

21. Neston life in the sixteenth week of War, and caring for casualties

Several khaki-clad locals were seen around the town this week; those men who signed up for the 4th Cheshires two weeks ago, many of them from the colliery, were having to travel into Birkenhead every day for their initial drill training at the Grange Road West barracks before joining the rest of the men in Shropshire or Northampton in December. Sergeant Thomas Griffiths, from the boot shop where Age UK is now sited, a long-term Territorial of that battalion, had rejoined as a Sergeant Drill Instructor (a different family of Griffiths from Neston's first 'killed-in-action' casualty on 20th September).

A recent Saturday afternoon had seen the Red Cross nurses, the men's ambulance corps under A. Hitchmough, and the recently formed local defence volunteers in a parade headed by the Boys Brigade bugle band marching to Hinderton Mount on the High Road. This was the home of (1) Chairman of the Council, (2) leader of the Neston Red Cross, and (3) their son, second-in-command of the 4th Cheshires. Field practice was carried out in the garden, followed by a march back via Little Neston.

A few of the Belgian soldiers were still at Parkgate's Red Cross hospital but it received its first twelve British casualties on a very cold dawn on Thursday. Five cars bearing Drs Gunn and Grant, and several of the ambulance corps, motored over to Liverpool to pick up the wounded who had arrived by train, and one can imagine the relief of arriving at the hospital to warm food, soup and coffee, hot water bottles and warm beds. They were not local men, the logistics of such an arrangement would have been impossible, but were from a range of units and suffering mainly from shrapnel and bullet wounds, and one with malaria. Many lively accounts of the fighting were forthcoming from these men when local visitors were allowed into the hospital on Sunday.

Private James Palmer, Royal Lancs Fusiliers, one of the soldier sons of the licensee of Little Neston's Royal Oak, was invalided home for a few days. He too shared vivid stories of the awful reality of life on the front line.

In what may have been a cautious move, the licensees of the Chester Arms in Parkgate, on the site of what is now the Old Quay car-park, changed their name from Waizbom to Weston. Ada and Albert were probably brother and sister of Russian/Polish descent, but some people with questionable surnames had suffered aggression in some parts of Cheshire.

Miss Elizabeth Molyneux had run a small private school in the iron hut on Park Street for nearly fifteen years. It had been erected by her brother who ran a bakery in the building next door (now the dental surgery), but she was now giving up the school and offered it to the Parochial Church Council, who thought it might possibly be worth renting. Some of us will still remember it as the Labour Hut.

Cecil Prosser, from Parkgate Square, a plumber with W. Hough who had a plumbing business on the High Street, was one of those men on the station on September 7th as they set off to join the Wirral Battalion (13th Cheshires). He was in Codford now, and finally would go to France with the rest of the battalion in September 1915. In May 1916 he received a shrapnel wound in the right leg at Vimy Ridge, spent months in hospital and was transferred to a Labour Corps working with prisoners of war in May 1917. Another on the station that day with a similar story was 33-year-old collier William Abel from Eldon Terrace. He badly injured his knee when he fell backwards into a trench near Armantières whilst repairing it in early 1916. He spent many weeks in hospital and had a short spell in a Labour Corps but was discharged in October 1917 as 'no longer physically fit for war service'.

An interesting project was being hatched in Birkenhead this week, and several Neston men would be heading for Birkenhead Town Hall next Monday to sign up for it....

And finally - to look back at a couple of recent football matches: on Saturday 14th, Neston Nomads, the lads from 'Cockletown' (yes, that's Neston, though in fact the team was not made up of local men), beat Prescott Wire Works 4-3. Last Saturday in a West Cheshire League match, Nomads beat Hoylake (the Sandboys) 2-0. Coming up next Saturday: an important match with Wallasey Borough.