

West Derby Society

NEWSLETTER

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Victorian West Derby

This unusual view of West Derby Village was painted by leading Liverpool artist William Gawith Herdman around 1854.

It is in the collection of the new Victoria Museum at the University of Liverpool. Curator Moira Lindsey revealed the watercolour's existence when she gave an illustrated talk at our April meeting – the Society's first in the newly-refurbished *Lowlands*.



The painting shows the Village shortly before it was rebuilt by the Earl of Sefton to make a suitable entrance to Croxteth Hall.

Unlike Herdman's better-known Village study, this smaller version shows the old chapel from Mill Lane. It is full of fascinating detail including several other vanished buildings.

The only one still standing is the Yeoman's House, seen in the detail below.



Herdman painted many views of old Liverpool, including scenes that had disappeared before his own time.

This painting confirms that he studied the Village and decided to record it before it was rebuilt. Your chairman has been researching an 1851 Royal visit to Liverpool when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert stayed at Croxteth Hall. The Herdman painting reveals that the Village had muddy, unmade roads which must have been awful to use in wet weather. There was a deluge when the Royal couple travelled from West Derby to Liverpool town centre. This may have spurred Lord Sefton and other community members to plan the modernisation of the Village.

Images courtesy of the Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, University of Liverpool.

Blackmore



This previously unpublished photograph shows the lodge on Eaton Rd that served *Blackmore* – Danescourt Rd was built on the site. The image was given to the Society recently by well-known builder William Searle who remembers both the lodge and mansion which were demolished in the 1920s. His enthralling recollections of the rural West Derby of his childhood will be published in a future edition of the *NewsLetter*.

West Derby Nuggets

Seeing the remarkable Herdman painting and view of Blackmore lodge prompted me to take a closer look at some of our vanished landmarks, **writes Alastair Caird**.

The Ancient Chapel of West Derby, as it was known, was in the centre of the Village and the site of the altar is marked by the monument. A study of the chapel's parish registers makes interesting reading.

The first baptism was that of Hugh, son of William Ryding, on 21 November 1688.

The first marriage is that of William Wrightson and Jane Widdrington of *Liverpoole* on 20 July 1698. There are no records of burials as there has never been a churchyard in West Derby Village.

There follow some details of marriages (in original language):

Jan 1st 1710 John Brambill of Pilsh Lane in Derby and Jane Mercer sp., then of Derby without lic. or pub. by Jos: Ambrose Low alias Tatchbegger.

Oct 3rd, 1710 Justilian Carteridge, Servane, to Mr Roper of West Derby and Sharlott Clerk alias Wilson of West Derby with Mr Low (alias Tatchbegger) of Rainford: Midnight without lic. or pub.

Suspended

These marriages, along with several others, appear to have been performed by a suspended clergyman called Joshua Ambrose Low, nicknamed Tatchbegger, without issuing a licence or publishing banns.

Such practices led to changes in the law and it is now illegal to marry a couple after 6 pm. The change was originally designed to avoid clandestine marriages without the knowledge or consent of parents.

The Diocesan registers of Chester and York record nothing of Low or the reason for his suspension. Perhaps it was not serious enough to reach the records of the Bishop or Archbishop. However, the following reference shows that a Joshua Ambrose had West Derby connections: *Joshua Ambrose, ejected and afterwards conformed. Curate of West Derby, Walton, Lancs. Vicar of Childwall 15 October 1664 – 86. Buried there in 1710.*

Joshua Ambrose lived in West Derby when he was vicar of Childwall – this is verified in the Childwall parish church registers.

Blackmore

The house was built by Philip Blessig who was for many years the Russian consul in Liverpool.

11 October 1881 – conveyance of 18.5 acres of land between Blessig and Richard Rankin Heap, flour miller.

20 September 1899 – Heap died leaving a £293,487 estate.

8 October 1924 – conveyance of 49 acres between Herbert Ryder Heap and others to Blackmoor Park Estates.

1 January 1932 – conveyance of piece of land 41 Queenscourt Rd between Blackmoor Park Estates and Peter Brandreth, a builder of 8 Zig Zag Rd.

Lands

West Derby, like other communities across England, was affected by the enclosures of common lands over the centuries. This frequently created great resentment as people saw ancient rights taken away.

The Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536-7 was a rebellion in the north started when monks were thrown out of monasteries. The revolt was the culmination of a generation of growing discontent and fear. Attempts by the landed gentry to enclose commons were met by riots when peasants destroyed fences and moved on to the enclosed land.

West Derby was affected by the Enclosure Acts. By the end of the 18th century all common land had been either enclosed or brought under the control of the West Derby Waste Lands Trust.

The trust came about in 1718 as a result of a quarrel about pasture rights on a number of commons in West Derby.

A meeting of residents, leaseholders and copyholders was called and it was decided that the lands should be enclosed for the public benefit of the inhabitants of West Derby forever.

The subsequent growth of Liverpool greatly increased the value of the Waste Lands. In 1934 the large sum of £5,000 was allocated to worthy causes in West Derby.

The charity still exists and makes annual grants running into thousands of pounds – *Lowlands* is among the beneficiaries.

Lane

Here are some interesting facts about lanes and land around the Village:

- Meadow Lane was adopted by the city council on 5 April 1951 before being extended through to Muirhead Avenue East.
- Land on Town Row between the old Village Hall and Melwood Drive was part of the Croxteth Hall Estate before being developed for housing.
- In 1922 builders Scarratt Brothers bought 8,138 sq ft of this land from the Earl of Sefton for £1,526 to build houses.

The premature death of the bachelor 5th Earl in 1901 (he never recovered from a riding accident) added to the financial woes of the Molyneux family.

The 6th Earl obtained a massive £50,000 mortgage against his considerable estates.

He was able to pay it off in 1912, probably after selling land.

Tithes

We all complain about having to pay taxes but they have been with us a very long time.

Tithes were an ancient form of taxation dating back to Saxon times.

They were originally an annual 10% levy on the inhabitants of the parish – the money went to the Church and clergy.

Two types of tithes existed – *mixed* and *personal*. The former was paid on such things as crops and livestock while the latter was generated by trades and occupations.

Mixed tithes were paid in gross while personal tithes were only one tenth of clear profits.

Tithes on crops etc were usually collected using the following method:

When the shaves of corn were ready for gathering, the parson or his deputy would walk around the fields and insert a small bundle of chips in every tenth stook.

Once this was done, the marked corn was carried to the tithe barn for storage. Later the corn was sold at auction and the cash given to the parson.

The purchaser used the tithe barn to thresh the corn to separate the grain from the husks and straw. The building was then closed for another year.

These ancient traditions were abolished by the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 when the levy was converted to a cash payment based on the price of corn.

Exempt

West Derby was exempted from payment of tithes in kind in 1750.

