

# Parkgate Society

(Founded 1972)

## Newsletter

Issue Number 79

Autumn 2010

### 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

#### 2010

20<sup>th</sup> September - "History of Bromborough  
Port" - *Gavin Hunter*

25<sup>th</sup> October - AGM at 7.30pm, followed  
by "As We Were No.3" -  
*Glynn Parry*

15<sup>th</sup> November - In the Footsteps of  
Forrest (Ness Gardens  
plant collector) - *Ted Brabin*

#### 2011

7<sup>th</sup> February - "The Big Shop"  
- *Mike Murphy*

7<sup>th</sup> March - "Emma, Lady Hamilton - a  
reassessment"  
- *Michael Corfe*

4<sup>th</sup> April - "Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm and  
Cottage" - *Vee Gatrell*

9<sup>th</sup> May - "Underground Wirral"  
- *Gavin Hunter*

Visitors are welcome

### **AGM**

**The AGM will take place on Monday 25th  
October 2010 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.

In the last year the committee co-opted Greta  
Simpson, Jill Brock, Jill Owen, Damian  
Loughe and Rob Naybour onto the  
committee.

Suzi Grenfell and Nick Marten have resigned.  
Stephen Gordon is not seeking re-election.  
Our thanks to all three for their input over the  
years.

The following Committee members are all  
willing to serve again, and the officers are  
proposed by the Committee -  
Valerie Place (President)  
Moira Andrews (Chairman), Greta Simpson  
(Vice Chairman), Angela Clarke (Secretary),  
Damian Loughe (Treasurer), Becky Ford, Jill  
Brock, Jill Owen, Rob Naybour and Jerry  
Harris.

**Please note that 2010/2011 subscriptions  
are due following the AGM.**

Articles or suggestions for future Newsletters  
are most welcome, please contact:  
Anne Williamson 0151 336 6146  
or Jerry Harris 0151 336 7406

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

4.00 Family or Single per year  
Payment can be made at any of our meetings, however  
we would prefer payment by Banker's Standing Order.  
Membership, Standing Order and Gift Aid forms are  
available, from our Secretary.

Printing of this newsletter has been made possible by the kind support of the Rightway Bevans Group.

**Rightway Bevans**

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The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, no. 503718

## NEWS & VIEWS

**Mostyn House School** – it was a great shock to everyone to hear about the closure of the School. Our thoughts go out to the Grenfell family. Obviously there is much speculation on the future of the buildings and many rumours will abound. On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> September a consultation event took place at the school, when local residents and interested groups were asked to put forward their views on the future. The plan is for a similar event in December, a Public exhibition of Draft Development Brief in March/April 2011 and a Production of Final Development Brief in April/May 2011. The Society will obviously be keeping a watching brief on the development.

Mostyn House School has been a patron of the Society since it was formed. They have allowed us to use the School for various functions and recently our committee meetings have been held there. Printing and the use of equipment are among other things that we have come to take for granted over the years. We are most grateful.

**St Thomas' Church** was reopened and rededicated on a warm and sunny Sunday afternoon, the 4<sup>th</sup> July, the Sunday closest to St Thomas' Day (3<sup>rd</sup> July). More than 150 people came to the rededication of the Parkgate premises by the Bishop of Chester, The Rt Rev Dr Peter Forster. They were welcomed by the Vicar, the Revd Neill Robb, who, with members of St Thomas congregation, enjoyed refreshments in a marquee, after the service.

Currently the Vicar of Neston is awaiting Charity Commission 'change of use' approval before community activities can commence, and that any queries should be addressed to the Vicar of Neston 0151 353 1000 or the church wardens, Peter Rossiter or Doreen Gordon. The Bishop's Trust is continuing and the Bishop of Chester remains as Patron. See page 7 for some of the history of the church.

The **Newsletter** has been very generously printed, over the years, by Mostyn House School. What to do next has been solved by an equally generous offer from local firm Rightway Bevans Group. Also, we have decided to produce a more environmentally friendly newsletter; no cover and double sided. We hope you will approve.

