

The objectives of

Billinge History Society

as stated in its constitution, are

To investigate, compile, preserve and present the History of Billinge for the education and gratification of present and future generations of the village, its surrounding municipalities and beyond.

To promote interest in and maintain appreciation of the History of Billinge, its buildings and immediate environment, by whatever means are within the capabilities of the Billinge History Society.

To publish the History of Billinge in printed and electronic formats so that all and any interested parties have easy and unrestricted access to it.

*

This book is an attempt to abide by those objectives. It has been a huge community effort. Six people donated the bulk of the written text; several others have also made written contributions, as the many the appendixes clearly demonstrate.

The photographs that illustrate this book all have their origins with Billinge families. We thank everyone who has donated photographs for making them available. So far we have over six hundred preserved for future generations.

Most of the information in this book was obtained from the older generation who still retain it. We are indebted to those who had the patience to speak to us and pass on their knowledge. Mrs Ethel Smith has played the major role in this regard. Without her, much of what is here recorded would have been lost forever.

All the written text and a great many more photographs than are contained in this book, can be viewed and downloaded from our websites at www.billinge-history.com and www.billinge-history.co.uk, which contain our email address and phone number.

This is the second edition of the work of Billinge History Society. We are entirely dependent on input from the local community. If you have documents relating to Billing History, any written family history or photographs, please consider briefly loaning them so they can be preserved and included and in the next edition.

We possess audio equipment to record oral history. The Billinge accent is well worth preserving. If you know anyone willing to tell the tale, please get it touch.

This book will undoubtedly contain mistakes. We hope those reading it will be able to point them out. Any suggestions for improvement are more than welcome.

Jack Boardman – Chairman BHS 2002.

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Billinge History Society

Edition Two

This is one of the ten copies of this edition printed by Billinge History Society 2002



Bill and Fred Ashall c 1915

From Longshaw Common to Chadwick Green.



The lady above, Lydia Melling, was born in Longshaw in 1850. Her lover, Thomas Robinson, was tragically killed by a train in 1872, after posting her a valentine card. She then married his elder brother William and made the long journey that gives this work its title.

Dedicated to Lydia's granddaughter, Ethel Smith nee Tinsley

INTRODUCTION.

Being back in Billinge after quarter of a century was like hearing a favourite tune played on an unfamiliar instrument - *Silent Night* on electric guitar perhaps or *Down By The Riverside* on bagpipes. It took a while for the familiar to become acceptable as commonplace again, to stop staring at the sights that constitute my earliest memories, trying to understand why they looked so different. Distance was something that had altered completely. From Claremont Road to Billinge Hospital had seemed too far to venture as a child - for heaven's sake it was at the other side of Longshaw! Houses that had seemed to be mansions and trees that were once enormous now appeared almost minuscule. Travel hadn't changed Billinge; it had given it a different perspective. Where I'd expected things to be twenty-five years worse than when I left this wasn't always quite the case. The old stone houses, that gave the place its character, had been renovated and not demolished. The housing estates were in better condition than I'd expected, as former tenants were owners now. Pride in new ownership was understandable and it showed. Even better, those family and friends that ill health or gross misfortune had not struck down had mostly done well for themselves. Someone had even written a book about the place.

There had been changes. Where once everybody knew who lived in just about every house within walking distance, now it was difficult to spot a familiar face. Liverpool and Manchester had touched borders at Billinge Church. Who could ever have imagined it? Who could have imagined traffic chaos in Carr Mill Road, busses running down Shaley Brow and Billinge Hill Quarry a rubbish dump for St Helens? What hadn't changed, thank goodness, was the view from Gores Lane Bridge, looking up at the Hill, and the way the old folks tell the tale. Nobody tells the tale quite like a Billinger and there were still a few old Billingers left around the place to tell them. My dad was one of those. If I asked a question on any topic of village life, the answer would include a thumb nail sketch of the subject's history and family relationships - the way they fitted into to the social fabric, who they married and where their parents came from. Then I'd go away and write short stories such as this.

The old man has his routine well in place by now; at eighty-six he should have. He gets up late, makes his own breakfast then reads the paper. Late afternoon he walks up the road to the pub. Like a well oiled machine he arrives back as dinner hits the table then goes to bed for a while before getting up if there's football on the television. The old girl has a different routine. After sixty-four years of marriage there's not a lot to talk about so she's mostly out when he's in and when he's out she cooks dinner. I drop round to chat with my dad, late afternoons, before his daily excursion for a pint. We watch boxing videos and talk about the old days and the folks that filled them but now are gone.

"His mother drowned herself in the marl pits and his brother Tommy did as well. But that was ages after. I never knew the mother but Jacky and me were about the same age. Tommy was a few years older. He never was quite with it, Tommy. One of those the kids were frightened of. You know that house near where your aunt lives? That's where those Swifts came from."

We were trying to establish lineage where surnames are few and generations many. My dad is clued up on local genealogy. All the old folk are.

"When you go down Long Fold Brow and those old stone cottages on the left then there's a gap then that big house that faces the other direction. Well the Mellings lived in this end, nearest the road, and the Swifts lived in the rest of the place. Where the Mellings lived was only one up one down and they were a big family, at least ten of them. They were all girls except Tommy. The Swift's place was better, more rooms, three bedrooms I think but I never went upstairs. There were six brothers and two sisters but they were better off because the old man sank the shaft at Brown Heath Colliery and the other in Tanner's Wood that linked up with it. So he always had an under manager's job at the pit. They were better off than most of us. Old Harry Melling worked when he could, sometimes at the pit or the farm or sometimes on the coal wagon, sometimes on the dole. You had to take work where you found it."

Then he paused a while, thinking back to his childhood.

"The women didn't work them days did they?" I ventured eventually, knowing they did but wanting to keep him talking.

"Not down the pit, well not round here anyway. They worked on the pit brow, picking the shale out of the coal, some of the Melling girls as well. Then they all used to ride home on top of the coal wagon."

He laughed then, at some memory he did not want to share with me. In that moment I pictured the horse-drawn wagon with its cargo of grimy girls, sitting on the coal, taunting the blustering adolescent boy who became my father. He smiled softly and continued.

"There was a wash house behind the house that both families shared. They've turned it into a garage now. Then a family moved in there as well, in just one room. There were about six of them. You'd wonder how they managed. There was no baths or nothing them days. And the Parrs, you know the Parrs, they lived in that first cottage going back up Long Fold. I think that was just one up one down and there were at

least eight kids there as well. Old Jem Parr used to finish his shift down the pit then go fishing all night at Carr Mill Dam with a carbide lamp to feed the family"

He paused again, frowning slightly, so quick this time with the prompting question

"Where did they all sleep?"

"I don't know; on the floor - anywhere. Only one of them was musical, you know, could play an instrument. That was Dave Parr, one of the brothers. He could play a ukulele. You never saw him without it, used to take it everywhere with him. We all called him Ukulele Dave."

Then he smiled again, his memories out in the street, away from the abject, one up one down poverty of rural working class England.

"All the girls could sing, you know, harmonise. They were Methodists. Old Hugh Parr from the Methodists Church, he was their uncle but those Parrs lived up by the old smithy. "It's gone now," he added, needlessly, because even I knew that. The smithy was still there when I was a child.

"Women had it tough those days. They were just slaves. I don't think my mother ever went out, not that I can remember. We kids did all the shopping."

Then he started making moves to leave so I left him to it. He would lock the two up, two down, pre war, semi detached council house on his way out. He's very security conscious. Somewhere out there in the rain my mother would be walking home with the shopping. She is pretty fit for eighty-four.

It did not take long to realise how much folklore is contained in the mind of a person of my father's age, or the way stories had passed on, from generation to generation, to become, in fact, the village's history. In closed societies, such as those that cling to the gentle slopes of Billinge Hill, stories kept the clan together, gave it identity and separated it from those outsiders who could be enemies. If you don't know about Wild Jacky, fishing in a puddle, outside the Labour in Vain, or 'owd T Berry' putting an expensive lock on a pigeon place with leather door-hinges, then you have to be a foreigner – and so it has always been, back into the depths of time. Those who told the tale retained incidents of particular significance as each passing generation added to the total of village folklore. When the original narrators were no more, these incidents remained, like the tips of icebergs, floating in a sea of the completely unknowable, melting in the sun of passing time. Time is running out for Billinge. There are few now left whose memories reach back to that gentle age of innocence before the First World War. When they are gone, and their stories heard no more, a part of country life is gone forever – perhaps all that will be left of Billinge will be the name.

Longshaw.

A modicum of information concerning Billinge History is available in public records but almost none about Longshaw. The name probably derives from 'Long' and the Old English 'Shaw,' meaning a copse or wood. When people first settled there is not easy to assess. Flint cores have been discovered on the south side of Billinge Hill that date back to 4,000 BC; Neolithic Man once roamed its gentle slopes. Billinge gets its name from the ruling clan of the Varini, one of the Angle tribes who eventually displaced the native Celts in what was eventually to become Lancashire. By 1000 to 500 BC the Aryan-speaking Celts or Gaels had arrived in Britain but where those peoples from the cold north originated is unknown. By the time the Romans began to colonise, those people we know as Saxons were established in North Germany and the Baltic Islands. The Angles, to whom the Varini were allied, were centred in the mid-Jutland peninsula. These Varini were settled in the group of islands, east of the Jutland Peninsula, of which Fyn or Funen is the largest. The Danes, who would later occupy most of the Jutland Peninsular, were still domiciled in Sweden. A British leader, Vortigern Vitalis, allied himself with Hengist the Jute in the late 5th century, paving the way for the Anglo-Saxon exodus to Britain. Eventually the Varini moved south then settled near the mouth of the Rhine in preparation for the sea crossing.

The Billingas in mythology are the followers or people of Billa, a leader-king of the 4th century BC. They are mentioned in the 1st century AD by Tacitus and again in 'Beowulf', 600 years later, as being the rulers or leaders of the Varini. These Billingas have been instrumental in establishing numerous place names throughout Europe whereas the Varini have not. Procopius the Byzantine tells that the King of the Angles in Britain, 534-547, had a niece betrothed to Radiger, King of the Varini. Radiger broke his promise and married his stepmother, a sister to Theudebert, King of the Franks. The Angle King wasn't pleased by Radiger's defection. His forces, including the jilted girl, crossed the sea in 400 ships, seeking redress. After suffering defeat in battle, Radiger had to marry the scorned princess and go with her back to Britain. The rest of his tribe followed him across the sea soon afterwards. From there their route can be followed; Lincolnshire and Norfolk are splattered with Billingas place names. Presumably the tribe split into two groups, one of which went west along the River Nene towards Northampton. Billing is a common Northampton surname. The main party travelled northwest through Lincolnshire, across the River Humber, into established Dacia then over the Pennines, via the Aire and Warfe valleys, to occupy vacant ground in the Ribble Valley. That area was then part of the Celtic kingdom of Southern Reged, ruled by Urien 570-590.

The Billingas settlements, west of the Pennines, originated in the early peaceable years from c550. It would be around that time that their main settlement, Billinge, was founded. The land was so sparsely populated that the newcomers exerted no pressure on the locals, if indeed there were any established settlements at that time. At first no attempt was made to overthrow the British King but gradually relations with the natives deteriorated, as more outsiders came into the area, culminating with the battle of Chester in 613, when the Britons were driven out or enslaved.

Norsemen from Norway and Sweden invaded northern England from the east and west c798 and at this time the Battle of Billingahoth (ridge of the Billingas) was fought near Whalley. Eventually these newcomers amalgamated with the resident

population. The Angles liked to be on ground between 500 and 1000 feet above the sea and Billinge Hill, at 630 feet above sea level, was ideal for them. From the summit they enjoyed its extensive views to forewarn them of possible unfriendly intrusion. The Norsemen settled the lower Lancashire Plain. After 800 nothing is known about the Bellinga tribe or its whereabouts. It is assumed that they remained in the vicinity of Billinge Hill, consolidated their settlement and acquired their hereditary lands. Billinge Hall is almost certainly the site of the original settlement. It was there that the Billinge family retained their principal holdings for countless generations, until John Billinge and his wife, Margaret nee Bradshaw, sold the heritage lands and the family seat to Francis Bispham in 1691. The history of the Billinge family is contained in a remarkable publication; 'Billinge of Billinge' by Harry and Marjorie Billings, copies of which can be seen at Wigan, St Helens and Billinge libraries. From that document all this information concerning early Billinge originates. There is a reference to 967 as being the date when 'the first historical Billinge' died, in a book published in 1833¹. In a book published in 1864² it states that 'Billinge seems to be the first settlement of a family of Anglo-Saxon Nobles whose earliest records are said to be mythological rather than historical.' Real evidence is recorded in the Charters of Cockersmith Abbey, to which Adam de Billinge and other members of his family donated land c1190-1201. The Inquest of 1212 states that the manor of Billinge had long been divided into three portions, almost equal. Men with the surname Billinge held two of these portions. The third landowner was Simon, son of Outi de Winstanley, probably of Norman descent. The Billinge family would have been lords of the manor, in their own rights, under the English Kings. They descended, in an unbroken line, from those original settlers who emerged from the mists of mythology to cross the Pennines c 550, making them our royal family, Radiger our King Arthur and Billinge Hall our Camelot. Billinge Hall still stands, shrouded in memories, but the Billinge family who created it has long since gone. Jack and Marion Boardman moved to Billinge in 1960. Marion, who had been a teacher before marriage, started teaching at Billinge School in 1967, when child-rearing duties permitted it. She was still teaching when old Billinge School closed in 1980 then taught another year at the new premises. That fact would not be remarkable except that Marion Boardman nee Howard was the daughter of Mary Alice Howard nee Billinge. Mary Ann was one of the thirteen children born to Alan and Mary Billinge, originally from Haydock³. Within the person of Marion Boardman a Billinge had returned home.

Written history began in the eighth century, due to the introduction of Latin literacy by missionaries of the Christian Church of Rome. After the Battle of Chester in 613 the original Celtic occupants, of what would one day become Lancashire, were pushed into Wales. Before the Norman Conquest Billinge was one of the fifteen berewicks, or dependent manors, of Newton. A manor those days would have been a wooden building, housing a small group of families, surrounded by smaller outbuildings and a stockade. These Anglo-Saxon farming communities probably averaged no more than forty people. There wouldn't have been ten thousand people living in all the lands between the Mersey and the Ribble at the time of the Norman Conquest. The population grew slowly, most of it concentrated in East Anglia and the southern Midlands. The taxation yield of Norfolk was more than ten times that of Lancashire, Cumberland and Northumberland combined in the early twelve hundreds,

¹ A History of England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings by J M Lappenberg

² Words and Places by Isaac Taylor.

³ See Appendix M.

when the entire population of England and Wales combined was between three and four million⁴. The first recorded visitation of the Black Death⁵ in 1238 probably halved it.

With the advent of literacy came record keeping. We know from early records that Adam de Billinge rented land in Billinge from the Baron of Newton in 1212 and that after his death, around 1290, his daughter Mary married Henry, a member of the Huyton family at Knowsley. They had two sons, William and Robert. William died childless and Robert left four daughters. When these four daughters married, the Manor of Billinge divided into four. The eldest daughter married John de Heton and their share of the Manor became the Manor of Birchley. The second daughter had a child who married Roger de Bispham. Agnes, the third daughter married Adam de Billinge, a member of a younger branch of the old family. The last daughter married Hugh de Winstanley.⁶

After the Conquest, a hierarchy of social obligation structured society from top to bottom. At the apex stood the King. At the bottom were surfs, providing service in the Lord's fields in return for land to cultivate for their own well-being. In the Lancashire Record Office remains an account of John Nowell swearing allegiance to Thomas of Hesketh, in May 1492, on Billinge Hill. This record states that Thomas of Hesketh was seated on a great stone and that Nowell swore: 'Sir, I will be your man from this day forward, and faith will I bear to you for the lands which I hold of you in Harwood.'⁷

The land was farmed from the offset or the inhabitants could not have survived. When and where the first tillers of the soil made their dwellings is largely a matter of speculation. Billinge Hall is almost certainly the site of the first Anglo-Saxon settlement. From there the population would have increased and slowly spread out into the surrounding countryside. What is certain is that the hamlets of Longshaw and Billinge developed separate identities. The original Bispham Hall was probably built about 1346, after the marriage of Roger de Bispham to Margaret de Heyton that same year. It seems logical to suppose that the stone houses that remain in Longshaw were constructed on the sites of previous dwellings, built to house earlier generations of agricultural labourers. These were almost certainly wooden huts. The landed gentry would have been the first to construct homes from stone. It's likely that tenant farmers followed their liege lords in the building of more permanent stone dwellings and that eventually the manual labourers were also housed in stone cottages.

For at least a thousand years farming was the only means of survival. Clearing the woodlands and removing sufficient stones to make the land fit for cultivation would have been a slow, laborious process. Gradually it was achieved and gradually the population, dependent on agriculture for sustenance, increased. Though history tends to be regarded as a process dominated by the application of ideas springing from the fertile minds of men, the ability to wage war in defence or in aggression, the achievements of our heroes, the fluctuations of our country's status in the league of worldly nations - none of this is strictly true. The fundamental fact of history is the

⁴ Hoskins & Finberg, Devonshire Studies

⁵ An as yet unconfirmed outbreak of bubonic plague may have decimated England c 500.

⁶ From article in the Evening Post, July 24 1969.

⁷ See A History of Lancashire by P J Gooderson

acquisition of food, backed by the practicalities of everyday survival, accrued and handed down over millennia. From the day our ancestors first looked down from Billinge Hill, until the Industrial Revolution, they farmed the land to feed themselves or they did not feed at all. The coal rush came to St Helens, Orrell and Wigan around the 1750s. The industrialisation that followed in its wake brought new employment opportunities, yet there were still some fifty working farms, on the slopes of Billinge Hill, in the early 1930s⁸. It took the descendants of those early Angles, who gave their name to Billinge, a thousand years to amass the resources, knowledge and population to quarry the earth beneath them and build their homes from stone.

Of the many stone buildings still standing in Longshaw it is almost certain that the earliest were *The Hootons*, in Cob Moor and *Cosy Cottage*, in Park Road. Both of these buildings probably date from around 1650 - unfortunately neither possesses a date-stone, as is the case with most stone buildings in the district. *The Manor*, in Cob Moor, was built in 1830, the row of stone houses adjacent to *Moss Cottage* in 1876, *Moss Cottage* in 1877, the detached two story house in Longshaw Old Road in 1877 and the row of cottages on UpHolland Road, in front of Longshaw Common, in 1843-1847. The title deeds to number 90 show that Daniel Taylor wrote a will in 1765 relating to this property, which eventually passed down to the Wilsons, but it is unclear if the current building replaced an earlier one. James Melling, a local quarry owner who never married, was apparently responsible for building rows of stone houses in Longshaw from around 1845 onwards.

The various farmhouses that dot the landscape would have been built long before the cottages. The two great ages for building farmhouses in Lancashire were 1680-1740 and 1840-1870⁹. There is a record of a petition, presented to Squire Bankes, opposing the construction of a cottage by “*Jonathan Tunstall in ‘Lankshaw’ dated the tenth day of October in the first year of the Raigne of our most Gracious Sovereigne Lord James the second. 1689.*” It’s apparent that the transition to stone dwellings did not come about quickly and whom the first inhabitants of Longshaw were is hard to tell. What now constitutes Billinge Higher End would long have been more prominent than Chapel End because the main road, from Prescott to Wigan, ran over Shaley Brow. It was at Brownlow that Billinge’s first school was erected. Henry Fishwick, in his *History of Lancashire*, published 1894, reveals that ‘the four townships, on the corners of which now stands the St. Helens, in 1799 did not contain more than 7,000 souls. Not until industrial St Helens developed, after the opening of the Sankey Canal in 1757, did the route between St Helens and Wigan gradually become the Main Street of Billinge. The route that road takes was created at the end of the Ice Age when waters, retained by the ridge that Billinge Hill is part of, burst through and formed the valley in which both the Main Street of Billinge and Carr Mill Dam now lie.

⁸ See Appendix B.

⁹ See *A History of Lancashire* by P J Gooderson, published 1980.

ROBYS.

As far as records go back there have been Robys both in Longshaw and in Billinge. There are still quite a few around now but in which spot they originated, or if they all stem from a common ancestor, I have not yet been able to establish. The opinion expressed in the web page of an American Roby¹⁰ is that Castle Donington, south-east of Derby, was built in the eleventh or twelfth century to command the crossing points of the river Trent. Although the castle is now merely a mound on the northern edge of the village, there still remains a thirteenth century church in the village today. Many Robey, Roby, Robie lines can be traced to this village. As the history of Billinge goes back much further than the eleventh century, there is no need to suppose that our local Roby clan have their origins in Castle Donington. It may be so; it may be just the opposite. Early documentation is hard to find.

It was Henry VIII's able administrator, Thomas Cromwell, who ordered the keeping of church registries from 1538. A 'Chapel of Ease' was constructed at Billinge on the site of the present church, around 1534. There is a record of James Roby, a churchwarden at St Aidan's Billinge, wrongfully detaining £7 from money collected from the worshipers in 1539. Early registries were kept on sheets of parchment. Many were lost or destroyed as the years progressed. It would be some considerable time before marriages, baptisms, and maybe burials, were performed at the Billinge Chapel of Ease. There is a recording of Lawrence Roby of Billinge marrying Ann Wilson of Winstanley 3rd February 1698 in the registry of St. Thomas at UpHolland. Few early Billingers could have married in the village. The church was rebuilt in 1717 and was eventually consecrated in 1882. The earliest reference to a Roby in the surviving registry of Billinge Church is of Catran Roby, who died 2nd November 1702. No other information is given. The name is strange and I've never seen it elsewhere. It's probably another form of Catharine.

Whoever Catran Roby was, that person died at the end of a tumultuous century. Wigan had changed hands three times in the course of the Civil War. When the town was ransacked by Colonel Rosworm's Parliament troops in March 1643, the church was looted and the town records thrown into the streets. Wigan was plundered by Scottish troops in 1648 and was the scene of more fighting 1651. There had been profound changes in England's constitutional structure and its standing with Continental Europe due to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Through the previous rules of Oliver Cromwell, Charles II and James II, England had been largely pro-French and anti-Dutch. When William of Orange was given the throne, firmly establishing a Protestant succession, it made France a more or less permanent enemy, with whom we were at war with, more years than we were at peace with, until Waterloo in 1815. Almost overnight legitimate trade with France ceased. The gentry began to toast themselves with gin instead of good French wine, with foreseeable results. England was about to embark on the gin period, the only time in its history, apart from the visitations of the Black Death, when the death rate exceeded the birth rate. Despite the drunken stupor that prevailed for fifty years, the spavined inhabitants of this tiny island sallied forth and conquered the world. The Nine Years War (1688-97) and the War of Spanish Succession (1702-13) involved Britain in warfare on a scale not experienced since Elizabeth's struggle with Spain. The sheer magnitude of

¹⁰ <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Prairie/1318/robey.html>

Marlborough's victories in the War of Spanish Succession not only secured the Protestant succession; it established England as a major force in Continental politics for the first time in History. England's star was in the ascendance. The Industrial Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars and the glory days of Empire were looming.

The next mention of a Roby in the St Aidan's registry is of James, son of John, born 29th November 1705, the year after the Duke of Marlborough's stunning success at the Battle of Blenheim. That year a total of fourteen children are recorded as baptised at St Aidan's. I can find no other record pertaining to this John Roby other than a Margaret, buried 13th April 1733, whose parent is recorded as John Roby, and the death of a John Roby buried 5th September 1749, which is probably him. Margaret may have been James' sister. John, the father, would have had brothers and sisters - single child families were most uncommon in those days. There's a record of another **John Roby**, the son of **Michael**, born 1st January 1721. I think this **Michael** is my great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather and he is most probably John's brother. There are records of a Francis Roby, whose wife, Mary, had at least four children between 1720 and 1728. These dates suggest that Francis, John & **Michael** were brothers. Francis is recorded as buried 10th 1728 and his profession is given as nailer. The making of nails, a trade long practised in Billinge, would for years be a source of Roby income. It would hardly be adequate to keep body and soul together but unemployment was tantamount to a death sentence and employment offered little better. An historian¹¹ of those times noted that '*poor relief in the eighteenth century continued to be operated on the basis of the Elizabethan Poor Law and the 1662 Act of Settlement. At their worst, these would have put a poor labourer and his family on par with or perhaps below that of an American slave or a Russian serf.*' The lot of the inhabitant of the industrial towns of Lancashire, in the 1840's, became far worse than that of an American slave for the latter was a valued commodity whereas the former was something hired, responsibility for which ceased at the factory gate¹².

Henry, the son of Jane Roby was born 18th February 1738. Maybe Jane was another sister of James. Two years later, 5th July 1740, Richard Roby, described as a husband, was buried. Who his wife may have been is beyond me but he could also have been a bother to James or indeed to James's father, John. The early records are far from complete and it is all but impossible to verify the early family line with absolute certainty. What is almost for certain is that Roby children, born in Longshaw, would all be descendants of the same family. The place was too small for it to be otherwise. The population of Billinge around 1720 was about 900. Longshaw contained only a fraction of that number.

Two years after the Battle of Culloden and the end of Bonnie Price Charlie's aspirations to the throne, Rachel, the daughter of **John** and Ellen Roby, was baptised 14th October 1748 at St Aidan's. This **John** Roby must be the **John** Roby born 1st January 1721, the son of **Michael**. He probably married Ellen around 1748 because Rachel is the first child recorded to these parents. There were others. Jane was baptised 13th May 1750. **Michael** is recorded 19th April 1752, John 30th October 1757, James 17th November 1754 and Betty 12th February 1764. The third recorded child, **Michael**, is my great, great, great, great grandfather. His children came into a world that coincided chronologically with the death throes of English Jacobinism and

¹¹ Paul Langford in the Oxford Illustrated History of Britain, chapter 7.

¹² For an account of those unspeakable horrors see 'English Saga 1840 - 1940' by Arthur Bryant, chapter two.

beginning of immense economic growth and social change that would ever after be described as the Industrial Revolution.

There were other Roby children baptised at St Aidan's shortly afterwards but these are the children of Henry and Elizabeth¹³, Betty¹⁴ and Peter and Peggy¹⁵.

In 1783 the Peace of Versailles was signed, recognising the independence of the American colonies. Britain's colonial aspirations had suffered a setback in the New World. On the thirteenth day of July 1783 Ann Roby gave birth to a son, shortly to be christened **Henry**. Her husband was **Michael Roby**. They were my great, great, great, great grandparents. As is the custom of their village, their names would be carried on down the generations. They had at least two other children, Betty born 6th March 1786 and Anne born 21st December 1788. About this **Michael** and Ann I know nothing more than that Michael seems to have had some connection with St Aidan's. He is recorded as being witness of at least eight weddings between 1793 and 1799. There is a record of a Michael Roby buried at St. Aidan's 20th December 1875 aged 86, which may have been another of their children. **Henry**, however, married Ann, a weaver born 21st September 1783. Their family included sons Darius, born 3rd September 1820, and **Michael**, born 10th November 1822 and at least one other child, a girl, Mary Ann, born 9th September 1826. I don't know what happened to Mary Ann or if this couple had other children but I do know that from these two sons an explosion of Robys occurred in Longshaw.

Henry carried on the connection to St. Aidan's as he starts to appear in the registry as a regular witness at weddings from 1800. He died blind on 17th October 1866 aged 83. In the 1841 census he is living with his wife, Ann, both aged 55¹⁶, Darius, 20, **Michael**, 15 and Ann 14. In 1851 he was still living with his wife, Ann, in Longshaw. They were both aged 67 at that time. There were only two girls named Ann recorded as born the same year as Henry; Ann, daughter of Edmund and Ann Wilson, and Ann, daughter of John and Hester Waterworth. As the name Hester does not appear in successive generations it is more probable that Ann Wilson was Henry's wife. In 1851 the children recorded as living with their parents are Darius and his wife Sarah aged 30 and 29 respectively, **Michael** and his wife Elizabeth aged 25 and 25, Ann, a granddaughter aged 2, Thomas a grandson aged 10 months and Thomas, a lodger, aged 69. This lodger, Thomas, may have been Henry's elder brother. Ann did not survive the next ten years. Her son Darius remarried between 1851 and 1861.

When I consider the life of my great, great, great grandparents, **Henry** and his wife Ann, I can only imagine it to have been one of unrelenting poverty. He is recorded as being 77, a former farm labourer, in the 1861 census and the life of such was not idyllic. An article about child farm workers¹⁷ tells of children aged six working 14 hours a day and having to pay for meals and tools out of the 3 pence a day they were receiving. That was in 1862. This article ends with these words, *'As a result of the Gangs Act 1868 and the introduction of other legislation, we no longer have the unsatisfactory and unhealthy conditions on farms that were endured by our forebears*

¹³ Henry 6/3/1768 – 19/12/1769, Henry 10/11/1771,

¹⁴ Betty illegitimate daughter of Betty, 28/11/1771. I can find no record of the mother's birth.

¹⁵ Peter 16/3/1783.

¹⁶ The 1841 census rounds off adults' ages to the nearest five years.

¹⁷ By David McGill in the September 1999 issue of Practical Family History.

of three generations ago.' Henry was five generations ago. His wife Ann is described in the census as a weaver. This would have been one of the so-called cottage industries shared by the entire family, from toddlers upwards, which kept alive so many of our ancestors. When new intensive farming methods and machinery started to appear around 1760, the demand for rural labour began to decline. The Napoleonic Wars worsened these problems when, in addition to falling wages, the price of food increased greatly. Matters got from bad to worse when 300,000 British soldiers and sailors were demobilised at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.

Most of those demobbed had no civilian skills and they swelled the ranks of farm labourers. In 1830, after rural riots in many parts of England, 3000 labourers were tried and 300 sentenced to death. In 1834 the six Tolpuddle Martyrs were transported. That was the year workhouses were introduced to discourage idleness and poverty was made a matter of personal shame. Not until 1872 was the National Agricultural Labourers Union formed. Basic education began in the 1870's, free from the 1880's, allowing some bright children to begin to move on from this appalling treadmill of poverty. It was all far too late for **Henry** Roby.

The 1861 census shows as follows - Longshaw Village

Darius Roby aged 40 (can't read occupation) born Winstanley.

Maria Roby, wife aged 32 born Billinge (died 28th April 1873, aged 44).

Ann Roby aged 12, daughter, nail maker born Windle.

Michael Roby aged 9, son, flag quarry, born Billinge.

Rachel Roby daughter, aged 4, born Billinge.

Henry Roby aged 1, son, born Billinge.

Henry Roby, father, widowed, aged 77, formerly farm labourer, born Billinge, Blind. (When Henry died 17th October 1866 at the age of 83 he'd outlived his son Darius, who died 8th August 1865 aged 44, by just over one year).

Unfortunately the 1861 census does not give addresses. I think that Darius and family were living at 6 Park Road because when his son Henry married Sarah Rigby 11th June 1894¹⁸, that address is given. This was Henry's second marriage, the first being to Jane Ann Anderton 23rd April 1888.

The same 1861 census for Longshaw village shows

Michael Roby aged 38, a stone mason, born Billinge.

Elizabeth Roby aged 35, wife, born Billinge.

Thomas Roby aged 10, stone quarry, born Billinge.

James Roby aged 7, scholar born Billinge.

Ann Roby aged 5, scholar born Billinge.

John Roby aged 1 born Billinge (25/9/1859).

This **Michael** and Elizabeth Roby are my great, great grandparents. **Michael** married Elizabeth around 1850-51 but the records are missing for that period. Wilson's Gazetteer shows the population in 1850 to be - Chapel End, 1129 acres, 389 houses, population 2015, Higher End, 1549 acres, 204 houses, population 1051. Their son **John**, then aged one, would become the grandfather my mother never knew. His photograph is the oldest we possess of that family line. There is a sensitivity to his

¹⁸ The year Billinge and Winstanley became an Urban District Council.

features that gives no indication of the brutal life he must have known as a child nail maker and a miner. Though the 1786 map shows no collieries located in Billinge, coal mining became the major industry through the 1800's. By 1855 87 men and women, 46 adolescents and 37 children were working at Blackleyhurst Colliery. This may have been Billinge's first major coal mining enterprise but others soon followed. In time, Billingers would come to be known either as poachers, pitmen or comedians; many were all three.

Billinge lies in the West Lancashire Coalfield. Longshaw is adjacent to the Orrell Coalfield, which is part of the great Wigan Coalfield. When coal was first mined in Billinge is not recorded but it's likely to have been near Longshaw Bottom, where the Orrell Four Foot seam outcropped near Chair Wood. When Thomas Winstanley died, in 1561, part of his will included the words, '*chargeth his coal mines with the payment of £20 per annum in the name of his wife jointure for the upbringing of her children.*' When James Bankes purchased Winstanley Hall in 1594 he notes that there were coal pits on his estate. Coal was mined from day eyes and shafts, around Dean Wood and Red Wood, in the early 1500's whilst records show that coal was worked in Haigh at the beginning of the 14th century. These workings would be for local consumption and are unlikely to have employed more than a few personnel. It was the opening of the Douglas Navigation in 1742 and the subsequent joining of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Dean Locks that caused the coal rush, bringing Liverpool and Bradford speculators into the area. One of those Liverpool speculators was Jonathan Blundell who bought Jackson's Orrell Colliery in 1776. He retired to Blackleyhurst Hall in 1796. His father, one of the most successful of the Liverpool merchants and ships captains, had been mayor of Liverpool. Part of the family fortune came from the slave trade. Blundells were major operators in the local coal industry until nationalisation in 1942. So extensively was the Orrell Coalfield worked that by the coming of the railways, in the mid-eighteen hundreds, some 20 million tons of coal had been extracted and the rich Four Foot and Five Foot seams virtually worked out.

As my great grandfathers and grandfathers worked down local collieries, I have taken the trouble to investigate their conditions of employment. 'The Orrell Coalfield-1740 to 1850,' by D Anderson, makes for illuminating, if not particularly cheerful, reading. For example, '*very young boys were used for opening and closing air-doors when the drawers came through with their tubs and baskets. The occupation was described as one of the most pitiable in the coal pit by its extreme monotony. Were it not for the passing and re-passing of the wagons it would equal to solitary confinement of the worst order.*' No doubt great fortunes were made from the coal deposited beneath the green fields of our village. Those who slaved underground led lives of abject poverty and misery, from which drink was a temporary respite and death was the only release. These workers could not have been contented. There were serious riots during the famine winter of 1800 in the Wigan district and again in 1812 and 1819, when a meeting of the Lieutenancy, under Lord Derby, was called in Wigan. Sir William Gerard and Myrick Bankes, both of them local coal producers, were among the landowners present at that meeting. A collier's union was formed in Wigan in 1830. Its members went on strike in 1831. The most serious disturbance occurred in the Chartist Riots, 12th August 1842, when 10,000 marchers descended on Wigan and stopped 3,000 locals from working in the mills and collieries.

As the deposits nearest to Wigan and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, on one side of Billinge Hill, and those nearest to St Helens and the Sankey Canal, on the other, were worked out, the coal under Billinge became economically viable to extract. Brownlow Colliery was opened near Billinge Hill in 1842 and others would have followed soon after. Windy Arbour Colliery's shaft was sunk in 1843 and produced coal until 1976. An article in the Bolton Chronicle, 31st January 1846, records an interchange between union spokesman William Holgate and an overlooker from a Billinge colliery. The results of a geological survey published in 1861 show several seams of coal at various depths with mine shafts, old and new, dotting the landscape. Over time, literally hundreds of shafts and day eyes must have been sunk in Billinge. The 1929 rate book shows that six collieries were still working within the municipal boundaries¹⁹.

There were at least four collieries in operation when I was a young man. Along Red Barn Road were the Hillside and Clay Pits. Gaffney's Pit, near to Blackleyhurst Hall and Lavin's Pit, across Turpin Fields, were still ongoing concerns. Extensive open cast mining operations occurred all over Billinge in the fifties. There is still open cast mining going on near Simms Lane Ends. In the late nineteen fifties most of the local miners worked in the larger NCB collieries around St Helens. I can remember the sound of their hob-nailed boots and rasping coughs as they made their way to the bus stop in the pre-dawn winter darkness of my early adolescence. I would pull the blankets over my head and go back to sleep. The pit got some of my ancestors but, thankfully, it didn't get me.

The 1871²⁰ Census Longshaw village shows.

Michael Roby aged 48, a stone mason, born Billinge

Elizabeth Roby aged 45, born Billinge

Thomas aged 20, a miner, born Billinge.

James aged 17, a miner, born Billinge.

Ann aged 15, a factory cleaner, born Billinge,

John aged 11 a nail-maker, born Billinge (25/9/1859)

Mary aged 9 born Billinge (15/9/1864).

Richard aged 7, born Billinge (17/1/1866)

Edward aged 7, born Billinge (17/1/1866)

Thomas is the first Roby mentioned as being a miner. In the 1861 census he is listed as a ten-year-old, working at the stone quarry. Ten years later he is working down the pit. The record shows that he died 2nd February 1877 aged 26. It's almost certain he was killed at work; mining was a dangerous occupation. Thomas didn't die without issue however. He married Elizabeth Barker 21st October 1873. His two sons were William, 6th January 1874, and Alfred, 12th January 1876. William died at the age of four, 2nd October 1878. Alfred married Eva Emily Collard, 6th October 1900 and they raised five children; Elizabeth, Thomas, Amelia, Ellen and Alfred. The second child, Thomas, named for his grandfather, was the father of Keith Roby, who still lives in Park Road. Keith used to play darts for the Stork Hotel with his cousin George Sumner, Amelia's son, when I played for the same team in the late sixties.

¹⁹ See Appendix D

²⁰ Also in the census Maria, the widow of Darius, 42; Ann, 22, a colliery servant; Michael, 19, a miner; John, 1, a grandson. Another family is William, 30, a miner; Ann, his wife, 30; John Thomas, 10; William Edward, 7; Isiah, 5; Elizabeth, 1.

In the course of uncovering information about the family, by speaking to existing descendants, an incident often mentioned was the Bolton football disaster, March 9th 1946. That day, Bolton played Stoke City in the quarter final of the FA cup. Stanley Matthews, the most famous name in football, appeared for Stoke, bringing thousands of extra fans to an already guaranteed capacity crowd. Young Nat Lofthouse was just establishing himself on Bolton's first team. He would go on to become the most celebrated player ever to pull on the Wanderers jersey. So many fans crammed themselves into the ground that a barrier collapsed, causing thirty-three deaths and over five hundred injuries. Among the dead were Tom Roby and his son Richard.

Tom was the son of James, the second of **Michael** and Elizabeth's sons. James married a girl called Jane, sometime around 1876. I have not traced the marriage record yet. James was a collier – it was becoming the predominant local occupation. His wife gave birth to at least three boys and two girls²¹. The third child, Thomas, married Ellen Chorlton²² 29th August 1908 and served on active duty in the First World War. Though he survived the experience he was so affected that he never worked again, spending his time growing tomatoes and chrysanthemums. His wife Ellen ran a small grocery shop, making and selling pies from the front room of their house in UpHolland Road. They had two sons, John and Richard, and raised John Ashall Chorlton, whose mother died in childbirth. He was the son of Ellen's brother John, who was one of the best bowlers Billinge ever produced. The other Chorlton brothers could hold their own on the bowling green. Billy Chorlton won the 'News of the World' at Preston in 1952.

Richard's Roby's only child, June (8/6/1937), married James Moyers and they live in Orrell. Their two children are Susan and Paul. Thomas and Ellen's other child, John, married Hilda Derbyshire from Pemberton and their three children were Frank, Kathleen and Barbara. Frank Roby used to have a television and radio shop in Church Street, Orrell. My mother went to school with him but never knew quite how they were related. Is it any wonder?

John Roby, my great grandfather, was to follow his elder brothers, Thomas and James, down the pit. The days of making nails were over. There is reference to nail making²³ that describes the trade as '*having increased greatly in the 17th century from an origin east of Wigan. It had spread south and west along the coalfield as far as St. Helens by the middle of the 18th century. The easiness of entry to the nail trade, the ready employment of women and youths and the low degree of skill made it a highly competitive trade with low wages and irregular employment. The working conditions, in the little forges, built at the back of the workers' houses, were appalling.*' **John**

²¹ Richard 10/2/1887, Mary 7/6/1879, Thomas 21/7/1882, William 2/10/1885, Elizabeth 17/9/1888.

²² In 1891, the Chorlton family lived at 108 UpHolland Road. William John Chorlton, a coal miner, married to Ann nee Smith, was the head of the family. Their first four children were all girls: Mary Ann (Polly) born 1883, Ellen born Oct 1884 Margaret, born July 1887 and Martha, who died aged 5 weeks in 1890. Charles, the first son, was born in 1891. Another daughter, Anne, followed him in 1893, but she unfortunately died in 1899. Then followed more boys: Billy in 1896, John in 1898, Joe in 1900, and finally Albert in 1902. All the brothers followed their father, by working down the mines. John Chorlton's first wife, Margaret Alice Ashall, died giving birth to John Ashall Chorlton in 1921. He then married Mary Williams, who gave birth to Eileen in 1923 and William Roy in 1926. After a career in the mines, the navy and the army, Roy became an ambulance driver at Billinge Ambulance Station.

²³ Trends in the Industrialisation of Merseyside 1750-1860 by J R Harris.

died 5th May 1908 at the age of 48. His death, from a lung condition, was almost certainly work related. He never saw his youngest child.

There is some space dedicated to nail making in Richard Donald Lewis' book, *The Billingers*,²⁴ concluding with these words. '*Most of them could neither read nor write and signed for the iron with a cross. As many of the children were put to work in the smithies at eight or nine years of age, they too became illiterate. We have some evidence that Billinge nail-makers were as dissolute as their Wigan counterparts, who were reported to be pretty bad, and if they were half as crafty as the Billinge poachers, then they were surely quite a bunch. The trade became over-exploited in the early eighteenth century and a long period of degeneration for the village nailer set in, as the industry became hopelessly over-competitive. John Rigby was well known as a Billinge nail-maker around 1777, but the trade seems to have been dying in the village by 1825.*'

So my great grandfather started work as a child in an industry whose conditions were described as appalling by a chronicler of that time. He started work when the industry was already dying some thirty years before he was born. It could not have been very rewarding but he would have known no different and had no choice. Toil was the norm for the children of working-class families. His cousin Michael, Darius's son, was working in the stone quarry as a nine-year-old. So was his elder brother, Tom. When my mother was 12, about 1927, she used to run errands for Elizabeth Roby, then aged about 75, the widow of Michael Roby and mother of yet another Henry Roby, who never married. Also living at the same address was a daughter, Mary, married to John Hewitt, with their children, Paul, Harold and Ethel. Harold Hewitt still lives in The Avenue, just round the corner from my parents. **Henry** Roby is therefore our common ancestor; Harold's great, great and my great, great, great grandfather. **Henry** Roby is the common ancestor to more than enough descendants to fill the Hare and Hounds on a Saturday night. That Longshaw watering hole, as it now stands, was built in 1907. Prior to that date, the Hare and Hounds was situated on the corner of Longshaw Old Road and Park Road, next door to the shop which is still operating. It would have taken most of the Robys less than ten seconds to walk there. I can imagine that the old Hare and Hounds was not a spot for faint-hearted strangers, filled, as it must have been, with quarry men, farm labourers, colliers and nailers - not the place to accidentally tread on someone's ferret.

In Harry Parkes' booklet 'The Life of George Lyon,' the author claims that UpHolland Priory was built with stone from quarries on Billinge Hill in either the eleventh or the thirteenth century. Exactly when local houses were first constructed from stone I have not been able to establish with certainty but quarrying probably developed into a local industry before 1700. What is for certain is that John Eddleston²⁵ bequeathed his land and house to charity when he died in 1672. This land included the Vicarage, Billinge Hill and a quarry called 'Grindstone Delph.' The coffin shaped tombstone of George Smith in Billinge Churchyard dates back to 1720. He supposedly died after being bitten by an adder whilst working at Billinge Hill Quarry. That tomb is St Aidan's most striking feature. **Michael**, my great, great grandfather, is always recorded as a stonemason. Many stone houses were erected in

²⁴ The Billingers by R D Lewis, published 1976 by Riversdown Publications Ltd, Pall Mall.

²⁵ See Appendix H The Eddleston Trust.

the course of his working lifetime. If he was not fully employed in their construction, he may have found further employment at Billinge Hill Quarry, dressing stone.

The 1881 census shows Elizabeth Roby as a widow 56, living in Longshaw, with **John** 21, Richard & Edward 17. All three boys are miners, as Thomas, the eldest brother, had been before his death. Elizabeth's husband, **Michael**, died 13th March 1875, at the age of fifty-two. James was working down the pit, married with two children by that time. Ann must have married or was living at another address. Darius' eldest son, Michael, also married a girl called Elizabeth. Their first child, Joseph, 8th August 1871, must have died young because they named their second son Joseph also. He was born 27th April 1878.

My mother's grandfather, **John**, died seven years before she was born. Her grandmother was Mary Elizabeth Ratcliff but I cannot find the marriage. There's a gap in the records. **John's** younger twin bothers both married girls called Naylor. The twins are recorded as being miners, living at 4 Park Road. The records show that Edward married Sarah Naylor 31st December 1889 and Richard²⁶ married Ann Naylor 15th February 1890. Richard's children were Thomas 5th May 1891, Wilfred 24th August 1893 and Ann 27th September 1895 – three months after Jack Dempsey was born. Ann ended up in America. I wonder if she ever saw Jack Dempsey? When Louis and I were in Monassa this year she suddenly sprung to mind. Richard died in 1902, another victim of the pit – his wife, Ann, died in 1907. Mary, Richard's elder sister, now married to a man called Barton and living at Lamberhead Green, took in the orphaned children, then aged 16, 14 and 12. Another Lamberhead Green family, the Tabeners, emigrated to Canada in 1910. Thomas Roby, then aged 21, went to the New World with them. Soon after Thomas arrived in Canada he sent for his brother Wilfred and sister Ann. Just before Tom married Molly Tabener, Wilfred returned to England on the Empress of Ireland. If he'd stayed for the wedding he may have been drowned because the ship went down on its next Atlantic crossing. Thomas and Ann stayed on in Toronto. Tom married Molly and they all moved to the San Francisco area about seven years later.

At first Tom Roby worked in the insurance business, but somewhere along the line he opened a pie shop in Alameda, California, which is on the Eastern Shore of San Francisco Bay, near Oakland. The Roby Pie Shop provided pies to most of the East Bay's restaurants. The business thrived, for a time. In '28 and '29 Thomas was expanding production capacity. He borrowed money to purchase a modern oil burning industrial oven but, as the payments on the debt began to come due, the depression hit. Demand for pies decreased; sales suffered; cash flow dried up; and within a couple of years the Roby Pie Shop was forced to close its doors.

Tom and Molly had three sons, Eric 19th October 1915, William 25th September 1917 and Thomas 27th December 1919. William and Eric still survive though both are now widows. Eric is reputedly playing tennis at 84²⁷. Thomas died from a heart attack some fifteen years ago. Ann married more than once. Her son by her second marriage, Bill Raust, now deceased, came over to England a couple of times to visit relatives with his uncle Eric and Eric's wife Gloria. Thomas Roby, the orphaned child of my great grandfather **John's** twin brother Richard, started a Roby line in America

²⁶ In Keith Roby's family bible there is a memorial to Richard's death, 18/3/1902, aged 38.

²⁷ Living at 130 Washington St Novato as of December 1999.

that has survived and mostly prospered. His three sons fathered seven grandchildren and they in turn produced a further nineteen great grandchildren. I stumbled across one of these grandchildren, Don Roby, due to an unlikely chain of circumstances similar to winning the lottery. When he returned my email, nineteen days before the turn of the millennium, it felt as if the past had reached out to touch me.

When Wilfred Roby returned to England he married Elizabeth Worthington, a girl from Pemberton, 5th February 1916. They had one daughter, Ann, who shares her father's birthday and was born 27th August 1917. Ann married George Houghton, another miner, at St John's Pemberton 19th July 1941. Their only child, Joan, was born in 1950 and died in 1994. Ann Houghton lives alone in River Street at Orrell Post. She remembers visiting Longshaw as a child with her mother. My mother remembers her as being a very attractive young girl when she came to visit their mutual cousins, twin Edward's children.

Twin Edward's first born were twin boys, 2nd December 1902, but they both died. His surviving children were Helen, Elizabeth, Jane, Ann & Richard. These girls, known as the four sisters, never married and managed the family sweet shop in Longshaw Old Road. Richard married Beatrice Hartley, daughter of James Lee Hartley, registrar at Wigan. Their children were Eric, William, Jean and James. Jean and James still live in Longshaw. William married Mini Bellis and their youngest child, Steven, has also fathered twins.

In 1891²⁸ census shows **John** 31, Mary Elizabeth 19 and Ann 7 months. This age difference is most unusual. Mary Elizabeth Ratcliff was born 11th June 1871. Ann was the first of at least five children. She was born 18th August 1890. The second child was my grandfather, **James**, born 16th July 1891, a year with a winter so severe that it became common practice to feed birds from bird tables for the first time in some parts of England, though probably not in Longshaw. The other children were Emily, born 1st April 1893, Michael born 25th October 1894 and John born 4th October 1908. All these children were born at 4 Park Rd. **John**, like his brother Richard, died from a lung disease, five months before the birth of John, the child named after him. His could not have been an easy life. The working classes were almost slaves in those days.

My mother remembers an old smithy in the back garden at 4 Park Road, large enough to have employed about 20 people. As her grandmother paid rent to the Smiths, farmers up Crank Road, this smithy was probably an enterprise of the Bankes family, of whom the Smiths would be tenant farmers. This stone building was used for housing chickens, as nail making was, in my mother's childhood, a matter of history. She remembers a Rhode Island Red cock that used to attack anybody that went near the hens until her father wrung its neck and put it in the pot. Her father used to keep pigs and grow potatoes and other vegetables, as there was a large plot of land attached to his mother's house. Ann, the eldest child, lived there with her mother, Elizabeth,

²⁸ In 1891 census there are other Robys living in Longshaw. At 22 Longshaw Old Road we find Edward 27, Sarah 23, Joe 1. Henry, 32 and William, 30, both miners, are living as lodgers with the Cheetham family. William, 15, is living with James and Hanna Ashcroft. Michael 29 and his wife Elizabeth are living with Joe, 3. Alfred Roby, 5, is living with the Barkers.

together with her husband, George Dillon²⁹, and the three boys, Frank, Harold and Jack. Emily and her family lived just round the corner. My grandfather and his family lived further down Park Road at number 28. His Uncle Michael and family lived at number one. Longshaw was getting too small to house all these Roby descendants. In the first quarter of the twentieth century at least twenty-six Roby children were born in at least twelve different Longshaw households. That does not include the children born to Roby girls who married into other local families, such as the Dillons.³⁰

Emily Roby married Harry Wilkinson, another Longshaw local, 25th September 1920. Their children were Irene and Alan. Irene married Frank Smith but had no children. Frank was a well-know tenor. He often sang at the short-lived Billinge British Legion. Frank would sing at the drop of a hat. He would stand at their front door in Claremont Road on Christmas Night, singing carols at the top of his voice. It was part of the festive season. Alan married a girl called Sylvia and they raised a boy named Mark.

Michael Roby, the fourth child, was born in 1894, the year that a French bacteriologist, Alexander Yersin of the Pasteur Institute, finally identified the microbe living in and on black rats that caused bubonic plague. He married Elizabeth Gaskell from Pemberton and went to live with her in that township. Their two children were girls, Elsie and Marian. Elsie married Aden Glover who owned or managed a fishing tackle shop in Pemberton.

Michael was the comedian of the family. He owned a tiny Yorkshire terrier that bit anyone who came in range and liked to eat raw potatoes. On his visits to Park Road he would turn the dolly tub upside down then preach from it like a Methodist minister, keeping his mother and sisters in stitches. Old Elizabeth would say, "Don't be so daft an' tek thi ooks wom Michael." "Am not gooin till thaa buys mi a packit o' cigs." "Tha mon buy thi own, thar workin'." Then Michael would grab as many of his mother's chickens as he could and run off down Park Road with them under his arm.

He was a poacher when his elder brother, my grandfather, worked as a gamekeeper on Winstanley Park, owned by the Bankes family. Jem Nanny, as he was know, was a big, raw-boned, cantankerous man who started work down the pit like most of his generation. The change to working in the open air must have been worth the probable drop in wages. His position as a gamekeeper caused friction with his younger brother. They did not get on socially for years because of it. My father still has the wooden baton that Jem carried on his patrols of the Bank's Estate and which he used to wave under his brother's nose and say, "Iv a catch thi poaching I'll gi' thi that." Jem finished his working days for the steel manufacturer GKN. So did my father. My father remembers a worker there telling him that his father-in-law was the strongest man he ever knew. My mother remembers Jem physically throwing a much younger bloke out of the Higher End Labour Club when he was well into his seventies. She can also remember her mother having to retrieve his coat, hanging on the fence outside Billinge Hospital, after he'd been fighting outside the Labour Club on a Saturday night. The local policeman, Bobby Hambly, often had to bring him home to Park Road when he was a younger man.

²⁹ Married 1/1/1916.

³⁰ See Roby notes at the end of this document.

Occasionally my grandmother, formally May Waterworth, would go out for a drink with Jem. That allowed the girls to run riot. They used to tie a rope to the large beam over the kitchen table and swing like monkeys, with the paraffin lamp swinging in unison. It's wonder they never set the house on fire, though Doris almost did on one occasion. As my mother recalled she and her sisters running wild around the house, with her grandmother banging on the door, trying to restore order and the neighbours being put through purgatory, she could hardly get the words out. "We were poor but we had a lot of fun," she managed to say through her laughter.

John Roby was born five months after **John**, his father, died. He was one of the better footballers the village ever produced and may have gone on to professional status had his mother allowed him to try it. He played for Billinge Juniors when they were in the Lancashire Alliance, alongside the Lowe brothers, Jack, Hugh and Billy, two of the Green brothers, Billy and Harry, Oswald Littler, Stanley Liptrott and Peter Middlehurst. His nephew, Frank Dillon³¹ was another outstanding football player at local level who went on to play professionally for Charlton Athletic. My great uncle John gave me my first job as a paperboy when he owned the news agency and grocery shop opposite Billinge Church. He married Helen Fairhurst and their son, Maurice, was for many years involved with Orrell Rugby Union Club. He is a talented artist, specialising in drawings of local buildings and landscapes. Helen is the granddaughter of Our Nell's Jack and at the age of 89 she still lives in Newton Road. She will be 90 in April 2000. I'm looking forward to that party.

My grandfather, **James** Roby, married Beatrice May Waterworth, the eldest child of Wilfred Waterworth from UpHolland and Annie nee Larkin, an Irish girl whose two sisters taught at Blackbrook. May's parents were married at Adlington, June 20 1890. Because Wilfred married a Catholic, it caused a great deal of consternation in what was a well-established farming family. May was fourteen when her mother died. She took over the raising of her younger brothers and sisters until she married **James** Roby. Their first child, Agnes, was born 18th June 1912 when Jem and May lived at 10 Longshaw Old Road. That was the year the Titanic went down. A postcard commemorating that event sent four months after the disaster to Henry Tyrer, a bookkeeper then living at 22 Main Street Billinge, still survives. Agnes was taken for a walk to Winstanley Park as a two year old and died from sunstroke. The next child, Doris 11th May 1914, was born at 28 Park Road, as were all the remaining children; my mother, Beatrice Ann 4th July 1915, Emily 28th September 1916, Edna May 25th July 1917, Ivy 5th November 1921, Betty 30th May 1926 and finally twin boys, John and James 19th June 1929. These twins died - John after eleven days and James after thirteen days. Obviously there is a gene for twins in the Roby make up. One generation before, Richard and Edward were the twin brothers of my great grandfather **John**. Edward himself was the father of twin boys, Frank and James, born 2nd December 1902. Edward's granddaughter, Jean, carried on the tradition by giving birth to twin daughters. His great grandson, Steven, has twin sons. My cousin Elaine, Ivy's daughter, has identical twin daughters. How many of the other twins are or were identical I cannot say.

³¹ 28/4/1920.

James and Beatrice May Roby's girls all grew up and married. One of my earliest recollections is of my Aunt Ivy speaking to my mother. Being about two at the time, my own speaking ability was limited to a few short sentences. As they spoke, I was amazed how much they could say and wondered if I would ever be able to say so much. Anyone who ever knew any of my aunts will know the answer to that one.

Doris, the eldest, was her grandmother's favourite. Consequentially she was better dressed and got to church on Sundays when her younger sisters hadn't the clothes to go in. She once almost burned the house down by throwing paraffin on the fire. Her father saw the smoke and ran home from feeding the pigs in his mother's allotment, just in time to prevent disaster. Doris didn't come home for a few days after that episode. She attended the Council School, in St James Road and then Hollgate School, near Orrell Post, before starting work at Orrell Mill as a fourteen-year-old. She married Stanley Williams, the son of an adventurous Welsh sailor, Jim Williams, a survivor from the glorious days of sail.

When Jim Williams left the sea, he came to Billinge to install electricity and lodged at district nurse Sarah Berry's home in Beacon Road. He got friendly with Alice, one of the daughters, had to move out because of the relationship but eventually married her. Their son Stanley also became a sailor. By a strange coincidence, Stanley and Doris Williams lived next door to John Chorlton, whose second wife was Mary Williams – no relation to Stanley. John Chorlton's children however, also claimed Sarah Berry as their grandmother. That was because Sarah Berry's parents were Henry Green and Nancy nee Gee. Henry died young and Nancy married again to Charles Martleton. Among her children was a daughter Mary. This Mary Martleton married a Welshman, Henry Williams (no relation to Jim Williams). When Mary Martleton became Mary Williams by marriage, she had one son and three daughters, Mary being the youngest. She died giving birth to Mary. Henry Williams moved on to Yorkshire, re-married and had more children. Sarah Berry, being Mary Martleton's half-sister (same mother, different fathers), took in the baby Mary Williams and brought her up. Mary grew up and married John Chorlton, living next door to Sarah Berry's real grandchild, Stanley Williams.

Doris Williams outlived her husband Stanley but failed, by a few months, to see out the millennium. She was an inquisitive, warm-hearted woman and an eager conversationalist. In the fifty years that I knew her, from being the kid she made nettle pop for to the much-travelled nephew who pushed her around in a wheel chair, her company was always a pleasure. For my money they don't come any better than my Aunt Doris. A few words, such as these, can never portray the effect that any person who lives for close on ninety years has in a close-knit society such as Billinge used to be.

From a past we can hardly comprehend, half a millennium before the Norman Conquest, successive generations each added to the pool of common knowledge that sustained us. In ways, big and small, the lives of those who passed before us touch us all. Beyond our grandparents we have the oral history that each generation creates from its tragedies and its triumphs, its superstitions and its iron strong beliefs. Beyond that are the scanty records in dusty archives that link us back five hundred years, if we are lucky. Beyond those archives there is nothing but the silent sentinel of Billinge Hill, looking down across the Lancashire Plain. No road reaches closer to the summit

than Beacon Road, where Doris raised her children, Olwyn, Douglas and Stanley. Her immediate neighbours, in 1947, in the redbrick row where she lived, were William Barnes, George Baker, John Chorlton, Clifford Taylor, John Edwards, Fred Atherton, Francis Taylor, Richard Ashton and Robert Houlton. She died in September 1999.

Beatrice Ann, my mother, and all her younger sisters went to the Council School until they started work as fourteen-year-olds. My mother went into service for a Baptist minister in Wigan then moved to Haydock Park Farm with Albert and Mary Hampson. Albert looked after the pigs while his wife, Mary, was the housekeeper. Mary was a sister to the Hitchens from Greenfield Farm in Carr Mill Road. The Hitchens came from Quaker Cottages, opposite Gladden-Hey Farm. John Bradburn, the farmer at Gladden-Hey, married then to Mary Ann Robinson from Tanyard House Farm, contributed a calf to the Hitchens to help them get established. The father, Henry Hitchen, carried on working down the pit whilst his son Herman, always a bachelor, ran the farm. Herman's brother, Thomas, became an engineer at the Viaduct Works in Earlestown, but helped on the farm when he was able. He married one of the Gee girls from Beacon Road and Enid Hitchen is their only child. Martha Hitchen, the eldest, married Jack Holland. Their two boys were Henry and John and the surviving girl is Mary. Eventually a dispute about the inbreeding of the pigs led to Albert and Mary Hampson leaving Haydock Park Farm. My mother left with them.

She went to work at Orrell Mill with Doris and her younger sister, Emily. It was closer to home and she had more company. Doris stayed on at Orrell Mill until she married. Emily and my mother moved to Eckersley's Mill in Wigan. They used to walk to work then run home to save the train fare to go dancing at the weekend. If they didn't beat the train back to Orrell Station, or if they arrived home flushed from running, their mother would know that they'd skipped the train and take the fare back off them. Such was the poverty of working class England between the wars. The day before my mother married Thomas Taylor, in 1935, she was sacked from the mill. They did not employ married woman.

Enid, my sister, was born in Doulton Street, St Helens, where my parents lodged with the Bacon family until they got their first home in Moss Road. My father's Aunt Eleanor lived close by with her husband Ellis Morley. The Morleys were taking care of Leo Taylor, my father's Uncle Thomas' son, in addition to raising their own children. My mother's parents lived nearby in Tracks Lane. From Moss Road my parents moved to Green Slate Road for a couple of years then got a cottage adjacent to Tommy Daniels' house near the reservoir. That house is gone now, as the way of life and the people who lived it are also gone. Billinge has never been an epicentre of historically significant events. For fifteen hundred years its inhabitants tilled the soil. For a much shorter period they mined coal beneath the surface. The strong survived and the weak ones perished. Life was never easy but having no choice they got on with living it as best they could, passing on their unique history by telling stories and affirming their position in the sequence of generations by memorising the genealogy of the surrounding neighbourhood. The old folks retain that skill. There are still a few who can recall the entire social infrastructure back to the early days of the twentieth century and beyond. The next generation won't be able to do that. We've been swamped with a tide of outsiders whose families are foreign to us. We have no way of knowing where they came from and few of us care.

Tommy Daniels farmed the Promised Land Farm, a part of old Billinge that hasn't yet disappeared under the creeping fungus of housing estates. John Cross and his wife Annie had arrived a few years earlier, around 1930, from Ollerton in Cheshire, to take over the nearby Billinge Hall Farm. All three of this couple's children married into the local farming community. Sidney Cross, their son, married Margaret Elizabeth Johnston from Longley House Farm, near the bottom of Winstanley. Annie Cross married Edward Abbot from Lime Vale Farm and Doris Cross married John Alker from New House Farm. My mother went to work for Tommy Daniels at Promised Land Farm before Enid started school, leaving the growing child with her parents. Then the war came. As my father's parents in Carr Mill Road would dominate my early childhood, our Roby grandparents in Tracks Lane would influence my sister's. I asked Enid to jot down her thoughts concerning this period of her life. This is what she gave me.

During the years of World War Two I lived with my grandparents, May and Jemmy Roby, at that end of Billinge know as the Moss. My early schooling was at St James' Primary School though some of my friends went to the Council School. The rivalry between schools was forgotten the moment we were back on home territory. Much of my spare time was spent around Greenslate Farm and the fields and woods nearby. Sam Glover, the farmer, was very patient with the local kids. He rarely scolded us or chased us from his property.

Both Granny and Granddad helped at the farm when extra labour was needed. They were hard working people and if I had a mind to be idle I had to keep out of their way. Grandma worked wonders to keep the family well fed. She cooked on an open range, boiling pans of potatoes and vegetables on the coal fire and baking cakes and pies in the side oven. She baked bread every week, made jam and pickles and was famous for her homemade wines and beer. I still have one of her large beer crocks at my home in Yorkshire.

Jemmy was said to have been strict with his six daughters but he was always an indulgent Granddad where I was concerned. One of my earliest memories is of standing on the toes of his clogs whist being danced round the room. I have done the same thing with many a toddler since then. He was a great tease. For years I believed that the tub of liquid fertiliser, kept by the greenhouse door, contained dragon's blood. He dissuaded me from begging for ice creams by saying the ice cream man let his nose drip into the ice cream. Every inch of his garden was cultivated. Vegetables for all seasons were his pride and joy, included interesting products such as tomatoes, cucumbers and mushrooms. He kept a small border of herbaceous flowers for our Walking Day baskets and for other special days.

I spent many an hour watering and weeding plants, which must have initiated my life long interest in botany and gardening. Granddad also bred rabbits for the pot. I can still recall the feel of icy fingers as I collected clover from snow covered fields as a treat for them. Those rabbits were my pets. I never did eat them when I was a child and have been reluctant to eat rabbit ever since.

Now and again Granddad would take me with him to visit his friends. I loved the trip to Winstanley Hall, riding on the crossbar of his big, black pushbike, an uncomfortable but exciting journey. Compared to the modest gardens of the village, the gardens at the Hall were amazing. There were long glasshouses with peaches and camellias growing against the walls and gape-vines hanging overhead. I never returned empty handed but always came home with a small gift of fruit or flowers. I still wonder how they survived the bike ride home.

Despite their hard working lives, Grandma and Granddad live well into their seventies, always making the best of whatever came along. I remember them with great affection.

My mother served three years in 158 Regiment of the Royal Artillery. After the war my parents lived for a while with my father's parents in Carr Mill Road. I was born there in October 1945. They soon got a council house in Holt Crescent³². Until I started school, my mother took me with her to work at Tanyard House Farm, then owned by Tom Robinson. Tom Robinson's grandfather, William, was born at Wiswall Farm, Longshaw, the scene of an unsuccessful raid by the notorious highwayman, George Lyon, around 1813. William was the eldest child. He had two brothers, Thomas and James and a sister Elizabeth. His brother, Thomas, was killed as a nineteen-year-old at the then Lancashire and Yorkshire Station at Wigan in 1872. He worked there as a porter. The inquest found that he struck his head against a pillar then fell beneath the wheels of a moving guard's van. The Valentine Card he sent to his sweetheart, Lydia Melling, just before his death, is still in the possession of June Edwards, his brother's great, great granddaughter, as Lydia subsequently married her lover's elder brother, William. James, the youngest brother, worked for Squire Bankes later in life and lived in the middle of three stone cottages, next door to the Blacksmith's Arms, at the top of Main Street, opposite Mount Pleasant Farm. The father of these Robinson brothers was James Robinson. After his death, between 1861 and 1871, his widow, Elizabeth, remarried Thomas Melling from Longshaw but this man mismanaged and lost the farm. John James Simm took over Wiswall Farm, which he inherited from his uncle, James Melling – the quarry owner who built the rows of stone cottages in Longshaw. The relationship between Thomas, James and Lydia Melling is unclear as of this writing³³. John James Simm died without issue whereupon his sister, Mary Ann, then married to Charles Mather, inherited. Charles Mather's brother, Richard Oswald, became Billinge's first Doctor Mather. His son, Richard, and Charles' three sons, Hugh, David and James, also became local doctors. James' widowed wife, Edith, still lives at Wiswall Farm and his son, Charles, also a retired local doctor, lives and farms at Sandy Forth Farm. When Charles retired from the family practice, in 1995, he brought to a close a tradition of his family practising medicine in Billinge for over one hundred years.

After his stepfather lost Wiswall Farm, William Robinson married Lydia Melling, from the Hare & Hounds, on January 13th 1876. He worked at Tanyard House Farm

³² See Appendix A for the names of heads of households in Holt Crescent and Holt Avenue in 1947-8

³³ See Appendix K for notes on the Mellings.

for twenty-five years. Then his employer, Mr Roscoe, died or left and he became the tenant farmer. Eventually his widowed daughter-in-law, Hannah, together with his grandchildren, Tom and Lillian, managed to buy Tanyard House Farm, after Squire George Bankes died in 1949 and a massive auction of his property was held to meet death duties. In that sell off, no less than thirty-one farms, though not all in Billinge, were auctioned, with far reaching consequences. Most of the new farm owners eventually sold their newly acquired acres for subdivision and the urbanisation of Billinge began³⁴.

William Robinson had two sons, James and William, and two daughters, Margaret and Mary Ann. Mary Ann Robinson married John Bradburn from Gladden Hey Farm. Margaret married James Ashton Tinsley from Otterswift Farm. William married Clarice Cunliffe, a local girl who worked in service for his mother. James married Hannah Hayes, related to the Hayes family at Lime Grove Orchards – always known locally as Bob Senney's. Hannah's father, James, and Bob (Senney) Hayes were brothers. Her family came from the Ramparts, a block of stone cottages behind the Unicorn Inn. Old William Robinson became an influential man. He served as a councillor for twenty years and as a sidesman for Billinge Church for forty years. It was his grandson, Tom, who farmed the land with his son, James, when my mother took me with her to work at Tanyard House Farm. There was no way I could have known, at that age, that four generations of my family had lived in the tiny cottage by the farmyard pond while four generations of Robinsons had farmed the land.

After I started at Birchley School, my mother worked for a while as a cook at a Nurses' Home in Wigan. From there she moved to Woolworth's as a cook then started work for her brother-in-law, Bob Dunlop, her sister Emily's husband, who owned a Woodworkers Supply business in Chapel Lane. She stayed with Bob Dunlop until she officially retired then worked part-time as a cleaner until she was eighty. At eighty-four she is remarkably robust and active. Fifteen hundred years of natural selection, on the slopes of a rocky hillside overlooking the Lancashire Plain, have produced a hardy stock of people. I only hope I inherit my mother's fortitude. If hard work is her secret then I probably won't.

