

THE GATEACRE SOCIETY

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

Website: www.gatsoc.org.uk Instagram: @TheGatSoc
Email: info@gatsoc.org.uk Twitter: @TheGatSoc

Executive Committee (2022-23)

Brian Doman, 6 Hayles Grove, L25 4SL (0151 722 6368) *Chairman*

Rosemary Doman *Vice Chair*

Mike Chitty, 16 Chartmount Way, L25 5LB (0151 428 7801)
Hon. Treasurer, Newsletter Editor & Assistant Environment Sec.

Eryl Chitty *Hon. Secretary*

John Wood, 3 Soarer Cottages, Grange Lane, L25 5LF *Environment Sec.*

Sue Coldwell, 30 Killester Road, L25 3QD *Local History Sec.*

David Phythian, 26 Primrose Road, L18 2HE *Membership Sec.*

Pam Ball, Flat 1 St Stephens Court, Halewood Road, L25 3PG (0151 428 0500)
Sales Officer

Sandra Sandland *Assistant Sales Officer*

Paula Jones *Social Sec.*

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.

© COPYRIGHT 2023. This Newsletter may not be copied – or redistributed electronically – without the written consent of The Gateacre Society.



Our next meeting:

HISTORY OF THE QUEENSWAY MERSEY TUNNEL

An illustrated talk by Billy Bradshaw on Monday 17th April, 7.30pm in Gateacre Chapel, Gateacre Brow, Liverpool L25 3PB

The Queensway Tunnel, and its control room in the George's Dock Building, was officially opened by King George V in July 1934. This talk will be about the tunnel's conception and construction – and what happens behind the scenes. It will also include a "visual walk through" of the tunnel tour.

Billy Bradshaw is an 'Engagement Officer' with Merseytravel, and he is hoping that there will be lots of questions from the audience. As one of the Tunnel Tour Guides, he has been showing people round for over 10 years.

Public walking tours – aimed at promoting the historic and economic importance of the Mersey Tunnels – started in 2006. Initially there was just one tour a week, but this rapidly increased to four a week due to public demand. Group tours are also offered, by appointment. The tours offer a unique behind-the-scenes look at an engineering and architectural masterpiece. From within the art deco George's Dock Building, visitors descend underground into the giant ventilation-fan chambers then on to part of the original Georges Dock – walking beneath the tunnel road deck.



DIARY DATE: On Monday 22nd May, at 7.30pm in Gateacre Chapel, Dame Lorna Muirhead will give us a talk entitled 'From Midwife to Lord Lieutenant'.

GATEACRE'S SLAVE GATE: WAS THE STORY TRUE?

On 27th February, Jim Kenny (who writes for 'Bygone Liverpool' under the name Glen Huntley) gave us a fascinating Zoom talk. He explained the origins of the pedimented gateway that stands in Halewood Road, within the perimeter fence of the Woodsome Park apartments – formerly the site of the Gateacre Hall Hotel.

The nickname 'The Slave Gate' arose because, right from the start, it was claimed to have been connected with Liverpool's slave trade. Jim's researches – outlined in our last Newsletter – have convincingly demonstrated that it was removed from the Merchants' Coffee House in George's Dock Gates (alongside St Nicholas's churchyard) in 1883 when that building was demolished to allow the road to be widened.

In September 1883 an article in the Liverpool Mercury claimed that *"the Merchants' Coffee House must be for ever memorable in the wider history of the nation at large as being the place where the last African slave was sold in England"*. A year later, a book entitled 'Liverpool and Slavery: An Historical Account of the Liverpool African Slave Trade' was published. Its author, using the pseudonym 'A genuine Dicky Sam', wrote that he 'recollected' an advertisement from the Liverpool Chronicle: *"A fine negro boy, to be sold by auction. He is 11 years of age; the auction will take place at the Merchants' Coffee House, Old Church Yard. Sale to commence at 7 o'clock, by candle light. By order of Mr Thomas Yates, who hath imported him from Bonny"*. A later author, Gomer Williams, referred to the same advertisement in his book 'History of the Liverpool Privateers and ... Slave Trade' (1897). He mentioned it alongside other slave auction advertisements from the period 1757-58.

The 'Bygone Liverpool' book – 'Liverpool's Slave Gate' – co-authored by Jim Kenny, lists a number of similar advertisements from the 18th century, proving that slaves were regularly sold in Liverpool (at least until the celebrated 'Somerset ruling' of 1772). There was, however, no slave 'market'. They would mostly have been ad hoc sales of 'privilege' slaves which had been given to ships' officers by the vessel's owner by way of thanks for a successful voyage. They were valued as house servants – and fashionable status symbols – by wealthy merchants.

What the 'Bygone Liverpool' team have discovered – but previous writers overlooked – is that the Merchants' Coffee House was, between about 1720 and 1767, the name of an establishment in Dale Street. The building at George's Dock Gates/Old Churchyard was, from its construction in 1756 until 1773, known as the Bath Coffee House, with a saltwater bath in the basement fed by the tidal waters of the River Mersey. The auctions of slaves, therefore, must have taken place at the Merchants' Coffee House in Dale Street. Jim Kenny's theory is that 'Dicky Sam' added the words 'Old Church Yard' to the alleged advertisement (the original of which has never been discovered) because the demolition of that building had recently been in the news.

Jim's conclusions are summed up on page 81 of the book:

"The Gateacre gateway came from a coffee house that was built by a slave owner [James Bromfield] and frequented by slave owners, but its reputation as a location of slave auctions appears to owe more to association than to historical fact. There is, though, a strong possibility that slaves, and former slaves that had become servants, passed through the gate

accompanying their 'masters'. It is a remarkable survivor from 18th century Liverpool, of which far too few remain. It is, like the Bluecoat (funded by a slave merchant) a relic of the town in a period of its most rapid development, a development that benefited greatly from the slave trade".

The book 'Liverpool's Slave Gate', is available as a PDF download from bit.ly/LSG2023

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

A recording of Jim Kenny's Zoom talk is available on the Gateacre Society's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@TheGatSoc/videos



CORONATION CELEBRATIONS IN GATEACRE

As reported in our November 2022 Newsletter, a tree is to be planted on Gateacre Village Green to celebrate the coronation of HM King Charles III. It is to be a Silver Birch – representing "new beginnings, renewal, purity and protection" in Celtic mythology – and will be funded by Liverpool City Council, thanks to our 3 Woolton Ward councillors (Kris Brown, Malcolm Kelly and Barbara Mace). Unfortunately, an inspection of the Green to choose a site for the tree revealed that two of the existing trees were dangerously decayed, and had to be felled as a matter of urgency. We are assured, however, that they will be replaced in due course.

To further celebrate the event, the Friends of Gateacre are organising what is described on their new Facebook page as "a family friendly Right Royal Knees Up". Between 12 noon and 6 pm on **Bank Holiday Monday, 8th May**, they will be organising entertainment, an arts and craft stall, and free face painting on the Green (just outside the Black Bull pub). There's an open invitation: "Bring your blankets, bring your portable chairs, food and drink... bring yourself, friends and family".

At 2pm a plaque – officially commemorating the planting of the new tree – will be unveiled by special guest the Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside.



Belle Vale Primary School and Gateacre School are both involved in the planning of the event, and the Black Bull and other local venues are planning their own activities alongside the community celebration. (Note that alcohol will not be permitted on the village green, only on licensed premises).

For further information, look out for local publicity, visit our website nearer the time, follow the Friends of Gateacre on Facebook, or email kris.brown@liverpool.gov.uk