain through', he told magistrates. However, the long term plan was to rebuild completely, a project completed in 1899 by James Wilson, a Tyldesley builder.

The theatrical trade journal *The Era* had claimed that the new Theatre Royal would be of 'brick and stone, not wooden', but Brierley's venue, built on the same John Street site, was actually made of timber. Only the ten entrances were brick, presumably for safety reasons. It was certainly bigger, 100 feet by 40 feet now with 750 seats in the pit and stalls and 250 in the balcony. There were six dressing rooms to one side of the stage, each eleven feet by eight feet. The building was lit by gas. Seat prices ranged from 4d in the gallery to 1/- in the centre circle.

Initially, Brierley was in partnership with Edward Conway, an actor-manager. He soon departed, and James Wilson the builder bought into the business. He remained Brierley's partner until his death in 1905. Then the Theatre Royal became a purely family affair, with Brierley's son Alfred and son in law William German becoming joint proprietors with Brierley.



Site of the Theatre Royal (2018)

In accordance with the law, there were no performances on Sundays. The Sabbath was the day when theatrical performers, having been paid on Saturday evening, travelled to their next engagements. The new companies arrived on Sunday afternoons in time for rehearsals on Mondays. The venue was closed during Holy Week and for a few days at Christmas. A three months closure each summer allowed for cleaning, renovation and improvements.

The enlarged stage, at 40 feet by 31 feet enabled some lavish stage effects. In the play 'A Dark Secret', in 1901, 'the stage is converted into a real river, with real boats, wherries, skiffs, outriggers etc.' Horses, ponies and an elephant clumped across the stage during a circus visit in 1908. Such performances were the exception though.

Venues like the Theatre Royal lacked resident performers. Instead, an apparently infinite number of theatrical companies crisscrossed the country, playing in Tyldesley for a week before moving on. Their plays varied from old standbys like 'East Lynne', to those with imperial themes such as 'At Duty's Call' and 'For the Colours'. Domestic and romantic dramas also proliferated, often with females as the leading characters; 'A Woman's Past', 'The Love of a Good Woman' and 'One Woman's Wickedness' for example. More exotic plays, set in the United States of America or Russia were also popular.

This kind of drama was becoming increasingly outdated in the new century and Tyldesley residents wishing to be entertained had alternatives to the Theatre Royal such as the Miners' Hall, and from 1911, the Carlton cinema in nearby Johnson Street.



Plan showing later alterations to the Theatre Royal

Both had adopted a combination of variety acts and the new medium of short films. Brierley had introduced films as early as 1899, but now increasingly they became more prominent as part of variety programmes. The words Picture Palace was added to the venue's title by 1910. The days of travelling drama companies were numbered.

Most of the live acts lasted ten minutes or so and consisted of singers, dancers and comedians.



Stan Laurel

Regional entertainers, such as Arthur Page ('Eaur John Joe'), a Lancashire dialect comedian and Jessie Harper, 'The Singing Lancashire Mill Hand', also appeared. Novelty acts like 'Dan Idle the Human Hairpin', 'Serpento the Human Eel' and Dolly Hill, 'who cures cripples in full view of the audience', also performed in Tyldesley. It is probably best not to speculate on the act of H Vallus, 'The Human Gasometer'.

Few if any of these turns were nationally known. However, when JF Cardwell's Juvenile Pantomime Company appeared in Tyldesley in 1907 and 1908, it included young Stanley Jefferson, the future Stan Laurel.

William Walter Brierley died in 1914, the Theatre Royal passing to his son Alfred. When the latter himself died two years later, the business was sold to the Wood family, the proprietors of the Carlton. It remained in their hands until its closure in 1958. Housing now occupies the John Street site.

In a benefit performance in 1905, the proprietor was serenaded by an especially composed song, There Are No Flies on Brierley. Many of the audience would have had good reason to agree.

NB Readers wishing to discover more about temporary wooden theatres like William Brierley's first Theatre Royal should read Victorian Portable Theatres by Josephine Harrop.

All the King's men - the Eckersley brothers

By Christine Booth

William and Mary (nee Webster) Eckersley gave three sons to the Great War. Formerly of Thompson Street, Worsley Mesnes, one of the most deprived places in Wigan in 1900, the family were all employed in the mine or the mill.

The young family out-grew their shared 'close' and sought fresh opportunities in Ashton-in-Makerfield. They moved to a rented house in Skitters Grove. James was born in 1891, Harold in 1892 and William junior in 1898.

Originally Wesleyan chapel goers, they switched to Holy Trinity Church, Downall Green. Educated at the British School, they were resourceful and intelligent. They entered employment at Garswood Hall Colliery and then the British army, one after the other.

Whilst Jimmy and Harry were coal-cutters machinists, they also had wider interests. Jimmy was training with the light horses for Lord Gerard's section of the Lancashire Hussars.

Harry was in the 9th Lancashire Rifles Volunteer Corps and was a pianist. Willie was a pony boy, with a second job repairing harnesses.



James Eckersley (in the centre) of Lancashire Hussars



Willie Eckersley, recruited in 1915

They had skills that made them natural choices for military service. Only one was married, and that was Jimmy, to Elizabeth Robinson of Park House, Warrington Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield.

Jimmy joined the 18th Battalion of the Kings (Liverpool) Regiment in August 1914. This was one of Lord Derby's 'Pals' regiments and Jimmy soon acquired his horsemastership at Hooton Park on the Wirral before mobilisation in 1915. Harry was recruited to the 1/4th Battalion Prince of Wales's Volunteers, later South Lancashire Regiment and was actually the first to sail to France. Willie volunteered for the 1/6th South Lancashire Regiment in 1915 and after intensive training with heavy horses on the Norfolk coast, was posted to Mesopotamia.

Willie's posting was changed at the last minute. The troopship anchoring at Alexandria was diverted to Gallipoli to reinforce actions firstly in July on 'W' beach and the Eski Lines alongside the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, and secondly in August at Anzac Cove with the New Zealanders. He left Suvla Bay in December after close encounters with the Turks. He rejoined his horses aboard ship for passage through the Suez Canal.

Jimmy, meanwhile, served as a cavalryman on both the Somme and the Ypres salient. He most distinguished himself at the capture of Montauban from the Germans in July 1916. Many Lancashire lives were lost here, as names in the battlefield cemeteries attest. In his dismounted role, Jimmy went on to spend gruelling months fighting through three woodland strongholds, Bernafay, Trônes and Delville Woods.

Harry was not far away also at Delville Wood and Guillemont. He served with the 55th West Lancashire Division, becoming the Pioneer battalion for them. The official war diary describes the onerous work of the pioneers moving over the Somme valley creating fortifications for the front line troops to launch from. He was wounded twice and the Wigan Observer of 22 July 1916 stated:

'Previously Missing, Now Reported Killed...Lance-Cpl. H Eckersley (737), Wigan'.

The Wigan Observer corrected the mistake, later publishing the following:

'Lance-Corporal Harry Eckersley is not killed, as was reported last Saturday.



Willie in Mesopotamia, 1916

He was wounded in the head by shrapnel (at Bazentin) and conveyed to the West Lancashire Field Hospital, where he made rapid progress towards recovery. He is now sufficiently recovered to resume duty, and has again joined his battalion and been promoted.'

Unlucky again, on 22 August 1916 the Wigan Observer commented:

'Corporal Harry Eckersley...has again been wounded. It is only a few weeks since he recovered from a shrapnel wound in the head...He was with his battalion in the recent fighting in Northern France (Guillemont), and on the 8th instant was shot through the neck, and is now at the base hospital at Boulogne.'



Grave of Private J Eckersley, Roye New Cemetery

At the Third Battle of Ypres he worked mostly on the Menin Road and at Wieltje.

Meanwhile, sailing from Suez to Basra was an exotic trip for Willie. He drove artillery horses, ammunition and stores wagons alongside the River Tigris with Lieutenant-General Maude and the 13th Division of the 3rd Indian Army Corps, in a vain attempt to relieve the fort of Kut, then besieged by the Turks. Water, supplies and reinforcements were a huge problem. He fought in the trenches around Dhara Bend and Shumran peninsula, but eventually died of wounds at the Adhaim Bend near Istabulat, on 21 April, 1917. The remains of Private 16275, lie in the desert and his name is commemorated on the CWGC Baghdad memorial.

Jimmy was at the Somme crossings, but on 28 March 1918, he was killed at the Battle of Rosieres. He was first buried by the Germans, and then gathered in to rest at New Roye British cemetery. The author visited there at the centenary of his death with her son, leaving a miniature miner's lamp and red roses.

Wigan Examiner on 4 May 1918 records Elizabeth's news that:

'...he was killed in action in France while taking part in the operations consequent upon the latest German offensive. In communicating the sad intelligence Captain Redhead says: The officers, NCOs and men of his company unite in tendering you our deepest sympathy in your sad bereavement. He was one of my most promising NCOs and always did his duty under most arduous circumstances.'

Better news came in the Wigan Examiner of 8 June 1918:

'Sergeant Harry Eckersley, whose home address is the Skitters, North Ashton, has been awarded the Military Medal. His battalion the 4th



First World War Memorial at Holy Trinity Church, Ashton-in-Makerfield

South Lancshires...which did so well against the German attack at Givenchy last April, and it was his conduct at this engagement which earned him this honour.' He was also listed in the London Gazette of 7 October 1918.

The King of the Belgians and Lord Derby presented Harry with his medal at Watermael, Brussels on 6 January 1919. Harry remained until 1919, rebuilding roads and repairing railways for the Belgian people.

A temporary local history exhibition was displayed at Ashton library in August. It included the three brothers named after kings of England.



Display at Ashton-in-Makerfield Library

A First World War Hero Remembered

MY GRANDFATHER, STANLEY CORSELLIS RANDALL, MM

BY CHRISTINE BARBOUR-MOORE

My maternal grandfather, Stanley Corsellis Randall MM, is being remembered, in this the centenary year of the Armistice at the end of the First World War.

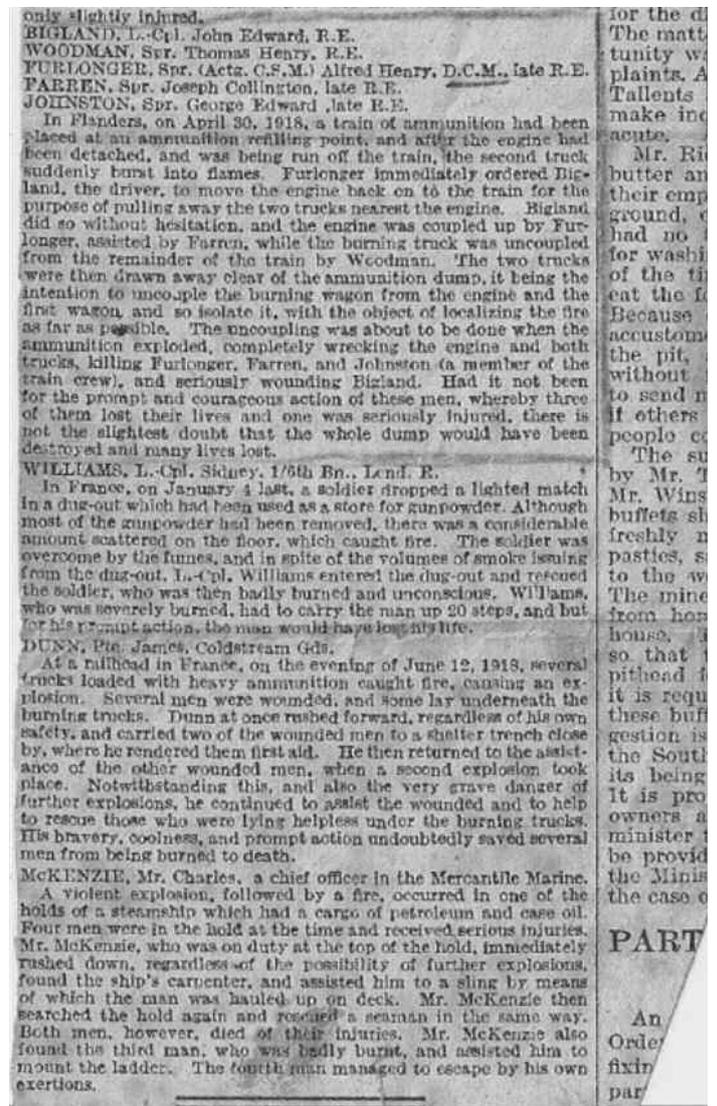
Stanley Randall was with the 12th Light Railway Company on the Western Front at Flanders, from 1917, Regimental Number 219111. His theatre of war was Ypres and Passchendaele in Belgium and he was a Warrant Officer, Class 1. He did survive the War.

On 30 April 1918, his quick thinking helped saved numerous men, when he and his comrades uncoupled rolling stock from a railway truck full of ammunition that had caught fire and exploded. Sadly three soldiers died – Sappers Alfred H Furlonger 109599, Joseph C Farren 267361 and George E Johnson 289129. These soldiers were awarded the Albert Medal and are buried next to each other in Haringhe Cemetery in Belgium. I visited their graves with my partner last year and was very moved at seeing their names on the grave stones. Prompt actions by all the soldiers saved the lives of many troops, by preventing the entire ammunition dump going up in flames and this saw Stanley and his comrades awarded the Military Medal for Bravery. This medal is held by my brother John Randall Barbour in Suffolk.

