

# Parkgate Society

Newsletter 45

AUTUMN 1993

President	J.R. Cochrane CBE
Chairman	G.W. Place
Vice-chairman	M.S. Potts
Secretary	A.M. Clarke
Treasurer	S.C. Edwards

## **FORTHCOMING MEETINGS** (8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel)

Monday, 27th September

**Charles Kingsley 'A Victorian Naturalist'** a talk by Steve Woolfall of the Grosvenor Museum.

**Membership:** The subscription remains at:

£3 Single or family  
£1.50 Senior Citizen

Monday, 25th October

7.30 pm **Annual General Meeting**

Please come and support the Society by contributing to the discussion. We need to know **YOUR** views so that you can get the most from us!

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

8.00 pm **Herbs & Wild Flowers of the Wirral** by a Wirral countryside ranger.

If you need **Transport** to reach our meetings, ring Angela Clarke (336 1069).

Monday, 29th November

**The World of Insects** an illustrated talk by W. Hubbert.

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## ROUND-UP OF SPRING MEETINGS

We had a lively meeting in February about *pub signs*. We have all seen a few of these so everyone could get involved. A good area for research on days out!

Our local ranger, Bernie McLinden visited us in March and demonstrated the management of the *Wirral Way*. He showed us some interesting early photographs of the old baths and railway before the park was established.

The workers turned out in April to *clear the marsh* which yearly gains height. Will we see the wall in a few years' time?

In April Glyn Parry, a transport enthusiast, gave an illustrated talk on travel to and on the *Isle of Man*. If we all take the trouble to use public transport perhaps these forms will survive for future generations to experience.

The husband and wife team, Chris and Gilly Lee, was a great inspiration to us all in May. They had undertaken an amazing honeymoon journey on bikes from *Victoria Station, London to Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe*. They shared their experiences of the African countries they visited and the hardships they had to endure.

As part of the St. Thomas' Church 150th anniversary celebrations in May, we mounted a *photo exhibition* in the church. Well attended despite poor weather.

The series of *guided walks* throughout June, Led by Geoffrey Place was an overwhelming success. More than 40 walkers enjoyed each of the 3 routes on beautiful sunny evenings. Geoffrey was, as usual, a mine of information - we all learnt a lot.

From the *Neston News*, 22 April 1993.

YOUR anonymous correspondent reiterates the old arguments about the need for improved facilities in Parkgate so as to obtain a bigger share of the tourism market.

This growth of mass tourism would lead to too many being interested in making money from it and too few in preserving its beauty.

People come here for the views of the Welsh mountains, the glorious sunsets and the Parade.

Walkers use the the Coastal Path or the Wirral Way for their tranquillity and beauty, while the RSPB Reserve is a noted centre for birdwatching.

There are good restaurants, pubs and renowned ice-creams.

Any income would certainly cause Parkgate to become more crowded and noisy and undermine the whole community. People would then shun the area.

What Parkgate needs is sympathetic preservation not some Philistine rejuvenation.

Its character must not be destroyed or allowed to deteriorate. It must remain as an oasis of peace and a refuge in an ever increasingly built up and commercialised country.

This is not developmental stagnation but simply protection from the worst of outside pressures.

To build a marina in Parkgate would irreparably upset the local balance. The costs of the new infrastructure would be huge and a terrible price to pay for what would be comparatively few extra jobs.

However, I will accept that a Heritage Centre could be a real asset; The whole area is full of interest and has a fascinating history.

Andrew Cubley, Hinderton Road, Neston.

# Save us from this tired old chestnut

It appears that each Spring, the News looks in its perpetual diary, sees Parkgate Marshes, and decides to "stir them up."

Then we are subjected to a number of articles and letters from the advocates of marinas and other grandiose schemes.

Councillors and council officials, London architects, directors of tourism and, of course, the anonymous "name and address supplied," all come out with their vague ideas, none of which are ever accompanied by any details, nor any suggestion of how much or from where the money for the construction and upkeep is to be obtained.

Meanwhile, any proposal for a simple improvement to the Parkgate frontage is put on hold in the Ellesmere Port and Neston Local Plan, for possible consideration in the year 2000.

Can you please get hold of the diary and make such alterations as will preserve us from this annual spate of useless correspondence.

Jack Cox, Bowring Drive, Parkgate.

We are grateful to Jack Cox, Andrew Cubley and Andy Ball (of the Neston News) for permission to reprint these letters.

