

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 £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'.
The Society's membership year ends on 31st October. 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).

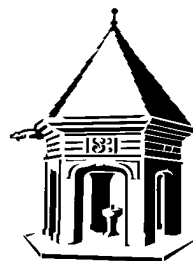
Our Tea-towel is also available, price **£4**.

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

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The Gateacre Society

Guarding the Past - Safeguarding the Future

NEWSLETTER - May 2017



Our next meeting:

**ROBB WILTON:
the day Robb
broke out**

An illustrated talk
(with film clip)

by Dr Tom Preston
in Gateacre Chapel,

Gateacre Brow L25 3PB

on Monday 5th June at 7.30 p.m.

The great Liverpool comedian, Robb Wilton, died exactly 60 years ago. Famous for his wartime monologue, 'The Day War Broke Out...', Robb also created many other characters such as the Police Sergeant, the Fire Chief, and most memorably, the magistrate Mr Muddlecombe JP.

Robb was a master of comic timing and 'fussy inaction'. His comedy has been a significant influence on Coronation Street and Dad's Army. His long career began in Victorian melodrama and ended with commercial TV in the 1950s. His life and career is a commentary on British social history over a period of great change and two world wars.

Wilton had strong local connections. He spent his early life in Woolton, made his stage debut in Garston, and spent his final years in Allerton.

Tom Preston has been giving talks on music hall and popular entertainment for many years. He is presently writing a biography of Wilton (the first!) to be published next year.

**ALL WELCOME - Admission free -
Donations invited**

Our summer coach trip:

**HOLYWELL AND
COLWYN BAY**

Saturday 22nd July

This day excursion begins with a visit to St Winefride's Well - a place of public pilgrimage for over thirteen centuries. Alongside the shrine building is an interpretative exhibition, including a collection of wooden crutches discarded by the cured in former times.

We travel on to Colwyn Bay, a Victorian seaside town which is now undergoing a series of regeneration initiatives. Our hosts the Colwyn Bay Heritage Group will take us on guided walks, highlighting the role of the town during WW2 (when it was the temporary home of the Ministry of Food) and looking at some recently-restored buildings. We finish with a visit to Rhos-on-Sea, and the smallest place of worship in the U.K.

**SEE OVERLEAF FOR DETAILS
OF
HOW
TO
BOOK
YOUR
PLACE
ON
THIS
TRIP**



MERCHANT PALACES AND PERSONALITIES

Our February 2017 talk – reviewed by Mike Chitty

The main title of Stephen Guy's talk was 'Forgotten Liverpool'. He took us on a whistle-stop tour of almost thirty houses, some of them surviving but others long since demolished. Stephen is Chair of the West Derby Society, so not surprisingly many of the pictures he showed had a West Derby connection. However, other areas featured were Allerton, Aigburth, Speke, Walton and Sefton Park.

The Earls of Sefton, who lived at Croxteth Hall, were members of the Molyneux family. The last Earl, who died in 1972, used to pronounce the name 'Molinox'. He was 6ft 5in tall, with no children but several dogs and racehorses. Stephen mentioned a wide range of other personalities, mainly business or professional men whose houses reflected their interests and status. Thomas Haigh, an architect, built himself a 'miniature stately home' called Lowlands (now a community centre) in West Derby. The Hutchinson family of millers lived at Holly Lodge House (later a school) which had a fine interior but sadly was demolished in 2016. We watched a video of the demolition, and heard about the campaign, led by members of the Hutchinson family, which failed to save it.

Broughton Hall (another school) had been the home of a German financier, Gustav Schwabe, who provided money to the White Star Line on condition that the ships were built by his nephew Gustav Wolff (of Harland & Wolff). Norris Green House was the home of the Heywood banking family. Like many others in the Liverpool area, its sumptuous interior was recorded by the photographer Henry Bedford Lemere. Another West Derby character was 'Bully Bates', the owner of rust-bucket 'coffin ships' – regularly claiming insurance payouts for cargoes lost and crew members drowned! A large tree has grown where the main gates of his mansion should have been, because he refused to pay the annual fee demanded by the Sandfield Park Company. Then there was James Meade-King, defender of public footpaths and temperance campaigner. West Derby village had 11 alehouses and pubs in Victorian times, but Meade-King donated a drinking fountain complete with the inscription 'Water is Best'.

