

A MALPAS MISCELLANY



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Published by the author
Stoke Cottage – Malpas – Cheshire
2017

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ISBN: 978-1-5272-1408-8

PHOTOGRAPHS

Front cover Old Hall Street around 1900. In the foreground can be seen the public weighbridge which used to be in the road by what is now the entrance to the *Red Lion* car park. The timber-framed cottages were demolished in the early 20th century (photograph courtesy of Walden Jones). Title page William Wragg in 1911 sitting in 'The King's Chair' which used to stand in the *Red Lion*. This is said to be the same 'great elbow chair' in which King John sat when, as legend has it, he came to Malpas (see page 22). When the pub was sold in 2017 the chair went for sale at auction, where it was purchased by a group of public-spirited *Red Lion* 'regulars', to ensure that it stayed in Malpas.

A MALPAS MISCELLANY

In the course of researching the history of Malpas and its surrounding area, I have written many articles on various aspects of that history. Gathered here are some of them, together with a few pieces of verse which I have discovered published in books, local newspapers and periodicals.

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DECURIO REBURRUS AND HIS LOST DIPLOMA

Reburrus was a Spaniard serving with the Roman army in Britain at the end of the first and the beginning of the second centuries. He was a



decurio, or junior officer, probably with the Twentieth Legion based in the fortress at Deva (Chester). He retired from the army in 103 AD and was issued with his discharge certificate, or diploma. This was the equivalent of a pension certificate, granting him full rights of Roman citizenship and the right to

marry a native woman in this country. It consists of two bronze plates, engraved on both sides and hinged together. The image here is of the inner side of the right hand plate. Reburrus either settled at Bickley or lost his diploma while passing through there. It was discovered in a field on Barhill Farm in 1812. Very few of these diplomas (sometimes called *tabulas/tabulae*) have been found in this country. The Malpas (or Bickley) Diploma is one of the best preserved examples and is now on display in the British Museum, with a facsimile copy in the Chester Grosvenor Museum.



Jubilee Hall car park excavation 1999
LEFT: Mary McMahon RIGHT: The late Gerrard Barnes

In 1999 an archaeological excavation in the Jubilee Hall car park uncovered what may have been the cellar of a workshop, situated alongside the military main road (from Hadrian's Wall via Chester and London to Richborough in Kent) on the line of today's Malpas High Street. 'Our' stretch of this road ran from the legionary fortress at Deva (Chester) via the fort at Mediolanum (Whitchurch) to the fort and late Roman town at Uriconium (Wroxeter). During the excavation a small piece of possibly Roman pottery was also found. Maybe the workshop had been a smithy or similar establishment to serve the Roman troops passing along the road? Or maybe the cellar had belonged to a Romano-British roadside inn – the 'Red Lion' ('Leo Ruber'?) of its day?

'FETCH THE ENGINES!' FROM MALPAS AND BROXTON

Before Malpas Parish Council was formed, following the 1894 Local



Government Act, the affairs of the town were conducted by the local ratepayers who met together as the *Town* or *Vestry* meeting. In those days the rates were collected by the church, for such purposes as maintaining the roads, relieving the poor and keeping law and order. The Town Meeting was under the ultimate control of the

church, and one of the two Malpas Rectors was Chairman, by right. Among the minutes of the meeting on 9th January 1831 there is a copy of a letter in which the ratepayers of the Parish of Malpas requested the churchwardens to call a meeting of the parish '*for the purpose of taking into consideration the best method of supplying [fire] Engines for the use of the Parish*'. This shows that, in those times, the churchwardens had a number of 'civil' duties in addition to their work in looking after the church's affairs and its building. Following the meeting, an order was sent to Messrs Tilley & Company in London for '*2 Engines of the Second Class of twelve men power upon the improved principle, with six lengths of improved pipe ... One dozen of leather buckets at £5.10s.0d per dozen for each Engine. The Engines to be upon Block Wheels*'. The two engines (similar to that illustrated) were brought by canal to Wheelock Wharf, near Sandbach, then by road to Malpas. One was to be based in Malpas, the other at the 'Egerton Arms' at Broxton (on the opposite side of the road to the modern 'Egerton Arms'). Volunteers would have taken the horse-drawn engines out to fires and pumped them by hand, drawing water from farm pits, ponds and streams.

By the time that Malpas and Broxton Parish Councils were formed in 1894, the Malpas engine was in a sorry state, due to heavy use both on farms and on buildings in the town, whereas the Broxton engine was still serviceable. Each parish council agreed to take responsibility

for its respective engine. Malpas Parish Council bought a new engine in 1895 and housed it in a wooden shed next to the Jubilee Hall, where



the modern drive leads to the hall's car park. Broxton Parish Council constructed a brick and slate shed for its engine and this still stands by the Old Coach Road, immediately opposite the entrance to Frogg Manor Hotel. The stone plaque over the door (illustrated) reads 'B.F.B. [Broxton Fire Brigade] 1895'. It appears

that the Broxton engine continued to be operated by volunteers whereas Malpas decided to employ a paid part-time uniformed brigade. Malpas Parish Council ran the brigade (with some replacement of engines) right until 1930, when it was taken over by Malpas Rural District Council, which in 1934 built a new fire station (now the Old Fire Station bistro) in the High Street.



Underneath one of the side windows of the Jubilee Hall, by the drive, can still be seen the brickwork (see illustration) filling the space where the key to the 1895 engine shed was once kept behind a glass panel. When the fire alarm was raised the first person to arrive at the engine shed would smash the glass and open the doors, ready for the horses to be hitched up. The firemen and horses were summoned by a bugle, which hung in the engine shed. There are two stories connected with that bugle, which is still preserved in the modern fire station. On a Sunday in June 1915, during World War One, a recruiting meeting for the army was held at The Cross in Malpas. Just as residents were returning from their various places of worship a rallying bugle call, given by a boy scout from Crewe, sounded through the town and was mistaken by many as the call-out signal for the Fire Brigade. People gathered round The Cross, expecting to see the firemen turn out. The other story tells of the rag-and-bone man who came to town with his bugle

to attract the attention of the residents. When he blew it the firemen ran from their workplaces or houses to find that there was no fire! The unfortunate rag-and-bone man was taken before the Broxton magistrates and fined ten shillings (50 pence) for disturbing the peace!

