



The History of Low Hall Local Nature Reserve

Photo credits:

Wigan Archives Service, WLCT

pages 2,3,5,9,11,12,13,14,15

www.wlct.org/heritage-services.htm

Friends of Low Hall

pages 16,17,18,19

www.friendsoflowhall.co.uk

Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust

pages 15,17,19

www.wlct.org

front cover: Low Hall (Wigan Archives Service WLCT)
back cover: Low Hall LNR (Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust)

A

cknowledgements



We would like to thank Wigan Archives Service, WLCT, for their help and the provision of many of the historic images in this booklet and Joyce Haggarty for bringing the information and text together.

Front cover: Low Hall before demolition

Back cover: Low Hall Local Nature Reserve 2010

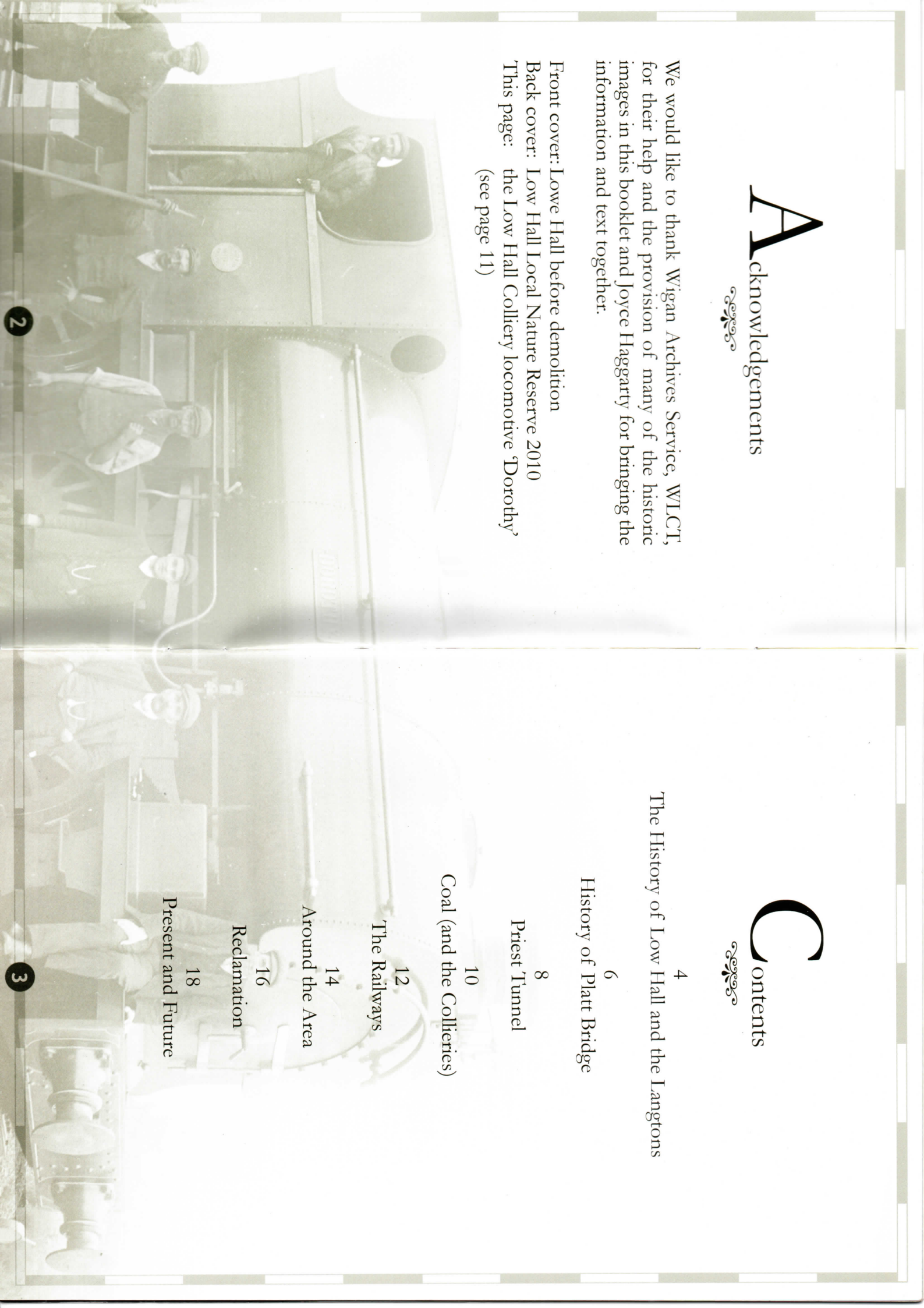
This page: the Low Hall Colliery locomotive 'Dorothy'
(see page 11)

