

PARKGATE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Number 25

Autumn 1983

President JR Cochrane
Secretary Mrs AM Clarke 336 1069
Treasurer EPD Taylor 336 4321

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Please put these dates in your diary !

----- Monday, 17th October, at The Boat House,
at 7.30 pm, The Annual General Meeting, followed by
at 8 pm, Dr Brian Harris, who will describe
ASPECTS of the HISTORY of CHESTER

Dr Harris is editor of the Victoria County History of Cheshire, and the author of an excellent guide book to Chester.

----- Monday, 14th November, 8 pm at The Boat House,
Dr Ian Wallace will tell us about
BUTTERFLIES and MOTHS of WIRRAL

----- Monday, 12th December, 8 pm at The Boat House,
Racster Dingwall will tell some of the secrets of
The NESTON PLAYERS
Mr Dingwall is a keen amateur actor, and is much
feared as a bagpipes player !

If you missed our GUIDED WALK round LITTLE NESTON,
it will be repeated on

----- Sunday, 18th September at 2.30 pm, starting outside Woodfall
Lane Primary School.

If anyone needs TRANSPORT to reach our meetings,
do ring Mrs Clarke, 336 1069.

Our Chairman

Hendrik Vollers has been a Committee member since 1973, became Vice-chairman in 1976, and was elected Chairman in 1981. He is now retiring from business and is in process of leaving this neighbourhood to live in Anglesey. In July he resigned as Chairman, and the Committee asked Geoffrey Place to take the chair until the AGM in October.

The Society owes a great deal to Henke's knowledge of buildings and of the planning regulations. As Chairman, his friendliness, humour and impeccable courtesy have done much to maintain the agreeable atmosphere which makes our meetings such pleasant affairs. We offer to him and to Joan our warmest wishes for a happy retirement.

Our Meetings

In March we were given a well-illustrated talk on the Native Wild Plants by David Parker, from Ness Gardens. He will have stimulated some of us to find plants which he has found in Wirral, but which may have eluded us. Who, for example, knows where to find wild primroses, common enough in Wales, but uncommon in Wirral ?

We welcomed Kenneth Burnley, editor of the Wirral Journal, to our meeting in April, when he described some of the old halls of Wirral. Parkgate has not yet made an appearance in the Wirral Journal, and we propose to put that matter right (editor willing) in the near future.

(Our Secretary has supplied the following note):

Those members, friends and guests from the Neston Civic Society who attended our meeting in May, enjoyed an amusing and informative talk from Geoffrey Place. The hobbies, sports and pastimes of the present day can seem tame and less enterprising than those of our forebears ! Thank you, Geoffrey, for your usual stimulating talk and thanks also to Valerie, who I am sure patiently assists in the very detailed research.

Past Chairman makes good !

Those who remember Steve Norris, who was Chairman of the Parkgate Society from Autumn 1972 until Spring 1974, will be interested to know that he has been elected MP for Oxford East. This constituency was described by the BBC as the number-one marginal in the country, and Steve snatched victory in the Conservative interest by a margin of 1,267. He used to live at Brooke House on the Parade, now the home of our newest recruit to the Committee.

A Ring of Decibels

Although our concern about over-noisy motor cycles has not been very active on the last few months, it has not been forgotten either. It seems that, despite the fact that new motorcycles have to be fitted with exhausts that meet official standards of noise suppression, it is sometimes the practice to replace them with exhausts which permit excessive noise, perhaps because the noise itself appeals to the rider. We are relieved to read that the government intends to ensure, next year, that replacement exhausts must also reach official standards.

Inconveniences !

We were astonished to read in the local press that this Society was said to have agreed that the public toilets in Parkgate should be closed during the winter months, as an economy measure. Numbers of people rang our secretary to complain of our supposed perfidy. No such thing. The suggestion was never put to us, nor would we have agreed to it. More important, we foresee no danger that such a thing will happen. The newspaper item was a piece of mis-reporting, as Councillor Mrs Dowding (in whose mouth the report had been mistakenly put) was quick to reassure us.

The Debate on the proposed lake at Parkgate

The meeting in Neston parish church hall on 12th August provided a lively and most interesting evening. The difficulty was, as everyone agreed, that there was little specific to discuss. The various plans drawn up so far (at the cost of a firm of consulting engineers, and at the instigation of Gordon Hatton, the local councillor for Burton) are very vague, and necessarily so unless a full-scale feasibility study is undertaken. The implications, which some of us foresee as formidable, are vaguer still. The meeting tended therefore to be an exchange of hopes and fears. The one definite point to emerge was that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which actually owns the land in question, has no intention of yielding it for such a purpose.

We are grateful to those members who wrote or phoned their opinions: of those that did, only one was in favour of the boating lake. Many others have commented in conversation, and it is clear that an overwhelming majority of the Society is, on present evidence, against the proposal.

As a Society, though, we are not necessarily digging entrenched positions against change. The whole recorded history of Parkgate has been a story of change, and the alteration in the foreshore over the last fifty years has been dramatic. We do not suppose that time will stand still now. It will be our duty, though, to examine any imposed change with cautious, even suspicious criticism; so that the best interests of Parkgate, as our members may envisage them, are fully considered.

One young member was very cross with the Society's recent letter because it gave more room to the cons than to the pros. Well, in the light of members' opinions expressed at that stage, the letter went a long way in favour of the pros! Its purpose, of course, was to excite interest in the meeting. Our critic felt strongly that his own view, that the need to provide for leisure activities is a paramount consideration, should have been included. We are happy to mention it now. Yet as another member wrote, "Constructing boating lakes and car parks ... will undoubtedly enhance the sailing facilities but will change completely the character of the district which obviously appeals to the many visitors as well as to the local inhabitants. We appreciate the need for recreational facilities for young people, but consider there are many existing and feasible sites elsewhere, especially on the Mersey shore."