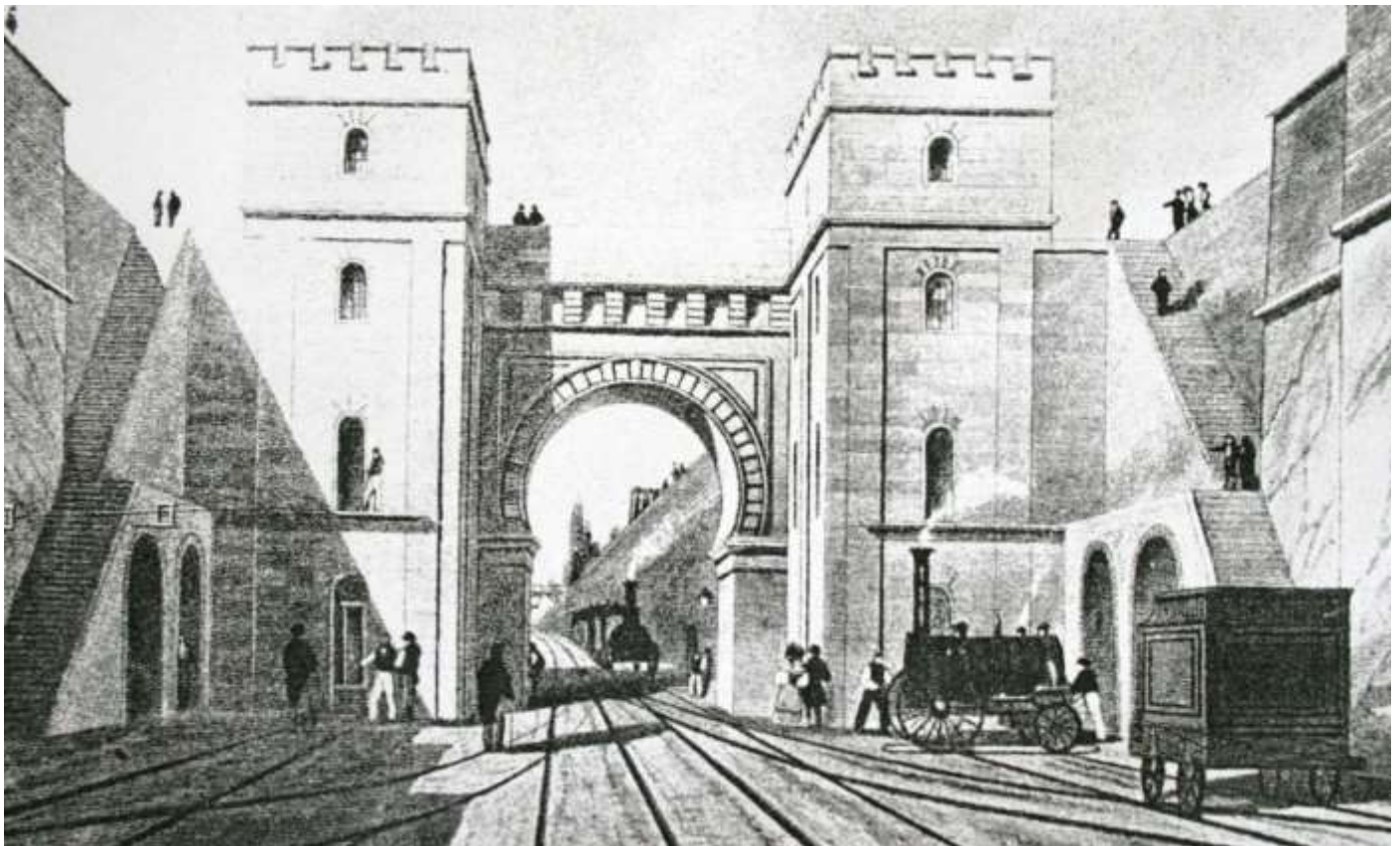
The 1836 legislation led to detailed maps and schedules listing owners, tenants, areas of land, crops, field names and values so that the appropriate charges could be made.

This information is extremely useful to local historians.

In a wealthy parish tithe barns could be massive buildings and some survive, mainly in rural areas.

There was a tithe barn near where the Jolly Miller stands today. Later there was mansion on the site, appropriately called *Barnfield*, which was demolished when Queens Drive was created in the 1920s. Barnfield Drive nearby reminds us of these historic links.

It conclusion, here are before and after pictures of a vanished Liverpool railway landmark.



This was the Moorish Arch at Edge Hill pictured shortly after the opening of the Liverpool to Manchester railway in 1830. It marked the point where locomotives gave way to cable-hauled carriages down the steep incline to the Crown Street terminus.



The arch was cleared away some years later when Lime Street Station was constructed and the railway taken through a cutting. The second picture shows all that remained of the arch in the 1970s.

Mystical Magical Tour

Now we can reveal where the annual mystery tour ended up ...

We left the Village promptly heading south through Huyton and along the Prescot bypass towards Eccleston.

No not that way – we turned off through the fields alongside Lord Derby's estate to the East Lancashire Road where there questions about its 1934 opening.

We thought that the Liverpool fashion of ladies wearing their pyjamas in the street had spread to Rainford but closer inspection revealed she was wearing a shocking pink tracksuit, not winceyette. In the twinkle of an eye we were over the Rainford bypass and plunging down a country lane, encountering grim-faced time trial cyclists.

Soon we were at Bickerstaff then, as we approached Ormskirk, some of the group though we had had a Close Encounter with a UFO. It was, in fact, the modernistic 1960s concrete water tower. Next we were heading through Scarisbrick – some asked if Southport was the destination?

South

No, we were now heading south through Halsall then past the ancient thatched Scotch Piper at Lydiate and on to Maghull, Sefton and Litherland.

We sped past the huge brick-built Stanley warehouse before plunging into the Wallasey Tunnel where many had to change their theories about our ultimate destination.

