

Emma, Lady Hamilton

1765 - 1815

*Emma was baptised **Emy Lyon** in Neston Parish Church on May 12th 1765. She celebrated April 26th as her birthday.*



She was born into poverty in the village of **Ness**.

She became the beauty of her age and the lover of **Admiral Horatio Nelson**, the nation's most famous naval hero of all time.

In this exhibition we use local archives to demonstrate that her relationship to the parish of her birth is closer than many think.

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Where was Emma born?

Local tradition says she was born in Swan Cottage, Ness. It is a fine three storey building (pre WW1 left and today right) and stands on one of the highest points in Ness.



On the back of the house there is a date-stone which gives the year it was built (1724) and many have thought that the "L" stands for Lyon.

But we now know that the letters stand for the builders John Leech and his son Samuel Leech. We also know that in the 18th century this house was lived in by a Customs Officer, who used it to keep watch on shipping on the Dee.

But we have uncovered a separate tradition that the house had a smithy next to it which served as the "Beacon of the Dee". So maybe this is where Emma's father worked and she was born.



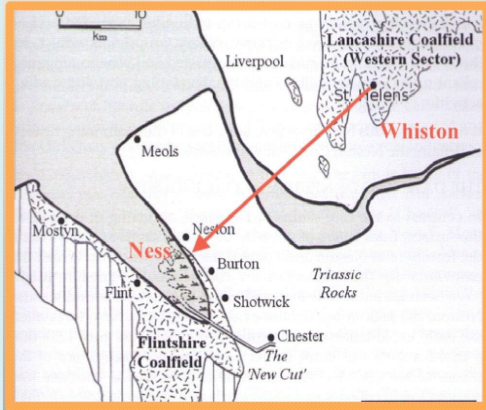
There is an alternative theory that Emma's family lived in "Smith's Cottages" in Ness, which are similar to those shown left.

However, there is no evidence to support this, and it seems that the cottages derive their name from a former owner called Smith, rather than a blacksmith's workplace.

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Who was Emma's father?

Her father was **Henry Lyon**, blacksmith of **Ness**. He died aged 26, only a few months after **Emma's** birth.



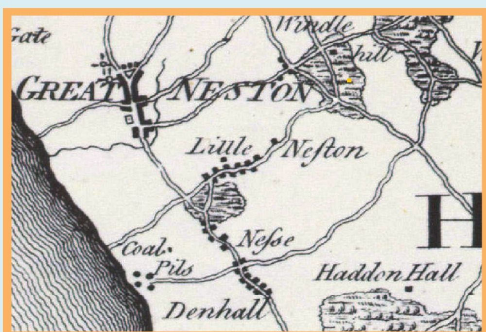
Research by members of the Burton and Neston History Society has shown that he came from **Whiston** in the parish of **Prescot** in Lancashire.

Whiston has coalfields similar to those in Ness, and **Henry Lyon** was a blacksmith specialising in mining equipment.

He came from a long line of blacksmiths in **Whiston**.

We know that **Henry** came to work in Ness soon after the mines opened in 1759. His mother **Alice Lyon**, his younger brother **Thomas Lyon** and maybe others came too.

His brother **Thomas Lyon** probably took over the smithy and in 1772 married **Mary Parry** and had five children, his eldest named after **Henry**.



Throughout her life, **Emma** had an uncle, aunt and cousins in Ness. So she always had a Ness family.

We do not know if her relatives knew of her, and she of them.

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Who was Emma's mother?

*Emma's mother was **Mary Kidd**, born in nearby Hawarden.*



After the death of Emma's father, **Mary Lyon** took baby **Emma** back to Hawarden to be looked after by her grandmother **Mrs Sarah Kidd** (see cottage left).

By the time **Emma** was 12 she was working as a maid in the house of **Dr and Mrs Thomas**, where the first portrait of her was drawn by the daughter of the house (see next panel).

At 13 **Emma** was taken to join her mother in London. She worked first as a servant in houses and in Drury Lane theatre.

Then she appeared in a public display at a quack doctor's **Temple of Health** (right).

At 16 she was hired as "entertainment" in **Sir Henry Featherstonhaugh's** mansion at Uppark, Sussex.



We know that **Emma** and her mother kept contact with **Neston** because in a later letter **Emma** passes comment on a **Mrs Ladmore**, whom she hoped to stay with.

Mrs Bathsheba Ladmore was a widow whose family were anchor-smiths and lived on the shore between **Moorside** and the **Old Quay**. The remains of the entrance to their house and yard can still be found (left) in the reeds of the marsh edge.

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The Transformation

*1782 was a turning point in **Emma's** life. She was 16, pregnant, and had been abandoned by her aristocratic lover.*



However, she had caught the eye of **Charles Greville**, a collector of antiquities, who decided to educate **Emma** and transform her into a cultivated lady of society.

