

Parkgate Society Newsletter

Autumn 1997

Issue Number 53

Meetings

We meet at 8 pm at the Parkgate Hotel.
If you need help with transport please
ring Angela Clarke on 336 1069 giving
24 hours notice.

Diary Dates

Monday 29th September

25 years of the Wirral Country Park
An illustrated talk by a countryside ranger.

Monday 27th October

A.G.M. at 7.30 pm
Your chance to tell us what you want for
your society.
Followed at 8.00 pm by -
Birkenhead Tramways Mr J.Coles will be
treating us to an illustrated talk.

Monday 1st December

"Listed, not Listing" A talk on local listed
buildings by Valerie Hozack. *Liverpool*

Subscriptions:

If you have not yet paid 1997 subscriptions
we would be grateful if you contact Valerie
Place at our meetings or at her home
(Pendmore, Station Road, Parkgate).
Subscriptions are (per house),
£4.00 Family or Single,
£2.50 Senior Citizens.
Donations very welcome.

A.G.M.

Monday, 27th October, 7.30pm

According to our constitution, nominations
for election of committee members shall be
made in writing at least 14 days before the
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Such nominations shall be supported by
proposer and seconder and the consent of
the nominee shall first have been obtained.

The committee members are currently
Geoffrey Place (Chairman)
Michael Potts (Vice Chairman)
Angela Clarke (Secretary)
Clive Edwards (Treasurer)
Shirley Britt, Becky Ford, Stephen Gordon,
Jerry Harris, Valerie Place,
Anne Williamson, Ron Wright.

These members are willing to serve again.

Car Related Problems in Parkgate

Our Chairman, Geoffrey, has recently been
in consultation with three town planning
students (working with the local authority)
to study possible solutions to car parking
and congestion in Parkgate. We await a
workable solution to these problems that
would not result in drastic alterations to our
community or jeopardise in any way our
local businesses.

NEWS AND VIEWS

We are sorry to learn that our **local countryside ranger, Bernie McLinden**, who has served us so well for a number of years, has left the district. He has moved to Flint in order to further his career as a ranger. We wish him well, and welcome Chris Smith as his replacement.

The Borough Council is experimenting with ways to enclose the edges of the **gutters** which direct the surface water from the Parade onto the marsh. The metal edges which have been missing for some time could be a danger for pedestrians. The Council has tried casing the openings with concrete.

The postal **pillar boxes** have all been given a coat of paint and in addition to the post box red we have been treated to golden crowns and black lettering.

We are awaiting the siting of the **Donkey Stand plinth** on which the Rotary Club will erect the panorama plaque, the prizewinning entry to a competition run for young people in 1995. We have seen the plaque, which is interesting and informative. If all goes well the construction should be completed by the time you read this!

The **Parkgate Conservation Area** sign has been replaced and you may notice the ship's flag is now blowing the correct way! !

Our Anniversary planting of **daffodils** at the entry points to Parkgate have put on an excellent show this Spring, I'm sure you will agree. The planting will be extended in the Autumn in the Station Road area.

We believe that the PCC of **St. Thomas' Church** has decided to re-apply for planning permission to demolish the building with the intention of erecting a new building eventually. It appears that the congregation has voted in favour of this decision.

However, the local press has reported recently that the church will be put up for sale.

The Society has given a donation of £100 to **Parkgate Primary School** to be spent on trees (one must be a horse chestnut!) The school has been establishing a Grounds Development Scheme to make a more interesting environment for children's play. A willow plantation has been created so that art materials can be grown. The children have also had hands-on growing experience by entering the junior petunia competition (judged at Gordale), and by creating their own living miniature gardens.

Our Chairman, on behalf of the Society, has again presented prizes to children at Parkgate School for their artwork produced while studying the local history.

We were pleased to see in the school's Ofsted Report that they were congratulated on their links with the community.

The site of the old Bath House was getting very untidy and attracting further dumping of rubbish. The owner, acting on instruction from the Council, has now tidied the site and removed the portacabin that has been there for some time.

