



Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

Newsletter

Autumn 2014

Issue Number 87

Meetings 2014/15

We now meet at 8pm at **The Cranston Suite, Neston Cricket Club, Station Road**, normally on the third Monday of the month.

- 15 September** – ‘The Union Jack’
- Derek Arnold
- 20 October** – ‘History of the Victoria Cross’
- Alan Goulbourne
- 17 November** – ‘From Turnpikes to Motorways’
- Gavin Hunter
- 16 February** – ‘Manchester Airport Fire Service’
- Neil Gyllenship
- 16 March** – ‘Salt Making at Puddington’
- Anthony Annakin-Smith
- 20 April** – ‘Wirral Barn Owl Trust’
- Steve Harris
- 18 May** – AGM at 7.30 pm
followed by ‘Dee Wildfowling
and Wetland Management Club’
- Hwfa Jones

If you need help with transport, please ring Mrs Angela Clarke, our Secretary, giving 24 hours notice, on 0151-336-1069.

Visitors are welcome – first time free – after that we will invite them to join as members.

The Annual General Meeting was held at the Cranston Suite, Neston Cricket Club, on Monday, 19th May 2014.

Chairman Moira Andrews welcomed our President Stephen Gordon and about 45 members. Our vision for Parkgate was now being realized: work on the Donkey Stand was now largely complete, with new interpretation boards to be installed during the Summer. It was next intended to install a boat at the middle slip, to be planted up with flowers, as a reminder of the former fishing industry here; it was, however, proving difficult to identify a suitable old boat for use here. One of the outcomes of the Mostyn House site development was that the Society was now discussing with CWaC the promotion of a blue plaque scheme for Parkgate and a possible blue plaque trail.

Thanks were offered to members of the Committee for their support over the previous 12 months, and in particular to Jerry Harris, who was standing down after many years.

The following officers and committee members were elected to serve for 2014/15:

Chairman: Moira Andrews
Vice-Chairman: Greta Simpson
Joint Secretaries: Angela Clarke & Alan Passmore
Treasurer: Damian Loughe
Committee: Jill Brock, Dave Johnson, Jill Owen, & Rob Naybour

Auditor: Ailsa Cowdell

Articles or suggestions for future Newsletters are most welcome, please contact:
Alan Passmore, tel: 336 2917 or alan.passmore39@btinternet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS - £7.00 Single / £10 Household per year. Subscriptions are due on 1st April each year. Payment can be made at any of our meetings; however, we would prefer payment by Banker's Standing Order. Membership, Standing Order and Gift Aid forms are available from Rob Naybour, our Membership Secretary, tel: 336-3650. Please check that your Standing Order is for the correct amount.

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NEWS AND VIEWS

A particular issue during the Summer has been the closure of Boathouse Lane in connection with the scheme to renew gas mains in the area. Surely it is possible to keep traffic running while essential works of this nature are carried out? In the past it generally used to be so. The consequent diversion of the through bus services away from Parkgate had a serious effect on those reliant on these services for their shopping or journeys to work. The road layout in Parkgate has been a problem for local people for generations, because of the lack of any diversionary route. We call on our representatives to try to ensure that road closures resulting in the curtailment of bus services are not resorted to in Parkgate in future.

Some good news on this front was that the scaffolding on The Parade at Mostyn House was at last taken down in early July and the traffic lights removed. After all these months it is now possible to get unrestricted access to and from Parkgate from the Neston direction once more. What a relief!

Another traffic issue that concerns us is the parking in Station Road, close to the entrance to Grenfell Park. There are currently no restrictions here, but we feel that the practice of parking here creates a dangerous situation because of the narrowing of the road at this location and the obstructed sight lines on this slight bend. It is not clear whether this is a temporary situation involving workmen at the Mostyn House site, or general parking, but a serious hazard currently exists, about which the authorities have been notified. Despite the new signage for the free car parks, unauthorised parking on The Parade also continues to be a problem; it will continue to be so without adequate enforcement of the existing regulations. Perhaps there is a case for surveillance cameras to be installed at the critical points, if it is not possible to have traffic wardens patrolling at times when the congestion is likely to be most severe.

