

Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

Newsletter

Autumn 2005

Issue Number 69

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 2005

- 19 September – John Graham –
‘Wildfowling on the Dee’.
24 October - AGM, followed by Leslie
Brown – ‘Diving and
working below water’.
28 November – Dr Hilary Ash – ‘New Ferry
Butterfly Park’.

Diary dates for 2006

- 6 February 2006 – Suzi Grenfell -
‘Sir William Grenfell’
6 March – Colin Lee – ‘The Home Guard in
Cheshire’
3 April – Colin Butt - ‘Historic Warships in
Birkenhead’
8 May – David Casement – ‘Storeton
Woods’

Visitors are welcome

SUBSCRIPTIONS

£4.00 Family or Single 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.
DONATIONS ARE WELCOMED

AGM

**The AGM will take place on Monday 24
October 2005 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 following Committee members are all
willing to serve again:

Geoffrey Place (chairman), Philip Owen
(vice chairman), Angela Clarke
(secretary), Peter Knight (treasurer),
Valerie Place (subscriptions secretary),
Becky Ford, Suzi Grenfell, Anne
Williamson, Stephen Gordon and Jerry
Harris

It is proposed that Anthony Annakin-
Smith is elected to the committee.

A proposal will be made to change the
name of the Society from ‘The Parkgate &
District Society’ to ‘Parkgate Society’.

Notice about subscriptions We are going
to have to tighten up our time-table for the
collection of subscriptions Our constitution
states that subscriptions must be paid at the
start of each year, at the latest by 1st April.
We shall therefore send out a subscription
reminder with the January Newsletter, to
those who have not paid.

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

Anne Williamson 336 6146 or
Jerry Harris 336 7406

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The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, no. 503718

NEWS and VIEWS

It is with sadness, we note that **Peter Moore**, a founding father of the Society, died earlier this year. He was the County Countryside Officer and helped to set up the Parkgate Conservation Area, the first in the county, and promoted the idea of the Society.

We have contributed to the Wirral Country Park "Station Rd" and "Old Baths" information boards with brief notes on "Parkgate's Two Stations", "The Parkgate Pillbox" and "The Old Swimming Baths", the latter two with photographs. They are now in situ and we hope that you enjoy our interpretive information.

Following the survey carried out by our committee on signage, etc, as reported in the last issue, we have also contributed to a similar survey carried out by the Neston Market Town Initiative, with the emphasis on signs and bus stops (timetables and visibility) to help visitors to the area.

We are continuing to press for improvements in Parkgate. Our survey list was passed to the appropriate authorities earlier this year; examples include the rotting seats on the donkey stand, the unsafe (but much needed) notice board in Mostyn Square, the Springcroft flowerbed and the drain covers on The Parade pavement.

Our Treasurer **Clive Edwards** is resigning from the committee after 28yrs of service. We are most grateful for all his hard work and enthusiasm and will be sorry to see him go. He continues to raise thousands of pounds for Claire House Children's Hospice with his Wirral Jazz Friends events. (The next concert is on 7 October, at Heswall British Legion.)

Work is continuing on the site redevelopment at Parkgate Nursing Home and construction of a walkway at **Boathouse Lane Bridge** looks imminent.

The fundraising "barometer" for **St Thomas's Church** showed the total, for May 2005, was £180,500. Planning permission for the phase 2 improvements and the two small extensions was passed in April 2005. This year's main fundraising events so far, the Antiques evening, the Hawaiian Dance and the Cricket Club Charity day have raised approx £2000 (see notice board for details). The Trust still needs to raise a little more before the next phase can begin.

A VISIT TO PARKGATE IN 1854

Parkgate was a dreary place when Kitty James came here in August 1854, on holiday with her half-sister Minnie (Mary Anne) and their grandmother. Kitty wrote the letter below to her father, John James, a solicitor in Wrexham. He had married three times; Kitty and Minnie were the daughters of the first two wives and "little John and his sister" were the children of the third wife. In 1854 Kitty was seventeen and Minnie, fourteen.

She found Parkgate dreary because the life had gone out of it. The village had been sold in separate lots, by the Mostyn estate in 1849 and 1852; most of Parkgate's sea bathing custom had been sucked away to New Brighton; and the weather was cold!

Here is what Kitty wrote:

"My very dear Papa,

According to your desire I write, but Parkgate affords so few subjects for a letter that I scarcely know what to put in it.

