

AUTUMN 2006

## Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

### Newsletter

Autumn 2006

Issue Number 71

#### 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 2006**

- 25 September – Linda Brislin – “North West Air Ambulance” + Neston Cricket Club  
23 October – AGM followed by “Some should-be-more-famous British women” by Mike Murphy + Groundwork Wirral  
27 November – Peter Nicholson – “History of Gordale Nursery and Garden Centre” + Neston MTL.

#### **Diary dates for 2007**

- 19 February – Chalky White – “Neston Town Council”  
19 March – TBA  
16 April – Gavin Hunter- “Thomas Mawson, landscape gardener”  
21 May – Ron Hutchinson – “Life through the rear-view mirror”

Visitors are welcome

Articles or suggestions for future Newsletters are most welcome, please contact:  
Anne Williamson 336 6146 or  
Jerry Harris 336 7406

#### AGM

**The AGM will take place on Monday 25 October 2006 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:

Philip Owen (chairman), Angela Clarke (secretary), Peter Knight (treasurer), Valerie Place (subscriptions secretary), Becky Ford, Suzi Grenfell, Anne Williamson, Stephen Gordon, Anthony Annakin-Smith and Jerry Harris.

It is proposed that Moira Andrews be elected to the committee.

Please note that 2006/2007 subscriptions are due following the AGM.

#### 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.

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## GEOFFREY PLACE

*Following the sudden and untimely death of Geoffrey Place, the Society President, Jim Cochrane wrote this appreciation, which he read out at our meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2006.*

I would like to share a few thoughts with you about Geoffrey Place, our Chairman and friend.

His life was filled with scholarship, integrity and service to others. For over forty-seven years, Geoffrey lived in Parkgate, and he became very active in researching and recording local history.

Geoffrey joined the staff of Mostyn House School in 1959, and he contributed enthusiastically to all the school's activities. His special interest was Air Rifle Shooting, and he was a successful shooting coach. He was elected Chairman of the Preparatory Schools' Rifle Association; he took over the Presidency from Lord Swansea. Geoffrey retired from Mostyn House in 1995.

Geoffrey's extensive post-graduate study resulted in his becoming a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Liverpool. He worked tirelessly on the history of Parkgate, and was a published author.

Geoffrey was an outstanding Chairman of the Parkgate Society, always a stickler for accuracy and a fine leader in promoting the welfare of Parkgate. He was responsible for encouraging civic pride and making Parkgate a welcoming village.

There are many myths about Parkgate; through his research, Geoffrey was able to correct a number of them.

Geoffrey married Valerie in 1964, and they were a wonderful team. Valerie gave so much strength to Geoffrey, and together they were dedicated servants of the local community. He belonged to various local societies, being a former Chairman of the Burton and Neston History Society, as well as being Chairman of its Research Group.

The thing I remember most about Geoffrey was that he loved a challenge. If it was impossible, he enjoyed it even more.

We all owe a great debt to this man for the unselfish work he did as a committed volunteer. We shall miss him very much.

## **NEWS and VIEWS**

The **Boathouse Lane Bridge and footpath** work was completed in February. An official access to the Wirral Way was constructed in July.

The **conservation sign** on Boathouse Lane has been reinstated, after an absence of 18 months.

**Retrospective planning applications** for recently installed signs at three public houses, on The Parade, have all been turned down. They will now have to be removed.

When we heard that **Moira Andrews** was not seeking re-election, to the Borough Council, after 18 years as one of our councillors, we quickly co-opted her on to Society Committee. Her knowledge of local government will be invaluable to the Society. You are invited to formally elect her to the committee at the AGM.

In 1977 the Society bought a seat to commemorate the Queen's Silver Jubilee. This was removed some years later, having suffered the ravages of vandalism and with it went the **plaque** that the Society had also provided. A further seat and plaque were provided which met the same fate. Much to our surprise the **plaques** were found recently in a Borough Council desk and have been returned to us!

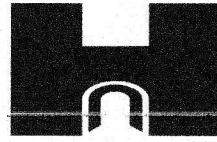
The **WW2 Air Raid Shelter** under the playing field at Mostyn House School is being fitted out as a new rifle range by the Phoenix Shooters Association. It will be dedicated to Geoffrey Place.

Filming took place in April for BBC's **Countryfile** and **Coast**. A rare Spotted Crake was seen, while filming at the Old Baths car park.

There have been discussions with the Borough Parks Officer about redesigning the flower beds at the entrance to **Springcroft**. We hope to get funding from the Neston MTI to carry out improvements.

**Neston Cricket Club, Groundwork Wirral and Neston MTI** have all been invited to give a short presentation on their plans, to our members at one of our monthly meetings. See the winter talks programme. The Society is taking an active part in Groundwork Wirral's public consultation on the development of Parksfield.

Another **survey walk** by members of the committee and Kieran Collins, resulted in a new list of items to be tackled. Until the ownership of the sea wall is established, some of the work may be delayed.