The Broxton Parish Council engine was not so heavily used as the Malpas engine and went out only occasionally, mainly to minor farm fires. There do not appear to have been any regular firemen and it may be that the victims of fires had to fetch the engine and operate it themselves, making a payment for its use. Eventually, in 1932, the engine was sold to the Bolesworth Estate for around £7.10s.0d (£7.50) and the engine shed was let by the parish council for an annual rent of £2.12s.0d (£2.60). Enquiries to the Bolesworth Estate office suggest that the engine no longer exists.

The fire service in Malpas has been through many changes of organisation and administration over the 186 years since those first Tilley engines were brought up the canal from London in 1831. We are fortunate in that we can continue to benefit from the services of the Malpas Fire Brigade (now part of the Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service), operating from its modern fire station in Chester Road.

THE CLAYHOLE IN WREXHAM ROAD

November 1767 Richard Leech, John Bathoe and Mr William Pratchitt fined ten shillings each 'for not scouring their ditches belonging to a water course leading from the High Road in Malpas near a place called the Clayhole Wrexham Road'.

(FROM: Cholmondeley Manor Court Records: Cheshire & Chester Archives & Local Studies REF: DCH/Y/9)

The Clayhole was what is now the semicircular piece of common land beside the Wrexham Road in Malpas. One of the uses of the clay would have been to make the 'daub' for the wattle and daub (known as 'clay windings' in Cheshire) used to fill the wall panels of timber-framed buildings (such as the former Clayholes Cottages – see below).

After clay extraction had ceased, the clayhole filled with water and was probably used as a watering pit for horses and cattle using the Wrexham Road. It is shown as a water filled pit on the Tithe Map of around 1840. Later it was filled in, to become the feature that is still visible today.

There used to be a pair of timber-framed cottages on the opposite side of the road, just slightly higher towards the church, which were called 'Clayholes Cottages'. One of them was the home of the Lawrence family, who moved to one of the newly built council houses in Springfield Avenue in 1949. I have been told that the Clayholes Cottages were demolished shortly afterwards.



The former Clayholes Cottages

Since it had been a public clayhole, then a watering pit, the piece of land became regarded as common land and was registered as such by the Parish Council in 1970. Because the Parish Council registered the land it also became responsible for its upkeep. Currently it is maintained on a voluntary basis by 'The Friends of Clayhole Croft'.

'THEY JUMPED ON TO THEIR CYCLES'

'Except for the newspapers and the enhanced price of many commodities there would be little to indicate that a war was in progress so far as Malpas is concerned The men in several instances who had come into the town to hear the news, saw the proclamation posted up on the post office doors, and without a word they jumped

on to their cycles, and left to fight for King and country' (The Whitchurch Herald 8 August 1914).

Even allowing for journalistic licence, that press report made me feel quite emotional as I started on my research for a booklet about *Malpas and the Great War*, published in 1993 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Armistice. The number of local studies of life on the home front during major conflicts continues to grow. Inevitably this brings those researching them into contact with stories about the experiences of local men and women who were involved in the actual fighting abroad.

An author who specialises in researching the subject is James W Bancroft, whose series of *Local Heroes* titles includes *The Light Brigade at Balaclava**. One of his subjects is John Palin, born in Malpas in 1828, who enrolled in the 4th Light Dragoons. He was among the 673 men (Tennyson's 'six hundred') who rode 'into the valley of death', during the Crimean War action at Balaclava in 1854. About 250 were killed but Palin '*was the last mounted man to return of the entire brigade. His rolled cloak was riddled with bullet holes, and two balls had passed through his water flask which hung by his side*'. Later in life he worked as a cab driver in Altrincham and '*before he lost his teeth was a favourite at local entertainments as a reciter of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'*'! (*James W Bancroft: '*Local Heroes – The Light Brigade at Balaclava*', published in 2001).

Not all of the stories which came back from the various military fronts were heroic or horrific. Some were comic, others rather poignant. A Malpas man who took part in the South African war (the 'Boer' war) was George Chesworth. With Arthur Caldecott, also from Malpas, he became 'news' even before he left England. This was the result of an incident at Aldershot, where the men received their initial training, reported in verse in *The Whitchurch Herald* in March 1901. The two had become involved in a drunken affray but got off lightly.

THE MALPAS YEOMEN AT ALDERSHOT
(from 'The Whitchurch Herald' March 1901)

*When the last yeoman draft went forth,
To conquer or to fall,
Foremost of townlets in the north
Rose Malpas to the call.*

*Two of her sons themselves enrolled,
Chesworth and Caldecott;
And full of spirits brave and bold,
Set out for Aldershot.*

*The days passed by; there came the eve
Before their embarkation;
And they resolved that they would have
One last jollification.*

*Behold them, with nine other friends,
Around the table festive;
But alcohol too often tends
To make some men offensive.*

*At all events one vulgar guest
Became so quarrelsome,
That Yeoman Chesworth thought it best
To chuck him from the room.*

*His comrades, witnessing the fight,
Were vexed to see him floored;
And on the gallant Malpasite,
They rushed with one accord.*

*At such unfairness Caldecott
At once with wrath was filled;
'I'm with you George,' he shouted out,
'For if we're to be killed,*

*It might as well be first as last,'
And dashed into the fray;
And now the blows fell thick and fast
But without much delay.*

*The Malpas champions had despatched
Five out of those who fought them;
But ere the other three were squashed,
The guard turned out and caught them.*

*They marched them off and locked them up,
To all alike impartial;
And in the morning brought them up,
To try them by court martial.*

*The rest received a reprimand,
But Malpas were commended
For quelling the disturbance, and
The matter thus was ended.*

*We soon shall hear of them again,
Distinguished in the wars;
For if they beat eight Englishmen,
They'd wallop eighty Boers!*



LEFT: George Chesworth RIGHT: Malpas members of the Cheshire Yeomanry being brought back from Whitchurch station, on the Malpas fire engine. George Chesworth on the left, Arthur Caldecott(?) centre, W O Mercer right.

When George returned home to Malpas in 1902, he was invited to a dinner in honour of himself and the other local volunteer members of

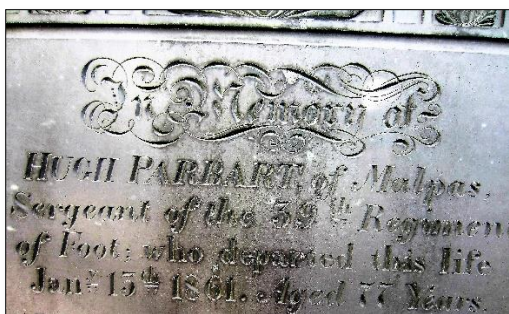
the Cheshire Yeomanry who had served in South Africa. It seems that he was asked to give an after-dinner speech about his experiences and, as an *aide memoire*, he wrote this out in a school exercise book. The book still survives locally. From it we know that George took part in several expeditions in search of parties of Boers. Skirmishes and running fights with the enemy are described and the notes suggest that he gave a good account of himself on each occasion.

