

Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

Newsletter

Spring 2015

Issue Number 88

Meetings 2015/16

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

20 April – ‘Wirral Barn Owl Trust’
- Steve Harris

18 May – AGM at **7.30 pm**
followed by ‘Dee Wildfowlers
and Wetland Management Club’
- Hwfa Jones

21 September – ‘Badger Protection in Wirral’
- Lesley Brockbank

19 October – ‘Liverpool’s Williamson Tunnels’
- Claire Moorhead

16 November – ‘History of Thornton Hough
Village’
- Gavin Hunter

This follows the hot-pot supper at **6.30 pm**.

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

Visitors are welcome to our talks – first time free – after that we will invite them to join as members. We really would like to see more new members; so why not introduce a friend, who you think would like to support what we do?

The Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given of the Society’s AGM to be held at the Cranston Suite, Neston Cricket Club, on Monday, 18th May 2015, at 7.30 pm.

Election of Officers for 2015/16: to be proposed en bloc:

Chairman: Jill Brock
Deputy-Chairman: Moira Andrews
Joint Secretaries: Angela Clarke, Alan Passmore
Treasurer: Damian Loughe

Election of Committee for 2015/6: to be proposed en bloc:

David Johnson, Jill Owen

Co-opted members to be ratified en bloc:

Derek Haylock, Bryan Lecky

Appointment of Auditor:

Ailsa Cowdell

There are no proposals/resolutions from the Committee to be considered at the AGM.

Any proposals from members to be considered at the AGM and any further nominations for the Committee must be submitted to our Secretary Angela Clarke at least 14 days before the AGM.

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 6th April each year. Payment can be made at any of our meetings; but we would prefer payment by Banker’s Standing Order. Membership, Standing Order and Gift Aid forms are available from Derek Haylock, our Membership Secretary, tel: 336-4461. Please check that your Standing Order is for the correct amount.

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The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, No. 503718.

News and Views

Once more the high tides of the winter drew huge crowds of people looking to enjoy the unaccustomed experience of seeing water lapping against the sea wall. In particular, Saturday 21 February, when the highest tide for many years was forecast, turned out to be a beautifully sunny day, and the sea wall was crowded with folk training their lenses on the wildlife on the marshes, as the grass gradually disappeared under the rising water. The viewing was good; and the RSPB were kept very busy answering questions and marshalling the traffic. In contrast with the previous winter, the high tides this year were not accompanied by storms, so thankfully no damage was done to property, and the experience could be enjoyed by all.

Those of us who regularly stroll along by the sea wall on The Parade can't help noticing the state of the premises which enjoy the benefit of the famous Parkgate sea views. For a while some of these have looked rather down at heel, but it is noticeable that a number of improvements are currently taking place. In particular, the façade at Mostyn House is now looking quite smart following the restoration – the redevelopment of the former school site is now at last coming to an end – see separate article – and what a difference it has made to the appearance of the building. In the last edition I was lamenting the loss of Parkgate Stores: for those who may not know, these former shop premises have now been incorporated into Chows, to create a new reception area for their restaurant business, and the frontage has been tidied up. When the Parkgate Take-Away have completed their renovations at Black Oak, creating a new dining facility, this will just leave Broad Beams as the only property in obvious need of serious attention. Away from The Parade we are conscious of a number of properties which appear to be standing derelict or uncared for; there may be many reasons for this but, unfortunately, there is very little that we can do other than draw attention to the issue and hope that the owners will soon be able to come to grips with the situation.

During the past months we have all been made aware of the Neston Neighbourhood Plan. A working party convened by Neston Town Council has for two years been going through a mass of statistics and other information to draw up a draft plan to dovetail with CWaC's local plan as the basis for future development in the Neston Parish area (including Parkgate) over the period to 2030. We have all been invited to submit our views on the draft. As a conservation society we have supported the draft plan's proposals for the protection of the green belt against any further encroachment and for the conservation of listed buildings – and also for non-listed buildings of historic or heritage interest. We have also supported proposals designed to encourage the tourist economy in Parkgate through improved facilities to support walking and cycling in particular; the draft plan promotes connectivity, with improved routes, signage, information points and parking facilities – including proposals for bridging Station Road, connecting the two sections of the Wirral Way, and for an information centre at the car park. We also gave general support to the proposals relating to public transport, the upgrading of the Borderlands line and the creation of a transport hub in Ladies Walk, Neston; but, if people are to be induced to leave their cars at home, what is required is a better service.

