

# A Heswall Scrapbook

## All the gossip from over a century ago

by Jenny McDonald and Roger Lane

Last year, a scrapbook collated by the family of Daphne Wright was donated to the Heswall Society. This consisted of a series of newspaper cuttings written by her uncle William F Young who wrote for the twice-weekly *Birkenhead and Chester Advertiser*. The articles in the cuttings, entitled 'Heswall Happenings', covered topical events in Heswall, usually interlaced with humorous and ironic comments and much speculation. William Young wrote under the pen name 'Litrebili'. This probably relates to a character in the novel *Trilby* by George du Maurier, which featured a hat that subsequently became famous. (*Trilby* was a 1894 magazine serial published as a book in 1895, and was also a very successful play.) *The Advertiser* was in competition with other papers, and Litrebili took every opportunity to publicise his scoops and to highlight errors reported by his rival columnists. The cuttings cover the period from the beginning of 1904 to the end of 1906. They provide an insight into Heswall at a time of its rapid expansion from the Lower Village up the hill to form the Top Village centred along Telegraph Road.

This expansion was exemplified by the Lloyds Bank branch in the Lower Village closing in favour of the branch in Telegraph Road. The post office in the Lower Village was supplemented by a new post office on the Mount, to which the mail sorting for all of Heswall was transferred. There were many complaints about the dangerous condition of the pavement in Rocky Lane as it was being made up into a new highway. Land around Rocky Lane was auctioned off for house building. The Cleaver Sanatorium had opened in 1902 and the start of the building of the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital was reported in 1906, together with an earlier report in 1905 of a fundraising appeal to erect either a clock tower or an operating theatre – which was obviously very successful, as both were eventually provided. Meanwhile, there were the first discussions about a bus service to Birkenhead, an activity that later would greatly promote the growth of Heswall.



During this period there was intense militarisation of the key European powers. The Boer War had only just ended in 1902, and public concern about the state of readiness of the nation to defend itself resulted in the Heswall Company (K Company) of the 1st Volunteer Battalion of the Cheshire regiment being well supported. The company was led by Captain W J Newton who was instrumental in the provision of a new land-based rifle range to replace the old range on the shore, which was deemed too dangerous. This could be how Target Road acquired its name. An annual shooting contest was held at the beginning of January. In the January 1905 event there were 46 participants, described as almost a full muster. Poignantly, just a decade later the names of some of the participants would be immortalised on the World War One War memorial.

For the younger male age group there was a very active Church Lads' Brigade led by Captain Newson, which was run on a combination of military and religious principles. The 'Lads' enjoyed a summer camp every year – often in Prestatyn, but sometimes as far away as Whitby.



The meetings of the Heswall cum Oldfield parish council were reported with some cynicism, especially the attendance record of the elected members. Funding for any special initiatives was raised by a levy on the general rates charged to each householder, which certainly led to a lot of scrutiny. There was much demand for street lighting, but this failed the 'affordability test'. One major project was the extension of St Peter's graveyard to cater for the increasing population. There was much discussion about the pond on the Puddydale recreation ground, which often flooded and made the surrounding playing fields very swampy. There was also a problem of bad smells in the summer. One local inhabitant fishing in the Puddydale thought he had caught a giant eel, which he struggled valiantly to land. To his great chagrin he found he had caught the inner rubber tube from a tyre. There was a decision to prevent cattle grazing on the Puddydale as several members of the public had been harassed by them. In 1906 it was reported that the council had bought neighbouring land to build the new Puddydale School.

Bicycle accidents were very frequent reported, no doubt due to the poor state of the roads and the very heavy bicycles which had poor brakes. There was a call to ban cycling down School Hill as there were so many accidents there. At the corner junction of the Mount, Dawstone Road and Rocky Lane, special measures were taken to widen the road and to move heavy railings back in order to reduce the number of accidents. Most commercial traffic was still horse drawn, and this mode of transport did not coexist well with mechanised transport. Horses would be startled when steam engines went under the bridges they were crossing, and the Heswall Cross junction became notorious for accidents between cars and horses. After one accident at the junction between Telegraph Road and Thurstaston Road, the horses pulling a carriage bolted and they were only stopped when the driver managed to steer them into the Queens Drive cul de sac. A horse pulling a cart delivering lighting oil on the Mount bolted and the cart demolished a wall on the sharp corner where the ill-fated house 'Highfield' was located (next to Feather Lane). This house was to suffer a similar accident a century later from a collision with a car which caused irreparable damage. The limousine driving Mrs Ismay, the wife of the shipping magnate living in Dawpool Hall, was involved in a collision with a cyclist on Telegraph Road. Cars were still a novelty for most of the population.