WIGAN DIGGER 6th Annual Festival

SATURDAY 10th SEPT 2016
11am - 9.30pm

WIGAN DIGGERS
Annual Festival

LIVE MUSIC
ALL DAY ACROSS TWO STAGES

FREE FUN
PACKED OPEN AIR EVENT

COMMEMORATING GERRARD WINSTANLEY & THE 17th CENTURY DIGGERS’ MOVEMENT

THIS YEAR’S HEADLINERS

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN

POETRY
COMEDY
EDUCATIONAL TALKS
PUPPET SHOW
CHILDREN’S ENTERTAINMENT
HISTORICAL DIGGING RE-ENACTMENT
BEER TENT with Diggers’ 1649 Ale
50+ FOOD, BOOK & OTHER STALLS

WIGANDIGGERSFESTIVAL.ORG
Gerrard Winstanley Gardens, The Wiend, WIGAN

HEINZ UNITE BRANCH

facebook.com/wigandiggersfestival @WiganDigger
Welcome to the Wigan Diggers Festival

THIS is our 6th celebration of the life and ideals of a man who might not be the most famous, but is certainly the most influential son of our town. We can promise a fantastic day out, with great music across two stages, 50+ food, book and other stalls. Fringe events that include presentations from authors and historians John Rees and Ian Brook. Campaigning film director Ken Loach will be presented with this year’s Winstanley spade award, by previous recipients Jimmy McGovern and Maxine Peake. We are pleased to welcome the Incredible Edible and other local community groups who are keen to promote the value of growing local food on waste and neglected land. We hope you find this booklet informative, and that the historical content will give you an incentive to find out more about Wigan and that fascinating period in the history of our country. The festival has grown as each year passes, and this one promises to be the best yet, but it all happens as a result of the hard work of the volunteers who make up the festival committee. We are especially grateful to our sponsors, from the trade union movement and local councillors, who finance the costs of staging this event, and a special thank you to the local business who’ve advertised in our brochure, they deserve your support. As always our list of bands and stalls are subject to change, so please check our web site for updates wigandiggersfestival.org

On the day of the festival the magnificent 17th century Mortlake Tapestry will be on display in Wigan Parish Church, it will be well worth a visit! (It is absolutely massive!)
Diggers’ Festival

Stall Holders

1. Wigan Diggers’ Festival Main Stage
2. Dorothy Fryman Song & Story Stage
3. Rumbah Caribbean Cuisine (with Vegetarian options)
4. Occupy Wigan Beer Tent (sponsored by Walkers Union Solicitors)
5. Wigan Diggers’ Festival HQ & Product Stall
6. Find out more about the Diggers Stall (& Display)
7. Wigan Diggers’ Arts & Culture Marquee
8. Zazou Theatre - Story of the Diggers (Puppet Show)
9. Bits & Bobs - Diggers’ Volunteer Craft Stall
10. Jean Jeannie - Ethic Gifts & Crafts
11. Gallimore’s Burgers
12. Revenge is Sweats - Confectionery & Soft Drinks
13. Socialist Labour Party
14. JENGBA Campaign - Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association
15. Nanas/Frack Free Lancashire/Friends of the Earth
16. Greater Manchester Keep Our NHS Public
17. Trade Unionist & Socialist Coalition
19. Unity Credit Union
20. Revolutionary Health
21. Eliza Face Painting
22. North West Anti-Nuclear Power
23. Greater Manchester CND
24. Greenslate Community Farm
25. Stitched Up
26. Greg’s Busy Bees - Honey
27. Bumble Bees - Upcycled Furniture
28. Friends of Real Lancashire
29. Wigan & Leigh Green Party
30. Manchester Solidarity Federation
31. Republic North West
32. International Brigade Memorial Committee
33. Stop TTIP - Manchester
34. Socialist Party of Great Britain
35. 38 Degrees Manchester/North West Equality Network
36. Rebel Road
37. Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)
38. St. George’s Hill 1649 Digging Re-enactment Site
39. Greater Manchester Unite the Union Community Branch
40. People’s Assembly Against Austerity
41. Manchester Trades Union Council
42. Greater Manchester Association of Trades Union Councils
43. Bolton Diggers
44. Greater Manchester Referendum Campaign
45. Wigan National Union of Teachers
46. Communist Party of Britain
47. Morning Star Newspaper
48. Gerrard Winstanley Memorial Plaque
49. Bookcycle
50. Diggers’ Festival Recycling & Waste Disposal Area
51. Diggers’ Festival Toilets
52. Wigan Constituency Labour Party
53. Bakers, Food & Allied Workers’ Union
54. North West Unite the Union - Education
55. Mr. Tea - Tea, Coffee & Homemade Lemonade
56. Foodie Box
57. Left Unity Wigan
58. Rail, Maritime & Transport union - North West & North Wales
59. North West Union of Construction
60. Allied Trades & Technicians
61. Talentvine Creations
62. Eileen’s Preserves
63. Wigan Socialist Workers Party

