

NANTWICH at play

A cartoon illustration of three children playing around a well. A boy in a yellow vest and white shirt is jumping over the well. Two girls in yellow dresses and white aprons are also playing. The well is decorated with yellow flowers. The text 'NANTWICH at play' is written in large, red, stylized letters.

Nantwich at Play

A Look at Leisure and Play through the Ages

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME to our exhibition in which we will show you the various ways in which Nantwich people throughout the ages have amused themselves when they are away from work.



So what is 'play'?

It's not just for kids! Play is as old as human society itself. From the earliest times people have sung songs, danced, told stories and pictured their worlds in painting or drama. In the early years of our history, much of this play was closely bound up with all other aspects of everyday life such as the rhythms of the seasons or religious calendars. Play in the past was more often than not a shared activity, an expression of community values and relationships. But even in these earlier times there was scope for more individual skills. People enjoyed the performances of travelling players or musicians and admired the skills of jugglers, tumblers or fire-eaters. Gambling and drinking also played a large part in organised activities such as Bear Baiting and Cock fighting. In Nantwich, these took place in local taverns and inns.

Even in these distant times there were social differences between classes, between old and young and between men and women. Some of these divisions were to develop from 1800 onwards to be joined by other distinctions. These included divisions between:

Players and Spectators
Amateurs and Professionals
Commercial Providers (e.g. cinemas) and consumers or audiences.

Let us start with the Medieval period and go right up to modern times. Along the way we shall see how play became 'organised' and increasingly diverse as numerous facilities and opportunities were created to enable people to 'get out' and enjoy themselves.



NOW

Enjoy the fun of FAIRS through the ages
Delight in a day at the RACES
Bathe in the former elegance of BRINE BATHS HOTEL
Capture the experience of going to the CINEMA in Nantwich
Explore through EXCURSIONS by train or bus
Support the SPORTS teams and players of yesterday.



Don't Delay - Make Your Way!

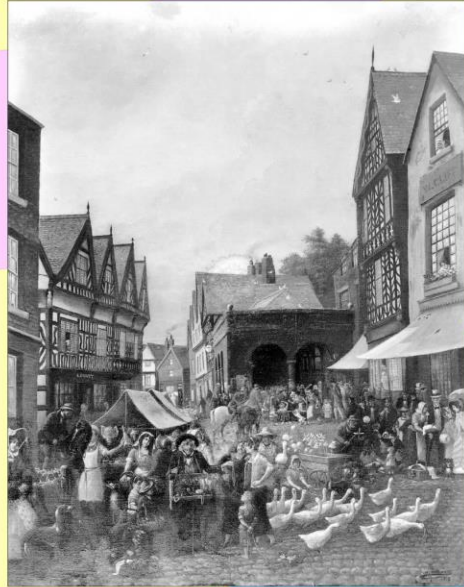
The earliest records go back to the 13th century, when Bishop Burnell on the 19th May, 1283, obtained the privilege of a chartered fair at Nantwich.

Historically fairs in Nantwich have always been connected with religious festivals, and three main fairs have been held:

- The March Fair – held on the 26th March
- The Bartholomew Fair – originally held on the feast of St. Bartholomew (24th August)
- The Christmas Fair – held on the 4th December

The biggest was the Bartholomew Fair, which was also known as the Old Fair, Great Fair or September Fair. This fair was originally held on the feast of St. Bartholomew and for four following days. In later years it was held on just one day, on the 4th September.

The fairs were a mixture of business and pleasure. Livestock, clothes and hardware would be bought and sold, and labour recruited.



Artist Archie Mackinnon 1912



The fun of the fair used to include "bull, bear and badger-baitings; cock-fighting; sack-racing; bolting hot porridge or dumplings (barm-balls, or barm-baws, as Nantwich people called them); swarming greasy poles, and grinning through horse-collars"!



In former times vendors, in order to attract buyers, were accompanied by jugglers, minstrels and buffoons; hence this fair became the great pleasure of the year, and often the scene of riot and dissipation".

In an 1806 List of Fairs three fairs are listed in Nantwich on March 15th, September 4th, and December 16th with cattle, horses, clothes, flannels, hardware, pewter and bedding being mentioned.

In 1819 a fourth fair was added, the New Fair which held on the second Tuesday in June.

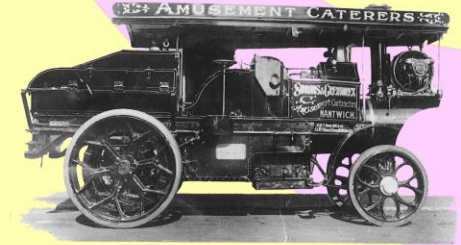


Music

There's even a piece of music, called Nantwich Fair.



Fun Fairs



Simons and Greatorex with Nantwich livery.
Photograph David T Greatorex

John Greatorex (1846-1943) was a photographer who did magic lantern shows and became a fairground owner. He had a base in Nantwich, and helped form the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Protection Association in 1889 (which later became The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain).

John had nine children, all were born showmen. Their rides included dodgems, electric galloping horses' and paratroopers.



