

# Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

## Newsletter

Autumn 2007

Issue Number 73

### 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 2007

- 17 September - "Liverpool – Capital of Culture 2008"  
– *Mary Beaumont*
- 22 October – AGM at 7.30pm, followed by "Shropshire Union Canal and Taylor's Boatyard"  
– *Geoff Taylor*
- 26 November – "The Williamson Art Gallery"  
– *Colin Simpson, Wirral Museums*

#### Diary dates for 2008

- 18 February – "Cheshire Murders"  
– *Alan Hayhurst.*
- 17 March - "Liverpool Overhead Railway"-  
– *Mike Murphy.*
- 21 April – "Chester Heritage & History Centre"  
– *Alison Watson*
- 19 May – "Birkenhead Park"  
– *Adam King.*

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 22 October 2007 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), Moira Andrews (Vice Chairman), Angela Clarke (secretary), Valerie Place, Becky Ford, Suzi Grenfell, Anne Williamson, Stephen Gordon, Anthony Annakin-Smith and Jerry Harris.

Peter Knight is resigning as Treasurer, so we are looking for nominations for a new Treasurer.

Please note that 2007/2008 subscriptions are due following the AGM.

### SUBSCRIPTIONS & DONATIONS

£4.00 Family or Single per year

Payment can be made at any of our meetings or directly to our Treasurer:

c/o Peter Knight  
71 Moorside Avenue  
Parkgate.  
CH64 6QS

Standing order forms are available, if required.

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**James Robertson Cochrane CBE JP FRGS FRZS**  
**President of the Parkgate Society**

**1924-2007**

Jim Cochrane was larger than life: a real giant of a man, not only in his physical stature but also in his achievements. His sphere of influence was immense. He had so many different interests that his life touched innumerable others' lives - as a colleague, a friend and an inspirational mentor.

Jim was born in Bolton on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1924, the son of a doctor, and he was sent to board at Mostyn House School in Parkgate in 1934 thus beginning his long connection with the School and our local community. Jim went on to public school at Wrekin College in 1938 from where he joined the Royal Navy in 1942. He served principally on the North Atlantic convoys, the Murmansk run and then in underwater mine disposal. He was invalided out of the Navy in 1945 following an explosion in Hamburg harbour.

In 1946 Jim returned to his old school in Parkgate as a teacher of mathematics, later to become Head of that department and Second Master of the School in due course. He was completely involved with all aspects of school life but it was the sports side where one of his greatest strengths lay. His love of sport shone through and enthused all the boys lucky enough to be coached by him. The 1<sup>st</sup> XI football team saw one of its most successful periods ever under his management. All the pupils were inspired and encouraged by the famous guests he would arrange to visit the school for a spot of expert tuition, such as Stanley Matthews.

Jim played tennis for Lancashire as a young man, and as a teacher he again became involved with the world of tennis through the prep schools circuit. He began to help run local tournaments such as Hightown and Hoylake. This path led him away from teaching and he became Chairman of the Lawn Tennis Association in 1981, then its President for the following two years. He was a member of the Management Committee at Wimbledon for twelve years and also served on the board of the International Tennis Federation. He held many important positions in the tennis and sporting world, but one that was very close to his heart was his Chairmanship of the Dan Maskell Tennis Trust which helps disabled people play, compete and enjoy the game of tennis.

As well as changing directions in his career in the 1980's, his private life took a wonderful new turn when he married Margaret Mary Leeson in December 1980 in the Mostyn House School Chapel. He adored Margaret Mary and her two children, Dickon and Lavell, and he loved the new found warmth of family life. He had first met Margaret Mary in 1955 when she was visiting England from Canada. They were brought together by their fathers who had met in 1915 as young doctors in the RAMC on their way to Gallipoli.

To our local community Jim gave his time and experience in many ways. He became a Magistrate in 1968 and later served as the Chairman of the Wirral Bench. In recent years he helped to raise funds for his old school, supported local charities and was also an advisor in the North West for The Prince's Trust. He was a member of the Parkgate Society and was elected Chairman in 1974, after Steve Norris left to pursue his career as an MP. By 1981 Jim was finding it increasingly difficult to attend the Committee's meetings because his tennis commitments took him away from Parkgate so much, so Geoffrey Place suggested he became the first President of the Society. Jim took a great interest in the Society's activities and received minutes of the meetings by e-mail.

Although Jim travelled the world and delivered finely polished speeches, he remained a down to earth Lancastrian who could converse as easily with the man in the street as the VIP in the Royal Box. He had plain and simple pleasures: watching Liverpool play football or catching up with Coronation Street. He liked plain and simple "not mucked up" food. He gave plain and simple no-nonsense advice whether the recipient was a young child or an international tennis star. And it is a plain and simple fact that he will be very much missed.

