

Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

Newsletter

Autumn 2003

Issue Number 65

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 2003 - 2004

- 22 September – Dr Ellen Singer – “Leahurst”
Veterinary Station.
- 20 October – Peter Bird – “Recovery of the Mary Rose”. Our AGM will precede this talk at 7.30pm.
- 24 November – Jim O’Toole, “Mostyn, a vintage port”.
- 9 February - Angus Tilston - "More films of local events".
- 15 March – Ian Norris – “Burton – the meek, the martyr and the mighty”.
- 19 April – Malcolm Ingham (WCP) – “Owls, squirrels and a wild cat”.
- 24 May – Glyn Parry – “Ephemera”.

Non – members are welcome

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

Jerry Harris 336 7406 or
Anne Williamson 336 6146

The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, no. 503718

AGM

The AGM will take place on Monday 20 October 2003 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, Clive Edwards (treasurer), Angela Clarke (secretary), Valerie Place (subscriptions secretary), Becky Ford, Stephen Gordon, Philip Owen, Anne Williamson (newsletter) and Jerry Harris (newsletter).

Proposed as committee member Peter Knight.

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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THE SWIFT FAMILY OF PARKGATE

By Cheryl Pemberton Swift

It would seem that the Swift family has lived in the Parkgate area for some 300 years. According to the Neston Parish Register, the Swift family appears in 1703, when William Swift, son of William Swift (farmer of Chester), was baptised. I am unable to research further than 1703 at present, but for the purposes of this short history I think it advisable to start with what I know for certain.

According to family legend, the Swift family originally came from Ireland. It was during the time of the Irish potato famine that they were deported to this area because of cattle rustling. Considering the family links with farming and butchery that have spanned 300 years, which I know about, this old story may have some substance. Links have also been suggested with the great Jonathan Swift, author of Gulliver's Travels, who visited Parkgate from Ireland frequently during the 1700's.

In 1790, Henry Swift, butcher and farmer of Parkgate, married Nancy Parr. We know for definite that the family also controlled the local slaughterhouse at this time because of a documented complaint in 1811 by Mrs Massie, who complained of the nuisance from the slaughterhouse in School Lane. Henry produced two sons, John and my direct ancestor and namesake – Pemberton Swift. It was Pemberton Swift who bought lot 28 in the Mostyn sale of Parkgate in 1849, from the Mostyn family. Lot 28 included the three houses on the Parade including The Old Butchers Shop, The Seven Steps, Teal Cottage and adjoining cottages, outhouses, slaughterhouse and land. At this time Pemberton rented land from the Mostyn estate in Parkgate and was known as a farmer and butcher in my personal records of the sale.

According to the directory of 1850, Pemberton Swift had replaced his father Henry as Parkgate's one and only butcher. Moreover, one of Pemberton's sons, also called Henry, followed in the family tradition and sold groceries and beer in Parkgate. The family business continued and developed as the family grew and new businesses opened in Neston and Ness and surrounding areas. The family also moved into surrounding areas as only one son could continue running the main business in Parkgate.

By 1906, Charles Swift, my grandfather, was in charge of the family business. I believe that during the two World Wars, the demand for meat in the area was great and the business employed many local people and helped to feed many more. Crucial family members remained at work whilst others went to fight. By the 1960's, another early death led to my father, William Swift, aged 23 years, being the eldest surviving son of eleven children, to inherit a family tradition that was slowly dying out. A tradition that he had been trained for all his life and one that he was expected to continue regardless of his own career choices.

The great times of village butchery were ending, especially with the introduction of supermarkets. The fact that the business had such a good reputation for home-killed welsh lamb, helped, but in 1982, when William died (aged 42) from a massive heart attack, the butchery business was in more trouble. My brother William (Billy) inherited

the dying business, aged 18, and without the full training that his ancestors had benefited from. The Chernobyl situation caused panic because people were told that Welsh lamb had been contaminated, and that event, coupled with our own personal situations, caused us to end a family tradition that spanned the generations. It was very difficult to close the shop part of the business but, with hindsight, it was for the best as it freed us to follow our own career choices.