The railway played a central part in Stanley Randall's life as he spent his entire civilian career in the industry, rising through the ranks at the London North Western Railway Company, to become a station master and then regional auditor. He had previously attended Manchester and Victoria University in 1909, for two years of study into railway accountancy.

My grandfather was 34 when he joined the Royal Engineers in 1917, serving in Flanders, in the fierce fighting around the town of Ypres and taking part in the Third Battle of Passchendaele.

However, his war continued until the year after the fighting on the Western Front ended in 1918.



Award of the Military Medal

He spent time in France and attended the signing of the historic Treaty of Versailles, which set the terms for peace between the nations.

I am filled with pride at my Grandfather's achievements and unlike many veterans of the First World War, he would sometimes tell me stories of his experiences and his memories. In particular, he recalled the rats in the trenches and the terrible conditions that soldiers were living. He told me of the joy at receiving letters from home and care parcels. Granny Randall would send him socks and amazingly, tomatoes and eggs – which he received in good condition –

as well as flea ointment. This always amazed me, when you consider the conditions soldiers were living under. Bombardment, rain, mud, cold, wind, absolute misery, and witnessing the deaths of comrades on a regular basis.

My Grandfather Stanley and Grandmother Bessie Randall, lived with us at Sicklefield House in Wigan, so I knew both grandparents well. What fine people they were too. But to me they seemed very elderly when I was just a young child growing up. On reflection, I think I was perhaps a little impatient with them. How I wish now that I could have spoken to both of them about their early lives. After their marriage in 1909, they had four still-born full-term babies from 1912 onwards and my mother, Eileen Barbour, nee Randall, born in 1913, was the only child to survive.

Due to this, I have lots of Grandpa's letters home and also photographs, his cap badge and a lighter from Passchendaele, that have been passed down to me. I have put his letters into a book and titled it, War Diary and Letters of Stanley Corsellis Randall MM. I also have the blue print map of all the railheads on route, as the 12th Light Railway Company moved forward to Ypres and Passchendaele. Grandpa carried this blue print with him during 'the push' forward. I have cross checked the Official War Diary of the 12th Light Railway Company, WO95/4056, with the blue print, so I can see when and where he was at a particular time. It is a fascinating record, but also very sad. On individual days, it gives the details of incidents and men killed and injured in action. I also have Grandpa's personal diary for 1917 and again, cross checked his entries with the blue print map.

Despite returning to his previous career after the war, he did not completely cut his ties with the military as he transferred to the Reserves when he returned to Britain.

Parts of his life story have been told in a manuscript that Granny Randall wrote, titled 'Light and Shade', a memoir covering his life with her when living in Appley Bridge from 1891 to his return from war in 1919. I have put this book into print and find it very emotional, as it describes in detail the loss of their four babies. It also details the birth of my mother Eileen in 1913, which I draw comfort from, since she



Stanley Corsellis Randall, pictured at Versailles, 19 July 1919

passed away in 1999 aged 85. My father Alexander Marsden Barbour passed away in 2003 aged 92.

In the last paragraph of 'Light and Shade', Granny Randall describes the letter Stanley handed to her on his return from France in July 1919. This letter was to be given to her, had Stanley been killed in action. Thankfully, he survived the war. The description in the memoir is terribly moving and personal, but this is the one letter that I cannot find in my collection, so I have written at the end of the book that...'my search continues'.



Stanley Corsellis Randall, pictured in a dug-out

Leigh and Wigan's Female Reform Unions and Peterloo

By Yvonne Eckersley

On the 16 August 1819, 60,000 men, women and children from the Manchester area walked to a Reform Meeting on St Peter's Field to listen to Henry Hunt and others speak on political reform. Alarmed Manchester magistrates ordered their dispersal. This was brutally done. Within half an hour, at least fifteen people sustained fatal injuries and many more were bludgeoned, sabred, trampled under horses' hoofs or crushed.

Over 600 needed medical treatment; more than 200 had been sabred, 70 battered by truncheons and 188 trampled by horses. George Partington of Parr Brow, Tyldesley was both sabred and trampled. Interestingly, women featured disproportionately among the injured. Why did ordinary working class people demonstrate in their thousands? And why did the authorities react in the way they did? In a nutshell, during and after the Napoleonic Wars, shortages of food, caused in no small part by the 1815 Corn Laws and bad harvests, rising unemployment, exacerbated by demobilised soldiers flooding the jobs market and increasing mechanisation, created horrendous distress among working people, particularly Lancashire weavers.

The poor repeatedly petitioned the government for help. Then, as this failed, a more overtly political agenda was adopted. Male and female reformers increasingly organised. They formed Hampden Clubs and Reform Societies/Unions, and in a very public way, gathered in large numbers to agitate for Parliamentary reform.

After the horrors of the French Revolution the authorities were more than a little afraid as to where this may lead. Rather than putting in procedures that would alleviate the distress, they decided that it was expedient to suppress working people's protests and calls for reform. Here in the North West, a committee of Lancashire and Cheshire Magistrates was established to preserve the peace. Three local magistrates, Richard Marsh of Westleigh Hall; Ralph Fletcher of Bolton, an Atherton mine owner; and William



Leigh Parish Church and Market Place, Leigh, early nineteenth century (Wigan Archives & Local Studies)

Hulton of Hulton Park, were members of this committee.

These men shared a bad reputation. Immediately after Peterloo, Henry Brougham MP told Lord Grey, 'The magistrates there (Manchester) and all over Lancashire have long [been] known for the worst in England, the most biggetted, violent and active'. Ralph Fletcher, a Bolton magistrate obsessed by law and order, had a courtroom in his home. According to E P Thompson he hated Luddism with a vengeance and was prepared to condone violence to secure convictions. He and William Hulton were the magistrates responsible for the execution of three men and a youth involved in burning Westhoughton Mill in 1812.

The Treasonable practices Act passed in 1795, established Committees of Secrecy to monitor the activities of the Reformers. From then an extensive network of paid spies and informers reported back to the Home Office either directly or through spymasters. Ralph Fletcher adopted the name Joseph Warren, when communicating with his spies. He established the Society for Information and Correspondence around 1803, and on an almost daily basis, kept the Home Office informed of local reformers' activities. In 1812 his spy network bill to the

Home Office was £159 3s 6d.

The Orange movement provided a useful network for gathering intelligence and enforcing law and order. Fletcher was a leader of Bolton's Orangemen. He became Colonel to the Bolton Volunteer Regiment and founded the Bolton Loyalist Church and King Club.

In 1811 William Hulton, aged 24, was appointed High Sheriff of Lancashire. By the time he became chairman of the Lancashire and Cheshire Magistrates and Constable of Lancaster Castle he had earned a reputation as a man who would deal with working class crime and social unrest severely. As Chairman of the Manchester Magistrates, he ordered the troops to disperse the crowd on St Peter's Field.

Richard Marsh of Westleigh Hall appears to have been a rather devious, even ludicrous figure, with a tendency to overreact. He escaped much of the public criticism after Peterloo despite playing an important role.

Leigh

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In 1818, thousands of Lancashire weavers went on strike, visiting local towns en masse to agitate for an increase in wages. Richard Guest, a

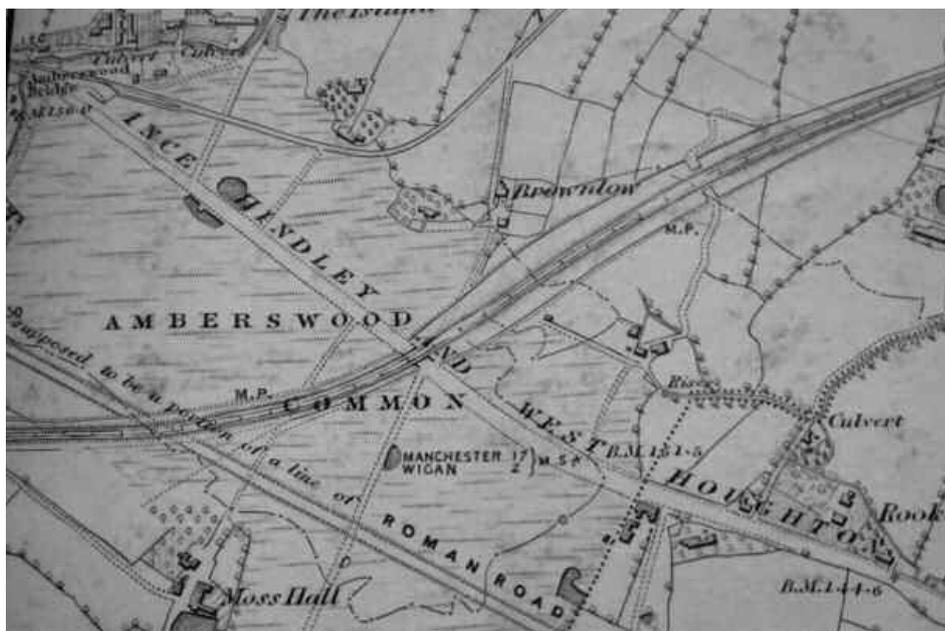
cotton manufacturer, described them as 'menacing' but described their leaders' actions that prevented 'outrage' and 'bloodshed' as 'highly praiseworthy' when they came to Leigh.

Around this time Richard Marsh and Thomas Weeton, his attorney, becoming convinced an uprising was in progress and called out 200 Leigh inhabitants to patrol its environs throughout one wet night. Richard Guest published a derogatory description of Marsh and Weeton as they set out 'for the fields of slaughter'. Apparently, they rode with 'drawn swords'. Weeton, flourishing his (rusty) sword above his horse's head was followed by Marsh with sword and pistols. At one point they allegedly confused brickyard kilns for burning houses. Back at Westleigh Hall, Guest tells us, as Weeton demonstrated his fighting prowess his 'sword hit his nose and cut it' and 'blood flowed'.

As agitation for reform mounted, there was growing unease in Leigh. Some residents felt intimidated. A number from Leigh and Pennington published their disapproval in the Manchester Chronicle (7 July 1819), writing - 'It is manifestly one thing to petition and remonstrate, and another thing to insult and menace'. Tensions were high, and by 24 July Marsh was recruiting special constables to police the reformers. Then on 26 July, Leigh Reform leaders, John Shovelton of Bedford, James Prescott and Thomas Wewell, of Westleigh, formally asked Richard Marsh for permission to hold a public meeting in Leigh's Market Place on Wednesday 11 August 1819, from 1pm.

Marsh was informed the meeting was 'specifically for the object of discussing and adopting some constitutional and practical remedy for reforming Parliament, and averting the present distress'. Richard Guest was one of the 25 Leigh people who signed the request. Although Richard Marsh did not oppose the Leigh meeting, he was, with other Manchester Magistrates, working to declare the planned reformers' mass meeting of 9 August on St Peter's Fields illegal. He signed the prohibiting order.

On 10 August, Marsh met Bolton and Warrington magistrates at Hulton Park to discuss tactics for handling the potential dangers of the Leigh meeting, at which Henry Hunt was expected to speak. There, Ralph Fletcher expressed the opinion that such meetings 'under whatever pretext they may be called ought to be suppressed'. Then, by specifically referring to, 'The Female Reformers' he identified them as a



1849, Ordnance Survey map - Amberswood Common on the Ince, Hindley and Westhoughton border.

serious threat; they were planning, 'to act a conspicuous part, by addressing the assemblage from the hustings, and furnishing a cap of liberty'

The Leigh Meeting

On 11 August 1819, five days before Peterloo, a parade of approximately 3000 supporters of Reform marched with music and banners to the Obelisk in Leigh Market Place. They were led by a sizable Leigh Female Reform Union. The women wore white dresses and black sashes, carried their own banners presenting the main political messages of the reform movement - 'No Corn Laws, Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage', and confrontationally, they carried a Cap of Liberty (a symbol of the French Revolution) high on a standard.

After Henry Battersby opened the meeting and a Mr Bamber was elected chairman, the Union's

Committee of twelve women joined them on the platform. They read the Female Reform Union's Address, which reiterated the sentiments of the banners, confirmed their allegiance to the cause, called for women and men to join the Reform movement, and ceremoniously presented the meeting with the said 'Cap of Liberty'.

In an effort to stop the meeting, magistrates deployed the strategy of arresting the main speakers from the platform (a tactic used at Smithfields, (London 21 July) and later at Peterloo). On the orders of Ralph Fletcher, police

led by Mr Turner (magistrate), arrested Thomas Cleworth and John Clure. According to a report sent to Lord Sidmouth the leaders left and the meeting began to disintegrate. However, contemporary press reports differ significantly, reporting that a Female Reformer, who could have been attendee Mary Bradshaw (Nell Lush), took the chair and the meeting continued. Mary Bradshaw was arrested the next day in Chorley accused of a felony.

Leigh's Female Reformers thwarted expectations of weakness, innocence (white being a symbol of purity), and modesty and in doing so proved vital to the meeting's success. Perhaps it was with this in mind that Charles Wrigley, reporting to the Home Office from Leigh, complained, 'These Lancashire women are proverbially witches in politics (if not beauty)', whilst magistrate James Norris told Lord Sidmouth, the presence and actions of the women were 'remarkable' and 'novel'.

However, Female Reform Unions had more than novelty value. The Leigh Union was one of the first formed. Each Union was committed to reform, had its own leaders, committee, speakers, organisation, and a shared dress code. Furthermore, they had influence within their families, as wives, sisters, daughters and mothers, to sow seeds of discontent. Some Female Reformers urged fellow members to instil hatred of authority in their children. This included using, 'The Bad Alphabet' for the use of children of Female Reformers, for examples: K...for King, King's Evil, Knave and Kidnapper.

