

THE GATEACRE SOCIETY

Founded 1974. Registered Charity No.508024.
A member of the British Association for Local History
and the Merseyside Civic Society

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Annual Membership Subscriptions

Household £5 Single pensioner £4 Company, etc. £10

The Society's membership year runs from 1 Nov-31 Oct.
If you are already a member, your **address label** indicates
the date when your next subscription payment is due.

If it reads '31/10/22', please renew as soon as possible.

*New members joining the Society after 1 July are regarded
as 'paid up' until 31 Oct the following year.*

If you wish to join the Society, or to renew, please send the appropriate
subscription to the Membership Secretary, David Phythian, 26 Primrose Road,
Liverpool L18 2HE: cheques payable to The Gateacre Society.

*Subscriptions may also be paid by bank transfer.
Please email us for our account details.*

DO YOU HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS?

If so, and if you would like to receive your Newsletters by email
instead of by post, please let us know by sending a message to
membership@gatsoc.org.uk quoting your name and postcode.

*If you are a member of the Society and you have notified us of your email
address, you will be sent details of our Zoom talks and invited to participate.*

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The Gateacre Society

A VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION

Guarding the Past - Safeguarding the Future

NEWSLETTER - January 2023

Our first Zoom talk of 2023:

LIVERPOOL'S PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS

**by Helena Smart
and Lindsey Sutton**

on Monday 30th January at 7.30pm



Helena Smart is the Archivist at the Liverpool Record Office, located within
the Central Library in William Brown Street. She'll give us an introduction
to the major photographic collections which are held there – showcasing
some gems from the collections and guiding us through how to access the
photographs both online and in person. Helena will also outline the
processes for reproducing images for social media and publications.

(This photograph of St George's Hall is © Liverpool Central Library and Archives)

Lindsey Sutton is an archivist working for the National Trust, and will talk
about the life and work of eminent Liverpool-based photographer Edward
Chambré Hardman. She will tell us about the work The National Trust is
doing in partnership with Liverpool Record Office to care for the items in
the extensive Chambré Hardman Collection, and share their stories.

Our second Zoom talk of 2023:

THE SLAVE GATE STORY

by Glen Huntley, on Monday 27th February at 7.30pm

(Please see overleaf for details. The next Newsletter won't be published until March)

*Attendance at our Zoom talks is restricted to Gateacre Society members only. If
you've attended any of our previous Zoom meetings, you'll automatically be sent
links for these a couple of days beforehand. Otherwise, if you wish to attend either
of these talks, please email membership@gatsoc.org.uk and we'll add you to the list
– and send you guidance notes, in case you're new to Zoom. (If you're not currently
a Gateacre Society member, we'll also tell you how you can join).*

GATEACRE'S SLAVE GATE: THE MYSTERY SOLVED

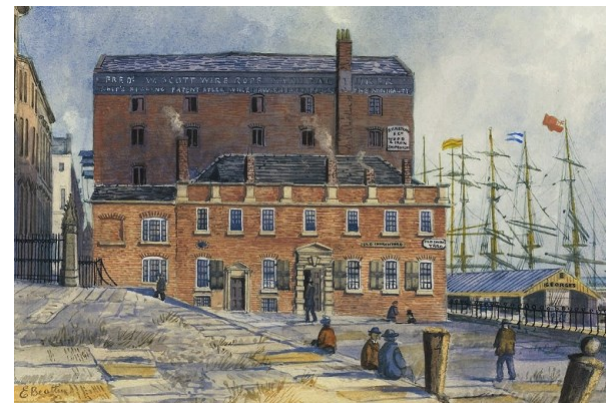
In our book of archive photographs – 'Gateacre & Belle Vale' – we included (on page 80) a view of the pedimented gateway in Halewood Road. It stands within the perimeter fence of Woodsome Park, the apartment blocks that were built on the site of the former Gateacre Hall Hotel. The gateway survives because, unlike the hotel, it was a Listed Building, having been designated as such in 1975. So when the hotel complex was demolished, in 2004, the gateway was left untouched.

