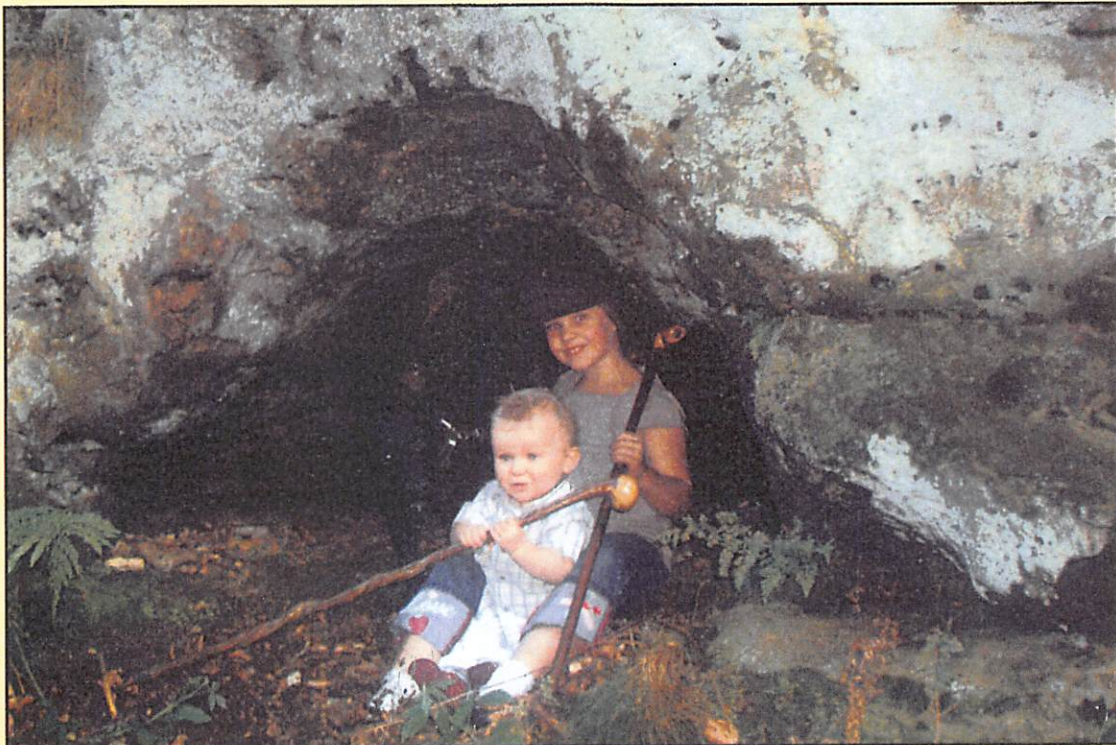


WIRRAL BITS and BOBS

Including:

Vikings, Caldy, Dawpool in Thurstaston,
A Walk along Parkgate Parade, Mucking the Fields,
Hard Times, The Anchor Inn and Irby Village,
Working Sticks, Farm Yard and Ship Yard.



By: Greg Dawson

DAWPOOL in THURSTASTON

During The Middle Ages the River Dee at Chester became badly silted up, mainly due to erosion of the coastline, and, as time went on, it became more and more difficult for ships to reach the city. In those days the deep water channel navigated by ships sailing in and out of the City hugged the Wirral coast. Chester shipping was forced to use small ports along the Dee from Blacon to Hilbre, where passengers and cargo were off-loaded and transported to Chester in smaller boats or by road.

Often, passengers and crew had to wait days or weeks for favourable winds before they could set sail. More alehouses opened in villages along the Dee coast to provide food, drink and lodging for these stranded travellers and mariners. In 1561 West Kirby had three alehouses, Caldy two, Caldy Grange one, Thurstaston one, Irby one, Heswall three, Gayton two, Neston two, Ness two, Burton five, Puddington one and Shotwick one. These figures illustrate just how important a port Burton was in the 1500s.

Due to ships being built progressively bigger, it became difficult to navigate the shallower waters of the lower Dee estuary ports. Chester shipping was forced further from the City to deeper anchorages, mainly at the Ness port of Denhall, Neston, Parkgate, Gayton, Hilbre and Red Bank.

