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THE GATEACRE SOCIETY

Registered with the North West Civic Trust

Chairman: G. Anthony McCann, O.L.A. School
Hedgefield Road, Tel: 487-9301
Hon. Sec: Mrs. Sylvia Lewis, Grange Lodge,
Grange Lane Tel: 428-3671

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER - 1983

Next meeting -

A N N U A L G E N E R A L M E E T I N G

The 9th Annual General Meeting of The Gateacre Society
be held on

TUESDAY, 25th OCTOBER 1983

at 8 p.m. in

The Gateacre Institute, Grange Lane

Nomination Forms are available from the Secretary.

NORTON PRIORY - On 25th July Mrs. Muldoon, the recently appointed Curator of the NORTON PRIORY MUSEUM, came to talk to us. She told how in 1970 the first excavations among tangled undergrowth were begun by the Society of Antiquaries. At that time no-one thought that anything of much interest would be found, as the site had been occupied previously by a Tudor mansion, rebuilt as a Georgian country house c.1740 and remodelled by Wyatt in 1776. However this has turned out to be the largest Mediaeval site in the country to be uncovered by modern methods of excavation.

The Priory for Augustinian canons was founded by the Baron of Halton in 1115 in Runcorn, moved to this site in 1134 and the Church, dedicated to St. Mary, was completed by 1157. The layout was the typical modular plan for an Augustinian Priory and the stone came from Windmill Hill about half a mile away. The Duttons of Dutton (4 miles away on the Northwich road) among other Cheshire families, endowed the Priory and, as a result, had the privilege of being buried in the Church. The Priory at its most flourishing had 24 canons and a Prior and, by 1391, was so large, wealthy and influential that it was raised, by the Pope, to the status of a Mitred Abbey. The order followed the rules of St. Augustine of Hippo and listened to a chapter of his writings every day in the Chapter House - hence the name.

Among the most important finds have been carvings of c.1300 of which Patrick Greene, the archaeologist in charge, says they are like no other carvings in England and seem to be the work of carvers from Ireland or the Isle of Man. Not only have floor tiles of c.1300 been found, but also the kiln in which they were fired and so it has been possible to recreate the way in which they were made using the same clay, the same glazes and baking them at the same temperature in a replica of the kiln.

The canons were buried to the east of the Church, workers to the north, and from a study of the remains - many of them died at the age of about 60 - it has been possible to determine blood groups, information about diseases - and there seems to have been a lot of arthritis - because of the damp site? Many burials were in sandstone coffins which had beautifully carved lids including one for a knight from

which the Cross used for the Museum has been taken.

Support for the excavations has been given by local industries, not necessarily in money but in practical ways, for instance the mould - 'cope' - for a 13th century bell was found (no bells of this date survive) and from it the Widnes Foundry has been able to make a replica 13th century bell which can be rung without fear of doing irreparable harm to a historic artifact.

Mrs. Muldoon's talk was illustrated with excellent slides and many of us have made a resolution to visit Norton Priory as a result of her fascinating story.

J.B.G.

ELIZABETHAN PRESCOT - At our September meeting Mr. Knowles gave us a vivid picture of life in 16th century Prescott - as well as indicating his sources to encourage members who might be inspired to learn more. He mentioned particularly the Court Rolls, Church Wardens' Accounts and Parish records from 1573 as the earliest and most valuable sources but there are later useful accounts such as the Rev. Paterson's 'Township of Prescott' 1908 and various articles by the Rev. Driffield in the Prescott Reporter of 1921.

In 1445 Henry VI granted the Manor of Prescott to the newly founded King's College, Cambridge. In the 16th and 17th centuries it was a large parish of 17 townships and, due to its commanding position, was a meeting place for religious wanderers. Its Charter of 1447 lays down many privileges granted to the inhabitants who jealously guarded their rights and strove to keep strangers at bay. Many surnames mentioned in early deeds are still common in the area such as Byres, Booths, Ogles etc., some mentioned as early as 1510.

Many buildings are mentioned but, unfortunately, there is little indication about where they were sited. There was the Court House in the Market Place, a pub the 'Eagle and Child' is mentioned in 1670, there was a Cockpit, a Bear House and 1617 a Playhouse for entertainment. Stocks and a large pond with a ducking stool are also mentioned. Only 4 wells are known (but there must have been many more?) and it was forbidden to wash clothes or puddings (sheeps or pigs intestines) in them.