Simons and Greatorex at Kingsley Fields
Photograph David T Greatorex

We have all learned through play, by touching, tasting and moving objects. From early times children were given toys to play with and even the poorest of children would have some small object, a stick, a piece of cloth, or a stone that was their toy. The class and wealth of their parents influenced the toys children played with and the activities available for their entertainment as is the case today. A form of football was played by adults in medieval times but it was soon copied and it certainly hasn't lost its popularity over the centuries.



Victorian children playing in the street with whatever they could find as a ball



Cup and Ball has been played through Medieval, Tudor, Georgian and Victorian times. It is still popular today and improves eye hand coordination. **We have them on sale in the Shop**

It was in the 19th century that toys were designed and made specifically for children. The industrial revolution with its ingenuity for manufacturing was instrumental in providing an amazing variety of toys and mechanical and clockwork toys. They would be made of wood, paper or metal—no plastic then. Coupled with the rise of the middle classes with money to spend, children's toys became not just entertaining but also educational. Better off children in Nantwich would probably have a Noah's Ark to play with as this was a toy allowed on Sundays.

Poorer children would often play with home-made toys, a clothes peg became a doll and a lump of wood could be a boat or a cart.



Victorian Noah's Ark

Dolls made from scraps of material, or wool and a peg.

The 1920's and 30's were a golden age for transport toys, with scale model boats, cars and trains. Children still like to play with trains and Thomas the Tank engine is as popular today with the children born in the 21st century in Nantwich. During the war and for some time after toys were difficult to obtain but in Nantwich there was a toy shop and we've been told of children in Nantwich eagerly looking in the window around Christmas time. Toy farms were very popular and we have one in the Museum collection.



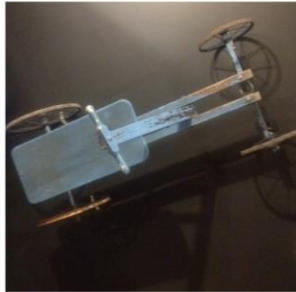
In the 1950's toys became a large part of everyday life for children although war games were very popular for years. Children would pretend to be aero-planes by putting out both arms and running as fast as they could, waving the "wings" and making engine noises. This has been confirmed by almost every male member of the research group. Girls in the main still played with domestic toys, dolls and dolls prams although they also had tricycles and scooters. Books and particularly annuals became a must at Christmas time most of us will remember our favourite one.



Doll's twin pram of the 1970's a luxury gift for a girl

"Trolleying was a great game and we would pester people to get the wood and the wheels. Dads would sometimes help with the making of them but when we got older we made them ourselves. We would 'trolley' down Crewe Road there wasn't much traffic then!"

G Moulton born 1938 and brought up in Nantwich



Home made trolley looking very well used with not much rubber left of the tyres.

Later as austerity disappeared there were games of cowboys with Davy Crocket hats and Roy Rogers outfits from the western heroes on television. Toy guns with 'caps' were also a used although the first two fingers pointed at the enemy could be used but you had to shout BANG.

The 1960's Baby Boomer generation owned more toys than any other previous generation—the plastic age had arrived.

Children still played out in the streets. Girls in particular loved to skip, play marbles and hop scotch although many games were played by both sexes.

"Cricket involved all the street and we played against a street light base on a road junction! When a vehicle ap-proached we just moved and then continued the game. Rounders was played in the same way."

Glyn Lowe lived in Wrenbury in the 1950's.

Girl's toys took a different turn in the late 1950's. Dolls now needn't be miniature babies preparing girls for motherhood but could be glamorous and active with the introduction of Barbie and later Sindy dolls. They even had boyfriends.



Sindy doll 1960's looking very much like a fashionable adult of the time.

1980's and Sindy is now very much part of the youth culture.

Girls in particular loved singing rhymes in the playground

"Row Row Row your boat
Gently down the stream
Throw your teacher overboard
And listen to her scream"

Said to another child:

Reply:

Liar, Liar Pants on fire!
I don't care, I don't care
And listen to her scream"
I can buy another pair!

Rhymes from Anna nee Pritchard, Nantwich Late 70's and 80's.

The children born in the 1990's onwards play with electronic toys. From a young age they manipulate the games on tablets, phones and computers often leaving older people bewildered. Bikes and scooters are still popular but are built and look very different.



Dolls are not as popular but toys such as Sylvan families with houses, cars and gardens widely advertised on television easily create a demand to collect as many as possible.

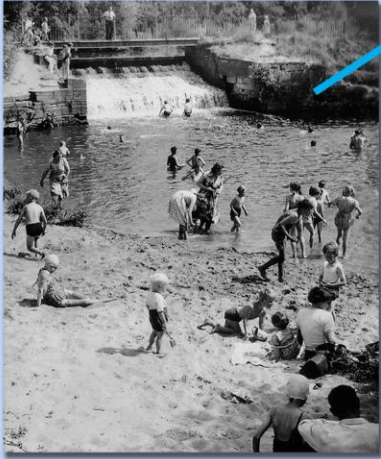


Sylvan Buttermilk Rabbit Family

Bathing and Swimming

The River Weaver has been a popular place to bathe and swim. In 1879 it was described as a "nice clean river" perhaps reflecting the recent moves in the mid-nineteenth century to drain sewage into the river downstream of the town.