Emily followed her elder sisters into the Mill. It's the way it was in those days. When Orrell Mill closed she had to go to Hope School once a week until she turned eighteen but she doesn't know why. It was something to do with the social security. She started at Eckersley's Mill at eighteen, where she had to work six months as a trainee without wages. It was while she worked at Eckersley's that she met and married Bob Dunlop from Darlington Street, Wigan, 25th September 1937. Bob was self-employed, in some capacity, as woodworker until he died in 1977. He probably got his enterprise from his mother who sold nettle pop to the workers at Darlington Street Brass Foundry, saving enough to buy several cottages in the area. Bob was an ever-cheerful character who never seemed fazed by any calamity. He and Emily operated a clog-sole enterprise at Jolly Mill, Boar's Head, before the War. After the War they moved first to Ince then into Wigan proper, always in the woodwork business. Emily had a shop on the corner of Chapel Lane and Bob operated a woodwork supply business in Princes Street. They lived in Ann Street, off Chapel Lane, until Emily became sick and was confined to hospital. My mother quit work at Woolworth's to

³⁴ In all, 31 farms, 65 cottages, 4 colliery sites, brickworks, woodland and accommodation land – 132 lots comprising 2278 acres, went under the hammer 2nd & 3rd May 1951.

help until Emily got better. She stayed working for Bob Dunlop until he died. The business expanded and moved to the bottom of Scholes, next to the River Douglas, then to The Boat Yard, alongside the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in Poolstock Lane.

My father built a bungalow for Bob and Emily, next door to Billinge Council Offices, in 1957. The bungalow is still there but the Council Offices are gone. The Dunlops lived there until Bob had a stroke in 1971. They sold the bungalow then moved to Aspul where Bob died and is buried at St Elizabeth's. Aspul is a long way for Emily's sisters to visit so in 1981 Emily moved to Church Street, next to Orrell Station.

"Ower Ivy sed, 'I waint b' comin up theer if tha teks ill agen,' so a thowt Emily, tha better cum wom!"

She sold the house in Church Street in 1997 and lives in the Sheltered Accommodation complex behind her former home. Like my mother she lives a very active social life. She was never a shrinking violet and she's not about to change at this stage of the game.

Edna May Roby went straight into service for the Barr family in Moss Road. She stayed there until she met and married William Heinikey. Soon after they moved to Birmingham where Edna still lives. Billy died a few years ago. He was the first Billinge born person to win the prestigious Waterloo Bowling Tournament. On the day that he played in the final my father gave Tommy Duncan five pounds to bet on Billy. When Tommy came back to Billinge that night he gave my father the five pounds back, saying he couldn't get the bet on. Few people ever pulled a fast one on my father but Tommy Duncan was one who managed it. Edna and Billy Heinikey were too far away for us ever to see them except when they came to Billinge to visit. Their two daughters are Audrey and Pauline.

Ivy Roby was a pretty good runner in her time. She once beat Nelly Halstead, the British champion, off a handicap mark at the UGB sports ground in St Helens. She played football for Bolton Ladies and together with Peggy Melling³⁵, a very famous Billinger, represented England at soccer. Ivy was a seamstress. She learned the trade at Brown & Haighs in Chapel Lane, Wigan. It was there that she met and married Charles Wilkie, a cutter who, incidentally, could run faster than Ivy. That might have been a good thing for Charles because Ivy had a temper and could fight like a thrashing machine. She was one of those rare women who are more than willing to fight with a man. I remember her best for always having a pot of tea made when I went to visit. She never had to make a fresh one when visitors came because as soon as one pot was emptied she made another. She had unusual eyes, one blue and the other green and grey. That gene has not passed on to her grandchildren though the running gene has. A granddaughter, Carrie, represented Lancashire and David, a grandson, is training with Liverpool, Pembroke and Sefton Harriers. Ivy and her husband are gone now. They left three children, Elaine, Ann and Charles.

Betty, the youngest daughter, was still at school when the war started. She can remember taking the younger children to the air raid shelter, wearing their gas masks. Of the six Roby sisters, Betty was the one who acquired an office job. She started

³⁵ Peggy was 68 when she died in 1990. The fish & chip shop she and her sisters ran on the corner of Garswood Rd was for years a focal point for the village's social life and a primary source of its nutrition.

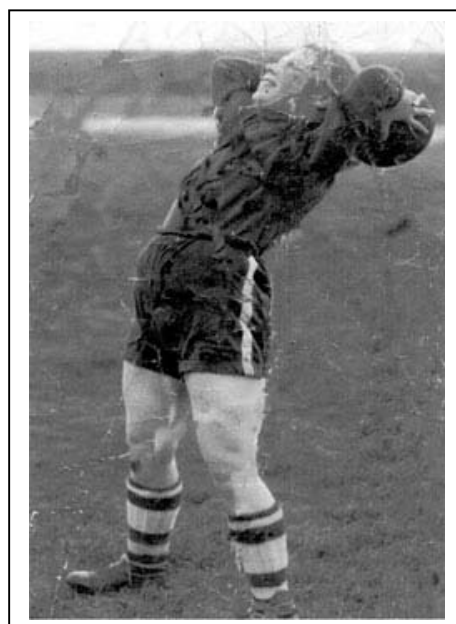
work as a typist at Brown and Haighs in 1940. Enid, my sister, was also living at Tracks Lane through the war years. It was Betty who instigated Enid's move from St James's Primary School to Holy Cross, St Helens, when she realised Enid was having difficulties with her schoolwork. As Enid went on to Higher Education, she probably owes a vote of thanks to our Aunt Betty. In 1949 Betty married Ernest Lee, a carpenter from Scott Lane, Marsh Green, who served his time with the Navy. They lived with Betty's parents until 1954 when they moved to Claremont Road. They've lived there ever since. My Uncle Ernie has always been a fisherman. He used to take me spinning for pike at Carr Mill Dam in those far away winters when it used to snow. My Aunt Betty is probably the best ever scone maker of my experience - so good in fact that I once put her up recipe on the Internet. Malcolm, their only child, got a university education and *has done well for himself* as we say in Billinge - good on him. He is the youngest of **James** Roby's grandchildren, the most travelled and perhaps the brightest.

Four of **James** Roby's daughters will see in the new millennium, as will his eleven grandchildren, twenty-four great grandchildren and thirteen great, great grandchildren. The Roby clan from Longshaw proved to be prolific. **James** Roby's descendants are just a fraction of that fecundity. I'd like to meet the rest of great, great, great grandfather **Henry** Roby's many and far-flung progeny but I wouldn't want to feed them. There wouldn't be much change from a tenner if you bought them all a drink.

(December 1999)



Peggy Melling



Ivy Wilkie nee Roby

CHADWICK GREEN.

From Newton Road to Carr Mill Road there was once an open expanse of farmland know as London Fields. An old village superstition held that on dark and windy nights a pack of ghostly hounds might be heard baying there, above the howl of wind through swaying branches, as the moon scudded across a cloudy sky. I never heard the hounds though I often worried about them as my grandfather walked me home in the stormy autumn evenings at the edge of my memory. My first conception of death, however, occurred in London Fields. It concerned the year two thousand, which is now almost upon us.

Though I remember the event with total clarity I cannot fit it exactly into time. I was too young. As near as I can estimate I would have been eight years old. In my embryonic mentality I was trying to come to terms with the concept of time as it relates to the passing years. London Fields is intersected by Garswood Road, in which, if one looks carefully, the old cobble roadway is depressed by the passage of laden coal wagons from years gone by. Just before my grandfather and I reached this intersection, it occurred to me that, one day, it might become the year two thousand. So I asked my grandfather if that were the case, would it actually someday be two thousand? He affirmed. I was simultaneously astonished and delighted. It was as if I'd discovered, quite unaided, the secret knowledge of the universe hidden in the power of numbers. Almost overcome by the immensity of this discovery I blurted,

"Granddad, I wish it was two thousand."

"It will come one day Joe but I won't be here."

"Why not?"

"I will have been dead a long time by then."

Then it hit me. Just as somewhere, back in the countless aeons, the inevitability of death must have dawned in the evolving mind of man, so too I realised, in the shattering confrontation with enlightenment, that my grandfather would die. Had he lived to the turn of the millennium he would have been one hundred and twenty-two years old.

TAYLORS.

Some two hundred years ago, **Edward** Taylor married a girl called Hester. They were my great, great, great, great grandparents, presumably born around 1769; the year James Watt's patented the steam engine. The days of England's predominately agricultural economy were numbered. The Industrial Revolution was on its way. The appalling poverty and degradation into which the working class of rural Lancashire would be plunged didn't become apparent until the publication of the Children's Employment Commission of 1842. The record says that their wedding took place in Winstanley but where in Winstanley I cannot imagine. Their dates of birth and Hester's maiden name are unknown to me at present, perhaps they always will be. Records only go back so far and then become hazy. The parents of this couple may well have witnessed Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Young Pretender, march

by their homes at the head of the last Jacobite army in December 1745. They may even have been sympathetic; after all they were Catholic at a time when there weren't many Catholics in the area. Years of religious persecution had seen to that. In 1717 only ten out of one hundred and ninety-eight families in Billinge were listed as being Papist. Unfortunately for Catholic supporters, the Highlanders grew afraid in unfamiliar flat terrain as they ran out of hills in the Midlands. With the English armies overseas and London there for the taking, they turned back to face ultimate disaster at Culloden in 1746. England remained Protestant. In the backlash of that near catastrophe, Catholic persecution intensified domestically and terror was unleashed against the Scottish Highlanders. It may have been some small consolation that Protestant England had to finally concede to Pope Gregory's reformed calendar of 1558 by dropping the eleven days from September 3-13 in 1752. Catholic emancipation would not happen until 1829.

Edward and Hester Taylor's first recorded child was **William**, born 14th December, in the dreadful winter of 1794, as England's troops fled across the frozen wastes of Holland¹ before the ravaging Jacobin army of France, spawned by the Revolution, at the outbreak of what would evolve into the Napoleonic Wars. The following month, one third of the expeditionary force of 18,000 would perish in four days as the retreat disintegrated into chaos. **William** was the eldest of a large family, the other children being James, Edward, John, Margaret, Thomas, Henry, Joseph and Peter, the youngest, born 28th October 1811, a year in which Luddite disturbances were recorded in Yorkshire - the effects of the Industrial Revolution were not pleasing everyone.

There was no official Catholic Church at Birchley until 1828 so **William** was not married at St. Mary's. I can't find a record of his marriage at St. Aidan's either. Maybe he got married at Birchley Hall. There had been a clandestine chapel there since 1618. The events centred on the Catholic Anderton family's occupation of Birchley Hall, from its purchase by Christopher Anderton in 1558 to the death of Sir Francis Anderton in 1770, are probably the most historically significant occurrences in Billinge history. That recorded history goes back to the Angles settling the area around 550 AD. The Celts would have been there before the Angles but they left no trace. The Roman Road, running north to Hadrian's Wall, ran through Warrington, Wigan and Preston. There was also a Roman Road from Manchester to Wigan. They mined some iron ore and coal at Orrell but they probably left Billinge alone. Who knows what went on in Billinge before the Romans came?

Wherever and whenever the marriage took place, **William** Taylor married Joan Fairhurst some time around 1820. The village must still have been reeling from news of the nearby Peterloo Massacre and George IV had just ascended to the throne. Their second child, **Esther**, born 28th May 1822, was my great, great grandmother². **William** died 12th June 1873 aged 78, the year Gladstone's government resigned and Disraeli rose to ascendance. There is a record of baptism for Joan, 19th February 1797, but I have not been able to trace any record of her burial. Her parents are recorded as William and Helen Fairhurst. They, like **William's** parents, **Edward** and Hester Taylor, are too far back for me to trace accurately at this time.

¹ See The Years of Endurance by Arthur Bryant.

² Their children were Edward 11/12/1820, **Esther** 28/5/1822, William 25/1/1825, Henry 19/9/1827, Anne 26/8/1830, Thomas 26/3/1833, Ralph 20/11/1835 and Sarah 5/2/1839

Esther Taylor is my direct ancestor. She was born as famine gripped Ireland and gave birth to Robert 18th May 1842, Alicia 29th January 1847 and **Thomas** 19th April 1853. These three children took their mother's name otherwise the Taylor name would not have been handed down to my grandfather, father, and ultimately to me. **Esther** then married William Harrison, probably in 1854/55, the time of the Crimean War and the Charge of the Light Brigade. St. Mary's marriage records begin in 1856. She subsequently gave birth to six more children, including twins.³ The last child was born two months short of her forty-fourth birthday. She was residing in Fair View when she died, 5th January 1907, four months short of her 85th birthday. The Anglo-Russian Entente was signed in that year, as Europe manoeuvred into armed alliances that would culminate with World War One and decimate the young men of Europe. Her grandson, James, would be a victim.

Thomas Taylor, Esther's second son, started work at the age of eight, sometime around 1861. He always remembered his uncles taking him to work that first morning, in the freezing dark, and told his son, **Francis**, about it. **Francis**, my grandfather told me. It had been snowing. His uncles had to lift him over the snowdrifts because his legs were too short. That he eventually became involved in the miners' union is all that his grandson, my father, knows about him. The history of the many district unions and various amalgamations of them, within the coal industry, is both complex and intriguing. Unions were legally suppressed in 1799 and not legalised until 1825, following the Peterloo Massacre. In constant dispute with coal owners and capitalists, union fortunes fluctuated as regularly as the weather. There was a serious local incident in October 1874 when 500 strikers fought with 200 strikebreakers outside the Ram's Head in Haydock. That was but one of countless incidents that typify the bitter class struggle that few Billingers could have been exempt from. I have been so far unable to ascertain with certainty my great grandfather's involvement with the union movement, other than it cost him his job. He led a strike at Bold Colliery, where he was employed as a checkweighman, and was subsequently blacklisted from further employment in the local coal industry. He married Sara, daughter of Frank Cunliffe, 29th August 1875, the year Disraeli's second government bought shares giving England control of the Suez Canal until the fiasco of the 1956 Suez Crisis.⁴ They ran a shop and outdoor licence on the corner of Rainford Road until their liquor licence was revoked for serving someone with the hair of the dog on a Sunday morning. Eleanor, the youngest daughter, loved to work in that shop. She could judge an ounce of thick twist tobacco by wrapping it around her hand. When Gertrude married Christopher Nulty in 1914, her father's union involvement was remembered and Christopher was dismissed from his position as a checkweighman at one of Lord Gerard's collieries.

The register says my great grandfather, **Thomas** Taylor, died suddenly 17th March 1916 aged 52 but that is incorrect. If he was born 19th April 1853 he must have been 62. On that morning Thomas took Jack, his dog, for a walk and died sitting under a tree down the bottom of Shaley Brow with his hand in his pocket, still through the

³ Margaret 5/10/1855, James 8/11/1857, twins Edward & William 22/9/1861, John 11/10/1863 & Alicia 19/3/1866,

⁴ Their children were Mary 13/11/1876; **Francis** 13/12/1878; Esther 11/1/1881 - 11/3/1882; Esther 4/9/1882; James 5/3/1885; Lawrence 15/8/1887; Gertrude 29/1/1890; Eleanor 15/4/1892; Thomas Cuthbert 20/3/1894 & Aloysius 11/6/1899.

dog's lead. They had to bring my grandfather to free the dog, which wouldn't let anyone approach its dead master. My dad knows the spot so hopefully I can find it myself with his assistance. Eighteen months later, Thomas's son, James, then a thirty-two year old corporal in the 114th Company of the Machine Gun Corps, was killed in action. It happened on the night of 31 August or the morning of 1st September 1917.

Thomas Taylor's wife, Sara nee Cunliffe, died on the 27th of November 1918, aged 63. She must have been born in 1854 but there is no record of baptism in the St. Mary's registry. The Cunliffes were also Catholics. My father remembers his great uncle, Frank Cunliffe, working as a wheelwright at the smithy in Rainford Road, opposite Gazing Row, where the chemist and bakery shops now stand. He remembers this Frank Cunliffe making trundles for him and his younger brother and taking him fishing at Carr Mill Dam.

In those days there were gorse, broom, and blackberry bushes growing in the centre of the arches. My father could only just see over the parapet. In that part of Carr Mill Dam, between the arches and Carr Mill Road, Bronze Bream used to spawn in season and could be caught only at that time of the year. When somebody was lucky enough to hook one, the other anglers would lift their tackle from the water so the person playing a bream could walk along to the end of the arches and net the fish on the bank. My father remembers his great uncle as being a good fisherman. The records show that this Francis Cunliffe married Mary Taylor at St. Mary's on February 14th 1900, a year before Victoria died. Their grandson, John Cunliffe, still lives at the top of Claremont Road.

Francis Cunliffe's father, another Francis, is named as the father of Sara in the record of her marriage to **Thomas** Taylor, 29th August 1876, the year Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. Unfortunately her mother is not named. There is a record of this Francis Cunliffe marrying Mary Derbyshire 5th February 1856.⁵ There is a record of John, born eleven months later and nine other children. Three of these children were christened Francis. The first Francis lived for two months and the second survived for seven months. The last of this family's three sons named Francis Cunliffe is the great uncle Frank my father remembers. The 1861 census shows his father, Francis Cunliffe, then aged 28, was living with his wife Mary, aged 24, and two children, Sara aged 5 and John aged 4.

My great grandmother, Sara Taylor, was therefore the daughter of Francis Cunliffe and Mary Derbyshire but she was born before they married. I can find no record of her baptism. The parents of this Francis Cunliffe were Jonathan and Mary Cunliffe who would have been Sara's grandparents, my great, great, great grandparents, born around 1800. There is no record of Francis Cunliffe being baptised around 1830 at St. Mary's. Perhaps he, like James Gaskell & Thomas Wilcock, came to Billinge from outside. On July 22nd 1837, the same year that Victoria started her long reign, his wife, Mary Derbyshire, was however baptised at St. Mary's. Her parents were Peter and Helen Derbyshire. Peter Derbyshire was born 14th March 1816. His parents were James and Margaret nee Foster. Go back far enough and we Billingers are all related but it's hard to sort out just how. Francis Cunliffe and his wife Mary nee Derbyshire

⁵ Their recorded children were John 26/1/1857, Francis 1/11/1861 – 15/1/1862, Jonathan 30/11/1862, Helena 28/12/1864, Anna 3/6/1867 – 20/5/1868, Maria 9/6/1869, Anna 22/10/1871, Francis 21/4/1874 - 14/11/1874, James or Jacob 28/11/1875 (a year before Polly Taylor) & Francis 11/1/1878 (10 months before **Francis** Taylor)

are therefore my great, great grandparents. They ran the Labour-in-Vain before their son-in-law James McLoughlin. Ann was James's first wife. She died 26th December 1901 at the age of thirty, after giving birth to the last of her four children, Beatrice Irene, who died eight months after her mother. James McLoughlin remarried Elizabeth Maxwell, a teacher at Birchley School who came from Liverpool. This couple had three more children and also managed the George & Dragon then the Unicorn.

Sara Taylor worked at Pilkington's; doing a job that became redundant with the introduction of the float glass process. Women were employed to continuously lift fifty-six pound weights on and off glass sheets as they were being polished. Consequentially, the women doing this job developed muscles like cannonballs. One of Sara's sisters could put her arm through the handles of two fifty-six pound weights, pick up a third and walk away with all three on one arm. My grandfather remembered her doing that for a bet, walking from the Brown Cow to Labour-in-Vain. His mother was not quite so strong but strong enough. She once struck at him with a rolling pin but missed, hitting the doorframe and breaking the rolling pin. If the blow had landed it would have killed him. He might have deserved it. He'd almost frightened his younger sister, Eleanor, to death by hiding in one of the coffins, made by his Uncle Frank, which was drying in front of the fire in a room behind the shop in Rainford Road. When his little sister came into the room, skipping round the coffin, he slowly raised the lid from inside, moaning as he did so. Little Eleanor went into hysterics.

Mary, the eldest child of **Thomas** & Sara Taylor, never married. She became the headmistress at Birchley Infants School, would have been 39 when her father died and just turned 42 when her mother passed away, leaving her head of the remaining family. Her eldest brother, **Francis**, had been married ten years by then. Gertrude had been married two years. James had died in action one year previously. Aloysius 18, Thomas 22, Eleanor 24 and maybe Lawrence 31, would still be living at 94 Rainford Road. Incidentally, that house was built in 1908. Polly, as she would always be known, would one day own it. Eventually she would sell it to William, the third son of her brother **Francis**.

There is mention of Thomas and Ellen Hill, publicans, living at 94 Rainford Road in the 1891 census so that was, possibly, one of the two cottages that stood next to the Brown Cow. More likely it was the Brown Cow. This Thomas Hill was the son of the famous 'Our Nell's Jack,' the champion speed skater, who became a Billinge legend in the winter of 1879 by winning 23 straight races against all comers on Carr mill Dam. The year that Jack Hill was demolishing the skating pride of England the Zulus were spearing British troops at Isandhlwana, our troops butchered the Zulus at Ulundi and in the tiny Georgian town of Gori, Stalin was born. In that same year at least one son of Billinge was doing his bit for Queen and Country. Henry Lowe from Long Fold was fighting with the 63rd Regiment of Foot on the Northwest Frontier. He came home from the Khyber Pass wounded then went back to work down the pit⁶. The Pathan tribesmen couldn't kill him but the coal mine probably did.

Our Nell's Jack merited a chapter in 'The Billingers'. Here, with permission of the author, that chapter is reproduced in full.

⁶ See article in Wigan Observer August 1976.

OUR NELL'S JACK

In the year 1879, England was hit by the Big Frost and Carr Mill Dam, near Billinge, froze over for four whole months. It was a big year for Billinge, for it is the only time on record that a Billinger rocketed to national fame.

Jack Hill, who was later to become the licensee of the "Brown Cow" Inn at the top of the Rant, was then a young man of nineteen. Born on the 20th of October 1860, he had been a speedy skater since boyhood and at the time of the Frost he was currently being proclaimed champion skater of all Lancashire. This claim was disputed by many, but it was true that Jack had never been beaten since growing to man's stature. In 1879 these controversies were to be settled beyond all doubt.

Carr Mill Dam is a deep and treacherous stretch of water both in summer and winter, but at the time of the Big Frost the ice was so thick that it was quite safe for large numbers of people to go on it without fear of any kind of accident. Shops, coffee-wagons and toffee stalls were set up out the ice and skating matches were held nearly every day in front of thousands of spectators. People flocked on from Wigan, St. Helens, Prescot, Liverpool and Southport and contestants and their supporters soon began to arrive from other counties. Such was the wintry splendour of the scene and the excitement of the competition that it was not long before important skating matches involving very high stakes were being promoted. In the thick of this rivalry, betting, argument and prize-winning was the young local hero skating under his Billinge nickname of Our Nell's Jack, taking on all comers from the many corners of England, and still the fastest man on the ice.

In the first two or three weeks, Jack cleaned all the local opposition, which consisted of the best skaters from the South Lancs coalfield. Some of these he beat by half the length of the course.

In the second month, his claim to the Lancashire title was put to the test as he encountered local champions from Southport, Formby, Kendal, Nelson and so on. Some of these men were bigger than Jack and all of them wore fancier outfits, but none of them was able to finish within yards of him.

Excitement mounted as he was matched with the renowned Jack Highcock from Windermere, who it was reputed, had never been bested. That day nobody would bet on Our Nell's Jack except Billingers. Highcock got off to a good start and at one stage was leading by sufficient a gap to wave to some of his admirers, but Jack clenched his fists tight and overhauled him in the second half to their tilt to skate in with five yards to spare and his Lancashire title now recognized by all. In the third month, they produced champions from all corners of the realm. Jack beat the Midlands champion with fifteen yards to spare and the champion of East Anglia by nearly thirty. He thrashed the champions of Cheshire and Derbyshire on the same day and skated past the Cumberland Number One after he had fallen on his nose at the start.

For every victory Jack chalked up, he received a gleaming cup or trophy, which increased in size and splendour as the skates and gate money went up. People would pack the saloon at the "Brown Cow" after the day's events to see the trophies, which

were on display behind the bar. Business had never been so good, for not only were strangers attracted by the exhibition of the fine cups, but the Billingers soon were rolling in money from their betting activities and they were not slow to buy drinks for the losers as well as for their friends and themselves.

By now, Billingers could size up a visiting skater like other men size up a boxing prospect or an up-and-coming racehorse. They would observe him as he put on his skates and fastened up his tunic, quietly assess liveness of movement and visible muscle, watch him practice on the ice before the match and finally decide for themselves the odds they would give or take. Most of them put their money on Jack and he rewarded their faith in him by winning consistently. All the big names finished behind him - Mannion, Gee, Brookfield, Gaffney, Daft Duck, Balmer, the West Leigh crack - counting only the big matches Jack won 22 victories in a row and still the ice on Carr Mill Dam held up the shops, stalls and the crowds.

People began to realise that the young lad never would be beaten. But there was one man he had not met. The champion of Lincolnshire was a formidable skater with the enigmatic name of Fish Smart. Though he had not been up to Lancashire, Fish Smart had never been beaten on ice and he claimed to be champion of All England. By this time, Our Nell's Jack's fame had spread as far afield as London itself and gaming and betting men both in the North and in the South began to get interested in staging a match between the two champions.

Fish Smart was an excellent and experienced skater who had actually written a book on skating and had even competed with foreigners abroad. It was inconceivable that he could be beaten by this young Billinge novice. There were some who argued that it would be no real match and that it would not be worthwhile for Smart to make the journey up North. By the time Jack had won 22 matches straight and Start's backers were forced to accept the challenge, the ice in the South was getting soft. There was one obvious venue for the match, where large crowds, heavy betting and thick ice could all be guaranteed-Carr Mill Dam.

And so it was. Fish Smart and his managers were met by a brass band at Wigan station and driven in style by pony and trap to Billinge. A special lunch was laid on at the "Brown Cow" during which it was observed that Fish was a short, stocky figure in his late twenties with thick, black hair, dark complexion and beady, intelligent eyes. He had a trim waist and strong, muscular calves. The next day, December 28th, 1879, saw the ice black with people. Fish and Jack had each had a twenty-minute work out on the ice and were stripping down to their racing tunics. Bets had been placed hours before. One woman had bought flour and baked bread the previous day to sell and raise money for her stake. A farmer had sold two of his pigs to increase his betting capital and Emily Baines, the landlady of the George and Dragon, had bet a horse and trap on the result. Large sums of southern money put on Fish Smart half an hour before the start of the race made Billingers wonder if they had been made fools of.

The match was over four hundred yards. A dark cloud passed over the wintry sun and, as the shadow spread quickly over the ice, the sharp crack of the pistol sent the two champions sprinting away. Jack had won the toss for choice of sides, but Fish, like Highcock before him, had faster reflexes than Jack and was two yards ahead after the first few seconds. This was the only advantage he was able to gain, however, and

the gap neither widened nor narrowed as Jack matched him lunge for lunge, with five hundred Billingers screaming at him in the dialect he knew so well.

At the halfway mark he clenched his fists in the old familiar way and pulled up to the shoulder of the Lincoln champion. Smart, however, had been waiting for the psychological moment when the Billinger, having exhausted himself by making up those two vital yards, could be crushed by a sudden counter-sprint on the part of his opponent. For a moment Fish glanced sideways at Jack, noted the lad's contorted face and bursting lungs, then suddenly put his head down and made his own supreme effort, mustering up all the speed that his hardened body and smooth technique afforded him. Jack lost a yard, then another; Billingers choked with disappointment as the gap widened and Jack seemed to lose his rhythm.

The Billinge skater, with the pulverized ice from Smart's skates showering and cutting his face, felt for the first time that winter the humiliation of being behind. The stream of ice, however, meant that he was still within striking distance, so he pressed his head even lower and kept his eyes glued to Smart's flashing heels as they entered the last stretch. Imperceptibly, Jack edged towards his rival and then the crowd shouted hoarsely as daylight could no longer be seen between the two men. Some say that Fish had made his bid five seconds too soon and flagged in the last few yards. Others say that Jack just skated past him in the frenzy normal to any Billinger who was about to be humiliated by a stranger in front of five hundred of his fellow villagers. At any rate, he won by six inches to a foot, which gave him 23 straight victories in 1879. Billinge, for the first and only time on its history, had a Champion of England. The ice broke soon afterwards and in following years was much thinner and unsuitable for big matches. Fish Smart never came again.

Thomas and Sara Taylor are listed in 1891 as living at 28 Rainford Road. That would have been the shop on the corner of Rainford and Birchley Roads. Mary, then 15, was living with her grandmother, Mary Cunliffe, at 234 Main Road. **Francis**, Esther, James, Lawrence and Gertrude were still living at home. I have no doubt that my great grandfather witnessed the triumphs of 'Our Nell's Jack' with great interest. He had been the champion's first serious opponent. The entire village would have been at Jack Hill's important races. Fifteen to twenty thousand were there the day he beat Fish Smart. For the next few generations, the young sports of Billinge would try to emulate him. My grandfather and his brothers skated - my father and his brothers likewise. Jack Hill's son, Thomas, also skated in money matches. A man called Highcock from Haydock beat him, at least twice, at Sefton Meadows. Tom Hill's sister, Alice, married Tom Fairhurst. Their daughter, Helen, married my mother's uncle, John Roby. She still lives in Newton Road, now almost ninety years old. The best skater in my father's time was another Billinger, Jimmy Lomax, a few years younger than Tom Hill. Jimmy Lomax won what money matches could be arranged for him but soon frightened off all opposition.

Skating at Carr Mill Dam could be dangerous. There are a number of springs in the lake that kept the ice above them from forming. The locals would stick a bush in the water to indicate the danger. My grandfather, his brother Aloysius and my father were all skating at Carr Mill Dam when someone skated into one of these holes and drowned. On another occasion a dog belonging to Peter Green, a friend of my

grandfather, went through thin ice at that part of the dam know as *The Gunnel*. The water was shallow there so Peter took his shirt off and jumped in to rescue the dog. Peter, the youngest brother of a large family of top class football players, dried himself on his shirt and carried on skating. His only son, Joe Green, drowned as a thirteen-year-old, in a lake left by opencast mining, near the Hollin-Hey Bridge. He was trying to rescue the younger Michael Barton, another only child, who slipped down the steep clay bank into the water and also drowned that day. I was there when the police dragged Michael from the murky brown water. Rigor mortis had stiffened his body into an unnatural shape and his hair was plastered to his crown like that painted on the head of my sister's old doll. The sight of this body so disturbed me that I avoided seeing another cadaver until work in a New Zealand hospital morgue left no option. Most of the Billingers of my generation will remember where they were on 1st August 1958 when news of that tragedy shattered the village. Alan Littler⁷, who lived at 68 Claremont Road, wrote these words in a letter, more than forty years after the event.

That day I'd arranged to meet Joe with Billy Melling to go to 'The Lost Lake' but Ma made me go to Wigan for a pair of shoes and Billy cried off too. When we came back, I was looking in the mirror over our fireplace when I heard Sally Baybutt next door tell my mother. I'll never forget the look on my face as long as I live. Sally didn't know if it was Peter Green's Joe or Joe Green's Peter – but I did. I just sank to my knees crying, "Not Joe, not Joe". I will never forget it - he was one of my best mates. I was amazed that Michael was with him – he never went there with us before - as you know he wasn't the full quid and Joe always felt responsible for him.

As the years progressed and the winters grew milder ice-skating became a memory. Carr Mill Dam was rarely safe for skating in my time. I remember skating once, as a ten-year-old, between the arches and the dam hollows, where the bronze-bream used to spawn, but by the time I was a teenager it was unusual to find a large area safe enough to ice skate upon. Maybe five years later, my father took me skating at Wrightington Fishponds, where the shallower water froze more readily. He mentioned his Aunt Cecily living close by. At the time I took no notice, I was too intent on skating. I can't remember the deep part of Carr Mill Dam ever holding. The legend of Our Nell's Jack will never be challenged, though Jimmy Lomax would probably have given him a run for his money. Jimmy's daughter, Elizabeth, married Gilbert Potter and they still live in Holt Crescent. They are great grandparents now and the champion's ice-skates are still in the family.

Mary Taylor was always known as Polly (as her eldest niece, Mary, first child of her brother **Francis** and his wife Helen, would always been known as Molly). My father remembers his Aunt Polly as being bossy and clever, just like his sister Molly. Margaret Nulty, Gertrude's youngest daughter, remembers visiting at Moss Bank, where Polly then lived with her youngest brother Aloysius and his wife Margaret Mary. She remembers Polly answering the door to Gertrude and four of her children by asking when they were leaving. Gertrude answered that they were leaving right then and did so. Margaret does not have fond memories of her eldest aunt. In her mind Polly treated Aloysius's wife, Margaret, as if she were a servant and that she looked down on women, like Gertrude, who had large families. Polly lived to be 86,

⁷ See Appendix L.

passing away 8th June 1962. She certainly looks severe in the few photographs that I have of her and is reminiscent, to me, of my Aunt Molly. My Aunt Molly was unquestionably the most formidable woman I ever met.

Esther Taylor married Dick Beesley. I haven't found the marriage record yet but Dick and his two sisters were orphans from Greenfield. The sisters were put into service and Dick was farmed out to a local family and took the name Beesley from them. Esther was a seamstress and ran a small sewing business from a stone cottage that stood immediately before the Mason's Arms, going down Carr Mill Road. Coincidentally another lady, Miss Bolton, ran a sewing business directly across the road in the stone cottage still standing there. When she died Bill Kearsley moved in with his wife Annie nee Parr. Esther and Dick moved from there to Chadwick Farm, where Marsh Grounds dip just before joining Carr Mill Road. Marsh Grounds is now a housing estate. Few of its inhabitants have ever heard mention of Chadwick Farm. My father remembers Dick Beesley fondly. He used to take him fishing to Carr Mill Dam. Dick was always a horse person. He worked for the redoubtable Dean Powell, priest at St Mary's Birchley 1872 - 1910, as a groom⁸. In Dean Powell's will there is provision for an annuity of ten pounds to be paid to his housekeeper, Anne Beesley. It seems probably that it was she who took in Dick from Greenfield and gave him his name. Dean Powell's will also stipulates that an annuity of ten pounds be paid to his manservant. This person is unnamed but it is almost certainly Dick Beesley.

Dean Powell often figured in my grandfather's stories. His regular visits to Birchley School, as recalled by my grandfather, had not been occasions for pupils to relish. In my childhood insecurity, I was pleased that he was no longer around. There is a short chapter about Dean Powell in 'The Billingers', which I will here reproduce in full, again with the kind permission of the author.

FATHER POWELL.

One of the best characters on Old Billinge, the Rev. Austin Powell, was not born in the village, but became Pastor of Birchley in 1872 and stayed there nearly thirty years until his death in 1910. His importance as a Billinge figure lies not only in the fact that he was for so long a pillar of the Catholic community, shaping the lives of all those connected with St. Mary's and Birchley Schools, but also in the way he provided a living link between the village at the time of his ministry and the ancient traditions of Billinge stretching back to the 16th and 17th centuries.

He was fully aware of his historical role as the latest in an unbroken line of priests serving at Birchley since Roger Anderton's ordination in 1645. The significance of the pre-Civil War Birchley operation, the centuries of struggle to follow, the crises during his own ministry, all gave him a tremendous feeling for the continuity of history and great affection for the old Hall, the rugged village and its sturdy people. There is little doubt that Austin Powell considered himself to be the Right Man in the Right Place at the Right Time.

It would have been hard to find a better-educated or more erudite leader. Born in 1842 near Liverpool, he was sent to St. Edward's College, Everton at the age of ten,

⁸ There is a photograph of Dick Beesley riding alongside Dean Powell in the book *The Billingers*.

where he studied for six years. There followed a 3-year course at St Cuthbert's College, Ushaw, after which he went to the English College at Rome, where Roger Anderton had studied more than two hundred years earlier. He pursued philosophical and theological studies for a further six years under the learned Jesuit theologians Ballerini and Franzelin. There were 30 other English students in the College and he himself was delighted with his sojourn in Rome. His own description of the city not only shows his enthusiasm for life, but also the richness of his vocabulary and imagination.

"Is there a man with the least spark of sensibility- be he Christian or Pagan- who would not like it? Obliterate Rome from the pages of history, and what would the annals of the world amount to? How like Rome? - with its hoary memories of king and consul, emperor and pope- with its ruins rich with the fable, the romance, the tragedy, the comedy, and the passions, the vicissitudes of 26 centuries-with its priceless art treasures on canvas or in marble- with its three hundred churches, each more noble than the other, culminating in St. Peter's- with its palaces, gardens, villas, fountains? I think it must have been Rome that inspired in me my love of antiques"

In the year 1866 he was ordained priest by Cardinal Patrizzi and ordered to Pro-Cathedral, Copperas Hill, in Liverpool. He remained there for two years, then spent three years at Newhouse before taking over Birchley a few months after his 30th birthday. He was already a man of the world. Apart from the experience gained from his travels, learning and profession, he came from a well-to-do family and quickly showed his abilities as a businessman. He had already bought a plot of land at Catforth and erected schools costing eight hundred pounds. He had a hand in the building of the Sacred Heart Church in St. Helens and one year after his settlement in Birchley he made an investment of two thousand pounds in a plot of land at Rainford (and this in competition with the local bigwigs at an auction) which, on account of coal mines beneath it, realised a profit sufficient for the erection of a presbytery. He financed further purchases of land at West Leigh and Plank Lane, where more churches were built. By 1889, when our three St. Helens newspapermen arrived on their fact-finding mission concerning the impending sale of Birchley Estate, Father Powell was too old a hand in such matters not to know how to manoeuvre the Catholic community out of the crisis.

He told the journalists that when Lord Gerard's agent had informed him that a bid of ten thousand pounds had been made for Birchley Hall and Estate on condition that the schools were moved elsewhere, he had been greatly perturbed. Not only would it be difficult and inconvenient to relocate the schools, but there were the sacred associations of the Hall itself. He lost no time in writing to his Bishop, suggesting that he should purchase Birchley, but as a second string to his bow, he approached John Middlehurst, a local Catholic, with the proposal that he (Powell) and Middlehurst buy the estate together at once. Middlehurst was immediately willing to buy the greater portion- the 172 acres surrounding the Hall- and Father Powell arranged to take over the land- 25 acres continuous to the presbytery. Without further ado they submitted a joint bid of nine thousand, four hundred pounds (Middlehurst's share was nine thousand pounds to Lord Gerard. Austin Powell declared that this was a much better bid than the one of ten thousand pounds made by the mysterious Protestant. On being asked how this could be, he pointed out that it would cost two thousand pounds to remove the schools- as the new building would have to be put up before the old one

came down- and Lord Gerard would therefore get only eight thousand pounds clear from the first offer.

Father Powell was pleased to inform the representatives of the "St. Helens Lantern" that his offer had been accepted and that the Catholic association with the Hall, Chapel and Presbytery would now be able to run on unhindered. He pointed out, of course, that the Chapel was now purely of sentimental value to the Church, since the construction of St. Mary's in 1828 had provided them with a proper place for their services. In connection with one of the newspapermen's querying the initial cost of the building St. Mary's, Father Powell had another interesting tale to tell. It appeared that Sir William Gerard, who had died in 1826, gave eight thousand pounds to be apportioned between Ashton and Birchley, two thousand pounds to go to each for a church and presbytery, and another two thousand pounds to each as an endowment. The trustees, who were laymen, started on the Ashton church first and when it was finished they found it had somehow absorbed seven thousand pounds out of the eight thousand pounds, so Birchley had to be satisfied with about one thousand pounds. The Rev. John Penswick- the priest then in charge- managed to scrape together another four hundred pounds; therefore one thousand four hundred pounds had been the original cost of the church.

"So, practically, Ashton owes Birchley three thousand pounds," asked one of the journalists. "Yes," laughed Father Powell, "that's how the matter stands, but when, if ever, restitution will be made is a different thing altogether."

It seemed that Austin Powell frequently made a good impression on newspapermen. This was already apparent in 1872- the year he came to Billinge- when he was interviewed by "Atticus" of the "Preston Chronicle"

"Mr. Powell is medium in build, light in complexion, with a calm, cool, irenic temperament; he takes things easily with equilibrium, has a well-trained mind, which can discourse of any ordinary subject, in religion or literature; is gentlemanly and scholarly, and yet free from hauteur and pedantry; has an ancient head on young shoulders; has seen so much, and knows the ways of the world well; can preach a sound and sensible sermon, and can hit off the defects of sinners to a nicety; has in him a quiet, keenly-edged wit and a genial, deeply set vein of humour; once tamed an eagle, and can bring all the sparrows to his doorstep by a good whistle; is generous in disposition, and devoid of everything in the shape of narrow-mindedness; discharges his priestly functions quietly and comfortably, and avoids all meddling, earwiggling, and corner cupboard hunting- tricks which some spiritual advisers are very proficient in."

With all these qualities, he was able to handle the Billingers (and not many outsiders could manage that). There are many Billingers still alive who remember him very well. He could be as tough and as eccentric as they were and he quickly gained the respect not only of his flock, but of the Protestants as well. They all knew the story of his catching this young eagle in the Apennines and stuffed and put on a shelf. He loved to take children for a ride in horse and trap, but he would thrash them soundly with his knobstick if he came across them playing truant during his walks through the fields. The villagers knew him as a farmer (he farmed Poverty Land) a mine owner, and a hunter (he rode with Lord Gerard). He was defiant in defence of his faith, but he was the firm friend of Canon Howard St. George and Gentleman James Parr. He

loved to appear eccentric or theatrical, leading the Catholic processions on horseback, keeping 4 donkeys and 4 black horses on his land, making bower-like structures outside Birchley school to be used as outdoor classrooms in summer, throwing out quotations from English and Latin poetry and reeling off jokes and amusing anecdotes when he was in the mood.

One good Catholic family at the Rant kept a ferocious dog, which bit him every time he went to visit them. It is said that on these occasions he would lose his usual composure and, as he vainly swished at the beast with his knobstick, shouted at his hosts “When are you going to have this Protestant dog of yours done away with?”

As there was no Methodist school in Billinge, Jim and Susannah Parr sent all their children to study at nearby Birchley. Sam Parr, the youngest, was a regular truant and, more often than not, Father Powell would find him among the bushes in Marsh Ground and thrash him with the knobstick. Sam would run tearfully home and hide behind Susannah’s pantry door, while the good living priest followed on at a leisurely pace up Long Fold and into the Parr living room. Susannah was often in two minds as to whether she ought to scold the autocratic chaplain or whimpering Sam, for she, too, had a will of iron. Father Powell, without saying a word to her, would go round the living room and systematically straighten all the pictures. After two or three minutes, when he was satisfied that all was symmetrical, he would say: “Well, how’s that Susannah?” And Sam would sneak out into the back garden, Austin Powell would take off his hat and coat and Susannah would get out her fine barge teapot.

There was a large plot of land attached to Chadwick Farm. I remember the overgrown orchard as a child. Dick Beesley grew vegetables and kept chickens and other livestock. He also owned a black funeral horse that he rode and used to pull the plough. He served in the Second Boer War. My father remembers that he always kept his sword above the mantelpiece. Because of his connections to the Church he gained a position with a priest in Cambridge. He and Esther moved there sometime around 1930. Esther died 11th October 1938 aged 56. Dick lived to be 90. He died 4th March 1967 and is buried at St. Mary’s.

Francis Taylor, like his father, **Thomas**, was a miner. He married Helen Gaskell, one of the four daughters of James Gaskell and Mary Ann Wilcock, 9th November 1908; the year Asquith introduced Old Aged Pensions. Helen was twenty-nine years old at that time. She was born 7th July 1881, during the first Boer War. Frank, the name he was always known by, was thirty. The marriage lasted 53 years. They successfully raised five from seven children.

Mary Ann (Molly) was the first child. She was born 15th August 1909 and went to Birchley Infant School, where her Aunt Polly was the headmistress. The Infant School opened 9th January 1899. The foundations were commenced 8th March 1898 and a committee was formed 13th March 1898 to meet liabilities. Mr Joseph Middlehurst was elected treasurer and Molly’s great uncle, William Wilcock, secretary. A collection of funds from catholic families raised £397 7s 3 towards the total cost of £1050. My father says that Molly was always acknowledged as being the cleverest child at Birchley School but was never entered for her scholarship. As soon

as she was able, around the age of fourteen, she left school and trained to be a nurse. As a nurse she rose to the top of her profession. She was matron of the Stead Memorial Hospital at Redcar when my sister Enid left school. It was at that hospital that she nursed then married a Scotsman, Adam Bell, 16th June 1951. They married in a non-Catholic Church then solemnised the marriage in Redcar 14th October 1952. Enid was born 14th January 1936, the year George V died, Edward VIII abdicated and George VI became King. Adam and Molly had no children but Enid lived with them from 1954 until her own marriage to Trevor Cook, 24th September 1960.

Molly and Adam came back to Carr Mill Road around 1960. She took over as matron at Whelley Hospital, Wigan, until her retirement. Adam died 25th March 1980. Molly died a few days short of the 87th birthday, 15th August 1996. She is buried at St Mary's.

Sarah was born 10th March 1911 and died 14th March 1912, aged one.

James was born 24th October 1912 and died 19th February 1916, aged four.

Thomas, my father, was born 16th November 1913. He has just turned eighty-six and is the source of much that has been reiterated here. I hope that I retain his mental edge to the same age. Genetically that seems possible. This project had taught me that we are a long-lived family. My father walks up the road for a couple of pints every afternoon on weekdays. My mother, now eighty-four, is fit beyond all reasonable expectation. Not long ago she walked home from Wigan. My father finished school in 1928 at the age of fourteen and became a bricklayer. That was when a seven-year apprenticeship was mandatory and you became a man when you came out of your time at twenty-one. Until then you were treated and regarded as a child. My dad served his apprenticeship with Joe Vose from Denton's Green, a position he acquired due to his Aunt Polly knowing Mrs Vose. In this respect he was lucky. The fate of most Billinge male school leavers, who had not been to Grammar School, was the pit.

In 1929⁹, Carr Mill Road was tranquil, unspoiled and scenically beautiful. Thomas Birchall ran the shop, on the corner of Carr Mill Road and Main Street, which eventually his daughter, Ruth, would come to operate. That Birchall family has retained the nickname *Butcher*.¹⁰ There was a row of five cottages on the left hand side, just down from Main Street. Joe Smith and John Thomas Gee lived in number one and one A receptively. Michael Dearden occupied number three, where once upon a time a pub called *The Divil in t' Tree* had been located. Years later, during excavations for a swimming pool, a Roman coin was found behind this property. Thomas Duncan lived in number five. Richard Barnes, the baker, lived at number seven. He was a familiar sight, delivering bread round the village with his horse and trap, occasionally picking up parcels and passengers from Garswood station¹¹. Someone once left a block of concrete, wrapped up in brown paper, at the station. Richard, unknowingly, struggled with it all the way back to Billinge. He was a huge man for his time but with a gentle nature. He used to let the kids ride up Long Fold Brow on the steps of his trap. Those five houses, at the top of Carr Mill Road, have long gone. Across the road, where Billy Birchall, Thomas Birchall's grandson, has

⁹ See Appendix E.

¹⁰ see notes re John Birchall and descendents page 223.

¹¹ See Appendix F – Reminiscences of Billinge.

his fruit shop, there were then two homes at numbers four and six. Ellis Corless resided at number two while Tom Berry lived at number four. His daughter Rachel married Thomas Melling. They lived right at the bottom of Carr Mill Road, at number seventy-seven, by Robinson's Pond, where my dad was born. Henry Hitchen leased Greenfield Farm from Kate Taylor, though his son, Herman, worked the land. They were a deeply religious family, walking to Haydock on Sundays to attend the Baptist Church there. Young Tom Melling, from number forty-one, had just started work for them. In time, influenced by his employers, Tom converted from a rough, tough kid into a life-long, devout Christian. He worked for the Hitchens for fifty-four years and was an integral part of Chadwick Green life for the better part of the entire twentieth century.

On the corner, at the bottom of London Fields, stands the now beautifully renovated Woodstock Cottage. Peter Alker had retired there, from Ashfield Farm in Garswood Road, with his twin sisters, Elizabeth and Margaret. His wealth was part of Billinge folklore. Kate Taylor is listed as the owner of Ashfield Farm in 1929 so it could be that Peter's prosperity originated from the sale of that land to her. He once was in a St Helens store, buying gramophone records, when the salesgirl became concerned about the volume of records he was amassing on the counter. She asked, politely, if he realised how much they cost and if he was sure he could afford them all. He replied,

"Ah cud ufford t' baa t' shop iv ah waantid luv."

His sister Margaret was still living there when I was a kid. She was an old lady then, still dressing in the traditional smock and bonnet of the former century. A Little Owl was always perched in a pigeonhole in the outbuilding, where Peter played his gramophone records. That hole was filled in as part of the restoration. Maggie Alker and the owl have long since gone.

The widowed Ellen Brimilow lived at the bottom of Long Fold Brow in the first of the row of stone cottages that still stand there. Her husband had been one of the more important workers at Brown Heath Colliery but he committed suicide, leaving her to fend for a large family. She worked for Joe Tinsley at Otterswift Farm, on the way to Carr Mill Dam. Red-headed Albert Brimilow was the only kid down Carr Mill Road who supported Wigan. Whichever of the other kids that were interested in Rugby League supported St Helens Rex. Jack Brimilow, the second eldest of the children, married Joe Nelson's sister Alice. Their son Ronald, born 1926, still lives in Claremont Road. Next door to the Brimilows lived Jack Roby with his wife Mary Ann. They had at least two boys and two girls. Mary Ann also worked at Otterswift Farm. These Robys moved away, probably to Huyton, to find work in the mines. Seth Martlew lived at number nineteen with his wife Tet nee Parr. Chris Martlew, one of Seth's sons, eventually took over Len Clough's cobbling shop in Main Street. As children we used to go in there to watch him working, fascinated by the way he could speak with a mouth full of nails. Tom Lowe lived next to the Martlews. His mother, Caroline, formally Parr, was Tet Martlew's sister. Tom's uncle, James Parr, lived next door at number twenty-three. Old James Parr had seven children of his own. His son Jonathan, always called Johnty, was the one nearest my father's age. Edgar Compson lived at number twenty-five, round the corner from the Parr household, in what was known as *The Fold*. His wife, Ester nee Lomax, was another farm girl. There were few employment opportunities for woman those days. Chris Martlew,

originally from number nineteen, married one of their children, Helen Compson, and Bert Rabbit married another, Ann. May Compson married Lawrence Richmond and their son, Alfred, married Jane Berry. Ester Compson's widowed mother, Ellen Lomax, lived next door at number twenty-seven. She raised the illegitimate child May Compson had to a soldier, killed in the First World War. The soldier's name was Nicholson. The child, John, took the name Lomax but always retained the nickname John Niky. At one time there must have been another cottage up the fold but by 1929 it was no longer there. The last cottage up the fold was number thirty-one, housing Levi Berry and his sister Margaret. The street numbers began again on Carr Mill Road at thirty-three where yet another Berry, Robert, was head of the household. Joe Littler lived at thirty-five with at least three daughters. Another former Parr girl, Mary Ann, lived at thirty-seven with her husband Edwin Bellis. One of their children, Ned Bellis, was killed in the First World War. His photograph hangs on the wall in the Olde House at Home. Another child, Ruth, married James John Littler and their children were Wilfred, who died as a three-year-old, Edwin (Ned), Herbert, Albert, Seth, Elsie Marion and Maria.

At the end of the row of cottages that make up Long Fold is a much larger house, at right angles to the road. When my father was fifteen, in the summer of 1929, three families lived there with close to twenty children. Number thirty-nine, known as the *Narrow House*, was a converted washhouse where another Berry family lived with about six children. Henry (Harry) Melling had eight girls, a crippled son who died when he was eleven and a son, Tom, who worked at Hitchen's Farm. They lived at forty-one, a tiny cottage attached to the big house. Harry Melling had an entirely different character to his son Tom. If he got too much to drink at the Mason's Arms he used to sleep under the hedges. The more religious Tom became the more likely his father was to turn the air blue with expletives in his son's company. Edward Swift and his family lived in the larger part of the building, designated number forty-three. Edward worked at Brown Heath Colliery, as did his son Edward. Jacky Swift, another of the sons, became my father's life long companion. The eldest girl, Alice, married Leonard Hill. Their son, Kenneth, lives alone in the property that now comprises what was once three dwellings housing something like thirty individuals.

Barrows Farm, on the right hand corner, was the domain of the Kearsley family. In 1929 Lord Gerard owned the land on which William Kearsley was the tenant farmer. William was the second generation. His father, Thomas, came to Barrows Farm from Arch Lane, via marriage to Alice Ellen Phythian. If any farmer were to be singled out as the subject for an epic on the rural life of Lancashire, Williams' son, George Kearsley, would fit the bill nicely. He fought as a pilot in World War Two, came back to Billinge and expanded the family enterprise until it reached all the way from Carr Mill Dam to Newton Road. Within a decade of his death it was all gone. It's a story that needs scant remark or a full rendering - nothing in between will serve.

Just off Carr Mill Road, along Marsh Grounds, was Chadwick Farm where my father's uncle, Richard Beesley and his wife, Eshter, had moved to from number fifty-nine. This cottage was officially forty-six Carr Mill Road and the two semidetached homes further up Marsh Grounds were officially numbers forty-six A and forty-six B. Those two houses still stand in the midst of the housing estate that obliterated Marsh Grounds. This property will be forever referred to, by what Billingers survive, as Austin Durkin's. Eventually it became one dwelling but in 1929 William Hampson

lived at 46A and Martin Conroy at 46B. Henry Moran married Margaret Conroy 21st November 1882. William Hampson married Bridgett Moran 25th May 1895. The Hampsons and the Conroys were related. Living with William Hampson in 1929 was Mary Ellen Durkin nee Moran and her son, Austin. Legend is that Austin's father was one of two brothers who came over from Ireland, married two Billinge girls, and then took off for Australia. That may be partially true. What is certain is that Austin Durkin was one of the better-known personalities of his generation.

The first record of a Durkin in Billinge is the birth of Mary, born 8th December 1846. Her parents were James Durkin and Helen nee Cunliffe. There is a record of a Helen Cunliffe born 8th July 1838, which may be her, but where James Durkin came from or where he was buried I have no idea. Anna Melia was born 28th February 1894. Her mother was Bridgett nee Durkin, who may have been James Durkin's daughter. A William Durkin, aged eight, from Simms Lane Ends, was buried at Birchley after dying 13th March 1899. Who his parents were is not recorded. John and James Durkin were brothers who seem to have come to Billinge from Simms Lane Ends. Any relationship with James Durkin is speculative but the name is uncommon. The records show that their father was Henry Durkin. Henry was born in 1843 so he is the right age to be James Durkin's son. On the 28th of February 1903, John Durkin married Mary Ellen Moran, who was living in Marsh Grounds at the time. Her family came from the cottage that used to stand near the double bend, down the bottom of Newton Road. John's brother, James, was a witness to the wedding, as was Bridgett Moran from Marsh Grounds. James married Anna McManus 8th August 1903. He is shown to be living at Malt Kiln House. Henry Durkin's burial record shows him to have been living at Malt Kiln House. He died at the age of 57 in 1910. He may have worked at Malt Kiln House or he may have owned it.

John and Mary Helen's first child, Henry, was born 7th January 1904. There are no further Durkins recorded as being baptised at St Mary's prior to 1912, when available records stop. There are three Durkin burials recorded in February 1911, all of them from Marsh Grounds. James Edward died at the age of five on the 5th, Henry aged seven on the 8th and Bridgett aged two on the fifteenth. The next Durkin record is the burial of Bridgett, aged 70, 18th August 1923. If she is the mother of Anna Melia why has she dropped her married name? Thomas Durkin's funeral was 19th November 1946. He was 60, making his probable birth 1886. How he fits in is beyond me. Mary Helen Durkin was buried 28th December 1954 at the age of 71 and Anna Durkin 2nd February 1966, aged 85. These are the two Billinge girls who married the Durkin brothers. A William Durkin was buried February 1972, aged 82 and Austin 16th October 1989 at the age of 79. Whoever this William was he must have been born in 1890. Like Austin he wasn't baptised at St Mary's. It is obvious that Durkins from outside of Billinge were buried at St Mary's and that Durkins born in Billinge were baptised elsewhere.

Of the three Durkin children who died in February 1911, only Henry, the eldest, was baptised at St Mary's. Austin must have been somewhere between four and fifteen months old when the tragedy struck. Sometime later, his father John and his Uncle James both left for Australia and John never returned. James reputedly returned sometime in the early seventies. Austin's mother, Mary Helen, was one of the few people, other than her family, who my grandmother ever spoke to. They didn't visit each other's houses; they met at church on Sundays. My father was an altar boy. His

duties included going to church early to ring the bell and to pump up the organ. Mary Helen Durkin sang in the choir. My father's Aunt Polly was the organist.

Back on Carr Mill Road, at number forty-seven, the widowed Margaret Gaffney¹² lived with her daughter Theresa and three sons, William, Joseph and Thomas. William and Joseph were partners with Edward Taylor in Blackleyhurst Colliery, off Newton Road. Thomas had married one of the William Kearsley's sisters, Jane (24/7/1912), but she died giving birth to a daughter, Edna. Tom Gaffney was Catholic and Jane Kearsley was Church of England. The union caused great friction on both sides. Jane's death served only to exacerbate the situation. Edna grew to be an attractive, intelligent, fun loving girl but she was ostracised by the Kearsleys. She married Jack Curner and they eventually moved into Claremont Road, a few doors down from the house we moved into after leaving Holt Crescent. She is still alive and remarkably healthy. One of her four daughters, Theresa, lives in the old family house in Carr Mill Road. William Harrison lived next door with his wife Elizabeth nee Foster. My grandparents lived over the wall at fifty-one. Their children, including my father, always referred to Elizabeth Harrison as Aunt Lizzy. They never knew why but in the course of this research I think I have discovered the reason. It goes back to my great, great grandmother, Ester Taylor. Her third illegitimate child, Thomas, born in 1853, was my great grandfather. After she married William Harrison, around 1854, her subsequent children were at least half uncles or aunts to my grandfather. Esther gave birth to twins Edward and William in September 1861. William Harrison married Elizabeth Gaffney in 1892 and came to live at 49 Carr Mill Road. Poor Elizabeth went mad because she never conceived a child. She was eventually committed and died in confinement. William Harrison remarried Elizabeth Foster, sister to Francis Foster who lived further down the road. My grandfather probably knew his grandmother's history but would never have told his children. William Harrison was at least his half uncle and maybe even his true uncle. The man she eventually married may well have fathered Ester's three illegitimate children. There were often economic reasons for couples not to marry in those days. Knowing that William Harrison was his uncle, my grandfather probably once referred to his wife as Aunt Lizzy, in the hearing of one of his children and the name stuck. Ironically, this second Elizabeth Harrison produced no children either so poor Elizabeth Gaffney may not have been the cause of the infertility that drove her mad and killed her.

Further down Chadwick Green were the Dixon brothers, at fifty-three and fifty-five. In the two cottages immediately before the Masons Arms lived J T Hogan and William Lomax. William Lomax was a brother to Ester Compson at Long Fold. He survived the Great War but committed suicide by putting his head on the railway track behind Carr Mill Dam. Among his children were Lillian, Doris and William. Miss Bolton, the seamstress, lived opposite at number fifty-six, in the detached stone house that still remains. The two cottages attached to the Masons Arms have long gone. Francis Foster lived in the first one, number sixty-three, and John Hardman next door at sixty-five. Francis Foster's son James was killed in action in World War Two. A

¹² John Gaffney was born in Ireland circa 1826. He moved to Scotland, near Castle Douglas and married Elizabeth, born circa 1812. They came to Billinge to work for Turny (attorney) Heald at Greenfield House and eventually became publicans at Moss Bank. They had three children, John c 1853, James c 1856 and Elizabeth. It was the children of the younger John Gaffney, William and Joseph, who became colliery owners. See also Appendix I

sergeant major from James' battalion, William Haynes, married James' sister, Mary. They moved into number 49 after the Harrisons. Lizzy Harrison was Mary Foster's aunt, not my father's.

Below the Masons Arms¹³, where Margaret Berry was the innkeeper, Billinge ended. The remaining section of Carr Mill Road was in Winstanley. William Kearsley farmed Barrows Farm on Lord Gerard's land and William Robinson farmed Tanyard House Farm on Squire Bankes' land. There is a 1922 rate book for Winstanley in St Helens Library but none so early for Billinge. The earliest rate book for Billinge still in existence is dated 1929. In attempting to reconstruct the Billinge of my father's youth, I used this later rate record to extract the names of those living in the Billinge part of Carr Mill Road and to jog my father's memory. I will continue, using names recorded in the earlier Winstanley record.

Below the Masons Arms and its two adjoining cottages are three redbrick houses, built by William Robinson in 1911. In 1922 Bill Martlew lived in the first, number sixty-seven, with his wife, Martha Alice nee Swift. Martha Alice wasn't one of the Swift family from Long Fold, she was the orphaned child of a Swift family from Longshaw. She went into service at Tanyard House Farm with her Aunt Lydia. There she met and married Bill Martlew. She died giving birth to a daughter during the strike of 1926. Bill moved back to Long Fold, to live with his parents. His mother's sister, Wilhelmina, also died soon after childbirth. Seth and Tet Martlew helped raise her child, Minnie Parr, whose son, Richard Donald Lewis, wrote *The Billingers*. Fred Williams, a mysterious Welshman, lived at sixty-nine. He cultivated a plot of land, formally Plum Tree Croft¹⁴, behind the Masons Arms and was noted for the quality of his tomatoes. Fred was a skilled wheelwright. He made a small handcart for my father to collect horse manure. There was more horse muck than diesel fumes those days. Mary Atherton was the head of the household at number seventy-one, the last of these three redbrick houses. James Robinson, the eldest of William Robinson's two sons, lived at seventy-five. He married Hannah Hayes from Orrell, a relative of the Hayes family at Lime Grove Orchards. Hannah was in service at Greenfield Farm when she met James Robinson. Their children were Thomas and Lillian. Further down Carr Mill Road, on the right hand side, there was a small plot of land known as Ellen Ann's Garden. Two fine pear trees still grew there when I was a child but have since been needlessly cut down. Ellen Ann Rigby used to take in children from Greenfield Orphanage. She opened the gate, blocking the road at that point, when horses and carriages, heading for Greenfield House, warranted admittance. The cottage where Ellen Ann Rigby lived had disappeared by 1922. The foundations were still evident when my father played there as a boy. It was a meeting place for the children of Chadwick Green, which included Lola Williams, Lillian Robinson, Daisy Millington, Mary Foster and Ethel Tinsley among the Chadwick Green girls that the boys from Billinge used to chase.

Across from this spot is Tanyard House Farm, then home to William Robinson. Edward Platt and his family lived next to the farm at number seventy-five. Mrs Platt

¹³ The initials FHS on the datestone of the Masons Arms stand for Henry and Sarah Fairshurst. They owned the cottages on either side of the pub, which have now been demolished. Their great grandson, Robert Rigby, was a stonemason. He took over the pub some time after 1871 and that is probably how the pub got its name. (Margaret Whittle)

¹⁴ See endnotes about Plum Tree Croft.

was somewhat obsessed with cleanliness. She was reputed to wash her money. These Platts were involved in mining coal at Neston, by the River Dee. When that colliery developed trouble due to water penetration, they may have taken over Birchley Colliery. Peter Hitchen and Mr Moss were co-owners prior to 1911 when Birchley Colliery was taken over by Billinge Collieries Limited. The Platts had cousins who lived near Lime Vale Farm. Carr Mill Arley Colliery was behind that house, managed by the Platts. Joe Leadbetter, a fine cricketer, moved into seventy-nine after my grandfather moved his family up the road to number fifty-one. He came from Pemberton, in the heart of the Orrell Coalfield, to be a winder at Brown Heath Colliery. He did not stay long. Thomas, brother of Harry Melling from number forty-one, took his place in the tiny cottage by the pond. These two brothers, and their sister Elizabeth, were the orphaned grandchildren of Lydia Robinson nee Melling's sister Elizabeth¹⁵. Lydia, was the daughter of Richard Melling, one time landlord of the Hare and Hounds.

Across the fields at Startham Hall, built by Squire Bankes in 1734, were two families, headed by Joseph Mason and Aaron Heyes. Jack Heyes, the son of Aaron Heyes, was so moved by his childhood at Startham Hall that he later wrote poetry about it.¹⁶ I traced him to a nursing home at Moss Bank, still upset at George Kearsley for knocking The Startham down. Jane Hayes was head of the household at Lime Grove Orchards; always known as Bob Senney's after her husband Robert's father. Senney was probably a nickname. Almost everyone from Billinge had a nickname. One of Jane Hayes' daughters married William Thomas Foster from Fair View. They went to live at sixty-seven Carr Mill Road when Bill Martlew vacated after his wife died in childbirth. Another of her daughters, Ami, married Albert Atherton from Newton Road. They ran a fruit business and she is reputed to be the first woman in Billinge to have driven a truck. The path from Bob Senney's across to Birchley Road passes through a dip where a brook runs through. That swampy region was known as the *Toad Holes*. Further along, at Lime Vale, William and Walter Platt lived at the big house, while Peter Lomax, father of the champion skater Jimmy Lomax, lived in the small cottage adjacent, now named Otterswift Cottage. The Carr Mill Arley Colliery was still in production behind the Platt's house in 1929. William Abbott farmed Lime Vale Farm until his death in November 1928. That farm had been in possession of the Abbot family for 103 years in 1928 and still is. Harry Abbot is the current occupier.

The relationship between the farmers at the bottom end of Billinge is interesting. It demonstrates the way control of the critical agricultural industry was retained.

Sometime between 1852 – 1858, James and Mary Ashton came from Lowton to take over the lease of Caleb's Farm, later called Carr Mill Dam Farm, previously leased from Sir David Gamble by a Birchall family. Caleb Birchall also gave his name to Caleb's Gates (usually known as Top Two Gates), Caleb's Cottage and Caleb's Wood. How his family lost the farm is unknown. The Ashtons had a large family. They left an unusual inscription on their gravestone in Saint Aidan's.

*Sown in corruption – raised in corruption
We shall sleep but not forever
There will be a glorious dawn*

¹⁵ See Appendix K.

¹⁶ See Appendix G.

*We shall meet to part no never
On the resurrection morn*

The descendants of the second eldest son, William¹⁷, still farm The Lawns at Tontine. Their youngest child, James, born 4th April 1858, was ordained as a minister and, after a stint in Canada, became a cleric of some note in Ireland. Surprisingly, the farm passed on to a daughter, Hannah. She married Joseph Tinsley from Thatto Heath, February 9 1875. It is they who probably changed the name to Otterswift Farm. Joseph Tinsley's daughter, Sarah Ellen, married Edward Abbot, the son of William Abbot from Lime Vale Farm. They took over the running of Moss Bank Farm. William Abbot's son William married Susan Redfern from Orritts House Farm, 15th October 1908. The other Tinsley children were Ann, John, Thomas, James, Robert, Ethel Mary and Joseph. John, Ethel Mary and Joseph worked Otterswift Farm between them. After their parents died and they had all retired, they sold Otterswift to Jimmy Abbot, the son of William Abbot who worked Lime Vale Farm and owned Fir Tree Farm at Kings Moss. James Tinsley married William Robinson's daughter Margaret 27th July 1904 and went to live at Brown Heath Nook Farm, adjacent to Brown Heath Colliery. Their children were Mary Lydia, Ethel, John and Hannah. Mary Ann Robinson, the second of Old William's daughters, married John Bradburn from Gladden-Hey Farm 27th January 1904. Between them, these intermarried farming families held interests in at least eight farms in 1929 - if carefully researched there will certainly be others.

There is certainly a connection between the Abbots and the Kearsleys. William Abbot married Elizabeth Phythian 24th April 1869. Tom Kearsley married her sister, Alice Ellen, from Barrows Farm. Mosses Phythian, then farming at Goose Green, married Jane Turner, daughter of John Turner from Windy Arbour Farm, 6th April 1904. Tom Kearsley came from a Family farming in Arch Lane. His son William married Annie Birchall from 24 Main Street 15th October 1908 and his grandson, George, would become perhaps the most successful farmer Billinge ever produced. He was a large-scale producer of pigs and poultry and his fields produced every vegetable imaginable.

When he died in November 1928, William Abbott had farmed at Lime Vale for 65 years. He left two sons, two daughters and twenty grandchildren to mourn his passing. The mourners listed at the funeral included his sons William and Edward, grandsons James Abbot, Edward Abbott Waterworth, James Waterworth, William Abbott Waterworth, sons-in-law Thomas Waterworth and James Waterworth, brothers-in-laws John Alker and Thomas Kearsley, nephews Moses Phythian John Birchall and other farmers and landowners including J Petty, E Moyers, W Platt, J Tinsley, J Jones and Mr G H Banks of Winstanly Hall.

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There was no television those days. You made your own entertainment or went without. My dad was a bit of an organiser as a school kid, arranging football games with kids from neighbouring areas such as Red Cat, Kings Moss, Garswood and Longshaw. He remembers that Bert Mitchell¹⁸ always use to fight with Arthur Bell

¹⁷ William Ashton, 1840-1900, was another noted speed skater.