Just in time to be recorded in the newsletter, **the railings along the sea wall** have been painted and look very smart with their gold tops. Hurrah!! Thank you Mike Solari for the work. The last time they were painted was in 1994.

**Free Talk on Neston & Parkgate's Slave Trade Links** - A free public talk on our area's links to the slave trade is being held in the town on November 4th. The talk, entitled 'The Slave Ships of Neston and Parkgate' will be given by Anthony Annakin-Smith, local writer and historian, who has researched the subject extensively. Organised by The Burton & Neston History Society, the talk will be held in the Town Hall at 7.30 p.m. Refreshments will be available.

No tickets are required but you are recommended to turn up in plenty of time as the level of interest when the talk was last held, in Burton, sadly meant that many people, had to be turned away.

**Parkgate's Wildlife** – this year a large badgers' sett in our locality has been confirmed as active by the local badger society. Following the successful breeding of Barn Owls in Parkgate last year, we can report that this year, Little Owls have successfully nested also. The sites of all these are of course guarded secrets, but many of the birdwatchers who have spotted the owls, have had a great deal of pleasure from observing and photographing them. Both owl nest sites were home-made wooden nest boxes made to designs suitable for the respective types of owls and were readily and eagerly used. How satisfying!

**Memories of Childhood Boat Trips Part 2**  
**Hilbre, Dee, Welsh Coast, etc.**  
**By Polly Carter**

Hilbre Island fascinated my brother; it was a magic place and very isolated. We let down the anchor, turned off the engine and just listened to the seals. After a while they became curious and to Robin's delight, swam alongside, the sun glistening on their whiskers. The big adults basked in the warm sun and occasionally cast an eye in our direction. When the tide was in favour of Burbo Bank, off Hoyle Bank, we all got up very early, dropped anchor when Dad got his bearings lined up, and rolled about as the tide ebbed. Suddenly the beautiful golden sands appeared in the middle of nowhere. The bank was showing. We could hardly wait. My brother covered the portholes with saucepan lids as he changed into his little woolly bathing costume and shivered. Dad usually rowed us ashore and we jumped out and pushed off again. The fun would begin. We raced through the shallow pools searching out marooned shrimps, they tickled our bare toes. Crabs were collected and occasionally dab, a small plaice type fish. But the real jewels were black lumps of coal; these were prized and kept for taking home. As more boats arrived we all played rounders mainly with sticks from the tide line. There were always lots of brooms and these made excellent bats. Dad reckoned that deckhands threw them overboard to avoid work! Once a crate of soggy oranges came our way, a green glass carboy and masses of skate eggs. We viewed New Brighton from the sea and could smell candy floss and doughnuts, blowing across on the wind. Come the tide turn and we were off.

One of my jobs was to scrape the top deck clean from seagull poo, as the sharp shells in it cut into the painted canvas stuck to the deck and also cut our feet. My first job was always to get the bilge pump going and I then used a stirrup pump to get the last drop out. We baled out the dinghy with a South African yellow cling peaches tin, the punt we baled out with a decorator's mini bucket, but the punt was big and heavy so it wasn't as prone to shipping water as the small pram dinghy was. I learned to scull in the punt but had to stand on the seat as I was so small, it took two hands to handle the big heavy oar. This doubled as a depth gauge as we came into shallow waters with the big boat. Robin and I sometimes rowed together in the dinghy, mainly to keep him occupied! Once we were in Rhyl harbour and I was rowing ashore to walk down to the roller rink when I heard a splash, looked behind and saw that he had fallen, again! I fished him back on board and turned round to get his wet gear off – again! We used to walk about Rhyl inhaling the chips and candy floss. If we had any spare pennies we would gamble them on the machines, which were forbidden, naturally.