## BUILDINGS AT RISK

Since our last Newsletter, two things have happened concerning Balcony House. First, a surveyor working for English Heritage found that the building can be saved, albeit expensively, which is interesting after reading a survey commissioned for the owners which painted a much blacker picture. Secondly, the planning committee of the Council has rejected both the application to demolish a Listed Building and the application to build six flats. There are known to be those willing to restore the house if they can buy it for a reasonable sum. Let us hope that recent developments will encourage agreement on what merits a reasonable sum.

There has been much interest and concern shown locally about plans for the restaurant on the corner of Mostyn Square, Pasta La Vista, formerly Chompers, formerly the Admiral Benbow Cafe. The Society did not raise an official objection to the plans for an outside staircase for this building and it may be helpful to explain why. We usually comment on plans from the point of view of the Conservation Area; that is, what the proposed development will look like. In this case we decided, after much discussion, that the plan was a considerable improvement on the last plan for a staircase there, and we did not think it would spoil an undistinguished building. But the staircase, by providing a fire escape, would have allowed the legal use of the upper floor, and some neighbours of the restaurant objected on the grounds that increased custom would be a nuisance to them. Much as the committee might sympathise with this concern, the building already has planning permission for this use, the upper floor was used until another exit became unavailable, and we did not feel that we could object on these grounds. However, public opinion has a force of its own and the plan was withdrawn. In addition, the outside paintwork (to which we did object when it turned to a bright yellow) has now reverted, in part, to white.

A third building which has been worrying us is Seaward House, until recently the Indian Restaurant. This venerable building bears the date 1721 and was described as new in 1732. The first record we have found for the use of Seaward House is in 1870 when the Misses Roberts were running a school for young gentlemen under 12 years of age, a school which they had formerly run in Neston High Street. In 1884 Miss Mary Cowan took over the school and ran it until the First World War. A former resident of Parkgate went to see the cook there during the days of food rationing, about 1917. "What shall I do?" said the cook. "The mice have got into the flour and I dare not throw it away." "Sieve it," advised her friend. So the cook sieved and sieved the flour, but could not get rid of all the mouse droppings. "Never mind," said the friend, "it looks like caraway seed." So the cook took some caraway seed, mixed it with the flour and made a cake. Miss Cowan declared it was the best she had ever tasted.

In the 1930s, Seaward House became a boarding house, or guest house as it was described in the 1950s. Then it became the Marie Celeste Restaurant, the Porthole Bistro, and finally an Indian Restaurant. One entire gable wall and its two front bays had to be replaced a year ago before a fire obliged the owners to sell. We hope that a new owner will carry out further repairs and return the building to residential use.

Geoffrey Place

## JACK THE RIPPER

In a recent Newsletter we told the story of James Maybrick, a Liverpool cotton broker who attended Parkgate races in 1889 where he was drenched by heavy rain. He then rode to a friend's house in Bromborough where he was taken ill and died. However, there was found to be arsenic in his body and his wife, Florence, was convicted of his murder, though the death sentence was reprieved.

It is now claimed in a book and television production, due to appear later this year, that a diary of Jack the Ripper has been identified and the new suspect is said to be James Maybrick.

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## ST THOMAS' CHURCH

The church in Parkgate has been commemorating the 150th anniversary of the building. This "neat gothic building" as the directories of Cheshire used to call it (Pevsner described it as a sandstone box) was built as a Congregational chapel, apparently through the generosity of George Rawson of Pickhill Hall near Thirsk, Yorkshire. It is thought that Mr Rawson was a visitor to Parkgate for the sea-bathing season, and it is rather typical of religious enterprises in the Neston area that they depended for both energy and funds on those who were not locals. The architects, Pritchitt & Son of York, gave their services free. The chapel cost about £600 to build, and the site was leased to trustees for two guineas a year by the landowner, Edward Lloyd Mostyn, who was praised by the Chester Chronicle for his tolerance in allowing space for nonconformists.

The opening ceremonies were held on Wednesday, 10th May 1843. There were services at 11am and 6pm, with preachers from London and Liverpool respectively, with six other ministers to assist the local man, the Rev Robert Roberts. Collections were taken for the building fund. The Chronicle reported: "The chapel was well filled by deeply interested congregations. In the afternoon about 70 friends of the undertaking sat down to dinner in the old Assembly Room which for some years past has been used as a place of worship by the Christian society now transferred to the new sanctuary."