Red Bank, (so called because of the clay cliffs) was a deep water anchorage between Caldy and Thurstaston. As early as the 1300s there is mention of an anchorage at the *Redebonke*. Eventually, close to a deep rocky dale in the cliffs, a little port grew. A brook running down the centre of the dale marked the ancient boundary between the manors of Caldy and Thurstaston. During the 1600s, the port by the dale in the Red Bank became known as Dale Pool, then Dalpool, Darpool and eventually, with the passage of time, the name became Dawpool. It was the deepest anchorage in the Dee and was favoured by Royal Naval Yachts which sometimes loaded large amounts of coinage there, sent out from Chester, for the payment of troops stationed in Ireland. Only in *Dawpool Deep* and *Beer House Hole* (which was opposite Boathouse Lane in Parkgate) was there enough water to allow ships to ride at anchor during low tide.

Just how busy Dawpool had become by about 1600 is illustrated by alehouse records of that time which list two alehouses in Thurstaston kept by *Thomas Anione* and *Wyllyam Whytmore* and three in Caldy, kept by *Henrye Tottye*, *Wyllyam Curtis* and *John Gouldeswere*.

Owing to further silting at Denhall and Neston, Parkgate became the main Dee port in the 1700s, but Dawpool was also important. While ships were anchored at these ports, passengers and various cargoes such as livestock, wine, gin, rum, brandy, tobacco, tea, linen, hides and iron could be off loaded and taken down to the shallower waters of Chester in smaller craft. Huge quantities of lead and coal from the numerous Flintshire mines were brought over to Dawpool, often from the port of Bagillt. Together with cheese and leather from Chester, the coal and lead was shipped mainly to Ireland and London but sometimes it was exported to other countries including Holland, Italy, France, Spain and even America.

Because there was enough water for ships to ride at anchor at low tide in Dawpool Deep, it was easier for the crew to stow a safer well balanced cargo there than at shallower anchorages where the ship might settle on the river bed. But, although Dawpool was a good anchorage, it was not popular with passengers or seamen because it was rather isolated, being at the end of a long narrow lane which ran down from Thurstaston Village. There were only a few houses and the custom officers Watch House. Dawpool could offer no comforts or facilities like the more popular Parkgate. Parkgate had inns, lodging houses and a shipyard with skilled tradesmen who could undertake repairs. Also, close to Parkgate was Neston with plenty of labour available and more inns offering food, drink and lodging. Nevertheless, Dawpool was still quite important.

During the 1700s, ferry boats called Packet ships sailed four times a week from Parkgate and occasionally Dawpool, to Ringsend in Dublin, weather permitting. These Packet ships not only carried passengers but also cargo and newspapers. There was a certain amount of smuggling going on along the Dee coast at this time, six customs officers and an excise man were based at Parkgate and one customs riding officer at Dawpool.

Jonathan Swift, author of the books, *Gullivers Travels*, *Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books* was one famous visitor to Dawpool. He was born in Dublin in 1667 and throughout his life he regularly sailed to and from Ireland using the Dee ports or Holyhead. It is known that he sailed from Parkgate to Ringsend, Dublin in 1704, landed at Dawpool in 1707 bound for Leicester and spent 1708 in England. In 1709 he sailed from Dawpool on 29th June and landed at Ringsend the next day before travelling to his vicarage in Laracor. He returned to England, landing at Parkgate in 1710 and again in 1713, the year he was made Dean of St. Patricks. He much preferred sailing from Parkgate or Dawpool, but when winds were not favourable he sometimes had to depart from Holyhead. He hated the long horseback ride to Holyhead where everyone spoke Welsh and he complained of having nobody to talk to while waiting for his ship to sail. Whilst stranded in Holyhead or wandering along Parkgate Parade or the cliffs at Dawpool, I wonder if he penned any of the dozens of old sayings he gave us, such as, "necessity is the mother of invention", "bread is the staff of life", "there is none so blind as they that will not see", "they say fingers were made before forks and hands before knives", etc.