Jim died on 17<sup>th</sup> July after a short and sudden illness. A service of thanksgiving for his life will be held in the Mostyn House School Chapel on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> November at 2pm.

## News & Views Autumn 2007

**Is the Society doing the right things?** We continue to liaise with other local bodies, watch over Parkgate and its developments, co-operate with other local groups, enter for community competitions, organise talks, print information on Parkgate, communicate with the planning dept., research local history and produce a twice yearly newsletter. We welcome feedback from our members as to how the Society can best serve its members, so let us hear from you.

This year members of the committee have met with the acting Chairman of the Friends of Park Fields, attended the first general meeting of the new community association ch64inc, met the Conservation Officer for EP&NBC, been updating the booklet "This is Parkgate" ready for re-printing, producing a Parkgate walks leaflet and been organising the Heritage Open Days in Parkgate, to mention just a few items!

**Park Fields.** An application made for Village Green status on the original area (not the cow field) is still pending. The Friends of Park fields are holding an Inaugural Meeting, on 18<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm, at the Civic Hall, Neston. All are welcome.

The **Red Lion** has laid out an attractive and large beer garden at the rear of the pub.

Following the introduction of gift aid in our Society, we are now in the process of computerising our **membership** lists and encouraging members to pay by standing order. We hope you continue to enjoy your membership of the Society and that at £4 for a family it is value for money.

The **swans** have successfully hatched cygnets on the marsh, much to the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike. Is this the first time their nesting has been successful? We think so.

### **The Springcroft Planting**

The Society has been fortunate to receive funds from the Neston Market Town Initiative and have worked closely with Geoff Coleman, a very creative and enthusiastic member of the Public Spaces Unit of EP&NBC, to create the Springcroft planting in Parkgate.

The new planting, at a strategic focal point to Parkgate, will provide year round interest. A range of traditional perennials with varied colour and foliage have been planted within hard landscaping, reflecting the history of Parkgate.

Original sandstone blocks from the railway bridge which spanned Station Road have been used. These form a backdrop to the feature railway bogey, representing the historical links with the railway line, now the Wirral Way. The old crazy paving has been replaced with tarmac and a redundant signpost next to the seat has been removed. Just for the record, the bogey, which we had thought was from mid-Wales, has now been confirmed as coming from a quarry at Much Wenlock in Shropshire

Contd.

Parkgate Society has dedicated a memorial seat to their late Chairman, Dr Geoffrey Place, historian and school master, who has made a huge contribution to Parkgate and district. The seat, with plaque, has now been installed at the front of the garden.

#### WEBSITES

Take a look at the website [www.neston.org.uk](http://www.neston.org.uk) which has been set up as a result of the Market Town Initiative and includes the whole CH64 area (Burton, Little Neston, Ness, Neston, Parkgate and Willaston). Local businesses, shops, traders, organisations, societies and clubs are encouraged to become listed on the site by sending full contact details and brief description (10 word max.) to Neston Website, MTI Office, Town Hall, Neston, CH64 9TR or by e-mailing [pwconsultancy@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:pwconsultancy@hotmail.co.uk)

Whilst on the subject of websites, Parkgate has its own website thanks to school pupil, Jonathan Bamforth. He has lived in Parkgate for 13yrs. Since moving to Parkgate he says he has been fascinated by its history, researching the history of buildings, studying old photos and map layouts. His own house dates back to the Georgian times and has had many interesting uses before becoming his home. He began his excellent website some years ago and each year it grows larger. Later this year he hopes to publish a live webcam link. Have a look at [www.parkgateguide.co.nr](http://www.parkgateguide.co.nr)

Don't forget we also have [www.stthomasparkgate.co.uk](http://www.stthomasparkgate.co.uk)

#### OBITUARY

In May, 2007, **John Pyke**, a popular member of The Parkgate Society and well known local figure has sadly died. Mr Pyke had joined the Society in 1996 and attended many of our talks, having himself given a talk on jewellery to the Society some ten years previously. His grandfather had founded William Pyke & Sons, the family jewellery business, the business he was Chairman of until his death, which occurred a few weeks before his 97<sup>th</sup> birthday. Educated at Birkenhead School, he had worked in Burma and had travelled the country buying gemstones, been twice mentioned in dispatches during the War, was a past President of the Rotary Club of Birkenhead, helped set up the Birkenhead Traders Association and was a Fellow of the Gemmological Association.

