

West Derby Society

WEB SITE

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2022

This is a shortened, modified version of the printed West Derby Society quarterly Newsletter sent free to all members.

And our Mystery Tour went to ... Ribchester

The West Derby Society's first annual mystery tour since 2019 took place on Wednesday 15 June. As with all these events, no-one knew our route and eventual destination, so guessing was rife. We set off from the Village and headed north along the motorways to Preston before taking the picturesque Clitheroe road and branching off to Ribchester.



The chairman first led a short walk to look at the village's famous Roman columns and baths (*left*).

Most of us then took refreshments at the White Bull in the heart of the village.

This early 18th century watering hole, with its unusual carved wooden inn sign, is one of the most photographed in Britain.

Triumph and Tragedy

On Wednesday 18 September 1830 some 50,000 people assembled at Edge Hill for the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, ***writes Alastair Caird.***

At 10 am the Duke of Wellington, (the hero of Waterloo, who had been staying at Childwall Hall with the Marquess of Salisbury) rode up in a carriage and four (horses).

With the Marchioness on his arm, Wellington entered a grand railway coach specially built for the occasion - there were two other coaches on the train.

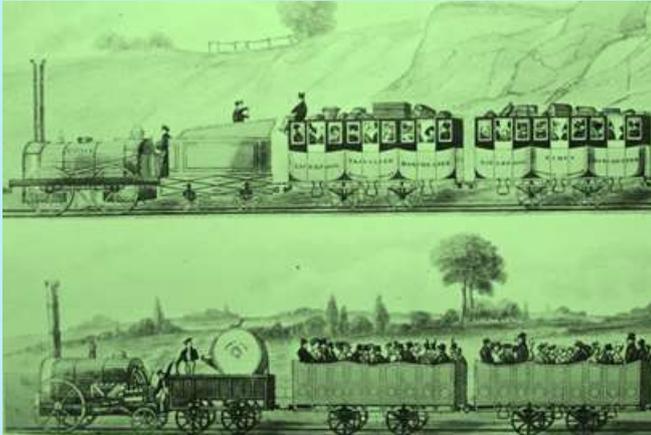
In front of the three coaches was a "neat open box" containing a "band of music".



The whole was drawn by the locomotive *Northumbrian*, driven by George Stephenson (*left*), builder of the new railway.

There were seven other trains besides, carrying 700 passengers.

The procession route was lined with thousands of spectators, some standing in especially erected grandstands. All went well until the procession reached Parkside, some 17 miles from the starting point. Here the engines were uncoupled to take on water. During this time, Liverpool MP and prominent politician William Huskisson stepped down from his coach to speak to the Wellington.



Unsteady on his feet, he slipped and before he could recover the *Rocket* ran over his leg fracturing it in two places. Everybody knew that the accident was serious and, despite efforts to save him, Huskisson died the same night.

It was a sad train procession which carried on to Manchester, where - as in Liverpool - thousands of

people had gathered.



Wellington was back in Childwall Hall (*left*) at 7 pm., the same evening but most of the people did not arrive back in Liverpool until 10 o'clock. It was raining heavily and the crowd were far from light-hearted, hearing that Huskisson had died at 9 pm.

For many years merchants in Liverpool and Manchester had tried to find a better mode of carrying passengers and goods between the two towns.

In 1824 it was calculated that 1,000 tons of goods passed daily between the two

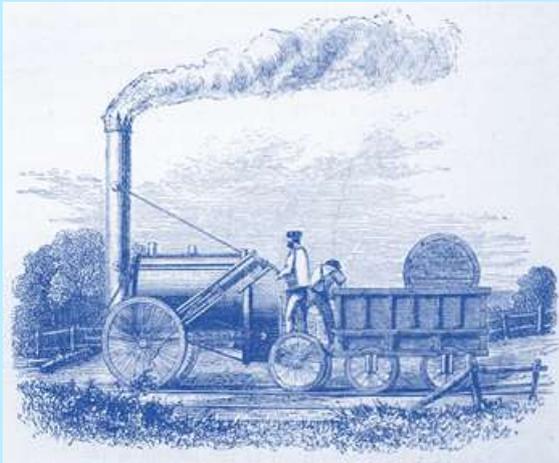
centres, both containing large and growing populations. These goods were carried by water on the Mersey & Irwell Navigation, Leeds - Liverpool and Bridgewater Canals.

Merchants and manufacturers in both towns began to consider the possibility of a railway.

There were, however, serious difficulties to be overcome before a line could be constructed.

First the land between the two towns had to be surveyed for plans to be drawn up. Many of the landowners did not want a railway passing through their estates. They treated the surveyors as trespassers, or worse.

There were other difficulties to overcome before the line could be laid. The consent of Parliament had to be obtained: this was not easy, for some of the landlords were either MPs themselves or had friends who were in parliament to vote against the proposals.