Today part of the family is still involved in butchery in Parkgate. We no longer own the Old Butchers Shop as it was sold 4 years ago. However, the history and the future of our family is important to many of us. We are a massive family spread all over the Wirral and surrounding areas!

NEWS AND VIEWS

We have abandoned placing photographs within articles, as the process we use for reproducing the News Letter does not give good results. As we wish to continue to enhance the News Letter by the use of photographs, these will now be placed on a single page, which will be reproduced by a different, more costly, method.

There was a good turnout of some 120 residents at the "Neston Looking Forward" event in the Town Hall earlier this year and a further good attendance at the evening follow up. Various ways in which Neston might be improved were discussed at the event organised by the EP&NBC.

The Council also organised an open afternoon/evening in July at Parkgate Primary School to look at plans for the safety of pedestrians and control of traffic in Parkgate. Numerous residents viewed the plans and added their opinions. There was much talk about the lack of enforcement of the existing parking restrictions (yellow lines). Future possibilities for Parkgate include an area of coloured tarmac on entering 30mph zone, coloured tarmac and traffic calming area where Bevy Road meets the Parade, no waiting/parking opposite Assembly Rooms and opposite the Red Lion, provision of pedestrian crossing points by the Ship and at Bevy Road, etc. Those present were encouraged to fill in a Questionnaire on their views.

The Parkgate Society was represented at the Neston Church Fayre annual event at Neston Church in July.

Congratulations to Jill Pratt of Parkgate for being awarded the Queen's Golden Jubilee Award for Wirral & Chester Riding for the Disabled in recognition of its commitment to the community.

Memories of Parkgate (Part 2)

By

Arthur Draper

The tide, in those World War II days, seemed always to come in. The shrimp and fishing boats were anchored all along the front. We lads would swim out to them and climb aboard. We would get our backsides slapped by the fishermen, when we came ashore! I first learned to swim off the wall at Parkgate square. We would come home from school, get into our trunks and run down the road when the tide was in.

In those days we were brought up with the Parkgate fishermen, who were great characters. They would go to church in Parkgate on a Sunday morning in all their sea-going finery; blue knitted jerseys carrying their prayer books, and some wore 'blockers' (hard hats). They nearly all had nick names: Sibbity Robinson, Stormy Mealor, Caggy Mealor, Sixfoot Smith (he was five foot tall!), Dick Dophy Smith, Monty Smith, Fatty Fewtrell, Giddy Fewtrell, Yank Fewtrell, Bad Luck Champion, Ragga Champion, Chipsie Peters, Wella Cross, Yonk Higgins.

They would sit making and mending nets, I think in those days the nets were made of hemp. They would then dip them in a black tar substance and hang them over the sea wall, to dry. There are traces of tar on the sea wall, in places, today.

Let's not forget other members of the Parkgate community, in the past. There was Dooly Prosser who owned the Deeside Café and Stores, which is now Mr Chows. Tom (Tittymouse) Mealor, who owned the Cosy Café, famous for it's shrimp teas, all caught by Tom with his hand net. He was found dead on the marsh after a trip for shrimps. The Old Quay now stands on the site of his café. Brudda Jones, the lamp lighter. Brudda would swarm up the lampposts, in his white pumps, to alter the clocks on the gas lamps, which would light up the Prom.

The Parkgate Baths were in their heyday then. We kids spent a lot of time there and towards the end of the war we had a big German friend, a POW. He was a Luftwaffe tail gunner, shot down and interned in Mollington. He was let out of camp for good conduct and would ride down to Parkgate on an army issue bicycle. He thought the world of us lads and made a lot of friends with the locals. His name was Richard and he spent a lot of time in the baths with us. One story I must tell about Richard; on his regular visits to Parkgate he became very friendly with a woman. Whilst her husband was away at sea in the Merchant Navy as a Chief Officer, she would bake Richard apple pies, to eat.

