

The “Hoole Bridge” Memorial (1889) – Who was behind it? – by Peter Elliot, 18 July 2018.

In 2014, two members of The Hoole History & Heritage Society discovered a fascinating document at the National Archives in Kew that (supposedly) led to a major development in Hoole in the late nineteenth century. The 1889 Memorial is a plea for better links between Chester Station and the northern suburbs, with an appended list of signatories with addresses. But who instigated it? One might think the very first of the signatories: however careful inspection of the document reveals that *may* not be the case and illustrates nicely a few points about historical document research.

Historical “evidence” can be classed, loosely, in three groups depending on proximity to what they describe:

- **Primary:** original materials on which other research is based. They are actual evidence from the time period involved and have not been filtered through interpretation or evaluation. The fact that something is primary does not mean it is the truth. The “Memorial” can be considered as primary. As with other original documents the actual physical form of the document may well convey more information than the plain text.
- **Secondary:** accounts written after the fact with the benefit of hindsight – they are commentary upon and contain discussion and interpretation of the primary evidence. They are not actual evidence. A later book or article might be considered secondary.
- **Tertiary:** distillations and collections of primary and secondary sources. They may lack references back to sources and can be of dubious accuracy. In this age of the Internet there are more and more of these sources.

The Memorial wasn't the only effort to improve things. In an earlier article on Hoole Bridge, Ralph Earham records several attempts to agree improvements to either the original bridge or the new steel bridge from 1890 (effectively the present bridge). Many of these involved the Hoole Local Board. To some extent various campaigns to improve the bridge have continued to the present day.

The first name given is: “Edward Evans-Lloyd. Plas Newton by Chester and Upton”. So he is the first suspect as to being the instigator. Notably, his name has been corrected by the deletion of the word “Plas” - surely he did not forget his own address? Evans-Lloyd's name seems to be crammed into a very small space at the foot of the plea rather than on the list and even overlaps the formatting of the document.

Evans-Lloyd has clear connections with Upton and Newton. A memorial at Upton parish church (on the north wall) reads:

“Sacred to the memory of Edward Evans-Lloyd, Col. of the Cheshire Gar. Artillery Vols. Born 1826 died 1916. Warden of this church from its consecration in 1854 till 1883, and Hon. Organist for thirty years; Hon. Treasurer of the Schools till 1900. By his efforts a fund was raised for building the Vicarage and in many other ways the welfare of the Parish was promoted by him”

He also has a memorial window in the Chester Cathedral cloister. It depicts Hugh Lupus, a Norman Earl of Chester famed for fighting the Welsh (strange for a memorial to a man with a Welsh name).

Via the volunteer's records the trail leads to a Lawyers “Who's Who” listing from the time (“Fosters Hand List of Men at the Bar”) which provides further information:

“Evans-Lloyd, Edward, Lt Col. Commanding 1st Cheshire and Carnarvonshire artillery volunteers, J.P. D.L. Co Merioneth, J.P. Cheshire, a member of the North Wales circuit, assumed the additional surname of Lloyd 1 Jan, 1876, on succeeding his cousin James Bowen Lloyd in the Plas Yndre (sic), a student of Lincoln's Inn 19 April 1853 (then aged 26), called to the bar 3 July, 1878 (only son of Edward Evans, of Newton Cottage, Cheshire dec); born 2 June 1826; married 12 Dec, 1862, Agnes, dau. Of Robert Browne, Esq, of London, M.D. Stanley House, Chester; Plas Yndre and Moel-y-Garnedd Bala, Merionethshire; Reform Club.”

It seems that these are both the same person “Gar” being short for Carnarvonshire and Lt-Col changed to (honorary) Col when he resigned his commission on retirement in 1886 (London

Gazette: June 15, 1886). Foster is a primary source, compiling information from his own times and the memorial from Upton helps confirm the link.

To clear up one issue “Stanley House” is not the same as “Stanley Palace”, at the time known as “Derby House”, but appears to have been at 3, Stanley Street (on the opposite side of Watergate Street). He is listed as being there in the 1883 Slater's Directory (and still there in 1902). As a solicitor, Evans-Lloyd would be reluctant to cram his name in covering some of the formatting in the document (much the same can be said for the Chester firm of solicitors representing the Earl of Kilmorey).