Yet again Parkgate has been affected by traffic issues. In early February Parkgate Road was closed for a week for re-surfacing between Station Road and Neston Cross. Fortunately the work was carried out very efficiently and the disruption seems to have been kept to a minimum. The result is a great improvement. Now perhaps the Council will address the question of the pot holes in Leighton Road. We are not convinced that the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit will do anything to reduce collision rates on The Parade (insignificant currently), but we may find that this is the way forward in view of the outcome of the recent public consultation. Our view is that, because of the physical conditions of The Parade, drivers do exercise care, and traffic movement traffic is self-regulating; what is necessary is the active enforcement of the parking regulations, and we are pleased to note that traffic wardens are now beginning to appear at times when congestion is expected.

These are early days, but the re-development of the former Mostyn House School site by the specialist company PJ Livesey appears to have been a great success. During the construction period there have been some problems related to the construction traffic and the parking of workers' vehicles in the Station Road area, but hopefully these difficulties are matters of the past – we are told that the Council will be looking at the question of restriction of parking and other traffic measures at the junction with Grenfell Park, once the builders have left the site. The location has proved very attractive to prospective purchasers, and sales have proceeded rapidly. We extend a warm welcome to our new neighbours and naturally hope they will be encouraged to join our Society.

It has been good to see the re-vitalised Donkey Stand being enjoyed by residents and visitors alike following the work carried there out last year. The opening of the Burton Greenway across the marshes to Deeside, and connecting with Chester, appears to have increased substantially the numbers of cyclists and walkers visiting the area, particularly The Parade.

A small detail, but important for the benefit of gentlemen trying to find relief, we have placed a notice on the toilet block in Mostyn Square, directing them to the new unisex facilities around the other side of the building.

In a change to our annual programme of lectures we are proposing to alter the format of our November meeting and begin with a hot-pot supper. We will start at 6.30 pm, which may leave time for some socialising between the meal and the talk at the normal time of 8.00 pm. We hope that this event will be very popular with members. Tickets will be on sale in due course. The cost of the meal will probably be about £13.50 for two courses, with participants responsible for purchasing their own drinks at the bar.

Our Vision for Parkgate

Since the last edition we have been pressing on with the implementation of the 'Vision'. The Council (CWaC) have guaranteed the availability of funding previously set aside to complete those aspects of the scheme which have not yet materialised.

Information boards have now been mounted on the three plinths on the Donkey Stand; these briefly describe Parkgate's maritime heritage, the wildlife to be seen on the marsh and the features of the Welsh coast opposite. It is intended in due course to provide additional information boards at other appropriate places, for instance at the North Slip, from where ferries once departed (from a landing stage) for Bagillt and Flint, and where ships were once constructed on the beach, and at the Middle Slip, where the Parkgate fishermen used to land their catches.

Despite our best efforts we have yet to find a boat locally suitable for planting with flowers and placing on the Middle Slip; we are still looking for an old wooden clinker-built open boat, which would represent the type of boat ('nobby') once used by the Parkgate fishermen. Anyone knowing of such an old vessel, not likely to sail again, is asked to get in touch with the Society. Gateway signage is to be positioned on Boathouse Lane and Station Road roughly marking the boundary of the Parkgate conservation area. These signs are to be in the same style as those for Neston and elsewhere; they will acknowledge not only Parkgate's history but the special nature of the place. It is intended to plant up a small dinghy to make a floral decoration close to the proposed gateway sign in Boathouse Lane.

