

Parkgate Society

Newsletter 43

Autumn 1992

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

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Monday, 21st September, 7.30 pm at the Parkgate Hotel

An Antiques Evening

This is a charity event and admission is by ticket. For details, please see the separate sheet enclosed with this Newsletter.

Saturday, 10th October Visit to Ince, Thornton le Moors and Stoak

Pat O'Brien will lead a tour, lasting about two hours. We will meet at 2.30 pm at **The Square, Ince**. Parking is usually available in the pub car park. If you would like a lift, ring Angela Clarke (336 1069).

Monday, 26th October at the Parkgate Hotel
at 7.30 pm, the Annual General Meeting, and
at 8 pm, a talk by Dr J.E.Cox on

Leahurst

the Liverpool University veterinary station on the Chester High Road.

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

Parkgate to Delamere

A talk by Frank Latham, a member of this Society, on his experience of publishing village histories.

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

The subscription remains at

£3 for single or family membership,

£1.50 for Senior Citizens

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

The Parkgate Society, 1972 - 1992

In 1972 Parkgate was threatened by the proposed Dee Barrage, which would not only have altered the whole character of the estuary, but would have blocked out our view of Wales. Immense embankments would have enclosed reservoirs for water directly in front of the village. The Parkgate Society was formed to respond to this threat. At about the same time, the new idea of Conservation Areas was being launched, and the first task of the new Society was to advise on the Conservation Area boundaries.

The Society has always seen one of its main tasks the response of local opinion to ideas, for good or bad, which seek to alter our village. Change is inevitable, and we have always tried to make constructive comments so that our views will be listened to the next time. In this spirit we have studied, the County Structure Plan, the Cheshire Green Belt, the Borough Local Plan, private proposals (like the man who thought that a miniature train running along the Parade would liven the old place up a bit !) and an endless procession of planning applications. Our role can only be advisory, and we have always kept in close touch with those that take the decisions; our local councillors and above all the officers of the Council, with whom we regularly arrange meetings.

When the Neston town centre was proposed as a conservation area, the Parkgate Society was asked if we would look after its interests. But we felt that this would be a false move, and that Neston needed a society of its own. We therefore invited a group of public-spirited Nestonians to meet us, offered them a loan and a committee member to get started, and suggested that they form a committee. That is how the Neston Civic Society began and we are very proud of our sister organization.

One of our earliest tasks was to provide accurate information about Parkgate, and it is strange now to think that in 1972 no serious attempt had ever been made to uncover its history. Our first publication was a very successful pamphlet, "A Stroll Through Parkgate". That was followed by Michael Barton's "Panorama of Parkgate" and our guide book, still in print, "This is Parkgate". Most recently we have commissioned a painting of the village from the artist David Scott, which will form the cover when we next reprint the guide book. All these publications have served the lesser but useful purpose of underpinning the Society's funds so that members' subscriptions can be kept low.

We often provide a speaker for local organizations, a guide for walks in the locality, and we have mounted several exhibitions.

Much of the work described so far has been done by hard-working members of the committee. Members generally are entertained by talks on matters of local interest each spring and autumn and with occasional social events. And of course we publish this Newsletter twice a year.

In the early days we planted some trees, but suitable sites are few; we did however provide some trees for St Thomas' churchyard. We have regularly collected litter from the foreshore and we have persuaded others, notably the Borough Council, to do so too. We have also played our part in the constant war against

litter by paying for new litter bins and by continually nagging the Council.

Once our funds accumulated, we were able to spend money on a variety of objects. Occasionally we have given money to the Council to encourage them to spend on Parkgate, as with some refurbishment in Mostyn Square, but usually we prefer to spend the money ourselves. We have bought a bench as well as litter bins. We commissioned Leonard Walker's Domesday survey of Parkgate in photographs, and we have provided photographs for such places as a ward for the elderly at Clatterbridge and Neston police station. With the Neston Civic Society we arranged for the display of viking carvings in Neston parish church. We have had watercolour paintings mounted and framed for display in Neston Library, to which we also presented a framed print of our own Panorama.

During our twenty years we have seen civic societies accepted as a useful part of the consultative part of local government, as concern for and interest in the environment has strengthened. Our usefulness, both to our members and to the wider community, is what matters. Here's to the next twenty years !

