**Trail Two Astley - Leigh / Coal and Cotton by Canal**

**An approximately one hour circular driving route of 15 miles / 24 km. with 28 stops so total time required around 3.5 hours**.

**START**

1. **Lancashire Mining Museum/Astley Green Colliery** (1908-70) The Clifton and Kearsley Coal Company sank the two new shafts off Higher Green Lane using the German Drop-shaft method, the first to do so in England, because of the water and quicksands encountered. The Drop-shaft or Sinking Drum Process involved forcing a cylinder through the heavily watered peat and loose layers to the rockhead and excavating within it.

**IMAGE 2.1: Looking up the Shaft at Astley Green** [https://lancashireminingmuseum.org/old-astley-green-photos/#jp-carousel-437](https://lancashireminingmuseum.org/old-astley-green-photos/%2523jp-carousel-437)

The seams went under Chat Moss which meant water was continually dripping down, making work very wet and hot. The standing Headgear, one of two formerly here, is the last surviving of the former South Lancashire coalfield.

**IMAGE 2.2: End of Shift at Astley Green** [https://lancashireminingmuseum.org/old-astley-green-photos/#jp-carousel-335](https://lancashireminingmuseum.org/old-astley-green-photos/%2523jp-carousel-335)

A colliery railway moved coal from the screens to the Liverpool and Manchester Railway but some coal was transported to power stations at Trafford Park and Stretford using the Bridgewater Canal. Sadly, there was a mining accident at Astley Green on 6th June 1939 when five men, including the manager, died in an explosion of firedamp. But in 1956, 36 year old deputy, Alf Hughes received The Daily Herald Order of Industrial Heroism (or ‘Workers V.C.’) for rescuing 30 year old electrician, Brian Walker when he was being dragged into a mechanical coal cutting and conveying machine. Alf was presented with his medal at Astley & Tyldesley Miners’ Welfare Institute (Gin Pit Club). Outside of the Museum, now a village green, once stood the pithead baths, canteen and medical centre designed for the Miners' Welfare Committee by architect C. Kemp. They were built in 1935–36 at a cost of over £24,000.

**IMAGE 2.3: New Pithead Baths at Astley Green** [https://lancashireminingmuseum.org/old-astley-green-photos/#jp-carousel-475](https://lancashireminingmuseum.org/old-astley-green-photos/%2523jp-carousel-475)

*Leave the museum, drive up the road and turn right onto Higher Green Lane.*

*Continue to the traffic lights on the East Lancs Road.*

*Cross the East Lancs Road and continue along Higher Green Lane.*

*At the end, turn left onto Manchester Road.*

*At the next two mini-roundabouts, continue along Manchester Road until you see the golf driving range on your left.*

*Turn left into Marsland Green Lane. Turn into the car park on the left just before the bridge.*

*2.* **Marsland Green Bridge** is one of several ‘occupation bridge’s built across the canal to allow workers access to the farms. It has wooden posts at either side of the bridge to protect it against wear and tear from towropes. Below the bridge are **narrows***,*a short length of canal with width room for only one narrowboat.

**The Bridgewater Canal** was built by Francis Egerton, the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater to transport coal from his Lancashire collieries. This section, the Leigh branch, was opened in 1795 to transport coal from the new Leigh collieries. Locally, it was known as ‘The Duke’s Cut’, a cut being a boater’s term for canals because they were literally cut out of the land. Following the Duke’s death in 1803, the Earl of Ellesmere inherited his estates. By 1923, the estates and collieries were owned by Bridgewater Collieries, a subsidiary of Bridgewater Estates which later became part of Manchester Collieries. The Bridgewater Canal was sold to the Manchester Ship Canal Company, now a subsidiary of The Peel Group.

The land that runs alongside the canal is calledthe **towpath** as it was originally used by horses to tow or pull boats along the canal. The inns and wharfs along the canal used to offer stables to accommodate the horses when boats moored up though not everyone could afford the fee for overnight stabling. Steam and diesel engines gradually replaced ‘horsepower’ but the last working horse boat only finished in 1960.

The opposite side to the towpath is known as the **offside** bank**.****A Coal Tipping Wharf** used to stand on the other side of the bridge on the offside bank, which served the Tyldesley Pit Complex of Gin Pit, Nook and St George’s collieries. The wharf was cut into the north bank and extended behind the houses along Marsland Green Lane. There was also a coal tipper and a boatyard with many of the boatmen who worked the canal living in nearby houses or on the boats.

**IMAGE 2.10: Coal Tipping Wharf at Marsland Green** <https://archives.wigan.gov.uk/archive/photograph-collections/astley/152991-pc200971>

The large house on the south towpath by the bridge served the area as The Bridge Inn pub. It was the extension of the Bridgewater Canal to Leigh that triggered the development of mining around Tyldesley by providing an efficient means of transporting the coal. John Darlington, owner of Gin Pit colliery, built a narrow-gauge tramway worked by horses, to transport coal from the pit. The wharf also served the Hindley Smithy. There is a winding hole here for boats to turn around in.

*Turn around in the car park and return to Marsland Green Lane.*

*Drive to the bottom of the lane and stop to look at the ‘Welcome to Leigh’ sign on Manchester Road.*

3. **Bickershaw Colliery Band.** On ‘Vesting Day’, 1st January 1947 the National Coal Board (NCB) took over 950 pits with their associated buildings, farmland and homes, and brass bands, on behalf of the people. The brass bands were either linked directly to the colliery that employed the musicians or indirectly by name and/or wage deducted contributions. The prizewinning Bickershaw Colliery Band was originally formed as Abram Colliery Band in 1919. In the beginning, both its instruments and playing standards were poor. Abram Coal Company’s Managing Director, Augustus M. Hart was ambitious but the band remained mediocre until his son, Major Ernest Hart M.C. (Military Cross) took over in 1934. A strict disciplinarian who expected high standards of all his employees, including the band members, the more he invested the better he expected the results to be. Before the band competed at Alexandria Palace in 1938, the Major told its members that if they didn’t win they should all jump in the English Channel! When they came 2nd he relented and gave them a £10 bonus each, but repeatedly threatened to close the band if standards didn’t improve. The band went on to win the British Open in 1940, 1943 and 1946, and were in constant demand for public concerts, and recordings by the BBC. Playing a brass instrument put a man at a distinct advantage when it came to getting a job at a colliery and most of the musicians were given surface jobs as it was easier to give them time off for competitions. But when the NCB took over Bickershaw Colliery, they withdrew the musicians’ retaining fees, so Major Hart took the band from the colliery, and arranged for it to rehearse at the Boar’s Head. When the band came 5th at Belle Vue that year Major Hart suspended its activities and temporarily closed it down. He later gave the men their uniforms and instruments as a token of his appreciation. On Saturday 23rd September 1950, Major Hart was killed by an express train on the railway line a few hundred yards from his home at Lowton Grange. He was 59. The coroner’s verdict was ‘Suicide whilst of unsound mind’.

*Turn left onto Manchester Road and drive until you see Leigh Cemetery on your right.*

*Drive into the cemetery.*

Or visit the Manchester Road Cafe & Sandwich Bar opposite, for refreshments & WC.