On Wednesday 11 August the Leigh Female Reform committee met in a Leigh pub and were addressed by male reformers including Henry Battersby, presumably to discuss details of their contribution at the Peterloo meeting. Henry Battersby was an established Leigh political reformer. In 1817, he had been the Leigh Hampden Club's delegate at the large Reform Meeting at London's Crown and Anchor and was one of the main speakers at the huge Protest Meeting on Amberswood Common on 8 November.

From 13 August, the Watch and Ward Act, passed for monitoring reformers activity and empowering authorities to intervene to protect people and towns, was implemented in our area. On the day after Peterloo, Richard Marsh requested that a 'single troop of horse' be sent to Leigh for 'a few months', to implement Watch and Ward, as without 'the protection of the military', he could not protect Leigh from the violent actions of the 'weavers, or as they style themselves, reformers'.

In justification Marsh included copies of anonymous Oaths, dated three days earlier. These Oaths were reports of reformers making weapons rather than instances of drilling. The documents claimed a blacksmith in Pickley Green was making pikes and had hired a man to file them; another man had been given orders for twenty pikes, he refused but believed he would have been asked to make 100. Yet another man swore he had made eighteen to twenty, various instruments, with points and keyholes fastened to staffs, and he could have had orders for 1000; a fourth informant tells how he invited reformers into his home, then feigning sleep, he overheard his guests plan attacks in Leigh.

However, as Robert Poole points out, these were treasonable offences. Richard Marsh ought to have arrested and prosecuted the men. He didn't. Could it be that these Oath's were manufactured to add weight to his request for troops? Or, as spies were paid and many in Leigh were starving, could the Oaths have been bought? Could they have been given under duress or were the reformers in Leigh really planning an armed insurrection?

Wigan

Rather than John Knight's attempt (the Lancashire's Hampden Clubs' leader) in his, 'Address to the Inhabitants of Wigan and its Vicinity', to shame Wigan's radicals, 'for having delayed so long to declare yourselves openly on the side of Reform', it took the horrors of Peterloo to motivate thousands of reformers. The



Westleigh Hall, home of Richard Marsh (Wigan Archives & Local Studies)

Times and the Morning Post estimated between 18,000 and 20,000 gathered on Amberswood Common on 8 November.

The first contingent of 200 to 300 people, headed by two men carrying a white flag edged with black crepe, arrived in Wigan from Ashton-in-Makerfield at 9.00am. A procession of between 9,000 and 10,000, accompanied by the members of the Female Reform Union, marched from Wigan's Marketplace from 10.00am. Along the way they were joined by processions – with music and flags bordered with black crepe – from Bolton, Warrington, Chowbent, Westhoughton, Leigh and other neighbouring towns.

Seven caps of liberty were carried in the procession. As these were tokens made, then ceremoniously presented at Reform meetings by the Female Reform Unions, we can assume each cap preceded a Female Reform Union. Other emblems of Reform were carried on standards: a bundle of sticks, a loaf, and a mop with a motto. The chairman was Mr Walker, Secretary of the Manchester Union Society. Speakers included radical leader Reverend Joseph Harrison, Henry Battersby of Leigh and Mr Hasleden, in whose Wigan Lane home Wigan's Reform Society met fortnightly.

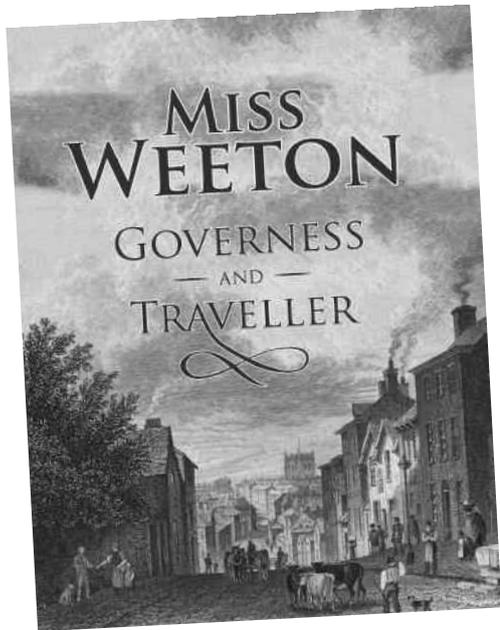
Mr Haseleden read the meeting's resolutions and the Wigan Female Reform Union presented their cap of liberty and Address. Such was the fear of a violent attack, the sight of a man on horseback wearing a forage cap spooked the crowd. Anticipating an attack by Sir Thomas Gerard and the troop of 39 Ashton Yeomanry stationed in the Market

Place, some panicked. As many were Peterloo survivors this was understandable. The 'Ladies of the Union', who by calling out, 'Be firm – remain where you are,' brought the fearful under control.

Both The Times and Morning Post reported, '...the parties returned to Wigan in procession, with music, flags and caps of liberty. They marched six abreast, in 'military array' through the Marketplace, past the Town Hall, the windows of which were occupied by Magistrates and constables, through Wallgate St[reet]....'. Despite Lord Balcarres of Haigh Hall, writing to Lord Sidmouth asserting, 'the day passed away with greatest order and tranquility', this must have been an intimidating sight.

Selected References:

- E.P. Thompson, 'The Making of the English Working Class'*
- Robert Poole, 'Peterloo Re-visited'*
- Samuel Bamford, 'Passages in the Life of a Radical'*
- Robert Walmsley, 'Peterloo the Case Re-opened'*
- Anna Clarke, 'Struggle for the Breeches'*
- Katrina Navickas, 'Protest and the Politics of Space and Place'*
- The Morning Chronicle*
- The Times*
- Morning Post*
- Bolton Express*
- Sherwin's Political Register, 7 August 1819*
- Parliamentary Records of Great Britain Documents housed in Local History boxes at Wigan and Leigh Archives*



Miss Weeton: Governess and Traveller'

If you need Christmas present ideas for anyone interested in local history, biographies or historic diaries look no further... **NOW ON SALE**, the story of the compelling Lancashire diarist, Nelly Weeton.

Written in solitude, Miss Nelly Weeton's letters, journal entries and other autobiographical writings transport the reader through Georgian Lancashire and beyond. Edited by local historian Alan Roby and published by the Archives, the volume brings new research into Miss Weeton's life to print for the first time, updating the works of the diary collector, Edward Hall.

This new edition in a single volume includes several wonderful colour illustrations and biographical profiles of key individuals in Miss Weeton's story. Crucially, we hear Nelly Weeton's life story recorded in her own voice, giving us a unique insight into her life in Lancashire's North West, Yorkshire, Isle-of-Man and North Wales. In vivid detail she also relates her experiences when she travelled on top of a stagecoach to and from London in 1824, where she witnessed the funeral of Lord Byron.

In Alan's words: 'Miss Weeton was an ordinary woman who was highly gifted. She learned the alphabet in three hours at little more than the age of two. Her favourite toys were chalk, slate and quill. She was a voracious reader and prolific journal and letter writer, who revealed an exquisite ability to describe people and events'.

This book was the winner of the 2017 Alan Ball Award, for excellence in publishing by public libraries and local authorities. Convenor of the Alan Ball Award judging panel, said:

"There were several high quality entries this year but we felt that Miss Weeton, Governess and Traveller, is an outstanding publication in every sense, with engaging content that is accessible to a wide range of audiences."

We could not recommend this book highly enough – the perfect gift at Christmas or at any time.

Priced at £20 the book is available from the Museum of Wigan Life and from The Archives, Leigh Library. Please send cheque for £20 plus £2.80 for p&p to Museum of Wigan Life and Wigan Local Studies, Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU More information on our blog. Can also be bought on line via Amazon and via PayPal at www.missweetonbook.wordpress.com. Also available from Waterstones, Wigan and good independent bookshops.

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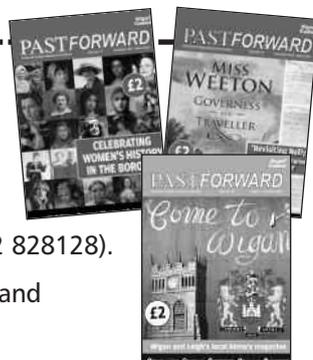
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BY JOHN O'NEILL

All's well that ends well

The story of Standish Well and the arrival of piped water in the Township

Republished with permission from John O'Neill's history of Standish Well and Market House, and account of how piped water replaced the unreliable and polluted supplies obtained for centuries from local wells and pumps, including that from the town well in Market Place.



James Martland Ainscough 1854-1937

Introduction

We owe a debt of gratitude to the individuals who were responsible for these improvements and I am particularly pleased to acknowledge many of them in this story including the late Margaret Ainscough for the invaluable information contained in her book 'James Martland Ainscough 1854-1937' about the life of her father, published in 1937.

John O'Neill

Part one

The Market Place Improvement Scheme

The story of Standish Well and Market House restoration in 1998 cannot be told without first referring to James Martland Ainscough born 25 February 1854 in a house situated on the northern side of Market Place and once the residence in the 1750s of Mary Smalley, a local benefactor who established a 'School of Pious Learning and Useful Industry for Girls' in Rectory Lane.

James' family farmed land to the rear of that property although he, on leaving school, was apprenticed in 1869 to John Pendlebury a draper on Standishgate in Wigan, and in 1882 entered into partnership with him, and on the death of John Pendlebury James was appointed as Chairman and Managing Director of the firm.

In 1893 he returned to his native Standish living in 'Prospect House', which sadly was destroyed by fire in 1910 and he and his family moved to 'Lindley Mount', Parbold. In 1918, he was elected to Wigan Council as a Conservative and was appointed Mayor for 1922-1923. James held a lifelong interest in education, local history, Standish Parish Church and was a keen antiquarian, taking a great interest in the Standish family and its Hall. He was also a friend of the Reverend T C Porteus and assisted with the latter's 'History of the Parish of Standish' published in 1927.

It was his love for Standish that led to his 'Market Place Improvement Scheme', an idea he had fostered for years following a book 'The Man of Ross' which his father had given to him, about the life of John Kyrle, who had lived in the 18th century and had spent time and effort improving his home town of Ross in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland.

James discussed his ideas with Sir Gilbert Scott the architect of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral,

whom he had met as Mayor at a time when the architect had been commissioned to design Wigan's War Memorial adjacent to Wigan Parish Church.

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott arranged for one of his assistants to visit Standish to draw up a plan with the Local District Council for 'The Market Place Improvement Scheme'.

That scheme would involve the removal of 'The Great Houses', a row of ten properties, by then in a very poor condition that had been erected in the late 17th and early 18th century. Some by then had been used as shops and warehouses to take advantage of Market Place, then recognised as the centre of 'the Town', where fairs and markets were held trading in all manner of produce from butter and fish to cattle and horses.

It was believed in some quarters that 'The Great Houses' had been purposely built fronting St Wilfrid's Parish Church in order to spoil its view by the Catholic Standish family, Lords of the Manor, following the Reformation, and were referred to as 'Spite Row' by those who believed that account to be true.

With the demise of the Standish family in 1929 and the earlier break-up of that family's estate from 1920, James obtained the deeds to 'The Great Houses' and passed them to Standish District Council.

That block was demolished, the site covered with a lawn and edged with an attractive stone wall. The ancient stocks were removed from the Well/Market House area where they had been placed for safety following their disappearance for a short period when found in a nearby field and placed in their traditional setting against the west-facing 14th century steps of the Market Cross, which itself had been fully restored by Cecilia Stickland in the early 19th century. Both the stocks and cross are



*Spite Row, pre-1930
(Wigan Archives & Local Studies, PC2009.41)*



Market Place following the improvements in 1930

Grade II listed structures. Prior to the erection of the Well/Market House cover under the Improvement Scheme there is no clear evidence that any shelter had previously existed.

A late 18th century painting of St Wilfrid's Church and Churchyard shows a view through the church gates onto Market Place but with only the cross clearly visible and no indication of a structure to the west of it.

A photograph taken in 1900 of the site shows a stone surround with decorative wrought iron railings that includes a gate leading to steps down to the well area on its western side and stone pillars on each corner of the Market House area.

The well itself had been, until 1892 (see later), a key source of drinking water and the cold water washing of laundry.

The Well/Market House would, if it had existed at all, been covered with a roof resting on four or six pillars.

Water from the well area would have been drawn-up in earlier times by a bucket and rope but later, with a reduction in volume, by a hand pump mechanism.

The larger flat area beyond the well was used for the sale of butter, fish and other produce laid out on slabs.

The last decorative railings prior to the erection of the Well/Market House under the scheme completed in 1930, was that said to have been erected around 1900.

Parts 2 and 3 – 'Piped Drinking Water' and 'All's Well that Ends Well', will be published in later editions of Past Forward. The full history is available from the Museum of Wigan Life and local libraries.

Professor James Topping

1904-1994 – A Distinguished Wiganer

BY TERRY SLOAN

James Topping was a distinguished physicist and mathematician and a pioneer in university education. His secondary education took place at Hindley and Abram Grammar School which eventually became Park High School in 1977, before closing in 1991.

Topping was born in December 1904 and brought up in Lower Ince, a working class district of Wigan. Like many other men living in this area his father, also James, was a miner, described as a coal hewer in the 1901 census and then a drawer in the 1911 census. The latter job involved pushing the coal tubs from the coal face to the pit eye.