Message of Welcome from Lisa Nandy
Labour MP for Wigan

“I’m proud that every year thanks to the commitment of a small group of men and women, Wigan comes together to celebrate our shared socialist aims and values at the Wigan Diggers Festival. It was 1651 when Gerrard Winstanley announced his ambition to return the land to shared, common use as “a common treasury for all”.

How angry he would have been, exactly 325 years later, to see people queuing at the Brick, relying on food parcels to feed their children in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. He would have raised against rising levels of homelessness in Britain and a system that allows too many big companies to make huge profits while paying their staff a wage that isn’t enough to live on.

We have a railway system that is shamefully still in private hands, run not for our common good but for the shareholders at the top. We have had six years of a government pursuing a policy of austerity, choking off the recovery of our economy and leaving the old, the sick and the young to pay the price. With huge cuts to our government funding, and pressure on our NHS, this town has paid a higher price than many.

Now more than ever we cannot afford to be divided. In recent years I have been proud to work with trade unionists and fellow socialists, on picket lines and in workplaces, in pursuit of social justice. I have seen for myself what we achieve when we stand in solidarity with one another.

By working together and standing up to those who seek to hold onto power for their own gain, we can change this country. There are people across this country who believe in the values Winstanley fought for – equality, common ownership and social justice. That’s why the Wigan Diggers Festival goes from strength to strength and long may it continue.”
Artists Line Up
(times to be confirmed)

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN
A hometown return for one of Wigan’s most successful and respected bands. From indie darlings on the iconic Factory Records, touring the world, playing Wembley, to hit records and Top Of The Pops, this is a reunion gig not to be missed.
www.railwaychildren.co.uk

GEORGE BOROWSKI
Universally known as Guitar George – he knows all the chords. Having shared stages around the world with many other greats, he is bringing his own magic to the Diggers Festival.
www.georgeborowski.com

MORE THAN WORDS
Wigan based Community group that uses drama, music, dance, poetry, singing and creative activities to help people to develop confidence and social skills.
www.facebook.com/MoreThanWordsAdvocacy

BUG
Politically motivated 70’s influenced punk band that both soars and inspires.
www.bugpunk.co.uk

COMMONERS CHOIR
Formed by Boff Whalley ex-Chumbawamba, the choir are explicitly political, peculiar, memorable, feisty, celebratory, witty, angry and inclusive.
www.commonerschoir.com

HARP & A MONKEY
A story telling electrofolk trio with a growing reputation and following around the festival circuit.
www.harpandamonkey.com

HEADSTICKS
Fast rising, hard hitting collision of folk and punk or punk and folk, setting the world to rights musically and lyrically.
www.headsticks.co.uk

DEAN LANE
Terrier focussed, Bolton based, supporter of causes and singer of songs.
www.deanlane.bandcamp.com

GEORGE BOROWSKI
Universally known as Guitar George – he knows all the chords. Having shared stages around the world with many other greats, he is bringing his own magic to the Diggers Festival.
www.georgeborowski.com

