

# Parkgate Society

## Newsletter

Autumn 2002

Issue Number 63

### 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 for 2002/2003 -**

16 September - Stephen Woolfall a talk on Charles Kingsley

21 October - Horse-drawn canal boats by Sue Day

25 November - Company B, a musical evening

3 February - Films of local places and events presented by Angus Tilston,

17 March - The Eden Project by Dr RA Dutton

28 April - Ancient settlements in Wirral by R Cowell

2 June - The Williamson Tunnels by Claire Moorehead

Non - members are welcome

Articles or suggestions for future newsletters are most welcome, please contact:

Jerry Harris 336 7406 or  
Anne Williamson 336 6146

### **AGM**

**The AGM will take place on Monday 21 October 2002 at 7.30 pm.**

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, Philip Owen, 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.

CH64 6QJ

Standing order forms are available, if required.

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### NEWS AND VIEWS

**Homewatch - Keyholders** We would remind members that have audible house alarms, not connected to the Police Station or other security services, that Cheshire Police Headquarters maintain, with written consent of homeowners, a computerised record of names, addresses and telephone numbers of voluntary holders of house keys, to enable the Police gain access in the event of a problem arising whilst the owners are absent. These details need to be renewed / reconfirmed annually as, otherwise, the data will automatically be deleted. It is preferable that two voluntary keyholders are nominated. If you wish to renew your details OR register your details for the first time, either write to Cheshire Police Headquarters, Chester, CH1 2PP or hand them in to Neston Police Station, in an envelope clearly marked "KEYHOLDERS".

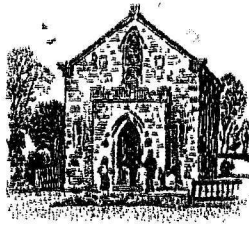
**The Wirral Way** As many will have noticed, there has been extensive tree felling, especially at the Station Road carpark. We know that several members were distressed to see the extent of the felling but we are assured by the Rangers, that this was necessary in order to remove old stock and allow new trees to mature. In a year or two's time it will be difficult to remember the barren view!

**Neston Cricket Club** invited their "Neighbours" to a meeting in May to put forward their latest plans for the development of their land. The latest proposal is for about one third of the back sports ground, alongside the Wirral Way, to be developed for new housing and for the existing clubhouse to be extended. We await further developments! The good news is that the Club are no longer planning to extend their facilities to Parksfield!

**Grade 2\* Listing** has been placed, by English Heritage, on the row of three 18<sup>th</sup> century cottages, 'the Butcher's Shop', Seven Steps and Teal Cottage. The only starred listing in the Parkgate front conservation area.

**Barn Owls** in the Wirral area have been increasing in numbers from one known breeding pair in 1998 to five last year and to eleven breeding pairs this year. The eleven pairs hatched about 42 young so hopefully there will be further sightings of the owls in Parkgate. Erection of owl nest boxes, costing £30 each for the materials because of their large size, has been helpful in furthering the increase in numbers. So look out for a large white bird flying low at dusk and pass on your sighting to PO Box 114, Hoylake, Wirral, CH48 8BX

**Community Awards** were presented in May this year by the Mayor of EP&Neston to notable volunteers in the community. Jimmy Pratt received one for his commitment to the community of Parkgate and in particular to the preservation of the Fisherman's Church, St. Thomas', Parkgate. Jimmy Pratt is a member of our Society, the Parkgate Preservation Trust and the Bishops Trust for St. Thomas'. A committee member of our society, Philip Owen, was also presented with the community award for his work with the Hospital League of Friends, particularly Clatterbridge, where he has been Chairman since 1990



## The Bishop's Trust for St. Thomas', Parkgate

The Bishop's Trust is now set up:

**PATRON** *the Rt. Rev. Dr Peter Forster, Bishop of Chester*

**TRUSTEES**, *GG Collings, Ms EJ Dennett MSc (Secretary), Mrs EF Gordon JP MA, SA Hearty, Mrs BO Hughes BA, DC Johnson, N Jones BA, Mrs AE Parkes BSc, Dr ERJ Pavillard MBBS FRCPA, MS Potts FCA DL (Treasurer), JAC Pratt, JN Tong FRICS, Mrs A Williamson MSc, BMF Youde LLB (Chairman).*

The future of the Fisherman's Church, St. Thomas' has been the subject of vigorous debate since its closure in 1994, but at last agreement has been reached on the way ahead.