In our caption to the photograph in the 'Gateacre & Belle Vale' book, we state: "The gate has a local nickname, the Slave Gate, as legend suggests it was brought here from the Liverpool waterfront where it had connections with the slave trade". Recent discussion within the 'Childwall, Gateacre & Woolton – Photos & Memories' Facebook group has uncovered other local stories about the gateway – and revived the controversy. Here are some of the comments posted:

"As a child I was told about the Slave gate but thought it happened on-site. I was mortified". "Good story, but no slaves came to Liverpool". "It was said that if you looked through that gate you would die". "The gate used to be open, but it was meant to curse you if you went through it". "The story we were always told is that it was cursed because the Gateacre hall was built on a monastery and the monks put a curse on it". "Apparently every time it was opened somebody on the Nook died in not very nice circumstances"

What is the truth behind these stories? Where exactly did the gate come from? What connection, if any, did it have with slavery? Thanks to thousands of hours of research by the 'Bygone Liverpool' research team (Glen Huntley and Darren White) we can now finally reveal the answers.

The large Georgian house that became the core of the Gateacre Hall Hotel had a number of different names during its lifetime. In the 18th century it was known as 'Mersey Vale', but in the 1880s – by which time it was the home of Liverpool cotton broker George Hunter Robertson – it was known as 'The Laurels, Nook Lane'. In our September 2005 Newsletter, we reported the discovery of a Time Capsule – a glass bottle stuffed with old documents – by demolition workers. This included a series of notes about people, places and events in Gateacre, handwritten in 1881 by Mr Robertson's two teenage sons. None of them, however, mentioned the gateway. Thanks to the recent research, we now know the reason for this: it was only brought to Gateacre in 1883. George Hunter Robertson was the man responsible, and it would seem that he had an interest in studying and acquiring antiquities. (After he left Gateacre, he bought Plas Newydd outside Llangollen, including "the priceless treasures that it contains".) Glen and Darren of 'Bygone Liverpool' have carried out a painstaking study of old photographs, paintings and drawings of old Liverpool buildings, in search of the original location of the gateway. Their focus – bearing in mind the alleged link to the slave trade – was the area close to the old waterfront. Eventually the source was identified: the Merchants' Coffee House, which faced onto St Nicholas' Churchyard, close to where Tower Buildings stands today. A watercolour by Edwin Beattie shows the pediment and pillars quite clearly; and it was in 1882/83 that this building was demolished to allow the Dock Road ('Georges Dock Gates' being the official name of this stretch) to be widened.



On 26th September 1882 an advertisement appeared in the Liverpool Mercury, offering for sale "Old Building Materials contained in the premises Nos. 2 to 10 George's Dock Gates, extending backward to Prison-weint". These materials would have included the pedimented door surround, which had no doubt caught the eye of Mr Robertson as something that would adorn his property in Gateacre.

Four days later, on 30th September, the Liverpool Albion reported as follows: "On the 1st of next month (October) a great improvement in the roadway opposite the George Landing-stage will be made. A considerable portion of the Church of St Nicholas will be cut away, and several warehouses, &c, including the old 'merchants coffee house', will be demolished. We may inform those of our readers who are not aware of the fact that the merchants coffee house is the oldest building of its kind in the city. It includes the slave market, a room where our ancestors used to purchase their slaves."

So that is where the gateway – and the legend – originated. But was the story about the slaves true? The deeper Glen and Darren probed, the more complex the explanation became. All will be revealed in our next Newsletter (and at our Zoom meeting on 27th February). If you can't wait that long, their book, "Liverpool's Slave Gate", is available as a PDF download from bit.ly/LSG2023

Please note that, although the PDF is downloadable free of charge, a 'BuyMeACoffee' button on the web page enables readers to make a voluntary donation towards the project costs.

SANDFIELD ROAD: GOOD NEWS AND BAD

A few weeks after our last article appeared ('Sandfield Road – From Bad to Worse') yet another lorry hit the corner of the Listed Building, 28a-d Gateacre Brow. This time it was a vehicle leaving Sandfield Road, inadvertently turning left instead of right. As has been demonstrated time and time again in the past, such a manoeuvre is likely to damage the building, as the rear of the lorry scrapes along the overhang and dislodges portions of the decorative plasterwork that give the mock-Tudor building much of its character.

The good news is that, in this instance, the owners of the vehicle have accepted liability, and will be paying for the necessary repair work. This is scheduled to take place during three successive Sundays, owing to the need to close the road while it's in progress.

The bad news is that, as yet, neither we nor the building's owners (Winter Melia Developments) have had any communication from the City Council, who have a duty to protect Listed Buildings and who many months ago were represented at meetings at which a range of possible solutions were discussed. We hope that these measures – a combination of warning signage, kerb realignment and protective bollards, as mentioned in our Newsletters as long ago as 2004 – will now be implemented without further delay.