



# Chester HISTORY & HERITAGE

Newsletter from Chester Community History & Heritage | SUMMER 2017

## Risen From the Ashes

In the early evening darkness of a Monday in November 1861 sudden cries of "Fire!" echoed down City Road – the Queen Hotel, only built and opened the year before as a rendezvous for elite travellers – was in flames.



The alarm was raised by a worker at the nearby railway and in a short time the engine from the Leadworks had arrived. Unfortunately there was no water available (the plug had been carelessly covered over by a thick layer of gravel in front of the hotel) and despite the subsequent arrival of the Great Western engine from Saltney and the two city engines the crews stood helplessly whilst the frantic search for a water pipe nearby proved fruitless and the flames started to run out of control, aided by the fierce gale that had started up. Eventually two hoses were used to carry a water supply from the station but by then the fire had really taken hold and by 7pm the whole of the back roof had fallen in. Thankfully, although storey after storey came crashing down the spirit vaults were saved - thousands of gallons of spirits were stored there and a resulting explosion should they

have caught fire would have been appalling. Human chains were set up to remove the beautiful furnishings, paintings and drapes to safe storage in the station building but ironically it was the servants quarters which took the worst of the damage and their possessions that were lost. Men, women and children braved the rain and wind to stand on the city walls and watch the flames rise higher – the reporter from the Cheshire Observer found it painful to witness that some spectators seemed to treat the horrors in front of them with levity and even enjoyed the spectacle of seeing one of Chester's finest buildings almost destroyed. After over twelve hours the fire had been extinguished but the Observer reported that the edifice was "a charred wreck, reeking with moisture and smelling abominably".



The fault was put down to a damaged chimney flue and as the building was heavily insured reconstruction work was started almost immediately although questions still remained over the water situation and at whose door blame for that could be laid.

The restored and refurbished Queen Hotel was as we still see it today. According to Chester Illustrated (1892) "there is not in England a more palatial, comfortable or well-appointed establishment". It was connected to the railway station by a covered walkway (so that the first class guests weren't inconvenienced by the weather when they stepped from the train) and porters, recognisable by their scarlet uniforms, met the trains as they arrived.



There were 100 bedrooms, all luxuriously fitted out and public rooms included a general and a ladies coffee-room, a reading room, a ladies drawing room, billiard room and two smoking-rooms. There was also an artistically laid-out garden with terraces and lawns as well as a mews for stabling. In 1867, a public house had been built on the opposite corner of City Road, to be used by ordinary travellers and by the servants of the gentry staying in the Queen Hotel. It was called the Queen Commercial Hotel and later The Albion, now the Town Crier. It was said that an underground passageway connected the two.

Despite that early disaster the hotel was deemed to be "second to none".



## Editorial

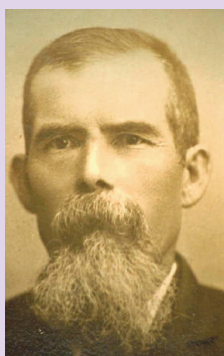
At the time of writing it does seem that Spring is in the air – lets hope that this summer brings good weather for all of us! We have certainly enjoyed a successful few months at CHH and hope you like our coming programme of events and exhibitions

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## Tragedy at the Yacht – update



Regular readers may remember an article some time ago which detailed the tragic story of Daniel Miller, landlord of the Yacht Inn in 1879. His wife – suffering from depression – had cut her own and her children's throats. Her small daughter died and she herself was sent to the Lunatic Asylum where she subsequently died giving birth to a frail, premature baby who also expired. Daniel had lost his home, his savings, his wife and two children and must have had no good memories of his time in Chester but we could not trace him after the 1881 census. We were contacted recently by one of his descendents who were able to bring us up to date – apparently Daniel married a Catherine Hogg, a housekeeper at the Bluecoat School, in 1882 and in 1884 sailed to Australia with his surviving children (but not his new wife). There he worked as a cooper until his death in Brisbane in 1913. We hope that his fortunes improved there and that he found happiness at last.



## Don't Miss...

**Saturday 22 July at Chester History & Heritage.  
Unlocking the Past – Turn the Key, Step Back  
in Time and Discover Your Family History.**

11am-4pm, Free, no booking required,  
all welcome.