In the 'poignant' category are the verses sent home from the front by Lance-corporal R G Lee of the King's Royal Rifles. These were published in the 'Chester Chronicle' in January 1915 under the title *A Soldier's Poem*. They are addressed to the girl he left behind in the Malpas township of Broxton:

'But when I am far away dear, others may whisper love to you / But think of the boy who is fighting for his country and for you! Think of me sometimes, darling, and when the conflict is o'er / I am coming back to claim you, for my own and evermore!'

It was of the same Broxton, where he spent childhood holidays with his aunt, that Wilfred Owen, a far better known war poet, wrote later in life: '*... Broxton, by the Hill / Where first I felt my boyhood fill / With uncontainable movements; there was born / My poethood*'. What muse floats upon the Broxton air?

In 1985 I was grateful to receive from the late Ian Rowbotham of Hyde a list of 23 Malpas men who fought in the various campaigns against Napoleon. Among these was Hugh Parbutt, who is remembered twice over in Malpas. His 1861 gravestone, recording him as a sergeant in the 59th Regiment of Foot, stands in the parish churchyard while, just across the road, the lane where his shoemaker's shop stood is still called 'Parbutts Lane'. Mr Rowbotham's researches show that Hugh had received the Military General Service Medal and was part of '*that astonishing infantry*' (General Napier's description) which helped to defeat the French at Albuhera in 1811.



LEFT: Headstone of Hugh Parbart (Parbutt) in the churchyard
RIGHT: Sign for Parbutts Lane off Church Street - opposite the churchyard

Although these stories do not contribute significantly to the local history of Malpas they do all have a value, in reminding us that even a small rural community had, and continues to have, connections with major events in the wider world.

THE CHUTNEY MAKERS OF CHURCH STREET

It was a sad sign of the declining activity which has affected many local voluntary organisations when Malpas Women's Institute closed down in 1995. Malpas had been one of the earliest WIs formed in this country but, like other voluntary organisations in recent years, reached the stage where it could not find sufficient candidates for the all-important officer posts of secretary and treasurer. Since then a number of other WI branches in this part of Cheshire have closed for similar reasons. Fortunately, the Malpas WI committee had the foresight to deposit their records, covering 1919-1995, in the Cheshire Record Office. The documents were very useful when I decided in 2005 to write a booklet about Malpas during the second World War (*Malpas and the Home Front*). The WI books cast a very interesting sidelight on activities in the town during those years. For instance, the reports of speakers give an indication of how rationing and other restrictions affected the home economy. When Mrs Hands, from the Ministry of Food, visited the WI she demonstrated the preparation of four dishes '*and members gained lots of profitable information, as to the use of left-overs, dried eggs and dried milk*'. Miss Constantine came to demonstrate '*how to do household jobbery. Owing to the fact that there is a shortage of workmen, keen interest was taken in how*

to put on a washer, put in wall plugs, mend carpets, wash blankets, and repair a fuse'. Subjects covered by other speakers and demonstrators included poultry keeping in wartime, 'make do and mend', wartime gardening, and dressmaking. Competitions at the monthly meetings included a *'supper dish for four persons not to cost more than 6d [2½p]'*; *'best dish made from potatoes'*; and *'best scones using a Ministry of Food recipe'*.

Although Malpas lay directly under the line taken by German aircraft as they flew to bomb Liverpool, the town escaped relatively unscathed by the effects of enemy action. However, during the night of 10th November 1940 rural Cheshire suffered its worst bombing, shaking the local population out of any complacency which may have developed. In response to this 'night of terror' the WI set up a committee *'to feed people bombed out of their homes if necessary'*.

Plans for evacuation of children and mothers from urban areas at risk from bombing were put into effect right at the beginning of the war in September 1939. The Women's Voluntary Service took the lead in putting the plans into action, involving both the Women's Institutes and Girl Guides in national and local committees to oversee the operation. Malpas WI had a talk from the local evacuee billeting officer in January 1940. In the following May they provided volunteers to prepare a hostel in Malpas (at *The Beeches*) designed to house children who, mainly due to medical or behavioural difficulties, could not be billeted in private houses. The records show further involvement when in November 1941 the WI members helped to provide a tea-party for local evacuees, and in the following January when they formed a sewing party to make clothes for evacuee children.

Across the country an important contribution made by Women's Institutes was the establishment of Fruit Preservation Centres, set up after the introduction of jam rationing in February 1941. By the end of the war nearly 6,000 such centres had been set up by local

branches, many of them using one of the 500 canning machines presented by the women of America. In the summer of 1941, 13,000 tons of fruit were saved by the scheme from being wasted and were turned into 2,000 tons of jam. The government supplied the sugar and, where necessary, paid for the fruit. The women volunteers who did the work were not allowed to buy a single jar of their own products and each jar had to be full to the brim as it would be sold as part of someone's food ration. Among the Malpas WI records is a volume recording the daily output for July to November 1941 of the centre, which had been set up in the Malpas WI room in Church Street. There the members would meet from 9.30 am to 6.00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, processing prodigious quantities of fruit and vegetables to produce jams, canned fruits and chutneys. Local residents were encouraged to bring in produce, either wild or cultivated in their gardens, to sell to the WI. The fruits used most frequently for jams were gooseberries and damsons (both common in Cheshire gardens), plums, rhubarb, raspberries, redcurrants, blackberries, bilberries (from the nearby Bickerton Hills) and apples; bottled fruits and vegetables included pears, apples, damsons and tomatoes; and chutneys were made using marrows, apples, onions and tomatoes. The production of a hundredweight (50 kg) of chutney on one day in October must have saturated the streets of Malpas with vinegar fumes!



The Malpas Women's Institute Fruit Preservation Centre in World War 2

Later the branch elected to take part in another government backed scheme and in June 1943 became licensed as '*A Catering Establishment for the sale to agricultural workers of Meat Pies or Meat Products under the Meat Pie Scheme*'. The pie scheme, launched in 1941, was a sort of rural equivalent to the British Restaurants which were located in urban areas, and enabled the distribution of meat and fruit pies to village centres for sale to workers in the fields.

