

# Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

## Newsletter

Autumn 2004

Issue Number 67

### 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 2004 - 2005**

- 20 September – Roger Bunn – “Walking and Working Stick Maker”  
25 October – The AGM followed by – Leslie Brown - “Diving and working below water”  
22 November – Dr Helen Ash – “Voluntary Service Overseas in China”  
2005  
7 February - Eric Johnson – Friends of Leasowe Lighthouse  
7 March – Steve Harris – Wirral Barn Owl Trust  
4 April – Colin Millington – The Fender Valley  
16 May – John Moffat – History of Flaybrick Memorial Gardens.

Non – members are welcome

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

Anne Williamson 336 6146 or  
Jerry Harris 336 7406

The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, no. 503718

### **AGM**

**The AGM will take place on Monday 25 October 2004 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), Philip Owen (vice chairman), Angela Clarke (secretary), Clive Edwards (treasurer), Valerie Place (subscriptions secretary), Becky Ford, Suzi Grenfell, Stephen Gordon, Peter Knight, 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**

It is, with sad hearts, that we report the death of **Julian Grenfell**, who died on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2004. He was a founder member of the Society and our loyal and generous supporter for more than thirty years. He would lend us anything we asked for, from photocopying facilities, to storage space, to teacups. He was the kindest of men and will be greatly missed.

Some members may be interested to see a booklet, *150 Years of Mostyn House School*, written by *Geoffrey Place*. Copies can be bought for £3.95, postage included, from the Secretary, Mostyn House School, Parkgate, Neston, CH64 6SG.

**Michael Potts** has resigned from the Committee after serving for 21 years. We are most grateful to him for all that he has done for us, for thirteen years as vice-chairman. His role as planning liaison officer has been taken on by **Peter Knight**. **Suzi Grenfell** has been co-opted onto the Committee.

**Clive Edwards**, our Treasurer, is to be congratulated for organizing Jazz concerts over the past 6 years, which have raised £14,800 for **Claire House**. The next one is on 22 October at Heswall British Legion. The Parade Jazz Band and the amazing Kid Boyd from Yorkshire will be playing.

It is good to see that the strengthening and building work on **The Old Butcher's Shop, Swifts**, has been completed, the scaffolding is down and the building is now awaiting new sash windows to be fitted.

The **Parkgate Nursing Home** redevelopment work (see Spring 2004 Newsletter) commenced at the end of July. Lets hope that disruption of the Parade is kept to a minimum.

**Leighton Hall Farm** barn conversion plans have been approved.



**Leighton Court**, the large house whose grounds stretched the full length of **Buggen Lane**, on its north side, had a gate on to **Leighton Road**. On this gate there used to be a notice which said:

Be ye man or boy or woman  
Be ye early, be ye late  
Be ye coming, be ye going  
Please don't omit to shut the gate.

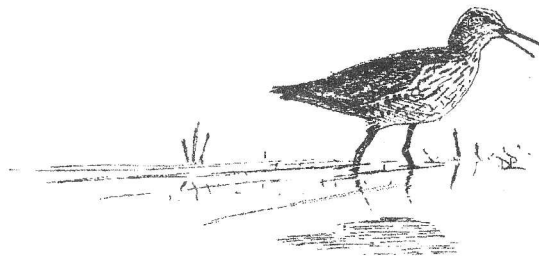
## **25 YEARS WORKING FOR THE WILDLIFE ON THE DEE ESTUARY**

**By Colin Wells, Site Manager, Dee Estuary Reserve**



**for birds  
for people  
for ever**

I can hardly believe that 25 years has gone by since the RSPB established a nature reserve off Parkgate. So, what has this meant for the Dee Estuary and its birds? Back in 1979, the society purchased from what was then British Steel, 2,050 ha of saltmarsh and inter-tidal mud and sand flats (Gayton Sands) on this important estuary. This enabled the society to create a large sanctuary area for feeding and roosting wildfowl and waders and soon after a substantial increase in birds was noted. Key wintering species are shelduck, wigeon, pintail, teal, oystercatcher, black-tailed godwit, dunlin, curlew and redshank. All occur in nationally or internationally important numbers. Since then, further land has been bought and management agreements made on both the English and Welsh sides of the estuary, have resulted in a reserve area of 5,415 ha dedicated to safeguarding the future of some of our most special birds.