4. **Leigh Cemetery** opened in 1856, funded by Westleigh, Pennington, Bedford, and Astley townships.

*Drive along the central path until you reach the crossroads in area 11 where you will see a tall grey monument on your right.*

**IMAGE 2.11: Map of Leigh Cemetery PDF** <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Docs/PDF/Resident/Births-Marriage-Deaths/Cemeteries/Leigh.pdf>

The **Bedford Colliery Monument** is dedicated to those who lost their lives in an explosion on Monday 13th August 1888. At 11.30am that morning the news spread that there was a fire at Speakman’s Colliery or ‘Wood End’ and crowds gathered waiting for news. An explosion had taken place in no. 2 Pit near to Lion’s Bridge, off The Avenue. Several miners had felt the effects and gone to the ‘pit eye’ (base of the shaft). The colliery owner, John Speakman was confined to bed so his son, Ernest withdrew the men from the mine and led the rescue party. They put up brattice cloths to restore ventilation and extinguish the flames. Among the first brought up wasJohn Wooley who was burned about the face and hands and had a badly cut forehead. Wooley was a day wageman who had only started at the pit the previous Saturday. He had been a watch repairer, but trade was bad and his wife was too ill to work so he went back to work as a collier. The night before, he had a dream that he and his mate would be killed. He and Henry Parsonage were drawing props and William Brown and Alfred Mort were filling tubs. Brown put his lamp between his legs to pick up a spade when there was a blaze that went into his lamp. He threw his spade down and started blowing out his lamp but it wasn’t ‘buried’ so he shook it about and it burst the gauze. A flash came out of the gauze and there was an explosion and all the lamps went out. The afterdamp knocked Wooley down, but he managed to scramble over some tubs then ran as hard as he could until saw a rescuer’s light. It took a week to recover all the bodies. 38 died, most of them under 30 years old from the Bedford area. St.Thomas’ brass band played at the head of a parade that formed at Leigh Liberal Club, processed along Church Street, Market Street, Lord Street, Chapel Street and ended at the cemetery. John’s Speakman’s grave can be found in area 11 too if you follow the right-hand fork of the path round to the left.

Nearby is the grave of **Alfred Wilkinson** won his V.C. (Victoria Cross) for an act of bravery in WW1 when he ran, under shellfire, to deliver an important message about reinforcements. Sadly, he later died whilst working in the surveyor’s laboratory at Bickershaw Colliery, killed by carbon monoxide fumes from a blocked chimney. On the morning of his death he’d received a letter informing him that he had been granted a commission in the Pioneer Corps during WW2. He was buried with full military honours.

A little further along stands a tall, polished granite monument to**Samuel Short**whowas an engineer at St George’s Colliery in Tyldesley and had worked for Astley and Tyldesley Collieries Ltd. for 30 years. On 12th September 1902, he was lowering 24 workmen into the mine when he was suddenly overcome by a fatal seizure. But, incredibly, he managed to apply the brake before he died. He was only 52. A fund raised £75 6s 11d. The monument cost £45 and the remainder was given to his widow along with £50 from Astley and Tyldesley Collieries Ltd. The story of his act of bravery went around the world in the international press.

*Turn the vehicle around and drive back up the central walkway to leave Leigh Cemetery.*

*Turn right onto Manchester Road and drive to the mini-roundabout next to* TheBowling Green Pub*.*

*Take the first exit on your left, then take the first exit on your left on the second mini-roundabout and continue along Manchester Road.*

Or visit The Bowling Green for refreshments & WC.

*Drive along Manchester Road/Chapel Street until you reach the traffic lights outside* ***The Canal Turn pub****.*

*Turn left and drive over Butts Bridge.*

*Take the second turning on your right into Butts Street then turn right into Elizabeth Street.*

*Drive to the bottom of Elizabeth Street.*

5. **Butts Bridge** may be named after the ‘butts’, an area for practicing with a bow and arrow, or the Lancashire word ‘butts’ which were small ridges with shallow ditches in between, common on wet land. Until the canal arrived in 1795, Bedford was largely a rural township with just a small settlement around The Butts area. From then on there was a steady growth in the town’s population from 11,025 in 1841, to 16,004 in 1861. Bedford was incorporated into the Leigh Local Board in 1874. The canal also provided Bedford with the raw materials and steam power to stimulate the growth of the textile industry.

**Leigh Manufacturing No.2 Weaving Sheds (Pendle Mills)** once stood here but ceased weaving in the mid-1960s when mills were closing across Lancashire at a rate of almost one a week. Despite the Cotton Industry Act of 1959, which was intended to help modernise and amalgamate the industry, the UK could no longer compete with cheaper imported cotton. Pendle Mill was used by other industries for a while but was eventually demolished to make way for apartments. Note how the architects have replicated the contrasting red and yellow colours of brickwork, and how the tops of the railings are shaped like the roof of a weaving shed. Maximum daylight was achieved through the use of north-facing roof lights which let the light in but didn’t dry out the cotton.

**IMAGE 2.13: Pendle Mill** [https://archives.wigan.gov.uk/archive/photograph-collections/leigh/760401-pc201511431?](https://archives.wigan.gov.uk/archive/photograph-collections/leigh/760401-pc201511431)

On the offside bank stood the **Bedford Iron Foundry,** where, from 1845,Messrs. John Picksley, Ruben Sims and Co. Ltd. manufactured domestic items, such as household fireplaces, grates and trap grids, then moved on to agricultural machinery. They were well known for their ‘Standard Mower’, which gave its name to a local public house. They used the canal to bring in timber by barge and to transport their goods, but they couldn’t compete with the more successful Albion Iron Works and went bankrupt in 1902. The **Leigh Manufacturing Company** erected their No.1 Weaving Sheds on the site in 1908, also built by Stott and Sons. The mill later became Tillie & Henderson's Clothing Manufacturing Company, Peter Blond Clothing Manufacturers and Townsends Cycles, but was demolished and **Stott Wharf** apartment block built on the site. Note how the architects have matched up the false ‘dummy' windows to follow the design of the original bottom section of the building.

**IMAGE 2.14: Leigh Manufacturing Company in 1936** <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10212762394886108&set=pcb.877080139107982>

The last mills to be built in Leigh were **Leigh Spinners’** two mills which were constructed and opened between 1911-1923 making the No.2 Mill one of the last spinning mills to be built in Lancashire. Designed by Bradshaw, Gas & Hope, the Grade II listed double spinning mill, with its intact engines, is one of the most complete of its type. When the No.1 Mill opened in 1915 it had a mainly female work force. The mills still stand at the bottom of Park Lane, off Manchester Road and are now home to many small businesses.

*Turn the vehicle round and drive to the bottom of Elizabeth Street.*

*Turn right onto Butts Street and drive down to the former Butts Mill.*

6. The Grade II**Butts Mill** was built in 1907 by Stott and Sons, one of the most prolific firms of mill architects of the 19th and early 20th-centuries. The firm patented several new construction methods which enabled them to incorporate larger windows and wider bays. The lower carding floors have large rectangular windows while those of the upper spinning floors are narrower. The ornate tower has terracotta Arts and Crafts details and is topped by a copper dome and filial or crowning ornament. Ironically, a lot more time and money was spent on the building than the comfort of the people who worked in it. It was designed as a double mill, but the mirror half was never built. The mill had 150,000 mule spindles in its heyday, but ceased spinning in 1960. It was later sold to Ward and Goldstone.

