

## **27. New Year, 1915, and hopes for a Lasting Peace.**

Neston traditionally celebrated New Year around The Cross, and as midnight approached the strong winds dropped, clouds disappeared and an almost full moon lit the familiar scene. As the church bells pealed there was much talk of 1915 being 'Our victorious year'; the Salvation Army Band led hymns including 'Jesus shall reign' and 'All people that on earth do dwell'. Rev. John Towert from the Presbyterian church (URC), now in his fortieth year as Minister in Neston was there, as he always was on this day each year, as was Rev. John Otty from the Congregational church (where Legion now stands), who voiced the hope that the New Year would be a good one that would bring a peace that would never again be broken. John Towert's son would die at home after being wounded in action in November 1916.

Another event on New Year's Eve, (Thursday) was a short sacred concert in Mostyn House chapel given by the Gladstones and some musical friends. Mrs Gladstone (Burton Manor) was very keen on music and encouraged its appreciation generally. She had organised the Wirral And Eddsibury Musical Competition and Festival the previous April, and was currently running a series of concerts in Chester.

The Vicar, Rev. Charles Brook-Gwynne was rather keen on a dramatic turn of phrase (see Week Seven), and his New Year letter employed some rousing examples such as 'destruction of Christian civilization', 'collapse of the British Empire' and 'we have drawn the sword in defence of the homes of England of the women and children'. The local 'shirkers' got a pointed mention; but it was to be over a year before compulsory conscription was introduced, though voluntary recruitment figures at Chester Castle for the first week of the year were better than they had been for months.

Another group of wounded soldiers from a variety of regiments had arrived at the Parkgate Hospital, with many vivid accounts of the horrors they had witnessed in the trenches where the men were now often waist deep in mud and water. Some of the wounded were reportedly eager to get back to the fray. Neston Doctors Gunn, Carlisle and Lewis Grant were being kept busy. Men of the Neston Red Cross detachment were taking it in turns to sleep at the hospital to work as orderlies to assist the Red Cross nurses at night. The men's detachment included J. Mealor, W.Briscoe and C.Peers all from Mill Street, W. Jervis from Gladstone Road, Thomas Pemberton Swift, butcher from The Cross, Fred Wilde from Ness and several men from Willaston and Burton. Extra evening

volunteer helpers included several men from Parkgate Parade - Mr Vonberg from Mostyn House, Frank Kirby from Talbot House, (architect, chairman of Cricket Club), and Grey Ritchie who lodged with Swifts at Seaview.\*

The Gladstones were supporting the hospital financially and improvements including new bathroom facilities were being organised. Sir Norman (expert in shipping law) and Lady Hill from Leighton House (by the 'bends' in Leighton Road), were providing furniture.

The Council's Health Committee heard a report from the Medical Officer on the state of seventeen houses in Liverpool Road whose owners were being threatened with improvement notices. Neston's councillors were doing their best to improve the town's poor housing, though it was an uphill struggle against some reluctance on the part of the owners who rented out the old cottages. The main problem was the old privy system, where the 'nightsoil' had to be dug out and dumped on the fields. Owners were slowly replacing the privies with water-closets, but often had to be threatened with closing orders before they did so. The row of cottages on Liverpool Road known up to recent times as Cottrell's Cottages were amongst those listed, see illustration.

A new school term started on Monday, though a lot of the infants were off with mumps, croup and whooping cough. On Wednesday afternoon twenty children were absent from the juniors because of the Congregational Sunday School treat.