Redshank

The saltmarsh off Parkgate is also very important for breeding birds with regionally important numbers of breeding redshank, skylark and reed bunting. Whilst the reed and sedge beds are important for breeding water rail, grasshopper, sedge and reed warblers. Birds of prey (Raptors) hunt the saltmarsh and last winter was exceptional for hen harriers with five coming in to roost off the Old Baths car park. Peregrine, merlin, kestrel, sparrowhawk, marsh harrier and short-eared owl can also be frequently seen. A feature of the last couple of years has been the increase in barn owls and many birdwatchers at dusk have enjoyed the sight of one of these charismatic birds hunting off the promenade! Over the years mosquitoes have been a major issue for Parkgate residents and rightly so. The RSPB have carried out substantial engineering works to try and alleviate the problem. Works carried out have involved, digging drainage channels, clearing silted gutters and creating larger pools which mosquito larvae do not favour. The large pools created near the Boathouse have attracted an excellent variety of bird species, which include: great white egret, spoonbill, spotted crane, curlew, sandpiper and little stint.

Since 1987 the RSPB and the local Ranger Services have been organising birdwatching events around the estuary. If the conditions are right, some of the best high tide birdwatching and raptor watching can be enjoyed off Parkgate, so why not come along and join us. In 2004, the RSPB celebrates 25 years on the Dee Estuary and has planned a packed programme of events to celebrate this important milestone.

For further information please contact the RSPB on 0151 336 7681.

### Key Dates in the history of the Reserve...

<b>1979</b>	Parkgate/Neston marshes (Gayton Sands) purchased creating a major wildfowl and wader sanctuary on the estuary. Bob Gomes became the first Warden.	<b>1983</b>	Wardening agreement established at the Point of Air.
<b>1984</b>	Bob Gomes left to become Warden at Elmley on the Isle of Sheppey. Colin Wells transferred from Leighton Moss to become the new Warden and latterly the Site Manager.	<b>1986</b>	Arable fields bought at Inner Marsh Farm. Creation of wetland takes three years to complete.
<b>1987</b>	First high tide birdwatching events at Parkgate, in partnership with Wirral Borough Council.	<b>1988</b>	Oakenholt Marsh purchased creating a safe wildfowl and wader sanctuary on the Welsh side of the estuary. Birdwatching hide erected at the Point of Air. Purchase of Burton Point Farm.
<b>1992</b>	Inner Marsh Farm opened to members. One hide and a small car park provided, access via Burton Point Farm.	<b>1993</b>	Point of Air/Bagillt Bank Wardening agreement signed with Environment Agency, creating a major wildfowl/wader sanctuary on Welsh side of estuary.
<b>1998</b>	Internationally important numbers of wildfowl/waders occurring on Inner Marsh Farm result in the site being designated as a SSSI.	<b>1999</b>	Inner Marsh Farm proposed as extension to Dee Estuary Special Protection Area.
<b>2000</b>	Wardening agreement signed with Mostyn Dock.	<b>2004</b>	RSPB celebrates 25 years on the Dee Estuary.

### TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO - The Society in 1979

This was the year that we first published our guidebook, *This is Parkgate*. Six years earlier we had produced a leaflet called *A Stroll Round Parkgate*, which had sold well, and we had accumulated enough money to try something more substantial. Mike Barton, who taught at Mostyn House, agreed to draw some illustrations, but only if he were provided with photographs. Nearly thirty pictures were found or newly taken and he was asked to pick a dozen or so. But, to our delight, he drew them all. The original version of the book has a bright yellow cover, later to be replaced by a painting by David Scott. The book is still available from Nicholls, in Parkgate.

Geoffrey Place gave a talk entitled *Parkgate and the Irish Invasion*, which he hoped would excite people's curiosity. Unfortunately the title misfired, as one prominent shopkeeper declared that he had Irish blood and, without hearing the talk, was offended. In fact, the talk was about the tides of Irish harvest labourers, which flowed in and out of Parkgate in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The Society was asked to join in the Primary School's parade, which had a pirate theme. Clive Edwards nobly dressed up as a pirate, we borrowed children from friends, and our pirate crew sailed along the Parade in a truck. Tremendous!

School Lane was, at last, given its No Entry sign, which we had been campaigning for.

