

# THE GATEACRE SOCIETY

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

Website: [www.gatsoc.org.uk](http://www.gatsoc.org.uk) Email: [info@gatsoc.org.uk](mailto:info@gatsoc.org.uk)

## Executive Committee 2017/18

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David Phythian, 26 Primrose Road, L18 2HE *Membership Sec.*

Pam Ball, Flat 1 St Stephens Court, Halewood Road, L25 3PG (428 0500)

*Sales Officer*

Sandra Sandland *Assistant Sales Officer*

## 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](mailto:membership@gatsoc.org.uk) quoting your name and postcode

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# The Gateacre Society

*Guarding the Past - Safeguarding the Future*

## NEWSLETTER - May 2018

### Our next talk:

## THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION OF 1956, ITS AFTERMATH AND MY ESCAPE

by **Dr Andrew Zsigmond**  
in Gateacre Chapel,  
Gateacre Brow L25 3PB  
on **Monday 21st May at 7.30 p.m.**

Andrew Zsigmond was a medical student in Hungary when the uprising started in October 1956. A year later he was living in a new country, speaking a new language and studying medicine in Liverpool. How did this extraordinary journey come about?

Like many of his compatriots, Andrew had joined the fight against communist rule. However, after some initial successes the revolution was crushed. He was forced into hiding - and then to escape to Austria along with four friends. They entered a refugee camp, from where they were 'rescued' by a double-deck London bus which was a recruiting office for the National Coal Board. A few days later they arrived in Barnsley, with jobs as apprentice miners, but eventually, following the intervention of the local MP, Andrew was offered a place at the University of Liverpool to continue his studies. Liverpool has been his home ever since - though Dr Zsigmond became the Honorary Hungarian Consul, and has maintained his links with his homeland in other ways.

**ALL WELCOME - Admission free - Donations invited**



### Our summer coach trip on Saturday 28th July: **THE YORKSHIRE SCULPTURE PARK AND WAKEFIELD**

Participants will have the option of visiting either the Sculpture Park (where a lot of walking is necessary to appreciate all of the open-air exhibits) or the city of Wakefield. Please see our website for details, or phone Mike Chitty on 428 7801. As usual, the trip is being organised by the Wavertree Society but is open to our Society's members and friends, and the coach will pick up outside the Black Bull at 9 a.m. Tickets are available from Mike, price £15 a head (cheques payable to The Wavertree Society, please).

# THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY IN RUNCORN & WIDNES

Our January 2018 talk – reviewed by Mike Chitty

Dr Diana Leitch – a trustee of the Catalyst Discovery Centre in Widnes – took us through two centuries of the chemical industry's development, highlighting the key role that both Runcorn and Widnes have played in its history.

In the 18th century, Liverpool people went to the villages of Runcorn and Widnes for the good of their health. But within 50 years there were complaints about 'acid rain' killing trees. The solution adopted – the building of taller chimneys – was ineffective, and living conditions deteriorated. Nevertheless the towns continued to attract people, because of the jobs available. The raw materials – salt from Cheshire, coal from Lancashire, lime from Buxton and North Wales – could all be easily obtained by canal or railway.

Industrialists also came from far afield. Johnson, Hazelhurst, Hutchinson, Gossage (an apothecary from Skegness), Gaskell, Mathieson and McKechnie (from the Mull of Kintyre) and Wigg (from Suffolk) became famous local names. Some of them lived in fine mansions in Runcorn, but others lived further away, e.g. Holbrook Gaskell in Woolton and Neil Mathieson near Sefton Park.

Soap was regarded as a 'magical' product because it made people clean. Heaps of the notorious 'galligu' waste product were regarded as a necessary evil. Men came from Germany, Poland, Russia and Lithuania – as well as Wales and Scotland – to work in the factories. 12-year-old boys made packing cases, and women cut up and packed the soap. Diana showed us photographs of 'bleach men' swathed in cloth, whose bare hands suffered chemical burns.

The United Alkali Company was founded in 1890 as an amalgamation of small firms, to fight off competition. The Hurter Laboratory was established in Widnes by a Swiss chemist. The Castner Kellner works was set up in Runcorn using American equipment – and is still producing chlorine 121 years later. The Salt Union was founded in 1882, piping brine to Weston Point.

