

The Eastham Archivist

November 2011

Recording Eastham's History

Issue No 6

1821 Lithograph of Eastham Church

This lovely 1821 lithograph of St Mary's, Eastham was discovered by our Internet sleuth, Marion Swindlehurst. Unfortunately it was just a page of a rare 1825 book of lithographs of the Liverpool area and was on offer for £1,200!

The group doesn't have that kind of money but a pleading email to the seller resulted in this high quality scan being sent with a request to remember him when we won the lottery! We are really most grateful to Richard Hawes of Lancashire Gallery for their generosity.

As this lithograph will have been drawn before the churchyard was extended it must have been as though the artist was almost leaning on top of the old, pre-extension, churchyard wall, if indeed there actually was a churchyard wall.

The ancient yew tree looks far from healthy, the spire is covered in ivy and the church clock, sadly long gone, is just visible. Hall Farm and its single story extension can be seen, as can the roof of a little cottage on the far side of Church Lane where Grove House stands today. The date can be seen on the flat stone lower left.

The photograph right is an attempt to picture the same scene today. The upright headstones are all post 1860, but the flat stones bear little resemblance to those in the lithograph - artist's licence perhaps?



The Story of Hooton Park Racecourse

Although it is recorded that the first official meeting at Hooton Racecourse was in 1899, in fact there is now evidence to suggest that racing took place there much earlier.

The Stanley's of Hooton had strong connections with the Grand National. Members of the family were closely involved with the very first Grand National run in 1839 and Sir Thomas Massey Stanley was both a Trustee and a member of the race committee.

So it was no surprise that this enthusiastic sporting family might wish to add a little spice to the main Liverpool event by staging a complementary race at Hooton Hall on the day before the National for the entertainment of their many sporting guests. Their training ground at the Hall was an ideal site. This was where the family's horses were trained for hunting and cross-country steeple chasing. It was therefore the ideal location for what originally would have been an impromptu event that then evolved into a regular racing meeting.

The Liverpool Mercury of the 1st March 1843 reporting on the Grand National, but mentioning the Hooton race, says :-

The arrival of strangers in Liverpool since Monday was very great; and, at the seats of the Earl of Sefton at Croxeth and Sir W.M. Stanley at Hooton, large parties of the sporting noblemen and gentry were assembled. We never saw so many noblemen on the course before - the Grand Steeple Chase at Hooton-park forming an additional attraction to this, and the Waterloo Coursing Meeting.

Three years later the same newspaper reporting on the Hooton Park Steeple Chase of the 6th March 1846, comments that "The judge was Mr Lynn of the Waterloo Hotel", (who had also been involved in the precursor of the Grand National.) It goes on - "the meeting increases in interest every year"

..... "the morning was cold and showery, but about noon it began to clear up, which induced great numbers to repair to the scene of action".

The Hooton event not only attracted the local population but also the rich and famous from across the land. The paper noted that those present included Prince



The scene at Hooton before the racecourse with the Mersey & Liverpool in the background

George of Cambridge, Marquis of Waterford, Earl Chesterfield, Lord Caledon, and Lord Glamis. The horses were often ridden by their wealthy owners, and in fact one race was set aside for 'gentlemen riders' as opposed to the professional jockeys.

in a fair way of winning when he fell". Almost as an afterthought the newspaper records that "the Marquis of Waterford in consequence of being thrown from Regalia had his shoulder dislocated". But all was well as "Sir Wm Stanley's surgeon was on the ground, and his Lordship's shoulder having been re-set, he was to be seen on the ground enjoying himself as if nothing had occurred!"



Richard Naylor, a keen racing man, bought Hooton Hall in 1849 from the now bankrupt Stanley's along with the 'training ground'.