Behind the Parkgate Baths were two big sheds that housed the Grenfell sand yachts. These were big frames with four big blow-up cartwheels and sails. The Mostyn House

School kids would use them on the hard sand, well out from the foreshore. When they had a rest they would leave them on the sand and we kids would run over, jump on them and off we would go! When they started to pick up speed we'd jump off and let them go on across the sand.

I left school at 14 years old and started serving my time as a cobbler at Woodfields, Smithy Lane, Willaston. I soon picked it up and got quite good at it and I started repairing shoes at home, in the shed. It went down very well with the local girls, as there were plenty of dances to go to, with lots of military personnel about. The girls always wanted to look their best. Dinky heels and stick on soles were the fashion then. I repaired a pair of high heel shoes for one of my lady customers, who was in a hurry to the bus for a date in Neston. She didn't have any change to pay so I said; "it's OK pay me later". Sadly I didn't see her again, she was murdered the same night in Wood Lane, and the accused was from HMS Mersey, a naval barracks on Clay Hill, Neston.

After two years of shoe repairing, at 16 years of age, I decided I wanted a change. I had an uncle that sailed throughout the war in the Merchant Navy and got bombed on the Bibby liner Staffordshire. When he came home from sea he would tell me about the glamour of foreign countries. I said to my Mother, "I think I'll go the sea, Mam". So off I went to the training ship TS Vindictrix moored at Sharpness, Gloucestershire. After doing 12 gruelling weeks of training, off I went to sea, in tankers, cargo boats, liners, and troopships. I really wasn't a stranger to the sea as, from 11 years old until I was 14 I joined the 1st Neston Sea Scouts. We had our HQ in the old stables opposite the Boathouse, which was then a café. On a couple of occasions I visited HMS Conway, which was then moored in Bangor Straight in North Wales.

I was to spend the next few years sailing around the world, mostly in Her Majesty's troopships. I went to most conflicts; eleven trips to Pusan in Korea, to Mombasa for the Mau Mau campaign, to Cyprus for the Eoka troubles and, in 1956, the Suez crisis. After finishing in the Merchant Navy, early in 1960, I worked with the Mealor family, shell fishing and on the shrimp boat with Colin Mealor, from a very old Parkgate fishing family.

Since then most people in Parkgate know me as a property repairman. I still have ties with the sea. I am the standard bearer for the Wirral branch of the Merchant Navy Association.

After all the exotic places I visited it was always nice to come home to Parkgate. Where I still live.

An appropriate footnote to these reminiscences was the obituary to Captain William Higgins (1922-2002), seen in the Sunday Times in December 2002 (extracted from the Daily Telegraph) - he was one of the finest game shots of his generation. It is understood that he shot down a Dornier bomber on the family estate at Puddington, with a .303 rifle, while on leave in 1940. As the plane came in very low, on its run to a nearby iron works, he managed to blast both engines.

THANK YOU TO CHERYL SWIFT, ARTHUR DRAPER, & HUCKLE, MARRS & POTTER FOR THEIR INTERESTING ARTICLES. WE WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO RECEIVE ARTICLES OR EVEN SIMPLE JOTTINGS THAT WE CAN USE FOR FUTURE NEWSLETTERS.

ST. THOMAS'S CHURCH

Since our last newsletter in January when fundraising had gathered just over £50,000 the barometer total now stands at a fantastic £107,000. Between the leaflet drop in January and the beginning of April £11,000 came in from donations from households. Easter saw the allocation of grants worth £40,000 from English Heritage/ Heritage Lottery Fund. The grants attracted publicity that included front-page articles in The News and The Chester Chronicle and a spot on the BBC northwest News, as well as other articles in the local press.