We are enjoying ourselves on the whole pretty well but we find Parkgate so very dull, that we think it will be better for health and spirits to make a change; and therefore have fixed to go to Rhyl next Wednesday. We found a family here, when we came, by the name of Platt, from Chester. Mr Platt is a chemist near Bolland's. They belong to Mr Knill's church and are a very nice family indeed. They went away last Monday.

Minnie is writing to Mr Griffiths today, as he desired, she is now about as well as usual, except the toothache, while I am writing she will be glad if you would send her some gutta-percha, in your next letter.

We go, sometimes, to Neston on errands but it is too long for Minnie, so she takes a donkey wherever she goes. As it is rather cold here now we have a fire in our lodgings. Have you cold weather in Wrexham?

There does not seem to be many people here at present and Grandma thinks Parkgate much duller than it used to be.

I think I had better finish my letter now as it is nearly post time, so with best love from all of us to dear Mama, who I hope is much better, and yourself and kisses to little John and his sister.

I remain your affectionate daughter,
Kitty"

'Mr Platt' was Henry Platt, whose chemist's shop was in Foregate Street, Chester. In 1855, the year after Kitty's visit, he built Alma Cottage on the Parkgate Parade. 'Mr Griffiths' may have been her family doctor, probably Thomas Griffiths, general practitioner, of Wrexham. 'Gutta-percha', a rubbery latex, was then used for filling teeth.

Bolland's, said to be near Henry Platt's shop, was a luxury grocers. The Revd. Richard Knill was minister of the independent chapel in Foregate Street, Chester. John James, Kitty's father, was also a nonconformist and played the organ at Wrexham Congregational Church.

The letter was posted at the Parkgate post office, which then formed the front part of the Ship Hotel. A copy of the letter was given to the Society by Geoff Topp.

TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO - THE SOCIETY IN 1980

In those days we used to organise annual clean-ups of the foreshore at the base of the sea wall, something, which is, thankfully, now done by the Council. As well as the regular clean-up, one of our committee members organized a junior pick-up followed by sausages and baked potatoes, which attracted some thirty young people. But our more senior members were showing signs of tiring of this annual toil!

The newsletter contained drawings of two Parkgate ships of the 18th century. These were the *Minerva*, a trading vessel, and a pilot's boat. The drawings were made by 13 year old Lee Langton of Mostyn House, from photographs of a bowl and a jug respectively. Both photographs have since been published in the book *The Rise and Fall of Parkgate*.

At that time Geoffrey Place was giving annual lectures on local history. The sixth in the series, given in 1980, was about "Customs and Smugglers".

1980 was the year that the Neston Conservation Area was finally decided upon. The Council originally asked us to look after it, but we felt that Neston needed a society of its own. The Parkgate Society therefore sought out likely people, invited them to one of our meetings and asked them to form a steering committee. We guaranteed them a start-up fund, lent them a committee member and were pleased to see the launch of the Neston Civic Society at the end of the year.

Our chairman then was Jim Cochrane, whom we congratulated on his appointment as vice-chairman of the Lawn Tennis Association and on his engagement to be married.

A plea for information about old Parkgate yielded a letter written, in 1854, by 17 year old Kitty James. It is reprinted in this issue.

LETTERS FROM 60 YEARS AGO

The following extracts are from letters written by Margaret Bamford to her fiancé, Frank Pritchett, who was serving in the Royal Navy on the cruiser HMS Sheffield.

The Bamford family, four sisters and a brother, were living at Holmwood, now Lilac Cottage, next door to Neston Library.

"Monday 7th May 1945

By the time you get this letter, 8th May 1945 will no doubt be an historic date. VE Day!!!

Tuesday

I'd only written one page when Norah, Kath and Lilan went mad and I couldn't concentrate any longer! They played Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings and they all began capering around. Then they started making pennants out of red white and blue material. They look very pretty, too. There are four strings of them from the front bedroom windows to four points on the garden wall.

Tom found a fine flag-pole for the big Union Jack, and we have Union Jacks and Stars and Stripes hanging from all the upstairs windows, and the British, U.S. and Red flags over the front door. On the front doorstep we've put a Nazi flag, made very expertly by Katy. That has to be walked over by everyone who comes in the house.

When I was on my way to Chester station last night people were standing on ladders and window ledges, hanging flags and bunting out and kids were running around shouting their heads off. When I reached the traffic lights, three bus loads of German prisoners went past and two little boys ran alongside waving Union Jacks! The Germans sat there like blocks of wood with their shaven bullet heads and the four British soldiers in the front of each bus sat with broad grins on their faces."