In early April we supported a very successful litter pick on the marsh covering the area from beyond the South Parade to The Boathouse. The winter storms had left a mass of unsightly debris on the strip between the sea wall and the channel, mostly plastic and polystyrene. With the organization of Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC), who provided bags and gloves, and led by RSPB, we collected a huge amount of rubbish. A welcome cup of soup was provided for the volunteers by Mozkitos on completion of the work. It is hoped that similar working party can be arranged at the end of September to deal with the vegetative growth on the sea wall and other areas in need of attention. We will notify members by e-mail of the details, requesting volunteers, if this can be fixed.

The area of the marsh affected by fire in April last year appears to have completely regenerated; hopefully the long-term effect on the wildlife in this area will be found to be minimal, as the re-colonisation of this area begins to take effect. During August the drainage channel parallel to The Parade has been dredged, in order to ensure an unobstructed flow of water; this should help reduce the habitats for mosquitos to breed.

As we learned from Colin Wells, the RSPB warden, at our meeting in February, another effect of the winter gales was the presence on the marshes of a number of birds blown off-course that we would not normally expect to see this side of the Atlantic, let alone in Parkgate. It has been a good time for bird-watchers. At the time of writing I am conscious of the huge numbers of geese passing over on their daily journey between their roosting and feeding grounds.

The closure of Parkgate Stores last year is still keenly felt. It had been thought that a purchaser had been found for the premises, but at the time of writing there is believed to be no offer under consideration. Of course, everyone is hoping that a buyer will be found who will open a similar type of business, as there is now no general provision store nearer than Neston town centre. The likelihood of such an outcome must be fairly remote, however, in view of the general downward trend in the provision trade.

At the end of July Elephant Coffee opened their new business at Hamilton House on The Parade, providing yet another venue for serious coffee drinkers; the premises also has a licence to sell alcoholic drinks. The building has undergone a complete renovation over the past year, ensuring very little of the original structure remaining; its new appearance, however, is more in keeping with the Georgian aspect of The Parade. Other new building developments currently taking place in this area of Parkgate include two new cottage-style houses on the site of the former slaughterhouse in Swifts Weint and a new dwelling to be constructed in the garage area at the end of Holywell Close.

The re-development of the former Mostyn House School site has been proceeding at quite a pace since planning permission was finally granted last year. The developers have sought to minimize the effects on local residents during the construction period, but inevitably there have been some causes of friction, particularly around the scaffolding on The Parade and parking in Station Road. Following further consultation with the Council's planning and conservation officers in the light of more detailed appraisal of the structure of the former school buildings, the developers have recently submitted revised detailed plans for approval; these are concerned with the internal remodelling of the building and generally seek to make more effective use of the space than the original design; also, in the grounds, access is to be adjusted so as to permit larger vehicles (eg emergency services) to turn on site. We understand there has been considerable interest from prospective buyers for both the new properties and the apartments in the former school buildings, with most of the units now spoken for. The first new residents have already moved in to their new homes. The old milestones have now been planted in their new positions adjacent to the parking area, where they can be seen by the public.

We have recently been informed that CWaC have agreed to support our plan to introduce a blue plaque scheme to Parkgate. There are a number of buildings in Parkgate which have associations with well-known people from the past, and we will shortly be seeking permission from the current owners for plaques to be installed in an appropriate location. We have a short list of such buildings. However, if you know of a building in Parkgate, which you feel merits a blue plaque because of its past association with someone famous or with some significant event, please get in touch. It is intended, eventually, to put together a blue plaque trail, which might become a self-guided walk of interest to both local residents and visitors.

There have been a number of enquiries about the whereabouts of the John Wesley plaque, which was removed from the wall at No 47 Parkgate Road before its demolition. We are given to understand that this plaque has been taken into safe keeping by the developer MacBride Homes and will be restored and re-sited in an appropriate position once the development is complete. We did express our concerns about this development of six new houses because of restricted vision at the access point to Parkgate Road.

A brief item on Parkgate and its history appeared in the August 2014 edition of 'Cheshire Life'.

