



Chester Newspapers about 100 years ago

By JAMES HALL

(Read 18th November, 1913)

THE earliest newspaper I have to speak about is the *Chester Chronicle*, or, to give it its full title, the *Chester Chronicle, Cheshire & North Wales General Advertiser*, for Friday, 17th June, 1814, No. 2032, price 6½d., bearing a Revenue Stamp 3½d.¹ Printed and published by J. Fletcher, Foregate Street, the proprietor states that it has "a very extensive circulation through the counties of Chester, Salop, Stafford, Lancaster, and all the counties of North Wales where it has a *Decided Superiority*."

Although the *Chronicle* had then been in existence nearly 40 years, it consisted only of a single news-sheet, like the newspaper ninety years before, that to-night has been exhibited and described by Mr. Taylor; but this number contains a noteworthy article, namely, a report in five columns of the Peace Celebrations in Chester, on Wednesday, 15th June, 1814. Napoleon had abdicated the throne of France and retired to Elba; Louis XVIII. had been acknowledged King, and the first Treaty of Paris had been signed on the 30th May. In consequence of these events

¹ The Duty Stamp represents the Emblem Rose, Shamrock and Thistle, surmounted by the Royal Crown, and below, the motto *Dieu et mon Droit*, and the date 1751; also "Discts 16^d pr Ct & Addl 18s pr Ct. Three pence halfpenny."

there were great rejoicings throughout this Kingdom; not on one special day, but at different dates, especially during the months of June and July.

Preliminary to the great festival, a dinner was held at the Blossoms Inn for the gentry on Tuesday, 14th June; and in the evening of the same day a contested game of Prison Bars on the Roodee attracted a large concourse of spectators.

On Wednesday, 15th June, a fine summer's day, the City was *en fête*; the bells pealed from the church towers, including the Cathedral, the bells of which had not been rung for sixty years.² By a shilling subscription fund, a treat had been provided for the inmates of the House of Industry. Each female had a $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of tea, 1lb. of sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of butter, and a six-penny white loaf; to which were added "6 bottles of wine, tobacco and snuff." The men were regaled with a quart of ale, bread and cheese, besides tobacco and snuff.

The children of the Charity Schools—1000 in number—attended service at the Cathedral; and then marched in procession to the Linen Hall for a dinner of beef and plum-pudding; the boys having a pint of ale, and the girls two glasses of negus. Public dinners were provided at the White Lion, Saracen's Head, Boot Tavern, and at most of the other Inns and public-houses.

A dense crowd, from 7,000 to 10,000 spectators, assembled in the afternoon on the river banks and on the walls to witness an improvised regatta, which probably produced more amusement than skilful oars-

² Stated by Hemingway in his *History of Chester* (Vol. II., p. 206), who, in error, gives the date of the Peace Celebration on the 17th June (the date of the newspaper issue) instead of on the 15th June.

manship. The first race was contested by men, two in each boat, from opposite the Snuff Mills to the bottom of the Groves and back again, twice. On the firing of a signal gun, a little fleet of six boats started. The first prize was a purse of four guineas; the second prize one guinea. "There was not much skill shown in this contest."

The second race, for boats rowed by two young women, was from the Snuff Mills to the bottom of the Groves and return. First prize, two guineas; second, half-a-guinea. "The winners had the advantage in point of skill, and passed the barge in great style."

The third race, for boys, for a purse of two pounds, the second boat ten shillings, is described as "an excellent pull."

The scene was brightened by the occasional discharge of pieces of cannon, and by the attendance of a band of music. "There were many other boats on the river, which added a considerable degree of liveliness and bustle," and "the whole passed over without any accident, except that a respectable brewer of this city fell overboard into the *vat* and gave his *grains* an extra *soak!*" "It is with pain we have to state that the rejoicings in this City were damped by one melancholy occurrence. Whilst lighting up the lamps at the New Bank, a stone, by some accident, fell from the top of the building on the head of a young woman named Lyon," fracturing her skull and causing her death.

The streets, decorated with festoons of laurel and flowers, after ten at night, blazed with coloured lamps in stars, crowns, and other devices, and figured transparencies, with a brilliance never before equalled.