Some summer hols we stayed at Conwy. We beached the boat and used "the legs" to keep her upright, for weeks. We spent hours sketching the craft in the harbour, the mountains, The Sleeping Princess, the castle, the bridges; it was all so interesting. We played in the shingle; mostly skimming stones when the tide was in. when it was out we made sand pies and paddled in the rock pools. Our mail was sent to the yacht club in the town. We roamed around the shops looking at sweeties and toys, water pistols and spud guns and cap guns if caps were available. I desperately wanted a tiny Toby Jug, showed it to Mum and she dismissed it as "so ugly". But he fired my love of antiques, as did that funny old antique curiosity shop. 40 years later I did get my tiny Toby, someone brought it into my shop in Heswall, so I bought it. Everything comes to those that wait!

Father had a fisherman friend, Peter Barr. When he was tied up at the quay unloading the catch into the boxes of loose ice, we marvelled at the size and variety of fish. Some were still alive. We usually got skate wings, Dad's favourite, and Mum cooked them in a pressure

cooker on the primus stove. Robin and I caught mackerel with lines baited with bits of foil over safety pins. We would see big shoals of them from the top deck, chase them and haul them in so fast, they jumped out of the water, the most beautiful blue silver. When we had enough for a meal I would scale and gut them throwing the guts overboard and watched the herring gulls swoop and catch them. Now the gulls swoop and pinch visitor's fish and chips when they are sitting on the harbour walls!

There was a joke shop in Deganwy, opposite Conwy, and Robin was always asking me to row him over the harbour. He pressed his nose against the glass, jingling his small coins in his pocket, begging for a loan from me. Money burnt a hole in his pocket, stink bombs winked at him along with inkblots and spiders. At last a modest purchase was made after a lot of fingering of the goods. It was well wrapped up in brown paper and clutched to his small frame. He also bought joke books, marbles and penknives. I looked in the jewellers, gemstones fascinated me, coloured pebbles from Scotland and necklaces made of shells. Neither of us had a watch so I had to keep an eye on the tide for our safe return. We paddled about in the rock pools and had a large collection of shells between us. This collection also contained prize pieces of blue glass; old Milk of Magnesia bottles worn smooth by many tides and shingle, slim pieces of slate for skimming and occasional oyster shells. If the sky looked like rain Robin and I put out clean bowls and buckets to save precious rainwater. Water was not easy in Conwy; "Old Dick" kept a padlock on the tap cupboard, he had a mean streak in him!

When we sailed home around the Great Orme, we saw jellyfish as big as plates. Dozens of types of sea birds, which sent us to find our Observer Books in order to identify them. I had a tiny shelf above my pillow with books on fungi and shells, seaweed and how to tie knots. Once we walked up the Conway valley and found horse mushrooms, 10" across, fried in farmhouse bacon fat, they were divine.

My father learnt to knit fishing nets, which were attached to a wood and metal drag device. This he launched over the side, dragged along the sea bed and hauled up, emptying the catch over the stern by undoing the thick twine fastened round the "cod end". He selected the flaties, Mum collected the raw grey shrimps and we stabbed and threw the rest overboard to the following gulls. Small fish were cooked on top of the asbestos covered exhaust and eaten there and then. The shrimps were boiled in a Heath Robinson container in salt water until they turned pink, then plunged in cold sea water, drained and placed in a Hessian sack and carried ashore. We had customer waiting for these delicious morsels. We all sat round picking them and I would dole them out with an aluminium jug, a quart at a time. Dad made his own very small nets expressly for shrimps, the needles being fashioned from slivers of soft wood. The nets need constant mending as the seabed was littered with sharp obstacles. In fact he built Robin a three-wheeler from pieces chucked out along the shore. The river was a tip and the sandbanks held centuries of junk.

We kids searched the tide line as we strolled along the shore; boxes of fruit, oranges were particularly seized upon and used as balls. Footballs were prized. Baulks of wood were reused and the residue was squirrelled away, in a dry garden shed, as winter fuel for our coal fire. We could hear him "chopping chips", kindling, which I would run round and give to my Gran. She would dry them out in her oven. Nothing was wasted.

