

Greg Dawson tells us more about Arrowe Park...

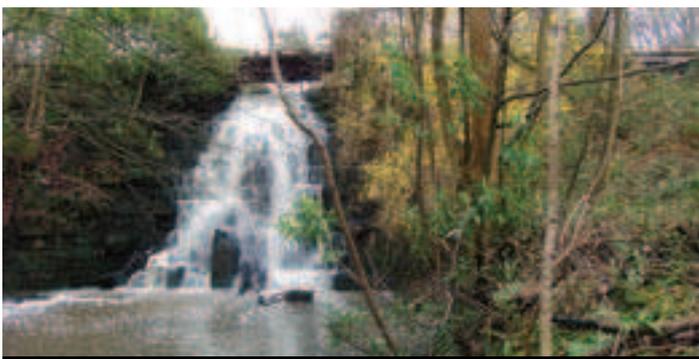


Arrowe Park Gates, before the Horse and Jockey pub was replaced by the Arrowe Park Hotel and Joe Lee's smithy was demolished and made into a car park.

John Shaw, Lord Mayor of Liverpool, was a rich ship and warehouse owner who used his vessels to transport slaves from Africa to the West Indies and America. It is recorded that in 1798 alone, three of his ships transported 1,339 slaves from Angola and the following year four of his ships loaded 1,515 African slaves. Eventually, in 1807, it was declared illegal to transport slaves from any port in the British Empire, or to land slaves in British territory after 1st March 1808. With the slave trade now illegal, John Shaw retired to Wirral. With his riches he bought Arrowe House Farm (demolished in 1966 to build Champion Spark Plugs) and moved in 1809. Over the years he gradually bought up large amounts of Arrowe Township, which was basically a block of land, east to west, between Arrowe Park Road and Limbo Lane and north to south, from Arrowe Brook Lane and the Arrowe Brook Road area, to Thingwall Road East and Thingwall Road. In 1810, he had a new house built for himself called Cherry Cottage, which stood where the Cherry Orchard pub now stands. John Shaw lived there until he died in 1829. He was succeeded by his great-nephew John Ralph Nicholson, who had to change his name to Shaw to inherit his great-uncle's estate.

In 1835, J R 'Nicholson' Shaw built the impressive Elizabethan style mansion, Arrowe Hall, of Storeton stone. With his inherited riches, Shaw continued to buy parcels of land in Arrowe. In 1843, he bought Top House Farm and Arrowe Brook Farm together with 346 acres of land from John Wright Esq. He used about 100 acres of the farmland to complete the layout of the 425-acre Arrowe Park.

Shaw gradually laid out pleasure gardens, large flower beds and vast plantations of various trees and shrubs, some brought in from abroad. He slightly diverted and straightened Arrowe Brook from Limbo Lane (where before it meandered) across the fields directly into the park. He also had the small dale in the Park, which the brook flowed through, dug deeper and wider. A dam was constructed to form a lake, or fishpond as he called it, allowing a constant overflow to create an impressive waterfall. Eventually, Shaw bought The Warrens from Ralph Yoxon and two small cottages (now demolished) at the junction of Thingwall Road and Limbo Lane, making him owner of the whole township of Arrowe. Shaw and his wife, Fanny, nee Crutten (a vicar's daughter from Macclesfield) had 12 children and they extended Arrowe Hall to their needs. Over the years a number of cottages and lodges were built on the estate to house gardeners, shepherds, farm labourers, woodsmen, masons and gamekeepers etc., many of whom came from Scotland and Ireland. The population of Arrowe in 1861 was 109. The estate was pretty well self-sufficient. Dairy cows kept at Ivy Farm (now in a dilapidated state opposite Landican Cemetery) supplied the Hall with milk, butter and cheese. Cattle and sheep were slaughtered and



The waterfall at Arrowe Park Lake. There is reference to a watermill in Arrowe in 1347. Research by Rowan Patel has found that a dammed mill pool may have existed here long ago. If so, it appears that the wealthy J R Shaw built a bigger and better dam to create his lake.

butchered for the kitchens, a flock of poultry was kept and gardeners grew fruit and vegetables. Fresh water was supplied from springs and wells; one well was actually in the Hall itself.