There were rich deposits of coal over which many disputes

took place - residents were permitted to dig up coal on their own land but they tended to dig just anywhere and one vicar was fined for digging coal on the main highway.

Mr. Knowles did not go into the Church history as this is a subject on its own, but he recommended a book by Arthur Roberts which has been published recently.

Members asked about the Prescott Museum and Mr. Knowles urged a visit there. The clock-making exhibition is a permanent feature on the first floor and is of major importance already and will probably become internationally known. On the ground floor are temporary exhibitions - always of interest.

Altogether we had an enlightening evening and one which extended our knowledge of the history of Merseyside.

N.L.

VILLAGE GREEN & COMMONS REG. ACT 1965 - We have now had the decision, dated 12th July 1983, of the Chief Commons Commissioner - Mr. Squibbs and it is that he refuses to confirm the registration of Gateacre Village Green as a Village Green within the meaning of the Act.

Briefly (the Hon. Sec. will be glad to let interested members read the whole document) his decision hinged upon whether the children living in Gateacre were playing their "..lawful sports and pastimes as of right". In his view they were not, but were "..on the land as members of the public using a public walk or pleasure ground subject to the regulations made by the local authority under sections 44 and 76 of the Public Health Act 1907 and section 69 of the Public Health Act 1925..". These regulations being "..quite incompatible with a right of a limited class of persons to use the whole of the land at all times without any restriction..".

This is all very sad - we thought we had a water-tight case with Gateacre Green which was certainly given to the people of Gateacre as a Village Green by Sir Andrew Barclay Walker in 1887 - but there is no point in worrying about it as an appeal can only be heard on a point of law and held in the High Court where expenses would be very high.

QUEEN VICTORIA -

One sunny morning in August a working party set off down Grango Lane to attack Queen Victoria with soap and water and some elbow grease. Helen Silcock was

armed with buckets and sponges, Melanie Thomas and I carried a short ladder and my young brother Christopher dragged a brush along. My Mum kept well behind, pretending not to be with us and we arrived on the Village Green amidst the curious stares of passers-by.

Having never come into such close contact with Her Majesty before we were amazed at what we saw and found. As we proceeded to remove the grime and verdigris from her personage we found lots of ladybirds in the nooks and crannies, they were country ladybirds (red with black spots) not the town variety which was surprising. Quite a few spiders were evicted from their homes that morning too. Her Majesty obviously hadn't washed behind her neck that morning because we found a piece of chewing-gum stuck behind her veil - I'm sure that she was not amused when it was put there.

When we had finished washing her (the first time for some years!) we polished her with some 'mycrystalline wax' provided by the Conservation Dept. of the Museum - this was to help stop the verdigris forming on her again.

After three hours of hard work we could finally step back to admire our work. We all had great fun, especially watching the expressions of the people who went by. Everyone was curious as to what we were doing. Perhaps when She has her Spring Cleaning we could have a notice to inform people that this is the work of the Junior Members of the Gateacre Society ?

Sarah Bee.

Our request for volunteers to clean and polish Queen Victoria led to one of our members, Mr. W. Collison recalling the refurbishing - over 50 years ago - of the Church of St. Silas in Pembroke Place (now demolished) when an inexperienced but enthusiastic helper applied acid to a marble statue of a little boy personifying "Innocence" in an effort to remove stains. Great were his cries of horror when the nose and half the features vanished in a cloud of CO₂. Mr. Collison washed off the acid, consoled his 'helper', obtained some plaster of Paris from the nearby Dental Hospital and working overnight restored the little statue to its former beauty. We are thankful that Queen Victoria did not suffer this fate.

LEE PARK SPORTS & SOCIAL CLUB (PROPOSED) The Development and Building Control Sub-Committee held a meeting at "the former

Goods Yard between Belle Vale Rd. and The Nook" on Friday 16th September (they were half an hour late) in order to come to a decision as to whether or not planning consent should be given for the renewal of permission to build a Sports & Social Club on this site.

