

## **15. Week ten of Neston in the war, and sad news from the Front**

Gunner Benjamin Griffiths was the eldest of the four soldier sons of Neston boot and shoemaker George Griffiths of Chester Road. Ben was married, with a baby girl, and now lived in Higher Tranmere. He had served for several years in the regular army before he took a job with Birkenhead Corporation, then rejoined on the outbreak of war as a reservist and went to France with the Royal Field Artillery.

Word reached Neston in early October that Ben had been killed in action on 20<sup>th</sup> September, the first Neston casualty of the war. He had been a keen athlete and a well-known figure in Wirral Athletics Club. His wife had received a couple of letters from him, saying he was keeping well, though over-tired at times, and would they please send him some tobacco. He hadn't, as yet, bumped into his brother Douglas who was also out there. Ben was the first Nestonian to be killed in action, many more were to follow.

Men who had only recently enlisted, unlike Ben, were still in training camps in England, and some of them would be so for many months. There was a shortage of billets for the vast numbers of Liverpool Pals (including Neston lads) signing up, and some were posted to Hooton Hall, with its ample grounds, for a few weeks. So a football match against Ellesmere Port was organized, and featured several well-known Wirral players from the Hooton-based Pals. A big gate saw the Port win by 2-1.

Neston Nomads' winning streak came to an end and they were heavily defeated 5-1 by Harrowby, a New Brighton team, at the New Brighton Tower Ground on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>. Birkenhead's Belgian refugees were treated to a visit to the stands in Prenton Park to watch Rovers and Oswestry in action. There is no record of Parkgate's Belgian visitors being taken to a match as yet; another nine arrived this week and were lodged at 4 Mostyn Square, a double-fronted house on the south side by Coastguard Lane.

Maud Gladstone from Burton Manor had arranged things for this second group of refugees, in addition to managing the upgrading of the Parkgate Convalescent Home for the war wounded who would soon start arriving. She was also one of the leading lights behind the Queen's Work for Women scheme based in Chester, finding useful tasks for women made jobless because of the war, and she donated a lot of money towards it.

Mrs Gladstone was one of the speakers at the annual prize-giving in connection with the technical evening classes at the council school on Burton Road on Tuesday. The thirteen different courses had been attended by 109 students. In

addition to the popular ambulance classes other courses included English, shorthand, and book-keeping. Cookery and dress-making classes had been running for twenty-two years. The practical drawing and workshop arithmetic were said to be especially useful in this town with so much building trade. Free 'scholarships' were given to some of the students for 90% attendance, including Norah Coventry, Bessie Oxton, Barbara Pearson, Jack Jellicoe and Wilfred Newcombe. A hearty rendering of the national anthem completed the evening. The county council's series of horticultural lectures had continued with a well-attended talk in the Burton Road schoolroom on 'Cultivation of Potatoes' the day before.

The Neston Red Cross Society were proving to be an industrious group, turning out shirts and socks for Neston men leaving for their units, and for sending to the Front. Socks, cigarettes/tobacco and chocolate were for ever in demand. The junior members of the Girls Friendly Society, (a group for girls and nothing to do with the Neston Female Society) were making lavender bags with comforting text cards attached for sending to one of the military hospitals. It is not recorded as to whether tobacco may have been more welcome!

The vicar's cycle accident had obviously been more serious than first thought and he was still not fit to work. Tom Swift, of the Scots Guards, who had been sent home with dysentery, was back with his Regiment this week.

On the Tuesday, the night of the prize-giving, much of Cheshire including Neston was convinced that an air-ship (a Zeppelin) carrying explosives was hovering over-head, after a huge flash of light followed by explosions were witnessed. Rumour ran rife concerning Germans landing at very places including Chester – but it turned out to have been a meteor crashing to earth in spectacular fashion.