There have recently been problems with the street lighting on The Parade; the reason why a number of lights have been out of action is still not clear. Under our 'Vision' we envisage that the existing lights will be replaced, as they become due, by new heritage type lamps of the sort already installed at the Donkey Stand and in Neston. If the current faults prove to be terminal for these lamps, we will be making the case for their replacement by new heritage lights in accordance with the long-term plan.

The owners of eight properties in Parkgate have now agreed with us to join the blue plaque scheme. These are: Dover Cottage, Mostyn House, The Balcony House & Assembly Room, Seven Steps, St Thomas' Church, The Old Watch House, White Cottage and Sawyer's Cottage. It is intended to have bronze plaques cast in the style now adopted for the west Cheshire area, giving brief details of the history of these premises. The use of bronze instead of aluminium, as elsewhere in Cheshire, is on account of the corrosive nature of the salty atmosphere we enjoy here. It is hoped that, when everything is in place, we will be able to hold an official opening ceremony to mark the occasion.

Alongside the blue plaques we have been working on a Parkgate Heritage Trail. This will be in the form of a new booklet, with illustrations in colour, describing the walk along The Parade; it is based on a leaflet previously prepared by the Society for heritage open days, and owes much to the vast amount of research given to the subject of Parkgate properties by our late chairman Geoffrey Place. This little publication should be available in time for the inauguration of the blue plaques: it will be on sale in local outlets.

English Heritage have announced a scheme for the volunteer monitoring of grade II listed buildings; these properties are the cinderellas of those historic buildings which have been considered worthy of being afforded protection against inappropriate development. Many of these buildings across the country have become neglected and their current state is a cause of national concern. We have well over 30 listed buildings in Parkgate and, whilst the vast majority are houses in occupation, and for the most part look to be in reasonable condition, we feel that it is worthwhile undertaking a brief survey. We have, therefore, set up a small group to investigate the state of the listed buildings in Parkgate – and those of equivalent age and interest without listing. If anyone else would like to help us with this work, we would be very grateful for additional support.

The condition of the sea wall and the general tidiness of the village are important aspects of our Vision. If we are to succeed in our next attempt to make our mark in the Cheshire Community Pride awards, we need to make some real progress in this area. However, this kind of activity needs the involvement of a large number of able-bodied and enthusiastic volunteers. The Committee has, therefore, established another team, the Community Spirit Team, under David Johnson and involving the wider membership and the community, to lead this aspect of our work and report back regularly to the Committee. His report is given next.

Parkgate Community Spirit in Action

'The Parkgate Vision Next Steps' was the title of a meeting held at Neston Cricket Club last October convened by our local district councillor. The meeting gave a number of speakers the opportunity to have their say in shaping the continuing improvements to Parkgate Parade. One of the speakers, David Johnson, a member of the Parkgate Society Committee, spoke about involving the community more and developing the community spirit in Parkgate to assist with the improvements. The Parkgate Society is the driving force in the Parkgate Vision and is keen to enter the village into the Cheshire Community Pride Competition as soon as practicable. David suggested there was more to be done in Parkgate than just tidying the Parade. Over many years the RSPB and community volunteers had worked hard to clear litter and debris left by the various high tides sweeping across the marsh. He suggested that the marsh clean-up was only the beginning and community action was needed throughout Parkgate. Litter along the Wirral Way, Wood Lane and Boathouse Lane was mentioned, also the neglected state of the green area at the end of Ropewalk, not forgetting the mud and leaves on the pavement between the Parks Field and Ropewalk. Also highlighted were the condition of the sea wall and the problem of the trees and weeds growing out of it. Certainly all these were areas that community volunteers could work on. At the end of his talk he invited interested residents to sign up and join the community spirit. 22 volunteers kindly registered their interest and, with offers of support from the Parkgate Traders and the Parkgate representatives on the Town Council, it was agreed that the meeting had been a success.

