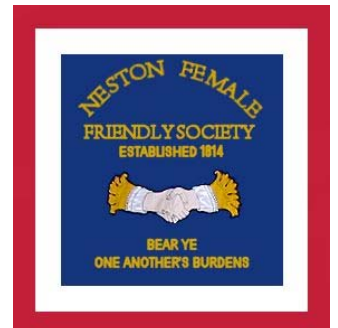


Celebrating 200 Years of Neston Female Society's Ladies Club Day

1814-1863: The early years

In 1814 England had been at war for many years and the country was suffering. Hardship and poverty were widespread. The women of Neston decided to do something to try to alleviate this by establishing the Neston Female Friendly Society to look after each other in times of need.

The motto 'Bear ye one another's burdens' epitomises this caring spirit that has continued down the generations. The Society's annual walk, eventually known as 'Ladies Club' or simply 'Ladies Day', demonstrates the caring principles upon which the society was founded. Over the years it has touched the lives of many, even beyond the membership of Neston Female Society.



The Society's original rules include.....

1. **This** Society does declare that the only interest and purpose for which it is established or intended be for raising fund by voluntary subscriptions towards the support of the old, sick, lame and infirm members thereof and for other purposes hereafter mentioned.
13. **That** on the first day of June every year the members do meet at the Clubroom at ten o'clock in the morning and walk in orderly procession to the Church, where an appropriate sermon shall be preached, and at four in the evening of the same day, the members shall meet again when they shall drink tea together, for which each person shall pay one shilling and every member who does not attend shall forfeit sixpence to the fund; and be no otherwise dressed on that day than in stuff, printed linen or cotton gowns, on forfeiture of one shilling to the box, on which day the accounts shall be examined and passed.

In return for their monthly subscriptions the Society provided its members with medical care in sickness and childbirth, an income if they were too ill to work and in old age when they would otherwise have to rely on family or parish relief. Membership comprised **Honorary Members**, who paid money into the Society but did not draw any benefit from it and **Benefitted Members** who paid in a regular amount, increasing with age, and could draw on society funds for certain purposes specified within the rules.

'if under twenty, sixpence: if above twenty and under twenty five, eight pence: if above twenty five and under thirty, nine pence: from thirty to thirty five, ten pence: if above thirty five and under forty, years, one shilling: if above forty and under forty six, one shilling and two pence: from forty six to fifty, one shilling and two pence, per month'

Members and others who might have taken part in the first walk...



The Ward Family

The **Reverend Thomas Ward** was the vicar at Neston Parish Church when the Neston Female Friendly Society was founded in 1814. It is likely that he was involved in establishing the society and he may well have delivered the first sermon. His two daughters, **Frances Mary** and **Anne Elizabeth** were members of the Society and **Frances** was **Honorary Stewardess**.

Lady Patroness..... Eliza Bayley. We do not for certain who this lady was. It is possible that she was a relative of the Reverend Thomas Ward as his wife was a Bayley, as was his mother. The Bayleys were a prosperous and reform minded family from Manchester.

Teachers... **Margaret Sophia Wilson, Maria Butler** and **Jane Downward** were amongst the first members.

Sisters ... **Sarah Pyke(Pinnington)** and **Ellen Pyke** were both daughters of Neston baker, John Pyke and his wife. Sarah was born in 1789 and in 1815 she married John Pinnington, a joiner. Sarah Pinnington was the Society's first **Benefit Stewardess**.

Mother and daughter.... Esther Monk was the wife of Parkgate customs officer, William Monk and Arabella Monk was their daughter. **Arabella Monk** was the other Honorary Stewardess, with Frances Ward, and was 26 years old when the Society started.

Doctor's wife... Phoebe Cliffe may have walked with her husband **John Cliffe** who was Surgeon to the Society.

Sisters-in-law... Ann Bond and **Mary Eliza Bond**. Mary may, at a later date, have been Lady Patroness in the years prior to her own death in 1844.



1814-1863: The early years



1835 Map of Neston

X marks the site of The Cross

The Parish Church can be seen as can Church Lane and Mill Street

Af marks the site of the parish school which was also founded in 1814, on the site that was later to house the Town Hall. The early walks may have started from here.

