

The

# Parkgate Society

Issue 51 Autumn 1996

Newsletter

## Diary Dates

**O**ur meetings are held at the Parkgate Hotel, commencing at 8pm unless it is stated otherwise. If you require transport to the meetings, please ring the Society Secretary, Angela Clarke, on 336 1069, giving 24 hours notice.

### Monday 23rd September

*Williamson Art Gallery* - an illustrated talk by the curator, Colin Simpson.

### Sunday, 6th October,

2.30pm,

*Mostyn House School.*

By special request, Geoffrey Place will be leading a tour of Mostyn House School. Meet at the Chapel, by entering the grounds via Grenfell Park.

### Monday, 21st October, 7.30pm

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please come and support your Society as we approach our 25th Anniversary.

Followed at 8 pm by -

*Hilbre Islands* - Vicki Seager, warden of the islands will be visiting us to give an illustrated talk on the nature reserve.

### Monday, 25th November

*"Wirral As We Were"* - a talk by Glyn Parry.

*The Borough Of  
Ellesmere Port &  
Neston's Coat Of Arms*



Represented in the Coat Of Arms:-

*The Port  
Industry  
Location  
Prosperity*

We will be celebrating the Society's 25th Anniversary in March 1997 and would like to do something special in its honour. If you have any good ideas, please let us know.

## 1995 - A Year Of Weather Records

**T**he beginning of the year saw above average rainfall, twice the monthly norm fell in February. With April came the sunniest month on record. May and June had cold nights following long, hot days. June was the driest since 1975. July and August were hot, the 2nd of August having the year's maximum temperature of 31.1 degrees. August was the sunniest month ever recorded. September broke the pattern with rain, the 4th was the year's wettest day. October was the warmest ever and the driest since 1969. Dry conditions remained through to the end of the year, despite a significant fall of snow on Christmas morning. December was the coldest for 20 years, the year's lowest temperature of -8.4 degrees occurring on the 28th.

*from Ness Gardens weather station*

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## NESTON 1840-1940

*For those of you who haven't yet heard Geoffrey's "Hard Sell"!*

A new book which vividly describes Neston's recent history has just been published. It is *Neston 1840-1940* edited by Geoffrey Place from the research of ten members of the Burton & South Wirral Local History Society.

The growth of Neston and its surrounding villages, including Parkgate, Little Neston, Ness, Raby, Thornton Hough and Willaston, has been traced from newspapers and official records but, above all, from people's memories.

The three authors (Susan Chambers, Edward Hilditch and Geoffrey Place) have charted many aspects of Neston life. The races at Parkgate used to be so joyous that sixty policemen had to be drafted in from Birkenhead. At the mine, the pit ponies were brought up during a coal strike in 1921 and ran races at a sports day held to raise funds for miners' children. Amongst the fishermen at Parkgate, there were serious fears that pollution, or the fear of it, would destroy the trade in mussels in the 1930s. Amongst the churches, the rivalry was once so intense that a Church of England curate locked the churchyard gates to frustrate the funeral of a nonconformist child. At the Town Hall, soldiers just returned from the First World War forced a public humiliation on some men who had dodged military service. These and many other gems of information make this book a must for anybody interested in Neston and its surrounding area.



The book has 120 illustrations, nearly all of them previously unpublished, and a cover designed by David Scott. The group has been able to keep the cost of publication down because one of them, David Morris, has done all the typesetting on his computer.

*Neston 1840-1940*. Edited by Geoffrey Place, costs £9.95 and can be obtained from local bookshops or <sup>by post</sup> from Mrs. C. Johnson, 11 Blackkeys Lane, Neston, South Wirral L64 9XA. (Post & Packing £2.00 extra).

## ROUND UP OF SPRING MEETINGS

In *February* we had a well-attended meeting with **Tom Miller**, Head of Planning Services of the Borough Council. He gave a very full and fascinating look at the Balcony House restoration and revealed new information about its history. Mr Miller showed us a human side to the planning department.

**Colin Wells**, our local RSPB warden was again well received in *March*, updating us on his work on the marshes and future plans.

*April* saw a visit by the historian of the **Griffin Trust** who had been sent at short notice, and who gave an extremely well-delivered talk on the history of Hooton Park and the formation of the Griffin Trust.

We had a very disappointing turn-out for the **Marsh Clearance** in *April*. The Willaston Venture Scout Unit saved the day and did a commendable job. There was noticeably less debris than in previous years, which is probably due to the action of clearance over time and the Borough Council's regular litter pick, for which we are very grateful.

**Clive Edwards'** knowledge of the jazz movement's development was amazing at our talk in *May*. Those of us who haven't followed jazz never knew there was so much to it!