Since the meeting in October discussions have been held with Cheshire West and Chester Council officials, Neston Town councillors, the chair of "Greening Group" of the council and the RSPB site Manager. The inaugural meeting of the community spirit volunteers was held at the beginning of February and a decision was made to hold a litter pick and marsh tidy-up after the high tides of 20-22nd February. On Saturday morning 28th February fifteen volunteers met outside the Red Lion at 9.45am and signed in for the litter pick. CWaC had loaned a number of litter grabbers and supplied the green plastic bags, the Parkgate Society had organised the insurance cover for their volunteers and, after a safety briefing, the volunteers set off clearing the area between the sea wall and the first gutter. In two hours 35 bags of rubbish were collected from the marsh. The volunteers also collected several pieces of timber, 2 footballs, a 2 metre length of plastic pipe, 3 tyres and a car wheel. An amazing effort ably assisted by Colin Wells with the RSPB "long hook", who fished out the tyres from the gutters. Special mention and thanks must also go to Dave from Cheshire West and Chester Council, who drove up and down the Parade collecting all the bags and the rubbish, which he took away for disposal. The Parkgate Community Spirit is now up and running and with plenty of ideas to improve Parkgate we are looking forward to an entry in the Community Pride Competition in 2016. If you would like to be involved please contact the Parkgate Society and register your interest via our email - parkgatesociety@googlemail.com

David Johnson

Historic Parkgate

Parkgate lies partly in the township of Neston and partly in Leighton.

Until within the last 40 years it was the principal place of embarkation for Ireland, and was much resorted to by numerous packets and traders, which could then anchor close to the shore. The tide having so far receded that no vessel of burthen can approach within a considerable distance and a large bank of sand occupying the channel of the river, Parkgate is now quite neglected as a packet station. The Custom House still remains, also the ruins of a pottery. A raised terrace, above the rise of the tide, in front of the houses, forms an agreeable promenade, and is much frequented by the numerous visitors in the summer; there are several hotels, among which is the Mostyn Arms, a spacious establishment, replete with every accommodation. At this hotel the County business for the western division of Wirral has been transacted since its removal within the last few years from Neston.

Extract reproduced from 'The History of the Hundred of Wirral' by William Williams Mortimer, first published in 1847 by Whittaker & Co., London.

Shipbuilding at Parkgate

Given the volume of shipping movements at Parkgate it is unsurprising that the port also acted as a centre for ship repairs and even shipbuilding. The first record of shipbuilding is in 1701 when the *Exchange*, ninety tons, was built; at least two shipwrights were known to live locally. Throughout the eighteenth century many occupations associated with the industry are recorded in Neston parish registers in all parts of the parish – not just shipwrights but also ship-carpenters, ship-painters, rope-makers, sail-makers and anchor-smiths. Ten

shipwrights are recorded in Neston parish registers between 1729 and 1739. In 1755, twelve shipwrights were employed at Parkgate to work on the *Royal Yacht Dorset*, though it is possible that some of these men were brought in from elsewhere. While Parkgate never rivalled Liverpool, or even Chester, in the scale of its shipbuilding, there are records of ships being built there in almost every decade of the eighteenth century. A total of twenty-three ships are known to have been built (there were probably more, of which no record remains), and seven are known to have been used in the slave trade.

Until 1785 the royal yacht (by then the *RY Dorset*) was the only ship carrying solely passengers. In that year the growth in the numbers travelling made it economically possible to build specialist passenger vessels. The peak of known shipbuilding activity seems to have come between 1785 and 1790, when ten ships were built by Thomas Makin, in partnership with John Washington. Washington died in 1789, and Makin became bankrupt the following year, leading to the end of the business and leaving eight apprentices without work. The year 1785 had seen the birth of the Parkgate Packet Company, the first purely passenger carrying business, using some of the vessels built in Parkgate.

Makin's business apparently operated at the north end of Parkgate next to the beerhouse, an earlier shipbuilding business run by Samuel Ansdell was based at the south end, at Moorside Lane. Ansdell built the two houses still standing on the south side of Moorside Lane, Springvale and Moorholme.