The “Who's Who” shows a connection with “Newton Cottage” which bordered on the grounds of Plas Newton, but Evans-Lloyd is not living at the cottage when the Memorial was being written: the Memorial lists Dr Davies-Colley (a close relative of a notable early female surgeon) as the inhabitant. In fact, Dr Davies-Colley lived there with his wife and daughter.

There is also some possible indication that Evans-Lloyd had lived at Plas Newton in 1843: the reference is utterly confusing and mixes-up events over a large number of years:

“The first churchwarden of Upton church (before it became the parish church) was Col. E Evans-Lloyd who reputedly lived at Plas Newton in 1843.”

In 1843 Evans-Lloyd would have been 16, still named plain Evans and certainly too young to be a colonel. Also, Plas Newton is believed to have only been built in the 1840's as it does not appear on Bryant's local map of the 1830's. Maybe this is a “red-herring”?

The biggest impact of Evans-Lloyd on Chester was perhaps his contribution of £600 towards the Eastgate Clock to pay for the clockwork and the dials. Indeed, his name appears on the south face of the clock, which states (on an iron plaque made at Coalbrookdale):

“This clock was presented to the City by Edward Evans-Lloyd Citizen & Freeman, 1897.”

The Eastgate clock may only help slightly but note that he is described as a citizen of Chester. By 1889, Evans-Lloyd would have been very well known in Chester.

A little further down the document the real occupant of Plas Newton, Alfred Tyrer, is listed. He was clearly a very wealthy man. His house was described as follows:

“Plas Newton and the grounds were made up of 8 acres of arable land and grazing, lawned areas to the west and south of approximately 1/2 acre, a putting green to the west in front of the house; a Japanese garden with its own miniature bridges with streams and waterfall and arches and figurines – all of which were shipped directly from Japan. To the north and west stood their pride and joy, the walled kitchen garden with almost half an acre of heated greenhouses (coke fired) and also the stable yard and horse boxes”

Alfred (1856-1942) was keen on polo, hence the horse boxes, and had the middle of the Roodee set out as a polo ground (“Polo”: 1894 – this again lists him as living at Plas Newton and running the Chester Polo Club). His son Oliver was educated at Eton (1894-97) and gives his occupation in the “old boys” book as “golf, polo, hunting and yachting”. Tyrer would also have been very well known in Chester – so it seems strange that the list of supporters should begin with a confusion of their residences.

Confirmation that Tyrer was living at Plas Newton at the relevant date can be found in the members list given in the “Annual Report of the Chester Society For Natural Science 1885/6”. This has the Tyrers living at Plas Newton and Evans-Lloyd living in Stanley Street just before the date of the Memorial. There can be little doubt that the address given for Evans-Lloyd is wrong.

The other “signature” at the foot of the first page is that of the agents of the Earl of Kilmorey. The 3rd Earl of Kilmorey (1880 -1915) was a major landowner in Hoole, Newton and Upton. The Earl married (1881) Ellen Constance Baldock (1858-1920), daughter of Edward Holmes Baldock (MP for Shrewsbury). She was a renowned beauty who caused a scandal by being bequeathed the 'Teck emeralds' among other jewels, from her lover, Prince Francis of Teck (1870-1910), brother of Queen Mary. She also reputedly had a liaison with Edward VII, a frequent visitor to the Kilmorey estates at Moure Park, County Down. The area of Hoole once known as Moor Park is now

Kilmorey Park – not a coincidence. His agents closed their Chester office in 2018.

