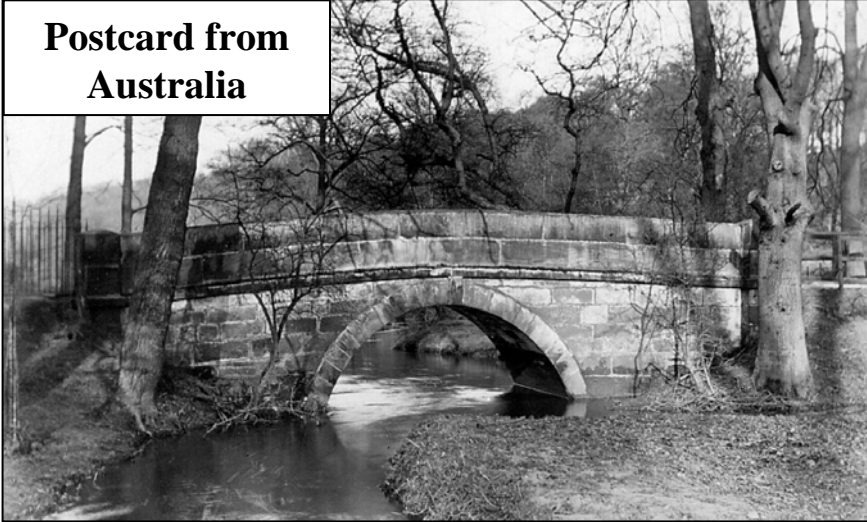


Local History Archives-Dibbinsdale Local Nature

Postcard from Australia



Rock Ferry, November 23rd 1908. Miss M. Hanaghan The Cliffe Llandegfan, Menai Bridge Anglesey. Thank you for your letter. Have to go out tonight so will write tomorrow. Do you remember this bridge? It is the one at Dibbinsdale on which you stood when we went there a month ago. I took this photo last March but have just got the negative back, so did this on Saty.night. It was very stormy here yesty but is improving. J

Bruce Atkin RMB 1562, Devon North,
Victoria 3971.AUSTRALIA . Email :batkin@vtown.com.au



In 1908 my grandfather John Atkin, a shipping clerk from Liverpool sent a card with this photo and caption to his girlfriend Marie Hanaghan. Marie was from Birkenhead but was staying in Menai Bridge with her employer C. Livingston of Oxton. This photo must have been one of John's favourites as he made several prints of it including a large one now in a frame at my parents' home and this version, printed on postcard paper.

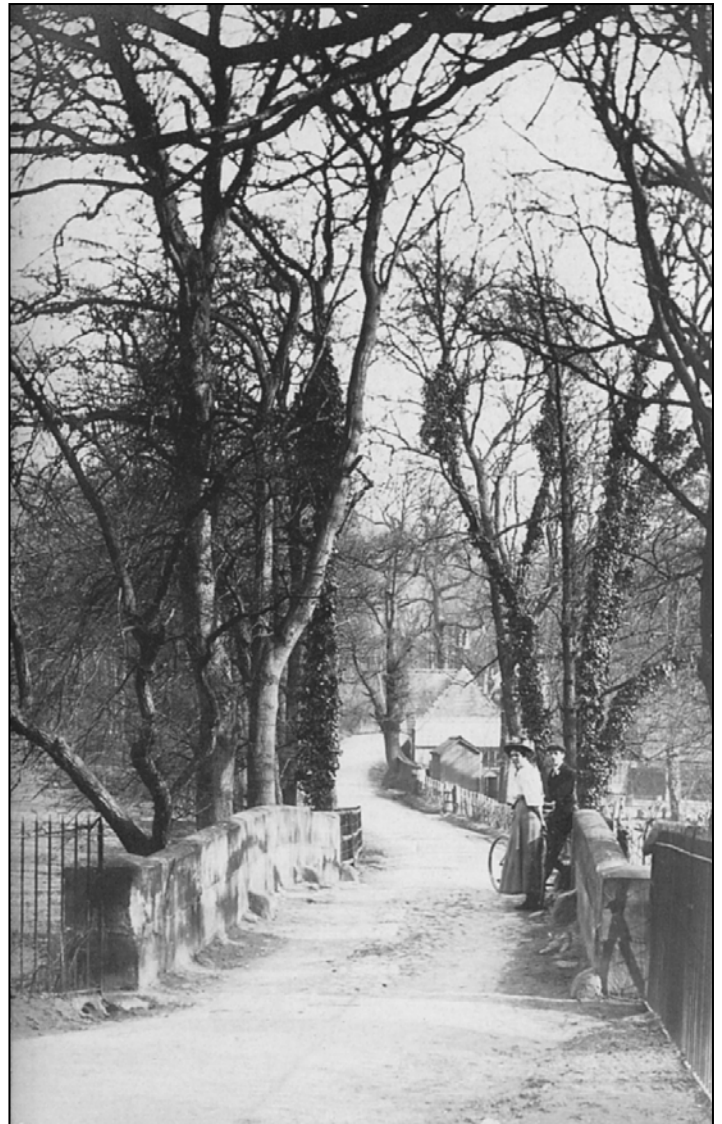
John had just returned from a trip to Canada where he stayed with his brother who was developing a wheat farm in the Saskatchewan prairies. This trip stirred something in John and gave him a yearning for the wide open spaces. However he was destined to spend the next 15 years managing shipping offices in Manchester and Liverpool.

In 1923, John and Marie, now married with four children and a comfortable house in Broad Green, Liverpool, read of an arrangement between the Victorian and British Governments to encourage British citizens with some finance to migrate to Victoria and settle on the land. In a short time he decided to give up all they knew and emigrate to Australia to realise his dream of becoming a farmer. Among the memorabilia they took with them were hundreds of John's photographs, and Marie's collection of postcards. Looking through these cards seventy-five years later, I noticed that a great number were written on. I began to lift them out of their albums and record what was written on the back. For a time this became an obsession and each time I eased a corner of a card up to sneak a look at the back and discovered handwriting, I held my breath wondering what was about to be revealed.

When I found this card I wondered where Dibbinsdale was. Contact with Cheshire residents suggested it was on the Wirral Peninsula and that the bridge still existed. Then I learned that there was a web site for Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve. Within a short time I was in touch with Ranger Peter Miller who told me the bridge was within his reserve. Peter explained that the bridge was rebuilt and widened in the 1970s, and he went out straight away and took some photos of it for me.

It is wonderful to have found the bridge in my grandfather's photos and to know that this little piece of history is being preserved. One day I will come and see it for myself. Should anyone want to know more my contact details are above. I expect shortly to complete a book, with more photos, about my grandparents' emigration

(Postscript. Bruce has been to see his grandfather's bridge and stayed at the Dibbinsdale Hotel)



New Poulton Bridge



*The River Dibbin
flows under a wider
reconstructed
sandstone
bridge*

Reaching a decision about what to do about a bridge that needed repair, but was a listed building, proved a difficult one at the time. Opinions swayed between leaving it as a footbridge and rebuilding a new one close by (as in the article below) to demolishing it and rebuilding it where it was but a little wider. Eventually a £75,000 scheme was proposed to do the latter. "County councillors were told that it is hoped to retain the bridge's character by using much of the original stonework, although the new crossing will be wider to allow vehicles to pass"



Bebington News article 10th March 1978

Triumph as Dibbin Bridge is saved

Dibbin Bridge at Bromborough, Wirral's oldest bridge, is to be spared the axe that has threatened its future for so long. The historic local landmark will be retained and repaired as a footbridge. Merseyside County Council's Highways committee decided on Monday. The move ends months of indecision over whether to demolish or develop the amenity. The reaction of conservationists was triumphant:

"I am sure pressure from the local groups who fought to save the bridge influenced this decision", said Mr David Waller, of Poulton Lancelyn Residents Association. "We seem to be winning a few rounds, don't we?" he said. "I think county may have thought some of these groups were just cranks to begin with. But in fact, we have some experts in these matters in our group, which all helps win battles like this" Coun. David Allan, Conservative

representative for Eastham and South Bromborough, agreed that the struggle for retention had "certainly been worthwhile"

"I am very glad that the county have taken note of the feelings of local people", said Coun. Allan, who was at the forefront of the campaign to keep Dibbin.

"I see this as tying up with last week's refusal of planning permission for housing development at Vineyard Farm, Bebington. I feel Dibbin is a little part of that conservationists' victory"

Chairman of Merseyside Highways and Tunnels Committee, Coun. Hubert Harriman, said "It will be repaired for use as a footbridge, and I understand it is later to be offered to the landowner"

The proposal now goes to full council for final approval. Meanwhile, plans are going ahead to build a new road bridge on the site in Dibbinsdale Road sometime in late spring, to take the traffic the older bridge cannot carry

Local History Archives-Dibbinsdale Local Nature



Rebuilding the old bridge to allow passing traffic- 1978

The Otter's Tunnel in flood-1980's



*This was built as a railway bridge
across the Dibbin*

**Local History Archives-
Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve
Stray notes - Local History Extracts
Brom Parish Magazine-
No 5 .The Otter Bridge**

The tunnel under the railway between Spital Railway Station and Bromborough rake Station is known to older Bromborough Folk as " The Otter Bridge ". Have you ever wondered why ? There used to be otter living in Dibbinsdale. a Mr W.H Hatcher, manager at Price's Candle Works (now Unichema Chemicals Ltd) in September 1863 captured a fine male otter just above Price's Works but after a few days captivity the animal escaped. Another otter was seen, two or three years previously, in the Dibbin where the stream flows out of Raby Mere. When he was a boy in Bromborough he knew an old man, a Mr Penlington. Now Mr Penlington had been a signalman on the railway and he used to say that he had shot the last otter in Dibbinsdale !

An old friend of mine told me recently that This incident probably took place in the latter half of the last century and may be the reason for the railway tunnel in Dibbinsdale having acquired the name of "The Otter Bridge".

Nora McMillan (11.7.95)

**Stray Notes No.4. Extracts from
Brom Parish Magazine . Dibbinsdale**

The pleasant Nature Reserve Valley now known as Dibbinsdale has not always gone under that name. It is the non-tidal part of the creek Bromborough Pool which runs out into the Mersey, past Spital Dam and through Port Sunlight.

The earliest use of the name Dibbinsdale only dates from 1831 ; various parts of the valley have been known as Foxdale, Plymyard Dale, Poulton Dale and Anstubbledale, and there may be other local names.