Even when the consent of Parliament was at last obtained, many difficulties remained: tunnels had to be driven, no less than 63 bridges and viaducts constructed, cuttings hewn through solid rock and many deep hollows were filled in.

The greatest difficulty was Chat Moss, a huge bog - in places 40 feet deep - between Worsley, Glazebrook and Leigh. Everything laid on its surface sank and vanished. It was once suggested that cattle grazing there might be shod with wooden pattens. But George Stephenson was equal to the task...

He overlapped great bundles of branches, heather and such brushwood as grew there, laying them with sand, earth and gravel thickly coated with cinders until he got firm, but elastic, foundations to carry the railway.

Even when the line was finished, it had to be decided whether to work the trains with a locomotive or fixed engines with drums and cables.

Finally, a competition was arranged at Rainhill to test how locomotives could perform with a £500 prize offered to the winner.

Five locomotives were entered for the competition. The *Cycloped*, an open truck propelled by a horse working a tread mill, caused great amusement.

However, the *Rocket* (above) was easily the best steam locomotive and won the prize.

In just after a fortnight after the opening day, a regular service of six trains a day ran between the two towns with four on Sundays.

Both Liverpool and Manchester greatly benefited: in just a few years all the big towns in the country were linked by rail.

(The Stockton to Darlington Railway was opened on 27 September 1825 but the passenger coaches were drawn by horses until 1833. Trains carrying passengers, goods and minerals were drawn by locomotives on the Liverpool - Manchester Railway from the start.)

A statue of Huskisson once stood in front of the old Custom House – it is now off Duke Street. One in his mausoleum in St James's Cemetery is now in the care of National Museums Liverpool.

oOo

A walking visit to Hilbre Island off the Wirral coast, made between the tides, is warmly recommended.

People first visited the islands 10,000 years ago and there has been continuous use of the three outcrops ever since.

Salt refining took place on Hilbre in the early 18th century: coal and rock salt were brought by sea, probably on a Mersey flat. Walking from West Kirby, the first island is Little Eye, then Little Hilbre followed by Hilbre Island itself.

In World War two the RAF set up decoy lighting on Middle Eye to confuse bombers raiding Liverpool Docks. Hilbre was once owned by Chester Abbey, two monks living there until 1538. It was sold to Mersey Docks & Harbour Board in 1856 and later to Hoylake Urban District Council. It now belongs to Wirral Borough Council.

In 1827 the first Holyhead to Liverpool telegraph signal system was built with a chain of stations along the North Wales coast, through Hilbre and Bidston Hill to Liverpool.



In 1841 a new system was built based on one design for all stations on the route. In 1849 Hilbre lifeboat house (*left* on an old postcard) and slipway were established as an alternative deep-water launch, as Hoylake crew had great difficulty launching at low tide. Hilbre boats saved 21 lives in 44 launches before closure in 1939. Grey and common seals can often be seen on West Hoyle

sand bar. Hilbre Island is only one of five places in the world where a sub-species of rock sea lavender occurs.

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In Sandfield Park, *St Ives* is a name you can just about read on a gatepost. It accesses an impressive sandstone house, approached by a short curving drive, with stables and outhouses. The house was built in 1853 for John William Cropper, a dry salter dealing in a range of products including glue, varnish, dye, colourings, drugs, oils and potted meats. It's a fine two-storey house with slated roof in Italianate style with a five-bayed front. Strict rules governed the lives of the wealthy occupants of the villas in the private park. You could not, for instance, carry on any trade or occupation within the houses.

Plaza Front Recreated



Kids in Bloom's recreation of the long-covered cinema façade is nearing completion – more in the next *Newsletter*.

Basil Grange Childhood Memories

By Alan Pennell

The writer was born in mid-November 1930 and lived in Thingwall Lane, Knotty Ash until 1944 when the family moved to Stoneycroft Crescent, Kremlin Drive, Bankfield Road, and Aldwych Road, in West Derby, from where in 1957 he married and set up home in Wirral.



The family doctor was Thomas Glynn-Morris who lived in *Basil Grange* (*left*). He had a chauffeur named Hatton who lived in the lodge at the entrance.

The purpose of recording these memories will highlight how social life, and life in general, has changed over time.

Dr Thomas Glynn-Morris was an elderly, well-built man, appearing quite tall to me, bespectacled, thinning white hair, a good complexion and with a very soft and gentle voice.

He used to tell us that when he had passed his exams and became a doctor, his early practice was in rural

Wales and he visited his patients on horseback. This he did in all sorts of weather, carrying his equipment in a large Gladstone bag and saddle bags.

When visiting our family this Gladstone bag contained clear bottles with multi-coloured contents. They almost looked like Dolly Mixtures / Smarties. When he needed to give medication to his patient, he would empty most of a jar's contents on to the table and select the appropriate medication from the multi-colours and shapes into a pill box, with instructions how to take them. Occasionally, he would need to prescribe medicine and would write out a prescription to be filled by the local chemist.

