

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 Email: info@gatsoc.org.uk

Executive Committee 2016/17

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Sandra Sandland *Assistant Sales Officer*
Rosemary Doman

Membership Subscriptions

Household £4 Single pensioner £3 Company, etc. £6

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

If you are already a member, your address label indicates the date when your next subscription payment is due.

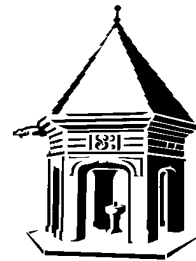
Our Book - *Gateacre & Belle Vale: in old photographs* - is on sale at our meetings and events, price **£10** (bookshop price £12.99).

Our Tea-towel is also available, price **£4**.

Visit our website - or contact Beryl Plent or Pam Ball for further 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



The Gateacre Society

Guarding the Past - Safeguarding the Future

NEWSLETTER - November 2016

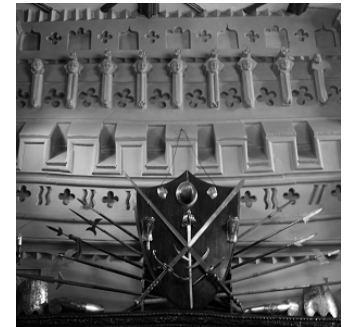
Our next meeting:

A Tour of Speke Hall in Words and Pictures

A talk by Anna Alexander
in Gateacre Chapel,
Gateacre Brow L25 3PB
on Sunday 4th December
at 2.30 p.m.

Anna Alexander – a member of the Gateacre Society – is a guide at Speke Hall where she conducts Victorian and Tudor tours. Her talk will guide you through the house and grounds as if you were on one of her tours. She will show photographs of many of the rooms in the hall and will describe the house and its history from the Tudor period through to the Victorian era. The focus of the talk will be the people who lived in the house – the Norris, Watt and Leyland families – and the servants who looked after them. You will also have the chance to examine a copy of the 1460 rent roll of Speke Hall which Anna has recently transcribed, and which forms part of some research she is doing at the moment.

ALL WELCOME – Admission free – Donations invited



IS YOUR SUBSCRIPTION DUE?

We shall not be issuing personalised reminders until the New Year, so please take a few moments to look at the date on your Newsletter address label. If (but only if) it reads '31/10/16', then your membership of the Society has expired, and we hope that you will renew – for 1, 2 or 3 years – by giving or sending your subscription to our Membership Secretary – see back page for details.

THE REAL ELEANOR RIGBY

Our April 2016 talk – reviewed by Mike Chitty

The name Eleanor Rigby has passed into history as a result of the Beatles song. On 4th April, Alice Bennett tried to separate the fact from the fiction.

Eleanor Rigby Whitfield was born into a working-class family in Vale Road, Woolton. Her grandfather was John Rigby, who had married Frances Hesketh of Pit Place after 'lodging' with her and her mother at the time of the 1871 Census. By 1881 John and Frances were living in Cobden Street with three children. John was a stonemason, Frances a laundress. By 1891 they'd moved to the house in Vale Road, and Frances and her 2 daughters were all recorded in the Census as laundresses: self-employed women, no doubt, taking in washing from the 'big houses' of the neighbourhood and from quarry labourers.

It was the daughter Mary who married Arthur Whitfield and gave birth to Eleanor. In 1901 she was 5 years old, and the Census spells her name 'Elenor'. Alice showed us floor plans of the house – which she now owns – a typical '3 up 3 down' terraced property built in about 1860. In an outbuilding at the back, Alice had found an 'Oxford & Cambridge Geography' textbook signed Eleanor Whitfield with a faint 'R' in between. It seemed that she was a diligent schoolgirl, who liked to write notes in the margins of her books. The story in the family was that her uncle paid for her to have piano lessons. Yet (based on a wages ledger discovered several years ago) it is also said that, at age 16, she was working as a scullery maid – 'the lowest of the low' – at the City Hospital (Parkhill) in the Dingle.