In Victorian days the part of Dibbinsdale from St Patrick's Well upstream as far as the railway was all known as Patrick Wood (note :not Patrick's Wood !). Yet in Bryant's map of 1831 Patrick Wood is clearly marked as woodland lying along the western (Poulton) side of the stream, and what we now call Patrick's Wood on the eastern (Bromborough) side is marked as Dale Hills !! No explanation of this transfer of names from one piece of woodland to another has been found, and such an occurrence is most unusual and deserves further investigation.

The genuine (original) Patrick Wood now lies buried beneath the former Spital Tip above Spital Railway Station.



A conservation scheme in the 1980's saw one of the tunnels blocked off at both ends to form a hibernating roost for bats - The Bat Tunnel.

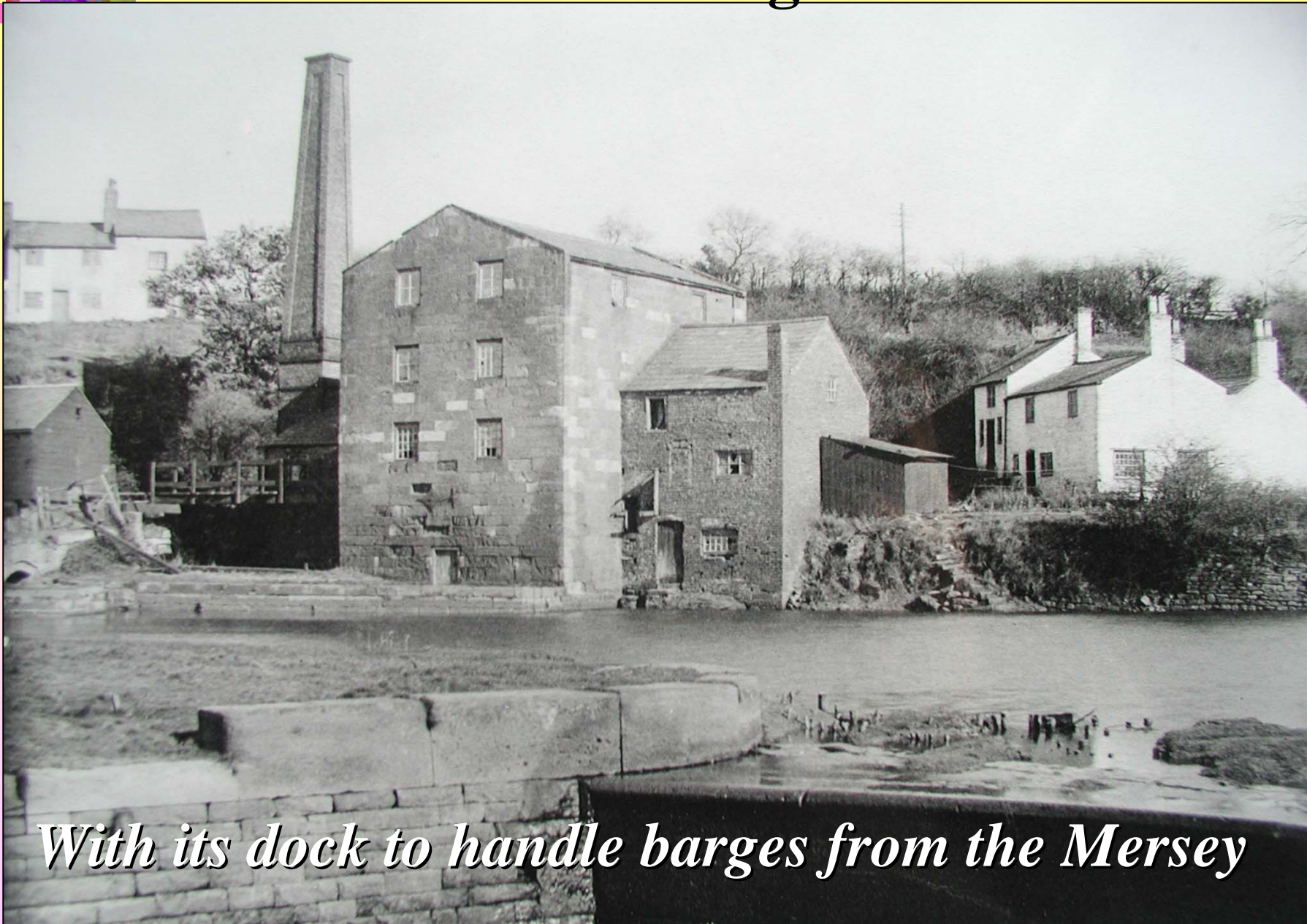
The river flows through this tunnel. The boarding is to keep the tunnel a steady temperature in winter



Making the path through the tunnel



Bromborough Mill



With its dock to handle barges from the Mersey

Local History Archives-Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve

Bromborough Mill

How it worked.

From the engineering standpoint water-milling deserves a study of its own. Perhaps the most important feature is the head of water available. At Bromborough Mill the head of water was the mill pool. This was possibly the only surviving part of the fourteenth century mill constructed by the Abbot of St Weburgh's, Chester. The pool was created by a man made weir. The present one was made in the nineteenth century.

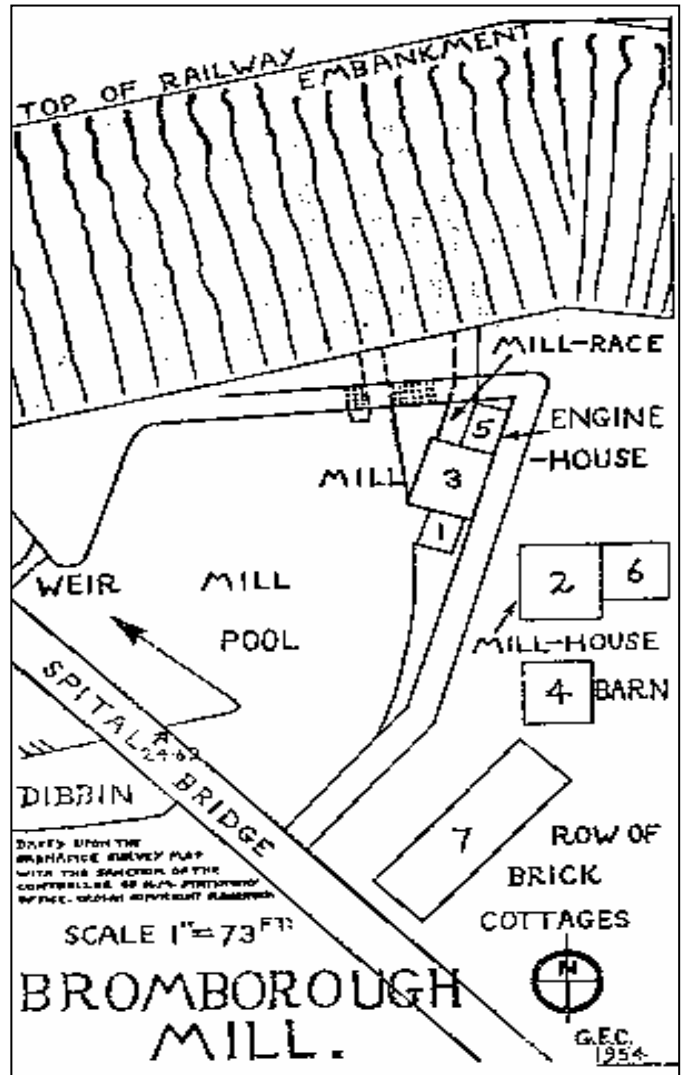
During the nineteenth century the pool was also enlarged and retaining walls built along the sides. The mill-wheel with a diameter of 17 feet, was undershot. This meant the water flowed through the water wheel underneath to turn it round. It was made of heavy teak timbers with iron jointings cast at Lanceley's and Son, Chester This was made in the nineteenth century, dating from some time in the period 1869 - 1882. It was situated in a portion of the mill cellar, walled off from the rest of the building.

The flow of water through a grating in the south wall was controlled by a sluice gate operated from the cellar. After flowing past the wheel, the water passed through a grating in the north wall into the mill-race and away to join the main flow into the Dibbin.

There was a third outlet from the mill pool controlled by a sluice gate and apparently used only in emergencies. The shaft of the mill-wheel passed into the cellar of the mill and was geared up to the four sets of mill stones on the ground floor above.

Unfortunately, none of the actual milling installations just described, were earlier than the last century, but they shed some light on a craft almost dead in this part of the country. In 1835, the mill was converted for the additional use of steam. This was probably because valuable working time was being lost with the tide backing up Bromborough Pool against the mill-wheel. There was therefore no water flow when the tide was fully in. The wheel would have been useless for four hours every tide.

In 1910 the construction of the railway embankment across the site blocked the mill race and forced the mill-wheel out of action. The mill was working from then only by an oil engine - the steam engine being taken out.



Formerly there was a wind mill connected with Bromborough Water Mill. This stood upon the top of the eastern side of the Dibbin Valley, overlooking the mill pool. It was a very graceful tower made of brick and built in 1777. This was when the Ellis family first became millers here. In 1878, the windmill was considered unsafe and blown up with gunpowder. The bricks from it were used to build the row of brick cottages



An old painting of Bromborough Mill by Henry Melling, a Liverpool artist, in 1844 called "The Water Mill"

View of Mill Cottages and Spital Dam



The History of Bromborough Mill

Along the northern side of the mill pool ran a raised causeway, pierced by two bridges, one for the mill-race, the other for the emergency water outlet. On the demolition of the latter, a cobbled-stone spread was exposed. This was traced for a distance of 43 feet and its position is stippled on the plan. It appeared to be a road 10 feet 6 inches wide crossing the two bridges and perhaps following the top of the causeway across Wharf Island.

On the 1731 Mainwaring Estate Map the bridges are shown carrying a road which then splits to cross Wharf Island. One road is marked as going to Bebington, the other to Neston. Whether or not the cobble-stone surface is original is difficult to say. The discovery of it is one of some importance seeing that this route would be in all probability the sole link between Chester and Woodside Ferries then passing through Bromborough. The Old Chester Road did not truly come into being until 1787 by Act of Parliament. By that time Spital Bridge was already in existence.

The only method of crossing the Dibbin at this point in 1731 was by the causeway bridges and ford at the water-mill. The road would appear then to be at least early eighteenth century in date.

Afterwards the construction of the Spital Bridge by-passed it and perhaps put down the discovered cobbles for getting to the other side of the rather marshy Wharf Island. It was common to tie up small vessels sailing to and from Liverpool in connection with the Mill.

Thus in the 20th Century the actual remaining buildings of the water-mill were mainly of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with only the " Old Sack House " being possibly of a period as early as the late seventeenth century.