At one time walkers would throw pennies from the town bridge to youngsters splashing in the water below.



Families enjoy the "towns own Blackpool" as they bathe and swim in the river at The Willows in the 1960s.



The long pool in Bathing Meadow where people could bathe and swim in the eighteenth century.



(Photograph Sue Church, 2011)

The outline of the pool in Bathing Meadow still visible in times of flood.

Rivers are dangerous.

The water in the River Weaver can rise very quickly. Many townspeople have lost their lives in the river over the centuries. When 12 year old Frederick Adams drowned in the river in 1879 it was realised how few people could swim. There was a call for more facilities for "boys to be instructed in the art of swimming." Why were girls not mentioned?

James Hall, a local schoolmaster and historian in the nineteenth century, observed that a long pool at Bathing Meadow fed from the river via a sluice had, at one time, provided a place where people could learn to swim.



People also swam in the canal. This picture illustrates a swimming gala held at Acton (later named Nantwich) Basin in 1908.

Did they know about the eels?



During the nineteenth century 'salt baths' at Snow Hill provided places for people to bathe and swim. They were replaced in 1935 by the open air Brine Baths Swimming Pool. The freshwater pool was opened in 1976. During a heat wave in that year 30,232 people visited the pools in a 2½ week period.



Opening event at the Brine Baths Swimming Pool, 1935.

Cruising

Some people prefer boating. The Nantwich & Border Counties Yacht Club was founded in 1953 at Acton Basin on the Shropshire Union Canal. A sailing section was established at Doddington Park a year later.

Activities included regattas, weekend games and competitions. Also long distance cruises to other canals and rivers until traffic on the canal made them impractical.

Nantwich & Border Counties Yacht Club Burgee - featuring:



Green - England,
White - Wales,
Plume of Feathers - Cheshire
Leopard - Shropshire
Knot - Staffordshire.

In the early days the cruising boats were custom built at Taylor's Yard in Chester. They were built in gleaming mahogany and were known as 'gentlemen's narrow beam cruisers.' In the winter they had to be craned out of the water to protect them from ice. Today many of the boats have steel hulls.



Cruisers moored at Nantwich Basin in 1968

The club moved to its current Dorfold Basin site in 1974. It was opened by Mrs Weatherby whose husband, John, was Commodore at the time.

Cruising the canals has been described:

Gliding smoothly through the peaceful country, the cares of everyday life become non-existent, all fear of boredom is removed as the hirer captains his boat, manoeuvring his craft in and out of the locks and drawbridges. Coronation Canal Cruisers leaflet ca 1950s/60s.

In 1968 the Shropshire Union Canal was declared a cruising canal. Since then the number of privately owned and hire boats has gradually increased.



Cruising Nantwich Embankment on the Shropshire Union Canal.

British Transport Waterways started a fleet of hire boats in 1958.

Today there are local marinas at:

- Nantwich
- Cholmondeston (Venetian Marina)
- Church Minshull (Aqueduct Marina)
- Swanley (Swanley Bridge Marina)
- Audlem (Overwater Marina) (below)



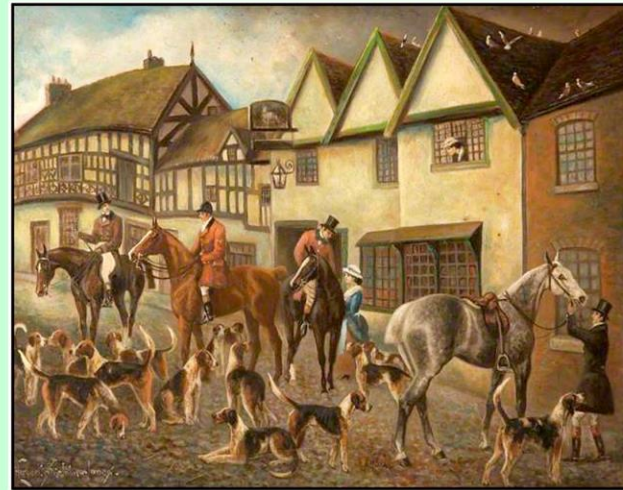
(Photograph Janet Maughan, 2014)

The Brine Baths Hotel

Nantwich Spa town?

In the 19th century it became fashionable to visit Spa towns and 'take the waters' to alleviate various ailments, including gout, rheumatism and indigestion. Towns with locally sourced mineral waters, such as Buxton, Harrogate and Leamington Spa became popular. In an attempt to exploit the local brine The Nantwich Salt Spring Baths Company was established in 1880 but its ventures proved unsuccessful and it was wound up in 1888. In 1887 The Nantwich Brine and Medicinal Baths Company was formed. The Company purchased Shrewbridge Hall and, taking advantage of a nearby brine spring, set about converting the Georgian mansion into a luxury hydro hotel, converting it at great expense.