Excerpt from 1862 Liverpool Mercury – NESTON LADIES' CLUB...

'The anniversary of this most auspicious and excellent institution was held on Thursday last, and, although the weather was rather unpropitious, a large number of ladies, honorary and ordinary members of the society, together with the Rev. Mr. Coxon, rector of Heswall and other local clergy, assembled in the national school and proceeded to the parish church, headed by the local volunteer band. The procession formed one of the most pleasing and interesting sights imaginable, each member carrying a white wand surmounted by a large nosegay containing all the gay flowers nature produces, which in church presented a sight of fascinating richness and fragrance..... After service the procession was again formed and marched to the national schools where an excellent tea was served.

After tea Mr. James Woodward, the secretary of the society, presented a statement of its affairs, from which it appeared that it numbers 30 honorary and 91 benefitted members. Its funds invested amount to upwards of £650.

A large party afterwards assembled on the bowling green at the Lion Hotel, and a pleasant evening was spent on the "light fantastic toe"

- *Correspondent.*



The iconic Staff or Stave carried by all who walk.

Traditionally made from garden flowers such as red peonies attached to a broom handle painted white.



The Dispensation Staff

normally held aloft by a gentleman on behalf of the Lady Patroness

in 'dispensation' of carrying the rules of the society.



1864-1913: The Fiftieth Anniversary and the photographic age

Excerpt from Liverpool Mercury, 3rd June 1864

‘The anniversary of this society was celebrated yesterday with more than ordinary éclat. The Neston “Ladies Club”, as it is generally designated, has now been in existence 50 years, having been established on the 1st January, 1814, and consequently the jubilee of this very useful institution created considerable interest not only in that particular district but in throughout the hundred of Wirral generally. The present lady patroness is Mrs. Lyon.

The anniversary of the society is always celebrated by a procession but the display of yesterday....exceeded any further demonstration. The weather was beautifully fine, and hundreds of people were attracted to Neston.’



A very early photo c. 1890 of Ladies Club assembled at The Cross

The Bushell fountain can just be seen in the background



The procession coming down the High Street

early 1900s

Excerpt from Cheshire Observer, 9th June 1883

‘In few Cheshire towns can be seen a more delightful spectacle than the annual festival of Neston Female Friendly Society.....the name is ever after associated with flowers bringing to the mind’s eye a scene of floral grandeur not easily forgotten..... The Neston Ladies Club is growing ever more popular.....The day opened with the sights and sounds that invariably accompany a country festival. Never tiring hobby horses pursuing their giddy course to the strains of a barrel organ, the occasional sharp crack of the rifle at the shooting gallery.....and the other hundred amusements that delight the heart of the rustic holidaymaker’



1901- The Committee of Neston Female Friendly Society

Mr Edward Kerns, the Secretary between 1883 and 1908 is

seated on the left of the picture



Ladies walking to Church in 1901

1864-1913: The Fiftieth Anniversary and the photographic age

Excerpt from Cheshire Observer, 6th June 1885

‘Neston Ladies Club- The festival seems to grow more and more in favour with the public, numbers of whom travel long distances. In Neston and the surrounding districts the event is regarded as a general holiday. Bunting is displayed in all directions, and from an early hour the streets are thronged with visitors. At one p.m. the bells of the parish church rang out a merry peal, and soon afterwards the members of the society.... began to gather at the National Schools for the procession. It may be mentioned that three old ladies, Margaret Archer, Martha Williams, and Jane Jellicoe who have been members of the society nearly 60 years, walked, were present at the tea, and entered with zest into the enjoyments of the hour’.