Swift was heavily involved in politics and writing. He wrote books, witty pamphlets and essays and he became an important and largely popular man. The two great loves of his life were "Stella" (Hester Johnson) who he had known since he was eight years old and Ester Vanhomrigh, who proposed marriage to him. For Ester Vanhomrigh he invented the poetical name of "Vanessa", "Van", from her surname and "Essa", from her Christian name. When corresponding with Vanessa about gossip, he coined another phrase we all use, "I heard a little bird say so".

Another man of the cloth to land at Dawpool was the Primate of All Ireland who came over aboard the *Royal Yacht Dublin* in 1718.

Records of Thurstaston Church tell us of some happy events in the lives of men who worked at or sailed from Dawpool during this period and also of some tragedies;

Ann, daughter of Samuel Soane of Dawpool, mariner, baptised May 28th 1712.

Andrew, son of Andrew Hancock of Irby Mill Hill, ships carpenter, baptised September 18th 1712.

Mariner, Thomas Crisp buried December 26th 1713.

Robert Mackniel, Osbourn Thompson and William Moore all of Newry in the County of Down in the Kingdom of Ireland, mariners, buried December 17th 1717.

William, son of William Bonny, mariner and Mary his wife of Shoreham in the County of Sussex, baptised July 25th 1722.

John, son of William Smith, mariner and Sara his wife of Thurstaston buried November 6th 1722.

Susanna, daughter of Thomas Hastings, mariner and Jane his wife of Dawpool in the township of Thurstaston baptised January 1st 1723.

Margaret, daughter of William Smith, mariner and Sara his wife baptised November 7th 1723.

Robert, son of William Bonny, mariner and Mary his wife of Shoreham in the County of Essex, buried August 31st 1724. (William Bonney later died in Gayton and was buried in Heswall).

By this time Chester and some of its smaller creek ports were almost choked by silt and the City was no longer second to London in shipping terms. The deeper waters of the Mersey had enabled the port of Liverpool to overtake Chester and grow as each year passed. Something had to be done, so, in 1737, a channel called the New Cut was dug from Chester along the Welsh coast to deeper waters near Flint in an attempt to enable larger vessels to reach the City. This altered the natural course of the River Dee and the deep water channel along the Wirral coast began to silt up.

Parkgate and Dawpool were still very important ports for many more years as the water there was still quite deep. But the writing was on the wall.

As would be expected in any port, tragedies continued to occur, sometimes to people from outside the area as records of Thurstaston Church continue to inform us.

Mary Ann Murro, an infant daughter of John Baptist Murro of the City of Paris in France, buried September 10th 1743.

William Smith, mariner of Burton, buried December 29th 1749.

Solomon, a stranger, drowned at Dawpool, buried March 1st 1757.

Thomas Roberts of Neston, mariner, buried April 4th 1757.

(The above dead mariner William Smith, also mentioned in records of 1722 as living in Thurstaston, was almost certainly forced to leave his home village Burton and work from Dawpool due to silting of the river).

Much shipping was recorded as using Dawpool and the port was mentioned numerous times in records from the mid 1760s alone. Between 1762-8 John Gleggs's accounts mention ships loading lead at Dawpool many times, some ships being bound for such ports as London, Naples, Dieppe, Bordeaux and La Havre. Other sources mention such ships as the *Andalusia*, bound for Leghorn, Italy in 1763, taking aboard 1,270 bundles of leather sent to her at Dawpool from Chester aboard nine sloops. In the records of St. Peters Church, Heswall, there is the recorded burial of David Gibbons from Brunswick, New England who died aboard the Brig *Hawk* anchored at Dawpool in 1764. Also in 1764, a ship loaded with coal from Ness colliery anchored at Dawpool to load more cargo before sailing on to Philadelphia.

Winds were not always favourable, and, it was often easier for larger ships to be loaded at Parkgate or Dawpool than to navigate the New Cut into Chester and then out again. Therefore when loading lead from the mines on Halkyn Mountain, it was often easier to sail the ingots over from Bagillt to Dawpool. The lead also served as ballast for ships with light cargoes.