The Shrewbridge Hall Brine Baths Hotel opened in 1893 and offered a large dining room, a ballroom, 54 bedrooms and a brine treatment suite. It was situated in 80 acres of grounds and had a golf course, tennis and croquet courts, a bowling green and gardens. It also provided stabling for 50 horses.



'Sporting Cheshire, Old Lamb Hotel' by Herbert St John Jones

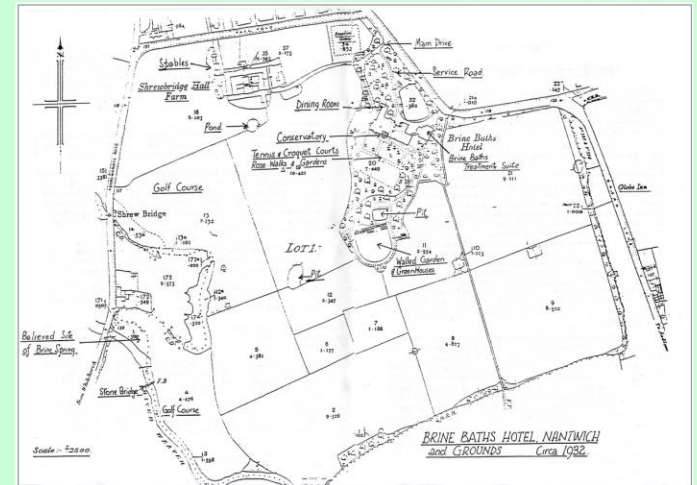
The Hunts

The hotel became an important and popular centre for the hunting community providing private apartments and stabling during the season. It was conveniently close to 5 local hunts - the North and South Cheshire Hounds; the North Staffordshire; the North Shropshire; and Sir Watkin Williams Wynn's Hunt.

Decline and Closure

Despite the appearance of affluence the hotel lost money during its early years and whilst a little profit was made later the Company went into liquidation in 1902. In 1903 a new company was registered, but appeared to be as profligate as the previous management purchasing many valuable works of art, antique furniture and rare china to try and maintain the grandeur of the hotel.

During the Second World War the land was taken over for agriculture and later the hotel was requisitioned by the War Office. After the War the hotel re-opened but struggled. In 1948 the hotel and grounds were purchased by the Working Men's Club and Institute Union who turned it into a convalescent home. In 1958 the hotel and land was sold for housing development and the hotel demolished.



The Open Road



An early velocipede in Nantwich.

Note the direct drive, there is no chain, no brakes, the tyres are solid and there are no springs visible.

Given the cobbled street it must have been a very uncomfortable ride!

Imagine the freedom such a machine would offer working people.

Cycling clubs became popular towards the end of the nineteenth century . Because the bicycles were expensive membership was largely confined to gentlemen and tradesmen.

The Penny-farthing 'ordinary' bicycle was popular as it was well suited to the poor roads. Even so the ride must have been uncomfortable as the bicycles had large iron wheels and sponge like 'cushion' wheels which would only have provided a modicum of comfort. The Penny-farthing was also quite dangerous. A rider could easily take a header over the handlebars. It is no surprise that excursions on Penny-farthings were relatively short perhaps not exceeding 10 miles.

By the beginning of the twentieth century bicycles were much better. Dunlop had introduced pneumatic tyres whilst mass production brought down costs.

Working men could now afford bicycles and gained the freedom of the countryside to race, tour and socialise. The original clubs declined as their members moved on to motor bikes and cars. The National Clarion Cycling Club was formed in 1895 taking its name from Robert Blatchford's socialist newspaper. Sections of the club were established throughout the country. Longer excursions were now possible. Beauty spots were favoured destinations especially where refreshments were available. Challenge rides involved distances of perhaps 100 miles whilst more leisurely rides would have covered 20-30 miles.

Nantwich did not have a cycling club but it was a favoured destination. It would have been possible to reach the town from places such as Liverpool, Manchester and the Potteries.

The Victoria Cocoa House in Pillory Street with next door the Free Library - now Nantwich Museum.

It was described as:

"A house of call for the Cyclists Touring Club."

An advertisement announced:

"Cyclists will be well attended to, and tired nature will be revived by sleeping accommodation of the most satisfactory kind."



Excursions by road

By the late nineteenth century bus services were well established. Charabancs were literally 'coaches with benches'. They were originally pulled by horses but by the early twentieth century they had engines.



Two charabancs outside the Nags Head, Willaston prepare for an excursion.

Note the men in one vehicle and the women in the other.



A Women's Institute outing prepares to depart ca 1950.



Ernie Chapman stands by Crosville 2174 FM Bristol MW in the company's ivory livery for coaches. The model operated between 1963 and 1977.

Note the partial roof glazing ideal for scenic routes.

Was the coach parked on the Welsh coast - Aberdovey or Barmouth where cliffs rise behind a narrow coastal strip?



Railway excursions

The railway came to Nantwich in 1858. It revolutionised travel and marked an end of self-contained local communities. Previously people could only move at the speed of a horse. By the middle of the nineteenth century a change of train at Crewe, probably the most important railway junction in the country, gave access to many places throughout the land.

