

# PAST FORWARD

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Wigan and Leigh's local history magazine



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**FRONT COVER**  
Wigan Carnival Handbooks, 1920s  
(Wigan Local Studies)

## Letter from the Editorial Team

Welcome to PAST Forward Issue 81.

We're pleased to publish further articles from the 2018 Past Forward Essay Prize Competition, kindly sponsored by Mr and Mrs John O'Neill. This edition includes the second prize winning entry by Tom Heaton, reflecting on life in wartime Scholes and Diana Brooks' account of the life of her grandfather, the performer, Christopher Matthews.

Elsewhere in the magazine, Steve Crook examines the circumstances of the deaths of Walter Herbert Eckersley and Gladys Shaw, Culcheth Local History group continue their research into life in and around the village, Tom Morton remembers the railway accident at Wigan North Western station in 1873 and Yvonne Eckersley continues her research into radical protest and the fight for political representation in Wigan and Leigh.

It is another full edition of fascinating local history stories and we hope you enjoy reading them as much as we have in editing the magazine.

### Leigh Town Hall and the Revealing Wigan Archives Project



The Archives & Leigh Local Studies service is now up and running in Leigh Library, our temporary home for the duration of the refurbishment of Leigh Town Hall.

Regular researchers and volunteers at the Archives will know that with the support of The National Lottery Heritage 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.

Anyone visiting Leigh will very soon be able to see visible evidence of work on the project. Our main building contractors have now been appointed and will be commencing the refurbishment work on site in early April. We will be refreshing the project website very soon and hope to be able to share photographs of the building work as it progresses. The project will not just focus on the Archives service, but the full renovation of the Grade II listed Town Hall structure. This will include work to the exterior of the building, including the shop fronts

on Market Street. As you will see from the architectural elevations here, little will change in the appearance of the building, but it will be carefully restored.

The Market Street shop units (numbers 2-6) will be the home of our new museum and archive exhibition space. We will be shortly appointing specialist exhibition designers to help realise our ambitions for our new museum space. Part of the work carried out by the exhibition team will be to engage local groups, organisations and individuals in helping to shape the design of the space and the contents of the new museum. If you would like to register an interest in the community engagement work with the new exhibition space or get involved with volunteering opportunities on the project once we reopen, please get in touch (full contact details are given on the back page of Past Forward).



Proposed elevation to Market Street, Leigh Town Hall (NPS Group)



Proposed elevation to the Civic Square, Leigh Town Hall (NPS Group)

### Welcome to Wigan Museums and Archives!

*Louisa Attaheri has recently joined the team in Wigan as our new Lead Officer (Museums), responsible for the care and management of the Borough's Museum Collections. Louisa has been working in museums for the past eleven years, volunteering in various organisations across Bolton, Stockport and Manchester.*

*For the past nine years she has worked as the Curator at Dundee Heritage Trust, overseeing the care, acquisition and display of collections for two accredited museums: RRS Discovery, Captain Scott's first polar exploration vessel and Verdant Works which focused on the city's textile heritage. In forthcoming editions of Past Forward she will be showcasing objects from the collection as part of our regular Collections Corner column.*



Information for contributors, please see page 32

# Growing up in Wartime Scholes

By Tom Heaton

Mother (Grandmother really) lived at the top of Scholes, next door to The Stag public house. I was seven years old and I remember walking home the few 100 yards to my house just off Platt Lane. I had been caught out in one of the early air raids. The sky was alight with criss-crossing searchlight beams and the flashes from bursting anti-aircraft shells. The Luftwaffe was busy bombing Liverpool and Manchester. I never remember being frightened but, as kids do, I was enjoying the free fireworks display for a short time until somebody spoiled it by rushing me into the cellar of Vic Oldfield's radio shop for safety.

Wigan wasn't considered a strategic target but the Heinkels and Dorniers flew overhead on their way to Liverpool. Wigan only suffered a couple of stray bombs. One of these flattened the Greenough Street Methodist Church, missing the Windmill public house (better known as the Top Long Pull) next door.

I was in Whelley Sanatorium during some of the bombing, suffering from diphtheria which existed in epidemic proportions at the time. Some of the



Wigan War Weapons Week, 12 March 1940

children were taken from their beds during an air raid to improvised shelter, usually under the table. I must have been too poorly to move as I was left in bed with two kitchen chairs crossed over my head for protection. I still remember feeling as if I was being suffocated.

Fortunately, living far from France and the launching ramps of German V1s and V2s, I only remember one incident locally involving these horrific weapons. We hadn't had an alert for a couple of months and thought that the war was more or less over. One night I was awakened by the sirens in the early hours of the morning. Thinking it was a false alarm I stayed in bed like the rest of the family. A short time later I heard the muffled sounds of two explosions. At the time we were told that they were V1s launched from German bombers but we were never told where they landed although rumour had it that it was in the Tyldesley/Atherton area not far out of Wigan.

Early in the war my parents (Dad had yet to be called up) took in one of the refugees fleeing from the German invasion of the Channel Islands. Geoffrey Tostevin was his name and he, along with the remainder of his school mates, had been hurriedly evacuated from his home town in Guernsey. Geoffrey was a couple of years older than me and had never seen a train. Consequently, he spent most of his short time in Wigan watching the trains, as the town is fortunately situated on the West Coast Mainline or the London and North Western as it was then known. I think Wigan was considered to be a little too close to the action and too dangerous as the Channel Islanders didn't stay long. We never were told where they were moved to. I did try to find out by writing to the Island but had no reply.



Mam and Jean Marriot

One evening I was at Mother's house when there was a knock at the door. I went to answer it and on opening the door found a line of people all with luggage. As was normal in Scholes, they were all invited in and given cups of tea while we listened to their story. They were all previously neighbours and friends of the family who had gone to live in Coventry, where there was work available during what had been the time of the Depression. We had, of course, heard of the devastating bombing of Coventry on the wireless, when anyone who could get out, got out.

Very swiftly they were distributed among those of us who had beds to spare. I think they were all members of the Tipping family and we took in a couple and their baby. I can't think how we accommodated them as we only had two bedrooms. Like most of the houses in Platt Lane, our house was only a two up and two down. I presume that, when the bombing eased off, they all returned to the Midlands. I shudder to imagine what a scene they

found on returning. One of the children, Evelyn Tipping, stayed on with my Auntie Evelyn to finish her secondary education at Whelley School.

Though Auntie Evelyn never had children of her own she was always willing to look after other people's children. When evacuees arrived in Wigan from London, she willingly took in fourteen year old Dennis Marriot. She had previously had a girl called Yvonne from Belgium. Dennis was the eldest brother of Jean, Leslie and John who had been previously billeted with another lady but this hadn't worked out for some reason.

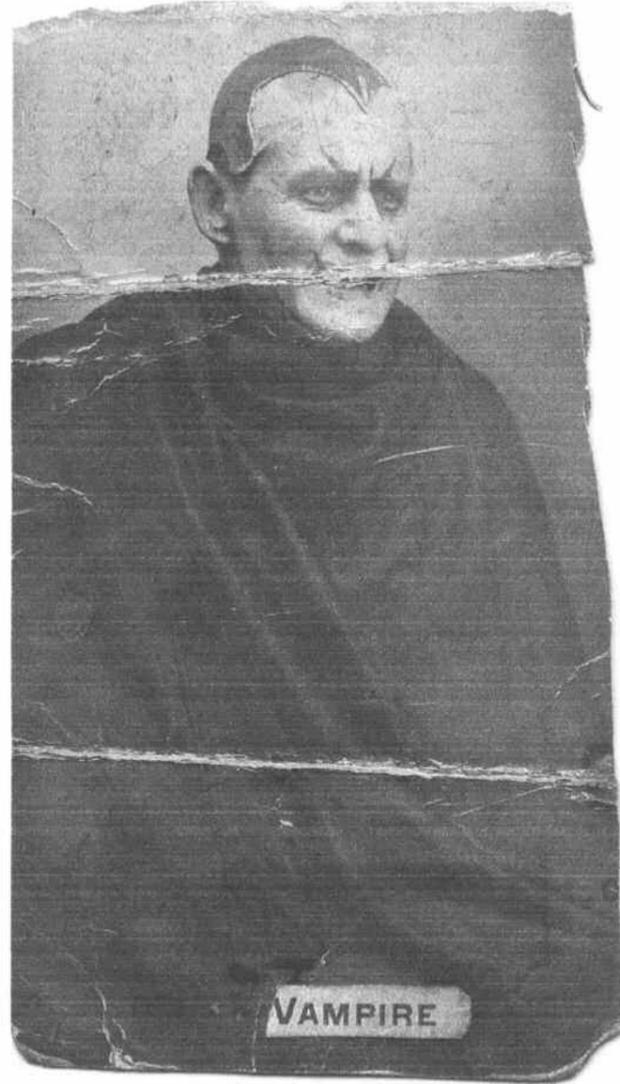
The children were paraded up and down the street and the placement officers went from door to door looking for likely families. Mam agreed to take the two young boys who were approximately the same ages as me and my brother Derek. At first Mam said she hadn't enough room to take the young girl as well but on afterthought she told them that she could share her bed. She couldn't bear the thought of her being split up from her siblings. We were given two camp beds for the lads who were squeezed in alongside the two of us.

I have read much over the years of the hardship and suffering endured by evacuees but great sacrifices were made by many of the host families as well. This seems to go mostly unrecognised, though we did get a letter of thanks from the authorities in Guernsey after the war. The two boys were treated exactly as we were, given the same meals and treats, such as were available in wartime and they were given the same presents for birthdays and Christmas as we were. When they returned home we never heard from them or their parents, though Dad and I went to visit them when we went down to London to watch Wigan play Bradford Northern in the Rugby League Cup final at Wembley.

I still think about them often, over 70 years later. For children, when they left it was like losing half of your family.

# Comical Cris

By Diana Brooks



Christopher Matthews in costume as a vampire

I never knew my grandfather, Christopher Matthews. He died 25 years before I was born. However, my mother and her siblings kept his memory alive by constantly referring to his talents.

Chris, stage name 'Comical Cris', was born in 1862 to circus performers. His father, an Irish-American jig and sand dancer and award winning clog dancer, was also a ringmaster who owned a team of horses. His mother rode them bareback while jumping through blazing hoops – quite an accomplishment!

At the age of seventeen, Chris became a professional ventriloquist following the lead of his late stepfather, Professor Carlo Young, who was a noted ventriloquist. He was soon appearing on the variety circuit in London and was once on the same bill as the great Marie Lloyd.

Disabled from birth, Chris spent his whole life in a wheelchair. He was ahead of his time perfecting his act. My mother recalled how she was always in awe of him. He could throw his voice amazingly and she was certain that Father Christmas spoke to her from up the chimney.

A description of his stage act in 1912 went as follows: 'A fifteen minutes' Ventriloquial interlude causing screams and yells of laughter all the time it occupies the stage, without in any way stooping to vulgarity, introducing figures that do almost anything but breathe. They drink, smoke, dance, crawl, and finally come on and bow to the audience, apparently without anyone near them. Not a one figure act but a pretty stage set, electrically lighted, concluding with a surprising novel effect. This is something entirely new.'

Chris himself dressed accordingly and I have a wonderful picture of him attired as a vampire when he performed 'Le Diable Rouge', 'The Devil's Drawing Room' and 'The Vampire'. I also have a lovely satin programme of his dated 1901 when he appeared at Leeds Empire. He was number fourteen on a bill of twenty-two artists, sandwiched between, 'The Rossow Midgets – the smallest performers on earth' and 'Nellie Lovell, The Premier Male Impersonator'.

My mother, Elise, was the youngest of Chris's large family. They lived at Ivy House, Primrose Street, Tyldesley. It was a large house for the area and it had two staircases. It was also a theatrical boarding house taking in many of



Programme for performance including, 'Cris – the favourite ventriloquist'

the Theatre Royal and Miners Hall variety performers of the day, one of them being a young boy named Sandy Powell who would later become famous as a comic ventriloquist.

For many years, Chris was manager and lessee of the Miners Hall on Elliott Street, Tyldesley, which is now a dance studio. In a write-up of his life in a national newspaper in 1916 after his death, it was quoted, 'Chris was the leader

of variety shows in Tyldesley for thirty-two years and was the first to introduce a permanent picture house there and was well respected and a well-known figure in the town where he has made his home for many years'.

Chris's son Jim was a projectionist at the local cinema until his death in the First World War.

I regret that I never knew my grandfather, as I think we would have got on very well. Like him I am attracted to 'the smell of the greasepaint' and have been an actress for some years. I am fortunate to have known the great Sir Ken Dodd and my partner Roy and I toured with him for many years doing the driving, merchandising, acting, front-of-house, backstage tea making and so forth. Doddy was a brilliant ventriloquist with his famous doll 'Dicky Mint'. When I told him about my grandad he was eager to see all my information and said I should write about him so that future generations could get a glimpse into the old variety days.