Gradually, over the years, the anchorages at Parkgate and Dawpool were ruined by silt and shifting sands caused by the digging of the New Cut. Land tax records of Thurstaston in the 1770s name the customs riding officer as Charles Shapely or Chapley, followed by Randle Padmore. Padmore, *Officer in the Customs*, was paying £5 land tax through the 1780s until 1792. In 1793 his name is not mentioned but the Customs paid £5 land tax, possibly to retain the premises. The following year there was no tax paid by the Customs, indicating that so little shipping was using Dawpool there was no longer need for an officer and the Watch House had been given up.

By the early 1800s, Dawpool was totally finished as a port, this seems to be proven by the population figures of Thurstaston which record 112 residents in 1801 and only 63 in 1811, consisting of 15 families living in only 10 houses. This indicates that when the port of Dawpool ceased to operate, 49 people moved out of the parish, possibly 10 or 12 working men with their wives and children. The last ferry from Parkgate to Ireland sailed in 1815 and the service was transferred to Liverpool. Wirral's share of what was left of Chester's shipping was lost to Flint and the new Welsh ports of Connahs Quay, Queensferry, Harwarden Bridge and Saltney along the banks of the New Cut.

At this time, steam boats started to be used for ferry services and a plan was eventually drawn up to re-establish a passenger ferry service from Dublin to the Dee and then by coach to Chester. In 1822 the famous engineer Thomas Telford presented a plan for a semi-circular sandstone harbour to be built off the Wirral coast between Dawpool and Caldy Steps. There was to be an 800 yard long floating roadway, built from the harbour to the shore and new road along the coast to Heswall. The final cost of the scheme was reckoned to be £30,000, a colossal sum in those days and the idea was scrapped. However, it appears that quite a bit of work was carried out between Caldy and Dawpool as there are hundreds of large sandstone blocks and thousands of smaller ones laid out along the shore. This could have been done before Telford's assessment and grand plan was drawn up.

Population figures indicate that the work could have been carried out in 1821 as the population of Thurstaston doubled from 63 in 1811 to 127 in 1821. The hamlet of Dawpool, which it appears was abandoned in the early 1800s, would have been re-occupied by the families of workers engaged in laying out the sandstone harbour blocks. The population fell again after work on the harbour was stopped. The Dawpool Estate, consisting of 228 acres, took its name from the old sea port and was the portion of Thurstaston stretching from the village to the shore from what is today the right hand side of Station Road across to Caldy fields. In 1819 the Dawpool Estate and part of Caldy passed to Colonel Maxwell Goodwin who in turn sold these lands to Middlesex born Joseph Hegan who had previously been living at *Arrowe Hall*.

The 1849 tithe map shows that most of the 924 acre parish of Thurstaston was owned by John Baskervyle Glegg of *Thurstaston Hall* whose family had been bequeathed the Estate by Mrs. Lucy Browne, a descendant of John Whitmore. The tithe map also shows that the Dawpool Estate was owned by Joseph Hegan Esq., of *Home Farm* (later called *Dawpool Farm*). Hegan also owned 80 adjoining acres in Caldy and 250 acres in Barnston.

Joseph Hegan had already built *Home Farm*. In 1858 he built Dawpool School on Station Road and in 1865 he built a house called *Dawpool* nearby. Hegan died in 1865 in Pau in the South of France aged 70. His daughters built the beautiful new Thurstaston Church in his memory in 1885. Part of the old original church still stands in the graveyard.

In 1877, the millionaire, Thomas Ismay (owner of the White Star shipping line of *Titanic* fame) bought Dawpool house with 39 acres. Ismay was born on January 7th 1837 in a small house in Whillan's Yard, off Wood Street, Maryport, Cumberland where his family worked as shipwrights. When he was a lad his mates nick named him "Baccy Ismay" as he chewed tobacco like the old salts he was friendly with. From an early age he had a great interest in ships and eventually became a very successful Liverpool based shipowner.

Thomas Ismay demolished the house called *Dawpool* which Hegan had built. In 1882, he began building a new and more grand *Dawpool Hall*, (overlooking the Dee) designed by Norman Shaw, the famous architect who designed the police headquarters, Scotland Yard in London.