## 25years AGO – PARKGATE in 1982

As usual, local planning applications were referred to the Society for our comment. 1982 proved interesting because of proposed changes at the **Old Quay public house**, at Chompers (currently The Marsh Cat) and at the Porthole Restaurant (formerly the Marie Celeste, and now a private house opposite The Old Quay). Each of these required an input from the Society (representing local public opinion), the most contentious being the Old Quay plans, which occupied a whole page of reporting in the Spring 1982 newsletter. Whitbread brewery had obtained permission from the licensing justices to throw open the whole of the downstairs space into one big bar and were designing the pub with a view to attracting more motorcyclists. After pressure from local residents and the Press, a meeting was set up with three members of the Whitbread management, the pub manager and a solicitor and the Society committee to discuss the plans. Whitbread management claimed that the market in Parkgate for a "local" bar with restaurant was already saturated, and they would not succeed if they tried to ape other establishments.

The cost of converting a basically unsuitable building to include a restaurant would be enormous and prohibitive. To the comment that the existing problems of motorcycle noise and other disturbances should not be made worse for the residents, they replied by offering to patrol the car park at peak times, to erect noise baffles, bike-parks areas and appropriate signs. The new bar would be tasteful, long and curving with a section for soft drinks on draught, and the décor at one end only would include a "garage scene".

Some **greetings cards** for Parkgate were produced using four line drawings from the "This is Parkgate, its buildings and its story" booklet. The cards were sold for 10p each.

The Society decorated with flowers the pulpit of **St. Thomas's Church** for the Harvest Festival and Flower Festival, and also donated £60 to pay for trees for the church yard to replace those lost through Dutch Elm Disease, which had resulted in a changed appearance of Mostyn Square. The Parish expressed gratitude for such a handsome gift and would decide which trees they would plant.

Some re-pointing of the **Sea Wall** took place this year.

The lifelong wildfowler and Parkgate resident, Harold Gill, has just had his book "**Dee Wildfowler**" published.



## NESTON REEDBED, RSPB DEE ESTUARY NATURE RESERVE

Thanks to the BBC television programme "Coast", Parkgate is now firmly on the maps as one of the best places in Britain from which to experience the high tide spectacle and see many species of wildlife in large numbers and at close range. What the programme didn't mention was that just a stone's throw away lies Neston Reedbed, which is the finest example of a tidal Reed marsh in the North West!

The area lies within the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and is part of the RSPB Dee Estuary Nature Reserve. Small birds such as Reed, Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers fly all the way from Africa to breed here, and join resident birds such as the elusive Water rail and Reed Buntings in raising their young. Another very rare breeding bird, the Bearded Tit, has bred here twice, and people travelled some distances to see them. These birds are all found in this habitat because of the wealth of invertebrates on which they feed, and there is relative solitude for their nest sites.

The reeds themselves become dry and brown in the winter and March and April become critical months on the reserve as our migrating birds may have already started their journeys to select the best areas for themselves. Imagine how it must feel to travel great distances to find that the reeds have all been burnt. That it was happened twice in spring 2007! Two fires were started in the reeds and these had a devastating effect, destroying almost all of this valuable habitat at a crucial time of year. Where would the wildlife go now?

Fire fighters were called in from Ellesmere Port and Chester to help extinguish the flames before the fire spread to nearby homes. Not only was the wildlife under threat but also nearby buildings, and anyone who was walking along the footpath, which leads towards the Harp Inn. The fire crews themselves that were called here, knew that they could also be called away at any time to attend an emergency in a nearby town.

A lot of rubbish was found in the ashes including bottles and tyres, and the fire crews pointed out that these items and the garden waste tipped onto the marsh by inconsiderate residents would all help to exacerbate the situation should another fire occur.

In an attempt to reduce damage to this special area, the RSPB has encouraged a group of volunteers to warden the area during the breeding season, but alas, our trusty team cannot be there twenty four hours a day. They have done a grand job over the last two seasons and it is disheartening for them when all their hard work seems to have been in vain.

Plans are in place for the future of the site to maybe do some engineering work including digging ditches which would divide the site into sections. This will benefit the wildlife creating more open areas, and also act as firebreaks.

If you would like to become more involved with the spring wardening scheme why not give us a call on 0151 336 7681? You only need to do whatever time you can spare, and we would love to hear from you.

Stuart Taylor.      Assistant warden Dee Estuary Nature Reserve.

## THE NESTON WINDMILLS

The existing brick tower of a windmill in Leighton Road, which now serves as a glass engraver's workshop<sup>(1)</sup>, has been variously dated between the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Pevsner) and 1800. This article attempts to date it more accurately.

In 1732 an excellent map (now in Bangor University) was drawn of the Mostyn estates in Neston, Leighton and Thornton, and it shows a single windmill on this site. Burdett's map of Cheshire, published in 1777, shows two windmills next to each other. One windmill was built, therefore, between 1732 and 1777, and it will be shown that this was the third and surviving mill of the three, which are known to have stood in Neston.