**Geoffrey Place** led a series of walks throughout *June*, with the numbers attending growing as his fame spread. This led to a fourth walk being added.

# NEWS AND VIEWS

Contributed by Geoffrey Place

## *The Future of St. Thomas'*

Some readers were displeased that we published, in our last Newsletter, Sue Jones' article which expressed the point of view of those who wish to see the building demolished. One member read it with "dismay and misgivings" and accused its argument of being "distorted". And it has to be said that Sue Jones chose to ignore (and elsewhere to belittle) the English Heritage report which paints a more optimistic picture. Yet, from our experience with Balcony House, which was saved after an English Heritage report corrected the totally damning report of allegedly independent surveyors, we have learned that surveys must be treated with caution.

However, it will do no good to look backwards or cry over spilt milk. We believe the way forward is to encourage the view that St. Thomas' can have a useful future and to explore ways of achieving this. This Society has started discussions which are likely to continue for some considerable time. If it is possible to find agreement for a programme of repair and extension, the recent formation of the Parkgate Preservation Trust, described below, may prove to be of invaluable help.

It may be helpful to set out the case for retaining the building, for whatever use. It is of historical interest as a Listed Building, and most people agree that it looks attractive. But it also forms part of a group of old and interesting buildings - the school, Coastguard Cottages, Mostyn Cottage, Brockleigh and the walls of School Lane - all at the heart of the Parkgate Conservation Area, and the loss of any one would diminish the group. The Point is made well by the following excerpt from the English Heritage Leaflet, "Conservation Area Practice":

Historic areas of distinctive character have a strong sense of place, and by suggesting continuity and stability provide points of reference in a changing world: they represent the familiar and cherished local scene. They will be of economic importance in attracting tourism and commerce. But this heritage is extremely fragile, under pressure for development which tends to destroy those very characteristics which made the area attractive in the first place.

## *The Donkey Stand*

You may have read in the papers that Neston Round Table held a competition among local schools and youth groups to suggest projects which would improve the local scene. The winning idea, earning a prize for Parkgate Primary School, came from Josie Dickinson, then aged ten, who suggested a display board for the Donkey Stand that could explain what Parkgate was all about. The Round Table's chairman, David Munro, then asked the Parkgate Society whether such a plan was acceptable and, if so, in what form.

Some years ago we had discussed the possibility of a "viewfinder" on the Donkey Stand - a plaque to explain what you are looking at and perhaps a telescope. But no finance was then forthcoming and the idea was dropped. Now that the Round Table is generously offering funds for a similar idea, we were very pleased to suggest, not a notice board, but an interpretative panel of the type often placed at ancient monuments. David Munro and Geoffrey Place have been discussing ways and means with the Borough Engineer (Andrew Jackman), Colin Wells of the RSPB and two members of the Cheshire Countryside Service, Bernie McLinden and Jo Danson who have experience of commissioning panels of this kind.

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# NEWS AND VIEWS

## *The Donkey Stand*

*continued*

It now seems likely that a design submitted by the Parkgate Society will be used. This will show the panorama of the Welsh hills and selected Parkgate buildings, taken from the "Panorama of Parkgate", drawn for the Society in 1975 by Michael Barton, and also showing some birds and an explanation of the RSPB reserve.

The first part of the sea wall to be built, about 1800, was from the Middle Slip to the house which then used to stand on the Donkey Stand. That is why there is a bulge in the sea wall - it had to go round the house. After the house was pulled down in 1841, the space remained as a place to sit. The donkeys, normally used to transport bags of shellfish to the railway station, were lined up on this spot on Bank Holidays to take children for rides to the South Slip and back. Hence the name, Donkey Stand.

## *The Parkgate Preservation Trust*

We welcome the formation of the Parkgate Preservation Trust, the brainchild of J.A.C. Pratt. Jimmy Pratt was for a while a committee member of the Parkgate Society, but he left to concentrate his energies on setting up this new venture.

The object of the Trust is to preserve for the benefit of the townspeople of Parkgate, and of the nation at large, whatever of the historical, architectural and constructional heritage may exist in and around Parkgate in the form of buildings.

There are eleven Trustees, all local residents, who are experienced in business including property management, finance and law. The trust is a company limited by guarantee as well as a registered charity, and is thus in a position to do things, such as handle property and large sums of money, which the Parkgate Society is not equipped to do.

The formation of a preservation trust was first discussed some years ago as a way of rescuing Balcony House. The new Trust sees its role as a last resort: it will try to find ways to save buildings when their owners *can no longer maintain them.*

The trustees have stated that they wish to work in harmony with the Parkgate Society, which has been happy to express similar goodwill.

