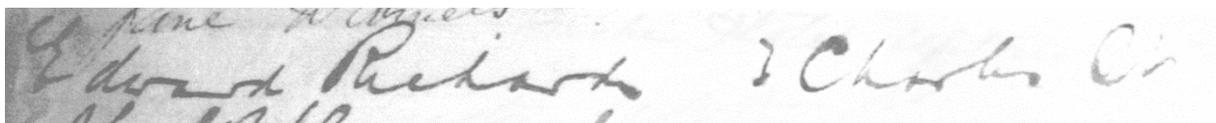


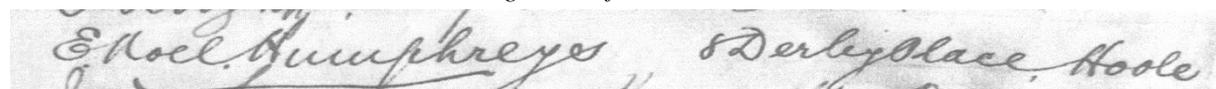
The Baker and the Accountant: two of the Petitioners for “direct access to the station” in 1889

Why did Edward Richards and Edward Noel Humphreys sign the Memorial (Petition) to The London and North Western and Great Western Joint Railway Companies in 1889? If we examine the available facts about their lives and attachment to Hoole we can come to a possible answer.

At the time of the Petition, both men lived in Hoole. Edward Richards at forty-four, was already a well-known local businessman. E. Noel Humphreys (as he liked to be known) aged twenty-two, was just starting out.



1889 Signature of Edward Richards



1889 Signature of E. Noel Humphreys

Their names can also be found together on another legal document relating to the sale and purchase of a Hoole property twenty-two years later in 1911.



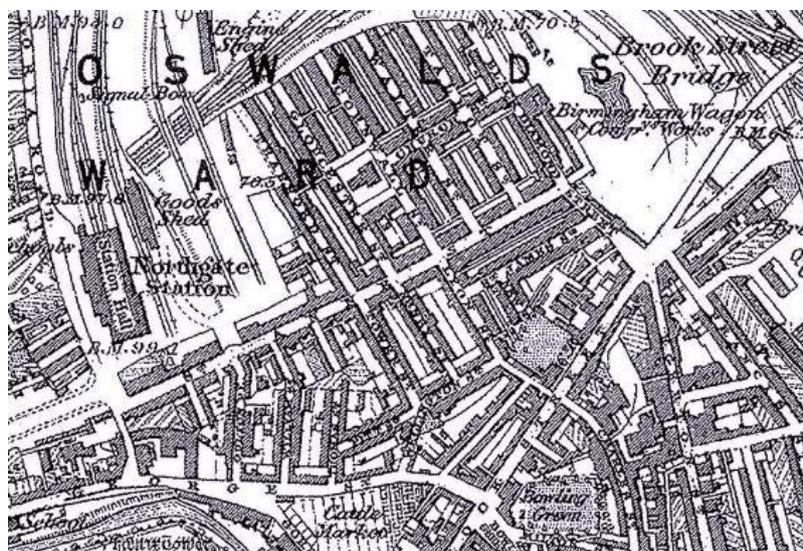
1911 Signatures E. Richards and E. Noel Humphreys

How had they become involved in that transaction? From parish and census records, newspaper reports and trade directories we can piece together an outline of their lives and Hoole connections.

The Richards Family

Edward was named for his paternal grandfather, a domestic gardener who, with his wife, Jane, had settled in Back Brook Street with their seven children. Their fifth child, Henry Francis, was to become Edward's father. Henry was baptised on 22nd October 1820 at St. John the Baptist Church.

