

Village History

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A Brief History of Northop Hall

by Alan Peers

With acknowledgments to

Bob Morgan and Mrs W. J. Williams

For centuries, what is now Northop Hall was a quiet rural part of Northop Parish. The eastern part appeared on Maps as Pentre Moch probably taking its name from the farm. Moch is the Welsh word for pigs. Most likely there was a pig farm here. There were a few farms with Welsh Names. Northop Hall, a 14th Century fortified house, was the chief house of Northop Parish. It was for a few centuries the home of the Evans family who were Welsh gentry having their own coat of arms a feature of which was a Boar's Head.

Among other features of the house is a spiral staircase and an internal well.

The village road was a part of the Chester to Holyhead coach road and might possibly have been a Roman road. It appears in the Ogilby Map of 1675 as also does the Windmill on what is now Hillcrest Estate, but known as the Millfield for many years. In Lloyds Parochialia 1690 Northop Hall, Galchog, Plas Ifan, Plas Bellin, Bryn Gwyn and Pentre Moch Farm are mentioned along with the bridge in Cork only recently constructed.

About 1790 the Dublin and Irish Coal Company began to mine in the area. To house the workers (mainly local people) rows of houses were built e.g. Dublin Row along side Bryn Gwyn Lane and Brighton Row. The area took Irish names, Dublin, Cork, Vinegar Hill. The early mines were primitive, sometimes men were lowered by a basket and found their way about with the help of a lighted candle. Sometimes a horse with a winch was used. The mining was widespread. A tram road was constructed to take the coal to Connah's Quay docks. To cater for the demands of the Buckley Area, the Buckley and Connah's Quay Railway was opened in 1862 for goods traffic. Coal, bricks and pottery were taken to Connah's Quay and pit props etc. brought back.

In 1827 the Bottom or New Road (old A55) was constructed. It was a turnpike road. Later deep mines were sunk. Galchog adjacent to the cricket field closed 1879. Dublin Main 1873/4 abandoned 1886, was below the bottom pub, Galchog Main lasted from 1897 to 1913.

To meet the spiritual needs of the growing village, the Calvinistic Methodists (Presbyterians) established a cause in 1803, subsequently building a church in 1840, in Cork. It is now two houses. In 1895 the present chapel was built. The Methodists, after meeting in a cottage opened a Church in 1837 at the corner of Bryn Gwyn Lane which is now a house. The present Chapel was opened in 1874. In 1882 the Established church set up in a tin building, their East Northop Mission Church. NB the name.

For a short time in the middle of the century the Presbyterians set up a school in the Chapel in Cork. Many children received a little learning in Dame Schools, e.g. in Brighton Row a miner's wife would teach a few children. In 1881 the Pentre Moch Board School was opened. In 1909 it was partially burnt down to be replaced by a new school which stood next to St Mary's Church. This was demolished in the 1980's.

In 1912 the present St Mary's Church was opened. Gradually the Village became known as Northop Hall after the house of that name.

Northop Hall was a small intimate village. Everybody knew everybody and most were related. Jones, Williams, Hughes, Roberts, Peers and Millington were the common surnames. People or families were given nicknames to identify them.

The village was under the control of four local authorities. The largest, the western part, was under Holywell R.D.C. The bottom part was in Connah's Quay U.D.C. Buckley U.D.C. and Hawarden R.D.C. Wepre Brook was the boundary.

Most houses, built in the early part of the 20th Century or even dating back to the 19th Century had soil closets and were without bathrooms or electricity. Most were rented. At night the village was in darkness except for the Connah's Quay U.D.C. area. Here there were a number of lamp posts. Mr Isaiah Davies lit the oil lamps every night but occasionally naughty boys would blow them out. Later electricity was brought to all of the village and later still the village streets were lit.