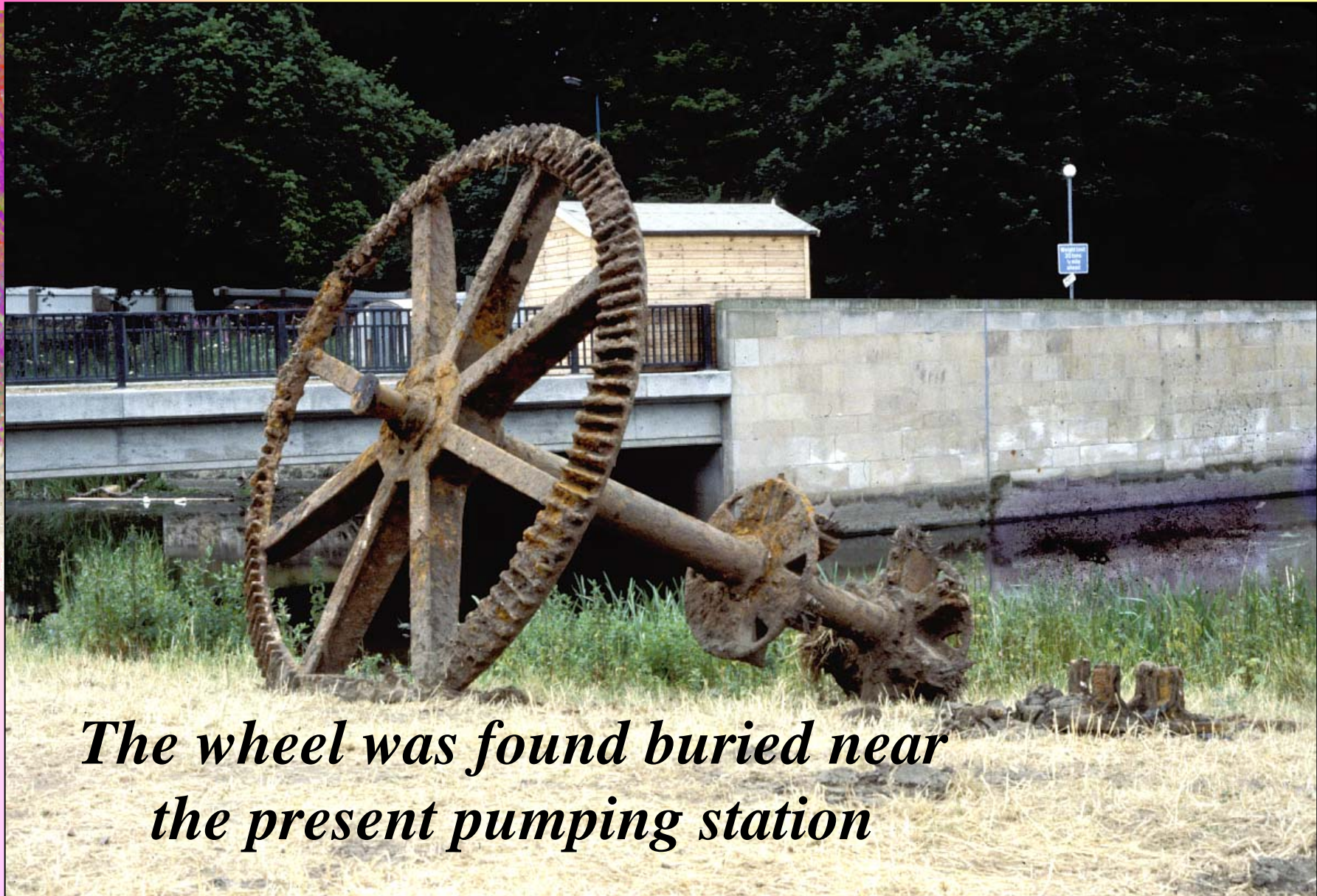


In " The Chartulary or Register of the Abbey of St Werburgh" in Chester there are mentions of the water-mills. These charters are drawn from the period 1270 - 1323. The only one specifying its date precisely is one in 1313. Perhaps the best known of these Charters is 689 rendered from the Latin into English as follows :-
 "Grant by W(illiam), son of W(illiam) Lancelyn, to T(homas 11) abbot of Chester, of liberty of digging in his land of Poulton (Lancelyn) and Bebington beyond the Pool in Poultondale, and making ditches and hags ? to drain away the excess of water coming down to the abbot's mill or mills, built or to be built in his said lands, as often as necessary; also liberty of digging in the said lands stones for the needs of the mills and causeway or causeways, wall or walls, pool or pools, ditch or ditches, bay or bays. Bond in £200 to observe this " *Date 1291 - 1323.*

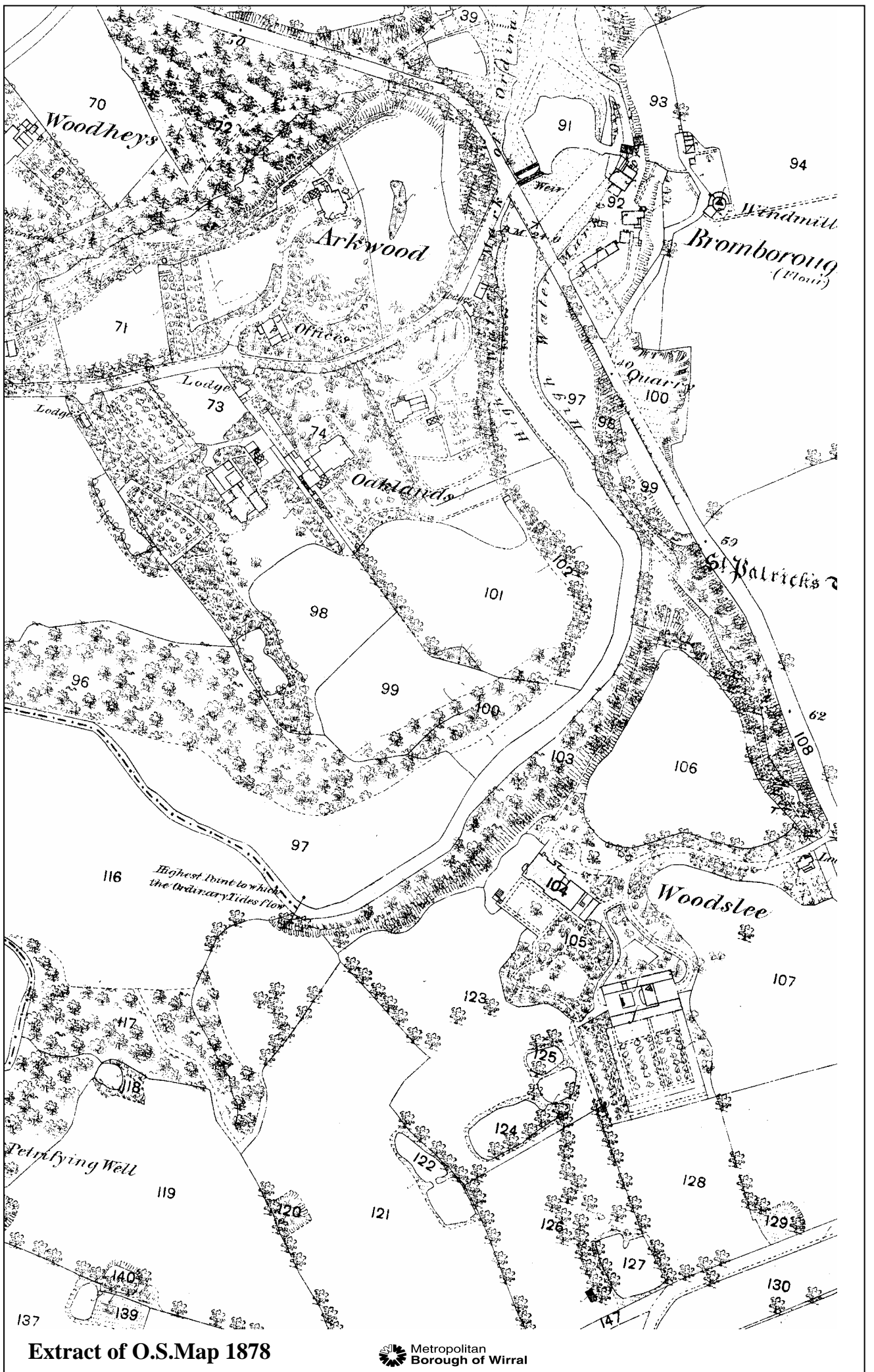
The mill was next mentioned in 1535 when a court decision was drawn up between Abbot of St. Werburgh's and William Lancelyn of Poulton to settle the vexed question of ownership of the mill. Then in 1594 after the dissolution of St.Werburgh's, Chester, a charter granted Bromborough Court House, including " all houses, MILLS , etc." to the Hardware family. In 1787 an Act of Parliament helped set up the building of the Old Chester Road also mentioned " Bromborough Mill " .



The mill gear wheel



*The wheel was found buried near
the present pumping station*



Extract of O.S. Map 1878

The Vikings in Dibbinsdale



*Was the Battle Brunaburgh
on the Wirral near Bromborough ?*

Viking Wirral

Wirral has a very special Heritage based around its great Viking history, and it is a Heritage locals are becoming extremely proud of.

Wirral is the only place in mainland Britain with documented evidence of Norwegian Viking settlers. Ancient Irish Chronicles report the first peaceful settlements led by the Norseman *Ingimund* in 902AD, followed by repeated raids on Chester after the peninsula became full of Norse settlers.

The Chronicles tell how the English of Chester used elaborate means to keep the Wirral Vikings back, including setting the town's bees onto them! The story of Ingimund represents Wirral's very own ancient Viking Saga. In two years time we celebrate the 1100th anniversary of these raids.



The area is full of major and minor place names of Scandinavian origin: it has the highest density of *-by* place names in the UK. And in Tranmere ("*Trani-melr*: Cranebirds' sandbank") it has the only English League team with a Norwegian Viking name. Forty generations or so ago Wirral was home to a thriving Scandinavian population with its own language and customs, its own parliament at Thingwall ("*Ping-vollr*: Assembly Field") and its own seaport at Meols ("*Melr*: sandbank") where hundreds of Viking age finds have been made.

English communities in the southern end of the peninsula (south and east of Raby – *ra-byr*: boundary settlement) would keep a watchful eye from the other side of the River Dibbin, for example where the Saxon *Bruna* had his *burh* or fortress, probably on the site of what is now Poulton Hall, home since 1093 of the oldest family name on Wirral - the Lancelyn-Greens. Since 2004 it has also been home of the Brunanburgh Viking Sculpture. Brunanburgh or *Brunanburh* the old name for Bromborough gives its name of a famous battle fought in 937AD which, following recent evidence, most experts believe took place on Wirral soil.

