

# Parkgate Society Newsletter

Autumn 2000

Issue Number 59

## Meetings

We meet at 8pm upstairs at the **Boathouse**. If you need help with transport please ring Angela Clarke, our secretary, giving 24hours notice (336 1069).

### *Diary dates—Autumn 2000/2001*

- 18 Sept The changing landscape of Wirral  
by Elizabeth Davey
- 23 Oct AGM at 7.30pm followed by  
The Battle of Rowton Moor  
by David Cummings
- 27 Nov A fortnight in the French  
Pyrenees  
by Peter Cunningham
- 22 Jan Homewatch  
by Bob Cain (Chairman Home  
Co-ordinators Group)
- 19 Feb A Night on the Tiles -nocturnal  
Naturalist.  
by Jeff Clarke (Countryside  
Ranger)
- 19 Mar Discover the Waterfront (Liverpool  
& Birkenhead.  
by Valerie Hozack

Non-members are welcome

## Character Appraisal

The Millennium collection of photos and leaflets of Parkgate in the year 2000 will be on view at the AGM meeting.

## AGM

Monday, 23rd 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 a proposer and seconder and the consent of the nominee shall first have been obtained.

## COMMITTEE CHANGES

Fiona Gow is moving out of the area and is therefore having to give up her post with the society. Fiona has been a committee member for two years. We offer our thanks to her and wish her well in her new home.

The remaining committee members are willing to serve again. They are Geoffrey Place (chairman), Michael Potts (vice-chairman), Clive Edwards (treasurer), Angela Clarke (secretary), Becky Ford, Stephen Gordon, Jeremy Harris (assist. Newsletter), Liz Marrs, Valerie Place (subscriptions), Anne Williamson (newsletter).

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

£4.00 Family or Single /year

£2.50 Senior Citizens /year

Payment can be made at any of our meetings or directly to Mrs Valerie Place, Pendmore, Station Rd., Parkgate. Standing order forms are available, if required.

Donations are welcome.

## News and Views

Two more additions to the list of **Parkgates** have been pointed out, one in Cheshire at Taton Park and the other in Northern Ireland, making 41 in total, so far.

It is with regret that we record here the deaths of **Leonard Walker**, a member of the Parkgate Society and a former committee member for 14 years, and also the famous landowner from nearby Thornton Hough, who did much to shape the landscape of the Wirral, **Lord Leverhulme**, who died in early July, aged 85 years.

The Parkgate Society have discussed and funded the planting of a **new hedge** this Spring at Parkgate Primary School, along the frontage to Brookland Road.

The new **cycle path** seems very popular and many families with young children are making use of this new local amenity. The construction of the new surface from Parkgate Primary School through to Neston has however caused some deterioration in the adjacent **horse path**. Our local ranger, Saul, informs us that £10 000 has been made available recently to improve the horse path. The money will be spent on cutting back, drainage of certain areas (around Willaston), and some surface improvement, although £10 000 will not go very far!

Some destruction of the newly planted **daffodils** in Station Road occurred as the pavement for the cycle route was widened, but we have been assured that they will be replaced, if we can suggest a new site for them. Any suggestions!

The Council have agreed to our request for two new **litter bins** to be sited near the fish & chip shop on the Parade.

The Trust Deed for "**St. Thomas' Church & Community Centre, Parkgate, Fund**" has gone to the Charity Commissioners for approval. When this has been granted, the **fundraising** can begin in earnest. However, fund raising has been proceeding, with the Jazz Spirituals concert in Neston Church raising £1300 last September and The Red Lion also raising a large sum from a marvelous "closing down" party at the Parkgate Hotel in April, which many locals enjoyed.

The architects have now presented their **plans for St. Thomas'** to the project group. The plans have been seen by the congregation and the working party.

Demolition and building has been taking place since April at **The Parkgate Hotel**, and at the time of writing (August), several large houses can be seen taking shape in the old car park and gardens. The original house took on a new look of grandeur when all the non-original wings were removed. It looks to be well worth saving. Although the "Regency Court" name appears on the advertising, we have been consulted on a suitable name for the new road. The committee put forward several suggestions based on historically sound facts. The Council settled on "Green Way", which was the name of the lower section of Boathouse Lane (from Leighton Road downwards), on the Leighton Hall map of 1732 (see Autumn 1999 newsletter). Hopefully, this will ultimately be the one used.