*Turn the vehicle round and drive back down Butts Street.*

*At the top, turn left onto Warrington Road and drive over Butts Bridge.*

*At the traffic lights, turn left into Chapel Street.*

*Continue along Chapel Street until you reach St Joseph’s Church on your left.*

*Turn left into Mather Lane.*

*Continue along Mather Lane then turn into the car park just before the bridge on your right.*

*7*. Opposite, on the offside bank of the canal, stands **Mather No.2 Mill,** a cotton mill, which was built in 1882. The Grade II listed building was renovated and converted into the Loom Wharf apartments in 2020. Originally it was a double mill, with the earliest part (later Mather No.1 Mill) adjacent to the boiler house, built in 1873 by Bradshaw, Gas & Hope of Bolton. The same firm also built the warehouse on the other side of Mather Lane bridge with a tunnel joining the two buildings.

**Mather Lane Bridge no. 65** was originally known as ‘Dick Mather Bridge’. Legend has it that it is named after a local 18th-century school teacher called Richard Mather, who drowned in a pond down the lane. However, no record has ever been found to support this theory. The original humpback bridge was an ‘occupation bridge’ enabling farmers, workers and travellers to continue to use the old tracks from their farms to main roads, which the canal had severed. The bridge’s blind approach made it perilous for motor vehicles, even with the addition of traffic lights, so a separate ‘cage like’ footbridge was built for pedestrians. Local people remember going over the bridge in a car when they were children and ‘leaving your stomach behind’ like being on a funfair ride. Both the road bridge and the footbridge were demolished and replaced with the new bridge in 1986.

**IMAGE 2.17: Mather Lane Bridge**[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mather\_Lane\_Bridge\_1976\_-\_geograph.org.uk\_-\_1766348.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AMather_Lane_Bridge_1976_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1766348.jpg)

The building, to which the car park is attached, was**Mather Lane Mill’s warehouse.** Grade II listed, it was built around 1882, with hoists and taking-in bays on the front and canal elevations. Mather Lane used to be a long, residential street with houses. **Thomas (Tommy) Burke, the ‘Lancashire Caruso’ and famous operatic tenor** was born at number 7 in 1890. He was the eldest of nine children. His father was an Irish Catholic miner and in 1893, when Tom was only three, there was a pit strike which lasted for five months. The formation of the Lancashire Miners' Federation in 1881 and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) in 1888 had improved wages and employment rights, but relations between pitmen and their employers were still poor. A drop in the market price of coal made coal owners decide to reduce wages by 25%. This was opposed by the MFGB and led to an almost total lockout involving around 300,000 coal miners in the Federated District, making it the largest strike in the UK. By October the mine owners had reduced their demand to a 15% wage reduction, but the MFGB refused the offer and demanded no cuts, and the creation of a board of conciliation to mediate future disputes. It was finally agreed that there would be a return to work with no cut in wages, and no further cuts before 1 February 1894. During these months the Burke family, like many other mining families, were fed daily from charity soup kitchens and searched the coal tips for small pieces of coal to keep them warm during the winter. At the age of 12, Tommy left school to work ‘part-time’ at Courtauld’s Silk Mill but at 14 he went down the pit as a ‘lasher-on’, hooking tubs of coal onto an endless steel rope as they were brought from the pit face. He was soon dubbed the ‘Minstrel Boy’ as he relieved the tedium of work by singing. He was also a keen member of Leigh Borough Brass Band, playing the cornet. He left the pit at the age of 17 and became a vegetable salesman with a donkey and cart but, after singing regularly at local venues, went on to train at Manchester College of Music and, later,in Italy. He sang before King George V at the Royal Opera House and toured North America and made extensive recordings. However, he had a weakness for women and alcohol, and died bankrupt in Surrey in 1969. His name lives on in the pub on Leigh Road.

**IMAGE 2.18 Tom Burke** <http://www.historicaltenors.net/english/burke.html>

*Turn the vehicle around and return to Mather Lane.*

*Turn left onto Ramsey Street then right onto Brunswick Street and continue along it until it meets Chapel Street.*

*Turn left onto Chapel Street and continue until you reach the traffic lights.*

*Turn left onto Spinning Jenny Way and go straight ahead at the next set of traffic lights.*

*Continue along Spinning Jenny Way until you reach the next set of traffic lights.*

*Go straight ahead into Twist Lane.*

**Note the mural of Alfred Wilkinson VC on the side of the house on your left, just after the entrance to Dorothy Grove.**

*Just before the next set of traffic lights, turn left into Kirby Road.*

*Drive into the car park at the rear of* **Leigh Miners Welfare Institute Recreation & Social Club.**

8. **Leigh Miners Welfare Institute Recreation & Social Club** opened in 1957 at a cost of £60,000. Miners Institutes developed in the latter part of the 19th-century to meet a need and demand for meeting places for self-education, union meetings and community recreation. They were originally funded by contributions from miners’ wages, often with support from coal owners. The Mining Industry Act of 1920 raised a levy of 1d per ton of coal produced, to create The Miners' Welfare Fund to provide amenities for miners such as pit head baths, scholarships and welfare halls/institutes. The annual Miner’s Gala was a big event. Leigh Miners’ was within walking distance of Parsonage Colliery, so the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) purchased the land and the miners each 'bought a brick a week' for one old penny. In 1977 Leigh Miners’ boasted a 5,000-strong membership. When the pits closed the NUM transferred all the land over to the Coal Industry Social Work Organisation (CISWO), who oversee the remaining 300 or so Miners’ Welfares that remain around the country. Management committees are charged a peppercorn rent and are responsible for running the buildings and providing affordable spaces for community groups such as Leigh Miner Rangers Rugby League Club which formed in 1966. It remains one of only two sides never to have played outside the top division of the amateur game’s flagship league. Rugby League, like mining, is tough, physically demanding and relies heavily on teamwork, so it isn’t surprising that so many mining areas produced successful teams. Miners had to be very disciplined and safety conscious underground, which maybe explains why the referees in rugby league have always received more respect than their counterparts in football, and why so many miners enjoyed the controlled aggression of rugby league after a hard shift. Local miners would also have access to The Lancashire and North Staffordshire Miners’ Convalescent Home on the North Shore at Blackpool. The purpose-built building was opened by the Prince of Wales in 1925 and provided 132 beds and care for miners recovering from sickness and injury. Bungalows were later added so that miners’ wives could stay with their convalescing husbands. The Miners’ Home closed in 1987 following the long-term decline of the mining industry and the building was sold and turned into private luxury apartments.

**IMAGE 3.1: The Lancashire and North Staffordshire Miners’ Convalescent Home** <https://www.blackpoolsocial.club/38612-from-the-archives-the-development-of-the-miners-home/>

Visit for refreshments & WC.