¹⁸ Bert's parents, Tom & Ann, lived at 13 Fair View. His grandmother 'owd Meg, came from the Quaker Cottages, near Gladden Hey Farm in Ashton Road

from Red Cat and that after one game Bert tempted Arthur away from his own territory, closer to Gores Lane Bridge, whereupon the whole Billinge team gave Arthur and his sole companion a good hiding. It did not always work out that way though. When my dad and his brother Frank had been pulled out of Birchley School to attend Holy Cross in St Helens, the Long Fold boys arrived behind St Helens Town Hall for a football game, arranged by my father, but only a couple of the other team turned up. They walked back home up North Road to go over Moss Bank but noticed a gang of St Helens boys playing football in Victoria Park and challenged them. The Billingers won at soccer so the St Helens boys challenged them to a game of Rugby League. As the Billingers didn't know how to play League properly, the game soon degenerated into a fight from which the St Helens boys emerged triumphant. Tommy Melling led this particular group of Billinge kids, by virtue of his age and strength. John (Niky) Lomax, Tommy Brimilow, Ned Bellis (son of Edward Bellis killed in WW1), Jimmy and Jacky Swift, Jonathan (Johnty) Parr, my father and his brother Frank were the others from down Carr Mill Road. The two kids from Billinge proper who hung around with them were Albert Littler (Ned's brother) from The Rant and Tommy Ratcliff from Piccadilly. Those who could afford it put a penny a week into the kitty for a new football. Tommy Radcliff was trusted to be treasurer. He was a particularly good singer. He and Jesse Foster were very popular around Christmas when they went around together, carol singing.

Football was always the main sport in Billinge. There were several teams over the years; Old Birchley, Birchley, The Prims, Shamrock Rovers, Billinge Juniors, Billinge Albion and St Aidan's Sunday School teams. The best team Billinge ever produced was when Billinge Juniors had a team in the Lancashire Alliance. There were at least six football fields below Billinge Church. There was one between Pingot Road and Newton Road, behind where the cinema used to stand, one across Main Street, between Malt House and the Olde House at Home, one between Garswood Road and Carr Mill Road, another behind Long Fold and one either side of Birchley Road. My dad played for Billinge Juniors under eighteen's but changed football teams to Orrell YMCA when he started to train for boxing there with a professional, Hiram Gaskell. Bill Huxley, the butcher, was another kid who trained at the YMCA for boxing. Where Marsh Grounds ran into Birchley Road, nowadays Trent Road, there used to be a sports club, run by St Mary's. Its local name was The Casino. Tom Callon used to train there. He was supposed to be the best boxer in Billinge though my grandfather reckoned his brother Thomas could beat him. Tom Callon lived with Joe Roby's family, at the splendid, detached stone house, situated at the corner of Fair View and Gorsey Brow. That was one of the homes, with a makeshift gymnasium in the cellar, where the would-be Billinge pugilists used to train. Probably due to the inspiration of local champions such as Peter Kayne and Nel Tarlton, lots of the local kids aspired to boxing. There was always a punch bag at Carr Mill Road. Some, including my father, graduated to the boxing club at Low House in St Helens. One of the makeshift gyms was at the Olde House at Home. Tom Bold lived there then. My dad liked sparring with Tom because he was a couple of stone heavier and exceptionally tough. He could hit Tom as hard as he could without hurting him. To illustrate that point my dad told the tale of when Tom and he were riding their bikes, flat stick, down the St Helens side of Moss Bank. Tom's wheel locked, throwing him over the handlebars. Tom just got up as if nothing had happened. It would have killed a normal bloke. Tom Bold's father was also named Tom. My father cannot remember him but

remembers his own father telling him that old Tom Bold was the strongest man ever to live in Billinge.

When his brother Frank started mating with Maurice Beesley, in my time a much-feared teacher at Birchley School, he persuaded my father to play football for St James's. He played there until after the War when he was in his thirties. Among the better soccer players of my father's generation were the Lowe brothers Jack, Hugh, Bill and Lloyd, the Green brothers Billy, Peter, Harry, and Jimmy, Oswald Litter¹⁹, Peter Middlehurst²⁰, John Roby²¹, Stanley Liptrot, Ned Wayne, Tommy Littler and Frank Dillon.

If he wasn't anything special as a football player my old man was a bit better than average as a fisherman. He had a good background as far as fishing goes. When old Jem Parr finished his day's work down the pit he would go fishing all night at Carr Mill Dam. As a child my father often stayed until well after dark with old Jim, as he fished, by the light of a carbide lamp, to help feed his family. Dick Beesley, my father's uncle, often took my dad fishing, as did his great uncle Frank Cunliffe. But what really got my father into match fishing was a trip organised by Bert Rigby from Haydock when he worked as a bricklayer at Pilkingtons. Those days, just before the Second World War, bricklayers could earn better money building retorts for the industrial glass giant than they could by building houses. Many, including my father, did both. Bert Rigby was a keen fisherman, spending all his free time at Carr Mill Dam. When my mother's father heard about this trip he fixed my father up with the necessary tackle and bait for match fishing and because of that he won both matches. After that success he was hooked. Over the years from 1945 to 1970 he organised fishing clubs at the Brown Cow, the Labour Club, St James's and Bispham Club. More often than not he got in the money. He reckons that Ned Littler was the best match fisherman of his generation - probably the best poacher too.

A fishing trip was always a welcome occasion. Club members would pay a weekly subscription then use the money to go on two or three fishing trips throughout the year. A typical trip would start with the coach leaving the pub about ten in the morning. There were always a few crates of beer on board so those who wanted an early start could get one. Those who started drinking early rarely won the money. Occasionally they would end up in the canal. Often two matches were fished during the course of the day. It depended on how far they were going and what time the pubs opened. A two hour match in the morning followed by a couple of hours in the pub then another two hour match in the afternoon, before heading to the nearest big town for a night on the drink, was the usual format. When the pubs closed they would all get back on the coach and arrive back in Billinge about two in the morning. Some participants were keener than others about the fishing but for all and sundry it was a day away from the routine of work, wife and family. Thomas Berry from Holt Avenue, also known as 'Owd T Berry', was usually the life and soul of these outings. 'Owd T Berry' was one of those uniquely Billinge characters, like Jimmy Roughly and Wild Jacky Frodsham, that everyone has a story about. He wasn't a great fisherman but he was part and

¹⁹ Oswald's son, Frank Littler, went to West Park CGS and became one of the best rugby union players ever from Billinge. He was a regular first team player for Orrell Rugby Union for years and the first ever Orrell RU player to score a try at Twickenham.

²⁰ Owd P Nat, later a famous bowler. I remember him beating Harry Green at the Dragon around 1967.

²¹ My mother's uncle

parcel of the day's enjoyment. His mother was Jane Berry, who married Joe Chisnall. Her brother John, known as 'Killy', helped her raise young Thomas. Her subsequent four children, all daughters, died young. Her husband, Joe Chisnall, born 13th September 1870, committed suicide by drowning in a pond on Madox Farm. His body was found 4th March 1928. Thomas, who was to become 'Owd T', married Mary Roughley, 13th April 1918, and raised four children, Tom, Joe, Jane and Denis. 'Owd T' lived to be ninety and will never be forgotten by those who knew him.

Because of these fishing trips, to various stretches of canals within driving range of the village, a generation of Billinge males grew familiar with such names as Glasson Dock, Garstang, Copper Kettle, Beaston Castle, Golgate, Mollington, Tarleton, and Red Rock.

All the fishing clubs in any one area, run from various pubs, belonged to a Centre. Billinge was in Orrell Centre. Once a year there would be a team competition for all clubs in a Centre and the Orrell Centre competition was the Foster Cup. In the early 1950s the Labour Club team, comprising Ned Littler, Bert Foster, Little Burt Corday, Jimmy Cunliffe and my father, won the Foster Cup. Bert Corday won the Taylor cup for highest individual catch of the day. That was a pretty good achievement in its time. Other noted match fishermen of that era were William Cunliffe and Jimmy Mousdell from the Oddfellows and Len and Joe Swift from the Hare and Hounds. I got into the match-fishing scene as it was coming to its finale. Affluence finished match fishing in Billinge. Once club members started coming to matches in their own cars and leaving for home after the match it killed the social side of fishing trips, which is what they were all about in the first place. I won the odd match in my time but was never a serious contender. Tony Hilton, another of my generation, went on to win his section of the All England twice. That is probably the highest achievement a Billinge born match fisherman has managed to attain though Barry Foster, son of Bert Foster, is considered by many to be one of the best match fishermen the village has ever produced.

My dad was also a cricketer. It was another popular village sport. He was captain of Billinge second team from the end of the War until the club was disbanded and the field used for building council houses²². That would be about 1950. He and Jack Lowe once bowled Dalton out for seven runs. My dad got five for four and Jack Lowe got five for three. Jesse Foster once returned bowling averages of six for one and nine for nine. Bill Derbyshire was the only batsman to score a century for the team and my father was the only bowler to get a hat trick. I can just remember running onto the cricket field as a toddler and my father catching me in his arms then carrying me back to the pavilion as spectators laughed and applauded. Little Bert Ward played a big part in the organisation of that cricket club and was more often than not the home team umpire. He was not averse to giving a favourable decision. Once, during a critical game, when one of the away batsmen was looking like winning the game single-handed, Bert whispered to my father, who was bowling,

“Just hit him on the legs Tommy.”

²² After the team folded many former players joined Bispham Cricket Club. See 'One Man's Pitch' by David Young.

My dad put one down the on side and appealed when the batsman padded it away. Bert gave him out LBW. The batsman was naturally upset.

“That wasn’t out.”

Bert came back with the reply that put him forever into local folklore.

“Look in next week’s Reporter and you’ll see if it was out or not.”

Regular first team players, before and after the War, were the headmaster of Billinge School, Luke Barton, his brother John Barton, John Willie Haseldon, Billy Tommy Foster, Ted Halliwell, Fred Birchall, Oswald Littler and the team’s best bowler Fred Garner. On the second team were the Melling brothers, Cyril and Ken, Jack Berry, Jack Lowe, Jim McNamara, my uncle Bill and the landlord of the Labour in Vain, Arthur Edmonson. This same Arthur Edmonson was also one of the best dart players in the village, maybe even the best. He wasn’t a Billinger and left the village before he was able to establish himself, though no sport is more likely to provoke controversy when discussing the merits of its participants than darts.

Darts spread to Billinge from Manchester after the War. The first dart board in the area was at The Grapes Hotel. The game caught on and replaced the previous popular pub game of rings. Ten teams formed the inaugural Billinge dart league of 1952 with my dad as president, my Uncle Bill as secretary and Terry Frayne as treasurer. The Labour in Vain topped the league with 25 points from eighteen games and took out the Kearsley Challenge Shield. The Chapel End Labour Club got the McLoughlin Challenge Shield as runners up with 24 points. Ned Littler won the Liptrot Cup for the individual knockout championship. Terry Picton won the Nelson Cup for best individual performance throughout the year. Early players of prominence were Arthur Edmunson, Frank Taylor, Bill Taylor, Terry Frayne, Harold Bradshaw, Jimmy Cunliffe, Jimmy Moyers, Harold and Wilf Barton, Harold Foster, George Boothroyd, Frank Liptrot and Albert Tickle.

The following 1953/54 season, the Labour Club won the league. The team for that year included my grandfather, my father, Uncle Bill, Ned Littler, Jimmy Roper and Timmy Frodsham. In the crucial game against the Labour-in-Vain, with the scores locked at three all, my grandfather beat my Uncle Frank, captain of the opposing team, to clinch the victory. He was so annoyed at having to beat his own son that he wouldn’t shake hands with his own team members.

There is a slight difference between good pub throwers and money throwers, probably a matter of temperament. Two names came to dominate the Billinge dart scene, Richard (Dicky) Melling and Steven (Stee) Dickinson. When it came to playing for money these two were as good as anybody in England, as their achievements provide adequate testimony. It will always be a point of contention as to who was the better player, as long as those who can remember them survive. There will be others who will argue that Wilf Barton was better than either of them. He was certainly on par. They played each other dozens of times, each registering their share of wins and losses. For me, the name I associate with darts will always be Dicky Melling.

He beat my father in his first money match and that was the last time my dad played for money. After that he arranged Dicky's matches and, together with Jacky Swift and my Uncle Bill, managed the young superstar through nineteen successive victories in his first year as a money thrower. There is no way of knowing how many times Dicky played for money or what his overall record was. In my father's 1956 diary²³ I can see that he beat Harold Barton 4-3 on the 31st of March, Harold Bradshaw 4-3 on the 28th of April, and Jacky Spenser 4-3 on the 5th of May, the same day Manchester United beat Birmingham 3-1 in the Cup Final. That particular match emphasises what was special about Dicky Melling as well as any.

These days, in professional dart tournaments, who ever goes up first wins the game. That gives a tremendous advantage to the person who throws first. It's much fairer to play equal darts, which was the way all money matches used to be arranged. With the score at three all Spenser went up, treble fourteen double eighteen, leaving Dicky two darts to finish. Dicky liked to finish on double top but he'd made a mess of his finishing sequence. Having twenty-one left with his last dart on the previous throw, he'd singled the nineteen to leave double one instead of five to leave double eight. Now, with two darts in hand, if he hit double one with his first dart he won. If he got it with the second he drew the game and they would play another game to decide the outcome. On the marker, with the entire match resting on that first dart, he turned round and said he would bet anyone in the pub half a crown that he won. Straight away one of Spenser's backers took the bet to put Dicky off. It made no difference. Dicky went back on the marker and buried double one with the first dart. That is what made Dicky Melling so special. The more pressure that was on the better he threw. He was always the best man to have throwing last for a team. If the match depended on Dicky winning the last game you knew that he would do it. The money wasn't important to Dicky - he played for the adulation. If the entire world had been watching when Dicky had just one dart to hit the double he couldn't miss it. He was to darts what Billy Boston was to rugby league or Muhammad Ali was to boxing.

For the rest of that year he beat Jacky Spenser 4-1 in a re-match on the 12th of May, Stee Dickinson 3-1 on the 3rd of November, lost 3-2 to Stee Dickinson on the 10th of November, beat Bill Smith 3-0 on the 16th of December and beat Stee Dickinson 3-1, three days before Christmas. On February the 25th that same year I went to Carr Mill Dam and amazed my grandfather by getting straight onto the ice and skating. He could not understand how I could do that but there were no roller skates in his days. It was the year an American Super Sabre jet fighter crashed in the field behind Makin's Farm, Devon Loch fell over an imaginary fence in the Grand National Jim Laker took ten wickets for 88, playing against Australia and my parents celebrated their twenty-first wedding anniversary. I turned eleven years old that October.

By the time I was old enough to get in the pubs legally Dicky had given the game away then made a comeback. I followed and backed him in dozens of matches and more often than not I chalked the board. It's an advantage to have your man chalking. He can make little mistakes at crucial moments, just as the other player throws for double. He won a lot more than he lost and gave a younger generation moments we will always remember. In a way it was like Ali's come back; sometimes it was heart

²³ That year Wilf and Harold Barton, Ned Littler, Jimmy Rooper, Jimmy Cunnlife, Joe Berry and Jack Rose played for the Labour Club. Terry Picton, Cliff Leigh, Steve Derbyshire, Jimmy Atherton, Ronnie Lyon & my dad played for the Brown Cow.

breaking to see him beaten by kids he could have wiped the floor with, sometimes he displayed the magic that was his alone. The Billinge dart league had folded in my time though some of the pubs had teams in other competitions. The area's top team in the 60's and 70's was the Delph Tavern, when Bill Painter was the landlord. The Delph Tavern continually won the prestigious Burtonwood Rosebowl with a team that included the five top players from Wigan - Joe and Pat Brown, Arthur Yarwood, Dicky Walls and Fred Chadwick. The automatic choices from Billinge were Tony Rabbit and Dicky Melling. Those final two places on that star studded team was contested for by the likes of Bill Price, Tony Hilton, and Brain Waite - great players in their own rights if just a shade behind the others. My father was non-plying captain of that team. He always saved Dicky for the last game, just in case it was vital. Dicky Melling is dead now. He was killed at work when a building being demolished collapsed on top of him. He twice saved my father's life by pulling him, in the nick of time, from collapsing trenches. When my father gets to that pub in heaven I know who will be waiting on the dartboard.

It's a fair assumption that bowls came to Billinge with the opening of the first bowling green. When that might have been I have no idea. We all know about Francis Drake and there must have been pubs in Billinge a long way back. The oldest surviving pub with a bowling green is the Holts Arms – named after the Holt family - in Crank Road, which was built in 1721 but that might have been too far away for most Billingers to use regularly. Bowls, like darts, needs lots of practice. The Eagle and Child was built in 1745 and there was a bowling green at the Stork Hotel, built, in its present manifestation, in 1752. A closer look at the Stork seems to indicate it was built around an earlier medieval dwelling²⁴. It was on the Stork green that my father had his first ever game of bowls, with James Foster who lived in one of the two cottages attached to the Masons Arms. James was killed in the Second World War. But the bowling green that was always the base for Billinge's bowling fraternity is at the George and Dragon. In 1825 the landlord was Thomas Mather²⁵. If he was the first landlord or not or when that pub was built I have been as yet unable to discover but it would have been some time after those further up the road. My grandfather played bowls for the Dragon. The names that came down from the generation before his are Jimmy Gee, Peter Garner (who probably entered the Waterloo and the Talbot), Bill Foster from the Stork and Owd Nat²⁶ - the character on the Dragon team in those days. Billinge has produced a lot of characters. One of those was Enoch (Nucky) Picton.

Nucky, coming from Haydock, wasn't strictly a Billinger but he married one, Ethel Gee. He became landlord at the George & Dragon for a while in the fifties but when

²⁴ These words are taken from *Ghosts of the North* By Tony Ellis but he does not give his source – 'Halfway between St Helens and Wigan, the Stork Hotel was built in 1717, on the site of an older inn that was built in 1640. The crypt of the old building, which is now used as the cellars of the more modern Stork Hotel, was used to incarcerate Royalist prisoners during the Civil War'.

²⁵ See *History, Directory & Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster* vol 11 by Edward Baines. Also mentioned: Thomas Birchall-wheelwright, John Cowley-gentleman, Simon Dixon-joiner, John Liptrott-schoolmaster, John Eaton-quarry owner, Rev John Penswick-priest at Birchley Hall, William Haward-landlord Stork Hotel, Henry Pemberton-gentleman, Thomas Petty-overseer, Michal Roby-landlord Eagle & Child, Thomas Tasker-tanner, Thomas Wilcock-miller.

²⁶ Nat is the nickname of the Middlehurst family. This Owd (old) Nat was the father of Owd P (Peter) Nat, one of the best bowlers and footballers of the next generation.

the bowling team failed to fulfil its fixtures for two consecutive seasons he stopped mowing the green and put a donkey on it. Wild Jacky Frodsham, another famous character, used to tempt the donkey into the pub with a packet of crisps. Getting the donkey out again was another story; many a table got kicked over in the process. When Nucky eventually sold the stubborn animal, the purchasers could not get it into the trailer. Nucky closed the pub door and left them to it. The last Billinge saw of the beast was it trotting along towards Southport, tied to the back of the trailer.

The green at the Eagle & Child is a bit easier to play on than the Dragon and the kids of my father's generation, Jonathan Parr, Bert Littler, Gerard Malone and Jimmy Ashall, learned to play there. It cost two pence to practice on the green all day. The first team my father played for was St James's. He had just started to play football for the same club when, one evening, watching the bowling, he remarked that he could beat any of those playing. The team captain heard the remark and replied, "You better sign on then." That was the start of his bowling career. In 1939 he and George Hilton were St James's entrants to the Cathedral Cup, a competition open to all CYMS clubs in the Liverpool Diocese. That year it was played at the Black Bull in St Helens and my father won it. He considers that win to be his best achievement in bowling apart from beating Brian Dunkan 21-13 at the George & Dragon the only time he ever played him. Brian Dunkan is the best bowler Billinge ever produced. Among his many achievements are five victories in the Waterloo and one in the Talbot. These two competitions are regarded as the ultimate in bowling prowess. The first person born in Billinge to win either was my uncle, Billy Hienikey, who won the Waterloo in 1964. Billy, who married my mother's sister Edna May Roby, was by that time living in Birmingham. His brother George still lives in Beacon Road.

When he got seriously into match fishing my dad gave up bowling. Eventually Bill Marshall took over the George & Dragon whereupon he organised a restoration of the neglected bowling green, which had become a village scandal. The Ribble bus never passed the Dragon without Billingers on the upstairs deck looking over the wall and passing scathing comments about the state of the green. Joe Nelson was the man who eventually got the green back to its former glory. Joe was a bit of a character himself. He had an acrimonious marriage break-up that left Joe to pay the alimony. It was against Joe's principles to do this. From that moment on he refused to get a job. He went into prison periodically, for the mandatory six-week spell allocated to non-payers of maintenance, for most of his life. His ex-wife lived a long time but Joe never faltered. When she eventually died Joe was an old man. He got a job immediately with the local council. I worked with him there for while - so did Nucky Picton. Joe used to put seven spoons of tea and two of sugar in his brew can. None of us co-workers ever had a cup of tea from Joe. It was like drinking treacle. Joe Nelson was a top-class bowler. He taught my father the marks on the tricky George and Dragon green.

Bert Rabbit, who organised the first team after the green's restoration, talked my father into coming out of retirement. The clinching argument that brought my father back to the Dragon was that his brother, Frank, had also decided to play for them. Being a new team they got a good handicap and won the Greenall's League Championship. It was 1965. There's a trophy, commemorating that victory, on the shelf at home. My dad turned 52 in 1965. He continued playing bowls for different clubs up until a couple of years ago. Though he smoked cigarettes for most of his

adult life and drank beer for all of it, my father still possesses a nimble mind and an excellent memory. He walks up the road to Bispham Club for a couple of pints most weekdays and can speak with authority on any number of topics. No doubt his genealogy plays a part in that, he comes from a long-lived family. But I tend to think a lifelong involvement in sport has been a major contributing factor to his amazing perseverance.

Francis, the fifth born, was, in my father's opinion, the most academically gifted child in the family. He was born at Tanyard House Farm 22nd August 1916. There was some dispute between the nuns at Birchley School and his Aunt Polly, headmistress of the Infants School. Francis was not entered for his scholarship. His father took both he and his elder brother, Thomas, out of Birchley and entered them at Holy Cross School in St. Helens. From there Francis won a scholarship to the prestigious St. Francis Xavier Collage at Liverpool. Whist at St Francis Xavier he won a boxing championship in which he defeated the son of Johnny Best, then boxing promoter at Liverpool Stadium.

Francis trained to be a chemist but shortly after starting in that profession the Second World War started and he was conscripted. Soon after joining up he caught meningitis, was invalided out and almost died. He never went back to being a chemist. After the war he started work at Pilkington's and stayed there till retirement. In those days Pilkingtons functioned round the clock. If Frank had to work night shift on Christmas Day he always went to Midnight Mass first. The company used to pay one-pound bonus at Christmas but he always gave it back because five shillings tax was deducted. He married Winifred Minton, a girl from Longshaw, and fathered one child, Irene. Irene is six months older than I, born 27th April 1945. We were in the same class at Birchley School. Irene went on to Grange Park Grammar School in St. Helens. She married Ken Ashurst 3rd March 1962 when she was seventeen. She has three children, two girls and a boy. Her two grandchildren, together with my sister Enid's grandchild, are this family's latest generation. None of these grandchildren carry the Taylor name.

Frank was a good sportsman, just about unbeatable on his local bowling green at Carr Mill. He was captain of the Labour-in-Vain dart team in the early fifties and a good amateur boxer in his early days. He was a great walker, like his father; as far as I remember he never rode a bike or drove a car and rarely caught the bus. I remember him as a soft-spoken kindly man, who, for whatever reason, chose never to take advantage of his academic capabilities. My Uncle Frank died 27th October 1989 aged 73. Winifred nee Minton, his wife, died 3rd November 1998 aged 81.

William, the last child born at Tanyard House Farm, came into the world 8th May 1919. He passed his scholarship and went to West Park Catholic Grammar School in St. Helens. Unfortunately for him, he passed his eleven plus a year early and was therefore one of the youngest in his class. When I passed my eleven plus as a ten-year-old, he advised that I should be held back a year. This did not happen and consequentially my time at Grammar School wasn't easy. It wasn't easy for Bill either. He was twenty at the outbreak of the Second World War and served throughout as a pilot in the Royal Air Force. He did not rise high enough in the ranks to join the civil air force after the war and became a teacher. Next to my grandfather he probably had more effect on my personality than any other relation. He was a free

thinker, doubting that the Holy Eucharist of the Catholic Mass transubstantiates into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, creator of the Universe. It seems a bit unlikely to me and that is probably Bill's doing. Because of my Uncle Bill I'm a reasonable swimmer. He used to collect me after school five nights a week and take me to Boundary Road Baths in St Helens. Twice a week we would go back to the Baths for swimming lessons so I was swimming seven times in five days and going on Saturday mornings with the local kids. Going to the Majestic Cinema on Friday nights and St Helens Baths on Saturday mornings was our principle form of entertainment until we were old enough to get in the pubs. For most of us, that occurred about the age of fifteen. We were all seasoned drinkers by the time we attained the legal drinking age of eighteen.

Bill was one of the few locals who owned a car when I was a kid. He used to take me with his mother, father, and sister Helen to Ainsdale Beach on Saturdays. So great an impression did these trips to the seaside leave that I can still remember the registration number of his first car – BV 9095. He was a member of West Park Old Boys Cricket Club. He took me to matches where I learned to mark the scorebook. He liked to back horses and took me to racecourses all round the country. Bangor-on-Dee is the racetrack I remember best. He married late in life, on the 15th April 1963, to Marian Wilson, a girl from Stowmarket that he'd met in his time with the Royal Air Force. My Uncle Bill bought the house at 94 Rainford Road from his Aunt Polly and moved in with Marian. Their only child, Paul - cousin to Enid, Irene and I - was born there 25th February 1966. Marian was never happy in Billinge and eventually they moved back to Stowmarket. Paul was a difficult child and this fact may have contributed to my Uncle Bill committing suicide 29th April 1980 aged 60. I found myself in the Stowmarket area this year and called in to see Marian for an hour or so. Paul wasn't home. She said he was living with a woman somewhere in the area. If Paul produces a male child then the name might progress to another generation. So far he hasn't done so.

Sarah Helen, the last child, was born 4th May 1921 at the new home up Carr Mill Road. She still lives there. She passed her scholarship and was educated at Notre Damme High School for Girls at St. Helens. My Aunt Nelly never married. She stayed home and looked after her parents. For years she worked for a chemist in St. Helens but when Molly came home from Redcar she changed professions to become a nurse. She retired in 1981 at the age of sixty; a year after Adam Bell died in 1980. She and Molly stayed together until Molly herself died in 1996. Only two of **Francis** Taylor's children will see out the twentieth century. His four grandchildren, his eight great grandchildren and his three (four if the Stork comes on time²⁷) great, great grandchildren will all see in the new millennium. None of them will connect the event to him quite like I will. He was right. He will have been gone a long time when the day comes.

My grandfather, Frank Taylor, died 28th July 1965 aged 86. Helen, my grandmother, died 12th July 1962 aged 81. Frank was thoroughly working class. Helen came from a more sedate upbringing. My grandmother never engaged in debate. Her response to any attempt to involve her in sensitive discussion was met with her stock phrase,

²⁷ It did not turn out that way. The fourth great, great grandchild was born just after the millennium.

“You believe what you believe and I believe what I believe.”

She was a kind, gentle and immensely private person. She rarely passed an opinion and never tried to impose one. Her thoughts were entirely her own. William was her favourite child. He and Sarah Helen took after their mother whereas the other three children tended towards her husband. She once said to William,

“Your father thinks he knows me but he doesn’t.”

They’d been married for fifty years.

James Taylor, the fifth born child of **Thomas** and Sara, married Jane McLoughlin 30th November 1912. He was killed in action 1917 aged 32. His remains lie in grave 1 B 13 at the Welsh Cemetery at Ieper, West Vlaanderen, Belgium. He left no children. Jane never remarried. She stayed faithful to her husband’s memory to her grave. She was one of the daughters of two Irish immigrants, James McLoughlin from Dublin and Mary Murphy. James, a collier, found lodgings in Fair View with another Irishman, the uncle of Mary Murphy and her sister, both working in the cotton mills in Bolton. When the sisters came to visit their uncle in Billinge, romance blossomed. James and Mary were married at St. Mary’s. Jane McLoughlin was one of their six children. Jane’s eldest brother, James McLoughlin, married Ann Cunliffe, who was a younger sister of Sara Taylor nee Cunliffe, James Taylor’s mother. James therefore married the sister of his aunt by marriage.

Lawrence Taylor served in the navy during the Great War so the family had members in all three services. He married Hanna Bold at St Oswald’s, Ashton, 15th April 1921 then moved to Bury. There was some dispute within the family and he did not communicate for years. Eventually my grandfather, father and Uncle Bill went down to Bury, after my grandmother died, and found him. They brought him back to Billinge. He stayed at Carr Mill Road with my grandfather for a couple of months and became reacquainted with his old Billinge friends. My father remembers Lawrence as being the least serious of the Taylor brothers, more inclined to joke and have a laugh than the others. That trip back home must have settled him as he died shortly after returning to Bury. There is an entry in the St. Mary’s registry for him being buried 18th December 1962. No age is given but he would have been 75. Lawrence had a daughter, Gertrude, who emigrated to New Zealand. She was born 18th June 1921. Before I left for that same country in 1974, my Uncle Bill, then living with his wife Marian and son Paul at 94 Rainford Road, gave me Gertrude’s name and address. Soon after arriving in Auckland I found her in the phone book and spoke to her briefly. She was living on the North Shore. There was no way I could get over to see her at that time and I never made contact with her again. I have forgotten her married name and her cousins, my father and my Aunt Nelly, likewise.

Gertrude Taylor married Christopher Nulty of Arch Lane Garswood on 10th October 1914. They are buried together at St Oswald’s. Gertrude died 9th May 1959 aged 69. Chris died 23rd October 1978 aged 90. They had a large family. The youngest of these, Margaret, lives with her husband, Len De la Haye, close to my parents in Tracks Lane. Gertrude was a good singer. One of her daughters, Philomenia, became an opera singer and eventually moved to America.

Eleanor Taylor married Ellis Morley. I haven't been able to find the date of the marriage. They were married in Wigan, not at St Mary's. They had two children, a daughter, Sarah Margaret, and a son, James. Ellis played rugby league for Wigan Highfield when that team was on par with Wigan. He was a big man with red hair and my father remembers him fondly. Eleanor worked as a nurse at Billinge hospital. The tiny stone house where they once lived, up what is now Green Slate Court, but was then The Patches, is still standing. Eventually the family moved away, for reasons probably related to employment. My father was playing bowls at St. James's one afternoon when a particularly striking red haired lady walked onto the green and asked if she might speak with her cousin. My father replied that he did not think he had such an attractive cousin. It was Sally Morley. He has never seen her since.

On the fifteenth of May 1925, Thomas Taylor married Katharine Emily Morris, a girl from Corfe Castle in Dorset that he met when he was in the Royal Flying Corps. She gave birth to a boy named Leo, 20th July 1931, in the town of Mere, but died sixteen days later. Eleanor and Ellis Morley raised Leo in Billinge, until the age of 6. Thomas re married Alice Beatrice Formby, originally from the town of Formby, in 1936. Beatrice was from a large family. She and another sister were farmed out to relatives in North Wales whereupon Thomas met and married her. Leo then went back to live with his father and stepmother. There were other three children by this second marriage. Kathleen Elizabeth married Brian Morgan 8th October 1960 and has three girls and one boy. Beatrice Ellen married John Adams 15th April 1968 and has one daughter. James married Denise Fredricka Conde five days after his sister Beatrice's wedding. They are both schoolteachers and have no children to date. James and I were born the same year. Our fathers share the same name but are from separate generations of the same family.

Leo Taylor married Eira Morris, a dark haired Welsh girl from Beddgelert, in the shadow of Mount Snowdon, 21st November 1959. He was a forester when they met and his love of the outdoors eventually took him to the summit of the Matterhorn. He was a mountaineer and a ski instructor who became an authority on the flora in Snowdonia National Park before he died April this year. His ashes were scattered in November in his beloved Gwynant Valley. His son, Mark, has his father's ginger hair. He was born 10th January 1979 and lives with his mother in that beautiful little village where, in the thirteenth century, Prince Llewelyn mistakenly slew the faithful wolfhound, Gelert, that gives the village its name.

My grandfather always claimed that Thomas was the best sportsman the family ever produced. I have a photo of him being presented with a trophy for winning the 100 yards flat handicap at Swindon 2nd July 1921. Grandfather used to say that Thomas could run one hundred yards in even time. He was also an accomplished boxer but a dislocated shoulder, caused by a propeller kicking back as he started his aeroplane in the First World War, forever after would come out of socket with little provocation. That injury ended the boxing career. Thomas, like his elder brothers James and Lawrence, served in the First World War. Somewhere there is a photograph of him standing by an early warplane. Dangerous as such an occupation must have been, he survived the war. James didn't. Thomas must have had a mechanical inclination. Though he started work at Carr Mill Arley Colliery, after the war he was qualified as an AA man. Gertrude's youngest child, Margaret, has a photo of him by his AA

motorbike and sidecar. The silverware and medals he accumulated as a result of his sporting prowess are now the family heirlooms of his children and grandchildren.

There's a cross set into the wall outside where Birchley School has been relocated, commemorating Annie Gaskell, a six-year-old, killed there in 1899. Dean Powell had the memorial placed where the accident happened. We were taught to say a prayer for her soul as we passed this spot, as were the previous generations before us. Annie was on her way home from school to Moss Bank on Friday 1 September 1899 when she was run over by a horse drawn lorry, belonging to Messrs Charles Wilcock and Son of St Helens. The driver, Robert Smith of Dentons Green, was exonerated from all blame at an inquest held at the George and Dragon three days later. Evidence given at that inquest stated that the driver was distracted by children running alongside the wagon and that Annie had undergone an operation on her eyes some time previously due to her having poor eyesight. Five months after the accident, a daughter born to the parents, Joseph and Mary Gaskell, was named Annie in her memory. Such was the custom of the times²⁸. Children were often named after a sister or brother who died prematurely. This second Annie Gaskell grew up and married a man called Burnett. They had a daughter called Jean who married a Harold Lowe. Jean Burnett, before she became Jean Lowe, was a Catholic and the Lowes were fairly staunch Protestants. In those days mixed marriages caused problems. They had one child, Elizabeth Anne, now married to Adrian Birchall, one of the seven sons of Wilf Birchall who sang at Covent Garden. Wilf was one of the children of James Birchall's second marriage. His first produced Mini Parr, mother of Don Lewis who wrote 'The Billingers'. Gaskell is a common surname in our part of Lancashire. If these Gaskells were related to my grandmother I have not been able to ascertain how.

My great grandmother's last child, Aloysius Taylor, was born two months before young Annie Gaskell met her sad demise. He had just turned nineteen when his mother died in 1918. As his formidable eldest sister, Polly, never married, Aloysius stayed with her, even after he married Margaret Costello, daughter of Patrick Costello and Margaret nee Tinsley from Crank, 26th July 1932. They had two daughters, Margaret Mary and Esther Patricia. Margaret Mary married Ronald Pye, the son of Stanley and Elsie Pye, from North Road St Helens, 5th March 1957. They have two daughters, Deborah Jane and Gillian. Esther Patricia married Anthony Fallon, son of James and Agnes Fallen, 16th September 1961. Their two children are Paul Damian, 11th December 1962, and Catherine Maria, 14th April 1964. Aloysius was a character and a good all round sportsman. He died 15th March 1982 aged 82 and his wife Margaret died 2nd January 1986 aged 81. They are buried at St. Mary's in the same grave

On my father's side of the family, my grandfather's father was a Taylor and his mother was a Cunliffe. My grandmother's father was a Gaskell and her mother was a Wilcock.

The 1851 census shows this family living in the Rant.

Thomas Wilcock 41 Head Victualler Born: Abram
Ann Wilcock 30 Wife Born: Billinge

²⁸ Harry Roughley provided the information about Annie Gaskell.

Mary Ann Wilcock 10 Daughter Scholar Born: Upholland
Thomas Wilcock 6 Son Scholar Born: Upholland
Jane Wilcock 4 Daughter Scholar Born: Upholland
Margaret Wilcock 1 Daughter At home Born: Billinge
Ann Harper 62 Mother-in-law Born: Billinge
Elizabeth Wilcock 8 Daughter Scholar Born: Upholland

Thomas & Ann Wilcock are my great, great, grandparents. Abram is a fair way from Upholland so how they came to be in Upholland I can only speculate. Possibly the Harpers originate there.

The 1861 census shows

Thomas Wilcock 51 Head Tanner Born: Billinge
Ann Wilcock 40 Wife Born: Billinge
Margaret Wilcock 21 Daughter Born: Billinge
Mary Ann Wilcock 11 Daughter Born: Billinge
William Wilcock 1 Son Born: Billinge

Early census records are notoriously inaccurate. In 1861 the girls' ages have been mixed up and Thomas' place of birth has changed but this is the same family. William's birth certificate names his mother as nee Harper. By then they were living at the bottom of Carr Mill Road, where my father would be born fifty three years later. Mary Ann Wilcock would eventually marry James Gaskell, a farmer's son from Ashton, on 29th March 1875 at St. Mary's. James would cross then re cross the Atlantic before his marriage. Here comes the travelling gene. The photograph of my great, great grandmother, Anne Wilcock, with one of her sons, is the oldest family photograph still in our possession. Her husband Thomas must have been born 1809/10 and that is as far back as I have been able to go on the Wilcock line at present.

Gaskell is a common name in our part of Lancashire. The Gaskell line that we belong to came from Ashton. They were farmers.

The 1841 census shows,
Greenhalgh Farm.
William 65. Farmer
John 40 Farmer
Joan 50.
James 35 Farmer
Cecily 30 Wife
William 7 Son
Joseph 5 Son
James 2 Son
John 7 months Son

The 1851 census shows,
Greenhalgh Farm
Thomas Gaskell 47 Head Farmer
Cecily Gaskell 40 Wife
Joseph Gaskell 16 Son Carpenters apprentice

James Gaskell 12 Son Scholar
John Gaskell 10 Son Scholar
Ellen Gaskell 7 Daughter Scholar
George Gaskell 4 Son
Charles Gaskell 1 Son
Francis Gaskell under 1 Son
All born Ashton-in-Mackerfield

There is a problem with Thomas, named in the 1851 census as the head of the household. He may have been James' brother, born between John and James, but where was James at the time of the census?

My great grandfather, James Gaskell, was born 22nd July 1838, a year before the Chartist riots and two years before the Penny Post was introduced. He was born when the Tokugawa Shogunate still ruled Japan, ten years before Marx and Engels published the Communist Manifesto and twenty years before the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species. He died 2nd May 1908 aged 69, six months before his third daughter married my grandfather. It is almost certain that he was the only person ever to have lived in this area after experiencing, first hand, the American Civil War. He is buried at St. Oswald's, Ashton, with his wife, Mary Ann. That she would live on, through a war even more appalling in its squandering of human life than the one he experienced, is something he could hardly have imagined. How could he have imagined the unimaginable? She died 10th September 1928 aged 88.

Great grandfather James' parents were James and Cecily nee Burgess. James Gaskell married Cecily Burgess on 25 January 1831 at St. Oswald's, Winwick, and John Gaskell married Jane Burgess on 28 April 1828, also at Winwick. It looks as if great, great grandfather James and his brother John may have married two sisters. We presume, from my great aunt Cecily's letter to her sister Helen - my grandmother - that the parents of these two brothers Gaskell were William and Ellen from Low Bank Farm. This letter is the only document that has passed down to my generation that gives any indication of the lives of our ancestors. Reading through that one short page made me feel that I could somehow reach out into the past and touch it. It prompted me to compile this rendition of family history for any future interested party and I will now reproduce it in full.

29 March 1934

Dear Helen

The Gaskells came over with the Gerards as their vassals when William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066. Living in Ashton today are the descendants of two other families who came over, the Lowes and the Roses. The Gerards in return for their services to William the Conqueror were awarded great tracts of land in Lancashire between Wigan and Warrington, two ancient Saxon towns. The Gaskells, Lowes & Roses would be their men-at arms & in return would have been granted smaller tracts of land.

The Gaskells were yeoman farmers. I have heard my father talk of his Grandfather William Gaskell & Grandmother Helen Gaskell who lived at Low Bank Farm, Ashton.

They had two sons, John & James. John was our grandfather. He had a farm of his own, the 'Greenhalges' in North Ashton. He married Cecily Burgess, our grandmother. They had a large family of 12 sons & 2 daughters. Three sons died in infancy. My father used to tell us that our grandfather always objected to being forced to pay tithe to support the Protestant clergy - so he sold his farm and took his family to America, except uncle William who was at Ushaw Collage Durham, studying for the priesthood. Uncle Will died soon after his ordination. He was attending the sick when typhus fever was raging at Seaham Harbor, Durham, when he caught the fever and died. I am very proud of him.

My father came back to England in 1875 and married my mother. They had been lovers before Father went to America.

Our grandmother, Cecily Burgess, was a daughter of one of the younger branches of the Burgess's who were smaller gentry and came from near Lancaster. They were staunch Catholics and during the penal days came to Bryn to be under the protection of the Gerards, one of the leading Catholic families of the country. In the course of the years, when the penal laws were relaxed, the elder branch of the Burgess family went back to their home near Lancaster whilst the younger branch remained in Bryn. The Burgess's were staunch Catholics. To this day a great treasure, 'the Martyrs Altar,' an oak cupboard with a concealed altar on which many Lancashire priests, including the glorious martyrs Father Edmund Campion and Father Edmund Arrowsmith, offered mass in the dead of night in the penal days, is in the possession of Mrs. Clarkson, of Bolton-le-Sands, near Lancashire. This lady is the direct descendant of the eldest branch of the Burgess's and a kinswoman of our. She has a son, a priest. Father Baybutt, my brother in law knows him very well and has often talked about this altar. I have never seen it but have seen a photo of it.

May we always be faithful to our Holy Catholic faith, which has been so carefully handed down to us through all the troublesome times.

Signed by Cecily A Baybutt nee Gaskell.

Cecily never met her grandparents or any of their children except her father. If the facts she discloses in this letter are true, they went to America around 1860, long before she was born. She must have heard whatever she knew about her forefathers from her father. She can be forgiven mistakes. Her father's parents were James (not John) and Cecily nee Burgess. I have confirmed this in the registry of St. Oswald's, Ashton. That church was opened in 1822 and is interwoven with the history of the Gerard family, which can be traced back in the direct male line to Otho, a baron of England in the sixteenth year of King Edward the Confessor (1042-66). Edward had been exiled in Normandy for twenty-five years before acceding to the throne. When he died without issue in 1066, William, Duke of Normandy, won the throne in battle from Harold, Earl of Wessex, the last Anglo-Saxon claimant to the throne of England. Perhaps a forefather of the Gaskell line came across the Channel with William. Perhaps the Gaskell family was already aligned with the Gerard family in England before the Conquest. Cecily's claim may be accurate but there are no written records to substantiate it that I have yet been able scrutinise. I doubt they exist.

There are records of the marriages of James Gaskell to Cecily Burgess in 1831 and John Gaskell to Jane Burgess in 1828 in the registry of St. Oswald's in Winwick. James and Cecily are my great, great grandparents. John is the elder brother but Jane, according to the 1841 census, is ten years older than John. Maybe that is true, maybe it is a mistake. In the 1841 census the ages of adults are rounded off to the nearest five years. I did a search for William Gaskell married to Helen (bearing in mind Helen is often given as Ellen) and there were two good possibilities. William Gaskell married Ellen Birchall 21 August 1791 and William Gaskell married Ellen Hewitt 9 January 1798. I could not find a record of the death of Ellen, wife of William Gaskell, between 21 August 1791 and 9 January 1798, so enabling me to pinpoint Ellen Hewitt as the mother of John and James. The 1841 census shows William to be sixty-five. Therefore in 1791 he would have been fifteen. In 1798 he would have been twenty-two. It is safe to presume that William Gaskell and Ellen Hewitt are my great, great, great grandparents. William was born two years either side of 1776. This as far back as I can go back on the Gaskell line for now.

That James and Cecily uprooted their family and emigrated to America fascinates me. James must have been over fifty at the time. That his son James returned to find the love he'd been forced to leave parallels, for me, the events in the remarkable Civil War novel '*Cold Mountain*' by Charles Frazier, the book I read shortly before leaving for America in June 1999. My son, Louis, and I made a journey exceeding sixteen thousand miles by road through thirty-one American States. We were hoping to find our long lost relatives. It didn't happen but we often felt we were treading in their footsteps.

When I finally read 'The Billingers' in 1997, the chapter that moved me most was 'The Andertons of Birchley' because the author had been to America and tracked down his long lost Anderton relatives. It made me want to meet the guy. I could see we had things in common though he had a lot more between his ears. That same chapter brought back to me the story that my grandfather had told me about the Billinge treasure. Again, with Don Lewis's permission, that chapter is here reproduced in full.

THE ANDERTONS OF BIRCHLEY

On a bleak February morning in 1889, three St. Helens journalists set out on a special assignment and trudged their way to Billinge through six inches of snow. As they themselves put it, no sanguine tramway or railway promoters had ever turned a pitying eye on the inhabitants of Billinge, so that the traveller to that ancient hill-side hamlet was compelled "either to wheel it or walk it". They seem to have found the trip somewhat arduous in the wintry conditions and one of them described the venture in the following words;

"Three travellers with aching backs,
Half buried in the snow, made tracks,
Each grasping with a look seraphic,
Some apparatus photographic

The three men were employees of the "St. Helens Lantern" at the time a fortnightly publication giving "Reflection on the Labours, Recreations and Distractions of her

People". They puffed and pulled their way up Moss Bank, "with many a slip and backward slide", and at last the summit was attained. At this critical stage they discovered they had left their notebooks back in St. Helens, so they scampered after a bunch of juvenile Moss Bankites "trooping into school" and gained possession of a few "copy books", thus avoiding a painful delay in the work they had to do. Still out of breath, they paused for a short respite on top of Moss Bank, before completing the last lap into Billinge.

Birchley valley lay at their feet. To the right the waters of Carr Mill Dam gleamed between the leafless branches of the plantation of trees around it. Halfway up the opposing hill they could see the square outline of Birchley Church and, beyond, the straggling line of grey cottages to Slack Farm and the "Labour in Vain" and the crooked Main Street twisting up to the dominant silhouette of St. Aidan's at the top. The Beacon, seen at its best from this angle, crowned the cheerless February scene, still white from the previous Sunday's blizzard. In line with the Beacon, and two hundred yards to the left of Birchley Church, they could just make out the bulky shape of another building, well back from the road and mysteriously shrouded among bushes and trees to be well-nigh invisible from the highway itself. This old, imposing structure, their destination of that morning, was Birchley Hall, a Catholic stronghold steeped in history and adventure.

The word was out that a Protestant landowner had offered ten thousand pounds to Lord Gerard, the owner, for Birchley Hall and Estate, on condition the Catholic schools nearby were removed elsewhere. The journalists had an appointment that very day with Father Austin Powell, the Chaplain of St. Mary's Birchley, to ascertain the fate of the Hall, which had been rebuilt by Catholics in 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada, and had served as a Catholic Mission since 1645.

A crisis at Birchley was nothing new; indeed the very survival of Catholicism in the Birchley valley is a remarkable story and one which reflects credit on several generations of Billingers of all faiths. Billinge, after the days of Henry the Eighth, was traditionally Protestant. The population figure of 1717 show a total of 198 families, of which 174 were listed as Protestant, 10 Papist and 14 Dissenters. Birchley Hall itself was reconstructed at a most difficult time for English Catholics, for the Penal Laws were such that even to declare oneself a Catholic endangered livelihood and possibly life. It was under such conditions that the Anderton family of Birchley clandestinely transformed the Hall into a centre of Catholic resistance and the story of their struggle is as exciting as any modern spy drama. "Plain clothes" priests posed as farmers in the Birchley area, and in the concealed chambers of Birchley Hall, operated a secret printing press- the first Catholic Press in England since the Reformation. Things were really happening in Billinge in the days leading up to the Civil War.

Birchley Hall owes its historical importance to the dynamic, prolific Anderton family, which took it over shortly after the middle of the 16th century. The Birchley estate had belonged to the de Heton family from the 13th to the 16th century and a mill house, possibly erected around 1450, had stood on the site of the present Hall. William de Heton went to live at Birchley around 1500 and remodelled the mill-house in the early part of his residence, so that the first reference to the mill-house in 1558 describes it as being in the timbered or "Chester" style. The name Birchley is thought by some to derive from the Old Norse "bjarkar" (cf. modern Swedish "bjork) meaning "birch"

and Anglo Saxon “leah” (grass-land). Dean Powell, however, pointed out that the trees surrounding Birchley were at that time mainly chestnuts and that hardly a birch-tree could be found on the estate. He considered the name derived from “Birchall-le” since one of the tenants of the mill-house had been a Thomas Birchall.

In 1550 William de Heton the Younger was in debt to a certain Roger Wetherelt of Lincoln’s Inn. By coincidence, Heton’s brother-in-law, Christopher Anderton, was also a lawyer- and a very good one-at Lincoln’s Inn. Anderton appears to have succeeded in purchasing Birchley around 1558, though the actual transfer of property seems to have taken place in 1581. At any rate Christopher and his son James are both credited with the rebuilding of the Hall at considerable expense, although it was likely that Christopher had obtained the estate at a bargain price, since the sovereigns of the day played shuttlecock with Catholic estates, as Dean Powell put it, and a Catholic would have to be out of his mind to start investing in land and property at that time. The Andertons, however, were no ordinary Catholic, and Christopher not only walked the tightrope with confidence, but died a man “of many acres”, in 1593. The family owned the important Lostock Estate and many others, but they did a good job on the rebuilding of Birchley, producing a fine example of an Elizabethan mansion, three-storied in Billinge stone with large gabled wings, a recessed centre and fine chimneys. James’s younger brother Thurston also made his contribution and his initials “T.A.” appear over the original front door opposite the date 1594. After James’s death, it was the youngest brother, Roger Anderton, who took charge and who in fact really founded “the Andertons of Birchley”, producing 6 sons and 4 daughters. Four of the sons became priests and three of the girls nuns.

There was no end to Roger’s energy. He was a much stouter Recusant than the Andertons before him and he began to implement measures which his predecessors had up to now avoided. Both Christopher and James were good Catholics at heart, but they were both averse to “playing ball” with those who imposed the new religion. Roger, on the contrary, moved from the defensive to the offensive and it is probably in the period of apathetic Protestantism following 1595 that he involved his family and friends in the installation of the secret printing press described above.

It is worth pausing for a moment to ask oneself why a man of Roger Anderton’s background and standing would suddenly begin to work against the throne and expose himself and those near to him to expropriation and perhaps death. What were his motives and how dangerous in fact was his course of action? It must be borne in mind that only a few decades previously England had been a Catholic country and the landed gentry were naturally strong supporters of the King. After the Reformation, English Catholics rejected, in varying degrees, the imposition of the new religion, but few of them wavered in their loyalty to the throne. A Catholic admiral commanded the British fleet that sailed against the Catholic Spanish Armada. Catholics stayed loyal to the Stuarts and incurred the wrath of Oliver Cromwell and the Parliamentarians. It was only natural that some of the people who demonstrated unswerving loyalty to King and Queen would also retain loyalty to the old faith. It was a severe dilemma for conservative Lancashire and her people. Roger Anderton had to make the difficult decision for himself. He was an Englishman from a good family blessed with land, property and education. His allegiance to the throne was unquestioned. One of his sons was in fact to turn soldier and fall fighting in the Royalist Army. But was the new religion good or bad for England? As one of the

most important men in Billinge, how should he use his influence? Which side should he be on?

Christopher and James had compromised, and with good reason, but Roger took the plunge. He was a courageous man, for almost everything he did was illegal.

A look at some of the Penal Laws will show us what risks he was running:

A priest caught saying Mass could be imprisoned for life.

Catholics receiving education abroad forfeited their estates to the next Protestant heir.

Any son of a Protestant house who became a Catholic was not allowed to receive his inheritance.

No Catholic could acquire legal property by purchase.

No Catholic could sit in the House of Lords or Commons, neither could he sit on a Judge's Bench or practise as a lawyer.

No Catholic had a legal claim to a horse valued above five pounds. (That meant that any one could take away his horse by offering him that sum for it. A story is told of a Catholic gentleman who, on being offered five pounds each for his carriage horses, went to the stable and shot them all).

No Catholic could carry arms.

No Catholic could teach.

Catholics would be fined for not attending the Protestant Church.

These laws were not always enforced and the Andertons had been successful skating on thin ice several years, but rewards were offered for information leading to the conviction of Catholic offenders. Roger was well aware that one informer, for a sum of one hundred pounds, could lead to disaster, financial ruin and imprisonment for all the Andertons. Nevertheless he set about organizing his underground movement. For some time the family had stayed away from the parish church and Roger paid the fines for his absence. It was natural that Catholics would hear Mass in secret and in 1618 a chapel had been added to Birchley Hall, disguised as a granary. There are now steps on the outside of the wing leading up to the chapel door, but originally it was a blank wall and the only access to the chapel was from the upper floors of the main house. The construction of the granary would appear quite normal in view of the agricultural nature of the estate and its mill-house traditions. In order to discover the religious service, Protestant spies would have first had to penetrate the main house, with its many rooms and passages and find their way to the upper floors without disturbing any of the inhabitants. It is unlikely that the Andertons would have left the route to the chapel entrance unguarded and we can safely assume that the alarm would be given. The interior of the chapel itself is striking in its simplicity and it would be a matter of seconds for the priest to gather up the sacred vessels and escape through a trap door, which is still in evidence in a small room off the sanctuary. A ladder led down to the concealed presbytery below and it is possible that further secret passages led back into the main building and even underground to Birchley Wood. It is supposed that a fire was kept lit for burning vestments and other items in an emergency and that a plan would be in operation to decoy intruders in various ways while the priest made good his escape or donned his "plain clothes" in his hiding place. Finally there would be a lookout man on the roof during Mass.

Such were the security arrangements at Birchley Hall that we have no record of any priest having been caught or arrested on the premises. A Missal and Chalice were found hidden under the trap-door, inferring that concealment was a necessity, but it

would appear that the “country squires” managed to keep their aliases intact and held regular Mass while no doubt learning something about local farming in the meantime. Away from Birchley Hall, however, protection was not always so well organized. One of the priests who offered Mass at Birchley was St. Ambrose Barlow, born near Manchester in 1585. He became a Benedictine monk at Douai and returned to Lancashire after ordination. Arrested one Easter Sunday morning, just after finishing Mass, he was hanged drawn and quartered at Lancaster in 1641.

The construction of secret passages and places of concealment at Birchley had been a defensive operation, but now Roger began offensive manoeuvres. One of the difficulties faced by the Catholics of the time was that of making their views known to the people. We would say today that the government controlled the media and not only was it forbidden to print Catholic literature in England, but the importation of Catholic books from abroad was also a treasonable activity. The Jesuit press at St. Omers in France produced the books, which were needed to combat the many anti-Catholic works being written, but you risked your head to get them across the Channel. Roger not only brought in books, but was almost certainly involved in importing a whole printing press from the Continent and setting it up within the bowels of Birchley. The hazards were tremendous. Apart from the problem of shipping bulky equipment, great care would have to be taken in choosing printing type, to avoid providing investigators with easy clues as to its origin. Then there was the question of choosing the operators, for printers at that time were regarded as special craftsmen and Roger would have to be sure not only of their professional competence but also of their religious convictions. We can imagine that the work was noisy and arduous and that the printers (also dressed as rural characters) would be glad to escape from their clandestine production and spend a few hours walking in the fields and, it is said, taking exercise in the caves and copses, which adjoined the estate.

In spite of the many problems, “Operation Birchley” achieved many of its objectives. At least sixteen books seem to have been printed on the secret press and one Wigan authority estimates the number of books and pamphlets printed there to have been over sixty. Who were the authors? It is likely that Roger Anderton himself wrote some of the early ones, using a pseudonym, but his first cousin, Lawrence Anderton, was more active and qualified for the work and wrote under the name of John Brereley. Lawrence had graduated from Cambridge, become a Jesuit at 28 and was known as “Golden-mouthed Anderton” on account of his eloquent speeches. He resided for a while at Birchley and there is little doubt that he would be regarded as the star author in the Billinge writing team. Rome was determined to win back her lost provinces and Lancashire was one of the prizes. Lawrence Anderton was made superior of the Lancashire provinces in 1621 but in the same year the Birchley printing press was raided. There seem to have been some indications that the authorities suspected the existence of a secret press in Billinge as early as 1613, but the luck of the Andertons had held out for almost a decade more. The curate of St. Peter’s Chapel in Newton-le-Willows stated in a 1624 publication that “there was a printing-house in Lancashire, suppressed about some three years since, where all Brereley his works, with many other Popish pamphlets were printed.”

This may or may not have been the end of the Birchley press, for it is said that the incredible Roger rode out this storm and actually reactivated the printing through the

1620s. Lawrence Anderton, certainly, continued to publish works, although these may have been printed in other parts of Lancashire or even abroad. Whether the press continued to function or not, Roger still had another 20 years to go. He seems to have thrived on danger and intrigue and died of natural causes (we are not sure exactly at what age) in 1640. There were, of course, sons to follow him. James, the heir, took possession of the Hall on his father's death. The second son, also named Roger, had entered the priesthood and was educated at St. Omers. Later he went to the English College in Rome, where he was entered into the records as "Edward Poole"- another example of a Birchley alias. Two of Roger's brothers adopted the name of Shelly and another that of Stanford. Roger was ordained in 1645 at the age of 24 and in the same year came to take charge of the Birchley mission. There has been an unbroken line of priests at Birchley to the present day. They used the "granary" chapel until 1828, when a Catholic Church was finally erected on the side of the highway.

The young Roger Anderton had not inherited the Hall, but he did inherit his father's incredible stamina. He was created Archdeacon of Lancashire in 1676 and served the mission at Birchley fifty years until his death in 1695, "leaving the sum of two hundred pounds for the maintenance of a secular priest to officiate at Birchley, on two Sundays every month". His brother James, the heir, bore no sons. His only daughter, Elizabeth, inherited the Hall and passed it on to her daughter, Mary, who had married Sir William Gerard, a well-known Catholic of the area. Thus Birchley Hall became part of the Gerard Estates and the line of the Andertons, of Birchley came to an end. The close association with the Catholic Church continued however. If the succeeding priests were not actually Anderton's they were priests in the full-blooded Anderton tradition. When the Gerards rented off parts of the Hall to other families, (not always Catholic) they were careful to stipulate that the mission be allowed to function unhindered. It was the Protestant offer of 1889 to purchase the Hall outright, accompanied by the conditions stated, that had provoked the crisis, which sent our three St. Helen's scribes hurrying over the fields to Dean Powell.

The priests who followed Roger Anderton in the mission continued to use aliases. Thomas Jameson was known as "Sedden" and Thomas Young as "Brooks", and so on. One of the later priests bore the splendid name of Rev. Emerick Grimbaldstone. The Rev. John Penswick built St. Mary's Birchley in 1828 and died at Garswood, in 1864 at the age of 86. During the 18th century the baronet Andertons of Lostock appeared to have kept up their connection with Birchley and one name from their line stands out in particular in this respect. This was Sir Francis Anderton (1680-1760). He seems to have visited Birchley regularly and is said to have raised fighting-cocks on the estate. Indeed Birchley and Moss Bank appear to have become a well-known centre for sport and gambling around 1730-40. The Duke of Suffolk is reputed to have matched his cocks against those of Francis Anderton in a pit in a field to the rear of the "Black Horse". Thomas Martlew, a collector of antiques and owner of a luxurious cottage on the slopes of Moss Bank, is said to have been a good friend of Francis and gambled his valued possessions on various cockfights. Sir Francis was the last of the Andertons that we know had a close connection with Birchley Hall. He was clearly very different in character from his serious-minded cousins, but he was a typical Anderton in that he had tremendous energy and lived till he was eighty. We may say that with his death the story of the Andertons of Birchley comes to an end. The deeds of Christopher, James and the two Rogers are fairly well authenticated and

there is little doubt that Sir Francis's activities in Billinge made a real contribution to the village's colourful history.

But the story does not quite end there. It has not been my intention in this book to write a history of Billinge, for this can be gleaned from the record books, but rather to put down all I know about the people of Billinge, their ways, their thoughts and their lore. In trying to do so, I would be wrong if I ignored gossip, or superstition or legend. And there is one legend which has been passed down from generation to generation- that of the Andertons and the Treasure.

Before devoting a few lines to this subject, I think it is time we got our shivering journalists out of the February cold and into the warmth of Birchley Hall. Dean Powell was waiting for them, surrounded by his reference books. As this famous Billinge chaplain is worth a chapter all to himself, I propose to leave details of their interview till later in this book and go back for a while to discuss an event which may or may not have taken place sometime between 1642 and 1700.

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The Andertons had hung on to their property and wealth partly through their own intelligence, skill and luck, partly through the independent character of Protestant Billingers, unwilling to turn informers against respected neighbours. The Civil War was to follow, however, and one version of the legend is that an Anderton buried treasure-sovereigns, jewels and pewter in the troublesome times of Cromwell. The Civil War lasted from 1642 to 1649. Another version is that one of the Andertons, in the latter part of the 17th century, married a rich Irishwoman and returned to Billinge by stagecoach, bringing with him his Irish bride and her fortune in gold and jewels. He is reputed to have stopped the coach at night outside or on the outskirts of Billinge, gone off into the darkness with the treasure and a spade and buried it good and proper. The task took him over two hours, so he is likely to have made a good job of it. He made such a good job of it that the treasure has never been seen since. His wife, who said to be unhappy about burying the fortune in the first place, was even cooler towards him when he discovered he was unable to find it again.

Whatever truth there may be in either of these two stories, the legend of the Anderton treasure was firmly established by 1700. Joseph Anderton, the grandfather of Susannah, was born in 1790 and his grandparents had not only told him about it but had actually looked for it. Susannah (b. 1841) believed that it had been found in her lifetime and that the finders had kept quiet about it. Many Billingers in the 1880s and 90s considered it was still under the ground and it was not uncommon for old men to go off and look in the woods for it. Others said it had been buried ten miles away and it would be impossible to trace its whereabouts within such a wide radius.

The original Andertons of Anderton, Lancashire, threw out many junior houses and if you follow a curve running from Anderton through Eccleston, Mawdesley, Wrightington, Appley Bridge, Skelmersdale and Billinge, the tombstones in the churchyards along the route show the resting places of a goodly number of them who died on the 19th century. At least three Andertons emigrated to America. They were sisters - Lavinia, Phoebe and Maria - and were probably nieces of Joseph Anderton, as Susannah kept in touch with them for a while when she was a young woman. They

had all gone over on the same boat sometime in the 1840s- three young, good-looking and presumably fertile girls. Phoebe, the eldest, was already a young widow and took two small sons with her. Jim Parr visited them during his American journey in the 1860s and reported that they had all got married and were doing well. One of them had married a man called Duncan Hamilton, for whom Jim had conceived a great admiration. Hamilton was said to have been the illegitimate son of duke. He was a proud, resourceful man, not without money, and he had helped all the sisters to settle down over there. Another sister had married someone called Gee and the third a man called Speakman. Jim spoke of a fine handsome boy named John Speakman. They were in New York and Illinois and were in the hotel business. That was all we knew. Jim had no doubt related much more, but nothing had been written down and all the letters from the American Andertons had been thrown away.

About 1955 someone down Long Fold turned up an old, brown photograph which had been lying in a bottom drawer for close on 70 years. It was an imposing picture. It showed a group of approximately thirty people arranged in three rows in front of a large wooden frame house. The back row was standing, the middle row sitting and the front row squatting on the grass. Those sitting on chairs were the elder members of the family. In the dead centre sat an austere old man with an abundant white beard, side-whiskers and an aristocratic air. There could be no doubt as to who ruled the clan. This would be the redoubtable Duncan Hamilton. It was not surprising that Jim Parr had taken a liking to him. Both were tall, upright, proud-looking men with a reputation for scholarship and justice. Next to Hamilton was sitting an equally proud-looking woman with her hair done up in a severe bun, her arms folded and her chin jutting forward. She strongly resembled Susannah and we knew that this was either Phoebe, Lavinia or Maria. The remaining eight men and women on chairs were subjects of great controversy among us, for we had different opinions as to which ones would be the other two sisters and their husbands. About Hamilton, however, there was unanimity of opinion. On the back row there was a tall, athletic-looking youth of such extraordinary good looks that we felt this must be John Speakman, described so flatteringly by Jim Parr. He seemed to be about twenty on the photograph and had a confident, unmarried look about him. The children appeared brown, mischievous and healthy. The house was vast and solid and we wondered how many of them lived in it. All in all, they looked an impressive clan.

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In 1957 I visited the United States of America. As I have some Anderton blood in my veins, it was suggested that I try to contact the American Andertons, who would no doubt be very numerous by now, and possibly quite rich after so many years on the hotel business. One of my problems was that, in trying to locate them, I had very little information to go on. I knew that they were in New York or Illinois, that they had married men called Hamilton, Gee and Speakman, and of course I had the picture. Armed with this aging photograph and a map of the United States, I set forth on my mission. I started in New York.

At that time New York had seven and a half million people and four million telephones. I do not recall any more how many of these telephones belonged to people with the names of Hamilton, Gee and Speakman, but I once wrote the number down and was very impressed by it. I also discovered that if you ring up a New

Yorker you have never met and ask him if he had a grandmother called Lavinia, you are not always taken with the seriousness you deserve and can get some very original and lively things said to you in reply.

After a while I gave up on New York and went to Illinois. There we found Americans much more patient and understanding and when my photograph had been examined by some learned professors and wise old journalists, I was assured that the house in the picture was almost certainly in Illinois. More detective work narrowed the area down to LaSalle County, south of Chicago, and a little further investigation found records of a Duncan Hamilton who had lived in the village of Lowell in LaSalle County. It only remained for me to drive there.

We were three in the car, for I had been touring America with an Englishman called Alex and a Swiss friend named Jean-Guy. As we drove south towards LaSalle, we often stopped and visited places of historical interest en route. This resulted in very haphazard scheduling, so that when we reached the town of LaSalle it was already well past midnight and the streets were deserted. There was fog in patches and we did not reach the village of Lowell until two in the morning, being able to read the signposts only from close quarters with headlamps trained on them. We could make out very few houses in the village and decided to park the car inside a park which we found by the highway. Two of us would sleep in the car and Jean-Guy (whose turn it was) would spend the night in his sleeping bag on the grass. He was not too happy about this, but we decided that we could not wake anybody up at that hour, so finally he dragged out his bag, put it carefully on top of a mound, where there was less moisture, climbed in and said good night.

The night passed quickly and I woke up at six. The windows of the car were steamed over on the inside. Rubbing a transparent porthole with the sleeve of my pyjamas, I peeped out at the morning scene. We were in a cemetery and Jean-Guy was sleeping peacefully on a grave. A white mist lay close to the ground, the sun as yet being too weak to disperse it. The grass was heavy with dew and the trees visible over the hedge were leafy green and still. It was a very English scene and could have been in old Billinge. I pulled out the picture and looked at it. The old-fashioned wooden house fitted perfectly into the landscape I could see before me. Amid-western house for sure, the Americans had told me. It was probably less than a mile away. Maybe somebody on the picture was still living in it; some of the tiny children could still be alive. It was difficult for me to imagine them as mid-twentieth century Americans; the picture had too much of Merrie England about it. And yet they would certainly talk like Americans. Would they have an old-fashioned air about them, as Billingers still had? Lowell seemed just as isolated as Billinge, possibly even more so. All we had found of it so far was a graveyard. Maybe old Duncan and Phoebe and Lavinia were sleeping just a few yards away.

Duncan and his wife stared stolidly up at me from the faded brown picture. Our eyes met and for a moment we seemed to bridge those seventy years. As I stared I felt as if I had entered the picture or as if they had come out of it and we had the same grass and trees around us and were breathing the same air. The younger people were watching me expectantly.

The feeling passed. I put the picture on the back window and returned to my century, eager to get going. Pretty soon I should have the answers to many of my questions. I awakened the others. Alex was sleepy-eyed and slow, Jean-Guy full of his usual early morning grumpiness. At that hour they did not share my enthusiasm. They were not their relations. Alex and Jean-Guy have no sense of history.

We had some warm coffee still in our flasks and we managed to put together a few sandwiches. The sun began to melt the fog and birds twittered in the trees around us. It was a lovely morning and had all the signs of a hot day ahead. Time heals all wounds and after a while my two companions began to speak. Alex said we were in a graveyard and Jean-guy told us he had slept on a grave. We packed everything in the car and backed out on to the main road. There was nobody in sight and we drove on slowly until we came to the first houses. There were only ten altogether and none of them looked like the one in my picture. I was not a little disappointed; it had been pulled down, as I had feared. Still I nursed the hope that some of the inhabitants would be able to give me more information. We stopped in front of a large wooden and brick house, which seemed to be the centre of the village. Climbing out, we sat down on the grass and smoked in the sun until there was sign of life.

Our car must have attracted attention, for after half an hour or so an old gentleman in a straw hat came out of the house and asked us if we were looking for somebody. I told him my errand and showed him the picture. He shook his head. Not only did the surnames mean nothing to him, but he was sure there was no house like that still standing in the neighbourhood. He had been living there for twenty years. We tried the other houses and the only shop, but our luck was no better. None we spoke to had been residents of Lowell for more than thirty years. We walked up to the other end of the village and looked round the bend; there were no other dwellings in sight. However, when we returned to the car a youth came up to us and suggested we go and talk to Mrs Price. She was an old lady who lived in the very first house as you came in from the cemetery end. She had just got up and was leaning over the garden gate. The youth said she had been born in Lowell.

I hastened over to her- a frail old lady in her seventies. When I mentioned the names I detected a glimmer of recognition in her eyes. She stretched out her hand:

“Let me look at the picture”.

She took out her spectacles, put them on and scrutinized the faces.

“That is Duncan Hamilton. There’s his wife Phoebe Hamilton next to him.”