Family portrait circa 1907, Cris is third from the left and my mum is the little girl holding the dog

# A TRAGIC AFFAIR

BY STEVE CROOK

In 2012, during my research into the Shaw brewing family of Leigh, I visited the grave of Gladys Shaw at Manchester Crematorium, in order to record the monumental inscription. Gladys (née Gorton), wife of William Shaw (1889-1937, Managing Director of George Shaw & Co., Ltd., Leigh Brewery, from 1918-1931), had been born in Chorlton, near Manchester, in 1889 but had lived her early life in Grappenhall, Warrington and Withington, Manchester. She had died of pleurisy and pneumonia on 7 January 1920 after a three week long illness, aged just 30 years.

While at the graveyard, I noticed a strikingly similar monument two plots to the right of Gladys. It was a horizontally laid sandstone slab of identical size and simply inscribed in an identical format.

The monuments read as follows:

In Loving Memory of  
WALTER HERBERT ECKERSLEY  
BORN APRIL 7th 1875  
DIED AUGUST 28th 1919

...compared to...

In Loving Memory of  
GLADYS SHAW  
BORN JULY 10th 1889  
DIED JANUARY 7th 1920



Monumental inscriptions for Gladys Shaw and Walter Herbert Eckersley



Gladys Shaw's monument (to the left) and Walter Herbert Eckersley (to the right) of a central and apparently unrelated grave

Both individuals had been cremated and their ashes interred.

Walter was a very wealthy and successful cotton magnate, being a director of the Fine Cotton Spinners' and Doublers' Association Limited, then one of the biggest such companies in the world. He was educated at Rugby School and Trinity College Cambridge, played cricket for Tyldesley Cricket Club, was once captain of Lytham and St. Anne's Golf Club (1913-1914) and, amongst his other business interests, was a one time director of George Shaw & Co., Ltd., Leigh Brewery. He was also uncle to Peter Thorp Eckersley (1904-1940), who having unsuccessfully contested the Leigh Parliamentary Division in 1931, was elected at the 1935 general election as Member of Parliament for Manchester Exchange. Peter was also captain (1929-1935) of Lancashire County Cricket Club.

Walter was married to William Shaw's sister, Mary (May) Shaw (1884-1957) and lived at Atherton Old Hall. It is worthy of note that although his domestic base remained throughout as Atherton Old Hall, Atherton, two codicils to his Will, dated 2 July 1918 and 10 June 1919 respectively, recorded that he was resident for the time being at 36 Lulworth Road, Birkdale.

It should be borne in mind that Manchester Crematorium at Barlow Moor Road, Manchester,

was opened in 1892 (being at that time only the second crematorium in the country) and cremation remained a relatively uncommon 'final choice for decades to come.

Further, Walter's Will had made no reference to his preferred method of bodily disposal. Interestingly too, Walter's family had a family grave in Tyldesley Cemetery and the Shaw family had a burial plot in Leigh Cemetery, but neither was utilised for either Gladys or Walter. Respective newspaper reports of the funerals noted that William's wife, Gladys, was notable by her absence at Walter's interment and William Shaw was similarly absent from his own wife's interment, 'unable to be present owing to illness'.

A feeling that there was more to this story than initially meets the eyes encouraged me to dig a little deeper. The following narrative is wholly factual and it is up to the reader to draw their own conclusions.

The respective deaths have unusual aspects. Walter had been discovered by members of his staff lying in his bath, apparently electrocuted by a faulty mains powered electrical vibrator. The death occurred on Thursday 28 August 1919 at around 6.50pm. The Inquest was held on the Saturday afternoon at 2.30pm, in private, without a jury and at the home of the deceased. Evidence was heard from Walter's staff and from William Shaw who was the first family member to arrive at the scene. Walter's demise was recorded by the Coroner as being 'Death from Misadventure'. Walter was cremated in Manchester on the Monday 1 September 1919 at 12.45pm.



William Shaw and Gladys Gorton, married at Cavendish Street Congregational Church, Manchester, 5 June 1912



Atherton Old Hall, (demolished in 1972)

As regards Gladys and as stated above, she had died of pleurisy and pneumonia on 7 January 1920 after a three week long illness, aged just 30 years, and just over four months after Walter's untimely death. The death occurred at the family home, Lowton Grange, Stone Cross Lane, Lowton. In the interests of balance, it should be added that the Spanish Flu had wreaked havoc in the UK from 1918 to 1920 and anecdotal evidence handed down through the family recalls that Gladys's six years old daughter, Betty, and five years old son, Kenneth, were prevented from seeing their ailing mother as she lay on her death bed.

The Leigh Brewery at this time was a major employer in the neighbourhood, and it seems strange, therefore, that the untimely death of the wife of an important local businessman such as William Shaw should be reported (9 January 1920) in the local press in such a discrete and minimalistic fashion – 68 words in the Leigh Chronicle.

Similarly 'to the point' but less brief reports of Gladys' funeral were published in the local press on 16 January 1920 (Leigh Chronicle and Leigh Journal). An inquest into the death was not held, notwithstanding its untimely nature, Dr. Sephton of Culcheth having signed the death certificate. Gladys had died on the evening of Wednesday 7 January 1920 and was cremated and interred in Manchester Crematorium at 4.00pm on Friday 9 January 1920.

In Herbert Worsley's 1988 book, 'The Dwindling Furrows of Lowton', he refers to his ex-residence at William and Gladys Shaw's, Lowton Grange: '...it was rumoured that Mrs. Shaw died there in tragic circumstances though I have never been



Lowton Grange

able to confirm this.'

He also quotes from a letter he received from Jules Boardman, who lived there as a child during the last years before the house was demolished (c. 1957): 'My abiding memory of The Grange, where I lived from the age of five until I was ten, is that it had an unhappy atmosphere, although I had not known at the time anything of its history. There were areas in the upper rooms where I and others were distinctly uncomfortable.'

Walter's will, originally penned 17 March 1916, provides evidence that all was not well between himself and brother-in-law William Shaw. Originally, the principal beneficiaries were Walter's wife, Mary (who would receive virtually all non-real estate and non-business articles plus residual payments by trust) and all of his nephews and nieces who were each to receive typically £1,000-£3,000 (held under trust).

The original will included as beneficiaries, William Shaw's children (Walter's niece and nephew) Betty and Kenneth. The executors of the will were originally listed as brother, Peter Eckersley (1864-1921), father-in-law, George Shaw (1860-1918, William's father) and Walter's friend (and solicitor), Joseph Rose Bowden (1869-1930) from the practice of Boddington, Jordan and Bowden, of Manchester.

Following George's death on 22 June 1918, a codicil to Walter's will, dated 2 July 1918, was added to substitute wife, Mary, and brother-in-law, Frank Shaw (William's younger brother) as executors in place of the deceased, George Shaw. This action seems to snub elder brother William.

As an aside, Mary wasn't mentioned in the probate record following Walter's death having surrendered her right to act as executor.

A second codicil to Walter's will added just one year later, and dated 10 June 1919, went on to exclude from the will just William's children, Betty and Kenneth (aged around 5 to 6 years old at the time) and to replace them by the son of a friend, Danson Cunningham (son of Jack Cunningham, also a bigwig in the cotton industry). William apparently snubbed again.

On 28 August 1919, just 79 days after William's children were snubbed, Walter Herbert Eckersley was dead at just 44 years of age.

Before and during the Great War, fit men of a certain age group were routinely conscripted into the armed forces. This process was subject to appeal and William Shaw, who had received his call-up papers, made an unsuccessful application to the Appeals Tribunal for exemption from active service. Soon after, on 15 May 1917, the Brewery directors' meeting minutes noted that William had been appointed to attend Cadet School with a view, if recommended, of taking up a Commission in the Army Service Corps Mechanical Transport, and was due to leave Leigh on the 21 May.

He did not return to the Board until 26 September 1918, having been away for 16 months. Two things of interest occurred during this leave of absence. William's father and Brewery Managing Director, George Shaw, died in Southport in June 1918 and William's posting to Palestine meant that he was unable to attend his father's funeral. Secondly, George's death and the absence from the Board due to active service of both of George's sons, William and Frank, meant that the number of directors required by the Company's Memoranda and Articles of Association to form a Board could not be achieved.

Frank, who had been posted closer to home, was given leave to attend his father's funeral and to attend to his business affairs. He attended two board meetings on the 1 and 25 July 1918. To remedy the lack of available directors, and at the board meeting held on 1 July 1918, Frank appointed Company Secretary, William Higenbottam, to the Board. Further, in anticipation of his own leave of absence from the Army coming to an end, Frank and the

Board, at the meeting held on 25 July 1918, appointed brother-in-law, Walter Herbert Eckersley, both to the Board and to the position of temporary Company Managing Director. This temporary status was set to expire on the return from Palestine of Frank's brother, William.

Two month's later, on William's return to the Board on 26 September 1918, Walter was stripped of his executive roll but remained on the Board and William took back his position as Company Managing Director.

There are numerous irregularities with regards to the Inquest into Walter's death. The Coroner, Samuel Foster Butcher, was a close and long-standing friend of both the Shaw and Eckersley families. He should have declined to oversee this case. It is also unusual, given the singular nature of this case, that a jury was not appointed to sit at the Inquest.

The holding of an inquest on a Saturday afternoon and the unusually brief period between death, inquest and funeral, beg a number of questions. There were also a number of significant discrepancies between aspects of the evidence supplied by the four principal witnesses. The main irregularity revolves around whether Walter was dead or still alive when found incapacitated in his bath. Finally, there are numerous substantive amendments to the hand-

written witness statements given to the police immediately after the tragedy when compared to those ultimately filed by the Coroner.

In the interests of relative brevity, much more detail has been omitted.

I've drawn a number of unwritten conclusions regarding what went on back then. For me it's an intriguing tale and one that deserves further investigation. I hope that the reader found it to be equally interesting.

## References

*Dates of birth & death - Ancestry.com and monumental inscriptions*

*Inquest records - Lancashire Archives*

*Historical inquest procedure & protocol - The Coroners' Society of England and Wales (Archivist)*

*Wills & probate records - HM Courts and Tribunals Service*

*Newspaper quotes - Leigh Chronicle and Leigh Journal*

*George Shaw & Co., Ltd., company minutes - Liverpool Archives*

*'The Lytham Century and Beyond, A History of Royal Lytham and St. Anne's Golf Club 1886 - 1986'*

# PAST FORWARD Subscription Form

## Copy Deadline for Issue 82

Contributors please note the deadline for the receipt of material for publication is Friday, 21st June 2019.

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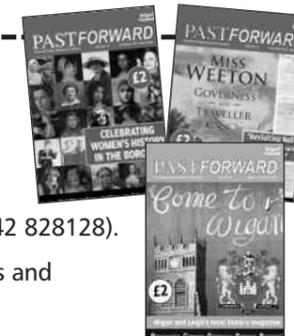
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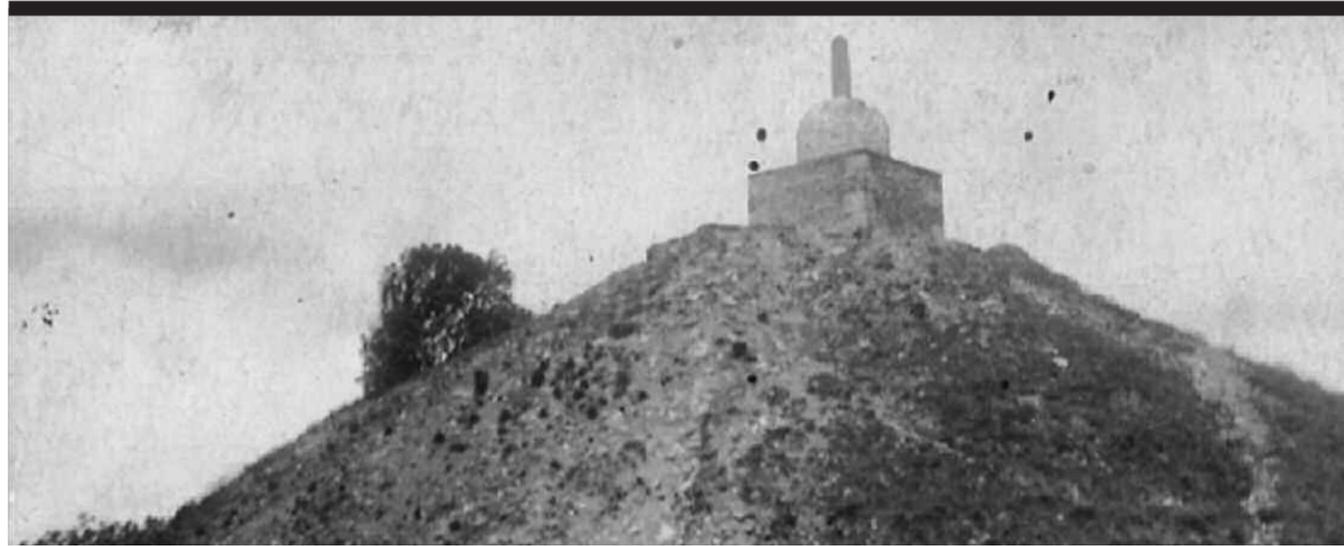
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# The Douglas Valley, the 1832 Reform Bill and Parbold Bottle

By Dr Stephen Craig Smith



*Parbold Bottle, late nineteenth century*

Most Wigan people are aware of Ashurst Beacon, that iconic structure built by Lord Skelmersdale in 1798 astride Ashurst Hill on the southern flank of the Douglas Valley. Less well known, but of equal historic significance, is Parbold Bottle, erected by local dignitaries to commemorate the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832. Located near the top of Parbold Hill on the opposite side of the Douglas Valley, Parbold Bottle was of similar scale and prominence as its Ashurst Beacon counterpart.