1901 congregating at The Cross



Going to Church 1904



1905 sermon at The Cross



Church Lane 1907

1864-1913: The Fiftieth Anniversary and the photographic age

Lady Patroness Mrs Elizabeth Lyon

Mrs Elizabeth Lyon was the widow of Edmund Brock Lyon. She was born Elizabeth Porter, in Liverpool, around 1810 and married Edmund Brock Lyon, of the wealthy Neston brewing family in St Georges Church, Liverpool in 1832 on 6th March. In 1841 the couple were living in Bebington with their children, Sarah (7), Joseph (6), Edmund (2) and Elizabeth (1). Her husband, Edmund, died in 1844 and in 1851 Elizabeth had moved to Neston High Street where she lived with her daughters Sarah, Elizabeth, Maria and Mary. Her son Joseph was later one of the curates in Neston. Mrs Lyon was Lady Patroness of the society between 1861 and 1890.



Ladies Club in 1908 with The Dispensation being held high on behalf of the Lady Patroness



Young girls watching the parade from the Church Yard in 1908

Lady Patroness Mrs Hannah Russell.

She was born Hannah Pacey in Boston, Lincolnshire about 1836. Her father, Jephtha Pacey, was for a time an architect in Birkenhead. She married local doctor, David Russell, in Manchester in 1861. He was born in Scotland and came to Neston where he was one of the partners in Dr James Braid's practice. After their marriage they lived at Vine House, Parkgate Road with children Helen, Edith, Henry, John, Frank and Annie. Dr Russell was surgeon and trustee of the Society and Mrs Russell was a member of the Society and Honorary Stewardess before being elected Lady Patroness on the death of Mrs Elizabeth Lyon. Mrs Russell was Lady Patroness between 1890 and 1909.



Ladies in the Churchyard. 1908



1909 shot including the famous banner

1864-1913: The Fiftieth Anniversary and the photographic age



The band leading the way in 1910

1910. One of the ladies could possibly be the Lady Patroness at the time
Miss Mary Lyon



Mary Lyon was born in 1843, the daughter of an earlier Patroness, Mrs Elizabeth Lyon, and her husband Edmund Brock Lyon. She lived at Elmleigh, on Parkgate Road with her sister. She died in 1925.



1911. The Ladies leave the school on Liverpool Road in procession.

What a glorious sight!

Ladies Club in 1913 walking down the High Street decked in bunting.



1914-1963: The Centenary to the Swinging Sixties

In June 1914 Neston Female Friendly Society celebrated their 100 year Anniversary. Ladies Club that year was an extremely auspicious occasion. A special commemorative medal was produced and many iconic pictures were taken.



A real honour to carry the banner or the dispensation in 1914

The Centenary Medal for
Neston Female Friendly Society



The crowds line the streets at The Cross as the bunting adds to the celebratory atmosphere



The band lead on down the High Street

The procession leads up Parkgate Road back to The Cross



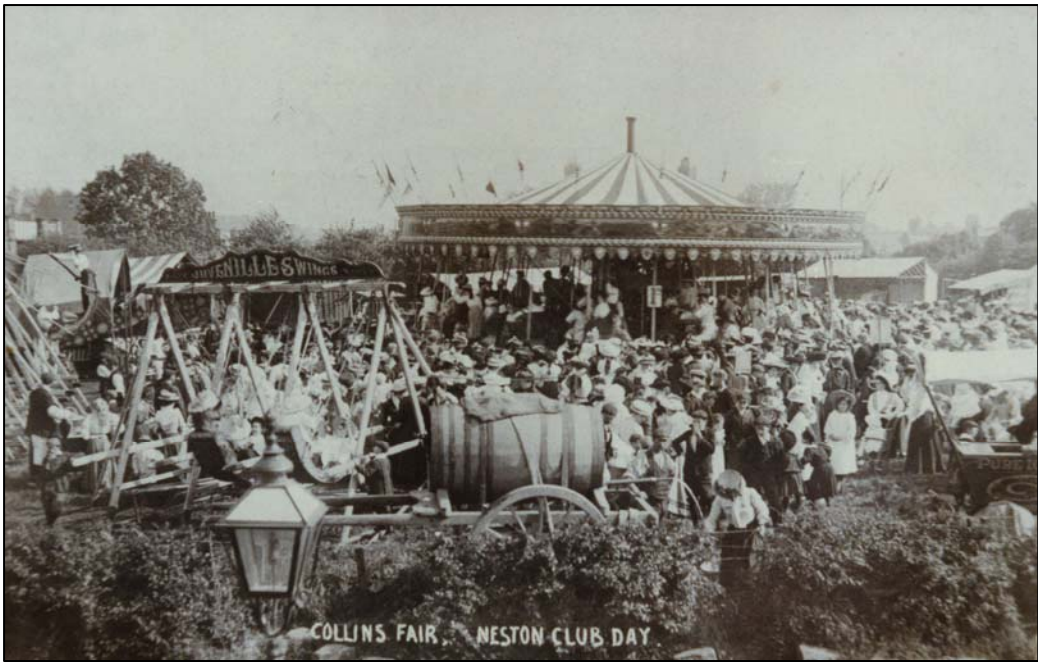
1914-1963: The Centenary to the Swinging Sixties