RECTORS, RANTERS AND RECUSANTS CHURCHES, CHAPELS AND MEETINGS IN MALPAS

In most aspects of its history, Malpas is not a unique place. What went on during past centuries in this small Cheshire town reflects what happened nationally and in many cities, towns and villages across the country. This is particularly true in the case of its 'religious' history, or rather the history of the various Christian congregations which have found a home in Malpas over the years.

The imposing fourteenth century parish church of Saint Oswald, which dominates the view from all roads into the town, probably had its origins as the private chapel to the castle. The church was at the heart of a large *ecclesiastical parish*, similar in size to many found in the North West of England. Until the second half of the nineteenth century it comprised twenty-five *townships* (with roughly the same physical boundaries as the modern *civil parishes* which bear their names), including Malpas itself. Twenty-four of the townships are in the modern county of Cheshire and the remaining one (Iscoyd) is in Wales. The parish stretched from Broxton and Bickerton in the north to Iscoyd (in the detached portion – the *Maelor* - of the former Welsh county of Flintshire) in the south, and from Cuddington and Oldcastle in the west to Bickley and Cholmondeley in the east. At one time it may also have included the ancient chapelry of Harthill. The ecclesiastical parish was reduced in size from 1863 onwards, with the formation of the new ecclesiastical parishes of Tushingham (1863), Bickerton (1876) and Bickley (1892), all of them incorporating a number of the former Malpas townships. In the late 20th century the

former *extra parochial* township of Threapwood was incorporated into Malpas ecclesiastical parish, which now incorporates eleven civil parishes.

Those interested in the detailed history of Saint Oswald's are well served by two publications. These are *An Architectural History of the Church of Malpas in the County of Cheshire* by Fred Crossley and J C Wolley Dod (1949) and *An illustrated history of Saint Oswald's, Malpas*, by the late Canon Michael Rylands (published in the late 1960s).

The story of the parish church as a social focus for the community is of equal interest to its architecture. During the Middle Ages, in parishes throughout the country, the parish church would be the centre of annual celebrations to mark the festival of the saint to whom the church was dedicated. The 'Wakes', which in many parishes (e.g. Tilston) have survived through to modern times as the occasion for rather more secular festivities, were the natural successors to these medieval celebrations. Organised by the long-forgotten parish guilds, they would have involved elaborate decorations and the erection of shrines in the church, and processions to the church by the clergy and parishioners. The guilds also served as early forms of mutual protection or friendly societies, providing forms of insurance for sick and elderly parishioners. As such they were perhaps the forerunners of the Friendly Societies which came into existence from the late 17th century onwards. The Malpas United Friendly Society was formed in 1802 and held its annual celebrations, including a procession to the church, during the annual Malpas Wakes over the August holiday weekend, which included the Feast Day of Saint Oswald. Later in the 19th century other Friendly Societies were formed in Malpas, including two 'lodges' of the Oddfellows, who also held annual celebrations over the Saint Oswald's Wakes weekend. The Malpas based Loyal Clutton Lodge of Oddfellows still exists.

Until the Reformation, when King Henry VIII made the historic break with Rome and declared himself head of the Church in England, the parish churches of England had all paid allegiance to the ultimate rule of the Pope in Rome. Therefore for the first two hundred years of its life Saint Oswald's was a Roman Catholic church. The first stage of the Reformation in England was brought about mainly by the Pope's refusal to allow Henry VIII to divorce his first queen, Catherine of Arragon. In 1530 the king started to campaign for a divorce, enlisting the help of lords and nobles across the country. In this he had the assistance of Sir William Brereton, a Malpas man. He was the sixth son of Sir Randle Brereton, whose magnificent chest tomb still stands in Saint Oswald's church. William is one of the children – we do not know which one – depicted in relief around the base of the tomb. Ironically many of those carved on the tomb have lost their heads or have been defaced, by accident or intentionally. Sir William Brereton really did lose his head, when he was executed on Tower Hill on 17th May 1536 along with four others, all five of them having been accused, probably falsely, of adultery with Queen Ann Boleyn. The Queen was to lose her own head two days later.

This was the violent end to a successful career during which William Brereton had amassed considerable estates and had been promoted to posts of importance in Cheshire, North Wales and elsewhere in the country. Among the offices he held were those of Chamberlain of Chester, Steward of Holt Castle and, perhaps most importantly, Groom of the Privy Chamber to Henry VIII, a position which brought him very close to the monarch. He was one of three King's Messengers '*who were sent to divers parts of England*' in 1530 to collect signatures for a petition to Pope Clement VII, pleading King Henry's case for a divorce from Queen Catherine.

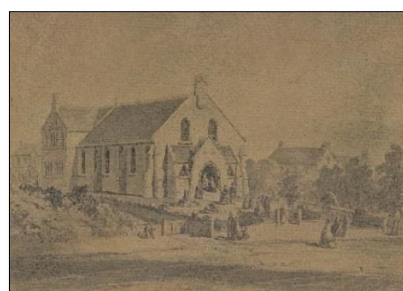
The Reformation marked the beginning of over four hundred years of change in the Christian church in Europe, in Britain and in Malpas. After Henry had declared his independence from the church of Rome, there were others who began, in their turn, to seek independence

from the Church of England and from the forms of worship set down in the Book of Common Prayer. And so it was that, from the 17th century onwards, the town of Malpas witnessed the rise and fall of Christian congregations calling themselves Quakers (or the Society of Friends), Independents (Congregationalists), New Connexion Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists and Primitive Methodists.

There were others, known as 'recusants', who would not denounce their belief in Roman Catholicism, refused to attend the parish church and were persecuted by the authorities. In fact there were many in Malpas who were made to suffer for their beliefs, particularly during the 16th and 17th centuries, reflecting the persecutions that took place across the country. In these days of religious freedom, it is difficult to credit that during the 16th century many Malpas Roman Catholics suffered long terms of imprisonment for standing by their religious principles. During the 17th century the same fate was suffered by local Quakers and Presbyterians, who held illegal meetings, known as 'conventicles', in private houses, barns, or even in the open air. It was in 1653 that the first Malpas Quaker Meeting was recorded, although it seems to have died out by the early 18th century.