He established his own stud farm and racing stable adjacent to the Hall. Later he was to become the proud owner of 'Macaroni' the winner of both the 1863 Derby and the 2000 Guineas. His

Even in those days some of the Hooton jumps were considered to be dangerous and had to be modified – the newspaper reports, "We are glad to perceive that the dangerous leap, at which so many accidents have occurred, and against which we particularly remonstrated last year, was omitted on the present occasion." However this didn't help the Marquis of Waterford, riding his horse 'Regalia' (4 to 1 against). The report goes on, "Regalia at last came out and was



winnings on the Derby alone were said to have totalled £70,000 of which he gave £3000 to his trainer, £1,000 to the jockey, Tom Chaloner, and £1000 to Liverpool charities. Nor were the workers on his Hooton Hall Estate forgotten either!

Such was his addiction to the sport that he purchased one of the greatest sires of all time **'Stockwell'**, for the sum of 4,500 guineas. After the 1862 season, **Stockwell** was moved to Naylor's stud farm at Hooton Park. The Liverpool Mercury of the 29th July 1862 reporting "*This magnificent sire, after a most successful season at Rawcliffe stud paddocks has arrived at Hooton Hall, where he will remain in Mr John Griffiths' care. For blood and appearance this horse is certainly second to none in England, and fortunately is in the hands of a gentlemen who can appreciate a good animal. The condition in which Griffiths has the breeding establishment at Hooton reflects the highest credit upon him, and proves him to be the perfect master of his business.*"

Stockwell lived the final eight years of his life in relative luxury. He went on 15-mile walks in good weather, and lived in a barn "*big enough for him to run about in*". He died in 1870 at the age of 21 due to an accident in the breeding shed. He was responsible for 209 winners of 1147 races, worth £362,451 and was nick-named the "Emperor of Stallions". He was Champion Sire seven times and second on four occasions. **Stockwell** is buried near the Rivacre Brook which was the site of the racing stables.

Mr Griffiths was a highly thought of trainer, but as the Liverpool Mercury reports on the 2nd of February 1864 he was involved in a 'road rage' incident, when he was summonsed for 'obstructing the turnpike road near Eastham'. His accuser - Police Superintendent Hammond - was cross summonsed for 'furious driving' The paper reports '*a string of young blood horse with riders on them on the wrong side of the road*'. They were passed at speed by Superintendent Hammond driving his '*horse and conveyance near Eastham Village*' who was accused of '*cracking his whip*'. When he got to the last horse on the string (was it **Stockwell** on his 15 mile



1862 Dery winner 'Macaroni'

walk?) which was ridden by John Griffiths, Mr Griffiths '*placed himself in front of the Superintendent and made use of a blackguard expression*'! This was the 'obstruction' which was the subject of the summons. The magistrates had the good sense to dismiss both summonses without hearing all the evidence!

Naylor will almost certainly have continued to use the training ground established by the Stanley's as gallops for the training of some of his horses. But did he also construct a proper racecourse? However after about 1880 he began to lose interest in Hooton Hall, possibly because of the imminent construction of the Manchester Ship Canal which skirted the boundary of Hooton Park. Eventually he moved to Kelmars, Northamptonshire and left the Hall and its grounds to its fate. It wasn't until 1898 that a new lease of life for the property was being considered.

In his book '*A Long Time Gone*' author Chris Pitt quoting from Bayle's '*Racecourse Atlas*' says :- "Whoever the gentlemen were who conceived the idea of converting the beautiful swards in Hooton Park into a Club and race course I have not the faintest idea, but suffice it to say that a very splendid piece of prudence was displayed in the selection of the site, for



Champion sire 'Stockwell'

there is no more charming spot on the broad acres of this country, or any place with better appointments for its purposes. The surroundings have been judiciously thought out and arranged fit for the reception of the King. In fact, it is impossible to speak too highly of what is, in every sense of the word, a place far more deserving to stand with our leading flat racing meetings than many I could mention; and now that the sport has become such a passion for all



Richard Naylor

creeds and classes, there is no plausible reason why Hooton Park should not enjoy that official recognition accorded to places less adaptable, in regard to a date, for a flat racing fixture"