The 1832 Reform Act marked the beginning of slow but long-term change to democracy in England. The Tory Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington was implacably against such voting reform, but his successor, Whig Prime Minister Earl Grey, passed the bill, albeit with some difficulty. The Act effectively doubled the number of people who could vote from around 350,000 to 650,000, although this still only represented eighteen percent of the adult male population. An emerging middle class benefitted from these changes and that may well be the reason why local Douglas Valley dignitaries erected such a monument.

For many years Parbold Bottle stood sentinel over Parbold Hill, but over the years it became a victim of time, the elements, vandalism and neglect – not helped by the fact that it stood on an earthen mound. Visitors to the monument would climb the earthen mound creating footpaths which acted as

drainage channels in wet weather. Parts of the Bottle collapsed after a severe thunderstorm in 1939 and a further severe storm in 1942 finally proved its death knell.

In the middle of the Second World War there were greater things to worry about than the collapse of a hundred year old monument to 1832 electoral reform. There was a distinct possibility the monument would be lost. It nearly was for some years.



*Parbold Bottle in 1939*



*Unveiling of new Parbold Bottle 1958*

The black days of war finally turned to grey days of post war rationing and austerity, and by the mid-1950s sunny days began to shine. It now became possible to be forward looking and Mr Goodacre and the Reverend C Barnes, vicar of the church in Parbold, together with other community minded people, launched a Restore Parbold Bottle Appeal with donations to be sent to the manager of the District Bank in Parbold. Their vision was to restore the once dominant land mark, if not on the exact same site, at least in a closely related position.



*Parbold Bottle in 2018*

The appeal was well received and within a relatively short time £100 was raised – roughly equivalent to £2000 in 2019. Messrs John and William Hardman, then owners of Parbold quarry, donated the necessary building stone and a new site, only a little distant from the original location, was chosen for firmer foundations.

The official unveiling of the new Parbold Bottle took place on Saturday 20 September 1958 in the presence of over 100 visitors, with Mr P Stephenson J.P. of

Asmall House, Ormskirk and Prof Lyon Blease of Liverpool University carrying out the official duty. Among those present were Mrs Florence Meadows, widow of Mr Thomas Meadows, one-time editor of the Wigan Observer and owner of the land surrounding Ashurst Beacon and a keen advocate for the restoration of historic structures. Newburgh and Dalton Boy Scouts and Girl Guides assisted by selling programmes on the day and serving teas and biscuits at Parbold School after the ceremony.

The original large square stone support was not replaced but the actual bottle shaped top and head were. The replacement of this local land mark is smaller than the original and in a slightly different location, but the meaning and significance has been faithfully retained. Although in a slightly less prominent position it is still an important element of the Douglas Valley today.

Next time you pass over Parbold Hill and stop to admire the view, walk the hundred yards downhill towards Parbold village from the summit lay-by and then along the short Millennium Footpath to the monument. There have been many changes to the Douglas Valley since the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832 but much of its beauty and splendour remain.

## References

*Wigan Observer*, 3 June 1939

*Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, Friday 29 August 1958

*Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, Friday 26 September 1958

## Acknowledgements

Alex Miller and Kathryn Pass of Wigan Archives & Local Studies

# Ellen Hindley: A Country Girl

by Marlene Nolan and Brian Joyce of  
Culcheth Local History Group

A pauper's death in the local workhouse was dreaded by the Victorian working class. Ellen Hindley, a 79 year-old former cotton weaver suffered this sad fate in Leigh Workhouse in September 1878.

The cause of her death was cirrhosis of the liver, although she had probably suffered from failing eyesight and arthritis for some time and had therefore been unable to support herself. Ellen's predictable fate was far from unusual, but her comparatively long life was. She lived through massive changes, from the industrialisation and urbanisation of South Lancashire to the implementation of the revolutionary New Poor Law of 1834. Examining Ellen's life helps us gain some understanding of this transformation.

Ellen was born in Holcroft Lane, Culcheth in August 1799 and baptised at Newchurch. Her parents, Adam and Elizabeth

Hindley, probably combined cotton weaving with agricultural work, a common practice locally. Ellen and her eleven siblings presumably contributed to the family economy from an early age by carding and spinning the raw cotton bought to the village on packhorses by agents of Manchester merchants 'putting out' work.

By the 1820s, carding, spinning and weaving were being increasingly concentrated in factories. Domestic workers trying to preserve their traditional way of life were forced to accept lower wages. Additionally, the putters-out used 'abatement' – fining workers for supposedly inferior work – to reduce costs. Ellen's family was large and perhaps suffered economically after her father's death in 1819.

For whatever reason, the 25 year-old unmarried Ellen left Culcheth in late 1826 and walked or hitched a wagon ride to Manchester. There

she obtained work as a servant to Margaret Burton, whom she later described as a 'widow and gentlewoman'. Her employer resided in apartments built over a warehouse in Water Street. Ellen received eight guineas per annum all-found on a twelve month contract, with board and lodging provided.

The bewildered country girl found herself in a strange new world. Manchester's population had been around 75,000 in 1801. By the time Ellen arrived it had increased to about 130,000. The town had no effective government until 1838 and grew haphazardly. Factories belched smoke and deposited waste into the River Irwell, which ran parallel to Water Street. A visitor had noted as early as 1808: 'The town is abominably filthy, the steam engine is pestiferous, the Dye houses noisesome and offensive and the water of the river as black as ink...'

Ellen lived near this open sewer, but at least residing with Mrs Burton saved her from the badly built overcrowded houses with no facilities which packed adjacent streets. However, she could not escape the nearby noise, smoke and filth. What was more, the Liverpool to Manchester railway was under construction and a beam girder bridge was being built over Water Street to take the line into the newly-built terminus at nearby Liverpool Road. Ellen was observing the industrial and transport revolutions at first hand.

At the end of her twelve month contract, she hired herself to Mrs Burton for a second year.

However, Ellen and her employer mutually parted company after only six months. Ellen quarrelled with Mrs Burton's daughter, but more importantly she found she was pregnant by her employer's son James, 'an engraver to the calico'. After collecting her outstanding wages, Ellen went to lodge with Martha Hudson of Little Bridgewater Street.

Meanwhile, Manchester parish officials had somehow got wind of Ellen's condition. She was taken to the office of the Overseers of the Poor in Fountain Street for a 'settlement examination'. Under the seventeenth century poor law rules still in force in 1828, it was important to ascertain which parish should legally bear the burden of illegitimate children. Ellen would have preferred to return to her family in Culcheth to give birth, but the law said otherwise. A servant who had lived in a parish for a year or more was its responsibility and not the birth parish if they differed. After checking Ellen's employment history with James Burton, the Overseers decided that her legal place of settlement was now Manchester.

She was taken by van to the workhouse in New Bridge Street, and was informed she could give birth there or anywhere else in Manchester if she wished. Ellen had saved half of her back pay from Mrs Burton and could afford to return as a lodger with Martha Hudson. She gave birth to twins there at the turn of the year. They were baptised at Manchester Collegiate Church (later redesignated as the city's cathedral) in February 1829. Ellen named her son James after his father and her daughter Elizabeth after her own mother.

A few weeks later, the twins were officially affiliated to James Burton. Manchester had no

Quarter Sessions of its own, so the Overseers took Ellen to the New Bailey court across the river in Salford. The Affiliation Order forced Burton to pay Ellen two shillings per week for the upkeep of each child until they were nine years old, payable quarterly via the Overseers.

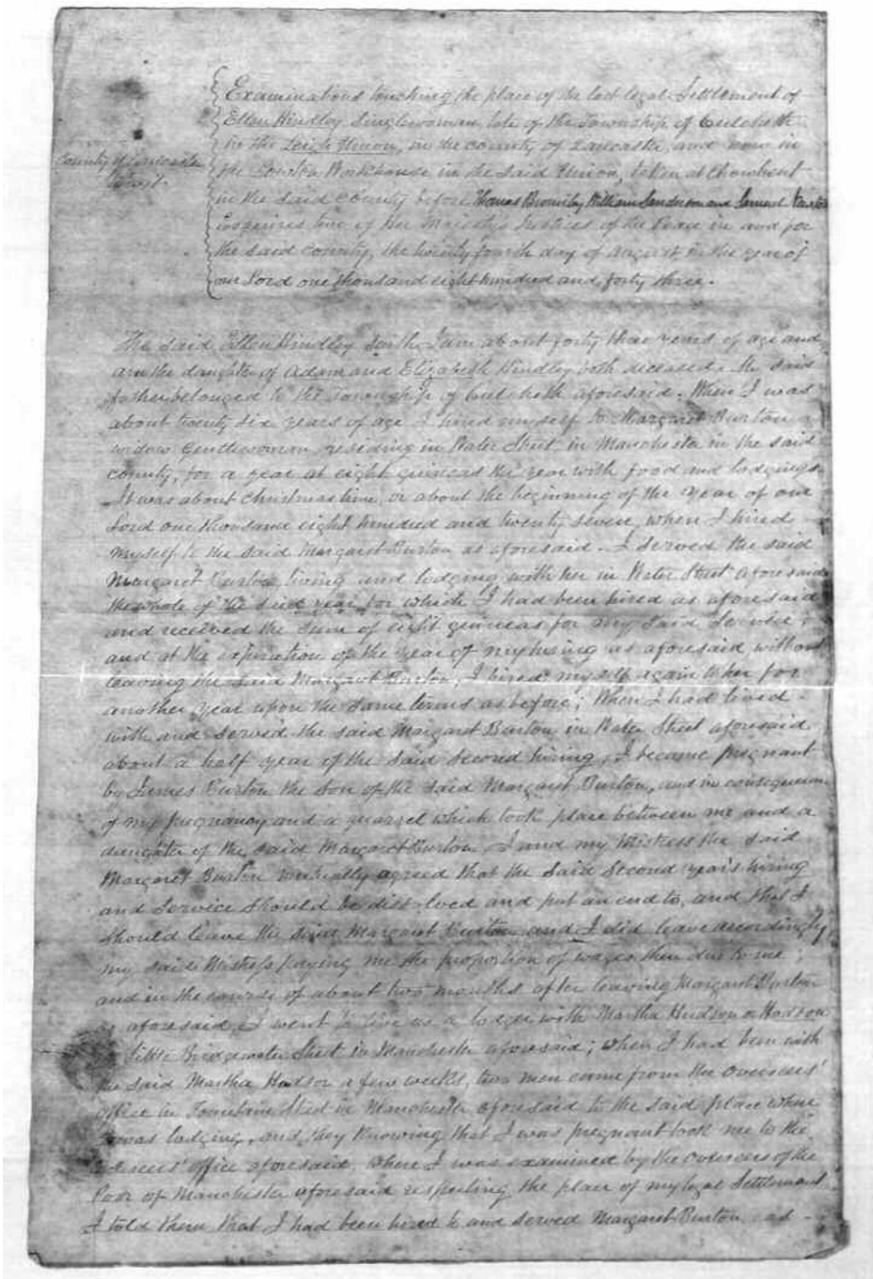
Burton's obligatory payments would have stopped at the beginning of 1838. A few months later, Ellen gave birth to another illegitimate child, who was baptised Robert at Newchurch in May. This time, we have not been able to identify the child's father.

The census of 1841 reveals that two-year-old Robert was being cared for by the Owen family, agricultural labourers of Windybank Farm, Glazebury. Meanwhile the twins were with Ellen's family at Holcroft Lane in Culcheth, probably working on the farm of Michael Paul. The whereabouts of Ellen herself is uncertain, although by 1843 she was in Lowton Workhouse with Robert.

By then the Poor Law Amendment Act had grouped parishes into Poor Law Unions, and Culcheth and Lowton were in the Leigh Union. However, the old parish workhouses continued



Newchurch Parish Church



Ellen Hindley, Settlement Examination, 1843 (Courtesy of Lancashire Archives)

to be used until the new Leigh Union Workhouse was built in 1851.

The Overseers at Lowton complained that while Ellen and Robert had become chargeable to Culcheth parish, their legal place of settlement was still Manchester. They therefore obtained an order from the County Justices at Chowbent that mother and son should return to the city's own workhouse. At about that time, Friedrich Engels described it as: '...the poor Law Bastille of Manchester, which, like a citadel, looks threateningly down from behind its high walls and parapets on the hilltop, upon the working-people's quarter below'. This imposing but threatening building dominated the area, which was full of the lowest quality housing imaginable, filthy streets, mills and railways.

Culcheth's parish accounts reveal that the pair remained in this hell upon earth until at least 1845.

