

# The Lancashire Society

## The Noise We Mek!



## at The Museum of Wigan Life

The Lancashire Society found itself back at The Museum of Wigan Life on Library street in Wigan on Thursday evening 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010 to meet and entertain members of the general public for the latest launch event for The Noise We Mek! project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

With fifteen people sat waiting patiently, Sid Calderbank opened the evening by explaining the aims of the project and sang Rochdale poet Edwin Waugh's Tum Rindle to the tune of "Robin Tamson's Smithy" – a tune specified by Waugh himself. The tune was played by Julian Taylor who continued to play whilst Alex Fisher danced in her clogs.

Alex then proceeded to give the group a demonstration of Clog Dancing explaining the different types of clogs such as everyday working clogs and dancing clogs. With accompaniment by Chris Pollington on accordion, we had a demonstration of different types of clog dance. Sid reappeared with his scythe for a performance of "A Mower's Song"



Following a demonstration by Chris of the audio equipment and an explanation of the way all the interviews we make will be archived, Julian gave us a demonstration of a small fiddle called a pochette used by itinerant dancing masters as well as a couple of tunes on his normal size fiddle. Sid then gave us a reading of a poem by Victorian poet James Brown of Haigh. It was a great

pleasure to welcome three members of James' family – Joyce Sherwood, her daughter Debra Johnson Brown and her son, Bradley. See Sid's account below of how he discovered James Brown.



A rendition of a song called "Wigan Pier" written in 1922 by prolific writers R.P. Weston and Bert Lee was given by Mark Dowding followed by the whole company joining Mark on "Leaning on a Lamp Post" – a song from the musical "Me and my Girl" but was taken up by Wigan-born George Formby in the film "Feather Your Nest"

Following the entertainment, everyone was invited for refreshments in one of the anterooms in the museum. Members of the society were able to chat with the audience and discuss the requirements of the project in greater detail and a number of the people gave us their contact details with a view to recording their memories at a future time. Some people suggested that we might like to be put in contact with people that they knew who would be interested in what we were doing. There was a lady who was telling us that her grandfather lived next door to the young George Formby and another lady who was interested in the songs of Weston and Lee. And so with the second public launch of the project, the Society looks forward to its next event in Blackburn.

James Brown, the story so far –

After the Lancashire Society had received the go ahead from the Heritage Lottery Fund administrators, and were able to officially start work on “The Noise We Mek!” project, Sid set about establishing contact with the local council arts, community and history departments along our route from Burscough to Blackburn. Through previous work he’d done in Wigan, he was introduced to Rachel Orme at the town’s Museum of Wigan Life, who was extremely helpful and directed him to Hannah Turner at Leigh Library Archives to help in his search for 19<sup>th</sup> century Wigan dialect poetry. So on the 26<sup>th</sup> May Sid found himself in Leigh library, home of the Wigan Archives. After a trawl through their extensive shelves, Hannah turned up a small book of local poems, printed in 1881 and written by James Brown of Haigh. One of the poems was an account of his visit to a friend in Burscough on New Years’ Day 1873! What a stroke of luck, not only local dialect but exactly on our canal route as well.

But more was to come. Hannah told Sid that she had contact details for one of James Brown’s descendants who were still interested in her forebear’s works – and would he like her to put us in touch? Not Half!

So Sid ended up on the phone speaking to Debra Johnson-Brown, who said her mother knew more than she did and she would get her mother, Joyce Sherwood, to ring him. Within 20 minutes Joyce rang – from Australia!! She’d been living there for some years but was due to return permanently to Lancashire in early September – in time for our launch event in Wigan, - perfect.

Meanwhile, Sid had uncovered a reference to a letter in the archives, written by James Brown in 1869 and with the help of Wigan archivist Alex Miller he found it. What a find – it was a letter to the Wigan Coal and Iron Company “soliciting patronage” for an evening entertainment he was organising – and the speaker was none other than Edwin Waugh (pictured right), “the Prince of Lancashire’s Poets!” Event to be held in the Public Hall, King Street, Wigan with the Haigh brass band in attendance.