Building has also been continuing on the property that is replacing the **Old Bath House**.

### Post-War Postcard of Parkgate

*Saturday 20th January  
Neston Parish Church*

*JAZZ*

*"Love & Friendship"*

*Proceeds to St. Thomas'  
Restoration*



#### APARTMENTS:

Long or Short Periods and Week-ends.

••

Full View of River Dee and Welsh Hills.

••

TEAS—Tea Room overlooking River Dec.

☉ TRY OUR NOTED POTTED ☉  
SHRIMPS AND FISH TEAS

Shrimps Dotted in Pure Butter on the  
Premises

☉ HOME-MADE PASTRY ☉  
AT LOWEST PRICES.

The Oldest Established Caterers in the District.

**H. M. STRINGER,  
IVY COTTAGE,  
PARKGATE,**

Tel. Neston 303.

CHES.

### The Dee Estuary Strategy

*A summary, by Geoffrey Place, based on an article by Dr Alan Jemmett, Project Manager of the Dee Estuary Strategy, in the Geographical Journal Nov 1998.*

The international importance of the Dee Estuary for waterfowl depends on avoiding human interference; yet there are many human activities, including industry, sport, fishing and recreation, which also have claims on the estuary, of which 39% was reclaimed "from the sea" (hence Sealand) between 1740 and 1916. Therefore a balance needs to be struck between competing interests.

Attempts to co-ordinate policies in the estuary, which is bordered by six local authorities and includes the boundary between England and Wales, are not new. The Dee Estuary Conservation Group was formed in the 1970s and the Dee Estuary Forum began meeting in 1985. But fresh impetus was given to the problems of estuaries generally by a House of Commons select committee, which published a report on Coastal Planning in 1992. This report called for integrated planning for estuary management. English Nature was given funds to encourage such initiatives and the Dee estuary was one of the first to benefit, because the pressures of industry were seen as a threat to its important wildlife. The existing Dee Estuary Forum decided that a Strategy should be established as a local initiative, without following any pre-set pattern. Dr Jemmett was appointed project manager. He sent a questionnaire to all interested parties, including the Parkgate Society, and he came to talk to our members.

The Strategy is funded by local authorities and government agencies and is overseen by an advisory group of 24 organizations, such as the Welsh Office, Mostyn Docks and the RSPB. It took the first three years, 1993-96, to develop the Strategy, which is a set of aims to encourage sustainable use and balance competing claims on the estuary. The aims are (very briefly):

- Clean water and shores,
- Protection and enhancement of wildlife,
- A prosperous and sustainable economy,
- Protection for the landscape,
- Good access and facilities for recreation,
- Education and information about the area,
- Management of the Dee's assets through a partnership of interests.

For these aims the Strategy set out numerous guidelines in 14 subject areas, one being, for example, Coastal Defences. As the Strategy is entirely voluntary, with no teeth to enforce co-operation, the first task of the advisory group was to persuade as many interested bodies as possible to endorse the Strategy, in the hope that they would then use its guidelines when making decisions. Getting endorsement was slow, for people needed to be persuaded that a voluntary partnership would actually work, but two years after its publication, the Strategy has been endorsed by 95 organisations.

Agreement was one thing; turning that into action is quite another. In 1996 the first Agenda for Action was published, listing 37 projects to be tackled in the next year. The projects mostly concerned information, publicity and management structures –

things which required little money, in fact, of these 37 projects, 15 were completed and a further 17 started within the year.

The support of the six local authorities round the estuary (Wirral, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Chester City, Cheshire, Flint and Denbigh) is vital to the success of the Strategy, but their commitment has varied. In some cases, news of the Strategy has not penetrated beyond a few officers. Inevitably in view of their voluntary nature the guidelines are used by organizations when it suits them and bypassed when it doesn't. Money is hard to come by and it worries Dr Jemmett (and should perhaps worry this Society) that our own borough council has withdrawn funding because of its own financial strictures.