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## *An Eye for Detail*

With the permission and encouragement of John Wilkinson, the Headteacher, the Parkgate Society has set up a fund from which prizes can be bought to reward children at Parkgate Primary School. The idea is to encourage the children to pay detailed attention to some aspect of Parkgate. The National Curriculum requires a local slant to some aspects of the prescribed work and, although the children live here, their teachers may not, and may not have much local knowledge. If we can help by supplying information and incentives, so much the better for the future of Parkgate.

What teachers may choose to do with such incentives is, of course, entirely up to them. As a first venture, the children in Class 5 painted some attractive and accurate portraits of buildings on the Parade. For these we awarded three book-token prizes and sixteen certificates.

# **THE VISIT OF MRS. FITZHERBERT TO PARKGATE, C. 1799**

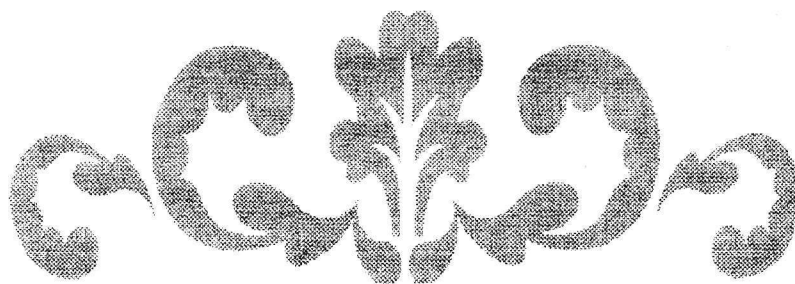
Maria Anne Smythe (1756-1837) was twice married before she met George, Prince of Wales, later George IV. She married him in a secret ceremony in 1785, when he was 23 and she was 29. But the marriage was regarded as invalid in law because the king had not given his consent: nor could he under the constitution, because she was a Roman Catholic. They separated in 1794 because George married Princess Caroline of Brunswick in 1795. But George and Mrs. Fitzherbert came together again in 1800 and until 1811, when George became Prince Regent. (Nothing is new)!

According to a document called "Lord Stourton's narrative", in 1799 the Prince was trying to obtain a reconciliation with Mrs. Fitzherbert: "in the meantime, while the negotiation was pending, she obtained a promise from His Royal Highness that he would not follow her into her retreat in Wales, where she went to a small bathing-place."

Although we may flinch a bit about being located "in Wales", it is believed her small bathing place was Parkgate. No contemporary record of her visit has been found, but Mrs. Gamlin wrote in "Twixt Mersey and Dee",:

She rented a large house up the shore because there was good stabling attached to it." (This house was said to be the Talbot Inn, now called Talbot House.) "She was an excellent horsewoman and the late father of Mrs. Cooper used to saddle the great lady's horse and help her to mount. While she was resident in Parkgate, English soldiers were encamped on the shore to the number of seven hundred under orders to sail for Ireland, for it was the time of the great rebellion (which started in 1798). Fearing that their rations were limited, Mrs. Fitzherbert in the kindness of her heart, out of her private purse, allowed a quarter of a sheep and a measure of potatoes among every seven men during the halt."

Geoffrey Place



## BUGGEN LANE

Buggen Lane, which leads from Park Street in Neston to Parkgate Road between high sandstone walls, is a place of some atmosphere. With Moorside Lane below it, it once formed the southern boundary of Neston Park and may therefore have been formed with the park about 1250. The land to the north of it was called Parkhead before Leighton Court was built in 1889. The land on the Neston side was one of the town fields - large open fields in which several farmers cultivated a number of strips. The feeling of being in a tunnel in Buggen Lane was greater when the grounds of Leighton Court stretched the whole length of one side, and the grounds of the house called Townfield and Elm Grove House occupied the other side. It is a pity that the walls have been pierced to give access to so many modern houses.

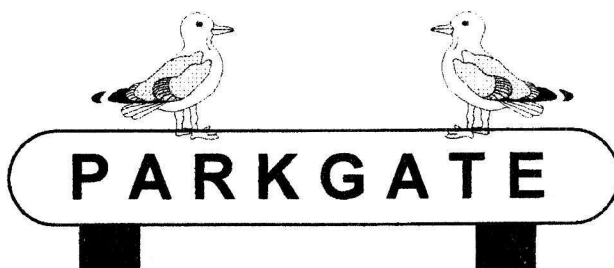
Although the stone walls are probably nineteenth-century, the ground level was higher on both sides. We know that the northern boundary of Neston Park, on the line of Brookland Road and Mostyn Square was marked by a "great double ditch", where two parallel ditches were dug with the spoil thrown up on either side, making an immovable boundary. Was Buggen Lane formed the same way? We cannot tell, but it seems possible.