"Friday, 17th August 1945

I promised I'd tell you about the peace celebrations in this letter. After I'd written to you on Tuesday night and sealed the letter, the news came at midnight that the Japs had given in, just the time when you were due back on the ship!

Won't you have a lovely long weekend next time? Katy set to work at once and made a Chinese flag to go with the GB, USA and USSR flags and a Jap flag to put on the steps with the swastika.

Tom helped Mr. Lewis, the dentist, to decorate the Town Hall. We heard there was to be a big Victory dance at the Institute on Wednesday night, so Norah and Kathleen and I went to sleep in the afternoon, as the dance, so they said, went on until 2 a.m. We got up at 5 o'clock for tea and then someone told us the dance was to be on Thursday! What a sell! We spent the evening listening to a band on the Cross and going the rounds of the many bonfires, which were blazing everywhere, with old Tojo burning in about six places at once. We finished up at Parkgate. There had been a huge bonfire opposite to where Mr. & Mrs. Peters live, but we were late for that one.

At night we went to the aforesaid dance, but not for long. The atmosphere was unbearable. Not that people were drunk - I only saw two drunken people and they were young boys, but there were about 300 too many there! We went home long before it had finished, "we" being Norah, Kathleen, Tom, Dorothy, four sea-scouts, two girls and two airmen we found there. We went up to the Cross and from then until 1 a.m. we had a marvellous time. The Cross was floodlit from huge lamps in the upstairs windows of Benson's, Southern's, the White Horse and the Brown Horse. Camerons' radiogram was placed near the window and they had two amplifiers near the window, outside the shop. Everybody danced around down Parkgate Road, Brook Street and round and round the Cross. The "gallery" was about ten deep. There must have been about a thousand people there! Mr. & Mrs. Tomlinson were having the time of their lives, and Doc and his new fiancée, a Wren, to whom he became engaged on VJ Day.

That's how we finished up our celebrations. All this, together with the bright sunshine, the flags and church bells, made a very happy day."

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Thank you very much Margaret. Does this inspire anyone else to put pen to paper?

Parkgate and its names (part 2)

By Anne Williamson

LITTLE LANE - created from a short entry in 1849.

MANOR CLOSE - built on the site of an 18th century house, called Manor House, probably on the site of the hunting lodge attached to Neston Park.

MANORIAL ROAD - this follows the path of a footpath that led to the Manor House.

MEALORS WEINT - the Mealor family run the fish and shrimp shop on the Parade and have been a fishing family for generations. Colin Mealor still fishes in the estuary.

MOORFIELD DRIVE - Moor refers to a marshy ground.

MOORINGS CLOSE - was once the garden of the house on The Parade called The Moorings) built in the late 1790s).

MOORSIDE AVENUE -off Moorside Lane.

MOORSIDE LANE - marks the old boundary of Neston deer park, thus the southern boundary of Parkgate, which ran down to the marshy ground - Moor.

MOSTYN GARDENS - off Mostyn Square.

MOSTYN SQUARE - the Mostyn family of North Wales owned Parkgate (and much of Neston) from 1672 (when Sir Thomas Mostyn married the heiress of Leighton) until 1849 when it was sold in a great auction.

OLD QUAY CLOSE - near the site of the old quay on the estuary.

OLD QUAY LANE - leads to the site of Chester's New Haven (built from 1541) later called New Quay or Neston Quay, then Old Quay.

PADDOCK DRIVE - probably the site of the paddocks when Parks Field, off Wood Lane, was used for horse race meetings.

