



Parkgate Society

Newsletter

Autumn 2018

Issue Number 95

Welcome to this new edition of our Newsletter. We hope you will find it an interesting read.



Parkgate: Dee Cottages (May 2017).

*‘Working together to preserve and enhance the unique character of
Parkgate’*

Notices

Meetings 2018/19 Season

We normally meet at 8pm at **The Cranston Suite, Neston Cricket Club, Station Road, Parkgate**, usually on the third Monday of the month.

17 Sept. - Annual General Meeting at 7.30 pm, followed by
'Nelson, the Navy and Tradition'
- Michael Murphy

15 Oct. - 'The Beauty & Interest of Wirral'
- Colin Millington
NB. To be held in the downstairs bar

19 Nov. - Hot-pot Supper at 6.30 pm
followed by
'The Liverpool Overhead Railway'
- Gavin Hunter

21 Jan. - 'The Burma Railway 1942- 1945: Disease, Death and Survival'
- Dr Geoff Gill

18 Feb. - 'Myanmar, My Great Grandfather and Me'
- Dr Bryan Lecky

18 Mar. - 'The Tay Bridge Disaster'
- Professor Sir Ian Gilmore

15 Apr. - 'Bittersweet - a Story of Sugar'
- Dr Trevor Evans

20 May - 'The Hardmans' House, 59 Rodney Street'
- Mr Norman Waddell

The Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the Society's AGM will be held at the Cranston Suite, Neston Cricket Club, on Monday, 17th September 2017, at 7.30 pm.

Election of Officers for 2018/19: to be proposed en bloc:

Chairman: Jill Brock
Deputy-Chairman: Bryan Lecky
Secretary: Alan Passmore
Treasurer: Roger Harris

Election of Committee for 2017/18: to be proposed en bloc:

Derek Haylock, David Johnson, Jim Lycett

Co-opted members to be ratified: Carol Fearnett, Marie Lycett

Appointment of Auditor:
Clive Edwards

The Committee are proposing that the position of Membership Secretary be added to the list of officers of the Society.

Any proposals from members to be considered at the AGM and any further nominations for the Committee must be submitted to our Secretary Alan Passmore at least 14 days before the AGM.

TRANSPORT - If you need help with transport to our meetings, please ring Alan Passmore, our Secretary, giving 24 hours' notice, on (0151) 336 - 2917.

VISITORS - We are always on the look-out for new members and, therefore, would like to encourage you to introduce your friends to the Society. Visitors are very welcome to attend our talks – first time free – after that we will encourage them to join as members.

SUBSCRIPTIONS - £7.00 Single / £10 Household per year. Subscriptions are due on 6th April each year. Payment can be made at any of our meetings; but we would prefer payment by Banker's Standing Order. Membership, Standing Order and Gift Aid forms are available from Derek Haylock, our Membership Secretary, tel: (0151) 336-4461. Please check that your Standing Order is for the correct amount.

News and Views

After a colder winter than for many years we have subsequently experienced a prolonged period of dry, hot weather which, as I begin to write, is at last beginning to show signs of coming to an end with the customary thunder storms. The effect of the cold weather earlier in the year was a delayed Spring, while the drought has since produced parched lawns and shrivelled plants, together with the threat of a ban in the use of hosepipes. Comparisons have been made with the summer of 1976, which was the year our family came to live in Parkgate. What a marvellous place we thought we had come to live in!

The dry spell covered the period of all the outdoor events that we had planned to support. The first of these was **Parkgatefest** on the weekend of Sat/Sun 2 & 3 June at Marsh Nurseries in Boathouse Lane. In addition to manning the Society's stall we were involved in setting up and taking down marquees, the parking of visitors' cars and collection of litter. Despite some surprise rain on the Saturday morning, the turn-out on Sunday made up for the reduced number of visitors on the previous day. In the event the fest was another success, but it was clear that its viability is very dependent on the weather. We also manned stalls at **Neston Fair** and **Parkgate Carnival** in July. Visitors to our stall were very interested in the old pictures of Parkgate and were very keen to give us their recollections of Parkgate; unfortunately, however, it is proving very difficult to turn this interest into the enrolment of new members.