Hindley and Abram Grammar School, as well as accepting fee paying pupils, also accepted some Foundation Scholars for whom school fees were waived, paid for by the Foundation. Even though the School is now closed, this Foundation is still in existence today, its charitable purpose being to help in the education of poorer students from Hindley and District.

In the early twentieth century Foundation Scholars were selected on the basis of an examination, known as the scholarship. Given his origins



*Professor James Topping wearing the gown he designed.
(Portrait by Michael Noakes, reproduced under Creative Commons license).*

James Topping junior would have been one of the Foundation Scholars. Even so, it would have meant considerable financial hardship for Topping's parents to have allowed young James to

attend the school which attempted to uphold middle class standards. This would be difficult to imagine today but in those days the costs of clothing, books and the other accoutrements of middle class

education would have been a significant drain on the Topping household finances.

In addition there would be the loss of contributions to the family income from earnings between the ages of fourteen, the normal school leaving age at the time, and sixteen, the age to which Foundation scholars were expected to remain at the Grammar School to complete their education. Nevertheless, young James was allowed to take up his scholarship and be educated at the school. My father (born 1905) was also a miner's son and lived close to Topping. He also passed his scholarship but was not allowed by his parents to become a Foundation Scholar for the reasons above.

At the Hindley and Abram Grammar School annual prize giving day in 1920, reporting on the year 1918-1919, the headmaster, Mr Fairbrother (known as Ferb to the scholars of the school), noted in his annual report that Topping had obtained a distinction in mathematics in the Oxford Senior Local examination held in 1919 when Topping was fifteen years old. This was already a portent of what was to come. Topping proceeded to Manchester University where he was an outstanding student of mathematics and physics, graduating in 1924 with a first class honours degree. These were the heady days in Manchester when Ernest Rutherford with his group was unravelling the secrets of the atom, work which was to lead to the Nobel Prize for Rutherford.

However, Topping was more interested in mathematical

physics rather than the experimental work of the Rutherford group. He therefore left Manchester and went to work for a PhD degree in mathematical physics at Imperial College London. His excellence in research led to the award of a Beit Research Fellowship during 1926-28 after which he was appointed lecturer at Imperial College. He progressed to take up lectureships first at Chelsea Polytechnic, then at Manchester College of Technology (later UMIST), before being appointed head of Mathematics and Physics at Regent Street Polytechnic (now the University of Westminster). He published a number of papers on various topics of mathematical physics and he was the joint author of a successful text book on mechanics.

According to his obituary (published in the Independent newspaper, 18 June 1994), Topping inspired students with clear presentations and close attention to detail. This is illustrated by the book he published in 1955, 'Errors of observation and their treatment', which was a recommended text on the physics course taken by me at Liverpool University. One day my mother spotted the book and wondered aloud if this was the same Jimmy Topping who used to walk along the street in Lower Ince with his nose in a book. She said he had the reputation of being a brilliant scholar of mathematics. She was quite right – and it must have been the same person.

In 1955, he was appointed Principal of Brunel College in London. Under his leadership,

in 1966, Brunel College London became Brunel University, one of the new Universities founded in the 1960s. Due to his profound influence during this conversion period he became the first Vice Chancellor of Brunel University where he remained until his retirement in 1971. He was appointed CBE in 1977.

During his career Topping developed radical views about university education, becoming convinced of the value of sandwich courses in which students spend part of their time at the university and part of their time working in industry. Under his patient and persistent guidance the sandwich course became accepted. This was not always easy as he had to argue his case against some in the University who were concerned about the loss of teaching time which meant that some traditional University courses would be lost from the curriculum.

He served and chaired many national and international committees although according to the Independent obituary he eschewed fame. His first wife died in 1963 and he later remarried, celebrating his silver wedding in 1990. After his retirement, as well as writing his book, 'Beginnings of Brunel University: from Technical College to University', he took great pleasure in creating a garden at his home. He became known among his neighbours as the man 'who would help them with their sums'.

Bert Trautmann and P.O.W. Camp 50, Ashton-in-Makerfield

By Anthony Pilgrim

Over the course of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, approximately 154,000 Italian and 400,000 German and Prisoners of War were detained in the UK. Italian POWs began to arrive in significant numbers during the summer of 1941. By December 1941, a substantial enlargement of the detention estate was deemed necessary, and one of the sites chosen for a new camp was land on the east side of Garswood Park, adjacent to the A49/Warrington Road at Ashton-in-Makerfield.

Designated Camp 50, the facility received its first 'guests' in October 1942. The prisoners were mostly accommodated in Nissen huts, each of which held about 80 men. Their compound additionally comprised a cook-house, grocery store, dining and



Nissen huts, guards and prisoners at Camp 50, c. 1943

recreation huts, ablution and latrine blocks, reception station and sick bay, and workshops. Inspection reports mention a 'church hut' at Camp 50, and a dining/lecture hall seating 350. The guards' compound, closer to Warrington Road, included administration buildings, soldiers' and officers' living quarters and ablution blocks, a fuel store, water tower and detention block.

Occupancy at the main camp fluctuated but was around 700 POWs, with others housed in nearby hostels or on local farms where they were employed.

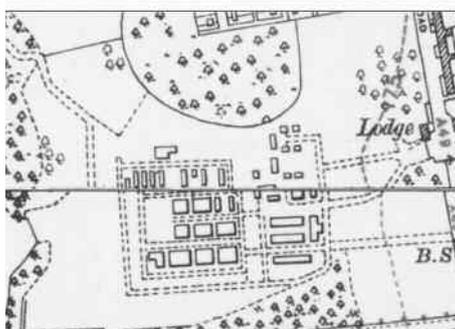
In spite of the Italian and German surrenders in 1943 and 1945 respectively, Camp 50 remained fully operational until 1 April 1948. Under the 1929 Prisoners of War Convention, POW status would only end with the signing of a peace treaty. Italy did not sign a treaty until 1947, and none has ever been signed by Germany. In practice, however, considerations other than a theoretical resumption of fighting led the UK to hold onto its POWs for as long as possible - in particular, an acute labour shortage and a determination to avoid the mistakes of the past whereby failure to provide for the orderly reconstruction and rehabilitation of a defeated Germany after the First World War had contributed to the rise of Nazism.

Bernhard 'Bert' Trautmann arrived at Camp 50 in June 1945, recruited to

work as a driver for the commandant. At this stage the population of Camp 50 was still overwhelmingly Italian, and POW Trautmann occupied a kind of no-man's land, eating with the POWs but sleeping in the guards' compound. In other respects he was typical of the German POWs who began to arrive at Camp 50 from July/August 1945, housed initially in discreet compounds within the main camp and alongside the POW hostel at Golborne.

Enticed by the prospect of camping trips and sports competitions, he had been a willing recruit to the junior branch of the Hitler Youth. On the outbreak of war he volunteered for the Luftwaffe, serving on the eastern front first as part of a ground-based communications unit but then as a paratrooper. In 1941, still only seventeen, he had witnessed the night-time shooting of unarmed civilians by the notorious Einsatzgruppen. In May 1944, with the failure of Hitler's Operation Barbarossa in the east and an Allied invasion of western Europe looking increasingly likely, his unit was redeployed to France. Here he faced the Allied forces in Normandy, afterwards joining the German retreat and taking part in the Battle of the Bulge before his capture near the German-Dutch border on 24 March 1945. His journey to Ashton was via POW camps at Weeze-on-Rhine and St Forte (Belgium), Kempton Park and Marbury Hall.

The British authorities had begun a programme of screening and re-education of German POWs in 1940. In September 1944, this was put on a more formal footing and entrusted to the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department (PID). Ultimately, however, the best method of re-education proved to be exposure to the local civilian population. German POWs were at first prohibited from fraternising with civilians, 'except in so far as may be strictly necessary for the efficient performance of the work allotted to them', but on 10 December 1946, it was



Camp 50 from above and as depicted on Ordnance Survey maps in 1947-1948. The A49/Warrington Road runs along the right-hand edge, with the Ashton-in-Makerfield Station platforms - now the site of 'The Parks' office complex - partially visible in the bottom right corner.



Postcard sent from Camp 50 by an Italian POW on 1 November 1945. He writes: 'Dearest parents, Today I let you know about my health. At the moment I feel good and I hope the same is true for all of you. I hope for a quick reply. I close this letter sending you my dear kisses. Your affectionate son, Bruno. Dear sister, I'm sorry I can't satisfy your request. I send you my dear kisses. Your brother Bruno'. The last of the Italian POWs were repatriated in July 1946.

announced that they would be allowed, 'to take unescorted walks within a radius of five miles of their camp or billet until lighting-up time, to converse with members of the public, and, subject to permission from their commandant, to accept invitations to private houses within the five mile radius'. Concerts and football matches brought prisoners and civilians together, and some close and enduring friendships soon developed. In the report of its final inspection of Camp 50, in March 1948, PID was forced to concede that:



Camp 50 soccer team, 1947, including Bert Trautmann, sitting cross-legged at the front

'Organised re-educational activities in this camp have impressed but few. Lectures become more and more unpopular... Since the beginning of 1947, re-education has passed into the hands of the population of Lancashire, whose friendliness has proved a great help. The ordinary workmen [of the district are] responsible for the fact that the majority of the PsW in this camp is pro-British'.

In September 1948, the Ministry of Works announced proposals to take over the abandoned camp, 'as it now stands for use by a Government Department for the period of the life of the buildings'. No objection was raised by Ashton-in-Makerfield Urban District Council, but a later suggestion by the Ministry that it should permanently retain and redevelop the site was rejected.

My correspondent, John Ellis, whose father had been a guard at Camp 50, recalled that:

'As kids we played in the old camp. Most of the huts were still there in the '50s. If you wanted to join our gang you had to climb to the top of the water tower and then walk round the top hanging on to the rusty tank'.

The site was eventually cleared for new grammar school buildings (now Byrchall High School), construction for which began in March 1964.

Bert Trautmann was among the 15,700 Germans who took up an offer to stay on in the United Kingdom as civilian workers. He went on to achieve footballing immortality as goalkeeper with Manchester City FC. A film – 'Trautmann' – is due for UK release in 2019, Camp 50 having been recreated for the purpose of a German film lot.

Note on Sources

Surprisingly little information about Camp 50 is held locally. Ashton-in-Makerfield UDC's deliberations on the provision of utilities for the camp and post-war disposal of the site are at Wigan Archives referenced, UD/Ash/A/A1/66 and 172.

Newspaper reports and memoirs – for example in, 'Memories of the Past' (Wigan MBC, 1993) and Frank Goulding's, 'A North West Village At War' (Cheshire Libraries & Museums,



Camp 50 newspaper, 'Aufbauwille', July 1946. Produced by the German POWs themselves, the paper appeared at first fortnightly but then monthly owing to paper shortages. Issue 8 leads with the first in a series of articles for younger POWs – 80 of whom, in 1946, were still in their teens – entitled, 'German youth, read and learn!'. The inside pages are a mix of national and international news, sports reports, listings of upcoming lectures and camp gossip.

1987) – focus mainly on encounters with Italian POWs during the early years of the Camp's existence.

At The National Archives (TNA), development of the UK's POW detention estate is documented by the ex-War Office files at references, WO 199/404-409. Foreign Office papers relating specifically to Camp 50 are at TNA references, FO 939/132 (inspection reports) and FO 939/300 (lecture reviews, copies of "Aufbauwille" etc). I should also acknowledge John Ellis (whose email in December 2017 launched me on this particular voyage of discovery), Trautmann biographers Alan Rowlands (DB Publishing, 2005) and Catrine Clay (Yellow Jersey Press, 2010) and the man himself (for 'Steppes to Wembley', Robert Hale Ltd, 1956).

A PENNINGTON SCULPTOR

By Julie McKiernan

Mary Pownall Bromet

In 1912, the sculptor Mary Pownall said:

'Women have not pushed very far into the world of sculpture yet, and unless they possess independent means they would be well advised to leave it alone.'

Fortunately, she was the granddaughter of James Pownall (1806-1859), a wealthy partner of one of the biggest silk firms in Leigh, Bickham & Pownall, who lived at Pennington Hall.

After his only son, James, married Mary Swanwick, in 1859, Pownall died and James Jnr., Mary and their children, Ellen (b. 1860), Mary ('Polly' b. 1862), Lucy (b. 1864) and Frank Bever (b. 1865) lived at Platt Fold Farm, and The Limes in Orchard Lane, before moving to Newton Hall in Middlewich. Pownall, Bickham & Selby was dissolved in 1868, enabling James to retire aged only 35.

Mary wrote:

'I do not know when my craving for Art began...The sky and trees, the blue English atmosphere, and the wonderful clouds forming themselves into glorious shapes like great castles and cities, made such a picture that I became 'alive' in a way that I had never been until then.'

But art was not encouraged at Mary's boarding school which she left after developing bronchitis, the start of a lifetime of 'delicate' health. When the family moved to The Grange in Knutsford, Mary

took particular pleasure in arranging flowers but longed to create something more permanent.