Sid is still searching for more information on this event. Did it take place, did Wigan Coal & Iron support it and can we find the programme? If so we can recreate it – now that would be something special!

Back to the “Noise We Mek!” launch event in the Museum of Wigan Life on 30<sup>th</sup> September and in the audience is not only Debra Johnson-Brown but also her mother – and her son. With three generations of Brown’s family in the room, Sid read the account of his trip to Burscough as it was written, in the broad dialect of Victorian Lancashire. This was a unique experience for him and for the family.

We have more work on James Brown and with the family’s permission and Wigan Archives’ help there may yet be a very special event to look forward to.

Here is the text of the letter written by James Brown to the Wigan Coal and Iron Company

*To Wigan Coal & Iron Co. Limited*

*Oct 8<sup>th</sup> 1869*

*Sir*

*Having made arrangements with Edwin Waugh, the Prince of Lancashire Poets, to give an entertainment in the Public Hall, King St, Wigan, towards the end of this month, & being desirous of making it a success, I am humbly soliciting the patronage of the clergy & gentry of the town and neighbourhood. The Mayor, ex Mayor, J. Cross Esq, R. Darlington Esq & other gentlemen have kindly promised to patronize me & I shall be happy if you will allow me to add your name thereto.*

*Trusting you will oblige me with a favourable reply at your early convenience.*

*I remain sir*

*Your ob't servant*

*Jas Brown*

*P.S. By the kind permission of A. Hewlett Esq, the Haigh Brass Band will be in attendance*

*JB*

The poem that was read by Sid at the museum is reproduced below:

Lines on a visit to a friend at Burscough (Henry Ellis Esq.)

Owd friend! Aw never shal forged, mi trip last new yer's day;  
To thy grand heawse where things wur spread, so plentiful and gay.

Awve co'd on friends, ay mony a score, bud never hav' aw met;  
Wi one uds trayted me afore, loike thee an' thy owd pet.

I'd filled mi hert brimful o' glee to meet wi sich glad cheer;  
A mon loike thee shud never dee, bud live on yer bi yer.

God bless thi lad an' th' woife also, likewise thi childer too';  
May health n' peace attend yo' o, whoile th' world tha travels throo.

Tha's risked thi loife o'er th' stormy seas, an met wi rare success,  
Throo sellin' bacon, lard, an' cheese, greight wealth tha does possess.

Aw know tha's mony o' theawsand peawnd, an wish tha'd ten toimes more;  
Then tha could buy a lump o' greawnd for thee an' me t' shoot o'er.

Thoose friends o' thoine shud come agen, we'd have some jolly fun;  
Aw know they'd grin for t' see two men loike us wi each a gun.

Becose aw connod shoot a bit an happily tha'd bith same;  
They'd soon tell me aw wurnod fit for ony sich loike game.

Bud then whods use, aw shudno care a rap chus whod they said;  
Iv tha knocked o'er a brid or hare, on which aw could be fed.

Aw watch'd thi oft thad afternoon, tha looked so merry lad;  
When Lathom band played eawt a tune, I'd made me doance loike mad.

Bud wurnd aw vex'd to hear some thief, had crept i'th heawse throo th' fowd;  
And stole a greight big lump o' beef, so darin an' so bowd.

Aw wish aw'd bin at back o th' dur, wen he wur gooin eawt,  
For t' just give him a run bar purr, or else a rattlin cleawt.

Still never moind chap isno' free, although he geet away;  
There's one abuv thad trick did see, he'll have to face someday.

So neaw aw'll close this bit oth lay, an' hope tha'll hav' mi o'er;  
Ud Mount Pellier on new yer's day, Eighteen seventy-four.

Mark Dowding and Sid Calderbank  
3<sup>rd</sup> October 2010