*Turn the vehicle round, return to the top of Kirby Road and turn left into Twist Lane.*

*Drive to the traffic lights and cross the A579 Atherleigh Way Bypass to continue along Twist Lane.*

*Take your first left into Sanderson Street and drive to the small car park at the end.*

9.The **Leeds and Liverpool Canal** meets the Bridgewater Canal near to Leigh Bridge. It is the longest single canal in Britain at 127.25 miles (204KM) long. It was completed in 1816, creating a vital link between the Irish Sea and the North Sea for the transportation of coal and merchandise, particularly cotton. The **Leigh branch**, from Leigh to Wigan, was opened in 1820 to connect The Leeds and Liverpool with the Bridgewater Canal, providing navigation to Manchester for cargo and people. There were daily ‘packet’ boats between Wigan and Liverpool via Manchester. The broad locks of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal enabled the use of 'short boats', cargo vessels which could carry around 45 tons, much more than narrowboats, and therefore more cost productive. This meant the canal could compete successfully with the railways and enabled it to escape closure, the fate of many UK canals in the 1960s, including the Manchester Bolton and Bury Canal. The Leeds and Liverpool Canal was nationalised in 1948 and is now maintained by the Canal and River Trust.

To your left,**Leigh Bypass Road Bridge No 11A** carries the A579 Atherleigh Way along the former route of Bolton and Leigh Railway. A spit of land used to carry the line across **Pennington Flash,** which was created by mining subsidence around 1900. When the surrounding land sunk, the canal had to be built up some twenty to thirty feet to counter the effect. The track bed of the former railway line which used to pass over the canal is now below canal level.

Further along the canal to your rightwas **Westleigh Basin**, where coal trains from Westleigh Collieries emptied their loads into the canal barges via a staith. Coal barges were generally wooden with quite shallow sides and had no coaming, or raised border, around the hatch to keep the water out. This was so that the barge could pass easily under the coal loading chute.

**The Mineral Railway Line** which used to transport coal from Parsonage Colliery to the coal wharf on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal crossed Twist Lane and travelled behind the backs of the houses on Sanderson Street. You will see how the angle of the line is still clear in the shape of the house on the corner, now Canine Care & Co.

*Turn the vehicle around and return to the top of Sanderson Street.*

*Turn left onto Twist Lane and continue over the roundabout.*

*Continue until you reach Urmston Street on your left then try and find a parking space close to the entrance of Firs Park, avoiding the double yellow lines.*

10.**Firs Park,** which opened in 1921, provided a ‘green lung’ and ‘pleasure ground’ for local people, particularly the working classes. It was created on the site of a former brickfield adjoining Firs mills. The land was donated by Sir John Holden (of ‘The Firs’) and his fellow co-directors of Messrs. Tunnicliffe and Hampson Ltd., Cotton Spinners. It contained a boating lake, bowling green, pavilion, two tennis courts, a bandstand, a terrace garden and a playground.

A little further along on your right,**St Peters Anglican Church** was consecrated in 1881. It was designed by Paley and Austin Architects of Lancaster, and has been designated by English Heritage as a Grade 2\* listed building, which means that it is judged to be of particular national importance or special interest. The War Memorial in front of the church features the names of miners from Parsonage Colliery who died during WW1: Sam Hill and P. Unsworth. In 1992, there was a ‘Funeral March’ to commemorate the closure of Bickershaw Colliery. 500 miners walked from the colliery to Leigh Miners Welfare Institute, stopping at the church for a short open-air service. The Rev. Ray Cooke and Lancashire Miners Leader, Roy Jackson ‘recorded the final chapter as Old King Coal was laid to rest’. The victims of mining tragedies were remembered, then they followed Golborne Volex Band to a farewell wake at the Welfare Institute.

*Continue along Firs Lane.*

*Pass Barker Street on your left then take the second turning on your left, opposite the Fir Tree Inn.*

*Turn the vehicle around.*

11. **The Mineral Line** from Westleigh Collieries (Higher Hall & Lower Hall Pits), which was a tramway, then later a railway, used to run alongside Firs Mills and crossed Firs Lane between Nangreaves Street and Leigh Street, then travelled across farmland to Westleigh Basin on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

**The Fir Tree Inn** is the centre for most of the fishing activities in Leigh, a popular pastime of miners and other working-class men. On the 1939 register, the landlord was John Henry Wright who was born in Dalton-In-Furness in 1873. After working in the iron ore mines from the age of 10, he moved to Leigh and started work as a drawer at Bedford Collieries. He worked there for three years, but after being buried by a large fall of rock, miraculously suffering only scratches and bruises, he went to work at the Albion Foundry. He stayed for 26 years before becoming licensed victualler at the Bowling Green Inn in Westleigh. He worked for the Liberal Party until the formation of the Labour Party and, as Mayor of Leigh in 1923, supported many charitable institutions and inaugurated the first Blind People’s Trust. During his 13 years’ service on the Town Council, he was also Chair of the Fire Brigade when it changed from horse machines to motor engines.

Visit for refreshments & WC.

*Turn left into Firs Lane and continue until it becomes Plank Lane.*

*Where Plank Lane bends to the left, turn right into Heath Lane.*

*Drive to the end of Heath Lane.*

12.**Bickershaw Country Park** is a nature reserve between Bickershaw village and Westleigh, on the original Bickershaw Colliery site. During the 19th-century, coal was worked from shallow workings in Bickershaw and Abram by the Bickershaw and Abram Coal Companies. In the 1840s the Ackers Whitley Coal Company was formed to work reserves under the Bickershaw estate.The average outputs from the Bickershaw and Abram collieries was in the region of 1,000 tons per week, but as the reserves of coal diminished, the company decided to sink new, deeper shafts at Plank Lane. This was made possible with the advent of bigger and better steam engines. The reclaimed colliery land is now a haven for wildlife, with extensive grasslands, woodlands, scrubland, and water and wetland areas. Diggles Flash is named after Jimmy Diggle who owned Heyfield Pit. In 1866 there was an outbreak of foot and mouth disease, so Diggle took his herd of 26 cows to the bottom of his pit to keep them safe from infection. He was a popular and humanitarian figure, known for his great kindness to his employees and his support for local Methodist churches.**The Willow Tree Inn or ‘Last Shift’** stood just beyond Westleigh Heath Farm, though no trace of it remains. It was originally a farm, but by 1891 it had become an inn which was popular with miners returning from the Higher Hall, Heyfield and Lower Hall Pits, hence its ‘Last Shift’ nickname. The miners’ wives would wait outside on pay day to get their housekeeping before it was spent on beer. In the 1960s the pub was very popular with local mods, but it was derelict by 1975, and demolished in the 1980s.