During the Great War Neston Female Society did not hold the annual walk in June. The first Ladies Club after 1914 was in 1919.



This photo was taken in 1919 as the crowds gathered at The Cross.

The old vicarage and the site of Tesco’s can be seen across the heads of the people watching the procession.



All the fun of the fair.

Collins’ fair was the highlight of the day for many Nestonians.

An excerpt from Roy Booth’s memoir ‘I was brung up in Neston’

We youngsters couldn't wait to see the walk over, so that we could run down Raby Road, just stopping to get an ice cream off Mrs Anyon with her push me ice cream cart, and looking at various stalls set up in Raby Road selling monkey on a stick, and bars of rock, then to the fairground field. In those days Maggie and John or Pat Collins used to bring their fair of Galloping horses, Noahs Ark and Dodgems, and many stalls including a Boxing Booth, and the men taking the money off you, which was usually two pence a ride, all had to wear white coats. This was a Collins Fair and it was very posh. In the Boxing Booth all the local men who thought they had a chance, used to go into the boxing ring with the fairgrounds champion, and if they could last three rounds without being knocked out, they got a pound note, a lot of money in those days. If the weather was bad and rainy you would get up to your neck in mud in the fair ground field as there was no Tarmac in those days.

Notice informing Society members of the 1926 Walk.

Neston Female Friendly Society.

(Registered under Friendly Societies' Act.)

ESTABLISHED JANUARY 1ST, 1814.

BENEFITS:

Medical Attendance.
Relief in Sickness, &c.
Old Age Pensions.
Funeral Allowance.

Several Thousand Pounds
have been paid for
these objects.

Honorary Subscriptions.
Half-a-Guinea

Capital Invested and in hand over £2,000.

Lady Patroness—MRS. TROUGHTON.

Treasurer—MISS ROBERTS.

Assist. Treasurer—MRS. LIVERMORE.

Trustees:
J. PEMBERTON, ESQ. R. L. PRICE, ESQ.
REV. WALTER BIDLAKE.

Medical Officers:
LEWIS GRANT, M.A., M.D. H. G. CARLISLE, M.D.
G. GUNN, M.D., F.R.C.S. (Edin).

Honorary Stewardesses
MISS ROBERTS AND MRS L. GRANT.

Benefit Stewardesses:
MRS. BUSHELL AND MISS HENDERSON.

Committee Room, Neston,
26th May, 1926.

Dear Madam.

The Annual Gathering will be held on Thursday, the 3rd June, 1926. The procession will start from the National Schools at 2 p.m. Members will attend Divine Service at the Parish Church, when the Vicar of Neston (Rev. Walter Bidlake) will preach. Afterwards the Annual Meeting will be held in the Town Hall. Tea will be provided.

Yours faithfully,
DICK WHARAM, Secretary.

To.....



1914-1963: The Centenary to the Swinging Sixties

During the years of the Second World War the society did not hold the annual walk. The first post war walk could have been 1946 or 1947.



This first photo is likely to be post war and shows the ladies and girls processing past The Brown Horse.

This second photo is likely to be a year or so later, possibly 1947, but taken in the same place.



This is a popular spot for keen photographers on the day. This shows Ladies Club during the 1950s.



Ladies Club in Coronation Year- the walk was actually 2 days after the coronation.