The nationwide growth in religious nonconformity from the late 18th century and right through the 19th century had a huge effect on national history. Nonconformity and Liberal politics went hand-in-hand. The increasing availability of elementary education, such as that provided by the Alport School in Malpas, meant that many labourers, craftsmen, shopkeepers and similar members of the 'lower' social classes had the opportunity to learn to read and write. In Malpas many of them might have found the atmosphere of the parish church of Saint Oswald to be rather aloof and unwelcoming. The 19th century rectors were drawn from the higher levels of society. Among them were members of the local gentry and land-owning families: the Egertons of Oulton; the Tyrwhitt Drakes; and the Kenyons. The services tended to be rather 'High Church' so that the more informal worship to be found in the Malpas chapels, belonging to the

Independents (later to be known as Congregationalists and who finally became part of the United Reformed Church), Wesleyan Methodists and Primitive Methodists (also known as ‘Ranters’) would be of more direct appeal to many local people. The parish church at that time was largely the preserve of the middle and upper classes, while the Nonconformists provided opportunities for their members to become very practically involved in chapel life, as chapel trustees, as ‘lay’ preachers, as deacons, and in a variety of other offices. At a very human level, the chapels offered opportunities for labourers, craftsmen, shopkeepers and their like to become ‘somebody’ and to feel valued in the work they undertook for their chosen cause.



L-R: TOP Saint Oswald’s church – New Connexion chapel(?) CENTRE Opening of Congregational chapel (1862) – High Street Church (1995) BOTTOM Wesleyan Methodist chapel (1892) – Primitive Methodist chapel (1894) – Saint Joseph’s Roman Catholic church (1950)

Another dimension was added to the religious life of the town in 1868 when the first post-Reformation Roman Catholic mass centre (bearing in mind that before the Reformation the 'mass centre' had been Saint Oswald's church) was established in Malpas. This was in Hugh McCaffrey's lodging house in Church Street (now the Lloyds Bank building) and was introduced mainly to cater for itinerant harvest workers, many of whom came over from Ireland on a seasonal basis. Hugh McCaffrey himself was among the many thousands of Irishmen who had emigrated to Britain following the devastating Irish potato famines of the 1840s. In 1950 one of the outbuildings at *The Beeches* in Tilston Road was converted to become St Joseph's Roman Catholic church but this closed in 2013.

There is evidence that by the late 19th century the Malpas nonconformist chapels had established friendly relationships among themselves, even to the extent of sharing their buildings at times. It is said that after the Wesleyan chapel, built in 1874, had been burned down (due to an over-heated boiler) in January 1891, the Wesleyan Methodists attended the Congregational and Primitive Methodist chapels until their re-built chapel opened in March of the following year. There is also evidence that by the early years of the 20th century the parish church was strengthening its relationships with the nonconformists, when all the Christian denominations in the town supported an open-air rally on the Ox Hayes in August 1902. The rally, which is said to have attracted a crowd of around 1,300, was addressed by the famous travelling evangelist 'Gypsy' Smith.

In 1922 there was a foretaste of something which was to come to fruition eventually (73 years later!) when discussions took place over a proposal, which came to nothing then, to link the Congregational, Wesleyan Methodist and Primitive Methodist congregations in Malpas. However, in 1995 the bond was finally forged when the combined United Reformed/Methodist High Street Church was opened, following the closures of the Wesleyan Methodist chapel in 1969 and the Primitive Methodist chapel in the late 1980s. High Street

Church stands on the site of the former 1862 Congregational (later United Reformed) chapel; the Wesleyan chapel in Old Hall Street was demolished in 1985 and its site is now occupied by the four houses known as *Chapel Rise* (their garages are the former chapel stables); and the Primitive chapel has been converted into a private residence.

So it can be seen that by the late 20th century there had been redundancies, reorganisations and unifications, leading to the present-day situation in which the town has just two Christian congregations, each with its own place of worship: Saint Oswald's Anglican Church and the High Street Church (United Reformed/Methodist).

THE TWO RECTORS OF MALPAS

From early medieval times until 1885 the Ecclesiastical Parish of Malpas had not one but two rectors, attached to the parish church of St Oswald. This was an uncommon, but not unique, situation. It probably arose from a divided inheritance in the Barony of Malpas, when the Baron had no male heir but did have two daughters, both of whom were entitled to 'nominate' a Rector. However, another explanation is provided by the legend that King John (or was it King James?), while travelling around the country in disguise in order to have a look at what his subjects were up to, arrived at the Red Lion Inn at Malpas. A 19th century Rector of Malpas wrote a poem to describe what happened next:

THE TWO RECTORS

Reverend Philip Egerton

(Sir Philip de Grey-Egerton – Higher Rector 1804-1829)

*A tale I will tell you, and though it be long,
I trust it will prove an excuse for my song,
How the parish of Malpas two rectors can boast,
One of whom claims the honour of being your host.*

*One day as King John was proceeding at leisure,
To view the Welsh mountains from this side of Cheshire,
To the Lion at Malpas in. cog. he came down,
With a travelling cap on instead of his crown.*

*The landlady curtsied, the landlord he bowed,
As the monarch, dismounting, advanced through the crowd,
For he looked just like one of those men of renown
Who bring samples from London to each country town.*

*To a neat little parlour they straightway repair,
And place in due order the great elbow chair,
Which chair at this day is in mighty request,
And a penny is paid by each down-sitting guest.*

*Odds fish, quoth the king, since to mirth I incline,
And am loth to sit down by myself here to dine,
In this populous town is there ne'er a brave chief
To partake of a chop or a collop of beef?*

*The landlord replied, there's the apothecary,
Who oft cracks a joke o'er a glass of old sherry;
And, besides, there's the Rector and Curate also,
Who enjoy a good dinner wherever they go.*

*The doctor was gone out to visit a patient,
The Curate was young, the Rector was ancient,
So the one to the Lion tripped down in a canter
And announced that the other would presently enter.*

*They ate and they drank, and were merry and gay,
Till the twilight of evening succeeded the day,
And when of good cheer they had all had their fill,
The rubicund landlord stepped in with his bill.*

*The Curate proposed, in the joy of his heart,
That himself and the Rector should each pay their part,
And because their strange guest had promoted such glee,
To permit him to pass on his journey scot free.*

*But the Rector exclaimed, I'll ne'er pay for such knaves,
For 'tis fit that each tub should stand on its own staves,
So divide the account, not by two, but by three,
And we'll rub off the score in an equal degree.*

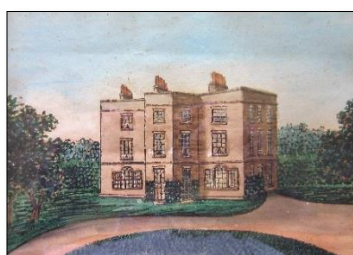
*Half asleep with his eyes, wide awake with his ears,
The King what the clergy had said overhears,
And discovering himself to the utter dismay
Of the Rector, he thus to the Curate did say:-*