*Turn the vehicle around and drive to the end of Heath Lane.*

*Turn right onto Plank Lane.*

*Drive along Plank Lane the turn left into Mitchell Street.*

*Drive to the bottom of the street then turn the vehicle around.*

13. This area was once full of old terraced housing and some shops, most of which were demolished in the 1960s and 1970s as part of the ‘slum clearances’. Leigh Town Council were given the power to purchase old and decaying houses and offer residents alternative accommodation, or give them the money to move on. **Plank Lane Labour Club** used to stand at the bottom of Mitchell Street on the right-hand side where Richmond House Care Home now stands. It was originally a wooden hut, built as a Young Men’s club, but became the Working Men’s Club and later, the Labour Club. It was replaced by a brick building in the 1930s and a bowling green was added later. It also had a Rugby League team. Major Hart, the manager of Bickershaw Colliery paid for the club to acquire a licence to serve beer and, in 1936, when he drew a horse in the Irish Sweepstake, treated all the pit men in the club to free ale. There was uproar when women were first allowed in, but they enjoyed the Saturday Night Bingo played with ‘slabs’, which were metal plates with the numbers stamped on, probably made in the fitter’s shop at the pit. Some of the profits went towards funding the club trips. There was an annual outing to Southport and a bonfire night treat at Lee Lane Park in Abram. This may have been the location of a fund-raising match between Plank Lane and Platt Bridge ladies football teams in June 1921. The ‘pea soup’ match attracted several thousand spectators and helped to support the Plank Lane Relief Fund for local miners who had been ‘locked out’ of work by coal owners who wanted to increase working hours and reduce pay. The club featured in Series 4 Episode 1 of ‘*Second City Firsts’ ‘Early To Bed’* by Alan Bleasdale, broadcast on 20.03.75.

*Drive back up Mitchell Street and turn left onto Plank Lane.*

*Continue along Plank Lane and turn left into Colliers Way.*

*Drive around the green.*

14.Wilkinson Park Drive is named after **Alfred Wilkinson V.C. (Victoria Cross)** who is commemorated by the life-size sculpture designed and created by tribute artist, Andrew Burgess. It stands where one of the Bickershaw Colliery mining shafts used to be. It was donated by Taylor Wimpey, who built the housing estate, and unveiled by Wilkinson’s granddaughter and nephew in 2018 to mark 100 years since he received his Victoria Cross. Wilkinson, who was born in Leigh in 1896, won his V.C. for an act of bravery in WW1 when he ran, under shellfire, to deliver an important message about reinforcements. Sadly, he died whilst working as a laboratory technician in the surveyors’ laboratory at Bickershaw Colliery, killed by carbon monoxide fumes from a blocked chimney. On the morning of his death he’d received a letter informing him that he had been granted a commission in the Pioneer Corps. He was buried with full military honours at Leigh Cemetery. Members of the Home Guard led the procession, followed by the Bickershaw Colliery brass band, members of the British Legion and the Special Constables. His V.C. and other medals are in the British Imperial War Museum. A plaque to his memory was unveiled in Leigh Town Hall in 2005 and in 2021, street artists Tony Brady, known as kELzO, and Evan Barlow created an artwork in Twist Lane featuring Wilkinson in time for Remembrance Day.

**IMAGE 3.6: Alfred Wilkinson V.C.** <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Robert_Wilkinson>

*Drive around the green and return to Colliers Way, then turn left onto Plank Lane.*

*Continue along Plank Lane until you reach the Marina on your left.*

*Find a parking space outside the marina.*

15.**Bickershaw Colliery** once dominated this area. Ackers Whitley purchased land in Plank Lane because it already had coal wharfs for loading the canal barges, and a new railway link between Wigan and Manchester was opening up markets in Liverpool and Manchester. No. 1 Shaft was sunk in 1872 and No. 2 Shaft shortly afterwards, both working the Crombouke Pemberton 5ft and the White and Black seams. In 1881 No. 3 and 4 Shafts were completed to the King Coal seam and in 1907 No. 5 Shaft gave access to the Ince Yard seam. This was deepened in 1921 to reach the Crombouke seam. In 1931 the newly named Bickershaw Collieries came under the Chairmanship of Major Ernest Hart M.C. (Military Cross). He was a fair but firm employer and under his leadership and guidance the Colliery was extensively reorganised. He also made the Bickershaw Colliery Band into a prize-winning band, which was in constant demand for public concerts, as well as recordings by the BBC. The No. 3 and 4 Shafts were deepened, opening up the Peacock, Plodder and Wigan seams, and new engines and buildings were installed, including a screening (coal sorting) and coal cleaning plant. Pit Brow Lasses were originally employed at the colliery to pick and sort the coal by hand. Although women (and children) had been banned from working underground since 1842, many men were still unhappy with them working at the surface. Manners and bad language were the main concern along with personal safety, neglect of their families and domestic duties and, of course, the trousers that many Pit Brow Lasses wore. In 1886 there were 1623 women in Lancashire working on the pit brow and they, and others around the country, successfully campaigned against a bill to stop them working at the collieries. Sadly, it wasn’t a job without risks. In 1894, 15-year-old screener (coal sorter), Ann Prescot accidentally fell down the steps from the screen and died of her injuries the following day. Following nationalisation of the industry, a further reorganisation scheme opened out two more faces for production and, until 1952, Bickershaw had five headgears. After the No. 5 headgears were demolished and the shaft filled in, all production and coal winding was focused in the Nos. 3 and 4 Shafts, leaving Nos. 1 and 2 Shafts for ventilation purposes. In the 1970s a £3m development scheme created the North-West's first ‘super-pit’ by linking Bickershaw’s workings with those of Parsonage and Golborne collieries. Seven miles of underground conveyor belting transported the coal to Bickershaw. The nerve centre of the operation was ELSIE – Electronic Lighting, Signaling, Indicating Equipment – which controlled the coal flow from eight widely-separated faces and monitored underground conditions. However, the colliery was subject to geological problems, and the end of production was announced in early 1992 with the union officials declaring that it had been ‘a political closure’. The colliery featured in the ITV drama series *Sam* (1973).

**IMAGE 3.3: Bickershaw Colliery, Coal Basin, Canal and WW2 Pill Box, 1952** <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3403558743251643&set=gm.2484610458354934&idorvanity=178876512261685>

**IMAGE 3.4: View from Slag Lane** <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=2265068940242721&set=pcb.1315932428556082>

**The Pit Canteen** used to stand on the opposite side of Plank Lane. Numerous other buildings once stood either side of the road including the ‘The Packet’, ‘The Grey Horse’ and the red brick ‘Britannia' opposite the bridge. The coal from the Abram pits was transported by horse drawn tramway, then by two steam locomotives, the Bee and the Wasp to the canal at Plank Lane, where previously there had been a glass works. The last cargo of coal transported along the Leigh Branch was in August 1972 when road transport took over local distribution.

**IMAGE 3.5: Bickershaw Colliery buildings** <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10207147408499969&set=pcb.680543692094962>

*Turn the vehicle round to return along Plank Lane. Stop outside the terraced housing just before the Nevison Pub, on your left.*

16.**The houses on this side of the road have a letter B at the end of their number**. Plank Lane straddles the old town border so these houses are in Abram whilst the houses on the opposite side of the road are in Leigh. Where you are now is roughly opposite the location of the entrance to Bickershaw Street, which marked the boundary to Bickershaw Colliery and led down to Green’s Bridge on the canal.

**The Nevison Inn** was originally a farmhouse whose owner started to sell beer, but it became a fully licensed public house in 1916. In the 1930s it was given the nickname of ‘Owd Ned’s' after the licensee, Edward Knowles who always sported a trilby and clogs. The name is believed to have been inspired by the notorious 17th century highwayman, John Nevison or ‘Swift Nick’ but, given that he operated East of the Pennines, it seems unlikely. Another pub, ‘The Correction’ used to stand opposite. Rumour has it that patrons would cross between the two depending on the different licensing hours of Leigh and Abram!