JD MEATYARD
Considered rage and passion in a musical form from the former leader of John Peel favourites The Levellers 5 and The Calvin Party.
www.jdmeatyard.com

QUIET LONER
The musical persona of singer songwriter Mat Hill, expect songs about love and fear, life and death, despair and hope.
www.quietloner.com

BELLA GAFFNEY
A Folk and acoustic musician, she writes folk inspired songs which she performs along with her own original arrangements of traditional pieces.
www.bellagaffney.weebly.com

GERRY O’GORMAN
Performing solo rather than with his band Flat Back Four, Gerry divides his passions between music, football taking in truth and justice along the way.
www.facebook.com/gerryoBFC

JOE SOLO
Musician, writer, poet, activist, broadcaster & washing machine engineer from Scarborough. Joe is the originator of the ‘We Shall Overcome’ national weekend of protest gigs.
www.joesolomusic.com

DARREN POYZER
A singer-songwriter who is passionate about peace and social justice and also has an excellent sense of humour and an engaging stage presence.
www.poyzer.com

ELIZA P
Singer song-writer, guitar player from Manchester, whose alternative, bluesy, folk, rock music is both refreshing and idiosyncratic.
www.reverbnation.com/elizap

RUN OUT THE GUNS
No airs or graces, no pretence, just fine quality musicianship and raw enthusiasm make this folk-rock 4-piece what it is.
www.runouttheguns.com

BIGFOOT STRAIGHT OUTTA WIGAN
Big Rock, Big Sound, Big Presence, Big Future and welcomed back after being a Big Hit last year.
www.bigfootband.co.uk
Wigan in the 17th Century

THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF A REVOLUTIONARY

Wigan Parish Church established in 1199, had been rebuilt just a year earlier. When Gerrard Winstanley; son of a Mercer was born. His birth registered in the church records on the 19th of October 1609.

The Church, along with the nearby Moot House, represented the two seats of power in the town, the Church being the biggest landowner; the rector was in effect the Lord of the manor, and the Moot house, or Town Hall, represented civil society. Although the population of the town at that time was only around 4,000 people, it was deemed larger and wealthier that the other three ancient boroughs in Lancashire:- Liverpool, Lancaster and Preston. During this period, Wigan’s economy was largely driven by its market which served a considerable area of South Lancashire. It had been made a royal borough in 1246, granting it the privilege of holding markets and fairs, raising revenues independent of the Lord of the manor. Main industries, other than agriculture, included pottery, textiles, pewter and iron. Wigan was famous for its bell making; it also saw the early beginnings of coal mining.

As the economy grew, so did the disputes between the rector and the town’s people over the share of the profits from that growth. Even people digging for coal in their own back gardens risked penalties. Pottery workers won a famous victory when in 1632 the Bishop conceded that they had the right to dig for clay on unused manor land. Perhaps this gave Winstanley the idea of digging for the common good. As the economy grew, so did the disputes between the rector and the town’s people over the share of the profits from that growth. Even people digging for coal in their own back gardens risked penalties. Pottery workers won a famous victory when in 1632 the Bishop conceded that they had the right to dig for clay on unused manor land. Perhaps this gave Winstanley the idea of digging for the common good. Although little is recorded about Gerrard Winstanley’s early years until he left Wigan for London in 1630, an apprentice in the textile trade. He had obviously been well educated by then. Wigan grammar school had been established in 1597, so it’s plausible he received his formal education there. Another huge influence in his education was the publication of the King James Bible. Completed in 1612, every church was required to hold a copy. This was the first time ordinary people had access to the scriptures in a language they could understand.

Winstanley absorbed himself in these writings, finding they contradicted the established interpretation of the bible, that church leaders, who were also land owners, used to justify the concentration of wealth amongst the few. His books are peppered with biblical references.