The Battle of Brunanburg



*Where did the Viking
army land?*

It is thought by some that the Battle of Brunanburh was fought on the Wirral in AD 937.



This was a very important turning point in history. Over 100,000 soldiers took part in what was said to be a very bloody battle with great loss of life. This was written in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of the time. The exact whereabouts of the battle is lost in time. No one knows for certain. There were no proper records.

It is known that it was fought by Athelstan, King of the Mercians and West Saxons, against a combined army of Viking kings and chiefs. The battle that was won by the Saxon king, Athelstan, meant that the threat of Viking control of the mainland of Britain was ended. After Athelstan, the Saxon kings united the land under the one king of all of England.

The armies of the Vikings came to England from Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Europe by sea. It is most likely that the invaders landed somewhere in the North west of England – the nearest place for them all to meet. There were already Viking settlers on Wirral. The place names of Wirral ending in “by”, like Irby and Frankby are evidence of this. Some think that this Viking army would have got together somewhere they had welcoming friends.

Bromborough was once known as Brunburg.

A very similar name to Brunanburh. It lay close to a possible landing place for a Viking army – Bromborough Pool. This estuary led out via the River Mersey to the Irish Sea. The Dibbin Valley acted as a boundary between Saxon and Viking settlers on the Wirral. Eastham and Bromborough as Saxon names. Raby, close by, is a Viking one.

There are other names that are of interest in the area. The large sandstone cliffs in the river valley are called the “clints”- this is a Viking word meaning a lookout place. On Storeton Hill there is a road now called “Redhill”, and a field name near Bromborough Pool called “wargraves”. Was this where a battle was fought?

Exciting as this all sounds, the answer is that it is probably unlikely. There is another site, on the River Brun, in Lancashire where there is also a claim for the battle. Near here a large treasure of ancient silver coins was uncovered. Was this the money, or booty, that the Vikings left when they had to flee so quickly after the battle? We will never know for certain. Wirral did become a land of the Saxons. There are the descendants of Viking settlers here on Wirral.

How the valley was formed



How the valley was changed by the ice age



These are pictures of a glacier in Greenland doing what we think happened on the Wirral 15,000 years ago

Why has the River Dibbin cut so deeply through the sandstone ridge here at Dibbinsdale?

The River Dibbin has dramatically changed its course in recent earth history. It is thought that the river once flowed to meet the sea near Moreton. This route to the sea was cut off because the frozen ice of the glacier pushed across Wirral from the Irish Sea. The water from the river was dammed up into a huge lake behind the ice unable to escape to sea. Eventually it broke through the sandstone ridge near Babbs Meadow and carved the valley to join the River Mersey instead at Bromborough Pool. The steep sides of the valley and cliffs were formed by the force of the water escaping through the gap in the sandstone ridge. When the ice eventually melted the river had made a new channel to the sea which it has stayed in ever since.

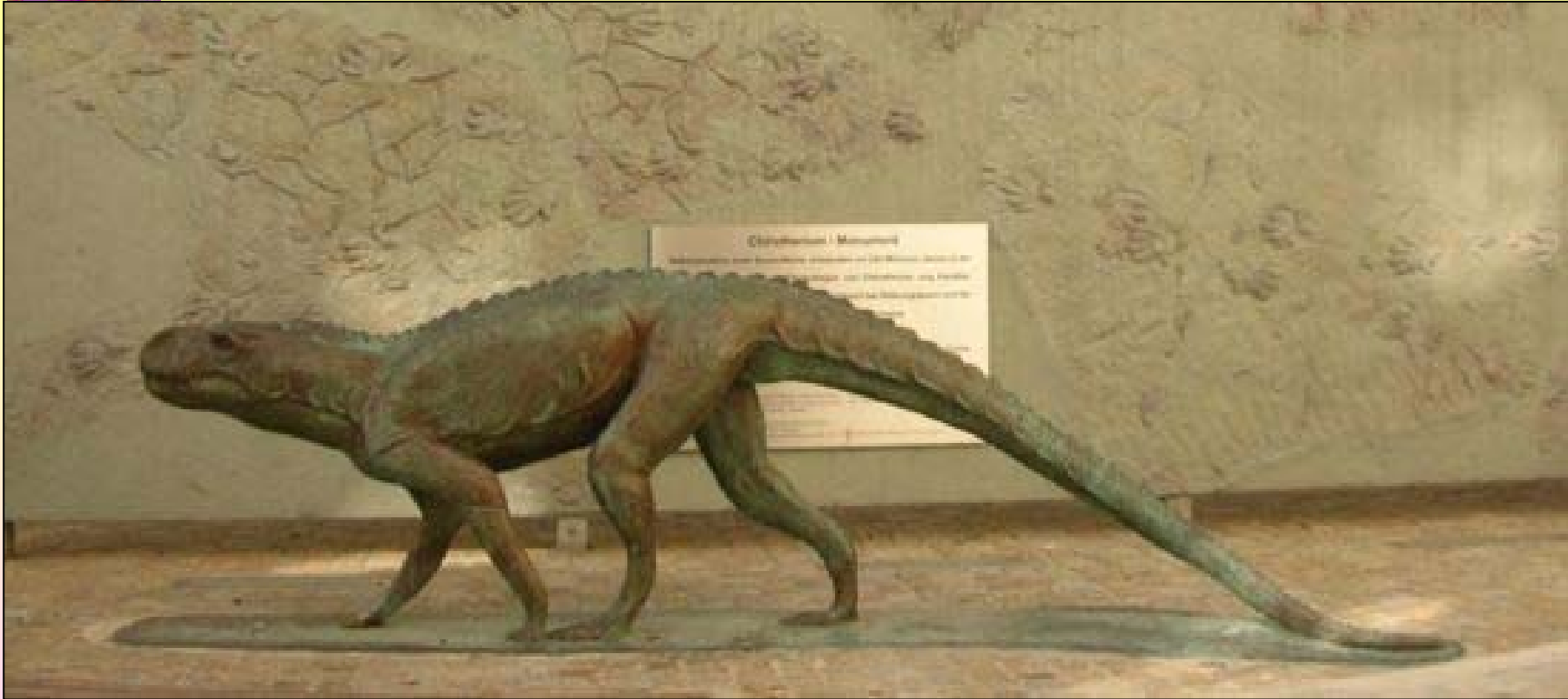
The meadow called Bodens Hey was drowned by this huge lake of water. When the ice disappeared 'till', or sediment, was left that the river had brought here to dump at the bottom of this temporary lake.

During the most recent chapter of the earth's history (The Quaternary Period) the world's climate changed to leave the polar ice caps pushed far into Britain. The earth's climate became very cold. It is this period that saw great mountains of moving ice (glaciers) scrape across the landscape. The glaciers were like huge bulldozers. They moved the earth underneath them.

The glacier ice on the Wirral only finally melted about 15,000 years ago. The landscape was changed by the huge amount of water that was released by the ice. It was changed by the sediment (till) that had been carried by the glaciers, that was now dumped in the Dibbin Valley. The melt water meant that the sea level got higher. The land was flooded by the sea. The Dibbin Valley became a salt water tidal marsh. It was not until Spital Dam was made that the sea was kept out of the valley.

The melt waters of the glacier would have made the river much deeper and more powerful than it is today. The steep sides of the valley we see today would have been worn away (eroded) by the flood waters. In places you can see large rocks under the ground that were dumped by the flood waters of the glacier. These are called 'erratic'. One was found close to the Rangers Office and has been put on show in the courtyard. The erratics are often of a different rock from the sandstone. The glacier has brought rocks here from Scotland and the Lake District.

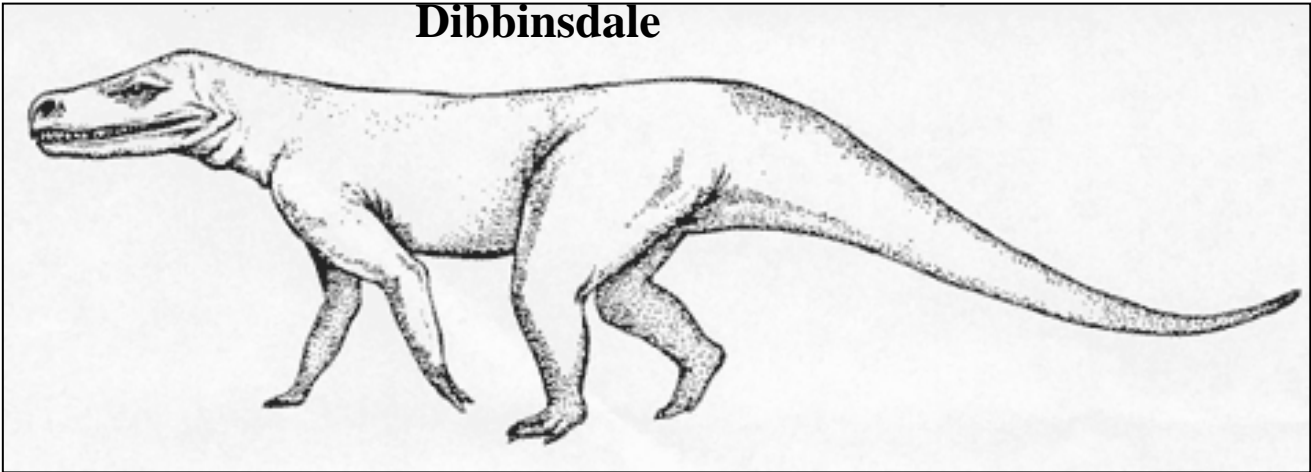
Geology of Dibbinsdale



Dibbinsdale in triassic times was part of a huge desert that stretched as far as what is now France.

The Chirotherium was a dinosaur that lived by the lakes within this desert

The Geology of Dibbinsdale



Chirotherium (also known as ***Cheirotherium***) or 'hand-beast', is the name of a creature which may be known only from fossil imprints of its tracks. These look, by coincidence, remarkably like the hand of an ape/human or bear, with the outermost toe having evolved to extend out to the side like a thumb, although probably only providing a firmer grip in mud. Its tracks were first found in 1834, in red sandstone in Thuringia, Germany, dating from 225-195 million years ago




The Triassic Period lasted about 30 million years, from 250 to 220 million years ago. The sediment that now makes the rocks was formed in a climate that was hot and dry. Britain was much closer to the equator than it is today. It was like the Sahara Desert is today. Big storms washed sediment to this area from what is now France. As time passed the land became less like a desert and was able to support life. For a dinosaur footprint to have been made in the sand there must have been some water for plants to grow for food for the creatures to eat.