Several members had sent in letters stating their objections and we were delighted that about 25 people turned out to support the Secretary. The two applicants were present and we were able to find out that the emphasis was to be on the social side in the first instance, and if they were successful and when they had sufficient money the sports side would be considered.

When the Committee arrived we handed over a petition of over 150 signatures while they listened to our reasons for wanting the application turned down (everyone was eager to speak, the Hon. Sec. could hardly get a word in - it was splendid to have so much support), then we all went up the path to see where the proposed building would be - climbing over tree trunks and brambles - and we pointed out how very close to the houses in The Nook and Lee Vale Road the club would be.

After a discussion with the applicants the Committee boarded their bus, had a short conference and then the clerk came to inform us that their decision was to recommend a refusal - let us hope that is the last we will hear of it.

Many thanks to everyone who attended the meeting - a good mornings work? Showing that a concerted effort and a reasonable argument can help to keep Gateacre as we wish.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Once again we look forward to actually having time to talk to our members - once the business part of the evening is over - to answer your queries (if we can) and perhaps most important to pick up your ideas about what we should concentrate on next.

Owing to greater commitments our Membership Secretary, Mrs. Bee is seeking someone to take over her job in the Society. Will anyone who has a little time to spare take over the job of keeping the records up to date, writing out membership cards (delivery arranged) and passing on the money collected to the Treasurer please get in touch with Mrs. Bee 428-5497 or the Hon. Sec.

Apart from the Membership Secretary we would welcome one or two more members on the Committee - perhaps there are some younger people who are interested enough to take on some small job helping to run the Society - two young men would be nice, they would help to put the balance right ?

GATEACRE TEA TOWELS - The Parents' Association of the Gateacre Comprehensive School have brought out a very attractive GATEACRE tea towel, with photographs of seven of Gateacre's buildings. These will be on sale at the A.G.M. and subsequent meetings or contact the Hon. Sec. price £1.25.

DRUIDS CROSS STABLE BLOCK - After seeing a drawing of the stable block in the City Planning Dept. showing the windows as small paned 'Georgian' type Miss Gnosspelius and the Secretary went along to the house fearing the worst. But we needn't have worried, Barry Kelley has had new sash windows made with large panes of glass as they would have been originally - the panic had been the result of an excess of zeal on the part of the friend who did the drawing.

How many of our members, we wonder, have been along to see the excellent job that Mr. Kelley is making of this Harvey Lonsdale Elmes building ? He took on a really daunting task - if you recall a 'dangerous structure' notice had been served on the building at that time - and he deserves much praise. Do call in next time you are passing, he would be delighted to show you all he has achieved so far.

MERSEYSIDE CIVIC SOCIETY, A.G.M. - The Annual General Meeting of the M.C.S. on the 21st September was held in the conference room at the International Garden Festival site. Before the meeting we were taken on a conducted tour and were most impressed by what we saw and look forward to a very fine event next year.

At the meeting itself we heard that the Lyceum in Bold Street seems all set to become a Post Office Museum and Post Office - but we do so wish they would hurry up and get it cleaned! The future of St. Andrew's Church in

Rodney Street is causing some anxiety also 169-175 Duke Street but some way of saving these fine buildings will emerge we hope. By the way they seem to think that Dukes Terrace are the only back-to-back houses left in Liverpool - they seem quite unaware of ours in Woolton and Gateacre.

VALLEY LINE - We were delighted to hear that the Horticulture Module of Valley Line (now at Bear Brand in Woolton) are working on the gardens at Gateacre Grange and doing some landscaping - we wish them well. They certainly have a challenge with these gardens which we understand were very fine indeed in the days of Sir Andrew Barclay Walker - who incidentally attended the Church of St. Andrew in Rodney Street in his younger days.

Photographs of the work that they are doing are being taken and copies have been promised for the Society's records.

BLOCKED GULLIES IN GATEACRE - Having had a number of complaints about blocked gullies - mostly in the centre of the village - we wrote to the Environmental Health Dept. on the 2nd August. We had a reply saying that these had all been attended to on the 15th August and someone actually saw the men at work. Members report that some gullies which have been quite useless for years are now clear - hurray.

ADVANCE NOTICE -

The November meeting will be on Tuesday 29th when Miss Gnosspelius is coming with her slides to give a talk on 'Georgian Liverpool'.

S.M.L. 6.10.83.