PARKGATE DONKEYS

The Parkgate fisherpeople were particularly fond of their donkeys, and very rarely was an instance of cruelty reported against them. A donkey will do far better with kind usage than with the stick, and an anecdote wherein figures a prominent Cheshire personage will exemplify that it is better to lead than to drive with hurtful blows.

Some years ago (many years ago) Mr Churton, the coroner, wanted to run a donkey at Chester Races, and succeeded in getting the loan of one, which the owner told him would win in a canter, but he gave him a word of warning: "If you touch him with a stick he will stop still and nothing will induce him to move." On the race day the animal took the lead of all the competitors, and when not far from the winning post, Mr Churton, in his excitement, hit the donkey with his stick, it instantly stood still, while all the others galloped on, and Mr Churton rode in last.

'A VISION FOR PARKGATE' - UPDATE

In the Spring 2013 edition of the Newsletter we set out details of our vision for a comprehensive scheme of maintenance and improvements to The Parade, which were expected to get under way in the Autumn. We explained that the funding for this work was being provided from a number of different sources as match funding alongside Councillor Dowding's grant for projects in Parkgate ward and a significant donation from the Society.

Things have moved on quite smartly since then, thanks to the enthusiastic commitment of the team charged with developing the plans, working to a liaison group, the Parkgate Improvement Group, representing Chester West and Chester Council (CWaC), Neston Town Council and, of course, the Parkgate Society; the RSPB and Parkgate Traders are also members of this group.

Peripheral to this scheme is the thorny issue of car parking in Parkgate, and it is here that local residents first became aware that things were happening. Kerbside markings have been strengthened at the most congested part of The Parade, so that the regulations can be enforced more effectively, provided that staff are on hand in the area to deal with this issue – we are told that the shifts worked by the Council's limited number of enforcement staff are being adjusted as appropriate. New direction signs have been put up, encouraging visiting motorists to use the free car parks at either end of The Parade: greater use of the Old Baths and Wirral Way free car parks should alleviate the problems to an extent.

As previously reported, the main area of activity last Autumn was concentrated on the Donkey Stand. During the Spring and Summer it has been very gratifying to see how much this refurbished area has been appreciated by the crowds of visitors, particularly during the fine weather we had earlier – many of these visitors are cyclists using the new cycle route across the marshes from Shotton. We have now been informed by CWaC that the fitting of the new interpretation panels on the Donkey Stand is likely to take place next Wednesday, 3rd September: separate boards set out some of the details of Parkgate's interesting maritime history, the wildlife to be seen in the area, and the interesting features of the Welsh coast that can be viewed from this spot.

There are plans to site a disused sailing boat at the Middle Slip as a reminder of Parkgate's past as a small fishing community; locating a suitable boat, however, is proving difficult so, if you know of an open clinker-built boat (about 15 ft) that has come to the end of its working life, we would like to hear from you. Parkgate Nurseries have kindly offered to plant it up as seaside flower garden with plants which will hopefully flourish in the windy conditions of the foreshore. If someone could kindly donate some appropriate artefacts, such as old fishing nets, etc., we could consider incorporating these objects safely into the scheme. Work will also be carried out on the slip to remove the unsightly concrete and reveal the original stonework. There is scope for another interpretation board here, telling the history of Parkgate's former fishing industry.

It is a relief that, although the ownership of the sea wall is still a matter for conjecture, CWaC have agreed to take on responsibility for its maintenance. Over the last few years the undergrowth has grown considerably, and a number of small trees have established themselves in the stonework, thus threatening the viability of the structure. A survey and some emergency maintenance has already been carried out, and it is hoped that regular attention in future will ensure the survival of the wall in the long term. It is likely that volunteers will be sought to undertake some of this work under the supervision of the council. Further work is also planned to tidy up the slipways at South Parade and The Boathouse and in the area of the Old Baths.

We are confident that in realizing these plans we will help to make Parkgate a more attractive place for visitors and residents alike. There is a limit to what the Society can do on its own, but working together with other partners we are finding that we can achieve far more for our community than we ever expected when we first set out our 'Vision for Parkgate'.