This picture is of the rear view of Dawpool Hall, Thurstaston built by Thomas Ismay in 1884. It had over 60 rooms and a staff of 32 indoor servants.

Dawpool Hall, built of red sandstone from Heswall, was completed in 1884 at a cost of over £53,000 and had over 60 rooms. In the entrance hall there was an inscription over the stone fireplace which read;

THIS HOUSE WAS BUILT BY THOMAS HENRY ISMAY AND MARGARET HIS WIFE, IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD, ONE THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED AND EIGHTY FOUR THE YEAR OF THEIR SILVER WEDDING. *Deus Dedit Debat Porro.*

When Telegraph Road (A540), from Heswall to West Kirby was being improved it was to follow the original route and pass close to *Dawpool Hall*. So, for the sake of peace and quiet, Ismay paid out of his own pocket to have the road straightened and cut through the solid rock of Thurstaston Hill so to bypass his mansion and be well out of sight. Unfortunately, the village pub the *Glegg Arms* was taken down in the process forcing landlord Joe Broster to move to the *Chestnut Horse* in Grange. The new section of Telegraph Road, more or less between the *Cottage Loaf* and Caldy Rugby field, is still known as *Ismays Cutting*. Also for peace and quiet Ismay had a new school called *Dawpool* built on Thurstaston Hill and used his influence to have Thurstaston railway station built as far away as possible, inconveniencing locals very much. Many an Irby and Thurstaston lad on leave from the forces cursed Ismay when having to lug his kit bag home almost from the shore.

Thomas Ismay was one of the most successful shipowners in the world. He had the freedom of the City of Belfast, where his ships were built by Harland and Wolf and he moved in the highest circles having entertained Queen Victoria who offered him a Baronetcy, which he refused. In 1889 Edward, Prince of Wales took his nephew the German Emperor, Wilhelm II (Kaiser Bill) on a tour of British naval ships at Spithead. The Kaiser admired all the ships but was most impressed by the armed cruiser *Teutonic*. She was a White Star liner which had been armour plated and armed with several guns so that she could also serve as a merchant cruiser in time of war. Kaiser Bill said, "We must have some of these", and he did. Germany began building its own ships which were previously built in Britain. Within eight years a German ship the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* was launched and when completed she won the Blue Riband which Germany held for ten years and by 1903 they had the four fastest ships in the World.

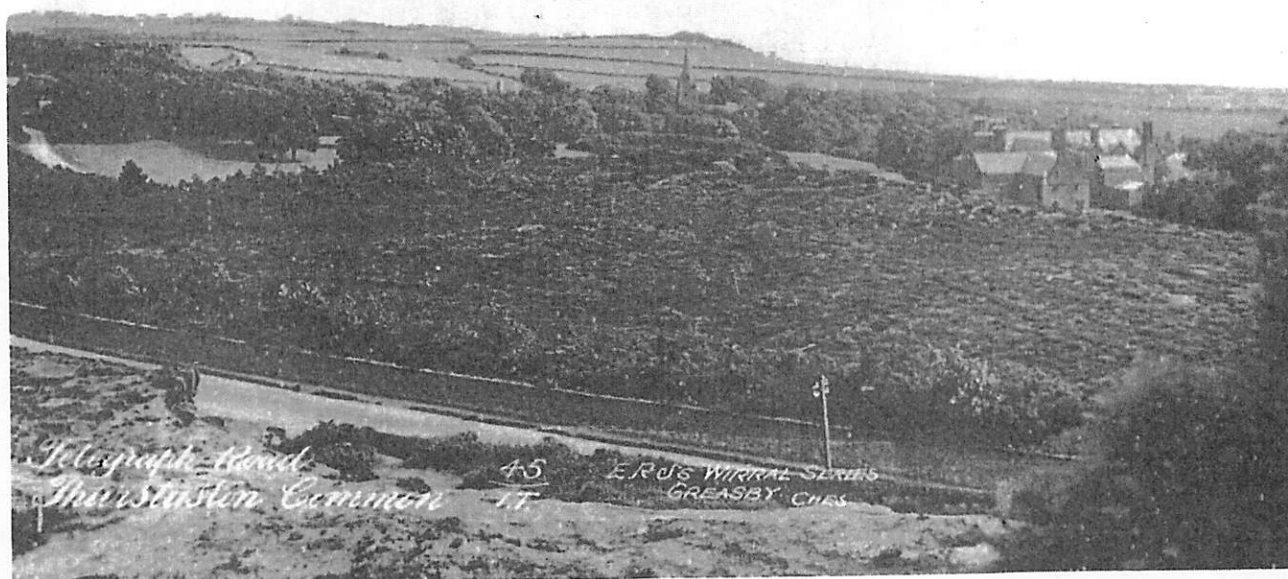
Thomas and Margaret Ismay had nine children. They named one of their sons Bruce which was Margaret's maiden name. At his daughters wedding reception Thomas Ismay said that he had "travelled in all parts of the World but he had never seen a place that he liked better than Thurstaston". Ismay died on 23rd November 1899 aged 63. Tributes came from all over the world including one from Kaiser Bill. The tomb of Thomas Ismay is in Thurstaston Churchyard, his wife Margaret who died in 1907 is buried with him.