To select a few descriptions of these illuminations:—

THE PIED BULL, the home of the Masonic Lodge No. 391. A very well executed transparency by Mr. S. Brown,³ representing a Master Mason, in full dress, standing on a tessellated pavement. On his left a pedestal, with the Masonic arms, compass, square, etc. In his right hand, a scroll with the following Scriptural motto: "The Lord hath given strength unto his people; he hath given the blessings of Peace." Above, an arch supported by pillars of the Corinthian order, around which is a wreath bearing the words, "*Vide, aude, tace,*" and "*Sit lux et lux fuit.*" On the front of the arch, "Holiness to the Lord"; and the all-seeing eye of Providence in the centre of the keystone of the arch. The summit is crowned by figures of Faith, Hope, and Charity. In the perspective, the skeleton of a house, building, and a ship in full sail—emblematical of Trade and Commerce. Above the whole, the sun dispersing the black clouds of anarchy and tumult, which have so long hung over the European hemisphere.

IN FURTHER NORTHGATE STREET, Mr. Fletcher's, the *Chronicle* proprietor's house—now known as "The Rock Mount," Parkgate Road—exhibited a brilliant display of variegated lamps, forming as it were a border to the roof. The glass cupola—it is still there—was ornamented with the words, "A Peace," one letter of which occupied each compartment of the hexagon. The blaze reflected from the whole must have been seen many miles in Wales.

English fondness for caricature and satire was manifested in transparencies before some of the principal houses and inns, *e.g.*:—

³ Mr. S. Brown was a noted Chester artist.

THE WHITE LION exhibited the Duke of Wellington slaying the Corsican dragon.

MRS. LEET OF THE SARACEN'S HEAD. John Bull at table, on which was a large piece of beef, and Bonaparte supplicating for a mouthful. This was painted by Mr. S. Brown.

THE FEATHERS' INN had eight transparencies, all of which are described, the most humorous being number four, representing a tailor riding on his goose, pursuing Bonaparte, who is in full retreat, the tailor brandishing at the runaway a cabbage, which was nothing more formidable than a cribbed piece of cloth!

THE REV. MR. CASSON'S had John Bull offering a tankard of porter to a Frenchman, in whose face appeared every sign of obsequiousness.

MR. MAINWARING OF ABBEY STREET pictured Bonaparte and Death in consultation, with the Devil playing a fiddle and exclaiming "I'm ready for him."

MR. MEACOCK, DRUGGIST, BRIDGE STREET. Bonaparte mounted on an Ass with his face towards its tail, and the Devil leading him to Elba—the motto, "Inseparable Friends."

THE EXCHANGE, THE COMMERCIAL NEWS ROOM, THE CASTLE, were gorgeously illuminated. The windows of the two shot towers (one 156 ft. high) were lighted up with candles, and a flare of twenty-nine flambeaux on the summit; but none of the four city-gates appear to have been either decorated or illumined. All had been rebuilt within the lifetime of people then living—the Eastgate in 1769, Bridge-gate in 1782, Water-gate in 1789, and North-gate in 1810—and possibly the Corporation would not allow the gates to be hidden, defaced, or in any way damaged.

Of course all Chester's display quickly passed away, "leaving not a wrack behind." No! not *all!* You will be surprised to know that one trace of decoration remains to-day of the great Demonstration, namely, the word "Peace" painted in red capital letters on one side of the Newgate Archway! Listen to this short paragraph in the newspaper:—

"THE NEWGATE was beautifully lighted up by Mr. Fitzgerald, pipe-manufacturer. From the centre of the arch was suspended a large ship, illuminated with variegated lamps; and each side 'Peace' and 'Plenty' painted in red."

The word "Peace" is still, a hundred years after, just legible; although, through alteration in the stonework, the word "Plenty" has disappeared. Strange to say, immediately below the word "Peace," is now a Notice Board calling men to join the Army or Navy, the Life-guards, Militia, Special Reservists, and so forth, as occasion requires.

In the same paper, but in another column, is a paragraph curiously headed "Mental Rejoicing," which may have meant the joy of a thoughtful man in his peaceful home, as contradistinguished from the joy of merry men in the noisy crowd. The Reporter says:—

"Richard Barker, Esq., of Llindir, has given ten guineas to the Infirmary, and ten guineas to the Blue School. This handsome benefaction was conveyed in a note to Messrs. Williams, Jones, Hughes, & Co., Bankers of this City, couched in the following terms:—

'Gentlemen,

To evince my gratitude and joy for the blessings of Peace, I beg you will debit my account with Ten Guineas as a donation to the Chester Infirmary, and the like to the Blue Coat School.'"