The Wirral has many different layers of sand that were laid in the Triassic Period. The minor layers of sandstone rock are called 'beds'. Some of the beds are almost like mud (Keuper Marl), some contain a lot of silt (Waterstones), others are sandy rock (Keuper Sandstone) and harder rock (Bunter sandstone). Some of the beds have pebble layers

The earliest discoveries of these long-hidden footprints caused perhaps the most astonishment. In this country they were first found at Storeton quarries. In the year 1838, the quarrymen found some singular imprints on the whitish sandstone, which looked like the impressions of a thick, fat hand. Experts have worked out it was a large beast with a small hand which walked slowly on its hind legs dragging a long tail, similar in movement to a non-hopping kangaroo.

The fossil footprints were made on the sandy shores of a massive inland sea. The climate then was similar to that of the Sahara Desert.

With the fossil footprints you can also find the fossils of ripples made by the waters of the sea on the shore.

The red sandstone rocks vary a lot in colour. Some areas like Storeton Hill have white/grey colour. In New Brighton the rocks are mc  Metropolitan Borough of Wirral

The ancient woodland of Dibbinsdale



*The last remains of the
Forest of Wirral ?*

Wirral Horn

The term 'forest' in the middle ages must not be confused with a wooded place. The Forest of Wirral was a game preserve of the rich and powerful. The Norman Earl of Chester created the post of forester in about 1129. (The charter was not dated).

The office of forester involved looking after the laws related to that place of hunting. The office had as its symbol, or title of office, The Wirral Horn.

Alan Sylvester was created the first forester in 1120, a hereditary post that carried with it the gift of land and the duty to carry arms at time of war. The Stanley family inherited the title in 1346 and gained possession of the horn that still exists in the hands of their descendants.

Dibbin Valley, part of the forest, must have been as heavily wooded as it is today.

The river marks the boundary between Bromborough, Spital and Bebington.

The woods of Dibbinsdale are therefore on the boundary of the parishes. The steepness of the valley sides have meant that farming has been difficult.

History of the Wirral Horn

The Wirral Horn is currently in the possession of the fourth Earl of Cromer and it came into his possession via the female line of the Stanley family of Storeton and Hooton.

The 17 inch horn was given to Alan Sylvester in 1120 when he was created chief forester of the forest of Wirral by the Earl of Chester.

He was also granted the manors of Hooton, Storeton and Puddington on condition that he not only performed the duties of forester but also "blew the horn at Gloverstone in Chester on the morning of every fair day"

The horn came into the possession of the Stanley family, via the female line.

However, in 1876 it ended up in the Cromer family when Ethel, daughter of the then Earl Stanley, married the first Earl of Cromer - and took the Wirral Horn with her.

The current Earl of Cromer, Evelyn Rowland Esmond Baring, 55, lives at Drayton Court, Drayton, Somerset. The Old Etonian is managing director of Inchcape Vietnam Ltd.

Ranger Pete's Mission -Extract from Wirral News 5th December 2001

Pete's mission is to see the horn back home in the Wirral - along with the title of Forester of Wirral.

Pete, who is the ranger at Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve, would love to be the holder of the ancient title as custodian of the forests of Wirral, which goes back almost 900 years.

Said Pete: "Its a title that, as far as I know, was last held by the last surviving member of the Stanley family, buried at Eastham.

"His badge of office was the Wirral Horn, a silver instrument believed to have been inherited by the Earl of Cromer"

But what makes Pete worthy of the honour ?

He said : " I know the forests of Wirral were actually hunting grounds owned by the king, rather than just woodlands, but I am the warden entrusted by Wirral Council to manage what is undoubtedly the finest block of ancient woodland on the peninsula.

Local History Archives-Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve

The Forest of Wirral



"Before my current post, I was Ranger at Eastham Country Park, another woodland with historical attachment. Before that, I was a teacher with a passion for local history - I rest my case!" Pete says he would, of course, have the valuable horn entrusted to Wirral Museum - purely on loan from the present owner.

As for the title, that, he said, would be honorary and "on loan" to whoever was managing Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve.

And he added: " It would be the role of the person to promote the appreciation of woodland in our landscape and in our communities. In fact it would be like a mayor of our oldest citizens - the trees "

The Lady Bridge



*One of the earliest
bridges on the Wirral*

The Lady Bridge



Reference(s)Cheshire RO DFI 218 (seal in 219) - copy of John Rylands Charter No 1542. 28 January 1286 / 7

Grant by William, son of William Lancelyn to the Abbot & Convent of St Werburgh's, of 2 bovates in Bebington with the advowson of the church which was given by Scyard and confirmed by William his grandfather and confirming other grants of a messuage & toft in Bebington and a garden & half a bovate in Bebington held by Adam de Thurstaston and 7 sellions and appurtenances in a field called Le Bruches and one piece (placeam) of land near the same field of Le Bruches and one fishery in the Mersey which Robert son of Geoffrey held and one cockshoot with appurtenances next to Le Limput which Simon de Bebington held and houseboat and heyboat in 'my' wood of Bebington to build and repair houses in Bebington and the fishery and firewood and pannage with common rights &c.



Here are two pieces of historical writing about the bridge below Bromborough Rake Station.

The existing bridge is quite new and crosses the River Dibbin, linking Bodens Hey Meadow with Marfords Wood. A raised causeway was built to take a footpath (public right of way to Raby Mere) across the marsh in the 1980's.

In 2003 the causeway was further raised and resurfaced to lessen flooding . This was part of the Ladybridge Wetland Scheme.

Extract from The Bromborough Society Records Scrapbook . No.2. 1970. Anderson

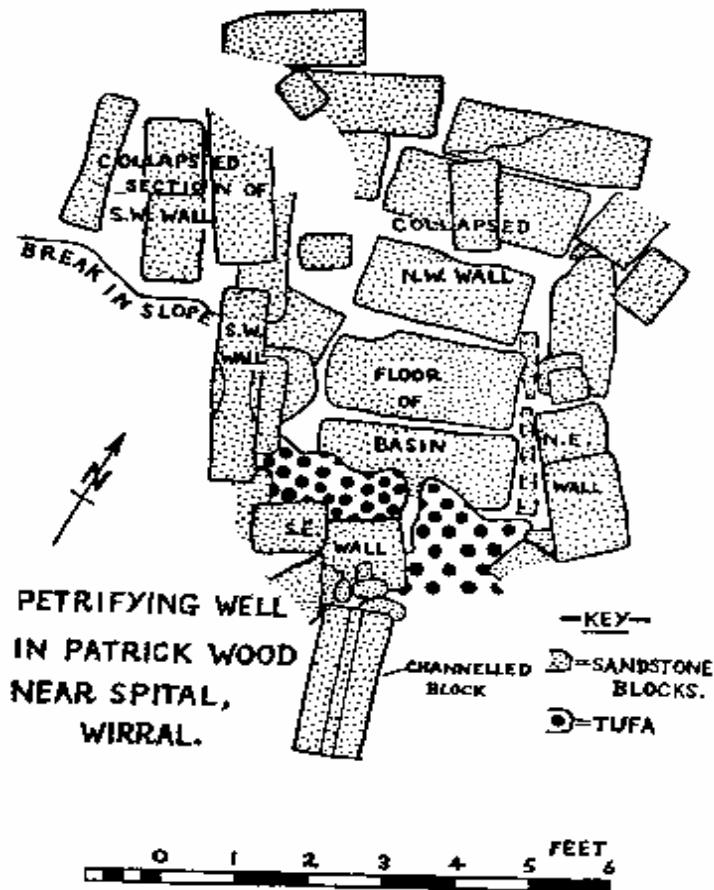
p.37 / 161 ' ... a little wooden bridge over the Dibbin at the foot of the wooded slope in Bromborough Woods at the end of the Rake- en route for Raby Mere. It has always been known as ' The Lady Bridge' ... It goes back to the early years of Edward I about 1274, when grants of land were being made by the Abbey of St Werburgh. One of these grants was made by the squire of Poulton- Lancelyn. He granted the right to construct a bridge on ' the soil of Poulton Lancelyn beyond the Pool in Poulton Dale between Bromborough and Bebington, with the liberty of taking timber in the woods of Poulton to construct the bridge and repair it for ever '

'It seems likely ' says the present Squire of Poulton- Lancelyn in his book on his family history ' that this was the site still occupied by a little wooden bridge, traditionally called ' Lady Bridge '

From its connection with the Abbey it may probably have been ' The Bridge of Our Lady '

Grant and confirmation of the **attachment of a bridge**, of any width they choose, on my soil of Poulton above the Pool in the Pool in Poultondale between Bromborough and Bebington with the right to collect in 'my' woods in Poulton and Bebington, wood for the construction , his repair and maintenance of the bridge for ever, together with pasture for the animals of the manor of Bromborough and pannage in the woods for 50 pigs. Confirmation of the right to dig & to out heath and gorse for the aforesaid manor of Bromborough.

Local History Archives-Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve- The Petrifying Well



The Petrifying Well can be found close to the Otters Tunnel. It lies hidden in woodland called Patrick Wood. This is private land owned by Cheshire Wildlife Trust and special permission is needed to enter.

The water that rises to the surface here holds limestone. When this limey water covers objects it leaves coats of limestone on them. They are 'turned to stone' or petrified. The earliest known mention of the well is in the "Gentleman's Magazine" for December 18th, 1762: "In a wood in the township of Bromborough there is a well whose waters petrify moss, leaves, etc., after lying in it for some time, in a beautiful manner". By the beginning of this century, the existence of the well was well known locally. There was no path to it. The steep, slippery and wet wooded slope put people off. It seems unlikely that many knew of its exact position.

A channelled stone, overturned on the slope above the well, had apparently been one of a number intended to lead water from the spring into the basin.

G.E.C.

The well was in such a hard place to get to. The reason for this may have been that it might have been connected with the medieval leper hospital. This lay across the valley, about half a mile away, roughly on the site of the outbuildings of Spital Old Hall. (Now developed into a housing estate 'Blair Park'). The cure for leprosy "was sometimes sought in medicinal waters "The fact that the water 'turned things to stone' may have seemed special to those who lived in the Middle Ages. Their knowledge of medicine at that time was very poor

Petrifying springs usually occur in limestone districts. The occurrence of one in a Bunter sandstone area, poor in lime, was sufficiently unusual to arouse the interest of a Liverpool geologist, the late E.G.Hancox, B.Sc, who investigated it in 1932. He found that the calcareous water actually welled up over a fairly large area. In July, 1954, the well was cleared of the silt and debris which had gathered since 1932. It was found to consist of a misshapen basin, roughly five feet square, composed of red sandstone blocks, and cut into the hillside. The whole structure was considerably ruined. It was possible to make out the plan of the structure, and to see that it had been floored by three large sandstone slabs.

