THIS SEAHAM GIRL HAD CHAMPAGNE AND PLUM CAKE ON HER BIRTHDAY

By C. A. SMITH

APART from the old village itself, where the ancient church hall and Glebe still evoke enchanting memories of memorial days, no part of Seaham is of greater interest than Tempest Place and the dockland area. We have already shown pictures of the Port Infirmary and one of its early matrons, Mrs Saunders, and we recall that it was built in 1844 by Lady Frances Anne, who devoted to this project the whole of the proceeds derived from the sale of a book entitled, "A Three Months Tour in Portugal, Spain and Africa," written and published by her ladyship in 1843. The Infirmary was then described as "a handsome Gothic building of stone, in an enclosed space of ground at the end of the North Terrace." It then contained a dispensary or surgery, five wards with 12 beds and the matron's apartment. The Infirmary, under the care of a house surgeon and a visiting staff of a physician and three surgeons, was managed by a committee of 12, under the patronage of the Marchioness.

Up to 1855 it was supported entirely by voluntary subscriptions and any fees charged to boarder patients. However, owing to suggestions from the masters and owners of shipping visiting the port, a charge of one shilling was laid upon every ship of over 50 tons visiting the harbour (sixpence if under 50 tons) in the name of "hospital money." This entitled every seaman visiting the port to free admission and treatment. The expedient proved a great success.

Fifty years later it was still in operation and then accommodated 16 patients and proposals were being made to enlarge the building since the need was very evident for "such an institution among a population surrounded by railways, collieries, etc., leading a life of risk and danger where accidents are of common occurrence."

The rest of its history is unknown to me except that it was recently used by the U.D.C. A little farther along Tempest Place we come to another of the Londonderry benefactions. As far back as 1847 a reading room had been established which later became known as the Mechanics' Institute in North Terrace. Annual subscriptions were made by the Marquess and Marchioness and Mr Henry Wall Smith, who owned the gas works in the Dene, provided the lighting.

It was on January 13, 1853, that a meeting was held in its newsroom to form plans for the erection of what eventually became the Londonderry Literary Institute in Tempest Place. On the adoption of the plans the Marquess offered the site and liberal contributions both from himself and Frances Anne.

On July 8, 1853, Mr Robert Wight, iron and brass founder, laid the foundation stone, and in August a fashionable bazaar was held at Seaham Hall by the Marchioness in aid of the building fund, which produced a very large sum. The building was thereby completed from Thomas Oliver's designs, with the front presenting a facade of about 80 ft. From the centre projected a portico supported by four massive doric columns, not unlike the columns built by John Dobson at Monkwearmouth Station, and terminated by an ornamental cornice and pediment.

Newsrooms

It was believed that the details were derived from the Parthenon. The internal structure of the hall was Ionic in type. A large lecture hall accommodated some five or six hundred people and was flanked by a library and newsrooms. The Institute was opened by Sir Archibald Allison, the well known European historian, on January 3, 1855, just 110 years ago. Full membership cost one guinea a year, admission to lectures and either the newsroom or library cost 10s, labourers could have full membership for 10s or 6s for use of the library and newsroom. Classes and lectures were part of the system and the library contained more than 350 books, with 45 members in 1855.

A smokeroom was in use some 40 years later. At the turn of the century its original function had ceased and the premises were used in succession as a church hall, U.D.C. premises, and, as our present picture shows, as the habitat of the Seaham O.A.P. Association. We provide pictures both old and new for comparison and interest, for there is much in this area which is directly due to the good offices of the Londonderry family.

Some interesting old buildings are shown in this early picture which depicts the Londonderry Institute and various churches and chapels of which we may recall the old Wesleyan Chapel, built in Tempest Place in 1833 to seat about 400. The Primitive Methodist Chapel in 1846 existed possibly in Church Street but in 1850 a plot of land was presented by the Marquess and a permanent chapel was built.

Wesleyan Chapel

It was rebuilt in 1871. Incidentally, the Wesleyan Chapel, now in Tempest Road was, I believe, originally built by the Independent Methodists at a cost of £1,000 in 1856 and purchased from them in 1881. It was then described as a handsome stone structure in the Gothic style and had a Sunday school attached which cost £700. Some of its architecture is striking and noteworthy. The old Wesleyan Chapel was then occupied by the Salvation Army.

No doubt, the Seamen's Bethel, opened in 1846 for materials provided by the Marquess, prepared the way for the Seamen's Mission and Institute, erected in 1909 in South Terrace. There are, I think, no less than 19 churches and chapels of various denominations in Seaham today.

Soon after the advent of the docks, Seaham Harbour witnessed a rise in manufactures and trade to keep face with the success of the Port. We have already mentioned Robert Wight and Sons, anchor manufacturers, brass founders and finishers, iron founders, and engineers. Then came the Seaham Harbour bottleworks, opened in 1852 and subsequently carried on by R. Fenwick and Co., of Sunderland.

Seaham Pottery

The Londonderry bottleworks, belonging to John Candlish and Co., had an international reputation. Seaham Harbour pottery belonged to Mr J. H. Walker. These are but a few of the many. There were also three breweries, printing offices, steam flour mill, gasworks, water company and, of course, shipbuilders, sailmakers, ship chandlers, and mast makers who attended to the business of "sail and steam," not to mention the great collieries, coal fitters, engine, wagon and locomotive works.

The Union Bank was opened about 1854, when the police station was in John Street. The time soon came for the Marchioness to invest something like £100,000 in the establishment of an ironworks and foundry. We show a picture of her laying the foundation stone of her blast furnaces in 1859.

Yes, wealth had come to Seaham, and, for many, life was good. Here is part of a letter written by a little girl of seven to her father in 1841, which I recently read. It is an interesting commentary on the outlook and education of a very young girl from an upper-class home.

April 1, 1841

My Beloved Father,

I promised in my last letter to write to you next, so I have kept my word as you see, but expecting a letter from you in return. I have been more busy than I can tell yo playing railway quadrilles for my birthday party which was yesterday. I had a most beautiful plum cake with a pot of flowers on the top of it and auntie gave us a splendid entertainment. There were baskets of cak and sugar which looked very pretty filled with cakes and crackers. Then we had a beautiful pineapple pie and some "champagne" and all kinds of sweet fruits, blancmange and jelly. Then music and dancing. I wish Sam had been there for Willie Bell was the only bean at dinner and there were 20 misses. Mrs Cox sent me a book and a very kind note inside to give me great pleasure and happiness. I hope dear mother is now quite well. We unite our affectionate love to you all. Your affectionate daughter,

Susan.

(To be continued)

The Robert Candlish Memorial Hall, another example of the 19th-Century architecture in Seaham Harbour.

The former Londonderry Literary Institute, as it is today. The foundation stone was laid on July 8, 1853, by Mr Robert Wight, iron and brass founder.

Lady Frances Anne lays the foundation stone of the blast furnaces near Seaham in 1859.

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