Parkgate's Only Murderer (so far)

Geoffrey Place

Norman Welch, who was hanged for murder at Lancaster gaol in 1835, was born in Parkgate in 1778, the eldest son of George Welch (1745-1828), a mariner from Liverpool who settled in Parkgate when he married in 1776, and opened a shop as a barber and maker of perukes or wigs. Later George Welch was a grocer and tea dealer.

His son Norman went to sea for some years and moved to Liverpool about 1812. In 1814 he enlisted in the 2nd Lancashire Militia until that regiment was disbanded in 1816. He served in Ireland, where he received a head injury during a brawl. Whether or not because of this injury, Welch became a violent man, apt to become dangerously excited, especially after drinking.

When he left the army he entered the Customs service in Liverpool, where he was a locker at the Custom-house, responsible for the security of a warehouse. One day in 1833, thirteen pieces of calico were found to be missing from Welch's warehouse, and the surveyor, William Southgate, made an unfavourable report which resulted in Welch being demoted to the position of weigher, with a considerable reduction in pay. Welch brooded over this treatment and considered that Southgate was to blame.

In October 1835, nearly two years after the loss of cloth from the warehouse, Welch bought a pistol, walked up to Southgate in the Custom-house yard, and shot him. Welch made no attempt at concealment or flight. At least two witnesses saw the shot fired, and saw Welch throw the pistol on the ground. When a police sergeant asked him if he knew what he had done, Welch replied, "Yes, that he had shot a damned rogue who had robbed him."

Southgate died the next day. In support of a defence of insanity, several witnesses "established the propensity of the prisoner to acts of great violence and outrageous bursts of passion, frequently excited and inflamed by drink." But Welch was found guilty of murder and condemned to death.

The trial was reported in the Annual Register for 1835, and we are grateful to Martin Crossley Evans for telling us about it.

Knitting

Shirley Britt

How did the 18th and 19th Century lady residents of Parkgate pass the time? The well-to-do would, undoubtedly, have pursued the fashionable pastimes of the day: painting (water colours), music, tapestry, embroidery; while the ordinary folk - busy making ends meet - would have needed to knit, crochet and sew, recycling their garments as those with modest means do today.

In recent years there has been a revival of these traditional crafts, so lady members of our society may be interested in a synopsis of the history of knitting, a popular and profitable pastime, newly emerging as an art-form.

Knitting is thought to have been practised for 3,000 years and to have originated in the Middle East. It is believed that in its earliest form, knitting was worked on the fingers of one hand; a later method involved frames with hooked needles. The straight knitting needle, with points at one or both ends, was probably a European invention. Over the years, knitting needles have been made from a variety of materials: wood, bone, bamboo, wire, steel and, latterly, plastic.

The date when knitting was first introduced to England is not known with any certainty, but in the middle of the 15th Century mention is made of "one knyt gyrdll" in the accounts of the Chapter of the Collegiate Church of Saints Peter and Wilfred in Ripon, and both Henry VII and VIII were known to favour "knytted woollen caps".

By the 16th Century, hand-knitting was becoming established as an industry and in the reign of Elizabeth I knitting schools were officially set up by Parish Councils to train the poor, thus providing them with the means to earn a living. However, the rapid development of a knitting machine, invented by William Lee in 1589, prevented English hand-knitting from reaching its full potential although the craft survived in a few isolated areas, particularly the Yorkshire Dales - and also in North Wales.

The average hand-knitter in the 17th Century in these areas could produce 2 pairs of stockings a week. Everybody there knitted - "drovers knitted while taking their sheep to market", "lovers went courting with their knitting"; it was considered that the couple would prosper and get on together if both were expert knitters in spite of any lack of the skills more usually considered necessary in setting up a home.

By the 18th Century, hand-knitting was an established home-based craft. For the most part, women knitted for their children and occasionally for themselves and their men: winter petticoats, sleeves, shawls, caps and waistcoats. In North Wales, knitting centred around Bala. Knitted gloves, wigs, socks, caps and stockings were produced and sold at Bala market. Sometimes the knitters would wait on stage coach routes to sell their goods to the passengers. The yarn used was wool but about this time, fine silk knitting started to appear. Towards the end of the century this was superseded by "white knitting". Increased trade with India and the Far East had ensured the importation of

large quantities of raw cotton. Imitation lace, knitted in natural cotton on the thinnest of wire needles, became highly prized. A magnificent example of the dexterity with which knitters exploited this material is provided by the baby's christening dress which was demonstrated at the 1851 Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace and gained a Bronze Medal. The knitter, a Miss Sarah Ann Cunliffe of Saffron Walden, Essex, had worked seven hours a day for five months, using some 6,000 yards of fine sewing cotton. The dress included a number of different designs and was 22 ins. (56 cm.) long.