“So it was Phoebe who married him. Do you know all the others?”

“I know everybody on this picture, although a lot of them died when I was still young.”

“Which ones are Lavinia and Maria?”

“Who?”

“Phoebe’s sisters.”

“Oh I never knew them. They didn’t live in this part of the country.”

“You mean they aren’t in the picture at all?”

“No. They are not from Lowell.”

“But who is this lady and that?”

She mentioned unfamiliar names.

“Do you see that three-year-old girl there, playing with her doll?”

“Yes”

“That’s me.”

You could see the likeness, when you knew.

“Who is that handsome youth? Is it John Speakman?”

“Why, so it is. Poor old John, God bless him. How did you know?”

“We heard he was good-looking.”

“He’s only been dead a few years. Eighty-seven he was. He was as handsome the day he died as he is on that picture. He had white hair and a silky moustache. He looked like Mark Twain.”

“Mrs Price, what happened to the house?”

“What do you mean, what happened to it?”

“Well where is it?”

“Where is it ? You just came from it. That’s it there.”

She pointed to the house where our car stood.

“But that house has an extra wing and no porch.”

“They built the brick wing after this picture was taken. The porch they took down forty years ago. Don’t you recognize it now?”

“Yes. The man who lives in it told us he’d never seen it.”

“Listen, young man, you ought to go and see Grace Poland. She’s John Speakman’s daughter. She lives in Tonica, the next village about three miles down the road.”

“Are there any relations left in Lowell itself?”

“No”

Thanking Mrs Price warmly for her information, I returned to the car and took two pictures of the big house, one from close up and another from the spot where the old picture had been taken from. Then I rounded up my colleagues and we drove on for five minutes till we reached the village of Tonica, about half the size of Lowell.

Grace Poland was a small, bespectacled widow in her sixties with snow-white hair and a Lancashire face. She was a pleasant, alert old lady and soon we were chatting readily over tea and sandwiches. I showed her my photograph.

“I have one just like it in one of my drawers. My father often used to take it out and look at it.”

“How many of these people in the picture are descended from the Andertons?”

“Two. Phoebe, my grandmother and John Speakman, my father.”

“Who are all the others?”

“Neighbours.”

“We thought you had a thriving clan over here. Where were Lavinia and Maria?”

“Maria married a Canadian and went to Canada. She died in Vancouver. Lavinia married a man called Gee, but they went to live in Indianapolis. I only saw her once when she came to visit. She was very much like my grandmother.”

“What about Phoebe’s second son?”

“He died on the boat on the way over. There was only John here”

“No children with Duncan?”

“No. He was getting on when he married her>”

“So there are no Hamiltons around?”

“None. And no Speakmans, either. Speakman was the name of Phoebe’s first husband in England.”

“Did John have no sons?”

“No I was the only child.”

“What about Lavinia and Maria?”

Maria had a daughter and there is one grand-daughter. She came back to Illinois. Cousin Susie. She's a widow of about my age. She lives about ten miles from here."

"Do you mean that you are the only two left? We imagined there would be scores of you around here. We thought everybody on the picture belonged to the family. Think what thirty people might have produced in three generations."

"The only person on that picture still alive is Mrs Price."

"Do you remember Duncan Hamilton?"

"I certainly do. He was a tyrant if ever there was one. Mind you he was honest and straight and all that. He never let you forget it."

"Was Phoebe happy with him?"

"She tolerated him. She was a pretty hard nut to crack herself, you know. They were rather a strait-laced lot in my father's younger days."

"What was your father like?"

"A grand old man, you'd call him. Always had a humorous twinkle in his eye. Here, this is a picture of him a couple of years before he died."

"He's magnificent. It's incredible how much he looks like Hugh Parr, Susannah Anderton's son. Same eyes, same eyebrows, same moustache."

"My father was a full-blooded Englishman, of course."

"And you are half English and half American. You certainly look English."

She took it as a compliment.

"You talk the same way as Phoebe used to."

"We're from the same village."

"Billinge, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Susie and I often wonder what it's like."

"It's a bit bigger than Lowell. It used to be very old-fashioned."

"We thought you lived in hotels."

"Hotels?"

"Jim Parr thought you were in the hotel business. He must have got mixed up."

:Oh, I know, Duncan once started a boarding-house, but he gave it up. Never had any boarders. He wanted everybody to be in by ten every night and they always had to say grace before meals."

"No business man?"

"Hopeless. Too many principles, I suppose. He could afford to have them, though. He had some land and he left Phoebe three thousand dollars. She left most of it to my father and he left most of it to me. We all just had ordinary jobs - never went in for investing or that kind of thing. This house is mine." It was small, square and wooden with a neat garden and an elaborate American kitchen.

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In the afternoon we visited the graves of John Speakman and the Hamiltons and then went to see Susie. Alex stayed behind to mow the lawn and Jean-Guy went to sleep on the porch. Susie looked very much an Anderton with her expressive eyes and prominent cheekbones. She showed us an oil painting of Lavinia, done when she was about fifty. Lavinia and Phoebe were like two peas from the same pod. We had tea at a small, round table. Susie had a kindly, thoughtful manner of speech, with a stronger mid-Western accent than Grace:

"I've always been conscious of my English blood. Of course, I was born over here and the pattern of my life and all my friends are American, but there is still some sort of nostalgia. I didn't notice it much when I was young and while I was married. Lavinia used to tell me about England a lot, but I didn't pay much attention as a little girl. It is chiefly since I have been widowed and have had only Grace here that I've thought more about my origins. When you get to a certain stage in life the future holds less for you and you begin to think more and more about the past and what older people talked to you about. When I came to live in Lowell, where Phoebe and Duncan and John are buried, it reminded me so much of the way Lavinia and Phoebe used to talk about England. We English-Americans don't stick together the same way as Italians and Jews and so on, but sometimes I feel that we keep more of the old country inside us than the others, even after two or three generations. I might be wrong."

"I think the very way you said that proves that you are right. I mean, the reserved manner you have of expressing yourself."

"You know, I'd find it interesting to go back there, just for a month or so, meet my English relatives and see the houses and fields where Lavinia grew up. And the place where the treasure was buried."

I tried not to twitch.

"You mean you know about the treasure?"

"Oh yes. The sovereigns. Lavinia loved to tell about it. How people looked for it for generations."

"I suppose it will never be found," I said.

"But they found it."

I twitched.

"Are you sure about that?"

"I am only repeating what I have heard. But Lavinia was sure."

"But Phoebe wasn't," said Grace.

"Who found it, and where, and when?" I asked.

"I don't know who, but Lavinia said she heard the sovereigns had been unearthed soon after she came to America. It was a rich hoard."

"But not in Billinge?"

"No. It was a few miles to the north- in a field."

I asked her more questions, but that was all she knew. Even this piece of news was incredible, coming from a third generation American.

"What is Billinge like?" asked Susie.

"As I told Grace, it's an old-fashioned place, just outside an industrial area.

Nearly all the inhabitants work in industry now."

"Isn't there a town nearby?"

"It's equidistant from Wigan and St. Helens. They are industrial."

"Like Chicago?"

"Chicago's bigger."

"I suppose Billinge is very different from Lowell."

"Well, it's quieter around here, but actually you look just like two Billinge ladies, chatting over your cup of tea. I don't see that the emigration of your grandmothers changed very much."

"Lavinia said that in England times were hard, but they weren't all that easy over here either."

"Some people just have an urge to travel. Just think of the challenge a new country like America would offer in Victorian days."

“My father used to say the only reason why people travelled away from home was so they could come back and talk about where they had been,” said Grace.

“Certainly Phoebe wanted to go back, in her old days.”

We sat on for an hour, filling up the teacups and staring out through the open French windows over the lawn to the oaks beyond. The green was soothing and I felt very much at peace and at home.

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Our story is almost at an end, but not quite. Many years later I was going through some old papers when a newspaper cutting from “Wigan Observer” caught my eye. It referred to an interesting find, which had been made on the Old Hall Estate, near Heskin, in January 1852. One of the workmen, a James Babet, was clearing up the roots of an old ash tree in a field on the estate, when his axe struck something hard. On examination it proved to be a pint pewter tankard containing 200 sovereigns from

the reigns of James I and Charles I. Not so long ago I was able to visit the spot and verify the story with the people who now live there. Heskin is ten miles north of Billinge, as the crow flies. And who was Babet’s employer-the tenant of the Old Hall Estate in 1852? He was a well-known local farmer named Roger Anderton.

When James Gaskell eventually returned to England from America in 1875, he married Mary Anne Wilcock at St. Mary’s, five months to the day before **Thomas** Taylor married Sara Cunliffe. They had four daughters, Elizabeth (Bessie), Cecily, Helen and Jane. They must have lived in Billinge for some while because Elizabeth and Cecily were baptised at St Mary’s. Elizabeth was born 11th December 1875 and Cecily 18th January 1879. Helen, born 7th July 1881, was baptised at St Oswald. The 1881 census has James and Mary Ann living at 30 Liverpool Road with daughters Mary Elizabeth aged 5 and Cecily Ann aged 2, which suggests they moved to Ashton soon after Cecily was born and that the census was taken prior to July while Mary Ann was pregnant. My grandmother was raised in the Dower House that still stands at Ashton Cross, opposite the golf course that once comprised part of Lord Gerard’s estate but when or in what circumstances they moved there is beyond me.

The eldest child, Bessie, married James Anderton from Earlestown. James was a strikingly handsome man who worked at the mighty Vulcan Works, where the steam engines that epitomise the English Industrial Revolution were produced. I managed to trace the last two children of this marriage before leaving for America in June this year. Here included are a few lines from notes I took that day.

On the way to Earlestown my father pointed out the mansion where his mother was born. For the first time in my life I realised the enormity of the gulf my grandmother crossed to marry a miner from the rant. It may have been a wider gulf than the Atlantic for her father. Jack was waiting at the door. He’d last seen his cousin, my father, forty-six years before in the Brown Cow. Now he was too old to ride the bicycle. I wasn’t. By bicycle I’d arrived and traced the remaining two of ten children born to the industrial machine of Victorian England. Their father had been a boss at the mighty Vulcan Works, where the steam trains of the English Empire were created. Their mother had been eldest daughter of James Gaskell. After the smiles and handshakes at the doorway Jack took my father through to the tiny lounge to meet his

eighty-nine year old cousin, Jane, ending a separation of seventy-one years. We stayed an hour. Father's routine does not allow for much improvisation. The obligatory cup of tea, that English riposte to every eventuality, the confirmation of family detail - who was living and who was dead - then the taxi came back and we left them.

When I got back from America, Jack Anderton had died.

Cecily Gaskell married Charles Baybutt of Wrightington, the brother of Canon Baybutt, priest at St James' Orrell from 1939-1965 and for a short time priest at St. Mary's. She died 6th September 1940, aged sixty-one. Charles survived her by almost five years. Cecily and Charles lived at a farm in Finch Lane, Wrightington. They are buried together at St Joseph's, where her father, James Gaskell, made the pews. In the same grave lies Norman Gaskell. This Norman Gaskell was related to Cecily only by marriage. He married Charles' sister Margaret. Charles had three brothers; Thomas, James and Robert, and five sisters; Grace, Mary, Kitty, Margaret and Ellen. Robert became a priest. It was he who negotiated the purchase of land near the top of Gathurst Brow on which Saint John Rigby's College stands.

John Rigby was born around 1570 at Harrocks Hill, near Wrightington. Those were not happy times for Catholics. The 1581 Act of Persuasion made it high treason to reconcile or to be reconciled with the Catholic Church. Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded in 1587 and the Spanish Armada repelled in 1588. John Rigby was in Cambridgeshire in 1600, working for Sir Edmund Huddleston of Sawston Hall, when he went down to London to represent his mater's widowed daughter before the magistrates and to pay her fines for recusancy. When questioned about his own faith he openly declared himself to be Catholic, was subsequently arrested and hung drawn and quartered, June 21st 1600. Another John Rigby farmed the land on which the college named after him stands, coincidentally, at the time of the land sale.

James, Canon Baybutt's brother, was not so reverent. When reciting the catholic 'Hail Mary,' he would say *'Hail Mary, full of Grace and what about our Kitty?'* James Baybutt, my great uncle's brother, had four children. His only son, James, married Mildred Brown and their son, David, is one of the administrators of the Eddleston Trust²⁹. In his time he was a champion grass-track motorbike racer. One of the three daughters, Ellen, married Thomas Horridge and their daughter, Jane, born 1925, is the family's unofficial historian. One of the old family wedding photos, that she kindly let me see, featured no less than ninety-eight persons. Another of James' daughters, Gertrude, married Thomas Calderbank, the son of Elias Calderbank, a former rag and bone man who founded Calderbank Scrap Metal Recycling in Wigan. One of Tom Calderbank's daughters, Patricia, married John Winnard, the producer of Uncle Joe's Mint Balls, another Wigan icon, whose sons carry on that tradition. The Baybuts are a well-established family. Many of their descendants are prominent members of the Wrightington community. Cecily and Charles proved not to be so fertile; they died childless. I have the copy of Cecily's letter to my grandmother, the one that revealed the existence of possible relatives in America, and a photograph from my grandmother's album that reveals her as a woman of stunning beauty. If I ever trace the American relatives I'll be looking for another Cecily.

²⁹ See Appendix H.

Jane Gaskell was baptised at neither St Mary's nor St Oswald's that I have been able to discover. Perhaps the family moved to Wrightington for a spell and she was baptised there. She married Harry Potter from Sheffield. My father thinks they had three girls, Elizabeth, Cecily and Mary. If the other three daughters of James and Mary Ann Gaskell were as retiring as my grandmother was throughout her life, then I seriously doubt any but the barest facts concerning them will ever come to light. Jane Gaskell remains the most obscure of my three great aunts.

Mary Ann's father, Thomas Wilcock, died on March 18th 1880, aged 71. Her mother, Ann, lived on at the tiny, two-room, stone cottage at the bottom of Carr Mill Road for another twenty-two years. She died on June 20th 1902 at the age of 81. That year Winston Churchill, then a new MP, spoke at St Helens Town Hall. The elder Wilcocks are buried, together with their sons, Thomas and William, at St. Mary's. Thomas died on November 22nd 1925 aged 80. William died on April 8th 1947 at 86; an age often attained by the assorted members of our family. William I can just remember. He lived with my grandparents, as part of the family, from their marriage in 1908 until his death almost thirty-nine years later. I had not quite turned two then but I can remember him. The vague image of a moustached old man is among my earliest memories. To my father and his brothers and sisters, William Wilcock was Uncle Willi. Actually he was their great uncle. He never married. He worked for Doctors Mason & Kyle in St. Helens as their bookkeeper and collected the weekly instalments that most people paid their doctor's bills with in those days. He was born at the Tanyard House Farm cottage, number 79 Carr Mill Road, as was my father and all his brothers and sisters except Helen. She is the youngest child of that generation of the Taylor family. She was born 4th May 1921 and still lives in the house that now is number 89 Carr Mill Road. It was originally number 51 and then 65. My grandfather signed the lease in 1919. Before then two sisters, Margaret and Ellen Mather, lived there with their niece Jane Mather as housekeeper. These sisters are listed as being 78 and 74 in the 1891 census. They left number 51 and the two adjacent dwellings at numbers 49 and 47, to the Catholic Church. As I write the family had been paying rent to the Church for eighty years. With three rooms upstairs and three downstairs it must have seemed spacious indeed when compared to the one up one down cottage attached to the barn at Tanyard House Farm, the very last building in Carr Mill Road.

Thomas Wilcock must have moved the family into that cottage between 1851 and 1861. In the process he changed his job description from 'Victualler' in the '51 census to 'Tanner' in the '61 census. Mary Anne, the eldest child, married James Gaskell in March 1875 and, presumably, moved to Ashton. She waited a long time for James. At least one of her two younger sisters, Elizabeth and Margaret, married before she did. Elizabeth married James Brown 27th October 1868. Margaret was a witness at that wedding. She is recorded as living in Manchester at that time. She was also a witness at the marriage of her elder brother, Thomas, to Mary Rigby, 12th July 1875. Again she is recorded as living in Manchester. There is no record of Margaret marrying at Birchley.

Thomas moved away, down the narrow path by Tanner's Wood, past Brown Heath Colliery, through the Dam Hollows and past Carr Mill Dam, to live with his bride in one of the old stone cottages that stood beyond the Top Two Gates, in Clinkham

Wood. The youngest child, William, was left at home. He was nineteen when his father died in 1880. He stayed on to take care of his mother until she died in 1902.

Sometime, before 1902, Helen Gaskell, my grandmother, promised Ann Wilcock, her grandmother, that she would look after her uncle William when her grandmother died. She lived up to that promise. When her grandmother died in 1902, Helen left the stately home at Ashton Cross and moved into the two-room hovel at Tanyard House Farm, to be William's housekeeper. It must have been whilst she was living there that she met Frank Taylor. They married at St. Mary's 9th November 1908

That dwelling at Tanyard House Farm is still standing though it has been rebuilt. There was once a barn, a storage area for skins and the dwelling, all under the same stone roof. Now they are all amalgamated into one home. Outside this renovated building, standing by the wall, is a large sandstone disk. This was a tanning stone. It used to lie near the pond, on the farm side of the building, where the skins must have been soaked before salting and tanning. Six of Frank and Helen's seven children were born in this cottage - all except Sarah Helen, the youngest. Before the move to number 51,³⁰ about two hundred yards up Carr Mill Road, three adults and the four surviving children all lived in these two rooms, one up one down as they used to call such dwellings. The ceiling was so low that Uncle Willi's grandfather clock had to stand in a hole dug for that purpose.

The grandfather clock moved up the road with the family in 1919. It is still there, standing behind my Aunt Nelly as I type these words in November 1999. My Aunt Nelly has lived in this house all her seventy-eight years to date. My son, Louis, is sleeping upstairs. He was born in New Zealand and raised, from the age of two, in Australia. He turned twenty-two a month ago. He has already been in eleven different countries and soon he will fly to yet another, Israel. I returned to England with Louis, after twenty-three years, almost three years ago. In those three years I have crossed the Atlantic five times and Louis has crossed it on three occasions. It took me some time to find the grave of my great grandfather, James Gaskell. I like to imagine that the urge to travel, which has dominated my life, comes as a genetic inheritance from him through his daughter Helen. She did not travel. She only left the house to go to mass on Sundays.

When my grandparents, their children, Uncle Willi and the grandfather clock moved to what is now 89 Carr Mill Road, the Dixon³¹s were living in the house next door, going down towards the Mason's Arms. That house, built in 1770, is divided into two dwellings. Bob Dixon lived nearest the Taylors, where Stan Grundy and his wife have since lived for over fifty years. Next-door Bob Dixon's brother, William, lived with his wife and family. One of the daughters, Jane, lived next door with Bob as his housekeeper. Bob never married. He worked as a carpenter for Pilkingtons. Six days a week he walked to and from work at Rainford. Seven nights a week, at nine-o'clock exactly, Uncle Willi and Bob Dixon would walk down the road to the Mason's Arms. My dad remembers that Uncle Willi was always back by ten. Uncle Willi and Bob Dixon were the only two customers who drank in what was then called the parlour room of the pub. The other clients drank in the taproom. Uncle Willi was a Tory. My grandfather defiantly wasn't. I have never know any person to use any other word

³⁰ Later changed to 65 then 89.

³¹ See Appendix O –The Dixon Story.

with such malice as when my grandfather used the word 'Tory.' That he resented Uncle Willi living with them as a result of his wife's promise to her grandmother was inevitable; that Willi and he were so politically opposite would not have helped. My father remembers having to separate them over a disagreement about the General Strike of 1926.

None the less, William Wilcock must have made a huge contribution to the family's welfare. His was one extra wage coming in when such could mean the difference between poverty and relative comfort. It was probably the reason that the three youngest children were able to go to grammar school. The two surviving children, my father and my Aunt Nelly, both remember Uncle Willi with great affection. He was good to the kids. He indirectly saved my father's life. A childhood accident, resulting in a fractured skull, was not responding to treatment until Dr Mason came to examine my father at Willi's behest. Doctor Mason took the barely conscious eight-year-old straight to St. Helens Hospital, whereupon he operated on him immediately. My dad recovered where otherwise he may not have done so. The grandfather clock needs a slight repair. I'll see that it's done before the year turns.

My grandfather, **Francis** Taylor, was the biggest influence of my formative years. For the first eighteen months of my life we lived at Carr Mill Road. Jack, the dog, named after his father's dog, used to jump in my pram when my mother pushed me up Long Fold Brow. We moved to 5 Holt Crescent before my second birthday. My mother took me to work with her at Tanyard House Farm, often called Robinson's Farm, but once I started school it was to my grandparent's that I went for dinner and after school, until my parents came home from work. It was my grandfather who met me at the school gate and who walked me home, both to Holt Crescent and later to Claremont Road. We moved to Claremont Road when I was eight. My early childhood memories are of long walks with my grandfather and his dog Jack. He taught me how to make catapults and how to play darts. He taught me the birds and the trees and where to tickle trout. He taught me the geography and the history of my surroundings. He taught me how to shoot with a shotgun. He taught me how to whistle with two fingers and this skill I in turn taught to Louis. The only thing I can do really well is to whistle for taxis. This I owe to my grandfather. But beneath those practical skills he bequeathed the basis of my earliest philosophy. I had no way of knowing it was happening but is there any faith stronger than a child's faith that its father, or in this case its grandfather, knows everything?

Accrued knowledge is passed down the generations in the format of oft-repeated stories. The undercurrent to many, if not most of, my grandfather's stories was the working class struggle. Their moral was simple; the upper class is the despotic enemy. My grandfather was a communist where there never was a communist party. That he never voted for other than for the Labour Party is more certain than the sun will rise tomorrow.

He was a short and stocky man who wore a flat cap and carried a walking stick. The stick was not for walking; it was a weapon. The pitchfork, or the pickle as we called it, is now as obsolete to agriculture as the carthorse. The staff of a pitchfork was made from ash; light, strong and the favoured wood for the quarterstaff, that traditional weapon of Old England. My grandfather's walking stick was the shortened staff of a pitchfork with a brass end to stop it fraying. If a dog bit one of his children he killed

it. I doubt any dog ever bit my grandfather; very few ever came near enough to him to bite. The few that did soon regretted it. Jack, his black fox terrier was partially to blame.

Jack was a feral animal, running wild on an airport on the other side of Warrington where my father was working just before the war. He saw Jack catch a rabbit and brought him home. Catching rabbits was his passport to Billinge where the skill was appreciated. Billingers have been poaching for generations. Having been feral, the wildness never left him. Until his death, some fifteen years later, Jack would fight with anything. The size of another dog never bothered Jack because a fight with an Alsatian, five times his size, wasn't as one-sided as it might have been. My grandfather always joined in, usually only half a step behind the fox terrier. His favourite stroke was the blow between the ears and he was an expert at it. I've seen him do it dozens of times, usually when we met a stranger with a dog on the long walks that constituted my early education. Only stranger's dogs came near my grandfather. Among the many visions that I retain of that tenacious old man, who was still riding a motorbike at eighty, is one of dogs melting away from his coming like fish from an approaching shark. As far as half a mile ahead, dogs would slowly rise from resting in sunny comfort, stretch, then yawn, and then disappear!

Now my grandfather has disappeared. Along with him much of the Billinge he lived his entire life in has also disappeared. The Greater Municipal Districts of Liverpool and Manchester converge at Billinge Church. Billinge Chapel End is now part of St. Helens and Billinge Higher End is part of Wigan. London Fields is now a litter-despoiled footpath through a series of housing estates, populated by the products of urban over spill. The threat of ghostly Hell Hounds is no longer tangible. A late-night walker is more likely to be assaulted by a mob of teenage hooligans. There is no valid reason whatsoever why anyone would linger a few yards south of the intersection of London Fields and Garswood Road in the dead of a winter's evening. At the stroke of midnight, on last day of the year nineteen ninety-nine, I'll be there.

29/11/1999.



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THE MATHERS – TEN GENERATIONS

News of my father's death arrived by e-mail from my sister's daughter Ruth. The message was brief, to the point and came as no surprise. 'Joe, your dad passed away today, just about dinnertime. Your mum is holding her own at present, apparently he was admitted to hospital on Thursday night, was in a lot of discomfort yesterday, he was given some diamorphines to ease it, but lost consciousness this morning. Mum and Dad are there to give Grandma a bit of support. I haven't spoke to any of them yet. This message was from our Helen. No doubt she will be in touch soon to tell you more. Lots of love Ruth'. It was the evening of Grand National day, won by a horse called Pappillon. Somehow that seemed appropriate. He once told me that Bill Derbyshire was the only person ever to score a century for Billinge. His own innings of eight-six had been a pretty good bat.

Louis and I were surveying a pipeline across the flat Lincolnshire farmlands, staying at a bed and breakfast place in Great Barford, close to Bedford, when the news arrived. After that we worked just about non-stop through occasionally atrocious weather to finish the job then get back to Billinge for the funeral. In doing so we just about killed our Colombian workmate and passed through the best English countryside that I can remember seeing. We worked straight across farmland, following the pipeline, which is not something that anyone can do with immunity, passing through or close by many tiny villages and isolated farm buildings. Often a farmhouse dwelling pre dates the villages, which were often built to house workers after the tenant farms were established. In the course of walking from Market Rasen to Bedford, by a more or less direct route, we passed through much that is more or less unique to England.

In the interim before the service we tracked down my father's long-lost cousin, Sally Margaret Hargreaves, formally Sally Morley, in that typical Lancashire mill-town of Nelson, snuggled against the outposts of moorlands, stretching eastward into Yorkshire. She told us the stories that her mother, Eleanor, had passed on to her and they dovetailed into those my grandfather had told to me, making the hazy mosaic of our mutual history more complete and tangible. She solved the mystery of one of the unidentified photographs in my grandmother's album. It turned out that the sepia toned image, printed on cardboard, was my great grandmother, Sara Taylor. That critical scrap of information alone would have made the trip worthwhile but being with Sally was a pleasure in itself. We learned that she has a son living in Brazil and that Leo Taylor's widow, Eira, lives in the tiny village of Beddgelert, in central Wales. Next day we went there.

There was snow on the Welsh Mountains, making them stand out vividly against a clear blue sky. All in all the scenery was breathtaking. Beddgelert sits at the foot of Mount Snowdon, at the junction of two mountain streams, where Prince Llewelyn so tragically killed his faithful wolfhound in the thirteenth century. The dog's grave is a matter of legend made tangible. There's an old church there with parts dating back to Celtic Christianity. Leo, my father's cousin, died last year, before I discovered the whereabouts of this family branch. His widow is a native of Beddgelert. I was to discover from her that Leo had been a mountaineer, a mountain guide, a ski instructor and an authority on Snowdon's flora. He had even climbed the Matterhorn. His ashes were scattered in the Gwynedd Valley, at the spot where tourists stop to take a

photograph when they visit the National Park in which Snowdon stands. We walked around the village with his twenty-one year old son, a quiet boy with sandy hair and faraway eyes. It was peaceful and very moving.

The service was held at Saint James', where great aunt Cecily's brother-in-law, Cannon Baybutt, had been parish priest for twenty-six years. From there the proceedings moved to St. Luke's, where his body was buried. It turned out to be a bitterly cold day, confirming, once again, that whatever family and friends survive me will not be subjected to same ordeal: the sight of my poor old aunt, hobbling the hundred yards or so from the church to the grave, to listen to more mumbo jumbo in the rain, then toss a pinch of sand in the general direction of the coffin, saddened me far more than the passing of a man who lived for close on a century. Those undertakers surely are on a winner - if I can arrange it so, they will gain nothing from my passing.

Three days after the funeral, on the twentieth of April 2000, Louis flew back to New Zealand. With my father and son both out of the picture there did not seem to be any great urgency in pursuing local history. Events, however, took on their own impetus in the form of a photograph that Keith Roby's wife Jean had discovered. It depicted a Methodist walking day procession, coming up Longshaw Old Road. The triangle of land behind the Hare & Hounds was vacant in this photograph but obviously the stonewall on the right, looking down towards Park Road, had been recently constructed. My thoughts were that if I could discover the construction date of that wall I would be able to make an educated guess as to which of our Roby ancestors might be among the spectators watching the procession. That land had belonged to the Mather family. Ten minutes after climbing off his tractor, in the yard at Wiswall Farm, Charles Mather handed me a printed document that his brother Hugh had compiled in 1993. That document is reproduced below, with apologies to Hugh for the editing out of obvious typographic mistakes and making slight adjustments.

INTRODUCTION

These notes on the history of the family are a compilation of facts and stories obtained from various people, of whom the most important have been Mrs Frances Hunt (from notes recorded around 1969), Miss Betty Wright and my mother, Mrs Edith Mather. I am particularly indebted to Mrs Margaret Whittle and Rev Tom Steel for information about the Mather family in the 18th Century and before. It is intended to enlarge it further, as more details become available. I have extended it forwards to include people who have died fairly recently, but have included few details of people who are still alive - that is a task for future generations. My purpose is to set down a permanent record of the family history, up to around 1950, for the interest both of our successors and ourselves. (Hugh Mather 30/3/1993)

PART ONE - PRIOR TO 1850.

Rev Tom Steel, Vicar of Prescott, has undertaken a comprehensive survey of the Mather family in the 17th-18th Centuries and virtually all my information is gained directly from his research. The first reference is in 1604, when Margaret Mather is mentioned as an 'old recusant' and in 1607, when Richard Mather is given a lease of land from the Gerard estate. It is not clear whether they are direct ancestors, but it seems likely from the

references both to recusancy, the leasing of land from the Gerard Estate and indeed their Christian names (see below).

RICHARD (16??-1672) AND MARGARET MATHER

A Richard Mather is the earliest family member who can be traced with reasonable certainty. His date of birth is unknown. In 1654 he obtained a lease of 'the Long Croft' in Billinge from the Gerard Estate. He paid £160 to James Anderton of Birchley for various properties, including the 'Longe Hayes, the Oxcroft, the two Clay Crofts, the Makeins Hey, the Makeins Lane and the Oven House Hey'. Richard was elected constable of Billinge and Winstanley in 1659. In 1661/2 he is described as yeoman and credited with giving one shilling as a 'free and voluntary present' to Charles II. He is recorded as occupying 18 acres in Billinge. The family links with recusancy are shown by a deed from 1665 relating Billinge Chapel, which names one Peter Mather (possibly Richard's son) 'if he be and continues a member of the C of E'. Richard was buried at Wigan on 13/3/1672 and his widow, Margaret, was buried on 5/4/1680. He had at least three children, namely Peter and Richard, born in or before 1651, and Francis, born by 1660/1. Our line of the family comes through his second son, Richard.

RICHARD (c1651-1733) AND ELIZABETH

Richard Mather was born around 1651. He married his wife, Elizabeth, before 1682 and had four children, namely Margaret, baptised in Wigan in 1682, Thomas, born c1686, John, and Anne, born c1688. He took a new lease of 'The Long Croft' from the Gerard Estate and this lease was renewed in 1715. The 'Return of Papists' of 1705 details him as being a Roman Catholic. In Estcourt and Payne's English Catholic Non-jurors, he is referred to as Richard Mather of Billinge, yeoman. He had a £5 annuity 'out of a house tenanted by their Protestant son Thomas'. In 1717 he is recorded as holding 19 acres in Billinge, leased from the Gerard's. He made his will in 1717, in which his property includes the 'Miln House', 'Chaddocks Ground' and 'the little house called Jennetts'. Richard died in 1733 and was buried at Wigan in June. His inventory survives. Elizabeth, his widow, died in 1745 and was buried at Wigan on 4/11/1745.

THOMAS (c1686-1745) AND HANNAH

Thomas was the second child of Richard and Elizabeth, born c1686. Both his parents were Roman Catholic but he had become a Protestant by 1715. Thomas was a court attorney and bailiff. On 4/6/1709 Wigan Court heard the petition of 'Mr Thomas Mather of Wigan to elect him attorney and choose him burgess'. He was duly elected burgess, was bailiff of court in 1709 and attorney from 1716-9. He married Hannah Rawlinson on 22/8/1726 by licence at Farnworth. At that time he is described as a 'gentleman, 35, of Billinge'- this would make his birthdate to be c1689. Hannah was the younger daughter of Peter Rawlinson, a yeoman of Farnworth and Newton and his wife Hannah (nee Dennis). In 1726 he is detailed as holding one acre of the Gerard's estate in Newton. He also seems to have acquired property in Newton through his marriage, notably those named 'Pepper Alley' and 'Crow Lane'. He is described as a 'gentleman' in 1727-1736 and as a 'yeoman' in 1743. He attended every Annual Vestry Meeting at Billinge except two, from 1718-1744. He died in 1745, five months before his mother, and was buried at Wigan on 28/5/1745, when he is described as 'Mr Thomas Mather of Billinge, Attorney'. Hannah, his wife, lived on until at least 1769. In 1760 she is

recorded as paying rents for the Newton properties, left to her by her father, Peter Rawlinson (who died in 1749 and was buried at Winwick on 5/7/1749). Hannah died between 1769 and 1781 and was probably buried in Wigan.

Thomas and Hannah had seven children, all baptised at Billinge. Elizabeth, the eldest, was baptised on 17/8/1727. Subsequent children were Alice (1729), John and Margaret (1731), James (1733), Thomas (1736) and Richard (1743). Our line of the Mather family comes through James, their fourth child. That of Rev Tom Steel passes through Elizabeth, who married John Hodgkinson, a weaver, in Wigan in 1748.

JAMES (1733-1802) AND ANN

James was born in 1733 and probably married Ann Berrington of Rainford at Wigan in 1765. As yet, little is known of him. He is described as a Billinge yeoman and died in 1802. James and Ann had several children, namely Thomas (1767), Ann (1768), Joshua (1769), James (1771), John (1772), Tabitha (1774), William (1776), Peter (1778) and Sarah (1781). Our line of family passes through Joshua. Of the other children, James is described in the 1841 census as a cotton weaver at Birchley Gate and Peter is listed as an 'independent' at School Brow.

JOSHUA (1769-c1850) AND 'PEGGY' (MARGARET)

Joshua, the third child of James and Ann Mather, was born in 1769. His first child, Richard, was illegitimate, born circa 1801 to Peggy Mather, who subsequently married Joshua on 23/08/1805. Little is known of the ancestry of Peggy, whose maiden name was also Mather. They then had 9 more children. In 1841 he is recorded in the Census as living at Fir Tree House, as a farmer and shopkeeper. He was alive in 1852, when he helped to administer the Estate of William Ainsworth. The latter, a grandson of Peter Rawlinson, had become a wealthy Liverpool merchant. On his death in 1807 his Estate was left to trustees to benefit his mentally handicapped brother, Thomas. When Thomas Ainsworth died in 1848, Joshua, his second cousin and next-of-kin, administered the Estate. It was divided into 10 parts and many of the extended Mather family benefited from it.

The ten children of Joshua and Margaret Mather were: Richard (1801), Betty (1806), Ann (1808), James (1811), Sarah (1813), Margaret (1815), Mary (1817), Ellen (1819), Joshua (1821), Peter (1831) and William (date of birth unknown). Our line of the family passes through the first born, Richard. The sixth child, Margaret, married Francis Crank in Wigan in 1866 and the Crank family, including Margaret Crank, now Whittle, who assisted with this research, is thus related to the Mathers.

RICHARD (1802-1874) AND ELLEN

Richard Mather was born in 1802, the first and illegitimate son of Joshua and Margaret ('Peggy') Mather. He was baptised at Billinge in 1802 as the illegitimate son of Peggy Mather. His exact parentage is thus slightly obscure, but in Joshua's will he is referred to as 'my illegitimate son'. Richard was a carter. He married Ellen Stephenson (born circa 1811) in 1833. She was a seamstress who came from Dittons Prior, Farnworth, near Widnes. Richard is said to have met her while carting stone to Widnes. It is reported that Richard saw her sewing in a window when collecting water for his horse and threw

the water away to have another look. The table at which she was sitting is now the possession of Betty Wright. When they married, they 'made their mark' in the parish register, evidently being illiterate. In the Baptism register, their residence is given as Billinge until 1837, but after that they are said to live in Winstanley. In the 1841 Census, they are recorded as living at Flint Cottages, Winstanley.

Richard and Ellen had several children, namely Joshua born 1834 and Margaret born 1837 (named after their paternal grandparents), James born 1842 (died in childhood), Hugh born 28/01/1844, Richard born 1845, and William, who was born around 1852. In the 1851 Census, the family is recorded as living at Chapel Brow, Billinge. Richard is described as a stone delf labourer and he is said to have worked for James Melling at some stage. In addition to their four children living at that time, they had four lodgers, three of whom were colliery labourers. By the 1861 Census, Richard is described as a shopkeeper, again on Chapel Brow. Whether this is the same shop run later by Hugh and Elizabeth is unclear. By 1871, Richard and Ellen are living with one lodger on Chapel Brow. Richard is described as an agricultural labourer. Richard (the father) died on 23/12/1874, aged 73, and Ellen (his wife) died on 24/06/1874 aged 64.

The three youngest children of Richard and Ellen (Hugh, Richard and William) survived to adult life, as did Joshua, the oldest child. The latter was living at 28 Holy Fold in the 1871 Census, with his wife Mary. Later, he lived at the Pingot and was remembered by Auntie Nelly as 'Uncle Joshua'. Hugh married Elizabeth Peet and they and their offspring are the main theme of this leaflet. Richard (his brother) was an engine driver. He was killed in a colliery accident when aged about twenty-seven. William went to live in Walton, to work as an engine driver and raised a large family based in Crosby.

PART TWO. HUGH MATHER (1844-1912) AND ELIZABETH PEET ONWARDS.

The modern history of the extended Mather family begins with this couple. They are the common ancestors of the Mather, Wright, Laithwaite and Hunt families and are the first ancestors of whom photographs survive. Hugh was born on 26/01/1844. He married Elizabeth Peet on 29/10/1866, when both were aged twenty-two. His occupation in the 1861 Census, when he was aged seventeen, was given as blacksmith. On his marriage certificate he is stated as being an engine driver. He worked at Sammy Stocks' pit at Blackleyhurst. He is said to have liked music and met Elizabeth when playing in a band at a school treat in Rainford.

Elizabeth Peet was born in 1845 at Atherton House Farm, Winstanley Road. She was the illegitimate daughter of Sally Peet, aged 21, a maid at Winstanley Hall, and James Nicholson. The latter came from Scotland. He was one of several Nicholson brothers who managed Bankes Estate. They seem to have been notably prolific. In the 1841 Census, William and Ann Nicholson are recorded as living at Atherton House Farm. Their children (and ages in 1841) are recorded as William (25), Phoebe (25), Mary (20), John (20) and Robert (27?). No son named James is recorded, making the identity of Elizabeth's father slightly unclear. James and Alice Peet are recorded as farmers in Winstanley in 1841. They may be forbears of Sally Peet.

Elizabeth Peet was brought up at Crank by 'Yorkshire Charlie', whose real name was Charles Howarth. They lived in a cottage, since demolished, which was opposite the

Pendlebury Chapel in Crank. He is said to have worked in the quarries in Crank Caverns and helped to construct the UpHolland railway tunnel. He married the aunt of Elizabeth, had no children of his own, but brought up his illegitimate niece. She claimed to have had only sixpence in her pocket at the time of her wedding.

After their marriage in 1866, Hugh and Elizabeth initially lived at 6 Beacon Road, in a cottage since demolished. It was one of three built at right angles to the road, as the road dips, on the left hand side going towards Billinge Hill. They were still living there in 1871. They subsequently moved to 52 Main Street, close to the 'Old House at Home', where Elizabeth ran a shop to supplement Hugh's earnings. She was extremely hard-working, thrifty and ambitious. The shop sold provisions (bread, cakes etc.) for miners. She is said to have risen at five a.m. to obtain water from the pump, situated in what is now Bankes Park, to start baking scones. She walked to St Helens to obtain supplies for her shop. They are said to have run the first post office in Billinge. Hugh subsequently became a contractor and employed Irish workers, to whom he sold provisions from the shop run by his wife, Elizabeth.

They had a family of six children, namely Charles, born 1868, Richard, Sarah Ellen (Nellie), Mary ('Polly'), Elizabeth (Bessie), and Charlotte ('Lottie'). Their eldest son, Charles, married Mary Ann Simm from 52 Main St in 1888. In the 1891 Census, the children living there were Richard (19), medical student, Sarah Ellen (17) dressmaker, Mary (13) and Charlotte (11). At some time afterwards, Hugh and Elizabeth moved across the road, to run the Stork Inn and the farm attached, which they rented from the Bankes Estate. It is probable that money from the Simm family, after Charles' marriage to Mary Ann, played an important part in this venture. The Stork was very prosperous. Large parties were held there for travelling merchants. It was a resting venue between Liverpool and Manchester. One early visitor was Lord Leverhulme. Elaborate meals were served and the small farm, attached to the Stork, was used to provide food. The four daughters helped to run the Inn, working as barmaids. The venture must have been very successful because they had saved enough capital to build the 'Red Knob Row' of houses in Newton Road (number 2 onwards), in 1903.

Elizabeth was always the dominant partner, being remarkably industrious and ambitious. Her husband, Hugh, was a kindly man and a good father but was much more passive and easy-going than his wife. He had a sandy beard, much in evidence in old photographs. He was a member of Billinge Council for many years, a Government Official, having been the assessor of taxes for over 30 years and the land valuation officer. He was a sidesman at Billinge Church for many years. He died on 13/07/12, aged sixty-eight, from pneumonia after working in the hay on the farm at the Stork. His obituary in the Wigan Observer states that 'he was a man who was very well known not only in Billinge, where he had had many interests for more than a generation, but also throughout the Wigan district. He was greatly respected and his funeral proceedings were most impressive'.

Elizabeth lived her final years at Longshaw House. She moved there with her daughter 'Auntie Nelly' and the Wright family (William and Polly, with their three young sons), presumably soon after the death of her husband in 1912. By the time Betty Wright was born, in 1914, the extended family was living at Longshaw House. Elizabeth initially rented Longshaw House from the Bankes, and the family subsequently bought it. In addition to the Wright family, Elizabeth and her daughter Nellie, Miss Emma Cadman

also lived there. She was the illegitimate daughter of a man named Cadman who owned a local quarry. She also had Nicholson blood, was a cousin of Elizabeth and regarded as part of the family. She was presumably a descendent of Canon Cadman, who was born at Longshaw House on 13/5/1815. He became a Canon of Canterbury Cathedral, Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Vicar of St Marylebone and died on 12/5/1891. Miss Cadman had been well educated at a private school, was rather genteel and taught the piano.

Elizabeth was a forceful, determined and extremely ambitious lady and was very much the head of the 'extended' Mather family. Her grandchildren were rather frightened of her. Perhaps her drive dated back to her childhood, as an illegitimate girl and virtual orphan, in Mid-Victorian England. Perhaps her Scottish blood, from her father James Nicholson, also played an important part. She frequently claimed to be writing her life story, in her old age, but this never materialized. She was clearly a very remarkable lady, who founded an equally remarkable extended family, and rose to a position of wealth and influence within the local community, from entirely humble origins. She died at Longshaw House on 6/6/1933, aged eighty-eight. Her obituary in the Wigan Observer describes her as 'one of the best known and most beloved residents of Billinge'. It refers to her work on behalf of Billinge Parish Church and states that her gracious manner endeared her to all who knew her. At her request, her eight grandsons carried her coffin from Longshaw House to Billinge Church. These were Hugh, David, James and Richard Mather; James, Hugh and Charles Wright; and Tom Laithwaite.

Elizabeth had a full sister, Mary Peet, who was brought up in Orrell, married a man named Nixon and through whom the family is distantly related to several local families, including the Rylance, Gaskell, Anderton, Barton and Nixon families. She also may have had another sister named Betsy. Their mother, Sarah ('Sally') Peet then married a man named John Topping, who came from a Catholic family and made gravestones. John Topping died on 25/1/1890, aged seventy. They had a son, Tommy Topping, who was the father of the family of window cleaners and who died on 4/10/32 aged seventy-seven. Sally died aged ninety-one at the Grapes Inn, Orrell on 3/2/1915, being thus born around 1824. She is buried at St James Catholic Church, Orrell, with her husband and her son. Mary Nixon's daughter, Alice, married a man named Winnard, and they ran the Grapes Inn at Orrell. They had a famous parrot in the bar, which attracted much custom by calling 'Drink up, time gentleman please!' All three Peet sisters lived well into their eighties.

THE SIMM FAMILY

JOSEPH (c1800-1849) AND ANN SIMM

The Simm family originated around Downall Green, Ashton in Makerfield. The details given below were recorded in the front of the Simm family bible, belonging to Francis Hunt. This bible revealed that Joseph Simm (circa 1800-12/3/1849) and his wife Ann had 11 children between 1828 and 1844. The fourth of these, John Simm, born 10/3/1832, was the father of Mary Ann Simm who married Charles Mather in 1888. They were a farming family and it seems possible that they gave rise to the locality 'Simm's Lane End'. Ann Simm became a widow after her husband died of a fever in 1849. The 1861 Census indicates that she was born in Ashton, around 1803 and that she was then living with her son John and daughter-in-law Mary Anne at Brownlow, with

James Melling. She is said to have lived somewhere near the pub named the 'Foot', near Billinge Hospital, but further details are not available.

Full details of Joseph and Anne Simm's children, from the family bible, are as follows:

Mary, born 17/11/1828, died?

John, born 12/1829, died 4/8/31 aged 19 months

Jane, born 13/2/1831, died?

John, born 10/3/32 died 21/2/97 (see below)

Susannah, born 30/5/1833, died 23/6/1851 aged 18

Ellen born 4/1/1834 died 11/4/57 aged 22

Thomas, born 22/11/1836 died?

Abraham, born 7/8/1838, died? (Alive in Billinge, 1876)

Robert, born 8/7/1840, died?

Hannah, born 25/2/1842, died 16/3/45 aged 3

Joseph, born 14/8/44 died 26/1/46 aged 19 months

JOHN (1832-1897) AND MARY ANN SIMM

John Simm was born 10/3/1832 at Billinge and died on 21/2/1897, the fourth child of Joseph and Anne Simm. He married Mary Ann Melling, who was born around 1829 and died on 27/10/1891. Her older brother, James Melling, born around 1822, owned a stone quarry (Coppice Wood quarry) on Billinge Hill around the years 1850-90 and made a considerable amount of money. He built the rows of houses in Longshaw, around 1845 onwards, from rough stone from his quarries. He was unmarried and lived for many years with John and Mary Simm and their two children. At the 1861 Census, they were living in Brownlow and farming 14 acres. At this stage, the household consisted of John, his wife Mary Anne, his mother Anne (aged 58), his sister (Jane Wadsworth, 30), and James Melling (aged 39), described as a lodger and stonemason. In 1871 Longshaw House Farm, as Wiswalls was then termed, was home to Thomas Melling, 'farmer of 33 acres, employing 2 boys'. The relation of Thomas Melling to James is unclear, and may be non-existent.

In 1881 John and Mary Simm are recorded as living at the 'City', Longshaw, with their children Mary Anne (12) and John James (7), and James Melling. John is described as 'farmer of 30 acres'. It is not clear whether they were living at Wiswalls at that time. James Melling bought the farm from the Gerard family on 9/8/1888 for £3000, after renting it for an unknown period. The farm included the triangle of land behind the Hare and Hounds. He died on 28/12/89 at Wiswalls. His estate was valued at £1701-13s-1d. Most of his estate, including Wiswalls Farm, was bequeathed to the children of his sister and brother-in-law, Mary Anne and John Simm, who were confusingly also named Mary Ann and John James Simm. His will was made on 17/12/1889 and he died on 28/12/1889. James Melling had another sister named Jane, who died prior to 1889, married to a man named Laithwaite. They had a son named James (or Joseph) Laithwaite, who was nicknamed 'Old Paider'. By all accounts he was a severe drinker and lived a rather erratic life, although said to be kind-hearted. He was left a row of houses to the left of Moore's shop but in effect was cut out of most of his uncle's will. He had a sister, Anne, who married William Barton. James Melling thus had several nephews and nieces and the two Simm children, Mary Anne and John James, seem fortunate to have inherited most of the estate.

Thus John Simm farmed at Wiswalls, after farming at Brownlow, moving there after his brother-in-law, James Melling, had bought it. As detailed above, he had two children, Mary Ann (born 27/9/1868) and John James (born 15/12/1873). They were old parents - Mary Anne Simm (nee Melling) had her two children when aged around thirty-eight and forty-four. Mary Anne died on 27/10/1891 aged sixty-two and John Simm died on 21/2/1897 aged sixty-four.

JOHN JAMES SIMM was Mary Anne Simm's younger brother, born on 17/12/1873. He farmed at Wiswalls after his father died in 1897. His uncle, James Melling, who died when he was 16, bequeathed Wiswalls Farm to him. He was an intelligent man, who had wide-ranging interests, such as astronomy, violin playing and cacti. He was not a successful farmer, apparently spending too much time in his greenhouse. Earlier in life he was in love with Bessie Mather (see below) who married Billy Cliffe. Towards the end of his life he became an eccentric recluse and Wiswalls farmhouse became increasingly dilapidated. Betty Wright, who was brought up at Longshaw House, barely half a mile away, never visited the farm in those days. He was regarded as very strange and rather frightening. He died unmarried and intestate on 15/8/1931, aged fifty-seven. For several years the house was derelict, until renovated by Hugh Mather in 1941. His estate, including Wiswalls, was passed on to his sister Mary Anne Simm. The gross value was £6259-8s-9d, net £1199-3s-1d.

CHARLES MATHER (c1868-1952), MARY ANNE SIMM & THEIR CHILDREN

Charles was the eldest child of Hugh and Elizabeth Mather, being born around 1868. He married Mary Anne Simm when both were aged twenty. He was regarded as rather idle and effectively retired having married a wealthy young lady. His occupation when he married was given as labourer.

Mary Anne Simm was born around 1868. She spent at least some of her childhood at Wiswalls Farm although it is not exactly clear when the family moved there. She attended a school at Brownlow and was a potentially wealthy young girl when she married Charles Mather in 1888. Charles and Mary Anne then lived at Wiswalls Farm for a while, with her parents and brother. In the 1891 Census, they are recorded as living at Wiswalls with Charles aged 25, Mary Anne 22, John James 17, and their young daughter Frances aged one. They subsequently lived at Chapel House, where Charles acted as coachman and general assistant to his brother Dr R.O. Mather. They then moved to 2 Newton Road, which was one of the row of houses built by his mother Elizabeth. They probably moved there after they were built in 1903. Charles lived in the same house for virtually 50 years. Later he became Registrar of births, deaths and marriages for Orrell, Billinge, UpHolland and Dalton, with his daughter Francis acting as his assistant, holding this post for thirty-one years, retiring in 1935. He is said to have married the young George Formby. He was fond of telling his children that 'there was no royal road to success', but it was generally thought that he had disproved this hypothesis.

There was some friction initially between Mary Anne and Elizabeth, her dominant mother-in-law, who regarded the Simms as rather ignorant, but was happy to utilise some of the Simm (i.e. Melling) family money nevertheless. Mary Anne dressed rather

plainly and appeared rather 'ordinary', out of keeping with her considerable wealth. On one occasion she was shopping in Pendlebury's, Wigan, when questions were asked as to her credit-worthiness. The manager apparently told the assistant that she could buy the entire contents of the shop if she wished.

She is remembered as a quiet, kind, and intelligent lady. She was generous to a fault and charged only nominal rents on the dozen or so houses she inherited at Longshaw from James Melling. She used to host a family party on Boxing Day, after the Wigan/St Helens rugby match, and offer hospitality at 2 Newton Road to the large 'extended' Mather family. Towards the end of her life, Mary Anne had a stroke and prolonged ill health. After being virtually chair-bound for several years, she died on 13/7/1941 aged seventy-two. Her obituary notice in the Wigan Observer refers to her 'very charming disposition'. She grieved considerably over her two children who died in infancy, John Irvine and John Oswald, and at her death was found to have retained their booties as a cherished possession.

Charles was interested in music. He was taught, by man named Birchall, to play the organ and was organist at Billinge Church for many years, from around 1888 to 1922. At that time, the organ was at the rear of the church, before the East End extension was built (around 1905). It is said that he had to be fetched from the Eagle after sermons to play the final hymn. On Christmas morning 1921 he was found to be unfit to play and Albert Mather (who is no relation) was asked to take over. Charles finally retired as organist in June 1922 after 32 years service and was presented with a chiming clock. He played the piano for silent films shown at the Conservative club and at one time had piano pupils, although his own children did not learn. He is said to have stored bacon inside his piano during rationing in World War I, resulting in rusty strings.

He was a large, stocky man, who latterly walked with difficulty after badly injuring his knees when out shooting, in 1935. He was universally known as 'Old Charlie' in his later years. He played a prominent role in local Council affairs for many years, serving on Billinge and Winstanley District Council for forty-nine years, from 1897 to 1946. He was Chairman of the Council on several occasions and was Chairman of the Water Committee for a long period. He was involved in various local projects. A water pump near Brownlow was named the Mather pump after him. Until an accident in 1935, he had never missed a council meeting for 38 years. He was appointed a County Magistrate in 1919. However, he was to some extent overshadowed by his bright and talented younger brother, Richard, for most of his life. Sadly, he died from burns. To quote the inquest, it was his practice to get up about 4.30 a.m. to light the kitchen fire at 2 Newton Road. He stumbled into the fire while fastening his boot. He died on the following day in Billinge Hospital, on 6/12/52, aged eighty-six.

Charles and Mary Anne Mather had six children. Four survived to adult life. These were Francis, Hugh Leslie, David Maurice and James Simm. They are detailed below. Two boys, John Irvine and John Oswald, born between Francis (in 1891) and Hugh (around 1895) died in infancy, aged around ten months and eighteen months, from gastro-enteritis.

Francis was born in 1891, in the study at Wiswalls Farm. She was brought up by her mother to be a gentlewoman and wore smart clothes and kid gloves, in contrast to her three younger brothers, who tended to be rather scruffy. She attended the Gamble

institute in St Helens and may have studied Art. She also boarded at the Notre Dame Convent in Wigan. As only French was spoken at mealtimes, she became fluent in French. She worked as a nurse at Billinge Hospital during the First World War when it was a military hospital. She married William ('Billy') Hunt, a farmer, around 1925, when she was well into her thirties. They lived at Home Farm, Ashton, ran a milk round and sold poultry and provisions, in conjunction with running the dairy farm. Her husband died around 1944. Francis then lived with Billy and Bessie Cliffe in Winstanley Road, before finally moving to 93 Up Holland Road, where she lived for the remainder of her life. She had one son, David, who was born around 1928. She had a gift for communication with children, and was much loved by younger generations towards the end of her life! She died in the 1970's, then aged in her eighties.

Hugh Leslie was born around 1895, and educated at Ashton Grammar School, as were David and James. He was notoriously mischievous as a boy and was fond of practical jokes. He grew to be a handsome, talented young man who excelled at sport, particularly athletics and trained in medicine at the University of Durham, in Newcastle. After his initial student training, he enrolled in the Navy as a surgeon probationer and fought in the Battle of Jutland. He subsequently undertook another spell in the Navy, in lieu of his younger brother, David. He then returned to Newcastle to finish his medical studies, qualifying as MB BS on 23/6/22. After serving as assistant to Dr Ormsby in Standish, he entered general practice with Norman Hartley in Pemberton, who subsequently died from appendicitis. Hugh then married his widow, Jeannie, took over the practice and lived in the Hartley family home, Leighton House, in Orrell Road, Pemberton. Jeannie is said to have married Hugh in part to retain the Pemberton practice for her son, Roy, who qualified in medicine intending to take up general practice but finally became an obstetrician. Alice Ashley, who subsequently lived at Wiswalls as Hugh's housekeeper, was employed there as a maid and wore a stiff black and white uniform. Hugh and Jeannie moved to Wiswalls after extensive renovations to the derelict house in 1941. He ran the farm, as well as the Pemberton practice, until his death on 3/12/1957, age sixty-two. He had intended to build a house on the Rough Heys, rather than renovate the house, but was unable to do so because of War restrictions. Ivy was said to be growing through the grandfather clock, which is now in the hall at Wiswalls.

Hugh was a handsome, energetic, intelligent man, with a good sense of humour. He liked fast cars in his youth and at one stage owned a large Sunbeam, of which he was very proud. He was a Mason, having been Master of Lindsay Lodge. He latterly became rather reclusive, partly because his marriage to Jeannie was not particularly close. She was often away, at her holiday home at Treadur Bay. They had no children.

David was born in about 1899. His second name was Maurice, after Dr Maurice Enright, a locum doctor who stayed at Chapel House around that time. He had asthma in childhood and was generally not over-robust. As a child he broke his leg while playing in the building site when the houses on the opposite site of Newton Road were being erected in 1905. The leg set badly, leaving it slightly crooked for the rest of his life. Both David and Hugh were strongly encouraged to work by their father, Charles, who was fond of telling them that 'there was no royal road to success'. They were both brought up at 2 Newton Road from 1903 onwards and David had the clock stopped in the evenings so he could concentrate on his studies. He progressed from Ashton Grammar School to Liverpool University. He became bald early in life, wore glasses

and was rather sensitive. A lifelong bachelor, he remained close to his brother James, who was about eight years younger. After qualifying MB ChB on 30/6/20, he entered general practice in Billinge. He also worked at Billinge Hospital throughout his adult life, becoming Medical Superintendent in 1936, on the retirement of his uncle. Dr David worked almost single-handed in the War years and undertook fairly major surgery. He drained empyemas, did 'Manchester' repairs, performed around 400 Caesarian sections during the war and had a deep interest in mental health and geriatrics. The geriatric unit at Billinge Hospital has subsequently been named in his honour. He lived at 2 Newton Road until the death of his father in 1952 then came to live with James and his family at 25 Newton Road and moved with them to Wiswalls in 1958. In the 1930's he farmed at Wiswalls, after the death of John James Simm, although he never lived there. Both he and Hugh liked shooting and he was active in the Home Guard in the war. He died on 6/5/65 age sixty-six. At the opening of the David Mather Unit at the hospital, it was aptly stated that 'his humanity, understanding and sense of humour endeared him not only to his patients but also to medical and nursing personnel with whom he came into contact.'

James was born on 3/6/07, weighing 4 pounds. He was by far the youngest in the family, being born about eight years after David, and as a boy was gentle and 'easy'. His middle name was Simm, for obvious reasons. He also attended Ashton Grammar School and Liverpool University, where he qualified when aged twenty. He was offered further training in surgery but came home to work in the family practice. He lived with David and his parents at 2 Newton Road from 1928 to 1938, when he married Edith Mee and moved to 25 Newton Road. In addition to his work in the practice, he was Medical Officer of Health for Billinge from 1932 to 1963, having obtaining the DPH diploma. He also gave many anaesthetics at Billinge Hospital, especially during the War. He was interested in music, opera and the theatre and was heavily involved in Masonry, becoming Worshipful Master of the Lindsay Lodge in Wigan. He also served as President of the BMA in Wigan. He was overwhelmingly popular as a doctor in Billinge and surrounding areas from 1928 to 1963. He died on 14/10/63, aged fifty-seven. A window in Billinge Church is dedicated to his memory.

THE 'CLAREMONT' BRANCH OF THE MATHER FAMILY

RICHARD OSWALD MATHER, 'R.O.', or 'Old Uncle Richard', the second child of Hugh and Elizabeth Mather, was born around 1870. He was bright and benefited from his mother's determination to make him succeed. He travelled daily to Wigan Grammar School, walking to Pemberton then catching a train. He subsequently studied medicine at Newcastle and qualified from Durham, although he obtained an Edinburgh qualification (LRCP, LRCS), in the early 1890's. His achievement in qualifying in medicine from a very humble background is thought to have been due in no small measure to the drive of his mother. He wrote a MD thesis on Psoriasis (or Acromegaly) and obtained the DPH diploma. He also had some postgraduate training in ophthalmology. He worked in Billinge for the remainder of his life. He initially practised in the shop in Main Street but subsequently moved the practice to Chapel House, Newton Road, and later to Claremont, which previously had a small schoolroom, which he bought from the Bankes family. He was Medical Officer of Health to Billinge from March 1896 to 1932 when his nephew James took over the post. He was also Medical Officer at Billinge Hospital for many years, assisted latterly by his two nephews, David and James. He married a Catholic girl named Annie Alker, who hailed

from a farm in Winstanley Road, at Brompton Oratory. This met with opposition from his parents, in keeping with the bigotry of those times. His wife was a sophisticated and proud lady but the marriage was not a total success. They had three children, Burgha, Richard and Phyllis.

Richard Oswald, a kind and cultured gentleman, was very highly regarded. He travelled around the practice initially in a pony and trap. In later life he always had a chauffeur and wore a morning coat. He was treated with considerable respect by the rest of the family, being referred to as 'Uncle Doctor'. He was an intelligent man, with various intellectual pursuits, including languages. His wife died on 21/1/41 and is buried at St Mary's, Birchley. After his retirement, 'Old RO' lived in a bungalow adjacent to Claremont, where his daughter Burgha looked him after. He died on 11/2/61.

Burgha was his eldest child. She was brought up as a Catholic, married a man named Pennington, and lived for many years in a bungalow next to Claremont. She looked after her father, 'RO', for the last decade of his life. She is still alive, in the Sue Ryder home in Billinge. She had no children.

Richard was brought up as Church of England and educated at Brighton College. He studied medicine at Durham and latterly at Liverpool, having had some problems in passing his finals. He married Betty, a dancer, who he had met whilst a student in Newcastle. He lived at Claremont for many years and was in the family practice for several decades. He was a kind man, who had more than his share of misfortune over the years. He lived to the age of over 80 and towards the end of his life lived in Newton Road.

Phyllis is the youngest child of 'RO'. She married Frank Bateman, a student friend of Richard. He became a GP in Leeds but died suddenly, when still relatively young. They had two children, Julia and Philip. She subsequently married her cousin James Wright.

LONGSHAW HOUSE & THE WRIGHT FAMILY

Sarah Ellen - Auntie Nellie - was the third child of Hugh and Elizabeth Mather, baptised on 29/3/1874. She became a nurse and midwife who never married. There is a charming photograph of her, dressed up in 'drag' attire, as an entirely convincing young man. She was involved in various public bodies, such as Boards of Governors and other good works. She was large, imposing, full of character and a highly respected lady who dressed well and possessed a slightly imperious manner. She lived for a large part of her life with the Wright family at Longshaw House, which she bought from the Bankes family. She assumed the dominant role in the extended family after the death of her mother in 1933, who in many ways she resembled. She organised large Christmas parties every Christmas. Towards the end of her long life she moved into the bungalow adjacent to Longshaw House (The Spinney) and was looked after by her niece, Betty Wright. She died on 1/1/64 aged 89.

Elizabeth (Bessie), the fifth child of Hugh and Elizabeth, married Billy Cliffe, a farmer living at Model Farm, Garswood. She was a kind lady who had no children. She and her husband lived the latter part of their lives in Winstanley Road.

Mary (Polly), the fourth child of Hugh and Elizabeth Mather, married William Wright in 1905. She was a very accomplished contralto, trained by a man named Berry in St Helens and practised in the clubroom at the Stork, accompanied by her elder brother Charles. She sang in the Billinge Parish Church choir, notably 'O Rest in the Lord', as well as with Wigan and St Helens Operatic Societies. There are photographs of her taking lead roles in Pinafore (Buttercup) and Patience (Lady Jane). Her voice resembled those of Clara Butt and Kathleen Ferrier. The photograph of her wedding, taken at the Stork in 1905, is an amazingly vivid and charming picture - although it was taken two weeks afterwards because no photographer was available on the day. There is a detailed description on the great day in an excerpt from the Wigan Observer. Her husband was a mechanical engineer who worked as an inspector of railway equipment. Immediately after their wedding they lived in Wargrave, near Newton-le-Willows, where their first three children were born. These were James, Hugh and Charles Wright, born between about 1908 and 1912. By the time their fourth child, Elizabeth Mary ('Betty'), was born in 1914 they had moved to Longshaw House, with the 'Mother-in-law' Elizabeth and Auntie Nelly. They lived at Longshaw House, where they brought up their four children. William Wright died on 9/10/30 aged sixty-four. Polly died on 24/9/41 aged sixty-five.

James Wright was their oldest son, born around 1908. He became a senior railway engineer, worked at Euston and wrote a book on signal engineering. He married Miss Molly Coe, who had also worked at Euston. They lived at Pinner for many years but had no children. After the death of his wife he subsequently returned to the North and married his cousin Phyllis Bateman. He died a few years later.

Hugh was the second son. His full name was Hugh Mather Wright. He also worked on in the railway industry but lived in Pemberton and his work was based in Manchester. He married Winifred Hartley and they had two children, James and Margaret. He died following an operation for a brain tumour on 4/9/67 aged fifty-seven.

Charles Wright qualified in Medicine from Liverpool University. He served with considerable distinction as a medical officer in the Second World War. He landed on the Normandy beaches on D-Day and was recommended for military decoration, although this was not eventually awarded. After the war he married Nora White, daughter of Archdeacon White, sometime Vicar of Billinge. He settled in practice in Pemberton. They had five children, namely William and Elizabeth (twins), Helen, Robert and Nicholas. The family was brought up at Longshaw House. Nora died on 29/4/1975, aged sixty. Charles died on 10/12/81, aged seventy.

Betty (Elizabeth Mary) was the youngest of the four Wright children. She was Superintendent Health Visitor in Wigan.

THE LAITHWAITES

Charlotte (Lotty) was the sixth and youngest child of Hugh and Elizabeth. She qualified as a teacher and taught at Billinge School. She subsequently married James Laithwaite. His parents ran a mixed grocery and tailoring shop in Main Street, situated on the corner on the right hand side of Main Street (going down the hill) just past the Methodist chapel. He became a much-respected headmaster at Robins Lane School in St Helens and head of a branch of St Helens Technical College in St Helens. They had one

child, Tom Laithwaite, who was born in 1911. James died on 21/10/1954 aged seventy-one and Lotty died on 23/10/1948.

Tom qualified in medicine at Liverpool University in 1935. He became a general practitioner in Upper Dickinson Street, Wigan, where he ran a single-handed practice for twenty years before joining the Graham family practice, which was situated next door. He married Constance Margaret Owen, the daughter of a much-loved clergyman. They had one daughter, Charlotte, who is now a health visitor. Tom died in December 1995.

THE 'CROSBY' BRANCH OF THE FAMILY

William was the younger brother of Hugh and the son of Richard and Ellen Mather. His date of birth is unknown but is probably between 1845 and 1850. He was an engine driver, driving long distance locomotives. He is thought to have virtually absconded from Billinge to escape the influence of Elizabeth and her apparent obsession with her son, Richard. He brought up a large family of seven children in Crosby, having married a rather dominant lady named Florrie, with considerable social pretensions for her daughters, who were sent to private schools. William was a caring and proud father. The members of this branch of the family were very talented and several showed musical ability. The ties with the Billinge branch of the family continued for many years. The children spent holidays there with their many cousins and were apparently proud of their Billinge origins. The writer visited Emmy and Sissy in about 1965. At that time, Emmy was very old and dementing. Sissy was about seventy-five. They remembered coming to stay at Wiswalls for holidays at the turn of the century. They described how Charlie was thought to have 'married a millionaire'.

William's seven children were Charles, William, Emmy, Sissy, Florey, Elizabeth and Fred.

Charles, the eldest son, was an organist and pianist who rose to be chief assistant to the Chairman for the Liverpool Docks Board, before his premature death from pneumonia at age forty-two. He converted to Catholicism on his marriage. His son William had a distinguished career in the RAF, and subsequently became a Chartered Accountant. He settled into business in Kenya where he brought up a family of four.

William was a fluent French speaker who worked in the French consulate in Liverpool, becoming Vice Consul.

Emmy, a professional violinist, obtained her LRAM, was a teacher and gave many concert performances.

Sissy was a teacher who taught at St Athanasius' Primary School in Bootle.

Florey was also a headmistress and had a daughter who lived in Pinner.

Elizabeth was a railway clerk.

Fred was the youngest of the family. He was in the timber business, working for Lamb Bros. After service in the First World War, he was sent out to Baltic countries to direct timber operations. He lived in Riga, Latvia until the communists seized power. After

moving back to Britain, he worked in Hartlepool during the war then moved back to Liverpool and finally settled in a farm in Wales. His wife was named Effy. They had a daughter, Jean, who studied languages, subsequently worked in Industrial Relations and now lives in Wales, where she is engaged in a sheep-recording project.

SOME GENERAL NOTES ON THE MATHER FAMILY

This family history is largely based on the extended family founded by Hugh and Elizabeth Mather, comprising their six children and eleven grandchildren. In 1866, when they married, they were virtually penniless. By the time of Elizabeth's death, in 1933, the family had become very successful and continued so over subsequent decades. It is for future generations to assess the fortunes of the more recent past. Certain interesting strands emerge from the saga. These are, firstly, the geographical closeness of the extended family unit, secondly, the influence of medicine, thirdly, that of music, and fourthly the strong farming tradition.