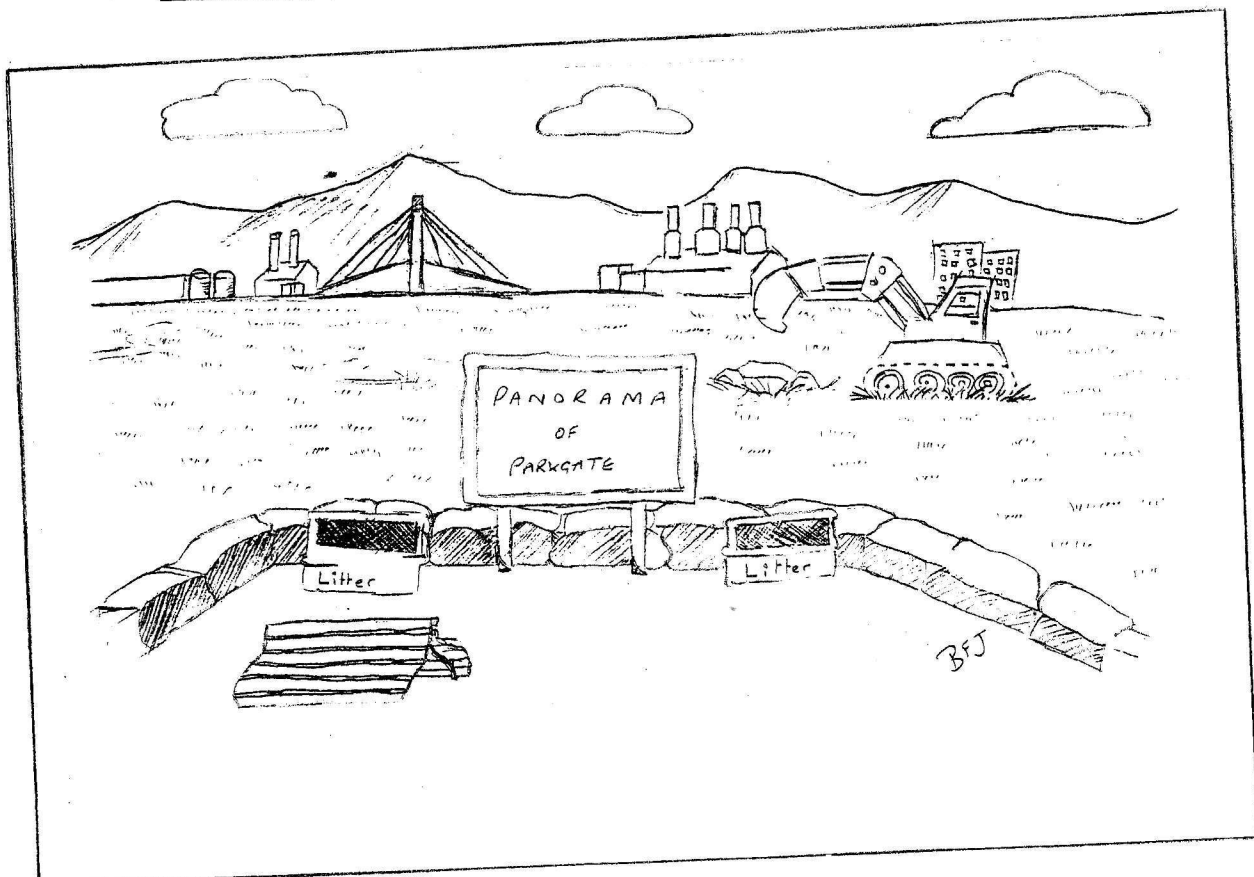
Chester Carriage Driving Club held an event in Parkgate in mid-August. Many ponies in traps of various types could be seen taking part in the long distance phase using the Leighton Road, Boathouse Lane areas of Parkgate.

Thankfully the bare expanse of mud from gutter clearing on the marsh has now been colonised by plants. The RSPB warden apologised for the spoil saying that things did not totally follow his intentions. The RSPB is continuing with its scheme to control mosquitoes on the marsh.

The Care 4 Kids charity held a Summer Ball on land at the Old Baths. A huge marquee was used for the function which was attended by over 400 guests, many of whom could be seen walking through Parkgate in their finery. The event went smoothly and appeared to be well organised. The site was cleared speedily. Money raised is to benefit Claire House and a children's ward at Arrowe Park Hospital.