## **heritage open days**

**IN NESTON AND PARKGATE**

**FRIDAY 8TH, SATURDAY 9TH, AND SUNDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER 2006.**

Come and find out more about the heritage and history of Neston and Parkgate, **ENTRY IS FREE.**

The **PARKGATE SOCIETY** and The **NESTON CIVIC SOCIETY** are jointly arranging this event in conjunction with the owners of the following buildings -

**St Mary and St Helen Parish Church** will be open Friday, Saturday and Sunday (pm). See the remnants of **VIKING CROSSES** displayed in the church, the unique collection of stained glass windows, the Royal Stuart coat of arms, dating back to the Civil War, and many other interesting features (such as the font that Lady Hamilton was baptized in!)

**St Winefride's Church** will be open Friday, Saturday and Sunday (pm). The building has a number of **PUGIN** connections and further interesting and rare stained glass windows.

**Mostyn House School Chapel** will be open Friday (to schools only, by invitation), Saturday and Sunday. Also see the **WW2 AirRaid** shelter under the main playing field! There will an interactive tour of the Chapel and shelter for children, with a hands on workshop. Also a limited opportunity to see, hear and maybe play the **War Memorial 37 bell Carillon!**

Self guided walks of both Neston and Parkgate, looking at the history and heritage of the two communities, will be available plus two guided walks, one around Neston and the other looking at the industrial heritage of the area, details of which will announced nearer the time.

There will be people on hand at each event to give information on their building. Refreshments will be available at all sites and on Saturday and Sunday there will be a free shuttle service between the buildings.

Please watch the local press and posters, nearer the time, for more information. If you wish to have more information you can visit the following web sites -

**[www.heritageopendays.org](http://www.heritageopendays.org)**

**[www.parishofneston.org.uk](http://www.parishofneston.org.uk)**

or email **[nandphods@merseymail.com](mailto:nandphods@merseymail.com)**

## HARBOUR BEGUN BUT NEVER FINISHED

Down on the marsh, near Neston, a hundred yards or so from the ugly, desolate slag heaps that remain as reminders of Wirral's abandoned coal industry, and almost within sight of the remote Harp inn, as it looks across the saltings, an old stone wall and a few slabs of scattered sandstone are all that is left of the once famous New Quay Harbour Works, the biggest job Neston ever tackled.

In Roman days, and for centuries afterwards, Chester was the most important port in the locality. As the Dee silted, and the boats became bigger, the commerce of the city lessened, and the ships had to use, as ports, the villages that are strung along the Dee coastline.

The cockle-shell craft came in turn to Shotwick, Burton and Denhall, and when these could no longer take them, the tiny boats dropped anchor off Neston.

But an anchorage was not enough. The ships needed a harbour, a place of greater safety than the most perfect anchorage could provide. Neston provided the best site and local authorities in Chester decided to build on the Dee shore in the vicinity of the village.

The place where the new harbour was to be erected had the local name of Lightfoot Pool.

As usual with most projects, lack of finance proved to be the first obstacle. Instead of the money coming out of the rates, as would probably happen now, a direct levy on the people of Chester brought the first funds, and over a much wider area parsons were authorised to make special church collections for the fund. Engineers estimated the cost of the scheme to be between £5,000 and £6,000, and the first appeal was made in 1541.

To increase the amount of money available, contributions were requested, and readily received, from the several City Guilds. Churchwardens were asked to be responsible for the other collections, which varied from 8d. to 2d. a month, depending on the circumstances of the individual. Important people paid 2s. 6d. per month.

Others were in the happy position of being able to donate a lump sum and then forget all about the scheme. One note records that many people were much behind in their payments.

Although the first funds were available in 1541, and some of the materials also, work on the new harbour did not begin until 16 years later.

In 1541 the Master of the Kings Wood beyond Trent had a directive to deliver to the Mayor of Chester, 200 trees growing in the Flintshire and Cheshire woods, for the new harbour works at Lightfoot Pool.

The task was tremendous. The first problem, to find adequate supply of stone locally, and as near as possible to the new harbour was soon solved. Masons and labourers were engaged, and 60 great stones were delivered each week, together with between 16 and 30 tons of filling stone. The transport of the local material had been arranged at fourpence per load. Additional supplies came by boat at one penny.

One of the cranes used in the work was of the treadmill type. These had been in use since Roman times, and were popular in mediaeval Britain. The women of Neston worked this treadmill. For their heavy labour they received 3d. per day, and as these were the days of penny-a-day wages, the money was good.

Reports state that most of the local ladies had a try at this part-time task, but in the end, the work was done by six regulars.

Thomas Lewis, Master of the Work for a short time, received tenpence a day, a wage reckoned to be "stupendously high". But after 20 weeks his work did not seem to be satisfactory, and his term of service ended. An inventory revealed that many items were broken and missing. One pay rise labourers received lifted their wages from 5d. to 5½d. a day, with another twopence for overtime.

The method of building the harbour wall was to construct parallel faces of great stones, and fill the spaces in between with smaller material. In October 1568 the work was reported as well on the way to being a good harbour.