By 1848, she was back at Holcroft in Culcheth. Her daughter Elizabeth developed dropsy and died in May. Ellen was present at her death and informed the authorities. Meanwhile James, the other twin, eventually settled in Hulme in Manchester, where he married and had his own family. He named one of his daughters after his mother.

The unsettled and itinerant phase of Ellen's life was over; she spent most of the rest of it in her parish of birth. The 1851 census reveals that she had escaped the poor law system by lodging at Holcroft Lane with her brother Thomas, a widower. She was listed as a winder, which involved twisting spun thread onto a loom. Ellen could have done this in a mill. Those attempting to

cling on to traditional methods of production in their own homes were finding work harder to come by and increasingly badly paid. Robert, her youngest son was by then an errand boy at Michael Paul's farm. We lose track of him after that.

1861 saw Ellen and Thomas living with William Hindley, another unmarried brother, an agricultural labourer at Cawley's Farm in Holcroft Lane. William himself was fortunate in having two acres on which to support himself and his relatives.

Ten years later, the three were still there. By this time William was 80 years old and Thomas 74. Ellen was also in her seventies. Ominously, the census enumerator did not list an occupation for any of them.

Sometime later, having avoided appealing to the poor law authorities for so long, 79 year-

old Ellen was eventually forced to enter the workhouse. Times had changed and as a sick and aged pauper, she was no longer the sole responsibility of her parish, but of a group of parishes designated the Leigh Union. She died in the Union Workhouse in Atherton. Being diagnosed as suffering from cirrhosis of the liver was perhaps a sign that Ellen used strong drink to help make her problems more tolerable. Whether she went to the Workhouse's Infirmary for

treatment or if she was a longer term pauper there, is unclear.

Ellen had lived long enough to witness the dramatic transformation of parts of the North West of England. She had resided and worked in the boom town of Manchester and had lived through the industrialisation of the textile industry, a process that had even spread to Culcheth. Old Adam Hindley had died in more settled times 60 years before his daughter and was buried in the

quiet rural graveyard at Newchurch. After her own turbulent life, Ellen was laid to rest with him.

*NOTE: Much of the biographical information on Ellen's early life comes from testimony she gave to the County Justices at Chowbent in 1843. She was sufficiently literate to sign the legal document prepared on her behalf, a characteristic more typical of a domestic servant than a weaver.*

## A long time ago in Roman Coccium...

Our volunteer cartoonist, Christopher Murphy, reimagines life in Wigan under Roman occupation!



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The Essay Writing Competition is kindly sponsored by Mr and Mrs J. O'Neill.



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### Criteria

- Articles must be a maximum of 1000 words.
- Articles must focus on a local history topic within the geographical boundaries of Wigan Borough.
- By entering the competition you agree to your work being published in *Past Forward*. The winning article will be published in *Past Forward* and other submissions may also be published.
- If selected for publication the *Past Forward* Editorial Team may edit your submission.

### How to enter

- Articles must be received by e-mail or post by Tuesday 1 October 2019.
- Electronic submissions are preferred although handwritten ones will be accepted.
- You must state clearly that your article is an entry into the Local History Writing Competition.
- You must include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address (if applicable). We will not pass your details on to anyone.

- It will not be possible for articles to be returned.
- You are welcome to include photographs or images however they cannot be returned.

### Submit to

pastforward@wigan.gov.uk

OR

Local History Writing Competition,  
Past Forward, Museum of Wigan Life,  
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU

# More than the Leight Feight: Women, Protest and Chartism in Wigan and Leigh 1838 – 1850

BY YVONNE ECKERSLEY

The people of Leigh and Wigan have a rich tradition of radical protest. This tradition was forged by the actions of ordinary people, individually and in groups, as they agitated to improve their social and economic conditions. They were involved in the politics and activism surrounding Peterloo, the Reform Crisis of 1831-1832, the anti-slavery campaign, the anti-Poor Law movement, the Ten Hour Movement, anti-Corn Law agitation, the early trade union movement, as well as Chartism.

The carefully nurtured anger and resentment engendered by the 1819 massacre at Peterloo helped maintain this radicalism. Hence, on 24 September 1838, when Leigh's radicals joined Bolton's at Agecroft to walk to the meeting of 200,000 Chartists on Kersal Moor, Salford, Leigh's banner carried the motto, 'In memory of the slaughter of our unarmed and peaceable brothers on the plains of Peterloo'.

## The Wigan Meeting

On 12 November, 20 to 30,000 people, members and non-members of various protest and radical groups from the neighbourhoods of Wigan, Leigh, Bury, Westhoughton, Westhoughton Dobbrow, Daisy Hill, Bedford and Hindley gathered in Wigan and marched behind banners to Amberswood Common at Higher Ince. They assembled to hear Feargus O'Connor and Joseph Raynor Stephens advocate the adoption of the People's Charter. On the day it was just Stephens who addressed the meeting.

For organisers and audience alike this was a continuation of their radicalism of 1819. The preserved Cap of Liberty, presented at the 1819 Amberswood protest meeting by the Wigan Female Reform Society, had pride of place. The motto, 'O'Connor - Hunts Successor', on Wigan's huge banner (8 foot by 6 foot) with its full sized portrait of Feargus O'Connor holding the People's Charter, and Henry Hunt's monument in the distance, speaks for itself. On its other side was a British Lion with mottos and imagery identifying some of the perceived causes of their suffering: 'Starvation Bastiles; Jew Jobbery - Aristocracy; Debt Funds; Shopocracy; White Slavery - state paupers'. More confrontational images and mottos included: 'Down, down to Hell, and say I sent you', on a black flag with a skull and crossbones, whilst on a scarlet scroll, 'Tremble, Tyrants, Tremble'.

In 1837, the Wigan and Leigh Anti Poor Law Associations had sent delegates to the Manchester Anti-Poor Law meeting where a petition requesting its repeal was launched. Both towns collected signatures for the petition. In 1838, Parliament rejected it. Much of Stephens' address tapped into resentment of this rejection, the New Poor Law itself and people's fear of incarceration in workhouses. He encouraged the belief that they had the potential power, if united as Chartists, to arrest the roll-out of Poor Law institutions. He gave his message credence by speaking in quasi-biblical and religious terms, couching his rhetoric in generic male terms. He disregarded the agency of the women present, postulating that women ought to be, as God ordained,

in the home, under the control of male heads of families and 'nobody else', i.e. not Poor Law Commissioners. Nor, one presumes himself, on Amberswood Common.

## Leigh Meeting

On 27 December 1838, Stephens was arrested on a warrant signed by Leigh Magistrates, T B W Sanderson of Chowbent and John Kenworthy of Astley. He was charged for having participated in a tumultuous meeting on the 13 November and inciting the meeting to violence against certain inhabitants of Leigh. He was taken to the Grapes Inn, Worsley, where the local Petty Sessions were held, then on to Salford's New Bailey. There, on 28 December, two Leigh Magistrates, John Kenworthy and J B Smith, the latter being the Leigh Magistrates' clerk, Leigh factory owner and Poor Law Guardian, decided he should stand trial and bailed him.

Leigh's meeting differed from Wigan's where Stephens' rhetoric had centred round a generalised antipathy. In Leigh he directed much of his rhetoric at specific and named targets, namely Leigh's Poor Law Guardians and certain mill owners. As a factory reformer and anti-Poor Law activist, Stephens' speeches had direct relevance for Leigh's women. Women were more likely to work in factories in appalling conditions. Unemployment and wage reductions reduced their already low wages to the point where they were at risk of being admitted to workhouses and separated from their children. To compound this, the Bastardy Clause,



*The Grapes Inn, Worsley (with permission, from the Frank Mullineux Collection, Salford Local History)*

by placing economic responsibility for illegitimate children on mothers, pauperized many women. The Leigh banner, 'Bastardy Laws', alludes to this. After Stephens' arrest the Leigh Women's Chartist Association donated £23 to his defence fund.

According to prosecution witness James Johnson, on 13 November Stephens was given a hero's welcome in Leigh. People lined the road from Wigan. A procession, consisting mainly of women, carrying banners and flags, in which pikes featured, led him to Leigh Market Place where bells had been rung to draw the crowd. Although Chairman, James Fenney, appealed to the crowd to be peaceful and law abiding, it had the potential from the start to be intimidating. An estimated two to three thousand boisterous people squeezed into the narrow streets surrounding Market Place. They reacted to Stephens' well-rehearsed, rousing rhetoric by shouting, cheering, firing pistols and waving pikes as he denounced particular Guardians, mill owners and the established church, whilst suggesting that people rise up, promising his leadership. Stephens spoke twice. The 8.00pm meeting was lit by up to twenty blazing torches.

Though there was no riot, alarm was such that 300 special constables

armed with truncheons were sworn in. The Home Office identified Leigh radicals as meeting in the White Horse, holding torchlight processions, drilling, making and selling pikes and cutlasses openly. Although this was disconcerting for the authorities, the ownership of arms was considered a right at that time. Immediately after Stephens' visit, Leigh magistrates again increased the number of special constables and the Government monitored local radicals. On 22 November, Worsley and Leigh radicals were warned not to hold their planned torchlight meeting on 15 December as, 'the Whigs have sent spies to entrap you'.

## Leigh Feight 1839

By the end of the Chartist disturbances of 1839, of the activists arrested, over 500 had been imprisoned, 221 transported and many more intimidated. Out of 139 arrested in Leigh, thirty-five were imprisoned for a year with hard labour at Kirkdale. The government and civil authorities clamped down on Chartists in what has been termed a rule of terror. Imprisoned Chartists were subjected to humiliating brutality.

Some Chartists sentenced to hard labour were publicly exhibited as they

walked the treadmill in Knutsford for visitors and in a street facing window at the New Bailey. Equally cruelly, prisons enforced a 'silent system' on Chartists. Some were simply held for long periods then released without trial. Many more, blacklisted by employers, could not find work locally.

In July 1839, the first Chartist Petition was rejected by Parliament at a time when wage reductions were creating horrendous distress. In response, Chartist leaders called for a three day 'National Holiday' (i.e., a general strike), timed to coincide with the anniversary of Peterloo. Leigh radicals voted to participate at a Leigh meeting on 1 August. On 4 August, 2000 Chartists went to Leigh Parish Church, displacing the congregation from their pews. Sam Whittle, a churchwarden, recorded they behaved well. Eight days later between 2000 and 10,000 (estimates vary) working people protested in Leigh. The protesters came to Leigh with a programme. Their intention was to visit Leigh's mills to persuade the mainly female workforce to stop work, and owners to stop production, or risk protesters pulling the plugs from mill boilers. This they did. By lunchtime on 12 August, twelve mills had been stopped. This continued the next day with contingents moving to and from nearby towns. On 14 August the large crowd (estimate 6000) became increasingly volatile. This was not unforeseen.

Amazingly, with a population of just 22,000, Leigh was deemed to be a such risk to national security, the Royal Armouries sent 150 swords, 300 long sea pistols, 300 flintlock pistols and 6000 rounds of ammunition. Despite these weapons and the enrolment of 500 special constables, Leigh magistrates called for military help from Haydock. The threat was considered serious enough for Sir Charles Napier, Commander of England's Northern Army, to come to Leigh. He complained to the Home Secretary that once the military arrived, local magistrates attempted to abdicate responsibility. They were, 'only with difficulty persuaded to remain in the town, whilst troops were rendering aid to the civil power'.



Newton Street, Leigh and the Obelisk on Market Place (PC2009.138, Wigan & Leigh Archives Online)

It was after magistrate T E Withington read the Riot Act at the Obelisk on Market Place, the fighting, (remembered as the Leigh Feight), between troops and protesters, took place. For days after, the military was occupied in a mopping up operation, arresting Chartists and confiscating arms.

feature of the 1842 Plug Plot was that huge contingents of mill workers, now joined by miners, travelled long distances, marching in force from town to town achieving an almost complete cessation of work in factories, coal mines and other large industries. 2000 strikers marched into Leigh from Eccles and Patricroft. A further 2000 marched from Bury to Heywood, from Heywood to Leigh and from Leigh to Middleton, turning out workers at mills and mines and collecting marchers as they went. At each town, large district meetings were held, addressed by strike leaders. It was reported that at least one, in Middleton, was addressed by a woman.

## 1842

Despite mass arrests, activism continued. Networks of Chartist Associations were still in existence. Through the Chartist newspaper, *The Northern Star*, we know that Leigh had an Association Room, where Astley, Tyldesley, Chowbent, Lowton and Westhoughton Chartists met, and Chowbent's Association also met in the Harrison Chapel. Following the rejection of another Chartist petition by parliament, the effects of the economic slump of 1841-1842 and another reduction of wages by mill owners, united trades unionists and Chartists called another general strike, again timed to coincide with the anniversary of Peterloo.