In summary, the 1843 church building needs urgent repair to stabilize the walls. Without the installation of tie bars to the walls, the building would eventually collapse. General refurbishment and minor alterations including treatment of timber, addition of a toilet and small kitchen, and the addition of central heating are all planned to enable a more versatile building for church and community use.

The church is now a listed building and is not being extended.

The Bishop's Trust has been formed to restore the church. As reported in the last newsletter, the Trust is a company limited by guarantee and is a registered charity. Plans are now well under way, professionals have been appointed and surveys done. A press release and launch of fundraising will take place on the evening of Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> September at Parkgate Primary School with the Bishop of Chester and the Vicar of Neston present.

### **The Community is invited to attend**

**Donations** are sought to enable restoration work to be carried out so that this building can be preserved in its peaceful site as a valuable asset for the people of Parkgate. Tax payers are encouraged to donate using a gift aid form to enable the Trustees to reclaim tax. Nicholls Ice Cream Shop and Parkgate Stores are kindly holding stocks of gift aid forms, and there are collection boxes in several Parkgate outlets including the above and the Red Lion.

**Thank you** to those who have already made donations via gift aid or via the Charity Cricket Match and balloon race at the end of June. Most of the balloons made it to the Manchester regions but 5 travelled on to Huddersfield, Crayke north of York and as far as Edinburgh.

Further fund raising activities are being planned, and grant applications will be sought to raise the £150,000 required.

Any correspondence to the Bishop's Trust should be addressed to PO Box 80, Parkgate, Neston, CH64 6WE

## The Parkgate Pillbox

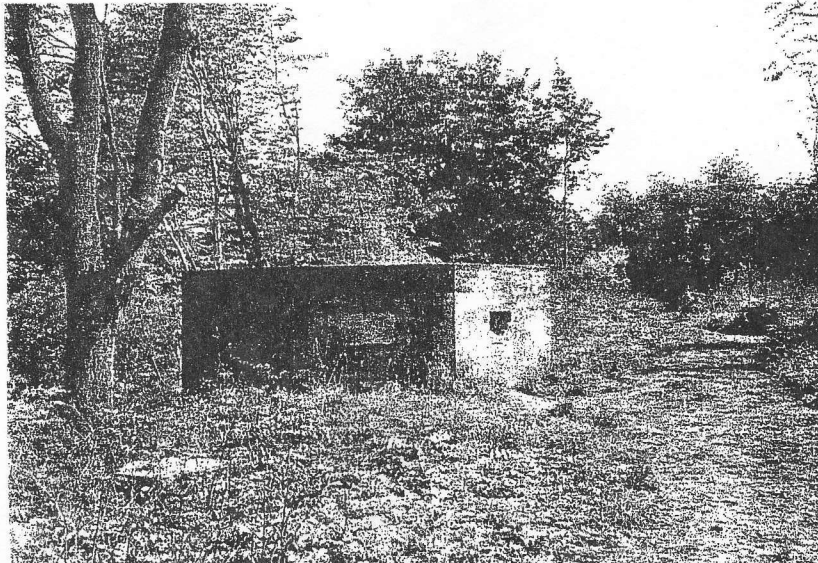
By Anne Williamson

The recent cutting back of undergrowth and felling of large trees at Station Road has exposed the Parkgate Pillbox. I have heard comments from Parkgaters ranging from sad and angry at the destruction of the trees to favourable (they needed thinning out). However, we are now left with a clearer view of our mossy pillbox. It could be called an ugly building with graffiti and with connotations of the war. It is nevertheless a local landmark; it is on the Borough Council's short list of (unlisted) buildings/structures of interest in Parkgate (see Autumn 2000 newsletter) and is a reminder of a significant chapter of England's history, the Second World War.

In January this year there was a letter to the Editor in the Daily Mail, asking about pillboxes and the reply to my surprise, included the fact that of 25,000 built, only about 7,000 remain. Many were built in coastal locations to guard against German invasion. This illustrated to me that the one in our environment should perhaps deserve more investigation and perhaps an informative plaque (if it could survive the vandals). Two books contained further information on these structures, "Neston at War" (1999), and "Pillboxes-a study of UK defences" by Henry Wills (1940).

The first British pillboxes (in the first war) were mainly circular in plan which gave them their name although the non-circular ones were normally called Strong Posts. These anti-invasion forts were designed to protect men manning machine guns (to prevent German invasions or advance across the country). General Sir Edmund Ironside, the Commander in Chief of the Home Forces dealt with home defence and in 1940 instigated construction of thousands of pillboxes and anti-tank blocks to stop German armoured columns. By Feb 1942 he directed that no more be built.

