

troops outnumbered the Jacobite army and having seized victory, proudly marched into Dublin two days later. However, the civil war in Ireland continued, to be ended in final victory for William only in October 1691 with the signing of the Treaty of Limerick, which allowed James to leave for exile in France. The celebration of the Battle of the Boyne remains to this day a source of political tension between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, and unrest has continued in Ireland ever since.

Not all visits by royalty were fleeting. A more prolonged stay on Wirral was made by Mrs Maria Fitzherbert, the first wife of the future George IV. He met her when he was 22, fell in love and persuaded her to agree to marry him in 1785. She was 29, a commoner, twice widowed and a Roman Catholic. The marriage did not have the consent of the monarch or parliament and so was not legal, but they lived together as a married couple in the Royal Pavilion at Brighton for almost ten years. When George's debts from his extravagant lifestyle became too great, his father and Parliament agreed to clear them if he consented to marry his cousin, Princess Caroline of Brunswick in 1795.



Mrs Fitzherbert stayed at Parkgate in Talbot House in 1798, which later became the Green Shuttles café and is now a private house. Mr Cooper, the Parkgate librarian, used to saddle up a horse and help her mount, before enjoying gallops along the Dee-side shore. At the time of her stay there was a large encampment of soldiers – about 700 in total – awaiting embarkation orders to sail from Parkgate to Ireland to put down a further Irish Rebellion. Mrs Fitzherbert was concerned for their welfare and “fearing that their rations were limited, out of the kindness of her heart” and from her private purse “allowed a quarter of a sheep and a measure of potatoes among every 7 men during the halt”. She was popular with the common people rather than with the royal courtiers.

George did not like Caroline and they separated after the birth of their daughter Charlotte, who was born nine months after the marriage. George was reunited with Maria Fitzherbert in 1800 but continued to have affairs and live an extravagant lifestyle and she ended their relationship in 1811. George became Prince Regent the same year, because of the declining health of his father George III. He was very unpopular with the general populace who sympathised with Princess Caroline, and so the bell ringers of Heswall had to be bribed with a sovereign by the rector and another half-sovereign by the churchwardens, before they agreed to ring “a few triple bob majors” to celebrate the coronation.

The authors are not aware of any visit of the current Queen to Heswall, Gayton or Parkgate. On 11th July 1957 the royal train carrying the Queen and Prince Philip on their first visit to the Wirral passed through Heswall Station on the way to Wallasey from Chester on the old Hooton to West Kirby line. This line was already closed to normal passenger traffic, and has since been fully closed and dismantled, and replaced by the Wirral Way. The local school children were given places on the bank behind the coal yard at Heswall Station to wave. Unfortunately, when the train arrived all the blinds were down, causing cries of anguish from the children – perhaps the kitchen staff ordered the blinds to be drawn as the Queen was taking lunch. Perhaps the cries were heard, for when the train arrived at the next station, Thurstaston, the Queen opened the curtains and waved to the crowds.

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Submitted by Roger Lane and Jenny McRonald (roger.m.lane@btinternet.com or 0151 342 9269) on behalf of the Heswall Society, which was established in 1953 “for the public benefit to conserve the heritage of the Ward of Heswall”. For more details of membership and activities please call Roger Lane or visit theheswallsociety.org.uk



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