But what of the buggen? A buggen is a ghost, like the Welsh word bwgan. Bogy, bogle and boggart are similar words. Oddly enough, for an area where people readily invent legends, there is no folk lore of what ghost there might have been. So if anyone sees one there, please let me know!

When the Mostyn estate was sold in 1849 and it was hoped to attract developers, the lane was primly marked "Prospect Road" on the sale plan, perhaps from fear of the buggen or from a coarse misinterpretation of the word. More recently a plan to provide a Neston bypass and "improve" the access to Parkgate would have sent traffic down a widened Buggen Lane, destroying its walls and its character. Fortunately the buggen was left in peace and the charm of the lane remains.

If we were herons  
we could have been  
immortalized!

Geoffrey Place



## PARKGATE C P S COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Recently appeared on national television to show the work done on a tapestry depicting the character of Parkgate. Lynne Stein, a textile artist visited the school to demonstrate the technique of rag rug work and class 6 used drawings they thought showed Parkgate's unique character:- a cricket bat and ball, a sunset, fish & chips, an ice cream, a heron, black & white buildings plus the wildlife on the Wirral Way.

The whole school, plus staff, Muriel Tinker having been coopted for her craft skills, parents and visitors have all taken a turn and the work has been on show at Ness Gardens' Visitors' Centre alongside other work by local primary schools.

You will perhaps remember seeing Lynne Stein working in Neston library. The traditional rag rug was used to cover floors in the home and was made by ordinary people <sup>from</sup> scraps of material. The techniques <sup>of</sup> "hooky" and "proggy" were used in her work, incorporating a wide variety of recycled fabrics such as wool and silk, to create eye-catching, textured pictures, rugs and wall hangings using a variety of colour blends and textures with a 3-D effect. Works of richness and beauty can be made from basic remnants and clothing items which might otherwise have been discarded.

# **MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL CENTENARY**

## ***An introduction to the Canal and its influence on Ellesmere Port 1894 - 1994***

(With Thanks to Ellesmere Port & Neston B C Department of Tourism)

### ***Introduction***

The Manchester Ship Canal was created to service the need to link Manchester to the sea and thereby reduce the costs of the transport element of the city's trading activities. The concept of a waterway linking Manchester directly to the sea had been mooted as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century but it wasn't until 1887 that the first sod was cut by Lord Egerton. Ellesmere Port benefited from the advantage of being a transshipment port at the junction of the two canals (the other being the Shropshire Union Canal) and its population increased with the prosperity brought by the new commercial and industrial activity. The Manchester Ship Canal, known as 'the People's Canal', was a major success for the small shareholder. Capital for the project was financed without government money by 39,000 shareholders from all sections of the community, at the time the largest number of investors in any private company.

### ***The Construction***

This massive engineering project was divided into sections, each one having its own workforce and equipment. During 1888 the Eastham to Ellesmere Port section employed 1,000 men, 5 steam excavators and 12 locomotives as well as having a blacksmith's shop. Most of the material (53 million tons in total) was dug out by men with shovels and wheelbarrows and much of it was used for embankments or 'bunds' to separate the Canal from the River Mersey. The Eastham to Ellesmere Port embankment is about two miles long and the highest point at 200 feet is Mount Manisty, named after the section engineer.

Apart from the labourers and engineers, the project employed tradesmen such as masons, carpenters and bricklayers as well as crane, excavator and engine drivers.

### ***The Workforce***

The Manchester Ship Canal represents perhaps one of the last major excavation projects to be done by hand in the western world. Manpower was immensely important, often being more effective than machinery, although the use of the steam excavator speeded up progress. Many of the navvies were locals from Cheshire and Lancashire and lived in crudely constructed villages of wooden 'hovels', close to the work site; one of these was at Stanlow Point.

### ***Development***

The import of raw cotton and export of finished textiles was the main basis for the Ship Canal link to Manchester. There was also a distinct advantage in a waterfront location for other industries which needed easy access to transport raw materials cheaply to domestic and overseas markets. By the early 20th century new companies had set up along the Canal which had an impact on the growth of Ellesmere Port. These included ship and engine repairing, smelting of non-ferrous metals, chemical manufacture and

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## MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL

*Continued*

flour milling. The town's population rose from 4,082 in 1901 to 16,000 in 1926.