Come and meet experts from Cheshire Archives & Local Studies, Chester History & Heritage and members of the Cheshire Family History Society to find out more about your family and local history. Bring in your old photographs and treasured family items (sorry, no valuations!) which may help to unlock the stories of your ancestor's past.

Whether you are just starting on this fascinating journey or have simply hit a brick wall in your own research we will be on hand throughout the day to answer your questions. Refreshments available.





## Current exhibitions

### All the World's a Stage – until 30 June

To complement the 2017 opening of Chester's brilliant cultural centre – Storyhouse – our displays celebrated performances from the past. Taken from our collections from The Royalty Theatre, The Gateway, the cinemas, Mystery Plays, Pageants and much loved amateur dramatics, this exhibition took us all back in time to the diverse entertainments in the city





## Future exhibitions

### There are Places I Remember... 3 July to 15 December

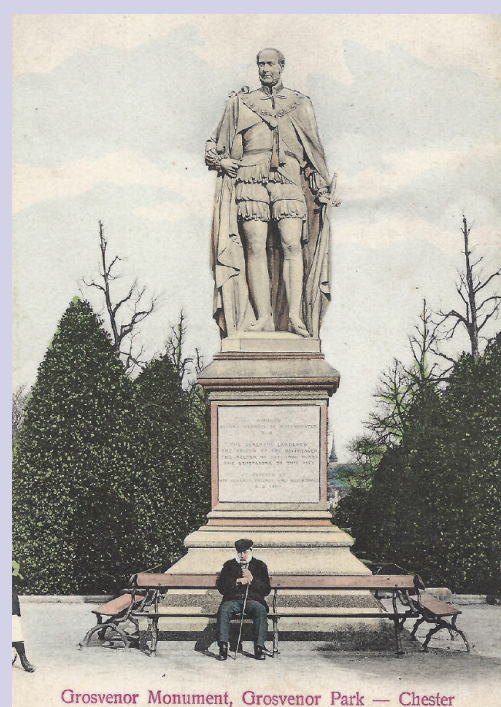
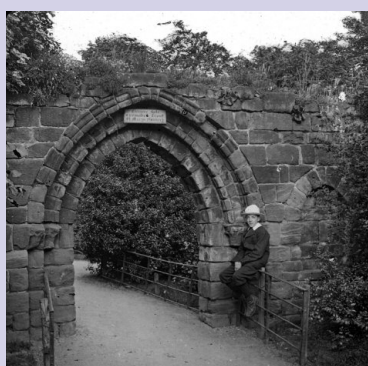
Step back in time with our latest exhibition as local photographer Doug Stewart showcases his modern images of Northgate Street alongside our collection of the same buildings in the 1960s.

This “now and then” journey along one of our more diverse streets not only takes in iconic buildings such as the Market, Town Hall and Odeon but also all those shops – newsagents, outfitters, cafes, chemists and grocers – which many of us remember so well. Better now or better then?



### Grosvenor Park & Bicentenary of Edward Kemp - 3 July to 15 December

To celebrate the bicentenary of Landscape designer Edward Kemp we are holding a mini photographic exhibition on Grosvenor Park. The exhibition features several photographs from the collection of the late local photographer James Warren, which were donated to us last year.



Grosvenor Monument, Grosvenor Park — Chester



# From Princess Street and Before – the Richard and Edward Wynne Members of My Family – Caryl Bailiff

In 1895 my great granddad Richard Wynne, aged 24, married my Great grandma Mary McGuinness, age 21, at St Oswalds Church. Mary was a Catholic from Liverpool, of Irish descent and Richard was Cof E – I don't know if any of Marys family attended as "marrying out" in



*Richard Wynne*

those days was seen as committing a mortal sin. By 1901 they were living at 29 Princess Street with their one year old daughter Lizzie but ten years later they were in Stone Place with Lizzie aged 11, Richard aged 8 (my grandfather) and Gladys Mariah aged 4. I understand that these were the only three surviving children out of 16 – including two sets of twins and one of triplets – the rest having been either stillborn or died in infancy. I was told that although Mary was no longer recognised by the Catholic Church the nuns would still come round to the house each week to collect money – each time she lost one of her babies they told her it was Gods will for marrying a Protestant and not having her children baptised as Catholics – needless to say they never came when Richard was at home. Things were so different in those days.