Some participants, such as wildfowlers, welcome the voluntary approach. Others see it as a major drawback: British Gas said, "The primary weakness of the Strategy is that it is totally dependent on the voluntary co-operation of all the estuary users". Although Dr Jemmett can point to successes which are difficult to evaluate, notably the mechanism whereby all users can state their case to each other, he now believes that legislation is required to give the Dee Estuary Strategy (and other estuary management plans) increased power to influence decision-making and to provide enough money to make long-term planning possible.

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### The Listed Buildings of Parkgate

In addition to the list in the Newsletter of Spring 2000, there is a local list compiled by our Borough Council which draws attention to buildings/structures of interest in Parkgate, these are:

Nicholl's ice-cream shop	The Pill Box, Station Rd
1-6 Holywell Close	Mostyn House School
1-4 Sandheys	The Watch House
The Sea Wall	Dee Cottages

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THE PUBS AND HOTELS OF PARKGATE No. 5      A Series by Geoffrey Place.

### The Chester Arms and The Old Quay

The Chester Arms, also called The Chester Hotel, stood on Station Road where the car park for The Old Quay is now. It was not an old inn and the first mention found of it was in 1855. There used to be a row of houses beside it, opposite the present Station Road cottages, the one nearest the river being the former Custom House. In 1851 the census records The Custom House Tavern, an alehouse mentioned nowhere else. It may be that this was the first name of The Chester Arms.

There is little that can be said about this pub. The site was cleared in the early 1960s and replaced by The Old Quay, built in 1963. Its name at once presented a problem for those who seek to explain Parkgate, for it never had a quay. It had a sea wall, but that was built to make a parade for the sea bathing visitors and no ship could tie up to its concave wall. It had a wooden landing stage for the ferry to Flint. Sea-going ships used to anchor in the mainstream of the river, some fifty yards from the present sea wall. The real Old Quay was a mile up river from Parkgate, at Neston Quay.

**The History of Backwood**By Anne Williamson

The article, "The History of Backwood, Its Origins" in the January 2000 edition of the Parkgate Society Newsletter brought several interesting phone calls and discussions about Backwood, including a letter from former owner Mr. Ronald Parrington, giving important farming recollections which I will include in the next article. My research into the origins has continued at Cheshire Records Office and at the present time I am researching the exchange of two parcels of land in the Leighton Parish in 1759 which may give further information, as well as collecting more recent information for part 3, Life in the 1900s.

NOTE Backwood consisted of several dwellings and the main house (the Hall).

**Part 2—Life in the 1800s**

Following on from the earliest traceable proprietor/owner (so far) of Backwood, Edward Bennett (and wife Elizabeth) who possibly bought the house in 1792, and who died there in 1829 (wife died 1822), the next owner or tenant was John Irlam (ref. Pigot's Directory, 1834).

By 1837 Robert Abram Welsh, gentleman, and his wife Elizabeth had the Hall. The 1841 census for the Parish of Leighton names Robert Welch (30yrs) and Eliza Welch (30yrs) and their children Elizabeth aged 9 and Robert aged 7 (not born in Cheshire) and Ralph aged 5, Thomas aged 3 and George aged 1 (all born in Cheshire). Four other people lived with them in the same dwelling, a 60yr old servant, Elizabeth R., a 25yr old governess and William and Elizabeth Thomas both aged 20yrs and both servants. It must have been a very confusing household with four Elizabeths. In 1842, the servants William and Elizabeth Thomas had a son Peter, marked in the Parish Registers as illegitimate. The parish registers reveal a little more about the Welch (or Welsh) family. They had a daughter Maria born in 1837, in between Ralph and Thomas, and died aged 6 weeks. Thomas was recorded as Thomas Chaffers, and that after George, they had Jeremiah (1842) and Mary (1844), a total of eight births. The birth of Maria, the baby that died, was recorded in Neston Parish in May, 1837 and gave her residence as Backwood. The birth of Ralph a year earlier was not found at Neston, but was in Cheshire, Robert (junior) was not born in Cheshire, so the Welsh family probably arrived at Backwood in 1836. The birth of Mary (1844) is the last recording of the Welsh family at Backwood, and by the 1851 census, the Craig family were in residence.

