

PARKGATE SOCIETY

Newsletter 39

Autumn 1990

President	JR Cochrane CBE
Chairman	GW Place
Vice-chairman	
& Treasurer	SC Edwards
Secretary	Mrs AM Clarke

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Monday, 17th September, 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel
Colin Wells, our local RSPB warden, will describe
BIRDS of the DEE ESTUARY

Monday, 22nd October, at the Parkgate Hotel,
At 7.30 pm, the Annual General Meeting, followed by,
at 8 pm, Dave Mitchelson, Countryside Ranger:
A VICTORIAN WALK from ROCK FERRY to RABY MERE

Monday, 26th November, 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel,
Bill Hubbard will give us a talk about
PORT SUNLIGHT

Monday, 14th January, 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel,

This is our annual JOINT MEETING with the Neston Civic Society and the Burton & South Wirral Local History Society. We have not yet been told who the speaker will be, but please make a note of the date !

Our Newsletter editor, Sheila Synge, will leave the district at the end of the year and so has had to resign from the Committee. We would like to thank her for all her hard work. Together with the death last year of Peter Taylor, this means that there are two vacancies on the committee. We intend to propose two new members for election at the AGM: Becky Ford and Ron Wright, both of whom have shown a close interest in the affairs of Parkgate for several years. If there are any other nominations, they must reach the Secretary before 8th October, and our constitution requires that the nomination must be accompanied by the names of proposer and seconder and the consent of the nominee must first have been obtained.

If you have any problem with TRANSPORT to attend any of our meetings, do ring Angela Clarke (336 1069)

MEMBERSHIP

The Subscription rates are: £3 Single or family
£1.50 Senior Citizen

Mrs Valerie Place will be pleased to receive your subscriptions at our meetings, or at her home (Pendmore, Station Road, Parkgate).

THE STATE OF THE PARK Parkgate and the Wirral Country Park

From the very name of Parkgate, it should be expected to have close connections with a park. The original park was an aristocratic hunting preserve from which the ordinary members of the populace were excluded on pain of repressive punishment. Nowadays, the park most closely associated with Parkgate is thoroughly demotic and open; the Wirral Country Park.

In the near future, the status of Parkgate's section of the WPC will change slightly when Cheshire County Council stops funding the Borough of Wirral's Countryside Rangers. Instead, Cheshire CC will supply their own staff for their end of the WCP. This may lead to different policies on either side of the county boundary, though Cheshire CC suggest that there should not be any noticeable change.

It is a regrettable fact that the most vandalised part of the park is the section between Parkgate and Neston where there is constant damage to the wooden fencing. This seems to occur in the evenings and is described as 'petty' but of course it is a drain on resources. The rangers simply do not have enough manpower to guard against this kind of damage.

Other damage can occur when property owners adjacent to the WCP cut down trees and bushes which strictly should be preserved. The poor quality of cutting does not help. Unfortunately, dumping sometimes occurs as well.

The real answer lies in education. Recently the rangers organised school parties to observe birds during the Spring tides and used the chance to bring home general environmental lessons. The WCP centre at Thurstaston is well used by school parties as well as by the general public.

Another problem is caused by bicycles. The bye-laws for the WCP ban cycling but in fact there is a great deal of cycle use. This has become particularly noticeable with the advent of the very popular Mountain or All-Terrain bicycles. Many walkers do complain about this but the rangers have little power to stop it. At present there is a policy review on this issue to see if all the different users of the WCP can have their wants reconciled. One good part about the old railway is its strong foundations. Other parts of the WCP are environmentally much more fragile and so less suitable to use by bicycles. Both equestrian and cycling users of the park should observe "the Rule of the Way" and give ground to walkers, but this does not often happen.

While Thurstaston is the WCP's most used centre, the Old Baths in Parkgate is second in popularity. At times there may be as many as 600 bird watchers near the Baths. The rangers have an information caravan and 'set up shop' in Parkgate when there is likely to be a big turn out. The Old Baths are nationally known. The story of one Worcester family who arrived for a high tide at 8 am, watched birds all morning and went home after a shrimp lunch is not an isolated example of the importance of this section of the WCP, and of the marshes, on a national scale.

There is also a good deal of historical interest in the Parkgate section of the WCP. The Old Baths themselves have disappeared below the car park, though their size and the nature of their construction can still be made out. On the Wirral Way itself, the railway bridges are notable examples of brickwork, some having railway company information plaques still attached, as well as clear evidence of the dirty nature of steam locomotives. There is still recognisable masonry at the site of Parkgate station, as well as the white tiling that lined the underpass.

Alec M Syngé

A RESPONSE TO WILLIAM BARRETT (Headmaster of Mostyn House, 1892--889, whose verses we published in our last issue)

There's still a place called Parkgate in the Hundred of Wirral,
Where pestilence roams in the form of the squirrel
and rats and mosquitoes; quite unlike the Tyrol.

You may fancy yourself by the Pacific Sea
But most of the year, grass is all you can see;
If you stand on tiptoe, you can just see the Dee.

The Parade is alight in the evenings round here,
People sit on the wall and discourse over beer
Just as they've done for many a year.

And tourists flood in to taste salt and ice cream,
To yon urban dweller Parkgate is a dream,
Only litter behind them reminds us they've been.

And the modern young schoolboy still in green and blue,
Daily he comes now and even girls too,
For them, Mostyn House values for life will hold true.

Progress goes on and folk come and go,
We watch buildings go up; estates seem to grow,
The twentieth century in Parkgate starts to show.

There's the scheme to build bridges from Wales to here,
Some call it progress, 'There's nothing to fear',
But what would it do to Parkgate's atmosphere ?

There's the Parkgate Society, now part of the lore,
Who inform and conserve; they comment and deplore,
Fighting to keep things that have proved good before.