Like **Pygmalion** of Greek legend, **Charles** fell in love with his creation.

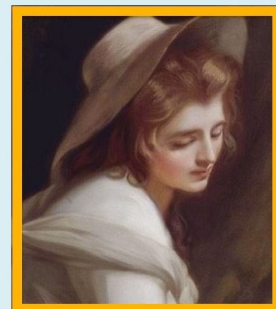
To go with her new persona **Charles** wanted to give her a new name. But first he demanded a copy of her baptism record from Neston Church.

We know she was staying in Chester and obtained the copy from **Curate Richard Carter**. Possibly **Emma's** Neston friend **Mrs Ladmore** was able to ask for it discreetly.



*Left: **Emy Lyon** drawn by Dr Thomas's daughter in Hawarden in c1777.*

*Right: **Mrs Emma Hart** painted as "Ariadne" (c1784) by **George Romney** in one of his most famous paintings.*



Emy **Lyon**.....becomes.....Emma **Hart**

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Emma Hart visits Parkgate

*In the summer of 1784, “Mrs Emma Hart”, now 19, collected her 2 year-old daughter from her grandmother in Hawarden and visited **Parkgate** together with her mother. They stayed just over a month and **Emma** wrote many letters to **Charles Greville**.*



The winter of 1783/4 had been hard, largely due to volcanic outpourings from Iceland.

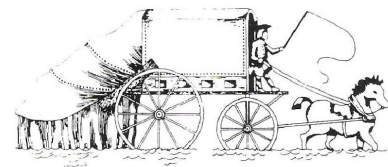
But in June 1784 the view across the estuary could be enjoyed again.

*“Flint from Parkgate” after
J.M.W. Turner 1796*

Parkgate was a fashionable resort, as well as a port.

Emma was suffering from a skin complaint which affected her joints (and her beauty). She preferred **Parkgate** because it had facilities for bathing and seaweed therapy, which she used daily.

Emma dismissed rival **Hoylake** as “not fit for a Christian”.



JOSEPH MANLOVE
OF THE GEORGE INN, PARKGATE,
INFORMS THE LADIES, GENTLEMEN, AND OTHERS THAT,
FOR THEIR BETTER ACCOMMODATION DURING THE
BATHING SEASON,
HE HAS PURCHASED AN ADDITIONAL
BATHING MACHINE
ON AN ENTIRELY MODERN CONSTRUCTION,
IN WHICH LADIES MAY BATHE
WITH THE UTMOST EASE AND SECRECY.

PRICE FOR A SINGLE BATHING, 8d.
AND EVERY LADY WILL, (IF DESIRED)
BE ATTENDED WITH A FEMALE SERVANT

Advertisement from “Chester Chronicle” dated 10th May, 1782.

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Emma's Parkgate hosts

Local tradition has it that Emma stayed at Dover Cottage on the corner of Station Road.



Local historians have identified the family that Emma and her baby and mother were staying with. Her hosts were **Mrs Mary Downward** and her grandmother **Mrs Kelsall**.

She mentions she 'has society' with Mrs Downward's sister and mother. These were **Elizabeth Briscoe** and the recently widowed **Elizabeth Williams**.

Emma's landlady, **Mary Downward**, was married to **Charles Downward**, a member of the burgeoning merchant class with interests in America. His brother supplied rope for shipping and his niece **Jane Downward** became a founder member of **Neston Female Friendly Society**, which still flourishes today.



Elizabeth Williams ran the *Blue Anchor*, a popular inn on Parkgate front located close to Mostyn Square.

Her late husband **Captain Hugh Williams** had owned a vessel used to transport destitute and starving Irish immigrants from the "House of Correction" (Old Quay left) to Dublin.

The Glory Years

*In August 1798 **Nelson** destroyed the French fleet in the **Battle of the Nile**.*



Nelson returned to Naples, wounded and exhausted, but a hero.

Emma, now **Lady Hamilton**, wife of the British envoy to Naples, flung herself at him.

So began the famous affair which both scandalised and fascinated the whole of Europe.

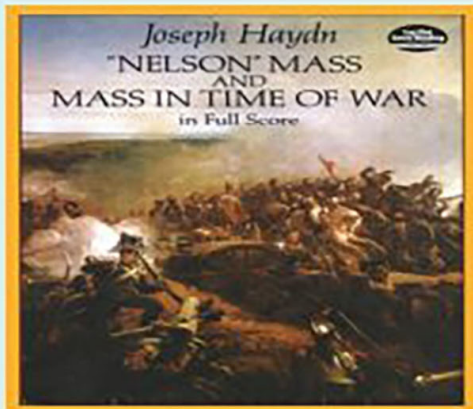
In 1799 **Emma**, **Lady Hamilton** was awarded the Cross of Malta for guaranteeing food and supplies to the island in their time of need. It was presented to her by the **Tsar of Russia**.