It may well be that nothing further will come of this proposal. For the present we can but wait and see, in a state of armed readiness.

Flowers for the Donkey Stand

We are very grateful to the Parkgate Nurseries for planting the tubs on the Donkey Stand with summer flowers. Despite the predictions of those who declared that they would soon be vandalised, the flowers have survived very well.

We are also glad to report that the Council has repaired the seats on the Donkey Stand.

The Election of the Committee

Apart from Mr Vollers who has resigned, the remaining members are willing to serve again. The Committee has nominated Geoffrey Place to become Chairman, and Clive Edwards to be Vice-chairman. Geoffrey Place joined the committee in 1973 and became vice-chairman in 1981. Clive Edwards joined the committee in 1977. The Committee also nominate Jim Davies and Michael Potts for election as committee members. Both live in Parkgate; Jim Davies has already helped us with motorcycle-related problems in his capacity as a solicitor, while you may have seen Michael Potts at the wheel of his venerable Aston Martin.

Our constitution lays down that, "Nominations for the election of Officers shall be made in writing at least 14 days before the Annual General Meeting. Such nominations shall be supported by proposer and seconder and the consent of the nominee must first have been obtained."

Any nominations should therefore be sent to the Secretary (Mrs AM Clarke, Sea View, The Parade, Parkgate) by 2nd October.

Those already nominated are: Chairman, GW Place; Vice-chairman, SC Edwards; Secretary, Mrs AM Clarke; Treasurer, EPD Taylor; as Committee members, Mrs DP Britt, JCM Davies, ADJ Grenfell, Mrs V Place, MS Potts, Miss M Tinker and DL Walker.

The AGM on October 17th will start at 7.30 pm, and there will be a pause between the Society's business and Dr Harris' talk, in case you prefer to come for the talk only at 8 pm.

The Ashfield Hall site

Ashfield Hall Farm is outside our immediate area of interest, but we are concerned at any loss of Green Belt land in this district. We are therefore keeping our eyes on the County's proposal to use this land (which they own) as a Science Park to attract 'high technology' industry. At present our Borough Council is against the plan. Although the matter is more nearly the concern of the Wirral Society, the Wirral Green Belt Council and the Neston Civic Society, with all of which we maintain close ties, we wish to support them.

The Neston Town Trail

This guide leaflet to Neston town centre, foreshadowed in our last Newsletter, has now been published by the Neston Civic Society. It has been written by Geoffrey Place with beautiful illustrations by Bernadette and Naomi Bowes. It costs 30p and can most easily be obtained from Russell's Bookshop in Brook Street, Neston, or from Neston Library.

St Thomas' Festival

Having seen our trees well and truly planted in the churchyard, we were able once more to help the church's festival in July by decorating the pulpit with flowers, through the skilful hands of Muriel Tinker. She reports that the occasion was a great success.

Committee members have also represented us at the Parkgate School Summer Fair, on the Civic Sunday, and at the opening of the Ellesmere Port Leisure Centre.

St Michael's Hamlet Society

Following two visits to Parkgate by members of this conservation society in Liverpool, they were good enough to invite us back in May. Those who were able to go, reported that they enjoyed a most interesting afternoon.

Lycidas sails again.

We try to see, not always successfully, that Parkgate events are accurately chronicled by those who write about this locality. Some six years ago the Oxford Literary Guide to the British Isles was published, and stated quite falsely that Edward King, the friend of Milton in whose memory the poet wrote 'Lycidas', was drowned at or near Parkgate. We wrote to the editor, Mrs Dorothy Eagle, and pointed out that the only evidence about this journey in 1638 states that, "This worthy gentleman, Mr Edward King, was a fellow student with Milton ... in Christs College in Cambridge: who having sailed from Chester, the ship that he was in foundered upon a rock in the Irish seas." The Dictionary of National Biography goes further and states, on uncertain evidence, "The vessel on which he had embarked left the estuary of the Dee, and was coasting in calm weather along the Welsh shore, when it struck a rock and foundered."

We are pleased to report that the new illustrated edition of the Literary Guide has amended the entry for Parkgate in line with our suggestions. Some other writers have fallen into the trap of supposing that a ship sailing 'from Chester' in 1638 would actually have sailed from Parkgate, as it would have done a century later. But of all the possibilities (Neston Quay is the most likely, followed by Hilbre, Dawpool or even Chester itself) that he might have sailed from at that date, Parkgate is the least likely. One recent writer about Wirral even made the mistake, following the equally inaccurate Young (1909), of making King sail the wrong way, from Dublin to Parkgate !

Treasure from the House of Lords

Those who tamper with the natural evolution of the Dee estuary, run the risk that they will induce greater changes than they bargain for. This topical fear is underlined by a document which we have just discovered among the records of the House of Lords. It is a petition, presented on 21st May 1733, in opposition to the Bill to canalise the Dee into the New Cut, which was actually built four years later.

The humble petition of several masters of ships and traders living at or near Park Gate whose names are hereunto subscribed on behalf of themselves and many others

Sheweth - That there is a Bill now depending in this Honourable House to recover and preserve the navigation of the River Dee, which if it passes into law and anything be done in consequence thereof to alter the channel as proposed by the said Bill, your petitioners apprehend that the greatest part of the water will be thereby diverted from Park Gate which is at present the safest and most convenient place on the said river for ships and vessels to lie or anchor in, and that the passage thereto will be choaked and destroyed to the great prejudice of the navigation of the said river and the ruine of your petitioners.

The petition was signed by 35 people. And they were right !