The chairman told an anecdote about Bidston Windmill's wooden machinery catching fire during a violent storm that sent its arms spinning like a Catherine wheel.

By the time we reached Heswall, Parkgate was the favourite guess for our destination. Not far out as we all realised as the coach came to a halt at West Kirby for an hour exploring and refreshments.

Then it was back in the coach for the return trip via Leasowe.

Archive Discovered

An intriguing cache of personal letters, postcards and other documents dating back 60 years has been donated to the Society.

They mostly originate from the period 1950 to 1954. The correspondence is between Mr and Mrs W S Mills of Arlescourt Rd, West Derby, and their son William when he was a student priest at St Joseph's College, Upholland.



This is an extensive collection and only a few examples are pictured.

Mr Mills Junior (Bill), who was born in 1929, celebrated his 21st birthday while at the college – there are several birthday cards in the collection.

Mr Mills Senior typed most of his letters and writes to his son on 25 February 1954:

I was off on Saturday morning, and spent the greater part of the morning abed. After a breakfast-cum-lunch I went to the Club, and had my first game of bowls for quite a while. I suppose that I spent a couple of hours on the green, and enjoyed it very much.

Mrs Mills writes on the same day, saying how she went to St Paul's the previous Sunday and attended the annual general meeting in the club room. *I had high hopes of resigning from the parish committee but woe is me, when I stood up and said I would like to resign, Mr Williams said, with a smile on his face, you won't, you won't be allowed to ...*

The letters are very well written and have yet to be studied. This is a rare and important chronicle of post-war Liverpool.

Planning News

The planning committee will hold a site visit at **43 Almonds Green** on 7 July 2009. The owners of the site want to build a sheltered accommodation block similar to the one in the first application which was withdrawn following objections from your Society and local residents. As reported in the last *Newsletter*, WDS is opposing this new application. On 23 June 2009, the issue came up before the planning committee. Members decided to visit the site before attending a planning committee at the Town Hall later that day when a decision may be reached. WDS was represented at the same planning committee meeting on when outline planning permission was given to the **Alder Hey** proposals.

Our thanks go to Eric Preston for speaking on our behalf at the meeting.

Support

We support the overall proposals for Alder Hey which will see the new hospital given a 90 degree turn. Springfield Park will be realigned so it will extend north from East Prescott Rd to Alder Rd. WDS is concerned about the re-siting of the Grade II-listed Nelson Column, known locally as the Half Nelson because of its modest size.

The committee heard that there are three potential locations being considered for the monument. WDS wants it to go in the proposed tree-lined boulevard on the site of the present hospital, running parallel with Alder Rd.

Work is progressing well on the Grade II-listed **Kiln Hey** mansion off Eaton Rd.

The imposing staircase can now be seen in its original state for the first time in decades after the removal of an ugly lift installed when it was the Alder Grange Residential Home.

The magnificent stained glass windows over the stairs, installed by former resident Edward Cookson in the 1880s, can now be fully appreciated.

Chairman's Comments

The discovery of dozens of detailed letters in a West Derby house has started me musing about what else may be out there.

They are intimate family letters originally only meant to be seen by those immediately involved. What is striking about them is their neatness, clarity and precision. These were people who led ordinary lives but were able to make their everyday activities and thoughts interesting.

There was a motive, of course - their son was away at college for probably the first time in his life. He must have led a literally cloistered life as he trained for the priesthood. Unlike other young men of his own age, he would not be able to socialise or enjoy himself in the same way.

His parents would have known this so were anxious to tell him about life in the area he knew well and which he was presumably missing.

Question

I think it is unlikely that our own times will be chronicled so well. This is because very few of us now write letters.

It would be very unusual now for someone to write a detailed letter every few days, as was the case with the Mills family.

I believe that very little will survive about day-to-day life in early 21st century Britain apart from some disjointed collections of images and garbled notes.

The Arlescourt archive is notable because the letters collection starts and finishes at specific times. It is therefore possible to follow the story of Bill Mills's period at college easily.

Today we largely communicate by telephone, text and e-mails – although a surprising 25 million UK postcards are still sent every year.

Phone calls and texts vanish into the ether and virtually none of the e-mails will survive.

As since time immemorial, it is only the written word on paper that will survive. **Stephen Guy**

