

18. The thirteenth week of war, and a Willaston funeral.

A big funeral was held in Willaston on Saturday for Lieutenant James Raymond McClintock Lonsdale, Willaston's first war casualty. A former student of Eton and Sandhurst, he went with the British Expeditionary Force to France at the start of the war, and died of wounds at Boulogne base hospital. Six horses drew the gun carriage bearing his coffin (draped in the Union Jack), from Hooton Station to Willaston Church and numerous men in uniform were present.

News came that John Palmer, one of the four servings sons from Little Neston's Royal Oak had been promoted to lance-corporal. His brother James Palmer (2nd Lincs Fusiliers) wrote of it being roasting hot when his battalion arrived in France, now it was very wet and freezing cold; if they got a barn to sleep in it was a luxury. He had been involved in intensive fighting at the Front.

Some of Rock Cottages, just before the bridge on Bridsons Hill, had already been demolished by November, which did not help the housing shortage in the town. There was a general reluctance by councils of the time to make new housing a charge on the rates. The Neston Cottage Company had just built the four houses which stand on Burton Road, now called Cottage Close, but the war interrupted the scheme. These were actually designed by two distinguished architects, R.T.Beckett of Chester and Gilbert Fraser of Liverpool. Perhaps Sir Percy Bates of Hinderton Hall, director of Cunard and of the Neston Cottage Company had influenced the choice of architect for these 'working class' cottage homes.

Several of the owners of old cottages had been served notices to bring them up to standard by replacing the old privies with water closets, Neston being very much behind other Wirral councils in improving these things. One such owner was Mrs Pakenham-Walsh who rented out cottage property near the Cross. She and her family lived at the old Vicarage, the large old house with thirteen rooms where Tesco now stands, and she ran a school from there. She had one son in the Navy, two in the Army and a daughter waiting to be posted for Red Cross work.

Mrs Rowlands from The Bungalow at the very southern end of Parkgate Parade was the local secretary for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, and was busy giving advice and money to soldiers' families for separation allowances. Money for the National Relief Fund was collected locally, sent to the central fund in London, then given back to local SSFAs as needed. A sixty-eight strong county-level War Relief Committee was managing to keep things organized so far. Dependents of soldiers were now entitled to be treated free by some local doctors, and to get their medicines free of charge. Drs Gunn

and Apsimon from Neston had signed up for this scheme, as had J.G.Lee's Chemist next to the Town Hall.

Mrs Maud Gladstone had yet another local enterprise in addition to Belgian refugees and the Red Cross hospital (which was still awaiting British casualties). Women in Wirral Rural Council areas including Ledsham, Ness, Willaston and Shotwick were invited to join her scheme for Work for Women (a branch of which she was already running in Chester). She would provide the materials and pay, at the regulation rate, for the making of baby clothes or women's and children's underwear if the work was done by women who were unemployed as a result of the war,

The poor-law guardians at Clatterbridge Workhouse were still dealing with poverty in the rest of the community. 'Out-door relief' was being requested by a 40-year-old woman from Liverpool Road, having lived with a man and their four children without the legal protection of marriage. She had insured him with the Salvation Army, but when he died in Clatterbridge Infirmary in September they refused to pay out as she was not his wife, though they returned the premiums to her. The clerk was ordered to ask the Salvation Army to pay her or explain why it would not. In December it was decided to offer the family the benefit of admitting them to the workhouse. There were 219 inmates in the workhouse, and 76 vagrants had been admitted in the last two weeks.

Little Neston Methodists had Mission Meetings on Sunday and on Wednesday, with a speaker from Nigeria showing limelight views of a missionary's life.

Tuesday night saw the annual meeting of the Bible Society, a non-denominational group that would eventually be sending thousands of bibles to troops in the war. Several Neston Revs and Mr Pemberton were present to hear entertainment by a large choir of Neston school children. On Wednesday the regular lecture at the Presbyterian (URC) schoolroom was 'Round the Domestic Hearth' including anecdotes humorous and grave.

The Library committee were given an up-date on the stock, five missing books had been traced, but one, "John Marchmont's Legacy" could not be found. (Read it or listen to it on-line!). It was decided to spend £1 on books dealing with the present war.