Geographical considerations:

Our line of the Mather family in Billinge can be traced directly back to Richard Mather, born c 1651. Thus, at least 10 generations of the family have been born and spent all their lives in or around the village. Hugh and Elizabeth, both born in 1844, started their married life in Beacon Road, moved to Main Street, then moved to the Stork. Elizabeth then moved to Longshaw House after the death of Hugh in 1911. Charles Mather spent his entire long life living within a 100-yard radius of Billinge Church, in Main Street, the Stork and 2 Newton Road. Sarah Ellen (Auntie Nellie) also spent her entire long life in Main Street, the Stork or Longshaw House. To some extent this may have been the norm in a relatively remote, clannish village in the period 1850-1950. However, the seven doctors in the extended family had studied in either Liverpool (four) or Newcastle (three) and yet all lived in Billinge, except for Tom Laithwaite, who was brought up in St Helens and subsequently lived and worked in Wigan. By the 1940s, the family was based around Longshaw House, with Auntie Nellie taking over the role of head of the extended family after the death of Elizabeth. Strong links were maintained with the Wright family, Claremont, two and twenty-five Newton Road and Wiswalls Farm, then being farmed by Hugh. This cluster of homes reflects both the inherent 'pull' of a close-knit family and the equally cohesive community of Billinge. In the subsequent decades, social patterns have been transformed and the extended family concept is rapidly diminishing, with the dispersal of family members to all parts of the UK, although some current members have continued the tradition by spending all their lives in Billinge.

Medicine

Richard Oswald qualified in Medicine in the late 1890's and set a family tradition, which extends to this day. It was clearly a considerable achievement in those times for a child of humble origins, from a small mining village, to qualify in medicine. Medical men were treated with considerable respect in late Victorian and Edwardian England. In the next generation, six out of eight men became doctors - Hugh, David and James Mather, Charles Wright, Richard Mather, and Tom Laithwaite. All eight doctors entered general practice as their primary profession and all worked in Billinge, Orrell or Pemberton, except Tom Laithwaite who practised in Wigan. The family tradition has extended into subsequent generations, with three out of James' four sons (including the writer) also

becoming medical men, in addition to Bernard, son of Richard. The tradition of Drs Mather in Billinge has continued since the 1890s, with Richard Oswald subsequently joined by his nephews David in around 1923 and James in around 1928. His son Richard later joined the practice, to be followed by Bernard (before he emigrated to Tasmania), and Charles who joined in 1964 and was until recently senior partner in the practice. Thus there have been six Dr. Mathers practising in Billinge in an unbroken line over the last 100 years. Richard Oswald and James were also Medical Officers of Health. The medical link has also influenced the female family members. Sarah Ellen Mather and Betty Wright were nurses, as was Francis Mather in the First World War. Charlotte Laithwaite also carries on this tradition.

Music

Hugh Mather met Elizabeth around 1865 whilst playing in a brass band. There is circumstantial evidence, from a contemporary report in the Wigan Observer, that his brother, Richard, who was killed in an accident when aged about twenty-seven, was also a musician. Charles, Hugh's eldest son, was Organist of Billinge Parish Church for thirty-seven years. He also played the piano for silent films and must have possessed sufficient musical talent to acquire the necessary keyboard skills in his youth. Polly, Charles' sister, was an accomplished singer. She played lead roles in operatic performances in Wigan, St Helens and Southport. Charles's son James was extremely interested in music, although surprisingly, he and his siblings were not given a musical training. The writer also continues this musical tradition. It is particularly interesting to note that the musical thread is continued in the large family founded by Hugh's brother, William, based in Crosby. His eldest son, Charles, was a gifted organist and his daughter Emily was a professional violinist.

Farming

Wiswalls Farm has been farmed since around 1860 - 70 by the Simm/Mather family. It was farmed in succession by John Simm (until 1897), John James Simm (until 1931), David Mather (until 1941), Hugh Mather (until 1957), and Charles and Edith Mather (from 1957 to the present). Bessie married a farmer (Billy Cliffe) as did Francis (Billy Hunt) and her son David carried on this tradition, farming in Standish. Edith Mather (nee Mee) continues the tradition, since the Mee and Oulton families both have predominantly farming backgrounds.

Reading through this document, written by one of the village's outstanding scholars, gave an extra dimension to my understanding of the way life in the village had evolved. The Stork Inn would never be quite the same. I would never again pass it without imagining it, as it must have been when that penniless, illegitimate little girl, raised by Yorkshire Charlie, had dragged herself up from obscurity to establish her descendants on the uttermost pinnacle of social respectability. Squire Bankes, as principal landowner and occupant of Winstanley Hall, must have commanded deference by his position as ultimate Lord and Master. Jonathan Blundell, the great industrial capitalist who bought Blackleyhurst Hall, and whose descendants dominated the local coal industry until the 1940's, would have inspired awe by an ownership of wealth beyond the dreams of ordinary mortals. The various Church ministers, in what was a predominantly religious, God fearing community, depended upon by all to lead the

way to heaven, would ever have been aware of the villagers' veneration. But no one held quite the esteem of the village doctor, who brought the child into the world and held the hand of the elder passing out of it. No one achieved the power of life and death by dint of dedication open to any with the ability and inspiration to attain that status, nor were as vulnerable to life's many temptations, as the village doctor. Elizabeth Peet made the words Doctor and Mather synonymous in Billinge for a century.

(12/5/00)



The Stork Hotel was managed by Hugh Mather (1844-1912) and wife Elizabeth nee Peet (1845-1933) from about 1891 to 1912. They had previously lived in the cottages show on the right of this picture

A SHORT HISTORY OF WINSTANLEY HALL AND ESTATE

The Winstanley Family

Originally, the areas of Billinge and Winstanley were combined as one manor in the Barony of Makerfield. They were later split into two separate Manors. The Winstanley family held the Manor of Winstanley from at least the year 1252. In 1560, Edward Winstanley abandoned the old manor house, the site of which is still marked by its moat, to have a new hall constructed in the style of Birchley and Bispham Halls. This became the core of the present Winstanley Hall.

Moated manor houses became very common in the 1400's. At this time there was much lawlessness; bands of outlaws roamed the land attacking and robbing wealthy landowners. There were also many feuds between neighbouring families, leading to attacks and the looting of properties. A property with a moat and only one crossing point was a lot easier to defend by household staff or a small group of soldiers.

Winstanley Estate is situated on the edge of a hill with a commanding distant view of Wigan, Haigh Hall and Rivington Pike. Also in the distance can be seen a range of the Yorkshire hills.

The earliest recorded coal mine in the Winstanley area dates back to about 1507, two years before the death of King Henry VII. When Sir Thomas Winstanley died in 1562 he had made provision in his will for the profits from the Winstanley Colliery, the sum of twenty pounds, to be paid to his wife and to be used for the benefit of his children. When the estate was sold in 1595 the list of tenants included 'William Barton of the coal pits'.

The Bankes Family

In 1595, a goldsmith and banker, James Bankes, bought the Hall, which then remained in that family until quite recently. The chief commercial activities of the estate as listed in 1595 were agriculture, coalmining, nailmaking and domestic weaving. In 1615 the Winstanley Manor Courts were held at the 'Bare Ring Ale House' at the Windy Arbour crossroads, opposite the stocks and whipping post. At that time, the inn acted as the administrative centre of the Manor. The 'Court of James Bankes' heard mainly minor cases; the majority being of 'Unlawful Gaming'. James Bankes died in 1617; he was buried in Wigan Parish Church on August 5th of that year.

William Bankes (1709 – 75) inherited the Estate in 1748 from his brother Robert. His son William succeeded him on his death in 1775. In that year the Winstanley Colliery was valued at over two hundred pounds.

In the Winstanley Colliery accounts for October 1776 it is recorded that there were five colliers employed at the Moorley Pit, four at the Lime Piece Pit, one at the Salterley Pit and three sinkers employed sinking a new pit.

The day wages at Winstanley Collieries in 1776 varied from 8d for a boy, 10d to 1s-1d for a youth and 1s-2d to 1s-4d for men. Those getting the higher rate were probably the better workers. The accounts also show that the Moorhey Pit produced 33 – 73 tons of coal per week with a face output of 44 – 60 cwt per man per shift, and the Lime Piece Pit produced 24 – 90 tons per week with a face output of 40 – 60 cwt per man per shift. These two pits produced profits of four to fifteen pounds per week during 1766. Development costs of more than three pounds for two other pits, sinking another pit and driving a sough etc had to be deducted from these profits.

The Winstanley colliers were allowed to work the pits once a year, for a whole week, without any payment of wages, for the production of their own ‘fire coal’, or ‘concessionary coal’. This happened at Michaelmas, when they were hired or rehired.

At Moorhey Pit the miners got 7tons 10cwt each and ‘like amount’ was shown as being ‘spent at hiring’. The miners at Lime Piece Pit got the same amount each but only 6tons was ‘spent at hiring’. The miners at Salterley Pit were engaged in ‘opening out’ and ‘development work’, they received over 7tons of coal each and 6tons ‘spent at hiring’.

The ‘fire coal’ was worth about three weeks wages to the miners and apart from the coal, 2s - 6d was paid to each miner when he was hired. On Good Friday, which was a holiday, the men and lads each received 3d.

In 1766 the annual output of the Winstanley pits was between 3500 and 5000tons of coal. By 1799 the output had risen to 8030tons. This pattern of work continued at the ‘Old Winstanley Pits’ until, in the 1840s, they were eventually exhausted. By then Meyrick Bankes had already sunk four new pits in the area east of the Croppers House Fault.

In 1788 the Bankes family erected a stone building with a pyramid style roof on top of Billinge Hill, to be used as a summerhouse for Winstanley Hall. That building, now without the pyramid roof, still stands on Billinge Hill. Fire damage from the 1935 Silver Jubilee bonfire damaged the original roof.

Anne Bankes of Winstanley, who married Hugh Holme of Holland House in 1731, was the sole heiress of her father, brothers and nephew. Her eldest son, Thomas Holme, was William Bankes’ cousin and he inherited the Winstanley estate on the latter’s death in 1800. There was an attempt by the Isle of Man branch of the Bankes family to lay claim to the estate upon William Bankes’ death, but this claim came to nothing.

Thomas Holme died in 1803 and was succeeded by his son Meyrick, who, under the terms of William Bankes’ will, changed his name to Bankes and took up the Bankes’ family Coat of Arms. The UpHolland and Orrell Collieries of the Holme family, and those at Winstanley belonging to the Bankes family, all came under the ownership of the one family. This made the Bankes family one of the largest landowners in the area.

In 1792 William Bankes had leased coal seams under the Winstanley estate to John Clarke of Orrell. The lease was extended in 1812. A statement of coal worked up to April 1846 shows that 102 acres 3 roods 40 square yards had been worked under the 1812

lease. This had yielded £31,832 in royalties for the Bankes family. The statement also shows that £1000 was paid to the Bankes as compensation for 'wagon roads, coal pit brows, roads and other trespass, the land not being made arable as required by the lease. Ian Gregson comments on the Winstanley area in his 'Portfolio of Fragments' published in 1817. He says:

Winstanley Hall is pleasantly situated on a hill with commanding distant views. Not far hence are two chapels under Wigan, Billinge and Holland. Billinge is about one mile and a half south and Holland church or priory the same distance northwest. Vast quantities of coal are raised in the district, which is very populous. Most excellent nails, screws and hinges are made in this neighborhood where there are also many weavers.

Meyrick Bankes snr died in 1827 at Cromwell House, Old Brompton Road, London and was succeeded in turn by his son, also called Meyrick (1811 – 1881).

In 1834 – 1835 Meyrick Bankes made a survey of the properties that belonged to him in Winstanley, Orrell, Pemberton, Billinge and UpHolland. At this time he owned about a quarter of the land in all five townships. He later extended his holdings by buying the following estates; Bispham Hall, Norley Hall and Hawkley Hall. The Bankes family also owned estates in Yorkshire and in Scotland.

In the 1834 – 35 survey, the soil of the Winstanley area is described as 'sandy mixed with clay in places with sandstone rock not far from the surface'. The estates farm's main crops at the time were oats, potatoes, hay and wheat. Also being grown on the estate were clover, beans, peas and turnips. A considerable amount of land was also given over to pasture and meadow with many small woods.

Included in the buildings mentioned in the 1834 – 35 survey were various workers small cottages. It stated:

There are six dirty, nasty cottages that should come down, twelve dirty cottages, eighteen small cottages with one small bedroom, twenty-six with two or more bedrooms and thirteen good comfortable cottages. Some of those with one bedroom had a parlour as well as a buttery.

The Ordnance Survey map for 1845 clearly shows an area called 'New Houses'. These cottages date back to about 1800 and may be some of those mentioned in the Bankes survey.

The cottages were in rows of about ten. The picture of the 'Upper Row' of cottages shows what they were like in the late 1800s. The row shown was demolished a few years ago. In the remaining row, numbers 134 – 152 Pemberton Road, I live at 138. There was a communal well in the front garden of 140. It was used by the rest of the row to draw fresh water before the cottages had indoor plumbing.

The cottages have two quite large buildings, about 30ft by 10ft, and 20ft by 10ft in their back garden area. These were used as washhouses for the inhabitants of the Row. The area backs onto 'New Houses Farm', which was probably built at the same time as the 'Rows'. The land has recently been sold and now awaits development.

Also on the 1845 map is the 'Banks Mineral Railway'. This can be clearly seen starting at the Winstanley Collieries and ending at 'Banks Pier' on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. A little known fact is that the famous 'Wigan Pier' was probably originally the 'Banks Pier'.

The original tramway serving Banks' Pier was built in the early 1820s for Thomas Claughton, linking Stone House Colliery in Goose Green with the coal tippler on the canal, near the Wallgate basin. By the 1840s the railway line, the pier and Stone House Colliery had all been acquired by Meyrick Banks.

The following extract comes from the Wigan Observer of March 3rd 1965 and gives a fascinating insight into the history of the pier.

The exact location of the famous 'Wigan Pier' is still a matter of considerable controversy; the best information pinpointing the location comes from the history book 'A Nineteenth Century Colliery Railway'. The book was written by Mrs Joyce Banks of Winstanley Hall, granddaughter of Meyrick Banks, who built the railway to transport coal from his mines at Winstanley to Wigan.

The fact that Meyrick Banks' railway ended at Wallgate basin on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Wigan is not conclusive proof that the railway terminus was Wigan Pier, but it is reasonable to suppose that it was so. The landing stage at Wallgate basin may have been called 'Wigan Pier' before the Banks' mineral railway was completed in 1845, the Wigan canal link had been built 71 years before. Records show that sailing trips were being held on the canal before 1845, with the Wallgate basin being their starting point.

Mrs Banks wrote in her book:

The opening of the Liverpool to Manchester Railway line in 1830, 56 years after the construction of the canal, and the connecting Newton to Wigan extension a year later opened up the Wigan coalfields and stimulated a variety of trades which had been encouraged by the canal.

Among the trades referred to were pottery, earthenware, iron mills and corn mills. The focal point for activity was a small area of land between Wallgate and the River Douglas. Here wound the Leeds and Liverpool canal with its convenient Wallgate basin. A pier head, well placed for canal transport, had already attracted colliery proprietors and the possession of a coal wharf was deemed to be extremely desirable.

On the death of his father in 1827 Meyrick Banks set his hand to the expansion of his collieries. After protracted negotiations for various rights of way, and a rebuff from Mr

Blundell Hollonghead concerning the use of his tram road from Pemberton Collieries, he found it more and more urgent to find a convenient outlet for his Winstanley coal

Along with his agent, Thomas Tebay, Meyrick Banks took the first steps towards building his own railway in 1836. In that year, Mr. E Stanley, a Liverpool surveyor, produced a plan and section for a railway from Winstanley to Wigan on his behalf. A large part of the route crossed land belonging to Mr Banks but he had to negotiate with seven other landowners in adding to the trustees of the Warrington – Wigan Turnpike Road. Many difficulties were overcome.

The length of Stanley's 4ft gauge line, starting from Mr Banks' No 2 pit and ending on the canal wharf at Wigan, was stated in his own plan to be 3791 yards.

The system of transportation at Winstanley was a combination of inclined planes and horse power. Transportation of coal on private railways was obviously a matter of general interest in the early part of the 19th century.

In 1828 the Liverpool Mercury published a description of a horse wagon or 'dandy cart' for use on mineral railways:

It was a two-wheeled truck boarded up on two sides and hitched to the back of the train of wagons. Two or more horses rode on the truck and were destined to pull the empty wagons back up the inclines to the collieries. The train carrying coal to Wigan, made up of six to eight wagons, was operated by two brakemen. Each wagon had a door at the front ready to run on to the tippler and a long handled brake fitted with a wooden shoe. In addition there were two horse wagons with their accompanying horsemen in readiness for pulling the empties back up the line.

Mrs Banks adds in her historical notes:

In 1842, it is indicated by account book entries that the total length of rail, approximately three and a half miles from No 4 pit to Wigan pier head, was completed in 1845. Meyrick Banks and Thomas Tebay, his agent, were justly proud of the success of the railway scheme, brought to fruition in the face of many difficulties and much opposition from rival coal owners.

The railway's final route was from Winstanley Colliery to Winstanley No 3 Colliery then on to Clapgate Pit, down to Stonehouse Colliery and finally to the canal. In 1929 the pier was no longer needed, it was demolished by Calderbanks and the metal work sent for scrap.

Near the Winstanley Hall estate, on Billinge Road, was a public house called 'The Pony Dick Inn'. It was named after the favourite white pony of Meyrick Banks. The pony died in 1841, aged 36, and was buried near to the Hall. The gravestone can still be seen there today. The public house was originally called 'The Horse and Jockey' before William Starkey changed the name when he became landlord.

In 1856 Meyrick Bankes sank the Winstanley No 5 pit at Windy Arbour. It was a basket winding pit and went down to two of the best coal seams in the area, the Orrell 4ft and the Orrell 5ft.

WINSTANLEY'S FULL LISTING IN THE FIRST WIGAN DIRECTORY, 1869.

WINSTANLEY township, which comprises an area of nearly three square miles, is surrounded by the townships of Orrell, Pemberton and Billinge. It is mostly occupied by the Park of Meyrick Bankes Esquire, whose residence, Winstanley Hall, is within it. There are coal pits in the eastern part of the township. There are neither public houses nor schools within its boundaries, though access is easy to the neighbouring townships.

The population in 1861 was 633, or about one person to every three acres.

Chadwick Green is partly in Winstanley and partly in Billinge.

Abbott, John	farmer
Alker, Robert	farmer
Ashall, Ann	farmer
Ashall, Mary	farmer
Ashton, James	farmer
Bankes, Meyrick esq	Winstanley Hall
Barton, William	farmer
Cliff, John	farmer
Daniels, Thomas	nail manufacturer
Davenport, John	farmer
Dearden, Edward	farmer
Dearden, William	farmer
Ellison, Edward	farmer
Fairbrother, William	farmer
Fairclough, William	farmer
Fouracre, Samuel	farmer
Halliwell, Thomas	gamekeeper
Hodson, James and Co	farmers
Laithwaite, Sarah	farmer
Latham, Thomas	farmer
Longton, James	corn miller
Moyers, James	farmer
Nicolson, John	farmer
Nicolson, Peter	farmer
Shortrede, Thomas	agent to Mr Bankes, coal proprietor
Tasker, Thomas	farmer
Turner, Henry	Farmer and stone quarry master

Town Surgeon	Mr J L Molyneux
Relieving Officer	Richard Wright
Assistant Overseer	John Birchall
Inspector of Nuisances	William Nickson
Registrar	J Baynes, Lamberhesd Green

Meyrick Bankes esq was also listed as a County Magistrate

WINSTANLEY POPULATION CHART

1801	631
1821	800
1851	675
1861	633
1871	602
1881	545
1901	564

These figures are taken from the Borough Census Reports.

The population of Winstanley, scattered over 1852 acres, was fairly static. The rise from 1801 to 1821 may be due to increased coal production during the war with France and the increased industrialisation of the Wigan area.

A few strange things happened at Winstanley Hall. Mrs Shortrede, wife of the estate agent Thomas Shortrede, was found drowned in a well in Winstanley Park on 10th August 1880. Shortly afterwards the estate's mason's wife hanged herself at the straw yard and quite soon after this, Thomas Shortrede shot himself. What went on? No one seemed to know or, more likely, no one was saying.

Meyrick Bankes spent a lot of the money he earned from his collieries on remodelling and extending Winstanley Hall.

The Hall recently appeared on the 'English Heritage' list of buildings at risk. The Hall is described as being 'in immediate danger of further rapid deterioration'. It was kept in reasonable condition after the last resident, Captain James Bankes, died in 1984. More recently, a badly leaking roof and rampant rot have taken their toll on the old Hall and the outbuildings have not fared much better. The Hall, outbuildings included, boasts upwards of seventy rooms, many of them quite large. The size has been something of a hindrance to Tim Bankes, the present owner of the Hall, in his plans to convert the buildings into flats. Limitations have also been placed on redevelopment by the building's Grade Two listed status.

Mr Bankes had a feasibility study carried out on the property which stated that up to five million pounds would be required to renovate and convert the Hall and its outbuildings into apartments.

In the year 2000 Dorbcrest acquired the property, they hope to retain the wood panelled walls and Victorian bulls-eye windows when they carry out the work required to make it into thirty-five high quality apartments.

The plans are in abeyance at the time of writing because planning permission has been refused on the grounds that the size of the ground floor rooms could not be altered and the redevelopment would change the appearance of the Hall too much. This would not be in keeping with its Grade Two Listed status.

If the buildings become too hazardous, Wigan Borough Council could order the owners to carry out basic repairs or issue a compulsory purchase order and buy the Hall.

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council's conservation officer commented:

Because of the nature of the Hall – which has a large number of rooms – it is quite difficult to convert without altering the look. It is one of the Borough's most significant houses and it is in the green belt, which makes it problematical for certain uses. But we will certainly look at proposals to save it.

What the future holds for Winstanley Hall and its 470-acre estate is not too clear. Hopefully it will remain intact and not be developed too much. Maybe one day the Hall and its grounds will be open to the public so that everyone will be able to enjoy them.

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J Bankes	Historical Notes on the Bankes Family

I have made use of the Archive Department of the 'Wigan History Shop'

A G Mitchell
March 2001

FOR KING AND COUNTRY

It must have been around November 1999 that my mother gave me a tiny slip of paper on which was typed a request for information about Billinge men killed in both World Wars. The name on the bottom of the slip was Harry Roughley. I thought it unlikely that this person was a relation of Jimmy Roughley, the legendary ‘Owd Ruff’ of Holt Crescent and so it turned out to be. Thirty years of living in Billinge could not disguise the St Helens accent when Harry Roughley answered the phone.

After single-handedly compiling the registries of St Mary’s Birchley and leaving copies at both St Helens and Wigan Reference Libraries, Harry had undertaken to gather and record information about all the names mentioned as having Billinge connections on the commemoration plaques and gravestones throughout the area. That is an enormous task for a lone researcher. He had gone through every Church Magazine deposited in the Leigh Archives and every local newspaper recorded on microfilm at both Wigan and St Helens Reference Libraries. His intention was to gather relevant information, a photograph and a picture of the regimental cap badge of every person killed in action, connected to Billinge, from two World Wars. A large percent of the information he was searching for proved easy to obtain. A small percent proved almost impossible. Feeling that my parents knew, or would know somebody who did know, everybody who died in the Second World War and the remaining families of those who perished in the First World War, I undertook to help Harry trace the names that were proving elusive. Some we found and some we didn’t. The quest was interesting and very fulfilling. I’m too young to remember even the Second World War but I do remember the derelict bombsites as the train pulled into Liverpool when I was a kid. Just a few weeks ago I came upon this poem, embossed on a bronze plaque, fastened to a stone by a deserted airfield near Fiskerton.

Listen to the Wind.

Stranger, pause here a little while,
And listen to the West wind’s sigh,
With its tale of long gone men -
Earth shall not see their likes again.

Stand by this stone and lend an ear,
And I’ll show you ghosts of yesteryear;
The windsock’s crack, the cold wind’s moan,
Long dead men crowd around – we’re not alone.

Look at this empty, lonely place,
Do their shadows unseen still cross my face?
Listen! Far off thunder – or a Merlin’s roar,
Borne on the wind from time’s remote shore.

Abandoned, quiet, here I lie,
Time stands still, though years roll by;
Runways broken, dispersals gone,
The only sound the skylark’s song.

Half a hundred years have passed,
Half a century since I saw them last;
Lancasters, black against the sky;
Aircrews young, so many soon to die.

They came from England and from distant shores,
Volunteers, each one, to defend liberty's cause;
These fractured runways know how many went,
Silent witnesses to Youth's blood spent.

I was created from the very earth for which they fought,
My rich, dark soil, with their sacrifice they bought;
In Lincoln Cathedral, yonder, their names are found,
And know this, by their blood you stand on hallowed ground.

Let the tangled weeds that cover me remain,
Shrouding my memories of hope and pain;
And, as I return slowly to land
Let this precious stone in perpetual homage stand.

So Stranger, continue now upon your way,
But forget not those who – it seems but yesterday
Gave their tomorrows that you might live,
For your freedom they gave all they had to give.

Cedric Keith St George Roberts. May 1995.

Dedicated to the Aircrews of 576 Squadron, No I Group, R.A.F. Bomber Command,
who operated Lancaster Bombers from Fiskerton between October 1944 and May
1945, so many never to return.

Reading these words made me think of my Uncle Bill and George Kearsley dive-bombing Chadwick Green as trainee pilots in 1940. It made me think again about my Uncle Stanley Williams on the Murmansk convoys and my Uncle Ernie Lee on mopping-up operations in the Pacific. It made me remember Betty Atherton running back to Holt Crescent from Carr Mill Road, terrified when a couple of stray bombs landed in the field near Long Fold Brow. It made me think about Harry Roughley and what he was doing to perpetuate the names of those from Billinge who gave their lives for King and country. It will not be long before there is not a single living person who can remember ever seeing someone who died in the Second World War. Below is the text that Harry as so far amalgamated – lest we forget.

(13/5/00)

1914-1918 War

Francis Anderton
William Neville Anderton
Francis Ashall
John Ashall
Herbert Atherton
John Ball
Thomas Bell
Joseph Edwin Bellis
William Bolton
James Callon
Joseph Chisnall
Samuel Clayton
Patrick Coleman
Reginald Crome
William Cunliffe
James Richard Ellison
Reginald Ellison
James Gaskell
Joseph Gee
Valentine Gerrard
Humphrey Glover
John Glover
Frederick Green
Samuel Hart
Josiah Hasleden
Joseph Hewson

Harry Hill
William Edward Hitchen
Arthur Frederick Humphrey
David Hurst
Robert Hurst
Thomas Hurst
William Thomas Hurst
Thomas Huyton
Ernest James
Job Jones
David James Kendrick
Henry Lomax
Henry Lowe
William Lowe
Thomas Makin
Richard Melling
John William Mills
Richard Richmond
Richard Roby
James Shuttleworth
Thomas Snowden
James Taylor
Arthur Whincup
Peter Whittle
Henry Wilson
Joseph Wilson

1939-1945 War

William Ashall
Alec Bold
John Bernard Bolton
Harold Dennett
James Gerard Foster
John Thomas Foster
Harold Gee
George Heslop
William Hewitt
Henry Heyes
Bernard Ralph Higham
Philip Geoffrey Higham

John Charles Hurst
John Leyland
George Littler
John Thomas Nicholson
Norman James Parkinson
Jack Pennington
Jack Ratcliffe
Herbert Summers
Horace James Walker
Arthur Cyril White
James Wilson

1914 – 1918

Francis Anderton

Private 29943 2nd Battalion South Lancashire Regiment.

Francis was born in Billinge on the 24th of April 1887 the son of James and Ann Anderton, and was baptised on the 22nd of May 1887 in St. Aidan's C.E. Church.

The family lived at 177 Main Street. Francis who worked as a collier married Isabella Smith a dressmaker of 104 Upholland Road, and they went to live at 7 Newton Road, Billinge when he enlisted at Warrington in the middle of 1916 to join the South Lancashire Regiment.

While serving in France he was reported missing and then killed in action on Sunday the 26th of May 1918 aged 29 years old.

His name is recorded on the Soissons Memorial, Aisne, France, on St. Aidan's Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 10/164.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, October 1916.

William Neville Anderton

Company Quarter Master Sergeant 1906 A Company 1/9th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment.

William was born on the 11th of January 1894 the son of Peter and Ellen Anderton of 161 Main Street, Billinge, and was baptised on the 4th of February 1894 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. Peter was a provision dealer.

William a former pupil of Ashton-in-Makerfield Grammar School and a student at St. Thomas's C.E. School, Ashton, went to study at Bristol University where he joined the University Territorials in 1912. After completing his course of training he joined Glazebury C.E. School and lived with his mother at Billinge Post Office, his father had died in 1913. Soon afterwards war broke out and he rejoined his regiment "The Gloucesters" on the 5th of August 1914, and left for the front in March 1915.

William was killed by a shell on Sunday the 3rd of September 1916 aged 22 years, and is buried in the Auchonvillers Military Cemetery, Somme, near Arras, France, grave II.H.10.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 5/203.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; The Wigan Observer, 15th of September 1917.

Francis Ashall

Gunner 171932 A Battery 103rd Brigade Royal Field Artillery

Francis was born on the 29th of August 1894 the son of William and Ellen Ashall of 20 Newton Road, Billinge, and was baptised on the 2nd of September 1894 at St. Aidan's C.E.

Church. Francis who was a Sunday school teacher enlisted at St. Helens to join the Royal Field Artillery.

While he was serving in France he was wounded at the end of September and died on Saturday the 20th of October 1917 aged 23 years. Francis is buried in the Etaples Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France, grave XXX.F.2A.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/197.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, November 1917.

John Ashall

Lance Corporal 16314 8th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment (formally 9752 Manchester Regiment)

John was born on the 19th of April 1888 the son of George and Alice Ashall of 122 UpHolland Road, Billinge, and was baptised on the 3rd of June 1888 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. He worked at the Winstanley Collieries before enlisting at Wigan in October 1914 to join the Manchester Regiment, later transferring to the East Lancashire Regiment.

John, who was serving in France, was reported missing and then killed in action on Thursday the 16th of November 1916. He was 28 years old and single. He is buried in the Waggon Road Cemetery, Baumont-Hamel, Somme, France, grave B.23.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; The Wigan Observer, 20th of January 1917.

Herbert Atherton.

Private 5454 5th Battalion Connaught Rangers (formally 4th Battalion)

Herbert was born in Billinge on the 14th of February 1883 the fifth of six children of Thomas and Margaret Atherton (nee Rigby), and was baptised on the 16th of February 1883 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. The family lived at 12 Fair View and Herbert enlisted at Southport to join the Connaught Rangers.

The Connaught Rangers formed part of the British Salonika Force in Macedonia, where he was killed in action on Tuesday the 7th of December 1915. He was 32 years old.

His name is recorded on the Doiran Memorial near the Doiran Military Cemetery, North Greece close to the Yugoslav frontier, and on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials, and on the St. Helens Cenotaph.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, May 1915.

John Ball

Private 19367 13th Battalion The Kings (Liverpool) Regiment.

John was born in Upholland the son of James and Ellen Ball. The family lived at 14 Kings Moss, Crank and John who had a younger brother James and two younger sisters Elizabeth and Ellen, attended Crank School and was also a member of Crank choir. He was confirmed in All Saint C.E. Church, Rainford. He enlisted at Southport on the 7th of September 1914 and joined The Kings Liverpool Regiment.

He went out to Salonika in September 1915 and was later wounded there in September 1916. After recovering he was sent to France in May 1917 but was killed there in a raid on the enemy's trenches on Wednesday the 7th of November 1917. He was 25 years old. A memorial service was held for him at Crank on Sunday the 9th of December 1917 at 3 p.m.

His parents received his medals:- 1914 Star
War Medal

His name is recorded on the Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France, bay 3, on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and All Saints C.E. Church, Rainford Memorials, the Upholland Cenotaph and on the Crank School Memorial (a reading desk now in Alder Lane Mission). His name is on the family grave headstone in All Saints Churchyard, grave 1098.

Sources:- Nephew; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Rainford Parish Magazine, December 1917.

Thomas Bell

Gunner 51147 11th Siege Battery Royal Garrison Artillery

Thomas was born in Ormsby, Yorkshire the son of Charles and Hannah Bell. He was working at Winstanley Hall before enlisting early in 1915 at Wigan to join the Royal Garrison Artillery.

While serving in France he was killed on Saturday the 23rd of March 1918. He was 24 years of age and is buried in St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, Seine-Maritime, France, grave P.VI.11B.

Thomas gave his parents as his next of kin, living at Hemlington Hall Farm, Stainton, Stockton-on-Tees, North Yorkshire. No record of where he was living in Billinge has been found.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's Memorial.

Sources:- St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, March 1915 to May 1918; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Joseph Edwin Bellis

Rifleman & Lewis Gunner 4332 1/5th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment

Edwin was born on the 21st of June 1897 the youngest child and second son of Edwin and Mary Ann Bellis of 29 Carr Mill Road (Long Fold), and was baptised on the 1st of August 1897 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. The family later moved to 37 Carr Mill Road and Edwin

worked as a drawer at the Winstanley Collieries, Leyland Green before enlisting on the 27th of September 1915 at St. Helens to join the South Lancashire Regiment.

He was serving in France when he was killed in action on Wednesday the 2nd of August 1916 aged 19 years. It is said that after Edwin was reported killed, his mother never laughed again, and she was one of the first mothers to go over to France in 1919 to visit her son's grave. Edwin is buried in the Peronne Road Cemetery, Maricourt, Somme, France, grave IV.F.39.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and the Methodist Church Memorials, the St. Helens Cenotaph and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/31.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, September 1916; The Wigan observer, 2nd of September 1916; The Billingers by R.D. Lewis.

William Bolton

Corporal T2/10137 Royal Army Service Corps

William was born on the 30th of January 1887 the last of four children of Henry and Mary Bolton (nee Eddleston), and was baptised on the 2nd of February 1887 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. William of Sefton Fold married Elizabeth Cook of Kings Moss on the 21st of August 1907 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. They had four children; Austin born 1908; Frank born 1910; Harry born 1914; Jane born 1915, died 1916. All were baptised in St. Mary's Church. The family lived at 3 Brook Lane, Kings Moss and William served in the Royal Army Service Corps.

William died of wounds in Billinge Military Hospital on Wednesday the 9th of April 1919 aged 32 years and was buried on the 12th of April in St. Mary's Churchyard, War grave 1/32.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials, and on All Saints C.E. Church, Rainford Memorial.

Sources:- Widow's daughter; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; St. Mary's Church Registers.

James Callon

Private 40537 2nd Battalion East Lancashire Regiment

James was born on the 16th of October 1897 the son of Peter and Elizabeth Callon (nee Duckworth), and was baptised on the 30th of October 1897 at SS. Oswald and Edmund Arrowsmith R.C. Church, Ashton in Makerfield. He enlisted in St. Helens to join the East Lancashire Regiment.

While serving in France he was killed in action on Monday the 23rd of September 1918. He was 20 years old and is buried in the Roelincourt Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France, grave V.E.17.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; SS. Oswald and Edmund Arrowsmith Church Registers.

Joseph Chisnall

Gunner 74497 B Battery 52nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery

Joseph was born on the 19th of January 1897 the son of Thomas and Mary Jane Chisnall (nee Gaskell), and was baptised on the 24th of January 1897 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. The family lived at 1 Victoria Road, Garswood and Joseph enlisted at Warrington to join the Royal Field Artillery.

While serving in Flanders he was wounded and died there on Friday the 26th of November 1915. He was 18 years of age and is buried in the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Belgium, grave 11.D.13.

His name is recorded on St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers.

Samuel Clayton

Bombardier 56848 D Battery 103rd Brigade Royal Field Artillery

Samuel was born on the 30th of May 1894 the son of William and Mary Clayton of 68 Rainford Road, Billinge, and was baptised on the same day at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. The family later moved to 19 Upholland Road and Samuel enlisted at Wigan at the end of 1914 or the beginning of 1915 to join the Royal Field Artillery.

He was serving in France when he was killed in action on Sunday the 8th of October 1916, aged 22 years. Samuel is buried in the Peake Wood Cemetery, Fricourt, Somme, France, grave C.27.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, January 1915.

Patrick Coleman

Private 19041 1st Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers (formally 3rd Battalion)

Patrick was born on the 11th of December 1876 the third of seven children of Patrick and Margaret Coleman (nee Mulroy) of Rainford Road, Billinge, and was baptised on the 17th of December 1876 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. It would seem likely that he enlisted with Henry Wilson as they both enlisted at the St. Helens and both joined the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, an unusual regiment for Billinge men. If so, he may have seen his friend and fellow villager killed in Gallipoli before the Battalion came back to fight on the Western Front.

While serving in Flanders he was killed in action on Tuesday the 16th of July 1918. Patrick was 41 years old, and his name is recorded on the Ploegsteerty Memorial, Belgium, panel 10, and also on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine.

Reginald Crome

Private 305702 2nd Battalion Tank Corps (formally 10546 Royal Army Medical Corps)

Reginald was born in St. Giles, Norwich, Norfolk, but enlisted at Wigan to join the Royal Army Medical Corps.

He was wounded and came to Billinge Hospital, which was a military hospital in the First World War, and whilst recovering signed an autograph book as did his mother Elizabeth Heazle who was working and living at the hospital. The first entry shows a drawing of the R.A.M.C. badge with name Pte. R. Crome and the date 2-5-17, and the second entry is a little poem "Some Love" and signed E.Heazle Military Hospital, Billinge. Reginald was transferred to the Tank Corps and while serving in France was again wounded and died on Sunday the 22nd of September 1918. He was 21 years of age and is buried in the Doingt Communal Cemetery Extension, Somme, France, grave 1.D.25.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Luke's C.E. Church, Orrell Memorials.

Sources:- Widow's daughter; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

William Cunliffe

Private 22495 9th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment (formally 4th Battalion Connaught Rangers)

William was born in Bryn in 1894 the son of William and Jane Cunliffe, but later the family moved to Billinge. He enlisted at Warrington at the beginning of 1915 to join the Connaught Rangers and was later transferred to the South Lancashire Regiment.

William was serving in Greece where he died of wounds at Salonika on Friday the 20th of September 1918, he was 23 years of age and is buried in the Sarigol Military Cemetery, Kriston, Greece, grave B.302.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, February 1915.

James Richard Ellison

Private 5971 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashire Regiment

James was born in Wigan in 1882 but was living in Billinge Higher End when he enlisted at Preston to join the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment.

While serving in France he was killed in action on Monday the 14th of September 1914.

His name is recorded on the La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial, France, on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Luke's C.E. Church, Orrell Memorials and on the Upholland Cenotaph.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Reginald Ellison

Able Seaman Z/38 Howe Battalion Royal Naval Division

Reginald was the son of James Ormrod and Anne Elizabeth Ellison of Laurel Bank, Tarbock Road, Huyton.

He enlisted at Liverpool (Mersey) to join the Royal Navy and served in the Howe Battalion of the Royal Naval Division, which was one of the twelve battalions formed from the Royal Navy personnel who fought as soldiers. While fighting at Gallipoli he received a gunshot wound on the 1st of May 1915 and was taken to a hospital in Alexandria, Egypt where he died on Wednesday the 26th of May 1915. Reginald was 18 years of age and is buried in the Chatby Military Cemetery, Alexandria, Egypt, grave L.127.

His name is recorded on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's C.E. Churchyard, grave 10/82.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Roll of Honour Howe Battalion, Royal Naval Division and The Cross of Sacrifice vol. IV 1914-1921; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Helens Newspaper, 1st of June 1915.

James Gaskell

Lance Corporal G/6959 6th Battalion The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) (previously Royal Field Artillery)

James was born on the 25th of April 1897 the son of James and Betsy Gaskell of "Brocstedes", Downall Green, and was baptised on the 3rd of July 1897 at Holy Trinity C.E. Church, Ashton (Downall Green). He went to Holy Trinity School and then worked for Crompton's hinge and lock manufacturer, as did his father, but later went down the coal mine before enlisting at St. Helens with his brother Thomas to join the Royal Field Artillery.

James transferred to The Buffs and while serving in France was reported missing and later killed in action on Saturday the 7th of October 1916. He was 19 years old and is buried in the Bancourt British Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France, grave VIII.A.1.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, May 1915 and July 1917; The Wigan Examiner, 26th of May 1917.

Joseph Gee

Driver 64872 24th Division Ammunition Column Royal Field Artillery

Joseph was born in Billinge on the 3rd of April 1893 the seventh of eleven children of William and Ann Gee (nee Wilson), and was baptised on the 16th of April 1893 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. The family lived at 206 Main Street, Billinge and Joseph was a member of the local football team, Billinge Albion, and worked at the Billinge Colliery before enlisting at St. Helens in January 1915 to join the Royal Field Artillery, becoming a driver.

Joseph was killed in action in France on Friday the 22nd of March 1918 aged 24 years.

It is said that after he was killed his parents never locked the front door in the hope that he would walk in.

His name is recorded on the Poziers Memorial near Albert, France, panels 7 to 10 and on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials.

His parents received his medals:- 1914-1915 Star; British Medal; Victory Medal.

Sources:- Niece; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers; The Wigan Observer, 1st of June 1918.

Valentine Gerrard

Sapper 434161 490th Field Company Royal Engineers

Valentine was the son of William and Emma Cecilia Gerrard of 1 High Street, Skelmersdale. The family moved to Smethurst Road, Billinge Higher End, and Valentine enlisted at Liverpool to join the Royal Engineers.

He was killed in action on Monday the 27th of May 1918 at Berry-au-Bac, France aged 21 years.

His name is recorded on the Soissons Memorial, France, St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial and on the Upholland Cenotaph.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Humphrey Glover

Rifleman R/8804 7th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps

Humphrey was born in Wigan the son of Samuel and Margaret Glover. He was married and lived at 38 Pool Street, Poolstock, and worked as a conductor on the Ashton route of the corporation tramways. Humphrey enlisted in January 1915 at Wigan to join the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

He was wounded on the 9th of September 1916 and after recovering returned to the front in March 1917. He was a signaller and while on active duty he was struck by a piece of a shell on Tuesday the 4th of December 1917, and died at the dressing station. He was 27 years old, and was buried in the Oxford Road Cemetery, , Belgium, grave V.E.4.

Humphrey was one of three brothers, another of whom Sergeant John Glover of the King's Own Scottish Borderers was killed about twelve months earlier, while the third has been discharged from the Army on medical grounds.

His name is recorded on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 5/28, and also on the Wigan Cenotaph.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The Wigan Observer, 29th of December 1917.

John Glover

Sergeant 11690 2nd Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers

John was born on the 10th of December 1895 the son of Samuel and Margaret Glover of 29 Longshaw Common, and was baptised on the 26th of January 1896 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. He was unmarried and lived with his parents at 42 Billing Road, Pemberton. John enlisted at the commencement of the war at Wigan and joined the King's Own Scottish Borderers

While in charge of a company of bombers in France he was shot by a sniper on Monday the 22nd of January 1917. John is buried in the Brown's Road Military Cemetery, Festubert, France, grave I.H.14.

He was one of three brothers, another of whom Rifleman Humphrey Glover of the King's Royal Rifle Corps was killed about twelve months later, whilst the third has been discharged from the Army on medical grounds.

His name is recorded on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's C.E. Churchyard, grave 5/28.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; The Wigan Observer, 24th of February 1917.

Frederick Green

Rifleman 4199 1/5th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment

Frederick was born in Sheffield in 1889 but was living in Billinge with his foster parent James and Elizabeth Green of 11 Fair View, when he enlisted at St. Helens to join the South Lancashire Regiment.

While serving in France he was wounded and died there on Wednesday the 9th of August 1916 aged 27 years. Frederick is buried in Dive Copse British Cemetery, Somme, France, grave 1.B.14.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Helens Newspaper, 29th of August 1916; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, August 1915.

Samuel Hart

Gunner 204045 2nd Reserve Battalion Royal Field Artillery

Samuel was born on the 14th of January 1890 the son of Henry and Anne Hart of Kings Moss, and was baptised on the 16th of February 1890 at St. Thomas' C.E. Church, Upholland. He was the ninth of ten children and attended Crank School. The family lived at "Crows Nest" a farmhouse halfway up Shaley Brow. Samuel went to work as a Police Constable in Hebden Bridge in the West Riding Constabulary, Yorkshire, and was living there at 7 Albert Street when he married Jessie Paul of 84 Rainford Road, Billinge on the 22nd of February 1915 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church, Billinge.

Samuel joined the Royal Field Artillery and while stationed at Catterick Camp died there suddenly of heart disease on Wednesday the 24th of January 1917 aged 27 years. He was buried on the 29th of January 1917 in St. Aidan's C.E. Churchyard, grave 9/30 (Ext 250).

His name is recorded on All Saints C.E. Church Memorial, Rainford, and on the Crank School Memorial (a reading desk now in the Alder Lane Misson) and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/30.

Sources:- Nephew; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Thomas' Church Registers.

Josiah Hasleden

Private Po 703(S) Portsmouth Battalion Royal Marine Light Infantry Royal Naval Division

Josiah was born on the 26th of December 1890 the son of Isaac and Mary Hasleden of Enfield Street, Pemberton, and was baptised on the 27th of February 1891 at St. Matthews C.E. Church, Highfield. Isaac was a collier. The family later moved to Winstanley Lodge, Orrell and Josiah volunteered to join the Royal Marine Light Infantry and served in the Portsmouth Battalion which was one of the Twelve battalions formed from the Royal Navy personnel to fight as soldiers.

Josiah was serving in Gallipoli where he was killed in action on Monday the 3rd of May 1915. He was 25 years of age and is buried in the Beach Cemetery, Anzac, Turkey, grave I.A.15.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Luke's C.E. Church, Orrell Memorials, and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/164.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Roll of Honour Portsmouth Battalion, Royal Naval Division and The Cross of Sacrifice vol. IV 1914-1921; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, May 1915; St. Matthews Church Registers.

Harry Hill

Private 5032 5th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment

Harry was born on the 28th of June 1888 the son of Joseph and Sarah Hill of Upholland Road, Billinge, and was baptised Harry Shaw on the 1st of July 1888 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. The family moved to 28 Newton Road and Harry worked at the Winstanley Collieries before enlisting in June 1916 at St. Helens to join the South Lancashire Regiment.

He was drafted to the front ten weeks after volunteering for bomb throwing, and was severely wounded by shrapnel and was admitted to hospital where he died on Saturday the 9th of September 1916 aged 28 years. Harry is buried in the Etaples Military Cemetery, Pas-de-Calais, France, grave X.C.12.

His name is recorded on the St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; The Wigan Observer, 14th of October 1916.

William Edward Hitchen

Driver 70274 20th Division Ammunition Column Royal Field Artillery

William was born on the 15th of January 1896 the son of Alfred and Ellen Hitchen of 17 Beacon Lane, Billinge, and was baptised on the 1st of March 1896 in St. Aidan's C.E. Church. The family moved to 48 Newton Road and William enlisted at Wigan in January 1915 to join the Royal Field Artillery.

While he was serving in France he died there of disease on Tuesday the 18th of June 1918 aged 22 years and was buried in the St. Flochel British Cemetery, Averdoint, Pas-de-Calais, France, grave 1.D.7.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 12/27.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, July 1918.

Arthur Frederick Humphrey

Private 242196 1/5th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment

Arthur was born on the 22nd of March 1883 the son of Jeremiah Alfred and Maria Humphrey of Winstanley Park, and was baptised on the 29th of April 1883 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. Jeremiah was a gamekeeper.

Arthur enlisted at Wigan to join the South Lancashire Regiment and while serving in France was wounded and died there on Saturday the 27th of April 1918. He was 35 years of age and was buried in the Etaples Military Cemetery, France, grave XXXII.G.2A.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Luke's C.E. Church, Orrell Memorials.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers.

David Hurst

Private 70462 22nd Battalion Manchester Regiment (Formally 40369 East Lancashire Regiment)

David was born on the 12th of April 1895 the son of Thomas and Alice Hurst of 33 Rainford Road, Billinge, and was baptised on the same day at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. He was living at Clock Face when he enlisted at St. Helens to join the East Lancashire Regiment, later transferring to the Manchester Regiment.

David was serving in Italy where he was wounded, dying there on Sunday the 3rd of November 1918. He was 24 years of age and is buried in the Giavera British Cemetery, Italy, grave 4.D.3. His brother Thomas serving in the Royal Fusiliers (City of London) was killed about three months earlier.

David's name is recorded on All Saints C.E. Church Memorial, Sutton, and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 5/19.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers.

Thomas Hurst

Private 1343 7th Battalion Royal Fusiliers (City of London)

Thomas was born on the 11th of July 1892 the son of Thomas and Alice Hurst of 33 Rainford Road, Billinge, and was baptised on the 28th of August 1892 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. He was living in St. Helens where he enlisted to join the Royal Fusiliers.

Thomas was killed in action in France on Wednesday the 21st of August 1918, he was 26 years old. His brother David serving in the Manchester Regiment was killed about three months later.

His name is recorded on the Vis-En-Artois Memorial, France, panel 3, on All Saints C.E. Church Memorial, Sutton on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 5/19, and on the St. Helens Cenotaph.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers.

William Thomas Hurst

Sergeant 54667 Machine Gun Corps (Infantry) (Formally 28568 3rd Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment)

William was born in St. Helens but was working as a collier and living at 42 Main Street, Billinge when he married Sarah Elizabeth Derbyshire a dressmaker living at 167 Main Street, at St. Aidan's C.E. Church on the 1st of June 1914. They went to live at 3 Garswood Road, Billinge where Sarah Elizabeth (Bessie) died on the 7th of December 1915 aged 34 years. William went to live with his mother Mrs. Annie Ward at 18 Newton Road, Billinge and then enlisted at St. Helens to join the South Lancashire Regiment, but later transferred to the Machine Gun Corps.

William aged 35 years died of wounds in the Military Hospital at Pendleton on Sunday the 14th of April 1918 and was buried with military honours in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/182 (New ground C.E. 558).

His name is recorded on the St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/182.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, May 1918.

Thomas Huyton

Gunner 810475 D Battery 231st Brigade Royal Field Artillery (Territorial Force)

Thomas was born in Billinge on the 14th of September 1895 the tenth of thirteen children of James and Elizabeth Huyton (nee Cook), and was baptised on the 15th of September 1895 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. The family lived at Kings Moss and Thomas enlisted at Rainford to join the Royal Field Artillery.

He was serving in the D Howitzer Battery in France when the whole battery took a direct hit on Thursday the 5th of July 1917 and all thirteen men were buried together in the Fosse Number 10 Communal Cemetery Extension, Sains-En-Gohelle, France, grave II.A.12. Thomas was 21 years of age.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials and also on the Upholland Cenotaph.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers; "Over There" a commemorative history of the old Leek Battery 1908-1919.

Ernest James

Lance Corporal 10311 6th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment

Ernest was born in Longton in Staffordshire. He enlisted at Warrington in 1915 to join the South Lancashire Regiment. While serving at Gallipoli he died there on Monday the 9th of August 1915.

No record has been found of where he was living in Billinge, and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission do not give an age or name any next of kin, but give their address as Kirkdale, Liverpool.

His name is recorded on the Helles Memorial, Turkey, panels 139 and 140, and on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, October 1915 and January 1916.

Job Jones

Lance Bombardier 5081 27th Battery Royal Field Artillery

Job was born on the 28th of December 1884 the son of Job and Mary Ann Jones of 21 Eustace Street, Warrington, and was baptised on the 8th of March 1885 at Warrington Parish Church (St. Elphin). Job senior was a wire drawer. On the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and in the 1881 census his mother is named as Mary Jane. The family moved to 58 Oxford Lane, Warrington and Job enlisted at Warrington to join the Royal Field Artillery.

He was wounded and while recovering in Billinge Hospital, which was being used as a military hospital during the war, met Nellie Walsh Rigby who was working at the hospital and they married at St. Nathaniel's C.E. Church, Platt Bridge on the 28th of November 1917. Job recovered and went back to the Front in France where he was killed in action on

Wednesday the 16th of October 1918. He was aged 33 years and was buried in the St. Aubert British Cemetery, Nord, France, grave III.B.25.

His widow listed as living at Billinge Hospital received his medals:-

1914 Star
British War Medal
Victory Medal

J. Jones is listed on the Warrington Cenotaph, but the Cenotaph does not list the Christian names or the Regiments.

Sources:- Son-in-law (by second marriage); St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Elphin's Church Registers; St. Nathaniel's Church Registers.

David James Kendrick

Private 32000 10th Battalion Cheshire Regiment (Formally Reserve in the 3rd Battalion, Loyal North Lancashire Regiment)

David was born in Billinge the son of David and Martha Jane Kendrick. The family was living at 152 St. James Road, Orrell and David, who worked at the Bispham Hall Colliery, joined the Territorials in 1912. When the war started he enlisted at Preston to join the 3rd Battalion of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, later transferring to the Cheshire Regiment.

David was killed in action in France on Friday the 28th of July 1916. He was 24 years old, and was buried in the Knightsbridge Cemetery, Mesnil-Martinsart, France, grave E.41.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and on St. Luke's C.E. Church, Orrell Memorials, and also on the Upholland Cenotaph.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazines, September 1914, May 1915 and September 1916; The Wigan Observer, 30th of September 1916.

Henry Lomax

Private 43474 1st Battalion Kings Shropshire Light Infantry

Henry was born in Crank on the 31st of March 1899 the son of Charles and Emma Lomax (nee Critchley). They later moved to Long Fold, Billinge and Henry enlisted at Billinge to join the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry. Henry and James Shuttleworth had the same grand parents.

Henry was killed in action on Thursday the 17th of October 1918 in France/Flanders and was buried in the High Tree Cemetery, Montbrehain, France, grave A.7. He was 19 years of age.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church, the Methodist Church and All Saints C.E. Church, Rainford Memorials.

Sources:- Mr. Frank Rimmer of Rainford; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The Billingers by R.D. Lewis.

Henry Lowe

Henry's name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial, but no information has been found out about him.

A search through the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records for all the Henry or H. Lowe's for the First World War has not revealed a Billinge connection. Very often there is no next of kin given and, therefore, no address to link to Billinge. Also, ages are not always given and sometimes only initials instead of Christian names.

Several baptisms of a Henry Lowe have been found in the Billinge and surrounding area, but not all the men on the Billinge Memorial were born in Billinge and again I have not found a connection.

If anyone has any information please let us know.

William Lowe

Able Seaman R/4062 Nelson Battalion Royal Naval Division (Volunteer Reserve)

William lived in Carr Mill Road, Long Fold, Billinge, and volunteered to join the Royal Navy. He was in the Nelson Battalion, one of the twelve battalions formed from the Royal Navy personnel to fight as soldiers.

William was wounded in France at the end of 1917 and was in hospital in France before being brought over to Netley Military Hospital near Southampton where he died on Saturday the 16th of February 1918. He was 26 years of age.

William is buried in St. Aidan's C.E. Churchyard, War grave 5/11 (middle C.E. 541).

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and the Methodist Church Memorials.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Roll of Honour Nelson Battalion, Royal Naval Division and The Cross of Sacrifice vol. IV 1914-1921; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, March 1918; The Billingers by R.D. Lewis.

Thomas Makin

Gunner 190822 A Battery 70th Brigade Royal Field Artillery

Thomas was born on the 28th of January 1891 the son of William and Agnes Makin of 1 Wigan Road, Billinge (Mount Pleasant Farm), and was baptised on the 22nd of March 1891 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. William Makin was a farmer and a churchwarden.

Thomas enlisted at St. Helens early in 1917 to join the Royal Field Artillery

He died of wounds in France on Thursday the 18th of April 1918 aged 27 years. He is buried in the Ligny-St. Flochel British Cemetery, Averdoingt, Pas de Calais, France, grave 1.A.2.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 5/25.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, April 1917 and May 1918.

Richard Melling

Private 20963 11th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment

Richard was born on the 20th of July 1892 the son of William and Margaret Melling of 112 Upholland Road, Billinge, and was baptised on the 18th of September 1892 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. The family later moved to 198 Main Street and at the outbreak of war he enlisted at St. Helens to join the 11th Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment, the "St. Helens Pals".

Richard was in hospital in Sheffield in April 1917 with blood poisoning in the thumb and later returned to the front. He was accidentally killed in France while returning to camp having been run over by a motor transport vehicle on Monday the 22nd of October 1917. He was 25 years old and single. Richard is buried in the Pond Farm Cemetery, Heuvelland, West Vlaanderen, Belgium, grave D.1.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 5/39.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, November 1917; The Wigan Observer, 17th of November 1917.

John William Mills

Private 20145 11th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment

Jack was born on the 25th of February 1892 the son of Frederick and Ann Mills and was baptised on the 28th of February 1892 in Holy Cross R.C. Church, St. Helens.

The family was living at 11 Graham Street, Pocket Nook, St. Helens and Jack enlisted early in 1915 at St. Helens to join the 11th Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment the "St. Helens Pals". His name is listed in the Holy Cross Roll of Honour of volunteers on the 19th of February 1915.

While serving in France he died of wounds on Friday the 10th of March 1916 aged 24 years. Jack is buried in the Corbie Communal Cemetery, Amiens, France, grave 1.E.9.

His name is recorded on the family grave headstone in St. Mary's R.C. Churchyard, grave 3/76.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The St. Helens Advertiser, 8th of March 1918; Holy Cross Church Records; St. Helens Newspaper, 19th of February 1915.

Richard Richmond

Stoker 1st Class K/30524 H.M.S. Queen Mary Royal Navy

Richard was born on the 4th of August 1886 the son of James and Helen Richmond (nee Houghton) of "Hilltop", Rainford, and was baptised on the 18th of August 1886 at Lowe House R.C. Church, St. Helens. He attended St. Thomas of Canterbury School between the 8th of July 1895 and the 25th of November 1898, and the family were living at Ellison's Houses, Crank.

Richard joined the Royal Navy and was serving as a stoker first class on the 27,000 ton battle-cruiser H.M.S. Queen Mary in the battle of Jutland in the North Sea, when on Wednesday the 31st of May 1916 the ship, which was third in line, was hit by a salvo at 4.26 p.m. Following a massive explosion and the ship turned over and sank in only one and a half minutes. Out of a crew of 1266 only 20 survived and were picked up by a destroyer. Richard was 29 years old.

His name is listed on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial, panel 19 and on both St. Mary's R.C. and All Saints C.E. Church Memorials.

Sources:- The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Helens Local History Library, The Cross of Sacrifice Vol. IV 1914-1921; Lowe House Church Registers; The St. Helens Reporter, 16th of June 1916; St. Thomas of Canterbury School Registers.

Richard Roby

Private 11794 1st Battalion Border Regiment (formally 10th Battalion)

Richard was born on the 9th of November 1894 the son of Henry and Sarah Roby of Main Street, Billinge, and was baptised on the 17th of December 1894 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. The family lived at the council offices, Billinge and Richard worked at the Winstanley Collieries before enlisting at Wigan to join the Border Regiment, originally in the 10th Battalion.

Richard was on board the 11,000 ton troop ship the "Royal Edward" sailing from Alexandria, Egypt, to reinforce the 29th Division at Gallipoli when it was sunk without warning by a torpedo on Friday the 13th of August 1915, six miles west of Kandeliusa (west of the island of Kos) in the Aegean Sea. It sank in only four minutes with more than 850 lives lost including Richard. He was 20 years old.

A memorial service was held for him in St. Aidan's C.E. Church on Sunday the 31st of October 1915. Richard was one of the first to enlist and was the first in the district to give his life.

His name is recorded on the Helles Memorial, Turkey, panel 119 to 125 or 222 and 223, and on the St. Aidan's Church Memorial and also on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/166.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, May 1915; The Wigan Examiner, 6th of November 1915; The Wigan Observer, 11th of September 1915.

James Shuttleworth

Driver W/2553 A Battery 121st Brigade Royal Field Artillery

James was born on the 27th of January 1897 the son of John and Annie Elizabeth Shuttleworth (nee Haines) of Rant Cottages, Crank. Annie Elizabeth Haines arrived in Rainford from Oxfordshire in about 1876 with her widowed mother Ellen who kept house for her widowed brother-in-law William Lomax, who she later married. Annie Elizabeth died aged 38 years at Brown Heath and was buried on the 9th of September 1908 at St. Aidan's Churchyard. His grandparents William and Ellen Lomax at 27 Carr Mill Road, Billinge,

brought up James, who was only eleven years old. They were also the grandparents of Henry Lomax who was killed in October 1918 aged 19 years.

James whilst serving with the Royal Field Artillery died on Monday the 29th of April 1918 aged 21 years and was buried in the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Poperinge, West Vlaanderen, Belgium, grave XXVIII.E.3.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church, the Methodist Church and All Saints C.E. Church, Rainford Memorials.

Sources:- Mr. Frank Rimmer, Rainford; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The Billingers by R.D. Lewis.

Thomas Snowden

Private M/281838 Motor Transport Reserve Depot (Grove Park) Royal Army Service Corps.

Thomas was born in Newton-le Willows the son of Abraham and Maria Snowden of Vulcan, and was baptised on the 23rd of April 1882 at Wargrave Emmanuel Church.

Thomas worked for over twenty years for Dr. Mather of Chapel House, Billinge as a coachman and servant, and was also a sidesman at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. He married Emma Heinekey a schoolmistress, of 3 Newton Road, Billinge on the 2nd of April 1907 at St. Aidan's Church, and they went to live at 13 Newton Road.

Thomas joined the Motor Transport section of the Royal Army Service Corps at St. Helens in January 1917, and within a fortnight he reported sick with pleurisy. He was in hospital in Bromley, Kent but was then moved to the Canadian Ontario Military Hospital, Orpington, Kent where he died on Sunday the 25th of February 1917 aged 35 years. He left a widow and a son Arthur who served in the Royal Navy in the Second World War. Thomas was given a military funeral on the 1st of March with some fifty soldiers attending from Billinge Hospital, and was buried in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/187 (Newground C.E.563).

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 9/187.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, April 1917; St. Aidan's Church Registers; Wargrave Emmanuel Church Registers; The Wigan Observer, 10th of March 1917; The Wigan Examiner, 10th of March 1917

James Taylor

Corporal 15479 114th Company Machine Gun Corps (Infantry) (Formally 6776 Connaught Rangers)

James was born in Billinge on the 5th of March 1885 the fifth of ten children of Thomas and Sarah Taylor (nee Cunliffe), and was baptised on the 8th of March 1885 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. He married Jane Mc Loughlin on the 30th of November 1912 at St. Mary's Church, and they lived at 29 Fair View.

James enlisted at St. Helens and joined the Connaught Rangers but later was transferred to the Machine Gun Corps. He was killed in action on Tuesday the 31st of July / Wednesday the

1st of August 1917 aged 32 years and is buried in the Welsh Cemetery (Ceasar's Nose), Ieper, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium, grave 1.B.13.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials and also two family grave headstones in St. Mary's Churchyard, graves 1/45 and 2/16.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers.

Arthur Whincup

Driver L/34557 29th Division Ammunition Column Royal Field Artillery

Arthur was born in Bramham, Yorkshire the son of Grafton and Mary Elizabeth Whincup. He lived with his wife Elizabeth at 202 Upholland Road, Orrell, and enlisted at Wigan to join the Royal Field Artillery.

Arthur was killed in action on Tuesday the 25th of September 1917 in France/Flanders, and was buried in the Canada Farm Cemetery, Elverdinghe, Belgium, grave III.C.45. He was 36 years of age.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Luke's C.E. Church Memorials, and on the Upholland Cenotaph.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Peter Whittle

Private 250139 2nd Reserve Cavalry Regiment

Peter was born in Billinge on the 2nd of October 1892 the second of three children of James and Ann Whittle (nee Taylor), and was baptised on the 9th of October 1892 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. The family moved to 2 Juddfield Street, Haydock and he enlisted early in 1915 to join the Cavalry Regiment. His name was recorded on the St. Mary's, Black Brook Roll of Honour of volunteers on the 16th of March 1915.

Peter died on Thursday the 13th of February 1919 aged 26 years, and was buried on Tuesday the 18th of February 1919 in St. Mary's Churchyard, War Grave 2/82.

Sources:- The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers; St. Helens Newspaper, 16th of March 1915.

Henry Wilson

Private 18770 1st Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers (formally 3rd Battalion)

Henry was born on the 24th of March 1885 the fifth of six children to James and Hannah Wilson (nee Taylor), and was baptised on the 29th of March 1885 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. Henry lived at Fair View and married Elizabeth Heaton of Gorsey Brow on the 24th of December 1909 in St. Mary's Church. They had two children, Ernest born on the 4th of

March 1911 and Stanley born on the 2nd of June 1913. Both were baptised in St. Mary's Church. The family lived at 20 Fair View, Billinge and Henry who was 6 feet 1 1/2 inches tall and weighed 11 stones worked at the Garswood Hall Collieries before he enlisted at St. Helens on the 3rd of February 1915. It would seem likely that he enlisted with Patrick Coleman as they both enlisted at the same place and both joined the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, an unusual regiment for Billinge men.

He was serving with the British Expeditionary Force at Gallipoli where he was shot by a sniper at 08.30 hours on Wednesday the 29th of September 1915. He was 30 years old. Henry is buried in the Azmak Cemetery, Suvla, Turkey, grave I.E.11.

His name is recorded on both St. Aidan's C.E. Church and St. Mary's R.C. Church Memorials.

Sources:- Daughter-in-law; Grandson; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers; The Wigan Observer, 30th of October 1915; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, May 1915 and November 1915.

Joseph Wilson

Private 43518 1st Battalion King's Shropshire Light Infantry

Joseph was born on the 14th of January 1896 the son of Edmund and Mary Alice Wilson of Billinge Higher End, and was baptised on the 16th of March 1896 at Bispham Methodist Church. He had one sister and four brothers. The family moved to 7 Green Lane, Orrell, and Joseph worked as a coal miner before enlisted at Upholland to join the King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

Joseph was killed in action on Tuesday the 8th of October 1918 in France/Flanders. He was 22 years of age and is buried in the Ramicourt British Cemetery, Aisne, France, grave A.30.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church, St. Luke's C.E. Church, Orrell and Bispham Methodist Church Memorials. His name is also on the family grave headstone in St. Thomas' C.E. Churchyard, Upholland.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Bispham Methodist Church Registers.

1939 -1945

William Ashall

Fusilier 3457618 10th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers

Bill was the only child of William Thomas and Alice Ashall (nee Kelly) who lived in Main Street, Billinge from where they ran a coal business, which Bill joined. In the 1930's this was a horse and cart operation, but eventually they bought a new motor lorry, but in 1939 the Army came along and requisitioned it and they then had to buy a second hand lorry. Bill married Doris Whittaker of Rainford on the 13th of May 1940 at All Saints C.E. Church, Rainford, but before the year was out he was called up and joined the Lancashire Fusiliers.

On Saturday the 9th of January 1943 he was reported missing in action in Burma. His body was never recovered, he was 29 years old.

His name is recorded on the Rangoon Memorial, Myanmar, face 8, and on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- Mr. Frank Rimmer, Rainford; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, March 1943.

Alec Bold

Driver 7906387 79th Assault Squadron Royal Tank Regiment

Alec was born on the 13th of August 1919 the eldest child of John and Adeline Dorothy Bold of 16 Newton Road, Billinge, and was baptised on the 7th of September 1919 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. The family later moved to 58 Beacon Road and Alec attended St. Aidan's School. He played the piano and was taught to play St. Aidan's organ by the organist Albert Mather. Alec worked at Evans Store in Garswood and then at the Maypole Stores, Pemberton before being called up and joining the Royal Tank Regiment.

Alec became a tank driving instructor on Salisbury Plain and later took part in the D-Day landing. He was driving a tank when it hit a land mine which killed him on Wednesday the 8th of November 1944. He was 25 years old and is buried in the Bergen-Op-Zoom War Cemetery, Netherlands, grave 15.B.9.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- Brother; Sister; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, December 1944.

John Bernard Bolton

Private 3529726 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment

John was born on the 13th of October 1917 the son of George and Edith Bolton (nee Winstanley), and was baptised on the 14th of October 1917 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. The family lived in a house opposite the George and Dragon on Main Street.

John was called up into the Army to join the Manchester Regiment and was serving in Thailand where he was taken prisoner by the Japanese. He died there on Wednesday the 16th of June 1943 aged 25 years. His parents only found out that he had died near the end of the War. John is buried in the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand, grave 2.M.38. The cemetery is only a short distance from the site of the former "Kanburi" prisoner-of-war base camp, through which passed most of the prisoners on their way to the other camps, and is the largest of the three cemeteries (two in Thailand and one in Burma) on the notorious Burma-Siam railway.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers; St. Mary's Parish Notice Book, 27th of May 1945.

Harold Dennett

Private 3195298 6th Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment

Harold was born on the 15th of August 1925 the son of Jesse Herbert and Jane Dennett of 9 Beacon Lane, Billinge, and was baptised on the 19th of September 1915 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church.

Harold was called up and joined the Lincolnshire Regiment and was fighting in North Africa as one of the "Dessert Rats" on the final drive to Tunis when he was killed in action on Thursday the 22nd of April 1943. He was 27 years of age and left a wife Irene and children Keith, Allan and baby Jeffrey. Harold is buried in the Massicault War Cemetery, near Tunis, grave VI.D.9.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 6/23.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The Wigan Observer, 22nd of April 1944; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, November 1943.

James Gerard Foster

Lance Corporal 3852794 1st Battalion The Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire)

James was born on the 9th of April 1910 the son of Francis and Ann Foster (nee Mather), and was baptised on the 10th of April 1910 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. He had a younger sister Mary born on the 9th of December 1911 also baptised at St. Mary's Church. He attended St. Mary's school and was the biggest boy in the school.

James married Monica Lawrenson on the 8th of August 1938 in St. Mary's Church. They lived in one of the two stone cottages near the Masons Arms, later moving to 125 Princess Avenue, Windlehurst, St Helens.

James joined the Territorials before the war, and was called up soon after war was declared. He was fighting a rearguard action at Brugge to cover the evacuation of Dunkirk, and whilst taking cover in a building it collapsed on top of him, killing him instantly on Saturday the 1st of June 1940, and he was 30 years old.