The format of the document changes between pages 1 and 2. On pages after 2 the names are in a (fairly) neat ruled list. Not all the entries are “signatures” - the entries for the Eccles family are all in the same hand (note the “H”: at least one of these may have been an illiterate blacksmith). Page 2 starts with a list of Dicksons. The first of which boldly underlines his name. His address is “Springfield” (which still exists – split-up - on Springfield Drive) for which Ashby Place, leading into Flookersbrook, was once an approach drive. Several of the Dicksons mentioned are listed as members in the “Report of the Chester Society For Natural Science 1885/6”:

- George Dickson at Springfield, Flookersbrook
- James Dickson at Brookfield House
- William Alfred Dickson at Newton Villa
- Samuel. J. R. Dixon at Mayfield House, Hoole

By the mid-19th century, the rise of a new middle class and an explosion in house building, resulting in the creation of entire suburbs, created an open and hungry market for the nursery industry, which grew rapidly to meet the demand for ornamental plants. Cousins Francis R. Dickson and James Dickson had come down from Perth by stage-coach in the early 1800s. The Dicksons were already (since 1728) well established as seed and nursery-men in Scotland and may have originally come to Chester when a Mr Potts of Chester ordered a vast number of trees for his estates in Wales. Two enterprises separated in 1853 (when both had sons to continue the businesses): F. & A. Dickson operating at Upton nurseries and James Dickson & Sons at Newton - and merged again in 1880s, when the grounds under cultivation extended to over 400 acres (about half a square mile). It was one of the largest businesses of its type in the country.

Could the Dicksons be behind the Memorial and the names of Evans-Lloyd and the agent of the Earl of Kilmorey have been added later? The Memorial consists of a number of leaves of paper glued head to foot, thus if the name of Evans-Lloyd was added “late” it would probably have been added after the whole document had been assembled: otherwise the list could be extended upwards.

The land which was once the Dickson nurseries is now covered by housing in Upton and Newton (hence the road name Dickson's Drive). At the time of the Memorial the only substantial development was at Upton Park. There are a cluster of the “proprietors” of Upton Park named in the Memorial. Upton Park originated when a group of three young Chester entrepreneurs - William Pitt, William Shone (his son is listed) & Thomas Wood saw the opportunity just north of the Chester city boundary, of a similar venture to Queens Park. Surveyor John Hitchen - responsible for the layout of Queen's Park for its “projector and proprietor” Enoch Gerrard - was engaged to draw up a plan, hence the similarities.

Nowadays Upton Park is served by Bache Station. At the time of the Memorial neither Upton Station (since gone) nor Bache Station existed. The nearest and most convenient station was Chester. The Dicksons are believed to have encouraged the development of Upton Park; and, as their land surrounded it, were in a good position to sell further land should the estate grow.

But why would the Dicksons want to sell land that was supporting “one of the largest businesses of its type in the country”?

Within a few years the Dickson business would be in decline. The land became wasted, with redundant workers trying to eke-out a poor living from produce on scattered stalls. Auction notices show the Dicksons trying to sell land from around 1905 (Chester Courant: 4th October 1905). By the 1920s much land both readily accessible and suitable for housing had been sold. The nurseries closed entirely in 1933. Upton House, to the west of Upton Park (and sold-off although F.A. Dickson's widow was still living there at the time of the Memorial) was derelict by the 1930s. Finally, the Chester shop closed in 1936. The same fate was suffered by many of the great Victorian seed and nursery dynasties. Of the Dicksons listed in the Memorial only George A (c1835-1909), who was at that time head of the family firm, appears to be an actual active nurseryman. Later directories show that many of the Dicksons listed had either died or moved

away from Hoole/Newton within a few years.

The Chester Dicksons listed in the “*Dictionary Of British And Irish Botanists And Horticulturists*” (DBIBH) are:

- Francis (1793-1866) and his son Francis Arthur (1826-1888)
- James (1795-1867), his sons George A (1835-1909) and William Alfred (1837-1891)

At the time of the Memorial the second-generation of the Dicksons were getting on and Francis Arthur had recently died. Did the third generation of Dicksons, none of whom are listed in the DBIBH, see the future coming in 1889? Good money was being made in Hoole building houses for sale and turning land into cash and there had already been a successful development at Upton Park where the Dicksons owned a lot of land.