*Kind sir, while I rule o'er this land, your regard
For a stranger like me shall not lose its reward;
But whene'er with a traveller you sit cheek by jowl,
You shall have wherewithal to replenish the bowl.*

*Now the King loved a pun, so he added in jest,
Whilst they listened with care to the Royal bequest,
If I were to share my possessions with you,
It is plain half a crown would be all that's your due.*

*I therefore desire, and do it with pride,
That you with his reverence the tithes will divide,
And thus though old Troy could ne'er boast of two Hectors,
The parish of Malpas may boast of two Rectors.*

*And now my tale's ended, before I retire,
As your minstrel this boon in return I require,
That each British Bowman in chorus will sing,
Here's a long happy reign to our patron the King.*



LEFT: The former *Lower Rectory* in Church Street (*The Bolling*)
CENTRE: The *Higher Rectory* (from a 19th century painting)
RIGHT: The modern *Rectory*, in the grounds of the former *Higher Rectory*

The two 'livings' (i.e the posts of each of the rectors) were known as the 'Higher' Rectory or Mediety and the 'Lower' Rectory or Mediety (the word 'mediety' means one of two approximately equal parts). The Higher Rector lived at the old rectory, which is now a private house (the present rector lives in a modern house built in the 1980s in the grounds of the old rectory), and the Lower Rector lived at the house, until recently known as *The Bolling*, in Church Street.

CELIA'S STORY SET IN STONE

The Celia Fiennes Waymark at No Mans Heath, which has become known locally as 'The Monument', was unveiled on a very cold, wet and windy day in December 1998. It was commissioned to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the 'Great Journey' undertaken by a remarkable lady who, in the reign of William and Mary, travelled throughout Great Britain, riding side saddle and with only the minimum of company. Her route in 1698 brought her down the Old Coach Road, part of the medieval road from Chester which later became the A41, on her way to stay the night in Whitchurch. During all of her travellings, this was the only time in which she encountered highwaymen! Two rather shady characters followed her down the road from Tarporley, through Beeston, Bulkeley and Hampton Post and then into No Mans Heath itself. Fortunately it was market day in Whitchurch and, as Celia approached the town, the highwaymen backed off, deterred by the increasing crowd of market-goers. Look closely at the monument and you will see carvings of Celia herself, her horse, the highwaymen and the market people.



The reason we know so much about Celia is that she kept detailed diaries of her journeys. These diaries still survive in the possession of Lord and Lady Saye & Sele, who live at Broughton Castle near Banbury and are members of the present day Fiennes family. The family also

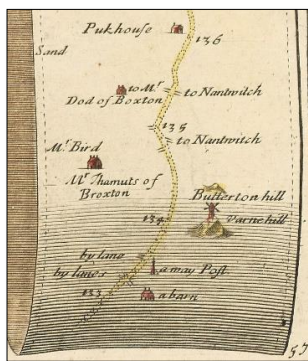
includes such well known personalities as Sir Ranulph Twistleton Wykeham Fiennes, the explorer, and the film actors Ralph and Joseph Fiennes. The unveiling of the Celia Fiennes Monument (pictured) was undertaken by Martin Fiennes, son of Lord and Lady Saye & Sele, who travelled up from London especially for the occasion. Those of you who were present may remember that the ceremony took place in the presence of the Lord Mayor of Chester and local rider Ros Hughes, dressed in period costume and riding side-saddle, to represent Celia. Her entry into Back Lane, and the ceremony, were both announced in great style by Julie Mitchell, one of the Chester Town Criers.

So how did the waymark come to be erected in No Mans Heath? At the time I was working as Community Development Officer for the former Chester City Council. My colleague Ian Makins, then one of the Council's Landscape Planning officers, knowing of my interest in local history, asked for some ideas for developing the piece of amenity land on the corner of Back Lane and the former A41. The land was surplus to the development of Cholmondeley Rise and the developers had entered into an agreement with the Council to finance its development and maintenance for public use. Realising that the year was the 300th anniversary of Celia's ride through No Mans Heath I suggested that some sort of memorial to the event might be appropriate. After obtaining the blessing of Bickley Parish Council for the project, it was agreed to commission Chester sculptor Jeff Aldridge to design and carry out the work. The design was based on information which we supplied to Jeff, plus the results of further research which he carried out himself. We decided to call the monument a 'waymark' to commemorate the fact that, not so far away, Celia would have passed the original Hampton Post. This was a tall brightly-painted pole in a field close by the Hampton Post crossroads, erected as a waymark to guide travellers in the days before roads had hard surfaces so that those using them often tended to stray away from the 'official' route, to avoid ruts and large puddles. The monument is unique in that, so far as I can ascertain, it is the only permanent memorial for Celia Fiennes in the whole country. It formed

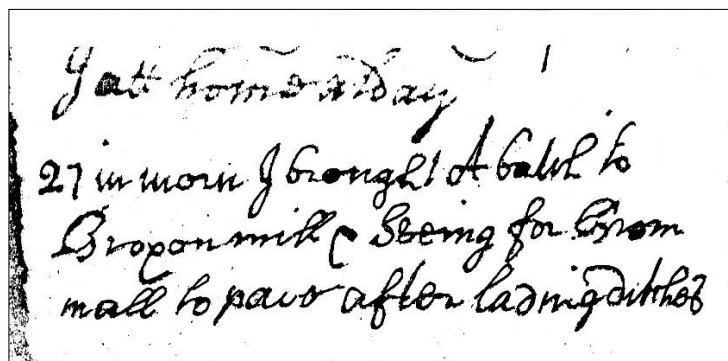
a very pleasant postscript to the unveiling ceremony when with Jill, my wife, I was invited down to Broughton Castle to inspect the original Celia Fiennes diaries. It gave us a great thrill to read in Celia's own handwriting her account of the journey to Whitchurch, in which she wrote: '*... here I may think I may say was the only tyme I had reason to suspect I was engaged with some Highway men; 2 fellows all of a suddain from the wood fell into the road, they look'd trussed up with great coates and as it were bundles about them which I believe was pistols...'*. Keep your wits about you if you walk along Back Lane on a dark night!

