

Parkgate Society Newsletter

Autumn 2001

Issue Number 61

Meetings

We meet at 8pm at the **Boathouse**.
If you need help with transport please ring
Mrs Angela Clarke, our Secretary, giving 24
hours notice, on 0151-336 -1069.

Diary dates – Autumn/ Winter 2001/2002

- 17 September Badger protection in Wirral –
Mrs Leslie Brockbank.
22 October AGM at 7.30 pm followed by
History of the Mersey
Ferries- Gordon Ditchfield.
26 November The Bromborough Singers.
4 February The National Wildflower
Centre, Liverpool –
Richard Scott.
11 March Discovering the Mersey
waterfront – Valerie Hozack
15 April The Lever Estate, next
installment-
Gavin Hunter.
20 May The Cotswolds and
Shakespeare country –
David Cummings.

Non – members are welcome

Parkgate Society Newsletter
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& Jerry Harris (336 7406)
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Articles for the newsletter are very welcome

AGM

The AGM will take place on Monday 22
October 2001.

According to our constitution, nominations
for the election of Committee members
shall be made at least 14 days before the
AGM.

The current Committee members are all
willing to serve again. They are: Geoffrey
Place (chairman), Michael Potts (vice
chairman), Clive Edwards (treasurer),
Angela Clarke (secretary), Valerie Place
(subscriptions secretary), Becky Ford,
Stephen Gordon, Liz Marrs, Anne
Williamson (newsletter) and Jerry Harris
(newsletter).

SUBSCRIPTIONS

£4.00 Family or Single per year
£2.50 Senior Citizens per year
Payment can be made at any of our meetings or
directly to
Mrs Valerie Place,
Pendmore,
Station Road,
Parkgate.

Standing order forms are available, if required.

DONATIONS ARE WELCOMED

NEWS AND VIEWS (and continued on page 8)

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS ON ST THOMAS' CHURCH, PARKGATE

by Clive Edwards

Following meetings of Parkgate people with the Bishop of Chester, the Vicar of Neston, the Rev. R.H.N.Robb on Sunday 29th July made a statement about St Thomas' to a combined congregation of St Mary and St Helen's, St Michael's and St Thomas'. He verbally emphasised that he had the Bishop of Chester's full agreement and support.

The press release covering this was as follows:-

"Since 1999 the Parochial Church Council of Neston and various groups in Parkgate have been working to restore and extend the Church of St Thomas. In March of this year it became apparent that those plans would not succeed. Upon the recommendation of the Bishop of Chester the Parish has taken independent legal advice and in the light of that advice there seems to be a way forward towards the restoration.

A group of amenity bodies in Parkgate will form a Trust and the Vicar will grant to that Trust a 5 year lease of the Church building to give the Trust an opportunity to raise the funds and to restore the building.

If, as we all hope, the Trust is successful then at the end of the 5 year period the building will revert to the Parish and the Church will be re-launched in Parkgate.

If, unfortunately, the Trust were to be unable to raise the funds, or if after a reasonable time following the restoration, there were not to be a viable worshipping congregation, then it is anticipated the Bishop of Chester would give his consent for the sale of the building.

The Vicar and Parochial Church Council fully endorse the work of the Trust and wish them every success in their venture".

The objective now is to restore St Thomas', as a church and as a place of community use. It is not expected, on cost and use grounds, that in the foreseeable future there will be an extension. The Church is suspending services in Parkgate (now in the school) until the restored building is open for worship.

Local support was very much to the fore recently, when on a perfect summer day, a well attended cricket match between the Red Lion and the Neston Cricket Club raised £1800 for the restoration.

[Ed. Our Society has been very much involved in these latest discussions with the Bishop and is putting forward two committee members as trustees for the Trust that will take over St. Thomas' for the next five years.]

THE PUBS AND HOTELS OF PARKGATE – No. 7 of a series by Geoffrey Place

The George Inn and The Mostyn Arms Hotel

There was a George Inn at Parkgate between at least 1727 and 1748, but it was a different house to the later George Inn, apparently standing next to the present site of the house called The Warren.

An inn called The Three Pigeons, later called The George and Three Pigeons, is a more likely candidate (for the George that later became the Mostyn Arms Hotel). It was recorded in 1750 but may then have been rebuilt in 1752, "a new-built, commodious and well accustomed inn with good parlours, lodging rooms, kitchen and cellar, new stabling holding 25 horses, coach house, garden, water pump and three acres." A Dublin newspaper praised the good and reasonably priced food (three courses for eightpence) at The Three Pigeons. In 1761 it was being called The George and Three Pigeons and the coach from Chester was leaving from it. In 1767 it's furniture was for sale, including 16 feather beds, brewing vessels, two new post-chaises, a boat and sails, and a new bathing house.