On the subject of membership we are, nevertheless, managing to keep our numbers fairly steady by recruiting about the same number that we lose. We don't keep statistics on our members, but it is clear that we are an aging group. This is not a healthy position for the Society in the long term. I am, therefore, asking all our existing members to consider whether they could introduce new friends, preferably slightly younger, to the Society. We are particularly on the look-out for new people who can work actively on behalf of the Society as well as those who are attracted by our annual programme of interesting talks.

This year we were very pleased to support the revived **Neston Music Festival**, promoting and sponsoring one of two concerts held at St Thomas's Church in May with Sue Reid and her group 'Reid between the Lines', who presented a programme of music from the American songbook. The general view appears to be that the whole festival was a great success, with several of the concerts being sold out and the others all well supported; indeed, we met our own target for tickets sold and enjoyed a wonderful evening of entertainment. It has now been decided that the festival should be repeated in 2019, subject to the Town Council again agreeing to sponsor the publicity (which was an important aspect to this year's success). Pat Hughes has offered to co-ordinate the managing group in place of Mike Shipman, and we are in talks with the Wirral Symphony Orchestra about the possibility of their putting on a concert of chamber music in Neston; in addition it is likely that Sue Reid will return for a further concert at St Thomas'. Watch this space for further details in due course.

Our **Community Spirit** team continue to do good work around the village, collecting litter and tidying up any grotty areas. We meet in Mostyn Square at 10 am on the first Saturday of the month and sally forth from there to the various different areas in need of our attention. The high tides early in the year left a substantial amount of debris on the marsh, requiring a concentrated effort to collect and bag up. We have been concerned about hedge growth reducing pavement capacity in some places; thanks to our efforts we have met with some success in this area, though not universally. We have entered the **Best Kept Village** competition again this year, so our efforts have concentrated on general tidiness and in particular on flower planting; and some additional planters are to be installed shortly. By now the inspectors will have made their two visits to the area and be considering their decision on

this year's entrants. Anyway, if you would like to join our team of volunteers, just let David Johnson know, so that he can contact you about specific events.



‘Parkgate in Bloom 2017’

We continue to scrutinize the local **planning applications** for the Parkgate ward and monitor the progress of approved schemes. Plans for the construction of an upper storey room with a viewing verandah at one of the bungalows in Paddock Drive met with strong objections from neighbouring residents. The decision was ‘called in’ for consideration by the Planning Committee, but in the event the scheme was approved. In their latest series of Grand Designs in July members of Neston Civic Society were given a presentation on ‘Sandpipers’ and ‘Curlews’, the two new houses currently nearing completion on the former orchard site to the rear of White Cottage on The Parade, and we were invited to view ‘Sandpipers’ afterwards. An application for permission to erect a further house close by in the conservation area on land to the rear of ‘Deva Bank’ and ‘The Bungalow’ remains to be determined. Also on The Parade at ‘Broad Beams’, adjacent to ‘Parkgate Fish & Chips’, renovation work still progresses slowly. The new house erected at No 2 Earle Drive appears to have been complete for some months, but it is still not occupied. Elan Homes continue marketing homes in their new development at Old Quay Meadows, Moorside Lane. There still seems to be no limit to the demand for homes in this area. Concerns have

been expressed about the future of green belt land in Boathouse Lane, now that Marsh Nurseries have confirmed that they are to cease trading shortly. We are not aware of any plans for development on this land, and you can be assured that the Society will fight to ensure that its status is not compromised as a result of proposals for inappropriate future use.

The Council are still applying patches to the many of the pot holes which keep appearing in our local roads – to little effect. However, we are told that Leighton Road, which is particularly bad, is to be re-surfaced shortly. The Council and the water authorities appear to have dealt satisfactorily with a problem of a sewage leakage, reported to us, which earlier this year affected those living in properties in the Moorside Lane area.

As mentioned previously, we continue to have concerns about the future of the **Mostyn House chapel**. It is still our hope that it will eventually be possible for this building to be opened to the public even on a limited basis, once all the practical difficulties have been sorted out.