Mr. F. Rutter lived at *Dawpool Hall* after the Ismays and during the Great War the grand house was used as a hospital for wounded officers. In later years no one wanted to buy this huge house which needed 32 indoor servants and was said to be cold and uncomfortable with smoking chimneys. *Dawpool Hall* was taken down and the whole of the interior and exterior, including stone walls, slate roofs and all fittings and fixtures were put up for auction by Perry and Philips of Bridgenorth on September 21st and 22nd, 1926. The sale catalogue ran to 56 pages, examples of items included were; lot 146 *Central Hall* oak floor as laid 63 ft. by 13ft. 9in, (pencilled in the margin is a price of £30); lot 379 *Irby Bedroom* No.6, eleven leaded light panels as fitted to bay, each 18in. by 3ft., with 3 fitted casements (no stonework included), pencilled in the margin is a price of £3. 5s; lot 558 5ft. 6in. *Rufford bath* in mahogany casing, with brass fittings, lead supply and discharge pipes, to be disconnected at wall and floor level, also the lead drip tray (pencilled in the margin is a price of £3. 10s).

The dismantling of *Dawpool Hall* was completed in 1927 and the grounds, consisting of 39 acres, were sold off in five lots and five new houses, *Roughlands*, *Thors Hill*, *Pine Ridge*, *Warren House* and another *Dawpool* were built. The name of *Home Farm* (the *Dawpool Estate* farm) was then changed to *Dawpool Farm*.



Dawpool School in Station Road, Thurstaston, built in 1858 by Joseph Hegan who then owned the Dawpool Estate. It was bought by Mrs. Margaret Ismay for £100 after a new school was built on Thurstaston Hill



Dawpool Hall, (once home of the Ismay family) looking from Thurstaston Hill c1918. Note the original road from Heswall to West Kirby to the left of the picture along which the old Glegg Arms once stood. Note the new route, Ismay's Cutting (A540) in the foreground and Thurstaston Church centre.

However, the row of the 12 *Dawpool Cottages*, along the old original road to West Kirby (now private) which comes out at the bottom of *Ismays Cutting*, are still standing. They are actually a few yards over the border in Lower Caldy and were originally built for the workers on the *Dawpool Estate*, (grooms, gardeners, stonemasons and farmers etc.)

The following heads of families were recorded living at *Dawpool Cottages* in 1938; no.1 Ernest Francis (estate caretaker), 2 Joseph White (fruit porter) 3 Harry Rutter (gardener), 4 Mrs. Mary Bennett, 5 John Bayman (ships joiner), 6 John Francis (gardener), 7 Frederick Totty (teamsman), 8 Edward Jones (teamsman), 9 William Tunley, (signalman) 10 Samuel Smith (teamsman), 11 William Law, 12 Frank Ravenscroft (gardener). Even in the late 1930s the above list shows how much rural communities still relied on agriculture and big houses for work. The importance of horses is illustrated by the fact that there were three teamsmen recorded.