This Society's part in the commemoration was an exhibition of photographs and other historic material in the church on 31st May. Becky Ford mounted an interesting display with contributions from David Scott and Leonard Walker.

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### **NELSON BURT'S GRAVESTONE**

You may remember that Nelson Burt was the nine year old boy who was drowned in the Mersey in 1822, and whose name is commemorated in the word NELSON set in pebbles outside Nelson Cottage at the foot of Station Road. Two years ago we found that the graveyard at Stoak (near the new Sainsbury's) contained two gravestones for him some thirty yards apart. We wondered whether they had originally been a headstone and footstone, or whether these were two parts of a single obelisk.

We have now found out, but it has taken a little time - although we obtained permission to move one of the stones, it was then up to the verger either to move it himself or to permit others to do the work. He, however, has heard whose wheels grind slowly and clearly can think of no better example to follow. We were given the nod earlier this year and found that the smaller stone was evidently not a broken extension of the larger, but must have been a footstone. It has now been replanted in an appropriate position in front of its counterpart.

An account of all this has been accepted for publication in the **WIRRAL JOURNAL**.

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### **AN ARTISTIC MYSTERY RESOLVED**

Some readers will have seen a postcard reproduction of a painting of Neston and Parkgate, made in 1836 by John Parker. David Scott included it in our exhibition at St Thomas' in May.

We had long wondered where the artist sat to paint the scene. In July, Valerie and Geoffrey Place went to see the original in the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. There they found that the artist had written on the back, "Parkgate from Haswell hill with Gt Neston, the estuary of the Dee and the Flintshire coast in the distance. Saturday July 2nd 1836."

We think the artist sat just below The Beacons, perhaps where Hillside Road is now. It is possible (though perhaps with the eye of faith) to identify the olde Pengwern Arms where the Boat House is now, and down river from it a group of houses (known as Long Houses and Short Houses) which have long since disappeared.

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## DEE ESTUARY STRATEGY

As a result of much discussion for several years by interested bodies about the management of the Dee Estuary, culminating last year in the public enquiry into the gas terminal at the Point of Ayr, a project officer has been appointed for two years to prepare a management plan - the Dee Estuary Strategy. He is Dr Alan Jemmett, who has been quick to ask us, as well as to discover for himself, the point of view of bodies like the Parkgate Society. His aims are:

- (i) to achieve the conservation and sustainable multi-use of the natural resource
- (ii) to provide a policy framework for integrating current and future uses and interest in the estuary.

Our first contacts with Dr Jemmett fill us with encouragement and we have managed to lure him to our meeting on 23rd May 1994.

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## NESS GARDENS - MICKWELL BROW REVISITED

In 1898 Arthur Kilpin Bulley, a Liverpool cotton broker and keen naturalist chose the sandstone outcrop at Ness on which to build his new home. Previously used as a public open space on which to picnic, farm fields were made into ornamental gardens. This included a series of seasonal beds and a plant propagation area. A large fruit and vegetable section was set out within the shelter of a newly planted pine wood. The valley to the south of the house, deepened by marl extraction, was used as a rock and water garden.

Bulley's interest was to introduce new species of plants into this country. Arctic-alpine plants were very topical 100 years ago and he thought if a plant growing at 10,000-14,000 feet in the Alps could also be found at sea-level in Spitzbergen, there must be plants on mountain ranges (especially in the Himalayas) that could be cultivated here.

He gave money to missionaries to bring back seed but this was a failure. Professional collectors had to be sought. Bulley was put in touch with George Forrest who collected seed from Western China from 1904 until he died in 1932. The first of his seven expeditions was his most successful - over the years he collected 30,000 specimens and introduced hundreds of new plants.

Bulley's gardens were open to the public from the outset - his massed displays of flowers were well-known. He started his seeds and plants firm Bees Limited at Ness, which he moved in 1911 to a 1000 acre site at Sealand.



Bees catalogues of 1909-1913 are of special interest, showing recently introduced species available to the public for the first time.

Other plant collectors followed, including F Kingdom-Ward in 1911 and R E Cooper who followed Forrest to China in 1912 and later to the Himalayan Province of Bhutan. In 1926 Siehe collected bulbous plants in Asia Minor.

With Bees Limited now at Sealand, J Hope was employed in 1913 as head gardener to convert the old nursery site into an amenity garden.