In 1770 we learn that Joseph Manlove, formerly landlord of The Anchor and Falcon, has become landlord of The George. It is not certain that this was The George and Three Pigeons, but in view of its accommodation it seems likely. In 1788 Manlove's son-in-law, Thomas Spencer, took over the inn and remained there until 1808 when he took over an inn at Holyhead, no doubt correctly sensing that Parkgate's days as a passenger port were numbered. His successor at The George, Daniel Briscoe, died in 1812 and his son, another Daniel, died aged only 39 in 1814. That left his wife, the renowned Esther Briscoe, in charge. In 1818 she completely refurbished the inn and reopened it in 1819 as The Mostyn Arms Hotel, the first Parkgate inn to bear the title of hotel. "Esther Briscoe respectfully informs her friends and the public that the inn is reopened and fitted up in the first style of elegance. The house has been considerably enlarged. Several parlours, sitting rooms, bedrooms (supplied with excellent bedding) have been added to it. From these extensive alterations, she will be enabled to accommodate whole private families, with complete suites of apartments, finished in a very superior manner. E. Briscoe begs leave to add that she has laid in an assortment of WINES of the choicest vintage, and SPIRITS of the first quality, and has selected every other article with the greatest of care."

For the next 36 years Esther Briscoe ran her hotel with great success. When the whole village was sold in 1849 she bought her own hotel, but when she died in 1855 the business found no buyers as a hotel because Parkgate's days as a popular resort were over for the time being. It was taken over by a schoolmaster from Tarvin and called Mostyn House School.

- Next in the series No. 8 The Vanished Inns of Parkgate.

HANDEL'S JOURNEY TO IRELAND 1741-42By Geoffrey Place

The myth about Handel and Parkgate states that the composer stayed here while awaiting a ship to go the Ireland for the first performance of *The Messiah*. Both Hilda Gamlin in *Twixt Mersey and Dee* and Arthur Mee's *Cheshire* said that Handel stayed at The George inn (later to become Mostyn House). RW Finn's *Cheshire (1928)* says, "When waiting at Parkgate for the Irish Mail, Handel corrected the score of his oratorio *The Messiah*." WT Grenfell even suggested that a performance of *The Messiah* was given in Parkgate. The *Liverpool Post* (14 December 1938) even had Handel staying with Mrs Briscoe, the landlady of Mostyn Arms, who died 112 years later. The old *Listed Buildings* list (not the 1999 version) had Handel staying at Leighton Banastre, which was not built until the 1790s.

In fact it has long been known (see V Schoelcher, *The Life of Handel 1857*) that these claims are nonsense. Handel recorded on the score of *The Messiah* that he finished it on 14 September 1741. He left London about 4 November and stayed in Chester while waiting for a ship but, because none was sailing from Parkgate, he actually sailed from Holyhead. It is true that he returned from Ireland through Parkgate in August 1742, but there is no reason to suppose that he stayed here.

He arrived in Dublin on 18 November 1741, which fact was announced by *Faulkner's Journal* in the following manner, "...and last Wednesday, the celebrated Dr Handel arrived here in the packet-boat from Holyhead, a gentleman universally known by his excellent compositions in all kinds of music".

"Dublin, 29 December 1741. The nobility did me the honour to make amongst themselves a subscription for 6 nights, which did fill a room of 600 persons, so that I needed not to sell tickets at the door... performance received with great approbation. Signora Avolio, whom I brought with me from London, pleases extraordinary. George Frideric Handel."

Faulkner's Journal for 23-27 March 1742, "For the relief of prisoners in the several jails, and for the support of Mercer's Hospital in Stephen's Street, and of the charitable infirmary on the Inn's Quay, on Monday 12th April, will be performed at the Musick Hall in Fishamble Street, Mr Handel's new grand oratorio called *The Messiah*, in which the gentlemen of the choirs of both cathedrals will assist, with some concertos on the organ by Mr Handel."

The same journal described (6-10 April) the rehearsal on 8 April, "...rehearsed at the Musick Hall ...to a most grand, polite and crowded audience ...allowed by the greatest judges to be the finest composition of music that ever was heard."

The performance was put off by request from Monday to the next day, Tuesday 13 April 1742. "Doors opened at 11, performance begins at 12 ...request it a favour that the ladies who honour this performance would be pleased to come without hoops, as it will greatly increase the charity by making room for more company."

"The sum collected for that noble and pious charity amounted to about £400, out of which £127 goes to each of the three great and pious charities."

“Mrs Cibber in *The Messiah* in Dublin executed her airs so pathetically that Dr Delany, the great friend and companion of Swift, exclaimed as he sat in the boxes, ‘Woman, for this be all thy sins forgiven.’”

Faulkner’s Journal several times asks ladies to come to the performances without their hoops, “If they abandon that fashion for one evening the hall will contain an hundred persons more, with full ease.”