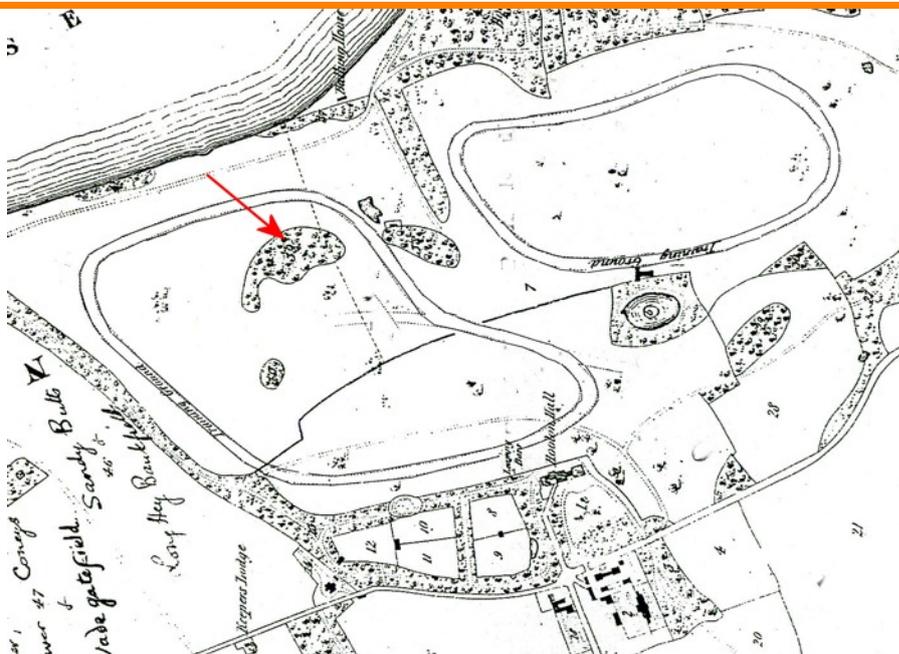
Perhaps it is here that we can help with 'the gentlemen who conceived the idea'? The Cheshire Observer of the 25th February 1899 reported that The Hooton Park Club Ltd had acquired Hooton Park. Its edition, exactly one month later, went further, explaining that Hooton Hall and the estate had been taken on a 21 year lease with an option to purchase. The company had been formed for the purpose of promoting racing, polo, golf, tennis and croquet. The chairman was Lord Rossmore, (Mr Naylor's son-in-law) whilst one of the directors was local resident Mr Clunie Dale. Mr R.K. Mainwaring was appointed manager and clerk of the course.

The report waxes lyrical on 'the view looking from the terrace of the Hall with the Mersey glinting in the sunshine in the background formed as pretty a pictures as anyone could desire to see'

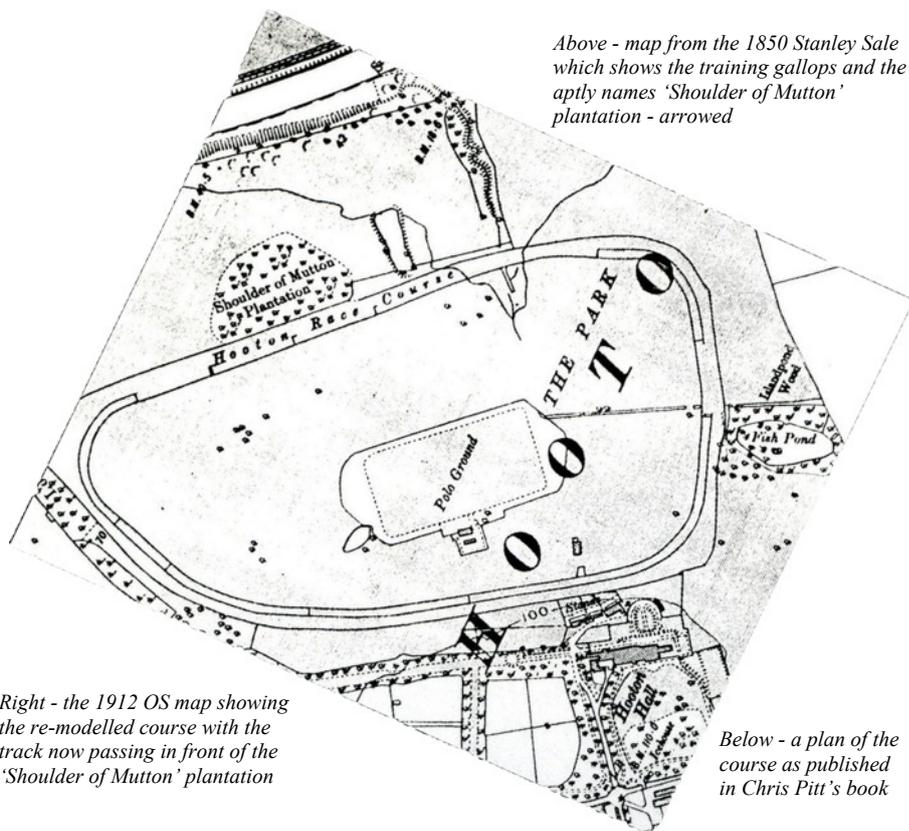
The paper reports extensively on the facilities being provided. New grandstands with a capacity of 2,500 people included The County Subscription stand, a luxurious, covered two-story affair with a capacity for 750 people, complete with refreshment rooms, two jockey's room (including one for gentlemen riders). The Tattersall's Stand again with space for 750 and with numerous facilities including a reporter's room.