Many of the names at the head of the list belong to those with Dicksons as near-neighbours – either close to where they then lived or around their nursery in Upton and Newton. There is a cluster near to the house of George Dickson at Flookersbrook and a further cluster near Mayfield House towards “Trafford” where solicitor Samuel J. R. Dickson (Slaters 1883 directory) and his wife conducted most of their social activities. They include William Wallace Johnstone who, according to his obituary (Chester Courant: 18th June 1902) “*acted for a considerable period as nursery manager for Messrs. James Dickson and Son. On the amalgamation of that firm with that of Messrs. F. and A. Dickson and Son, he was appointed manager of the extensive nurseries of Dicksons*”. But the highly experienced Johnstone is getting elderly – he was 78 when he died.

Extension of the City boundary into Hoole was already being discussed at the time. Subsequent events show that the extension of the City into Newton would also happen – perhaps the Dicksons were already worried that their nursery might soon become part of the City as a result of boundary changes. Or were the latest generation more interested in things other than horticulture? The Chester Courant (5th August 1908) lists the huge number of guests entertained by Tyrer at his lavish Plas-Newton garden party following the 1908 Upton Flower Show.

There is not a single Dickson among them.

In summary:

- Evans-Lloyd's name and that of the agents of the Earl of Kilmorey seem to have been crammed into the small space at the foot of page 1, with a mistake in the address of Evans-Lloyd (later corrected).
- Evans-Lloyd did not live at Plas-Newton when the Memorial was prepared, but in Stanley Street near the Watergate; Probably born at Newton Cottage, he had a lifelong association with Upton and Newton; In the Memorial (and other documents from that time) Newton Cottage is occupied by Dr Davies-Colley and Plas-Newton is occupied by Alfred Tyrer;
- The first five names on the list's ruled page are Dicksons and their manager; Many of those at the head of the list are near-neighbours of the Dicksons or live adjacent their nursery; The “Trafford” cluster lies where solicitor Samuel J.R. Dickson (and his wife) attended fetes, church (Plemstall), etc.
- Although the Dicksons business continued (in slow decline) for another thirty years, the third and fourth generations of the Dicksons do not seem to have remained in this part of Chester or been particularly interested in horticulture; By 1908, the Dicksons do not appear to be associated with the Upton Flower-show at all.
- Successful housing development had already occurred at Upton Park which was surrounded by land owned by the Dicksons;

A footbridge was built from the still surviving (but bricked-up) station entrance on Hoole Road shortly after the Memorial. The footbridge itself has long been demolished. The entrance is covered with Builder's Yard signage and parts of the arch can still be seen: but if there was a central lamp-holder, it is almost certainly gone.

A somewhat tentative conclusion is that Evans-Lloyd didn't forget his own address but that his

name was added late in the day and that originally the venerable George A Dickson (of Springfield in Hoole) was the first name on the list and so most likely one of the original "plotters". Perhaps he realised the next generation of Dicksons were not going to continue the family business but that improving communications between Newton/Flookersbrook and the station then selling land for residential development was an alternative option. This would mean that while Evans-Lloyd was largely responsible for the Eastgate clock, he wasn't in the lead with the railway footbridge.

That is a lot to deduce from the struck out "Plas", but without that clue no-one might ever think of looking at the guest-list from Tyrers 1908, gilded-age, flower-show garden party at Plas-Newton and noting who was *not* invited.

Whether the footbridge was constructed *only* due to the Memorial remains unclear: 1889/90 also marked the end of the most significant modifications and extensions to the existing Chester station complex (planned since 1870). These included - construction of an enlarged north island platform (the present through platforms 4 & 7 and bay platforms 5 & 6) and its buildings, the north train shed, the main pedestrian bridge and the scissors crossovers.

Just one last clue to the who-done-it: as noted at the outset, Ralph Earlham told us that the present steel bridge replaced the old one in January 1890. Passengers from Hoole would therefore (at least for a while) have needed some alternative way of getting to and from the station. Maybe the railway company was planning a Hoole footbridge anyway?

Peter has also placed this article on his own website:

[http://chester.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Hoole Railway Footbridge](http://chester.shoutwiki.com/wiki/Hoole_Railway_Footbridge) - where links to references can be found.