The sad day came when Dad announced that he'd sold the "Vina", she was to be used as a gig boat on the Manchester Ship Canal. Robin was inconsolable. Then we went on a trip to Mr Crossacks yard to view her successor. She had been a whaler and was sleek but had a damaged hull. The designs were everywhere, as Dad's ideas for her poured out. He tried at one point to buy an old narrow boat, 70' long by x 7' wide, but she was half submerged in

mud and access difficult with the lorry so it was abandoned. My Mother loved the canal, the peace and quiet, as we used to tie up along the bank, usually by a field of cows. Robin and I searched for mushrooms, located the farmhouse and, armed with jugs and containers, would ask for milk and water. Farm butter was Mother's passion and with a fresh egg she was in heaven! 'Cow pat' cakes were decorated with ragwort and clover, kept us happy for hours. As the boat was still, Dad was able to get his joinery tools out to do jobs. He would toss over little offcuts of wood and we would race them in the water; our version of "pooh sticks", except we used lengths of dark green weed from the bank, which acted as ropes and propelled our boats along. Robin overreached himself and, as usual, fell in, this time into the River Weaver, just a quiet little plop and he was sinking fast. Dad jumped in and dragged him up and out, his smelly wet gear being left on the bank, which I stretched over bushes to drip-dry. Robin said, "it was warm down there", thick mud apparently. We did play in the canals, where shallow spots were to be found, and made a mess and a lot of noise. Some canals were very warm especially when they were discharging chemicals and using water for cooling systems. This meant the mud was churned up like watery brown soup and when we got out the little hairs on our bodies had mud particles stuck to them. We looked very brown and had to be sluiced down with fresh water before we could get back on board again.

*Well that has relived some wonderful childhood memories. Both my parents have now passed on, so it is the end of an era! Sadly something tells me that current Health & Safety rules would not have allowed us the free life we had back in the 40s and 50s!!!!*

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## **Twenty Five Years Ago Parkgate in 1985**

### **Openings, closings and building development**

The Abbeyfield Society established itself in Parkgate by purchasing its large semi-detached house in Earle Drive.

Texaco applied for planning permission to demolish their Bebington Ford garage on Parkgate Parade and redevelop the site as flats for the elderly. The Society was impressed with the plans which were described as reproduction late Victorian style and resulted eventually in the Deeside Court building. The site of the Bebington Ford garage, between Mr Chows and Greywalls was previously Leemans Garage which began its life as early as the 1920s formerly occupying a position opposite the Cricket Club where the house Filia Regis now stands. Later in the 1920s Leemans moved to the Parade and when the adjacent old convalescent home was demolished in the 1950s were able to expand their business towards Greywalls by using that area as parking.

Mr. Williams's shop, the Green Bottle, closed down. The shop, which occupied the corner site that is now the Parkgate Ice Cream Shop, featured on the long running 'pen & ink' notelets of Parkgate.

Peter Barnes, formerly of the Boat House, sold the very successful Parkgate Hotel to Whitbreads and the new manager, Henry Turner took over.

### **Honours for Parkgate and the Society**

The Society's President, Mr Jim Cochrane was awarded the CBE in the New Year's Honours. He had just stepped down as the President of the lawn tennis association and was a JP and Chairman of the Bench of EP & Neston Magistrates.

### **Local History Books**

Burton & South Wirral Local History Society published their recently completed History of Burton and announced that they were planning next to undertake a history of Neston. This was subsequently published, with the aid of a loan by the Parkgate Society, in 1996, and titled "Neston 1840-1940". The editor was Geoffrey Place.

### **Parking changes**

Do any of you remember the old fashioned no parking road markings that were painted along the Parade? < **NO PARKING** > This was the year we changed from these to the modern system of the dreaded double yellow lines. Should they instead have painted a row of white elephants !!??

### **History repeats itself!**

The Society began investigating the ownership of the **Sea Wall** and the strip of marsh between the wall and the RSPB reserve. This complex issue with the many factors that surround the ownership and maintenance warrants a whole article in the newsletter, but suffice it to say, the Society in 2010 is pursuing the repainting of the black railings near the middle slipway. (Below is an article that Geoffrey Place wrote in 1985. This is now in the hands of the Town Council, and it is hoped that it will help resolve the ownership and hence the maintenance of the wall.)