She was the first woman to receive this honour and started a fashion for the cross as jewellery which has lasted to this day.



On their triumphal return through Europe in 1800 **Nelson** and **Emma** met the composer **Joseph Haydn** in Vienna.

Emma was invited to sing in the '**Nelson**' Mass and a special cantata was composed for her.



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The 'Nelson' Cottage of Parkgate

Lord Nelson died on 21st October 1805 in the **Battle of Trafalgar**. He had asked the nation to look after **Emma**, but tragically it failed to do so. **Emma** proved incapable of managing the property left to her and fell into debt. She was shunned by society.



But one man continued to admire and respect her. **Albin Burt** was a painter of miniatures who spent his summers in **Parkgate**.

When he was young, **Emma** had helped him to gain commissions through her aristocratic contacts.

His mother (**Mary Roberts**) was from **Hawarden** and was a close friend of **Emma** and her mother. She had known **Emma** as a child and lived to witness the entire "**Emma** phenomenon" from start to finish.

To demonstrate his loyalty, Albin named his first two children **Emma Hamilton Burt** (1812, right) and **Nelson Burt** (1813, left).

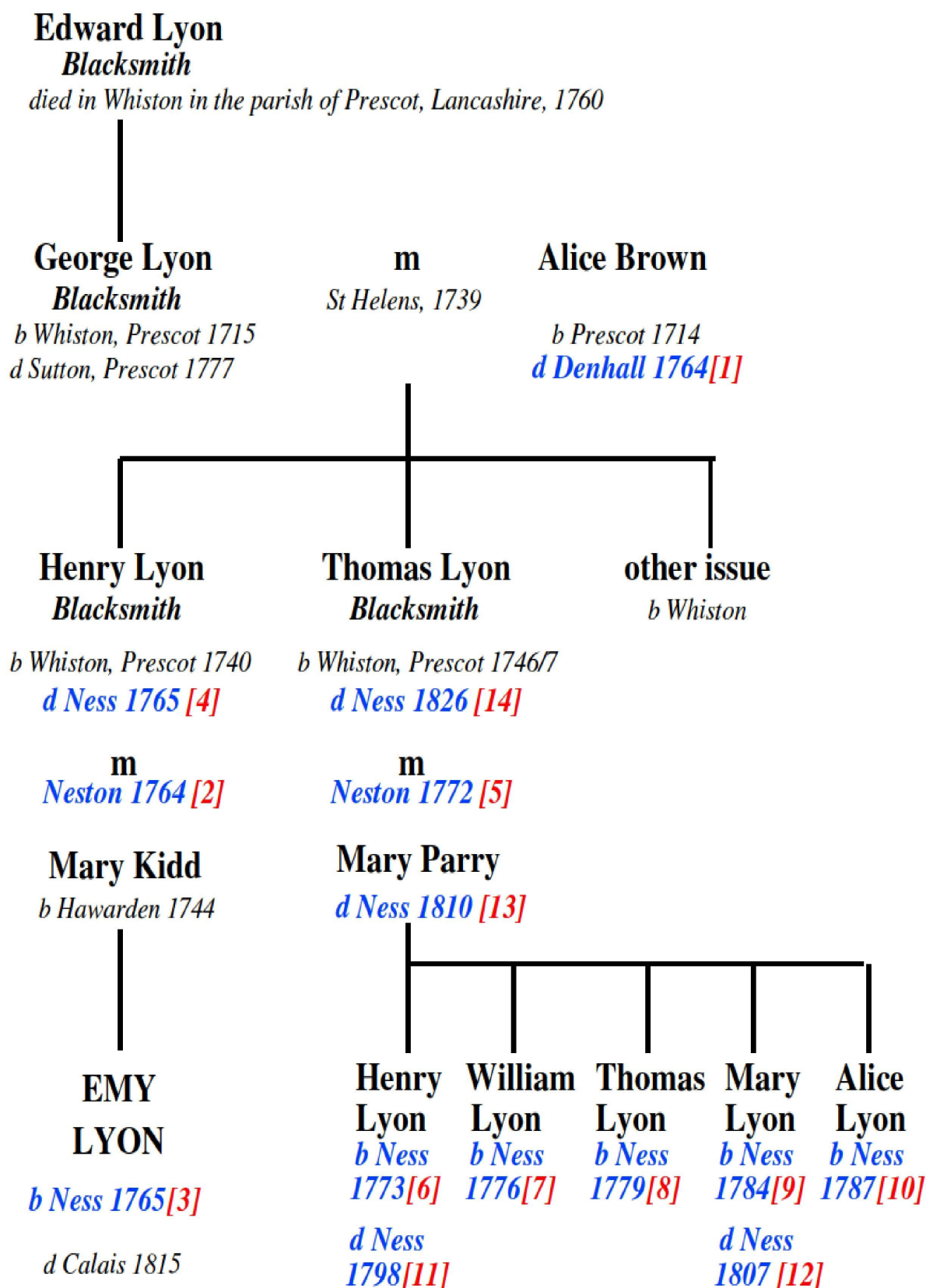
Tragically, **Nelson Burt** was drowned in a storm when he was 9 years old while sailing with his father from Liverpool to Ellesmere Port.