By 1939 Richard, Mary and Gladys ( a shop assistant) and her friend Florence ( auntie Woo, a shop owner) were living at 42 Princess Street which was the house attached to the City Mission. Richard was 69 at that time and still working as a labourer for Chester Corporation (Electric) whilst Mary was the

caretaker for the Mission. They had lived there for about 20 years. Living in the Mission House must have been a luxury , with a living room, kitchen, scullery (with its own cold tap and copper for boiling water) , three bedrooms and a private backyard with their own lavatory.

In 1922 my grandfather Richard (Ted) aged 20, a goods porter on the railway, had married my grandmother Evelyn Parkinson, a 19 year old fish and chip fryer at Hignett's at St Marks Church in Saltney. Their first home together was a one room self contained flat. In reality this was a large upstairs room with an open grate – the only means of cooking - a double bed, two armchairs and a table with two chairs (the table also doubled as a washstand with a bowl and jug). The washing up was also done in this bowl, with the dirty water tipped into a slop bucket under the table. There was gas lighting but nan told me it was cheaper to use oil lamps or candles if you were really hard up. All the water had to be carried up and down stairs in buckets, as was the coal for the fire. Every morning the chamber pot would be carried downstairs to be emptied in the shared lavatory in the backyard. Nan and granddad had a strip down wash every day but they used to go to the mission house for a bath once a week. One beautiful thing in the flat was a chiming wall clock with a brass pendulum – a wedding present from Mr and Mrs Hignett. I grew up with the sound of this clock chiming the hour and half hour along with the weekly ritual every Friday, after helping nan clean the brasses, of winding up the clock – five turns to the right and no more.

Unfortunately when nan died, this clock, along with other things, disappeared. In case anyone is wondering where these flats were, they are now the highly sought after, very expensive Georgian townhouses in Stanley Place. The houses to the left, looking towards the City Walls were all tenements and those on the right were homes and surgeries to doctors or offices for solicitors.

In 1923 my nan was in labour with my mum, in the front bedroom of Dick and Marys home, the Mission House in Princess St, with a midwife and Mary in attendance. At that time there was a cattle market and slaughterhouse on the opposite side – near where the Crown Plaza hotel is now. They were slaughtering the pigs for Christmas and according to my mum the midwife didn't know who was making the most noise – my nan or the pigs! When my mum was born she was covered in a "cawl" (pronounced "call"). This was the amniotic fluid sac, a rare thing.





The midwife removed it and put it to one side – this was one of her perks as she would later sell it to a sailor for a shilling.

He would wear it in a pouch around his neck as it was believed that the charm would prevent drowning. My mum was born covered in dark fluffy hair and she had beautiful big dark brown eyes. My nan thought she looked like a monkey – in that first look between mother and child, instead of a bond they developed an instant dislike for one another which lasted their whole lives. Ganny Wynne loved the new baby and when nan's lying-in period had finished she went back to work at Hignetts, leaving my mum with Ganny Wynne at no.42.

Soon after my nan and grandad moved into 41 Princess Street as the tenements were infected with bugs and cockroaches. There seemed to be a system in place in those days between the tenant of a property and the rent collector: if a tenant's married son or daughter was in need of accommodation and a house in the area became vacant, the tenant would give the rent collector "key money" to ensure that their relative would get the empty property. This was an unofficial arrangement and only happened if the tenant paid their rent on time and the new tenants were in regular employment.



*Beryl and Doris Wynne*

This arrangement was still going in the 1950s when my grandad paid "key money" for a house a bit further up the street for my aunty and her husband. Throughout the years this system meant there were lots of close family members all living in the same streets making for a close knit community – something that sadly doesn't seem to happen much nowadays.

Three years later my nan is back in Ganny Wynne's front bedroom giving birth to my aunty. It all went well and my nan took to this little blonde haired baby who because of her size was nicknamed Titch. After this my nan had to give up work as Ganny Wynne, not in the best of health, was unable to look after a new baby and a small child. However, living next door she still had a lot of input with the children.