Mr Bulley provided recreational facilities for the local population, "Bulley's Rec" was situated where the picnic area is now and areas were allocated for games. The main car park was, until the second world war, a crown bowling green. A second green was later added, where the sorbus trees are behind the old tea rooms. Ness tennis club played, until the mid 1960s, on the tennis courts situated where the herb garden and laburnum arch are now.

Mrs Bulley saved Burton Wood from being felled, by purchasing it and presenting the woods to the National Trust. Mr Bulley was a member of the group which bought Thurstaston Common, also for the National Trust.

A K Bulley died in 1942 and six years later the garden, surrounding farmland, cottages and main house (Mickwell Brow) were given to the University of Liverpool with an endowment of £75,000. The gardens are to be kept open to the public as a practical and fitting tribute in his memory.

A new phase in the gardens began in the late 1950s. Shelter belts had now 50 years growth which allowed the opening up and replanning of the previously compartmentalised gardens. All the original land of the Bulley estate was incorporated into the gardens which were now to be made accessible to mechanical equipment. The rock garden was cleared from the neglect of the war years and low maintenance shrubs planted.

From 1962 the newly established "Friends of Ness Gardens" helped to buy much of the walling stone and most of the paving slabs which the director, J K Hulme, was so good at acquiring from demolition sites nearby. There were paving slabs from Liverpool streets, sets from railway goods sidings and paving slabs from six disused railway platforms. The roof of the Visitor Centre was clad with slates from the old Ness Holt school.

York paving stone from Jubilee Drive, Liverpool lay along the terrace which replaced the old pergola. Paving from the Dock Road and around the old warehouse on Brownlow Hill and sets from Liverpool streets can be seen all around the gardens.

Platform coping stones came next - the old tea room terrace from Hadlow Road Willaston and the retaining walls built from the sandstone blocks of the goods siding. The slabs from Neston South pave the approach to the main terrace and the sandstone forms the retaining wall near the rock garden. The west platform from Ledsham forms the paving in the herb garden, the sandstone retaining walls being the boundary wall of Christ Church Ellesmere Port, Calday Grange Grammar School and Maryton Grange. The path near the conservatory was originally the Blacon platform.

The Jubilee Garden is paved with slabs from the disused platform of Hooton Station. The terrace wall and paving slabs near the garden shelter overlooking the rock garden came from Walton-on-the-Hill Station in Liverpool. The materials from which the shelter is built were part of Ness Holt school, as were the sandstone blocks forming retaining walls near the conservatory and viewing platform.

The main retaining wall below the Visitor Centre formerly enclosed a coal depot on the fringe of the University precinct in Grove Street. The sets around the Visitor Centre and conservatory are mainly from a goods siding in Bootle. The portico of Hanson Lodge Noctorum forms the viewing point over the Dee Estuary. The circular enclosure above the heather garden used to be the well room in the basement of the old Northgate Brewery in Chester.

The low retaining wall overlooking the herbaceous section came from a Neston monumental masons when they ceased trading. The York stone path below was collected from the approach to Everton football ground.

Next time you visit Ness Gardens, imagine the sandstone outcrop as it was 100 years ago with its clump of sycamores which still remain below the heather garden. Tour the sites of Wirral history retained in stone and look for plant names introduced - including forestii and bulleyana. It's on our doorstep!

Becky Ford

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#### **PARKGATE MOSQUITOES - AGAIN! (OR NEVER AGAIN?)**

Have you suffered at all this year from the attentions of the dreaded Parkgate mosquitoes? It appears so far to be a very quiet summer for these little nuisances - they have been as reclusive as the sun! - but whether this is due to the control programme or to natural population fluctuations or, indeed, to the weather, will never be clear since effective monitoring of the marsh spraying was not included in the programme.

An appealing system for protecting against the little biters (preferable surely to the aerial spraying recommended, and approved, by Local Authority enthusiasts) is suggested by the work of a team of chemists from the University of Alabama who report on the presence of powerful insecticides in marigolds. The compounds, which are given off from leaves and flowers, were shown to be especially active against a close relative of our very own mosquito, Aedes detritus.

So, if you want to keep the mosquitoes at bay without environmental damage, get to work on the flowerbeds and plant marigolds - and spread some beauty at the same time. (The African or French types are more effective than the traditional garden variety it seems.)