The girls walk through the Church Yard with **Mr Tilley** in 1956.

1914-1963: The Centenary to the Swinging Sixties

1960: the Ladies' Club give birth to the Beatles!

"On the first Thursday in June... they shall be provided with a convenient place where they shall be allowed to dance till nine o'clock, at which hour they must break up. Any *respectable person* (not being a member of the society) may be admitted to the dance on their paying the sum of 1s at the door."

On **Thursday June 2nd 1960** the crowds came out as usual to see the ladies walk to Church followed by tea as they had since 1814. The tea was at Neston Institute and, after the speeches, the flowers and staffs were cleared and the youth of Neston gathered for the evening's entertainment.



"A Wirral newspaper reporter spoke to them on their opening night at Neston Institute on Thursday 2 June – THE BEATLES FIRST HEADLINING ADVERTISED PERFORMANCE ANYWHERE – and the resulting article had it right: they were Beatles with an A".

(Mark Lewisohn in Beatles Tune In, 2014)

From The Birkenhead News and Advertiser (Heswall & Neston edition)

'ROCK' NIGHT IS THURSDAY

Cass and his Cassanovas, a rhythm group making a name for themselves in Neston, will be missing from the Thursday "rock" nights in the Institute for the next few weeks. They are going on tour with Billy Fury, one of the top teenage idols of the day.

In their place the teenagers—and older—of Neston and district will be able to dance to the music of the Silver Beetles. This new five-piece group has made a terrific impact on Merseyside, pulling in capacity houses wherever they appear.

North western promoter Mr. Les Dodd, of Paramount Enterprises, has satisfied a long felt need of the district by providing an evening of "rock and jazz" for the teenagers' enjoyment.

'Rock' group at Neston Institute

A LIVERPOOL rhythm group "The Beatles," made their debut at Neston Institute on Thursday night when north-west promoter, Mr. Les Dodd, presented three and a half hours of rock 'n' roll.

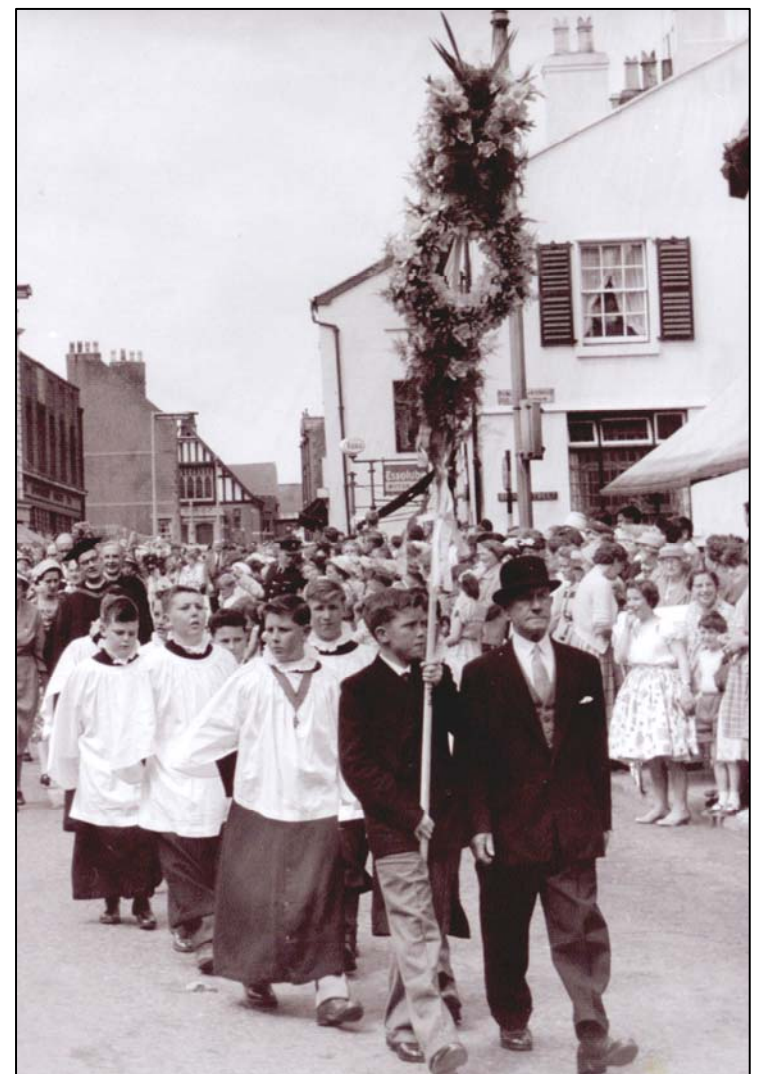
The five strong group, which has been pulling in capacity houses on Merseyside, comprises three guitars, bass and drums. John Lennon, the leader, plays one of the three rhythm guitars, the other guitarists being Paul Ramon and Carl Harrison. Stuart Da Stael plays the bass, and the drummer is Thomas Moore. They all sing, either together, or as soloists.