There were a number of big houses in the district, Brook Park, now the Northop Hall Country House Hotel (formerly the

Chequers Hotel) was the home of Mr Watkinson whose family owned the local collieries, Plas Ifan, Mr and Mrs Astbury, Highfield Hall, Mr J Platt cotton merchant, Plas Bellin Mr Charlton.

Most men worked at Summers Steelworks Shotton, Courtaulds Textile Mills Flint and Greenfield, the local brick-works or later at Broughton Aircraft works. Married women tended to stay at home. A number of farms were in operation - Pentre Farm, Roberts, Cae Llys, Williams, White House Farm, Williams, Cae Eithin, Cotterall, Brookside Farm, Jones, Wellfield Farm, Latham, Galchog Farm, Astbury and Northop Hall Farm, Reid or Lloyd.

There were several shops, sometimes in the front rooms of houses managed by the wives while the husbands were working. They included Isaiah Davies, T.C. Roberts, Carrie Hughes, Co-op grocery and drapery departments, W. Millington, Miss M Williams and one or two others. There were two barbers' shops. Joe Astbury had his in a wooden hut on the opposite side just below the Black Lion. Between the Black Lion and Carrie's Shop was a wooden hut where Allan Jones had his. It was common to be shaved with a cut throat razor. Bread, milk, fruit and veg and coal were taken around the village by horse and cart or van. Milk was also supplied at the farms. In the Reading Room, Alf Peers had a printing press. He also sold sweets and delivered newspapers. Doctors had surgeries in houses in the village. Doctors Collier and Herford practiced for many years.

There was a bus service from Mold to Chester but for many years it bypassed the village. People had to walk to the Smithy or Rees's Nurseries in the hope of getting on. A bus made a journey from Birkenhead to the Loggerheads, later returning. There were few cars. A taxi service, usually at weekends, was run by T.C. Roberts, I. Davies and J. Williams.

The two pubs -Boar's Head and Black Lion - were more commonly known as the Top and Bottom Monkey. There is no definitive explanation as to their names. Women generally did not go to the pubs

The local Bobby, based in Northop, was regularly seen on his bike and held in some awe.

The Miners Institute, opened in about 1927, played an important part in village life. Billiards was the popular game. It was the venue for concerts and a visit by a theatrical group who put on a melodrama. Outside were tennis courts and a bowling green. Mr. Millington kept strict control. Outside also was the village memorial to the dead of the 1st World War. At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month a memorial service was held - the school children walked down to attend this service.

The Post Office was run by Mrs. Stokes. Mr. Stokes made toffees which were very popular. A horticultural show would, from time to time, be held in the Church House and the adjacent field. A travelling circus would set up its tent in a field by the Boar's Head Pub. The village often had football teams. The playing fields varied- below the Hillcrest estate at the top of the village, down Pentre Farm lane on the left where the road goes up, but most often in a field next to the Boar's Head Pub. The cricket team, established in 1908 had a fine reputation regularly supplying players for the county side. The team was made up mostly of local boys and they played local teams in the main. The W.I. founded in 1936 was strong and at one time had a good choir.

A commercial railway ran through the village from Buckley Junction to Connah's Quay. Twice a day the steam engine and trucks called at the sidings. Here coal was delivered to the local traders. The railway also took bricks, coal, pottery etc. to Connah's Quay Docks. It closed in 1967. The railway line also provided a way for people to walk to Deeside. It was also used by workers going to John Summers to businesses and going to school. Those going to the Hippodrome Connah's Quay, Alhambra and Ritz Shotton often went this way.

Practically all the children attended the village school. Some boys of large and poor families walked to Northop School. They were Blue Coat Boys aided financially by money from the Owen Jones Charity which owned Well Field Farm.

From 1920 to 1955 Mr. Ernest Jones reigned supreme. He was a Headmaster in the old mould. The cane was often in use. He was a fine pianist. Miss Williams who started in 1899 and retired 50 years later was in charge of the infants. Misses Davies and Wallace and Mr. Trebor Williams taught at various times. The 3 R's dominated. In the big room on Friday morning it was Arithmetic until noon. Out came some well used cards which must have been in use for years with such sums as, 'Multiply £13. 17. 9. 3/4 by 37 or Reduce £3. 16. 5. 3/4 to farthings.' If the sum was wrong you were sent to do again.