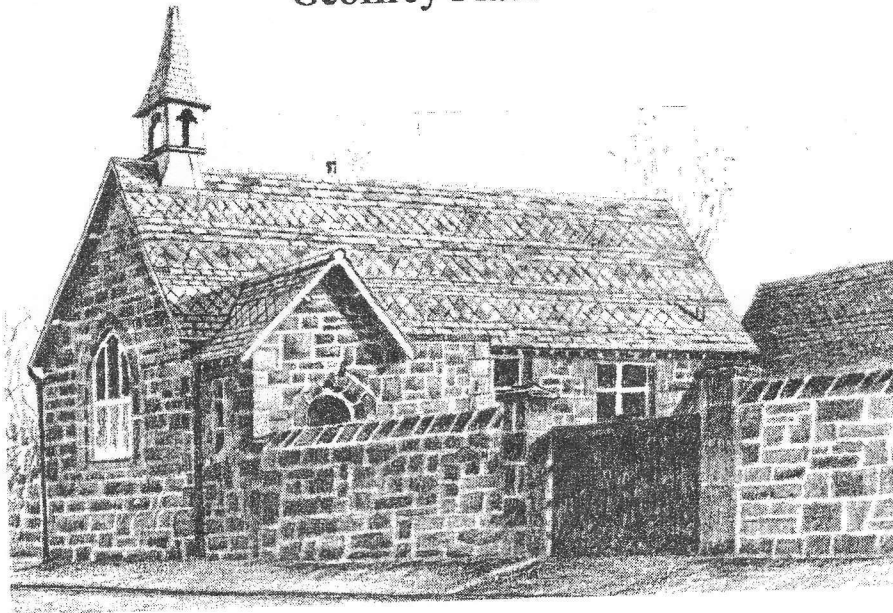
The land on Boathouse Lane has now been bought by the Badger Pony Sanctuary, a charitable organisation. The hedge to Boathouse Lane has been trimmed and the area is being fenced and tidied.

Well done to the organisers.



THE INFANT SCHOOL - PARKGATE

Geoffrey Place



The old infants' school, now a private house, stands behind St. Thomas' Church. It was designed by Thomas Penson, the Chester architect who was responsible for the black-and-white revival in that city. His name is on the plans for the Liverpool Road school in Neston. As the Parkgate school was built immediately afterwards with similar design features, we can accept that Penson designed both, although he did not sign the Parkgate plans which are dated 1859. The exact date of opening has not been found. It was probably in 1860, and we know that Margaret Walker was the mistress in 1861.

Unfortunately the school's first log book has not survived, so we have scrappy information until the second log book starts in 1886. From at least 1864 to 1874 the mistress was Annie Kerns, who then moved to Liverpool Road. Her first entry in its log book reads, "Surprised to find many of the children very dirty and untidy". Presumably Parkgate children had higher standards. Miss Kerns remained at Neston until her death, aged only 44, in 1886, after suffering an accident at school. She is commemorated by a window in the parish church.

The careers of two of the early teachers illustrates how teaching skills were acquired by apprenticeship. Annie Bushell had been a monitress (a senior pupil who helped the mistress) at Parkgate in August 1891. When she left school (Neston) in 1892, she became a pupil teacher at Parkgate and signed her indentures in May 1894. She taught at Parkgate until 1896 and returned as mistress in 1906. She remained there until 1919, the school's longest serving head. She then went as Head of Neston Infants School until 1929.

Catherine Norman, born in 1889, came to Parkgate as a pupil teacher in 1903. In 1907 she gained her Preliminary Certificate and was appointed assistant mistress. Her salary had started at £5 a year, going up each year to £20. In 1910 she qualified as a teacher and was then entitled to £45 a year. This was too much for Parkgate, so she went briefly to the "top school" in Liverpool Road before being appointed assistant mistress at Little Neston. She retired in 1921 to marry (and become mother of David Scott the artist) and died in 1979 aged 90.

Until 1907 the mistress at Parkgate always had a monitress or pupil teacher to help her and from 1907 to 1914 she had a qualified assistant. After 1914, however, she seems to have been on her own until 1953. Numbers varied widely, from 62 on the roll in 1896 (but an average attendance of 45) to 14 in 1946. Children could be admitted from the age of 3 and transferred to Neston at the age of 8 until 1899, after which they transferred at 6 or 7. They transferred on November 1st because that was the official start of the school year, although actually in the middle of term. The school year was made to start in August from 1905.

The best part of the school building was the patterned slate roof, but in other respects the design was poor. Inspectors constantly criticised the heating, lighting and ventilation. "The room was very cold," commented the inspector in 1885, and Catherine Norman was troubled by the cold. "Four large holes in the roof, made for ventilation, produce an intolerable draught."

In 1887 a corrugated iron room was installed in the playground to increase the accommodation. It stayed there until 1938. Then an air raid shelter was built there which proved so durable that several attempts to demolish it failed. It was finally removed in 1994.

