

### **36. Weeks 32 and 33 of Neston in the Great War, and more men are joining the colours.**

A minor British victory at Neuve Chapelle against the German lines had been wasted by failure to follow it through, and progress in the Dardanelles was painfully slow. The country needed munitions in much greater quantities. H.N.Gladstone of Burton Manor, who was managing the Gladstone estates at Hawarden whilst the 'young squire', his nephew William Gladstone was serving with the Welsh Fusiliers, was being approached by the War Office about gun-cotton (explosives) manufacture at Queensferry.

Birkenhead Corporation gas-workers were on strike, but Neston was not effected as it was still producing its own gas (until 1929 when Birkenhead took over the company). Liverpool dockers were calling wild-cat strikes and the cost of living was steadily rising. The Liverpool Road schools again had no coke for a while, and on the 18th was a heavy snowstorm and nearly half the children were kept a home.

Several Neston men had joined the Cheshire Field Company Royal Engineers in the past few weeks. Henry Blake from Dee Cottages on the Parade was already in the Dardanelles, and his brother Ralph had just signed up. Wilf Pritchard and Hughie Norman from Little Neston, were already serving Sappers, and Joseph Mealor, stone-mason from 5 Hinderton Road had gone to Birkenhead and joined, followed by Charles Bromfield Bushell, quarryman from Park Street the following day. Henry Parry from Mill Street joined them a week later.

Cheshire Education Committee discussed the contentious suggestion by the agricultural committees of whether to exempt 12-14 year-olds from school so they could work on the farms, where the labour problem was getting dire, partly because farm labourers had been leaving the land and taking better paid jobs in the towns as wages were rising. Several unions strongly opposed the use of children.

Local entertainment included a 'Patriotic and Pictorial evening for King and Country' featuring Neston Boy Scouts, at the Institute on Tuesday, with realistic scenes of war, snapshots of soldiers and sailors, views of France and Belgium and songs and recitals by a representative of the Liverpool Temperance Union, including 'The Little Hero' and 'Tipperary', while his wife entertained with 'Home Sweet Home' and 'Killarney'.

A St Patrick's Ball was held in the Town Hall the following night, for well over a hundred guests, a time-honoured Neston custom, profits to the Red Cross Fund.

Another whist drive was organised for patients, staff and friends by the local ambulance men on Saturday at the Parkgate Hospital, (prizes were a silk scarf and a morocco leather cigarette case) whilst last week they held a Social Evening in the Town Hall to recruit more men to bring their numbers up to the level that would allow them to be recognized as an official Voluntary Aid Detachment by the War Office. Joseph Pemberton, chairman of the council made an encouraging speech. The men did a lot of work at the Parkgate Hospital, including the delivering of patients; on the night of Sunday 14th, a Red Cross train had steamed into Birkenhead from Southampton bearing 200 wounded, many from the fighting at Neuve Chappelle and some were taken to Parkgate.

Discussions were still proceeding regarding a regularising of local defence forces into the Cheshire Volunteer Regiment, and various corps were springing up all over Wirral, doing some drilling with dummy rifles, but with little idea as to who was going to finance them. The Ness member of Wirral Rural District Council, which covered many of the areas surrounding Neston, was Major Grundy of Haddon Hall Farm, himself a keen Volunteer member, but he reported to the council that the residents would not be happy paying for the local defence forces, and that money should come from the government.

Two well-known local residents were buried this week; there was a well-attended funeral for Thomas Matthews, a popular fisherman from one of the cottages in Station Road, Parkgate. His son William who was serving in the war was one of the mourners. Mrs Mary Pyke, widow of farmer John Pyke who had lived in the house next to Vine House on Parkgate Road for over fifty years, also had numerous local mourners, Henry Norman being the undertaker.

Staff vacancies were advertised at the laundry on Old Quay Lane, where an engineer/fireman and a van driver were wanted, and Wildes at Ness urgently wanted a baker. A general servant, with knowledge of bar work, was wanted immediately by Mr Stringer at the Brown Horse.

There were races at Hooton Park on Friday 12th and Saturday 13th, including the Great Cheshire Steeplechase. That same Saturday saw only one West Cheshire League football match that managed to field teams, and that was Neston Nomads being beaten by Wirral Railway 1-0.

This article covers roughly 10th - 24 March 1915.