C

ontents



The History of Low Hall and the Langtons	4
History of Platt Bridge	6
Priest Tunnel	8
Coal (and the Collieries)	10
The Railways	12
Around the Area	14
Reclamation	16
Present and Future	18



The History of Low Hall and the Langtons

Hindley was one of the 15 “berwiks” of the Royal Manor of Newton before the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. After this, it continued to form part of the Barony of Makerfield, with the Banestic Family as the 1st Barons of Hindley.

Robert Langton, Lord of the Manor of West Langton in Leicestershire, married the daughter and heir of the last male Banestic family (Baron of Hindley).

On his death, all his lands went to Robert Langton of West Langton. He gave the Lordship of Hindley and other lands to his youngest son Robert Langton, who descendants became known as the “Langtons of Low in Hindley”.

In the “Bains History of Lancashire”, it states “the manor and fee of Mackerfield, which extends over the township of Lowton, Goldborn, Haydock, Ince, Pemberton, Billinge, Winstanley, Orrell, Hindley, Abram, Kenyon, Ashton, Southworth-with-Croft, Haughton, Middleton, Arbury, Woolston-with-Martins Croft and Pulton-with-Fearnhead was formerly owned by the Langton family of Low Hall Hindley”.

In 1652, Abraham Langton as a “papist delinquent” had his estates sold for treason by the Parliament, but seems to have recovered some of them.

His son Philip succeeded him and was tried in 1694 for participation in the “Lancashire Plot”.

Very shortly afterwards he was succeeded by his son Edward Langton, who as a “papist” registered his estate in 1717.

Edward died in 1733 leaving his property to Catherine for her life, on her death to go to his nephew and nieces named Pugh.

William Pugh had Low Hall estate and the manor house of Low Hall, on his death he’s nephew Edward Philip Pugh of Coetmore in Camarvonshire, sold it all to the Duke of Bridgewater for £6,650, who in turn sold it to the Duke of Ellesmere.

Nothing is known of the permanence of the ancient religion in the 17th century but mass was said at Low Hall when the opportunity was afforded.

Dom John Plaicid Acton a Benedictine

was stationed at Low Hall in 1699 and died there in 1727.



Low Hall, a moated manor house in Platt Bridge, was the seat of the Langtons, lords of Hindley, from 1330 to 1733. The house and the Manor of Hindley was sold to the Duke of Bridgewater in 1902, thirty years after this picture was taken.

H

istory of Platt Bridge

Platt Bridge was formed out of part of Abram, Ince-in-Makerfield and Hindley in the early 1500's.

From 1851-1901 Hindley, Ince-in-Makerfield, Abram, and Hindley had lost their independence and become part of Wigan Metropolitan Borough.

One distinguished family in the area was the Peters family; they originated in Cornwall, and settled in the area of Platt Bridge in the 17th Century. Ralph Peters was born in Hindley and became an attorney; from 1707, he was the Town Clark of Liverpool a post he held for 36 years. The family had property in both Platt Bridge and Liverpool.

His eldest son Ralph Peters II became Deputy Recorder, Freeman, and Bailiff of Liverpool through the 18th century.

Richard the youngest son became a Freeman of Liverpool, took holy orders, and went to America, where he was Rector of Christ Church Philadelphia. Along with Benjamin Franklin, he was one of the founders of the Public Academy in Philadelphia, now the University of Philadelphia.

A 'plat' or 'platte' is a foot-bridge. Origins of other nearby place names include Hindley: a hind wood or clearing. Abram: Eadburh's homestead/ village or berrned-in land. Ince-in Makerfield: Island. Makerfield could be from Maecer, a wall, and feld, the Old English for open land. Maecer is pre-English, and could refer to ruins, probably of a Roman fort, approached by a nearby Roman road.

Early records show that there were pits in Platt Bridge in the 1820's. In 1839, John Dobbs and Adam Platt were working Bamfurlong Colliery and in 1847, John Price and Co. opened another pit. Cross Tetley and Co Ltd. Later took over all the mining rights, opening pits at Fogg's Fold and Low Green.

