

## Arrowe Hall and Park

The early history of Arrowe Park is entwined with the Shaw family. Arrowe Hall was built in 1835 by John Ralph Shaw on the site of a smaller building, Arrowe House. It was enlarged over the next fifty years, the imposing entrance hall being added in 1880. He furnished it with 'mock-Elizabethan' furniture, some of which can be seen on display at the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum in Birkenhead.

John Shaw had purchased the first piece of land which lies within the present park boundaries. The 'Mayor of Liverpool' twice (in 1794 and 1800), he was not well liked by his peers, who thought him foolish for caring for the poor and needy during his term of office. He held very few receptions and gave what monies would have been spent to charity. A wealthy ship-owner, John Shaw allowed his ships to transport 'slaves' from Africa to America. At the time though, this was seen by many people as being a decent profession.



**A Portrait of John Ralph Shaw**



**Arrowe Park Lake**

John Ralph (Nicholson) Shaw was a great-nephew of John Shaw. To inherit the Estate of his great-uncle, he had to change his name from Nicholson to Shaw. John Ralph Shaw was responsible for most of the landscaping of the park, much of which remains unchanged today. He constructed the lake and waterfall on the estate by damming and changing the direction of the Arrowebrook. In 1837, he married Fanny Cruttenden, a vicar's daughter from Alderley and they had 12 children.

John Ralph Shaw was a magistrate and was very hard on any trespassers or poachers who were brought before him. On the Estate at Arrowe, to ensure people did not stray from the public footpath that crossed his lands, he installed 'mantraps' and 'spring-loaded shotguns'. His daughters played a strong role in Woodchurch CE School, helping teach singing and needlework. John Ralph Shaw would also open the estate for the school to hold picnics for the children.

William Otto Nicholson Shaw succeeded his father in 1884. He was an Oxford student, where he gained a BA, and went on to become a Major in the Cheshire Yeoman Cavalry.

The family graves of the Shaw family can be found in the churchyard at Holy Cross, Woodchurch.

At the turn of the century, Arrowe Estate became the property of a Major McCalmont, but as he was serving with the army he leased it to Mr. Williamson ('Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead'), a Liverpool Shipping magnate. The Williamsons left for Allerton Towers (in Liverpool) and in 1917 the estate passed to Lord Leverhulme, who let it to the Johnson family.

In 1926 the estate was purchased by Birkenhead Corporation on the understanding that it was to be used for the people of the borough.

In 1929 the World Scout Jamboree was held in the park, which was a great success despite the rain! Following the Jamboree the first playground was built, including swings, seesaws and maypoles.

During the 1930's the golf course was laid out, along with bowling greens and tennis courts. The public used to flock to the hall on summer weekends to listen to brass bands playing on the lawn, while part of the hall was used as a café.

At the start of the Second World War the Hall became a headquarters for the army. After being rescued from Dunkirk many French soldiers were billeted in huts on the estate. Senegalese soldiers who were part of the Free French Army were accommodated on the estate, while their officers lived at the Hall.

The park was also used as a tank training area, it is not true that the strange 'corrugations' on parts of the golf course and woodland (for example 16<sup>th</sup>. and 17<sup>th</sup>. fairways) were caused by the tanks (nor are they remnants of a medieval field system). They emanate from Ralph Shaw's tree planting, allowing thousands of seedlings to be 'grown on' while the shallow trenches acted as drainage channels to save the roots rotting from excess water.

As can be seen on other website photographs, golf continued throughout the war despite the tanks and the course returned to full use after the war and is considered a good challenge, being used as a qualifying course for the Open. The Hall has been used as a convalescent home for the Birkenhead hospitals and later became a respite weekend home for disabled children.

The recent history of the hall has been riddled with uncertainty. While it had been left to decline, the hall has been cleaned and is now looking beautiful again. An American bid was put in for the Hall to become a 'Teddy Bear Factory', but it was rumoured that this was a cover to take over the golf course and privatise it, the hall to become a hotel.

This faded when it was apparent that the golf course could not be sold. Wirral Ranger Service have shown little interest in taking charge of the Hall as its offices and a viability study by the Golf Club showed that it would be uneconomic to adopt the Hall as a clubhouse. The hall is currently being utilised as a private respite and care home



**Arrowe Hall 1900**

Following are a few of the many fascinating historical photographs of the Hall, Park and environs available:



Gates to Arrow Park showing The Lodge, around 1900

Arrowe Hall



Arrowe Hall

Arrowe Hall



Entrance gates  
around 1930

Thought to be  
path by side of  
Pitch and Putt  
about 1920





Waterfalls on Arrowebrook – the whole of the stream and lake in Arrowe Park are artificial, the stream having been diverted from its natural route in 1830's



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