

41. Week 41 and 42 of the War in Neston, and the start of the summer sporting season.

Early May heralded the start of the bowling season, and the preliminary round of the Association Cup was held on the green of the Neston Hotel (the pub opposite to the Town Hall). Neston had been absent from the competition for a few years, but played its first match of this season at the Sandon Arms in Heswall on 22nd, (Whit Saturday) being beaten 15 games to 12. The Parish Church Cricket Club had better luck on the same day when they beat Seacombe by 51 runs. The Northern Quoiting League which included Neston decided to just organise its own friendly matches this season because of the shortage of players.

By the middle of May detailed reports were appearing in Wirral newspapers about local people involved in the *Lusitania* disaster on May 7th. The Cunarder, on the last section of its voyage from New York to Liverpool, was sunk by a German U-boat with the loss of over 1,000 lives, one of them being Parkgate-born Able Seaman Thomas Evans whose wife and family lived in Barnston. Joseph Duncan from 'Ryley's Castle', the small house next to the Watch House was a cook on his eighth voyage, and after being knocked overboard, and then thrown into the water from a capsized life-boat, was fortunately picked up by a steamer and saved.

Private Joseph Jones of Lees Lane, whose news we have shared before, was with the 5th Battalion of the Cheshires (the former Chester-based territorials) on the Western Front, and wrote again this week. He said it was very warm and they had been in the trenches for twenty-five days but were now having a week's rest. They had been dealing with gas attacks from the Germans and had to breathe through a pad (gas-masks were not yet in use). Harold Bell from Gladstone Road was with the same battalion and had also written to his family, pointing out he would be in the trenches for his birthday on the 9th! He thought the War would not last much longer.

The formerly Birkenhead-based 4th Battalion Cheshires which a lot of the colliers had joined in the autumn, were still training in England and were waiting to see action, which was to come when they went to Gallipoli in July. The 'Wirral' Battalion, 13th Cheshires, which a large group of Neston men had joined in early September (see photo on station platform in AMA article of second week in September last year), were being moved to Aldershot this week, where they stayed until going to France in September 1915.

The 101st anniversary of the Female Friendly Society was in sight, but due to the war situation it had been decided (amidst some controversy) to not have a Walk this year, but that the members should make their own way to the church and the meeting afterwards.

In the warmer weather the injured soldiers from the Parkgate Red Cross Hospital could be seen on the Parade, sitting on the sea-wall chatting to the fishermen, while the women did their knitting and sewing and watched the children on the shore. The Duchess of Westminster (the then Duke's step-grandmother) paid a visit accompanied by Mrs Pemberton, Red Cross leader and wife of Neston's Chairman of the Council, and Dr Gunn. Several of the latest batch of patients were suffering from the effects of gas attacks, for which the healthy Parkgate air was said to be beneficial. One of the regular Whist Drives organised by the ambulance men was held on the Saturday night, always a popular diversion. Miss Swift from Ivy Cottage donated the prizes.

This article covers approximately the last two week of May 1915.

Thanks to Ian Norris for information on the *Lusitania* death.