A further public meeting is to be organised by CWaC, probably at the end of October, at Neston Cricket Club, to bring further plans to Parkgate residents and also provide an opportunity for related matters to be discussed – details to be announced in due course.

A FLYING VISIT TO PARKGATE IN 1914

During the period 1910-14 there were many visits to the area by pioneer aviators. We celebrated the anniversary of Robert King's visit to Parkgate in July 1912, in our Spring 2012 issue. Now we celebrate the centenary of Henri Salmét's visit in July 1914.

"8th July 1914 - Parkgate pleasure flights by Henri Salmét

July saw the Cheshire Automobile Club arrange for Frenchman Henri Salmét, who was on a publicity tour for the Daily Mail, to provide the residents of Parkgate with three days of aerial activity. Salmét was no stranger to this part of the country having landed at the Red Noses, New Brighton in August 1912, and Hooton Park in 1913.

His Gnome powered Bleriot monoplane arrived, by lorry, at Leighton Park, on the eighth. A canvas marquee had been specially erected to house the aircraft. On his first flight, Salmét took up his host, Mr A.G. Grenfell, the headmaster of Mostyn House School. Grenfell is reputed to have thrown a bottle of champagne out of the aircraft, giving the Territorial Army on summer camp in Parks Field, their first taste of "aerial bombardment". Salmét made two other flights that day. The following day, a large number of residents gathered on the promenade and adjoining fields to watch Salmét giving flights. He started flying at 11am and continued until 8.30pm in the evening.

Passengers were being taken up at two guineas (£2.10p) a time. There was also a free flight draw. The winner was a Mr Muir who had bought the ticket for his son Eric. This proved to be a problem in that Eric was 5 years old and it was obviously not possible for Eric to take his place in the passenger seat of the aircraft. Eric's father was offered £3 for the ticket, but refused to sell it. Henri Salmét was advised of this and agreed to take both Eric and his father up. They had a long flight over The Wirral and when they landed, Eric who must have been the youngest person to fly on The Wirral, said, "It was Champion". He received a certificate and said that he wanted to be a "Flying man" when he grew up.

Conditions had been windy and Salmét indicated that things were "A little tricky" in the afternoon. In order to bring a little excitement to the crowd, Salmét dived in the direction of the assembled crowd, which caused some of them to scatter with much laughter as he flew over them. By the end of the day, he had made nineteen flights. On the last day, trouble with his engine, an 80hp seven-cylinder Gnome limited his activity. He had to seek help from Mr Ellis the mechanic at Mostyn House who normally ran the school's electric light plant."

Our thanks to Colin Schroeder and the Wirral Champion Journal for permission to reproduce this article.



A series of photographs records this memorable occasion, including the plane in flight and the repair being carried out on the third day. The two selected above show (left) Henri Salmét with Mr Scott of the Daily Mail, sponsors of the event, and his mechanic – see story above; and (right) the pilot with 'the youngest passenger' – clearly not Eric Muir, as mentioned in the description above, but maybe the youngest unaccompanied passenger. Who was she? Do you recognise any of the bystanders?

THE PARKGATE REGATTAS

History has a habit of repeating itself. Almost two hundred years ago consideration was being given to ideas for improving 'the Parkgate experience'.

In 1824 the editor of the *Chester Chronicle* listed a number of ideas which might improve Parkgate in the eyes of its seabathing visitors, such as a library, music and a regatta. It was possibly in answer to this appeal that a regatta was organised in 1827. Whether they were an annual event from then on is uncertain.

They were regularly mentioned in the 1830s and were well established in 1842, when the Parkgate Regatta was organised for the benefit of the village's boatmen. A band (Stubbs' Royal Harmonic Band) played during the afternoon of 22 September, and there were six races: for schooner-rigged boats, two for jigger-rigged boats, for small boats, and two for four-oared boats, one of them open only to women rowers. There was dinner afterwards at Mr Williams' of the Ship Inn, and at Mrs Briscoe's of the Mostyn Arms Hotel. A straw in the wind, though, on this occasion may have been the presence of Mr John Rigby, who brought '*his beautiful new steamer the Lapwing to anchor opposite the hotel*', and invited the regatta committee on board for wine.

