

## **6. Into the second week of war, and the town gets organized**

Some men who were already Army Reservists or Territorials had promptly left Neston to join their units in Chester and Birkenhead, and on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> August, Lord Kitchener's call for a New Army of 100,000 men went out to the nation, and was heeded by a good number of Nestonians who had never before given a thought to military life. Many took the opportunity to join in an adventure and see a bit of the world. So many Cheshire men headed for the recruiting office at Chester Castle that there was nowhere to cater for them, consequently many were signed up then sent home for a few days.

On the afternoon of Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup>, just a week after war was declared, an important meeting attracted a huge crowd to the Town Hall. The organizer was Mrs Pemberton, Neston's Red Cross township leader (and wife of the chairman of the council, and mother of Major J. A. Pemberton of the Territorial 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Cheshire Regiment which had already left Birkenhead). She shared the platform with various local figures; on the stage, which was bedecked in red, white and blue, sat Dr Grant (local GP and Red Cross instructor), Father Ryan from St Winefride's (veteran of the Boer War), Rev. Towert from the Presbyterian church, Mr Edgley of the Congregational church, Rev. Morrell from Burton and Lady Bates from Hinderton Hall (wife of Sir Percy Bates, a director of Cunard).

The local Red Cross, explained Mrs Pemberton, would be serving several aims, one being to organise the making of 'garments' – Major Pemberton had already requested a hundred shirts and a hundred pairs of socks for his men, still stationed in Shropshire. A never ending supply of socks was a need that was to feature constantly in the war, and could readily be supplied by those at home wanting to do their bit. There were already knitting classes in Miss Richardson's school (an old house which stood near the present entrance to Moorside Avenue). The Institute on Little Neston Green and the Iron Room at Parkgate (a small corrugated iron structure at the infants' school) would serve as outposts for Red Cross activities. Mr Price, manager of the town's North and South Wales Bank (on the ground floor of the Town Hall) would open an account and take subscriptions.

Mrs Pemberton, perhaps with some foresight, listed various local buildings that could be used as military hospitals, and encouraged ladies to join the Friday night classes in the council chamber to train as Red Cross nurses, to form Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs). Men would be needed for such tasks as carrying stretchers from the stations to the

hospitals; there were already volunteers for that and more were called for. The meeting closed with enthusiastic applause and the national anthem.

Captain Coventry of Townfield in Mill Street had run the Boys Brigade for several years. He had previously been involved in the old Neston Volunteer company though this movement had been disbanded nationally in 1908. Captain Coventry probably saw an opportunity for reviving the old movement, as town and villages were rapidly setting up local defence forces in case of invasion. He started collecting names and some of the former members were coming forward, Major Grundy, T.P Swift, and J.Fleming, soon to be joined by many others in the next couple of weeks. The Drill Hall under the Town Hall would again be serving its original purpose!