

# Wardle and Smallbridge History Group

## Newsletter

Issue number 7  
January 2018

Autumn of 2017 was marked by the sad loss of one of our long time and valued members; Leslie Ostermeyer. A tribute to his life appears on the following page.



A combination of weather and health problems meant the postponement of some of our planned activities for the latter part of the year but Spring is just around the corner...

Our activities for the year 2017 were brought to a festive conclusion with members who attend the Wednesday meetings having Christmas lunch at the Riverside Restaurant in Rochdale College. For anyone who hasn't tried this place it's highly recommended.



Wind and rain, snow and fog may keep many of us indoors at this time of the year but our friendly Facebook followers will keep you entertained from the comfort of your nice warm armchair.

Membership is constantly increasing and is rapidly approaching the thousand mark.

It can be accessed by the usual methods or by clicking on the link on the WASHG website; it's well worth a look and guaranteed to keep you interested...

**Membership** of the history group, which gives access to our weekly meetings, archives and all activities costs only slightly more at a mere £5 for a full year. Subscriptions are due in January so there couldn't be a better time to join.

### *Contact us*

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Please leave a message and  
we'll reply ASAP



Leslie Ostermeyer, who was one of our oldest members, died in November at the age of 94. He was born in Rochdale and grew up there and his first job was as a trainee signal box operator. Although this job was a reserved occupation he left to join the RAF as soon as he was old enough. He married in 1942 and moved to Wardle after he was demobbed. Leslie joined the history group in 2004 and attended almost every week. He was a modest man and didn't like to talk about himself.

Leslie took on the task of collecting information from the Rochdale Observer that mentioned Wardle and Smallbridge. We have about eight large folders covering the years from 2004 until 2016 when Leslie became too infirm to attend.

In 2013 when he was ninety the group celebrated his birthday with a Birthday cake, although we could not fit 90 candles on it. Leslie also attended the Remembrance Day Service every year wearing both his own medals and those of his father who served in WW1. He was very proud to have his photograph taken with the Mayor and Chris from The Prince's Trust on his last attendance in 2016. He continued to take an interest in the work of our group and our Newsletter kept him in touch with what was happening.

### **Whatever happened to Bentfield Charles Hucks?**

In our last newsletter we told the tale of how Mr Hucks unintentionally landed his aeroplane near Nick Road Farm in January 1914 and had to be towed back to Manchester behind a milk float. Mr Hucks was something of a public figure, being the first Englishman to 'loop the loop' and was at that time on his way to Leeds to give one of his regular demonstrations of this skill.

In July of the same year he had another lucky escape when his engine cut out and he had to land on the sands below the cliff at Scarborough. In early August he volunteered to join the Royal Flying Corps where he flew over the German lines as an Observer to gather information for the artillery.

Newspapers repeated the story of how troops on the ground had witnessed him chasing off a German aircraft which was over the Allied trenches. Both of the planes were unarmed but they said that they saw Hucks pull out a revolver with his left hand and shoot at the German who then made for the safety of his own area. On another occasion an anti-aircraft shell passed through the



The Tornado with B C Hucks and passenger

fabric of the wing, then between him and his passenger. He said that he didn't visualise aircraft being used for anything other than observation and predicted that 'bombs from aircraft cannot do much harm'. He was soon invalided out of the RFC with pleurisy and pneumonia and died of double pneumonia in 1918, which was brought on by what became known as the Spanish Flu epidemic.

### Visitors

We often have visitors dropping in to our Wednesday morning meetings to look at our records or simply chat about people and places. Towards the end of November a group of boys and girls from the Wardle Cubs group together with Akela Norma Brandon came for an evening visit. They were welcomed by Ann and Dena from the history group and were told the story of this imposing building and enjoyed looking at the exhibits, particularly the detailed scale models of the three communities; Smallbridge, Wardle and Watergrove. A number of parents were amused to discover photographs of themselves in their own younger days.

### Wardle Library

With the co-operation of Wardle Library, group members have again created one of their attractive window displays. The theme this time is the topical one of 'Toys'. Material is included from the History Group's collections and the display which is changed several times a year is always popular with both library users and passers-by.



### Remembrance Sunday



Despite a bitterly cold wind and a grey sky, Wardle Academy Band led a remarkably large parade from Wardle Square down to the Memorial Gardens for the annual ceremony. The Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor Ian and Mrs Christine Duckworth together with around twenty five other visitors later called in the Community Centre where, as well as having a look at the displays upstairs were served tea, coffee and biscuits by members of the Princes' Trust.

### Little Town

Inspired by the temporary information board which was erected recently at this popular spot, we are working with United Utilities towards providing a permanent display which will allow visitors to visualise the buildings which once stood in this



compact community. As well as a productive farm there was a group of cottages whose residents included weavers, spinners and fullers, working both at home and in the factories; there were farm workers and quarrymen and a number of coal miners; all living here since before official records began.



## Smallbridge and Wardle War Memorial

More than eighty names are recorded on this memorial from the First World War. Because they were only given an initial and a surname combined with the passing of around a hundred years, many of them are unknown except to a few family members. Much work has been done over the years by group members to identify them, to record where they lived, where they worked and where they fought and died; in other words to recognise that they were sons, husbands and fathers, not simply a list of names on a stone column.

This is an ongoing project; recently the stories of seventeen men who died in the Second World War were told on our Facebook pages in the days leading up to the Remembrance Day ceremony.

## Knowle Syke Bridge

The bridge on Knowle Syke Street was closed recently for repairs. We have researched its history and that of the earlier ford through the stream, and are liaising with other local groups to discuss possible ideas for reusing the large stones which formed the bridge to provide a local amenity.

In the early twentieth century the nearby Whittaker Mill was home to the Mountain View Holiday Farm. All food was vegetarian, Board and Residence was only fifteen shillings per week and in their own words 'although no attempt will be made to imitate the attentions of fashionable boarding establishments, the matrons will do all in their power to make everyone comfortable and happy...' They spoke of 'a rushing mountain stream passing through the meadows, on the banks of which many meditative hours may be spent, within sight and sound of the dashing little waterfalls'. This picture of the waterfall below the bridge would be familiar to their guests.



In the mid 1970s Lancashire Life magazine chose Wardle as the subject in their series 'Discovering Lancashire'. This photograph shows that it was still recognisable as having been a working mill with the loading doors to the three floors. A few of the small paned windows remained in the top storey and are possibly contemporary with the 1815 origin of the building.