Succeeding priests, who until 1758 resided chiefly at Park Hall Charnock Richards or at Standish Hall, moved the chapel to Strangeways manor and then to Hindley village, this change was made in 1789. From 1758 there has been a Benedictine priest in charge and the present church of St. Benedict's in Market Street Hindley was built in 1869.

In 1528 Robert Langton, then "Chief Lord of Hindley" and Gilbert Culcheth, who held a manor described as "half a manor" and a dwelling called Hindley Hall, nominated "charter-holding tenants" to "appoint the places where coal and turbury should be taken for fuel", Langton as his right nominated three and Culcheth one. The "waste lands and platt", is where the coal was dug. These are now known as Amberswood and Platt Bridge.

It is believed that the manor was pulled down in the 1960's and the moat filled in the late 1960's early 1970's.

Priest Tunnel

(A PERSONAL ACCOUNT)

For many years, there have been rumours of a tunnel from the Manor of Low Hall to Strangeways pub, used for the priests to escape through. This could not have been the case; the Manor of Low Hall built in the late 1600s while Strangeways pub was not built until the 1800s.

So, was there a tunnel?

After speaking to a member of the Borsdane Friends Group (BFG), who was brought up in Platt Bridge, I believe I can now confirm that there was a tunnel and that he has been down it.

He told me of a “big old barn” with a lot of rooms in it (which from newspaper evidence), was the first house and manor of the Langtons of Low Hindley. He also remembers the “big house” which was taken down to build the tram depot (later the bus depot), which was the second house of the Langtons, built because they had had a chapel added to the first, and that was not a good thing to do at that time, so it was left empty for a few years.

Referring to the description, you can see on a map circa 1840 how close Lowe Hall was in relation to a property (marked on the map as Dover House) adjacent to what is now Spring View Cricket Club. A distance of approximately 400 metres.



The Rose Queen procession of 1903 passes along Moss Lane with Dover House Farm in the background.

On the land adjacent to Spring View Cricket ground was a farm “a big old farm with a big fireplace with a thick iron grate, you could stand up in the fireplace, and there was a tunnel from the farm to the old barn.”

He told me he had been in the tunnel but that it was blocked of part of the way through, he was told that it was for priest escaping from the “old barn” and that the parliamentarians had found it and blocked it off,

Is this the tunnel everyone has been looking for and was it blocked by the “Roundheads” or was it blocked by the building of the road?

The farm was Pollets, which was pulled down when “open cast” mining was started on Amberswood

Coal (and the Collieries)

In the ‘Victoria County History’, covering Lancashire published in 1911, Hindley is described as “a singularly dreary stretch of country, where pastures are scanty and blackened.” Of Platt Bridge it said “Distinctly unpicturesque, dingy grass fields alternating with collieries, pit banks and railway lines”.

Coal mining had taken place in Hindley and Platt Bridge on a small scale before the 19th century. Improvements in the transport links, first with the Leeds Liverpool Canal and then in the 1830’s with the railways, led to the expansion of the coal industry, with larger collieries and the grouping of smaller ones.

COAL is a sedimentary rock, generally falling into three types: lignite, bituminous coal and anthracite. The classifications are determined by the levels of carbon, oxygen and hydrogen present in the coal.

Lignite - a soft brown fuel between coal and peat. Lignite is used to generate electricity. A quarter of Germany’s electricity comes from lignite power stations. Its high moisture content makes it vulnerable to spontaneous combustion.

Bituminous - formed when lignite is subjected to high pressure. Turned into coke for iron and steel making by burning it without oxygen to get rid of volatile hydrocarbons such as benzene and propane.

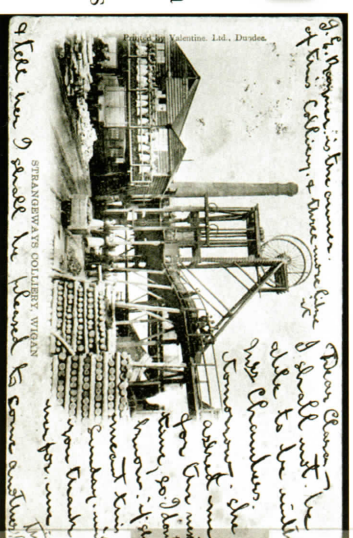
Anthracite - biggest carbon value and fewest impurities. It is too expensive to burn in power stations so is mainly used as a domestic fuel. Its fine particles can be used in filters.