Sales of Christmas cards raised over £500. The Feb quiz night in the Red Lion was well supported and raised £890. A bric a brac stall at Neston church fayre and ploughman's lunches, a raffle and sponsored runs at the cricket club charity event in July added a further £900. Charity boxes throughout Parkgate continue to be very well supported. At the time of writing (July) it is proposed that **WORK CAN BEGIN ON THE FIRST PHASE OF RESTORATION- THE STRUCTURE (WALLS AND ROOF) THIS AUTUMN** as soon as tenders have been received, contractors appointed and formalities completed. **THANKS TO ALL FOR DONATIONS**

Parkgate now has a tea towel on sale Produced by the Bishop's Trust for St. Thomas's - artwork by Lisa Moore Proceeds to the church. £3.99 each navy blue or bottle green. From local shops or the Bishop's Trust, PO Box 80, Parkgate, Neston, CH64 6WE (£4.60 incl. postage) please mark envelope TEA TOWEL.



25 YEARS AGO - THE SOCIETY IN 1978

We began meeting at the Boathouse, which had just been taken over and refurbished by Peter Barnes. We had two talks by Geoffrey Place, one on the buildings of Parkgate and the other involving a visit to Mostyn House chapel. We also had a talk about the birds of the Dee estuary.

We found, in Neston Library, a sketchbook containing watercolours painted in 1938 by G L Behrend, of the Old Quay House. The book was in poor repair and we feared that some of the pictures might go missing, as some already had, so the Society paid for them to be mounted and displayed in the Library. (They should still be there.)

The Cheshire Green Belt proposals were published, which, to our delight, protected Parks Field and the land north of Boathouse Lane. (Thankfully it is still in place.)

The possibility of closing Neston High Street to traffic was once again discussed, but the proposal to drive a better road through to Parkgate by destroying Buggen Lane was, thankfully, dropped.

At the invitation of our chairman, the Mayor and several of the senior Council officers came to see us and had an instructive tour. It was generally thought to have been a great success, but, unfortunately, it aroused the jealousy of one of our elected councillors (long since departed) who harangued the committee for not inviting him. He had shown no interest in the Society before or afterwards, so we felt no regrets. One result of the visit was the appearance, on the Donkey Stand, of two concrete flower tubs. Despite the kind offer of the Parkgate Nursery to keep flowers in them, they were not a success. They attracted too much interference and not enough water, and some years later we asked that they be removed.

We arranged for the Wirral Way rangers to make and fix the Parkgate Conservation Area signs on the two approach roads.

An article, which gave the building dates of the row of houses that form the Station Road cottages, was published by the Society.

The Dee Salt marsh viewed from the air

By

Jon Huckle, Rob Marrs & *Jaq Potter

Applied Vegetation Dynamics Laboratory, University of Liverpool, Liverpool L69 3GS,
& *Biology Department, University College Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester CH1 4BJ

A short note abstracted two scientific papers both deposited with the society

Dee Salt Marsh History

The salt marsh is a dominant feature of Parkgate. The Dee estuary is one of the largest in the North-west (16,100ha), and contains intertidal mudflats (12,980ha) and salt marsh (2,100ha). Salt marsh has developed through progressive silting of the estuary that has been documented since the 11th century, but these natural processes have been accelerated by human interventions that reclaimed land and reduced the erosive power of the tidal channel especially during the last century. In the early 19th century, the main river channel was directed along the Welsh coast and at that time the Cheshire side was noted for its firm sandy beaches.

During the 20th century salt marsh has extended rapidly along the Cheshire coast as a result of 1) reduced tidal erosion, 2) increased deposition of sediment in sheltered areas and 3) the introduction of cord grass (*Spartina*) in the 1920s at the head of the estuary (around John Summers' steelworks) to aid land reclamation. By 1952, individual *Spartina* plants were being recorded in inner pans and gutters near Parkgate. The primary colonisers of the salt marsh at that time were annuals (*Salicornia* -a small pale green plant that looks a little like asparagus spears), but by the late 1950s, *Spartina* had spread throughout the area and by 1964 it had become the dominant species.