Archaeological Survey of Merseyside

Ref- WRRN /Poulton- cum Spital /33838(SJ 3369 8318)

Re Spital Old Hall- Site of Medieval Chapel and leper hospital

The site of the 12th Century Chapel of the Blessed Thomas the Martyr is well attested in medieval documents. Founded between 1174- 1184 the chapel was endowed with lands, half the site of a mill, a fishery and part of the wood (Tait 1920,126). The earliest reference to the leper hospital associated with the chapel is circa 1270- 80 when the 'leper houses' on Poulton Millway (Spital Road, leading to the mill of the Abbey of St Werburgh of Chester on the Dibbin) are mentioned in a quiteleyn of William Lancelyn (Tait, 1923, 329)A reference in the Wirral Forest Court Rolls states that William Lancelyn erected three houses at Poulton near the Bebington house of lepers before 1286, and in the period 1270- 83 the same William granted the Abbott of St Werburgh three butts of land in the territory of Poulton as the site of a grange and cottage. It appears from this evidence that a significant nucleus of medieval settlement existed around the chapel site.

The walled garden



*View of the
garden and
school from the
top of the tower*

Woodslee Cottages-now No.4 in 1983



**The tip
slope
viewed
from
the
tunnel**

*Tipping
stopped in
the early
1970's*



Local History Archives-Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve



A-The tip entrance sign

B-The entrance at Dibbins Hey

C-Scene

D-Scene looking into the valley

E-View from the tunnel

F- Tip slope

G-Tree planting on slope

H- Early tree growth on slope



The Legacy

What domestic waste that was tipped on the site is not known.

What the valley looked like here before the tipping began is not known

What effect the lechiate (what is washed through the soil) may have on the river is not known

Spital Tip



Woodslee Squatters



Squatters took over the prisoner of war camp after the war

Wartime memories

Dot Fuller and her family lived at No.5 Woodslee Cottages during the war. It was her parents home before that. Her father worked for Brothertons as an engineer. Dot went on to marry Bill and had their baby son Neil in No.5. It is Neil and his family who now live in the present house- now renovated.

Dot was my neighbour when I first became the ranger at Dibbinsdale. She loved to tell you about her 'history' and the local history of Woodslee was a passion with her. It held many memories both bitter and sweet. She was a teenager in the war and a time for many people of very vivid memories.

One of her most amusing tales related to the prisoner of war camp that was situated where the present day car park now is. She would daily pass by the fenced and guarded prisoner camp at the end of the drive to Woodslee Cottages where she lived. I don't think the army who ran the camp really allowed civilians to come that close. There was a guard house where the present day lodge house now is. There was a barrier to prevent access to the camp on the road.

Dot would see the prisoners in the camp on a regular basis. There were German and Italian prisoners there at one time. They lived in wooden huts like pavillions. The main 'job' of the prisoners was to form part of a 'land army'. Because there were so many British men in the forces at war fighting away from home there was a shortage of labour and particularly in food production. The prisoners would go out to farms in the area to work. It was not such a difficult life because as a prisoner you were well fed and escaped any danger of being killed in action. Many prisoners were quite 'happy' being out of the war.

Dot remembered that one particular German prisoner was very well spoken. He would talk to Dot from his side of the fence. She was probably quite flattered he was 'chatting her up'. What amused her was that he would ask Dot questions about the area that she probably shouldn't have answered. In the war there was a worry about 'spies' sending home information. The man would ask Dot how you could get to Chester for example. Dot was convinced that the prisoner was escaping camp at night and going into town for recreation- then return back to sleep.

Woodslee Camp-Transcript of a hand written letter of 7th July 2002.

Dear Peter,

I was sorry to hear of Dot Fuller's death and read with interest her comments on life in Woodslee in the spring of 2001 newsletter. I remember Auntie Dot and her husband, Uncle Bill, as they were known to me as a child.

I was born in Bromborough in 1944 spending the first months of my life in the New Ferry / Port Sunlight area. Following this, my mother and myself lived in a rented house in Garston in Liverpool for 12 to 18 months.

After the war, my father returned demobbed from the RAF and wished to return to Bromborough. As far as I can recall, the army had housed soldiers in nisson huts in the grounds of Brotherton Park in close proximity to the "big house", already starting to crumble.

Around 1946, my father and his friend discovered that the army had vacated the huts, some were wooden and some made from corrugated iron. There were approximately ten huts 'behind' or to the side of Woodslee House nearer to Spital Road. There were two isolated huts to the other side of the house nearer to the pond, or 'pit' as it was known. Thus we moved to Woodslee Camp. My father and his friend and young family rented the two adjacent huts.

Our hut was wooden, divided into three or four rooms divided by partitions. There was a stove with a pipe reaching to the ceiling for heating purposes. Although there was a tap located near the ten huts grouped together, there was not a water supply in close proximity to our hut. We had an Elsan toilet, which had to be emptied on a regular basis. My parents enjoyed the outdoor life and had a few hens and several hives of bees.

Now Dot Fuller, her father, husband and son lived in Woodslee Cottages. Dot provided us with fresh water everyday. My father visited the stable yard with two enamel buckets to be filled on a daily basis.

Whilst my parents were happy with their accommodation my grand parents were horrified with the lack of facilities. I recall our roof leaked in several places and I remember the "ping" of rainwater collecting in several receptacles. We were known as "squatters" despite the fact that they (The Council) charged rent

Whilst we were poor, we were able to manage on our limited income. Some other "hut" dwellers were malnourished and poorly clothed.

As children, Neil Fuller and myself were warned off the now delightful Woodslee Pond. In 1946, it was a dark, gloomy overgrown area known as the "Pit". The house was also "out of bounds" as it was tending to crumble and become hazardous. It was also full of stray cats. As ever the woods were wonderful with their annual profusion of bluebells.

In 1950, my parents were offered a council house in Beechwood Road, Bromborough. We had two toilets, running water, a wash house, French windows = what bliss !! We remained there until 1956 when we moved to Chester.

Contact with grandparents kept me in touch with Dibbinsdale until their deaths in the 1980's. I now visit every Mat time to enjoy the magnificent display of bluebells. We still maintained contact with Dot Fuller and I last saw her in October 2000. Happy memories indeed and a big thanks to Auntie Dot for our vital water supply!

I have managed to locate a photograph of Woodslee Camp taken in 1946. (I am the little one to the right, aged 2) The copy enclosed may be of interest as part of Dibbinsdale's history.

Regards. Diane Reid.

Dibbinsdale in the Second World War



Hurricane fighter aircraft

Dibbinsdale in the Second World War

Local History Extracts- Brom Parish Magazine-Stray Notes No. 22

Relics of World War II at Woodslee.

In view of the current interest in relics of World War II we now put on record yet more about Woodslee Field (now of course, part of Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve)

When the Army occupied Woodslee(The House) there had to be Air Raid protection for the inmates .

So , in a convenient bank which had bordered the grass tennis court beside the house, an Air Raid Shelter was excavated. It was well made, with old railway sleepers used as props for the roof (after necessity for the shelter had passed these sleepers were appreciated: during the very severe winter of 1947 !)

When the local council took over Woodslee Estate as a public park the shelter was filled in and the bank restored to its former shape. The "Pill Box" at Spital Dam survives , but the Air Raid Shelter on the site of the old quarry at the corner of Mill Road and Spital Road has long gone. In its prime it was surrounded with a flourishing vegetable garden thanks to Captain Wrigg.

Nora McMillan and Dorothy Fuller.

'Channel Stop' - D.E.Gillam

It was not all that unusual for a successful Spitfire pilot to be asked to fly Hurricanes, but Denys Gillam was told to do just that towards the end of the Battle of Britain. Gillam had joined the RAF in the mid-1930's and in 1938 had been awarded the Air Force Cross when flying from Aldergrove on weather recce flights, often in extremely hazardous conditions, and for flying supplies to the residents of Rathlin Island, isolated by storms for three weeks. When the war began he was a flight commander in NO 616 Squadron, flying Spitfires, with which he saw action over Dunkirk and during the Battle of Britain. By September he had shot down at least seven German aircraft and damaged others and was soon to receive the DFC, but then he was posted to No 312 Squadron (the second Czech squadron to be formed in the RAF) as a flight commander, only to find they were flying Hawker Hurricanes , which to him was:-

'... a great disappointment. Only four of us flew away from the Battle of Britain and I'd been virtually commanding Squadron 616 ; I had visions of re-forming the squadron but instead I was taken out and sent to the Czechs. They were being formed at Duxford and we took them straight to Speke near Liverpool to bring them to an operational standard. Then in October 1940 we began readiness and investigation of X-raids, scrambling etc.'

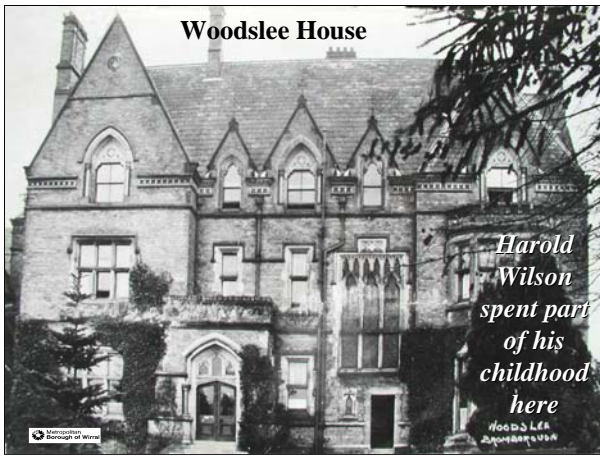
Two sections were scrambled from Speke on 8 October in poor visibility and with wheels still down we spotted a Ju88 being fired at by AA guns. My two Czech wingmen began to chase it as I pulled up into a climbing turn, rolled or rather slid off the top right under him (he was at 1000 ft), and when I had enough power pulled up and got a very close shot, and he went down and crash landed on the other side of the Mersey, about half a mile from the aerodrome. I continued round, lowered my wheels and landed. It was a very quick thing. I logged it as a 10 minute flight but I think it all happened in about seven - one of the fastest kills in Fighter Command. I got into my car, drove through the Mersey Tunnel to the crash site and the German crew were just being rounded up. The pilot was dead but the gunner, who had put bullets into all three of my Hurricanes, including a bullet in my windscreen, had survived. I cut the German badge off the side of the aeroplane together with one of the swastikas for souvenirs, then returned to Speke.