The three ships built while Makin's business flourished are illustrated on James Hunter's map, c1790 – the *King*, *Queen* and *Princess Royal*. The *Queen* was to be wrecked in 1796 at Birkdale, but all the passengers were saved. A leading writer on seamanship and shipbuilding at the time, Liverpool dockmaster William Hutchinson, criticized Parkgate's shipbuilding techniques, saying that they had led to the total loss of a vessel coming into his port. He claimed the 'Parkgate method' of hanging the rudder was inadequate, risking irreparable loss of control if a ship struck a sandbank, of which there are many locally.

Reproduced from 'Neston: Stone Age to Steam Age', edited by Susan Chambers, by kind permission of the Burton and Neston History Society

The "Volunteers" come to Parkgate, 1903

The Volunteer Rifle Corps were formed throughout the country in 1859 and the years following, because there were signs that the French were showing warlike spirit. 36 rifle corps, 5 artillery corps and one engineer corps were formed in Cheshire. The 11th Cheshire (Neston) Rifle Volunteers were formed in January 1860, with three officers and about 70 men. Annual shooting competitions were held on their practice ground, at the south end of Parkgate.

The most popular feature of the Neston corps was its band, which played at many local functions. In 1864 the band was not considered good enough to play on Ladies' Day, so the band of the Chester corps was engaged instead. The Neston band, offended, played anyway - outside the church, at full blast, during the sermon.

Towards the end of the 19th century, Parks Field, in Parkgate, became a regular site for visiting Volunteer units. In these photographs, two artillery units are shown; in July 1903 came the 4th Lancashire Royal Garrison Artillery, and in August came the 1st Worcestershire RGA. They used to take their guns to the fields at the north end of Parkgate, beyond the (then empty) site of the Boathouse, and fire into the estuary. Local people used to hasten on to the sands, as soon as it was safe to do so, and retrieve the brass shell cases.

Volunteers came to an end in 1908, when army reorganisation, following the South African War, abolished them and founded the Territorial Army instead.



Jerry Harris

Mostyn Place – Breathing New Life

The Developer’s Perspective

The Promenade at Parkgate on The Wirral has got its landmark back. For years the distinctive black and white frontage of Mostyn House School has been shrouded in scaffolding, its safety uncertain.

Manchester based specialists PJ Livesey bought the Grade II listed site from the Grenfell family in 2013, and since then have been working to restore its fabric and transform the interiors into some of the most spectacular new homes available on the Wirral.

Now, thanks to clever construction and painstaking repair work, the facade has been repaired, the scaffolding has gone and it is once again the pride of Parkgate.

Such was the demand that most of phase I sold off plan and now phase II is ready to preview. Properties in this phase range from bright and spacious garden apartments and luxury duplex apartments with vast terraces to the penthouse complete with a viewing gallery in the original tower. Historic features and premium specification combine to create a sense of luxury and exclusivity that set these very special homes apart from the ordinary.

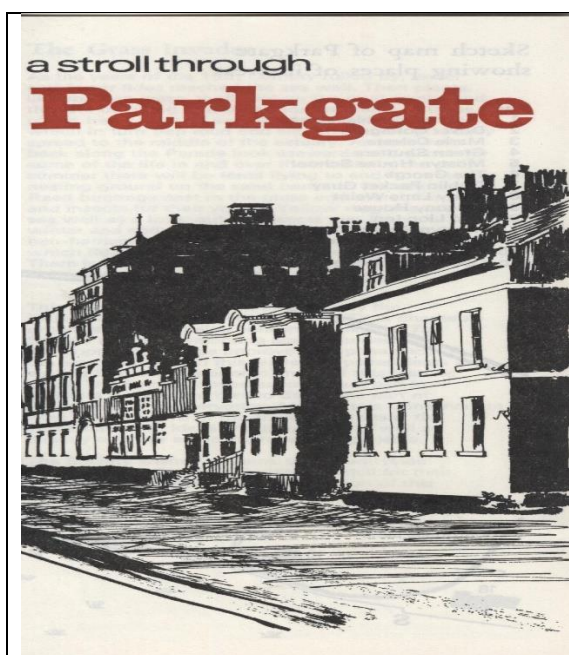
Craig Lynch is sales and marketing director with the PJ Livesey Group. He said: “The interest in Mostyn House has been phenomenal, and the reaction from buyers, when they see what we are delivering here, is very rewarding.