Although nan and grandad had both been employed they were never well off and when she gave up her job things got worse. Granddad was only earning £2 a week, delivering goods from the railway by horse and cart to businesses in Chester. Their priorities were: pay the rent, fuel for the fire, food on the table and if you were lucky, money for the gas. Most importantly money was set aside each week for the family life insurance. This was to ensure you had a good "send-off" – a good oak coffin with brass handles and a private plot in the cemetery. When I was a child I can still remember the jam jars in the sideboard cupboard containing money for these priorities. Mr Cansdale from the Prudential came each week for the insurance money – 1s per adult and 6d for me, a child.

My mum growing up was the tall lanky one, like all the Wynne side. Because money was scarce she had to wear Aunty Glad's cast off clothes, taken in or belted. She also had to wear her cast off shoes, stuffed with newspaper to make them fit. Mum hated wearing these shoes as her toes were twisted out of shape for the rest of her life. In later years she always took me to Cowleys in Watergate St for my shoes, a big expense for her. She drummed it into me not to wear anyone else's shoes as it would ruin my feet. When I had my children she took it on herself to buy their shoes, also from the trusted Cowleys. As children, my mum and aunty only had two new items of clothing each year. These were a new pair of white ankle socks for Easter and the same for the Sunday School Whit Walk. My aunty, due to her size, always had "new" clothes, usually from a second hand shop. Nan was a fantastic knitter and she would buy old jumpers and cardigans for pennies, wash them, unpick them and reknit the wool into another garment. (To be continued)



# Plants Shall Bloom and Perfume Scent the Air

Inspired by our Grosvenor Park and Bicentenary of Edward Kemp Exhibition we had a peek through some newspapers from 1950's to 1970's to find details of what was happening in the park at that time.

## The Cheshire Observer; 3 August 1957

Some 16,500 carpet bedding plants are used in this striking display in Grosvenor Park, which is attracting much attention from visitors & holiday-makers. It takes the form of the scout's badge, & is the work of the Park Superintendent and his staff.



## The Cheshire Observer; 17 August 1957

### Scented Garden opened by the Mayor for the Blind

Although Thursday afternoon with its tearing wind & constant drizzle of rain, was anything but pleasant for most people, for a large number of Chester's blind people, it will long remain a day of happy memories.

Through Chester Rotary Club & the local authority a special scented garden in Grosvenor Park was opened for them. Present at the ceremony was Mr. W. A. Shepherd (President of Chester Rotary Club) who said that the garden's inception was due to the Golden Jubilee of the Rotary movement, which was celebrated in 1955. All rotary branches were encouraged to commemorate the occasion by raising money for a philanthropic purpose. The Chester branch after consultation with the council decided to make this scented garden.



The Mayor performed the opening ceremony, "This garden is for you, and those who come after you, for as long as plants shall bloom and perfume scent the air" he said to the blind who were present, as he opened the garden.

After the speeches the blind were led round the garden, which is on the St. John's Church side of the park. It is provided with a hand-rail, three large seats and the names of the plants are written in Braille along the rails. All the flower beds are raised. The garden is stocked with lavender, honeysuckle, wild thyme, mint, sweet briar, and many other sweet smelling plants & herbs.

## Chester Chronicle; 16 May 1959

### Maytime in the City's Park

One of the favourite summer haunts of the people of Chester, and of the surrounding districts, must be Grosvenor Park. Its attractions are unrivalled for many miles. At this time of year particularly the park is appreciated, and with the glorious weather we are enjoying, even more use than usual is being made of it.

This week the flower show is at its best, indeed it was planned to coincide with race week so that the visitors to Chester might see it in all its full glory. The tulips in particular make a delightful show, combined with pansies, and wallflowers.

Grosvenor Park is an interesting combination of the old and the new. The many Holly trees which line the paths for example are over a hundred years old and provide a charming contrast to the colourful flowers.

Approaching the Groves through the park one might pass through "The Quarry", where the "Old Shipgate" and a doorway removed from St. Michael's Church stand. It is thought that this part of the park was originally an old quarry, and that the stone from it was used to build St. John's Church.



Old favourites are the Lily Pond, and the Japanese Rock Gardens. The latter makes a delightful sight, with the little water falls and the many varieties of plants & shrubs.