The incident of the Junker Bomber crash on the Mersey water front was a memorable incident for many on the 'home front'. For one man, who witnessed it (as a child) whilst in a rowing boat on the Mersey, there is a memorable story of hope and kindness that brought a German pilot and the man who helped save him together many years after the war.

Woodslee House

*Harold
Wilson
spent part
of his
childhood
here*

WOODS LEE
BRAMBOROUGH

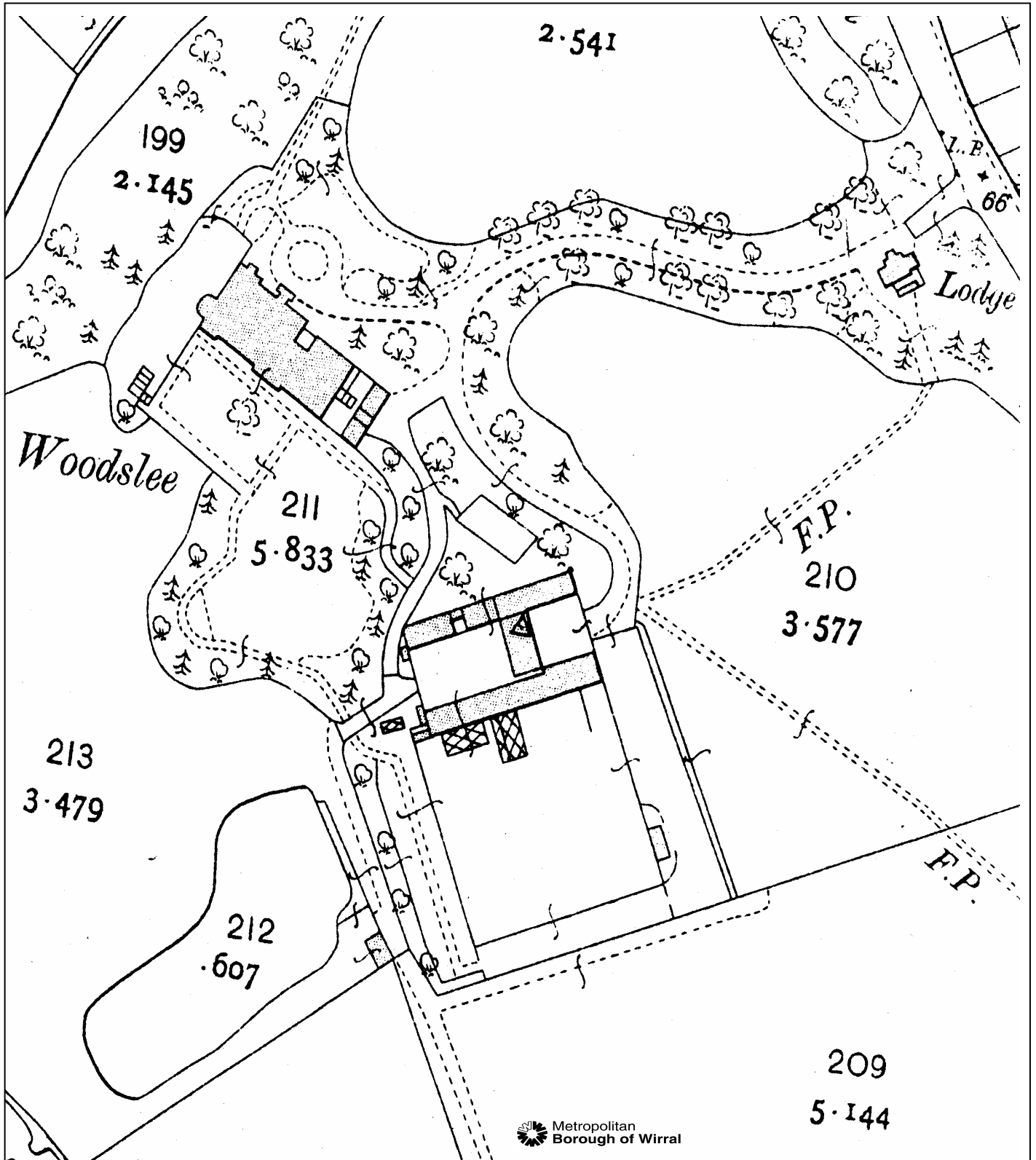


Woodslee House

Below is an extract of the O.S Map of 1878 showing detail of Woodslee House(now demolished) and Woodslee Cottages.

This is how the buildings must have been when built by Mr Rankin of Bromborough Hall for his daughter and son- in- law David McIver.

Some of the trees in the photographs can still be identified



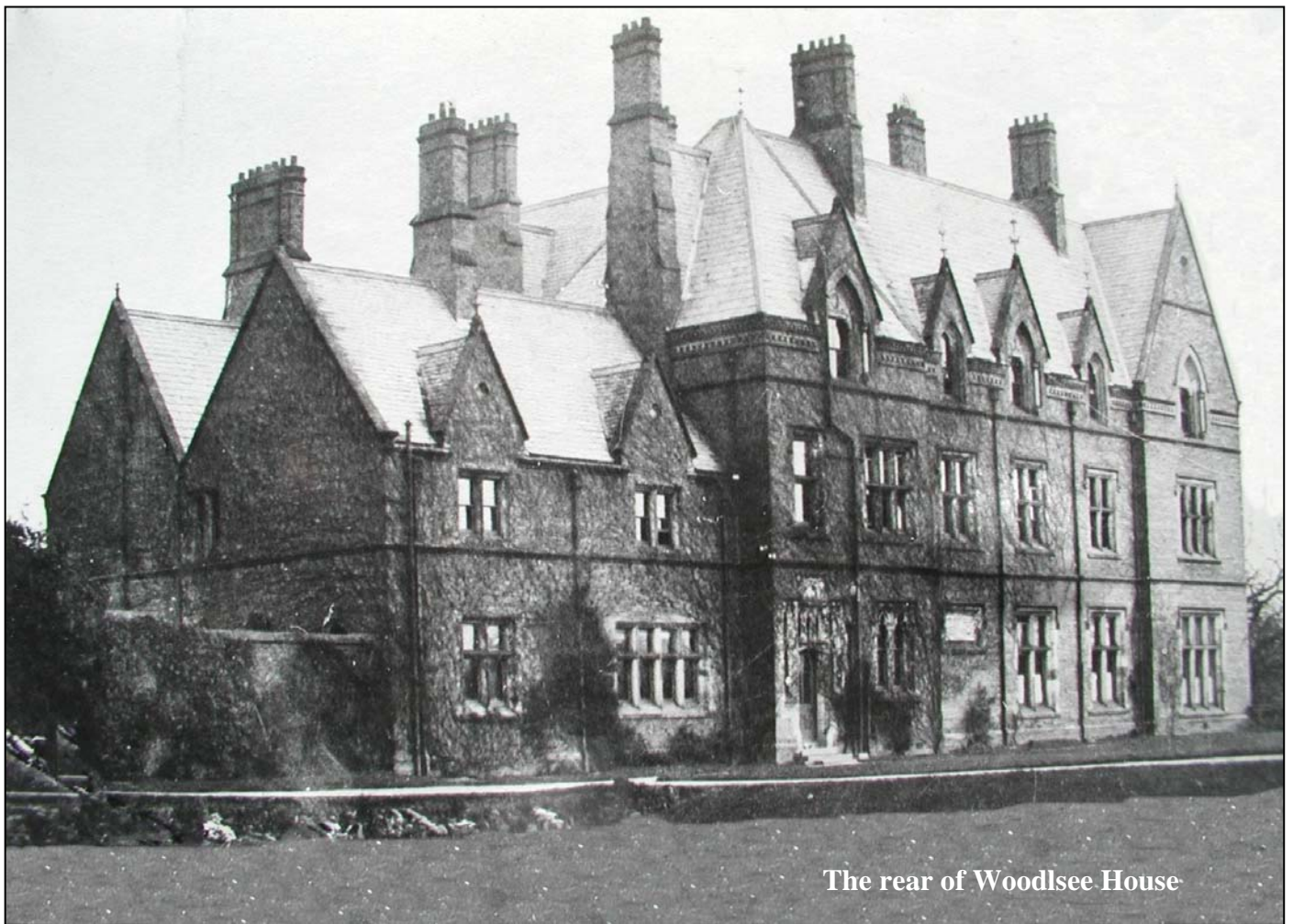
People living in Woodslee House. Taken from 1891 and 1901 Population Census

The MacIver Household of 1891 at Woodslee House

Name	Relation	Status	Age	Age	Occupation	Where born
<i>David MacIver</i>	Head	Married	50		Steamship owner	Liverpool , Lancashire
<i>Edith.E.MacIver</i>	Wife	Married		37		Rock Ferry , Cheshire
<i>David MacIver</i>	Son	Single	15		Scholar, Eton	Bromborough, Cheshire
<i>Annie MacIver</i>	Daughter	Single		14	Scholar	London
<i>Margaret MacIver</i>	Daughter	Single		10	Scholar	London
<i>Edith.E. MacIver</i>	Daughter	Single		8	Scholar	Ambleside,Cumberland
<i>Edward.J. MacIver</i>	Son	Single	6		Scholar	Bromborough, Cheshire
<i>Dorothy. MacIver</i>	Daughter	Single		6	Scholar	Bromborough, Cheshire
<i>Lois. MacIver</i>	Daughter	Single		6	Scholar	Bromborough, Cheshire
<i>Rachel Bloxham</i>	Servant	Married		60	Nurse. Dom Serv	Sudenhams,Bucks
<i>Edith Shilton</i>	Servant	Single		20	Nurse. Dom Serv	Whitehaven, Cumberland
<i>Katherine.J.Lloyd</i>	Servant	Single		33	Waitress	Oswestry, Salop
<i>Martha Hall</i>	Servant	Single		21	Waitress	Llanfechan, Montgomeryshire
<i>Margaret Davies</i>	Servant	Single		23	Cook	Thornby, Durham
<i>Ada Ashcroft</i>	Servant	Single		20	Kitchen maid	Knotty Ash, Lancs
<i>Mary.A. Proctor</i>	Servant	Single		28	Laundress	Ardwick,, Lancs