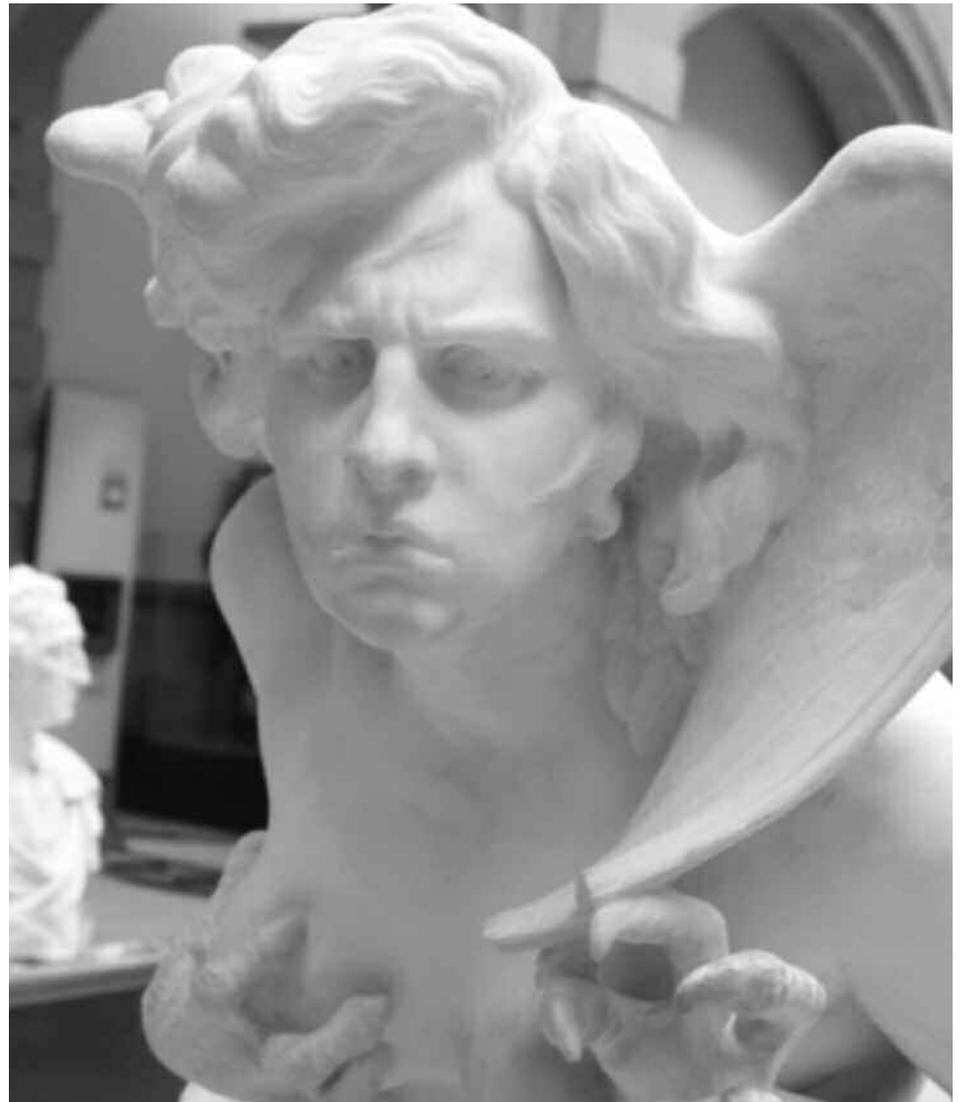
'At last I found an extraordinary medium- white gutta-percha, which when softened in hot water could be fashioned into flowers and fruit.'

Around this time, the family went to stay in Ilkley to take 'the baths'

and Mary met Alfred Bromet, one of six well-known rugby playing sons of a solicitor from Tadcaster.

Mary nicknamed him 'the champion' because:

'I felt I could trust that face, those true and honest eyes, with my whole life...On our return home he and I wrote to each other frequently. I had told him all about my longing to become an artist and



The Harpy Calaeno, 1902, by Mary Pownall, Kelvingrove Art Gallery (Wikipedia, Creative Commons License)

received his full sympathy in return.'

But they were not to meet again for many years.

In 1887, Mary and Lucy went to The Royal Jubilee Exhibition in Manchester where they found sculptor John Cassidy modelling in clay.

'I still find it difficult, after many years of hard work and experience, to explain the intoxication that filled my being as I watched the sculptor's hands making the dead clay live.'

Surprisingly, Mary's parents allowed her to attend Cassidy's studio where she learned how to copy masterpieces before creating an original statuette of a shepherdess which was exhibited in Manchester Art Gallery in 1890. It was bought by Charles Galloway, who became one of her greatest supporters but it was a woman who was to change Mary's life forever. Mrs Steinthal of Ilkley Wells, saw Mary's head of a Roman warrior in a shop window and, on learning the artist was a girl, asked to meet Mary.

'Her kindness and sympathy were beyond words, and she consented to come and see my father... "Your daughter has talent; it is not right to keep her back, let her have her chance. I can give her the address of a sculptor in Frankfurt, and your daughter Lucy can study music there".'

So Mary and Lucy, accompanied by Mr Steinthal, travelled to Frankfurt where they both studied for a year. But the threat of war meant that they soon headed to Paris where Mary attended The Academie Julian. Her work was so good that two of her 'heads' were submitted to La Societe des Artistes Francaises Salon, and she was the first



*Watford War Memorial, also known as Watford Peace Memorial
(© Stephen Danzig (WMR-2950))*

women ever to be allowed to compete with the men in sculpture, her statuette of St Sebastien gaining first prize.

'The Parents wanted me to 'give up' and return home, to be 'a good girl and marry a nice fellow.'

She managed to persuade them to allow her to take a studio of her own and in 1896 they visited her and Lucy in Paris. Fortunately, she escaped the unwelcome attentions of a 'great artist' who had asked her to become his mistress when a 'delicate' chest led to recuperation in Switzerland. But she continued to work and in 1899 'Now I'm a Fairy' won a 'Mention Honorable' from La Societe des Artistes Francaise. She then arranged to work under Monsieur J B Champeil, in the Villa Medici in Rome, but when she and Lucy returned home for the summer they were met at Victoria Station by Alfred Bromet. It was a happy reunion and he asked:

"When do you intend to come and settle in England and let me build you a studio?" So we became engaged."

However, Mary had already arranged to return to Rome for two winters so they told no-one but Lucy. Back in Rome, Mary started work on one of her most dramatic sculptures 'The Harpy', which she gave her own face.

When their engagement was finally announced Mary's parents were both frail so they were married in Switzerland in June 1902 where her brother Frank lived and could 'give her away'. On returning to England, they moved into Lime Lodge, Oxhey and a studio was added to the house. It was here that she started to sign her name Mary Pownall Bromet and produced many striking sculptures including 'An Intruder', which was bought in 1906 by the Princess of Wales. Mary was President of the Society of Women Artists from 1913 to 1915-1916 and continued to exhibit every year in London, Paris and Rome. One of her most important and prominent commissions was the Watford Peace Memorial, one of only a few created by a female sculptor, which was recently upgraded by Historic England to Grade II* listed status. Mary died on the 25 February 1937.

CAN YOU HELP?

Earlier this year a volunteer for Wigan and Leigh Hospice discovered an album of photographs which were taken in Wigan in the 1940s and 50s.

The volunteer found the photographs inside a carrier bag which had been donated to the charity's shop in Hope Street in Wigan town centre.

Despite an appeal through social media for the owner to get in touch no-one came forward to claim the photographs.

Anna Hart, Retail Manager for the hospice, said: "Our volunteer was sorting through some donations and came across a lovely old album full of photographs taken around Wigan. We posted some of the images on social media and, while a few people named some of those people in the photographs, no-one came forward to claim them.

'Someone who saw the post suggested that we donate the album to Wigan Archive Services, which we thought was a fantastic idea.

We're really pleased that these photographs will be preserved and kept for future generations to enjoy.'

The collection is now in the care of the Archives & Local Studies. The majority of the collection is family photographs, including images of soldiers, family holidays and group trips.

We'd be delighted if any Past Forward readers are able to help identify any of the images in the collection – please drop us a line at archives@wigan.gov.uk

Wigan and Leigh Hospice is a charity supporting over 1,000 local people with life-limiting illnesses every year. It receives a third of its funding from the NHS and relies on the support of local people and businesses.

You can find out more about the work of Wigan and Leigh Hospice at: <https://www.wlh.org.uk/>







*The Lake at Astley Sanatorium, Damhouse
(Wigan Archives, PC2010.3041)*

Astley Sanatorium formerly Astley Hall – Damhouse

BY DOREEN JONES

When I read the recent Past Forward article [Past Forward, Issue 78] regarding Damhouse, it brought back memories of living at The Lodge to the Hall for a period of time.

When I was ten months old my mum, Doris Jones, walked with me in my pram from Westleigh to Astley. We were going to live and care for Grandad Herwin Jones. Grandma Jones had died, hence our move. We were to live at The Lodge, Astley Sanatorium.

My dad, Jimmy Jones – known in later years as the 'pitman poet' – was Herwin's younger son. Grandad Jones was an ambulance man at the hospital. He also undertook portering duties. My mum was to be the lodge keeper, booking all who entered the gate and those leaving into a ledger. This book was taken once a week to

the matron for inspection control of visitors. The Hall and wards had now become an infectious diseases hospital – Astley Sanatorium.

The patients, in the main children, were suffering from scarlet fever, diphtheria, meningitis and pulmonary tuberculosis. The immunisation and vaccination programme for all young children led largely to the eradication of these diseases. Poliomyelitis cases were also been nursed there – hence an iron lung machine on one of the ward corridors.

There was a resident doctor, Dr Davidson, who had his residence in the grounds. I also remember a visiting doctor, a Dr Edge, from Crumpsall Hospital.

In my early years, until I was eleven years old, I



Nurses and 'Father Christmas' at Astley Hospital, c. 1939 (Wigan Archives, PC2010.3550)

had the freedom of some of the grounds and woods. The drives up to the hospital and grounds were planted with rhododendrons and were very attractive when flowering. There was also a rookery. During spring time there would be an annual shooting of birds to keep the population down! I remember gamekeepers coming from Worsley. There was a splendid orchard with cherry, pear and apple trees which I raided in autumn time.

The resident doctor had a son, Ian. He and I had great fun together, from sailing the punt on a very beautiful lake in the grounds to ice

skating there in the winter. We made 'slides' on the ice.

At Christmas time the vicar of St Stephen's Church nearby would dress up as Father Christmas and visit the wards, delivering presents. I was dressed as a nurse and rang a hand bell to announce his coming. On Christmas Eve the nurses would tour the wards singing carols, with their cloaks turned inside out to show the red lining – which, in the lantern lights they carried, looked very seasonal. They ended their night at The Lodge, Mum having baked mince pies. I produced a bottle of sherry and cordials to the joy of everyone. Following Christmas the nurses and trades staff put on a wonderful variety show for us all to enjoy in the Nurses' Home.

In later years (1953-1956) I returned to Astley Hospital, as it later became. I was a student nurse doing my SRN training at Leigh Infirmary and Astley Hospital.

I returned recently for the NHS 50 Years celebration. Fortunately the Hall is in the good care of the Morts Astley Heritage Society, so all can enjoy the grounds and Hall. The grounds have now also been used in areas for housing development.



Astley Sanatorium staff. Herwin Jones, the author's grandfather, pictured back row, third from right

'The Art of Survival'

Born in the early thirties in St Helier, Robert Dower Barron, Hindley Green resident, remembers life in Jersey during the German occupation in the Second World War.

Robert lived in Jersey with his Scottish parents. A natural linguist, Robert spoke English at home to his parents and French at school. Asked how he found learning dual languages Robert explained 'language became a hobby'. After the Nazi invasion 'we had to learn German at school...for one hour every day. (Speaking German) has come in very handy...in Canada I got a job within 3 days at the airport being an interpreter and it is something that stayed with me my entire life.'

The occupation of Jersey began on the 1 July 1940 when the Germans realised the island was undefended. Robert remembers how the 'Nazis walked in, they just took it over, no gun firing, nothing'. He also could recall the first German he ever came across. The German wanted to know if he had a bicycle pump to pump up his bicycle tyres.

Describing five years of German occupation is not simple but Robert recounts some examples. The first is of a harrowing experience which began for him and his family one sunny Thursday evening. In 1942, on the 18 September, a German Officer with steel helmet and brass plates came to the house to arrest his father. They knew he was coming and his father had gone into hiding, so the German Officer turned round to his mother and said, 'That is no problem I arrest you, Frau Barron, your father-in-law, and your son, and you have until four o'clock tomorrow afternoon to find your husband but you will be shipped to Germany tomorrow afternoon!'

The reason why they wanted to arrest Robert's father was because he was born in Scotland and Hitler

wanted hostages from the island in retaliation for the British arresting Germans in Iran. The German officer stood to attention and shouted, 'Heil Hitler.' Robert's mother stood to attention and exclaimed, 'God Save the King'. The person who had given the Germans information on Robert's father said to his mother you're going to get me into trouble for that. The Nazi officer took the informant by the scruff of the neck and pulled him out of the house and said to him that is a brave woman!

Robert's mother died when he was very young but that episode that Thursday night has lived with him throughout his life. The next day a local farmer said he would take the family including Robert's father in his cart down to the pier. They went through the main streets of the island, the capital St Helier, and saw the German soldiers all with steel helmets, fixed bayonets, every so many feet and the local people saying goodbye. There were about a 1000 people arrested who were going to be put on a ship to a prison camp in Germany.

When they got to the harbour they discovered that the employer of Robert's father told lots of little white lies to the Officers and told them they couldn't take him to Germany, the island needed him and it would take three months for them to find a replacement if they could.