His name is recorded on the St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial and on the Dunkirk Memorial, Dunkirk Town Cemetery, column 95.

Sources:- Brother-in-law; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers.

John Thomas Foster

Lance Corporal 3968947 1st Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment (formally Lance Corporal 2/5th Battalion Welsh Regiment)

Tommy was born on the 15th of November 1915 the son of Thomas and Annie Foster of 168 Main Street, Billinge, and was baptised on the 16th of January 1916 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. He attended St. Aidan's school. The family moved to 41 Holt Crescent and Tommy worked as a gardener at Rainford Hall before being called up in April 1940 to join the Welsh

Regiment. While on leave he married Violet Minnie Unsworth of 33 Cansfield Grove, Ashton-in-Makerfield at St. Peter's C.E. Church on the 15th of June 1940.

He was transferred from the Welsh to the Dorsetshire Regiment, and about five weeks later in N.W. Europe a mortar landed in the trench that he was in. He was brought out by two stretcher bearers, but died shortly after on Saturday the 9th of September 1944.

Tommy is buried in Schoonselhof Cemetery, Antwerp, Belgium, grave II.C.18. He was 28 years old.

His widow received his medals:-
1939-1945 Star
France and Germany Star
1939-1945 Defence Medal
1939-1945 War Medal

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- Widow; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, October 1944; The Wigan Observer, 30th of September 1944; The Wigan Examiner, 3rd of October 1944; The St. Helens Newspaper, 29th of September 1944.

Harold Gee

Corporal 3864592 The Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire) and No. 2 Commando

Harold was born on the 25th of July 1920 the son of James and Jane Gee of 2 School Brow, Billinge, and was baptised on the 29th of August 1920 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. He was a member of St. Aidan's Young Men's Class and worked at the Ravenhead Brick Works, St. Helens before being called up in August 1940 to join The Loyal Regiment.

While serving in The Loyal Regiment Harold joined the Commandos which was recruited with volunteers from the Corps and Regiments to form a highly trained force to raid the enemy held coasts. The No. 2 Commandos were formed in the summer of 1940, and later in the War served in Sicily, Italy and Yugoslavia where Harold died of wounds on Tuesday the 10th of October 1944. He was 24 years old and was buried in Albania but his grave is now lost.

His name is recorded on the Tirana Park Memorial Cemetery, Albania and on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, November 1944; The Wigan Observer, 4th of November 1944.

George Heslop

Able Seaman D/JX 369179 H.M.S. "Kite" Royal Navy

George was born on the 24th of September 1924 the son of Joseph and Sarah Ellen Heslop of Blackleyhurst, and was baptised on the 26th of October 1924 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. The family later moved to Crosby and George joined the Royal Navy, serving as an Able Seaman on board H.M.S. Kite.

The ship was a "Black Swan" class sloop built at Cammell Lairds and was used as an antisubmarine escort to the North Atlantic convoys. Russian convoy JW59 set out from Loch

Ewe on the 15th of August 1944 with 33 merchant ships and with a heavy escort including escort carriers “Striker” and “Vindex” and escort groups 20th and 22nd. “Kite” was in the 22nd Group. The aim of the heavy escort was to guard the convoy and also to search out and attack the pocket battleship “Terpitz”, which was attacked three times between the 22nd and the 29th of August. On Monday the 21st of August 1944 the 1 350 ton ship H.M.S. “Kite” was sunk by a torpedo from submarine U344 in the Greenland Sea S.W. of Bear Island. Out of a crew of 192 only 9 survived. George was one of the casualties, he was 19 years of age. The submarine U344 was sunk three days later by British ships.

George’s name is recorded on the Plymouth Memorial, panel 8b column 2, and also on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan’s Churchyard, grave 9/153.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Index of sailors killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan’s Church Registers.

William Hewitt

Private 14234845 1st Battalion Duke of Wellington’s West Riding Regiment

William was born on the 30th of December 1923 the son of William and Ann Hewitt of 43 Moss Road, Billinge Higher End, and was baptised on the 25th of February 1924 at Bispham Methodist Church. William was the fourth of five children; Bessie, Margaret, Annie, William and Hilda, and he worked at the Ross Works shoe factory at Pemberton before being called up to join the Duke of Wellington Regiment.

William had been serving abroad in Italy since April 1944 where he was killed in action on Tuesday the 12th of September 1944. He was 20 years old and is buried in the Florence War Cemetery, Italy, grave IV.G.11.

His name is recorded on St. Luks’s C.E. Church Memorial and on the Ross Shoe Factory Memorial situated at the back of St. Matthew’s C.E. Church, Highfield, Pemberton.

Sources:- Sister; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The Wigan Examiner, 11th of November 1944; The Wigan Observer, 7th of November 1944; Bispham Methodist Church Registers.

Henry Heyes

Lance Corporal T/107863 Royal Army Service Corps

Harry was born on the 22nd of December 1919 the son of George and Alice Heyes of 182 Main Street, Billinge, and was baptised on the 25th of January 1920 at St. Aidan’s C.E. Church. He attended St. Aidan’s School and Upholland Grammar School. Harry ran his own coal delivery business before being called up and joining the Royal Army Service Corps.

Harry was fighting in North Africa, and at the evacuation of Tobruk while he was on board a ship, he volunteered to go back to blow-up the installations and was captured. He was taken as a prisoner to Italy where he escaped and was re-captured, escaped again and was shot on Monday the 8th of February 1943. He was 23 years old and is buried in the Ancona War Cemetery, Italy, grave 11.G.2.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan’s C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- Cousin; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, April 1943.

Bernard Ralph Higham

Sergeant 3714069 1st Wing Glider Pilot Regiment Army Air Corps

Bernard was born on the 11th of November 1919 the son of John Joseph and Florence Brigham Higham (nee Bowes) of 160 Boundry Road, St. Helens, and was baptised on the 16th of November 1919 at Sacred Heart R.C. Church, St. Helens. John Joseph was a dentist. Bernard went to West Park R.C. Grammar School, and the family moved to Billinge shortly before the war living at Little Houghwood in Red Barn Lane, Billinge.

Bernard served in the Glider Pilot Regiment, which was an army regiment formed by volunteers in January 1942 to transport airborne forces, and consisted of R.A.F. trained pilots who when landed fought as soldiers. He was reported missing and later killed in a raid on Arnhem, Netherlands on Monday the 25th of September 1944. He was 25 years old and is buried in the Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery, Netherlands, grave 3.A.14. His brother Philip Geoffrey who was in the R.A.F. was killed about a year before.

His name is recorded on the West Park Old Boys Memorial (now situated in the De La Salle High School, St. Helens), St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial, St. Helens Cenotaph and on the family grave headstone in St. Mary's R.C. Churchyard, grave 1/1D.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Sacred Heart Church Registers; St. Mary's Church Notice Book, 15th of October 1944 and 7th of October 1945.

Philip Geoffrey Higham

Sergeant 1132896 104 Squadron Bomber Command Royal Air Force
(Volunteer Reserve)

Philip was born on the 18th of July 1922 the son of John Joseph and Florence Brigham Higham (nee Bowes) of 160 Boundry Road, St. Helens, and was baptised on the 23rd of July 1922 at Sacred Heart R.C. Church, St. Helens. John Joseph was a dentist. Philip went to West Park R.C. Grammar School, and the family moved to Billinge shortly before the war living at Little Houghwood in Red Barn Lane.

Philip served in 104 Squadron which flew Wellington Bombers, and early in 1942 most of the squadron was posted to the Middle East. He was reported missing and later killed in a raid on Italy on Saturday the 30th of October 1943, he was 21 years of age and is buried in the Bolsena War Cemetery, Italy, collective grave 1.B.7. His brother Bernard Ralph who was in the Glider Pilot Regiment was killed about a year later.

His name is recorded on the West Park Old Boys Memorial (now situated in the De La Salle High School, St. Helens), St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial, St. Helens Cenotaph and on the family grave headstone in St. Mary's R.C. Churchyard, grave 1/1D.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Index of airmen killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Sacred Heart Church Registers; St. Mary's Church Notice Book, 29th of May 1944.

John Charles Hurst

Sergeant-Pilot 745671 Royal Air Force (Volunteer Reserve)

John was born on the 17th of March 1920 the only son of Ernest and Edith Hurst of 65 Delph Street, Wigan, and was baptised on the 18th of April 1920 at Wigan Parish Church (All Saints). The late Mr. Hurst was a member of the teaching staff of St. James Road School, Orrell. John was an old boy of Wigan Grammar School and he had been studying to become an optician when he decided to join the R.A.F. in July 1939.

He had just passed out as a pilot when he was tragically killed in a flying accident on Monday the 30th of September 1940. He was 20 years old and was buried in St. Aidan's C.E. Churchyard with full military honours on Thursday the 30th of October 1940. War grave 8/21 next to the family grave.

His name is recorded on the Wigan Cenotaph.

Sources:- The Wigan Examiner, 5th of October 1940; The Wigan Observer, 5th of October 1940; Wigan Parish Church Registers.

John Leyland

Corporal 3383508 1st Battalion East Lancashire Regiment

Jack was the son of Paul and Mary Jane Leyland of 439 Wigan Road, Bryn, and he was in the Army when he married Mary Ellen Gee of 27 Holt Avenue at St. Aidan's C.E. Church on the 29th of July 1939. They lived with Mary's family at 27 Holt Avenue and they had one child Helen Margaret, born on the 23rd of April 1940 and baptised on the 9th of June 1940 in St. Aidan's C.E. Church.

Jack was an Army reservist, having served four years in Shanghai and Hong Kong, and was recalled at the outbreak of the war to join the East Lancashire Regiment. He was in the evacuation of Dunkirk, and while later serving in Normandy he was killed by accident on Monday the 10th of July 1944. He was 33 years old and is buried in the Brouay War Cemetery, Calados, France, grave 111.G.10.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The St. Helens Reporter, 8th of September 1944; The Wigan Examiner, 26th of August 1944; The Wigan Observer, 19th of August 1944.

George Littler

Guardsman 2662307 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards

George was born on the 22nd of June 1920 the son of Henry and Mary Littler (nee Bennett) of 80 Prescott Street, Wigan, and was baptised on the 11th of July 1920 at Wigan Parish Church (All Saints). His father was a collier. The family came to live at 26 Longshaw Common and George who attended St. Aidan's school was the eldest of four children; George, Eva, Harry and Jacky.

He worked at the Co-op in Billinge making deliveries with a cart before being called up to join the 3rd Battalion of the Coldstream Guards. George was very musical and played a guitar and while in the Army frequently played a mouth organ. He was killed in action in Italy on Sunday the 23rd of January 1944 aged 23 years, and is buried in Minturno War Cemetery, Italy, grave IV.B.8.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- Brother; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Wigan Parish Church Registers; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, March 1944; Mr. Cheetham.

John Thomas Nicholson

Private 14209590 2nd Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment (previously Manchester Regiment)

Jack was born on the 26th of August 1921 the son of Ernest and Nellie Nicholson of 64 UpHolland Road, (now re-numbered 70) Billinge, and was baptised on the 16th of October 1921 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. He attended St. Aidan's school and was the eldest of four children; Jack, Bella, Irene and Harold. He liked boxing and used to practice with his mates; Irvine Nicholson, Jack Dillon (who also served in the forces), Jim Dawber, Jimmy Smith and Dick Roby. Jack was an apprentice bricklayer serving his time with James Gaskell and worked in Billinge and in Liverpool on bombed buildings. Because of his apprenticeship he was not called up until he was 21 years old, joining the Manchester Regiment and later transferring to the Monmouth Regiment.

While serving in the Monmouthshire Regiment in France he was killed in action on Tuesday the 15th of August 1944. John was 22 years old and is buried in the Banneville-La-Campagne War Cemetery, Calvados, France, grave VIII.E.8.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources: Sister; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, September 1944; St. Aidan's Church Registers.

Norman James Parkinson

Private 13076347 240 Company Pioneer Corps

Norman was born on the 28th of August 1909 the son of John and Ann Parkinson, (nee Chisnall), and was baptised on the 5th of September 1909 in St. James' R.C. Church, Orrell. His father died and his mother re-married Samuel Parry in 1914. His mother died in 1932 and is buried in St. Mary's R.C. Churchyard.

Norman was called up and joined the Pioneer Corps. He died on Monday the 24th of January 1944 aged 34 years and was buried with his mother on Saturday the 29th of January 1944 in the family grave in St. Mary's R.C. Churchyard, grave 4/64.

His name is recorded on the grave headstone.

Sources:- St. James' Church Registers; St. Mary's Burial Register.

Jack Pennington

Sergeant 1040748 Wireless Operator/Air Gunner Royal Air Force (Volunteer Reserve)

Jack was born on the 12th of August 1920 the son of William and Margaret Pennington of 258 Upholland Road, Billinge Higher End, and was baptised on the 30th of August 1920 at Bispham Methodist Church, Billinge. He lived with his wife Lilian at "Lyndene", Smethurst Road, Billinge Higher End and was a member of Bispham Methodist Church. Before joining the Royal Air Force he worked at Bispham Hall Brick and Terra Cotta Company at Orrell.

He had been in the R.A.F. for two years when he was killed on active service on Thursday the 16th of December 1943. He was 23 years old and was buried with military honours on Thursday the 30th of December 1943 at St. Luke's C.E. Churchyard, Orrell, grave 116.

His name is recorded on St. Luke's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The Wigan Observer, 1st & 8th of January 1944; The Wigan Examiner, 11th of January 1944; Bispham Methodist Church Registers.

Jack Ratcliffe

Sergeant 2209639 57 Squadron Royal Air Force (Volunteer Reserve)

Jack was born on the 10th of December 1923 the son of James and May Ratcliffe (nee Parr) of 17 Beacon Lane, Billinge, and was baptised on the 11th of January 1924 at Chapel End Wesleyan Methodist Church, Billinge.

Jack was the eldest of seven children, five boys and two girls. The family moved to 45 Rainford Road and before being called up in 1942 Jack worked as second man on a lorry for Robinsons Transport, Red Cat, Crank. He joined the Royal Air Force, Bomber Command and was in the 57th Squadron stationed at East Kirkby, Lincolnshire.

Jack was an air gunner in a Lancaster Bomber (top gun position) and was reported missing and later killed in action. His plane was shot down after a raid over Wesseling, Germany on Thursday the 22nd of June 1944. Only one member of the crew survived after bailing out and the plane crashed in the Netherlands. Jack was only 19 years of age.

He is buried in Bergan-Op-Zoom War Cemetery, Netherlands, collective grave 24.A.1.

His parents received his medals:- Air Crew Europe Star

1939-1945 Star

1939-1945 War Medal

Jack's name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church and the Methodist Church Memorials.

Sources:- Sister; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of airmen killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, September 1944; Wesleyan Methodist Church Registers.

Herbert Summers

Driver 2366991 Royal Corps of Signals

Bert was born in 1905 the son of James and Margaret Jane Summers and the husband of Lily Summers of Billinge.

He was called up and joined the Royal Corps of Signals serving in Greece where he was killed on Monday the 18th of December 1944, aged 39 years.

Bert is buried in the Phaleron War Cemetery, Greece, grave 10.C.15.

His name is recorded on St. Luke's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Horace James Walker

Private 3859564 2nd Battalion The Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire)

Horace was born in 1917 the son of Reginald Arthur and Stella Walker (nee Mackenzie) of Billinge. He had two brothers and three sisters and worked as a butcher at Baxters shop, Upholland before being called up and joining the 2nd Battalion of The Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire).

Horace was a prisoner of the Japanese in Thailand where he died on Saturday the 5th of June 1943. He was 26 years old, and was buried in the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand, grave 9.M.4, his name is also on the War Cemetery memorial panels. The Cemetery is only a short distance from the site of the former "Kanburi" prisoner of war base camp, through which passed most of the prisoners on their way to the other camps, and is the largest of the three war cemeteries (two in Thailand and one in Burma) on the notorious Burma-Siam railway.

His name is recorded on St. Luke's C.E. Church Memorial and because he was a member of the bible class it is on the sundial outside the Church.

Sources:- Sister-in-law; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second World War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Arthur Cyril White

Pilot Officer (observer) 11523 26 Operational Training Unit Royal Air Force
(Volunteer Reserve)

Cyril was born on the 27th of August 1918 at St. James' Vicarage the son of Rev. Arthur and Elizabeth White, and was baptised on the 15th of September 1918 at St. James' C.E. Church, Poolstock, Wigan. His father was Vicar of St. Aidan's from 1935 to 1949 and he was also Arch Deacon of Warrington 1948-1958. Cyril who drove a red MG sports car was studying theology at Oxford but left to join the R.A.F.

He was stationed at number 27 O.T.U. from where two crews were sent to No. 26 O.T.U. Wing, Buckinghamshire to man two spare Wellington bombers for the thousand-bomber raid on Cologne. Cyril was the youngest member and the only commissioned man in the crew. He was the front gunner and bomb aimer. His plane (O for orange) was the first to take off from Gravelly, an unfinished airfield, their target being Cologne railway station. After Cyril had released the bombs he returned to the front gun turret and shortly afterwards the plane was attacked from both the front and back by fighter planes. All the crew except the pilot Fred Hillyer was killed, and the pilot had to bale out over the Netherlands, where he was captured and taken prisoner. It was Sunday the 31st of May 1942. Cyril was 23 years old and is buried in the Uden War Cemetery, Netherlands, grave 4.A.6.

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial, and on the family grave headstone in St. Aidan's Churchyard, grave 13/15.

Sources:- Miss Betty Wright; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, July 1944; The Thousand Plan-The Story of the First Thousand Bomber Raid on Cologne, by Ralph Barker, Airlife Publishing 1992, P. 99;101;187-9.

James Wilson

Private 4393416 6th Battalion Green Howards (Yorkshire Regiment)

James was born on the 10th of June 1917 the son of William and Ellen Wilson of 19 Fair View, Billinge, and was baptised on the 17th of June 1917 at St. Mary's R.C. Church. He had two brothers and one sister.

The family moved to 22 Fair View and James worked at the Co-op shop in Billinge before being called up and joining the 6th Battalion of the Green Howard Regiment. James was one of the "Desert Rats" who fought in North Africa, where he was killed in action on Tuesday the 6th of April 1943. He was 25 years old.

He is buried in Enfidaville War Cemetery, Tunisia, grave V.E.28.

His parents received his medals:- African Star
 1939-1945 Star
 1939-1945 War Medal

His name is recorded on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial and on the family grave headstone in St. Mary's R.C. Churchyard, grave 1/62.

Sources:- Sister-in-law; St. Helens Local History Library, Index of soldiers killed in the Second world War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Mary's Church Registers; St. Mary's Church Notice Book, 25th April 1943.



Robert Hurst

Private 352395
23rd Battalion
Manchester Regiment
(Formerly 17973 Border Regiment)



Robert was born on the 10th of June 1898 the son of John and Elizabeth Hurst of 21 Longshaw Common, and was baptised on the 4th of July 1898 at St. Aidan's C.E. Church. Robert had two elder brothers, four younger brothers and two younger sisters. The family

moved to 12 Park Road, Billinge and he worked at the Winstanley Collieries before enlisting at the outbreak of war when he was only 16 years of age.

He joined the Border Regiment and after his training was sent to the Dardanelles, where he landed on his 17th birthday, and later contracted dysentery and was invalided home. After being in this country a few months he was drafted into the Manchester Regiment and was sent out to Egypt, where he had the misfortune to get wounded in the head by a bomb exploding. After being in hospital for a few weeks he was sent to France, being wounded later at Ypres. He had only been back a few days after two weeks leave when word was received that he was missing and then reported killed in action on Wednesday the 24th of October 1917.

His name is recorded on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium, panel 120 to 124 and 162 to 162A and 163A, and also on St. Aidan's C.E. Church Memorial.

Sources:- Niece; St. Helens Local History Library, Soldiers killed in the Great War; The Commonwealth War Graves Commission; St. Aidan's Parish Magazine, May 1915 and March 1918; St. Aidan's Church Registers; The Wigan Observer, 26th of January 1918.

THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II ON BILLINGE

It was in March 2000 that an article in the local paper mentioned a women looking for Billingers to interview about World War Two. I gave her a bell. She intended submitting a dissertation on the impact of that war on Billinge and we made a friendly deal that I would help her find people to interview if we could use her material. The finished document is intended for academic assessment. It contains a bibliography, acknowledgments, a preface, records of interviews and other material required by such an endeavour. With the author's permission I have extracted from it the pages below.

BILLINGE BEFORE THE WAR

In order to consider the impact which World War Two upon Billinge, it seems relevant to outline the village's history and lifestyles before the war. Billinge lies between Wigan and St Helens, two miles from the A580 East Lancs. Road linking Manchester and Liverpool and is surrounded by farmland. Since 1945 new housing estates and shops have been built, sometimes, unfortunately, replacing older buildings.

Billinge is situated on a hill, which rises 602 feet, dominates the surrounding area and is the highest point in Merseyside. The beacon on the hill was part of the old signalling system and from the summit, according to Richard D. Lewis in *The Billingers*, 16 counties are visible. Stone from the now-disused quarry was used to construct many of the older buildings. Billinge's neighbours are Garswood, Upholland, Orrell, Ashton in Makerfield and Rainford, while Haydock, Newton le Willows, Winwick and Warrington are close.

Accessible evidence of Roman presence in the area is now scarce, although in his book, *'A History of Lancashire'*, J.J. Bagley states that they built a stronghold at Wigan, which was a road junction for Lancaster, Manchester and routes to Chester. There are claims that they visited Orrell, and a Roman coin was reportedly found during building renovation work in Billinge's Carr Mill Road. Bagley claims that the first settlement at Billinge may have occurred when family groups of Angles crossed the Pennines, settling on 'fairly high ground ... and on isolated sites clear of the marshland' (p.8). Bagley explains that 'The *-inga* place-names ... are of this early period', which he dates at circa 570 A.D., when '*Billinge* (became) the new home of the family of Bylla'. Billinge seemed to avoid the Viking invasions that occurred later, although they settled at Skelmersdale and Scholes in Wigan.

In '*The Billingers*', Richard Lewis claims that by 1720 the village population was around 900, while the 1801 census describes 1,141 inhabitants, of whom: '146 people were employed in agriculture and 477 in handicrafts, trades and manufactures'. He quotes the 1861 and 1961 censuses, which give populations of 3,066 and 6,945 respectively, while recent housing developments have continued this growth. Evidence of early forms of work is shown on a tombstone in St Aidan's churchyard describing a man who died in 1720 from an adder bite while working in Billinge Hill Quarry, and both Bagley and Lewis describe nail-making as a prevalent cottage industry until 1825.

By 1939 most local men were employed in mining, Lewis claims that a 1786 map shows no collieries in Billinge although the industry blossomed during the 19th century as the area is within the West Lancashire Coalfield. By 1842 Billinge's Blackleyhurst Colliery employed 133 local people over 13 years of age and 37 children. Mining increased locally, by 1929 there were six collieries in Billinge and 12 large mines in St Helens.

There were outlets for the villagers' leisure time, with a corrugated-iron cinema, football and cricket teams, fishing, possibly even some poaching activity and at least nine public houses, some with bowling greens. Many families kept chickens and grew vegetables and fruit, and there were a few pigs in back gardens.

Billinge has long associations with Roman Catholicism. Birchley Hall, which was privately owned in wartime but is now a Sue Ryder Home, had priest holes and tunnels. By 1939 there was a Methodist Chapel and Protestant and Catholic churches with their own schools as well as a Catholic orphanage, which is now a Nugent Society School

Village life was not easy, the community was isolated and large families occupied small cottages with few labour saving devices. Men became accustomed from an early age to coalface work, and even during World War Two youths of 14 were still working in the mines under conditions described by one Bevin Boy as: 'half-naked bodies, bending, crawling, rolling, heaving, straining to produce that without which we cannot exist'¹. Bevin tried to conscript more employees for the mines in 1943, when demand for coal exceeded production. There were no memories of Bevin Boys being used in Billinge pits but the passage serves to illustrate the normal working conditions in mines.

Many local women worked in timber yards, agriculture, or in shops as well as bringing up families. By the outbreak of World War Two, Billinge was a close-knit, industrialised, working class village. The village's patriotism is still evident as the tree planted to celebrate the Relief of Mafeking in 1901 flourishes along Main Street.

VILLAGE LIFE DURING WORLD WAR TWO

The most prevalent remark among the Billinge people who survived the Second World War was: 'We were lucky really', and this may be true when their wartime experiences are compared with those of Manchester and Liverpool, which bore the brunt of the attacks in the North-West. There can, however, be no doubt that the war deeply affected every aspect of the lives of the village's wartime inhabitants, in their workplaces, schools, homes and socially. Their memories of this period are still powerful, 55 years after the end of the war.

According to a Marion Yass, in 'The Home Front - England 1939-1945', a Mass Observation Poll of 31 August 1939 showed that only 18% of people expected war, an increase of merely 3% on a September 1938 poll, but this possibly reflected wishful thinking rather than realism, since preparations for war were by then apparent

¹ Asa Briggs, *Go to It! Working for Victory on the Home Front 1939-1945*, p.66, quoted from David Day's *The Bevin Boy*.

throughout Britain. In 'The People's War', Angus Calder states that the first Government pamphlet on Air Raid Precautions was issued in September 1935, therefore shortly after Germany's announcement that it had 're-established her air force and introduced military conscription'². By April 1937 the Air Raid Wardens Service had been created and on 9 August 1939 there was a trial blackout. Norman Longmate's, 'How we Lived Then' states that gasmasks were distributed at his Boarding School shortly after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, in 1938. In Bury and the Second World War, Ken Inman and Michael H. Helm describe the preparations there, including digging anti-tank trenches in 1938, protecting buildings with sandbags, and the delivery of a Bren gun to the barracks in April 1938.

Procedures for the evacuation of children from potential major target areas had been established and, according to Arthur Marwick's 'The Home Front', this began on 1 September, after the German invasion of Poland. No Billingers were among the '827,000 schoolchildren and 524,000 mothers with children under school age' described by Asa Briggs, in 'Go to It! Working for Victory on the Home Front 1939-1945', (p.106), who were evacuated under the arrangements which Marwick claimed were 'pretty chaotic', but village life was affected later in the war when evacuees sought refuge in the area.

In Billinge no one could remember being surprised when Neville Chamberlain announced the outbreak of war on the wireless. An Air Raid Warden's wife recalls having already been instructed on the operation of a stirrup pump, but fervently hoped that she would never need to extinguish a fire with the contraption. A wartime schoolboy remembers listening to the Prime Minister's announcement at 11.15 a.m. on Sunday, 3 September, with some builders working along his road. A church organist recalled the Vicar shortening the service so that his congregation could listen to the broadcast, which concluded: '... and that consequently this country is at war with Germany'³.

Richard Lewis, who was born in Billinge in the 1930s, briefly describes his wartime experiences in the area:

On Sept. 3rd., 1939, war with Germany was declared. The lights started going out all over Europe, nowhere more effectively than in Wigan, where the blackout was *de rigueur*. Our location, midway between Liverpool and Manchester meant that we had bombers passing overhead many nights from 1940 to 1944⁴.

Many aspects of daily life were very quickly affected by the onset of the war. In 1939 one family had to find a second-hand lorry for their coal-merchants business in Billinge's Main Street after the army requisitioned their recently purchased new vehicle. Sadly, this later became inconsequential to the family when their son was lost in action while serving with the Lancashire Fusiliers in Burma in 1943.

The central control over foodstuffs, which was quickly established, dramatically affected consumers and producers throughout Britain, Billinge being no exception.

² Mike Brown, 1999, Put That Light Out! Britain's Civil Defence Services At War 1939-1945, p.3.

³ Marion Yass, The Home Front. England 1939-1945, p 16

⁴ Richard D. Lewis, The Road to Wigan Pier, p.5-6

Workers in food stores could sometimes supplement their diets, and a chemist's shop worker remembers that occasionally goods could be bartered for food. A local farmer's daughter recalls the legislation which soon controlled all aspects of production and supply, particularly the laws regarding the rearing of pigs, which stated that farms could slaughter only one pig each year for their own use. Local farmers co-operated and shared whichever animal was available, to ensure a more even supply of pork. Similar mutual co-operation was widespread, and Pig Clubs became 'particularly popular with fire stations and wardens' posts' throughout the country⁵.

The war encroached on other aspects of farm life, and a mother and daughter who had escaped from the Liverpool bombing were evacuated to a local farm. This was especially memorable as the little girl one day saw the cows being milked and told the farmer that at home they got their milk from nice clean tins, not from dirty old cows. In *Storm Over The Mersey*, Beryl Wade explains that milk was delivered to dairies in Liverpool in cans then ladled out into bottled or jugs.

Winston Churchill's disapproval when Oliver Lyttleton, President of the Board of Trade, proposed the introduction of clothes rationing in 1941, would have seemed justified to farm workers. According to Paul Addison's 'Churchill on the Home Front 1900-1955', Churchill accused Lyttleton 'of wanting to "strip the poor people to the buff"' and one farm worker remembers this rationing posing particular problems, as they received no special allowances although their clothes wore out quickly and needed mending frequently.

Later in the war some German Prisoners of War were sent to work on one local farm. It seems that they received lenient treatment, even being allowed to light small fires and bake potatoes. Under the rationing system, agricultural and heavy manual workers were allowed extra cheese to cope with physically demanding tasks⁶, and on this farm it was considered that the Germans could not work without adequate food. Realising that even this small amount of help to Prisoners of War might be misconstrued, the family tried to avoid official scrutiny.

There were no recollections of the Women's Land Army having been used on Billinge farms, but a lady who has recorded her memories of life on one of Lord Derby's farms in Rainford remembered that 'girls from the country and towns came out to the farms dressed in khaki and green complete with a wide brimmed hat ... we were grateful for their help to the country even if we were a little jealous of their uniforms, and badges.' There are also references to Liverpool girls working with the Voluntary Land Army on a farm in Ormskirk⁷.

In 'North West Village at War, Winwick 1939-45', Frank Goulding recounts that Italian Prisoners of War who were used for farm work there always sought shelter from the rain. It is unclear whether the same problems occurred when Italians worked along Billinge's Red Barn Lane, but it is remembered that these particular workers attracted a great deal of attention from the local young ladies. German Prisoners of

⁵ Anne Valery, *Talking About the War ... 1939-1945: A Personal View of the War in Britain*, p.55.

⁶ Norman Longmate, *How We Lived Then*, p.141.

⁷ Mrs E Gibbons in *Liverpool Women at War - An Anthology of Personal Memories*, p.113-114.

War worked in Billinge mines, and the son of one miner remembers being told that this caused problems since Polish workers were also employed there and the two nationalities had to be separated.

Working conditions in the mines showed little improvement during the war, despite the ever-increasing demand for coal. When Henry Moore was commissioned to illustrate miners at work, he described the coalface conditions:

If one were asked to describe what Hell might be like, this would do. A dense darkness you could touch, the whirring din of the coal cutting machine, throwing into the air black dust so thick that the light beams from the miners' lamps could only shine into it a few inches - ... pit props placed only a foot or two apart ... all this in the stifling heat⁸.

There were no showers at many mines and Billinge miners used tin baths at home. Miners believed that they were helping Britain's war efforts even though they were not on the front line, as Bert Coombes, a miner, wrote in 1944 in 'Those Clouded Hills':

'There is blood on the coal; there will always be blood on the coal'⁹.

There was considerable discontent within the industry due to the working conditions, the huge demands for coal, the strains placed upon the labour force by the presence of unwilling new workers, and the disputes over wage structures. In 1944 the President of the National Union of Miners said that there had 'never been a time when there was such unrest and dissatisfaction in the country's coalfields'¹⁰. These problems were exacerbated by the weather, and in 'The People's War. Britain 1939-1945', Angus Calder records that in 1942 'there were forty-six degrees of frost on January 15th. In the third bad winter of war, the transport of coal, by rail and road, broke down yet again.'

Some Billinge miners were sceptical about Winston Churchill's leadership after he became Prime Minister in 1940. From their perspective Churchill seemed rather remote and smug, and his famous oratory failed to impress these down-to-earth men, although he could have been addressing them directly when he told the House of Commons 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat'¹¹. Their attitude was summarised by one wartime miner's daughter who recalled her father's view that Churchill seemed 'Quite safe down there in that bunker all night, then he'd come up in the morning, waving a big cigar and giving us the V sign.'

One aspect of life, which certainly changed during the war, was school. A junior school headmaster at the time recalled asking children to bring in oddments of net curtains to fasten inside the windows, to prevent glass falling into the classrooms, should the school be bombed. Window protection was an essential practice, described in Liverpool schoolgirl, Beryl Wade's, wartime reminiscences of life in a sweetshop, when people used 'net curtaining to glue on', and Anne Valery's description in 'Talking About The War 1939-1945: A Personal View of the War in Britain' of 'criss-

⁸ Asa Briggs, *Go to It! Working for Victory on the Home Front 1939-1945*, p.63.

⁹ Asa Briggs, *Go to It! Working for Victory on the Home Front 1939-1945*, p.62.

¹⁰ Will Lawther, in Asa Briggs, *Go to It! Working for Victory on the Home Front 1939-1945*, p.62.

¹¹ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again, Britain 1945-1951*, p. 25.

cross sticky brown paper on our house windows to protect us from glass splintering from bombs’.

One headmaster took the initiative of splitting the school day into two, boys attending during the morning and girls in the afternoon. In this way he hoped that families would not lose all their children if their school suffered an attack. Since the school did not have its own shelter at that time, these precautions seemed sensible and necessary, but this was not a universally adapted idea and the routines chosen by different schools to cope with the wartime dangers varied greatly. A wartime schoolboy recalls their school rota system, since the shelter was too small for all the pupils together. A schoolgirl at St Mary’s, Billinge, remembers occasions when pupils were sent out for the day to help with picking up potatoes. Pupils were given cards, which the farmer signed to prove that they had spent the day working.

While the war affected the lives of Billingers who were employed, attended school or enrolled in the services, the greatest impact was encountered within their homes. One lady who married a Mine Engineer on 24 August 1940 remembered going to Wigan market to buy some green velvet material for her wedding dress. In ‘The People’s War’ Angus Calder explains that clothes were not rationed until June 1941, against Churchill’s wishes as he ‘consistently fought to retard the development of “austerity”’, although he agreed while preoccupied after the Bismarck sank.

Clothes were not a particular problem in planning a wedding in 1940, although later in the war Billinge brides had to borrow one another’s wedding dresses. This couple’s arrangements were however cast into disarray when the air raid siren sounded on their wedding night and the groom, who was an Air Raid Warden, had to report for duty. This memory is substantiated in a report regarding Winwick:

We experienced ground vibrations from exploding bombs for the first time on Saturday night, 24th August, as our neighbours at Newton-le-Willows received their initial batch of explosives in a field adjoining the East Lancs. Road¹².

The German target in Earlstown was probably the Vulcan Foundry, where Matilda tanks were made, and Goulding’s book contains an aerial photograph of the works taken by a German plane on 6 September 1940.

Goulding describes the severe winter conditions, when, for three days from 26 January 1940, Winwick suffered ‘the heaviest snowstorm within living memory ... six feet high snowdrifts ... lingered with us until the first week in March’. 1940 was not exceptional: wartime winters were all very bleak: ‘one of the remarkable features of these wartime winters was the unusual number of heavy snowstorms. For the third winter in succession, we saw deep snow piled high’. Apparently the conditions were even worse in Billinge, possibly due to its more exposed and higher location, as one lady, who was nursing in Liverpool at the time, stated that: ‘In Billinge in 1940 there was a huge snow drift, 30ft deep in Main Street’. These freezing conditions would have made farming and mining impossible.

Billinge women played their part in the war effort, for example knitting circles were formed to send clothing to servicemen. It was customary to post the name and address

¹² Frank Goulding, *A North West Village at War, Winwick 1939-45*, 1987, p 12.

of the knitter in with these garments so that, if possible, the serviceman who received the parcel could one day thank the sender. A lady in Garswood was very surprised after the war to answer her door to a Frenchman who said he had received her knitted socks and wanted to thank her.

Many local women worked in wood yards, several of which operated in Billinge throughout the war. Martin Rigby shows a photograph of a Rainford timber salvage yard, where unwanted nails were removed from wood before it was used for ammunition boxes. Other women were taken by bus to munitions factories, one of which was in Risley. This was unpopular work due to transport difficulties, also there was 'a shortage of welfare facilities and women were fearful of explosions, dermatitis and skin discolouration'¹³. Women were often obliged to work under the National Service (No.2) Act covering female conscriptions, which became law in December 1941.

Their fears were not unfounded, as one 21-year-old Billinge lady who worked at the Risley factory died of cordite poisoning. This was not an isolated incident, the hazards of working in a Kirby munitions plant, including the loss of women's fingers, ears, and even deaths due to explosions are described in 'Liverpool Women at Work', an anthology of contributions from Liverpool wartime women. Another problem encountered by women employed in traditionally male spheres was that male employees sometimes resented their intrusion, as another anthology describes:

The young chaps who worked there knew very well that any moment they would have to go off to war. ... They were mad because they'd been called up. They were mad at us for taking over their jobs, even though we had no choice. They didn't want to show us what to do and they made things really awkward¹⁴.

As increasing numbers of goods became rationed, many villagers followed governmental advice to 'dig for victory' and cultivated their own fruit and vegetables. This was especially useful when hens provided fresh eggs so that the disliked powdered egg could be avoided. One lady remembers problems when her family registered with a Main Street shop for their rationed goods. Shopkeepers could offer substitute brands in place of customers' favourites and she recalls her father's irritation when his preferred Woodbines were regularly replaced with the less popular Turkish 'Pasha' cigarettes, especially as a Special Policemen still obtained Woodbines there. Her father coped with the inferior substitutes for a while, but when his patience was exhausted he went to the shop after his shift in the mine and demanded Woodbines. Apparently the coal dust added to his fearsome appearance and the shopkeeper found Woodbines for him after that.

It would be wrong to portray Billinge as devoid of all social life during World War Two, although the local sporting leagues were temporarily suspended. The cinema with corrugated-iron walls in Main Street remained a popular diversion from the daily hardships and a source of amusement for boys who created a dreadful noise by running sticks along the outside walls. Some villagers walked to Garswood for weekly dances, which attracted some of the American troops who were stationed nearby. One man who was a teenager at the time remembers four of these GIs

¹³ Pat Ayers, *Women at War. Liverpool Women 1939-45*, p.22.

¹⁴ Jean Wynne, in Mavis Nicholson, *What Did You Do In The War*, Mummy p.201

regularly attending the dances. The Americans disappeared suddenly in 1944 and he recalls one of them returning after the war to tell his English friends that the other three had sadly been killed in the D-Day landings in June that year.

Although the blackout conditions made wartime travelling difficult, one lady remembers going by train to Wigan fair with three RAF trainees from the Padgate camp. This was a particularly happy wartime experience and a welcome break from the normal routine of hard work and 'making-do', even though finding her way home in the dark was a challenge. Nighttime cycling was hazardous; one man who cycled to work covered his bicycle lamp with black material, which allowed a pinpoint of light through, giving just sufficient light on familiar routes.

The village pubs were popular meeting places in wartime and on Saturday nights the Hare and Hounds in Billinge Higher End often attracted American troops. At least one Billinge lass married an American soldier after the war and Richard Lewis records their popularity, especially among the children who were attracted by their supplies of sweets.

While the German campaign to bomb the North West was most intensive, during 1940 and 1941, refugees sought shelter in Billinge and the neighbouring area. Rainford High School was used as a temporary dormitory for people from Liverpool, some even walked there from the city outskirts. Beryl Wade describes spending several nights in the Thatto Heath area of St Helens during the Liverpool blitz in May 1941. Several families found refuge in Billinge and were housed along Roby Well Way, they must have received kind treatment as some remained in the village after the war. One lady vouches for this kindness, remembering that her ARP Warden husband would regularly bring small groups of refugees to their home for Saturday tea, which posed problems for her due to the rationing and the scarcity of food.

In 'Britain in the Century of Total War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967', Arthur Marwick claimed that 'Total war involved the same sort of disruptions in domestic social life as had the conflict of 1914-18; these were further enhanced by the fierce aerial bombardment and the fact that Britain was used as an allied base. In Marwick's view, war is:

a human and social activity ... in a 'society at war' certain activities take place, certain situations are created, certain problems arise, certain processes are set in motion¹⁵.

In Billinge, as elsewhere in Britain, World War Two affected all aspects of daily life, in schools, in the workplace, socially and at home.

DEFENDING THE VILLAGE

In Billinge, as elsewhere throughout Britain, men were conscripted for active service during the war, but many were required to remain in the village and continue their essential work in the mines and other heavy industries. The defence of the village therefore relied largely upon those who continued their usual employment, and by September 1939 many had enlisted as Air Raid Wardens and were preparing to join

¹⁵ Arthur Marwick, *Total War and Social Change*, 1998, p xiv.

the Special Police and Auxiliary Firefighting forces. They were expected to work their normal hours and also to carry out their civil defence training and duties on a rota basis during out-of-work hours.

The first appeals for Air Raid Precaution volunteers were made in January 1937, by 1938 local authorities were required to arrange their civil defence systems, including: wardens, first aid, emergency ambulance, gas decontamination, rescue, repair and demolition services, as well as setting up first aid posts, gas cleansing stations and casualty clearing stations. They were also obliged to expand the local fire services by forming and equipping an Auxiliary Fire Service¹⁶.

Recruits in rural areas like Billinge were described by a 1942 Ministry of Information publication as having 'performed interminably the peculiarly testing task of standing and waiting'. Air Raid Wardens formed approximately half of the civil defence service. Their duties included surveillance:

He was the eyes and ears of the Control Centre in the field ... As a reporter in the field, his just judgment of the extent and severity of bomb damage was what enabled Control to send the right services to the right places ... This he could do only by knowing his neighbourhood and its people¹⁷.

Since their duties included ensuring that all buildings conformed to blackout directives and supervising air raid precautions both within buildings and outside, during the period before the commencement of the serious air raids, the Wardens were considered by some people 'as public enemy number one'¹⁸. Although there were instances when these supervisory duties caused conflict in communities, and even made them the butt of local jokes, the Wardens played a vital role in safeguarding lives when the aerial attacks began. One Billinger recalls with admiration a Warden's prompt actions in extinguishing an incendiary device, which had fallen into her front garden, thereby saving her property from severe damage.

Part of their duties was to ensure people took suitable shelter when the air raid siren, which was sited on the Main Street Council Office, sounded. The Billinge Wardens sometimes allowed these rules to be modified, and two Wardens' wives said they always sheltered under their stairs rather than go into designated communal shelters. One lady remembers staying under the stairs with her mother, who had always been frightened of thunderstorms, but the noise of the planes overhead and the imminent danger soon cured her fear of thunder.

Several people particularly remembered over-zealous Air Raid Wardens in the village, whom they felt, occasionally, overstepped their official duties. One local man, now in his eighties, still recalls with indignation a Warden who saw him kissing his girlfriend goodnight on the front step and subsequently reported the 'carryings on' to his father, who then demanded a full explanation of his conduct. Another Billinge man recalls his father's irritation regarding one miner who was a part-time Warden and forgot that his civil defence authority was not enforceable while at work. Apparently the error of his judgement was explained and the workplace levels of authority were re-established.

¹⁶ Mike Brown, Put That Light Out! Britain's Civil Defence Services At War, p 4.

¹⁷ Ministry of Information - Front Line 1940-41, 1942, p 144.

¹⁸ Anne Valery, Talking About the War - 1939-1945: A Personal View of the War in Britain, p 7.

A local family particularly remembered one Billinge Warden, keen on helping to maintain law and order in the community, who had surreptitiously been keeping a pig behind their cottage, close to the Warden's home. As the war continued, meat became scarcer under the rationing, and eventually the pig was considered ready for slaughter. In order to accomplish this without attracting the attention of the authorities, the family waited patiently until the Warden left home to begin his duties, then quickly summoned the slaughterer. A man who was born during the war can remember the great amusement which this deception, which provided a welcome pork supplement to many Billinge dinner tables, continued to cause long after the war ended.

David Carroll states in *The Home Guard* that the Local Defence Volunteers, later renamed the Home Guard, were formed following a radio broadcast by Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State for War, on 14 May 1940. The Billinge company headquarters in Pingot Road was the base for 40 men under the leadership of two First World War veterans, Major Naylor from Golborne and Captain East. One veteran of this force remembers that they operated in twos with one rifle to each pair and that Captain East took them to Altcar Range, which lies between Southport and Liverpool, to learn to fire their weapons. Their duties included helping to maintain the blackout and they had the authority to shoot out any lights, which shone in windows. The Home Guard manned an Observation Post on Billinge hill, which helped to warn their Command Post of incoming air attacks and also guarded the roadblocks, which were set up in strategic points throughout the village. These duties comply with Norman Longmate's description in 'The Real Dad's Army' of the Home Guard's 1940 directives to 'Observe and Report'.

The manning of the roadblocks during cold winter nights may have been monotonous, since traffic would have been scarce and few people owned private cars, but the vigilance of the Billinge Home Guard was demonstrated on two occasions at the Rainford Road blockade. A veteran who manned this point particularly remembers challenging two vehicles there.

In one case a van was stopped at 4 a.m. and the driver did not seem to take the matter seriously when the Home Guard questioned him regarding his identity and his destination. Since their orders were not to allow anyone through whom they considered suspicious, one of the men on duty had to search the vehicle while his companion covered his actions with their rifle. The search revealed that this was in fact a newspaper delivery van, and the driver was considered to have been foolish to cause the confrontation, since he had been in real danger of being shot. The risks taken by the driver are outlined by Norman Longmate's claim that 'the LDV' were in 'a unique position as the only army in history to have killed more of its own countrymen than its enemies.' On the other occasion they stopped a military vehicle driven by an army officer who replied to their questions by saying: 'Do you mind if I don't tell you that, but I can assure you I am not a German.' He was allowed to continue his journey.

The dangers encountered by the Home Guard even in quiet Northwest villages are apparent in an incident in Garswood, when an unexploded bomb landed in a playing field. Since the team required to defuse the bomb could not reach the village until the following day, the bomb had to be guarded overnight and two Home Guardsmen were

posted there. Unfortunately, during the night the sentries apparently heard a disturbance close to the device, and when they went nearer to investigate, the bomb exploded, killing them both.

Auxiliaries who were based at local fire stations assisted the Fire Service. One Firefighter in May 2000 still possessed his tin helmet marked NFS 28 and his fireman's axe from his time with the Ashton in Makerfield brigade. Their main duties were to deal with incendiary bombs, many of which were dropped by German planes, which had possibly found the situation 'too hot' for them over Liverpool and were jettisoning their loads over the countryside before returning to base. This kept the Firefighters busy since one night a field in Garswood had at least 50 fires burning.

A difficult job that the firefighters faced was helping out at scenes where large explosives had landed. The Ashton in Makerfield Brigade had a harrowing experience when the cottage of an elderly couple received a direct hit as they drank tea at their dining table in the early hours of the morning, their sleep having been disturbed by the air raid. The bomb fell between the couple, killing the wife instantly and badly wounding her husband.

Another aspect of firefighters' duties was to assist other civil defenders in maintaining a vigilant watch over the neighbourhood, including empty premises, in order to stop any possible breach of security. There was widespread suspicion regarding 'elements in Britain which would collaborate with Hitler', as explained by Angus Calder in 'The People's War. Britain 1939-1945', (p.138), and during the war the country became a homeland where pill-boxes, tank traps, road blocks bristled on all sides, where railway stations became anonymous and signposts pointed to nowhere, where 'walls had ears' and any stranger might be a fifth columnist or saboteur¹⁹.

Rumours that Germans might be parachuted into Britain, and might even be disguised as miners, were rife, so members of the civil defence were constantly reminded of the need to be on the alert for any possible threat to security. This was demonstrated by one Firefighter's memory of returning from duty late at night on his bicycle, and passing a cottage, which he knew to be unoccupied. As he passed, he heard strange sounds in the cottage, so he dismounted, took out his axe and crept quietly round to the back of the building. When he reached the back door, he realised that the sounds were actually running water, a frozen pipe had burst and water was flowing down the cellar steps. He was relieved not to have to face an enemy on this occasion, armed only with his fireman's axe, but this shows the potential dangers which the civil defence were prepared to face.

Various sites around Billinge were used by the services in the war effort. It was a familiar sight to see military vehicles lined up along the Rainford by-pass, ready for despatch. Within that area, by Daisy Hand Farm, there was a large ammunition store, which was guarded by regular soldiers. One lady who has lived all her life in the area claims that these military activities must have been known to the Germans, as Lord Haw-Haw mentioned Rainford in a broadcast. Tim Healy, 'Life on the Home Front', p.34, explains that William Joyce was a British Fascist who broadcast from Berlin as Lord Haw Haw. Some 6 million people in Britain listened to his broadcasts, which

¹⁹ Michael Moynihan, *People at War, 1939-1945*, p 10.

began with the words 'Germany calling'. He was executed at the Tower of London after the war. There are reports that munitions were stored in disused mines, including one in Upholland. Richard Lewis mentions the large military camp in Ashton in Makerfield, which was used by many different nationalities, and there was also a camp in Haydock. Prisoners of War camped in Haydock and one local man on holiday in Germany met an ex-prisoner who stayed there. In Earlstown the Matilda tanks were manufactured and the American air base at Burtonwood, which has only very recently closed, also show the area's military involvement.

During the Liverpool blitz in May 1941 an anti-aircraft battery was stationed on Billinge hill as a temporary measure to try to prevent some of the bombers reaching the city. There was a permanent battery near to Crank Caverns, along the Rainford Road, manned by regular troops, and the site is now marked by a property called 'Gunsite Bungalow'. One man who was a young child during the war remembers that the guns themselves were removed shortly after the end of the war but that their mounts were left, providing an unusual playground for him and his friends.

In view of the very serious bombing raids, which were experienced by the nearest cities, Billinge escaped lightly from aerial attacks during the war. There are only reports of one large explosive in the village itself when a bomb landed in a field opposite Greenfield Orphanage and fortunately the only casualty on this occasion was an Air Raid Warden who banged his head. A line of craters was once visible between Crank and the East Lancs Road, but the land has since been cultivated in different ways and it is not now possible to ascertain whether they were caused by a series of bombs. There are accounts of direct hits in many of the surrounding villages and towns but Billinge was fortunate in suffering only very slight bomb damage and certainly seemed to benefit from the efforts of its efficient and vigilant defenders.

Defending the village on a part-time basis must have taken up a great deal of the hours, which were not spent working. One impact of the war upon Billinge's Civil Defence representatives must have been to eliminate almost all their spare time in order to safeguard their community.

BILLINGE SERVICEMEN IN ACTION

Billinge's history of fighting on the front line includes a man who received a medal for his part in the 1878-80 Afghanistan War, after which he retired wounded and then worked in the mines, as reported in the Wigan Observer, August 1976. Many local men were involved in the South African Wars and Fred Holcroft claims in 'The Devil's Hill, Local Men at the Battle of Spion Kop, 1900', that in the Battle of the Spion Kop, 'the Lancashire Fusiliers led the British assault, ... they included many men from the Wigan area, and ... they suffered the greatest losses of all the British regiments'. The involvement of Billinge men in these wars seems probable as a tree was planted along Main Street to commemorate the Relief of Mafeking. Local war memorials show that at least 51 Billinge men were killed in action during the First World War, indicating a very high level of participation for a small Northwest community.

During World War Two Billingers served in all branches of the armed forces and took part in the European and Far Eastern conflicts, thereby upholding the village's tradition of fighting for their country. The November 1941 issue of St Aidan's Church magazine, edited by Reverend A. White, lists 118 men who were then known to be 'Serving with the King's Forces', plus one Merchant seaman, one lady in the WAAF and one in the ATS. This list includes the Vicar's son who had left theological studies in Oxford to join the RAF. Sadly he was killed in May 1942 while returning from a 1,000-bomber raid on Cologne.

Nine of the 118 listed as being on active service when the magazine was issued were subsequently killed in action, along with at least 14 other men from the village. Six of the Billinge men who died in the fighting were Roman Catholics, including two brothers from Red Barn Lane who died in separate incidents in the air, and three were Methodists, so their names did not appear in the Church of England magazine, neither would those who had joined the services after November 1941. This seems to indicate that Billinge would have had a considerable number of men involved in action during the course of the war. In a small community, all the inhabitants would have known the men who had gone to the front line, and may have been distant relatives of some, so the impact of their involvement in the conflicts upon the villagers would have been considerable. The grief of mothers whose sons did not return from the war is still remembered by old friends and neighbours.

Happily, the majority of Billinge servicemen returned to the village virtually unscathed, but some bore the mental and physical scars of their ordeal, which had long-term effects on their lives after the war. One local man had joined the Coldstream Guards in the early 1930s, and then went to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. These troops were evacuated from Dunkirk under 'Operation Dynamo' in which 338,226 men, 'almost the entire B.E.F. was saved', according to A.J.P. Taylor's 'English History 1914-1945'. While in France he regularly corresponded with his wife using the Forces Mail Service, and his letters show how much he missed his family life in Billinge and looked forward to his leave. Later he joined the British campaign in Tunisia, and took part in the Battle for Longstop Hill, a German stronghold, described by A.B. Austin, in 'Birth of an Army' as 'their first and most important barrier to Tunis'. The British faced grim conditions on the hilly terrain with climbs so arduous that, Austin claimed, 'you were tired when you had to begin to fight'. The Billinge soldier was among the many casualties, he received a severe leg wound and returned to England.

There is some evidence that Billinge Hospital was used for military cases during the First World War, but this soldier was treated in Peasley Cross Hospital, St Helens, where his leg was eventually amputated. He survived his injury, and led a happy family life after the war, even cultivating his garden. His daughter was surprised to meet one of his fellow Dunkirk veterans some time ago, who explained how her father saved his life by holding him up in deep water for several hours until they were rescued.

One casualty who may have escaped the official lists was a sailor spending his leave at home in Billinge. A small farewell party had been arranged for the day when he was due to return to his ship. His family realised that they needed some extra items of

food for the party and, as time was short, the sailor offered to cycle to the shops, but sadly he was killed on the journey.

The war doubtless had a great impact on all those involved in active service as well as their families, friends and neighbours. The families of those who were killed felt the greatest effect, especially as they often had no certainty of the circumstances of the deaths. The family of one soldier, who was taken as a Prisoner of War in Burma and did not survive, received a letter from the Burmese authorities, asking if they wished to pay towards the upkeep of his grave. However, the reports of prison camp survivors regarding their treatment in Burma cast doubts as to whether the Billinge man would have been given a proper burial or grave. Thus his family did not feel able to send a donation for the grave, as they could not rely on this really serving the intended purpose.

One man who was a small child during the war can remember being frightened when his soldier father returned home, as he was almost a stranger. He particularly remembers his father's anger if any food was wasted after the war, having seen starving children rummaging in rubbish bins to find scraps of food. His father returned to work in the local mines and rarely referred to his wartime experiences, but he always recalled the plight of the desperate children, which had left a lasting impression on him.

An enduring memory of another Billinge soldier is of endless journeys, while constantly on the alert for signs of danger. Similar experiences are described in the narrative of a Liverpool soldier who travelled through South Africa, India, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Sicily and Italy. A profile of the author summarises the impact of the Second World War upon the veterans:

Like many of his fellow comrades, the deprivations, sacrifices and strenuous endeavours associated with the Second World War have given Jim an inner toughness and self discipline which has stood him in good stead throughout his life²⁰.

COMPARISONS WITH CITY EXPERIENCES

Liverpool had been bombed before 1 May 1941, and was targeted afterwards, but that date belongs to history, for that was the night that history was written in letters of fire across the Mersey sky. It was the night that ushered in what was probably the worst week that the world had ever known²¹.

Liverpool docks, which carried troops and supplies to the front line and into Britain, were vital to the country's survival. At the beginning of May 1941, according to John Hughes in 'Port in a Storm', there were '231 sea-going merchant ships in the port', most of which were British but some were from Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Holland and Norway, plus several from neutral countries. In addition there were '48 tugs, 292 barges, flats, elevators and other small craft; plus the Royal Navy's contribution - destroyers, corvettes, minesweepers, sloops'. The docks brought in raw materials for processing at Liverpool's industrial sites; there was vital shipbuilding in

²⁰ W.R. Cockcroft, in James W. Gonzales, *A Journey to Remember*, p 167.

²¹ Richard Whittington-Egan, *The Great Liverpool Blitz*, p 7.

Birkenhead and commercial enterprises in the city centre. In World War Two the Headquarters of the Western Approaches was in Liverpool and there were ordnance factories in Kirby and aircraft manufacturing in Speke, which meant that 'the concentration of legitimate military targets in the area was ominous'²².

During the Liverpool blitz there were '509 alerts; 68 raids; 119 land mines; 2,315 high explosive, 50 oil, and innumerable incendiary bombs' which damaged 184,300 homes and totally destroyed another 10,840²³. The devastation in Liverpool was so severe that lists of those killed were displayed daily outside the Town Hall. It was sometimes impossible for individual funerals to be conducted and Whittington-Egan states that 550 'Unknown Warriors of the Battle of Britain' were buried in a common grave in Anfield cemetery on 13 May 1941. In 'Storm Over The_Mersey', Beryl Wade recounts that a total of 1,453 people from Liverpool were killed during May 1941, with 1,065 seriously injured, and in addition there were 257 victims from Bootle.

The attacks on rural areas like Billinge were less intense but would have been no less terrifying. There was, however, usually the comfort of being able to provide appropriate funerals for those who were killed, and the organist at a Garswood Church clearly remembered playing the 'Dead March' for the two Home Guardsmen who were killed by the bomb there.

In Beryl Wade's description of her wartime childhood in Liverpool she describes the way in which the war had affected the city even before the May 1941 onslaught. By the Spring of 1940 'an Ack-Ack gun had been installed' in Walton Hall Park, 'with a large barrage balloon flying above it'. Wade describes donating her tricycle to a street collection of metal for war use and the way in which these efforts were encouraged by Liverpool Corporation Health Committee who offered a prize for the school which collected the most waste 'comprising paper, bones, old clothes and other salvage material'. The metal collection was certainly carried out in Billinge too, as iron railings were taken from outside buildings in Main Street.

In addition to the dangers from bombings, the people in the city had to cope with the same rationing as the rest of the country, which brought shortages of almost every commodity. This was particularly hard for those whose homes were lost, as many household items were irreplaceable. Many city dwellers lived in old terraced houses, which had no gardens, and they therefore had no means of supplementing their rations by growing any of their own food in the same way as villagers. One farmer's daughter from Rainford accompanied another farm worker with a lorry full of cabbages for sale in Liverpool. Although the quality of the cabbages was so poor that they might not even have been good enough for pig food in other circumstances, she was amazed to see the queues which quickly formed in Liverpool when people realised that there were fresh vegetables for sale, emphasising the hardships and deprivation which were endured daily.

The death toll and the buildings which were damaged were possibly the tip of the iceberg for the people of Liverpool, there were innumerable other hardships which became everyday occurrences during World War Two. One example of the stark reality of the situation in human terms was a couple that married just before the war

²² John Hughes, *Port in a Storm*, p 1-2.

²³ Richard Whittington-Egan, *The Great Liverpool Blitz*, p 62.

and rented a terraced house in Kirkdale. In 1941 the lady was pregnant and her husband worked on the docks. One land mine exploded in an adjacent street making their block of terraced houses move, which terrified her, causing problems with her pregnancy and the baby was stillborn. While she was in hospital the nurses brought an orphaned baby boy to her and offered him as a replacement for her lost child. She realised the desperate situation, if a baby could just be offered to a stranger, as he had no one else.

People from Billinge were aware of the situation in Liverpool, searchlights were visible from Billinge hill and refugees began to seek shelter in the relatively untroubled villages and towns. One Garswood man remembers going to Liverpool on business during the war and seeing the funnel of a ferryboat, which had been sunk sticking out of the Mersey. The boat was probably the Wallasey ferry, Royal Daffodil II, which was sunk at Seacombe loading stage in May 1941, was raised in July 1942 and returned to service by June 1943²⁴. The boat was recovered and returned into use, and he was pleased to be able to ride in it again subsequently. On another occasion he recalled seeing among the many bombsites one with a Union Jack standing proudly on the top, which for him symbolised the people's resilience in the face of their adversity.

Among the people of Billinge there was awareness that, despite the hardships, which they suffered, they had escaped the worst dangers. The villagers who stayed at home during the war believed that they had tried to assist their less fortunate neighbours by helping to maintain the supplies of coal and food and offering shelter where possible. A nurse who worked in Liverpool during the air raids, including duties on the docks, and so witnessed the onslaught, described feeling as though she was 'coming home to Jerusalem' whenever she reached the relative sanctuary of Billinge in wartime.

CONCLUSIONS

The Second World War affected every aspect of daily life for the people of Billinge, in their homes, schools, employment and socially. At least 51 Billinge servicemen died in action and there were also civilian deaths, while many survivors of the war were physically and mentally scarred by their experiences. The impact of the conflict is still powerful enough to upset some Billingers, 55 years after its end, and it is doubtful whether families of those who died ever fully recovered.

When comparing the experiences of village life in wartime with Liverpool, the people of Billinge were aware of their fortune in escaping the worst of the bombing, and being able to supplement their rations with their own produce. Many Billingers admired and respected the resilience shown by the people of Liverpool, whose onslaught was visible from Billinge hill.

The people of Billinge showed the strength of character necessary to continue their everyday work in the mines and on the farms to help maintain essential supplies. As a close-knit community, they coped through the difficult war years by mutual co-operation wherever possible. The amount of courage necessary to continue normal patterns of life and simultaneously encompass extra burdens and problems during a

²⁴ John Hughes, *Port in a Storm*, pp 129, 130, 166

World War is unquantifiable, but the people in North West villages did their utmost throughout the war to protect their communities, maintain supplies and help each other to survive.

(Sybil Lowery April 2001)

BILLINGE HILL RADIO STATION - A SECRET 'Y' STATION?

In May 1938 my newly married parents Harold and Gwen Renwick moved into one of six newly built semi-detached houses at the end of Upholland Road, close to it's junction with Wigan Road. These six semis had been built by local builder Cyril Melling for Lancashire County Police, to house officers who were to man the new radio station on Billinge Hill round the clock.

This was a time of progressive development in policing. Lancashire Police already had a VHF radio station at Barnacre Nr Garstang. It had a 20-mile range and fed two cars using the latest two-way radios. By 1938 new radio stations at Billinge, Higham (Nr Burnley) and Newhey (Nr. Rochdale) were serving 140 cars equipped with radio.

Also in 1938, the government set up 'Station X' at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire. This was a highly secret establishment where work on cracking the German 'Enigma' code was to take place. Station X was fed by intercepts from what were known as 'Y' stations.

I recall my farther telling me that in addition to their general police radio duties they were required to 'scan the dial' and record all coded messages, some, he said, from German U-boats. These were then relayed to the Home Office. My farther had been in the merchant navy before becoming a police officer and was trained in Morse code, as were his colleagues on Billinge Hill.

Recent television programmes, which told the story of the cracking of the Enigma code and the brilliant mathematician Alan Turing of Manchester University, who did more than anyone to break it, raised my curiosity. I emailed Bletchley Park and asked if the radio station on Billinge Hill had been classed as a 'Y' station.

Their reply was as follows –

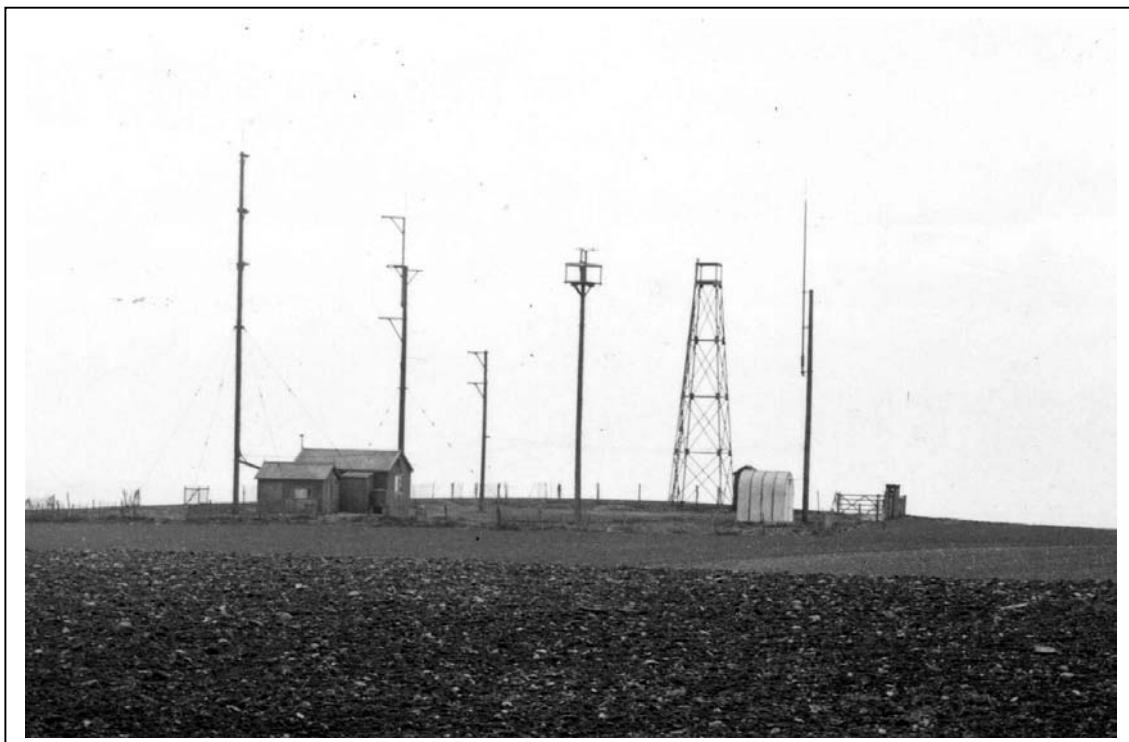
‘It has taken a lot of research to find out what your father was doing at Billinge Hill.

We know there were two police units of - one at Denmark Hill in SE London, the other at Manchester. We are not certain but believe Billinge Hill was used to listen for illicit clandestine radio transmissions from Eire, where enemy agents were operating from 1938 to 1944. They were also believed to be covering the Manchester area for ground wave signals. They were to report to the Home Office and the Radio Security Service. Their work was special intercept duties and not part of the military 'Y' service’.

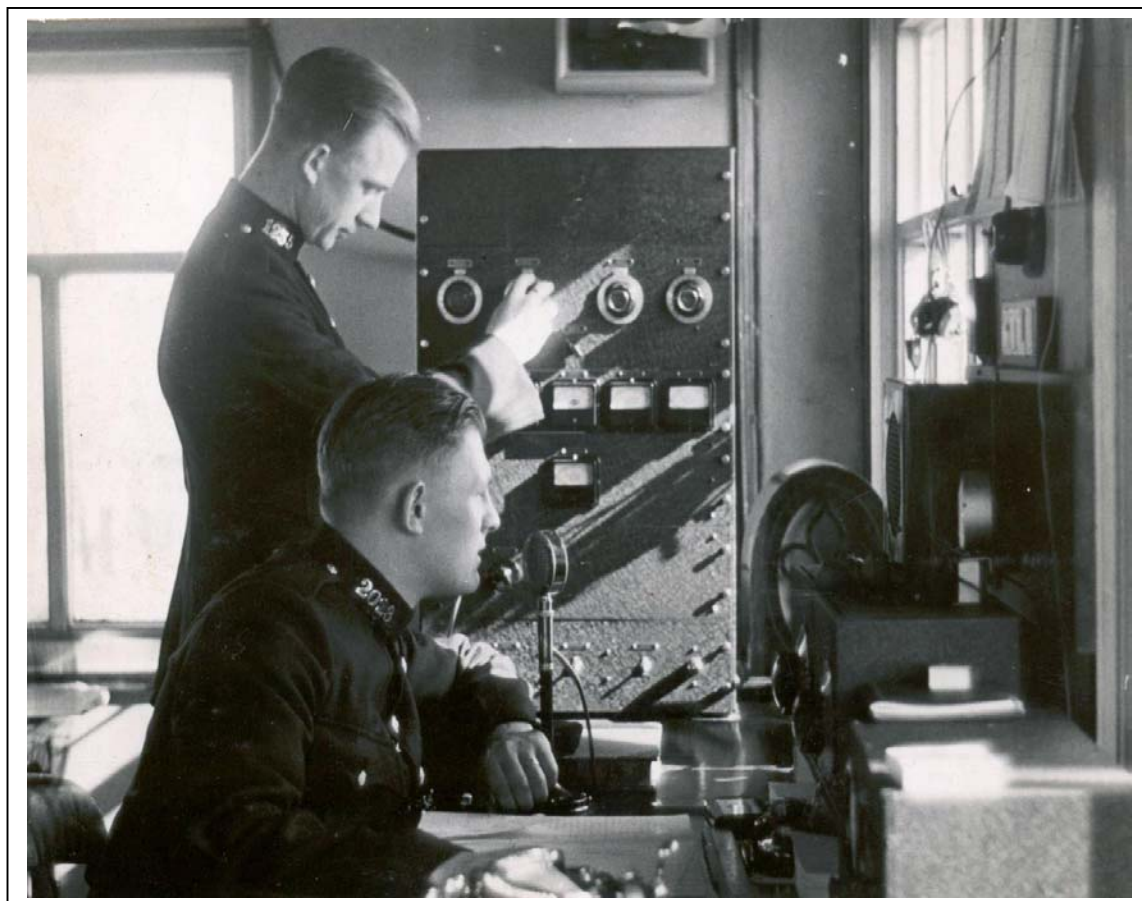
David White Bletchley Park.