One day in 1897 an inspector arrived to find that the mistress was late and the room very cold. He made some strong comments about both the temperature and the punctuality. Mrs Comber of Leighton Brow, a staunch visitor and supporter for 25 years, presented a clock to the school as a result.

A common reason for absence was bad weather. In 1916, it was noted "The attendance has been low this week owing to the gales and high tides, some of the children being unable to get along the shore." In 1929, "Bitterly cold. To relieve distress, stockings and underclothing were distributed to necessitous cases. The parents were very grateful for the gifts." In the same year, "I have bought a strong draught screen. The money was obtained by a sale of work and a gift." In 1933, "Snow blizzard. A little girl blew over returning from the lavatory. Her hand badly

cut," The problem of poor lighting was not solved until electricity was installed belatedly in 1939. Then only two lights were installed, increased to seven 20 years later.

The school sometimes had problems with outsiders. In June 1940 there was a dispute because adults insisted on the right to use the school's air raid shelter. In 1946 the problem was that busmen and lorry drivers were using the school lavatories because there were no public ones.

The mistress immediately after the war, Winifred Broad, was one of the few unsuccessful ones. In 1947, "Late five minutes - ill - would not have been in school if anyone to take my place. Rev. J. East (the vicar) was in school having heard I was late on 7th March. Reprimanded me in front of the children without asking anything about it or giving me a chance to explain." Six months later the inspectors called: "Ominous . . . I was at a disadvantage - they came before 9 am and I had not even tidied my hair. They did nothing but fault find." In April 1948, "Received unsatisfactory report here for the first time in my life . . . Report was untrue and unjust." Two weeks later, "Sent in my resignation . . . owing to the unpleasantness of the vicar who always said he would get me out - so Christian of him!"

In 1962 Joyce Aldred became the Head and assisted by Patricia Southey, she ran Parkgate Infants School for its last six years, closing finally on 13th September 1968. Three days later the new Parkgate County Primary School opened. Miss Aldred was its headteacher for ten years before she retired. She is still living in Moorside Lane.

In 1970 the old school building was sold and used for a playgroup and occasional exhibitions. In 1977 it was converted to a private house.

BOOKS

A new book has been written to coincide with the centenary of Ness Botanic Gardens. Entitled "A Pioneering Plantsman" the book has been written by Brenda McLean a Fellow of the University of Liverpool, where she was formerly a lecturer in biogeography.

She tells the story of Arthur K. Bulley a colourful character of the Liverpool Cotton Exchange. A keen socialist, a shrewd businessman he would go to great lengths to secure new plants for his nursery, Bees Ltd.

Using letters, journals and Bee's catalogues Brenda McLean recaptures the enthusiasms and frustrations of Bulley and the botanists, gardeners and plant hunters who shared his zeal.

A Pioneering Plantsman can be obtained from Ness Gardens gift shop and other good bookshops priced £29.

MAGAZINES

-THE BIG ISSUE -

I thought this magazine deserved a mention in ours, because I have found few local people who understand its purpose and because their 17th March magazine included an excellent "out and about" type article on Parkgate, complete with colour photograph.

You may have seen people selling this magazine in the street in Chester, Birkenhead or Liverpool. Did you buy one or walk away, perhaps thinking it was an extreme political magazine and so be put off? Or think the person was a bit scruffy and was begging and avoid him or her?

The truth is that it is a weekly magazine of general scope, including some articles

concerning homelessness, which has been created for sale by some homeless people. This is to give them both a means of earning some money and just as important, self respect and a chance to work towards a job and a place of their own to live.

Becoming homeless can happen suddenly to people. Some young people are even thrown out by their own parents. A loss of job, getting in with a bad crowd or finding life difficult to cope with for someone lacking family help, can all be reasons.

So please support "The Big Issue" vendors, that are officially "badged" and have a friendly word with them!

Clive Edwards

PARKGATE FLIGHTS

Three ravens were seen flying over the golf course (not quite Parkgate) in March making their loud calls. Perhaps they had come for a day out from the Welsh mountains or even the Tower of London!

Perhaps they had read "The Big Issue"! It has not been reported if they stopped off for ice cream or shrimps. Whatever they did they left no litter, unlike some human louts on the Friday after our marsh clearance. They threw their take away meal containers down on to the marsh within feet of a litter bin. A crowd of drunken youths were seen "walking" back to Neston at 11.30pm and a fence by the Wirral Way entrance was damaged. They seemed by their laughter to be really enjoying themselves!