Enclosures

Under the traditional feudal system of communal agriculture, the lord of the manor allowed the community to grow crops, graze cattle, pigs and poultry, and forage for game and wood in the forests, in return for a portion of their produce. This system became increasingly undermined by the enclosure of common land by the rich and powerful, depriving communities of the ability to provide for themselves. This led to riots, and civil disobedience campaigns throughout the country. Alarmed by this, royalty provided certain checks and balances to try to curtail the worst excesses of these land grabs. Winstanley and others however, were deeply affected to see land lying idle behind fences, whilst ordinary people went hungry. Ironically, after the civil war, which many on the parliamentary side thought they were fighting to secure a fairer society, the new parliament sided with the land owners, dissolving the last few rights country folk had to access the land. Huge penalties implemented to deter people from exercising their previous customs. For example 50 separate hanging offences passed to prevent anyone feeding themselves by catching wild game.

Wigan and the Civil War

The English civil war began in 1642. Wigan and Warrington lent strong support to the Earl of Derby and the Royalist cause, whilst Bolton sided with the Parliamentarians. One of the first skirmishes between
royalists and roundheads took place near Wigan at this time, whilst the battle of Wigan Lane in 1651, proved to be one of the last confrontations of the war. The town changed hands a couple of times during the war, suffering greatly from pillaging each time it fell to Cromwell’s forces. Wigan’s two M.P.’s supported both sides in the divide. Orlando Bridgeman was a keen royalist and distinguished himself in their forces, whilst Alexander Rigby was a noted Parliamentary commander. After the success of the Parliamentary forces, Cromwell punished the Borough by increasing taxes and removing its privileges. These were given back to the town after the restoration of the monarchy.

Postscript

Wigan’s 17th century industry continued to grow, helped by the development of the canal and rail systems. By the end of the 19th century, pottery, pewter and bell making had disappeared, replaced by coal, cotton and iron, the first pit sunk in 1619, had grown to 48 producing 4 million tons a year, and the population had reached 61,000.

Paul Hilton (See also “Potted Guide to the History of Wigan” and “Aspects of Wigan’s History”)

The right to a say in government

The issues raised in the historic conflict between Charles I, resting his claim to govern Britain on the divine right of kings, and Parliament - representing, however imperfectly, a demand for the wider sharing of power - concerned the use and abuse of state power, the right of the governed to a say in their government, and the nature of political freedom.

They found spokesmen in John Lilburn, Richard Overton, William Wallwyn, Gerard Winstanley and others...

The Levelers grew out of this conflict. They represented the aspirations of working people who suffered under the persecution of kings, landowners and the priestly class, and they spoke for those who experienced the hardships of poverty and deprivation. They developed and campaigned, first with Cromwell and then against him, for a political and constitutional settlement of the civil war which would embody principles of political freedom, anticipating by a century and a half the ideas of the American and French revolutions.

Freedom of speech

The Levelers found spokesmen and campaigners in John Lilburn, Richard Overton, William Walwyn, Gerard Winstanley the True Leveler or Digger, and others. These men were brilliant pamphleteers enjoying a short-lived freedom to print, publish and circulate their views at a time when censorship was temporarily in abeyance, and printing presses newly cheap and easy to set up. They developed their own traditions of free discussion and vigorous petitioning and used them to formulate and advance their demands.
The Agreement of the People

The Levelers’ demands were encapsulated in a remarkable document called An Agreement of the People outlining a new and democratic constitution for Britain. The preamble to the third draft of this Agreement, published on May 1st 1649, states that:

We, the free People of England, to whom God hath given hearts, means and opportunity to effect the same, do with submission to his wisdom, in his name, and desiring the equity thereof may be to his praise and glory, agree to ascertain our Government to abolish all arbitrary Power, and to set bounds and limits both to our Supreme, and all Subordinate Authority, and remove all known Grievances. And accordingly do declare and publish to all the world, that we are agreed as followeth:

That the Supreme Authority of England and the Territories therewith incorporate, shall be and reside henceforward in a Representative of the people consisting of four hundred persons, but no more; in the choice of whom (according to natural right) all men of the age of one and twenty years and upwards (not being servants, or receiving alms, or having served with the late King in Arms or voluntary Contributions), shall have their voices...