The current salt marsh extends beyond Heswall, representing an expansion along the shore of approx. 6-8km in 40 yrs, as well as extending more than 3km out into the estuary at Parkgate. The ability of *Spartina* to convert mud flat to salt marsh, originally used to help reclaim land, is now a major source of concern for coastal management, particularly in estuaries such as the Dee where the conservation value is high. The Dee estuary is one of the top ten wetland sites in Europe in terms of the numbers of birds visiting it each year. More than 130,000 over-wintering wildfowl and waders are regularly recorded, and consequently nature conservation is a high priority for management of the estuary. The invasion of *Spartina* is primarily a problem caused by man, and is now a major issue in the strategic management of the Dee estuary.

In 1997 we measured the size of the salt marsh in the Dee Estuary, and then studied two areas in detail 1) at the advancing front of the marsh near Heswall, and 2) where marsh has been developing over 50yrs at Parkgate.

Measuring the size of the marsh and the distribution of plants

In 1997 measurements were made of the different types of salt marsh communities; this was by taking very high-resolution, digital images from an aircraft at an altitude of 3000m. These images were made up of reflectance patterns of different wavelengths of light (beyond what we can see). The reflectance patterns were checked on the ground and then processed

to produce maps of the different plant communities (Fig. 1). The total area of the salt marsh was found to be 2122ha (1ha = 2.47 acres), a slight increase in area compared with a study carried out 20 years ago.

We then looked at detailed historical change in salt marsh communities through time in two areas (Area 1 near Heswall and Area 2 near Parkgate). Here, we compared our 1997 maps to similar (but less detailed maps) produced from black and white aerial photographs taken with a standard camera, and held in the aerial photography archive in the Department of Geography, University of Liverpool. The areas selected are shown in detail in 1997 (Fig. 2)

Area 1: Near Heswall (Fig. 3)

This area in 1955 had no vegetation. In 1947 some plants of *Spartina* were reported growing on bare mud between Parkgate and Gayton, and *Salicornia* was growing at Parkgate. The salt marsh advanced 3km from Parkgate. Between 1965 and 1975 colonisation continued at a similar rate to the previous two decades. However, since 1975, there has been a significant reduction in colonisation, and the marsh in this area may be reaching its natural limit.

Area 2: Near Parkgate (Fig. 4)

In the 1940s this area contained the apex of the marsh. In 1939 the first *Salicornia* seedlings were noticed on Parkgate beach, and by 1947, salt marsh had colonised a width of 450m. By 1952 the width was 567m and expanded further to 1215m in 1964. During this period, *Spartina* replaced *Salicornia* as the primary colonising species and was dominant until sediment accretion resulted in succession to *Puccinellia maritima* (common salt marsh grass) and *Aster tripolium* (sea aster). The marsh area had increased outwards into the estuary between 1975 and 1997, but at a lower rate than in area 1. Between 1975 and 1997 the annual rate of increase was 1.8 ha/yr. and the marsh width in 1997 was approx. 2.4km with *Salicornia* once again the primary coloniser.

Summary

At the apex of the marsh (Heswall), the colonisation process has slowed dramatically and may be reaching equilibrium with forces of erosion from incoming currents and continuing effects of the river channel itself. In contrast, the development of the marsh in at Parkgate has continued albeit at a slower rate, suggesting that in this area of the estuary, colonisation of mudflats by salt marsh is continuing.

Acknowledgements

We thank Chester College and the RSPB for funding; the Department of Geography, University of Liverpool for access to the historical aerial photographs, and the NERC Airborne Remote Sensing Facility for the collection of remote sensing data in 1997.

The Society wish to thank Rob Marrs for presenting this paper for use in the Newsletter, for allowing it to be condensed and for supplying the photographs to support the paper.