Local people could travel far afield quickly and cheaply whilst those who worked on the railway including the works at Crewe enjoyed free travel.

Many Irish immigrants found work on the railways. The journey home to Ireland was cheap and easy taking the train to Holyhead and the railway-owned ferry to Dublin.

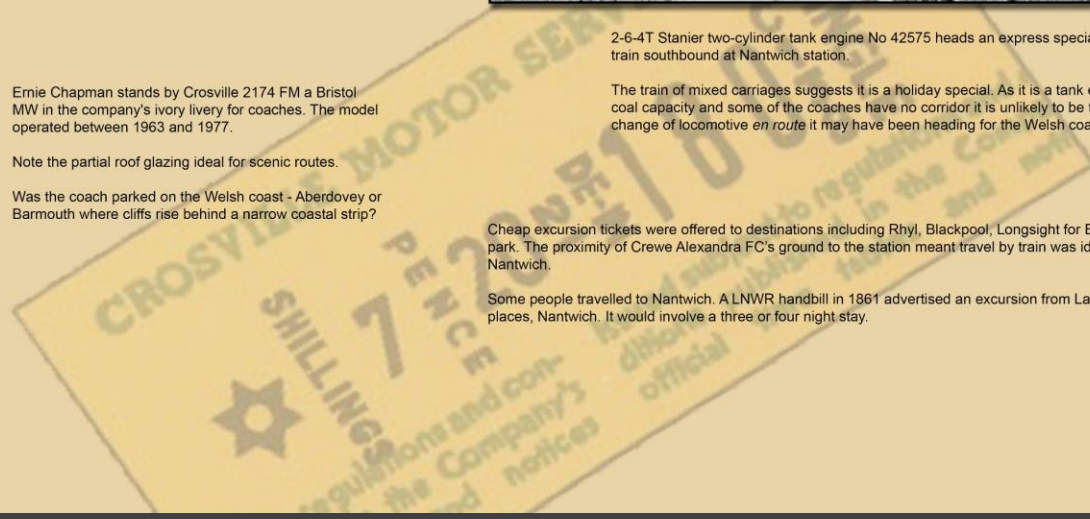


2-6-4T Stanier two-cylinder tank engine No 42575 heads an express special or excursion train southbound at Nantwich station.

The train of mixed carriages suggests it is a holiday special. As it is a tank engine with limited coal capacity and some of the coaches have no corridor it is unlikely to be travelling far. After a change of locomotive *en route* it may have been heading for the Welsh coast.

Cheap excursion tickets were offered to destinations including Rhyl, Blackpool, Longsight for Belle Vue Zoo and amusement park. The proximity of Crewe Alexandra FC's ground to the station meant travel by train was ideal for supporters from Nantwich.

Some people travelled to Nantwich. A LNWR handbill in 1861 advertised an excursion from Lancaster to, amongst other places, Nantwich. It would involve a three or four night stay.





Greenwood map 1819 showing the racecourse

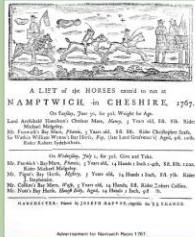


Nantwich racecourse on modern map

map data © 2015 Google - map created using <http://www.gpsvisualizer.com>

It is often overlooked that the racing of thoroughbreds took place in Nantwich for over a hundred years. The inaugural race was in 1729. Racing continued until the 1820s. The racecourse was situated on Beam Heath – to the north of the town off the A530 - in an area close to the Alvaston Hall Hotel. Research is under way at Nantwich Museum to establish a complete narrative of the Racecourse.

Initially racing was the sport of rich men who would exhibit their wealth by showing off their expensive new racehorses. Gradually townspeople began to take an interest. Eventually a June race meeting became established in Nantwich as a major social occasion coinciding with the town fair. This formed part of a circuit of summer races throughout Cheshire including towns such as Tarporley and Knutsford.



Nantwich race card 1767

Nantwich Races and Town Fair, with accompanying festivities, often alcohol-fuelled prospered into the nineteenth century, including food stalls, entertainers, pedlars, and travelling players. Venues utilised included pubs and inns such as The Crown and The Griffin.

Bear baiting and bull baiting, together with cock fighting were popular activities during the day. These activities were the subject of heavy gambling



Bear baiting in the 17th century



A limited number of races were held each day, such as the "Nobleman's and Gentleman's Subscription Purse" and the "Town Purse". The "Gold Cup" race of 1821 had a value of One Hundred Guineas and the subscription was ten guineas, this equates to a winning pot of £920 in today's money.



"Winning by a nose" by Francis Massey of Poole Hall

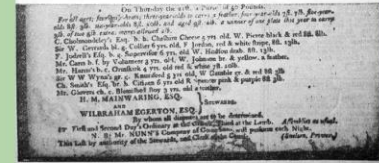
The type of racing in Nantwich began as a challenge between two horses running over a long distance. Gradually an oval course was developed where the need for stamina was replaced by choosing to race higher quality horses over shorter distances.