The following year, 1843, the Dee Yacht Club was formed at Parkgate. However, the yacht club sank into inactivity, and so may have the regattas, in that records of them in the newspapers faded away for twenty years. In 1863 the yacht club was refounded, and the following year the Parkgate regatta was revived, by the yacht club, as a mixed social occasion. There were races for yachts and for boats rowed by gentlemen, several sailing races for fishermen, and a race for boats rowed by '*mechanics*'. There was a trophy for the yacht race and cash prizes for the rest.

In the late 1860s, however, the conditions at Parkgate were ceasing to be favourable to yachts, and the yacht races began taking place off Heswall, while in 1872 the club left Parkgate for Hilbre.

The regattas continued, though how regularly is uncertain. The races in 1903 were described as the Heswall and Parkgate regatta. The programme for the last of the traditional regattas, held on 11 July 1914, describes the afternoon firmly as Parkgate Fisherman's Regatta. There were races for both sails and oars; for nobbies, yawls and punts; rowing and sculling races for fishermen and for all others; and a tug of war between rowing boats. To finish the afternoon there were races, for old men, and for young girls whose winner was given a child's tea set. The final event was a tug of war. In earlier days this had been between Neston fishermen and Parkgate fishermen, but in 1914 the team of eight Parkgate fishermen was challenged by a team of seven ironworkers from Ellesmere Port. Just as Parkgate seemed to be losing, a score of wives and girl friends seized the end of the rope and pulled the Port men to defeat. The umpire started to protest, but was told that the Port men should have brought their own women! Afterwards there was dancing on the Green, a piece of ground behind the houses, on which Holywell Close has since been built.

The war prevented any more regattas until 1920, but when the day came, there was no wind and therefore no sailing. The prize money was divided equally between all the entrants. The crowds adjourned to the Green to dance to a band from Heswall, but after a very short time a downpour of rain sent the band fleeing for shelter. That inauspicious day was 2 October, so in 1921 a more usual date was fixed, at the end of July. The rain poured down, and a lack of wind was followed by half a gale. But the races did take place (although in the race for nobbies, only one boat finished), the band of the Liverpool Orphanage somehow managed to play on the Donkey Stand, and there were races afterwards. But the old spirit, not to mention the old weather, was judged to have gone, and the regatta was never revived.

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TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO Parkgate in 1989

Membership Snippets

The Society had been holding their public meetings in the Trafalgar Room of the Parkgate Hotel (currently Parkgate House, Greenway). They had use of the room free of charge, but on the basis that, if the hotel received a paid booking for the same night, the Society would have to meet in the bar. Unfortunately, this situation arose on the occasion of the AGM. This dilemma resulted in a major decision that henceforth they would have to pay for their use of the room on a proper basis to ensure their booking, which inevitably resulted in having to raise the subscriptions. So, in 1989 the subscription became £3 single or family, or £1.50 for a senior citizen.

For those of you exclaiming and reminiscing about the Parkgate Hotel, it actually closed down and transformed into a building site that was to become Greenway, in the year 2000.

Photography

Committee member and keen photographer, Leonard Walker, completed his two-years of endeavour of photographing every aspect of Parkgate, resulting in a complete photographic record as a historical statement for the future. Photos from this collection have since been exhibited in Neston Library and on notable occasions for the Society. The collection has been now been placed with the Cheshire Records Office for safe keeping. Hopefully, one day they could be made available to purchase on a CD or other modern equivalent.

Mostyn Square

The old bus shelter in the square (since demolished to enhance the view of our beautifully renovated church) was "improved" slightly by repairs and a coat of new paint inside and out. The old obscured glass was replaced with see through glass. The bus shelter had always caused a huge amount of discussion because of its poor state. A new litter bin and a flower tub were placed in the square and thanks to further pressure from the Society the road sign "The Square" was replaced with "Mostyn Square", its correct title.

TV Fame

Parkgate featured on a Granada TV programme called Sanctuary by the Sea, part of the "Down to Earth" series. It involved a walk by the presenter, Bob Smithies, along the shore from Hilbre to Shotwick. Geoffrey Place, Chairman of the Society, accompanied him along the Parkgate Parade section.