The paper states that the work is being carried out by Wm Brown & Sons of Manchester whilst the architects are Messrs Magnall & Littlewood, again of Manchester who had carried out work at the New Haydock course and were re-modelling the stand at Chester.

Was there a previous course here as suggested earlier? Unsubstantiated reports indicate that Richard Naylor built a course at Hooton in about 1875, but no reports of meetings there have come to light. However the Liverpool Mercury report intriguingly talks about 'not proposing to interfere with the present course which is a mile and a half in circumference, but next year it will be extended to two miles'. It also mentions that that a third stand 'will be constructed from timbers and materials forming the old stand and is placed partially on the same site but is removed westwards some 23 yards'. Again the paper hints of an earlier course by stating 'the paddocks in front of these stands will be re-arranged and the railing removed nearer to the course so as to give increased space'.

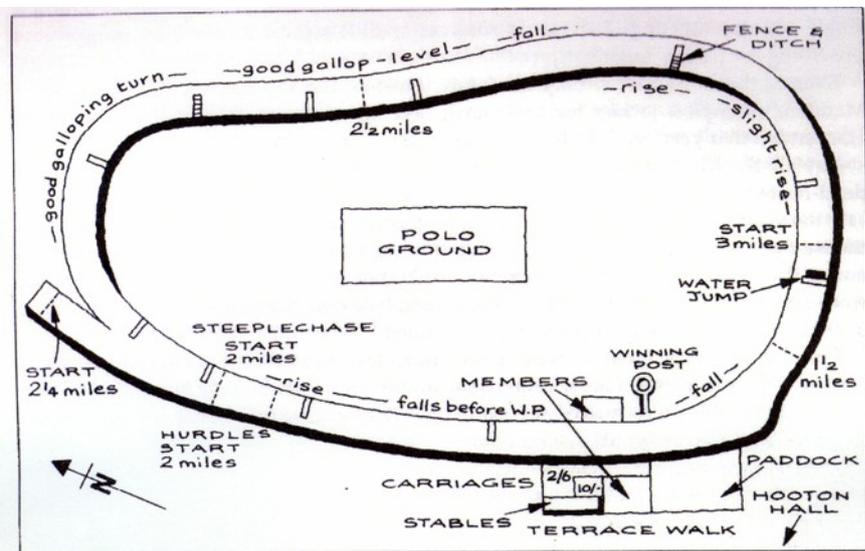


Above - map from the 1850 Stanley Sale which shows the training gallops and the aptly names 'Shoulder of Mutton' plantation - arrowed



Right - the 1912 OS map showing the re-modelled course with the track now passing in front of the 'Shoulder of Mutton' plantation

Below - a plan of the course as published in Chris Pitt's book





All of this suggests the existence of that earlier course, but further research is needed!