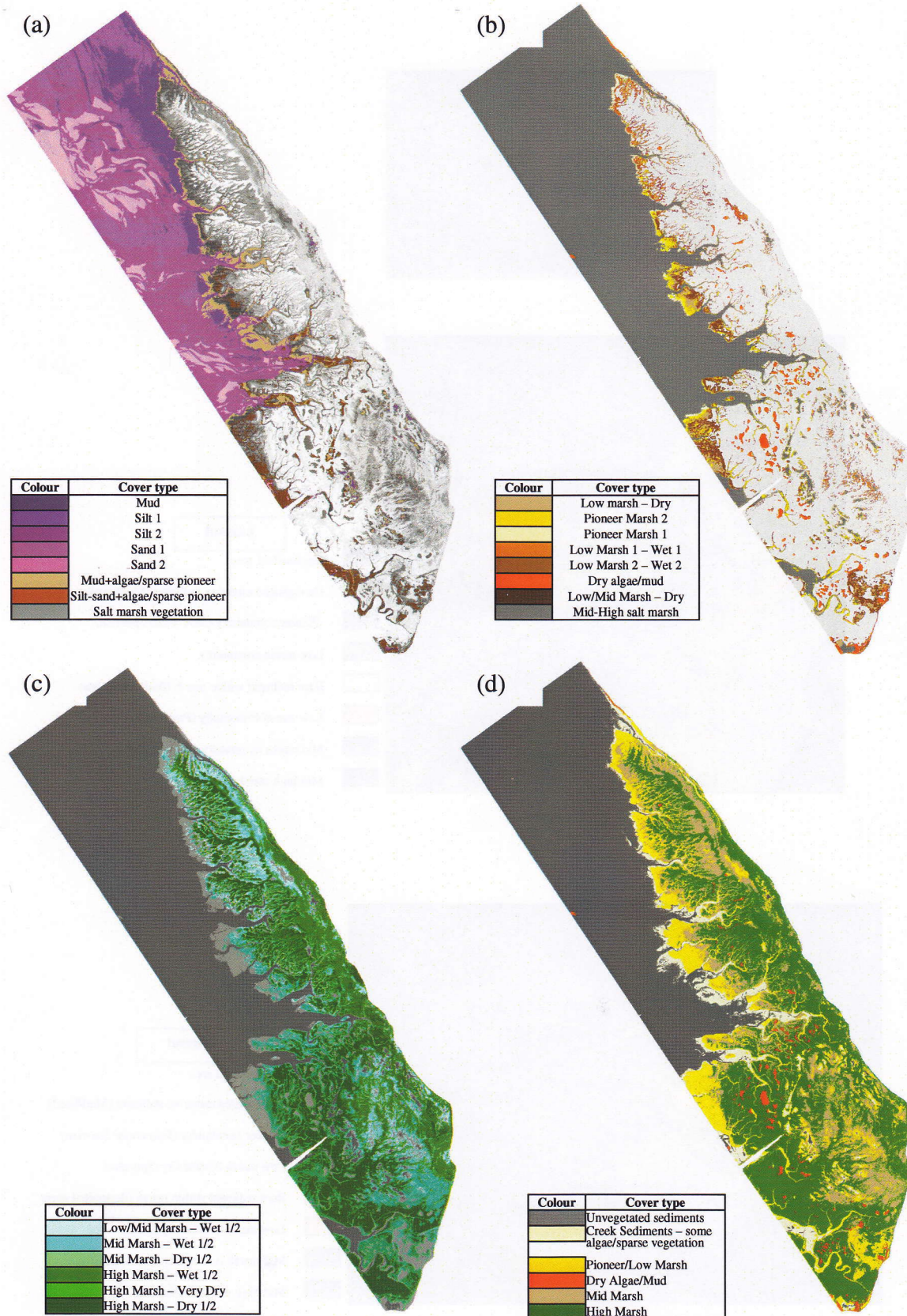
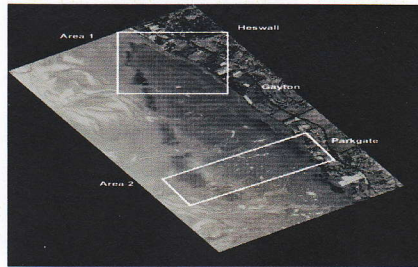
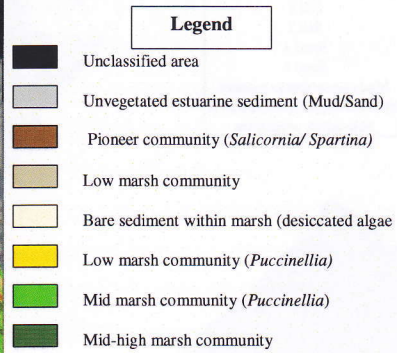
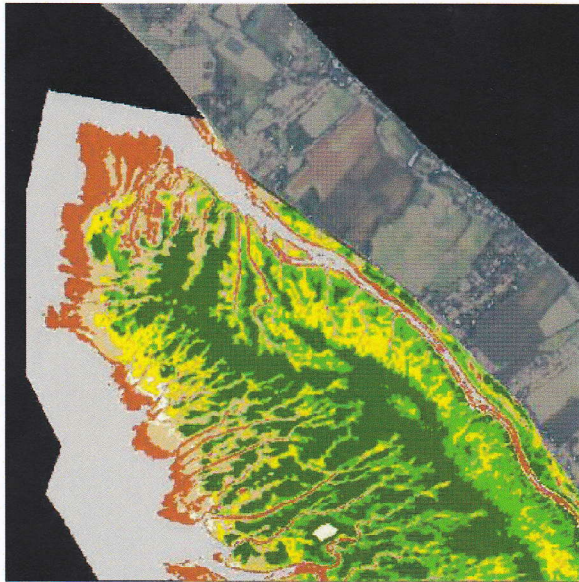