The Johnston household of 1901 at Woodslee House

<i>William Johnston</i>	Head	Widower	60		Shipowner	Ireland
<i>Anna. M. Mitchell</i>	Sister	Widow		54		Ireland
<i>Henry.G. Johnston</i>	Son	Single	32		Shipowner	Liverpool, Lancs
<i>Robert.S.Johnston</i>	Son	Single	30		Shipowner	Liverpool, Lancs
<i>William. S.Johnston</i>	Son	Single	27		Shipowner	Liverpool, Lancs
<i>Aileen.A. Johnston</i>	Daughter	Single		24		Rock Ferry, Cheshire
<i>Essie.W.Johnston</i>	Daughter	Single		22		Rock Ferry, Cheshire
<i>Helen Kendall</i>	GranDaug			7		Rock Ferry, Cheshire
<i>Gilbert Kendall</i>	Granson		7			Rock Ferry, Cheshire
<i>Gladys Barry</i>	Visitor	Single		21		Middlesex
<i>Helen Spence</i>	Visitor	Single		26		Liverpool, Lancs
<i>Catherine Johnston</i>	Servant	Widow		49	Cook	Ireland
<i>Mary Moore</i>	Servant	Single		32	Housemaid	Whitehaven,Cumberland
<i>Mary Reece</i>	Servant	Single		45	Waitress	Perival,Merrioneth
<i>Alice Crockett</i>	Servant	Single		21	Housemaid	Chester, Cheshire
<i>Margaret Griffiths</i>	Servant	Single		23	Housemaid	Denbighshire
<i>Mary Woodcock</i>	Servant	Single		23	Laundrymaid	Birkenhead, Cheshire
<i>Anne McDally</i>	Servant	Single		41	Laundrymaid	
<i>Mary Thompson</i>	Servant	Single		18	Kitchenmaid	Runcorn , Cheshire



The rear of Woodsee House

Woodslee House

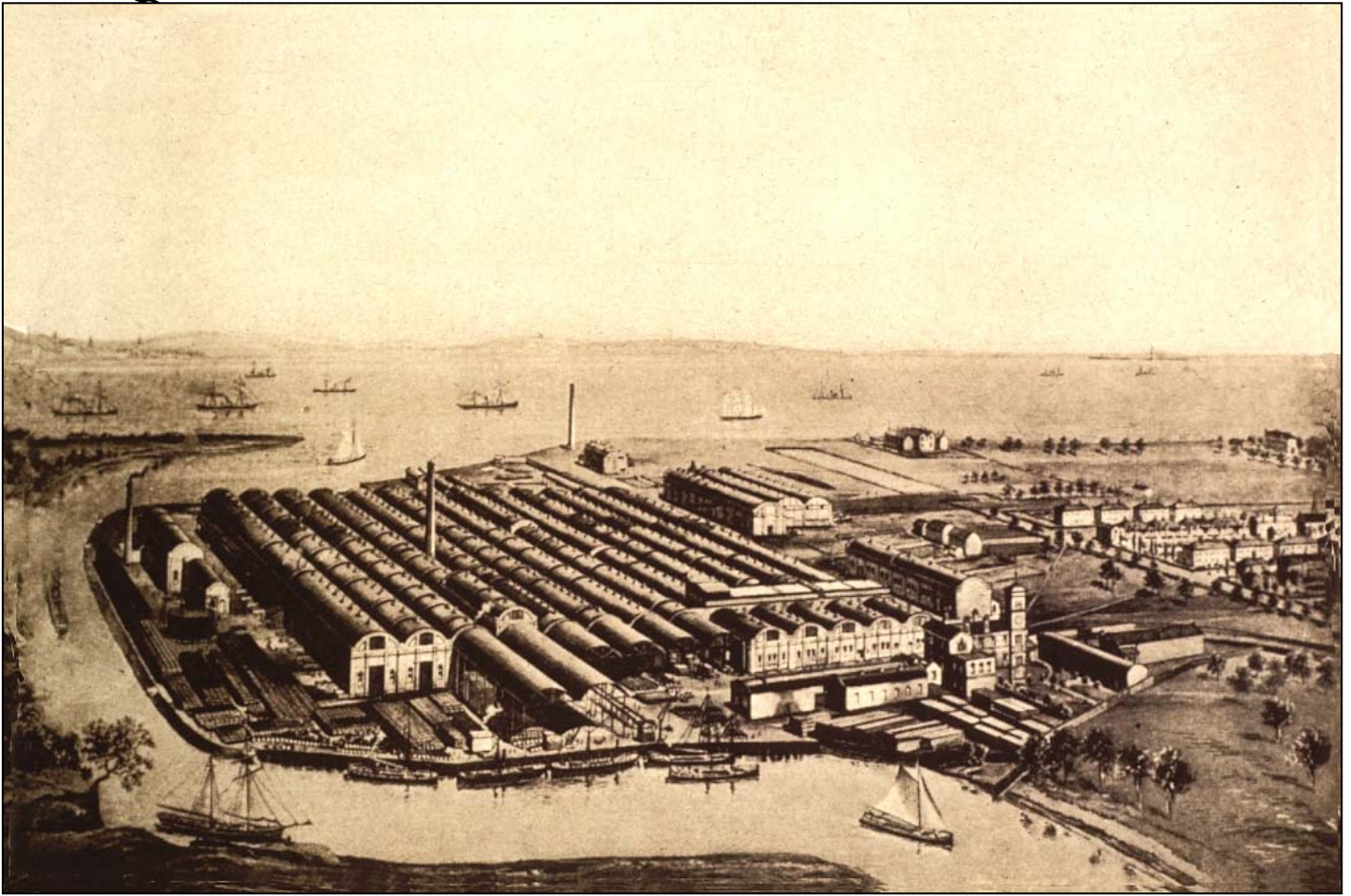
In 1919 Woodslee was for sale. Sir Edward Brotherton came to Bromborough to found his chemical business at a factory on the Mersey. He needed houses for his key workers who had moved from Wakefield to the new factory so he bought Woodslee house and grounds. He turned the house into six flats. He also converted Woodslee Cottages houses. Sir Edward was a considerate employer and provided Sports Club for his employees with cricket in the summer as well as tennis, bowls and football. The bowling green was near the present park off Spital Road. Two hard tennis courts were built on the what is known as Woodsee Field. A grass tennis court was beside the house with the rock garden beyond. It was during this time that Sir Harold Wilson, once Labour Prime Minister, lived as a boy in one of the Woodslee flats.

All these sporting activities ceased with the outbreak of war in 1939 when the army took over the house and grounds. The people who lived in the house had to leave, although the people in the lodge and cottages were not affected.

The years of the Second World War saw Woodslee changed into an army camp. There were ten army huts, a cook house, and a toilet block. The parade ground is now the car park. No trace of these army huts remain except the foundations of one still to be traced near a huge oak close to the former rock garden.

On one notable occasion a Bren gun carrier, by some mischance, drove into Woodslee Pond. The carrier lay half submerged but was eventually pulled out with some difficulty. A Welsh regiment, when stationed at Woodslee, had their mascot with them, a fine upstanding white goat that paraded proudly with them. Both British and American forces were stationed at Woodslee and later some Italian and German prisoners of war also. When the army gave up Woodslee the house stood empty. Lord Brotherton no longer needed either house or land. He generously gave it all to the local council for an open space for people to enjoy.

Local History Archives-Dibbinsdale Local Nature



Bromborough Pool in the 19th Century

Alan Brotherton was a Yorkshire man who developed a chemical industry based on an unwanted bi-product of the coal and gas industry- coal tar. Coal was used to make the first gas used in the home. With coal tar he was able to make dyes for clothing that were “fast”. That means that clothes would keep their colour when washed.

With this new technology, better dyes could be made cheaply and in great amounts. A chance to buy a German company, Beyers, who made dyes themselves came about at the time of the First World War. Brotherton moved a lot of his staff from Wakefield to Wirral to run the “Mersey works”. The factory is no longer there, but it was close to Magazine Road, off the New Chester Road.

Brotherton was a very generous and far sighted employer. He saw the way that Lever had built a new factory and houses for his employees at Port Sunlight. He new that Bromborough Pool had been one of the first industrial villages. He thought this was a good idea. Having workers living close to the factory in good living conditions in a nice place would mean better workers.

Following Levers example he wanted to make an industrial village of his own that he was to call Port Rainbow. (because of the dyes he made) He would make places for his worker to live close to the factory in pleasant surroundings. He bought Woodslee House and cottages which were up for sale with this in mind.

He particularly wanted the estate to act as a place of research and testing of his products- a laboratory. One of the most important of his staff at Woodslee was Charles Wilson , his chemist. The Wilson family lived in a ground floor flat in the large Victorian house. The Wilson’s son, Harold, went on to become the country’s Prime Minister.

Stray Notes No.8 Woodslee –

The History of a Bromborough House

Woodslee was one of a large number of Victorian Houses (" Villas") built around Bromborough when the coming of the railway (opened 1840) made travel to Liverpool easy for people who wanted to live in country surroundings.

Apart from the walled garden, there was a rock garden, now just traceable beneath overgrown rhododendron bushes. There were also well looked after lawns on the north and west of the house.

The lawn to the west was bordered by a row of Yew trees. Specimen trees bordered the drive, including Holm Oaks and Red Horse Chestnuts, and Monkey Puzzle trees, of which two survive. The numerous Spanish Chestnuts (Sweet Chestnuts) lining the path down from the main car park to Patrick's Well were almost certainly planted at the same time.

The land on which Woodslee was built originally formed part of the Mainwaring Estate. The house was built in 1869 as a wedding gift from the bride's parents when David McIver married Annie Rankin of Bromborough Hall. The wedding in took place on July 1st 1863 .Local directories show that by 1869 Woodslee was inhabited by the MacIver family. The MacIvers were originally from the Island of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. They took a leading part in the development of regular steamship services across the Atlantic and in the formation of the Cunard Line.

Tragically, Mrs MacIver was drowned while bathing off Beaumaris on August 24th 1869, so she had not very long in which to enjoy her new house. She left two sons and a daughter.

Some years later David MacIver married again. Edith Eleanor Squarey became the second Mrs MacIver on May 12th 1873. A MacIver descendent has written affectionately of life in the big house which was full of children

(there were 14 altogether) Her account **Family Omnibus** (privately printed) can be consulted in Birkenhead Library. One daughter Helen died young and lies in the churchyard of St Barnabas.

For many years Woodslee was not the only MacIver house. 'Wanless How ' on Windermere was a beloved holiday home to which the family went to each summer, only returning to Woodslee in October for the winter and spring. The MacIvers had to leave Woodslee for a smaller and less expensive house. This was found in number 11 Caroline Place, Birkenhead. Woodslee was left for good in May 1893. It was let to 'a very good tenant', a Mr William Johnston, a Liverpool ship owner, who later bought the place.

Mr Johnston remained at Woodslee until 1919. Then Gore's Directory for 1918 gives a " Mrs Mitchell" for Woodslee, perhaps she was a caretaker ?

and in 1919 she again appears as occupant of the house
Nora Macmillan and Dorothy Fuller.



The back of Woodslee Cottages in the 1980's before the buildings were made into private houses