The Senior Officer told Robert's mother that that they would send Robert's grandfather to Germany instead of her husband. His mother refused and the German Officer that had arrested them the day before turned around and said, 'You are a stupid woman. You've

got a young boy downstairs. Do you want that nice boy to go to a prison camp?' And his mother of course said no and signed the paper to send his grandfather as a hostage instead.

That night they went home in a car which had been procured by Robert's mother after demanding that they be taken home in an automobile. When they finally arrived back home, the house had been ransacked as people thought they would never see them again. They brought back two mattresses and the family slept on the mattresses on the floor of the parents' bedroom.

At about eleven o'clock at night they heard their iron gate open and Robert's mother first thought was that the Germans had come back for them. Robert knew better though, he said, 'It's my grandad!' And it was!

His grandfather had joined the queue of people waiting to get on the ship to Germany. One of the men in the queue with his two children accused Robert's grandfather of pushing in to which he replied, 'If you are in such a hurry to be going to Germany just go ahead.' His grandfather walked to the back of the queue.

That day thirty people couldn't get on the boat, Robert's grandfather was one of the thirty.

The incident Robert related would have taken place in September 1942 when 1200 British born islanders were deported to Germany. In June of that same year the Germans had ordered that all wirelesses be handed in. To have a wireless was extremely dangerous yet some of the islanders including



Robert Dower Baron, pictured in June 2018

Robert's father built their own crystal radios.

Robert would listen to the news from the American Forces Network in Cherbourg and take notes. Since the invasion of Normandy in June 1944 Jersey was completely surrounded by the British and the Americans in France. Robert would look over to France on the way to school knowing that that country was liberated and yet they were still under Nazi occupation. The islanders thought they would be liberated but

they had to wait nearly a year for that day to come.

Robert had some old friends who lived about a mile and a half away; they had no access to the news. Robert used to write the news and put the notes in the sole of his wooden shoes. He would then visit the family and show them his jottings, but to get there he had to walk through a German artillery camp. Robert would smile at the guards and speak in German to them. They would let him through

the camp and Robert would visit his friends. He was twelve years old at the time and had he been caught he would have been in serious trouble.

Another clear memory was starvation. They were very hungry and there was no gas, no electricity, and no coal. They had an old stove with wood burning and they used that to cook. They lived on potatoes, turnips, and there was no bread or anything like that. In January 1945 the Red Cross came from Portugal in a Swedish ship with Canadian prisoner of war parcels. The family received four parcels, including chocolate which Robert hadn't seen in years and didn't particularly like. In the package was Spam, Fray Bentos Corned Beef, red salmon and bacon. The Red Cross realised that Jersey had no bread so the SS Vega brought flour. Robert's mother told him to get four loaves from the bakers. Robert did as he was dutifully told but on the way home he sat on a hedge and devoured one of the loaves of bread. When he returned home his mother asked why there were only three loaves. Robert told her and his mother broke down in tears, she was so upset that she hadn't been able to feed her child. Robert felt that he had done a bad thing but eating that bread was something he has never forgotten.

Liberation was a wonderful day and again the family went on a horse and cart but this time it was a journey free from fear. Robert remembers how 25 British soldiers and a Colonel liberated the islanders from 20,000 German troops, not a shot was fired when they landed, not a shot fired when they left. Liberation day was a dull miserable looking day but it certainly wasn't dull for the islanders.

Robert says of those five years he learnt to survive and the art of survival has stayed with him all through his life.

Robert still visits Jersey. He has three children and four grandchildren all of whom he is extremely proud of.

A WIGAN HERO

BY TOM WALSH

When David Gill left his home in Standish Lower Ground on the morning of the 8 October 1938 he could never imagine that the life of a seven year old boy would lie in his hands.

He was a coal-man and his work that day was to take him to Litherland, Liverpool. He was delivering to a house when a neighbour raised the alarm that a boy had fallen into the canal at the back of the house where he was visiting. What happened next makes you proud of this Wigan man and proud to be a Wiganer.

To tell this story I rely on the citation from 'The Humane Society', newspaper reports, a letter from the boy's mother and remarks by the magistrate who presented the scroll. Because David Gill never sought credit for his bravery, his daughter Myra is equally reticent about her Dad's courage, both showing typical northern modesty. This is underlined by the first newspaper report, paraphrased, which reads:

'IDENTITY RIDDLE OF RESCUE

'Man's Dive Into The Canal at Litherland. An unknown boy about 6 or 7.



David Gill

The boy was taken to Bootle Hospital suffering immersion. About 12:30, a man was seen to jump into the canal to bring the boy to the bank, along with a second man gave artificial respiration. The Echo understands the rescuer was a man named Gill from Wigan'

The report goes on to say on being told of the boy's plight he jumped through the back window of 6 Mill Lane and dived in to the water. Mrs McKnight, the householder, says she saw him carrying the boy running to the main road where a crowd had gathered. She then lent him a change of clothing. He left without giving his name or address.

It is reported that Mr Gill summoned the ambulance to convey the boy to hospital. It is reasonable to assume that his name only came to light when the emergency service asked the name of the caller.

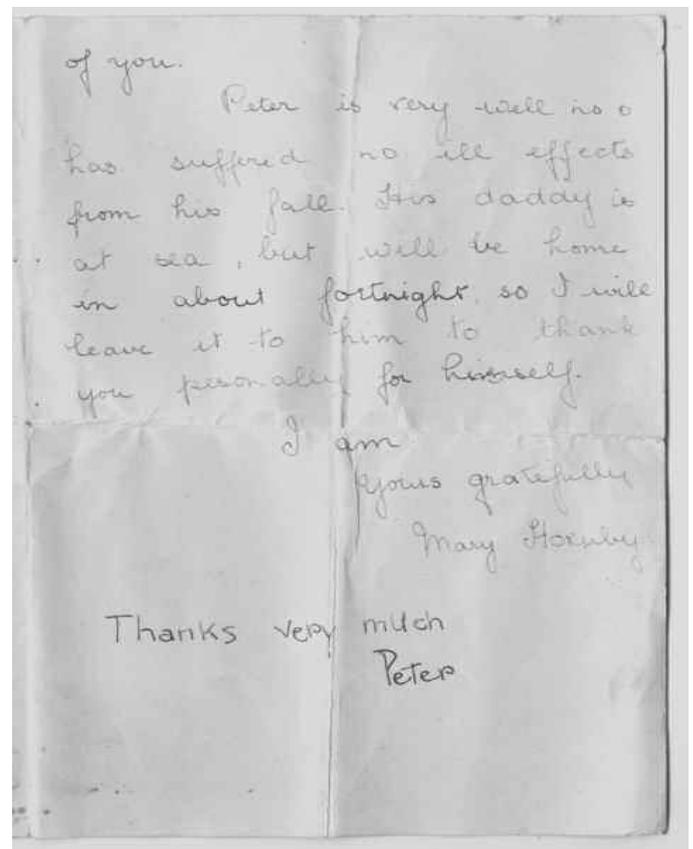
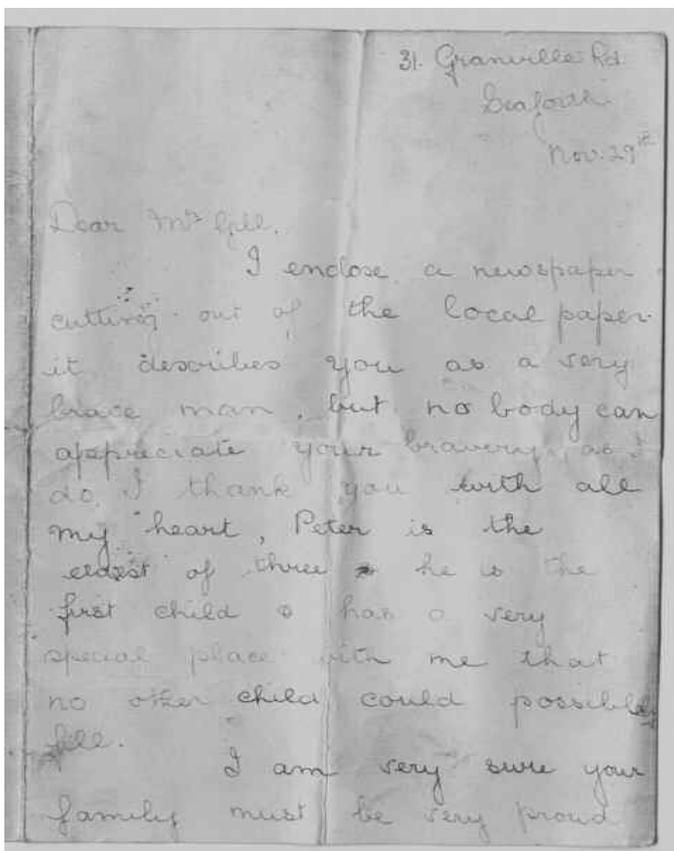
A second report published some time after the first story, again paraphrased:

'DIVED TWICE, TO SAVE DROWNING BOY'

Mr Bark, the magistrate who presented David Gill (30) with The Humane Society's Honorary Testimonial, the gathering heard the police report, which was read out in court stated, 'On the morning of 8th October, Peter Hornby, aged seven was playing on the towing path of the Leeds Liverpool Canal at Litherland with two other boys when he fell into the water. David Gill, who was delivering coal to a nearby house, at once ran through the house and climbed through the back-kitchen window, the houses having no back doors, removed all his clothes with the exception of his trousers, and dived into the water.

He was unable to locate the boy for a few moments so he dived to the bottom. He found the boy but at first was unable to bring him to the surface. Gill dived again and succeeded in bringing him to the surface and getting him to the side where artificial respiration was applied. When the ambulance arrived oxygen was given until 1pm, when the doctor stated that he was out of danger.'

Mr. Bark went on to say that, 'If it had not been for the prompt and courageous action of David Gill there was no doubt the boy would have lost his life. You showed not only bravery but wonderful presence of mind.' He went on to say, 'One of the most meritorious things about the whole matter is that after the first time you did not bring him to the surface, you dived down a second time and were successful'. Such is the stuff of heroes.



Letter sent to David Gill by Mrs Hornby and Peter Hornby

The scroll and the newspaper cuttings along with a letter from the boy's mother were made available to me by David Gill's daughter and son in law, Myra and John Burns. The letter reads:

'Dear Mr Gill, I enclose a newspaper cutting from the local paper. It describes you as a very brave man but nobody can appreciate your bravery more than I do, I thank with all my heart. Peter is the eldest of three sons, he is the first born child and has a very special place with me that no other child could possibly fill. I'm sure your family must be very proud of you. Peter is very well with no ill effects from his fall. His Daddy is away at sea but will be home in about a fortnight so I will leave it up to him to thank you properly for himself. I am, yours gratefully, Mary Hornby.' There is an addendum to the letter in a child-like hand that reads: 'Thanks very much, Peter.'

The letter from Mrs Hornby and note from Peter must have moved David Gill; I'm sure it meant more than the certificate from the Humane Society, the message from Peter particularly. When seeing Peter's 'Thank you' in the flesh, so to speak, I think it would bring a tear to the hardest of hearts. I've tried, unsuccessfully, to trace the family. I hope that any publicity created by this article may lead to Peter Hornby's family or indeed Peter himself being traced – he would be 87 now so it's possible he could be alive today.

It would be wonderful to put the families in touch. Readers of Past Forward with Liverpool connections may know of families with the Hornby surname. Failing that, maybe The Liverpool Echo and Radio Merseyside could be persuaded to widen the search.

When writing this article my mind goes to the old film, 'It's a Wonderful Life'. The film looks at how the world would be different if the hero hadn't lived. I can't help but wonder how

life turned out for Peter Hornby; did he have children and grandchildren? However his life turned out, if the coal-man from Wigan had been minutes earlier or later, or if he had been a non-swimmer, the Hornby family would have had a lifetime of sorrow.

It's often said that 'if' is the biggest word in the English language. When pondering on stories like this it certainly seems to resonate.



Certificate presented by the Humane Society to David Gill

Thomas McCarthy Junior

A Wrestling Comedian

By Larry McCarthy

It would be difficult to fully describe a life as varied as that of Thomas McCarthy Junior in just one article, nevertheless, an attempt will be made to do justice to the life of a colourful man, who at various stages of his life was a champion wrestler, comedian, singer and blacksmith.

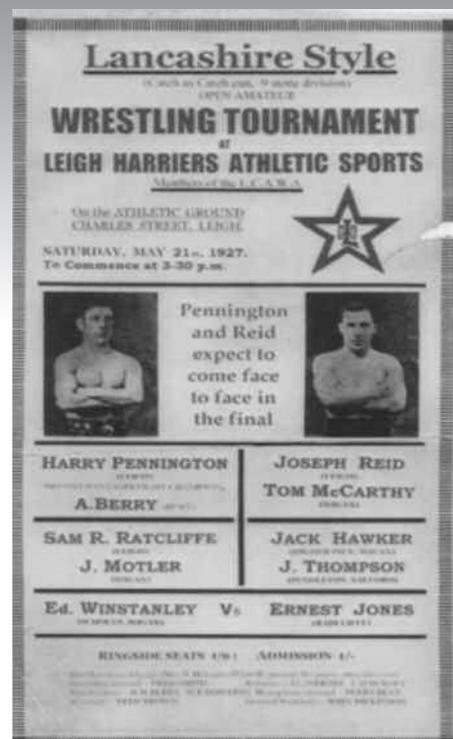
Thomas McCarthy Junior was born in Belle Green Lane, Ince, in 1906, the son of Thomas McCarty Senior, the well-known Wigan wrestler, First World War Distinguished Conduct Medal recipient, puppeteer, circus performer and trainer of Wigan Rugby League from 1919 to 1939. Over the course of several generations, the

Like his father, Thomas would have a varied career as a performer and would also become a top wrestler, well known in Lancashire and beyond. In fact, as a young man, Thomas was initially trained in Lancashire wrestling by his father, who had been 9st 7lb Catch as Catch Can wrestling Champion of England prior to the outbreak of the First World War and had also been dubbed the Wrestling 'Champion of Gallipoli', winning a match under Turkish sniper fire!