We have long felt that the unofficial path that gives access to and from the Wirral Way at Boathouse Lane is a potential hazard, because it gives onto the road on the opposite side to the footpath and close to a bend; it is not an officially approved path, but has developed as a desire line as a result of custom and practice. We are now pleased to be able to confirm that funding has been put in place to construct a new path on the opposite side, which will connect directly with the footpath on the south side of the road. A start is to be made shortly.

As briefly noted in the previous edition, we are considering the feasibility of submitting a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in conjunction with CWaC for funding for some of the projects identified in our 'Vision for Parkgate' and so far not achieved, viz: improved local signage, further interpretation boards and heritage plaques, etc. There will be new arrangements for Heritage Lottery bids in 2019, so we must wait to hear exactly what is required. In the meantime we have taken advice from our partners, including Cheshire Community Action, and will test the strength of local support for our bid before proceeding further. Local involvement and support is an important consideration in the case of any bid for funding from Lottery sources.



The Boathouse and The Parade, as seen from the Old Baths, July 2017

We were very sorry to hear in June of the death of one of our long-standing supporters Jimmy Pratt, who had been an active member of the Committee and very closely involved with St Thomas' Church over many years. Formerly resident at Sawyers Cottage he and Jill had moved south just a few years ago to live closer to their daughters. We pass on our condolences and best wishes to Jill and her family.

As part of the **Heritage Open Days** programme in early September we are again organizing guided walks based on our Parkgate Heritage Trail. On Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th we meet at the Batbox (the former WW2 pillbox) on the Ropewalk carpark in Station Road at 3.00 pm. The walk is about 1.5 miles, but lasts about 1.5 to 2 hours. Participants should come appropriately dressed and shod for the weather conditions. St Thomas' church is also taking part in the HODs scheme and will be open to visitors on the Sunday afternoon from 12.00 midday to 5.00 pm.

Finally, we have just heard that Nicholl's Ice Cream Shop was reported in The Guardian on 9 August to have been judged to be in the top 20 ice cream parlours in Europe. Congratulations to them on this great achievement – though we are obliged to acknowledge that there are other local outlets with a good product!

Some of Parkgate's Animal Inhabitants (Part 2) by Linda Haylock

Horses were used to carry Artillery soldiers and their equipment to and from the sands at Parkgate for firing practice, and then back to their camp on Parks Field. The Artillery units also exercised their horses along the promenade before World War I.



Royal Horse Artillery in France in 1914

b) For carrying loads:

During the 18th century, horses were used to pull bathing huts into the water so their inhabitants could be immersed in the sea water (sea bathing was meant to confer health benefits).

A sketch depicting the 1860s shows horses pulling carts with their loads off the sands. It seems that horses were used to pull heavier loads whilst ponies pulled lighter cargo. A photograph from 1905 shows fishermen waiting on the sands with horses and carts to unload their catch and carry it away. Another photograph shows a horse and trap used for shrimping, with the water reaching up to the horse's stomach. Sampkin from the marshes was transported from Parkgate to Birkenhead Market by horse and trap.

c) For racing:

The Neston races began in 1728 with the racecourse initially being at Windle Hill. However, a Cheshire map published in 1831 shows a racecourse at Parks Field, Parkgate. Place⁴ surmises that the Neston Races were held at both places during the early 1800s. The races in Parks Field seem to have ceased around 1846 but in 1881 the Wirral Hunt Club revived the tradition by holding its first annual steeplechase meeting there, consisting of six races. The annual event was extremely popular, with people attending from all over the Wirral, and it continued until 1895 when a jockey was badly injured during a steeplechase race.

In the early 20th century, Lt. Mike Rimington ran a horse reformatory and riding school in Station Road. He was known as a latter-day horse-whisperer.



Today, we still see the occasional horse and rider making their way along the Parade.

Ponies

Ponies also had their day in Parkgate and its surroundings. Fishermen used to unload their catch of cockles and mussels from their fishing boats, transfer them to ponies and carts for transport back to their homes where the seafood was cleaned and sorted ready for sale.

Pit Ponies were used at Little Neston mine to pull small wagons of coal.