The 20th century saw more mergers. Lever Brothers took over Gossages, and soap making in Widnes ceased. ICI was created in 1926, as a combination of United Alkali, Brunner Mond (of Northwich), British Dyestuffs (of Blackley) and Nobel (of Ayrshire). ICI was a philanthropic employer. Activities such as Rose Queen festivals and pensioners' parties were recorded in the staff magazine; the copies held at Catalyst are now a very useful historical source. Sadly, the name has now disappeared, as the various divisions were sold off one by one.

WW2 saw Widnes play a key (though top secret) role in the development and manufacture of poison gas, and research on uranium isotopes. The workers at the Hurter Laboratory and the 'Hush Hush Works' on Wigg Island had to sign the Official Secrets Act. After the war, the research continued. Dr Charles Suckling, who lived in Woolton, invented Halothane, the first non-flammable anaesthetic.

Diana recommended the Manchester Ship Canal cruise as a way of seeing what is left today. More especially, she recommended a visit to the Catalyst Discovery Centre, which was founded in the former Gossages building in 1987 to preserve artefacts and archives and to promote teaching of the 'STEM' subjects in schools. No doubt many of our members will have been sufficiently inspired by Diana's talk to follow her advice this summer.

# SANDFIELD ROAD SUCCESS

The site meeting mentioned in our last Newsletter took place on 2nd March. The outcome was an agreement that the City Council's highways department would draw up plans to mitigate the damage to the listed building, 28a-d Gateacre Brow, on which both we and the owners of the building would be consulted. Another outcome, thanks primarily to Cllr Malcolm Kelly, was a meeting with the Merseyside Regional Director of Travis Perkins, Mr Marc Chitryn. He immediately announced a series of measures to be taken by the company, including the provision of trained 'banksmen' to guide reversing lorries, a reduction in the number of companies allowed to deliver to the Sandfield Road depot, and restrictions on the hours during which deliveries will be accepted. It is recognised, however, that not all the damage has been inflicted by vehicles visiting Travis Perkins, so there is still a need for adjustments to the kerbs and bollards, and possibly new signage at the Gateacre Brow junction. Funding will be a problem, but the hope is that the work can be carried out as part of the long-overdue resurfacing of Gateacre Brow.

## GRANGE LANE VERGES

When the planning application was submitted to build houses on the former Gateacre Comp School site, we expressed concern about the future of the grass verge which was such a distinctive feature of Grange Lane. We were assured that the surrounding pavements would be relaid like-for-like, i.e. with grass verges in Grange Lane and Gateacre Park Drive but not in Cuckoo Lane.

The Grange Lane verge is now interrupted by 57 driveways to the new houses, but new turf has been laid in between the driveways to maintain a predominantly green frontage. Following early damage to the turf caused by pavement parking, white post-and-chain fences have been installed to keep vehicles off the grass. Recently, however, we noted that tarmac had been laid in a few places – e.g. either side of Chantry Road, which is the new side turning off Grange Lane – where grass had been indicated on the Site Plan. This has been reported to Countryside Properties' project manager, as well as to the City Council's highways and planning departments, and we very much hope that remedial action will be taken.

## VISIT OUR WEBSITE

*for more information, colour images and web links relating to some of the items in this Newsletter*

## DIARY DATES

**Mon 9th July:**  
'Liverpool Cowkeepers' talk by Dave Joy, 7.30pm.

**Sat 15th September:**  
Heritage Open Day in Gateacre

**Sat-Sun 6th-7th October:**  
Big History Show at the Western Approaches HQ Museum, Liverpool

**Sun 28th October:**  
Gateacre Society A.G.M., 2.30pm

## PUBLIC INQUIRY PROGRESS

The Inquiry into our Public Right of Way Claim for Glenacres/Byron Court took place on 27th-29th March, and re-convened on 13th April. Unfortunately it was not possible to close the Inquiry on that day, because a vital document – the Head Lease which would establish who actually owns the Byron Court land across which the disputed path runs – had not been found.

Both the Inspector and the City Council's solicitor agreed that the Byron Court Management Company need to be given a chance to prove that they had a legal right to challenge users of the path. While the document is not crucial to our own argument – which is that a Right of Way already existed before Byron Court was built – a failure to find it will certainly strengthen our case. The Inquiry re-convenes on Tuesday 14th August, 10am, at Woolton Golf Club.