As a memorial to his son, **Albin Burt** painstakingly created the name **NELSON** in cobblestones outside the house in Station Road **Parkgate** where they stayed.

It was the labour of many years, and is made from stones gathered from the shore.

This monument is likely to last longer than many more elaborate memorials.



1754 May
 o William son of Tho: Smith of Nibley & Anne his wife
 + Alice daughter of John Smith of Nibley
 o David son of John Smith of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Anne daughter of John Smith of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of John Smith of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Anne daughter of John Smith of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of John Smith of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Anne daughter of John Smith of Nibley & Anne his wife

[1]

Banns of Marriage between Henry Lyon and Mary
 were published the 27th of May the 2nd of June
 the said Henry Lyon and Mary
 were Married in this Church by Ravens the
 Eleventh Day of June in the Year One Thousand
 seven Hundred & Sixty Two by me W. Gardner

[2]

o Isaac son of John Hendrick of Nibley & Jane his wife
 o Alice daughter of Samuel Martin of Nibley & Alice his wife
 o Anne daughter of John Lyon of Nibley & Margaret his wife
 o Mary daughter of John Lyon of Nibley & Margaret his wife
 o Elizabeth daughter of John Hendrick of Nibley & Jane his wife

[3]

1765 June
 o Henry Lyon of Nibley & Jane his wife
 o John son of George Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Betty daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Joseph son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of Charles Hargrave of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Peter son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife

[4]

N^o 202
 Banns of Marriage between Thomas Lyon and Mary
 were published the 27th of May the 2nd of June
 the said Thomas Lyon and Mary
 were Married in this Church by Ravens the
 twenty ninth Day of December in the Year One Thousand
 seven hundred & seventy Two by me W. Gardner

[5]

o Mary daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Betty daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Joseph son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of Charles Hargrave of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Peter son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife

[6]

o William son of John Lyon of Nibley & Mary his wife
 o Mary daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Elizabeth daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife

[7]

o James son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Mary daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Betty daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Joseph son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of Charles Hargrave of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Peter son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife

[8]

o William son of John Lyon of Nibley & Mary his wife
 o Mary daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Elizabeth daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife

[9]

o Mary daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Betty daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Joseph son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of Charles Hargrave of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Peter son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife

[10]

o Mary daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Betty daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Joseph son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of Charles Hargrave of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Peter son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife

[11]

+ Margaret Helsal
 o Martha daughter of John Langley of Thornton farmer by Martha his wife
 o Mary daughter of John Penketh of Hargrave Hall farmer by Jane his wife
 + Mary daughter of Thomas Lyon

[12]

Anne Domin 1710
 January
 o Mary daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Betty daughter of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Joseph son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o John son of Charles Hargrave of Nibley & Anne his wife
 o Peter son of John Barker of Nibley & Anne his wife

[13]

Thomas Lyon. Sept. 1st December 81. W. Gardner

[14]

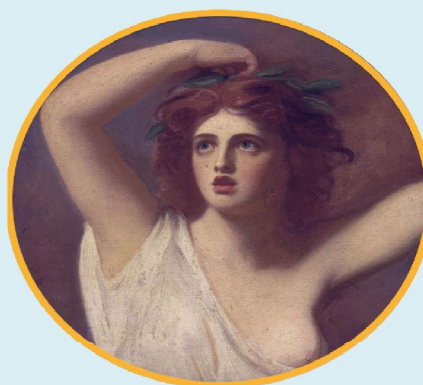
Emma's Memorial

***Emma** died in poverty in Calais on January 15th 1815, most probably suffering from amoebic dysentery. She was given a hurried burial, the likely site of which was destroyed in WW2.*

Although the nation neglected her, some recompense has been made by the **1805 Club**, who erected a memorial to her in 1994:



The inscription gives her birthplace as “**Nesse, Angleterre**” and the monument is topped by *a ball of Wirral sandstone*. However, there is still no monument to **Emma** anywhere in the United Kingdom.



Emma Hart as Cassandra
by George Romney c1785