

THE GATEACRE SOCIETY

Founded 1974. Registered Charity No.508024.
A member of the British Association for Local History
and the Merseyside Civic Society

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WE NEED NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

If you would like to know more about what is involved,
please have a word with any existing member

Annual Membership Subscriptions

Household £4 Single pensioner £3 Company, etc. £6

If you wish to join the Society, please send the appropriate subscription to the
Membership Secretary, David Phythian, 26 Primrose Road, Liverpool L18 2HE:
cheques payable to 'The Gateacre Society'.

*The Society's membership year ends on 31st October. If you are already a member,
your address label indicates the date when your next subscription payment is due.*

Our Book - Gateacre & Belle Vale: in old photographs -
is on sale at our meetings and events, price **£10** (bookshop price £12.99).

Our Tea-towel is also available, price **£4**.

Visit our website - or contact Beryl Plent or Pam Ball for further details.

DO YOU HAVE AN EMAIL ADDRESS?

If so, and if you would like to receive your Newsletters by email
instead of by post, please let us know by sending a message to
membership@gatsoc.org.uk quoting your name and postcode

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The Gateacre Society

Guarding the Past - Safeguarding the Future

NEWSLETTER - July 2017

Our next meeting:

KITTY WILKINSON: the Saint of the Slums

**An illustrated talk by Pauline Hurst
in Gateacre Chapel,
Gateacre Brow L25 3PB
on Monday 10th July at 7.30 p.m.**

In 1832, during a cholera epidemic, Mrs Catherine (Kitty) Wilkinson had the only heating boiler in her neighbourhood of Liverpool. She helped her neighbours to wash infected clothes and bedding - so this was effectively the first public washhouse. Ten years later, with public funds, her efforts resulted in the opening of a combined washhouse and public baths in Upper Frederick Street, the first in the U.K.

We are pleased to welcome back Pauline Hurst, who has spoken to us twice before. This well-illustrated talk also looks at the development and use of public bathing and swimming facilities, by reference to the extensive local Health Reports in the Liverpool archives.

ALL WELCOME - Admission free - Donations invited



COACH TRIP

Our trip to North Wales on 22nd July is now fully booked. All those who have paid should have received their tickets. Any enquiries, please phone Mike Chitty on 428 7801.

HERITAGE OPEN DAY

On Saturday 9th September, Gateacre Unitarian Chapel will be welcoming visitors from 10.30am-4pm, and St Stephen's Church will be open from 10 until 3 o'clock. Members of the respective congregations will be on hand to show people around, and we shall be providing guided historical walks between the two venues.

Mike Chitty will lead a two-hour circular walk, taking in Sandfield Road and the site of 'The Nook', visiting St Stephen's and returning via Belle Vale Road. This walk will start from the Chapel at 1pm. Another two-hour walk, following the same route but starting at St Stephen's Church and including a visit to the Chapel, will leave from St Stephen's at 2.30pm.

Like all of the activities in the Heritage Open Days programme, these events are open to all, free of charge.

LIVERPOOL BOTANIC GARDENS 1802-2017

Our March talk – reviewed by Mike Chitty

Steve Lyus, who spoke to us on 19th March, has been researching the history of Liverpool's botanical collections, and campaigning to keep them intact and on view to the public.

The story began in 1800 when two Liverpool doctors – Bostock and Rutter – proposed the creation of botanic gardens and a museum of natural history. William Roscoe and Rev William Shepherd (of Gateacre Chapel) were among those supporting the plan. The purpose was to enable the study of nature, and the economic and medicinal value of plants, using living specimens, and to provide a pleasure garden near the rapidly expanding town.

In order to establish the gardens, shares were issued to 'proprietors' and the Corporation was asked to provide a suitable piece of land. The site chosen – in the Mosslake Fields area – was bounded by what became Olive, Myrtle and Laurel Streets. The gardens opened in 1802/3, and a plan published in 1808 shows their layout, with a Curator's House and Library at the entrance and a Conservatory behind. The catalogue listed 4,823 different species.

The first curator was John Shepherd (no relation to William) who was paid £60 per annum "plus house, coal and candles". The plants came from the proprietors, collectors and sea captains. Between 1820 and 1840 Liverpool was the leading botanic garden in Britain, and was exchanging specimens and seeds with others including St Petersburg and Calcutta. By the 1830s, however, the gardens were completely surrounded by buildings, and suffering the effects of air pollution. Six acres of land in the West Derby township – on the south side of Edge Lane – were purchased, and opened in 1836. Many of the plants, including mature trees hauled on wheels by horses, were transferred from the original site.

