

Chairman's Report 2016

The year started by commemorating the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta, when Professor Graeme White gave a talk on Cheshire's own Magna Carta, in which the Earl of Chester, Ranulf III agreed with his eight local Barons the way in which they would keep their serfs so that the Barons would remain loyal to him.

In February, Linda Webb illustrated the story of James Hampson Spencer, a Victorian chemist and photographer with premises in Bridge Street. He photographed the visit by the Prince of Wales to the Royal Agricultural Show when it was held in Hoole in 1893, and also was an official photographer of the Grosvenor family at Eaton Hall and of Gladstone at Hawarden. His techniques were clearly at the forefront of the new camerawork which was then developing.



Pot lid from Spencer's Shop and one of his early photographs taken at Chester Castle

In March, Ray Buss from the Chester Canal Heritage Trust guided us along the canals and rivers around Chester, from the Queensferry Bridge to Ellesmere Port, highlighting the industries and businesses which had developed. Plans for a canal which would have run parallel to Westminster Road to the River Mersey were shared and we also learned that the Chapel on Hoole Lane opposite the Lock Vaults was in fact a Mission Church of St. Paul's in Boughton and designed by John Douglas.

A presentation on Flookersbrook was given by John Ebo, illustrating its early history and the extent of the land to which it gave its name; how the Earl of Kilmorey became a major landowner and the Walker and Lightfoot families played a large role in its development; and the significant legacy of Charles Brown, 6 times Mayor of Chester, who was responsible for the Flookersbrook Improvement Act 1876 which ensured the conservation of the area which we know today.



Flookersbrook at the end of the 19th Century

Using material from the County Record Office and his own photographs, Phil Cook took us over (and under) Hoole Road Bridge sharing its construction and development as Chester General Railway Station became the convergence of many lines; schemes for its widening and the consequences for the surrounding area were illustrated and although many changes have taken place since, the Bridge remains essentially as it was when it was built in 1841.



An even older route was traced by Monty Mercer as he examined the Roman Road from Wilderspool near Warrington through Chester and across the Dee. After crossing the River Gowy in Mickle Trafford it passed through Hoole Bank where it was known as The Street, came through Newton Hollows, diverted to cross Flookersbrook (the stream) and probably crossed the Dee by a causeway where the Weir is now.



Postcards of Newton Hollows



*Robert Morrison
Former Curate of All
Saints Church*

In the lead-up to the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, Dave Rees presented a talk in June on the Battle and the men of Hoole who took part. We heard about the week-long artillery bombardment before the 1st July infantry attack, the fighting continuing in twelve separate battles until November and details of some of the 19 men of the area who gave their lives, including Robert Morrison former curate at All Saints Church.

On the 1st of July members of the Society organised a small ceremony at Hoole War Memorial to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of the Somme. After 2 minutes silence a whistle was blown at 7.30 am, to coincide with the start of the first assault. The names of the fallen were read out and a wreath of poppies laid. Some 30 people attended.

In November, Ann Marie Curtis of the St. Werburgh's Parish World War I Group gave an update on the latest findings from their researches including details of the large Belgium community who came to Chester when their country was overrun at the start of the War.

The Society was asked to be a part of the National War Memorials Project which aims to record, and also help preserve, Memorials which may be in schools, community centres, works, business premises etc. The help of members is sought in identifying them.

In September, your Chairman gave a presentation on The Ermine (now The Flookersbrook). In Victorian times, it was an important hotel offering accommodation and stabling, and hosting functions of local organisation e.g. Flookersbrook, Newton and Hoole Female Friendly Society, Volunteer Fire Brigade, and Hoole Cricket Club. Auction sales and a cattle market were held there and its significance in the Hoole & Newton community was underlined.



The Ermine in the 1950's (left) was the original Victorian building which had been clad to look old world. The windows and bay remain the same but the entrance porch was replaced by a canopy

Four years on from the formation of Hoole History & Heritage Society members were reminded of changes that have taken place in that short period of time: Hoole 2012 - 2016
3 banks closed; The Bee Hive occupied by Richer Sounds; The Elms Medical Centre closed; Hoole Library now an Academy; 'Leahurst' replaced by a large retirement home; the Park Lodge sold; Sainsburys in Faulkner Street; at least 3 restaurants opened; the Co-Op to be closed; The Grange, one of the last properties on Hoole's Tithe Map still standing, to be converted into apartments.

In October, Members were asked to review the Society's progress to date and to look to the future. Some 25 members contributed to a stimulating evening and your Committee are looking at ways to respond to the issues raised – a summary will be provided at the Annual General Meeting.

The Society has continued to contribute a History Corner in the freely distributed Hoole Roundabout which now also covers Newton. Articles on different streets and areas have provoked great interest. Besides creating publicity for the society, they have led to new information and inquiries; queries have also come via our website and examples include: Vivien Terrace; Archibald Manley; Properties in Peploe Street; Queensway; Did Yanks stay at the Bromfield during World War II?; Does Wendy Ives, Hoole's 1951 Festival Queen still live locally?. The Society has worked closely with The Hammond School to commemorate its centenary and its location at Hoole Bank House.

Talks have been given to a number of organisations during the year which raise awareness and often result in new information being found. They are also a source of income for the Society.

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| 1 December 2015 | Phil Cook to British Transport Pensioners' Federation - Chester, N Wales & Merseyside Branch – <i>'Local Railway History'</i> |
| 10 December 2015 | Monty Mercer to Burton Historical Society – <i>'The Royal Agricultural Show in Hoole, June 1893'</i> |
| 8 March 2016 | Monty Mercer to the Sight Impaired Group, Garden Lane Centre – <i>'The Royal Agricultural Show in Hoole, June 1893'</i> |
| 27 July 2016 | Phil Cook to Institute of Railway Operators – <i>'Tour of Chester General Railway Station'</i> |
| 29 July 2016 | Linda Webb to Eaton Lodge, Hoole Road – <i>'The Workhouse & Alexandra Park'</i> |
| 19 September 2016 | John Ebo to New Church Monday Club, Brook Lane – <i>'Flookersbrook'</i> |
| 25 October 2016 | Linda Webb to The Friendship Group at the United Reformed Church, Hoole Road <i>'The Workhouse & City Hospital'</i> |

Committee members also addressed the Cheshire Local History Research Forum about the problems and needs that a newly formed Society faces in trying to organise an archive. The Society is now a part of CWAC's Heritage Forum arrangements, working with Chester Civic Trust re development and conservation issues in Hoole.

As at the 5th November 2016, the Society had 36 individual, 38 family, 8 business and 3 group members – total 85.

Members will be aware of the amount of information which has been gathered and shared during 2016. The pace of change has emphasised that the conservation of both the property and the records of the area has never been more essential.



The off-licence on the corner of Charles Street and Westminster Road was run for many years by Archibald Manley, pictured here in his World War I uniform