



**ERSEY THIRSTDAYS
HASH HOUSE HARRIERS**

Run Number 525

25th May 2023

The Stocks Tavern, Newton-le-Willows

The Pack: Wigan Pier and Now and Then (Hares), Snoozanne, Mad Hatter, 10secs, Overdrive, Peter Pong, PA

As the train slowed down on the approach to Newton-le-Willows, Snoozanne looked out at the green sunlit valley below and commented that Wigan Pier always set runs in lovely countryside. But in fact we were not yet at our goal and it was lucky the train doors didn't open when the train stopped, as we would have dashed out onto Earlestown station. Eventually, several minutes late and with precious beer time ticking away, we emerged at the right station and had only a short walk to the Stocks Tavern. Here we found the rest of the pack sitting outside in the sunshine (PA must have been on the same train but unlike Mad Hatter he had not made the tactical error of trying to lock the carriage door rather than open it). Wigan Pier inspired us by promising that there was a marvellous sight to see at the end of the run, but then told us that the run was so long that we'd be unlikely to get that far. She then spoilt the surprise anyway by telling us that the attraction was the George Stephenson viaduct which was one of the oldest railway viaducts in the world. A later look at the map revealed that this was where Snoozanne had admired the view earlier, so most of us got to cross the viaduct if not actually see it. WP offered to make up for any disappointment by showing us photos of it. As someone said, it would be quite tempting to spend the whole evening sitting outside the pub looking at photos of what we'd have seen on the hash. In our twilight years it could offer quite an attractive form of hashing.

Shortly Overdrive appeared, having caught the train from Chester. Excuses had been received from Victim saying he had overslept after a "late lunch" as he put it, while taking some of fcuk's friends on "a tour of Chester". So no-one else was likely to turn up. Speed was of the essence if we were to have any chance of seeing the viaduct, but there is always someone, and this time it was 10 secs who had to make the last-minute trip to the loo when everyone else was ready to go.



But finally we were assembled to hear the instructions. The trail had been marked in chalk, flour and flower; the hares had mostly used recyclable pictures of flowers to mark the trail where chalk was not practicable. Also the trail was a kind of “figure-of-eight” with trail crossings, and so to avoid confusion the outward trail had been marked in white and the inward trail in blue; but some parts had been marked in pink and this might just have been because the white or blue chalk had run out... one thing seemed clear, if anything had gone wrong it was Now and Then’s fault. Also, Wigan Pier was never known to set a trail without some kind of drama occurring and this was apparently no exception; but the story would be told later.



The trail led straight into a park and then emerged quite near the station. Along the road a viaduct was found but it was not THE viaduct; the trail then led into more parkland following a stream.



Some blue arrows were found but duly ignored for the moment.



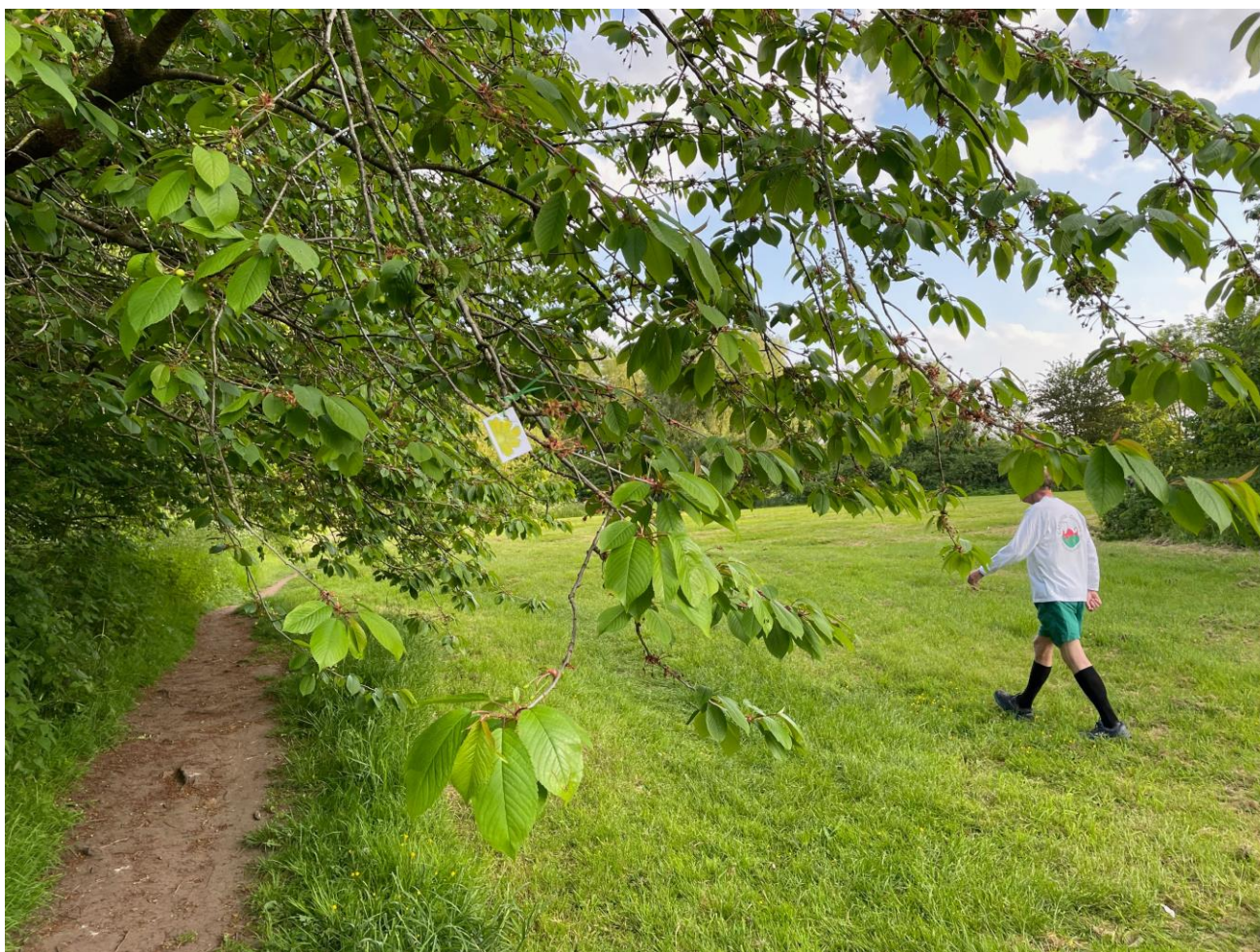
And several flower markings were also spotted.