Alice speculated on what life in Woolton would have been like for women of Eleanor's generation, many of whom had been left single as a direct result of WW1. Eleanor was 35 before she got married: to Thomas Woods, a man 17 years older than her. When Eleanor died, Thomas married Lilian Heatley, 26 years his junior. Thomas's mother is said to have been a Rigby, and Eleanor's mother was originally a Heatley. Alice has been trying to unravel all the interconnections.

Eleanor's life in the 1920s and 30s remains something of a mystery. Her sisters – Hannah and Edith, who worked as seamstresses – apparently never spoke about Eleanor. It is said that Eleanor had been jilted at the altar, and Thomas was her second choice. Some people claim that Eleanor attempted suicide by throwing herself down a well, and had to be dragged out by her feet. Her 1939 death certificate, though, simply gives 'aneurism at home' as the cause of death.

Nowadays the gravestone in St Peter's churchyard, Woolton – 'Eleanor Rigby wife of Thomas Woods' – is a regular stopping-point on the Beatles Liverpool tourist trail. But Paul McCartney has always claimed that Eleanor was from Eleanor Bron (the actress in 'Help!') and that Rigby was from a shop in Bristol. John Lennon is said to have been intrigued by the word 'Asleep' on a gravestone in Woolton – and that word appears just below the name Eleanor Rigby. Could John and Paul (who first met in the Church Hall across the road) have subconsciously noticed the Rigby inscription back in the 1950s?

Alice spoke of other coincidences, including the fact that the Vale Road house – of which the Rigbys and the Whitfields were tenants – was once owned by a McKenzie (another name that appears in St Peter's churchyard). What the truth is, we shall never know – but Alice's talk left us wanting to find out more.

CONSERVATIVE CLUB NURSERY PLAN

A planning application (ref. 16F/2198) was submitted in September to use part of the Conservative Club in Grange Lane as a day nursery for up to 50 children. The plans indicate the conversion of the main dance hall to nursery use, and the creation of an outdoor play area on part of the car park alongside Belle Vale Road. We have lodged an objection to the proposal, because of the site's unsuitability on traffic grounds, the loss of valued community facilities, and the failure of the plans to improve the appearance of either the building or its curtilage.

'BREWERY GARDENS' PLANS APPROVED

Planning application 15F/2296 was finally given the go-ahead by the City Council's Planning Committee on 11th October. We had objected to the proposed three-storey apartment block because of its impact on properties in Halewood Road – notably the Brown Cow's beer garden – and what we considered to be its incongruous design: a 'building on stilts' supported in part by the unattractive metal-roofed shed in Lower Sandfield. The Council's planning officers, however, disagreed with us, saying that the proposed 'oversail' by the upper floors 'adds an interesting design feature to the scheme'.

AUTUMN LEAVES – AGAIN

At the time of writing, a thick mass of slippery leaves covers the whole of the Gateacre Brow pavement, down from Rose Brow as far as the doctors' surgery. The situation elsewhere in Gateacre is just as bad. Members can help by reporting accumulations of litter and leaves to the City Council as soon as they occur. Either phone 0151 233 3001 – describing the location as clearly as possible, and making sure that you are given a reference number – or report it online via bit.ly/LCCscform

RIGHT OF WAY LATEST

Our claim that the Acrefield Road – Glenacres – Byron Court – Woolton Park pedestrian route is a Public Right of Way has won the backing of the City Council's Highways Department. A Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) is to be published shortly, formally designating the path as a Right of Way. People will then have six weeks to lodge representations – whether in favour of or against the proposed Order. For details of how to do this, please refer to our website or contact any of our Committee members. We are keen to obtain copies of any photographs of Glenacres or the former Acrefield Bank home, taken over the past 40 years, and to hear from anyone who used to walk through the area on a regular basis.

EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT to 'The Real Eleanor Rigby'

Research carried out since April has revealed that the 'E Rigby' working at the City Hospital in 1911 was in fact Edith, not Eleanor. And Edith's family lived in Bootle, not Woolton. Intriguingly, though, it seems that both Eleanor and Edith had great-grandfathers born in Upholland, Lancashire: William and Edward Rigby respectively. And at the 1871 Census, Eleanor's grandfather John Rigby was described as a Stone Mason in Woolton, and Edith's grandfather Edward Rigby Jr was a Stone Quarryman in Roby Mill, Upholland.