Not everyone was pleased with the prospect of a racecourse at Hooton. Mr Wm Fergusson Irvine writing in his book 'The Old Halls of Wirral' (published 1903) and commenting on the fall of the Stanley family says:-

"we mourn their fall especially when we see the gently rolling park lands rented by a limited company, while down the avenues, heavy with historic memories, we hear the raucous yell of the betting tout, and see placards of a race-meeting posted on the trunk of an oak tree that heard Eastham bells ring in King Charles the Second".

How he might have described the Vauxhall Car Factory which currently occupies the site one shudders to think.

The course was to survive as a National Hunt track until the start of the First World War with the last race being run on the 17th April 1915, although a rather bizarre event was staged in 1930 before a crowd of 20,000. Eight riders took part clad in white nightshirts with only the moonlight and a few blazing torches attached to the rails to guide them. The race started on the stroke of midnight and inevitably devolved into chaos as some of the revellers wandered onto the track in the path of the horses. No one was hurt but no one was sure who had won either!

It is significant that this event was held as part of the 325th anniversary celebrations of the gunpowder plot, but given the Stanley's connection with Guy Fawkes that is another story!



Photos

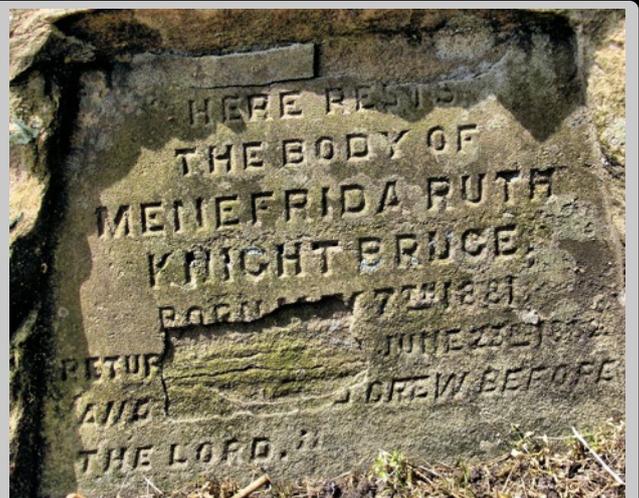
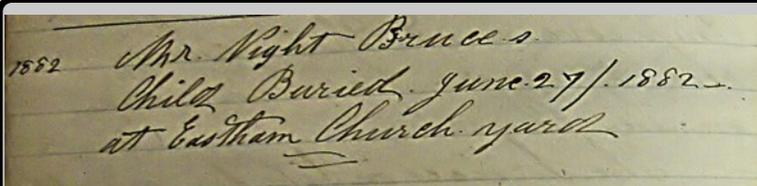
Top - the two-storey County Stand
Centre - The racecourse with the railings that were moved and 'The Shoulder of Mutton' plantation in the distance
Lower - The balustrades of Hooton Hall
Photographs courtesy of Ian Bumphrey

Acknowledgements

Numerous people have helped with this article and we are grateful to John Slusar for the photos of the Hooton Park Race Badges - see his website - www.greyhoundderby.com for more info. Patricia Erigero of 'Thoroughbred Heritage' for permission to use the portrait of 'Macaroni' (web site www.tbheritage.com) Marion Swindlehurst for her superb Internet research Susan Nicholson for material from Bromborough Society Archives Ian Bumphrey for permission to use the photos from his new book 'Yesterday's East Wirral'

John Worthington's Diary *More from the 1880 - 1889 diary of Eastham's Wheelwright. The year for this extract is 1882.....*