FIG 1. A series of maps of the different vegetation types of the Dee estuary in 1997, showing: (a) unvegetated sediments, (b) pioneer and low marsh vegetation classes, (c) mid and high marsh vegetation classes, and (d) marsh zones derived from merging of these classes.

(a)



(b)



(c)

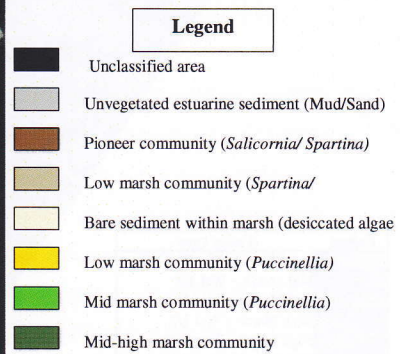
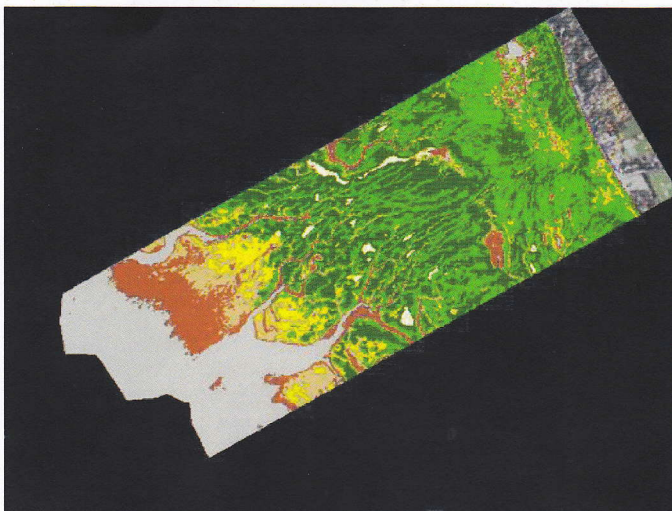


FIG. 2. A map of marsh communities in the two slices of the Dee estuary in 1997 derived from multispectral data, the dominant classes are shown in different colours: (a) areas sampled; (b) Area 1 near Heswall (Scale 1:10000); (c) Area 2 near Parkgate (Scale 1:12500).



FIG. 3. Historical sequence of black and white aerial photographic images of Area 1 near Heswall: (a) 1955, (b) 1965, (c) 1975, (d) 1997. Dark areas indicate unanalysed areas not included in photographic coverage (Scale 1:16000).