My memory of music is, in a lower class, going up and down the Modulator. Hardly entertaining - especially for the boys. Poetry had to be learnt by heart. 'The Brook,' 'Pedlars Caravan,' and 'Nobody' come to mind. The same was true of Scripture - Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, 23 psalm Beatitudes etc were all committed to memory. P. T. was Drill in the yard.

We attended Buckley Baths for swimming. We had good Football and Cricket teams for a small school. Boys were taught gardening and for a time went to Ewloe Green School for woodwork and the girls for cookery. Very little was displayed on the walls but there was a map of the World showing the British Empire in red.

There was central heating but also fireplaces where fires were sometimes lit. In the early days there were no school meals - children went home or had packed lunches. Horlicks was at one time on sale in the morning break. The school was spacious, dating back to 1911 with a part of the previous 1881 building which was burnt down 1909. It was designed to take children up to the age of fourteen. When secondary education became universal, children left at eleven. Hence there was plenty of room for the sixty or seventy who now attended.

The teachers had to cope with a class embracing two or three years. Children sat at heavy cast iron desks - two to a desk. Seated at high desk was the teacher. The class register was sacred. Ink was in the desk well. The pens had nibs which soon corroded.

At the age of eleven, children went to Hawarden County School or Deeside Central School. School life was usually routine. There were visits from the school dentist who would set up his equipment in a classroom.

A regular visitor was Tommy Titus Williams. He was the School Attendance Officer who checked on absentees. We also had talks on subjects such as Tuberculosis. A welcome guest was the Rev. Shiel a kindly retired clergyman who entertained and gave out sweets. With the partitions drawn back the school was used for concerts and dances etc.

In 1935 the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary was celebrated and in 1937 the Coronation of King George VI. Parties were held. Commemoration Cups were given to the children and there were fireworks at Highfield Hall. Mr. Jones retired in 1955 and was succeeded by Mr. A Rawlings. After the war Mrs. Chesters and Miss Jean Lloyd Williams joined the staff and gave noble service.

Village life was quiet and safe. There were few burglaries. Possessions were left out side and doors were left unlocked. Most had radios. TV only arrived in the Fifties. Life for children was simple, boys wore short trousers and boots. Best clothes were kept for Sundays or special occasions. Women did not wear trousers in the early years. There were few road vehicles so children could play on the road in safety. Games were football, cricket, Hop-Scotch, Skipping, Marbles, Whip and Top, French Cricket, Tag etc.

The village was surrounded by fields now occupied by estates. Here children could play or look for mushrooms. The area opposite the Post Office was known as "The Banks," a rough patch of land boys played cowboys and Indians, often re-enacting what they had seen at a matinee in the Hippodrome on Saturday afternoons.

There were clubs in the churches for the older youth. Here all kinds of activities took place. Most children were at home early especially in the dark nights. Draughts, Snakes and Ladders Dominoes, Monopoly, Ludo and card games were played. There were no TV's or computers. Many learnt the piano. At Christmas there were parties in the churches, Santa Claus, Christmas tree, food, presents and of course party games.. Postman's knock, Pass the Parcel, Musical Arms, The Grand Old Duke of York gave much enjoyment. Almost all children attended Sunday school, The places of worship were quite well attended. Most families identified with one church. Some children would attend two Sunday schools -Methodist in the morning either the Church or Presbyterian in the afternoon. St Mary's church had a sizeable choir of Men and Boys. The Presbyterian Church had a strong Girl Guildry and a good drama society which put on plays. For a time the Methodist Church had a Boys Brigade. The Sunday school anniversaries were great occasions. Children with new clothes and dresses sang and recited. For the church the flower festival at Northop was a special event. For the Methodists the Jubilee was very important. Children and adults paraded up the village and sang Hymns or songs at various spots. This was followed by a tea. Sandwiches and Bara Brith was the norm. Ladies with large teapots filled the cups. Afterwards sports were held in the field next to the chapel.