Although the advent of railways in the 19th Century facilitated the accessibility of machine-made garments, hand-knitting was encouraged in the education of girls. Women's magazines began to appear giving information on etiquette, the latest fashions, advice on household problems, and patterns for hundreds of items to knit. These indomitable Victorian ladies knitted just about everything - from the "unmentionable" knitted drawers for ladies, to half-hose, suspenders, braces and pen wipers for gentlemen. They also renamed the garments. Shawls became "clouds", "fascinators", "comforters"; short bolero type jackets were called "zuave" or "hug-me-tight"; a chest warmer "bosom friend". However, towards the end of the Victorian era "the new woman" began to emerge - she was no longer content to stay at home lovingly knitting a cycling jersey and necktie for the man of the house - she was too busy cycling herself and participating in sporting and social activities, leaving little time for the retiring, domestic joys of knitting.

This century knitting has been as much a necessity as a pleasure, especially during the two World Wars. Today, hand and machine knitting is part of both high fashion and everyday life, giving pleasure through the opportunities for creativity or simply from wearing the garments. The renewed interest in practising the craft, fostered by enthusiasts like Kaffe Fassett, an American with extraordinary artistic flair, ensures that the skills are not lost in the sands of time.

Further information is available in "The Art of Knitting" edited by Eve Harlow, 1977 (Wm. Collins, Glasgow) which is highly recommended.

The Annual General Meeting

If anyone would like to nominate a candidate for the committee, the name of the nominee (who must first agree) with proposer and seconder, must reach the secretary by 12th October. However, the present committee members are willing to serve again. They are: Shirley Britt, Angela Clarke, Clive Edwards, Becky Ford, Harold Loughran, Geoffrey Place, Valerie Place, Michael Potts, Muriel Tinker, Leonard Walker and Ron Wright.

We are grateful to Becky Ford for organizing our Treasure Hunt. It was quite easy for some, mystifying for others and a pleasant walk round Parkgate for all.

Around Cheshire Quiz

1. Neston's church clock has: (a) Roman numerals
(b) Arabic numerals
(c) No numerals
(d) The quarters only.
2. Chester's ancient walls provide a walk of: (a) 1 mile
(b) 2 miles
(c) 3 miles
(d) 4 miles
3. In Bebington Park stands a stone bearing the curious inscription:
(a) A chomping stone for asses
(b) A rubbing stone for asses
(c) All stones are asses
(d) A stone to rub your ass
4. Where can you see the remains of an abbey destroyed by fire and flood over 800 years ago: (a) Stanlow
(b) Frodsham
(c) Lymm
(d) Middlewich
5. Bebington church can boast of this unusual attraction:
(a) a stuffed two-headed duck
(b) an all-female choir
(c) the footprint of a Triassic "kangaroo"
(d) part of a crashed Messerschmidt sticking out of the roof.
6. What is striking about the church in the village of Burton:
(a) It has no tower or spire
(b) The clock has only one hand
(c) It has sunk six feet into the ground
(d) It is held up by an oak tree
7. Where in Cheshire would you find the most fully excavated monastic site in Britain: (a) Norton Priory
(b) Neston Priory
(c) Stanlow Abbey
(d) Saighton Abbey
8. Which village boasted a 355 foot long swimming pool, once the largest in England ? (a) Parkgate
(b) Burton
(c) Shotwick
(d) Hooton
9. Who left his Cheshire home to do brave work among the fishermen of what is now Canada ? (a) Dean Stanley
(b) Wilfred Grenfell
(c) James Prescott Joule
(d) Bishop Heber
10. In a quarry in which village was found the fossil impressions of the footsteps of a prehistoric animal: (a) Bebington
(b) Beeston
(c) Bidston
(d) Bickerton

Answers: 1 (c) 2 (b) 3 (b) 4 (a) 5 (c) 6 (b) 7 (a) 8 (a) 9 (b) 10 (a)