Although many of the details of this general strike are similar to the 1839 strike, there was an important difference. In 1842, Leigh was an important regional town in a planned demonstration of power by trade unionists and Chartists in an effort to force constitutional change. The main



The White Horse Hotel, Leigh (PC2009.138, Wigan & Leigh Archives Online)

The nature and scale of the disruption in the area challenged local civil and military forces. On 15 August a communication to the Home Office reported all the constables of the Warrington division, assembled at Leigh to support local constables, failed to turn a mob of many thousands out of the town. In Warrington itself, magistrates were panicked as thousands of protestors from Wigan marched into Warrington. Public houses were closed, special constables enrolled and troops travelled by train from Newton to defend the town. Whilst Colonel Wemyss' troops were successful in preventing marching colliers from Lord Egerton's pits in Worsley, armed with pit tools and led by a large number of 'decently dressed young women', from entering Manchester, Hindley was abandoned to the strikers as there were not enough constables or troops to cope.

Women mill workers featured prominently among the marchers. The press sympathetically recorded their desperate condition. Women and girls, many walking as many as twenty miles, 'astonished spectators...by the poverty of their attire', and because 'some were marching in bare feet' or heavy clogs. The press criticised the authorities. The *Manchester Guardian* reported, 'there was a procession in Wigan and all was peaceful. The soldiers were ordered out, and they instantly attacked people on all sides'.



Leigh Pike confiscated in 1839. Donated to Pennington Hall Museum. Now in the possession of the Wigan Museum Service.

## After the Plug Plot of 1842

Despite Government efforts to suppress the movement by arresting leaders and activists, demanding very high court costs to starve it of funds and intimidating individuals, radicalism did not disappear in 1842. There was some continuation of the National Holiday. In 1843, 300 Wigan women pit workers with 100 male colleagues struck, continuing their strike for months. The Wigan Miners Union worked closely with local Chartist Associations, meeting in places like the Crofters Arms. They organised mass meetings on Aspull Moor and Shevington Moor in 1843 and in 1844, between 8,000-10,000 gathered on Amberswood Common where the Chartist lawyer William Prowting Roberts spoke. Throughout the 1850s there were sporadic strikes and protests in Wigan, led by miners and weavers unions.

However, there was movement away from the strategy of mass protest meetings and violent confrontations. Radicals looked to more peaceful and constitutional means to achieve a better life. From 1843, Feargus O'Connor was developing a Chartist Community Land Plan. Thousands of subscribers donated small sums of money to buy four large country estates. From these subscribers draws were held and winners were allocated a plot of land to help them become self-supporting. There were subscribers and recipients in Wigan and Leigh. Co-operative farming schemes were not new to Leigh. Chat Moss was the site of a socialist community farm in the 1830s and the

Tyldesley Cooperative farm in the 1840s. Chartists tried to enter Parliament. Although Edward Nightingale could not muster enough support to stand in Wigan, in 1841 and 1847 William Dixon of Lamberhead Green, treasurer of the Miners Union, stood and was a popular candidate. However, despite winning the vote at the hustings he lost at the polls. As the century wore on constitutional activism, municipal and parliamentary, and trade unionism became the main focus for working class activists.

### Selected references:

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- Leigh Local Studies, cuttings boxes.*
- The Manchester Guardian*
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- Beamont Diaries Nov 1841-42. Warrington Archives*
- Women in Protest 1800-1850. - Malcolm I Thomis and Jennifer Grimmer*
- Political Women 1800-1850. - Ed. Ruth and Edmund Frow*
- The Dignity of Chartism. - Dorothy Thompson*
- Charrism and Society: An Anthology of Documents. - FC Mather*
- The Miners Association: A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists. Raymond Challinor & Brian Ripley*
- Protest and Politics of Space and Place 1789-1848. - Katrina Navickas*
- Chartism: A New History. - Malcolm Chase*
- Various Internet websites.*
- Further reading on the Leigh Feight - John Lunn's History of Leigh, Thomas Boydell's Notes and Reflections of Old Leigh.*

## GREAT RADICAL DEMONSTRATION AT WIGAN.

On Monday last, one of the largest Demonstrations ever known to have been held in the neighbourhood of Wigan, was convened at Worsley Common, to adopt the People's Charter and the National Petition. Early in the morning, the town was all alive, and thousands seemed to wait with ardent anxiety the arrival of the period when they were to be assembled together to register their determination to join the endeavours of those who have already set them the example, in the struggle for freedom. At about two o'clock, an immense procession moved from the town to the Common, where a very commodious bustings was erected. The numbers present could not be less than from twenty to thirty thousand, having come from Wigan, Leigh, Bury, Bedford, Lindley, and other places. The following is the order of procession:-

- WIGAN.
- No. 2.—Banner, eight feet by six feet. Green Silk. Trimmings—Red fringe.
- 1st. side—  
A full length portrait of Feargus O'Connor, Esq., in the attitude of addressing the Public, holding the People's Charter in one hand, Hunt's monument in the distance. Motto on a scarlet scroll, gold letters—O'Connor Hunt's successor.
- Reverse—  
The British lion roused, and in the attitude of tramping under his feet  
Starvation Bastiles,  
Debt Funds,  
Jew Jobbers—Aristocracy,  
Shoepocracy,  
White Slavery—State Paupers,  
Holding a three-edged flaming dagger in his fore-paw—the black flag suspended between the point of the dagger and the point of his tail.  
Motto on black flag—  
Down, down to Hell, and say I sent you there.  
Also a death's head and cross-bones, and a viper's sting at the extreme end of the flag.  
Motto, on a scarlet scroll over all, in gold letters, Tremble, Tyrants, tremble.
- LEIGH.
- 2.—Marshals on Horse-Back.  
Flag.  
Committee, two a-breast.  
Union Jack.  
Members, four a-breast.  
Tri-coloured Flag.  
Members.  
Cap of Liberty.  
Members.  
Bundle of Sticks.—Flag.  
Motto—  
Britons, do your Duty.
- Reverse—  
The People, the Source of all Wealth.  
Members.  
Green Silk Flag.  
Motto—  
Union is Strength.  
Reverse—  
Abolition of Slavery.  
*The Northern Star.*  
Members.  
Green Flag.  
Motto—  
The Fire Points.  
Reverse—  
Equitable Adjustments.  
Members.  
Coach and Pair.  
Green Flag.  
Motto—  
Rights of Labour.  
Reverse—  
Justice to the Millions.  
*Shoemaker's Society.*  
Union Flag.  
Motto—  
It is better to die by the sword than perish with Hunger.  
We will have our Birthright.  
*Hindley Working Men's Society.*  
Flag.  
Committee.—Band, two a-breast.  
Flag.  
Members, four a-breast.  
Tri-coloured Flag.  
Silk Weavers, four a-breast.  
Flag.  
The United Order of Free Mechanics.  
Members, four a-breast.  
Inscription—  
Let Brotherly Love Continue.  
*Hindley Union.*  
Tax upon tax we can't endure—  
A Radical Reform is the only cure.  
Universal Civil Right and Religious Liberty.  
What mean ye that ye beat my people, and grind the face of the poor, saith the Lord God of Hosts.  
*Hindley Working Men's Association.*  
The People's Charter.  
Motto—  
O'Connor and Stephens our leaders are now,  
These dignified men have laurels stamped on their brow.  
Reverse—  
Britons, break your chains of slavery.  
Pull Corruption's Pillar down.  
Triumph over despotic knavery.  
Drive all tyrants to the ground.  
Up Lord save us, or we perish.  
Liberty or Death.  
Reverse—  
Ye have despised the poor.  
Do not rich men oppress you?  
BURY FLAGS.

*The Northern Star - The Radical procession from Wigan to Amberswood Common, November 1838*



## The Dootson Collection

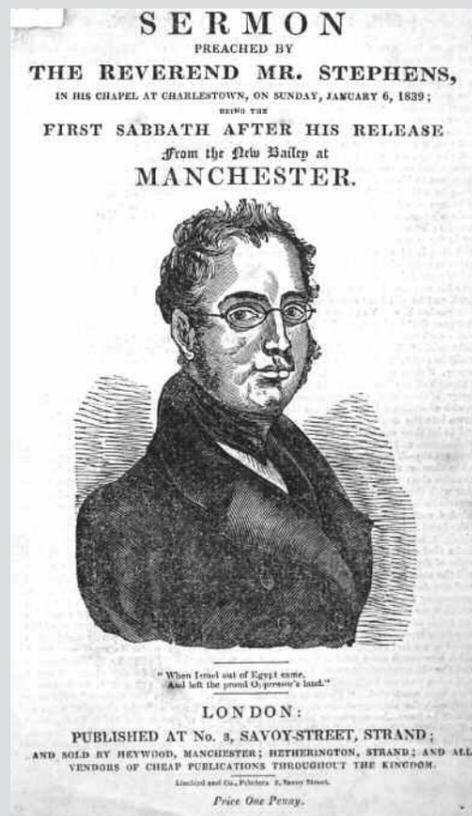
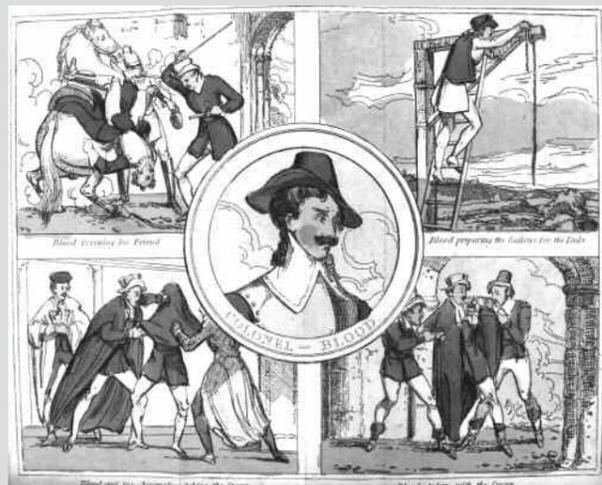
This past year Christine Watts has used her volunteer hours at archives & local studies to catalogue the pamphlet section of the Dootson Collection. The Dootson Collection is part of Leigh Local Studies, and was given to the Borough of Leigh in 1952 by the widow of Leigh solicitor Thomas Robert Dootson. Thomas was an avid book collector and the library consists of a Lancashire section as well as books on more general subjects. The pamphlet collection largely consists of pamphlets published in the north-west. Religious sermons from the 19th century make up a sizeable portion of the collection, many of which are non-conformist. One of the sermons is by Reverend Stephens, whose visit to Leigh in 1838 is said to have been a contributing factor to Chartist agitation and the 'Leigh Feight'. A colourful retelling of 'The Life and Adventures of Colonel Blood' can also be found in the collection. Blood is notorious for his attempt to steal the crown jewels, he is known locally for marrying Maria, the daughter of Golborne resident John Holcroft.

Other local connections include 'Christmas and Manchester or the story of 'Christians Awake''. 'Christians Awake' was written by John Byrom, whose ancestral home is Bryom Hall at Lowton.

Other noteworthy pamphlets include 'The life of James Johnson, an escaped slave from the southern states of America', a harrowing narrative of James Johnson, who settled in Oldham after escaping slavery in North Carolina. James retells his experiences of his life enslaved on a plantation and his courageous escape. Travelling via Liverpool, James wandered around Lancashire including Wigan before settling in Oldham.

To find out what's included in the collection go to the Wigan Council Libraries catalogue page <https://capitadiscovery.co.uk/wigan/> and type in Dootson Collection.

Our thanks go to volunteers Christine and Jamie for cataloguing and arranging the pamphlets.



## CORRECTION TO EDITION 80



We have been asked to correct details of an image from *Astley Hospital in Past Forward 80*. Image details should read as follows: Staff from Leigh Infirmary and Astley Hospital Training School, prize-giving, c. 1956, Miss Smith and Miss Merron, and in middle is Miss Wylie (Manchester Royal Infirmary Matron at the time), Doreen Jones (end of front row on right), and 3rd from right, Mr Tom Wintle (from Atherton).

Saturday 20th April  
**Easter Egg Hunt**  
10am until 3pm

Saturday 25th May  
**Handmade Craft Fair**  
10am until 3pm

Friday 7th June  
**General Knowledge Quiz Night** including  
Pie & Peas  
starting at 7pm

Saturday 15th June  
**Shakespeare's As You Like It**  
Performed by Rain or Shine Theatre Company

Saturday 6th July  
**Proms on The Lawn**  
starting at 6.30pm

Saturday 31st August  
**Dog Show**  
starting at 11am  
Saturday & Sunday 21st & 22nd September  
**Heritage Open Weekend**

Saturday 28th September  
**Lancashire Evening**  
including Hotpot Supper  
starting at 7pm

Saturday 26th October  
**Pumpkin Hunt**  
10am until 3pm

Saturday 30th November  
**Christmas Craft Fair**  
10am until 3pm

Saturday 14th December  
**Christmas Carols in the Courtyard**  
5pm until 7pm

Damhouse, Astley Hall Drive, Astley, Manchester, M29 7TX Telephone: 01942 876417

## 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.

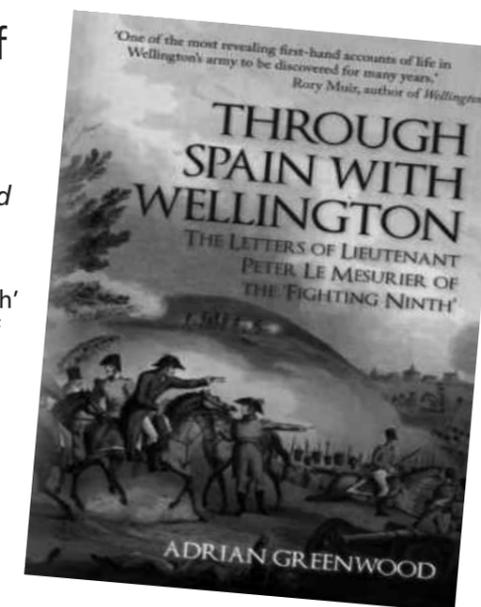
The correspondence of this young officer provides a unique and fresh insight into the campaigns of Moore and Wellington against Napoleon. They also show the transformation of the boy into the man. He suffers retreats and celebrates victories, witnesses sieges, rape and plunder, and falls in love; his 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.