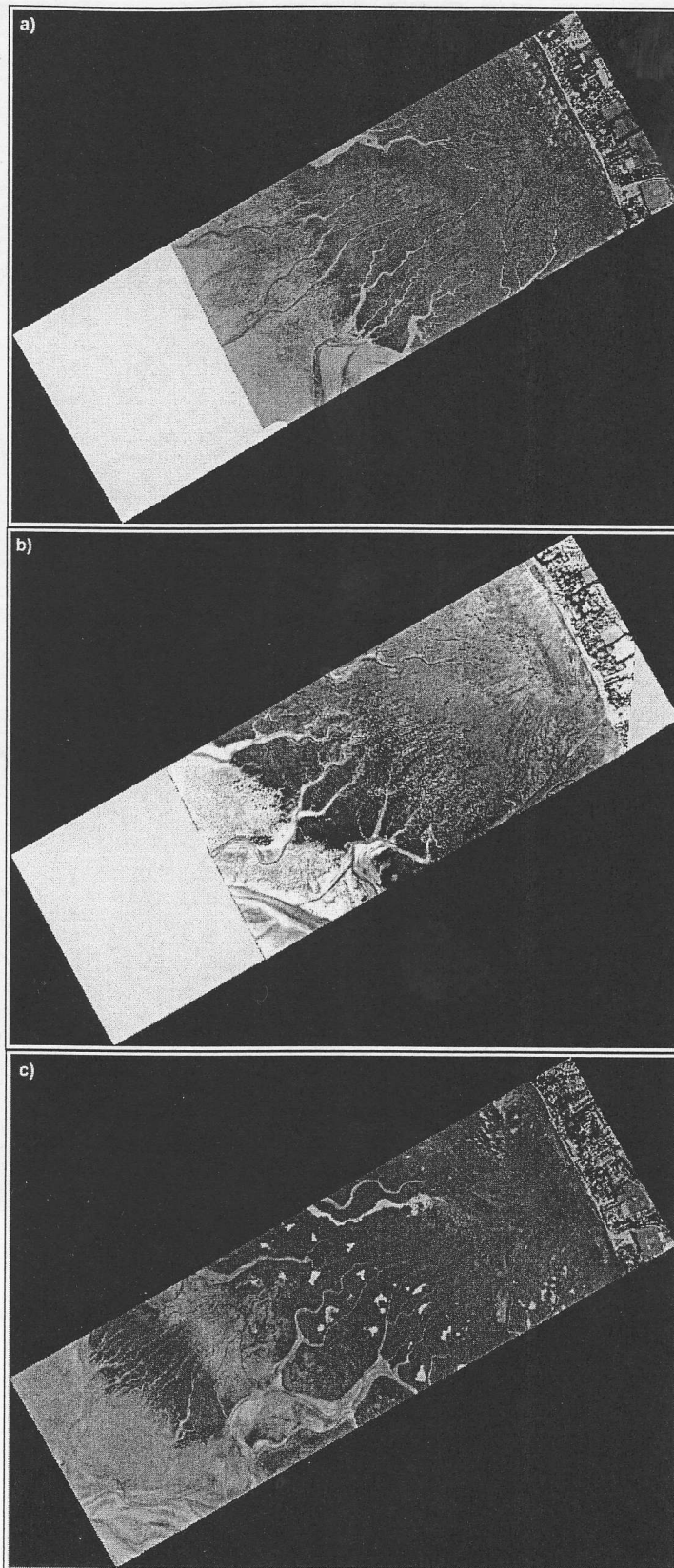


FIG. 4. Historical sequence of black and white aerial photographic images of Area 2 near Parkgate: (a) 1955, (b) 1965, (c) 1975, (d) 1997. Dark areas indicate unanalysed areas not included in photographic coverage and the photograph for 1955 is not reproduced because of poor quality (Scale 1:18000).