Shaw was very keen on shooting and close to the Hall he planted spinneys for pheasant breeding. Partridges were reared in the grounds and ducks were encouraged to breed on the lake and on the many water filled clay and marl pits on the estate. As always, game attracts foxes and Shaw trapped and shot them. This made him unpopular with the local gentry as in those days, Wirral was a fox hunting area. Shaw was not interested in fox hunting and it was said that he did not ride either, but when he was asked not to shoot any more foxes, he agreed. As a friendly gesture, Sir William Stanley of Hooton was invited to hunt the Arrowe estate with his pack of foxhounds. The hunt was served a breakfast which included a tureen of jugged hare laid out on the Arrowe Hall billiard table. The hounds sniffed out a fox in the woods and chased it for about a mile before it was caught and killed.

In 1867, the Arrowe Estate went up for sale. An auction was held by Churton & Elphick, auctioneers of Whitchurch at the Craven Rooms, Birkenhead, and the sale included land in neighbouring villages amounting to about 2,000 acres. Part of a large advertisement included the following details: "The modern mansion of Arrowe Hall is built in the Elizabethan style of architecture, of white stone and has recently been thoroughly renovated by the present owner ... It is situated in the centre of a richly planted Park of great extent and beauty, with extensive sea and land views including the Welsh Mountains and Cumberland Hills ... The stabling and coach-house accommodation are excellent and there is a capital walled garden and orchard near the Hall. The entire premises are abundantly supplied with spring and rainwater and lighted throughout with gas made on the premises, at works erected at great cost by Messrs. Porter and Co. of Lincoln."

On the Friday after the sale the *Daily Post* carried a small article which says that the bidding for the Hall and Park started at £35,000 and reached a final bid by Mr Robert Hughes of £50,000, when the lot was withdrawn from sale. A few days later in the same paper, in the list of bankrupts is the name Shaw, J, the younger, Liverpool cotton broker, but somehow he managed to hang on to Arrowe.

John Ralph (Nicholson) Shaw died at the Hall in 1884 and was succeeded by his son, Major William Otto Nicholson Shaw. William built a few more houses on his estate including one at Arrowe Brook Farm and Ivy Cottages (next to Ivy Farm) which bear his initials 'WONS'. Like his father before him, William was keen on field sports and shooting in the Park. His head gamekeeper lived in a cottage (demolished years ago) specially built in the woods, with a row of kennels close by. Another gamekeeper, Thomas Williams, lived at Hawthorn Cottage, Pensby Road, Thingwall. This old cottage is still standing, now called Stone Cottage, it is located opposite Penrhyn Avenue. William Shaw hunted abroad and hung many of his trophies in Arrowe Hall, including the head of a man-eating tiger. In 1901, the Arrowe Estate was sold to Lieut. Col. Henry Leslie McAlmont, owner of the famous racehorse Isinglass. McAlmont served in the Boer War while also serving as Conservative MP for Newmarket. He died a year later in 1902. His heir, Major Dermot McAlmont, owner of the remarkable racehorse The Tetrarch ('The Spotted Wonder'), sold the estate in 1917 to Baron Leverhulme of Bolton Le Moors. Neither the McAlmonts nor the Leverhulmes lived at Arrowe. They rented the Hall and Ivy Farm house to wealthy families, such as Frederick J Harrison JP, the Wallasey-born shipowner of the famous Harrison Line of Liverpool. However, the large workforce of various trades was still employed on the estate: Mr McFee the head gardener had 16 men under him. In 1923, the entire 752-acre Arrowe Township passed to the Second Viscount Leverhulme who sold the Hall and the 425-acre Park to Birkenhead Corporation in 1927, but kept the farms and farmland outside the Park boundaries.

At this time, the large open spaces within the Park were being farmed, some of them were grazing land, others were arable. Birkenhead Corporation had all arable land within the Park boundaries sown with oats and undersown with grass. There were no combine harvesters or balers in 1927 and the large fields took some time and labour to harvest. My Dad and other local farmers, including the Oxtons (who farmed at The Warrens) and the Browns, were hired along with their horses and carts to harvest the crops, helped by council workers. After the corn was cut, 'Foxy' Brown, who lived at The Thatch (a smallholding which once stood opposite Top House Farm), carried out the skilled task of building the sheaves of corn into stacks, ready for threshing. After the corn was harvested, the grass grew through the stubble. Hedges were pulled out, fences taken down and gates were removed to create the big open spaces of grassland which were made available to the public the following year.