LOW HALL

In 1908, this colliery had 708 men working underground and 231 working on the surface. Around this time a collier at the face earned 7s 0d (35p) per day, and a draw (pushed full tubs to collection points) earned 5s 6d (28p) per day. By the 1930 most of the pits in Hindley and Platt Bridge had closed

STRANGEWAYS

By the 1840 Strangeway Hall had three pits operating with a tram line running south to join the canal at Leigh, the pits were enlarged and a railway line was built to Crompton’s Siding near Spring Branch Junction, this line was one of many linking most of the collieries of Platt Bridge, Hindley Ince and Wigan.



An old postcard of Strangeway's Colliery

AMBERSWOOD

This was on the site of an earlier colliery and was reopened in 1894, it was taken over by Raynor who changed its name to Moss Pit, then to Gypsy Pit in 1907, it was closed down three years later, but opened briefly in the 1920's.

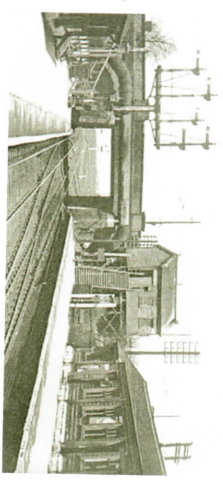
Another Amberswood Colliery was sunk by the Hindley Coal and Tile Co. in 1891 it was named Riding Mine Colliery, this closed down in 1910, although the brick works continued.



T he Railways

Hindley South Station was opened by the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway on the 1st April 1884, on the south side of Liverpool Road. It was called Strangeways and Hindley. Connected to the main line at Glazebrook, it was opened to goods services in 1879 with an east to north curve (meaning it could only go to Manchester). In 1900 a west to north curve was added to allow trains to go to Liverpool.

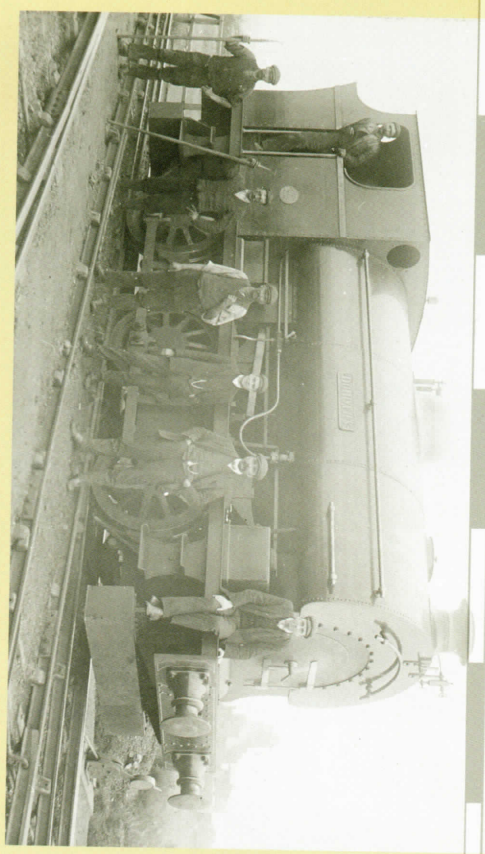
On the 1st January 1892 the station was renamed Hindley and Platt Bridge. From 1900 a passenger service was started, running to Manchester Central and Warrington Central. By 1903 there were eight trains to Manchester and six to Warrington each day, Monday to Friday.



Hindley South in the 1950s

After 1945 the line went into decline. The station was renamed Hindley South on the 1st July 1950. On the 1st November 1964 the Wigan Central to Manchester Central stopped at the station for the last time before it closed.

In 1968 the station was demolished, the track bed was lifted and the area, no longer drained, filled with water, which now runs into the "Flash."



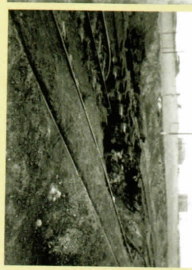
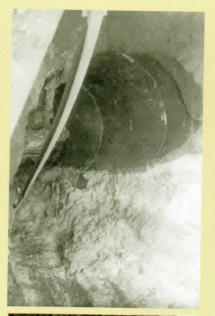
The doomed engine 'Dorothy' with the driver Ludovic Berry on the footplate. Berry followed in his father's footsteps who was also a colliery engine driver.