‘Freeborn Englishmen’

The Levellers held themselves to be freeborn Englishmen, entitled to the protection of a natural law of human rights which they believed to originate in the will of God - rights vested in the people to whom alone true sovereignty belonged. These sovereign rights were only loaned to Parliament, which should be elected on a wide popular franchise and hold the people's rights in trust.

A ‘common storehouse for all’

The Diggers, or True Levellers as they described themselves, went even further and advocated absolute human equality - including equality between men and women - and at the same time anticipated today's environmental and green movements in seeing the earth as a precious ‘common storehouse for all’. The Digger leader, Gerard Winstanley, wrote in his pamphlet The True Levellers’ Standard Advanced, published on April 26th 1649.

In the beginning of Time, the great Creator,

Politics is really about education, not about propaganda

Tony Benn
1925-2014

Reason, made the Earth to be a Common Treasury, to preserve Beasts, Birds, Fishes and Man, the Lord that was to govern this Creation; for Man had Domination given to him, over the Beasts, Birds and Fishes; but not one word was spoken in the beginning, that one branch of mankind should rule over another ... And that Earth that is within this Creation made a Common Storehouse for all, is bought and sold, and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great Creator is mightily dishonored...

Unsurprisingly, the ideas of the Levelers were considered extremely dangerous by those
with a vested interest in the preservation of privilege, property and power. By 1650 the Levellers’ movement had been effectively crushed. Cromwell’s Commonwealth represented a formidable advance compared to the reign of King Charles which preceded it. But it did not - and in terms of its historical and industrial development probably could not - adopt the principles that Lilburn, Overton Walwyn, and still less Winstanley, were advocating. Ten years later came the Restoration of Charles II. In 1688 Britain witnessed the shadowy beginnings of a constitutional monarchy which had little in common with real political democracy. But the elimination of the Levelers as an organized political movement could not obliterate the ideas which they had propagated. From that day to this the same principles of religious and political freedom and equality have reappeared again and again.

When the American Congress set out their political principles in the Declaration of Independence on July 4th 1776, the ideas were taken straight from the English Levelers a century and a quarter before: We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the governed.

The Americans had also drawn heavily on the writings of Tom Paine, who was a direct heir of the Leveler tradition, and whose Rights of Man also won him a place in the history of the French Revolution (he was elected a Deputy to the first French Constituent Assembly summoned to implement the principles of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’). The English reformers of the early 19th century also drew many of their ideas and language from the Levelers’ mix of Christian teaching, religious and political dissent, social equality and democracy. It fired the imagination of generations of Congregationalists, trade union pioneers, early co-operators, Chartists, and socialists. And so it will always be. For politics is really about education, not about propaganda. It is about teaching more than management. It is about ideas and values and not only about Acts of Parliament, political institutions, and ministerial office. The Levelers, thank God, still teach us that.

Gerrard Winstanley in seeing the earth as a common treasury for all was a forerunner of today’s environmental and green movements

We are very pleased to see that many of these groups will be represented at our festival. One country that has put into practice Winstanleys aspirations of sustainable agriculture is Cuba. Because of the American economic blockade, which has now lasted 55 years, the Cubans have turned necessity into a virtue. With support from Cuban scientists, farmers have adopted agro ecological techniques. Thousands of oxen replaced tractors that could not function due to lack of petroleum and spare parts, they’ve substituted green manures for chemical fertilizers and bio pesticides for insecticides. At the same time the Cuban Government has encouraged forms of production where groups of farmers grow and market their produce collectively. As Cuba reoriented its agriculture to depend less on imported chemical inputs and imported equipment, per capita food production in Cuba has increased by 4.2 percent per year, during a period when production was stagnant across Latin America and the Caribbean. Urban gardens, which first sprang up during the economic crisis of the early 1990s, have developed into an important food source. The most productive urban farms yield up to 20 kg of food per square meter, the highest rate in the world, using no synthetic chemicals. Urban farms supply 50 to 70 percent or more of all the fresh vegetables consumed in cities such as Havana and Villa Clara.