- May 20th New Organ Chamber Open
- May 22nd Mrs Matherson - seven new houses finished
- June 21 William Smith Married at her (*sic*) home.
- June 27 Mr Bruce-Knight's Child Buried at Eastham Church yard. - *see headstone right and more detail below*
- June 27th Jane Griffiths Died Aged 54 years. Buried on 29th June 1882 at Eastham.
- July William Smith (*elected*) Captain of the Eastham Quoiting Club.
- July 8th. John Brooks, Blacksmith, Hooton, Died. Buried July 11 1882.
- July 17 Mr McAllister sold his household furniture and Out Door Effects on Monday
- July 20th Mr McAllister and all his Family Sailed to Canada on Thursday.
- Sept 12th Marriage of Miss Gertrude Tobin of Eastham. The pretty village of Eastham was, on Thursday, the scene of much rejoicing consequent upon the marriage of Miss Frances Gertrude Tobin third daughter of Mr James Aspinall Tobin of Eastham House to Captain L.E. Coker, Royal Artillery, Bicester House, Oxfordshire eldest son of the late Major Coker. The village was decorated at different points and the road close to the main entrance to the Parish Church was spanned by a beautiful floral arch.
- Sept Office Bearers of the Eastham R? room (*Reading room?*)
President – Thomas Matherson Esq.,
Vice presidents - The Rev W Torr, Mrs Just, H.E. Chambres, Gurney Fox, E Grey, J Tobin.
Treasurer : Thomas Matherson; Secretary : Mr Edward Waring; Librarian : Mr James Worthington,
Chairman of Committee : Mr W.J. Macdonle.
Committee : Messrs J Bennion, W Brester, Mr Chaplin, T Dawson, A Kent, Mr J Rowland, Mr J Worthington, Samuel Smith, D Smith.
- Sept 23rd Elizabeth Price Died age 77 years – buried at Eastham.
- Sept 29th Eastham Church Harvest Thanksgiving was on Friday.
- October 6th Oddfellows. Widows Friends Lodge Eastham. The members of the above club had a substantial Knife and fork tea at their Club room, Stanley Arms, Eastham on October 6th at 6 o'clock also a ball in the evening. Dancing to commence at 8 o'clock. Tickets for tea and ball 2/- each, for Ball alone 6d each to be obtained from any members of the committee Members of the committee viz – Jas McKie, Jno Griffiths, L. Hughes, Wm Hill, Bro Jno Rowe, Bro Thos Naylor, H Wright and Sec



The poignancy of the death of a child can be felt just as movingly today as when it happened 130 years ago.

Little Manefrida Ruth Knight-Bruce died aged just 13 months in June 1882. John Worthington's handwritten account (above), the headstone (top right) and the now damaged inscription (left) movingly encapsulates the grief of her parents. Surely this demonstrates the case for recording, and if possible, preserving these monuments that so vividly express the sorrow and bewilderment of the parents at the death of their beloved child?

Book Review

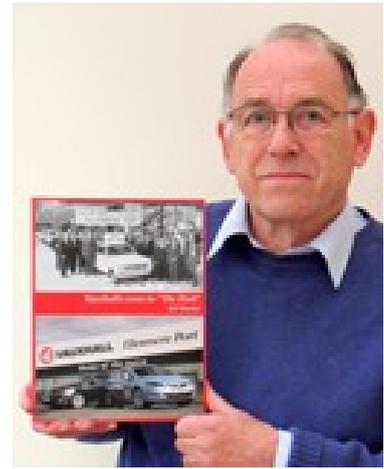
**Vauxhalls Come to "The Port"
by Bill Thacker**

*The story of the
development of Hooton
Airfield into the Ellesmere
Port Plant*

In 1900 Hooton Hall was standing empty and virtually abandoned by its owner Richard Naylor. Powered flight was still three years away and the motor car age was just dawning; all motor vehicles had by law to be preceded by a man carrying a red flag. Hooton Park would see two World Wars and many businesses succeed and a few fail in the intervening years. Richard Naylor would be astonished that on his mansion's estate on the former racecourse and airfield there now stands a 3½ million square feet factory employing 2,500 people capable of building 16,000 cars every month. It's

estimated that about 100,000 people (including the author) have worked at Vauxhall Motors since November 1962 when the plant opened. This has had an enormous collective impact upon the lives of the people of Chester and Wirral as there cannot be anyone living in the area who doesn't know someone who has worked at Vauxhall.