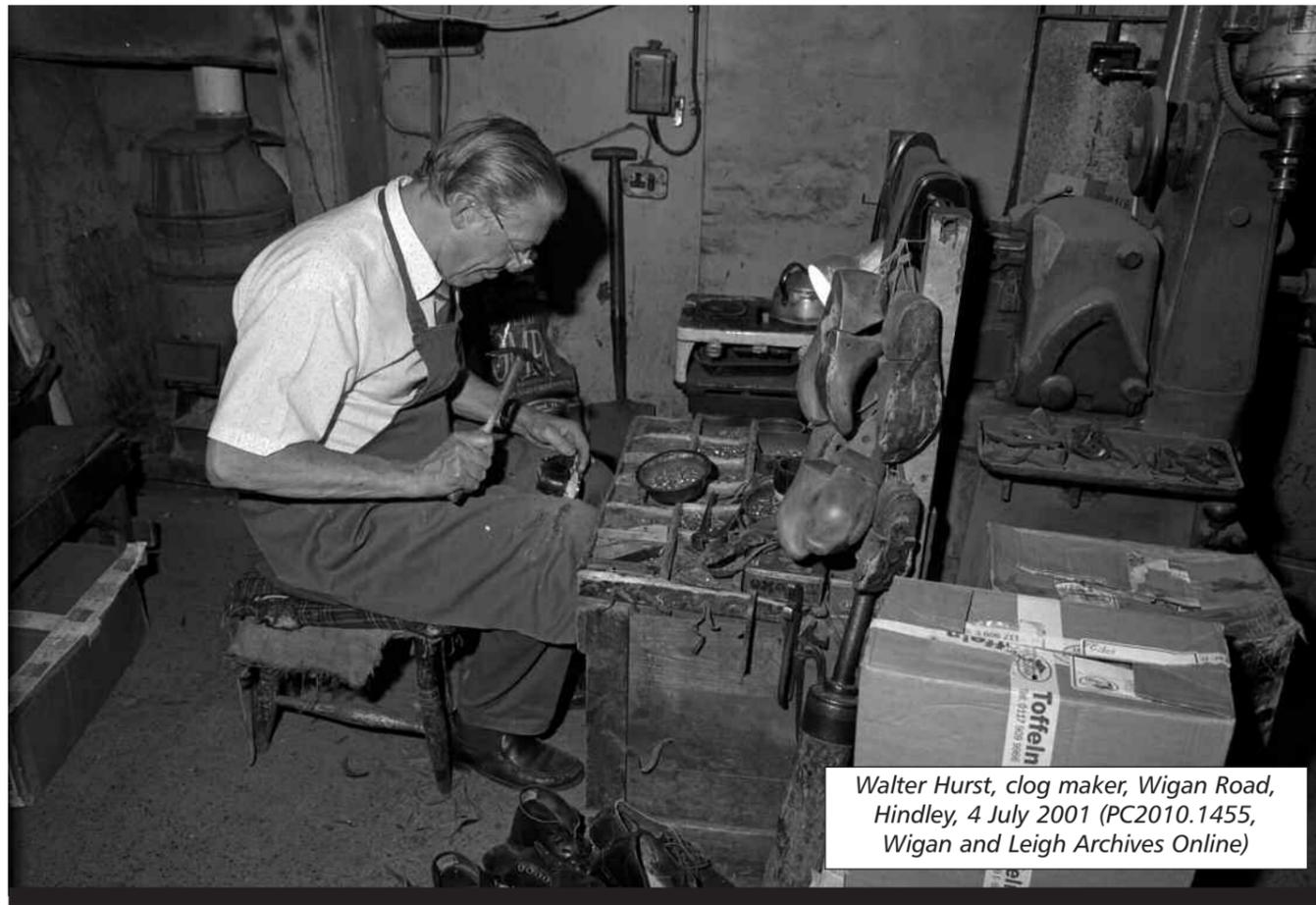
Any unpublished letters from the conflict are scarce, but such an extensive unpublished collection is rare indeed. With background information and commentary provided by expert Adrian Greenwood and meticulously footnoted, this is a worthy addition to the literature of the Napoleonic Wars.

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'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





Walter Hurst, clog maker, Wigan Road, Hindley, 4 July 2001 (PC2010.1455, Wigan and Leigh Archives Online)

# From Logs to Clogs: The Sole Survivor

BY AUSTIN LYONS

I really don't know how it happened, it occurred so quickly. Maybe I was daydreaming, but there I was, a young lad again about nine years old, standing in front of a cobbler's shop fascinated by the skills of an expert making clog soles. The year would be about 1925 but this was no ordinary memory, as all the incidents came so quickly and clearly to mind. I was in fact in front of Richard Rothwell's double-fronted shop window on the corner of Chapel Green, Hindley, with his workshop on one side and shop counter taking in repairs on the other.

Richard was a tall thin chap with a rather pale complexion, whilst his wife, on the other hand was just the opposite. She was very tall and well built and as some used to say 'cut a fine

figure'. They had three children, two grown-up lads and a younger sister. The boys, who didn't follow their father into his business, were prominently associated with St. Peter's Boys Brigade. They must have held some senior positions in the Brigade as their uniforms indicated this.

Back to the shop window, I am still there, puzzled as to how Richard came to be the only cobbler in the whole of the Hindley district, to make his own clog soles. All the others bought them commercially. How or why Richard had this exceptional skill, I have no idea. I could just see, by standing on tiptoe, what I believe to be beech wood logs, cut to various lengths, piled up behind him.

What attracted my interest were the two huge implements each about three foot in length, which must have had some form of a blade at the far end. Taking one of these, with his arm at full stretch, I saw him scoop or gouge out lengths of shavings at the far end, to produce the traditional arched shape of the clog. This raises the front, just below the ball of the foot, to at least three inches from ground level, making the clog completely waterproof. A small segment at the lower end was cut out to produce the heel. He now changed to the other implement, which I observed had a much narrower blade in order to cut a rebate around the shaped clog sole on which would rest the thin black leather of the upper part of the clog. This was secured by nailing special clog nails, almost touching, around the whole of the clog, but not before the sole had been scraped and polished.

The exception was the miners' clogs which were cut higher to give added protection to the ankles. The mill girls, on the other hand, had shorter uppers as did the children's clogs. All the foregoing, had of course metal grooved strips (which we called Clog Irons) nailed on the underside of the sole and heel, giving rise to the monotonous sound of clanking clogs, for the greater part of the working and school week.

Then came that time for us lads, when safely away from any parental control, would scrape our clogs on one side. Then running at a good speed, produce a fine display of sparks! Another time, my younger brother Con, was running around the dining table so quickly, that one of his clogs came off and smashed clean through the large front window and into the street. Thankfully, no one was passing at the time but the crash of breaking glass brought neighbours to their doors, alarmed by



A pair of ladies clogs (Wigan Museum Collection)

the noise of it all. Fortunately a plumber and glazier only lived a few doors away, so the damage and glass replacement were quickly dealt with.

Another time, one of my playmates said he proposed to sail one of his clogs along Borsdane Brook the following day. He hadn't allowed for a heavy rainfall overnight, which changed the usual trickling flow of the brook into a heavy stream. Undaunted, the lad in spite of it all, placed one of his clogs into the swollen stream and then ran the 30 yards or so, to the next bridge at Platt Lane, to retrieve it. But he had underestimated the speed of the water, and to his dismay saw his clog sail away into the distance. I can't imagine what kind of excuse he offered his angered parents as he walked into the house with only one clog. This is where my unusual memory now starts to fade, and like that clog at Platt Lane Bridge, am being carried away and back again to adult reality.

## 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](http://www.wiganheritage.com)

# A Dreadful Tragedy at Wigan North Western Station

At 1.18am on the morning of Saturday 2 August 1873 a 'Terrible Railway Accident' occurred at the London and North Western Railway's Station in Wigan. The train concerned was the 8.00pm overnight express to Scotland and 'commonly known as the Tourist Train'.

It was running late, by about fifteen minutes, and was described as being 'unusually heavy'. It was hauling 22 assorted carriages and three vans and was headed by two engines. Although the speed as it approached Wigan was reported as 35-38mph, many passengers were later to give evidence of high speeds previously rocking the carriages.

At the south end of the station, as the main platform was approached – an island platform – there were 'facing points' which allowed access to a siding on the left side of this island platform. The two engines and the first fifteen carriages cleared these without any trouble but then the next two vehicles, a carriage and a van, left the rails and were dragged along the main platform at speed before, incredibly, righting themselves on the rails at the north end of the station as the train carried on.

The remaining carriages and a guards van had 'jerked from the body of the train line at the

facing points and rushed up the siding at a tremendous speed but only to be brought up to a fearful stoppage within a distance of 70 to 80 yards'. The carriages had veered along the platform edge abutting the siding, ploughing up earth and flags. The first of these detached carriages, the eighteenth of the train, 'leaped the metals and bounded upon the platform, throwing itself in mid-air and alighting bottom uppermost upon the platform. The carriage was smashed into a thousand splinters'. The next four turned completely over 'smashing themselves into indescribable wrecks'. One passenger, 73 year old Mary Roberts from Carlisle, was hurled over an adjoining wall and through the slated roof of Messrs. Walkers engineering foundry on the street below, to the horror of those working there. She died instantly, her body 'being shockingly mutilated'.

Meanwhile, the train was brought to a halt some quarter of a mile north of the station by Turner's sidings, adjacent to Mesnes (Barebones) Colliery, now Bull Hey, the home of Wigan Cricket Club. The driver in charge, William Strawpert, walked back to see what had happened, whilst the leading engine was despatched to Rylands Sidings' signal box to warn oncoming trains. Strawpert, 'intended to try and find out the cause of the accident', he later testified, 'but I was completely upset with the occurrence, and I did not do so'.

At the station, 'a ghastly scene presented itself, the terrible wreck of the carriages and the shrieks and groans of the injured and dying making up a spectacle which may possibly be imagined but cannot be described'. The few LNWR staff on the station at that hour were soon joined by 'medical gentlemen', police officers and other volunteers, including the workers from the damaged foundry.

Passengers who were injured were taken to the Victoria, Clarence, Royal and Minorca hotels and

to the Wheatsheaf Inn and the Ropemakers Arms, where they were tended. Others less seriously injured were able to rejoin the train, which left for Scotland later that morning. Thirteen people were killed. Amongst those who died were: Sir John Anson, deputy lieutenant of Lancashire; Zachariah Roberts, the son of Alice Roberts; and the three young children of John Wark, along with their nurse Alice Minett. Mr Wark was not injured himself although his wife suffered a fractured leg. Others who died were from London, Ayr, Aberdour in Fife, Weymouth and Oxford. One compartment, in one of the wrecked coaches, was empty. It had been vacated at Warrington, as the person occupying it had intended leaving at Crewe but had fallen asleep and fortunately was able to leave at Warrington. Later that day an official account was issued by the railway company stating as follows:

*'The 8pm train last evening went alright until approaching the Wigan Station, and on passing the facing points leading to the loop line which runs at the back of the platform the two engines and seventeen carriages (being for the north of Scotland) passed over safely, but the latter portion of the train, including the Glasgow and Edinburgh etc. Carriages, came off the line, ran upon the platform, and came into contact with the station buildings... On examination after the accident the points were found alright, and the signals correct. No hypothesis can as yet be suggested to account for the accident'.*

An inquest was opened that evening and was concerned primarily with inspecting the scene and identifying the victims before adjourning until 7 August for further identifications. In the meantime, on 5 August, Captain Tyler, an inspector from the Board of Trade, arrived in Wigan and immediately made a 'most elaborate examination of the scene of the accident'. This inspection, 'of the points was not unattended with danger as the traffic at the spot is immense, while it is here that the junction of the London North-Western and the Lancashire and Yorkshire takes place, so that the number of passenger, luggage and mineral trains, and odd engines continually on the move are bewildering to any but the clearest heads'. It was estimated

at that time that some 200 train movements took place in this area each day.

Despite the thorough investigation which was followed by a lengthy inquest, no satisfactory explanation for the disaster could be determined. The cause is still a mystery. Increasing volume of train traffic through the station caused North Western Station to be rebuilt between 1889 and 1894. This followed on from the completion of the Whelley Loop Line in 1886 between Bamfurlong and Standish, which enabled many trains, mainly goods traffic to avoid the station altogether. The new station had five through platforms and five bay platforms and a second entrance in Queen Street, near the scene of the horrific death of the passenger Mrs Roberts. The station in this form lasted until 1973 when the buildings were swept away and the station was again substantially rebuilt to coincide with the electrification of the route from London to Glasgow.