Visit for refreshments & WC.

*Drive along Plank Lane u til it bends to the right and becomes Firs Lane.*

*Drive along Firs Lane, cross Walter Street, May Street and* *Grace Street.*

*Stop outside 212 Firs Lane.*

17.Herelived **Walter Nelson,** a married man who was only 30 years old when he was killed in the 1932 disaster at Bickershaw Colliery. On the 10th October, the dayshift winding engineman, John Ernest Hitchin arrived to take over from the night engineman. At 5.55 a.m., the buzzer sounded and the banksman (person in charge of the shaft and cage at the surface of a colliery) signalled that he was ready to descend and the cage was loaded with 20 men and lowered. Shortly after there was, what a woman who lived opposite the colliery described as, ‘a sort of crashing sound like thunder. We rushed out of our houses as soon as we heard it.’ The onsetter (person in charge of loading and unloading of cages at the pit bottom or ‘eye’) down below said that the descending cage passed at a tremendous speed crashing 630 feet down into the water in the shaft sump. He heard cries from the shaft and on looking down, saw a face in the water. Only one man in the descending cage escaped. James Sharpe, 47 was the last man to enter so he was near a gate, which he managed to lift. He suffered broken bones and head injuries and lived with disabilities for the rest of his life. The other 19 men drowned. Between them they left around 70 persons without a breadwinner. 15 of the 19 were buried at Leigh Cemetery in one funeral service. 2,000 miners marched from Plank Lane at the head of the cortege. The King sent a message of sympathy and the Mayor of Leigh’s Relief Fund raised over £2,000 for the families of the victims. At the inquest the jury found that the wrong lever had been applied, and that the cage had passed the point at which the ‘Visor’, an automatic device to prevent overwinding, was set. The source of the accident was an error of judgement by the engineman. As a result, the “Visor” controller at the colliery was immediately altered.

*Drive along* *Firs Lane. Cross Nangreaves Street and stop just last the entrance to Malham Close.*

18. This was the location of **The Firs Maternity Home,** which was formerly the home of Sir George Holden, Mayor of Leigh 1920-22, who owned the Firs and Tunnicliffe’s Mills. His father, Sir John Holden, gave Firs Park to the town. After the Holdens left The Firs, the Council acquired it in 1931 and converted it into a Maternity Home. It stopped delivering babies in 1979 but stayed open for recovering mothers until 1985. It was later demolished and there are now houses on the site. You were not considered to be a true ‘Leyther’ unless you were born at The Firs.

**IMAGE 3.7: The Firs** <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1476270342599463&set=gm.266093946873274&idorvanity=178876512261685>

*Drive along Firs Lane until you reach the traffic lights.*

*Turn left onto Parsonage Way and continue until you reach the car park on your right.*

*Turn into the car park and find a space.*

19. **Parsonage Colliery** used to cover all of this area. It was sunk on derelict land that was previously Barton's Chemical Works, but was named after the Westleigh township parsonage which originally owned it. There had been drift mines in Westleigh since the 12th-century but, during the second half of the 19th-century, it became possible to mine the deeper seams, and coal became an important industry in Leigh. Parsonage was the last pit to be sunk in the area, but became one of the deepest in the country, its shafts to the Arley minegoing down over 3,000 ft (900 m). Sinking began in 1913 but was halted by WW1. Coal mining was one of several occupations which were scheduled as vital for war work, so these workers were given a ‘On War Service 1915’ badge so that they wouldn’t get targeted as cowards. But when conscription came in in 1916, many miners enlisted voluntarily. Out of 1,657 men employed by the Wigan Coal and Iron Company, 688 went to fight and each was promised work on his return. However, 81 men were killed and a further 118 wounded. Parsonage lost eight men: Pat Caine, J. Carrell, James T. Cox, Sam Hill, James Hogan, Rueben Such, J. Swindells and P. Unsworth. The solid bronze memorial plaque dedicated to them is now in Leigh Library. Ironically, the oldest pit rucks associated with the site, long since swallowed by Jackson’s Clayhole, were called the ‘German Rucks’, possibly because some of the German POWs from the camp at Etherstone Street were involved in their tipping. Coal was first wound to the surface at Parsonage in 1921. Steam power was supplied by 12 Lancashire boilers. Ventilation was particularly important, as the temperature reached 118 °F in some workings. Miners were given salt water as they could lose up to 7lbs in weight by sweating each day. Output increased rapidly from 1,044 tons in 1921 to 325,000 tons by 1930 but, because the pit was so close to the town centre, large pillars of coal had to be left under the parish church and other large buildings. Parsonage Pit Baths opened in 1930. The Coal Miners Act of 1911 ruled that coal owners must provide pit head baths if a ballot of the workforce showed that they were wanted. There were 1050 ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ lockers and 74 bathing cubicles each with a spray supplying cold, tepid and hot water. Mr G. Rowson, MP for Farnworth, said that he was prepared to leave the question as to whether the baths should be used to the womenfolk. If the man came home with pit dirt she would not let him have his dinner or go to bed until he had been back and washed. The baths would assist the miners in placing a higher value on themselves. Women’s baths were added in 1933 when it was noted that ‘coal dust only becomes dirt if they take it away from the colliery’. Previously inaccessible coal seams were accessed in the 1960s with the driving of the Horizon Tunnel and the colliery was subsequently linked underground to Golborne and Bickershaw collieries to become a ‘super pit’. Coal winding ceased in 1976 and the colliery closed in 1992.

**IMAGE 3.8: Parsonage Colliery 1992** <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3217515828522603&set=gm.2266143296868319&idorvanity=178876512261685>

*Return to Parsonage Way then turn right into Leighbrook Way after the petrol station.*

*Drive along Leighbrook Way and go straight through the first set of traffic lights.*

*Or, turn left at the traffic lights and visit* **The Parsonage Pub Restaurant**for refreshments & WC. See the pillar in the pub: ‘The Lancashire coalfieldwas one of the most prolific in England. The total shafts sunk to gain coal numbered several thousand. Lancashire miners used terms in different ways to other coal mining areas. A mine in Lancashire refers to a coal seam. The term pit was used for the shaft sunk to access the mine and the term colliery was used to describe the whole of the surface area including the headgear, wash-houses, offices and trams.’

*Drive along Leighbrook Way and turn right at the second set of traffic lights onto Atherleigh Way.*

*At the next set of traffic lights, turn right onto Firs Lane, then take the first sharp left into Findlay Street with the Railway Pub on the corner.*

*Pull into the car parking area opposite the pub.*

20. **The Railway pub/Westleigh Station.** At the end of what is now Railway Road, Westleigh Station opened in 1831, followed by the Railway Inn in 1833. This originally stood on the other side of the road next to a level crossing on the Bolton to Kenyon line. It was a ticket booking office and also provided drinks for thirsty passengers, whose refreshment was served to them on trays. One landlord, James Yates, was a water diviner, which made him a good well sinker and pit shaft borer. He sank some of the old Bickershaw Colliery shafts. When the level crossing was replaced with an embankment and a bridge in 1840, the inn moved to its present position. Passengers walking to the station from the centre of town originally had to walk down Twist Lane and then alongside the railway line to reach the station. But in 1858 the Railway Company paid for Railway Road to be paved, to create a more convenient and direct route to the station from the town centre. In 1888 Mr Bulkeley of Lowton provided about 60 of the men out on strike at Bickershaw Colliery with a potato pie dinner at the Railway Hotel, presided over by Mr R. Isherwood, the Miner’s Agent. Mr Bulkeley had been on strike himself for 17 weeks 25 years previously.

