

of Oldham. The great Victorian mansions built in the middle years of the last century in Werneth Park are still to be seen in Oldham. Most of them have now fallen on evil days and many of them have been converted into flats. But a hundred years ago it was the highest social ambition of a rising Oldham family to have a house in Werneth Park. It was there that all the great folk of the town lived. And one of the grandest mansions in Werneth Park was the home of John Platt.

As in the sixteenth century and later, London merchants who had amassed a fortune in the city usually acquired a pleasant country estate in Surrey or Essex and set themselves up as country gentlemen, so the really rich manufacturers of the cotton towns of nineteenth century Lancashire sought to go out of the sight of mills and factory chimneys and settle down on country estates. John and James Platt, as we have seen, had a country house and estate in Yorkshire. But in August, 1857, James Platt was killed in a shooting accident on the moors near this house and it was probably for this reason that John Platt decided to seek a country seat elsewhere, exchanging his share in Ashway Gap and certain other property with his brother's widow in part payment for James's share in the firm. It was, at all events, in 1857 that John Platt turned his attention to North Wales and decided upon making Llanfairfechan his country seat.

This was a turning point in the history of Llanfairfechan. As it happened John Platt just missed the Bulkeley sale of 1856. If he had been able to purchase the Bulkeley lands sold that year, there is no saying what Llanfairfechan would be like today. Certainly very different from what it is. As it was, John Platt purchased the partially built and derelict mansion of Bryn-y-Neuadd and the 150 acres of land belonging to it. Soon things began to hum. The inhabitants of Llanfairfechan were astounded at the building activities and developments that began to take place with a rapidity and on a scale of such magnitude as had never been known before or even dreamt of in the parish. A greater impression, indeed, could scarcely have been made on the inhabitants if the Sultan of Turkey had suddenly decided to descend on Llanfairfechan. What impressed the poor people most of all, of course, was what they regarded as the unbounded wealth and riches which this great Mr. John Platt from Manchester must have possessed. Until quite recently some old people in Llanfairfechan would tell you how trains arrived in Llanfairfechan in those days loaded with gold belonging to Mr. John Platt.

It is certainly not at all surprising that they should have been astounded. We cannot help being impressed ourselves by the tremendous drive and energy and the attention to detail in the work, carried out within three years, of transforming Bryn-y-Neuadd into the house and well planned estate which we know today. Work

began on the partially built and derelict mansion. It was enlarged to four times its original size. A home farm was built as early as 1858. An extensive kitchen garden was laid out, surrounded by high stone walls. Small farms and cottages were bought up and pulled down in order to make way for a great extension of the Bryn-y-Neuadd demesne which was enlarged to 330 acres. The old turnpike road from Bangor to Conway passed uncomfortably close to the mansion—it used to be a straight road all the way from the bridge at Llanfairfechan to the ridge just above Aber. John Platt obtained permission from the Turnpike Trust to move the road back from his house and those who pass along the main road through Llanfairfechan will be sufficiently familiar with the long, sweeping bend which makes such a lovely approach to the village from the Aber direction. Trees and coverts were planted to hide the mansion and the park from both the road and the railway and to beautify the estate. Drives and walks were laid out and lodges built: the Farm Lodge, the Front Lodge and the Grand Lodge, the latter facing towards Aber. Obviously John Platt had to have a railway station at Llanfairfechan and so by 1860, through his influence, a station had been built in a situation which, though most convenient to Mr. John Platt and the residents at Bryn-y-Neuadd, remains to this day most inconvenient to the inhabitants of the village. By 1860 the mansion was completed. The date 1861 is on the Front Lodge, adorned with the Platt coat of arms and the family motto, "Virtute et Labore". The "Annals of the County Families of Wales", published in 1872, described Bryn-y-Neuadd, the seat of John Platt, Esquire, as a "structure which with its appurtenances, tastefully planted grounds and magnificent surrounding scenery, is one of the most pleasing residences in the Principality". Finally, although John Platt was an advanced Liberal in politics, in religion he was a churchman. The parish church of Llanfairfechan was, from John Platt's point of view, inconveniently situated and, although rebuilt in 1848, altogether too small and plain. Besides, it was used by the mass of the parishioners, who were Welsh-speaking. So he had a new church built in 1863-4, entirely at his own expense; Christ Church, a church which, with its lovely spire, is surprisingly beautiful considering that it was built in the mid-Victorian period. Here the services were to be entirely in English. The church was endowed by Mr. Richard Luck and others. Christ Church stood across a field from the Front Lodge of Bryn-y-Neuadd and through this field a private drive was made. And so, on a Sunday morning in the 1860s, the carriages would come to the grand entrance door of Bryn-y-Neuadd. John Platt and his family would come out and the carriages would roll up the drive right to the church door and the family would enter and take their seats in the Platt Family Pew, whilst the congregation, many of them employed on the Bryn-y-Neuadd estate, watched respectfully the arrival of the party from the Hall. Mr. Platt was soon made a Justice