There's no place quite like it from Land's End to Leicester
One still needs to wear anorak and sou'wester,
But it's now in South Wirral, no longer in Chester.

Helen Staveley-Taylor

The Fort, Bats and other Beasts We have not yet got the
apertures restored, even if
still blocked, on the anti-invasion fort, but the County Council
is working on it. The Mersey Bat Group came up with the most
interesting suggestion that it could be used as a bat roost,
but unfortunately they wanted to cover the whole thing in earth
to insulate it. We hope a compromise may be possible whereby
the building can retain its fort-like appearance from the road
but still be insulated. A final decision will have to await
Cheshire CC's takeover of this section of the Country Park.

On the Map. Our concern for the status of the 'back path' which
now runs from Brooklands Road to Bevy Road (and once
continued to Boathouse Lane) started some five years ago. We are
happy to report that Cheshire CC has confirmed that the path
will be entered on the definitive footpath map of the County.
We feel sure that this act will lead to improvements in the
upkeep of this useful local short cut.

BRUSHES WITH A FOX

Anthony Mould

I met her first on a fine, warm, windless June evening. It was twilight, and she was at the far end of my lawn. I stood silently. Suddenly, with her head down, sniffing purposefully at the ground, she appeared a yard away, caught my scent, looked up in surprise, turned and sped away. I remained still, and she stopped after twenty yards and walked into our little paddock.

I walked slowly to the far end, and as I spied her in the growing gloom, so she saw me. She stopped and sat down to watch me, her large, triangular ears pricked. I continued into the field and found that I had got within twenty feet of a young, wild vixen. Fascinated by this beautiful creature, I stood and watched. She seemed relaxed, and was enjoying the newly mown hay, stretching and rolling in it. If I moved, she would maintain her distance and circle around me. I made no sudden movements and talked to her continuously.

I was greatly intrigued by the episode, and the idea evolved that I might persuade her to take food from me. The following evening at dusk, I went in search of her, armed with pieces of meat in my pocket. I saw her at once: in the paddock; sitting motionless and watching me. I approached, making gentling sounds, and found myself a few yards from her. She circled me, and I flicked some food without moving my arm. She scented it immediately, came nearer to retrieve it, and turned and left the field. I waited, hoping she would return.

She did, and we repeated this until I ran out of meat. I then sat down on the grass. For ten minutes or so she circled me, sat down occasionally, stretched, and once leapt high in the air to pounce on a real or imaginary mouse.

The following evening it was barely dusk, when I saw her from the window, sitting on the edge of the lawn. I quickly took some food into the garden. As I talked, I moved slowly towards her, stopped within twenty feet and threw a titbit. Each time, after much hesitation and circling, she came and took it within eight feet of me. The next night, to my surprise, it happened. With the greatest hesitation she took, or rather snapped, a three inch long piece of ham from my fingers. As I expected, the vixen did not take from my hand the following evening, or for several after, although she appeared and took the meat I threw to her. When she did, however, it represented a breakthrough, and since then she has taken all offerings from my fingers. I now offer the morsels in an open hand, which she delicately picks up in her teeth, and sometimes eats without moving away. She is extraordinarily agile, and on one occasion caught a young bird in front of me, eating it, claws and all, in two minutes.

To say that an animal has a sense of humour is probably unscientific. But the vixen certainly likes to play when in the mood, generally when she is not hungry. From the beginning I tried to get her to play by rolling a ball towards her. After a week or two she would, if she felt like it, pick up the ball. I then approached her as if to take it away, and she would run away and drop it. To make it easier to find the ball in the dark, I tied a piece of ribbon to it. That night she excelled

and gathered the ball with a high, graceful leap, and ran off. Like a dog, she ran off again each time I tried to get it.

She has now developed a second game. When I followed her about the garden, she would suddenly run a few yards and slow down, expecting me to chase her. This is more exhausting than the ball game, and we rapidly run out of garden. When she loses interest in playing she does so suddenly, and her demeanour changes as she trotsswiftly and silently to one of her regular exits. I am then reminded that she is not a pet, but a wild creature who will spend the remainder of the night hunting her wide terrirory: gardens, fields and hedgerow.

(First published in Country Life, October 1988)

Liaison In January we welcomed to a meeting of the Committee Mr Peter Gamet, the Borough's Head of Technical Services. We discussed litter bins, the design of street furniture, the problem of sewage flowing on to the marsh and similar topics. Mr Gamet will not remove the ugly red bollards round the public toilets but he will paint them brown.

We have submitted to the Planning Department some suggestions for improving the look of Mostyn Square. Would any of our members be willing to keep plants regularly watered, on the Donkey Stand and by the bus shelter ?

We have also made some recommendations, on request, for improving the local List of Buildings of Historic or Architectural Interest. The present list is full of inaccuracies !

We keep pointing out to the authorities that the bins are well used but overflow at weekends. We hope that weekend emptying may eventually come about.

Our reent meetings

In March we were pleased to welcome back Mrs Valerie McFarland, who told us about the birds and plants of the Seychelles. In April a former Chester Tourist Officer, Joan Houghton, guided us through Chester Ancient and Modern. In May our chairman, Geoffrey Place, gave us an insight into the lives of passengers at Parkgate from convicted felons to landed gentry.

This Newsletter Harold Loughran, who was co-opted on to the Committee in the course of the year and will stand for election at the AGM, has kindly offered to edit the Newsletter as Sheila Synge is leaving. This issue contains contributions from two members of the Society and we should welcome others.

The Playground We congratulate the Council on the new children's playground on the Ropewalk, and particularly Councillor Brenda Dowding for getting the necessary funds diverted to this side of the Borough. There will, we undrostand, be a plantation of shrubs on two sides which should make it very attractive.