Handel gave his last entertainment in Ireland on 3 July 1742. His departure is recorded in the *Dublin News Letter* for 10-14 August, “yesterday, the Right Hon the Lady King, the celebrated Mr Handel, and several other persons of distinction, embarked on board one of the Chester traders, in order to go to Parkgate.”

The notion that Handel came to Parkgate in 1741 derives from a misreading of a letter written by Charles Burney, who was a schoolboy at the time:

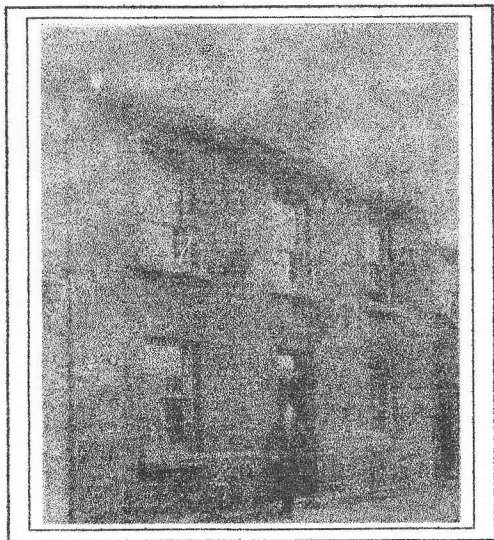
When Handel went through Chester, on his way to Ireland, this year 1741, I was at the Public School in that city, and very well remember seeing him smoke a pipe, over a dish of coffee, at the “Exchange Coffee House”, for, being extremely curious to see so extraordinary a man, I watched him narrowly as long as he remained in Chester, which, on account of the wind being unfavourable for his embarkation at Parkgate, was several days. During this time he applied to Mr Baker, the organist, my first music master, to know whether there were any choirmen in the cathedral who could sing at sight, as he wished to prove some books that had been hastily transcribed, by trying the choruses that he intended to perform in Ireland. Mr Baker mentioned some of the most likely singers then in Chester and, among the rest, a printer of the name of Janson who had a good bass voice and was one of the best musicians in the choir. At this time Harry Alcock, a good player, was the first violin at Chester, which was then a very musical place, for besides public performances, Mr Prebendary Prescott had a weekly concert, at which he was able to muster eighteen or twenty performers, gentlemen and professors. A time was fixed for this private rehearsal at “the Golden Falcon” where Handel was quartered, but, alas, on trial of the chorus of *The Messiah*, “And with his stripes we are healed”, poor Janson, after repeated attempts, failed so egregiously that Handel let loose his great bear upon him. After swearing in four or five languages cried out in broken English, “You shcoundrell! tit not you dell me dat you could sing at soite?” “Yes sir” said the printer, “and so I can, but not at first sight.”

This ‘Commemoration of Handel’ was printed in the *Chester Chronicle* on 8 April 1785 after being published in Charles Burney’s *A General History of Music* 1776-89.



"MEMORIES OF NESTON AND PARKGATE"
by VISTULA (VISTY) EDGEWORTH CARR.

Visty was born in 1914. Her father, Gordon Carr was in the Territorial Army and so was called up. Visty was 4 when he finally came home and he, and his wife Margaret, became caretakers of the Neston Telephone Exchange in the High Street.



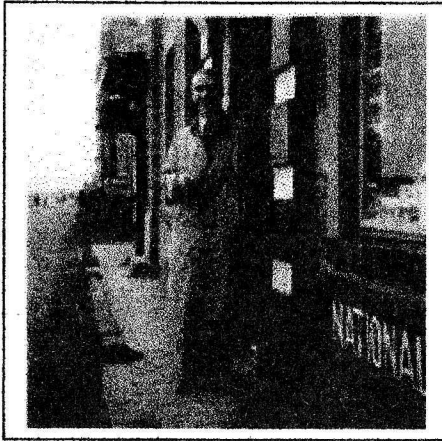
It was a large building with 6 bedrooms, which housed Visty, her parents, brother, grandmother and aunt. There was a switch room manned by initially two, then three, girls. Gordon and Margaret were on duty at night - when a bell rang in the house they had to get up and answer the calls. The public phonebox was in the hall and cost about tuppence to use. Many villagers were afraid of the new technology and asked Gordon, Margaret or even Visty to make the calls for them. Later Visty's aunt became the supervisor. Visty remembers less well off families in the village sending their children to the Exchange, on the way to school, because Margaret would often sit them down for a plate of bread and dripping, also the children wearing shoes belonging to their older siblings, that were often too big for them. The Exchange, it seems, was at the hub of local activities.