A painting exhibited at Nantwich Museum and dating from 1781 may give some clues as to newspaper reports and contemporary racing handbooks.



"Mr Walsh's Perdita with Jockey Up, on Nantwich Racecourse" by Benjamin Killingbeck (1781)

In 1800 the annual races were held in July but a further most curious race was run earlier in the year. According to a newspaper report: "On the 6th March a singular and well contested race was run over Beam Heath, near Nantwich, between Mr Barrowcliffe, who rode his Welsh horse, "Punch," twice round the race-course, two miles, and Mr Yardley, who ran on foot, with his hands tied on his back once round the course. The race was won by Mr Barrowcliffe beating Mr Yardley by four yards, and was performed in 5 min. and 56 seconds.



Nantwich race card 1803

The final race was on the 6 June 1823. By that time the gentry were losing interest in bringing their horses to, what were by then, old fashioned racecourses such as Nantwich. The newly wealthy owners of the Industrial Revolution also preferred newer, more sophisticated venues.

In 1824 a shoe manufacturer, Mr. White, and a salt manufacturer, Mr. Davies, applied to lease the site of the racecourse. The land was then ploughed for cultivation. Other sites around Nantwich such as the "Ley Grounds" and the "Ox Pastures" were used after 1824 but with only limited success. It is not certain where these sites were. Can you help?



Could this be the start & finish post?

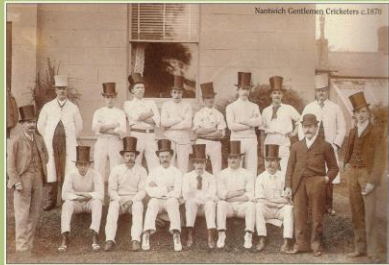
The demise of the racecourse was not the end of an interest in attending races by Nantwich people. By the mid-eighteenth century horse racing had become the first truly regulated sport. The formation of The Jockey Club as the regulating body tried to eliminate corruption and encourage a spirit of fair play as well as legitimating betting. Accordingly, racing began to develop as a major spectator activity. This trend accelerated with the arrival of the railways which made travel to race meetings far more accessible to a wide range of people.

As transport links continued to improve, Nantwich racegoers could make a day out of going to racecourses such as Chester, Uttoxeter and Bangor-on-Dee as well as further afield – a trait which continues to this day. In addition the deregulation of betting has led to there being an increasing number of Bookmakers shops and online facilities where this popular pastime flourishes.

Nantwich Racecourse was a vital part in establishing British racegoing! You may not have known that!

The town has many sports clubs including:

Nantwich Cricket Club



The earliest records of Nantwich Cricket Club suggest that it began in 1848, playing at Kingsley Fields. It was around 1876 that the famous A.N. Hornby of Lancashire and England first played at Nantwich. In 1879 he played for Lancashire against a Nantwich side of 20 players which the county side won by an over and an innings.



In 1890 Nantwich joined the North Staffordshire League, winning their first trophy in 1895. However, the club left the league a few years later to play friendly games. Two names of importance to the club, Maybury and Steventon, were instrumental in returning the club to league status in 1920. They provided the impetus for success in the 1920s and early 1930s with the club able to attract top quality players from outside the area.

With the expiry of the lease at Kingsley Fields the club moved to the Barony Park in 1955, playing there until 1970 when they moved to their current ground at Whitehouse Lane.



Nantwich Town Football Club



The first recorded football game involving players from Nantwich was in 1877 with an away match with the newly formed Crewe Alexandra club.

In 1884 Nantwich Football Club was established and played at the London Road ground (Jackson Avenue). After initial success the club struggled to survive in the periods before the First World War and between the wars. No matches were played during the wars.

In 1999 the ground was sold and together with the aid of grants and loans the purchase and construction of the Kingsley Fields ground was made.

The highlight of Nantwich Town FC's history was when it won the Football Association Vase trophy in 2006.



Crewe and Nantwich Rugby Football Club

A club was formed in Crewe in 1874 and was associated with the Crewe Railway Works. It only lasted 3 years.

The current club was formed as Nantwich RUFC in 1923, playing at a variety of grounds including at Victoria Park, Crewe. In 1926 the club changed its name to include Crewe. In the same year the team played in the white jersey with black hoop for the first time.

In 1945 the club re-formed and as its old ground was still under cultivation played its games at Haslington. In 1958 the team moved to play at the Barony Park, Nantwich. During the 1960s the club struggled due to a lack of players but by the 1970s was able to field 5 sides.

In 1995 the club moved to its current location at the Vagrants on Newcastle Road, Willaston and is thriving, running over 20 teams including a touch rugby team, a ladies team, juniors and mini rugby.

Park Road Bowling club

A group of professional and middle class businessmen formed a 'gentleman's' bowling club in 1906, renting the bowling green from the Brine Baths Hotel. A pavilion was constructed on land adjacent at a cost £120. New members were strictly vetted as to their standing and financial status in the town. The annual subscription was a guinea (£1.1.0).

The tenancy agreement with the Hotel and its subsequent owners continued until the land was purchased from a housing developer in 1958.