At the age of 20, in October 1926 at Chorlton Town Hall near Manchester, he would enter his first competition of note, nothing less than the British Amateur Wrestling Association Bantamweight Championships. This was the first time the championship had taken place outside of London and in the north of England. As such, the tournament was very well represented by Lancashire with over two thirds of the 24 entrants hailing from Wigan and Leigh.

After having won his first two bouts, Thomas was matched with the talented Harry Pennington, the 1925 Bantamweight Champion of Lancashire and eventual winner of this tournament. According to a report from the now defunct Sporting Chronicle newspaper, which covered the event, Thomas, was exceedingly unlucky in this match, as he appeared to get the winning pin-fall on Pennington and thus immediately stood upright expecting to be awarded the victory. However, although a number of spectators and the Sporting Chronicle's reporter stated that the referee, the well-known martial arts pioneer, Percy Longhurst, appeared to signal the win, he in fact had signalled for the bout to continue and an upright Thomas was easily flattened out. This eliminated Thomas and enabled Pennington to advance to the final.

Despite the setback of losing in controversial fashion, Thomas was soon back in competition. In May 1927, he was again involved in a high profile Lancashire amateur wrestling tournament, again in the 9st division.



Leigh Harriers Competition poster, 1927 (Allan Best Collection)

The tournament was hosted by Leigh Harriers Athletic club on their grounds and Thomas was matched up against the excellent local wrestler, Joe Reid. This bout would also result in a loss to Reid, who was the tournament's eventual winner. However, the losses to Pennington and Reid where by no means a disgrace, as both Leigh wrestlers were considered some of the best amateurs the country had produced to date. Pennington had been picked in 1927 to represent England against France, whilst Reid would win the British Bantamweight Championship five years in a row, from 1931 to 1935 and represent Great Britain in the 1930 Empire (Commonwealth) Games, winning silver, and the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, placing a very respectable fourth.

Thomas would continue to wrestle and in 1930 he became a Wigan Boxing and Wrestling Association committee member, the association being chaired by none other than his father. Also on the committee was his great friend and future brother in law,



Thomas McCarthy, obituary, 1954 (Wigan Observer)

family surname had morphed from Carty, to McCarty and eventually Thomas adopted the more familiar McCarthy, hence the oft seen spelling variation from his father in local newspapers of the time. It was often speculated that some families of Irish extract were adding a prefix in an effort to return a surname to the original form.

As a child Thomas grew up in Lower Ince, however, when his father was offered the job with Wigan Rugby League, shortly after the First World War, the family moved to a house in Orchard Street, a stone's throw from Central Park.

PUBLIC NOTICES

WRESTLING AT THE MAJESTIC
TENTERFIELD STREET, PRESTON
FRIDAY, JULY 1936.

DOORS OPEN 6.45 P.M. COMMENCE AT 7.45 P.M. PROMPT.
SEATS MAY BE BOOKED AT THE OFFICE, 10 A.M. TO 5 P.M.

ALL-STAR PROGRAMME - PURE STYLE WRESTLING, SENSATIONAL COSTUME AT CATCH WEIGHT.
TEN 5-MINUTE BOUTS.

ZARANOFF THE GREAT V. LEW ROSEBY
(MANCHESTER). The Russian Wrestling Scientific (GLAYTON). Ex-Amateur British Champion, De-
fender of the World's Cleverest Wrestler. The Un- feated Strangler Lewis recently. Roseby is also a
beaten Champion without a county. very clever and scientific wrestler.

EXTRA EIGHT 5-MINUTE BOUTS COME! SPECIAL!

JOE REID V. EX-SEAMAN STACEY
(LEIGH). British Empire Boston Champion. A (PORTSMOUTH). Late Champion of Channel
great favourite at Preston. Fleet.
You saw how Stacey defeated Cannon (Glasgow) here on July 26th. Will he do it with Reid? This is a contest
worth watching, make no mistake!

EIGHT 5-MINUTE BOUTS WALTER-WRIGHT COSTUME.

TOMMY MACK V. JOHNNY BIRCHALL
THE DUNOY (DOVCASTER). Narrowly defeated by (MANFIELD). South County Walter-Wright Cham-
Billy Jackson (London), British Walter-Wright pion. Defeated Syd. Millar at catch-weights at
Champion, recently in this Hall after putting up a Boylan N.S.B. recently.
splendid performance. A Fair Tackle is expected here.

GREAT LIGHT-WEIGHT COSTUME. TEN 5-MINUTE BOUTS.

GINGER BIRK V. TED MORAN
(TUDLEY). Lightweight Champion of Eng- (CARDIFF). Welsh Lightweight Champion. This is
land. Challenges any Englishman at 10st. for £100 his Max's best card in Preston, but when you have seen
& side him in action you will hope it won't be the last.
Winner of over 100 contests.

ADMISSION (including Tax): 2/-; BALCONY, 1/6; BINGADE, 2/6.
LADIES SPECIALLY INVITED - HALF-PRICE TO BINGADE. LATE 'BUS' TO ALL PARTS.

Advertisement for wrestling at The Majestic

the talented wrestling prospect, William Francis Disley. In July 1930, in an attempt to revive traditional Lancashire Catch as Catch Can outdoor matches, his father promoted and organised a well-attended wrestling tournament at the Hill Top Grounds in Hindley.

Thomas was referred to in a report by the Wigan Examiner at the time as 'Wigan's outstanding Bantamweight'. He was matched against Jim Miller, dubbed 'Wigan's Young Hercules', in the 9st 4lb category. Thomas was victorious by two falls to one in nine minutes and was awarded a medal for his efforts. Also competing on the bill,



The author's grandfather and great-grandfather (Wigan Examiner)

as a middleweight, was the great Billy Riley, Wigan's famous world champion wrestler and also good friend of his father, Thomas Senior.

Not long after, whilst moving up the weight divisions, having won a number of matches and medals, Thomas eventually became the Lightweight Wrestling Champion of the North. Despite his prowess, his family often remarked in jest on how he was never able to perform a headstand, which was seen at the time as a prerequisite for becoming a successful wrestler.

By the mid-1930s wrestling would morph from real and often brutal

Lancashire Catch as Catch Can matches to 'All in Wrestling', which unlike its predecessors, were in effect staged matches, with pre-determined victors. Thomas and his best friend William also transitioned to this new form of sports entertainment and regularly wrestled at a number of venues including Preston, Bolton, Rotherham and Chorley throughout 1935 and 1936.

Despite the staged nature of the bouts, the wrestlers were often injured. However, Thomas's family always noted how he was able to return home relatively unmarked. Whilst William would wrestle under a different pseudonym on every show, Thomas chose the stage name 'Ex-Seaman Stacey' and referred to himself as the Wrestling Champion of the Navy, fighting out of Portsmouth. According to his family, he had never been on a barge, let alone a boat!

Stage names were proving to be a very popular gimmick with professional wrestlers at the time, a habit which continues to this day. His choice of stage name was most likely due to the fact that his father had toured the north of England in 1913 with promoter Bob Sommerville's troupe of wrestlers, one of whom was the real Champion Wrestler of the Navy and the original Seaman Stacey. Seaman Stacey was killed in action in France in the First World War and the choice of his name by Thomas, would have been a means of continuing the legacy of his father's friend.

Outside of wrestling, Thomas would work as a blacksmith's striker and subsequently a blacksmith at Ince Waggon Works. He worked there for a

number of years with his brother in law William and then went to work again as a blacksmith's striker for Walker Brothers at Pagefield Iron Works in Wigan. Throughout the Second World War, Thomas was exempt from joining the armed forces as his job was considered a reserved occupation, crucial to the industrial war effort.

During this time, he put one of his other talents to good use, his skills as comedian. In fact he was considered such a skilled comedian, that he often performed on the BBC Workers Playtime radio broadcast, which served to boost the morale of factory workers during the war. The programme was broadcast three times a week from a factory canteen. His nephew Bill remembers how his uncle Thomas was capable of making people laugh, despite always having a deadpan expression on his face. In addition to his considerable skills as a comedian, Thomas was also well known as a singer and had performed for a while at the Wigan Hippodrome in 1926.

Soon after the war, in 1946, at aged 40, his health began to deteriorate and he was unable to either work or perform to earn a living. As a result of this, his family had to move away from Orchard Street in the late 1940s and settled in Norley Hall Avenue in Pemberton. As fate would have it, he sadly died only two months after the death of his father, in November 1954, at the relatively young age of 48 and is buried at Gidlow cemetery in Standish. He was survived by a wife, four sons and three daughters. Nevertheless, like his father, he was born to perform – his curriculum vitae was varied and interesting to say the least.

BY ALAN ROBY

Found...the grave of Miss Weeton's brother, Thomas

In Edward Hall's two volume book, 'Miss Weeton's Journal of a Governess' (Oxford University Press, 1936), Hall revealed that Miss Weeton's brother, Thomas Richard Weeton (1781-1845) and his wife Jane, nee Scott (1780-1831), are both buried in the churchyard of The Holy Trinity, Horwich, near Bolton.

During my own research for 'Miss Weeton, Governess and Traveller' (Wigan Archives, 2016), I was informed that the grave records for part of the nineteenth century had been destroyed in a fire. That could mean having to look for the proverbial 'needle in the haystack'. Due to time constraints, I decided to proceed without trying to find the grave, satisfied instead by the discovery of portraits in oil of both Thomas and his wife Jane; alas no painting or sketch of Thomas' sister, Miss Nelly Weeton has ever been discovered.

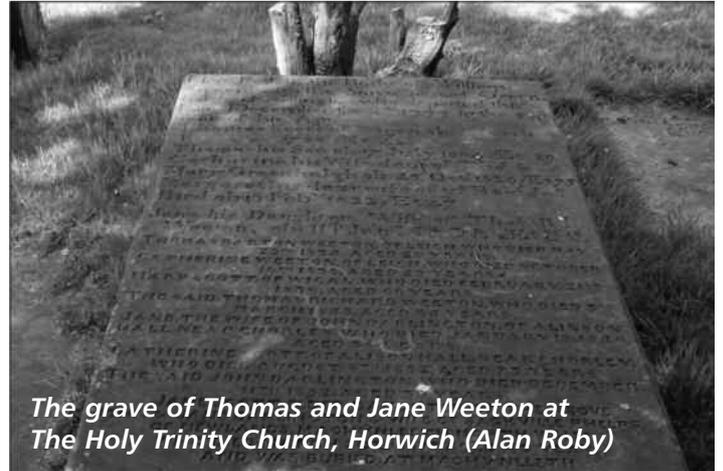
On a beautiful spring day this year, I decided to attempt to discover the grave of Thomas and Jane Weeton. Many graves in Horwich Churchyard are in the form of slabs of stone, horizontally placed at ground level, but knowing something about Thomas and Jane's aspirations and gentry connections through his wife's family, I did not believe such an unprepossessing memorial stone would be satisfactory for them, neither did I believe there would be no marked grave. For that reason I decided to look for a memorial erected well above ground level, and in less than twenty minutes I spotted an elevated grave about 30 yards distant; it consisted of a large stone slab, supported horizontally on six stone pillars.

The memorial was noticeable simply because it was raised above the level of nearby graves, and was the family grave of a number of individuals with different surnames, including Thomas and Jane Weeton and their children, Thomas Barton Weeton (1805-1834) and Catherine Weeton (1806-1835). Another daughter of Thomas and Jane, also Jane (1807-1845), had married a wealthy colliery owner, John Darlington (1817-1852). Both Jane and John are in the same grave. Altogether there are no less than fourteen people revealed on the stone, which itself stands on an earlier grave, still to be examined.

At this time I am undertaking research into the ancestors of Thomas' wife, Jane, whose mother, Catherine Scott, was the great-granddaughter of a Lord Willoughby of Parham.

If a Past Forward reader who would like to investigate any of the names on the grave, I have included a photograph of the grave and the names listed with this article.

Further details about Miss Weeton Governess and Traveller, can be found on page 7.



The grave of Thomas and Jane Weeton at The Holy Trinity Church, Horwich (Alan Roby)

WIGAN BOROUGH ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE NETWORK

Wigan Borough Environment & Heritage Network is the representative body for all local societies, groups and individuals interested in protecting and promoting the Borough's Heritage and Natural Environment.

The network provides advice, speakers, site visits and partnership working with Wigan Council, Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles, Greenheart and other relevant bodies.

All are welcome to our meetings, held every six weeks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

For further details please contact the Secretary on 01942 700060, joe41@blueyonder.co.uk or visit www.wiganheritage.com

Information for Contributors

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- Publication is at discretion of Editorial Team
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- Submissions may be held on file for publication in a future edition
- Articles must be received by the copy date if inclusion in the next issue is desired

Submission Guidelines

- Electronic submissions are preferred, although handwritten ones will be accepted
- We prefer articles to have a maximum length of 1,000 words
- Include photographs or images where possible – these can be returned if requested
- Include your name and address – we will not pass on your details to anyone unless you have given us permission to do so

We aim to acknowledge receipt of all submissions.