The arrows were often on fences and walls. Luckily no-one had yet been tempted to try any wild swimming.



It was easy to forget to look for the flower markings which were naturally somewhat camouflaged...



After emerging for a while into open country and running along a cornfield, we found ourselves in what had been the Vulcan Works where steam locomotives had once been manufactured. Not much is now left of this, except a large pool once used for cooling purposes but now a fishing lake;...



...also the “Vulcan Village”, an area of specially-built workers’ cottages a la Port Sunlight. Wigan Pier said she had spared us a detour to see these at close quarters, but we were able to contemplate them in the distance.



Shortly after this we arrived on the banks of the Sankey Brook navigation. Built in 1755, this is apparently the first canal constructed in the Industrial Revolution. Technically it was only licensed to be a “navigation”, i.e. a widening of the original river, but sneakily they made it completely separate. Interestingly, the Carr Mill Dam near Billinge, which Wigan Pier took us around last year, was once extended in order to provide water for the Sankey canal; and is the biggest body of water in Merseyside. Anyway the canal was looking lovely in the evening sunshine.





After a kilometre or so we reached the decision point; we could do a there-and-back to the viaduct further along the canal, or start heading for home. We chose the latter option, which would already be a 4.5 mile run altogether.



So we crossed the bridge...





...which brought us to the Mucky Mountains, a large dump of toxic waste which actually looked rather attractive now it had been converted to a nature reserve. This was the site of Vitriol Square, which sounded like a soap opera with a particularly acerbic cast, but in fact was once a delightful set of residences thoughtfully positioned to save workers in the sulphuric acid factory from a long commute. One hopes they didn't feel bitter about having to live there...



Some of us must be shrinking if this sign is correct...



From now on we were following the blue arrows and a feeling of déjà vu became apparent once we approached the Vulcan Works area again.



All the same, the cemetery was a new feature of the return trip and shortly afterwards Wigan Pier paused outside this garden gate, put a finger on her lips and said this was where It Happened. But she refused to go into further details for the moment, saying all would be revealed at the On Inn.



Luckily we were not to be kept in suspense much longer. After following the stream back, under the viaduct and through another area of parkland, we were back at the On Inn. Wigan Pier moved her car into the car park by the church. She had abandoned her original plan to use some conveniently placed gravestones to support the food, which was just as well as there was clearly a choir practice taking place and churchgoers were emerging into the carpark at intervals.



10secs might appear to be helping but in fact he is cunningly making sure that two of the legs will collapse when all the food is on the table.



There was a tempting array of food with dips, cheese, strawberries, grapes, and cakes; we were sadly unable to do justice to it all due to approaching train departures, and we asked Wigan Pier to tell us about the afternoon's drama while we were finishing off. It seemed that while they were passing the garden in question, they had heard sounds which they interpreted as cats fighting. But George had known better and had bounded over the gate. It seems that George is a dog, by the way. When Wigan Pier and Now and Then followed, they found an elderly woman had fallen and was crying in pain. She refused to allow an ambulance to be called, but luckily there were neighbours who were able to offer assistance and take over responsibility for further care. But who knows how long she might have lain there without George's intervention.

In the absence of fcuk, no doubt also sleeping off a late lunch, Overdrive deputised as RA. Comments were invited on the run and it was criticised for being too scenic and sunny; its shape was also commented on (was it really a figure-of-eight?). Down downs were awarded to:

The Hares (with special mention for their afternoon emergency activities)

10secs: for delaying the start of the run with his toilet stop

George: for heroism (down-down taken on his behalf by Now and Then)

Finally we hurriedly bundled the remains of the feast into the boot and headed back to the pub for a quick drink before the train.



This gave us the chance to take the team photo which had been forgotten earlier (probably due to 10secs' visit to the loo).