It took a long time for women to be accepted as full playing members of the club. This was only achieved following a secret ballot at the 1995 AGM.

The club started competing in the Market Drayton league in 1968 having previously played friendly fixtures against local clubs. The club is thriving and now has 10 teams playing in various local leagues.



Nantwich Tennis Club

The tennis club was formed in 1896 and included from its onset women members and players.

For most of the following years the club occupied the Mount Drive courts until moving to Windy Arbour off the Middlewich Road in 1986. It is a flourishing club with over a hundred adult members and nearly one hundred juniors.



The Vagrants

In 1932 casual games of cricket were organised by boys of the then Crewe County Secondary School under the name Crewe Vagrants because of the initial lack of a home ground. War time saw an amalgamation with the Doddington Park cricket club. Post War Frank Boden, founder member and considerable benefactor of the club, purchased the present site on Newcastle Road, Willaston. The purchase of the old pavilion from Middlewich cricket club proved a challenge with each section being moved by lorry, from pub to pub, to its new location.

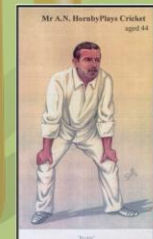
A hockey section (men and women) was formed in 1956 with players from the Permanent Way Club, Crewe. In 1973 a squash court was opened with the original club members coming from the nearby Alvaston Hall club. In 2008 the South Cheshire Harriers started to use the club as its base. In addition football is played on the all-weather pitch.

In 1995 with the extension of the A500 road to Nantwich and the realignment of existing roads the club house and squash courts were demolished and new ones built.



A.N. Hornby

Albert Neilson Hornby (1847 -1925) one of the best known sportsmen in England during the nineteenth century, lived at Church Minshull, Nantwich and is buried at St Mary's Church Acton. He played cricket for Lancashire, the MCC and England, captaining his county and country, including the famous first 'Ashes' match at the Oval in 1882 when Australia defeated England by seven runs. He also played rugby for Preston Grasshoppers, Manchester FC and England, captaining his country in 1882. He even played football for Blackburn Rovers in 1878 but was unable to continue because of rugby and cricket commitments.



Early Days

The first public projected image shows in Nantwich took place at the Town Hall and Corn Exchange by the bridge which opened in 1858.



By the turn of the century Pendleton's Talking Pictures were being shown. Mr and Mrs Smith from Market Drayton read the captions on the screen and provided sound effects. Coconut shells made the sound of galloping horses. Tissue paper the sound of slithering snakes.

The Cosy

Nantwich Picturedrome opened in 1912 in the old Ebenezer Chapel in Castle Street. Animated pictures were shown every day. Entrance charges ranged from 3d - 6d (1 - 2½p.) In 1920 the cinema was re-named the Cosy Super Cinema. It closed in 1950 being unable to meet fire safety requirements. The building survives as a nightclub.



The building in 2014 which housed the Cosy Cinema from 1920.

In the early days of the silent films the dialogue was provided by captions and sub-titles. The story has been told of one daughter who would visit the Cosy with her mother in order to read to her the captions and sub-titles.

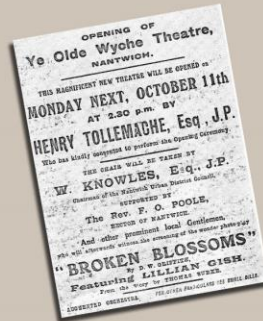


The first floor dining room at Ye Olde Wyche Theatre which overlooked Market Street.



Ye Olde Wyche Theatre/The Regal

Ye Olde Wyche Theatre at the end of Market Street was opened with some ceremony on 11 October 1920. It was owned by Mr T E Markham who also owned the Cosy Cinema and was associated with the Town Hall Cinema.



Announcement of the opening of Ye Olde Wyche Theatre (left) and a report of the occasion from the Nantwich Guardian 15 October 1920 (right.)



The auditorium of the Ye Olde Wyche Theatre in the 1930s. There was seating for 1200. A central aisle was added when the building became a permanent cinema

The theatre was designed to show films and for the performance of variety shows and stage plays. The stage was 20' deep with dressing rooms behind. The site of the stage and scenery doors can still be seen.

The theatre became the Regal during the 1940s and was converted to Cinemascope in the early 1950s. Cinemascope involves a wide curved screen providing pictures which are panoramic: it was accompanied by stereophonic sound. At the time the Regal had the largest cinema screen in Cheshire. As a result the seating capacity had to be reduced to 1000. There were 900 seats downstairs and, following closure of the dining room, 100 seats on the balcony.

In 1954 W Southam Morris of SM Associated Cinema Ltd sold the Regal and the Cosy to Essoldo Circuit (Control) Ltd.

The Regal closed in 1966 probably due to dwindling audiences as television grew in popularity at that time. By 1959 television had virtually reached the whole of the country. The building in Market Street became a bingo hall, the Legalite, but that closed in 1976.



The Mickytops - remember them?

The Mickytops was the Saturday morning show for children still fondly remembered and highly regarded.

They featured short cartoons and a longer serial such as Flash Gordon starring Clarence Linden 'Buster' Crabbe.