The occupations of the workers living in *Dawpool Cottages* after the Second World War gives an indication of how times were changing and even in rural Thurstaston, the importance of horse power and of agriculture as a major employer were on the wane; 1 Ernest Henry Frances (estate caretaker), 2 Ernest John Francis (gardener), 3 Harry Rutter (gardener), 4 Mrs Mary Bennett, 5 William Owen (clerk), 6 George Bennett (bus driver), 7 John Peers (his son Frank was killed in W.W.II in the push after D-Day, his name is on the village war memorial), 8 Ernest Cartwright (farm worker), 9 William Cork (Tate & Lyle worker), 10 Samuel Smith (teamsman), 11 Mrs. Elizabeth Pierce, and 12 Frank Ravenscroft (gardener).

Dawpool Farm continued as a working farm, run by Charley Howell whose father, also Charley, farmed there before him. The big well designed buildings were always kept in first class order and years ago the National Farmers Union used to hold barn dances in them. *Dawpool Farm* was built as a model farm and had the finest buildings of any farm in Wirral. My Dad always said it was a pleasure to go there. He used to buy loads of chat 'taters' there off Charley Howell for my Grandad's pigs. Dad said it was so easy loading the 1cwt. sacks (112 pounds) as you just backed the horse to the loading bay which was somewhere near the height of the cart and loaded the sacks on. At all the other farms Dad would have to carry big sacks out of the buildings and lift them up onto the back of the cart.

Charles Howell, whose family had farmed there for many decades, also designed and I believe patented a cage fox trap which caught foxes alive. He had great success with them and advertised them in the "Farmers Weekly". I remember Charley coming to George Bowden's farm in Thingwall in the late 1960s to "have words" with George for using a fox trap of similar design to his, which he thought George had copied. George also had success with his trap, not only did he catch a number of foxes, in about 1972 I remember him catching a badger in it.

After Charley died in 1981 aged 71, *Dawpool Farm* ceased to be a working farm. Thankfully, all the sandstone buildings individually designed and built by Joseph Hegan were tastefully made into apartments and not taken down like *Dawpool House*. The *Clock Tower* is a survivor of the Ismay era, built by Thomas Ismay in 1892 and can be viewed from the road.

However, far worse than losing the grand *Dawpool Hall*, we have also lost the beautiful little dale in the cliffs. Wirral Urban District Council, in its wisdom, made the picturesque cliff-side dale which gave its name to the port of Dawpool, into a rubbish tip. This historic wooded dale in the *Red Bank* where travellers sometimes sheltered whilst awaiting ship, today no-longer exists, having been filled in with rubbish during the 1960s and 70s, levelled and left to grow wild. The brook running through the dale to the River Dee, marking the ancient boundary between Thurstaston and Caldy, was piped under the tip and out onto the beach. Years ago, a lad I know once found 30-odd well worn silver coins and as many copper ones near this spot, all dating from the 1700s. During 1966-7, Caldy Golf Club planted trees to screen the tip from its course.

Today, there is little evidence of the old port of Dawpool. The lane which led to it from Thurstaston Village is now a cart track. Along Caldy shore there are still a great number of large sandstone blocks from the abandoned quay project. A little further along the shore towards Thurstaston is *Shore Cottage*. I believe this Victorian cottage is built on the ruins of the old customs officers Watch House. It is an ideal site for a Watch House, just above the high tide line with clear views of the river and along the coast. Years ago Sally McCrae lived in one half of *Shore Cottage* and Patrick Deasy in the other. For many years Sally served tea to ramblers and was very well liked. She died in 1953 aged 87. Today, the cottage is a private house, still known far and wide as *Sally's Cottage*.

However, *Redbank* was, and still is, an important anchorage for local fishermen. Also, links with its maritime past were further strengthened when the Dee Sailing Club was built close to the sight of Dawpool Port, after being forced to abandon its previous premises in Heswall, (now *Sheldrakes* restaurant) due to the silting up of Gayton Gutter.



This sandstone arch was believed to be the gateway to Dawpool Port from Dawpool Lane which ran from Thurstaston Village through the fields and down the dale to the shore, as can be seen on the 1899 map in the back of the book. The arch has long since disappeared and the little dale, seen through the arch, was filled in by Wirral U.D.C.