“We combine the heritage of the building with the most contemporary of interiors, and we do it without compromise. The company’s aim is to not only provide luxury homes of great space and character but to leave a lasting legacy for the area.

“Buyers know that each property here is unique and there is just one chance to buy.

“There will never be another Mostyn Place, and we have already seen values increase.”

Dani Greenhalgh, Sales Negotiator, PJ Livesey Group



A Stroll Through Parkgate

In the 1975 European Architectural Heritage Year Guide Book Competition, The Parkgate and District Society was awarded a certificate for our "well designed" guide book 'A Stroll Through Parkgate'. Does anyone still have a copy?

This little book was probably the forerunner of our booklet 'This is Parkgate', written by our former Chairman, the late Geoffrey Place, with illustrations by Michael Barton, which is still available through the Society or at Mozkitos Coffee and Nicholl's Ice Cream Parlour.

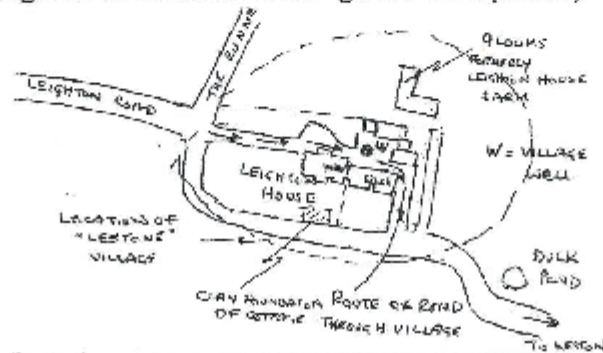
An Explanation of "The Bends" at Leighton

Bob Curwood

Having lived at Leighton House for the past 32 years, I have often been asked for an explanation for the complex bends on Leighton Road in this location – particularly by those motorists who have been involved in accidents in the vicinity!

Research plus some limited excavations on my property have revealed part of the answer. Leighton House, which dates back to the early 17th century, (and was divided into West and East Wings in 1983) is built on the site of the village of "Lestone", which is listed in Domesday Book of 1086. (see below for list of residents.) Leighton House is identified in the Mostyn Estate maps of 1732.

The following sketch map shows Leighton House environs. (The attached map of "Leighton Village and its Cultivated Fields" gives a wider picture.)