Cheshire Railings

An attractive feature of Cheshire crossroads used to be the white-painted railings which allowed drivers clear visibility at junctions. Most of these have fallen into disrepair. The Society suggested that those situated half way up Boathouse Lane should be repaired. They were heard with sympathy, but unfortunately ownership of the railings is not always clear. So can you see any remnants today?

Ropewalk Play Area

The Council agreed to spend over £14,000 to make the children's play area a safe and attractive place to play.

The Draft Local Plan

Council representatives held discussions with members of the committee explaining the Draft Local Plan as it applies to Parkgate for the next 10 years. This article in the Autumn 1989 newsletter is worthy of interest so is reproduced here –

Parkgate is preserved as a distinct place by the Green Belt, which prevents building on the north side of Boathouse Lane. There is also a finger of Green Belt on either side of Wood Lane, and an island of Green Belt beyond Moorside Lane which halts the spread of Little Neston. It is intended to confirm these boundaries, and indeed to tighten them by declaring the coastal strip to be an Area of Special County Value. This Society has informed the Council that it welcomes these policies.

There are two specific proposals which affect our village directly. The first is the formation of a Dee Coastal Walk. This will link with Wirral Council's coastal walk and continue it to Denhall. This will mean the existing walkers' route will be improved and signposted. The second proposes a Heritage Centre for Parkgate, suggested as "The provision of an interpretive display depicting the history of the town and surrounding area, the story of key local buildings and institutions and information on the wildlife of the Dee Estuary".

The Borough has pledged itself "to relieve the traffic and parking congestion at Parkgate". The article from 1989 comments "While we applaud the principle, how to achieve this aim is another

matter". The article continues and discusses the Neston Relief Road, another interesting idea of the time. The relief road would allow pedestrianisation of the High Street at the cost of losing car parking around the back of the shops. Ladies Walk was the first section of relief road that was intended to continue through where Sainsburys is now.

Anne Williamson, Parkgate

REFLECTIONS ON PARKGATE 11 YEARS ON

We've been in this area now for just over 11 years; boy, how time flies! And we are still loving it in spite of the mossies, gnats and other biting insects. We didn't have half as many in Yorkshire, but then we never had goldfinches or as many birds of prey as we now have – goldfinches in the garden and on occasions birds of prey as well.

In the floods during the winter we were trying to make our way along the front, the traffic was horrendous and the water was rising; all kinds of animals were trying to escape the water by running across the road, most getting run over as the cars were bumper to bumper. Two lads in working clothes were stuck in their van on the curb not able to pull out; they got out of their van and having work gloves began a mammoth task of picking up animals and moving them across the road, stopping cars in their way. It was lovely to see; if you remember from my previous article, I like rats. I'm not sure residents along the front were as pleased!

So now we have the scaffolding around Mostyn House School removed, I was trying to think how long it had been there - 2 years? Thank goodness it's down and the whole front now looks smart and well cared for.

In July we went on the coach trip to Clitheroe, a wet/hot day, but we still had a good time. What was amazing was the amount of people we knew from all kinds of different venues, The singing group from the U3A, the Art Appreciation also from the U3A, people from the Cricket Club, people from The Gatehouse Club, where we are very active members, the Civic Society and of course the Parkgate Society. Not to mention people one bumps into many times when out down Neston town or on the front in Parkgate. So we now feel like part of the furniture of Parkgate/Neston, not that it took us very long to feel that.

What we have noticed about the people around here is that they love their dogs, which I'm pleased to say are no bother now that owners pick up. So we also have doggy friends. We've adopted a pony from the pony sanctuary in Parkgate, so we have horsy friends too, and just about all the local cats visit us. Cats hold a very special place in our hearts.

Another thing which is very noticeable to us is the amount of people that go to church or chapel of all denominations and how well they seem to get along. It's also wonderful to hear the bells being rung on a Sunday morning.

We have lived in different parts of the country and the feeling of community here is stronger than anywhere we have known.

Freddie Race, Parkgate

CONTACTS

If you wish to raise issues of relevance to the Society, contact one of the joint secretaries:

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Published by The Parkgate Society August 2014.