The 1841 census illustrates the large families and the occupations of the times in Leighton; the Smiths, agricultural labourers with children aged 14, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2, plus a 50yr old relative, the Uptons, farmers with children aged 9, 8, 7, 6, 1 plus 70yr old relative, and the Washingtons, gardeners with six males living with them of various surnames (ages 15 and 30) and all described as woodmen, showing the importance still of Leighton Woods. England at the time was altering to Victorian styles and attitudes and the marriage the year before of Queen Victoria caused changes in the marriage ceremony itself, with the wearing of white wedding dresses rather than the best frock beginning now. For the wedding generally, the family and guests would gather together for the wedding "breakfast" with alcohol (commonly hot rum) and would then walk the couple of miles to church together. At church, the ceremony would have been less formal with more noise, chatter and clapping and more of a party atmosphere than today. The church would have been decorated with local wild flowers. The "reception" would be a cold buffet with pies and local produce, with drink in tankards and long clay pipes smoked by the men. The men of farming class would wear top hats and high colored waistcoats with scarf-like neckties and high waisted trousers with braces. The women would wear long dresses with ruffles and decoration on bodices and sleeves. Their hair would be long, centrally parted, generally in a bun and bonnets would be worn. Stockings were to the knee and held up with garters. Smallpox and cholera killed many children in these days (ref. The Real History Show TV 5/3/00 "Re-creation of a 1840 Wedding in Slaidburn, Lancs/Yorks").



But back to Backwood. In the years between the Welsh and Craig families, the parish registers show in 1847, Thomas Routledge, bricklayer of Backwood and his wife Ann had a baby daughter, Mary Anne, and in 1849, the gardener, John Shannon and his wife Jessie had a daughter, Ann, followed two years later by another daughter, Agnes. The 1851 census returns at Neston Library indicate that John and Jessie Shannon from Scotland, were both 30yrs when Agnes was born and lived at Backwood Cottage, together with their nephew and niece, both from Scotland. By 1851 Hugh Craig (aged 70yrs) and his wife Ann (55yrs) from Scotland had taken over the main house, with their son Hugh (22yrs. BA Cambridge and born Liverpool). One could speculate that John and Jessie Shannon may have come to live and work here for the Craigs, also from Scotland. If this was the case, this would put the Craigs arrival at Backwood as between 1844 and 1849. They remained here until the 1860s. The 1851 census also lists the Craig's other servants as Grace Thompson (59yrs, housekeeper/servant); Henry Mitchell (26yrs, bailiff from Carlisle and son of Robert Mitchell, a manufacturer); Charles Mitchell (19yrs groom from Carlisle), Elizabeth Mitchell (22yrs, housemaid from Carlisle); Catherine Dunn (29yrs cook from Ireland), and Isabella Lindsay (20yrs dairymaid from Scotland). In November, 1851 Henry Mitchell, the farm steward married Isabella, the dairymaid (daughter of a seafarer) and they had sons Robert (1852), Henry (1854), Charles (1856) and a daughter Ann Craig (1859) named after the mistress of the house.

The Deaths Register records the death of James Scott of Backwood in 1854, and the Marriage Registers in 1858 show the marriage of Ellis Price, a labourer of Backwood, and Martha Owens, both children of labourers, and both signing the registers with a cross as their mark, the witnesses were Henry and Elizabeth Mitchell, and signed with their names!

In 1861 (census), Hugh (landed proprietor) and Ann Craig and their son Hugh (then described as a merchant from Liverpool) still lived at the house. Their farm bailiff, now called cowman, Henry Mitchell (40yrs) and wife Isabella (30yrs), and their four children still lived there. Charles Mitchell, the groom, was now known as the bailiff and Elizabeth Mitchell was still housemaid. They had a new dairymaid, Janet Patterson (20yrs). The following year Charles Mitchell died aged 32years. In 1870, Lewis Ducker (19yrs), labourer of Backwood and son of a gardener, married Ann Jones (19yrs) of Neston.