The striking feature about this park is its air of neatness, everywhere the lawns and flowers have the appearance of being well-looked after and "happy." At the same time however, the public are not expected to walk primly on the paths, just admiring the flowers. Although there are some restrictions, children are allowed to play on the grass, which makes the park a popular spot with mothers



## Cheshire Observer; 23 April 1961

Finished in time for the Easter holidays was an extension to Grosvenor Park, situated at the back of St. John's Church it overlooks the public bowling green, The Groves & the River Dee.

## Cheshire Observer; 11 September 1970

### Legion Emblem in Flowers

Gardeners in Chester's Grosvenor Park are to lay out a flower bed showing the British Legion's emblem to mark the movement's Golden Jubilee next year.

A design is being drawn up after the City Council Public Services Committee decided on the application from the British Legion, and had to turn down one from the British Limbless Ex- Servicemen's Association to mark the 25th anniversary of the formation of its Chester Branch.

## Cheshire Observer; 7 September 1973

### Floral Celebration Request

The Royal National Lifeboat Institute have made a request for the floral bed in Grosvenor Park, to be used to celebrate their 150th anniversary in 1974.

Chester Public Services & Recreation Committee heard on Monday that there had been no other applications and they recommended that the Lifeboat Institute to be allowed use of the floral bed.

# Events diary - SUMMER 2017

Lache & Westminster Park Local History Group hold various events and activities – please contact Linda Shuttleworth, [shuttleworths@talktalk.net](mailto:shuttleworths@talktalk.net) for further details.

## JUNE

- 13 Weaverham History Society, University Primary Academy 7.30pm. Dr Diana Leitch MBE, “History of the Chemical Industry in Runcorn and Widnes”
- 13 Saltney & Saltney Ferry Local History Group Methodist Church, High Street Saltney 7pm. Penny Brett Roberts, “Voyages on the QE2”
- 21 Pulford & Poulton Local History Group, Pulford Village Hall 7.30pm. Tom Jones, “Chester Zoo”
- 28 Chester History and Heritage Nicholas Fry “Chester Mystery Plays” talk to be held in the Grosvenor Museum Lecture Theatre 2pm-3pm £2. Please pay on the door.
- 29 Chester History & Heritage slideshow, David Ellis “The Silver Screen” 2-3.30pm £3. Booking essential 01244 972210.
- 29 Chester Family History Society, All Saints Church Hall, Vicarage Road Hoole 7.30pm. Geoff Johnson, “Getting Organised in Family History Computing”

## JULY

- 11 Weaverham History Society, University Primary Academy 7.30pm. Vanessa Oakden, “The Knutsford Hoard”
- 22 Chester History & Heritage, St Michaels Church Bridge St. “Unlocking the Past” 11am-4pm drop-in. Family and Local History day with Cheshire Archives & Local Studies. Free, all welcome and refreshments available.
- 27 Chester Family History Society, All Saints Church Hall, Vicarage Road Hoole 7.30pm. AGM and Eileen Simpson, “A Volunteer’s Experience in the Cheshire Military Museum”

## AUGUST

- 1 Chester History & Heritage guided walk with John Whittingham “Up the Junction” 7pm-8.30pm £3 meet at Chester Railway Station. Booking essential 01244 972210.

## SEPTEMBER

- 4 Frodsham & District History Society, Main Street Community Church 7.45pm. Michael Murphy, “Crime and Punishment in Dicken’s London”

- 6 Chester History & Heritage guided walk with Yvonne Kirk “Grosvenor Park” 1.30-3pm. £5. Meet at Grosvenor Park Lodge. Booking essential 01244 972210 .
- 6 Backford Mollington & District Local History Society, Village Hall 7.30pm. Ken Pye, “Journey Over the Water”
- 7-10 Heritage Open Days. Brochure available July/August.
- 13 Malpas Field Club, Malpas High Street Church 7.45pm. Vanessa Oakden, “Recent Archaeological Finds in Cheshire: Objects from the Portable Antiquities Scheme”
- 20 Pulford & Poulton Local History Group, Pulford Village Hall 7.30pm. David Cummings, “The History of a Street”
- 28 Chester Family History Society, All Saints Church Hall, Vicarage Road Hoole 7.30pm. Peter Denney, “The Delves Broughton Family”