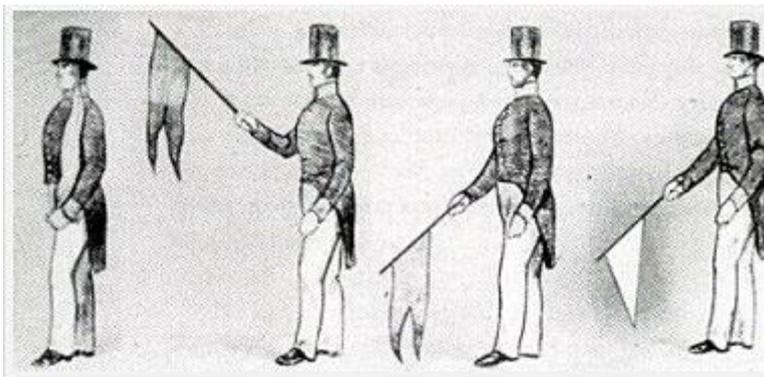
In summer 1846 aged 25, having left home, Henry was living in Gloucester Street nearby, which was in the same parish, St. Oswald's. He was working as a porter when he married Mary Roberts at St. Oswald's on 5 July. The wedding took place in the south transept of Chester's Cathedral which served as this ancient parish church.¹ Mary had also been living in Brook Street although she had been born over the border in Northop, Flintshire about thirteen miles away.



Brook Street area and Gloucester Street 1872²

By the time they baptised their first child, Edward, three years later, they were living on Brook Place just off Brook Street but by this time Henry's mother, Jane, had died and in 1851 his father was lodging at an inn in Frodsham Street. On the census taken that year, Henry gave his occupation as a railway policeman. In addition to his wife and son, six other people were living with them, five of whom were family members. Two of the men were also railway employees, one being Henry's brother, Thomas, a station master.

The 1840s was the decade of major railway construction by multiple companies set up for the purpose. Each company had a responsibility to employ men to police the construction labourers ("navvies") and, once lines were open, to ensure they were kept clear. Using flags and lamps as signals, these policemen were, in effect, the first signalmen. They were stationed at regular intervals along the line to ensure clear passage for trains. Perhaps it was the regular pay rather than reliance on a porter's tips that Henry preferred now he had a family. The uniform was distinctive: a dark swallow-tail coat, straight trousers and a tall hat.



Illustrated London News 1844

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With four busy rail routes converging at Chester and the recently opened station it is impossible, without further research, to identify Henry's employer. However, shortly after the birth of his second son in 1854 (this child given his own name, Henry), they made a life-changing decision. They moved to Bishopsfield (later, Hoole) and Henry left railway employment.

On the other side of the railway from Brook Street and the City, Bishopsfield was rapidly developing as a new residential area with better quality housing and shop premises. In the decade between 1851 and 1861 the number of residents tripled. Perhaps Henry saw an opportunity to fulfil a dream or maybe he simply had a good eye for business, for in the 1857 Post Office Directory he was listed at 2 Charles Street, Flookers Brook (part of Bishopsfield) as a baker and provision dealer.⁴ In subsequent directories he is noted variously as "Baker and Flour Dealer" and "Postmaster". Charles Street is one of the two main shopping streets in Hoole (the other being Faulkner Street) and Henry's premises were prominent on the centre corner between the two.



Bishopsfield (Hoole) 1871-91⁵

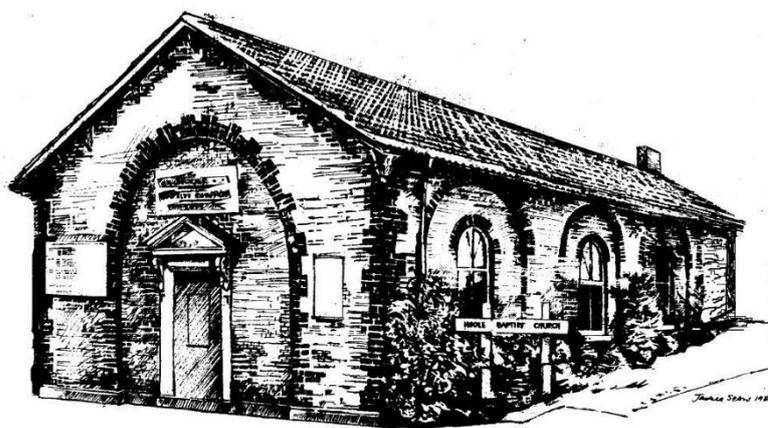
For the next twenty-five years Henry built up his business in Charles Street expanding to occupy 1-3 (a shop and warehouse) with his two sons eventually joining him as bakers. He found additional ways to serve the Hoole community by becoming a founding member of both the Hoole Local Board in 1864 and the Board of Governors of the local workhouse.