The Manchester Ship Canal Company was able to respond and adapt to developments in cargo handling, particularly the bulk carrying of oil and containerisation. In 1922 and 1933 on the isolated site of the medieval Stanlow Abbey, two oil docks were built on the Mersey side of the Canal where the Shell Oil Company was to locate oil storage tanks and underground pipelines which extended throughout the country. Later, in 1954, the Manchester Ship Canal Company constructed the Queen Elizabeth II Dock at Eastham designed to load and discharge bulk liquid petroleum products, chemicals and edible oils. This is the largest enclosed dock in the United Kingdom.

### *The Manchester Ship Canal Today*

The main entrance to the Canal is through the two locks at Eastham. The lower section of the Canal is busy today, handling most of its oil traffic through the Queen Elizabeth II Dock along with the Stanlow Oil Docks. Forest products, pulp, newsprint, steel and bulk products are handled at Manisty Wharf whilst the Ellesmere Port section provides storage and warehouse accommodation together with "roll on, roll off" facilities for unusual loads.

### *Manchester Ship Canal Vantage Points*

The Canal can be viewed from Stuart's Wharf and North Pier (Ellesmere Port) and Seaview Drive (Eastham).

Canals have played an important role in the history of Ellesmere Port; in the 18th Century it was the construction of the Shropshire Union Canal followed a hundred years later by the Manchester Ship Canal, Britain's last and biggest canal.



## FACTS

### **LENGTH:**

35.5 miles, 57 Kilometres

### **WIDTH:**

230 feet, 70 metres

### **DEPTH:**

28 feet, 8.5 metres

### **LOCKS:**

There are five locks, raising the Canal by a total of 60 feet and 6 inches from the Mersey estuary at Eastham to Pomona Docks in Manchester.

### **JOURNEY TIME:**

From Eastham to Manchester 6 - 8 hours.

### **OPENING:**

Officially opened on 21st May, 1894 by Queen Victoria.

### **EXCAVATION:**

An estimated 53 million tons of rock and earth was excavated.

### **WORKFORCE:**

The construction employed 16,000 men.

### **WAGES:**

The average weekly wage was between one pound and 25 shillings (£1.00 - £1.25).

### **ACCIDENTS:**

1,292 accidents occurred from 1887 - 1892, 130 fatal, 165 leading to disability.

### **COSTS:**

£15 million



## **GET ON YOUR BIKE**

The charity Sustrans (it stands for Sustainable Transport- i.e. routes for cyclists and walkers) who have been awarded £42 million from the National Lottery Millennium Fund, are working to complete a National Cycle Network. The network will pass within two miles of over 20 million people.

Discussions are currently taking place within the Wirral for a route to link Liverpool with Chester and Flintshire. A substantial amount of money could be pumped into the area to improve routes, building amenities and interpretation through quiet lanes and possibly the Wirral Way. The plan for the National Cycle Network is that it will go through the middle of most major towns and cities in the U.K. serving homes, shops, schools and offices.

Half the Network will be traffic-free: built along old railway lines, canal towpaths, riversides and derelict land. These high quality routes will be open to cyclists and to pedestrians, and often convenient for pushchairs and wheelchairs too.

The other half will be on roads. Town roads will be traffic-calmed or have cycle lanes, while quiet minor roads will be chosen for country sections.

Special road crossings will ensure safety throughout. There are more bicycles than cars in Britain, but they are little used because traffic conditions deter people.

The Trans Pennine Trail is, at the time of writing, due to open in July in Barnsley, the first European Long Distance Footpath in Britain. It will form part of E8 (currently Rotterdam to Istanbul).

I may just get on my bike after many years, should the conditions exist for me to feel safe to do so. BF

*(It would be worth paying to witness such a spectacle !! GM)*

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**Editor: Becky Ford, The Moorings, The Parade, Parkgate,  
to whom all contributions should be sent.**

**Telephone 336 5088**

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## **Cheshire Magistrates'**

### **Courts**

### **Open Day**

**Saturday 28th September  
10 am - 4 pm  
Guided Tours & Mock Trials.**

A chance to see the Chester Courthouse, now used by the Ellesmere Port & Neston Bench, from the Magistrates' point of view.

**The Couthouse,  
Grosvenor Street,  
Chester.**

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## **1st Neston Scout Group**

### **Grand Auction Goods & Promises**

**Tuesday, 15th October 1996,  
7.30pm  
Neston Town Hall**

Everyone welcome.

If you have any goods, services or promises which the Scouts can auction, please contact Becky on 336 5088 or Gill on 336 5911.

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Secretary: Mrs A.M. Clarke, Sea View, The Parade, Parkgate (336 1069)