

Parkgate Society

Newsletter 41

Autumn 1991

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

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Monday, 30th September, 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel,

The Work of Our Countryside Ranger

Barry Jackson will report on the recent change in management, whereby Cheshire County Council has assumed responsibility for its own section of the Wirral Country Park.

Monday 28th October, at the Parkgate Hotel,

at 7.30 pm, the **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

followed at 8 pm by

Bebington, Then and Now

By Dave Mitchelson. Those who heard him last year will want to hear him again.

Monday, 23rd November, 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel,

The Story of Cottage Pottery

will be related by Lyn Trust.

In January 1992 we expect to be invited to a joint meeting with the Burton & South Wirral Local History Society and the Neston Civic Society, this time in the Gladstone Village Hall, Burton. The date and subject have not yet been announced. When we know, we will let you know at our meetings.

If you need TRANSPORT to reach our meetings, do ring Angela Clarke (336 1069)
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Membership

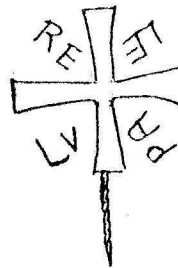
The subscription rates are:	£3	Single or family
	£1.50	Senior Citizen

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

A Memory of the First World War

This charming lapel badge was bought in a car boot sale and brought to us for identification, via Mrs Rigby and Susan Chambers. The clues, engraved in tiny writing on the back, read:

"Parkgate 1914-19, from HN & MEG".



HNG was Henry Neville Gladstone of Burton Manor, whose wife Maud (MEG) showed a great interest in the Voluntary Hospital run by the Red Cross in the Convalescent Home at Parkgate. It therefore seems probable that the Gladstones gave these commemorative badges to the hospital staff, and that the initials PA, LE, RE and LV represent the four nurses.

The house which contained the hospital had once been the residence of the Presbyterian minister, AM Halkett. The house stood on the site of the North end of Dee side Court (where the car park of the garage used to be). In 1881 this house was bought by Chester Royal Infirmary with the funds of the Parkgate Bathing Charity, which had since 1790 enabled poor invalids to stay in Parkgate for the benefit of sea bathing. The Convalescent Home was opened in 1882 by the Duke and Duchess of Westminster, and the next year the house next door was bought for use by women and children.

In 1914 the Convalescent Home, like the Neston Institute, was taken over as a Red Cross hospital. The house was returned to the Chester Infirmary in 1919, but by this time the house was becoming decayed and it was sold in 1923. With the proceeds of the sale, a Parkgate Convalescent Fund was set up and which is still in being. Nowadays it supports the convalescence of needy patients in their own homes.

The house, renamed Rigby House, was used between the wars as a holiday home for Liverpool children. Whole schools would come, with their teachers. During the Second World War it was used for evacuees; for example, in 1940 the children of Elleray Park School, Wallasey, were evacuated there. After the war it was turned into flats before being demolished in the late 1950s.

It seems very unlikely that we will find names to fit the initials of the four nurses, if they were indeed nurses. But perhaps we may !

Maid of the Mill A distant memory of the Parkgate racecourse which was once on Parks Field, in the form of the picture of a horse called Maid of the Mill, returned briefly to Parkgate some weeks ago. The picture, a pastel drawing dated 1841 and signed by the artist G.S. Warwick, was a charming but clearly amateur portrayal of a brown horse. A label on the back, unfortunately not supported by any documentary evidence, stated that this horse had won the Parkgate Steeplechase in 1843, ridden by John Grace of Whitby Hall (Ellesmere Port) and owned by Robert Egginton of Abbeyfield, Tarvin.

Unfortunately the present owner of the picture asked a price which was deemed too high, either for its artistic or historical value, so the Maid of the Mill has not remained in Parkgate.

A race meeting was held at Parkgate every year, from the 1830s to about 1895, usually in May or June.

The Returning Tide of paper, alas, has kept us busy. We were very pleased with the efforts of our members and supporters on 6th April, . On this day we picked up a great deal of litter, weeded the sea wall, and tried to roll the vegetation back from its base (or its apparent base: the actual base is another six feet down at least). This job proved harder and we did not get far. We therefore welcomed the suggestion, by Harold Loughran, that young offenders on Community Service work might tackle the task. This they started to do on 15th August .

It is a fair wind indeed that upsets nobody. One resident has found that the efforts to dig a shallow trench at the foot of the sea wall, intended to stop the marsh plants from colonising the wall, have unearthed broken glass, no doubt originating from the Red Lion, so that he cannot walk his dog there.

You may recall that we reached agreement with the Council about a design of litter bin for Parkgate; they were to be like the Neston black and gold ones, but smaller to fit our pavements. We were then told that there was no money to buy them. So, in due course, two double-size bins appeared on the Donkey Stand. We were not consulted about the siting and could wish that they were not so prominent, but after all the fuss we have made about the need for more bins, we can hardly complain now !

The increased number of collections from the bins has certainly helped, but the problem of litter on the foreshore remains. **Anybody** can ring by the way can ring an "emergency number" if you think the litter situation is out of hand. It is 525 5192.

We had a most interesting meeting with Cheshire's Countryside Manager who has just taken charge of his section of the Wirral Country Park. He noted our hopes for the anti-invasion fort beside Station Road and will see what he can do. He was then waiting to move into new offices at Willaston station.

The Official Guide The official guide to the Borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston for 1990/91 is well produced and makes interesting reading. The historical description of our side of the borough is, however, somewhat inaccurate. The Parkgate Society pointed out this fault in an earlier guide some years ago and our offer of help was accepted but not, when it came to a new edition, used. So we have tried again. This time your chairman went to see the Council officer responsible for the guide, Mr Ian Simpson, who declared that he was only too glad to accept help. The new edition, with the Parkgate section totally rewritten by Geoffrey Place, will go to the printer in December.