'DOROTHY'

On The 30th April 1945, the locomotive "Dorothy" and a number of coal wagons disappeared down a shaft when the ground opened up under them. The engine was operating at the Low Hall Colliery, driven by Ludovic Berry.

The last carriage fell into the capped shaft of No. 7 New Zealand Pit, dragging the rest of the train with it. The shaft opened up following a deterioration of its lining and constant passing of shunting trains above it. Berry refused to jump off the train and failing to save it, was pulled into the shaft with it and killed.

Both train and driver are still down there; a rescue was deemed impossible and the hole was filled in. A small memorial commemorates the location of the tragedy.



Left, 'Dorothy'; facing skywards down the shaft; centre, the hole left by the collapse; right, Ludovic Berry's memorial between Platt Bridge and Bickersham.

Around the Area

Sammy's Farm

On what is now Low Hall Local Nature Reserve there was once a farm, owned by a farmer known locally as Sammy. In 1880, because of coal mining, subsidence occurred and the land and farmhouse were flooded. At times the flooding was so bad that the water would even cover Liverpool Road. To prevent this a pumping station was installed on the land, which stopped working in 1937. It was eventually demolished in 1968 along with 6 cottages.

Council Tip

Hindley Urban District Council opened a tip on Low Hall in 1895. It was only in use until 1930 when it was closed down and covered with soil.

Bowling Green Club

No one is sure when this was opened. There was a pond next to the Bowling Club. The Bowling Club was closed and demolished in 1960 and the land ploughed over to prevent use.



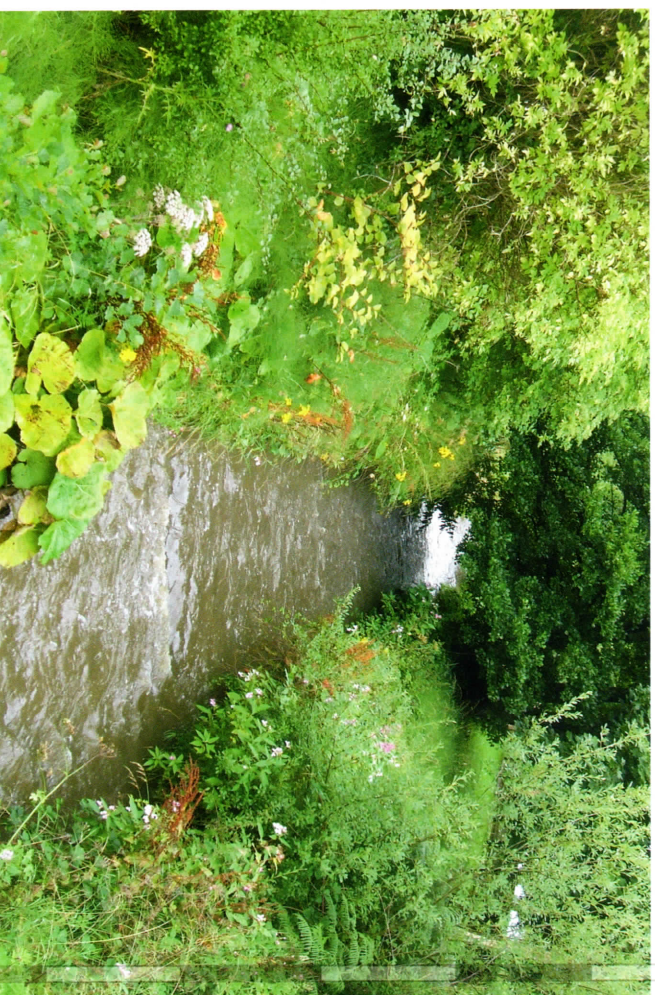
left to right: Palace Cinema and F Balls Herbalist Shop on Liverpool Road; Parish Church of St. Nathaniel's circa 1905.

Liverpool Road

Until June 1895 this was known as Stoney Lane, when the council decided to change the name to what we now know as Liverpool Road.

