

#### **40. Weeks 39 and 40 of the War, and the Vicar has a good idea**

The staff at the Parkgate Red Cross Hospital finally said good-bye to the last two Belgian soldiers who had been treated there, but a party of twelve wounded British arrived from fighting at Hill 60 and Ypres on the Western Front in early May. They came north by train into Birkenhead Woodside Station (now no trace of this, near the bus terminus by the landing stage), and were met in four cars loaned by Neston people, with an ambulance brigade man in each vehicle. The hospital was entirely run on voluntary effort and donations, and a long list of residents who had made contributions, including a billiard table, was published in the paper.

Clatterbridge Workhouse and its Guardians had a duty to supply food for a mid-day meal to casual vagrants who had stayed for a night in the workhouse, and a long debate was ensuing as to how this meal of 8 ounces of bread and 2 ounces of cheese was to be provided; Castle's shop on High Street was offering this for 4d (nearly 2p) a person, including seats and shelter. Previously the men had been given mid-day supplies when they left the workhouse in the morning. Vagrancy figures were actually dropping, as men joined the forces and more jobs became available. There were currently 89 of these casual vagrants compared to 163 the previous year.

Little Neston Methodist Church celebrated its anniversary on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup>, with local children performing charming solos, such as 'Stand for the right', 'Living lessons', 'Whom do you love' and 'Christ's little child'. 'What can a little chap?' was recited by Louie Oxtan, and other young performers included Florrie and Hannah Jones and Alec Fenney.

Birkenhead's Charles Thompson Mission put on yet another of its shows, a patriotic concert with crowning of the Neston May Queen on the 11<sup>th</sup>, in the Institute. Entirely performed by well-trained children it featured such items as a play entitled 'Virtue Rewarded'. A display of 'Birkenhead Bantams' by Amos and six little boys was said to be particularly good. The orchestra played selections, and Mrs J.D. Lever, widowed sister-in-law of W.H. Lever from Thornton Manor, (he who had built the Institute), crowned the May Queen. A skipping rope display was followed by numerous other numbers including 'Mamma's little soldier', 'Bonny Scotland', 'Dear old Dad' and 'Follow the flag'.

Half of the pupils from the 'Top' school on Liverpool Road were off sick as whooping cough and chicken pox ran riot. Wednesday May 12<sup>th</sup> was a

windy and wet day, and some of the children were so drenched that they had to be sent home.

At the monthly Parochial Church Council, the vicar proposed that some sort of institute be started so there would be a recreation room for the men to use when they returned from the fighting at the Front; this was two years before the formation of a Comrades association was proposed, and probably the first local seed of the Comrades (later British Legion).

Improvements were planned for the area at the junction of Cross Street and Park Street, and Mr Whineray from Leighton Court was giving land for road widening and Birkenhead Brewery who owned the Plough pub (facing the grassed area) gave some land so the corner of Park Street/Cross Street could be widened.

The annual report from Neston Library revealed a total of 3,234 books in stock, with 210 active members. Just over 5,000 issues had been made and only one book had gone missing in the previous year.

Robert Bridson and Sons, locomotive engineers of Bridge Street were appearing in court at Ellesmere Port for not having the weights painted on the wagons the locos were pulling. One was a threshing machine, one a straw presser and the third had living accommodation. The excuse was that these were not the usual types of hauled vehicles, but a fine of 20 shillings was imposed.

To say that the War was not going well for the allies would be an understatement; fighting men were desperately needed and in these pre-conscript days various military units were asking for volunteers in the local papers – the Cheshire Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery wanted shoeing smiths and saddlers immediately, the Army Service Corps urgently needed drivers of all types, and Cheshire Yeomanry wanted 200 good recruits to sign for foreign service. Career opportunities nearer home included those for a young man able to mould and make dough for Corkill's bakers on Liverpool Road, or a benchman for the boot-trade at Gater's on Parkgate Road, and a tall, respectable youth was wanted in Hinderton for cleaning windows- perhaps at Hinderton Hall.

Chester Races were being held, as usual, in the first week of May, despite some objections. It transpired eventually that attendance figures were down and the races were not held again until after the war. The feasibility of holding the Cheshire Show this year was discussed and decided

against, as it would be taking men away from work and probably cause problems in transportation of exhibits.

This article covers approximately May 1<sup>st</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> 1915.