Those that remain today are used for many purposes including birdwatching hides, fisherman's shelters, pigsties and one has attractively been used as the lower floor of a boatyard office. Our pillbox has been blocked up to prevent its misuse and vandalism.





Nationwide, they were built in various shapes and designs, turrets, mini-castles (Trearddur Bay, Anglesey), square, rectangular, hexagonal or octagonal, but the most widely used design was the concrete hexagonal one. The shape was largely determined by the type of weapons being housed inside and the number of men to occupy them. Some had painted camouflage, netting camouflage or natural plants, bushes or straw. Additional defences such as ditches or coiled wire were used around pillbox sites. Local variations in design existed and "Neston at War, 1939-1945" describes ours as "a reduced and irregular version of type FW3/24, a hexagonal plan with one longer side. It was built in 1939.

Is our pillbox rare or common? Wills' book states that most were constructed along the south and east coasts of England. On the Wirral peninsula there are two rectangular ones on the southerly approach to West Kirby and three in a line across the peninsula (ours, one on the Heswall side of Clatterbridge roundabout and one by the A41 beyond Hooton crossroads). "Neston at War" states that seven pillboxes remain on the Wirral and there are other defensive structures mentioned.

Near to the Wirral there is one on the England/Wales border near Deeside Industrial Park, three around Chester, none through the Cheshire farmlands until you reach the edge of the Peak District where there are about a dozen in a line from Manchester through Alderley Edge, Macclesfield & Congleton, to Stoke.

In summary then our pillbox is one of a common design (but slightly modified), fairly rare in the Wirral (one of seven) and even rarer in the northwest generally (very few in Cheshire). Perhaps therefore we should have an interpretive plaque placed by the newly installed kissing gate on Station Road in order that we should understand that this slightly ugly, mossy structure is something to be preserved.



### THE MILESTONES of the CHESTER HIGH ROAD (A540) - By GW Place

The Wirral Turnpike Act of 1787 made the Chester to Parkgate road a toll road, administered by a Turnpike Trust. The Trust erected milestones, made of sandstone, along the Chester High Road.

In 1896 the newly formed Cheshire County Council removed the old milestones and replaced them with cast iron mileposts. AG Grenfell, the headmaster of Mostyn House School, came across the discarded stones. In January 1899 he wrote in the school magazine, *The Griffin*, "Some eighteen months ago the poor old stones, which had stood for heaven knows how many decades, were ruthlessly pulled up by the roots, carried to the Half-way House (the Yacht Inn) and tumbled ignominiously on the grass by the wayside. There they have lain ever since, in a dead heap, mutely appealing in their fallen estate to the sympathy of any passer-by who has soul enough to be sickened by the grinning cast iron substitutes."

He bought the stones "at very small cost" to save them from being broken up for 'binding', which probably means road rubble. He bought seven stones and placed them beside the entrance drive to Mostyn House. There they remained for 87 years, until Grenfell Park was built in 1986. The milestones were moved, but not very far. They were replanted beside the main drive but nearer the school. Another of these stones was found in the 1980s and was placed beside the Chester High Road near the south gate of Leahurst, the veterinary field station of Liverpool University. The inscription on this stone reads "Chester 9 Little Neston" and "Little Neston" is repeated on the back. The figure 9 has been recut in a style that does not fit the rest.

The seven stones at Mostyn House are inscribed as follows (insofar as they remain legible):

Chester (?2) miles Little Mollington  
 Chester (?3) miles Great Mollington  
 Chester  
 Chester 5 miles  
 Chester miles Ledsham  
 Chester miles Puddington  
 Chester 8 miles Willaston

It seems likely that there were ten stones originally, of which eight survive. The order may (speculatively) have been:

1	Bache
2	Little Mollington
3	Great Mollington
4	Saughall
5	Shotwick
6	Ledsham
7	Puddington
8	Willaston
9	Little Neston
10	Great Neston

Eventually the iron mile posts, so scorned in 1899, acquired a venerable status. In 1978 the Wirral Society looked at the surviving posts of the eighteen which were erected between Chester and West Kirby in 1896. Eleven remained, and the Society recommended that they be cleaned and repainted.