**IMAGE 3.9: Westleigh Station 1950 looking north** [https://www.facebook.com/groups/178876512261685/search/?q=westleigh%20station](https://www.facebook.com/groups/178876512261685/search/?q=westleigh%252520station)

*Return to Findlay Street and drive until it bends to the right and becomes Railway Road.*

*Continue until you reach Langdale Street on your left, and pull into the car park opposite the old* **Leigh Technical College and Library.**

21. **Leigh Technical College and Library.** This imposing brick building was built between 1890 and 1894 by the Leigh Literary Society for Leigh Technical School and the Public Library, each with its own entrance at either end of the building. Ackers Whitley Coal Company worked coal under land belonging to the William France Charity, and the royalties they paid meant that the trustees were able to grant £1,000 in 1890 to the building of the College and a further grant of £500 in 1895. The architects, both members of the society, were J. H. Stephen and J. C. Prestwich. The pupils and staff of Leigh Grammar School moved into the building from 1898 until 1931 and the Pupil Teacher’s Centre and Senior Boys School were also based here. In 1924 a children’s library and reading room were opened underneath the main library. It was granted Technical College status in 1926 and, with the increasing mechanisation and legislation of the mining industry, became a place to study for engineering, management and safety qualifications. It later became part of Wigan & Leigh College and closed several years ago when its courses were moved to the Wigan campus. The front of the building is in a preservation area.

*Turn the vehicle round and return to* *Langdale Street.*

*Drive to the end of Langdale Street and turn right onto Walmesley Road.*

*Drive along Walmesley Road, following it as it bends to the right behind the Parish Church.*

*Turn left into St Mary’s Way and drive to the end before turning left onto Market Place.*

*Get into the right hand lane and take your first right into Church Street.*

*Drive down Church Street.*

*As you near the end of the street, find a parking space.*

22. Gamble Street, at the end of Church Street, was where the **Fletcher Burrows’ Mineral Railway Line** emerged from an underground tunnel that travelled beneath Queen Street, Lord Street and Brown Street from **Bedford Coal Basin.** It was cut in 1857 and linked to the Howe Bridge Collieries of Fletcher Burrows by a horse drawn tramway, which ran through a tunnel under Leigh’s streets. At first the coal was hoisted down into the boats, but a coal tipper or ‘pier’ was introduced to speed up the loading process. The stump still remains marking the former site of ‘Leigh Pier’. During WW2, coal traffic by boat ceased and in 1952, the track was lifted, the tunnel bricked up, and the cuttings filled. At Bedford Basin there were toll houses on either side of the canal which probably acted as ‘tally’ houses, recording the boats and charging for the amount of coal they carried. **‘**Kebbing’ was popular in this area, using a homemade basket or ‘keb’, to dredge small amounts of coal out of the canal after the tipper truck had been. The horse drawn tram from Howe Bridge Collieries crossed the fields then Orchard Lane, The Avenue and Holden Road. In 1861 a new, more direct route was created using a standard gauge line, but both the Ellesmere and the Lilford locos had to be specially built to fit the existing tunnel.

Opposite you stood the walk-up to **Bedford Leigh Station** which stood at the junction of Duckinfield Street and East Bond Street. The line used to run parallel to Platt Fold Street. The station opened in 1864, was renamed **Leigh & Bedford** in 1876 and simply Leigh Station in 1914. Passenger services ended on this line in 1969. **The Railway Arches** on Princess Street are all that remain of the bridges and embankments that used to take the ‘Leigh Loop’ section of the Kenyon to Manchester Railway Line across the streets and Bridgewater Canal. The bridge was made of ‘Staffordshire Blue’, a strong type of construction brick originally made in Staffordshire. It was made from local red clay, Etruria marl which became deep blue in colour when fired at a high temperature in a low-oxygen reducing atmosphere. This created a very hard, impervious surface with high crushing strength and low water absorption making it perfect for bridges and canal construction.

**IMAGE 2.19: Leigh (Bedford) Station, aerial view 1957** <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3176343625973157&set=gm.2216300471852602&idorvanity=178876512261685>

*Take your next left into Platt Fold Street.*

*Continue along Platt Fold Street until you reach the junction with Holden Road.*

*Turn right onto Holden Road and drive until you see the traffic lights ahead. Find a parking space on the left.*

23. The Guided Busway follows the route of the **Bedford Leigh branch of the London & North Western Railway (LNWR).** The ‘Leigh Loop’ section of the Kenyon to Manchester Railway Line opened in 1831, and became part of the LNWR in 1846. The mineral line from Bedford Colliery ran more or less parallel to the railway line. This area had a long tradition of small coal pits but John Speakman began sinking two shafts south of the railway line in 1874, and by 1876 coal was being produced at the **New** **Bedford Collieries**. Bedford was also known as Wood End - the wood being Bedford or Hough Wood at Lilford Park. Two shafts were sunk to the Crombouke mine. No.1 Pit was the upcast whilst No.2 Pit acted as downcast. No.2 Pit was later deepened to the Seven Feet (or Black & White) mine, and the Trencherbone mine. Different grades of coal were extracted from different seams, e.g. household and manufacturing coal from the Crombouke seam. One local resident remembered the habits of the collier in the 1870s. ‘Wages were paid fortnightly but no work would be done on the following Monday. On this day it was not uncommon for the groups of men to indulge in some sort of spree, which usually lasted till evening. For food during these escapades, the help of mine host and his wife was enlisted, and most willingly given in the provision of potato pies, pasties etc.’ It was here in 1888 that 38 men and boys lost their lives in an explosion on the 13th August. Speakman's Sidings were created between Tyldesley Station and Bedford Leigh Station, along with the private mineral railway line to Guest Street. Bedford Colliery was owned by the Speakman family until it was amalgamated with Manchester Collieries in 1929 and its railway was connected to the [Astley and Tyldesley Collieries](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Astley_and_Tyldesley_Collieries) railway system between [Nook](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Nook_Colliery) and [Gin Pit](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Gin_Pit_Colliery) collieries. The colliery became part of the [National Coal Board](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/National_Coal_Board) in 1947. In 1965 Granada TV filmed scenes at the colliery for *The Daughters of the Vicar* by DH Lawrence, adapted by Leigh born Peter Eckersley. In the same year, Mrs Sheila Barlow, the Bedford Colliery Queen, was crowned the Lancashire Gala Queen. She won £50 and a free holiday in Morecambe. Bedford Colliery was originally scheduled to close in 1963 due to 'exhaustion of supplies’ but its miners built up such a high output rate that it was hailed for setting a good example to the rest of the Lancashire coalfield. However, in 1967 NCB chiefs told representatives of the 700 men that, despite its high production figures, it now had to close to prevent needless subsidence damage, particularly to a new sewerage scheme.