The errors concerning Neston and Parkgate were details of small importance to anyone but a specialist - though that is no reason why they should not be corrected. The one glaring mistake concerned Burton. In the High Street in Burton, the Guide declared, there is a 13th century stone cross. This totally untrue statement was accompanied by a photograph of a war memorial cross erected in 1917, with that year plainly engraved upon it. How could such a mistake have happened ? Mr Simpson, who had merely copied from earlier editions, did not know; but we have worked it out.

In Pevsner's Cheshire in the 'Buildings of England' series, he describes, among the monuments in Burton church,

Coffin lid, with a
foliated cross; 13th century.

It is printed like that, so that if the eye skims the page, it sees mention of a cross at the start of a line. Truly, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing !

Conservation Problems

The English Historic Towns Forum believes that many conservation areas are in danger of sliding into decline. Its delegates had been hearing about plastic window frames replacing wooden sliding shutters, concrete tiles replacing slates, loft extensions which transform the roof line, front gardens which become car parks, and fine terrace houses being painted "a rainbow of unfortunate colours." Could these things happen in Parkgate ?

Some conservation officers would welcome greater powers to prevent this sort of thing. However, some critical voices have doubts about conservation areas as we know them. Are they just British examples of what Americans call "snob zoning", whereby one patch is protected without enhancing the town as a whole ?

There is also a tendency to assume that the character of a place depends on its buildings, without enough reference to economic and social life, traffic problems and the population mix.

The reasons for listing a conservation area need to be kept in the public and official mind. Arguments about Chester's Green Belt, where the economic health of the city has to be fitted uneasily into its rural surroundings, underlines the difficulties in striking a just balance.

Here in Parkgate, the Borough's Local Plan shows every desire to protect us; but the statutory need to enhance the conservation area by positive improvements has never yet been addressed. Such seemingly minor details of street furniture, like the siting of bins and notices, still goes largely uncoordinated, despite the genuinely friendly noises which the Council's officers make when they speak to this Society.

Or are we too intent on "our patch" ?

The Annual General Meeting

The existing committee members are willing to stand again; but if anyone would like to make a nomination, the name of the nominee (who must first agree) with proposer and seconder, must reach the secretary before 7th October.

Our Social Evening

Leonard Walker was much praised for his fiendish skill with the camera in setting such a diabolical quiz when we met for a buffet supper at the Parkgate Hotel. One brave member boasted of having named only one picture correctly ! There were some little prizes for the more observant contestants, and the evening was generally considered to have been very successful, despite the somewhat slow appearance of supper. 42 members and their gusts came, which was a good number for the space available.

The Parkgate Society held its formative meeting in 1972, so that we shall celebrate our 20th anniversary next year. How shall we do it ? If you have an entertaining idea, let us know.

A Tale of a Wandering Tombstone

You know Nelson Cottage, where the name NELSON is spelled in black pebbles ? If you have studied This is Parkgate as a good member should (if only because the income from its sales keeps your subscription down) you will know that Nelson Burt, a small boy drowned in 1822, is remembered there.

He is also remembered by a stone inscription in Stoak churchyard, where Nelson was buried. If you visit the new Sainsbury's, Stoak is on the other side of the main road. The Places went to look at his gravestone, and found two. One was carved with his full name and a description of the storm in which he died; the other, a smaller version, was just carved "NB 1822". Yet these stones were thirty yards apart.

It turns out that the churchyard was "tidied" some twenty years ago, and the stones were dotted about with little or no reference to their original positions. So we may not know exactly where Nelson lies, but at least we can get the two stones together. The vicar, Mr Herbert, thought that a tall obelisk had been broken and that these were the two parts; but we now think that they are the head and foot stones of the grave. We have obtained permission from the vicar and churchwardens to place the two gravestones in the correct relative positions. This should have been done by the time you read this, but we await the pleasure of the verger, who is not to be hurried.

This renewed interest in Nelson Burt uncovered a fellow devotee, Peter Clay, who first noticed the stones while walking his dog in Stoak churchyard and determined to research the story.

He and Geoffrey Place have been pooling their information.

The Burt's cottage in Parkgate was just a weekend retreat from the family home in Crane Street, Chester. The father, Albin Burt, was an artist. He described himself as a "miniature painter" and he specialised in watercolour portraits, of which there is a collection in the County Record Office. He also engraved and published prints. In December 1822 he took his nine year old son Nelson on the ferry from Liverpool to Ellesmere Port, intending to continue on the canal to Chester. The ferry was the Prince Regent, built at Runcorn in 1816 and one of the first steam ships on the Mersey.

It had been built to ply between Runcorn and Liverpool. When the paddle steamer was opposite Eastham, a tremendous storm blew up. The storm caused great devastation throughout the country: in Neston it damaged the windmills, and the older one (next to the present one in Leighton Road) never recovered. The Chester Chronicle printed a full account of the confused events that took place when the paddle steamer ran out of coal, bumped into a river barge in the dark and began filling with water. Nine people drowned, including the captain and his child, and Nelson Burt, although his father survived. One report said that Nelson was washed from the deck after his father had scrambled on to the barge; another said that both reached land but that Nelson's hat blew off and he unwisely tried to retrieve it. We will never know.

The black pebbles were originally set in earth, and part of the name was lost when a bow window was added to the cottage.

So the name was re-set in cement in the 1920s.