Recently they returned from a Scottish tour, starring Johnny Gentle, and are looking forward to a return visit in a months time.

Among the theatres they have played at are the Hippodrome, Manchester; the Empire, Liverpool and the Pavilion, Aintree.

"Fifteen years later, John Lennon – given a copy of the cutting in 1964 and keen ever after to show it around – called it 'possibly THE FIRST REVIEW OF BEATLES EVER'. It was definitely so."

(Mark Lewisohn in Beatles Tune In, 2014)



A young **Robert Halsall** walks in his first Ladies Club Day (3rd Choirboy from right) with the then Secretary **Mr Albert Tilley**.
I wonder if the choirboys got to see the Beatles?

Albert Tilley was one of the longest serving secretaries for Neston Female Friendly Society, holding the post between 1937 and 1968. He was born in Neston in 1898 the son of coalminer John Tilley and his wife, Mary. When he was a child he lived in Eldon Terrace in Neston. He married Mary Ann Lloyd of St Julian, Shropshire in 1922. After his marriage he lived in Olive Drive. He died in 1968.



1964-2013: The Ladies will never walk alone

Carnival Spirit For Neston Ladies' Day

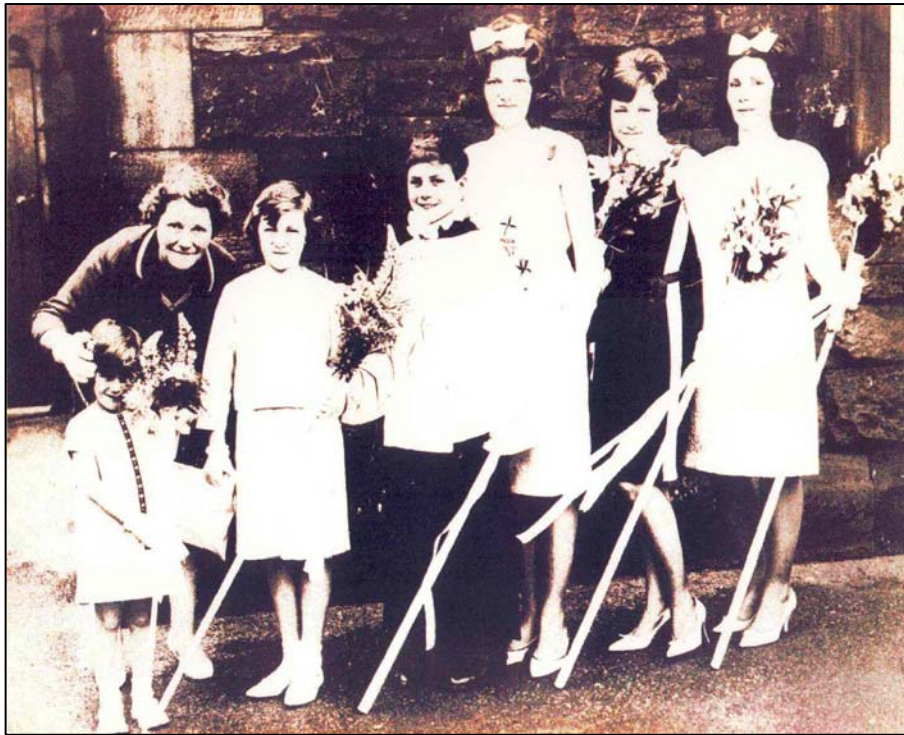
There was a carnival air about Neston yesterday afternoon, as the town's Female Friendly Society – Britain's only one – celebrated its 150th anniversary.