Borsdane Brook

In an attempt to ease, the flooding the southern end of Borsdane Brook was deepened and widened in 1925



Borsdane Brook flowing between Hindley and Low Hall

R eclamation

SSSI

(Site of Special Scientific Interest)

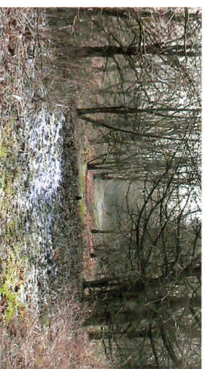
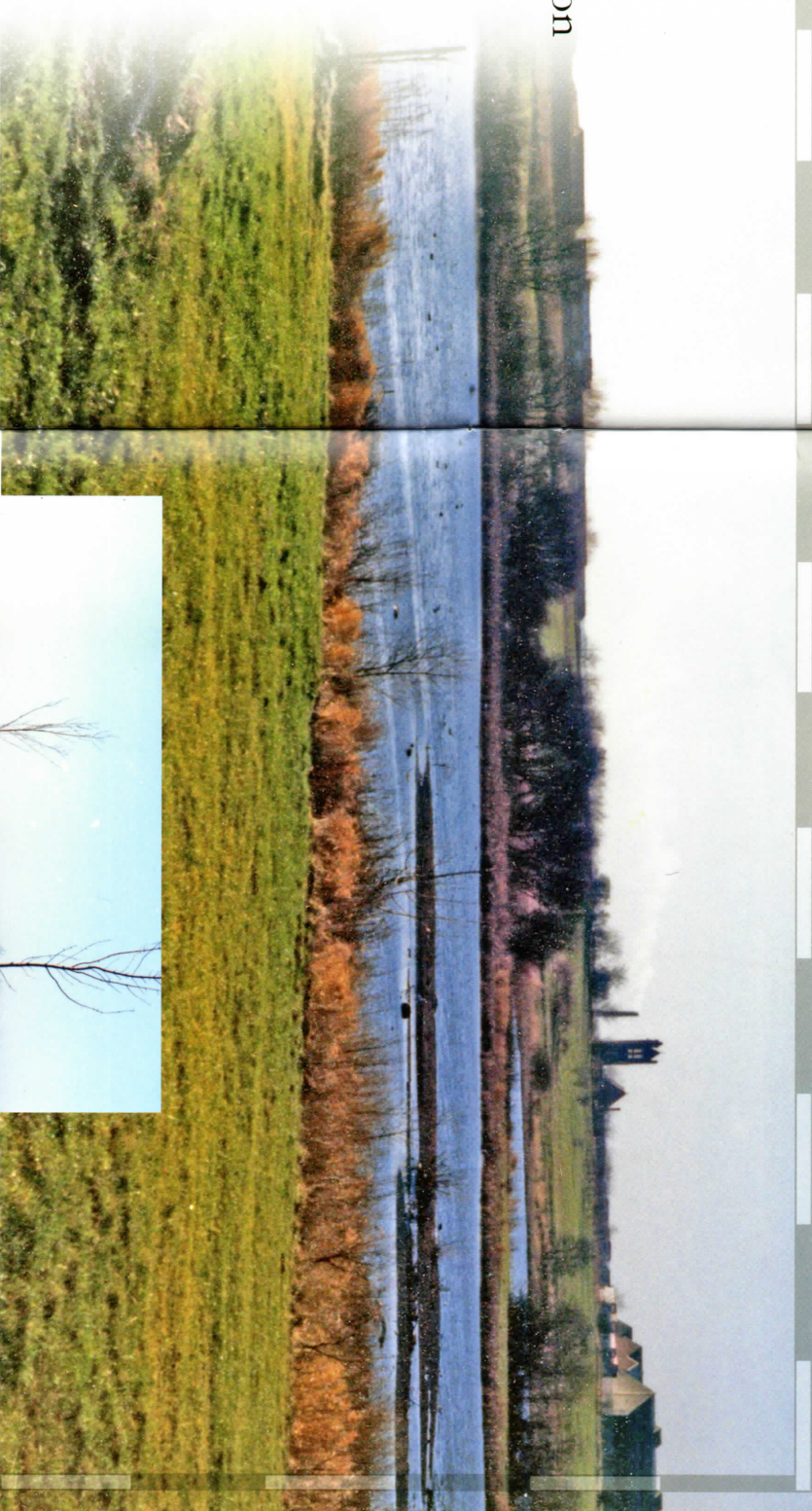
If you visited Low Hall in the 1960s you would not have seen a tree or much wildlife. The council decided to plant trees in the 1970s and early 80s. With the trees came the diversity of wildlife.