Editor. Ravens have nested this year on Chester Cathedral roof. Being such a rare occurrence, the Tourist Information Office in the Town Hall installed a TV screen on which the public could watch the ravens and young in the nest.

PARKGATE VIEWED FROM AFAR

by Geoffrey Place

The following was written by Emlyn Williams, the actor and playwright, in his autobiography **George**. The incident would have been in 1909 when he was four years old. His father kept a pub at that time near the village of Mostyn.

From the height behind Pen-y-maes, a field away, you could see across to the Cheshire Plain; and once, sitting with my father in the trap on his way down to Mostyn for beer, I asked him what that place was over the water, with all that sand? He said it was another country, where Welsh was not spoken and the public houses were open on Sunday. I remembered the Sahara, and asked if it was Africa? He laughed and said it was and that on a clear day you could see elephants walking in and out of Parkgate.

A NEW GROUP OF SHOPS

from "Architectural Review" vol. LXXV111 Sept. 1935.

A member recently brought this article to our attention. Nicholls Ice Cream Shop.

"The colour scheme was carried out in collaboration with E.R.F.Cole. The cafe ceiling is in Eau de Nil, the walls are ivory, the door architraves and the window bars aluminium, the door tangerine. The floor and stairs are laid with black rubber tiles. The frames of the steel chairs are painted Eau de Nil, and the backs and seats are black. The table tops are of black glass.

MEMORIES OF THE WAR

by Geoffrey Place

One of our members helped to find billets for evacuees from Wallasey, who arrived at Neston and Parkgate on 2nd September 1939, the day before war was declared. The children for Parkgate were assembled in the covered playground at Mostyn House. Armed with lists provided by the Council, two volunteers then led tearful children, with gas masks hanging round their necks, from house to house. In theory householders were obliged to take them, but some refused. Placing the children was a heartbreaking task. Our member, having found a house which would take two mothers with babies, drove one of the mothers back to Wallasey to fetch a cot.

On a lighter note, Hylda Wall-Jones was taken one day, with her parents, to lunch at the Union Hotel (now the Ship) by her brother. "It was a ghastly meal and my brother thundered,

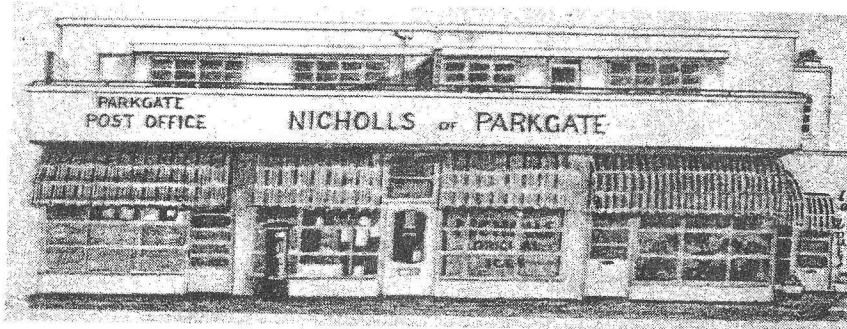
'I would like to see the manager. Please bring him'.

'I am sorry sir,' muttered the waiter, 'but he has gone out for lunch.' "

Any other anecdotes or memories of the war years in or near Neston and Parkgate will be very welcome to Geoffrey Place (336 2891)

The centre shop, primarily used for the sale of ice cream, is convertible, with the balcony and bedrooms for use as a cafe."

Steel, aluminium and black glass, not to mention the tangerine door, and this was 1935. Some ideas here for Mr Collier for 1998!!



HOW TO MAKE PARKGATE A PROSPEROUS HEALTHY RESORT

Reprinted from the Chester Chronicle, 22 Sept., 1909

How frequently the wearied man of business, the invalid, the anaemic, or the broken-down in health sighs for or anxiously enquires after some locality, east, west, north or south, where he may have a change of air and recover his health and spirits, or prevent the early development of pulmonary symptoms. While looking up the various seaside resorts, each of them loudly proclaiming by pictures and advertisements their claim to sympathy and support, he quite overlooked the fact that within a radius of twelve miles from Chester or Liverpool, is such a place. It is true there is no puff or advertising placards; no, the place is old, decayed, and has nearly passed out of mind. Perhaps it may be because the waters have left the shore, or the indifference of the inhabitants; it is nevertheless true, there is such a place supplied, not so much by man but by the vast resources of nature, with just the air jaded or unhealthy humanity requires. This is no other than the old, quaint and lapsed village of Parkgate on the banks of the Dee.