The first windmill, of which we have certain knowledge, stood a short distance from the town along a road then called Raby Lane, but which is now called Raby Park Road. The Field Book of Neston, 1732 (Mostyn papers at Bangor) calls it "the Old Windmill, in the road, without any land", and it calls the mill in Leighton Road (then called Leighton Lane) "the new windmill". The upper diagram, marked "old" and "new", with the town of Neston between them. We do not know when the "old windmill" was built. In 1596, the Earl of Derby leased, inter alia, Neston Myll to George Ledsam (Mostyn Bangor) but we cannot tell where this mill stood, nor whether it was driven by wind or water.

In 1729 a new mill was built at Neston, by John Evans, for Sir Roger Mostyn (Mostyn Bangor) and this must be the same "new windmill" recorded on the 1732 map. In 1733 the same source records that the "old mill" was repaired, and both mills must have been operating together at the same time. We do not know when the "old mill" was demolished, but it was certainly no longer there when another estate map was surveyed in 1811. The fact that Burdett, who shows little detail on a much smaller scale, does not show the Raby Lane mill in 1777, is not, in itself, proof that it had gone by that year; but as he shows the third mill, it is unlikely that the Raby Lane mill was still working.

Which of the two mills in Leighton Lane was built in 1729? The four diagrams drawn to the same scale help make the answer clear. In 1732 there is one mill, near the fork in the two roads, Leighton Lane and Wood Lane. In 1814 the earlier mill is shown by a circle, and a second mill is shown further from the fork with the mill cottage between the two. Bryant's map of 1831 makes it plain that the two circles of 1814 are in fact windmills. The Tithe Map of 1847 shows only one remaining mill, the one further from the fork and the mill cottage. It is thus certain that the mill which had gone was the earlier one built in 1729.

We do not know what happened to the 1729 mill, but there is a clue. Certainly both were working in 1822 when they were advertised as corn mills to be let; "The tenants of Sir Thomas Mostyn in Neston, Thornton and Leighton are under covenant in their leases to grind their corn at these mills." (Chester Chronicle 6 Dec). Only a week later a severe gale caused serious damage to both the Neston mills, the top and upper storey of one being "quite blown off" (Chronicle 13 Dec).

It is possible that one of them did not recover and was a mere stump when Bryant showed both mills with conventional signs in 1831.

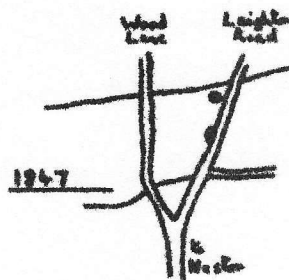
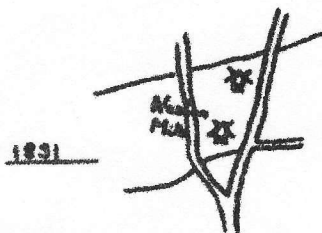
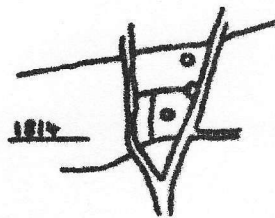
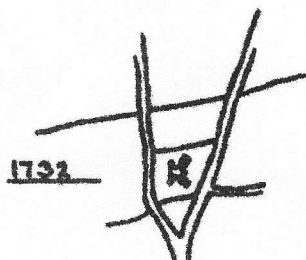
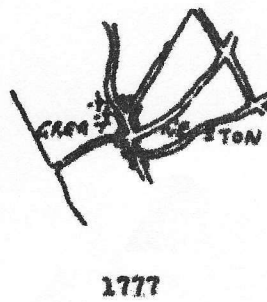
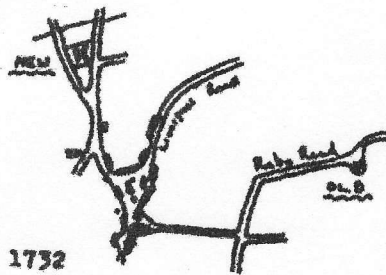
The remaining Neston mill, then, was built between 1732 and 1777. It worked until about 1885, although for the last few years it had two arms only (EM Abraham, "Old Flour Mills of Wirral", LCHS 1903). The arms used to reflect a pattern of sunlight on to the roadway and horses would often refuse to pass by until the mill was stopped.

(1) At the time when this article was written this is correct, however, the mill now is a private dwelling.

*This piece was written by Geoffrey Place some years ago, and we are very grateful to Valerie Place for giving us permission to reproduce it (Eds)*

1732 Mostyn Estate Map. The Old and New Mills at Neston.

1777 Burdett's Map of Cheshire.



1814 Mostyn Estate Map.

1831 Bryant's Map of Cheshire.

1847 Tithe Map.