LNR

(Local Nature Reserve)

Low Hall was designated a Local Nature Reserve in 2009 and officially opened by the radio DJ and writer Stuart Maconie, (originally from Wigan) along with Mayor Cllr. Mark Aldred. With this status Low Hall has added protection for development and activity which could be detrimental to it.

In the same year the Low Hall Local Nature Reserve Group won the Best Environmental/Biodiversity Project for the transformation from derelict land to an ecological haven.



A woodland trail before...

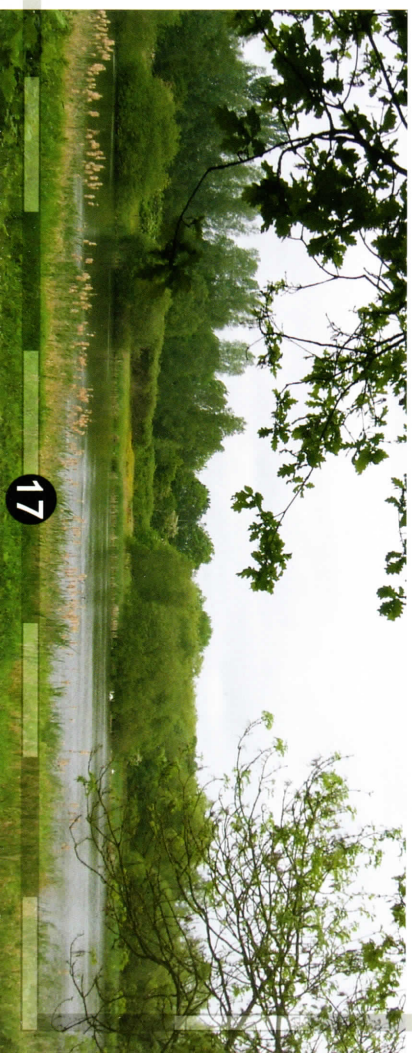


...and after improvements.



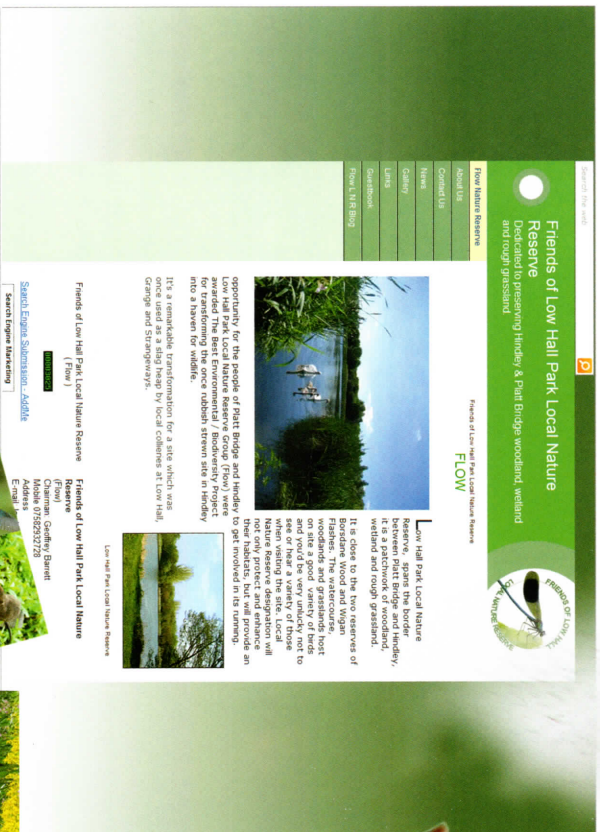
Main picture and left: images of Low Hall taken thirty years ago showing the views across the site before extensive tree planting blocked them out.

Below: what the view across the lake looks like now.