We’ve invited Lorraine Tillett of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign to give a presentation and film show illustrating current Cuban agricultural techniques, so look out for her at our fringe events.
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At 500 years old, located in the heart of the town centre and situated in the town’s only conservation area lies Wigan’s hidden gem – The John Bull Chop House – Voted Wigan CAMRA pub of the year and runners up for best pint in Thwaites awards for excellence, the John Bull has been run by the same family for 40 years and offers a warm welcome to all.

Coopers Row, Wigan WN1 1PQ
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MARTLAND MILL BREWERY

Tap 'n' Barrel
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The Victorian Quarter
Hallgate, Wigan WN1 1LR

6 Hand Pulled Real Ales
Continental draft lagers and still ciders
Specialist selection of wines
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Live music every Sunday 3-5pm

Open from 12pm six days a week.
Late licence weekends. Closed Tuesdays.
Telephone: 01942 386966
Standish already has an Incredible Edible group - Standish in Bloom – and now with the support of Wigan Council more groups are getting involved and it’s sowing seeds across the borough!

And what better opportunity could there be to launch this new Incredible Edible partnership than supporting the Diggers Festival and celebrating Gerrard Winstanley.

His view of the earth as "a common storehouse for all", of equality, education and enterprise, resonates completely with Incredible Edible.

Incredible Edible Standish - Courtesy of Wigan Council

The IE movement was started 8 years ago by a small group of people in Todmorden who wanted to do something to create a better future for our children. They wanted to see if they could create a kinder form of prosperity through access to local food.

Through the ‘power of small actions’ they just got on with doing things. By growing, sharing, teaching and buying local produce, they’ve developed a simple model that puts food at the heart of the town – and it works!

The original gang – Courtesy of Incredible Edible Todmorden

Now across the UK, more than 125 different communities, from the rural to intensely urban, have embraced the Incredible Edible model based on three ‘plates’ - Community, Learning and Business.

Each Incredible Edible group is unique, working to their own strengths and towards delivering the three plates in their own way. Food is bringing people together, growing, sharing skills, learning, and socialising, and, along the way, enriching communities and creating jobs and opportunities for enterprise.

But it’s time to be bolder! Wigan is the start of a new brave experiment – The IncrEdible North.

From councils like Wigan, to prisons & hospitals, to community groups & businesses, Incredible North aims to connect everyone who believes in the value and potential of local food, so they can create a kinder future - one plot, one plate, one pound at a time.

For more info and to find out where will be at the event visit: www.incredibledible.org.uk/diggers
Getting involved with the diggers

Around 4,000 people attended last year's festival, and a great time was had by all. This year we want it to be even bigger and better! Why not come join us and make a day of it?

The Diggers Festival is run completely by volunteers, from the planning to the execution and there is always room for more to get involved.

Most of the planning and organisation takes place at monthly meetings throughout the year. These are usually held on the third Monday of the month, from 7.30pm at The Anvil pub (we do have a separate room). The meetings are open and friendly, even when differences of opinion are expressed. We welcome people of all persuasions, although given the nature of Gerrard Winstanley's ideas and theories, most of us redress to the left in a political sense. In addition to the main committee, there are a number of sub-committees that focus on different aspects of the running of the festival, such as the bar, publicity, fund raising and finance and the music committee. Members of these committees are also all members of the general committee and we generally ask new members to serve on the general committee through one of these sub-committees that are also members of the general committee and we generally ask new members to serve on the general committee through one of these sub-committees that focus on different aspects of the running of the festival, such as the bar, publicity, fund raising and finance and the music committee. Members of these committees are also all members of the general committee and we generally ask new members to serve on the general committee through one festival in order to understand the full running of it before volunteering for membership of a sub-committee that takes their interest.

