

Landmarks, Customs and Reminiscences of Higher Irlam



Higher Irlam
Street scene

This article is taken out of a booklet written by James Goodier in 1972. Although most of the landmarks mentioned are not around any more I know a lot of residents still remember a much quieter peaceful time than the times we live in now.

From 1720 onwards farm houses started to be built in Higher Irlam, these buildings were the first to be built out of brick. Another feature of these houses was that one or two bedrooms would be situated above the stable. There are many disadvantages of living above a stable but in an age when timber and peat were the only means of heating a building any arrangement which produced warmth was a prime consideration.

Of the three public houses in Higher Irlam there has always been some controversy as to which is the oldest. An old map of 1781 shows all three. In the old coaching days the Nags Head was recognised as the Halfway House between Manchester and Warrington.

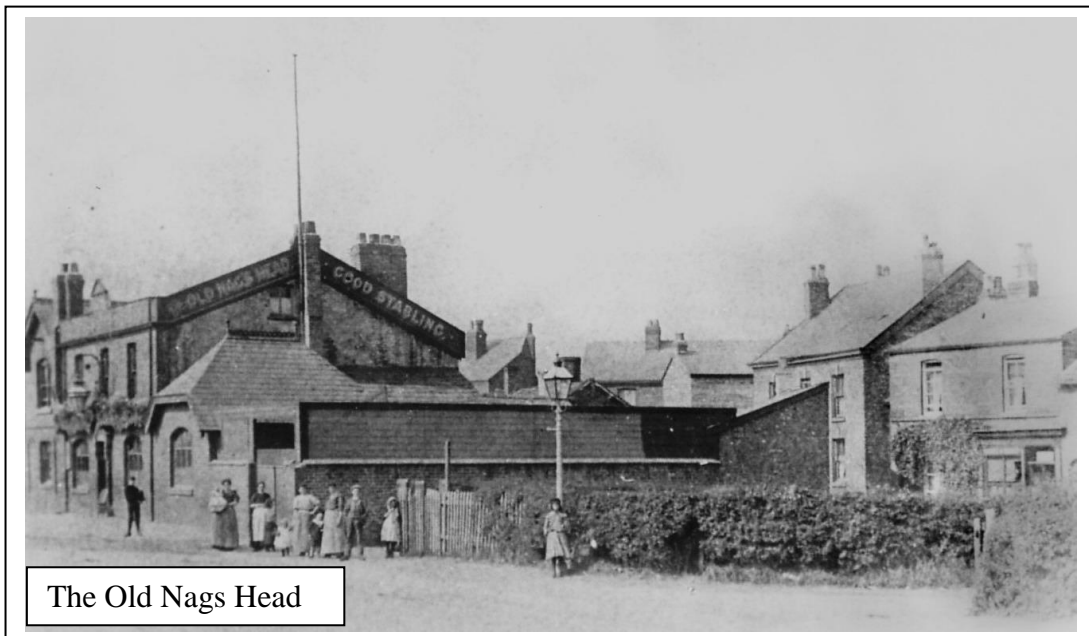


The original White Lion was built with its frontage facing Boat Lane, as this was the main thoroughfare through Higher Irlam. The early history of the Boat House is tied up within the history of the river Irwell from the time when the Old Quay Navigation made the river navigable about the middle of the 18th century.

The original Smithy stood on the land where the Margarine works stood, and the Higher Irlam Toll Bar stood on land on the opposite side of the road. It was demolished on the 1st January 1892; the last collector of tolls was a Mr Arthur Harding.

During weekdays when the hours of darkness fell on the village the only sounds that could be heard would be the grinding of the iron rimmed wheels of the farm lorries making their way to Manchester. Bedtime for most villagers was before 10pm. The first higher Irlam policeman was known to have said that if there was a light showing in a house at night, it was a sure sign that someone in the house was either dying or having a baby.

Farm workers were paid their wages on a Saturday and it was a custom of the Irishmen who lived on "Shants" on local farms to come into the village on Saturday night to do their weekly shopping. When it was completed it was not unusual for them to ask the shopkeeper if he would put their parcels to one side for a few minutes while they just slipped into the Nag for a pint. At times this arrangement did not turn out very satisfactory - pints would increase to quarts, time would pass rapidly by and the shopkeeper would have to keep his shop open until closing time at the pub, awaiting the arrival of the Irishmen to collect their parcels.



There would be an annual invasion every Good Friday of colliers from Astley and Tyldesley districts. These men on the pretext of "Coomin' t'Irlam t'see ships on't Canel" crossed the moss in gangs of seven or eight and always wore clogs. Most of them never saw the Canal, as they got no further than the Nags Head or White Lion. Before they left in the evening much beer had been consumed and several bouts of fisticuffs had taken place, with the local policeman having an unusually busy time. No doubt he like all the villagers heaved a sigh of relief when they saw the last invader making his way home across the moss.