VANISHED WINDMILLS IN SOUTH CHESHIRE

As you walk along the Sandstone Trail on Larkton Hill, approaching Maiden Castle from the south-west, your eye may be drawn to a circular group of trees standing on the foothills, just above Richard Siddorn's Broxton Hall Farm. Known locally as Broxton Clump, the trees mark the site of a former post windmill. Post mills were the forerunners of the tower mills, such as that beside the A.534 at Burland, now converted into a residence, and that at Threapwood, built in the late 18th century and now derelict. The Broxton mill is marked on John Ogilby's road map of 1675 and is referred to in the diary of Robert Bulkeley of Bulkeley, covering the period 1714-1729. At various times Robert wrote of his visits to Broxton windmill to grind his oats and other cereals.



John Ogilby's 1675 map showing Broxton mill



Robert Bulkeley's diary 1718: '*... I brought A batch to Broxon mill ...'* (courtesy of Keele University Library)

We don't tend to think of our area as 'windmill country', more as an area where water mills flourished on the many watercourses, such as the Rivers Weaver and Gowy. However, it may be that some of the windmills in our area were constructed as 'auxiliaries' to water mills, so that in times of drought it might still be possible to use wind power to grind the local corn. At one time there was an obligation for all the residents of a manor to have their corn ground at the Lord of the Manor's mill, and he was able to charge them a fee for the service or to take a share of the grain as his due. The rental book for Lord Crewe's estate in Peckforton shows that in 1653 he owned both a windmill and a water mill in the township. They were close to each other and evidence for both of them still survives on the ground. The rental book includes inventories for '*goods in ye watermill*' and '*goods in ye Wyndmill*'. The latter inventory includes the toll ark, a container for his lordship's share of the grain.

In Malpas the street now called 'High Street' was known as 'Windmill Street' until the 1870s. One windmill, to the south of Malpas, stood in the large field on the corner of Old Hall Street and Mastiff Lane. During the 1976 drought Rhys Williams, the Cheshire County Council Archaeologist at that time, carried out an extensive aerial survey of the Dee Valley area and photographed a crop mark in that field. It was in the classic form of a circle containing a cross, evidence for the base of the trestle which had once supported the massive mill post, which would have been the trunk of a felled oak tree

PLUMBERS AND GLAZIERS.
Jones Eaton, Windmill st

Jones Eaton, painter and glazier, High st.

Entries for Eaton Jones' business, from local directories of Malpas for 1848 (top) and 1864 (bottom). His shop is now the shop occupied by Barlows, the electricians. Between the two dates the street name had changed from 'Windmill Street' to 'High Street'.



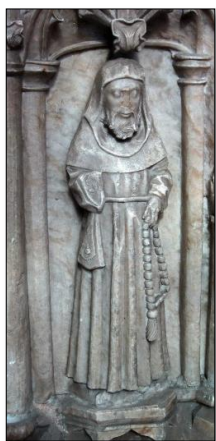
Adult students on a weekend local history course in 1976 at the former St Joseph's Conference Centre (*The Beeches*). They are standing on a low mound in the field formerly called *Wyndy Milne Banke*. The mound was the site of two or more of the Malpas post mills. It was levelled in preparations for the building of the *Brockbank* development in 2011.

At the north end of the High Street, on Tilston Road, lay the field where part of the housing development known as *Brockbank* was built in 2011. In a lease by Lord Cholmondeley to Thomas Brereton of Edge, dated 1659, it is described as '*That part of the Milne field ... where said all milnes were lately erected by him and Lord Cholmondeley and called the wyndy Milne Banke*'.

PHILANTHROPIC, CHARITY AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN MALPAS

The town has a long tradition for providing lower cost housing for less well endowed residents. In the parish church stands the impressive alabaster chest tomb of Sir Randle and Lady Eleanor Brereton. Sir Randle was an early provider of charitable housing, in the form of an almshouse, otherwise known as a bedehouse, to accommodate five men. One of the men, known as 'bedesmen', is shown on the side of the Brereton tomb. Almshouses were established as charitable foundations to care for the elderly, the infirm and others in need of

accommodation. Many of them were founded during the Middle Ages.



Bedesman on
Brereton tomb



Effigy of Sir Randle Brereton
on Brereton tomb

Although the accommodation in the first Malpas almshouse was probably free, it did carry fairly heavy obligations in connection with the chantry chapel, in the church, where Sir Randle's tomb would originally have been constructed. The almsmen were expected to say prayers daily for the souls of Sir Randle and Lady Brereton, and other members of the Brereton family, after their deaths. These prayers were intended to lift the souls of the deceased out of the limbo of Purgatory, into the higher realms above. Two of the almsmen or 'bedesmen' are depicted in a series of carvings around the base of the Brereton tomb, in which they are shown holding their rosary beads (bedesmen=beadsmen). Although we do not know their names we do know that they were probably the earliest occupants of charitable housing in Malpas. The system came to an end in 1547, in which year Edward VI dissolved all of the chantry charities. The Malpas almshouse seems to have survived the dissolution of the chantries, shedding its chantry obligations but continuing to provide accommodation for poor persons.

The Malpas Parish Register records the burial of Thomas Blymhill '*an old poor man of the Almshouse*' in March 1570/71. A further 18 burials of almspersons, nine each of men and women, are recorded

in the register before 1636, at which date Sir Thomas Brereton, a descendant of Sir Randle Brereton who had built the first almshouse, founded and endowed one of the two surviving sets of Malpas almshouses, this set originally providing six dwellings. In 1721 Lord Cholmondeley had them rebuilt, specifically as accommodation for six poor women. In 1955 they were renovated and converted into four roomier dwellings. In 2001 the Cholmondeley Almshouse Trust was combined with the Wigfield Trust, which administered the other set of Malpas almshouses, to form the Malpas Almshouse Trust and the Cholmondeley Almshouses were again altered, this time to provide only two dwellings. At this stage they were re-named *Cholmondeley Terrace*, since they no longer serve their traditional purpose as almshouses.