Present and Future

After decades of reclamation and improvements the work still continues. The Friends of Low Hall now have their own website and literature to promote the reserve and the activities that are taking place.



above: www.friendsoflothall.co.uk
right: the website also has a leaflet that you can download



Friends of Low Hall Park

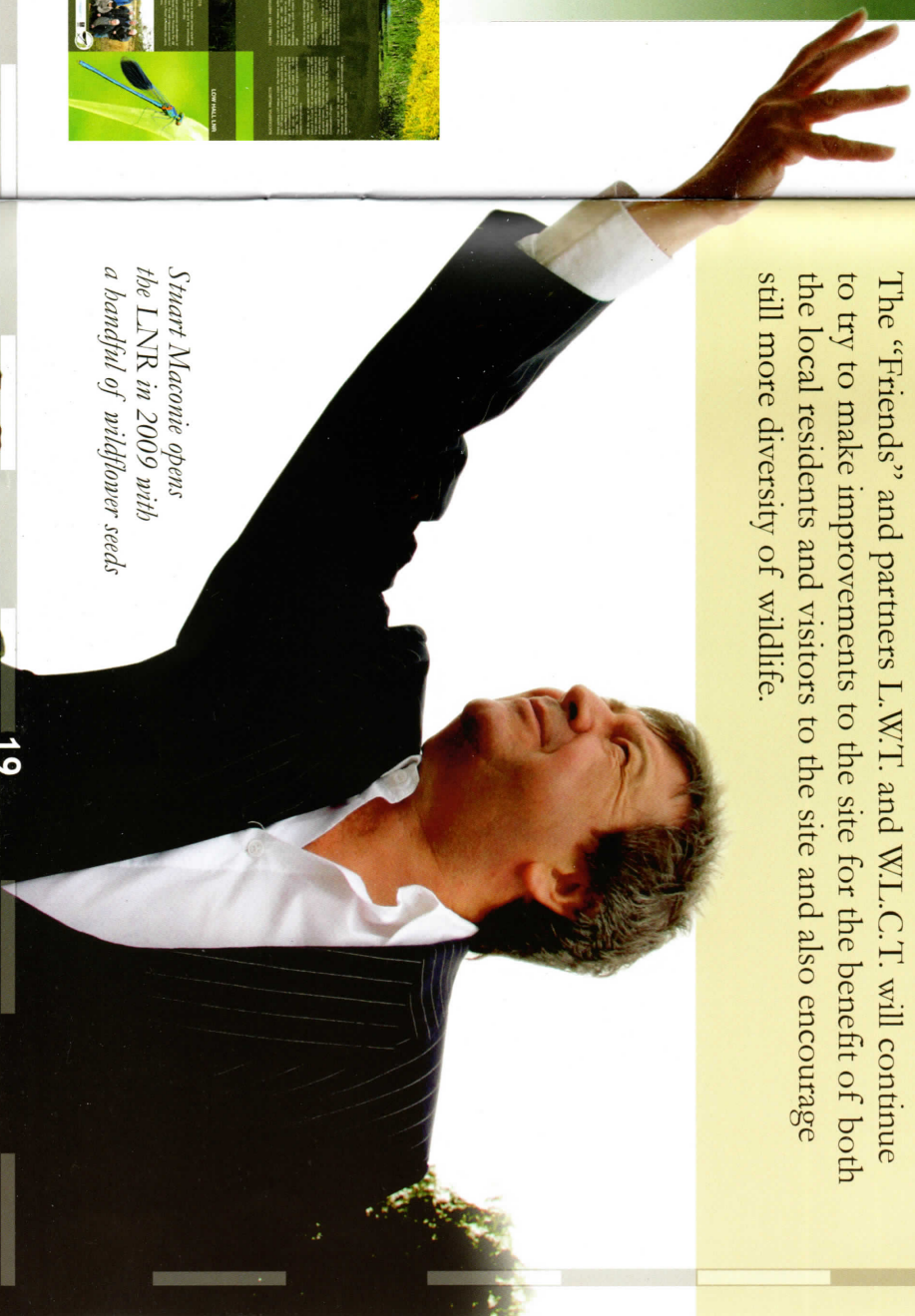
In 2008, a group of local residents got together to form "The Friends of Low Hall."

Working with Lancashire Wildlife Trust and Wigan Leisure and Culture

Trust and with a grant from "Awards for All", a new woodland trail was put in, along with an information sign on the car park.



The "Friends" and partners L.W.T. and W.L.C.T. will continue to try to make improvements to the site for the benefit of both the local residents and visitors to the site and also encourage still more diversity of wildlife.



Stuart Maconie opens the LNR in 2009 with a handful of wildflower seeds