David Britt



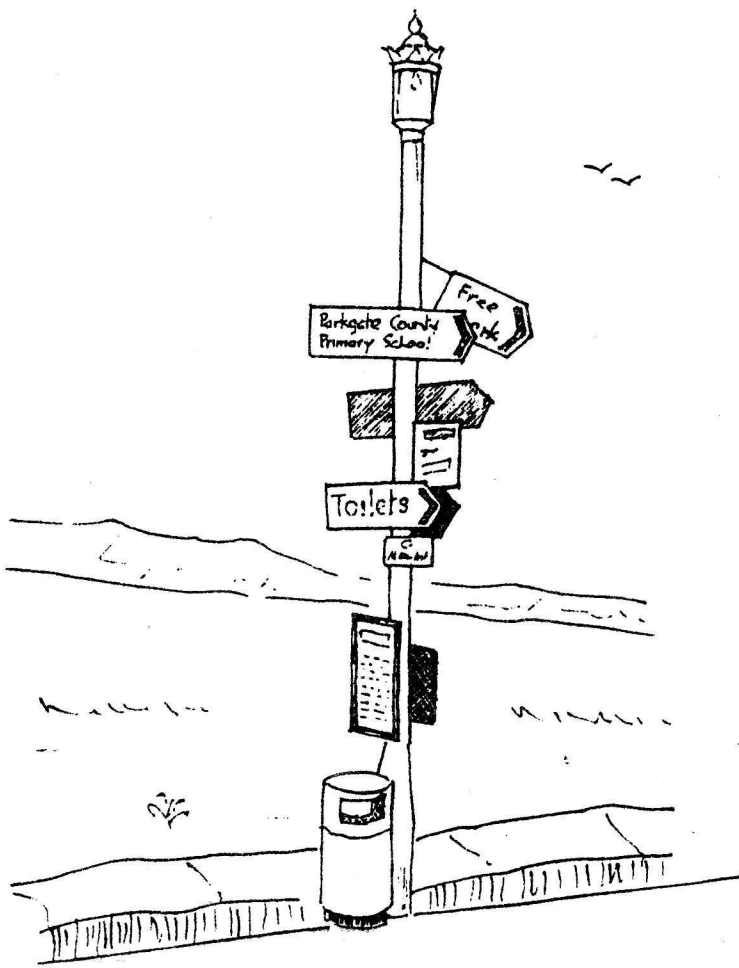
## NEWS AND VIEWS

It was pleasing to see that the lights along the Parade have been repaired and now switch off in the daytime. The lamp at the Middle Slip (by the Watch House) was replaced in an attempt to improve the lighting at this hazardous point.

We have also been negotiating the tidying of the Middle Slip by replacing the sandstone blocks with three black bollards.

In an attempt to clean up playing fields, the Council has installed bins in the Ropewalk and Parks Field for owners to deposit dog waste. We highlighted this need in our Newsletter of Spring 1991.

The Society has, for some time now, been arranging for a single replacement sign to be erected on the lamp post opposite Mostyn Square. Hopefully, a satisfactory conclusion is near, but, just for the record, Ron Wright has captured the lamp post as it stands today. Lovely, isn't it!



A Planning Application has been made for change of use of Tony Smith's shop in Station Road from a Grocer's shop to a Financial Advisors' Office.

Wirral Way walkers will be pleased to find that Cheshire Countryside Rangers have now put in place a new bridge at the Brookland Road site.

### THE COMMITTEE

After three years of service on the committee, Harold Loughran has resigned because of the pressure of other commitments. We are grateful to him for his interest and support. To fill the vacancy, James Pratt has been nominated and will stand for election at the Annual General Meeting. Mr. and Mrs. Pratt have recently finished a most successful restoration of Sawyers Cottage.

According to our constitution nominations for the election of committee members shall be made in writing at least 14 days before the Annual General Meeting (to be held on Monday, 25th October 1993). Such nominations shall be supported by proposer and seconder and the consent of the nominee shall first have been obtained.

The remaining committee members are willing to serve again. They are Geoffrey Place (chairman), Michael Potts (vice-chairman), Angela Clarke (secretary), Clive Edwards (treasurer), Shirley Britt, Becky Ford, Valerie Place, Muriel Tinker, Leonard Walker and Ron Wright.

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Newsletter  
Editor:  
Secretary:

The Parkgate Society Autumn 1993  
Becky Ford - items for the  
Spring issue by 1 November '93.  
Mrs. A.M. Clarke, Sea View, The  
Parade, Parkgate.