By 1871 (census), the ownership had changed again with Theodore Rathbone (39yrs), JP and farmer, born Liverpool and his wife Maria (36yrs), born Birmingham, as the new residents. Their daughters May (4yrs) born Wales and Lucy (2yrs) born Neston lived with them as did five servants, Ann Jones (24yrs, waitress, born Wales), Mary Roberts (24yrs, housemaid, born Wales), Rachel Beamond (20yrs, cook, born Wales) and Sophia Robshaw (32yrs) and Charlotte Robshaw (19yrs) both born Yorkshire. Two other properties were listed. One housed Edward Francis (40yrs, coachman/domestic, born Flintshire), his wife Jane (29yrs, born Wales) and John (4yrs, born Wales) and the other was home to Charles Owen (45yrs, born Hertfordshire) and his wife Elizabeth (47yrs, born London). Theodore Rathbone was a member of the prominent Liverpool family, Sir William Rathbone was Lord Mayor of Liverpool 1837/38 and Eleanor Rathbone became a well known local MP in the 1920s. The University of Liverpool have named halls of residence after the family.

It is interesting to see how the gentry such as the Craigs and the Rathbones seem to move house with all their servants with their families and presumably all their livestock. One can speculate as to the enormous effort involved in moving long distances with all these people, farm equipment, feeds, animals and furniture, and all before the age of cars and lorries. The Rathbones may have benefited from the arrival in Parkgate of the Hooton to Parkgate railway (1866) and its extension from Parkgate to West Kirby in 1886.

In 1890 Theo Rathbone died aged 58yrs. A matching pair of ornate graves in Neston church yard, directly behind and next to the church have the inscription:

*"In Loving Memory of Theodore Rathbone born in Liverpool March 14 1832. Died at Backwood Oct 21 1890"*

*"IN Loving Memory of Mary widow of Theodore Rathbone of Backwood and eldest daughter of James Johnstone M.D. born in Birmingham March X1 1835 died Menaggio, Italy March 2nd 1913."*

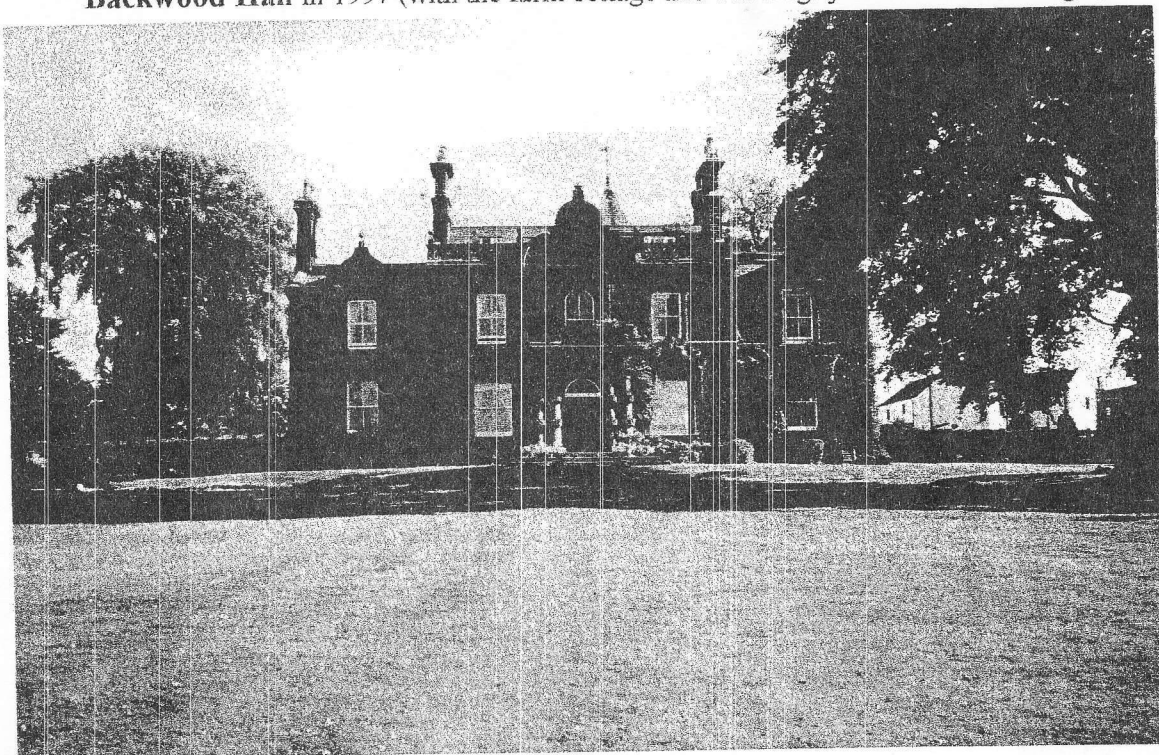
Keen to find out more about Theo Rathbone I looked through old Chester Chronicles in Chester Library and was interested to find a report of his death in the Obituaries for Oct 25th 1890:

"Death of Mr. Theodore Rathbone JP. It is with regret that we have to announce the death of Mr. Theodore Rathbone JP which took place at seven o'clock on Tuesday morning at his residence, Backwood, Neston. Mr. Rathbone had been ailing some considerable time from a complicated disorder and had not sat on the bench for two or three years he having met with an accident to his foot in the house. He was JP for the hundred of Wirral and in former years used to sit in the Neston Court. He never identified himself with commercial life but preferred to travel and paid visits to Norway, Canada, and other places. The deceased gentleman was first cousin to Mr. William Rathbone M.P. and he leaves a widow and one daughter, who is unmarried. The funeral took place at Neston Parish Church this Friday afternoon, at 3.15."

At the time of his death, 1890, the Chester Chronicle was showing adverts for pocket watches, oil lamps and quack medicines. The price of beef at Crewe market was 5 1/4d to 6 1/4d /lb. New milch & calving heifers were £14—£23, store pigs were 13s—50s, and store sheep were 27s—52s. The Chester Infirmary published a weekly statement of in-patients which read: cured 16, relieved 4, made out-patients 4, incurable 1, dead 2 and unrelieved 0. Government league tables are nothing new!

Part 3—Life in the 1900s next edition.

**Backwood Hall** in 1997 (with the farm cottage and buildings just visible to the right).



**TWENTY-FIVE YEARS - The Parkgate Society in 1975**

In 1975 the Society was in its fourth year and the spring and autumn newsletters were each of only three stapled sheets with no cover. The newly-appointed chairman was Jim Cochrane, who is now our president, and the secretary was the evergreen Angela Clarke who still graces that position. There seem to have been only two meetings that year. In April a certain Geoffrey Place spoke to 90 members of the Society about "The Origins of Parkgate"(the first talk he gave to the Society, and he is still at it) while in October there was a talk on "The birds of the Dee estuary". The Society was worried about membership, as it had lost 68 members since the heady days of its launch but had only gained three. If they held a mere two meetings a year that is not surprising.

1976 was European Architectural Year, and to mark the occasion, the Society agreed to pay part of the cost of refurbishing the Donkey Stand which then had a plain cement surface and no seats. The Borough Council provided some of the seats and began re-laying the surface with setts and stone slabs. Unfortunately the money ran out before they had finished and it remains to this day in an unfinished state. Our newsletter explained that the sea wall at this point was built round a house which was demolished in the 1840s, thus leaving the Donkey Stand. One Parkgate shopkeeper, who had come here in 1935, stated that he did not believe this story because he did not remember any house there!

There had been a plan to build 200 houses on the land between Wood Lane and Leighton Road which the Council had refused, and two of our members represented the Society at a public enquiry which thankfully confirmed that this was to be Green Belt land. Similarly, a plan to turn Buggen Lane into a major road and thus destroy it was headed off. Our committee also discussed the proposed oil-fired power station at Connah's Quay, which turned out to be quite a baby compared with the new gas-fired one that is there now.

We had produced a booklet, *A Stroll through Parkgate*, a precursor to our later guide book. We entered this booklet in a competition run by the Design Council and it was awarded a Certificate of Merit. We thought at first that we had won a prize, and a mere certificate was rather a let-down.

There was a National Tree Week that year and the Society planted 14 trees in three locations, having planted nearly 60 trees two years before. One of the locations was Earle Drive and every single one of our trees there was vandalised. On the other hand, we removed a small tree that was growing out of the sea wall by the Donkey Stand.

The first years of the Society had been rather unstable, with three chairmen in the first three years. 1975 saw the Society settle down into a working rhythm that has prevailed ever since.

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Parkgate Society Newsletter  
 Editor: Anne Williamson (336 6146), Assist. Jeremy Harris  
 Secretary: Mrs. Angela Clarke (336 1069).  
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