

23. Into December, and the eighteenth week of War in Neston

A sudden outbreak of mumps hit the Liverpool Road 'Mixed' schools (juniors and above) on Wednesday with three families being affected, Peters, Youngs and Millingtons. The next day Campbells, Duckers and Ouldreds were also suffering. The Infants had twenty-two cases, and by Friday only half of the eighty-five pupils were in school, as chicken pox and eye infections also struck. On Monday 7th the Medical Office of Health ordered the Infants department to close immediately for the Christmas holiday.

The Parkgate Entertainers under Ithiel Lloyd of Parade House put on concerts in the Town Hall on Monday and Tuesday nights, to fund presents for those in the ranks. The hall was packed on both nights, and the wounded soldiers from Parkgate plus the nursing staff were treated to yet another night out. Most of the artistes were from the local fishing families, including Fewtrells, Robinsons and Mealors. Isiah Fewtrell, of Dover Cottage, was at 12-years-old the youngest performer and acquitted himself wonderfully. Ithiel Lloyd (of independent means) was an excellent female impersonator, and he made a short speech pointing out the skills and talents of these poorer families. His concerts became regular favourites in the war years.

The new billiards season was underway, with John Cottrell of Leighton Road serving as secretary of the Wirral Amateur Billiard League, based in Neston Institute. Neston played Port Sunlight (but were beaten), but of course many of the players were with the forces.

Two soccer teams that had both lost in the Cheshire Senior Cup last qualifying round, Neston Nomads and Ellesmere Port St Mary's met on Saturday at Boathouse Field in the Port. A small crowd saw Neston being victorious 4-0 though it had to be admitted the Saints could not field a full team. Nomads' future programme was announced and they would be doing a 'Welsh Christmas Tour', playing Llandudno on Christmas Day and Ewloe Villa (Hawarden) on Boxing Day.

The Wirral Guardians discussed Christmas at the Workhouse - Madame Clara Butt had offered to send artistes who were unemployed because of the war, to entertain the inmates, and this offer was gratefully accepted. A special fund would pay for the entertainers explained Madame Butt, who organised many charitable concerts throughout the war. There were 209 Clatterbridge workhouse inmates as of early December.

It had been rumoured for a while that there were problems at the colliery, so it was probably no surprise when the announcement came this week that the Wirral Colliery Company was going into liquidation and was to be sold by auction (as a going concern) on 14th December. It included twenty-seven acres with offices, plant, workshops, engine-houses, manager's residence and twenty-three cottages. There were also listed one locomotive and 128 coal wagons, horses and carts. The current company had run it since 1911.

An interesting appeal case was just starting involving Burton farmers John and Richard Kemp against John Summers Steel Works. The sheep farmers had claimed £2,000 for damage to sheep and crops on the marshes, caused, they claimed, by discharge of noxious gases and liquids from the smelting works. Although bodies of many dead sheep contained zinc or lead, the judge had decided they died of disease. The farmers decided to challenge this decision.