## AUNTIE SARAH'S BY THE SEA

Post war Parkgate and Neston, what a grand place to grow up in; it had everything you needed/could wish for. Cameron's for bikes and Dinky toys and B.S.A. Bantams for big boys, Hodges' toy shop for Tri-ang toys and trains, and later Matchbox, Frog and Airfix, the Co-op with its Christmas grotto, Rostance's, Nichols, Hughes, Cooper's, Peters, Manning's, Lawson's, TAG's, Cash's, Bartley's, Irwin's, Evans the baker and, of course, my Mum and Dad's, Woodhouse's, with its cardboard cut-out of Arthur Askey advertising GEC TVs. I know, I know, there are very many more, and I hope I have not offended by not listing all, you can now start in Liverpool Road and work your way down town. See how many you can remember, and then you must go to Parkgate for Swift's, and the lady who had a grocers shop in the front room of a bungalow in Brookland Road, and don't forget Crook's the chemist, medicines dispensed and films developed. Now spend the rest of your evening remembering all the smashing shops and services that were once on offer in the bounds of Neston Urban District, oh! and don't forget, two/three or is it more stations, Leaman's garage, Hill's coaches, Askey's taxis, the New Cinema, steam rollers, the Cottage Hospital and the Rev'd East and Sunday School trips by steam train from Neston South to West Kirby.

This was where I lived, as a lad, a lucky lad, the youngest son of Jim and Beat Woodhouse and grandson of Sarah Anne Brazenell (Nanny). At last I've got there: "Auntie Sarah's by the Sea". My earliest recollections of Parkgate being those of visiting my Nanny, who ran a guesthouse on the Promenade, called Sea View. At nine on a Saturday morning my Mum would walk me down to the Cross, to catch one of those lovely green No. 102 Crosville Bristol L6Bs, a halfpenny fare and I was on my way to the Square to be met by Nanny. After a drink and a biscuit, the first job was to help Nanny (at least I thought I was helping) to change the beds for next week's guests; there was actually a room in the upstairs of an out-building in the yard. Then over the road, with bread, to feed the seagulls, quite often they would be bobbing up and down on the water, yes water. Back for a drink, my Nan with her Camp coffee, then off to the shops, butchers, grocers, maybe an ice cream and seemingly always, a visit to Mr Crook, the chemist. After that, in the right season, it would be off into my Granddad's wonderful walled garden for fruit and veg. I can't remember much about Saturday lunches except that my Nan occasionally spoilt me with my favourites, pancakes.

Saturday afternoon, and the place started to get busy, visitors arriving to stay or for an afternoon out. Then my Mum arrived, to take up her Saturday afternoon job as a waitress for Miss Hope (I think it was Miss), in Broad Beams Coffee House, next door to my Nanny's. What wonderful smells came out of that place, none of your Camp coffee there. The rest of the day varied, I think it depended on who was around. I might help Nanny bake or be taken to visit Granddad in his signal box on Parkgate station, paradise!!! One of my brothers might turn up and I may be taken for a walk,



to play in the sand, yes sand, there was still sand between the Boathouse and the Baths, yes the Baths, I was occasionally taken for a swim in the Baths, the little pool, of course.

I suppose I still haven't quite got to "Auntie Sarah's by the Sea", well here goes. My Nanny and Granddad were Shropshire folk, their families still living there, farmers and country folk from the Bishops Castle area of south Shropshire or as it was known then, Salop, and some from the big town, Shrewsbury. Well on this little island of ours you don't get much further from the sea than Salop, so many a treat was had by visiting Auntie Sarah. To me these were the real highlights of those long summer days in Parkgate, being taken out by my visiting Shropshire aunts, uncles and cousins. Nanny retired and so did Granddad, he did a bit of gardening for posh folk, they moved to a semi in Brookland Road, "White Cot", no more paying guests, but still the Shropshire gang came to "Auntie Sarah's by the Sea".

PS. What about the Schools and Doctors, Polly Hodgson, Big Jack Simpson, Selby etc., what a great start to life, happy memories!

(Mr Woodhouse, what a wonderful article, thank you. Please contact us, we need more of this! Anne and Jerry.)

## ST. THOMAS'S CHURCH

This time last year we were looking forward to starting structural work on the church as soon as tenders had been received and a contractor appointed. That work, phase 1, is now complete and the church walls have been strengthened and tie bars fitted (visible only from the interior). The building has been re-roofed using the original slates.

The Bishop's Trust held an open day in July to allow people to see the work so far and to enable suggestions and comments to be made. This, the first opportunity for public access for 10 years, was hugely supported with about 120 signing in and an estimated 200 visiting in a steady stream throughout the day. A 10 minute outdoor thanksgiving service was held, the church bell rung and teas and assorted cakes (kindly donated) were served.

A letter was sent to benefactors in January explaining that work was beginning, this was followed by several fundraising events: a bric a brac sale (£950), a history of lingerie evening with naughty but nice food (£535), a fancy dress Skool Daze Dance (£950), the annual cricket match and ploughmen's lunches at the Wine and Music Festival at marquee week (approx. £600). These events, together with the open day and the sale of pews (£2700) have helped to raise about £6000 so far this year.