This new book by Bill Thacker tells the story of the site from country house through military uses to how it came to be Vauxhall's northern manufacturing plant. Although this is on the surface a superb well-researched and sumptuously illustrated local history publication, this is also very much a people book, focusing on the personalities before and during the Vauxhall era. Oral history from factory workers really brings the Vauxhall story to life and the entire book is illustrated with period photographs. A colour section features 1960s advertising for the Viva - "Easiest possible car to clean. Just wash, rinse and wipe to restore showroom



shine." Glamorous women drive the cars, men in sheepskin coats look on, adoring families crowd round the new Viva... If you have worked at Vauxhall or had a Viva or an Astra this is a must-have book for you. *Vauxhalls Come to "The Port"* The book is available from Bill Thacker Tel., 01244 683521 @ £11 P&P Free. (RRP £13.95)

'Before and after' photographs are always an interesting way of comparing the evolution of a building. The picture on the right, taken in 1920, perhaps reflects a more opulent age, while the later picture (2010) a more austere time.

The exotic Victorian balcony sadly disappeared in the 1970's, the chimneys too have altered; the little annexe to the left hasn't changed much but it no longer displays the 'Cycles' sign!

The windows are unaltered, but the ornate carvings above the ones in the earlier picture have gone. A Sky TV aerial now adorns the side wall.



**History & Heritage
Week 2012**

Wirral's annual history event will take place again in September, 2012

It has been suggested that Eastham's contribution might be an exhibition to demonstrate the history of the village using a time-line based on the evolution of St Mary's Church from about 500 AD - just after the Romans left Britain!

This promises to be an exciting project and will be an ideal opportunity for everyone to be involved.

Watch this space!



Help!

Does anyone know the origin of this monument that at one time occupied a prominent site on the balustraded walk at Hooton Hall overlooking the race course?

The monument had three sides and was mounted on three stone tortoises, the inscription was in Greek but the photo is not clear enough for translation.

Might it have been erected by Richard Naylor to commemorate his winning of the Derby by 'Macaroni', or might it have been erected after the accidental death of his champion sire, Stockwell? See Hooton Racecourse article in this issue.

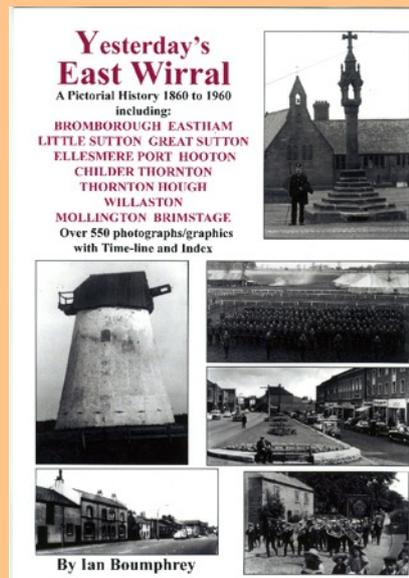
If anyone has any ideas then Bill Thacker would be delighted to hear from you. Give him a ring on 01244 683521 if you can help.

Yesterday's East Wirral

Ian Boumphrey's superb 128 page new book, lavishly illustrated with 550 photographs featuring Eastham, Bromborough, Ellesmere Port and other adjoining villages.

It covers the 100 years from 1860 to 1960 and is an utterly fascinating pictorial guide to the life and history of the area. It is an excellent reference book and would make an ideal Christmas present for former residents who have moved away from the area.

Unputdownable!



Available from any Eastham Archive Group committee member (see below left) or give David Allan a ring on 0151 327 3576 to secure your copy.

Free Delivery in the Eastham area, otherwise please add £2.50 for P&P

Price £9.95

CAN YOU HELP?

Do you have any memories of old Eastham or perhaps photographs that we can scan. If so we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact one of the committee members below.

John Brown 327 1034

Marion Swindlehurst 0161 865 6820

Tracey Fisher 334 8960

Chris Monro - 327 4721

David Allan 327 3576 or email - david.allan132@ntlworld.com

David Colenso 327 3546

Join Us

If you are interested in local history or involved in family research or just want to know more about the area in which you live then please do join the group.

Our annual membership subscription is only £5 and this will ensure that you receive a year's supply of The Eastham Archivist (four issues a year)

To join just send a fiver to David Colenso, Hooton Mount Lodge, Eastham Village Road, Eastham, Wirral CH62 0AW

(Please make cheques payable to EAG)