## CAN YOU HELP?

### The Female Convicts Research Centre

From 1803 to 1853, 12,500 female convicts were transported to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), as punishment for crimes, mainly theft. After serving their sentences, they were released into the community. Their transportation left a lasting legacy.

A few years ago, I was contacted by The Female Convicts Research Centre in Tasmania asking if I could get together a team of people who would be willing to research the backgrounds of these women prior to their transportation. This included their family, their background, their baptism, where they lived and the census records. Also, obviously their criminal records, where they were tried and any newspaper reports about the trial.

We got together a small team of volunteers who were eager to do this and had either computer access at home or at their local library.

Currently we have found the backgrounds of over 3,000 of these women and girls. Each of them has a story to tell. We aim to remember them all, to give them back a voice.

We are always looking for more help and if you would like to join our team please let me know. There is no pressure on anyone, and all of our volunteer are local and always support each other on what they are doing.

Pat Bellas

Please contact Pat and the project volunteers through the Archives & Local Studies at [archives@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:archives@wigan.gov.uk)

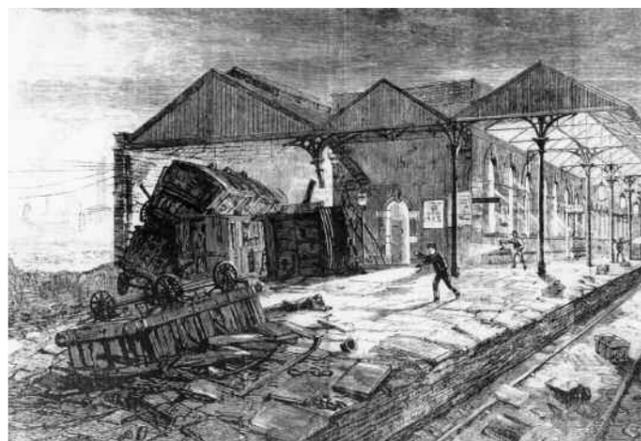


Image showing the scene at Wigan North Western Station, from the London Illustrated News, 1873

# Jane Nisill Traynor 1887-1940

BY JEAN ASPINALL AND DOROTHY HART

In the year that we celebrate women's suffrage, we have no evidence that our grandmother Jane Nisill was a Suffragette. However, she was a forceful determined career woman; qualities that are celebrated today, but probably raised difficulties at that time in her family life.

It is only when we get older that we take an interest in family members who we never knew. Most information about these relatives is mainly based on family anecdotes and photographs. But how reliable is this? Jane Traynor Nisill is our grandmother and opportunities to ask family members who knew her are long gone.

A few stories passed down, whether true or false, are all we have, plus two photographs. We know that she was a midwife, that her mother died at a young age and her father abandoned the family. He went back to Ireland and possibly remarried.

Online research, old street maps of Wigan, birth, marriage and death records, military records and links with genealogy groups in Ireland, plus a visit there filled in some but not all the gaps. Wigan Cemetery records are one of the most useful resources as we found both dates of death and addresses.

Our grandmother Jane Nisill had a short, hard life and yet achieved so much. Jane was the eldest child of John Nisill and Mary Matthews. Both parents came from Ireland and married at St Patrick's Church, Wigan. The marriage certificate shows that they each signed the certificate with a cross. Jane was born at Skitters Grove, Ashton in 1888, followed by Mary 1890, John 1891, Thomas 1893, Joseph 1895, Charles 1898, James 1900, Richard 1902 and Christopher 1904. The family moved around a great deal living in many areas

around Wigan and at one time lived in Chesterfield, where Charles was born. The 1891 Census shows that the children were born in different locations.

John, her father, was a Tunneller in the local mines and in the 1901 Census the family at last seem settled in Egerton Street, where Richard and Christopher were born.

In July 1906 Jane's mother Mary died aged 39 and her brother James died three weeks later aged six. Wigan Cemetery records show that they are buried in different public graves; a reflection on the family's financial state. At this time Jane was nineteen and probably had to stay at home to look after her father, sister and six brothers.

Soon after this Jane's father abandoned the family and went back to Loughshinny, Ireland where he had been brought up. Family stories imply that he took the youngest boys with him but later returned them to Wigan.

In 1908 Jane married Patrick Traynor, unsurprisingly on the marriage certificate she is not registered as employed! Married life in Egerton Street started with a readymade family and in the next six years Jane also had four children. James 1908, Joseph 1910, Veronica born in 1912 but died in 1913 and our father John 1914. Patrick, her husband, was a French Polisher, a job that kept him in full employment all his life. He was employed by Prestons Furnishes and after retirement did occasional work for Middleton and Woods.

Two house moves were made between 1908 and 1913 the family finally living in Melverly Street. Over this time their financial situation had also improved since they were able to bury Veronica in a private grave. Before the war there were twelve people living in the house.

The outbreak of the First World War brought big changes in Jane's life. Brothers Thomas, Joseph and Charles served in the army. Her brother John died on Christmas Eve 1914 and Charles died of natural causes while stationed in Ireland in 1918.

Her husband Patrick, being of small stature, only served in the army at a later date. We have not been able to trace any army records, but we know that he served in Arras, France and for a time was reported missing presumed dead.

This must have put Jane in a very difficult situation. How was she to support three young children and two young brothers as a widow? Her mother and fraternal grandmother in Ireland had been nurse/ midwives but they were unqualified and probably just stayed with mothers during labour and laid out the dead. Perhaps, due to this connection, she decided to qualify as a midwife, training at St. Mary's, Manchester. We think that she probably qualified about 1917 since the photograph shows her in her nurse's uniform with James, Joseph and John who looks about three years old. The three boys were looked after by Patrick's parents at this time who lived in Frith Street. Our father told us that before he started school his mother took him on her bike to attend births, and that he had to sit on the doorstep until the baby arrived.

At the end of the war Patrick returned from France. Life for Jane was to be very different. A working wife who wanted to continue with her career brought its difficulties. Was it making her own money or the satisfaction of her commitment to women in the Wallgate/ Pemberton area that made her so determined?

When her brother died in 1918 his home address was 269 Wallgate but we do not know when this move took place. By this time the family living in Wallgate had reduced to nine, Jane being the only female. In 1922 Winifred was born followed by Monica in 1927. Throughout this time Jane continued to work until her death in 1940. During her career she must have delivered a great many babies since, in the area in which she practiced, the families

had many children. In her lifetime she did what she was dedicated to, and our father said that she would rather deliver a baby than put a meal on the table.

But she also enjoyed life and visited Ireland with the younger children. Family occasions such as weddings and funerals, with her sister Mary and cousins, were also attended. Early financial hardship had made Jane a careful manager of her money. When she died in 1940 she left £1,302-17-3 and had to pay £39-5-0 in estate duty. Patrick never remarried and died 28 years later. They are buried at Our Lady's, Downall Green and a picture taken in 1940 looks as if it is the first burial in the plot by the gate entrance.

But what happened to the father who abandoned his family? He did return to his place of birth in Ireland and married Mary Wilde in 1908. On a visit to Loughshinny we were told that he abandoned his second wife and was never seen again. Where he went we are not sure, but he died at Jane's home in 1920 with only sixpence in his pocket.



Jane, dressed in her nurses uniform, with her sons James, Joseph and John, circa 1917

# D-DAY

BY MALCOLM RYDING AND JOSEPH HERBERT 'BERT' RYDING

The landscape of Dartmoor: purple, heather clad moorland, wide open landscapes, rushing rivers and obscure stone tors; rolling valleys, waterfalls, ancient and eerie forests and lonely ruins; breath-taking, always changing.

This countryside idyll was on the doorstep for Private 3776184, Joseph Herbert Ryding, as he prepared for his part in the D-Day landing in June 1944. There could not have been a greater contrast to what he would witness: the horrors of shattered bodies, a sea of blood, tanks stuck in the sand and the shelling barrage of the landings.

Billeted at The Globe Hotel, in the South Devon market town of Newton Abbot, Bert had only recently met his future wife, Hilda – a Dartmoor girl, a house mother in a children's home. Their time together was short-lived before he was off with his mates to battle.

Joseph Herbert (known as Bert) landed on Sword Beach with C-Company, 5th Kings Liverpool Regiment. His initial time on the Normandy beach was brief. Injury in his right ankle from a shell splinter forced him to be returned to the UK.

When he was once again fit for combat the Kings had moved on. On 3 August 1944, Bert returned to France. This time it was with the South Lancashire Regiment which had been decimated in the earlier landings. With them he made his way across France and eventually became part of the 'Market Garden' operation in Holland.

The partial success of 'Market Garden' put the Allies in possession of a wedge of Holland with its point at Nijmegen, and the immediate object was now to clear remaining enemy from west of the Maas river. On the southern flank of the wedge, the 1st Infantry Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment, took part in some of the most bitter fighting of the campaign to liberate Overloon and Venray between 12 and 18 October. Two and a half thousand soldiers were killed.

It was on the outskirts of Venray that Bert, a section leader, was seriously injured on 16 October by a shoe mine hidden in the mud of the Molenbeek. Eventually he was taken to a field hospital in Stevensbeek, a village close to Overloon.

Later came repatriation to the specialist Queen Mary's Hospital for war limblees in Roehampton, then to Hillingdon Hospital in Uxbridge and finally, Childwall



Private Bert Ryding

Hospital, Liverpool, to complete his rehabilitation after losing his lower right leg and parts of several fingers.

He was discharged on 4 September 1945, for 'ceasing to fulfil Army physical requirements Para 390 (xvi) KR 1940' – he was one of 12,000 service personnel to lose limbs in the Second World War.

Bert's army commander said of him in a subsequent reference: 'He was an excellent soldier, smart, cheerful, willing and industrious and able to turn his hand to any of the varied jobs required of him...He has the quality of integrity.'

Bert went on to live a full and productive life, working firstly at Leyland and Birmingham Rubber Works and as caretaker at Ashfield House, Standish, until retirement in 1984. He married in 1947 and had three children. For many years he was chairman of the Wigan branch of the British Limblee Ex-service Men's Association (BLESMA).

In 1990, during a visit with veterans, organised by the Dutch Wappenbruder (War Brothers), Bert visited the former field hospital school, lay down in the hall, stared to the ceiling and said: 'Yes they put me here, I recognise the ceiling!'

The following is an account of Bert's D-Day and later activity, found among his Army memorabilia after his death on 22 April 1998 and reproduced here in full.

## 6 June 1944, D-Day

The order came to get into the landing craft. The seas were mountains of water, black and cold. All around as far as the eye could see were other ships of all sizes and shapes. Suddenly on our left we saw a ship split in two, why, we never found out but the bows rose into the air then the stern just like a huge V, but no time to worry about them poor beggars. The faces of my mates and mine also told its own story, what did the immediate future hold. Then into the craft and lowered into that awful water and away circling round until all the other landing craft were in some kind of straggly line. The job was under way.

How many were in the boat I don't know. My pal Harry, like me like us all, wondered if we'd make it. A bet was made who would be sick first. He lost and later paid me the five Francs which I still have. What a racket. Big guns firing, shells whizzing overhead. Then the rocket ships opened up – what a sight. Flaming metal, scores of them flying skywards like a hailstorm. The beach and houses a long way off came into view, the craft beached and out we dived into three foot of water.

Then we realised what war was about and I know how small was my contribution. The top half of a body bobbed about then a few legs, then more bodies – must have been hit by machine guns and mines. It was a terrible shock.

On the beach this wasn't Blackpool or Tenby but for real. The RE [Royal Engineer] officer fine big red-haired fellow was taking his men up to the shoreline when a tremendous bang, showers of sand and mud flew up and he was another number on a war memorial. It sickened us but we didn't forget to flatten ourselves down. Then a barrage of air bursts came over, not very funny when you don't know what it's all about, a nasty pain in the right ankle at the back and I'd got a shell splinter. My fighting day was over.

One of our medical orderlies took me to a dressing station, a short journey I'll never forget. Lined up on the foreshore were lines of stretchers, scores of them with mostly dead men on them; occasionally one stretcher had a poor soul crying for help or his mother but no-one had time to care for these. Then to a huge gun site and in the cellar wounded men being dressed and sorted out. The rest of

the day was spent sitting around watching this huge war machine roll along, planes by the hundred bombing not a mile away, gliders crashing in the fields beyond, smoke from houses burning, dead men, Jerry and ours, crying men, tanks bogged down in the sand, hundreds of all kinds of craft. It was a huge masterpiece of showmanship but inside of me I was sick, terrified and hoping to wake up from this nightmare. Not only me but thousands of blokes like me.

That evening the walking wounded crawled, hobbled or somehow made our way to a beached craft which took us out to a hospital ship. On the way a ship discharging cargo hailed us: 'This is the captain speaking. Thank-you for what you have done today. We are proud of you and wish you well.'

I'll never forget that moment. Someone really cared, someone who still had to find out what it was all about.