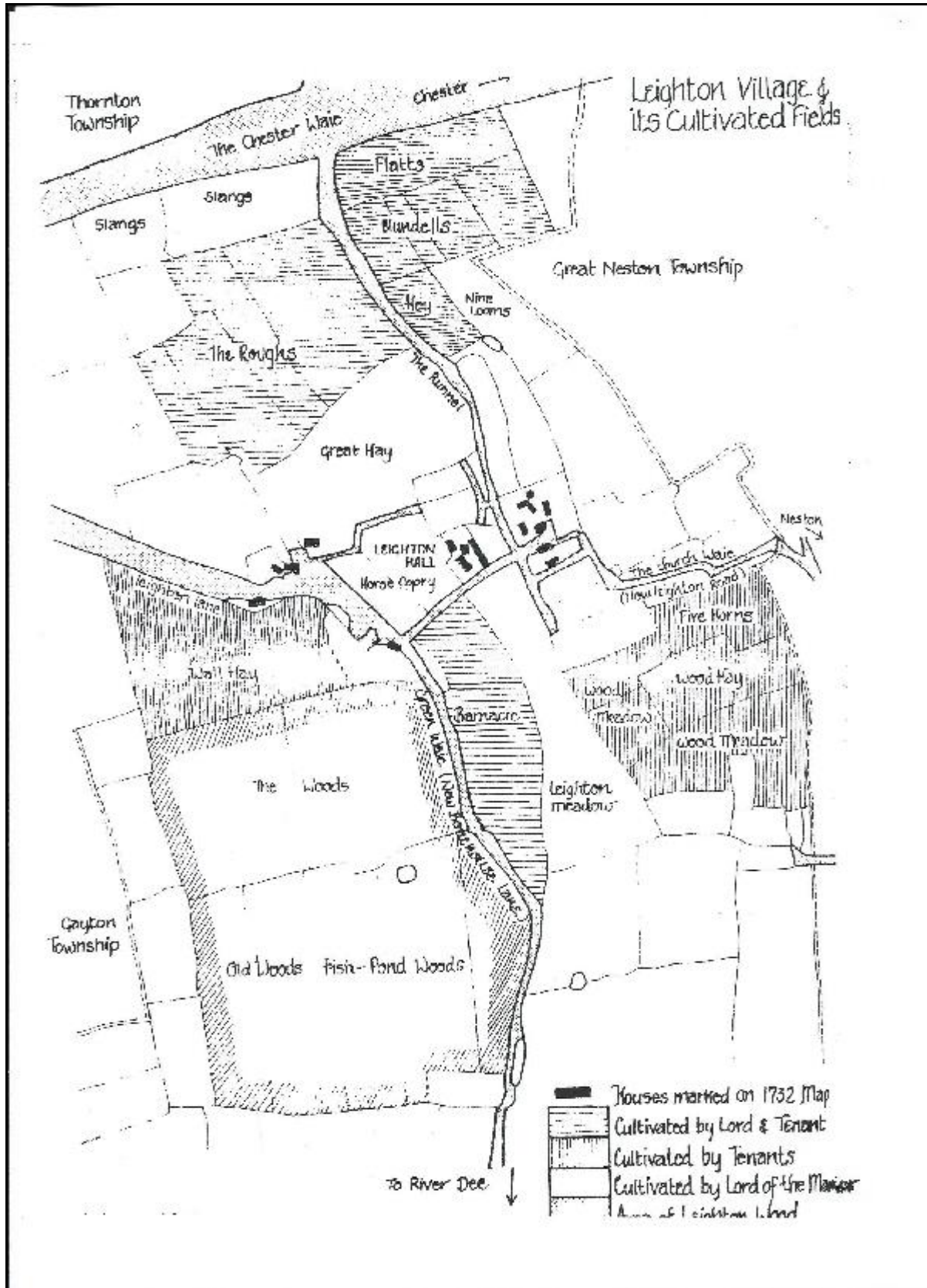
The arrowed route through Leighton House property is assumed to have been the main route through the village. Evidence for this is the discovery, during excavations to install improved drainage in the Courtyard area, of the remains of the village well. (Marked W on the map.) In addition, 3 ft down in the drive adjacent to the NW corner of the house, a cobbled roadway and sandstone base of a building were exposed.

The clay foundation of a cottage (similar to that "embedded" in the East Wing of the House) is present in the garden of West Wing (shown on both maps.)

Leighton Road was, in effect, a "by-pass" round the village, giving rise to the multiple bends on its present route. The final bend is to avoid the duck pond, which still exists.

Details from Domesday Book,

Place name:	Leighton in Neston, Cheshire
Folio:	264v Great Domesday Book
Domesday place name:	Lestone
People mentioned within entire folio:	Aelfric; Asgol; Beorhtmaer; Church of St Werburgh, Chester; Colbert; Dedol; Dot; Dot, thegn; Drogo; Eamwine, thegn; Edwin; Edwin, thegn; Eit; Fulk; Godric; Godwine; Gunnar; Herbert; Humphrey; Hundingr; Hundolfr; Lambert; Leofmoth; Mundret; Picot; Ramkel; Rawn; Reeves of Earl Edwin; Reeves of Earl Morcar; Robert fitzHugh; Robert of Rhuddlan; Robert the cook; Roger; Stenuff; Toki; Uhtaed; Lif; Umfdl; Willam;



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

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Published by The Parkgate Society April 2015.