Sadly, the gardens failed to cover their running costs, and in 1846 they faced extinction. Liverpool Corporation took over, using its powers under the Museums Act 1845. Free access was allowed to the public, visitor numbers climbed to 250,000 a year, and the gardens became famous for orchids and gingers in particular. However in 1858 the newly-appointed curator, Johann Wilhelm Birschel, who had worked at Kew and Chatsworth, reported that the grounds were in a "very poor state", the hot-house temperatures were "never regulated", and the tools were in "very bad order". He resigned a few months later.

The gardens remained at Edge Lane – as part of Wavertree Park – until after WW2. There were constant worries about the neglect of the collections, and sulphurous smoke from the nearby houses, gasworks and railway yards added to the problem. During the war, the gardens were blitzed, and Air Raid Wardens stationed in the buildings burnt the historic records to keep warm! After the war the decision was taken to move the gardens to Harthill within Calderstones Park. Orchid specialist Percival Conn became Superintendent of Liverpool Parks, and embarked on developing 'The Liverpool Orchids' species collection.

Conn told the Council, in 1951, that he needed £32,000 for new greenhouses. He was given just £1,320 – and it was 1964 before the new gardens opened to the public. What Steve called "the good times" (with 16 glasshouses, each 100ft long) lasted for 15 years, until 1979. The collections were exhibited, and won awards, around the world. But when Militant Tendency took over the Council in 1983, the horticulturists were sent to cut grass verges, and in 1984 the gardens closed. Nowadays the vestibule (housing the Calder Stones) survives, but there are just brambles where the glasshouses used to be.

Between 1984 and 2007, the 10,000 plants rescued from Harthill, and relocated to Greenhills Nursery in Garston, were "invisible to the world". Some tree ferns were taken to Sefton Park Palm House, and other plants went to the Eden Project, Chester Zoo and Kew. Then in 2008 – Liverpool's Capital of Culture year – Jyll Bradley published "Mr Roscoe's Garden" and persuaded the City Council to exhibit at Chelsea. Displays followed at Tatton Park and Southport. It was decided to close Greenhills Nursery, but to move "one of each plant" to Croxteth Hall. Fortunately that restriction was ignored, and today the Victorian Walled Garden at Croxteth is home to what is left of the city's botanical collections. For the time being, the threat to their existence has been lifted. Steve ended his fascinating talk by encouraging everyone to visit the Walled Garden when it re-opens for the summer.

A CLEAN-UP DAY

On Saturday 2nd September, the Friends of Gateacre will be tidying-up the village in preparation for Heritage Open Day. New helpers are always welcome. Please come along to the Grange Lane/Belle Vale Road corner, ready for a 9.30am start.

For further details, visit the special FOG page on our website.

GLENACRES RIGHT OF WAY

On 20th June the City Council submitted all the documentation to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, who is responsible for determining 'disputed' Public Right of Way claims. The Planning Inspectorate will now have to decide whether to invite further written representations, or to arrange a local hearing/public inquiry. We understand that it is likely to be a further 27-35 weeks before the final verdict on our Right of Way claim is announced.

28a-d GATEACRE BROW

The black-and-white building on the corner of Sandfield Road, originally built in 1891 as a telephone exchange and shops, was sold at auction in December 2016. The new owners, Karl Winter and Phil Melia, have recently given members of the Gateacre Society's committee a tour of the building, and explained to us their plans for the future. They have submitted an application for planning permission (ref.17F/1386) and listed building consent (17L/1387) to convert the upper floors – plus the rear part of the ground floor – into 5 flats, with 5 car parking spaces laid out in the yard at the rear. The front part of the ground floor will remain in business use, and no significant changes are planned to the outside appearance of the building.

We have expressed concern about the car parking situation, and have suggested that just 3 or 4 flats would be more appropriate. We have also asked for more detailed information on the proposal to be made available, so that local residents are in a better position to comment. Meanwhile we hope to assist the owners in finding a solution to the longstanding problem of damage to the building from passing lorries, whose drivers regularly misjudge the extent of the overhang as they turn into Sandfield Road.

REMEMBER THE H20?

Just a few weeks ago, the bus stop sign outside Gateacre Chapel was replaced with a new version, reading 'Buses towards Woolton, Hunts Cross, Speke'. Until then, the sign had read 'H20' – a bus service that last operated in June 1994! Do you have any photographs of the H20 – which ran between Runcorn and Liverpool city centre – or other services such as the H24 (which took 90 minutes to reach Gateacre from Chester on its way to Liverpool)?

A new era begins on Sunday 23rd July, when – in addition to the 89 to John Lennon Airport – the 174 bus starts to call at this stop en route to Woolton Hill Road, Reynolds Park and St Peter's Church, before returning to Gateacre along Kings Drive and Halewood Road on its way to Belle Vale.

Photo: The bus stop sign as it was, earlier this year. The building in the background is 28a-d Gateacre Brow.