The Local Board sometimes convened at the Reading Room/Lecture Hall in Peplow Street which had been built in 1863 to encourage local residents to gather for educational purposes. Self-improvement was much in vogue at the time. It could also be hired for local events. Around 1880, it was no longer needed for its original purpose, and was acquired by Henry. Handily, the property also included space for a cart shed and stable for Henry to house his horse and delivery cart.

Henry retired shortly after and handed the business to his sons. He did not move far. Just around the corner in fact, to 32, Peplow Street. His youngest son, Henry, died in 1891 aged 36 leaving his wife, Lucy, three children, and his brother, Edward to run the business alone. Edward continued to live with his parents now resident at 19, Charles Street on the corner of Peplow Street. After his father's death three years later on 3rd September 1894, Edward continued the business for a few more years but had retired himself by 1901.

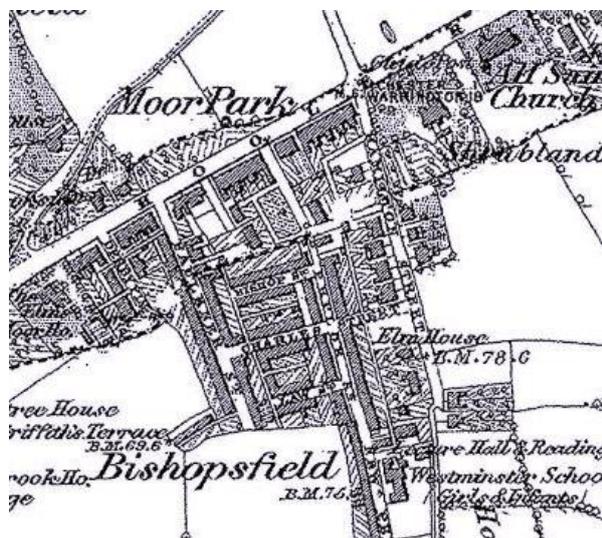
Two generations of the Richards family had been at the heart of Hoole as it grew. Their business expanded to meet the demand selling and delivering baked products and other provisions but also serving the community's best interests. A token of this was Edward's willingness to join others in signing the Petition for pedestrian access from the Bishopsfield/Flookersbrook (Hoole) side of the railway to the station, a subject that his father had pressed as part of the Local Board.

As one of his father's executors, Edward sold the Reading Room/Lecture Hall with the adjoining stables and cart shed in 1911. From 1883, it had been used each Sunday by an off-shoot of the Milton Street-based Ebenezer Baptist Church congregation to provide a mission base in Bishopsfield. By 1911, this was the predominant use of the building and Henry's executors conveyed it to a group of sixteen men representing local Baptists, one of whom was E. Noel Humphreys.



*Baptist Church (Former Reading Room/Lecture Hall)
Artist's impression drawn 1980 of pre-1966 image ©HBC Chester*

The Humphreys Family



Noel (as he preferred to be known) was born in 1867 in Ruabon, Denbighshire to Jenkin and Rebecca Humphreys of Church Street. His father, a land and mineral surveyor, was from coal mining stock. Noel was the third of six children and was under the age of ten years when the whole family moved to 8, Derby Place, Hoole, his father continuing as a mining engineer and surveyor.

It is interesting to note that only Noel signed the Petition in 1889 (at the age of twenty-two), not his father or brothers who were all at the same address.

At the time, Noel was articled to Wakefield and Enock, Accountants of 16, Corn Exchange Chambers who were auditors of the Chester Diocesan finances. He passed his final Chartered Accountancy exam two years later in January 1891, being placed fourth nationally and, as highest of any provincial candidate, gaining a certificate of merit.⁷ The same newspaper three weeks earlier describes him as an “energetic secretary” of the Chester Sunday Schools Union, a group of fifteen churches across the City providing activities for youngsters.⁸

Following his qualification, Noel remained with the same firm at first, but then set up his own business, initially in Newgate Street and then at 9-11, Old Bank Buildings in the City in 1900, being the first tenant.