Planning is well under way for stage 2, with improvements to the church floor and the approach path planned. General interior improvement, heating, lighting and design and positioning of kitchen and WC are under discussion, with options being costed in detail.

The barometer total, at time of writing, stands at approx £140,000. More grants are being applied for and further fundraising is planned.

### FLINT RESCUE BOAT "C. E. M. E"

[The following are the recollections of Arnold Whiteway, lifelong wildfowler, punt maker and cabinet maker, from Neston]

The Dee Estuary and surrounding countryside, on Christmas and Boxing Day, 1956, were covered by thick snow and the wildfowl had descended in hundreds on the estuary, so had a number of wildfowlers with their guns. There was a hard frost, and the air was absolutely still.

As people, on the Flint side of the estuary, began to settle around their warm firesides on Boxing Day evening, a pitiful cry came from the estuary, "Save me, save me, help, help." The voice was clearly heard by people more than a mile apart. The Police were informed and they, firemen, and others were quickly on the scene, but they were powerless to help, because the caller was on the far side of the channel.

The channel was wide and deep, with large pieces of ice floating in the tidal water. It was foggy and the caller could not be seen. Owing to the Christmas holiday, the local fishermen had hauled their boats out of reach of the tide. It was after great difficulty that one of the boats was eventually launched, and when it finally reached the scene, the 'calling' had stopped. Next day, the body of the wildfowler was found on the edge of the channel, by Bill Jones, a nephew of Arnold Whiteway. Nearby was his haversack, but neither his gun, nor his dog, were ever found.

Following the tragic death of this young man, local people at once set about finding ways and means of providing a boat that could be used in such an emergency. A public appeal was launched by the Mayor of the Borough of Flint, with a target of £500. This figure was quickly realised, by donations and fundraising dances, but the problem was, what type of boat to get.

The foreshore is about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles long, with mud marshes between the channel and the mainland. The tide rushes in and out close to the foreshore, sometimes at 6 knots. It was therefore decided to keep the boat on 'wheels', and take it to the scene of an emergency along the coastal road, and then carry it to the water.

Mr Peter Bithell, the senior salmon fisherman on the river, insisted on a 17-foot boat, but to get one strong enough, and yet light enough, was a problem. A committee was formed to find the right boat. Mr Bithell, Mr Arnold Whiteway, representing the wildfowlers, Police Inspector Roberts and others, were on this committee. Many boat builders were written to and the committee went to see a number of boats, which were thought to be suitable, but Mr Bithell, as an experienced boatman, turned them all down for various reasons.

The committee then heard that a boat meeting their requirements, could be viewed in Manchester. They went to see it, and after examining it carefully for some time, Mr Bithell said, "This boat has been built by an expert, it has bearings everywhere, I can't find any fault with it." It was a 15'x5'4" boat, built by Tod's of Weymouth, and one was purchased by the Committee. It was dedicated on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1957, and named after the Mayor, Cecilia Emily Mary Edwards. One week later it saved a life in the estuary.

On a lovely Sunday afternoon four German female students set out on the four-mile wide estuary, to walk the sands from Heswall to Greenfield. The sands were firm, as they usually are, just before the tide turns and floods the whole estuary in a very short time. When they had almost reached the Welsh shore, the tide began to flood, and it was rushing along the channels between them and the shore. The four girls started to retreat towards Heswall, only to find that they had been cut off by the tide. They were good swimmers, and they decided to swim the channel. Three got safely across, but the fourth was forced to turn back.

The plight of the girl was seen by a person at Courtauld's factory, who rushed to the scene with a lifebelt, but he could not get to her. Every moment the channel was getting wider, the tide was rushing faster, and the sandbank on which the girl stood, was becoming smaller. An urgent message was sent to the police at Flint, 4½ miles away, for the Rescue Boat. The Coxswain, with one other member of the crew, and a police officer, hitched the trailer onto a car, and without waiting for more of the crew to arrive, rushed the boat along the Coast road to the scene.

The local Police Inspector, and others, arrived at the same time and helped to launch the boat. The outboard engine was started and the boat headed towards the stranded girl. In this short time, the rising tide had forced her to the top of the sandbank. She was taken off just in time. The bank was completely covered very shortly afterwards and the boat passed over it on its way back to Flint.

The girl was no worse for her experience, and was soon joined by her three friends who had succeeded in swimming the channel.

In a record to the Committee, Mr Bithell, the Coxswain, said, "This girl, in a way, enjoyed her ride in the boat. It was a lovely afternoon, but to think a young girl like that, 20 years of age, in a matter of minutes, would have passed out of this world if it hadn't been for the little boat."

[A sequel to this piece will be printed in the Spring 2005 Newsletter.]