So, not a 'Y' station but clearly in that little wooden hut on Billinge Hill a part was played in counter espionage.

John Renwick. Email UnionCord@aol.com



The radio station as it was in 1938



Harold Renwick (nearest) and Eric Ketchel on wartime duty at Billinge Hill radio station

APPENDIX A

Holt Avenue 1947-1948

2 – L Richmond	1 – Edwin Littler
4 – John Carney	3 – James John Littler
6 – Harold Hardman	5 – Thomas Atherton
8 – Len Mousdell	7 – Joe Speakman
10 – Thomas Littler	9 – W Garner
12 – James Albert Littler	11 – J Boardman
14 – Francis Liptrot. ¹	13 – Nora Chisnall
16 – H Eaves.	15 – Andrew Carney
	17 – T Frayne
	19 – Amos Cunliffe
	21 – William Foster
	23 – Michael Carney
	25 – G Boardman
	27 – Elizabeth Gee
	29 – G Grundy
	31 – Thomas Berry
	33 – James Garner
	35 – P Garner
	37 – Harry Richmond
	39 – William Lowe
18 – James Gee	41 – Brimlow
20 – Albert Morris	43 – Fred Gee
22 – W Melling	45 – Thomas Green
24 – J Witherington	47 – G Clayton
26 – J H Smith	49 – Harry Melling
28 – Stanley Littler	51 – Levi Liptrot



R Hewson Len Mousdell Ernie Middlehurst Stanly Littler

¹ J Bellis moved in 16/8/1948.

Holt Crescent 1947-1948

1 – James Clayton	2 – Cliff Littler
3 – Charles Wilkie	4 – R Moyers
5 – Thomas Taylor	6 – Matthias Hilton
7 – Jimmy Mousdell	8 – J Mason
9 – Fred Gee	10 – Ernest Middlehurst
11 – Ernie Fairweather	12 – Peter Simpson
13 – Eric Bold	14 – Jimmy Roper
15 – James Grundy	16 – Jimmy Roughley
17 – Albert Wilson	18 – Stanely Liptrot
19 – Bert Foster	20 – Frank Smith
21 – Andrew Power	22 – Henry P Cunliffe
23 – Bert Corday	24 – Ms M Wilcockson later C Taylor
25 – Jack Middlehurst	26 – Ernest Gee
27 – Wilf Birchall	28 – Frank Ashcroft later P Liptrot
29 – Alfred Dennet	30 – Joe Parr
31 – Fred Rigby	32 – Mathew Barton
33 – Hary Green	34 – Mary E Hewson
35 – Joe Hennesy	36 – Mary E Twist.
37 – Alfred Smith	
39 – Elizabeth Melling	
41 – Mark Coalman	
43 – Frank Chisnall	
45 – Joe Dierden	
47 – Seth Littler	
49 – William H Melling	
51 – John Malone	
53 – Fred Cunliffe	
55 – Ellen Rabbit	
57 – Albert Mitchel	
59 – Fred Speakman	
61 – Wilfred Grundy	
63 – R L Patterson	
65 – Henry Liptrot	
67 – H E Boardman	
69 – Ellis Foster	
71 – John Barton	

APPENDIX B

Billinge Farms 1929

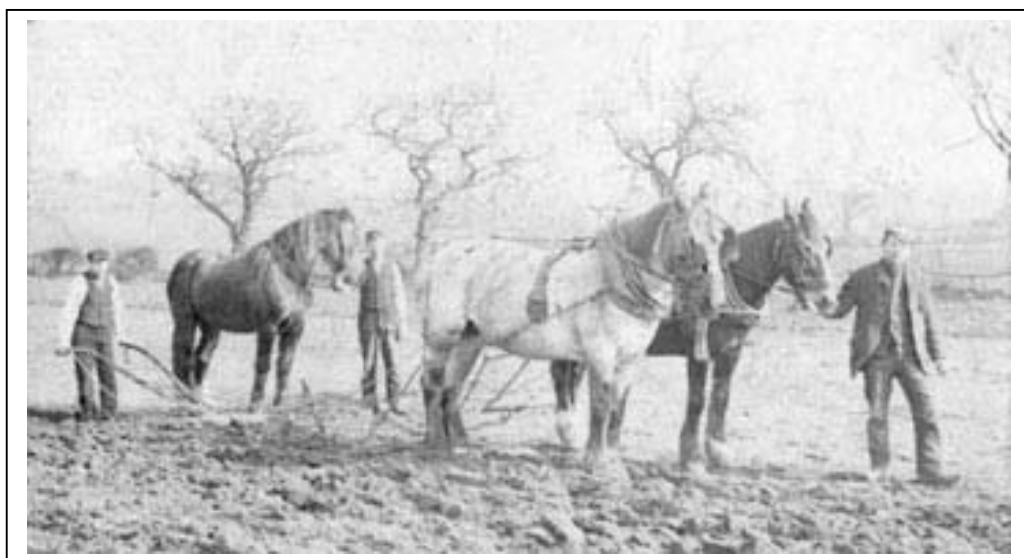
FARM	FARMER	LANDLORD
Manor House Farm	Issac Barton	G Banks
Dukes Farm	Richard Bradburn	G Banks
Windy Arbour Farm	James Turner	G Banks
Sandy Forth Farm	John Smith	G Banks
Ashgrove Farm	Edward Moyers	G Banks
Norbury Farm ²	Edward Moyers	Eddleston Charity.
Birchley Farm	Joe Middlehurst	Joe Middlehurst
Land at Birchley	Herman Hitchen	Robert Neville
Land at Birchley	Rev. Joseph Rigby	Robert Neville
Land at Birchley	John Wilson	Robert Neville
Brownlow Farm	Henry Middlehurst	Henry Middlehurst
Greenfield Farm	Henry Hitchen	Kate Taylor
Barrows Farm	William Kearsley	Lord Gerard
Tanyard House Fram	William Robinson	G Banks
Startham Hall ³	Thomas Kearsley	William Kearsley
Lime Grove (Orchards)	Jane Hayes	G Banks
Otterswift Farm	Hannah Tinsley	Sir D Gamble
Lime Vale Farm.	William Abbott	G Baknes.
Land at Bispham Hall	E J Pennington	G Banks
Plane Tree Farm	Smith Bros.	G Banks
Nevilles Farm	Smith Bros.	G Banks
Beacon Farm	John Middlehurst	Henry Middlehurst
Promised Land Farm	Arthur Lavatt (?)	Joseph Gibbons
Shaley Brow Farm	John Hart ⁴	Smith Bros
Crows Nest Farm	John Makin	G Banks
Billinge Hall Farm	Mrs Halewood & J Traverse	G Banks
Derbshire House Farm	John Traverse	E J Pickmore
Red Barn Farm	Henry Birchall	Mary Wilcock
Billinge Brook Farm	John Makin	G Banks
Rainford Brook Farm	John Makin	G Banks
Ashfield Farm	Herbert Moyers	Kate Taylor
Greenslate Farm	Samual Glover	Wigan Board of Guardians
Billinge Lane Farm	John Birchall	G Banks
Higher Billinge Lane Farm	Thomas Birchall	G Banks
Lower Billinge Lane Farm	Edward Sumner	G Banks
Blackleyhurst Hall Farm	Charles Taylor	Lord Gerard
New House Farm	James Alker	G Banks
Hesketh House Farm	Laithwaits	G Banks
Swiftgate Farm	Robert Alker	G Banks

² Harold Littler lived at the Farm House.

³ The middle of the three houses at Startham.

⁴ John Hart's daughter Edith married Fred Kearsley who farmed Ashfield Farm after Bert Moyers. Their son, Fred, continues to farm there.

Farrass Farm	Samuel Fouracre	G Bankes
Athertons Farm	Thomas Nicholson	G Bankes
Longshaw House Farm	John Ashall	G Bankes
Hill House Farm	William Smith	G Bankes
Jamesons Farm	Edward Dierden	G Bankes
Kings Moss Farm	John Makin	John Makin
Lower Heaton Farm	Little Bros.	Little Bros.
Wiswall Farm	John James Simm	John James Simm
Mount Pleasant Farm	William Makin	G Bankes.
Maddocks Farm	Richard Petty	G Bankes
Orrits Farm	Samuel Redfern	G Bankes
Sefton Fold Farm	John & Peter Moyers	Lord Gerard
Little Houghwood Farm	E Makinson (?)	John Reed
Houghwood Farm	James Maudsley	James Maudsley
Crookhurst Farm	Joseph Owen	Lord Derby
Hayes House Farm	Thomas Makinson	Mary Holcroft
Fir Tree Farm	Joseph Jones	Abbot Brothers.



APPENDIX C
Longshaw 1929

Park Road.

1. Michael Roby	2. William Boardman.
7. Rachel Cheetham	4. John Rigby.
9. Elizabeth Ashall	6. James Moyers
13. Robert Unsworth.	8. James Melling.
	10. Stanley Hurst.
	12. Thomas Nicholson.
	14. John Nicholson.
	16. Sarah E Ashall.
	18. Thomas Halliwell.
	20. Mary Melling.
	22. James Beelsy.
	24. Albert Hampson.
	26. James S Silcock.
	28. James Roby.
	30. William Hurst.
35. Humphrey Ashall.	38. John Halliwell.

Longshaw Old Road.

2. Robert Hallwood.	20. Henry Swift.
4. Clifford Ashall.	22. Joseph Roby.
6. Margaret Balmer.	24. Alfred Roby.
8. Mary Horrocks.	26. Luke Melling.
10. Mary & Elijah Roby.	28. Joe Wilkinson..
12. Henry Wilkonson.	30. Jane & Ann Roby.
14 Robert Connolly.	32. Henry Heaton.
16. James Melling.	34. Martha Sutton.
18. Thomas Pennington.	



Longshaw Common.

2. Thomas Lawson.	1. Mary E Barton.
4. John Barton.	3. John Minton.
6.	5. Henry Dillon.
	7. Joseph Barker.
10. Stanley Melling.	9. Alfred Smith.
	11. John Carnk.
	13. William Smith.
16. James Heaton.	15. Francis Hewit,
18. Thomas Nicholson.	17. John Moyers.
20. William Crank.	19. George Atherton.
22. Mary E Anderton.	21. Ernest Heaton.
24. George Hampson.	23. William Hewit.
26. Henry Littler.	27. John Melling/
	29. Joseph Miller.
	31. Sharlot A Barton.
	33. Richard Roby.
	35. William Bold.
	37. Thomas Gee.
	39. Elijah Boardman.
	41. Thomas Barton.
	43. Joseph Gee.
	45. Mary Laithwaite.
	49. William Chorlton.
	51. Alice Barton.
	53. Sarah Bates.
	57. John Dingsdale.
	59. Joseph Laithwaite.
	61. Richard Melling.
	63. Peter Moss.
	65. Thomas Melling.
	67. Henry Heaton.
	69. Thomas Melling.

APPENDIX D

Businesses, Pits, Pubs⁵ & Landlords 1929

Masons Arms	Margaret Berry.
Holt Arms.	John Hayes.
Stork Inn.	Wilfred Horthersall.
Foresters Arms.	Peter Mather.
Oddfellows Arms.	James Smith.
George & Dragon.	Charles Rich.
Labour-in-Vain.	James Birchall.
Eagle & Child.	William Atherton.
Colliers Arms – Moss Road.	Harold Dickinson.
Colliers Arms – Kings Moss.	Arron Parr (? Hard to read)
Brown Cow.	Thomas Hill.
Hare & Hounds.	Edward Borrows
Unicorn Inn.	James McLoghlin.
Off Licence. 208 UpHolland Road.	Joe Chisnall.
Off Licence. 140 UpHolland Road.	Alfred Barton.
Off Licence. 80Rainford Road.	Joseph Beesley. ⁶

Billinge Collieries & Other Businesses 1929

Billinge Collieries & Other Businesses 1929		
Carr Mill Arley Colliery		Lime Vale.
Billinge Colliery.		Brownheath.
New Billinge Colliery.		Newton Road.
Blacklyhurst Colliery.		Newton Road.
Windy Arbour Colliery.		Windy Arbour.
Worsly Mesnes Colliery.		Pemberton Road Winstanley.
Sand Pit.*	Joseph Middlehurst.	Birchley Road.
Builders Yard.	Melling Bros.	Park Road.
Brick Works	Bispham Hall Brick & Terra Cotta	Smetherts Road.
Brick Works.	Orrell Brick Co. Ltd.	Orrell Raod.
Stone Quarry.	Melling Brothers.	Billinge Hill.
Builders Yard.	Gaskells Ltd.	UpHolland Road.
Builders Yard.	W & A Mather.	Cross Lane.
Cinema.	Associated Theatres.	Main Street.
Stone Breaking Plant.	Peter Wild.	Crookhurst.
Clog Sole Factory.	Higson & Parkinson.	UpHolland Road.

*Sand was mined opposite Lime Vale Farm then tipped near Birchley Road. A woman, Francis Eddleston, who lived in the house at the far end of Birchley School, then loaded it into wagons, by hand, for transportation to Pilkingtons.

⁵ Also Top & Bottom End Labour Clubs. Conservative Club, Bispham Club, Red Triangle Club & Winstanley Estate Clubs in Orrell Road and Winstanley Park Cricket Club.

⁶ The father of Maurice Beesley, a teacher at Birchley School. Joe Beesely also managed a coal round.

APPENDIX E

Carr Mill Road 1929

1 Joseph Smith	1A John Thomas Gee
2 Ellis Corless	3 Michael Dearden
4 Thomas Rigby	5 Thomas Dunken
7 Richard Barnes	11 Peter Acker
15 Ellen Bromilow	17 James Roby
19 Seth Martlew	21 Thomas Lowe
23 James Parr	25 Edger Compson
27 Ellen Lomax	31 Margaret Berry
33 Robert Berry	35 Joseph Littler
37 Edwin Bellis	39 James Berry
46 Richard Beesley	46A William Hampson
46B Martin Conroy	47 Margaret Gaffney
49 William Harrison	51 Francis Taylor
53 Robert Dixon	55 William Dixon
57 J T Hogan	59 William E Lomax
56 Elizabeth Bolton	61 Masons Arms Margaret Berry
63 Francis Foster	65 John Hardman
67 William Thomas Foster	69 Fred Willimas
71 Mary Atherton	73 James Robinson
75 Edward Platt	Tanyard House Farm William Robinson
77 John Thomas Melling	
81 (Startham) Joseph Mason	83 (Startham) Arran Hayes
Lime Vale Peter Lomax	Live Vale William & Walter Platt



The Mason's Arms as it used to be

APPENDIX F

Reminiscences of Billinge

By Mrs. N E Twist.

Billinge, as I knew it, for 60 Years.

My earliest and most pleasant memories in childhood, in Billinge was the clip-clop of horses hooves, ringing on the 'sets' of the roads, bringing supplies, and keeping the village in touch with faraway towns.

The beautiful dapple grey shire horse that every other day brought the covered wagon to the 'Stores'. Newly baked bread and cakes, plus hardware, household goods and any other wares unobtainable in the little shops.

One of the most interesting places for us, was the smithy, that stood at the bottom of the 'Square', high, dark and mysterious the only light, the red glow, where the horseshoes were heated, and the sparks from the anvil, as the blacksmith twanged, and hammed the shoes to fit. Alas, we were never allowed to stay long, as the horses waited to be shod, we were 'shooed' away, in case of accidents.

Then there was 'Quick Dick Barnes' the baker, a massive man, who used to draw the bread, at a certain time each day, with a red handkerchief over his nose, against the coke fumes, from the ovens. When he was refreshed, after this early shift at the bakehouse, he used to saddle up the pony and trap and deliver the bread to outlying districts. Simm's Lane Ends and Garswood were one of this chief stopping places, and anyone coming by train to Garswood station at the same time, would get a ride home.

Newspapers were delivered, mid mornings in a natty little governess cart and pony by members of the Barton family from Longshaw.

Milk was delivered by horse and cart, but the customers, took the jugs to the milkman, who ladled it from the huge urn, with a pint or 1/2 pint measures. Some people went to the farm as they wanted it, what a lovely smell there was, if it was milking time when you were there, and could watch the fresh milk, cooled and measured out, while you waited.

One of the village characters, used to deliver milk to Greenfield House, 'Our Lady's Convent'. Mornings and evenings she used to trundle her three iron wheeled cart, backwards and forwards, muttering to herself, and calling down the curses of 'God.' on the boys who used to tease and play pranks on her.

The children of the Convent and the Sisters were a well established part of village life, and Birchley School, four times a day, they walked in crocodile form, back and forth, and Church on Sunday. During the Spanish Civil War, there were several Spanish Refugee children housed at the Convent for some time.

Long happy summer days, when mothers sat outside with their babies and knitting, waiting for their menfolk to come from the pits, marred sometimes, by the news of tragic death, or injury to some member of a family, but they never suffered alone, everyone rallied round, and helped where they could.

Winter, always a warm happy time, fires roaring up the chimney, coal at 5 shillings a ton, baking days, and lamplight evenings. Games round the fire, relatives visiting, when everything but adult conversation stopped. Children should be seen and not heard!!

Once a week, if we behaved, we were allowed to go to the Magic Lantern show, at the Methodist Chapel, some of the expressions of description, used to illustrate the films are still in use today, and can conjure up the image of 'Old Hugh' as clearly as some of the television personalities of today.

The General Strike of 1926, to my mind signifies the end of the happy village life, where had been neighbourliness and friendship, was replaced by misery, poverty and degradation. The degradation came, after weeks of no work, no income the people were forced to go for 'relief', perhaps 6 or 7 shillings per week, or maybe vouchers, to be used at a certain shop for groceries. How the greyfaced women hated lining up outside the house in Main Street when the 'Relief' was paid in public and discussed later.

When anyone needed Medical attention beyond what could be given, in the stone floored doctor's surgery it meant an interview at Longshaw House, with 'Sir Ellen Mather' for a 'recommend', issued at the discretion of the 'Board', with regard to circumstances.

Occasionally, there was an issue of a few yards of Calico, referred to as DOW, for the very poor of the parish. I think? this concern, is still administered under the Bispham Charities, also some charity, that provided coal for the needy, every three or four years. Maybe this has ceased under the Welfare State.

Growing up, during school holidays, meant pea-picking at Birchley Hall Farm, where Miss Lily used to farm with a tractor, an innovations at that time. She was a well know figure walking the village, with the Irish Setter dogs she used to breed. Her sister married a doctor from Wigan, and when they used to visit it was like the Royalty riding through the streets.

There was one time, when the Queen Mother and the late King George the 6th as Duke and Duchess of York visited the village, but there was so much unemployment at that time I do not remember any great enthusiasm then.

Today there are new estates, peopled from far away places, with different accents, we are part of St Helens and Merseyside, to a degree, our parents would not have believed possible.

Like everything else in this changing world, it has advantages and disadvantages. I for one am pleased to enjoy at least some of them.

APPENDIX G

SOME MEMORIES OF A CHILDHOOD LONG AGO

by Jack Heyes

Donkey-stoned steeps and flagstone floor
Cooling your dinner behind the front door
When the dark windows told us it was night
Paraffin lamps were lit, to give us some light.

Hot-pot, with a big suet crust on top
Then out if a big stone bottle a drink if pop
Clogs polished brightly, ready for school
Fishing for jacksharps in nearby pool.

Smells of wash-days, with steaming soap suds
Using camphorated oil and wintergreen rubs
In the evening, as fire burned bright
You sat, looking for faces in the firelight.

Hurrying down the garden path in the pouring rain
To answer a call of nature on a wooden frame
Newspaper squares hang threaded on string
Some settled for half a story, others would sing.

Trundles, yo-yos, tops and whips
The smell of vinegar on your chips
Big jam butties to fill up a gap
The corporation pop straight from the tap

On Friday nights the tin bath came down
In front of the fire we were all scrubbed down
Then dried down, stood on a cosy peg rug
A hot drink of cocoa in your favourite mug.

Hours playing hapily, by a clear running stream
Making shadow figures with a wall as your screen
Free from sex maniacs and muggers' attacks
Respect for old age when sex meant sacks.

Up to the pictures once a week we would go
Tuppence a time, on the front row
Oh the excitement as we settled in
To watch Buck Jones or Rin Tin Tin.

Net curtains as the window peg-rugs on the floor
Friends always made welcome at the ever-open front door
Now I live in a modern flat and have colour TV
But nothing can replace that old cottage for me.

APPENDIX H

The Eddleston Trust

*The following is taken from the Victorian History of Lancashire Volume VI.
Published 1911. (Page 67).*

Concerning Charities:

For the Billinge townships the principal foundation is that of John Eddleston, who, in 1672, bequeathed his house and lands for charitable uses. There were several other benefactors.***

** This estate consisted of a house and about 14 acres of land, part of the Blackleyhurst Estate, on which was a quarry called Grindstone Delph; it was subject to a fee-farm rent of 20s to John Blackburn (to Sir William Gerard in 1828 by purchase). The use was for the maintenance of a pious and orthodox minister for Billinge Chapel, for the school, and the relief of the poor. In practice the house and land were occupied by the incumbent of the chapel and the profit from the quarry, leased for \$50 a year in 1828, to the schools and poor of the two townships of Billinge. The gross income in 1899 was \$98, out of which £1 ground rent was paid to Lord Gerard. The beacon on the hill stands on this property. As the quarry has become exhausted the trustees have ceased to distribute the income from it but £10 a year had been given to the poor.*

*** William Bankes in 1775 left £20 to each of the Billinges and in 1828 18s was paid yearly out of the estate of Myrick Bankes. £57 resulting in the sale of William Birchall's estate and a gift of £40 by – Okill, was used in 1799 to purchase a cottage, the rent was spent of linen for the poor. The cottage, in 1899, produced a net income of £4 3s 6p, distributed by the vicar in money and clothing, with 18s paid to the overseers by Mrs. Bankes of Winstanley, and distributed in doles of calico or flannel. Elizabeth Comber in 1896 left £100 for the provision of coal and food for the poor at Christmas.*



APPENDIX I

Gaffney Records in St Mary's Registers 1792-1912

As God Parents

27/11/1869	John Gaffney	Carol Cunliffe
31/3/1872		Carol Cunliffe
6/9/1876	Elizabeth Gaffney	Maria Derbyshire
6/5/1877	John Gaffney	Maria Fazrrar
30/4/1881		Mary King
28/1/1882		Mary Case
11/4/1891	Elizabeth Gaffney	Agnes Dixon
25/7/1908	Thomas Gaffney	William Willcock

Births

20/10 1884	Thomas	John & Margaret
8/9/1886	Joseph	
16/4/1889	Therisa	
16/7/1895	William	
16/7/1895	Mary Elizabeth	

Burials.

16/11/1873	Elizabeth	61?
15/1/1888	John	62
25/7/1895	Mary Elizabeth	9 days
17/7/1918	John	65 (47Carr Mill Rd)
18/4/1919	Jane (James' wife)	65 (132 Main Street).
23/7/1934	Margaret (John's wife)	78
14/8/1937	James	81
26/10/1950	Thomas	66
5/7/1961	Laura Wain (Joe's wife)	74
30/9/1965	Therisa	76
4/3/1967	Joseph	81
16/6/1972	Rose (Tom's 2 nd wife)	81 (nee Whitle)

Weddings

11/10/1882	John x Margaret Sumner	John – father
18/6/1892	Eliz x Bill Harrison	John
11/2/1889	James x Jane Derbyshire	John

APPENDIX J

THE FOSTERS

By Alan Foster

William FOSTER born 17-- married Anne, born 17--, at - church, in the year of -- and had 5 children,

Elizabeth FOSTER, born Billinge in 1774,

John FOSTER, born Billinge in 1777,

Thomas FOSTER, born Billinge in 1779,

Paul FOSTER, born Billinge in 1781 and

Henry FOSTER, born Billinge in 1782.

Henry FOSTER (1782-1860) was born on December 27, 1782 in Billinge to his parents William and Ann FOSTER. At the age of 21 on July 23, 1804 at "All Saints" church in Wigan he married Jane ATHERTON of Ashton. They had 5 children of which 2 died prematurely.

William FOSTER born on May 26, Billinge, Lancs 1805, died prematurely.

Mary Anne FOSTER born December 30, 1810, Colchester, Essex

William FOSTER born March 24, 1816, Weedon, Northants

Bartholomew FOSTER born July 8, 1821, Billinge, Lancs, died prematurely.

Bartholomew FOSTER born August 15, 1826, Billinge Lancs

Henry, was a Tailor by Trade. On January 6, 1807 in Wigan, enlisted in the Royal Regiment of Artillery as a gunner. He was assigned to Major Alex Campbell's company, 3rd Battalion. From the WO54/276 Description Book reads: - Age 24, Height 5'10", Trade Tailor, Could Read and Write, Fair Complexion, Dark Brown Hair, Grey Eyes.

Royal Artillery...1807-1819)

1807-1809, Stationed at Colchester Barracks, Essex

1809 July, Sailed to Ter Veer, Belgium for the Walcheron Expedition and the Siege of Flushing.

1809 Sept, Stationed at Norwich

1810-1812, Stationed at Colchester Barracks, Essex

1813-1814, Sailed to Eastern Spain via Lisbon and Alicante to Tarragona for the Peninsula Wars and the Siege of Tarragona.

1814 July, Sailed back to the UK and Colchester Barracks, Essex.

1815-1819, Stationed at Weedon Ordnance Depot, Northants

1819 Dec, Stationed at Woolich Barracks then discharged.

Henry's known addresses in Billinge where Main Street, Billinge Slack (1841 Census), The Rant (1851 Census), Gorsey Brow at Death 1860. Henry died of bronchitis on September 20, 1860, in Billinge, at the age of 78 years.

Mary Anne FOSTER (1810-...), born Colchester Barracks, Essex, had 4 children - Marjorie, Agnes, Alexander, Thomas, prior to her marriage in 1853 to Timothy HEYES (1818-1882), following which they had a child, Anne.

William FOSTER (1816-1891), born Weedon Barracks, Northamptonshire, married 3 times (see below).

Bartholomew FOSTER (1826-1899), born in Billinge, married Sarah HESKETH (1831-1908), born in Rainford. They had 6 children, Mary (1853-...), Henry (1855-1894), James (1857-1903), Sarah (1859-...), William (1866-...) and Joseph (1873-1939).

William FOSTER (1816-1891) (see 'The Highwayman' below) whose 1ST first marriage was to Catherine GASKELL (1821-....) in Billinge in 1839 and they had a son Thomas.

Thomas FOSTER (1840-...) married Elizabeth HEATON (1837-...) and had a child, John.

John FOSTER (1857-1925) 1st marriage to Mary WARD (1861-1880) and had a child Thomas (see Thomas Foster 1880-1945 below).

John FOSTER (1857-1925) 2nd marriage to Elizabeth TAYLOR (1860-1934) and had 3 children, William (*), John (**) and Ellis (***).

Thomas FOSTER (1880-1945) married Annie BARROW (1887-1945) and had 12 children.

Eliza FOSTER (1907-1977) married Ernest DIXON (1903-...) and had 3 children, Eric, Kenneth and Maureen.

Mary Ward FOSTER (1909-1975) 1st marriage Arthur WADE (1906-...)

Mary Ward FOSTER (1909-1975) 2nd marriage William GEE (...-...)

Elizabeth FOSTER (1911-...) married Uriah SMITHIES (1901-1982) and had 3 children, Roy, Archie and Colin.

Annie FOSTER (1913-1997) married Bernard DUTTON (1903-...) and had 2 children, Camilla and Frances.

John Thomas FOSTER (1915-1944) married Violet Minnie UNSWORTH (1919-....) and had 1 child, Barbara.

William FOSTER (1918-1964).

Ellis FOSTER (1921-1994) married Elsie DRAPER (1921-...) and had 2 children, Trevor and Alan.

Margaret Alice FOSTER (1925-...) married Gordon GEE (1926-...) and had 1 child, Kathleen.

May FOSTER (1927-1995) 1st marriage to William GLYNN (19...-...) and had 1 child Anne.

May FOSTER (1927-1995) 2nd marriage to William RADCLIFFE (1922-1993).

Olive FOSTER (1930-...) married Harold TICKLE (1923-...) and had a child Roy.

Roy FOSTER (1933-...) married Winnie GASKELL (1930-...)

(*) William FOSTER (1892-1966) married Margaret WATERWORTH (...-1964) and had a son John (1921-1997)

(**). John FOSTER (1895-1973) married Minnie ROBY (1897-1964) and had 2 children, Sarah (1923-...) and Kenneth (1926-...).

(***) Ellis FOSTER (1898-1962) married Frances BOLD (...-1925) and had a child, Mary (1925-...).

William FOSTER (1816-1891) 2nd marriage was to Maria HOPKINS (1819-1865) in Tasmania in 1849. They had no children.

William FOSTER (1816-1891) 3rd Marriage was to Martha CUNLIFFE (1833-1883) in Billinge 1866 and they had 2 children Sarah and William

Sarah FOSTER (1867-1927) married John FRODSHAM (1860-1929) in Billinge 1884 and had 14 children

William FOSTER (1874-1954) married Elizabeth RATCLIFFE (1878-1925) at Billinge in 1900 and they had 9 children, all born in Billinge. After the death of his first wife, William married Mary TAPLIN nee HUGHES (1879-1961), in Billinge in 1925.

Mary FOSTER (1898-1988) married Albert HILL (1898-1986) and had a child Hilda (1924-...).

William FOSTER (1900-1986) married Jane HEYES (1902-1993) in 1926 and had a child, Jean, (1927-...).

Fred FOSTER (1903-1972) married Eleanor BIRCHALL (1907-1992) and had 2 children, Mildred (1933-...) and William (1938-...).

Burt FOSTER (1906-1984) married Elizabeth MOYERS (1907-1990) and had 3 children, Betty (1929-....), Barry (1937-...) and Valerie (1945-...).

Simon FOSTER (1908-1988) married Mary PEACH (1913-1973) and had 2 children, Arthur (1933-...) and Phyllis (1938-...).

Harold FOSTER (1910-1982) married Marian LEWIS (1915-...) and had a child, Margaret (1950-...).

Jesse FOSTER (1912-1968) married Emily LAWTON (1915-1994) and had 2 children, Alan (1941-...) and Hazel (1943-...).

Stephen FOSTER (1915-1969) married Hilda ROBERTS (1915-...) and had a child, Rita (1940-...).

Frank FOSTER (1920-....) married 1st wife Annie SUMNER (1920-1943) and had a child, Rita (1940-...) & married 2nd wife Elizabeth MATHEWS (1923-...) and had 2 children, Keith (1954-...) and Glen (1956-...).

"THE HIGHWAYMAN" (WILLIAM FOSTER 1816 - 1891)

William was the second child of Henry & Jane FOSTER, born and baptised in 1816 at Weedon Barracks, Northamptonshire, during his father's tenure in the Royal Regiment of Artillery. His trade was that of a weaver. In 1839, at the age of 23 years, he married Catherine GASKELL in Billinge and had a son named Thomas. In June 26th, 1841, he was charged and arrested for Highway Robbery and Stealing then incarcerated at Kirkdale Jail awaiting trial. The offense was committed at Windle, St Helens, together with two other accomplices, namely John BIRCHALL aged 19 and William LIPTROT aged 23. At the trial, on July 15, 1841, at Kirkdale, William and his two accomplices were found guilty and sentenced to ten years, to be served in Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania). They were transported aboard the 549 ton Barque the "John Brewer" sailing out of Sheerness on December 5, 1841, via Teneriffe and arriving at Hobart, Van Dieman's Land, on April 6, 1842.

During his stay in Van Dieman's Land he was housed in a camp called Finders Bay Station, now known as Taranna. While there, he made three applications to marry Sarah Pring 1844, Hannah Osborne 1848 and Maria Hopkins 1849. All these girls were convicts. He decided on the latter and married Maria Hopkins on May 14, 1849 at the Bothwell United Church, Van Diemans's Land. At the end of their sentences, in 1851, they returned to the UK and settled in Billinge, William's hometown, where they lived at Gorse Brow. Maria died in 1865 at the age of 46 of an Abdominal Tumor. Not wanting to waste any time, William found another wife (# 3) by the name of Martha CUNLIFFE and they were married October 23, 1866. They had two children, Sarah and William. Martha died in 1883 at the age of 49 of Phthisis. William lived alone for the rest of his life and died in 1891 at the age of 75 years.

APPENDIX K

THE MELLINGS

There exists a record of Richard and Betty Melling, born in the late 1760's and married in the late 1780's. They were the parents of Joseph, 29/8/1790, John, 15/1/1792, William, 4/8/1793, Richard, 18/7/1794, Ellen, 23/5/1802 and Thomas, 1/1/1804. They may also have had children named Henry, James and Peter. Tracing so many male Mellings to the present is very difficult. Following just one male from this family will illustrate the point.

Thomas Melling (1st January 1804 – 4th March 1854) married a woman called Margaret who died 20th November 1883. They appear to have had five children; **Richard** 1838-1887, and four girls, **Elizabeth**, born 1828, **Margaret**, born 1833, **Mary**, born 1841 and **Lydia**, born 1850.

Elizabeth had an illegitimate son, Thomas Melling c1855, mentioned in the 1861 census. The father was Henry Ashall, whom Elizabeth married 26 July 1868, when young Thomas was seven years old. Thomas married Alice Peet from Kings Moss c1878 and their children were Henry, Thomas, Elizabeth and Aaron (who died 17 December 1888, seven months after his mother died giving birth to him).

Thomas became a stonemason, walking to work in Liverpool on Mondays and back to 12 Park Road Longshaw on Saturdays. He died 21 April 1891, three years after his wife, due to stone dust poisoning. His cousin John Ashall from 6 Park Road signed the death certificate. The three orphaned children, Henry, Thomas and Elizabeth, were raised at Chadwick Green by their great aunt Lydia.

Henry Melling married Elizabeth Barston from Windle 13 November 1904 and became the father of eight girls, a crippled son, William, who died at the age of eleven and a son, Thomas, who worked at Hitchen's Farm in Carr Mill Road for fifty-four years. The girls were Alice, Phyllis, Elizabeth, Anne, Mary, Clarice, Edith and Margaret.

Thomas, Henry's brother, married Rachel Rigby from Carr Mill Road. Their children were Elizabeth, Harold, Thomas and a girl, Mary, who died at about two years old. They lived at Woodstock Cottage for a while then moved to the cottage by the pond at Tan Yard House Farm, at the bottom of Carr Mill Road.

Elizabeth Melling, sister of Henry and Thomas, married Robert Ormeshire, the son of Lydia's sister Mary. Their children were Edward and Annie.

Margaret's husband's surname was Ashall. Their three boys were James, Thomas and John their daughter was Margaret. John, the youngest, was born c 1866. By 1871 his mother was a widow.

Mary's husband was Robert Ormersher. Her son Robert married Elizabeth Melling, granddaughter of her sister **Elizabeth**.

Lydia married William Robinson and together they made the long journey from Longshaw Common to Chadwick Green and gave this work its title. Their lives of their four children, two boys and two girls, are dealt with in the main body of this text. Lydia brought her sister Elizabeth's three orphaned grandchildren, Henry, Thomas and Elizabeth, to Chadwick Green with her.

Richard's wife's christian name was Sarah (1842-1892). Her maiden name may have been Melling also. She appears to be the daughter of John Melling (15/1/1792) and Ellen nee Holland who lived at the Hare and Hounds. They were, I think, the proprietors of the Hare and Hounds at the bottom of Longshaw Old Road, before it was rebuilt by their grandson, John Thomas Melling (1864-1925), in 1907. John and Ellen had daughters named Sarah and Margaret and it could be that John was the brother of Thomas (1804-1854), making Richard and Sarah cousins.

Richard and Sarah had five children, John Thomas (1864-12/10/1925), who became a builder, Margaret, Ellen, Elizabeth Ann and Richard.

Margaret's husband, John Thomas Heaton was the landlord of the Queen's Arms in Sandbrook Rd, Orrell now known as Sandbrook Arms. Richard and Sarah's other daughters, Ellen and Elizabeth Ann, married the brothers of John Thomas Heaton - three sisters thereby marrying three brothers. Ellen married Henry and they became the first proprietors of the new Hare and Hounds. Elizabeth Ann married Fred Heaton, a miner.

Richard Melling was the father of Cyril, Ken and Winifred Melling. Ken Melling ran the garage in UpHolland Road, across from the Unicorn and is featured in 'One Man's Pitch' by David Young.

John Thomas Melling (1864-1925) built many of the houses in and around Longshaw. He and his sisters and brother lived in the old Hare and Hounds in Longshaw, later building the new Hare and Hounds around 1907. John Thomas' two sons Richard (1891) and Francis (1893) carried on the building firm known as J.T Melling & Sons. His daughter Ellen (1895) married William Atherton and they became the proprietors of the Eagle and Child on Church Brow. As this couple had no children they are not the parents of Irvine Atherton who was subsequently landlord of the same pub. Jane Atherton, sister of William Atherton, married Joseph Tinsley from Otterswift Farm. They lost two girls at birth and helped run the Eagle and Child for about 10 years. When William married Ellen Melling, Joe Tinsley went back to farming for a while then married again to Clara Edwards from Tarbuck House. They subsequently moved to Brownheath House and there were no kids by this marriage.

Francis Melling married Catherine Smith from Plane Tree Farm, Crank Road, and had one son, John, who died in 1979.

Richard Melling married Maggie Bradley from Sutches Farm, UpHolland and had two children, Elizabeth Anne and William.

William married to Ethel Hitchmough and left 4 sons: Stephen, Andrew, John and Anthony when he died in 1973.

Elizabeth married Leslie Houghton in 1949 and had two children. Anne born 1952 married Ian Gaskell and has two daughters, Amy and Alison. David, born 1955, married Lynn Sherrif. They have a son Gareth and daughter Bethany.

APPENDIX L

LITTLERS & HALLIWELLS

Alan Littler's parents were Jervis Littler and Miriam nee Halliwell. Miriam was the daughter of John Halliwell who married a woman named Ashton around 1880. Their children were Thomas, Robert, Edward, Henry, Jane, Annie, Miriam, Margaret and Peter.

Jane married Nat Liptrot and their son, Thomas Edward, married Jane Kersley from Barrows Farm. Annie married John Thomas Ashall from Coulshead Farm, Makin's Corner. Miriam married Jervis Heyes Littler and they lived at Morris House, Longshaw and then 68 Claremont Road. Margaret married John (Jack) Edwards and died giving birth John.

There are several Littler families in Billinge. To differentiate between them they were know by nicknames. Alan's Littlers were called 'Tablys'; other Littlers were know as 'Gubbys' and some even by their real name, Littler. The 'Tablys' where an interesting family; Alan and all his brothers are the university educated sons of a miner. His father's brothers owned and farmed Lower Heaton⁷ House Farm, near the up and down steps. Some indication of their background is evident in this letter, from Alan, outlined below.

Tashkent12th July 2000

Dear Joe

I'm not sure about the Ashton's. The only ones I ever met lived in Hare's Finch and were descendants of my mother's Uncle Billy who was a mine manager of one of the Pilks collieries. My grandmother was an Ashton, in service at the Stork, who married John Halliwell, a gardener there. They lived for many years in the cottages down Beacon Rd. just behind the Eagle and Child.

My Uncles Jimmy, Billy, Tom and Bob Littler farmed Lower Heaton House Farm from the early 1920's to the 1970's. Jimmy died of gangrene after an accident with a pitchfork in the 50's. My Dad hero-worshipped him. He'd been through WW1 and was a good athlete in his day. It was the only time I ever saw my Dad cry. He'd just come back from a night shift and I can see the tears rolling through the coal dust as I write. When they all died out, there was a bit of a family dispute over the wills. The law in them days didn't bear a lot of close scrutiny. Most of them were virtually illiterate and there had been a great deal of double dealing over the years. As they were all unmarried, the farm, by rights should have come to us.

My dad was a beneficiary of his father's will but we gave up in the end as it was messing around for peanuts and my brothers and I had too much else to think about. Most of the spoils went to the Clephan family who, probably still live in the Rant Cottages. It's a very

⁷ The Heatons are one of the oldest Billinge families. They seem to have appeared in Billinge in the 14th century when John de Heton (1332-1361) married a daughter of Robert de Huyton, Lord of Billinge. They were involved in a notorious dispute with the Andertons in the 1590's which cost them Birchley and Billinge Halls. See <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~heaton/history/billinge.htm> and <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~heaton/history/birchley.htm> by Craig Smith.

complex story and it's over 25 years ago now. My brother Tommy, who died of leukaemia in 1980, always maintained that their solicitor was a crook (aren't most for that matter). He was proved right a few years later when the guy got seven years for embezzling funds from St. Helens Parish Church.

As for George, I remember him well. He lived near the Unicorn in Orrell and was never directly involved in the farm but was often there. He did a bit of this and that and was always regarded as the black sheep. My Ma took a pretty dim view of the lot of them although I must say that she did all she could to help. They were useless farmers – my Dad never lost an opportunity of letting them know it too. One thing I can say for my Dad – it was his lucky day when he met Miriam.

I have a dim recollection of George's demise. I can't recall what happened but I think they didn't report the death for some days and transported the body around a bit. You just couldn't make some of this up. I'd be glad to know what your Mum remembers about it. There was a darker secret than that. There was a sister Emma - I think - who was insane and spent all her life a virtual prisoner in the farmhouse in conditions I can only imagine. I never set foot over the threshold although I was often there as a kid, riding the tractors for days on end. They built a new house at the "top end" of the land – not far from the brickworks - in the 50's and that's where we met most of the time.

Stee and Tommy Littler were my father's nephews – my cousins. The eldest of my father's brothers, Henry (I think!) married a Catholic and was ostracised. All that side of the Littlers comes from him. There was another Littler sister too – not sure of her name – I'll have to check with my brother John. She married a Coleman. My cousins, Peter and John Coleman were fair boxers. Your Dad would have known them from Lowe House days. I remember another brother Jimmy – he used to visit us in Claremont Rd.

I never knew the Catholic Littlers, what a waste of time. I was once on a bus with my brother, Gordon, in St. Helens. I was about ten at the time. We were coming back from Liverpool where Gordon was a student. This chap got on and Gordon started talking to him. When he got off at Birchley, Gordon said, " You don't know him do you? He's your cousin". It may have been Stee. My Dad kept in contact of course, both with them and the Colemans. They'd remember "Uncle Jerv".

As for your family, of course I remember your Mum and Dad very well. I only have a vague memory of Enid though as she was older than we were. I remember Stan and Doug Williams very well of course. We were in the church choir together for years. I remember one choir practice, on a beautiful summer evening. Only Duggy and I showed up and the organist, Albert Mather, thanked us and let us go. We went round Billinge Hill together and I remember Doug climbing up to a suspected hawk's nest in the quarry. I wonder if he remembers. Also I have very fond memories of your Aunt Doris. I doubt if I ever met a more cheerful person in my life. I can see her broad smile now.

I thought, probably not the only one, that your cousin Ann Wilkie was the best looking girl in Billinge. Probably still is. She used to deliver to Claremont Road – was it milk? I never missed a visit! Give them all my very best wishes.

As for you, I have so many memories. Remember the Webley 410, marking the cards with black ink before playing brag – so many memories. As I get older I realise how lucky we were to come from a place like that at the end of an era in many ways.

Last night I had dinner under the stars here with about ten other project leaders from the EU. We have a little bash about every two months or so. One of the guys, a Brit who lives in Brussels, was saying that he found it difficult to adapt when he went home. He found it so claustrophobic and boring. (Mind you Brussels is an awful place at the best of times). He asked me “Will you ever go back?”. Well “ever” is a long time but I could see what he meant. Having watched people trying to survive for the past six years, I find it hard to spend time with people who discuss nothing but the price of things, people who are rich beyond the wildest imaginings of most people on the planet. I think that most of my trips to England in future will be as a tourist. But sitting in our old house in Park Road a few weeks ago, I could be tempted in my old age.

The photos are great. I wouldn't have recognised Fed Rigby – mind you it's a long time. I'd just about have recognised you – if prompted. Send me a clearer photo! You look to have two great kids. I never mentioned that my best mates are Kiwis – from Invergargill in the South Island. They are not there now – one is in Sydney (he was a student with me) and the other in Hong Kong. He's a lawyer and came to Wigan with me to give our family lawyer a pep talk in the late 70's – that day we met John Waterworth, from Beacon Road, in the pub. He was then a senior detective, in court, putting a local hood away for a long time. I had a great time in London in the 70's with the Kiwis. Paid a visit to see the guys in NZ in 1978. Played cricket and sailed with them and am still very much in touch.

I'll be back again in the UK mid-October – any chance of a meeting?

Hear from you soon.

All the best, Alan



Elizabeth Swift Ellen Rigby ? Elizabeth Bold Miriam Halliwell

APPENDIX M

The Billinge Family in Haydock

1871 Census

At Haydock Green

Isaac Billinge aged 47 born Parr – underlooker

Ann aged 48 born Ashton

Gertrude aged 17 born Haydock

Jacob aged 14 born Haydock

Pauline (?) aged 2 (grandchild) born Bolton

1881 Census

At Haydock Green

Isaac Billinge aged 57 Colliery Manager

Ann aged 58

Gertrude aged 27

Jacob aged 24 mining foreman

Alice aged 4 granddaughter born Bolton.

At Old Toll Bar

Roger Billinge aged 21 & John Billinge aged 19, both miners, lodging with William (59) & Susanna Greenall (57)

1891 Census

At Tailor's Shop in Church Street

Isaac Billinge widow aged 67 living on his own means

At Albert Terrace

Elizabeth Billinge 35 (widow of Jacob?) born Sutton.

Walter aged 8 born Haydock

Ada aged 5 born Haydock

Ann aged 4 born Haydock

Amy aged 2 months born Haydock

At Stone Row Chipoly (?) Lane

Allan Billinge aged 30 coal miner born Haydock

Mary aged 27 born Haydock

Temperance (?) aged 10

Doreen (?) aged 7

Elizabeth aged 6

John aged 5

Catherine (?) aged 2

Gertrude aged 1 month

Baptised at St James Haydock

6/8/1882 Lily by John & Ann – collier born Haydock

Baptised at Methodist Chapel Haydock

29/5/1853 Gertrude by Isaac & Ann

9/7/1885 Ada

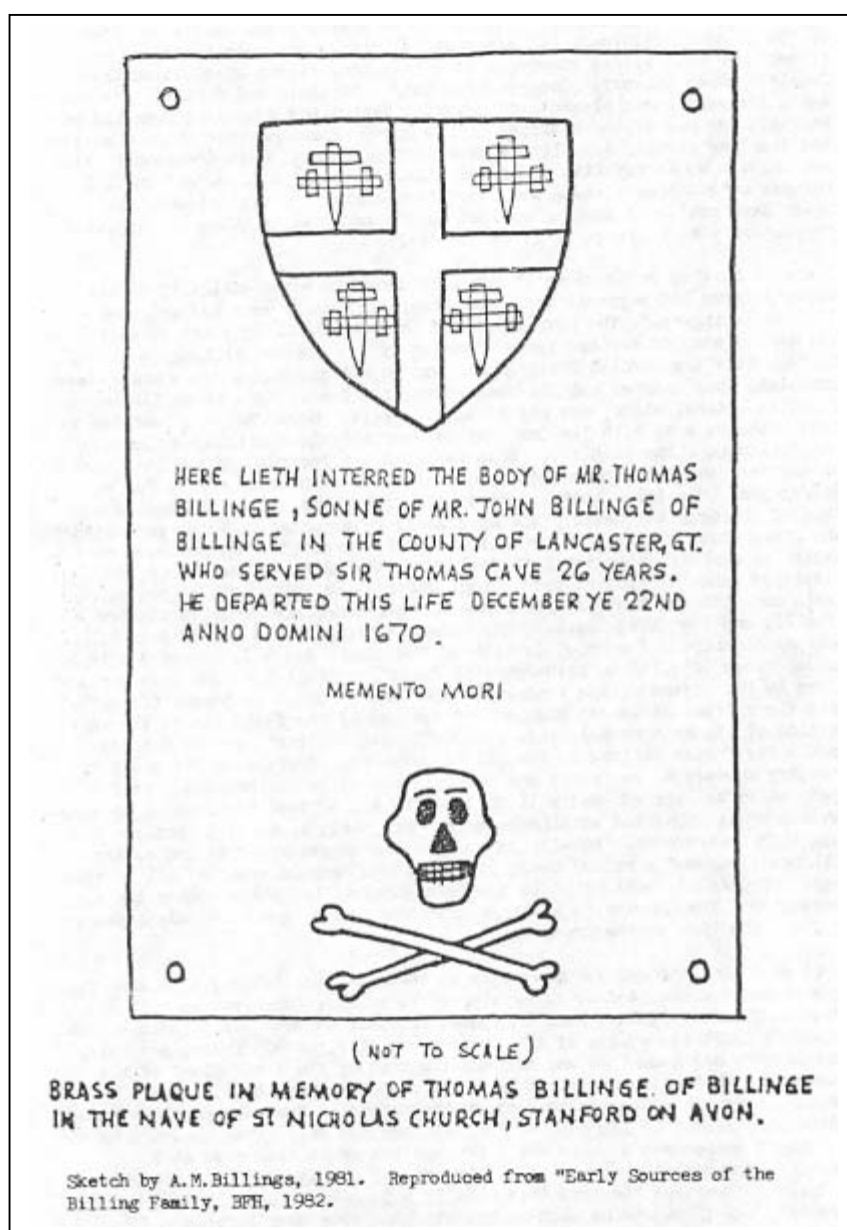
4/4/1888 Ann

24/1/1891 Amy

29/4/1894 Albert

28/4/1926 Robert Kenneth by Albert & Louise (40 Chifily (?) Road

Note. The directors of Ashton Grammar School elected John Billinge as manager of Ashton Charities in 1852⁸.



⁸ See Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire volume 104.

APPENDIX N

THE LAVINS

Thomas Lavin was born in County Mayo in 1877. He was but one of countless thousands who left that poverty stricken country for a hopefully better life in England. His aspirations proved fruitful. He came to work for the Bradburns on Layland Green Farm, at the corner of Layland Green Road and Ashton Road, and somehow won the hand of the farmer's daughter Margaret. They married and raised a family of nine children by operating a milk business. Harold, Margaret's brother inherited the farm. Thomas died 10th February 1949 aged 72. His wife Margaret died 13th May 1947 aged 68. Their children were:

Frederick Lavin married Winifred? They farmed at Golborne Road Ashton. Their children were Thomas, Frederick, Irene and Dorothy. Fred died 2nd August 1973 aged 75. Winifred died 7th 1975 aged 78. Irene married William Mason from Startham Hall.

James Lavin married Lillian Ashton. Their children were Mildred, Olive, Arthur, and Reginald. James died 12th December 1967 aged 67. Lillian died 25th November 1997 aged 96.

Henry Lavin did not marry. He died 6th February 1967 aged 65.

William Lavin married Alice Taberner. Their children were Joyce, Cathleen and Margaret. Cathleen married John Tinsley, son of John Tinsley and Annie nee Cunliffe.

Francis Lavin married? Their children were Pauline and Michael.

Lawrence Lavin married Alice Grundy. Their children were Norman and Jeffrey. Lawrence died 27th October 1992 aged 72.

Thomas Lavin married Theresa? Their children were Anthony and Janet. Thomas died 28th May 1958 aged 43. Theresa died 13th February 1990 aged 72.

Helen Lavin did not marry. She has been courting with Bernard Hanrahan for a time before she died 12th July 1947 aged 36.

Joe Lavin married? His children, if any, are unknown. He died 10th July 1999 aged 79.

Thomas Lavin must have inspired his sons to get ahead in the world by his enterprise and adventurous spirit. Within one generation the family owned five farms, an extensive coal delivery business and a productive coal mine. James Lavin became a successful builder in his own right apart from getting into the coal business with his brothers Fred, Lawrence and William. In 1942/43, when Lord Gerard put up part of his estate for sale, he bought Garswood Hall Farm, which is still in the family, run by his grandson Keith. Lawrence bought Senly Green and Hollin Hey Farms, which are

still in the family, run by his sons Norman & Jeffrey. William bought Charity and Arch Lane Farms. He left them to his daughters who sold them to the present owners. James Lavin's first venture into the colliery business was not successful. His second attempt was however but part of the Bank's requirement was that his brothers William, Frederick and Lawrence were part of the company. They started what became know as Lavin's Pit before James took his family to Rhodesia 26th March 1947. William Russell, a plumber from Moffat, shipped out for Africa on the same vessel. He came to work for James Lavin when the latter started a building business in Salisbury, Rhodesia, and eventually married James's daughter, Olive. James made a coupe of trips home, buying Billinge Lane Farm in 1950, still farmed by his son Reginald, before returning for good on 1952. The colliery continued to function as an ongoing concern until 1970.

APPENDIX O

THE DIXON STORY

By Gerry Rigby

This is the story of the Dixon family, the brothers & sisters of my great grandmother Margaret Rowson (formally Margaret Dixon). Margaret Rowson was a child of John & Mary Dixon (formally Mary Rigby) from Brownheath Nook, Chadwick Green, Billinge.

The full family of John & Mary Dixon, all born in Brownheath Nook, was:-

Margaret, born 1834, married James Harvey Rowson from Eccleston in 1860, died 1910 age 77, buried at Birchley.

William, born 1837, married Jane Bone from Winstanley in 1862, died 1907 age 70, buried at Birchley.

Simon, born 1839 died 1840, exact date of death and burial place unknown.

Simon, born 1842, bachelor, died 1866 age 23, buried at Windleshaw

John, born 1845, bachelor, died 1880 age 35, buried at Birchley

George, born 1848, married Ann Witherington from Ashton in 1870, died 1928 age 79, buried at Birchley

Joseph, born 1852, married Margaret Witherington from Haydock in 1873, date of death and burial place unknown.

The two Witherington girls above were both daughters of Frederick & Ellen Witherington, (nee Morris).

Frederick Witherington was the son of George & Margaret Witherington.

The first family (the Rowsons) has been almost fully catalogued, and the last family (Joseph Dixon) has also been fairly well catalogued. However the lives of William & George are very much incomplete.

Taking **William** first.

In the 1861 Census, William is shown single and living in Chadwick Green. In 1862 he marries Jane Bone from Winstanley, the daughter of Robert & Ann Bone. In the 1871 Census the family is living in Chancery Lane, Parr and is listed :-

Dixon	William	Head	33	Sawyer	Billinge	1838
Jane(nee Bone)		Wife	32		Winstanley	1839
	John	Son	7		Billinge	1864
	George	Son	5		Wigan	1866
	Robert	Son	2		Parr	1869

After the 1871 Census two further children were born, namely :-

William	Son	Parr	1872
Ann	Daughter	Parr	1874

Unfortunately as Ann was born on 3rd September 1874, her mother Jane died on 7th September 1874, age 35 from Parr Stocks.

The children were then John 10 yrs, George 8 yrs, Robert 5 yrs, William 2 yrs, and Ann newly born.

Ann was taken by her Uncle & Aunt, James Harvey & Margaret Rowson, living then at 41, Croppers Hill, St Helens, and Robert & William were taken by their Grandparents, John & Mary Dixon who were still living in Chadwick Green. All these movements are shown on the 1881 Census, namely Robert age 12, William age 9, and Ann age 6.

However on the 1881 Census for Lancashire there is no listing of William (now age 43), or his son John (now age 17), or his son George (now age 15). The latter child re-appears on the 1891 Census.

The 1891 Census shows the two grandchildren Robert & William still living with their grandmother, now a widow in Chadwick Green, their grandfather, John Dixon having died in 1887.

Ann Dixon is still living with James Harvey & Margaret Rowson but now at Billinge Brook Farm.

Apparently when Ann grew up she stayed a spinster and eventually lived with her bachelor brother Robert, in Chadwick Green and they became known by my mother as Uncle Bob & Aunt Annie Dixon.

On the 1891 Census, George, the missing son of William now re-appears age 25 and living at 57, Carr Mill Road, Chadwick Green. He has now married Sarah Burrows from Billinge, the daughter of William & Sarah Burrows (nee Taylor), in 1885 and has the following children:-

William	1886	Born Billinge
Jane	1888	Born Billinge Spinster died 1945

Other children followed, the details of which are taken from the Birchley St Mary's Baptism Register:-

Joseph	1890	Died age 8 months
Mary	1891	
Cecilia Helen	1895	
Agnes Josephine	1902	
Beatrice	1905	

At the moment little is known about these children.

In 1898, William, son of William & Jane Dixon (nee Bone), marries Ellen Atherton and lives next door to Uncle Bob and Aunt Annie Dixon in Chadwick Green. It is thought that William Dixon was related to Ellen Atherton as Ellen's mother was

formally Margaret Rigby and William was a grandson of the marriage of John Dixon = Mary Rigby. This has not yet been proved although there is gossip in the family about it.

William & Ellen had the following children:-

Ann	1899	Cripple died 1932 age 33, buried at Birchley grave 3/3 with Thomas & Margaret Atherton.
Jane	1900	Drowned 1928 age 28, buried at Birchley grave 2/46 with her great grandparents John & Mary Dixon
Robert	1903	Married Annie Tinsley
Margaret	1906	Tailoress, Spinster, died 1993 age 87, buried at Birchley grave 6/10 with her parents William & Ellen
Mary Antonia	1909	Married Arthur Case
Joseph	1914	Died 1922, age 8

Going back a generation and summarising the children of William & Jane Dixon (formally Bone)

John is unaccounted for since the 1871 Census.

George marries Sarah Burrows from Billinge in 1885 and dies on 3rd February 1930 age 64, and is buried at Birchley grave 2/44 with his wife Sarah, who died 30th January 1945 age 79, and their daughter Jane who died 10th January 1945 age 57.

Robert stays a bachelor (Uncle Bob Dixon). Died 1945 age 77, buried at Birchley grave 2/39 with his parents William & Jane Dixon (nee Bone).

William married Ellen Atherton from Billinge in 1898. He died on 15th October 1944 aged 72 years, Ellen died on 17th July 1956 age 81 years, both are buried in Birchley grave 6/10 with their daughter Margaret mentioned above.

Ann stays a spinster (Aunt Annie Dixon). Died 1920 age 45, buried at Birchley, grave 2/39 with her parents William & Jane Dixon (nee Bone).

The father is also unaccounted for since the 1871 Census until 1907 when he dies age 70 from an address in Chadwick Green and is buried in Birchley with his wife Jane. The first in the grave is Jane (1874), then William (1907), followed by Aunt Annie Dixon (1920) and finally Uncle Bob Dixon (1945).

There are 3 questions left to be answered, namely:-

- 1) Where has William (husband of Jane) been since the 1871 Census till his death in 1907?
- 2) What happened to his son John last seen on the 1871 Census?
- 3) Where was his son George at the time of the 1881 census?

Continuing the family downwards we have:-

Robert Dixon = Annie Tinsley who had the following children:-

- 1) Joseph Marie
- 2) Margaret Mary
- 3) Mary Barbara
- 4) Mary Joan
- 5) Mary Magdelan
- 6) Robert

Robert and Annie are believed to be dead but many of the above children are still alive and details are being obtained.

Arthur Case = Mary Antoine Dixon who had the following children:-

- 1) Tony
- 2) Margaret now Margaret Lea
- 3) Helen now Helen Wilcox
- 4) Teresa

Now to George

George was born 1848 in Brownheath Nook, Chadwick Green and married Ann Witherington from Ashton in 1870.

The 1881 Census listed the four children below living at 83, Chancery Lane, Parr.

Mary Ellen, born 1871 in Earlestown.

Margaret, born 1873 in Parr.

Jane, born 1875 in Parr. Didn't marry.

Alice, born 1879 in Parr.

Ann, born 1884 in Ramford Street Parr, didn't marry.

On the 1891 Census the family is shown at 163, Ramford St., Parr

George	Head	42	Carpenter	Born Billinge
Ann	Wife	42		Born Haydock
Mary E	Dau	19	Glass Smoother	Born Newton
Jane	Dau	15	Dressmaker	Born St Helens
Alice	Dau	11	Scholar	Born St Helens
John	Son	9	Scholar	Born St Helens
Annie	Dau	7	Scholar	Born St Helens
George	Son	4	Scholar	Born St Helens
Elizabeth	Dau	2	Scholar	Born St Helens

The known sequence of events after 1891 is as follows:-

1899 George (father) dies age 51 from Parr. Buried at Birchley.
1903 Ann (daughter) dies age 19 from 78, Chancery Lane, Parr. Buried at Birchley.
1928 Ann (mother) dies age 79. Buried at Birchley.
1948 Jane (daughter) dies age 73. Buried at Birchley.

All the above are in the same grave.

APPENDIX P

THE COLEMANS

The first record of a Coleman in Billinge is the birth of Mary 7th Mary 1856, the daughter of John and Catherine nee Lavell. John Coleman was born 18th November 1860 and died, aged 6, 18th Feb 1867. Margaret 30th April 1864 was their next child and then Catherine 30th October 1865. There are no further children recorded to this couple. How they came to Billinge is unknown; they were probably already married with children when they arrived. John, aged six, is the first recorded Coleman burial so maybe John and Catherine, his parents, came here looking for work around 1856, found it and then moved on sometime after 1867. No other members of this family have been traced as being buried in Billinge.

The next Coleman record in Billinge is the marriage of Patrick, son of Patrick and Bridgett, and Margaret, daughter of Patrick and Mary Mulroy, 6th November 1870. Margaret came from Portico evidently and used to keep pigs behind the old post office. If and how this Patrick Coleman was related to John, husband of Catherine Coleman, is unknown but they could have been brothers. Patrick lived to be 69. He was residing at Wigan at the time of his death in 1909 but is buried at St Mary's. Margaret Coleman died 19th July 1903 at 53.

Patrick and Margaret were godparents to Catharine McManus 28th December 1877, the daughter of John and Ann nee Fay. It seems that Irish drovers used to bring cattle over from Ireland to sell in Billinge. These drovers used to board with the McManus and Durkin families, pasturing their cattle at Joe Middlehurst's Farm, in Birchley, until they disposed of them at the best price. It could be that this association with the McManus family stems from Patrick, and maybe his brother John, being Irish drovers and former lodgers.

Whatever Patrick Coleman's origins, he settled in Billinge and raised a family. The children were Bridgett 21st September 1871, William 31st December 1873 who later married Martha Lloyd in Wigan 29th July 1937*, Patrick 11th December 1876, Mark 29th May 1879, Peter 16th July 1881 - 31st July 1952, Geoffrey 22nd November 1883 and Mary 7th May 1887. Bridgett lived for four years and Mary died as a three-year-old.

Mark Coleman married Ellen Littler, daughter of Thomas Littler from the Rant, on the 21st of September 1907. The Colemans are thus related to the Littler brothers from Lower Heaton Farm, the demise of which caused much controversy. Mark and Helen's children were Mary 10th July 1907 - 28th July 1907, Peter 15th February 1910, Joseph Norman 21st February 1911 - 22nd September 1911, Mark 1913 - 1st September 1986, Josephine 1916 - 25th May 1972, John, Rachel 1920, Mary 1923 and James 1926 - 14th September 1987 William was the last, date of birth unknown.

There is a record of the death of Mary Coleman 9th December 1920 aged 3 months and William Coleman 11th April 1928 aged 11 months. At this stage the parents are unknown.

Elizabeth Coleman died 1st June 1973 at 63. She was, presumably, related by marriage.

James Coleman's wife Evelyn died 26th March 1988 at 59, six months after her husband. They were the parents of Linda Pye nee Coleman, who still lives in London Fields.



Mark Coleman above and Ellen Coleman nee Littler below



APPENDIX Q

THE McLOUGHLINS

The first McLoughlin in Billinge was James, an Irish lad looking to better his prospects in England as so many of this countrymen did. He appears to have been a miner who found lodgings in Fair View with a fellow countryman, Patrick Fogherty. Patsy, as he was known, had a couple of nieces working in the cotton mills near Bolton. One of these girls, Mary Murphy, married James McLoughlin at St Mary's 18th November 1866. James had been around a while by that time as he stood as godparent to Joan Gahagan at St Mary's in 1860.

James McLoughlin was the first child born to this couple. He arrived 29th March 1867, to be followed by John 18th April 1869, Thomas 5th April 1871, Ann 29th December 1874, Jane 25th June 1876, twins Joseph and Nicholas 26 February 1878, Ann 4th June 1879, Jane 25th March 1881, and Mary 12th August 1883. Two of these children died young, Jane at three weeks and Ann at two years. Succeeding children were named after them, as was the custom of that era of high infant mortality.

James McLoughlin married Ann Cunliffe from the Labour-in-Vain 3rd September 1891. Ann was the eighth of eleven children born to Francis Cunliffe, who married Mary Derbyshire 5th February 1856. The first child born to this couple was Sara, my great grandmother. Francis and Mary ran the Labour-in-Vain; in time James and Ann McLoughlin took over the management. Ann and James's first child, born out of wedlock, was Francis 2nd November 1887, but he died in 1890, aged three. They had four more children, Mary 11th June 1892, Christine 11th April 1895, James 29th January 1897 and Beatrice Irene 16th August 1899. The last child lived for eight months; the mother died 26th December 1901, aged thirty. She had been godmother to Gertrude, Thomas Cuthbert and Aloysius Taylor, the children of her elder sister Sara, among others. Another of Sara's children, James Taylor, married James McLoughlin's sister, Jane. Helen, another Cunliffe sister, married William Eddleston 28th June 1894. Their two girls were Frances 24th October 1894 and Helen 20th July 1896.

After Ann's death, James remarried a teacher from Birchley School, Elizabeth Maxwell, originally from Liverpool. They had three more McLoughlin children, Irene Mary 20th August 1909, Helen 25th November 1910 and Patricia.

John McLoughlin married Margaret Harrison of Fair View 24th November 1900. Their children were Mary Elizabeth 26th April 1902, Joseph 1st December 1903, Thomas Kerian 23rd September 1905, James 21st November 1907 John 9th March 1910 and Margaret.

Thomas McLoughlin never married.

Joseph McLoughlin married Martha Chisnall of Simms Lane Ends 26th January 1905. Their children were James Joseph 23rd September 1905, Martha Ursula 15th June 1907, Mary Patricia 17th March 1908 and Joseph Cyril 29th March 1911.

Nicholas McLaughlin married Susan Pendlebury and kept the Stag Hotel at Garswood then moved to Doncaster. Their children were Ann, Lawrence and John

Ann McLoughlin married William Blackburn of Birchley 4th July 1906. Their children were Ann 5th May 1906, James 11th April 1908, Marcella Mary 31st January 1911, Sheila, Josephine, Mary and Leo.

Jane McLoughlin married James Taylor of 94 Rainford Road 30th November 1912. He was killed in action in WW1 and Jane never remarried. There were no children.

Mary McLoughlin married James Hanranhan of Fair View 30th May 1907. Their children were James 23rd May 1908, Bernard 18th September 1910, Gerard, Denis, Joseph, Mary, Patricia and Kevin Edward the last 29th August 1926.



*Main Street Billinge
James Hanrahan c1871-2/10/1958
with children Mary, Kevin & Pat*

APPENDIX R

THE JACKSONS

From: Dallas <manicom@canada.com>
Subject: JACKSONs, etc in Billinge
Date: Thursday, January 25, 2001

Elizabeth JACKSON's parents James JACKSON and Margaret UNSWORTH were married at St Mary's Birchley Billinge in 1847

Elizabeth JACKSON was born Sep 7 1848 in Billinge and baptised Sep 10 1848 in St Mary's.

Elizabeth's ancestors are listed in the parish baptismal records for Birchley Chapel from 1792 to mid 1800.

I can go as far back as the patriarch Thomas JACKSON married to Mary FLETCHER about 1759 and their 8 children.

Their eldest son, Jonathan JACKSON baptised Feb 20 1760 in Billinge and then married to Jane DARBYSHIRE on Jul 13 1786 in Wigan All Saints. They had 8 children all baptised at Birchley Chapel.

Their eldest son John JACKSON (born 1787 in Gorsey Brow Billinge) married to Elizabeth FRODSHAM on Dec 9 1811 in Wigan All Saints. They had 9 children all baptised in Birchley Chapel/St Mary's. (Elizabeth FRODSHAM was baptised Oct 10 1790 in Birchley Chapel to Joseph and Mary according to the IGI online)

Their son James JACKSON baptised Mar 25 1820 in Birchley married Margaret UNSWORTH on May 31 1847 in St Mary's and they had 5 children.

Elizabeth JACKSON, my 3X great grandmother is their daughter born 1848. She married Henry LITTLER Mar 2 1868 in Birchley/St Mary's OR St Oswald's Ashton in Makerfield.

Henry LITTLER was born Sep 23 1845 in Parr St Helens but I haven't yet sent away for his birth cert.

Elizabeth's uncle *John JACKSON was boarding at Rant Billinge Chapel End in 1881

1881 CENSUS

James Heyes, head, carter, 68 b Billinge, Lancs

Jane, wife, 69 b Billinge

James Kelly, lodger, collier Unm 26 b Liverpool, Lancs

*John Jackson, lodger, general labourer Unm 66 b Billinge, Lancs

John JACKSON would have been born abt 1815 and his parents were John JACKSON and

Elizabeth FRODSHAM.

Here's a few more names and their spouses:

Children of Jonathan JACKSON and Jane DARBYSHIRE (born abt 1765 in Billinge)
Margaret JACKSON married 1st John HEWSON 2nd Jonathan SIMPKIN
Mary JACKSON had child Ann JACKSON in 1815; married John BARKER in 1820
James JACKSON married Sarah FAIRHURST in 1824

Children of John JACKSON and Elizabeth FRODSHAM
James JACKSON married Margaret UNSWORTH
Elizabeth JACKSON seems to have married 1st Henry BIRCHALL; 2nd Thomas FAIRHURST

Joseph JACKSON seems to have married Sarah HOLLAND
Jonathan JACKSON married Rachel abt 1854 and their children were born in Peasley Cross.