Today we have the Pony Sanctuary. Based in Boathouse Lane, the sanctuary was opened by the Bamford family in 1984. It rescues and cares for ponies (as well as horses and donkeys) that have been neglected, cruelly treated or have otherwise lost their homes. The sanctuary runs well-attended annual events and open days. The ponies can be seen in the sanctuary fields at any time of the year.

Donkeys

Horses and ponies were not the only members of the equine family to carry fishermen's haul. Donkeys with side panniers also aided female shrimpers in transporting their wares and donkey carts based at the Middle Slip used to collect catch brought in by fishing boats. On occasion, the animals were ill-treated. In response the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (now the RSPCA) held a donkey competition in a field in Neston in an attempt to improve the lives of the donkeys.⁵

In 1871, Bank Holidays were first established and many day-trippers began to visit Parkgate. The donkeys previously used to pull carts full of seafood were now employed to take children for rides along the Parade. Their starting place was the projection of the sea wall now known as the Donkey Stand.

Dogs

Although the dogs in question were not of Parkgate origin, Wilfred T Grenfell placed a memorial in Mostyn House chapel which reads, '*In grateful memory of my rescue from a drifting ice-floe and of three brave dogs, Moody, Watch and Spy, whose lives were sacrificed to save mine*'.⁶ This is the story of when Grenfell crossed icy waters in Newfoundland. The ice broke up and he only survived the overnight bitter cold by killing his three husky dogs in order to wrap their skins around him to retain warmth.

Parks Field hosted the Wirral sheepdog trials in 1893, with 139 entries.

While looking at photographs of Parkgate in the past, I was quite surprised at the distinct lack of dogs walking with their owners; certainly in comparison to today. It is impossible to walk in Parkgate today without encountering a dog - it is a true dog-walker's paradise.

Cats

I would never voluntarily leave out cats. I'm just postponing them for another article where I hope to cover ghost stories of Parkgate. If anybody can help me out with tales of old hauntings, I'd be very grateful.

Mammals on the Marshes

During high tides at Parkgate, many small mammals are flushed out from their dens and nests from the encroaching waters. They scurry across the marsh towards the sea wall and land hoping to find safety. I have seen a vole desperately trying to find a hole in the wall large enough to squeeze into. There have been photographs and reports of a fox running along the marsh at high tide and even, on one occasion, a hare.



European Water Vole

©Tom Marshall

Harvest mice once made their nests amongst the grasses and reeds at Parkgate. After several particularly high tides and fires on the marsh, I wondered whether any still survived. A recent correspondence from the RSPB at Burton Mere re-assured me:

“Yes, Harvest mice are still present. Parkgate marsh was the first place these tiny little mice were noticed on the reserve, but since, we have found them all over Burton Mere Wetlands and they seem to be doing really well.

“Other mammals we have seen out there are water and common shrew, bank and field vole – we suspect water voles use the upper marsh around Denhall Lane, but haven’t had any proof yet!

“Of the UK’s larger mammals, three use the marsh regularly: Foxes actually earth out there, and badgers forage out there in the evenings.

“Otters are the third; they definitely use the marsh as we have seen plenty of signs of them, but we just don’t know how extensively they use it.”⁷

I’m still hoping very much to spot that elusive otter one day.

Linda Haylock

1. O’Brien, Pat (compiler). *The Archive Photograph series: Burton to Heswall*, Chalford Publishing Company 1996
2. Place, Geoffrey W. *The Rise and Fall of Parkgate, Passenger Port for Ireland 1686 – 1815*, The Chetham Society 1994
3. Greatorex, Vanessa. *Parkgate and Neston Through Time*, Amberley Publishing, 2014
4. Place, Geoffrey W. *Neston Races in the 1880s*, Burton and Neston Historical Society Bulletin 10 1990.
5. Place, Geoffrey W. *The Rise and Fall of Parkgate, Passenger Port for Ireland 1686 – 1815*, The Chetham Society 1994
6. Place, Geoffrey W. *This is Parkgate, second edition (reprinted with amendments)*, Parkgate Society, 2008
7. Grubb, Alasdair (RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands). *Email correspondence*, 2018.