PARKGATE ROAD - the road from Neston to Parkgate

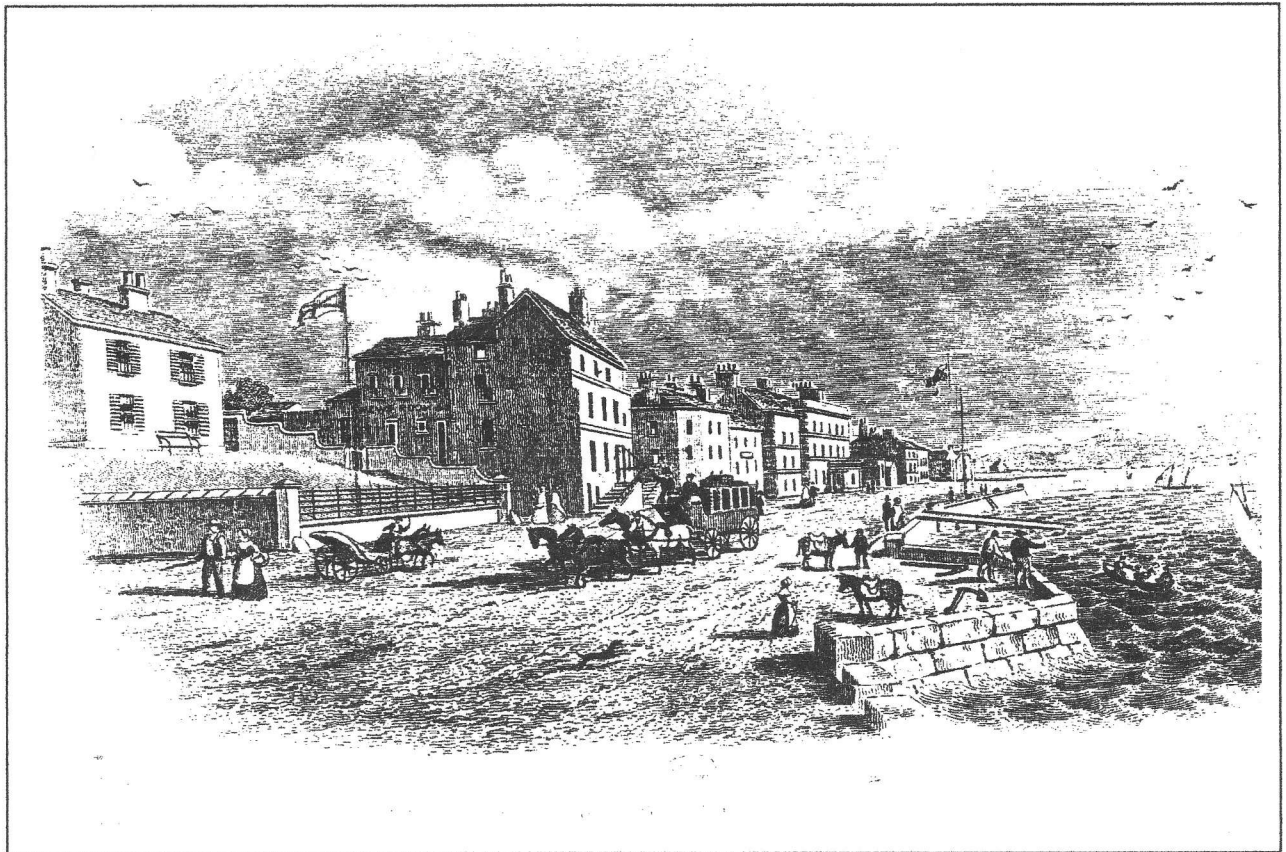
SANDHEYS - originally called *Playground Place* because it was built on part of the sports ground of Mostyn House School. A hey was an enclosure.

SCHOOL LANE - the old schoolhouse was an infant's school from 1860 - 1968. Mostyn Cottage was a boy's boarding school (Parkgate Academy) in the 1860s and Brockleigh was a girl's boarding school for at least 50 years until about 1860.

SPRINGCROFT - remained undeveloped for a long time because its springs made the ground too wet.

STATION ROAD - formerly the Turnpike Road (1787 -). Now named after the railway stations, one built on the south side of the road in 1866, and the other built in 1886, when the line from Hooton to Parkgate was extended to West Kirby. The station areas are now part of the Wirral Country Park (opened in 1973), and form part of the Sustrans cycle route from Liverpool to Chester.

PARKGATE about 1860



This print shows, on the left, Alma Cottage, which was built in 1855. It was built by Henry Platt, a Chester chemist, whose shop was in Foregate Street. He named his house after the battle of Alma River, in the Crimea, where Britain and her allies defeated Russia, in September 1854. Next to Alma Cottage is the old Assembly Room, since called Balcony House, but the balcony has not yet been built. On the Donkey Stand are two donkeys, waiting to carry visitors who did not want to walk. There are also two large mooring anchors, which unfortunately were taken as scrap iron, at the start of the Second World War.

This print is said to have been used as the letterhead of the Pengwern Arms, an inn that stood on the site of the present Boathouse. During the 1860s the inn was run by the Johnson family, and family tradition has it that the coach in the picture is the Johnson's omnibus, which took people from Parkgate to Hooton (until the railway came to Parkgate in 1866), or to Woodside ferry. There survives a business card, allegedly of the Pengwern Arms, showing this print. It was engraved and printed by Evans & Cresty of Chester.