FROM THE *Chester Chronicle*, FOR FRIDAY, 22ND JULY, 1814:—

(1) THE PREMIER ADVERTISEMENT is a Grand Festival of Music in the Nave of the Cathedral for the benefit of the Public Charities, to be held on the mornings of Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 27th to 30th September, 1814.

(2) PREPARING FOR PUBLICATION.—A History of the County Palatine and of the City of Chester, by Geo. Ormerod, of Chorlton, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., dedicated (with permission) to H.R.H. the Prince Regent, Earl of Chester, including King's *Vale Royal*, and Leycester's *Cheshire Antiquities*, sold by Broster and Son, and T. Poole, Chester [and other booksellers elsewhere].

(3) JUBILEE COLUMN, MOEL FAMMA.—Notice is hereby given That a Meeting of the subscribers to this building will take place upon Moel Famma, on Thursday, the 4 Aug: next at 11 o'clock in the forenoon, to inspect the state of the work; to determine on an appropriate inscription to be placed upon the same, and for other matters relative thereto.

John Jones, Ruthin

Will^m Wynne, Mold

Clerks to the Committee.

(4) EXTRAORDINARY PRODUCTION OF NATURE.—There is now growing in the gardens attached to the mansion of the Rt. Hon. Lord Crewe, in this county, a cucumber, measuring 7ft. 3in. in length. There are several others of a prodigious size.

FROM THE *Chester Chronicle*, FOR FRIDAY, 8th APRIL, 1825. Price 7d., the stamp having risen to 4d.:—

CATHEDRAL ORGAN.—The Organ which has recently been placed in our Cathedral, was opened on Sunday

last [3rd April, 1825], by Mr. Haylett, Prof. Mus. of Cambridge, the new Organist. It is built by Messrs. Boucher and Fleetwood, and for compass of sound, and mellowness of tone, is certainly a very fine instrument. The pedal stops are powerful, running down to double G; the trumpet is uncommonly effective, and the swell, fitted up on the Venetian principle, one of the best we have heard. Mr. Haylett displayed great ability throughout the services, particularly in the chorus of "How excellent" in the morning prayer; and the beautiful air of "I know that my Redeemer liveth" at the evening service. There was a very full attendance at Church. The Sermon was preached by the Rev. Mr. Pearson.

FROM THE *Chester Courant & Anglo-Welsh Gazette*, FOR TUESDAY, 13th JANUARY, 1829. Price 7d. Stamp duty 4d.:—

MR. GOUGH'S STEAM CARRIAGE.—Yesterday the inhabitants of part of the town of Salford were somewhat surprised to see a very handsome vehicle, resembling a stage coach (except that it had a chimney rising about six feet above the roof), progressing past their houses without any visible means of propulsion. Very few persons knew at first what it was, or whence it came; but, on inquiry, it turned out to be a steam carriage, invented and constructed by Mr. Nathan Gough, which was making its first appearance on the road. Mr. Gough set out from his factory about eleven o'clock; and the carriage having gallantly mounted a steep ascent into the road, six persons mounted upon it, and Mr. Gough taking the helm, the carriage proceeded up Regent Road. On arriving at the toll-bar, Mr. Gough pulled up, for a moment, and asked the keeper what was the toll.

The man was apparently a little puzzled by the question, but at length replied, there was nothing to pay; on which Mr. Gough passed through the gate, and proceeded up Cross-lane, then turned down the road past the Crescent, to the end of Oldfield Road, where, we believe, a trifling accident happened to the glass tube, used as a water gauge, and the steam was consequently blown off, and the coach was drawn home to Mr. Gough's premises. The experiment, however, was upon the whole, a most satisfactory one; the carriage, when passing over the level ground, travelled at the rate of from five to six miles an hour. It was stopped, or set in motion, in an instant; and was guided with the greatest facility, both in turning corners and travelling along the open road. Indeed, during the greater part of the journey, Mr. Gough directed it with his feet. The appearance of the carriage is very good: the hind boot, which is considerably larger than in a stage coach, contains the coals, the boiler, the fire, &c: and the whole of the machinery is concealed from view. The carriage is mounted on springs like a stage coach, and its motion seemed to be perfectly easy, either on the macadamised road or on pavement. We must not forget to state that the carriage is entitled "The March of Intellect."

(Reprinted from the *Manchester Guardian*).