Yet, 36 years later, in 1604, men were still labouring on the scheme. What happened we are not sure, as there does not seem to be any record of the haven being properly completed. Perhaps, by that time, the ever encroaching sand had rendered the harbour virtually useless, and it was necessary to make a start on a newer port lower down the river.

*We are grateful to members Mr and Mrs A Smith for this article from a Wirral newspaper, thought to be from the 1950 - 1960s. We cannot trace which newspaper so are unable to attribute the article.*

## SIR WILFRED GRENFELL - MISSIONARY DOCTOR OF LABRADOR

*Following the talk given, last February, by Suzi Grenfell, we were given this article, written by Margaret Lello, for which we are most grateful. It also gives members who did not attend Suzi's talk, an insight into the life of her great-great uncle.*

"On a recent trip to Labrador and Newfoundland, we noted that our itinerary included a visit to the Grenfell house Museum at St. Anthony, L'Anse aux Meadows.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell was born in Parkgate in 1865, the second of four sons of the Rev. Algenon Sidney Grenfell, headmaster and proprietor of Mostyn house school. Sir Wilfred studied medicine and a year after qualifying, he joined the National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen as a medical missionary. During a visit to Labrador in 1892, he found there was only one doctor, who paid an annual visit from the Newfoundland colony, to look after thousands of seasonal cod fishermen, over 3000 permanent settlers and the native people living along the coast. He decided to devote the rest of his life to looking after the needs of these isolated communities and, over the ensuing years, established nursing stations, hospitals, schools and an orphanage.

On a lecture tour in England in 1922, he talked of his life in Labrador and mentioned, in passing, the difficulty in finding suitable clothing for Arctic conditions. Mr Walter Haythornthwaite, a Burnley mill-owner, took up the challenge and, after experimenting for a year, came up with the ideal material - light, strong, weather and windproof, and breathable. This Grenfell cloth, as it was called, was used extensively in later Himalayan and polar expeditions - even tents were made of it! As young mountaineers in the 1950s we had heard of Grenfell cloth but could never afford it - we were kitted out courtesy of the Army Surplus Stores, and could only envy members of the Climbers Club speeding up the Nant Ffrancon, in their sports cars in this sought-after kit!

The Grenfell house Museum in St. Anthony, was the former family home - a wooden house with polar bear skin and sealskin rugs on the polished floors and on the walls, memorabilia and pictures of the work of this most remarkable man from Wirral. His statue outside the Museum looks towards one of the first hospitals he set up. We handed over a recently published history of Mostyn house School, which we had bought from the school prior to our departure, which was gratefully received - their only copy being old and dog-eared.

On our return home, we took our photographs of the Grenfell Museum along to Mostyn House, where the current Head is Sir Wilfred's great-great niece. It happened to 'Open day', so we were entertained to coffee and the most delicious scones in Wirral, and given a tour of the school with Jonathon, one of the 'on-duty' pupils."

## 25yrs Ago - The Society in 1981

*Does the date 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1981 mean anything to you?* It will when I mention a certain marriage! The Prince of Wales married Lady Diana Spencer, and in Parkgate people celebrated. 150/200 people gathered at The Saltings in Manorial Road and enjoyed such festivities as skittles, a treasure hunt, an old photo exhibition, guess the weight competition, etc. There was also a pianist and food to complete the occasion. £81 was collected and sent to the Blue Peter Appeal, which was duly acknowledged by Bidy Baxter.

*Neston Cricket Club celebrated its Centenary*, which was the cause of some discussion! Our Parkgate guide book which had been meticulously researched and written by our late Chairman, *Geoffrey Place*, stated that the club was founded in 1895. It was noted that there were at least four earlier clubs in Neston or Parkgate and because Neston Cricket Club were aware that cricket had been played in Parkgate on August Bank Holiday, 1881 had decided to commemorate that date for their Centenary. Who knows when the bicentenary will be held - a difficult decision, but let's hope it will still be in existence then.

Do you remember the popular *Radio programme "Down Your Way"*? Well the radio crew headed by Brian Johnston, visited Parkgate and interviewed local folk. The highlights of the programme were written up in our newsletter of the time.

".....*Colin Mealor* pointed out the difference between a shrimp and a prawn: "size and colour; shrimps are small and brown, prawns are a bit larger and pink. Anything over 200 to a pound in weight are classed as shrimps and under 200 to a pound are prawns."

.... *Reg Bushell* told how he came to make his model of a fishing vessel: "to occupy my time (after his appendix burst) I made a model of a boat, the Two Brothers, a boat that father and Mr Mealor used to work. Father had boats of his own, but I think a boat is like a horse; like a jockey likes a certain horse, I liked the Two Brothers".....

.....*Geoffrey Place* quoted the infant school's log book for 1887: "owing to heavy gales we were unable to have the school this morning: the parents refused to sent the children as it was unsafe, owing to slates falling about the shore.".....

.....*Eric Jarvis*, one of the original Wirral Country Park rangers talked about the high tides flushing out wildlife, such as bedraggled foxes splashing through the rising waters on the marsh, and *Jim Cochrane*, our Society President, talked about how he had married the previous year to a Canadian, and therefore chose for his piece of music, "Oh Canada".