Other well-known names mentioned in Stephen's talk were Waring (of Waring & Gillow) who lived at Palmyra in Aigburth Vale, Mrs Blackler (of the Liverpool store) whose bathroom at Park Lea in Fulwood Park featured 'a real throne' of a lavatory, and Holt (of the shipping line) whose home Sudley is 'a unique survival', the only art collection of a Victorian merchant still in its original location.

Stephen's descriptions of the favoured architectural styles ranged from the 'Jacobethan Tudor' houses of Alexandra Drive to the 'Gothic horror' of Gunavah in Sefton Park. Some of the surviving houses are genuinely old – like Speke Hall and Tue Brook House. Stephen told us that the current owner of Tue Brook House (built 1615) is thinking of opening it to the public. St Ambrose Barlow, Catholic martyr, is said to have hidden in it, and the owner would like to find the hiding place! By way of contrast, some of the buildings shown were demolished within 50 years of their construction – like Allerton Beeches (demolished 1939) which had been designed by Norman Shaw for Henry Tate Jr.

Stephen's talk attracted a large audience. It made us realise how much of Liverpool's heritage has been lost – but also how much documentary evidence survives, and how much we can learn about the city's history by studying the families who used to live in these large houses in the surrounding countryside.

DIARY DATES

Monday 10th July, 7.30pm.
Gateacre Society talk in
the Chapel: 'Kitty
Wilkinson & Josephine
Butler' by Pauline Hurst
Saturday 9th September.
Heritage Open Day in
Gateacre. The Chapel and
St Stephen's Church will
both be welcoming visitors.

COACH TRIP BOOKING DETAILS: 22nd July

The coach to Holywell & Colwyn Bay (see front page) departs from Gateacre Brow (Black Bull) at 9.15 a.m. The trip is organised by the Wavertree Society, so the first pick-up point is Lake Road L15 (near the Picton Clock) at 9 o'clock. The cost is £15 per head – payable at time of booking. Tickets will be on sale at our talk on 5th June, or send your money (cheques payable to The Wavertree Society, please) to Mike Chitty, 16 Chartmount Way, Liverpool L25 5LB. Please remember to include a contact phone number – plus S.A.E. for the tickets if you are ordering them by post.

BLACK IS THE (ONLY) COLOUR?

A few months ago, the Gateacre Society's Committee began drawing up a list of environmental issues and desirable improvements within the Gateacre Village Conservation Area. We hope that this will form the basis of a discussion event later in the year.

We thought we had identified a reasonably simple and practical restoration project at the top of Gateacre Brow. The Victorian letter box, built into the sandstone wall of Gateacre Grange, has been disused for many years now, since the Royal Mail decided that it was not a safe location for their workers to collect letters from. Having been replaced by a modern 'lamp box' a few yards further along Rose Brow, the original box was painted black to indicate that it is no longer in use. Were it not for the fact that Gateacre Grange is a Grade II Listed Building, and its boundary wall was clearly 'tailored' to accommodate the box when the house was built circa 1869, the box would probably have been removed altogether.

The idea we had was to restore the original appearance of the box, by removing the thick layers of paint that have built up over the years and revealing the cast-iron lettering which reads 'Post Office' and 'V R'. We sought advice from the Letter Box Study Group, who confirmed that the design of the box is contemporary with Gateacre Grange. They told us that it is an '1861 Box No.1 Large', made in the period 1861-71 by Smith & Hawkes of Birmingham. They also told us that it would originally have been painted green, this having been the standard colour for British postboxes prior to 1874. What better, we thought, than to repaint it green – a colour that wouldn't give the impression of a box still in active use – with the lettering perhaps picked out in gold.

Unfortunately, when we wrote to the Royal Mail's 'Property & Facilities Solutions' division on 15th May, telling them what we had in mind, we got an immediate and unwelcome response: "It is policy for all out of service boxes to be painted black and we would unfortunately refuse the request for this to be green. ... I will however raise a ticket for an engineer to attend to make good the paintwork". Within 48 hours of this email being sent, yet another layer of shiny black paint had been applied by a Royal Mail employee.

We have not, as yet, given up the fight. The Joint Policy Statement by Royal Mail and Historic England, published in 2015, states that redundant boxes will be "... painted in a colour other than red (normally black)". It also confirms that listed building consent is, officially, needed to change the appearance of a box such as this. What precedents are there, we wonder, elsewhere in the country? We know that our wall box is a rare survivor – but we cannot believe that we are alone in our ambitions.