Society members walked through the town's crowded narrow streets, watched by several thousand onlookers, in the traditional Ladies Day procession, always held on the first Thursday in June.

For the first time ever there was a service at the Neston Roman Catholic Church as well as in the Anglican Parish Church. Afterwards both Anglicans and Roman Catholics joined in a second procession around the town, stopping at The Cross for a short service before going on to the tea party.

About 350 people walked in the procession. At the head of the Friendly Society members walked Mr Tilley in a black suit, black bowler and carrying a furred umbrella in contrast to the flower tipped staffs of the women. – *Liverpool Echo*, June 1964

Five generations of the Hully family walked in the 150th year of Ladies Club



The 1964 walk



It's a tough job holding onto the banner in the wind



1964 dignitaries



Two very stylish young ladies
In 1968

The girls walking to the Neston Institute for the tea



1964-2013: The Ladies will never walk alone



Kenny Millington carries the Dispensation in 1968
with the new Secretary **Mr Ewart Warburton**



Girls dressed in their best in the early
1970s



Watching Ladies Club c.1974



The girls step out in
1975

The fortunes of Neston Female Friendly Society were at a low ebb during this period. One of the ways in which this was offset was through fundraising. In the 1970s the Neston Ladies Day Darts Competition ran over several months each year, culminating in Trophy Night at the British Legion on the eve of Ladies Club, where a cheque would be presented to the then Secretary, Mr Norman Angel to help with the expenses of the day. The founders and organisers of the Darts Competition were Robert Halsall, Dennis Murray, Rose Claire, Charlie Christian, Billy Williams, Ev Christian, Tommy Munnerly, Alan Clapperton, Larry Daintree and Ray Oldfield.

There was also a decline in the membership of the society due perhaps to the existence and support provided by the welfare state. The existing members worked hard to persuade younger generations of local women to join Neston Female Society, to keep the traditions and ethos of mutual support alive and responding to the demands of the modern world. Unity is strength.



1964-2013: The Ladies will never walk alone



The walkers head out of Church Lane in the 1980s



A sprightly Mrs Hough in the 1980s

-and on the right as Lady Patroness (centre) with Mrs Mary Tilley



Walking down the High Street in 1983



Carrying the banner is a job the men of Neston undertake with pride. For many years the banner was carried by the McCumskey family. William (Bill) McCumskey carried the banner between 1966 and 1984 when he passed the responsibility onto his son-in-law Peter Halsall. This picture shows Secretary **Mr Norman Angel** checking the banner prior to the day.



1964-2013: The Ladies will never walk alone

Becoming Neston Female Society.....

When the Financial Services Authority came into being during the 1990s, the Neston Female Friendly Society faced its biggest challenge yet. As a Friendly society it had previously been paying an annual subscription of £800 to the 'Life Assurance & Unit Regulatory Organisation' but under the FSA, this fee would rise to almost £2000. At the time the Society's annual income was only in the region of £300. Advice was taken and the Society applied to be deregistered from the FSA, losing the 'Friendly' part of the name in the process. The negotiations which would ensure the survival of the Society took almost 5 years.



Membership of Neston Female Society has gone from strength to strength and the number of ladies and girls walking has increased, with record numbers in recent years. The girls have an added incentive these days - not only do they get new outfits, they also get free tickets to the fair.

Neston Ladies Day Fundraising Committee works hard along with the membership throughout the year to raise enough money to pay for the band to lead the procession, extra staff for stewarding and helping at the AGM, as well as towards the cost of extra policing on the day. Neston Town Council also supports the Society with an annual grant to cover the cost of the road closures on the day.

Come rain or shine the women of Neston will walk together on Ladies Club Day as they have since 1814.