The meetings of the sub-committee are usually less formal and are arranged separately from the general committee at times that suit the members of those committees. Volunteers on the day are very welcome whatever your specialist skills or willingness to pitch in – we always need people to help keep the site clean and tidy, to help with assembling and arranging the stalls etc. Speaking of stalls, these are a great way to engage new people with your organisation and ideas as well as supporting the festival itself. For a small fee, you will have access to the thousands of people who attend the festival and to associate your ideas with the good feelings generated by the event. All the money raised by the stalls helps ensure the future and growth of the festival. Perhaps the most frequently asked question relates to how to get to perform at the festival. All the acts submit an application form earlier in the year and a selection of these are chosen by voting at the Music Committee. Members of the committee have a wide variety of tastes and the selection is intended to include a range of styles and preference is also given to artists that have both allied themselves with political causes in the past and also play original music. All the artists selected in this way perform for reasonable expenses on the day, plus a small amount of hospitality in the form of food and drink. If you would like to be considered for Festival 2017, then keep an eye on the Wigan Diggers Facebook, Website and Twitter as details of how to apply will be posted early next year.

In 1630, a 21 year old textile trader moved to London. He did well at first, but as a result of the abuse of power by the both the King and Parliament and then the outbreak of the English Civil War which started twelve years later, he saw his business ruined and in 1643 he became bankrupt. His father-in-law helped him move to Cobham in Surrey, where he initially worked as a cowherd. However, by the time of the defeat of the Royalist side and King Charles execution in early 1649, he and a group of others in a similar situation had got together to represent the voice of the common people, and especially that of the propertylessly poor.

The man’s name was GERRARD WINSTANLEY.

He soon became the key spokesperson of the group which the people living at the time referred to as ‘THE DIGGERS’, but who were also known as the ‘True Levellers’ as distinct from another group led by John Lilburne, Richard Overton and William Walwyn known as ‘The Levellers’ who while seeking equality before the law, and an extension of the right to vote for most men, did not support the abolition of private property and common ownership of the land. The Diggers ‘nickname’ came from their belief that the land should be available to every person to dig and sow, so that everyone, rich or poor, could live, grow and eat by the sweat of their own brows, as according to them ‘The earth was made to be a common treasury for all.”

THE DIGGERS also advocated absolute human equality including equality between men and women which in the 1600s was a very radical idea indeed.

WHAT DID THE DIGGERS DO?

Instead of simply voicing their opinion through the books and other papers GERRARD WINSTANLEY wrote, he and THE DIGGERS, who consisted of mainly poor families that had no land of their own (as land was only owned by the rich) decided to take direct action by taking over common land that belonged to no one, and which was not in use, and started to farm it, so as to allow everyone who worked the land to eat. At first this went well, but unsurprisingly the ideas of THE DIGGERS were considered extremely dangerous by those with a vested interest in the preservation of privilege, property and power. As more of these communities appeared rich land owners and the corrupt government sent soldiers (see drawing from the time depicting this below) to beat them, destroy and also play original music. All the artists selected in this way perform for reasonable expenses on the day, plus a small amount of hospitality in the form of food and drink. If you would like to be considered for Festival 2017, then keep an eye on the Wigan Diggers Facebook, Website and Twitter as details of how to apply will be posted early next year.

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SO WHY HAVE A DIGGERS’ FESTIVAL IN WIGAN?

Well, the simple answer to that is that GERRARD WINSTANLEY was born and raised in Wigan. It is also, from the earlier action of Wigan Clay and Coal ‘Diggers’ who established their right to dig up local common land for clay and coal, it is suggested by some Winstanley scholars, that he drew his inspiration for his own actions in 1649.

As well as being able to find out more about the life, ideas, and actions of this great Wiganer, we want to celebrate him and THE DIGGERS’ movement with a festival of live music, poetry, film, great beer, and most of all a re-born sense of community spirit amongst ordinary people everywhere.

A FINAL NOTE

Historically GERRARD WINSTANLEY and THE DIGGERS movement was, and is, one of the most important parts of the English ‘Revolution’ of 1649.

This is recognized globally with GERRARD WINSTANLEY amongst those listed on a monument dedicated to “The great Socialist thinkers” in Moscow, Russia.

We think Wigan should be proud to be the home of such an important historical figure, especially as he was the voice for so many ordinary people at the time.

“For freedom is the man that will turn the word upside down, no wonder he hath enemies”