Local Councillors informed the Society that the Borough is going to build a "Trim Trail" on **Parks Field**. However, they wanted also to point out that the idea of putting a large number of football pitches that had been proposed 6 or 7 years earlier was still a possibility.

The Society added its comments to the proposed development of land behind Mostyn House, known as **Grenfell Park**. 1) The route of Little Lane should be maintained, 2) the proposed housing density should be reduced, and 3) the landscaping should allow for existing trees to be incorporated into the plan.

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## **THE SEA WALL AT PARKGATE**

**By Geoffrey Place**

In 1799 Sir Thomas Mostyn, who owned Parkgate, bought the remaining stones of the ruinous Old Quay, a mile up river, from the City of Chester. It is likely that he used this stone to build the first part of the sea wall, which ran from the Middle Slip, at the Watch House, to the Donkey Stand. This first section appears to have been built in two parts, as the north stretch has no parapet. There then was a house on the site of the Donkey Stand, and the sea wall went round the house. The first mention of the "*quay wall*" yet found, was in 1800 (CRO, QJF 228/2). This first section of the wall can be seen on an estate map surveyed in 1811.

The Mostyn estate map dated 1732 shows clearly that there was no sea wall and roadway in front of the houses, which gave directly on to the beach. The ships would anchor in the mainstream of the river, then some fifty yards from the shore, and there was no quay or landing stage at all. Passengers were rowed ashore at high tide or carried across the wet sands by sailors. There was a landing stage at the Boat House for the ferry to Flint, established in 1786. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a wooden landing stage just south of the Donkey Stand, built before 1849, probably by the Dee Yacht Club. Only the posts were visible in 1915 when the District Council was petitioned, unsuccessfully, to put a new top on it, 30 to 40 feet long. The posts had been buried in sand for 40 years but had reappeared. The only clue to an earlier landing stage comes from an advertisement in *The Chester Chronicle* of 5 June 1770: "*A genteel house pleasantly situated on the Kay, at the lower end of Parkgate, to let*".

The wall, therefore, was not built for the benefit of the ships, but for the sea-bathing visitors. One of the rituals of inland spa towns was the daily promenade. At Parkgate, the visitors in 18<sup>th</sup> century, bathed early in the morning, so a Parade was built where the ladies could show off their finery. As *The Chester Chronicle* reported on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1811; "*A grand, brilliant and*

*splendid display of fireworks will be exhibited on the shore beneath the Terrace at Parkgate*". The Mostyn family was keen to develop Parkgate as a bathing resort as its importance as a port began to decline and the various stretches of the sea wall are examples of this development.

The second section of the sea wall, perhaps built in the 1820's, was a southward extension from the Donkey Stand to a point opposite Prospect House, as can be seen in a drawing dated 1825 (or 1833). The parapet stones of this section each have a rectangular hole in the top, giving rise to the surmise that there may once have been railings. But the holes are too shallow for this and are probably grip holes to assist moving the stones. The third section of the wall completed its southern end as far as the South Slip, as may be seen on Bryant's map of Cheshire published in 1831. The parapet stones of this section have no holes in the top.

The fourth section completed the northern end of the wall, from the Middle Slip to the Boat House. It was described as the "*new marine parade*" when the estate was sold in 1849, and the purpose of building this section may well have been to encourage the purchase of buildings lots at this end of the village. It was a condition of this sale that most purchasers, and not only those with Parade frontages, "*shall contribute towards keeping up in the repair of the Sea Wall against the Estate, which is now on a most perfect state and not likely to require any outlay whatever, for a long period*". In November 1897 the Local Board asked counsel's opinion about responsibility for the wall and sent a repair bill to the Turnpike Trust.

There used to be two wooden flights of steps leading from the Donkey Stand to the beach, fitted by the District Council in 1904, and there were other sets of steps opposite the Square and Mostyn House. There remains a set of concrete steps opposite the end of Station Road and some steps cut into the sandstone opposite the Red Lion. The only part of the wall with no parapet is a stretch of some 90 yards beside the Middle Slip and this stretch is now protected by railings, probably put up in 1881 (Minute Book 15 October). The total length of the wall is about 1200 yards.