On occasion when he visited it seemed that my presence might not be needed, so it was suggested I go and see Hatton who was waiting in his car outside.

This suggestion was always gladly accepted: I would hop into the front passenger seat and Hatton would open the glove box and offer a butterscotch! Hatton was a lovely, gently spoken man, dressed in full chauffeur uniform. Mostly he wore the cap, only occasionally would I see him not wearing it, generally in summertime. Hatton would talk about all sorts of things, now long forgotten, but those days are treasured memories of courtesy between man and boy.



I cannot recall the car, a limousine by any standard, possibly a Humber (*left*). When doctor returned to the car I would thank Hatton, hop out, have a brief farewell chat with doctor and dash in to relate my conversation with Hatton to my parents.

Our family moved to Stoneycroft in 1944 and two years later to Kremlin Drive to accommodate our widowed maternal grandmother. All this time our

medical needs were catered for by Dr Glynn-Morris. In 1947 I started a five-year engineering apprenticeship which seemed to have interested our doctor. One evening I was invited to *Basil Grange*, my first experience of a big house. On entering a large hall, with a wide staircase in the distance, I was met with a very large marble statue in the middle of such a big airy space. Strangely, this space despite its size exuded a homely warmth reflecting the nature of its owners. On being guided into his study I was confronted with walls covered in books where the doctor showed me some of the artifacts he had collected in many foreign excursions, ending with a fascinating epidiascope display of slides taken, I think, in Egypt. On leaving he gave me, to keep, a beautiful leather-bound book from his huge library.

Children

Dr Thomas had two children, Mansell and Glynys. I seem to remember that Glynys was in one of the Women's Services in the war. Mansell had studied medicine and had established a practice of his own in his new house at the junction of Childwall Park Avenue and Woolton Road. At about this time he took on our family medical care. He was shorter than his father and had thinning ginger hair. His manner was, as was his father's, listening and caring. By this time dispensing of medication was not from bottles of Dolly Mixtures!

Hobby

His hobby was cars and membership of a motoring club and he often told of his experiences. One thing I learned from him, due to his following of big races like Le Mans 24-hour etc was – he always left his car in gear so that when he leapt into it, pressed the starter and shot off! This was noticeable when he left after visiting us, no delay in take-off!

Dr Mansell looked after us till our family members started to go their different ways and our parents moved to Appley Bridge near Wigan.

Looking back over those times it must make the reader think, and realise how much life, its conduct, its courtesies, pace of life etc. has changed, and be drawn to the conclusion – not necessarily for the better.

Though not connected with the foregoing it is worth recording other cameos of life in the 1930s.

To be concluded.

Suddenly at The Priory?

Two fading pieces of paper and card recall the passing of Peter Thomson, a former Liverpool mayor who lived at Leyfield Priory, a big castellated house that once overlooked The Triangle.

Mrs Thomson writes on heavily black-edged note paper thanking the German vice consul for sending her memorabilia of her late husband: *Mrs Thomson desires to assure Chevalier C de Stoess that his very thoughtful and appropriate souvenir of her beloved and lamented husband she much values, and appreciates, and begs to thank him most sincerely for his kindness in preparing and sending it to her. May 31st 1876.*

There are said to be more Liverpool mayors buried in Knotty Ash churchyard than anywhere else and Lt Col Thomson was one of them.

His memorial card reads:

In Remembrance of Lt Col Peter Thomson 12th L.A.V. Mayor of Liverpool who died May 13th 1876. Aged 61 years and was this day interred in the Church Yard, Knotty Ash. Leyfield Priory, West Derby, Liverpool, May 18th 1876.

Thomson was chief engineer for the Cheshire Lines. It is said the Priory was built from stone excavated from the West Derby cutting.

Mrs Thomson died at the Priory in 1890.

Chairman's Comments

I spent my Easter holidays at Cardiff – a city I had never visited before – and attended morning service at nearby Llandaff Cathedral.



These beautiful stained-glass panels caught my eye and I was surprised to discover they originally came from Hale Hall, south of Liverpool. (see larger image below).

Picturesque Hale Hall on the banks of the Mersey lost many of its fine decorative features before falling into ruin.

Dating from the 17th century, the panels depict a rhinoceros, elephant, leopard and horse along with birds, insects and plants (*below*).



In 1951 the panels were installed in the cathedral in memory of the dean, David John Jones.

This type of recycling is called architectural salvage and was once common before conservation laws were tightened.

There are several local examples.

A stone sundial dated 1793 can be seen on the wall of St Mary's church in West Derby.

It was originally on the wall of the ancient West Derby Chapel, demolished about 1856, before becoming a feature of nearby Moss House for some time.

The lich gate at Knotty Ash church was originally the canopy in the hall of Boltons, a half-timbered house built by a wealthy miller about 1400 off Finch Lane.

It was incorporated into the gate after Boltons was dismantled in 1897.

Stephen Guy