Joseph JACKSON, son of James JACKSON and Sarah FAIRHURST seems to have married
Ann CARTER in 1850 and had several children, all born in Billinge.

Children of James JACKSON and Margaret **UNSWORTH (born May 31 1824 in Windle
Prescot)
Elizabeth JACKSON married Mar 2 1868 to Henry LITTLER in Birchley/St Mary's OR
St Oswald's Ashton in Makerfield.
John JACKSON married Elizabeth CUNLIFFE in 1872 in St Oswald Ashton in Makerfield.
James JACKSON married Alice LEA / LEIGH

**The parents of Margaret UNSWORTH were James UNSWORTH and Margaret HEYES who
were married on Oct 14 1821 in Lowe House Windle Prescot.

James was born 1790 in Windle, the son of George UNSWORTH and Elizabeth BATE who
were married Aug 12 1795 in St Helens Parish.

Margaret HEYES was baptised Mar 10 1801 in one of townships of St Helens, the
daughter of Thomas HEYES and Margaret PILKINGTON who were married Dec 29 1794 in
Farnworth Prescot.

Thanks for any light you or anyone else can shed on these families!!
Dallas Manicom
Nova Scotia Canada

APPENDIX S

THE HEATONS

By Paul Heaton

James Heaton & Ann Heaton first appear in the 1841 Billinge Chapel End census when they were living at Brown Heath. James was born 1821 and Ann was born 1822. They produced a number of children over the years as follows:

Henry (B 1840), Mary (B1848), Elizabeth (B1850), Jane (B1859), James (B1857) & Ann (B1860).

I have traced them through the census returns with their addressess as follows:-

(1851) 120 Chadwick Green, (1861) 5 Chadwick Green, (1871) 103 Hollin Hey farms, (1881) 136 Chadwick Green.

Apart from the census, which lists James as “a farmer of 46 acres” each census, return records James as a collier. I wonder if James was a collier at Brown Heath Pit? James died on the 8th January 1891, Ann died on the 23rd September 1891 and were both interred at Billinge Parish Church. I have also got a copy of their funeral card with these details on. Their daughter Mary (B1848) was my great-great-great-grandmother who herself produced a number of children. Ellis Heaton (illegitimate) was born 1869. I have obtained Ellis’s baptismal, birth, marriage & death certificates, none of which name a father, a puzzle that I am also keen to solve. Presumably she then married a man named Ashall as she then had 2 children by him - Elizabeth Ashall (B1874) and Charles Ashall (B1876). On the 26th August 1878 she then married Moses Phythian and produced the following children:

Jane (B1879), Mary (B1881), Moses (B1883), Ellen (B1883), John (B1887) & Catherine (B1889). These details were obtained from the 1891 St Helens census, which registered the family as living at 166 Twists Cottages, Clipsley Lane. Mary died February 12th 1922 and Moses died July 23rd 1922. I also have their funeral card with these details.

I wrote to all Phythians within the St Helens phonebook and obtained a contact via a gentleman called Albert Phythian (Marys great grandson) who furnished me with a copy of the family bible she kept which details all the marriages of her children as well as the names of their partners. If anyone is descended from these people I will be only too happy to furnish them with a copy. I also placed an ad in the St Helens Star and obtained a contact via Iris Heaton who provided me with a photograph of Mary Heaton and Moses Phythian. I am now searching for any documents relating to James & Ann Heaton (photographs especially) as well as modern day locations for the places that they lived. It goes without saying that I would also love to get even further back.

Can anyone help please?

Thanks a lotPaul Heaton

APPENDIX T

THE FARRARS

By Maureen McManus

ELIZABETH FARRAR and BILLINGE

Tracing my Family History was, for many years, something that I promised myself I would do 'one day'. I think I was deterred somewhat by warnings that, as a hobby, it was very addictive and time consuming and also by the family folk-lore stories that all of my great-grandparents came from Ireland and therefore records would be unavailable or even non-existent. I used to dream of tracing a family of "olde English yeomen" with roots going back two or three hundred years.

Early retirement was the chance to indulge myself. My starting point was my father's parents, married in St. Helens in 1904. I had never known my grandmother, Elizabeth Farrar, nor any of her family as she had died in 1925 when my father was 12 years old. I was surprised to discover that she had been born in 1879 in Chadwick Green, Billinge, a place that I had heard of but knew nothing about. The 1881 Census gave me the address Brown Heath Nook and details of the family; parents Thomas and Elizabeth and seven children, Elizabeth being the youngest.

Some time soon after that, I found myself one Sunday afternoon with nothing planned and decided to visit Billinge. I don't know what I was expecting to discover. I drove through the village and noticed St. Mary's Church, Birchley. It looked old enough to have been there in Elizabeth Farrar's time so I stopped to look around. I noticed many people walking round behind the building and followed them. I arrived at the doors of the Parish Hall on which was a notice announcing an exhibition of Parish History! Inside, the Hall was crowded with people and displays of all types. I soon realised that I hadn't time to read everything. Noticing a table with two ladies selling booklets I asked if there was one about the exhibition. They pointed to a man at a table in the middle of the room and said he was the one to answer that question. It turned out that he was responsible for staging the whole event and was just looking forward to it being over so that he could get his life back. He asked about my interest in the exhibition and couldn't believe that I had arrived that day just by chance. I explained that I knew nothing about Elizabeth Farrar, her family nor of any connection with St. Mary's. He then introduced me to several people in the room who were from old Billinge families and might be able to help me.

One lady told me that the reason for the exhibition that weekend was that the original Church Bell was going to be re-hung in the restored bell tower and that the bell was on display in the Church. If Elizabeth had lived in Billinge, she would have grown up hearing that bell. I decided to go across to the Church to see it. Walking across the Hall I had to pass a pillar with part of a display on it. The names on one of the notices seemed to jump out at me. They were a Farrar family with the same Christian names I remembered from Elizabeth's family; Ralph, Thomas, James, Francis, Ann and Elizabeth. The list was the Papist Return for 1767 in Billinge. I knew then that I was meant to be there but I didn't know then that my dream was about to come true.

THE FARRAR FAMILY 1702 - 1925

THOMAS FARRAR (16?? – 1745) and ALICE (16?? – 1739)

THOMAS and ALICE FARRAR are my 5x GREAT GRANDPARENTS. The Register of St. Aidan's Church lists the burial of Alice, wife of Thomas Farrar, Billinge on 6 December 1739 and of Thomas Farrar, Billinge, yeoman, on 29 December 1745. The only other information I have comes from Thomas's Will, which is in the form of a Court Roll so he must have been a Catholic. It was drawn up in 1740 probably just after Alice's death, as he leaves his Estate "the shop, Bawkhous and New Garner at the house where I now dwell " to his eldest son Ralph for " nourishing, cherishing and providing for me with necessaryes during my natural life and Decently interring my body after my decease " His younger son William was charged " to satisfy pay and Discharge all my just debts ". Ralph Farrar, Tom Marsh and Tho. Mather were named Executors and the witnesses were John Morris, Thomas Wiswall, and Jeffery Burchall.

RALPH FARRAR (1702 – 1761) and ELIZABETH (c1709 – 1780)

RALPH and ELIZABETH FARRAR are my 4x GREAT GRANDPARENTS. Ralph was baptised at Wigan on 23 November 1702. In the Will of Thomas Marsh of Winstanley made in 1732, Ralph and his brother William are named as nephews and beneficiaries. The Will also states "I give to the poor people in Winstanley the sume of fifty shillings, the Interest whereof to be distributed by the overseer to the most necessitous on every St. Thomas Day before Christmas" The money is left to Ralph Farrar to do as directed.

Ralph's signature is on the record of the Vestry Meeting to agree the Church Lays of St. Aidan's in 1749 and in the burial Register he is named as Ralph Farrar, Billinge, weaver, father of Elizabeth, died 1741; Margaret, died 1745 and William died 1752. Ralph's burial is recorded in 1761.

The rest of the family are listed on the Papist Return for Billinge in 1767. Names and ages are shown as – Elizabeth (58), Thomas (29), Ann (27), James (23), Ralph (19), Francis (11). All of the family had lived in Billinge from birth and the occupation of the sons was weaver. The burial of Elizabeth Farrar is recorded in 1780.

WILLIAM FARRAR (c 1703 – 1770) and ELIZABETH (c 1711 – 1776)

William was the second son of Thomas and Alice and younger brother of Ralph. His family are also named on the 1767 Papist Return - William (64), farmer; Elizabeth (56); John (25) carter; Thomas (20) nailer; James (18) husbandman; and Mary (22). William and Elizabeth are recorded as residing in Billinge for 8 years, the children for 12 years. William died in 1770 and was buried at Windleshaw.

His Will describes him as William Farrar of Winstanley, yeoman, and is also in the form of a Court Roll. The Will states “ I do hereby Give Devise and Bequeath all those my three Messuages or Dwelling Houses with all the Outbuildings Land and Hereditaments and Appurtenances thereunto belonging called Farrars situate lyeing and being in Billinge unto my loving wife Elizabeth Farrar ” and at her decease, to the four children “ share and share alike ”. The Executors are named as William Marsh of Winstanley, Yeoman; Thomas Farrar of Winstanley, son; and Peter Locker of Billinge while the Witnesses were John Unsworth, Seth Hampson and William Vose. His wife, named Betty on the Memorial Inscription, died in 1776 and was buried at Windleshaw. Also named on the Inscription are John Farrar, son, died 1806; James Farrar died 1816; Elizabeth Rimmer daughter of the above John Farrar, died 1847; Alice Case died 1876 and John Case died 1886.

William’s son James who died in 1816 left a Will which stated that his Real and Personal Estate including “ the Land and Buildings where we now live... the cottage on the west side of my building in the occupation of Thos. Haslinden...the adjoining house in occupation of Peter Taylor... the Messuage or Cottage in the occupation of William Smith... the cottage in the occupation of Thos. Melling ... and them four Cottages lately erected by me situate near the Crab Lane in Windle ” were to be divided between his wife, daughter Betty and her children Alice, James and John. The Executors were daughter Betty, John Rogerson and James Bassonett with John Rogerson, George Taylor and Ricd. Borrows as witnesses.

RALPH FARRAR (c1748 – 1812) and JANE FAIRCLOUGH

RALPH and JANE FARRAR are my 3x GREAT GRANDPARENTS. Ralph was the sixth child of Ralph and Elizabeth Farrar. The 1767 Papist Return gives his age as 19 years, residence in Billinge 19 years and occupation as weaver. He married Jane Fairclough in 1803 at Farnworth, near Prescott. St. Aidan’s Register records his death in 1812 and His Will names him as Ralph Farrar of Windle, yeoman. His Real and Personal Estates “the Messuage and Tenement-Buildings and Land which I now occupy in Windle “ and “ my Messuages and Land In Billinge ” are bequeathed to his wife Jane and his sons John and Ralph, or if the sons die before the age of 21, at his wife’s death to his nephew John Farrar of Windle, Check-manufacturer and William Fairclough, “son of my wife.” He also states “ it is my wish that my Sons do follow the Roman Catholic persuasion”. Executors were Jane, his wife, friend and beneficiary Simon Dixon of Billinge, chairmaker and James Twist of Parr, Husbandman. Witnesses were Henry Bridge, Jonathan Case and Tho. Sherratt.

THOMAS FARRAR (c1738 – 1803)

Thomas was the eldest child of Ralph and Elizabeth, age 29 in 1767, occupation weaver and had lived in Billinge from birth. When he died in 1803, his Will named him as Thomas Farrar of Billinge, yeoman, and his “ Estates Lyeing and being in Billinge and Windle ” were to be divided between his two brothers, James and Ralph who were also appointed Executors together with Thomas Marsh. Witnesses were William Marsh, John Marsh and John Mather.

JAMES FARRAR (c1744 – 1817)

James was the fourth child of Ralph and Elizabeth, age 23 in 1767, occupation weaver, in Billinge from birth. The Windleshaw Record of Burials records his death in 1817 and his residence as Billinge. His son was John Farrar of Billinge, who is named in Baines Lancashire Directory 1824 with William Fairhurst as “Check Manufacturers”. John Farrar died in 1827 when Letters of Administration were granted to his widow, Elizabeth, the other signatures being Thomas Berry of Winstanley, servant man, and John Barlow of Wigan, manufacturer.

FRANCIS FARRAR (c1756 – 1801)

Francis was the youngest child of Ralph and Elizabeth, age 11 in 1767, residence in Billinge from birth and a weaver. St. Aidan’s Parish Register records his burial as 1801 but it was not until 1829 that Letters of Administration were granted to John Farrar of Windle, lawful nephew and next of kin, when Francis was described as “a Bachelor deceased without Parent, Brother or Sister, Uncle, Aunt, child or Grandchild”. The other signatures were those of Simon Dixon, chairmaker, and John Mather of Billinge, Farmer.

JOHN FARRAR (1803 -??) and ANN MATHER (1803 -??)

JOHN and ANN FARRAR are my 2x GREAT GRANDPARENTS. John was the elder son of Ralph and Jane, baptised at St. Mary’s, the godparents being William Marsh and Ellen Birchall. The 1841 Census shows them living at Birchley Gate with five sons, Ralph (12), James (10), Francis (8) Thomas (6) and John (4) John’s occupation is given as Ag. Labourer and Ann’s as cotton weaver.

By 1851 Ann was a widow, living at 91 Birchley Road, dependent on the children while the son’s occupations were Ralph, shoemaker; James, coal miner; Francis, Thomas and John all Coal miner Labs. Also living with them was Ellen Lowe age 6, niece, a scholar. All the residents had been born in Billinge. The eldest son, Ralph, appears again on the same Census at 18 Chapel Brow, the home of William Knowles, cordwainer and Beerseller; his wife Mary and 7 children. Also named are Thomas Knowles, brother; Wm. Bold, lodger, Thomas Welsh and Ralph Farrar, visitors. The occupation of the last three was shoemaker.

In 1861 Ann with James, Thomas, John and Helen Lowe was living at 8 Lower Rant. Ralph had married Jane Knowles, daughter of James and Alice Knowles of Winstanley at St.Mary’s and they were living at 10 Lower Rant with their son John age 1. Francis married Teresa O’Gorman and their daughter Ann Frances Farrar was baptised at St. Mary’s in 1864.

The 1881 Census records Ann Farrar, widow, age 78, living at Moss Bank, Windle with Alice A. Mather age 18, granddaughter, occupation teacher. Ralph and Jane’s address is given as Birchley Road, Lower Rant, and living with them are John, 21; James, 18; William, 14 and Richard, 3. Jane Farrar died in November 1881 and was buried at St. Mary’s. Ralph died in 1899 and was buried with her.

THOMAS FARRAR (1835 -?? and ELIZABETH MIDDLEHURST (1846 -??)

THOMAS and ELIZABETH FARRAR are my GREAT GRANDPARENTS. Thomas was the fourth child of John and Ann Farrar, baptised at St. Mary's, William Rowe and Mary Pennington being the godparents. In 1865 he married Elizabeth Middlehurst, daughter of John Middlehurst and Margaret Sumner of Moss Bank, Windle, at St. Helens Parish Church.

The 1881 Census shows the family living at 124 Brown Heath Nook, Billinge with Thomas age 46, coal miner, Elizabeth 35, and seven children: Joshua, 14, a farm labourer born in Windle, Ann, 12, born in Haydock, Margaret, 10, born in St. Helens, John, Thomas, Mary, and Elizabeth all born in Billinge. St. Mary's Register records the baptisms of the children with members of the family and friends as godparents - Ralph and Jane Farrar, John Gaffney, Mary Foster and Sarah Sumner. Another child, Esther, was baptised in 1882, godparents George Rigby and Mary Sumner.

By the time of the 1891 Census the family were living at 55 Owen Street, St. Helens with the addition of two more children, Joseph age 7 and Catherine age 1, both born in Thatto Heath. In 1904, the year of their daughter Elizabeth's marriage, the family were living in Roby Street, St. Helens.

ELIZABETH FARRAR (1879 – 1925) and JAMES PATRICK HYLAND (1881-1972)

ELIZABETH and JAMES PATRICK HYLAND are my GRANDPARENTS. They were married in 1904 at St. Austin's, Thatto Heath, St. Helens. Their eldest son was born at 74 Elephant Lane but by 1907 they had moved to Farnworth, near Bolton where the rest of the family, including my father, was born. Which brings the story back to where I started - except for one more addition.

Two of Elizabeth Farrar's sisters, Ann and Mary, married two brothers, James and Charles Garner of Eccleston in Prescot. Ann and James Garner had a son George, who died in April 1918 and was buried in Friedreichsfeld Cemetery, Condi, Germany. He had been engaged to be married to Mary Latham, daughter of James Latham and Mary Whitfield. In 1925, when Elizabeth Hyland was seriously ill, it was Mary Latham who went to Farnworth, Bolton to help to care for Elizabeth, the aunt of her late fiancé. She later married James Patrick and became stepmother to Elizabeth's children, George Garner's cousins, and, later still, my Granny Hyland.

APPENDIX U

THE WINSTANLEYS

By Eric Winstanley

It's strange how we embark on certain projects and later, when we think back, we ask ourselves, 'what if', 'why' or 'if only'? Such is the case with the compiling of my family tree.

I often think back to seven years ago, to that afternoon when for some obscure reason I decided to strip the wallpaper from around the window without taking the curtains down and without removing the television from the nearby plinth. It was only an afterthought that prompted me to move the TV to safer place. What a mistake! How was I to know that my back would collapse? Since then, and who knows for how much longer, I've been in constant pain and utter discomfort.

My time off work prompted next-door neighbour John to pay a visit and try to help fill my time by showing me the computer he'd acquired on retirement. He just had to show me what it was capable of and how he'd been spending his newly acquired free time. What he showed me was how to compile a family tree. Both his computer and the family tree package were almost antique compared to the packages we have at our disposal these days.

That was the start. I attacked the project of compiling notes and asking my parents questions with vigour, although when I resumed work the project was put on the back burner. When I acquired my own computer with a family tree programme in 1999, the project was resurrected.

I'd retained all the information obtained previously. Now I had to dissect and re-input it into the new package - a far cry from my neighbour's antique version. To compliment already acquired information came more searching questions for family and friends. Some of these questions were for confirmation and others were more probing.

It helps if there's someone around to ask questions of and if that person has a good memory. In this respect I was lucky. While his recent memory is a little shaky, my father's distant memory is excellent - when you're in your eighties it doesn't half help. That isn't to say he was alone in furnishing me with family connections and other relevant information. My mother had her input. She hasn't as much information as my dad but she would, and still does, throw in a new name occasionally to trigger another memory tester. Another useful source of information has been visits to local graveyards to verify dates and confirm certain statistics.

My family tree centres around two villages - Downall Green and Billinge - and the surrounding countryside. They are very closely situated; even more so nowadays with all the new estates and new roads, nevertheless they are still uniquely identifiable.

DOWNALL GREEN

My mother has always said that around the time she was born, 1922, there were only three families in the village of Downall Green – the Lowes, the Shaws and the Fairhursts. The 1881 census confirms this, albeit not as literally as my mother would have me believe. When you consider that my mother, Lizzie Ashton to her friends, Elizabeth Winstanley to officialdom, has only lived in two houses all her life and these are two doors apart in Spindle Hillock, then she must know what she is talking about.

You can paint a fair picture of the past was from census information. Rectory Road doesn't appear to have changed much. In 1881 there was the shop at the bottom (number one), the Blue Bell Inn at the other end and further on the Church of Holy Trinity. In between we find a sprinkling of names with possible family connections. Shaws occupied the first three houses. Because Shaw, Lowe and Fairhurst are names in my family tree, I'm pursuing their relationships with extra interest. The same kind of family connection possibilities occurs in Downall Green, Brocstedes (Brocstedge in the census), Leyland Green Road, Moss Lane (Billinge Road to modern day inhabitants), Tapster's Moss and up to Simms Lane End. Shaws, Lowes and Fairhursts occur in these streets also.

BILLINGE

The other side of my family lies in the other village – Billinge. This is my dad's territory and we still have family living in Billinge. My dad's cousins live in Rainford Road and his brother lives with his wife in Park Road, Longshaw.

At this point, I would like to go back some 18 months. Having arrived early at the History Shop in Wigan, I was waiting for the doors to open when I entered into conversation with a chap who'd just chained his cycle to the rail and approached me in a friendly fashion.

We initially passed the time of day. When the pleasantries were over, he asked what I was researching. I said that I was just embarking on my family tree research and was that day looking at the registers of St. Aidans Billinge. He took a keen interest in this information. When my two-hour session at the microfilm viewer was over and I was about to leave, a voice from the other end of the room beckoned me over.

"My name is, Joe Taylor, how have you gone on?"

It was the cyclist. He was soon appraising my finds with interest and offering possible help. It was obvious he knew Billinge, had an idea who my dad was and knew the Winstanley family. We must have talked for about a good 45 minutes. As my parking time was almost up, I left, but not before we had exchanged phone numbers and I'd received an offer of assistance, from my new friend, with computer related work. He offered to come around to the house and help me set up with varying family tree related projects on the Internet; something at that time that I was completely ignorant about

You may well be wondering what on earth this episode has to do with compiling my family tree? I mention it because, as I stated at the beginning, life is full of 'what ifs'. If I hadn't arrived at the History Shop early that day I would probably not have encountered Joe Taylor and he would not have met me. Still wandering? Some eighteen months after this meeting, I was in bed with flu when my wife came into the bedroom and told me that Joe Taylor was on the phone and wanted to speak to me. Having forgotten about our little chat in Wigan, the name was a little cloudy. I picked up the phone and realised in seconds who it was.

The purpose of his call was twofold. First, he'd come in contact with an ex Billinger, living in Shropshire, trying to trace her Winstanley connections. He had instinctively thought of me and wanted to put us in contact with each other. Secondly, he wanted me to have input into a 'History of Billinge' that he was working on and asked if I could write up my Billinge connections.

Some time has gone by since then. I've spent some of it pondering whether I should or could write-up my Billinge ancestry. It seems easy enough to put down on paper but to have it put into print is another thing all together. There may not be enough information and it may not mean anything to anyone other than myself and family, but having seen first-hand the amount of work that has already gone into the History of Billinge, I thought it only right to give it a try.

My dad is Fred Winstanley, born at Alder Lane Farm Crank in August 1918. From there the family moved, via Beacon Lane, to their home at 42 Newton Road, where I can well remember every Sunday catching the bus from Downall Green and going, with my parents, to my grandparent's. I can remember we used to catch the bus for our return, at alternative ends of Newton Rd.

My grandparents, Frederick Winstanley and Lydia Alice nee Green, had three more sons after my dad.

William was the second son, born and raised at Alder Lane Farm before settling down for quite a while with his wife, Freda Ablett, in Newton Rd. They have no children and are now living at East Mount, Orrell.

Thomas Winstanley lived with his wife, Lillian Penk, and their two sons Alan and Ian, with my grandparents at 42 Newton Rd whilst Uncle Tom embarked on the not too easy task of building his own bungalow at Park Rd, Longshaw. He still lives there with my aunt.

The youngest brother is my namesake, Eric Winstanley who can be seen on the St. Aidan's Soccer Team of c.1939 on the Billinge web site. He must have handed down his sporting prowess to me, as my dad didn't take an active role in sport. He was the eldest son, born in 1918, and spent much of his younger life in the army.

Eric divorced his first wife, Anne Bennett. They had two children; Carol, now living in Birmingham with husband Brian and two girls, Claire and Leonora, and Andrew, who live in Appley Bridge. Eric's second wife is Betty nee Sharples. They live in Sandy Lane, Orrell.

To round things off, I am the only child of Fred Winstanley and Lizzie nee Ashton. I live with my wife Janice at Fernlea Grove, Downall Green. My daughter Kerry is married to Gareth Morris and they live with their son Owen Gareth, at Bryn. Our son Martin still doesn't relish the thought of moving out and lives at home with us.

Having been born at Crank, one may not be considered as being strictly a Billinger but there is not much my dad doesn't know about both the place and its people. He felt somewhat aggrieved the other day when he encountered a lady who could identify him as a Winstanley but couldn't place his name. When he reminded her where he was born, she jokingly remarked that he wasn't a true Billinger.

All three of my uncles worked at the two Heinz factories in their time. My dad spent most of his working life at Thomas Crompton and Sons in Ashton-in-Makerfield, working as the painter. My mother also worked there in the packing department, where she made a number of friends, one or two being from Billinge. Ironically enough it was at the recent funeral of one of these friends, Marjorie Laithwaite, that my dad met the disbelieving lady.

I spent twenty years at Crompton's myself before moving on.

Tracing my Winstanley background has not been easy. My grandfather Frederick was one of four children but he was the only one to have a family. His parents were Thomas Winstanley (born 1855) and Elizabeth nee Hurst (born 1855).

Alice, their first child (b.1878), didn't marry. Neither did their second child, Thomas (b.1880). Both children were living with their parents at Longshaw at the time of the 1881 census.

Thomas, like his father before him, was a stonemason and did much of his work on St. Aidan's church.

Ellen Winstanley (b.1882), the third child, married Louis White but didn't have a family.

Finally came my grandfather Frederick (b.1892).

I can go back two more generations on the Winstanley side but don't know where they lived or anything about them other than their names. My great, great grandparents were Thomas (b.1833) and Elizabeth. I think Thomas's parents were Richard and Margaret Winstanley, my great, great, great grandparents.

I know that dad's grandmother's side of the family has a strong Billinge connection. Elizabeth Hurst's parents were Thomas Hill and Ellen Hurst. Elizabeth was one of two children born to Ellen before she married Thomas. Her brother was John Hill; forever known in Billinge as 'Our Nell's Jack'. The other children born to Thomas and Ellen Hill were; Ann, who married Thomas Ashall; Ellen, who married James Frodsham; Margaret, who married Thomas Melling; Alice, who married Joseph Haselden and Mary Ann, who married James Lomax.

In 1881, John Hill, the champion skater, was living with his wife Mary Jane Frodsham at the Rant and six children; Mary Ellen, Sarah Ellen, John, Alice, Thomas and James.

Mary Ellen Hill (Aunt Polly to me) married John Huyton Green, a brother to my dad's mother, Lydia Alice Green. After John died in December 1929, Mary Ellen married William Swift. Mary Ellen and John had two girls, both of whom are living in Rainford Road - Mary and Kate. Mary (Nurse Green to many of the population of both Ashton and Billinge) never married. Kate Green married Colin Sixsmith.

Sarah Ellen married David Liptrot, John never married, Alice married Thomas Fairhurst, Thomas married Julia Jackson and James married Mary Ann Fairhurst.

*

In compiling my family tree and doing research on Downall Green, I have lost count the number of times that coincidence has played an active role. It is surprising how many people are compiling their family trees or doing some sort of family research. One of many tools available for Family research is the Family Genealogy Forums on Internet. Whilst browsing these recently, I stumbled on the Fairhurst Family Forum. As the name appears on both sides of my family, I took a closer look. I scrolled down the messages until I came across a request for information on a familiar sounding name, George Fairhurst of Billinge. Carol Littler had made the request two years previously. I've since met Carol as we are researching the same families.

My Grandmother, Lydia Alice Winstanley nee Green, was the daughter of Robert Green and Catherine (Kate) nee Huyton. She had six brothers, Charles, James, Joseph, Robert, William and John. John and Charles retained the surname of Huyton Green. John Huyton Green was the same man who married Mary Ellen (Polly) Hill, mentioned earlier. Robert, (b. April 1852) and Kate (b. May 1859) Green were born at Aughton. They both married in February 1881, also at Aughton and came from predominantly farming backgrounds.

My great grandfather was Robert Green. His father was William Green, born 1810 at Lydiate. He farmed Rookery Farm at Rainford, a 40-acre farm employing four men and three boys. My great grandmother was Kate Green nee Huyton. Her father was William Huyton, born in September 1818 at Scarisbric. William Huyton was also a farmer, at Hills Lane, Aughton, where he lived with his wife, Lydia nee Georgson and family. Also at Hills Lane in 1881 was William Huyton's son John, on another farm that he shared with his wife Ann and family.

William Huyton's daughter Anne lived with her husband, John Prescott, her father-in-law James Prescott and her two children, at Hills Lane, where they operated a market gardening business.

Farming goes further back on the Huyton side of the family. William Huyton's father, Jonathon Huyton, born in 1795 in Skelmersdale, was also a farmer, as was William's father in law, William Georgson, born in 1791 at Burscough.

One of my Grandmother Winstanley's brothers, Robert Green, (Uncle Bob) and his wife, Elizabeth Margaret nee Hogg (Auntie Lizzie), born in Littleborough in 1891, also carried on the farming tradition. They had a farm at Eccleston that I remember going to on numerous occasions. With no electricity it was always an adventure. Once they gave up the farm, they moved to Ormskirk, where Uncle Bob was the envy of the market gardening fraternity. What he didn't grow in his allotment wasn't worth growing. He did a great deal of trading with the Ormskirk community, not to mention his relatives from Downall Green! Whatever it was that he fed his vegetables on it certainly worked. He and his wife both lived until well into their nineties, Auntie Lizzie dying literally weeks before reaching her century. They had two children, Harold and Mary (Bunty). Mary is living in Downend, Bristol with her husband, Raymond Prangle and family.

CONCLUSION

People have had all kinds of family heirlooms handed down to them through the ages; mine was my Grandfather's shed. He had the shed originally in Newton Road, where he used it to keep poultry. It was handed down to my dad who also used it to house hens and turkeys. My father in turn handed it down to me. I don't use the shed keep poultry but it's been used as a play room for my children in and is now a fourteen by twelve storage area for gardening equipment. It came with me from our last house in Hindley Green, where my son and nephew once began to paint it white, as they didn't like the creosote colour. Hopefully it will be used for some time to come, possibly as a play area for my grandson.

There are hundreds of Winstanley's in the area but I haven't been fortunate enough to discover family connections other than the ones already mentioned. I believe that should the door of opportunity open slightly, it could produce a flood of Winstanley family connections for me.

I have enjoyed writing this account of my family tree and hope that my doing so helps contribute to a successful venture into Billinge History. I hope that anyone reading this shares the same enjoyment. If anyone out there can help to with my research, I will be very pleased indeed to hear from them.

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APPENDIX V
THE BIRCHALLS
By Adrian Birchall

My Birchall Line - The Story So Far.

I am sure that what I am setting out below will need to be added to and amended to in the fullness of time but on the basis of getting the show on the road here goes! I should also say at the outset that I will include all sources and acknowledgements of help received. The improvements I am imagining will involve both people in more modern times and people farther back in time.

On Feb 3 1813 a James Birchall from Ashton married an Anne Copple, also from Ashton, at Winwick. The witnesses were an Elizabeth Copple (Anne's mother?) and a Thomas Hayworth. This information was taken from the Vital Records Index (VRI-Mormons). The VRI also gives the children of James and Anne. These were:

George b. Sept 8 1816 ch. Oct 6 1816
Eleanor b. Dec 14 1818 ch. Jan 24 1819
John b. Sept 9 1821 ch Oct 21 1821
Betty b. Jul 15 1824 ch. Aug 15 1824
Anne b. Mar 13 1827 ch. Apr 15 1827
George b. Mar 23 1830 ch. Apr 12 1830

Now moving on to the 1851 census we find living in Gorsey Brow, Billinge the following Birchall family.

James aged 60 a nailmaker from Ashton
Anne aged 58 his wife from Ashton
Elizabeth (Betty?) aged 27, a handloom weaver, born in Wigan
George aged 21, a handloom weaver, born in Ashton
Robert aged 17, a coalmine labourer, born in Billinge
Martha aged 6, a scholar, born in Billinge (Martha would appear to be the daughter of Elizabeth).

I am working on the basis that this is the James and Anne Birchall who were married in Winwick in 1813. The first George b.1816 had probably died and Eleanor, John and Anne had met the same fate or by 1851 they had left the family home.

On Oct 24 1852 George Birchall, aged 23, described as a collier (had he changed jobs since the 1851 census or was it just an error on the census?) and living in Pemberton married a Margaret Peet, aged 24, also shown as a resident of Pemberton but with no occupation. I'm pretty sure the marriage took place at Billinge Church, as the vicar presiding was Howard St. George who was the vicar of Billinge at this time. George's father is shown as James Birchall and his occupation is given as nailor (as in the 1851 census) which is the same occupation shown for George Peet, Margaret's father. It would appear that neither George nor Margaret could write, as they were unable to sign the certificate. The witnesses were a Thomas Berry and a Jane Hurst (I believe

that Margaret's mother, Mary Peet was Mary Hurst before she was married and so is Jane Hurst Margaret's aunt or grandmother?).

Turning now to the 1881 census, we see that George (now 51) is described as having been born in Ashton and is now blind. He is living at Overton (off Up Holland Road) with his wife Margaret (aged 52) and their daughters Alice (aged 11), Sarah (aged 9), Margaret (aged 5) and a granddaughter, Edith (aged 4). All the family, apart from George, is shown as born in Billinge.

We are now faced with some "interesting" questions. Where was their son James, who was born in 1867 and would therefore have been aged 13/14 in 1881 and who were the parents of the granddaughter Edith? Given that George and Margaret were married in 1852 it is highly likely that they had a number of children before James in 1867. While not all of them may have survived, if some did, including a parent of Edith, where are they in 1881?

In the 1891 census, George (61) is now described as a blind widower (clearly Margaret had died between 1881 and 1891) and is living with his son James (aged 23), a coalminer and his daughter Alice (aged 21) in Up Holland Road. So James is back at home. Did he return to help look after his blind father, following his mother's death, or was he only away temporarily in 1881? What about Sarah, who would have been 19, Margaret, who would have been 15 and the granddaughter Edith, who would have been 14?

The 1881 mystery of the missing James is probably solved by the discovery that the 1881 census does show a James Birchall, aged 13 and born in Billinge, working as a farm boy, living at Lion's Den Farm, Culcheth with Thomas Gormley.

Now we know that by 1891, James was living with his father George and his sister Alice. Around this time he married Wilhimena Parr who in 1881, aged 6, had been living with her family at Longfold in Billinge. The family included Hugh, aged 8, and the parents James and Susannah. The household was headed by the grandmother, Ellen Parr (aged 64 and born in Parr, St. Helens).

James Birchall and Wilhimena Parr had 2 children, James and Wilhimena (Minnie) who became the mother of Richard (Don) Lewis. James' wife, Wilhimena, died shortly after giving birth and Minnie was brought up by the Parr family. James, the son, was to own the petrol station near The Stork Inn in Billinge, later in life. Did the Birchalls bring him up?

Following the death of Wilhimena in 1891, James Birchall fathered 2 children with Alice Melling before they married. These children were John (born?) and Wilfred (born May 30 1897). James and Alice were married on May 28 1898 at Billinge with James' father, George, shown as being a collier. Alice Melling was 25. Her mother Mary Melling attended the wedding and was one of the witnesses. The other witness was Amos Marshall. Alice's father is not shown. James's address is given as 39 Up Holland Road and Alice's as 2 Longshaw Common. After the marriage they had a number of further children, Joseph, Albert, George, Nellie, Elizabeth, Mary, Alice and Edith.

Alice Melling was born on May 29 1873 and the 1881 census shows her, aged 7, living with her mother Mary (aged 34 and a shopkeeper in Longshaw) and sister Mary, aged 2. If Mary was 34 in 1881 then she should have been born in 1846/47. There is a record of a Mary Anne Melling born March 14 1846, the daughter of a collier, George Melling and his wife, Elizabeth.

Returning to James Birchall living on Gorsey Brow with his family in 1851 - there is an interesting development in the 1871 census. This shows, living on Gorsey Brow, William Fairhurst, a coalminer (aged 43), living with his wife Elizabeth (aged 46 and this I believe to be the Elizabeth Birchall in the 1851 census), a daughter, Anne, aged 9, a grandson William Birchall, aged 8 (parents?) and the father-in-law, James Birchall, described as a 82 year old ex-nailmaker, born in Ashton. As there is a record of the Martha Birchall (aged 6 in 1851) being the daughter of Elizabeth, is William Martha's son? Coincidentally, the 1871 census also shows living on Gorsey Brow Thomas Fairhurst, a coalminer aged 47, living with his wife, Elizabeth, aged 45, their 2 sons James (aged 17) and Thomas (aged 11) and a step-son, Henry Birchall, a coalminer aged 23. What's the connection I wonder?

At the time of writing this I could find no mention of George and Margaret Birchall and their son James who would have been three or four in the 1871 census for Billinge and Ashton. Where did they live at this time or did I just overlook them?

APPENDIX W
Greenfield House Intermediate Approved School
By Bert Morris

I spent six very happy years in Billinge, 1963-69, as a teacher at Greenfield House, which opened as a Boys' Approved School in mid 1963. The premises had previously been used as an orphanage and the people in the Billinge community were not at all happy at the change.

To understand why, it is necessary to realise that an Approved School was a sort of open prison for juvenile offenders and was administered under Home Office supervision rather than under the Department of Education. Billinge residents were appalled that juvenile offenders were to be housed in the village and I understand that a number of public complaints and appeals were made to prevent this happening. These were unsuccessful and Greenfield received its first "pupils" in May 1963. The Catholic Arch Diocese of Liverpool administered the school as an Intermediate School, which housed boys aged 13 to 17. The Diocese already had a Junior Approved School at Formby and a Senior School at Widnes. Greenfield House completed the range of provision for Catholic boys who were committed by the courts for a variety of offences. Committal was for three years although boys could be released earlier if their behaviour was satisfactory and the School believed they were unlikely to re-offend.

The school accommodated fifty boys and had a staff of three teachers, three trade instructors, two House Masters, a Head Master, a Deputy, various cooks, and administrative and ancillary staff. Although regarded locally as a junior prison, the school, like all other Approved Schools, did not lock up its students. As the staff numbers indicate they were closely supervised during their waking hours and had a night supervisor on duty in the dormitories when the day staff went off duty. Outside of school hours, the boys were offered a wide range of sports and hobbies including canoe building and canoeing, fishing, photography, boxing, handicrafts and swimming. The school has its own mini-bus and outdoor education including hiking; camping and map reading was a regular activity. The school functioned as a regular boarding school and its pupils were soon frequently seen around the village on their way to the new library, to church at St Mary's and to the shops, particularly Brown's Hardware. After the first two years local residents were happy to have the school and volunteered that it was less trouble than the orphanage had been.

My time in Billinge was a particularly happy time. Initially the three teachers lived in schoolhouses on the Windsor Road estate. I was the first teacher to arrive having transferred from a much larger Approved School in Bristol. When we arrived in Billinge at lunchtime one day complete with three children we found that the house we were to move into at 52 Windsor Road, was finished but had not been cleaned. The rooms were littered with builders' rubble and of course no floor coverings had been installed! And our furniture was to be delivered from Bristol at 8 a.m. the next day. The Head Master, Mr McCarthy, had assured us that "Yes the house was finished" and "Yes it was all ready for us to move into"! Not the best introduction to Billinge. When we later bought our own house at 26 Trent Road, we made very sure that it was finished and cleaned and fitted up before we even thought of moving in.

Moving to Billinge was a great experience for us. My wife and I, from Manchester and Salford respectively, had not enjoyed Bristol where we found the people reserved and difficult to get to know. The Billinge folk could not have been more different; warm, accepting, friendly and cheerful. Queuing up in Peggy's fish and chip shop was an education; the Billinge accent was so broad we couldn't understand a word. However the fish and chips were great and we loved it. Trying all the pubs was another experience and I found myself at home in all of them. Fond memories of the Stork, the Eagle and Child and the Midway, pasties and a pint of bitter.

What of the Greenfield House boys? Although they had all been in trouble with the law in their hometowns, very few of them were any trouble when they came to Billinge. Most came from Lancashire with the occasional one from the Potteries or Cheshire. All were very easy to get on with and from a teacher's point of view they were the best students I ever had. Not the brightest but respectful, enthusiastic, cheerful and appreciative - far better to teach than many classes in "ordinary" schools. Why were they there? Mainly because of the homes or areas from where they came. Certainly as people I found them great and would be happy to regard the vast majority as friends.

I left Billinge in 1969 and moved to Canada and then to Australia. Although I have no intention of moving back to Britain to live, Billinge would be one place I would be happy to return to if it happened that did "go back".

Thank you Billinge. Thank you the Billinge people and thank you Greenfield House and all the young men I taught there. Bye.

Bert Morris



APPENDIX X

DONATIONS TO BIRCHLEY NEW INFANT SCHOOL

Work on the building of the school began on March 8th 1898 and the Infants moved in on January 9th 1899.

A considerable proportion of the cost of the school came from donations made by local people. The names of the donors, listed by area, are given below.

Birchley District

The Very Rev Dean Powell
Mr Joseph Middlehurst
Mrs Priscilla Middlehurst
Miss Bridget McGrath
Miss Jane Bolton
Miss Elizabeth Maxwell
Miss Ann Beesley
Miss Rosalie Rowson
Mr James Jackson
Mr Henry Taylor
Miss Sarah Ellen Taylor
Master William Taylor
Mr Lawrence Beesley
Mrs Jane Eddleston
Mr James Eddleston
Mr William Eddleston
Miss Catherine Eddleston
Miss Alice Eddleston

Mr Thomas Boyle
Mrs Sarah Ann Boyle
Mr John Joseph Balmer
Mr Thomas Webster
Mr James Blackburn
Mr John Blackburn
Mr William Hampson
Mrs Bridget Hampson
Mrs Bridget Conroy
Mr Martin Conroy
Mr Miles Frodsham
Mr John Durkin
Mr John Kilmurray
Mr Ralph Pendlebury
Miss Louisa Pendlebury
Miss Mary Webster
Mrs Ann Dixon

Chadwick Green District

Mrs Margaret Mather, R.I.P.
Miss Jane Mather
Mr William Wilcock
Mrs Mary Rigby
Mr John Rigby
Mr Thomas Rigby
Miss Margaret Rigby
Mrs Mary Dixon
Mr Robert Dixon
Miss Mary Dixon
Mr Thomas Taylor
Mr Francis Taylor
Mr James Taylor
Mr James Gaffney
Mrs Jane Gaffney
Miss Mary Derbyshire

Mr William Dixon
Mrs Ellen Dixon
Mr Owen Nulty
Mr Robert Owen Nulty
Mr Francis Beesley
Mr James Cunliffe
Mr George Dixon
Mr Thomas Chisnall
Mr William Harrison
Mr John Gaffney
Mr Benjamin Massey
Mrs Mary Foster
Mr Francis Foster
Mr Thomas Wilcock
Mr John Wilcock
Mr Henry C Beesley

Mr John Derbyshire
 Mr John Beesley
 Mr Thomas Rigby (late of Startham Hall)
 Mr Joseph Houlton
 Mr Joseph Gaskell
 Miss Ellen Gaskell
 Mr Joseph Rigby
 Mr Thomas Rigby (Brown Heath)

Mr James Loftus
 Mr William Beesley
 Mr William Houlton
 Mr William Bold
 Miss Elizabeth Hurst
 Mrs Alice Rigby
 Mrs Ellen Fenny
 Mr Charles Brannon

Rainford Road District

Mr Frederick Leather
 Master Frederick Joseph Leather
 Miss Mary Teresa leather
 Miss Sarah Ellison
 Miss Constance Ellison
 Miss Annie Ellison
 Mr Henry Wilson
 Mr George Burrows, Sen
 Mr George Burrows
 Mr Robert Pigott, Sen
 Mrs Ann Pigott
 Mr James Pigott
 Mr Charles Pigott
 Mr Robert Pigott
 Miss Mary Pigott
 Miss Eliza Pigott
 Mr Henry Liptrot
 Mr John James Quinn
 Mr James Moran

Mr James McLaughlin
 Mr Joseph Cook, Sen
 Mr William Cook
 Mr Joseph Cook
 Miss Mary Cook
 Mr John Morris
 Mr Thomas Morris
 Mr Thomas Hewson
 Mr Patrick Coleman
 Mr Mark Coleman
 Mr John Chisnall
 Mr William Chisnall
 Miss Ann Chisnall
 Miss Martha Chisnall
 Mr M Connaughton
 Mr John Connaughton
 Mr Henry Connaughton
 Mr John Power

Sephton's Fold, Fair View & Gorsey Brow District

Mr James Mc Laughlin and Family
 Mr Patrick Fogherty
 Mr Henry Bolton
 Mrs Mary Bolton
 Miss Jane Bolton
 Miss Elizabeth Bolton
 Miss Josephine Bolton
 Mr William Bolton
 Mr William J. Townshend
 Mrs Ann Townshend
 Master William Townshend
 Master George V. Townshend
 Master James Townshend
 Miss Phoebe Ann Townshend
 Mr George Bolton
 Mrs Sarah Bolton

Mr James Eddleston
 Miss Mary Eddleston
 Mr John Cross, Sen
 Mr John Cross
 Mr James Cross
 Mr Thomas Malone
 Mr Peter Malone
 Mr Thomas Roby
 Mrs Elizabeth Harrison
 Mr Thomas Harrison
 Mr John Harrison
 Miss Eliza Harrison
 Miss Ann Harrison
 Mr Thomas Atherton
 Mr James Fairhurst
 Mr Thomas Fairhurst

Mr John Fairclough
 Mr Henry Fairclough
 Mr Peter Fairclough
 Mr Peter Taylor
 Mr William Taylor
 Mr William Foster
 Mr James Hanrahan
 Mr John Mullin, Sen
 Mr John Mullin
 Mr Thomas Mullin

Miss Kate Roughley
 Mr William Roughley
 Mr Henry Birchall
 Mr Patrick Frayne
 Mrs Bridget Frayne
 Mr Michael Power
 Mr Michael Mitchell
 Mr James Wilson
 Mr Peter Wilson
 Mr James Green

Main Street & Billinge Higher End District

Mr Thomas Mather
 Mrs Margaret Cliff
 Mr William Cliff
 Mr John Cliff
 Miss Mary Cliff
 Miss Jane Cliff
 Mr James Swift
 Mr Geoffrey T. Crank
 Mr Edward Summer
 Mrs Margaret Frodsham
 Mr Thomas Frodsham
 Mr Vincent Frodsham
 Mrs Ann McManus
 Mr Thomas McManus
 Mr Nicholas McManus
 Miss Kate McManus
 Miss Annie McManus
 Mr John McManus
 Mrs Mary Cunliffe
 Mr Francis Cunliffe
 Mr Thomas Derbyshire
 Mr John Derbyshire
 Miss Sarah Derbyshire
 Mr Peter Frodsham
 Mr Thomas Gee
 Mr Levi Gee
 Mr Frederick Gee
 Mr Thomas Beesley
 Mr Charles Beesley
 Mr William Beesley

Mrs Kate Littler
 Mr John Littler R.I.P.
 Mr Richard Littler
 Mr James Littler
 Miss Elizabeth Littler
 Mrs Sarah Gee
 Mr John gee
 Mrs Martha Mather
 Mr Joseph Mather
 Mr James Mather
 Mr William Whittaker
 Mr Joseph Littler
 Mr Joshua Blackburn
 Mr Robert Ward
 Mr William Balmer
 Mr John Balmer
 Mr Henry Dunkin
 Mr James Dunkin
 Mr John Dunkin
 Mr William Gore
 Mrs Jane Green
 Mr Joseph Green
 Mr John Malone
 Mr John Frodsham
 Miss Alice Frodsham
 Mr Thomas Connor
 Mr George Grundy
 Mr John Wadsworth
 Mr Albert Cross
 Mr Joseph Ward

Billinge Higher End District

Mr John Middlehurst
 Miss Elizabeth Middlehurst
 Miss Kate Middlehurst

Mr William Fishwick
 Mr John Cook
 Mr Richard Rigby

Mr Henry Middlehurst
 Mr John Middlehurst
 Mrs Alice Rimmer
 Mr James Hurst
 Mr William Hurst
 Miss Esther Hurst
 Mr James Harvey Rowson
 Miss Helena Rowson
 Mrs Mary Rimmer, R.I.P.
 Miss Annie Dixon
 Mr Henry Stringman
 Mr James Sumner

Mr Daniel Hitchen
 Mrs Elizabeth Sutton
 Mr Henry Sutton
 Miss Mary Sutton
 Miss Margaret Sutton
 Miss Jane Sutton
 Miss Martha Sutton
 Mr James Huyton
 Mr William Rowson
 Ms Mary Ann Coxhead
 Mr Joshua Sumner

Rainford District

Mrs Elizabeth Middlehurst
 Miss Mary Ellen Middlehurst
 Miss Mary Smith
 Mrs Sarah Smith
 Miss Mary Agnes Smith
 Miss Phoebe Ellen Smith
 Miss Sarah Elizabeth Smith
 Miss Sarah Jane Cliff
 Miss Ann Foster
 Miss Mary Ann Foster
 Miss Ann Cliff
 Mrs Margaret Glover Hull
 Mr Thomas Seddon, R.I.P.
 Miss Valentine
 Mr Thomas Green
 Mr Joseph and Mary Houlton
 Mr Robert Houlton
 Mr John Houlton
 Mr Thomas Houlton
 Miss Ann Houlton
 Mrs Elizabeth Connolly
 Mr Michael Hopkins
 Mr John Hopkins

Mr Thomas Hopkins
 Mr William Hopkins
 Mr James Sumner
 Mr Philip Costello
 Mr Patrick Costello
 Mrs Margaret White
 Mr Thomas White
 Miss Margaret White
 Mr Peter Boardman
 Mr George Sumner
 Mrs E Lathom
 Mr James Higgins
 Mr Dominic Higgins
 Mrs Margaret Sumner
 Master Austin Sumner
 Master Stephen Sumner
 Miss Mary Sumner
 Mr Michael Burke
 Mr John Burke
 Mr John Graley
 Mr Michael Devine
 Miss Catherine Gore
 Mr James Duffy

Windle District

Mr & Mrs William Sumner
 Mrs & Miss Mary Jane Sumner
 Mrs Margaret Cunliffe
 Mr John Webster
 Mr & Mrs Peter Case
 Mr William Case
 Mr John Case
 Miss Sarah Ann Case

Miss Margaret Ashall
 Mr James Ashall
 Mr Joseph Beesley
 Mr William Beesley
 Miss Margaret Beesley
 Miss Frances Beesley
 Mrs Ann J Brookfield
 Mrs Flaherty

Miss Martha Case
Miss Elizabeth Case

Mr Henry Brown

There were several anonymous donations in all districts.

The total amount donated was £395 – 7s – 3d towards a total cost of building the school, including all fees etc., of £1050.



ROBY NOTES

From West Derby hundreds for Upholland Parish

Baptisms

Christopher s. of Henry Roby born upon Sunday being the 25 Aug 1650 01 Sep 1650
Katherine d. of Henry Roby born 04 Sep 1652 12 Sep 1652
Henry s. of Henry Roby born 30 Dec 1655 08 Jan 1655
Jeffery s. of Henry Roby born 17 Mar 1657 21 Mar 1657
Margret d. of Henry Roby born 30 Mar 1658 06 Apr 1658
Elizabeth d. of Henry Roby born 01 Dec 1659 10 Dec 1659
Jeffery s. of Henry Roby born 07 Mar 1666 10 Mar 1666
Vrsula Robie d. of Christo: Robie of Upholl and born 02 May 1644 05 May 1644
Elizabeth d. of Christopher Robie born 17 Jan 1646 19 Jan 1646
Jeffery Robey eldest son of Christo: Robey born 29 Jan 1648 30 Jan 1648
Jane Robey d. of Christo: Robey born 22 May 1650 26 May 1650
Hannah Robie d. of Chris: Robey born 15 Jul 1652 17 Jul 1652
Sarah Robie d. of Christo: Robie born 09 Dec 1654 11 Dec 1654
Charles second s. of Christopher Robie born 11 Sep 1657 13 Sep 1657
Rachell Robie youngest d. of Christopher Robie born 29 Aug 1661 01 Sep 1661
Elizabeth d. of Henerey Roby of Holland borne 01 Dec 1657 04 Dec 1657
Margrat d. of Henerey Roby of Holland borne 13 Mar 1657 14 Mar 1657
Rachall d. of Cristofer Roby of Holland borne 29 Aug 1661 01 Sep 1661
Edmund s. of Richard Roby of Orrell borne 30 May 1664 05 Jun 1664
Grace d. of Richard Roby of Orrell 20 Jan 1666
Jeffrey s. of Henerey Roby of Holland born 07 Mar 1666 10 Mar 1666
Humfray s. of Lorance Roby of Holland 26 May 1668 31 May 1668
Mary d. of John Roby of Bilinge 13 Jun 1669
Humphrey s. of Henry Robie of Holland 14 Aug 1670
William s. of Lawrence Robie of Billing 07 Apr 1671
Margery Roby d. of Ri Roby of Orall 08 Jun 1673
Jane d. of Edmond Roby of Orrall 08 Dec 1689
Martha d. of Christopher Roby of Upholland 01 Jan 1691
Richard s. of Edmond Roby of Orrall 19 Jun 1692
John s. of Edmund Roby of Orrell 12 Nov 1693
Eline d. Christopher Roby of Upholl: 12 Aug 1694
Christo: s. of Christo: Roby of Upholl: 10 Sep 1696
Margret d. of Richd Roby de Orrell Weavr 30 Jan 1724
Jane d. of Richd Roby de Orrell Weavr 06 Jan 1730

Burials

Parnell the w. of Christopher Roby of Holl 10 Sep 1630
Jeffrey Roby s. of Henneroy Roby of Holland 29 Mar 1657
Jefefrey Roby of Holland 10 Apr 1658
Sarey d. of Cristofar Roby of Holland 22 Feb 1666
Humphrey Roby of Biling 03 Dec 1669
Katrien d. of Robert Roby bast begoten 19 Oct 1670
Richard Roby of Orall 01 Apr 1676
Margrett Roby his daughter 04 Apr 1676
Robert Roby of Vpholland 18 Dec 1688
John s. of Edmund Roby of Orrell 11 Mar 1693
John s. of Edmond Roby of Orrall 21 Nov 1696
Grece w. of Henery Roby of Upholl yeoman 22 Jan 1699
Catherin Roby of Billing Widow 17 Sep 1700

Marriage

Robert Roby Margret Pickauanse 31 Jan 1612
Christopher Roby of Holland Katherin Sephton of Skerlmersdall 06 Mar 1642
Edmund Roby and Ellizabeth Bibby both of this Parish Apr 1655
C.T. Christopher Roby and Eline Heaton both of Upholland 24 Aug 1685
C.T. John Latham And Jane Roby both of this parish 05 Jan 1691
Lawrance Roby of Bilinge and Jane Wilson of Winstanley 03 Feb 1699

From St Aidans Registries

Births & Burials

Catran Roby died 2/3/1702?

29/11/1705 James, son of John Roby, was born, fourteen that year.

1/1/1720 *John* son of Michael, looks like married Ellen below 18/10 1748*

4/2/1720 Ellen daughter of Francis Roby, two of seven for that year.

12/5/1723 Margaret daughter of Francis Roby (nailer)

4/7/1725 Humphrey son of Francis and Mary. Buried 26/9/1727

23/7/1727 Humphrey son of Francis (nailer) and Mary.

29/1/1728 Ellen buried. Parents above.

10/2/1728 Francis nailer buried.

13/4/1733 Margaret buried. Parent John.

18/2/1738 Henry son of Jane

5/7/1740 Richard buried. Husband.

14/10/1748 Rachel daughter of John* and Ellen 14 that year.

5/9/1749 John buried. * Look for the birth

13/5/1750 Jane daughter of above.* look for death .

19/4/1752 *Michael* son of above.*

30/10/1757 John son of above

17/11/1754 James son of above.* check the name Jane?

12/2/1764 Betty daughter of above.

6/3/1768 Henry son of Henry and Elizabeth.

19/12/1769 Henry son of Henry buried.

10/11/1771 Henry son of Henry & Elizabeth

28/11/1777 Betty illegitimate daughter of Betty Roby.

16/3/1783 Peter son of Peter & Peggy

13/6/1783 *Henry son of Michael & Ann. 29 that year.*

21/9/1783 *Ann Wilson by Edmund & Ann*

6/3/1786 Betty by Michael & Ann Roby

12/4/1788 Ellen Roby buried.

27/12/1788 Ann by Michael & Ann

30/5/1790 Ellen by John & Ann

1/1/1792 Michael by above

2/2/1794 Ellen by above

16/12/1795 John by above

4/12/1796 William Roby married Nancy Mason.

26/11/1797 William by above

26/11/1798 William by above

14/3/1800 Abraham by above

27/7/1800 Charles Kenyon married Mary Roby. W Roby witness.

17/8/1801 Henry illegitimate by Betty

14/3/1802 Abraham son of John buried.

16/7/1809 John illegitimate by Betty.

6/1/1809 Betty buried *check this and above.

2/9/1810 John son of Betty buried.

18/12/1825 Michael by Michael & Mary.

9/9/1826 Mary Ann by Henry & Ann

15/1/1867 Elizabeth by John & Elizabeth collier

4/9/1867 Martha by James & Rachel collier

6/4/1868 William by Simon & Elizabeth collier

3/10/1868 John illegitimate by Ann

2/4/1869 Darius by Michael & Ann collier HE

13/11/1869 James by John & Sarah collier

19/12/1869 Susan by Simon & Elizabeth collier

3/2/1870 Joshua illegitimate by Maria HE

25/12/1870 Thomas by John & Mary labourer

8/8/1871 Joseph by Michael & Elizabeth mason HE* look for death.

14/9/1871 Alfred illegitimate by Maria HE

15/11/1871 Jane by Simon & Elizabeth collier

15/6/1873 Margaret by Thomas & Alice collier

11/12/1873 Ellen by ? & Betty collier

6/1/1874 William by Thomas & Elizabeth collier HE*

20/7/1874 James Thomas by Thomas & Alice collier

14/1/1875 Maria by Michael & Elizabeth labourer
 6/9/1875 Rachel by Simon & Elizabeth collier
 4/11/1875 James by Thomas & Alice collier
 12/1/1876 Alfred by Thomas & Elizabeth collier HE*
 26/9/1876 Ann by Joshua & Elizabeth collier
 18/10/1876 William by John & Mary collier
 25/11/1876 Elizabeth by Thomas & Alice collier
 10/2/1877 Richard by James & Jane collier HE*
 7/4/1878 Rachel illegitimate by Ann
 24/4/1878 Joseph by Michael & Elizabeth collier HE
 23/6/1878 Oswald by Thomas & Alice collier
 15/3/1879 Hanna by Simon & Elizabeth collier
 7/6/1879 Mary by James & Jane collier HE*
 30/7/1879 Michael by Thomas & Alice collier
 18/2/1880 William Bankes died. He was the last male of a line that reached back to Richard Bankes of Bank Newton, parish of Gargrave, Yorkshire, who settled in Wigan then bought Winstanley Manor in the reign of Henry V111

Note. HE means Higher End.

23/3/1881 Rachel by Thomas & Alice collier
 5/7/1881 William by Michael & Elizabeth collier HE
 27/11/1871 Joseph by Simon & Elizabeth collier
 21/7/1882 Thomas by James & Jane collier HE*
 15/2/1883 Thomas by Simon & Elizabeth collier
 24/4/1884 Henry by Michael & Elizabeth collier HE
 10/8/1884 Michael by Thomas & Alice collier
 2/10/1885 William by James & Jane collier HE*
 20/3/1886 James illegitimate Long Fold
 30/10/1886 Caleb by Simon & Elizabeth collier
 Ann by Michael & Elizabeth collier HE
 24/5/1888 Rachel by Thomas & Alice collier
 2/10/1888 Thomas illegitimate by Margaret Long Fold
 11/9/1888 Elizabeth by James & Jane collier HE*
 9/11/1888 George by Michael & Elizabeth collier 26Park Rd
 26/6/1889 John by Simon & Elizabeth collier Main St
 12/3/1890 Joseph by Edward & Sarah collier 30 Rainford Rd
 15/8/1890 Ann by Michael & Elizabeth 4 Park Rd*
 6/11/1890 Darius by Michael & Elizabeth 26 Park Rd
 5/4/1891 Elizabeth by Thomas & Alice collier 55 Main St
 5/5/1891 Thomas by Michael & Ann collier 15 UpHolland Rd
 10/7/1891 James by John & Mary Elizabeth collier 4 park Rd
 22/11/1892 Mary by Michael & Elizabeth collier 1 Park Rd
 25/10/1894 Michael by John & Elizabeth collier 4 Park Rd
 9/11/1894 Richard by Henry & Sarah collier Main St
 24/9/1895 William Francis by John & Mary collier Picadilly

 4/1/1901 Elizabeth by Joseph & Rachel 28 Park Rd
 2/12/1902 Francis by Edward & Sarah 22 LOR
 2/12/1902 James by above * look for deaths
 18/11/03 Thomas by Alfred & Eva Emily 18 Park Rd
 25/5/1906 Jane by Edward & Sarah 22 LOR
 20/7/1906 William by Richard & Martha Jane 124 UpHolland Rd
 25/10 1906 Mary Alice by Joseph & Rachel LOR
 31/8/1908 John by John & Mary Elizabeth 4 Park Rd
 4/12 1909 Elizabeth by Richard & Martha Jane 124 UpHolland Rd
 12/2/11 Amilia by Alfred & Eva Emily LOR
 18/6/1912 Agnes by James & Beatrice May 10 LOR
 8/6/1913 John by Thomas & Ellen 118 UpHolland Rd
 11/5/1914 Doris by James & Beatrice May 28 Park Rd
 19/10/1914 Rachel by John & Lily 13 UpHolland Rd
 4/7/1915 Beatrice Anne by James & Beatrice May 28 Park Rd
 28/9/1916 Emily by James & Beatrice May 28 Park Rd
 16/5/1918 Jane by Richard & Martha Jane 86 UpHolland Rd
 25/7/1918 Edna May by James & Beatrice May 28 Park Rd

19/9/1919 Alfred by Alfred & Emily 24 LOR
 31/12/1919 Eric Richard by Richard & Alice Beatrice 33 Longshaw Common
 28/4/1920 Frank Dillon by George & Ann Dillon nee Roby 10 LOR
 14/5/1921 John Dillon?
 5/11/1921 Ivy by James & Beatrice May 28 Park Rd
 22/8/1922 Richard by Richard & Martha Jane 86 UpHolland Rd
 27/11/1924 Edward Hartley by Richard & Alice Beatrice 32 Longs Common
 1/4/1926 James by James & Annie 15 UpHolland Rd
 30/5/1926 Betty by James & Beatrice May 28 Park Rd
 8/3/1928 James by Richard & Alice Beatrice 33 Longshaw Common
 22/11 1928 Keneth Rowland by James & Annie 15 UpHolland Rd
 19/6/1929 James & John by James & Beatrice May 28 Park Rd

Michael, Son of Henry, married Elizabeth around 1850-51. Records missing 1849-1852.

Marriages

3/2 1698 Lawrence Roby Billinge x Jane Wilson Winstanley.
 23/4/1888 Henry Roby 28 x Jane Ann Anderton. Darius Roby Thomas Anderton.
 11/6/1894 Henry Roby x Sarah Rigby 6 Park Rd. Darius Roby.
 15/8/1903. Richard Roby x Martha Jane Ashall. James Roby.
 1920-24 (hard to read) James Lowe 19 Pemberton x Elizabeth Roby 21. 24 LOR. Albert Roby.

OTHER NOTES.

16/12/1924 Joseph Tinsley x Jane Ellen Atherton. Joe Tinsley. William Atherton Eagle & Child.
 25/9/20 Edward Abbot 34 x Sarah Ellen Tinsley 29. William Abbot Lime Vale Farm. Joe Tinsley Otterswift Farm.
 24/7/1912 Tom Gaffney Startem(?) x Jane Kearsley. John Gaffney Tom Kearsley.
 13/12/1905 Thomas Ashcroft x Annie Tinsley. Joe Tinsley.
 26/4/1905 James Robinson v Hanna Hayes. William Robinson.
 27/7/1904 James Ashton Tinsley x Margaret Robinson. Joe Tinsley William Robinson.

Hitchens. Thomas daughter Enid. Herman. Mary x Jack Holland. Marth. Baptists.
 Lomax & Compsons Long Fold. John Nickleson Lomax. Richmond lived there. Farmed at Birchley Hall. Son Richard Richmond, knocked about a good while when dad was young. Annie Compson married Bert Rabbit. Bert catholic Annie not but both buried at Birchley. Helen Compson x Chris Martlew.

The girls at Chadwick Green. Lola Williams x Ernest Sudworth from Newton Rd. Lilian Robinson x George Morris used to work on the farm. Daisy Millington x Fred Atherton Fair View. Mary Foster x Bill Haynes from Wigan via Mary's brother James killed 39-45. Haynes sergeant major. Ethel Tinsley x William Smith Longshaw farther Alf. Hanna Tinsley & dad used to take messages to Gladden-Hey Farm.

Lola Williams' father wheelwright made a cart for dad to pick up horse muck. Cultivated plot behind Masons Arms where Plum Tree Croft was.

The Billinge boys who used to chase the Chadwick Green girls were Fred Roby son of Little Oswald Roby from opposite council office. Albert Roby relative by marriage not blood. Len Rigby from opposite school.

Wiswall Farm. James & Mrs Robinson. William, James, Elizabeth. James died she married a Melling he drank the farm away went to live in Longshaw Common. William worked at Tanyard House Fram. Married Lydia Melling from Hair & Hounds. Children were James x Hanna Hayes = Thomas Lilian. Mary Ann x John Pendlebury Bradburn from Gladden-Hey Farm = 0. Margaret x James Ashton Tinsley from Otterswift Farm = Mary Lydia, Ethel, John, Hanna. This family brought up at Brown Heath Nook Farm. William x Clarice Cunliffe in service at farm = Stela, William, Joan, John.

Hetty Lomax x Edger Compson = May Compson x Lawrence Richmond = Alfred Richmond x Jane Berry = Audrey, John, Lawrence. John Nickleson Lomax by May Compton.

Tom Melling 27/7/1912 – 16/9/1998 @ 86. Had 8 sisters 1 brother who died @ 11. Deacon Providence Strict & Particular Baptist Chapel Haydock.

Baybuts. Thomas, James, Robert, Charles, Grace, Mary, Kitty, Ellen & Margaret. Robert, the priest, Grace, Mary and Kitty did not marry. James' children were Ellen, Gertrude, Florence and James. Thomas' children were Mary and Charles.

Plum Tree Croft was leased in 1777 to John Farhurst, a weaver, for 3000 years, for a peppercorn rent, by John Rothwell of Windle. The two cottages that eventually became the Masons Arms were built by Henry Fairhurst in 1779. History, compiled by Margaret Whittle, granddaughter of a former owner, is displayed inside the pub.

Kearsley from Arch Lane = William, Tom, John. Tom was a builder. Bill had the farm.

Phythians at Barrows Farm.

Tom Kearsley x Alice Ellen Phythian = William, George, Jane. William Abbot x Kate Phythian

Jane x Tom Gaffney = Edna. George x ? = Tom, Jane, Alice.

William x Ann Birchall = Frederic, William, George, Jane, Alice & Tom (died young).

Frederic x E Hart (Shaley Brow Farm) = Fred, Thomas. William x Annie Parr = Allan. Jane x Tom Liptrot = Alan, Stuart, Ian, Karl. Alice x James Hampson then x James Arnold (?).

John Birchall was born c1831 in Winstanley, married an Ellen Fairclough and had five children, Robert, Thomas and Ann born 3rd December 1859 and two other's yet to be located. At the time of the twins birth John was a Butcher. Ellen died and John remarried Mary Ann ? from Billinge. In the 1881 census he lived in a farmhouse at Upholland and his employment was farmer of nine acres. He started another family of four girls, all born in Upholland. They were Mary born 1869, Elizabeth 1872, Susan 1875, and Sarah Lottie 1879.

Thomas, then an agricultural labourer, boarded with Michael Roby and his family in Fir Cottages, St. Helen's Road, Billinge. He married Ellen Pilling from Downall Green. Ellen was the daughter of John Pilling a Smithy in the mine, and Ellen, whose other siblings were: John Pilling born 1858, Alice born 1866, and Robert born 1873. Ellen (the daughter) lived as a domestic servant to Robert Birchall, a widower at Slack Equity Buildings, Main Road Billinge. It could be that this was John's brother and therefore Thomas' uncle.

Thomas Birchall and Ellen Pilling married at Billinge Church on January 17th, 1882. Howard St. George officiated. Ann, Thomas' twin moved to 29, Park House Golbourne, as a servant to William Caunce and family. Thomas and Ellen went on to have 11 children.

Edward 1883-1894, supposedly bitten by a dog and developed septicaemia

Robert 1886-1969 married Charlotte Rigby

Joseph 1887-1932 married Betty Patterson

Anne 1888-1950 married William Kearsley

Nellie 1893-1973 married. John Melling – parents of the famous Peggy Melling

Edward 1895-1980 married Ellen Light

Mary 1897-1983 married Walter Gaskell

Thomas 1900-1980 married Elizabeth Turner - parents of Billy's Birchall, grocer at the top of Carr Mill Road

Ruth 1903-1977 firstly married Laurie Gee then William Atherton

John and Maggie 1905 - Maggie died in October 1905 and John in 1982.

John married Emma Blackburn from Rainford.

John's became a policeman in 1925 in Ormskirk and in 1928 he married Emma Blackburn from Rainford.

His job moved his family all over Lancashire but he finally settled in Blackrod. John and Emma had six children: John Edward 1929, Margaret 1932, Joseph 1934-1966, James Derek 1939, Thomas 1940-1946 and Sheila 1943 (information supplied by Ann Jackson, granddaughter of John Birchall).



Thomas Birchall 1859-1940