In 1879 it was reported that AS Grenfell of Mostyn House had agreed with Mr Macfie to pay half the expense on keeping up the sea wall in front of their properties, if other owners would do the same, and if the other half were paid by the Local Board. The Local Board and its successor the District Council did repair the wall from time to time. In 1881 (Minute Book 9 April), 18 yards of the wall was rebuilt, and later that year 70 yards were pointed and backed. The Board repaired the Middle Slip and the Donkey Stand in 1882 – 4. There was a great storm in 1889 (reported 12 October) which caused 15 yards of the wall, by the convalescent home, to collapse and the Board repaired both the Middle and Boat House slips. In 1884 (12 May) the Council declared that it owned the wall and threatened to prosecute anyone who undermined it by removing sand or gravel at its foot. AG Grenfell was given permission in 1901 "*to dress the big rough stones at the foot of the wall*".

## **St. Thomas' Church – some snippets of history!**

### **The Original Opening 1843**

*Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> May 1843 11am and 6pm services.*

Preachers were from London and Liverpool respectively, with six other ministers and the local Rev., Robert Jones assisting.

The Chester Chronicle reported: "The Chapel was well filled by deeply interested congregations. In the afternoon about 70 friends of the undertaking sat down to dinner in the old Assembly Room which for some years past has been used as a place of worship by the Christian society now transferred to the new sanctuary."

### **The Original Building was a Congregational Chapel.**

It was built through the generosity of George Rawson Esq. of Pickhill Hall near Thirsk, Yorkshire, costing £600, with architects, Pritchitt & Son of York, giving their services free.

The site was leased to Trustees by the landowner Edward Lloyd Mostyn for two guineas a year. He was praised by The Chester Chronicle for his tolerance in allowing space for nonconformists. It later changed to a Presbyterian Church (1858), and was eventually leased by the Church of England (1910) and purchased by them for £300 in 1917. They named it St. Thomas' Church.

### **St. Thomas' Church**

The church has also been known affectionately as the **Fishermen's Church** because for much of its history many of the local people who attended earned their living through fishing and shrimping, and the church garden walls were used for drying nets.

In May 1993 the **150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** of the building took place. A **flower festival** and various activities took place, with the church full throughout. Approximately 1000 people signed the visitors' book during that week.

The church thrived and had a popular Sunday club for children and also a choir, until sadly, with a faulty and leaking heating system, rotting and woodworm infested sections of flooring, walls that were bowing outwards under the weight of the roof and roof slates sliding free, the building was declared unsafe and essential safety work was required. The cost was too much for the Parish.

### **The Closure 1994**

The last service was held on a warm summer's Sunday, the 24<sup>th</sup> July 1994.

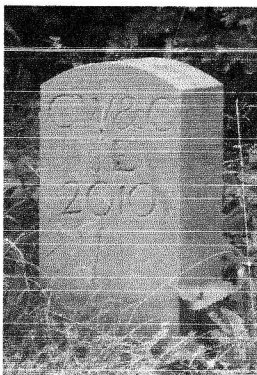
### **The Bishop's Trust for St. Thomas'**

Following years of uncertainty, an application for demolition, and a "For Sale" board in the church garden, the Parkgate Preservation Trust spurred the community to action, the building became listed grade II, and a Trust was formed under the patronage of the Bishop of Chester to lease, fund raise and restore the building.

### **2002-2010 Fund raising and building work**

Removal of pews, the large church organ and all the differing floor levels, renewal of all the building services and installation of modern facilities, together with the re-roofing, stabilisation of the walls and equipping for modern use, has enabled the building to be returned for use once more as a daughter church for the Parish of Neston and as a much needed community building.

The total cost of work was £250,000, of which English Heritage gave grants of approx. £40,000 and also advised on restoration.



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This sandstone block, on the north side, near the top, of Boathouse Lane, commemorates the "Beating the Bounds" carried out earlier this year, by the Lord Mayor of Chester, Councillor John Ebo, to establish the boundaries of the new Authority.