CONTACT DETAILS:

pastforward@wigan.gov.uk or
The Editor at **PAST FORWARD**,
Museum of Wigan Life,
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.



Norman Prior 1919-2018

A tribute to Norman Prior, who passed away on 24 July By Anthony Pilgrim

Norman was born at Croft Cottages on the Brynn Hall Colliery estate north of Landgate Lane, and spent his early life working as a fitter at the Colliery.

Those who follow my 'Makerfield Rambler' blog on Flickr (www.flickr.com/photos/themakerfieldrambler/albums) may remember my feature on Brynn Hall Colliery, on which he and I collaborated. Norman seemed at first rather bemused by my interest in that part of his life, preferring instead to talk about his war service (in particular his involvement in the evacuation of British forces from Dunkirk in June 1940), of which he was justifiably proud.

Life was in general very hard in the 1920s and 1930s – it was, after all, the era of the Great Depression, hunger marches and George Orwell's, 'The Road to Wigan Pier'. Indeed, unbeknown to Norman at the time, Orwell actually visited Brynn Hall Colliery on 24 February 1936; an experience he describes in the second chapter of his famous book.

In some ways Norman was glad to get away from all that: the war quite literally broadened his horizons and led him to consider other options and new possibilities when peace returned in 1945. He was also quite dismissive of the efforts of self-styled mining historians who had little or no personal experience of the industry. He said in one of his emails to me:

'One important thing to remember is that I lived there and saw it every hour of every day'. On the website wiganworld.co.uk, when someone dared to question his assertion that animal life could and did thrive many miles below ground:

'My stories are real and true. Have you ever seen mice and crickets down the pit? I have.'

Having persuaded him that my interest was genuine and that I would faithfully record everything he had to say on the subject, the memories of life in and around Brynn Hall Colliery came like a flood! Oftentimes it was all I could do to keep him 'on topic'. For a man already well into his nineties he had remarkable recall. For example:

'While [my grandfather was] with the plate laying gang it was my job at the age of four to take a can of tea and sandwiches for his breakfast in the brick cabin right across from our house', and, 'My mother did cleaning work in the Winding House and told me of the winding engine man growing a couple of orange trees in there which produced real oranges'.

I hope I did justice to his contributions. When the project was complete I had it printed up in book form – a limited edition of two – and sent a copy to Norman, a gesture which he seemed to appreciate.

Rest in peace, Norman, and thank you – for everything.

Through Spain with Wellington the Letters of Lieutenant Peter Le Mesurier of the 'Fighting Ninth' – Out Now

By Adrian Greenwood and Gordon Rigby, from manuscripts in the Edward Hall Diary Collection at Wigan Archives & Local Studies

Gazetted into the 9th Foot as an ensign in 1808, Peter Le Mesurier saw action from the earliest days of the Peninsular War almost to its end. The 'Fighting Ninth' were in the thick of it, and his letters describe nearly every major engagement of the war; the retreat to Corunna, the Walcheren Expedition, the sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Burgos and San Sebastian, and the battles of Salamanca, Vitoria, the Nivelle and the Nive.

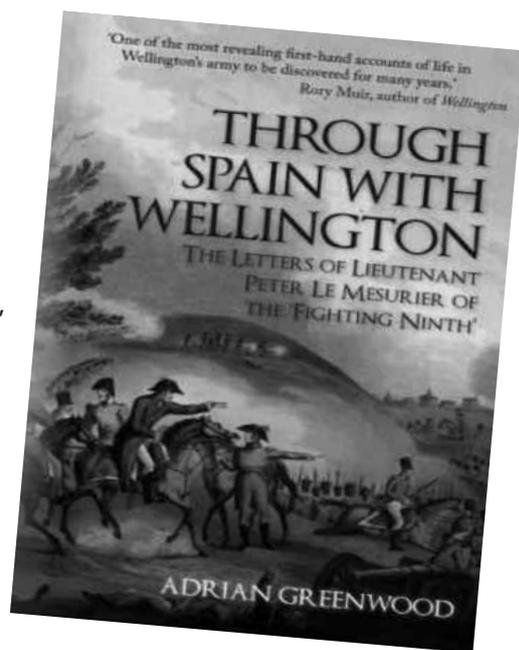
The correspondence of this young officer provides a unique and fresh insight into the campaigns of Moore and Wellington against Napoleon. They also show the transformation of the boy into the man. He suffers retreats and celebrates victories, witnesses sieges, rape and plunder, and falls in love; his letters are spiced with fascinating asides, wry humour, rich period detail, some very human fears and admissions, and the casual understatement of the British officer.

Any unpublished letters from the conflict are scarce, but such an extensive unpublished collection is rare indeed. With background information and commentary provided by expert Adrian Greenwood and meticulously footnoted, this is a worthy addition to the literature of the Napoleonic Wars.

With background information and commentary provided by expert Adrian Greenwood, meticulously footnoted, this is a worthy addition to the literature of the Napoleonic Wars.

'One of the most revealing first-hand accounts of life in Wellington's army to be discovered for many years.' - Rory Muir, author of Wellington.

Available from Amberley Publishing, £9.99, ISBN 978-1-4456-7724-8



Child's Play – a Celebration of Childhood

*'It was the best of times,
it was the worst of times'*

CHARLES DICKENS, A TALE OF TWO CITIES



Childhood can be a magical time full of love, family and wonderful experiences that shape the life ahead. But it wasn't like that for all children. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many children faced extreme poverty, living in poor housing with little access to medical care or personal hygiene. Others were born in the workhouse. For those that survived past birth, diseases such as scarlet fever, measles and mumps meant many, rich or poor, were lucky to survive their fifth birthday.

Children often did paid work, looked after younger siblings or helped the family business. Schools were largely for the wealthy until the education reforms of the late Victorian era. Boys and girls had very different expectations and experiences. Childhood in Wigan Borough was shaped by family income, gender and urban/rural life.

A new exhibition at the Museum of Wigan Life examines what it was like to be a child living in Victorian times and explores how it was different to the childhood of today.

Come along to discover how very young children were put to work and experience how they played and learned. You will see what it was like to be a chimney sweep with an interactive chimney activity and sample how the Victorians learned at school. This **FREE** interactive exhibition is suitable for all ages and is open now.

For more information contact 01942 828128 or email wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk

Aspull and Haigh Historical Society

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month at Our Lady's RC Church Hall, Haigh Road, Aspull from 2pm to 4pm. All are welcome, contact Barbara Rhodes for further details on 01942 222769.

Atherton Heritage Society

Please note – From 2019 the meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of the month. Meetings begin at 7.30pm. in St. Richards Parish Centre, Mayfield St. Atherton.

9 January, 'Atherton Collieries' – Alan Davies
13 February, 'She's Airborne, She's Flying (Concorde)' – Gordon Bartley
13 March, 'Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition' – David Hill
10 April, '100 Years of Womens' Suffrage in Wigan' – Yvonne Eckersley

Visitors Welcome – Admission £2, including refreshments. Contact Margaret Hodge on 01942 884893.

Billinge History and Heritage Society

Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at Billinge Chapel End Labour Club at 7.30pm. There is a door charge of £2. Please contact Geoff Crank for more information on 01695 624411 or at Gcrank_2000@yahoo.co.uk

Culcheth Local History Group

The Village Centre, Jackson Avenue. Second Thursday of each month. Doors open 7.15pm for 7.30pm start. Members £10 Visitors £2 Enquiries: Zoe Chaddock – 01925 752276 (Chair)

Hindley & District History Society

Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.00pm at Tudor House, Liverpool Road, Hindley. Please contact Mrs Joan Topping on 01942 257361 for information.

Leigh & District Antiques and Collectables Society

The society meets at Leigh RUFC, Beech Walk, Leigh. New members are always welcome and further details available from Mr C Gaskell on 01942 673521.

Leigh & District History

www.leighanddistricthistory.com
An exciting new, free, local history website, covering Leigh and the surrounding districts. Still in its infancy, it already boasts a list of births, marriages and deaths, 1852-1856, including cemetery internments, nineteenth century letters from soldiers serving abroad, a scrapbook of interesting articles, local railway accidents and an embryonic photograph gallery. There are also links to other sites covering historic and genealogical interest.

Leigh Family History Society

The Leigh & District Family History Help Desk is available every Monday afternoon (except Bank Holidays) from 12.30pm to 2.30pm, at Leigh Library. There is no need to book an appointment for this Help Desk.

Monthly meetings held in the Derby Room, Leigh Library at 7.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month (except July, August and December), contact Mrs G McClellan (01942 729559).

19 January, 7.30p.m., AGM Followed by 'Update on the Archives Project' – Alex Miller
19 February, 'Artefacts of Folk Magic' – Peter Watson
19 March, 'Agnes Maud Royden' – Richard Sivill

Lancashire Local History Federation

The Federation holds several meetings each year, with a varied and interesting programme. For details visit www.lancashirehistory.org or call 01204 707885.

Skelmersdale & Upholland Family History Society

The group meets at Upholland Library Community Room, Hall Green, Upholland, WN8 0PB, at 7.00pm for 7.30pm start on

the first Tuesday of each month; no meeting in July, August and January. December is a meal out at The Plough at Lathom. For more information please contact Bill Fairclough, Chairman on 07712766288 or Caroline Fairclough, Secretary, at carolinefairclough@hotmail.com

Wigan Civic Trust

If 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. Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7.30pm. The venue is St George's Church, Water Street, Wigan WN1 1XD. Contact Mr A Grimshaw on 01942 245777 for further information.

Wigan Archaeological Society

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, at 7.30pm, in the Standish Suite at the Brocket Arms on Mesnes Road - on the first Wednesday of the month (except January and August). There is a car park adjacent on the left. Admission is £2 for members and £3 for guests. For more information call Bill Aldridge on 01257 402342. You can also visit the website at www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk

Wigan Family and Local History Society

We meet on the second Wednesday at 6.45pm, at St Andrews Parish Centre. Please contact wigan.fhs@gmail.com to find out more information. Attendance fees are £2.50 per meeting for both members and visitors. Our aim is to provide support, help, ideas and advice for members and non members alike. For more information please visit, www.wiganworld.co.uk/familyhistory/ or see us at our weekly Monday helpdesks at the Museum of Wigan Life.

Wigan Local History & Heritage Society

We meet on the first Monday of each month at Beech Hill Book Cycle at 6.30pm. Admission to the meeting is £2.50. For more information please contact Sheila Ramsdale at sheila.ramsdale@blueyonder.co.uk

How to Find Us



Museum of Wigan Life & Wigan Local Studies

Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU

Telephone 01942 828128

heritage@wigan.gov.uk

Mon-Wed 9am-2pm Thursday-Friday 12pm-5pm

Saturday 9am-2pm

Archives & Leigh Local Studies

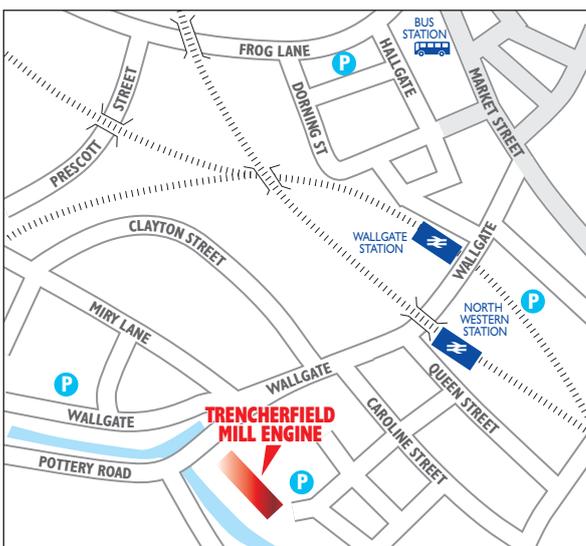
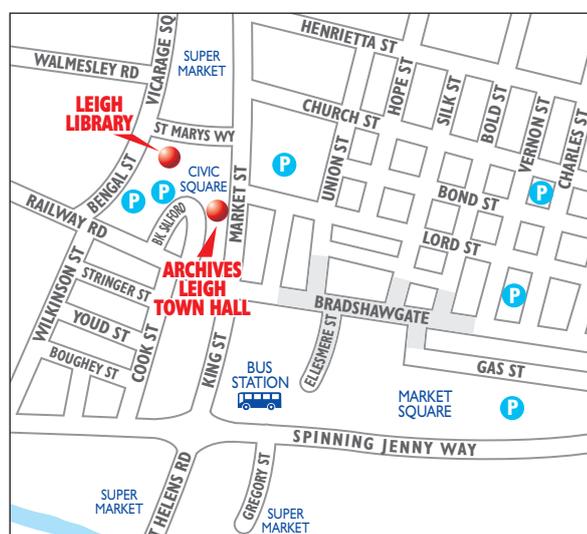
(temporary location until 2020)

Leigh Library, Leigh WN7 1EB

Telephone 01942 404430

archives@wigan.gov.uk

Mon-Wed 9am-2pm Thursday-Friday 12pm-5pm



Trencherfield Mill Engine

Wigan Pier Quarter, Heritage Way,

Wigan WN3 4EF

Telephone 01942 828128

b.rowley@wigan.gov.uk

Please see website for Steaming Sunday calendar

YOUR LOCAL MUSEUM

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Salford Stockport
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Take a closer look www.gmmg.org.uk



GREATER MANCHESTER MUSEUMS GROUP



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