August Monday, Bank Holiday: Again my feet on French soil via the Mulberry Harbour because my scratch had healed and I was fodder again. This time what a change. The South Lancs decimated so we were broken up (the 5th Kings) and joined that mob. Few weeks rest, across the Seine, the Maas (I think) then a course on how to be a soldier. I passed with top marks, a joke surely after all the training I had had. A stripe? Not on your life and the company CO wasn't impressed by my refusal and said 'But you'd be a section commander just the same' so I couldn't win.

Holland, Nijmegen, a Bridge Too Far eh! We crossed it in and out, eat more German pork and smoked Dutch cigars



Private Bert Ryding's discharge papers and Kings Regiment shoulder title

that would kill a donkey. Vandalised houses for pillows or blankets (the owners could be dead or something so it didn't matter to us) after all the usual topic was 'Will we make it?' A good excuse for doing what we wanted. Nothing criminal though.

This village, that hamlet, then the 12 October we had to go for Venlo and Venray in Holland because of the railway importance. Half my section wiped out by air bursts. Today, Thursday, no deaths just leg, arm and or neck wounds. God why wasn't I one to get away from the nightmare of digging in, no sleep, eating any mush that turned up, smoking inside your tin hat to hide the glow. Why didn't they move the corpses that once looked like me, poor mum, poor dad or wife or whoever. What if they only knew how we hated this? You haven't seen them digging trenches 100, 200, 300 yards long, bringing their bundles in grey army blankets wrapped around them, boots sticking out or not always, then lowering them into that clay, blokes just like me who had never lived and yet lived to die just like some filthy vermin. God help these people who invented war. They shall grow old, not they.

Friday rolled on into Saturday. The 14 October 1944, a cool autumn day, press on for Venlo. God, why do they send us tanks. The Jerry can see us without them stupid bastards giving them something to aim at. They were the old Desert Rats, they ought to have stopped there. Then all hell let loose, tanks hit, burning away. We dive for cover – anything – a pile of cow muck to hide behind. Then peace. We made it to the main road with a ditch on either side.

After a briefing with the CO I had to lead my section (four of us), what a laugh, to a certain point, cross the road and get behind the house at the crossroads. Not one friend in front of me only the last remains of Dutch land and the German army. All is quiet, my heartbeats could be heard in Berlin, then a slow progress up this ditch on the left of the road. A brief rest then it's over the top, across the road and into the ditch, and bang the world blows up into a red, black, green volcano with me sitting on it. Was it minutes, hours or days before the world settled down? I don't know but I remember the Jerry prisoners who were ordered to lift me out of the ditch. I remember the poor sod who trod on a mine and no doubt lost a leg, that made the score even. I am sorry it had to happen to him but he just had to be a prisoner at the wrong time. The rest is history to me and mine. The pain is still real, the fears are just as fearful and my inside aches for what I've seen. My dreams are mine alone but shared by thousands who cannot break that vow of silence. To tell would be sacrilege, a betrayal of all our mates who died in vain. The nightmare is over and yet it is with me every day, not because I want it to be but because it's the way it was meant to be. How futile, how ludicrous, how obscene and still we haven't learned.

1945: My proudest moment. Wearing hospital blues, on crutches, waiting for a tram back to Childwall from the Pier Head, Liverpool, after being on a few days leave. An old lady about 70 odd years, came to me and said: 'My husband is very shy but we would both like to shake your hand and say 'Thank you' for what you have done for us.'

Two old people who no doubt had suffered in many ways but still had time to think about me. Bless you both.

## Information for Contributors

We always welcome articles and letters for publication from both new and existing contributors.

If you would like to submit an article for PAST **FORWARD**, please note that:

- Publication is at discretion of Editorial Team
- The Editorial Team may edit your submission
- Published and rejected submissions will be disposed of, unless you request for them to be returned
- 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](mailto:pastforward@wigan.gov.uk) or  
The Editor at PAST **FORWARD**,  
Museum of Wigan Life,  
Library Street, Wigan WN1 1NU.

## Miss Weeton: Governess and Traveller'

If you need 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.

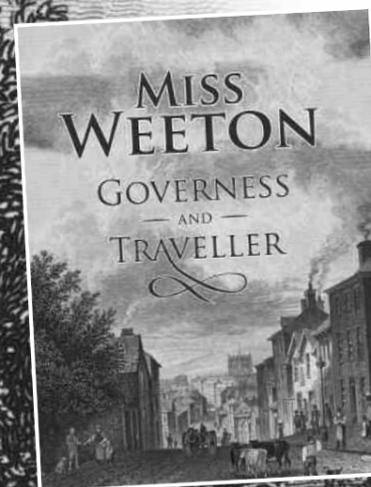
This new edition in a single volume includes several wonderful colour illustrations and biographical profiles of key individuals in Miss Weeton's story. Crucially, we hear Nelly Weeton's life story recorded in her own voice, giving us a unique insight into her life in Lancashire's North West, Yorkshire, 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 any time.**



Alan Roby and Alex Miller  
(Wigan Archives) with the  
2017 Alan Ball Award



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](http://www.missweetonbook.wordpress.com).

Also available from Waterstones, Wigan and good independent bookshops.

## Talks at the Museum of Wigan Life and Wigan Local Studies

Places are limited for our talks so please book by phoning 01942 828128 or emailing [wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:wiganmuseum@wigan.gov.uk)

### Children of the Titanic

Thursday 4 April, 12.30pm – 1.45pm  
Museum of Wigan Life, £3.00 including tea/coffee

**Why did their brave families board the ship? What was life like for children on Titanic? Why did so many die in the cold water of the Atlantic?**

On cruise ships today, space for children is a necessity. In 1912 there was no such consideration. There were 126 children aged 14 or under on board the Titanic (although numbers vary). Boys over 14 years were classed and treated as men. 60 children died in the disaster, two of whom died on their birthday.

Through individual stories of survivors and victims, this talk will reveal their moving experiences. The sinking for some would be the last thing they would remember. For the survivors, many of whom lost their fathers, the night of April 14th would change their lives for ever.

*Illustrated talk by Caroline Heaven (British Titanic Society)*

### Was the lady floating? The Murders by George Joseph Smith

Thursday 16 May, 1pm – 2pm  
Museum of Wigan Life, £3.00 including tea/coffee

'1912-1914. George V is King, in a pre-war Britain which had enjoyed almost a century of peace and prosperity amidst the glory days of the Industrial Revolution. In a time of unparalleled social movement, three men were married: Oliver George Love, George Rose Smith, and Charles Oliver James. These three grooms all had two things in common: they were all the same man, and they were all soon to be widowed. Bessie Mundy, Alice Burnham, Margaret Lofty – the Brides in the Bath.'

*Illustrated talk by Charlie Guy, MA*

### Courts, Crimes and Constables

Thursday 13 June, 12.30pm – 1.30pm  
Museum of Wigan Life, £3.00 including tea/coffee

Join us for this well-illustrated talk by Marianne Howell on the history of crime and punishment through the ages. Starting with the Romans (what did the Romans ever do for us?) you will discover many intriguing and sometimes gruesome stories along the way. Local and national examples are included in this fascinating journey through crime and policing.

### How to be WomanLEIGH

Saturday 6 July 2019, at Leigh Parish Church, 2pm  
Tickets £7 / £5 concessions, available from Wigan Archives & Leigh Local Studies

This summer a dramatic interpretation of the stories surrounding the visit of the suffragettes to Leigh in 1909 will take place in Leigh Parish Church on Saturday 6 July at 2pm. 'How to Be WomanLeigh', written by Julie McKiernan and directed by Martin Green, will be performed inside the church and there will be the opportunity for a question & answer session afterwards. For more information please email [contactus@healthyarts.org.uk](mailto:contactus@healthyarts.org.uk)

### The Leigh and Wigan Female Reform Unions and Peterloo

Local history talk by researcher and historian, Yvonne Eckersley

Monday 12 August 2019, 1pm-2pm, in the Derby Room at Leigh Library, £3, tickets available from Wigan Archives & Leigh Local Studies, booking is essential

On 16 August 1819, 60,000 men, women and children from the Manchester area walked to St Peter's Field in support of political reform. Within half an hour at least fifteen people sustained fatal injuries and many more were bludgeoned, maimed or crushed by horses.

Join Yvonne on the 200th anniversary of the massacre to hear the story of how Wigan and Leigh radicals protested in the narrow streets of Leigh as well as the wide open space of Amberswood Common.

### The Leigh and Wigan Female Reform Unions and Peterloo

Local history talk by researcher and historian, Yvonne Eckersley

Friday 16 August, 12.30pm – 1.30pm  
Museum of Wigan Life, £3 - including tea/coffee

### From Cotton Bales to Canopic Jars

Thursday 19 September, 12.30pm – 1.30pm  
Museum of Wigan Life, £3 including tea/coffee

150 years ago, a young girl dreamed of visiting the land of the pharaohs. 20 years later she sailed the Nile, rode a donkey across the desert, and dined in the sun with Sheikhs.

Annie Barlow, daughter of one of Greater Manchester's largest textile magnates, devoted part of her life to preserving Egypt's ancient heritage. This story tells how her passion built up one of the country's best collections of over 10,000 Egyptian artefacts.

### Dead and Buried

Thursday 31 October, 1pm – 2pm  
Museum of Wigan Life, £3 including tea/coffee

Join us on Halloween to dispel the dark myths of the Victorian dead and shine a light on some of the forgotten, outdated and downright creepy funerary practices, traditions and superstitions of the age. From booby-trapped coffins and body-snatchers to photography and funeral souvenirs, come and explore the fascinating world of the Victorian dead brought back to life.'

*Illustrated talk by Charlie Guy, MA*

### A Concise History Of Coal Mining – From the formation of coal 300 million years ago to the recent end of deep mining

Thursday 14 November, 12.30pm – 1.30pm  
Museum of Wigan Life, £3 including tea/coffee

With reference to the industry nationally, from the use of coal around 1450BC in South Wales, but as much as possible focusing on the Lancashire Coalfield, first documented in 1294. Illustrated throughout plus rare film records.

*Illustrated talk by Alan Davies*

### 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.

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](mailto: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 £1 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](http://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).

16 April, 'If only walls could talk' – Thomas McGrath

21 May, 'Charlotte Blears', – Kath Graham  
18 June, 'Children of the Titanic' – Caroline Heaven

17 September, 'Princess Margaret' – Brian Joyce

15 October, 'The Manchester Drag Ball' – Thomas McGrath

19 November, 'Culcheth Characters' – Marlene Nolan

### Lancashire Local History Federation

The Federation holds several meetings each year, with a varied and interesting programme. For details visit [www.lancashirehistory.org](http://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](mailto: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 Bocket 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](http://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](mailto: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/](http://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](mailto: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

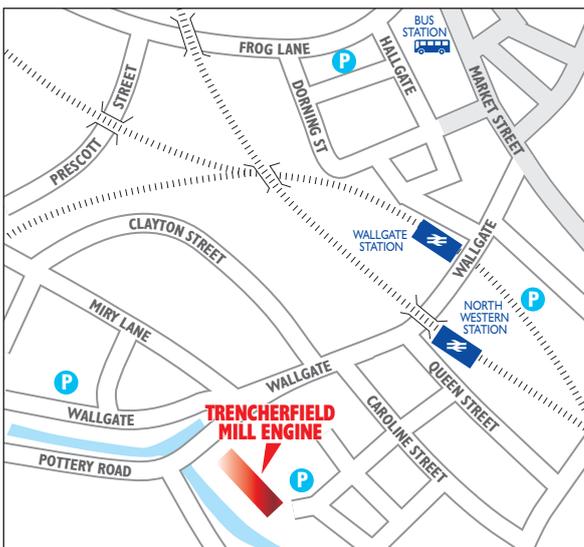
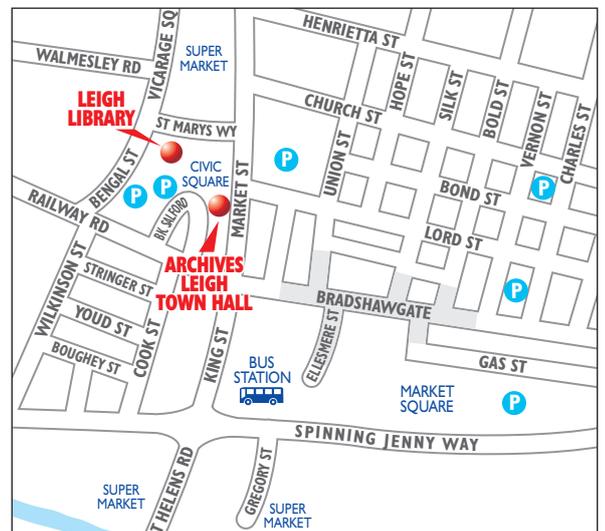
(temporary location until 2020)

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

Please see website for details

YOUR LOCAL MUSEUM

Bolton Bury  
Oldham Rochdale  
Salford Stockport  
Tameside Wigan

Take a closer look [www.gmmg.org.uk](http://www.gmmg.org.uk)



GREATER MANCHESTER MUSEUMS GROUP



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