Boys from St Joseph's approved school in London Road would file down to the Regal for the show. They had their own place on one side of the auditorium.

The shows could be noisy and children who misbehaved could find themselves ejected from the cinema. They were, however, given a free ice lolly on their birthdays.

Half the thrill was the sense of being unaccompanied in an adult venue.

The programme would be a major topic of conversation at school on Monday mornings. Those who had not been there would hang on the tales of Zorro's exploits.



Oakfield Zoological Gardens

The founder of Chester Zoo, George Mottershead, was born in Sale, and as a child regularly visited Belle Vue Zoo in Manchester. He was unhappy with how the animals were kept, and decided to have his own zoo – without bars!

In October 1916, at the Battle of the Somme, George Mottershead suffered a bullet wound to his neck, injuring his spine. He was initially paralysed, and recuperated at Highfield Military Hospital in Knotty Ash. Contrary to the expected medical prognosis he eventually recovered the ability to walk (with a limp) after 3 years in a wheelchair.

After the war, George, with his wife Lizzie and daughter Muriel, together with George's parents (Albert and Lucy) moved to the Oakfields, on Stock Lane in Shavington in 1919 to begin new lives as market gardeners. They then bought a shop in Mill Street, Crewe to sell the produce.

George started selling pet birds. Realising that there was an opportunity to attract even more customers, he put his collection of animals on display and, encouraged by a surge in public interest, started adding even more exotic animals. Chimps and monkeys were soon followed by bears, reptiles and more birds.

It was at Shavington where George originally had his zoo:



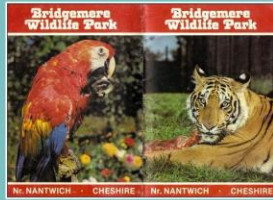
Shavington Zoo c1931

It was so popular that Crosville Motors started a bus service there. In 1930 George bought Oakfield House and nine acres of land for £3,500 at Upton, Chester and moved his animals there. Chester Zoo opened in 1931. His story was featured in the BBC drama "Our Zoo", but they didn't mention the zoo in Shavington and just mentioned the shop they had in Crewe.



Bridgemere Wildlife Park

There was another zoo at Bridgemere, on land near Bridgemere Hall, called Bridgemere Wildlife Park:



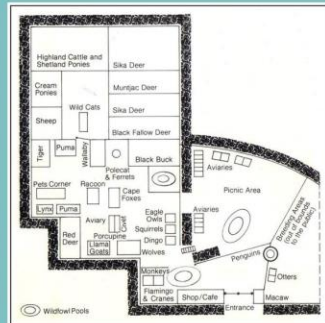
Bridgemere Wildlife Park Guide

Bridgemere Wildlife Park was officially opened in June 1972, by His Grace the Duke of Westminster, and was the first of its kind in North-West England. It started as a private collection of waterfowl on one small pool, and it was extended and developed through the years. Eventually there were four large landscaped pools which were fed with fresh water from a stream which passed through the Park.



Bridgemere Wildlife Park © Copyright David Quayle

The Bengal Tigers (shown on the cover of the brochure) were introduced to the Wildlife Park when very young and had to be hand reared. Other species at the park included Northern Lynx, Black Panthers, Indian Leopard Cats, Scottish Wild Cats and Pumas.



Plan of Bridgemere Wildlife Park from zoo guide



Bridgemere Wildlife Park © Copyright David Quayle

The Park contained various enclosures and paddocks and covered an area of nearly forty acres. Visitors were allowed to stroll freely over the mown meadows. The Wildlife Park was also very much concerned with conservation, and bred many different and rare species of mammal and bird.



Bridgemere Wildlife Park

There was a souvenir shop which sold mementoes and novelties, and a café selling sandwiches and home-made cakes.

Bridgemere Wildlife Park closed in 1992.

Stapeley Water Gardens

Stapeley Water Gardens garden centre at Butt Green, opened in 1965 and became a major tourist attraction, drawing 1.3 million annual visitors.



Stapeley Water Gardens

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It included a small zoo, the Palms Tropical Oasis, which was opened by the magician Paul Daniels in 1987



The Palms, Stapeley Water Gardens

Species kept at The Palms included a beaded lizard, lesser hedgehog, a striped skunk, red-handed tamarin, meerkats, poison-dart frogs, tarantulas, tenrecs, a Turkish spiny mouse and a crocodile (caiman)!

The zoo closed on 5th September 2010, and the remainder of the Water Gardens closed the following year. The tourist attraction was closed as part of a plan to build 150 houses on the site. When the zoo closed the animals were moved to other institutions including the Blue Planet Aquarium in Ellesmere Port, Chester Zoo and Reaseheath College.

Reaseheath Animal Centre and Zoo

Reaseheath College has its own Animal Centre and Zoo, which is part of the college's Animal Management Department. It's used to teach animal care, veterinary nursing and wildlife conservation and ecology.



It is a licensed zoo, with over 125 different species of animal including mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and amphibians. It's open in the summer, in conjunction with the college's Maize Maze.