"I remember golden sands at Parkgate where I played as a child with a bucket and spade and paddled" says Visty. "It was quite a fashionable resort. I had a job, in my early teens, potting shrimps caught at Parkgate. It was quite an industry. I remember The Boathouse being built and the waves lapping and crashing up the sides. There was great excitement when an outdoor swimming pool was built and people, from places like Heswall, came to enjoy the facility, although not everyone could afford the entrance fee of about sixpence." That was the charge for the whole day and Visty recalls there being ladies' and gentlemen's changing rooms and a large platform, where she and her friend Molly would lie sunbathing. (Molly Bushell's family ran a General Store in Neston.)



The swimming pool was filled with salt water and had a high diving board and a spring board. All through her young life, Visty and her friends enjoyed excursions to Parkgate, walking along the front, eating shrimps bought from Mealor's, wearing their Sunday best.

Visty left school at 15 and, because she was used to the telephones at home, was asked to work at the Burton Village Exchange, the switchboard for which was in a lady's front room! Later she took her civil service exams, one of which was written; the other being a speech exam, and cycled daily to Heswall to work at the Telephone exchange there. The Neston Exchange became automatic and was moved to Leighton Road and the old Exchange became a newsagent and the family moved out. Visty's father, however, continued to work nights at the Telephone Exchange until shortly before he died, at the age of 66.



Visty married Sydney Benyon, who lived in Birkenhead and worked for the Prudential Assurance Co. She left the Civil Service but when Syd went off to serve in the Second World War she was called back to work.

Can anyone identify the building on the Parade that Sydney is standing outside? (Ed.)

TWENTY – FIVE YEARS AGO: The Society in 1976

We recorded the highest number of people attending a talk, when over 90 people came to hear Geoffrey Place describe the "Sea Bathing Cure". There were also talks about Ness Gardens and wildlife in Wirral. This year also saw the first of Geoffrey's walk, a guided tour of Parkgate.

Our new publication, after two years of preparation, was the "Panorama of Parkgate", a three foot long scroll, which portrayed the houses on the Parade and a view of the Welsh hills, drawn in impeccable detail by Michael Burton.

Our first publication, a leaflet called "A Stroll Through Parkgate", was at last beginning to show a profit. One of our founder members of the Society, Olive Wilcox, had been instrumental, with Hilda Wall-Jones, in preparing this publication. When she died in 1975 her sister gave the Society Olive's scrapbook, of which she was very proud. It contained many snippets of local information as well as some of her own interests. We advertised in the Newsletter that any member could borrow it. (Sadly nobody ever has.)

The Society had been pressing the old Neston Council, for several years, to make school lane one-way. We now had the new Ellesmere Port & Neston Council, which at last took up our proposal and sorted out this dangerous route.

Two members of the Society, Derek Hill (who is still a member) and the late Derek Bryan, came up with a plan to dig out a channel on the foreshore with the intention of "bringing back the water" – one of several plans that have surfaced over the years, with that aim. The Society took the proposal seriously and asked several experts on the Dee Estuary for their comments. One of them was Dr. Pugh-Jones from Salford University who took the trouble to come and see us. He predicted that the marsh would dry out and become solid ground in ten years. (Twenty-five years later, not much has changed!) When Derek Bryan later became a local councillor he persuaded the Council to have a professional assessment made of his plan – with a similar result to that obtained by the Society.

Postscript The year 2001, unfortunately, will be remembered for the foot and mouth disease which caused such disruption and distress nationally. Locally, all footpaths, including the Wirral Country Park, were closed in the early part of the year.

NEWS & VIEWS (continued from page 2)

Parkgate hit the front page of the local newspapers in March this year with an article about the **high tides** on the weekend of 10/11th March. "*Parkgate was extremely busy on both days causing traffic congestion*", commented the Neston News. In fact, Parkgate was full! Cars were parked on the approach roads and throughout the residential minor roads and after the peak of the tide on Sunday, when large numbers of visitors tried to leave, the traffic trying to get on to the Chester High Road formed an impressively long queue down Boathouse Lane almost to its junction with Leighton Road, thwarting those hurrying to the FA cup Liverpool v. Tranmere Rovers match at Tranmere that afternoon.

The 10.3metre (33.8ft) tide of 11th March is due to be exceeded on 19th and 20th Sept (10.4m) and equalled on 17th Oct but unfortunately these are not only midweek but also around midnight. So, unless you want to use flash bulbs and torches, your next big tide should be Wed 19th Sept, just after midday, when there is a 10.2m. predicted.

Earlier this year **our Primary School** achieved an "excellence" award for its strong results in SATs performance tests.

Neston Cricket Club called an extraordinary general meeting on April 26th at Neston High School to consider the proposal –

"The Club Council seeks a mandate from members to pursue planning permission with a view to the acquisition and development of land adjacent to Parksfield and the redevelopment of the existing Neston C C site, funded by the sale of the rear playing fields and subject to a further E.G.M. to ratify the detailed scheme."

The proposal was carried and we will watch with interest and concern these major plans to change both the cricket club and the Wood Lane/Parksfield areas.