Although it appears that under the terms of the 1721 re-foundation the Cholmondeley almshouses were to provide accommodation for six women, there is evidence that at one time they accommodated small family units as well. A list of paupers in the parish of Malpas covering the period approximately 1656 to 1690, which also records the numbers in each pauper family, is preserved in the Cholmondeley of Cholmondeley records. In the township of Malpas alone, for which 223 persons are listed in 1681, presumably being all of those who were in receipt of poor relief, there is a section headed: 'Those following belong to ye Almes House':

Randle Tompkin & his daughter	2	in household
Randle Lloyd his wife and 3 children	5	“ “
John Barlow	1	“ “
Jane Johnson & her daughter	2	“ “
Ketherine Roberts	1	“ “



Cholmondeley Terrace
(Church Street)



Wigfield Terrace
(Chester Road)

The six Wigfield almshouses were endowed in 1854 by the Reverend Henry Wigfield of Bickerton (which was part of the ancient parish of Malpas). They were paid for out of the fortune bequeathed to him in 1841 by Elizabeth Tayler, wife of a former Rector of Malpas, and provided free accommodation, with the added benefit of a quarterly cash stipend and free coal. The 1861 Census returns show that, seven years after their foundation, the almshouses were occupied by five almswomen and one almsman. Four of them were natives of Malpas parish, one of Handley parish nearby, and one from Ellesmere in Shropshire, thus deviating from the original terms of the trust, which stated that they should be occupied by *'poor or decayed men or women being inhabitants within the parish of Malpas'* who had been *'reduced in circumstances from misfortune and not from misconduct'*. The houses have been altered in the past few years and now comprise four dwellings. As, similarly to Cholmondeley Terrace, they no longer serve as almshouses they have been re-named *Wigfield Terrace*.

During the final two decades of the nineteenth century, there were three benevolent Malpas business-men – Arthur Callcott, Joseph Lewis and Thomas Huxley - who sought to use some of their hard-earned profits through the time-honoured method of investing in bricks and mortar. A report in the *'Chester Chronicle'* in August 1884 spoke of *'a long-felt want being met by the erection of several new cottages in the town and neighbourhood'*. These included the first three cottages, on the former site of an old barn, which were to form

part of Rock Terrace in the High Street. They were built as low cost housing for working people by Arthur Callcott, the clock and watch maker, who was later to build himself a shop (pictured below, in 1897)



at the north end of the terrace. Also being built in 1884, by Joseph Lewis (pictured below, on his memorial plaque in the Jubilee Hall) at the same time that he was building *The Beeches* in Tilston Road as a residence for his own family, were the twelve *Oathills Cottages*, in the road known as 'Oathills', off Chester Road. The newspaper report continued with

the comment that: *'Of late years it has been the order to pull down and destroy the cottages but we are now glad to notice the reverse of the order, and new and better houses for the labouring classes erected, so that each week end the migration to other parts of those who toil in the neighbourhood will be reduced, and the facilities be greater for*



comfortable housing of those who come to work here.' The architecture of the Oathills Cottages is unusual for this area and has an 'Arts & Crafts' feel about it. Joseph Lewis, who also had a house in Hornsey, north London, may have been inspired to build them by the construction during the previous

year of what is now the Noel Park Estate in Hornsey. This was a development of around 2,600 houses by the Artisans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company Limited. Joseph would almost certainly have been aware of the development and may have visited it to look for ideas for the *Oathills Cottages*. Noel Park is now a conservation area and the houses there are much sought after.

The 1891 Census Returns show that Joseph achieved his objective in attracting 'the labouring classes' to his new cottages at The Oathills. In that year the occupations of the twelve heads of households were listed as two each of gardeners, bricklayers and general labourers, and one each of agricultural labourer, labourer on roads, foreman platelayer on the railway, groom and (house) painter. The numbers in

each household varied from eight (1 cottage), through seven (2), six (3), five (3) and four (2), to one household with only two members. Six of the householders were natives of Malpas but the others had been born elsewhere in Cheshire (Handley and Chester), in the Maelor (Willington), in Shropshire (Whixall), in Montgomeryshire (Welshpool), and in Gloucestershire (Tewkesbury). In 1895 the *Oathills Cottages* were purchased, as an investment for its Superannuation Fund, by the Loyal Clutton Lodge of Oddfellows, leading to them becoming known as the *Oddfellows Cottages*. The 1901 Census shows that they continued to be occupied by working class families.



Rock Terrace



Oathills Cottages

In 1899 Thomas Huxley, who ran the largest of the local building companies, submitted to Malpas Rural District Council, which in those days was the local planning authority, his proposals for four new cottages in Church Street. These cottages known today as *Welsh View*, with 'mock half-timbering' to the upper storey, were built soon afterwards. They were probably intended as housing for Huxley's employees.

In recent years, many local authorities have made it a condition in granting planning permission for some new private housing developments that the development should include a proportion of 'affordable' housing. A fairly recent example of this in Malpas is the terrace of twelve properties known as *Brockbank*, built in 2011 in Tilston Road. This was built in conjunction with the redevelopment of

The Beeches, the former Saint Joseph's Roman Catholic Retreat and Conference Centre, further along the road towards Tilston.



Welsh View (Church Street)
around 1906



Brockbank (Tilston Road)

MUSIC AND DRAMA IN MALPAS IN THE 1940s AND 1950s



LEFT to RIGHT: Richard Harrison – Tom Mercer - Herbert Yates with Alport pupils on home made instruments - Reverend Guy Hopher
(Photos – Oriel Piggott, Bill Coffin)

The Head Teacher of the Alport Boys' School from 1938 until 1944 and then of the combined Alport girls' and boys' school from 1944, until he retired in 1958, was the legendary Herbert Yates. He was also organist and choirmaster at Saint Oswald's church. An indefatigable organiser, Mr Yates, alongside others such as Jack Peberdy, Tom Mercer, rector Guy Hopher and verger Richard Harrison, was responsible for many musical and dramatic events in Malpas from the time of the second World War into the 1950s.

This was a 'golden age' for artistic and social activities in Malpas. Those who participated and are still living have fond memories of those days. The venues for these activities were the Jubilee Hall, the Alport School, Saint Oswald's church, the Congregational and two Methodist churches/chapels, and the parish hall. Sadly, of the last three in this list the Wesleyan Methodist chapel has been demolished; the Primitive Methodist chapel is now a private residence; and the parish hall is no longer available for public use.

There appear to have been two main factors which helped to hasten the demise of this range of activities. Many residents had purchased their first television sets in order to watch the broadcast of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation on June 2nd 1953. After that, many became rather addicted to watching the 'box' and possibly became more reluctant to venture out in the evenings to take part in other activities. Another factor appears to have been the need to repair the floor of the main room upstairs in the Jubilee Hall, which had become unsafe soon after the Coronation. From May 1954 the room was closed while fund-raising was undertaken to pay for re-laying the floor. The Parish Hall provided an alternative venue for plays, concerts, etc., but was unable to offer facilities to match those of the Jubilee Hall.



LEFT to RIGHT: Malpas Amateur Dramatic Society's 1953 production of 'The Monkey's Paw' – Jack Peberdy - Gilbert & Sullivan's opera 'The Yeomen of the Guard' performed by Malpas Evening Institute Operatic Section in 1953
(Photographs of productions by courtesy of *Chester Chronicle*)