In March 1899, he married Nellie Edge in Llandudno. Born in Preston, Nellie was an artist sculptor and a leading member of the local amateur dramatics society. Her father ran a photographic business. They set up home firstly at 5, Hamilton Street, but then moved across the Hoole Road to a house they named *Caer-y-caeë* (meaning closed/fenced city in Welsh) on the Newton side of the main road. They had two children during the next seven years.

Noel’s firm developed into a substantial business. It took on the auditing of the Diocesan accounts from his former employers, he acted as executor for a number of GWR shareholders and he was also auditor for several local companies. Later he was the Secretary and then a Director of North Wales Power & Traction, a company that not only owned the Porthmadog, Beddgelert & South Snowdon Railway, but also generated hydroelectricity. He was appointed Managing Director from 1913-1920 but resigned in 1918 when financial losses meant a re-structuring of the company. It was ultimately nationalised in 1948. He played a role in many Chester and North Wales companies after his retirement from his own business in 1921.⁹

Both Noel and Nellie were involved in Hoole life. From April, 1900, Noel was elected councillor for the west ward of Hoole on Hoole Urban District Council and was an outspoken representative on “the burning question” of Hoole having its own recreational park when local landowners and the Chester District Council were not supportive.¹⁰ He felt that the only way to obtain improvement to Hoole’s railway bridges (Flookersbrook and Hoole Lane) was by amalgamating the two councils, Hoole with the City. He acted as spokesman for a ratepayers’ group (petitioners) from the time of their “marked change of view” on amalgamation in 1906 through to 1911 although he was de-selected as councillor in 1907. Later he was a Town Councillor.¹¹ Nellie sat on the Chester Union Schools Board for Hoole.

Despite retiring to Llandudno in the 1920s, on the 1939 Register he is described as an “electrical and switchgear manufacturer” so clearly still had fingers in several pies! He died in Llandudno on 13 March 1954 aged 86, Nellie having died four years earlier aged 84. His firm, still operating under his name, continued until at least the 1980s maintaining a connection to Hoole by acting as accountants to the Baptist Church in the Reading Room.

With a little research, it has been interesting to discover the nature and extent of the involvement of these men and their families in Hoole life. Although in very different roles, both these men played a key part in the development and advancement of the local community’s interests. Their signatures to the Petition were just one indication of their commitment to improving life in Hoole during their lifetimes.

{Article researched and prepared by Ruth Ludgate, a member of Hoole History and Heritage Society, in August 2019}

¹ British History online, available online at: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/ches/vol5/pt2/pp133-156#h3-0009> [accessed 20/6/19]

² <http://chester.shoutwiki.com/wiki/File:1872Railmap.jpg> [accessed 2/6/19]

³ Drawing courtesy of the British Transport Police History Group, available online at: https://www.btpfhg.org.uk/?page_id=54&wppa-album=1&wppa-photo=53&wppa-cover=0&wppaoccur=1 [accessed 20/6/19]

⁴ 1857 Post Office Directory of Cheshire, p. 87, available online at: <http://cheshiredirectories.manuscripteye.com/pdf/1857/02a/index.htm> [accessed 20/6/19]

⁵ 'OS Map name 038/11', in *Map of Chester and its Environs* (Southampton, 1871-1891), British History Online, available online at: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/os-1-to-2500/chester/038/11> (accessed 20/6/19)

⁶ <http://chester.shoutwiki.com/wiki/File:1872Railmap.jpg> [accessed 2/6/19]

⁷ Cheshire Observer, Saturday 24 January 1891, p.4, British Newspaper Archive

⁸ Cheshire Observer, Saturday 3 January 1891, p.4, British Newspaper Archive

⁹ Obituary, Cheshire Observer, Saturday 27 February 1954, p.7, British Newspaper Archive

¹⁰ Cheshire Observer, Saturdays 10 February 1900, p.3 and 31 March 1900, p.8, British Newspaper

¹¹ Cheshire Observer, Saturday 20 December 1919, p.4, British Newspaper Archive