How often we speak of the good old times, forgetting that our ancestors of 200 years ago were wiser than we are, for they appreciated in those far away days the beautiful air of Parkgate better than we do of the present day. Why did they do so? Why were more than 14 hotels (note 1) and numerous private houses built and crowded with the fashion of the day, also the many invalids in search of health? It was not the houses or hotels, nor even the medical advisers; but it was that which nature has so lavishly provided, free to all - that salubrious air of the locality. This air is peculiar to the vicinity of Parkgate owing to its wonderful combination. It is created by the fresh invigorating breezes which blow from the Welsh mountains across the vast expanse of sand and mud which extends for miles, and blends with the fresh tidal waters from the Irish Sea. It gives brightness to the eyes, colour to the cheeks.

Ask the residents of Parkgate or the Scripture readers from Liverpool who during their holidays reside in the mission house (note 2); or the many invalids who for a few weeks stay at the well-conducted convalescent home (note 3). Ask the visitors who crowd here in the season, or the more numerous visitors who come for the pure air, many of whom would like to make a longer stay if facilities were afforded them. One family were so benefited in health that they are anxious to book the same apartments for the whole of August next year. On enquiry of the volunteers who have just left here (note 4), the consensus of opinion was that it is a delightful air, and its effects would be lasting.

When the sun shines out on the silvery waters of the Dee, and we look on the magnificent panorama stretching out before us, we feel it can scarcely be equalled in quiet beauty for fifty miles around. Opposite stands Flint Castle, hoary with age and its Plantagenet traditions. On the summit of the hill close by is Halkyn Castle, the Welsh seat of the Duke of Westminster. On the other hand, should we confine our thoughts and walks to the neighbourhood of Parkgate, there are plenty of quiet sequestered nooks, with shady lanes and secluded spots.

As one benefited by the air of the place, I will venture to suggest a few of the needs and requirements wanted so that Parkgate as in the olden days may stand on its merits. None

- 1 should be allowed to throw decaying matter, or anything to cause a nuisance, on the foreshore.
- 2 As arrangements may be made, the houses on the narrow part of the promenade be thrown back, leaving a broad footwalk and a noble roadway.
- 3 Plant some lime or other trees, protected, all along the promenade, also a few seats for visitors. It is not very dignified to be seated on the stone wall.
- 4 A few gas lamps, or better still the electric light, introduced in the principal thoroughfares would throw a charm on Autumn or Winter evenings. (Note 5)
- 5 Get rid of the old and insanitary dwellings up many of the courts and on the front. Rebuild suitable boarding houses, hydros, and some small neat villas with gardens, to take in visitors, not to exceed £20 per annum, all of them modern construction, with up to date appliances such as bathrooms etc; also recreation and tea rooms for visitors.
- 6 The railway companies should have a better service. No train to Liverpool or Chester ought to take longer than half an hour with through carriages.
- 7 Let a syndicate be formed, or the authorities and owners bestir themselves, and do their best to make the place and its surroundings inviting and comfortable, then the future of Parkgate is assured.
- 8 If man will only do his duty as suggested in the above, nature, so lavish and free, will continue to do hers. Parkgate, rising like a phoenix from its ashes, purified and rejuvenated, may yet rival or even surpass the proud position she held upwards of 200 years ago, as one of the leading health resorts in the United Kingdom.

NOTES (1-5) by Geoffrey Place.

- 1) This is a myth. There were no hotels in Parkgate "200 years ago", the first being the Mostyn Arms Hotel opened in 1818. Before that there were inns and beerhouses, but never as many as 14 at one time. Perhaps six ?
- 2) The mission house was the house nearest the river opposite the Station Road Cottages, where the Old Quay pub now stands. It was the former Custom House. In the 1920s it was owned or leased by Christ Church, Great Homer St., Liverpool and was used by them as a convalescent or holiday home.
- 3) The convalescent home run by Chester Royal Infirmary stood on the present site of Deeside Court. In 1923 it was renamed Rigby House and used as a holiday home. It was demolished in the 1950s.
- 4) The "volunteers" were volunteer soldiers, usually Royal Artillery, who camped on Parks Field in the summer from 1900 to 1921.
- 5) Neston's gas works opened in 1882. We are not sure when gas lamps were installed on Parkgate Parade but they should have been there in 1909. They were not converted to electricity until 1965.

Editor: Becky Ford, The Moorings, The Parade.

Secretary: Mrs. A.M. Clarke, 5 Tithebarn Drive, Parkgate. (336 1069)

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