A favourite meeting place for the men was the Smithy. Here Fred and Evan Jones reigned. Horses were shod, equipment was made or repaired, children's hoops were made.

Two events stood out in the year. For the children the Sunday school trip, usually to Rhyl was the highlight. Children saved up and on the day, two or three buses would head for Rhyl. The first sight of the promised land was the water tower just outside of Rhyl. Armed with buckets and spades, they made for the shore. Here were Punch and Judy, cycling and paddling areas. Open air variety and much more. The climax was the visit to the Marine Lake. With candy floss bought at the top we made our way down an avenue of kiosks - the palmist, fortune teller, shooting gallery and shy stall. Then across the road into the Marine Lake proper. Here was the Lit-tie Train, The Tunnel of Love, Helter Skelter, Ghost Train, Dodgem boats and lots of games. Fortified with chips or ice cream we would head for home where the villagers would be outside awaiting our return.

The other event was carol singing. Along with the Christmas parties it made Christmas. All Churches went carol singing. Prior to Christmas Eve the outskirts would be visited. But on Christmas Eve they went round the village one vying with the other. At one time the Methodists sang through the night and had breakfast at Chapel. On Boxing Day Northop Band would play in the village. On New Year's Eve the Presbyterian Men, starting at midnight at Brook Park, would sing to their own members.

Elections brought a certain colour in to village life. Most families were identified with a political party. Party colours were

displayed. It some times led to strong words.

The 1939-45 war was a watershed. Young men and women were called up to the forces, land army or factories. Evacuees came here from Liverpool. Gas masks were issued. Villagers joined the A.R.P. The Home Guard was formed. National days of prayer were held with church parades. A search light was set-up off Bryn Gwyn Lane. At the end of Bryn Gwyn Lane a P.o.W. Camp was established. Plaques were awarded for e.g. saving for victory campaigns.

Concerts were held to raise money for servicemen. A number of Village men gave their lives.

The old village changed especially with the coming of sewage disposal, more cars and TV in the sixties. New estates were built on fields where formerly children played and hay was gathered. Old houses e.g. Brighton Row were pulled down. New comers with a different style settled here. As the poet said “The old order changeth, yielding place to new”

Useful Sources of Information

Lloyd’s Parochialia 1690 in Welsh
History of Northop 1832 Edwards
Flint Hist Soc Transactions Vol 22
Buckley Soc Magazines
W.M.C.Q. Buckley Railway Boyd
Flintshire Place Names Ellis Davies
Gazetteers and Postal Directories
School Log Books 1881-1950c
Northop Parish Registers

Census Returns 1840.1890 Micro Film
archives.
Also availalbe from Flint County Archives.

Maps.

Ogilby Road Map 1675 ; John Evans 1795
O.S.Maps from 1840
Maps and Plans on roads, railway, Mining.
Photographs Village

The Four Lane End Smithy

Lonely it stood at four lanes end
A nearby oak some shade did it lend
This was a favourite place of meeting
For one was always assured of a greeting
Here Fred and Evan plied their trade
Horses were shod, children’s hoops were made
Truly this was a strange combination
For, whereas Fred was given to meditation
Evan, when on occasion he was stirred
Would bring forth many a colourful word
Locals and wayfarers would often call
Discuss the news and the past recall
Work was life. Fred and Evan did not many
But relied on Mary Lizzie and Annie
These humble folk lived out their days
In rustic, unsophisticated ways
Alas, the flaming forge, the bellows roar
The homely ways are now no more
Gone the burning sparks the hammers blow
Where stood the smithy, weeds and bushes grow
Yet as we gaze on the spot where it used to be
We remember with love, Fred, Evan and the old smithy

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