Horse Flies

by Bryan Lecky

Although the picture below may be overstating the problem, many people living in Parkgate and Neston have found this summer that horse flies have been far

more troublesome than mosquitoes. Horse flies go under a variety of other names including “cleggs” (from Old Norse) and “gadflies”.



(Jumanji is a fantasy film set in the jungle. I am grateful to an anonymous photographer)

The male horse fly is a gentle soul which does not bite and who feeds on plant juices, mainly nectar and pollen. Our tormentor is the female which requires a blood meal to reproduce and accesses this mainly from large mammals using mouth parts which rip and saw through the skin (see illustrations overleaf). The fly's salivary glands produce a complex set of anticoagulants, including those that inhibit fibrin formation (the essential process in forming a blood clot). The blood is then soaked up by other mouth parts which act as a sponge. It has been estimated that large livestock such as cows and horses can lose up to 300ml of blood daily from sustained horse fly attack.

The bite is painful and this may give sufficient time for the human victim to be able to kill the fly before the attack is completed. This contrasts with the mosquito which almost painlessly penetrates the skin and sucks blood. The horse fly bite commonly results in localised pain and swelling. Some may experience a more severe reaction, probably because of allergic reaction to the saliva. Horse flies are not known to spread human disease in the UK, but in tropical countries may spread trypanosomiasis and tularaemia. The horse fly is a strong flier and has been recorded as flying up to 30 miles (and also pursuing its prey). Unlike mosquitoes, which tend to bite in the early morning and evening, horse flies are mainly active in full daylight.



Close-up of female showing large compound eyes and aggressive mouthparts.

Horseflies are found worldwide, except in the extreme north and south of the globe. They favour warm and damp lowland regions, including marshes, woods and rivers. They are, like mosquitoes, attracted by CO₂ in exhaled breath, but also by dark moving shapes and reflected sunlight on water (a potential problem in swimming pools).

Mating occurs in swarms, often in the same locality each year. The horse fly eggs are laid under stones and vegetation, usually near a source of water. Once hatched, the larvae migrate to moist soil or other wet places, feeding on small insects. After about a year the larvae pupate in moist soil. The adult horse fly emerges from the pupae after several weeks.

Considering prevention, insect repellents containing a high concentration of DEET may have some effect. Other measures including covering up and avoiding playing tennis at Neston Cricket Club in spring and summer. Commercial fly traps are available, but a simple version can be made from a large soft drinks plastic bottle. The bottle is transected, the bottom baited with little rotten meat, and the top placed upside down into the bottom to act as a trap.

For further reading, visit www.fliesonly.com.

Dr Bryan Lecky
Parkgate Society

The riddle of the sands: some pictures of old Parkgate



In the early years of the 20th century, before the First World War, pupils of Mostyn House School carry out rifle practice under the direction of headmaster AG Grenfell. No doubt most of these boys would have served in that war and some of them would have been amongst the 80 old boys who gave up their lives in this conflict a hundred years ago in the service of their country. The old customs house and neighbouring properties were demolished about 1962.



Less than 50 years later, after another World War, the sand has been covered over by a thick layer of silt deposited by the river and turned into grazing for cattle. The new front to Mostyn House School was added in 1932 to stabilize the original Georgian buildings. Nicholls shop was constructed in 1935, and this picture also shows Hilbre House still standing, adjacent to the Ship Hotel.

Diary Note: Heritage Open Days 2018

Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 September

Parkgate Heritage Trail: Guided Walk

Meet at the Ropewalk carpark, Station Road, at 3.00pm

Contacts

If you wish to raise issues of relevance to the Society, please contact our secretary:

Alan Passmore: Tel: (0151) 336-2917

Email: secretary@parkgatesociety.co.uk

Queries about membership should be addressed to our membership secretary:

Derek Haylock: Tel: (0151) 336-4461

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

Alan Passmore, tel: (0151) 336-2917 or email:

secretary@parkgatesociety.co.uk

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The Parkgate Society is a registered charity, No. 503718, founded
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Don't forget our website: www.parkgatesociety.co.uk

– also the heritage trail for pictures of old Parkgate:

www.parkgateheritagetrail.org