### AUBREY THOMAS - architect

Walter Aubrey Thomas (1864 - 1934), the architect of the Liver Building, has not received the recognition that he deserves. The Cheshire Record Office recently commissioned some research, by Alan Shape, into his life, from which the following notes are derived. Thomas was born in Tranmere in 1864, the son of an architect. In 1885 he married Maud Paris and they had seven children, the eldest born in Oxton and the rest born in the Neston area. Thomas was a keen reader of Dickens and his children had Dickensian names. Even his grand-daughter, who lives in Parkgate, is called Dorrit.

After living in Oxton, the family moved to Springfield in Church Lane, Neston, in the 1890s. Thomas then built his own house in Parkgate in 1902, called by him Bleak House but now known as Brooke House. This house, which has fine plaster ceilings, is now Listed Grade II. He raised the sandstone wall in front of the house so that passers-by on the Parade could not ogle at his three lovely daughters, when they sat in the garden. In 1926 he built himself a new house at Dunstan Wood, Burton. This was completely built of concrete, even the roof, as apparently Thomas was afraid of fire. Perversely he then put thatch on the concrete roof; but a housemaid's cigarette set fire to the thatch and it was replaced by tiles. Thomas did not stay at Dunstan Wood for long, and about 1930 he moved back to Neston, at a house called Lymington, Moorside. He died in 1934.

Aubrey Thomas was a pupil of the Liverpool architect Francis Doyle, who designed both the rebuilt parish church in Neston and the Presbyterian church there. Thomas' main claim to fame was his design for the Liver Building, a revolutionary design in ferro-concrete, started in 1908. He also designed many other Liverpool buildings, including Tower Buildings, the State Insurance Building, the African Old Mill, additions to the *Liverpool Post and Echo* offices, Crane Buildings, the stores of Blacklers and Owen Owens and the Lord Street arcade. He also designed many domestic buildings including Mickwell Brow at Ness, the home of Arthur Bulley.

### TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO - The Society in 1977

We found ourselves temporarily without a meeting place in Parkgate and our talks in 1977 were held in the hall of the United Reformed Church. But our members did not like going there and we were glad to accept an invitation to move to the Boathouse.

Up to this time, the Society's newsletter was no more than two or three sheets of paper stapled together. In the Autumn of 1977 we first produced a printed cover (a rather dull blue one) which made it look much more attractive, and it stretched to five pages. Meetings were still rather sparse: there were only three talks in the year, one guided walk and a marsh clean-up.

To celebrate the Queen's jubilee (25years on the throne) the Society bought a seat, suitably inscribed, and placed it on the Parade in front of the Old Quay pub. Unfortunately it was eventually torn to pieces by mindless thugs whose successors still haunt Parkgate.

We were campaigning for the Council to take responsibility for litter on the foreshore (forced on them much later by Parliament) and for the "back path", the path joining Brookland Rd to Bevy Rd (eventually successful).

## THE ROPEWALK, PARKGATE

By Geoffrey Place

The Ropewalk is a modern name for the footpath, which runs in a straight line between Station Road and Brookland Road. But it seems that it was originally called Cheltenham Walk, a pretentious name that reflects its original purpose, to provide a sheltered walk for the sea-bathing visitors when the wind was too strong on the Parade. "Ropewalk" then seems to have evolved as a local name.

The path was sketched in on an estate map dated 1814 but surveyed in 1811, which tells us that it was built after 1811, but before the survey made for Bryant's map of Cheshire in 1829. The path was accompanied on its river side by a drainage ditch, and it was probably built at the same time as a series of drainage ditches that ran for nearly two miles behind Parkgate, from Moorside Lane to Boathouse Lane.

A ropewalk is a place where ropemakers wind strands of hemp together by walking backwards. There were certainly ropemakers in Parkgate in the shipping days (which ceased in 1815), for they are mentioned in the parish register. According to James Stonehouse, who wrote a series of articles about Neston district in the *Chester Chronicle* in 1882, there was then a cattle shed by the Ropewalk which used to house ropemaking machinery, with a boiler house for tarring cables. The Ordnance Survey 25" map of 1872 suggests that this barn was on east side of the Ropewalk, a few yards north of its junction with Little Lane.

In 1906 the Neston Council put up notices prohibiting cyclists from Little Lane and Cheltenham Walk, so that name was regarded as official then.

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Members may be interested to know that a recent 'photographic panorama of Parkgate Parade' is available for viewing at Cathallan Studios, 94 Telegraph Road, Heswall. Orders are now being taken.