**IMAGE 2.20: Bedford Colliery** [https://archives.wigan.gov.uk/archive/photograph-collections/bedford/153508-pc20101829?](https://archives.wigan.gov.uk/archive/photograph-collections/bedford/153508-pc20101829)

*Continue along Holden Road, crossing the Guided Busway.*

*Turn left into Coltsfoot Close, turn the vehicle around and stop near the top of the close.*

24. Opposite, at the top of Guest Street, was the site of the former **Coal Wharf and Landsale Yard**. Before Holden Road was built in 1923,the mineral line ended here. A **landsale** was the practice of selling coal locally free of tax. This was an industrial part of town with a brickworks and claypit in the fields on the opposite side of Holden Road. Its bricks were probably used to build many local buildings. Holden Road was named after the Holden family who provided Leigh with two mayors.

*Turn left onto Holden Road and drive to the roundabout at the end.*

*Turn left into Green Lane.*

*Stop on the left just after Tudor Court, near the older detached house, Woodlawn.*

25. **Woodlawn** was built in 1909 by Alfred Turner, who ran a successful plumbing business on Chapel Street. His only son, Geoffrey who was 6’ 3.5” became the 1927 Northern Counties high-jump champion with a leap of 5’ 11”. He represented his country seven times, and competed at the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928, where he was unplaced. But in 1929 he jumped 6’ 4.5” which took him to the top of the 1929 European high-jump rankings, and to equal 5th in the world. The same year he equalled the British record with a leap of 6’ 5” at Widnes but there were no qualified officials present so it couldn’t stand. In 1932, he bought Fir Tree Farm in Stretton but was taken ill with septic tonsils. Despite desperate attempts to save him, he died aged only 24. He was due to go to the Los Angeles Olympics and his wedding day was only 4 weeks away. His fiancee, Miss Nora Spelman of Earlestown, eventually inherited Woodlawn and never married. Geoffrey was buried at Leigh Cemetery. Turner Way at Leigh Sports Village is named after him.

**IMAGE** 2.**21: Geoffrey Turner, born in Leigh, a member of Leigh Harriers, winning the high jump at Gigg Lane Football Ground, Bury; Bury Police Sports, 17 June 1928** [https://archives.wigan.gov.uk/archive/photograph-collections/leigh/154784-pc20102674?](https://archives.wigan.gov.uk/archive/photograph-collections/leigh/154784-pc20102674)

*Drive along Green Lane, cross Thorneycroft and Wash Lane and pass Rosedale Drive.*

*Where the road divides, take the left branch and continue along Green Lane until you reach the end of it.*

*Turn the vehicle round and park near to the path leading into the estate.*

26. **Reclaimed land.** The small wood at the end of Green Lane is mostly made up of birch trees which thrive on reclaimed land, and were planted when the slag heaps, or coal rucks, were levelled.

The **Walmsley Farm Housing Development** is named after the farm and the nearby house, *The Walmsleys,* later inhabited by John Speakman, who sank the New Bedford Colliery. When Bedford Colliery was bought by the Coal Board in 1947, *The Walmsleys* became the Pit Manager’s House. Ten of the housing estate’s streets are named after miners who died in the Bedford Colliery disaster of 1886. Fairclough Park Drive after Thomas Fairclough aged 34, Hadfield Grove after Allen Hadfield, aged 21, Mort Close after Alfred Mort aged 25 and Richard Mort aged 26, Clayton Green after Thomas Clayton aged 25, Daniels Close after Michael Daniels aged 44, Hampson Court after Stephen Hampson aged 61, Cooke Close after John Cooke aged 17, Heaton Green after William Heaton aged 14, Stirrup Close after Thomas, William and Peter Stirrup aged 13, 18 and 43, Worthington Place after Isaac Worthington aged 38.

*Drive along Green Lane until you reach the junction with Manchester Road.*

*Turn left onto Manchester Road and drive until you see Sutton Park on your left, home of* **Leigh Miners Rangers***. Pull into the entrance drive.*

27. **Leigh Miners Rangers Club** was formed in 1978 to fill a gap left by the demise of Senior School Rugby. The club has produced over 100 professional players, including Dennis Betts, Darren Wright, Tommy Martyn, Simon Booth, Scott Naylor, Steven Blakeley, Mickey Higham, Paul Rowley, Stuart Donlan and Stuart Littler. The Senior Club play at Leigh Miner’s Welfare Institute off Twist Lane. Rugby was first played at Rugby Public School in 1823 but gradually spread throughout the country. Like mining, it was tough, physically demanding and relied heavily on teamwork, so it isn’t surprising that so many mining areas produced teams. Leigh Rugby Club started up at Bucks Farm, Pennington in 1878. In 1883, a team from Thorne Colliery in Wakefield won the Yorkshire Cup which upset many of the RFU who didn’t like being beaten by working-class players. It was the refusal to allow such players to receive financial compensation for taking time off work that led to rugby splitting in two in 1895. Leigh was one of the breakaway clubs that formed the Northern Union and had many miners in its ranks. They had to be very disciplined and safety conscious underground which perhaps explains why the referees in Rugby League have always received more respect than their counterparts in football. And why so many miners enjoyed the controlled aggression of Rugby League after a shift.

*Look across the road at the school opposite.*

28.Opposite stands **Bedford High School**. The senior school building set back on the left used to be Leigh Grammar School from 1932-1976, when it closed and ‘went comprehensive’. The school had a proud history of producing engineering students, many of whom went on to work in the later, more mechanised, years of the mining industry.

*Continue along Manchester Road, past Leigh Cemetery on your left, towards Astley.*

*Opposite St Mary’s School, turn right into Lingards Lane and park near The Cart & Horses.*

**29. Manchester Road** is the old Medieval trackway to Astley, Boothstown, Salford and Manchester and was originally known as Town Lane.

**The Cart & Horses** has been a pub since at least 1835. It originally stood on the opposite corner until 1920, when it moved into *The Farnworths* or *Town Lane House*. The house was named after the wealthy family who lived there. They were descended from a fustian manufacturer-turned-farmer whose son, John founded the Bedford Brewery with Richard Guest of Leigh. Fustian is a thick, hard-wearing twilled cloth with a short nap, usually dyed in dark colours. Two of Guest’s sons, Thomas and Peter, founded the Union Mill in Bedford, Leigh but were in conflict with each other. St Mary’s RC High School stands on the site of two rows of cottages known locally as *Triangle Row*. One brother built the first row, and the other brother built the adjoining row, to deliberately spoil the view! The small cottage, *Farnworth Lodge* to the right of the pub, now separated by the car park entrance, was built by The Farnworths for their coachman and gardener, Edward Shuttleworth and his family.

*Turn the vehicle round and turn right onto Manchester Road towards Astley.*

*Continue along Manchester Road, going straight across the first mini-roundabout.*

*Take the second exit at the second mini-roundabout then turn right into Higher Green Lane, cross the East Lancs Road (A580) and return to the* ***Lancashire Mining Museum.***